A COURT BALL AT THE WINTER PALACE, ST. PETERSBURG.

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SOCIAL LIFE IN RUSSIA.

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First Paper.

I.

IN order to understand the social structure of Russia we must imagine to ourselves a Gothic cathedral. The visitor who enters the nave is struck first of all by an inexplicable disproportion between the heaviness of the colossus and the frail elegance of its visible anatomy. Arches with fine mouldings, sustained by slender columns, are the only apparent supports of the enormous mass of stone. All these supports converge upward toward a common point, where they abut, namely, toward the key-stone, which often takes the form of a figure sculptured in relief. It seems to be suspended in space, and it nevertheless carries the whole weight of the edifice. This central figure from which everything starts and to which everything converges is the Tsar; the arches and the columns are the aristocracy, which emanates from him, and which alone stands out in relief on the thick masonry behind this net-work of lace. We say the aristocracy, and not the nobility. In Russia the word "nobility" corresponds with ideas considerably different from those which it awakens in the West. It is not here an ancient and closed caste; it is a numerous class, open, and increased each generation by the service of the state under all its forms. It includes all the officers, and with few exceptions all the minor functionaries and all the magistrates. In the country districts there is nothing intermediate between the peasantry and the nobility, which counts in its ranks all that in France and in England would be called the upper and lower middle classes. In the towns alone, in the rather limited class of the merchants, and in the still more limited group of the liberal professions, we might find something analogous to the French *bourgeoisie*. Nevertheless we should have to take this term in the sense which it had in our European towns in the Middle Ages. The emancipation of serfs dealt a mortal blow to the minor nobility. Such of its members as possessed only a few acres of land and a few serfs, losing at the same time a part of this land and the gratuitous labor of their emancipated serfs, had to sell their patrimony. They then migrated toward the towns, demanded their living from the service of the state, and established themselves in the bureaux of the administration. The result is—if we may associate these two words—a very numerous and a very miserable noble proletariat. With the exception of a few historical families, the greater part of this nobility has its origin in the *tchine*, and is constantly augmented and renewed from this source. The *tchine* is the uniform hierarchy, established by Peter the Great to include all his servants in a vast mandarinate, where the civilian, the military man, and the churchman are assimilated with equality of rank. This Jacob's ladder rises at the beginning of life before all Russians of every condition, even before those who have no condition at all. The great business of existence is to slowly climb the fourteen steps until they reach that one from which death alone will dislodge them. At two epochs in the year, when the Emperor distributes his favors, on the first of the year and at Easter, you may see during several days all the functionaries and officers looking for their names amongst the thousands of others on the closely printed lists which fill the third page of the newspapers, just as the Italians look for their numbers on the lists of the drawings of the royal lottery. If the first of the year and Easter do not bring to the exemplary functionary a hoist up the ladder of the *tchine*, they will bring him the cross, the plaque,

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or the cordon of one of the seven orders of chivalry, which must be placed in mathematical progression, according to the degrees of service, one above the other, on persevering breasts. At the top of the hierarchy, on the uppermost step, radiate a few highly favored by fortune, the Field-Marshals and the Chancellor of the empire. On the last of the fourteen steps the cornet and the student humbly take position. After the sixth step, corresponding with the rank of Colonel, hereditary nobility is acquired; while the fourth step confers the much-desired title of General, both in the civil and military order, with the qualification of "Excellency." When one has not lived in Russia it is impossible to conceive the prestige attached to this title of General, or the facilities which it gives everywhere and for everything. The man who is invested with it is separated from the common run of mortals. He obeys the laws only so far as he finds it convenient, and commands in everything, wherever he may be. The common people obey him as if he were a demigod. To attain this dignity is the supreme ambition of all the servants of the state. The common salutation, by way of pleasantry amongst friends, is this verse from the comedy of Griboïedof, which has become a proverb: "I wish you health and the *tchine* of General." Nevertheless, the mere fact of being a General, especially in civil order, does not class a man in the aristocracy of Petersburg. For that, one at least of the following conditions is necessary: brilliant birth, an office at the court, service in the Guards, a reputation for elegance, political influence, and finally, and above all, the favor of the sovereign. You must be of the court or approach the court easily. Two words borrowed from current language characterize the absorption of the empire (an empire which covers the half of Europe and the half of Asia) for the benefit of one man and of a privileged *élite;* Petersburg, the capital of this empire, is called, in official style, "The Residence." This term tells us plainly that the city derives its importance not from the interests that are concentrated there, but from the circumstance that the court resides there. On the other hand, you will invariably hear an individual or a place judged with these words, "He is in society." "Society" means the 2500 persons who are inscribed on the lists of the grand fêtes of the court; the rest of the world does not exist from the point of view of representation.

These short explanations were necessary in order to mark the boundaries of the world whose exterior life we wish to depict. To those who desire to study more deeply its constitution and secrets we cannot do better than recommend the reading of the memoirs of Saint-Simon, who described by anticipation the court of the Tsars when he sketched with satirical pen the physiognomy and peculiarities of the court of Louis XIV. We find in the court of the Tsars the absolute predominance of the military element, with a special *nuance*, which is the fetichism of uniform communicated a century ago by German military régime; the disdain of the nobility of Versailles for the provincial nobility; the competitions and intrigues around the sovereign; the craze for imitating his tastes and manners—in short, all the forms of that perpetual monomania which haunts the soul of the courtier, namely, the desire to be distinguished by the master.

And now let us beg the reader to try and form an idea of the frame in which we are going to sketch a few scenes of elegant life, as it were—those luminous images which the electric-light projects for a moment on a white wall.

II.

This framework is the immense polar region buried beneath snow, vast horizons of plains of a crude white color—a dead world, shining and brilliant like old Chinese porcelain. The accidents of the land having neither form nor color, you divine their existence vaguely, lost as they are beneath the uniform shroud. This frozen world reminds one of the Eastern desert, of which it has the silence, the solitude, and the dazzling quality; the only difference is that snow takes the place of sand. For whole weeks together heavy flakes of snow fall from the low sky, obscuring from view the nearest objects; ten, twenty, and sometimes thirty degrees of cold—a temperature which seems to exclude all manifestations of life.

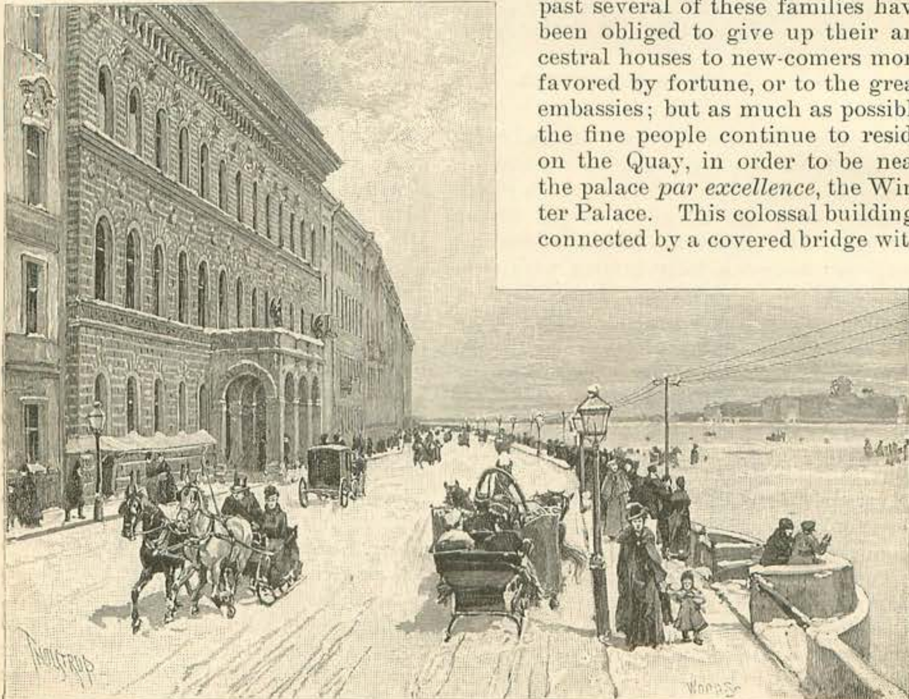
Suddenly before the train which has rolled the weary traveller for many mortal days across this dreary and unvaried landscape a capital arises: it is the Palmyra of the North, heralded by the painted or gilded domes of its churches. While

ON THE NEVSKOI PROSPEKT.

the miserable sun of pale copper-color shines for a few hours just above the horizon, let us get into a sleigh, which glides rapidly over the noiseless carpet of the streets. It carries us through business quarters, between lofty houses with double windows, and crosses three lines of canals connecting with the Neva. Here we are in the heart of the city, on the Nevskoi Prospekt. The black trotting horses run at full speed, cross each other like flashes of lightning, making the snow fly beneath their feet in fine dust around the light "egoists." This is the name given to those light sleighs without any back to lean against, where an officer and sometimes a young woman balance themselves, their knees imprisoned beneath the rug of bear-skin. When a couple ride in these sleighs the man holds the woman with a graceful gesture, passing his right arm around her waist. On the tiny seat an enormous coachman, with a long white beard, wrapped in his long coat, a square cap of red or blue velvet on his head, drives his trotters with pontifical majesty, his arms well rounded, his elbows out, his hands taut. He controls the animals by means of two reins no thicker than ribbons. The whole harness, composed of a few leather thongs, is scarcely visible. This gives to the horse a picturesque elegance; it seems to run at liberty beneath the big wooden arch that curves above his neck. Sometimes the sleigh is harnessed with a "madman"; that is to say, a loose horse is attached by a simple trace, who prances and curvets all alone like a wild horse; when a third is added it becomes the "troïka"—the classical team—where the shaft-horse trots between his two companions, who are kept at a gallop all the time. On both sides of the road more modest vehicles, arranged in long rows, appeal to the humbler folks. These are sleighs for hire. They are drawn by poor little ponies, and driven by peasants crouched up in their touloupe of sheepskin—farmers from the environs who come to the capital to earn their living with their farm-horses during the winter season. On the sidewalks the crowd of pedestrians hurry toward the Gostiny Dvor, the bazar, vaulted after the Oriental fashion, where you perceive beneath the arcades the low-

roofed shops of the goldsmiths and of the sellers of holy images. A group of mujiks have stopped in front of a chapel all ablaze with light; they are piously making the sign of the cross and prostrating themselves on the ground before lighting their candles before the silver-gilt image of the Madonna, which we see shining in the midst of this glowing halo. Let us continue our ride to the end of the Prospekt. We round the building of the Admiralty, pass alongside the Church of St. Isaac, remark as we pass the admirable statue of Peter the Great, raised by the sculptor Falconet on the bank of the river. The bronze Tsar is represented on horseback; with a gesture of sovereign will he causes the town of his dream to rise at his command on this desert marsh where the elks used to wander. A few steps further and we reach the Quay. This is the marvel of St. Petersburg—this dike of rose Finland granite which stretches in a straight line over a length of more than three miles, closing in the Neva, which is as broad at this spot as an arm of the sea. The river is held captive beneath its crust of ice. Foot-passengers and equipages cross it in every direction. In the middle there is a crowd of sportsmen around a ring, where a course has been traced for horse-racing. Further on some Laplanders have fixed their home in a tent of skins, in front of which the children amuse themselves by riding on the backs of reindeers. Opposite, on the northern bank of the Neva, the Cathedral of St. Peter and St. Paul rises above the bastions of the citadel. A flash of light bursts from the twilight sky, and remains there motionless, like a tongue of fire. It is the lofty and slender golden point of the steeple. A ray of the invisible horizontal sun strikes it above the mist, in the clouds, and this luminous sign indicates the burial-place of the Romanoffs, the place where they all go to rest beside the Tsar who founded their race. Further on, the river divides into numerous branches, which run toward the sea through the docks of Vassili-Ostroff, and the view is lost amidst the masts of the ships, fixed for long months in the spot where winter has imprisoned them.

Let us proceed along the Court Quay. As we advance, an uninterrupted series of palaces unfolds itself before our eyes, those of the Grand-Dukes and those of the families of mark. For some years past several of these families have been obliged to give up their ancestral houses to new-comers more favored by fortune, or to the great embassies; but as much as possible the fine people continue to reside on the Quay, in order to be near the palace *par excellence*, the Winter Palace. This colossal building, connected by a covered bridge with



THE COURT QUAY.

the Palace of the Hermitage, seems to command all the subject palaces around it, and to shelter them under its wings. Built in rococo style by the architect Rastrelli in the reign of Catherine, it has been often altered and enlarged in order to lodge multitudes of servitors of all ranks. It is a world in itself, like the palace of the Sultan at Constantinople. The resemblance is striking, and shows us the identity of origin and manners between the masters of the East and the masters of the North. One single fact will give an idea of the luxury and disorder which formerly prevailed in the immense caravansary: when a severe revision of the *personnel* and of the lodgings was made for the first time after the fire which broke out in the reign of Nicholas, several cows were found in the attics. These cows belonged to an old servant, who kept them for his own personal use.

Let us stop at the Winter Palace. It is there that we shall at once make acquaintance with Russian society on one of the days when it has been invited to a grand court ball.

III.

In the morning the sergeants of the imperial household have gone through the town with their lists to the houses of the elect, who have been convoked for that evening. An invitation to the court is an order given on the very day of the fête. According to received etiquette, it liberates from all anterior engagements with private persons; it liberates even from duties toward the dead, for mourning does not dispense one from the obligation to appear at a court ceremony, and it must be laid aside when one enters the palace. A woman is not allowed to present herself in black before the sovereign, unless she is wearing mourning for one of the sovereign's relatives. Dinner has been taken hastily, for the ball opens at nine o'clock, and you must be there well before the hour in the salons, where you wait for the arrival of the Emperor. Hundreds of carriages fall in line and deposit at the different entrances of the Winter Palace shapeless bundles of furs, and then return to take their position on the square. The coachmen, who pass a part of the night standing in the snow, gather around large fires lighted in grates, which are placed there for these occasions. It is a picturesque bivouac. They look like elfs assembled in the darkness on this field of ice to guard the enchanted palace where a magician is calling up the sweetest visions in a mirage of spring.

The doors close behind the bundles of fur, and immediately after they have entered the vestibule they are metamorphosed by a touch of the magician's wand. The fairy spectacle begins. The heavy cloaks fall from bare shoulders, and beautiful butterflies issue from these chrysalides in the midst of the rare flowers that cover the marble steps, and in the mild air of a June atmosphere. A cortége reminding one of the *Arabian Nights* mounts

STATUE OF PETER THE GREAT.

the staircases; trains of lace sweep over the porphyry steps; diamonds and gems shine in the glow of the lustres; there is a brilliant array of many-colored uniforms; sabres and spurs clank over the floors. The guests defile between pickets of Chevalier Guards, chosen from amongst the handsomest men in the regiment—giants in armor, who stand as motionless as statues. The company assembles in the White Room, in the Salle du Trône.

Here in the front rank are considerable personages, the old "portrait ladies," so called because they wear in their corsage in a frame of brilliants a miniature of the Empress; severe guardians of ancient etiquette, living chronicles of the court, they teach the traditions to the swarm of young women over whom they keep watch, namely, the maids of honor, who may be recognized by the monogram in diamonds

of the reigning Empress, which they wear buckled with a knot of blue ribbon on the left shoulder. The celebrated beauties of Petersburg are all there. They cross the room with a picturesque indolency and pliancy in their walk and bearing. There is something languid in their manner, as though their looks and words were absently following a long dream that leads them to the extreme limits of their interminable father-land. Amongst the men who press around them we remark first of all some aged people and high dignitaries, old servitors who have grown white in the service of the court ever since the reign of Nicholas; aides-de-camp of his Majesty, ministers, ambassadors, and chamberlains with the golden key on their backs; and all these worthy bosoms are bedecked with grand cordons and constellated with decorations which do not leave a square inch of surface free on their breasts. Then come the young officers; most of them belong to the two crack regiments of the Chevalier Guards and the Horse Guards. They carry in their hands a heavy helmet surmounted with a silver eagle with open wings. Here beside them are Lancers in red jackets, Grodno Hussars in green, Cossacks draped in their long tunics belted with cartridge cases in niellé silver. The Hussars of the Guard look peculiarly elegant in their short white dolmans embroidered with gold and bordered with sable fur, which hang loosely over their shoulders. In this crowd the pages of the Empress move about discreetly, and finally the servitors of the palace, the runners, with their hats with long plumes of the time of Catherine, and negroes dressed in rich Oriental costume. The gloomy note of the black dress-coat is banished from this brilliant symphony of color. One single swallow-tail may be seen—that of the honorable minister of the United States.

Nine o'clock. The doors of the private apartments of the Winter Palace open. Immediately there is a deathly silence. A voice announces, "The Emperor." The Tsar advances, followed by all the members of his family, each one in the rank assigned to him by his degree of relationship. If you wish to comprehend at a glance the social secret of this empire, turn your back to the door through which the sovereign enters, and look at this entrance by reflection—if I may so express myself—on the faces of those present. At the same moment all these physiognomies put on, as it were, the same uniform, the same solemn expression, at once grave and smiling. The whole vital force of these men and women is concentrated in their eyes, which seek those of the master. We have never contemplated this spectacle without having been reminded of the first appearance of the rays of the sun on the crests of mountains at the instant when it rises. You have no need to look behind you to know that the sun has risen; you are informed of it by this quivering light on the opposite summits. In the same way, when you are a little accustomed to the court, you have only to look at the faces of the courtiers to be able to see, without possibility of mistake, that the Emperor is about to come, that the Emperor is coming, or that the Emperor has come. And his coming is in reality a rising of the sun—of the sun which brings favor and dispenses life to all these persons.

The first bars of the polonaise immediately re-echo through the rooms. It is not a dance, but a cadenced march, the traditional promenade which opens the ball. The Grand Marshal and the Grand Mistress take the head of the procession. Generally this venerable couple represent between them pretty nearly two complete centuries. The Emperor gives his hand to one of the Grand-Duchesses, the Empress to one of the foreign ambassadors, and other couples form in their suite and proceed around the room. After this obligatory ceremony the sovereign goes to chat with the diplomatic corps or with his grand dignitaries, and the quadrilles and waltzes begin; but the ball does not become really animated until the mazurka, that dashing military and *par excellence* national dance. The cavalier marks the rhythm of the music by striking the floor with the heel of his spurred boot; he raises his partner in his arms like a trembling bird, dashes across the room in three bounds, deposits his prey at the other end, and falls on his knee before her.

The grand balls are the most imposing, but the more private balls, called "bals des palmiers," are perhaps more magnificent. Those who wish to see what old society was must make haste to be present at a "bal des palmiers." There is nothing in the other courts of Europe that can be compared to this fairy-like scene. At one o'clock the Grand Marshal opens the doors of a long gallery transformed into a trop-

ical conservatory. On the boxes out of which spring palm-trees, myrtles, and camellias in full bloom small tables of twelve covers are placed sufficient for a supper for five hundred people. In the paths of this African forest, which is brought in the morning from the imperial greenhouses on sleighs, the picturesque crowd that we have above described form groups, while the music plays, hidden behind the foliage. In this realm of verdure all is joy for the eyes—the flowers on the trees and on the women; the bright colors; the play of light on the cloaks and the cuirasses, on the court dresses all stiff with gold embroidery, on the flashing steel of the swords and helmets, on the plaques of the orders of chivalry, and on the rivers of diamonds—orders and diamonds such as you see nowhere except in Russia.

THE EMPRESS WEARING THE "KAKOCHNIK."

This is a unique fête for the eyes, but it is still more so for the philosophical observer. Nowhere else can be seen in stronger relief the perpetual struggle of refined life against this cruel climate—the caprice of the impossible which caused Petersburg to be born, and which makes it live so near the north pole. These ladies in low-necked dresses who are lounging beneath these blooming camellias have come over a road of ice through twenty degrees of cold. Between the branches of the palm-trees we can see the motionless river with its burden of equipages; we can see the carpet of snow which surrounds the palace; and our thoughts follow this carpet of snow far, very far, over thousands of versts, and see it covering even to Asia the sad solitudes where the Russian people are sleeping their gloomy winter sleep. Whether we look at the sight before us or whether we reflect, everything is contrast and miracle in this noise of pleasure in the midst of such a

silence, in this supreme luxury of civilization at the order of the almighty power of the East.

When this almighty power is weary of the scenery of the tropics, it changes it at will for a frame composed of the marvels of European genius and the treasures of Flanders and of Italy. Sometimes, in accordance with the usage which dates from the time of the great Catherine, the ball is transported into the neighboring rooms of the Hermitage Museum, and the mazurka is danced in the midst of an assembly of spectators painted by Veronese, Rubens, and Vandyck.

The living and real fête is as elegant and superb as the fête of those noble phantoms on the panels; and for the stranger who brings to it our paltry cares it is almost as chimerical and as distant as that of the patricians of Veronese. Do those who order the fête and enjoy it bring to it the happy conviction of former times before the days of disaster? There is an indescribable something suggestive of ceremonies which are continued out of a sense of duty, and of a Church where faith has lost its firmness.

There can no longer be any frank gayety in this Winter Palace, haunted as it must be by one of those formidable souvenirs which impose upon royal dwellings a lugubrious physiognomy. In entering this palace under the new reign, on the days when Alexander III. is holding court, the servitors of his father cannot forget the last receptions of Alexander II., which were darkened by so many tragedies. One in particular we can see before our eyes as if it were yesterday. On March 2, 1880, was celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of the accession to the throne of the Emancipator, who at that memorable date was to receive the tribute of gratitude from his people. Magnificent fêtes had been arranged but two weeks before the anniversary day, the 18th of February; the explosion at the Winter Palace occurred, ruined all those projects, and spread mourning and terror around the sovereign. A repetition of the attempt was announced for the 2d of March, and in the capital, smitten with unreasonable panic, the precautions of the police caused people to believe that it was a day of riot rather than of festivity. When we entered these sumptuous halls, where the imagination saw nothing but mines and ambuscades, alarm was betrayed on many a face. Alexander II. appeared; his visible fatigue and emotion scarcely allowed him to address a few words to his guests. Prince Gortchakoff, who had been absent from Russia for several years, was seen there for the last time. The old companions of the Emperor, witnesses twenty-five years previously of the prodigal hopes that had greeted his accession to the throne, looked without courage through the veil of present sadness upon their master, grown old, smitten physically and morally by so many blows, a prisoner in this palace which threatened to fall in ruins over his head. The illustrious Chancellor, in the decline of age and success, betrayed by his strength as well as by his plans, leaned painfully on a console in the salon of Peter the Great, in the midst of that court where absence had made him for so long a time a stranger. A presentiment of an inevitable misfortune oppressed all hearts and hovered over all this august pomp and circumstance.

One year after, March 13, 1881, there was a fresh meeting in this palace, in presence of the bleeding body that had been brought in from a neighboring street. The unforgettable vision of that afternoon is still present in the minds of the youngest of the dancers when a ball calls them to the palace. They see once more the terror and desolation of these vast rooms; the courtiers watching for the doctors to give them news of the agony; the immense square all black with people; the stupor of the crowd waiting with eyes fixed on the imperial standard; finally the sign of the cross which passed over all these tearful visages when the standard fell down the flag-staff, announcing that the drama was over. The habitual guests of the palace who passed there the winter months of 1881, and heard on two occasions the dull explosion of dynamite, retain in their ears that besetting anguish, and more than one catch themselves listening for it between two bars of a waltz.

After all, this is perhaps a stimulant for wild pleasure, especially for the Russian nature; and for that matter it is a sin to sadden by these gloomy thoughts the young couples who are dancing beneath the palm-trees. Life, which desires us to forget everything in order to continue its work, orders them to forget and be happy by love, as it commands these plants to bear flowers in spite of ice and snow. No souvenir of mourning and of terror can

A SPRING REVIEW ON THE "CHAMP DE MARS."

prevail against the sweet influence of life.

Outside of the gala balls the Winter Palace is only opened to society on rare occasions—on the 1st of January and at Easter, on the anniversary of the Tsar's accession to the throne, on the reception of a foreign prince, or for the baptism or marriage of a member of the imperial family. There is also a meeting there on January 6th for the fête of the Jordan, or benediction of the waters of the Neva. This is the most characteristic of these ceremonies. Religious pomp is joined with military glory to give it more brilliancy. A pavilion richly decorated is built on the ice of the river, through which is bored an opening, in order that the cross may be dipped in the water. Liturgical hymns sung by the choruses of the imperial chapel with inimitable perfection accompany the prayers of the Metropolitan. This prelate, followed by his clergy, blesses the invisible waters in order that they may be beneficial to man and fertilizing to the earth during the ensuing year. Formerly at Petersburg, and quite recently amongst the pious populations of the Volga and the Don, this solemnity gave occasion to explosions of fanaticism. As soon as the priest had plunged his crucifix in the river, mujiks would throw themselves into the sanctified waters, with the persuasion that they had a curative virtue like those of the pool of Bethesda. A natural result of this icy bath was a cold in the chest. At the fête of the Jordan it was not devotion alone that made martyrs; the etiquette of the court had its martyrs also. Up to the end of the reign of Nicholas tradition demanded that the Emperor should follow the procession bareheaded and without cloak, and the persons of his household were obliged to imitate his example. Furthermore, incredible as it may seem, the ladies of the palace used to go down into the snow décolletées, their delicate arms and bosoms exposed to the rigorous temperature that prevails at this epoch of the year. At the present day the old usages have become modified, and cloaks are tolerated. We must return to the salons, where people come to congratulate the Tsar, in order to see the curious spectacle of an assembly in ballroom attire at eleven o'clock in the morning. The maids of honor on that occasion wear the ceremonial costume of a red robe with long train; their hair is bound up beneath the *kakochnik*—the national head-dress, borrowed from the ancient Boyars. It is a half-diadem and crescent of garnet red velvet, surrounded with pearls, from which hangs a long white veil. This archaic adornment gives a strong character to the beauty of these blond daughters of the North.

IV.

It is not at the palace that one oftenest has occasion to see and approach the Emperor. It is rather at military solemnities. These solemnities are less frequent in the present reign than they used to be. Alexander III. has not the passionate love of his predecessors for the minor details of military life. He resides very little in Petersburg. Even during his stay in the capital he shirks the exacting duties of military work as much as possible. Nicholas and Alexander II., on the contrary, vied in exactitude in this matter with the Prussian monarchs, and trained the whole masculine society of their empire to respect uniform, and the minute obligations which it imposes. A society keeps for a long time a habit which has been thus profoundly impressed upon it. For nothing in the world would the old Emperor have missed the Sunday parade in the large riding-school of the Michael Square. He went there on the 13th of March, 1881, in spite of the supplications of his minister, Count Loris Mélikoff. It will be remembered that it was on his return from this ceremony to the palace that the assassins struck him. When the Tsar receives the Sunday report in front of the two battalions which share the service of the week he is surrounded by his numerous military household. The old generals resume for the moment their place in the regiment of the Guards where they made their début, and they make a point of marching past with the troops under the eyes of their chief. The foreign attachés and most of the ambassadors follow these exercises regularly; indeed the European powers are almost always represented in Russia by generals, in order that their envoy may enjoy the prestige attached to the epaulet, and the facility of access to the presence of the sovereign which it alone gives. The ambassador rides a moment beside him, and a few words are then exchanged on the events of the day: the words that have had most influence on temporary history

SUNDAY PARADE IN A RIDING-SCHOOL.

have fallen from the imperial lips in the Michael Riding-School, murmured in a half-whisper in the attentive ear between the two commands of "Shoulder—arms."

These riding-schools of the Guards corps are immense buildings, well closed and heated, where a regiment of cavalry can manœuvre at ease in the depth of winter. In those of the Hussars and Chevalier Guards the officers sometimes give brilliant carousals. They organize equestrian quadrilles with daring horsewomen, and vie with each other in skill to conquer the ribbons of their ladies, who applaud them from the surrounding tribunes. Besides the Sunday parade, scarcely a week passes without the Emperor presiding over the fête of some regiment which is celebrating its patron saint, or one of those numerous jubilees which are destined to perpetuate the military spirit, such as the anniversary of a victory, or the fiftieth anniversary of some chief made famous by a half-century of service. On such occasions the Tsar wears the uniform of the regiment which he wishes to honor, or that of the corps to which the hero of the ceremony belongs. In the same way, when he marries one of his aides-de-camp or when he visits him on his death-bed, he always wears a corresponding uniform. This usage implies a whole system of wardrobe policy, very subtle and very complicated. The servitors of the empire attach the greatest importance to these flattering shades of attention; the motive for which the Emperor has put on such and such a uniform on such and such a day is much commented upon, and carefully registered on that thermometer of the sovereign favor the variations of which are the perpetual study of the courtier.

If you wish to see military Russia in all its glory and epic luxury you must take your place in the first days of April on one of those tribunes which rise at the extremity of the Champ de Mars on both sides of the imperial pavilion. Society meets there to assist at the grand spring review. All the Guard is massed before us—20,000 men at least, and perhaps more. Other states may pride themselves on a military force equivalent to

this, but none can show a force so magnificent and picturesque in aspect. All the races and all the arms of this varied empire are about to defile before our eyes, from those noble Chevalier Guards, who seem to have been resuscitated from the romantic Middle Ages, down to the Kirgheez of the Asiatic steppe, who are still pagans. "Attention!" Thousands of voices have transmitted the same word of command. "The Emperor!" He appears yonder at the corner of the Champ de Mars. The moment he is seen all the flags flutter, all the bands join in one formidable chorus to send heavenward the sounds of the national hymn, "God save the Tsar." The Emperor arrives at a gentle gallop. Behind him follows an escort which makes many hearts beat amongst the fair public of the tribunes. It is a gathering of the most illustrious names and the finest horsemen of the Russian nobility. All the armies of the world have contributed to form this staff. The Hungarian magnate rides side by side with the Japanese military attaché, the French képi salutes the fez of the Mussulman bey. The Master passes along the front of his troops; the Empress follows in an open barouche. At the approach of their Majesties the band of each regiment resumes the hymn with wild fury—a hurricane of harmony, which accompanies and envelops the imperial procession. The traditional salutations are exchanged between the Tsar and his soldiers: "Good-day, children." "We are happy to do well for your Imperial Majesty."

The sovereign stops before the tribune of the Grand-Duchesses; he gives the signal, and the march past begins. At the head are the platoons of the Asiatic escort, eastern and wild Russia, Mussulmans from Khiva and Bokhara, Georgian princes, Tcherkesses, Persians, Mongols, and Caucasians. These primitive warriors, armed with lances and steel maces, wear long coats of mail over their brilliant silk dresses, furs of great price, damascened helmets or Tartar caps. This is the vanguard of the hordes of Attila, the concession made in the regular army to legend and fancy. Then come the compact masses of the regular army, the infantry first of all—Preobrajensky, Finland Chasseurs, and soldiers of the Paul Regiment, with their large copper hats in the form of mitres—such as were worn by the Grenadiers of Frederick the Great. In accordance with an old tradition, all men who have flat noses are recruited for this regiment. The lines of cavalry follow the infantry like living walls of brass and steel. Then come the light troops—Red Hussars, Grenadiers, and Lancers; and finally swarms of Cossacks, galloping on their little ponies, sweep along from the extremity of the Champ de Mars at full speed, stop and turn short at the foot of the imperial tribune. These troops perform the exercises of the Arab fantasia—lie down on their saddles, lean over to the ground without quitting their stirrups, and pick up the lance or pistol that they have thrown down before them. The artillery closes the march. The batteries, admirably horsed, are carried along at full speed by black chargers as fine as the finest trotters.

As the last cannons disappear, rattling over the pavement behind the trees of the Summer Garden, the court and its guests go to breakfast in the palace of the Princes of Oldenburg, which faces the Champ de Mars; and the foreigner who follows the Emperor—his eyes still full of this heroic vision—wonders how a man can resist the intoxication of such power gathered in his hand and the temptation which must come upon him to let loose this superb force against the world.

In the summer, at the camp of Krasnoe-Selo, the Tsar and his military company live for two weeks in the midst of the troops of the Guard. Every day there are marches and sham battles improvised for the occasion. Breakfast is served in tents, and at night victors and vanquished meet at a gala spectacle in the theatre of Tsarskoe. No civilian is admitted. It is a wonderful sight, this floor of the theatre covered with helmets and epaulets, below a double row of boxes, where the women vie with each other in elegance. At these manœuvres of Krasnoe, at these combats in the presence of carriages full of ladies, we can imagine to ourselves what must have been the campaigns of Louis XIV. when the great King besieged the towns of Flanders surrounded by the beauties of Versailles, and when the trenches were dug before their eyes to the sound of violins.

We have perhaps staid too long at the court, but it was necessary in order to make the reader appreciate the preponderating place it holds in social life. But with the exception of the rapid appear-

ances which we have just indicated, the Emperor disappears from the eyes of his subjects and retires with his family to the solitude of Gatschina—that Russian Escurial—a gloomy and sombre castle hidden in the midst of pine forests at a few leagues' distance from the capital. There the imperial couple lead a regular, tranquil—one might say *bourgeois*—existence. The Emperor and Empress devote themselves to the education of their children and to the expedition of business. Respect forbids us entering indiscreetly into the home of their Majesties. Let us take leave of them in order to follow society as it goes out of the Winter Palace. We shall find it free from the trammels of etiquette, amusing itself more frankly in the daily life of the salons.

EMPEROR ALEXANDER III. AT KRASNOE-SELO.

V.

The salons enable us to understand the life of the French aristocracy in the eighteenth century, such as it is described in the memoirs of the time. Organized entirely for the sake of worldly intercourse, conversation, and elegant pleasure, one might revive and apply to this society Talleyrand's words when he called up his souvenirs of the years before 1789: "Those who have not lived at that time have not known what the pleasure of living is." We have sometimes ventured to ask with admiration grave functionaries whom we used to meet every night at an advanced hour at the fêtes of Petersburg, when they found time to work. We must believe that such a thing as work is quite superfluous in this happy country. Everybody gets up late like the winter sun, himself so late. Street life does not begin before ten o'clock in the morning; the shopkeepers have not taken down their shutters before that hour. Immediately after breakfast you call your sleigh for a promenade on the crowded Quay or on the Prospekt, but already day has begun to decline. Visits follow uninterruptedly until dinner-time. You go from house to house among your friends, exchange news—almost always court news which has been published in the morning in the *Journal de St.-Pétersbourg*, and the more private news which you have gathered from the lips of some high-placed personage. After dinner you go to the play. This usage is beginning to go out of fashion, but a few years ago all the "smart" people passed the early part of the evening in some fashionable theatre—either at the Italiens or at the Théâtre Michel, where the best Parisian actors play French comedy. The younger people prefer to go to the bouffes, where Judic and Granier used to receive écrins of diamonds in bouquets of roses. Nowadays the Russian theatre, which was formerly abandoned by the upper class, is coming into favor again. The present reign is setting the example of patronizing national life. People pay court by going to applaud the pieces of Griboïedof, of Gogol, and of Ostrowsky, interpreted by Madame Savina, the Sara Bernhardt of Russia.

After the theatre each repairs to the salon which he habitually frequents. The evening meetings begin quite late. If you arrive at eleven o'clock at the house

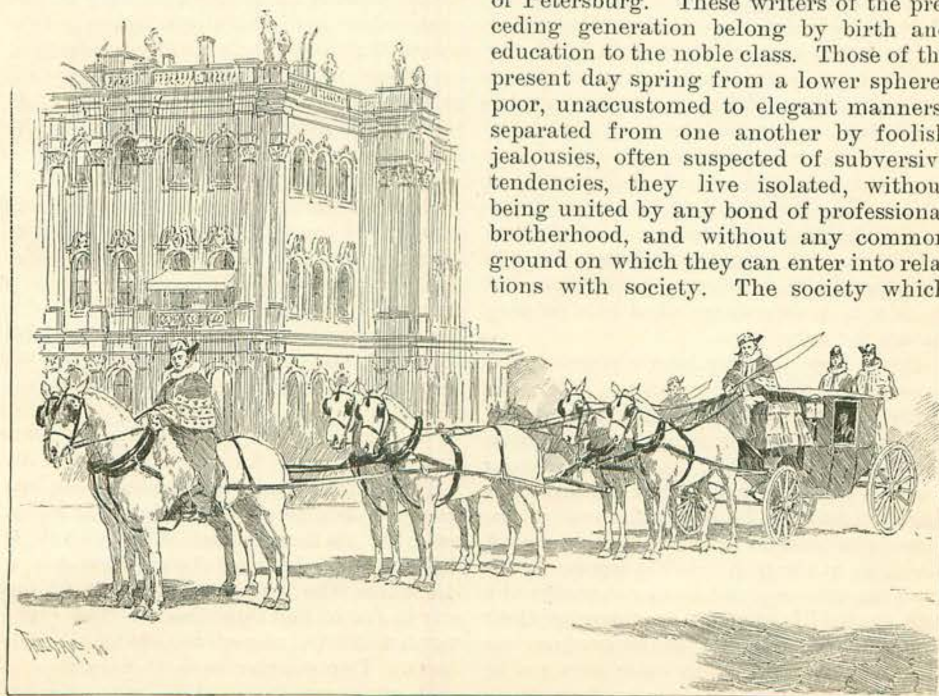
where you are invited, it is not rare to be told that madame is not yet dressed; she has been sleeping after dinner in order to rest her complexion. On the other hand, you may knock at certain hospitable doors up to two o'clock in the morning; no one will be astonished to see you come in, and your place will be set at supper, which is the favorite meal with the Russians. Luxurious or modest, the supper is always served for the intimate friends. It is prolonged until a late hour, and no one goes to bed in St. Petersburg until three o'clock in the morning. These children of the night live at their ease only after dark and by artificial light. There are some delicate women whom no one remembers to have seen by daylight; it is true, very generally, they are women who have passed the prime of their beauty.

Formerly, and that not so long ago, some seigneurs kept "open house," and you could go and dine there without being invited. The diminution in fortunes has put an end to these patriarchal manners. During the carnival season rich private individuals give balls and concerts, and sometimes *folles journées*, or dances which begin in the morning in the greenhouse filled with tropical plants, and do not end until dawn of the following day in the supper-room. But a description of these amusements would appear pale after a description of the balls of the palace. Let us rather try to catch the physiognomy of the ordinary every-day social life in the familiar groups which meet night after night around the tea-table, where the silver samovar sings.

The subdivision into coteries is the characteristic feature of the change which has been going on in this society during the past fifteen or twenty years. Formerly it was a large family, maintained within limits rigorously fixed by the court list. This common bond kept closely together all the members, who lived in perpetual intercourse. Everybody knew everybody even from childhood. In speaking of each other they used, in accordance with Russian custom, the baptismal name, followed by the name of the father; for instance, Ivan Petrovitch, Anna Pavlovna. Some few foreigners—young men belonging to the European aristocracy—brought to Petersburg by the diplomatic service, were received with open arms as children of the house. All this has changed with the growing extension of that family, with the embarrassments in which nearly all fortunes are involved, and with the appointment to public office of new individuals selected from outside the ancient caste. Shall we add that the formation of opposite political parties contributes somewhat to this schism? The word "parties" would be inexact and, at present at least, too serious for Russia; but at any rate there has grown up in certain circles a habit of criticising the constituted powers, and in order to do that you must be sure of all the persons of the company. We cannot say that society has been invaded, for the largest fortune in commerce does not yet give any access to it. Nevertheless society feels the need of defending itself, being conscious of the approaching danger, and the strongest and proudest sections of it intrench themselves within their little citadels. Foreigners, whom the railways and business are bringing daily in greater numbers, are received less readily than formerly; they no longer enter the family circle. A material barrier has arisen before them. Hitherto French was the natural language of Petersburg society. There are still grandmothers living who scarcely speak Russian, and do not write it at all. Under the new reign, in order to flatter the manifest tastes of the sovereign and of his surroundings, the native tongue has made an offensive return. It is currently spoken in the salons—a fact which would have been considered to be bad tone by the preceding generation. At the Yacht Club, which is the most elegant of all the clubs, ten years ago general conversation took place in French, but to-day the members employ only the mother-tongue. When the foreigner has been lucky enough to conquer these difficulties, after a long stay, he soon appreciates the charm of Russian social intercourse. He discovers, amongst the women especially, a universal intellectual culture beneath the frivolity of fashionable life. When do these torpid beauties find time to read and learn? You rarely see them with a book in their hands; their existence is idle or wholly taken up by pleasure; and yet you never find them at a loss. They are acquainted with the latest novel published in Paris, in London, and in New York; with the latest scientific theory of Harttmann, Herbert Spencer, or Edison; with the opera which has just been presented at Bayreuth or at Milan; they talk intel-

ligently about literature, music, science, metaphysics, spiritualism, or politics, and always in a well-informed manner, and with surprising clearness and novelty of views. They know everything, it would seem, by birth and intuition. The fact is, they learn everything by social and cosmopolitan intercourse, just like the French women of the eighteenth century. Mesdames du Deffand, de Tencin, and d'Epinay would find sisters worthy of themselves in Petersburg, living in conditions absolutely similar to those of life in Paris under the reign of Louis XV. It is always to this epoch that we must return in order to understand what constitutes the charm of Russian society. This charm is born of absolute liberty of intellect, and of a boldness of thought which scrutinizes all problems, and attacks all questions with the arms of scepticism. Here are none of the conventions or fears which tie the tongue in our old society, divided and battered by so many revolutions. The Russian plays with dangerous ideas like a child with knives whose hurtful power he does not know by experience. The ideas which among us reopen old wounds, because they have been translated into facts, do not awaken in Russia anything but hopes, because they are still in the domain of dream. In the same way, on the eve of 1789, the French nobility was delighted with that which was destined to decapitate and ruin it. An old Russian lady who was reading Taine's book on the *Ancien Régime* said to us one day, "From time to time I close this book with terror, so completely do I find in it the image of our own social and intellectual state"—a state threatening by the morrow which it forebodes, but charming so long as it lasts.

The comparison would be inexact as regards one point only. The savants and men of letters who used to reign in the salons of the eighteenth century mingle very little with the aristocracy of Petersburg. There are only two or three houses where they are received in the private circle. In these intelligent homes we have at times met Tourguénief when he returned to his father-land, Dostoïevsky, Goutcharof, and the celebrated novelists and poets of the last twenty years. Alone, the greatest of all, the Count Tolstoï, remaining invisible. In retirement on his estate of Yasnaia-Poliana, he applies to his peasants the social theories which he preaches in his writings; he has broken with the life of Petersburg. These writers of the preceding generation belong by birth and education to the noble class. Those of the present day spring from a lower sphere; poor, unaccustomed to elegant manners, separated from one another by foolish jealousies, often suspected of subversive tendencies, they live isolated, without being united by any bond of professional brotherhood, and without any common ground on which they can enter into relations with society. The society which



THE EMPRESS'S CARRIAGE.

reads them is unacquainted with their persons, and when they do appear in a salon they bring with them an embarrassed and silent reserve.

Instead of professional literary men, the artists and literary men of society animate the conversation, particularly the poets. In Russia everybody is a bit of a poet. Verses are written there in abundance and with facility; but, as a general rule, in the aristocracy, as in all classes of this nation, the woman is, *par excellence*, the sociable element. She is superior to the man in penetration and promptitude of intellect. As humanity does not live by brains alone, the young officers of the Guards play the most prominent rôle in the salons, and if they do not shine by their refined culture, they take their revenge by their gallantry. In this social function they give proof of that passionate folly and princely prodigality which Madame de Staël immortalized by saying, "The desire of the Slav would set a town on fire." You may still see grand seigneurs, true sons of Potemkin, playing with the impossible in order to satisfy the caprices of the lady of their heart. One will by telegraph send for a cart-load of roses from Nice, another for a celebrated orchestra from Warsaw. The following story is told of a gentleman poet who died a few years ago. He was talking in the presence of a lady of a Kirgheez musician whom he had met during a journey beyond the Ural, in the steppe of Orenburg—one of those camel-drivers who play their antique Asian melodies on long reed pipes. The lady expressed regret at never having heard these harmonies of the desert. The poet immediately wrote for this Kirgheez to be sent from the other end of Russia, and then despatched him to play before the lady.

Sport holds a very small place in the existence of these long winters. The climate is unfavorable, and Russians of all conditions detest physical exercise, and do not feel the need of it. In a village on a Sunday you will not see the peasants engaged in games. They remain motionless, gravely seated at their doors, or around the table at the inn. In the upper classes the men who are not hunters resolve the problem of life without ever moving their limbs. Old men are known whom no one ever remembers to have seen walk; they do not stir except to go from their chair to their carriage. Horseback riding is not held in honor even amongst the officers of the cavalry regiments, who rarely ride except when their military duties compel them. Petersburg is the only point in the universe where lawn-tennis has not made its appearânce. Skating, in this country where the climate furnishes so abundantly the necessary conditions, is abandoned to the children of the common people. It had a momentary vogue only during the embassy of Lord Dufferin, who was one of the lions of society; the noble lord imposed this taste, which he had brought back with him from Canada. On the contrary, the Montagnes Russe are very popular, because you meet there the Grand-Duchesses in the beautiful gardens of the Tauride. The Empress used to excel in this exercise when she was still Crown-Princess, and practise it in its most dangerous forms; she would descend a rapid incline standing up, at the risk of breaking her neck a thousand times.

It cannot be said that the Russian man is sedentary. He will readily pass his life in a carriage, on a sleigh, or in the railway cars. To traverse space at full speed is a pleasure of which he never wearies, but it is only seated locomotion that he loves. The women, frail hothouse flowers, take pleasure only in the nonchalant habits of their homes amidst hyacinths and azaleas. Conversation, card-playing, dancing, of which they never weary, constitute their pastimes. At times they also feel the passion of the Slavs for dizzy speed, merely for the pleasure of feeling the icy air beat against their cheeks across the snowy steppe over which they career. Often during the conversation around the tea-table some one will propose a troïka ride; the motion is accepted with enthusiasm. This is the favorite amusement of winter nights, and the one that leaves in the mind of the foreigner the most vivid and novel souvenirs.

VI.

Large four-seated sleighs are ordered from a job master famous for the swiftness of his horses and the skill of his drivers. The bells of the teams tinkle at the door; the company envelop themselves from head to foot in furs; the women tie Orenburg shawls over their faces. Two couples take their places in each of the vehicles, and, as may be readily conceived, it is not chance that gen-

A TROÏKA RIDE TO THE FORTS OF CRONSTADT.

erally presides over this arrangement, but another little god who is less wise than chance. The driver gathers in his hands his bundle of reins, and speaks tenderly to his horses: "Forward, my little pigeons." The three pigeons start at full gallop through the empty streets, twenty degrees below zero, the air still, the sky black as steel, and sparkling with golden spots which glitter over the whiteness of all objects in this limpid atmosphere. The cold freezes the breath as it issues from the lips. In a few minutes the beards are converted into stalactites of ice. The Russian heart bounds with joy. "Quicker! quicker!" cry the women, their voices broken by wild and joyous laughter. The driver, who has previously fortified his stomach with innumerable glasses of brandy, administers stout blows with his knout over the backs of his horses, and yet they are giving the maximum of speed that can be expected from their limbs. They too seem to get intoxicated with their own galloping. The equipage flies along the quays and crosses the river; the mean houses of the faubourgs, with their poor little lights, vanish out of sight behind it like phantoms. Trees take the place of houses the more deeply we penetrate into the islands; now we glide over vacant country in absolute darkness, the tinkling of the bells and the ripples of laughter alone breaking the silence that has gathered over the earth. When the hoofs of the horses strike the pavement beneath the thinner snow, or when they bound over a projecting block of ice on an arm of the Neva, the heavy sleigh jumps and jolts enough to throw the travellers out. Woe be to the one who is talking at this moment; he is sure to bite his tongue cruelly; and then the laughter redoubles at his expense. The combined intoxication of the movement and of the cold is at its height. "Go on more quickly," the voices of the women say, nervously; and sometimes a deeper voice murmurs in a lower tone: "Why, faster? It would be better that we never arrived at the end."

We do arrive, however. The team, white with foam, stops in front of an isolated tavern. It is Samarcande or Tachkent, one of the inns of the suburbs of Petersburg, famous for the troupes of Bohemians who lodge there. The party hires a room decorated in anything but a luxurious manner: four smoky walls, a few chairs, and a table. Champagne is brought and the Tsiganes appear. The choir is composed of three or four men and eight or ten women. The men wear on their bronze faces the expression of the tranquil dignity of their race. With their aquiline profiles, their sad and profound eyes, they seem like dispossessed kings of Asia. We would gladly depict the women in some picturesque Eastern costume, but the truth compels us to confess that they are dressed in shabby silk dresses, the cast-off finery of some elegant lady, bought at a second-hand store in the Gostiny Dvor. The olive-colored complexions beneath their painted cheeks, and the fire of their eyes beneath their painted eyebrows, alone betray the Indian origin of these daughters of the Pariahs. The leader of the choir tunes his guitar and strikes up an accompaniment, very slow at first, and then gradually quicker and quicker. The Bohemian girls sing; they are seated in a semicircle, their bodies and faces motionless. At the beginning the accent is cold and restrained. These women appear indifferent to the sentiment they are interpreting, like sibyls visited by a god whom they do not feel. But little by little their voices become animated, and warm into that guttural trembling which artists of any other race can never succeed in imitating. The demon has taken possession of the singers; they hurry the rhythm with furious alternations; melodies and words are infused with the same excitement, the languor, the despair, and the fire of wild passions. The soul of the old Aryas has accumulated in these songs all the wildness and melancholy of its nature.

It finds an echo in the soul of the Slavs. Look at those patrician ladies who are listening to the daughters of Bohemia; in spite of the difference in education and social condition they are true sisters of the Tsiganes. With all their apparent reserve and disdain, they vibrate in unison, with the same violence of nature; they will remain there all night, magnetized by these airs of the native country. The men do not attempt to conceal their delight. A Russian will spend his last ruble in order to procure himself the pleasure which he prizes above all others. Monomaniacs return here every evening, and pass their nights listening to these songs, nailed to the table by a tyranny as irresistible as that of the opium-smoker. Most of the officers of the Guards live on

RACING ON THE NEVA.

a footing of friendly familiarity with the Bohemian women; this evening the presence of ladies embarrasses them. Next time when they return alone champagne will flow in torrents, and pocket-books will be opened without counting. Occasionally a scuffle disturbs the party; some merchants, tired of waiting, will quarrel with the officers for possession of the room and singers. No less passionately fond of this pleasure, and even more prodigal, the merchants manifest their enthusiasm by throwing to the Tsiganes handfuls of bank-notes and golden imperials. A Bohemian woman celebrated in her art has only to stoop to pick up as much money as an operatic "star." Nevertheless none will ever think of suspecting her savage virtue—a virtue which is proverbial, protected by the jealous watching of the men of the tribe, and guaranteed by interest. A handsome Bohemian woman often ends by marrying a General. These unions are not rare in Russia, and the singing woman of Samarcande ends her career as an honorable mother of a family in a provincial town where her husband commands.

The inns where the Tsiganes sing are the usual object of nocturnal excursions; sometimes, however, others are suggested; for instance, to the observatory of Pulkowa, which rises midway between Petersburg and Tsarskoe-Selo, on a hill crowned with pine-trees. It is the only elevation in the marshy plains which surround the capital. There lives a little German colony; for they are Germans who keep watch over the Russian heavens. With a few exceptions this family of astronomers is recruited in the university at Dorpat, and holds its celestial fief with jealous care. When you enter Pulkowa you find yourself transported to another world. You might imagine yourself in some calm institute in Göttingen or Jena. Confined in the mysteries of space and time, these modest savants work under the direction of their senior member or "doyen." They live in common a patriarchal life, an honest German life, staid and serious like that of the stars. Strangers to the noises of the great city and to the interests and passions which surround them, these astronomers have fixed the boundaries of their earthly horizon at the wood of pine-trees and the roofs which shelter their households and their books. The only revolutions that

they look forward to are those of the firmament; their newspapers are the tables of the sun and planets; their subject of conversation, the theorems of Kepler, or the excellent recipe of Madame la Doyenne for smoking the breasts of geese—an artless mixture of humble domestic cares and of the great secrets of the Eternal. The monks of science mount into their glass palace wrapped up in warm cloaks, with fur caps on their heads, like the astrologers you see depicted in ancient engravings. The old savants conduct their pupils to the top of the tower, into that vast rotunda which revolves upon itself, and seems like the poop of a ship, with its masts, its rigging, its instruments of polished brass, and its port-holes where the telescopes are pointed. The lamps burn over the books, the compass moves over the charts, the telescope scrutinizes the polar regions, and the calculations of ages are continued. The observers are adding a page to the annals of the sky. At that hour when everything which makes noise and illusion on the earth is silent, these modest people are truly the masters of the universe. They ordain its destinies; they know from whence it comes, whither it goes, and what it weighs. Grave, and proud of their responsibility—like their brothers the sailors—they watch for us all. They mark the passage of the planet in the unknown, in the midst of the formidable fleets which it crosses in its passage. If some benighted traveller passes in these solitudes he perceives up there the lights of the crew manœuvring its aerial dome; he wonders if it is not some phantom ship lost on the sea of snow, or else he may imagine that he hears some monks assembled in their oratory for matins, who sing by night the praises of the Lord.

But this solitude and this peace are exposed to frequent invasions. If an eclipse is announced, the ladies of Petersburg form a party to go to Pulkowa; they either belong to the court or have taken the precaution to have some dignitary in their party, and consequently the Imperial Observatory could not refuse to satisfy their caprices. The troïkas deposit in the temple of science the noisy visitors, who take possession of the telescopes, and demand for their own particular use that corner of the heavens where something important is about to happen. They have all these mysteries explained to them; they ferret about in albums of lunar photographs, and their curiosity is excited by the marvels that the old sorcerers tell them. The evening ends with supper on ham and sauer-kraut prepared by Madame la Doyenne, and in listening to one of the young German women play on the piano a sonato of Schumann or Weber. The joyous band then starts back, enchanted with the contrast between its habits of luxury and the austere simplicity of the existence of which it has just taken a glimpse. Another day the troïkas will be called for in the morning for a long excursion to the forts of Cronstadt, over the icy road which connects this island with Petersburg. It is distant about fifteen miles—two hours' gallop over the frozen sea. Poles indicate the route across this deceptive plain; houses of refuge, with alarm-bells which tinkle during the blizzard, remind us that this desert has also its moral sirocco. Here and there a ship stands up against the horizon frozen in the ice; some you see with all their sails spread and yet quite motionless. It is on the return journey after nightfall that the horror of this landscape impresses one. At a certain moment at twilight it is impossible to distinguish on the horizon where the sky begins and where the earth ends. You seem to be caught in an immense sphere of milky crystal; when you look at the horses fixedly they seem to be suspended in ether. In order to enable the eye to recover the sense of reality you must wait until you come across a refuge—the paltry sleigh of a mujik, a flight of crows, or one of those ships which seemed motionless in the morning, but which now in the crepuscular twilight of the snow seem to be gliding along in the opposite direction to your sleigh. No words can express the anguish that weighs like a pall on this polar country—the gloom, the cold, the terror of it are palpable; you are beset with a terrible dread of losing your way. Such doubtless was the primordial chaos before light was separated from darkness and the sea from the land. And the Russian delights in this wild flight through space, feeling that his soul is almost liberated from the body and transported into dream-land by a Walkyrian ride. "Troïka," said Gogol, in a celebrated passage of the *Âmes Mortes*—"troïka-bird, who invented thee? Thou couldst only be born amongst an audacious people. But

AT THE CLUB—THE WHIST TABLE.

art thou not thyself, O Russia, the brave troïka that none can pass? Where art thou going? Answer! The troïka does not answer; it flies onward, and clears all obstacles."

VII.

Let us leave the salons and the ladies and visit the men when they are amongst themselves at their club. In Russia, as everywhere else, this institution has been introduced from England. At Petersburg and Moscow the principal club to which all the society men belong is called the English Club. Its foundation dates from the reign of the great Catherine. At that epoch the British merchants contracted the habit of meeting together on Saturday evenings, after they had shut up their offices and settled their accounts of the week, to dine, chat, and amuse themselves together. Thus were born the English clubs. They have retained down to our times this characteristic of being meeting-places only on special days. During the rest of the week you meet there only a small number of habitués. On Saturday alone one hundred and sometimes two hundred guests, or even more, begin at four o'clock in the afternoon to partake of the *zakouska*. This is the preliminary repast, which is eaten standing, while you pick out of a multitude of little plates caviare, smoked fish, and salt dainties. These *hors-d'œuvre* are accompanied with draughts of eau-de-vie and kummel; for the Russians drink their strong liquors before dinner. At five o'clock the table is served. This early dinner hour is the subject of perpetual discussion between the young men, who wish to adopt Western fashions, and the conservatives of the old school, who have hitherto succeeded in maintaining the patriarchal usage. The men take their seats with due regard to subordination of ranks; as Tolstoï has said in describing a dinner at Moscow, the men take their hierarchic places as naturally as water seeks its level. The

club has no president. It is directed by the senior members, who are elected and take service alternately. The member on duty sits at the upper end of the table, and it is he who in a loud voice proposes the health of the Emperor on the anniversaries of the imperial fêtes, when all the men rise immediately and clink their glasses noisily.

What a dinner it is! The heart of Pantagruel would be wild with joy if the Rabelaisian hero could contemplate the piles of victuals which are so gravely absorbed by the heroic stomachs of the Generals of the English Club. It is not the sight of Russia under arms that makes one tremble for the future of the world. It is when he sees Russia eating that the physiologist can surely say, "This is the race that will devour the others." The table groans under the enormous weight of joints of beef, the roasted suckling pigs served hot, or cold in jelly, the sterlets of the Volga, and the monster pasties. By way of an appetizer, as we would eat our dozen oysters, the terrible Russian General absorbs before his soup a dozen *blinies*—which are heavy pancakes stuffed with caviare and seasoned with hot melted butter. This national dish is served only during the carnival, and then it is obligatory. The feast is moistened with copious libations—French wines, hydromel, *kvass* or rye beer, the Russian drink *par excellence*. It is on Easter Day that the capacity of these ogres may be best estimated. The morning is passed in visits to friends, and in every house there is a table laden with viands, in the midst of which towers a whole lamb. The breakfast begins over again at each visit.

The Merchants' Club is organized on the model of the English Club, and its traditions are the same. During the week the rich commercial man of Petersburg or Moscow does not leave his counting-house. Seated with senatorial gravity in his modest shop, where business in tea, grain, and fur is transacted for millions of rubles, he calculates his profits on rings of yellow and black wood threaded on rods of wire fixed on a frame. The Russians have borrowed this arithmetical machine from the Turks and Persians. The merchant passes his evenings with his wife, who is a veritable harem recluse, drinking countless glasses of tea, while the lamp burns before the holy image. On Sunday he puts on his finest caftan and his shiniest boots, calls his drosky, and goes to join his colleagues at the club dinner. The appetite of the General would have astonished Pantagruel, but that of the merchant would confound Gargantua. After these sumptuous repasts we will not guarantee that he will not end up the evening at the tavern of the Bohemians, unless he has paid one hundred rubles for a box to see Sara Bernhardt, who is just giving her opening performance in a language which he does not understand. But the psychology of this most strange mortal, the Russian merchant, would lead us too far. Let us conclude our review of the clubs.

The young "swells" of the Guards and of the diplomatic corps deign to enter the Yacht Club only. Originally, in order to be admitted to this select circle, you had to possess a yacht of your own, but gradually the club has extended its membership, while at the same time it has remained exclusive and rigorous in its elections. Here the superannuated manners of the English Club are ridiculed, and the members observe the usages of the Jockey Club of Vienna and of Paris. At the hour of the promenade the fashionable carriages pass and repass in the grand Morskaia in front of the windows, where the judges of *haut ton* deliver their verdicts. The women raise their eyes timidly toward the areopagus, which judges, without possibility of appeal, their beauty, their toilets, their *liaisons*, whether open or secret, but always fully known to the Arguses of the Yacht Club.

In these clubs, different as they are, one common characteristic reminds you that you are in Russia. On leaving the dining-room each one hurries to take his seat at the whist table. Those who are the most eager call those who linger, with the traditional phrase, "We are losing golden time." In order to arrive at the number of tables you may boldly divide by four the total number of persons present; there will scarcely ever be a mistake. The General whom we saw just now preparing for himself so laborious a digestion is settled for the night at his fighting post. He establishes around him the various attributes necessary for his happiness: the glass of tea, which will be constantly filled; the big silver case, overloaded with monograms and coronets in relief, and containing a goodly stock of cigarettes, which will be lighted one after the other without a moment's respite; the

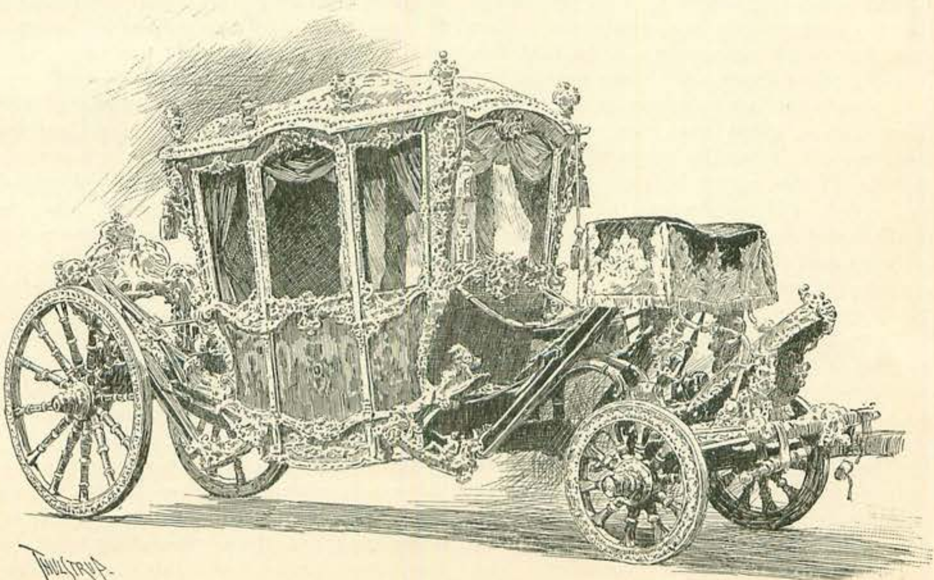
stick of chalk and the brush, for in Russia counters are unknown, and losses and winnings are written on the corner of the green cloth, which is brushed vigorously after each game. The cards are dealt, and for seven or eight hours the conversation of this honorable assembly is reduced to the sacramental formulæ, "Clubs," "Hearts," "Trumps," "The trick."

If we were requested to represent Russia by some symbolic figure, hesitation would be impossible. We should simply have to paint a green baize table with some packs of cards in the middle of a snow steppe. This universal passion for gaming may be explained by many causes. The Slav is nervous, eager for violent emotion, and devoted to chance. The hours are long and ennui unendurable during a stay in the deserted country districts or in the natural stagnation of the small provincial towns. In the capitals, for the rich and leisured classes, conversation in public places was, even until quite recently, embarrassing and full of danger; the police of the terrible Third Section had an eye and an ear in every club. In these places of meeting an imprudent or misunderstood word involved certain disgrace; it was preferable to be silent and to play. This latter cause has disappeared, but its effect remains.

If acquaintances meet in a railway car, cards are brought out of the valise; the conductor is asked to bring a table and some candles; and from Petersburg to Odessa the travellers will play at bézique or quinze without raising their eyes from the board for days and nights together. Two persons who may happen to step from their carriages together at a relay station get into conversation, and the first thing they do is to challenge each other for a game of cards, which will not finish until the one or the other has lost all his money. The whist tables at the clubs show the passion in its mildest form.

Alas! these tables are not satisfied with reigning in their legitimate kingdom. Every day they usurp a little more room in the salons, and drive away that charming conversation which we were vaunting just now; this transformation in social manners is very marked. With some young women gaming has taken the place of that wit which was the charm of former generations.

But while we are sketching these scenes of winter life the days are growing longer and milder; the ice on the Neva is breaking up; the blue water appears between the blocks that float seaward. The Petersburg hive is about to swarm over the whole surface of the empire. Let us follow the emigrants out of the town: we shall find them in another existence, in the midst of new scenes and of other horizons.



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