THE WORLD OF LONDON.*

OUR English cousins, more particularly, that representative portion of them whose dwelling is London, seem to be undergoing a persistent series of social inquisitions. After the bold, not to say brutal, frankness of "Max O'Rell" came the equally frank and cutting reminiscences of "A Foreign Resident;" and now another pseudonymous foreigner takes upon himself the rôle of public gossip. *The World of London* is, in its English version, at least, an inoffensive volume (the original has been expurgated and re-expurgated to meet the un-Parisian literary ideals of London and New York); but its pictures of social life, if at all truthful, must have been inspired by actual knowledge, obtained *in propria persona*, after the manner of the *Pencillings* of the lamented Willis. The tone of the book is in the main kindly, and is always bright and chatty. Sometimes careful expurgation has not eliminated the shaft of sarcasm, but on the whole there is little that the victims of Count Paul Vasili's instantaneous photography could object to in his representations. The series begins with the royal family; goes on through court and cabinet; takes up the men of the day as seen in politics, journalism, literature, painting, diplomacy, and last, but not least, "sport;" touches lightly, but with keen aim, on home and foreign politics; passes from the "middle class" to "society" proper; and gives us a bird's-eye view of existence at a typical English country-house. All this with a pleasant fund of reminiscence and anecdote. The present life of Queen Victoria is contrasted with the earlier days when

> she gave garden parties in Buckingham Palace to more than six hundred guests; when on rainy afternoons every one had to beguile the time by narrating some amusing anecdote; or when her Majesty, with her hair powdered, excited universal admiration at a famous fancy ball by her graceful dancing of a minuet; or when she carelessly carried off the keys of the official despatch-boxes when she went for a ride, and lost them on the road, so that a squad of policemen had to be sent to search for them, to the amusement of all London.

The Prince of Wales is compared to Shakespeare's Henry V:

> If, on the one hand, the Prince of Wales is a man of a former age, he is, on the other, perfectly modern; he is a Parisian living in London; he loves the Boulevard, and conversation full of wit and repartee, in which he plays his part to admiration. He is admittedly the finest and first gentleman of the United Kingdom, and if he claims, as he is said to do, the title of the first gentleman in Europe, that claim, though great, is not excessive. His courtesy is exquisite, his grace of manner is irresistible; he throws himself entirely into the matter that for the moment occupies his attention, and makes each favored person to whom he speaks believe that he is an object of special consideration. But the future king of England is chiefly distinguished from many of his countrymen by his complete freedom from arrogance. His friends say that with them he forgets his rank, but it is only on condition that they remember it; and his familiarity with others is not theirs with him.

The chapter on "The Court" is made up of vignettes like these (the quality of such a book can best be shown by quotation):

> Lord Spencer, the Viceroy of Ireland, is chiefly distinguished by an astonishing beard—a beard so gigantic that his friends think it funny to say he can hide himself behind it, and say he is not at home.
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> Lady Spencer, a perfect type of the *grand dame*, is called "Spencer's Faery Queene" by her Irish admirers. She is lively, clever, and amiable; she dresses to perfection, wears marvellous jewels, is well read, and a delightful talker.
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> Gladys, Lady Lonsdale, is one of the loveliest women in London. She takes an interest in everything—arts, science, politics; surrounds herself with clever people; and, regardless of their rank, admits Bohemians of the pen and pencil. She has taste, some reading, and very high aspirations—indeed, a varnish of all things; and I should no more allow myself to criticise the depth of her knowledge than the size of her feet.
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> The Countess of Dalhousie is a very beautiful and bewitching woman, but she has one great defect: she is not natural. All her gestures, all her movements are artificial. Her want of tact, a social virtue which means keeping one's self in the background, has alienated many of her friends.
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> Lord Alington, whom his friends call "Bunny," bursts into a room like a gust of wind; he is the life and soul of society; he is gay, happy, sprightly, never without a bit of news, quite equal to inventing some if there is none to hand, and a capital story-teller. He is an inveterate sportsman, and divides his time between the turf, where he has hitherto won neither money nor popularity, and the meritorious task of amusing his friends. Disraeli called him "the champagne of society."

The future historian of the Victorian era with such data at hand cannot complain of lack of material for depicting the social color of the times.

Of Count Paul Vasili's opinions on foreign political matters, perhaps it is enough to say that his letters are dated from St. Petersburg, and that he believes firmly in the destiny of Russia to absorb India.

* The World of London (La Société de Londres). By Count Paul Vasili. Harper & Bros. 25c.