

GLIMPSES OF RUSSIA.

I.

A Visit to the Bishop of the Sobor, Tiflis.

The city of Tiflis has a population of over 100,000, and is situated on both banks of the Kurra (the ancient Cyrus River) which flows into the Caspian Sea near the famous oil-wells of Baku. It is an important military station, for in its neighborhood and its barracks are located 60,000 troops, watching their opportunity to make a dash for Persia and the Southern Ocean. Lord Salisbury has just planned a clever "coup" by which he has made over the concession of the Euphrates Valley Railway to the German Emperor, thus making it her interest to join us in checkmating these aspirations. Persia is now in the German "sphere of influence," and the two great Protestant powers of Europe united as regards the Eastern question.

The "Sobor," a word derived from the Roman "Suburra," lies in the Armeno-Persian quarter of the above city and on entering it we step at once from the West, represented by the 8,000 German Colonists, and the Russian quarters, into the East, represented by Tartars, Persians, Kurds, Armenians and a large Jewish admixture.

My friend, Baron Burundukoff, wished to introduce me to the Bishop and his family, with one of the young ladies of which he had an evidently tender understanding. He was my faithful "cicerone" in studying Russian customs and manners and our mutual studies in Russian

and English led to a close friendship and correspondence, which, alas! was broken by his death in the last struggle between Russia and Turkey. A merry, blue eyed blonde of thoroughly Saxon type and exquisitely courteous manners, he was the representative of the best side of Russian life. On dark nights he would guard me home through the streets with drawn sword, and on one occasion beat a drunken Armenian on the arm, as he lurched against us, exclaiming, "That's the only way to treat that 'camille,'" and I had my first glimpse of military despotism not unknown in Germany. Soon after he presented me with a Karl rifle from the Government stores and we proceeded to the butts to prove it. No one would be the first to fire it among the officers present, certainly not myself. At last up jumped Count Bebitoff, introduced to me as the smallest man in the Russian army. The next thing we saw, as the smoke cleared away, was the brave Count on his back, his heels in the air and probably muttering in Russ, as Mrs. Bounds in "Skying a Copper," "Why, where is the powder blew?" At our reunion afterwards over a bottle of Kakhetian wine, (I was not a Good Templar then), I trusted that in any future scrapes we might have Russia might always find such brave men to stand fire and that they would continue to use the Karl rifle—and the result be equally innocuous.

The day of our visit was in Holy week and the occasion "The Blessing of the Waters" which took place in the forenoon and in which the Bishop took a conspicuous part, resplendent in purple and