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PRESIDENT IN PERPETUITY

*The Man Mr. Boswell
Will Meet in Moscow*

WHEN New Zealand's Minister to Moscow reaches his destination, he will present his credentials to Michail Kalinin, President of the Praesidium of the Supreme Council of the U.S.S.R. Here is a pen-picture of the man he will meet, taken from the London "Observer."



MICHAIL KALININ
"Elderman of the village"

ELECTED Presidents, as a rule, come and go quite often; many European monarchies have proved insecure. So it is odd that the most drastic of revolutions should have provided so stable a figure as that of Michail Kalinin, who has just finished his first quarter of a century as President of the U.S.S.R.

His official title is "President of the Praesidium of the Supreme Council of the U.S.S.R." The makers of the revolution were jealous of titles and distinctions. The ladder of authority has grown much steeper, but the rungs still retain the old labels of innocence. Until 1940, Marshal Stalin was only First Secretary of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party, and the President is still, by name, only chairman of a committee. The principle of power dispersed in the anonymous people still lingers in the institution of the world's most centralised regime.

Kalinin's personal history is so typical of the older Bolshevik proletarian that at first sight it shows almost no individual colouring. He was born in 1875, the son of a poor peasant, in an obscure village near Tver, now renamed Kalinin. At 20 he worked in St. Petersburg (Leningrad) at the famous Putilovka works, Russia's biggest metal plant, and largest hotbed of the revolution. It was

there that he joined Lenin's "Union of Struggle for Freedom," the forerunner of the Russian Social Democratic Party.

The archives of the Tsarist police record his first arrest in 1899. In the next 15 years he was arrested 14 times, winning the highest battle-distinction of the revolutionary Bolshevik almost every year. He sowed the seeds of revolution all over the country. As an agitator, his wanderings led him from the Putilovka works to the great railway workshops at Tiflis in the Caucasus, where two other famous revolutionaries—Joseph Stalin and Maxim Gorki—pioneered for socialism. The three men were a closely-knit band in later years; but at Tiflis they seem to have missed one another.

INSIDE the party, Kalinin belonged to the moderates. Inborn kindness and mildness made of him the typical man of compromise. Had he been born an Englishman, or a Frenchman, he would probably have been no revolutionary, but a successful trade union leader or parliamentarian. Bargaining—not even hard bargaining—would have been his element. But Tsarism barred all the avenues of compromise, and forced moderate men into life-and-death opposition. Even so, Kalinin never became the embittered rebel. In the critical weeks of 1917 he consistently clashed with Lenin. He voted for a compromise with the Mensheviks, and advocated "democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants," the slogan coined by Lenin at an earlier stage, and later discarded by him.

Lenin won the day. In April and May, 1917, the Party was converted to "proletarian dictatorship." Kalinin was not. But he followed his leader faithfully.

Soviet Russia's first President, Sverdlov, died in March, 1919. He had been president and first secretary of the party. The two functions were now separated. Stalin filled Sverdlov's place in the Party, Kalinin in the State. The choice was Lenin's, and he gave two reasons for it. The head of the State—he said—must be known for his tolerance and contact with the people.

Kalinin was, in fact, the most peasant-minded leader among the Bolsheviks. Himself of peasant origin, he

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