

A SINGULAR CUSTOM

And How It Was Illustrated by a Russian Countess

By LOUISE B. CUMMINGS

A ball was in progress in the Winter palace at St. Petersburg. There were few persons in the resplendent throng who were not titled, and in Russia even a prince cannot hold his position in the court circle without complying with a number of requirements. Among the few at the ball without the prefix to the name of count, baron, duke or even general, without gold lace or a string of decorations on the breast, but in plain black evening dress, was Adelbert Wyman, an attaché to the American legation.

If Wyman was bereft of artificial plumage nature had endowed him with an attractive personality. He was finely built, being tall and proportioned for an athlete, while his countenance bespoke a manly spirit within. Having inherited a fortune and work not being a necessity with him, he had adopted a profession in which money making had no part and which to him seemed full of interest—diplomacy.

Wyman had prepared himself for his career by the study of international law and more especially of several foreign languages, Russian among the number. He was therefore enabled to chat in her native tongue with a young Russian girl, with whom he danced several times at this imperial ball. The Countess Olga Ivanovna was one of those women of the north whose complexions are fair, whose eyes are blue and whose hair is flaxen. Notwithstanding the fact that she was noble and her companion was a commoner, she seemed to be pleased with him. Indeed, there was something unique in that unadorned figure among hundreds of men most of whom relied for admiration on their velvet clothes, tinsel and the medals strung on their breasts. Some of them were misshapen, some had homely faces, and all were dressed as if for a play. Wyman alone was unadorned.

"How do you like Russia?" asked the countess. All visitors are asked this question and if they are well bred usually reply that they like the country they visit very much. Wyman's reply was that the country interested him. When asked why, he said that it was in the marked difference to what he had been accustomed.

"In what way?" asked the girl. "First, with you Russians everything points from the people to the government, while with us everything points from the government to the people. In other words, here the people seem to be for the government, while with us our government is for the people. But it is the many singular customs in the different parts of your great empire that especially interest me, the pronounced varied types of your people. I have read that in a certain province dowryless girls are raffled for as wives, the money paid in for chances being given for a marriage portion."

"There is a more singular custom than that," added the countess. "In a certain part of Russia the girls propose to the men. If a girl wants to marry a man she goes to his house. If he refuses to marry her he is regarded as insulting her and her family, and they take revenge upon him."

"The privilege of proposing marriage," said Wyman, "accorded to the man is a mere custom. For my part I see no reason why a woman should not be as free to ask a man to marry her as that a man is free to ask her to be his wife."

"Do you really mean that?" asked the countess, looking up at Wyman archly. "I certainly do. But you must not take me in that respect as representing my countrymen. I like to think for myself and am not a slave to customs."

The two parted at this point, but just before the ball closed they met again.

"We go next week to our house in the province of Viatka," she said. "If you will make us a visit there I think I can show you some more of our odd customs. The people about us have some very singular ones."

"I assure you I feel highly honored by the invitation and shall accept it with much pleasure."

In time Wyman received a formal invitation to visit Count Ivan Ivanovna's estates in Viatka. A time was set for his coming, but none for his departure. This surprised him, for it is usual among most entertainers in high life all over the world to invite their guests for a definite period. The American was cordially received by the young lady's family and a suit of rooms placed at his disposal. He had not before met any of them except Olga, and he seemed to be considered her special guest. At any rate, she took upon herself his entertainment, driving him about herself, showing him the people, how they lived, how they worked and how they reared their children. Wyman was much interested in it all and more especially in the ignorance of not only the children, but of their parents.

"But you have not shown me," said Wyman one day when they were out together, "any of those singular customs you spoke of when in St. Petersburg?"

"You must be patient," was the reply. "You Americans are always in

haste. If you are to be a diplomat you must get rid of that American trait." A couple of weeks passed. Olga Ivanovna showed no disposition to part with her visitor, nor did he care especially to return to the city. There were no intricate questions between the United States and Russia to render his attendance on his chief necessary, and he was not recalled. He occupied his time during the day in studying the Russian people under the guidance of his fair hostess, and the evenings did not seem long enough, since he invariably spent them in her company.

If Wyman thought of what might come of this association it certainly did not occur to him that a family whose nobility might be traced back for centuries, which was in high favor with the czar, would consent to admit a commoner like himself into its charmed circle by giving him one of its members to wife. Nor did he suspect that Olga Ivanovna would stoop to ally herself with him. He was happy, and he was young, and young persons are not given to looking to a point where their happiness may come to an end.

One evening Olga showed a well defined symptom that the little god had claimed her as one of its victims. He parting with the American was accompanied by an intensity of feeling not before definitely displayed. Wyman went to his rooms wondering. Could it be that, yielding to love, this high-born beauty would surrender to an untitled man from the other side of the globe?

The next morning Olga told her guest that there was to be a singular ceremony in the line of what she had promised him. He was delighted. Olga would take part in it. Would he like to do the same? Certainly. What was it like? There would be racing. She would be dressed in running costume. If he intended to take part he would better dress for the same purpose. Capital! He had been a sprinter in school and afterward in college. He had several cups at home he had won on the cinder path.

An hour later Olga appeared attired in a dress the skirt of which came only to the knees. Wyman had no sprinting costume with him, so he appeared simply in a pair of white flannel trousers and shirt. Thus arrayed, the two sprang into a phaeton which stood at the door, and Olga drove to a field on which was a crowd of people. At one end of the open space was a tent. Olga drove to a point near the canvas, and both she and her guest alighted. Olga went into the tent for a few moments, where she divested herself of her jacket and came out ready for a run.

Wyman saw no one else prepared for racing and noticed that he and Olga seemed to be the center of attraction. While he was wondering what it all meant, Olga, who had walked a short distance from him, turned, beckoned to him and then darted away over the field.

Wyman ran after her. There was the same excitement, the same cheers, the same shouts, as when he had won cups in America. He was surprised to see that Olga was running very swiftly. Gallantry at first caused him to moderate his pace, but it was not long before he realized that if he was to catch her he must do his best.

The space to be traveled was 200 yards, and to win Wyman must catch the fugitive before reaching a goal at the other end of the field. He was at first so dilatory that when Olga had made half the distance it seemed he would lose. And so he would have just had not Olga in the next quarter slowed her pace. Within a hundred yards of the goal she ran so slowly that Wyman had no difficulty in catching her. He put his hand on her shoulder, and she fell back into his arms amid a vociferous approval of the onlookers.

Having recovered her breath, she slipped her arm through his, and they walked back together to the starting point. Out of the tent came a priest and advanced toward them. Olga raised her hand in protest.

"No, no, father. This is not a real wedding. This gentleman wished to see some of our customs, and I thought I had best show him one of our wedding ceremonies and arrange that he should be a part of it, but your services will not be required."

Wyman stood looking at the speaker wondering. The excitement of the chase was upon him. Moreover, a delightful suspicion flashed in his mind that there was something more in this ceremony than to show him a custom of the country.

As for the crowd, it showed signs of dissent. There were cries of "A wedding, a wedding!" But the countess, who was much beloved by the people, stilled them.

"For my part," said Wyman, looking at Olga with eyes that expressed far more than his words implied, "I think the people are right. We should not disappoint them."

At this the cries were renewed, and this time Olga found it impossible to still them. She gave Wyman a questioning look, then dropped her eyes. Wyman struck while the iron was hot and signaled to the priest to advance and perform the ceremony. Olga yielded, and the two, having been made one, were escorted to the bride's home by a singing, shouting populace.

Wyman returned to the embassy at St. Petersburg, and it was announced to the world that the secretary of the American legation and the Countess Olga Ivanovna were betrothed. Not long afterward they were married in presence of the imperial family, and there were few persons at the capital who knew that this was a supplementary ceremony.

Wyman's life has been spent mostly abroad, but a portion of it he has lived in America with his Russian wife.

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The Name

The city derives its name from the falls of the Little Luckiamute River, which flows through the city from the West.

The first sale of town lots occurred in 1889, though donation land-claim settlers came here many years before that date. In 1900 the population was 269; in 1910, 969; 1914, about 1,250.

The Location

Falls City is situated in the south central part of Polk County Oregon, in section 21, township 8, S., range 6, W., Willamette meridian, 27 rail miles southwest of Salem, and 73 rail miles southwest of Portland, in the narrow western end of the Little Luckiamute River valley, surrounded on the north, south, and west by the foothills of the Coast Range mountains. Elevation, 886.38 ft above sea level. Transportation—Salem, Falls City & Western Railroad, which extends from Salem to Black Rock, a rail distance of 30 miles, with S. P. main line connections at Dallas, Gerlinger, and Salem, and with the Oregon Electric at Salem.

Falls City is incorporated as a city, and contains 753.33 acres, valuation for taxation \$268,837. The city administration is composed of mayor, seven councilmen, auditor and police judge, marshal, treasurer, engineer, health officer. Salaries: Marshal and water superintendent, \$60; auditor, \$25; attorney, \$25.

Water and Wood

The city of Falls City owns the gravity water system. Its first cost was \$30,000. Pure mountain water is piped from springs on Judge Teal's ranch, 3 miles away, at an elevation of about 300 feet above city level.

Oak and fir fire wood is plentiful and cheap.

Lumber, Fruit, Vegetables and Berries

Electric-power planing and saw mill, log pond, dry kiln and lumber yard in the city, lumber flume, logging roads and logging outfits, all owned and operated by the Falls City Lumber Co.

The surrounding bench and hill lands are as well adapted to the production of fruits and berries as any other section of the Pacific Northwest, and development on these lines is going on.

Vegetables and berries of many kinds grow to perfection in and adjoining Falls City, and many acres are planted to strawberries and loganberries. Market conditions are improving steadily, as production is increased.

Schools, Churches, Societies, Clubs

Falls City has a 12-grade school with a four-year high school course, with principal, assistant, and eight grade teachers. Its diplomas are accepted by the higher schools in lieu of examinations. The entire community is justly proud of the school.

The Religious organizations are: Adventist, Catholic, Christian, Free Methodist, Methodist Episcopal, German Lutheran.

The Fraternal societies: Ind. Order of Oddfellows, Rebekahs, Masons, Knights of Pythias, Pythian Sisters, Modern Woodmen of America, Royal Neighbors of America, Woodmen of the World, Women of Woodcraft.

Free reading room. Gem theatre, photoplay.

Hydro-electric light generated by the power of the falls; owned by the Falls City Electric Co., W. B. Stevens president, H. C. Brown vice-president and manager, A. W. Stevens secretary and treasurer.

Telephone system, with long-distance connections. C. J. Pugh local manager.

Business Enterprises

Falls City is well provided with the usual business enterprises. The News contains the announcements of the following business and professional men of the city:

- Bakery, D. Toller,
- Bank of Falls City, W. F. Nichols cashier.
- Barber shops, Wm. Bohle.
- Carpenters and Builders, Elle & Elle, S. Ouderkerk.
- Clothier, Tailor and gents' furnisher, Chas. Hartung.
- Confectionery stores: B. L. Ellis, R. B. Harrington.
- Drug store, M. L. Thompson.
- Dentist, Dr. A. G. Atwood.
- Department store, N. Selig.
- Funeral director, R. L. Chapman.
- Furniture, J. C. Talbott & Co.
- General stores, N. Selig, F. C. Lumber Co., F. C. Merc. Co.
- Hardware store, J. C. Talbott & Co.
- Hotels: Falls City Hotel, Fritz Droegge, owner and manager; The Madena, Mrs. Mae Nichols, Mrs. Dennis, managers
- Jewelry store, W. A. Persey.
- Newspaper, the Falls City News, D. L. Wood & Son.
- Photoplay theatre, the Gem, C. J. Pugh.
- Physicians, Dr. W. B. Officer; Dr. F. M. Hellwarth.
- Pressing and cleaning parlor, I. A. Johnston.
- Railroads, Salem, Falls City & Western, Southern Pacific.
- Real estate agent, F. K. Hubbard Realty Co.
- Restaurant, The Madena; Wm. Finley, owner.
- Saloons: The Oregon, C. W. Matthews; The Idaho, Chas. Mix.

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REAL ESTATE FOR SALE

- 1 Lots 1, 2, 3, 4, 13, 14, block E.
- 2 Two fine building lots in block G, East View add.
- 3 For rent, house, barn, 3 lots; \$6; Ellis street. Property for sale.
- 4 For Sale, 2 good lots, on Pine street in block K, cultivated.
- 5 Lots 13, 14, 15, 16, block O, at a bargain; \$100 cash, bal. on terms at 8%.
- 6 Two lots, 6-r. house; fruit, berries, city water, electric light; close in, bargain.
- 7 For sale, One acre, adjoining city limits, with 5-room house. A bargain at \$425, terms. House to rent.
- 8 For sale—9 acres, partially improved; house, timber; spring and living stream; near western city limits; price, \$1000, half cash.
- 9 For sale, one acre, cultivated, fruit, berries; 6-r. house insured for \$1400; elec. light, city water, cesspool; price \$1050; all cash, or \$500 cash, terms on balance.
- 10 For sale, 7 lots (all of block A) in Montgomery's addition to Falls City; good garden ground, fenced; city water; price \$1100 if bought within the next 30 days.
- 11 For sale, fine home in city, with 25 acres, 10 cultivated.
- 12 For sale, lots 7, 8, 14, 23 block K, and lots 11 and 12 block E. Will trade for Portland property.
- 13 For sale, lot 2 block M, M. ad.
- 14 For sale, 80 a. 1 1/2 mi. north of city 20 a. improved; 25 a. good timber; plenty of pasture and water.
- 15 To rent, 12-r. house.
- 16 Two acres, cultivated, fruit, berries; 6-r. house, sheds; water, electric light; will divide.
- 17 Three acres, adjoining city.
- 18 Five acres, in city.
- 19 Six lots, no improvements; cheap
- 20 Lot 5 and 20 ft. of lot 4 blk D, 70 feet front, on North Main street, is for sale at a bargain; best building lot in town. See F. K. Hubbard.

F. K. Hubbard Realty Company
In The News office, Falls City

Abstracts of title promptly furnished. Rates reasonable. Brown & Sibley, 610 Mill St., Dallas, Or.

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