

Victor Vasnetsov

Cathedral of St. Vladimir, Kiev

THE VIRGIN OF THE ALTAR APSE

Mc31 ⁵⁻³/₃₀

THE RUSSIAN ARTS

BY
ROSA
NEWMARCH

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ILLUSTRATIONS

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CHAPTER XIV

THE NEW ART

National sentiment takes new forms. Archeological interests. Individual v. State Patronage. Free intercourse with foreign Schools. The decorative painters of to-day. Retrospective art. Roerikh. Bogaevsky. Chourlianis. Stelletsy. Bakst and Benois. Doboujinsky. Soudeiken. Koustodiev. The Future.

THE latest phases of Russian art—those of the XX. century—are too complicated and changeful to be definitely classified as yet. I intend in this chapter merely to indicate the new movements in painting, and the conditions under which they have come into existence. If I entirely trusted the criticism of the last ten years I should, at this stage, destroy the body of my book, and link the contemporary art of Russia to the chapter upon iconography. But realizing that the injustice of the new generation to the one immediately preceding it is no new story in art or literature, I still believe in the survival of much of the now despised didactic, national and realistic painting of the XIX. century; I see that period joined to the art of to-day, by ligaments of living tissue, which cannot be severed with impunity, however loudly they may be derided by the “young Barbarians” of the newest tendencies,

who are the Russian equivalent of the Parisian “jeunes fauves.” I, who was first introduced to Russian art at the moment when Realism and Nationality were its sword and buckler, who was guided in my studies by that sturdy and *intransigent* champion of the Russian cause, Vladimir Stasov, could not part lightly with the ideals which inspired my first sympathies, and brought my earliest conviction that the artistic destinies of Russia were approaching a great fulfilment. When I returned to the country after a few years' absence, I found myself in what at first sight, appeared to be an entirely strange world of art, inhabited by wholly new ideals. So much so that reading the progressive papers, and hearing the young generation talk, I might have believed that the liberalism of the last quarter of the XIX. century—*our* liberalism and progress—had either never existed or was scrapped and relegated to such dustheaps of art as the Tretyakov Gallery and the Alexander III. Museum. It should, perhaps, have brought home to me the fact that I was old enough to lay myself resignedly on the shelf; but I had had a similar experience in Paris in 1907, when youth was worshipping in a kind of Dervish-frenzy, not only before the works of Gauguin and Matisse, but before those of their disciples, while, strange to say, quite a considerable number of people on the right side of senility and decrepitude were still taking pleasure in visiting the Luxemburg, and spending an hour or two in the society of Courbet, Moreau, Bonnet and Puvis de

Chavannes. So in Russia I, too, continued to frequent what are just now regarded as the official sepulchres of art, and gradually I came to see in what respects the new painting had inherited virtues from the old.

With the works of a group—happily small—of Russian painters who have followed the French “de-formation” of art to the furthest limits of anarchy, I am not concerned here. The last vestige of nationality has been stripped from them, therefore they have no place in a book devoted to Russian art. Moreover it is probable that they are already non-existent, for the shock of war has sent many a boastful cosmopolitan running home to take refuge beneath the despised banner of patriotism; while, after the struggle is over, the world will be too busy upon the work of serious reconstruction to dally with the arts of freak, perversity and exoticism.

Already in 1901, during my second visit to Russia the conflict between the earlier ideals, embodied in the works of the Members of the Society of Travelling Exhibitions, and the new tendency towards the French *decadent* and post-impressionist influences was growing acrimonious. The comic papers had pictures of a colossal Vladimir Stassov, belabouring the pigmy followers of these false gods after the time-honoured fashion of the Old Woman who lived in a Shoe. This effort to smack into the paths of virtue and patriotism, the representatives of a young experimental group of painters was the last effort of this large-hearted, indomitable old patriot on behalf of the



Turner (M. A.)

PAN

Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

cause he had served for over half a century. Stassov knew perfectly well what he was doing, for he was not one of those intellectuals who stagnate after middle life. On the contrary, all contemporary movements in art amused and interested him. But though he thought all things lawful, he was convinced that many things were not expedient for his fellow countrymen. When he said that "if you strip a Russian of his nationality, you leave a man several degrees inferior to other Europeans" he spoke a harsh, but obvious truth. He was not one of those who believed that Russia was already rotten before she was ripe; but just because of his faith in her future destinies, he feared lest contact with some undoubted symptoms of decay and derangement might bring about this catastrophe. Convinced that his country had a great artistic mission to fulfil, he was of opinion that this required the renunciation of many fleeting impulses and alluring caprices which were less harmful to the older civilisations of the West. He mistrusted the *otsebyatinost** of the Russian character. His views, now considered old-fashioned, are nevertheless re-echoed by an acute modern critic, Serge Makovsky, when he says: "Paris as a world capital may indulge in fads and cosmopolitan luxuries—she is rich enough in painters to afford them. Russia must still create her own school. We have not yet conquered the right to go outside our own land. We must not listen to *derniers cris*

* Literally "beside-itselfness."

but to the voice of our Russian past; our history, life, and national genius."

In reality Stasov need not have been alarmed for the fruits of the healthy tree of Russian nationality. What he did not realize was the fact that Russian art needed no longer to dwell in that restricted citadel of *positive* national sentiment, in which it had taken refuge thirty years earlier, in order to defend itself from the encroaches of cosmopolitanism on the one side, and official pressure on the other. The garrison of the fortress, both musicians and painters were in danger, after a time, of perishing of inanition. Had Stasov lived a few years longer, he might, perhaps, have been convinced that the changes coming over the art of Russia were inevitable, that they emanated, in fact, from still deeper movements of the national conscience than those which had awakened the realistic and didactic instincts that saved it from the insincerities of the pseudo-classic and pseudo-Byzantine subjection of the XIX. century. Would he have seen that there were other verities besides those of *les choses vues*? Perhaps not; for there are two clear types of Russian character, and often they never mingle their convictions and emotions, as in the case of Tolstoi and Dostoievsky. As Mr. Maurice Baring has pointed out, the former saw with a clear penetrating glance, only that which lay before his eyes, piercing ruthlessly beneath all superficial trappings and false sentiments. A patriot, devoted to everything that has its roots in the Russian soil,

"all that is not of the soil—anything mystic or supernatural—was totally alien to him." With the Dostoievsky type spirit speaks to spirit, ever striving to appeal to extramundane intuitions. Stasov and the realists of the 'sixties belonged to the Tolstoyan type, although they denied it, not being themselves *Bogoiskately*—God-seekers. But they coincided with that epoch of reform of which Tolstoi was specially representative; which, like most periods of reform, was distinctly anti-mystical.

By the close of the XIX. century a very different spirit began to inform the art of Russia. Naturalism had run its course, and the new sympathies and tendencies bear witness to the mystical passions which lie deep in the heart of most Russians. Like incense in a censor, this mysticism only needs to be agitated by some emotional impulse to give out all its sweet and calming influences. We see the religious idea—interpreted in a very wide sense—in the works of Gé and Kramskoi, who were both God-seekers to a certain extent, although they sought to limit Him to the Man-God. It is evident in the work of Vasnetsov, who stepped in to save religious art from degenerating into materialism; who placed it once more in its old place in the house of God, and gave a new incarnation to the Slavonic Madonna. It is reflected in the tranquil asceticism of Nesterov's pictures with their chaste and saintly figures, which seem to hush and sanctify the landscapes, wherein they stand lost in ecstatic visions. We are aware of it in the

works of Vroubel, long after he gave up ecclesiastical painting, yet still sought to embody his Madonna-dreams in such feminine types as "Primavera" and "Koupava" the enchantress. It is an ever-present element in Scriabin's music, and is heard, though less persistently and clearly, in the compositions of Rebikov and Vassilenko. And in the art of the XX. century it appears in varying degrees, and in many disguises, and, inextricably linked to the national sentiment, it is discernible to those who seek it beneath the superficial coverings of Decadence, Post-impressionism, Futurism and all the other nomenclature, which is to true art, what the jargon of the fashion plates is to essential humanity.

The chief influences that have directed the movements of contemporary art in Russia seem to be threefold. First, there is the fervent interest in, and the accurate study of, archæology; the spirit of research into the primitive sources of culture which was active during the second half of the last century, laying bare whole strata of forgotten things, and leading men's imaginations back through "the wonder and mist of days" to civilisations and polities of which only the faintest echoes remained in the world. We are giants in the study of paleology as compared with our parents. Archaism, then, has entered deeply into Russian thought; so deeply that in painting, music and poetry we find it an active power. The most representative group of painters to-day are all "retrospectivists" in their different ways.

Another factor in the development of recent art is the exchange of an exclusive State patronage for individual initiative. The former was generous, but not liberal, since it aimed at drilling artists for the glory and service of the State. Its assistance was conditional. Patrons such as Tretyakov and Mamantov came forward—in most instances—to help genius upon its own terms. No country in the XIX. century boasted a more generous-hearted and open-handed Mécænas than Mamantov. Moreover in questions of art he saw eye to eye with the artist; a comparatively rare attitude with the patron, who usually wants to lay up treasure in heaven by endowing the public on earth; with the result that the public is occasionally consulted about his benevolent projects, while the artist is merely commissioned. It was with this larger and more sincerely æsthetic desire of helping art that Mamantov started his private Opera Company in Moscow, giving to Feodor Shaliapin his first chance of proving his great gifts, and calling out the activities of a whole group of talented young artists as designers and decorators. The Art Theatre at Moscow grew out of a similar impulse. Naturalism was in favour when Stanislavsky directed the first years of its existence. This did not satisfy the rising school of impressionists whose watchwords were "simplification, synthetisation and stylisation." The Theatre founded by Mme. Kommissarjevsky in Petrograd was intended to meet these needs. Meierholdt's experiment with the Stoudia Theatre, and

the "Ancient" Theatre both represented phases of freer æsthetic advance. With the result that in decorative art, at least, Russia has now begun to repay western Europe with interest for what has been borrowed in the past.

Lastly, there has been that freer intercourse with other nations which could not fail to modify the positive and exclusive realistic nationalism of the "Society of Travelling Exhibitions" and "the Mighty Five" of Music. That phase of art was a necessity of the XIX. century. It was the protest of vigorous young people rebelling against their long subordination to foreign tutelage. The generation to which Repin, Verestschagin, Balakirev and Moussorgsky belonged limited itself in order that young Russia might eventually have a freer choice in art. And the contemporary painter has undoubtedly exercised his freedom in a way that was impossible when only a few talented students were selected and sent at the Government expense to centres where certain ideas were propagated, to be inoculated against germs of individual thought, much in the same way as a suspectedly hydrophobic case is now sent to the Pasteur Institute. The Russian artists of the XX. century have wandered abroad very much as they pleased. They have not copied in droves in the galleries, nor herded in the conservatoires; they have simply passed through this or that studio or classroom—sometimes it must be confessed making an unnecessary noise in their entrance or exit; they have contemplated

only such pictures and listened only to such music as appealed to their taste, or lack of taste; they have had the freedom of which they dreamed. If the result seems at a first glance to be somewhat chaotic, yet it is possible, even for a conservative critic, to discern elements which remain as purely Russian as those he loved and fought for nearly a generation ago. Moreover in stylistic, decorative art it looks as though Russia were building up a great harmonious school in which the technical virtuosity lacking in the works of the "Travellers" will find a place. The Russian genius for artistic co-operation seems well on the way to accomplish this.

In the Second Exhibition of the Post-Impressionists, held at the Grafton Galleries in the winter of 1912-1913, some of the later phases of Russian painting were to be seen. These pictures suffered by being judged in proximity with those belonging to a movement in which, with very few exceptions, the Russian artists represented had taken no part. They were not working with that group which, as Leo Bakst says, "wallows in the nethermost pit of coarseness, and begins by hating all that is old," but for the revival of the archaic national art, of its peculiar beauty and expressive power. But since we know very little of the old pictorial idiom of the Russians, the significance of such works as Roerikh's "Sacred City," Von Anrep's "Fisa playing on his Harp" or Stelletsy's "Tsaritza and her Suite on a Pilgrimage," was completely lost upon us. An indiscriminating

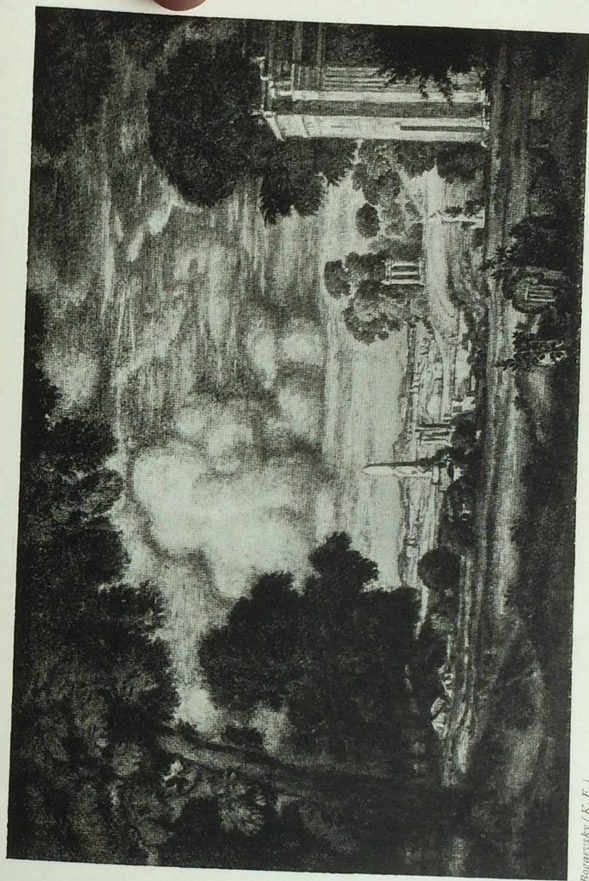
public smiled, and classed them with Picasso's "Le Bouillon Kub," or Lewis's "Mother and Child," lumping them all together as "queer things," or part of "a huge joke"; whereas they were part and parcel of that same artistic tendency that we were running wild over in Diaghilev's mountings of Russian Opera and Ballet.

Peculiarly representative of the "archaic" group is N. K. Roerikh (b. 1874), who had some half-dozen pictures hung in this Exhibition of 1913. He has been aptly described as the direct continuator of the artist of the Stone Age, who with a sharpened flint traced the rude semblance of familiar things upon the walls of his cave-dwelling. He is, however, a great deal more than this. He is a magician who can evoke a sense of remote and pre-historic times. His landscapes are often cold, grey and inhospitable as the scenery of the Quaternary Epoch; desolate contours of ice-worn hills; shores but recently carved into cliffs, and indented by the action of polar seas. Sometimes, as in "Triumph" there is not a trace of vegetation, and the only vestige of human life is a row of sepulchral *tumuli* raised over the remains of some primitive, long-forgotten heroes. Occasionally he uses this sunless scenery as the background for figures that match it in their ruthless stony appearance. When we look at them we recall with a shudder all the old lore of rock idols and stones which cry out, "uttering under the cover of night words which hold the key of mysteries belonging to a remote past." Roerikh has

moods such as might be inspired by Leconte de Lisle's poem "Solvat Seclum." For the most part his pictures, though imaginative, are wholly of this earth; but of this world he paints, as Voloshin says, "only that which is stone-blind, stone-dumb, and stone-deaf." Now and then he makes an excursion into an apocalyptic sphere; as in "The Last Angel" who stands among rolling clouds of fire, while beneath his feet crimson tongues of flame lick up the strong and glorious works of men's hands like leaves in an autumn fire; or again in "War in Heaven," where great masses of angry clouds, holding vague hints of supernatural forms, are sweeping over a lonely, boreal landscape, wherein the pigmy huts of a lake settlement only serve to accentuate the helplessness of mortals under the weight of the catastrophic sky. Such a portentous cloud-army might have heralded that coming of Dchingis Khan and his horde. The "Meeting of Ancient Slav Druids" and "The Red Sail" are full of this epic enchantment. Roerikh designed wonderfully suggestive scenery for Borodin's opera "Prince Igor." He has also made many valuable studies of old Russian architecture. Like most of the younger Russian school he works in several mediums, oils, water-colour and pastel.

Among the "archaics" must be included also Constantine F. Bogaevsky (b. 1872) who, like Shelley and Roerikh, loves "all waste and solitary places." But whereas Roerikh is the interpreter of Northern latitudes, Bogaevsky is spellbound by southern

scenery. Not, indeed, that he is allured by its bright and riant moods; it appeals to him only in its sterile and tragic aspects. The first of these artists is the painter of natural desolation, the second of human devastation. Bogaevsky's landscapes suggest those spots of earth, which have been desecrated by man's cruelty, and poisoned by his wrong thinking and evil doing. Such tracts of land as are haunted by tragic memories, "strange, savage, ghastly, dark, and execrable"; where the hills are mortuary barrows, and earth's crust lies like a winding-sheet over dusty ossuaries of perished and half-forgotten civilisations. Most frequently he paints such aspects of the earth seen in the wan light of an eclipse, or illuminated by some devious comet, or a flock of stars shining cold and gigantic upon a doomed and untenanted world. His thoughts, however, do not "in a dark Cimmerian desert ever dwell." His later pictures, though still sombre, appear less baleful, because of the humanizing presence of trees, which are to this artist what stones are to Roerikh. It has been said that Claude Lorraine is Bogaevsky's spiritual ancestor; but this can only be taken in the broad sense that both are idealists in landscape painting. The Russian for instance, never uses his scenery as the setting for mythological episodes. His great, solitary, wind-tormented trees, are the sole tenants of his landscapes; their melancholy rustling fills his solitudes, softening the asperities of his solemn hills and the dead seas that reflect their rocky escarpments. His art is



Bogaevsky (K. F.)

AN ITALIAN MEMORY

very poignant and ominous. With Bogaevsky we have journeyed as far from Shishkin and Kouindjy as these painters are remote from Poussin and Vorobiev. But still we are on this earth.

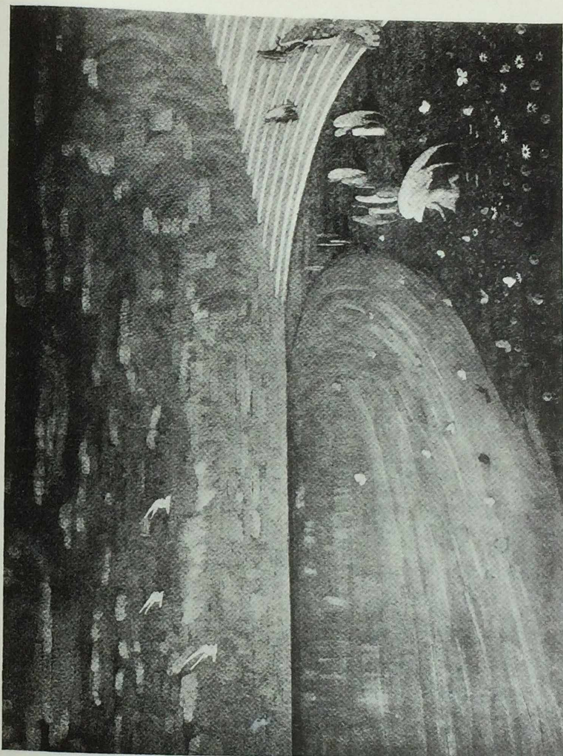
That is hardly the case with the pictures of N. K. Chourlianis (b. 1875). Those strange dream-designs seem to belong to some unfamiliar intermediate region. The dividing line between music and painting is almost obliterated in the work of this strange mystical painter. Moussorgsky in his "Pictures from an Exhibition," tried to make music a clear and positive medium, for the expression of things committed to paint and paper by his friend Hartman; Chourlianis on the contrary attempts the translation of music into terms of pictorial art. In his graphic illustrations of several musical compositions entitled "Allegro, Sonata No. 5"; "Andante, Sonata No. 6"; "Fugue"; "Prelude and Fugue—a Diptych," he is not merely borrowing musical terminology to suggest the meaning of his paintings as Whistler did. His art at that stage was really unable to choose between the domination of music on the one hand, and colour and form on the other. I have never seen these early attempts by Chourlianis to serve two masters, which are described by Serge Makovsky as "visions of impossible landscapes that never existed, which charm us not only by their rhythmical delicacy and profoundly musical mood, but by their qualities as pictures—their fine colour, and the decorative subtlety of their composition."

At this time Chourlianis was as much occupied with music as with painting. He only devoted himself seriously to the latter in 1908, when he had already written two symphonic poems for pianoforte, "The Sea"* and "The Forest," and a few smaller compositions. He was of Lithuanian descent, and in 1907 settled in Vilna, where he immediately became one of the leaders of the movement to revive and stimulate Lithuanian culture.

His dual temperament, combining the seer and the singer, is shown most forcibly in the picture entitled "Rex," which perplexed visitors to the Salon in 1909 as much as those who saw it at the Grafton Galleries in 1913. In this kind of cosmic symphony, the fire which glows at the heart of it forms the centre of an occult world; it is encircled by mysterious shadows, the mounting spires of the heavenly spheres, and peopled by winged messengers. It is a subject such as Scriabin treated musically in his "Prometheus," and we realize that in this painter's soul sounds and visions are practically interchangeable. The very complex schemes of design in which angels, rainbows, processions of stars, and cloud forms, move among hills and valleys, which are not of this planet, is like the working out of some wonderful contrapuntal problem. It is not at all like the esoteric art of Blake, because with all its passionate mysticism it is essentially musical.

Chourlianis died in 1911, and during the last year

* Performed at the "Soirées of Contemporary Music," Petrograd.



PARADISE

Chourlianis (N. K.)

of his life he executed a wonderful series of "Legends"* in *tempera*. He was suffering at the time from a cerebral affection, which caused his premature death. But these works, although they may be hallucinatory, are linked to this plane of existence by the representation of familiar things, seen in unfamiliar aspects. White steps leading from earth to heaven; Noah's Ark resting on the mountain-top beneath the framing arch of prismatic colours; strange temples and obelisks, each one a pharos, giving out a light at its apex which shines wan against the glow of sunset. Even these pictures, although stronger in colour and clearer in form than the earlier works, will not, as Makovsky observes, appeal to "rational or sceptical spirits." Chourlianis would have been the ideal decorator of some splendid theological fane in which Scriabin's "Mystery"† might have been enacted. Had not death deprived Russia of these two gifted artists, the one at the age of twenty-six, the other in his forty-fourth year, their eventual co-operation seemed predestined.

Alexander Stelletsy is another representative of this group, and perhaps the most definitely "retrospective" of them all. He is not concerned with protohistory, but with the traditions of iconography. Many people began by speaking of Stelletsy's works as mere *pastiches* of the old ecclesiastical paintings,

* Exhibited at the "Alliance of Russian Artists," in 1910.

† Scriabin died prematurely in 1915, leaving an unfinished work entitled a "Mystery," which was to be a Symphony of music, words and gestures, combined with a secondary symphony of colour and perfume.

but came to the conviction that they were not doing justice to this artist who has, as it were, distilled all the vital juices from the archaic art, and turned them to account in his own pictures. Others, again, have fought against the influence of his painting, as one fights against a spell, but found themselves yielding at last, as one yields to the sedative impression of some grave monotonous chant, accompanied by the rhythmic swinging of censors. But even in yielding, all do not find this condition of soul sweet or ecstatic. Benois says: "Stelletsy's art is a lament over our latter-day culture, over all that is dying or dead in us." And he adds that personally he finds himself a stranger to Stelletsy's paradise and saints, and to his Old Russia and Byzantium: "it is a terrible Russia; monstrous to us of the present day; Byzantium, city of death in life, of lethargy, and a kind of spiritual quiescence. . . . A gloomy, mystic, cabalistic art."

In his decorative work for the stage Stelletsy calls up the same atmosphere half-mysticism, half-wizardry, and always pervaded by the dark austerity of Byzantine monachism. His scenery for Ostrovsky's "Snow Maiden" (*Sniegouochka*) transformed that charming vernal idyl, smiling and tearful as the spring itself, into a Vision of Judgment. He is better suited in the spirit and period of Count Alexis Tolstoi's drama "Tsar Feodor," for which he carried out a series of "make-ups"—stern images of saints, grim and forbidding magicians—besides the actual

scenery. The Tretyakov Gallery now contains the originals of his illustrations to "The Epic of the Army of Igor," on which he spent many years, the most astonishing quality of which is their fidelity to the past; they impress us less as an archaic revival than as the authentic thing.

Stelletsy began as a sculptor, but being a born colourist and decorator, he soon went on to experiment with polychrome plaster casts and processions of figures in bas-relief against a coloured background. His work in this respect is still archaic in the best sense. Benois—who thoroughly appreciates the genius of Stelletsy, while shrinking from the visions which it invokes—sums up this artist's work in these words: "he does not merely resurrect costumes and characters, but teaches us how to see nature through the eyes of past generations, to whom the world was more fantastic, more alluring, more sinful and terrifying than it is to us." Stelletsy is certainly one of the outstanding decorative artists of the day.

With the work of Leon Bakst (b. 1866), and Alexander Benois (b. 1870), we are more familiar in this country, since they are the scenic artists *par excellence* of Diaghilev's productions of opera and ballet in Paris and London; the creators of the wonderful art of many moods and many colours; subtle, passionate and sensuous—Russian art in "its holiday attire," out to allure and electrify the sophisticated Parisian and the simpler minded Britisher—an art skilfully and audaciously prepared for the purpose by such a past

master as Diaghilev, but which, it must be observed in passing, would certainly prove as startling to the Russian general public as to the majority of us Western Europeans. For in this dazzling, seductive, and not too-conscientious mode of production; this ruthless cutting of operas to throw particular characters into relief; this conversion of opera into ballet, and building of theatres within theatres; this disregard of the ideals of dead composers, justified by the brilliant success abroad of these perversions of their works—there is much that would shock the steady going, average patron of music and the drama in Russia itself. This, however, does not detract from the merits of Bakst's art, the splendour of his settings and the fascination of his costumes, wrought "in blood and fire," which would certainly eclipse the modest authentic dresses of a Stelletsy.

Bakst's retrospectivity knows no limits of period or country. His outlook is far more varied—and possibly more superficial—than that of the artists whose works I have been reviewing. Voloshin says that whereas for Bakst the archaic is only a large room in a museum of antiquities, for the others it is the atmosphere without which they could not exist. The excavations carried on by Evans early in the century in the island of Crete stirred the imagination of the Russians. More particularly the discovery in the Palace of Knossus of a representation of King Minos—much resembling a North American Indian with a head-dress of feathers—seemed like



THE PLAYER ON THE GUSSLEE
By D. S. Stelletsy

a first palpable archæological link between the mythical Atlantean tradition, and the world of to-day. One of Bakst's most striking flights of imagination is his "Terror Antiquus"—an Aphrodite standing serene and unmoved amid a fearful terrestrial catastrophe. Her hair is elaborately braided, and she clasps a dove to her bosom. The poet Vacheslav-Ivanov interpreting this picture reveals all its historic symbolism; but to the ordinary spectator its central idea will probably be the triumph of feminine vanity; the complacency which no cataclysm has power to disturb, which we see so strangely and forcibly illustrated at the present moment where one column of our newspapers describes and advertises every sort of extravagant luxury, while another contains the description of cities ruined, of death and mutilation in horrible forms, of women crazed by brutality, and children dying of starvation by the roadside. But though Bakst's "Terror Antiquus" may fortuitously appear a cogent comment on the callousness of the eternal feminine, nothing could be further from his art than the didactic intention. I apologize for the mere suggestion. He is not always in this antique and philosophical mood. Roerikh may worship stones and Bogaevsky love trees, but Bakst's art is human; he delights in men and women and the clothes they wear. His drawing with all its vivacity has an almost classical severity and purity of outline, while he uses colour as the medium of psychological expression in a way no other artist has ever done before. Sometimes

his sultry colour-effects flaunt wickedness in our faces; at other times they are subtly malignant. His finest work for the stage is probably the scheme he worked out for the ballet "Scheherezade," although in "Cleopatra" the contrasts are stronger and more startling.

The decorations for "Le Pavillon d'Armide" are generally regarded as Benois' scenic masterpiece. Here he reproduced the "grand art" of the XVIII. century, the polish, the graces and mannerisms of Versailles, to the manner born. One might suppose that he had made the period the special study of a life time. But later on we find this amazingly versatile artist producing a Chinese setting for Stravinsky's ballet-opera "The Nightingale," with the same consummate ease. Benois masters new spheres of nationality, and every variety of period, realising such novel effects of colour, and giving such point and humour to his pictorial commentary on the play or the ballet he is illustrating that he takes his place among the most gifted of Russia's many gifted *décorateurs*. He has not the glowing and passionate colour-expressiveness of Bakst, but he understands equally well the need of concurrence between line, tint and dramatic intention.

Another representative of the decorative group is E. Lanséré (Lanceray) who combines with the firmly knit lines of his almost ascetic and graphic art a certain degree of rococo romanticism. He has recently come into prominence with his decorations (including

the Legend of Persius) for the residence of M. Nekrassov in Moscow, and his strikingly original scenery for the production of Calderon's drama "St. Patrick's Purgatory."

Mstislav Doboujinsky (b. 1875) is a draughtsman of great merit and peculiar imagination. He feels the fascination and solitude of the city as other artists live under the spell of the sea and the forest. His ocean is a boundless expanse of roof-tops; he is the poet of the sky-scraper and the suburban dwelling. Only we feel that in all his dwellings—indifferent as they may outwardly appear to the comedies and tragedies enacted within their walls—there are haunting memories. Doboujinsky's subjects are not prosaic in treatment for he combines with his love of bricks and mortar a paradoxical touch of demonism which was revealed in his decorations for Remisov's mystery comedy "The Devil at Work." More charming was his scenery for "A Month in the Country," a play by Tourgeniev, showing a Russian country house of the 'thirties or 'forties. Doboujinsky has painted in Holland and England. A picture of his "The Tower Bridge" (*gouache*) is in the possession of M. Oustimov, Petrograd. He works chiefly in water-colour and occasionally in pastel.

S. Soudeikin is a versatile artist who paints ballet scenes, pastorals and stage landscapes, all conceived in a vein of sportive allegory, and reminiscent of the first half of last century. In his pictures Cupids, lovers, lambs, poets in Byronic cloaks, ladies in

hoops and powder, meet and mingle like perfumes in a potpourri. His landscapes, however, are not invariably *paysages sentimentales*, but often quite realistic, and his trees in particular are sympathetic, living things. Into his fields he loves to introduce a few Dresden china figures of human beings and animals, as though half-ashamed of these incursions into naturalism. His still-life shows a charming feeling for colour; and while his human beings are artificial, the moods of his china men and women and the shadowy tenants of his tapestry backgrounds are curiously human. Soudeikin painted the scenery for Maeterlinck's "Sister Beatrice," for the Kommissariievsky Theatre, and for various productions for the Theatre Zimin at Moscow, as well as for the Little Theatre. He works in oils, water-colours, pastel and tempera, and his pictures are much in demand among connoisseurs.

Other painters belonging to the modern "retrospective" and "stylistic" group are: Somov, a Petrograd artist, with a tendency to reflect the French art of the XVIII. century; Petrov Vodkin, inclined to mysticism and influenced by Gauguin; I. Bilibin, an "archaist," who is becoming known to us in this country by his imaginative illustrations of Russian fairy tales.

The Tretyakov Gallery now contains some of the most characteristic works by Michael Alexandrovich Vrubel (1856-1905) to whom reference is also made in Chapters XII. and XIII. Here is the "Demon"—the Demon of Lermontov's poem—for which he

made many studies before he threw himself with feverish energy into the completion of the finished picture, dated 1910, on which he sometimes worked for fourteen hours at a stretch. On the summit of Kazbec lies the long sinuous body of the Demon, stretched at full length upon his folded wings, which are gorgeous as a rich brocade with their many tinted peacock eyes; and from out this mass of shade and colour peers the proud, evilly inspired face of Lermontov's "unhappy demon." Here, too, is the haunting "Night," (1900)—Pan, or a satyr, appearing through a tangled mass of crimson thistles to a group of horses shaggy and brown as himself; and also the famous picture of the crouching "Pan," "seated in Nature's cove, and one with Nature evermore." But the beautiful "Swan Queen" rising from the water in her billowy white robes that are half feathers, half white samite, "mystic, wonderful," and that amazing picture "Lilac," together with many other strikingly original things, are in private collections. Vrubel was a decorator of genius, not easy to place in the world of art; a painter of whose work it is impossible to give any adequate idea in a paragraph or a page.

N. Tarkhov tends more distinctly towards naturalism. In some of his early pictures he paints the gay life of the Paris Boulevards, the booths in the Faubourg St. Martin, and so on. Later, he made motherhood and childhood his theme, and his studies of children asleep or at play are tenderly felt without the

least sentimentality. Few artists understand and paint cats better than Tarkhov; not the haughty mysterious feline beauty, who condescends to dwell with mortals for a time, but "the harmless necessary cat," who will sport with a child until both are tired, and then purr itself to sleep in its playfellow's arms. This artist is a fine colourist who has learnt his technique from the Gallic outdoor impressionistic school.

While M. Larionov is the chief leader of the revolutionary group of "young barbarians," who protest against the polished æstheticism of the Petrograd *décorateurs* by adopting a rustic simplicity and roughness of method, Boris Koustodiev (b. 1878) shows considerable affinity with the older school of painters—the Society of Travellers. Not, of course, in their didactic tendency, which has long since died out, but in his frank choice of subjects which are purely national. He loves the same themes which inspired Perov and his disciples—groups of peasants, ecclesiastical types, village festivals. But Koustodiev's point of view is very different, and also his methods of painting, for he paints gay scenes from popular life, and paints them with that love of clear, bright, audacious colour, the secret of which was unknown to the Russian artists of last century. Koustodiev was a pupil of Repin and assisted him in his great official picture "The Sitting of the Imperial Council of State" (1902). In his portraits—which are numerous, and mostly interesting—he is the continuator of Repin and Serov; but he does not quite rank as their equal

as a "professional" portrait painter, for he does not, like these artists, almost invariably surmount the difficulties of representing a subject imposed upon rather than selected by him. Like all his generation he has been drawn into the great decorative movement which absorbs the best contemporary talent of the country. Koustodiev has painted comparatively little outside his native land, where he still finds out of the way districts that offer him attractive material in the way of colour and life. His best works are the series of village fairs and festivals, in which he transmits sympathetically and vividly realistic impressions of the Russian crowd; a bright kaleidoscopic movement shown against a rather stiff decorative background of wooden houses and trees. This artist draws in the sense that Serov drew, and is therefore regarded by "De-formatists" as being somewhat academic. There is no artist in Russia who shows himself more awake to the various movements taking place around him; fortunately he has also a strong individuality, so that he has never allowed himself to be drawn into a narrow realism on the one hand, or the artistic anarchy of "les jeunes fauves" on the other.

Russian art has never been pursued quite wholeheartedly for art's sake; it has always been influenced by "movements" social and religious. This may be a confession of its weakness, but it is a predominant feature which cannot be ignored. In the pictures dating from the last half of the XIX. century, we find national sentiment, intimate pathos, dramatic

feeling, sincerity and loftiness of purpose—but nowhere that passionate preoccupation with technical methods, that effort after mature craftsmanship that is so characteristic of French art. Repin approached it; Serov and Levitan were both masterly in their different ways; but Russian art has not developed along these lines. The “stylistic” group of the XX. century have acquired the secrets of colour, and are *virtuosi* in many directions; but again we see them dominated by the influence of various “isms”—mysticism and even “barbarism.” Its future still seems to lie in the Russian power of intelligent assimilation of methods, and in the strong national individuality that for the last thousand years has turned these assimilated elements to its own use, stamping them with its own image and superscription. The folk still looms large in the art of Russia, it is still the well-head from which music and painting, and the choreographic art can draw unexhausted stores of fresh and living inspiration; but the folk is no longer limited to a few millions of recently liberated serfs, whose pitiable lot lay like a dark shadow over the art and literature of the last century. The folk now means all Russia, past, present and to come. The swing of the pendulum has brought Russian thought back from the realism and utilitarianism born of the problems which followed upon the Emancipation in 1861, from the pitying worship of the newly-created “People,” and the disillusionment, which led to Nihilism, to the older spiritual

view of things. The “Travellers” were too exclusively occupied with the problems of contemporary life; the painters of to-day are, perhaps, too greatly absorbed in retrospect; but on the whole, it is well that the modern movement in art should keep pace with the national life. It is infinitely important that it should not wholly outstrip it, or become alienated from it. Against this danger, there is a great protective power in this awakened interest in the past, which is, as Serge Makovsky points out, not merely “a play of fancy,” but a result of that “tendency to tradition”—that is an essential feature of the Russian character. If it manifests itself rather excessively in some of the painters, of whom I have written in this chapter, we may feel sure that the war, among many other beneficent activities, will purge the new Art of any retrograde, affected, or superstitious tendencies and leave it a clear and burning testimony to the beauty of the Russian soul.