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THE QUEEN OF SPADES

AND OTHER STORIES.

BY

ALEXANDER PUSHKIN.

TRANSLATED BY

MRS. SUTHERLAND EDWARDS.

BEAUTIFULLY ILLUSTRATED.

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PUSHKIN.

Alexander Sergueievitch Pushkin came of a noble family, so ancient that it was traced back to that Alexander Nevsky who, in the thirteenth century, gained a great victory over the Swedes upon the ice of the River Neva, in token whereof he was surnamed "Nevsky" of the Neva.

His mother, Nadejda Ossipovna Hannibal, was the grand-daughter of Abraham Petrovitch Hannibal, Peter the Great's famous negro. His father, Surguei Lvovitch Pushkin, was a frivolous man of pleasure.

The poet was born on the 26th of May, 1799, at Moscow. He was an awkward and a silent child. He was educated by French tutors. A poor scholar, he read with eagerness whatever he could get in his father's library, chiefly the works of French authors. His brother states that at eleven years old Pushkin knew French literature by

heart. This cannot, of course, be taken literally; but it shows under what influence he grew up. In October, 1811, he entered the Lyceum of Tsarskoe Selo. Among the students a society was soon formed, whose members were united by friendship and by a taste for literature. They brought out several periodicals, in which tales and poems formed the chief features. Of this society (the late Prince Gortchakoff belonged to it) Pushkin was the leading spirit. His first printed poem appeared in the *Messenger of Europe* in 1814. At a public competition in 1815, at which the veteran poet Derjavin was present, Pushkin read his "Memories of Tsarskoe Selo." This poem, which contains many beautiful passages, so delighted Derjavin, that he wished to embrace the young author; but Pushkin fled in confusion from the hall.

In June, 1817, Pushkin's free and careless student life ended. After finishing his course at the Lyceum he went to St. Petersburg, and, though he entered thoroughly into the dissipated pleasures of its turbulent youth, he still clung to the intellectual society of such men as Jukovsky and Karamsin, men occupied in literature, whose friendship he valued very highly.

At that time society was much disturbed. Political clubs were everywhere being formed. In every drawing-room new views were freely and openly advanced; and in these discussions the satire and brilliant verse of Pushkin attracted general attention. These at last brought him into great danger. But Karamsin came to his rescue, and managed to get him an appointment at Ekaterinoslavl, in the office of the Chief Inspector of the Southern Settlements. There he remained till 1824, travelling from place to place, first with the Raevskys to the Caucasus, and thence again with them through the Crimea. This journey gave him materials for his "Prisoner of the Caucasus," and "Fountain of Bachtchisarai." Both poems reveal the influence of Byron.

Towards the end of 1820 he went to Bessarabia with his chief, who had just been appointed viceroy of the province. Once, on account of some quarrel, this person, Insoff by name, sent Pushkin to Ismail. There the poet joined a band of gypsies and remained with them for some time in the Steppes. In 1823 he went to Odessa, having been

transferred to the office of the new governor-general, Count Vorontsoff, who succeeded Insoff.

Here he wrote part of "Evguenie Onegin," a sort of Russian "Don Juan," full of sublime passages and varied by satire and bitter scorn. This work has lately been formed the subject of a very successful opera by Tchaikovski, who took from Pushkin's poems a story now known and admired by every educated Russian.

The poet, however, did not get on with his new chief. A scathing epigram upon Vorontsoff led the count to ask for Pushkin's removal from Odessa, "where," he said, "excessive flattery had turned the young maids head."

Pushkin had to resign; and early in August, 1824, he was sent into retirement to live under the supervision of the local authorities at Michailovskoe, a village belonging to his father in the province of Pskoff. Here the elder Pushkin kept a petty watch over his son, whom he regarded as a perverted nature and, indeed, a kind of monster.

In October, however, the father left Michailovskoe, and the poet remained alone with Arina Rodionovna, an old woman who had nursed him in childhood, and whose tales had first inspired him with a love of Russian popular poetry. At Michailovskoe, Pushkin continued his "Evguenie Onegin," finished "The Gypsies," and wrote the drama of "Boris Godunoff." Here he lived more than two years—years of seclusion following a long period of town life and dissipation.

These two years spent in the simple, pleasant company of country neighbours proved a turning point in his career. Now for the first time he had leisure to look about him, to meditate, and to rest.

He had come into the country with a passionate love for everything that showed the feeling or fancy of the Russian peasant. His taste for popular poetry was insatiable. He listened to his old nurse's stories, collected and noted down songs, studied the habits and customs of Russian villages, and began a serious study of Russian history. All this helped greatly to develop the popular side of his genius. He

afterwards relinquished his earlier models of the romantic school, and sought a simpler, truer inspiration in the pages of Shakespeare.

Writing to a friend, Bashkin says that he has brought up from the country to Moscow the two last cantos of "Evguenie Onegin," ready for the press, a poem called "The Little House at Kolomna," and several dramatic scenes, including "The Miser Knight," "Mozart and Salieri," "The Beast during the Plague" and "The Commander's Statue."

"Besides that," he goes on to say, "I have written about thirty short poems, Nor is that, all, I have also (a great secret) written some prose—five short tales."

Fortunately for him, Pushkin was living in the country, when, in December, 1825, the insurrection and military revolt against the Emperor Nicholas, who had just ascended the throne, broke out at St. Petersburg.

Pushkin was affiliated to the secret society, with Pestle and Ryleieff at its head, which had organised the rebellion; and, on receiving a summons from his confederates, he started for the capital. So, at least, says Alexander Herzen in his curious "Development of Revolutionary Ideas in Russia." On leaving his country house, Pushkin met three ill omens. First a hare crossed his path, next he saw a priest, and, finally, he met a funeral. He went on, however, towards Moscow, and there learned that the insurrection had been crushed. The five principal leaders were executed, and whole families were exiled to Siberia.

In September, 1826, the Emperor Nicholas had an interview with Pushkin at Moscow. Pushkin replied simply and frankly to all the Tsar's questions, and the latter at last promised in future to be himself sole censor of the poet's works.

Pushkin remained at Moscow till about the end of the winter of 1827, when he was allowed to go to St. Petersburg. There he afterwards chiefly resided, returning sometimes to the country to work, usually in autumn, when his power of production, he said, was strongest.

In the summer of 1829 Pushkin visited the Army of the Caucasus then operating against the Turks. He describes his experiences in his "Journey to Erzeroum."

On the 18th of February, 1831, he married Natalia Nikolaevna Gontcharova, and soon afterwards received a Foreign Office appointment with a salary of 5,000 roubles.

In August, 1833, meaning to write a novel on the Pugatcheff Insurrection, Pushkin paid a short visit to Kazan and Orenburg to acquaint himself with the locality and collect materials. But his tale, "The Captain's Daughter," appeared considerably later.

Pushkin and his wife were invited to the court balls, and the Emperor was very gracious and attentive to the poet.

This roused the jealousy of the court nobles, though in descent Pushkin was not inferior to many of them. The studied hauteur of these personages caused the poet much irritation, and led him to waste much energy on petty struggles for social precedence. He was, moreover, constantly in lack of means to meet the expenses attending his position. Partly on this account he undertook, in 1836, the editorship of the *Contemporary Review*, and continued it until his death. In the four numbers issued under his care, Pushkin published original articles, besides the translations then so much in vogue.

All the publications of that time were made to serve the personal aims of their editor. It was useless to seek in them impartiality. Pushkin's criticism, however, were independent, and for this reason they made a deep impression. On starting his Review he had taken great care to entrust the criticism to a small circle of the most accomplished writers.

Pushkin's correspondence throws full light on his character, and reveals it as frank, sincere, and independent. His letters show that he had original ideas on literature, on contemporary politics, on social and domestic relations, and, in short, on every subject. These views were always clear and independent of party.

During his later years the poet felt a longing for the country. As early as 1835 he petitioned for some years' leave in order that he might

retire from the capital. In his last poem, "To my Wife," he says how weary he is of noisy town existence and how he longs for rest.

At the end of 1836 scandals were circulated at St. Petersburg about his wife. Dantès von Heckeeren, an officer in the Horse Guards, began openly to pay her attention. Pushkin and many of his friends received anonymous letters maliciously hinting at Dantès success. Dantès's father, a dissipated old man, threw oil upon the flames. Meeting Madame Pushkin in society, he did his best to make her quarrel with, and leave her husband.

All this being repeated to Pushkin, greatly incensed him. He challenged young Heckeeren, but the latter made an offer to Madame Pushkin's sister, and married her. This did little to mend matters. Pushkin withdrew the challenge, but nursed his hatred for Dantès, and would not receive him in his house.

Meanwhile the scandal grew, and the two Heckeerens continued their persecution of Madame Pushkin. In society, Dantès was said to have married the sister-in-law only to pay court to the wife. Pushkin, always convinced of his wife's innocence, showed for her the tenderest consideration. He wrote, however, a very insulting letter to old Heckeeren after which a duel between Pushkin and the son became inevitable. It was fought on the banks of the Black Elver, near the commandant of St. Petersburg's summer residence. After it Dantès Heckeeren, no longer able to remain in Russia, resigned his commission and went to France, where he took up politics, and, as Baron d'Heckeeren, was known as a senator in the Second Empire.

Pushkin was already wounded in the body when he fired at Dantès, and hit the arm with which Dantès had guarded his breast.

"At six o'clock in the afternoon," writes Jukovsky, to the poet's father, "Alexander was brought home in a hopeless condition by Lieutenant —Colonel Dansasse, the old schoolfellow who had acted as his second. The butler carried him from the carriage into the house.

"It grieves you, my friend," said Pushkin, "to see me thus?" Then he asked for clean linen. While he was undressing, Madame Pushkin, not knowing what had happened, wished to come in. But her

husband called out loudly, "*N'entrez pas, il y a du monde chez moi.*" He was afraid of alarming her. She was not admitted till he was already lying on the couch.

"How happy I am," were his first words to her; "I am still alive, with you by my side. Be comforted, you are not to blame. I know it was not your fault." Meanwhile he did not let her know that his wound was serious. Doctors were sent for—Scholtz and Sadler came. Pushkin asked everyone to leave the room.

"I am in a bad way," he said, holding out his hand to Scholtz. After examining him Sadler went off to fetch the necessary instruments. Left alone with Scholtz, Pushkin inquired what he thought of his condition.

"Tell me candidly."

"You are in danger."

"Say, rather, that I am dying."

"It is my duty not to conceal from you even that," replied Scholtz. "But we shall have the opinion of the other doctors who have been sent for."

"*Je vous remercie; vous avez agi en honnête homme envers moi,*" said Pushkin; adding after a pause, "*Il faut que j'arrange ma maison*."

"Do you wish to see any of your family?" asked Scholtz.

"Farewell, my friends," said Pushkin, looking towards his books.

Whether at that moment he was taking leave of animate or inanimate friends I know not. After another pause, he said:

"Do you think I shall not last another hour?"

"No. But I thought you might like to see some of your friends."

He asked for several. When Spaski (another doctor) came near and tried to give him hope, Pushkin waved his hand in dissent, and from that moment apparently ceased to think about himself. All his anxiety was for his wife. By this time Prince and Princess Viasemsky,

Turgueneff, Count Vielgorsky, and myself had come. Princess Viasemsky was with the wife, who, in terrible distress, glided like a spectre in and out of the room where her husband lay. He was on a couch with his back to the window and door, and unable to see her; though every time she entered or merely stood in the doorway he was conscious of it.

"Is my wife here?" he asked; "take her away." He was afraid to let her come near him lest she should be pained by his sufferings, though he bore them with wonderful fortitude.

"What is my wife doing?" he asked once of Spaski. "She, poor thing, is suffering innocently. Society will devour her!"

"I have been in thirty battles," said Dr. Arendt; "and I have seen many men die, but very few like him."

It was strange how in those last hours of his existence he seemed to have changed. The storm which only a few hours before had raged so fiercely in him had disappeared, leaving no trace behind. In the midst of his suffering he recollected that he had the day before received an invitation to attend the funeral of one of Gretcheff's sons.

"If you see Gretcheff," he said to Spaski, "give him my kind regards, and tell him how sincerely I sympathise with him in his affliction."

Asked to confess and to receive the sacrament, Pushkin assented gladly. It was settled that the priest should be invited to come in the morning.

At midnight, Dr. Arendt came from the palace, where he had been to inform the Emperor. His Majesty was at the theatre, and Arendt left instructions that on his return the Emperor should be told what had occurred. About midnight a mounted messenger arrived for Arendt. The Emperor desired him to go at once to Pushkin, and read to him an autograph letter which the messenger brought. He was then to hasten to the palace and report upon Pushkin's condition.

"I shall not go to bed; I shall wait up for you," wrote the Emperor Nicholas. "And bring back my letter."

The note was as follows:

"If it will be the will of God that we shall not meet again, I send you my pardon, and advise you to receive the last Christian rites. As to your wife and children, they need cause you no anxiety. I take them under my own protection."

The dying man immediately complied with the Emperor's wish. A priest was sent for from the nearest church. Pushkin confessed and received the sacrament with great reverence. When Arendt read the Emperor's letter to him, Pushkin took hold of it and kissed it again and again.

"Give me the letter; I wish to die with it. The letter; where is the letter?" he called out to Arendt, who was unable to leave it with him, but tried to pacify him by promising to ask the Emperor's permission to bring it back again.

At five in the morning the patient's anguish grew overpowering. The sufferer began to groan, and Arendt was again sent for. But all efforts to soothe the pain were futile. Had his wife heard his cries I am sure she must have gone mad; she could never have borne the agony. At the first great cry of pain the Princess Viasemsky, who was in the room, rushed towards her, fearing the effect. But Madame Pushkin lay motionless on a sofa close to the door which separated her from her husband's death-bed. According to both Spaski and Arendt the dying man stifled his cries at the moment of supreme anguish, and only groaned in fear lest his wife might hear him and suffer. To the last Pushkin's mind remained clear and his memory fresh. Before the next great paroxysm he asked for a paper in his own writing and had it burnt. Then he dictated to Dansasse a list of some debts, but this exertion prostrated him. When, between the paroxysms, some bread sop was brought, he said to Spaski:

"My wife! call my wife. Let her give it me."

She entered, dropped on her knees by his side, and after lifting a couple of spoonfuls to his mouth, leant her cheek against his. He caressed and patted her head.

"Come, come," he said, "I am all right. Thank God, all is going on well. Go now."

His calm expression of face and steady voice deceived the poor wife. She came out of his room bright with hope. He asked for his children. They were brought in half asleep: He blessed each one, making the sign of the cross, and placing his hand on their head; then he motioned to have them taken away. Afterwards he asked for his friends who were present. I then approached and took his hand, which was already cold, and inquired if I should give any message to the Emperor.

"Say that I am sorry I am leaving him. I should have been devoted to him."

On the 29th of January, at three in the afternoon, after two days of excruciating pain, Pushkin died. His death was regarded throughout Russia as a public calamity. In St. Petersburg disturbances were feared. It was thought that the people might lynch Heckeeren and his son. A secret funeral was arranged. The body was carried into the church late at night in the presence of some friends and relations; and in the neighbouring courtyards piquets were stationed. After the service the corpse was despatched to the province of Pskoff, and was buried in the monastery of the Assumption at Sviatogorsk, near Pushkin's property at Michailovskoe. The Emperor gave about 150,000 roubles to pay his debts and to bring out a complete edition of his works, besides granting a liberal pension to the widow.

On the 6th of June, 1880, was solemnly unveiled at Moscow a statue of Pushkin, erected by voluntary subscriptions from all parts of Russia.

Pushkin was slim and of middle height; in childhood his hair was fair and curly, but afterwards it turned dark brown. His eyes were light blue, his smile satirical, but good-natured and pleasant; his clever, expressive face bore evidence of his African descent, as did his quick and passionate nature. He was irritable, but kind and full of feeling; his conversation sparkled with wit and good humour, and his memory was prodigious. Pushkin, it has already been said, was of ancient lineage, but no Russian is sufficiently well-born to marry into the Imperial family, and when quite recently the Grand Duke Michael, grandson of the Emperor Nicholas, married without permission the

granddaughter of Pushkin, he caused the liveliest dissatisfaction in the highest quarters. The bride may console herself by the reflection that her grandfather was, in the words of Gogol, "a rare phenomenon; a writer who gave to his country poems so admirable that they attracted the attention of the whole civilised world; a poet who won respect and love for the language, for the living Russian types, the customs, and national character of Russia. Such a writer is indeed a rarity."

THE QUEEN OF SPADES.

CHAPTER I.

There was a card party at the rooms of Narumoff, a lieutenant in the Horse Guards. A long winter night had passed unnoticed, and it was five o'clock in the morning when supper was served. The winners sat down to table with an excellent appetite; the losers let their plates remain empty before them. Little by little, however, with the assistance of the champagne, the conversation became animated, and was shared by all.

"How did you get on this evening, Surin?" said the host to one of his friends.

"Oh, I lost, as usual. I really have no luck. I play *mirandole*. You know that I keep cool. Nothing moves me; I never change my play, and yet I always lose."

"Do you mean to say that all the evening you did not once back the red? Your firmness of character surprises me."

"What do you think of Hermann?" said one of the party, pointing to a young Engineer officer.

"That fellow never made a bet or touched a card in his life, and yet he watches us playing until five in the morning."

"It interests me," said Hermann; "but I am not disposed to risk the necessary in view of the superfluous."

"Hermann is a German, and economical; that is the whole of the secret," cried Tomski. "But what is really astonishing is the Countess Anna Fedotovna!"

"How so?" asked several voices.

"Have you not remarked," said Tomski, "that she never plays?"

"Yes," said Narumoff, "a woman of eighty, who never touches a card; that is indeed something extraordinary!"

"You do not know why?"

"No; is there a reason for it?"

"Just listen. My grandmother, you know, some sixty years ago, went to Paris, and became the rage there. People ran after her in the streets, and called her the 'Muscovite Venus.' Richelieu made love to her, and my grandmother makes out that, by her rigorous demeanour, she almost drove him to suicide. In those days women used to play at faro. One evening at the court she lost, on *parole,* to the Duke of Orleans, a very considerable sum. When she got home, my grandmother removed her beauty spots, took off her hoops, and in this tragic costume went to my grandfather, told him of her misfortune, and asked him for the money she had to pay. My grandfather, now no more, was, so to say, his wife's steward. He feared her like fire; but the sum she named made him leap into the air. He flew into a rage, made a brief calculation, and proved to my grandmother that in six months she had got through half a million rubles. He told her plainly that he had no villages to sell in Paris, his domains being situated in the neighbourhood of Moscow and of Saratoff; and finally refused point blank. You may imagine the fury of my grandmother. She boxed his ears, and passed the night in another room.

"THE OLD MAGICIAN CAME AT ONCE."

"The next day she returned to the charge. For the first time in her life, she condescended to arguments and explanations. In vain did she try to prove to her husband that there were debts and debts, and that she could not treat a prince of the blood like her coachmaker.

"All this eloquence was lost. My grandfather was inflexible. My grandmother did not know where to turn. Happily she was acquainted with a man who was very celebrated at this time. You have heard of the Count of St. Germain, about whom so many marvellous stories were told. You know that he passed for a sort of Wandering Jew, and that he was said to possess an elixir of life and the philosopher's stone.

"Some people laughed at him as a charlatan. Casanova, in his memoirs, says that he was a spy. However that may be, in spite of the mystery of his life, St. Germain was much sought after in good society, and was really an agreeable man. Even to this day my grandmother has preserved a genuine affection for him, and she becomes quite angry when anyone speaks of him with disrespect.

"It occurred to her that he might be able to advance the sum of which she was in need, and she wrote a note begging him to call. The old magician came at once, and found her plunged in the deepest despair. In two or three words she told him everything; related to him her misfortune and the cruelty of her husband, adding that she had no hope except in his friendship and his obliging disposition.

"'Madam,' said St. Germain, after a few moments' reflection, 'I could easily advance you the money you want, but I am sure that you would have no rest until you had repaid me, and I do not want to get you out of one trouble in order to place you in another. There is another way of settling the matter. You must regain the money you have lost.'

"'But, my dear friend,' answered my grandmother, 'I have already told you that I have nothing left.'

"'That does not matter,' answered St. Germain. 'Listen to me, and I will explain.'

"He then communicated to her a secret which any of you would, I am sure, give a good deal to possess."

All the young officers gave their full attention. Tomski stopped to light his Turkish pipe, swallowed a mouthful of smoke, and then went on.

"That very evening my grandmother went to Versailles to play at the Queen's table. The Duke of Orleans held the bank. My grandmother invented a little story by way of excuse for not having paid her debt, and then sat down at the table, and began to stake. She took three cards. She won with the first; doubled her stake on the second, and won again; doubled on the third, and still won."

"Mere luck!" said one of the young officers.

"What a tale!" cried Hermann.

"Were the cards marked?" said a third.

"I don't think so," replied Tom ski, gravely.

"And you mean to say," exclaimed Narumoff, "that you have a grandmother who knows the names of three winning cards, and you have never made her tell them to you?"

"That is the very deuce of it," answered Tomski. "She had three sons, of whom my father was one; all three were determined gamblers, and not one of them was able to extract her secret from her, though it would have been of immense advantage to them, and to me also. Listen to what my uncle told me about it, Count Ivan Ilitch, and he told me on his word of honour.

"Tchaplitzki—the one you remember who died in poverty after devouring millions—lost one day, when he was a young man, to Zoritch about three hundred thousand roubles. He was in despair. My grandmother, who had no mercy for the extravagance of young men, made an exception—I do not know why—in favour of Tchaplitzki. She gave him three cards, telling him to play them one after the other, and exacting from him at the same time his word of honour that he would never afterwards touch a card as long as he

lived. Accordingly Tchaplitzki went to Zoritch and asked for his revenge. On the first card he staked fifty thousands rubles. He won, doubled the stake, and won again. Continuing his system he ended by gaining more than he had lost.

"But it is six o'clock! It is really time to go to bed."

Everyone emptied his glass and the party broke up.

CHAPTER II.

The old Countess Anna Fedotovna was in her dressing-room, seated before her looking-glass. Three maids were in attendance. One held her pot of rouge, another a box of black pins, a third an enormous lace cap, with flaming ribbons. The Countess had no longer the slightest pretence to beauty, but she preserved all the habits of her youth. She dressed in the style of fifty years before, and gave as much time and attention to her toilet as a fashionable beauty of the last century. Her companion was working at a frame in a corner of the window.

"SEATED BEFORE HER LOOKING-GLASS."

"Good morning, grandmother," said the young officer, as he entered the dressing-room. "Good morning, Mademoiselle Lise. Grandmother, I have come to ask you a favour."

"What is it, Paul?"

"I want to introduce to you one of my friends, and to ask you to give him an invitation to your ball."

"Bring him to the ball and introduce him to me there. Did you go yesterday to the Princess's?"

"Certainly. It was delightful! We danced until five o'clock in the morning. Mademoiselle Eletzki was charming."

"My dear nephew, you are really not difficult to please. As to beauty, you should have seen her grandmother, the Princess Daria Petrovna. But she must be very old the Princess Daria Petrovna!"

"How do you mean old?" cried Tomski thoughtlessly; "she died seven years ago."

The young lady who acted as companion raised her head and made a sign to the officer, who then remembered that it was an understood thing to conceal from the Princess the death of any of her contemporaries. He bit his lips. The Countess, however, was not in any way disturbed on hearing that her old friend was no longer in this world.

"Dead!" she said, "and I never knew it! We were maids of honour in the same year, and when we were presented, the Empress'"—and the old Countess related for the hundredth time an anecdote of her young days. "Paul," she said, as she finished her story, "help me to get up. Lisaveta, where is my snuff-box?"

And, followed by the three maids, she went behind a great screen to finish her toilet. Tomski was now alone with the companion.

"Who is the gentleman you wish to introduce to madame?" asked Lisaveta.

"Narumoff. Do you know him?"

"No. Is he in the army?"

"Yes."

"In the Engineers?"

"No, in the Horse Guards. Why did you think he was in the Engineers?"

The young lady smiled, but made no answer.

"Paul," cried the Countess from behind the screen, "send me a new novel; no matter what. Only see that it is not in the style of the

present day."

"What style would you like, grandmother?"

"A novel in which the hero strangles neither his father nor his mother, and in which no one[Pg 27]
[Pg 28] gets drowned. Nothing frightens me so much as the idea of getting drowned."

PAUL AND LISAVETA.

"But how is it possible to find you such a book? Do you want it in Russian?"

"Are there any novels in Russian? However, send me something or other. You won't forget?"

"I will not forget, grandmother. I am in a great hurry. Good-bye, Lisaveta. What made you fancy Narumoff was in the Engineers?" and Tomski took his departure.

Lisaveta, left alone, took out her embroidery, and sat down close to the window. Immediately afterwards, in the street, at the corner of a neighbouring house, appeared a young officer. The sight of him made the companion blush to her ears. She lowered her head, and almost concealed it in the canvas. At this moment the Counters returned, fully dressed.

"Lisaveta," she said "have the horses put in; we will go out for a drive."

Lisaveta rose from her chair, and began to arrange her embroidery.

"Well, my dear child, are you deaf? Go and tell them to put the horses in at once."

"I am going," replied the young lady, as she went out into the ante-chamber.

A servant now came in, bringing some books from Prince Paul Alexandrovitch.

"Say I am much obliged to him. Lisaveta! Lisaveta! Where has she run off to?"

"I was going to dress."

"We have plenty of time, my dear. Sit down, take the first volume, and read to me."

The companion took the book and read a few lines.

"Louder," said the Countess. "What is the matter with you? Have you a cold? Wait a moment; bring me that stool. A little closer; that will do."

Lisaveta read two pages of the book.

"Throw that stupid book away," said the Countess. "What nonsense! Send it back to Prince Paul, and tell him I am much obliged to him; and the carriage, is it never coming?

"Here it is," replied Lisaveta, going to the window.

"And now you are not dressed. Why do you always keep 'me waiting? It is intolerable."

Lisaveta ran to her room. She had scarcely been there two minutes when the Countess rang with all her might. Her maids rushed in at one door and her valet at the other.

"You do not seem to hear me when I ring," she cried. "Go and tell Lisaveta that I am waiting for her."

At this moment Lisaveta entered, wearing a new walking dress and a fashionable bonnet.

"At last, miss," cried the Countess. "But what is that you have got on? and why? For whom are you dressing? What sort of weather is it? Quite stormy, I believe."

"No, your Excellency," said the valet; "it is exceedingly fine."

"What do you know about it? Open the ventilator. Just what I told you! A frightful wind, and as icy as can be. Unharness the horses. Lisaveta, my child, we will not go out to-day. It was scarcely worth while to dress so much."

"What an existence!" said the companion to herself.

Lisaveta Ivanovna was, in fact, a most unhappy creature. "The bread of the stranger is bitter," says Dante, "and his staircase hard to climb." But who can tell the torments of a poor little companion attached to an old lady of quality? The Countess had all the caprices of a woman spoilt by the world. She was avaricious and egotistical, and thought all the more of herself now that she had ceased to play an active part in society. She never missed a ball, and she dressed and painted in the style of a bygone age. She remained in a corner of the room, where she seemed to have been placed expressly to serve as a scarecrow. Every one on coming in went to her and made her a low bow, but this ceremony once at an end no one spoke a word to her. She received the whole city at her house, observing the strictest etiquette, and never failing to give to everyone his or her proper name. Her innumerable servants, growing pale and fat in the ante-chamber, did absolutely as they liked, so that that the house was pillaged as if its owner were really dead. Lisaveta passed her life in continual torture. If she made tea she was reproached with wasting the sugar. If she read a novel to the Countess she was held responsible for all the absurdities of the author. If she went out with the noble lady for a walk or drive, it was she who was to blame if the weather was bad or the pavement muddy. Her salary, more than modest, was never punctually paid, and she was expected to dress "like every one else," that is to say, like very few people indeed. When she went into society her position was sad. Everyone knew her; no one paid her any attention. At a ball she sometimes danced, but only when a *vis-à-vis* was wanted. Women would come up to her, take her by the arm, and lead her out of the room if their dress required attending to. She had her portion of self-respect, and felt deeply the misery of her position. She looked with impatience for a liberator to break her chain. But the young men, prudent in the midst of their affected giddiness, took care not to honour her with their attentions, though Lisaveta Ivanovna was a hundred times prettier than the shameless or stupid girls whom they surrounded with their homage. More than once she slunk away from the splendour of the drawing-room to shut herself up alone in her little bed-room, furnished with an old screen and a pieced carpet, a chest of drawers,

a small looking-glass, and a wooden bedstead. There she shed tears at her ease by the light of a tallow candle in a tin candlestick.

One morning—it was two days after the party at Narumoff's, and a week before the scene we have just sketched—Lisaveta was sitting at her embroidery before the window, when, looking carelessly into the street, she saw an officer, in the uniform of the Engineers, standing motionless with his eyes fixed upon her. She lowered her head, and applied herself to her work more attentively than ever. Five minutes afterwards she locked mechanically into the street, and the officer was still in the same place. Not being in the habit of exchanging glances with young men who passed by her window, she remained with her eyes fixed on her work for nearly two hours, until she was told that lunch was ready. She got up to put her embroidery away, and while doing so, looked into the street, and saw the officer still in the same place. This seemed to her very strange. After lunch she went to the window with a certain emotion, but the officer of Engineers was no longer in the street.

She thought no more of him. But two days afterwards, just as she was getting into the carriage with the Countess, she saw him once more, standing straight before the door. His face was half concealed by a fur collar, but his black eyes sparkled beneath his helmet. Lisaveta was afraid, without knowing why, and she trembled as she took her seat in the carriage.

On returning home, she rushed with a beating heart towards the window. The officer was in his habitual place, with his eyes fixed ardently upon her. She at once withdrew, burning at the same time with curiosity, and moved by a strange feeling which she now experienced for the first time.

No day now passed but the young officer showed himself beneath the window. Before long a dumb acquaintance was established between them. Sitting at her work she felt his presence, and when she raised her head she looked at him for a long time every day. The young man seemed full of gratitude for these innocent favours.

She observed, with the deep and rapid perceptions of youth, that a sudden redness covered the officer's pale cheeks as soon as their eyes met. After about a week she would smile at seeing him for the first time.

When Tomski asked his grandmother's permission to present one of his friends, the heart of the poor young girl beat strongly, and when she heard that it was Narumoff, she bitterly repented having compromised her secret by letting it out to a giddy young man like Paul.

Hermann was the son of a German settled in Russia, from whom he had inherited a small sum of money. Firmly resolved to preserve his independence, he had made it a principle not to touch his private income. He lived on his pay, and did not allow himself the slightest luxury. He was not very communicative; and his reserve rendered it difficult for his comrades to amuse themselves at his expense.

Under an assumed calm he concealed strong passions and a highly-imaginative disposition. But he was always master of himself, and kept himself free from the ordinary faults of young men. Thus, a gambler by temperament, he never touched a card, feeling, as he himself said, that his position did not allow him to "risk the necessary in view of the superfluous." Yet he would pass entire nights before a card-table, watching with feverish anxiety the rapid changes of the game. The anecdote of Count St. Germaines three cards had struck his imagination, and he did nothing but think of it all that night.

"If," he said to himself next day as he was walking along the streets of St. Petersburg, "if she would only tell me her secret—if she would only name the three winning cards! I must get presented to her, that I may pay my court and gain her confidence. Yes! And she is eighty-seven! She may die this week—to-morrow perhaps. But after all, is there a word of truth in the story? No! Economy, Temperance, Work; these are my three winning cards. With them I can double my capital; increase it tenfold. They alone can ensure my independence and prosperity."

Dreaming in this way as he walked along, his attention was attracted by a house built in an antiquated style of architecture. The street was full of carriages, which passed one by one before the old house, now brilliantly illuminated. As the people stepped out of the carriages Hermann saw now the little feet of a young woman, now the military boot of a general. Then came a clocked stocking; then, again, a diplomatic pump. Fur-lined cloaks and coats passed in procession before a gigantic porter.

Hermann stopped. "Who lives here?" he said to a watchman in his box.

"The Countess Anna Fedotovna." It was Tomski's grandmother.

Hermann started. The story of the three cards came once more upon his imagination. He walked to and fro before the house, thinking of the woman to whom it belonged, of her wealth and her mysterious power. At last he returned to his den. But for some time he could not get to sleep; and when at last sleep came upon him, he saw, dancing before his eyes, cards, a green table, and heaps of rubles and bank-

notes. He saw himself doubling stake after stake, always winning, and then filling his pockets with piles of coin, and stuffing his pocket-book with countless bank-notes. When he awoke, he sighed to find that his treasures were but creations of a disordered fancy; and, to drive such thoughts from him, he went out for a walk. But he had not gone far when he found himself once more before the house of the Countess. He seemed to have been attracted there by some irresistible force. He stopped, and looked up at the windows. There he saw a girl's head with beautiful black hair, leaning gracefully over a book or an embroidery-frame. The head was lifted, and he saw a fresh complexion and black eyes.

This moment decided his fate.

CHAPTER III.

Lisaveta was just taking off her shawl and her bonnet, when the Countess sent for her. She had had the horses put in again.

While two footmen were helping the old lady into the carriage, Lisaveta saw the young officer at her side. She felt him take her by the hand, lost her head, and found, when the young officer had walked away, that he had left a paper between her fingers. She hastily concealed it in her glove.

During the whole of the drive she neither saw nor heard. When they were in the carriage together the Countess was in the habit of questioning Lisaveta perpetually.

"Who is that man that bowed to us? What is the name of this bridge? What is there written on that signboard?"

Lisaveta now gave the most absurd answers, and was accordingly scolded by the Countess.

"What is the matter with you, my child?" she asked. "What are you thinking about? Or do you really not hear me? I speak distinctly enough, however, and I have not yet lost my head, have I?"

Lisaveta was not listening. When she got back to the house, she ran to her room, locked the door, and took the scrap of paper from her glove. It was not sealed, and it was impossible, therefore, not to read it. The letter contained protestations of love. It was tender, respectful, and translated word for word from a German novel. But Lisaveta did not read German, and she was quite delighted. She was, however, much embarrassed. For the first time in her life she had a secret. Correspond with a young man! The idea of such a thing frightened her. How imprudent she had been! She had reproached herself, but knew not now what to do.

Cease to do her work at the window, and by persistent coldness try and disgust the *young* officer? Send him back his letter? Answer him in a firm, decided manner? What line of conduct was she to pursue? She had no friend, no one to advise her. She at last decided to send an answer. She sat down at her little table, took pen and paper, and began to think. More than once she wrote a sentence and then tore up the paper. What she had written seemed too stiff, or else it was wanting in reserve. At last, after much trouble, she succeeded in composing a few lines which seemed to meet the case.

"I believe," she wrote, "that your intentions are those of an honourable man, and that you would not wish to offend me by any thoughtless conduct. But you must understand that our acquaintance cannot begin in this way. I return your letter, and trust that you will not give me cause to regret my imprudence."

Next day, as soon as Hermann made his appearance, Lisaveta left her embroidery, and went into the drawing-room, opened the ventilator, and threw her letter into the street, making sure that the young officer would pick it up.

SHE TORE IT INTO A HUNDRED PIECES.

Hermann, in fact, at once saw it, and picking it up, entered a confectioner's shop in order to read it. Finding nothing discouraging

in it, he went home sufficiently pleased with the first step in his love adventure.

Some days afterwards, a young person with lively eyes called to see Miss Lisaveta, on the part of a milliner. Lisaveta wondered what she could want, and suspected, as she received her, some secret intention. She was much surprised, however, when she recognised, on the letter that was now handed to her, the writing of Hermann.

"You make a mistake," she said; "this letter is not for me."

"I beg your pardon," said the milliner, with a slight smile; "be kind enough to read it."

Lisaveta glanced at it. Hermann was asking for an appointment.

"Impossible!" she cried, alarmed both at the boldness of the request, and at the manner in which it was made. "This letter is not for me," she repeated; and she tore it into a hundred pieces.

"If the letter was not for you, why did you tear it up? You should have given it me back, that I might take it to the person it was meant for."

"True," said Lisaveta, quite disconcerted.

"But bring me no more letters, and tell the person who gave you this one that he ought to blush for his conduct."

Hermann, however, was not a man to give up what he had once undertaken. Every day Lisaveta received a fresh letter from him, sent now in one way, now in another. They were no longer translated from the German. Hermann wrote under the influence of a commanding passion, and spoke a language which was his own. Lisaveta could not hold out against such torrents of eloquence. She received the letters, kept them, and at last answered them. Every day her answers were longer and more affectionate, until at last she threw out of the window a letter couched as follows:—

"This evening there is a ball at the Embassy. The Countess will be there. We shall remain until two in the morning. You may manage to see me alone. As soon as the Countess leaves home, that is to say towards eleven o'clock, the servants are sure to go out, and there will be no one left but the porter, who will be sure to be asleep in his

box. Enter as soon as it strikes eleven, and go upstairs as fast as possible. If you find anyone in the ante-chamber, ask whether the Countess is at home, and you will be told that she is out, and, in that case, you must resign yourself, and go away. In all probability, however, you will meet no one. The Countess's women are together in a distant room. When you are once in the ante-chamber, turn to the left, and walk straight on, until you reach the Countess's bedroom. There, behind a large screen, you will see two doors. The one on the right leads to a dark room. The one on the left leads to a corridor, at the end of which is a little winding staircase, which leads to my parlour."

At, ten o'clock Hermann was already on duty before the Countess's door. It was a frightful night. The winds had been unloosed, and the snow was falling in large flakes; the lamps gave an uncertain light; the streets were deserted; from time to time passed a sledge, drawn by a wretched hack, on the look-out for a fare. Covered by a thick overcoat, Hermann felt neither the wind nor the snow. At last the Countesses carriage drew up. He saw two huge footmen come forward and take beneath the arms a dilapidated spectre, and place it on the cushions well wrapped up in an enormous fur cloak. Immediately afterwards, in a cloak of lighter make, her head crowned with natural flowers, came Lisaveta, who sprang into the carriage like a dart. The door was closed, and the carriage rolled on softly over the snow.

The porter closed the street door, and soon the windows of the first floor became dark. Silence reigned throughout the house. Hermann walked backwards and forwards; then coming to a lamp he looked at his watch. It was twenty minutes to eleven. Leaning against the lamp-post, his eyes fixed on the long hand of his watch, he counted impatiently the minutes which had yet to pass. At eleven o'clock precisely Hermann walked up the steps, pushed open the street door, and went into the vestibule, which was well lighted. As it happened the porter was not there. With a firm and rapid step he rushed up the staircase and reached the ante-chamber. There, before a lamp, a footman was sleeping, stretched out in a dirty greasy dressing-gown. Hermann passed quickly before him and

crossed the dining-room and the drawing-room, where there was no light. But the lamp of the ante-chamber helped him to see. At last he reached the Countess's bedroom. Before a screen covered with old icons (sacred pictures) a golden lamp was burning. Gilt arm-chairs, sofas of faded colours, furnished with soft cushions, were arranged symmetrically along the walls, which were hung with China silk. He saw two large portraits painted by Madame le Brun. One represented a man of forty, stout and full coloured, dressed in a light green coat, with a decoration on his breast. The second portrait was that of an elegant young woman, with an aquiline nose, powdered hair rolled back on the temples, and with a rose over her ear. Everywhere might be seen shepherds and shepherdesses in Dresden china, with vases of all shapes, clocks by Leroy, work-baskets, fans, and all the thousand playthings for the use of ladies of fashion, discovered in the last century, at the time of Montgolfier's balloons and Mesmer's animal magnetism.

"A FOOTMAN IN A GREASY DRESSING GOWN."

Hermann passed behind the screen, which concealed a little iron bedstead. He saw the two doors; the one on the right leading to the dark room, the one on the left to the corridor. He opened the latter, saw the staircase which led to the poor little companion's parlour, and then, closing this door, went into the dark room.

The time passed slowly. Everything was quiet in the house. The drawing-room clock struck midnight, and again there was silence. Hermann was standing up, leaning against the stove, in which there was no fire. He was calm; but his heart beat with quick pulsations, like that of a man determined to brave all dangers he might have to meet, because he knows them to be inevitable. He heard one o'clock strike; then two; and soon afterwards the distant roll of a carriage. He now, in spite of himself, experienced some emotion. The carriage approached rapidly and stopped. There was at once a great noise of servants running about the staircases, and a confusion of voices. Suddenly the rooms were all lit up, and the Countess's three

antiquated maids came at once into the bed-room. At last appeared the Countess herself.

The walking mummy sank into a large Voltaire arm-chair. Hermann looked through the crack in the door; he saw Lisaveta pass close to him, and heard her hurried step as she went up the little winding staircase. For a moment he felt something like remorse; but it soon passed off, and his heart was once more of stone.

"A STRANGE MAN HAD APPEARED."

The Countess began to undress before a looking-glass. Her head-dress of roses was taken off, and her powdered wig separated from her own hair, which was very short and quite white. Pins fell in showers around her. At last she was in her dressing-gown and night cap, and in this costume, more suitable to her age, was less hideous than before.

Like most old people, the Countess was tormented by sleeplessness. She had her armchair rolled towards one of the windows, and told her maids to leave her. The lights were put out, and the room was lighted only by the lamp which burned before the holy images. The Countess, sallow and wrinkled, balanced herself gently from right to left. In her dull eyes could be read an utter absence of thought; and as she moved from side to side, one might have said that she did so not by any action of the will, but through some secret mechanism.

Suddenly this death's-head assumed a new expression; the lips ceased to tremble, and the eyes became alive. A strange man had appeared before the Countess!

It was Hermann.

"Do not be alarmed, madam," said Hermann, in a low voice, but very distinctly. "For the love of Heaven, do not be alarmed. I do not wish to do you the slightest harm; on the contrary, I come to implore a favour of you."

The old woman looked at him in silence, as if she did not understand. Thinking she was deaf, he leaned towards her ear and repeated what he had said; but the Countess still remained silent.

"You can ensure the happiness of my whole life, and without its costing you a farthing. I know that you can name to me three cards ——"

The Countess now understood what he required.

"It was a joke," she interrupted. "I swear to you it was only a joke."

"No, madam," replied Hermann in an angry tone. "Remember Tchaplitzki, and how you enabled him to win."

The Countess was agitated. For a moment her features expressed strong emotion; but they soon resumed their former dulness.

"Cannot you name to me," said Hermann, "three winning cards?"

The Countess remained silent. "Why keep this secret for your great-grandchildren," he continued. "They are rich enough without; they do not know the value of money. Of what profit would your three cards be to them? They are debauchees. The man who cannot keep his inheritance will die in want, though he had the science of demons at his command. I am a steady man. I know the value of money. Your three cards will not be lost upon me. Come!"

He stopped tremblingly, awaiting a reply. The Countess did not utter a word. Hermann went upon his knees.

"If your heart has ever known the passion of love; if you can remember its sweet ecstasies; if you Pave ever been touched by the cry of a newborn babe; if any human feeling has ever caused your heart to beat, I entreat you by the love of a husband, a lover, a mother, by all that is sacred in life, not to reject my prayer. Tell me your secret! Reflect! You are old; you Pave not long to live! Remember that the happiness of a man is in your hands; that not only myself, but my children and my grandchildren will bless your memory as a saint."

The old Countess answered not a word.

Hermann rose, and drew a pistol from his pocket.

"Hag!" he exclaimed, "I will make you speak."

At the sight of the pistol the Countess for the second time showed agitation. Her head shook violently she stretched out her hands as if to put the weapon aside. Then suddenly she fell back motionless.

"Come, don't be childish!" said Hermann. "I adjure you for the last time; will you name the three cards?"

The Countess did not answer. Hermann saw that she was dead!

CHAPTER IV.

Lisaveta was sitting in her room, still in her ball dress, lost in the deepest meditation. On her return to the house, she had sent away her maid, and had gone upstairs to her room, trembling at the idea of finding Hermann there; desiring, indeed, *not* to find him. One glance showed her that he was not there, and she gave thanks to Providence that he had missed the appointment. She sat down pensively, without thinking of taking off her cloak, and allowed to pass through her memory all the circumstances of the intrigue which had begun such a short time back, and had already advanced so far. Scarcely three weeks had passed since she had first seen the young officer from her window, and already she had written to him, and he had succeeded in inducing her to make an appointment. She knew his name, and that was all. She had received a quantity of letters from him, but he had never spoken to her; she did not know the sound of his voice, and until that evening, strangely enough, she had never heard him spoken of.

"ONE GLANCE SHOWED HER THAT HE WAS NOT THERE."

But that very evening Tomski, fancying he had noticed that the young Princess Pauline, to whom he had been paying assiduous court, was flirting, contrary to her custom, with, another man, had wished to

revenge himself by making a show of indifference. With this noble object he had invited Lisaveta to take part in an interminable mazurka; but he teased her immensely about her partiality for Engineer officers, and pretending all the time to know much more than he really did, hazarded purely in fun a few guesses which were so happy that Lisaveta thought her secret must have been discovered.

"But who tells you all this?" she said with a smile. "A friend of the very officer you know, a most original man."

"And who is this man that is so original?"

"His name is Hermann."

She answered nothing, but her hands and feet seemed to be of ice.

"Hermann is a hero of romance," continued Tomski. "He has the profile of Napoleon, and the soul of Mephistopheles. I believe he has at least three crimes on his conscience.... But how pale you are!"

"I have a bad headache. But what did this Mr. Hermann tell you? Is not that his name?"

"Hermann is very much displeased with his friend, with the Engineer officer who has made your acquaintance. He says that in his place he would behave very differently. But I am quite sure that Hermann himself has designs upon you. At least, he seems to listen with remarkable interest to all that his friend tells him about you."

"And where has he seen me?"

"Perhaps in church, perhaps in the street; heaven knows where."

At this moment three ladies came forward according to the custom of the mazurka, and asked Tomski to choose between "forgetfulness and regret."[1]

And the conversation which had so painfully excited the curiosity of Lisaveta came to an end.

The lady who, in virtue of the infidelities permitted by the mazurka, had just been chosen by Tom ski, was the Princess Pauline. During the rapid evolutions which the figure obliged them to make, there

was a grand explanation between them, until at last he conducted her to a chair, and returned to his partner.

But Tomski could now think no more, either of Hermann or Lisaveta, and he tried in vain to resume the conversation. But the mazurka was coming to an end, and immediately afterwards the old Countess rose to go.

Tomski's mysterious phrases were nothing more than the usual platitudes of the mazurka, but they had made a deep impression upon the heart of the poor little companion. The portrait sketched by Tomski had struck her as very exact; and with her romantic ideas, she saw in the rather ordinary countenance of her adorer something to fear and admire. She was now sitting down with her cloak off, with bare shoulders; her head, crowned with flowers, falling forward from fatigue, when suddenly the door opened and Hermann entered. She shuddered.

"Where were you?" she said, trembling all over.

"In the Countess's bedroom. I have just left her," replied Hermann. "She is dead."

"Great Heavens! What are you saying?"

"I am afraid," he said, "that I am the cause of her death."

Lisaveta looked at him in consternation, and remembered Tomski's words: "He has at least three crimes on his conscience."

Hermann sat down by the window, and told everything. The young girl listened with terror.

So those letters so full of passion, those burning expressions, this daring obstinate pursuit—all this had been inspired by anything but love! Money alone had inflamed the man's soul. She, who had nothing but a heart to offer, how could she make him happy? Poor child! she had been the blind instrument of a robber, of the murderer of her old benefactress. She wept bitterly in the agony of her repentance. Hermann watched her in silence; but neither the tears of the unhappy girl, nor her beauty, rendered more touching by her grief, could move his heart of iron. He had no remorse in thinking of

the Countess's death. One sole thought distressed him—the irreparable loss of the secret which was to have made his fortune.

"You are a monster!" said Lisaveta, after a long silence.

"I did not mean to kill her," replied Hermann coldly. "My pistol was not loaded."

They remained for some time without speaking, without looking at one another. The day was breaking, and Lisaveta put out her candle. She wiped her eyes, drowned in tears, and raised them towards Hermann. He was standing close to the window, his arms crossed, with a frown on his forehead. In this attitude he reminded her involuntarily of the portrait of Napoleon. The resemblance overwhelmed her.

"How am I to get you away?" she said at last. "I thought you might go out by the back stairs. But it would be necessary to go through the Countess's bedroom, and I am too frightened."

"Tell me how to get to the staircase, and I will go alone."

She went to a drawer, took out a key, which she handed to Hermann, and gave him the necessary instructions. Hermann took her icy hand, kissed her on the forehead, and departed.

He went down the staircase, and entered the Countess's bedroom. She was seated quite stiff in her armchair; but her features were in no way contracted. He stopped for a moment, and gazed into her face as if to make sure of the terrible reality. Then he entered the dark room, and, feeling behind the tapestry, found the little door which, opened on to a staircase. As he went down it, strange ideas came into his head. "Going down this staircase," he said to himself, "some sixty years ago, at about this time, may have been seen some man in an embroidered coat with powdered wig, pressing to his breast a cocked hat: some gallant who has long been buried; and now the heart of his aged mistress has ceased to beat."

At the end of the staircase he found another door, which his key opened, and he found himself in the corridor which led to the street.

[1] The figures and fashions of the mazurka are reproduced in the cotillon of Western Europe.—TRANSLATOR.

CHAPTER V.

Three days after this fatal night, at nine o'clock in the morning, Hermann entered the convent where the last respects were to be paid to the mortal remains of the old Countess. He felt no remorse, though he could not deny to himself that he was the poor woman's assassin. Having no religion, he was, as usual in such cases, very superstitious; believing that the dead Countess might exercise a malignant influence on his life, he thought to appease her spirit by attending her funeral.

The church was full of people, and it was difficult to get in. The body had been placed on a rich catafalque, beneath a canopy of velvet. The Countess was reposing in an open coffin, her hands joined on her breast, with a dress of white satin, and head-dress of lace. Around the catafalque the family was assembled, the servants in black caftans with a knot of ribbons on the shoulder, exhibiting the colours of the Countesses coat of arms. Each of them held a wax candle in his hand. The relations, in deep mourning—children grandchildren, and great-grandchildren—were all present; but none of them wept.

To have shed tears would have looked like affectation. The Countess was so old that her death could have taken no one by surprise, and she had long been looked upon as already out of the world. The funeral sermon was delivered by a celebrated preacher. In a few simple, touching phrases he painted the final departure of the just, who had passed long years of contrite preparation, for a Christian end. The service concluded in the midst of respectful silence. Then the relations went towards the defunct to take a last farewell After them, in a long procession, all who had been, invited to the ceremony bowed, for the last time, to her who for so many years had been a scarecrow at their entertainments. Finally came the

Countess's household; among them was remarked an old governess, of the same age as the deceased, supported by two woman. She had not strength enough to kneel down, but tears flowed from her eyes, as she kissed the hand of her old mistress.

In his turn Hermann advanced towards the coffin. He knelt down for a moment on the flagstones, which were strewed with branches of yew. Then he rose, as pale as death, and walked up the steps of the catafalque. He bowed his head. But suddenly the dead woman seemed to be staring at him; and with a mocking look she opened and shut one eye. Hermann by a sudden movement started and fell backwards. Several persons hurried towards him. At the same moment, close to the church door, Lisaveta fainted.

Throughout the day Hermann suffered from a strange indisposition. In a quiet restaurant, where he took his meals, he, contrary to his habit, drank a great deal of wine, with the object of stupefying himself. But the wine had no effect but to excite his imagination, and give fresh activity to the ideas with which he was preoccupied.

He went home earlier than usual, lay down with his clothes on upon the bed, and fell into a leaden sleep. When he woke up it was night, and the room was lighted up by the rays of the moon. He looked at his watch; it was a quarter to three. He could sleep no more. He sat up on the bed and thought of the old Countess. At this moment someone in the street passed the window, looked into the room, and then went on. Hermann scarcely noticed it; but in another minute he heard the door of the ante-chamber open. He thought, that his orderly, drunk as usual, was returning from some nocturnal excursion; but the step was one to which he was not accustomed. Somebody seemed to be softly walking over the floor in slippers.

"HERMANN STARTED AND FELL BACKWARDS."

The door opened, and a woman, dressed entirely in white, entered the bedroom. Hermann thought it must be his old nurse, and he asked himself what she could want at that time of night.

But the woman in white, crossing the room with a rapid step, was now at the foot of his bed, and Hermann recognised the Countess.

"I come to you against my wish," she said in a firm voice. "I am forced to grant your prayer. Three, seven, ace, will win, if played one after the other; but you must not play more than one card in twenty-four hours, and afterwards, as long as you live, you must never touch a card again. I forgive you my death on condition of your marrying my companion, Lisaveta Ivanovna."

With these words she walked towards the door, and gliding with her slippers over the floor, disappeared. Hermann heard the door of the ante-chamber open, and soon afterwards saw a white figure pass along the street. It stopped for a moment before his window, as if to look at him.

Hermann remained, for some time astounded. Then he got up and went into the next room. His orderly, drunk as usual, was asleep on the floor. He had much difficulty in waking him, and then could not obtain from him the least explanation. The door of the ante-chamber was locked.

Hermann went back to his bedroom, and wrote down all the details of his vision.

CHAPTER VI.

Two fixed ideas can no more exist together in the moral world, than in the physical two bodies can occupy the same place at the same time; and "Three, seven, ace" soon drove away Hermann's recollection of the old Countess's last moments. "Three, seven, ace" were now in his head to the exclusion of everything else.

They followed him in his dreams, and appeared to him under strange forms. Threes seemed to be spread before him like magnolias, sevens took the form of Gothic doors, and aces became gigantic spiders.

His thoughts concentrated themselves on one single point. How was he to profit by the secret so dearly purchased? What if he applied for leave to travel? At Paris, he said to himself, he would find some gambling-house where, with his three cards, he could at once make his fortune.

Chance soon came to his assistance. There was at Moscow a society of rich gamblers, presided over by the celebrated Tchekalinski, who had passed all his life playing at cards, and had amassed millions. For while he lost silver only, he gained bank-notes. His magnificent house, his excellent kitchen, his cordial manners, had brought him numerous friends and secured for him general esteem.

When he came to St. Petersburg, the young men of the capital filled his rooms, forsaking balls for his card-parties, and preferring the emotions of gambling to the fascinations of flirting. Hermann was taken to Tchekalinski by Narumoff. They passed through a long suite of rooms, full of the most attentive, obsequious servants. The place was crowded. Generals and high officials were playing at whist; young men were stretched out on the sofas, eating ices and smoking long pipes. In the principal room at the head of a long table, around which were assembled a score of players, the master of the house held a faro bank.

He was a man of about sixty, with a sweet and noble expression of face, and hair white as snow. On his full, florid countenance might be read good humour and benevolence. His eyes shone with a perpetual smile. Narumoff introduced Hermann. Tchekalinski took him by the hand, told him that he was glad to see him, that no one stood on ceremony in his house; and then went on dealing. The deal occupied some time, and stakes were made on more than thirty cards. Tchekalinski waited patiently to allow the winners time to double their stakes, paid what he had lost, listened politely to all observations, and, more politely still, put straight the corners of cards, when in a fit of absence some one had taken the liberty of turning them down. At last when the game was at an end, Tchekalinski collected the cards, shuffled them again, had them cut, and then dealt anew.

"Will you allow me to take a card?" said Hermann, stretching out his arm above a fat man who occupied nearly the whole of one side of the table. Tchekalinski, with a gracious smile, bowed in consent. Naroumoff complimented Hermann, with a laugh, on the cessation of the austerity by which his conduct had hitherto been marked, and wished him all kinds of happiness on the occasion of his first appearance in the character of a gambler.

"There!" said Hermann, after writing some figures on the back of his card.

"How much?" asked the banker, half closing his eyes. "Excuse me, I cannot see."

"Forty-seven thousand rubles," said Hermann.

Everyone's eyes were directed toward the new player.

"He has lost his head," thought Harumoff.

"Allow me to point out to you," said Tchekalinski, with his eternal smile, "that you are playing rather high. We never put down here, as a first stake, more than a hundred and seventy-five rubles."

"Very well," said Hermann; "but do you accept my stake or not?"

Tchekalinski bowed in token of acceptation. "I only wish to point out to you," he said, "that although I am perfectly sure of my friends, I can only play against ready money. I am quite convinced that your word is as good as gold; but to keep up the rules of the game, and to facilitate calculations, I should be obliged to you if you would put the money on your card."

Hermann took a bank-note from his pocket and handed it to Tchekalinski, who, after examining it with a glance, placed it on Hermann's card.

Then he began to deal. He turned up on the right a ten, and on the left a three.

"I win," said Hermann, exhibiting his three.

A murmur of astonishment ran through the assembly. The banker knitted his eyebrows, but speedily his face resumed its everlasting

smile.

"Shall I settle at once?" he asked.

"If you will be kind enough to do so," said Hermann.

Tchekalinski took a bundle of bank-notes from his pocket-book, and paid. Hermann pocketed His winnings and left the table.

Narumoff was lost in astonishment. Hermann drank a glass of lemonade and went home.

The next evening he returned to the house. Tchekalinski again held the bank. Hermann went to the table, and this time the players hastened to make room for him. Tchekalinski received him with a most gracious bow. Hermann waited, took a card, and staked on it his forty-seven thousand roubles, together with the like sum which he had gained the evening before.

Tchekalinski began to deal. He turned up on the right a knave, and on the left a seven.

Hermann exhibited a seven.

There was a general exclamation. Tchekalinski was evidently ill at ease, but he counted out the ninety-four thousand roubles to Hermann, who took them in the calmest manner, rose from, the table, and went away.

"HE SAW BEFORE HIM A QUEEN OF SPADES."

The next evening, at the accustomed hour, he[Pg 67]
[Pg 68] again appeared. Everyone was expecting him. Generals and high officials had left their whist to watch this extraordinary play. The young officers had quitted their sofas, and even the servants of the house pressed round the table.

When Hermann took his seat, the other players ceased to stake, so impatient were they to see him have it out with the banker, who, still smiling, watched the approach of his antagonist and prepared to

meet him. Each of them untied at the same time a pack of cards. Tchekalinski shuffled, and Hermann cut. Then the latter took up a card and covered it with a heap of banknotes. It was like the preliminaries of a duel. A deep silence reigned through the room.

Tchekalinski took up the cards with trembling hands and dealt. On one side he put down a queen and on the other side an ace.

"Ace wins," said Hermann.

"No. Queen loses," said Tchekalinski.

Hermann looked. Instead of ace, he saw a queen of spades before him. He could not trust his eyes! And now as he gazed, in fascination, on the fatal card, he fancied that he saw the queen of spades open and then close her eye, while at the same time she gave a mocking smile. He felt a thrill of nameless horror. The queen of spades resembled the dead Countess!

Hermann is now at the Obukhoff Asylum, room No. 17 a hopeless madman! He answers no questions which we put to him. Only he mumbles to himself without cessation, "Three, seven, ace; three, seven, *queen*!"

THE PISTOL SHOT.

CHAPTER I.

We were stationed at the little village of Z. The life of an officer in the army is well known. Drill and the riding school in the morning; dinner with the colonel or at the Jewish restaurant; and in the evening punch and cards.

At Z. nobody kept open house, and there was no girl that anyone could think of marrying. We used to meet at each other's rooms, where we never saw anything but one another's uniforms. There was only one man among us who did not belong to the regiment. He was

about thirty-five, and, of course, we looked upon him as an old fellow. He had the advantage of experience, and his habitual gloom, stern features, and his sharp tongue gave him great influence over his juniors. He was surrounded by a certain mystery. His looks were Russian, but his name was foreign. He had served in the Hussars, and with credit. No one knew what had induced him to retire and settle in this out of the way little village, where he lived in mingled poverty and extravagance. He always went on foot, and wore a shabby black coat. But he was always ready to receive any of our officers; and though his dinners, cooked by a retired soldier, never consisted of more than two or three dishes, champagne flowed at them like water. His income, or how he got it, no one knew, and no one ventured to ask. He had a few books on military subjects and a few novels, which he willingly lent and never asked to have returned. But, on the other hand, he never returned the books he himself borrowed.

His principal recreation was pistol-shooting. The walls of his room were riddled with bullets-a perfect honeycomb. A rich collection of pistols was the only thing luxurious in his modestly furnished villa. His skill as a shot was quite prodigious. If he had undertaken to shoot a pear off some one's cap not a man in our regiment would have hesitated to act as target. Our conversation often turned on duelling; Silvio, so I will call him, never joined in it. When asked if he had ever fought, he answered curtly, "Yes." But he gave no particulars, and it was evident that he disliked such questions. We concluded that the memory of some unhappy victim of his terrible skill preyed heavily upon his conscience. None of us could ever have suspected him of cowardice. There are men whose look alone is enough to repel such a suspicion.

An unexpected incident fairly astonished us. One afternoon about ten officers were dining with Silvio. They drank as usual, that is to say, a great deal. After dinner we asked our host to make a pool. For a long time he refused on the ground that he seldom played. At last he ordered cards to be brought in. With half a hundred gold pieces on the table we sat round him, and the game began. It was Silvio's habit not to speak when playing. He never disputed or explained. If

an adversary made a mistake Silvio without a word chalked it down against him. Knowing his way we always let him have it.

But among us on this occasion was an officer who had but lately joined. While playing he absent-mindedly scored a point too much. Silvio took the chalk and corrected the score in his own fashion. The officer, supposing him to have made a mistake, began to explain. Silvio went on dealing in silence. The officer, losing patience, took the brush and rubbed out what he thought was wrong. Silvio took the chalk and recorrected it. The officer, heated with wine and play, and irritated by the laughter of the company, thought himself aggrieved, and, in a fit of passion, seized a brass candlestick and threw it at Silvio, who only just managed to avoid the missile. Great was our confusion. Silvio got up, white with rage, and said, with sparkling eyes—

"Sir! have the goodness to withdraw, and you may thank God that this has happened in my own house."

"THE OFFICER SEIZED A BRASS CANDLESTICK."

We could have no doubt as to the consequences, and we already looked upon our new comrade as a dead man. He withdrew saying that he was ready to give satisfaction for his offence in any way desired.

The game went on for a few minutes; but feeling that our host was upset we gradually left off playing and dispersed, each to his own quarters. At the riding school next day we were already asking one another whether the young lieutenant was still alive, when he appeared among us. We asked him the same question, and were told that he had not yet heard from Silvio. We were astonished. We went to Silvio's and found him in the court-yard popping bullet after bullet into an ace which he had gummed to the gate. He received us as usual, but made no allusion to what had happened on the previous evening.

Three days passed and the lieutenant was still alive. "Can it be possible," we asked one another in astonishment, "that Silvio will not fight?"

Silvio did not fight. He accepted a flimsy apology, and became reconciled to the man who had insulted him. This lowered him greatly in the opinion of the young men, who, placing bravery above all the other human virtues and regarding it as an excuse for every imaginable vice, were ready to overlook anything sooner than a lack of courage. However, little by little, all was forgotten, and Silvio regained his former influence. I alone could not renew my friendship with him. Being naturally romantic I had surpassed the rest in my attachment to the man whose life was an enigma, and who seemed to me a hero of some mysterious story. He liked me, and with me alone did he drop his sarcastic tone and converse simply and most agreeably on many subjects. But after this unlucky evening the thought that his honour was tarnished, and that it remained so by his own choice, never left me; and this prevented any renewal of our former intimacy. I was ashamed to look at him. Silvio was too sharp and experienced not to notice this and guess the reason. It seemed to vex him, for I observed that once or twice he hinted at an

explanation; but I wanted none, and Silvio gave me up. Thenceforth I only met him in the presence of other friends, and our confidential talks were at an end.

The busy occupants of the capital have no idea of the emotions so frequently experienced by residents in the country and in country towns; as, for instance, in awaiting the arrival of the post. On Tuesdays and Fridays the bureau of the regimental staff was crammed with officers. Some were expecting money, others letters or newspapers. The letters were mostly opened on the spot, and the news freely interchanged, the office meanwhile presenting a most lively appearance.

Silvio's letters used to be addressed to our regiment, and he usually called for them himself. On one occasion, a letter having been handed to him, I saw him break the seal and, with a look of great impatience, read the contents. His eyes sparkled. The other officers, each engaged with his own letters, did not notice anything.

"Gentlemen," said Silvio, "circumstances demand my immediate departure. I leave tonight, and I hope you will not refuse to dine with me for the last time. I shall expect you, too," he added, "turning towards me, without fail." With these words he hurriedly left, and we agreed to meet at Silvio's.

I went to Silvio's at the appointed time and found nearly the whole regiment with him. His things were already packed. Nothing remained but the bare shot-marked walls. We sat down to table. The host was in excellent spirits, and his liveliness communicated itself to the rest of the company. Corks popped every moment. Bottles fizzed and tumblers foamed incessantly, and we, with much warmth, wished our departing friend a pleasant journey and every happiness. The evening was far advanced when we rose from table. During the search for hats, Silvio wished everybody goodbye. Then, taking me by the hand, as I was on the point of leaving, he said in a low voice:

"I want to speak to you."

I stopped behind.

The guests had gone and we were left alone.

Sitting down opposite one another we lighted our pipes. Silvio was much agitated, no traces of his former gaiety remained. Deadly pale, with sparkling eyes, and a thick smoke issuing from his mouth, he looked like a demon. Several minutes passed before he broke silence.

"Perhaps we shall never meet again," he said. "Before saying goodbye I want to have a few words with you. You may have remarked that I care little for the opinion of others. But I like you, and should be sorry to leave you under a wrong impression."

He paused, and began refilling his pipe. I looked down and was silent.

"You thought it odd," he continued, "that I did not require satisfaction from that drunken maniac. You will grant, however, that being entitled to the choice of weapons I had his life more or less in my hands. I might attribute my tolerance to generosity, but I will not deceive you; if I could have chastised him without the least risk to myself, without the slightest danger to my own life, then I would on no account have forgiven him."

"HERE IS A MEMENTO OF OUR DUEL."

I looked at Silvio with surprise. Such a confession completely upset me. Silvio continued:

"Precisely so, I had no right to endanger my life. Six years ago I received a slap in the face and my enemy still lives."

My curiosity was greatly excited.

"Did you not fight him?" I inquired. "Circumstances probably separated you?"

"I did fight him," replied Silvio, "and here is a memento of our duel."

He rose and took from a cardboard box a red cap with a gold tassel and gold braid.

"My disposition is well known to you. I have been accustomed to be first in everything. Prom my youth this has been my passion. In my time dissipation was the fashion, and I was the most dissipated man in the army. We used to boast of our drunkenness. I beat at drinking the celebrated Burtsoff, of whom Davidoff has sung in his poems. Duels in our regiment were of daily occurrence. I took part in all of them, either as second or as principal. My comrades adored me, while the commanders of the regiment, who were constantly being changed, looked upon me as an incurable evil.

"I was calmly, or rather boisterously, enjoying my reputation when a certain young man joined our regiment. He was rich, and came of a distinguished family—I will not name him. Never in my life did I meet with so brilliant, so fortunate a fellow!—young, clever, handsome, with the wildest spirits, the most reckless bravery, bearing a celebrated name, possessing funds of which he[Pg 80]
[Pg 81] did not know the amount, but which were inexhaustible. You may imagine the effect he was sure to produce among us. My leadership was shaken. Dazzled by my reputation he began by seeking my friendship. But I received him coldly; at which, without the least sign of regret, he kept aloof from me.

"WE CLUTCHED OUR SWORDS."

"I took a dislike to him. His success in the regiment and in the society of women brought me to despair. I tried to pick a quarrel with him. To my epigrams he replied with epigrams which always seemed to me more pointed and more piercing than my own, and which were certainly much livelier; for while he joked I was raving.

"Finally, at a ball at the house of a Polish landed proprietor, seeing him receive marked attention from all the ladies, and especially from the lady of the house, who had formerly been on very friendly terms with me, I whispered some low insult in his ear. He flew into a passion and gave me a slap on the cheek. We clutched our swords,

the ladies fainted, we were separated, and the same night we drove out to fight.

"It was nearly daybreak. I was standing at the appointed spot with my three seconds. How impatiently I awaited my opponent! The spring sun had risen and it was growing hot. At last I saw him in the distance. He was on foot, accompanied by only one second. We advanced to meet him. He approached, holding in his hand his regimental cap filled full of black cherries.

"The seconds measured twelve paces. It was for me to fire first. But my excitement was so great that I could not depend upon the certainty of my hand, and, in order to give myself time to get calm, I ceded the first shot to my adversary. He would not accept it, and we decided to cast lots.

"The number fell to him; constant favourite of fortune that he was! He aimed and put a bullet through my cap.

"It was now my turn. His life at last was in my hands. I looked at him eagerly, trying to detect if only some faint shadow of uneasiness. But he stood beneath my pistol picking out ripe cherries from his cap and spitting out the stones, some of which fell near me. His indifference enraged me. 'What is the use,' thought I, 'of depriving him of life, when he sets no value upon it.' As this savage thought flitted through my brain I lowered the pistol.

"'You don't seem to be ready for death,' I said, 'you are eating your breakfast, and I don't want to interfere with you.'

"'You don't interfere with me in the least,' he replied. 'Be good enough to fire; or don't fire if you prefer it; the shot remains with you, and I shall be at your service at any moment.'

"I turned to the seconds, informing them that I had no intention of firing that day, and with this the duel ended. I resigned my commission and retired to this little place. Since then not a single day has passed that I have not thought of my revenge; and now the hour has arrived."

Silvio took from his pocket the letter he had received that morning, and handed it to me to read. Someone (it seemed to be his business agent) wrote to him from Moscow, that a certain individual was soon to be married to a young and beautiful girl.

"You guess," said Silvio, "who the certain individual is. I am starting for Moscow. Me shall see whether he will be as indifferent now as he was some time ago, when in presence of death he ate cherries!"

With these words Silvio rose, threw his cap upon the floor, and began pacing up and down the room like a tiger in his cage. I remained silent. Strange contending feelings agitated me.

The servant entered and announced that the horses were ready. Silvio grasped my hand tightly. He got into the *telega*, in which lay two trunks—one containing his pistols, the other some personal effects. We wished good-bye a second time, and the horses galloped off.

CHAPTER II.

Many years passed, and family circumstances obliged me to settle in the poor little village of H. Engaged in farming, I sighed in secret for my former merry, careless existence. Most difficult of all I found it to pass in solitude the spring and winter evenings. Until the dinner hour I somehow occupied the time, talking to the *starosta*, driving round to see how the work went on, or visiting the new buildings. But as soon as evening began to draw in, I was at a loss what to do with myself. My books in various bookcases, cupboards, and storerooms I knew by heart. The housekeeper, Kurilovna, related to me all the stories she could remember. The songs of the peasant women made me melancholy. I tried cherry brandy, but that gave me the headache. I must confess, however, that I had some fear of becoming a drunkard

from *ennui*, the saddest kind of drunkenness imaginable, of which I had seen many examples in our district.

I had no near neighbours with the exception of two or three melancholy ones, whose conversation consisted mostly of hiccups and sighs. Solitude was preferable to that. Finally I decided to go to bed as early as possible, and to dine as late as possible, thus shortening the evening and lengthening the day; and I found this plan a good one.

Pour versts from my place was a large estate belonging to Count B.; but the steward alone lived there. The Countess had visited her domain once only, just after her marriage, and she then only lived there about a month. However, in the second spring of my retirement, there was a report that the Countess, with her husband, would come to spend the summer on her estate; and they arrived at the beginning of June.

The advent of a rich neighbour is an important event for residents in the country. The landowners and the people of their household talk of it for a couple of months beforehand, and for three years afterwards. As far as I was concerned, I must confess, the expected arrival of a young and beautiful neighbour affected me strongly. I burned with impatience to see her; and the first Sunday after her arrival I started for the village, in order to present myself to the Count and Countess as their near neighbour and humble servant.

The footman showed me into the Count's study, while he went to inform him of my arrival. The spacious room was furnished in a most luxurious manner. Against the walls stood enclosed bookshelves well furnished with books, and surmounted by bronze busts. Over the marble mantelpiece was a large mirror. The floor was covered with green cloth, over which were spread rugs and carpets.

Having got unaccustomed to luxury in my own poor little corner, and not having beheld the wealth of other people for a long while, I was awed; and I awaited the Count with a sort of fear, just as a petitioner from the provinces awaits in an ante-room the arrival of the minister. The doors opened, and a man about thirty-two, and very handsome, entered the apartment. The Count approached me with a frank and

friendly look. I tried to be self-possessed, and began to introduce myself, but he forestalled me.

We sat down. His easy and agreeable, conversation soon dissipated my nervous timidity. I was already passing into my usual manner, when suddenly the Countess entered, and I became more confused than ever. She was, indeed, beautiful. The Count presented me. I was anxious to appear at ease, but the more I tried to assume an air of unrestraint, the more awkward I felt myself becoming. They, in order to give me time to recover myself and get accustomed to my new acquaintances, conversed with one another, treating me in good neighbourly fashion without ceremony. Meanwhile, I walked about the room, examining the books and pictures. In pictures I am no *connoisseur*; but one of the Count's attracted my particular notice. It represented a view in Switzerland was not, however, struck by the painting, but by the fact that it was shot through by two bullets, one planted just on the top of the other.

"A good shot," I remarked, turning to the Count.

"Yes," he replied, "a very remarkable shot."

"Do you shoot well?" he added.

"Tolerably," I answered, rejoicing that the conversation had turned at last on a subject which interested me.' "At a distance of thirty paces I do not miss a card; I mean, of course, with a pistol that I am accustomed to."

"Really?" said the Countess, with a look of great interest. "'And you, my dear, could you hit a card at thirty paces?"

"Some day," replied the Count, "we will try. In my own time I did not shoot badly. But it is four years now since I held a pistol in my hand."

"Oh," I replied, "in that case, I bet, Count, that you will not hit a card even at twenty paces. The pistol demands daily practice. I know that from experience. In our regiment I was reckoned one of the bests shots. Once I happened not to take a pistol in hand for a whole month; I had sent my own to the gunsmith's. Well, what do you think, Count? The first time I began again[Pg 89]
[Pg 90] to shoot I four times running missed a bottle at twenty paces.

The captain of our company, who was a wit, happened to be present, and he said to me: 'Your hand, my friend, refuses to raise itself against the bottle! No, Count, you must not neglect to practise, or you will soon lose all skill. The best shot I ever knew used to shoot every day, and at least three times every day, before dinner. This was as much his habit as the preliminary glass of vodka."

"SILVIO! *YOU* KNEW SILVIO?"

The Count and Countess seemed pleased that I had begun to talk.

"And what sort of a shot was he?" asked the Count.

"This sort, Count. If he saw a fly settle on the wall—you smile, Countess, but I assure you it is a fact. When he saw the fly, he would call out, 'Kuska, my pistol!' Kuska brought him the loaded pistol. A crack, and the fly was crushed into the wall!"

"That is astonishing!" said the Count. "And what was his name?"

"Silvio was his name."

"Silvio!" exclaimed the Count, starting from his seat. "*You* knew Silvio?"

"How could I fail to know him? We were comrades; he was received at our mess like a brother officer. It is now about five years since I last had tidings of him. Then you, Count, also knew him?"

"I knew him very well. Did he never tell you of one very extraordinary incident in his life?"

"Do you mean the slap in the face, Count, that he received from a blackguard at a ball?" "He did not tell you the name of this blackguard?"

"No, Count, he did not. Forgive me," I added, guessing the truth, "forgive me—I did not—could it really have been you?"

"It was myself," replied the Count, greatly agitated. "And the shots in the picture are a memento of our last meeting."

"Oh, my dear," said the Countess, "for God's sake do not relate it! It frightens me to think of it."

"No," replied the Count; "I must tell him all. He knows how I insulted his friend. He shall also know how Silvio revenged himself."

The Count pushed a chair towards me, and with the liveliest interest I listened to the following story:—

"Five years ago," began the Count, "I got married. The honeymoon I spent here, in this village. To this house I am indebted for the happiest moments of my life, and for one of its saddest remembrances.

"One afternoon we went out riding together. My wife's horse became restive. She was frightened, got off the horse, handed the reins over to me; and walked home. I rode on before her. In the yard I saw a travelling carriage, and I was told that in my study sat a man who would not give his name, but simply said that he wanted to see me on business. I entered the study, and saw in the darkness a man, dusty and unshaven. He stood there, by the fireplace. I approached him, trying to recollect his face.

"'You don't remember me, Count?' he said, in a tremulous voice.

"'Silvio!' I cried, and I confess I felt that my hair was standing on end.

"'Exactly so,' he added. 'You owe me a shot; I have come to claim it. Are you ready?'

"A pistol protruded from his side pocket.

"I measured twelve paces, and stood there in that corner, begging him to fire quickly, before my wife came in.

"He hesitated, and asked for a light. Candles were brought in. I locked the doors, gave orders that no one should enter, and again called upon him to fire. He took out his pistol and aimed.

"I counted the seconds.... I thought of her ... A terrible moment passed! Then Silvio lowered his hand.

"'I only regret,' he said, that the pistol is not loaded with cherry-stones. My bullet is heavy; and it always seems to me that an affair

of this kind is net a duel, but a murder. I am not accustomed to aim at unarmed men. Let us begin again from the beginning. Let us cast lots as to who shall fire first.'

"My head went round. I think I objected. Finally, however, we loaded another pistol and rolled up two pieces of paper. These he placed inside his cap; the one through which, at our first meeting, I had put the bullet. I again drew the lucky number.

"'Count, you have the devil's luck,' he said, with a smile which I shall never forget.

"I don't know what I was about, or how it happened that he succeeded in inducing me. But I fired and hit that picture."

The Count pointed with his finger to the picture with the shot-marks His face had become red with agitation. The Countess was whiter than her own handkerchief; and I could not restrain an exclamation.

"I fired," continued the Count, "and, thank Heaven, missed. Then Silvio—at this moment he was really terrible—then Silvio raised his pistol to take aim at me.

"Suddenly the door flew open, Masha rushed into the room. She threw herself upon my neck with a loud shriek. Her presence restored to me-all my courage.

"'My dear,' I said to her, 'don't you see that we are only joking? How frightened you look! Go and drink a glass of water and then come back; I will introduce you to an old friend and comrade.'

Masha was still in doubt.

"MASHA THREW HERSELF AT HIS FEET"

"'Tell me; is my husband speaking the truth?' she asked, turning to the terrible Silvio. 'Is it true that you are only joking?'

"'He is always joking. Countess,' Silvio replied. 'He once in a joke gave me a slap in the face; in joke he put a bullet through this cap

while I was wearing it; and in joke, too, he missed me when he fired just now. And now *I* have a fancy for a joke.'

"With these words he raised his pistol as if to shoot me down before her eyes."

Masha threw herself at his feet.

'Rise, Masha! For shame!' I cried, in my passion. 'And you, sir, cease to amuse yourself at the expense of an unhappy woman. Will you fire or not?'

"'I will not,' replied Silvio. 'I am satisfied. I have witnessed your agitation—your terror. I forced you to fire at me. That is enough; you will remember me. I leave you to your conscience.'

"He was now about to go; but he stopped at the door, looked round at the picture which my shot had passed through, fired at it almost without taking aim, and disappeared.

"My wife had sunk down fainting. The servants had not ventured to stop Silvio, whom they looked upon with terror. He passed out to the steps, called his coachman, and before I could collect myself drove off."

The Count was silent. I had now heard the end of the story of which the beginning had long before surprised me. The hero of it I never saw again. I heard, however, that Silvio, during the rising of Alexander Ipsilanti, commanded a detach of insurgents and was killed in action.

THE SNOWSTORM.

Towards the end of 1811, at a memorable period for Russians, lived on his own domain of Nenaradova the kind-hearted Gravril R. He was celebrated in the whole district for his hospitality and his genial character. Neighbours constantly visited him to have something to eat and drink, and to play at five-copeck boston with his wife,

Praskovia. Some, too, went to have a look at their daughter, Maria; a tall pale girl of seventeen. She was an heiress, and they desired her either for themselves or for their sons.

Maria had been brought up on French novels, and consequently was in love. The object of her affection was a poor ensign in the army, who was now at home in his small village on leave of absence. As a matter of course, the young man reciprocated Maria's passion. But the parents of his beloved, noticing their mutual attachment, forbade their daughter even to think of him, while they received him worse than an ex-assize judge.

"THE LOVERS MET IN THE PINE WOOD."

Our lovers corresponded, and met alone daily in[Pg 98]
[Pg 99] the pine wood or by the old roadway chapel. There they vowed everlasting love, inveighed against fate, and exchanged various suggestions. Writing and talking in this way, they quite naturally reached the following conclusion:—

If we cannot exist apart from each other, and if the tyranny of hard-hearted parents throws obstacles in the way of our happiness, then can we not manage without them?

Of course, this happy idea originated in the mind of the young man; but it pleased the romantic imagination of Maria immensely.

Winter set in and put a stop to their meetings. But their correspondence became all the more active. Vladimir begged Maria in every letter to give herself up to him that they might get married secretly, hide for a while, and then throw themselves at the feet of the parents, who would of course in the end be touched by their heroic constancy and say to them, "Children, come to our arms!"

Maria hesitated a long while, and out of many different plans proposed, that of flight was for a time rejected. At last, however, she consented. On the appointed day she was to decline supper, and retire to her room under the plea of a headache. She and her maid,

who was in the secret, were then to go out into the garden by the back stairs, and beyond the garden they would find a sledge ready for them, would get into it and drive a distance of five miles from Nenaradova, to the village of Jadrino, straight to the church, where Vladimir would be waiting for them.

On the eve of the decisive day, Maria did not sleep all night; she was packing and tying up linen and dresses. She wrote, moreover, a long letter to a friend of hers, a sentimental young lady; and another to her parents. Of the latter, she took leave in the most touching terms. She excused the step she was taking by reason of the unconquerable power of love, and wound up by declaring that she should consider it the happiest moment of her life when she was allowed to throw herself at the feet of her dearest parents. Sealing both letters with a Toula seal, on which were engraven two flaming hearts with an appropriate inscription, she at last threw herself upon her bed before daybreak and dozed off, though even then she was awake tied from one moment to another by terrible thoughts. First it seemed to her that at the moment of entering the sledge in order to go and get married her father stopped her, and with cruel rapidity dragged her over the snow and threw her into a dark bottomless cellar, down which she fell headlong with an indescribable sinking of the heart. Then she saw Vladimir, lying on the grass, pale and bleeding; with his dying breath he implored her to make haste and marry him. Other hideous and senseless visions floated before her one after another. Finally she rose paler than usual, and with, a real headache.

"SHE BURST INTO TEARS."

Both her father and her mother remarked her indisposition. Their tender anxiety and constant inquiries, "What is the matter with you, Masha—are you ill?" cut her to the heart. She tried to pacify them and to appear cheerful; but she could not. Evening set in. The idea that she was passing the day for the last time in the midst of her

family oppressed her. In her secret heart she took leave of everybody, of everything which surrounded her.

Supper was served; her heart beat violently. In a trembling voice she declared that she did not want any supper, and wished her father and mother good-night. They kissed her, and as usual blessed her; and she nearly wept.

Reaching her own room she threw herself into an easy chair and burst into tears. Her maid begged her to be calm and take courage. Everything was ready. In half-an-hour Masha would leave for ever her parents' house, her own room, her peaceful life as a young girl.

Out of doors the snow was falling, the wind howling. The shutters rattled and shook. In everything she seemed to recognise omens and threats.

Soon the whole home was quiet and asleep. Masha wrapped herself in a shawl, put on a warm cloak, and with a box in her hand passed out on to the back staircase. The maid carried two bundles after her. They descended into the garden. The snowstorm raged: a strong wind blew against them as if trying to stop the young culprit. With difficulty they reached the end of the garden. In the road a sledge awaited them.

The horses from cold would not stand still. Vladimir's coachman was walking to and fro in front of them, trying to quiet them. He helped the young lady and her maid to their seats, and packing away the bundles and the dressing-case took up the reins, and the horses flew forward into the darkness of the night.

Having entrusted the young lady to the care of fate and of Tereshka the coachman, let us return to the young lover.

Vladimir had spent the whole day in driving. In the morning he had called on the Jadrino priest, and, with difficulty, came to terms with him. Then he went to seek for witnesses from amongst the neighbouring gentry. The first on whom he called was a former

cornet of horse, Dravin by name, a man in his forties, who consented at once. The adventure, he declared, reminded him of old times and of his larks when he was in the Hussars. He persuaded Vladimir to stop to dinner with him, assuring him that there would be no difficulty in getting the other two witnesses. Indeed, immediately after dinner in came the surveyor Schmidt, with a moustache and spurs, and the son of a captain-magistrate, a boy of sixteen, who had recently entered the Uhlans. They not only accepted Vladimir's proposal, but even swore that they were ready to sacrifice their lives for him. Vladimir embraced them with delight, and drove off to get everything ready.

It had long been dark. Vladimir despatched his trustworthy Tereshka to Nenaradova with his two-horsed sledge, and with appropriate instructions for the occasion. For himself he ordered the small sledge with one horse, and started alone without a coachman for Jadrino, where Maria ought to arrive in a couple of hours. He knew the road, and the drive would only occupy twenty minutes.

But Vladimir had scarcely passed from the enclosure into the open field when the wind rose, and soon there was a driving snowstorm so heavy and so severe that he could not see. In a moment the road was covered with snow. All landmarks disappeared in the murky yellow darkness, through which fell white flakes of snow. Sky and earth became merged into one. Vladimir, in the midst of the field, tried in vain to get to the road. The horse walked on at random, and every moment stepped either into deep snow or into a rut, so that the sledge was constantly upsetting. Vladimir tried at least not to lose the right direction; but it seemed to him that more than half an hour had passed, and he had not yet reached the Jadrino wood. Another ten minutes passed, and still the wood was invisible. Vladimir drove across fields intersected by deep ditches. The snowstorm did not abate, and the sky did not clear. The horse was getting tired and the perspiration rolled from him like hail, in spite of the fact that every moment his legs were disappearing in the snow.

At last Vladimir found that he was going in the wrong direction. He stopped; began to reflect, recollect, and consider; till at last he became convinced that he ought to have turned to the right. He did

so now. His horse could scarcely drag along. But he had been more than an hour on the road, and Jadrino could not now be far. He drove and drove, but there was no getting out of the field. Still snow-drifts and ditches. Every moment the sledge was upset, and every moment Vladimir had to raise it up.

Time was slipping by, and Vladimir grew seriously anxious. At last in the distance some dark object could be seen.

Vladimir turned in its direction, and as he drew near found it was a wood.

"Thank Heaven," he thought, "I am now near the end."

He drove by the side of the wood, hoping to come at once upon the familiar road, or, if not, to pass round the wood. Jadrino was situated immediately behind it.

He soon found the road, and passed into the darkness of the wood, now stripped by the winter. The wind could not rage here; the road was smooth, the horse picked up courage, and Vladimir was comforted.

He drove and drove, but still Jadrino was not to be seen; there was no end to the wood. Then to his horror he discovered that he had got into a strange wood. He was in despair. He whipped his horse, and the poor animal started off at a trot. But it soon got tired, and in a quarter of an hour, in spite of all poor Vladimir's efforts, could only crawl.

Gradually the trees became thinner, and Vladimir drove out of the wood, but Jadrino was not to be seen. It must have been about midnight. Tears gushed from the young man's eyes. He drove on at random; and now the weather abated, the clouds dispersed, and before him was a wide stretch of plain, covered with a white billowy carpet. The night was comparatively clear, and he could see a small village a short distance off, which consisted of four or five cottages. Vladimir drove towards it. At the first door he jumped out of the sledge, ran up to the window, and tapped. After a few minutes a wooden, shutter was raised, and an old man stuck out his grey beard.

"What do you want?"

"How far is Jadrino?"

"How far is Jadrino?"

"Yes, yes! Is it far?"

"Not far; about ten miles."

At this answer Vladimir clutched hold of his hair, and stood motionless, like a man condemned to death.

"Where do you come from?" added the man. Vladimir had not the courage to reply.

"My man," he said, "can you procure me horses to Jadrino?"

"We have no horses," answered the peasant.

"Could I find a guide? I will pay him any sum he likes."

"Stop!" said the old man, dropping the shutter; "I will send my son out to you; he will conduct you."

Vladimir waited. Scarcely a minute had passed when he again knocked. The shutter was lifted and a beard was seen.

"What do you want?"

"What about your son?"

"He'll come out directly: he is putting on his boots. Are you cold? Come in and warm yourself."

"Thanks! Send out your son quickly."

The gate creaked; a youth came out with a cudgel, and walked on in front, at one time pointing out the road, at another looking for it in a mass of drifted snow.

"What o'clock is it?" Vladimir asked him.

"It will soon be daylight," replied the young-peasant. Vladimir spoke not another word.

The cocks were crowing, and it was light when they reached Jadrino. The church was closed. Vladimir paid the guide, and drove into the

yard of the priest's house. In the yard his two-horsed sledge was not to be seen. What news awaited him?

But let us return to the kind proprietors of Nenaradova, and see what is going on there.

Nothing.

The old people awoke, and went into the sitting-room, Gavril in a night-cap and flannel jacket, Praskovia in a wadded dressing-gown. The samovar was brought in, and, Gavril sent the little maid to ask Maria how she was and how she had slept. The little maid returned, saying that her young lady had slept badly, but that she was better now, and that she would come into the sitting-room in a moment. And indeed the door opened, and Maria came in and wished her papa and mamma good morning.

"How is your head-ache, Masha?" (familiar for Mary) inquired Gavril.

"Better, papa; answered Masha.

"The fumes from the stoves must have given you your head-ache," remarked Praskovia.

"Perhaps so, mamma," replied Masha.

The day passed well enough, but in the night Masha was taken ill. A doctor was sent for from town. He came towards evening and found the patient delirious. Soon she was in a severe fever, and in a fortnight the poor patient was on the brink of the grave.

No member of the family knew anything of the flight from home. The letters written by Masha the evening before had been burnt; and the maid, fearing the wrath of the master and mistress, had not breathed a word. The priest, the ex-cornet, the big moustached surveyor, and the little lancer were equally discreet, and with good reason. Tereshka, the coachman, never said too much, not even in his drink. Thus the secret was kept better than it might have been by half a dozen conspirators.

But Maria herself, in the course of her long fever, let out her secret, nevertheless, her words were so disconnected that her mother, who never left her bedside, could only make out from them that her daughter was desperately in love with Vladimir, and that probably love was the cause of her illness. She consulted her husband and some of her neighbours, and at last it was decided unanimously that the fate of Maria ought not to be interfered with, that a woman must not ride away from the man she is destined to marry, that poverty is no crime, that a woman has to live not with money but with a man, and so on. Moral proverbs are wonderfully useful on such occasions, when we can invent little or nothing in our own justification.

Meanwhile the young lady began to recover. Vladimir had not been seen for a long time in the house of Gravril, so frightened had he been by his previous reception. It was now resolved to send and announce to him the good news which he could scarcely expect: the consent of her parents to his marriage with Maria.

But what was the astonishment of the proprietors of Nenaradova when, in answer to their invitation, they received an insane reply. Vladimir informed them he could never set foot in their house, and begged them to forget an unhappy man whose only hope now was in death. A few days afterwards they heard that Vladimir had left the place and joined the army.

A long time passed before they ventured to tell Masha, who was now recovering. She never mentioned Vladimir. Some months later, however, finding his name in the list of those who had distinguished themselves and been severely wounded at Borodino, she fainted, and it was feared that the fever might return. But, Heaven be thanked! the fainting fit had no bad results.

Maria experienced yet another sorrow. Her father died, leaving her the heiress of all his property. But the inheritance could not console her. She shared sincerely the affliction of her mother, and vowed she would never leave her.

Suitors clustered round the charming heiress; but she gave no one the slightest hope. Her mother sometimes tried to persuade her to choose a companion in life; but Maria shook her head, and grew pensive.

Vladimir no longer existed. He had died at Moscow on the eve of the arrival of the French. His memory was held sacred by Maria, and she treasured up everything that would remind her of him; books he had read, drawings which he had made; songs he had sung, and the pieces of poetry which he had copied out for her.

The neighbours, hearing all this, wondered at her fidelity, and awaited with curiosity the arrival of the hero who must in the end triumph over the melancholy constancy of this virgin Artemis.

Meanwhile, the war had been brought to a glorious conclusion, and our armies were returning from abroad. The people ran to meet them. The music played, by the regimental bands consisted of war songs, "Vive Henri-Quatre," Tirolese waltzes and airs from Joconde. Nourished on the atmosphere of winter, officers who had started on the campaign mere striplings returned grown men, and covered with decorations. The soldiers conversed gaily among themselves, mingling German and French words every moment in their speech. A time never to be forgotten—a time of glory and delight! How quickly beat the Russian heart at the words, "Native land!" How sweet the tears of meeting! With what unanimity did we combine feelings of national pride with love for the Tsar! And for him, what a moment!

The women—our Russian women—were splendid then. Their usual coldness disappeared. Their delight was really intoxicating when, meeting the conquerors, they cried, "Hurrah!" And they threw up their caps in the air.

Who of the officers of that period does not own that to the Russian women he was indebted for his best and most valued reward? During this brilliant period Maria was living with her mother in retirement, and neither of them saw how, in both the capitals, the returning troops were welcomed. But in the districts and villages the general enthusiasm was, perhaps, even greater.

In these places the appearance of an officer became for him a veritable triumph. The accepted lover in plain clothes fared badly by his side.

We have already said that, in spite of her coldness, Maria was still, as before, surrounded by suitors. But all had to fall in the rear when there arrived at her castle the wounded young colonel of Hussars—Burmin by name—with the order of St. George in his button-hole, and an interesting pallor on his face. He was about twenty-six. He had come home on leave to his estates, which were close to Maria's villa. Maria paid him such attention as none of the others received. In his presence her habitual gloom disappeared. It could not be said that she flirted with him. But a poet, observing her behaviour, might have asked, "S' amor non è, che dunque?"

Burmin was really a very agreeable young man. He possessed just the kind of sense that pleased women: a sense of what is suitable and becoming. He had no affectation, and was carelessly satirical. His manner towards Maria was simple and easy. He seemed to be of a quiet and modest disposition; but rumour said that he had at one time been terribly wild. This, however, did not harm him in the opinion of Maria, who (like all other young ladies) excused, with pleasure, vagaries which were the result of impulsiveness and daring.

But above all—more than his love-making, more than his pleasant talk, more than his interesting pallor, more even than his bandaged arm—the silence of the young Hussar excited her curiosity and her imagination. She could not help confessing to herself that he pleased her very much. Probably he too, with his acuteness and his experience, had seen that he interested her. How was it, then, that up to this moment she had not seen him at her feet; had not received from him any declaration whatever? And wherefore did she not encourage him with more attention, and, according to circumstances, even with tenderness? Had she a secret of her own which would account for her behaviour?

At last, Burmin fell into such deep meditation, and his black eyes rested with such fire upon Maria, that the decisive moment seemed very near. The neighbours spoke of the marriage as an accomplished fact, and kind Praskovia rejoiced that her daughter had at last found for herself a worthy mate.

The lady was sitting alone once in the drawing-room, laying out grande-patience, when Burmin entered the room, and at once inquired for Maria.

"She is in the garden," replied the old lady: "go to her, and I will wait for you here." Burmin went, and the old lady made the sign of the cross and thought, "Perhaps the affair will be settled to-day!"

Burmin found Maria in the ivy-bower beside the pond, with a book in her hands, and wearing a white dress—a veritable heroine of romance. After the first inquiries, Maria purposely let the conversation drop; increasing by these means the mutual embarrassment, from which it was only possible to escape by means of a sudden and positive declaration.

It happened thus. Burmin, feeling the awkwardness of his position, informed Maria that he had long sought an opportunity of opening his heart to her, and that he begged for a moment's attention. Maria closed the book and lowered her eyes, as a sign that she was listening.

"I love you," said Burmin, "I love you passionately!" Maria blushed, and bent her head still lower.

"I have behaved imprudently, yielding as I have done to the seductive pleasure of seeing and hearing you daily." Maria recollected the first letter of St. Preux in 'La Nouvelle Héloïse.'

"It is too late now to resist my fate. The remembrance of you, your dear incomparable image, must from to-day be at once the torment and the consolation of my existence. I have now a grave duty to perform, a terrible secret to[Pg 117]
[Pg 118] disclose, which will place between us an insurmountable barrier."

"It has always existed!" interrupted Maria; "I could never have been your wife."

"I know," he replied quickly; "I know that you once loved. But death and three years of mourning may have worked some change. Dear, kind Maria, do not try to deprive me of my last consolation; the idea that you might have consented to make me happy if——. Don't speak, for God's sake don't speak—you torture me. Yes, I know, I feel that you could have been mine, but—I am the most miserable of beings—I am already married!"

Maria looked at him in astonishment.

"I am married," continued Burmin; "I have been married more than three years, and do not know who my wife is, or where she is, or whether I shall ever see her again."

"What are you saying?" exclaimed Maria; "how strange! Pray continue."

"In the beginning of 1812," said Burmin, "I was hurrying on to Wilna, where my regiment was stationed. Arriving one evening late at a station, I ordered, the horses to be got ready quickly, when suddenly a fearful snowstorm broke out. Both station master and drivers advised me to wait till it was over. I listened to their advice, but an unaccountable restlessness took possession of me, just as though someone was pushing me on. Meanwhile, the snowstorm did not abate. I could bear it no longer, and again ordered the horses, and started in the midst of the storm. The driver took it into his head to drive along the river, which would shorten the distance by three miles. The banks were covered with snowdrifts; the driver missed the turning which would have brought us out on to the road, and we turned up in an unknown place. The storm never ceased. I could discern a light, and told the driver to make for it. We entered a village, and found that the light proceeded from a wooden church. The church was open. Outside the railings stood several sledges, and people passing in and out through the porch."

"'Here! here!' cried several voices. I told the coachman to drive up."

"'Where have you dawdled?' said someone to me. 'The bride has fainted; the priest does not know what to do: we were on the point of going back. Make haste and get out!'"

"I got out of the sledge in silence, and stepped into the church, which was dimly lighted with two or three tapers. A girl was sitting in a dark corner on a bench; and another girl was rubbing her temples. 'Thank God,' said the latter, 'you have come at last! You have nearly been the death of the young lady.'"

"The old priest approached me; saying,

"'Shall I begin?'"

"'Begin—begin, reverend father,' I replied, absently."

"The young lady was raised up. I thought her rather pretty. Oh, wild, unpardonable frivolity! I placed myself by her side at the altar. The priest hurried on."

"Three men and the maid supported the bride, and occupied themselves with her alone. We were married!"

"'Kiss your wife,' said the priest."

"My wife turned her pale face towards me. I was going to kiss her, when she exclaimed, 'Oh! it is not he—not he!' and fell back insensible."

"The witnesses stared at me. I turned round and left the church without any attempt being made to stop me, threw myself into the sledge, and cried, 'Away!'"

"What!" exclaimed Maria. "And you don't know what became of your unhappy wife?"

"I do not," replied Burmin; "neither do I know the name of the village where I was married, nor that of the station from which I started. At that time I thought so little of my wicked joke that, on driving away from the church, I fell asleep, and never woke till early the next morning, after reaching the third station. The servant who was with me died during the campaign, so that I have now no hope of ever

discovering the unhappy woman on whom I played such a cruel trick, and who is now so cruelly avenged."

"Great heavens!" cried Maria, seizing his hand. "Then it was you, and you do not recognise me?" Burmin turned pale—and threw himself at her feet.

THE UNDERTAKER.

The last remaining goods of the undertaker, Adrian Prohoroff, were piled on the hearse, and the gaunt pair, for the fourth time, dragged the vehicle along from the Basmannaia to the Nikitskaia, whither the undertaker had flitted with all his household. Closing the shop, he nailed to the gates an announcement that the house was to be sold or let, and then started on foot for his new abode. Approaching the small yellow house which had long attracted his fancy and which he at last bought at a high price, the old undertaker was surprised to find that his heart did not rejoice. Crossing the strange threshold, he found disorder inside his new abode, and sighed for the decrepit hovel, where for eighteen years everything had been kept in the most perfect order. He began scolding both his daughters and the servant for being so slow, and proceeded to help them himself. Order was speedily established. The case with the holy pictures, the cupboard with the crockery, the table, sofa, and bedstead, took up their appropriate corners in the back room. In the kitchen and parlour was placed the master's stock in trade, that is to say, coffins of every colour and of all sizes; likewise wardrobes containing mourning hats, mantles, and funeral torches. Over the gate hung a signboard representing a corpulent cupid holding a reversed torch in his hand, with the following inscription: "Here coffins are sold, covered, plain, or painted. They are also let out on hire, and old ones are repaired."

The daughters had retired to their own room, Adrian went over his residence, sat down by the window, and ordered the samovar to be got ready.

The enlightened reader is aware that both Shakespeare and Walter Scott have represented their gravediggers as lively jocular people, for the sake, no doubt, of a strong contrast. But respect for truth prevents me from following their example; and I must confess that the disposition of our undertaker corresponded closely with his melancholy trade. Adrian Prohoroff: was usually pensive and gloomy. He only broke silence to scold his daughters when he found them idle, looking out of window at the passers by, or asking too exorbitant prices for his products from those who had the misfortune (sometimes the pleasure) to require them. Sitting by the window drinking his seventh cup of tea, according to his custom, Adrian was wrapped in the saddest thoughts. He was thinking of the pouring rain, which a week before had met the funeral of a retired brigadier at the turnpike gate, causing many mantles to shrink and many hats to contract. He foresaw inevitable outlay, his existing supply of funeral apparel being in such a sad condition. But he hoped to make good the loss from the funeral of the old shopwoman, Tiruhina, who had been at the point of death for the last year. Tiruhina, however, was dying at Basgulai, and Prohoroff was afraid that her heirs, in spite of their promise to him, might be too lazy to send so far, preferring to strike a bargain with the nearest contractor.

These reflections were interrupted unexpectedly by three freemason knocks at the door. "Who is there?" enquired the undertaker. The door opened and a man, in whom at a glance might be recognised a German artisan, entered the room, and with a cheery look approached the undertaker.

"Pardon me, my dear neighbour," he said, with the accent which even now we Russians never hear without a smile; "Pardon me for disturbing you; I wanted to make your acquaintance at once. I am a bootmaker, my name is Gottlieb Schultz, I live in the next street—in that little house opposite your windows. To morrow I celebrate my silver wedding, and I want you and your daughters to dine with me in a friendly way."

The invitation was accepted. The undertaker asked the bootmaker to sit down and have a cup of tea, and thanks to Gottlieb Schultz's frank disposition, they were soon talking in a friendly way.

"How does your business get on?" enquired Adrian.

"Oh, oh," replied Schultz, "one way and another I have no reason to complain. Though, of course, my goods are not like yours. A living man can do without boots, but a corpse cannot do without a coffin."

"Perfectly true," said Adrian, "still, if a living man has nothing to buy boots with he goes barefooted, whereas the destitute corpse gets his coffin sometimes for nothing."

Their conversation continued in this style for some time, until at last the bootmaker rose and took leave of the undertaker, repeating his invitation.

Next day, punctually at twelve o'clock, the undertaker and his daughters passed out at the gate of their newly-bought house, and proceeded to their neighbours. I do not intend to describe Adrian's Russian caftan nor the European dress of Akulina or Daria, contrary though this be to the custom of fiction-writers of the present day. I don't, however, think it superfluous to mention that both, maidens wore yellow bonnets and scarlet shoes, which they only did on great occasions.

The bootmaker's small lodging was filled with guests, principally German artisans, their wives, and assistants. Of Russian officials there was only one watchman, the Finn Yurko, who had managed, in spite of his humble position, to gain the special favour of his chief. He had also performed the functions of postman for about twenty-five years, serving truly and faithfully the people of Pogorelsk. The fire which, in the year 1812, consumed the capital, burnt at the same time his humble sentry box. But no sooner had the enemy fled, when in its place appeared a small, new, grey sentry box, with tiny white columns of Doric architecture, and Yurko resumed his patrol in front of it with battle-axe on shoulder, and in the civic armour of the police uniform.

He was well known to the greater portion of the German residents near the Nikitski Gates, some of whom had occasionally even passed the night from Sunday until Monday in Yurko's box.

Adrian promptly made friends with a man of whom, sooner or later, he might have need, and as the guests were just then going in to dinner they sat down together.

Mr. and Mrs. Schultz and their daughter, the seventeen-year-old Lotchen, while dining with their guests, attended to their wants and assisted the cook to wait upon them. Beer flowed. Yurko ate for four, and Adrian did not fall short of him, though his daughters stood upon ceremony.

The conversation, which was in German, grew louder every hour.

Suddenly the host called for the attention of the company, and opening a pitch-covered bottle, exclaimed loudly in Russian:

"The health of my good Louisa!"

The imitation champagne frothed. The host kissed tenderly the fresh face of his forty-year old spouse and the guests drank vociferously the health of good Louisa.

"The health of my dear guests!" cried the host opening the second bottle. The guests thanked him and emptied their glasses. Then one toast followed another. The health of each guest was proposed separately; then the health of Moscow and of about a dozen German towns. They drank the health of the guilds in general, and afterwards of each one separately; The health of the foremen and of the workmen. Adrian drank with a will and became so lively, that he himself proposed some jocular toast.

Suddenly one of the guests, a stout baker, raised his glass and exclaimed:

"The health of our customers!"

This toast like all the others was drunk joyfully and unanimously. The guests nodded to each other; the tailor to the bootmaker, the bootmaker to the tailor; the baker to them both and all to the baker.

Yurko in the midst of this bowing called out as he turned towards his neighbour:

"Now then! My friend, drink to the health of your corpses."

Everybody laughed except the undertaker, who felt himself affronted and frowned. No one noticed this; and the guests went on drinking till the bells began to ring for evening service, when they all rose from the table.

The party had broken up late and most of the guests were very hilarious. The stout baker, with the bookbinder, whose face looked as if it were bound in red morocco, led Yurko by the arms to his sentry box, thus putting in practice the proverb, "One good turns deserves another."

The undertaker went home drunk and angry.

"How, indeed," he exclaimed aloud. "Is my trade worse than any other? Is an undertaker own brother to the executioner? What have the infidels to laugh at? Is an undertaker a hypocritical buffoon? I should have liked to invite them to a housewarming; to give them a grand spread. But no; that shall not be! I will ask my customers instead; my orthodox corpses."

"What!" exclaimed the servant, who at that moment was taking off the undertaker's boots. "What is that, sir, you are saying? Make the sign of the cross! Invite corpses to your housewarming! How awful!"

"I will certainly invite them," persisted Adrian, "and not later than for to-morrow. Honour me, my benefactors, with your company to-morrow evening at a feast; I will offer you what God has given me."

With these words the undertaker retired to bed, and was soon snoring.

It was still dark when Adrian awoke. The shopkeeper, Triuhina, had died in the night, and her steward had sent a special messenger on horseback to inform Adrian of the fact. The undertaker gave him a *grivenik* [a silver fourpenny bit] for his trouble, to buy *vodka* with; dressed hurriedly, took an *isvoshchik*, and drove off to Rasgulai. At the gate of the dead woman's house the police were already standing, and dealers in mourning goods were hovering around, like ravens who have scented a corpse. The defunct was lying in state on the table, yellow like wax, but not yet disfigured by decomposition. Hear her, in a crowd, were relations, friends, and

domestics. All the windows were open; wax tapers were burning; and the clergy were reading prayers. Adrian went up to the nephew, a young shopman in a fashionable *surtout*, and informed him that the coffin, tapers, pall, and the funeral paraphernalia in general would promptly arrive. The heir thanked him in an absent manner, saying that he would not bargain about the price, but leave it all to his conscience. The undertaker, as usual, vowed that his charges should be moderate, exchanged significant glances with the steward, and left to make the necessary preparations.

The whole day was spent in travelling from Rasgulai to the Nikitski Grates and back again. Towards evening everything was settled, and he started home on foot after discharging his hired *isvoshchik.* It was a moonlight night, and the undertaker got safely to the Nikitski Grates. At Yosnessenia he met our acquaintance, Yurko, who, recognising the undertaker, wished him good-night. It was late. The undertaker was close to his house when he thought he saw some one approach the gates, open the wicket, and go in.

"What does it mean?" thought Adrian. "Who can be wanting me again? Is it a burglar, or can my foolish girls have lovers coming after them? There is no telling," and the undertaker was on the point of calling his friend Yurko to his assistance, when some one else came up to the wicket and was about to enter, but seeing the master of the house run towards him, he stopped, and took off his three cornered hat. His face seemed familiar to Adrian, but in his hurry he had not been able to see it properly.

"You want me?" said Adrian, out of breath. "Walk in, if you please."

"Don't stand on ceremony, my friend," replied the other, in a hollow voice, "go first, and show your guest the way."

Adrian had no time to waste on formality. The gate was open, and he went up to the steps followed by the other. Adrian heard people walking about in his rooms.

"What the devil is this?" he wondered, and he hastened to see. But now his legs seemed to be giving way. The room was full of corpses. The moon, shining through the windows, lit up their yellow and blue

faces, sunken mouths, dim, half-closed eyes, and protruding noses. To his horror, Adrian recognised in them people he had buried, and in the guest who came in with him, the brigadier who had been interred during a pouring rain. They all, ladies and gentlemen, surrounded the undertaker, bowing and greeting him affably, except one poor fellow lately buried gratis, who, ashamed of his rags, kept at a distance in a corner of the room. The others were all decently clad; the female corpses in caps and ribbons, the soldiers and officials in their uniforms, but with unshaven beards; and the tradespeople in their best caftans.

"Prohoroff," said the brigadier, speaking on behalf of all the company, "we have all risen to profit by your invitation. Only those have stopped at home who were quite unable to do otherwise; who have crumbled away and have nothing left but bare bones. Even among those there was one who could not resist—he wanted so much to come."

At this moment a diminutive skeleton pushed his way through the crowd and approached Adrian. His death's head grinned affably at the undertaker. Shreds of green and red cloth and of rotten linen hung on him as on a pole; while the bones of his feet clattered inside his heavy boots like pestles in mortars.

"You do not recognise me, Prohoroff?" said the skeleton. "Don't you remember the retired, sergeant in the guards, Peter Petrovitch Kurilkin, him to whom you in the year 1799 sold your first coffin, and of deal instead of oak?" With these words the corpse stretched out his long arms to embrace him. But Adrian collecting his strength, shrieked, and pushed him away. Peter Petrovitch staggered, fell over, and crumbled to pieces. There was a murmur of indignation among the company of corpses. All stood up for the honour of their companion, threatening and abusing Adrian till the poor man, deafened by their shrieks and quite overcome, lost his senses and fell unconscious among the bones of the retired sergeant of the guard.

The sun had been shining for sometime upon the bed on which the undertaker lay, when he at last opened his eyes and saw the servant

lighting the *samovar.* With horror he recalled all the incidents of the previous day. Triuchin, the brigadier, and the sergeant, Kurilkin, passed dimly before his imagination. He waited in silence for the servant to speak and tell him what had occurred during the night.

"How you have slept, Adrian Prohorovitch!" said Aksima, handing him his dressing-gown. "Your neighbour the tailor called, also the watchman, to say that to-day was Turko's namesday; but you were so fast asleep that we did not disturb you."

"Did anyone come from the late Triuhina?"

"The late? Is she dead, then?"

"What a fool! Didn't you help me yesterday to make arrangements for her funeral?"

"Oh, my *batiushka!* [little father] are you mad, or are you still suffering from last night's drink? You were feasting all day at the German's. You came home drunk, threw yourself on the bed, and and have slept till now, when the bells have stopped ringing for Mass."

"Really!" exclaimed the undertaker, delighted at the explanation.

"Of course," replied the servant.

"Well, if that is the case, let us have tea quickly, and call my daughters."

THE POSTMASTER.

Who has not cursed the Postmaster; who has not quarrelled with him? Who, in a moment of anger, has not demanded the fatal hook to write his ineffectual complaint against extortion, rudeness, and unpunctuality? Who does not consider him a human monster, equal only to our extinct attorney, or, at least, to the brigands of the Murom Woods? Let us, however, be just and place ourselves in his position,

and, perhaps, we shall judge him less severely. What is a Postmaster? A real martyr of the 14th class (i.e., of nobility), only protected by his *tchin* (rank) from personal violence; and that not always. I appeal to the conscience of my readers. What is the position of this dictator, as Prince Yiasemsky jokingly calls him? Is it not really that of a galley slave? No rest for him day or night. All the irritation accumulated in the course of a dull journey by the traveller is vented upon the Postmaster. If the weather is intolerable, the road wretched, the driver obstinate, or the horses intractable—the Postmaster is to blame. Entering his humble abode, the traveller looks upon him as his enemy, and the Postmaster is lucky if he gets rid of his uninvited guest soon. But should there happen to be no horses! Heavens! what abuse, what threats are showered upon his head! Through rain and mud he is obliged to seek them, so that during a storm, or in the winter frosts, he is often glad to take refuge in the cold passage in order to snatch a few moments of repose and to escape from the shrieking and pushing of irritated guests.

If a general arrives, the trembling Postmaster supplies him with the two last remaining *troiki* (team of three horses abreast), of which one *troika* ought, perhaps, to have been reserved for the diligence. The general drives on without even a word of thanks. Five minutes later the Postmaster hears—a bell! and the guard throws down his travelling certificate on the table before him! Let us realize all this, and, instead of anger, we shall feel sincere pity for the Postmaster. A few words more. In the course of twenty years I have travelled all over Russia, and know nearly all the mail routes. I have made the acquaintance of several generations of drivers. There are few postmasters whom I do not know personally, and few with whom I have not had dealings. My curious collection of travelling experiences I hope shortly to publish. At present I will only say that, as a class, the Postmaster is presented to the public in a false light. This much-libelled personage is generally a peaceful, obliging, sociable, modest man, and not too fond of money. From his conversation (which the travelling gentry very wrongly despise) much interesting and instructive information may be acquired. As far as I am concerned, I profess that I prefer his talk to that of some *tchinovnik* (official) of the 6th class, travelling for the Government.

It may easily be guessed that I have some friends among the honourable class of postmasters. Indeed, the memory of one of them is very dear to me. Circumstances at one time brought us together, and it is of him that I now intend to tell my dear readers.

In the May of 1816 I chanced to be passing through the Government of ----, along a road now no longer existing. I held a small rank, and was travelling with relays of three horses while paying only for two. Consequently the Postmaster stood upon no ceremony with me, but I had often to take from him by force what I considered to be mine by right. Being young and passionate, I was indignant at the meanness and, cowardice of the Postmaster when he handed over the *troika* prepared for me to some official gentleman of higher rank.

It also took me a long time to get over the offence, when a servant, fond of making distinctions, missed me when waiting at the governor's table. Now the one and the other appear to me to be quite in the natural course of things. Indeed, what would become of us, if, instead of the convenient rule that rank gives precedence to rank, the rule were to be reversed, and mind made to give precedence to mind? What disputes would arise! Besides, to whom would the attendants first hand the dishes? But to return to my story.

The day was hot. About three versts from the station it began to spit, and a minute afterwards there was a pouring rain, and I was soon drenched to the skin. Arriving at the station, my first care was to change my clothes, and then I asked for a cup of tea.

"Hi! Dunia!" called out the Postmaster, "Prepare the *samovar* and fetch some cream."

In obedience to this command, a girl of fourteen appeared from behind the partition, and ran out into the passage. I was struck by her beauty.

"Is that your daughter?" I inquired of the Postmaster.

"Yes," he answered, with a look of gratified pride, "and such a good, clever girl, just like her late mother." Then, while he took note of my travelling certificate, I occupied the time in examining the pictures which decorated the walls of his humble abode. They were

illustrations of the story of the Prodigal Son. In the firsts a venerable old man in a skull cap and dressing gown, is wishing good-bye to the restless youth who naturally receives his blessing and a bag of money. In another, the dissipated life of the young man is painted in glaring colours; he is sitting at a table surrounded by false friends and shameless women. In the next picture, the ruined youth in his shirt sleeves and a three-corned hat, is taking care of some swine while sharing their food. His face expresses deep sorrow and contrition. Finally, there was the representation of his return to his father. The kind old man, in the same cap and dressing gown, runs out to meet him; the prodigal son falls on his knees before him; in the distance, the cook is killing the fatted calf, and the eldest son is asking the servants the reason of all this rejoicing. At the foot of each picture I read some appropriate German verses. I remember them all distinctly, as well as some pots of balsams, the bed with the speckled curtains, and many other characteristic surroundings. I can see the stationmaster at this moment; a man about fifty years of age, fresh and strong, in a long green coat, with three medals on faded ribbons.

I had scarcely time to settle with my old driver when Dunia returned with the *samovar*. The little coquette saw at a second glance the impression she had produced upon me. She lowered her large, blue eyes. I spoke to her, and she replied confidently, like a girl accustomed to society. I offered a glass of punch to her father, to Dunia I handed a cup of tea. Then we all three fell into easy conversation, as if we had known each other all our lives.

The horses had been waiting a long while, but I was loth to part from the Postmaster and his daughter. At last I took leave of them, the father wishing me a pleasant journey, while the daughter saw me to the *telega*. In the corridor I stopped and asked permission to kiss her. Dunia consented. I can remember a great many kisses since then, but none which left such a lasting, such a delightful impression.

Several years passed, when circumstances brought me back to the same tract, to the very same places. I recollected the old Postmasters daughter, and rejoiced at the prospect of seeing her again.

"But," I thought, "perhaps the old Postmaster has been changed, and Dunia may be already married." The idea that one or the other might be dead also passed through my mind, and I approached the station of ---- with sad presentiments. The horses drew up at the small station house. I entered the waiting-room, and instantly recognised the pictures representing the story of the Prodigal Son. The table and the bed stood in their old places, but the flowers on the window sills had disappeared, while all the surroundings showed neglect and decay.

The Postmaster was asleep under his great-coat, but my arrival awoke him and he rose. It was certainly Simeon Virin, but how aged! While he was preparing to make a copy of my travelling certificate, I looked at his grey hairs, and the deep wrinkles in his long, unshaven face, his bent back, and I was amazed to see how three or four years had managed to change a strong, middle-aged man into a frail, old one.

"Do you recognise me?" I asked him, "we are old friends."

"May be," he replied, gloomily, "this is a highway, and many travellers have passed through here."

"Is your Dunia well?" I added. The old man frowned.

"Heaven knows," he answered.

"Apparently, she is married," I said.

The old man pretended not to hear my question, and in a low voice went on reading my travelling certificate. I ceased my inquiries and ordered hot water.

My curiosity was becoming painful, and I hoped that the punch would loosen the tongue of my old friend. I was not mistaken; the old man did not refuse the proffered tumbler. I noticed that the rum dispelled his gloom. At the second glass he became talkative, remembered, or at any rate looked as if he remembered, me, and I heard the story, which at the time interested me and even affected me much.

"So you knew my Dunia?" he began. "But, then, who did not? Oh, Dunia, Dunia! What a beautiful girl you were! You were admired and

praised by every traveller. No one had a word to say against her. The ladies gave her presents—one a handkerchief, another a pair of earrings. The gentlemen stopped on purpose, as if to dine or to take supper, but really only to take a longer look at her. However rough a man might be, he became subdued in her presence and spoke graciously to me. Will you believe me, sir? Couriers and special messengers would talk to her for half-an-hour at the time. She was the support of the house. She kept everything in order, did everything and looked after everything. While I, the old fool that I was, could not see enough of her, or pet her sufficiently. How I loved her! How I indulged my child! Surely her life was a happy one? But, no! fate is not to be avoided."

Then he began to tell me his sorrow in detail. Three years before, one winter evening, while the Postmaster was ruling a new book, his daughter in the next partition was busy making herself a dress, when a *troika* drove up and a traveller, wearing a Circassian hat and a long military overcoat, and muffled in a shawl, entered the room and demanded horses.

The horses were all out. Hearing this, the traveller had raised his voice and his whip, when Dunia, accustomed to such scenes, rushed out from behind the partition and inquired pleasantly whether he would not like something to eat? Her appearance produced the usual effect. The passenger's rage subsided, he agreed to wait for horses, and ordered some supper. He took off his wet hat, unloosed the shawl, and divested himself of his long overcoat.

The traveller was a tall, young hussar with a small black moustache. He settled down comfortably at the Postmaster's and began a lively, conversation with him and his daughter. Supper was served. Meanwhile, the horses returned and the Postmaster ordered them instantly, without being fed, to be harnessed to the traveller's *kibitka.* But returning to the room, he found the young man senseless on the bench where he lay in a faint. Such a headache had attacked him that it was impossible for him to continue his journey. What was to be done? The Postmaster gave up his own bed to him; and it was arranged that if the patient was not better the next morning to send to C——— for the doctor.

Next day the hussar was worse. His servant rode to the town to fetch the doctor. Dunia bound up his head with a handkerchief moistened in vinegar, and sat down with her needlework by his bedside. In the presence of the Postmaster the invalid groaned and scarcely said a word.

Nevertheless, he drank two cups of coffee and, still groaning, ordered a good dinner. Dunia never left him. Every time he asked for a drink Dunia handed him the jug of lemonade prepared by herself. After moistening his lips, the patient each time he returned the jug gave her hand a gentle pressure in token of gratitude.

Towards dinner time the doctor arrived. He felt the patient's pulse, spoke to him in German and in Russian, declared that all he required was rest, and said that in a couple of days he would be able to start on his journey. The hussar handed him twenty-five rubles for his visit, and gave him an invitation to dinner, which the doctor accepted. They both ate with a good appetite, and drank a bottle of wine between them. Then, very pleased with one another, they separated.

Another day passed, and the hussar had quite recovered. He became very lively, incessantly joking, first with Dunia, then with the Postmaster, whistling tunes, conversing with the passengers, copying their travelling certificates into the station book, and so ingratiating himself that on the third day the good Postmaster regretted parting with his dear lodger.

It was Sunday, and Dunia was getting ready to attend mass. The hussar's *kibitka* was at the door. He took leave of the Postmaster, after recompensing him handsomely for his board and lodging, wished Dunia good-bye, and proposed to drop her at the church, which was situated at the other end of the village. Dunia hesitated.

"What are you afraid of?" asked her father. "His nobility is not a wolf. He won't eat you. Drive with him as far as the church."

Dunia got into the carriage by the side of the hussar. The servant jumped on the coach box, the coachman gave a whistle, and the horses went off at a gallop.

The poor Postmaster could not understand how he came to allow his Dunia to drive off with the hussar; how he could have been so blind, and what had become of his senses. Before half-an-hour had passed his heart misgave him. It ached, and he became so uneasy that he could bear the situation no longer, and started for the church himself. Approaching the church, he saw that the people were already dispersing. But Dunia was neither in the churchyard nor at the entrance. He hurried into the church; the priest was just leaving the altar, the clerk was extinguishing the tapers, two old women were still praying in a corner; but Dunia was nowhere to be seen. The poor father could scarcely summon courage to ask the clerk if she had been to mass. The clerk replied that she had not. The Postmaster returned home neither dead nor alive. He had only one hope left; that Dunia in the flightiness of her youth had, perhaps, resolved to drive as far as the next station, where her godmother lived. In patient agitation he awaited the return of the *troika* with which he had allowed her to drive off, but the driver did not come back. At last, towards night, he arrived alone and tipsy, with the fatal news that Dunia had gone on with the hussar.

The old man succumbed to his misfortune, and took to his bed, the same bed where, the day before, the young impostor had lain. Recalling all the circumstances, the Postmaster understood now that the hussar's illness had been shammed. The poor fellow sickened with severe fever, he was removed to C———, and in his place another man was temporarily appointed. The same doctor who had visited the hussar attended him. He assured the Postmaster that the young man had been perfectly well, that he had from the first had suspicions of his evil intentions, but that he had kept silent for fear of his whip.

Whether the German doctor spoke the truth, or was anxious only to prove his great penetration, his assurance brought no consolation to the poor patient. As soon as he was beginning to recover from his illness, the old Postmaster asked his superior postmaster of the town of C——— for two months' leave of absence, and without saying a word to anyone, he started off on foot to look for his daughter.

From the station book he discovered that Captain Minsky had left Smolensk for Petersburg. The coachman who drove him said that Dunia had wept all the way, though she seemed to be going of her own free will.

"Perhaps," thought the station master, "I shall bring back my strayed lamb." With this idea he reached St. Petersburg, and stopped with the Ismailovsky regiment, in the quarters of a non-commissioned officer, his old comrade in arms. Beginning his search he soon found out that Captain Minsky was in Petersburg, living at Demuth's Hotel. The Postmaster determined to see him.

Early in the morning he went to Minsky's antechamber, and asked to have his nobility informed that an old soldier wished to see him. The military attendant, in the act of cleaning a boot on a boot-tree, informed him that his master was asleep, and never received anyone before eleven o'clock. The Postmaster left to return at the appointed time. Minsky came out to him in his dressing gown and red skull cap.

"Well, my friend, what do you want?" he inquired.

The old maids heart boiled, tears started to his eyes, and in a trembling voice he could only say, "Your nobility; be divinely merciful!"

Minsky glanced quickly at him, flushed, and seizing him by the hand, led him into his study and locked the door.

"Your nobility!" continued the old man, "what has fallen from the cart is lost; give me back, at any rate, my Dunia. Let her go. Do not ruin her entirely."

"What is done cannot be undone," replied the young man, in extreme confusion. "I am guilty before you, and ready to ask your pardon. But do not imagine that I could neglect Dunia. She shall be happy, I give you my word of honour. Why do you want her? She loves me; she has forsaken her former existence. Neither you nor she can forget what has happened." Then, pushing something up his sleeve, he opened the door, and the Postmaster found himself, he knew not how, in the street.

He stood long motionless, at last catching sight of a roll of papers inside his cuff, he pulled them out and unrolled several crumpled-up fifty ruble notes. His eyes again filled with tears, tears of indignation! He crushed the notes into a ball, threw them on the ground, and, stamping on them with his heel, walked away. After a few steps he stopped, reflected a moment, and turned back.

But the notes were gone. A well-dressed young man, who had observed him, ran towards an *isvoshtchick*, got in hurriedly, and called to the driver to be "off."

The Postmaster did not pursue him. He had resolved to return home to his post-house; but before doing so he wished to see his poor Dunia once more. With this view, a couple of days afterwards he returned to Minsky's lodgings. But the military servant told him roughly that his master received nobody, pushed him out of the antechamber, and slammed the door in his face. The Postmaster stood and stood, and at last went away.

That same day, in the evening, he was walking along the Leteinaia, having been to service at the Church of the All Saints, when a smart *drojki* flew past him, and in it the Postmaster recognised Minsky. The *drojki* stopped in front of a three-storeyed house at the very entrance, and the hussar ran up the steps. A happy thought occurred to the Postmaster. He retraced his steps.

"Whose horses are these?" he inquired of the coachman. "Don't they belong to Minsky?"

"Exactly so," replied the coachman. "Why do you ask?"

"Why! your master told me to deliver a note for him to his Dunia, and I have forgotten where his Dunia lives."

"She lives here on the second floor; but you are too late, my friend, with your note; he is there himself now."

"No matter," answered the Postmaster, who had an undefinable sensation at his heart. "Thanks for your information; I shall be able to manage my business." With these words he ascended the steps.

The door was locked; he rang. There were several seconds of painful delay. Then the key jingled, and the door opened.

"Does Avdotia Simeonovna live here?" he inquired.

"She does," replied the young maid-servant, "What do you want with her?"

The Postmaster did not reply, but walked on.

"You must not, must not," she called after him; "Avdotia Simeonovna has visitors." But the Postmaster, without listening, went on. The first two rooms were dark. In the third there was a light. He approached the open door and stopped. In the room, which was beautifully furnished, sat Minsky in deep thought. Dunia, dressed in all the splendour of the latest fashion, sat on the arm of his easy chair, like a rider on an English side saddle. She was looking tenderly at Minsky, while twisting his black locks round her glittering fingers. Poor Postmaster! His daughter had never before seemed so beautiful to him. In spite of himself, he stood admiring her.

"Who is there?" she asked, without raising her head.

He was silent.

Receiving no reply Dunia looked up, and with a cry she fell on the carpet.

Minsky, in alarm, rushed to pick her up, when suddenly seeing the old Postmaster in the doorway, he left Dunia and approached him, trembling with rage.

"What do you want?" he inquired, clenching his teeth. "Why do you steal after me everywhere, like a burglar? Or do you want to murder me? Begone!" and with a strong hand he seized the old man by the scruff of the neck and pushed him down the stairs.

The old man went back to his rooms. His friend advised him to take proceedings, but the Postmaster reflected, waved his hand, and decided to give the matter up. Two days afterwards he left Petersburg for his station and resumed his duties.

"This is the third year," he concluded, "that I am living without my Dunia; and I have had no tidings whatever of her. Whether she is alive or not God knows. Many tilings happen. She is not the first, nor the last, whom a wandering blackguard has *enticed* away, kept for a time, and then dropped. There are many such young fools in Petersburg to-day, in satins and velvets, and to-morrow you see them sweeping the streets in the company of drunkards in rags. When I think sometimes that Dunia, too, may end in the same way, then, in spite of myself, I sin, and wish her in her grave."

Such was the story of my friend, the old Postmaster, the story more than once interrupted by tears, which he wiped away picturesquely with the flap of his coat like the faithful Terentieff in Dmitrieff's beautiful ballad. The tears were partly caused by punch, of which he had consumed five tumblers in the course of his narrative. But whatever their origin, I was deeply affected by them. After parting with him, it was long before I could forget the old Postmaster, and I thought long of poor Dunia.

Lately, again passing through the small place of ———, I remembered my friend. I heard that the station over which he ruled had been done away with. To my inquiry, "Is the Postmaster alive?" no one could give a satisfactory answer. Having resolved to pay a visit to the familiar place, I hired horses of my own, and started for the village of N——.

It was autumn. Grey clouds covered the sky; a cold wind blew from the close reaped fields, carrying with it the brown and yellow leaves of the trees which it met. I arrived in the village at sunset, and stopped at the station house. In the passage (where once Dunia had kissed me) a stout woman met me; and to my inquiries, replied that the old Postmaster had died about a year before; that a brewer occupied his house; and that she was the wife of that brewer. I regretted my fruitless journey, and my seven roubles of useless expense.

"Of what did he die?" I asked the brewer's wife.

"Of drink," she answered.

"And where is he buried?"

"Beyond the village, by the side of his late wife."

"Could someone take me to his grave?"

"Certainly! Hi, Vanka! cease playing with the cat and take this gentleman to the cemetery, and show him the Postmaster's grave."

At these words, a ragged boy, with red hair and a squint, ran towards me to lead the way.

"Did you know the poor man?" I asked him, on the road.

"How should I not know him? He taught me to make whistles. When (may he be in heaven!) we met him coming from the tavern, *we* used to run after him calling, 'Daddy! daddy! some nuts,' and he gave us nuts. He idled most of his time away with, us."

"And do the travellers ever speak of him?"

"There are few travellers now-a-days, unless the assize judge turns up; and he is too busy to think of the dead. But a lady, passing through last summer, did ask after the old Postmaster, and she went to his grave."

"What was the ladylike?" I inquired curiously.

"A beautiful lady," answered the boy. "She travelled in a coach with six horses, three beautiful little children, a nurse, and a little black dog; and when she heard that the old Postmaster was dead, she wept, and told the children to keep quiet while she went to the cemetery. I offered to show her the way, but the lady said, 'I know the way,' and she gave me a silver *piatak* (twopence) ... such a kind lady!"

We reached the cemetery. It was a bare place unenclosed, marked with wooden crosses and unshaded by a single tree. Never before had I seen such a melancholy cemetery.

"Here is the grave of the old Postmaster," said the boy to me, as he pointed to a heap of sand into which had been stuck a black cross with a brass *icon* (image).

"Did the lady come here?" I asked.

"She did," replied Vanka. "I saw her from a distance. She lay down here, and remained lying down for a long while. Then she went into the village and saw the priest. She gave him some money and drove off. To me she gave a silver *piatak.* She was a splendid lady!"

And I also gave the boy a silver *piatak,* regretting neither the journey nor the seven roubles that it had cost me.

THE LADY RUSTIC.

In one of our distant provinces was the estate of Ivan Petrovitch Berestoff. As a youth he served in the guards, but having left the army early in 1797 he retired to his country seat and there remained. He married a wife from among the poor nobility, and when she died in childbed he happened to be detained on farming business in one of his distant fields. His daily occupations soon brought him consolation. He built a house on his own plan, set up his own cloth factory, became his own auditor and accountant, and began to think himself the cleverest fellow in the whole district. The neighbours who used to come to him upon a visit and bring their families and dogs took good care not to contradict him. His work-a-day dress was a short coat of velveteen; on holidays he wore a frock-coat of cloth from his own factory. His accounts took most of his time, and he read nothing but the *Senatorial News*. On the whole, though he was considered proud, he was not disliked. The only person who could never get on with him was his nearest neighbour, Grigori Ivanovitch Muromsky. A true Russian *barin,* he had squandered in Moscow a large part of his estate, and having lost his wife as well as his money he had retired to his sole remaining property, and there continued his extragavance but in a different way. He set up an English garden on which he spent nearly all the income he had left. His grooms wore English liveries. An English governess taught his daughter. He

farmed his land upon the English system. But foreign farming grows no Russian corn.

So, in spite of his retirement, the income of Grigori Ivanovitch did not increase. Even in the country he had a faculty for making new debts. But he was no fool, people said, for was he not the first landowner in all that province to mortgage his property to the government—a process then generally believed to be one of great complexity and risk? Among his detractors Berestoff, a thorough hater of innovation, was the most severe. In speaking of his neighbour's Anglo-mania he could scarcely keep his feelings under control, and missed no opportunity for criticism. To some compliment from a visitor to his estate he would answer, with a knowing smile:

"Yes, my farming is not like that of Grigori Ivanovitch. I can't afford to ruin my land on the English system, but I am satisfied to escape starvation on the Russian."

Obliging neighbours reported these and other jokes to Grigori, with additions and commentaries of their own. The Anglo-maniac was as irritable as a journalist under this criticism, and wrathfully referred to his critic as a bumpkin and a bear.

Relations were thus strained when Berestoff's son came home. Having finished his university career, he wanted to go into the army; but his father objected. For the civil service young Berestoff had no taste. Neither would yield, so young Alexis took up the life of a country gentleman, and to be ready for emergencies cultivated a moustache. He was really a handsome fellow, and it would indeed have been a pity never to pinch his fine figure into a military uniform, and instead of displaying his broad shoulders on horseback to round them over an office desk. Ever foremost in the hunting-field, and a straight rider, it was quite clear, declared the neighbours, that he could never make a good official. The shy young ladies glanced and the bold stared at him in admiration; but he took no notice of them, and each could only attribute his indifference to some prior attachment. In fact, there was in private circulation, copied from an envelope in his handwriting, this address:

A. N. P.,
Care of Akulina Petrovna Kurotchkina,
Opposite Alexeieff Monastery.

Those readers who have not seen our country life can hardly realize the charm of these provincial girls. Breathing pure air under the shadow of their apple trees, their only knowledge of the world is drawn from books. In solitude and unrestrained, their feelings and their passions develop early to a degree unknown to the busier beauties of our towns. For them the tinkling of a bell is an event, a drive into the nearest town an epoch, and a chance visit a long, sometimes an everlasting remembrance. At their oddities he may laugh who will, but superficial sneers cannot impair their real merits —their individuality, which, so says Jean Paul, is a necessary element of greatness. The women in large towns may be better educated, but the levelling influence of the world soon makes all women as much alike as their own head-dresses.

Let not this be regarded as condemnation. Still as an ancient writer says *nota nostra manet.*

It may be imagined what an impression Alexis made on our country misses. He was the first gloomy and disenchanted hero they had ever beheld; the first who ever spoke to them of vanished joys and blighted past. Besides, he wore a black ring with a death's head on it. All this was quite a new thing in that province, and the young ladies all went crazy.

But she in whose thoughts he dwelt most deeply was Lisa, or, as the old Anglo-maniac called her, Betty, the daughter of Grigori Ivanovitch. Their fathers did not visit, so she had never seen Alexis, who was the sole topic of conversation among her young neighbours. She was just seventeen, with dark eyes lighting up her pretty face. An only, and consequently a spoilt child, full of life and mischief, she was the delight of her father, and the distraction of her governess, Miss Jackson, a prim spinster in the forties, who powdered her face and blackened her eyebrows, read Pamela twice a year, drew a salary of 2,000 rubles, and was nearly bored to death in barbarous Russia.

Lisa's maid Nastia was older, but quite as flighty as her mistress, who was very fond of her, and had her as confidante in all her secrets and as fellow-conspirator in her mischief.

In fact, no leading lady played half such an important part in French tragedy as was played by Nastia in the village.

Said Nastia, while dressing her young lady:

"May I go to-day and visit a friend?"

"Yes. Where?"

"To the Berestoff's. It is the cook's namesday. He called yesterday to ask us to dinner."

"Then," said Lisa, "the masters quarrel and the servants entertain one another."

"And what does that matter to us?" said Nastia. "I belong to you and not to your father. You have not quarrelled with young Berestoff yet. Let the old people fight if they please."

"Nastia! try and see Alexei Berestoff. Come back and tell me all about him."

Nastia promised; Lisa spent the whole day impatiently waiting for her. In the evening she returned.

"Well, Lisaveta Grigorievna!" she said, as she entered the room.

"I have seen young Berestoff. I had a good look at him. We spent the whole day together."

"How so? tell me all about it."

"Certainly? We started, I and Anissia——"

"Yes, yes, I know! What then?"

"I would rather tell you in proper order. We were just in time for dinner; the room was quite full. There were the Zaharievskys, the steward's wife and daughters, the Shlupinskys——"

"Yes, yes! And Berestoff?"

"Wait a bit. We sat down to dinner. The steward's wife had the seat of honour; I sat next to her, and her daughters were huffy; but what do I care!"

"Oh, Nastia! How tiresome you are with these everlasting details!"

"How impatient you are! Well, then we rose from table—we had been sitting for about three hours and it was a splendid dinner-party, blue, red and striped creams—then we went into the garden to play at kiss-in-the-ring when the young gentleman appeared."

"Well, is it true? Is he so handsome?"

"Wonderfully handsome! I may say beautiful. Tall, stately, with a lovely colour."

"Really! I thought his face was pale. Well, how did he strike you—Was he melancholy and thoughtful?"

"Oh, no! I never saw such a mad fellow. He took it into his head to join us at kiss-in-the-ring." "He played at kiss-in-the-ring! It is impossible."

"No, it's very possible; and what more do you think? When he caught any one he kissed her." "Of course you may tell lies if you like, Nastia."

"As you please, miss, only I am not lying. I could scarcely get away from him. Indeed he spent the whole day with us."

"Why do people say then that he is in love and looks at nobody?"

"I am sure I don't know, miss. He looked too much at me and Tania too, the steward's daughter, and at Pasha too. In fact, he neglected nobody. He is such a wild fellow!"

"This is surprising; and what do the servants say about him?"

"They say he is a splendid gentleman—so kind, so lively! He has only one fault: he is too fond of the girls. But I don't think that is such a great fault. He will get steadier in time."

"How I should like to see him," said Lisa, with a sigh.

"And why can't you? Tugilovo is only a mile off. Take a walk in that direction, or a ride, and you are sure to meet him. He shoulders his gun and goes shooting every morning."

"No, it would never do. He would think I was running after him. Besides, our fathers have quarrelled, so he and I could hardly set up a friendship. Oh, Nastia! I know what I'll do. I will dress up like a peasant."

"That will do. Put on a coarse chemise and a *sarafan*, and set out boldly for Tugilovo. Berestoff will never miss you I promise you."

"I can talk like a peasant splendidly. Oh, Nastia, dear Nastia, what a happy thought!" and Lisa went to bed resolved to carry out her plan. Next day she made her preparations. She went to the market for some coarse linen, some dark blue stuff, and some brass buttons, and out of these Nastia and she cut a chemise and a *sarafan.* All the maid-servants were set down to sew, and by evening everything was ready.

As she tried on her new costume before the glass, Lisa said to herself that she had never looked so nice. Then she began to rehearse her meeting with Alexis. First she gave him a low bow as she passed along, then she continued to nod her head like a mandarin. Next she addressed him in a peasant *patois,* simpering and shyly hiding her face behind her sleeve. Nastia gave the performance her full approval. But there was one difficulty. She tried to cross the yard barefooted, but the grass stalks pricked her tender feet and the gravel caused intolerable pain. Nastia again came to the rescue.

She took the measure of Lisa's foot and hurried across the fields to the herdsman Trophim, of whom she ordered a pair of bark shoes.

The next morning before daylight Lisa awoke. The whole household was still asleep. Nastia was at the gate waiting for the herdsman; soon the sound of his horn drew near, and the village herd straggled past the Manor gates. After them came Trophim, who, as he passed, handed to Nastia a little pair of speckled bark shoes, and received a ruble.

Lisa, who had quietly donned her peasant dress, whispered to Nastia her last instructions about Miss Jackson; then she went through the kitchen, out of the back door, into the open field, then she began to run.

Dawn was breaking, and the rows of golden clouds stood like courtiers waiting for their monarch. The clear sky, the fresh morning air, the dew, the breeze and singing of the birds filled Lisa's heart with child-like joy.

Fearing to meet with some acquaintance, she did nor walk but flew. As she drew near the wood where lay the boundary of her father's property she slackened her pace. It was here she was to meet Alexis. Her heart beat violently, she knew not why. The terrors of our youthful escapades are their chief charm.

Lisa stepped forward into the darkness of the wood; its hollow echoes bade her welcome. Her buoyant spirits gradually gave place to meditation. She thought—but who shall truly tell the thoughts of sweet seventeen in a wood, alone, at six o'clock on a spring morning?

And as she walked in meditation under the shade of lofty trees, suddenly a beautiful pointer began to bark at her. Lisa cried out with fear, and at the same moment a voice exclaimed, "*Tout beau Shogar, ici,*" and a young sportsman stepped from behind the bushes. "Don't be afraid, my dear, he won't bite."

Lisa had already recovered from her fright, and instantly took advantage of the situation.

"It's all very well, sir," she said, with assumed timidity and shyness, *"I* am afraid of him, he seems such a savage creature, and may fly at me again."

Alexis, whom the reader has already recognised, looked steadily at the young peasant. "I will escort you, if you are afraid; will you allow me to walk by your side?"

"Who is to prevent you?" replied Lisa. "A freeman can do as he likes, and the road is public!"

"Where do you come from?"

"From Prilutchina; I am the daughter of Yassili, the blacksmith, and I am looking for mushrooms." She was carrying a basket suspended from her shoulders by a cord.

"And you, *barin*; are you from Tugilovo?"

"Exactly, I am the young gentleman's valet" (he wished to equalize their ranks). But Lisa looked at him and laughed.

"Ah! you are lying," she said. "I am not a fool. I see you are the master himself."

"What makes you think so?"

"Everything."

"Still——?"

"How can one help it. You are not dressed like a servant. You speak differently. You even call your dog in a foreign tongue."

Lisa charmed him more and more every moment. Accustomed to be unceremonious with pretty country girls, he tried to kiss her, but Lisa jumped aside, and suddenly assumed so distant and severe an air that though it amused him he did not attempt any further familiarities.

"If you wish to remain friends," she said, with dignity, "do not forget yourself."

"Who has taught you this wisdom?" asked Alexis, with a laugh. "Can it be my little friend Nastia, your mistress's maid? So this is how civilization spreads."

Lisa felt she had almost betrayed herself, and said, "Do you think I have never been up to the Manor House? I have seen and heard more than you think. Still, chattering here with you won't get me mushrooms. You go that way, *barin*; I'll go the other, begging your pardon;" and Lisa made as if to depart, but Alexis held her by the hand.

"What is your name, my dear?"

"Akulina," she said, struggling to get her fingers free. "Let me go, *barin,* it is time for me to be home."

"Well, my friend Akulina, I shall certainly call on your father, Yassili, the blacksmith."

"For the Lord's sake don't do that. If they knew at home I had been talking here alone with the young *barin,* I should catch it. My father would beat me within an inch of my life."

"Well, I must see you again."

"I will come again some other day for mushrooms."

"When?"

"To-morrow, if you like."

"My dear Akulina, I would kiss you if I dared. To-morrow, then, at the same time; that is a bargain."

"All right."

"You will not play me false?"

"No."

"Swear it."

"By the Holy Friday, then, I will come."

The young couple parted. Lisa ran out of the wood across the fields, stole into the garden, and rushed headlong into the farmyard, where Nastia was waiting for her. Then she changed her dress, answering at random the impatient questions of her *confidante*, and went into the dining-room to find the cloth laid and breakfast ready. Miss Jackson, freshly powdered and Jaced, until she looked like a wine glass, was cutting thin slices of bread and butter. Her father complimented Lisa on her early walk.

"There is no healthier habit," he remarked, "than to rise at daybreak." He quoted from the English papers several cases of longevity, adding that all centenarians had abstained from spirits, and made it a practice to rise at daybreak winter and summer. Lisa did not prove an attentive listener. She was repeating in her mind the details of her

morning's interview, and as she recalled Akulina's conversation with the young sportsman her conscience smote her. In vain she assured herself that the bounds of decorum had not been passed. This joke, she argued, could have no evil consequences, but conscience would not be quieted. What most disturbed her was her promise to repeat the meeting. She half decided not to keep her word, but then Alexis, tired of waiting, might go to seek the blacksmiths daughter in the village and find the real Akulina—a stout, pockmarked girl—and so discover the hoax. Alarmed at this she determined to re-enact the part of Akulina. Alexis was enchanted. All day he thought about his new acquaintance and at night he dreamt of her. It was scarcely dawn when he was up and dressed. Without waiting even to load his gun he set out followed by the faithful Shogar, and ran to the meeting place. Half an hour passed in undeniable delay. At last he caught a glimpse of a blue *sarafan* among the bushes and rushed to meet dear Akulina. She smiled to see his eagerness; but he saw traces of anxiety and melancholy on her face. He asked her the cause, and she at last confessed. She had been flighty and was very sorry for it. She had meant not to keep her promise, and this meeting at any rate must be the last. She begged him not to seek to continue an acquaintance which could have no good end. All this, of course, was said in peasant dialect; but the thought and feeling struck Alexis as unusual in a peasant. In eloquent words he urged her to abandon this cruel resolution. She should have no reason for repentance; he would obey her in everything, if only she would not rob him of his one happiness and let him see her alone three times or even only twice a week. He spoke with passion, and at the moment he was really in love. Lisa listened to him in silence.

"Promise," she said, "to seek no other meetings with me but those which I myself appoint."

He was about to swear by the Holy Friday when she stopped him with a smile.

"I do not want you to swear. Your word is enough."

Then together they wandered talking in the wood, till Lisa said:

"It is time."

They parted; and Alexis was left to wonder how in two meetings a simple rustic had gained such influence over him. There was a freshness and novelty about it all that charmed him, and though the conditions she imposed were irksome, the thought of breaking his promise never even entered his mind. After all, in spite of his fatal ring and the mysterious correspondence, Alexis was a kind and affectionate youth, with a pure heart still capable of innocent enjoyment. Did I consult only my own wishes I should dwell at length on the meetings of these young people, their growing love, their mutual trust, and all they did and all they said. But my pleasure I know would not be shared by the majority of my readers; so for their sake I will omit them. I will only say that in a brief two months Alexis was already madly in love, and Lisa, though more reticent than he was, not indifferent. Happy in the present they took little thought for the future. Visions of indissoluble ties flitted not seldom through the minds of both. But neither mentioned them. For Alexis, however strong his attachment to Akulina, could not forget the social distance that was between them, while Lisa, knowing the enmity between their fathers, dared not count on their becoming reconciled. Besides, her vanity was stimulated by the vague romantic hope of at last seeing the lord of Tugilovo at the feet of the daughter of a village blacksmith. Suddenly something happened which came near to change the course of their true love. One of those cold bright mornings so common in our Russian autumns Ivan Berestoff came a-riding. For all emergencies he brought with him six pointers and a dozen beaters. That same morning Grigori Muromsky, tempted by the fine weather, saddled his English mare and came trotting through

his agricultural estates. Nearing the wood he came upon his neighbour proudly seated in the saddle wearing his fur-lined overcoat. Ivan Berestoff was waiting for the hare which the beaters were driving with discordant noises out of the brushwood. If Muromsky could have foreseen this meeting he would have avoided it. But finding himself suddenly within pistol-shot there was no escape. Like a cultivated European gentleman, Muromsky rode up to and addressed his enemy politely. Berestoff answered with the grace of a chained bear dancing to the order of his keeper. At this moment out shot the hare and scudded across the field. Berestoff and his groom shouted to loose the dogs, and started after them full speed. Muromsky's mare took fright and bolted. Her rider, who often boasted of his horsemanship, gave her her head and chuckled inwardly over this opportunity of escaping a disagreeable companion. But the mare coming at a gallop to an unseen ditch swerved. Muromsky lost his seat, fell rather heavily on the frozen ground, and lay there cursing the animal, which, sobered by the loss of her master, stopped at once. Berestoff galloped to the rescue, asking if Muromsky was hurt. Meanwhile the groom led up the culprit by the bridle. Berestoff helped Muromsky into the saddle and then invited him to his house. Peeling himself under an obligation Muromsky could not refuse, and so Berestoff returned in glory, having killed the hare and bringing home with him his adversary wounded and almost a prisoner of war.

At breakfast the neighbours fell into rather friendly conversation; Muromsky asked Berestoff to lend him a droshky, confessing that his fall made it too painful for him to ride back. Berestoff accompanied him to the outer gate, and before the leavetaking was over Muromsky Pad obtained from him a promise to come and bring Alexis to a friendly dinner at Prelutchina next day. So this old enmity which seemed before so deeply rooted was on the point of ending because the little mare had taken fright.

Lisa ran to meet Per father on his return.

"What has happened, papa?" she asked in astonishment. "Why are you limping? Where is the mare? Whose droshki is this?"

"My dear, you will never guess;"—and then he told Per.

Lisa could not believe Per ears. Before she Pad time to collect herself she heard that to-morrow both the Berestoffs would come to dinner.

"What do you say?" she exclaimed, turning pale. "The Berestoffs, father and son! Dine with us to-morrow! No, papa, you can do as you please, I certainly do not appear."

"Why? Are you mad? Since when have you become so shy? Have you imbibed hereditary hatred like a heroine of romance? Come, don't be afoot."

"No, papa, nothing on earth shall induce me to meet the Berestoffs."

Her father shrugged his shoulders, and left off arguing. He knew he could not prevail with her by opposition, so he went to bed after his memorable ride. Lisa, too, went to her room, and summoned Nastia. Long did they discuss the coming visit. What will Alexis think on recognising in the cultivated young lady his Akulina? What opinion will he form as to her behaviour and her sense? On the other hand, Lisa was very curious to see how such an unexpected meeting would affect him. Then an idea struck her. She told it to Nastia, and with rejoicing they determined to carry it into effect.

Next morning at breakfast Muromsky asked his daughter whether she still meant to hide from the Berestoffs.

"Papa," she answered, "I will receive them if you wish it, on one condition. However I may appear before them, whatever I may do, you must promise me not to be angry, and you must show no surprise or disapproval."

"At your tricks again!" exclaimed Muromsky, laughing. "Well, well, I consent; do as you please, my black-eyed mischief." With these words he kissed her forehead, and Lisa ran off to make her preparations.

Punctually at two, six horses, drawing the home-made carriage, drove into the courtyard, and skirted the circle of green turf that formed its centre.

Old Berestoff, helped by two of Muromsky's servants in livery, mounted the steps. His son followed immediately on horseback, and the two together entered the dining-room, where the table was already laid.

Muromsky gave his guests a cordial welcome, and proposing a tour of inspection of the garden and live stock before dinner, led them along his well-swept gravel paths.

Old Berestoff secretly deplored the time and trouble wasted on such a useless whim as this Anglo-mania, but politeness forbade him to express his feelings.

His son shared neither the disapproval of the careful farmer, nor the enthusiasm of the complacent Anglo-maniac. He impatiently awaited the appearance of his hosts daughter, of whom he had often heard; for, though his heart as we know was no longer free, a young and unknown beauty might still claim his interest.

When they had come back and were all seated in the drawing-room, the old men talked over bygone days, re-telling the stories of the mess-room, while Alexis considered what attitude he should assume towards Lisa. He decided upon a cold preoccupation as most suitable, and arranged accordingly.

The door opened, he turned his head round with indifference—with such proud indifference—that the heart of the most hardened coquette must have quivered. Unfortunately there came in not Lisa but elderly Miss Jackson, whitened, laced in, with downcast eyes and her little curtsey, and Alexis' magnificent military movement failed. Before he could reassemble his scattered forces the door opened again and this time entered Lisa. All rose, Muromsky began the introductions, but suddenly stopped and bit his lip. Lisa, his dark Lisa, was painted white up to her ears, and pencilled worse than Miss Jackson herself. She wore false fair ringlets, puffed out like a Louis XIV. wig; her sleeves *à l'imbécille* extended like the hoops of Madame de Pompadour. Her figure was laced in like a letter X, and all those of her mother's diamonds which had escaped the pawnbroker sparkled on her fingers, neck, and ears. Alexis could not discover in this ridiculous young lady his Akulina. His father kissed

her hand, and he, much to his annoyance, had to do the same. As he touched her little white fingers they seemed to tremble. He noticed, too, a tiny foot intentionally displayed and shod in the most coquettish of shoes. This reconciled him a little to the rest of her attire. The white paint and black pencilling—to tell the truth—in his simplicity he did not notice at first, nor indeed afterwards.

Grigori Muromsky, remembering his promise, tried not to show surprise; for the rest, he was so much amused at his daughter's mischief, that he could scarcely keep his countenance. For the prim Englishwoman, however, it was no laughing matter. She guessed that the white and black paint had been abstracted from her drawer, and a red patch of indignation shone through the artificial whiteness of her face. Flaming glances shot from her eyes at the young rogue, who, reserving all explanation for the future, pretended not to notice them. They sat down to table, Alexis continuing his performance as an absent-minded pensive man. Lisa was all affectation. She minced her words, drawled, and would speak only in French. Her father glanced at her from time to time, unable to divine her object, but he thought it all a great joke. The Englishwoman fumed, but said nothing. Ivan Berestoff alone felt at his ease. He ate for two, drank his fill, and as the meal went on became more and more friendly, and laughed louder and louder.

At last they rose from the table. The guests departed and Muromsky gave vent to his mirth and curiosity.

"What made you play such tricks upon them?" he inquired. "Do you know, Lisa, that white paint really becomes you? I do not wish to pry into the secrets of a lady's toilet, but if I were you I should always paint, not too much, of course, but a little."

Lisa was delighted with her success. She kissed her father, promised to consider his suggestion, and ran off to propitiate the enraged Miss Jackson, whom she could scarcely prevail upon to open the door and hear her excuses.

Lisa was ashamed, she said, to show herself before the visitors—such a blackamoor. She had not dared to ask; she knew dear kind Miss Jackson would forgive her.

Miss Jackson, persuaded that her pupil had not meant to ridicule her, became pacified, kissed Lisa, and in token of forgiveness presented her with a little pot of English white, which the latter, with expressions of deep gratitude, accepted.

Next morning, as the reader will have guessed, Lisa hastened to the meeting in the wood.

"You were yesterday at our master's, sir?" she began to Alexis. "What did you think of our young lady?"

Alexis answered that he had not observed her.

"That is a pity."

"Why?"

"Because I wanted to ask you if what they say is true."

"What do they say?"

"That I resemble our young lady; do you think so?"

"What nonsense, she is a deformity beside you!"

"Oh! *barin,* it is a sin of you to say so. Our young lady is so fair, so elegant! How can I vie with her?"

Alexis vowed that she was prettier than all imaginable fair young ladies, and to appease her thoroughly, began describing her young lady so funnily that Lisa burst into a hearty laugh.

"Still," she said, with a sigh, "though she may be ridiculous, yet by her side I am an illiterate fool."

"Well, that *is* a thing to worry yourself about. If you like I will teach you to read at once."

"Are you in earnest, shall I really try?"

"If you like, my darling, we will begin at once."

They sat down. Alexis produced a pencil and note-book, and Akulina proved astonishingly quick in learning the alphabet. Alexis wondered at her intelligence. At their next meeting she wished to learn to write.

The pencil at first would not obey her, but in a few minutes she could trace the letters pretty well.

"How wonderfully we get on, faster than by the Lancaster method."

Indeed, at the third lesson Akulina could read words of even three syllables, and the intelligent remarks with which she interrupted the lessons fairly astonished Alexis. As for writing she covered a whole page with aphorisms, taken from the story she had been reading. A week passed and they had begun a correspondence. Their post-office was the trunk of an old oak, and Nastia secretly played the part of postman. Thither Alexis would bring his letters, written in a large round hand, and there he found the letters of his beloved scrawled on coarse blue paper. Akulina's style was evidently improving, and her mind clearly was developing under cultivation.

Meanwhile the new-made acquaintance between Berestoff and Muromsky grew stronger, soon it became friendship. Muromsky often reflected that on the death of old Berestoff his property would come to Alexis, who would then be one of the richest landowners in that province. Why should he not marry Lisa? Old Berestoff, on the other hand, though he looked on his neighbour as a lunatic, did not deny that he possessed many excellent qualities, among them a certain cleverness. Muromsky was related to Count Pronsky, a distinguished and influential man. The count might be very useful to Alexis, and Muromsky (so thought Berestoff) would probably be glad to marry his daughter so well. Both the old men pondered all this so thoroughly that at last they broached the subject, confabulated, embraced, and severally began a plan of campaign. Muromsky foresaw one difficulty—how to persuade his Betty to make the better acquaintance of Alexis, whom she had never seen since the memorable dinner. They hardly seemed to suit each other well. At any rate Alexis had not renewed his visit to Prelutchina. Whenever old Berestoff called Lisa made a point of retreating to her own room.

"But," thought Muromsky, "if Alexis called every day Betty could not help falling in love with him. That is the way to manage it. Time will settle everything."

Berestoff troubled himself less about his plans. That same evening he called his son into his study, lit his pipe, and, after a short silence, began:

"You have not spoken about the army lately, Alexis. Has the Hussar uniform lost its attraction for you?"

"No, father," he replied respectfully. "I know you do not wish me to join the Hussars. It is my duty to consult your wishes."

"I am pleased to find you such an obedient son, still I do not wish to force your inclinations. I will not insist upon your entering the Civil Service at once; and in the meantime I mean to marry you."

"To whom, father?" exclaimed his astonished son.

"To Lisa Muromskaia; she is good enough for any one, isn't she?"

"Father, I did not think of marrying just yet."

"Perhaps not, but I have thought about it for you."

"As you please, but I don't care about Lisa Muromskaia at all."

"You will care about her afterwards. You will get used to her, and you will learn to love her."

"I feel I could not make her happy."

"You need not trouble yourself about that. All you have to do is to respect the wishes of your father."

"I do not wish to marry, and I won't."

"You shall marry or I will curse you; and, by Heaven, I will sell and squander my property, and not leave you a farthing! I will give you three days for reflection, and, in the meanwhile, do not dare to show your face in my presence."

Alexis knew that when his father took a thing into his head nothing could knock it out again; but then Alexis was as obstinate as his father. He went to his room and there reflected upon the limits of parental authority, on Lisa Muromskaia, his father's threat to make him a beggar, and finally he thought of Akulina.

For the first time he clearly saw how much he loved her. The romantic idea of marrying a peasant girl and working for a living came into his mind; and the more he thought of it, the more he approved it. Their meetings in the wood had been stopped of late by the wet weather.

He wrote to Akulina in the roundest hand and the maddest style, telling her of his impending ruin, and asking her to be his wife. He took the letter at once to the tree trunk, dropped it in, and went much satisfied with himself to bed.

Next morning, firm in resolution, he started early to call on Muromsky and explain the situation. He meant to win him over by appealing to his generosity.

"Is Mr. Muromsky at home?" he asked reining up his horse at the porch.

"No, sir, Mr. Muromsky went out early this morning."

How provoking, thought Alexis.

"Well, is Miss Lisa at home?"

"Yes, sir."

And throwing the reins to the footman, Alexis leapt from his horse and entered unannounced.

"It will soon be over," he thought, going towards the drawing-room. "I will explain to Miss Muromsky herself." He entered ... and was transfixed. Lisa!... no, Akulina, dear, dark Akulina, wearing no *sarafan* but a white morning frock, sat by the window reading his letter. So intent was she upon it that she did not hear him enter. Alexis could not repress a cry of delight. Lisa started, raised her hand, cried out, and attempted to run away. He rushed to stop her. "Akulina! Akulina!" Lisa tried to free herself.

"*Mais laissez moi donc, Monsieur! mais êtes vous fou?*" she repeated, turning away.

"Akulina! my darling Akulina!" he repeated, kissing her hand.

Miss Jackson, who was an eye-witness of this scene, knew not what to think. The door opened and Grigori Muromsky entered.

"Ah!" cried he, "you seem to have settled things between you."...

The reader will excuse me the unnecessary trouble of winding up.

KIRDJALI.

Kirdjali was by birth a Bulgarian.

Kirdjali, in Turkish, means a bold fellow, a knight-errant.

Kirdjali with his depredations brought terror upon the whole of Moldavia. To give some idea of him I will relate one of his exploits. One night he and the Arnout Michailaki fell together upon a Bulgarian village. They set fire to it from both ends and went from hut to hut, Kirdjali killing, while Michailaki carried off the plunder. Both cried, "Kirdjali! Kirdjali!" and the whole village ran.

When Alexander Ipsilanti proclaimed the insurrection and began raising his army, Kirdjali brought him several of his old followers. They knew little of the real object of the *hetairi.* But war presented an opportunity for getting rich at the expense of the Turks, and perhaps of the Moldavians too.

Alexander Ipsilanti was personally brave, but he was wanting in the qualities necessary for playing the part he had with such eager recklessness assumed. He did not know how to manage the people under his command. They had neither respect for him nor confidence.

After the unfortunate battle, when the flower of Greek youth fell, Jordaki Olimbisti advised him to retire, and himself took his place. Ipsilanti escaped to the frontiers of Austria, whence he sent his curse to the people whom he now stigmatised as mutineers, cowards, and blackguards. These cowards and blackguards mostly perished within the walls of the monastery of Seke, or on the banks of the Pruth,

defending themselves desperately against a foe ten times their number.

Kirdjali belonged to the detachment commanded by George Cantacuzène, of whom might be repeated what has already been said of Ipsilanti.

On the eve of the battle near Skuliana, Cantacuzène asked permission of the Russian authorities to enter their quarters. The band was left without a commander. But Kirdjali, Sophianos, Cantagoni, and others had no need of a commander.

The battle of Skuliana seems not to have been described by any one in all its pathetic truth. Just imagine seven hundred Arnouts, Albanians, Greeks, Bulgarians, and every kind of rabble, with no notion of military art, retreating within sight of fifteen thousand Turkish cavalry. The band kept close to the banks of the Pruth, placing in front two tiny cannons, found at Jassy, in the courtyard of the Hospodar, and which had formerly been used for firing salutes on festive occasions.

The Turks would have been glad to use their cartridges, but dared not without permission from the Russian authorities; for the shots would have been sure to fly over to our banks. The commander of the Russian military post (now dead), though he had been forty years in the army, had never heard the whistle of a bullet; but he was fated to hear it now. Several bullets buzzed passed his ears. The old man got very angry and began to swear at Ohotsky, major of one of the infantry battalions. The major, not knowing what to do, ran towards the river, on the other side of which some insurgent cavalry were capering about. He shook his finger at them, on which they turned round and galloped along, with the whole Turkish army after them. The major who had shaken his finger was called Hortchevsky. I don't know what became of him. The next day, however, the Turks attacked the Arnouts. Hot daring to use cartridges or cannon balls, they resolved, contrary to their custom, to employ cold steel. The battle was fierce. The combatants slashed and stabbed one another.

The Turks were seen with lances, which, hitherto they had never possessed, and these lances were Russian. Our Nekrassoff

refugees were fighting in their ranks. The *hetairi,* thanks to the permission of our Emperor, were allowed to cross the Pruth and seek the protection of our garrison. They began to cross the river, Cantagoni and Sophianos being the last to quit the Turkish bank; Kirdjali, wounded the day before, was already lying in Russian quarters. Sophianos was killed. Cantagoni, a very stout man, was wounded with a spear in his stomach. With one hand he raised his sword, with the other he seized the enemy's spear, pushed it deeper into himself, and by that means was able to reach his murderer with his own sword, when they fell together.

All was over. The Turks remained victorious, Moldavia was cleared of insurgents. About six hundred Arnouts were scattered over Bessarabia. Unable to obtain the means of subsistence, they still felt grateful to Russia for her protection. They led an idle though not a dissolute life. They could be seen in coffee-houses of half Turkish Bessarabia, with long pipes in their mouths sipping thick coffee out of small cups. Their figured Zouave jackets and red slippers with pointed toes were beginning to look shabby. But they still wore their tufted scull-cap on one side of the head; and daggers and pistols still protruded from beneath, their broad girdles. No one complained of them. It was impossible to imagine that these poor, peaceable fellows were the celebrated pikemen of Moldavia, the followers of the ferocious Kirdjali, and that he himself had been one of them.

The Pasha governing Jassy heard of all this, and, on the basis of treaty rights, requested the Russian authorities to deliver up the brigand. The police made inquiries, and found that Kirdjali really was at Kishineff. They captured him in the house of a runaway monk in the evening, while he was at supper, sitting in the twilight with seven comrades.

Kirdjali was arraigned. He did not attempt to conceal the truth. He owned he was Kirdjali.

"But," he added, "since I crossed the Pruth, I have not touched a hair of property that did not belong to me, nor have I cheated the meanest gipsy. To the Turks, the Moldavians, and the Walachians I am certainly a brigand, but to the Russians a guest. When

Sophianos, after exhausting all his cartridges, came over here, he collected buttons from the uniforms, nails, watch-chains, and nobs from the daggers for the final discharge, and I myself handed him twenty *beshléks* to fire off, leaving myself without money. God is my witness that I, Kirdjali, lived by charity. Why then do the Russians now hand me over to my enemies?"

After that Kirdjali was silent, and quietly awaited his fate. It was soon announced to him. The authorities, not thinking themselves hound to look upon brigandage from its romantic side, and admitting the justice of the Turkish demand, ordered Kirdjali to be given up that he might be sent to Jassy.

A man of brains and feeling, at that time young and unknown, but now occupying an important post, gave me a graphic description of Kirdjali's departure.

"At the gates of the prison," he said, "stood a hired *karutsa.* Perhaps you don't know what a *karutsa* is? It is a low basket-carriage, to which quite recently used to be harnessed six or eight miserable screws. A Moldavian, with a moustache and a sheepskin hat, sitting astride one of the horses, cried out and cracked his whip every moment, and his wretched little beasts went on at a sharp trot. If one of them began to lag, then he unharnessed it with terrific cursing and left it on the road, not caring what became of it. On the return journey he was sure to find them in the same place, calmly grazing on the steppes. Frequently a traveller starting from a station with eight horses would arrive at the next with a pair only. It was so about fifteen years ago. Now in Russianized Bessarabia, Russian harness and Russian *telegas* (carts) have been adopted.

"Such a *karutsa* as I have described stood at the gate of the jail in 1821, towards the end of September. Jewesses with their sleeves hanging down and with flapping slippers, Arnouts in ragged but picturesque costumes, stately Moldavian women with black-eyed children in their arms, surrounded the *harutsa.* The men maintained silence. The women were excited, as if expecting something to happen.

"The gates opened, and several police officers stepped into the street, followed by two soldiers leading Kirdjali in chains.

"He looked about thirty. The features of his dark face were regular and austere. He was tall, broad-shouldered, and seemed to possess great physical strength. He wore a variegated turban on the side of his head, and a broad sash round his slender waist. A dolman of thick, dark blue cloth, the wide plaits of his over-shirt falling just above the knees, and a pair of handsome slippers completed his dress. His bearing was calm and haughty.

"One of the officials, a red-faced old man in a faded uniform, with three buttons hanging loose, a pair of lead spectacles which pinched a crimson knob doing duty for a nose, unrolled a paper, and stooping, began to read in the Moldavian tongue. From time to time he glanced haughtily at the handcuffed Kirdjali, to whom apparently the document referred. Kirdjali listened attentively. The official finished his reading, folded the paper, and called out sternly to the people, ordering them to make way for the *karutsa* to drive up. Then Kirdjali, turning towards him, said a few words in Moldavian; his voice trembled, his countenance changed, he burst into tears, and fell at the feet of the police officer, with a clanking of his chains. The police officer, in alarm, started back; the soldiers were going to raise Kirdjali, but he got up of his own accord, gathered up his chains, and stepping into the *harutsa*, cried *egaida!'*

"The gens d'armes got in by his side, the Moldavian cracked his whip, and the *karutsa* rolled away.

"What was Kirdjali saying to you? inquired a young official of the police officer.

"He asked me," replied the officer, smiling, "to take care of his wife and child, who live a short distance from Kilia, in a Bulgarian village; he is afraid they might suffer through him. The rabble are so ignorant!'"

The young official's story affected me greatly. I was sorry for poor Kirdjali. For a long while I knew nothing of his fate. Many years afterwards I met the young official. We began talking of old times.

"How about your friend Kirdjali?" I asked. "Do you know what became of him?"

"Of course I do," he replied, and he told me the following.

After being brought to Jassy, Kirdjali was taken before the Pasha, who condemned him to be impaled. The execution was postponed till some feast day. Meanwhile he was put in confinement. The prisoner was guarded by seven Turks—common people, and at the bottom of their hearts brigands like himself. They respected him and listened with the eagerness of true orientals to his wonderful stories. Between the guards and their prisoner a close friendship sprang up. On one occasion Kirdjali said to them:

"Brothers! My hour is near. No one can escape his doom. I shall soon part from you, and I should like to leave you something in remembrance of me." The Turks opened their ears.

"Brothers;" added Kirdjali, "three years back, when I was engaged in brigandage with the late Mihailaki, we buried in the Steppes, not far from Jassy, a kettle with some coins in it. Seemingly, neither he nor I will ever possess that treasure. So be it; take it to yourselves and divide it amicably."

The Turks nearly went crazy. They began considering how they could find the spot so vaguely indicated. They thought and thought, and at last decided that Kirdjali must himself show them.

Night set in. The Turks took off the fetters that weighed upon the prisoner's feet, hound his hands with a rope, and taking him with them, started for the Steppes. Kirdjali led them, going in a straight line from one mound to another. They walked about for some time. At last Kirdjali stopped close to a broad stone, measured a dozen steps to the south, stamped, and said, "Here."

The Turks arranged themselves for work. Four took out their daggers and began digging the earth, while three remained on guard. Kirdjali sat down on the stone, and looked on.

"Well, now, shall you be long?" he inquired; "have you found it?"

"Not yet," replied the Turks, and they worked away till the perspiration rolled like hail from them.

Kirdjali grew impatient.

"What people!" he exclaimed; "they can't even dig decently. Why, I should have found it in two minutes. Children! Untie my hands, and give me a dagger."

The Turks reflected, and began to consult with one another.

"Why not?" they concluded. "We will release his hands, and give him a dagger. What can it matter? He is only one, while we are seven."

And the Turks unbound his bands and gave him a dagger.

At last Kirdjali was free and armed. What must have been his sensations. He began digging rapidly, the guard assisting. Suddenly he thrust his dagger into one of them, leaving the blade sticking in the man's breast; he snatched from his girdle a couple of pistols.

The remaining six, seeing Kirdjali armed with two pistols, ran away.

Kirdjali is now carrying on his brigandage near Jassy. Not long ago he wrote to the Hospodar, demanding from him five thousand louis, and threatening, in the event of the money not being paid, to set fire to Jassy, and to reach the Hospodar himself. The five thousand louis were forwarded to him.

A fine fellow Kirdjali!

THE HISTORY OF THE VILLAGE OF GOROHINA.

Of all professions that of a man of letters has always seemed to me most enviable.

My parents, respectable but humble folk, had been brought up in the old fashion. They never read anything; and beyond an alphabet (bought for me), an almanack, and the latest letter-writer, they had no books in the house.

The letter-writer had long provided me with entertainment. I knew it by heart, yet daily found in it fresh beauties; and next to General N ——, to whom my father had been *aide-de-camp,* Kurganoff, its author, was, in my estimation, one of the greatest men. I questioned everyone about him; but unhappily no one could gratify my curiosity. Nobody knew him personally. To all my questioning the reply was that Kurganoff was the author of the latest letter-writer, but that I knew already. He was wrapped in darkness and mystery like some ancient demi-god. At times I doubted even his existence. His name was perhaps an invention, the legend about him an empty myth awaiting the investigation of some new Niebuhr. Nevertheless he dogged my imagination. I tried to give some form to this very personage, and finally decided that he must be like the land-judge, Koriuchkin, a little old man with a red nose and glittering eyes.

In 1812 I was taken to Moscow and placed at a boarding school belonging to Karl Ivanovitch Meyer. There I stayed only some three months, because the school broke up in anticipation of the enemy's coming. I returned to the country.

This epoch of my life was to me so important that I shall dilate upon it, apologizing beforehand if I trespass upon the good nature of the reader.

It was a dull autumn day. On reaching the station whence I must turn off to Gorohina (that was the name of our village) I engaged horses, and drove off by the country road. Though naturally calm, so impatient was I to revisit the scenes where I had passed the best years of my life, that I kept urging the driver to quicken speed with alternate promises of vodka and threats of chastisement. How much easier it was to belabour him than to unloose my purse. I own I struck him twice or thrice, a thing I had never done in my life before. I don't know why, but I had a great liking for drivers as a class.

The driver urged his troika to a quicker pace, but to me it seemed that public-driver-like he coaxed the horses and waved his whip but

at the same time tightened the reins. At last I caught sight of Gorohina wood, and in ten minutes more we drove into the courtyard of the manor house.

My heart beat violently. I looked round with unwonted emotion. For eight years I had not seen Gorohina. The little birches which I had seen planted near the palings had now grown into tall branching trees. The courtyard, once adorned with three regular flower beds divided by broad gravel paths, was now an unmown meadow, the grazing land of a red cow.

My britchka stopped at the front door. My servant went to open it, but it was fastened; yet the shutters were open, and the house seemed to be inhabited. A woman emerging from a servant's hut asked what I wanted. Hearing the master had arrived, she ran back into the hut, and soon I had all the inhabitants of the courtyard around me. I was deeply touched to see the known and unknown faces, and I greeted each with a friendly kiss.

The boys my playmates had grown to men. The girls who used to squat upon the floor and run with such alacrity on errands were married women. The men wept. To the women I said unceremoniously:

"How you have aged." And they answered sadly:

"And you, little father, how plain you have grown."

They led me towards the back entrance; I was met by my old wet-nurse, by whom I was welcomed back with sobs and tears, like the much-suffering Ulysses. They hastened to heat the bath. The cook, who in his long holiday had grown a beard, offered to cook my dinner or supper, for it was growing dark. The rooms hitherto occupied by my nurse and my late mother's maids were at once got ready for me. Thus I found myself in the humble home of my parents, and fell asleep in that room where three-and-twenty years before I had been born.

Some three weeks passed in business of various kinds. I was engaged with land judges, presidents, and every imaginable official of the province. Finally I got possession of my inheritance. I was

contented: but soon the dulness of inaction began to torment me. I was not yet acquainted with my kind and venerable neighbour N——. Domestic occupations were altogether strange to me. The conversation of my nurse, whom I promoted to the rank of housekeeper, consisted of fifteen family anecdotes. I found them very interesting, but as she always related them in the same way she soon became for me another Niebuhr letter-writer, in which I knew precisely on what page every particular line occurred. That worthy book I found in the storeroom among a quantity of rubbish sadly dilapidated. I brought it out into the light and began to read it; but Kurganoff had lost his charm. I read him through once more and never after opened him again.

In this extremity it struck me:

"Why not write myself?" The reader has been already told that I was educated on copper money. Besides, to become an author seemed so difficult, so unattainable, that the idea of writing quite frightened me at first. Dare I hope ever to be numbered amongst writers, when my ardent wish even to meet one had not yet been gratified? This reminds me of something which I shall tell to show my unbounded enthusiasm for my native literature.

In 1820, while yet an ensign, I chanced to be on government business at Petersburg. I stayed a week; and although I had not one acquaintance in he place, I passed the time very pleasantly. I went daily to the theatre, modestly to the fourth row in the gallery. I learnt the names of all the actors and fell passionately in love with B——. She had played one Sunday with great artistic feeling as Eulalie in *Hass und Reue* (in English *The Stranger.*) In the morning, on my way from headquarters, I would call at a small confectioner's, drink a cup of chocolate, and read a literary journal. One day, while thus deep in an article "by Goodintention, some one in a pea-green greatcoat suddenly approached and gently withdrew the *Hamburg Gazette* from under my newspaper. I was so occupied that I did not look up. The stranger ordered a steak and sat down facing me. I went on reading without noticing him.

Meanwhile he finished his luncheon, scolded the waiter for some carelessness, drank half a bottle of wine, and left. Two young men were also lunching.

"Do you know who that was?" inquired one of them.

"That was Goodintention ... the writer."

"The writer!" I exclaimed involuntarily, and leaving the article unread and the cup of chocolate undrunk, I hastily paid my reckoning, and without waiting for the change rushed into the street. Looking round I descried in the distance the pea-green coat and dashed along the Nevsky Prospect almost at a run. When I had gone several steps I felt myself stopped by some one, and looking back I found I had been noticed by an officer of the guards. I; ought not to have knocked against him on the pavement, but rather to have stopped and saluted. After this reprimand I was more careful. Unluckily I met an officer every moment, and every moment I had to stop, while the author got farther and farther away. Never before had my soldier's overcoat proved so irksome, never had epaulettes appeared so enviable. At last near the Annitchkin Bridge I came up with the pea-green greatcoat.

"May I inquire," I said, saluting, "are you Mr. Goodintention, whose excellent article I have had the pleasure of reading in the *Zealous Enlightener?*"

"Not at all," he replied. "I am not a writer but a lawyer. But I know Goodintention very well. A quarter of an hour ago I passed him at the Police Bridge." In this way my respect for Russian letters cost me 80 kopecks of change, an official reprimand, and a narrow escape of arrest, and all in vain.

In spite of all the protest of my reason, the audacious thought of becoming a writer kept recurring. At last, unable longer to resist it, I made a thick copy book and resolved to fill it somehow. All kinds of poems (humble prose did not yet enter into my reckoning) were in turn considered and approved. I decided to write an epic furnished on Russian history. I was not long in finding a hero. I chose Rurik, and I set to work.

I had acquired a certain aptitude for rhymes, by copying those in manuscript which used to circulate among our officers, such as the criticism on the Moscow Boulevards, the Presnensky Ponds, and the Dangerous Neighbour. In spite of that my poem progressed slowly, and at the third verse I dropped it. I concluded that the epic was not my style, and began *Rurik*, *a Tragedy.* The tragedy halted. I turned it into a ballad, but the ballad hardly seemed to do. At last I had a happy thought. I began and succeeded in finishing an ode to a portrait of Rurik. Despite the inauspicious character of such a title, particularly for a young bard's first work, I yet felt that I had not been born a poet, and after this first attempt desisted. These essays in authorship gave me so great a taste for writing that I could now no longer abstain from paper and ink. I could descend to prose. But at first I wished to avoid the preliminary construction of a plot and the connection of parts. I resolved to write detached thoughts without any connection or order, just as they struck me. Unfortunately the thoughts would not come, and in the course of two whole days the only thought that struck me was the following:

He who disobeys reason and yields to the inclination of his passions often goes wrong and ends by repenting when it is too late.

This though no doubt true enough was not original.

Abandoning aphorism I took to tales; but being too unpractised in arranging incidents I selected such remarkable occurrences as I had heard of at various times and tried to ornament the truth by a lively style and the flowers of my own imagination. Composing these tales little by little, I formed my style and learnt to express myself correctly, pleasantly, and freely. My stock was soon exhausted, and I again began to seek a subject.

To abandon these childish anecdotes of doubtful authenticity, and narrate real and great events instead, was an idea by which I had long been haunted.

To be the judge, the observer, and the prophet of ages and of peoples seemed to me a most attainable object of ambition to a writer. What history could I write—I with my pitiable education? Where was I not forestalled by highly cultivated and conscientious

men? What history had they left unexhausted. Should I write a universal history? But was there not already the immortal work of Abbé Millot. A national history of Russia, what could I say after Tatishtcheff Bolitin and Golikoff? And was it for me to burrow amongst records and to penetrate the occult meaning of a dead language—for me who could never master the Slavonian alphabet? Why not try a history on a smaller scale?—for instance, the history of our town! But even here how very numerous and insuperable seemed the obstacles—a journey to the town, a visit to the governor and the bishop, permission to examine the archives, the monastery, the cellars, and so on. The history of our town would have been easier; but it could interest neither the philosopher nor the artist, and afford but little opening for eloquence. The only noteworthy record in its annals relates to a terrible fire ten years ago which burnt the bazaar and the courts of justice. An accident settled my doubts. A woman hanging linen in a loft found an old basket full of shavings, dust, and books. The whole household knew my passion for reading. My housekeeper while I sat over my paper gnawing my pen and meditating on the experience of country prophets entered triumphantly dragging a basket into my room, and bringing joyfully "books! books!"

Books! I repeated in delight as I rushed to the basket. Actually a pile of them with covers of green and of blue paper. It was a collection of old almanacks. My ardour was cooled by the discovery, still they were books, and I generously rewarded her pains with half a silver ruble.

When she had gone I began to examine my almanacks; I soon became absorbed. They formed a complete series from 1744 to 1799 including exactly 55 years. The blue sheets of paper usually bound in the almanacks were covered with old-fashioned handwriting. Skimming these lines I noticed with surprise that besides remarks on the weather and accounts they contained scraps of historical information about the village of Gorohina. Among these valuable documents I began my researches, and soon found that they presented a full history of my native place for nearly a century, in chronological order, besides an exhaustive store of economical,

statistical, meteorological, and other learned information. Thenceforth the study of these documents took up my time, for I perceived that from them a stately, instructive, and interesting history could be made. As I became sufficiently acquainted with these valuable notes, I began to search for new sources of information about the village of Gorohina, and I soon became astonished at the wealth of material. After devoting six months to a preliminary study of them, I at last began the long wished for work; and by God's grace completed the same on the 3rd of November, 1827. To-day, like a fellow-historian, whose name I do not recollect, having finished my hard task, I lay down my pen and sadly walk into my garden to meditate upon my performance. It seems even to me that now the history of Gorohina is finished I am no longer wanted in the world. My task is ended; and it is time for me to die.

I add a list of the sources whence I drew the history of Gorohina.

I. A collection of ancient almanacks in fifty fifty—five parts. Of these the first twenty are covered with an old-fashioned writing; much abbreviated. The manuscript is that of my grandfather; Andrei Stepanovitch Belkin; and is remarkably clear and concise. For example: 4th of May. Snow.

Trishka for his impertinence beaten. 6th. The red cow died. Senka for drunkenness beaten. 8th. A fine day. 9th. Rain and snow. Trishka for drunkenness beaten.... and so on without comment. 11th. The weather fine, first snow; hunted three hares. The remaining thirty-five parts were in various hands mostly commercial with or without abbreviations, usually profuse; disjointed; and incorrectly written. Here and there a feminine handwriting appeared. In these years occurred my grandfather's notes about his wife Bupraxic Aleksevna; others written by her and others by the steward Grobovitsky.

II. The notes of the Gorohina church clerk. This curious manuscript was discovered by me at the house of my priest; who has married the daughter of the writer. The first earlier sheets had been torn out

and used by the priests children for making kites. One of these had fallen in the middle of my yard. I picked it up? and was about to restore it to the children when I noticed that it was written on. From the first lines I saw that the kite was made out of some one's journal. Luckily I was in time to save the rest. These journals, which I got for a measure of oats, are remarkable for depth of thought and dignity of expression.

III. Oral legends. I despised no source of information, but I am specially indebted for much of this to Agrafena Tryphonovna, the mother of Avdei the starosta and reputed mistress of the steward Grobovitsky.

IV. Registry reports with remarks by the former *starosta* on the morality and condition of the peasants.

"31st October, 1830. Fabulous Times. The Starosta Tryphon."

The foundation of Gorohina and the history of its original inhabitants are lost in obscurity. Dark legend tells how that Gorohina was once a large and wealthy village, that all its inhabitants were rich, that the obrok (the land proprietor's tithes) was collected once a year and carted off in loads no one knew to whom. At that time everything was bought cheap and sold dear. There were no stewards, and the elders dealt fairly by all. The inhabitants worked little and lived merrily. The shepherds as they watched their flocks wore boots. We must not be deceived by this charming picture. The notion of a golden age is common to all nations, and only proves that as people are never contented with the present, and derive from experience small hope for the future, they adorn the irrevocable past with all the hues of fancy. What is certain, however, is that the village of Gorohina from ancient times has belonged to the distinguished race of Belkins. But these ancestors of mine had many other estates, and paid but little attention to this remote village. Gorohina paid small tithe and was managed by elders elected by the people in common council.

At that early period the inheritance of the Belkins was broken up, and fell in value. The impoverished grandchildren of the rich grandsire, unable to give up their luxurious habits, required from an estate now only producing one tenth of its former revenue the full income of

former times. Threats followed threats. The starosta read them out in common council. The elders declaimed, the commune agitated, and the masters, instead of the double tithes, received tiresome excuses and humble complaints written on dirty paper and sealed with a *polushka* (less than a farthing).

A sombre cloud hung over Gorohina; but no one heeded it. In the last year of Tryphon's power, the last of the starostas chosen by the people, the day of the church festival, when the whole population either crowded noisily round the house of entertainment (the public-house) or wandered through the streets embracing one another or loudly singing the songs of Arhip the Bald, there drove into the courtyard a covered hired *britchka* drawn by a couple of half-dead screws, with a ragged Jew upon the box. From the britchka a head in a cap looked out and seemed to peer curiously at the merry-making crowd. The inhabitants greeted the carriage with laughter and rude jokes. With the flaps of their coats turned up the madmen mocked the Jewish driver, shouting in doggrell rhyme, "Jew, Jew, eat a pig's ear." But how great was their astonishment (wrote the clerk) when the carriage stopped in the middle of the village and the occupant jumped out, and in an authoritative voice called for the starosta Tryphon. This officer was in the house of pleasure, whence two elders led him forth holding him under the arms. The stranger looked at him sternly, handed him a letter, and told him to read it at once. The starostas of Gorohina were in the habit of never reading anything themselves. The rural clerk Avdei was sent for. He was found asleep under a hedge and was brought before the stranger. But either from the sudden fright or from a sad fore-boding, the words distinctly written in the letter appeared to him in a mist, and he could not read them. The stranger sent the starosta Tryphon and the rural clerk Avdei with terrible curses to bed, postponing the reading of the letter till the morrow and entered the office hut, whither the Jew carried his small trunk. The people of Gorohina looked in amazement at this unusual incident, but the carriage, the stranger, and the Jew were quickly forgotten. They ended their day with noise and merriment, and Gorohina went to sleep without presentiments of the future.

At sunrise the inhabitants were awakened with knockings at the windows and a call to a meeting of the commune. The citizens one after the other appeared in the courtyard round the office hut, which served as a council ground. Their eyes were dim and red, their faces swollen; yawning and scratching their heads, they stared at the man with the cap, in an old blue caftan, standing pompously on the steps of the office hut, while they tried to recollect his features, which they seemed to have seen some time or another.

The starosta and his clerk Avdei stood by his side, bareheaded, with the same expression of dejection and sorrow.

"Are all here?" inquired the stranger.

"Are all here?" repeated the starosta.

"The whole hundred," replied the citizens, when, the starosta informed them that he had received a letter from the master, and, directed the clerk to read it aloud to the commune. Avdei stepped forward and read as follows:

N.B. This alarming document, which he kept carefully shut up in the icon-case, together with other memorandum of his authority over the people of Gorohina, I copied at the house of Tryphon, our starosta.

> "TRYPHON IVANOFF,
>
> "The bearer of this letter, my agent.... is going to my patrimony, the village of Gorohina, to assume the management of it. Directly he arrives assemble the peasants and make known to them their master's wishes; namely, that they are to obey my agent as they would myself, and attend to his orders without demur; otherwise he is empowered to treat them with great severity. I have been forced to take this step by their shameless disobedience and your, Tryphon Ivanoff, roguish indulgence.
>
> "(Signed) NIKOLAI *N....*

Then the agent, with his legs extended like an X and his arms akimbo like a phitab, addressed to them the following pithy speech: "See that you are not too troublesome, or I will certainly beat the folly out of your heads quicker than the fumes of yesterday's drink." There

were no longer any fumes left in the head of any man of Gorohina. All were dumbfounded, hung their noses, and dispersed in fear to their own houses. The agent seized the reins of government, called for the list of peasants, divided them into rich and poor, and began to carry into effect his political system, which deserves particular description. It was founded upon the following maxims: That the richer a peasant, the more fractious he grows, and the poorer, the quieter.

Consequently, like a good Christian, I cared most for the peace of the estate.

First, the deficits were distributed among the rich peasants, and were exacted from them with the greatest severity. Second, the defaulting or idle hands were forthwith set to plough, and if their labour proved insufficient according to his standard, he assigned them as workmen to the other peasants, who paid him for this a voluntary tax. The men given as bondsmen, on the other hand, possessed the right of redeeming themselves by paying, besides their deficit, a double annual tithe. All the communal obligations were thrown upon the rich peasants. But the recruiting arrangements were the masterpiece of the avaricious ruler, for by turns all the rich peasants bought themselves off, till at last the choice fell upon either the blackguard or the ruined one.

Communal assemblies were abolished. The tithes were collected in small sums and all the year round. The peasants, it seems, did not pay very much more than before, but they could not earn or save enough to pay. In three years Gorohina was quite pauperised. Gorohina quieted down; the bazaar was empty, the songs of Arhip the Bald were unsung, one half the men were ploughing in the fields, the other half serving them as bond labourers. The children went begging, and the day of the church fête became, according to the historian, not a day of joy and exultation, but an annual mourning and commemoration of sorrow.

FROM A GOROHINA ANNALIST.

The accursed steward put Anton Timofeieff into irons, but the old man Timofei bought his son's freedom for one hundred rubles. The

steward then put the irons on Petrusha Gremeieff, who likewise was ransomed by his father for sixty-eight rubles. The accursed one then wanted to handcuff Lech Tarassoff, but he escaped into the woods, to the regret of the steward, who vented his rage in words; but sent to town in place of Lech Tarassoff Vanka the drunkard, and gave him for a soldier as a substitute.

PETER THE GREAT'S NEGRO.

CHAPTER I.

Amongst the young men sent abroad by Peter the Great to acquire the information necessary for a civilised country was his godson Ibrahim the negro. He was educated in a Parisian military school, passed out as a captain of the artillery, distinguished himself in the Spanish war, and when seriously wounded returned to Paris. In the midst of his enormous labours the emperor never ceased to ask after his favourite, of whose progress and good conduct the accounts were always favourable. Peter was exceedingly pleased with him, and frequently invited him to Russia; but Ibrahim was in no hurry. He excused himself; either his wound, or his wish to complete his education, or want of money, served as the pretext; and Peter complied with his wishes, begged him to take care of his health, thanked him for his assiduity in study, and though exceedingly economical himself was lavish to his *protégé,* and sent together with gold pieces fatherly advice and warning.

Judging by all historical accounts, the flightiness, madness, and luxury of the French of that period were unequalled. The latter years of Louis XIV.'s reign, memorable for the strict piety, dignity, and propriety of the court, have left no traces behind. The Duke of Orleans, in whom many brilliant qualities united with vice of every kind, unfortunately did not possess an atom of hypocrisy. The orgies of the Palais Royal were no secret in Paris; the example was

infectious. At that time Law made his appearance. To the love of money was united the thirst for pleasure and amusement. Estates dwindled, morals perished, Frenchmen laughed and discussed, while the kingdom crumbled to the jovial tunes of satirical vaudevilles. Meanwhile society presented a most uninteresting picture. Culture and the craving for amusement united all classes. Riches, amiability, renown, accomplishments, even eccentricity, whatever nourished curiosity or promised entertainment, was received with equal pleasure. Literature, learning, and philosophy left the seclusion of the study to appear in the great world and minister to fashion, the ruler of opinions. Women reigned, but no longer exacted adoration. Superficial politeness took the place of profound respect. The escapades of the Duke de Richelieu, the Alcibiades of modern Athens, belong to history and display the morals of that period:

"Temps Fortune, marqué par la licence,
Ou la folie, agitant son grelot,
D'un pied leger parcourt toute la France,
Ou nul mortel ne daigne être dévot,
Ou l'on fait tout excepté pénitence."

Ibrahim's arrival, his appearance, culture, and native wit, attracted general attention in Paris. All the ladies fought for a visit from the Tsar's negro. More than once was he invited to the Regent's merry evenings; he was present at the suppers enlivened by the youth of Voltaire and the age of Shollier, the conversations of Montesquieu and Fontenelle. Not a ball, not a fête, not one first representation did he miss; and he gave himself up to the general whirl with all the passion of his youth and nature. But the idea of exchanging these entertainments, these brilliant pleasures for the simplicity of the St. Petersburg Court was not all that Ibrahim dreaded. Other and stronger ties bound him to Paris. The young African was in love. No longer in the first bloom of youth, the Countess L. was still celebrated for her beauty. At seventeen, on leaving the convent, she was married to a man for whom she had not learnt to feel the love which ultimately he showed no care to win. Rumour assigned her lovers, but through the leniency of society she still enjoyed a good repute;

for nothing ridiculous or scandalous could be brought against her. Her house was the most fashionable, a centre of the best society in Paris. Ibrahim was introduced by young G. de Merville, who was regarded generally as her latest lover; an impression which he tried by every means to strengthen. The Countess received Ibrahim with civility, but without particular attention. He was flattered. Usually the young negro was regarded with wonder, surrounded and overwhelmed with attention and questions; and this curiosity, though veiled by a display of friendliness, offended his vanity.

The delightful attention of women, almost the sole aim of our exertions, not only gave him no pleas are, but even ailed him with bitterness and wrath. He felt that he was for them a species of rare animal, a strange peculiar creature, accidentally brought into a world with which he had naught in common. He even envied those whom no one noticed, and deemed their insignificance a blessing. The idea that nature had not formed him for tender passion robbed him of all self-assertion and conceit, and added a rare charm to his manner towards women. His conversation was simple and dignified. He pleased the Countess L., who was tired of the formal pleasantries and pointed innuendoes of French, wit.

Ibrahim visited her often. Little by little she grew used to the young negro's looks, and even began to find something agreeable in that early head, so black amid the powdered wigs that thronged her drawing-room (Ibrahim had been wounded in the head and wore a bandage in the place of a wig). He was twenty-seven, tall and well built, and more than one beauty glanced at him with feelings more flattering to him than mere curiosity. But Ibraham either did not observe them or thought their notice merely coquetry. But when his gaze met that of the Countess his mistrust vanished. Her eyes expressed so much kindness, her manner to him was so simple, so easy, that it was impossible to suspect her of the least coquetry or insincerity.

Though no thought of love entered his mind, to see the Countess daily had become a necessity. He tried to meet her everywhere, and every meeting seemed a godsend. The Countess guessed his feelings before he did so himself. There is no doubt that a love which

hopes nothing and asks nothing touches the female heart more surely than all the arts of the experienced. When Ibrahim was near, the Countess followed all his movements, listened to all his words. Without him she became pensive, and fell into her usual abstraction. Merville was first to notice their mutual attraction, and congratulated Ibrahim. Nothing inflames love like approving comments of outsiders. Love is blind, and putting no trust in itself clings eagerly to every support.

Merville's words roused Ibrahim. Hope suddenly dawned upon his soul; he fell madly in love. In vain the Countess, alarmed by the vehemence of his passion, wished to meet him with friendly warnings and sage counsels; but she herself was growing weak.

Nothing escapes the eye of the vigilant world. The Countess's new attachment soon became known. Some ladies wondered at her choice; many found him very ordinary. Some laughed; others considered her inexcusably imprudent. In the first intoxication of their passion Ibrahim and the Countess noticed nothing, but soon the jokes of the men, the sarcasms of the women, began to reach them. Ibrahim's formal and cold manner had hitherto guarded him from such attacks; he bore them with impatience, and knew not how to retaliate. The Countess, accustomed to the respect of society, could not calmly endure to see herself an object of ridicule and scandal. She complained to Ibrahim either with tears or bitter reproaches; then she begged him not to take her part, nor ruin her completely by useless disturbance.

Fresh circumstances complicated her position still more: results of her imprudent love began to show themselves. The Countess in distress told Ibrahim. Consolation, advice, suggestions were in turn exhausted and rejected. She foresaw her inevitable ruin, and in despair awaited it. Immediately the Countesses condition became known, reports circulated with renewed vigour. Sensitive women exclaimed in horror; the men made bets whether she would bear a white or a black child. Epigrams poured in about her husband, who alone in all Paris suspected nothing. The fatal moment approached, the Countess was in a terrible state. Ibrahim called every day. He saw her strength of mind and body gradually failing. Her tears and

terror increased momentarily. At last she felt the first throes. Measures were taken hurriedly. Means were found to get the Count out of the way. The doctor arrived. Two days previous to this a poor woman had been persuaded to resign into the hands of strangers her new-born infant, for which a messenger was sent.

Ibrahim remained in the study next the bedroom where the unhappy Countess lay, scarcely daring to breathe; he heard muffled groans, the maidservants whispers, and the doctor's directions. She suffered long. Each groan lacerated Ibrahim's heart, and every silent pause filled him with dread; suddenly he heard the weak cry of a child, and unable to control his delight rushed into the Countess's room. A black infant lay on the bed at her feet. Ibrahim approached it. His heart throbbed violently. He blessed his son with a trembling hand. The Countess with a faint smile stretched towards him a feeble hand, but the doctor, fearing too much excitement for his patient, dragged Ibrahim away from her bedside. The new-born babe was laid in a covered basket and carried out by a secret staircase. The other child was brought in, and its cradle placed in the bedroom. Ibrahim left feeling a trifle calmer. The Count was expected. He returned late, heard of the happy confinement of his wife, and was much pleased. Thus the public, which expected a great scandal, was disappointed, and forced to be satisfied with backbiting. Everything fell back into its usual routine. But Ibrahim felt that his life must undergo a change, and that his intimacy must sooner or later become known to Count L. In which case, whatever might ensue, the Countess's ruin was inevitable. Ibrahim loved and was loved with passion; but the Countess was wilful and flighty; and this was not her first love. Disgust and hatred might in her heart replace the tenderest feelings. Ibrahim already foresaw the time of her indifference. Hitherto he had not known jealousy, but now with horror he anticipated, it. Convinced that the anguish of a separation would be less painful, he resolved to break off this luckless connection, quit Paris, and return to Russia, whither Peter and a dull sense of duty had long been calling him.

CHAPTER II.

Days and months passed, and love-sick Ibrahim could not resolve to leave the woman he had wronged. The Countess from hour to hour grew more attached to him. Their son was being brought up in a distant province; social scandal was subsiding, and the lovers began to enjoy greater tranquillity, in silence remembering the past storm and trying not to think of the future.

One day Ibrahim was standing at the Duke of Orleans' door. The Duke passing him, stopped, handed him a letter, and bade him read it at his leisure. It was a letter from Peter I. The Tsar, guessing the real cause of his absence, wrote to the Hake that he in no way desired to compel Ibrahim, and left it to his free will to return to Russia or not; but that in any case he should never forsake his foster-child. This letter touched Ibrahim to the heart. From that moment his decision was made. Next day he announced to the Regent his intention to start immediately for Russia.

"Consider the step you are about to take," replied the Duke. "Russia is not your home. I don't think you will ever have a chance of seeing your torrid Africa, and your long residence in France has made you equally a stranger to the climate and the semi-barbarous life of Russia. You were not born one of Peter's subjects. Take my advice, profit by his generous permission, stay in France, for which you have already shed your blood, and be convinced that here your services and talents will not be left without their due reward."

Ibrahim thanked the Duke sincerely, but remained firm in his resolve.

"I regret it," replied the Regent; "but on the whole you may be right."

He promised to let him retire and wrote to inform the Tsar.

Ibrahim was soon ready for the journey. On the eve of his departure he passed the evening as usual at the Countess L's. She knew nothing. Ibrahim had not the courage to tell her. The Countess was calm and cheerful. She several times called him to her and joked about his pensiveness. After supper everybody had gone, leaving in the drawing-room only the Countess, her husband, and Ibrahim. The

unhappy man would have given the world to be left alone with her; but Count L. seemed to be settled so comfortably near the grate that it appeared hopeless to wait to see him out of the room. All three remained silent.

"Bonne nuit!" at last said the Countess.

Ibrahim's heart sank and he suddenly experienced all the horrors of parting. He stood motionless.

"*Bonne nuit, messieurs,*" repeated the Countess.

Still he did not move. At last his eyes became dim, his head went round, and he could scarcely get out of the room.

Arriving at home, almost mad, he wrote as follows:

"I am going, dearest Leonora, to leave you for ever. I write because I have not the strength to tell you otherwise. Our happiness could not continue; I have enjoyed it against the will of destiny and nature. You must in time have ceased to love me. The enchantment must have vanished. This idea has always haunted me, even when I seemed to forget all, when at your feet I was intoxicated by your passionate self-abnegation, by your boundless tenderness. The thoughtless world mercilessly persecute that which in theory it permits. Sooner or later its cold irony would have vanquished you, and cowed your passionate soul, till finally you would have been ashamed of your love.

"What, then, would have become of me?

"Better to die; better to leave you before that terrible moment. Your happiness to me is more precious than all; you could not enjoy it, while the gaze of society was fixed upon us. Remember all you have endured, your wounded pride, the torture of fear; the terrible birth of our son. Think; ought I any longer to subject you to such fears and dangers? Why should I endeavour to unite the fate of so tender, so beautiful a creature with the miserable life of a negro, a pitiable object scarce worthy of the name of man?

"Forgive me, Leonora; dear and only friend. In leaving you, I leave the first and last joy of my heart. I have no fatherland nor kin. I go to Russia, where my utter solitude will be my joy. Serious pursuits to which from henceforth I devote myself, if they do not silence must at any rate distract painful recollections of the days of rapture. Farewell, Leonora! I tear myself away from this letter, as if from your embrace.

Farewell, be happy, and think sometimes of the poor negro, of your faithful Ibrahim."

The same night he started for Russia. The journey did not seem as terrible as he had expected. His imagination triumphed over fact. The further he got from Paris the nearer and more vivid seemed to him all the objects he was leaving for ever.

Imperceptibly he reached the Russian frontier. Autumn had already set in, but the hired relays, notwithstanding the badness of the roads, brought him with the swiftness of the wind, and on the seventeenth morning he arrived at Krasnoe Selo, through which at that time passed the high road.

There remained twenty-eight versts' journey to St. Petersburg. While the horses were being changed Ibrahim entered the posting-house. In a corner a tall man, in a green caftan and a clay pipe in his mouth, sat leaning against the table reading the *Hamburg Gazette*. Hearing some one enter he raised his head.

"Oh, Ibrahim!" he exclaimed, rising from the bench. "How do you do, godson?"

Ibrahim recognised Peter, and in his delight rushed at him, but stopped respectfully. The monarch approached, put his arms round him, and kissed him on the forehead.

"I was told of your coming," said Peter, "and drove off to meet you. I Pave been waiting for you here since yesterday."

Ibrahim could not find words to express his gratitude.

"Tell them," added the Tsar, "to let your carriage follow us, while you get in by my side and drive to my place."

The Tsar's calèche was announced; he and Ibrahim got in and started at a gallop. In an hour and a half they reached St. Petersburg. Ibrahim looked with interest at the new-born city, which had sprung up by the will of the Tsar. The bare banks, the canals without quays, the wooden bridges, everywhere bore witness to the recent triumph of human will over the elements. The houses seemed to have been hurriedly built. The whole town contained nothing

magnificent but the Neva, not yet decorated with its granite framework, but already covered with ships of war and merchantmen. The Tsar's calèche drew up at the palace, *i.e.* at the Tsaritsa's garden. On the door-steps Peter was met by a woman about thirty-five, handsome, and dressed in the latest Parisian fashion. Peter kissed her, and, taking Ibrahim by the hand, said:

"Katinka, do you recognise my godson? I beg you to love and welcome him as before."

Catherine turned on him her black searching eyes, and graciously held out her hand. Two young beauties, tall and shapely, and fresh as roses, stood behind her and respectfully approached Peter.

"Lisa," he said to one, "do you remember the little negro who stole apples from me at Oranienburgh to give to you? Here he is, I introduce him to you."

The grand duchess laughed and blushed. They went into the dining-room. In expectation of the Tsar the table had been laid. Peter, having invited Ibrahim, sat down with all his family to dinner. During dinner the Tsar talked to him on different topics, inquiring about the Spanish war, the internal affairs of Prance and the Regent, whom he liked, though he found in his conduct much to blame. Ibrahim displayed an accurate and observant mind. Peter was much pleased with his answers; remembering some incidents of Ibrahim's childhood, he related them with such good-humoured merriment that no one could have suspected this kind and hospitable host to be the hero of Poltava, the mighty and terrible reformer of Russia.

After dinner the Tsar, according to the Russian custom, retired to rest. Ibrahim remained with the empress and the grand duchesses. He tried to satisfy their curiosity, described Parisian life, their fêtes and capricious fashions. In the mean-while, some of the emperor's suite assembled in the palace. Ibrahim recognised the magnificent Prince Menshikoff, who, seeing the negro conversing with Catherine, cast him a scornful glance; Prince Jacob Dolgoruki, Peter's stern counsellor; the learned Bruce, known among the people as the Russian Paustus; young Bagusinski, his former companion, and

others who had come to the Tsar to bring reports and receive instructions. In a couple of hours the Tsar came out.

"Let us see," he said to Ibrahim, "if you remember your old duties. Get a slate and follow me." Peter locked himself in the carpenter's room and was engaged with state affairs. He worked alternately with Bruce, Prince Dolgoruki, General Police-master Devière, and dictated to Ibrahim several ukases and decisions. Ibrahim was struck by the rapidity and firmness of his decision, the strength and the pliability of his intellect, and the variety of his occupations. When his work was ended Peter took out a pocket book to compare the notes and see if he had got through all he had meant to do that day. Then quitting the carpenter's workroom he said to Ibrahim:

"It is late; I dare say you are tired, sleep the night here, as in the old time; to-morrow I will wake you."

Ibrahim, left alone, could hardly realise that he was again at St. Petersburg, in the presence of the great man; near whom, not yet aware of his great worth, he had spent his childhood. It was almost with regret that he confessed to himself that the Countess L. for the first time since they parted had not been his sole thought throughout the day. He saw that in the new mode of life awaiting him, work and continual activity might revive his soul, exhausted by passion, indolence, and secret sorrow. The idea of being the great man's assistant, and with him influencing the fate of a mighty people, awoke in him for the first time the noble feeling of ambition. In this humour he lay down upon the camp bed prepared for him,—and then the usual dreams carried him back to distant Paris, to the arms of his dear countess.

CHAPTER III.

Next morning, according to his promise, Peter woke Ibrahim and greeted him as lieutenant-captain of the Preobrajensky regiment, in

which he himself was captain. The courtiers flocked round Ibrahim, each one in his own way trying to welcome the new favourite.

The haughty Prince Menshikoff gave him a friendly grasp of the hand. Sheremetieff inquired after his own Parisian friend, and Golovin asked him to dinner. Others followed his example, so that Ibrahim received invitations for at least a whole month.

His life was now passed in regular but active occupation; consequently he was not dull. Prom day to day he became more attached to the Tsar, and grew better able to appreciate his lofty character. The thoughts of a great man are a most interesting study. Ibrahim saw Peter in the Senate debating with Buturlin and Dolgoruki, discussing important questions in the Admiralty, fostering the Russian navy,—in his leisure, with Theophan, Gavril, Bujinski, and Kopievitch, examining translations from foreign publications, or visiting a factory, an artizan's workshop, or the study of some learned man. Russia became to Ibrahim one vast workshop, where machinery alone moved, where each workman under ordered rules is occupied with his own task.

He felt that he too must work at his own bench, and tried to regret as little as possible the amusements of his Parisian life. But if was hander to forget a dearer memory. Often he thought of Countess L., her just indignation, her tears, and grief. At times a terrible thought oppressed him: the distractions of society: new ties: another favourite. He shuddered; jealousy began to rage in his African blood, and burning tears were ready to flow down his swarthy face.

One morning he was sitting in his study amid official documents, when he heard himself loudly greeted in French. Turning quickly round he was embraced with joyous exclamations by young Korsakoff, whom he had left in Paris in the whirl of the great world.

"I have only just arrived," said Korsakoff "and came straight to you. All our Parisian friends desire to be remembered to you, and regret your absence. The Countess L. requested me to invite you without fail, and here is her letter for you."

Ibrahim seized it eagerly, and was looking at the familiar writing on the envelope, scarcely believing his own eyes.

"How glad I am," added Korsakoff, "that you have not been bored to death in this barbarous Petersburg. How do they manage here? What do they do? Who is your tailor? Have they started an opera?"

Ibrahim absently replied that the Tsar was probably at that moment at work in the shipping dock.

Korsakoff laughed.

"I see," he said, "you are preoccupied, and don't want me just now. Another time we will have a good talk; I am off to present my respects to his Majesty." With these words he turned on his heel, and hurried out of the room.

Left alone Ibrahim quickly opened the letter. The countess complained tenderly, reproached him with falseness and inconstancy.

"You used to say," she wrote, "that my happiness was more to you than all the world. Ibrahim, if this were true, could you have left me in the state to which the sudden news of your departure brought me. You were afraid I might detain you. Be assured that, in spite of my love, I should have known how to sacrifice it for your good and to what you deem your duty."

The countess ended with passionate assurances of love, begging him to write, if only occasionally, and even if there were no hope that they would ever meet again.

Ibrahim read and re-read this letter twenty times, rapturously kissing those precious lines. Burning with impatience for news about the countess, he set out for the Admiralty, hoping to find his friend still there, when the door opened, and Korsakoff re-entered. He had seen the Tsar, and he seemed as usual perfectly self-satisfied.

"Between ourselves," he said to Ibrahim, "the Tsar is a most extraordinary man. Fancy! I found him in a sort of linen vest on the mast of a new ship, whither I had to scramble with my dispatches. I stood on a rope ladder, and had not room enough to make a proper

bow. I lost my presence of mind for the first time in all my life. However, the Tsar, when he had read my papers, looked at me from head to foot. Ho doubt he was agreeably impressed by my good taste and splendid attire. At any rate he smiled, and invited me to the assembly today. But I am a perfect stranger in Petersburg. For my six years' absence I have quite forgotten the local customs. Please be my mentor; call for me on your way, and introduce me."

Ibrahim promised, and hastened to turn the conversation on the subject that most interested him.

"How was the Countess L.?"

"The countess? At first she was naturally most unhappy at your departure; then, of course by degrees, she grew reconciled, and took to herself another lover—who do you think? The lanky Marquis R. Why do you open those African eyes of yours? Does this appear to you so strange? Don't you know that enduring grief is not in human nature, particularly in a woman. Meditate duly upon that while I go and rest after my journey, and don't forget to call for me on your way."

What terrible thoughts crowded Ibrahim's soul? Jealousy? Rage? Despair?—Ho!—but a deep, crushing sorrow.

He murmured to himself. I foresaw it, it was bound to happen. Then he opened the countess's letter, read it over again, hung his head, and wept bitterly. Long did he weep. Those tears relieved him. He looked at his watch and found that it was time to start. Gladly would he have stayed away, but the party was an affair of duty, and the Tsar was strict in exacting the attendance of those attached to him.

He dressed and started to fetch Korsakoff. Korsakoff was sitting in his dressing gown, reading a French book.

"So early?" he exclaimed, seeing Ibrahim.

"Excuse me," the other replied, "it's already half-past five, we shall be late; make haste and dress, and let us go."

Korsakoff hurriedly rang the bell with all his might; the servants hurried in, and he began hastily to dress. His French valet handed

him slippers with red heels, light blue velvet breeches, a pink kaftan embroidered with spangles. In the antechamber his wig was hurriedly powdered and brought in; Korsakoff pushed into it his closely cropped head, asked for his sword and gloves, turned ten times before the glass, and announced to Ibrahim that he was ready. The footmen handed them their bearskin overcoats, and they drove off to the Winter Palace.

Korsakoff smothered Ibrahim with questions.

Who was the belle of St. Petersburg. Which man was considered the best dancer? and which dance was the most fashionable? Ibrahim very reluctantly gratified his curiosity. Meanwhile they reached the palace. A number of long sledges, old carriages, and gilded coaches stood on the lawn. Near the steps were crowded coachmen in livery and moustaches, outriders glittering with tinsel, with feathers and maces, hussars, pages and awkward footmen carrying their masters' furcoats and muffs, a following indispensable according to the notions of the gentry of that period. At sight of Ibrahim a general murmur ran. "The negro, the negro, the Tzar's negro!" He hurriedly led Korsakoff through this motley crowd. The Court footman opened wide the doors; and they entered a large room. Korsakoff was dumb with astonishment. In this big hall, lighted up with tallow candles dimly burning amidst clouds of tobacco smoke, sat magnates with blue ribbons across their shoulders, ambassadors, foreign merchants, officers of the guards in their green uniform, shipbuilders in jackets and striped trousers, all moving to and fro in crowds to the unceasing sound of sacred music. The ladies sat near to the walls;—the young attired in all the splendour of fashion. Gold and silver shone upon their gowns; from the midst of wide crinolines their slender figures rose like flower stalks. Diamonds glittered in their ears, in their long curls, and round their neck. They turned gaily to the right and left awaiting the gentlemen and the dancing.

Elderly ladies tried cunningly to combine the new style of dress with the vanished past; caps were modelled on the small sable hat of the Tsaritsa Natalia Kirilovna, and gowns and mantles somehow recalled the sarafan and dushegreika (short jacket without sleeves). They seemed to share rather with wonder than enjoyment in these new

imported amusements, and glanced angrily at the wives and daughters of the Dutch skippers, who in cotton skirts and red jackets knitted their stockings and sat laughing and talking quite at ease amongst themselves. Seeing the fresh arrivals, a servant approached with beer and tumblers on a tray. Korsakoff in bewilderment whispered to Ibrahim.

"Que diable est ce que tout cela?" Ibrahim could not repress a smile. The empress and the grand duchess, radiant in their own beauty and their attire, walked through the rows of guests, talking affably to them. The emperor was in another room, Korsakoff, wishing to show himself to him, with difficulty pushed his way through the ever-moving crowd. Sitting in that room were mostly foreigners solemnly smoking their clay pipes and drinking from their earthen jugs. On the tables were bottles of beer and wine, leather pouches with tobacco, tumblers of punch, and a few draught-boards. At one of these was Peter playing draughts with a broad-shouldered English skipper. They solemnly saluted one another with gulps of tobacco smoke, and the Tsar was so engrossed by an unexpected move of his opponent that he did not notice Korsakoff, in spite of the latter's contortions. At that moment a stout gentleman with a large bouquet on his breast rushed in, announced in a loud voice that dancing had begun, and instantly retired. He was followed by a large number of the guests, including Korsakoff among the rest.

The unexpected sight surprised him. Along the whole length of the hall, to the sound of the most doleful music, the ladies and gentlemen stood in two rows face to face. The gentlemen bowed low; the ladies curtsied lower still, first to their *vis-à-vis*, then to the right, then to the left; again to their *vis-à-vis*, then to the right, and so on. Korsakoff, gazing at this fantastic pastime, opened his eyes and bit his lips. The curtsying and bowing went on for about half an hour. At last they ended, and the stout gentleman with the bouquet announced that the dances of ceremony were ended, and ordered the band to play a minuet. Korsakoff was delighted, and made ready to show off. Among the young ladies was one whom he particularly admired. She was about sixteen, dressed richly but with taste, and sat next an elderly gentleman of dignified and stern appearance.

Korsakoff rushed up to her and begged the honour of a dance. The young beauty was disconcerted, and seemed to be at a loss what to say. The man sitting next her frowned more than before. Korsakoff awaited her reply, when the gentleman with the bouquet approached, led him to the middle of the hall, and said pompously:

"Dear sip, you have done wrong. In the first place, you approached this young person without first rendering her the three requisite salutes, and secondly, you took upon yourself the right of choosing her, whereas in the minuet that privilege is hers and not the gentleman's. For this you must undergo severe punishment, that is you must drain the goblet of the Great Eagle."

Korsakoff from hour to hour grew more astonished. In a moment the guests surrounded him, loudly demanding instant compliance with the law. Peter, hearing the laughter and loud talk, came from the next room, being very fond of witnessing such punishments. The crowd divided before him and he stepped into the centre, where stood the accused with the master of the ceremonies before him holding an enormous cup full of malmsey wine. He was earnestly persuading the culprit to submit willingly to the law.

"Aha!" said Peter, seeing Korsakoff, "you are caught, brother. Drink, monsieur, and no wry faces."

There was nothing for it. The poor dandy, without stopping, drained the goblet and returned it to the master of the ceremonies.

"Hark, Korsakoff," said Peter, "your breeches are of velvet, the like even I don't wear, who am much richer than you. That is extravagance, take care I do not quarrel with you."

After this rebuke Korsakoff wished to leave the circle, but staggered and nearly fell, to the great delight of the emperor and the merry company. This incident not only did not mar the harmony nor interest of the principal entertainment, but on the contrary enlivened it.

The gentlemen began to scrape and bow, and the ladies to curtsy and knock their little heels together with great diligence, no longer keeping time to the music. Korsakoff could not share in the general merriment. By her father Gavril Afanassievitch Rjevski's orders, the

lady whom Korsakoff had chosen approached Ibrahim, and, dropping her eyes, timidly held out her hand to him. Ibrahim danced the minuet with her and led her back to her seat, then went in search of Korsakoff, led him out of the hall, placed him in the carriage, and drove him home. At the beginning of the journey Korsakoff mumbled, "Curses upon the soiree and the goblet of the Great Eagle," but he soon fell into a deep sleep. He knew not how he got home, undressed, and was put to bed, and he awoke next day with a headache, and a dim remembrance of the scraping, curtseying, and tobacco smoke, the gentleman with the enormous bouquet, and the mighty goblet of the Great Eagle.

CHAPTER IV.

(Verse from "Ruslan and Ludmila.")

"Our forefathers were leisurely souls,
  Right leisurely did they dine,
And they ladled slow from their silver bowls
  The foaming beer and wine."

I must introduce you, gracious reader, to Gavril Afanassievitch Rjevski. He came of an ancient noble race, owned vast estates, was hospitable, loved falconry, had an enormous retinue, and was, in a word, a good old Russian gentleman. In his own words he could not bear anything foreign, and in his home he tried to maintain the customs of the good old days he loved so well. His daughter was seventeen. In childhood she had lost her mother, and she had been brought up in the old-fashioned way, amid a crowd of governesses, nurses, companions, and children from the servants' hall. She could embroider in gold and was illiterate. Her father, in spite of his dislike to all things foreign, could not oppose her wish to learn German dances from a captive Swedish officer living in their house. This worthy dancing master was about fifty; his right foot had been shot through at the battle of Narva, and therefore it was not very active at

minuets and courantes; but the left was very dexterous and agile in the more difficult steps. His young pupil did credit to his teaching. Natalia Gavrilovna was celebrated at these soirees for her dancing, which was partly the cause of Korsakoff's proceedings. He came next morning to apologise to Gavril Afanassievitch. But the young dandy's manner and fine dress displeased the proud *barin* who nicknamed him the French monkey.

It was a holiday. Gavril Afanassievitch expected a number of friends and relations. In the ancient hall a long table was being laid. The guests were arriving with their wives and daughters, who had at last been released from their domestic prison by the order and by the example of the Tsar. Natalia Gavrilovna handed round a silver tray laden with golden cups, and each guest, as he drained one, regretted that the kiss which accompanied it on such occasions in olden times was out of fashion.

They sat down to table. In the place of honour next the host sat his father-in-law, Prince Boris Alexeievitch Lykoff, a boyar in his seventieth year. The other guests were placed in order of descent, and thus recalling the happy times of precedence by office, sat down, men on one side, women on the other. At the end of the table, the companion in the old-fashioned dress, a dwarf,—a thirty-year-old infant, affected and wrinkled,—and the captive dancing master in a shabby dark blue uniform, took their accustomed seats. The table, covered with a great number of dishes, was surrounded by numerous and busy servants, distinguishable among whom was the butler, with severe mien, big stomach, and pompous immobility. The first few moments of dinner were devoted entirely to the dishes of our time-honoured Russian cookery. The rattle of plates and the activity of spoons produced a general taciturnity.

At last the host, perceiving that the time had come for entertaining the guests with agreeable conversation, turned and asked:

"Where, then, is Ekimovna? Let her be summoned!"

Several attendants were about to rush off in different directions, when an old woman, painted white and pink, decorated with flowers

and tinsel, in a silk damask gown with a low neck, entered, singing and dancing. Her advent occasioned general delight.

"Good-day to you, Ekimovna?" said Prince Lykoff. "How are you getting on?"

"Well and healthily, gossip; all night dancing, my suitors awaiting."

"Where have you been, fool?" asked the host.

"Dressing, gossip, to receive the dear guests, on the Lord's festival, by order of the Tsar, by command of the master, to the derision of the world in the German style."

At these words there was a loud burst of laughter, and the jester took her place behind the host's chair.

"And folly talks foolishly, and sometimes tells the truth in her folly," said Tatiana Afanassievna, eldest sister of the host, and much respected by him. "Naturally the present style of dress must seem ridiculous to everybody. When you, my friends, have shaved your beards and put on a short coat, it is of course no use talking of women's rags; but really it is a pity the sarafan, the maiden's ribbons, and the povoinik [a head-dress] should be discarded. It is really sad and comic to see the beauties of to-day, their hair frizzed like flax, greased and covered with French powder, the waist laced in so tight that it seems on the point of snapping—their bodies encased in hoops, so that they have to go sideways through a carriage door. They stoop; they can neither stand, sit, nor breathe—real martyrs, my poor dears."

"Dear mother Tatiana Afanassievna!" said Kirila Petrovitch, formerly a *voievod* at Riasan, where he acquired 3,000 serfs and a young wife, neither by strictly honourable means. "But my wife may dress as she likes as long as she does not order new gowns every month and throw away the previous ones, while still quite perfectly new. Formerly the granddaughter included in her dowry the grandmother's sarafan; but now you see the mistress in a gown to-day and to-morrow it is on the maid. What is to be done? Nothing but ruin confronts the Russian noble. Very sad!" he said, with a sigh, looking at his Maria Ilienitchna, who seemed to like neither his praise of

olden times nor his disparagement of the latest fashions. The rest of the ladies shared her displeasure, but they said nothing, for modesty was in those days still deemed essential in young women.

"And who is to blame?" asked Gravril Afanassievitch, frothing a mug of *kissli shtchi* (sort of lemonade). "Is it not our own fault? The young women play the fool and we encourage them."

"What can we do? We cannot help ourselves," replied Kirila Petrovitch. "A man would gladly shut his wife up in the house, but she is summoned with beating of drums to attend the assemblies. The husband follows the whip, but the wife runs after dress. Oh, those assemblies! The Lord has sent them upon us to punish us for our sins."

Maria Ilienitchna sat on needles; her tongue itched. At last she could bear it no longer, and turning to her husband inquired with a little acid smile what he found to object to in the assemblies.

"This is what I find to object to," replied the irritated husband. Since they began, husbands cannot manage their wives; wives have forgotten the teaching of the apostles—that a wife shall reverence her husband. They trouble themselves not about their domestic affairs, but about new apparel. They consider not how to please the husband, but how to attract the officers. And is it becoming, madam, for a Russian lady—wife or maid—to hobnob with German tobacconists and with their workmen? Who ever heard of dancing till night and talking with young men? If they were relatives, all well and good—but with strangers and with men they do not know."

"I would say a word, but there is a wolf near," said Gavril Afanassievitch, with a frown. "I confess these assemblies are not to my taste; at any moment you may jostle against a drunken man, or perhaps be made drunk yourself to amuse others. Then there is the danger that some blackguard may be up to mischief with your daughter; the modern young men are so spoilt, it is disgraceful. Take for instance the son of the late Evgraff Sergueievitch Korsakoff; who at the last assembly made such a fuss about Natasha, that he brought the blood into my cheeks. Next day he coolly drives up to my gate. I was wondering whether it could be Prince Alexander

Danilovitch. No such luck. Ivan Evgrafovitch! He would not stop at the gate and take the trouble to walk up to the door, it is not likely! Korsakoff rushed in, bowing and scraping, and chattered at such a rate, the Lord preserve us! The fool Ekimovna mimics him most comically; by-the-bye, fool, give us the foreign monkey."

Foolish Ekimovna seized the cover off a dish, tucked it under her arm like a hat, and began wriggling, scraping with her feet, and bowing in all directions, saying *monsieur*, *mademoiselle*, *assemblée*, *pardon*. General and prolonged laughter again showed the delight of the guests.

"Exactly like Korsakoff," said old Prince Lykoff, wiping away his tears of laughter when the noise had gradually subsided. "It must be owned, however, he is not the first nor the last who has come from foreign parts to holy Russia a buffoon. What do our children learn abroad? To scrape their feet, to chatter the Lord knows what lingo, not to respect their elders, and to dangle after other men's wives. Of all the young people who have been educated abroad (the Lord forgive me) the Tzar's negro most resembles a man."

"Oh, prince!" said Tatiana Afanassievna. I have—I have seen him close. What a frightful muzzle he has. I was quite frightened of him."

"Certainly," added Gavril Afanassievitch. "He is a steady, decent man, not a brother of the whirlwind. Who is it that has just driven through the gate into the courtyard? Surely it is never that foreign monkey again? What are you animals doing?" he exclaimed, turning towards the servants. "Run and keep him out, and never let him in again."

"Old beard, are you dreaming?" foolish Ekimovna interrupted. "Are you blind? It is the royal sledge. The Tsar has come."

Gavril Afanassievitch rose hurriedly from the table. Everybody rushed to the windows; and positively saw the emperor ascending the steps leaning on the arm of his orderly. There was a great commotion. The host rushed to meet Peter; the servants flew hither and thither as if mad; the guests were alarmed, and some wondered how they might escape. Suddenly the thunder voice of Peter

resounded in the hall. All was silence as the Tsar entered, accompanied by his host, in a flutter of joy.

"How do you do, ladies and gentlemen?" said Peter gaily.

All made obeisance. The Tsar's sharp eyes sought in this crowd the host's young daughter. He beckoned to her. Natalia Gavrilovna approached rather boldly, but blushed not only to her ears but to her shoulders.

"You grow prettier every hour," said the Tsar, and according to his custom kissed her on the head. Then turning to the guests he exclaimed:

"Why, I have interrupted you! You were dining? I beg you will sit down again, and to me, Gavril Afanassievitch, give some aniseed vodka."

The host rushed at the stately butler, snatched from him a tray, and himself filling a small golden goblet, handed it to the Tsar. Peter drank it, ate a piece of bread, and again invited the guests to continue their dinner. All resumed their seats but the dwarf and the companion, who did not dare to remain at the table honoured by the presence of the monarch. Peter sat down beside the host and asked for some shtchee (a cabbage soup). The Tsar's orderly handed him a wooden spoon inlaid with ivory, a knife and fork with green bone handles—Peter never used any others but his own. The dinner table conversation, which a moment before had been boisterously merry, ended by being forced and scanty. The host from respect and delight ate nothing; the guests, too, became ceremonious and listened with reverence to the Tsar as he discussed in German the campaign of 1701 with the captive Swede.

The fool, Ekimovna, several times interrogated by the monarch, replied with a sort of cold timidity, which, by-the-bye, did not in the least prove her natural folly.

At last the dinner ended. The monarch rose, and after him all the guests.

"Gavril Afanassievitch!" he said, addressing the host. "I want a word with you alone." Taking his arm, he led him into the drawing-room

and locked the door. The guests remaining in the dining-room whispered about the unexpected visit, and fearing to intrude, dispersed speedily without expressing to their host the usual after-dinner thanks. His father-in-law, daughter, and sister accompanied each in silence to the door, and remained alone in the dining-room awaiting his Majesty's departure.

CHAPTER V.

Half an hour later the door opened and Peter came out. With a solemn bow to the treble salute from Prince Lykoff, Tatiana Afanassievna, and Natasha, he passed out into the lobby. The host handed him his long red overcoat, conducted him to the sledge, and on the door steps again thanked him for the honour he had done him.

Peter drove off.

Returning to the dining-room, Gavril Afanassievitch seemed much troubled; angrily bade the servants clear the table, sent Natasha to her apartments, and informed his sister and father-in-law that he must talk with them. He led them into the bedroom, where he usually took his after-dinner nap. The old Prince lay down upon the oak bed; Tatiana Afanassievna sat down upon the ancient damask easy chair, and drew the footstool towards her; Gavril Afanassievitch locked all the doors and sat down at Prince Lykoffs feet. In a low voice he began:

"The Tzar had a reason for coming here to-day. Guess what it was."

"How can we know, dear brother?" replied Tatiana Afanassievna.

"Has he commanded you to a voievod?" asked his father-in-law. It is time he did so long ago. Or he has proposed a mission to you? Why not? Not always clerks. Important people are sometimes sent to foreign monarchs.

"No," replied his son-in-law, scowling. "I am a man of the old pattern; our services are not required in the present day, though perhaps an Orthodox Russian nobleman is superior to modern upstarts, pancake hawkers, and Mussulmen. But that is a different matter."

"Then what was it, brother?" asked Tatiana Afanassievna crossing, herself.

"The maiden is ready for marriage, the bridegroom must be in keeping with the proposer. God grant them love and discretion; of honour there is plenty."

"On whose behalf then does the Tzar propose?"

"Hum, whose? indeed!" exclaimed Gavril Afanassievitch. "Whose! That is just the point."

"Whose?" repeated Prince Lykoff half dozing already.

"Guess," said Gavril Afanassievitch.

"Dear brother," replied the old lady, "how can we guess? There are many gentlemen at court. Any one of them would be delighted to marry your Natasha. Is it Dolgoruki?"

"No, not Dolgoruki."

"The Lord be with him, he is so haughty. Shein? Troekuroff?"

"Neither of them."

"I don't care for them either. They are flighty and too German. Then it is Miloslavsky?"

"No, not he."

"God be with him, he is rich and stupid. Who then? Is it Eletsky, Lvof? It cannot be Ragusinski? Well, I cannot imagine. Then whom does the Tzar wish Natasha to marry?"

"The Negro Ibrahim."

The old lady exclaimed and threw up her arms. Prince Lykoff raised his head from the pillows, and in astonishment repeated: "The negro Ibrahim?"

"Dear brother!" said the old lady in a voice full of tears. "Do not destroy your darling daughter, do not deliver Natashinka into the claws of the black devil."

"But how then?" replied Gavril Afanassievitch, "refuse the Tzar, who in return promises us his protection to me and all our house."

"What!" exclaimed the old Prince, who was wide awake now. "Natasha, my granddaughter, to be married to a bought negro?"

"He's of good birth," said Gavril Afanassievitch, "he is the son of a negro Sultan. He was not taken prisoner by the Mussulmen but sold at Constantinople. Our ambassador bought him and presented him to Peter. The negro's eldest brother came to Russia with a handsome ransom and——"

"We have the legend of Bova Koroleviteh and Eruslana Lasarevitch."

"Gavril Afanassievitch," added the old lady, "tell us rather how you replied to the Tzar's proposal."

"I said that he was in authority over us, and that it was our duty to submit to him in everything."

At that moment a noise was heard behind the door. Gavril Afanassievitch went to open it, but something obstructed; he gave a hard push, the door opened, and he beheld Natasha unconscious lying on the blood-smeared floor.

Her heart misgave her when the Tzar was closeted with her father. A sort of presentiment whispered to her that the matter concerned her; and when Gavril Afanassievitch bade her to retire, while he conferred with her aunt and grandfather, she could not resist feminine curiosity, crawled quietly through the back rooms to the bedroom door, and missed no word of their terrible conversation. When she heard her father's last sentence, the poor girl fainted, and falling, struck her head against the metal-bound chest which held her dowry.

The servants rushed in, lifted Natasha, carried her to her own suite of apartments, and laid her upon her bed. After a little she came to and opened her eyes, but recognised neither father nor aunt. Fever

set in; in her delirium she spoke of marriage and the Tzar's negro, and suddenly cried in a plaintive and piercing voice: "Valerian, dear Valerian, my life, save me: There they are, there they are."

Tatiana Afanassievna glanced anxiously at her brother, who turned white, bit his lip, and left the room in silence. He returned to the old Prince, who, unable to mount the stairs, had remained below.

"How is Natasha?" he asked.

"Poorly," replied the sad father; "worse than I thought: in her delirium she raves about Valerian."

"Who is this Valerian?" inquired the anxious old man. "Can it be the orphan son of the musketeer whom you brought up in your house?"

"The same, to my sorrow!" replied Gavril Afanassievitch. "His father saved my life during the insurrection, and the devil induced me to take home the accursed young wolf. Two years ago, at his own request, he was drafted into the army. Natasha cried at parting with him, while he stood as if turned to stone. I thought it suspicious, and spoke to my sister about it. But Natasha has never mentioned him since; and nothing has been heard of him. I hoped she had forgotten him, but it seems not. I have decided; she shall marry the negro."

Prince Lykoff did not contradict him; it would have been useless. He returned home. Tatiana Afanassievna remained by Natasha's bedside. Gavril Afanassievitch, after sending for the doctor, locked himself in his own room, and in his house all was still and sad. This unexpected proposal of marriage surprised Ibrahim, at any rate, quite as much as it surprised Gavril Afanassievitch. It happened thus.

Peter, while busy at work with Ibrahim, said to him:

"I have remarked, my friend, that you are low-spirited; tell me frankly what it is you want.'"

Ibrahim assured the Tsar that he was contented with his lot, and wished for nothing better.

"Good," said the monarch; "if you are sad without a cause, then I know how to cheer you."

At the conclusion of their work, Peter inquired of Ibrahim:

"Do you admire the young lady with whom you danced the minuet at the last ball?"

"Sire, she is very nice, and seems a modest, amiable girl."

"Then you shall make her more intimate acquaintance. Should you like to marry her?"

"I, sire?"

"Listen, Ibrahim; you are a lonely man, without birth or clan, a stranger to everybody but myself. If I were to die to-day what would become of you to-morrow, my poor negro? You must get settled while there is yet time, find support in new ties, connect yourself with the Russian nobility."

"Sire, I am contented with you; the protection and favour of your Majesty. God grant I may not survive my Tsar and benefactor. I desire nothing more, and even if I had any views of matrimony, would the young girl or her relations consent? My personal appearance——"

"Your personal appearance? What nonsense! How, are you not a fine fellow? A young girl must obey her parent's wishes; but we will see what old Gavril Rjevski will say when I go myself as your matchmaker."

With these words the Tsar ordered his sledge, and left Ibrahim wrapped in deep meditation.

"Marry," thought the African; "and why not? Surely I am not destined to pass my life alone, and never know the greatest happiness and the most sacred duties of manhood, simply because I was born in the torrid zone? I cannot hope to be loved; what a childish thought! Is it possible to believe in love? Can it exist in the frivolous heart of woman? The Tsar is right; I must assure my own future. Marriage with young Rjevski will unite me to the haughty Russian nobility, and I shall cease to be a stranger in my new country. From my wife I shall not require love; I shall content myself with her fidelity and friendship."

Ibrahim wished to work according to his custom, but his imagination was too excited. He left the papers, and went out to stroll along the banks of the Neva. Suddenly he heard Peter's voice, looked round, and saw the Tsar, who had dismissed his sledge and was following "him with a lively countenance.

"It is all settled, my friend," said Peter, taking him by the arm; "I have betrothed you. Tomorrow, call upon your father-in-law, but be careful to honour the pride of the *boyar*; leave your sledge at the gates, and go across the yard on foot, talk to him of his honours and distinction, and he will be delighted with you. And now," he added, shaking his cudgel, "take me to the rogue Danileitch, with whom I must have an interview about his latest pranks."

Ibrahim thanked Peter most sincerely for his fatherly care, accompanied him as far as the magnificent mansion of Prince Menshikoff, and returned home.

CHAPTER VI.

Gently burnt the hanging lamp before the glass case, wherein glittered the gold and silver frames of the ancestral *icons.* The flickering light lit faintly the curtained bed, and the table strewn with labelled phials. Near the fireplace sat a servant at her spinning wheel, and only the light sound of her distaff broke the silence.

"Who is there?" asked a weak voice. The maid rose instantly, approached the bed, and quietly raised the curtain.

"Will it soon be dawn?" asked Natalia.

"It is already noon," replied the maid.

"Oh, heavens! and why is it so dark?"

"The shutters are closed, miss."

"Then let me dress quickly."

"You must not, miss; the doctor forbids it."

"Am I ill then? How long?"

"Nearly a fortnight now."

"Is it really so? And it seems to me but last night that I went to bed."

Natasha was silent; she tried to collect her scattered thoughts. Something had happened to her, what it was she could not remember. The maid stood before her, awaiting her orders. At that moment a muffled sound was heard below.

"What is it?" asked the patient.

"The masters have finished dinner," answered the attendant; "they are rising from table. Tatiana Afanassievna will be here directly."

Natasha seemed pleased, she waved her feeble hand. The maid dropped the curtain and resumed her seat at the spinning wheel.

A few minutes after, a head, covered with a broad white cap with dark ribbons, peeped through the door and asked in a low voice:

"How is Natasha?"

"How do you do, auntie?" said the invalid gently, and Tatiana Afanassievna hurried towards her.

"The young lady is conscious," said the maid, cautiously moving up an easy chair. With tears in her eyes the old lady kissed the pale languid face of her niece, and sat down beside her. Immediately after her came the German doctor in a black caftan and learned wig. He counted Natalia's pulse, and told them first in Latin, then in Russian, that the crisis was over. He asked for paper and ink, wrote a new prescription, and departed. The old lady rose, kissed Natalia again, and at once went down with the good news to Gavril Afanassievitch.

In the drawing-room in full uniform, with sword and hat in hand, sat the royal negro, talking respectfully with Gavril Afanassievitch. Korsakoff, stretched full length upon a downy couch, reclined, listening to their conversation while he teased the greyhound. Tired of this occupation, he approached a mirror, the usual refuge of the

idle, and in it saw Tatiana Afanassievna behind the door making unperceived signs to her brother.

"You are wanted, Gavril Afanassievitch," said Korsakoff to him, interrupting Ibrahim.

Gavril Afanassievitch instantly went to his sister, closing the door behind him.

"I am astonished at your patience," said Korsakoff to Ibrahim. "A whole hour have you been listening to ravings about the ancient descent of the Lykoffs and the Rjevskis, and have even added your own moral observations. In your place *j'aurais planté la* the old liar and all his race, including Natalia Gavrilovna, who is only affected and shamming illness, *une petite santé.* Tell me truly, is it possible that you are in love with that little *mijaurée?*"

"No," replied Ibrahim, "I am of course marrying, not from love, but from consideration, and that only if she has no actual dislike for me." "Listen, Ibrahim," said Korsakoff, "for once take my advice; really I am wiser than I look. Give up this silly idea—don't marry. It seems to me that your chosen bride has no particular liking for you. Don't many things happen in this world? For instance: of course I am not bad looking, but it has happened to me to deceive husbands who were really not a whit my inferior. Yourself too.... you remember our Parisian friend Count L.? A woman's fidelity cannot be counted on. Happy is he who can bear the change with equanimity. But you! with "your passionate, brooding, and suspicious nature, with your flat nose, thick lips, is it with these that you propose to rush into all the dangers of matrimony?"

"Thank you for your friendly advice," said Ibrahim, coldly; "you know the proverb: 'it is not your duty to rock other folk's children.'"

"Take care, Ibrahim," replied Korsakoff, smiling, "that it does not fall to your lot to illustrate that proverb literally later on."

The conversation in the next room waxed hot.

"You will kill her," the old lady was saying; "she cannot bear the sight of him."

"But just consider," replied her obstinate brother. "For a fortnight now he has been calling as her accepted bridegroom, and hitherto has not seen his bride. He might think at last that her illness is simply an invention, and that we are seeking only to gain time in order to get rid of him. Besides, what will the Tsar say? He has already sent three times to ask after Natasha. Do as you please, but I do not intend to fall out with him."

"My God!" exclaimed Tatiana Afanassievna; "how will she bear it? At any rate, let me prepare her for this."

Gavril Afanassievitch consented, and returned to the drawing-room.

"Thank God!" he said to Ibrahim; "the crisis is over. Natalia is much better. I do not like to leave our dear guest, Mr. Korsakoff, here alone> or I would take you upstairs to get a glimpse of your bride."

Korsakoff congratulated Gavril Afanassievitch, begged them not to put themselves out on his account, assured them that he was obliged to go, and rushed into the lobby, whither be refused to allow his host to follow him.

Meanwhile, Tatiana Afanassievna hastened to prepare the invalid for the arrival of her terrible visitor. Entering the apartments, she sat down breathless by the bedside and took Natalia by the hand. But before she had time to say a word, the door opened.

"Who has come in?" Natasha asked.

The old lady felt faint, Gavril Afanassievitch drew back the curtain, looked coldly at the patient, and inquired how she was. The sick girl tried to smile but could not. Her father's stern gaze startled her, and fear overcame her. She fancied some one stood at the head of her bed. With an effort she raised her head and instantly recognised the Tsar's negro. At that moment she remembered all, and all the horror of the future presented itself before her. But exhausted nature could receive no further perceptible shock. Natasha dropped her head back on the pillow and closed her eyes, her heart within her gave sickly throbs. Tatiana Afanassievna signed to her brother that the patient wanted to go to sleep, and everybody left the apartments quietly. The maid alone remained and resumed her seat.

The unhappy beauty opened her eyes, and seeing no one by her bedside, called the maid and sent her for the dwarf. But at that moment an old, round creature, like a ball, rolled up to her bed. Tie Swallow (so the dwarf was nicknamed) had rushed as fast as her short legs would carry her up the stairs after Gavril Afanassievitch and Ibrahim, and hid behind the door. Natasha saw her and sent the maid away. The dwarf sat down on a stool by the bedside Never had so small a body contained so active a soul. She interfered in everything, knew everything, and exerted herself about everything. With cunning penetration she knew how to gain the affection of her masters, and the envy of all the household over which she wielded autocratic sway. Gavril Afanassievitch listened to her tales, complaints, and petty requests. Tatiana Afanassievna asked her opinion every moment and took her advice, while Natasha's affection for her was unbounded. She confided to her all the thoughts, all the impulses of her sixteen-year-old heart.

"Do you know, Swallow," she said, "my father is going to marry me to the negro." The dwarf sighed deeply, and her wrinkled face became more wrinkled.

"Is there no hope?" added Natasha. "Do you think my father will not have compassion upon me?"

The dwarf shook her cap.

"Won't grandfather intercede for me, or my aunt."

"No, miss, the negro during your illness managed to bewitch everybody. Master is mad about him, the prince dreams of him alone, and Tatiana Afanassievna says it is a pity he is a negro, otherwise we could not wish for a better bridegroom."

"My God, my God!" sobbed poor Natasha.

"Don't grieve, dear beauty," said the dwarf, kissing her feeble hand. "If you must marry the negro, at any rate you will be your own mistress. Now it is not as it was in olden times; husbands no longer imprison their wives; the negro is said to be rich, the house will be like a full cup—you'll live merrily."

"Poor Valerian," said Natasha, but so low, that the dwarf only guessed but did not hear the words.

"That is just it, miss," she said mysteriously, lowering her voice; "if you thought less of the sharpshooter's orphan you would not rave of him in your delirium, and your father would not be angry."

"What!" inquired Natasha, in alarm; "I raved about Valerian? My father heard? My father was angry?"

"That is the misfortune," replied the dwarf. "Now, if you ask him not to marry you to the negro, he will think Valerian is the cause. There is nothing to be done, you had better submit, and what is to be will be."

Natasha made no reply. The notion that the secret of her heart was known to her father had a powerful effect upon her mind. One hope only was left to her—that she might die before the completion of this hateful marriage. This idea comforted her. With a weak and sad heart she resigned herself to her fate.

CHAPTER VII.

In Gavril Afanassievitch's house opening from the hall on the right was a a narrow room with one window. In it stood a simple bed covered with a blanket. Before the bed stood a small table of pine wood, on which a tallow candle burnt, and a book of music lay open. On the wall hung an old blue uniform and its contemporary, a three-cornered hat; above it nailed to the wall with three nails hung a picture representing Charles XII. on horseback. The notes of a flute sounded through this humble abode. The captive dancing-master, its solitary occupant, in a skull cap and cotton dressing-gown, was enlivening the dulness of a winter's evening practising some strange Swedish, marches. After devoting two whole hours to this exercise the Swede took his flute to pieces, packed it in a box, and began to undress.

THE GYPSIES,

NARRATIVE AND DRAMATIC POEM.

A noisy band of gypsies are wandering through. Bessarabia. To-day they will pitch their ragged tents on the banks of the river. Sweet as freedom is their nights rest, peaceful their slumber.

Between the cart wheels, half screened by rugs, burns a fire around which the family is preparing supper. In the open fields graze the horses, and behind the tents a tame bears lies free. In the heart of the desert all is movement with the preparations for the morning's march, with the songs of the women, the cries of the children, and the sound of the itinerant anvil. But soon upon the wandering band falls the silence of sleep, and the stillness of the desert is broken only by the barking of the dogs and the neighing of the horses.

The fires are everywhere extinguished, all is calm; the moon shines solitary in the sky, shedding its light over the silent camp.

In one of the tents is an old man who does not sleep, but remains seated by the embers, warming himself by their last glow. He gazes into the distant steppes, which are now wrapped in the mists of night. His youthful daughter has wandered into the distant plains. She is accustomed to her wild freedom; she will return. But night wears on, and the moon in the distant clouds is about to set. Zemphira tarries, and the old man's supper is getting cold. But here she comes, and, following on her footsteps, a youth, a stranger to the old gypsy.

"Father," says the maiden, "I bring a guest; I found him beyond the tombs in the steppes, and I have invited him to the camp for the night. He wishes to become a gypsy like us. He is a fugitive from the law. But I will be his companion. He is ready to follow wherever I lead."

The Old Gypsy: "I am glad. Stay in the shelter of our camp till morning, or longer it thou wilt. I am-ready to share with thee both bread and roof. Be one of us. Make trial of our life; of our wandering, poverty, and freedom. To-morrow, at daybreak, in one van, we will go together. Choose thy trade: forge iron, or sing songs, leading the bear from village to village."

Aleko: "I will remain."

Zemphira: "He is mine; who shall take him from me? But it is late.... the young moon has set, the fields are hidden in darkness, and sleep overpowers me."

Day breaks. The old man moves softly about the silent camp.

"Wake, Zemphira, the sun is rising; awake, my guest. 'Tis time, tis time! Leave, my children, the couch of slothfulness."

Noisily the clustering crowd expands; the tents are struck; the vans are ready to start. All is movement, and the horde advances over the desert.

Asses with paniers full of sportive children lead the way; husbands, brothers, wives, daughters, young and old, follow in their wake. What shouting and confusion! Gypsy songs are mingled with the growling of the bear, impatiently gnawing at his chain. What a motley of bright-coloured rags! The naked children! The aged men! Dogs bark and howl, the bagpipes drone, the carts creak. All is so poor, so wild, so disorderly, but full of the life and movement ever absent from our dead, slothful, idle life, monotonous as the songs of slaves.

The youth gazes disheartened over the desert plain. The secret cause of his sadness he admits not even to himself. By his side is the dark-eyed Zemphira. Now he is a free inhabitant of the world, and radiant above him shines the sun in midday glory. Why, then, does the youth's heart tremble—what secret sorrow preys upon him?

God's little bird knows neither care nor labour, Why should it strive to build a lasting nest? The night is long, but a branch suffices for its sleeping place. When the sun comes in his glory, birdie hears the voice of God, flutters his plumage, and sings his song. After spring, Nature's fairest time, comes hot summer. Late autumn follows,

bringing mist and cold. Poor men and women are sad and dismal. To distant lands, to warmer climes beyond the blue sea, flies birdie to the spring. Like a little careless bird is the wandering exile. For him there is no abiding nest, no home! Every road is his; at each stopping-place is his night's lodging. Waking at dawn, he leaves his day at God's disposal, and the toil of life disturbs not his calm, indolent heart. At times, glory's enchantment, like a distant star, attracts his gaze; or sudden visions of luxury and pleasure float before him. Sometimes above his solitary head growls the thunder, and beneath the thunder, as beneath a peaceful sky, he sleeps serene. And thus he lives, ignoring the power of blind treacherous Fate. But once, oh God! how passion played with his obedient soul! How it raged in his tormented breast! Is it long, and for how long, that it has left him calm? It will rage again; let him but wait!

Zemphira: "Friend, tell me, dost thou not regret what thou hast left for ever?"

Aleko: "What have I left?"

Zemphira: "Thou knowest; thy people, thy cities."

Aleko: "Regret? If thou knewest, if thou could'st imagine the confinement of our stifling towns! There people crowded behind walls never breathe the cool breeze of the morning, nor the breath of spring-scented meadows. They are ashamed to love, and chase away the thought. They traffic with liberty, bow their heads to idols, and beg for money and chains. What have I left? The excitement of treason, the prejudged sentence, the mob's mad persecution or splendid infamy."

Zemphira: "But there thou hadst magnificent palaces, many coloured carpets, entertainments, and loud revels; and the maiden's dresses are so rich!"

Aleko: "What is there to please in our noisy towns? The genuine love, no veritable joy. The maidens. How much dost thou surpass them, without their rich apparel, their pearls, or their necklaces! Be true, my gentle friend! My sole wish is to share with thee love, leisure, and this self-sought exile."

The Old Gypsy: "Thou lovest us, though born amongst the rich.. But freedom is not always agreeable to those used to luxury. We have a legend:—

"Once a king banished a man from the South to live amongst us—I once knew but have forgotten his difficult name—though old in years he was youthful, passionate, and simple-hearted. He had a wondrous gift of song, with a voice like running waters. Everyone liked him. He dwelt on the banks of the Danube, harming no one, but pleasing many with his stories. He was helpless, weak, and timid as a child. Strangers brought him game and fish caught in nets. When the rapid river froze and winter storms raged high, they clad the saintly old man in soft warm furs. But he could never be inured to the hardships of a poor man's life. He wandered about pale and thin, declaring that an offended God was chastening him for some crime. He waited, hoping for deliverance, and full of sad regret. The wretched man wandered on the banks of the Danube shedding bitter tears, as he remembered his distant home, and, dying, he desired that his unhappy bones should be carried to the South. Even in death the stranger to these parts could find no rest."

Aleko: "Such is thy children's fate, O Borne, O world-famed Empire! Singer of love, singer of the gods, say what is glory? The echo from the tomb, the voice of praise continued from generation to generation, or a tale told by a gypsy in his smoky tent?"

Two years passed. The peaceful gypsy band still wanders, finding everywhere rest and hospitality. Scorning the fetters of civilisation, Aleko is free, like them; without regret or care he leads a wandering life. He is unchanged, unchanged the gypsy band. Forgetful of his past, he has grown used to a gypsy life. He loves sleeping under their tents, the delight of perpetual idleness, and their poor but sonorous tongue. The bear, a deserter from his native haunts, is now a shaggy guest within his tent. In the villages along the deserted route that passes in front of some Moldavian dwelling, the bear dances clumsily before a timid crowd and growls and gnaws his

tiresome chain. Leaning on his staff the old man lazily strikes the tambourine; Aleko, singing, leads the bear; Zemphira makes the round of the villagers, collecting their voluntary gifts; when night sets in all three prepare the corn they have not reaped, the old man sleeps, and all is still.... The tent is quiet and dark.

In the spring the old man is warming his numbed blood; at a cradle his daughter sings of love. Aleko listens, and turns pale.

Zemphira: "Old husband, cruel husband, cut me, burn me, I am firm, and fear neither knife nor fire. I hate thee, despise thee; I love another, and loving him will die."

Aleko: "Silence, thy singing annoys me. I dislike wild songs."

Zemphira: "Dislike them? And what do I care! I am singing for myself. Cut me, burn me, I will not complain. Old husband, cruel husband, thou shalt not discover him. He is fresher than the spring, warmer than the summer-day. How young and bold he is! How much he loves me! How I caressed him in the stillness of the night! How we laughed together at thy white hair."

Aleko: "Silence, Zemphira. Enough!"

Zemphira: "Then thou hast understood my song."

Aleko: "Zemphira!"

Zemphira: "Be angry if thou wilt.... the song is about thee." (*She retires singing*, "*Old husband, &c.*")

The Old Gypsy: "Yes, I remember; that song was made in my time, and has long been sung for folk's amusement. Marioula used; as we wandered over the Kagula Steppes, to sing it in the winter nights. The memory of past years grows fainter hourly, but that song impressed me deeply." . . . . . All is still. It is night, and the moon casts a sheen over the blue of the southern sky. Zemphira has awakened the old man.

"Oh, father! Aleko is terrible; listen to him! In his heavy sleep he groans and sobs."

The Old Gypsy: "Do not disturb him, keep quiet. I have heard a Russian saying that at this time, at midnight, the house spirit often oppresses a sleeper's breathing, and before dawn quits him again. Stay with me."

Zemphira: "Father, he murmurs Zemphira!"

The Old Gypsy: "He seeks thee even in his sleep. Thou art dearer to him than all the world."

Zemphira: "I care no longer for his love; I am weary, my heart wants freedom. I have already—But hush! dost thou hear? He repeats another name."

The Old Gypsy: "Whose name?"

Zemphira: "Dost thou not hear? The hoarse groan, the savage grinding of his teeth! How terrible! I will rouse him."

The Old Gypsy: "No, don't chase away the night spirit; it will leave him of its own accord!"

Zemphira: "He has turned, and raised himself; he calls me, he is awake. I will go to him. Good night, and sleep."

Aleko: "Where hast thou been?"

Zemphira: "With my father. Some spirit has oppressed thee. In sleep thy soul has suffered tortures. Thou didst frighten me; grinding thy teeth and calling out to me."

Aleko: "I dreamt of thee, and saw as if between us.... I had horrible thoughts."

Zemphira: "Put no faith in treacherous dreams."

Aleko: "Alas! I believe in nothing Neither in dreams, nor in sweet assurances, nor in thy heart."

The Old Gypsy: "Young madman. Why dost thou sigh so often? We here are free. The sky is clean, the women famous for their beauty. Weep not. Grief will destroy thee."

Aleko: "Father! she loves me no more."

The Old Gypsy: "Be comforted, friend. She is but a child. Thy sadness is unreasonable. Thou lovest anxiously and earnestly, but a woman's heart loves playfully. Behold, through the distant vault the full moon wanders free, throwing her light equally over all the world. First she peeps into one cloud, lights it brilliantly, and then glides to another, making to each a rapid visit. Who shall point out to her one spot in the heavens and say, 'There shalt thou stay'? Who to the young girl's heart shall say, 'Love only once and change not'? Be pacified."

Aleko: "How she loved me! How tenderly she leant upon me in the silent desert when we were together in the hours of night! Full of child-like gaiety, how often, with her pleasant prattle or intoxicating caress, has she in an instant chased away my gloom! And now, Zemphira is false! My Zemphira is cold!"

The Old Gypsy: "Listen, and I will tell thee a story about myself. Long, long ago, before the Danube was threatened by the Muscovite (thou seest, Aleko, I speak of an ancient sorrow), at a time when we feared the Sultan who, through Boodjak Pasha, ruled the country from the lofty towers of Ackerman. I was young then, and my bosom throbbed with the passion of youth. My curly locks were not streaked with white. Among the young beauties there was one.... To whom I turned as to the sun, till at last I called her mine. Alas! like a falling star, my youth swiftly sped. Still briefer was our love. Marioula loved me but one year."

"One day, by the waters of Kagula, we encountered a strange band of gypsies, who pitched their tents near ours at the foot of the hill. Two nights we passed together. On the third, they left, and Marioula forsook her little daughter and followed them. I slept peacefully. Day broke, and I awoke; my companion was not there. I searched, I called—no trace remained. Zemphira cried, I wept too! From that moment I became indifferent to all womankind. Never since has my gaze sought amongst them a new companion. My dreary hours I have spent alone."

Aleko: "What! Didst thou not instantly pursue the ingrate and her paramour, to plunge thy dagger in their false hearts?"

The Old Gypsy: "Why should I? Youth is freer than the birds. Who can restrain love? Everyone has his turn of happiness. Once fled, it will never return."

Aleko: "No, I am different. Without a struggle never would I yield my rights. At least, I would enjoy revenge. Ah, no! Even if I were to find my enemy lying asleep over the abyss of the sea, I declare that even then my foot should not spare him, but should unflinchingly kick the helpless villain into the depths of the ocean, and mock his sudden

terrible awakening with a savage laugh of exultation. Long would his fall resound a sweet and merry echo in my ears." . . . . . *A Young Gypsy*: "One kiss, just one more embrace."

Zemphira: "My husband is jealous and angry. I must go!"

The Young Gypsy: "Once more.... a longer one.... at parting."

Zemphira: "Good-bye. Here he comes."

The Young Gypsy: "Tell me. When shall we meet again?"

Zemphira: "To-night, when the moon rises over the hill beyond the tombs."

The Young Gypsy: "She is deceiving me; she will not come."

Zemphira: "Run—there he is! I will be there, beloved!"

Aleko sleeps, and in his mind dim visions play. With a cry he wakes in the dark, and, stretching out his jealous arm, clutches with a startled hand the cold bed. His companion is far away..... Trembling he sits up and listens.... All is quiet! Fear comes upon him. He shivers, then grows hot. Rising from his bed, he leaves the tent, and, terribly pale, wanders round the vans. All is silent, the fields are still, and it is dark. The moon has risen in a mist, and the twinkling stars are scarcely seen. But on the dewy grass slight footprints can be discovered, leading to the tombs. With hurried tread he follows on the path made by the ill-omened footmarks.

In the distance, on the road side, a tomb shines white before him. Carried along by his hesitating feet, full of dread presentiment, his lips quivering, his knees trembling ... he proceeds ... when suddenly ... can it be a dream? Suddenly he perceives two shadows close together, and hears two voices whispering over the desecrated grave.

The First Voice: "'Tis time."
The Second Voice: "Wait."
The First Voice: "'Tis time, my love."
The Second Voice: "No, no! We will wait till morning."
The First Voice: "'Tis late already."

The Second Voice "How timidly thou lovest! One moment more."
The First Voice: "Thou wilt destroy me!"
The Second Voice: "One moment!"
The First Voice: "If my husband wakes and I am not——"

Aleko: "I am awake. Whither are you going? Don't hurry; you both are well here—by the grave."

Zemphira: "Run, run, my friend."

Aleko: "Stop! Whither goest thou, my beautiful youth? Lie there!" (*He plunges his knife into him.*)

Zemphira: "Aleko!"

The Young Gypsy: "I am dying!"

Zemphira: "Aleko, thou wouldst kill him! Look, thou art covered with blood! Oh, what hast thou done?"

Aleko: "Nothing; thou canst now enjoy his love."

Zemphira: "Enough, I do not fear thee! Thy threats I despise, and thy deed of murder I curse."

Aleko: "Then die thyself!"

Zemphira: "I die, loving him." . . . . . From the east the light of day is shining. Beyond the hill Aleko, besmeared with blood, sits on the grave-stone, knife in hand. Two corpses lie before him. The murderer's face is terrible. An excited crowd of timid gypsies surrounds him. A grave is being dug. A procession of sorrowing women approaches, and each in turn kisses the eyes of the dead. The old father sits apart, staring at his dead daughter in dumb despair. The corpses are then raised, and into the cold bosom of the earth the young couple are lowered. From a distance Aleko looks on. When they are buried, and the last handful of earth thrown over them, without a word he slowly rolls from off the stone on to the grass. Then the old man approaches him, and says:

"Leave us, proud man. We area wild people and have no laws. We neither torture nor execute. We exact neither tears nor

blood, but with a murderer we cannot live. Thou art not born to our wild life. Thou wouldst have freedom for thyself alone. The sight of thee would be intolerable to us; we are a timid, gentle folk. Thou art fierce and bold. Depart, then; forgive us, and peace be with thee!"

He ended, and with great clamour all the wandering band arose, and at once quitted the ill-fated camp and quickly vanished into the distant desert tract. But one van, covered with old rugs, remained in the fatal plain standing alone.

So, at the coming of winter and its morning mists, a flock of belated cranes rise from a field loudly shrieking and flying to the distant South, while one sad bird, struck by a fatal shot, with wounded drooping wing, remains behind. Evening came. By the melancholy van no fire was lighted; and no one slept beneath its covering of rugs that night.

THE END.

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