



Thirty Years After

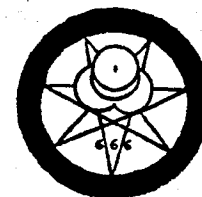
Aleister Crowley

THE FUN OF THE FAIR

(Nijni Novgorod, 1913 e.v.)

by

ALEISTER CROWLEY



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This effort at a "grand reportage" is within eighteen months of attaining its majority: but Russia is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever". Ivan the Terrible and his Boyars, Nicholas and his Barin, Stalin and his Commissars: tempus edax rerum breaks his steel jaws before he gets through the zakouski.

"Stand, Russia! Let thy freedom grow in peace,
Beneath the constant rule, the changing Tsar!
Thy many, thine inhospitable seas
Shall ring thee round, a zodiac to thy star;
And frost, the rampart of thine iron ease,
Laugh at the shock of war."

Three and forty years since I wrote that, and the ink glitters red with blood and glory for this Winter Solstice.

"Grand reportage"? Certainly: I wrote the verses that describe each incident immediately after (or as!) it took place.

This gaily-painted mask is my favourite wear when travelling on holiday: lovers of Truth should look into the eyes.

ALEISTER CROWLEY.

Errata

P. 16, l. 4. read

"Say, my heart's sister, wilt thou sail with me?"

I wrote the line in the text, thinking it original. Then I got the awful thought that it was Shelley, and put the inverted commas and the footnote. Then I looked it up, and couldn't find it!

P. 12, l. 4.

for "you" read "yer".

Political Note.

l. 5, for "regime" read "régime".

l. 15, for "phrophecies" read "prophecies".

l. 1, for "anaomic" read "anæmic".

Chorus, l. 5, delete comma.

l. 6, for "statis" read "stasis".

SMÖRGÅSBORD, ANTIPASTO,
HORS D'OEUVRES AND
ZAKOUSKI

by
LOUIS MARLOW

To the memory of
Anny Ringler,
Olya,
and
Marie Lavroff;
and to a dear friend
as yet unknown
Sascha Ernestine André
on the occasion of her marriage to
my staunch
Karl Johannes Germer.

Here is a dish of caviare. Caviare à la Crowley. No one else could serve such a feast in such a manner. The qualities of this "Reportage"—wit, irony, vigour, vividness, raciness, and verve—all are Crowleianized, all are plentifully endowed with that Crowleian surprisingness so alluring always to some and so infuriating always to others. Under the Byronic surface of this verse there show clearly the living shapes of that singular identity glancing and flashing like fish, strangely-finned, strangely-hued, strangely-tailed.

In its impressions of the Russia of 1913 lies the special interest, at this time, of *The Fun of the Fair*. Those who read it can no longer make the error of blaming the Russian Revolution for certain features of Russian life which, long before Lenin, were uncongenial and inconvenient to the Western European. They will see how such "un-English" customs should be treated: lightly and wisely, with urbane and philosophic wit. This particular bar to sympathetic understanding of our Russian Ally will weaken and fall as they read.

But the most important thing about this picaresque poem is that only Crowley could have written it. To say that a man's work is unmistakably his own in every line is higher praise nowadays than it ever was: it is praise enough.

I

The Moscow Jeremiahs cry Ichabod
 Over the Fair at Nijni Novgorod.
 Railways, they say, its glories have diminished;
 The merchants murmur, and the fun is finished.
 But, as experience teaches, those who hoard
 Their Schopenhauers are often just the bored,
 And as I need no pepper-pot to spice
 The simple soups of virtue and of vice,
 Trusting the Cook of Life to season well
 His masterpieces to my taste and smell,
 I put my hope and confidence in God,
 And booked my seat for Nijni Novgorod.

2

Nothing so desolates the heart and brain
 As travel by the swiftest Russian train:
 One might think coaching days were come again.
 Stay! all philosophers pick purple plums
 From every pudding that attracts their thumbs;
 The train epitomizes life itself.
 It is made tolerable by an elf
 Who, though responsible for some disasters,
 The best of servants and the worst of masters,
 Is one who (awkward both to catch and cast off)
 We shall be sorry when we see the last of.
 Consider not thy place-card as a chain,
 But seek thy "fortune" swiftly in the train.
 First, see how primitive one's pleasure is.
 Recalling, commenting on, Genesis.
 Here is a problem for a Darwin's grapple:
 The Elohist says Eve purloined an apple;

B

How comes it then that evolution's cares
 In these six Chiliads produce only pairs?¹
 Conjecture, probe no more the mystery!
 It matters nothing, least of all to thee.
 Rather lament that, though thy limbs be supple,
 Alone thou canst make only half a couple.
 Lament no longer; when Dame Nature errs,
 It is our duty to stop gaps in hers.
 And here she speaks with no uncertain voice;
 You pay no money, yet you take your choice.
 Yes, a safe bet that twa-three fellow-travellers
 Of Ennui's skein are looking for unravellers:
 For which thank your Creator, then your sire,
 Then your own efforts, and, before you tire
 Of all thanksgiving, the exciting cause—
 The vastness of the steppes and the slow pause
 (To call it "motion" were to take in vain
 That worthy concept) of the Russian train
 That seems a tortoise indolent as weighty
 Matched with the bicycles of 1880.
 Four hundred versts—no more—from Moscow city
 To take ten hours seems certainly a pity.
 Still, woman, with some aid from wine and song,
 Makes long a little, and a little long.
 Who knows the ins-and-outs of travelling,
 In spite of ups-and-downs, may feel a king.

3

Having thus fattened and bedecked the victim,
 It is high time that my stiletto pricked him.
 No theme Byronic my pure pen engages;
 No new Tom Jones pollutes my pious pages;
 At this stage of the journey my scenario
 Borrows no lewdness from a loose Lothario,
 Confessing, with the frankness of a Fosco,
 I stirred no eyelid all the way from Moscow.

¹Nonsense, my lad; the connoisseur can choose
 The classic *spinthria*, now-a-days *partouse*.—[Ed.]

10

Now, neighbours, Nijni Novgorod is nigh.
 The Jew is dropping medicine in his eye;
 The sad Caucasian despairing droops;
 The German wakes to what he dreamt of—soups.
 Here's quite a town, with huts and spires and horses!
 Here's ducks and goats, and hills and watercourses;
 All heart could wish, the journey's period.
 Yes, this is surely Nijni Novgorod.

11

The railway station offers nothing new;
 The usual buffet, and a shrine or two.

12

The droskys¹ here being happily designed
 To throw one out both sides and eke behind,
 I took a porter. Here I gravely erred,
 Having of Russian scarce a single word,
 And he no knowledge—not a glimmer, he!—
 Of where my Yermoleff Hotel might be.
 We wandered many a verst of mild inquiry,
 Through streets, some cobbled, but the most part miry:
 When sudden in the vista came a dip,
 And he forsooth decided to take ship.

¹ I have risked all but my immortal soul
 Of yore in the Norwegian cariole;
 In Baltistan I trust I learned the knack
 Of braving Indus in the zany "zak";
 In Mexico the Broncho's back confessed
 My nerve—my skill's not equal to my zest.
 Much mountaineering tends to make one staunch;
 I often ride upon an avalanche.
 But for the blasé, whom these things no longer
 Thrill, on the look-out now for something stronger—
 I shall be glad to call the man my friend,
 And I can confidently recommend
 That final test of the good help of God,
 A drosky-ride through Nijni Novgorod.

13

The Volga has its spell to lure and bind;
 Strange craft, rafts, barges, bridges ill-designed,
 Piles on pontoons, on sandbanks planed across.
 (Here is truth's gain once more my poem's loss.
 This was no Volga of my boyhood's dream,
 But Oka's base and tributary stream!)
 However, here's the quay, and there's the hill
 Crowned with its Kremlin,—but the thoughts that fill
 My mind are not of these. I am grown deaf
 To nature; I desire the Yermoleff.¹
 Despair succeeds to doubt; with growing gall
 I had to take a drosky after all.
 We climbed a hill; we wandered up and down
 The blazing boulevards of this beastly town.
 At last I see the proud "Rossia" rise.
 Welcome! it echoes to the cloud-swept skies.
 I leap to earth; fate smiles its dreadful doom!
 In the Rossia they had got no room.

14

I left my bag, though, and set out on foot.
 An hour convinced me it was all no boot.
 Like Noah's dove, without an olive, back
 I wandered, life still growing bleak and black.
 Vodka and sturgeon² pulling me together,
 And cheered by contemplating the fine weather,
 I made a further effort to explain
 That man, who only wakes to sleep again,

¹ To calm the reader's natural anxiety,
 I solve this little problem with propriety.
 No Yermoleff Hotel at all was here,
 Yermoleff merely brews the local beer!
 I must get even with the Moscow bloke
 Who thought I should appreciate his joke!

² Horseradish sauce, with cucumber and cherries:
 Equal to anything you get at Verrey's.

ds, as the fox his hole, the bird his nest,
Some kind of bed—his object being rest.
Thus far I made my point, and, lunch dispatched,
I went forth hopefully once more, and scratched.
First, I passed through the Kremlin: I confess
That the interior did not impress;
It was, like Quakers when they fall to sin,
Far better outside than it was within.
However, from the parapet one gains
A sight of Volga and her mother plains.
Both might go on for ever, it appears;
And so they do, if all is true one hears.

15

I agitated weary legs and found,
Where the Rodjestvenskaya goes to ground,
A cupboard. This I gladly haste to hire,
Though it is not a land of heart's desire.
For instance, bedclothes are not to be had.
Towels and soap? The people think me mad.
Things even more necessary to life than these
Are not; the people smile and stand at ease.
My plight would move a tyrant's stony bowels.
No soap?—I brought soap. I did not bring towels!
Nor did I bring that useful—well, you know—
That the Peruvian ties to saddle bow.
However, men like I am don't give up.
I shaved and washed in some one's coffee-cup,
Dried myself on pyjamas—kindly note
I sleep—if sleep I can!—in overcoat.
If sleep I can? In Russia one lies snug?
So do the other tenants of the rug.

16

Having come thus far, by the grace of God,
I go exploring Nijni Novgorod.
My luck being what it is, the rain comes down
Like haystacks, falling on the damned old town.

Till now I trust I've kept my venom hidden.
Thunderstorms, damn it! fairly put the lid on.
'Twas in the middle of the bridge it caught me.
No roof to shield, no vodka to support me,
Stoic, beneath the eavage of my hat,
I walked and dripped, and wished I were a rat.

17

What was it made me brave the elements
Thus boldly? What historical events
Depended on me? Easy to explain:
I wanted to find out about my train.
Yes, friends, the more of Nijni Novgorod I see,
The more I weep my ill-advised Odyssey!
The gods that I have always praised before, saw
Me wishing sometimes that I were in Warsaw!
Those who know Warsaw will appreciate
The quality of anguish desperate
That went to make that wish. Well, on I went;
Shop after shop displayed its soap, its scent,
Its furs, its boxes, knives, dalmatics, figs,
Cottons and silks, dogs, oranges, and wigs,
And every other article of trade
In every quality and every grade
And every quantity at every price.
The sellers (doubtless slaves to every vice),
Tartars, Caucasians, Russians, Poles, and Finns,
(So like each other they might all be twins,
Said my tired eyes) of many a mingled race
In life's shop-window filling every case,
Patriarch, matron, boy, man, mother, wench,
All sorts: but not one sort that could speak French!
As a French scholar was my sole desire,
I mentally consigned them to hell-fire.
Proof of the wisdom of creation's plan
That God danms not so readily as man;
For these were possibly quite decent folk,
Despite the filthy jargon that they spoke!

other rubbish of ten years ago.
 However, as I wish my poem read
 When Havelock Ellis and the rest are dead,
 I may observe that the girl just behind me
 Is evidently quite prepared to find me
 Prince Charming. (Damn! I hope you understand.
 I do this as a duty. Love is banned
 By every honest Briton. I alone
 Do love by stealth, and blush to find it known!
 Here's truth and fiction curiously mingled.
 Mix them yourselves, and tell me if it tingled!)
 Now she is gone. It's really rather funny—
 She is an "artist": that costs too much money.
 Art for art's sake—no! there my aphorism
 Is cut like the sun's glory by a prism,
 For she comes back. Oh well! Expect a pause!
 When vodka takes the stage, the muse withdraws.
 I order coffee made in a machine;
 Why should it cost three roubles? I am mean,
 Maybe. Six shillings for a cup of coffee?
 If it were not for vodka, not for toffee!
 Well, if at birth God wrote upon my forehead
 That I was to be scalped, it may be horrid,
 But scalped I shall be. A prophetic gypsy
 Once augured that one night I should be tipsy.
 I mocked her scrutiny of the event.
 And now I know it was to-night she meant!

21

This café-concert fake, as I'm a sinner,
 Spoils love—what odds? But also it spoils dinner.
 The finely meditative frame of mind
 That a well-ordered dinner leaves behind
 Were marred by interruption from a sage;
 A fortiori, from a stupid Stage.
 Gaiety, when I am or am not drunk,
 Makes me too jealous of a Buddhist monk
 Who in three robes, once yellow, later puce,

Sends noise to nowhere, women to the deuce,
 And by the contemplation of his nose
 Gets good digestion, and divine repose.
 How can I emulate that monk, I ask you,
 While squeals Mademoiselle Borucharskya?
 I wait (in hell) for Aishye-Rustzma, martyr,
 Because she's billed as an "artistic Tartar".
 Is Tartar the comparative of tart?
 If so, come Aphrodite! farewell Art!

22

This coffee has saved money in the long run.
 Near midnight, and it slackens not its strong run.

23

This Tartar lady—vain were Cupid's rumours!
 She's like the rest exactly—but wears bloomers.
 I now sincerely wish I had confined
 My evening's wooing to the girl behind.

24

My early training conquers, praise the Lord!
 With all this vice I am extremely bored.
 I shall arise, and gird myself, and pay
 My bill, and tip the man, and go away.
 Virtue has triumphed; it is not quite nice,
 This only happens when I'm bored by vice!

25

I walked across the bridge; I climbed afar
 By the funiculi funicular
 To where Vostotchny runs his lordly hall—
 Restaurant, concert, theatre, and ball.
 Careful of virtue, chary of expense,
 I passed it by, and footed gaily thence

12

This attitude of easy tolerance
Springs from a very simple circumstance:
This, that my long walk ended happily—
The station buffet, and a glass of tea!

18

Although I very rarely go to church,
God never wholly leaves me in the lurch.
Russians insure their lives in railway trains,
Though why the young should do so beats my brains.
Still, I am glad; for the insurance girl,
—In Nijni Novgorod the one pure pearl!—
Speaks German. My retreat thus made secure,
I tempted destiny, fell to the lure
Of yet another drosky. Back or side
It lacked; it asked an acrobat to ride!
Save one small knob perhaps they put a ring to,
Nothing to lean against, or catch and cling to!
I clutched an obol, needing it for Styx.
A crazy stallion and a boy of six,
Racing for life across uneven cobbles,
Would turn the thoughts of a V.C. to obols!
However, death shot wide. He felt no shame at
The miss—I was a nasty mark to aim at!

20

Now the reward of courage I might reap.
The lust of food exceeding that of sleep
If only for an hour, I took a table
At the Apollo, and, thank God, was able
To order, in an icy silver jar,
What they call Ikra, and we caviar.¹

¹ Note for the gourmet. If your lips grow scornful
Over the Russian black-bread, yclept Chörnny,
You err. As nothing else its taste combines
With caviar. And when you read these lines,
Further observe that caviar best walks
On stilts of finely chopped green onion stalks.

Vodka prepared its passage through the pharynx,
And vodka oiled my late lamenting larynx.
(I wish to say, before it takes effect,
I cannot warn you what you may expect;
But this I say, that *when the word occurs,*
The action follows.) Oh, censorious sirs!
If ever man deserved a dam' long drink
Of vodka, it is I, who did not shrink
All day for your sakes sun and storm to dare,
Parleying growls with many a Russian bear,
And faithfully reporting what the fair
Is like. Oh, where, in Satan's name, oh where
Is my sweet shashlik? (Note the strange but true
Effect of vodka—four rimes now for two!)
Where is my shashlik? "What's a shashlik?" Slave
Of prejudice and Brixton, to the grave
From that fierce moment when some scissor-sword
First snapt in twain thine umbilical cord,
Travel, and taste of vodka! (You observe
The effect of vodka on poetic nerve?)
Hush! now the band starts; everybody tunes
His instrument—oh joy beyond all Junes!
Here's the Caucasian, grey and silver; high
Above his head four skewers scare the sky,
And every skewer holds the toasted mutton,
For which Heaven's Son would give his yellow button,
That is a shashlik! Oh, my waiter, pour
The Riesling of Sebastopol! No more,
No more the vodka! I've an intuition
This drunk will come to exquisite fruition.
The band is playing ragtime Wagner. Life
Seems much more liveable. I have no wife,
But here one's wants are readily supplied.
The band begins. The curtains now divide,
And—no! again I disappoint you, miss!
A Russian café-concert lacks the bliss
Of novelty. One hears of naughty Flo
The golden-haired, who changed so much, you know,

10

other rubbish of ten years ago.
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12

By darkling paths, suggested, it may be,
By hope of finding Whistler's Battersea.
In fact, if a mere layman dare to say so,
Nijni by night is like his Valparaiso.
An active and malicious beggar found me.
I had a sword-stick, else he might have downed me.
As things fell out, not I but he inspires
The Nijni Sherlocks to Cumaean fires.
Down the hillside I wandered in the dark
Across the bridge again, a fading spark
Still hoping virtue—ever prone to fall—
Might witness vice's triumph after all.

26

In one thing Nijni Novgorod's no joke.
Upon that beastly bridge you may not smoke:
And, as I crossed it fourteen times—about!—
This fact completely spoilt my evening out,
Especially since vice remained as coy
As I have been, two decades, man and boy.
Weary, I sought my bedstead, there to stretch
Chaste limbs of an uncomfortable wretch.
Not even a candle in the room whereby
To catch these loose impressions as they fly!
I took a chair, and the hall lamp; and now
Sleep spreads his angel wings upon my brow.
(Life has no more to offer to a king.)
So ends an uneventful evening,
Barring, of course—well, no more need be said
To those familiar with the Russian bed.

27

The story of my getting up I curtail.
I cleaned my shoes upon a piece of shirt-tail,
Went to the coffee-cup and made my toilet,
(There's pathos—but another word would spoil it!)
Sailed forth, resolved most potently to square
Experience with the fulness of the fair.
The day was fine, the hour was half past ten.
I had of course refilled my fountain pen;

But oh! the misery I might have spared
Myself if I had properly prepared
The victim for the ordeal by a glass
Of tea. Oh well, no matter, let it pass!

28

Till One I wandered up and down the fair,
And this is part of what I noticed there:
Sausages, satchels, sables, samovars,
Locks, studs, hats, flat-irons, rat-traps, motor-cars,
Tea, stirrups, saws, straps, belts, coats, sandals, forks,
Censers, rugs, ikons, beads, horns, carpets, corks,
Handkerchiefs, banners, melons, bread, clocks, wheels,
Fish, earrings, nuts, combs, onions, sharpening steels,
Tomatoes, popguns, buttons, apples, screws,
Books, rattles, pa-posh, safes, decoy-ducks, shoes,
Cooking-pots, guns, galoshes, amber strings,
Pearl, coral, balalaikas, carriage springs,
Tin toys, accordeons, basins, gramophones,
Powder flasks, typewriters, lamps, purses, bones. . . .
And now, by Jesus Christ and Doctor Tanner,
And all who have fasted in their well-known manner,
I think I have earned food; and, as I eat it,
I will look through the record and complete it
By mention of each nation, gens, or clan,
Kindred, tongue, people, race or tribe of man
That ever scuttled ship or cut carotid,
Whom with this eagle eye of mine I spotted,
And in my note-book jotted them as potted.
Russ, Finn, Lapp, Dane, Norwegian, Swiss, Greek, Pole,
Turk, Persian, Spaniard, Portugee, Creole,
Bulgar, Roumanian, Montenegrin, Serb,
A cockney answering to the name of 'Erb,
Belgian, Basque, Dutchman, Ghoorka, Sikh, Pathan,
Madrasi, Cingalee, Chinese, Afghan,
Jap, Siamese, Shan, Chin, Malay, Burmese;
Tibetan, Balti, Zulu, Javanese,
Hottentot, Krooboy, Veddah, Bushman, Gippy,

14

Hanaka, Scot, men from the Mississippi;
 Khun-khus, Dewan, Yank, Taggara, Panjabi,
 Men who claimed pedigree from Hammurabi,
 Austrian, Cossack, German, Tartar, Swede,
 Bengali, Cappadocian, Samoyede,
 Folk from Andorra, men of Monaco,
 Italian, Jew, Sicilian, Esquimaux,
 —Here's where artistic feeling should have checked me.
 You'll think I'm lying. Well, you can't expect me
 To stick to truth all day and every day.
 Besides, I've tried it, and it doesn't pay.
 Still, if I did exaggerate a bit,
 I'll face the box and 'kiss the book on it'
 That I at least saw Russians. Ebb, thou tide
 Of incredulity, be off, subside,
 Skidoo, take hook, begone, scam, twenty-three!
 In future you may strictly credit me.

29

Beyond the block of shops there is a square
 Containing the diversions of the fair.
 The usual thing—monkeys, two-headed brats,
 A lion-tamer, wrestlers, acrobats,
 Nothing of note; but here the sons and daughters
 Of misery had set up their headquarters.
 Beggars! the halt, the maimed, the blind, the lame,
 Every one different—and so strangely same!
 Here if in nothing else this most erratic
 Town is emphatically Asiatic.

30

Beside the bridge were naked children bathing,
 When I perceived the prospect of a plaything
 In the slim person of a Tartar lass
 Of sixteen summers: so it came to pass
 I thus addressed her: "Maiden of Kashgar!
 Pearl of Herat! Bokhara's brightest star!
 Dawn on the desert! Siren of the Snows!
 Soul of the steppes! Dusk lily-bloom that blows
 In what a wilderness! Ah, leave that hand

In mine; Love's office is to understand!
 Tulip of Tartary! New-born gazelle!
 Herald of heaven advancing into hell!
 "Wilt thou not come—wilt thou not fly with me?"¹
 The bird, the river call us to the sea.
 There go the ships! Oh let the Volga bear
 The enchanted whispers of our love's own air
 By far Kazàn where skulls adorn the plain,
 To sweet Samàra with its golden grain,
 To gay Saràtoff with its gardened hills,
 To Astrakhàn—oh! nature to it thrills,
 My love—your cheeks (through all their olive) glow!
 Your eyes are fixed in ecstasy! I know
 You love me—come! oh come, my love! what lack
 Hath heaven but kisses, strenuous and slack,
 Between your shoulders? Is not life a dream,
 Earth but a mote that revels in the stream
 Of sunlight? Why then, I am all on fire,
 I clench my fingers, and my lungs suspire
 Terrible sighs—and thou with tender eyes
 Welling with love, exchanging sighs for sighs
 From the young bosom's blossom that expands
 Its joy beneath the sunlight of my hands
 That press it—ah, thine head falls back, the lips
 Curl back as all the world is in eclipse,
 And ask—what here they may not have. We move
 Lost in the dream—the dream of virgin love—
 And find ourselves—oh in what garden of spice?
 What palace of desire? What Paradise?
 Angels fling flowers for a bridal bed;
 Cherubs drop perfume on my lady's head;
 The air awakes to singing seraphim;
 Archangels lead them to the song supreme
 That when God heard it, before Light was, curled
 His lips with passion to create the world—
 Where? Must I let the ancient secret out?
 The very room I have complained about!

¹ Any sweet kiddie is sure to get giddy, on
 Hearing her lover quote Epipsychidion!—[Ed.]

31

Then she: "Thou sun whose fiery beams enlarge
 My crescent! Tide that floats my gilded barge
 Out on the sea of rapture! Tower of strength
 That hast laid low my battlements at length!
 Bee that hast robbed the honey of my flower!
 Thief that hast had a lifetime in an hour!
 Thou stalwart that with sudden outrage and force
 Didst fling me across thy saddle, in thy course
 Spurning the stars with stallion hoofs! Thou god
 Of all my prayers, their perfect period!
 Tiger that leaping from thy lair hast torn
 My tender flesh! Insufferable thorn
 To pierce my rose! What clamour shall I make?
 Cry out on vengeance? Call on God to slake
 That thirst of blood? Murder me, yes or no,
 Monster and vampire—but I love thee so!
 Leave me no more! I give myself! I yield
 All the bright barley of my maiden field
 To brew thee wine! Intoxicating draught
 Of Love—no poison-potion Arab-quaffed
 So thrilled—my veins are raptured—blood and brain
 Dance as my tribe have never danced. Again!
 Again! Again! Thy kiss is molten fire
 Feeding delight, yet nourishing desire.
 Am I then lovely? All is thine! For thee
 I left the frozen fields of Tartary:
 For thee my mother travailed at my birth;
 For thee God sent me from the stars to earth!
 Take all thou wilt! I give thee all I can,
 My monster-master! I have found my man!"

32

And I: "God do so unto me, and more
 If ever I forget thee to adore
 Strange goddesses. Then, once again, thy breast!
 Give me thy throat to drain its burning best!"

Thy finger-nails torment my shrieking spine!
 Now—once again, fair Tartar, thou art mine!
 Once, twice, and thrice—oh, but let death decide
 The battle, swallow in his trembling tide
 Victor and vanquished! Stern arbitrament
 Of war! Dread god of the divine event!
 There—ay, 'twas there that Héré yielded up
 The wine that never flowed in Hebe's cup:
 'Twas there Antinous bid Adrian be:
 There Eli-gabel made the slave go free!
 Yea, what life gathers is but boyish bliss:
 Death's rite be ours—the first was naught to this!
 Then—"

33

There was more, much more; let this suffice
 To hymn the triumph of virtue over vice!

34

I thought it right to enter in my log
 The details of this daring dialogue;
 And if the reader has been bored, advise
 Closing the book—I don't apologize.
 Most probably, his intellect will ask
 How we were fitted for the testing task
 Of making these remarks—a Tartar wench
 Is not the sort of person to talk French!
 Well, I've a shot left in my old portmanteau.
 Or, please suppose we spoke in Esperanto!

35

I climbed the hill again, to ponder thence
 The beauty of these rivers' confluence.
 There lies the Volga, mighty bar and bond
 Of Russia; rich green flats reach out beyond,
 So restful that the eye is hard to draw
 Back from their soft calm brilliance, till I saw

Minute the churches, dotting it with white,
And golden haycocks by the banks, alight
With the sun's tragedy. To left and right
The hill winds, wooded, with its greener roofs
Putting even Nature to severer proofs,
And, red and green and gold, Byzantine revel
Of churches where one might invoke the devil,
So all-fantastic are their twisted spires
And domes aglow with their own monstrous fires!

36

Below me lies the Oka, grey and gold,
Asleep, its shipping mightier in mould
Than once Leviathan. The busy bridge,
Each mannikin minuter than a midge,
Leads to the square grown misty, dense and dun,
Beneath the blazing agony of the sun
That dies above them. What with pears and port,
A stiffish hill-climb and still stiffer sport,
I gladly notice on my left the bar
That men do call the Vostotchny Bazaar.
I could have found a shorter name, I think;
To me it simply stands for "food and drink".

37

This food, this drink,—oh, lots of it!—are mine.
From the great balcony I watch decline
The sun, reluctant (I believe it true!)
To set, in case his setting spoil my view!
More golden and more green the domes and crosses
Of great Saint—here the Muse again at loss is.
This church was built since patient Baedeker
Pencilled his volume, and I shall not stir
To ask the waiter who the Saint is—dome
And cross shine no less bright. A blue-grey gleam
Subtly enfolds the steppes. Soft clouds lie grey
About the north: earth's noises die away:
Heaven's anthem wakes—'tis but a hush increased!
Great flights of birds come flickering from the east

Like dead leaves down the wind; the Volga shines
More silver-rose; still subtler grow the lines
Of all the landscape; a vermilion haze
Surrounds the sun, that still shoots out his rays
Venomous, as a warrior in his death
Spends utmost malice in the utmost breath.
—And now all suddenly goes blue. The sky
Flames into green and orange. Must thou die,
Belovèd? This is the extreme of fate.
The whole world goes incalculably slate.
The wind comes chill; the sun is dead. Oh death,
I feel the first faint fondling of thy breath
Even now. Bring wine! Bring food! Bring anything!
It matters nothing: man must meet his king.

38

Well, Volga still extends, a silver streak,
And the full moon is not so far to seek.
Before an hour's gone she will countermand
The sunset, make old Nijni fairy-land.
In any case, I'm powerless in the matter;
I'll eat, and take my chance of getting fatter.

39

However, it grows cold, and I am fain
To go and catch my Tartar girl again,
And, with a little bit of luck, my train.

40

My song resumes its melancholy tune.
I reached the station just two hours too soon,
Or else an unknown period too late.
(Russia is never truly up to date:
Is there no statesman to resolve "I shall end her
Imbroglio of the antient Julian kalendar?")
In any case, I am indeed ill-fated;
My German lady has evaporated.

20

41

However, I command a glass of tea,
Resolved, with Asquith, I would wait and see.
So here I am, a miserable being
From too much waiting and too little seeing.

42

(I might describe the buffet; but, my aunt!
You bet your bottom dollar that I shan't.
I split my light of genius in a prism;
This ray's called "conscientious journalism";
But—they admit it, even at Scotland Yard—
The strongest conscience may be worked too hard.)

43

One who is universally admitted
In these degenerate days the keenest-witted
Mahatma going—I am proud to boast
I was the pupil that he scolded most—
Once told me this important mystery
Pertaining to the ninety-ninth degree:
"Never do Magick; you will surely rue it."
But what use is it, if you mustn't do it?

44

Accordingly, I first approached the shrine,
Making no reverence:¹ then these words were mine:

¹ This strikes the saint at once; in his high station
Of life he sleepily soaks adoration.
A *man's* approach gives him a nasty jar;
He wonders who, by Vassily! you are.
Familiar with the story of the past,
His constant dread is an iconoclast.
He feels relieved on hearing you mean trade;
You get his whole attention and his aid.
Afraid to haggle, glad to be well out of it,
He gets you all you want; and more, no doubt of it.

"Sir, since the sottish vote of a majority
Has 'drest you in a little brief authority',
(Angels would weep, indeed, to see you sainted,
If they but knew how badly you were painted!)
I introduce myself." (I did.) "I doubt
If there is much we could agree about;
But here's a basis for our bargainings;
You want wax candles, and I want three things.
First, no more trouble over this damned ticket.
(Safe journey? Well, I'll trust you to play cricket.)
Second, that no one steals my precious bag.
Third, since the hours unconscionably lag,
A lady's conversation. For the first,
A candle of five kopecks. Next *and* worst
A candle of ten kopecks. For the girl,
A candle of five kopecks." Then I twirl
Toes, and march off with a nonchalant nod.
He put the situation before God.

45

The booking-office opened with a rush.
There, sweetly smiling, with a damask blush
Mantling her cheeks, my German¹ girl. Both hands
Offered her service to my least commands;
There were my tickets. Venerable and mild,
A porter with the spirit of a child,
The courage of a lion, the address
Of Cinquevalli, grasped my bag. I bless
My saint already—almost I begin—
"Say, what an all-fired place to travel in!"
Fell on my ears. I naturally turned,
And quite admitted that the saint had earned
His twenty kopecks. She who thus addressed me
Was just the person who could interest me.
These were her merits: youth, rank, elegance,
Beauty (though nothing had been left to chance),

¹ Sie war nicht Deutsch; sie sprach es schlecht—no fit Art!
So, sleep on both those long ears, xxxx xxxxxxxxxxxx!

ong common-sense, unquestionable pluck,
Bright ways, strong intellect. Yes This was luck!
The conversation sparkled—cunning elf!
She made me tell her all about myself!
So that an hour passed charmingly. The saint,
Now positively smiling through his paint
At the tall candle with the small gilt pattern
—My sense of gratitude was never slattern—
Blazing before him, to encourage trade
Threw in a bonus—the best car that's made!
No Russian carriage with its worse than flea,
Its cushions without elasticity,
But the real thing—the hall-marked wagon-lit!
Silver and velvet and mahogany!
The bell that tinkles once, and in a trice
Comes the Veuve Clicquot bucketed in ice!

46

Here the Muse flags. Would great Apollo dare
To string the lyre to joys beyond compare
As these? Apollo is a golden god:—
After three days of Nijni Novgorod,
To find a bed with pillows, and fine linen
Whiter than winter's self to stuff one's skin in,
Were more than mere Olympians can equal.

47

Like all good yarns, the story has no sequel.
I rose to greet the sun. The train ran smooth,
As if it had a woman's heart to soothe,
Through woods and gardens, dotted here and there
With summer villas. Now, remote and rare,
Is Moscow, all its myriad houses lying
Still sleep-drenched in the shadow stupefying
Of night, while all its thousand domes take fire
Sparkling and glimmering toward day's desire,
Their thousand throats of bronze in chorus one
To hail the resurrection of the sun.