

12. The Day the Snows Started.

Hussaria was reduced in accordance with the latest theories of high-concept pacification. In response to the continued agitation there, her neighbouring great power had brought the little nation to the edge of starvation and ruin (and what hunger failed to claim, the epidemic of smallpox took) in the way of a precautionary lesson. It had announced too that the devolved all-parishes council had been prorogued as a first step on the way to its complete abolition. But the all-parishes council responded to this announcement with hideous, unspeakable venom. It refused to recognise its forthcoming abolition, met in stormy emergency session, identified with brazen insolence the settled will of the Hussarian people: and declared - the independence of Hussaria!

The neighbouring great power staggered in horror and disbelief: but recovered quickly. And this, then, was the beginning of Hussaria's reduction, which was conducted in strict accordance with that old rule of war that if a defender provoke an aggressor to attack an undefendable position, that defender can expect no mercy: to every hero a maiden or two, to every soldier the spoils of war!

And Hussaria, having no weaponry of her own (for her defence was a matter reserved to the neighbouring great power) was thus unarmed and in that respect, entirely undefendable.

The unarmed popular rising - after three weeks of bombing - was a famous but disastrous bloodbath. It lasted in any organised sort of fashion for a month at most. The survivors took to the forests and swamps (for it was a low-lying nation) and for some weeks the partisans held out there, as Radio Free Hussaria broadcast

increasingly desperate appeals for international aid and declarations of support.

Thus provoked beyond any reasonable endurance by this continuing insolence, the neighbouring great power took the decision to destroy Hussaria utterly, and not only in the industrial and agricultural sense, but - perhaps especially - in the cultural sense too.

But first all factories were demolished and carried away, and great trains rumbled in the night for some weeks in this work. Existing natural resources were destroyed or the capacity to exploit them in any way destroyed, with coal mines flooded, coal fields fired, and the installations of the nation's shallow-sea coastal oil industry smashed beyond repair. In the countryside, all but the most inaccessible border forests were burned. In spring, rippling plains of wild flowers had rolled across the countryside in the national colours: that, indeed, is where the national colours came from. These plains were eradicated utterly. All livestock was slaughtered, dogs were shot or strangled, every crop was fired in the fields and the seed grain poisoned, the wells and water-sources were fouled, and all buildings and structures and machines burned and tumbled - mansions and cabins, fences and walls, corner shops, post-offices, stockyards, pumping stations, petrol stations, tractors and tractor stations, lumber mills, milking sheds and butter churns, schools, dairies, barns, silos and granaries of all and every type.

The administrative and transport infrastructures of the nation were destroyed utterly too. Telephone exchanges and telephone lines, town halls, devolved government departments, pensions offices, the surgeries of doctors and dentists, buses and bus stations, locomotives and coaches and railway stations and invalid carriages and bicycles and wheelchairs, street lighting, sanitary services and

refuse collection points, electricity power stations, even bottled gas and bottled gas depots - all were destroyed.

The built environment was not overlooked. All buildings in the Hussarian vernacular were destroyed, particularly those relating to cultural endeavour, though not overlooking cemetery headstones, monuments of any size, and all war memorials (for many Hussarians had died in the wars fought by the neighbouring great power). Ecclesiastical buildings in the traditional wood-carved form were burned and their ashes carried away, while the neighbouring great power then arranged for public conveniences to be erected on these sites.

Then culture came under renewed attack. All emblems of nationality, of any sort whatsoever, were banned, and possession of any item construed to be in the national colours was made punishable by death. This included even any garment embroidered - as most were, especially in the countryside - in these national colours. Possession of the mandolin, generally considered to be the principal instrument of national music and now declared to be an instrument of sedition, led at once to arrest and execution. Radio stations were closed at once, newspapers and magazines shut down, and concert halls were set afire. All place-names and hitherto existing maps were abolished, and a special commission of the neighbouring great power was appointed to prepare new ones. All items relating to domestic dressmaking - a tradition of Hussaria - were confiscated under threat of frightful penalty. All tools relating to carpentry were also seized, including all the chisels, gouges, soft hammers and treadle-lathes across the land.

The ancient university had been annihilated in the earlier bombing: and now the national theatre was also destroyed. The

national archives burned for days, until a torrential storm extinguished the flames; as did the contents of the national library and the national gallery, and all other libraries and galleries too, throughout Hussaria. Every bookshop in the land was closed, including second-hand and antiquarian shops, their contents destroyed, and their owners carried away. The possession of any book was punishable on a sliding scale relative to its subject, with deportation mandatory for a modern history title, and death (by hanging) for an ancient or classical title. Death by slow axe was the customary penalty for anything in the field of poetry, including manuscript poetry, in whatever language.

Then the concentrations began in earnest, usually by occupational group and generally involving the intelligentsia: though in Hussaria all clock-makers, candle-moulders, carpenters, weavers, cobblers and tailors were central members of that intelligentsia, and so they were arrested in the early days, and never seen again.

All clergy-men were seized, as were all lawyers, architects, actors, painters, sculptors, writers, librarians, dancers and publishers, and the headquarters of their professional associations looted and burned. Even journalists were taken away (except for those whose contractual relationship with their employers required them, under pain of stiff penalty, to approve and promote the hitherto-existing constitutional arrangements between Hussaria and her neighbouring great power).

Performing musicians and composers and instrument makers were taken too, all instruments destroyed, sheet music burned and music shops, schools and academies closed. All teachers at all age-levels were arrested at first too, though some later returned to an

elementary technical curriculum shorn of the Humanities, and all regraded as CAL technicians on short-term contracts.

A strict curfew was enforced throughout the land, and the security forces freely took and held hundreds of thousands of children as hostages. No meetings of more than five people were allowed outdoors, and of no more than three indoors. The making of a fire for purposes of cooking or heating or lighting was disallowed, except by written and special provision. And finally the neighbouring great power requisitioned for the use of its soldiers all the felt boots, goose-down bedding, fur coats, winter clogs, warm bonnets and lined heavy-weather gloves that were to be had in the land.

And then, not long before the snows of winter started, the great deportations began. Some, always the most prominent citizens of the former Hussaria, were walked alone in chains, and under heavy guard, through the villages of their land, bound towards the border of the neighbouring great power. Starving farmers stared in sullen hatred at this demonstration, but there was nothing they could do: and many were mutilated, or worse, for trying to toss a scrap of bread or potato towards the prisoner. But most of the deportees marched in columns hundreds-strong, shackled one to the next and whipped along bare-headed and often bare-footed as the cold grew worse. Any sort of singing led to immediate beating and almost certain death.

When they had passed and gone, these great columns, the land seemed emptier. The border forests - these had not been burned - swarmed with silent dogs from which the larynx had been sliced, and which tore and slashed and killed on sight. The handsome boots of the neighbouring great power strode and strolled in ash - and if, here and there, a tiny spark still lived, they did not see

it. Naked and venereal children (for the neighbouring great power had been even-handed in its justice) lurked starved and shameful in the smoking ruins.

Towards the end, the appeals of Radio Free Hussaria became ever more urgent, ever more desperate. Then it went off air. That was the day the snows started.

Then, there was silence.