LANGSTON HUGHES

A Negro Looks at Soviet Central Asia

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

In *A Negro Looks at Soviet Central Asia* the well-known American Negro poet Langston Hughes tells of his observations and impressions during a short sojourn in the Soviet Republics of Central Asia. These sketches also show the reactions of a revolutionary poet and the son of an oppressed nationality to the achievements of formerly oppressed nationalities gained under the banner of the Soviets which no doubt will be of interest to the English-speaking workers and specialists in the Soviet Union.

1. Going South

To an American Negro living in the United States the word *South* has an unpleasant sound, an overtone of horror and of fear. For it is in the South that our ancestors were slaves for three hundred years, bought and sold like cattle. It is in the South today that we suffer the worst forms of racial persecution and economic exploitation—segregation, peonage, and lynching. It is in the southern states that the colour line is hard and fast, Jim Crow rules, and I am treated like a dog. Yet it is in the South that two-thirds of my people live: a great Black Belt stretching from Virginia to Texas, across the cotton plantations of Georgia and Alabama and Mississippi, down into the orange groves of Florida and the sugar cane lands of Louisiana. It is in the South that black hands create the wealth that supports the great cities—Atlanta, Memphis, New Orleans where the rich whites live in fine houses on magnolia-shaded streets and the Negroes live in slums restricted by law. It is in the South that what the Americans call the "race problem" rears its ugly head the highest and, like a snake with its eyes on a bird, holds the whole land in its power. It is in the South that hate and terror walk the streets and roads by day, sometimes quiet, sometimes violent, and sleep in the beds with the citizens at night.

Last spring I came almost directly out of this American South to the Soviet Union. You can imagine the contrast. No need for me to write about it. And after a summer in Moscow, last September I found myself packing up to go South again—but, this time, South under the red flag. I was starting out from Moscow, capital of the new world, bound for Central Asia to discover how the people live and work there. I wanted to compare their existence with that of the coloured and oppressed peoples I had known under capitalism in Cuba, Haiti, Mexico, and my own United States of America. I wanted to study the life of these people in the Soviet Union, and write a book about them for the dark races of the capitalist world.

On the train I had a lot of time to think. I thought how in the thirty years of my life I had never gotten on a train in America without being conscious of my colour. In the South, there are Jim Crow cars and Negroes must ride separate from the whites, usually in a filthy antiquated coach

next to the engine, getting all the smoke and bumps and dirt. In the South, we cannot buy sleeping car tickets. Such comforts are only for while folks. And in the North where segregated travel is not the law, coloured people have, nevertheless, many difficulties. In auto buses they must take the last seats in the rear, over the wheels. On boats they must occupy the worst cabins. The ticket agents always say that all other accommodations are sold. On trains, if one sits down by a white person, the white person will often get up, flinging back an insult at the Negro who has dared to take a seat beside him. Thus it is that in America, if you arc yellow, brown, or black, you can never travel anywhere without being reminded of your colour, and oft-times suffering great inconveniences.

I sat in the comfortable International car on my first day out of Moscow and remembered many things about trips I had taken in America. I remembered how, once as a youngster going alone to see my father who was working In Mexico, I went into the dining car of the train to eat. I sat down at a table with a white man The man looked at me and said, "You're a nigger, ain't you?" and left the table. It was beneath his dignity to eat with a Negro. At St. Louis I went onto the station platform to buy a glass of milk. The clerk behind the counter said, "We don't serve niggers," and he refused to sell me anything. As I grew older I learned to expect this kind of happenings when travelling. So when I later went South to lecture on my poetry at Negro universities, I carried my own food because I knew I could not go into the dining cars. Once from Washington to New Orleans, I lived all the way in the train on cold food. I remembered this miserable trip as I sat eating my hot dinner on the diner of the Moscow-Tashkent express.

Traveling South from New York, at Washington, the capital of our country, the official Jim Crow begins. There the conductor comes through the train and, if you are a Negro, touches you on the shoulder and says, "The last coach forward is the car for coloured people." Then you must move your baggage and yourself up near the engine, because when the train crosses the Potomac River into Virginia, and the dome of the Capitol disappears, it is illegal

any longer for white people and coloured people to ride together. (Or to eat together, or sleep together, or in some places even to work together. But we will speak about these things later.) Now I am tiding South from Moscow and am not Jim-Crowed, and none of the darker people on the train with me are Jim-Crowed, so I make a happy mental note in the back of my mind to write home to the Negro papers: "There is no Jim Crow on the trains of the Soviet Union."

In the car ahead of mine there is a man almost as brown as I am. A young man dressed quite ordinarily in a pair of tan trousers and a nondescript grey coat. Some Asiatic factory worker who has been to Moscow on a vacation, I think. We talk a little. He asks me what I do for a living, and I ask him what he does. I am a writer. He is the mayor of Bukhara, the Chairman of the City Soviet! I make a note in the back of my mind: "In the Soviet Union dark men arc also the mayors of cities,'" And here is a man who is the head of a very famous city, old Bukhara, romantic Bukhara known in stories and legends the world over. I must write about this for the Negro papers in America, But I learned in the course of our conversation, that there were many cities in Central Asia where dark men and women were in control of the government – many, many such cities. And I thought about Mississippi where more than half of the population is Negro, but one never hears of a Negro mayor, or of any coloured person in the government. In fact, in that state Negroes cannot even vote. And you will never meet them riding in the sleeping car.

Here, there were twelve of us going South from Moscow, for I was travelling with a Negro group from Mezhrabpom Film on a tour of the Soviet Union. Later they left me in Central Asia, while they returned to Moscow by way of the Caspian Sea, Tiflis and Dnieprostroy. And then went back to America.

Kurbanov, for that was the name of the young Uzbek from the Bukhara Soviet, came often to talk to us. He was a mine of information about the liberation of Central Asia and the vast changes that have come about there after the revolution. Truly a land of Before and After, as we listened to him talk: Before the Revolution, emirs and khans, mul-

lahs and beys. After the Revolution, the workers in power. Before, one half of one per cent of the people literate. Now, fifty per cent read and write. Before, education solely for the rich, mostly in religious schools; and no schools in the villages. Now, free schools everywhere. Before, the land was robbed of its raw materials for the factories of the Russian capitalists. Now, there are factories in Asia itself, big plants, electric stations, and textile mills. Before, no theatres, no movies, no modern culture. Now, national art encouraged and developed everywhere. Before, Kurbanov said, racial persecution and segregation, the natives treated like dogs. Now, that is finished, and Russian and native, Jew and gentile, white and brown, live and work together. Before, no intermarriages of white and dark, now there are many. Before, Kurbanov himself was a herd-boy in the mountains. Now, he is member-of the Party and the Chairman of a city soviet. Truly, Soviet Asia is a land of Before and After, and the Revolution, with tremendous strides, is creating a new life that is changing the history of the East, as Comrade Kurbanov talked.

We gathered these things not only from our Uzbek comrade, but from many other passengers we met on the long train during the five days and nights south-east to Central Asia. There was a woman librarian from Leningrad, who had been home on a vacation going back to the work of which she spoke with pride—the growth of the library at Tashkent, the large number of books in the native languages with the new Latin alphabet that were now being published, and the corresponding growth of native readers. There was a young Red Army man who told us of the camaraderie and understanding growing up between lads of widely different and environmental backgrounds in the Red Army School at Tashkent. There was a Russian merchant privileged to help in the building of new industries in an ardent and once backward, but now awakening Asia. And there were two young Komsomol poets going from Moscow to work on new publications for the encouragement of national literature in the young writers of Soviet Asia.

One night, we held, a meeting with the members of the train crew not then on duty. Our Negro group and the

workers of the express exchanged information and ideas. They told us about their work and their part in the building of socialism. We told them about the conditions of Negro labour in America, about the crisis abroad, about Al Capone and the Chicago bandits, and the bootleggers and bankers of Broadway. We found that they knew, as their comments and questions indicated, a great deal more about America than the average American knows about the Soviet Union. And we learned that their working conditions are superior to those of American railway workers—particularly in regard to the train porters. Here, in each coach, there is a compartment with berths where the crew might rest. The Negro porters on American trains have no such conveniences. Here, on the sleeping cars, there are two attendants. In the U.S.A. a single man takes care of a car, working throughout a long trip, and perhaps managing to catch a little sleep on the bench in the men's toilet. Our porters depend on tips for a living, their wages being extremely low. In 1925 they organized a union but, under a compromising bourgeois leadership, so they have gained nothing save occasional threats of wholesale dismissal from the company and their replacement by Filipinos. The American Federation of Labour refused to receive them (the various white railway unions do not admit Negroes). These things we told the crew of the Moscow-Tashkent express and they, in turn, sent back through us their revolutionary greetings to the Negro railway workers of America.

So, with our many new and interesting comrades of the train, the days on the road passed quickly. First. the rich farm lands slid by outside our windows; stations where peasant women from the kolkhozes sold chickens and cheese and eggs; then the Volga at sunset, famous old river of song and story; a day or so later, Orenburg where Asia begins and camels are in the streets; then the vast reaches of the Kirghiz steppes and the bright tip of the Aral Sea like silver m the sun.

On the day when we passed through the Kazakstan desert, the Fortieth Anniversary of Gorky's literary life was being celebrated throughout the Union. The Komsomol poets and the train crew organized a meeting, too. At a little

station where the train stopped m late afternoon, we all went onto the plat form and short speeches were given in honour of Gorky and his tremendous work. (Even in die heart of the desert, this writer whose words throb with the lives of the common people, was not forgotten.) Nomad Kazaks, the men in great coats of skins, the women in their white headdresses, gathered around, mingling with the passengers. One of the young poets spoke: then a representative of the train crew, and someone from the station. My speech in English was translated into Russian. and again into the Kazak tongue. Then the meeting closed. We sent a telegram to Comrade Gorky from the passengers of the train, and another from our Negro group. And as the whistle blew, we climbed back into our coaches, and the engine steamed on through the desert pulling the long train deeper into Asia. It was sunset, and there was a great vastness of sky and sand before the first stars came.

Late the following afternoon, we saw a fertile oasis of water and greenery, cotton growing and trees in fruit, then crowds of yellow faces and bright robes at the now frequent stations. At evening we came to the big city of Tashkent, the new centre of the East.

2. A Visit to Turkmenia

In the autumn, if you step off the train almost anywhere in the fertile parts of Central Asia, you step into a cotton field, or into a city or town whose streets are filled with evidences of cotton nearby. On all the dusty roads, camels, carts, and tracks loaded with the white fibre go toward the gins and warehouses. Outside the towns, oft-times as far as the eye can see, the white balls lift their precious heads.

The same thing is true of the southern part of the United States. In Georgia and Mississippi and Alabama, you ride for hundreds of miles through fields of cotton bursting white in the sun. Except that on our roads there are no camels. Mules and wagons bear the burdens. And at home, cotton is not so valuable anymore with the crisis on and the factories closed. And; too, whereas here the textile mills now run full blast, in America many of them are closed or working part time. There's really a vast difference between Turkmenistan and Alabama. And a world between.

About a year ago, when I was in the South all winter, I spent some time in Alabama, fifty miles or so from the now famous Scottsboro. I wanted to visit a village in the big cotton plantations there. "It's dangerous," my friends said. "The white folks don't like strange Negroes around. You can't do it." But I did finally manage to do it—and this is how: During the December holidays, I went with a section of the Red Cross (a Negro section, of course, as everything is segregated in the South) to distribute fruit to the poor—the *poor* meaning in this case .the black workers on a rich plantation nearby.

We set out in a rickety Ford and drove for miles through the brown fields where the cotton had been picked. We came to a gate in a strong wire fence. This passed, some distance further on, we came to another fence. And then, far back from the road, huddled together beneath the trees, we came upon the cabins of the Negro workers—cheerless one-room shacks, built of logs. A group of ragged children came running out to meet us.

The man with the Red Cross button descended from the car and spoke to them in a Sunday-school manner. He asked them if they had been good, and if they had gotten any presents for the holidays. Yes, the children said, they had been good, but they hadn't got any presents. They reached out eager little hands for the apples and oranges of charity we offered them.

We went into several of the huts, and while the Red Cross man talked about the Lord, I asked a few earthly questions. I asked an old man if the cotton had been sold. He answered listlessly, “I don’t know. The boss took it. And even if it has been sold, it don’t make no difference to me. I never see none of the money nohow.” He shrugged his shoulders helplessly and sucked at this pipe. A woman I spoke to said she hadn’t been to town for four years. Yet the town was less than fifteen miles away. “It’s hard to get off,” she said, “and I never has nothing to spend.” She gave her dreary testimony without emotion. The Red Cross man assured her that God would help her and that she shouldn’t worry.

A broken-down bed, a stove, and a few chairs were all she had in her house. Her children were among those stretching out their skinny arms to us for charity fruit. Vet the man who owned this big plantation lived in a great house with white pillars in the town. His children went to private schools in the North and travelled abroad. And these black hands working in white cotton created the wealth that built his fine house and supported his children in their travels. A woman who couldn’t travel fifteen miles to town was sending somebody else’s children to Paris. Thus, the base of culture in the South.

Economists call it the share-crop system, this mass robbery and exploitation of the southern Negro workers in the American cotton fields; Ironical name—lor cotton is a crop that the Negro never shares. This is how the planters arrange it: The black peasant signs a contract (which often he cannot read) for a year’s work for himself and his family. His pay is to be a portion of the crop that he raises on shares. He moves into a cabin on the white man’s lands. The plantation owner advances him the seed to plant, and every month a little corn meal and salt meat from the commissary. These advances are charged to the peasant’s account by the plantation bookkeeper. At the end of the year when the cotton is picked, the plantation owner takes the whole crop, tells the worker his share is not large enough to cover the rent of the cabin, the cost of the seed, the puce of the corn meal and fat meat, and the other figures on the book. “You owe me.” says the planter. So the Negro is automatically in debt, and must work another year to pay what he owes the landlord. If he wishes to take his family and leave, he is threatened with the chain gang or lynch-terror. Thus the black field hands are kept in slavery on the big plantations of America. A beautiful system for getting free labour, white cotton, and culture. A modern legal substitute slavery—this share-crop system. And yet American capital-

ists have the nerve to accuse the Soviet Union of forced labour.

How different are the cotton lands of Soviet Central Asia! The beys are gone—the landlords done with forever. I have spoken to the peasants and I know. They are not afraid like the farm hands of the South. "We were afraid once," they said, "but not now. The beys are gone."

It was the height of the picking season when I visited the Aitakov Kolkhoz near Merv. The Turkmen director took us to the fields where, in the bright morning sun, a brigade of women were picking cotton, moving rapidly through the waist-high rows, some stuffing the white bolls into the bosoms of their gowns until they were fat with cotton, others into sacks tied across one shoulder. Thirty-two kilos of picked cotton was counted a working day. but the udarniks picked sixty-four kilos or more a day. And many of the women I was watching were udarniks. This brigade had fulfilled 165 per cent of its plan, In their beautiful native dresses of red and green with their tall headdresses surmounting moon-coloured faces, these women moved like witches of work in a sweeping line down the length of the broad field, taking the whiteness and leaving the green-brown stalks, stuffing into their sacks and bosoms all the richness of the earth.

On this particular day, while the women worked in the fields, the men were repairing the irrigation canals near the main stream, the director told us. But the men also pick cotton when there is no heavy work to do.

1 remarked at the absence of children in the fields. In the American South they would be picking along with the parents. "Here, they are in school." the director said. Our kolkhoz has a four-year school. And in the village nearby there is a school for five hundred pupils where the older students go. There is a teacher here for the grown-ups, too. You will see during the rest period."

The director went away and left us with the time-keeper and his assistant, a young student learning to keep the books. They were both Turkmen with marvellously high black *telpeks* of shaggy lamb's skin towering above their heads. With them I could not speak a word. My bad Russian did not work. But Shali Kekilov, the poet of the Turkmen Proletarian Writer's Union, translated. We sat on the grass under the fruit trees bordering a dry canal and learned the facts about their kolkhoz, and the success of collectivization in their districts. Within the village radius of eight kilometres, out of a population of 2,700 people, only twenty individual farmers remained. On the Kolkhoz Aitakova itself there were 230 workers, ten

of them members of the Party, and eleven candidates. Two of the Party members were women; and two women were candidates. There were twenty-eight Komsomols.

When the rest period came, a boy brought tea and bread to the fields. The women sat in a group on the grass and, as they ate, a girl moved among them with a book, helping each woman to read aloud a passage—thus they were learning to read, a thing that in all the long centuries before, women in Central Asia had never done.

The men sitting on the grass with us were proud. “Before the Resolution there weren’t twenty-five women in the whole of Turkmenia who could read. Now look!” A woman peasant sat on the edge of the cotton field reading out of a book. Something to cry with joy about! Something to unfurl red banners over! Something to shout in the face of the capitalist world’s colonial oppressor. Something to whisper over the borders of India and Persia.

In the afternoon, I helped pick cotton, too. Then the young man came to take us to the tea-house for dinner. There I answered many questions concerning the Negroes in America. It was dusk when we walked across the fields to the cluster of buildings that formed the centre of the kolkhoz. They were preparing the nursery as a guest-room for us, moving back the little chairs and tables of the children and spreading beautiful rugs on the floor that we might sit down.

Soon guests began to arrive, teachers from the village school came and then the men who had been out on the irrigation works all day, and among them musicians. They came m twos and threes and larger groups until the room was full. One oil lamp on the floor was the only light, and as they sat around it, their tall hats cast tremendous shadows on the walls. *Chainiks* of tea were brought, and a half-dozen bowls that were shared by all. As the tea-pots emptied, they were passed continually back and forth from hand to hand to the door where a man replenished them from the water boiling over an open fire outside in the dark.

Many stories were told to us there in #the nursery by the men who shared with us their little bowls of tea; stories of the days when women were purchased for sheep or camels or gold—if you were rich enough—young women; or, if you were poor, you worked three to five years in the field to receive an old wife that some rich man had tired of. Stories were told of the beys who controlled the water, and whose land you must till in order to water your own poor crops. Stories were told of feuds, and tribal wars, tsarist oppression, and mass misery. And all this *not* a bundled years ago, but *only* ten or fifteen years past. These men in the tall hats had not read about it

in history books. It had been their life. And now they were free.

Then the boys began to sing to the notes of their two-string lutes. The high monotonous music of the East filled the room. The two singers sat crossed legged on the floor, face to face, rocking to and fro. One was the young man who, during the day, learned to be a time-keeper. The other, a peasant, between verses threw back his head and made strange clucking sounds with his throat. They sang of the triumphs of the Revolution. Then they sang old songs of power, of love and the beauties of women with faces like the moon Sometimes they played, without singing, music that was like a breeze over the desert, a quiet breeze coming out of the night to the cotton fields.

A sheep had been killed and, from the fire outside, great steaming platters of mutton were brought which we ate with our hands. Most of the men left at midnight, but several remained to keep us company, and slept on the floor with us.

In the morning, Shura, the little son of the Russian woman who runs the nursery, and his playmate, a golden-faced Turkmen lad, came to show me the new cat that had just been born in the stables. They took me with great pride all over the barnyard. We saw the oxen being driven out to work, yoked in pairs; the camels in the long line loaded with cotton, starting off for town. We saw the brick kiln, and the two children and I climbed to the top of it, and looked at the gay fields of cotton in the morning sun, stretching away toward the desert.

Shura, the little white boy, and the darker Turkmen boy took me by the hands and insisted that I see the oven for making bread. I went, but I was not thinking particularly about the oven. I was thinking, as I looked at the two small boys, "This would never happen in Alabama where white children and coloured children do not grow up together. I am glad that here, in the Soviet Union, all the ugly artificial barriers of race have been broken down. Little Russian boy and little Turkmen boy, you will never know the distorted lives full of distrust and hate and fear that we know in America, or that strangle the Indians and the British over the mountains to the South."

"Look where we bake our bread," the children said. I put my head into the big brick oven. Then I heard Kekilov calling that it was time to start for the irrigation ditches. And the children had to go to school.

1 visited several other cotton kolkhozes in Turkmenia and Uzbekistan, and one sovkhoz. I filled two note books with figures and

data: the number of hectares under cultivation, the yield per hectare, the percentages fulfilled according to the plan—some not always good—the method of irrigation, the amount the state pays for cotton in rubles and wheat and cloth and tea. All these things will be of great interest for American readers who are not familiar with the basic details. 1 stayed for two days at the mechanization station for farm machinery near Tashkent; and another day at the seed selection station where a number of American Negro chemists are employed at work they would seldom be allowed to do in the United States. I saw the cotton college. I visited the big building of the Cotton Trust at Tashkent. I looked at statistics. I studied charts.

The figures, sooner or later (important as they are) I shall forget. Maybe I will lose the note books in my travels. But the things I shall always remember the peasants themselves have told me: "Before, there were no schools for our children; now there are. Before, we lived in debt and fear; now we are free. Before, women were bought and sold; but that is gone. Before, the water belonged to the beys; today it's ours. Before, life was never certain—now it is!

3. Palaces, Priests and Power

Throughout the centuries, the biggest and most successful robbers have always lived in palaces. The sweat and blood of the masses have always furnished the moisture to cement the stones of plunder for the walls, and the hands of thousands of hunger-driven women have woven the rugs and tapestries of comfort for the masters and mistresses of the great houses of splendour. To look back a bit: The Pharaohs in Egypt and the Medicis in Florence; the Doges of Venice and the Tsars of St. Petersburg; the Rajahs at Delhi and the Emperors at Peking. Or, to be strictly contemporary: the Pope at Rome and the Rockefellers at Pontico Hills.

And always, throughout the centuries, close to the palaces have been the temples. It's happened so much that it surely could not have been by chance. Remember the temples at Karnac, and St. Mark's at Venice. The Taj Mahal, and the golden domes along the Neva. St. Peter's at Rome, and the Rockefeller Baptist Church on Riverside Drive in New York. And in London, Buckingham Palace and Westminster Abbey. How religious are the great who live in palaces!

The Emir of Bukhara, too, was a holy man. His city was a shrine for all true believers in its day. His best friends were the mullahs. And his town palace, a walled citadel, rose high on an artificial eminence above the city. The only thing the Emir allowed to rise higher was the tall tower beside the official mosque of Mejidhalyan. But this tower had much more than a religious meaning. Not only here did the muezzins call to prayer, but from it, the Emir threw his enemies to their death on the stones of the dusty road beneath. O, most high and holy tower of Bukhara. Religion and power. Power and death.

In the very front of the Emir's palace was a bazaar, and in the street leading to his chief mosque, also, there was buying and bargaining. The Emir collected taxes from the traders and tribute from the mullahs—dealer in both goods and holiness, the Emir. He lived well. And loved Allah. And put fifty million gold rubles in an English bank.

He had some two or three hundred wives, off and on, did the Emir Alem-Khan of Bukhara. Four of them were the official wives permitted by the Koran. The others were of lesser standing. At his palace in the country outside the walls of the city, he kept a perma-

nent harem of about a hundred veiled girls, in residence. This harem was constantly replenished with lovely young maidens. The women he tired of were given away as presents to his court officials and military officers. When the revolution came, and the Emit fled to Afghanistan, he left most of his women behind, taking instead boys and gold and jewels.

One of his former wives works now in the Tea House of the Red Partisans at Bukhara. I went to see her one day. She is still beautiful, with skin like ivory, and soft grey eyes. She is married now to a workman, uncovers her face, is much happier, she says, than she was in the Emir's palace. With strangers she is a shy little woman who does not talk much. But she recounted how, when she was only twelve, she was given to the Emit. Then began three monotonous years in the palace harem, which was little more than a prison, guarded by old women and eunuchs. At fifteen, the Emir gave her away to his prime minister. She went from one harem to another till the Revolution set her free. Now she walks the streets without a veil, she belongs to herself, and she earns her own living.

One day, at the Emir's former estate in the country, I saw the women's quarters in which she once lived. They were some distance removed from the palace proper, behind double doors and thick walls of their own. A series of rooms around small courtyards, the walls and the narrowness shutting out the breeze, making them stifling hot in summer. The girls were illiterate, the servants did the work, and the doors to the outer world were locked. No wonder the death rate for women was high in Bukhara. Many of them must have died of sheer ennui. The Emir's dogs at least had the freedom of the entire court, the orchards, and the grape arbours. The women were always shut up in one place—except when one or two of them might be called to the Emir's bed-chamber. Or when, on occasions, he might allow them all to bathe in the great square pool behind his summer house. Then he would sit on a screened balcony and gaze down upon the beauty of a hundred wives in the water.

The Emir's summer house had modern plumbing, and is built like a European villa. The official palace itself, within the same double-walled enclosure, is a huge and ornate building around a court where a fountain played. Inside, each room was decorated by a noted Eastern artist. But some of the artists must have been pretty bad. Their taste was atrocious. The walls are gaudy, and confused with shelves, niches, gilt, and too many colours. The ceilings are

patterned indentations of many hues. In the niches hundreds of vases and knick-knacks and marble clocks sit. There are gigantic lacquered vases, too, brought by special escort from China. On the walls there are pictures of the Emit himself, his staff, and the Russian embassies that came to visit him. The floors are of inlaid wood. The window panes arc multi-coloured.

Only one room is really beautiful. That is the reception hall. It is done entirely of mirrors and white plaster. Both walls and ceiling are pure white with bits of patterned mirrors beneath the plaster; everywhere live flowers. There is a great silver chandelier hanging in the centre. When this was lighted, so the present caretaker said, the room blazed with such light, the white walls and their hundreds of tiny mirrors glowed so brightly that, through the long French windows, the reflection could be seen on the night sky for miles around.

Here in this room, the Emir received only the most special guests. All others, he would allow to stand in the courtyard outside, while they addressed him through the tall windows. Such careful differentiation was not due entirely to a sense of honour and dignity. It was due somewhat to fear also. The Emir had a thousand enemies—so it was not wise to allow too many people near him. Better that folks stood in the courtyard outside.

As to the peasants and common people, the Emir never received them within the walls of the palace. Sometimes in the road, he would allow them to bow their heads in the dust and present him with a petition. But during the last years of his reign, these petitions became so numerous, and the demands of the people so insistent, that the Emir could not sleep well in his brass bed in the palace, nor hold pleasant courts. So he applied measures of great repression to the populace. Prison, beatings, death.

Maji Mir baba and Ata Hajaiv, two of the old revolutionists of Bukhara, told me about it. Shishkin, the historian, told me, too. In those days, one ruble out of every six had to be given to the Emir as taxes. From the peasants the officials took two-thirds of their crops, leaving scarcely enough to eat. (These officials received no salary, only a commission on what they collected, so their greed knew no bounds.) Young wives then cost six thousands rubles—no poor man could buy. Rooms in the medress, where one had to go for religious training if wanted to rise in the world, were sold for fabulous prices. Cotton, wool, caracul, cocoons, tea, went to the markets of Europe

and tsarist Russia, enriching the court but leaving the masses of Central Asia hungry.

Life was too hard. Revolt came, as in Russia. Kerensky told the Emir to make a few reforms, so a ministry of mullahs and merchants was created. The masses soon learned that this meant nothing. In Bukhara they demonstrated against it. Troops and religious elements attacked. Many were arrested. Prison. Seventy-five strokes on the back. Some died. (Haji Mir-baba, who lived to tell the tale, showed me a picture of himself in the Emir's jail with the striped wounds across his back.)

This did not stop the revolutionaries. The struggle went on. To tell it quickly: The young Bukharians sent a committee to Tashkent, to confer with the leaders there on tactics. They returned with other revolutionary workers, and comrades from Baku and Samara. From Kazan, they sent an ultimatum to the Emir. The Emir requested that a committee come to see him. Twelve comrades went. They were killed.

In the city, armed revolt broke out. It was crushed. The Emir killed three thousand comrades. Tortured and burned others. Rewards were offered for each head of a revolutionist The Emir still slept in his brass bed in the country palace. But not for long.

Faisula Hajaiv (now President of the Council of Peoples Commissars of Uzbekistan) and two others were selected to go to Comrade Lenin at Moscow. Captured by the White Arm at Samara. Sentenced to death. Escaped. Moscow at last. Plans and organization. In March, 1920, a well-planned attack on the Emir began. After five days, he was forced to flee to Afghanistan. Then the beginning of the end of terror and persecution, an opening of doors to women, and the death of Allah. In 1925 the workers and peasants organized the People's Republic of Bukhara and asked to be allowed to join the Soviet Union. In 1925 the First Soviet Congress of Uzbekistan was held. Now the brass bed of the Emir still stands in the summer palace, but the wives are free from the harem, the Emir is gone, and the whole estate is shortly to become a rest home for the workers of the sovkhozes. Peasants will sleep where they could not enter before, and women will stroll unveiled beneath the grape arbours where once they walked only in paranjas guarded by eunuchs. And the fountains will play for the workers.

In the citadel in Bukhara, the Emir's castle high on a fortified mound overlooking the city, guess who likes there now? Behind the

walls of this town palace, where the great officials resided, where the mint was and the prison, and the best water cisterns, guess who lives there now? Students from the technicums, sons and daughters of poor peasants and workers, whose fore-parents for ages and ages bowed in the dust in front of rulers and beys. And what are these students doing? For one thing, they are learning to read and write by the new Latin alphabet which the mullahs who formerly controlled education declared unholy. Only the Arabic script of the Koran had the sanction of Allah, the priests said cursed be all those who learn the new letters!

But the new letters are learnt, now, and nobody is cursed. Everybody lives better than they did before. The great mosques of the once holy Bukhara are nearly empty of worshippers. The many towers where the muezzins called to prayer are only play-places for children. The twisted turbans that once had a religious significance no longer mean anything, and pilgrimages to Mecca are no more.

In the courtyard of a once famous religious medress whose cold little cells were filled with students stupidly learning by rote the books of the Koran, the Soviets have built a new museum. Here there are many beautiful things, old books and jewels and rugs and hangings. And here too are the cudgels of the dervishes, the horses tails of the saints, and other holy relics of the past. Religion has gone into a museum and out of the world. And a new alphabet has come into the people's life, an alphabet that brings knowledge to poor peasants and women, to workers and all those who before knew only the lies of the priests and the threats of the tax collectors.

The wisest of the priests went with the Emir when he fled. Priests love palaces and gold and power. When Ibrahim Bek, the bandit, tried to organize the counter-revolution, the greatest of the mullahs were behind him crying a holy war. And still there are men, I am told, in Bukhara who bow toward the East and pray for the Emir and his soldiers to come back. But they don't pray out loud. The young workers and students laugh at them—their heads in the dust—for holy Bukhara is no more. Even its physical aspects will soon disappear since the city soviet has a plan for a brand new town. All the old minarets and walls and hovels will be torn down, and within the next ten years a new modem city will be built. The Tower of Death will be left standing as a historical curiosity—like the cudgels of the dervishes in the museum.

Two years ago I was in Haiti, the little black island of Toussaint

L'Ouverture, that is now a colony under the rule of the American marines. There, too. the towers of churches rise everywhere, Catholic churches. And the puppet governments that aid in American exploitation are made up of most religious gentlemen faithful to the holy mass. In Cuba, too, where the *universities* have been closed for three years because the students were revolutionaries, the *churches* are wide open. Read Mayakovsky's poems, *Black and White,* or *Syphilis,* if you don't know what life is like in Cuba. In both Haiti and Cuba terror and repression, hunger and fear predominate, like those last years of the rule of the Emir in Bukhara. Uprisings are crushed, youths are killed, women prostituted, American gunboats circle the Caribbean waters. Shark fishing is prohibited off the harbour of Havana, say the newspapers. It seems that the gentlemen who go to holy mass and run the government are afraid that dead bodies will be pulled up from the waves instead of fish—the military prisons overlook the ocean at Havana.

Across the water, on the mainland of America, the god worshippers are legion. Mencken, America's literary clown, calls the South "The Bible Belt" because there are so many churches, preachers, and prayers there. And it is in this Bible Belt that hundreds of Negroes are lynched, race riots arc staged, peonage and chain gangs and forced labour of all forms are found, women are exploited in the cotton mills, and farces of justice like the Scottsboro trial are staged. The rich live in modem palaces with white columns, the ministers grow fat, and the air is full of sermons every Sunday night—out-smelling the magnolias—for the radio belongs to the rich in the big houses.

In New York, priests, ministers, and fortune tellers ply their trade by the thousands. And "tourists go to see the stained-glass windows in the big church with elevators that the Rockefellers of Standard Oil have built to the glory of God. From New York and Boston and Chicago the religious rich stretch out that fingers to the black South in the guise of missionary philanthropy, endowing Negro church schools, buying the brains of the dark youth in the ghettos and cotton fields and stuffing them with meekness and humbleness and "the opium of the people."

In the Northern industrial cities hundreds of thousands of Negro and white workers, unemployed, walk the streets in the shadows of the skyscrapers, hungry. Ford turns his machine guns on them in Detroit; and in Washington the army is called out against them. And

in the churches, the bosses pray and the ministers are one in denouncing communism—and calling on God—like the mullahs of Bukhara when the Emir ruled.

I walk through die streets of Bukhara, eastern city of song and story, place of legend. I walk through the crumbling walls of sun-dried brick, beneath the empty towers and minarets, past the palaces and mosques. I remember how, as a boy in far-away Kansas, I dreamed of seeing this fabulous city of Bukhara—as distant then as a fantasy of the *Thousand and One Nights*. And now, in 1932, here I am (dreams conic true) travelling through the courtesy of a Soviet newspaper, throughout Central Asia, and seeing for myself all the dusty and wonderful horrors that feudalism and religion created in the dark past, and that have now been taken over by socialism. Great changes there have been, in ten years. Greater changes there will be, certainly. Yesterday, the inaccessible Emir and his walled palaces. And today....

Well, today I am going to dinner with Kurbanov, the former herd-boy, who is now chairman of the city soviet of the fabulous town of Bukhara.

4. Youth and Learning in Turkmenia

In the United States a year or more ago, a well-known beloved Negro woman, a teacher, was severely injured in an automobile wreck when her car turned over, throwing the passengers into a field beside a country toad. The teacher's name was Juliette Derricotte. She was motoring with three of her students from Fisk University in Nashville, where she was Dean of Women, to the home of her patents in the state of Georgia. Suddenly an approaching car, in order to pass a slower vehicle, swerved toward the centre of the road. Miss Derricotte, to avoid a collision, turned quickly to the side of the highway. Her wheels sank into a ditch, and her car turned over. The Negro teacher and the three students accompanying her were all badly injured. Passing motorists carried them into the nearest town, a small southern farming centre. Here the white hospital refused point blank to give treatment to Negroes, so the bruised and bleeding victims were not admitted. Instead, they were taken to the house of a poor black woman of the town and there white doctors gave them attention, but without the necessary instruments and anaesthetics that the hospital could have furnished, Three of them were suffering intensely, but the least injured of the four, a young student, was able to find a telephone. He called the nearest city in which a Negro hospital was located, and asked that an ambulance be sent for them. Late in the night the ambulance arrived, but on the way to the distant Negro hospital Juliette Derricotte, the teacher, died. Thus one of the most brilliant of the younger coloured women was lost to America. Had not a white hospital refused to treat black people—even in so grave an emergency as this serious automobile accident—her life might have been saved.

That same day in Birmingham, Alabama, another young teacher, a man but recently graduated from Hampton Institute, was beaten to death by a white mob, lynched in broad daylight in the streets of a big city.

That week-end I was lecturing at Hampton, one of the largest and best known of the schools for Negroes in the South. The students there, learning of the circumstances of Juliette Derricotte's death and of the lynching in Birmingham, were full of grief and anger—one of the finest Negro teachers refused treatment in a white village hospital or an ambulance to carry her to the city. and one of their own graduates beaten to death.

“We will organize a protest meeting,” said the students. “Not even dogs would be treated like that.”

So a committee was formed and plans were made. I was asked to help with the organization, to speak at the protest meeting, and to aid in formulating telegrams to the newspapers. But word of the students’ plans soon reached the faculty, and when we met in the evening for a final talk, a representative of the President’s office was there. This Negro teacher immediately began to throw cold water on die students’ plans. He said that perhaps the newspaper reports of Miss Derricotte’s death were not true. That the students should wait and investigate first. That even if the reports were true, the students could go quietly about writing a letter of condolence to the parents of the victims, and not hold an open protest meeting.

“Hampton,” he said, “never protests. That is not our kind of a word. We go slowly and carefully and investigate.”

When this teacher had finished speaking, the students were afraid to go ahead with their plans for a protest meeting. They knew that they would surely be expelled from the school. They knew that it would be difficult for them to get into other schools. They would be blacklisted as agitators. That had happened at Hampton before when there had been a student strike against oppressive and inhuman rules and regulations over campus life. So now, almost without argument, the students abandoned the idea of having a meeting. One or two of them were bitter and defiant, but the rest were afraid, so the meeting was not held. A teacher for whom the word *protest* was too strong, had killed the spontaneous and healthy desire of his students to speak against a system that lets injured Negroes die before it will open its white hospitals to them, and that lets white mobs beat black men to death in the streets.

What kind of school is this Hampton staffed by meek teachers educating spineless students? A religious school, of course, a Christian charity school supported by the philanthropy of rich and kind-hearted white capitalists who are willing for them to know how to work, but not to protest, and who are willing for black children to go to a black school, but not to a free white state school; and who therefore support and condone with their philanthropy the vicious colour-caste system of America.

The famous industrial school for Negroes, Tuskegee in Alabama (founded by Booker T. Washington) has an endowment of over a million dollars gained by begging from rich white folks. Here

the president and all the teachers are Negroes—yet there is on the grounds of Tuskegee a guest house where black people may not eat or sleep! This guest house is for white visitors only. Against this the teachers say nothing. But this indicates to what an extent capitalist philanthropy has bought the pride and manhood of the "intellectuals'' of the black South. Behold how the education of Negro youth is controlled and demeaned by capitalist charity!

And with these charity dollars go preaching and prayers and hymns. Most of the presidents of the Negro schools are ministers, and a large part of the education is religious Many harmless amusements are forbidden the students on religious grounds. A rigorous and unnatural separation is enforced between boys and girls. Modern and scientific attitudes of study are discouraged. A mid-Victorian atmosphere prevails.

The reason, of course, for the prevalence of these Negro philanthropic schools and colleges is this: The free public-school system in the southern cotton regions extends only partially to Negroes. Throughout this section laws separate Negroes from whites in all public places—trains, street cars, theatres, hospitals, and schools. Most southern cities have excellent school buildings for whites, but small and inadequate shacks for Negroes, with oft-times no institutions of higher learning for them at all. For example, the average annual expenditure per child of school age in Alabama is as follows: For white children, $23.57; for Negro children $3.81. A startling difference! In South Carolina the state spends for each white child an average of $27.88 per school year; but on each Negro child only $2.74 is spent. With such discriminatory odds against him, the Negro child has a difficult time getting an education. Thus, without the religious philanthropic schools, in many localities Negro children would remain utterly illiterate.

In Kazakstan and Turkestan, before the Revolution colonics of tsarist Russia, the native children were utterly illiterate. Conditions were even worse than they are now in Alabama. In Asia the tsar supplied no schools for the education of the conquered peoples. And in the cells of the established Mohammedan medresses practically nothing except religion was taught, the Koran being the main text book, and seeking for Allah the main reason for learning. And even this meagre knowledge was open only to boys and men, not to girls and women.

Now, of course, in Soviet Central Asia all that is changed. The

world knows of this change. But the surprising thing to a visitor from abroad, coming to Uzbekistan or Turkmenia, is the rapidity with which this change has been brought about. In less than ten years a new system of education has been introduced—and not only introduced but put into amazing working order. Teachers have been developed; students have been graduated; and illiteracy, not only of children but of adults, has been greatly reduced. The cells of the medresses are empty, and the schools of the state are overcrowded. New books in a new alphabet have come into being. Already to the youth today, Allah is only a legend, and the Koran is forgotten. Marx, Lenin, Stalin, chemistry, economics, scientific agriculture, mathematics, electricity, and hygiene are the new realities to millions who once knew only the sleepy teachings of the priestcraft.

"How have you done this?" I asked in wonder when I visited the offices of the Commissariat of Education in Ashkhabad, capital of the Turkomen Soviet Socialist Republic m the heart of Asia. "How in so short a time have you developed this new Soviet educational system, created teachers, built schools, and taught thousands of students, awakening the minds of the masses?"

They told me how it had been done. It had not been easy—building this path to education in a region where illiteracy had been so great.

In the early years many teachers came down from Russia to help. Bright young Turkmen workers were chosen and sent away to normal schools in Russia with all expenses paid. They returned bringing the new light. Textbooks were translated from the Russian and other languages. New texts were written in the Turkmen tongue. Sometimes they were copied by hand when printing processes were unavailable. Students taught one another, taught their parents, taught the peasants and workers. There was a comradely exchange of knowledge. What would have been a tremendously hard task was made easier by the great eagerness of all the people to learn—the hunger for knowledge that tsarism had starved. Thousands of new books, magazines, and newspapers in the national languages, but in the new universal Latin alphabet, were published, thus encouraging the desire to read. And now in 1933 in Turkmenia, this once most backward of the tsarist colonies, there are 6,100 teachers (85 per cent of them native people) and 75,000 pupils and students!

This information came to me from the group of officials in the

Turkomen Narcompros (Commissariat of Education)—a group that included Turkmen, Russian, Tartar, and Tyurk nationalities—all working for the common aim of enlightening the masses. Each man spoke with great enthusiasm of his work, one telling of the creation of text books, another of the village schools, another of the kindergartens, another of the theatres and art classes. I was told how teachers study in summer and are paid while studying. (And I thought of America where teachers must spend their own hard-earned money to get further educational advantages for themselves; and of Chicago where teachers have not been paid at all for months.) I was told of the excursions and rest homes provided for educational workers in Turkmenia. I was told, too, how children here in Soviet Asia stay in school during the cotton gathering season. (And I contrasted in my mind Alabama where school bells may ring—but black children remain in the fields when cotton needs picking.) I was told how at present seven years' schooling is required for all Turkmen children but that, beginning next year, ten years will the minimum. And I was told that the struggle now is for quality in teaching, and that all forces are being pushed toward that end—for the broad basis of education is already established. Today the task is to make education as excellent as possible.

During the weeks that followed, I visited nearly all of the scholastic institutions of Ashkhabad and several of the surrounding villages. I was under the guidance of a most enthusiastic Soviet teacher and MOPR worker. Comrade Stephan, a political exile many years ago from Belgium, who threw in his lot with the workers' Revolution and now teaches in one of the large seven-year schools at Ashkhabad. Every morning before his teaching duties began, Comrade Stephan would call at the *Dom Sovietov* for me to visit with him a school, a museum, a library, or a factory.

1 met many teachers and students and had a chance to talk to them. How different, I discovered, was the Soviet students' attitude from the American students. At home, with most students, football and other sports occupy a leading place in their conversations. Here in Turkmenia, students held passionate conversations about the progress of life under the First Five-Year Plan, the growth of literature under the Soviets, the plans of the imperialists beyond the borders. Here in a remote corner of Asia, I found young people asking intelligent and penetrating questions about happenings in France, Cuba, Mexico, and other countries where I had been.

And everywhere in Ashkhabad there are schools—an amazing number! There are schools for Turkmen children, for Farsi children, for Russian children, and other nationalities, with the teaching in each case in their own language. There are high schools. There are colleges of pedagogy, commerce, science, transport, veterinary treatment. There are special research institutes, with laboratories of bacteriology, mineralogy and botany for graduate students. There is a library school every summer for village librarians held under the guidance of the Turkmen Central Library. And besides all these, there are night schools for workers, schools in clubs, schools in the Red Army barracks, and schools in factories. For instance, attached to the Eighth of March Silk Mill there is not only a seven-year school, but a silk high school, a liquidation of illiteracy school, and a Communist Party school for candidates to the Party. Children and grown-ups all go to school. All this, mind you, in the comparatively small city of Ashkhabad in the heart of the Turkmenian desert where once, under the tsar, Turkmens were not even allowed on certain streets of the towns, let alone in the classrooms of the Russian schools; and as recently as 1920 not more than 1 per cent of the whole country's population could read or write!

But now the masses are making up for lost time. Even in the dusty little villages of the desert, new school buildings are being built, larger and better than the small ones that served in the early years immediately after the Revolution. To these new rural schools will come new young Turkmen teachers from the normal schools at Ashkhabad; some even from the larger institutions at Tashkent; and others who have been to far-away Moscow for their education. The light of learning is pouring in an intense blare over Soviet Asia. Turkmenia welcomes this light with open arms.

I spent a day at the First Turkmenian Normal School at Kishi. This is attached to a modern combinat containing within itself all grades from kindergarten through the normal courses. It is located in a sandy plain a short distance from the city of Ashkhabad. On one side the desert stretches away to the horizon, and on the other the mountains rise like a wall. Beyond is Persia.

The director of the First Turkmenian Normal School is a political immigrant from Persia. There he was a shoemaker. Here he has under his guidance three hundred and fifty students and thirty-eight teachers. He received his training at the Communist University in Tashkent. He is a dark, firm man who impresses one well. He did

not talk a great deal, but he showed me through the wide halls and well-lighted class rooms of the main normal building—and what I saw was better than words. I saw the splendidly equipped laboratories, the museum of biological and geological specimens and charts, and the room where the live animals for student study are kept: white rats, turtles, frogs, and fish, and great lizards that swell their bodies with air to ferocious size. I listened to some of the classes being conducted. I remarked on the various nationalities among both teachers and students. The students were largely local Turkmen, Farsi, Beluchi, and Berberi, but there were a few Russians, some Tartars and Armenians. The teachers were Russian. Turkmen, and Farsi. Among them were five women, one an assistant professor. This is a remarkable thing in a land where a decade ago women neither taught not received teaching.

1 was interested in the social origin of the students. The greater number, the director explained to me, are from poor peasant parentage, one hundred and forty-one in actual figures. Sixty-six are from the kolkhozes, forty-six are workers, twenty- nine are from the militia, and the rest are from hired farm labour and small proprietor stock. One hundred and twenty-six students are Komsomols, and thirty-seven are either in the Party or are candidates for membership.

The students who gathered to greet me were interested in learning of student life in America. I spoke to them in English, which Comrade Stephan translated into Russian, which was then retranslated into Turkmen. But even with these double translations we succeeded in effecting some interesting exchanges of background and opinion. I told them of the difficulties for poor students, especially of minority groups in America. And they in turn told me of their new life and gave me their revolutionary greetings to carry back to the proletarian youth in the United States who still live under capitalism, and to the Negro students caught in the tangled web of religious philanthropy and racial oppression.

But the little children of the seven-year school to whom I spoke later were not satisfied with sending mere verbal greetings so far away as America. When they gathered in the open yard in the sunshine about the steps of their building, they brought with them a beautiful wall newspaper that they had made themselves in the Turkmen language for me to carry back to the Young Pioneers of America.

I shall not soon forget that sea of little faces below me as I stood on the steps—yellow, brown, white faces of these children of the Turkmen Socialist Soviet Republic as represented in this school on the edge of the desert. I shall not forget the eager questions that they put to me for more than an hour about life in those utterly different lands abroad where workers' children may suffer from hunger and cold and lack of schooling, while other children have everything. And how can there be enough food, they asked, and yet people do not eat? And do they actually burn wheat in America to keep from selling it cheaply? Why arc Negroes lynched? And why striking workers imprisoned? And is there really an electric chair?

And when the questions were finished, a little fellow came forward with the wall newspaper with its bright picture of a revolutionary sun at the top, which they entrusted to my care for the Pioneers of America. Then I went away. Their lusty young voices rang out in farewell. A horse and cart belonging to the school carried me back to Ashkhabad.

5. Dances and Music of Uzbekistan

In Samarkand and Bukhara the trade union arranged concerts of the old folk music for our Negro delegation. In Tashkent we saw *Farbar Va Shiria*, an Uzbek opera woven of the oldest tunes and dance patterns of Central Asia, retelling on the stage an ancient legend.

After our delegation left for America, I, remaining in Central Asia, saw many of the new plays in the national minorities theatres. In Ashkhabad I saw an exciting drama about the struggle. against the counter-revolutionary forces. In Tashkent I attended vivid and thought-provoking plays about the taking off of the veil from the faces of the women, about the bandits (bashmachi) of the hills, and other very modern subjects growing out of the growth and triumph of the Revolution. These new plays were well written and well acted, straightforward and direct, sometimes crudely melodramatic, but certainly not turgid or dull or unimportant.

On the other hand, these new plays of Soviet Asia were not very different in intent and construction from many dramas I had seen in Moscow about the struggles for the new life in this land of socialist construction. In America we have many articles about the Soviet theatres of Moscow, and the themes of their plays. To repeat much the same information with Asiatic colouring would not be giving anything new to mv readers. “I will find out instead about the folk-art and the ways in which it is being carried over into the new era,” I said to myself. So I went to some of the official people of the Tashkent theatre world and began to ask about the history of their theatre and especially about the survival of the folk-arts therein.

Strangely enough, I could get very little information about the old art. Maybe they didn’t know. Whatever the reason, they would talk only about the new dramas and their political importance and Soviet meaning.

“1 appreciate all that,” I said, “But I want to know about the old, too. Of course, the new drama is tremendously important, but the old music and dances are still of use, aren’t they? In all the chaihannas the old music is still being played. To many old tunes, new Soviet songs are sung. At *subbotniks.* Pioneers and Komsomols still dance the old Uzbek dances. And *Farbar Va Shirin,* one of the loveliest theatrical spectacles I have ever seen anywhere, is built from the folk art?”

To no Avail. No one would talk about the past. I thought about Lenin and Lunacharsky, among others, warning young artists of the dangers of being too scornful of the culture of yesterday.

"O.K." I said to myself. "I will go to folk artists themselves and find out about their work."

Some days later, I sought out the greatest of the Uzbek dancers, Tamara Khanum. And she in turn found for me two of the oldest and most famous of the musicians, Austa Alim Kamilov, player of hand-drums, and Achmedjean Umozazov, player of flutes. And from them I learned many things.

The history of the Uzbek dance is the history of the breaking down of traditions. Tamara Khanum herself is a breaker down of traditions. She was the first woman in the history of the peoples of Uzbekistan to perform on a public stage. And that was only ten years ago. Tamara Khanum s appearance on the stage, unveiled and unashamed; marks the opening of the Uzbek theatre to women artists. Before that time all the performers had been men.

And so with the dancers, both public and private—they had all been men. At festivals and weddings the men danced—and the women looked, if they were allowed. In the public squares and folk theatres the men danced—and often the women did not even look. In the old days, dancing, like most of the other joys of life, belonged only to the males. Now since Tamara Khanum, with a bravery that is worth noting, smashed past traditions, women dance, too.

Before the Revolution, the professional dancers began as boys, and some of them became very famous—to their world what Nijinski was to the world of the classical ballet. Their names were known in all the tea-houses, and great crowds of men would come to see them dance. Often these boy-dancers were bought outright by the rich beys, and thus became exclusive entertainers to the bey's invited guests at private feasts. At certain times of the year there would be a sort of dancer's fair, when prospective buyers of boy-dancers would gather to select their entertainers. At these colourful dance-markets, the best and most handsome of the youthful dancers would display their steps before a vast gathering seated around an enormous space in the open air.

The old men of Tashkent and Andizhan still speak of a certain male dancer, Ala Haja, who could circle this great open exhibition area three times doing the most delicate and complicated patterns with his body. The old men recall one competition of boy-dancers at

which four thousand men were gathered, including many rich beys who had come for miles around to the dance market. In their turbans and silken gowns, they had come to buy dancers.

The Traditional Uzbek dances are not vigorous arid boisterous exercises as many of the folk dances of the West are. Nor are they artificially acrobatic in the manner of the ballet and the theatre. Uzbek dances, typical of the dances of the East, are delicately patterned movements and graceful body rhythms, often weaving a story in plastics that the uninitiated would not understand. Each of the old dances had their own traditional beginning, middle, and end—the forms being a mould only for the grace of the individual performer. Like the classical sonatas for the piano in Europe, the traditional Uzbek dances might vary only in so far as the subtlety and interpretive skill of different performers gave them shaded variations within the mould of the pattern.

Of course, many famous dancers originated marvellous variations on traditional themes. Extremely subtle and extremely delicate movements of the wrists and of the hands, the fingers and the head, the mouth and the eyes might come into play. Certain dancers of the past were able to execute a very famous movement of the eyebrows as they danced: one eyebrow up, the other down, continuously, like the two sides of a balance. This particular movement is said to have come from the way in which a rice-mill is propelled by a flowing stream. And all over Uzbekistan people said, "How good it is that we have rice-mills, because from them we have been given a dance."

As the water and the rice mill enters in the Uzbek dance, so the native folk music makes use, too, of sounds from the daily life of the country. The *carnai*, that long horn often of greater length than the man is tall who plays it, reproduces the: cry of the tiger in the steppes. The little flutes of bamboo trill like a bird of the forest in an oasis of sweet water. These things the old musicians told me.

"In the silence of the steppes, there are a thousand sounds," Achmedjean, player of reeds, said. "Our instruments know them all."

To most Westerners, however, the music of the East is unbearably monotonous. At first in Central Asia, all the tunes sounded alike to me. But after hearing much native music, I could finally distinguish many subtle variations of melody that a piece might display, variations of tone so shaded and delicate that the ear of a New

Yorker, used to the blare of jazz bands, or the marked patterns of European symphonies, would never catch at first hearing.

With rhythms, however, I felt more at home. In America, the Negro players of the jazz bands achieve a variety of rhythmic effect that white players, no matter how competent, somehow never master. Deep and subtle rhythms that never lose themselves in tangled inaccuracies can often be heard in the humblest little band of Negro musicians in a backwoods Mississippi village. So in Uzbekistan, the folk musicians are capable of infinitely rhythmic variations defying notation by the conventionally trained musicians of the conservatories.

The two old and famous Uzbek musicians, whom I came to know, are very simple people, not proud and puffed up about their art. The player of flutes was a shepherd in his youth. He began to play in the fields on reeds that he would cut and tune himself. Then he became a weaver of silk. Only since the Revolution has he been a professional musician, playing at great concerts in the workers' clubs and theatres. He still makes his own instruments from the shoots of the young bamboo, and in order to hasten their mellowness, he takes them with him into the steaming caverns of the Uzbek baths—and there he plays on them for hours.

Kamilov, the player of drums, was a maker of *arbas* (high-wheeled carts) until very recently. He was the best maker of *arbas* in the whole city of Margelan. Everybody with goods to haul wanted a Kamilov *arba.* But now the old man spends a great deal of time in Tashkent playing drums as only he can play them. Tamara Khanum will not dance unless he is in the orchestra.

I asked Kamilov about his life and his music. He told me that in his youth music was not a special or highly paid art. Almost all the boys learned to play and sing and dance for their own amusement and that of their friends. By the time he was eighteen, Kamilov was known all over Margelan as especially good at fingering out compelling rhythms on the round single Eastern drum-head, like a huge tambourine, that is held in one hand and played with the fingers of the other. He was often asked to play at the "gaps," or friendly entertainments in the men's quarters on Fridays, the day of rest in the Mahommedan world. Sometimes Kamilov and his fellow musicians would be invited to come and play for the rich beys, especially when there were wedding feasts lasting for ten or fifteen days. For these occasions in the homes of the rich, the musicians would be

paid well in gold, food, and clothing. But mostly Kamilov played for nothing for himself and his companions in the tea houses and the court yards of private dwellings where the men came together.

He knows now sixty sets of traditional folk-rhythms, and has developed from them more than two hundred variants. His old teacher, the musician whom he listened to and played with in his youth, is still alive, and knows all the rhythms, too, but Kamilov is considered the greatest artist and is more beloved by the native public. He is one of the mainstays of the orchestra of the National Uzbek Musical Theatre at Tashkent.

He has done his share in the upbuilding of modern Uzbek stage. And there has been in his life, in this connection, one great tragedy. His sister-in-law who, like Tamara Khanum, was after the Revolution one of the earliest women actresses, went against the will of her husband's family in appearing as a public artist. For this she was stabbed one night twenty-seven times by her brother, with the connivance of her husband. Thus they avenged what her family considered a disgrace.

In the history of the Uzbek theatre under the Soviets, there are several other such cases of women artists suffering death from irate relatives. Tamara Khanum, however, had no trouble from her father about going into the theatre because, before her professional, appearance, her father was killed by basmachi in Fergana. The bandits had come to carry away the young girls, his daughters, including Tamara, but it happened that week the girls were in Tashkent, and the old man was alone. The bandits killed him and robbed the house.

In the early days of Tamara Khanum's appearances on the stage, there was danger that the basmachi might invade the theatres and steal the women from the stage. More than once she has danced under guard, and has been afraid to leave the theatre.

In 1925 Tamara Khanum was in Paris with a group of Uzbek musical and dance artists. While there, however, she was seriously ill, so the Parisians did not get to enjoy the beauty of her art, nor was she able to see much of the Parisian theatres. She went once to the music hall, but did not care for the art of the nude ladies performing therein—for she herself dances in the full robes and heavy jewels of an Uzbek woman of pre-revolutionary times.

She is a specialist in the dances to barabans and cymbals. She has taken over the best of the old dances of the former boy-dancers,

and has created new patterns of hat own. In the opera*, Farbar Va Shirin,* to a great burst of music in which the percussion instruments predominate, she comes across the stage straight and tall like some young animal ff the steppes. Then with lithe and vigorous movements, she begins one of those patterned and posed, yet vibrant dances that have in then simple precision something of the clear sharpness of the mountains-and plains of Central Asia. To the steady heart-like beat of the drums, the tempo of her dance never slackens, and finally she whirls away only to be called back by the applause of the audience, invariably, until she repeats the dance. Her appearance in this opera is one of the high spots in an evening of general excellence.

In the early years of the new Uzbek theatre, Tamara Khanum danced, acted, and sang, playing in many productions from their repertory. In several of the revolutionary plays she originated the leading feminine role. Now, however, her appearances are, as a rule, confined to dance numbers alone in some of the plays, occasional concerts, and many hours of teaching young pupils to whom she is greatly devoted. From one woman—herself—in company with a group of men, she has seen the Uzbek musical theatre grow until now it numbers twenty-six women in the Tashkent company alone, not counting the dozens of women playing in affiliated groups of this theatre in other cities.

Tamara Khanum has been married twice, her first husband being a famous folk-singer, Musafar Muhamid. Her present husband is a young musician. She has two children. The oldest is a little girl called Vanzetta because she was born on the day of the Sacco-Vanzetti execution. When her mother dances, she watches with bright eyes of admiration.

"What is happening to the old folk dances and music nowadays?" I asked Tamara Khanum. "Are steps being taken to preserve them?"

In reply, she told me that even then a special series of concerts were being arranged at which the best of the folk artists from the whole of Uzbekistan would perform at Tashkent; that all the young artists would be there to see and to learn; and that a conference would be held as how best to preserve the heritage of music and of dance that has come down to the October Revolution.

"Faisula Hajaiv himself is greatly interested," she said, "and will help us." Then I knew that the folk arts of the Uzbek Republi-

can was assured of serious attention. I had met Faisula Hajaiv and found him to be, as many citizens affirmed, a man of great culture and intelligence.

In parting, Tamara Khanum gave me, very shyly, one of her own records. Later, a friend translated its words for me. It was an old tune, but the words were filled with a new. spirit. The song was about a father who wanted to sell his daughter in marriage. Well, daughters in Uzbekistan have rapidly become acquainted with the new laws which prohibit the selling of women. And they are not afraid to sing about it either.

6. New People

New times demand new people. This saying one has heard before. But in Soviet Asia, as elsewhere in the Soviet Union, new people are coming into being. And they are not all just newly born babies either. Or only Pioneers. or Komsomols. No indeed.

For instance, in the old city of Tashkent: Halima Kasakova didn't learn to read and write until she was forty. She is a middle-aged woman now, but for only eight years of her life has she walked in the streets without a thick horse-hair veil hiding her face. In 1925, with the Revolution still young in her part of the world, she took off the veil, went to school—and now? Well, now she is an important figure in the management of the Women's Club in the old part of the town where for the first time in remembered history women sit on terraces open to the street and drink tea! Furthermore, she is a member of the City Soviet.

Bat don't think that at the Women's Club in Tashkent they only drink tea. Much, much more is done there than that. Under the active guidance of Halima Kasakova and other women like her, classes are held in reading, writing, the care of the house and of babies; clinics arc held; health work is centred. Old habits and customs are broken down, and other new women are being made.

Not all those, by any means, who are being made over for the better in Central Asia are former people of the working class, either. There is in Tashkent a woman, no longer young, of the once-aristocracy, who lived a life of easy culture and well-fed leisure. Now she goes to work every morning as a translator in an office. In her spare time she aids a German specialist. She is happy. She has found a life of active usefulness under the Soviets. And as a translator, she has been for months on some of the most important construction works—dams and electrical projects—working on highly technical material with foreign engineers. To me, also, her services were of great help in gathering information and interviewing people for my articles and book. Never once did she speak, or even hint by the slightest shade or tone, dislike of the workers' republic that is the new Uzbekistan. Never, in her conversations nor in her translations did she intrude (as some old translators are not averse to doing) slimy insinuations against the Soviet

power. Her speech and her work indicated always only a respect for the new and a great interest in being able to help in its development. "My child will grow up under this new life," she said. "It is better than the old."

Children under the new life, well, there's no comparing them with children in Europe or America. In Uzbekistan, many youngsters seemed to know world politics better than I did. They could ask me questions I didn't know how to answer. And at their Pioneer meetings, they stand on their strong little legs, independent and confident, and give intelligent opinions on subjects as big as war and world revolution—things a New York child has not even heard of before adolescence.

And in the Komsomols, here are the sturdy young men and women: new workers with udarnik zeal; new journalists knowing how to interpret a modern world to the people; new poets writing not the old songs of religion and love, but the new songs of growth and construction under socialism. And in positions of trust as official representatives of the people there are many new young men, graduates of the Komsomols. Kurbanov, chairman of the city soviet of Bukhara, is only twenty-eight years old. Fifteen years ago. he was a herd-boy in the mountains who didn't know his letters.

But of all the new citizens I met in Central Asia, I think I shall remember as long as any a simple young worker at Chirchikstroy. I am not even sure of his name. I think he said Tajaiv. I didn't take notes, and I wasn't speaking with him over five minutes. But the glow in his face, the pride in his voice, as he told me about the building of the first Komsomol barracks—somehow that sticks in my head to this moment.

1 had driven out with the manager of construction and some newspaper men to the site of the dam that is to be, about an hour's ride from Tashkent. Here at Chirchikstroy will rise an enormous electrical and chemical development. But it is only just beginning now. Until 1911 they had not even barracks for the workmen on the site. The Komsomols working there said, "We will build our own barracks." And they did. That is why I was motoring through the snowy

dusk one January evening, along a rough country road across the steppe, to attend the opening of those barracks the Komsomols had built.

Tajaiv, the lad I'm writing of, didn't meet us at the door or anything like that. He was not one of the official people. Nor did he speak on the program. But once inside the big warm barracks with its many cots in a row like a Red Army dormitory, it wasn't long before I saw him. He had an udarnik's badge, and a very clean shirt, and a big smile. He wasn't a big person. He was shorter than the other young workers about the room. Just a little hard Uzbek or Tadjik boy of perhaps fifteen or sixteen or seventeen A youngster who hadn't ever seen a bed of roses But now he was very happy. As one of our hosts he came near the stove to greet us.... Look what we have built—our Komsomols here—the first barracks at Chirchikstroy. Here we will live while the dam is made. Before we built this, there was nothing on this land. This is the first building—our work!

His dark round young face was aglow with their big achievement, and with the much bigger achievements to follow at this place: Chirchikstroy—light and power and chemicals for all that section of Asia. Tajaiv would build it. His hard young hands. They had the power to transform the whole future. To build, to build, to build.

Now I know why the near-by Indian Empire trembles and Africa stirs in a wretched sleep. Chirchikstroy will throw such a light on the southern sky! In Soviet Asia there are a million Tajaivs with strong hands and young hearts proud of new buildings on new land in a new world. A million Tajaivs who will build and build and build! And the light will shine not only on their sky alone.