

# YOUTHS DEPARTMENT

YOUNG COSSACK CENTAURS.

BY V. GRIBAYEDOFF.

Young Russia is eying with envy three bright Cossack boys who have been summoned by the Emperor to St. Petersburg. They are Elias Tcherneff, Vassili Dolmatoff and Simeon Kleekoff, aged respectively ten, twelve and thirteen years.

It is the intention of the Emperor to bring them up in the Winter Palace, practically under his own supervision. As the promotions of imperial favourites is rapid in Russia, we may expect to hear some day that one or more of these boys has received command of a portion of the Czar's army.

The three were chosen for their merits as horsemen by the Czarewitch, the Czar's eldest son and heir, during his visit to their native town of Orenburg in the summer of 1891. That was the signal for a loyal demonstration on the part of the Cossacks of the district. Parades, festivities and exhibitions of horsemanship became the order of the day.

The most interesting feature of the programme was contributed by Cossack boys of from ten to fifteen years of age.

As the Czarewitch is chief ataman, hetman, or headman of the Cossacks, their elders wished to show him the proficiency on horseback of the youngsters who will some time be his cavalry soldiers. So they began to arrange for a tournament of boys as soon as they heard the Emperor's son was coming.

As all the boys could ride well, all wished to take part; but not more than a few hundred of the most skilful could be accommodated. These, when chosen, were overjoyed, while the others complained so bitterly that their fathers had a hard time to appease them.

"Father," an aggrieved boy would cry, "go to the captain and tell him there is no boy of my age in the whole camp who can manage a horse better than I!"

"It's true son," the father would answer indignantly, "but I can do nothing. The elders have chosen. You must be content this time to ride with the guards."

For the elders had arranged that all the boys excluded from the tournament should act as escorts, guards or orderlies on the great occasion.

Several companies, each containing one hundred of the more skilful boys, were duly organized. Of these not all were to be competitors for the special prizes. Those selected to compete were supplied with white gymnasium shirts, dark blue belts, wide crimson trousers called *Sharovaru*, and a curved sword or *shaska*. They sat their fathers' best horses, and the companies were commanded by the oldest and smartest boys.

The escort companies wore the regular Cossack uniform, and were commanded by the regimental instructors. The smallest boys were on the left flanks. It was delightful and amusing, while the companies were under review, to see their soldierly bearing and hear how each company's shouts of response to applause ended in a shrill crescendo of the littlest fellows.

When the cavalcade of special competitors rode into the arena they saluted their chief ataman, the Czarewitch, by waving their short curved *shaskas*. Then the sports began.

The first was tent-pegging, a game in which the riders try while galloping hard to strike with a lance point a tent-peg driven into the ground. At this difficult game the chosen boys often deftly transfixed the peg, and bore it aloft triumphantly on their lance-points.

The feat of dropping the sword while riding at full speed and picking it up without reining in was performed by the boys with surprising skill.

Bags of sand were suspended in the air so as to hang directly in front of the young cavalymen who, spurring madly ahead, were obliged to bring the point of a wooden lance against the centre of the sandbag in order to turn it aside from their path.

Failure to accomplish this meant an ugly blow on the head from the sus-

pended bag. A glancing stroke from the lance is worse than none at all.

The accurate aim of the young centaurs in this achievement greatly pleased the Czarewitch and all the spectators.

Then there was jumping over bars five feet from the ground, and an assault at arms, in which the boys, dividing into two sections, rode to the charge with lance pitted against *shaska*. There were also separate combats with the same weapons, on foot and on horseback, besides many other feats which need not be described here.

The three boys Tcherneff, Dolmatoff and Kleekoff, displayed such remarkable skill in the various evolutions and sports that the Czarewitch awarded them the prizes.

The youngest boy, Tcherneff, obtained the first prize, a timepiece engraved with the Russian Eagle. This was a personal present from the Czarewitch. The remaining prizes were from the Cossack's regiment and consisted of a watch and a *shaska*.

When the three boys, some months later, were summoned to St. Petersburg, their pride and happiness knew no bounds. An illustration from a photograph taken shortly after their arrival in the capital shows them in full uniform and accompanied by their instructor, Sergeant Reetkoff.

It is not surprising in view of the ordinary training of Cossack boys, that they are skilled in horsemanship and the use of arms even before they reach their twelfth year.

As soon as the baby boy appears strong enough to endure rough handling his father takes him when he goes on horseback. As the boy grows and his legs strengthen he is placed on a gentle steed. The father rides alongside and holds the child by the hand.

Gradually the little legs acquire "grip," and the boy rides out alone, soon to indulge in breakneck runs down-hill to water for his horse.

The fun ends not seldom in a fall, and the future cavalymen comes home with a black mark or two on his body. Scratches or bruises, however, never trouble him; indeed, he rather glories in them, for they insure him applause for his courage.

The mother is so far from being uneasy about the young rider that she encourages him with praise and sweetmeats.

The older a boy grows the greater is his love of horses. By degrees he picks up from the men various feats and difficult evolutions, which constitute a kind of national game among the Cossacks, and are comprehended under the name of *djegee torku*.

One must be very watchful and continuous in its practice, for the chance of broken limbs are frequent; "Never mind broken bones!" is the cry. The bones are young, and the pieces join quickly when reset by some of the rough experts in such surgery, who may be found in every little Cossack village.

With all his love of horses, the Cossack boy does not neglect his studies. At the present day all Cossacks can read and write, except, perhaps, a few very old men. The law requires that every boy of ten shall be sent for at least three years to school, where he is taught reading, and arithmetic, usually by an ex-officer of the Cossacks. The boy learns arms and military tactics from another instructor.

The Cossack greatly prizes his ability to read and write, for no matter where he may be stationed, on the Austrian frontier or in far-off Turkistan, he can correspond with his relatives at home. And the world has no men to love their homes and their kin more tenderly than the gallant Cossacks.—*Irish Catholic*.

## GOOD MANNERS.

One day, when Tom was playing in the yard, he saw a boy standing by the gate. He was ragged and dirty, his hat was torn, and his feet were bare. But he had a pleasant face. In one hand he carried a pail half full of blackberries.

"Go away from here!" said Tom, running to the gate. "We are rich and we don't want ragged boys around."

"Please give me a drink," said the boy. "If you are so rich you can spare me a dipper of water."

"We can't spare you anything," said Tom; "if you don't go away I will set the dogs on you."

The boy laughed and went away, swinging the tin pail in his hand.

Tom saw him go over into a meadow where he climbed on the stump of a tree. The boy took up a big whip that had been laying hid in the grass, and then

Tommy knew he was the boy who minded Farmer Jones' cows.

"I think I will get some blackberries, too," said Tom to himself.

He went out of the gate into a lane leading to a meadow where there were plenty of berries. Tom saw some fine large ones growing over a ditch. He thought he could leap over it very easily. He gave a run and a very big jump. The ditch was wider than he thought and instead of going over it he came down in the middle of it. He had not much hope that help would come, for he was a long way from any house. He screamed until he was tired. He began to think he would have to spend the night in the ditch when he heard steps on the grass. Looking up he saw the ragged boy he had driven from the gate.

"Please help me out," said Tom crying.

The boy bent down and drew Tom out of the ditch. He was covered with mud, his hat was gone and one shoe was lost in the ditch. He looked very miserable.

"Who is dirty now?" asked the boy.

"I am," said poor Tom, "but I thank you very much for helping me out of the mire. And I am sorry I sent you away from the gate."

"The next time I come perhaps you will treat me better," said the boy; "I am not rich but I think I have better manners."

"I think so, too," said Tom.

The next day when Tom saw the boy going by, he called him in, showed him his rabbits, doves and little ducks and gave him a ride on his pony.

"You have good manners now," said the boy.

"Yes," said Tom, "I found them in the ditch."

## IRISH TOPICS

A number of evictions were carried out on the Marquis of Conyngham's estate near Ardara, recently.

Mr. Channing, M.P., has forwarded to the Arran Islands seven tons of potatoes, which he received from Mr. Fox, of Lincoln, Eng.

At Doonbeg, near Kilrush, a young man named Kereck lost his life in trying to recover some timber which was floating in the bay.

The death is announced of Sister Mary Clare Harbison, of the Presentation Convent, Drogheda. She was in the twenty-ninth year of her religious profession, and was a native of Magherafelt, County Derry.

The death occurred at Kinawell House, Tipperary, on April 30, of J. Massey, J.P. Deceased was eighty-four years of age. Mr. Massey always showed himself in touch with the feelings of the majority of his countrymen.

D. Fitzgerald Gabbett, J.P., of Cahircolish House, Cahircolish, is mentioned as one who may be selected for the Lord Lieutenancy of the County Limerick, vacant by the death of Lord Emly. Mr. Gabbett represented Limerick City, from 1879 to 1886, as a Home Ruler.

An eviction was carried out on the estate of Mr. Fuge at Templeenry, near Buttevant, recently. The tenant, J. Frawly, is a very industrious man, and occupied the farm for the past forty-five years. Some time ago he received notice to quit from Fuge and his offers for a settlement were rejected.

The assistant sub-sheriff for Tipperary, Mr. Mitchell, accompanied by some bailiffs and a protection party of police, visited the townland of Killineave, on April 28, and evicted a tenant farmer, named John Haugh, with his wife and ten children, for non-payment of rent. Mr. Haugh held thirty-five acres of land from a Mr. Haire, of London, the rent being £26 and the valuation £22. A caretaker is in occupation of the place.

Thomas O'Gorman, chairman of the Limerick Association, announces that the friends of John Daly, at present undergoing penal servitude for life, for complicity in the dynamite conspiracy, are about to make arrangements for nominating him at the approaching general election for the Parliamentary representation of the City of Limerick. Support, he says, will be given by Irishmen all over the world, and it is hoped Daly will be elected unopposed.

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