

themselves to the actual reality. A revolution is necessary, in order to exchange the old image of the fancy for the new one of the eye. Mountains, lakes, and rivers, require a new arrangement—yet the descriptions may have been admirable, and, when read on the spot, have probably assisted in pointing out beauties and features of the landscape which otherwise might have escaped our notice. With this experience I will not attempt to describe in detail, but only very generally, what I saw in St. Petersburg and Moscow; and, as I intimated in my last chapter, shall attempt to inform my readers, who care to know it, of the general impression only which the general view of both made upon me.

At the beginning of the last century, the site on which the capital is now built, was a dreary morass, shaded by the primitive forest and, like a huge black sponge, was charged with moisture from absorbing, since creation, the waters of the Neva that flowed through it, and over it as they pleased. The Czar Peter, a giant man, with a giant's will, boots and walking stick, and with a genius which bordered on insanity, determined, as all the world knows, that here should be built the capital of his Empire. And so after having learned shipbuilding, and other useful handicrafts, while he lived in that small wooden house in Holland—which I have visited with all tourists to that wet, flat land of ditches, canals, and windmills—the said Peter built a similar hut among the marshes of "the Islands" of the Neva, and began to drive piles, build quays, and accumulate stones, to rear a new Amsterdam.

Peter determined to have ships, to beat the Swedes, and thus gain the command of the Northern Sea, and open a grand gate to his future empire—how much greater since his day!—and also to have always open a back-door to Europe. He began by ordering every strange ship to bring thirty paving stones as a part of her cargo, and every boat ten, and every land carriage three, and the stones accumulated, and the city was built. All his plans succeeded. When he beat Charles XII. at Pultowa in 1709, he exclaimed that "the foundations of St. Petersburg at length stood firm." He fought many enemies, but the Neva was his greatest, and may yet prove one of the most invincible if provoked by any opposition of the Baltic. Twenty five feet of rise, such as has occurred will probably decide the battle against the capital of the Czars. But for more than a century and a half Peter's plans have beat the Neva's stream. Upwards of 600 streets reticulate the surface of the morass, 12,000 public and private conveyances drive over it, 11,000 shops and stalls adorn it, and half a million of people live upon it. But alas! the morass has so far its triumphs! If a pit is dug in any part of the town, three feet deep, the water oozes from its sides and hot-

tom. This probably affects the health of the population, as the deaths every year exceed the births by 8000.

Knowing the admiration which most travellers have expressed for St. Petersburg, I am almost afraid to acknowledge my great disappointment with it. It by no means came up to what I expected from the description I had read, or the "illustrations" I had seen of it. The finest view I think, is from the centre of the Admiralty, in that grand open space where 100,000 men may be manœuvred. In front of the Nevskoi Prospect, one of the widest streets in Europe, and stretching in a straight line for three miles. To the left is the noble Alexander column, flanked on one side by the Winter and Hermitage Palaces, and on the other by the handsome quadrant of public offices, opening by a large arch into streets beyond, having on its summit a car of victory. The extreme right of the view, and of the place, is bounded by the buildings of the Holy Synods, and the farthest angle filled up by St. Isaac's Cathedral. The open space on the opposite side to St. Isaac's, and next the Neva, is marked by the statue of the Czar Peter; while beyond the broad, noble river itself appear the long buildings on the quays of the Islands. There is no doubt a vastness in the scale of this Place d'Armes, which is imposing. There are, moreover, details in this great whole which stand minute examination. St. Isaac's Church—which by the way, cost about, as some say, £16,000,000!—is a stately and solid building without, but too bizarre within, and too over-loaded with gildings, and too flash with colour, to produce the solemn effects of York or Westminster as a place of worship. It is, however, admirably adapted for those spectacles in which the Greek Church delights. The Hermitage Palace, with its noble staircase, and magnificent collection of paintings, is worthy in every respect of a great capital; nor is there any morolith in Europe to be compared with the Alexander Column, the shaft alone being eighty feet of unbroken polished granite. But in spite of all this, and much more which might be said in favor of other views, and of particular objects, the general impression which the whole made on me irresistibly was that of a rapidly got up city, with a singularly waste and unfinished look about it, barbaric vastness and oriental display, without real, endurable, unmistakable grandeur. The platform or base-line is ugly from which the buildings spring, being a desert of uneven stones, full of mud or dust-holes, open waterways, and undulations, excruciating to the miserable travellers in a drosky. This sadly mars the general aspect. The vast majority of the palaces are mere brick and stucco, with a very decayed, shabby look about them, while the immense space seems to dwarf every building into paltry dimensions, and themselves to appear empty of people, who are but dots on their acres of surface. The