From Dicken's Household Words.

AT HOME WITH THE RUSSIANS.

An English lady who, for ten years, was domesticated among the Russians, and did not quit their country until some time after the commencement of the present war, has just published—under the title of An Englishwoman in Russia—three hundred and fifty pages of information upon the actual state of society in that empire. The book confirms ideas familiar to many people; but, inasmuch as it does this in the most satisfactory way, wholy by illustrations drawn from personal experience or information of a trustworthy kind, its value is equal to its interest. Having read it we lay it down, and here make note of some of the impressions it has left upon us.

Unless, from one who has been for a long time an English resident, and who can speak without passion, it is not easy to get clear views of the internal state of Russia. Despotism has established there so strict a censorship, that even the Russian scholar only learns as much of his own country as the emperor shall please, and a learned traveller assured our countrywoman that, of an account written by him of his journeys in the north of Asia, only those parts were allowed to be published wherein nothing was said tending to expose the desolation of the land. The regions of the barren north were no more to be confessed than a defeat in arms. The great historian of Russia—Karamsin—was obliged to read his pages to the emperor before he was allowed to publish them. Not only a certain class of facts, but also a certain class of thoughts, are rigidly kept from the public mind.

One of the best living Russian authors complained to the Englishwoman that all those parts of his works that he valued most had been cut out by the censor. He wrote a play containing, as he thought, some admirable speeches; it came back to him from the censor's office with every one of them erased, and only the light conversation left as fit for the amusement of the public. Shakespeare is honoured greatly by the trading class, and translations of King Lear and Hamlet are frequently performed; but all those of Shakespeare's plays which contain sentiments of liberty, such as Julius Cæsar, are excluded by the censor. A Russian writer wished to produce a play, on some subject in English history; upon which he consulted with our countrywoman. Every topic was found dangerous. The story of Elfrida, daughter of the Earl of Devonshire, was suggested. The Russian shook his head. It would not be allowed. "Why not? It is a legend of a thousand years ago."—"Why, they would never let Elfrida's husband cheat the king."—"But he was not a Czar."—"No matter. The act is the same, and the possibility of a crowned head's being deceived would never be admitted by the Czar."

The Czar of Russia practically stands before the greater number of the subjects as a little more than God. "The Czar is near,—God is far off," is a common Russian saying. "God and the Czar know it," is the Russian for our "Heaven knows!" A gentleman describing one evening the emperor's reception on the route to Moscow, said, "I assure you, it was gratifying in the extreme; for the peasants knelt as he passed, just as if it were the Almighty himself." And who shall contradict this deity? Our countrywoman was once at the opera when the emperor was graciously disposed to applaud Madame Castellan by the clapping of his hands. Immediately some one hissed. He repeated his applause;—the hiss was repeated. His majesty stood up—looked round the house with dignity—and, for the third time, solemnly clapped his hands. The hiss followed again. Then a tremendous scuffle over-head. The police had caught the impious offender.—An example of another kind was made by a young lady whose brother was killed at Kalafat, and who, on receiving news of his death, smiled, and said, "She was rejoiced to hear it, as he had died for the emperor." Imperial munificence rewarded her with a splendid dowry, and the assurance that her future fortune should be cared for.

There is need now to encourage a show of patriotism. The Englishwoman who, on her return, found London streets as full of peace as when she quitted them;—had left St. Petersburgh wearing a far different aspect. Long lines of cannon and ammunition-waggons drawn up here and there; parks of artillery continually dragged about; outworks being constructed; regiments marching in and out; whole armies submitting to inspection and departing on their mission, told of the deadly struggle to which the Czar's ambition had committed him. There was no hour in which wretched recruits might not be seen tramping in wearily by hundreds and by thousands, to receive the emperor's approval. It is hard for us in this country to conceive the misery attending the terrible conscriptions which plague the subjecs of the Russian empire. Except recruits, hardly a young man is to be seen in any of the villages; the post roads are being all mended by women and girls. Men taken from their homes and families leave behind, among the women, broken ties and the foundation of a dreadful mass of vice and immortality. It is fearful enough under ordinary circumstances, "True communism," said a Russian noble, "is to be found only in Russia."

One morning a poor woman went crying bitterly to the Englishwoman, saying that her two nephews had just been forced from her house to go into the army. "I tried"—we leave the relator of these things to speak in her own impressive words—"I tried to console her, saying that they would return when the war was over; but this only made her more distressed. 'No, no!' exclaimed she, in the deepest sorrow, 'they will never come back any more; the Russians are beaten in every place.' Until lately the lower classes were always convinced that the emperor's troops were invincible; but it seems, by what she said, that even *they* have got to know something of the truth. A foreigner in St. Petersburgh informed me that he had 'gone to see the recruits that morning, but there did not seem to be much patriotism among them: there was nothing but sobs and tears to be seen among those who were pronounced fit for service, whilst the rejected ones were frantic with delight, and bowed and crossed themselves with the greatest gratitude.'" Reviews were being held almost daily when the Englishwoman left, and she was told that, on one occasion, when reviewing troops destined for the South, the emperor was struck with the forlorn and dejected air of the poor sheep whom he was sending to the slaughter.

"Hold your head up!" he exclaimed angrily. "Why do you look so miserable? There is nothing to cause you to be so?" There is something to cause *him* to be so, we are very much disposed to think.

But we did not mean to tell about the war. The vast empire over which the Czar has rule is in a half civilised—it would be almost more correct to say—in an uncivilised state. Great navigable rivers roll useless through extensive wilds. Except the excellent roads that connect St. Petersburg with Moscow and with Warsaw, and a few fragments of road serving as drives in the immediate vicinity of these towns, there are no roads at all in Russia that are roads in any civilised sense. The post-roads of the empire are clearings through wood, with boughs of trees laid here and there, tracks over steppes and through morasses. There is everywhere the grandeur of nature; but it is the grandeur of its solitudes. A few huts surround government post stations, and small brick houses at intervals of fifteen or twenty miles along the routes are the halting places of gangs destined for Siberia. A few log huts, many of them no better than the wigwams of Red Indians, some of them adorned with elegant wood tracery, a line of such dwellings, and commonly also a row of willows by the wayside, indicate a Russian village. A number of churches and monasteries with domes and cupolas, green gilt, or dark blue, studded with golden stars, and surmounted each by a cross standing on a crescent; barracks, a government school and a post-office; a few good houses, and a great number of huts—constitute a Russian provincial town, and the surrounding wastes or forests shut it in. The rapid traveller who follows one of the two good lines of road, and sees only the show-places of Russian civilisation, may be very much deceived. Yet even here he is deceived only by a show. The great buildings that appear so massive are of stuccoed brick, and even the massive grandeur of the quays, like that of infinitely greater works, the Pyramids, is allied closely to the barbarous. They were constructed at enormous sacrifice of life. The foundations of St. Petersburg were laid by levies of men who perished by hundreds of thousands in the work, One hundred thousand died of famine only.

The civilisation of the Russian capital is not more than skin-deep. One may see this any day in the streets. The pavements are abominable. Only two or three streets are lighted with gas; in the rest oil glimmers. The oil lamps are the dimmer for being subject to the speculation of officials. Three wicks are charged for, and two only are burnt: the difference is pocketed by the police. All the best shops are kept by foreigners, the native Russian shops being mostly collected in a central bazaar, Gostinoi Dwor. The shopkeepers appeal to the ignorance of a half-barbarous nation by putting pictures of their trades over their doors; and in his shop a Russian strives to cheat with oriental recklessness. Every shop in St. Petersburg contains a mirror for the use of the customers. "Mirrors," says the Englishwoman, "hold the same position in Russia as clocks do in England. With us time is valuable; with them appearance. They care not though it be mainly false appearance." They even paint their faces. The lower classes of women use a great deal of white paint, and, as it contains mercury, it injures alike health and skin. A young man paying his court to a girl generally presents her with a box of red and white paint to improve her looks; and in the upper classes ladies are often to be seen by one another, as they arrive at a house, openly rouging their faces before entering the drawing-room.

These are small things, indicative of an extensive principle. Peter the Great undertook to civilise Russia by a coup de main. A walk is shown at St. Petersburg along which he made women march unveiled between files of soldiery to accustom them to go unveiled. But civilisation is not to be introduced into a nation by imperial edict, and ever since Peter the Great's time the Russian empire has been labouring to stand for what it is not, namely, the equivalent to nations that have become civilised in the slow lapse of time. It can only support, or attempt to support, this reputation by deceit. It must hide, or attempt to hide—and it has hidden from many eyes with much success its mass of barbarism, while by clever and assiduous imitation, as well as by pretensions cunningly sustained, it must put forward a show of having what it only in some few directions even strives to get.

The elements of civilisation Russia has, in a copious language, soft and beautiful without being effeminate, and a good-hearted people, that would become a noble people under better government. Their character is stained chiefly by ignorance and fear. The best class of Russians—especially those who are not tempted by poverty to the meanness that in Russia is almost the only road to wealth—are boundlessly hospitable, kindly, amiable almost beyond the borders of sincerity, but not with the design of being insincere. They are humane to their serfs; and although this class suffers in Russia troubles that surpass those of the negro slaves, it is not from the proper gentlemen and ladies of the country that this suffering directly comes. When the noble proprietor himself lives in the white house that peeps from among trees, side by side with the gilt dome of its church, the slaves on the estate are reasonably happy. It is not true that a Russian gentleman is frequently intoxicated. A Russian lady never is so. Of the government functionaries, who form a large class of the factitious nobility and gentry of the empire, no good is to be said: they are tempted to pillage and extortion under a system that all radiates from a great centre of deceit. Ostenation is the rule. A post-master, a colonel in rank, receiving forty pounds a year and without private estate, is to be seen keeping a carriage, four horses, two footmen, and a coachman. His wife goes extravagantly dressed: she has two or three children, a maid and a cook to keep; but she can afford to pay a costly visit every season to the capital. This system of false pretension ruins the character of thousands upon thousands. It makes of Russia what it is,—a land eaten up with fraud and lying. Living near such a colonel-post-master, the Englishwoman could observe his mode of operation. He was about to pay a visit to St. Petersburg, but wanted money. His expedient was to send an enormous order for iron, for the use of government, to a rich iron-master in the town. The iron-master knew that gold, not iron, was the metal wanted; and as he dared not expose himself to the anger of a government official, he was glad to compromise the matter by the payment of a round sum of silver roubles as a fine for default in execution of the order. The habit of ostentation—barbarous in itself, which destroys the usefulness and credit of the employes of government—tempts the poor nobles also to a forfeiture of their own honour and self-respect.

It runs into everything. Even in the most cultivated classes, few Russians who have not gone out of Russia for their knowledge are really well-informed. They have learnt two or three modern languages, and little else. Yet they cultivate a tact in conversing with an air of wisdom upon topics about which they are almost wholly uninformed, and after an hour's sustainment of a false assumption, show perhaps, by some senseless question, that they cannot have understood properly a syllable upon the points under discussion. Their emptiness of mind is a political institution. "If three Russians talk together, one is a spy," stands with them as a social proverb. They are forbidden to express their own opinions upon great movements in the world; their censorship excludes from them the noblest literature; they have no common ground of conversation left but the merits of actors and actresses, the jests of the last farce or trashy comedy, or the state of the opera,—in which place, by-the-by, such operas as William Tell and Massaniello are performed with new libretti, from which all taint of a love of liberty has been expunged. Feeling the weakness of all this, and in a great many cases secretly resenting it, the men shrug their shoulders and say, "What would you have? We must play cards and talk of the odd trick." While our countrywoman was staying with a friendly Russian lady, an old gentleman called to borrow a few roubles, got them, and departed. "Ah, poor man," said the lady, when he was gone, "think how unfortunate he has been. He once possessed fourteen thousand slaves, and he has lost them all at cards." The English visitor expressed regret that a man of his years should be the prey of such a vice. "How old do you think him?" was then asked. "Oh, sixty at the least." "Sixty! He is past eighty, only he wears a wig, paints his eyebrows, and rouges to make himself look younger."

The Russian ladies have little to do but read dissolute French novels (which the censorship does *not* exclude), dress and undress, talk slander, and criticise the dresses of themselves and one another. Their slaves do all that might usefully occupy their hands, and they are left to idleness; which results in a horrible amount of immorality. The trading classes and officials talk almost exclusively of money. The enslaved peasants, bound to the soil, content when they are not much beaten, sing over the whole country their plaintive songs (they are all set in the minor key), and each carries an axe in his girdle; for which the day may come when he finds terrible use.

At present, that day seems to be very distant. The ignorant house slaves, like the negroes holding the same rank elsewhere, are treated as children. A new footman, in a household which the Englishwoman visited—a man six feet two out of his shoes—was found to have an aptitude for breakage. He was told one day that when next he let anything fall he would be punished. On the day following he dropped the fish-ladle in handing fish at the beginning of dinner. He looked dolefully at his master, expecting that blows would be ordered. His mistress—put him in the corner! Their ignorance is lamentable. A Russian gentleman returned from abroad, where he had seen better things, determined to devote his life and fortune to the enlightenment of his peasantry. Their priest taught them that he was destroying ancient customs, and that his design was to subvert the religion of their forefathers. "The consequence was that the slaves formed a conspiracy against him, and shot him one evening as he was reading a book in his own sitting-room."

(To be continued.)

Gun Cotton.—It is said that this powerful agent is about to be made serviceable in the Eastern war, and guns adapted to its use are now in process of manufacture for the Austrian Government. A letter from Vienna has the following:—

"Thirty-two of the new guns (four batteries) to be used with gun cotton are already finished, and it is believed that 168 more (16 batteries) are extremely reserved just at present, but still it has transpired that only twelve-pounders will in future be cast, 'as they need not be heavier in metal than the old six-pounder—if gun cotton is used—and almost all the Russian field batteries are composed of twelve-pounders.' The experiments with gun cotton still continue, and one result is too remarkable not to be mentioned: A 12-lb. ball was fired from a gun charged with powder at some thick boards prepared for the purpose, and another ball of the same weight was fired from one of the new guns charged with gun cotton; 'although the new gun was 160 yards farther from the target than the old one, the hole made by the shot of the former was well defined and clean, while the orifice made by the latter was jagged and splintery."

How Abernethy got Married.—Have I mentioned the recent death of the widow of the late John Abernethy, the great surgeon? She was well on to eighty. There is a story of the way in which Abernethy got this woman to marry him. Once upon a time he went to church, and was shown into a pew where there were two ladies. He had no prayer-book, and the lady handed him one. They walked out of the pew together, and found, at the porch, that it was raining heavily. Abernethy offered to take them home in his carriage, which was waiting. They had some chat, in the course of which it came out that they were mother and daughter, not very well off, and widow and daughter of an officer in the army. Abernethy sat them down at their humble dwelling. As he stood at their table he handed his card to the daughter, and said: "Young lady, I am Mr. Abernethy, the surgeon. I have never married, for I never could spare the time. I should like to marry you. If you would simply write me a line on Tuesday, saying whether you will have me, I shall call the next day and take you to church." He could only spare fifteen minutes in the house; and, when he came out, was the accepted of a very pretty woman. They were married on Tuesday, and he drove home with her to the stately mansion, of which she thus became the mistress. "My dear," said he, after he had introduced her to some of his friends assembled to receive her, "you must excuse me until 3 o'clock, for I have to give my lecture at Bartholomew's Hospital, which I cannot omit on any account." They were a very happy couple; and when Abernethy died, in 1831, his widow came in for all his wealth, estimated at something like £100,000.

Intelligence from Persia is unfavourable. Russian influence at Teheran predominates. The English ambassador and M. Bourre were about to present an ultimatum to the Shah, demanding an auxiliary corps of thirty thousand men.

Queen Elizabeth, when she visited Worcester, borrowed 200*l.* of the Corporation, which still stands as a "bad debt" on the town books.