

## LETTERS FROM THE BALTIC.

## DILEMMAS OF A PORTRAIT IN ESTONIA.

One day, to diversify the subject, a tall Estonian peasant was ushered in, bearing a note from a neighbouring family; wherein it appeared that, in consequence of some bantering questions and promises, they had sent the best-looking man the estate could boast, to represent the physiognomy and costume of his class. And truly, as fine and good-looking a young man stood before us as needed be seen. At first he returned our glance with rather more courage than a peasant here usually ventures to show; but on being told his errand, blushed like a girl, and proceeded to place himself in the required position with a *mauvaise honte* which, it must be owned, was at first not limited to himself. He wore the regular peasant's costume—his long hair falling on his shoulders; a coat made of undyed black wool down to his heels, with metal buttons and red-leather frogs; and his feet clad in the national *passelt*, or sandals of untanned cow's-hide. After the first novelty was over, he stood sensibly and respectfully enough; and being shown his miniature fac-simile, and told that it would go to England, acknowledged it to be *vegga illos* (very beautiful.) And he took his leave in perfect good-humour with himself and us. But a few days after, a disastrous sequel to this adventure reached our ears. Under the conviction that he had been subject to the spells of a sorceress, his lady-love cast him off for another; his fellows taunted and avoided him; while, added to this, the innocent victim himself was in the utmost terror of mind lest this mysterious delinquent of his person should prove the preamble to his being banished either to Siberia or—to England.

## THE NORTHERN CAPITAL OF RUSSIA.

St. Petersburg must be acknowledged to be an extraordinary work of art; in the regularity of its plan, the costliness of its public buildings, and the general magnificence of its architecture, it is without a rival. The stranger finds himself in a city of palaces; the barbarian genius of Peter the Great has effected more in a marsh, than the polished skill and hereditary wealth of all the European sovereigns in the world. But it is impossible for us to doubt that St. Petersburg is only a magnificent mistake. Its great founder, in showing the haughtiness with which barbarians defy obstacles, has shown only the rashness of attempting to conquer the eternal resistance of nature. Moscow ought to be the sole capital of the empire. By building St. Petersburg at a cost of wealth and life which would have made Moscow as splendid as a dream of eastern imagination, he formed two interests where there should be but one; he fixed the great organ of government at the remotest possible distance from the most vigor-

ous, populous, and important portion of his dominions; he condemned his successor and his court to the most rigid climate: planted eternal jealousy between the north and south, and gained little more than the fixture of a splendid settlement, surrounded by swamps and snows, on the shores of a sea, frozen six months in the year, and with nothing before it for conquest but the melancholy wastes of Poland and the frozen deserts of Scythia. If he had concentrated the strength of the empire round Moscow, with its glorious climate, its superb position, Russia must have long since been to the east what ancient Rome was to the west; the territories which have since cost her such long and wasteful struggles, would have been spontaneously absorbed into her dominion, and every power from the Indus to the Hellespont would have acknowledged her diadem, either as a tributary or a slave.

## COURT CONVERSATION.

Russia has no literature, or rather none to attract a frivolous woman; and political subjects, with all the identical chit-chat which the observances, anniversaries, &c., of a constitutional government bring more or less into every private family, it is needless to observe, exist not. What then remains?—Sad to say, nothing, absolutely nothing, for old and young, man and woman, save the description, discussion, appreciation, or depreciation of toilette—varied by a little cuisine and the witless wit called *l'esprit du salon*. To own an indifference or ignorance on the subject of dress, further than a conventional and feminine compliance, would be wilfully to ruin your character equally with the gentlemen as with the ladies of the society; for the former, from some inconceivable motive, will discuss a new bracelet or a new dress with as much relish as if they had hopes of wearing it, and with as great a precision of technical terms as if they had served at a *marchand de modes*. It may seem almost incredible, but here these externals so occupy every thought, that the highest personage in the land, with the highest authority under him, will meet and discuss a lady's coiffure, with a *gusto* and science as incomprehensible in them, to say the least, as the emulation of coachman slang in some of our own eccentric nobility. Whether in a state where individuals are judged by every idle word, or rather where every idle word is literally productive of mischief, the blandishments of the toilet, from their political innocuousness, are considered safest ground for the detention of mischievous spirits, I must leave; but very certain it is that in high circles of Petersburg it would seem, from the prevailing tone of conversation, that nothing was considered more meritorious than a pretty face and figure, or more interesting than the question how to dress it.