

CATHARINE II. OF RUSSIA.

In the year 1762 Catharine became Empress of Russia. Around her were gathered the chief conspirators, men coarse, ill educated and risen from the lowest ranks of the people, in whose society she complained that she could find no pleasure, yet to whose aid she was indebted for all she was. Her subjects were discontented and rebellious. She visited Moscow, the ancient seat of the Czars, but her life was threatened, and she hastily returned to St. Petersburg. Even there she found herself surrounded by conspiracies against her power and her person. The European monarchs looked coldly upon the parvenu Empress who now wielded the uncertain sceptre, which she was believed to have won by a barbarous and dreadful crime; and from her dangerous eminence, Catharine beheld herself everywhere surrounded by a thousand terrors which might have appalled any nature less resolute than her own.

Danger, however, only seemed to draw out her wonderful genius for command, and her fierce, unhollowed ambition guided her to a course of policy that made her the most potent monarch of her time. She crushed discontent at home with unparalleled vigor. The ancient nobility of Russia, who hated and despised the German usurper and her low born courtiers, at length became her willing slaves. The countless legions of bishops and monks, whom she had offended and treated with ignominy, when they had ceased to be useful to her, hid themselves, overawed and helpless, in their cells. Her splendid victories and contests won for her a popularity among her subjects such as none of her predecessors but Peter the Great had possessed. Abroad, the monarchs of Europe were soon overmastered by her imperious will. Frederick the Great courted her favor. Joseph II of Austria became a willing instrument in accomplishing her most unscrupulous designs. George III of England sank into her ally. Dissolute Louis XV vainly strove by feeble diplomacy to check the stately progress of the new Semiramis. Catharine became the master intellect of Europe.

Of all her vast designs, that upon which her chief energies were expended was to make Russia acknowledged as one of the civilized nations of the time. As Phillip of Macedon had labored with fierce, untiring zeal to make his native kingdom Greek, so Catharine lived to make Russia European. She was resolved to be received as a peer into that assemblage of crowned heads whose haughty caste was still inclined to look down upon the barbarous empire which the great Peter had brought into notice; and she prepared to take an equal place among the Hapsburgs, the Bourbons and the Guelfs.

If she had not been an Empress, Catharine might perhaps have won a higher glory as an author. Her love for letters was intense and lasting. She sought the correspondence and friendship of almost every eminent literary man of the day; she wrote to Voltaire in terms of sincere admiration, and strove in vain to allure him to St. Petersburg. With Diderot she was more successful, and the philosopher condescended to give a portion of his time to a visit to the faithful Empress. Their conversations were long and philosophical; and Diderot seems to have found a far more agreeable friend in Catharine than the sarcastic Voltaire in his admirer and persecutor, Frederick. Catharine was always profuse in her liberality to literary men. She purchased Diderot's library at a considerable sum, in order to provide a dowry for his daughter, allowing him to retain the use of it for life, and settled upon him a pension as her librarian. She wished to induce the historian Robertson, by munificent offers, to write an account of her reign. Her court was filled with men of intelligence and learning, of science and art. Every form of mental excellence found in her a friend; she established academies or societies of learning and science, and lavished her revenues in seeking to awaken the intellect of her people. Poets, musicians, philosophers, actors and artists sprang up under her careful patronage; and she succeeded, at last, in making St. Petersburg illustrious as one of the intellectual centers of Europe.—Harper's Magazine.

CHINESE RIVER HOUSES.—Approaching the river, we go on board of a boat, which is rowed by a woman and a girl. We have ducks and chickens for fellow-passengers, walking about, and a rooster clapping his wings and crowing on the roof over our heads—a boat, which is the only home these women have; where they eat, sleep, and work; in which children are born; which is their home from the cradle to the grave. We go up the river through a great fleet of boats; such curious craft that we may as well give up attempting to describe them. A great many are called "flower boats." They are hotels, which we can hire if we wish to give a dinner to our friends. The Chinese have no parlors or drawing-rooms in their houses, and when they entertain their friends they hire one of these craft and have a dinner. Here is one boat with a party in full swing. A puff of wind brings the fragrance of the dinner, cooking at the bow—they are to have onions and roast chicken, and probably forty or fifty other dishes. Looking in at the windows as we glide past, we see the company, behold the fittings up of the boat, the walls in vermilion and gold, astral lamps overhead, the party in the centre of the cabin, and half a dozen "flower-girls" around them; not that the girls have flowers to sell, but they are hired as ornaments—are quite good-looking, have their hair done up in the primest jug-handle style, and their cheeks bright with rouge. The Chinese are fond of music (music that is sweet and melodious to their ears, would make us stuff cotton into our own); two girls with instruments somewhat like guitars; a man with a one-stringed fiddle; another with a kettle-drum; a boy with a gong—that is the band! This is a genteel party, and they eat, drink tea, play cards, tell stories, listen to the music, and so enjoy themselves till far into the night—the gentleman pays the boatman for the use of the boat, and has no trouble the next morning in clearing up the parlors and drawing-room.—E.

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Being manufacturers of our own Lead and
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