



Fig. 26. Malo-krasnoyarsk on the Irtish

The boats on the Irtish bear names such as Rosa Luxemburg, Liebknecht, Lenin, Karl Marx, The Third International. The saloon was situated in the prow, and most of the outer wall was of glass. One could sit at the white-clothed tables for hours enjoying the view, which on the voyage through the Altai is incomparably lovely. And even without being a gourmet one could not help appreciating the Russian kitchen on board. I am not here referring to the usual courses and the soups that one gets everywhere in Russia, but to the fish, especially the sturgeon, and the absolutely fresh caviare, grey and large-globuled, so cheap and abundant that one would certainly choke if one did not put a brake on one's appetite! We almost lived upon caviare during the six days on the Irtish.

In the morning light we entered the funnel through which Zaisang-nor pours its superfluous waters into the mighty Irtish. The lake lies 413 meters above sea-level. The Irtish has a slow fall. Its waters seldom rush. Generally it glides along in majestic dignity, soundlessly rolling its massive volume in graceful, swirling coils. On the north shore of the lake is an extensive plain; and the landscape does not become beautiful until one sails in between the two mountain-ranges that bear the names Kalbinsky and Narimsky in the Altai. Unfortunately it was already late in the afternoon before we got so far. But as long as the fading light lasted we stood admiring this imposing landscape and the cliffs falling sheer down to the river.

At all the landing-places one finds barges serving as jetties, and the whole of the local population comes down to the bank to look on at the loading and unloading operations, which sometimes last for an hour or so. Occasionally another passenger comes on board from a boat that is rowed out to the paddle-steamer from the bank. During the latter part of May all the Siberian rivers are in flood.