FROM JAPAN TO EUROPE BY THE TRANS-SIBERIAN ROUTE.

By H. A. BONAR, Esq., H.B.M. Consul at Yokohama.

Monday, 18th February, 1901.

Admiral the Rt. Hon. Sir J. C. D. HAY, Bart., K.C.B., D.C.L., etc.,
in the Chair.

IN availing myself of the privilege of reading before this learned Institution a narrative of my trip home from Japan last summer, I do not claim the performance of a difficult or a novel journey. I shall feel gratified, however, if by this means so much of the ignorance on the overland travel to the Far East under present conditions can be dispelled. I think I may say that this ignorance is as great in the East as it is in Europe. But for the assurance made to me more than a year ago by a member of this Institution, then in China, who has a special knowledge of the Siberian region, that the journey by rail and river would be practicable after the spring of 1900, I should probably have given up my plan for want of information. A reference to "Murray's Guide" I thought would help me, but having obtained the most recent edition from London, I found in it but vague information as to the contemplated Siberian Railway dating 1893. Beyond question, one can now travel by river and rail almost uninterruptedly from the Far East to Europe, or *vice versa*, in comparative comfort and at little expense. Later there will also be a considerable saving in time, and sixteen or seventeen days will suffice to get to points of that most interesting of regions which it now requires a journey of forty days to reach. I further accomplished the particular object I had in view of performing the shortest journey between Tokio and Europe with the minimum amount of sea-travelling. This may not appeal to many, but it will be a comfort to some to know that now they can reach beautiful Japan with very little risk of sea-sickness, and China by rail all the way, so soon as the Manchurian part of the railway is completed. This probably will happen at an early date, when the Russians will be able to reach Port Arthur in absolute comfort and independently of the great waterway to the Far East.

There can be no harm in Russia acquiring territory for this purpose, so long as other nationalities are admitted without too many restrictions. Manchuria will certainly be more accessible than under Chinese rule. I is not my object to speak about the Manchurian Railway, which probably will be so soon finished, but I wish to say something on the subject of that complete land communication which Russia has now had for nearly a year, and of which she was able to avail herself on the first great occasion, within two months after its completion when the troubles in China broke out. Therefore, I will not further dilate on the immense advantages, political and commercial, which Russia gains by her land communications with the Far East, for Mr. Colquhoun has already done so in a paper read before this Institution in June last.

The following statement is probably no exaggeration:—"During the three months ending 1st October (old style) the Siberian Railway conveyed 54,410 men and 11,407 horses to the Trans-Baikal territory; 46,209 men and 9,149 horses, and 3,906 tons of war material were conveyed along the Shilka and Amoor Rivers." It appears further that only 19,000 men were conveyed by sea to Vladivostok and Port Arthur during the same period. We passed the first two or three military trains going east just before reaching Lake Baikal, and they were carrying some 900 to 1,000 men each. At that rate there is nothing astonishing at the figures given above. One must remember, of course, that they were only conveyed from Irkutsk, across Lake Baikal, to Stretensk, and thence from this point they were taken down the river in barges. I cannot speak as to the supply of these; there are probably enough stern-wheelers and other steamers, together with barges and rafts, available for the carriage of troops on the river. From every point of view, the Amur communication will always be a second but invaluable string to Russia's bow in Siberia.

I return now to the object of my paper, which is to describe travel through Siberia under present conditions, and which will certainly improve, regardless of the completion of the Manchurian Railway. Going East will always be an easier matter than coming West by the Amur; several days are saved on the down-river journey; and river steamers are more likely to connect promptly. My notes apply only to travel between April and September. I am given to understand that after the first week of the latter month the river begins to freeze. During the other months nothing need be feared from the climate, but one should always have a supply of warm clothes; though mosquitoes do not worry one, flies are a great annoyance, and a piece of mosquito-netting is useful. This journey costs much less than either that by the American-Continental and Pacific, or the Suez—Hong-Kong route. The railway and steamer fares are astonishingly low, first-class from Tokio to Moscow they amounted

to only £21 10s. 6d. for a distance of over 7,000 miles; if, in addition, meals and hotel expenses, at the rate of ten shillings a day for thirty days, are added, and £3 or £4 for baggage expenses, the cost of the journey need not exceed £40. That is about half the cost *via* Canada or Suez. Later, no doubt, as Mr. Colquhoun points out, one will be able to travel to Peking or Shanghai for £32 10s., and to Japan for £2 or £3 more. As a matter of fact, it cost my companion and myself rather over £60 apiece to travel from Tokio to London, but that covered hotel expenses at various places where we were detained, wines and spirits and mineral waters, and the use of a servant for part of the time. It is quite certain that steamship companies will never be able to compete with these rates; further, there is no doubt that the Russian authorities will make travelling in Siberia or Manchuria as luxurious as it is in European Russia. The following statement is an example of what is intended, if not already done: "The trains now running on the Moscow to Irkutsk section on the Trans-Siberian Railway are to be heated and lighted by electricity. There are electric cigar-lighters in each compartment, and the water and milk in the dining-car are kept from freezing by electric heaters. The lamps on the sleeping berths are turned on or off automatically by drawing the curtains, etc."

With only a bare outline of the trip, supplemented by third-hand information received at the last moment from Vladivostok, my companion and I—travelling alone seemed inadvisable—left Tokio on 1st June by rail for Niigata, a treaty port on the coast of Japan, situated almost opposite to Vladivostok, and presenting one of the shortest sea routes between Japan and the Siberian coast. A Japanese mail steamer was scheduled to leave Niigata on the 4th for Vladivostok, on its monthly run from Saghalien, *via* Hakodate, a mail service which is carried on only from May to November. Railway travelling in Japan is sufficiently well known to require no further description. The distance from Tokio to the Western Port, some 250 miles, necessitates 18 hours' travelling, with a break for the night at the small sea port of Naoyetsu on the Japan Sea. The route is not uninteresting; the railway rises from the Tokio plain to the Karuizawa plateau 4,000 feet above the level of the sea by a series of tunnels, skirts the base of Mount Asama, said to be the largest active volcano in Japan, and then descends to the western seaboard through extremely pretty scenery. Naoyetsu is one of the many places in Japan where it is not a joy to pass a night in an inn—generally spoken of as a tea-house, which is a very different thing. A scramble for the hot bath, which one likes to have first, of course, a long and weary wait for the evening meal, much sliding of doors and clapping of hands to call the waitresses, the incessant tapping of the small Japanese pipes against the tobacco-boxes, and the conversations of loud-voiced travellers are great

drawbacks to most Japanese inns. But there are, of course, delightful places to be found where one may enjoy the luxury of a hot bath prepared specially, where nice clean cotton dressing-gowns are provided for the guests, where the mats are clean, the waitresses polite and neat, and where one can enjoy excellent Japanese food and good saké at moderate prices. The globe-trotter rarely visits places of this sort, and if he does his guide does not allow him to enjoy these luxuries, but gets them himself instead; the globe-trotter is given perhaps the worst room because he wants to keep his boots on, and has to be satisfied with a tough beef-steak which his guide has ordered for him, and is charged more than he would have to pay in most parts of Europe for much more comfort.

Unkind as it may seem to say it, the globe-trotter is not loved by the resident in Japan; somehow or other with his guide he has spoilt manners and prices. I will not say that it is always the fault of the traveller himself, his guide probably represents him as a person to be fleeced and to be put off with a minimum of comfort and the worst of everything that an inn can provide. However, there are still some parts of Japan, the unbeaten tracks, where one meets with courteous treatment and real Japanese comforts.

Niigata is one of those old-fashioned places. It is some 85 miles west of Naoyetsu, and the railway company that owns the line is distinguished for using liquid fuel produced in the district, and for numerous accidents. We spent two days there and enjoyed ourselves thoroughly. It is now a flourishing town of 50,000 inhabitants. Though it has been opened some forty years to foreign trade, it has been absolutely neglected by the foreign merchant. Until recently it was impossible to reach it except by a three days' journey over high passes, and the anchorage being an open roadstead, ships avoided the place. It is the chief town of one of the richest districts, and now has rail communication with the rest of Japan; harbour works are in course of construction, and it will probably prosper like other places opened to foreign trade. It is near to the centre of the oil-producing industry, which needs foreign capital and management to help the Echigo district to supply kerosene oil, of which Japan consumes an enormous quantity. But the Japanese have so far given no inducement for the introduction of foreign capital, and though they feel the need of it they have not cared to legislate in any way which will benefit the country if it is to benefit the foreigner also.

The out-of-the-way corners of Japan are always the most attractive, and we were sorry to leave this hospitable and cheery place for the Siberian coast. We went on board the Japanese mail-steamer "Gaisen Maru," 1,700 tons, which does the Japan-Vladivostok mail service in the summer months, and on which we found excellent accommodation, good food, and a most obliging captain and staff.

At Niigata steamers have to lie about a mile off shore, and as it is often impossible to get on board we counted ourselves fortunate in having perfect weather. Probably Niigata will never become a port of embarkation for the Siberian Railway, though it is on a straight line from Tokio to Moscow, but it will always save time to travel this way. There is also regular steam communication between Nagasaki and Vladivostok *viâ* the Corean ports. This involves some 600 to 800 miles sea-travelling, but the steamers are large and comfortable. There can be but little doubt that the passengers and goods traffic to and from Japan *viâ* Siberia will be diverted to Talienwan as the terminus of the Manchurian Railway. I was assured some years ago by one of our naval officers who has had considerable experience on the China station that the great Asiatic Railway then commenced by Russia must have its terminus at Talienwan to be of any use to the commercial communities of the East. Approximately it is situated only forty-eight hours from Pekin, Shanghai, and the railway system of Japan, and is also at the outlet for the natural trade route from the Amur through Manchuria to the sea. Originally Russia could count only on Vladivostok as the terminus of the railway which was to follow the Amur to Khabárovsk, but Talienwan is an ice-free port, Vladivostok is not. It is the only port free of ice to which the railway could be brought.

We crossed the Japan Sea in the finest of weather in 46 hours travelling at 9 knots and we reached the entrance to Vladivostok on the morning of the 6th. We were indeed fortunate to find a thick fog lifting. In the summer months, owing to fog, the approach is so difficult that none but the boldest navigators would dare pick their way to the harbour. The entrance to the port is very picturesque, but the scenery is a secondary consideration, and attention is attracted to the new forts going up in every direction. The harbour of Vladivostok, one of the best in the world, is completely hidden from view when approached from the sea. The steamer took a sharp turn to the right and the inner harbour and the town of Vladivostok came suddenly in view. I had notions of a dreary and miserable-looking fortress such as it probably was not long ago, so I was astonished to find a gay-looking town with rows of magnificent buildings built up on ground rising sharp from the water's edge. A boom in land and buildings has recently set in, but all the palatial buildings are not as yet occupied. Since the acquisition of Port Arthur the Russians are determined that Vladivostok shall be a commercial as well as a naval port. Of shipping there was not much in the harbour, but it was interesting to see the cargo which was being discharged by some three or four British steamers. It consisted of railway material, and some twenty or thirty engines were lying about on the wharf; by now they are probably in the centre of Manchuria. Other shipping was fairly well

represented. The harbour is truly an ideal one; the innermost arm capable of holding more men-of-war than are ever likely to congregate there is reserved for naval purposes and extends for a mile or so and is absolutely sheltered. There was only one Russian man-of-war at anchor, and there was also an ice-breaker, which is to give access to shipping in winter.

Vladivostok is inhabited by some 29,000 Europeans, Chinese, Koreans, and Japanese. It is governed by a military Governor, a smart and distinguished officer. There are various reports as to the strength of the garrison. At a moderate estimate it consists of some 12,000 men, whose number can at short notice be increased to probably 30,000 by drawing on neighbouring military posts. I was told on excellent authority that within five days of the order for mobilisation being issued in June last 11,000 men were on their way from Vladivostok to Port Arthur.

The trade of Vladivostok is almost entirely in the hands of foreigners, principally Germans. One German firm, with a turnover, it is said, of some 7,000,000 to 8,000,000 roubles—say, £800,000 to £900,000 per annum—appears to have almost the monopoly. In a vast establishment, with banking and shipping, import and export departments, they employ over a hundred European clerks; there is also a large store similar to one of the large London co-operative stores, where every article for household use, wines, spirits, and provisions can be bought at fairly moderate prices. There are, besides, a number of other shops where the traveller can buy everything he is likely to want for the Siberian journey. We had brought a quantity of stores and bedding, which is most indispensable, but most things can be bought as one proceeds. There is only one British firm in Vladivostok, and I did not hear of another in Siberia. The Germans are well established there.

On landing from the steamer we were surprised to find no customs officers. Likewise, when we ultimately landed with our baggage, there was no one to inspect it; and for the present the imposition of customs duties seems to be in abeyance. There were crowds of Chinamen and Koreans on the landing stage, squabbling for employment. A Russian gendarme kept them in order by boxing their ears. There were, besides, most repulsive-looking emigrants camping in the open air with their baggage; altogether it seemed as if the ruffianism of the East had collected on the spot. The droschke drivers were certainly villainous-looking specimens of escaped and released convicts from the neighbouring Russian penal settlements. It would be wise not to venture away from the main thoroughfare of the town at night. The shabby-looking droschkes were patronised almost entirely by smart-looking military and naval officers, being driven in every direction at a gallop, regardless of ruts and holes. The streets are in a shocking condition, and in rainy

weather are almost impassable. Droschke fares are only 40 kopeks (10d.) for a short distance, and had better be used for going about the town or when taking baggage to the station. Though the latter is only about 100 yards from the landing stage, one has to drive nearly half-a-mile to gain admittance into the station with one's luggage. There are several hotels in Vladivostok; the "Hôtel du Pacifique" and the "Zolotoi Rok" (Golden Horn), which has a theatre attached to it, and where the high life of Vladivostok congregates in the evening. Fortunately we found both hotels full—I say fortunately, because we were in no hurry to make acquaintance with what no hotel in Siberia is reported to be without, and that is vermin. I have heard previous travellers declare that one particular variety was not infrequently served up in the soup. We arranged, therefore, to stay on board the Japanese steamer, and found it very comfortable, as we were only 300 yards from the shore. We had to spend two days in Vladivostok, and they were tedious enough; the neighbourhood is absolutely uninteresting except, perhaps, to those in search of knowledge, which they are not likely to get.

We heard anything but encouraging information as to our further progress through Siberia. No one seemed able to give accurate details. We were told that crowds of passengers were waiting at Khabárovsk for more water in the river, and that we were not likely to get a passage; further, that the new railway section on this side of Lake Baikal was in a dangerous condition, that passengers had to travel in cattle vans and had to sit up, forty crowded in a carriage, for three days and nights. All this was not encouraging. However, Messrs. Kunst and Albers, to whom we brought a letter of introduction, secured us passages on the up-river steamer leaving on 11th June. Steamers leave Khabárovsk every fifth day for Blagovestchensk, so that one is bound to be delayed at Vladivostok. Travellers are warned not to push on to Khabárovsk, the accommodation there being of the worst. We heard of other English passengers having preceded us, and at Vladivostok we met two others from China also bound west. There is only one train each day between Vladivostok and Khabárovsk, a distance of 406 miles, time 27 hours. The train is timed to leave at 9.45 in the morning, but we were wise in getting there before 9 o'clock. To get one's luggage through requires much patience and determination, moreover we were at a great disadvantage, being overloaded with luggage—mostly stores and bedding—and not being able to make ourselves understood, as we knew no Russian. French and German did not seem to help much, though the latter proved the more useful language of the two; but it was a most agreeable feature throughout our journey to find the Russians most exceedingly courteous and helpful in extricating us from difficulties caused by a want of know-

ledge of the language. On the railway only one pood (36 lbs. English) is allowed free, and excess is charged at a very high rate; but we piled all we could into the carriage, and considered ourselves lucky in getting off for 15s. for excess luggage to Khabárovsk. The passenger fare was moderate enough—34s. for 400 odd miles. The carriages are very comfortable, on the principle of the *wagon-lit*; there are seats for four only in each compartment, and at night four comfortable berths can be arranged. Our first business was to make friends with the conductor, this we did by presenting him with some Japanese paper napkins; he was delighted, and we were left alone the rest of the journey. One must always be ready to use inducements of some kind, and, as a rule, money will secure everything. The lavatory arrangements on the train, and, as a matter of fact, on the Siberian steamers and in the hotels, left very much to be desired. But the Russian traveller does not bother very much about washing, and with a little management one can get on well enough. Besides our bedding we had brought enamelled washing basins and a canvas bath—all proved most useful. There is a restaurant car of somewhat uninviting appearance attached to the train, and meals of all sorts can be had at prices of about 1 to 2 roubles (2s. to 4s.). As is well known, the *Zakuska*, or preprandial refreshment, consisting of vodka and caviar, ham and various cold dishes, is much relied on as a preparation for a Russian meal, and we made it take the place of a meal sometimes. We found our provisions came in most useful, and really had little need to go to the restaurant car. Tea (Russian fashion) is to be had always; and as boiling water is easily got, cocoa will be found a valuable addition to one's stores.

The scenery after leaving Vladivostok is of the Canadian type—extensive woods and a scarcity of villages. There are many stations, mostly for the purpose of watering the train, and taking in fuel in the shape of rough logs. The speed of the train is about 15 miles an hour, and only one important station is passed, that of Nikolsk, from where a line branches off to meet the Manchurian line at Kharbin (pronounced Harbin). This section and several others are already in working order. The construction of the Vladivostok-Khabárovsk section would appear to have been premature. But it is not so, as it establishes most important communications with the Amur. The fact of its being entirely on Russian territory is, perhaps, of no consideration from a Russian point of view. The accompanying map, which I have reason to believe correct, will explain the actual and future communications of the Amur and the Manchurian region. Whatever happens to the Manchurian Railway—and I do not think much will happen to it now—the Amur River communication will always be available, in summer at events. We arrived at Khabárovsk shortly after midday on the day following, having

spent quite a comfortable night in the train. The town is about a mile from the station, and the baggage is conveyed on rough carts driven by Koreans. We had no idea where we were to lodge at, though we heard there were two hotels, called, strangely enough, "The London House" and "The Rossia Hotel." We selected the latter, and we were wrong. There were actually no rooms available, but we persuaded the landlord, who was originally of German nationality, to let us have two rooms which had been reserved. These rooms were spaces 5 feet by 9 feet, with a small bedstead and a tumble-down washhand-stand. We felt sure that we should here experience the plague of Siberian hotels already alluded to. We had to give up one of the rooms to our fellow travellers, but hearing that the up-river steamer would arrive in the course of the afternoon, we went down to arrange to spend the night, if possible, on board. We succeeded in doing this, and returned to the hotel for dinner, which proved a villainous meal. Our bill for that and the temporary occupation of our room came to 19s. We thought that a bad beginning for economy in travel; but these high charges proved exceptional, and prices for rooms are much the same as in Russia. Travellers are warned not to stay a night in Khabárovsck if they can avoid it.

Khabárovsck is the principal seat of government of the Primorsk Province which extends some 2,000,000 square miles, and is the residence of the Governor-General, who is also Commander-in-Chief in Eastern Siberia. He has under him three governors of districts residing at Vladivostok, Blagovestchensk, and Chita. The town, which is inhabited by some thirteen thousand souls, is built on heights overlooking the Amur at a point where the Ussuri River joins it and commands a most extensive view of the Amur River which is here some $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles, but very shallow.

We were fortunate in securing a three-berthed cabin on the up-river steamer and were agreeably surprised to find the steamer clean and commodious and the lavatory arrangements better than expected. The "John Cockril," as she was called, is one of half-a-dozen passenger steamers originally built in Europe and then added to and built up for passenger accommodation. The upper works are so high that the funnels almost disappear. The steamers carry the Imperial mails and are as regular as the state of the river will permit, but ample allowance is made for the journey up river. The official time tables give five days for the length of the passage to Blagovestchensk a distance of 918 $\frac{1}{2}$ versts (612 English miles) (a verst is two-thirds of a mile).

The navigation of the Amur by steamers commenced as early as 1844. The present steamboat service is carried on by the Amur Trading and Steamship Company and by the Amur Navigation Company. The former company is in receipt of a Government subsidy, but owing to mismanage-

ment, so it is reported, is financially in a bad way. The other company had better not be relied on, and though its steamers may hold out a prospect of arriving two or three days earlier than the following mail steamer, passengers stand a very good chance of being stuck in the river. We were none too early in having taken possession of a cabin—there was indeed a crowd of passengers waiting to go up river, and the price paid for an extra berth was well worth the extra comfort. Most of the first-class cabins have two berths. Here as everywhere else one's own bedding comes in most useful. Passengers travelling east or west are recommended to secure their accommodation in advance. Though military officers of high rank naturally get the preference, applications for accommodation are fairly treated in order. Before leaving Tokio I was very kindly furnished with letters of introduction from the Russian Minister to the Governor-General of the Amur Province, and anticipating difficulties on the new railway section, I determined to seek his assistance to secure as much comfort as possible. I was most courteously received by His Excellency General Grodékoff, the present Governor-General, who promised at once to secure for my friend and myself accommodation in one of the official carriages. I shall mention further that he did me the honour to invite me to breakfast, an occasion which afforded me the opportunity of witnessing some of the enthusiasm which animates the high officials of Siberia. I found myself one of sixty guests nearly all military officers of the highest rank, including the three Governors of Provinces who had been assembled to celebrate the unveiling of a statue to the memory of those who had lost their lives in the work of acquiring for the Tsar of All the Russias these distant and desolate regions. The toasts which were proposed by the Governor-General and which I could only guess at, were no doubt loyal in the extreme, and expressive of further efforts to be made to accomplish the great work begun in the Far East. They were solemnly but enthusiastically received and cheered to the accompaniment of military music. The whole administration of the Governor-General was represented at this banquet, and those officers with whom I was able to converse were most affable and seemed gratified at the attempt we were making to travel to Europe by the new route. They had no doubt as to the great facilities that were offered by it, but asked one to be indulgent on the score of discomforts which would soon be made to disappear. I promised I would give the new route a fair trial, and judging from my experiences I am quite prepared to undertake the journey again. On taking leave of General Grodékoff, he recommended me to the care of two generals, travelling westward, one of whom was relinquishing command of his military district and returning to Europe with his wife and son. Most amiable and charming travelling companions they proved. The other, a

general of cavalry, was going (as he thought) on short leave to Paris. He was recalled on the way and within a month of his departure was back again fighting the Chinese. Reluctant as one may be to rely continually on the assistance of others, it is a wise plan when travelling in these parts to be furnished with letters of introduction. Of course if one's object is the acquisition of special knowledge it is better not to use letters of introduction. Needless to add that under any circumstances a passport is absolutely indispensable.

To resume our journey, we left punctually at four in the afternoon, and were pleased to find that not all who crowded the steamer were coming on. As it was, there seemed hardly any room to move, and all the children for hundreds of miles around seemed to have collected on board. There was a most varied crowd of passengers, every rank of military and civil officialdom, engineers, doctors, schoolmasters, actors, all travelling westward, and of whom quite a number were bound for Paris. My friend's deck-chair soon became public property, and for peace and comfort we retired to our cabin. The after part of the steamer is given up to second-class passengers; as to third-class travellers, they disappeared somewhere during the day, but turned up to sleep on deck. There was no room to walk round the deck after 9 p.m., and one would come across whole families who had come to sleep there. Our principal trouble was with the meals. The supper, 8 p.m. (dinner always at midday), consisted of one dish only, generally some hard meat covered with a thick brown sauce. But we found, however, we need not pay the regulation two roubles a day (4s.), which included tea and bread and butter in the morning, midday dinner and supper, and that we could order what we liked and pay for each item. We managed our meals somehow; either we cooked them ourselves in the cabin, or got the steward to have our provisions cooked for us. Entirely unassisted, that poor steward, he had to wait on about twenty first-class passengers; we had pressed a rouble in his hand on arriving on board, and he looked after us well. We gave him more on leaving, and he got part of my wardrobe, which I intentionally meant to diminish as I went along. For one person two roubles is a good fee for the steward; but how that man managed to do all he was required is still a mystery. However, we did ourselves very well, and only smiled when the thick, brown, cabbage soup with huge lumps of black meat floating in it, eagerly fished for by everyone in turn, was put on the table. Our immediate friends we treated with biscuits and jam after every meal, and much they appreciated it.

When the steamer stopped there was always a crowd of women and children on the bank with fresh baked loaves, milk, eggs, and generally fresh caviar by the plateful. Once you have eaten the newly-prepared caviar, you do not want to eat that which is sold in shops. It looked like

a dish of the smallest and freshest green peas, and tasted rather better. It is eaten by the spoonful, and a plate costs a few kopeks. So if a traveller is particular about his food on board, he can always buy fresh bread, milk, and eggs at the various villages where the steamer stops. Certainly the bread looks most appetising, and is, as a rule, good. The stoppages occur every seven or eight hours; but there are some forty places marked in the itinerary. The stoppage is more for the purpose of taking in wood than to land or take in passengers. Opportunities are thus afforded of taking a short walk on shore. The villages are all inhabited by Cossacks and their families. Their habitations are of the roughest description, but are stoutly built of timber. There is an imposing looking church in every village, and right through from Vladivostok to the Russian frontier a Russian church is an ever-present feature in the landscape. Until recently some 12,000 Cossacks only have had the guarding of the Amur banks; by now their numbers have, no doubt, been largely increased. The Chinese bank of the river is said to be infested with brigands, and skirmishes between them and the Cossacks are frequent. I cannot help thinking that much of the fighting in Northern Manchuria was of this kind. At one village a display of horsemanship of the Cossacks was arranged for one of the generals. The feats they performed were certainly wonderful. Though for miles everything is desolation, I cannot say that I saw signs of misery or distress; resignation, if not contentment, was expressed on the women's faces.

For the first two days after leaving Khabárovsk the banks of the Amur are flat and sandy, covered with coarse grass and jungle; no habitations were to be seen on either bank for miles. But the monotony of the passage is pleasantly relieved during some twenty-four hours where the Shighan Hills close in on the river, causing the stream to be deep and presenting extremely pretty scenery. After that the banks once more become flat, and the only object of interest before reaching Blagovestchensk is the Chinese town of Aigun, situated some 26 miles east of it. As we passed it, this Chinese town, with its mud encampment, presented a most peaceful aspect—there was not a sign of a soldier about, and one could never have supposed that a fortnight later this district would prove the scene of a determined attack by the Chinese on Blagovestchensk. What interested us passengers most were two live sturgeons that had been caught on the opposite bank, and were still struggling.

We made very good time and reached Blagovestchensk ninety-six hours after leaving Khabárovsk, the steamer keeping up an average speed of 7 miles an hour. The draught of water was only 4 feet, and even then careful navigation was necessary to take the craft through the narrow channels left for navigation. Blagovestchensk, with its tall

buildings and churches could be seen miles across the sands formed by the River Zeia, which joins the Amur just below the town. The Zeia is navigable for a certain distance and leads to regions where gold is abundant. The difficulties of mining it are enormous, due particularly to want of protection from brigandage.

With our arrival at Blagovestchensk, the most comfortable part of the river journey ended, and we heard all sorts of stories as to difficulties and trials awaiting us further up. We could get no reliable information at all. It was reported there was no water in the river, and that to get up at all we should have to travel in barges. One thing was clear, and that was a detention of three days at Blagovestchensk before we proceeded; there were outside steamers of miserable description ready to leave at once. Some of the more venturesome passengers went on board and started, but were back again within 36 hours. We landed with all our baggage, and piloted by one of our general friends found our way to the Grand Hotel and secured an excellent room—a room which would be good in any European first-class hotel. We were astonished to find such accommodation in the very centre of Siberia, and the two of us paid only 4 roubles (rather over 8s.) per day for the room. Travellers in Russia know probably that though the price of a room seems high, there is no limit to the number of beds that can be put into it, and it is much cheaper to occupy the same room; an extra bed only costs 50 kopeks (or 1s.). We found in the manager, a Frenchman by birth, a most obliging individual, and were delighted to find excellent cooking and good wines and beer. It is difficult to realise that this, the principal town of the Amur Province, and now containing 32,000 inhabitants, was a few years ago only a military outpost. There are splendid shops, and the large stores of Kunst and Albers provide everything. The town is also the residence of a Governor, and its military and commercial importance are undoubted. The traveller is advised to replenish his stores here, for it is on the next stretch of river that he will most require them. It is advisable also to take a supply of mineral waters, although they insist on charging corkage on board the steamer. Most passengers drink the Amur River water, but it is not safe to do so.

I mention one little irritating incident which occurred within a few minutes of my entering the hotel, as a warning to observe certain Russian customs. One is, to take off one's hat when entering a room. Every room has an ikon (saint's picture); but walking through the hall of the hotel, which was also used as a dining-room, I omitted to uncover my head, and my attention was immediately drawn to my apparent rudeness by some Russians sitting at a table. Of course I at once did what I ought to have done before. The Russians are very touchy also in the matter

of the daily greeting, and one should not omit to shake hands on every available opportunity. It is best not to be particular as to whom one shakes hands with, but one should certainly greet one's train and steamer acquaintances in that way; by all means shake hands with the conductor of the train every morning.

We spent the time in Blagovestchensk pleasantly and comfortably, although there is nothing to see, but the weather was fine and surroundings cheerful. On the morning of the 18th we went to secure our accommodation on the small steamer, which we heard might possibly take us as far as Stretensk, as the water in the river had increased. We found she was only drawing 3 feet, and was quite a small craft compared to our first steamer. The accommodation was not nearly so good and it certainly looked as if we were going to have an uncomfortable time of it. Some of the passengers were put on a barge, which was towed up by our steamer. The cabin accommodation was fair, but the washing and sanitary arrangements could hardly be worse. The first-class saloon was crowded, and as usual one steward had to do everything. We managed to secure the services of a Russian who had been a servant and who was working his way home. We paid him a small sum per day and he did everything for us. He spoke a few words of French, which unfortunately for him he could never use correctly. Every enquiry he replied to "*Je sais; je sais*," and was going to do everything *tout de suite*—he never knew anything, and we found that like in Japan there was no such thing as "at once" in Siberia, but he was useful all the same. It would make all the difference in comfort and not add so very much to the expense to take a servant on this journey. The minimum estimate of our passage to Stretensk was now ten days, although seven days is the time calculated in the time-tables. We heard of previous travellers who were sixteen days on the way; we were lucky in getting off with eleven.

We left Blagovestchensk at 8 p.m. on the 18th, seven days from Khabárovsk, regretfully leaving hotel comforts behind us. For two days the scenery, although more varied, was not particularly interesting. But two days' steaming brought us to a part of the river where the banks were of a peculiar formation. They appeared to be on fire in a dozen different places, some close on the water's edge, and yet there seemed nothing but sand and stone to burn. It couldn't be sulphur, but it was probably coal burning by spontaneous combustion. The scenery became more and more interesting, and having once more settled down to the routine of our steamer life, we thought that things might have been very much worse. So far I have said nothing on the navigation of the steamers: Up to Blagovestchensk it seemed simple enough; pilots steer the steamer by landmarks in the shape of tall posts every few hundred yards, which at night are lighted up with a red lantern. On this stretch, however, it is

not safe to navigate throughout the night, and we anchored generally about eleven, and proceeded at daybreak the next morning. The navigation on the Stretensk stretch is very intricate, and I wonder the steamer did not go ashore a dozen times. Though the pilot steers the steamer, the captain is supposed to look out in dangerous places. I regret to say that our particular skipper spent nearly the whole of the twenty-four hours gambling with passengers in his own room. However, a sharp look-out is kept by two men forward, who with weighted poles, take continuous soundings and shout the same. When one hears only 4 feet or $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet called, it becomes exciting. Once we did grate over the stones in the bottom of the river and thought the steamer must have got damaged, but we were not told. We only stuck once, but fortunately got off in about two hours; it was lucky we were not there two days. One wonders how it is possible to keep the river lighted on a stretch of river over 2,000 miles in the uninhabited parts. It is done by solitary individuals who, late in the afternoon, may be seen paddling about in a dug-out, whose duty it is to trim and light the lamps, some of which are in most inaccessible places on the face of rocks. It is impossible for these individuals to be travelling to and from the villages, and they have to live in the solitary wooden huts seen here and there. The most important station is Pakrofka, which we reached on the sixth day. It is situated a mile or so below the point where the Shilka joins with the Argun in forming the Amur. It is a long straggling village in a desolate-looking district, where a little cattle rearing and corn growing provide occupation for a scanty Siberian population largely supplemented by Chinese labourers. Here we were detained twenty-four hours because the steamer could not proceed further, and had to wait for a barge to take us up to Stretensk. The barge duly arrived in tow of a tiny little steamer with a full complement of passengers just arrived from European Russia and bound eastward. Among them was a group of some dozen ladies, and their cheerful appearance removed much of the doubt we had as to the difficulties of the railway journey.

The barges on the Amur used for the conveyance of passengers are in one respect more comfortable than the steamers, the heat of the engines is avoided. Drawing only 12 inches of water, and about 120 feet long, they have two decks. The lower deck is divided into two large cabins, for male and female passengers; there is no division between the bunks, but it is easy enough to curtain them off with rugs, etc. On the whole, the accommodation was much better than we expected. On the upper deck there is a small dining saloon, above that again there is a deck without any protection, which the Moujiks (peasants) used to lie about on. The cooking left much to be desired, and we had to rely almost entirely on our provisions. The boat that had brought us up left

immediately with her passengers, who would probably reach Khabárovsk in less than eight days. Finally we got under way again—it didn't seem to matter much when we arrived at Stretensk. A mile above Pakrofka we entered the Shilka River, and for four days we travelled through extremely pretty scenery. But we were severely tried by hundreds of horse-flies, which settled on the barge, and made life miserable. Moreover, the sun was very hot, and one was of necessity confined to the cabin below. Still everybody remained cheerful, and seeing how badly others fared who had not provided themselves with luxuries, we had not so much to complain of. The patience of the lady passengers, more especially that of Princess K——, the general's wife, was wonderful. The journey must indeed have been trying to them. It is doubtful whether other European ladies would bear it so well. A few years of life in Eastern Siberia had accustomed them to discomforts. Right through one was struck with the contentment of those poor unfortunate wretches who are in Siberia seeking a livelihood and who are compelled to travel from one place to another. They would sleep anywhere, and were satisfied to eat only black bread, which was so mouldy that it was broken up into small pieces and put in the sun to dry. At Pakrofka we first heard of troubles in China and of the mobilisation of Russian troops at Vladivostok, and sharp work it must have been, for on our passage to Stretensk we passed several barges with men and horses going down the river. There seemed general satisfaction at the prospect of war, but it was not known whom Russia was going to fight. Telegraphic news was scarce. We finally arrived at the end of our river journey on 29th June, having taken eighteen days to do 798 miles. Stretensk is a large village rather than a town, with a fair number of shops; but the hotel is bad. The Shilka River is fairly swift, and crossed by a ferry, the only means of reaching the railway station on the opposite bank. The train was timed to leave at 11 o'clock at night, and we had a long and weary day before us. As we had heard, there were nothing but baggage trucks fixed up with wooden seats for the conveyance of passengers over the 400 miles to the shores of Lake Baikal. It was nearly three weeks since the Governor-General had given directions about special arrangements for us, and a special carriage which we were to have was doing other duty somewhere else. From 9 o'clock till 11.30 p.m. we sat on our luggage on the platform waiting for this carriage, and really began to think we should have to do like all our fellow passengers,—pig it out in one of the vans, each one of which was crowded with all sorts and conditions of Siberian travellers, men, women, and children crowded together in hopeless confusion. For most of them sleep must have been out of the question, but judging from their appearance on the following day they seemed brutelike in their absolute disregard for comfort or clean-

liness. Most of our fellow passengers managed somehow or other to get enough room to lie down in. At the last moment our "wagon de service" was put on, and we were able to make ourselves comfortable in a first-class coupé with a lavatory attached to it. The general and his family had a large compartment to themselves, and owing to their continuous and cordial assistance we certainly got all the comfort that could be had on that journey. Similar circumstances are not likely to occur again, for ordinary first-class carriages were to be run from August last. The line was not sufficiently set to allow heavy carriages to be used. The engineering difficulties for a considerable stretch above Stretensk must have been considerable; but as we proceeded we reached level regions, and saw a fair amount of cultivation on either side of the track. There were buffet stations at irregular intervals, and for that part of the country the catering might have been much worse. Only two towns of importance are passed, Nerchinsk and Chita. The latter is the chief town of the Trans-Baikal province situated on the high road to China and to Eastern Siberia and is likely to become of great importance. As we approached Lake Baikal we met military trains coming East; this caused delays of several hours at some of the stations; but considering that this was the first military use made of the railway, things seemed to go smoothly enough. We also passed a train conveying convicts. They were carefully guarded, but seemed fairly comfortable. The former method of marching convicts for hundreds of miles through the Siberian deserts is now at an end. In every respect the Siberian Railway will be a most civilising influence.

Travelling for three days and three nights we reached Misovaia on the shore of Lake Baikal, and for a whole day awaited the coming of the ice-breaker, which in summer is used for ferrying across passengers and cars. And a wonderful craft this ice-breaker is. The whole interior space of the ship is arranged to take in a whole train, but it appears that the sea-going capacities hardly warrant a heavy train being put on board, so only the mail car and the baggage van were ferried across, and passengers walked on board with their belongings. There is a beautiful saloon, and catering and wines are excellent. The ice-breaker, originally constructed by Armstrong & Company, was brought out in sections to Lake Baikal and put together on its shores. She does not fulfil all the requirements. Crossing Lake Baikal is like going to sea, and storms are frequent and of great violence. The scenery on the shores is said to be remarkably beautiful; but we crossed in a dense fog and saw nothing. The distance to the railway station on the other side is only forty miles, and the passage lasts about four hours. At Listvinitchnoïe, only forty miles from

Irkutsk, great confusion still exists, and only baggage vans and fourth-class carriages were available for passengers.

Leaving at midnight we experienced probably the greatest discomfort of our journey, and arrived at 5 o'clock in the morning in the foggy and dusty atmosphere of Western Siberia, feeling absolutely wretched. The station is nearly two miles from the centre of the town, and in the early hours of the morning hunting for hotels was a dismal proceeding. We forced our way into one and waited for a room that was to be vacated presently; every hotel was full. For an old-established town the condition of the hotels at Irkutsk is of the worst. Later on in the day we shifted over to the hotel "Decco," which is perhaps the best. We had to put in two days, for the weekly *train de luxe* only leaves on Friday, though ordinary first and second-class express trains leave every day. The fares by these are cheaper, of course, but one takes 11 days to reach Moscow instead of 8½. There is no need to describe Irkutsk, as we have now reached districts more or less well known. Our hopes had been centred in the *train de luxe*, of which one had heard so much in newspapers. But we were unlucky enough to travel the very week when the real *train de luxe* was not running. The one timed to leave that week was on show at the Paris Exhibition and performing numerous journeys between Paris and Peking. We found our train to consist only of one first and two second-class sleepers and a restaurant car. There was no drawing-room car, no gymnasium, or bath, etc., such as we had been led to expect; the car, however, was clean and new, and as only a moderate charge is made for sleeping-berth accommodation, one could be very comfortable with a two-berthed section to oneself. In the matter of railway fares Russia is distinctly ahead of other countries, and the charges for sleeping-car accommodation in other countries of Europe generally are extortionate compared to those charged on the Russian railways. It would be quite possible to travel second-class right through Siberia by steamer or rail; the difference in comfort is slight, but there is a considerable difference in the fares. The freight for excess luggage is, of course, a considerable item, but as it is only 14s. per 36 lbs. for a distance of nearly 4,000 miles, the charge is not very high. At Irkutsk they were very particular as to the amount of luggage to be taken into the compartment, but with a little management one of the attendants can be got to take charge of smaller luggage that one may require during the journey; in fact, one can arrange to have access to one's baggage right through the journey. The attendance is good, and the officials very civil though stern. We dined quite sumptuously in the restaurant car, and found prices quite moderate. Let me recommend two or three particular dishes which can generally be got, and which most people will approve of. One is "sterlet" — a Russian fish prepared in various ways—and is most delicious. Then

"riabchick" or (hazel grouse) is always in season. The bill of fare is fairly varied; there is a set midday dinner, price 1·25 roubles (3s.), which, as a rule, is very good. On a long railway journey the most refreshing beverage is kvas, a sort of cider prepared from various fruit; the Crimean red and white wines, generally of uniform quality, are also recommended, and good beer is to be had everywhere. The journey from Irkutsk to Moscow has also been described in guide books. One crosses some of the largest rivers of Europe and Asia. The bridges in particular are wonderful examples of engineering skill. We passed *en route* the last batch of political convicts, which included a lady. The days were monotonous, but the journey did not seem very long after all, and we reached Moscow on 14th July feeling very fit. Let me recommend a stay of two or three days at least at Moscow. It is doubtless one of the most interesting cities of the world.

I give below a table of distances, the time taken over various stretches of the journey, and of the steamer and railway fares. I have no hesitation in saying that the journey is quite feasible for ladies who are accustomed to travelling and who don't mind a long railway journey. Personally, I have found the trip sufficiently enjoyable, and am quite disposed to travel through Siberia again.

From.	Miles.	Time taken. Days.	Detentions.	Fares, Approx.
				£ s. d.
Tokio to Niigata, rail ...	225	1½	2½	0 17 6
Niigata-Vladivostok, sea ...	450	2	—	2 12 0*
Vladivostok-Khabarovsk ...	476	1½	2½	1 14 0†
Khabarovsk-Blagovestchensk...	612	4	—	2 6 0†
Blagovestchensk-Stretensk ...	798	11	3½	3 0 0†
Stretensk-Irkutsk ...	788	4½	1½	2 0 0†
Irkutsk-Moscow ...	3,946	8½	2½	9 0 0†
	7,295	33	12½	21 9 6

* Including food. † Excellent.

Journey, 45 days.	£ s. d.
Distance, 7,295 miles cost	21 9 6
Extra luggage	2 10 0
Hotel expenses	6 5 0
Meals, 33 days' travelling at 3 roubles (6s.)	10 0 0
Cartage and droschke	2 0 0
Tips	2 0 0
	£44 4 6
Add to that an allowance of £16 for journey from Moscow to London	16 0 0
Total	£60 4 6

J. J. K. & Co., Ltd., London.

Reproduced from the *Monthly Review*.

Major E. J. MEDLEY (17th Bengal Cavalry) :—It is only five weeks ago since I left Irkutsk, so perhaps I may be able to supplement by a few up-to-date remarks what the lecturer has told us of his journey by steamer and train across Siberia. My experiences on the Siberian line were winter ones, and, therefore, differ in certain respects from what the lecturer experienced travelling in the summer. He came across Siberia from the East ; I came to it travelling through Asia from India in the South. I can recommend coming either from the East or from the South on to the Siberian line as preferable to coming from the West. The standard of comparison, it should be remembered, is more of an Asiatic one. It is hardly fair to compare the trains on the Siberian line, which is a new line, with the 50 or 60 miles an hour on our European trains. With regard to what the lecturer said on the subject of the small animals in the hotels, I travelled through in the winter, and although I took several bottles of Keating's with me, I am bound to confess I never had any occasion to use them. It is only fair, I think, to give that praise to the Siberian hotels, which certainly, from my experience of them, is most favourable. Of course I am comparing them with Asiatic and Indian hotels, and not with European hotels. One must remember that the Siberian line has only been completed barely six years, and it takes a little time for a railway to introduce European manners and customs into Siberia. Coming from India and Asia, of course, the hotels are Asiatic and absolutely different from European hotels. My first experience of the railway was at Tomsk. When we sank down in the luxuriously cushioned chairs and divans and the electric light was turned on, it was certainly a great revelation to me. At Irkutsk, I believe, since the lecturer was there, another new hotel, called the Métropole, which is quite up-to-date in all the latest European arrangements, has been opened. On the Trans-Baikal section, although it has not been actually taken over by the Siberian Administration, it has vastly improved since the summer. The first and second-class carriages run now are just the same as on the section between Irkutsk and Moscow. The pace is a little bit slower, but the comfort is exactly the same. They are now talking of continuing the through Moscow-Irkutsk train on to Stretensk. I went on to Stretensk from Irkutsk, and had the good fortune of crossing the Baikal on these new ice-cutting steamers. There are now two, the "Baikal," the big steamer which carries a whole train across and which is kept chiefly for goods traffic, and a small steamer, the "Ungara," which is mainly concerned with passenger traffic. It was one of the most curious experiences I have ever undergone, to see by electric light one of these steamers cutting through the ice and crossing the lake, and seeing the ice ploughed up on either side by the ice-cutter. 'M. Hulkoff, the Minister of Communications in Russia, had hoped to keep communication open all the winter by means of these steamers, in which case they might have postponed for some time the building section round the Baikal, which is expected to be very expensive, because it is solid rock cutting all round. Unfortunately, when I was coming back the shaft of the screw of the big "Baikal" steamer was broken. It was not considered advisable or thought possible for the "Ungara," the small steamer, although it accomplished the journey in 12 hours, to maintain this communication across the lake through the winter, and therefore immediately after my passage across—I was fortunate enough to be on the last trip—the communication was stopped for two months. When we arrived across the lake we found a train-load of passengers from Irkutsk waiting to go across, and much to their horror and indignation they all had to return to Irkutsk. A certain number of them, whom business compelled to get across the lake, undertook the journey of 60 miles across on the ice on small sledges. Of course, there is no mark showing the road, and the 60 miles across the lake have to be done straight away on end with

one pair of ponies. It may be interesting to know that at Stretensk we encountered the same amount of cold that the Duke of Abruzzi met with on his journey to the North Pole—52° centigrade. That was the only really bad cold that I had the whole time; luckily for us there was no wind, still that one day gives one an idea of what Siberian cold can be. Returning from Stretensk, we travelled back with two officers, one from Pekin and one from Manchuria. The officer from Pekin had been wounded in the Pekin fighting. He had sustained severe concussion of the brain in a railway accident between Pekin and Taku, and coming up the Amur in the winter he had lost all his toes. He travelled from Japan to Vladivostok, then up the Amur exactly the same way that the lecturer did, from Khabárovsk to Blagovestchensk. There was not enough snow, so he came on wheels; of course the rivers were all frozen over in the winter at that time of the year. From Khabárovsk on to Stretensk he came by sledge up the Amur, and as he was travelling with a gold convoy he was unable to warm himself at every station stopped at, as is usually the case in Russian posting, and consequently he suffered the loss of the use of his toes. There was every possibility of his being turned out of the Service. As regards the *train de luxe*, there are two weekly trains between Irkutsk and Moscow. I can bear out what the lecturer has mentioned with regard to the electric light, the saloon carriages and everything; the whole thing is most beautifully arranged, and there is an excellent library on board with Russian, French, German, and English books, in fact the library contains some of the best literature on Central Asia that I have met with anywhere. The whole thing is most wonderfully managed. What struck me was that the administrative part of the undertaking is most excellently done, but very often the executive is not up to the mark, and they spoil what might be a very good business, by not carrying out their complete instructions. I should just like to mention that at Irkutsk in the summer, communication is kept up between the railway station and the town by means of a bridge of boats. In the winter, the river freezes over, and sledges run across on the ice. I happened to arrive in December before the river had really frozen over, and the difficulties of communication between the station and the town then were extraordinary; in fact, for two days the town was absolutely cut off from communication with the railway station, and received no mails. That is a very serious point for them. I suppose, in time, the town will be forced to build a proper bridge. I am sorry that my remarks have been so disjointed. I hoped to have received a printed copy of the lecture previously, but I only received it before entering the room, and so I was unable to follow the lecture as well as I should like to have done.

Mr. H. A. BONAR, in reply, said:—There are hardly any questions to reply to that Major Medley has mentioned, but I am pleased to have heard, and to have the experience of one who has so recently travelled over that particular route. I meant my remarks to apply particularly only to summer travelling, and I do not suppose that for some years to come winter travelling will be possible over that line; at least not to the Far East. I do not think that one need hesitate about travelling Eastward. I think the fact of coming from Central Europe and travelling on the Russian railways is as pleasant a revelation as coming from the Far East. I can say thus much for the Russian railways, that they are exceedingly comfortable, and it does not matter whether you come from the East or West, they are an improvement on the railways on either side. I am glad to hear that until the middle of December, travelling over the Siberian Railway can be so comfortable.