



THE EMPEROR AND EMPRESS IN ANCIENT MUSCOVITE DRESS

PEEPS AT MANY LANDS

RUSSIA

BY

L. EDNA WALTER

B.Sc., A.C.G.I.

WITH TWELVE FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS
IN COLOUR

BY

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TO

MY INDEFATIGABLE CRITIC

THIS LITTLE BOOK

IS

AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED

PREFACE

I SHOULD like to thank many friends, amongst whom I must mention Mrs. Brodsky, Mr. Clark, and Mr. Stern, for giving me so freely of their Russian experiences.

My thanks are also due to Messrs. Smith, Elder and Co. for kindly allowing me to use the story of Vasilissa from "Russian Folk - Tales" by W. R. Ralston, to whose valuable books on Russian folk-song and story I am much indebted. I must also thank the friend whose kindly suggestion called this my first little book into being.

EDNA WALTER.

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SKETCH-MAP OF RUSSIA.



MONUMENT TO PETER THE GREAT, FOUNDER OF ST PETERSBURG

R U S S I A

CHAPTER I

R U S S I A

“HEAVEN is high and the Czar is far off,” runs a Russian proverb, and to most of the people in Russia the proverb—or, at least, the last part of it—is literally true. It is an impossible task to give anyone an idea of the immensity of the great country which rolls away eastwards from Germany for nearly two thousand miles before the Ural Mountains rear their jagged peaks between Europe and Asia.

There are railways from north to south and from east to west, but no Russian can travel across his country and manage to see the sea on both sides in a short day’s journey as an Englishman can between Liverpool and Hull, or a Scotsman between Edinburgh and Glasgow.

When the first railway was to be built from St. Petersburg to Moscow, there was a good deal of quarrelling amongst the officials as to the exact route it should take. One wanted it to traverse the rye district to the east, for certain rich rye-growers would reward him if it did; another had similar reasons for wishing the line to go to the west, that the growers of hemp and flax should not forget him. These were not

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the reasons they gave to the Czar Nicholas, but he showed he knew them when he said, "There is only one honest official in all my Empire, and that is myself." So he took no notice when the Minister of Ways and Roads brought in the map with the proposed route marked on it, but took up a ruler, drew a straight line with it from St. Petersburg to Moscow, and said, "You will make the line so." There is no more to be said when a Czar speaks; he is an absolute ruler; so the rails run in a straight line through forest land for four hundred miles, and only one town, Tver, lies on its route.

Had the Czar been in London he would have found it very difficult to rule the straight path of a railway four hundred miles long without making it cross the sea, and even then Loch Lomond would have come in the way. Had he been in Edinburgh he could not have done it at all.

The Russian trains are comfortable, but slow. Even over that straight four hundred miles they take nearly twelve hours. The carriages are wider and broader than ours, with a long corridor. There is plenty of room, for each carriage is supposed to take only from four to six people. If you travel by night berths are let down from the walls, and each passenger can lie at full length. In the third-class carriages there are also seats stretched along the corridor on the outside; the third-class compartments are not divided by partitions nor provided with doors, as are those of the first class, which more nearly resemble ours.

There is much more conversation in a Russian carriage than in an English one, and it is difficult to

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sleep even with a good rug and comfortable pillow. When the people get in they take a long time to arrange their boxes and bundles, and make a great deal of noise over it. The light is dim, being only that of a candle, so they tumble over each other's possessions before they finally settle down. Then they arrange their pillows and things for the night, and finally get out their provisions. In England one occasionally sees people making tea on a journey. In a Russian third-class carriage everyone will be provided with his kettle and his tea. Some, too, will carry a candle and stick it on to any projecting ledge by the simple process of pouring a little of the melted wax on to the support and rapidly planting the other end of the candle in it.

It is quite frequent for a poor peasant to get in and try to ride without a ticket. An English traveller tells us how, just as he was once going to sleep, the guard came in with a candle and hunted in every corner of the carriage as though he had lost a penny. He was looking for an extra man who had got in at the last station, and could not be found. The other people had hidden him under the seat with their boxes. The guard returned to the search several times, and climbed up on to the berth, turning over the sleepers to have a good look at them lest one should be the culprit. The hidden man became so interested in the search that curiosity prompted him to put his head out. Then he was caught and turned off at the next stop.

“Later in the night,” says the same traveller (Mr. Baring), “a huge and old peasant entered the train and crept under the seat. The guard did not notice him, and after the tickets had been collected from the

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passengers who had got in at that station, the man crept out and lay down on one of the higher berths. He remained there nearly all night, but at one of the stations the guard said, 'Is there no one for this station?' and, looking at the peasant, added, 'Where are you for, old man?' The man mumbled in pretended sleep. 'Where is your ticket?' asked the guard. No answer. At last, when the question had been repeated thrice, he said: 'I am a poor little old man.' 'You haven't got a ticket,' said the guard. 'Get out; you might lose me my place—and I a married man.' 'It is on account of my extreme poverty,' said the old man, as he was turned out."

The guard does not mind waking a sleeper when he wants his ticket, and he is not particular how he does it. He may turn the sleeper over, or pinch his toe. If the man is a peasant he puts up with it, but if he belongs to a better class he expresses his views to the guard very forcibly, and sometimes there is such a disturbance that a gendarme has to be called in, who writes down a report of the whole matter, each man in turn giving his story. What becomes of the report no one knows, but there is nothing the Russian official likes better than writing down a long report.

Everyone talks to everyone else, and the remarks are frequently personal. A priest or monk will be addressed by a mechanic. "You are no use: you don't earn your living, you only beg," and the monk argues as best he may. Or one mechanic will say to another: "You say you come from Kronstadt, but you don't know the Governor's name—it is plain you are lying."

Sometimes they indulge in simple, childlike curiosity,

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and the same traveller says he was once travelling with two Cossacks. "Who is that man?" called out one to the other. "He is a foreigner." "Is he travelling with goods?" "No, he is just travelling, nothing more." "Where does he come from?" "I don't know." Then, looking down on the Englishman below, the upper Cossack said: "Thou art quite bald, little father" ("little father" being a common Russian way of addressing another). "Is it illness that did it, or nature?" "Nature," said the Englishman. "Shouldst try an ointment," he said. "I have tried many and strong ointments, including onion, tar, and paraffin, none of which were of any avail. There is nothing to be done." "No," said the Cossack with a sigh, "there is nothing to be done. It is God's business."

CHAPTER II

"NITCHEVO"

THE first-class carriages are very comfortable, and the little berths are provided with spring mattresses. The trains are, however, so long that they have a curious wavy motion from side to side, and this often produces a sort of sea-sickness. The speed is slow, and accidents are few. The waits at the stations are often very long, for no train leaves one station till the station ahead signals by telegraph that the line between the two is clear. If the impatient foreigner asks when the train is going on he is always told, "Sei tchas," which perhaps at one time meant "At once," but now has no such limits. The Russian, however, in no hurry, waits

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placidly, and tries to soothe an impatient neighbour with the phrase, "Nitchevo" ("It does not matter"). It is sometimes said that a traveller knows Russian when he knows "Nitchevo," so many and varied are the occasions when it is used.

Few towns except St. Petersburg and Moscow are properly paved, and very often the main street is like a morass, full of holes and ruts, or with rough, uneven cobble-stones to lend excitement to your travels.

Outside the station of a town will be seen a number of tiny one-horse carriages, called "droskies," and the moment you appear all the *isvoshtniks* try to secure your custom. You bargain with one for yourself and a second for your luggage, while the other coachmen become abusive; sometimes even a specially angry loser will use his whip upon the back of your driver. The back is, however, so thickly coated with a padded coat, even in summer, that the whip makes no impression. No impression can you make either if you wish to call your *isvoshtnik's* attention by a thump on the back.

He gives you a word of advice as you start. It is "Hold fast for Heaven's sake," and indeed the advice is needed, for the back of the carriage gives you no support above the waist, and you are jolted about from side to side and up and down while the drosky rolls ahead, stops suddenly, and as suddenly goes on again. The driver seldom uses a whip to his horse. A pull on the reins checks its speed, a loosening increases it, and he talks to it constantly—"My brother, my friend, my little father, my sweetheart. Come, my pretty pigeon, make use of thy legs," he will say. "What now? Art blind! Come, be brisk! Take care of that stone there.

“ Nitchevo ”

Didst not see it? There, that's right. Bravo! hip, hip, hip! Steady, boy, steady! Now, what art turning thy head aside for? Look out boldly before thee! Huzza! Yuhk! Yuhk!”

He warns a foot passenger by a loud grunt. If he drives over him he will be flogged. “ Nitchevo !”

It may be that you alight at a country station thinking your destination is close by, but find that the little town you are wanting is not even in sight, although the station bears its name. Sometimes you will find no drosky, but have to content yourself with a Finnish cart. This has no springs and no seat! A little piece of carpet serves to indicate that it is meant for passengers—lest it should be mistaken for a farm-cart. Straw supplies the place of the seat. The harness shows signs of the wear of time, and its various parts are joined by bits of rope. There is, in point of fact, a good deal of rope about the whole conveyance. Should you be disposed to question the security of some of its parts the driver says, “ Nitchevo ”—which here means, “ Don't bother yourself; it will be all right,” and you embark in the cart, hoping for the best, and prepared to put up with the shaking and jolting which is ahead.

It frequently happens that the railway will only take you within some hundreds of miles of the place you want. Then, if it is on a main route—but do not think this means a highroad in our sense of the word—there is a system of imperial post. You get a large document upon which is written various particulars about yourself, where you come from, where you are going to, how many horses you want, and so on. You pay for this, of course (you can get nothing official without payment),

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and go to the post-station, demanding your vehicle and horses. You may secure a real tarantass if you are fortunate, but the quality of the vehicle degenerates as you get farther into the country. The tarantass is a phaeton in the summer and becomes a sledge in winter; it has no real springs, though long pieces of wood upon which the carriage rests serve to lessen the jolts. In the centre of the shafts one fast-trotting horse is harnessed and driven with a bearing-rein. This rein is attached to the *duga*, a high curved piece of wood connecting the front of the two shafts and rising above the horse's collar. In the top of it hangs one, or sometimes two, bells. Outside the shafts gallop one or two loosely harnessed horses, their heads held low and turned outwards. It is said that they are trained to keep their heads low so that travellers may see over them, but there is no fine scenery in most of this great country, and it has been suggested that the horses adopt this position in order that they may keep an eye on the driver and quicken their pace if they see signs of the whip.

A rougher cart resembling the Finnish cart replaces the tarantass in outlying districts, and its cradle-top gives your head many a nasty knock, as the ruts in the bad road often cause you to be jerked a foot high. The post-stations are from ten to twenty miles apart, and the horses you want are produced in course of time. You may be anxious to hasten on, but "Nitchevo!" There is no hurry. Why do you bother yourself?

A night at a post-station is not restful. There is only one room, and other passengers will come in at all hours awaiting change of horses and asking for tea.



A DISH OF TEA FROM A SAMOVAR. *Page 9.*

“ Nitchevo ”

Everyone wants tea. In winter a traveller calls out before his sleigh stops, “Quick with the samovar.” The samovar is like a large urn, with a tin of burning charcoal in the centre to boil the water. The water is drawn off into a little teapot, into which the traveller has put his own tea—for travellers carry their own tea in Russia—and the teapot is then put in its place at the top of the samovar to keep warm. A glass with a piece of lemon stands in a saucer, and into this the tea is poured, or into a little bowl. The Russian generally uses no milk, and his tea has a finer flavour than that which reaches England. This may be because it comes overland from China instead of by ship on a six weeks’ voyage.

The man who is trying to rest in the post-station finds little peace, and, indeed, his couch is not one to woo sleep. He may have a hard wooden bench with his blanket underneath him, or he may find a softer resting-place in some straw on the floor. In neither case is he likely to be free from insects, from the attentions of passing beetles, or from the bites of their smaller relatives.

Hotels at the smaller towns give you rooms specially furnished, and there is generally some arguing about the price before the bargain is struck. You find no sheets or blankets on the bed; you are expected to provide your own. Wealthy Russians until quite recent times travelled about with many horses and serfs, and so took all the things they needed for their comfort. Since Alexander freed the serfs, and since railways have crept across the country, travelling with a retinue of servants has grown less, and the hotels are now gradually coming to supply the needs of travellers, though the

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sheets are hired separately, and are not included in the cost of the room.

The country roads are never made, or rolled, or mended. They are nothing but tracks full of ruts, made by the traffic of carts through the mud ; when the ruts become impassable a new track is formed to right or left, and so the way becomes wider, but there is no hedge or wall of any kind to mark its limits, unless a little plot of cultivated land has had a small wooden fence put round it by a more than usually careful peasant. But that will be rare, and the usual track will be merely a clearing in the forest, or a space left between miles of cultivated fields.

When a river has to be crossed many new experiences are gained. There will be a bridge across it, but everyone will avoid this if there is a possible ford, or the passenger will prefer to wade and let the cart go over by itself. The coachman, however, takes the bridge, like everything else, with resignation. The bridge is made of long trunks of trees thrown across the stream, and upon these trunks rest wooden cross-pieces splintered up. They are not fixed, and so huge gaping holes appear between them. You point these out to the *isvoshtnik*. "Nitchevo!" he answers, "don't bother! Providence will look after us," and the horse picks his way along the tracks. "Bump" goes the wheel into a hole, up you swing again, and the perilous journey continues till you reach the muddy track on the other side.

If a wheel comes off or a shaft breaks, it is fixed on with string. "Nitchevo!"

St. Petersburg

CHAPTER III

ST. PETERSBURG

RUSSIA has had more than one capital, and the two that one thinks of in these days are Moscow the old, and St. Petersburg the new one. Moscow, like most great cities, grew naturally, St. Petersburg artificially. It was the great Peter—the first Czar who ever saw the sea—who planted a city on the Baltic, as, he said, a “window by which the Russians might look out into civilized Europe.” He found a place amidst the marshy islands of the Neva, and there he started a city and a navy. It was unhealthy, it was dangerous, but nothing ever stopped Peter the Great, and it gave him considerable pleasure to stir up his sleepy nobles in Moscow, and make them move to a spot where they might learn something of the other countries in Europe. So piles were driven into the wet ground, and an attempt was made to drain the marsh.

In 1703 Peter began a fortress on one of the islands, first of wood, but later of stone. The surrounding forests provided plenty of wood, but there was no stone. Peter was, however, a master among men, so every ship which came into the Neva was ordered to bring stone according to its size, and every peasant bringing hay, corn, or what he would had to add stone to the load in his cart. Thieves and street criminals were sent, not to Siberia, but to St. Petersburg to help in the building. With hands and nails they scraped up the earth and carried it in their shirts to the ramparts.

By 1710, after erecting a small church, Peter had

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built himself a house, and commanded every noble and merchant in Moscow to do the same.

Peter's city was of too quick a growth to last long, and the present capital shows little that is much more than a century old. Everything in it is vast ; the streets are so wide, and the squares so immense, that the very palaces seem small and squat. It is only by comparison that they appear so, for in truth they are huge, though often without beauty or grace. The famous Winter Palace is so enormous that a regular colony grew up on the roof of the old building unknown to the inhabitants below, so it is said. It was started by the men who were stationed up there to prevent the water from freezing by throwing hot iron balls into the tanks. These men fetched their families, their fowls, and their goats, put up huts between the chimneys, and fed their animals on the grass which sprang up. Finally—so it is said—some cows appeared, though how they got there is not told ; then the colony was discovered and suppressed, and both poultry and their owners were made to descend.

The main streets used to be planted with two rows of trees, and are called "Prospects," the most famous being the Nevski Prospect. The cross streets, even the smallest, would be considered wide thoroughfares in any other European capital, and blind alleys are unknown.

The width of the streets and size of the houses make walking a tiring pastime ; in one street, or *Prospekt*, it takes thirty minutes' good walking to pass three houses, so little wonder that very few women and girls are seen in the streets, and "Darai isvoshtnik," the call for a drosky, is the most frequent sound heard. Stands for

St. Petersburg

dozens of these occur everywhere, and the *isvoshtniks* who drive them form a regular colony of their own. They live in their carriage or sleigh by day, and sleep in it by night or when not driving. They seem to mind neither heat nor cold, and horse and man feed in the streets. Mangers have been put up for the horses, while hay is sold at frequent shops in small bundles—enough for one horse; the *isvoshtniks* are catered for by vendors of *kvas* (which is a kind of light beer), tea and bread. Young boys from all parts of Russia begin to drive before they are twelve years old, at first for hire, but they gradually get together enough to buy a horse and drosky, and then they start on their own account. If fodder is too dear, they drive off to another town, and so move on till they find one where custom and cost suit each other. In no country of Europe are the men given to wandering so much or so far.

For poorer folk there are now electric trams, and in winter public sleighs, when a couple of kopecks do duty for a halfpenny fare.

A drive along the Nevski Prospect will show us the busiest part of St. Petersburg. It starts at the square which takes its name from the Admiralty, a massive building whose tall spire is the most graceful thing in the city. In summer the dust is terrific, and all who can get away leave St. Petersburg for the country; but in winter the Prospect is thronged with gay sledges, and bright with many uniforms. No city in the world can show so many uniforms, from the blue-coated Circassian soldier to the telegraph girl, who attends to you decorated with brass buttons and epaulettes.

There are many, many ranks of officials or *tchinov-*

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niks, and all these wear uniforms. Everyone in the Government service has his grade : in the lowest ranks will be the men who look at your passport, necessary to everyone, Russian or stranger, who travels about, or those who take down any complaints made in the police office, or those who sell you stamps. Above the fifth or sixth ranks all are noble. Titles, especially military titles, are very common, for civilians receive a rank bearing a military name. A short time ago a professor at Moscow was elevated to the rank of "General," and is addressed as "Your Surpassingness," not quite as high as "Your Excellency." By rights, the term "Your Honour" only belongs to those in the ninth to the fourteenth class of *tchinovniks*, but is used to address every Russian—much in the same way as we use "Esquire." Every University graduate is a noble, and the title of "Prince" is inherited by all the sons of a Prince. Hence it happens that titles are very common, and although every noble, or *dvoryanin*, has the right to go to Court, the majority who possess this right have scarcely boots to go in.

The officials are so numerous that they hamper and retard everything that ought to be done. They are poorly paid, and are, amongst all Europeans, the men most notorious for receiving bribes. When money is collected for the relief of a starving, famine-ridden district, it passes through so many hands that nothing is left to be handed over by the last *tchinovnik* to the dying sufferers in his village.

All the fashionable shops are to be seen in the Nevski Prospect, and it will be noticed how few book-sellers there are. Freedom in writing books or news-

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papers is unknown in this country, and hundreds of officials are even employed in blotting out from every foreign newspaper which comes in by post any remarks which would seem to reflect upon Russian government.

One of the most curious spots in the Nevski Prospect is the *Gostinnoi Dvor*, or Great Bazaar. It contains miles of lanes and alleys, through which pour the sledges or droskies of servants buying all that is wanted for the daily needs of the great houses. Booths selling the same kind of articles always cluster together, and the light-haired, brown-bearded merchants, wearing their blue cloth caftans and caps (covering them over in winter by a white wolfskin coat), cry the merits of their wares to the passers by.

“My little father, where are the furs?” inquires a would-be customer. “Furs? I have them here. What will suit you? Pray walk in. You will find everything here.”

“Boots from Kazan,” calls another, “all of the finest quality.”

“Clothes in the newest fashion, made by the best makers,” echoes from a booth farther on, and so the cries go on. These merchants do not go home by day, so sellers of bread, cheese, and sausages pass constantly along the lanes to feed the hungry. Here will come a huge steaming samovar, and there will be wheeled a barrel of *kvas*. When trade slackens the merchants will amuse themselves with their grey squirrels, their nightingales, or other singing-birds, or they will start a game of draughts with their neighbours, and a small crowd of friends will bet on the game; everyone stops

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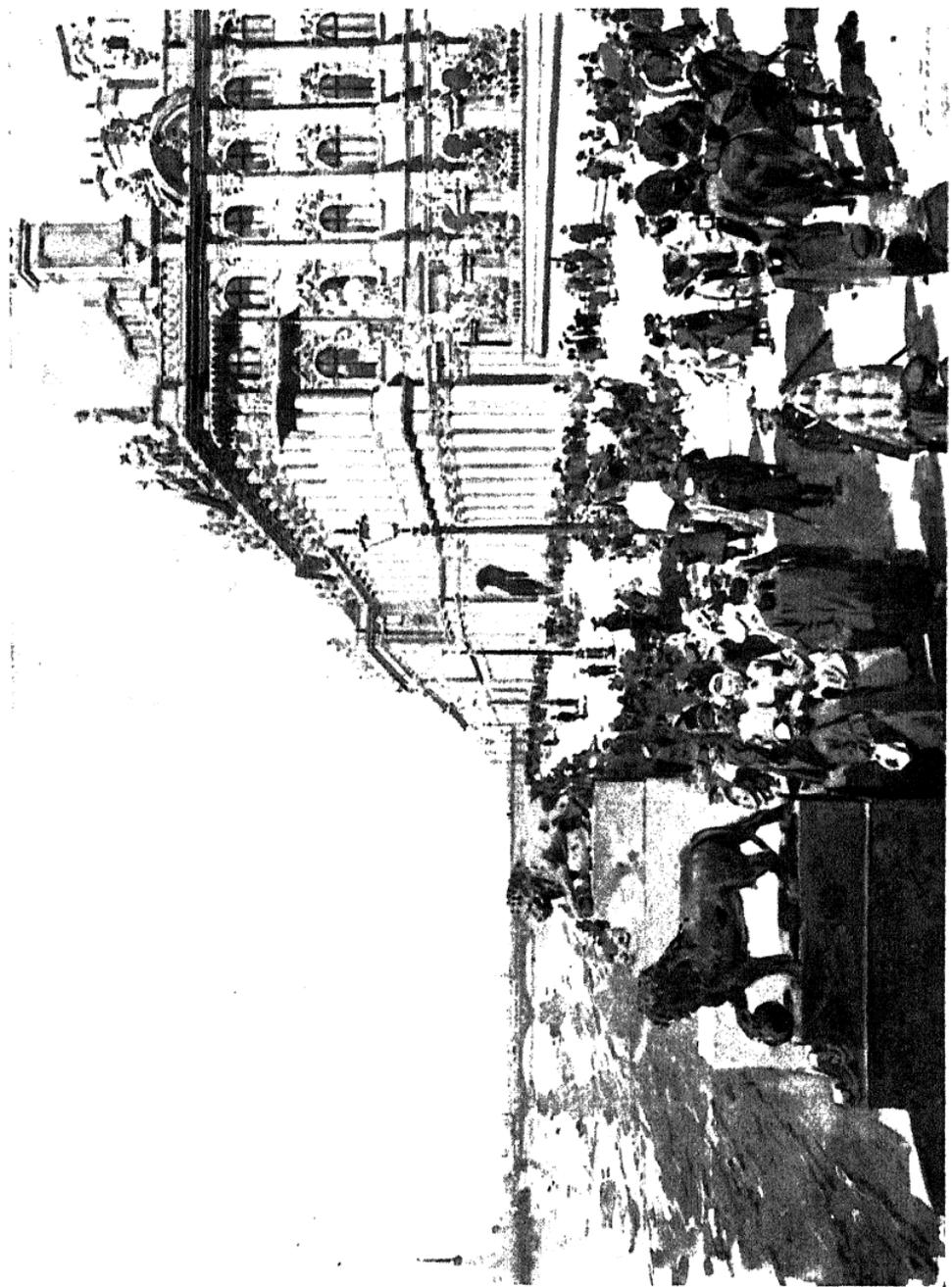
at once as a customer appears, and each tries to bow him into his own booth.

In a corner of every booth, as indeed in a corner of every shop, room, or office in Russia, hangs a holy picture, or ikon, to which the owner frequently turns and bows. Little lamps are kept burning in front of these, but nowhere else is anything allowed to be burnt. In winter this absence of fire makes the *Gostinnoi Dvor* very cold, and the men sometimes run races or play a sort of football down the wide avenues to keep themselves warm.

There are a great number of booths selling nothing but holy images and pictures, and nowhere is there a brisker trade done. There are little Madonnas, St. Nicholases, or St. Elijahs crowded together in heaps like stones by the roadside, costing a few kopecks; next come pictures of all the possible saints, with their gold and silver backgrounds, and so on to elaborate and inartistic moral pictures, or portraits of the Czar, costing many roubles. Many of these things are bought in large numbers for the furnishing of their houses by new-comers.

Watch one of the merchants reckoning the bill. He writes nothing down, but takes up a frame holding a number of beads on wires, and quickly with his fingers he whisks the beads along, and tells the customer what he owes. This use of the abacus is common in all the shops in Russia, and although Russian children learn arithmetic at school, they always use the abacus in actual life in trade.

The coins are simple. The silver rouble is about the same value as our two-shilling piece, and a hundred



THE WINTER PALACE ON THE NEVA *Page 12.*

The Neva

kopecs go to the rouble. A kopec, therefore, is worth about the same as our farthing, but is much more common, and even a little copper half-kopec is often met with.

Squares with huge statues, palaces, rows of mighty residences, follow each other down the Nevski Prospect till the Fotanka Canal is crossed and the public omnibus or sleigh replaces the drosky. Dirty beards and long caftans are now seen instead of the shaven chin and smarter coats of the other side; mean shops and painted wooden houses and hovels take the place of stone palaces; no statues adorn the big, useless squares, and at last the great Nevski Prospect, after four miles of gradual degradation, becomes merely the abode of the very poor, and ends at the monastic cemetery of St. Alexander Nevski.

CHAPTER IV

THE NEVA

GREAT and pretentious as St. Petersburg is, the mighty river winding through it for thirteen miles is its master for life or death. She brings food from the interior, and herself provides pure and sparkling water. All the things necessary for life—clothing, houses, fuel—she carries from within or receives from without. In summer her water and her islands are a perpetual source of pleasure and delight; in winter her frozen surface presents a scene of gaiety and movement; in spring she is a source of anxiety, and sometimes of terror.

For six months of the year she is frozen over, and the pontoon bridges, which are made in sections, are

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rapidly pulled asunder as soon as the ice, which at first forms and breaks, threatens their safety.

The real winter is supposed to start on the feast of St. Nicholas, which we write thus—December 6/19, the first figure indicating the Russian, and the second the English, day of the month. To explain this double date we must go back to the sixteenth century, when it was found that the calendar, which was intended to agree with the earth's position in its path round the sun, was wrong by ten days. Pope Gregory ordered these ten days to be cut out, and all the Catholic countries obeyed. England, being a Protestant country, ignored Gregory and his astronomy. In the eighteenth century, however, England, too, determined to put matters right, and an Act of Parliament was passed in 1752, by which it was ordered that the extra days—then eleven—should be cut out of the calendar, September 3 being called September 14. The Gregorian Calendar keeps matters right by omitting leap year from certain centuries, as in 1900. Russia, however, still keeps to the old Julian Calendar, and so every century adds a day more to the difference between her date and those of everyone else. On December 6/19 the tram-lines are laid upon the ice, many roadways paved with straw are carried across, skaters congregate in various reserved spots, and sleighs race against each other in others.

A great provision-market is held on the ice a little before Christmas, and the booths stretch for miles. Everything is frozen. Countless oxen, piles of sheep and goats, pyramids of pigs, form a frozen range of hillocks, from which the butcher makes his choice.

The Neva

With hatchet or saw he cuts up his sheep, ox, or sometimes even bear, not into joints, but into sections, which his customers carry off to keep in their ice-cellars.

Every home of any pretension possesses its cooling cellar, where huge blocks of ice are piled into shelves, on which stand the food, milk, and *kvas* used in the summer. Thousands of workmen are therefore engaged during the winter in drawing ice from the Neva. Whole processions of sledges may be seen carrying it into the city. The surface of a portion of the ice is scraped, and a huge oblong is outlined with hatchets, and marked into smaller sections by cross-cuts. Deep trenches are now cut all round the block with axe and hatchet, and in them the workmen stand and cut away the ice at their feet, till at a depth of four or five feet it becomes too thin to support them. The last layer is broken by iron poles, and the huge square mass of ice is left floating. Upon this the men mount, and with their sharp ice-breakers strike blow after blow into the cross-cuts till the blocks are ready to be pulled out. Each clear green mass of crystal is hauled on to a low sledge, the sheepskin-coated driver sits on it, and off he goes.

Although the ice becomes tremendously thick, holes are made in it for the washerwomen, who wash the clothes of St. Petersburg in the freezing water even when our Fahrenheit thermometer would register— 13° —*i.e.*, 45° below freezing. It must be admitted that the clothes are not much the cleaner for their wash, and show little result for the hardihood of their washers.

When this temperature is reached—though the Russians would give it in Réaumur, not Fahrenheit

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degrees—no children are allowed out, eyelids freeze to the cheeks, and noses are frostbitten. “Little father, thy nose!” calls one Russian to another, and begins rubbing the stranger’s white chalky nose with snow. It is also a common thing for anyone with both eyelids frozen to knock at a door and ask for a little warmth, when he is taken at once to a seat near or on the great stove which warms the homes of the great, and which serves the peasant both as kitchener and bed.

A great ceremony takes place in every town and village in Russia on the festival of the Epiphany, January 6/19. This is known as the Benediction of the Waters. In St. Petersburg the ceremony is performed by the Czar outside the Winter Palace. A wooden temple is put up on the ice, decorated with gilt and paintings within, and surrounded by a hedge of fir boughs without. A hole is made in the ice, and to this a procession consisting of troops with banners, gorgeously robed Bishops and priests carrying lighted tapers and big ikons, precedes a second procession, consisting of the Czar and his Court. They have already had one service in the Imperial chapel ; they now have another on the ice. The water is blessed, any evil spirits flee, the soldiers fire, and everyone is sprinkled with the holy water. The procession returns, carrying vessels filled with the water for use in the future. The people then try to get to the hole. Some take away goblets of the cold liquid, others plunge into the water to be cleansed from sin. Many dip their little babies into the icy bath, so strong is the superstition of the people that this will save their souls ; but the delicate little frames seldom survive the shock of the ice-cold

The Neva

plunge. Everyone is careful to make a cross on his door on that day, lest the evil spirit expelled from the water should enter his home.

About April the ice generally shows signs of breaking up. The tram-lines are removed, the wooden bridges are pulled down, and communication between the different banks becomes difficult. Even when the blocks of ice separate and are on the move, men will be found daring enough to cross by springing from block to block. Many are drowned in their attempts, for the Neva claims a bigger toll of human life than any other river in Europe.

When there is sufficient space for a boat to pass, the governor of the Fortress puts across in his little launch and takes to the Emperor a goblet of water from the Neva, informing him that the river is now open. The Emperor drinks the water to the health of his people, and in old times he filled the goblet with gold. It was found, however, that the goblet tended to grow bigger, to the discomfort of the Czar, who had to drink the water, if to the benefit of the Commander, who took back the gold. So a sum was fixed, and since then the goblet has remained of a normal size.

Till the Commander has crossed no boat may move, but when once the gun announces his safe arrival, swarms of boats and steamers attempt to steer their way in the open water between the icebergs which race down from Lake Ladoga. This is the time when the river is very high, and as the inhabitants know too well that St. Petersburg is only thirteen feet above the normal level of the sea, an anxious watch is kept upon the height of the water. A single boom from the Admiralty

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gun warns those who live in cellars to move into higher quarters, and when the lowest streets are under water the alarm gun is fired every quarter of an hour. At these alarms, however, people shrug their shoulders, but if a west wind should arise to drive the water from the Gulf of Finland up towards the city at a time when the river is swollen and the ice is breaking up, then, indeed, there would be a time of terror, and the minute gun from the Admiralty would call upon all vessels to hasten to the relief of a drowning city.

CHAPTER V

DOWN THE VOLGA

MOST of us think of the Thames as a delightful picnic river—a stream where steamboats are few and pleasure-boats many—at least above London Bridge. You would never dream of taking a real journey on its waters; even from Oxford to London it would take two days, not because it is far, but because there are so many locks; and you could certainly not lodge on the little steamboat.

Very different is it with Russia's chief river, the Volga. There you can travel for nearly a fortnight—almost time enough to get from Liverpool to New York and on to the Rockies. For two thousand miles or more steamers and barges ride up and down the Volga carrying passengers, timber, oil, and every kind of wares between Ribinsk and Astrachan. There are express steamers only stopping at important places, and others calling at smaller villages.

Down the Volga

Cross the gangway on to one of the large steamers lying alongside the quay at Ribinsk. Then you will make up your mind how you will travel, for you will find four classes to choose from. The first and second are on the upper deck, and there you will be provided with a deck cabin containing a sofa, a washhand stand, and a water tap, which allows the well-to-do Russian to indulge his preference for washing in running water. In the third class you will have a bunk in one of the two tiers which surround the general cabin, but whether you travel first or third class you will have to provide your own blankets.

There is a fourth class, where the passengers are enclosed, but have no bunks. They sleep on a sort of low wooden table, dirty in themselves and their surroundings; but some even poorer and dirtier creatures are huddled together in all sorts of odd spots, sleeping face downwards among the cargo. In the third class your companions would be clean and respectable, but very talkative, going to sleep late and beginning their morning conversations before daybreak. What they lose in sleep by night they make up for in dozes at odd moments by day.

All sorts of passengers will be on board, well-to-do merchants with their families and servants—the children often noisy and quarrelsome—students going from their University to their home in the country, a group of soldiers singing rollicking songs learnt in St. Petersburg, or another group of uniformed Kalmucks huddled together in the stern of the boat singing low, weird, pathetic notes as they speed back to Astrachan and freedom. For four years these conscripts have had to

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endure the severity of the barracks in place of the simple ease of their wandering tent life on the steppes ; and their one idea now is to get back and burn their uniforms, and to forget, if they can, the townfolk who made fun of their dark skins and clicking speech.

There will be dark-visaged Jews, perhaps piloting some white-robed Tartar merchants to or from the great fair at Nijni Novgorod, and keeping a very watchful eye upon them and all they do.

Then there will be some Mohammedans—each with a roll of carpet under his arm. He may have much or little luggage, and employ porters to carry it, but he always carries the carpet himself. Five times a day he looks at the sky, turns himself in a calculated direction, puts down his carpet, takes off his outer shoes, and, kneeling on the carpet, bows till his forehead touches the floor. This is his way of saying his prayers, which he never omits, no matter where he is or by whom surrounded. His prayers are to Allah, and his observations of the sky are to enable him to turn towards the holy city of Mecca. He is, however, sometimes out in his reckoning, and turns his face towards Peking by mistake.

If you have been watching the river as well as the passengers, you will have noticed how wide and brown it is long before you get to Nijni. Gently sloping banks are green with grass and trees and shrubs, while here and there they are yellow with corn. At the edge of one of the green patches you will see a girl wading in the river and leading a cow to drink. Her red skirt is tucked up beneath a long green coat, thick even in the summer, and instead of a hat she has tied a red handkerchief on her head.



F. D. Macmillan

Down the Volga

But it is only at her shores that the Volga is shallow; she has no fords or sand-banks like her sister, the Don. There the steamer often runs aground many times in the day. The Don captain always gives a free passage to a band of strong Cossacks if they will help him at these times, and when the ship gets stuck they jump overboard and haul her off.

The villages on the banks of the slow-flowing Volga are not generally very picturesque, but when the steamer stops you may have time to wander over the cobble-stones which pave the streets. In early dawn or evening the streets will be deserted, and you will not wonder at the grass growing between the stones. Then, too, the little low white houses with their green roofs will look their best, their untidiness unnoticed as your eyes wander to the gilded dome of the church round which they cluster. In the daytime you may find a street market in progress.

On the quay there is always a busy scene—passengers coming and going, and a bright-coloured, ragged, and dirty crowd watching events. The idlers munch sun-flower-seeds, and litter the whole place with the husks; others offer melons and other fruit, pies, and cabbages, to the steamer's passengers. The ship does not burn coal, but oil or timber, so her store has to be replenished every now and then. Then, too, she may carry a cargo of small timber-blocks if she is going south, or tallow or bags of grain if she is going north. All the carrying is done by men in thick, ragged, torn coats, their red or blue shirts showing through the rents. They wear thick caps on their heads—both heads and caps being dirty—and instead of stockings they wear a sort of bandage round their legs. This bandage is

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made of a kind of coarse linen called "crash," and is seldom washed, though its wearing power is great. Occasionally one man can boast a pair of string shoes, but that is rare, and stamps the wearer as above his fellows. Sometimes these men have a wooden support strapped across their backs, so that they can carry very large loads. They do not hasten or hurry to the steamer's side when she arrives---it is Russia, and there is no hurry---and they loll against the wooden palings, watching her idly as she departs.

CHAPTER VI

DOWN THE VOLGA (*continued*)

BELOW Nijni the river is soon a mile wide, and the right bank becomes almost picturesque, with a range of low hills, often rocky and precipitous, at the water's edge; but unless you are sailing close to the bank the vastness of the river dwarfs even these, and the eye would as soon turn to the green flat land on the left. When we speak of "sailing" we mean going by steam, for sails are seen so rarely on the Volga that sailing-craft can practically be said not to exist.

A day's journey on the Volga is nothing, so immensely long is this river, and so two days after we leave Nijni we have only travelled another five hundred miles and arrived at Samara. Here you can, if you like, take train for Siberia, and go for some four thousand miles right away to Vladivostok; or you can watch the great loads of corn arriving by day and night, coming from hundreds of miles, for Samara is the centre of the greatest

Down the Volga

corn-growing region in Europe. Down to the quays it is dragged, and then barge after barge is tugged, not by horses along a towing-path, but by steamer up the Volga, till it gets by canal and Neva to St. Petersburg, or even to Riga, whence it comes over to England to feed our people. But sometimes there has been no rain in this vast land round Samara; the crops fail, and there is famine. Then the Russian Government sends soldiers into the barren land. Drunken, grimy Cossacks are sent to aid the ragged, ill-paid policeman who has been stationed in every starving village to keep the peasants in order, or "knout" them if they murmur and complain. Little wonder if the forbidden "Marsellaise" is often sung by the metallic voice of some cheap gramophone in the village inn.

But the Cossack is not always seen as a cruel and drunken tyrant. A boat passes with a number of Cossacks on board, and across the Volga come strange, weird strains. The men are singing a soft melody in a strange minor key—singing of their own much-loved river, the Don—

"Father of ours, famous quiet Don."

Then the music changes, swifter and wilder becomes the melody, as one of their robber songs rings out. Of their old rebel leader, Stenka Razin, they never tire, and in song and story they tell how he kept the Czar Alexis at bay, burnt the towns from Simbirsk to the Caspian, and exacted toll from all the ships down the Volga as freely as the Scottish pirate, Henry Martyn, ever did from English merchants in the North Sea. Bold in captivity, they defied their captors, and of one

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the song tells how, when he was asked by the Czar himself who were his companions when he robbed and stole, he replied: My companions were four—my first the dark night, my second a knife of steel, my third my good steed, my fourth a tough bow, and my messengers were keen arrows;” and the Czar, pleased with his bold reply, gave him pardon and “a lofty dwelling in the plain with two pillars and a cross-beam.”

You may remember among the ballads and songs of our own bold Robin Hood the one where he asks that his grave may be made of gravel and green, and his bent bow be placed by his side. The Cossack is fiercer, and we hear in the fading song how one asked for a cross at his head, his horse at his feet, and his sabre in his hand, that those who passed should first utter a prayer, and then, startled by the horse and sabre, should cry: “Surely this is a brigand who is buried here, a son of the brigand, the bold Stenka Razin!”

And now we are nearing Astrachan and the Caspian. We stop at Tzaritzin, and the third class empties itself. Water-melons appear as before, and caviare figures as a new item in the ship’s menu. Tzaritzin is a big place, so four gangways connect us with the landing-stage. Along one comes a short, white-robed Jew, fez on head and wearing soft, heelless slippers, so that he walks silently amid groups of passengers. He carries a wooden box, and in it he has green sparkling emeralds, red glowing rubies, and other precious stones from the Ural Mountains. Those who know about stones buy cheaply, but those who are ignorant had better keep away. Just as he has done a little business a ship’s

Down the Volga

officer sees him. "Be off with you!" says the officer. "Sei tchas" ("At once"), replies the Jew. But the officer knows that "Sei tchas" may equally well mean "to-morrow" or "next week," so with a hand on the collar he helps him off the first gangway. In a moment the Jew reappears from the second, and plies his trade as before. He is discovered by the same officer, who reminds him of his fate a few minutes previously. The little Jew looks injured and surprised. "Surely," he says, "the officer must have made a mistake: it was not he." The officer does not stop to argue, he helps him down the second gangway. But the Jew is not beaten yet. Are there not four gangways? And so he tries each one in turn, and has time to sell a few gems before he is turned off. Perhaps he has a special collar to make life easier at the gangways.

A day's journey from Tzaritzin, through two hundred miles of sweet-scented hay, lands you into the heat and colour of Astrachan. Dirty, noisy crowds swarm on the quays and booths, idle as the dust, but clad in the wonderful colours that only the East can show. So at Astrachan we feel we have left Europe for Asia.

CHAPTER VII

THE PEOPLES OF THE SOUTH

"SCRATCH a Russian and you find a Tartar," is an English proverb, and like most proverbs it has some truth in it.

Long ago, before Russia was one big country, as she is now, before there were Czars, but when different

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Princes ruled over different kingdoms of Russians, soon after the time when our King John was made to sign our Magna Charta, a savage race of people swooped upon the south-east of these kingdoms, pillaged the villages, burnt the dwellings, set fire to the fields, and murdered the inhabitants or carried them off as slaves. Where they went they conquered, and at last all Russia, and even Poland and the States between it and Bulgaria, had to submit to these ruthless Tartars. The fear of them was so great that it spread even to England.

The leader of this horde was a certain Genghis Khan, who was, to begin with, merely ruler over a Mongol tribe at the north of China. He was very big and very brave, and both he and his people were like very ugly Chinamen. They lived in tents, and kept flocks of sheep and goats, and when they wanted more they fought a neighbouring tribe and took their possessions. It was easy enough to move on, for tents could be carried and flocks driven, so the horde spread westwards, persuading every tribe it met to join it, and so having an ever increasing army.

Before long Genghis was ruler over a vast Empire, extending nearly half round the earth. But so many different races could not hold together for long, and thus, when Genghis Khan died, the great Empire began to split up again. One of the States into which it split was the Tartar State, known as the "Golden Horde," and the Khan who ruled it still held all the Russian Princes in subjection, and made them come to his capital on the Lower Volga to pay their allegiance.

The Tartars did not worry the Russians about

The Peoples of the South

religion, or laws, or the management of their land. All they wanted was tribute money, and they sent men into the different little kingdoms to collect it. These men had a touch of the Chinese about them too, like the Mongols from farther east, and were much disliked for their cruelty and oppression. Hence there were frequent revolts, followed by harsh repressions.

The Tartars had a strange religion, worshipping fire as well as Buddha and strange idols, but they allowed the Russians to remain Christians, and it is said that one of the Khans became a Christian monk. Later on the Tartars all became Mohammedans.

When the Russian Princes found that they always got the worst of it whenever they rebelled, they gave up this policy and tried to curry favour by taking presents to the Khan and his Court. The Khan had many wives and many daughters, and sometimes the Russian Prince and his suite married these Tartar ladies. Gradually one Prince would be rewarded by being allowed some extra authority over other Princes, and would be appointed to collect his own taxes, and occasionally those of a rebellious neighbour. It was in this way that the Prince of Moscow gradually gained and held the title of Grand Prince, and received favour at the Khan's Court till the Golden Horde began to show signs of weakness in the fifteenth century. Then the wily Moscow Princes turned against their sometime masters, and finally put themselves at the head of the movement which threw off the Tartar yoke.

Still, however, the Tartar tribes lived their old lives in the southern plains, to the terror of the peaceful

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Russians on their borders, upon whom they would make warlike descents with the suddenness of a tropical storm. They would steal the cattle and the children from the unfortunate village, burn the churches and the farms, sometimes torture or kill the elders, and sometimes drag them off into slavery. This went on even after Ivan the Terrible reconquered the Tartar tribes of the steppes, from Astrachan to Kazan, just before Elizabeth began her glorious reign in our own country.

But although by this time Ivan the Terrible, Grand Prince of the kingdom of Moscow, had made himself Czar of all Russia, it was not easy to grapple with remnants of the horde, who were as far off as the Crimea and the steppes—the flat plains near the Black Sea. The Turks wanted slaves. The Tartars established an enormous slave-market at Theodosia, and sold the unfortunate captives from Poland or Moscow in dozens by auction—those from Poland fetching a better price, because they were less cunning than the Muscovites.

To protect their unfortunate people against this terrible fate the Czar of Russia and King of Poland united in building forts and establishing a regular army of Cossacks. There were other Cossacks too, better known as Free Cossacks, who held separate States along the principal southern rivers, the Don, Dneiper, Volga, and Ural. These are the Cossacks famous in song and story. They were a race of soldiers who governed themselves, though subject to the Czar. Being Russians, they harassed the Tartars as the Tartars harassed their more peaceful neighbours, and anybody who wished to go through their territory had to ask permission first.

In ancient times most tribes at some period of their



L. J. Hornum

RUSSIAN SOLDIERS, SHOWING A MOUNTED COSSACK WITH HIS KNOUT. Page 27.

The Peoples of the South

existence obtained their wives by capturing them from a neighbouring tribe. This practice was kept up by the Free Cossacks till, and even beyond, the sixteenth century. They captured so many Tartar wives that they soon acquired certain Tartar characteristics, and began to differ from the true Russians. The cruelty for which they were, and still are, known was an inheritance from their Tartar mothers, and their terrible whip, the "knout," made of leather, thickened at the end round a ball of lead, still stands as a testimony to Tartar influence.

The various Cossack communities were constantly giving trouble. When there was a fall-off in the booty which they could raid from the Czar's enemies, they turned with little regret upon the Czar's subjects. So long as they could live by stealing and not by working they did not trouble themselves about allegiance, and when things were dull, they would either raise an insurrection against the Czar themselves, or occasionally join his enemies in a war.

Gradually, however, Czar after Czar strove to lessen the power while keeping the useful activities of these soldier bands. Always as Russia pushed her frontier farther into Asia, Cossacks were sent to guard it. At present the Cossacks possess land and pay no land taxes, but they receive no salary, and have to serve as soldiers for twenty years, equipping themselves all the time. Little wonder, therefore, that a Cossack regiment, sent to quell a mutinous village, turns its attention to robbery and plunder.

The Tartar races to-day live more peacefully than in centuries ago, but still retain their habit of living in tents.

Cross the flat, far-reaching steppes, and for miles and

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miles no hill or tree will break the monotony of that lonely plain, but after many hours a group of oddly placed tents will tell you that you are approaching a Bashkir *aoul*, as the movable village is called. Each tent is round, supported by wooden props and covered with felt. You will probably be received hospitably and invited into one, where the *akhun*, or headman, and his short, dark friends will look at you with their small eyes.

He slightly resembles, but is not so ugly as, his flat-faced Mongolian ancestors, and he shaves his head. His womenfolk are veiled, so that their faces cannot be seen, and they are kept in the background. Curiosity will probably prompt them to creep out quietly from their tent and peer through the eye-holes of their veils at his visitor. There will be no chairs, tables, or forms in the tent ; a cushion on the floor is all you will have to sit on, and several cushions will form your bed if you stay the night.

The dinner you will receive will be very simple, and if you cannot eat boiled mutton it will be best to keep away from the steppes. A sheep is caught, killed, and rapidly skinned. Into a huge pot of water boiling over a wood-fire the sheep, cut up into pieces, is cast. When it is boiled lumps of it will be lifted out by a wooden bowl. This is placed on a piece of linen on the floor of the tent, and dinner is ready. Around the cloth you and your hosts sit upon cushions. You have no plate, nor knife, fork, or spoon. Your host hands you a few ribs, or some other attractive piece, and you proceed to eat from hand to mouth, without even the help of a piece of bread. Everyone takes supplies by hand from the one and only bowl, and if a Bashkir has taken a

The Peoples of the South

fancy to you, he will show his attraction by putting delicate morsels of his own joint into the only receptacle which you have—your mouth. Only the most hardened traveller should visit the Bashkirs.

You will not drink during dinner, but afterwards, and then your drink will be koumiss, a sort of fermented mare's milk, and rather like watered-down butter-milk, which has been kept for a week in hot weather. Just as there was only one bowl for the meat, so there is only one bowl for the drink, and this passes round from mouth to mouth. The Bashkirs, although Mohammedans, do not concern themselves much with washing, so that there are a good many drawbacks to the enjoyment of their well-meant hospitality.

Both these people and the Kirghis, farther south, chiefly live by keeping flocks. They refuse to do any hard work, and will move on rather than drive a plough. As, however, their numbers increase, and their land does not, those nearer the borderland of agriculture hire Russian peasants to till their plots. In course of time, however, stern necessity will force them to plough and reap, as it has forced all other tribes in their turn.

CHAPTER VIII

VILLAGE LIFE

IN an English village a man with a little land to farm plants what he likes, and gathers when he likes: it is no affair of his neighbours. But in Russia everything to do with the land farmed by a peasant is the affair, not of himself, but of all the other peasants. The reason is

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that the land is not his at all—he does not pay rent for it—it is the property of the village community. But though no one pays rent, each family pays a tax in proportion to the amount of land allotted to it. Now and then the Russian Government takes a census of the people, and in each village a list is prepared of the number of male members; the village commune has to pay taxes in accordance with this number, regardless of births and deaths, till a new revision list of “souls” is made. If in some family the “souls” are little boys of a few years old, they of course cannot work the land which should count as their share, and so the villagers arrange their burdens among themselves. This they can do by means of their village council, or *mir*, which consists of all the Heads of Households.

Usually the head of a household is an elderly man, and he exercises an enormous control over his family, even choosing the wives of his sons when he wants some more strong arms to help in the family work. Sometimes, however, the men of the family are away in distant towns, perhaps as waiters in the *traktirs* or cheap restaurants of the bigger towns, or as tailors in Siberia, and then a woman will be the head of the household and attend the *mir* meetings.

The Heads of Households elect a kind of chief man called the *starosta*, who receives a few shillings a month for his trouble, and wears a brass chain round his neck from which hangs a bronze medal. In spite of the medal, however, no one ever wishes to be elected *starosta*. There is no canvassing for votes: the *mir* simply gathers itself together in a field or some open space, and each peasant hopes someone else will

Village Life

be elected. In fact, Ivan will suggest that Alexis be chosen, or Alexis suggests Ivan. Each will then give many reasons why he himself should not be elected. But no one listens to them ; the other peasants seize upon one of the names, and in due course the unwilling acceptor of office receives the medal and the chain.

The one matter that everyone is really interested in is the division of the land. In places such as the south, where the soil is very fertile, everyone is glad to have land, but all through the north and centre of Russia this is not the case. All the same, though the land be poor, there are those dreaded taxes to be paid, and each tries to get as small a portion as possible, so that he may pay a correspondingly small proportion of the tax which the whole commune has to pay to the Government. The village has three kinds of land, the first where the cottages are built, and that needs no redivision, because the families hold their cottages as their own, next the cultivated land, and last the big hayfield.

The cultivated land has a third of it set apart for rye ; a third for summer grain like wheat, oats or buck-wheat ; and a third for lying fallow to rest for a year. If there are one hundred "revision souls" on the list, then each of these plots of land will be made into one hundred strips, and each household will have to cultivate so many of those strips as seems fair to the community, and pay taxes in proportion. The meeting to settle this will be held out of doors, as all other meetings are, and each Head of a Household comes up in turn. Whether out of politeness or as a means of beginning the conversation, he is asked how many shares he will take. Human nature being everywhere much the same,

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he endeavours to take as little burden as possible. "I will take four shares," he says in a tone of magnanimity, and looks round hopefully for approval.

"You are speaking rubbish," says a neighbour. "Why, you have three strong sons."

Dmitri is prepared for this, and endeavours to explain away the difficulty. "My eldest is always in St. Petersburg at harvest-time, and the youngest, too, goes away in summer."

But the rest of the *mir* know that no man leaves the commune without its written consent, for which he has to pay, and he is bound to send home the amount of his taxes. So Dmitri is reminded of this, and another peasant, overcome at the thought of Dmitri's wealth, calls out, "Lay on him six souls," which is the Russian way of saying, "Give him six shares." Dmitri protests, and calls upon his patron saint. Finally the *starosta* says, "Let us give him five shares. What say you, O Orthodox." The "orthodox" cry out, "Yes, five," and Dmitri is dismissed.

In every case there is the same striving after fewer burdens. It is easy to understand, for the taxes are very heavy and the people are so very poor. But when once the *mir* has settled the case no more is said. No one is more subservient to authority than the Russian peasant.

Meetings of the *mir* are continually held, always on Sundays or holidays, of which there are so very many. They settle when the hay is to be mown, and when the fallow land is to be ploughed. "Where is the boy who looks after the sheep?" If he is unsatisfactory the *mir* elects a new one, less given, if possible, to sleep,

Village Customs

but as all Russians seem to be able to sleep at any time and anywhere, a really satisfactory improvement on little Boy Blue is difficult to find. A village watchman may be needed; the *mir* finds him. No domestic affairs are free from interference from the *mir* if it chooses, and should any member become a trouble to the community, it settles what shall be done with him.

CHAPTER IX

VILLAGE CUSTOMS

RUSSIA has a terrific winter; rivers are frozen, and snow covers the land for five months in the year; in the far north for six. But early in April the snow begins to melt, and the mud and filth of a country without real roads cannot be imagined by ourselves. But the mud is just what the peasant needs for the grain which he is anxious to sow as soon as he can. Winter has left its mark on all; there has not been enough food for the family, or enough fodder for the cattle. Often the very thatching of the cottage roofs has been torn down to give some sustenance to the poor cattle and horses before they can be turned out on St. George's Day. They are indeed a sorry sight; thin, lean, ill, and lame they limp out into the fields and receive a sprinkling of holy water from the priest.

The beginning of spring is of such importance to the Russian villages that it is not to be wondered at that old customs of celebrating it are still kept up. In most parts these celebrations begin on March 1, when all the women and children get up very early and go to

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the top of the nearest hill, where, dancing round, they sing:

“Spring, beautiful Spring!
Come, O Spring, with joy!
With great goodness,
With tall flax,
With deep roots,
With abundant corn.”

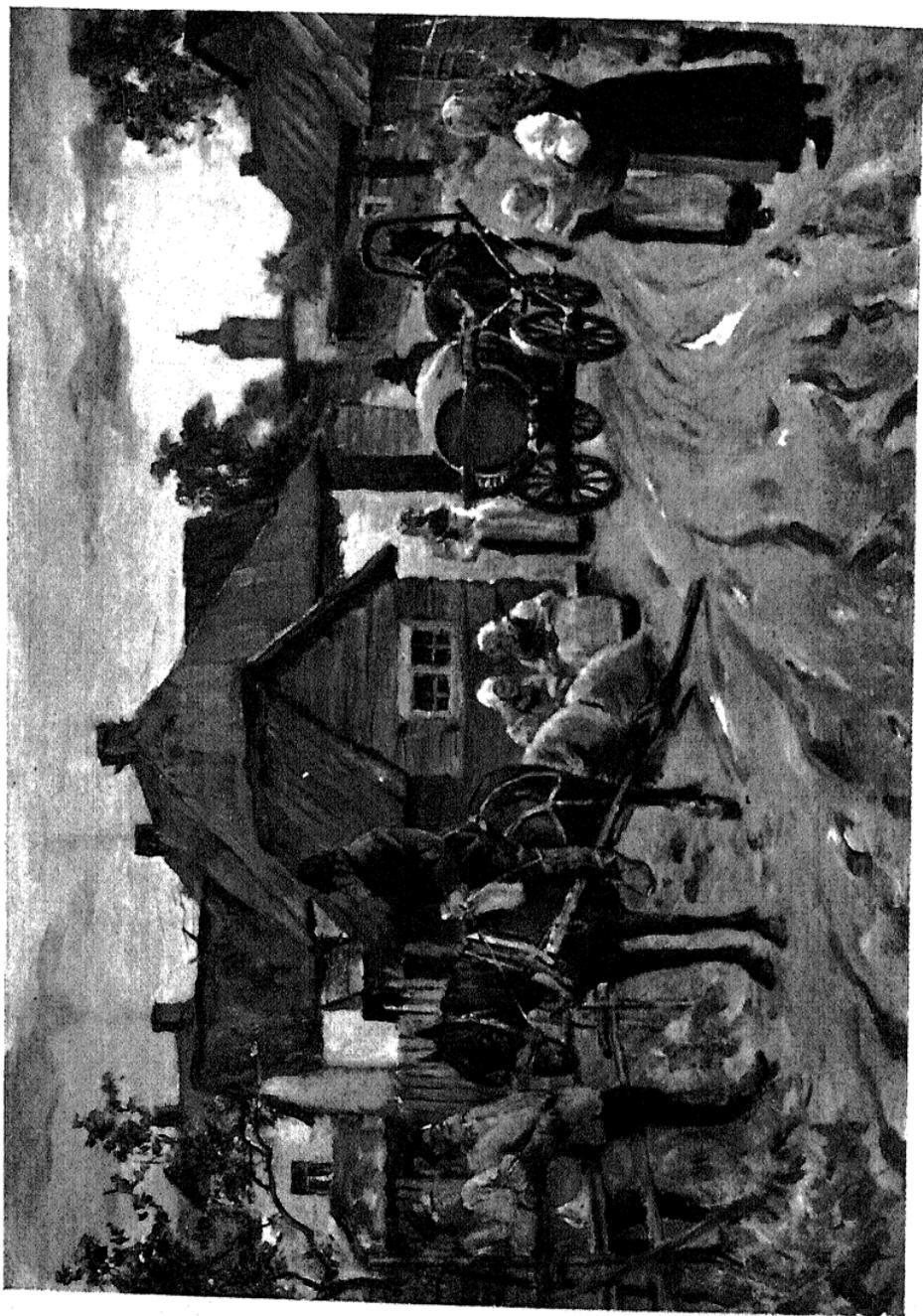
Most of Russia is so flat that there is often no hill, so the top of a cottage or barn is used. Sometimes the girls make a hole in the ice and dance round it singing,

“O healthful spring-tide water,
To us also give health!”

If the ice is melted, they may sing this in the water. People who are ill are carried through the melting snow and sprinkled with the water in the hope of a cure.

But St. George's Day is the great festival, for the Russian St. George did not trouble himself about the slaying of dragons and rescuing of Princesses. He looked after the farmers and kept their cattle and sheep from injury. And so important is he that no cattle are turned out before then, even though the grass be green and the air mild. In the part of Russia called White Russia, the cattle are driven through the morning dew, which is supposed to be specially good on that day. In Little Russia the children go out on that morning very early and roll in it. One of the songs sung to St. George (Yegory) is the following:

“We have gone around the field,
We have called Yegory;
O thou our brave Yegory,
Save our cattle,
In the field and beyond the field,



A RUSSIAN VILLAGE.

Village Customs

In the forest and beyond the forest ;
Under the bright moon,
Under the red sun ;
From the rapacious wolf,
From the cruel bear,
From the cunning beast."

With the beginning of spring the young men who have been away working in the towns return to help their fathers and the rest of the household in the fields, and then there are great festivals. This lasts from Low Sunday till the end of June. The girls go out into the meadows to meet their brothers and friends, and then the return is celebrated by dance and song. A very favourite game is *pleten*, where a number of couples with hands locked together form in line and imitate a fence ; then they sing :

"Be twined together, O fence ! be twined together !
And do thou be coiled up, O golden pipe !
Be folded up, O rustling damask !
From behind the hills the maiden has driven out the ducks.
Come away home, duckie ;
Come away home, Grey one."

Then the leaders join and hold up their hands, while the other couples pass underneath, singing :

"Untwine, O fence, untwine !
Uncoil, O golden pipe !
Unfold, O rustling damask !"

There may be a couple of the *khorovods*, as these dancing circles are called, at opposite ends of the village street, the songs floating pleasantly to the ears of the old people who sit outside their little wooden huts. The younger women on such holidays gather in groups,

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and discuss household matters; the men in other groups compare their flocks and herds.

With the early showers in the spring little children may be heard singing :

“ Pour, O rain !
Over the grandmother's rye,
Over the father's wheat,
Over the girls' flax,
Pour in bucketsful !
Rain, rain, let thyself go
Stronger, quicker !
Warm us young ones.

Sometimes the first rain from a thunderstorm is caught and kept to work cures, for the peasant despises a doctor even if he can get one, and prefers a miracle.

Everything is regulated by saints' days, and the hay-making starts on St. Peter's Day (June 29), when the hay is fetched home in most curious carts. The little lean pony is harnessed with string to two poles, the back ends of which drag along the ground. On to these two poles are tied huge bundles of hay, and this wheelless apology for a cart is dragged and jerked from the common hayfield till the load can be deposited in its owner's shelter. The whole village goes out and mows at the same time, the hayfield being divided into the right number of strips on the spot. They cast lots for the strips and at once mow them.

From Elijah's Day (July 20) till the end of August the peasants have to work hard to get in the harvest—really, two harvests, one of oats and one of rye. Father, mother, sons, and daughters, all lend their aid early and late to get everything in by the end of September, and the seed sown for the following year.

Village Customs

Then, on October 1, comes Harvest Home, beginning, as every festival in Russia does, with prayers and blessings, and ending with drunkenness. A service—long, like all Russian services—is held in the church, and as many as can, put on gay clothes and attend. Then follows a feast in each cottage, whose one large room has received its great annual scrubbing in honour of the invited guests.

In the right-hand corner of the room stands the ikon, and each guest on entering bows to it before saluting the members of the family. The feast begins with a sort of cabbage soup, very oily, but a dish which for many months may often form the principal food of the family. Meat-pies of a special kind have been carefully baked the day before, and there may also be cooked mutton or pork—real luxuries to a people who can seldom afford meat. Beef is only provided in the homes of the richer peasants. For drink there is the home-made beer and the rye brandy, called vodka. It is the last which is the undoing of the Russian, and many of the guests are unable to stagger home, but drop down in the road, and lie there till wakened by the morning sun.

CHAPTER X

A RUSSIAN CHILD

As nothing important or unimportant begins or ends without some rites or ceremonies, it is not to be expected that any Russian is allowed to live many hours without being blessed by the priest. Generally he is sent for before the little one is twenty-four hours old.

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In a comfortable home in one of the larger towns the little baby is well looked after, sometimes by a lady nurse as well as by a nurse of the servant class. Often the latter is an old woman of the people, with all the superstitions of her race, and it does not do for an incautious visitor to utter any remark such as, "What a beautiful child!" for any ejaculation may produce an effect like the evil eye, and the nurse in horror mutters prayers hastily over him to undo the effect of your words. "God bless him, the Lord be with him, the Holy Virgin be about him," the nurse may exclaim; "do you wish the little angel to be bewitched?" and she rocks the *liulka*, in which lies the little baby.

This curious cradle does not stand on the floor, but hangs by a pole and leather straps to a ring in the ceiling; so the nurse has only to give this cradle a gentle touch and it swings up and down, as the old woman chants some old lullaby, just as an English woman would sing "Rock-a-bye, baby," only the Russian chant will be more plaintive and doleful.

The baby is wrapped in a quilted counterpane while in the *liulka*, and when the counterpane is taken off it is a very quaint little object that appears—more like an Egyptian mummy than a living being. No arms or legs are to be seen, and from head to foot the little thing is bound round with two yards or more of cotton or woollen material about eight inches broad, even the forehead being included in the scheme, and the "swaddles" being tied at the feet with tape. For the first week or two the infant wears these "swaddles" always, and after that only when put to sleep, but some of the little ones—presumably those who will have

A Russian Child

character—revolt against this tyranny, and cry as loudly as any English child would the moment they are tied up. So it happens that strong-minded babies leave off the “swaddles” months earlier than their meeker brothers or sisters.

The lady nurse always washes the little one herself, and a Russian baby’s washing is very different from an English one’s. A little mattress stuffed with camel’s hair is put at the bottom of the bath, which contains warm water, and the baby is put into this with a bolster made of a rolled-up towel for its head. It is wrapped up in a little sheet while it lies there, and warm water is poured over it from a ladle.

Until it is six weeks old it is only clothed in various wrappers; after that a boy is provided with a little shirt and a bib, a girl with a sort of cotton frock and cap. A boy’s clothes are tied with blue ribbon, a girl’s with pink.

Within twenty-four hours the priest is summoned, and a discussion at once takes place as to the name. It is very seldom that a family name is selected, for it is considered more pious to choose the name of the saint whose day is near the child’s birthday. It is impossible to be baptized with a name which is not the name of a saint. When Princess Dagmar married the Grand Duke Alexander (afterwards Czar) she had to be baptized into the Græco-Russian church, and Dagmar not being the name of a Russian saint, they chose one of her names that was—namely Maria. Furthermore, one of her father’s names, Theodore, had to be chosen instead of Christian, because there is no St. Christian in the Russian Calendar. So whereas everyone knew her

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before as Dagmar, daughter of Christian, she became known in Russia as Maria Feodorovna—that is, Maria, daughter of Theodore.

The priest dresses himself in his cope and reads out prayers, not in Russian, but in Slavonic, turning towards the sacred ikon. He makes the sign of the cross many times, brings the child's name into some of the prayers, and waves the little body in front of the picture many times before the baby has finished his first service and is carried off to sleep.

No language is so rich in names of endearment as the Russian ; it is curious, however, that there is no word for baby used as we use it, as a name, so the little one is at once called by an altered form of his name. Dmitri will be known as Mitinka, Vasili (William) will at once be Vasinka, which corresponds to Willie. Katherine will become Katinka, and Elizabeth be turned into Liza, Lizinka or Lizotchka.

As soon as the child can speak, the word *matoushka* (mother) becomes *mamasha*, or *manminka*, and the words *batinka*, *batioushka*, *matinka*, *matioushka*, *lapinka*, *lapoushka*, meaning "dear" or "darling," are used constantly by everyone.

As the little child grows old enough to be addressed he adds the name of his father, and the two names are used together in a way utterly unknown to us. Thus Alexis, whose father is Dmitri, will be addressed and referred to as Alexis Dmitrievitch, and his sister Maria will be known as Maria Dmitriovna, even after she is married. The family name is used far less than with us. It sounds rather curious to other ears to hear a father—the good Dmitri, for example—say to his rebellious son,

A Russian Child

“Now, Alexis Dmitrievitch, I intend you to go with me to the church, so be off with you and get ready.”

Although Alexis had received his name when he was twenty-four hours old, and had been called Aleoshinka, or Aleoushka, ever since by the many morning visitors who had called to see the little man and take coffee and buns with his mother, his real christening has not yet taken place.

That ceremony occurs within six weeks, and the large font is brought from the church and placed on a special carpet in front of the ikon in one of the large rooms.

As a rule a child has both a godfather and god-mother, and the godfather must provide Alexis with a little gold cross to hang round his neck by a blue ribbon : Alexis' little sister has a pink ribbon to hers. The font is filled with warm water, and has three tapers placed on its rim ; the priest takes the babe—not dressed, but wrapped up in various things, with its best silk quilt on the top—and crosses it nine times. Then he blows several times on its face, commanding the devil and all his army to depart from it. After long prayers, with many repetitions, the parents have to leave the room, even if they are the highest in the land. Then the tapers are lighted, the water in the font is blest, and the priest picks out the babe from its wrappings, and plunges it right under the water, face downwards, three times. Alexis signifies his disapproval of this performance in a way common to all children.

The little shirt and coat are put on by the priest, but the ceremony is by no means over. With prayers

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the child is crossed in a dozen places with a feather dipped in holy oil, and carried many times by priest and godparents round the font.

After a long litany the little one's hair is snipped off in four different places at the top of its head with a small pair of scissors, thus forming a cross. The godfather pinches the morsels of down together with a bit of wax from his taper, and throws it into the font. If the little pellet sinks, it is considered a sign that the child will soon die. At the end of it all the baby is carried to its mother, thence to the nursery; there it is put into warm wrappers, and so to its *liulka*. Then the poor tired little Aleoshinka sleeps for many hours, while his elders are drinking his health in champagne, and leaving silver roubles under the glass for the lady nurse.

In a country town all the peasants will come in for miles round on a Sunday morning, and bring their babies to be baptized. There are no seats in the church, so while the parents themselves are out marketing, their *baboushkas* (a sort of woman quack doctor who acts as nurse) sit on the floor, and talk to each other and their babies while the service proceeds. The service, however, goes on the same as though those forty babies were not there, and in due course the font is moved to its place, the forty pairs of sponsors grouped half round it, and the forty *baboushkas* placed behind holding their babies—those with boys on one side, those with girls on the other.

Unless the parents are much more learned than the peasants usually are, they will have no knowledge of the name their child is to have till he is



RUSSIAN PEASANT CHILDREN.

A Russian Child

brought to them afterwards, for the priest looks into the calendar and selects one name for all the boys and one for all the girls. If the day happens to be on or near November 6, there may be twenty Pauls and twenty Claudias turned out at once; and if there happens to be another Paul in the family already, well, a change in the nickname will do. Forty times must the priest blow on the little faces, then one hundred and twenty times on brow and other parts to send out the devil. This must be a strain on his breath, but that is nothing to what his muscles must suffer as he dips the forty little creatures three times each into the water. Forty gasping children throw back their forty little heads in succession; forty pairs of arms are stretched out towards the font; forty pairs of eyes open in astonishment, and forty mouths testify to the strength of the lungs within.

CHAPTER XI

A RUSSIAN CHILD (*continued*)

As Alexis and his little sister, Marie, grow up they will first be taught by a governess at home, perhaps a French governess. They will learn to read and write Russian, and a hard task they find it. Our twenty-six letters give trouble enough, but in Russian there are thirty-six of them to be mastered. Some of the letters look somewhat like ours, but they do not stand for the same sounds. For instance, *P* is sounded like our *R*, *H* like our *N*, *C* like *S*, and *W* like *E*.

Here is a slip from a Russian calendar, giving the

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date corresponding to our June 4, as shown by the lower figures.

1910	МАЙ	31 день	1910	MAY	31 days
Мученица Евдокия	22	Княжна Евдокия Дурова вспом. Мар. Александров.	The Martyr St. Vasilii (St. William)	22	On this day died the Empress Marie Alexandrovna (1880)
142	4	221	142	4	223
	Суббота			Saturday	

Leonti, the priest's son, has a still harder task, for he must not only read Russian, but Slavonic—the old original language—too, and spelling with Slavonic letters will cause many a tear to trickle down Leonti's cheek. The sons of priests are always intended to be priests or something connected with the Church, and hence from their earliest years they are taught to accustom themselves to Church rites and ceremonies. Leonti when quite small will solemnly christen his sister's doll Euphemia, and should the unhappy Euphemia meet with early destruction by being left too long on the stove, he will bury her with equal satisfaction to himself and his parents, who watch the budding priest, or "pope," as he is called, with keen interest.

Both Alexis and Leonti will be glad to get away from their reading-books and their tables to play with their toys, or they will join some other boys at *tyopki*. Alexis will try to throw his metal disc so that it falls into a hole in the ground, and Leonti will follow; if it

A Russian Child

falls in, he scores one, and if it fails, he awaits his next turn, each striving to be the first to make the winning twenty points.

They may hurry to the public gardens, where they are sure of a swing or a seesaw. There is a pole, too, with a number of ropes fixed at the top which they eye with keen interest, and as soon as he sees a rope hanging loose Leonti runs to get it as fast as his little legs will carry him. He puts his head through the loop at the end and draws it down until he can sit in it, his hands holding the rope above ; then with a kick he sends himself into the outer ring of swinging boys.

Alexis at the age of six or so may be sent to a preparatory class, and he will be seen trudging along in summer in his holland tunic and red shirt with a neat leather strap round his waist.

He finds plenty of amusement in looking at the pictures which are painted all over the shops to show those who cannot read what is sold within. The baker's shop is one of his favourites. The huge rolls and loaves of bread may interest his elders, but it is the picture of the cake, cut to show the thousands of currants, that attracts his eye, and he has some compensation in the thought that if he cannot have the cake a few kopecks will buy some of the French pastry or chocolates, all pictured in strong colours on the lintels of the doors.

Next door the picture of a giant butcher handing over a ruddy joint to an equally giant customer contrasts with the neighbouring jeweller, who shows mighty generals and nobles blazing with stars, orders and crosses, and holding up hands covered with rings.

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On the wall above may be seen great portraits of fiddles, flutes, mouth-organs and *balalikas*—the last a kind of guitar, and almost the Russian national instrument—while from the top floor hang coloured canvases showing sausages and smoked hams, coats, caps and shoes.

The one picture which makes Alexis shudder is that of the dentist barber, not so much because of the picture of the men being shaved, or the fainting lady having her arm cut, but because of the border, full of leeches, dentist's instruments, and drawn teeth. These revive unhappy memories in Alexis' mind, and he hurries past or gazes instead at the yellow and white gabled houses opposite.

There is one day in the year which is a great day to the little boy. It is his name's day; this is not his birthday, but the day of the saint after which he is named. As he is called Alexis, his name's day, like that of all other little boys called Alexis, is perhaps February 12/25, as that is one of the days of Alexis, or it may be March 17/30, or October 5/18, Alexis being honoured on several days.

Of course, the day begins with a service in the church. It is the service of "Everlasting Remembrance" which is held on so many occasions. On the day of Alexis, the saint and all his namesakes are prayed for to be held in everlasting remembrance, and everyone present at the service can hand to the priest a little book of names dear to the owner, and these names the priest reads over and includes in his prayer. Sometimes many people hand up their remembrance books—with, of course, suitable fees—and the priest hurries through them so fast that no one can understand

A Russian Child

a word. So common is this particular service that even the christening of an engine in a common spinning factory has been made the occasion for a service for holding the founder of the firm in everlasting remembrance.

All Alexis' relatives give him presents on his name's day. His toys are not very varied: they are generally of carved wood, a horse with a wagging head, or two peasants hammering an anvil by turns in time to the swing of a wooden bob. A spade and bucket will be sure to find a place among his gifts, and perhaps a box of gardening tools, with which he will amuse himself in the sandy soil. On his last name's day his uncle gave him a toy concertina, and he has since then divided his attention between that and diablo. Every Russian child learns to play on a concertina, or a mouth-organ, and in the villages some of the peasants become quite fair performers. It is quite a common sight to see a couple of children in the town playing on some of these instruments to earn a few kopecks.

There is, of course, a feast on everyone's name's day, and if Alexis does not drink vodka and other spirits before and after the meal, his elders do. But he has his share of *kvas*, or thin beer, for it takes the place of water in the big jugs, and the *shitshee*, or national cabbage soup, is made with it. On a feast day cream will be put into the soup to enrich it, after the cabbage, butter, barley meal, and meat, have all boiled in the *kvas*. The *kvas* in rich houses is made fresh every day—in fact, a servant is often kept specially to brew this, for Russians keep many servants, and each servant will only do certain work. The dishes eaten will differ according to the time of year and day of the

Russia

week, for religion has much to say on the subject of what may be eaten or not eaten at certain times.

Seldom will roast meat be seen; it will almost certainly be boiled or pickled, and many kinds of *pirogas*, or little pies, will be served. Some will contain chopped meat, others fish, mushrooms, vegetables or fruits, for the Russians like to have as little trouble in biting things as possible, and prefer their food to almost melt in their mouths.

Everyone will sit down to the meal together at a given signal, and everyone will rise together. No speech or joke accompanies a toast, everyone rises silently, bows and clinks his neighbour's—but no one else's—glass with his own, and silently reseats himself. The dinner will end with dessert, which will be taken in another room.

It is a great event when Alexis and Marie are ready to go to their grammar-schools, or gymnasia, as they are called. So it is celebrated by a special service—a *moleben*—held by the priest in front of the ikon. The Russian boy is used to these services, and so shows no annoyance when one is held at the beginning of every new term, or at the commencement of the holidays.

At the gymnasium he learns very much the same as an English public schoolboy, but more of the history and geography of other countries. It does not strike him as curious that every boy in his district for hundreds of miles, whatever grammar-school he attends, uses the same books, for this is all settled by some official, and not by any schoolmaster. By making every boy use only a carefully prepared history book, it is hoped that the boys may never learn that the Czar and Government

A Russian Child

are, or ever have been, anything but perfect. Even Ivan the Terrible must not be painted black, though he murdered his own son.

Alexis works very hard, but he plays no cricket or football ; real games are unknown to him, and still less to his sister Marie, to whom hockey or lacrosse would probably seem terrifying. As he gets older his work will have one object—he wants to use his learning for the good of his country, for every pure Russian is a politician. Although he knows more, much more, when he leaves school than an English boy, he cannot hold his own in the world like a boy from Eton or Harrow.

No people are so delightful for their knowledge, their speech, and their manners, as the cultured Russians, but the mass of people live in the darkest ignorance. In the towns there are schools for the poor, and in some of the large villages too, but often there is no school within hundreds of miles of small villages. The Government pretends that it wants all the children to be educated, but should anyone dare to open a school without permission he is punished with imprisonment.

Whenever there is any agitation to be quelled in a district the Cossacks shut up the school first, and ill-use, perhaps flog, the unfortunate schoolmaster. Catherine II. owned to the truth when she told a governor of Moscow that she only established schools in order to keep up appearances before the eyes of Europe, but she had no wish that the people should make use of them, as, if they did, that would be the end of Czars and Governors.

There is one time of great festivity when all schools are closed, and that is known as the “butter week.”

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Then Alexis and Marie have a splendid time for eight days, and during that time do not think—even if their elders do—of the great fast of seven weeks which will follow it. They eat so much butter during this festival, because it is forbidden later, that they would become rounder and rounder in their already round faces were it not for their exertions out of doors. Every morning they make their breakfast of a rich kind of pancake cooked in butter, and sometimes spread with caviare. Milk and eggs, too, they will have, and if their mother is more lavish with the cream than is for the good of their health, she excuses herself with the reflection that during the seven weeks to follow they will have neither flesh nor fowl, and neither milk, eggs, nor sugar. She is willing to obey the order of the Church, and give them only fish and vegetables later, but for this week, at any rate, they must have all the rich things that boy or girl can desire.

“Butter week” comes during Russia’s long winter, and as soon as breakfast is over Alexis and Marie, with pockets well provided with kopecks, hurry to the endless amusements provided out of doors. A huge field of snow or a frozen sheet of water has been set apart for the fair, and off run the children to the centre, and give up some of their little coins in return for a swing, a turn on a roundabout, or a ride on an elastic seesaw. They will not be alone at these *katsheli*, for they are enjoyed by old and young, rich and poor.

“Let us go to the ice-mountain now,” says Marie; and Alexis fetches two little sledges made of wood, or perhaps of ice, shaped like ships, which he drags along by a string. Off run the children to the stairs at the back



RUSSIAN SERVANT IN HER HOLIDAY DRESS OF LITTLE RUSSIA. *Page 53.*

A Russian Child

of a wooden scaffold, and mount to a little gallery some thirty feet high. In front of them is a steep slope made of blocks of ice which have been built up between wooden planks. Workmen have chipped the corners off the blocks, and poured water down till the whole has become a solid mass with a smooth frozen surface.

“You go first,” says Marie, and Alexis, holding the string of his sledge in his hand, sits on the straw at the bottom, and whizzes off down the slippery slope, till Marie sees his red scarf floating out behind, far below her, before she is ready to start. Then she too, with body thrown far back, cuts through the rushing air, with a speed that carries her half a mile along the gentle base and level slide beyond. From the ice-mountain opposite comes another band of children and grown-ups, but each passes each on the level slide with no power of recognition, though the two long slides on the ground are only separated by a bank of snow.

The breathless children go off with their little sledges dragging behind, and after another run down, “Tea,” says Marie, “Nuts,” says Alexis, and they go to the nearest row of wooden booths, which have been, as it were, planted in the ice, and whose supporting poles are held in its freezing grip. At the very first one there is a steaming samovar, with a little teapot ready at the top.

“Your obedient servant, sir,” says the vendor, “what is your pleasure? Ready directly. How cold it is! One wants something to drink. How? You will take sugar and lemon? What, no lemon? then cream ;” and he pours out two glasses of tea for the thirsty children.

He continues his invitation to others.

“Who will take my most delicious tea? See here it

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is, yellow as gold. How superb! how I should like to drink it myself! What, nothing? I am very, very sorry." This last to one who passes unheeding to another booth. But, in truth, all the tea-sellers do a good trade.

The nut-seller cries his wares at the next booth. "What will you take, excellency?" he says to one man. "Hazel nuts? Spanish nuts? Italian nuts? You like them mixed, perhaps? Come, my lovely maiden, will you taste my ruddy nuts, brown as your hair—do they not make your mouth water?" and so on, as the children hurry away with a shovelful of his mixture. They and everyone else eat them as they move about, and the ground presents a sad litter of broken nutshells.

Many are the allurements of the booths during the week, and fast go the kopecks from their pockets. Here some bonbons tempt them, there a conjurer, then a performing bear. On the last day excitement is at its greatest height. "Down rush the sledges from the ice-mountain, till the ice glows again, the swings are at full flight, the bells of the little wooden horses in the roundabouts tingle without ceasing, the men announce from hour to hour how long the carnival has to last; nimbly rolls his lesson off the tongue of him who shows the lions and the boa-constrictor, that he may despatch one set of customers and get as many more as possible. All seem eager to drain the last drop in the cup of joy, until the hour of midnight strikes, and proclaims the beginning of the fast." Every dancer is brought to a sudden halt, the roundabout is brought to rest with a jerk, the swings stop, the ice-mountain is deserted, and a multitude of old and young toil homewards through the snow, tired

Christmas Eve

and weary, ready to rest, and knowing that for them and for all the millions in that great country there will be no more enjoyment for seven weeks.

CHAPTER XII

CHRISTMAS EVE

EVERY English boy or girl wakes up on Christmas morning with a feeling of joyful expectation, for has not St. Nicholas been busy? and, as we all know, St. Nicholas is specially fond of children. We know how a wicked butcher threw three little boys into his salting tub to pickle them into bacon, and how St. Nicholas went to his house and asked for some. The frightened butcher went into the cellar, followed by the saint, who there and then called the children by name, so that the three little pickles came alive out of the tub, and the butcher perished in their stead. Of course, after this St. Nicholas is the great friend of children, and he is all the same even though they have shortened his name into Santa Claus.

In Russia it is not Christmas Day (which, we must remember, comes thirteen days after ours), but Christmas Eve, that is the great day, only Santa Claus does not begin his work so early. He waits till the evening. Let us see how Irina Petrovna spends her Christmas Eve in a country house.

She wakes at seven o'clock, but the room is dark, because there are double shutters to keep out the great cold.

Presently Mashinka, the old servant and nurse, enters

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in her short, dark blue skirt and large white apron, with a white handkerchief on her smooth hair, and opens the outer shutters. As a rule she has all sorts of gossip to tell at this time : wolves have been into the courtyard and fought the watch-dogs during the night, or there has been a heavy fall of snow, so that Ivan Ivanovitch has had to help to cut a new path from the house to the kitchens and the stables and the farm-buildings just behind. Or Dmitri Michaelovitch moved into his new house with a cock and hen, and at dawn the cock refused to crow, so all the family are fearing the misfortune which is sure to follow.

But this morning she has no such news to give ; she moves silently and slowly, for it is a fast day.

Irina jumps up, and in a few minutes has dressed and put on her warm red plaid frock. She walks downstairs ; at other times she would run or jump, but to-day all is so silent and still that the little girl feels oppressed.

The dining-room is desolate, with its breakfastless table. Generally it looks so cosy, for Irina's father, Peter Vassilivitch, is well-to-do. He owns land, and, what is rare in Russian landlords, looks after it well himself. As a rule, they, like other well-to-do people, spend this time in St. Petersburg ; but this year they have come away to their country house, because Andrei the steward wanted to know about some plans for new stables and barns.

Perhaps that is why Irina finds a farmer's manual on a side-table and a couple of calendars beside it. At any rate everything is depressing, and upstairs her father and mother are praying in their rooms.

In the hall she puts on a long fur coat with a big

Christmas Eve

warm collar coming right above the ears ; then follows the fur cap which comes well down over her forehead. She runs across the rough, snow-covered drive, past the long seesaw which every country house possesses, and then amongst the trees.

There is no well-kept park round a Russian country house, no neatly clipped hedge to bound it, and no well-trimmed drive leading to the main road, so she quickly gets into the thick forest, where the fairy-like branches of the birch-trees brush against her as she passes.

In a short time she comes to a frozen river, and finds two boy friends busy with a little sledge. They, too, are in fur coats and caps. Forgetting all about fast days and solemn services, she gets into the sledge, and, holding the red scarves of the boys, she drives her human and willing horses far over the snow-covered ice. It is far from St. Petersburg, perhaps two thousand miles, and as they run they get through the forest and on to the steppes. No big trees are to be seen ahead, but bending willows mark the curves of the winding stream. After a couple of hours Irina sees one of her father's sheepfolds—a long, low thatched building all white with snow, and out comes the shepherd with his dogs. Inside the building the sheep are standing or lying close together, creeping closer to a stack of wool at one end of the shed as they retreat before the new-comers. There are no chairs, so the shepherd gives the children rough heaps of clean straw to sit on. Then, forgetting that it is a fast day, the kind-hearted shepherd reaches a piece of rye bread from a shelf below the tiny square window, and gives it to them with a cup of goat's milk. It is rough

Russia

fare for the children, but the dark brown bread, black crust and all, vanish quickly. Then they rest, and the shepherd tells them stories while they stroke the half-tamed sheep. He cannot read, this shepherd, but he has always known those stories, he heard them so often from his mother and grandmother, and everyone knows them.

What shall he tell them? "A *skazka*" (fairy story), they say. Shall it be the tale of the Water Snake? No! Irina does not like the Water Snake, it is so sad; she would rather hear about Vasilissa and her wonderful doll; so the peasant tells them the *skazka* which little boys and girls have loved to hear in Russia as long as English children have known about Cinderella.

CHAPTER XIII

THE STORY OF VASILISSA

IN a certain kingdom there lived a merchant. Twelve years did he live as a married man, but he had only one child, Vasilissa the Fair.

When her mother died, the girl was eight years old. And on her death-bed the merchant's wife called her little daughter to her, took out from under the bed-clothes a doll, gave it to her, and said: "Listen, Vasilissa, dear; remember and obey these last words of mine. I am going to die. And now, together with my parental blessing, I bequeath to you this doll. Keep it always by you, and never show it to anybody; and whenever any misfortune comes upon you, give the doll food and ask its advice. When it has fed, it will

The Story of Vasilissa

tell you a cure for your troubles." Then the mother kissed her child and died.

After his wife's death, the merchant mourned for her a befitting time, and then began to consider about marrying again. He was a man of means. It wasn't a question with him of girls (with dowries); more than all others, a certain widow took his fancy. She was middle-aged, and had a couple of daughters of her own, just about the same age as Vasilissa. She must needs be both a good housekeeper and an experienced mother.

Well, the merchant married the widow, but he had deceived himself, for he did not find in her a kind mother for his Vasilissa. Vasilissa was the prettiest girl in all the village, but her stepmother and step-sisters were jealous of her beauty, and tormented her with every possible sort of toil, in order that she might grow thin from over-work, and be tanned by the sun and the wind. Her life was made a burden to her. Vasilissa bore everything with resignation, and every day grew plumper and prettier, while the stepmother and her daughters lost flesh and fell off in appearance from the effects of their own spite, notwithstanding that they always sat with folded hands like fine ladies.

But how did that come about? Why, it was her doll that helped Vasilissa. If it hadn't been for it, however could the girl have got through all her work? And therefore it was that Vasilissa would never eat all her share of a meal, but always kept the most delicate morsel for her doll; and at night, when all were at rest, she would shut herself up in the narrow chamber in which she slept, and feast her doll, saying the while:

"There, dolly, feed; help me in my need. I live

Russia

in my father's house, but never know what pleasure is ; my evil stepmother tries to drive me out of the white world. Teach me how to keep alive and what I ought to do."

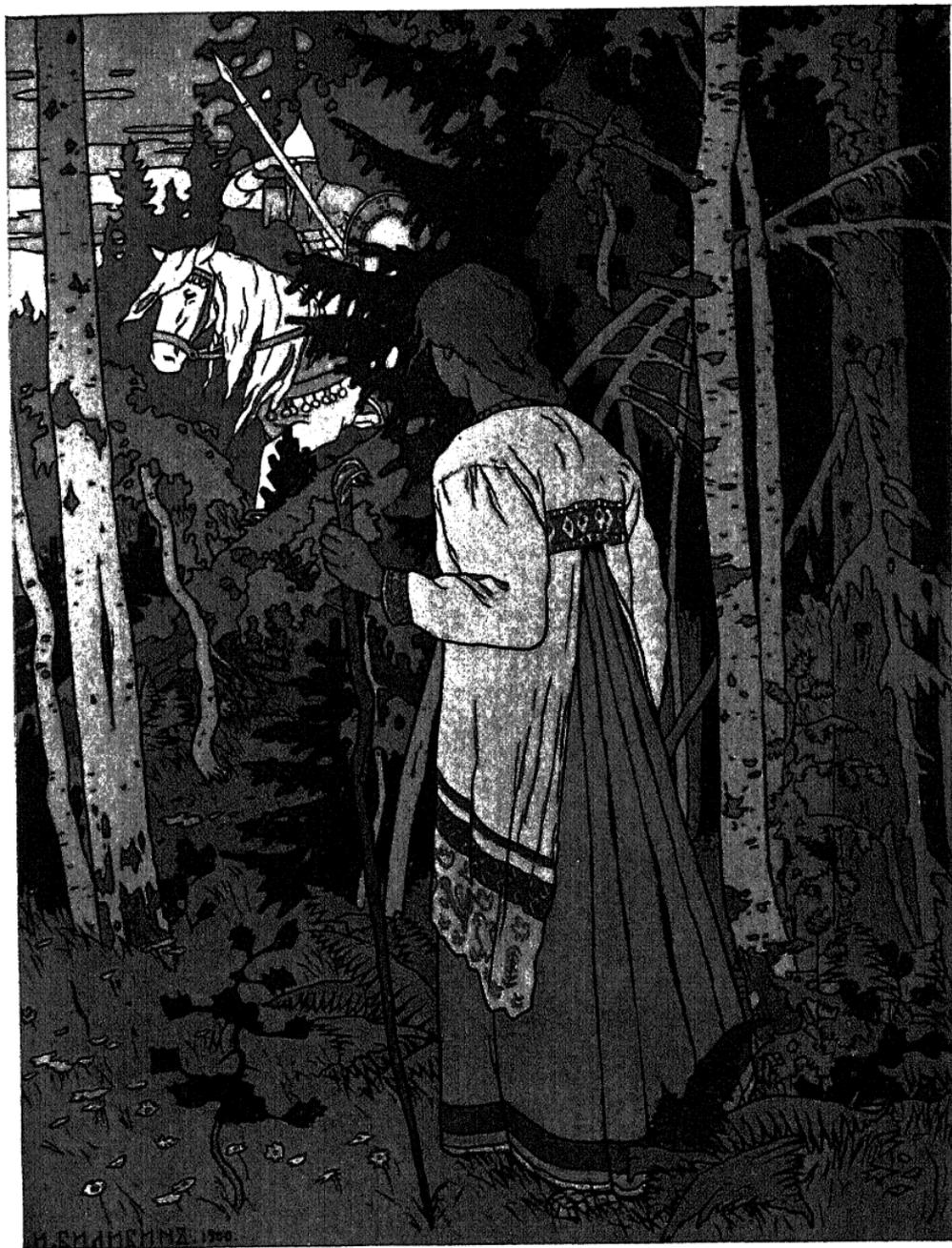
Then the doll would eat, and afterwards give her advice, and comfort her in her sorrow, and next day it would do all Vasilissa's work for her. She had only to take her ease in a shady place and pluck flowers, and yet all her work was done in good time ; the beds were weeded, and the pails were filled, and the cabbages were watered, and the stove was heated. Moreover, the doll showed Vasilissa herbs which prevented her from getting sunburnt. Happily did she and her doll live together.

Several years went by. Vasilissa grew up and became old enough to be married. All the marriageable young men in the town sent to make an offer to Vasilissa ; at her stepmother's daughters not a soul would so much as look. Her stepmother grew even more savage than before, and replied to every suitor :

"We won't let the younger marry before her elders!" And after the suitors had been packed off, she used to beat Vasilissa by way of wreaking her spite.

Well, it happened one day that the merchant had to go away from home on business for a long time. Thereupon the stepmother went to live in another house ; and near that house was a dense forest, and in a clearing in that forest there stood a hut, and in the hut there lived a Baba-Yaga. She never let anyone come near her dwelling, and she ate up people like so many chickens.

Having moved into the new abode, the merchant's wife kept sending her hated Vasilissa into the forest on



VASILISSA ON HER WAY TO THE BABA-YAGA. Page 00.

The Story of Vasilissa

one pretence or another. But the girl always got home safe and sound ; the doll used to show her the way, and never let her go near the Baba-Yaga's dwelling.

The autumn season arrived. One evening the step-mother gave out their work to the three girls ; one she set to lace-making, another to knitting socks, and the third, Vasilissa, to weaving ; and each of them had her allotted amount to do. By-and-by she put out the lights in the house, leaving only one candle alight, where the girls were working, and then she went to bed. The girls worked and worked. Presently the candle wanted snuffing. One of the stepdaughters took the snuffers, as if she were going to trim the wick, but instead of doing so, in obedience to her mother's orders she snuffed the candle out, pretending to do so by accident.

“What shall we do now ?” said the girls ; “there isn't a spark of fire in the house, and our tasks are not yet done. We must go to the Baba-Yaga's for a light !” “My pins give me light enough,” said the one who was making lace. “I shan't go.” “And I shan't go, either,” said the one who was knitting socks ; “my knitting-needles give me light enough.”

“Vasilissa, you must go for the light,” they both cried out together ; “be off to the Baba-Yaga's !” And they pushed Vasilissa out of the room.

Vasilissa went into her little closet, set before the doll a supper which she had provided beforehand, and said :

“Now, dolly, feed, and listen to my need ! I'm sent to the Baba-Yaga's for a light. The Baba-Yaga will eat me !”

The doll fed, and its eyes began to glow just like a couple of candles. “Never fear, Vasilissa dear !” it said ;

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“go where you’re sent. Only take care to keep me always by you. As long as I’m with you, no harm will come to you at the Baba-Yaga’s.”

So Vasilissa got ready, put her doll in her pocket, crossed herself, and went out into the thick forest.

As she walks, she trembles. Suddenly a horseman gallops by. He is white, and he is dressed in white; under him is a white horse, and the trappings of the horse are white—and the day begins to break. She goes a little farther, and a second rider gallops by. He is red, dressed in red, and sitting on a red horse—and the sun rises.

Vasilissa went on walking all night and all next day. It was only towards the evening that she reached the clearing on which stood the dwelling of the Baba-Yaga. The fence around it was made of dead men’s bones: on the top of the fence were stuck human skulls, with eyes in them; instead of uprights at the gates were men’s legs; instead of bolts were arms; instead of a lock was a mouth with sharp teeth.

Vasilissa was frightened out of her wits, and stood still, as if rooted to the ground.

Suddenly there rode past another horseman. He was black, dressed all in black, and on a black horse. He galloped up to the Baba-Yaga’s gate and disappeared, just as if he had sunk through the ground—and night fell. But the darkness did not last long. The eyes of all the skulls on the fence began to shine, and the whole clearing became as bright as if it had been mid-day. Vasilissa shuddered with fear, but stopped where she was, not knowing which way to run.

Soon there was heard in the forest a terrible roar.

The Story of Vasilissa

The trees cracked, the dry leaves rustled ; out of the forest came the Baba-Yaga riding in a mortar, urging it on with a pestle, sweeping away her traces with a broom. Up she drove to the gate, stopped short, and sniffing the air around her, cried :

“ Faugh, faugh! I smell Russian flesh! Who’s there?”

Vasilissa went up to the hag in a terrible fright, bowed low before her, and said :

“ It’s me, granny. My stepsisters have sent me to you for a light.”

“ Very good,” said the Baba-Yaga ; “ I know them. If you’ll stop awhile with me first, and do some work for me, I’ll give you a light. But if you won’t, I’ll eat you !”

Then she turned to the gates, and cried:

“ Ho, thou firm fence of mine, be thou divided! And ye wide gates of mine, do ye fly open !”

The gates opened and the Baba-Yaga drove in, whistling as she went, and after her followed Vasilissa ; and then everything shut to again. When they entered the sitting-room, the Baba-Yaga stretched herself out at full length, and said to Vasilissa :

“ Fetch out what there is in the oven ; I’m hungry!”

Vasilissa lighted a splinter at one of the skulls which were on the fence, and began fetching meat from the oven, and setting it before the Baba-Yaga ; and meat enough had been provided for a dozen people. Then she fetched from the cellar *kvas*, mead, beer, and wine. The hag ate up everything, drank up everything. All she left for Vasilissa was a few scraps—a crust of bread and a morsel of sucking-pig. Then the Baba-Yaga lay down to sleep, saying :

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“When I go out to-morrow morning, mind you cleanse the courtyard, sweep the room, cook the dinner, and get the linen ready. Then go to the corn-bin, take out four quarters of wheat, and clear it of other seed. And mind you have it all done—if you don’t I shall eat you !”

After giving these orders the Baba-Yaga began to snore. But Vasilissa set the remnants of the hag’s supper before the doll, burst into tears, and said :

“Now, dolly, feed ; listen to my need ! The Baba-Yaga has set me a heavy task, and threatens to eat me if I don’t do it all. Do help me !”

The doll replied :

“Never fear, Vasilissa the Fair ! Sup, say your prayers, and go to bed. The morning is wiser than the evening.”

Vasilissa awoke very early, but the Baba-Yaga was already up. She looked out of the window. The light in the skulls’ eyes was going out. All of a sudden there appeared the white horseman, and all was light. The Baba-Yaga went out into the courtyard and whistled—before her appeared a mortar with a pestle and a broom. The red horseman appeared—the sun rose. The Baba-Yaga seated herself in the mortar and drove out of the courtyard, shooting herself along with a pestle, sweeping away her traces with a broom.

Vasilissa was left alone, so she examined the Baba-Yaga’s house, wondered at the abundance there was in everything, and remained lost in thought as to which work she ought to take first. She looked up ; all her work was done already. The doll had cleared the wheat to the very last grain.

The Story of Vasilissa

“Ah, my preserver!” cried Vasilissa, “you’ve saved me from danger.”

“All you have to do now is to cook the dinner,” answered the doll, slipping into Vasilissa’s pocket. “Cook away, in God’s name, and then take some rest for your health’s sake.”

Towards evening Vasilissa got the table ready and awaited the Baba-Yaga. It began to grow dusky ; the black rider appeared for a moment at the gate, and all grew dark. Only the eyes of the skulls sent forth their light. The trees began to crack, the leaves began to rustle, up drove the Baba-Yaga. Vasilissa went out to meet her.

“Is everything done?” asks the Yaga.

“Please to look for yourself, granny!” says Vasilissa.

The Baba-Yaga examined everything, was vexed that there was nothing to be angry about, and said :

“Well, well ! Very good !”

Afterwards she cried :

“My trusty servants, zealous friends, grind this my wheat !”

There appeared three pairs of hands, which gathered up the wheat, and carried it out of sight. The Baba-Yaga supped, went to bed, and again gave her orders to Vasilissa :

“Do just the same to-morrow as to-day ; only besides that take out of the bin the poppy-seed that is there, and clean the earth off it grain by grain. Someone or other, you see, has mixed a lot of earth with it out of spite.”

Having said this, the hag turned to the wall and began to snore, and Vasilissa took to feeding her doll.

Russia

The doll fed, and then said to her what it had said the day before :

“Pray to God, and go to sleep. The morning is wiser than the evening. All shall be done, Vasilissa dear.”

The next morning the Baba-Yaga again drove out of the courtyard in her mortar, and Vasilissa and her doll immediately did all the work. The hag returned, looked at everything, and cried : “My trusty servants, zealous friends, press forth oil from the poppy-seed !”

Three pairs of hands appeared, gathered up the poppy-seed, and bore it out of sight. The Baba-Yaga sat down to dinner. She ate, but Vasilissa stood silently by.

“Why don't you speak to me ?” said the Baba-Yaga. “There you stand like a dumb creature.”

“I didn't dare,” answered Vasilissa, “but if you give me leave, I should like to ask you about something.”

“Ask away, only it isn't every question that brings good. Get much to know, and old soon you'll grow.”

“I only want to ask you, granny, about something I saw. As I was coming here, I was passed by one riding on a white horse ; he was white himself, and dressed in white. Who was he ?”

“That was my bright Day !” answered the Baba-Yaga.

“Afterwards there passed me another rider, on a red horse ; red himself, and all in red clothes. Who was he ?”

“That was my red Sun !” answered the Baba-Yaga.

“And who may be the black rider, granny, who passed by me just at your gate ?”

“That was my dark Night ; they are all trusty servants of mine.”

The Story of Vasilissa

Vasilissa thought of the three pairs of hands, but held her peace.

“Why don’t you go on asking?” said the Baba-Yaga.

“That’s enough for me, granny. You said yourself, ‘Get too much to know, old you’ll grow.’”

“It’s just as well,” said the Baba-Yaga, “that you’ve only asked about what you saw out of doors, not indoors! In my house I hate having dirt carried out of doors;* and as to over-inquisitive people—well, I eat them. Now I’ll ask you something. “How is it you manage to do the work I set you to do?”

“My mother’s blessing assists me,” replied Vasilissa.

“Eh! Eh! What’s that? Get along out of my house, you bless’d daughter. I don’t want bless’d people.”

She dragged Vasilissa out of the room, pushed her outside the gates, took one of the skulls with blazing eyes from the fence, stuck it on a stick, gave it to her, and said:

“Lay hold of that. It’s a light you can take to your stepsisters. That’s what they sent you here for, I believe.”

Home went Vasilissa at a run, lit by the skull, which went out only at the approach of the dawn; and at last, on the evening of the second day, she reached home. When she came to the gate, she was going to throw away the skull.

“Surely,” thinks she, “they can’t be still in want of a light at home.”

But suddenly a hollow voice issued from the skull,

* Equivalent to saying, “She liked to wash her dirty linen at home.”

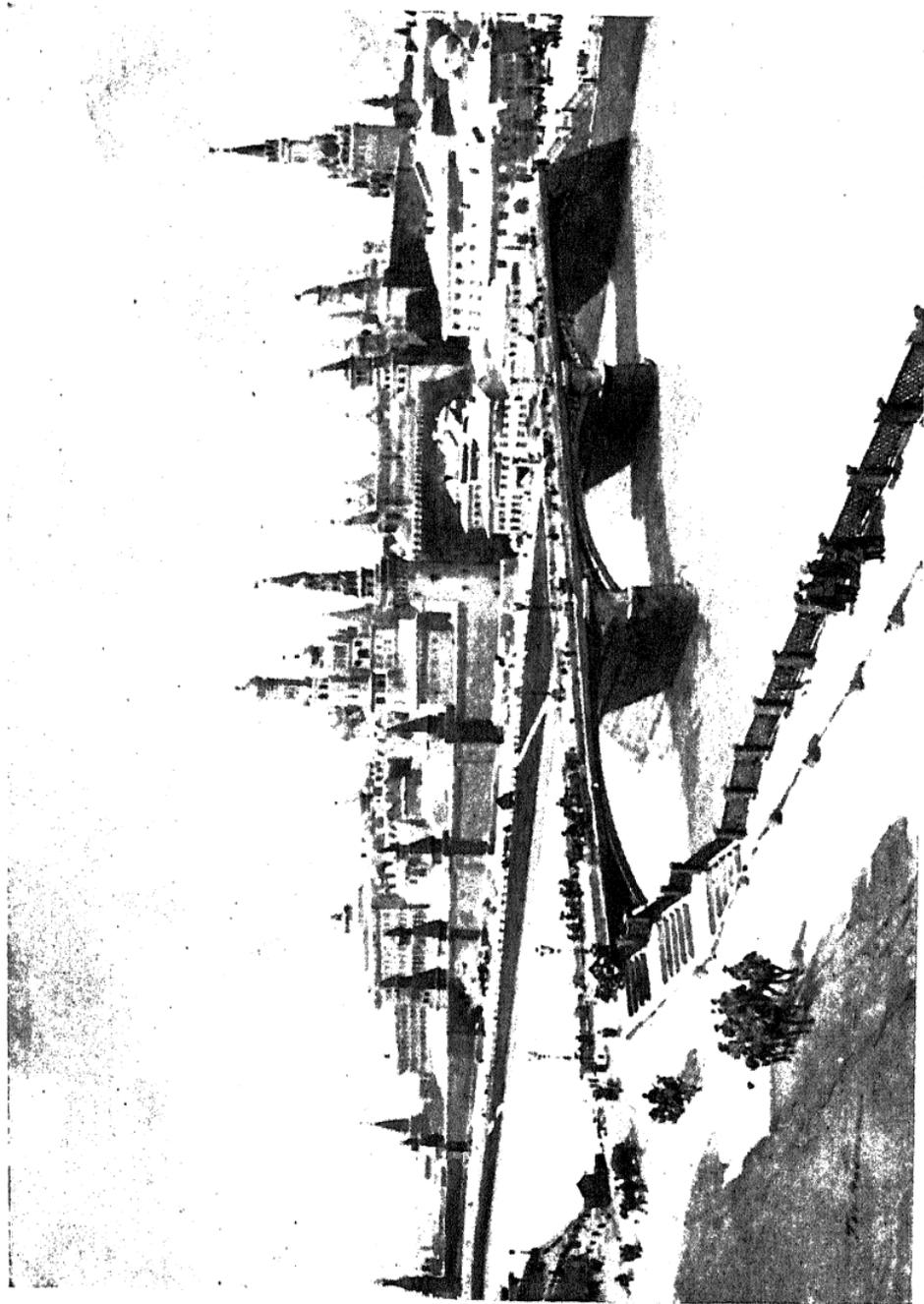
Russia

saying, "Throw me not away. Carry me to your step-mother!"

She looked at her stepmother's house, and, not seeing a light in a single window, she determined to take the skull in there with her. For the first time in her life she was cordially received by her stepmother and step-sisters, who told her that from the moment she went away they hadn't had a spark of fire in the house. They couldn't strike a light themselves anyhow, and whenever they brought one in from a neighbour's, it went out as soon as it came into the room.

"Perhaps your light will keep in!" said the step-mother. So they carried the skull into the sitting-room. But the eyes of the skull so glared at the stepmother and her daughters—shot forth such flames!—they would fain have hidden themselves; but run where they would, everywhere did the eyes follow after them. By the morning they were utterly burnt to cinders. Only Vasilissa was none the worse.

Next morning Vasilissa buried the skull, locked up the house, and took up her quarters in a neighbouring village. After a time she began to work. Her doll made her a glorious loom, and by the end of the winter she had weaved a quantity of linen, so fine that it might be passed like thread through the eye of a needle. In the spring, after it had been bleached, Vasilissa made a present of it to the old woman with whom she lodged. The crone presented it to the King, who ordered it to be made into shirts. But no seamstress could be found to make them up, until the linen was entrusted to Vasilissa. When a dozen shirts were ready, Vasilissa sent them to the King, and as soon as her carrier had



The Story of Vasilissa

started, she washed herself and combed her hair, and dressed herself, and sat down at the window. Before long there arrived a messenger, demanding her instant appearance at Court. And, when she appeared before the royal eyes, the King fell desperately in love with her. "No, my beauty," said he, "never will I part with thee; thou shalt be my wife." So he married her. And by-and-by her father returned, and took up his abode with her. And Vasilissa took the old woman into her service. And as for the doll—to the end of her life she always carried it in her pocket.

The shepherd ends his story just as the afternoon begins to close, and off go the children, along the even snow and through the forest, wondering, perhaps, if the Baba-Yaga has passed there too. On arriving home they confess their sins—only the little matter of the rye bread is not mentioned. Everybody is busy; the cook is getting ready the supper, and father is inside the drawing-room, with the door locked. Irina tries to see through the keyhole. Someone has said there is to be no Christmas-tree, but, if so, why did mother go away shopping for four days? and why did the pedlar who came two days ago stay so long?

Irina finds a book, and tries to read it, but it is only Kryloff's "Fables," and she does not understand them, so she gets tired, and goes back to the door with her brothers.

"Cuckoo," "Cuckoo," rings out the clock six times, and then open comes the door. There *is* a Christmas-tree after all. It reaches from floor to ceiling, with a shining star at the top. Hundreds of burning white candles light up its dark needles, and tiny wax

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figures dance among the hanging oranges. At the foot of the tree lies a heap of parcels. Ah! that explains those four days' shopping. No one is forgotten, and everyone makes merry.

Then comes Pavel, in his black Sunday clothes, to say that supper is ready. The dining-table looks very different from usual; the white cloth is there, but it is not smooth. Underneath it has been spread a layer of hay, and the children's fingers are at once busy pulling out stalks. Irina gives a cry of joy; her piece is quite complete with its yellow dried flower—and that shows that she will be lucky all the year.

There is no meat to be eaten, but only fish dishes, followed by puddings. Their puddings are very special, just as ours are, and there are two, the white *kostya*, made of rice, almonds and raisins, and the black *kostya*, made of honey, barley and walnuts.

During supper, the children from the school which Irina's mother has started sing carols outside, and many kopecks are taken out to them by Pavel. Then follow the young villagers, also singing and receiving gifts. Lastly comes the church choir. They too receive money, and are invited in to supper after Irina and the others have returned to their wonderful tree and their toys. All too soon comes bedtime, to which the little Russian girl and her brothers object—just as much as you do—and they are allowed on this special evening—just as you are—to stay up one hour longer.

Moscow

CHAPTER XIV

MOSCOW

THE three words "Our old capital" have a magic influence over the heart of every Russian, who regards Moscow as the sacred centre of the Empire; and, indeed, it is often called the "Holy City." To its churches and relics flock thousands daily, and those who, in other towns, speed departing friends to Moscow, often commission them to "burn a taper of forty kopecks' value at the shrine of the martyr St. Philip in the Cathedral of the Assumption" or at that of "the little St. Dmitri in St. Michael's."

Moscow is a city of irregularities, a bewildering mixture of old and new. In the centre is the fortified hill—the famous Kremlin—and outside this, the streets wind hither and thither, up hill and down dale, with quaint mixtures of houses, courts and gardens. In one place it is empty as a desert, in another crowded as a town; in one it resembles a wretched village, in another a mighty capital.

If you go into one of the little quiet, deserted streets in the early morning you may be startled at the sight of a cow coming out of a garden gate belonging to one of the red or yellow wooden houses. She takes her way calmly and thoughtfully along the street, and greets an acquaintance with a whisk of the tail. At one of the city gates she will find a number of friends waiting, and when all the herd are gathered, a sheepskin-coated peasant leads them to some pasture outside the town.

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At eventide he brings them back to the gate, whence they disperse, each to her own garden and little painted house. No one ever interferes with these cows; they are allowed to go their ways unmolested through the streets.

The Chitai Gorod still shows that it was the part occupied by the Tartars when they pushed the Russians outside, and is surrounded by a wall and gate. Outside the wall all is deserted, inside the gate all is bustle and confusion and traffic, crowds of droskies in the roads and walkers on the pavements, separated by rows of shouting street vendors selling grapes, cucumbers and what not.

A regular market of booths lines the inside of the wall, and higher up is all that remains of the old *Gostinnoi Dvor*—the Great Bazaar of all Russian towns. The new “Rows,” with their stone arcades of shops, replace the more picturesque bazaar. Here everything is more Asiatic than in St. Petersburg, the shops or stalls of gold and silver brocade telling of the East. Whether in the “Rows” or in the outside markets the merchant and his boy use every art to persuade you to buy, and the method of purchase is Eastern—you offer the merchant at most half what he asks; the more Asiatic he is the less you offer him. He brings his price down, but not to yours; you continue the bargain for a little, but never show that you want the article. Walk away and he will follow you; the thing is yours. But watch carefully to see that the article you take away is really the one you bid for, for these Russian merchants are the most plausible cheats in the world.

There is a recognized thieves' market in Moscow, where many curious things are to be found, but it is

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well to venture there unadorned with jewellery, as a man has sometimes lost a finger to provide some rascal with a coveted ring.

One quaint memento of Peter the Great can sometimes be picked up in these markets. It is a Beard Token. Peter objected to beards, and ordered all his subjects to cut them off, but Peter had not quite appreciated the regard of the Orthodox for their beards. They refused to cut them off, and said it was sacrilege. Peter compromised. They should wear their beards on payment of a tax of fifty-two kopecks, and to enable the bearded to show that they had paid the money they wore a copper token. This had on one side in relief a nose, lip and long beard, on the other was the inscription, "Beard money paid."

From the market we cross the dust-covered Red Square with its stunted thirsty trees to the walls of the Kremlin, outside which is the Church of the Protection of the Virgin, better known as Vassili Blagennoi, the Church of the Holy St. William. This is the strangest, most incongruous, fascinating and repellent church in Europe. A labyrinth of chapels capped by cupola-crowned turrets, all of different shape and different sizes, rears its jagged confusion above the Kremlin wall. Every stone is painted, and so brilliant are the colours that the whole suggests that serpents' skins and dragons' heads, or the wonderful plumage of tropical birds, have been stretched over a bed of giant thistles, and the whole transformed into stone. The church was erected by Ivan the Terrible to commemorate the victory over the Tartars at Kazan, which made him the first real Czar of Russia. Its very weirdness seems to reflect the fiendish

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cruelty of its author, who watched its growth from a seat on the Kremlin wall.

In front of the church is the Red Square, where in times of old the Czars of Moscow published their edicts, and where Ivan the Terrible carried out so many of the vile massacres and executions which have made him infamous among all nations and through all time. The tortures he inflicted have never been, could never be, surpassed.

Such a Czar could hardly hold the allegiance of his distant towns, and so he frequently made sudden descents upon them and punished them for treason, whether they had committed it or not. Novgorod, the great northern town, more important commercially than Moscow, supplied him with a thousand victims a day. The great Bell of Novgorod, which had so often called upon its citizens to defend their town, was taken too, that it might call no more. But the tyrant might have spared himself this small act of spite. Had he left the bell to ring, its call would have been unheeded, for in that fallen city he had left none to hear.

He placed it near the Redeemer Gate in the Kremlin wall, where it served to ring the alarm in Moscow till its metal was used in making the last great bell for the tower "Ivan Veliki."

The Metropolitan, or Archbishop, Philip dared to reprove Ivan for his terrible cruelties ; he was removed and strangled. The world can show no martyr who perished for devotion to a nobler cause—the divine cause of justice and mercy.

For a time Ivan played at being religious, made himself the Abbot of a monastery, and his familiars monks :

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he amused himself by committing murders by day and singing psalms by night.

Ivan, having no consideration for the bodies of his subjects, occasionally remembered their souls, and so put up the little chapel of St. Cyril for their repose. There is a letter still existing wherein he requests that prayers be said for the souls of three thousand four hundred and seventy—a mere fraction of his victims—of whom nine hundred and eighty-six are mentioned by name—some are mentioned as “with wife and children,” “Kazarin Dubrovski and his two sons and the ten men who came to their defence.”

There were two men of whom Ivan was afraid. One, we are proud to think, was the English ambassador, and the other a religious fanatic. Sir Jeremy Taylor came before him with his hat on, and Ivan—who had a few days before nailed the French ambassador’s hat to his head—wrathfully asked him how he dared to do it. “I am the ambassador,” answered Sir Jeremy, “of the invincible Queen of England, who does not veil her bonnet, nor bare her head to any prince living. If any of her ministers receive any affront abroad, she is able to avenge her own quarrel.”

Ivan was throughout his reign anxious to remain on good terms with England. He allowed English traders to reside in Moscow; he stole their goods, of course, but he left their persons unmolested. He went so far at one time as to offer to cast away his seventh wife if Elizabeth would send him an English lady of high rank, and Lady Mary Hastings narrowly escaped the honour.

Like most assassins, Ivan was superstitious, and when the begging monk, “Blessed Willie,” upbraided the

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Czar for his wickedness, and with uplifted finger prophesied evil to come, Ivan was frightened. The monk would drop Ivan's present of gold, saying that it burnt his fingers, and that it came from hell. Frequently he put his own person between Ivan and his victim, and the rattling of his iron chain and collar as he pointed to Ivan's forehead, and cried out that he saw horns growing there, struck such terror to the heart of the Czar that for the moment he stayed his hand.

Enraged as he often was, he never dared to hurt the naked body of the brave old beggar, who was at last laid to rest in the church which Ivan built. Now, in this weird mockery of a church, the only spot recalling a thought which is pure or lofty is the tomb of the beggar monk, and the church is called after him, the Church of the Holy St. William, its real name being never used.

The atrocities of Ivan had stripped the country of all the great and powerful among its nobles, and cut down its fighting power by thousands, so that it fell an easy prey to the Poles, till in the far-off town of Nijni, on the Volga, arose a man whose patriotism saved his country. From a common butcher and cattle-dealer came the call. "Sacrifice your goods, and sell your possessions," he cried, flinging his own gold to the ground. "Yes! let us even sacrifice our wives and children, if needed, to find a faithful commander to lead us to victory and recover the sainted remains of the miracle-workers of Moscow." The people threw their gold at his feet; women tore their bracelets from their arms, and jewels from their necks, to swell the heap. They stinted nothing, and with this wealth they provided an army for their chosen leader, Pojarsky. Other towns began to



E. S. Hansen

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join in the movement ; money and soldiers were soon pouring in. Some, like the Cossacks, were jealous, and remained hostile, but gradually the enthusiasm for Pojarsky and his brave helper grew, until at last the Poles were driven back, the treasures of Moscow recovered, the Cossacks won over, and a descendant of the old Romanoff house, who was proclaimed as Czar Michael, was received by the whole of Russia, and founded the dynasty which still reigns.

In the Red Square, not far from Ivan's stone excrescence, stands a sculptured group, representing Minin the Butcher, urging Prince Pojarsky to free his country. Near this group is the famous Gate of the Redeemer, through which Pojarsky made his entry to the Kremlin on his return from victory.

Every man who passes through this beautiful gate must uncover his head. If a stranger omits this, his neighbours call out, "Your hat, your hat, little father."

For high up in the tower above is a picture of the Redeemer, which, though faded, is an object of reverence to all Russians. A keeper sits beneath the tower, keeping the lamp always alight before it, and upon a little stall by his side are wax tapers, which he sells to those who wish to burn them before the picture. Many are the wonder tales that the old man will tell you—how the picture caused clouds to arise, so that marauding Tartars could not find their way into the Kremlin ; how Napoleon's invading French tried to reach the picture, but their ladders always broke in the middle ; how they brought cannon to fire at the picture, but the powder always became damp ; how, to keep the powder dry, they

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put a fire over the touch-hole, and made the cannon explode, but it exploded the wrong way, killed the gunners, and left the picture and the gate untouched.

Most cities are content with one cathedral ; Moscow has nine, of which three are inside the Kremlin.

The Czars are crowned in the Cathedral of the Assumption, married in the Cathedral of the Annunciation, and buried in that of the Archangel Michael—at least, they were buried there till Peter the Great changed the burial-place to St. Petersburg.

In the Cathedral of the Assumption, blazing with colour and shining with gold, but no larger than the nave of an English Cathedral, are buried the bodies of many saints. The verger points out to you, with horror, the spot where Napoleon slept after he entered Moscow in 1812, and tells you how he gazed doubtfully into the tomb of St. Jonah—but the saint raised his finger, and the Master of Europe fled in terror.

Before leaving the Kremlin give one look at the great cannon, by the side of Ivan Veliki, which is for the people of Moscow what Mons Meg is to the Scotsmen of Edinburgh, and then note those silent witnesses of Napoleon's defeat—the hundreds of cannon which fill the square in front of the Arsenal. All are labelled, there they stand—so many Dutch cannon, so many Prussian, and an iron army of Frenchmen, but, let us be thankful ! not one British.

Leave the Kremlin for the Red Place, and then turn your steps down the hill towards the Sunday Gate. There you will see a great multitude of people turning into a little chapel—in fact, none will pass, Czar or peasant, without stopping there. This is the last rest-

ing-place of the "Iberian Mother," who enjoyed such a reputation for miracles in her abode on Mount Athos, that the Czar Alexis invited her to Moscow, in the seventeenth century, and there she has remained ever since.

She is dark brown, like most Russian saints, has a net of real pearls round her head, and wonderful jewels about her person. The hands of herself and the child are covered with a thick crust of dirt, from the kissing they have received through the centuries, for to her come pilgrims of all nations, Armenians, Bulgarians, Greeks or Russians. "Here come the peasants early in the morning, before going to market. Hither comes the merchant, on the eve of a new speculation. Hither come the healthy and the sick, the wealthy and those who would become so; the arriving and departing traveller, the fortunate and the unfortunate, the noble and the beggar."

The picture is, if desired, carried to the home of sick persons and others, and she travels there in a carriage and four, driven by a bareheaded coachman. While she is out, a copy takes her place in the chapel. Sometimes, when she is in too much request, the answer is given, "The Mother is too tired to-day, and cannot come."

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CHAPTER XV

PALM SUNDAY AND EASTER EVE

ON Palm Saturday the streets of Moscow assume a very bright and cheerful aspect, for it is the beginning of the children's fair. From early morning the peasants have been coming along the muddy roads and through the gate, driving their rickety carts full of branches, or even whole trees. Others, not possessing a cart, carry great bundles of twigs in their arms. The weary ones are glad to rest for a moment on the benches in the Alexander Garden, but only for a moment, for they must press on to the Red Square, where they take their stand and sell their branches and twigs as fast as they can.

That old peasant yonder in the dirty skeepskin has brought his little boy and girl; they each have their branch, and all go to the church to have them blessed. Many processions are formed of the branch-bearers, who sing as they move. One old peasant will carry his branch home to hang under the ikon, or put over the bed on the stove that the pains of rheumatism which he feels in his right arm may be charmed away. The two children have other uses for theirs. Everyone walks about till late at night, and the children arise very early the next morning; they have a special privilege on Palm Sunday, and that is to flog with their palm branches everyone who oversleeps on that morning. They are so excited with the thought of their power that many are awake all night, and woe betide the

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sleeper who sleeps too late! He is awakened by the stroke of the twigs as the attacking children sing :

“ The rod strikes—
Strikes to weeping.
I strike thee not :
The rod strikes.”

All the children from far and near swarm through the gates in the Kremlin wall, and hurry to the vast, ill-kept open space in the centre, where their special fair is held. The very poorest parents have saved a few kopecks that their children may not be without some little toy, if only one made of chips stuck together in the shape of a bird, while rich children have expensive presents and feasts. The holy objects in the fair are especially made for the children ; crosses are made in sugar or in gingerbread, so when the owner of one is tired of carrying it in his hands, he can call his mouth to his assistance.

The peasant who brings in his children takes them reverently to see the bell—surely the Emperor among the bells of the world!—at the foot of Ivan Veliki, or Big John, as the tower is called. Mute and broken it rests now, but if its metal could speak it would ring out in the tones of the many bells which went to its making how it called the brave to arms in distant corners of the Empire.

Then they will go out through the Gate of St. Nicholas, for has not St. Nicholas always been the good friend of the moujik? Of him there are endless stories, and the old peasant tells one of them to the wonder-loving boy and girl at his side.

Once a poor peasant was driving along the road in

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autumn, and the road was so bad that his cart stuck fast, and could not be moved. While the peasant was trying to lift it out St. Kassian came by. "Help me, little brother, to get my cart out of the mud," said the peasant.

"Go along with you," answered St. Kassian; "do you suppose I've got nothing better to do than stop to waste my time with you?"

And he passed on his way. Just afterwards St. Nicholas came along, and the peasant appealed to him.

"I'll help you, little brother," said the kind saint, and in a moment the cart was pulled out and started on its way.

When the two saints arrived in heaven the Lord asked them where they had been.

"I have been on earth," answered St. Kassian, "and a moujik called to me to help him get his cart out of the mud, but I wasn't going to stop and spoil my heavenly robes."

"I too have been on the earth," said St. Nicholas, whose white robes were covered with mud, "and saw the same moujik, who called to me, and I helped him to get his cart out of the mud."

Then said the Lord, "Listen, Kassian: because you did not assist the moujik in the time of his need, shall men offer you thanksgiving only once in four years; but to you, Nicholas, because you helped the moujik to free his cart, shall men give honour and thanksgiving twice every year."

And so it is that St. Nicholas' Day comes twice a year, while St. Kassian is only remembered every Leap Year.

The great fast, in which the Palm Sunday fair comes as a slight break, ends at Easter, and on Easter Sunday

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everyone is exhausted, and anxious with expectation. The bells of the churches are silent, and inside darkness reigns, only broken by the solitary taper of a devout reader. Crowds come and go, but silently.

As night advances the crowds in the streets thicken; the churches are thronged. Suddenly the bell of Ivan Veliki rings out, and is echoed by every other bell in Moscow. The next moment the whole tower is illuminated from its base to its cross, lights blaze from every house, rockets ascend from many gardens, and cannon boom. All the churches are packed with standing multitudes. The Metropolitan himself officiates at the Cathedral of the Assumption, and as the bell rings out the hour, he announces the message "Christos voskress"—Christ is risen.

The Metropolitan and his clergy now pass in long procession to bless the food for Easter Day. Long lines of dishes within the church are succeeded by overflow lines without—heaps of Easter loaves, called *kalitshe*, decorated with white flowers, towers of sweetened pressed curds, called *paskha*, shaped like pyramids, with burning tapers at the top, masses of red and other coloured eggs, plates of preserved fruits, jars of honey, cases of sugar, all decorated, coloured, or illuminated. All are watched by their owners till the sprinkling with holy water shows the possessor that he can go home and break his fast with sanctified food. Then the great space outside the palace becomes alive with moving lights. To and fro through the Gate of the Redeemer pass the surging crowds, friends greeting friends with the Easter kiss, and the universal salutation, "Christos voskress"—Christ is risen.

Russia

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TITLE.	AUTHOR.	PUBLISHER.
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