

The Russian Steppes.

Along the Volga Don Railway one sees in all its fullness what the Russians expressively call the "bad steppe"—a boundless waste of desolate gray moorland, without warmth, without color, life. Under the cheerless dimness of a stormy evening there are few sights more gloomy and terrible than the silent, eternal desolation of this immeasurable solitude, amid which the clank and whistle of the passing train sounds strange and incongruous. It is a positive relief to catch sight of the jagged black line that marks the position of the rocky heights which overlook the still hidden waters of the Don; but the famous river itself is a little more cheerful than its ghostly vestibule. The Volga is lonely as an old world deserted, the Don as a new world, still unpeopled. Toward nightfall the aspect of the whole landscape becomes wild and dreary to the last degree. The red light fading slowly over the vast treeless plain, the creeping shadow gathering over the sandy shores and long, low islets till all is wrapped in ghostly dimness—the dead, grim silence broken only by the splash and welter of the sullen waters, or the wild cry of some passing bird—have an effect impossible to describe. The few natives who are to be seen harmonize well with such a landscape—gaunt, wiry Cossacks, rushing along the shore like vultures, their gray coats streaming on the wind, their shaggy hair tossing like a mane beneath the high black sheep-skin cap, their small, deep-set eyes glancing restlessly to and fro as if in quest of prey—true sons of the steppe—swift, tireless, unamiable as the wolves of their native deserts. Yet these so-called "monsters" are really very jovial, hospitable fellows in their way to any one who cares to visit them in their own haunts. Such a visit, however, is not to be recommended to nervous or delicate travelers, the Cossack form of welcome being (as I can testify from repeated experience) to seize and toss their guest into the air five or six times, amid uproarious shouts, and with an energy to which the Rugby "tossings" immortalized by my friend Mr. Thomas Hughes, are as nothing.—Cor. New York Times.

ENNUI IN PARIS.—Paris is a town of contrasts, and no people complain more frequently of the tiresomeness of life than the Parisians. Next to the words *esprit* and *spirituel* the most frequently used are *ennui* and its derivative adjectives. It has been suggested that, perhaps, if the Parisians would capture the Bastille every morning they would not feel so deeply bored. As it is, they are bored for everything—by books, by music, by the theatre, by their friends, by their mothers-in-laws and, in short, by all the details of life. *Je m'ennuie* is the universal cry, and *vous m'ennuiez* is its echo, inasmuch that one sometimes feels inclined to conclude that the French of to-day are not so gay as their forefathers were, and that the *esprit* of which they talk so much is a name that has survived the reality. *Ennuie*, however, is not a new ailment. The bitter cry of unutterable *ennui* that ever fell from mortal lips was that of the Hebrew Sardanapalus, the lord of the seven hundred concubines, the greatest king, the greatest lover, the greatest poet, the greatest artist, the greatest philosopher of the East, who, on the morrow perhaps of the visit of the Queen of Sheba, exclaimed that there was nothing new under the sun.

BURDETTE ON MUSIC.—The oboe resembles a clarinet very much like a rake resembles a hoe; all the difference is at one end. The voice of the oboe is very much like that of a man trying to whistle with his head under water. The orchestral composers use the oboe on account of its simple, honest quality to express a countryman going into a bank and asking the banker to lend him \$200 until Tilden is elected. In Jacobin's beautiful creation, "Souffles from the Kitchen," you will remember that oboes are used to convey the remarks that pass between the cook and the grocer's boy, who had just brought home two gallons of maple sugar syrup in a one gallon kerosene can, and *vice versa*. The candid astonishment of the cook infuses the soul of the listener, while the efforts of the grocer's boy to explain away the apparent discrepancy between the quantity of syrup and the size of the can is beautifully and touchingly conveyed.

FORTY-TWO DAYS ON CIDER.—Mrs. Hannah Bent, of East Boston, was kept alive for forty-two days during a recent illness by moistening her mouth with cider. Her stomach could not endure tea, coffee, milk or even water, and it is doubtful whether it ever received more than a spoonful of the cider with which her mouth was moistened. Something broke in her stomach, which gave her relief, and she gradually recovered, and is now in the enjoyment of her usual health. She was attended during her forty-two days' fast by Mrs. Cummings, who states positively that nothing but cider entered Mrs. Bent's mouth during that time. It is believed that abstinence from food saved her life.—[Boston Traveler.

"THOSE HORRID FRENCH NOVELS."—A society belle was sitting with a party of friends on the balcony of a watering-place hotel a few days ago. The conversation turned on the guests of the house, and one attractive young lady, a recent arrival was criticised. "I don't know how you can call her handsome," said Miss S—, in response to the opinion expressed by Mr. R—, a gentleman of the party, "she is so insipid; then she wants to be thought clever, and does nothing all day but read those horrid French novels and other trash." The group soon afterward broke up. "I beg your pardon, Miss S—, but you left your book on your chair," said Mr. —, presenting the forgotten volume. It was a bound copy of "Nana."—Hour.

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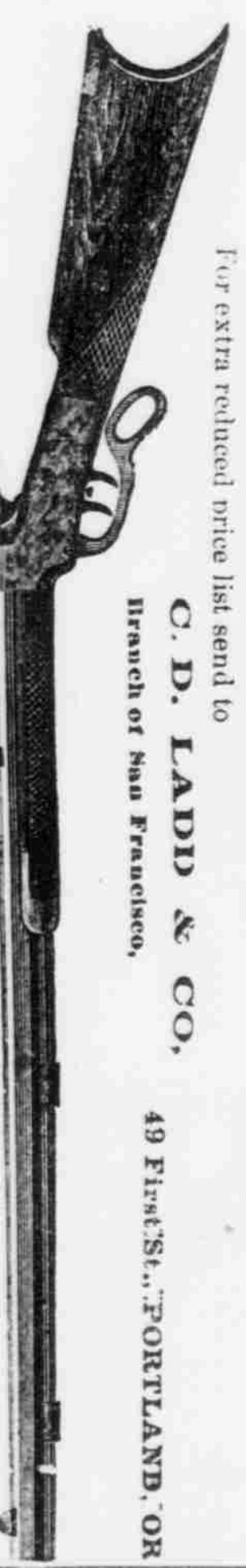
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