

THE DRAMA OF MY LIFE

Mukden: "The Bloody Sunday": Kronstadt. By IVAN NARODNY Illustration by WILSON KARCHER



The Battle of Mukden



IBERTY! WHO CAN appreciate it save one who, like myself, has been long confined! I was free, free! The word rang in my ears — free to go and to come and to live as I pleased. How different was this world of action from that of the cell!

How different was the speech of the lips from the talk of the walls! For years after my release from prison, I subconsciously accompanied with my fingers the language of my unwilling lips. And when I saw a flying dove or a creeping mouse — those symbols of friendship in prison — I would start as if I had beheld a ghost; for in that moment I saw, as in a flash, the whole kaleidoscope of four terrible years spent in solitary confinement.

Two years had passed since my release from prison, two happy years. I was living on my farm, and it seemed as if the peace I had found would last for ever. I felt that the cruelty of my life in prison had crushed every aspiration. But suddenly, I awoke. The war between Russia and Japan was on. The peasants and the working people of the cities began to revolt. It looked as if a great revolution might be imminent. I was no longer content to remain idly at home, when my military friends were working day and night for the cause that was so dear to us all. I felt as if a voice were urging me to join them and, though I knew the danger, I could not choose but go.

I went to St. Petersburg, where I learned that half of the members of our organization had been ordered to Manchuria. Those left behind had plans to start a big uprising at a moment when the autocratic government would be weakest. Our ideal was not socialism, for which reason we did not associate with either the socialistic or the social revolutionary parties. We proposed to make Russia a Republic, first of all. With this in view, my friends wished me to go to Manchuria, there to imbue the army with a spirit of rebellion. A favorable opportunity presented itself when a Russian and a German paper asked me to become their special war correspondent, and I accepted.

I left St. Petersburg on May 4, 1905. Beyond Moscow there was an endless succession of troops and ammunition trains. If I had not seen mountains and valleys, villages and towns from the window of my car, I should have thought the world was merely a huge armed camp. After two weeks of strenuous traveling, I arrived in Harbin and obtained, with great difficulty, a room in the Hotel Orient. That was surely one of the most expensive hotels that I have ever patronized. For a dirty and damp bedroom, bare of furniture and even without a bed, I paid four dollars a day. My daily bill amounted to something like forty dollars. The house was kept by two ex-convicts, who looked as if they were capable of strangling a guest at any moment, if they suspected that he had money on his person.

I met a couple of Russian newspaper men, who told me that it was impossible to go any farther. They said that the correspondents at Mukden were on the point of returning and that Admiral Alexieff with his staff — Alexieff was at that time the Viceroy of the Far East — was also expected back. General Maximoff, to whom I had a letter of introduction from my military friends in St. Petersburg, informed me that the plan of the campaign was a general retreat to Harbin, which city was to become the headquarters of General Kuropatkin. However, I was resolved to see the war and left Harbin for Mukden.

It took a day and two nights to reach Mukden, and when I arrived there I felt that I had left the

western world far behind. I was in a monumental Eastern bazaar, overerowed with barracks, hospitals and gambling houses, and tormented by a ceaseless clamor, such as I have never heard since. The city was a tangle of closely packed, one-story houses, intersected by three main streets, and with a network of innumerable back alleys. The brilliant coloring of the costumes and uniforms, the tinkling temple bells, the theaters with their great gongs to attract the passers-by, the roaring of the guns from the distance and the moans of the wounded — all made a monstrous impression upon me. It seemed as if human life meant nothing here.

During my few weeks in Mukden, I got many glimpses of the horrors of war. I stayed at the house of a young Chinaman, a mile out of the city, with my friend, Colonel S.; and we were soon in touch with all the members of our revolutionary organization. We arranged a meeting in a Buddhist temple, where a resolution was adopted that everything possible should be done to create chaos in the Russian army. This was one of my most dangerous undertakings; for if I had been detected at that time, I should have been shot the next day.

On October 8, I received instructions to start for the front and to join the First European Army Corps, which formed part of the reserves. I arrived in the evening at the village of San-Lintse, twelve *wersts* southeast of Mukden. I passed the night in the tent of a colonel, a member of our organization. But, on October 11, I moved with the Sixth Regiment of Siberian Cossacks to a village four *wersts* farther in, near the headquarters of General Kuropatkin. On October 12 artillery fire began early in the morning. This was my first experience of real war. The day was clear; but the atmosphere was heavy with the odor of smoke and blood. From a *kopje* in front of our position, I got a splendid view of the fighting. To the east, a succession of brown hills were like the waves of an angry sea; to the west was a wide plain, dotted with little black groups of

infantry. In the center of the plain, a battery was engaged in an uninterrupted duel with a Japanese battery. As I watched, it received a hail of shells, which exploded with an ear-splitting crash and spread destruction and death. In the extreme distance were the peaceful hills of Yantay. The firing of the batteries continued until late in the evening. The infantry then retired to the southwest.

In the night it rained heavily, the noise of the thunder mingling with that of musketry. News of terrific fighting arrived continuously. The wounded began to pass our camp. I could hear distinctly their groans and cries. On the roadside, I found here and there the corpses of those who had died in the ambulances, or from exhaustion. A young soldier writhed in the shadow of the wall of a graveyard. He only moaned in answer to my inquiry if I could do anything for him. I lighted a candle that I was carrying and learned that he was dying from the effects of a ghastly wound in his breast. I gave him a few mouthfuls of the wine I had with me, and offered him a cigar. He smoked and seemed to be relieved. Removing his bloodsoaked shirt, I found that his body had been mangled by bayonet wounds. I tore my handkerchief into strips and tried to bind his wounds; but before I was able to relieve him, he died in terrible agony. All that night the incident haunted me, and I could not close my eyes.

The intermittent thunder of the great guns was heard throughout the night. A few minutes before sunrise the next morning, the batteries got down to work in real earnest. The shells of the enemy seemed to fall every moment nearer to my post of observation. I turned to the nearest Russian battery, and saw that it was astir. It was the highest time to leave. Scarcely had I mounted my pony and left the *kopje*, when two shells fell behind it. On my arrival at the headquarters of the First Army Corps, I was told that the Japanese were in a village three *wersts* off. Corpses, bloody clothing and bandages were to be seen in every direction.

We received orders at dawn to be in readiness to move. A fierce infantry battle was expected to take place the following day. The nervous strain that I had undergone, added to the fact that I had not slept for the past two nights, had left me so exhausted that I could hardly stand on my feet. The village, which was occupied by the regiment commanded by my friend, Colonel S., had already been deserted by its inhabitants. I passed the night in the house of a Buddhist priest. At daybreak I was awakened by a special messenger from the colonel, informing me that an infantry battle was going on and that he had gone to the front, leaving a letter to his family, in my care, in case he should be killed. I rushed out of the house, and in a few seconds was in a literal hell of fire and death. Bullets whistled around my head. A few houses had caught fire, and the flames were spreading rapidly. The wounded lay wherever I looked — symbols of the suffering of the whole human race. Some were trying to reach the Red Cross camp, and hundreds of them were shot down by fresh bullets. Others writhed in their agony, without succor. I seemed to be plunged into the lowest circle of the inferno of human pain.

There was some degree of safety in my proximity to the hospital camp; but I looked longingly at the hills, which were beyond the range of the rifle bullets, although the field guns seemed to be doing execution even there. I gave one last glance at the scene around me — the most horrible recollection of my life. Then, I set spurs to my pony, and in time I safely reached the valley beyond the hills. But a ghastly sight met me there, also. The valley was filled



I saw swords rising and falling

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