

**DOMESTIC SCENES IN RUSSIA: IN
A SERIES OF LETTERS
DESCRIBING A YEAR'S
RESIDENCE IN THAT COUNTRY
CHIEFLY IN THE INTERIOR**

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Domestic Scenes in Russia: In a Series of Letters Describing a Year's Residence in That Country
Chiefly in the Interior by R. Lister Venables

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R. LISTER VENABLES

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revised
BY THE

REV. R. LISTER VENABLES, M.A.

SECOND EDITION, REVISED.

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TO
THOSE TO WHOM
THE ORIGINALS OF THESE LETTERS
WERE ADDRESSED,
This Volume
IS MOST AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED BY
THEIR SON.

PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION.

THE republication of the following series of Letters has been suggested by the interest in all questions connected with Russia to which the events of the present time have given rise.

The Letters were written many years ago, but in the interim little change can have taken place in the manners and customs they describe. The character of the people, the principles of the government, the institutions of the country, and the relative positions of the different classes in the community remain unaltered. The book, therefore, in its descriptions of Russian life, its sketches of Russian habits and ideas, and its general picture of the social condition of the people, will convey no incorrect impression of the existing state of things. The peculiar circumstances under which the author visited the country, his position of intimacy in private families, and his constant opportunities of unreserved intercourse with Russians of the highest character and intelligence, afforded him unusual advantages in acquiring authentic information. But when he proceeded to publish his Letters he found it a matter of some little difficulty and delicacy to speak of Russia with truth, and yet without committing any breach of confidence, and without making an ill requital for the unbounded kindness and hospitality for which he was indebted to his friends in that country.

The object of the book is not to discuss the strength or the weakness of Russia, but to relate such incidents as may entertain or interest the reader, and to delineate such national and social characteristics as fell under the author's observation.

At the present moment perhaps the relative positions of the landed noble and the serf may be deemed worthy of some attention. And with reference to this subject especial notice will naturally be directed to the oppressive system of the conscription—hateful to the nobles as a burthensome tax, and dreaded by the peasants as the worst of evils. Looking to the conscription and its effects, we must indeed give both those classes credit for the sternest principles of self-denying patriotism if we suppose war in the abstract to be popular with them. The peasant, it is true, has a fanatical veneration for his Emperor, and the fallacious cry of a Holy War against the Infidel may make some impression on his mind. Yet the Russian serf has far more of the submissive resignation of a fatalist than of the spirit of a hero or a martyr in his character; while his master, the noble, is undoubtedly no enthusiast—on the conservative side at least—in religion or in politics. Yet the Russian is by no means destitute of national pride, and it may reasonably be assumed that the contest with foreign enemies tends to stimulate the loyalty of the people and to check and deaden internal disaffection. The longer the contest lasted the more closely perhaps would the Government and the people of Russia be united, the more powerfully would the national spirit be roused, and the more cheerfully might the country submit to the necessary sacrifices entailed by the war. Yet we may judge how terribly severe those sacrifices must already be, not only from the reports which have occasionally reached us of late, but from the consideration that *men, money, and communications*

—the three first essentials of war—are three most prominent deficiencies in the wide but thinly inhabited regions of Russia.

Mr. Sabouroff's Letter on rural affairs, at the conclusion of this book, will furnish some interesting suggestions on this head. "Time and money," says he (in one word, *capital*), "are generally the very things of which landed proprietors in this country have least at their disposal." And again, "Owing to our total deficiency in the means of internal communication it sometimes happens that while in one part of the country there is a superabundance, another part is suffering from dearth."

It must not be forgotten that Tamboff, the province more especially alluded to by Mr. Sabouroff, is stated by him to be by comparison peculiarly fortunate in the possession of channels of communication. It is, moreover, the very province which was spoken of some years ago in our own parliament as the inexhaustible granary of Russia; and the justice of this character is to a considerable degree borne out by Mr. Sabouroff's descriptions of the great fertility and abundant produce of the district.

The natural inference from all we know of Russia leads us to conclude that the country must already be greatly impoverished, and its resources fearfully strained by the war. Russia therefore cannot but earnestly long for peace. At the same time we must presume that, while on the one hand little sympathy is probably felt with the ambitious designs of the late Emperor, and with the aggressive policy of which the Grand Duke Constantine is now regarded as the champion; yet, on the other hand, no indifference to the national honour of Russia is likely to stain any important class or body in the community.

At the present moment prospects of peace have somewhat