

The Heart of Holy Russia

*Originally published in the January 1918
edition of The International.*

"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 judgment 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 Hiramabif 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 unpleasant, 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, 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 por-

phyry, 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 costive 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 longsuffering 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 sav-

age 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 Poirer.

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 tintured 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 sinless 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 "Masque of Anarchy" anticipated Tolstoi's non-resistance with a plan of campaign whose principal tactic was to allow yourselves to be mown down by artillery in order to fraternize with the gunners. It is, incidentally, a perfectly practical plan — in the long run.

Were I not resolved to keep politics out of this paper, I could adduce some singular evidence to this effect.

St. Basil's is unquestionably supreme among these monuments. Its likeness to the others is so much more like, its opposition so much more salient, its violations so absolute, and its unity so achieved, beyond theirs. Ivan the Terrible had the eyes of the architect put out, so that he might not make another masterpiece for another emperor.

How curiously ineffective are words to conjure vision! Even poetry can only reproduce an impression, and by no means the cause of the impression.

Here is St. Basil's from the front.

On the extreme left, far back, a column on open arches with a windowed spire; next, a low grey phallus, the gland of grey stripes salient from a green background spiked with red pyramids. Then a lofty phallus, the shaft ornate in red and grey, the gland striped with orange and green in spiral; under it nestles another phallus, its gland covered with flat diamonds of red and green.

Then another, lofty, with a straight stripe of red and green. Now comes the main spire, shaped rather like a wine-bottle, fretted with myriad false arches, adorned in red, green and Naples yellow. Its gland is gold. Then a grey shaft supports a gland trellised with green, yellow diamond pyramids filling the spaces. Last comes a high

lingam decorated with false arches, its gland of red and green pyramids set spiral. At the foot is a grey covered balcony; and admission is gained by a quasi-Chinese causeway whose spires are covered with green grey scales, ribbed with red, white and green. The whole is further ornamented chiefly with bars of red, white, yellow, orange and green in various combinations, and the flat spaces with painted flowers in pots, executed in a style somewhat recalling certain phases of post-impressionism.

There is the northern aspect. So ineffective is it to expose the mechanism of a masterpiece! As one walks round it, round is a correct term, for the ground plan is circular, not angled — new towers spring into view, always fantastically varied, yet never permitting the impression of the whole to alter by a jot.

“The earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof”; and yet “in Him is neither variableness nor shadow of turning.”

IV.

The Moskwa by night has a curious likeness to the Thames; and St. Saviour’s takes on the aspect of St. Paul’s. For a second the illusion is complete; then one turns back to the marvellous parapet of the Kremlin, and is again in Asia. One passes into the enchanted garden of Alexander the Third, with its ruins of elder walls, now half hidden by usurping vegetation, always beneath the machicolations of pale orange, crowned by the mighty palace of the Tsar. Moscow has virtue to hallow modernity. The guide-book informs us that such and such was rebuilt in eighteen hundred and something; one is as unmoved in admiration as when one learns that the gargoyles of Notre Dame are Early Victorian. It merely intensifies one’s admiration for Early Victoria.

In these gardens monsters play; it is only in keeping. No Pagan dream of centaur, nymph, hermaphro-

dite, faun, hamadryad, exceeds the soul that laughs in Russian eyes. Who has the key of the garden of Pan? He will find it more useful in Moscow than even in London, where the constant wear of the nerves — London is the City of Interruptions — drives all who would remain themselves to explore strange kingdoms, wherein themselves are lost. With a telephone at one's elbow, one is obliged to fill a minute with the wine of a month. Unnecessary task for Moscow, where the minutes are worth months by their own right divine. What is boredom in the west is bliss in the east. It is the elemental forces of Nature that nurse our hearts. London's comedy and tragedy are so glazed over by hypocrisy that London feeds on lies. In Moscow one is constantly faced by facts. The troughs of sulphuric acid between the double windows, without which one could have no daylight in winter, are undeniable.

In Nice the hotel porter can (and does) telegraph to the papers that his thermometer is 21 degrees C. when there is snow on the ground and a blizzard blowing.

It is this annual lustration of snow that keeps the heart of Moscow pure, even as India is purged by heat and rain. Where Nature always smiles degeneracy soon sets in. Countries not purified by calamity must be washed in blood. This is the merciful and terrible law, and this is the law under which wild beasts prowl unmolested in the garden of the Third Alexander. Those who accept the law of their own being are free within the limits of their destiny. Osiris bore the crook and scourge; the Russian has his trances and his vices — and the knout. I wish I were sure that the Russian — not only his artist — were as sure as I am that the two are but phases of a unity which would have no phases but for an inexplicable optical illusion! However, the artist knows it and the peasant lives it; that must suffice.

Russia is always in extremes: the Café Concert at the Aquarium and the finest ballet in the world on the one hand — the mercury mines on the other. The Tsar

on the one hand — the greatest personal freedom in Europe on the other. An Education Act would drown Russia in blood: a Duma is an anachronism. The result is a life simple and moderate, perfectly policed and admirably free. When all is said and done, the only crime is to conspire against a rule which ensures this freedom. The ethics of Russian rule is not to be judged by the convicted sneak-thieves who come to England and pose as political martyrs, or the women who, after being licensed prostitutes for fifteen years in Warsaw, arrive in London with a tale of a *vierge flétrie* and a wicked governor-general. Russia is pre-eminently sane, as England is hysterical. A press censor saves one (at least) from the excesses of the Press. In England today it is impossible to discover from the newspapers whether a million stalwart men made the welkin ring at Sir Bluster Bragg's meeting, or whether the attendance was limited to an old lady suffering from rheumatism and two jeering boys. Both reports are often enough sent in by the same man.

In Moscow one does not bother one's head about such matters. You can blow ten thousand men to pieces with less fuss than (in England), a draper can get rid of his wife. There is no excitement about the "dramas passionnels" in the papers; every Russian buttons up a hundred Crippens in his blouse — which often enough has not even buttons! No man can estimate the strength of Russia. Moscow is the richest city in Europe. Russia has real wealth, not the wealth that depends on wars and rumors of wars. Let every bank in the world break, and the planet break up in universal war: Russia would not turn a hair. Certain financiers might default; no other would suffer. The Russian Empire is a fact in Nature; the British Empire is the hysterical creation of a few Jingo newspapers. England without a navy can be starved in three weeks. Russia overpowered merely starves her invaders. General Janvier and General Février are finer strategists than my lords Roberts and

Kitchener. Russia has in her own right all the things that are wanted. The "Vin exceptionnel de Georgia" which I drank tonight would be hard to match in French vintages, and it only costs ten shillings a bottle even at this den of thieves where I sup and write. If you insist on all you have coming straight from Paris, it is expensive to live; I find the local products, from hors d'oeuvres to that kind which neither toils nor spins, incomparably finer. The Christmas strawberry at the Savoy is not equal to those that you pick wild in June. The opposite contention is one of those superstitions that oppresses the newly rich, and makes their lives a burden fiercer than Solomon's grasshopper. All life ultimately reposes on spiritual truths, not on material illusions. If a man is a physician at forty, he knows by experience the simple truth of poets like Wordsworth, Burns, and Francis Thompson. A friend of mine has recently had his adequate income multiplied by five. The other day he said to me: "Till now I never knew what it was to be poor." The poor remain happy in their hope; "if they were only rich!" The rich have lost that illusion; they know riches are valueless, and they despair of life. A girl friend of mine lived for three years happily on a pound a week or less; she has come into a thousand a year, and "never has a penny to bless herself with." She even contemplates an expedient as ancient as it is unsatisfactory to eke out the exiguity of her existence. This is where the Russian scores; he steals ravenously, and flings away the spoils. He never attaches any value to money, or regards it as a standard of worth. Birth is a good deal, influence something, even saintship, artistry, or pre-eminence in vice have value; but riches are left to the Jew. The Russian is the only rival of the Irishman as the antithesis of all that Weininger implies by the Jew — which term, by the way, has an extension quite different from that of the Hebrew race. To say so much is not to take sides in a controversy or even to admit that controversy as legitimate; as a logician, I deny that either of

the contradictories A and a necessarily fall into either of the classes B or b.

In Russia I go further, and assert the identity of A and a. It is the secret of the extravagance of strength and weakness which is eternally whispered between the steppes and the sky.

V.

It is not often that Nature condescends to make a pun; here she has done so, by the constant reminder of the astounding likeness between Moscow and Mexico (D. F.). There is the same "sudden unfinishedness"; for example, between the Kremlin and St. Basil's there is a patch which has known no workman's toil. There is also the terrible rain, which makes horses stand knee-deep in water. I once saw a man thigh-deep in the Pivnaya next to the Hermitage Restaurant — the best in Moscow — bailing for dear life. There are the same great open circles, with low crude houses on the patio system, stalls here and there, animals in unexpected places, a general air of mañana, occasional Chinese, odd drunkards reeling about in open daylight. I must also mention that eminently respectable women smoke in the street, and that both sexes refuse to submit to the inconvenience of waiting when they are in a hurry. Electric trams of surprising excellence run through roads paved with cobbles of desolating irregularity. Even minute details concur; for example, the bedrooms in my corridor run 109, 103, 108, 106, 101. The gardens and boulevards suggest an alameda rather than the Paris which they were probably intended to imitate, and the behavior of the people who adorn them goes to complete the likeness. The suburbs confirm the diagnosis, with their wooden huts and their refreshment shanties, their fields unenclosed, their sudden parks and fashionable hotels whose approaches would not be tolerated in the most primitive districts anywhere else.

And as I make these observations on the road to Sparrow Hills, my friend remarks (*sua sponte*) that it is exactly like the back-blocks in Northern Australia!

And this is 56° North! Whence comes this constant suggestion of the tropics? Except for the quality of the rain, there is rationally no striking resemblance. To me this is an unsolved puzzle, an isolated fact which I connect with no other item of my mind, much less subordinate to any general principle. But it is so strong and so remarkable that it must be set down in the record.

VI.

Pale green as the sea in certain seasons, with all of its translucence, are the twin spires and the dome of the Iberian Gate, whose facade is of the color of a young fawn, and whose windows are dappled white. Beneath each tower is a passage, and between these nestles the Chapel of the Virgin of Iberia, the holiest shrine of Russia. Most sacred is the image of the Virgin, a copy of that of the Iberian monastery of Mount Athos, a copy made according to the rules of ceremonial magic, amid fasts and prayers and conjurations. It was presented solemnly in 1648 to the Tsar Alexis Mikhailovitch by the archimandrite Pochomius. The cheek of the Virgin bears yet the mark of the knife-thrust of an iconoclastic Tartar.

The chapel is crowded with many other ikons, and the ragged-devout. Also, as Baedeker cynically remarks, *se méfier des pickpockets*. (It is delightful to find Baedeker among the prophets!) But while the interior is like all Russian shrines, an avalanche of gold, the interior is a noble canopy of that vivid blue-violet which nature so rarely produces but by way of the laboratory, starred with gold, and crowned with a golden angel, the crimson brick of the Duma on the east, and the History Museum on the west, it is a spectacle of unwearying beauty.

To me it is evident that devotion and admiration leave their object admirable. I believe that the apprecia-

tive eye can distinguish between two similar objects, one of which has been worshipped, and the other not. I believe that the human mind does leave an abiding imprint on things as much as they do upon the mind.

I almost believe that the Tower of the Saviour is the most beautiful in the Kremlin, partly because for two and a half centuries no man has dared to pass beneath it without uncovering his head, and that St. Nicholas of Mojaisk really protected his image from the attempt of the French to blow up his gate with gunpowder. All such petty miracles are credible enough in face of the one great and undeniable miracle of the existence of so much beauty upon earth.

VII.

Education spoils the Russian as it spoils everybody. The Tretiakoff gallery is sufficient evidence. There appears no true original strain of Russian art. The whole gallery is so imitative that every picture in it might have been painted by Gerald Kelly. And unfortunately there are only one or two who mimic anything so high as Reynolds or Gainsborough; the principal influences are rather those of Frith, Luke Fildes, and others of the sentimental photograph school. The pictures of Peroff, Makowsky, Kramskoi, Gay and Repine are oleographs more oleographic than all previous oleographs. Verestchagin has been well called the despair of photographers; he had astonishingly normal perception, and a facility of draughtsmanship and color which implies a mastery in which nothing was lacking but individuality. He fills some ten pages of the catalogue with 235 oil paintings, many of them conceived on the most generous scale. The man must have had a far greater capacity for painting than I have for looking at his pictures. A mosque door, life-size, with the minute carvings reproduced so that the texts are as legible as the original, figures again and again in these vast canvases. The painter never

seems to have grasped the first fundamentals of painting. In this gallery the fact that representation of nature has no connection with art is driven home, and one almost begins to sympathize with the Futurist manifesto.

The only insight beyond that of Bonnat, Bougereau, Carolus-Duran, and their bovine kind is shown by Shishkin, Sudhowsky, Prvokline, Mestchersky, Dubovsky, Nesteroff, and Kuindjy, until we come to recent years, when the accessibility of Paris has given an entirely new direction to Russian art, and the Latin quarter has warned Russian students that they must be original. Paris has become the sole centre of art, and so destroyed all national characteristics! (I noticed exactly the same tendencies in the gallery of Stockholm.) The slavish imitation that marked all nineteenth century work, even more than eighteenth century, is gone, and the future appears more hopeful than that of art in any other country.

But the past must be closed; the Tretyakoff gallery is only "an average Academy," except for the room which is consecrated to foreign art, and holds the best Gauguin, the best Van Gogh, and the best Toulouse-Lautrec that one is likely to see between Vladivostok and the studio of Roderic O'Connor in the Rue du Cherche-Midi — where it is always Quatorze Heures!

VIII.

But of all these matters it is idle and impertinent to write. Analysis shows "King Lear" to be a jumble of twenty-six very commonplace letters, repeated without any regard to symmetry or any other rule for assembling the same. This appalling café-concert (where of the thirty items barely three are tolerable) does not hinder my appreciation of the Shashlik which my bold Circassian in his brown rough robe with the silver furniture will presently bring me on a skewer. The concert comes to an end; the banality of bad orchestra, bad singing and

bad dancing of bad women, inaudible through the clatter of innumerable forks on plates and tongues in jaws, is dead before it is alive; this is not Moscow, or even an impression of it. The lady in black silk (on my right) with "sapphire" oblongs about 2 1/4 inches by 2 1/2 inches in her ears reminds me delightfully of the cold sucking-pig of the Slaviansky Bazaar. Life cancels life; death is the only positive, perhaps because it has the air of being the only negative.

Moscow is the bezel of a poison-ring: about it is only the gold and silver of the stars and of the steppes, a ring whose equation is the incommensurable.

I can take ship in my imagination, and arrive at marvelous heavens; I can conjure monsters from the deep of mind; nothing so strange and so real has found the mouth of the sunrise on its russet silken sails, or hailed my bark from the far shore of Oceanus or Phlegethon. Chimaera, Medusa, Echidna, and those others that we dare not name, is it you or your incarnations that come, incubus and succubus, unasked into the dream which we call Moscow? Why is the essence of the unsubstantial fixed in stone, the land of utmost faery paved with cobbles, the grossest vices transfigured with a film of moonlight, the blood of unnamable crimes become of equal virtue with the blood of martyrs? Why is the face in the ikon so dark, if not for the face of Ivan the Terrible as he gazed sneering on the face of his own son, struck down by his own hand? Blood on the snow, and starlight on the cupolas! The Strelitzes headless before St. Basil's, and the sun setting ablaze those pinnacles of lust erect! The city washed in fire, and the conqueror of Europe flying before his army from the advance-guard of Field-Marshal Boreas! Heroism and murder hand in hand, devotion and treachery mingling furtive kisses under the walls of the Kremlin!

What ghosts lurk in the shadows of the garden of Pan find playmates in those of the garden of Alexander III. All this is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent as

That Great Name itself; all this is prophesied eternally
and infallibly as I step from the ignis fatuus concert-hall
to the garden, where columns, crescents, trees, and
fountains are alike ablaze with ultraviolet — unearthly as
only one other sight that I have seen, the ashen horror
of eclipse, — the miracle of summer dawn in Moscow!