

ILLARION YANKIN

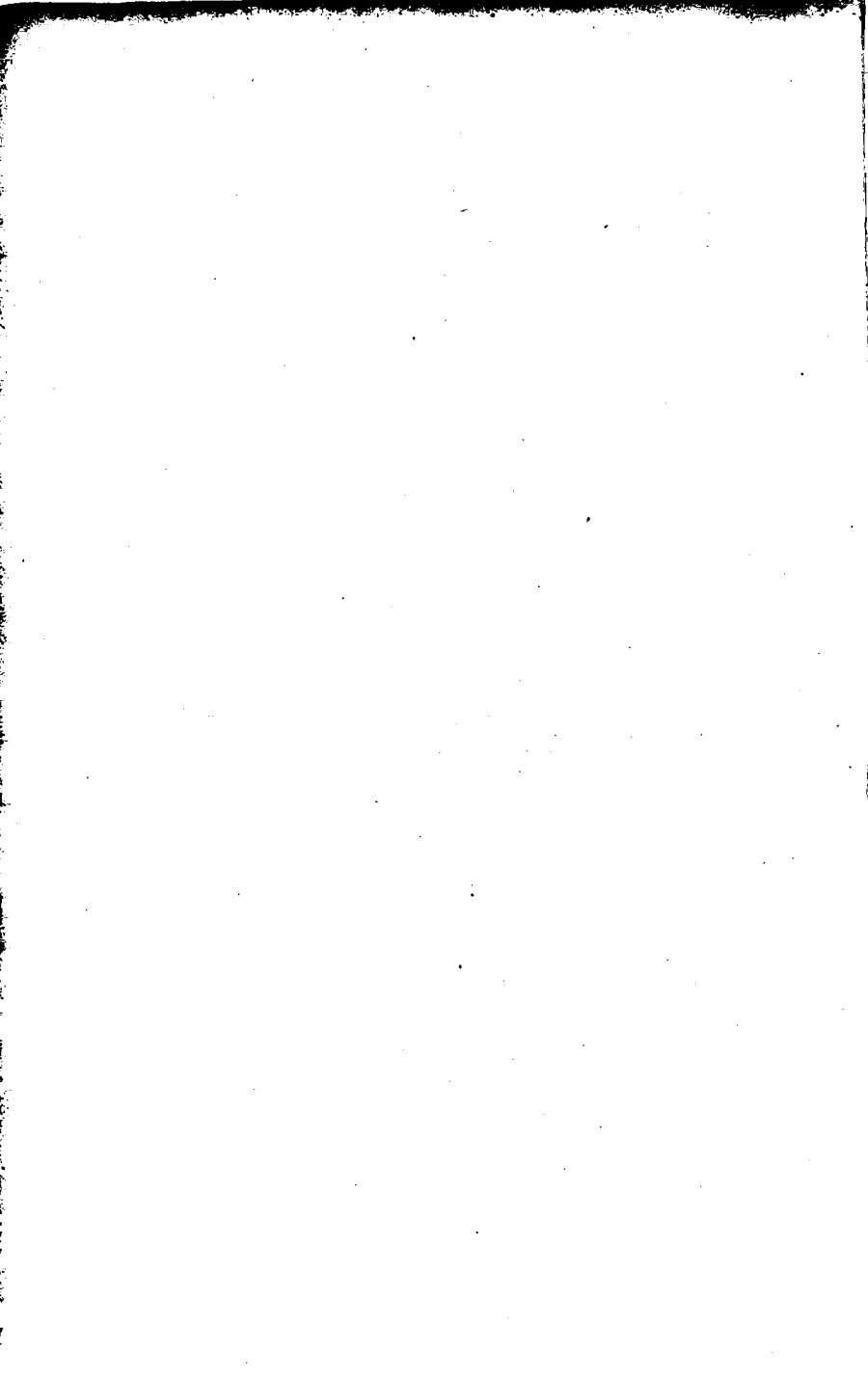
NOTES
of a
STAKHANOVITE



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE
Moscow 1950



SKETCHES
OF
SOVIET LIFE



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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The publishers have supplied this edition with photographs illustrating the life of the author.



I arrived at the Krasnogvardeiskaya copper mine in Krasnouralsk, the Urals, in 1934.

I often recall that first day at the mine. On the face of it there is nothing remarkable about a young man getting a job. But what made the day memorable was the warm welcome the mine gave us newcomers from the collective farms. There were special people to take care of us and they did their best to make us as comfortable as was possible in a modest little mining town.

We had not yet begun work and were not on the pay roll, but we were constantly being told about the amenities we had at our disposal: here was the hot water, here the reading room, here the laundry, and here the tailor shop if we wanted to make use of it.

The dormitory we were put up in was not exactly a mansion, of course, but it was spick and span and cosy. The house managers used to run in off and on to ask whether the place was heated properly. The trade union and Komsomol public inspectors kept them on their toes.

I had heard and read a great deal about the sensations a man experiences on going down into a mine for the first time. Some say: "You feel the dreadful weight of the rock pressing down on you." Others say: "The gloom of the underground depresses you." The first thing that struck me was that it was warm down there.

I had grown up in a village and was used to working in the fields; of large-scale industry I did not have the slightest idea, and of the new construction jobs of the five-year plan, the huge factories and mines, I knew

only from what I had read in the papers. And although I had plenty of work in the Novy Pakhar (New Ploughman) Kolkhoz, which my wife and I had joined in 1928, I was eager to go to work in the Urals when that opportunity was offered. I wanted to do something more exciting.

There was nothing frightening about the mine because they gave us the simplest work to do: I began as a mucker. The miner at the face drilled blast holes with a pneumatic drill, and when the ore had been blasted down, our job was to shovel it into trams. But even the simple physical work I was doing was part of a large-scale production process based on mechanization. The productivity of the latest model drills put out by Soviet plants was very high indeed for the time.

The muckers were the human link between two mechanized processes. The hard copper ore was first drilled and then the blast holes were charged with explosive and the rock blasted to bits at one shot. Our job was to clear the loose ore away from the face fast enough to keep the loaded trams flowing in a steady stream to the hoist.

So far everything depended on the worker being handy and alert.

I'll make a go of it, I said to myself.

I soon got to know the other men in the mine and made some friends. And although for a long time, more than a year in fact, I wasn't promoted, I made up my mind to stay on in the mine. I had already acquired a taste for the work. It was my secret ambition to become a more highly skilled worker, but I didn't want to push myself forward. At last Mikhail Grigorievich Kurzayev, the drillers' crew leader, came over to me one day and said:

"Would you like to work at the face, Illarion? I see you've got the knack. What do you say?"

"I'm willing."

"All right then, listen to me." We sat down together and for the rest of the evening Kurzayev told me what a driller ought to know. He explained how the ore beds lay, what the ore and rock were like, how to handle a drill, what to do in emergencies, and what to be on the lookout for....

"I don't think you've been wasting your time around here all this year," he said as we parted. "If you run up against a snag you can always ask. Start in on the evening shift."

Kurzayev may not have been a professional speaker but he talked so warmly and interestingly about his native Urals, about the great Second Five-Year Plan and about mining that I was soon itching to lay my hands on a drill.

Kurzayev deliberately kept away from the face when I started in drilling. Most likely he believed from the pedagogical point of view that I would feel more sure of myself if left alone. And I for my part was too grateful to him for having risked putting me on the face to let him down. I drilled seven one-and-a-half metre holes in my first shift and everything went smoothly. I already knew what the various drill holes were like and how they were to be placed to break up the rock properly.

Toward the end of the shift Mikhail Grigorievich appeared.

"Seven? Fine."

He examined the set and shook my hand. On his way out he turned back and said:

"Listen boy, I've told them to put you on piecework right away. So you'd better watch out—you've got a quota hanging over you."

That's all right, I said to myself, let it hang! I'll cope with it!

I went home excited and happy. After supper I sat down to write letters: one to the wife telling her to

join me at once, the other to Yakov Merkulov, the kolhoz chairman, asking him to help her to leave.

The management of the mine also encouraged me to bring my wife over. The section chief said to me:

"I can't expect serious work from a man who has his home and family somewhere else. Once you've decided to be a miner you'd better settle here properly."

Long before my wife arrived I was told that I could expect a separate apartment when my family came.

And so the day came when I walked through the mining town no longer a bachelor day labourer but a real miner, a respectable family man who had come to the Urals to stay.

Around this time I had passed my technical exams and had been promoted to the highest category. I had a trade!

In 1935 I finished what was called courses for masters of socialist labour.

I had had only three years of schooling and I had to study hard to make up for lost time. Courses? I'll take them! A lecture? I'll go to the lecture! Study circle? No objections to that either! Anything else I can sign up for?

"Want to sign up for a current events class?"

"I'm on!"

Dozens of people seemed to be interested solely in persuading young miners to study. The Party Bureau heard the reports of representatives of the technical education department, the mine trade union committee and the school for adults, and urged them to show more initiative. Strict instructions about study programs, schedules and attendance were issued.

Our crew leader at that time was Alexei Boyarskikh. He hadn't much use for young workers. He took any success by a newcomer as a personal affront. Was it envy, or what? He was annoyed by drillers who were



Illarion Yankin and his wife in 1928 when they joined a kolkhoz.
That was six years before he decided to become a miner

eager to pick up anything new in the way of technique. Once, when I was still working in Boyarskikh's crew, the shift superintendent, Pavel Osipovich Sokolov—a Communist, an experienced miner and a warmhearted, likeable man—came up to me and said:

“Have you heard how much coal Stakhanov has been turning out?”

“I have,” I said.

“Well, and how much do you think you could do if we have everything in perfect shape?”

“Pavel Osipovich, you know yourself, I'm the youngest of the lot...”

He laughed.

“Why, lad,” he said, “that's just why I came to you.... Come on, be a sport. If it's hard going we'll help you. The main thing is to keep your head and have confidence in yourself.”

And he gave me a sly wink.

Sokolov rarely came to us more than once during the shift. And here I saw him looking in twice and three times. He was keeping an eye on me to see how I was coming along. I drilled practically the whole shift through, taking hardly any time off for auxiliary work. I didn't specially strain myself. Just the same, by the end of the shift I had trebled my quota.

I went up in the cage along with Boyarskikh. He wouldn't speak to me. Looked daggers at me and didn't say a word. For four days after that he didn't greet me when we met. What was wrong with the man?

The behaviour of our crew leader was a broad hint to us young miners not to dare to turn out more than he did. Sometimes out of respect for an older worker we did try to slow up a bit and prepared the face for the crew leader so he could top our own outputs. On such days Boyarskikh would liven up and begin laying it into us:

"Well, greenhorns? You thought you'd beat the old man, eh? Watch him drill the stuff and learn, you snott-noses!"

But the minute anyone chanced to get ahead of him he would start sulking again.

Much later I realized what the trouble was. It had taken the old miners long years to learn their trade. It could not have been otherwise in the old days before the Revolution, when the mines belonged to the capitalists and mining technique was primitive. We, young miners, came to the mines after new machinery and equipment had been installed and new Soviet methods of technical training introduced. The whole atmosphere in the mines now helped the worker to learn the trade faster. What had taken the oldtimers years to learn we picked up in a year or eighteen months. Some of the older miners had a hard time adjusting themselves to these changes.

"Here's the way we look at it," Sokolov said. "The young workers have to be given a boost, and as for folks like Boyarskikh, we'll teach them to appreciate the new methods too. Mark my words, Boyarskikh will drop his nonsense some day and give a good account of himself."

He was right.

Some ten years later I read in the newspapers that Alexei Boyarskikh had been decorated for the successful application of Stakhanov methods. There was nothing remarkable about that. The Stakhanov movement swept the hardened conservatives out of the way and helped the simple "laggers" onto the right path.

Grigori Ivanovich Zateyev was a crew leader of quite a different type. He was an old miner too, but unlike Boyarskikh he was an ardent supporter of anything new and daring. He took pleasure in the success of every young driller. One day he came over to me and said:

"I see you're not getting along with your crew leader. What about coming over to my crew?"

"I don't mind."

"Done, then," said Zateyev. "Now, we'll be 'flying in airplanes' all the time. I've spoken to the chiefs already."

The next shift I was transferred to Zateyev's brigade which nearly always figured in the first column of the output index board marked by an airplane. Boyarskiikh's crew mostly plugged along on "horseback" or "by car."

I liked working with Zateyev. Everybody respected our crew leader. And he deserved it: he could beat any technician when it came to drilling, tunneling or blasting. At the same time he was a good organizer, and he always thought in terms of the interests of the state as a whole. People's Commissar Sergo Orjonikidze knew him personally.

Sergo Orjonikidze used to come to our mine and talk to our best crew leaders like old friends. This made a tremendous impression on me. Imagine my pride when I, a young driller, was invited along with Zateyev to a conference of miners conducted by the People's Commissar himself! Orjonikidze wanted our advice about raising ore output. He spoke to us with much feeling.

There were wreckers in our mine at the time who went about their dirty work. They fanned fires underground in the sulphur and pyrites layers and succeeded in causing a major fire which put the mine out of commission for quite a long time.

History will never forgive our enemies this heinous crime against the Soviet people!

I was transferred to a salvage crew and for nearly two years we were fire fighting.

Salvage men work where other miners are not allowed to go. Wearing respirators they make their way to where the air is laden with poisonous gases, to the very heart of the danger areas. With special tools at their disposal their job is to clear away cave-ins and slips.

In the salvage crew I went through special training,

acquiring a new profession, and was made a detachment commander.

"You're getting along famously in our crew," political instructor Speshilov said.

I was very happy to hear this praise, but for all that I did not give up the idea of going back to drilling.

Two years passed and the fire was put out, although there still were levels where it was impossible to work because of the heat. Gradually mining operations got under way and the underground installations were put back into shape. Stopes were cut at the new 169-metre level and a newly-formed drilling crew with myself at its head was sent there to work. Later we went down to the 244-metre level. Even here the aftermath of the fire still made itself felt; the ore was hot and the temperature of the air remained high in spite of the increased ventilation.

The perfidious blows delivered by the enemies had evoked a holy wrath in the workers, and we worked as fiercely as if we had been in the thick of battle.

And for that matter it was a battle we were engaged in, and the workers of our mine, even those who only a short time before had been quite frank about working primarily to make money, felt that they were soldiers in the firing lines and acted accordingly.

This was a period when our life had blossomed out in all its beauty, when the policy of the Bolshevik Party had fully triumphed—the period when the people proudly adopted the Stalin Constitution.

There were eighteen men in my crew. I remember nearly all of them personally—Vasili Kurzayev, Mikhail Lyashkevich, Grigori Borodin, Fyodor Kushtynayev, Alexei Drobyshevsky, and others. Nearly all of them were workers who had come to the mines from the village at the same time as I had. But they were no longer casual newcomers, they were professional miners who loved their

work and who felt at home in the mine. They had settled in Krasnouralsk for good, brought their families over and become regular city folk.

All the men were eager to learn. They had the regular technical study circles and all sorts of courses in technical and general subjects at their service, besides which crew leaders, foremen and technicians begrudged neither time nor effort to teach every novice. Just say the word and every facility for study would be yours!

What a great thing that is!

In a book published in Sverdlovsk, an old Urals miner, P. P. Yermakov, describes how the skilled worker in prerevolutionary Russia sought to keep the secrets of his trade from newcomers and smartly cuffed the ears of the too curious.

"What'd you hit me for, anyway? I wasn't getting in your way, just looking from the distance...."

"I'll teach you to look on ... poking your nose into other people's business!"

But if you were to ask crew leaders Kurzayev or Zaleyev what they valued most in the young worker, they would answer:

"The desire to learn. Definitely the desire to learn."

Our whole crew studied every day.

We learned not only in the classroom, but directly on the job. Sometimes after work we stayed on in the mine for a long time discussing the results of the day's work, getting one another's advice, arguing, devising ways and means of extracting more ore with less holes, comparing the different types of drills, timing ourselves, and going along to other workings to see how the work was done there.

A large group of instructors in mining mechanics, geology and mathematics had been assigned to teach us.

When I first came to the mine Sokolov told me: "Remember now, you've got to study. Learning makes a

man ten times stronger. We'll give you all the teachers you need, the rest is up to you. But we won't pay instructors for nothing. So you'd better be serious about it, Yan-kin!"

I was serious. I got myself textbooks and copybooks and every day after work I sat down to my studies like a schoolboy.

Aksenov, the chief engineer, often asked me how I was getting on.

"Haven't dropped it yet, eh? It's hard for you, I know, but stick it out, lad. . . ."

I stuck it out.

When we began on the 244-metre level my crew came out first. We were "flying" now, turning out one-and-a-half times the monthly quota, or an average of more than 2,000 cubic metres of ore.

It soon became clear to me that there wasn't enough work for eighteen drillers in our stope. Too crowded. I took the matter up with the section superintendent.

"From the standpoint of the interests of the state, comrade chief," I said, "you could take six men away from us and the work would only profit by it."

"How do you make that out?"

"It's quite simple. With so many drillers there's not much elbow room to manoeuvre, there isn't enough face to drill all the 480 minutes of the shift."

"Interesting, interesting. . . . Have to think it over," said the chief.

And although the other crews continued to work the old way for the time being, ours was cut by six men. Not without a big fuss though, because the six men in question didn't want to be released. Kuzmin and Zakharov were the most stubborn of the lot.

"We're not going to any new crew," they declared.

The matter had to be taken to chief engineer Aksenov. He called us all in.

"What's the trouble, comrades?" he said, addressing Kuzmin and Zakharov.

"We want to stay where we are."

"But you can form a new crew. We'll give you the best conditions," Aksenov coaxed them.

"Let others form a new crew...."

I began to feel awkward about the whole business, so I made a suggestion.

"All right," I said. "Suppose I take six men and leave the crew myself. Do you agree to that?"

"Nothing doing, you can't drop us like that...."

Well, after prolonged talks with the chief engineer and the mine manager the drillers finally agreed to fall in with the reorganization, but they were sore at me for a long time for upsetting the quiet routine they had all been accustomed to.

But who wants a quiet life anyway?

In order not to disgrace ourselves, we had undertaken to drill double the former area of face, and we did it too!

Muckers liked working in our stope better than anywhere else.

"This is the stuff!" they exclaimed as they shovelled away the piles of ore we had prepared for them. "Look at the way they turn it out!"

We had plenty of elbow room now!

Formerly, when we were crowded for space, we just let the drills gnaw away lightly at the rock—there was plenty of time. But now we had our drills going like rapid-fire machine guns. There were always new positions to move to.

And what was the result? Although there were only twelve of us instead of eighteen, our muckers were loading one and a half times as much ore as before.

I was invited to attend a meeting of the Party Bureau.