

GIRL LIFE IN RUSSIA.

It is a bright sunny morning in December; the ground is covered with thick snow, many inches deep, that has become hard and beaten on the streets by several weeks of sledge driving. This morning seems particularly bright and frosty, and a slight fall of fresh snow during the night makes everything sparkle in the sunlight, while a sort of ringing noise rises from the ground as one presses the snow, and a white cloud accompanies the horses as they swiftly pass on.

Well wrapped up in their fur-lined paletôts, with fur-lined boots, and seal-skin caps tied with warm shawls over their heads, two young girls are carried quickly along. It is about a quarter before nine; the streets are mainly alive just now with young people, all hurrying to school. Here, a group of boys, in their thick grey overcoats and warm caps, with their skin satchels full of books strapped on to their backs; there, a few girls who have met, and walk on together, discussing some important school matter, while their maids or other attendants follow them, carrying their well-filled school-bags; for the young girls are rarely allowed to go alone, if the parents have anyone they can send with them.

All along the street one sees single scholars or several together, making for the gymnasium, or the private school, according to their habit. School hours are much the same as in England, from nine till eleven, and again, after an hour's recreation, from one till three, for the younger classes, the elder often having extra lessons which keep them another hour.

Our two young friends above mentioned, Olga and Kartia by name, are bound for a private gymnasium, one of the best schools in St. Petersburg, the excellent directress of which has held that position for twenty-five years, and is much loved and respected. They have to cross the Neva by one of the three bridges which remain during the winter, and they draw their furs well round them, as they feel the cold wind coming down the broad frozen plain. The river itself is crossed by many well-made paths and roads in different directions, and many other children coming to the same school are crossing on foot, but our two friends have a coachman who prefers the bridge to the ice, and does not listen to the girls' entreaties to go round the other way.

Once arrived in the entrance-hall of the school, the work of unwrapping takes place, which requires some time, as so much has to be worn in these northern latitudes. The little children are helped by the man-servant or the maid, and all properties are hung on the owner's respective pegs. Boots, or the high warm goloshes so universal, have to be taken off, and then the child, freed of her trappings, steps lightly out in her simple brown frock and always prettily shod feet, into the large hall. All the scholars wear the same kind of dress at school.

The day's work is begun with a prayer and hymn, or a chapter read from the Bible. As there are many Germans among the scholars, prayers are held in two separate rooms—one for the children belonging to the Russian or Greek Church, and the other for the Germans. The girls then disperse to their different classrooms, and, seated at their desks, await the master or mistress to give the lesson. The rooms are lofty and well lit with large windows on one side, and well warmed with the usual tall, cylinder iron stove, or maybe a square-tiled one.

The light faces of the girls show that their school work is agreeable to them, but to an

English eye many would seem very pale. White or sallow faces are unfortunately more the rule than the exception in St. Petersburg. The close air, the late hours, and the hot rooms all lead to this.

Our two friends, Olga and Kartia, are both handsome girls of Caucasian parentage. Their father is of an old princely family, and commander of troops in the south, while their mother keeps a home for her girls in the capital, that they may have the benefit of a good school. The eldest is a brunette, with well-pencilled eyebrows, pretty teeth, and a laughing mouth. She has a quantity of black wavy hair, which grows low on her brow. She is not very clever, but is a good-natured girl, and has reached the seventh class, which is the highest in the school. Her younger sister is among the pale ones; she also has fine features and beautiful brown hair, but is delicate in health. She is a capital scholar, and works well whenever her health will allow it; but for this drawback she would have been in the same class as her sister.



RUSSIAN SERVANT.

There is much work to be done in a good school in Russia, for the languages are as imperative as anything else, more especially French, to the study of which many hours are devoted. German also has an important place in the school plan; and besides these, the usual subjects, as history, geography, and arithmetic, &c., which are always taught in the Russian language, have much time devoted to them. The scholars have always much to prepare at home, which is a constant cause of complaint from the parents; but the competitive examinations at the end of the school career, for which most girls hope to enter, exact high attainments, and are a fearful tax on the memory.

Olga will certainly not undertake anything so severe as a public examination. She will soon leave school, and perhaps attend a class or two afterwards merely for occupation. She will enter upon a round of gaiety which will be more to her taste. Already she knows the enjoyment of the opera, the most fashionable

place of entertainment in St. Petersburg; and as her mother has subscription tickets, and goes every Monday evening, either Olga or Kartia have accompanied her during the last two seasons. Frequent dances and visits to the theatre will be the amusements of this young lady afterwards, and very probably terminate in an early marriage, as she is handsome and well off.

Kartia will finish better in the school than her sister, if her health permits. She will win a diploma at the public examination, and afterwards, if she wishes to continue a still higher course of study, she can do so by attending the classes called the *Cours pédagogiques*, which last three years, and which qualify anyone passing them well to become professor. As no one can teach in a Russian school without a diploma, of course these "*Cours*" are well attended, and hundreds try to win the important document so necessary to many for their daily bread. Perhaps in no town is there so much lesson-giving and lesson-taking as in St. Petersburg.

This busy school-life of the girls lasts for about nine months of every year; the three summer months are usually spent in the country. There is a general exodus from the towns about the beginning or middle of May, and at the end of that month there is a very marked difference even in the number of people in the streets, so many thousands have gone out, bag and baggage, to live a rustic life in a "Datch" or summer wooden cottage among the pine woods, or on the border of some lake, where the children can play to their hearts' content, and the elder members of the family can sit in the garden or on the balcony, never missing the daily bathe in the lake near by. Everyone leads an open air life as much as possible through the summer months, and all meals are taken on the balcony, which is a large verandah at one side of the house, open in the front, and prettily draped with red and white linen. A large table is generally to be seen in such a balcony, which is always on the same floor as the dwelling-rooms. Here, morning and evening, the semovar, or urn, will be seen steaming away, and often the cheerful sounds of a merry party at dinner will be heard by the passers-by, towards the end of an afternoon.

The young girls like to dress themselves in the picturesque Russian costume in the summer time, which shows a gay mixture of red, blue, and white, in the much-embroidered chemisette and apron, and in the many ends of ribbon tied to the long-plaited hair. This is originally the costume of Little Russia or Ukraine, but has of late years been very popular as a summer dress among the ladies in the north—it is cool and comfortable in the hot summer weather.

A group of young ladies thus costumed, and attended by their elder and more quietly-dressed friends, will wander off into the woods for a stroll in the evening, or round by the lake, where they will sit on some of the many benches always at hand, to chat with their comrades, or perhaps take a boat, if they have an oarsman among their acquaintance—for the ladies themselves seldom row, or, indeed, share in any of the active sports so popular in England. Riding is, perhaps, the only amusement that is considered fitting for a young lady, and this, of course, is for a limited number.

A pretty scene is often to be met with in the garden of a datch on a summer's day. Half-a-dozen young girls will be balancing themselves in the popular swing of the coun-

try, and singing some Russian air as they move to and fro. This swing consists of a long plank of wood, hung by strong ropes from either end to a pole above, which latter is supported by two upright poles standing on either side of the walk, or on the lawn. A swing thus arranged gives a complete feeling of security, and offers opportunity for several persons to mount at once, as all stand, and the plank is some eight or ten feet long. These swings are universal, but another kind resembles the old see-saw of our childhood.

The Russians will not be satisfied without some means of musical entertainment in their summer life, and there is sure to be a hall or a covered place where the musicians and company can sit, so as to pass several hours of the evening with this amusement—sometimes a variety being given by a dance. This latter is frequently performed in the open air, and being on a wide gravelled place, such a cloud of dust will arise after an hour that one would fancy the dancers had scarcely breathing power left them.

Such a scene near Moscow, one warm summer's evening, sent me home wondering what would human nature find pleasure in next—the figures of the dancers were completely hidden by dust.

In certain neighbourhoods of large towns the musical band is famous for its excellence, as its members belong to the best opera orchestra. These, of course, draw regular crowds of visitors, and attractive concerts are periodically given during the summer—indeed, the "Music," as it is called, is the fashionable meeting-place for the evenings. Occasional picnics are other means of amusement with which the young people make the summer pass gaily.

Many a young girl, still at school, will probably have to work up some subject that she is weak in, for her class, and for this purpose a lady is engaged for the summer months to give lessons in the required subject. She will either come on stated days, or remain with the family all the time; the latter is generally preferred as most private. School

lessons cease in May, and many a teacher is glad thus to find occupation and a little rest for the summer, as the work thus undertaken is seldom such a strain as that of the winter.

We have spoken already of a private gymnasium or school, which has among its scholars many boarders. These, of course, come more immediately under the influence of the resident mistresses, of which there are several, besides the much-esteemed directress, and of course everything depends upon the tone in the school as to the future welfare of the girls; where there is order, steady and earnest work, and high principle, good results must follow. Two or three girls share a bedroom with a mistress, each having her own neat, white bed, with pretty lace cover thrown over the pillows; a screen generally separates that of the mistress from the girls. A coverlid and a pair of sheets is all that is on the beds—blankets are unknown, and as the whole house is uniformly heated, one is never cold in bed. There is no "tucking in" in Russia, as at home. A private writing-table stands near the window, where many broad-leaved plants help to keep the air pure and give a pretty appearance to the room, as is very general in Russian houses. One seldom sees the snugness or extreme comfort of an English room, but there is often much elegance, and the abundance of plants helps to this. Tea in the morning all together, at eight o'clock, with a roll and butter, luncheon at twelve, dinner at five, after a walk, and tea again at eight, are the usual meal-times; and those girls who live in or near the town usually go home after school on Saturdays, to stay until Monday morning early. Owing to the very frequent holidays or saints' days in Russia—which in some months come as often as once a week, and must be given in all schools—the children are frequently at home on other days besides the Sunday. These holidays are restful to both scholar and teacher, it is true, but they sadly interfere with the work that is desired to be got through in the year.

Another mode of education very general in Russia, and especially protected by royalty, is that received in the "Institutes." These are large buildings entirely devoted to the purpose of bringing up girls from eight years old until eighteen, and some even stay on later as *pepinière*, or assistant to the *dame de classes*. These institutes, of which there are several in the largest towns of Russia, were founded by Catherine II., and were intended to educate, after a more European model than then existed in Russia, the daughters of all those who served the Crown. For a long time the ladies appointed to teach or act as class mistresses were only French; now, however, Russian ladies are as often chosen. Much attention has always been paid to the manners of the young girls. The teaching of the classes, however, is almost entirely in the hands of masters, and as these are the only men that many of the girls see from one year's end to another—for they never go out of the building except to walk in the garden or drive in the Imperial coaches, which are periodically sent for that purpose—the result is that those girls who have no friends in the town to spend the holidays with, acquire a foolish shyness that quite unfits them for ordinary life, and the comforts and luxuries which they enjoy in these institutes also make them discontented with the homes to which they return afterwards.

It is not every girl that can receive her education in one of these institutes. As it is often given at the cost of the Crown, it is naturally a much-desired boon to many a father and mother of small means; but the child must be balloted for, and perhaps wait some time until there be a vacancy; the children not thus favoured must pay.



RUSSIAN PEASANT GIRL.

The buildings are generally large and roomy, with fine class-rooms, which are well provided with school material, and good masters are appointed to teach. The directress is generally a lady of high social position, as hers is considered a post of honour. She has frequently to receive members of the Imperial family, or other dignitaries who may make a visit to the institute, and she may be at any time summoned to the Court herself, for these institutes are especially under the supervision of the Empress. In the same way the gymnasiums are under the special supervision of her Highness the Princess Marie Paulovna, the wife of the Grand Duke Vladimir, who may visit them at any time.

There is generally a fine large hall in these buildings, which is useful on different occasions for festivities, or for special assemblies of the children, and here on Sundays they can receive their friends during certain hours. Of course it is well filled with outsiders on these occasions, and many a nicely tied-up parcel or tempting basket is left behind with the child, who, however, must let it undergo the inspection of the directress or of someone appointed for the purpose.

Long, lofty corridors on one side of the hall, and again upstairs beside the dormitories, lead to these two parts of the building. The place for exercise for the girls in summer is the fine garden, which is always provided. In winter, however, it is impossible for them to go out there, and they take exercise in the large hall, or in the class-rooms, which are large also.

In the dormitories there are often twenty or thirty beds, each one with its neat white cover, a stool and chair beside it, and the image of the child's patron saint hung over the bed-head on the wall. The rooms are otherwise bare, and the lavatories are outside. As there are often several hundred girls in an institute, the size of the dormitories need be large, and the order necessary in the meals, and indeed throughout the whole management, must naturally be great. The girls of each class have their own especial costume or colour of dress, so that at once they are known; and the simple dress, whether brown, blue, or dark green, with the white apron, short sleeves, and low-cut neck, over which a white linen cape is always worn, strikes the English eye as prettily old-fashioned.



RUSSIAN NUN.

A very different institution, and having very different results, is the "Public Gymnasium," which is the aversion of the quiet, old-fashioned father, who looks upon it as the source of all ill-behaviour, disorderliness, and unmaidenliness for his daughters, whom he would rather keep at home with a governess and masters, or send to the sanctuary of the above-mentioned institutes. But, though, if the home influence and instinctive good taste of the girl does not help her, she certainly does acquire rough and unladylike manners, and perhaps even adopts a too independent air, still, the benefit of these comparatively lately established public gymnasiums is undoubtedly great. The teaching is good and thorough, there is not so much time devoted to the different foreign languages, but the principal subjects of a good education, and the sciences, are taught well in the Russian language. Brilliant examinations are passed at the end of the course of study, and diplomas are given. These gymnasiums may be well compared to our high schools in England, with the difference that no lady teacher is allowed in the higher classes, as a rule. These are, of course, only day schools, and are merely arranged for the classes, but the directress has her apartments in the building.

All girls in Russia, however, by no means go to school. A large number belonging to the aristocratic families are educated at home with the help of masters, while a French and English governess will frequently be engaged to be in constant attendance on the young ladies, who perhaps have a German *bonne* as well. In this way a familiarity in the three languages is early acquired, often at the expense of their own native tongue. However, within the present reign, there has been awakened a great interest in restoring the Russian language to its proper level, and already it is spoken at the Court, and frequently in the best society, where within a few years ago only French was heard.

Our friends Olga and Kartia, who go off so cheerfully every morning to school in St. Petersburg, have a family of cousins in Moscow who often hear of the animated life the others lead in the capital, with perhaps a little envy, but who still feel with the indolence engendered by ease and irregularity of hours, that it would be far too much trouble, and far too irksome, to have to get up at 7.30 every morning to get off in time for school. No, they find the getting up at nine or even ten o'clock quite early enough, and then straggle into the breakfast-room to take their tea and roll, if, indeed, it has not been brought into their own room. A morning's lesson with one of the governesses is probably followed by luncheon, and a walk, or lessons with masters, will fill up the afternoon. The evening is often spent in the theatre—one of the chief amusements in Russian towns, and children of all ages are freely taken to them.

The summers are frequently spent abroad, or on some estate in the country. In many quite Russian families, where the influence of foreign travel has not much penetrated, the set of apartments for the girls and their governess is quite apart from those of the brothers and their tutor—indeed, the brothers and sisters will only meet at meal-times, or in the large hall. The simple, straightforward intercourse of our English boys and girls together, the girl's interest in the boy's pursuits, the boy's pride in the girl's acquirements, and his manly readiness to protect her, are almost unknown amongst the greater part of the Russian brothers and sisters. Excellent seed must have been sown by many of the brave, patient, Englishwomen who have spent many years of their lives in Russian families, and who, in spite of many difficulties, have continued the uphill work of training their pupils to become useful men and women,

and, as a rule, the English governess has won respect, and often the lasting affection of her pupils; the Russian heart is a very warm and affectionate one.

In the merchant class—that class so marked as its own in Russia—the girls are almost always brought up at home. Though their fathers may be wealthy—which they often are—the life at home is very simple, and the extravagant luxury that is seen so often in other households rarely extends to these. There will often be a French or English governess living in the house, who is the companion of the daughter, and is often made much more the friend of the family than she might be in a higher class of life. There is, however, seldom much desire for a very extended field of acquirements, as the members of this class intermarry and remain together almost exclusively, and do not seek to become brilliant members of society in general.

The young girls of the Russian Church go through no ceremony of confirmation, but they generally receive a great deal of religious instruction from the priest at school; if brought up at home there is not so much, but it depends upon the parents' feeling for it. No Russian can change his or her religion as long as he is a subject and living in the country. Quite in their earliest childhood the communion is taken and the infant is baptised in the church, when the whole body is immersed in water three times, and the godmother on receiving the child walks round the font three times with it. A godmother and godfather can never marry, however great strangers they may be to each other.

The young Russian lady has not so many interests to occupy her as our English girls have, and hence the idea of marriage is always a prominent one—having an establishment of her own is the object of every girl's ambition. In the higher circles, perhaps, inclination is allowed some sway, but in the merchant class the marriage is generally an arrangement for money, and is often brought about by a certain *Svarka*, or professional matchmaker, who tells a young man seeking a wife where he can find one to suit his needs. If the arrangement answers, the *Svarka* receives a fee from the bridegroom and a black silk dress from the bride.

A wedding scene is a gay one in a Russian, as in most other churches. The ceremony generally takes place in the evening, about eight or nine o'clock, and the guests assemble in the church, near the doorway, to receive the bride when she is brought in by her father. The church presents a very pretty appearance, illuminated with its many wax lights; and the abundance of gilding and of colour that is so often seen adds to the effectiveness. As there are no seats in a Russian church, there is free space for the guests to stand in.

About half-way up the centre of the building a handsome carpet is laid, on which the young pair are to stand during the ceremony; before it, towards the altar, is placed a table, on which the Bible is laid. When the bride arrives at the door of the church, the bridegroom goes to meet her, and receiving her from her father, leads her up to this carpet, and stands on it before the priest, who awaits them. A little boy, often the youngest of the family, precedes the bride, carrying the chief household image, which has been taken from its accustomed place on the wall in the corner of the first room in the house. The most curious part of the ceremony is the walking of the bridal pair three times round the temporary altar, preceded by the priest and followed by two friends, who hold a couple of gold crowns over the heads of the bride and bridegroom. They are often received into the church with beautiful music, but no instrument is heard.

A glance among the Russian peasantry

shows us the young girl busy in household occupations in the winter, either spinning or weaving the linen, which is everywhere made at home; at times feeding the animals; or, maybe, she is making lace, or embroidering towels, and so helping to support the family. An immense quantity of the lace and embroidered towels now sold in the towns are made by the peasant women, and the variety of design is sometimes noticeable, although very grotesque and often inartistic. One young girl used to take her designs from the hoar frost on the window panes, and thus produced some most elegant patterns.

In the summer-time, and when the ground is no longer hardened by frost, the girls labour in the fields with the other women. An immense deal of field labour is done by the peasant women of Russia; and while the men go off to the towns to drive the droskies or public cabs, or get work in some factory, the women cultivate the little plot of ground at home, or have occupation on other land.

The peasant girl's life is not an unhappy one. They sing at their work, though it is always the plaintive Russian music; and in the fields at work their voices will be heard a long way off. In the evenings they will collect together outside some well-known cottage, and when chatting is exhausted, start singing once more, and perhaps wander off altogether to another part of the village, singing as they go; the retreating voices sound very pleasant as they come up the valley, the native harshness which at first assailed the ear being mellowed by distance. Many of these voices could, with training, be rendered musical and sweet. There is much beautiful choir music in the Russian churches, though this is only for male voices; but doubtless, if female voices were needed, the supply would be as great as that already found among the boys and men.

As a child, the peasant girl rarely goes to any school, as hitherto there has not often been a chance for her in the village where she lived; now, however, schools are being established far more generally. She is busily employed at home, and enjoys herself with her companions when evening comes. She marries early, and, when once married, has to live in the same cottage as her mother and sisters-in-law, serve them, and do all the principal work of the household. Then her hard life begins; but it greatly depends upon herself if she lives well with the others, and is rewarded by the respect of her children in her old age if she does so. The frequent drunkenness of the men throws much hard labour upon the wife's shoulders. This modern curse of Russia is widespread, and is indeed the general condition of the peasants, both in town and country, on any holiday, their other amusements being very limited.

Russia is an immense country, covering many thousands of square miles, and it is, perhaps, presumption to speak of girl life in Russia without knowing the many different governments into which this country is divided. To a certain degree only can we feel that our subject is here represented, but at present Russia's capital is the centre of its great educational movement, which is having so vast an influence upon the whole country,—though not altogether a happy one—and, therefore, our attention has been particularly directed to the girl's interests in St. Petersburg, while those of other districts have not been disregarded.

There is, undoubtedly, a grand future in store for Russia; but the country will have to go through a period of trial and progress, which will prove how much the endurance of its people and their energy and ambition are worth. Its girls, too, may do their part in the onward movement.

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