

THE HOLY LAND EXCURSION.

LETTER FROM "MARK TWAIN."

[SPECIAL TRAVELLING CORRESPONDENT OF THE ALTA.]

[Number Twenty-Two.]

In the Crimea—More Souvenirs of California—
Diplomatic Preparations—Reception by
the Czar—Among the Royalties—Royalty
in Plain Clothes—Family Relations—
What Republicans Think of in Imperial
Presence—The Unterrified Brown—
"Twain" Reads his Piece.

YALTA, August 27th.
Preparing to Visit the Emperor.

EDITORS ALTA: We anchored here day before yesterday. To me the place was a vision of California. The tall, gray mountains that back it, their sides bristling with pines—cloven with ravines—here and there a hoary rock towering into view—long, straight streaks sweeping down from the summit to the sea, marking the passage of some avalanche of former times—all these were as like what one sees in the Sierras as if the one were a portrait of the other. The little village of Yalta nestles at the foot of an amphitheatre which slopes backward and upward to the wall of hills, and looks as if it might have sunk quietly down to its present position from a higher elevation. This depression is covered with the great parks and gardens of noblemen, and through the mass of green foliage the bright colors of their palaces bud out here and there like flowers. It is a beautiful spot.

The first thing we did was to send a Committee on shore to confer with the Governor-General concerning our reception, and to present to him a brief address for the Emperor which our Consul had advised us to prepare, and which a Committee of the cheekiest of us had been ordered to draft. Why they should have made me Chairman of a Committee whose main talent was to consist of cheek, was an injustice which to me was as strange as it was painful. I accepted the office, but I did it under protest. I did it partly because I was more familiar with Emperors than the other passengers, and therefore able to write to such people with an easier grace than they, and partly because I thought that if I could spread it around that I had been corresponding with the Emperor of Russia, may be it would make my photograph sell.

Well, the Governor-General said that his Majesty would receive our whole party the next day at noon, at his summer palace—that etiquette would be waived and the address read and presented to him in person, at that time—that the Grand Duke Michael (his brother) had extended an invitation to the party to visit him at his palace on the same day, and that on the following day they and their families desired to visit the ship if the sea were smooth. He said we must disembark at half past ten or eleven and ride to the palace (three miles) in carriages which would be provided for us.

So the whole ship's company turned out at about 7 o'clock yesterday morning, and dressed from that time until 11. We got ashore, then, and drove to the Czar's mansion. It stood in the midst of a mixture of lawn, flower-garden and park, and was as snugly located as possible, almost. Its architecture is simple, but handsome and attractive, and its porches, stairways and windows are so clothed with vines and flowers, that the place looked like a cosy home, not a chilly palace.

The Reception.

We formed a circle under the trees before the door, for there was no one room in the house able to accommodate our seventy-five persons comfortably, and in a few minutes the imperial family came out bowing and smiling, and stood in our midst. A number of great dignitaries of the Empire, in undress uniforms, came with them. With every bow, his Majesty said a word of welcome. I copy these speeches. There is character in them—Russian character—which is politeness itself, and the genuine article. The French are polite, but it is often mere ceremonious politeness. A Russian always imbues his polite things with a heartiness, both of phrase and expression, that compels belief in their sincerity. As I was saying, the Czar punctuated his speeches with bows: "Good morning—I am glad to see you—I am gratified—I am delighted—I am happy to receive you!" If he had said he was proud to receive that gang, I would not have believed a word of it. But he might have been happy—he looked it. All hands took off their hats, and the Consul inflicted the Address on him. He bore it with unflinching fortitude; then took the rusty looking document and handed it to some great officer or other, to be filed away among the archives of Russia—in the stove, perhaps. He thanked us for the Address, and said he was very much pleased to see us, especially as such friendly relations existed between Russia and the United States. The Empress said the Americans were favorites in Russia, and she hoped the Russians were similarly regarded in America. These were all the speeches. The San Francisco police brought with gold watches, as models of gravity and point. After this the Empress went and talked sociably (for an Empress) with various ladies around the circle, several gentlemen entered into a disjointed general conversation with the Emperor, the Dukes and Princes, Admirals and Maids of Honor dropped into free-and-easy chat with first one and then another of our party, and whoever chose stepped forward and spoke with the modest little Grand Duchess Marie, the Czar's daughter, who is fourteen years old, light-haired, blue-eyed, unassuming and pretty. Everybody talks English. Being after information more than anything else, I captured a fine old gentleman who seemed perfectly willing to be bored with questions, and bored him good. I kept it up, and bored him at many times and in many places during the afternoon. But I did not know he was the Lord High Admiral of Russia. I took him for a lieutenant in the army. But he was very affable and polite, and liked to talk. He was posted on everything, too.

If these dignitaries had come out in their trotting harness, and blazing with orders and decorations, and had assumed a courtly grandeur of bearing and speech, they would have put our light out in the twinkling of an eye—they would have extinguished us like setting a church down on a tall-candle. They gauged us, and came at us accordingly. They dressed for the occasion. When, in the course of that half-hour's chat, the Countesses and Baronesses and Duchesses of the household got mixed up with our ladies, you could not tell them apart, except that our ladies were the finest dressed and looked the most showy. All the Admirals, and Dukes, and Princes, and Generals were Lieutenants to me; just as in Italy, I couldn't tell the policemen from the Marshals of the Kingdom. You couldn't tell which was the Empress of Russia without having her pointed out; the only way to find the Emperor was to hunt for the man that had the plainest clothes. I think any question asked with a kingly air would have stricken any of our party speechless; but the homespun simplicity of voice and manner of all the imperial party broke the ice at once and set every tongue going with a cheerful vivacity that had no suspicion of embarrassment about it. They were not five minutes in forgetting that they were in a helpless and desperate situation.

The Imperial Wardrobe.

The Emperor wore a cap, frock coat and pantaloons, all of some kind of plain white drilling—cotton or linen—and sported no jewelry or any insignia whatever of rank. No costume could be less ostentatious. He is very tall and spare, and a determined looking man, though a very pleasant looking one, nevertheless. It is easy to see that he is kind and affectionate. There is something very noble in his expression when his cap is off. There is none of that cunning in his eye that all of us noticed in Louis Napoleon's.

The Empress and the little Grand Duchess wore simple suits of foulard (or foulard silk—I don't know which is proper,) with a small blue spot in it; the dresses were trimmed with blue; both ladies wore broad blue sashes about their waists; linen collars and clerical ties of muslin; low-crowned straw hats trimmed with blue velvet; parasols and flesh colored gloves. The Grand Duchess had no heels on her shoes. I do not know this of my own knowledge, but one of our ladies told me so. I was not looking at her shoes. I was only too proud to observe that she wore her own hair, plaited in thick braids against the back of her head, instead of the hated thing they call a waterfall, which is about as much like a waterfall as a canvas-covered ham is like a cataract. Taking the kind expression that is in the Emperor's face and the gentleness that is in his young daughter's into consideration, I wondered if it would not tax the Czar's firmness to the utmost to condemn a supplicating wretch to misery in the wastes of Siberia if she pleaded for him. Every time their eyes met, I saw more and more what a tremendous power that weak, diffident school-girl could wield if she chose to do it. Many and many a time she might rule the Autocrat of Russia, whose lightest word is law to 70,000,000 of human beings! She was only a girl, and she looked like a thousand others I have seen, but never a girl provoked such a novel and peculiar interest in me before. A strange, new sensation is a rare thing in this hum-drum life, and verily I had it here. There was nothing stale or worn out about the thoughts and feelings the situation and the circumstances created. It seemed strange—stranger than I can tell—to think that the central figure in the cluster of men and women, chatting here under the trees like the most ordinary people in the land, was a man who could open his lips and ships would fly through the waves, locomotives would speed over the plains, couriers would hurry from village to village, a hundred telegraphs would flash the word to the four corners of an Empire that stretches its vast proportions over a seventh part of the world, and a countless multitude of men would spring to do his bidding. I had a sort of vague desire to examine his hands and see if they were of flesh and blood, like other men's. Here was a man who could do this wonderful thing, and yet if I chose to do it I could knock him down. The case was plain, but it seemed preposterous, nevertheless—as preposterous as trying to knock down a mountain or wipe out a continent. If this man sprained his ankle, a million miles of telegraph would carry the news over mountains—valleys—uninhabited deserts—under the trackless sea—and ten thousand newspapers would prate of it; if he were grievously ill, all the nations would know it before the sun rose again; if he dropped lifeless where he stood, his fall might shake the thrones of half a world! If I could have stolen a button off his coat, I would have done it. When I meet a man like that, I want something to remember him by.

Imperial Condescension.

As a general thing, we have been shown through palaces by some plush-legged filagree but flunking or other, who charged a franc for his breed after talking with the company half an hour, the Emperor of Russia and his family conducted us all through their elegant mansion themselves. They made no charge. They seemed to take a real pleasure in it. There was condescension for you. It even touched Brown. He said, "The idea of him trotting them beats through here himself! Some of 'em won't know any better than to offer him a *pour boire!*" I wish I was Emperor about a minute—you'd see some of these roosters climb that fence!" You notice that word. It pains you. But you cannot conceive how it pains me. Yet I am obliged to hear it every day. I have talked to Brown a great deal about it, but it does no good. He forgets himself right away and uses it again. That time we saw the Pope, he touched up an English gentleman with his umbrella and said: "Which is him? The rooster with the bald head?" And when the gentleman scowled upon him, he said: "It's all right, you know—I thought may be it was that other duck that's got a red hat on." These things distress me beyond expression.

We spent half an hour idling through the palace, admiring the cosy apartments and the rich but eminently home-like appointments of the place, and then the Imperial family bade our mob good-bye, and said they would see them again on board the ship.

An invitation was extended to us to visit the palace of the eldest son, the Crown Prince of Russia, which was near at hand. The young man was absent, but the Dukes and Countesses and Princes went over the premises with us as leisurely as was the case the Emperor's, and conversation continued as lively as ever. Brown said he knew the gang would nip something—such was his expression—but they did not. They behaved themselves in the most creditable manner.

It was a little after one o'clock, now. We drove

to the Grand Duke Michael's, a mile away, in response to his invitation previously given. Of this, more anon.

The Address.

As it has been sent to various Russian papers for publication—so I am told—you may as well print it yourself. Inasmuch as the Emperor approved the document, I hope you will allow me as much for it as if you had ordered me to write it yourself. The passengers approved it also—all, except one. He objected to "your Majesty"—said it might be right enough, but still it looked like we were fishing for an invitation to dinner:

"To His Imperial Majesty, Alexander II, Emperor of Russia:

"We are a handful of private citizens of the United States, travelling simply for recreation—and unostentatiously, as becomes our unofficial state—and, therefore, we have no excuse to tender for presenting ourselves before your Majesty save the desire of offering our grateful acknowledgments to the lord of a realm which, through good and through evil report, has been the steadfast friend of the land we love so well.

"We could not presume to take a step like this, did we not know well that the words we speak here, and the sentiments wherewith they are freighted, are but the reflex of the thoughts and the feelings of all our countrymen, from the green hills of New England to the shores of the far Pacific. We are few in number, but we utter the voice of a nation!

"One of the brightest pages that has graced the world's history, since written history had its birth, was recorded by your Majesty's hand when it loosed the bonds of twenty millions of men; and Americans can but esteem it a privilege to do honor to a ruler who has wrought so mighty a deed. The lesson taught us then we have profited by, and are free in truth, to-day, even as we were before in name. America owes much to Russia—is indebted to her in many ways—and chiefly for her unwavering friendship in seasons of our greatest need. That that friendship may still be hers, we confidently pray; that she is and will be grateful to Russia and to her sovereign for it, we know full well; that she will ever forfeit it by any premeditated unjust act, or unfair course, it were treason to believe.

SAM. J. CLEMENS,
WM. GIBSON,
A. N. SANFORD,
TIMOTHY D. CROCKER,
COL. P. KINNEY, U. S. A.,

Committee on behalf of the passengers of the American steam yacht *Quaker City.*"

This address will be copied into the various newspapers of Europe, and so I am perfectly satisfied, now, that my photographs will sell.

Our little unpretending visit of a few untitled American scrubs, instead of being no consequence, except as a fifteen minutes' bore to the Czar, which was all we expected, begins to assume a national importance. I will observe, in this connection, that the price of photographs in Constantinople is twenty francs a dozen—say four dollars.

MARK TWAIN.