

The Topsy-Turvy House

AT THE PARIS EXHIBITION.

BY META HENN.

From Photographs exclusively taken for THE STRAND MAGAZINE.

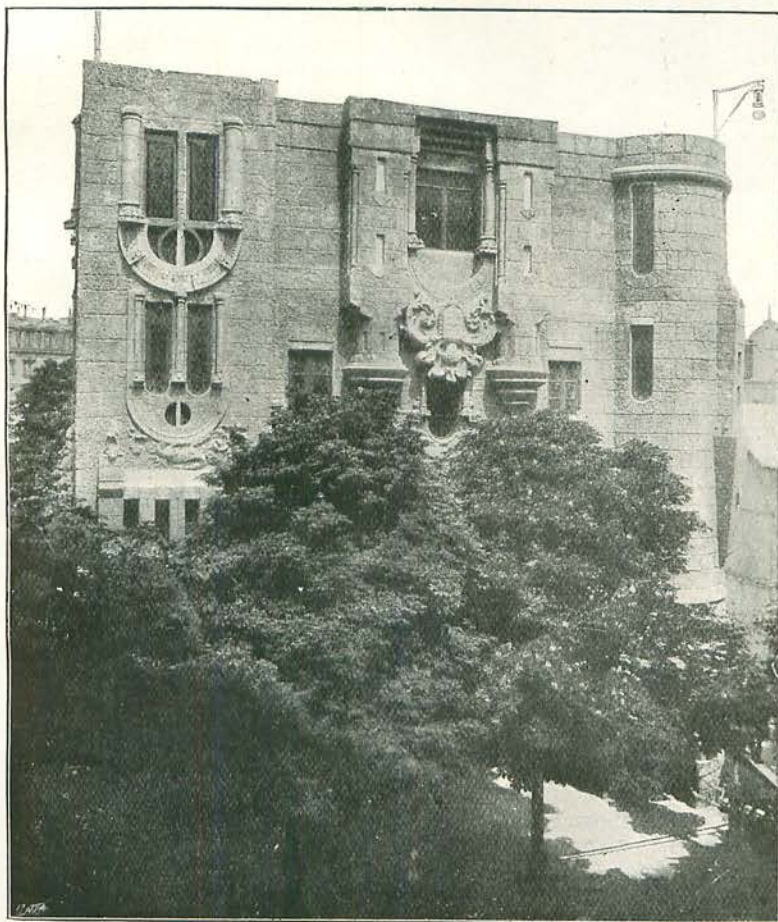


HE side shows of the Paris Exhibition are for the most part situated in the Rue de Paris, and on a fashionable evening—which by the way has been fixed by *le haut monde* for every Friday during the duration of the Exhibition—that splendidly illuminated thoroughfare fairly teems with the *chic* of Paris.

When visitors are tired of instruction and

the "Long Toms" made at Creusôt, they are anxious for a holiday, for a breathing-space, and they will find their weary feet take them to the Rue de Paris.

There they will discover side shows from all parts of the civilized and uncivilized world, and among other things they will be startled by an extraordinary structure which is called "*Le Manoir à l'Envers*," namely, a topsy-turvy house, built so that its roof is to be found where the foundations should be,

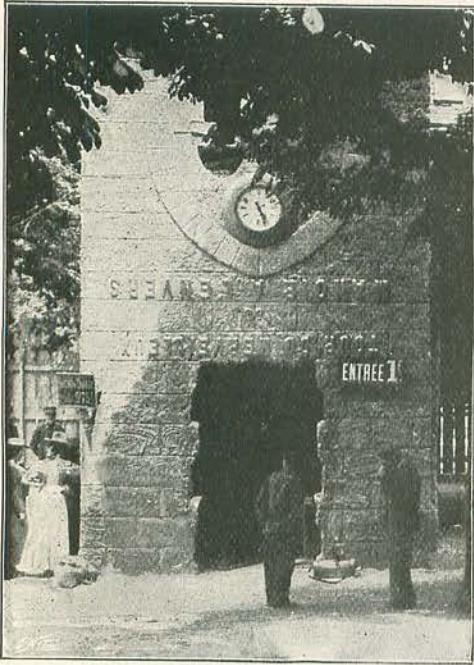


EXTERIOR VIEW OF THE TOPSY-TURVY HOUSE.

edification; when they are filled with the wonders of manufacture and the marvels of science; when they are surfeited with the marvellous cheeses made in Switzerland and

and the wine-cellar is placed where the chimneys of well-behaved suburban villas are invariably situated.

The idea of building a house upside down



THE ENTRANCE—NOTE THE CLOCK AND WRITING BOTH UPSIDE DOWN.

is, from the showman's point of view, distinctly ingenious, and Mr. Adolphe Kotin, a Russian gentleman, has scored a point in catering for the curiosity and wonder loving propensities of the average holiday-maker.

During an interview which took place under the roof (*i.e.*, in this case the foundations of the building) I gathered some interesting details of how this extraordinary attraction first came to the light of day.

Mr. Kotin, it appears, was one day asked by a friend to contribute towards a fund which was being got up for the benefit of a brother mortal in temporary difficulties. It transpired that this gentleman in difficulties expected an early call from the local "man in possession."

When Mr. Kotin had subscribed towards the sum needful to keep the undesirable visitor out of bounds, he suggested that the hard-up man should take his furniture and screw it to the ceilings, so that when the man in possession came in he would find nothing to take possession of, and consequently speedily show him the shine on the back of his best Sunday overcoat.

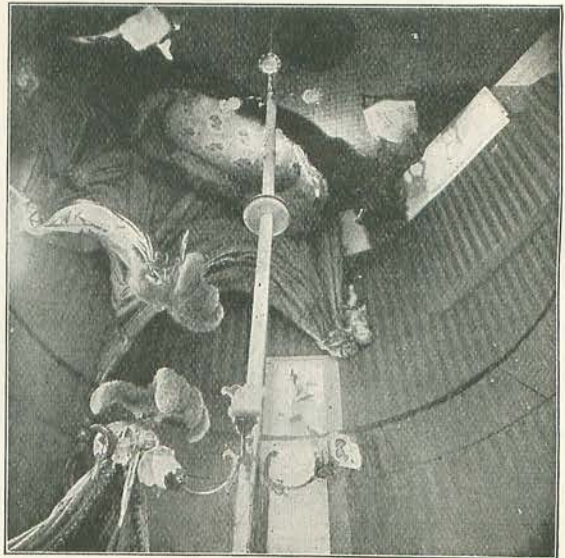
There was more in that jocular

suggestion than most people would have dreamt of, however, and the idea struck Mr. Kotin as one that showed possibilities of considerable pecuniary profit if carried out in reality.

Plans were made, showing rooms in which the whole of the furniture was to be screwed to the ceiling, where vases stood on chimney-pieces upside down, where every knick-knack peeped at you face downwards. These were of no avail, however, for Mr. Kotin found that by such means real life—that is, movement on the part of the occupants of the various rooms—could not be shown, and as people are not to be screwed down, he bethought himself of a different plan which we find realized in the present structure, but not quite to the expectation of the inventor, owing principally to the short space of time given him for construction, and the monstrous way in which the Exhibition workmen behaved when they found that they were, for the time being at least, "the cocks of the walk."

Mr. Kotin, finding his original plans next to impossible, had recourse to optical illusion in a very fascinating and original conception. We may as well give the whole thing away at once. There are mirrors upon mirrors; mirrors before you, mirrors behind you, above you, and on every side; in fact, there are mirrors wherever you may chance to be looking.

Where Mr. Kotin's chief difficulty lay, however, was in obtaining sufficiently large mirrors to suit his purpose. Eight of the



MY LADY'S BOUDOIR.

leading glass manufacturers of France absolutely refused to entertain the making, and above all the fitting to the ceilings, of such huge mirrors as Mr. Kotin demanded.

mediæval castle (which ancient structure the building is supposed to represent) support it, and the cellar, with its wine and spirit bottles all upside down, is to be found about 50ft. above ground-level.



AN UPSIDE-DOWN BEDROOM.

At last, however, an enterprising firm took up the matter, and Mr. Kotin tells me that the mirrors which are placed on the ceilings of the various rooms in the "Manoir à l'Envers" are without exception the largest of their kind in the world. The manufacture and fitting in position have cost no less than 36,000 francs all told.

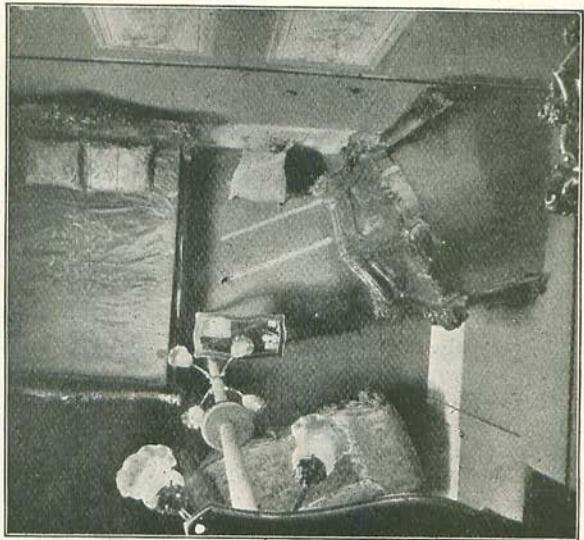
It appears that glass, however thick, is so flexible that it became impossible to place the mirrors, some of which are about 12ft. square, on the ceilings, as desired, without some support, which in this case consists of a glass pillar which supports each mirror in the centre.

The "roof" of the building, as will be seen on a near approach, is about 7ft. from the ground, nearly touching the hat of a tall man as he passes underneath. The tiles remind you of their presence, though you do your best to avoid them, and you enter by means of the chimney, the smoke of which comes out face downwards; whilst the drain-pipes possess exits far above the trees which line the avenue.

The chimneys and buttresses of this

At the so-called entrance-door you will observe that the clock and the lettering are upside down, and as you enter you will find yourself walking up the steps with your feet upwards and your head at a perilous angle; while farther on you will find a lady in a drawing-room knitting very prettily on a sofa which looks as though it were suspended upside down by a thread to the ceiling above. Soon your head will swim in bewilderment, and quite naturally you make your way to the bath-room, where the water flows upwards into an upside-down bath-tub, in defiance of all the laws of gravity. Further still, a gentleman, in this instance Mr. Kotin himself, will be found trying to swallow his food feet upwards in the dining-room, and how the dainty mistress of Topsy-Turvydom fares in her boudoir is a problem the solution of which we will leave to others.

The Louis XV. furniture, with which, by the way, this curious mansion is furnished



ANOTHER VIEW OF THE SAME.

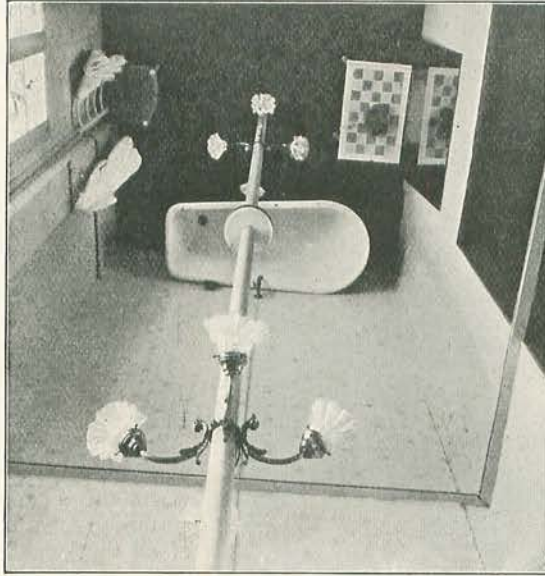
throughout, is of the most costly description and, though seen upside down, enhances the prettiness of the various rooms.

The building itself is made entirely of iron, covered with plaster, and in sections, so that it may be easily taken to pieces and removed when necessary.

Mr. Kotin, speaking of the construction of the Topsy-Turvy House, was especially emphatic in ascribing much of its success to the valuable assistance he has received at the hands of Mr. Henri Gros, the popular and well-known managing director of the Metropolitan Theatre in the Edgware Road, who has taken great interest in the scheme, and to whose energy the existence of this unique attraction is mainly due.

It appears that when Mr. Kotin first suggested the idea of a Topsy-Turvy House everyone laughed, and people shrugged their shoulders and smiled sadly—that is, when they did not say rude things; but though Mr. Kotin is a Russian by birth, he has been schooled in England, where dogged perseverance is taught as in no other school in the world.

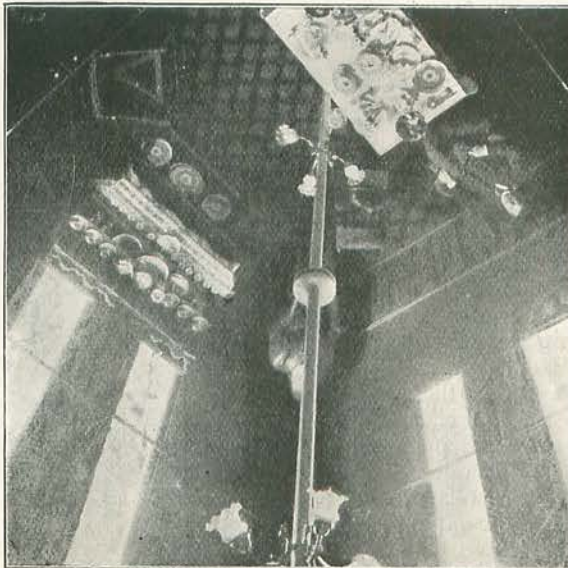
The workmen to whom the inside arrangements of the building were intrusted had to



THE BATH-ROOM.

be watched night and day. They would insist on placing the windows the right way up and the wall paper with buds pointing upwards; then, again, in their endeavours to do well they fixed the staircases intended for visitors upside down, so that it would have been impossible to enter the building at all; hence, upon Mr. Kotin's arrival after a day's absence he found it impossible to negotiate the stairs, and no small amount of diplomacy was required to make the men understand that, though most things were to be upside down, the means of ingress and egress had to be perforce constructed according to ordinary rules.

Taken altogether the conception and construction of the "Manoir à l'Envers" has proved no small undertaking to the inventor, and he is to be complimented on the creditable manner in which he has succeeded, notwithstanding the enormous difficulties which untoward circumstances have placed in his way, in producing one of the most extraordinary attractions which have ever astonished the public.



THE DINING-ROOM,