

Our Foreign Letter.

A VISIT TO RUSSIA.

(Concluded from page 455.)



The good nature and perseverance of a young friend, niece of Mrs. W. She made it her business to hunt up a baby in the village to be baptised the Sunday before I left Russia. A baby was soon found, but, alas! no sponsors; and the poor mother, after scouring the village in search of some, came with tears in her eyes, to say that no one would oblige her?

Now, it is the custom in Russia for god-parents even amongst the very poor—to give presents, which is, of course, sometimes a difficulty; so this dear girl, nothing daunted, began to coax her own relatives to stand for the child; but they were not so responsive as she expected to find them! However, one of her aunts at last yielded to her entreaties, and a bribe of two roubles was sufficient to induce a young man to undertake the duties of god-father!

The following Sunday this infant was triumphantly borne to church wrapped up in a bed-quilt! The font is not part of the structure of the church, but is brought in for the service of Baptism and then removed; this particular font, made of lead, looked dirty and unpolished; in size and shape about that of an infant's bath. The priest, arrayed in a curious green vestment, first blessed the water in the font, then made a pretence of spitting three times, which denoted, I believe, that in the name of the child, he renounced the world, the flesh, and the devil. The child is anointed twice, once before baptism, and once afterwards, on the head, the chest, the palms of the hands, and the soles of the feet; then it is plunged three times quite naked into the font. According to the sex, it is received into the arms of either the god-father or god-mother; then the priest puts over it a tiny white garment. These are adorned with coloured ribbons; dark blue or green for boys, and pink for girls.

The final ceremonial was the most curious; the priest takes a pair of blunt-pointed scissors, and cuts four tufts of hair off the child's head, and puts them upon a small wax leaf, which the sponsor holds ready in his hand; and this is folded up and thrown into the font. The meaning is this: The child, having nothing else to offer to its Maker, gives the hair of its head as its first sacrifice.

There are two fine Cathedrals in St. Petersburg—St. Isaac's, which stands near the famous equestrian statue of Peter the Great; and the

Kazan Cathedral. The style of architecture is very different in both; the former is built in a square, with two projecting portals, each supported by eight magnificent granite pillars; it has a round tower in the centre, with a gilded dome.

Inside, one's attention is immediately attracted by six columns supporting the arch in front of the Sanctuary, four are of malachite, a Siberian stone of vivid green, the others of lapis-lazuli, a beautiful dark blue stone, with a gold vein running through it, also Siberian, I believe. These cost huge sums of money. But what, to my mind, are far more beautiful—although comparison is out of the question—are the exquisite mosaics of life size, corresponding in number to the columns, and facing them, on the Sanctuary screen; they are so fine that one has to approach them very closely to be made aware that they are not paintings.

The two on either side of the Sanctuary gate, representing the Saviour and the Madonna, are by Italian artists, and are the most beautiful; the other four of Russian saints, including, of course, St. Nicholas, by native artists. The icons in St. Isaac's, with the exception of one, are nothing very remarkable, but the magnificent west doors are well worthy of notice and admiration; they are of solid bronze, representing scenes from Scripture in bas-relief.

It is sad to think that this beautiful Cathedral, which was built under the personal supervision of Nicholas I. at a cost of R. 23,000,000, and which was only completed in the year 1858, is subsiding unequally into the boggy ground. (St. Petersburg is built on a bog.) It is, in fact, too heavy for the ground, and the walls threaten to give way.

The Kazan Cathedral is built in imitation on a small scale, of St. Peter's at Rome. The furniture is not nearly so handsome as that of St. Isaac's, but it is rich in icons, some of which are very costly, one especially, representing the Madonna, which is a blaze of precious stones. These are treated with great reverence by the congregation, who prostrate themselves in front of them, make the sign of the Cross three times (from right to left, and not left to right as in the Western Church), and then kiss them. The chancel rails of this Cathedral are made of pure silver.

I saw many other things of great interest in St. Petersburg, but I must only quite briefly touch upon them. The Hermitage (as its name does not imply!) is a fine Art Gallery and Museum combined; it contains a great many pictures by the Old Masters; the Flemish School is largely represented.

The marvellous beauty of Tvasoffski's pictures of sea and sky have given me "the pleasures of memory" ever since, and made me feel the truth of Goethe's words, namely, that "we ought every day to see a good picture, hear a fine song, read a good poem, and, if possible, speak a few reasonable words."

I fancy the "reasonable words" would come

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