

ST. PETERSBURG

THE Dunnes' yacht *Pythia*.

August.—St. Petersburg gets into the blood; it has gone to my brain. A tray of wet, wonderful, pink roses in the stone square outside the palace, and the brazen clang of military music. Redness, blood, power, strength—the strength that wants and takes, the unhesitating strength of brute and brains. The width of the Nevsky Prospect, the rush of the horses, absolutely indifferent to anything which may come in their way; it is Northern and it is new, and it is insatiably greedy. I feel the gilt domes and granite bases, I understand the warmth now, the cold that comes later. I can imagine the flame of sun-blazed snow around the stone and the

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colour of the roofs. But with everything that seems familiar about it, there is, too, the charm of some unknown sumptuousness of temperament. It is the stark realisation of useless gorgeousness, alive, virile, huge; imagination realised, and as useless as the iridescence of a humming-bird's wing, or the gemmed scales of a snake. It perpetuates the race nevertheless. It has the same effect as Nature's loveliness, who accomplishes her purpose in scarlet and perfume and velvet moths. It runs over and drips to the slighter minds who breed their designs in the shadow of red brick rows and comfortable, grey stone churches.

But if we can't exactly equal the grandeur of the Russian greed—the Proteus crouched at the edge of Europe—we can at least get the variety of the junk shop. We, too, can get the Protean charm of life. But in grasping music

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now, and colour next, and afterwards turning to words, perhaps we miss the grace of all—miss the power to feel completely any single thing. "O thou soul of my soul, I shall clasp thee again." But what? but who? but when? Every different person in oneself is responsive to different people, and one couldn't keep a sort of emotional rabbit-hutch in eternity where one could give each affinity in turn its own infinite embrace.

I'm afraid even transcendental constitutions couldn't stand the strain.

After the fleshly mood that St. Petersburg gives, after the brutal swagger of the Cossacks, the whirl of fast horses, I felt rather out of place in the strictly spiritual gathering of Murillos and Correggios in the Hermitage: the red-mouthed Madonnas, the unexcited saints, the questioning of painted eyes.

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Life does not seem now to have any time for the dreams of impotent moments, pressing its lips to the mouth of the future . . . and the marble staircase is so high, the marble halls so very cold and long! The massive, bent monsters of men and women, holding up the portico of the Hermitage, are like the senses that strive to get their satisfaction from the things inside.

But when I went to St. Isaac's for the afternoon service, the gilt gates of the High Altar were open, the red in the Christ's robe window showed with the crimson of a sunset that mixed into the darkness. The rapture of the voices touched me, like a memory.

But you don't regret people, you regret the mood you had with them. The jewels on the mitres of the priests were naked flame; the colours of the columns of malachite and lapis lazuli changed and moved,

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as though some memory of light had stirred to the depths of unborn worlds.

The 27th.—St. Petersburg realises many dreams. I don't know whether it is altogether profitable; a dream realised is dead; and Peterhof is posed as for all the extravagance of life that women long for. You walk with the ghosts of dead empresses, through its mirrored galleries.

But all women are to themselves creatures of infinite power, if they only had the opportunity to exercise it. Given beauty and Egypt, what chorus girl could not play Cleopatra? It is only, after all, the lovers of Cleopatra that have made her famous. But we, we who have no money, no empire, no power, what have we to make up for the gold tissue and rose garlands and diamonds, for the hundred lovers picked out from the cleverest and

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finest of the world, as one picks out fish or pheasants?

We have Virtue! I turned and surveyed my black-gauze-dressed, thin body in one of the silver-framed mirrors and laughed aloud.

Virtue!

I shall never put on a grey dress and say that I am good, simply because I haven't the money to put on a white satin one and say that nothing is wicked.

For Sin is an extravagance for the rich. Oh, how I want money, how I want money!