

of double thickness over the heart. None of these men, however, resorted to such precaution until repeated attempts at assassination had been made. True it is that "uneasy lies the head that wears a crown." Nicholas II. of Russia has waited for no such attempt on his life. Ever since the last arrests of Nihilist students at Odessa he has worn a shirt of nickel and steel, onerous as the garment must be to a man of his inferior physique and lethargic habits. Still stranger stories of his fear and caution have penetrated the walls of the Imperial palace and gained credence among the people of his capital. Although no dagger has been laid on his pillow to unnerve him, and no warning of death has been put under his dinner plate to plague him, the Czar never visits his dinner table or bed without the company of a trusted attendant. It is this attendant's business to examine every napkin and to turn every plate on the table before his Majesty sits down to eat, and to unmake and make again the whole bed before his Majesty retires for the night. At every door of the dining-room and bed-chamber stands a Cossack guard, day and night, and from every dish that is served at the Imperial table a special watcher in the Court kitchen must eat a mouthful before it is served, to prevent any chance of poisoning. As from 1885 to 1895 it now can be said with truth that not a bird could fall to the ground within ten miles of the Imperial palace without being seen by a hundred eyes.

### RUSKIN ON DEBT.

Probably there are few if any of the readers of *Sunshine* who have had the opportunity of reading the following characteristic letter from Mr. Ruskin. It was written in reply to a communication asking him to give a contribution towards the extinction of the debt upon an English Chapel and contains some truths that are well worth heeding.

"BRANTWOOD, CONISTON, LANCASHIRE,  
May 10th, 1886.

"SIR,

I am scornfully amused at your appeal to me—of all people in the world precisely the least likely to give you a farthing! My first word to all men and boys who care to hear me is *Don't get into debt*. Starve and go to heaven—but don't borrow. Try first *begging*—I don't mind if its really needful *stealing*! But don't buy things you can't pay

for. And of all manner of debtors, pious people building churches they can't pay for are the most detestable nonsense to me. Can't you preach and pray behind the hedges, or in a sand-pit, or a coal-hole first? And of all manner of churches thus idiotically built, iron churches are the damnablest to me. And of all the sects of believers in any ruling spirit—Hindoos, Turks, Feather Idolators, and Mumbo Jumbo Log and Fire Worshipers—who want churches, your modern English Evangelical Sect is the most absurd, and entirely objectionable and unendurable to me! All which they might very easily have found out from my books—any other sort of sect would—before bothering me to write it to them.

Ever, nevertheless, and in all this saying,

Your faithful servant,

JOHN RUSKIN."

### THE SERIOUSNESS OF LIFE.

The following is an Eastern apologue that has made a deep impression on many minds, amongst others on that of Tolstoi: A traveller in the desert is attacked by a furious wild beast, and, to save himself, gets into a dry well; but at the bottom of the well he sees a huge serpent, with jaws wide open to devour him. He dares not get out for fear of the wild beast. He dares not descend for fear of the serpent. So he catches hold of a branch growing out of a crevice of the well. His arms grow tired, but still he holds on; and then he sees two mice, one white, one black, gnawing through the branch, inch by inch. He knows that he must give way soon, and he must perish; yet, seeing a few drops of honey on the leaves, he stretches out and takes them, though he finds them no longer sweet. The interpretation is not difficult. The desert is the world; the wild beast is passion; the serpent is death; the branch is the life to which we cling; the black and white mice which gnaw through the branch are the nights and the days; the honey on the leaves are the few poor, transient pleasures at which men vainly clutch as they hang over the abyss. And what are they worth?—*Farrar's Social and Present-Day Questions.*

He—Do you believe that money has a personality? She—I don't know. Why? He—Here's a telegram I just got from my wife at the seashore, addressed to "one hundred dollars," in my care. She—what does it say? He—It says "come at once."