



# KIM PHILBY

THE UNKNOWN STORY OF THE  
KGB'S MASTER SPY

TIM MILNE

IAN INNES MILNE CMG OBE

WITH A FOREWORD BY PHILLIP KNIGHTLEY

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Biteback Publishing

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‘If in the end he still remains something of a mystery, we should not be surprised: for every human being is a mystery and nobody knows the truth about anybody else.’ – *A. A. Milne*

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## FOREWORD

This memoir is the previously unknown story of the long friendship between Kim Philby and Ian Innes ‘Tim’ Milne,<sup>1</sup> an association which lasted for thirty-seven years, from the time they first met at Westminster School in September 1925 until Philby’s defection to Moscow in January 1963. It is the only first-hand account of the Philby affair ever written from the inside by someone who served in the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) and worked alongside the so-called KGB master spy. Philby’s own book was of course written in Moscow under KGB supervision and is therefore suspect.

From Westminster Milne and Philby proceeded to different universities – Philby to Trinity, Cambridge and Milne to Christ Church, Oxford – but they travelled together in central Europe during university holidays and remained close.

Philby joined SIS in September 1941. Milne followed him some weeks later, recruited by Philby as his deputy and serving alongside him in Section V for most of the war years. Like Philby, Milne stayed on in SIS after the war and they remained professional colleagues as well as friends until Philby’s dismissal from the service in 1951. Their friendship continued for a dozen years after this until Philby’s flight from Beirut.

When the Philby story first broke and became a hot news item in 1967, largely as a result of a series of articles in the *Sunday Times* written by me and two colleagues which subsequently became a bestselling book,<sup>2</sup> Tim Milne was identified in print as being a close friend of Kim Philby, and although Milne was then still a serving officer in SIS, press interest in him became intense. I was working on the Insight team at the *Sunday Times* and the editor asked me to find Milne and try to persuade him to talk about his long association with Philby, particularly the holidays they had spent in Europe together. Was there a clue to be found there that explained Philby’s treachery? Milne politely sent me on my way, pleading the restrictions of the Official Secrets Act. He retired from SIS in October 1968, continuing in government service for another seven years, but he never spoke publicly on the subject of his friendship with Philby, although in later years he was invariably courteous to the various authors who approached him for information.

Tim Milne died at the age of ninety-seven in 2010 and his obituary in *The Times*<sup>3</sup> stated in part that his ‘feelings on learning of his old friend’s sustained betrayal of his colleagues and his country can only be a matter of conjecture: he himself maintained great discretion on the subject for the rest of his life’. It was not widely known, outside his family and former service, that he had in fact written a very full and frank account of his association with Philby, nor that his memoir had been accepted for intended publication in 1979. However, before any such publication could happen Milne was required to submit the manuscript to SIS and obtain their permission to publish, in view of the confidentiality obligations incumbent on him. In the event, permission was denied and Milne reluctantly had to abandon the project.

Free of these obligations today, Milne’s daughter has now given permission for her father’s memoir to be published, and this account of a friendship which lasted almost forty years and included a professional relationship for ten of those can now be related in full. Over the past forty-seven years, since the first articles on Philby were written, a considerable number of other articles, TV documentaries and drama treatments, as well as countless books, have appeared: none, however

have been written by someone who knew him as well, or for as long a period, as Tim Milne.

~~It comes as little surprise that this memoir is so elegantly and well written, given that Tim's~~ father, Kenneth John Milne, was a contributor to *Punch* magazine and a close literary collaborator with his brother (Tim's uncle), Alan Alexander Milne, the author of the Winnie-the-Pooh books among others.<sup>4</sup> Tim's own inherited and natural writing excellence was also in demand after he left Oxford, as he worked for five years as a copywriter for a leading London advertising agency before war intervened.

Although Kim Philby's treachery was to cause Milne personal distress and considerable professional difficulties, he writes about his long association with Philby without any hint of rancour or bitterness. When I interviewed Philby in Moscow in 1988, he told me, 'I have always operated at two levels, a personal level and a political one. When the two have come into conflict I have had to put politics first. This conflict can be very painful. I don't like deceiving people especially friends, and contrary to what others think, I feel very badly about it.'<sup>5</sup> Philby's widow said in an interview in 2003, 'To the end of his days he openly talked about how the hardest and most painful thing for him had been the fact that he had lied to his friends. Until the very end it is what tortured him most.'<sup>6</sup>

It is not known whether Milne knew of these statements, as undoubtedly he was one of the friends to whom Philby was referring. When the news came that Philby had died, in Moscow on 11 May 1988, Tim's daughter asked, 'I suppose you have mixed feelings?' Milne replied, 'No, for me he died many years ago.'

One recent author on the subject of Philby wrote, 'Many individuals exert a fascination over the public, but rarely has one individual held such a fascination for so many years for a country that they betrayed.'<sup>7</sup> The year 2013 marked the fiftieth anniversary of Philby's defection to Russia and twenty-five years since his death in Moscow: following these anniversaries, the publication of Tim Milne's full account of his close friendship and association with this most unusual man may now provide readers and historians alike with the closing chapter on the story of Kim Philby.

*Phillip Knightley*

January 2014

[*Editor's note:* These notes were compiled (not by the author) some time after the book was written.]

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> From childhood and for the rest of his life, Milne was known to his family and friends as 'Tim'.
- <sup>2</sup> Phillip Knightley, Bruce Page and David Leitch, *Philby: The Spy Who Betrayed a Generation*, André Deutsch, London, 1968.
- <sup>3</sup> A lengthy obituary was published in *The Times* on 8 April 2010.
- <sup>4</sup> For an excellent account of the life of A. A. Milne and the close relationship with Kenneth (who died in 1929) and Kenneth's widow and children, see Anne Thwaite, *A. A. Milne: His Life*, Faber, London, 1990.
- <sup>5</sup> Phillip Knightley, *Philby: The Life and Views of the KGB Masterspy*, André Deutsch, London, 1988, p. 219.
- <sup>6</sup> Rufina Philby, interview with the *Sunday Times*, June 2003.
- <sup>7</sup> Gordon Corera, *The Art of Betrayal: Life and Death in the British Secret Service*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 2011, p. 92.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is dedicated to the memory of my parents. My father wrote his account in longhand and my mother typed and retyped the manuscript many times. Though it is ostensibly my father's book, in reality it was a joint project which involved them both for several years. I know how very pleased they would have been to see the publication of this memoir, even so long afterwards.

Most, if not all, of my father's colleagues and contemporaries in SIS have now died, and Kim Philby himself died more than twenty-five years ago. However, this is one story which never seems to lose its fascination for many, despite the half-century which has passed since Philby's defection to Russia.

The final version of my father's manuscript was accepted for publication both in Britain and in America in 1979. I remember how disappointed and discouraged my father was when he was denied permission to publish. The manuscript was subsequently abandoned, and during his lifetime my father never revisited the possibility of publication.

Considerable thanks must now go to my collaborator, Richard Frost, who first encouraged me to proceed with this project, and then worked tirelessly on the editing and the source notes, before acting as intermediary between me and Biteback Publishing. Without Richard, it is certain that the typescript of this book would still be languishing in a ring binder, unseen.

I should also like to thank Phillip Knightley, who contacted me after my father's death to enquire whether a manuscript still existed, and if so whether he could read it to express an opinion on its suitability for publication today. I am very pleased that he has contributed the foreword to the book.

Finally, I must warmly thank my editor, Michael Smith, for all his advice and friendly help. I also thank Hayden Peake for his expert guidance, and the excellent team at Biteback, not least the copy-editor Jonathan Wadman, who is himself an 'Old Westminster'.

*Catherine Milne*  
February 2014

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## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

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## INTRODUCTION

Many books have appeared on Kim Philby, including the chief character's own account.<sup>1</sup> Much of the story has been laid bare. But from my long friendship with him I believed that, although I had no startling revelations to make, I could fill a few gaps in the published record and perhaps correct one or two misconceptions, as I saw them, and having now retired from government service I would like to contribute my recollections.

This is not a researched book. I have no documents or letters, and no access to unpublished material. It is many years since I had anything to do with intelligence work. I write from memory jogged here and there by books and articles already published, though there must be many I have not read. On several points of wartime detail where my recollection differed from existing accounts I consulted former intelligence colleagues, long retired.

The original *Sunday Times* articles of 1967 published for the first time many of the basic facts about Philby's career. Although these articles caused some publicity difficulties for me at the time, I thought the *Sunday Times* helped to establish a valuable point of principle, which I fully support: provided its current and future work is not seriously handicapped, a secret service has no right to permanent immunity from public scrutiny and criticism; it cannot expect that faults and errors should be hushed up indefinitely.

In my own book, the first nine chapters (excluding Chapter 4, which is largely autobiographical) describe chronologically my acquaintance with Kim Philby from our first meeting in 1925 to our last in 1961. I have tried as far as possible not to duplicate what others have written, but to rely on my personal recollections. However, there were several periods of his life of which I knew little at first hand, notably Cambridge, the Spanish Civil War, Washington and Beirut; to the small extent I have touched on these I have usually drawn on other accounts. But for the most part I have described things as I saw them at the time, with occasional passages of hindsight. The period 1941-45 and the Iberian subsection of Section V of the Secret Service, in which he and I worked, are treated in some detail. I have freely discussed wartime intelligence matters, as have many others, but post-war intelligence, for the most part, is mentioned only in passing. Chapter 12, without pretending to be a deep analysis of Kim Philby, man and spy, offers some thoughts on his motives and personality.

I do not agree with several writers who have stated that Philby was essentially an ordinary man in an extraordinary situation; rather, I would say, he was an unusual man who sought and found an unusual situation. Nor, from what I saw of Kim and St John Philby, do I believe the theory of the domineering or dominant father.

I have tried to avoid either condemning or condoning what Kim did. This is not because I have no strong views, but because I am trying to write a factual account of what I knew of him. It would only confuse things if I were to hold a moral indignation meeting every few paragraphs. If the personal picture I have presented is friendlier than several others that have appeared, well, that is how I saw him.

*Tim Milne*

## **Author's note**

The Soviet organisation which Philby joined in the 1930s had many titles before settling down in 1954 as the KGB. I have not attempted to follow these changes, which would merely confuse the reader, not to mention the author. Where the context requires, the term KGB should be considered to include its predecessors, and the term NKVD its successors; the intervening titles have not been used.

I have referred throughout to SIS, not MI6; and to MI5, not the Security Service.

## **Notes**

[1.](#) Kim Philby, *My Silent War*, MacGibbon & Kee, London, 1968.

## THE PUBLIC SCHOOLBOY

September, 1925. A very small boy is happily trying to squash a bigger boy behind a cupboard door. Another small boy, me, is watching with some alarm.

That is my first memory of Kim Philby. An hour earlier I had been deposited at 3 Little Dean's Yard, one of the new batch of King's Scholars at Westminster School. Kim, although only six months older than me and still diminutive in his Etons,<sup>1</sup> was beginning his second year. The forty resident King's Scholars formed a separate house, called College, which in some ways was a kind of school within a school, with its own traditions, rules, clothes and vocabulary. The juniors, as scholars in their first year were called, had a fortnight to master these mysteries. During this time each junior was assigned to the care of a second-year scholar, who not only would be his mentor but would take the rap for any sins committed by his protégé. My own mentor was now ignominiously pinned behind the cupboard door, and I wondered – unjustly as it turned out – what good he would be to me if he could not manage this small pugnacious fellow with a stammer.

Kim was the only person in College, and almost in the entire school, that I had heard of before. Over a period of about a decade at the turn of the century, my father and his brother Alan, and Kim's father, St John Philby,<sup>2</sup> and his father's brother, had all been at Westminster, the first three in College. St John Philby had earlier been a pupil in the 1890s at a preparatory school of which my grandfather J. V. Milne was founder and headmaster. (In his autobiography,<sup>3</sup> he says, 'I cannot but feel that in J. V. Milne we enjoyed the guidance of one of the greatest educators of the period – certainly the greatest of all who crossed my path.') The two families had been acquainted, but had drifted apart. I had never previously met any of the Philbys but my father had told me to look out for Jack Philby's son.

Books and articles on Kim have made much of his public school background. Some accounts have implied that he was very much a product of the system and, that when suspicions of him arose the system closed ranks and succeeded in protecting him for several years. In fact Westminster at this time, and particularly College, were not very typical of public school life, and Kim himself was highly untypical even of Westminster.

The school was not just in London, but in the very centre of London, closely linked with Westminster Abbey, which was our school chapel. (I must have attended between 1,200 and 1,500 services there in my time.) Two-thirds of the rather small complement of 360 pupils were day boys and of the boarders (who included all the resident King's Scholars) most lived in or near London. Kim's house was in Acol Road, in West Hampstead. I myself, living in Somerset at the time, was one of the few boarders who could not go home at weekends. This was not a self-centred school divorced from the outside world. It was also not one of the most successful schools, by the usual criteria of the time. We did not get many university scholarships, apart from our closed scholarships and exhibitions to Christ Church, Oxford and Trinity College, Cambridge. Unsurprisingly, with our small numbers and relative lack of playing fields on our doorstep, we were not too good at games. And socially we were not quite on a level with Eton, Harrow and one or two

others.

~~But Westminster was an unusually humane and civilised place. There was room for a hundred flowers, if not to bloom, at least not to be trampled on. Eccentrics were prized, particularly if they made you laugh. In College, and perhaps in other houses, there was little or no bullying; the smaller boys tended to take advantage of this by taunting and tormenting the larger or older ones, as a puppy might an Alsatian. It was not a sin to be a dud at games, and there was in any case the alternative of the river; you can't be a dud at rowing. In College, administration and discipline were mainly in the hands of the monitors, who had the power to cane juniors and second-year boys – usually for trivial offences. The fear of being caned was real enough in my first two years, but I was caned only once, and I'm not sure that it happened to Kim at all. There were many rules and restrictions, but once you reached your third year most of them ceased to apply.~~

Some accounts have suggested that Kim had a bad time at school. I would say he had a rather easy life, particularly in his later years. He was never a popular figure, but neither was he unpopular. People accepted that he was something of a loner, who had erected barriers around himself, and were not disposed to ill-treat him or try to knock him into a different shape. There was little hint at this time of the convivial and gregarious Kim of the 1940s. He had something untouchable about him, a kind of inner strength and self-reliance that made others respect him. Nobody ever mocked him for his stammer. But between Kim and perhaps half a dozen people there was a strong mutual antipathy. This was notably true in the case of our housemaster, the Reverend Kenneth Luce. He did not have a lot to do with our daily routine – he came more into my life as a form master for two terms than as housemaster at any time – but he made a strong impression on us; whether it was of Christian dedication and moral fervour or of sanctimonious self-righteousness depended on your outlook. Once from my nearby cubicle I heard him trying to persuade Kim that he ought to be confirmed. Kim let him carry on for several minutes before revealing that he had never even been baptised. Luce, recovering, tried to shrug it off by saying that that could easily be arranged, but thereafter it seemed that he never pursued the subject with the same drive; perhaps he reckoned that he would have to convert the parents as well as the boy.

One account I have read describes the battle for Kim's soul in much more dramatic terms. Kim was 'badly mauled in the struggle' and later allegedly claimed to have suffered something like a nervous breakdown. I find this hard to accept. He seemed to have little difficulty in holding his position as one who was prepared (because he had no choice) to attend services, but not to go further than that. He certainly did not change his beliefs: he allowed that the prayer book had some value as a 'handbook of morality' but nothing more. Luce himself was a so-called Modern Churchman (he had been chaplain to Bishop Barnes of Birmingham), which in some people's eyes was halfway to agnosticism, and was perhaps inclined to take a less dogmatic view than other headmasters in Orders might have been.

Kim was not brilliant at school. No doubt he was handicapped at the start by his youth – he was only twelve and three-quarters when he entered in 1924 and might have done better to have waited another twelve months – and by ill health in his first year. Scholars were expected to pass School Certificate at the end of their first year, or their second at the latest, but Kim took three years to get over this hurdle. I have a school list from Lent term 1927 – his eighth – which shows him still in the Shell (the School Certificate form); he is placed fifteenth out of twenty-three boys, a little below a later Regius Professor of Medicine at Oxford but above a later Bishop of London. He had only two years left after School Certificate, but in those two years caught up rapidly.

College, although the smallest house and consisting entirely of King's Scholars, was rather good

at games. Kim, while far from outstanding, was by no means a rabbit. If he had not abandoned games in his final year – an option available to a senior – he might have made a reasonable mark at soccer and cricket. He was a fair goalkeeper. At cricket he played in the school 2nd XI – I recall especially his bowling action: front facing, round arm, head and chin raised high as if he were peering over a wall, and with a distant air of meditation even at the moment of releasing the ball. He used to field on the offside. I wish I could report that his regular position there was third man but I think he was more usually to be found at deep extra cover – itself appropriate in its way. Like many of us King's Scholars, he played a lot of Eton fives. The gymnastic prowess ascribed to him in one account has vanished entirely from my memory, but he was a keen boxer. I have documentary evidence – rare in this narrative – to show that he was in the team that boxed against Tonbridge School in March 1928, and was beaten. 'Philby got off with a thick ear, against Campbell, who was at least half a foot taller than himself. He was handicapped by a shorter reach than that of his opponent, and was on the defensive most of the time.' Kim was not often on the defensive, then or later.

Unlike practically everyone else in College, and indeed in the school, Kim never joined the Officers' Training Corps. Thereby he saved himself not only a good deal of trouble, but also the appalling discomfort of the uniform of those days, invariably known as 'the million' for some facetious reason to do with fleas. I am not sure why Kim stayed out of it. He can hardly have taken up a pacifist attitude at the age of twelve. Perhaps it was simply an offshoot of St John Philby's non-conformist philosophy. I, with one or two others, left the corps at the end of my third year for pacifist reasons, but I will not deny that a secondary motive was the alternative it gave me of playing fives on the two corps afternoons, Wednesday and Friday. Probably it was on those afternoons that Kim was to be found in the gymnasium.

He was prankishly inclined. One evening, in his 'box' or small partitioned-off study, he had the idea of baring the wires of his reading lamp, connecting them to drawing pins and inviting several of us to give ourselves mild shocks; why we were not electrocuted I do not understand. Later during prep, there was an enormous blue flash from Kim's box. The lights went out all over College, and, or so we believed, over a large part of the City of Westminster as well. By the time the candles arrived, Kim had managed to conceal all evidence of his misdeeds, and the cause was duly diagnosed as a faulty reading lamp.

Kim had a considerable sense of humour, but in some ways a peculiar one. Much that others found funny he did not. He displayed more than a hint of *schadenfreude*, a characteristic that remained with him all the time I knew him. He derived a fairly harmless enjoyment from the discomfiture of others, and had a mocking tongue; but he was never one to bully the smaller or weaker – his targets were usually larger than himself.

Kim and I were not particularly close friends at school, until perhaps his last year. I do not know what drew us together. Neither of us was homosexual and there was never, now or later, the remotest sexual or physical attraction or even romantic attachment between us. We seemed to agree on few things. There was always considerable reserve, and one that persisted into afterlife. We did not even use Christian names until after he had married Lizy.<sup>4</sup> Surnames were more commonly used then than now among schoolboys and undergraduates, but even so, with everyone else I knew well it was first names.

Two things, however, formed an early meeting ground – an interest in professional soccer and cricket, and music. It was with Kim that I saw my first professional soccer match – Chelsea against Clapton Orient at Stamford Bridge. He was an Arsenal supporter, I a Chelsea one. At cricket we

were both Surrey fans. Naturally we had our idols – mine was Gloucestershire’s Wally Hammond, whom as early as 1924 I had seen make a superlative 174 on a bad wicket, an innings that remains with me yet – but for Kim, always individualist and unpredictable in his likes and dislikes, it was the Surrey professional Andrew Sandham, a highly solid and dependable batsman but hardly glamorous. By contrast, Kim also nursed a passion for Tallulah Bankhead, surpassed only by my infatuation for Janet Gaynor.

My musical education at Westminster (I was never a performer) came largely from Kim and another friend of mine, Jock Engleheart. Their tastes were almost diametrically opposed. Jock was a fine musician with such absolute pitch that if a choral piece were transposed a semitone to make it easier for the first tenors or second basses he found it quite difficult while singing from a score to check himself from reverting to the original key. He had two gods: Bach and Delius. Kim liked neither of these – Bach, he said, never developed, you couldn’t tell early works from late – but it was from Kim’s records that I first heard most of the standard classical symphonies, concertos, sonatas and chamber music, though little or no opera or choral or vocal works. In his last year he bought one of the best gramophones that those days could offer, with a huge specially designed horn, and spent his games-free afternoons buying, or more usually borrowing on approval, records from shops in the Charing Cross Road. His favourite work at the time was the César Franck symphony, and his favourite composer, then as later, Beethoven.

I said earlier that Kim was not a homosexual. I was amazed to read that, after leaving school, he apparently claimed that at Westminster he had ‘buggered and been buggered’. I find it difficult to believe either that such incidents took place, or, even more, that he would ever have spoken of them in this way, or at all – Kim, who was so private that one never observed him using the lavatories, the doors of which had to be kept open; it was a lasting mystery how he performed his bodily functions at all. He was never at any time given to sexual boasting, confession or fantasy. Even in later life he seldom discussed his ordinary heterosexual relationships. Nor can I imagine who could have been the other party, or parties. There were plenty of romantic friendships at Westminster, but Kim appeared aloof from all such diversions. Moreover we had remarkably little privacy in College. Although in the dormitory we each slept in a separate cubicle, the curtain that formed the door ended two or three feet from the ground, and there were strict rules about not entering someone else’s cubicle. There was nowhere to go for country walks, no haystack to retreat behind. It is true that anything could have happened at weekends, when boys who lived in London could go home. But homosexual relationships and romantic friendships at public schools are seldom totally secret for long, if at all; and Kim’s name never came up in this connection. Perhaps I was simply naïve, and all sorts of things went on under my eyes that I never knew about. But unless strong evidence is produced, I shall continue to disbelieve the story.

Kim grew up very quickly in his last two years. By the final year he had become bored with everything the school had to offer, though he must have continued to work hard to get his close exhibition to Trinity, Cambridge. He was not made monitor – an honour, or chore, imposed annually on four out of the eight or nine seniors, i.e. scholars in their last year. Luce, who was responsible for making the selection, was notorious for excluding anyone of a strongly independent turn of mind. Forceful characters like John Winnifrith,<sup>5</sup> with a good academic and athletic record were passed over. But to be fair I think any housemaster would by then have regarded Kim as too little concerned in College life to be eligible.

Kim’s career at school does not bear out the theory sometimes put forward of a son under pressure to live up to the standards of an overdominant father. St John Philby had been captain of

the school and for two years a member of the cricket XI. Kim was uninterested in trying to emulate either of these successes, nor did he give the impression of having turned his back on them because he knew he would fall short of his father's achievement: it was merely that he thought he had better things to do. Kim's stammer has also been attributed to early fear of his father. But since thousands of children with a dominant parent *don't* stammer, it could hardly be the cause. In any case I do not believe that St John Philby did 'dominate' his son, certainly not by the time he reached Westminster. Kim at school was tough, self-reliant and self-confident. His father was abroad most of the time, and must have seen relatively little of his son.

St John Philby at this period was widely known as an Arabist of unorthodox views, though he had not yet made his celebrated crossing of the Rub' al Khali, the 'Empty Quarter' of Arabia. Kim showed no great interest in the Middle East, but admired his father's expert knowledge of Arabia and the Arabs, by comparison with what he saw as T. E. Lawrence's romanticism. I had chosen *Revolt in the Desert* (the shorter version of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, which had not yet been published) as a school prize and asked Kim what he thought of it. 'Well,' he said, 'I found the first sentence so magnificent that I never really managed to read the rest.' One small service rendered by Kim to his father during his schooldays is acknowledged in the introduction, dated August 1928, to one of St John Philby's best-known books, *Arabia of the Wahhabis*, later republished. Kim was responsible for a number of small line drawings – architectural elevations and the like – that appear in the book. Like everything he did on paper, they are neat and accurate.

What brought us together? I think it was partly the attraction of opposites – Kim the quiet rebel and me the rather conventional boy enthusiastically involved in school life. I began to be intrigued by someone who seemed to reject many of the things I automatically accepted, but who was not in the least a dropout. What he on his side saw in me I don't really know. Perhaps he found in me a useful sounding board for his developing views. Perhaps he simply liked me. Though he was not my closest friend at school, he was undoubtedly different from the others. I would have been surprised to learn that the friendship would last another third of a century; and astonished that one day I would be writing a book about it.

## Notes

- [1.](#) The Westminster School uniform for scholars was tails, a white bow tie and a top hat.
- [2.](#) A noted Arabist and explorer.
- [3.](#) St John Philby, *Arabian Days: An Autobiography*, Robert Hale, London, 1948.
- [4.](#) Lizy (née Friedman), Philby's first wife.
- [5.](#) Later Sir John Winnifrith, Permanent Under-Secretary at the Ministry of Agriculture.

## NEW FRONTIERS

Kim went to Trinity College, Cambridge, in the autumn of 1929, while I returned to Westminster for my final year. My father had died in May, after a long illness, and my family had left Somerset to return to the London area, though we did not have a proper home for another two years. Kim, unlike most of his school contemporaries, was not in the habit of revisiting Westminster once he had left it, but we met during the Christmas holidays of 1929–30 and made a tentative plan to travel on the Continent after the summer term was over. We did not meet in the Easter vacation of 1930 (he went to Hungary), and must have made the subsequent arrangements by letter, because the next time I saw him was at our rendezvous at Nancy in eastern France at the beginning of August. I recall, however, that before Kim left England my uncle, A. A. Milne, who had taken my family under his wing since my father's death, invited him to lunch so that he could vet his nephew's friend. Kim evidently passed the test.

This was the first of three Continental trips I made with Kim between August 1930 and April 1933. It has been suggested that his recruitment by the Soviet secret service might have taken place on one of these occasions, or at least preliminary contact made, which is why I am describing our travels in some detail.

I had not been abroad before and was extremely green. My mother, who never set foot outside Britain in all her long life and distrusted foreigners, thought to provide some measure of insulation for at least the first day by buying me a first-class ticket from Victoria to Nancy (the only time I can remember travelling first class by rail, sea or air, except at public expense). Thus I arrived in style, to the amusement of an unshaven Kim, who met me at the station.

The Cambridge term had of course ended some weeks earlier. Kim had bought an old motorcycle and sidecar and gone off to Budapest with a Trinity friend, Michael Stewart. Whether he distrusted my ability to get to Budapest under my own steam, or else thought I might like to see rather more of the Continent than the view from a train, I cannot remember, but he elected to leave Michael behind in Budapest and drive all the way back to France to fetch me. The bike broke down in the Black Forest and was left to be repaired while Kim came on to Nancy by train. He had been robbed of a camera and money by a German youth to whom he had given a lift, but was in good heart and we talked till long after midnight in the station restaurant before taking a train into Germany: hard class of course. There we picked up the bike and set off on our five-day journey eastwards, Kim driving and me in the sidecar.

It has been said that Kim first learnt to ride a motorcycle in Spain before going up to Cambridge and boasted later to friends that he had reached speeds of eighty miles an hour. I don't believe this story, and it certainly could not have been on this machine. I think our highest speed on the entire trip was about thirty-five miles an hour, going downhill slightly out of control. People don't travel on motorcycles with sidecars nowadays, and fond though I became of the bike, I can see why. On the second day we had heavy rain which soaked not only ourselves but also our luggage. Most of Kim's stuff was probably in Budapest but I had on the pillion a suitcase which was henceforth a



sorry thing, as were many of its contents. The further east we travelled the worse the roads became. According to the Baedeker guide of 1905, 'the roads of Austria-Hungary, on the whole, fall considerably short of the English standard, for the steamroller is unknown in that country'. By 1930 the steamroller had made its entry but it still had a lot to do. Somewhere in Austria our bike and sidecar began to lean ominously inwards towards one another. An Austrian garage did a rough patch-up job, and we managed to push on into Hungary and spend an exotic evening at Magyaróvár, all gypsy music and heavy red wine. But the next day the inward leaning was more pronounced than ever, and getting worse. After further attempts at garages, we decided to try a blacksmith. In the small town of Kisbér we found one who within an hour or two had hammered out and fitted a number of strong metal struts and bolts which not only restored each of us to a vertical position but were to last all the way back to England. We rattled into Budapest in fine style.

This first of my three journeys with Kim was a light-hearted juvenile affair. Kim and I were eighteen, Michael nineteen. The other two had found a luxurious (by our standards) room in Károly király utca,<sup>1</sup> complete with running water, almost unique in our various journeys. From this base we explored the city, walking the splendidly baroque Andrásy út, watching the fireworks rise above the ramparts of Buda, bathing in a swimming pool constructed in the flowing yellow Danube, lunching at a ridiculously cheap island restaurant where an orchestra most appropriately played the Franck symphony, buying hot Wiener schnitzel or goulash or *kukuruz* for a few pence from automatic machines, seeing Marlene Dietrich in *A kék angyal*, otherwise *The Blue Angel*, and meeting Hungarian friends whom Kim had got to know on his visit to Budapest in April. After several days of this we had to quit our room, which was booked for someone else. Our money was running low but we had no wish to leave Budapest. Fortunately among Kim's friends were two brothers named Szegedi-Szűts. The elder, István, was a film cartoonist (some of whose work I saw later at the Oxford Film Society). The younger, György, among other things owned a garage where a number of cars were kept; he suggested we should stay there for nothing, sleeping in whatever cars appeared the most comfortable. We followed this excellent plan for five days, living mainly on chocolate and crisp white rolls.

It was a good time. I am sure that Kim and Michael, with a year of Cambridge behind them, must have found me irritatingly schoolboyish, but they were generally tolerant. The only sinister character we met was a smooth rich Hungarian who got into conversation with us at the Danube pool. He took us out to a sumptuous dinner under the stars, followed by a trip on the river in his speedboat. His intentions turned out to be strictly dishonourable, but I fear he had no return at all for his outlay.

The time came for our journey back to England. Since the bike and sidecar seated only two, and since only Kim drove, Michael and I had to take it in turns to go by rail. It fell to Michael to take the train to Vienna, where we were to meet him at the Westbahnhof. Our rendezvous arrangements never made proper allowance for delay or mishap. As far as I can recall, Michael simply had to hang about the station until we turned up. Kim and I had progressed only fifty miles from Budapest when, in the village of Bábolna, we broke down: a large nail through one of the tyres, and other troubles now forgotten. There was no hope of any help that day: the entire village was drunk celebrating some unidentified occasion. We joined wholeheartedly in the celebrations, but afterwards had nowhere to sleep. A kindly and still fairly sober farmer or horse breeder offered us a room in his stables; passing between the backsides of two long rows of horses, we sank gratefully into the straw of a small windowless barn at the end of the building, happily unaware of the rats. In the morning heads were clear, the sun shining and the bike soon repaired. Reasoning that as Michael

had waited so long he would not mind waiting longer, we made a detour to Bratislava in Czechoslovakia, largely to buy *The Times* and find out what was happening in the final Test. It was late in the day when we reached Vienna.

From there we continued to Salzburg, Munich, Cologne, Liège, Brussels and finally Wissant between Boulogne and Calais. We were not, I think, complete philistines. I remember our standing in Vienna in almost shocked silence before a Raphael Madonna, and listening in a Salzburg courtyard to Mozart. But generally the journey was uneventful. Somewhere in Austria we thought we would sleep in the open to save money, but were driven indoors by thick mist and dew. In the Rhineland, Kim had a letter from home saying that St John Philby had turned Moslem. Kim made light of it, but I suspect that he was a little distressed that – whether for political reasons or not – his father had renounced atheism or agnosticism or whatever had been his exact brand of scepticism.

We finished up at Wissant because Kim's mother, Dora, his three young sisters, Diana, Patricia and Helena, aged about ten, eight and six, and a male cousin of Kim's age were staying there in what we regarded as a truly palatial hotel. Dora Philby, with her red hair and husky voice, was very attractive; much the best looking, I thought, of the mothers of my various friends. Kim moved into the hotel with the others, while Michael and I found a modest pension which gave us full board and lodging for five bob. We spent much of our time at the hotel, taking illicit baths and playing auction bridge with the Philby family. After four days I had to return to London to take part in a family celebration. There was no room inside the bus to Boulogne, so I sat on the roof rack with the luggage: a suitable finale to the whole enterprise.

So ended my first look at the outside world, and it enormously whetted my appetite for more – preferably in the company of Kim if possible. He was a marvellous travelling companion, intensely interested in everything and impervious to discomforts and setbacks. Also, although I think he never formally studied languages after doing School Certificate French, he was an excellent linguist. His German was already more than adequate and he had some Hungarian.

Kim's politics at this time, September 1930, were still somewhat vague – certainly left wing, but he had not yet acquired the knowledge of or interest in Marxism that marked his third and fourth year at Cambridge. Michael Stewart was seemingly more interested in art than politics. In later years I met him once or twice at Acol Road, but he was never an intimate of the Kim-Lizy or Kim-Aileen homes. After the war he had a distinguished career in the diplomatic service, became British ambassador in Athens and received a knighthood.

In October 1930 I went up to Christ Church, Oxford. It was nearly two years before I managed to get abroad again with Kim. I saw relatively little of him during this period, but from time to time we watched cricket or football together. Occasionally we met at Lord's. Indeed a kind of coterie including some Oxford friends of mine, would gather in the upper tier of seats by the sight-screen at the Nursery End. At times Kim's father turned up, sometimes in the company of Harold Hardy the Cambridge mathematician. On one memorable occasion St John Philby found himself sitting next to Bertram Thomas, who – to St John's intense disappointment – had beaten him by a year or two to the first crossing of the Rub' al Khali. I expected fireworks but instead the two conversed gravely and politely, like two old Arabs over a hubble-bubble.

I have no real recollection of Kim's father before the early 1930s. I never got to know him well but always liked him. In spite of his quarrelsome reputation he was invariably pleasant to me – perhaps more because he had known my grandfather, father and uncle than because I was a friend of Kim; unlike Kim, he looked back on his school and university days with great affection. He was small and stocky, with a beard – unusual for his generation – which gave him an air of distinction.

and made it easy to imagine him in Arab costume. Dora Philby has sometimes been pictured as a meek character whom St John treated as a doormat. No one who knew her could have thought of her in this way; and Elizabeth Monroe's very well-informed and documented study, *Philby of Arabia*, makes clear what a resourceful and courageous woman she was and how much her husband depended on her. Kim was often rather contemptuous of his mother, but when he was in trouble in 1955, he turned to her rather than anyone else; nor did she let him down.

On such occasions as I saw father and son together, the relationship always seemed friendly, relaxed and adult. While Kim can have agreed with few of St John's political views, he respected his realism and outspokenness. He quoted to me something his father had said about India. One of the arguments then currently used against home rule was that only 10 per cent of Indians were literate. St John pointed out that 10 per cent of 400 million was forty million, about the same as the then population of Britain: why use forty million literate British to govern India instead of forty million literate Indians? For the life of me I could not see a flaw in this argument, as far as it went, and I'm not sure that I can today. Another of his father's remarks quoted by Kim was '*The Times* has a profound distrust of the expert'. St John believed strongly in experts; he was one himself, and for all his pugnacity he recognised expertise in others. I think Kim inherited something of the same attitude.

In the long vacation of 1931, for family reasons, I stayed in England. Kim went off to Yugoslavia, in particular Bosnia. He had a strong attachment to the former Austro-Hungarian Empire – not of course its political system, but its lands and peoples. The most beautiful parts of Europe, he thought, were to be found within those old boundaries, and whenever he had the opportunity to travel he went there: in 1930 (twice), 1931 and 1932, not to mention his long stay in Vienna in 1933–34.

In the summer of 1932 we made our second trip. This was the most ambitious of the three. We planned to visit Yugoslavia, Albania and, if possible, Bulgaria. Kim had already left England, and I visited the Albanian consulate in London to seek a visa. The consulate turned out to be a small British solicitor's office in the City. Visas were no doubt filed somewhere between Torts and Wills. The Bulgarian visas had not yet reached London, but we had hopes of picking them up at the Bulgarian legation in Tirana. I left London in mid-July, and met Kim in Paris; where he had been in France, I cannot remember. We were going to have to do a lot of walking in the Balkans, as means of transport from one place to the next, and decided to get ourselves into condition in the Black Forest. We walked there in hilly country for three or four days, gradually lengthening the day's stint to something over twenty miles. Our plan was to go on to Munich for a day or two and then take the train to Venice. But a crucial general election was going on in Germany, and Kim, who was by now extremely interested in German politics, felt impelled to make a diversion to Berlin; he had a strong journalistic urge to be wherever things were happening, or might happen. We had already attended a rally in Stuttgart, where Alfred Hugenberg (of the far right) spoke. So we separated for a week: Kim to Berlin, I to Munich, where I spent the time trying to learn a little German and walking endlessly until I knew almost every street in the city. When I felt bored or lonely, I would go to Munich Hauptbahnhof and watch the expresses leave for exotic parts of Europe. Kim duly rejoined me. He was keeping a diary on this trip, but though I read the Berlin entries I do not recall anything of them. I do recall that he wrote, 'Milne has found lodgings that boast the prettiest housemaid in Munich.' This was news to me; but his views and mine on female attraction seldom agreed. Certainly she was a charming and friendly girl.

On the eve of the election we attended a vast Nazi torchlight rally at which Hitler spoke. Unlike

Kim, I could not follow much of what was said, but that mattered little; he had said it all before many times. What impressed and alarmed us was the totally uncritical attitude of so many perfectly ordinary German men and women. Our predominant feeling was contempt for the whole circus – the showmanship, the schoolchildren prancing round in gymnastic displays, the stupid petit bourgeois citizens swallowing it all. Politically I think that at this stage we were more concerned over the threat to the left, even the moderate left, than to world peace. A day or two later we sat in a workers' café listening to the ominous election results on the radio: Nazi gains everywhere. The main left-wing parties had held their ground, but most of the small parties had been almost annihilated. Just how far Kim had moved towards communism or Marxism at this time I find it difficult to judge: my political education had a long way to go. According to his own story, his final conversion came in the early summer of 1933. Sitting in the Munich café, we applauded both Socialist Democrat and Communist victories.

Our fortnight in Germany, intended primarily as a loosener before we tackled the Balkans, must have left a deep impression on Kim, as it did on me. The Nazis were not yet in power, there were no concentration camps, Germany was still a free country; but we felt we had seen into the future.

We took a night train over the Brenner Pass, spent two or three hours in Verona, and reached Venice in the afternoon. This was not a Baedeker tour and we did no justice at all to Venice: our boat was leaving for Dubrovnik at 6.30 the next morning. We asked the proprietress of the *albergo* to call us at five. She forgot, but at five past five, for no discoverable reason, a brass band struck up outside our window and woke us: I have never been able to think entirely ill of Italy since.

So here we were in the Adriatic, two healthy undergraduates in good physical training, on a sunny August day of 1932. We had nothing with us but rucksacks. At least half the weight in mine consisted of books I was reading for greats – Plato, Aristotle, the Greek and Roman historians – and a heavy raincoat which I never wore. I had but two shirts – one on, one off – and no spare shoes when my shoes wore out, as they did twice, we had to wait while they were repaired. No spare trousers, no medicines. I think Kim's outfit was much the same, except that he had a camera. For money each of us had merely a bank letter of credit, a single sheet of paper. With this I could walk into any bank in the Balkans, even in Albania, and draw two or three pounds' worth of local currency with no trouble at all. Optimistically we thought we might be able to use it on the boat during our thirty-six hours' voyage, and had come aboard with only a few lire. The pleasures of Adriatic travel began to pall when we found that the boat was not a bank, and we went to bed that evening – that is, dosed down on a wooden bench – extremely hungry.

Up at six the next morning, the day already hot, we were looking wistfully over the ship's rail at Diocletian's palace in Split, and wondering how to raise a meal, when we became aware that we were being watched with curiosity by two people, apparently Englishmen, who had just come aboard and like us were travelling third class. One of them looked familiar to me, and after a minute I placed him: Maurice Bowra,<sup>3</sup> already a celebrated Oxford figure, who had been one of the moderators when I took honours mods a few months earlier and had invigilated some of the papers. We all got into conversation, and before long Bowra and his companion, Adrian Bishop, were standing us the most delicious omelettes I have ever tasted. The rest of the voyage was highly entertaining. This was Bowra off duty: not the Oxford don of brilliant and malicious epigram, but the relaxed holiday acquaintance in whose company we all sparkled. Everything that happened was funny, or could be made funny: the world suddenly seemed a much more interesting place. Bowra had had a fascinating early life: three times as a boy before the Great War he had travelled to China by the Trans-Siberian Railway. When we arrived at Dubrovnik, he and Bishop – who for some

reason had been living at Metković, a small malaria-ridden town lying between Split and Dubrovnik – forsook their third-class status and went off to a good hotel, while we sought a cheap but adequate place which sported twin adjacent thunderboxes. During the next two days we continued to see Bowra and Bishop until they left for the Greek islands. It was a highly civilised interlude.

From Dubrovnik we took ship southward to Kotor, at the head of a superb fjord, and trudged up the mountains towards Cetinje, the capital of the former kingdom of Montenegro. Kim had been a prep school with the sons of the Montenegrin royal family, and we visited the decaying so-called palace, part of which was known locally as 'Biljarda' because it had once boasted a billiards table. We spent three or four days walking in Montenegro, and finally took an ancient bus down to Bar, a small port not far from the Albanian frontier.

Our boat was due to leave at six the next morning for Durrës in Albania. This time, taking no chances, we kept awake in turns. I spent my hours trying to learn Albanian by candle-light from Archibald Lyall's splendid little volume *Twenty-Five European Languages*. Lyall was obviously a humorist. In addition to a vocabulary of 800 words, there were some thirty conversational sentences, the same for each of the twenty-five languages. These included 'Where is the water closet? On the fourth floor.' In Albania, we found later, there appeared to be, as far as one could judge, neither fourth floors nor water closets. Albanian was clearly a primitive language, borrowing widely from others to deal with any invention or concept later than the Stone Age. But there was something endearing about a language which took seventeen words to say 'Have you a cheap single room?'

Not many Englishmen have been to Albania – for lack of facilities and attractions before the war, and political reasons since (at least until about 1991). I liked it so much that I went again in 1938, not with Kim but with my wife, and got to know a few Albanians with whom we corresponded until Mussolini invaded the country in 1939.

Arriving in Durrës in the evening, Kim and I began our Albanian interlude in highly uncharacteristic fashion, knocking up the British consul to complain that we had been overcharged by the boatman who brought us from the ship. The poor consul, in dressing gown and slippers and suffering from malaria, could do nothing for us. Later we got into conversation with two British engineers staying in our so-called hotel, and listened with amused superiority to their ultra-conservative political views. Theirs were the last English voices we were to hear on our Balkan journey.

One of the likeable things about the Albania of the 1930s was its air of self-deprecating inefficiency and absence of nationalist self-importance. But there could be efficiency, too. In Durrës my shoes, which had been badly repaired in Montenegro, began to disintegrate. We found a little cobbler in an open-fronted shop, and within an hour they were not just repaired but stronger than when new. (I was truly sorry when later my mother gave them away to the Boy Scouts.) From Durrës we took a bus to Tirana, the capital, but there was no transport eastward to Elbasan, our next objective. We would have to walk the thirty miles in a single day, which meant getting on the road by 4.30 in the morning. As we had to share our room in Tirana with four Albanians, and the beds were too dirty even to get into, we slept little and were glad to leave. Our plan was to divide the day into three: five hours on the road or track leading to the top of a 2,000-foot pass, five hours resting there in the heat of the day and five hours walking the remaining fifteen miles down to Elbasan. The map, which owed as much to imagination as to research, showed a spring at the top of the pass. Parched with thirst, we struggled up the rocky bed of a waterless stream, but no spring was to be found. It was some time before we came across a local inhabitant. Here was a chance to try my

Albanian, and I pulled Lyall out of my rucksack. Splendid fellow, he actually gave the word for spring! ‘*Ku asht prendvera?*’ I asked eagerly. The man looked completely blank: two foreigners plainly unhinged by some experience, had just asked him ‘Where is the springtime?’ Eventually it was explained and we were guided to a bubbling ice-cold spring in a green glade. When we finally reached Elbasan it was nearly dark. By the time we had eaten, we had had enough. I was attacked all night by mosquitoes and later counted seventy bites. The next morning, after buying a Flit-gun, we spent our time resting, washing our clothes in the river Shkumbin and walking around a town as oriental as anything in Asiatic Turkey.

There was a road of sorts eastwards from there to the Yugoslav frontier, a distance of some fifty miles. We managed to get a lift on a truck nearly full of merchandise; the small remaining space held six Albanians, two gundogs and ourselves. The journey, with many stops and minor breakdowns, took ten hours, and it was getting dark when they dropped us a mile or two from the frontier. Knowing that it would be closed and the guards liable to shoot on sight, we had to call out continuously as we walked, ‘*Granica! Granica!*’ (It was the Serbian word for frontier, but we hoped it would do.) At last torches flashed on us from an Albanian frontier post, where, after identification, the commandant gave us a fine welcome. Soldiers were turned out of a small room and put in with the goats, straw palliasses and a meal provided, money refused. In the morning we crossed into Yugoslavia and walked down to Ohrid, at the head of the beautiful lake of that name. Here we spent three relaxing days. The insects still bit, but we took encouragement from a theory – probably false – that malarious mosquitoes were not found above 1,000 feet.

Things had changed somewhat from our previous journey. Kim was now even more of an ascetic, more serious without being pompous, determined not to make the slightest concession to tourism or even normal comfort. Wherever we went we automatically sought out the cheapest place to sleep; by train we always went third or ‘hard’ class, and would have gone fourth if it had existed (as it did in Bosnia, where Kim the previous year had travelled around in what amounted to cattle trucks). But he was as interesting a companion as ever. As usual he had taken the trouble to read up the history of the area. This knowledge was all the more valuable because we had no guidebooks (the French *Guide Bleu* to Yugoslavia was published later). So I came to know something of the conflict of Turk and Serb over the centuries, a subject we found more interesting than the sterile contemporary politics of Yugoslavia. But most of our thoughts, energies and discussions were devoted to the simple business of living: finding somewhere to sleep, food to eat, good water to drink, getting from one place to another. Alcohol we drank sparingly in the Balkans: occasional beer when we could find it, a little local wine, the odd *slivovitz*. The whole trip, like the other two, was completely sexless. Asceticism was not the only reason for all this. We had little money – I was living entirely on my Oxford scholarship income, and Kim was certainly not well off. I kept careful accounts in a tiny notebook. It may all sound very joyless, but in truth it was a very full and satisfying time: to this day I can reconstruct practically the entire journey from memory. The greatest deprivation I suffered from was the absence of English newspapers.

For language we relied very largely on Kim’s Serbo-Croat, which was more than adequate for the minor traffic of life. I managed to learn a few of the essentials myself. *Ima li voda ovde?* Is there water here? *Imate li grozhdje/hleb/sobu?* Have you grapes/ bread/a room? *Gde je nuzhnik?* Where is the loo? (This last question was usually unnecessary. The *nuzhnik*, if indoors, was a noisome little den that proclaimed itself at a distance; if outdoors it was a sort of solitary sentry box, easily identified.) Very frequently, when we arrived in a village, the local ‘English speaker’ would be trotted out. This invariably proved to be someone no longer young who had emigrated to

America in about 1910 and had returned some time after the war, leaving behind him most of the English he had acquired. We got used to being greeted in friendly but ancient American slang – ‘Hi, you son-of-a-bitch.’ Kim’s Serbo-Croat was really much more useful: he was able to make conversation.

The ‘hotels’ of the Balkans at that time were not those of today. Their names were in the highest traditions – Ritz, Bristol, Carlton – but they were, frankly, hovels. I think one or two had enough electricity for the occasional light bulb, but most did not. There would be nothing like running water, and the so-called lavatories were too awful to describe. The beds were not too bad, although one was not always sure of the last occupant. But the food was surprisingly good, though perhaps more because of our hunger than anything else. I do not recall any bathrooms – indeed, I doubt whether I had a bath throughout the journey, certainly not after leaving Germany.

Primitive and lacking in amenities though the Balkans were, they were a friendly enough place. We never had any fears for our safety or that of our few possessions. Except for Dubrovnik and Kotor there was virtually no tourist trade in any of the places we visited. Often we were assumed at first to be Germans – I expect many people had never seen an Englishman before. Once or twice we were taken for brothers: there may have been a slight physical resemblance at that time, but it probably appeared more pronounced to people unused to English faces. We were thrown together so much for these few weeks, with so little company and so few other diversions, that we might have become seriously irritated with one another; but personal relations held up well, though I do remember one occasion when for reasons now forgotten we strode along for several miles, one slightly ahead of the other, not on speaking terms; each with his own cloud of flies and thoughts.

While in Albania we had had to abandon hope of getting Bulgarian visas and had settled instead for a short foray into northern Greece. The Greek legation in Tirana gave us visas on the spot (unusual in the Balkans in those days). Our plan was to walk the forty-odd miles from Ohrid through Resan to Bitolj, in the very south of Yugoslavia, whence we could get a train into Greece. The road was not well provided with villages and we had done some twenty-seven miles before we found what appeared to be an inn, but turned out to be a brothel. Refreshed by a beer, and repelling all advances, we pushed on and even entertained thoughts of reaching Bitolj that night. This would have been overdoing things. We had been humping our rucksacks all day over rough roads and hill tracks, with the temperature in the nineties, and it was getting late. Fortunately after a couple of miles, and tiring rapidly, we found somewhere to stay. We made Bitolj the next morning, after three more hours of walking.

Two days later we were on our way by train to a village called Arnissa in Greek and Ostrovo in Macedonian, about halfway along the railway to Salonica. We had chosen it from the map because of its situation on a large lake, under the great massif of Mount Kaimakchalan. The scenery turned out to be as good as we had hoped, but I doubt if Arnissa had ever had much in the way of visitors before (it is now said to be an up-and-coming summer resort). There was not even what passed in those parts for an inn. Nor were there any roads; to get down to the lake, we had to walk along the railway line. At the little station restaurant we came across a peasant who offered us a room in his house. There we stayed four nights, paying the equivalent of about three (old) pence a night each. The room did not actually have any beds but there were two hard wooden chests covered with quilts of a sort. We slept on these, although I suppose we might have been just as comfortable on the floor. The lavatory was magnificent in its architectural simplicity. A small part of the first floor which jutted out beyond the ground floor was screened off; two floorboards had been prised apart so as to leave a small triangular hole, through which one could see the sunlit ground below. That was

all. For meals we ate excellently at the station restaurant. The local population was Slavonic speaking Macedonian – a mixture of Serb and Bulgarian, close enough to Serb for our purposes – but there were a number of Greek soldiers with whom we talked mainly in French. It was a confusing area linguistically. The Greek for ‘yes’ and the Macedonian word for ‘no’ were both pronounced ‘nay’. Heads were nodded upwards for ‘no’ and from side to side for ‘yes’, again misleading for an Englishman. It was very easy to find yourself misdirected. There was nothing to do but sit peacefully by the lake, bathe in its medicinal-tasting waters, read Plato and Thucydides, eat at the restaurant and talk to the villagers and soldiers. My total expenditure in the four days was six shillings.

We took the train back to Bitolj. From now on we would do no further walking as a means of transport, but would make our way slowly up to Belgrade by rail. The first day took us from Bitolj to Skopje, or Skoplje as it was then spelt. Though only 120 miles, the journey took fully twelve hours. At that time a stretch of eighty miles lay over a superb narrow-gauge mountain railway, the kind which has a turning radius of about a hundred yards; one could – and did – get out of the train on one of those 180-degree turns, cut across a field and jump in on the other side. It was intensely hot. We ate grapes and bread and sweated. On the other side of the little wooden carriage a woman was coughing blood on the floor.

But we were about to rejoin civilisation, in a sense. Through Veles ran a main line connecting Salonica, Skopje and Belgrade. So from Veles to Skopje we enjoyed the experience of travelling at speed – perhaps forty miles an hour. A tremendous thunderstorm cooled the air and turned all to mud.

At Skopje my inside decided to rebel for the first time against its unaccustomed dietary and physical regime. The last straw was a meal consisting of a whole melon and a glass of sour cream. Balkan peasants are supposed to live to 120 on this kind of diet, but I lay on the bed feeling terrible while Kim, who seldom suffered from internal upsets, gaily called attention to what was happening in the street below. Only when a performing bear walked past did I manage to drag myself to the window. Next day things were better and we explored the town. Much of the attraction of Yugoslavia lay in the Turkish legacy – the mosques, the buildings, the little eating places where many varieties of food were kept hot in tureens displayed in the window. There were still a number of older people of Turkish descent to be seen, gravely courteous, writing Turkish in the Arabic script, which was now forbidden in Turkey itself. By comparison the Serbs seemed brash and unpolished.

We continued our way to Belgrade by slow stages. The last leg was by night train, so full that we had to stand on the open platform between the coaches, where we choked every time we went through a tunnel. Arriving sleepless at 5 a.m., we had to tramp the streets for an hour before we found somewhere cheap enough.

By now I was beginning to feel the need for home comforts and company, and decided it was time to head for London. Kim preferred to visit Belgrade yet again before returning home. Before he did so, he probably made a side trip down the Danube to the Iron Gates, about a hundred miles east of Belgrade: he claims in his book to have gone there before the war, and this seems the most likely occasion. For my part, after travelling thirty-two hours hard class, I broke the journey at Frankfurt. Not to be outdone by Kim I searched for some time before I found a cheap enough bed, to discover in the small hours that I was sharing it with at least a dozen bedbugs. Next day, having no German money left, and not wishing to draw more from a bank, I visited the British consulate outside their official opening hours, to ask if they would kindly give me a mark in exchange for a



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