

PASSPORTS, POLICE, AND POST OFFICE IN RUSSIA.

WE imported into Russia, untaxed, undiscovered by the custom-house officials, a goodly stock of misadvice, misinformation, apprehensions, and prejudices, like most foreigners, albeit we were unusually well informed, and confident that we were correctly posted on the grand outlines of Russian life, at least. We were forced to begin very promptly the involuntary process of getting rid of them. Our anxiety began in Berlin. We visited the Russian consul-general there to get our passports *viséd*. He said, "You should have got the signature of the American consul. Do that, and return here."

At that moment, the door leading from his office to his drawing-room opened, and his wife made her appearance on the threshold, with the emphatic query, "When are you coming?"

"Immediately, my dear," he replied. "Just wait a moment, until I get rid of these Americans."

Then he decided to rid himself of us for good. "I will assume the responsibility for you," he said, affixed his signature on the spot, to spare himself a second visit, and, collecting his fees, bowed us out. I suppose he argued that we should have known the ropes and attended to all details accurately, in order to ward off suspicion, had we been suspicious characters. How could he know that the Americans understood Russian, and that this plain act of "getting rid" of us would weigh on our minds all the way to the Russian frontier?

But, at the frontier, the gendarmes evoked a throb of gratitude from our relieved hearts. Not a soul of them seemed to suspect that the American government owned a consul who could write his name on the huge parchments, which contrasted so strongly with the compact little documents from other lands.

"Which are your passports?" inquired the tall gendarmes who guarded the door of the restaurant, as we went to take our seats in the Russian train.

"The biggest," I replied, without mentioning our names, and they handed them over with a grin.

On our arrival in St. Petersburg, we were not even asked for our passports. Curiosity became restless within us. Was there some sinister motive in this neglect, after the harrowing tales we had heard from a woman lecturer, and read in books which had actually got themselves printed, about gendarmes forcing themselves into people's rooms while they were dressing, demanding their passports, and setting a guard at their doors; after which, gendarmes in disguises (which they were clever enough to penetrate) followed them all over the country? Why was it thus with them, and not with us? The *why* ripened gradually. We inquired if the passports were not wanted.

"No; if you intend to remain only a few days, it is not worth while to register them," was the startling reply; and those wretched, unwieldy parchments remained in our possession, even after we had announced that we did not meditate departing for some time. I hesitate to set down the whole truth about the anxiety they cost us for a while. How many innocent officers, in crack regiments (as we discovered when we learned the uniforms), in search of a breakfast or a dinner, did we not take for the police upon our tracks, in search of those concealed documents! Our excitement was ministered to by the Tatar waiters, who, not having knowledge of our nationality, mistook us for English people, and wrecked our nerves by making our tea as strong and black as beer, with a view to large "tea-money"

for this delicate attention to our insular tastes.

If no one wanted those documents, what were *we* to do with them? Wear them as breastplates (folded), or as garments (full size)? No pocket of any sex would tolerate them, and we had been given to understand by veracious (?) travelers that it was as much as our lives were worth to be separated from them for a single moment. At the end of a week we forced the hotel to take charge of them. They were registered, and immediately thrown back on our hands. Then we built lean-tos on our petticoats to hold them, and carried them about until they looked aged and crumpled and almost frayed, like ancestral parchments. We even slept with them under our pillows. At last, we also were nearly worn out, and we tossed those Sindbad passports into a drawer, then into a trunk. There they remained for three months; and when they were demanded, we had to undertake a serious search, so completely had their existence and whereabouts been lost to our lightened spirits. In the mean time we had grasped the elementary fact that they would be required only on a change of domicile. By dint of experience we learned various other facts, which I may as well summarize at once.

The legal price of registration is twenty kopeks (about ten cents), the value of the stamp. But hotel and lodging-house keepers never set it down in one's bill at less than double that amount. It often rises to four or five times the legal charge, according to the elegance of the rooms which one occupies, and also according to the daring of the landlord. In one house in Moscow, they even tried to make us pay again on leaving. We refused, and as we already had possession of the passports, which, they pretended, required a second registry, they could do nothing. This abuse of overcharging for passport registration on the part of landlords

seems to have been general. It became so serious that the Argus-eyed prefect of St. Petersburg, General Gresser (now deceased), issued an order that no more than the law allowed should be exacted from lodgers. I presume, however, that all persons who could not read Russian, or who did not chance to notice this regulation, continued to contribute to the pockets of landlords, since human nature is very much alike everywhere, in certain professions. I had no occasion to test the point personally, as the law was issued just previous to my departure from the country.

The passport law seems to be interpreted by each man for himself in other respects, also. In some places, we found that we could stay overnight quite informally; at others, our passports were required. Once we spent an entire month incognito. At Kazan, our balcony commanded a full view of the police department of registry, directly opposite. The landlord sniffed disdainfully at the mention of our passports, and I am sure that we should not have been asked for them at all, had not one of the officials, who chanced to be less wilted by the intense heat than his fellows, — they had been gazing lazily at us, singly and in battalions, in the intervals of their rigorous idleness, for the last four and twenty hours, — suddenly taken a languid interest in us about one hour before our departure. The landlord said he was "simply ridiculous." On another occasion, a waiter in a hotel recognized the Russians who were with us as neighbors of his former master in the days of serfdom. He suggested that he would arrange not to have our passports called for at all, since they might be kept overtime, and our departure would thus be delayed, and we be incommoded. Only one of our friends had even taken the trouble to bring a "document;" but the whole party spent three days under the protection of this *ex-serf*. Of course, we be-

spoke his attendance for ourselves, and remembered that little circumstance in his "tea-money." This practice of detaining passports arbitrarily, from which the ex-serf was protecting us, prevails in some localities, judging from the uproar about it in the Russian newspapers. It is contrary to the law, and can be resisted by travelers who have time, courage, and determination. It appears to be a device of the landlords at watering places and summer resorts generally, who desire to detain guests. I doubt whether the police have anything to do with it. What we paid the ex-serf for was, practically, protection against his employer.

Our one experience of this device was coupled with a good deal of amusement, and initiated us into some of the laws of the Russian post office as well. To begin my story intelligibly, I must premise that no Russian could ever pronounce or spell our name correctly, unaided. A worse name to put on a Russian official document, with its *H* and its double *o*, never was invented! There is no letter *h* in the Russian alphabet, and it is customary to supply the deficiency with the letter *g*, leaving the utterer to his fate as to which of the two legitimate sounds — the foreign or the native — he is to produce. It affords a test of cultivation parallel to that involved in giving a man a knife and fork with a piece of pie, and observing which he uses. That is the American shibboleth. Lomonosoff, the famous founder of Russian literary language in the last century, wrote a long rhymed strophe, containing a mass of words in which the *g* occurs legitimately and illegitimately, and wound up by wailing out the query, "Who can emerge from the crucial test of pronouncing all these correctly, unimpeached?" That is the Russian shibboleth.

As a result of this peculiarity, our passports came back from each trip to the police office indorsed with a brand-

new version of our name. We figured under Gepgud, Gaggod, Gabgot, and a number of other disguises, all because they persisted in spelling by the eye, and would not accept my perfect phonetic version. The same process applied to the English name Wylie has resulted in the manufacture of Villié. And the pleasant jest of it all was that we never troubled ourselves to sort our passports, because, although there existed not the slightest family resemblance even between my mother and myself, we looked exactly alike in those veracious mirrors. This explained to our dull comprehension how the stories of people using stolen passports could be true. However, the Russians were not to blame for this particular absurdity. It was the fault of the officials in America.

On the occasion to which I refer, we had gone out of St. Petersburg, and had left a written order for the post-office authorities to forward our mail to our new address. The bank officials, who should certainly have known better, had said that this would be sufficient, and had even prepared the form, on their stamped paper, for our signature. Ten days elapsed; no letters came. Then the form was returned, with orders to get our signatures certified to by the chief of police or the police captain of our district! When we recovered from our momentary vexation, we perceived that this was an excellent safeguard. I set out for the house of the chief of police.

His orderly said he was not at home, but would be there at eleven o'clock. I took a little look into the church, — my infallible receipt for employing spare moments profitably, which has taught me many things. At eleven o'clock the chief was still "not at home." I decided that this was in an "official" sense only, when I caught sight of a woman surveying me cautiously through the crack of the opposite door to the antechamber. I immediately jumped to the conclusion that a woman calling

upon a chief of police was regarded as a suspicious character ; and rightly, after various shooting incidents in St. Petersburg. My suspicions were confirmed by my memory of the fact that I had been told that the prefect of St. Petersburg was "not at home" in business hours, though his gray lambskin cap — the only one in town — was lying before me at the time. But I also recollected that when I had made use of that cap as a desk, on which to write my request, to the horror of the orderly, and had gone home, the prefect had sent a gendarme to do what I wanted. Accordingly, I told this orderly my business in a loud, clear voice. The crack of the door widened as I proceeded, and at my last word I was invited into the chief's study by the orderly, who had been signaled to.

The chief turned out to be a polished and amiable baron, with a German name, who was eager to render any service, but who had never come into collision with that post-office regulation before. I remarked that I regretted not being able to certify to ourselves with our passports, as they had not been returned to us. He declared that the passports were quite unnecessary as a means of identification ; my word was sufficient. But he flew into a rage over the detention of the passports. That something decidedly vigorous took place over those papers, and that the landlord of our hotel was to blame, it was easy enough to gather from the meek air and the apologies with which they were handed to us, a couple of hours later. The chief dispatched his orderly on the spot with my post-office petition. During the man's absence, the chief brought in and introduced to me his wife, his children, and his dogs, and showed me over his house and garden. We were on very good terms by the time the orderly returned with the signature of the prefect (who had never seen us) certifying to our signatures, on faith. The

baron sealed the petition for me with his biggest coat of arms, and posted it, and the letters came promptly and regularly. Thereafter, for the space of our four months' stay in the place, the baron and I saluted when we met. We even exchanged "shakehands," as foreigners call the operation, and the compliments of the day, in church, when the baron escorted royalty. I think he was a Lutheran, and went to that church when etiquette did not require his presence at the Russian services, where I was always to be found.

As, during those four months, I obtained several very special privileges which required the prefect's signature, — as foreigners were by no means common residents there, — and as I had become so well known by sight to most of the police force of the town that they saluted me when I passed, and their dogs wagged their tails at me and begged for a caress, I imagined that I was properly introduced to the authorities, and that they could lay hands upon me at any moment when the necessity for so doing should become apparent. Nevertheless, one friend, having applied to the police for my address, spent two whole days in finding me, at haphazard. After a residence of three months, other friends appealed in vain to the police ; then obtained from the prefect, who had certified to us, the information that no such persons lived in the town, the only foreigners there being two sisters named Genrut ! With this lucid clue, our friends cleverly found us. Those who understand Russian script will be able to unravel the process by which we were thus disguised and lost. Still, in spite of this experience, I always regarded my passport as an important means of protection. In case of accident, one could be traced by it. A traveler's passport once registered at the police office, the landlord or lodging-house keeper is responsible for the life of his guest. If the landlord have any bandit propensities, this

serves as a check upon them, since he is bound to produce the person, or to say what has become of him. In the same way, when one is traveling by imperial post carriage, the postilion must deliver his passenger safe and sound at the next post station, or be promptly arrested. The passport serves here as a sort of waybill for the human freight. When a foreigner's passport is registered for the first time, he receives permission to remain six months in the country. At the expiration of that period, on formal application, a fresh permit is issued, which must be paid for, and which covers one year. This takes the form of a special document, attached to the foreign passport with cord and sealing-wax; and attached to it, in turn, is a penalty for cutting the cord or tampering with the official seal. These acts must be done by the proper officials. I thought it might be interesting to attend to securing this special permit myself, instead of sending the *dvórník* (the yard porter), whose duties comprise as many odds and ends as those of the prime minister of an empire.

At the office I was questioned concerning my religion and my occupation, which had not been inquired into previously. The question about religion was a mere formality, as they care nothing for one's creed. I stated, in reply to the last question, that I was merely "a traveler."

"Don't say that; it's too expensive," returned the official, in a friendly way.

"To whom? How?" I asked.

"To you, of course. A traveler, as a person of leisure, pays a huge tax."

"Call me a literary person, then, if you like."

"That's not an occupation!" (Observe the delicate, unconscious sarcasm of this rejoinder! As a matter of fact, the Russian idea of literary men is that they all hold some government or other appointment, on the committee of censorship, for example, — some ratable position. Upon this they can depend for

a livelihood, aside from the product of their brains; which is practical, and affords a firm foundation upon which to execute caprices.)

He suggested various things which I was not, and I declined to accept his suggestions. We got it settled at last, though he shook his head over my extravagant obstinacy in paying two dollars, when I might have got off with half the sum and a lie. He imparted a good deal of amusing information as to the manner in which people deliberately evade the passport tax with false statements; for example, governesses, who would scorn to be treated as nurses, get themselves described as *bonnes* to save money. I have no doubt that the authorities amiably assist them by friendly suggestions, as in my own case; only I decline to sail under false colors, by the authority of my own government or any other; so his amiability was wasted so far as I was concerned.

It would seem to the ordinary reader that the police would be able to lay hands on a man, when he was wanted, with tolerable promptness and accuracy, after all the details which the law requires in these "address tickets," as the local passports are called, had been duly furnished. But I remember one case, among several, which impressed me as instructive and amusing. The newspapers told the tale, which ran somewhat as follows: A wealthy woman of position, residing in one of the best quarters of St. Petersburg, hired a prepossessing young lackey as one of her large staff of domestics. Shortly after his advent many articles of value began to disappear. Finally, suspicion having turned on this lackey, he also disappeared, and the police undertook to find him. It then became apparent that the fellow had used a false passport and address, and was not to be found where he was inscribed. He caused an exciting chase. This ended in the discovery of a regular robbers' nest, where a large number of false pass-

ports were captured, the prepossessing lackey and his friends having abandoned them in their attempt to escape. The papers were also constantly remarking on the use made by peasant men of their passports. The wife is inscribed on the husband's "document," separate passports for wives being, as a rule, difficult of attainment in the lower classes. The peasants are thus able, and often willing, to control their wives' places of residence and movements, and preserve entire liberty of action for themselves, since their consent is required for the separate passport, or for the wives' movements on the common passport. In such cases the passport does become an instrument of oppression, from either the Occidental or the Oriental point of view.

As for the stories told by travelers of officious meddling by the police on their arrival in Russia, and of their footsteps being dogged, I have recently been favored with some light on that subject. I believe the tales, with reservations, since some perfectly innocent and truthful friends of mine related to me their own similar experience. A man, who seemed to their inexperienced eyes to be a police officer, told them that the authorities thought three weeks, one in Petersburg and two elsewhere, would be amply sufficient for their travels in Russia. They had a high-priced French courier, who pretended to know a little Russian. Perhaps he did know enough for his own purposes. He told them that they were watched constantly, and translated for the officer. But he did not tell them that they already had permission to remain in the country for the customary six months. I made them get out their passports, and showed them the official stamp and signature to that effect. This clever courier afterward stole from them, in Warsaw, a quantity of diamonds which he had helped them purchase in Moscow, and of whose existence and whereabouts in their trunks no one but himself was aware. This helped me to an expla-

nation. It is invariably the couriers or guides, I find, who tell travelers these alarming tales, and neglect to inform them of their rights. It certainly looks very much as though some confederate of theirs impersonates a police official, and as though they misinterpret. The stories of spies forever in attendance seem to be manufactured for the purpose of extorting handsome gratuities from their victims for their "protection," and for the purpose of frightening the latter out of the country before their own ignorance is discovered. As I never employed the guides, I never had any trouble with the police, either genuine or manufactured. I visited the police stations whenever I could make an excuse; and when I wished to know when and where the Emperor was to be seen, I asked a policeman or a gendarme. He always told me the exact truth unhesitatingly, and pointed out the best position. It was refreshing after the German police, who put one through the Inquisition as to one's self and one's ancestors as soon as one arrives, and who prove themselves lineal descendants of Ananias or Baron Munchausen when a traveler asks for information.

When we wished to leave the country, I again usurped the *dvórník's* duties, and paid another visit to the passport office, to inspect its workings. Our Russian passports were clipped out, and little books were given us, which constituted our permission to leave Russia at any time within the next three months, by any route we pleased, without further ceremony. These booklets contained information relating to the tax imposed on Russians for absenting themselves from their country for various periods, the custom-house regulations which forbid the entry, duty free, of more than one fur cloak, cap, and muff to each person, etc., since these books form return passports for Russians, though we surrendered ours at the frontier. As the hotel clerk or porter attends to all pass-

port details, few foreigners see the inside of the office, or hear the catechisms which are conducted there, as I did. It is vulgar, it smacks of commercial life, to go one's self. Apathy and lack of interest can always be relied upon to brand one as aristocratic. In this case, however, as in many others, I considered myself repaid for following Poor Richard's advice: "If you want a thing done, do it yourself; if not, send!"

To sum up the passport question: If his passport is in order, the traveler need never entertain the slightest apprehension for a single moment, despite sensational tales to the contrary, and it will serve as a safeguard. If, for any good reason, his passport cannot be put in order, the traveler will do well to keep out of Russia, or any other country which requires such documents. In truth, although we do not require them in this country, America would be better off if all people who cannot pass a passport scrutiny, and a German, not a Russian, passport examination, were excluded from it.

I have mentioned the post office in connection with our passports. Subsequently I had several entertaining interviews with the police and others on that point. On Sunday afternoon, in Moscow, we went to the police station of our quarter to get our change-of-address petition to the post-office authorities signed. There was nothing of interest about the shabby building or the rooms, on this occasion. The single officer on duty informed us that he was empowered to attend only to cases of drunkenness, breaches of the peace, and the like. We must return on Monday, he declared.

"No," said I. "Why make us waste all that time in beautiful Moscow? Here are our passports to identify us. Will you please to tell the captain, as soon as he arrives to-morrow morning, that we are genuine, and request him to sign this petition and post it?"

The officer courteously declined to look

at the passports, said that my word was sufficient, and accepted my commission. Then, rising, drawing himself up, with the heels of his high wrinkled boots in regulation contact, and the scarlet pipings of his baggy green trousers and tight coat bristling with martial etiquette, he made me a profound bow, hand on heart, and said, "Madam, accept the thanks of Russia for the high honor you have done her in learning her difficult language!"

I accepted Russia's thanks with due pomp, and hastened into the street. That small, low-roofed station house seemed to be getting too contracted to contain all of us and etiquette.

Again, upon another occasion, also in Moscow, it struck us that it would be a happy idea and a clever economy of time to get ourselves certified to before our departure, instead of after our arrival in St. Petersburg. Accordingly, we betook ourselves, in a violent snow-storm, to the police station inside the walls of the old city, as we had changed our hotel, and that was now our quarter.

A vision of cells; of unconfined prisoners tranquilly executing hasty repairs on their clothing, with twine or something similar, in the anteroom; of a complete police hierarchy, running through all the gradations of pattern in gold and silver embroidery to the plain uniform of the roundsman, gladdened our sight while we waited. A gorgeous silver-laced official finally certified our identity, as usual without other proof than our statement, and, clapping a five-kopek stamp on our paper, bowed us out. I had never seen a stamp on such a document before, and had never been asked to pay anything; but I restrained my natural eagerness to reimburse the government and ask questions, with the idea that it might have been a purely mechanical action on the part of the officer, and in the hope of developments. They came. A couple of hours later, a messenger entered our room at the hotel, without

knocking, in Russian lower-class style, and demanded thirty kopeks for the signature. I offered to pay for the stamp on the spot, and to supply the remaining twenty-five kopeks when furnished with an adequate reason therefor.

"Is the captain's signature worth so much?" I asked.

"That is very little," was the answer.

"So it is. Is the captain's signature worth so little? Tell me why."

He could not, or would not.

I made him wait while I wrote a petition to the police. The burden of it was: "Why? I was born an American and curious; not too curious, but just curious enough to be interested in the ethnographical and psychological problems of foreign lands. Why the twenty-five kopeks? It is plainly too little or too much. Why?"

The messenger accepted the five kopeks for the stamp, and set out to deliver the document. But he returned after a moment, and said that he would entrust the five kopeks to my safe-keeping until he brought the answer to my document, — which he had had just sufficient time to read, by the way. That was the last I ever heard of him or of it, and I was forced to conclude that some thirsty soul had been in quest of "tea-money" for *vódka*. I am still in debt to the Russian government for five kopeks.

The last time I arrived in Petersburg, I tried a new plan. Instead of making a trip of a couple of miles to get the signature of our police captain, or sending the petition at the languid convenience of the overworked *dvórník*, I went to the general post office, which was close by, and made a personal request that my mail matter be delivered at my new address. The proper official, whom I found after a search through most of the building, during which I observed their methods, declared that my request was illegal, and ordered me to go for the customary signature. But by this time

I had learned that the mere threat to make Russian officials inspect my passport was productive of much the same effect as drawing a pistol on them would have had. It was not in the least necessary to have the document with me; going through the motions was easier, and quite as good. Every man of them flushed up and repelled the suggestion as a sort of personal insult; but they invariably came to terms on the spot. Accordingly, I tried it here.

This particular man, when I pretended to draw my "open sesame" spell from my pocket, instantly dropped his official air, asked me to write my name, with quite a human, friendly manner, and then remarked, with a very every-day laugh, "That is sufficient. I have seen so much of it on your previous petitions that I can swear to it myself much better than the police captain could."

The most prominent instance of minute thoughtfulness and care on the part of the post-office officials which came under my notice occurred in the depths of the country. I sent a letter with a ten-kopek stamp on it to the post town, twelve versts distant. Foreign postage had been raised from seven to ten kopeks, and stamps, in a new design, of the latter denomination (hitherto non-existent) had been in use for about four months. The country postmaster, who had seen nothing but the old issues, carefully removed my stamp and sent it back to me, replacing it with a seven-kopek stamp and a three-kopek stamp. I felt, for a moment, as though I had been both highly complimented and gently rebuked for my remarkable skill in counterfeiting!

As a parallel case, I may add that there were plenty of intelligent people in New York city and elsewhere who were not aware that the United States still issued three-cent stamps, or who could tell the color of them, until the Columbian set appeared to attract their attention.

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