

Transbaikalia
near Tshita,
23rd Nov. 1903.

Dear-----

I am going to try to write you a letter in the Trans-Siberian Train, which will be difficult owing to the vibration. I wrote you last from Moukden, and gave my letter and a paper to Mr. Fisk to post. Mr. Stepanov drove me to the station and we had an hour to wait for the Express from Dalne to Kharbin - When it came up, Mr. Mackay of Tientsin got out. He was one of my fellow passengers on the "Empress", with his wife and daughter. His wife has developed tumour and she is returning to Cardiff to be operated on. He was travelling with her as far as Manchuria. It is about 24 hours journey from Moukden to Kharbin, but we were 2 hours late, arriving about 4 p.m. I went to the Russo-Chinese Bank, but Mr. Gabriel was not a second Mr. Fisk, and I had to look about for a bedroom. Hotels are poor, small and full. Kharbin, is the Winnipeg of Manchuria, near extensive grain districts and is very rapidly growing. It has 15,000 European, mostly Russian, inhabitants, and 30,000 Chinese. The new, old, and European towns cover much ground. The new town is on the Sungaru River, at present frozen, dozens of River Vessels being anchored and frozen in, in a group, filling the water way. I found a poor, barely furnished bedroom, but a good restaurant, where there was a band and much company, but where they "squeeze"- Kharbin men have large salaries. The place (outside) was bitterly cold, it stands on a plateau, and catches the wind. I was afraid of frost-bite. I slept well, and in the morning was taken by a German over a large flour mill, with the most modern machinery; there are several mills at Kharbine and many fine buildings; the Russians lay out their towns well, and the buildings are more stately than

in similar, equally new towns in Canada and America. The Russians build very solidly; their stone and brick buildings will last for ages. Their stations are much more solid than in America, and their railway officials are well dressed and many of them aristocratic, or at least military in appearance. The host of underlings are Chinese, or Russians of the rougher, dirtier sort, but they are capable in their way. I left Kharbin in less than 24 hours in another new Russian Express, booking to Irkutsk. I have been 3 days on board and have nearly 2 days more to spend here, before reaching Irkutsk, as we are now about 8 hours behind time. I have only 4 or 5 fellow passengers, as it is an extra train to St. Petersburg. It consists of 1 first and 2 second class cars, 1 Dining Car (Stolevaya) with partry and kitchen, 1 luggage wagon in 3 divisions, 1st division sleeping, 2nd division for baggage and mails, and 3rd division, with electrical power Machinery for lighting the whole train, lastly a powerful Engine, with covered house for drivers and a huge tender stacked with wood for boiler; apparently no coal used. The passenger cars are each about 80 feet long, by 10 feet broad, and within they are about 12 feet high. The line, railway, is a broad gauge one, 5 feet gauge, (the rails are not heavy enough for high speed trains) but the cars are on 2 bogies each, and of course extend $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet on each side beyond the rails. The cars are entered at both ends and have, first, a covered landing platform, next a lavatory division and store division (for heating train) and then passing through a second door, you enter the corridor, a full yard wide, running the length of the car. There are large plateglass, double windows, (to keep out cold) every 4 feet, the windows 2 feet or more

wide. Under each table is a bracket table, covered with cloth, and on each side of the tables bracketed seats, so that people can sit along the corridors and drink tea, or play cards or dominoes. There is not of course much room for passing, when they are so occupied. The staterooms open from the inner side of the corridor and they are 7 feet long to window (which is of plateglass and about 2 feet 3 inch wide) and about 6 feet wide. I will describe my room--It is a second-class one; in the Express there are few first class passengers, the second rooms being only slightly different in the matter of decoration from the first; and all enjoy equal privileges in the train, including dining car, and pay same prices for food. (A British Naval Officer and many others told me on no account to pay first class fare; they said it was throwing money away). The second-class rooms are designed for 4 persons, but at present are rarely occupied by more than 2 persons, and I have one reserved to myself. It has a couch on each side of the middle gangway with boxes underneath for bedding. The backs of the couches can be raised to form the upper tier of berths. I have one up and one down; one up to hold my valise etc., and to give more room for sleeping below. Above the berths are 2 tiers of Metal and netting brackets for holding baggage; the upper for large baggage, the lower for small. There are abundance of brass hooks for clothing. The upper part of the inner side of the door is looking-glass. In the centre of the ceiling is a dome shaped electric light, with night cap, and over the table, which is between the couches and supported by a ladder to mount the upper berths when needful, is another electric light, with parachute cover, which can be turned up or down, according to the light required. Within the room, let into the walls are four brass

cigar ash holders, of which there are also plenty along the corridor. In describing the corridor I should have said that overhead, about 8 feet from floor, there are Metal Wire shelves for heavier baggage, such as my portmanteau--The walls of my room are covered with light brown leather, and the upholstering is olive brown leather, with striped holland covers. Over my door is a handsome candle lantern with cover, to be used when electric light happens to go out. The Woodwork in the second cars is light in the first-class car, beautifully grained mahogany, red in colour, which contrasts with a green wall and carpets. Some of the first-class rooms are for 2 passengers only, and the width only 4 feet 6 inches. Some are double rooms for four, family rooms, with Mahogany folding doors between; these rooms when united are about 9 feet ~~long~~ wide; the length is the same as in the second cars, viz., 7 feet. Now to describe the sanitary arrangements. The W.C. is in the lavatory, but the basins are well made and covered and kept very clean. The Wash basin is oval in form, and about 20 inches in length by a foot or more in breadth--Over it is a tap, with index to regulate the heat of the water required, and over that a bracket and pipe with rose, which pours a shower of water into the basin, so that you can put your head under it and shampoo to perfection. The lavatory is well fitted with large looking-glass, shelves and hooks, and the floor is tiled with a vent with stepper in it, so that you can enjoy a perfect sponge bath, the water running away as it falls. The room is kept at a high temperature and the water ranges from cold to hot. Everything is well done and solid; made to last. The carriages were built near Moscow. The Russians have made great progress at manu-

facturers, since the Exhibition of 1862. You will now want to know something about the Dining Car and food. The Car is luxurious, roomy well lighted (at night by elegant ^{drop} electric lights) well decorated and the tables beautifully laid. The Saloon is divided in the middle by a smoked Oak and plate-glass screen of elegant design. Each table is laid for four, and there are 6 tables in each saloon division. The chairs are also of smoked Oak, upholstered in maroon leather, seats and backs, with the letters K.B., which in Russian are K.V. and mean Kitaiskay -- Vestostinay, i.e. Chinese Eastern (Railway understood). The windows are hung with corded Pongee silk curtains, washable, trimmed with yellow green gimp. The tables bear flowers, and the table equipage is faultless. The food a first rate; delicious tea and coffee, good brown and white bread, delicious butter and eggs; every dish well cooked and served; consomme fit for the Queen, served with such toast as is nowhere else to be had. The waiters are very polite and attentive, and bring me coffee, Zuckary (a kind of rusk), and fruit every morning to my room. It is the summit of luxury in travelling, not to be had elsewhere, as far as my experience goes.

We are now passing through splendid scenery, distant blue mountains, sky clear pale blue, the plains and the trees covered with snow. It is lunch time and the train is oscillating unusually; they are trying to make up some of the lost time. We have travelled 2846 versts from Pekin (verst 1174 yards) about 2,000 miles, and have just gone through our first tunnel, perhaps 100 yards long.

I had to leave off yesterday at lunch time and have not since had the chance of finishing my letter. It is so dark in these latitudes; the

day lasts only about 9 hours, and the vibration of the train is often such that one cannot write. I am now at 8 p.m. crossing Lake Baikal on the Great Eastern of the Lake, viz, the "Baikal", the Great Ice-cutter; a huge vessel with 4 black funnels. I paid the difference between first and second cars on the Lake as the passage lasts $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours. I am now writing in the large First-class refreshment Saloon, where I have just had a glass (Stackan) coffee, a small glass (linsispka) vodka and some zukary, or rusks for $\frac{1}{2}$ rouble, or 1/1. The refreshments are dear compared with those on the train, where you get a well cooked, substantial dinner of 4 courses, with cafe noir for $2/8$. This large room, containing Bar, with sofas, settees and many electric lights; and in which, as everywhere else, there are beautiful portraits of the Czar and Czarina, is situated over a vast floating railway station, which held just now 27 large railway vans, landed at Tankhoi; the terminus on the Trans-Baikal side--Below the stations are floors with most powerful engines, which enable the steamer to cut through the ice, when the Lake is frozen; also with many comfortable rooms for the crew and engineers--At the other end of the steamer, also suspended over the railway station are 2nd class and 3rd class saloons and staterooms. I have a large state room with two couches and have all my baggage there, including some vases and curios from Moulden. There is hardly any motion on board, only a slight tremour from the engines--these, I am glad to say are of English make, but put together at Baikal. The more I see of these parts, the more I am impressed with the power and pushfulness of Russia. Amongst other things she is pouring rolling stock into Eastern China (Manchuria) and I have passed since leaving Kharbin

many trains with soldiers, and how many passed in the 15 hours of darkness I cannot say. We were 6 or 9 hours late in arriving at Tankhei, and it was chiefly owing to our waiting at stations to let other trains pass, as the line in chief is only a single pair of rails. I don't say Russia is moving armies, but she intends to have a strong body of men in Manchuria, and to hold what she has created there, for though on paper China can buy the line back, she will never be able to do it at the Russians price--Millions are being spent on the line, and quite fine villages and towns are springing up everywhere in its vicinity. China is too weak to protect such property, and Russia will do it. We shall only be able to claim an open door for trade as the price of our consent to Russia's occupation of Manchuria, or to back Japan up when she fights for the Corea, which I am afraid she will eventually have to do. Russia wants all the year round ports, 20 outlets, and inlets to Siberia, a second Canada, and no doubt she will get them, as she is working all the while, whilst others are talking. She takes no notice of the Western newspapers, but just pushes on, spending and building and peopling; also quietly subjugating the more servile, but industrious and ignorant people of north east Asia. As an instance of the way she is lavishing money. The special train I have been in for 4½ days, had only ½ dozen passengers at most, and the restaurant car is costing 150 roubles, £15 or £16 per month--Service and food on the most efficient and lavish basis--Even the waiters have been or are soldiers. I have had one waiting on me, and he was most polite and capable, and helpful to me in learning Russian. I can now read the difficult printing and my Imperial Guide is coming

into use, which at first I despaired of. I had also a most indefatigable man as car attendant. He watched me like a cat watching a mouse to anticipate all my wishes. He made me up delightfully clean beds, clean sheets every day, gave me clean towels, strapped and unstrapped baggage, brushed my clothes and was quite satisfied and happy with the 2 roubles I gave him--Then he worked so hard in the carriage, sweeping the floors, washing the lavatories, and had to get in such heaps of wood for the stove for hot water, which he kept going day and night. He slept, when he did sleep, and that was by fits and starts, between the more distant stations in a sort of oven between the stove, lavatory and first second-class compartment, and his room or oven was filled with all kinds of train accessories, and often so full of billets of wood that one could not see how he could possibly get in, and yet when I opened his door and asked for a thing, it was never any trouble to jump up and get it. He was a Pole from Wilna or Gredne, and he and I had to get on together with German, which he knew sufficiently for practical purposes. He did not help me with Russian, and I do not think he cared to speak it. He said he was a Kalwi or Catholic, and therefore he would not love the Orthodox or Greek Church. Now, as to the scenery. It has been mountainous for the last 2 days and the country has been covered with snow. The mountains as we approached Baikal became bolder, and were richly wooded with firs. Between the mountains are great flat plains, some of them wooded sparsely, which look like old Lake bottoms, which I suppose they are. The rivers are all frozen, we crossed the Seluika, near Tchita, the capital of the Trans-Baikal Province of Siberia, yesterday and the Yukon this afternoon. Tchita

is on the "Shilka" a tributary of the Amoor. From Tshita the towns become pretty and more important, the Greek Churches being quite a feature.

I must stop now as the horn is blowing and we must be nearing Baikal. I must post this at Irkutsk, where we should arrive in the small hours.

Grand Hotel,

Irkutsk,

25th November, 1903.

We arrived at Baikal just after I wrote the last paragraph, and did not leave there until nearly 11 p.m. We were on landing, ushered into a waiting and refreshment room, crowded with Russian Emigrants, many of them sleeping on the floor. We got the baggage in amongst them and the next minute had to scramble out again with it treading over the slain (with sleep). I had 3 fellow passengers who spoke nothing but Russian, and when we had got berthed I plied them with the Conversation Book, and we had some good laughs. It was 1 a.m. when we reached Irkutsk, which is buried in snow. I had to drag my baggage out myself, and had to wait with ^{it} some time between 2 trains before I could get to the platform--Then a Russian came along and shouldered my 3 heavy packages, whilst I managed the light ones. We got out upon a sort of boulevard, ankle deep; in soft snow. The air was so full of mist we could hardly see where we were. A small sleigh came up with a boy and man in it, and I said "Take me to the Grand Hotel". When my luggage had been got in there was really no room for anyone, but the boy diver mounted and I thrust one leg in

amongst the bags and got the other leg over to the back seat. I clutched the bags to steady them, and the other man stood on the blade of the sleigh and put his arms round some of the baggage. The horse was a restive one and set off at a great pace, but I kept my balance, and we mounted a steep hill and stopped before a long building. It was a "Grand Hotel" a suburban one, as it proved, but not the "Grand Hotel". However, it was so bitterly cold I was glad of shelter. I dragged most of my baggage myself up a long staircase and found myself in a narrow, almost furnitureless room. It had a bedstead, sans bedding, a table with a dirty cloth on it, and 3 or 4 chairs. The "Ivestehik" or Driver was the son of the house and had been looking for a customer. However, he was a willing lad, and got me a clean pillow and one coverlet. He also brought in a boiling samovar and gave me some hot tea and dry bread. Not bad! My hands were soiled and I asked for some hot water, when he dragged in a thing like a tin table, supported on a hollow tin pillar--over the basin was a kind of big canister, and into this he poured some warm water--There was a sort of little jiggling tube fixed into the bottom of the canister, and when I touched it a few drops of water dribbled on to my hands. By patience, however, I got them clean, and then taking off my thickest clothing, I put on my Senegal jacket and coat, and drawing the coverlet half over me tried to go to sleep. But I had taken all the strong tea out of the tea-pot, instead of diluting it, and could not sleep; 3 o'clock struck and after that I dozed occasionally. At eight the boy brought me some poor Coffee and afterwards I told him to get the sleigh and take me to the Russo-Chinese Bank. It was on the other side of the Angara, in the heart

of Irkutak, and Grand
of Irkutak, and in the Grand Hotel building, Mr. Kon secured me a
room here at a moderate price, and I have got my luggage here, but
it cost me as much for "Ivestchika", or sleighs, as would have paid
for a comfortable night here. I have been almost good for nothing
to-day, and could not get in to see the Governor General, Mr. Mil-
lerius, but must see him early to-morrow. I hope to be able to vis-
it the Alexandrovski Convict settlement in this neighbourhood, and
shall probably get an order on the strength of Mr. Lessar's letter.
There are many fine buildings here, and the place is well laid out.
We are in the Bold Street of Irkutak, and around are many fine stores
and shops. There is also a large Theatre, and a good Museum and
Geographical Society, but no Bourse. I saw in the Geographical
Society, the Reports of the London and Manchester Geographical So-
cieties, but not the Liverpool one. The remains of the Mammoths are
very fine, and the Archeological Collections good--There has evi-
dently been as much civilisation in these parts in early times, as
in Europe, perhaps more, but probably the climate was milder ages
ago. I am now tired, and will post this. Let H. E. Jones know I
am journeying as fast as I can towards home. The train travelling
is the best just now, and the houses are warm, but outside it is too
cold to be comfortable, and the presence of Lake Baikal makes this
part damper than the rest.

The particulars I have given you of the trains, I want for the
London "Times". Many people are inquiring about the accommodation.

(Signed) Thomas H. Barker.

IRKUTSK,

26th November, 1903.

My dear-----

I closed my letter last night intending to post it to-day, but I was kept so on the go all day long, that the Postoffice was closed when I went there. Most places of the kind close early here. I had to go to the Russe Bank first thing, and they sent me to the Governor of Irkutsk. The Isveschek took me in the first place to the Governor General's house, but he was in St. Petersburg. I lost $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours by that error, and then had to go to the house of Governor Mollerius, Civil Governor. He did not keep me waiting 5 minutes, but received me in full civic uniform in a very handsome parlour decorated with the portraits of former Governors. We had half an hour's lively conversation in French (I am getting quite expert in French, but the German bothers me rather--every now and then a word is missing) and he gave me a letter to the Officer in charge of the Great Alexandrovski Convict prison, 50 miles from here on the north side of the Angara. Therefore at 7 a.m. I start for that place in a country carriage and have had to buy a black sheep skin pelisse for the journey. It will take me to-morrow to get there and I expect the Governor of the prison will put me up for 2 nights, as the middle of the day is wanted for the inspection, and the third for the drive back. After I left the Governor's I visited briefly the two cathedrals, which are gorgeous inside, with most interesting and costly decorations. Afterwards I went to the Technical Schools, built and endowed chiefly by a Russian Lady, now dead, and two gentlemen. The conductor spoke German, so I had a good hour and a quarter or half in that language. I went through all the class-rooms

and workshops, engineering, joinering, building, draughting etc. There are about 600 youths and young men there, many of them very bright fine fellows, who will run English neck ^{and} as neck any day, and probably beat them, for they seem very earnest in their work, and their faces denote good capacity. From there I went back to the Bank, and a young Russian went with me to buy the pelisse. If you would like me to keep it, you had better write me at once to Peterbourg, as the Russians call it, C/o British Embassy, otherwise I may sell it again. There, as fur is dearer in Russia than in Siberia. After a hasty cup of tea, I drove off in a sleigh to the "Nicholas 1st Institute for young ladies" The Directrice, an elderly lady with a double Russian name (I have her card) and most fluent in French received me most kindly and took me all over the place from top to bottom; there are three extensive floors. The young ladies were just going in to dinner, about 160 of them, and I had quite a Royal progress through the room. The young ladies all rose and curtsied, and I had to keep bowing all the way through. I saw their dinner, a good three course one, their laundry and huge steam bath room. They enjoy a steam bath once a week and look very well on it; some of the girls are beautiful; they come from all parts of the Russian East, as the Empress is the patroness. The Directrice has to go to report to the Empress, and knows both the present and Dagmar well. She has lovely portraits of them. The next floor was all class-rooms, with a grand hall-room, and 20 saloons for music, each containing a grand piano, all made in Peterbourg. I heard one and it had a lovely soft tone, and the player a beautiful touch. Had I not been going to the Prison, I should have gone to see the Ball. The top floor was dormitories, of which I saw a sample. Lastly the

old lady took me into her salon, a very fine room, invited me to sit down, and brought out a box of fine Turkish Cigarettes. She gave me one and took one herself. I struck a match and gave her a light, and she sat on the sofa and heard something of my adventures and chatted away in French. I got on to story telling, giving her the anecdote of Alexandra, Dagnar and the Horse in Hyde Park. About five I made my adieu! the old lady escorting me to the Hall. She was a dear quaint creature, but immensely interested in her establishment, which is beautifully clean, all the passages and halls painted white, which is renewed every year. The girls lavatory basins shone like silver. The Directrice says she has little sickness; all drinking water is boiled in vessels of samovars. And remember this is all in Siberia. A great trade is done here, and there are many rich people, with large mansions; a great many men going about in costly furs. The weather was clear to-day and the view over the Angara lovely in the snow. The bridge lights looked beautiful at night when I left the Institute. The Directrice says that the weather from the middle of December to April is clear and sparkling. The Park round the Institute is then levelled and the young ladies all skate therein, as on a pond or lake. So life is not without its enjoyment even here. I am told that Mr. Clifton and Professor Gertz, of Hameth Lane have arrived at the "Metropole" here, to-day, and I hope to see them on Sunday. On Monday I leave with regret, for Tomsk, as there is still much to be seen. I must see the Goldmining Laboratories. I think I told you I saw the Mint at Osaka.

(Signed) Thomas. H. Barker.