

# THE HOLY LAND EXCURSION.

## LETTER FROM "MARK TWAIN."

[SPECIAL TRAVELLING CORRESPONDENT OF THE ALTA.]

[Number Twenty-three.]

Visiting the Grand Duke—Imperial Condescension—An Obliging Grand Duke—Lunch with Royalty—How it Looks Behind the Scenes—A Troublesome Poet—Majesty Returning Compliments—An Irruption of Inferior Notabilities.

YALTA, RUSSIA, August 27th.

At the Grand Duke's.

We arrived there in twenty minutes from the Emperor's. It is a lovely place. The beautiful palace nestles among the grand old groves of the park—the park sits in the lap of the picturesque crags and hills, and both look out upon the breezy ocean. In the park are rustic seats, here and there, in secluded nooks that are dark with shade; there are rivulets of crystal water; there are lakelets, with inviting, grassy banks; there are glimpses of sparkling cascades through openings in the wilderness of foliage; there are streams of clear water gushing from mimic knots on the trunks of forest trees; there are miniature marble temples perched upon gray old crags; there are airy lookouts whence one may gaze upon a broad expanse of landscape and ocean. The palace is modelled after the choicest forms of Grecian architecture, and its wide colonnades surround a central court that is banked with rare flowers that fill the place with their fragrance, and in their midst springs a fountain that cools the summer air, and may possibly breed mosquitoes, but I do not think it does.

The Grand Duke and his Duchess came out and the presentation ceremonies were as simple as they had been at the Emperor's. In a few minutes conversation was under way, as before. The Empress appeared in the verandah, and the little Grand Duchess came out into the crowd. They had beaten us there. It was pleasant to know that they were not in a hurry to get rid of us. In a few minutes the Emperor came himself on horseback. It was very jolly. You can appreciate it if you have ever visited royalty and felt occasionally that possibly you might be wearing out your welcome—though as a general thing, I believe, royalty is not scrupulous about discharging you when it is done with you.

The Grand Duke is the third brother of the Emperor, is about thirty-seven years old, perhaps, and is the princeliest figure in Russia. He is even taller than the Czar, as straight as an Indian, and bears himself like one of those gorgeous knights we read about in romances of the Crusades. He looks like a great-hearted fellow who would pitch an enemy into the river in a moment, and then jump in and risk his life fishing him out again. The stories they tell of him show him to be of a brave and generous nature. He must have been determined to prove that Americans were welcome guests in the imperial palaces of Russia, because he rode all the way to Yalta and escorted our procession to the Emperor's himself, and kept his aids scurrying around clearing the road and offering assistance wherever it could be needed. We were rather familiar with him then, because we didn't know who he was. We recognized him now, and appreciated the friendly spirit that prompted him to do us a favor that any other Grand Duke in the world would have scorned to do. He had plenty of servitors whom he could have sent, but he chose to attend to the matter himself.

The Grand Duke was dressed in the handsome and showy uniform of a Cossack officer. The Grand Duchess had on a white alpaca robe, with the seams and gores trimmed with black barb lace, and a little gray hat with a feather of the same color. She is young, rather pretty, modest and unpretending, and full of winning politeness.

Our party marched all through the house, as usual, and then the nobility escorted them all over the grounds, and finally brought them back to the palace about half-past 2 o'clock to breakfast. They called it breakfast, but we would have called it luncheon. It consisted of two kinds of wine, tea, bread, cheese, and cold meats, and was served on the centre tables in the reception room and the verandahs—anywhere that was convenient; there was no ceremony. It was a sort of a free blow-out, like a picnic. I had heard before that we were to breakfast there, but Brown said he believed Drake's boy had suggested it to his Imperial Highness. I reckon not—though it would be like him. Drake's boy is the famine-breeder of the ship. He is always hungry. They say he goes about the staterooms when the passengers are out, and eats up all the soap. And they say he can get between meals, but he prefers oakum. He can't like oakum for dinner, but he likes it for a lunch, at odd hours, or anything that way. It makes him very disagreeable, because it makes his breath smell like the sigh of a buzzard, and keeps his teeth all stuck up with tar. Drake's boy may have suggested the breakfast, but I hope he did not. It went off well, anyhow. The illustrious host moved about from place to place, and helped to destroy the provisions and keep the conversation lively, and the Grand Duchess talked with the verandah parties and such as had satisfied their appetites, and straggled out from the reception-room. When the Consul and our Secretary to the Legation at the Imperial Court said it was time to go (we kept ourselves posted all the time), we bade the Grand Duke and the Grand Duchess good-bye, and cleared out.

We had spent the best part of half a day in the home of royalty, and had been as cheerful and comfortable all the time as we could have been in the ship. I would as soon have thought of being cheerful in Abraham's bosom as in the palace of an Emperor. I supposed that Emperors were terrible people. I thought they never did anything but wear magnificent crowns and red velvet dressing-gowns, with dabs of wool sowed on them in spots, and sit on thrones and scowl at the flunkies and the people in the parquette, and order Dukes and Duchesses off to execution. I find, however, that when one is so fortunate as to get behind the scenes and see them at home and in the privacy of their firesides, they are strangely like common mortals. They are pleasanter to look upon than they are in their theatrical aspect. It seems to come as natural to them to dress and act like other people as it is to put a friend's cedar pencil in your pocket when you're done using it. But don't you know, I can never have any confidence in the tinsel kings of the theatre after this? It will be a great loss. I used to take such a thrilling pleasure in them! But, hereafter, I will turn me sadly away and say: "This won't answer—this isn't the style of king that I am acquainted with!" When they prance around the stage in jewelled crowns and splendid robes I shall feel bound to observe that all the Emperors that ever I was personally acquainted with wore the commonest sort of clothes, and didn't prance. And when they come on the stage attended by a vast body-guard of supes in helmets and tin breastplates, it will be my duty as well as my pleasure to inform the ignorant that no crowned head of my acquaintance has a soldier anywhere about his house or his person.

### "Saved as by Fire."

Under Providence we have been spared one humiliation here. Our poet has been rigidly suppressed, from the time we let go the anchor. We have only three uncouth characters on board, and the poet is one of them. He is a shameless old idiot who writes the most diabolical rhymes one can imagine, and shoves them under doors, hands them to Consuls by the ream, and waylays foreigners in out-of-the-way places when no succor is near, and inflicts his verses on them. That they do not understand English is nothing to him. He is inexorable. His only aim seems to be to save three cents when he can do it by going cold or hungry, and to flood Europe with his infernal poetry. Knowing that we watch him and try in every way to circumvent him, he has become wary of late, and employs all manner of surreptitious means to circulate his trash. When it was announced that we were going to visit the Emperor of Russia, the fountains of his great deep were broken up and he rained ineffable bosh for four and twenty hours. The anxiety as to what we were going to do with ourselves was suddenly transformed into anxiety about what we were going to do with our poet. The problem was solved at last. Two alternatives were offered him—he must either swear a dreadful oath that he would not issue a line of his vile poetry while he was in the Czar's dominions, or else remain under guard on board the ship until we were safe at Constantinople again. He fought the dilemma long, but yielded at last, with a heavy heart. It was a great deliverance. Perhaps you would like a specimen of his style:

"Save us and sanctify us, and finally, then,  
See good provisions we enjoy while we journey to  
Jerusalem.

For so man proposes, which it is most true,  
And time will wait for none, nor for us too."

He will grind you out that kind of rubbish by the yard, and cast it off to kings and princes, with his name signed in full at the bottom. However, we ought not to be too hard on him. For aught we know, God made him. It is even possible that He made him for some wise purpose. That the poet has failed to fill the bill is matter for regret, but not for execration. Still, while we cannot disguise the truth that he is a failure, let us at least be charitable, and hope that he is doing his level best.

### Distinguished Visitors.

The sea has been unusually rough all day, and no one is expecting the Emperor on board the ship. I make no doubt that the invitation he extended to himself and family to visit the vessel was only a little stretch of politeness, and that he really had very little idea of coming. Others think differently. I don't suppose any of us know enough about imperial etiquette to be able to express an opinion on the subject that would sell for much in the market.

However, we have had a lively time of it, anyhow. We have had such a run of visitors all day, so Brown says, that "if we had been a bank we would have been busted." The Governor-General came, and we received him with a salute of nine guns. He brought his family with him. I observed that carpets were spread from the pier-head to his carriage for him to walk on, though I have seen him walk there without any carpet when he wasn't on business. I thought maybe he had what the accidental insurance people might call an extra-hazardous policy ("policy"—joke, but not above mediocrity,) on his boots, and wanted to protect them, but I examined and could not see that they were blacked any better than usual. It may have been that he had forgotten his carpet, before, but he hadn't it with him, anyhow. He was an exceedingly pleasant old gentleman; we all liked him, especially Brown. When he went away, Brown invited him to come again and fetch his carpet along.

Prince Dalgorouki and a Grand Admiral or two, whom we had seen yesterday at the reception, came on board also. I was a little distant with these parties, at first, because always when I have been visiting Emperors I don't like to be too familiar with people I only know by reputation, and whose moral characters and standing in society I cannot be thoroughly acquainted with. I judged it best to be a little offish, at first. I said to myself, Princes and Counts and Grand Admirals are very well, but they are not Emperors, and one cannot be too particular about who he associates with.

Baron Wrangel came, also. He used to be Russian Ambassador at Washington. I told him I had an uncle who fell down a shaft and broke himself in two, as much as a year before that. That was a falsehood, but then I was not going to let any man get ahead of me on astonishing and surprising adventures, merely for the want of a little invention. The Baron is a fine man, and is said to stand high in the Emperor's confidence and esteem.

Baron Unger-Sternberg, a boisterous, whole-souled, jolly old brick of a nobleman, came with the rest. He is a man of progress and enterprise—a representative man of the age—what is called a "rustler," in California. He is the Chief Director of the railway system of Russia—a sort of railroad king. In his line he is making things move right along in this country. He has travelled extensively in America. He said, he tried convict labor on his railroads and with perfect success. He says they work well, and are quiet and peaceable. He observed that he employs nearly ten thousand of them now. This appeared to be another call on my resources. I could not let any astonishers pass. I was equal to the emergency. I said we had eighty thousand convicts employed on the railways in California—all of them under sentence of death for murder in the first degree. That closed him out.

We had General Todleben, the famous defender of Sebastopol, during the siege, and many inferior army and also navy officers, and a number of unofficial Russian ladies and gentlemen. Naturally, a champagne blow-out was in order, and was accomplished without loss of life. Toasts and jokes were one thanking the Emperor and the Grand Dukes, through the Governor General, for our hospitable reception, and one by the Governor General in reply, in which he returned the Emperor's thanks for the speech, etc., etc.

I suppose we shall sail now, right away.  
MARK TWAIN.