

Stalin Leads A Life Of Stark Simplicity

No one knows the truth about dictators while they are dictators. They may themselves supply the driving force, or they may be the medium through which it works. Whatever the truth is concerning Stalin, all who have seen him agree about his simple ways of living. Here is a pen picture from a recent book by Stephen Graham (who is not one of Stalin's political admirers):

THE house in which Stalin works is a "nice place with white-walled rooms, pictures in gilded frames, arm-chairs and sofas upholstered in white and gold, antique marble vases, crimson curtains, palms and ferns in big pots. There are portraits of gentry of a bygone age. Not much has been disturbed since the original owners quitted the scene.

“Stalin lived there as if he had leased a furnished house for the season. He did not order the bourgeois luxury to be removed. Neither did he profit by it very much. It did not interest him. He sat in his own cabinet with masses of papers and books and works. Here for a while he tried to learn English, but gave it up, finding it too difficult. Sometimes he would go to another room and play the pianola, which, it is said, holds some fascination for him.

Follow's Lenin's Example at Chess

"In imitation of Lenin, who was a clever chess player, he played chess and gave orders that the game be encouraged everywhere. He received few visitors at Gorki. His third secretary at Party headquarters, Kagano-vitch, his fellow Georgian, Ordzhonikidze, and Kikovan, were almost the only Communists invited to this retreat.

"Since so much more depended on him, he was more protected. Fifteen agents of the O.G.P.U. guarded the house. The road from Gorki to Moscow was constantly watched by police and detectives. Each morning punctually at nine o'clock he would set off in a glittering Rolls-Royce with two guards on the step and a police automobile following.

Long Hours

"He had a long working day and only got back home late at night and after supper he commonly continued to work. He does not play cards like most of the other leaders, and also, unlike other comrades, takes little pleasure in sitting round a table drinking and gossiping.

Simple Living

"In the winter he moves his family back to the Kremlin. There is a little house used by palace servants in a bygone age. There are white linen curtains to the windows on the first floor and beyond these curtains lives the dictator in four sparsely furnished rooms. One of his children used to sleep on a sofa in the dining room. With everything at his disposal Stalin kept up no establishment.



THE SPHINX OF THE KREMLIN

“His meals are sent up on a tray from a communal restaurant. Some Caucasian cook sees he has those peppery dishes which he likes, his *paprika*, his *shashlik*; washed down with wine from his native Georgia. He is not a great Vodka drinker. Red wine such as one can get at any *bukhan* in the Caucasus is all he asks. He enjoys good health; his abdominal trouble did not recur.

"The dinner is served on nationalised plates, some of them still bearing the initials of the Tsars. He sits down to dinner in the afternoon and to supper in the evening with his new young consort, and his children. There are seldom any visitors at these meals. Stalin eats and drinks and says little. He does not discuss politics with his wife nor tell her the event of the day. When the meal is over he moves back to his chair, lights his pipe

and seems to fall into a reverie. No one knows whether on these occasions he is thinking of affairs of State or merely enjoying the warmth of his digestive processes.

Long Silences

"He sits brooding with the face of a sphinx. An involuntary admirer of Stalin describes it in this way:

“Calm and immobile sits Stalin, with the stone face of a prehistoric dragon, in which alone the eyes are living. His thoughts, wishes, plans crowd upon his mind. . . He knows all that is happening in the spaces of immense Russia. But nothing agitates him. He has no doubts.’

“ Stalin has great power of mental concentration. He went through a test of this kind once. It was before the revolution. The Tsar's police and military were tired of his constant escapes from banishment and decided to put him through a torture which few survive with sanity. He was made to run the gauntlet of the Salyansky regiment and each soldier beat him as he passed with the butt end of his rifle. Stalin concentrated his thoughts upon some aspect of Marxism, gritted his teeth and walked the whole alley of yelling and buffeting soldiers. The man who could do that has some almost Indian power of thought over body.

"So one need not assume that in his long silences over his pipe Stalin has not thought out the development of the revolution and the next steps in his career.

"It is noticeable that he prizes and protects his privacy. In his home he is immune from unwanted visitors or telephone calls. It is more difficult to get to see him in his Kremlin retreat than it was to see Lenin. And he cannot be called up by troublesome citizens on the telephone. The important people of the regime have their own limited telephone exchange. Thus a call on the telephones in Stalin's apartments can only proceed from one of his associates.

Telephone Messages to O.G.P.U.

“According to one of the secretaries, there is an apparatus which is only used for listening in to other members’ conversation. He is watchful. The power which he has won it is his intention to keep. A telephone message from him to the O.G.P.U. disposes of the freedom, perhaps of the life, of any individual in all Russia. The Tsars were as absolute, but their power was not so great.”