LIFE IN A RUSSIAN FAMILY

It was toward the end of the month of January when I first reached Moscow, and the streets were deep in snow, while in the country a veil of virgin purity wrapped all nature, says a writer in Blackwood's Magazine. The drive from the station to the hotel is a pleasant change from the bondage of prolonged railway travel, and can not fail, moreover, to interest any observer used only to the countries of Western Europe.

A queue of men in rags is slowly dwindling away, as each eager component part of it reaches a spot where some charitable dole is being dispensed to the needy. The half-starved mongrels that skulk about, snarling and quarreling among themselves, suggest an Eastern city. Sturdy peasants in sheepskins, with frozen beards, are reviling in no measured terms the ancestors of their tried horses, as they struggle up a sharp incline. Wealthy merchants are whirled past by horses that are overheated in spite of the low temperature. Foot passengers, clad in long fur coats, and beggars in the scantiest of clothing, are seen at every turn; while the shops, with their quaint signs and their announcements in an alphabet that seems to have lost its reason, alternately bewilder and delight. Huge sturgeon, frozen solid, are solemnly standing on their heads outside the fishmonger's door, waiting to be chopped into blocks and sold; while above the busy scene of life and commerce, the golden cupolas of many a quaint and stately church rise high into the clear air.

The streets and footpaths are crowded; but with all the movement there is but little noise, from the soft carpet of snow that covers the ground. The only sounds that break upon the ear are the harmonious murmur of voices, the sharp crunch of the snow under foot, the hard breathing of the over-driven peasants' horses, the swish of a passing sledge, the tinkle of the kolokolchickee, the driver's short encouraging cry; while clear above all, as a note from another world, breaks in the deep sound of some mighty church bell.

After two days of comfortable hotel life, I found a family which seemed to answer my requirements and on the third day I transferred all my belongings to a flat in a crooked street off one of the great thoroughfares. My new quarters were not pretentious, but they were clean, and sufficiently comfortable. On a floor of polished parquetry, partially covered by a mat or two, stood a bed, a table, a couple of chairs and a washstand; while a wardrobe and my traveling bath, the wonder of the family, which stood in a corner, completed the modest list. Several tiled stoves kept the flat at a high temperature. The double windows were not intended to open; but a ventilator in each was supposed to be opened for a short time daily, which was considered to fulfill the requirements of health.

It may be well at the outset to dispose of a very common delusion, which is shared even by many educated people in this country. On arrival in Russia the traveler who is ignorant of the language will find all other tongues of very little use to him. It is a great mistake to suppose that most Russians can speak French or German. There are Russians belonging to the Baltic Provinces who speak German better than Russian; and there are a few in other parts of the empire who, having been brought up in the constant society of English or French tutors, speak these languages better than their own. But, as a rule, it is Russian, and Russian only, that will enable a traveler to leave the beaten track with comfort or profit.

The reasons for the prevalence of the opinion that Russians are endowed with a polyglot faculty are two in number. In the first place, as Russian is not generally spoken in Europe outside the Russian Empire, it follows that those who wish to indulge in the luxury of foreign travel must acquaint themselves with the languages commonly spoken in the countries they intend to visit. Now, the wealthy classes, to which some persons invariably belong, are fully aware of the uselessness of the Russian language outside the frontier, and, moreover, they adopt the only really practical method of getting out of the difficulty. In the household of the rich in Moscow and other places are English and French ladies of good family and education, who take entire charge of the children during a term of years, receiving a liberal salary. Their young charges very naturally learn to speak idiomatically and with a perfect accent. It is not surprising, therefore, that people so educated should speak foreign languages well; but it is ridiculous to regard such as in any way representative of their nation.

Russian boys of the ordinary well-to-do middle classes, who have not the advantage of years of special tuition in childhood, and who adopt the time-honored method of learning languages by attending classes at school, speak ludicrously bad English, even when they are in the highest classes, and are being awarded full marks, five, regularly for their progress and acquirements in this language.

The other reason why Russians have attained such a name with us as linguists arises out of the similarity of the Russian and English languages in one important particular. In nine cases out of ten what betrays a foreigner in England is his inability to pronounce the English r. However fluently or grammatically he may speak, if a Frenchman, or a German, he never can get over this difficulty. In Russian the letter in question is pronounced as in English so that it does not entail the facial and thoracic contortions that it might but for this happy circumstance. The combination th, however, forms a great stumbling block to all Russians, who have only learned English as adults, but this is a purely English sound, and its mastery by Russian children does not form any barrier to their progress in their own language. With the letter r it is different, for it is very rare, indeed, to find any one who has acquired the correct pronunciation of the French or German r who can at the same time master the English sound of the letter, and the converse is also true. It will be inferred that English and Italians speak Russian better than any other European nations; that this is true I know on good authority.

A description of the Russian family with which I spent some time may not be out of place, as it is in many ways a typical one.

Mr. Dobree, the nominal head of the household, was supposed to be a stock broker, but his real profession was one for which no name has yet been found that is at all satisfactory to its followers. It consisted in smoking, tea-drinking on a scale unknown in this country, and novel-reading. He was, in fact, a rate of the type familiar to readers of Daudet, and he had contributed nothing to the upkeep of his family for a dozen years or so. He was a tall, dark man of about fife-and-forty, with a sallow complexion.

Mrs. Dobree was dark, too, but short, and inclined to embonpoint. A pair of kindly and intelligent eyes looked out from beneath a forehead, the forward curve of which might denote either mental weakness or an historical mind of rare power. In her case it was fortunately the latter, as she had the memory of a Macaulay. But she had that which Kingsley justly extols above talent. She was a good woman, and devoted to her family. She had a heart that was kindness itself, a quick temper and a charming manner, which made every one feel at home at once.

There were two sons. The elder, Meesha, was a sharp, good-looking lad of 18. He had just finished his course of schooling at the academy, and was serving a year as a gentleman private, going every day to his barracks. The second, Ivan, was not so good looking, but he was nevertheless an honest and clever lad, though of less showy parts. He was in his last year of school.

In one thing this family was especially typical of the Russian middle classes—all had bad health. Mr. Dobree fered from epileptic fits. Mrs. Dobree had a serious gastric malady. Both the sons were delicate in different ways.

The food usually eaten in middle-class Russian families is quite different from that supplied in hotels and restaurants, and is not appetizing to an educated palate. You have had your coffee and kalach—a kind of light bread—some hours ago, and the inward monitor prompts that it is time to sit down to the midday meal. On a cloth, which can scarcely be considered sans tache, several places are laid. The knives and forks are of steel, and beside each is a triangular glass bar on which to rest them when the change of plates is made.

Mrs. Dobree, the hostess, having pulled the maid servant's ears for some trifling neglect of duty, takes her place at the table, and begins to ladle out the fish soup, so tasty to a Russian palate. "Only a little for me," you plead timidly, as the dorsal fin of some monster is flopped out into the plate, and your fears begin to be seriously aroused. "Oh, but you eat nothing," says madam, giving you another ladleful; then cutting off a large piece of butter, she puts it into your plate, gives it a few turns, and then whisks the melting delicacy into the tureen, upon which all eyes are now fixed. With some care you avoid being choked, and manage to get the servant to remove your plate, though it is not empty. Then comes the next course, peerojock. At a first glance this dainty might be taken for a thick girdle cake; but when the knife is applied, it seems to be composed of two pasty layers half an inch thick, separated by a solid inch of chopped toad-stools, which, gathered in the summer time in the woods, have been hanging on a string for many months above the servant's bed. Your entreaties for a small helping are merely regarded as the outcome of national modesty, and you are soon face to face with a formidable hunk of the dread compound. But your troubles are not over yet. Your next course may be some tough old bull; and when you are nearly hors de combat, a cauliflower is brought in and put before you. This might have been acceptable at an earlier period of the feast, but now you are hardly equal to the effort. "Oh, do have some," says Mrs. Dobree coaxingly. "I went to the market myself this morning, and paid a rouble for it; no one else will have any—we do not care for vegetables." This is true, so you resume your knife and fork, and do battle with the last arrival, while your struggles are witnessed by an appreciative circle. Perhaps you may be asked to give a good account of eight or ten blinnee—a thick pancake eaten at certain seasons of the year with sour cream—and you are sure to be offered plenty of acid black bread. You are not sorry when the meal is over, and probably no one has had any idea of your sufferings, which are increased by the evident desire of your hostess to please, and the consequent necessity of concealing them.

Some private matters of importance necessitated my return to England for a few weeks at Easter. When I returned to Russia it was the beginning of May; the long winter was gone, and the slush of spring dried up. The town would soon be unbearably hot, peopled only by the poor, business men, shopkeepers and the ubiquitous American.

Scattered round Moscow, on the different arteries leading from the city, there are many little villages of pretty wooden houses, empty in winter, but occupied in summer by middle-class Russian families. Mrs. Dobree had rented a country house or datcha, from a Gen. Khrabree, whose estate was not far from the little town of Klopgorod. The house was in a wood, opposite to a large summer camp, so, as I was particularly anxious to see something of the Russian army in time of peace, the arrangement made by Mrs. Dobree promised to suit admirably. It was nearly 100 versts from Moscow, and thither the family intended to move about the 10th of the month; I say about, for our days were somewhat restricted in choice. I did not care to move on Sunday, but Mrs. Dobree objected to both Monday and Friday, "as they were such unlucky days," so the start was eventually fixed for a Tuesday.

We were all glad when we found ourselves standing on the platform at Klopgorod. The tarantasses, or springless carriages, drawn by two horses, were not ready, so that a wait of three hours in the refreshment room, was necessary. It was an out-of-the-way station, and the presence of an Englishman would create surprise, if not suspicion, so I was cautioned by Mr. Dobree to give no indication of my nationality. Some baggage had been sent on earlier, and was, we hoped, by this time at the datcha, ten miles off. After the long delay our equipages drew up, and, followed by the supplications of a crowd of beggars, we set off at a good pace for the house. Our way lay through the town, across the undulating fields, and at the pace we were traveling, separated only from the wooden flooring of the carts by a heap of hay, the jolting and vibration were uncomfortable and even alarming. Outside one of the first cabarets of the little town we came upon our baggage! The wagoners were dragged out indignantly, and with scant ceremony put again upon the road. After passing through the town—an agglomeration of wooden huts and white stone buildings, above which rose the green cupolas of several churches—we left the rough cobble-stones behind, and, emerging into the open country, began to thread our way across great rolling corn fields, without visible boundary save the dark edging of primeval forest.

The drivers, notwithstanding the roughness and narrowness of the track, seemed disposed to make a race of it, in spite of the sufferings and protests of their fares. The second pair of horses turned out to be the speedier, and their continued efforts to pass the leaders resulted only in bringing them within striking distance, so that their noses were brought up sharp by the backs of those of the party who were in the first tarantass. After some futile efforts the chase was given up, and "Little Elias" and "Despised Little Daniel," so they were called, had to be content to follow at a safe distance. Toward nightfall we passed the large Russian camp, and then, crossing a stream, neared a young wood, inside the border of which stood our datcha. Our baggage could not arrive for at least two hours, so, improvising some beds out of deal chairs and tables, we lay down tired and hungry, to get what rest we could.

In the morning we were able to take stock of our new house. It was a square log hut with a veranda outside the entrance. A central hall separated four rooms of nearly equal size. We were not, however, the first occupants, for a colony of young jackdaws were established in the chimney, and we had to evict the unbidden guests before there could be any prospect of dinner.

The morning after our arrival in the country the cook came to pay her respects to her mistress and to offer her opinion on the datcha. The Russian peasantry are extraordinarily superstitious, and our domestics were not different from the rest of their kind. One of the ideas which is received by them almost as an article of belief is that every house is inhabited by a domovoy, or spirit, who expresses his approval or otherwise of the inmates soon after they come into occupation. The cook, then, having examined her person, and having found no traces of pinching or other violence on the part of the presiding genius of the place, gave it as her opinion that we should pass a very pleasant time. Na datche, though she herself would have much preferred to have had c public house within reasonable distance; not that she ever took anything—that, of course, goes without saying.

It was a pleasant enough place to spend a few summer months in, but in winter it must have been a desolate spot, and all our neighbors told us that all their large watch dogs had been eaten by wolves; ntohing but the bones remaining. Surrounding the house was a young wood of saplings and silver birch trees just in the freshness of spring foliage. Across a strip of turf and the river was reached. Above it rose a bluff, on which the soldiers' great open dining sheds and many other huts belonging to the camp clustered thickly. Before and after every meal grace is sung, and the harmony of the men's voices, unaccompanied by any musical instrument, is not to be despised.

It was refreshing after the dust and turmoil of the town at this season of the year to sit on the veranda and read the humor of Gogol, the graphic descriptions of Tolstoi and Tugeney, or to revel in the matchless poetry of Pushkin and Lermontoy, undisturbed save by the gentle shimmer of the aspen leaves and the occasional respons eof a company of soldiers to the stereotyped morning greeting of the commander on first seeing his men, "Zdorovo rebyata" ("Hail my children.") The men's answer is given in a mechanical way: "Glad to do our best, your honor," or "excellency," or "highness" according to the rank of the officer.

The Russian soldier is about middle height, very deep-chested and thick-set, with sallow complexion, square jaw, and broad face, and an appearance of great strength and determination. He does not look quick-witted and, in fact, is not; but he is intrepid and well disciplined. In the short hot summer his dark-green tunic is replaced by a white shirt, which is gathered in at the waist with a black leather belt, while the dark cloth pantaloons are tucked into long boots. He is cheerful and uncomplaining, and though badly paid, according to our ideas, he is not ill fed, getting three pounds of black bread a day and plenty of potatoes and of his favorite cabbage soup, with meat occasionally. After the day's work was over many would come down to the stream to fish or bathe, and others would while away the long summer's evening with selections on their favorite instrument, the concertina, some comrades forming a ring round an expert step-dancer, giving an exhibition of his skill, and keeping time to the lively air of the musician.

Though in an out-of-the-way part of the country, there were yet some neighbors, and one at least of these deserves more than passing notice. On some rising ground half a mile to the right of our house stood a couple of datchas. In one of these lived several senior officers belonging to the camp opposite, whilst in the other dwelt a being, the description of whom I attempt with some diffidence. Though intended by nature to be a woman, this eccentric person lived in a state of revolt against her destiny, and wore, not merely in private, but unblushingly on public occasions, men's clothing of the most pronounced character. She affected the costume of a country gentleman, and was habitually to be seen in riding-breeches and boots, a short jacket and a peaked cap. When the description of this lady began to be whispered about for the costume was regarded as a little unusual even in Russia, I confess that I was somewhat incredulous; but I soon became convinced of the fact from personal observation.

The food in the country was of a more Western nature than what we had had during the winter-time in town. Sometimes a chicken provided us with a welcome change; sometimes dishes of beautiful wood strawberries, with abundance of cream, added a very acceptable relish to our meals, and often, after a course of the perennial old bull with garlic sauce, we would hear the rattle of wheels, a confused sound of voices, and two rival vendors of ices, who had disposed of all their cool delights in camp, would cross the stream and race up the incline to the datcha for our custom.

Near at hand were many pleasant walks in the quiet woodland glades, but however desirable it might be to stroll out in the evening and enjoy the fragrant perfume of the orchids and other beautiful wildflowers, and listen to the thrilling notes of the nightingale, it was yet a pleasure which had frequently a certain element of risk in it. Round the villages and outside the towns in Russia there is an invisible fringe made up of the outcasts of society and the desperate. These Razboyniks, as they are called, are a serious menace to the weak and defenseless. Peter, our faithful man servant had an encounter with some of them which might have had unpleasant consequences, not merely for himself, but also for me. He had been to fecth my washing from Pokrovka, and was returning rather late across the fields, when he heard footsteps behind him and saw two dark forms approaching quickly. He made off at a good pace for the plank bridge across the stream on the other side of which lay the datcha. Suddenly he came upon a soldier to whom he appealed for help and the figures, which were close upon him, disappeared in the darkness. He pushed on again quickly for the bridge, but soon became conscious that he was still pursued. He kept his lead, however, till he neared the river, and once across it he would be within hail of the house. Just as he was about to set foot on the plank, two other figures jumped out from beneath it and the way was cut off. Without a moment's hesitation he plunged into the river, holding up the precious bundle of clean shirts and calling out loudly for help. The Razboyniks gave up the chase and more than satisfied with a rouble in recognition of his fidelity.

Unfortunately, all of Peter's compatriots are not of the same kidney as himself, and there is a trait of character very common in Russia which sooner or later obtrudes itself. The average native has some considerable difficulty in discriminating between meum and tuum, and it is so far as the possessions of others are concerned, a communist. A writer has put it somewhat crudely by declaring that every Russian is more or less of a chief. Without going quite so far as this, it may safely be affirmed that there is dishonesty in Russia where the reverse might reasonably be expected. In a work, written by one who only began to learn the Russian alphabet when on his outward journey, it is stated that "the drosky driver who bows so politely to the passers-by, and crosses himself as he passes almost every church, will generally contrive to rob you of something if it is only to the value of a piece of string." That the writer's conclusions are not far from the truth the following incident will serve to show. I was driving once to a railway station, before I had been two months in the country. The driver was communicative, and turned around frequently to give me the benefit of his opinion, so far as the rattling of the cranky drosky over the stones rendered this possible. When in the train shortly afterward, my eyes strayed to the rack where my Gladstone bag was deposited. I suddenly became conscious of something unusual in its appearance, I had done it up carefully before starting, but now a curious white stripe ran down one of its well-worn sides; one strap was missing! The artful ishvostchik, while keeping me in conversation and looking me straight in the face, had, with one hand, managed to loosen the strap and transfer it to his pocket.

LEATHER REMNANTS.

A Material of Which No Part is Permitted to Go to Waste.

Leather remnants are a regular article of trade. In manufactures of leather there are remnants, just as there are remnants in the manufacture of cloth, of tin, of wood, and of very many other materials. There are wholesalers who deal in leather remnants exclusively, who will buy any leather remnants whatever, and who find a sure sale for everything they buy. For many purposes the remnants are as good as pieces cut from whole sides would be, and they cost very much less.

A manufacturer of fine shoes, who buys whole skins, cuts out the best and uses that only and sells the rest as remnants. The remnants are sold to manufacturers who make a cheaper grade of shoes; the shoes made from such remnants may be better and cheaper than shoes made from cheap whole stock.

Harness makers and saddlers who buy whole skins have more or less remnants, little pieces, and odds and ends that they have no use for, but which may be made useful for one purpose and another. From any whole stock there must be remnants, and the remnants are all good for something' remnants of belting, for instance, are sold to make boot heels of, and insoles.

The smallest remnants of some kinds of leather are used for the filling of balls; leather remnants are used for making suspender tips; for leather trimmings; for legging straps; for the making of cheap pocketbooks, and for covering eyeglass and spectacle cases, and various kinds of fancy goods; for book binding; for making children's shoes; for the straps used on hobby horses; for leather buttons and washers; for corners on books. Remnants of French calf are used for fine cobbling; and remnants generally are sold for a very great variety of purposes.

WASN'T ONE OF THEM.

A Scotch clergymen and one of his elderly parishoners were walking home from church one frosty day, when the old gentleman slipped and fell flat on his back. The minister looked at him a moment, and, being assured that he was not hurt, said to him: "Friend, sinners stand on slippery places. The old gentleman looked up as if to assure himself of the fact, and said: I see they do; but I can't.

INCUBATORS FOR BABIES

INGENIOUS METHOD TO INCREASE THE POPULATION OF FRANCE.

Made on the Same Principle as the Apparatus for the Artificial Hatching of Eggs—Thirty to Sixty-Four Per Cent. of the Little Ones Saved.

The alarmingly small birth-rate in France and the resultant fact that the population of that country is almost at a numerical standstill, while that of all her near neighbors is rapidly increasing, has awakened a new interest in all that bears upon the preservation of infant life. French babies, in other words, are at a premium, and the social scientists are aroused to the importance of using every effort to prevent a diminution of the stock on hand.

Dr. Rousselle, of the French Senate, has been so energetic in this field that he might very well be called a second father to thousands of French little ones whose feeble lives have been saved by the operation of measures he originated and succeeded in having enacted into laws—laws which have stood as a barrier between the lives of the helpless and the negligence and cupidity of those on whom fell the delicate task of rearing them.

Next to Dr. Rousselle comes Dr. Farnier with his ingeniously contrived incubators, in which the faint glow of life in baby weaklings is carefully screened and gently fanned with an enduring flame. As far back as 1857 Dr. Deunce, of Bordeaux, invested

AN INCUBATOR CRADLE,

in which the baby was kept shielded from the outer air in an artificially warmed case. Dr. Deunce's invention, however, had the objection that the child breathed through direct introduction the colder outer air, with disastrous results to its lungs.

Dr. Farnier made three improvements on the Deunce incubator, with the result that he has at last succeeded in meeting all the necessary conditions and warding off, as far as possible, all dangers to the frail little lives. His improvement upon this contrivance followed some time afterwards and was adopted in the same institution. Now comes his improvement upon the improvement with the result that the Paris Maternity prides itself on having the most perfect mechanical conservator of baby life in existence.

The Farnier incubator is made on the same principle as the apparatus for the artificial hatching of eggs. It consists of a large oblong box of thick wood divided into two compartments. The lower contains a reservoir of hot water. The wooden plank which is the ceiling for this compartment serves as the floor of the little baby bedroom above it. This lilliputian apartment is furnished with

A DAINTY LITTLE CRIB

and may be very prettily decorated. Among the other articles of furniture is a thermometer with large, plain figures, so that when an observer looks in through the glass in the ceiling to see how the youngster is coming on he may also make a note of the exact temperature. Ample provision is made for the free admission to the little room of pure, outside air, but it has to pass first in close contact with the reservoir of hot water, so that when it is delivered for consumption to the baby's lungs it is warmed to the same temperature as the little room itself. Very delicate and ingenious devices are used to insure as even temperature as possible.

About every two hours the baby is taken out of his little den, and for a fe w moments, while he is taking nourishment, is exposed to the air of the large room, an operation to which he generally raises as vociferous an objection as the strength of his lungs will permit.

The success of this baby incubating process sufficiently attests the value of Dr. Farnier's invention. Out of a group of infants born under certain conditions where formerly none were known to survive now fully 50 per cent. are saved. In another group of weaklings only 30 per cent. formerly survived. The incubating process has raised this percentage of life to 64.

AN EMBARRASSED MOTHER.

This Boy Should Have Been Taken Home and Well Spanked.

A great many things occur on the street car simply because it is a public conveyance and the privacy of home is made impossible. This scene occurred on a street car in a certain city not long since:

"Mamma," shouted the golden-haired infant in knickerbockers, "what are you wearing auntie's sealskin sack for?"

"Hush, Willie," quickly urged the mother with a vivid blush, while the men tried to look unconscious and the women smiled delightedly. "Aren't you glad we're going to see grandma?"

"Yep. But I'll bet that she'll ask how you come to have auntie's sack on."

"Do keep quiet, dear. Get up here and look out the window. Just see the sleighs and the pretty horses."

"Whew, don't they go it, though! But suppose auntie wants to go out, will she put on that old cape you had on? And my goodness! What do you think, Mamma Dilson, you're wearing sister Jennie's hat! Won't she just snort and tear?"

"See here, my young man, you must either keep quiet or I'll punish you severely when we get to grandma's. I mean it now. How often have I told you that little boys should be seen and not heard?"

"'Bout a million times. But, I say, mamma, I can think about what a row there'll be when Jennie finds out that you wore her hat, can't I? That hain't bein' heard, is it?"

The little woman held up her finger, and when she led Willie off at the next corner his feet did not touch the floor twice in the whole length of the car.