

which recall the Primitives. It is the superb barbaric indifference to balance, which piles gold on gold. Only the faces, hands, and feet in ikons are uncovered; the robes, carved in gold or silver-gilt, or woven in pearl and every other precious stone, cover the canvas. These faces and hands are indecipherable, would be so even in good light. At first, one dislikes the gap in the gold. At second, one gives up criticism and adores. The whole overpowers; nothing else matters. One is in presence of a positive force, making a direct appeal. The lumber of culture goes overboard. Fact, elemental fact, reaching beyond all canons, is with one and upon one. There are the coffins of a hundred Tsars, red copper slightly bronzed, each with name and date in high relief, the simplest ornaments in holy Russia. Above the coffins of the Romanoffs hangs a marvellous golden canopy. Along one side are mighty banners, ikons encased in gold. And the Sanctuary has St. Michael, mighty and terrible, slaying the serpent; for this is the Church of the Archangel. The floor is purple with porphyry, rough and uneven blocks on which the squarer never toiled, but polished by millions of devout feet for centuries.

Go into the Church of the Assumption. Here is the fresco of Jonah with his adventures from the casting-overboard to the preaching in Nineveh. And one passes from the corridor direct into a dim sanctuary, its pictures, painted with infinite detail, invisible even by the light of a taper — and one acquiesces in the eternal truth that invisibility is no drawback to the appreciation of a picture! Further along, a sombre clerestory holds a vast reliquary of gold and silver, the covers half drawn to show most aged bones of saints; here a hand, there a foot, here again a bone which piety has decorated with gold wires.

And through all moves the concourse of many women and some men, prostrating themselves crossing themselves, ceaselessly, kissing the frames of the relics one by one, testifying most notably to the vitality of the faith thus mummied, the faith, which, as Eliphaz Levi said, has not inspired a single eloquence since Photius. The popes are the most despised of the people; the cult is bound hand and foot in the winding sheet of a formality one hundred times more costly than the Roman; and yet it tingles and throbs with overwhelming life. Again the antinomy of things is conquered; it is as if *lucus a non lucendo* were recognized as an absolute and irreversible canon of philology.

The secret is in the Russian himself. He is the natural martyr and saint, the artist in psychology. Most people are exquisitely aware that even the commonest Russian regards the sexual act as a serious scientific experiment, with grave concern studying the personal equation in all its details, never admitting enthusiasm until the stage directions so ordain. This principle is carried as far in religion. The people cross themselves when they feel like it, prostrate themselves by no discoverable rule. Each man carries out his cult with no reference to his neighbor. Each is present in order to work himself into religious ecstasy. If he succeeds, he has been to church; if not, he hasn't.

The Russian understands suffering itself as a thing to observe, not to feel. He accepts the hardships of his lot as God's experiment with man. The means is nothing, the end all. Hence the patient longing of his dog-like eyes, and the beatitude glimmering from his pale cheeks. Hence the joy in sorrow and sorrow in joy of his whole mental composition. Hence his long-suffering and his fierceness, his tenderness and his brutality.

The Great Mean is realized by the exhaustion of the extremes. It is Chinese Taoist philosophy in practice, and at the same time the antithesis of that plan of achieving everything by doing nothing.

III.

As instructive as the Russian at prayer is the Russian at debauch. He drinks to get drunk, realizing the agony of the limitations of life as much as Buddha, though the one finds sorrow in change, and the other seeks change as the remedy of sorrow. And so all his gaiety only amounts to a wish that he were dead, or at least mad; he strives to overcome the enemy, life-as-it-is, by entering a realm where its conditions no longer threaten and obsess.

His method is childish, to our supercilious eyes, for we have gone through the mill of the Renaissance and a hundred other educational crises, while Russia — with the deadly exception presently to be noted — has remained a "spring up, a fountain sealed." But all our pleasures have some primitive physiological basis in one or other of the senses, and the man who enjoys a mutton chop has no need to envy him who turns from some nauseously bedevilled kickshaw. In Russia the essential elemental thing is always there, and even the mistakes of its art and life turn to favor and to prettiness. A savage woman of twenty is always splendid, though she blacken her teeth and tattoo her face and hang her ribs with spent cartridges and thrust a fishbone through her nose; our civilization resembles a hag dressed by Poiret.

All this of Moscow, the heart of holy Russia; whose crown is the Kremlin; it does not apply to Warsaw, with its sordid gangs of Jews and Roman Catholics, or to Petersburg with its constantly increasing taint of sham Parisianism. Paris at its best is a poor thing; unless it is one's own in a most special sense one must be very intimate with artists to escape the commercial gaiety of Montmartre, the ruined boulevards, and the general tawdriness of its second-rate monuments. But the worst elements of Russia have annexed the worst elements of Paris:

"Whose manners still our tardy apish nation

Limps after in base imitation."

Paris is the Circe that turns Russians into swine.

Politically, the influence of Rousseau has been deplorable.

The "contrat social" is as out of place in Asia as frock coats and lavender trousers on the tawny limbs of the Samurai. Pushkin, the national poet, is but an echo of Byron. It was at that period that Russia discovered Europe, and it has discovered nothing since. What we most like in Russian literature we should most dislike. One's natural feeling is toward familiar things. It is not the western garnish of Tolstoi that we should admire. His perfectly insane views on poverty and chastity and non-resistance are the truly Russian utterance. Where those views are tinted by national considerations they become French, and his lofty craze for chastity degenerates into a neo-Malthusianism, as craven in its theory as it is disgusting in its practice. The authentic Russian says, "Let God be true, and every man a liar": it is the voice of his own holy spirit that speaks, and that voice cares nothing for conditions. "If thine hand offend thee, cut it off," said Christ, and immediately Russia produced a sect as senseless as the Galli, the shorn priests of Cybele, the fellow martyrs of Atys. There is no talk of the "interests of the community," and the rest of it. Shelley's