
Russia, Volume 3

Custine Astolphe

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R U S S I A.

ST. PETERSBURG, MOSCOW,

KHARKOFF, RIGA, ODESSA,

THE

GERMAN PROVINCES ON THE BALTIC,

THE STEPPES, THE CRIMEA,

AND

THE INTERIOR OF THE EMPIRE.

BY *J. G. Kohl* J. G. KOHL. 1505-878

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P R E F A C E.

THE volume here presented to the public contains an abstract of nine closely-printed volumes, descriptive of the general features and popular manners of a large portion of the Russian Empire. To bring the contents of those nine volumes within the compass of one, was a task of some difficulty; but the Editor flatters himself that it has been accomplished, without omitting any of the more interesting portions of the four original works, published in quick succession by their accomplished and lively author. To the generality of readers, this epitome will, probably, be a more welcome offering, than a more faithful, but, at the same time a far more voluminous translation, could have been.

5-10-34

The description of St. Petersburg has been given at much greater length than any of the other portions of the work; partly, because it was supposed that the capital would be an object of greater interest to the English public than the other parts of the empire; and partly because, in the Editor's opinion, Mr. Kohl's description of St. Petersburg is decidedly the best of his works on Russia.

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***.* The Maps and Plans which accompany the original works have not been given in the present translation, partly because they would materially increase the cost, and partly because such diminutive maps are very unsatisfactory. Readers who may desire them, will find the special Maps of Russia, and the Plans of St. Petersburg and Moscow belonging to the series published by the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, very superior to any which could have been introduced into this work.**

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ST. PETERSBURG

CHAPTER I.

PANORAMA OF ST. PETERSBURG.

FORMED in early antiquity, and crystallized during the barbarism of the middle ages, our cities, with their narrow streets and many-cornered houses, with the hereditary inconveniences and anomalies of their architecture, look often like so many labyrinths of stone, in which chance alone disposed the dwellings; but in St. Petersburg, the offspring of a more enlightened age, every thing is arranged orderly and conveniently: the streets are broad, the open spaces regular, and the houses roomy. The fifty square versts destined for the Russian capital, allowed every house a sufficient extent of ground. In our old German towns, tall distorted buildings seem every where squeezing each other out of shape, and panting, as it were, for want of room to breathe in; whereas in St. Petersburg every house has an individuality of its own, and stands boldly forth from the mass. Yet St. Petersburg is any thing but a picturesque city. All is airy and light. There is no shade about the picture, no variety of tone. Every thing is so convenient, so good-looking, so sensibly arranged, and so very modern, that Canaletto would have found it hard to have obtained for his canvass a single poetical tableau such as would have presented itself to him at every corner in our German cities, so rich in contrasts, recollections, and variegated life. The streets in St. Petersburg are so broad, the open places so vast, the arms of the river so mighty, that large as the houses are in themselves, they are made to appear small by the gigantic plan of the whole. This effect is increased by the extreme flatness of the site on which the city stands. No building is raised above the other. Masses of architecture, worthy of mountains for their pedestals, are ranged side by side in endless lines. Nowhere gratified, either by elevation or grouping, the eye wanders over a monotonous sea of undulating palaces.

This sameness of aspect is at no time more striking than in winter, when the streets, the river, and the houses are all covered with one white. The white walls of the buildings seem to have no hold upon the ground, and the Palmyra of the north, under her leaden sky, looks rather like the shadow than the substance of a city. There are things in nature pleasing to look upon and gratifying to think of, and yet any thing but picturesque, and one of these is St. Petersburg.

No other place, however, undergoes a more interesting change in spring, when the sky clears up, and the sun removes the pale shroud from the roofs and the waters. The houses seem to recover a firm footing on

PANORAMA OF ST. PETERSBURG.

the ground, the lively green of the painted roofs, and the azure star-spangled cupolas of the churches, with their gilt spires, throw off their monotonous icy covering; the eye revels again in the long untasted enjoyment of colour, and the river, divested of its wintry garment, flows again in unrobed majesty, and gaily mirrors the palaces ranged along its banks.

As the city presents no elevated point, the spectator, to see it, must elevate *himself*, and for this purpose there is no place better suited than the tower of the Admiralty, from which the principal streets diverge, and near which the great arms of the river seem to meet. This tower is provided with a series of galleries, and the delightful views from those galleries on a fine spring day are not easily matched in any other city.

At the foot of the tower the inner yards of the Admiralty present themselves. There the timber from the forests of Vologda and Kostroma lies piled in huge heaps, and mighty ships of war are growing into life under the busy hands of swarms of workmen. On the other side lie the splendid squares or *plokhtshods* of the Admiralty, of Peter, and of the Court, along the sides of which are grouped the chief buildings of the capital. The Hotel de l'Etat Major, whence Russia's million of soldiers receive their orders; the Senate-house, and the Palace of the Holy Synod, in which the *meum* and *tuum*, the believing and rejecting, the temporal and the spiritual concerns of a hundred nations, are discussed and determined; St. Isaac's Church, with its profusion of columns, in which each stone is of colossal magnitude; the War-office, where a thousand pens ply their peaceful labours in the service of Mars; and the mighty Winter Palace, in a corner of which dwells the great man to whom one-tenth of the human race look up with hope or anxiety, and whose name is prized and dreaded, beyond any other, over one-half the surface of our globe.

The length of the open spaces bordered by the public buildings just mentioned, is not much less than an English mile, and the spectacles, metamorphoses, *tableaux vivans* and *ombres chinoises* which daily and hourly present themselves to the spectator who keeps watch upon the tower of the Admiralty, are as varied as they are magnificent and interesting. At one extremity, near the Senate and the Synod, stands the colossal equestrian statue of Peter the Great trampling underfoot the dragon of barbarism, and ever ready to dash off at a full gallop from the rock, from the summit of which his charger appears to be in the act of springing. The heads of the state and of the church—metropolitans, senators, bishops, and judges—are constantly arriving and departing, their equipages keeping up an incessant movement around the immortal Peter. At the other extremity arises the smooth and polished monolith of the "Restorer of Peace to the World," on the summit of which stands the archangel with the cross of peace, while at its foot the rattling of imperial equipages scarcely ceases for a moment. Field-marsals, generals, governors, and gentlemen of the court, are constantly coming and going. Priestly processions, military parades, pompous equipages, and funeral trains, are thronging by at every hour of the day, and the drums and fifes are rarely silent, but continue, at brief intervals, to announce that a mighty man of the earth has just passed by.

To the south of the Admiralty the most important part of the city unfolds itself, the Bolshaia Storona, or Great Side. Towards the west lies Vasiliefskoi Ostrof, or Basilus Island, with its beautiful Exchange, its

Academy of Sciences, and its University. To the north is seen the Petersburgskaia Storoza, or Petersburg Side, with its citadel stretching out into the Neva; and towards the east arise the barracks and factories of the Viborg Side. These are the four principal divisions of the city, formed by the Great and Little Neva, and by the Great Nefka. The Great Side comprises by far the most important portion of the capital, with the court, the nobility, and more than half the population. The least important is the Viborg Side, inhabited chiefly by gardeners, soldiers, and manufacturers. It is rapidly extending, however, for nowhere else in St. Petersburg are building speculations going on to a larger extent. The Basilius Island commerce appears to have selected for her especial residence, and the Muses have raised their temple by the side of Mercury's. The Petersburg Side, a low and marshy island, remarkable chiefly for its fortress or citadel, whose rayon drives the houses from the river-side, is inhabited by the poorer classes of the population, and has already assumed much of the character of a metropolitan faubourg.

The closely-built masses of the Great Side—closely built in comparison with the other quarters of the city—are divided into three semicircular divisions by the Moika, the St. Catherine, and the Fontanka canals. These divisions are called the First, Second, and Third Admiralty sections, and are again subdivided by the three principal streets diverging from the Admiralty: the Neva Perspective (Nevskoi Prospekt); the Peas Street (Gorokhovaia Oulitza); and the Resurrection Perspective (Vosnosenskoi Prospekt).

As these three principal streets meet at the foot of the Admiralty Tower, a man, taking his position at this central point, may look down them, and, with the aid of a good telescope, see what is going on in the most remote quarters of the city. The direction of these three streets and of the canals determine that of most of the other streets. Of these the most remarkable are the Great and Little Morskaja, the Great and Little Millionaya, the Meshtanskaja, and the Sadovaia or Garden Street. All the streets without exception are broad and convenient, blind alleys and narrow lanes being wholly unknown. They are classed, indeed, into prospekts, oulitz, and perouloks, or cross streets, but even these perouloks would in any of our older towns be thought quite spacious enough for main streets. Every street has two names, a German and a Russian.

Beyond the Fontanka, along whose banks are ranged a succession of palaces, lie the more remote portions of the city; and beyond these, bordering on the swamps of Ingermanland may be dimly seen, through the mists of the horizon, the suburbs on the Ligofka and Zagarodnoi canals, together with the suburban villages of great and Little Okhta. Even these remote quarters, peopled by yemshchiks, plotniks, and mushiks,* bear no resemblance to the wretched abodes of poverty in most of our European cities. There are in London and Paris, and even in many German cities, quarters that seem the chosen domain of famine and misery, and where a filthy, ragged, insolent, and demoralized race of beings, are crowded into houses as dirty, as dilapidated, and as repulsive as themselves. Not so in St. Petersburg. Beggars, rag-gatherers, and half-naked cripples, are nowhere to be seen in the city graced by the imperial residence. Indeed, in none of the large cities of Russia is there to be seen

* Waggoners, carpenters, and peasants.

a street population such as we have just described. Of this, the state of serfage in which the lower classes live is the cause. The poor are all in a condition of dependence; and that very dependence, while it impedes the workman in his attempts to raise himself, prevents the possibility of his falling so low as may sometimes be the case with a free labourer. In no city of Russia do we see the wretched hovels of poverty offering a painful contrast to the mansions of the wealthy, as may be seen in almost every city of Western Europe. The suburbs of St. Petersburg, where dwell the labouring classes, or the black people, as they are there called, have a desolate and uninviting air; still there is nothing repulsive or disgusting in them.

The roofs in St. Petersburg are generally flat, and few houses can boast of more than two floors; indeed the majority have only one, particularly in the remoter quarters. Even in the heart of the town many one-floored houses are seen, and houses of three or four floors are to be met with only in the three Admiralty sections. Now that ground-rents have risen so much, and the town is stretching itself out in every direction, loftier houses are beginning to be built, and additional floors are in some places erected over those that already exist. While I was in St. Petersburg some hundreds of houses underwent the process of having their roofs taken off, for the purpose of having additional floors added.

In the same way that the three *prospekts* diverge from the Admiralty Tower towards the south, the several arms of the Neva stretch away towards the north, and when the stranger with his telescope is tired of watching the dashing equipages on the one side, he may turn and contemplate the ships and gondolas on the other. Bridges there are but few over the Neva, and a man would, therefore, often have to go a round of several versts when he wanted to cross the river, were there not all along the banks a multitude of boats ready, for a few copeks, to convey him to the other side. These boats are mostly uncovered, and are rowed, by two men. Covered boats, however, with six, ten, and even twelve rowers are not wanting. The watermen ply their calling with much dexterity, and sometimes even entertain their passengers with songs and music. The court, the ministers, the nobles, and many of the public institutions, have their private barges, richly ornamented, and rowed by men in handsome liveries. The canals and the several arms of the Neva are as much animated by these boats as the streets by equipages; and, on Sundays, little fleets may be seen gliding away to the enchanted islands that form the favourite resort for amusement to the citizens of the Russian capital.

In the spacious arms of the Neva, the ships of war, as well as the merchant vessels, find a spacious anchorage; they are not, therefore, crowded together, as is the case in some large maritime places, but lie grouped and scattered along the quays. These quays, again, are bordered by noble buildings; by the sumptuous mansions of the English Quay, by a range of palaces on Vassili Ostrof Quay, by the Exchange, the Corps* of Cadets, the Academy of Sciences, the University, the Academy of Arts, the Corps of Cadets of the Mines, &c. All these buildings are pompous and of vast extent.

* The *Kadetskoi Korpus*. The Russians apply the word "corps" not only to the young gentlemen themselves, but likewise to the building that serves them as a residence.