

THE HEART OF HOLY RUSSIA.

By Aleister Crowley.

"Above Moscow is nothing but the Kremlin; and above the Kremlin is nothing but Heaven."—Russian Proverb.

I.

Observers so well, yet so diversely, equipped as Von Moltke and Théophile Gautier, concur in amazement at this city of miracle. As one would expect, the truly original mind of the strategist finds worthier expression than that of the mere expert in words.

Gautier, writing of St. Basil's, exhausts himself in such forcible-feeble photography as this: "On dirait un gigantesque madrépore, une cristallization colossale, une grotte à stalactites retournée."

The soldier sums the whole city in a phrase of inner truth: "On se croit transporté dans une de ces villes que l'imagination sait se représenter, mais qu'en réalité l'on ne voit jamais."

All of us, I hope, and in particular my Lord Dunsany and Mr. S. H. Sime, have seen these cities of the imagination; and the more we have travelled the world, the more we have grown content with our disappointments. Delhi, Agra, Benares, Rome, London, Cairo, Naples, Anuradhapura, Venice, Stockholm, all fall short in one way or another of making one exclaim as I exclaimed when my eyes first fell upon the great east wall of the Kremlin, its machicolated red brick crowned by the domes of the cathedrals, its Tartar towers culminating in the glorious Gate of the Saviour, flanked by ineffable St. Basil: "A hashish dream come true." There is nothing in de Quincey, Ludlow, or Baudelaire so fantastic-beautiful as the sober truth of Moscow. It has not been planned; it obeys no 'laws of art.' It is arbitrary as God, and as unchallengeable. It is not made in any image of man's mind; it is the creation of mind loosed from the thrall of even so elemental a yoke as mathematics.

It is the imagination incarnate in metal and stone. It is the absurd in which Tertullian believed. It is a storm of beauty, a mad poet's idea of heaven. It mocks human reason. It belongs to no school or period; it could not be imitated or equalled, because the mind of even the greatest artist has limitations, grooves of thought; and in Moscow, it is the unexpected which always happens. Happens: the Kremlin is an accident. The town itself is an accident. There is no particular geographical reason for it being where it is. As to natural advantages, it has none. There is a small river, perhaps half as wide as the Harlem River or the Thames at London Bridge, and a hill no higher than Morningside or Ludgate Hill. Go to the top of Ivan Veliky one clear day and you can see but vastness of plain all ways to the horizon, save for that low mount-line whence Napoleon first saw the city. It has no Vesuvius, no bay of blue, no crested Posilippo. It has no seven hills. It has no mountain setting, no mighty river, no possibility of background but the sky. And there it is, unassailably magnificent, sheer warlock's work. It is the sudden crystallization of one of those "barbarous names of Evocation" of which Zoroaster speaks. It is the efflorescence of a Titan vice, the judgement of the God that turned Lot's wife into a pillar of salt upon a spinthria of the whole race of giants. For, like the Thyrsus around whose spear twist vine tendrils, every dominant form of the Kremlin is a fantasy upon one theme, and that a theme of which the sun himself is

but the eidolon. It is the Lord of Life, the Giver of Life, the bountiful, the single, the master of ecstasy, the fulfiller of promise, the witness of the invisible, the vicegerent and arbiter of the godhead, the mainspring of manhood, the compeller of destiny, that is commemorated in this wilderness of wonder.

This Basil church (might one not say Basilisk church?) is the solution of the platonic antinomy of the Many and the One. There are no two spires alike, either in color or in form or in juxtaposition. Each asserts that unity is in multiplicity in unity; each is a mathematical demonstration of the identity of being and form.

Here is the arcanum of the Brothers of the Rose and Cross; here the solution of the problem of the alchemists; here the square is circled, here the cube is doubled, here is perpetual motion in unmoving stone; the volatile is fixed, the fixed is volatile, Hermes has laid Christ the cornerstone, and Hiram-abif has set his seal upon the pinnacle of the temple.

And as I gaze in this July full moon, facing the Northern Lights, eternally brightening and never growing brighter, behind the frozen dream, suddenly the rich silence breaks into sound. Incomparable beauty of the bells of Moscow! There are no other bells in the world that can for a moment be compared with them. And they play music. Not tunes vulgarized by cheap association, not imitation of any other music, but melodies all their own, as wonderful to the ear as is the city to the eye. In accord with the miracle of the building, they repeat the great work accomplished in every phantasy of phrase, the lesser bells answering the greater like the nymphs caressing Bacchus.

It is stupendous, unbearable; the consciousness breaks into ecstasy; one becomes part — that peculiar part which is the whole — of the choral colossus. There is no more limitation; time, space, the conditions of the ego, disappear with the ego itself in that abyss of eternity, that indivisible and instantaneous point, which is the universe.

II.

Within the churches is infinite prodigality of gold. Except in St. Saviour's, a modern Europeanized bad church, height is always so disproportionate to breadth that one might fancy oneself in the torture chamber of a Sadistic god. Up and up, out of sight, stretch the fierce frescoes, with their snakes and dragons that devour the saints, their gods, bearded as their own popes, and their devils, winged and speared like the horsemen of the steppes that their forefathers feared. All sight, in these dimly-lit shrines, ceases before the shaft of the divine instrument starts from the curves — slight enough — of the roof. When these churches were built, the windows had to be minute, because of winter. Ivan the Terrible was ignorant of "chauffage centrale." The effect is unpleasing, the void breaks in upon form and eats it up. It turns the whole edifice into a magic mouth gold-fanged, whose throat sucks up the soul into annihilation.

There is no truly original feature in the art of the frescoes,