

Maurice Baring's 1927 Novel on Russia and Wartime Manchuria: *Tinker's Leave*

Epigraphs

“ I wonder if he [the Chinese boy who suddenly disappeared] has taken us right. Wait here Miles. I will just trot down that track [on my pony] and see if it leads anywhere—if not, we will go back [on our ponies] to the village [in southern Manchuria].’

Troumestre [Miles' abiding Catholic companion and informed religious guide] trotted off. **Miles felt a sense of despair** in the *gowliang* [the ripening millet fields] **in the deepening twilight, so far from everything and everybody, not able to speak a word of any necessary language** [neither Russian nor Chinese]. Nor did he believe in Troumestre's **sense of locality**.

'He may find himself with *Hun-hu-ses* [roaming Chinese bandits] or Japs,' he thought. But Troumestre came back presently.

'I think it's all right,' he said. 'the only thing to do is to go on.'

They did.

They met a Cossack. **Never had Miles seen a more welcome sight.**” (Maurice Baring, *Tinker's Leave* (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1928—first published in 1927), p. 243—italics in the original; my bold emphasis added.)

“**The Cossacks were bathing naked on horseback.** Miles and the others stood by the lake and watched.

'And to think,' said Troumestre, 'that we should be at war [the 1904-1905 Russo-Japanese War] on an evening like this!...I shall never go to war again,' said Troumestre, 'as long as I live. That I swear.'

He knew little that eight years later [in 1913] he would be in another war in Turkey [and the Balkans]—a week after the declaration of hostilities **from which he would not return**.

'I don't suppose that I [at now 27 years of age] shall go to war again—that any of us will,' Miles said.

'One war is enough for a lifetime,' said Gérard [a foreign correspondent from France].

They were silent and pensive for a time. The Cossacks were [now] riding their horses home.” (Maurice Baring, *Tinker's Leave*), pp. 238-239—my emphasis added.

“Outside the Cossacks were singing their evening prayers. The voices rose in high, strong concert [concord of sounds and voices]. The attack or the chant was clean, sharp, and clear. **Miles [an Englishman] had never heard anything like it in his life.** It began as suddenly, as sharply, **as someone diving off a springboard into a stream.** There was no hesitation. The voices seemed to rush **into the breach** [as with the valorous cavalry in combat]. The tenors were higher and sharper than Miles had ever heard or could imagine, and the bases were like the deepest organ pedal-stop in a cathedral. Yet sometimes the bases seemed higher than the tenors. **Miles and the others listened in silence.**

'What did that mean?' asked Miles, when it was over.

'It is a Prayer to the Holy Ghost,' said Troumestre. It means something like this':

'Heavenly King, our Comforter / Spirit of Truth, / Who dwellest everywhere, and pervadest everything, / Treasure of Goodness, and Giver of Life, / Come and abide with us, / And deliver us from all that defileth, / And have mercy on us, / Oh! Thou most merciful, / And save our souls.'

'It's wonderful,' said Miles [who was himself, professedly, “an Anglican Catholic” (225) and an innocent Tinker, and adventurous—also in a family wine-business in England!].” (Maurice Baring, *Tinker's Leave* (1928), p. 240—my emphasis added.)

“If tinkers may have leave to live, / And bear the sow-skin budget, / Then my account [tale] I well may give, / And in the stocks avouch [for, or to confess] it....Jog on, jog on, the foot-path way, / And merrily hent [grasp, seize] the stile-a: / A merry heart goes all the day, / Your sad [heart] tires in a mile-a.” (William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, Act 4, Scene 3—Autolycus' charming but impish Verse, and his jolly ending Song; and it was also Maurice Baring's deftly chosen Epigraph for his 1927 novel. My emphasis added.)

Ten years after the sacred events at Fatima, Portugal, as well as a full decade after the 1917 Bolshevik revolutionary takeover in Russia, Maurice Baring — who knew the Russian language very well — wrote another book on Russia (and Southern Manchuria) set in the years 1904-1905, during the gravely consequential Russo-Japanese War, in which Japan was victorious.

Baring's 1927 book was itself a novel and entitled *Tinker's Leave*. It is essentially about a 27-year-old Englishman — Miles Consterdine — who gradually comes of age and unto a greater maturity, after his unexpectedly meeting some Russians in Paris and then taking — with their adventurous encouragement and with Alyosha Kourigene's further companionship — an extended leave of absence from his family business in London in order to visit for the first time Russia and the Russian Far East during war. Miles will become increasingly haunted by Russia and by this cumulative experience in

war and love — to include his innocent and abidingly pure experience with his first love, Elena Ilyin, a courageous and very memorable character herself.

In Baring's Dedication of his 1927 novel to his friend "A.D.M." he revealingly says:

It is difficult to remember where and when the seed of a book is sown; but I think the seed of *this* book fell into the ground in a railway carriage, somewhere between Kharbin and Lake Baikal, in the year 1905.

What has it turned out to be? What is it? A novel? A book of travel? An argument? A picture of manners [Russian, Cossack, Japanese, and Chinese]?

I think it is perhaps a record of impressions received in Russia and Manchuria, in war-time, and transposed into a phantasy. I have tried to collect these impressions, to sort [and to sift] them, and to string them like beads on a slight thread of a story.¹

Although Baring does not explicitly present or discuss the manifold consequences of the 1904-1905 war, it will nevertheless be fitting at this point to convey Major General J.F.C. Fuller's own deep and far-sighted strategic understanding of the fruits and momentous effects of the Russian defeat and the Japanese victory in 1905:

More important than these [just discussed] tactical changes were the influences of Japan's victory on world affairs. **It disrupted Russia by stimulating the virus of revolution which for long had eaten into her bowels.** By liberating Germany from fear of war on her eastern flank it freed her to concentrate on her western border, **and thereby upset the balance of power in Europe....**

But it was in India—the pivot of British imperial power—that the world revolution took surest form....[In the informed 1912 words of C.F. Andrews:] "A Turkish consul of long experience in Western Asia told me that in the interior you could see everywhere the most ignorant peasants "tingling" with the news. Asia was moved from one end to the other, and **the sleep of centuries was finally broken....**A new chapter was being written in the book of the world's history.... **The old-time glory and greatness of Asia seemed destined to return."**

In corroboration of this, Mr. Pradhan writes [in 1930]: "**It is impossible to exaggerate the effects of the Japanese victory on the Indian mind.**" Indian students began to study the history of Japan **to discover what had enabled her to wound so deeply one of the greatest European Powers.** They found the answer in Japanese patriotism, self-sacrifice and national unity. Here were miraculous **powers beyond the might of armaments.** The rise of Japan was looked upon as "a divine dispensation." Indian students flocked to the Rising Sun....

All these stupendous happenings were fertilized by the conflict, fought on the far eastern flank of Asia, as over 450 years before an equally great conflict had been

¹ Maurice Baring, *Tinker's Leave* (New York and Garden City: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1928), p. v.-vi. Henceforth, all further references to *Tinker's Leave* will be from this 1928 edition, the pages being placed above in the main text of this essay, and in parentheses.

fought on the far eastern flank of Europe. The fall of Port Arthur in 1905 [on the coast of southern Manchuria], like the fall of Constantinople in 1453, rightly may be numbered among the few really great events in history.²

Maurice Baring himself was very deeply affected by his own time with the Russian Military, especially as a foreign correspondent in Manchuria in 1904-1905; and thus came his consequential decision to return to Russia many times, until June 1914, just before the outbreak of World War I.

These are some of the books on Russia that Baring wrote and published before his 1927 novel: *With the Russians in Manchuria* (1905); *A Year in Russia* (1907); *Russian Essays and Stories* (1909); *Landmarks of Russian Literature* (1910); *The Russian People* (1911)—(Dedicated to Gilbert K. Chesterton); *What I Saw in Russia* (1913); *The Mainsprings of Russia* (1914); *An Outline of Russian Literature* (1914); *The Oxford Book of Russian Verse* (Editor and the Introductory Essay)(1925).

From the vantage point of 1927, Baring could also reflectively consider what had happened to him in 1904-1905. On 1 February 1909 — the Vigil of Candlemas — Maurice Baring was received into the Catholic Church at the Brompton Oratory in London; and in his later 1927 novel, *Tinker's Leave*, Baring presents quite appreciatively the Catholic Faith and Culture, and Catholics themselves (like Walter Troumestre, Miles's guide and companion; or Hilaire Belloc's un-identified vivid religious verse, “The Song of the Pelagian Heresy” from Belloc's *The Four Men* (1912) — and he did it more favorably so than he did, or could have done, in 1905. However, the early examples to Baring of the Russian Orthodox Faith — and the Sacred Culture and its Sacred Liturgy and the Piety (and bells!) of the Russian People — touched him from the first moment he was present, and it was cumulatively, I believe, very important for his gradual and abiding, loyal conversion to the Roman Catholic Faith in 1909.

In his 1927 novel, Baring's narrator recurrently introduces sacred things, and he does it with reverence. For example, we are presented with Miles' first visit to Moscow — arriving from St. Petersburg with his companion Alyosha — as they were *en route* to the Russian Far East and Manchuria:

Miles and Alyosha were settled in the first-class carriage of the Trans-Siberian Express....Miles was writing a letter...After giving his friend a short summary of the events which had taken him to Russia, and a brief sketch of his adventures in St. Petersburg, he got as far as his arrival at Moscow.

² J.F.C. Fuller, *A Military History of the Western World, Volume III—From the American Civil War to the End of World War II* (New York: Da Capo Press paperback edition, 1957), pp. 168-170 (from the Volume's Chapter 4—pp.136-170)--my emphasis added.

“We arrived in the morning about half-past nine. Everything was unlike what I expected...Kouragine [*i.e.*, Alyosha] took me directly we arrived to **a small church called *Our Lady of Unexpected Joy***. We went there from the [rail] station. **He put up a candle there, and one for me. I asked him [myself being a self-professed High Church Anglo-Catholic] if he expected anything; he said 'No'—that was the point.**” (67-68—emphatic italics in the original; my bold emphasis added.)

We already see Miles' sincere innocence and humble interrogatives, and they will continue throughout the novel, often with his blushes of embarrassment. We now also, in passing, learn of a rare little church in Moscow with a memorable name and inspired dedication.

A little later, we hear Alyosha extensively discuss world literature, to include Russian Christian literature, especially the great Dostoyevsky; and the Catholic correspondent from England, Walter Troumestre, will then ask his own searching questions and accept Alyosha's acute reply:

“But what about Dostoyevsky [1821-1881],” asked Troumestre. “Is he a realist? Is he an artist? Does he reflect life? Does he hold up a mirror to Nature, or does he make a peep-show of his own?”

“Dostoyevsky makes patterns, like all artists...**and in them he tells...the adventures of the Russian soul.**” (83—my emphasis added)

Baring also gives us glimpses of the Russian countryside and Russian folklore to stir the mind:

He [Miles] wondered whether it was true, whether there would, as Alyosha had prophesied, ever be anything between him and **this grey, monotonous brownness**; he thought it improbable. He thought of the woods and marches and fields of his home [in England], the solid, sane, green English countryside....How beautiful, and how comfortably beautiful, that all seemed compared with what [the “monotonous brownness”] he was looking at now!

“But I suppose,” he [Miles] said, “if you hadn't Russian blood, that wouldn't have happened [to you, Alyosha]?”

“No, not at all [replied Alyosha]. It happens to foreigners too. It will happen to you; **and perhaps some day in the future you will remember this journey, and it will haunt you like the face of some one you once loved [such as Elena Ilyin?]. You will never get rid of the infection, never escape. It was so with me. I remember when I first came to Russia....Now, after all these years, I remember the first time I went to the country in Russia.** It was at the beginning of the summer holidays, the end of June....I drove to my Uncle Pierre's house—the uncle [Pierre Dashkov] you met in Paris....It was so hot that we didn't go out until the evening. Then **we drove to the river and bathed. The water was still...I thought there might be a *Russalka* in the weeds....**That is what you call a **pixie** [a fairy of mischievous character]. **They have green eyes, and if you make friends with them you go mad....**And we came home late....**the green corn was in flower, and it smelt good.**

“We drove home through the corn. After dinner we sat out on the terrace, and **listened**

to the people in the village singing....They were still celebrating the wedding... dogs barked, and **the drunken people sang and danced. You could hear them stamping...somewhere far away lovers were singing....a very sad song.** That, I remember, was **my first experience of the country of Russia.**" (76-78—my emphasis added)

After they got out to southern Manchuria, "Miles asked Alyosha whether there was any chance of their being allowed [as foreign correspondents or photographers] to go to the Front"(129); and Alyosha replied with candor:

"For some of you, yes; you [Miles] are being kept here **on probation....**You are English—and they suspect you a little. **You are too innocent to be true.** [And, besides that, your country's conduct and policy are strongly anti-Russian, and actively pro-Japanese!] **They think you are Machiavelli in disguise.** I have told them it is nonsensical. But in the end it will be all right, and you will find that the [combat] Front will come [north] to you quite soon enough." (129—my emphasis added)

In one of the many discussions about war (as well as world literature), Alyosha and Troumestre, in Miles' attentive presence, have an enlivening exchange, also about a paradox: the success of failure:

"People talk of progress," said Troumestre, "but war still goes on."

"War will always go on," said Alyosha, "until all the street-boys of the world stop who are quarrelling over an orange, and are ready for arbitration."...

"Surely," said Troumestre, "a country is the better for the possibility of war...when there is no war, doesn't it mean decadence, the decline and fall of empire?"

"The Roman Empire didn't decay because it abolished war," said Alyosha, "It decayed because it relied on mercenaries."

"That is just my point," said Troumestre. "They forgot how to fight..."

"[In contrast with the English and Japanese,] **We [Russians] are more unlucky.** But then that is our point. **It is the failure who by us is the greatest success. Ivan the Fool,** who gains the kingdom—which is not always of this world. That [nobility of failure] is what we all of us want to grasp."

"Ivan the Fool [a famous example of a Holy Fool in Russian legend] grabs a little in this world too, doesn't he?" said Haslam [another foreign journalist].

"A little," said Alyosha, "but not much. Russia looks large, because it can be stretched like an elastic; but think of how little we have made of our resources.... We don't want to develop, to grow rich; nearly all of our rich men are foreigners or Jews...we do not care for money; we treat it like what it is—dirt. There is a proverb which says, '**If you have two loaves, sell one and buy lillies.**'" (155-156—my emphasis added)

We may now consider a part of another, and more theological, discussion; and we take note of the Catholic, Walter Troumestre's keen comments as well as his rumbustious, sly introduction of some

of Hilaire Belloc's own comic verse (from Belloc's 1912 book, *The Four Men*):

“By future life he [Rudyard Kipling or his “*babu* [Hindu] Indian” from South Asia] meant, I suppose, the transmigration of souls [reincarnation]?” said Troumestre.

“I guess so.” [said Haslan]

“Well,” said Troumestre, “I can only say in the words of the poet [*i.e.*, Hilaire Belloc himself, Maurice Baring's beloved friend]:

“I thank my God for this in the least, / I was born in the West and not in the East, / That he made me a human instead of a beast/ Whose hide is covered with hair.”

“I can't see,” said Miles, “why they [the Hindu Orientals] shouldn't be just as right as you.”

“We know,” said Troumestre, **“they are wrong, because God Almighty came down to earth on purpose to tell us so.”** (161-162—my emphasis added)

Almost thirty pages later, Baring again presents the Catholic Troumestre and his searching theological discourse with the atheist journalist, Jameson, who holds many caricaturing and untrue views about the Catholic Creed and religious practices. Jameson's words thus inspire Troumestre's prompt verse rejoinder:

“Bad theology,” said Troumestre....“It is true that it is enough for the *soul* to make...a gesture--also a *perfect* act of contrition is as good as the Sacraments.”

“How can you believe a gesture can make any difference?”

“Falling off a cornice is only a gesture,” said Troumestre.

“I don't believe you believe what you've got to believe, all the same,” said Jameson.

[Then, at once, comes forth Troumestre's surprising song to Jameson, again without any attribution to Hilaire Belloc himself:]

“He didn't believe in Adam and Eve, / He put no Faith therein; / His doubts began with the Fall of man, / And he laughed at Original Sin. / With a tow-ti-row”

[Thus] **sang Troumestre**. Jameson [then] took up the chorus [of Belloc's drinking song], and then everybody joined in somehow [to include Miles]. (187-188—my emphasis added)

Such is “God's Good Foison [Abundance],” as the poet John Dryden (d. 1700) also once said about his fellow poet Geoffrey Chaucer (d. 1400)!

Hilaire Belloc's own robust verse is entitled “The Song of the Pelagian Heresy,” and is to be found in full in his 1912 book *The Four Men* — as was his earlier unattributed verse-chorus: “I thank my God for this in the least...That he made me a human instead of a beast.”

Later (224-225) we see another worthy incident with Troumestre and Miles the Anglican

Catholic, namely, their visit to a Chinese Catholic church in Southern Manchuria:

After the midday meal and the midday siesta, Gérard [the French journalist] said he wished to visit to the Chinese Catholic church, which he had heard was in a neighboring village. The doctor, Troumestre, and Miles agreed to go with him. They rode to a village some miles off, and found a clean Presbytery and **a small church with an altar, some candles** and paper flowers, **a Crucifix, Images of Our Lady and of the Sacred Heart. Troumestre and Gérard genuflected, and Troumestre said a prayer.** They then called called on the priest, a bronzed Chinaman who was reading his Breviary....He had been condemned to death during the Boxer troubles [1899-1901], and led out to execution, **but reprieved** at the last moment. **Troumestre then said he wanted the priest to hear his confession.** They disappeared into the church....

When the priest and Troumestre came back, the priest gave them all his blessing and they went away. On the way back home Miles and Gérard rode together. Gérard asked whether Troumestre had always been a Catholic, or whether he was a convert. Miles explained. “And you,” he [Gérard] said, **“are you a Catholic?”**

“Yes,” said Miles, **“but I am not a Roman Catholic; I am an Anglican Catholic.”**

“A Protestant?” said [the Frenchman] Gérard.

“No, not a Protestant,” said Miles [at 27 years of age]. **“At least I was not brought up as one;** my aunt was High Church, and I was brought up High Church.”

“What is High Church?”

“High Church is the opposite of Low Church.”

“But what is Low Church?”

“Low Church are people like Nonconformists, Methodists and the Salvation Army.”

“Ah, *l'armée du Salut*. But, then, why are not you a Catholic, a Roman Catholic?”

“Because,” said Miles, “Roman Catholics, so my aunt says, are heretical and schismatic in England and Wales; they introduced all sorts of new things into the Church during the Middle Ages which the Early Church knew nothing about—**a lot of abuses—indulgences—images and rosaries—and new dogmas like Purgatory and praying for the dead—and dangerous things like confession,** letting the priests run everything,” he said **rather shyly.**

“But,” said Gérard, “those things are not new. Russians and Greeks have confession and prayers for the dead, and have had them ever since the earliest times.” (224-225 —my emphasis added)

The rest of this revealing and substantive exchange (225-230) between Miles and Gérard and Troumestre should be read in its entirety, and savored. It is one of the many discourses to be found in this richly interwoven, and modestly unassuming, novel of almost 400 pages: Baring's *Tinker's Leave*.

Before we briefly touch upon Baring's inimitable and poignant presentation of some deep

matters of the heart and human love — involving, especially Alyosha and Miles and the gracious nurse, Elena Ilyin — we should consider the manner of Baring's depiction of the combat-wounded Russians and especially a wounded Russian colonel:

They arrived at a [Manchurian] village. They entered a little house. Some soldiers were in one room **warming themselves at a fire**...there were two more rooms: one **occupied** by Japanese prisoners, the other by **Russian dead**.

“*Occupé*,” said the fastidious officer to Miles. The Cossack who had been sent to find a billet [for the gravely wounded Colonel] explained this, and pointed to a shed, full of refuse and dirt.

The [fastidious] officer shuddered....

“*Moi rester*,” said Miles. He felt he must stay in case Troumestre came back.

The fastidious officer left in disgust.

Miles stood warming himself by the fire.

Presently some officers of an infantry regiment walked in, **drenched and exhausted**. The Cossack met them [the infantry officers] and said something. Miles did not understand what they said...and he guessed the Cossack had told them **the billet was reserved** for the officers of the [artillery] battery, **for the infantry officers left immediately in anger and despondency**.

“What shall I do with my pony?” thought Miles. He walked back to the knoll [where the wounded Colonel had lain all alone, seemingly abandoned]. It took some time.

The Colonel was still there, and [then came] the doctor, and the young Cossack officer, and Gérard, who had stopped at the knoll before going on.

The Colonel refused to move. The doctor, Miles, and the young Cossack and Gérard **left him wrapped in his Caucasian cloak, his eyes shut**.

The words, “**They all forsook Him and fled**,” came [poignantly] into Mile's mind. He pointed to the Colonel, and asked Gérard whether he [the Colonel] wasn't coming. The doctor shook his head and Gérard said: “He's too ill. He can't move.”....

As Miles [soon later back in the village] **warmed his hands by the fire**, he thought of **the Colonel laying alone on that knoll. He thought of St. Peter, as he warmed his hands**. (252-254—my emphasis added)

We may now better appreciate Maurice Baring's implicit and allusive ways — so as to show us another nuance of Miles' deepening moral character, as he thought of St. Peter's own deserting denials.

Soon after this memorable scene and heartfelt reflection, Miles will meet the nurse, Elena Ilyin, again, at the “Red Cross attachment” (254):

Elena Ilyin told Miles that she had been working with a flying ambulance column the day before, **and had given first aid to the wounded**. She was going to do the same today. She was dressed in a grey riding-habit....

Miles, after he had fed his pony, said good-bye; everyone began to move. **Elena Ilyin got on her pony. She looked, Miles thought, graceful on horseback.**” (254—my emphasis added)

Not long afterwards, as the battles were heating up around Liao-yang, Miles was to contract a debilitating illness, part of which was **sunstroke** and another part of it was **dysentery**; but it also unexpectedly included a sapping intractable touch of **malaria** itself (261):

He was faint from hunger and fatigue. He sank into an exhausting stupor, but instead of sleeping he began to rave. He had caught a sunstroke. **He spent the night in delirium.** The next morning a hospital train stopped at the siding close by, and Miles was carried to it unconscious by Ivanov, Jameson, and his Cossack. **He was put in charge of a nurse, who happened to be Elena Ilyin, and sent to Mukden.** Ivanov's Cossack took charge of his [Miles'] pony. (261—my emphasis added)

As Baring deftly says: “Thus another chapter of life began for Miles.” (275)

It was more than a sunstroke that Miles had caught during **the strenuous days of the battle** of Liao-yang. It was dysentery. He was taken to Mukden, to a hospital outside the town, and there he was nursed until the end of September [1905]....

Elena, and the staff of doctors whom he had originally met in Liao-yang, were all of them still at Mukden, in a train. **Elena's husband had been killed during the battle of Liao-yang. Her unit was not attached to Miles' hospital, but she visited Miles almost daily.** (262-263—my emphasis added)

During Miles' period of convalescence, and after so many of their frank and fundamental discussions together, Elena suddenly had to depart:

Elena was called away to see someone in the hospital, and **as she left Miles, he felt as if the sunshine had gone with her.**

He realized now what he had vaguely thought before, but never put in words—that he could not imagine life without her.

And then the old question came back to him, in a flash—the old question that Alyosha's aunt and cousins had put to him in Paris in that restaurant [about his taking the risks of an adventure to Russia!], a question which had already once changed the course of his life: “**Why not?**”

“Why not?” Why should he he not marry Elena Ilyin? Her husband was dead—she was free [except perhaps for earlier love, Alyosha?]
—he was free—he was well off....

He loved her—there was no one like her; he had met nothing in his life to compare with her frank directness, those clear eyes, and that simple serenity; she understood everything, one had to explain nothing...she was so much more natural than any one he had ever seen in his life. What would Alyosha think? Alyosha was married [to Anna Ivanova in a Siberian village, Verkhneudinsk (361, 336)]....Alyosha would be pleased....He [Miles] must ask Elena. (265—my emphasis added)

In the novel, however, Miles was never to be accepted by Elena. She declined to become his beloved wife. Nor did Elena ever consent to marry Miles' cherished friend, Alyosha. Alyosha himself thankfully returned to his loyal wife, Anna, whom Miles was also soon to meet:

At Verkhneudinsk [in Siberia, not far from Irkutsk], **Alyosha's wife came to meet him at the station.** She was short, fair, and had light-blue eyes. One could not call her pretty, but **she was engaging; she had no pretense to any kind of elegance. But she reminded Miles of some of the pictures of the [Russian] Empress Catharine.** She wore a cheap astrakan jacket and an astrakan cap. **There was nothing in the least common about her, and no sort of nonsense. She was as transparent as crystal.**

The moment she kissed Alyosha on the platform, and shook hands with Miles, smiling, and saying she had heard a lot about him, **Miles saw how impossible it would have been for Alyosha to leave her—out of the question....**Anna Ivanova—that was her name—told them the local news.

When it was time for them to go, Anna Ivanovna shook hands warmly with Miles and said with a friendly smile:

“You must come and stay with us here when you come back. **Of course you will come back.**”

Alyosha told her about Susieki. [It was the estate where Miles, along with his loyal nurse Elena, had happily convalesced, and he then was to purchase the whole estate himself **as a wedding gift for Alyosha and Elena!**]. She [Anna] laughed and said:

“It is a good idea, only Mihal Ivanovitch [Miles] **will be lonely without someone to look after him.** We must find a nice Russian wife for him. **A Russian wife is just what he needs [but, poignantly, it will not be Elena]....**

She kissed Alyosha and blessed him, and said good-bye to Miles. (360-361—my emphasis added)

Shortly before Miles was to meet Anna in person, Miles, with some blushing, tried to deliver a message to Alyosha in person; and Alyosha was then to tell Miles something decisive and important:

Miles felt fearfully embarrassed about delivering this message [from Vallia, Elena's own brother who had just died at Susieki, at the family estate].

Alyosha, as if divining his embarrassment, said:

“Perhaps he [Vallia] wanted to congratulate me; but I must tell you at once that what I wrote to you about my new marriage [to Elena Ilyin] being settled is no longer true. That is all over. The truth was, I found I could not leave my wife [Anna]. She consented [to my new marriage], but it was just *that* which made it impossible—and the other person [Elena] was no longer willing [to break the Sacrament of Matrimony], for the same reason”....

There was a pause.

“Well,” Alyosha went on, “I went to Tsitsihar. I was sent there [punitively so, because

he had once unjustly killed a man], and then to Verkhneudinsk [in Siberia]; there I saw my wife, and I told her everything—the whole story. That the miracle [of heartfelt loyal love] had happened. She said to me: 'I understand, Alyosha. I will give you up, because I know that you do not really belong to me; why should I keep you? And if she [Elena] consents to take you [in a true sacramental marriage?], I will set you free.' [Perhaps, Anna's marriage to Alyosha was not thought to be a true one, after all?] And when Elena knew this [the sincerity of Anna's permission and offered release], she felt she could no longer marry me; and I too felt it would be wrong; so we said good-bye. And now I shall go back presently to Verkhneudinsk, to my cigar store; and I hope that we may live happily ever afterwards....At any rate, we have missed committing a crime. We [Elena and I] should not have been happy. I should not have made Elena happy.” (345-346)

As is often presented in Maurice Baring's varied writings, the humble and noble acceptance of intimate sorrow is the secret of life — as a Catholic priest once told him.

Miles was to buy Susieki, first as a wedding gift for Alyosha and Elena; but it did not come to pass and the estate later largely burned down; and it happened when Miles himself was not present, but, instead, was back in England. For, the main manager of Miles' family business, Mr. Saxby, had unexpectedly died and Miles was thus recalled home to London.

Miles had received an evening telegram from London: “Poor Saxby died suddenly. Heart. Please come home at once. Urgent. Writing Moscow, Consul.” (359)

Miles' protracted foreign adventures would soon be over. But his linguistic ability in Russian had already become quite excellent, and Miles would likely often return to Russia again, there where he had learned so much about life and war, and so much about true and loyal love and the true Faith — and where, as a loyal young man in his late twenties, he had also given so much of his own heart.

In 1935, eight years after *Tinker's Leave*, Maurice Baring expressed one of his deepest insights, which is also a recurrent theme in almost all of his writings, to include *Tinker's Leave*:

“One has to *accept* sorrow for it to be of any healing power, and that is the most difficult thing in the world....A priest once said to me, 'When you understand what *accepted* sorrow means, you will understand everything. It is the secret of life.’”³

--Finis--

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3 Maurice Baring, *Darby and Joan* (London: William Heinemann LTD, 1935), p. 178—italics in the original, also a novel. Near the end of *Tinker's Leave* we read: “He [Miles] rode away with the two Cossacks. **Elena looked at him and smiled as he waved. Miles felt inclined to cry. He had never felt so sad before. Life seemed to be over for him. All the point and salt and color of it seemed to vanish....Thus it was that Miles could not stop at the Red Cross detachment [to see nurse Elena once more]. He did not see Elena Ilyin again.**” (356, 359-360—my emphasis added)