TALACHINO: A HOME FOR RUSSIAN FOLK ART: BY K. R. CAIN

FEW things are more intimately expressive of the inner life and ideals of a nation than the art of its peasant people. It is they who shelter and preserve the old traditions of craftsmanship—in their hand-woven garments, their sturdy home-made furniture, their simple pottery, carved chests, in all the primitive yet appealing decorations which stamp with individuality the humblest objects of fireside, workshop and farm.

The realization of this fact has made many a country turn from the elaborate, over-polished products of modern civilization back to the home of its simpler country and village folk as the guardians of a beauty which the cities in their commercialism have lost. And often the result has been a revival and stimulation of peasant crafts and industries which might otherwise, through lack of opportunity and encouragement, have been gradually lost.

Among the art revivals of this nature which have occurred throughout Europe during the last few years, one of the most interesting is in Russia. At Talachino, the property of the Princess Tenichew, a remarkable art center has been established, where Russian folk art, in old and new forms, has found the inspiration it needed for fresh growth and blossoming. Indeed, the work has been developed along such radical lines that it is regarded by connoisseurs as containing the elements of a new national style.

In this unique center the Princess Tenichew has collected the best art of the world for the instruction and inspiration of every peasant on her estate, and every worker in her studios. The whole atmosphere of the place is that of a family group, where people of all classes meet for a common purpose. Thousands of laborers and students come to Talachino, which has thus become a place of considerable importance in the popularity and development of the surrounding district. All who bring the mark of talent, all who are earnest and eager in their efforts to perfect their own

THE FAÇADE OF THE Teremok WHICH HOUSES TALACHINO'S LIBRARY: THE DESIGNER IS MALIOUTINE, ART DIRECTOR OF THE SCHOOL; RUSSIAN FONDNESS FOR ORNAMENTATION IS HERE EVIDENT.
particular craft, find welcome there—students, scientists, workers in wood and metal, weavers and dyers, artists and craftsmen of every kind. At their service are the museum and the library, exhibits of the work of modern painters, the newest artistic and technical publications, while the contests and expositions are open to all. And while much is taught by the example of great achievements in each branch of art and industry, the creative rather than the imitative spirit is fostered, and the individuality of the student is encouraged toward self-expression along original lines.

To organize such an art center as Talachino requires not only a sincere love of the work but also a wide artistic and technical knowledge, initiative and creative ability, and infinite patience in carrying all the details to completion. Fortunately for the undertaking, Princess Tenichev possesses all these qualities in remarkable degree, for she has lived many years in the world of art and has carried to successful issue several important enterprises.

In the Russian Museum at St. Petersburg—or rather Petrograd, as we must call it now—are many tributes to her activity. A certain section of aquarelles was a gift from the Princess. It was through her efforts that the Museum has work by Vroubel, Blomsted, Ernfeld, Enkel, Purvitt, Mme. Yakountchekof—a fine collection constantly enriched with new acquisitions. She helped to create the review "Mir Iskousstra," and encouraged many promising artists. Her own museum, which was formerly at Talachino, has been transferred to Smolensk, and with its exhibitions of applied arts and ethnography is the joy of the old city. Everything in it—embroideries, carvings, ikons and medals—is rich in both scientific and artistic value. Now is the collection limited to ancient objects, for it includes much incomparable work of the new masters, such as Lalique, Falize, Gallay and Colonna.

The Princess, of course, has many able and energetic helpers at Talachino, and foremost among them stands Malioutine, the Master Craftsman and Art Director of the studios. She was one of the first to appreciate his talent and to see the disadvantages under which the artist had labored. Confiding her studios to his direction, she gave him free rein to realize all the caprices of his rich creative fancy. That of which Vasnetzof dreamed in his architecture, and Mme. Yakountchekof in her toy structures, is here realized, yet nothing borrowed from either. All is Malioutine—at the same time purely rustic Russian, new, fantastic, picturesque. It is impossible to assert where begins the individual imagination, or ends the grace of the old Muscovite spirit. Malioutine, by the peculiar nature of his talent, by his clearly expressed personality, reveals only one master more original and powerful than himself—Gallen, the Finn, the son of his nation, of epic legend. Both were
among the first to show forth the art of the future—northern art with all the inexhaustible beauty of the people, their customs and character, their laws and logic.

It was Malioutine who designed the original structure which contains the library of the Talachino school. This teremok—old Russian for “little castle”—is a spacious two-story building, with brick sub-structure, situated about a mile and a half from the home of the Princess, and surrounded by a palisade, or tall fence, of artistic design, the entrance gate strangely cut, showing through its openwork the approach to the building, from perron to summit. This gateway, opening into the forest, merges into the pine branches against the dazzling background of deep snow or sunlight beyond, according to the season. All around are scattering pine trees and interspersing birches, with their delicate white trunks; below extends a perspective of fields, cut by ravines.

The somber beams of the teremok itself are circled with fantastic girdles; multicolored ornaments flash and gleam, bas-reliefs, swans with wings uplifted, sunbursts, undulating wavelike lines, bands, stars, squares—designs reflecting every sort of animate and inanimate life. Certain details of the building astonish by their unexpectedness, their picturesque simplicity, the boldness of their composition. One’s consciousness is saturated with this peculiar beauty, very old, Slav to a supreme degree, ingenious, barbaric, yet naive and homely. Inside is a curious porcelain stove made after Malioutine’s design; wonderful wooden settees and a sculptured stairway baluster of curious pattern. Equally successful and of very fine and positive decorative taste is a doorway executed after the design of the Princess Tenichef.

The theater as well as the library was designed by Malioutine, and is a long, one-story building with slanting roof, windows close together and framed in sculptured wood. Every free space on the walls is covered with wood carving in relief, resembling the ornaments of certain boats on the Volga and other northern rivers, an ageless art which survives to the present day. In
the far past without false sentiment, free from preconceived tendencies—looks simply with the eye of the seeker and diviner, as a poet who loves the mystery of popular beauty.” He continues, “It would be difficult to say precisely to whom is due the honor of priority in this new way.”

Then follow names scarcely heard in our country—Swartz, with his series of illustrations and pictures borrowed from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, giving proof of a fine comprehension of historic truth, and a nice discrimination in details; Sourikof, the Titan of Russian historic painting; Solntzof, Plekanof, and the story pictures of Vasnetzof. The impulse was given. Lost magic returned. From old churches and cities, antique carved wood, quaintly designed embroideries, all the original beauty which had slept for centuries in the tranquil immensity of far Russian spaces, every old treasure yielded something needful to our modern

SLEIGH DECORATED AFTER THE DESIGN OF THE PRINCESS TENICHET, FOUNDER OF THE RUSSIAN ART-CENTER OF TALACHINO.

the museum of the Princess is an admirable collection of these prows, some dating from the early seventeenth century, some from the time of Peter the Great and the renowned Catherine.

All through the decorations of Talachino and its buildings—above the gateway to the teremok, in the decorations of the walls, in the old Russian ornaments, the ancient brocades of glittering gold—one sees the famous “wonder-bird,” Talachino’s tacit crest, the delight of the Princess and the sign manual of Maloutine. The decorative use of this legendary bird seems especially appropriate, for it is closely interwoven with the traditions of the people. Worshiping peasants sang of its flight, its golden plumage, its prophetic voice. It was a symbol of all magical and longed-for beauty—this sun-bird of the East which came to hover awhile over the snowy Northland, perhaps the embodiment of some bright Oriental memory of this strangely mingled race.

Serge Makowsky declares, “Never has the art of our cities more nearly approached primitive art”—writing of Talachino—“peasant art, which for so many centuries developed in peaceful villages, in the forests, in the calm of the endless Steppes, beside impassable Russian marshes. For the first time the Russian painter, permeated with European culture and experience, looks upon the people and

CRABLE WITH BEAUTIFULLY DECORATED WOOD AND DRAPERY, THE DESIGN OF THE PRINCESS TENICHET.
masters; and temple decoration and the applied arts took on fresh forms—neither entirely new, nor yet imitations. The national operas were staged with decorations and costumes in harmony with the spirit of the music, instead of with the obviously unfit; utensils for daily use were covered with designs, reminders of ancestral implements; fantastic flowers, turn-soles and ferns blossomed on the pottery, furniture and stuffs; everywhere national ornamentation was revived.

Honor is especially due to two remarkable artists, Helen Polenof and Marie Yakountchekof, who, sustained by Mme. Mamontof, an art patron, founded several studios in the village of Abramtzevo. Here were executed after their designs and ancient models all sorts of objects adapted to the comfort of modern homes. Unfortunately, their valuable activity was of short duration. Mme. Polenof died in 1898, and Mme. Yakountchekof in 1902. Their studios, little by little, gave place to those of Talachino. The intellectual class of cities, unused to the art of the people, awoke to the realization of its vitality, and the success of the productions of Talachino has been astonishing. “Hopeful breaks in the ranks of triviality,” writes Roerich, who has been called the Viking painter, with his “exceptional taste, his grave twilight thought, creator of somber prehistoric men,” a special admirer and friend of Talachino.

Thus, out of an evident spiritual need, Talachino has drawn together the best artists—Vroubel, Zinoviev, Bechtol, Michinof, Samoussief, Borotchetsky and many others—to give birth to new forces in art. The school has especially developed in woodworkers the sentiment of ornament, that ancient fondness that still lives in the peasant of today. “This sentiment cannot be aroused artificially,” says Roerich. “It hides in the obscure soul of the people like a seed, waiting centuries for a propitious soil to burgeon forth in generous growth. The people keep the elemental forms, embryos of beauty, immutable and eternal as destiny; symbols of race unity, they are more living and lasting than the temporary superpositions of history. When the time is ripe they bloom out, enduring, in splendid designs.”

Even so brief a glimpse must prove that the Russian people, the peasants, are not a wretched class, doomed to misery and suffering, but a vast world concealing in its depths the wealth of centuries of knowledge, dreams, traditions, feelings, with the tangible proof of the crystallization of art life, the inheritance of a thousand years.

A nation seldom shines with all the arts at once, those of war and those of peace. Russia held germs of beauty in its barbaric days which so far have refused to bloom amidst civilization—certainly not in cities. Art, mysterious as the wind, comes not at bidding; and it often passes the haughtiest door to smile on the humblest hovel. So, out of the homes of her peasants, the folk-art of Russia has come, expressing in its own inimitable way the soul of her people.

GARDEN CITY CHILDREN

The Imperial Health Conference at a recent exhibition in London presented some interesting facts concerning child welfare. Among the reports which showed the value of healthy environment upon children, was that of the Medical Officer of Health for Hendon. He has found that in the Garden Suburb school of Hampstead the height of the pupils from 5 to 8 years averages from $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch to $\frac{1}{2}$ inches more than that of children living under less natural conditions. The Marquis of Salisbury has demonstrated his interest by developing on his estate at Liverpool a garden suburb on copartnership principles.