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A SCENE IN RUSSIA.

By the Author of 'Incidents of Travel in Arabia Petrea and the Holy Land.'

GREAT FETE AT PETERHOFF.

The whole population of Petersburg was in motion, on the day appointed for the great fete at Peterhoff. It was expected that the entertainment would be more than usually splendid, on account of the presence of the Queen of Holland, then on a visit to her sister the empress; and at an early hour the splendid equipages of the nobility, carriages, droskeys, telegas, and carts, were hurrying along the banks of the Neva, while steam-boats, sail-boats, row boats, and crafts of every description, were gliding on the bosom of the river.

As the least trouble, we chose a steam-boat, and at twelve o'clock embarked at the English Quay. The boat was crowded with passengers, and among them was an old English gentleman, a merchant of thirty years' standing in St. Petersburg. I soon became acquainted with him, how I do not know, and his lady told me, that the first time I passed them, she remarked to her husband that I was an American. A lady made the same remark to me at Smyrna. Without knowing exactly how to understand it, I mention it as a fact, showing the nice discrimination acquired by persons in the habit of seeing travellers from different countries. Before landing, the old gentleman told me that his boys had gone down in a pleasure-boat, abundantly provided with materials, and asked me to go on board and lunch with them, which, upon the invitation being extended to my friend, I accepted.

Peterhoff is about twenty-five versts from St. Petersburg, and the whole bank of the Neva on that side is adorned with palaces and beautiful summer residences of the Russian seigneurs. It stands at the mouth of the Neva, on the borders of the Gulf of Finland. Opposite is the city of Cronstadt, the seaport of St. Petersburg, and the anchorage of the Russian fleet. It was then crowded with merchant ships of every nation, with flags of every color streaming from their spars, in honor of the day. On landing, we accompanied our new friends, and found 'the boys,' three fine young fellows just growing up to manhood, in a handsome little pleasure-boat, with a sail arranged as an awning, waiting for their parents. We were introduced and received with open arms, and sat down to a cold collation, in good old English style, at which, for the first time since I left home, I fastened upon an old-fashioned sirloin of roast beef. It was a delightful meeting for me. The old people talked to me about my travels, and the old lady particularly, with almost a motherly interest in a straggling young man, inquired about my parents, brothers, and sisters, etc.; and I made my way with the frank-hearted 'boys,' by taking 'boat.' Altogether, it was a regular home family scene; and, after the lunch, we left the old people under the awning, promising to return at nine o'clock for tea, and with 'the boys' set off to view the fete.

From the time when we entered the grounds, until we left, at one o'clock the next morning, the whole was a fairy scene. The grounds extended some distance along the shore, and the palace stands on an embankment, perhaps a hundred and fifty feet high, commanding a full view of the Neva Cronstadt, with its shipping, and the Gulf of Finland. We followed along the banks of a canal, five hundred yards long, bordered by noble trees. On each side of the canal were large wooden frames, about sixty feet high filled with glass lamps for the illumination; and at the foot of each was another high frame-work, with lamps, forming, among other things, the arms of Russia, the double-headed eagle, and under it a gigantic star, thirty or forty feet in diameter. At the head of the canal was a large basin of water, and in the centre of the basin stood a colossal group in brass, of a man tearing open the jaws of a rampant lion; and out of the mouth of the lion rushed a jet d'eau, perhaps one hundred and fifty feet high. On each side of this basin, at a distance of about three hundred feet, was a smaller basin, with a jet d'eau in each about half its height, and all around were jets d'eau, of various kinds, throwing water vertically and horizontally; among them I remember a figure larger than life, leaning forward in the attitude of a man throwing the discus, with a powerful stream of water rushing from his clinched fist. These basins were at the foot of the embankment on which stands the palace. In the centre was a broad flight of steps leading to the palace, and on each side was a continuous range of marble slabs, to the top of the hill, over which poured down a sheet of water, the slabs being placed so high and far apart as to allow lamps to be arranged behind the water. All over, along the public walks, and in retired alcoves, were frames

hung with lamps; and every where, under the trees, and on the open lawn, were tents of every size and fashion, beautifully decorated; many of them, oriental in style and elegance, were fitted up as places of refreshment. Thousands of people, dressed in their best attire, were promenading the grounds, but there were no vehicles, until, in turning a point, we espied, at some distance up an avenue, and coming quietly toward us, a plain open carriage, with two horses and two English jockey outriders in which were a gentleman and lady, whom, without the universal taking off of hats around us, I recognised at once as the emperor and empress. I am not apt to be carried away by any profound admiration for royalty, but, without consideration of their rank, I never saw a finer specimen of true gentility; in fact, he looked every inch a king, and she was my beau ideal of a queen, in appearance and manners. They bowed as they passed, and, as I thought, being outside of the line of Russians, and easily recognised as a stranger, their courtesy was directed particularly to me, but I found that my companion took it very much to himself, and no doubt every long-bearded Russian near us did the same. In justice to myself, however, I may almost say that I had a conversation with the emperor; for although his imperial highness did not speak to me, he spoke in a language which none but I (and the queen and his jockey outriders) understood; for, waving his hand to them, I heard him say in English, 'To the right.' After this interview with his majesty, we walked up to the palace. The splendid regiments of cavalier guards were drawn up around it, every private carrying himself like a prince; and I did not admire all his palaces, nor hardly his queen, so much as this splendid body of armed followers. Behind the palace is a large plain, cut up into gravel-walks, having, in one place, a basin of water, with water-works of various kinds, among which were some of peculiar beauty, falling in the form of a semi-globe.

A little before dark, we retired to a refectory under a tent, until the garden was completely lighted up, that we might have the full effect of the illumination at one coup d'œil; and, when we went out, the dazzling brilliancy of the scene within the semi-circular illumination around the water-works, was beyond description. This semicircular frame work enclosed, in a large sweep, the three basins, and terminated at the embarkment in which the palace stands, presenting all around an immense fiery scroll in the air, sixty or eighty feet high, and filled with all manner of devices; and for its back-ground a broad sheet of water, falling over a range of steps, with lighted lamps behind it, forming an illuminated cascade, while the basins were blazing with the light thrown upon them from myriads of lamps, and the colossal figures, of a reddened and unearthly hue, were spouting columns of water into the air. More than two hundred thousand people were supposed to be assembled in the garden, in every variety of gay, brilliant, and extraordinary costume. St. Petersburg was half depopulated, and thousands of peasants were assembled from the neighboring provinces. I was accidentally separated from all my companions; and, alone among thousands, sat down on the grass, and for an hour watched the throng passing through the illuminated circle, and ascending the broad steps leading toward the palace. Among all this immense crowd there was no rabble; not a dress that could offend the eye, but intermingled with the ordinary costumes of Europeans were the Russian shop-keeper, with his long surtout, his bell-crowned hat, and solemn beard; Cossacks, and Circassian soldiers, and Calmuc Tartars, and cavalier guards; hussars, with the sleeves of their rich jackets dangling loose over their shoulders, tossing plumes, and helmets glittering with steel, intermingled throughout with the gay dresses of ladies, while near me, and, like me, carelessly stretched on the grass, under the light of thousands of lamps, was a group of peasants from Finland, fiddling and dancing; the women, with light hair, bands around their heads, and long jackets enwrapping their square forms, and the men with long great-coats, broad-brimmed hats, and a bunch of shells in front.

Leaving this brilliant scene, I joined the throng on the steps, and by the side of a splendid hussar, stopping his manly figure to whisper in the ears of a lovely girl, I ascended to the palace, and presented my ticket of admission of the Bal Masque, so called from their being on masks there. I had not been presented at court, and consequently, had only admission to the outer apartments with the people. I had, however, the range of a succession of splendid rooms, richly decorated with vases and tazzas of precious stones, candelabras, couches, ottomans, superb mirrors, and inlaid floors, and the centre room, extending several hundred feet in length, had its lofty walls covered to the very

ceilings with portraits of all the female beauties in Russia, about eight years ago. I was about being tired of gazing at these pictures of long-sleeping beauties, when the great doors at one end were thrown open, and the emperor and empress, attended by the whole court, passed through on their way to the banquetting-hall. Although I had been in company with the emperor before, in the garden, and though I had taken off my hat to the empress, both passed without recognising me. The court at St. Petersburg is admitted to be the most brilliant in Europe; the dresses of the members of the diplomatic corps, and the uniforms of the general and staff officers, being really magnificent, while those of the ladies sparkled with jewels. Besides the emperor and empress, the only acquaintance I recognised in that constellation of brilliantly-dressed people, were Mr. Wilkins and Mr. Clay, who, for republicans, made a very fair blaze. I saw them enter the banquetting-hall, painted in oriental style to represent a tent, and might have had the pleasure of seeing the emperor and empress and all the brilliant collection eat; but, turning away from a noise that destroyed much of the illusion, viz., the clatter of knives and forks, and a little piqued at the cavalier treatment I had received from the court circles, I went out on the balcony and soliloquized, 'Fine feathers make fine birds; but look back a little, ye dashing cavaliers and supercilious ladies! In the latter part of the seventeenth century, a French traveller in Russia wrote that 'most men treat their wives as a necessary evil, regarding them with a proud and stern eye, and even beating them after.' Dr. Collins, physician to the Czar in 1670, as an evidence of the progress of civilization in Russia, says, that the custom of tying up wives by the hair of the head, and flogging them, begins to be left off; accounting for it, however, by the prudence of parents, who made a stipulative provision in the marriage contract, that their daughters were not to be whipped, struck, kicked, etc. But even in this improved state of society, one man 'put upon his wife a shirt dipped in ardent spirits, and burnt her to death,' and was not punished, there being, according to the doctor, 'no punishment in Russia for killing a wife or a slave.' When no provision was made in the marriage contract, he says, they were accustomed to discipline their wives very severely. At the marriage the bridegroom had a whip in one boot, and a jewel in the other, and the poor girl tried her fortune by choosing. 'If she happens upon the jewel,' says another traveller, 'she is lucky; but if on the whip, she gets it.' The bridegroom rarely saw his companion's face till after the marriage, when, it is said, 'if she be ugly, she pays for it soundly, may be the first time he sees her.' Ugliness being punished with the whip, the women ducted to great excess; and a traveller in 1631 saw the grand duchess and her ladies on horseback, astride, 'most wickedly bepanated.' The day after a lady had been at an entertainment, the hostess was accustomed to ask how she got home; and the polite answer was, 'your ladyship's hospitality made me so tipsy, that I don't know how I got home.' And for the climax of their barbarity—it can scarcely be believed, but it is recorded as a fact—the women did not begin to wear stays till the beginning of the present century!

Soothed by these rather ill-natured reflections, I turned to the illuminated scene, and the thronging thousands below, descended once more to the garden, passed down the steps, worked my way through the crowd, and fell into a long avenue, like all the rest of the garden, brilliantly lighted, but entirely deserted. At the end of the avenue, I came to an artificial lake, opposite which was a small square two-story cottage, being the old residence of Peter the Great, the founder of all the magnificence of Peterhoff. It was exactly in the style of our ordinary country houses, and the furniture was of a simplicity that contrasted strangely with the surrounding splendor. The door opened into a little hall, in which were two old-fashioned Dutch mahogany tables, with oval leaves, legs tapering and enlarging at the feet into something like a horse-shoe; just such a table as every one may remember in his grandfather's house, and recalling to mind the simpler style of our own country some thirty or forty years ago. In a room on one side was the old Czar's bed, a low, broad wooden bedstead, with a sort of canopy over it, the covering of the canopy and the coverlet being of striped calico; the whole house, inside and out, was hung with lamps, illumining it with a glare that was almost distressing, contrasted with the simplicity of Peter's residence; and, as if to give greater contrast to this simplicity, while I was standing in the door of the hall, I saw roll by me, in splendid equipages, the emperor and empress, with the whole of the brilliant court which I had left in the banquetting hall, now making a tour of the gardens. The carriages were all of one pattern, long, hung low, without any tops, and somewhat like our omnibuses, except that, instead of