

MY PEEK BEHIND

THE CURTAIN



HILTON HINDERLITER

MY PEEK BEHIND THE CURTAIN*

By
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*the *Iron* Curtain

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Dedicated to my wife and beloved companion,
Jenny. Even though her future security was put in
jeopardy by the events described in the following
pages, she supported and encouraged me.

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Forward

In July, 1977, following a bizarre journey I had made to communist Bulgaria two months earlier, a startling letter appeared in my mailbox—one that a bank in West Germany had relayed to me from a “scientific and political dissident” named Stefan Marinov. Preceding a list of questions and explanations was a hand written note that said:

“Dear Mr. Hinderliter: I should like very much to obtain detailed information about your visit to Sofia. . . . with whom you have spoken, and what was told you exactly. If you would inform the press about your adventures, I will remain very thankful to you.—S. Marinov”

In response to Mr. Marinov’s request, I wrote the following report of what I had experienced behind the Iron Curtain. Let the reader lay aside the world of the routine, the familiar, . . . and come with me as I recount the true story of my plunge into the unknown. . . .

A Wild Idea

As I look back on it, now, November 18, 1976, seems like only yesterday. It was on that date that I first heard of a science conference to be held in Varna, Bulgaria. For a variety of reasons, the description of this conference caught my attention. The topic touched on ideas I had been wondering about, and would be sure to gather open-minded thinkers with whom I would enjoy tossing ideas back and forth. Besides all that, Andrei Sakharov was announced as the keynote speaker. He was the Soviet scientist who had been stripped of his former prestige because of the stand he took against the unjust actions of the Russian leaders. To be able to see Sakharov in person would be a great opportunity, in my book. But the very idea of my attending a conference in Bulgaria—to think about it as a serious possibility made me laugh! It just didn't seem possible at all. I had classes to teach at the time the conference was scheduled; the travel expenses would be far beyond my resources; I had never flown commercial airlines, nor coped with the complexities of international travel (let alone into communist countries!)

Unrealistic as it all appeared, my thinking was soon given an about face. Have you ever felt impressed that you should do a certain thing? Maybe it comes through circumstances that seem too much to be coincidental. Here at a campus of a state university,

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certain special funds for professional activities become available from time to time. . . . back then the frequency at which such funds appeared was less than once per year. Curiously enough, the very next day after hearing of Marinov's conference, I received notice that special money was obtainable for faculty activity. Even though only a fraction of the proposals for such activity would be accepted, I had a strange feeling that mine would be one that would be approved. Not only did that happen, it also was the first instance on our campus of foreign travel supported by the university! This award, though, was limited to 50% of the actual costs of the trip. But for the first time in the 8 years I had been teaching, I was asked to teach a course for extra pay during the regular school year. The pieces were falling into place. However, this extra class, and my regular ones besides, were still scheduled to run through the time of the conference. To juggle the class schedule is a job for a miracle worker, because it is usually impossible to find an extra period during the week when all the students can fit in an extra meeting. They would all have to be willing to make the schedule change, too. Nevertheless, we found times for extra classes, and everybody was happy with the idea.

With all these barriers falling out of the way, there was still a gnawing in the pit of my stomach. The reason was that I had, in the past, expressed ideas hostile to communist leaders, and in such a way that my name might be on somebody's "black list". Even after my visas were granted, I inquired (through Lloyd's of London) about buying insurance that would have provided my wife with income, in the event that I be detained from a prompt return home.

So now, as the winter months rolled on, I found myself with the money, the time, and all the necessary approvals for an excursion to the other side of the globe. What could hinder me

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now? Unless you remember the newspaper headlines of March 5, 1977, you'd never guess.

Shake Up

By this time I was determined to reach Varna, but now the possibility arose that Varna might not be reachable because of a severe earthquake that hit Eastern Europe. Within a few days of the tremor, the death count rose to 1500, with 10,000 people injured, and property damages estimated to take four to five years to rebuild. Bucharest, Rumania, the location of the quake's greatest destruction, was little more than 100 miles from the Bulgarian seaport of Varna!

After hearing this news, a friend who also planned to go to this conference phoned to suggest that I not go near the place—as he had already decided to do. What should I do? Did I want to have buildings burying me in rubble? I wrote to Marinov and asked simply to be housed in single-story quarters. Even a tent would have been satisfactory, considering the level my anticipation had reached by this time.

However, still further bad news hounded me. Another would-have-been attender (except for the earthquake) voiced the rumor that only a handful of others would be willing to take the risk. Finally, the straw that almost broke the camel's back was a telegram bearing Stefan Marinov's name, which came just one week before departure date. It said that additional earthquakes

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were predicted for the Varna region during the time that the conference was scheduled to meet!

The contents of the telegram puzzled me. . . . who can predict earthquakes with any accuracy? The warning looked phony, and I even suspected that Marinov hadn't sent it. If he hadn't, who had? And what might I get into, if I went ahead with my plans?

Since all the people scheduled to speak at the conference were to have sent copies of what they were going to say, I decided that—even if most of them stayed away—I could read the written versions, and still fulfill the goals I had for going. Therefore I sent a return telegram to Marinov, stating my intentions, and requesting a reply if it would not be possible for me to do this. Hearing nothing more, I proceeded as planned. Things had worked out too well to be the result of chance. This was a once-in-a-lifetime situation that I would never forgive myself for backing out of. If there really was a reason for my going to Bulgaria, the only way for me to find the answer was to go. . . . even though I might end up in the middle of I-knew-not-what!

Bon Voyage

To keep expenses to a minimum, I flew by Icelandic Airlines. Since they land in Luxembourg, I bought a rail pass—which allowed me to travel on any train in Western Europe at will. Separate tickets would be needed only in the communist countries I would be entering—Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. Ahead of me lay a wide ocean, and many miles of railroad tracks.

My first flight on a jet was a memorable experience. With only two hands for grasping handles, and two shoulders on which to hang straps, I was hard-pressed to transport enough baggage to keep me going for nearly a month—not to mention souvenirs I hoped to bring back home. But I managed to fit everything into two large suitcases, plus a smaller shoulder bag. In planning for the original conference, I anticipated that there would be times when the subjects on the program were of no interest to me. For those times, I took along an assortment of books that I had accumulated at home. . . . ones that I had wanted to read when I got the time. The question entered my mind, too, whether I might get into trouble for carrying certain books into Bulgaria. But my travelling library caused me no problems at the border inspections. Instead they caused other woes: they threatened to raise my air fare both going and coming (that's why I kept them with me, in the carry-on shoulder bag); and they succeeded in twisting my neck out of

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shape, from the streets of Luxembourg to the back alleys of Sophia!

It was an uneasy farewell at the airport, with my family aware of the uncertainties of what might happen to me. Having to stoop to enter the shiny cylinder that was to carry me away, I soon found my first jet takeoff to be exhilarating. To be hanging there suspended in a steeply inclined pipe full of people, amid the whine of the engines, made me feel so far from home already. At least I was cheered up by the realization that this kind of flight didn't make me nauseous like small plane rides always did. I couldn't help but notice that the visual smorgasbord from up there is marvelous. From my window seat I tried to decide which was my favorite: the cloud formations that looked like row on row of billowy balls of cotton, or the rivers and highways etching designs through forests and patch-quilt-looking fields. Then out came the food, with the stewardesses distributing miniaturized dinnerware from wheeled carts that took a journey of their own when the plane hit unstable air. As we reached New York City, the sun was beginning to set—which caused the many small lakes below to dazzle like blobs of molten copper amid the haze that enshrouded the features of the terrain. It was down, down, down and around, around, around as we awaited our turn for landing; over water, over houses, over water again. Tilting, twisting, . . . then all of a sudden there stood the Statue of Liberty!

After the tremor of the initial touchdown, I felt relieved to be on solid earth again. I could no longer sit and watch; I had to cope with the change of terminal at Kennedy Airport. Before I knew it, my shuttlebus encounter had eaten up 45 minutes, and it was time to trek through the catacombs of passageways leading to another plane. This takeoff showed me a different face of the city, which

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now resembled a gigantic Christmas display of lights. As we sailed across parts of Canada (according to the garbled voice on the intercom), I struggled to keep my eyes open until chow time. Yet, after the trays retreated and the cart folded back into thin air, do you think I could doze off? After many fruitless attempts at counting sheep (made so much easier by clouds that looked like wool), when a sense of drowsiness finally got hold of me again,—there flashed the first rays of the rising sun. . . . on Greenland, no less! My need of rest just couldn't compete with that.

The intercom was now spouting out announcements in several languages, as we descended to Iceland. I wondered what that would be like. So far I could see only the bedspread of opaque clouds below. When we glided down onto them, like a toboggan skimming across a layer of snow, I gasped as a white Huff engulfed us. When it released us again (now lining the ceiling), I gazed down at what looked like. . . . the surface of the moon! This lunar-looking desolation gave us a change of crew, then catapulted us on to the continent of Europe, to our final perch in Luxembourg. There, even before we touched the runway, I was made to feel at home by the face of a familiar friend—the yellow blossom of a dandelion.

On My Own Two Feet

Now came the moment of suspense: would my luggage really appear? It had been on its own through the change of planes at Kennedy. As one load after another (lacking my two suitcases) showed up on the merry-go-round belt at the baggage claim, I wondered how I would manage without them. Then, “Yeah, yeah!” I said to myself, as they finally appeared.

After a bus ride, and a grocery motivated jaunt through downtown Luxembourg, I was ready for my first train ride. TEE “Edelweiss” was quite a beginning for ones’ rail career, electric Venetian blinds and all! As we breezed along the edge of France, officials appeared to check passports and tickets. In order to prevent the loss of important papers, my wife had made me a special hidden vest; and I noticed that sometimes the ticket checkers and customs people reacted to my reaching inside my shirt, as though I were going to draw a gun!

By 11 PM I was in Zurich, where I had to spend the night. (No trains were going in the desired direction until the next morning.) In my shoulder bag I carried a paperback travel guide. With it, I felt confident. For some strange reason, though, I never flinched at the thought of finding a room so late at night. Following a map of the city, I managed to locate the YMCA Hotel. On the way, I did happen to consider the possibility that all of the rooms might be

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full. But I didn't have to worry about that, because I found the front door locked, and the lights all out! Standing on the street with my suitcases, I paged through my guidebook, then started walking in the direction of my second choice of room. (By now it was midnight.) I asked two young fellows standing on the corner for directions. One said he was going that way, and would show me. . . . he even insisted on carrying one of my suitcases. (Later I thought, "What would I have done, had he run off with it?") Along the back streets that made up his shortcut, we conversed in a mixture of his semblance of English and my semblance of German. The only person we passed was a "friendly-looking" girl scantily clad in a baby doll outfit. When we arrived at the proper street, he walked up to the address I sought (which was also closed and dark by now), pulled out a key, and opened the door! He already had a room there; and being familiar with the place, he climbed the stairs and roused the proprietor. So I ended up with a room after all!

Next morning, after my initiation to what is called "continental breakfast", back I trekked to the train station. There I put into action my luggage logistics plan. Overnight I had sorted into one suitcase all of the things that I should not need in Bulgaria (things I had brought along for the later parts of my venture), then this suitcase was left at the baggage check in Zurich. Such a plan lightened my load, and made changes of trains much easier. So now, with only one suitcase (albeit no featherweight), and my trusty companion—the shoulder bag of books (bulging with the addition of groceries and a canteen full of water), I headed toward that which proved to be the most breathtaking of scenery—the Alps. Darting into and out of tunnels, the train followed a curvy course, as though writing its signature among the foundations of those dazzling, snowcapped giants penetrating the clouds above. With eyes glued to the picture window affording this view, I

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noticed that we gradually ascended until the nearby earth disappeared, as we crossed a trestle which must have been etched onto the face of the sheerest of cliffs! Inhabitable regions now lay far below, in the postcard perfect valley fading out of sight.

What next? Would every turn in the track bring me such exhilarating feelings as this? The term “exhausting” would be a better description of the next phase of my journey (yet, in all fairness, it turned out to be a bit historic, too)—the one and only Orient Express.

Nostalgic to Nauseating

Not realizing that the Orient Express was soon destined for discontinuance, I climbed aboard with only an awareness of its cloak-and-dagger mystique. This was, for a bit of contrast, my first encounter with separate passenger compartments. Also, the trains I had been on thus far had been exclusively first-class. That difference wouldn't have been too memorable, were it not for the behavior of one of my compartment sharers. The frequent French conversations he had with conductors were largely unintelligible to me, but something was obviously awry. Some miles farther on, a conductor appeared who became quite hostile to this fellow. After that, his prolonged absence suggested that he had left the train; but then I noticed his luggage still in the rack. Did he forget it? . . . The truth never dawned on me till his reappearance later still: with a second class ticket, he was riding in a first-class car—except when forbidden by non-lenient conductors!

Well, Venice was not far ahead, and we would be an hour in the station. I had made a list of all the errands that I thought could be run in that time, first of which was mailing home a letter. By the end of the hour, not even this first item had been completed. A long wait in the post office line merely resulted in my being informed that a stamp could only be purchased with Italian currency; and there was an even longer line at the currency

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exchange counter. Till the whole episode had ended, the letter to be mailed had been lost! In the future I would assign more liberal amounts of time to simple errands.

The lesson was one worth learning, for we would soon be in Trieste. There three major feats were planned: changing money, making a telephone call, and buying a train ticket to get me to places where my rail pass wasn't valid. My preference was to call home, to know whether a reply to my telegram had arrived since I left there. But I decided I'd better buy the train ticket first. To my dismay, I learned that, at 10 P.M. nobody in the train station would take a traveler's check. I searched all my pockets for cash. Not being versed on international finance, I had somewhere absorbed the idea that I could get into trouble for carrying foreign currency into iron curtain countries, so I had retained an absolute minimum. I did have a few German marks from the exchange at Luxembourg. Those, added to my odds and ends of Belgian and Swiss francs, totaled just enough for a one-way second-class ticket to Sophia! Any more close calls like this, and my nerves would short circuit!

The hour was approaching for departure from Trieste, so it was high time for finding an appropriate car. Until now I had been aware of the signs showing the destinations of individual cars, but had not made use of them, for the trains had remained intact. This time the train would be dividing during the night, so I had to find a car headed for Sophia—unless I wished to wake up in Outer Slombovia the next morning. Up and down the track I searched; but alas, the name Sophia did not appear on any of the signs! There were Italian conductors to be found, but my shrugs and questioning wail “Sophia?” were fruitless. First I was directed from this end to that end of the train; there I was motioned back to this end again.

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(If I had only known at the time, many of the cars labelled for other destinations were going *through* Sophia.)

At long last I was assured that one certain car was bound for my long sought Sophia. It was second-class alright, but it was a *smoker*. I climbed aboard to learn that it was already so full that people were standing in the aisles! Oh, I made some vain attempts at entering compartments—"Couchette, couchette!", was the consistent rebuke. That meant that, even though the bench-type seats were not jammed to capacity, the passengers wanted enough room to be able to lie on one side for the all night ride. Who was I to argue with them? Instead I plopped down my suitcase (and book bag), which had been straining at my shoulder sockets since we pulled into Trieste. I sat on top of it (along one side of the aisle), leaned against the window, and wondered what the next twenty hours of confinement in this threatening environment held in store.

As we rolled out of the station, toward my first exit from the free world, I asked an older fellow beside me in the hall whether he spoke English, or Deutsch. "Yugoslav!", was the reply—voiced proudly as if to say, "Now you're in our neck of the woods, Yankee!" As we left behind the lights of the city, the moonlight filtering through the foggy countryside framed a most-appropriate setting for such an excursion. Who knows, maybe I *could* sleep sitting on a suitcase, after all.

Before very long my champion—the conductor—appeared. Why, he not only checked my ticket; he was actually crowding people together in a compartment nearby, to make room for me to sit down! I could look forward to a restful night after all.

Wait, tho', the two facing seats now held five adults and a child. The luggage racks overhead were piled high (being 6 ft. 7 in. tall has enough disadvantages, without a dangling bicycle for a

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pillow!). And the place was permeated with a thick cloud of tobacco smoke, of a variety with which my nostrils had hitherto been unmolested. A gesture toward communication brought no better fruits here, than in the aisle—although the negative response now carried a more apologetic tone. The parents of the child across from me were opposites in shade of complexion (reflecting the contrast among Yugoslavian stocks, I deduced), and the repetitious rhythm of their conversation resembled the “clackety-clack” of the train wheels.

Still another occupant appeared in the doorway, a man whose temporary absence had made him unaware of my late arrival. A shuffle of bodies afforded him a place to sit, then things settled back to normal. Legs were intertwined now, in their search to find room under opposing seats, and everybody had their own kinds of snacks and things to drink. The canteen, which I had last filled in Switzerland, was a welcome burden, as it washed down the variety of provisions I had accumulated thus far. (I depended solely on my shoulder-bag larder, all the way from Zurich to Sofia.)

Out of the blue a soft voice questioned, “Do you speak English?”!! Was I dreaming? No, the man who had recently reappeared noticed the newspaper I was reading. It turned out that he and the two other women in the compartment were from Istanbul, and that he had spent some time in the U.S.A., in connection with his military service. I came to appreciate this man very much—Adnan was his name. Because of his previous automobile travels in Bulgaria, he was a source of valuable information; and he was the only person on the train with whom I could talk.

Next came the border passage. The train halted, as uniforms of different colors scurried through the hallway. The official with the

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thick book was checking passports. Some of the others I couldn't identify, but I wasn't about to attempt to ask questions, under the circumstances. Later I learned that one of these was a banker—to exchange currency. Oh well, I wasn't planning to buy anything in Yugoslavia—not this time through, at least. Most of the delay was spent in silence. The perfect time for a walk in fresh air, I thought; but the young people huddled together by the closed door didn't second the motion. As I approached, they shifted to one side—guessing my destination to be the rest room. When I pointed toward the exit, they laughed and motioned me away, with expressions that asked, “Are you crazy?” Maybe a walk under the stars wasn't such a good idea after all, I mused, as I made an about-face.

Hearing the wheels turn again (after an hour of boredom) was a relief. So much so, that sleep came in spite of all the adverse conditions.

The morning found us still in Yugoslavia, as our route stretched from one end of the country to the other. It was a warm day; and, with the departure of some of our travelling companions, the rest of us alternated between standing in the hallway, and stretching out on the seat for a roomier nap.

In Beograd I thought I'd get smart and cash a check, so as to have usable currency on hand. It was the middle of the day so I thought surely I could pull this off in the train station. Not being able to read signs in the local print, I spied an “i” sign, that stands for information. After a wait in line there, I was told to advance to the counter across the lobby. I even made it through that line, however my wave of a traveler's check only caused a wrinkle on the brow of the cashier. Back I went to the information window. “Oh, that can't be cashed in the train station—only at. . . . across

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the street"! As I walked away disgusted, I tried to recall the name of the place. "Look! There hung a sign that seemed to resemble the word I had just heard." However, when I got there, it proved to be a restaurant!

I was at the end of time's rope again, but at least this exercise in futility wasn't so tiring. Knowing that I would return to the same coach, and believing that I could trust those remaining on board, I had taken the extravagance of leaving my trappings in *situ*. My expertise on the rails by this time (gained from all of a day and a half, and three changes of trains) made me aware of the fact that my mobile nest might be shifted to a different track by the time I returned. (With my luggage on the rack, a mix up would have had no solution as simple as the mere catching of the next express in the same direction.) So the first thing I had done in the station was inspect the schedule board. It was not as easily deciphered here as in Zurich, but I soon got the hang of it, and—sure enough—the track for departure was not the same as that for arrival. Having jotted down the respective numbers, the return to the train was a success—which was, sadly, more than I could say for my other efforts in Beograd.

Lots to be Learned

The weather was beautiful now, which made it that much more pleasant to study the sights along the track: large fields, with here and there a few people—working by hand or, less frequently, with oxen. The homes were simple, with nothing even resembling a lawn. In populated areas, every available space between houses might be cultivated.

Leaning on the open windows in the aisle, Adnan told me much about the people. They would not be friendly; not for lack of good intentions, but because they could get into trouble for associating with strangers. As an example, he referred to the woman who had entered our compartment that morning, carrying large bags of tomato plants. At mealtime he offered her something—I think it was a little cake sealed in cellophane. He reminded me how she had accepted it, sticking it into her picnic basket, but hadn't eaten it because (he explained) someone else might see, and wonder why it was given to her.

The people in Yugoslavia have very little in the way of material goods, he continued, and in Bulgaria even less. There is no retirement, for people continue to work whether they want to or not. Anyone who doesn't work, doesn't eat. Everything is under government control.

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He was puzzled by his own observation that even the poorest of peasants can be happy—in contrast to those of us who have so much freedom, and so many conveniences, and yet are discontent. Such hardworking people just aren't capable of realizing how bad off they are, was more or less his answer to the dilemma.

I had a different opinion: happiness does not result from the possession of “things”, nor necessarily from freedom. I certainly wouldn't appreciate the overbearing control of the state; but on the other hand, I see so many of my own countrymen dashing to pieces their inner joy on a dive from the cliffs of free-living—“doing their own thing”, as they call it. There is a type of control which is both beneficial and satisfying. There is a power, not of guns nor of finances, but one that is all-encompassing: the One that I was trusting to direct and sustain me through any crises that lay ahead.

Soon we were talking religion. For some reason (spurred by his reference to the happy peasant) I quoted to him a verse from the Bible, about Jesus being the true light that gives light to every man.

Adnan had expressed his belief in some creating and all-knowing Intelligence; but he was convinced that this Being was inaccessibly far above our experience.

To the contrary, my claim was that the same One who oversees all that exists, looking upon every facet of the universe of His own handiwork—from the immense aggregations of stars, to the tiny intricacies of the atom—that this same awesome creator and overseer establishes personal relationships with individuals. To be sure, it is only through such a relationship that a person finds genuine contentment.

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I won't divulge whatever details I can remember of the personal experience which Adnan then recounted to me, nor describe the depth of emotion expressed in the telling, but it was a perfect example of what I had been talking about. God really does get a hold of each one of us!

It was not until after the topic of our conversation changed, that I was struck by a thought that sent chills up my spine: This was a communist country. It was not a matter of whispering to somebody sitting next to me in a closed compartment. We were in the hallway; people were passing by, and sitting with the doors open in neighboring compartments; and to top it off, the noise of the train and of the wind blowing in the open window required us to shout, in order to be heard of each other!

Well, it was worth it, even if I might have gotten into trouble. The value of a single human being is immeasurable in the sight of God.

To return to earth, it would be a gross understatement to say that conditions on the train had degenerated. Trash and empty bottles had been accumulating in the hall, and somewhere near this point in time a woman came through to sweep it all out the door. The scenery outside was certainly deserving of better treatment. I can remember ranges of mountains rising to form an impregnable barrier. We must have been destined for a tunnel, I thought, but following a rocky watercourse, we threaded our way into a narrow gorge carved between the summits. Soon there were walls of rock that a long arm could have touched, sometimes on both sides of the track. Then came not just one tunnel, but many tunnels—one after another (mostly short)—causing a repetitious on-off-on between the brightness of the daytime sun, and the faint glow of the overhead lights in the car. Somewhere along the line we had

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changed from electric locomotives to diesel; and now we also passed steamers that looked like remnants of a by-gone era.

Finally our eastward-bound quarters approached the last border to be crossed. Here I was surprised by the financial convenience: the chap in uniform gladly cashed my travelers check, right on the train. (Not until later did I learn about the gyp of the official exchange rate—little wonder they were so accommodating!) Here I also got my “pink paper”. Adnan had told me about that: the one that is to be kept, and marked every time a sizeable purchase is made. That’s to prevent exiting travelers from taking the advantage of the Bulgarian government, that the government takes of entering travelers—given the possibility that they might happen to pick up a few extra leva during the course of their stay. It is not uncommon for natives to approach outsiders, right on the streets, in an effort to make illegal changes of currency.

By now I was not only in the country, but nearly in the city as well; for Sophia lies near the western border. Soon I would lose contact with my new friend, and only source of advice—facing a country where English is a rarity, and my poor excuse of German not much greater help. As had happened so many times in the past three days, the wheels screeched to a halt in the station; but now it wasn’t just the harbinger of a boring delay. Now it signaled the stepping stone to answers to the perplexing mysteries of the conference; the earthquake telegram; what was behind it all? Suitcase (and book bag) in hand, off I jumped to discover what awaited me in the land of the Balkans.

Sofia at Last

First off, I got the impression that the whole place was deserted. No one else was in sight, amid the cavernous passageways under the tracks. Then, making my way to the daylight at last, I noticed that I must have happened onto an out of the way route—for I came to the surface *behind* the station, rather than inside it.

My sense of smell was now operating in high gear. I wouldn't say that the place stunk; it just had a smell that was strange. In hopes of locating an information center where English was on the menu, I leisurely strolled from one end of the station to the other. It was still daylight; so, unlike the nip and tuck timing of some of my other arrivals, I wouldn't be hurried here. I had all evening to do nothing more than locate a room.

Ah, *there* was the information booth; and they spoke English, too—or sort of. The reply consisted of English words; but often these had nothing to do with the question I had asked. But I did learn where the housing agency was—in the center of town (quite a distance from the train station). I was told certain trolley numbers that would get me in the right direction, along with the number of the stop nearest to the agency. I had already read in my tourist guide that tickets must be bought *before* boarding, in kiosks. Now I

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didn't know what a kiosk was, but I figured I'd watch where other people bought tickets.

Unfortunately, I couldn't see anyone else buying tickets in the vicinity of the trolley stop. So back I went to the information window. "On the downstairs level of the train station", they told me. Hence down I went; but among all the little booth-type set-ups I didn't see anything indicative of trolleys, nor could anybody there understand my question.

"Hello, information, here I am again!" This time I got the girl to write out the statement, "Please show me where I can buy trolley tickets", in Bulgarian. This I showed to people along the way, and they kindly pointed toward my goal. It turned out that many of the little booths had the tickets, but under the counter—which made it impossible for me to gesture toward the item I needed. At long last I had my tickets—I bought a whole bunch to avoid the repeat of such a process in the future.

It was during this search for trolley tickets that I encountered the fellow in the blue uniform who got through to me in German the offer that he would take me anywhere I wanted to go. My mother had always taught me to not get into cars with strangers; and that would have been reason enough, *without* the presence of the shady looking deadbeat who was tagging along some distance behind (like the accomplice eyeing up the next victim). Probably he was legitimate, but. . . . just in case. . . . I replied, "No thank you!" But the major effort of getting rid of him was a bit unnerving, sandwiched between my hikes to and from the information booth (luggage in hand all the while).

At least now I had my tickets, and I knew which trolley to take. Relieved, I got on, but it turned out to be the wrong *place* to get on. The thing made a loop before going back into town, and I

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got on *before* the loop. So at the next stop the driver looked around as if to say “Everybody off”—but, of course, I didn’t get off. At least I had punched my ticket, which was done on the honor system. (Roving monitors levied fines against any who were caught riding for free—according to my travel book.) I had seen everyone else punching their tickets upon entering, so I followed suit. But now the driver was unhappy, and I didn’t have the foggiest idea why. In my hand, the pack of additional tickets lay exposed—which seeing, he tore away another, punched it himself, and sat back down. A passenger who, just entering, witnessed this act, uttered a phrase as though cursing the driver for doing it. By the time I put all of this together in my head, we were at the next stop, where a whole crowd of passengers climbed on—and we swung around toward the heart of Sophia.

Thanks to the diversion, I lost track of the count of stops (which apparently hadn’t started out from the correct reference, anyway), so I tried asking other passengers.

Wouldn’t you know it, a quite attractive young woman came to my aid. Only her willingness was beyond the call of duty, and it conjured up Adnan’s warning about the availability of prostitutes in the city. To this day I can hear her sweetly saying, “Ich will zeigen sie” (I will show you)—which made me think to myself, “Hmmm . . .?” She kept suggesting a certain hotel (which only added to my suspicion), but when I stepped off at the recommended stop, and saw her remaining behind, I concluded that she must have been on the up and up after all.

On foot again, I managed to navigate the couple of blocks between there and the tourist agency. What I was after was a room with an English-speaking family, which was obtainable—according to my guidebook. The cool reception I got at the agency

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didn't strike me as unusual then; I attributed it to the lateness of the hour, as it was by that time dark outside. Looking back now, I chuckle to ponder the reaction of whoever received my earlier telegram—given the likelihood that the police were watching for my arrival. Who would've expected an American scientist en route to a conference to come riding in, second class, on the Orient Express; and then to ask for a room with a private family?

While at the tourist office, I thought I'd ask for directions to Mr. Marinov's laboratory. The girl looked up something in a book, then reported to me that the place was "only open in the summers"! That's funny, I had been corresponding with him at that address throughout the winter. But I didn't argue; I just guessed that she didn't know what she was talking about, and I walked out onto the street—map in hand.

A map in print I could read had seemed like a big help—until it dawned on me that the street signs were in Bulgarian letters! The girl had marked my destination with an "X", which tempted me to believe that I could count streets this way and that, and thus get where I wanted to go. But it didn't work! People I asked for directions couldn't understand me; then finally I ran across a man who spoke German. He couldn't read the address (in Bulgarian script) where I was to stay, but he designated on my map the street where we stood. That allowed me to replot a successful course to the location marked "X". Still there were many buildings to choose from, when I got there; but a few more inquiries helped me find the one I needed. Expecting to see a house, I faced instead a tall apartment building—dark and deserted-looking. With my hands pleading to drop the bags I had carried all over town, I bumped through the front door, and fumbled in the darkness to find if

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anyone were at home. I felt like giving up, but at this point there was no viable alternative.

How the big surprise came about exactly, I don't remember, but my ears were playing tricks on me—a man appeared on the stairs, and the next thing I knew, English words were emanating from his mouth! He was even an American: a biologist on a government grant to study Bulgarian frogs (if my memory serves me correctly). He was also pretty-well-versed in Bulgarian, but still was unable to make sense of the address which the girl from the tourist office had written. So he knocked on some doors, asked for the name of my host, and finally found my room.

Plop went the luggage, as I took him up on his offer to show me around the city. First there was a meal in the open air, at a street-side restaurant. Then he gave me a tour of sights in that part of town: the Bulgarian version of the “Tomb of the Unknown Soldier”, the various government buildings, the Roman ruins in the causeways beneath the streets. He said that there was very little danger in the city—even late at night, very little crime. Indeed the center of town was very well lighted, and the stone showplaces in the downtown area were of excellent appearance (in contrast, I noticed later, to the dwellings farther from the sightseer's view).

By this time I had told him of my plans concerning the conference, and of my hope to find Stefan Marinov the following morning. He had never heard of that name, nor that lab, but he offered the ultimate in advice: In case I had any trouble locating the place, he suggested that I see a Mrs. Gancheva—who spoke fluent English, and would know of anybody in the country having any connection with science (because of her position in the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences).

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He even showed me the building where Mrs. Gancheva was located, and told me how to reach her office. With that kind of connections, the next day's objectives were sure to be a cinch!

Thanking and saying goodbye to my compatriot who had been such a help and a boost to my morale, I made my way (exhausted) up the five flights of stairs to my room. It wasn't like home, but it surely beat the confines in which I had spent the previous night. I could now say that I had made it to my goal—on time, and in one piece, I had reached the land that I had read and wondered about. The city whose name had eluded me in Trieste (remember the railroad-car signs?)—Sophia—now sprawled in all directions outside my window!

Mission Accomplished. . . . Almost?

It was a new day, in a new world. As I looked from my window I thought, “If there *were* an earthquake, I wouldn’t want to be in a building like this!” But this was only to be temporary, till I could find out what was going on. Even before tackling that, I decided I should eat something.

Down the narrow side streets I found the stores I was after. To eat a bowl of cereal in my room was my first choice. Even if processed cereal weren’t available here, surely milk could be purchased; and most anything is good dunked in milk. After some searching, I caught sight of a store selling dairy products. Wielding Bulgarian currency, and a finger with which to point, I strode in with confidence. The only trouble was, I *didn’t* leave with milk. According to normal procedures, I was to *pay* the cashier *first*, telling her what I wanted; then the receipt was to be taken to the counter, for picking up the desired item. Somehow I managed to circumvent the normal process, and went directly to the counter. There things were not placed within reach (where I could have studied their contents), and nothing in sight resembled a container for milk, so I tried language as a last resort. . . . “Milk. . . . Milch, . . .” The lady immediately echoed a local word similar to these—her face registering the satisfaction of having understood what I was trying to get across—and she handed me a container. It

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was the shape of the plastic dishes that cottage cheese comes in at home. I guessed that didn't prove anything one way or the other; at least it was white inside. So I shook it. Uh oh: it was thick! I looked up and shook my head no, at which the lady smiled and walked away. All of a sudden I recalled reading in my travel guide that shaking one's head from side to side meant yes in Bulgaria! Too late now, and too much trouble to go through it all again. Whatever it was, I'd eat it for breakfast!

Further down the street I stepped into a bakery shop. (There were no big, general stores here, all were small specialty shops.) One row of the goodies under the glass appeared to be sweet rolls, several of which were soon with me on my way back to the room.

Well, the thick milk turned out to be yogurt—tasting very sour to one who had never tasted yogurt before, and the rolls were very tough, with their shiny look due to grease, rather than sugar glazing! What a way to start the day.

Next I headed for a telephone. My American tour guide of the previous night had even explained the use of the pay phones in the street, and I had been careful to end up with plenty of suitable coins, while making my morning's purchases. The first dial for Marinov gave no answer, so I waited and tried again. . . . Still no answer. I tried another phone, to be sure. . . . Nothing.

It was time for the last-ditch resource: Mrs. Gancheva. Soon I was at the prescribed building, about to enter the front door; but the lady in a booth by the door had a different idea. I couldn't understand the words she was rattling off, but I could deduce their meaning: I wasn't allowed inside.

I tried to explain to this woman whom it was I wished to see, and why, but she didn't understand a word of it; so I waited. . . .

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After a while, a man appeared who spoke German. In spite of my limited vocabulary, I got through to him. Nonetheless, he told me that Mrs. Gancheva wasn't in her office at the time, but that I could wait for her return. Fine; I started toward the door again. . . . No! I had to wait outside!

Some time during this delay I witnessed another peculiar incident. A second woman seemed to be asking the one in the booth what I was doing there. Upon being told (I heard the name "Gancheva" mentioned), she looked at me with the slyest grin, then walked inside.

Strange things were happening, but all would be clear when Mrs. Gancheva appeared. At long last there she was, for the woman in the booth was stopping her and motioning towards me. I eagerly showed her the address of Marinov's lab, only to hear, "That place has been closed down for a long time"! "How long?", I retorted (I had received a letter from there just one month before). She wouldn't say. Then I showed her the name Stephan Marinov. She replied, "There is no such person"!!

Feeling like Santa Claus had just kicked me off his knee, I asked no further questions. She was obviously very uncomfortable talking to me; whether on her own behalf, or because of the man who came in with her, I did not know. I wondered whether my knowing her name and location might have brought suspicion on her.

Turning, I walked away—mentally reeling from a hodge-podge of seemingly-contradictory facts. First of all, by this time I was convinced that if anybody functioned at all in Bulgaria, the government agencies knew about it, and Mr. Marinov had been especially noticeable—having published articles in foreign scientific journals. I had looked those up, when I first heard of the

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conference. Besides that, my visa had been approved on the basis of the meeting. So, if Marinov really didn't exist, then the conclusion could only be that the government had fabricated a fictitious name, in which scientific articles were published over a span of years, in which a conference was organized, then sabotaged—but for what reason? That wouldn't have made any sense.

The only possible solution was that he really had existed, the government being well aware of it—but that they had somehow put him out of circulation. My showing up to inquire about him in two unexpected places (the rooming agency, and before Mrs. Gancheva) had led to contradictory fabrications (“open only in summers”, and “closed for a long time”).

Numerous other thoughts came to mind, too. For example, if he actually had been incarcerated, my asking about him would put me on the spot. (That idea had flashed through my mind earlier, causing me to not press the issue with Mrs. Gancheva, but instead to pretend that I accepted her explanation as true.) For me to snoop around further would have been unhealthy, to be sure. That is, even if I had been able to snoop. For I couldn't speak or read the Bulgarian language, much less have any clues on where to begin. All that I had to go by, the address given for the lab, made no correlation with street names listed on my city map.

Another interesting line of thought centered on any future coverup to be made of Marinov's disappearance—for the sake of those who had stayed home after receiving the earthquake scare. Probably, I surmised, letters would be sent out in his name (but written by someone else), claiming that the conference would be rescheduled, perhaps in another country—but that, if it did meet later, he'd not be a part of it.

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My head was swamped with speculations, and I had nowhere to turn for answers. Having faced one nerve wracking predicament after another, then having run into this brick wall, I decided to go back to my room and relax. Maybe my thoughts would gel, and I could make a sensible decision about what to do next. No sooner had I collapsed onto the bed, than I dropped off unintentionally into a deep sleep.

Awakening later in the evening, I planned the remainder of my itinerary for Bulgaria. There was nothing to be accomplished here in the way of science, but I did want to hunt for souvenirs, and prepare for the long train ride back. So, another two days were relegated to the stay in Sophia. That meant another night's lodging; so I informed my host of the desire to stay there an extra night, proceeding to pay him for it. Not so! I had to pay the additional amount to the rooming agency, and be sure to bring back to him the receipt—because he was accountable for it! (Indeed, everything was “under control” here.) What about this family with whom I was staying: the elderly gentleman was only to be seen in the evenings, and his wife was only there during the day. . . . Were they assigned to jobs; and couldn't they arrange their schedules so as to spend their time together?

Another quandary reared its puzzling head: The American who had been so helpful the night before had related his impressions of life in Bulgaria. He regularly travelled into the countryside, staying with a native family. According to him, the people were surprisingly well off. But that clashed with Adnan's opinion, and with the bits and pieces of evidence coming to my attention. Was it possible that this scientist's visit had been arranged to give him good (but erroneous) assessments to convey

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to the outside world? Or was he just voicing words that were expected of him there—but ones that he didn't really believe?

One thing was for sure: The following morning I wanted something other than yogurt for breakfast! To that end, I had the girl at the rooming agency write out the Bulgarian word for milk on a piece of paper which I would show at the store. After that I walked and rode streetcars various places—to become familiar with the city, and to find places to shop the next day. Out away from the tourist-oriented areas I happened onto a local market. It was a long row of stands, with the surrounding streets swarming full of people. It was so much so that cars didn't attempt to penetrate the mobs of bodies. There were vegetables of every sort—all fun to try to identify, and compare with ones I had grown back home. There were also all kinds of hand-crafted articles. Even at the official (unfair) exchange rate, there were bargains. Whatever I bought, though, would be an extra burden in shuffling from one train to another in the days ahead—so I excluded sizeable items from consideration. All of a sudden my attention was drawn to a car working its way through the masses of people. I noticed it, not only because of its solitary presence among the crowds, but also because it had remained close by for some time now—neither gaining nor losing ground on me. An unusual coincidence, I thought. So I took a good look at it (even memorizing the license number), then I doubled back, to see what it would do. It stopped! All that time it moved along with me; now it stopped. At least it didn't make a U-turn; but it was obvious now that I had my eye on it. There were uniform-clad walkie-talkie carriers sprinkled liberally throughout the throngs of prospective buyers, making it an easy job for anyone wishing to keep tabs on me. Later, on my way back through the downtown section, I located a whole row of the very same kind of cars (model and color), lined up in front of a

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government building. Some were occupied by uniformed policemen, others by men in business suits (plain-clothes men?).

Back at the market, I was fascinated by the wares for sale; and I studied how I might negotiate a purchase. The transactions had to wait for the next day, though, because I didn't have a bag, which the customer brings with him here. Applying a bit of acquired wisdom, I resolved to buy only items with a plainly advertised price. After I trustingly handed a street vendor a bill in payment for a popsicle, a count of the change showed that he had charged me the equivalent of \$1.40 in U.S. money!

Strolling once again on the glamour streets, I was drawn to the sound of a marching band—was a parade on its way? It turned out to be only a band and drill team, but the military dress alone was worth the seeing—especially the feathers in the hats. The music was a treat, too. The procession maneuvered into place by the entrance to a political building (apparently they were honoring a visiting dignitary), and the first number on the program was *My Country 'Tis of Thee*. The tune that followed was new to me, but I enjoyed it—a lot of minor chords, brought out well by the brass instruments. During this spectacle I noticed groups of children being assembled to watch, but the grownups on the streets were uninterested. Maybe their apathy was due to familiarity, or maybe they had other reasons. . . .

Errands and Exit

Friday was to be my last full day in Sofia, and a feeling of uneasiness began to creep up on me. I had taken the time to ponder things like the knowledge that, had I disappeared, nobody back home would have been aware of it, nor have had the slightest hint as to where to start looking for me. On the way out I would be travelling by train—with others in the outside world totally unaware of my schedule. Such things hadn't worried me before; but then I hadn't previously pictured myself as one asking questions about a man who had apparently been arrested.

I recalled, too, that my wife had made me promise to be careful. So I decided to pay the American Embassy a visit. Now I wasn't about to make any waves about Marinov's "non-existence". My plan was to act like I had accepted the story told me by Mrs. Gancheva—that is, as long as I was in Bulgarian territory! Some of the efforts I executed towards that end seem rather silly, as I look back on them now. But I wasn't taking any chances!

As for the embassy, I did not assume it impossible that conversational content there might find its way to the Bulgarian government. So I simply informed the desk-keeper of the time I expected to reach Beograd, and of my intention to have the American Embassy there contact them. If they heard nothing within a reasonable time after that, I requested that they check on

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my whereabouts. Whether the people at the embassy thought I was crazy, or whether they paid any attention to the request, I don't know, but a girl there had me write out my name and plans, and that was a relief to me personally. I felt that my appearance at the Embassy might at least have had an effect on anyone keeping an eye on my activities. As I went in I returned the glance of a fellow parked in a car across the street who pretended to be fiddling with the chrome on his car. As I left the embassy the fellow was still there watching and I noticed that it was one of those official type cars.

During the day, one of my priorities was familiarization with the trolley routes and changes involved in my return to the train station. "I would feel better to be able to slip out of here unnoticed", I thought. So, planning to be on my way before daybreak, I kept a mental record of landmarks that would be visible in the dark. Now all the necessities had been taken care of; just a passing of time, and I would see the free world again. As I wound my alarm clock, I wondered what the morrow would bring.

Well, the first thing I noticed upon awakening was that the sun was already up—I had overslept! There was still plenty of time, though, to catch the train. I made it to the station, onto a coach, and across the border without a hitch! What a relief it was to be in Yugoslavia! Not exactly a haven of freedom, but a giant step in the right direction.

At Beograd I stopped to contact the embassy, and in order to buy a ticket to the Austrian border (at which my Eurail pass would resume its validity) I needed to cash a traveler's check. The check cashing had been a stumper the last time through this city, but now there was much more time. Going through the inquiry process again, at the station, I learned that the establishment I sought

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across the street (instead of the restaurant I tried before) was a travel agency. Without delay I found the place, and it was open—success at last! Or so I thought, till I was told that they didn't handle money on Saturdays (guess what day it was!).

Now where? Well, they said there was a bank in the center of town (which was up over a steep hill). At least I would check my baggage and avoid the extra load. The luggage depot was just a few doors down; but there I faced the dilemma of not having any Yugoslavian money, and having to pay when I dropped off my things. The proprietor refused to delay payment till pick-up time (after I would have changed some dollars to dinars). So everything went with me (besides the suitcase, don't forget the bookbag); up the hills. The streets went every which way. But I found the bank, the embassy, and once again the train station where I gladly dragged myself aboard for another ride closer to free soil.

At another stop in Yugoslavia I had a memorable experience. I encountered some young people who looked friendly. "Do you speak English?" they asked. However, all my responses failed to produce coherent replies. After a while an older fellow from the same group came by—he spoke better English than the others. It so happened that they were all from the country of Albania. The older one was the teacher of an English class, the others were the students, and they all took this trip together to Yugoslavia. After the teacher walked away, the teenagers continued to be fascinated by me. Likely they had never stared an American in the face before. In spite of the language barrier, we got through to each other somehow (gestures helped). I showed them pictures of my family, and they reciprocated. Before we separated, we got the urge to exchange addresses. The piece of paper I was using as a bookmark in my travel guide happened to be a Bible tract outlining

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the story of how God sent his own Son into the world to die for our sins, . . . how that Son rose again, and offers eternal life to all who believe on him. I wrote my address on the back of it, and handed it to them. With them studying English in school, I guessed that they would try to translate all the words printed on the paper. Now it so happens that Albania is notoriously anti-religious, more so than other communist countries. In the others, religious freedom is at least claimed to exist (although, in practice, it doesn't), but in Albania it is openly declared that religion is forbidden. So I was very pleased that, through this little incident, the gospel made its way into Albania.

Wending My Way Home

As soon as I crossed the border into Austria, I wrote to the State Department in Washington—telling of my experiences, and asking whether Mr. Marinov might be helped in any way by American intervention. A conference on human rights was soon to be convened in Beograd, where a plea on his behalf might be made.

While in Europe, and having (with the rail pass) unlimited travel capabilities, I went looking for scientists from whom I could learn more about the subjects that were to have been discussed at the conference in Varna. Also I mapped out routes to places that I wanted to visit.

In Geneva, Switzerland, I stood agape as moped drivers carried along everything from tuba cases to extension ladders! Then Germany became the center of my remaining excursions. I holed up in a small town in the Black Forest, where I heard not one word of English in four days. Another jump put me right next to East Germany, where I stayed in a castle whose outbuildings had been made into a hotel. Some of the local residents there gave me a personal tour of the border—complete with fence and observation towers. On one day I even hitchhiked, to reach a town not accessible by rail. In the process of all my travels here and there, I shuffled all my luggage (remember the suitcase left in Zurich, on

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the way to Bulgaria?) into the Munich baggage check, where I kept most of my things stored away—carrying only a few items with me from town to town. One ominous task loomed ahead, as my departure date drew nearer and nearer—I had to transport everything I had in Munich to the airport in Luxembourg. (By this time I had at least mailed some non-valuables home already, but I wanted to take the rest with me.) I must have been some sight, as I changed trains with so many suitcases and packages dangling from me. . . . including a box of crystal from the Bavarian forest, tied to my elbow with a rope! Nothing was broken along the way, but the suitcase containing most of my foreign acquisitions lost its way, on the last leg of the flight (from New York to Pittsburgh). It did arrive the following day, though, so I can say that myself and all my trappings made it home safe and sound.

But What Happened to Marinov?

Being at home didn't erase the puzzles, but it did present some new access to clues. Right away I wrote to an American member of the conference organizing committee. He had heard indirectly of Marinov's being arrested, but was not sure of the outcome.

Then came a letter about the rescheduling of the conference—bearing Marinov's name and address. Maybe it would be held in another country, managed by somebody else—that's just what I had guessed might come in his name, (but written by someone else!)

I also wrote to the bank in Hamburg, to which registration fees for the conference had been remitted, asking whether they knew what had become of him. At long last came the answer—not a second hand rumor, not a fabrication designed to cover up the truth—but a letter the bank had received directly from him, with parts written in script to me personally (including the request quoted on the first page of this story). Other contents of that letter which remain embedded in my memory are:

. . . .“As a result of my scientific and political dissidence I have entered in a conflict with the Bulgarian scientific and political authorities. . . . Several times in the last ten years I have been detained in prison and psychiatry.

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. . . . At the last moment, on the 15 April, aiming to undermine this conference, the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in cooperation with the police imprisoned me in psychiatry—let me mention that this conference has been authorized by the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs!!! Telegrams have been sent to all participants, announcing. . . . a ‘fear for an earthquake at the beginning of May in the region of Varna’!!! Under my severe protest that if I should not be immediately released, then an international scandal will be provoked in connection with this shameful barbarism, and under the impression of telegrams and a phone call of my colleagues from abroad, I have been released. . . .

. . . . For the organization of ICSTA I have lost the total of \$2000. I have asked the Bulgarian Academy of Science to cover all these losses, because the comedy with my imprisonment in the psychiatry and the cancellation of a conference which has been authorized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been organized by the Academy. The Academy refused to pay a single cent. . . .

. . . . I beg you to have understanding that the political order in my country is quasi-barbaric and when one’s constitutional and civil rights, as well as the rights asseverated by the UN charta and the Helsinki agreement, are brutally violated one can neither defend oneself nor appeal to any institution in the country or abroad for help. In such terrible conditions I am working and fighting for years, endeavoring to tell the scientific truth which I have discovered to the world. The reasons for these actions from the part of the Bulgarian Academy of Science and of the police is a fear that I should gain a large scientific recognition and, since I am known as a man of an independent mind and a free will, I shall become a dangerous moral figure, defender of human rights, personal dignity and spiritual freedom. . . .”

Looking Back On It All

In thinking of Mr. Marinov and the various letters he had written to me, I wondered what he meant by “spiritual freedom”. Perhaps he had in mind the freedom of the spirit to pursue independent thought (not necessarily in conformity with the party line). I wondered if he had any grasp of the term “spiritual freedom” in the Christian sense—the freedom from guilt, which we can experience through faith in Christ’s atonement for our sin. (He wiped the slate clean, and made it possible for us to be “on good terms” with God.)—the freedom from being a slave to our natural desires. Yes, there is a “control” in communist countries, an oppressive domination that we in the West do not have to bear. Nevertheless, even in free societies most people are slaves to their own passions. They may even be aware that this is so, but feel helpless to correct the problem. Faith in the Son of God will make a person truly free, and that freedom can be possessed by people who do have to live under communist domination (or any form of oppression, for that matter). I have seen many cases, in the “free” world, of people being oppressed in the very name of Christianity—being “controlled” by a religious system that manipulates them through fear. The tactics are more subtle than those of the secret police. It may be an implied fear that “you will be sorry” if you are not loyal to a certain religious system. If you don’t shell out enough money to the system, God’s going to punish

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you, etc. It's interesting to note that Jesus never said anything like that. Instead, he said, "Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," and his words were spoken to ones who lived under the domination of a foreign power (Rome). So there is a spiritual freedom that can be had, in spite of political oppression, and in spite of religious oppression. That spiritual freedom can be yours. Let me ask you one question: "How do you feel towards God? Do you look forward to meeting him face-to-face?" This is an important subject, in fact it is the most important subject, in your life. The Bible contains a lot of things you should be aware of. The Book of John is a good place to begin.

Postscript

(Written 7 years later)

Although I have never yet met Stefan Marinov, I have learned that he is no longer in Bulgaria. By the grapevine I heard he was in Brussels, Belgium. I am glad that he has not met the same fate as Andrei Sakharov (his would be keynote speaker), who now wastes away in internal exile in the Soviet city of Gorky. When I found out that Marinov had been released from the “psychiatry” at just about the same time that I was in Sophia, I wondered if my being there was an aid to his cause. I suppose that having an American scientist snooping around looking for him would have exerted some pressure toward his release.

Other results of my trip to Bulgaria included the personal contacts I made en route. I wonder if Adnan remembered our conversation about God; I wonder if the Albanian students ever translated the Bible tract on which I wrote my address.

Perhaps the most significant result of my trip was the lesson it taught me, personally. The fact that I had been convinced that God wanted me to go, to plunge into the unknown, involving serious risks, then the observation that He made it a success, He got me through it. . . . this is the lesson I am talking about. It has inspired me to be willing to take risks in other situations, as long as I am convinced that God is behind it, not purposeless risks, not thrills

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for my own pleasure, . . . but things I felt I should do, yet what would other people think of me, what would happen if . . . ? The lesson of my Bulgarian adventure has given me enough determination to take some stands for principles that I knew to be worth standing for, yet otherwise I might not have had the courage to be willing to take the risks, to face the possible consequences. The details of those more recent situations in my life are not relevant to you; but the lesson is good for everybody: When God directs you to do something, do it. Don't refuse or drag your feet for fear of what might happen. I'm not referring to emotional whims, or fanaticism, or such as that. I mean things that are consistent with Biblical principles, things that God would be pleased with. I hope you have enjoyed reading about the things that happened to me; but more than that I hope you will be encouraged to do whatever God leads you to do, no matter what the risks.

