

# The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the  
Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

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THE FOLDING ICON OF THE CITY OF ST. PETERSBURG, ENTRUSTED TO GENERAL KUROPATKIN IN CONNECTION WITH HIS CAMPAIGN IN MANCHURIA.



ST. NICHOLAS, THE THAUMATURGIST.

IN ON HIS DEPARTURE TO ·



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## RUSSIAN ICONS.

BY THE EDITOR.

RUSSIA is little known in the United States. We know something of the history of Russia and of its government. We possess maps that show the enormous extent of that country, and statistics give the necessary information concerning its inhabitants, their traits and their general condition. Further, there are some Russians living among us, but they are not typical and do not represent the people. Most of them have left their homes because they were dissatisfied with the conditions, and not a few among them are Nihilists. There have been Russians of the nobility visiting our country. Russian naval officers stayed in this country to see the perfection of Russian men-of-war built in American shipyards. Most of them were noblemen who cut an elegant figure in society and made many friends among the rich, but they, too, are not typical of the people. Of Russian literature Tolstoy's works are best known, but he, though in a certain sense a true Russian, is too unique and too original to give us a correct idea of the character of the Russian nationality. The peasant who forms the great majority of Russian people is a good-natured and pious man. True, he is illiterate and credulous, but if he is misguided it is certainly not his fault. He intends the best and is willing enough to submit to authority, spiritual as well as secular. There are scarcely more devout Christians in the world than in Russia, and their Christianity has been less modified by modern ideas than anywhere in the world, perhaps only the Armenian and Coptic Churches excepted. The latter are now recognised as of great importance for the sake of historical investigations as to the views that prevailed among the early Christians. Russian Christianity upon the whole still represents the views that prevailed in

the Greek Empire soon after the establishment of the State Church and the official introduction of the veneration of Saints. The Reformation did not reach Russia, and so the iconolatry, or reverence



ST. ALEXANDER NEVSKI.



ST. NICHOLAS, THE THAUMATURGIST.



ST. MICHAEL, THE CHIEF OF HOSTS.



ST. GEORGE, THE VICTORIOUS.

shown to pictures, is still one of the characteristic features of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Our frontispiece represents one of the most famous Russian Icons, which is credited by many pious believers with miraculous



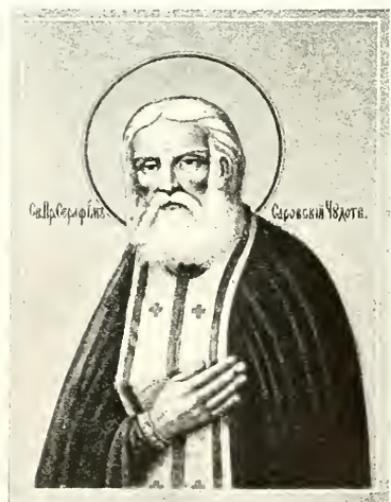
THAUMATURGICAL ICON OF TVERSKI,  
ATHOS.



THE KAZAN ICON.



THAUMATURGICAL ICON OF THE KAZAN  
CATHEDRAL, ST. PETERSBURG.



ST. SERAPHIM OF SAROVO.

powers. It is the famous folding Icon of St. Petersburg and shows in the center one of the most notable Russian Saints, St. Alexander

Nevski, who, in his worldly capacity, was a sovereign that reigned at Novgorod. He waged a victorious war with Sweden and gained a decisive victory on the banks of the River Neva in 1240, hence the people called him the hero of Neva, or in Russian, *Nevski*, under which name he became endeared to Russian patriots and may be considered as the most popular Saint in the Czar's domain.

On the left hand wing of the St. Petersburg folding Icon we see St. Alexis, who happens to be the special patron Saint of Kuropatkin, whose Christian name is Alexis.

On the right hand wing we see another famous Russian Saint, who holds the first place after St. Alexander Nevski in the hearts of good Russian Christians, St. Nicholas, the Miracle Worker, or, as he is more commonly called in Greek, "the thaumaturgist." Above the centerpiece appear the three busts of the Holy Family, Christ, the Virgin Mary, and St. Joseph. A Russian cross surmounts the whole, and incidentally we call attention to the fact that the Russian cross possesses a slanting beam which represents the seating plug on which crucified persons used to be placed, a feature which, for æsthetical reasons, has been omitted in the Western Church or is supplanted by a footrest.

Icons are very extensively used in Russian worship, so much so that every Russian regiment has its patron saint whose Icon is kept in the church of the garrison which in war time may be a tent after the fashion of the Jewish Tabernacle, and is in charge of a clergyman, a deacon and other functionaries who attend to the usual religious duties. The day of the regiment's Saint is celebrated by the regiment, and clergymen carrying a crucifix are sometimes present in battle to encourage the wavering and to comfort the wounded and dying. All people who have a desire to be orthodox, especially the people of the peasantry, carry on a little chain or string around their necks underneath their clothes, a small cross or some sacred image given them on the day of baptism. The Icon of a Saint is tacitly assumed to assure the presence of the Saint himself and so, since the Saint is believed to be a miracle-worker, most of the Icons are credited with miraculous powers. The logic of the argument is primitive but on its own premises quite consistent, and the truth is that an unshaken faith in miracles sometimes under certain circumstances rendered possible the most extraordinary events.

We here reproduce a number of the most famous Icons of Russian Saints and Arch-angels, among whom St. Michel, St. George, St. Seraphim of Sarovo, St. Nicholas, St. Alexander Nev-

ski, and above all the Theotokos, i. e., "the Mother of God," play an important part.

Among the Theotokos pictures, an ancient Icon of the Tverski Monastery of Mt. Athos (a place sacred since the days of Greek paganism) is looked up to with special reverence and has therefore become a prototype of innumerable copies distributed throughout Russia. Though the features of the face vary, the attitude and the general expression are the same in almost all of them.

Much can be said for as well as against icons. Protestantism and, more so, Puritanism, reject them as pagan, while both the Greek and Roman Catholic Churches have sanctioned their use. We abstain here from discussing the subject, and would, from the standpoint of the impartial investigator of facts, only indicate that they play a most significant part in the history of civilisation. One cannot deny that in spite of their indubitably pernicious influence among the superstitious, they have been the means of great achievements, especially in religion and art.

[We learn from the daily papers that the Icon of the Kazan Cathedral has been stolen. The thieves, a man and a woman, are under arrest. They were caught at Nijni-Novgorod, but while the jewels are recovered the picture itself, it appears, has been burned.]