

and circumstances necessitate their making due and proper provision for age, infirmity, or other conditions of life in which they desire to keep themselves comparatively independent of their fellows—is not, however, to be fully seen in the returns of the savings banks. Such returns, of course, speak eloquently for the very praiseworthy efforts of some millions of the people who are endeavouring, in their practice of thrift and economy, to better their condition. Each depositor possesses in his bank-book a most serviceable certificate; and that there are at the present time between five and six million persons in the British Islands holding such certificates of their well-doing, is at all events a very pleasant and hopeful consideration. But in all probability the amount saved in the savings banks by the wage-earning classes does not represent one-half of the actual sum of the “providence money” of the people. Periodical investments for the purchase of house or other property; sums paid towards the premiums of insurance policies; deposits in friendly and in yearly societies; money paid for merchandise and small businesses; cash stowed away, in not a few instances, privately and against all risk of failure of banks, or fraud by their officers—these are a few of the means, all more or less legitimate, by which vast numbers of

persons, other than savings bank depositors, provide against those inevitable “rainy days and rude” that come, sooner or later, to almost every member of the human family. How much the total amount of the people’s providence, effected by these methods, would come to in the aggregate, it were difficult indeed to say; but it requires no effort to perceive that, added to the gross accumulations, now fast approaching one hundred millions sterling, in those happily ordered institutions, the savings banks, the sum must be enormous, thus affording substantial evidence of the increasing temperance, thrift, and providence of our fellow men and women.

The following is an estimate of the total sum of money now ascertained to belong almost exclusively to our working-class population:—

| | | |
|---|--------|---------------------|
| I. In the Savings Banks | | £100,000,000 |
| II. In Benefit and Friendly Societies | | 50,000,000 |
| III. In Building Societies | | 40,000,000 |
| IV. Share Capital in Co-operative Societies | | 10,000,000 |
| | | <u>£200,000,000</u> |

Were this great sum divided among the entire population of the United Kingdom, every person—man, woman, and child—from the Queen to the humblest “workus” individual, would receive about six pounds apiece!

A RUSSIAN WEDDING.

BY FREDERICK HASTINGS.



FORMALITIES connected with nuptial arrangements in the land of the Czar are more elaborate, picturesque, and suggestive than those in our own land. I am indebted greatly to a very intelligent friend in Alexandrosky, and to various works on the ceremonies of the Greco-Russian Church, for explanation of some

of the quaint customs which I witnessed during a recent brief residence in Russia.

It seems that when a young couple is at first betrothed, very orthodox Russians like to have the priest come and bless them, by saying a few prayers before the lamp-lit “eikon,” or sacred picture, in the room. This practice is, however, falling into disuse. Then after a betrothal the accepted one is almost always at the house of the bride. He leaves late and will probably be again at the house by luncheon-time. The parents may find this rather wearisome, but the young people enjoy it, and often, doubtless, wish the parents were not so assiduous in their attentions. The mother has often to understand what is meant by being *de trop*. A Russian artist recently very cleverly delineated this in a picture, called “Two is company,

three is none.” We can see how much the enamoured one wishes the stately old dame were far removed.

In the higher circles, almost immediately after a betrothal, workwomen are hired to make the trousseau. According to an old Russian rule, the bridegroom makes his bride a present of a wedding costume, as well as of jewellery. The dowry of a Russian maiden will consist of a full wardrobe, household linen, kitchen utensils, silver articles, carpets, curtains, china, furniture, and a piano. The latter is said to be indispensable. They do not care for plated articles, but require that everything shall be of solid silver. People in very moderate circumstances begin early to lay by something for the dowry of their daughters. Wedding presents are seldom given by friends. Should a young wife die without leaving any children behind, her dowry can be lawfully claimed by her parents. The husband can retain only the bed, and the picture with which his deceased wife was ceremonially blessed.

Sometimes young ladies form parties to help the intended bride to make her clothes. It is said to be a popular belief that if any part of the trousseau forming the dowry be unpicked, the young couple will pick quarrels when they are tied together.

The month of May is supposed to be an unlucky month for marrying. The name of the month re-

sembles in sound the Russian verb "to worry;" hence, in part, the superstition. A more likely explanation is this, that as the winter breaks up in May and the snow melts, leaving much garbage and filth to fester in the hot sun, a great amount of sickness is prevalent, and the month comes to be regarded as unlucky and trying.

The guests are far more numerous at a Russian than at an English wedding. They are invited to be "assistants" at the wedding. The witness, who is generally the grandest of the "connections" of the family, is the most important person. He pays the priest's fees. Then come ladies of honour and bridesmen. The latter have to purchase sweetmeats for the bridesmaids. The "boyarin," who carries the sacred picture of Christ in silver and gilt, is generally a little boy. When the party arrives at the church, it is his duty to hand the two pictures to the "reader," who places them behind the "royal gates" or leaning against the altar-screen.

The old nurse, or housekeeper, superintends the carrying of the dowry from the house of the bride to that of her future husband, and arranges everything for the use of the bride. There is no law as to the number of bridesmaids or their costume. Their dresses are not all alike. On the eve of the wedding-day sometimes a "farewell girls' party" is given. No gentleman attends this. All those present must be from the unmarried. They sing choruses, chase each other in the garden, and romp to their heart's content. They devour any amount of tea, ice-cream, lemonade, and sweetmeats. After supper they say farewell, and leave the intended bride very exhausted in view of the ceremonies of the following day. The old custom is for the betrothed pair to fast (eat nothing) on the day of their marriage until after the ceremony, which, in the family of a noble, must always take place in the evening. This makes the day most tiresome to a girl. The bride distributes her cast-off girlish toys, ribbons, and jewellery to her companions. These things are called "maiden beauty." The peasant-girls cut up and divide among their companions, on their wedding-day, the long ribbons which are fastened at the end of the plait of hair which hangs down the back. These peasants, immediately after their marriage, have the hair braided in two plaits and wound round the head, then covered with a sort of tight cap tied behind, or with a cotton or silk handkerchief. When at Pargola, in Finland, I often saw the unmarried girls trooping along in the eventide, hand in hand, singing their weird melodies, and friends told me to notice the difference between the style of the hair of the unmarried and the married. The married women have, in addition, under the invariable handkerchief, a little piece of linen, a lappet about the size of a florin, hanging over the centre of the forehead. This is a more evident proof of marriage than wearing a wedding-ring.

When the women begin to braid up the hair they sing part of a wedding-song—

"Ah! my braid, my braid of maiden hair;
Ah! soon shall it be divided in two!"

When fastened up, the married woman, however young, always wears a cap when in company with others. She will go about the home without a head-dress, but seldom out of doors. Of course those in the higher ranks do as they like in respect to the hair, but we are speaking of the custom among the peasants.



"TWO IS COMPANY, THREE IS NONE."
(From a Painting by a Russian Artist.)

Some superstitious friends will drop a bit of money into the shoe the bride is to wear, and this is for good fortune.

Banns are generally published, and the fees to the priest are regulated by what the parties can afford. The priest gives a certificate. Marriages are allowed to take place on Sundays as well as week-days, and are generally at eventide in the church. We were much surprised to see the crowds in one great church in the Nevsky Prospect. We were rather fortunate in witnessing a marriage of one of lofty official rank, as well as at another place in seeing the way in which the poor peasantry celebrate their nuptial festivities. Much of the finery is hired by the poorer classes, and crowns which are used belong to the church.

The wealthier class provide a large silver waiter, with loaf and massive castle-shaped salt-cellar filled with salt. When it is time to set off to church, the father of the bridegroom takes a picture of Christ, purposely provided, and "waves it crosswise over his son's head three times; then presents it to him to kiss. He

then gives it to the mother, who does the same. Then taking the loaf from the salver he waves it in a similar manner, with the salt-cellar in it, but it is not kissed." It is said to be a very bad omen if the salt-cellar should during the ceremony fall to the ground. Nothing is said during this brief ceremony but the words, "In the name of the Father," &c. The son kisses his parents' hands, and they embrace him. As soon as this little domestic ceremony is over the bridegroom sets out for the church. The bride, who has gone through a similar scene, soon arrives, preceded by her "boyarin," who carries the sacred picture in front of her. Where carriages are used, the "boyarin," arrayed in "scarlet silk shirt, black velvet full trousers, and high top-boots," goes bareheaded with the bride, keeping his face in the direction in which she is going. The young pair meet at the door, and proceed hand-in-hand towards the "naloy." This is a small altar, like a small, low, square reading-desk. It is light, and we were interested in seeing how rapidly and easily it was moved from before one picture to another. Carpet is laid down in honour of the young couple, even as it is for the bishops when they come into church. The choir of male voices begins an anthem which is certainly very powerful and beautiful, although unaccompanied by any instrument. Alas! we never understood more than the words frequently heard, "Gospodi, gospodi, gospodi pismileo," which, we were told, meant "O Lord, O Lord, have mercy upon us!" The young couple prostrate themselves thrice; then the "royal gates," or door, in the broad, richly-gilt, picture-panelled altar-screen, are thrown open, and the priest in his ornate canonicals appears. He makes the sign of the cross over their heads, and then places in their hands two wax tapers ornamented with ribbons. Incense is waved, and the service begins. After two short prayers, the priest goes to the altar and brings thence two thick rings of gold which have been worn during the engagement. These had been given to him at the commencement of the service to be laid on the "throne," or high altar. He gives the rings to the young people with certain words. They then exchange rings three times. "This signifies that their future joys, cares, intentions, and actions should be mutual and in good agreement."

After more prayers, and the Litany for the Imperial family, the significant act called "crowning" takes place. The groomsmen places in front of the young couple a pink handkerchief, upon which they are motioned to stand. It is said that there is a popular superstition that the one who first puts foot on the handkerchief will be head of the house. Of course they do not hurry, but each courteously tries to be first. The priest, among other things, asks the significant question, "Have you ever promised yourself to another?" This must be a very awkward question for some ladies and gentlemen to answer, but they can use the words of the ritual, "I have not promised myself, honourable father." We fear that often the truth is strained in answering this. More prayers follow; then the "reader" appears with a salver, on which are "two gaudy crowns of plated silver, ornamented

with little medallions of our Saviour and the Virgin." The priest makes the sign of the cross with one crown over the head of the bridegroom, saying loudly, "The servant of God, M—, is crowned with the handmaid of God, N—, in the name of the Father," &c. He then holds the medallion of our Saviour to the lips of the bridegroom to be kissed, and places the crown on the head. Sometimes the groomsmen holds the crown a few inches above the head of the bridegroom. The poorer people prefer to wear it. As the crown is large and heavy, a handkerchief is stuffed behind to keep it from falling off. The same ceremony is performed over the bride. Then, after more prayers, the Communion Cup is brought. This is filled with wine and water. The priest blesses it, and then holds it to the lips of the young couple to sip. Three times they sip it. This is a type that all joys and sorrows must be equally shared. It also has reference to the custom of the primitive Church for newly-married persons to partake of the Holy Communion on their nuptial day. After the sipping of the cup, and more prayers, the priest joins the hands of the newly-married under his stole. This indicates the indissolubility of the union. They then follow him round the "naloy" three times, hand-in-hand, symbolising the eternity of their union and the joyful nature of their new life. Another prayer, and the crowns are removed. Then the priest desires the couple to kiss each other. Formerly the crowns were worn for a week, but a few minutes are enough now. The newly-married then go and kiss the pictures on the altar-screen, and go home.

Arrived at home, the ceremony of benediction by the parents is again performed, and in similar fashion to that before starting for the church. The superstition connected with the candles that are held during the ceremony is peculiar. They watch which candle burns most rapidly. The one who holds the candle which is lowest at the end of the service is supposed to be the one who will die first. It is a very melancholy idea, and must have a painful effect all through life on those deeply attached.

Before eighteen on the male side and sixteen on the female, no marriage can take place; nor can it after eighty for men or sixty for women. A fourth marriage is not permitted. Priests may only marry once. They have to treat their wives kindly to preserve them, as they cannot have a second wife. Marriages in secret, without witnesses, are not valid, and no orthodox Russian can marry an unbaptised person. If he should marry a foreigner, his wife must bind herself in writing to bring up the children in the Greco-Russian faith.

In Calabria, where Greek colonies exist, marriages preserve the old Greek features. One crown only is used, and the man and wife alternately take and wear it during the procession round the "naloy" in the nave of the church. When the wedding party returns to the home of the bridegroom, the wife, following ancient precedent, "affects a dread of entering, and waits until the mother-in-law, or some one to represent her, appears, and places a sugared almond in the young



A RUSSIAN BRIDE.

bride's mouth as a sign that she is henceforth to be the true house-mistress." In the villages, the bride, alas! often becomes the slave of the mother-in-law, and of the whole household. Of course, in place of the wedding breakfast, as the ceremony usually takes place in the evening, a supper and dance finish up the nuptials with which so many superstitions are mixed up.

Directly a ceremony was over, we noticed there was a great rush for carriages and droskies, while the crowd outside pressed against the railings to scan the dresses and uniforms of those who were compelled to wait until their vehicles drew up. We must confess

that we were more struck with the handsome character of the countenances of the men than with those of the ladies; and it is, perhaps, English pride that leads one to say that our female sex is certainly more generally beautiful than the Russian.

Not often is any honeymoon taken; the young people settle down at once to enjoy their own home and receive their friends. This is economy and convenience. Russia is generally so uninteresting in its landscape, and the distances are so great, that any young couple would have to go far to find a place to please them. We can believe they would say from their hearts, "There is no place like home."