

"Right or wrong, Peter was determined to *occidentalize* his empire. The darling wish of his heart was to place himself upon the sea-shore, in order the more easily to Europeanize his country. In the meantime he altered the commencement of the year from the 1st of September to the 1st of January, much to the astonishment of his subjects, who wondered that the Czar could change the course of the sun.

"Both coasts of the Gulf of Finland, together with both banks of the river Neva, up to the lake Ladoga, had been long, and were still, in possession of the Swedes. These frozen morasses were not a tempting site for a metropolis. Still Peter had determined to take possession of that coast, and already in imagination had built his capital upon those dreary solitudes, peopled only by the elk, the wolf and the bear. This man, more than any one, perhaps, that ever lived, was the illustration of the power of volition. He always settled in his own mind exactly what he wanted, and then put up his wishing-cap. With him, to will was to have. Obstacles he took as a matter of course. It never seemed to occur to him to doubt the accomplishment of his purpose. For our own part, we do not admire the capital which he built, nor the place he selected; both are mistakes, in our humble opinion, as time will prove and is proving. But it is impossible not to admire such a masterly effort of human volition as the erection of Petersburg.

"On the 16th of May, 1703, without waiting another moment after having possessed himself of the locality, he begins to build his metropolis. One hundred thousand miserable workmen are consumed in the first twelve months, succumbing to the rigorous climate and the unhealthy position. But '*il faut casser des œufs pour faire une omelette*;' in one year's time there are thirty thousand houses in Petersburg. Never was there such a splendid improvisation. Look for a moment at a map of Russia, and say if Petersburg was not a magnificent piece of volition—a mistake, certainly, and an extensive one; but still a magnificent mistake. Upon a delta, formed by the dividing branches of the Neva—upon a miserable morass half under water, without stones, without clay, without earth, without wood, without building materials of any kind, having behind it the outlet of the lake Ladoga and its tributary swamps, and before it the Gulf of Finland contracting itself into a narrow compass, and ready to deluge it