"MAXIM," THE STORY OF MAKING A PEASANT INTO A SOLDIER: BY RICHARD WASHBURN CHILD

(A chapter from "Potential Russia": By permission of E. P. Dutton & Co.)

The story of Maxim will tell much of Russia at war. With its movement, its color and its pictures it will contain much of the sum total that one can see or feel in the empire of the Czar today. In it there is the theme of the fourth of the four great dramatic facts of this conflict.

"The first of these great dramatic facts, I think, is the spirit of Great Britain. . . . And the second is the efficiency of Germany. . . . And the third is the dignity of France. . . . And the fourth drama of the conflict concerns a terrible thing. It is the human flesh of the endless hordes of men. It is the stockyard hordes of armies like the Russian army. It is the story of the millions. But, individually, it is the story of Maxim.

"Russia is a country of peasants; if Maxim were destined to be born in Russia, the chances were three to one that he would be a peasant, and that Maxim should be a peasant fate decreed. Fate dropped him, a pink and squirming thing, in a little Russian village a day's journey from Petrograd, and almost that distance from Moscow.

"Maxim represented Russia as much as any soul could represent Russia. He was more Russian than the Czar, more Russian than any bureaucrat. He was a Slav, a peasant; he was one of the one hundred and twenty million cast in the image of God and tilling the soil. More than this, his infancy represented Russia because the lusty health of his young flesh combined with the stare of his blue eyes, in which no one could quite tell whether there were simplicity or guile, dense ignorance or the ancient meditations of old Oriental mysteries. Above all, Maxim had the quality which is the essence of the charm of Russia and Russia's peasantry. It was not picturesqueness; it was not simplicity or elusiveness; it was potentiality; it was possibility. Like Russia, Maxim was a humanized question mark; he was a slate upon which nothing had been written. No one could tell whether he was the world's yesterday or the world's to-morrow."
"MAXIM"

"He was born into a world of earth and wood. And in this, too, he represented Russia, for Russia is a civilization of earth and wood. That which satisfies the hunger of the Russian mind is ownership of soil; it is the passion of the empire. That which satisfies the hunger of his body is eaten with a wooden spoon from a wooden bowl.

"The home of Maxim, for whom destiny has marked out a part—a little but significant part—in the great world war, was of wood. Snow and wind from the lowering skies of Russian winters had turned to weathered gray the unpainted exterior of the half-thatched peasant home, the roof of which extended to cover the shed in which the horse, the two cows and a pig were kept. Inside, in the room where Maxim, his sister and his father and mother spent all of their indoor hours, the reverse side of the lumber was yellow-brown, unplastered and undecorated, except by clothes that hung on the wall, by four covers of a magazine published in Moscow, wooden utensils on a shelf, and a painted wooden icon hung in the corner so that a saint of the Russian orthodox church might ever cast upon the room a benevolent stare from brown, doelike eyes. There was a large wooden table and a stove of tiles with a mouth always hungry for wood.

THE outdoor world across which the young legs of Maxim first began to walk was a part of the great Russian plain, but the village of fourteen or fifteen houses was built under the shadows of four lines of birch trees, whose leafy tops waved in the summer, so that the birches writhed as gracefully as dancing dryads—as the birches wave in a landscape by Corot. Maxim's world extended as time went on and as his hair grew more and more like flax through the bleaching of hatless summers, and then, as his body was made to have magnificent form and strength, retaining its unbent, untwisted youth through its labor in the communal fields, extended until this world of his could be said to include nearly thirty square miles. It included at least one town on the railroad from which the produce of the countryside was shipped away and in which there were such things as newspapers from Petrograd and Moscow, and a local government in the control of landed proprietors which was a cross between a paternal village-improvement association and a board of aldermen, was called a zemstvo council, and maintained schools, doctors and hospitals. Maxim did not know that a few years ago only one person in four in Russia could read or write; it was quite a normal thing not to read or write, but Maxim learned from a traveling teacher because a plump, young thing named Vera, who looked most pretty in the old peasant heirloom dress, had learned and teased Maxim unmerci-
fully for his backwardness. If he could have foreseen the Great War, no doubt he would not have bothered his head; for, like the millions of him, Maxim was something of a simple philosopher.

“He was something of a simple philosopher, but his religion had a large part in the sweetness of his life. In Maxim there was a capacity for religious feeling of which even Father Sergius, the village priest, a rather stupid man, did not dream. Maxim’s world was small, therefore the unknown world of superstition and of religious hope appeared all the larger. The young man saw that men of his own age in the town celebrated holidays by their vodka drinking and congregated in tough gangs—a new thing in Russia—but it was Maxim and not these tough young men of the town who could represent the spirit of the Russian peasantry. Maxim simply prayed for help and purity and for the pity of a stern God; his eyes remained clear as crystals from the Urals, and there was a spring in the step as he walked over the creaking snow in his rope and basket shoes, his padded leg swathings, and his calf-skin cap, and he had deep-breathing lungs and coursing blood under his skin.

“In this respect, too, he represented the real, human Russia. An American doctor in charge of one of the largest of the hospitals, receiving soldiers from the front, told me that among the six thousand muzhiks he had treated only eleven men had the diseases of immorality. ‘Why?’ said I. ‘Russian peasant: religion; clean living,’ said he. ‘I never believed an army could be so free from these diseases.’

“In the winter the young man’s father went to the city where, as an izvoshchik, or single-horse public vehicle driver, in a padded coat, he earned money, not to spend upon luxuries, but with the eternal Russian muzhik’s ambition, his land madness: the same land madness which forced the abolition of serfdom in Russia and which, way down deep, consuming the Russian heart, was the real strength behind the agitation of the so-called intelligent class in cities and towns and the urban revolutionary elements that in nineteen hundred and five resulted in Russia’s first Duma or national assembly: a form, if not a fact, of constitutional government. The theory of constitutional government Maxim did not understand at all, and in this respect he represented the real Russia much better than the universities and the widely diverse reform theories and the politicians of the cities. But he understood the land madness of the muzhiks, for he had it.

“Maxim had also a Slav sense of a mild sort. Between himself and his own customs and the peasants and the customs of villages not far away there were vast differences. In common, however, there were Slav instincts, the orthodox religion, the vague, mysterious recognition
of a vague, mysterious government, and at bottom a childlike attitude toward the Czar which has given rise to the term Little Father. All these combined bound Maxim to other Russians, to the infinite world of Russia beyond the horizon of his own little world.

"Happy enough, dreaming much, worshiping blindly, in ignorance of the modern western world, but feeling a hunger for it; not influenced much by the Orient, but feeling its ancient breath, Maxim, the human animal whose body was beautiful, whose hair was light, and whose mind was dark, still represented Russia, for he was young, strong, rather inscrutable, untested, undeveloped—a Potentiality.

"Then the war came.

"The news of the war reached the village, but in the length and breadth of that little hamlet no one could be found who knew why the war had come. War was something which came like a tempest of unknown forces. Not even the zemstvo doctor who came into the cation could explain. A war was in progress, and that was a fact to be accepted, for the mind of the muszhik likes to say to itself, 'Life is life; a fact is a fact, and if nothing can be done about it, it is something to be taken down in one gulp.' Old Vladimir, who heard that the Czar was fighting the Austrians, recalled the days he had spent in Petrograd and said, 'Well, the Germans are a great business people, and it is lucky they are on our side.' It took several days to correct the impression which the remark had made. Indeed, it was not until Vera had received a note sent by a messenger from her brother, who was serving his term in the army, that it was known that the Russian forces had been mobilized and that the western frontier already was in the tumult of masses of men and metal hurled against other masses of men and metal in a fury of hate which no one understood.

"One evening Maxim came back from a journey to the town on the railroad. Summer had gone, and the skies, with their flat, gray blanket threatening a winter covering for the flat Russian plains, were lit for a moment in the west with a flare of red as if the war had thrown up the spray of its blood and fire. Maxim plodded along beside the undersized chestnut horse with the flax-colored mane and tail, but the head of the young man was bowed and his mind was full of the pictures he had seen.

"At the railroad station of the town a troop train had stopped and out of it there had poured in liquid streams endless sodiers, unshaven, unbathed, red-eyed. It was a Siberian regiment which had marched and ridden and starved and thirsted across the empire. The men were strange types, and in the last cars of the train were half a hundred
PEASANT HOUSE in Russia such as a vast number of Maxim's type occupy, made with steep roof to shed the winter's snow, unpainted, weathered to a wonderful gray by the storms of many years may be seen at the right.

HUMBLE HOUSES in Russia are often painted in the gayest of colors as may be seen in the one shown below:
The heavy thatched roof in wonderful browns and overlay of green moss with the gaily painted side walls combine to make as interesting and original structures as can be found anywhere in the world.
HEIRLOOM DRESSES, caps and jewelry, richly embroidered, intricately woven and skilfully wrought such as are shown at the left, bring out to the full the delicate beauty of Russian peasant maidens:

The young girls such as belong to Maxim's class take pride and joy in needlework of all kinds, making all the garments that they wear save those handed down to them from mothers, grandmothers and even great-grandmothers.

RUSSIA IS A COUNTRY OF PEASANTS.—clean living, endowed with great capacity for religious feeling and with a deep love for the soil: The great hunger and passion of the Russian people is ownership of the soil and well do they understand how to cultivate it to get the utmost possible yield of harvest from their acres:

The Russian peasant class from whom the vast army of Russia has been drawn are as a rule, magnificent in physique and in ability to walk many miles a day and to endure the greatest hardships: They are courageous, determined and intensely loyal:

The photograph at the right is characteristic of the stern resolve and vigorous strength of the peasants from Kielce.
LOOMS upon which the peasant women of Russia weave their own clothing and household linen are often beautifully carved by their men folks during the long hours of winter when they are shut away from their work in the fields.

CARVED and painted wooden candlestick made by the peasants of Greater Russia for use on a home altar.

WOODEN BOWLS, often carved and gaily painted, hold the food of Russian peasants which is eaten with a carved wooden spoon.

WOODEN SCOOP carved and painted, used to serve the food in Russian peasant families.

LAUNDRY BEETLES, in fact, nearly all household implements used in Russian farmhouses, are made beautiful by carving and originality of form.
ELABORATE and beautiful head-dresses have been retained in the picturesque costumes of Russia longer and more generally than in any other European nation:

One realized something of the wonder of these head-dresses last winter in the production of "Petrovichka" by the Russian Ballet:

The picture at our left shows Lada, the Russian dancer, in one of the most gorgeous of the head-dresses still worn: This costume was brought from Russia by Lada and worn in her New York dances.

THIS RUSSIAN COSTUME was also worn by Lada in her first presentation of Russian dancing in New York:

The original of this head-dress is extraordinarily beautiful both in the richness of material, in the colors, in the metal work and jewels:

Like the one above, it was found in Russia by Lada and brought to this country to become a part of her most beautiful dancing costumes.
tribesmen from the far eastern borders of Mongolia who wore jackets of sheepskin with the wool side exposed and fierce, curved knives carried in broad metal-studded belts. Maxim had thought that the enemies of Russia had arrived, for he did not know that beside the body of the army, made up of muzhiks, the fighting strength of Russia contains much wilder and more curious elements than the Cossacks. He did not know that some of these strange tribesmen ask after a few hours of their journey from their homes when the fighting will begin, and that in one case, over a hundred miles from the Austro-German trenches, some of these tribesmen roamed abroad by night, and, returning, reported to the Russian officers that they had killed seven Japanese, but that four had escaped.

"Maxim had seen the flat cars carrying the field pieces, and he wondered if these had been cast from the metal which once had been the chimes in the church of the town and which the authorities had taken away. He knew nothing about the great Russian standing army which the Government was to throw headlong without sufficient munitions into the hungry mouth of the slaughter, day after day.

"When the troop train of the Siberians had gone Maxim could see the second train standing on the other track. A great crowd was around it, and yet he could see that a truck was being moved from car to car and that limp men were being taken out of the doors and placed in double rows.

"They are hurt!" gasped Maxim, standing on tiptoe.

"They are dead," answered the crowd, it seemed almost joyfully, and a cloud of its breath showed on the frosty air.

"I am so glad I am not twenty-one, the army age," said Maxim. "I would have to be killed.'

"But that night, when he had entered the living room of his father's cottage, he hung upon the wall a picture which he had bought. It was the colored lithograph of a man unbelievably handsome and perfect, the portrait of a demigod. It was a picture familiar all over Russia. It is supposed to be the likeness of the Czar.

"MAXIM" during the ten months that followed often came in from work in the fields and looked at the icon in the corner, crossing himself, and at the picture of the Czar. The icon meant God, and the Czar meant Russia, and he knew in a general way that Russia was threatened; that his own kind was threatened. He knew no more of why there was a war than he knew in the beginning. Austrian prisoners had gone by in open freight cars with the cold rain beating down upon their bedraggled, muddy uniforms, and their heads, often hatless and matted, bowed down in hopeless misery. One
of them had looked at Maxim, and Maxim had waved his hand because he felt the sense of being a human creature and that the other was a human creature too. But the prisoner from a long distance spat at Maxim.

"'God will take care of Russia,' said Maxim. 'I hope I will not have to fight.'

"In these words he spoke something of the presence of fanaticism and the lack of an intelligent patriotism in Russia: Maxim was still being representative of human Russia, the overwhelming peasant Russia. But Maxim had to fight. After the notice a soldier came.

"'Do you know what you are now?' said the soldier, and a scar on his cheek grew red as he said it. 'You are what we call cannon meat.'

"From childhood Maxim had felt the presence of some mysterious authority over his destiny. Somewhere there was a government. Its arm was long; its grasp was strong; its power was great. If it now reached out for Maxim at a time when the harvest was just beginning, and, indeed, at the time when he was making plans to marry Vera, the niece of old Vladimir, there was nothing to be done about it. So it is in Russia. But also there is an astonishing self-respect for the individual in Russia; so strong is it that in many quarters parents and school teachers would not think of corporal punishment. Therefore Maxim looked at the recruiter, who was old enough to be his father, and said insolently, 'You make a good soldier.'

The other looked at Maxim's clear skin and eyes, at his flaxen hair, and at the straight, powerful body of the young giant.

"'So do you,' he said indulgently. 'And when you are a soldier you will learn something about your country. When soldiers come back from wars they are the wisest men in their villages. And they can talk of things that no one can print in newspapers.'

"Maxim was glad to hear it. He put a map of Russia on the wall and made the soldier draw a line upon it to show his old father, bent by husbandry, and his old mother, withered by housewifery and hoeing cabbages, where the fighting was going on.

"'Warsaw has fallen,' said the soldier.

"'I know, I can read,' replied Maxim. 'If the people would pray more, we would get it back again.'

"His mother's knotted fingers clung to his sleeve, and her thin, dry lips were shut tight. Vera cried a little and allowed herself the torture of memories of spring days when they had danced together outdoors on the green behind the communal steam bathhouse. So Maxim left his village with his young, strong body and his good, untrained mind and a woolen blouse, a woolen suit, and a pair of greased boots; with him he took all that he had.

"The eggshell of his narrow world had burst. In a daze and a
dream the dirty old passenger car whisked him through the sleepless night, crowded among other young men whose lips had just begun to show a growth of hair and who chattered ceaselessly about the war and their own villages and new rumors until drowsiness and stupor overcame them.

“They were all muzhiks gathered up for the service of the Czar. Maxim stared at their shadowy outlines in the dim light of the one candle at the end of the car, the rays of which were reflected on the gilt of an icon at the other end. But for the most part he pressed the end of his straight nose against the window pane, watching the showering sparks from the wood-burning locomotive and the villages which flashed by, lying dark against the white film of moonlight on the fields.

“The next day was the most noteworthy of all his life, thought Maxim, for the train had taken him to Petrograd, the capital of his country! This was a place of dreams indeed!

“Out of the train tumbled all the new recruits, and they were marched down the Nevsky Prospect as far as the Letainy Prospect, grinning at the wonderful life on the great capital thoroughfare, at the unbelievable buildings, monuments and shops; gayly uniformed coachmen, beautiful ladies, and soldiers in many uniforms; Cossacks in gay cloaks and dashing, prancing horses; officers with tinkling medals and clanking swords; the Cathedral of Our Lady of Kazan, and gilded domes and spires.

“Only once did Maxim, breathless with wonder and fear, laugh. This was when he saw himself and the others turn the street corner into the gloomier avenue. The petty officer in uniform ran forward and turned the leaders as a shepherd turns the course of animals; it was exactly as if the men had been a flock of sheep or a herd of cattle.

“They all went past numerous Red Cross signs, denoting hospitals for the wounded from the front, on to the military barracks. And there Maxim was given a uniform, shoes and belt. They were the best clothes he had ever had; to him they seemed to be a gift from the Czar, a personal gift, and when he had an opportunity