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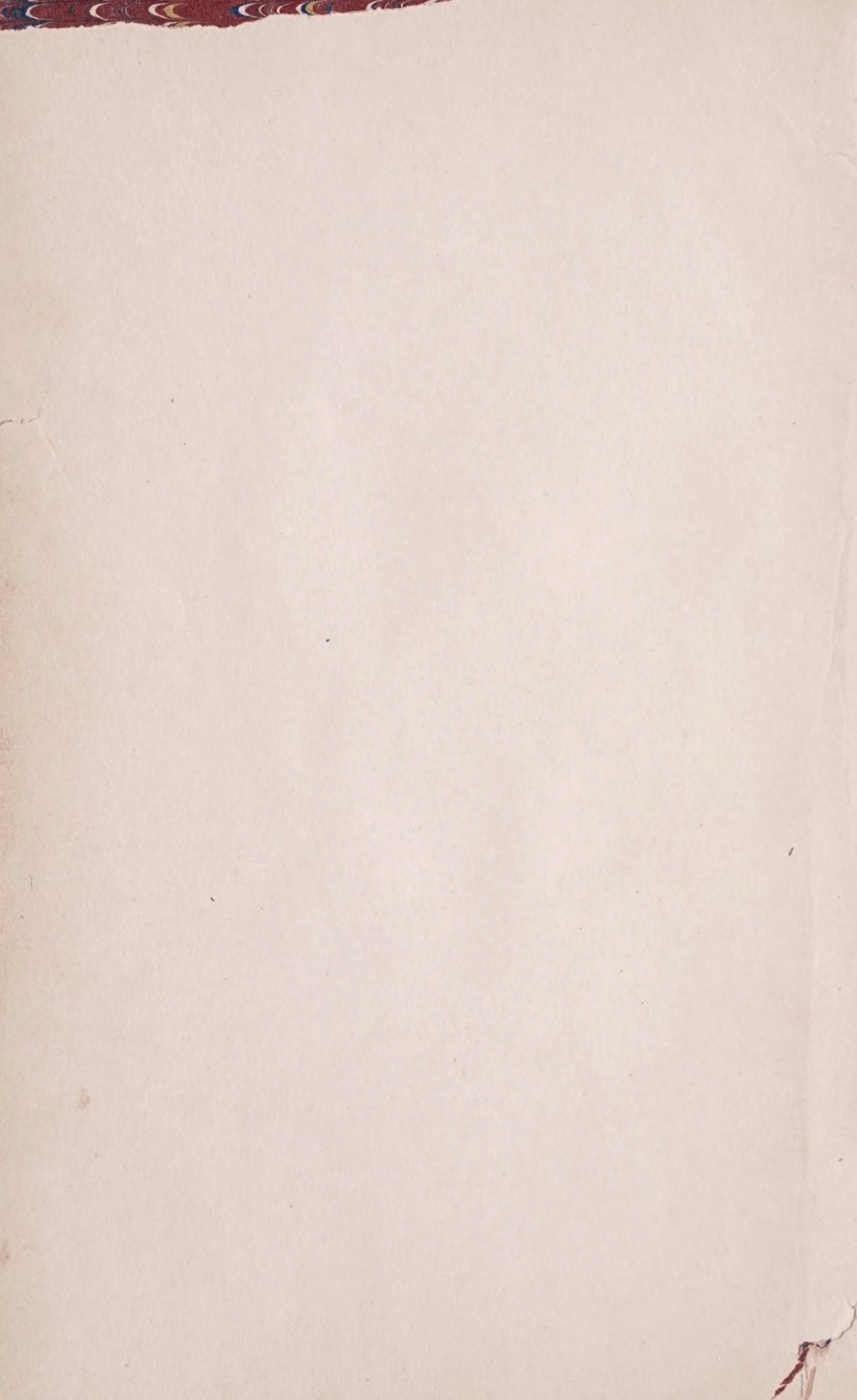
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## THE SECRET DESPATCH,

BY

JAMES GRANT.



NEW YORK,

JOHN W. LOVELL COMPANY,

14 & 16 VESEY STREET.

Allen Bros., Sole Advertising Agents, 23 Union Square, New York.

No. 49.





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**A WEEKLY PUBLICATION.**  
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Vol. 2, No. 49. Dec. 19, 1882. EXTRA.

Annual Subscription, 52 Numbers, \$8.00

# THE SECRET DISPATCH.

## CHAPTER I.

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### THE LOST TRAVELER.

“**H**EAVEN aid me! where am I now—which way shall I turn—advance or retire?” exclaimed Balgonie, as his horse came plunging down, almost on its knees, amid wild gorse and matted jungle.

A cold day in the middle of April had passed away; a pale and cheerless sun, that had cast no heat on the leafless scenery, and the half-frozen marshes that border the Louga in Western Russia, had sunk, and the darkness of a stormy night came on rapidly. The keen blast of the north, that swept the arid scalps of the Dudenhof (the only range of hills that traverses the ancient Ingria), was bellowing through a gorge, where the Louga poured in foam upon its passage to the Gulf of Finland, be-



tween steep banks that were covered by gloomy pines, when the speaker, a mounted officer in Russian uniform, who seemed too surely to have lost his way, reined up a weary and mud-covered horse on the margin of the stream, and by the light that yet lingered on the tops of the tall pines, and gilded faintly the metal-covered domes of a distant building on the opposite bank, looked hopelessly about him for the means of crossing the dangerous river.

“Where am I?” he repeated, almost despairingly; for, as Schiller sings in his “Song of the Bell,”—

“Man fears the kingly lion’s tread;  
 Man fears the tiger’s fangs of terror;  
 And still the dreadliest of the dread  
 Is man himself in error!”

Though clad in the uniform of the Russian Regiment of Smolensko, which was raised in the famous Duchy of that name, the traveler was neither Muscovite nor Calmuck, Cossack nor Tartar, but a cool, wary, and determined young Briton, one of the many Scottish officers whom misfortune or ambition had drawn into Russian service, both by sea and land, from the time of Peter the Great down to the beginning of the present century; for many Scottish officers served in the Russian fleet with Admiral Greig at the famous bombardment of Varna: and it was such volunteers as these that first taught the barbarous hordes of the growing empire the



true science of war and the necessity for discipline.

The rider's green uniform, faced with scarlet velvet and richly laced with gold, was covered by a thick gray pelisse (like our present patrol-jackets), trimmed with black wolf's fur: he wore a scarlet forage cap with a square top, long boots that came above the knee, and a Turkish sabre that had once armed a pasha of more tails than one.

"Swim the river I must," he muttered, after having traversed the valley in vain, looking for a bridge, boat, or raft of timber; "but, egad, death may be the penalty. Well," he added, with a gleam of ire in his dark gray eyes and a bitter smile on his lip, "there was a time, perhaps, when I little thought that I, Charlie Balgonie, would find a nameless grave in this land of timber, hemp, and salted hides, where caviare is a luxury, train-oil a liqueur, and the air of Siberia deemed healthy for all who have any absurd ideas of political freedom, or are silly enough to imagine that a man may be the lord of his own proper person."

To add to his troubles and discomfort, though the month was April—usually the most serene of the year in Russia—snow-flakes were beginning to fall, rendering yet greater the gloom of the gathering night.

"I was to have found a bridge here. Can that Livonian villain, Podatchkine, have deluded, and then left me to my fate?"



He knew that in his rear, the way by which he had come, lay half-frozen morasses, healthy wastes, and forests of spruce, larch, and silver-leaved firs—vast natural magazines for supplying all Europe with masts and spars—the haunt of the wolf and bear; he knew that to linger or to return were worse than to advance, and that he must cross the stream and seek quarters and guidance at the château, the name of which was yet unknown to him.

This was, if possible, the worst season for passing the Louga, which is always deepest and most navigable in spring. It rises in the district of Novgorod; and, after traversing a country full of vast forests for more than 180 miles, falls into the Gulf of Finland.

Balgonie buttoned tightly his holster-flaps, hooked up his sabre, assured himself that an important dispatch with which he was entrusted was safe in an inner pocket, and prepared seriously for the perilous task of swimming his horse across the stream.

Again he looked anxiously at the château, the abode evidently of some wealthy noble or *boyar*. Its outline had almost disappeared in the increasing obscurity; the last faint gleams of the west had faded away on the onion-shaped roofs of its turrets, and a central dome of polished copper, which was cut into facets like the outside of a pine-apple (for



there is much of the Oriental in the old Russian architecture); but lights were beginning to sparkle cheerfully through its double-sashed windows upon the feathery and funeral-like foliage of the solemn pine woods.

Could those who were comfortably, perhaps luxuriously, seated within, but know that there was a poor human being on the eve, perhaps, of perishing helplessly amid the dark flow of that deep and roaring river!

“Courage, friend Charlie!” said the rider to himself; and then he hallooed loudly, as if to attract attention, but did so in vain. The night was becoming a very severe one; the flakes of snow fell thicker and thicker on the gusty and cutting blast.

“Ah! if I should perish here—such a fate!” thought he, shuddering. “Shall I be swept down this black and horrid stream, the Louga, to be cast a drowned corpse upon its banks, to be found stripped and buried by wondering, but unpitying serfs and boors; or shall I be torn and mangled by bears and wolves; or borne even to the Gulf of Finland, far, far away, having thus an obscure and wretched fate, without winning the name I had hoped to gain—forgotten even by those who wronged me in Scotland, the land that never more shall be a home to me!”

He did not say all this aloud; but certainly some



such painful surmises flashed upon him as he forced his snorting and reluctant horse, by a vigorous use of the spurs, through the thickly interwoven brushwood that grew on the bank of the river, the dull and monotonous rush of which, encumbered as it was by large pieces of ice, was sufficient to appal even a stouter heart than that of this young Scottish soldier of fortune.

With a brief invocation on his lips, he gave his horse the reins and gored it with the rowels. A strong, active, and clean-limbed, but somewhat undersized animal from the steppes of the Ukraine, with a fierce and angry snort, it plunged into the torrent, and breasted the icy masses bravely.

The slippery fragments that glided past, struck at times both horse and rider, forcing them to swerve down the stream; others were dashed by the whirling eddies against the projecting pieces of rock or roots of old trees; but after twice nearly despairing of achieving the passage, and believing himself lost, his horse trod firmly on the opposite bank. It emerged, panting, snorting, dripping, and trembling in every fibre, from the flood, and then Captain Balgonie found that he had escaped with life, and had safely passed the swollen waters of the Louga!

Leading his sturdy little steed by the bridle and caressing it the while, he made his way up the opposite bank, guided only by the lights in the man-



sion (or castle); but he proceeded with extreme difficulty, for the underwood was thick and dense as that which grew round the Palace of the Sleeping Beauty; ere long, however, he reached a plateau, the border of a park or lawn, and saw the snow-whitened walls and turrets of the edifice towering before him.

Rising from a balustraded terrace, with an arched porte-cochère in front, the façade was square, and three storied, having a central dome like an inverted punchbowl, and several little angular towers, tall and slender like minarets; these cut the sky-line, and were surrounded each by a broad cornice or gallery, and terminated by a bulbous-shaped roof, exactly like an onion with its acute end in the air.

The lights in its many windows, the red and yellow colored curtains within, all indicated warmth and comfort; while with the snow flakes freezing on his sodden and saturated uniform, his limbs benumbed, and his teeth well-nigh chattering, Balgonie hastily led his horse under the porte-cochère, and applied his hand vigorously to the great brazen knocker on the front door.

It was speedily opened, and a white-bearded *dvornick*, or porter, wearing a long flowing *shoubah*, or coat of fur, lined with red flannel, admitted him with many humble genuflections, at the same time summoning a groom to take charge of his horse.

By the bearing of these lackeys, one might al-



most have thought that the Captain had been expected, or was a friend of the family : but a uniform has ever been an all-powerful passport, and an epaulette the most mighty of all introductions in Russia, where everything is measured by a military standard ; thus, in an incredibly short space of time, the wants of rider and horse were alike hospitably attended to.



## CHAPTER II.

### THE CASTLE OF LOUGA.

CAPTAIN BALGONIE, of the Regiment of Smolensko, soon found himself in a comfortable bed-chamber, where the genial glow of a *peitchka*, or Russian wall-stove, diffused warmth through his chilled frame, and where every current of the external atmosphere was carefully excluded by double window sashes, adorned with artificial flowers between.

When he chose to repose, a couch draped with snow-white curtains, and having a coverlet of the softest fur, awaited him ; and above it hung a little holy picture of the Byzantine school, a Holy Virgin, with a halo of shining metal in the form of a horse-shoe round her head, if he chose to be devout and offer up a prayer.

A valet, after supplying him with hot coffee and a good dram of *vodka* (which somewhat reminded him of his native "mountain dew"), said that the Count, his master, would rejoice to have the pleasure of the visitor's society, after he had made a suitable toilet, and exchanged his wet uniform for a luxurious robe-de-chambre, in the pocket of which he



took especial care to secure his dispatch unseen.

Hospitality such as this, was not merely then a characteristic of the people, but was the result, perhaps, of a meagre population, and the absence of inns; thus the arrival of a stranger, especially an officer on duty, at this Russian mansion, created little or no surprise among its inmates.

He was ushered into the presence of Count Mierowitz, whose name at once inspired him with confidence and satisfaction; for, by one of those singular coincidences "which novelists dare not use in fiction, but which occur daily in actual and matter-of-fact life," he had arrived at a mansion where he was not altogether unknown.

"I have to apologize to your High Excellency for this apparent intrusion," said he; "but I have been misled or abandoned by my guide. I am Captain Balgonie, of the Regiment of Smolensko, and have the good fortune to number among my friends your son, Lieutenant Basil Mierowitz, the senior subaltern of my company."

"For Basil's sake, not less than your own, Captain, are you most welcome to the Castle of Louga," replied the Count, lifting and laying aside his cap.

He was a man well on in years; his stature was not great, neither was his presence dignified; he stooped a little and was thick set, with a venerable beard, undefiled by steel; for, like a true old Muscovite, he contended that man was made in the



image of God, and should neither be cut or carved upon. His eyebrows were white, but his eyes were dark, keen, quick, and expressed a spirit of ready impulse, for laughter or for ferocity—one, who by turns could be suave or irritable, especially when under the influence of wine, which generally made him fierce and stupid; for never, in all his life, had he suffered control or had his will disputed.

His silver hair was simply tied behind with a black ribbon; in his hand he carried a little cap of black wolf's fur, adorned by rudely set jewels; he wore a queerly cut coat of dark red cloth trimmed with fur, and wore breeches of the same stuff, and lacked but a dagger and pistols with brass Turkish butts at his girdle, to seem what he really was, in disposition and character, a type of the boyar of the old school, who preferred quess to champagne, ate his pancakes with caviare, and was proud of being a specimen of the old Russian noble, as he existed in the time of Peter the Great, when his class first united some of the vices and luxuries of Western Europe to their native lawlessness and hardy ferocity.

Such was Count Mierowitz.

“When did you last see my son?” he asked, in tone more of authority than of anxious inquiry.

“Some three months since, Excellency: he has been detached on the Livonian frontier.”

“And you, Captain ——”



I am proceeding on urgent imperial service from Noygorod where my regiment is stationed in the old palace of the Czars."

"To whither?"

"Schlusselburg."

The host changed countenance and almost manifested signs of discomposure on hearing of that formidable fortress and prison—the veritable Bastille of St. Petersburg, and he said:

"A name to shudder at—by St. Nicholas it is!"

"And, but for the feather in the wax of my dispatch," resumed Balgonie (showing a red government seal in which a piece of feather twitched from a pen was inserted, the usual Russian emblem of *speed*), "I had not, perhaps, tempted the dangers of the Louga, but sought a billet on the other side, if such could be found."

"You know not, perhaps, that my woods are full of wolves; but this is not the way to St. Petersburg."

"Yet I was so directed, Excellency."

"You have been misled, and are only some seventy versts or so from the place you have left."

"You amaze me, Count," exclaimed the perplexed Captain; for in the Russian service, an error becomes a crime.

"Captain, you should have gone by Gori, Oustensk, Spask, and so on."

"That devil of a Podatchkine, an orderly of



General Weymarn, who sent him specially with me, has either deluded or abandoned me."

"Yet we must thank your Podatchkine, in so far that he has procured us the pleasure of your society in this lonely place—my daughter and my niece, Captain Ivanovitch Balgonie," continued the Count, introducing two young ladies who came through the curtains of a species of boudoir, "Natalie and Mariolizza Usakoff. Our visitor, Natalie, is that Ivanovitch Balgonie of whom Basil has spoken so much and so kindly."

Without being a vain man, Balgonie felt at that moment considerable satisfaction in the conviction that he was—as his glass had often informed him—decidedly a good looking young fellow, with regular features, fine dark eyes, curling brown hair, and a smart moustache; for Natalie Mierowna, like her cousin Mariolizza, was one of the most attractive women at the dangerous Court of the Empress Catharine II.; for it was during her reign that the story and the atrocities we have unfortunately to record took place; when among us, in more civilized Britain, the grandfather of her present Majesty, old George III., was king, and the arts of peace and war grew side by side.

"The friend and comrade of my brother Basil is welcome," said Natalie, presenting her hands (very tiny and delicate they were) to Balgonie, who bowed and touched them lightly with his lips; "he



has often written to us concerning you and your adventures together in Silesia."

"I am but too fortunate to be remembered thus."

"Nay," rejoined Natalie, "we could scarcely forget that daring act of yours, which won you the rank you hold at present. Ah, Basil told us all about that when he was last here," she added, with a beautiful smile, of which she knew that many had already felt the power.

"You mean my reconnoitring the enemy's position and avoiding being taken by them?"

"Yes, pray tell me about it?" said Mariolizza, her blue eyes dilating with pleasure; "my brother was there too—Apollo Usakoff, a lieutenant in the Regiment of Valikolutz."

"It was a very simple matter," replied Balgonie, bowing to each of the cousins, and not sorry to have a good personal anecdote to relate of himself, one which was certain to make him appear to advantage in the estimation of two very attractive women. "It was only a *ruse de guerre*, and occurred when our Regiment of Smolensko was with the combined armies in Silesia, and before the King of Prussia attacked Count Daun at the Heights of Buckersdorff. An exact account of the Austrian position was required by our general, who had not then received the orders of the Empress to fall back upon Russian frontier. The task was one of extreme



peril ; so I being a soldier of fortune, having all to win, and nothing to lose——”

“ Save your life ! ” interrupted Natalie.

“ One in my position, among a foreign army, must not value that too much,” said the Captain, in a tone not untinged with melancholy.

“ Well ? ”

“ I volunteered for it, despite all that your son, Count, my friend, could say to dissuade me. Well armed, at midnight, I set out on my solitary mission, unattended and alone, without relinquishing my uniform ; for if taken prisoner when otherwise attired, I would infallibly be hanged as a spy ; but ere long I found, that in such a dress, there were insuperable difficulties to making the reconnoissance required.

“ At the cottage of a Silesian boor, near the base of the Eulanbirge (or mountain of the owls), I stopped to make some inquiries. The fellow proved to be partially tipsy ; the contents of my pocket-flask, potent vodka, completed his happy condition, and after a few jests I prevailed upon him to change dresses with me. He donned the green coat, epaulettes, and boots of the Regiment of Smolensko ; I, the ample canvas caftan and girdle of a Silesian boor,—a fur cap, and a visage daubed with grime, completed my costume. Thus attired, and retaining only my pistols, I reconnoitred safely and unheeded the Austrian position, noting the



defences, trenches, fascine batteries, cannon, and general disposition; but I had a narrow escape, for when returning to the cottage of my new friend, the boor, a party of Count Daun's Imperial Cuirassiers, who had been patrolling the Eulanbirge, overtook me, and at once, perceiving I was not a Silesian, questioned me rather closely and curiously.

"I succeeded in passing myself off as a Pomeranian; and pointing to the cottage, told them that there was concealed an officer of the famous Regiment of Smolensko. They at once galloped off and surrounded it, while I stole away to a thicket, and climbed into a tree, from whence I could see the poor boor, clad in my uniform, and still laboring under the influence of his late debauch, dragged a prisoner—despite all his bewildered protestations and denials—towards the camp of Count Daun; while I, under cover of night, reached in safety the lines of the allies, and made my report to General Weymarn, then commanding our division of the army.

"It proved of no use to us, as we fell back next day; but it enabled our ally, the King of Prussia, to storm with signal success the Heights of Buckersdorff, to drive back Count Daun, and invest Schwiednitz. He offered me rank in his army; but I declined, on which the Empress sent me the commission of Captain in her Regiment of Smolensko,



thus enabling me to rank as a noble of the ninth class."

"May you soon rank as one of the sixth," said the Count, patting the Captain on the shoulder frankly.

"Ah, Excellency, it may be long ere I become a colonel; yet," he added, almost as if talking to himself, "when I got the letter of the Empress addressed to me, Carl Ivanovitch Hospodeen\* Bal-

\* Equivalent to Monsieur or Esquire.

gonie, I could not but smile at the thought of how such a title would have sounded in the ears of my good father, old John Balgonie, of that ilk!"

"Let me repeat that you are most welcome," said the Count, who totally failed to understand the meaning of the last remark; "and luckily you have arrived just as the ladies and I were about to proceed to the supper-table."

To Balgonie it had become apparent that each time he mentioned the name of the Empress, the proud pink nostrils of Natalie seemed to dilate, and that a decidedly dangerous expression glittered in her splendid dark eyes.

Natalie Mierowna, whose beauty had caused such jealousy at Moscow and St. Petersburg (two duels are spoken of concerning her), had ever shone brilliantly in the "follow-my-leader" kind of dance, now so well known among us as the Mazurka,—the old Slavonian measure, in which all succeeding



couples have to imitate the motions of the first; and the chief Russian peculiarity of the dance consists still in the circumstance of the ladies selecting their own partners—the brilliant Natalie, we say, having twice sportively, or in a spirit of coquettish bravado, chosen a handsome young aide-de-camp, whom the Empress was supposed to view with favor, led to her abrupt exile from Court, and to the detaching of Captain Vlasfief, of the Imperial Guards, to irksome and secluded duty at the state prison of Schlüsselburg. This unmerited affront filled her brother, Basil Mierowitz, with such fiery indignation, that but for the dread of compromising his whole family, he would have cast his commission at the feet of the imperious Catharine, and quitted the Russian army; but flight or exile must at once have followed the act.

As it was, though detached and distant on the Livonian frontier, he was now conceiving a scheme for vengeance, much more perlious to himself and to all concerned, and which actually aimed at the dethronement of the Empress Catharine!



## CHAPTER III.

### NATALIE.

THESE are few Russian ladies now, who do not speak with equal facility, German, French, and English; but Natalie Mierowna and her cousin were then each mistress of them all,—and this was in the comparatively barbarous time of Catharine II.

Thus their acquaintance with European literature enabled them to excel in an easy and well-supported conversation of which the old boyar, their kinsman, could make nothing; and which they could embellish by their wit and power of quotation, and with an exquisite *finesse d'esprit* peculiarly their own. When this dangerous charm was added to the great beauty of Natalie, she could not but prove a perilous acquaintance for the young Scottish wanderer.

Her loveliness was indeed great.

She was a large, showy, and snowy-skinned beauty, almost voluptuous yet very graceful in form, with fine dark eyes, that were dreamy or sparkling by turns as emotion moved her; long-lashed they were, and perhaps too heavily lidded.



Her hair was of the darkest brown, almost black; her lips were full, but flexible, small and pouting when in repose, almost too large when she smiled, which was frequently.

It was when she spoke of the Empress, that her white bosom heaved, and a fiery expression seemed to pervade her whole features. She said little, and that little was generally said with assumed gentleness or real reserve, for language cannot be too guarded in Russia; but her dark eyes flashed, her delicate nostrils dilated, her short upper lip quivered, she threw back her proud head, and more than once Balgonie saw her white hands clenched; for all the dove-like softness of her nature seemed to depart, when she thought of the affront that exile from Court had put upon her, and her whole family, even to delaying the marriage of her cousin Mariolizza to her brother Basil, to whom she was engaged—solemnly betrothed by a religious ceremony.

She took the arm of Balgonie, and led the way to the dining-room, which was lit by brilliant crystal girandoles, and heated, of course, by a peitchka, the greatest luxury of civilized life that can be found in a cold climate, and which warms a house more effectually than any grate of coals can do. Built on that side of the large, lofty, and magnificent room which was farthest from the windows, it was formed of solid stone, with several carved



apertures, and lined with white shining porcelain; within it, blazed a constant fire of billets and fagots, under the care of the *dvornick*, or house-porter, and these were furnished by the Count's serfs or woodsmen from the adjacent forests.

All made a sign of the cross in the Greek fashion, and seated themselves; but weary and exhausted by his long ride and recent immersion in a swollen and icy river, Balgonie found it almost impossible to partake of the supper that was pressed upon him: caviare on slices of bread to begin with,—“caviare from the roe of the sturgeons of the Don,” as the Count informed him,—roasted capon and jugged hare, dried figs and conserves, prunes, and *pastilla* of fruit and honey compounded, together with the champagne, Rhine wine, and vodka, in silver tankards and goblets of jeweled Venetian crystal.

The jaded traveler could only make a pretence of eating; but he could drink deeply, for he was athirst; and more than one foaming goblet of sparkling Moselle was filled for him, till he became giddy and confused. Were the fumes of the wine mounting to his head? What was the Count saying in an undertone? Was it of him that the cousins were talking in some strange language, and covertly exchanging smiles with their beautiful eyes? “Courage, Charlie,” thought he, “this is a bad beginning!”

Though people were not very particular as to a



bumper more or less in those days anywhere, in Russia least of all, an emotion of shame came over the young Scottish officer; he felt his cheeks and forehead burn, and he made a vigorous effort to rally his senses, but in vain: he heard the voices of Natalie and of Mariolizza; but he knew not what they said or what he replied, for he felt as one in a half-waking dream. They were talking merrily, however, in French, which is always spoken well by the Russians; perhaps, because the tongue that can master Russ may achieve anything.

After a time he mastered sufficient energy and sense to beg that he might be permitted to retire, as he had his journey to resume betimes on the morrow; and he was escorted to the chamber by the Count in person. Its four corners seemed to be in rapid pursuit of each other now, and the floor and the ceiling to be incessantly changing places; then his senses reeled, and the light departed from his eyes. He found himself fainting.

The sudden and rapid journey from Novgorod, the lack of food and the toil he had undergone for one night and two entire days, while wandering with the treacherous Podatchkine, the crossing of the Louga, and the bruises he had unconsciously received from several pieces of floating ice, had all proved too much for his system, and brought on a relapse of an old camp fever from which he had suffered once when serving with the army in



Silesia,—and in the morning he was delirious.

Though weak, bewildered, scared by the prospect of loitering thus when proceeding on urgent duty (for obedience and discipline become a second nature to the soldier), enduring a raging thirst and a burning pang that shot with each pulsation through his brain, stiff in every joint and covered with livid bruises, he had still strength left as dawning day stole through the double sashes of his windows, to stagger from bed, and search for the dispatch, which, on the hazard of his life, he was to place in the hands of Bernikoff, the Governor of Schlüsselburg.

He hurriedly, and with a tremor that increased, examined each of his pockets in succession, then his sabretasche, and lastly the pocket of the robe-de-chambre; but the dispatch—the dispatch of the Empress—entrusted to him as a chosen man by Lieutenant-General Weymarn was gone!

Lost, or abstracted, it was irretrievably *gone!*

Was he the victim of treachery or of a snare? Was it a dream that the voluptuous and beautiful Natalie, with her snowy skin, her dreamy eyes, and her fascinating smile, had been hovering about him—a dream or a reality?

Alas! he knew not; for again the walls and windows were whirling round him in wild career, and he sank on the floor insensible.

Poor Charlie Balgonie knew not that the morn-



ing on which he made this alarming discovery was that of the second day since his arrival at the Castle of Louga.



## CHAPTER IV.

### CORPORAL PODATCHKINE.

**S**CARCELY had Charlie Balgonie achieved the passage of the Louga, and, in the dark, forced his panting horse up the wooded bank towards the lighted windows of the castle, then his guide and orderly, Corporal Michail Podatchkine, who, for reasons which were his own, and which shall ultimately be explained, had decoyed him many, many versts to the southward of his proper route and then abandoned him, while he still cautiously followed, and watched him plunge into the perilous stream—watched him in the hope that he might perish in its icy current; Corporal Podatchkine, we say, had barely seen the officer's safety was certain and assured, than he turned his horse's head, and with a hoarse malediction on his bearded mouth, rode away in an opposite direction.

The lighted windows of the Castle of Louga soon darkened and vanished in his rear; the snow-flakes came thicker and faster on the icy blast, whitening his round bearskin cap and fur shoubah or cloak, and the untrimmed mane of his shaggy horse; but with his long lance slung behind him, his knees up



to his saddle-bow, and his fierce, keen eyes peering out the way before him, the amiable Podatchkine, who, though a Livonian by birth, had the honor to hold the rank of corporal in a corps of Cossacks, rode on through the dense fir forest as unerringly as if every tree therein had been planted by his own warlike hands.

Ere long, with a grunt of satisfaction, he struck upon a track that led to the right and left, and he unhesitatingly pursued the latter. There were then none of those verst-posts, about ten feet high or so, such as may now be found by the side of the Russian roads through the forests, or along the open steppe; but Podatchkine rode steadily on, pausing only now and then to unsling and grasp his spear, or give a fierce gleaming glance around him, while the nostrils of his thick snub-nose dilated, when a prolonged and melancholy howl, rising from the woody depths into the chill drear sky of night, announced that some wolf was rousing itself in its lair among the grass or in its den beside the river.

Anon, he came to a place where the forest was partially cleared, and there stood a little hut, built of squared logs. The walls of this edifice were whitened artificially; but the roof was rendered whiter still by a coat of the fast-freezing snow. A single ray of smoky light streamed from the opening (which passed from a window) near the door,



on which Podatchkine, without dismounting struck three blows with the butt of his lance.

“Nicholas Paulovitch,” he exclaimed, “are you within?”

The door was soon unfastened, and thereat appeared a figure, not unlike an Esquimaux, bearing a pine torch. He was a man of great stature and muscular development, clad in a caftan of coarse, thick, and warm material, girt by a broad belt in which a long rusty knife was stuck; he had on bark shoes and long leggings of sheepskin, which, like Bryan O’Linn’s breeches, had “the skinny side out and the hairy side in;” and he cultivated one long lock of grizzled hair behind his right ear in the old fashion of the Black Cossacks; but this appendage was concealed by the hood and tippet of fur which he wore. This man, however, did not belong to any of the nomadic military tribes, but was a species of Russian gipsy, a half breed.

He held up the pine torch, and its flaring light tipped with a lurid, weird, and uncertain glow his fierce, tawny, and repulsive visage, causing his cunning and almond-shaped eye to gleam redly, like two carbuncles, from under their thick and impending brows, which were nearly as shaggy as the moustache that blended with his greasy and uncombed beard; and in the same light the head of Podatchkine’s lance and the hafts of his sabre, dagger, and pistols glittered at times, being the



only bright parts of his remarkably dingy costume.

“Is it you, Michail Podatchkine—and *alone*?” he asked surlily.

“Yes; even so, alone. Dost think I have the evil eye about me that you stare so, Nicholas Paulovitch?”

“God forbid!” replied Nicholas with a shudder, for this idea is the grossest and the greatest of all Russian superstitions; “but I expected two—yourself and another.”

“Who told you so?”

“Olga Paulowna, my sister, who yesterday saw you at Krejko.”

“True, I remember. Now listen, old friend and comrade ——”

“Hush, the girl is within and may hear you.”

“Well,” said Podatchkine, lowering his voice, while the other extinguished his torch, half closed the door of his hut, and drew nearer the speaker, “by order of General Weymarn, Governor of St. Petersburg, General of the Cavalry, Director-General of the Canals, Bridges, and Highways ——”

“And the devil knows all what more!” said the other impatiently. “Well?”

“I am ordered to guide this Carl Ivanovitch Balgonie, who is a stranger, to the gates of Schlus-selburg, as he bears to Bernikoff a dispatch of importance; but I have been promised a heavy sum ——”



“ Ah ! how much say you ? ”

“ I have said nothing yet.”

“ But you spoke of a heavy sum.”

“ Two hundred silver roubles.”

“ Two hundred silver roubles ! ” exclaimed Nicholas, opening his avaricious eyes with wonder, and then closing them again, so that they looked like two narrow slits.

“ Yes, every *densusca*, if I, by fair means or by foul, prevent the delivery of that paper into the hands of old Bernikoff.”

“ He whose dagger tickled the throat of Peter III. : and by whom are you offered this, friend Podatchkine ? ”

“ I can trust you : well, by the Lieutenant Apollo Usakoff.”

“ The grandson of the Hetman Mazeppa ! ”

“ The same ; and by Basil Mierowitz —— ”

“ Well, and what the devil have I to do with all this ? ” growled the half-breed.

“ Much : fifty roubles will be yours, Paulovitch, if you will assist me,” said Podatchkine in a husky whisper.

“ Let us talk over this : dismount, and come in.”

“ Nay, there is Olga Paulowna : then I have other work to do ; but give me a drink, for I am sorely athirst.”

The other speedily brought him a painted bowl full of foamy quass, which the Cossack Corporal,



for so we may term him, drained to the dregs; though it is a liquor, to any but a Russian, horrible as the water of Cocytus.

“Let us be wary, friend Podatchkine,” said the woodman: “the knout is not an angel, but it teaches us to tell the truth alike of ourselves and of others.”

Refreshed by his bitter draught, the Corporal shook the gathering snow-flakes from the sleeves of his fur shoubah, and resumed somewhat garrulously:

“My next instructions are, that the dispatch, which is from the Empress herself (whom God and our Lady of Kazen long preserve!), and which bears the imperial seal, shall never be delivered; but must be obtained by me for Basil Mierowitz and the Lieutenant Usakoff, now detached upon the Livonian frontier, and who both know as little as I care, that its bearer is actually their own dearest and most valued friend! I misled the Hospodeen Balgonie, lured him to the river’s brink, and left him there, in the hope that he and his horse might become frozen on the steppe or in the forest, where I could rob him at ease; but the man seems made of iron, and, to my astonishment, I saw him swim the Louga. I thought all gone, he, the dispatch, and my 200 roubles, when he plunged his horse into the river; but he stoutly won the opposite bank, and has made his way straight to the



dwelling of Count Mierowitz, where now, I doubt not, he is safely housed."

"It seems to me, friend Podatchkine, that you took a great deal of useless trouble when you had your dagger and pistols," said the other, suspiciously.

"Nay, if he was to perish thus, suspicion might too readily fall upon me; for he is a favorite officer of the Empress, and of Weymarn too. My plan is this: I may get the dispatch to-night in yonder castle of Count Mierowitz."

"And if not?"

"Then I shall again lure and mislead Balgonie, and bring him here in the night."

"What then?" asked the woodman doggedly.

"How dull we are, Paulovitch. We shall drug and drown him; thus shall he die without a wound. I will take back the dispatch to Novgorod; and you can carry the body on his horse to St. Petersburg, where a sum will be given you for finding it. The poor stranger, they will say, has perished amid our keen Russian frosts, and that will be all. Nicholas Paulovitch, the carcass will be well worth twenty roubles to thee."

"And thy fifty?"

"You shall receive when the affair is over, and when you come to me at Novgorod, where I am quartered."

"By the bones of my tribe, and by the sword



that flames in the hand of the holy Michail, I am with you, Podatchkine !” exclaimed the half-breed with ferocious joy, mingling his gipsy cant with that of the Russian church. Then they shook heartily their hard and dingy hands—hands that had wrought many a deed of merciless cruelty.

“And now, Paulovitch, give me a light for my pipe, and let me begone.”

A few minutes more and these worthy compatriots had separated.

Podatchkine rode somewhat leisurely to a ford that he knew of lower down the river, believing that in time the whole onus, and perhaps suspicion, of Balgonie’s death (if it was necessary) might fall on the woodman, whom he had resolved to cheat of the promised fifty roubles if he could.

“He will play me false,” muttered Podatchkine. “Is not the dog a gipsy? Beware of the tamed wolf, of the baptized Jew, and the enemy who has made it up; why should I not delude him who will readily delude me?”

Our enterprising Corporal was correct in his estimate of Nicholas Paulovitch; for, at the same moment, that personage, while wrapped in his filthy sheepskin (caring nothing for the comfort of any other bed than the floor), was considering how he might drug and drown both the officer and his treacherous guide, sell both their bodies at the nearest military post, and, by taking the dispatch to



Novgorod himself, obtain the entire reward offered for it by the Lieutenants Mierowitz and Usakoff, or still more, perhaps, by delivering it to the Empress!

There was a third person who had overheard the first savage plot, and who felt her heart stirred with pity and terror for Balgonie, who had given her a silver kopec at Krejko but yesterday,—the gipsy girl, Olga Paulowna, the sister of Nicholas Paulovitch; and she resolved to baffle both conspirators if she could.

It was in perfect ignorance of who might be the bearer of that dispatch (with the contents of which a spy had acquainted them) that the two officers, who were now engaged in an extensive and dangerous political and military conspiracy, contrived to have Podatchkine, in the character of a guide and orderly, sent upon the trail of one who was really their most valued friend and comrade; though, as a foreigner and soldier of fortune, they deemed it proper to keep him as yet in total ignorance of their daring hopes and plans.



## CHAPTER V.

### THE DAGGER OF BERNIKOFF.

**I**T may now be necessary to afford the reader a little historical insight as to what it was that hinged on this important dispatch of the Scottish officer, Balgonie.

When the Emperor Peter II. died of small-pox (just on the eve of his marriage), closing a short reign of three years of stormy trouble and dark intrigue, the whole male issue of Peter the Great of Russia became extinct.

The Duke of Holstein, son of his eldest daughter, was entitled to the throne; but the Russians, for certain cogent political reasons, filled that perilous seat with Anne, Duchess of Courland, daughter of Ivan, Peter's eldest brother. Governed by her favorite Biron, on whom she bestowed the Duchy of Courland, she broke through all the limits which growing civilization had imposed upon the power of the Czars; she engaged in many useless wars, lost vast treasures and more than a hundred thousand men in strife with the Turks, and closing an inglorious reign, was succeeded by one who will shortly be introduced to the reader, Ivan Antono-



vitch, or John IV., son of her niece, the Princess of Mechlenburg, an infant only six months old. This Princess sent Biron, the Regent to the usual place of Muscovite seclusion, Siberia, and assumed the administratorship during the minority of her son.

This state of affairs was but of short duration when Elizabeth, daughter of Peter the Great, having a strong party, seized the crown, banished the entire family of Mechlenburg, and deposing the infant monarch, Ivan IV., confined him for life a prisoner of state in the great Castle of Schlusselfurg, where he had been for twenty-three years, at the period when our narrative opens.

To mention him in conversation, and still more to possess a coin bearing his effigy, incurred the guilt and insured the punishment of treason! More than twenty years after the deposition of this transitory emperor, a German tradesman, who had worked long as a cabinet-maker at St. Petersburg, went to Cronstadt, intending then to embark for his native city, Lubeck. As it was not permitted to carry out of Russia above a certain quantity of specie, an officer of customs asked the German "what he had with him?" "Only a few roubles to pay for my passage," he replied; and on being commanded to show them, one was discovered having the effigy of Ivan IV.! In vain did the unhappy tradesman protest that he neither knew he had such a coin, nor from whom he had received it.



Death was the penalty; but his goods were confiscated, and he was condemned to perpetual imprisonment in the mines of Siberia.

The Empress Elizabeth died the victim of intemperance; and while poor Prince Ivan—an uncrowned emperor, a prisoner without a crime—was left to pine in the Castle of Schlüsselburg, the sceptre was given to the feeble and dissipated Peter III., the husband of the beautiful, voluptuous, and talented Catharine II., daughter of a petty prince, but descended from the ancient house of Servestan,—a woman whom, in three short months after their coronation, he contrived to disgust by his political innovations, and still more by his amatory inconstancy; so it was resolved to get rid of Peter, who was then in his thirty-fourth year.

Peter I. had nearly lost Russia by compelling the people to cut off the tails of their coats; and Peter III. became equally unpopular by ordering them to trim their vast beards, and by putting his troops in the Prussian uniform. Crowded heads should leave such matters to tailors and tonsors; but he certainly abolished the secret tribunal with its contingent horrors, and recalled many a poor exile from Siberia.

A party was formed for his dethronement: so one evening in July, 1762, when he was surrounded by his guard of Holsteiners, and amusing himself with his flower garden (he was a great botanist),



and with some of his beautiful mistresses at the palace of Orienbaum,—particularly the Countess of Woronzow, to whose allurements he had abandoned himself,—the exasperated Empress prepared to strike a final blow for Russia and for herself.

Putting on a uniform of old Russian Guards belonging to her future favorite, Captain Vlasfief, with the most coquettish grace, this young and beautiful, but in some respects terrible woman borrowed from the nobles around her all the accessories of a complete military toilette: of Basil Mierowitz, a hat; of Count Orloff, a scarf; of Colonel Bernikoff, a belt; of some one else, a sword. Over all, she wore the blue ribbon of the first order of the Empire, which her impolitic husband had laid aside for that of Prussia.

The drums beat to arms: in this strange guise she showed herself to the troops, who were now mustered to the number of twenty thousand men in the great square of St. Petersburg, where the sight of the uniform of the old guard, which had been forced to give place to Peter's cherished Holsteiners, raised bursts of acclamation, quite as much as the appearance of Catharine, who was then "in the full flower of her robust beauty, perfectly elegant in figure, and purely feminine from her shoulders to her feet, which were remarkably handsome, and of which she was very proud." Her nose was aquiline, her eyes blue with black lashes, and her



hair, a brilliant auburn, was curling on her shoulders. Thus, has an eye-witness described her.

The regiments began to file off against the Emperor, and little knowing the end of the expedition; among the troops on this night marched Charlie Balgonie, with the colors of the Regiment of Smolensko on his shoulder.

Everywhere the rebellious Empress was received with enthusiasm, and the Great Chancellor Woroslawff, who was sent against her, was among the first to join her party.

The Emperor, abandoning his flowers and his fair ones, fled to his yacht or galley, which was rowed to Cronstadt, of which his enemy, the High Admiral Talizine, had already made himself master. The imperial galley (relates M. Rulhière in his "*Histoire sur la Révolution de Russie*") came under the ramparts in the night, while the great alarm bells rung, the drums were beaten and scarlet rockets ascended in showers from the dark mass of the Castle of Kronslot; and then, all along the line of fortifications, Peter saw two hundred port fires shedding their weird unearthly glare through the yawning embrasures upon the twilight sea and sky—each port-fire beside a loaded cannon—loaded against himself!

This was at ten o'clock; but ere the great oars of the galley were lain in, or the anchor dropped, a sentinel challenged:



“Who comes there?”

“His Imperial Majesty the Emperor,” replied the Captain of the galley, who was standing on its gilded prow.

“There is no longer any Emperor!” was the stern reply of some one on the ramparts.

“’Tis false! I am here—I, Peter Antonovitch,” said the Emperor, growing pale at these daring and terrible words, as he stood up and threw back his cloak to show himself and his well-known Prussian star, by the clear, lingering twilight of the northern evening.

“Steer off,” shouted Admiral Talizine, “or, by our Lady of Kazen, I will fire on you!”

“We are going—give us but time,” cried the Captain hopelessly, through his speaking-trumpet.

At that moment a thousand voices on the ramparts shouted on the still twilight air—

“Long live the Empress Catharine II.!”

On hearing this, Peter burst into tears, and fell back into the arms of his attendants, saying:—

“The conspiracy is general—from the first days of my short reign I have seen it coming!”

He was soon after abandoned by all, even by his obnoxious Holstein Guards, who surrendered to the Regiments of Smolensko and Valikolutz; and then he was committed by his wife, prisoner of state, to the Castle of Robsch, in a solitary place, eighteen miles from St. Petersburg. Six days afterwards



had only elapsed, when it was suggested that though young Ivan was still lingering a captive at Schlüsselburg, and some were not without hopes of replacing him on the throne, tranquillity could not be perfectly restored while Peter lived, though lonely and abandoned now.

His wife's lovers and favorites came to this decision, speedily; so, late one afternoon, three horsemen arrived at the residence of the fallen Emperor. They were Count Orloff, who had in his breast a laced handkerchief of the Empress, the grim Colonel Bernikoff, and a Hospodeen or gentleman, who announced that they had come to sup with him; and, according to the Russian fashion, glasses of brandy were served round before they sat down.

In that given to the Emperor was poison.

Whether, adds the historian we quote, they were in haste to carry back their dark tidings, or whether the horror of the deed made them anxious to finish it, none can know; but to hasten their terrible work, they insisted on giving him another glass.

Already the subtle poison was diffusing itself through the vitals of the unhappy Emperor; and now, struck by the pallor of their faces and the ferocious expression of their eyes, he started back, refused the proffered glass, and despairingly summoned assistance.

They then flung themselves upon him, and Count Orloff, pulling from his breast the handkerchief he



had concealed there, threw it over the mouth of Peter, to gag him and stifle his cries. He was dashed again and again to the floor, where he defended himself against his assassins with all the fury that terror of death and despair could inspire.

Two young officers of the guard now rushed in, and, as the orders of all were to slay Peter without a wound, they knotted the handkerchief round his neck to strangle him, while the Count pressed his knees upon his breast.

Still the dying Emperor struggled so fearfully that the ferocious Bernikoff, losing all patience, plunged a dagger into his throat; and thus, poisoned, stabbed, and strangled, he expired without further resistance.

A few hours after this, pale, dishevelled, and covered with blood, dust and perspiration, with torn garments and disturbed bearing, Count Orloff appeared before the Empress. "She arose in silence," says M. Rulhière, "and passed into an inner room, whither he followed her. Some minutes after, she called Count Panin, who was already named her minister, and informed him that the Emperor was dead, and consulted with him upon the mode of announcing his demise to the people."

It was given out that he had died a natural death.

The wound inflicted by Bernikoff's dagger was carefully sewed up; the orifice was neatly covered by a piece of gold-beater's skin; and the body, in



an old green regimental coat, with four wax candles as a funeral state, was exposed for three days to the people. The Russians were permitted to wear their beards; the Empress poured out her afflictions in a ukase, and offered up her prayers, as became a widow, in the church of our holy Lady of Kazan.

And it was in the service of this charming people,

“—this new and polished nation,  
Whose names want nothing but pronounciation,”

—a people, who, in the arts of peace, were little better than the Scots when James I. was butchered in the Black Friary at Perth, or the men of “Merry England” when her crook-backed Dick was smothering the royal babies in the Tower—that, by an adverse fate, our hero found himself a soldier of fortune, when, as before stated, old George III. was King of the British Isles, “the first gentleman in Europe” was a sinless infant on his mother’s knee.

After Peter was laid in his grave, and Catharine was firmly seated on his throne, her conduct was cautious and judicious, and, as even her enemies admitted, at times magnanimous; yet frightful atrocities were committed during her reign, when she degenerated into ferocity and debauchery.

The captivity of the young and innocent Ivan in Schlüsselburg, in charge of the unscrupulous Bernikoff, Captain Vlasfief, and a Lieutenant named



Tschekin—three officers in whom Catharine had implicit reliance—seemed more helpless now than ever when the sceptre was in her firm grasp.

Now that Peter was disposed of, her only dread consisted in the chance of Ivan's escape; so his guards were doubled, and her orders to Bernikoff concerning him were to ensure his detention even by death if necessary: and it was concerning this very dread that Captain Charles Balgonie was proceeding with a dispatch from Novgorod, where Catharine, with some of her favorites and courtiers, was residing for a time in the ancient palace of the Czars.



## CHAPTER II.

### THE PALATINE

**C**ORPORAL PODATCHKINE was an admirable specimen of his own type of Russian,—one who was more afraid of neglecting Lent than of murdering his fellow-being, especially if that fellow-being was a foreigner; “for,” saith M. L’ Abbé Chappe at this time, “they do not reckon foreigners among the number of their brethren.”

His thick black scrubby hair was cut straight across the forehead in a line with the eyebrows, and at each side it hung perpendicularly down below the ears, in the old Russian and Mediæval fashion, and was, moreover, cut square across the neck behind, just as the English wore theirs in the days of Richard III.; and he kept alternately scratching and smoothing his rugged front, nervously and assiduously, when he removed his fur Cossack cap; and, full of affected concern, even to exhibiting tears in his small cunning eyes, presented himself, through the bribed auspices of the dvornick, to Natalie Mierowna next morning, and besought her to have him “conducted to the chamber of his brave, his beloved Captain, his comrade and brother,



who was, he now learned, seriously ill, helpless, and delirious,"—and, in fact, just as the cunning Corporal wished him to be.

There he found Balgonie, certainly too ill and weak either to recognize him or understand what he was about; so the faithful Cossack made a rapid and skilful investigation of all the officer's pockets, and especially his sabretasche, for the dispatch.

Not a vestige of it was to be found.

"What the devil can he have done with it?" muttered the bewildered Corporal, as he thought of his 200 silver roubles; "can he have lost it in the river, or swallowed it?"

The truth is, that Natalie Mierowna had her doubts about the fidelity of Podatchkine, and even of some of her own domestics, and aware of the risk run by the stranger if he lost a dispatch of the Empress, she had, prior to the introduction of the Corporal, secured the document, and at that moment it was hidden in her own fair bosom until she could secure it in a safer place.

In her bosom! Poor Natalie! Alas, she little knew its contents, and the horrors they were yet to produce.

Baffled thus in his attempt to secure it, there was no resource for the faithful warrior of the steppes now but to take up his quarters, which he was nothing loth to do, at the Castle of the Louga, and there quietly and comfortably to smoke his pipe by



the kitchen stove; await the recovery or the death, he cared not which, of Balgonie; and to concert further measures with the huge gipsy, Nicholas Paulovitch, whom he saw daily.

It was no feverish dream of Balgonie that Natalie Mierowna had been hovering about his bedside; for she and her consin Mariolizza had been his especial nurses.

In less than three days the feverish delirium subsided, sense completely returned, and the young Captain appeared to be laboring under a species of influenza. A cold, as we understand that homely but troublesome kind of ailment in foggy Britain, is almost unknown in the latitude of St. Petersburg. "It is," says Dr. Granville, "indigenous to England, and, above all, to London;" yet we fear Balgonie had a most unromantic and unmistakable cold, consequent on his immersion in the icy Louga, together with an aguish shivering, which rendered the quitting of his couch, and betaking himself to the saddle, as yet quite impossible.

Balgonie had an insatiable thirst: he had visions of iced champagne; but in lieu, got only tea-punch, if we may so call it—being tea in the fashion still taken by the Russians (who hold that milk spoils it), with a slice of lemon or preserved fruit; and as he got stronger, Katinki, a strapping Polish damsel with fine black eyes, who was Natalie's particular follower, added thereto a dash of rum and then



*tsvetochny*, or flowery tea, with cakes, which the Captain seemed to relish all the more when he understood them to be made by the white hands of Natalie: an appreciation which showed a decided improvement in the young officer's health. But—

“My dispatch,” he frequently said aloud,—“I must begone with my dispatch!”

“Might it not be entrusted to the Corporal Podatchkine?” asked Natalie one morning, as she personally gave him his warm and soothing drink with her own hand, Katinka standing demurely by with a silver salver.

“Impossible, Hosphoza, for so I may call you; an officer alone can carry a dispatch of the Empress. Its contents are most urgent: this delay, over which I have no control, may be visited by royal disfavor, even punishment; and I fear that the air of Tobolsk or Irkutsk would ill suit a Scotsman's lungs, Natalie Mierowna.!”

“Yet tarry here you must,” said she, with a smile, the beauty of which proved very bewildering: “the Louga is coated with ice this morning, but not so thick, however, that it might not be broken by throwing a five-kopec piece from here; but to travel yet would only kill you, Carl Ivanovitch, and cannot be thought of just now.”

Then as she glided away, with her beaming smile, her white hands and taper arms, her rustling dress of scarlet silk trimmed with snowy miniver, and



all the sense of perfume that pervaded her, Balgonie sighed wearily yet pleasantly, and half thought that beautiful figure a dream, as he turned on his soft and luxurious pillow, and marvelled whether his past or his present existence was the real one.

A captain in the ducal Regiment of Smolensko, and not yet twenty-five! Some ten years ago, his future seemed to point to a very different course of life.

Far from Russian steppes and icy streams, their forests and barbarity, his mind had been wandering home to Britain's happier shore; and he might have said with the Bard who sang the "Course of Time,"—

“Nor do I of that Isle remember aught,  
Of prospect more sublime and beautiful,  
Than Scotia's northern battlement of hills,  
Which first I from my father's house beheld,  
At dawn of life; beloved in memory still,  
And standard yet of rural imagery.”

His story is a brief one, and not very startling, save for its rapid career of injustice.

Charles Balgonie, son of John Balgonie of that Ilk in Strathearn, had come into the world during that which was perhaps the most stupid, lifeless, and impoverished era of Scottish existence, the middle of the reign of George II.; when the country was without trade, energy, or enterprise, and when nothing flourished save that which prospers there more



than ever even under the rule of her present Majesty, and will do so apparently unto the end of time,—gloomy fanaticism and canting hypocrisy: more among the laity certainly, who make a trade and cloak of outward religion, than among the clergy, who dare not be liberal, even if so disposed; for without a public and noisy exhibition of sanctity, few have ever had much chance of place or profit north of the Tweed.

Moreover, Charlie was born at a time when to be a Scotsman or an Irishman was almost a political crime in the eyes of their somewhat illiberal fellow-subjects, and when for either to attain eminence in the service of their native country was nearly an impossibility; and hence the Scots crowded to the armies and fleets of Russia and Holland, and the Irish to those of France and Spain.

By the early death of his parents, Charlie had been cast, in his extreme boyhood, upon the tender mercies of a bachelor uncle, Mr. Gamaliel Balgonie, a hard-hearted, grasping and avaricious merchant in Dundee—one who was a noisy exhibitor of religion, a fervent expounder of crooked texts, and, of course, and Elder of the Kirk; a great quoter of Scripture upon unnecessary occasions; one who always wore garments of sad-coloured broad cloth, with a spotless white cravat, and whose quavering voice and meek but cunning eyes were frequently uplifted against the enormities, the wickedness, and



“the temptawtions and tribulawtions of this weary world;” and who was, moreover, a vehement despiser of that which he stigmatized as “its wretched dross,” but which he left no means, fair or foul, untried to acquire.

In the lovely vale of Strathearn—one of the most exquisite tracts of verdant scenery in Scotland—stood the home of Charlie Balgonie. In his delirium, the present had fled, and the past returned. He had been a boy again at his father’s knee—a child with his curly head nestling on his smiling mother’s breast; again, in fancy, had her kisses rested on his cheek, and her soft voice lingered lovingly in his ear; again had he felt all that happiness, perfect trust, and security which the boy feels by his father’s hearth, and the man, in after life, never more!

He heard not the hoarse Louga crashing down its ice-blocks to the Baltic Sea; but the gentle murmur of the Earn, flowing from the wooded hills of Comrie towards the broad blue bosom of the Tay—the Earn, where many a time and oft he had lured the brown trout and the speckled salmon from the deep, dark pools, near the old battle-cross of Dupplin and the Birks of Invermay. Again he had heard the leaves rustle pleasantly in the summer woods, where he had nuted and birdnested when a boy; and he had seen, in a vivid dream, his glorious native valley where it narrows at Dunira; and



far beyond, the blue ridges of the mighty Grampians, lifting their summits, alp on alp, to the clouds, eternal and unchanged as when the foiled legions of Julius Agricola fled along their slopes in rout and disorder.

On the death of his parents his small paternal estate of a few hundreds per annum would have become, as all might have supposed, his inheritance; but the relation before mentioned—the paternal uncle, Gamaliel, a man of the strictest probity, and of that which was equally valued in Scotland, extreme sanctimony; one who, on the funeral day, had shed abundance of tears at the uncertainty of life, and had excelled even the minister in prayer and “in warsling wi’ the diel” (*i. e.*, wrestling with Satan)—suddenly produced a will, by which, to the profound astonishment of all, the entire estate was left to him as a return for certain loans and sums advanced to the deceased, of which, however, no proof could be found; but it was a veritable death-bed will, written accurately by a notary, and duly signetted with the autograph of “John Balgonie of yt Ilk.”

Though tremulous and shaky,—strangely so,—and rather unlike the usual signature of the deceased laird, three men there were, accounted good, worthy, and religious men, who solemnly deposed to having seen “the hand of the dead man pen those four words.”



It was a case which made some noise in those days, because thirty-six hours after the alleged signature was given John Balgonie died.

The law of Scotland requires that, after framing and signing such a deed, the testator must have been able to go once at least to church or market. How it came to pass we know not now, but the dispute, though without a basis, was brought before the Supreme Court by some friends of the orphan, for there were not a few persons in Strathearn who alleged that John Balgonie's hand had certainly traced the signature which was sworn to so solemnly as his,—but had done so after death: the pen being placed in the fingers of the corpse, which were guided by those of the pious and worthy merchant of Dundee, who wanted his nephew's little patrimony in aid of certain speculations of his own.

Pending a decision, the bereaved boy was removed to the busy town on Tay side, and was left to solace his sorrows at school, prior, as he supposed, to becoming a drudge in his affectionate uncle's counting-house, when the last of his slender inheritance had been frittered away in the fangs of the law.

One day—poor Charlie never forgot it—his worthy Uncle Gam returned from Edinburgh by the packet. The case had been decided against him, and the Court was about to name trustees to look



after the estate of the orphan boy: so that boy learned long after. Mr. Gamaliel Balgonie was unusually grave, stern, and abstracted; but he deliberately seated himself at his desk, and while humming, as was his wont, a verse of a psalm, he penned a letter addressed to the captain of a vessel then lying in harbor, and gave it to his nephew for immediate delivery, desiring him to wait for the answer.

Charlie remarked that Uncle Gam did not, according to his usual careful custom keep any copy of this letter; and that it was written in a hand so unlike his usual penmanship as to be completely disguised.

The boy, then in his fifteenth year, started on his errand with alacrity. It was better to be out amid the bustle of the sunlighted quays, than drudging with a quill in the sombre merchant's office in a narrow gloomy alley of Dundee. He soon found the ship, which was moored at some distance from the shore, with her fore-topsails loose, and blue-peter flying at the fore, to indicate that she was ready for sea; yet Charlie had no suspicion of the trap into which he was running, or the cruel fate that awaited him.

The skipper, a rough, surly, and brutal-looking man, eyed the boy keenly, while tearing the letter into minute fragments, after he had perused it, with a grim smile of satisfaction. He then went to a



locker, where he poured out a glass of something that seemed to be port-wine.

“Drink that, my lad,” said he, “while I write an answer to your uncle.”

Charlie, half afraid to refuse, though the skipper's bearing began to inspire him with distrust, drained the glass; but scarcely had he done so when the cabin seemed to be whirling round him; he thought that he was becoming sea-sick, and was in the act of staggering towards the cabin stairs, when he was felled to the floor by a blow from the skipper's heavy hand—a blow dealt cruelly and unsparingly.

He recovered consciousness some time after, to find himself—stiff, sore, and bloody, from a wound in the temple—lying on deck in the moonlight, with some twenty-five other boys, several of whom were still in the same state of stupor or intoxication in which they had been brought on board. Others were loudly lamenting their parents and brothers or sisters they never more would see, and all were more or less covered with blows and bruises. To his horror and dismay, Charlie now found that the ship was at sea, and running between the dangerous reef known as the Bell Rock and the flat sandy shore of Barrie; and that, through the machinations of Uncle Gamaliel, he had been lured in to the hands of one of the most notorious plantation-crimps that ever infested the Scottish coast—Captain Zachariah



Coffin, of New England, whose craft, a Palatine ship, the *Piscatona*, was a letter of marque, carrying twelve six-pounders and fighting her own way.

Many miserable little fellows who had been lured to a certain den in Aberdeen, and there drugged, robbed, and manacled, were brought on board the Palatine ship as she lay off Girdleness and burned three red lights, in the night, as a private and concerted signal with the crimps ashore: and some of these same crimps were discovered, in after years, to have actually been the magistrates of the city!

After this, the *Piscotana* was hauled up, in order to go north about by Cape Wrath, having on board nearly fifty boys, who were to be sold as slaves to the highest bidder in Virginia; for nowhere was the infamous crime of kidnapping carried to a greater excess, even during the early years of George the Third's reign, than in the neighborhood of the Granite City—where, in some instances, whole families disappeared, and their horror-stricken and bewildered parents died broken-hearted and insane.

Among the little Palatines—a name given by Americans to individuals who were thus kidnapped—some there were who pined and wept for home; and some who built castles in the air, and looked to America as a land of promise. Others there were who schemed out vengeance, and were sullen. Among the latter was our hero, who hoped yet to repay his



wrongs on Uncle Gam, but meanwhile was knocked about mercilessly by the sullen skipper, and was so repeatedly rope's-ended by him, that he was often a mass of blood and bruises ; and then, like a poor little vietim, as he certainly was, Charlie would creep away into a corner, or skulk between the lee, carronades, where the salt spray flew over him, and mingled with the tears he wept so unavailingly, for those once tender and affectionate parents who were lying side by side in their graves, in sunny Strath-earn, far, far away.

Many times, after being beaten cruelly, he was deprived of food for hours and put in the bilboes—where the captain amused himself by hunting a savage dog upon him.

But his time of vengeance was coming !

Storms came on when the *Piscatona* entered the Pentland Firth ; and four days after Dunnet Head with its flinty brow, four hundred feet in height, had vanished into the wrack and mist astern, a sudden cry of fire caused every heart to thrill on board the lawless vessel.

Whether an act of treachery or not, it was impossible to ascertain ; but it had broken out near the ship's magazine, to which it communicated with frightful rapidity ; for suddenly, while the crew were all running fore and aft with buckets, a dreadful explosion seemed to rend the *Piscatona* in two. Half of the main-deck was blown away with



two of the boats. A whirl-wind of fragments flew in every direction; and then the flames shot into the air in scorching volumes, which soon set the courses and top-gallant sails on fire.

Discipline, or such a system of it as Zachariah Coffin maintained on board, was totally at an end. Some of the crew lowered the only remaining boat, and fought like wild beasts for possession of it, knocking each other into the water without mercy. Captain Coffin cocked his pistols at the gangway, shot one man dead, and swore with a dreadful oath that he would kill the next who dared to precede him; but he was struck from behind by an iron marline-spike, and falling, together with his savage dog, into the flaming gulf that yawned amidships, was seen no more.

Some of the crew ultimately pushed off in the boat; others sprang overboard and held on to spars and booms. But these and nearly all the little Palatines perished miserably, after being half scorched. Some were crushed to death by the falling yards and masts. Many held on to the fore and main chains, till these became so unbearably hot, that they had to drop off, with screams of despair—when they sank, faint, weary, and helpless, to the bottom at last.

How it all happened Charlie Balgonie never knew. But hours after the whole affair was over, and the detested *Piscatona* had burned down to her



water-line and sunk, leaving all the sea around her discolored and covered with floating pieces of charred wood and the buoyant parts of her cargo, he found himself adrift in the wide and stormy Pentland Firth; but wedged with comparative safety in a large fragment of the fore-top, to which, the yard being still attached by the sling, a certain amount of steadiness was given; yet his heart leaped painfully, each time, when the fragment of wreck rose on the summit of a green glassy wave, or went surging down into the dark and watery trough between.

To add to the terrors of his lonely situation, the sun had sunk amid gloomy purple clouds, and a rainy night was drawing on. Half drowned, perhaps, the poor boy soon became faint and exhausted, and would seem to have dropped into a species of stupor; for when roused by the sound of strange voices, he found himself close by a great and towering ship, which lay to, now right in the wind's eye with her main-yard aback, and her gunports and hammock nettings full of weatherbeaten faces, gazing at him with eagerness and curiosity in the twilight, while a boat was lowered from the davits and pulled steadily towards him by six sailors clad in dark green.

She proved to be a Russian 50-gun ship, the *Anne Ivanowna*, commanded by Thomas Mackenzie, one of the many Scottish admirals who have bravely



carried the Russian flag in the Baltic and the Black Sea, the same officer who a few years after was to build the great harbor and forts of Sebastopol, at the little Tartar village then known as Actiare.

His youthful countryman became his *protégé*.

The worthy admiral sought to make a sailor of the rescued Palatine ; but the latter had seen quite enough of the sea while on board the *Piscatona*, and while he was clinging like a limpet or barnacle to the piece of drifting wreck ; so he became a soldier, and served under General Ochterlony, of Guynd, in the Regiment of Smolensko, where, as a cadet, his superior smartness, intelligence and education, not less than his courage, soon distinguished him among his thick-pated Russian comrades : thus, in less than ten years, he became, as we find him, Captain Carl Ivanovitch Balgonie, the most trusted aide-de-camp of Lieutenant-General Weymarn, Commander-in-Chief of the City and District of St. Petersburg.



## CHAPTER VII.

### THE SOLDIER OF THE CZARINA.

“**Y**OU can never know, Ivanovitch Balgonie, how much I pitied you—”

“You lady?” was the joyous repose.

“That is, I and Mariolizza,” said Natalie Mierowna, slightly blushing (the Russians always speak thus, putting the personal pronoun first), “when we found you sunk on a fever-bed, in a foreign land, so far from your country, your friends, your mother, perhaps; for you are young enough, I think, to miss her still, at such a time, although a soldier.”

“Far indeed, in many ways!” replied Balgonie, with a bitter smile, as he thought of Uncle Gam and the Palatine ship; or perhaps it was illness that had weakened him. “I have a country to which, more than probable, I shall never return; but father, mother, or friends, I have none there: all who loved me once, have gone to the silent grave before me.”

“All?”

“Yes, lady.”

“But you are making many friends in Russia,



said Mariolizza, cheerfully : “ there are my cousin Basil Mierowitz, and my brother Apollo Usakoff, who both, I know, love you as a brother.”

“ True ; and most grateful am I to them for their regard, for both are polished gentlemen. I have old General Weymarn, too, though I know not what he will think of this delay in delivering the Imperial dispatch.”

“ Alas, that most tiresome dispatch ! ” exclaimed Natalie ; “ but I forget,” she added, with a curl of her short upper lip, “ those who proceed on the errands of the Empress Catharine, would need seven-league boots, or the carpet of the prince in the fairy tale, which transported the owner at a wish.”

“ Hush, cousin,” said Mariolizza, glancing timidly round : but no one was near save Corporal Podatchkine, who was stolidly smoking a huge pipe at a little distance on the terrace, when this conversation took place two days after Balgonie became convalescent, and fully a week since the night of peril on which he swam the Louga.

“ I cannot describe to you, ladies, the relief that came to my mind on discovering that it had neither been lost nor stolen, but was safe—”

“ In Natalie’s bosom ! ” said Mariolizza, laughing.

“ Certainly the last place, where, for her own sake, I would place a dispatch of the widow of Peter III.,” responded the other, haughtily ; but



Balgonie felt his heart beat quicker as she spoke. Her voice was sweet and low, and had a wonderful chord in it.

The day was mild and beautiful, and truly an April one. The last of the ice had disappeared from the river; not a flake of snow was visible among the woods or on the distant hills; and the bright sun of noon shone clearly and brilliantly from a deep-blue sky flecked by floating masses of white cloud, and cast across the bosom of the Louga the shadows of the great fir trees that spread like a sea of solemn cones for miles along its banks; and amid that woody sea, the most striking feature was a white-walled monastery with its "golden-headed church" and all its metal cupolas glittering in the sunshine.

As they promenaded on the gravelled terrace that lay before the Court's residence, Balgonie could see the domains of Mierowitz that lay for miles around: the patrimonial village of the Count, nestling among the coppice, containing a dozen or so of stone houses, and double that number of quaint tumble-down edifices of wood, and a church with a little gilt cupola, where his surfs said their prayers, and thanked God and him for permission to live and breathe, and to hoard their roubles in secret—for wealth in a serf was a sure source of misery, extortion, and perhaps of torture, if discovered.

In the immediate foreground were wharves, where



the wood for masts and spars from his forests were launched, and formed into great rafts for conveyance to the Gulf of Finland. The din of axes and the crash of falling timber, with the cheerful voice of the woodmen and labourers, were heard rising from the echoing woods, as they lopped and trimmed the giant pines for conveyance to the Baltic coast; for his forest trees were one of the chief sources of revenue to Count Mierowitz.

“Your father’s mansion is indeed a noble one!” said Balgonie, who after surveying the landscape from the terrace, ran his eyes over the façade of the castle, as it was named, though by no means so well fortified as his patrimonial tower in Strathearn, which dated from the days of the Sixth James.

“So noble that the first Count of our name who built it, when Ivan Basilovitch—Ivan the Terrible—was Czar, put out the eyes of the architect, who was, of course, one of his serfs,” said Natalie.

“For what reason?” asked Balgonie, starting.

“Lest he should repeat the work for another,” replied Natalie; “but then the Count was a fierce soldier, who had served under Yermack in the conquest of Siberia. I fear you think us very barbarous, Captain Balgonie; but I can assure you, that even in the remote forests of Yakoutsk, on the banks of the Lena, there is more regard for human life and divine laws now, than existed when my father was a boy. He has, indeed, seen terrible things!”



Balgonie did not see much of the Count, who was generally occupied among his people, to whom he was alternately a source of reverence and of terror.

Though infinitely more civilised than the old Russian noble as described by Clark, "unwashed, unshaven, eating raw turnip and drinking quass," (for according to the Doctor, in 1799, "raw turnips were handed about in slices in the first houses, on a silver salver, with brandy as a whet before dinner,") he was a fair average specimen of a fine old Muscovite gentleman "all of the olden time," who had a cat-o'-nine-tails always at hand; who generally unbuttoned his vest when the gold cup was brought, in which he drank his pink champagne or rare Hungarian wine, which he always had in equal plenty with his fiery vodka and bitter quass; who reckoned his silver roubles by sacksful, and his Slavonian souls by thousands; and who, though by no means a bad fellow, as his imperious and outrageous class go in Russia, had still the somewhat czarish notion, that true nobility means "the privilege of being treated like a human being of intelligence and feeling, and of treating others as if they were nothing of the kind."

Scandal said that in his wild youth he had flogged his serfs to fight with his favorite bear, and flogged them again if they maltreated or bit Bruin too much: Balgonie certainly saw two or three old serfs



who had lost an ear in these combats. And when the Count took his afternoon nap, if a cock crowed in the village, a dog barked, or a cat mewed, the whole community were in trouble, when the stout dvornick, or house-porter, was seen to issue forth with his cat-o'-nine-tails in search of the proprietor.

A rich sash usually girt the waist of his old-fashioned tunic, which was of fine cloth, and trimmed with fur, broad or narrow according to the season; a square cap of crimson velvet, tasselled with gold and edged with ermine as white as his beard, was placed diagonally on his head, when he went abroad; and then he carried a long gold-headed cane, with the exact weight of which most of the shoulders of the neighborhood were perfectly familiar. On holy festivals the breast of his best velvet coat was always covered by orders of the empire; a dozen of servants usually hovered about him when he dined; and he always went to church and confession in a clumsy old coach drawn by six white horses, three abreast, in honour of the Holy Trinity.

He was proud of being one of the old hereditary nobles, who are distinguished from the personal nobility by their right to possess serfs, and to whose earthly tyranny there was no limit, save the tomb. All the wretched serf possesses, even his wife, was the property of his lord. Fear of secret murder alone protected the latter species of property; hence, no wonder it is that the land is without a



middle class. Even in the present century, Heber, in his Journal, mentions an instance of a Russian noble who, in his profane cruelty and lust of power, nailed a servant on a cross, for which he was only imprisoned in a monastery.

But in the character of Count Mierowitz, there was something of the rough and hardy country gentleman. He it was who caught with his own hands, and in his own forests by the Louga, the famous team of brown bears which, in the marriage procession of the late Empress Elizabeth's jester, drew that jocular personage and his bride, when the newly-wedded couple proceeded to the wonderful palace of ice (which was built on the frozen Neva), all the ornaments of which were icicles, and the appurtenances of which were also ice, even to the cannon which were fired, and did not burst.

“When Peter the great came to the throne,” said he, one day, “he found only two lawyers in all Russia; so, Captain Balgonie, he hung one as an example to the other. Ah, he was a truly great man, Peter! The English admired him, solely because he tried to imitate them; but, for that very reason, we don't approve of many of his innovations. We look from the north and south sides of the same hedge.”

It is not surprising that Charlie Balgonie preferred the society of two beautiful young girls to that of a testy old boyar. To enhance their natural



attractions and winning manners, they were always dressed in the most fashionable French *mode*, and wore the rich stuffs which came from Moscow, and even from China.

They and he had many topics in common, on which they could converse, after old Count Mierowitz had dined and dozed off to sleep—such as the theatre erected some years before at Yaroslaff, by Volkoff, whose troupe were now performing the tragedies of Soumorokoff at St. Petersburg, where a government theatre had just been erected by a ukase; while another ennobled the manager, Volkoff, who had died last year, after appearing at Moscow in *Zelmira*. Their knowledge of French and German opened up the best literature of Europe to the two cousins, which was fortunate; for at the period of our narrative, Russia had almost none, save some barbarous national songs, fabulous ecclesiastical records, and ferocious traditions: nor is she now much advanced in letters, though certainly, two months after publication, Charles Dickens may be read at Tobolsk—that terrible Tobolsk—where, as we have all read in our youth, Elizabeth wept such grateful tears on the bosom of her Smoloff.

Exiled from court, and secluded amid these forests by the Louga, a Russian lady had few resources for amusement then; so the unexpected visit of Captain Balgonie, with whose name and courage they



were quite familiar, proved a most welcome and fortunate circumstance to those two handsome girls, who were merely enduring life, or simply vegetating, in the great old mansion of Count Mierowitz.

But there was one topic in which our soldier of fortune could by no means agree with Natalie Mierowna—her bitter and most unwise hostility to the strongly established power of the Empress, or, as she styled her, “the woman who now occupied the throne of Ivan;” a prince whom she viewed exactly as the Scottish Jacobites did “the Young Chevalier,” and a few old Frenchmen do at the present hour, “Henry V.,” the descendant of St. Louis. These sentiments, however, she had to utter in secret, or when none were by them; and when he gazed into her dark and beautiful eyes, so full of romantic enthusiasm and of dangerous light, he felt thankful that one so peerless and so perilous was not, at all events, his enemy.

She had accompanied the Empress on her celebrated pilgrimage to the ancient cathedral of Rostov, by the Lake of Nero, where the last of the Prince of Jaroslay was murdered in cold blood by Ivan the Terrible. Her expedition had taken place in the May of the preceding year. Catharine and her ladies walked ten versts afoot daily, and it was at the conclusion of this devotional journey that the final quarrel had taken place concerning the mazurka with the Aide-de-camp Vlasfief.



“That insult shall never be forgotten here!” said she, stamping a little foot, in a prettily-embroidered scarlet shoe, on the carpet of the drawing-room, where, fortunately for herself, she was alone with Balgonie: “an insult to me—to us, who have the blood of Ruric the Varangion in our veins; and from her—this woman of Anhalt-Zerbst!”

Balgonie laughed; for the Ruric blood is to Russians what Captain John Smith’s is to the Virginians, and the Norman element to the English.

“Yes,” she continued, “’tis something novel, an insult to us, from this Catharine, misnamed the Great, who has enslaved all the Ukraine, and given men and women away by thousands—like herds of cattle, to her courtiers and her lovers!”

“Oh, be wary; I pray you, be wary, or speak in French!” said Balgonie imploringly, while laying his hand impressively—rather too impressively, we fear—upon hers, which was so delicately smooth and white, and was placed very temptingly within his reach, as they sat near each other for the purpose of conversing in low and confidential tones.

“The people are mere slaves under her rule,” continued Natalie, lowering her voice but without withdrawing that coveted hand; perhaps she forgot it in her energy; but the omission made poor Charlie Balgonie’s honest heart beat very fast indeed, and his color came and went painfully while her dark and glorious eyes were bent on his: “in



her I behold only a usurper, who wields a knout in lieu of a sceptre, and who seats herself on a throne of human skulls; but the time is coming when all these things shall be altered."

"And this time, Natalie Mierowna—what do you mean?" asked Balgonie, who had been long enough in Russia to feel a thrill of terror at words so wild and dangerous.

"When it comes you will learn; if the blow fails, woe unto those on whom it recoils! You may escape as a stranger; but I fear me, she will punish the whole Regiment of Smolensko—"

"My regiment—mine, say you?"

"Yes, yours, Hospodeen, even as Peter the Great did the Battalion of Strelitz, for adherence to his sister Sophia; and that we know to be one of the most sanguinary sacrifices on record, even in Russia."

"Heaven knows that is admitting a great deal; but you say either too much or too little to satisfy my curiosity; explain this coming peril—this mystery—to which you refer."

In her growing energy, Natalie's other hand was now clasped above his, and truly "the situation had its charm."

"Let us speak of it no more," said she, recollecting herself, and with a strange smile; "ere long you shall know all; but not now—not now. Alas! the best I can wish you, Ivanovitch Balgonie, is, that



your chance visit here may not also compromise you with Catharine."

They pressed each other's hands: it was done, perhaps, merely in the energy of conversation; but, to be brief, Balgonie found himself now hopelessly and helplessly in love with Natalie Mierowna.

Though both cousins were remarkable for their beauty—one blonde, the other dark—he had never for a moment wavered between them; for he had been, from the first moment he beheld her, irresistibly attracted by the brilliant and black-eyed Natalie. Besides he knew well that Mariolizza was betrothed, or, as the Russians might justly phrase it, assigned away, to his friend and brother-officer, Basil Mierowitz.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### IN LOVE.

**I**T was scarcely possible that the result of his visit could be otherwise than it had proved; for Natalie was no common-place beauty, but one who had subdued the hearts of many more men than Charlie Balgonie—men, who now at Moscow and St. Petersburg were counting the days of her exile from the Court of Catharine: and when Charlie thought of her in after years, the calm repose of his days of convalescence, the aspect and furniture of his chamber in the old Castle of Louga, the genial glow of the peitchka, the double window sashes with their bright false flowers between, the Byzantine picture of the Holy Virgin with its shining metal halo, and the varnished panels of the walls, were all associated, as in a pleasant dream, with the dark and beautiful eyes, the round taper arms, the white and delicate hands on which so many diamonds glittered, the jetty hair that was twisted in massive braids (yet fell in ringlets, too) round the superb head,—the graceful, floating, and statuesque figure of Natalie Mierowna, always so richly, even coquettishly attired. Natalie, so soft,



so tender, and so true, in all the relations of life and the amenities of society ; and yet who could be so keen in her hate, so fiery in her political rancor, when thinking of her own injuries, and the terrible wrongs of the captive Ivan, whose adherent she had become.

Charlie Balgonie blessed the exile and choice of circumstances, all so sudden and unforeseen, which had cast him in her path. He loved her with all the passionate adoration so beautiful and winning a woman could inspire in a young and ardent heart ; nor was it long before Natalie became aware of this, and was affected by the same emotion. There was one glance given, by which “each read and understood each other’s soul.” Lovers soon find means to comprehend each other, and Mariolizza, who speedily guessed their secret, which she certainly thought a dangerous one, found many excuses to leave them often together.

The long, long dream of his youth and early manhood,—the waking dream of many a lonely hour of reverie in the summer woods, by the seashore, or in the still hours of military duty, in camp and bivouac—a fair face that would smile on him,—a girl to love, and worship, and trust,—one who would trust and love him in return, was embodied at last ; and in Natalie he saw this hitherto imaginary sphinx of whom he had been thinking, and for whom he had been waiting so long.



Her voice, her smile, her presence, seemed to fill the air as he breathed with a new charm, that made every nerve thrill, investing the most simple and common wants of every-day life with sudden delights and joys; in short, and in common phraseology, the poor young man was "over head and ears in love."

The declaration of his passion, and Natalie's acceptance of it, came about just as others have done; and for three days after,—without looking the future confidently or inquiringly in the face,—Balgonie abandoned himself to the delight of his new and successful passion, and forgot all about the troublesome Empress, her pressing dispatch, and the terrors of Lieutenant-General Waymarn.

How could he think of such, when seated in the half-curtained alcove which opened off the drawing-room, on those calm April evenings; when the soft breeze that floated over the vast forests came laden with the odor of the spruce and fir boughs? Seated, with Natalie—in all the glory of her youth, her beauty, and the flush of her first love—by his side, often deftly and with rapid fingers weaving up the coils of her heavy black hair (which would come down, somehow, on these occasions); as she did so, displaying to greater advantage than ever the magnificent contour of her bust, her white shoulders, and taper arms, and adding even to the coquettish side glance of the half-veiled eye, the most splendid of



all her natural ornaments were those great, heavy loose braids on which the sunlight shone.

What was to be the future of all this?

On the strong friendship of Basil Mierowitz he could fully rely; but then Natalie was on bad terms with the vindictive Empress, and he, Balgonie, was a soldier, and, according to the rules of the Russian service, could not marry without permission from his colonel, who, at present, would not dare to accord it, circumstanced as the bride would be.

Marry? What would the proud old Russian boyar say, or do, or think, when he heard that the penniless Scot—the mere adventurer—the soldier of fortune, was the accepted lover of his daughter, and that he had dared to lift his eyes to her otherwise than in the way of solemn and awful respect?

If his High Excellency could have but peeped into the aforesaid alcove on some of the occasions referred to! The mere fact of being a Scot would not have conveyed much to the mind of the Count. If to any unlettered Englishman of the present day, the names of Moldavia, Croatia, Bulgaria, Servia, Pomerania, Grodno, Mingrelia, and so forth, give but a vague idea of their whereabouts or history, it was perhaps worse in the Count's instance; for so far as he, worthy man, was concerned, or for all he knew to the contrary, the Land of Cakes might have been in the flying island of Laputa.

“He would be furious, no doubt,” thought Bal-



gonie; "but ne might soothe his troubled mind by flogging a few serfs, shooting a few brown bears, and draining sundry horns of quass."

Charlie had been present at more than one Russian marriage and betrothal, and the coolness of the ceremony had excited his astonishment and repugnance; for, in that country, those life-enduring arrangements are concluded by a mere match-maker, who makes the proposal, not to the girl, but to her father. He remembered particularly the case of Lieutenant Tschekin's espousal with the daughter of General Weymarn, who, having stated her dower to the go between,—a thousand pheasants or so,—the gallant subaltern was satisfied, and thus, as usual, the whole affair was settled without the taste or inclination of the young lady being consulted or considered. In Russia, the papa consents; and, according to some old custom, mamma pretends to object and weep.

"My daughter," said the General, "I have given you away in presence of my aide-de-camp."

"To one I know, father?" she asked.

"No."

"To whom, then?" she continued, perfectly undisturbed.

"One you shall soon know—here he comes; and this is thy bridegroom, daughter: art satisfied?"

The young lady, of course, declared she was satisfied. She and the Lieutenant placed their hands



behind them, stretched out their necks, pouting their lips for a very frigid kiss, and the matter was soon concluded by a priest.

When Balgonie thought of the delicacy and gentleness of Natalie, and remembered the marriage of the Lieutenant Tschekin, he shrunk alike from the idea of seeing her subjected to the mummerly of a Greek espousal and the vulgar horrors of a wedding feast and drinking bout *à la Russe*.

At last he began to wake from his dream, to find the stern necessity of departing; and, indeed, the snub-nosed Podatchkine, who was always hovering about, seemed as a perpetual reminder of the duty he was neglecting. The lovers were solemnly betrothed in secret,—Mariolizza was their only confidant,—and at present they could but arrange to wait until they could mutually confide in Basil Mierowitz, whom Natalie, ere long, expected to see. To write to each other, save by special messenger, was deemed at present unwise; but Balgonie would visit her as he returned again to Novgorod.

So the last evening they were to spend together came; and they were seated, wreathed in each other's arms, with Natalie's cheek resting on Balgonie's shoulder, in an embowered rustic seat, not far from the very place where he had so boldly crossed the swollen river on that eventful night.

Charlie's heart was full of sadness and bewilderment; he could but mutter and whisper of his love



and their hopes, and again and again kiss Natalie on the cheek, on the lips and snowy neck, her hands and arms, while her tears flowed fast; for she had all the cooing tenderness of a ringdove now, and could only murmur from time to time:—

“Oh, Carl, Carl—my own Carl!” and so forth; and, like other young ladies similarly circumstanced on the eve of separation, believed herself to be the most miserable being in the world. But, amid all this, she suddenly started and grew pale, on seeing a figure approach.

“See, Carl, see!” she exclaimed: “that horrible woman must be ominous of evil at such a time. Why has she been permitted to approach?”

Balgonie saw, at a little distance, only a Russian gipsy girl, possessed evidently of considerable personal attractions. She stood timidly, and irresolute whether to advance or retire; and bowed her head with great humility, while crossing her fine but dusky hands and arms upon her breast. In old age the Russian female gipsies are as remarkable for their extreme hideousness, as in youth they are famous for personal beauty; so this young girl was full of picturesque loveliness, and instead of being clothed in rags, as the wanderers of her race are elsewhere, her costume was brilliant in colours and rich in material. She had large glittering ear-rings; a gaudy kerchief bound her black tresses; and her rounded cheeks being freely rouged, added to the



wonderful lustre of her dark and dusky eyes, and to the generally theatrical character of her singular beauty and bearing.

“Oh!” resumed Natalie, with something of a shudder, “’tis Olga Paulowna: don’t let her speak to us in our parting hour, Carl, lest we be compelled to hear her sing, and that may perhaps bode evil. The dvornick, I understand, has thrice by dog and whip driven away this gipsy girl, who has come to the house again and again, ostensibly to seek alms, but doubtless only to steal or work mischief by her cunning; for though our Russian gipsies are not allowed to pitch their tents on any land without the express consent of the owner, this girl’s brother, Nicholas Paulovitch (as he calls himself), a half-blood, has permanently settled on our estate, somewhere in the forests; though he is despised and loathed by the peasantry, whom, doubtless, he loathes and hates most cordially in turn. I do wish she would go away without being ordered to do so.”

Little did Natalie know that those ill-requited visits of the poor gipsy girl had direct reference to the life and safety of him whose hand clasped hers so tenderly and confidingly.

“Faugh!” said Natalie, with increasing annoyance; “she is about to sing,—something naughty no doubt,—but her voice will soon summon the dvornick.”

Many of those female wanderers in Russia can



sing divinely; and it is on record that even the great Catalani was so enchanted by the melodious voice of a gipsy girl at Moscow, that she took from her own shoulders a superb shawl, which had been given to her by the Empress, and placed it on those of the nomadic singer, "as a tribute from art to nature."

And Olga now began to sing with great sweetness one of those Russian songs, by which the gipsies, to flatter the people, sought to foretell the downfall of the Crescent; and many such prophetic strains were current even during the war in the Crimea, as foreshadowing the fate of the "sick man" at Constantinople.

"Years after years shall roll,  
 Ages o'er ages glide,  
 Before the world's control  
 Shall check the Crescent's pride.  
 Banished from place to place,  
 Where'er the ocean's roar,  
 The mighty gipsy race,  
 Shall visit every shore.

"But when the hundredth year  
 Shall three times doubled be,  
 Then shall the end appear  
 Of all their slavery.  
 Then shall the warlike powers  
 From distant climes return,  
 Egypt again be ours,  
 While the Turkish domes shall burn!

"Again the Christian's cross  
 Shall over stamboul wave,



And ruin, weeds, and moss,  
Mark the last Sooltan's grave !  
Again shall Christmas bells  
Ring where the Muezzins cry  
When across the Dardanelles  
The Moslem hordes shall fly !

“ So Egypt shall be freed,  
Her tribes return once more,  
Their flocks and herds to feed  
Where their fathers dwelt of yore :  
When all our warlike powers  
From distant climes return,  
Then Egypt shall be ours,  
While the Turkish turrets burn ! ”

The last line ended in a shriek, with which a cry from Natalie mingled ; for the cruel dvornick had been stealing through the thicket unperceived, and now bestowed a heavy lash across the tender shoulders of the cowering and shrinking girl ; but ere he could repeat it, Balgonie sprang forward, arrested the descending whip, and then placing in the hand of the singer a few Livonian groschen, bade her hasten away, on which she departed, with tears of pain and gratitude, after pressing his fingers to her lips ; and, in her terror and confusion, leaving her task undone—her warning of coming treachery untold.

“ Oh, Carl ! ” said Natalie, laying her head again on Balgonie's breast, “ dearest Carl, I am so glad she has gone without anathematizing us—or, or weaving some mischievous spell ; for, smile as you



may, I can't help fearing those people! I am a true Russian, and dread the evil eye!"

Richer by a lock of dark and silky hair and a diamond ring (both the objects of many a secret kiss), but leaving his heart behind him, in one swift hour after this little episode, Balgonie had departed to meet, and, for greater security, to travel in consort with, a caravan of a hundred and fifty boors, who were conveying sugar from Moscow to St. Petersburg.

He was guided again by the sly Podatchkine, who had resolved to take especial good care that the said caravan should be avoided.

"God be with you, Hospodeen—God be with you—adieu," said the old Count, lifting his square velvet cap courteously, as he bade farewell to his guest at the porte-cochère.

Balgonie so respectfully kissed the hands of Natalie and Mariolizza, that none could have detected a difference in his manner to either; and certainly none could have suspected that the tears of the former were yet wet upon his cheek—her kisses lingering on his lip, that he seemed to leave his soul upon her hand, and that the wrung hearts of both were swollen with concealed emotion.

"Uich!" thought Corporal Michail Podatchkine as he rode after the officer into the deep forest "I'd as soon think of kissing the foot as the hand; who knows among what carrion either may have been



stuck? By St. Nicholas, I would rather eat a sheep's tail or a rump steak from an old troop mare than kiss either."

Some hours after Balgonie's departure, and when Natalie in the solitude of her own room was abandoned to tears and unavailing regrets, a trusted messenger from her brother arrived with a brief note, written so enigmatically that none save herself could have understood or deciphered it; but the spirit of it was briefly this:—


"All is arranged for freeing the prisoner of S. (chlusselburg) by a stratagem. A dispatch that may counteract, if not baffle our plans, and fatally compromise us all, has been sent by old Weymarn to St. Petersburg. I know not who the bearer is; but be assured of this, *he will never reach it alive.* We have set Podatchkine on his track, and he, worthy Livonion, for two hundred roubles, would skin his own father alive."

After reading this pleasant epistle, little wonder is it that Natalie was found by Mariolizza, as the twilight deepened, half senseless upon her bed, cold, in tears, and utterly miserable.



## CHAPTER IX.

### DELUDED.

 LOVER has occasionally been likened to a fool, as being a man possessed by one idea—his mistress. This was certainly somewhat of poor Charlie Balgonie's state of mind. He saw only the dark eyes, the half drooped lids, and the farewell glance of Natalie; so full of hidden and tender meaning; and while thinking of her and of her last words and promises, their mutual hopes of the future, based almost entirely on Basil, he fell an easy pray to the plans and schemes of the wily Corporal Podatchkine, who saw only his anticipated two hundred silver roubles; and who, knowing the country as well as if it had been every acre, rood, and verst this own property, led him on and on he knew not where; but, at all events, two hours after they should have met the caravan, they found themselves, to all appearance, lost in a dense forest of dark pine trees.

Failing the caravan, having now proceeded, as he believed, some twenty miles or so, Balgonie had thoughts of passing the night at the house of a friend of Count Mierowitz, a *duornin*, of whom he



had been told by Mariolizza, who laughingly assured him, that this personage was "a fine Russian gentleman of the old school, who beat his wife regularly every Thursday and Saturday with a whip of thongs," and was seldom sober.

Those duornins were country gentlemen, who held their lands by knights' service, and were bound to attend the Czar on horseback in time of war. Formerly it was sufficient to send a man well armed and mounted; but Peter the Great first compelled them or their sons to serve in person, if they could not pay for a substitute.

In short, though he knew it not, Balgonie had been for the last two hours riding merely in a wide circle, and, by the careful guidance of Podatchkine, was now not many miles from the hut of the gipsy woodman, Nicholas Paulovitch; and, consequently, he was much nearer the Castle of Louga than he had the least idea of.

On this night there was a glorious Aurora in the north; and full of his love, his own tender thoughts, and inspired by the beauty of the scene, it seemed, to the somewhat provoked Podatchkine, that the dreaming Captain was quite disposed to pass the night where he was.

When the dense wood of stupendous pines opened into the long vistas, the whole northern quarter of the sky could be seen, illuminated from the horizon to the zenith. Gloriously bright as the most bril-



liant phosphorus, masses of fire arose in the form of columns that waved, towered, and shot into the air, with streaks of fainter light between. Anon they all blended and merged into each other with renewed grandeur, aslant, or radiating from a centre, like the sticks of a mighty fan. All that portion of the heavens seemed a mass of shining gold, rubies, and sapphires, with a wonderous light streaming over them, broadening, brightening, and deepening, then fading away, to flash forth again in greater beauty and glory, while, as if to enhance the magnificence of this illumination, many falling stars shot across it, leaving in their train sparkles of light, more brilliant even than the glory that blazed beyond. In black outline between, and in the immediate foreground, towered the dark and solemn pines, in solitude and silence.

Not a sound was heard but the occasional snort of their horses, or the cry of a distant wolf.

Balgonie was surmising whether Natalie would be surveying the beautiful natural illumination from her window, or from the terrace: he forgot that it was nothing new to her. Certainly it proved of little interest to Michail Podatchkine, who under his thick beard, growled at the officer for loitering.

The Scottish islesmen call the streamers of the Aurora "the merry dancers;" but the Siberians name them "the raging host:" and Balgonie was reflecting what a relief their brilliance must prove



to the lonely hunters, who at that very time were pursuing the white bear and the blue fox, far beyond the Lena, and along the shores of the Icy Sea, when his attendant disturbed his reverie.

“Well, Michail,” said he, in reply to some remark in which the Corporal, who saw nothing wonderful in the matter, urged that they should proceed, “we have missed the sugar caravan, and cannot discover the residence of the duornin I spoke of, so I am rather provoked with you.”

“Oh, Excellency, who can withstand God or the Great Novgorod?” whined the fellow, using an old Russian proverb.

Jean Paul Richter says, “the more weakness, the more lying; force goes straight, but any cannon-ball with cavities in it goes crooked.” Some such thought as this occurred to Balgonie, as he checked his horse, and half turning round, with a stern expression in his face, which the light in the north made sufficiently plain, he said:—

“Rascal! I fear you are deceiving me again!”

Hustled up on his saddle, rather than in it with his knees on his holsters and his lance slung behind him, Podatchkine made many signs of the cross, and called on St. Sergius and all the other *moshtschi*, or saints of Russia, to bear witness that he was as innocent as a young bear of any such foul idea; but only begged that his Excellency would proceed, and assured him that the track they were on must as-



surely bring them, ere long, to some woodman's dwelling.

At this time, such is the slavish influence of superstition, that Podatchkine, for mere fellowship, kept close to the very man against whom he had formed the most fiendish schemes; for stories of the Wood Fairies,—of the *Leechie*, or Forest-demon, whose fangs tore the benighted asunder,—of the *Domovoi*, or mischievous Russian Brownie,—of the *Vodianoï*, or smiling River-spirit, who lured travelers to a watery doom,—of wolves and bears in ravening herds, came fast upon his memory; for the forest was growing denser, and the darkness deepened painfully after the Aurora faded away, and a few solitary stars alone glinted through the openings between the broad, flat, pendant branches of the intertwisted pines.

The silence of the night was now broken only by the whistling croak of the *valdchnep*, or great woodcock, as he darted from amid the black gloom of a pine tree, or the lighter shadow of the graceful, but, as yet, leafless birch; and the craven and clamorous anxiety that had been giving real pangs, and even qualms of conscience, to the superstitious Podatchkine began to subside, when the wood opened a little, a red light appeared, and they approached the cottage of Nicholas Paulovitch, the half-bred.

It was, as already stated, built of logs, squared by the hatchet outside and inside, and whitened by



chalk: before it yawned a deep draw-well, with a bucket, handle, and winch.

“’Tis the cottage of a man I know. Here, Excellency, we can pass the night,” said Podatchkine, leaping from his horse and dutifully taking Balgonie’s bridle, as if to anticipate any proposition of proceeding further. “There is a shed behind where I shall stable our horses: Nicholas, I know, will make us welcome to his lodge.”

In a few minutes more, Balgonie found himself seated in the cottage, the aspect of which struck him as being peculiarly comfortless, dingy, and squalid, as he viewed it by the light of a *loutchin*, or species of pine torch, which stood in a rusty iron holder on the rough deal table, whereon lay a pack of frayed and dog-eared cards.

On the walls were some rude images, stuck over with crumbs of black bread, which attracted the flies in summer and the dirt at all times. In a place of honor was a holy effigy, with some train oil flaring before it in a tin sconce, as a species of votive lamp; for the proprietor affected religion quite as much as Mr. Gamaliel Balgonie did in a more civilised part of the world.

The furniture consisted of a few plain stools, and some very dirty bearskins spread on the floor in the corners, as beds; and on the table was a pitcher of foaming and seething quass, with wooden bowls to drink it by.



Balgonie took in all these details at a glance.

How great would have been his surprise, if he had known that after riding so many miles, he was only a short distance from *her*, from Natalie, who was now weeping bitterly and sleeplessly on the bosom of her cousin for him, and for the fate she dreaded, and yet had not the power to avert, or from which to save him.

In addition to Podatchkine and the host, Nicholas Paulovitch, who stood respectfully at a little distance from Balgonie, and was appraising the exact value of his costume, arms, and ornaments, even to Natalie's diamond ring, there was present another ill-visaged fellow, with a powerful figure, square shoulders, and giant beard, like every Russian of the lower order; eyes that were small and piercing, like those of a mouse; a long, fierce nose and jagged teeth, hair shorn off close above the eyebrows and brushed all down straight from the crown of his head, which in form resembled a cone or a pineapple.

This Barbarian, who was dressed chiefly in a shoubah of sheepskin, and had a small, but sharp, hatchet and dagger in his girdle, was a Stepniak, from a district where nothing like a town was ever seen or known, but whose aid and strength Paulovitch thought might be useful and necessary in the work he and Podatchkine had cut out for themselves in the night.



## CHAPTER X.

### THE CORPORAL IN HIS OWN TRAP.

**B**ALGONIE was rather weary after his long and desultory ride by rough and unfrequented roads, chiefly devious forest paths; he felt thirsty, and looked at the pitcher of quass.

“Will his Excellency drink?” asked Nicholas Paulovitch, in his hoarse and husky voice.

Now as quass is simply a species of sour beer, made of rye and oatmeal, colored by a red berry and is generally the beverage by which the Russians wash down their coarse bread and salt, Balgonie declined: the Stepniak proposed to add thereto a dash of train oil; but the suggestion made the young officer shudder.

“I have fortunately one bottle of Rhine wine,” said the woodman, with a rapid and furtive glance at his comrades; “his Excellency will doubtless honor us by taking it with his supper, at least with such fare as the forest produces, a stewed rabbit or so.”

“I thank you, good fellow. Where is this cottage situated?”

“Situated,” replied Nicholas, with a quick and



uneasy glance at the Corporal, fearing there might be some discrepancy in their information.

“Yes, in what part of the country?” said Podatchkine; “for we naturally wish to know.”

“Near Velie.”

“Then I am somewhere about forty versts from the Louga?”

“Yes, Excellency, precisely,” replied the rascal.

“Hence, if my horse is fresh, I may reach Schlüsselburg to-morrow?”

“Scarcely, as it lies fully a hundred versts beyond Velie,” said Nicholas,

“Is the distance so great?” exclaimed Balgonie, little knowing that it was even more, and all unsuspecting of how these wretches were deluding him.\*

“But, Excellency, we may prove more able guides than Michail Podatchkine,” said the gipsy woodman; “for we—that is the Siepniak and I—must proceed to St. Petersburg to-morrow, on a little piece of business we shall have to perform together.”

“Poor devils!” thought Podatchkine, “if you take his body to St. Peterburgh, you will both be

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\*The cottage of those assassins is said to have been situated ten versts, or about eight miles distant from Louga on the road to Velie. *Vide* dispatch from General Weymarn to the Empress, dated 8th August, “concerning Carl Ivanovitch Balgonie, a Scottish Captain in the Regiment of Smolensko.”—*Utrecht Gazette*.



accused of murder and knouted, as sure as my name is Michail; so I shall save my fifty silver roubles."

Even at the present day in Russia, few will venture to receive or meddle with a dead body, or attempt to succour a dying or a drowning person, in dread of the dangerous accusations and extortions of the police.

A sound, as of footsteps, and of something like a drinking vessel falling on the floor of an upper apartment, made the woodman start up with an oath of astonishment and alarm. He hurriedly applied a ladder to the trap which gave admission to this place, and ascended into it; but returned almost immediately to say, "there was no one there." The evident surprise and alarm of the three men at this trivial occurrence, is said to have been the first cause of exciting Balgonie's suspicion.

He glanced at the Stepniak, who sat silently observant in a corner, drinking his quass, with his feet resting against the rude peitchka, or stone stove, which was built into the log wall of the cottage, and when surveying his vast bulk and colossal stature, together with his singularly ferocious aspect, the reflection occurred to him, that he should have placed his pistols in his girdle instead of leaving them in the holsters of the saddle.

He was the reverse of timid; he was "brave even to rashness, and had faced death many times" (to



quote General Weymarn) since his career of wandering began ; but the idea certainly did flash upon his mind, that his situation in that lonely forest had its perils, and that two men more repulsive in aspect and in bearing than the gipsy and Stepniak, he had never seen, even in Russia.

Was it some mysterious and intuitive sense of danger drawing near that made such thoughts pass through the steady mind of Balgonie ?

He and Podatchkine were both armed, and even were these men outlaws, they would scarcely, he believed, dare to assault an officer on military duty ; besides, the very name of Schlüsselburgh, whither he was proceeding, carried a wholesome terror with it ; so dismissing his casual suspicions, Charlie unbuckled his sword, and seated himself at the table, on which a cold supper of stewed rabbits and coarse rye bread was laid for the four who were present.

A platter was placed for a fifth person whom Nicholas remarked to Podatchkine in a growling tone was still abroad in the forest, or had not returned from some place which was named in a whisper.

With an affectation of extreme respect and courtesy, none of the three worthies would seat themselves at the table, until Balgonie specially invited and urged them in succession to do so.

The bottle of Rhine wine was produced from the apartment above and opened. The length of the



cork and the dust on the bottle (wherever it came from originally) argued well of the contents; and two horns, one of which had a handsome silver rim, were placed for the Captain and Corporal.

The former was rather surprised to find such a drinking vessel at this silver mounted cup in a place so squalid, and he was about to lift and examine it, when Nicholas Paulovitch, with almost nervous haste, filled it, and also that of the Corporal, to the brim.

To the surprise of Balgonie, the latter exhibited some undisguised alarm on seeing wine placed before *him*; it was an attention under all the circumstances he neither wished nor expected; and so he declined to drink of it, saying that he was "a true Russ, and would adhere to the quass."

"Nay, fear not, friend Michail," said the woodman, "'tis the best of Rhine wine. The cup with the silver mounting is of course for his Excellency the Hospodeen," he added with a quiet but grim significance, which the wily Cossack quite understood, so he drained the wine horn without further objection.

Soon after having supped, and imbibed his full share of the wine bottle, Balgonie expressed a desire for repose, as he wished to depart by day-break; but he had other reasons for retiring so early. He did not much relish the society of the gipsy, the Stepniak, and the Corporal of Cossacks;



and he wished to indulge in reverie, to commune with himself, and let the current of his thoughts run undisturbed on Natalie and their adieux.

“This way, Excellency,” said Nicholas, with alacrity, lifting the pine torch in its iron loutchin, and ushering him up the stair, a mere common ladder, and through the trap-door into the little apartment above, where his couch, composed merely of skins of the bear and sheep awaited him, and where he could see the dark forest and the occasional stars through a small window that gave light and air to the place, which was so limited in size, that it somewhat resembled a little cabin in a ship.

Left in this miserable den to his own reflections and to darkness—when Nicholas descended with the pine torch, carefully closed the trap-door and secured it on the lower side by a wooden bolt, moreover, softly removing the ladder—Charlie Balgonie placed his sword conveniently at hand, and cast himself upon the pile of skins that were to form his bed, and thought he had often fared worse in the bivouacs of Silesia and Bavaria.

“So—he is safe,” said Nicholas Paulovitch, looking upward with a grin of savage satisfaction at the closed trap, as he replaced the loutchin on the table, and then closely scrutinised the Corporal, whose eyes had already become red and inflamed.

“Hush!” said Podatchkine, “take care.”

“Why?” asked Nicholas, in a hoarse whisper.



“Because all may not be yet as you wish it, and in Russia sometimes the tongue flays the shoulders and cuts off the head.”

“True,” said the hitherto taciturn Stepniak, who was carefully feeling the keen edge of his hatchet; “as the Tartars have it, ‘when you have spoken the word, it rules over you; while it is yet unspoken, you rule over it.’ But it seems to me Michail Podatchkine, that you have taken a great deal of trouble, and wasted much time in the matter of this dispatch. As you passed through the forest together, why the devil did you not give him a good *tzchick*”—(which we can only render “prod”)—“in the back with your lance?”

“Because, if a wound is found on him, folks might say he had been murdered; and he must bear not a scar.”

“And neither shall you, friend Podatchkine,” said Paulovitch with a cruel grin.

“Come—don’t make unpleasant jests,” growled the Corporal, with a yarn and a shudder; “wounds have not been fashionable since Orloff and Bernikoff supped with Peter III.”

“You grow wary as you grow older Corporal.”

“I have no desire to travel with the next caravan to Siberia, with one side of my head and face shaved, and an iron rosary, some five pounds weight, my wrists.”

“Fear not—you will never see Siberia.”



“Then you have made all sure about this Ivanovitch Balgonie?” said Podatchkine, whose utterance was becoming somewhat inarticulate.

“Ay, sure enough; the cups were ——”

“The cups!”

“The cup, I mean, was drugged with those black berries which grow in the forest hereabout; the same stuff used by fine ladies to whiten their hands.”

“But why the cup and not the wine?”

“For this reason: I might have been constrained to drink with him; and I had no desire to fall, like some one else, into a trap of my own baiting.”

Podatchkine, on whom the powerful soporific with which his cup had been drugged—the sleepy nightshade—had been rapidly taking effect, and whose small cunning eyes had been opening and shutting alternately, while a numbness stole with a weariness over all his faculties, seemed suddenly to grasp at the terrible meaning of the speaker. He gave a start—he essayed to rouse himself and shout, but in doing so, toppled off his stool, and sank on the clay floor in a profound slumber.

“At last!” said the half-breed, administering a kick to the prostrate figure; “at last he has gone to sleep; now to make sure that he shall never waken more. Ah! the Asiatic! he was just getting suspicious at the end.”

“There are two kopecs in his pocket,” said the



Stepniak, after investigating the garments of the snorting Podatchkine, who was now breathing heavily through his red snub nose, which, between his scrubby beard and his shock of hair, was almost the only feature of his face that was visible.

“Leave the kopecs where you found them!” said Nicholas, with a gipsy oath.

“Wherefore?” asked the Stepniak with surprise.

“It will seem all the more honest in thee, my good Stepniak, when you take the body—bodies, I should say—to the nearest military post. You have but to say you found them dead in the forest.”

“And the wet clothing?”

“Dew or rain—what a head you have!”

“True—true; ah! what a man you are, Nicholas Paulovitch, so full of bright thoughts! That idea would never have occurred to me.”

“Nor the other either. Quick, now; we have not a moment to lose!”

They extinguished the pine torch, and tying the Corporal’s hands securely with a cord, carried him forth to the draw-well before the cottage. Then they substituted that worthy warrior’s heels for the bucket which was usually appended to the rope, and permitting the winch to revolve softly and gently, lowered him down, snorting and gasping in his unnatural slumber, head foremost, into the deep dark water below!

The Stepniak turned the iron handle of the winch



or windlass, while the gipsy guided the rope with its heavy burden. He was deliberately lowered down until only his heels remained above water, as the two wretches could see by the starlight when stooping and peering into the darkness below.

The snorting had ceased now!

The dying Corporal was heard to struggle with his hands, as if he sought to free them from the cords; a few bubbles filled with air rose to the surface and burst. This continued for a minute, during which all was silent everywhere, save the half-suppressed breathing of the two assassins, and the dreary sound of the night wind, as it shook the dark branches of the giant pines that towered in solemn gloom around them.

Nicholas Paulovitch listened intently, and kept his eyes fixed on the cottage where their other victim lay, as he doubted not, sunk in what was intended to be his last sleep.

Anon, all became still—deathly still—in the depths of the dark well; the rope ceased to vibrate, and the bubbles came no more.

“Let us leave him here for a few minutes, and now for the Captain and his dispatch! By the time that we return, the Corporal will be as stiff as if he stood for sale in the frozen market on the fête of St. Nicholas!” said the gipsy, with one of his diabolical grins; while the Stepniak, with a smile of satisfaction that showed all his huge yellow teeth,



smoothed down to his eyebrows the thick coarse black hair that grew from the apex of his conical caput.

They now re-entered the cottage, and again lighted the torch in its iron loutchin. All remained just as they had left it; the quass pitcher, the wooden bowls, the two cups, and the empty wine bottle were on the table, and the platters, with the débris of their rustic supper; but the superstitious gipsy felt a species of shudder come over him, for when the torch flared up in the night wind and cast strange shadows on the dingy and discoloured walls of the log-hut, it seemed to his diseased imagination, for a moment, as if the outline of the drowned Corporal still occupied the stool on which he had been seated.

“Come,” said he huskily, “the dispatch!—and then for the other!”

They listened intently, and placed the ladder against the trap-door. All was still—not even the breathing of Balgonie was heard. Ascending first, with a knife in his teeth, in case of unexpected resistance, the gipsy knocked thrice on the trap without receiving any response. He then withdrew the wooden bolt, pushed it up, and introducing his head and shoulders, held aloft the pine torch, and turned towards the bed of skins.

It was unoccupied; and in a moment he saw that the bare and desolate chamber was without a tenant!



“Malediction!” he shouted; “he has escaped us—but how? Search—search! He cannot be far off, after the dose I have given him; search—and we must use our hatchets now!”



## CHAPTER XI.

### OLGA, THE GIPSY.

**B**ALGONIE had scarcely thrown himself at length on the soft, but not very odorous, pile of skins which formed his couch, when a face appeared at the little window, which was pulled open, and a voice called to him in a low and earnest whisper :

“Hospodeen—Carl Ivanovitch! Hospodeen, attend to me; but oh, be silent, as you value your life!”

He started up, softly approached the window, and saw, by the dim starlight, a fair female face with very dark eyes, white and regular teeth, and long, glittering ear-rings.

“I have seen this face before,” thought he; “but when, and where?”

Balgonie, in truth, was too much of a lover to have more than one female face ever before his eyes—that of Natalie Mierowna.

“I am Olga, the gipsy,” said the girl humbly.

“Olga! Olga! whom I saw at the house of Count Mierowitz this evening?”

“The same, Hospodeen!” (Balgonie expressed



an exclamation of astonishment to find her, as he thought, so far from that place.) “You gave me a silver kopec once upon a time, at Krejko, when passing through that town with Michail Podatchkine; and, this evening you saved me from the whip of the dvornick, when, for the third time I had ventured near the Count’s mansion, in a vain search for you, or the Hospoza Mierowna.”

“In search of us—and for what purpose, girl?”

“To warn you, that for nearly a month past, a plot has been formed to deprive you of a valuable paper, and even of your life.”

“My life—when?”

“On the first opportunity.”

“By whom—and where, girl—where?”

“Here in this solitary hut—even now your assassins are in consultation—listen.”

He placed his ear to the trap-door, and heard the murmur of hoarse whispers below.

“Hush,” said Podatchkine, as already related, “take care!” Then followed the question of the subtle and ferocious Stepniak, as to why he had not given Balgonie a “prod” with his lance in the forest; and the whole conversation in all its horrible details, up to the moment when the wretched Corporal with death and terror mingling in his soul, fell from his seat in a stupor.

“Father in heaven!” exclaimed Balgonie, full of despair and horror, as he mechanically felt for his



fatal dispatch, to ascertain that it was yet safe, "I have drunk of this drugged stuff, and am also lost!"

"Nay," said the gipsy, hurriedly, "nay——"

"I drank the accursed wine from a cup——"

"True; but not from the cup which was intended for you."

"How?—speak!—speak!"

"The wine and the cups too were all stolen by Podatchkine, with many other things, at different times, from the household of Count Mierowitz. This night you were duly expected here, and thus a plan was laid to destroy both you and your treacherous guide. Two cups were fully and deeply drugged by my brother Nicholas: one was richly mounted with silver; and knowing well that it was to be set before you, I abstracted it barely an hour ago, substituting another of the same kind, and now I have it here. Oh, Hospodeen, a narrow escape you have had!"

Balgonie began to breathe more freely; but, assured that never had he run so narrow a risk of death, he felt, though enraged and furious, his blood run cold, when contemplating the fate intended for him. Peeping through a chink of the hatch or trap-door, he saw that the ladder of access had been removed, and that the door of the squalid cottage was open now, for the loutchin flared more than ever in the night wind. It was then extinguished; but still he could see and hear them dragging forth



the passive form of Corporal Podatchkine, whom he supposed to be dead.

Personally, Balgonie felt that he was no match for either of the powerful giants below—men whose bodily strength was quite equal to their ferocity, and whose daggers and hatchets might make mince-meat of him. Moreover, they had now deprived Podatchkine of his sabre and loaded pistols, and were thus more completely armed. Charlie had his hand on his sword—a handsome Turkish sabre; but relinquishing the ideas either of attack or defence, while the glow of rage rose in his breast and cheek, he thought only of immediate flight.

“If you would save your life and the dispatch of the Empress, follow me this instant, and get your horse before they return: you have not a moment to lose.”

It was the gipsy girl who spoke again, in her low earnest whisper, and with perfect decision.

“Then I owe my escape—my safety——”

“To my gratitude. Pass through the window and descend by the wall.”

“Women,” says a certain philosopher, “are not at all inferior to men in coolness and courage, and perhaps much less in resolution than is commonly imagined; the reason they appear so is, because women affect to be more afraid than they really are, and men pretend to be less.”

Balgonie found that the courageous girl to whose



guidance he now trusted himself, had been enabled to reach the window by standing on the roof of the outhouse, or shed, in which Podatchkine had stabled their horses. The whole edifice being built of squared logs, was not very high; and it afforded easy means of ascent and descent, by the interstices consequent to its rude construction by the hatchet. He soon leaped to the ground, and softly assisted her to descend.

“Here is your horse: you see, Hospodeen, that your kindness to the poor gipsy girl was not thrown away.”

Balgonie looked rapidly to his bit and girth, adjusted himself in his saddle, hooked up the hilt of his sabre, and shortened his rein, almost unaware of the black tragedy being so coolly and deliberately acted on the other side of the cottage.

“Ten versts farther from this will bring you to the monastery of the Troitza, which you will know by its three domes. You have but to ride straight westward by the forest path; God keep you, and may you and the beautiful Hospoza be happy in your loves!”

“Tell me, gipsy girl——”

“Ah, I can foretell nothing, save that in love mere merit is of little matter.”

“What is of most importance—beauty?”

“No.”

“What then?”



“Success, Hospodeen.”

He almost laughed, as he slipped into her hand two xervonitz (the largest coins he had,) and in a moment more was galloping over the soft grass of the forest path she had indicated.

“By Jove,” thought he, as he spurred on, “I shall not be sorry when this infernal dispatch is safe in the hands of old Bernikoff; and to think of that wretch of a Podatchkine! I always expected the fellow to be a rogue, but not of so deep a dye!”

The unfortunate Corporal, now, as he deserved, hanging head foremost downward in the draw-well, stark and stiff and cold, had been to all appearance a good Russian, Balgonie reflected: he neither confessed, fasted, nor did penance (too much bother all that would have been for the Corporal of Cossacks); but he kept Lent regularly to all appearance; made a sign of the cross fussily before and after every meal; always went to church when in camp or quarters; and never omitted his prayers and genuflexions at night, if in haunted places or when passing a wayside cross, especially if any one was by. All this was no doubt studiously hypocritical; and Charlie remembered that his worthy Uncle Gam kept Fast-days and “Sabbaths” with stern and gloomy rigour; that he said a long and sonorous prayer before meals—a longer prayer after them; that he went thrice daily to kirk at the ordained periods, and had nightly a noisy expounding and



out-pouring of the spirit that would have put the great John of Geneva himself to the blush.

“Ah,” thought poor Charlie, as he trotted on his lonely way through the darkened forest, “decidedly there are Podatchkines in Scotland as well as elsewhere and in Russia.”

The light was beginning to dawn, for it was the morning of one of the first days of May, so long had he been detained by illness—shall we say by love?—at the castle by the Louga, that Muscovite Eden, as now it seemed to him. The birds were chirping merrily in the woods; and in some places he saw the brown rocks shaded by a species of graceful silver birch and dark rowan tree, similar to those that grew in his native strath at home.

By midsummer he knew that the birchen glades he traversed would be in full foliage, and that the rowan berries would hang in ripe red clusters among the thick green leaves; and that there, too, would be gray lichens on the granite cliffs, and in their clefts soft emerald moss, the wild strawberries and the drooping bells of the purple foxglove, just as he had seen them where the Earn “gurgling kissed her pebbled shore” as it flowed towards the Tay.

They seemed like old friends in that strange place, and with a sigh of gratitude for his escape from a perilous and deadly snare was mingled one of hope—a wish—a bootless wish, that one day he might sit by the banks of the lovely Earn with Natalie by



his side, amid all the security his native land afforded, and under the white blooming hawthorns that cast their sweet fragrance to the soft winds of the Perthshire valley.

Beloved Natalie—so fair and delicate, so dark haired and so bright-eyed! Her diamond ring, and still more her lock of soft and silky hair, brought all the charm and sense of her presence vividly before him. He counted the brief hours since they had parted, and sighed to think how many hours and days and weeks must inevitably elapse before they met again.

In memory and imagination, he conned over and over again each tender speech and glance, each mute caress and passionate kiss, with every circumstance and minutiae of their occurrence and bestowal; and what lover has not done so since time began, and apples grew, and roses bloomed in Eden! Even his recent narrow escape, and the gipsy's gratitude were forgotten in the ardor of his thoughts.

And he sighed again, when thinking how wild and insane were the dreams in which he was indulging, as he touched his horse with the spurs, on seeing the three shining domes of the Troitza, or monastery of the Holy Trinity, rise before him amid the green woodlands.



## CHAPTER XII.

### ST. PETERSBURG.

**A**FTER traversing a green valley some five or or six miles in length, bordered on each side by forests of fir trees, dark, solemn and acutely conical, where the sunlight could scarcely ever penetrate to the thick rank grass and herbage that grew below, and where a merry gurgling brook rushed noisely along by the side of the narrow horseway, Charlie Balgonie drew his bridle at the gates of the Troitza monastery, when its white walls, its three great cupolas, shaped each like a gigantic onion inverted, covered with plates of burnished copper, and all painted and bestarred, were shining gaily in the morning sun.

There he was made welcome by the monks—quaint-looking men, in long black caftans, with high black caps, fashioned like our modern hats, but without brims, and having black veils floating behind over their long, straight hair. He deposited some money with the treasurer, declined the invitation of the sacristan to see the uncorrupted body of some saint with an unpronounceable name, reposing in its shrine like a silver bedstead, and its head be-



girt by a diadem with pearls as large as pistol bullets; for the saint had been a martyr, who, in the days of Ivan Basilovitch, the Tartars had rewarded for his attempts to convert them by knocking out his brains; and now he was a miserable mummified relic of humanity, before which, for many ages, thousands of devotees had knelt and wept and smote their breasts in paroxysms of prayer. Charlie waived the invitation; and after having a good breakfast in the refectory, and there telling his story to the monks, he was somewhat bewildered when informed by them, that after all his (certainly circuitous) journey with Podatchkine on the preceding evening and night, and after his riding since he had left the cottage of the gipsy, he was still barely twenty miles from the Louga!

Was a spell cast upon him? was his horse bewitched, that he was to continue travelling thus, and yet never make progress? It almost seemed so; but one of the monks, a more shrewd man than his brothers, explained the whole affair as being consequent to the cunning of Podatchkine, and his scheme for destroying the dispatch-bearer.

A large party of pilgrims on horse and foot were returning to St. Petersburg that afternoon. With them Balgonie travelled for the remainder of his journey; and, after traversing a wild and desert tract of country, on the evening of the next day he had the pleasure of beholding, in the distance before



him, that new but vast and splendid capital,—

“Proud city! Sovereign mother thou  
Of all Slavonian cities now,”—

covering the once wild waste whereon, before the time of Peter the Great, the father of his country, a few wretched fishermen were wont to contend with the wolves and bears for a spot to erect their huts—where, as Count Segur says, winter reigned for eight months of the year, rye was an article of garden culture, and a bee-hive a curiosity.

Its bulbous-shaped Byzantine domes, and tall needle-like spires, and all its countless roofs, that rose beyond each other in ridgy succession like the waves of the sea, and are generally like the sea in colour, being of a brilliant green or an ashy hue, were now all tinted redly by the rays of the setting sun, which cast the shadows of its many bridges on the waters of the Neva and of the canals that glided silently and darkly beneath them.

As the sun sank beyond the Gulf of Finland, and the shadows deepened on every plated dome and granite rampart, the great gilt crosses of our Lady of Kazan (a fane which was ten years in building) and of many other noble churches glittered, or rather seemed to burn like stars, amid the deep blue of the cloudless sky beyond.

Balgonie's satisfaction, on finding himself so near the end of his journey, was somewhat clouded by a trivial circumstance.



After entering the city by a palisaded barrier, where stood a guard of the Regiment of Valikolutz, he checked his horse's pace, while the caravan of pilgrims, whom he now wished to quit, traversed a long street of small wooden houses that lay beyond. Here, close by the margin of the Neva, lay a man with his loose caftan wet and dripping, and a piece of sack or old canvas spread over his face. On his breast lay his fur cap, as if to receive alms for his burial; for none doubted that he was a poor drowned fellow just fished up from the Neva, and that money was required of the religious and charitable alike for his obsequies and masses for the repose of his soul. So all the pilgrims from the Troitza threw something into the fur cap, where denuscas, kopecs, even roubles and Polish ducats, jingled fast together, while the passers muttered prayers and made signs of the cross.

All the caravan had passed; so the clatter of Balgonie's charger, steel-scabbard, and accoutrements, seemed to create a different effect on the attentive ear of the seemingly drowned man; for the knave, who had only been acting, started up, and, with his spoil, fled like a hare down one of the little alleys that opened off the wooden street. He vanished in the twilight, yet not so quickly but that Balgonie was able to recognise in his face and form, the bulky and muscular half-bred, the gipsy, Nicholas Paulovitch.



What had brought him to St. Petersburg? Was he still dogging the luckless dispatch-bearer, or had he only fled thither that, among its thousands, he might elude the punishment with which Count Mierowitz would be sure to visit him, if the murder of the Corporal was discovered?

This episode made Balgonie feel uncomfortable, and suspicious that other and hidden dangers yet menaced him, as he rode steadily but watchfully through the densely crowded, but monotonously regular streets of houses, which are stuccoed white-washed, and decorated with different colours, roofed with wood and iron, painted in most instances green, and nearly all pillared and piazzaed—each long vista, with its oil lamps, being terminated by domes and spires; and ere long he saw the lights shining in the lofty windows of that magnificent crescent, which, for a time, was the palace of Catharine's most cherished favourite, "the fair-faced Lanskoi," as Byron has it—

"A lover who had cost her many a tear,  
And yet but made a middling Grenadier."

And now the melodious bells were ringing for vespers in the towers of our Lady of Kazan—a Greek cruciform fane, which was founded as a rival to St. Peter's at Rome, and named after the Tartar kingdom of Kazan. It is the greatest church in the city, and one of high sanctity.

Along the northern margin of the Neva, a river



broad as the Thames at London Bridge, but (unlike the Thames) deep, blue, and transparent as crystal, lined with solid granite quays, and bordered by many stately palatial edifices, Balgonie pursued his way; but the stars were shining at midnight on the vast sheet of water called the Lake of Ladoga, before he, weary and worn with fatigue, dismounted beneath the formidable gates of the castellated prison of Schlüsselburg, which had been strengthened and fortified anew by General Count Todleben, whose arrest and quarrel with the Empress had made so much noise three years before the time our story opens.



## CHAPTER XIII.

### WHAT THE SECRET DISPATCH CONTAINED.

**T**WENTY-FOUR miles eastward of the city, the small town and fortress of Schlüsselburg stand, at a point where the Neva issues from the Lake of Ladoga, and on the left bank of the river. The little town had then somewhere about three thousand inhabitants, who chiefly lived by the manufacture of cotton and porcelain.

On an island, where the river joins the lake and moats it round, is built the fort, which is about four hundred yards square: its walls are of stone, massive, and fifty feet in height, terminating in battlements and turrets of antique form.

The passage to this island is by a long draw-bridge.

The guard which kept this formidable state prison, where many a hopeless sigh was wafted through the rusty bars of its prison grilles across the waters of Ladoga, was composed entirely of a body of dismounted Cossacks, selected for the purpose, as the task of keeping or secluding the dethroned Emperor Ivan was one of no small responsibility and importance; so these men were all Cossacks of a high class, and were rather richly dressed.



Their short blue jackets were elaborately embroidered with yellow lace, and a multitude of gilt buttons, but were hooked across the chest; their trowsers of scarlet cloth were loose, long, and gathered into their boots, which were of brown Russian leather, and reached to six inches above the ankle. Their busbies of black shining fur had bright scarlet bags, tall white feathers, a cockade, and tasselled cord. They were all clean and soldier-like men, well moustached, and sternly resolute in bearing; and all were armed with musketoons, short sabres, and brass pistols.

A guard of these men received Balgonie at the gate and drawbridge with a profound military salute; and a picturesque aspect they presented, as their arms flashed in the murky light of the great oil lantern that swung in the dark, weird, and deep-mouthed archway, where a massive port-cullis showed its iron teeth, all red and rusted by the mists of the Neva and the stormy blasts that swept across the Lake of Ladoga.

The great masses of the fortress, ghostly and shrouded, with faint red lights gleaming out here and there; the enormous strength of the gates, their planking, bolts, and bars; the thickness of the walls; the number of embrasures and loop-holes for cannon and musketry, all converging to one point, the approach or river entrance; the number of sentinels, and, more than all, the vast strength of the



portcullis and double gates, together with the difficulties he experienced in procuring admission, though in uniform, and though a staff officer bearing a dispatch of the Empress, all served to impress unpleasantly on the mind of Charlie Balgonie a state of extreme watchfulness, of suspicion, and mistrust; and also a sense of vast responsibility of the charge confided by Catharine to Colonel Bernikoff.

That gallant officer and estimable personage had retired long since, after a deep drinking bout, and would be—as Lieutenant Tschekin (the son-in-law of General Weymarn), who was third in command of the fortress, informed Balgonie—quite invisible till breakfast time to-morrow, when the dispatch would be delivered to him: and a sigh of real annoyance escaped Charlie, when he found that this odious paper was to be yet some eight hours or more in his secret pocket.

He repaired to the officers' guard-room at the barrier gate, and there, wrapped in his cloak, without undressing (as he hoped next day to exchange the atmosphere of Schlüsselburg for that of some hotel in the Vasili-Ostrov), lay down to sleep, and if possible to dream of Natalie; but he had undergone too much toil for such gentle phantasms, so he slept like a dormouse, till the sun was high in heaven, unawakened even by the deep boom of the morning gun, a 36-pounder, as it pealed across the Lake of



Ladogo; but ultimately he was roused by Tschekin and Captain Vlasfief, a very handsome young man, but a cruel and heartless *roué*, whom ultimately he detested. These, after shaking him heartily, announced that Colonel Bernikoff awaited him at breakfast, and was not in a mood to brook much delay.

His hasty toilette was soon complete, and he was speedily ushered into a plain, almost naked white-washed apartment arched with stone. Through its grated windows the morning sun shone cheerily, and the blue waters of the lake could be seen with the white sails of many a tiny coasting vessel.

Here, at a table of plain Memel timber, destitute of cloth, but on which massive silver vessels with rudely formed wooden bowls and platters were oddly intermingled, was seated the Governor, who, like the czars and boyars of old, still took quass for breakfast with roasted beef or bear's ham, bread with caviare, greens with vinegar, salted plums and other abominations. But Balgonie saw that coffee and even tea, with ham, eggs, and kippered salmon, were prepared, with other condiments, for those who, like himself, had nothing of the Tartar in their blood.

“Hail to you—I wish you health,” said Bernikoff, courteously enough, in the old Russian fashion, and presenting his hand to Charlie, who took it, shuddering as he remembered the fate of Peter



III.; "welcome to Schlüsselburg, Captain Ivanovitch Balgonie."

Bernikoff, who wore a dark-green undress uniform faced with scarlet, was a man well up in years; he had fierce and shining black eyes that made soldier and serf alike quail beneath their gaze; yet they were small, cunning, and twinkling eyes, the lashes of which were half closed—the eyes of one who could act the cruel tyrant on one hand, and the cringing slave on the other. He had a massive, square, and brutal jaw, thin wicked lips, a nose as round as a grape-shot, close short grizzled hair, and long snaky mustachioes.

He was of Tartar blood, and came of those "warlike and merciless tribes who studied nothing but the use of arms; who passed their lives on horseback; who even lived on their horses in this sense, that their chief food was horseflesh and the milk of mares; who, at the same time, could go for days without food; and who, when they took a city by storm, put all the inhabitants to the sword except the working men."

"Seat yourself, Captain, and proceed to breakfast, while I read your dispatch," said the Governor. "Holy Sergius! it is from Catharine Christianowna herself! The Czarina is great, but Heaven is higher!" he added, placing the paper on his forehead, as he bowed over it; and then taking an enormous pinch of Beresovski snuff, a most pungent



compound, from a gold box said to have been found in the pocket of Peter III., he proceeded to peruse that document which had proved of such trouble to the bearer.

The eyes of Balgonie, Tschekin, and Vlasfief, who alone were present, were fixed inquiringly upon him, and they could see that the contents disturbed him greatly; he grew pale and flushed by turns; his brows contracted to a terrible frown; a red spark of devilish light glittered in his eyes, and his lips were compressed.

“Ah, the Asiatics! the accursed Asiatics!” he muttered. This is a most opprobrious epithet in Russia, and excited some surprise in his hearers.

He carefully folded the dispatch, and turning sternly to Charlie, who was keeping his eyes on him and drinking his coffee the while, he said:—

“Ivanovitch Balgonie, there is a feather in the seal—the usual sign of *haste* among us here in Russia; yet you have not troubled yourself much with speed, for this dispatch is dated at Novgorod more than a month back!”

“Permit me to explain, Excellency,” said Balgonie eagerly, and anxiously too.

“I shall be glad if you *can* explain it,” replied Bernikoff, with increasing sternness. “I have known a general, a leader in ten battles, degraded, knouted, and sent to hunt the ermine with a cannon ball at his heels for a smaller dereliction of duty than this.”



Balgonie's heart beat very fast while he related his story—of his being misled by a traitor twice; of the passage of the Louga at such terrible hazard; of his subsequent illness; and the episode at that log hut.

“That you were in the guidance of a traitor, I knew before your arrival; and I am extremely glad that he fell into his own snare,” replied Bernikoff, a little more calmly; “but this matter is extremely awkward for you, and becomes more complicated every hour.”

After glancing again at the dispatch, and bending his keen rat-like eyes on Balgonie, he asked:

“Were Basil Mierowitz or Usakoff, the grandson of Mazeppa, at the Castle of Louga any time during your sojourn there?”

“No, Excellency, neither of them were.”

“Spies say differently—but you can swear it?”

“On my honour do I swear it! But why?”

“I have had bad news from the head-quarters of your regiment, and from Lieutenant-General Weymarn, since you left Novgorod.”

“And these tidings, Excellency?”

“Are to the effect that your friends, the two subalterns, have both deserted, with several soldiers, all of whom are natives of the Ukraine.”

“Deserted!”

“And are nowhere to be found, though pursued by a whole sotnia of Cossacks.”



“Deserted!” reiterated Balgonie with real concern.

“Yes—the cursed Asiatics!” replied Bernikoff, expectorating with great vehemence, and thoroughly believing that each time he did so he cast out a devil.

For some moments intense anxiety and alarm bewildered Balgonie, and he felt himself grow pale at a time when six searching eyes were bent with a doubtful expression upon him. He remembered the hostility, the threatening and mysterious words of Natalie, and grew almost sick with apprehension of he knew not what, as he muttered inaudibly—

“Basil deserted—and his cousin too! The whole family will be inculpated and degraded. Oh, Natalie, my hapless love! Did General Weymarn state this in *his* dispatch?” he asked aloud.

“He did, and at its end referred to you.”

“To me, Excellency?”

“Yes; here is the document, and it concludes thus: ‘as I and the Regiment of Smolensko will shortly march into St. Petersburg, Captain Carl Ivanovitch Balgonie need not return to Novgorod; but, until then, shall attach himself to your staff, and remain in Schlüsselburg, where, ere long, you may require all the good service he can render you.—WEYMARN.’”

Great were the mortification and disgust of Balgonie on learning that he was to remain for an in-



definite period in a place so revolting and uncomfortable, and with no other society than that of three military jailers,—cruel, hard-hearted, and avaricious Muscovites of the worst kind; and with these orders died his hopes of revisiting, as he intended, Louga, on his return, and of seeing Natalie again.

Under ban as all the household of Mierowitz would be now, should he ever see her more? Every way fate and the tide of events seemed to be against him and her, already in the very dawn of their love.

“And now, gentlemen,” said the Governor, lowering his voice, “the Empress’s dispatch contains only two lines, thus: ‘A scheme is formed to free Prince Ivan. *Let him not fall alive into the hands of these who come to seek for him!*’ Nor shall he!” exclaimed Bernikoff with ferocious enthusiasm, as he dashed a cup of vodka among his quass, and drained the goblet, after shouting, “The health of Her Imperial Majesty Catharine Christianowna—hurrah!”

“Hurrah, hurrah!” added Vlasfief and the Lieutenant.

Balgonie also, as in duty bound, essayed to “hurrah,” but the sound died away on his lips.



## CHAPTER XIV.

### CHARLIE'S FIRST DAY IN SCHLUSSELBURG.

**F**ULL of anxious thoughts, he passed more than half of the succeeding day on the ramparts of the castled-prison, alone, avoiding Colonel Bernikoff, Captain Vlasfief, and their subaltern, Tschekin, none of whom were consonant to his taste, for all were deep gamblers and heavy drinkers.

His mind was full of care for Natalie and all her family. Some desperate and revengeful plot, of which the desertion of her brother and of his cousin Usakoff was but the beginning, the means to an end, was certainly hatching—a plot that might too surely end in bloodshed, in the savage punishment and the ruin of all.

He sorrowed keenly for his two friends Basil Mierowitz and Apollo Usakoff, for both were polished and educated gentlemen, men of a class and style more common in some corps of the Russian army now than in those days. And there was poor Mariolizza, too—so brightly beautiful, so happy, and so merry! Her love, her hopes and schemes, would all be crushed and blighted, as well as his own.



Balgonie was not without fears for himself, and of being compromised in the affair; or perhaps, lured into subtle state intrigues and deep plots, in the failure or success of which he could have no interest politically or personally, save in his love for Natalie—a love that had changed the whole current of his ideas and opened up a new realm of thought and incentive to action.

Already he was beginning to revolt at the Russian service, and yet he had been happy in the Regiment of Smolensko, and had found in the land of his adoption, like every Scottish adventurer that has trod the Russian soil, honours scarcely to be won at home.

How long was he to be on the staff of this ferocious Commandant, and in this horrible prison, where many an innocent victim was pining hopelessly in chains and misery? “The mutual distrust in which people live in Russia,” says the Abbé Chappe D’Auteroche in his scarce travels about this time, “and the total silence of the nation upon everything which may have the least relation either to the government or the sovereign, arise chiefly from the privilege every Russian has, without distinction, of crying out in public, *slowo dielo*; that is say, ‘I declare you are guilty of high treason, both in words and actions.’ All the bystanders are then obliged to assist in arresting the person so accused; a father, his son, and the



son his father, while nature suffers in silence. The accuser and accused are at once conveyed to prison, and afterwards to St. Petersburg, where they are tried by the Secret Court of Chancery."

Thanks to this pleasant state of society, the chambers and chains of Schlüsselburg were seldom unoccupied.

Vlasief was hollow-hearted, avaricious, and sensual; Tschekin, the Lieutenant, a slimy, cruel, reckless, and ignorant Muscovite; but old Bernikoff was really a character whom Balgonie equally dreaded and despised.

His subtlety and oppression had been the means of reducing, at different times, some thirty officers to the ranks, with permission to serve and work their way up again; and many more were now cursing him and their fate, at Irkutsk and remoter Siberia, for their inability to purchase his mercy or good-will. When commanding at Cronstadt, he had been detected once in the act of transmitting whole sledge loads of government shot, shell, lead, and ropes, across the frozen gulf for sale in Sweden; and also in buying at a cheap rate base denuscas to pay the troops: but so trusted was the old rascal by the Empress, that he always escaped the degradation, the hanging or shooting, which, on those discoveries, were so freely meted out to his subalterns.

On the estate of Bernikoff a serf once amassed



ten thousand roubles, and offered them for the freedom of his daughter, who was about to be married.

“Let me see the girl!” was the reply.

As a serf can possess nothing, the father trembled in his soul at this demand; as his daughter, unfortunately for herself, was beautiful.

“Holy Sergius!” exclaimed Bernikoff, “what business has a serf with ten thousand roubles; the girl and the money are alike mine!”

And so he literally and lawfully seized them both.

Though a savage soldier, like every old Muscovite, he was the slave of mechanical devotion. No statue or picture of the Holy Virgin, of St. Sergius, or St. Alexander Newski, was ever passed by him without a profound reverence and a sign of the cross. To such effigies he would address himself before he knelt even to the Empress: and before them he had been known to kneel and kiss the ground five minutes before or after he had knouted a miserable boor (whose pockets were empty), or nearly slain a soldier by making him run the gauntlet, for merely having the seams of his gloves sewn outward instead of in; for wearing his hat on the left side of his head instead of the right; or for some other offence equally heinous.

And it was on the staff of this distinguished officer (temporarily, however) that Charlie now, to his great disgust, found himself.



On three sides, far around this island prison, stretched the waters of Ladoga—the largest lake in Europe, being one hundred and thirty miles long, by nearly ninety broad; full of rocky isles and dangerous quicksands, over which, from its flat shores, sweep frequent and perilous storms.

From the somewhat dreary view of this small inland sea, whose northern and eastern coast could not be discerned, he turned to survey the fortress, with all its strength of gloomy walls, grated windows, and frowning cannon, till suddenly his eye was arrested by a very remarkable face, which was observing him from the sombre depth of a strongly barred and arched window of the great tower.

It was a pale face, but singularly handsome—grave, and even sad in expression—a young man's face with the slightest indication of a moustache, but for which, in its paleness and extreme delicacy of feature and tint, it might have passed for that of a twin brother of Natalie Mierowna!

Suddenly it was detected by a Cossack sentinel, who shouted shrilly, and slapped the but-end of his loaded musketoön: on this, the face instantly disappeared.

This was he concerning whom Balgonie had brought that terrible dispatch—Ivan, the deposed Emperor—the prisoner of Schlüsselburg!

“Twenty-three years!” thought Balgonie with a



shudder ; “ twenty-three years in that tower—since his very babyhood—oh, it is terrible ! ”

Other ears had heard the shout of the sentinel ; for now a man, who in a boat had been fishing near the fortress, suddenly shipped a pair of sculls and pulled away towards the town with an air of alarm that seemed equalled only by his dexterity. This fisher had been hovering about the fortress all day. “ Can he be the gipsy—the half-breed ? ” thought Charlie : “ ah ! the dispatch is out of my hands now.”

Lieutenant Tschekin now approached with an invitation from Bernikoff to join him at dinner, adding, “ Remember that with the Colonel, eating is indeed a science ; and temperance he views as mere want of spirit.”

As they proceeded together through various archways and gates, the shrieks and entreaties of a man apparently in mortal agony rang through the echoing prisons with a horrible cadence, that chilled the free blood in Balgonie's veins.

A court through which they had to pass was crowded by soldiers, formed in hollow square, and Balgonie was compelled to linger and look on with Tschekin, who seemed rather to enjoy the spectacle.

“ Hah,” said he, “ the punishment is nearly ended—let us wait and see the *batogg* ! ”

It was a soldier being knouted, which is simply the Russian word for “ whipped.”



Stripped to the loins, he was strapped to an erect board, formed like an inverted cone, and having three notches at the upper end, one to receive his chin, and the other two his wrists, while the torturer wielded a knout, the handle of which is usually eighteen inches long with a thong of thirty-six inches. This is always boiled in milk, by which process it swells and the edges become sharp, hard, and more destructive.

The whipper was skilful: he laid on his lashes from the neck to the loins, so as to deal them at intervals of one inch artistically apart, leaving a stripe of flesh between each; but these regulated and omitted stripes, after receiving a fresh knout, he proceeded to take off in succession, with wonderful and terrible precision, till the man's entire back was a mass of blood, and he hung, fainting and well-nigh speechless, by the wrists.

"Oh, Excellency," said he, in an imploring voice, "remember that my brother, Alexis Jagouski, aided you in escaping from the battle of Zorndorff!"

This was most true, but the story was a terrible one. At Zorndorff, where the Russians were defeated with such slaughter and driven towards the frontiers of Poland, the horse of Bernikoff was shot under him, and he was in danger of being cut down by the Prussian Hussars. In this sore extremity a Cossack named Alexis Jagouski took his leader behind him on his crupper; but that person-



age, finding that the double weight impeded the horse's speed, and that the Hussars were close behind, shortened his sabre in his hand, and plunging the blade into the body of his preserver, flung the corpse from the saddle, and escaped alone.

At this reminiscence Bernikoff only scowled more deeply; and now the lacerated back of the sufferer was strewed with coarse gunpowder, to which a match was applied. This is technically known as the *batogg*, and the agony it produced is indescribable.

The culprit was now cast loose, but was still able, according to the slavish usage of the country, to crawl on his hands and knees towards Bernikoff, and he gasped out:—

“Hospodeen—Excellency, I thank you humbly for this most merciful punishment.”

“Begone, dog of an Asiatic!” replied the Governor, kicking him in the face; “when next you seek to fill your pipe, this will teach you to keep your filthy fingers out of my tobacco pouch.”

These were the defenders of their country, the Holy Russia, among whom a wayward fate had cast the Scottish palatine: the blood of the latter boiled within him; but he knew too well that to expostulate would be but to excite suspicion, and to court degradation and the musket. Something, however, in the expression of his face did not escape Bernikoff's keen and angry eyes.



“Ivanovitch Balgonie, a superior can never act unjustly to his inferior,” said he sternly; and these words terribly embodied the genuine spirit of the true Russian *Tchinnochnik*, or noble class. “I am in the service of the State,” he added; “and the State is the Czarina!”

Yet this upright Governor, who knouted the poor Cossack for pilfering a pipeful of tobacco, had always a garrison double its actual strength on paper, the pay and rations of the men of straw forming a pleasant addition to his many secret perquisites, while his soldiers starved and frequently begged food from the very prisoners they guarded.

It was neither hospitality nor love of soicity which had procured the honor of an invitation for Balgonie; but Bernikoff shrewdly suspecting that he might have some loose cash, resolved to possess himself thereof at cards; so barely was a dinner of *shee* (which is identically Scotch broth,) croquettes, with *puree* of beet-root, beef in the Hussar style, with salad of baked beet-root and biscuits, dismissed, than champagne-cup, and vodka (or corn-brandy) punch became the order of the evening; and Bernikoff, who was a great gourmand, with his face flushed and his uniform open, after signing the cross and bowing thrice to a picture of St. Sergius, sat down to cards with Vlasfief and Tschekin, who were quite as sharp as himself, and with poor simple-hearted Charlie Balgonie, who dreaded to decline,



circumstanced as he was on all hands; and who was glad when allowed to quit the table with the loss, he never could understand how, of twenty xervonitz, or pieces worth nine shillings sterling each.

“Now, Vlasfief—’tis you and I; rouge-et-noir!” exclaimed Bernikoff, draining a goblet of vodka punch at a draught.

“I am too weary too play, most excellent Colonel; pray excuse me,” urged the Captain, who had lost considerable to his senior also.

“You, then, Tschekin?” said Bernikoff savagely.

“I hav’n’t a kopac to spare, Excellency!”

“Well—I saw a pretty housemaid at your mansion in the town yesterday—the daughter of a serf apparently.”

“Feodorowna?”

“Very likely—with red hair and brown eyes.”

“Ah! the same; she came with Madame Tschekin from the household of her father, General Weymarn.”

“By all the devils, she is very like old Weymarn!”

“She is the daughter of my old nurse, Colonel,” said Tschekin gravely, with an air of annoyance.

“I don’t care whose daughter she is!”

“Well?”

“I’ll put a hundred silver roubles on her.”

“Done! I put her on the ace.”

“The ace hath lost!” exclaimed Bernikoff, with a shout of laughter. “Holy Sergius! the girl is



mine. To-morrow," he added, "I'll send a corporal and a file of men for her, with a covered kabitka. See that all her things are packed and ready, friend Tschekin, or write to your wife about it, and say you have lost her at cards."

"The devil!—Excellency—this can't be."

"Why? I won her fairly."

"But the girl is about to be married to her cousin."

"*Was*, you mean; the cards have changed her destiny, like that of the serfs whom Valsfief drank away in champagne last night."

So passed Charlie's first day at Schlüsselburg.



## CHAPTER. XV.

### THE IMPERIAL PRISONER.

**F**ORTUNATELY for Balgonie, there was a chaplain, or priest, of the Russian Greek Church, attached to the fortress; and his society, at times, tended to alleviate what he endured from having to associate with such a human bear as Colonel Bernikoff,—an annoyance from which he would only be relieved by the longed-for return of General Weymarn and the Regiment of Smolensko to St. Petersburg.

The ceremonies of religion retain in Russia all their pristine influence, and afford the miserable and unlettered serf a short season of relaxation from labour and severity during festivals, when he may enjoy his can of fiery vodka and revel in intoxication. Unlike many of the Russian clergy, who adopt the cowl merely as the means of evading slavery in civil life, or slavery added to peril in the army, and also as a chance of attaining to power and nobility, Father Chrysostom, the Chaplain of Schlusselfurg, was a humane, gentle, and learned old priest, whom the Commandant had been depraved enough to strike with his clenched hand on



more than one occasion; but prior to doing so, he had always contrived, oddly and superstitiously enough, to have the chief badge of the father's sacred office, his—baretta—abstracted and hidden.

Through the good offices of the chaplain, with the permission of the Governor, which was yielded very unwillingly, Balgonie (whose curiosity and commiseration were greatly excited) was presented one evening to the deposed Emperor Ivan, and the particulars and incidents of that interview made a deep and sad impression upon him.

The entrance door of the central tower was small, arched, and of great strength. Above it were carved the Russian arms, first adopted by Ivan Basilovitch in the sixteenth century: a spread-eagle, having on its breast an escutcheon bearing St. Michael and a dragon, with three crowns in chief for Muscovy and the two Tartar kingdoms of Kazan and Astracan.

On passing through a little paved court, grated over with iron, where the royal recluse was permitted to breathe the external air, while a sentinel trod to and fro above his head, another door-way, secured by a portcullis grooved into the wall, gave access to the narrow stair which led to his apartments. These were two in number: their windows and doors were all grated with iron; and sentinels, with loaded arms, watched every avenue by day and night.



His sitting-room was plainly, even neatly furnished: its chief ornaments being a pretty Madonna and some gaudy pictures of Muscovite saints; and it had one window, which opened towards the vast expanse of the lake of Ladoga.

Pale, handsome, and resigned, gentle in eye and manner, the poor young prince had grown to manhood in total ignorance of the outer world and of all he had lost. He knew only the four walls of the prison, the changing hues of the waves and clouds, the wild swans and the waters of Ladoga.

As related in our fifth chapter, the Prisoner of Schlüsselburg was the eldest son of the Princess of Mecklenburg, Elizabeth-Catharine, niece of the Empress Anne. His father was Anthony Ulric, Duke of Brunswick-Wolfenbittel, whose whole family was banished from Russia by the usurping Empress Elizabeth.

The infant Ivan had been dethroned, after being a king for exactly one year.

During the reign of the Empress Catharine, he was detained in Schlüsselburg "under the denomination of a *Person Unknown*, and it was given out that his senses were impaired, though it is pretty well understood that this is without foundation." "His fate has been particularly lamentable," continues a newspaper of the period; "torn from the bosom of his family, he has now passed twenty-three years in close captivity. The late Empress



Elizabeth, towards the latter end of her life, seemed disposed to treat this noble captive with clemency and favor—either from sentiments of justice and compassion, or to render two great personages more circumspect and submissive.”

These personages were her successors, the unfortunate Peter III. and Catharine II.

Ivan's mother is said to have died of grief; but Duke Anthony Ulric and his four other children were all confined for life in a house at Horsens, a town of Jutland, at the extremity of the Baltic where they had a precinct of a mile English; but it was surrounded by high palisades, beyond which they dared not venture under pain of death; and there the Duke, old and blind, passed the last years of his melancholy life.

His youngest daughter, Elizabeth, “was a woman of high spirit and elegant manners,” according to Coxe, the traveler, who visited her; “she possessed portraits of her father and mother, and even contrived to procure a rouble of her brother Ivan, struck during his short reign. It is difficult to conjecture how she could obtain a coin, the possession of which was more than once punished by the Empress Elizabeth as high treason, as it is still more difficult to imagine how she could secret it from the knowledge of her guards during her long imprisonment.”

Confinement had rendered Ivan's features un-



naturally pale and delicate; and, by years of systematic constraint and oppression, his fine, clear, and very beautiful dark eyes had a soft, subdued and chastened expression, that was singularly touching and winning.

The tone of his voice was also gentle and alluring.

“Hospodeen,” said he, presenting his hand to Balgonie, “I rejoice to meet you, if one who leads a life so strange as mine can be said to rejoice; but you are one to whom I may talk a little without danger—eh, Father Chrysostom? And he has told me, Hospodeen, that you are not a Russian, but a native of some island that is far away in the sea. What are you? A Tartar—a Tcherkesse? Oh no, you cannot be either. I know them; for they guard me,” he added, with a little shudder.

“I am your friend, believe me, Ivan Antonovitch,” replied Balgonie, who was touched by the childlike simplicity of the poor recluse, who was plainly attired in a caftan of fine green cloth, edged with a narrow trimming of yellow fur; the square crowned cap, which he only wore when in the grated court, was of the same materials. A small gold cross was at his neck, a rosary of amber hung at his right wrist, and a little pipe, the only luxury allowed him, was dangling from one of his breast buttons.

When in his presence Balgonie always thought



with horror of the cruel tenor of the dispatch he had brought, and trembled for the result of his friends' conspiracy.

To teach Ivan anything, even to read or to write, was treason; yet he had gleaned a little of his own history, and that of his family, from the casual remarks of his guards and from the Chaplain, during the long, long years of his captivity, the reason for which he failed to understand, but the system of which had become as a second nature to him; and the little he learned, made a deep, rather than a bitter, impression upon him.

The whole energies of each successive Chaplain had been given to preparing him for another and a brighter state of existence, and to turning his hopes and wishes towards it, rather than to this world, of which he was well-nigh weary if not utterly ignorant; and so much was he impressed by the uncertainty of human life in general, and of his own in particular, that daily, for years, he had seen the sun rise from the waters of Ladoga in doubt whether he would see it set; and nightly had he laid down his head without the assurance of being a live man in the morning.

Life had no charm—death no terror for Ivan.

In his visits, which were frequent, as the young Prince had conceived a great regard for him, Charlie Balgonie knew not upon what topics to converse; for he experienced great difficulty in fashion-



ing his sentences and observations to suit a listener whose knowledge of the external world and of all the machinery of life was so limited. In those visits Balgonie was always accompanied by the Chaplain, or Captain Vlasief, as the watchful and suspicious Bernikoff would by no means permit them to have an interview alone.

“I am so glad to have you for a friend, Ivanovitch Balgonie,” the Prince would say sometimes; “though Father Chrysostom assures me that kings may have peers and soldiers, serfs and slaves, but, alas! they can never have a *friend*! I have heard my guards say that I was once a King—an Emperor; but I cannot remember when. It must have been long, long ago, as Russia has had four monarchs since. I have not even a dream of it—an Emperor? Yet I shall, too, probably die even as Demetrius did. I cannot remember even my mother; for they tell me she died of sorrow, when I was brought here from a place called Moscow. Do you, Hospodeen, remember yours?”

“When I was but a child she died, to my sorrow. Had she lived, I might not have been here in Russia to-day,” replied Balgonie.

“Well—but you may remember,” persisted the young Prince.

“True, your Highness; memories I have of a soft fair face that bent over my little bed at night; of one who kissed and hushed me to sleep; but those



memories are faint and vivid, broken and uncertain, according to my mood of mind; and strange it is that they come to me more in dreams by night than thoughts by day, especially as I grow older."

"I should like to have some such dreams, but then I have nothing to remember; I know not even my own age or when I came here," said Ivan thoughtfully. "If I do dream by night, I seem to hear only what I hear by day—the voices of the Cossack sentinels, the screams of the sea-birds, the dashing of the waves when the wind crosses the lake, or the clanging of the castle bell. Then there are times when I dream that I see Demetrius, and then I awake in a cold perspiration. Tell me of the things that are being acted in the great world that lies beyond the Lake of Ladoga, for Father Chrysostom speaks to me only of Heaven."

"It is said that the King of Prussia has agreed to the proposal of—of—the Empress, about the county of Wirtemberg, in Silesia."

"How, agreed?"

"Count Biron is to have the estate as Duke of Courland, on paying eight thousand guineas to Field-Marshal Count Munich," said Balgonie.

The Prince sighed with a bewildered air, for all those names were quite new to him.

"And who is Count Biron?" he asked.

"A friend of the Empress," said Father Chrysostom rather hastily, to anticipate the reply of Balgonie.



“Tell me something more. Nay, Father Chrysostom, don't chide us, pray,” said he, seeing that the white bearded chaplain looked uneasy and rose to retire.

“Conversation of this kind is strictly forbidden,” said he; “and if Captain Vlasfief was here ——”

“Oh!” exclaimed the Prince with a shudder, but not of anger (he seemed too gentle for that emotion), “don't talk of Vlasfief I implore you. Pray tell me more news, Hospodeen; I shall learn all the names in time, and try to remember them.”

“There are strange tidings from Warsaw,” replied Balgonie, who began to get bewildered and knew not on what to converse, if the most simple topics of the day were forbidden; “a battle has been fought at Slonim, between Prince Radzivil and the Russians, who defeated him after a five hours' engagement; and the Princess Radzivil, who is newly married and remarkably beautiful, fought on horseback among the Polish troops.”

“Ah, Demetrius fought on horseback too,” said the Prince, as if speaking to himself, and a gesture of undisguised impatience escaped the chaplain; “pray tell me something more, for no one ever speaks of such things to me.”

“A new theatre has been opened at St. Petersburg,” replied Balgonie (who thought to himself, “the devil is in it, if I cannot speak of *that!*”),



“and there was represented an opera, entitled *Charles the Great*.”

“Ah, I don't quite understand all that; say it again.”

Indeed, Balgonie might as well have spoken of carbonic gas or the Atlantic cable, had he ever heard of such things; for the mind of the young Prince could not comprehend the most simple matters of every day-life. This was merely the result of his entire seclusion; but the adherents of the Empress, her favorites and lovers, industriously circulated through Russia the report that he was in a state of idiotcy.

“And this place that you spoke of?” he resumed enquiringly.

“The theatre?”

“Yes, Hospodeen; who lives in it?”

“One of the actresses performed a magnificent cantata, in honor of the Empress.”

“Ah! 'tis she, I understand, who keeps me here,” said the Prince, with a sad smile; and now in real terror, and quite repenting the introduction he had brought about, Father Chrysostom rose to hurry Balgonie away.

As they were retiring, the Prince said:—

“Hospodeen, you have dropped something.”

It was the locket with Natalie's hair.

“What is in this?” asked Ivan, with childlike interest.



“A lock of hair, your Highness.”

“How odd! and you wear it, just as I wear my cross?”

“It is the gift, the souvenir of a lady I love, and who loves me: a countrywoman of your own.”

“A woman?” said Ivan, ponderingly.

“Yes, Excellency.”

“I have never looked upon a woman’s face, and know not what it is like; though the Empress (whom God long preserve!) visited me when a child, as I have been told. I have heard that they are not bearded like men. I shall never see one, it is forbidden; yet—yet—as I often tell Father Chrysostom, I have dreams by day—dreams of something else than wild swans and bearded Cossacks—of something to cling to, some one to love and be loved by. It must be this kind of love you speak of—oh yes, it must!” said Ivan, as he gazed with stupid, but reverent wonder at the lock of hair, ere he returned it to Balgonie.

“Poor young Prince!” exclaimed the latter, as the chaplain hurried him away, and the portcullis clanged behind them in its grooves of stone.

The priest now urged upon Balgonie, that if his visits were to be continued, the affairs of the outer world must in no way be referred to, or the result might be most disastrous for all concerned.

“The seclusion in which the prisoner is kept, has, I fear, impaired his understanding,” said Balgonie.



“Hah! do you think so?” grunted Colonel Bernikoff, who overheard the remark, as they issued from the tower of Ivan. “You must know, that your genuine Russian is like a tiger, as some writer has it—a tiger who licks the hand of his keeper, so long as he is chained; but who tears him asunder when loose. The Empress quite understands this!”

“How is it that you intrust me so freely to visit your prisoner?” asked Charlie, who began to fear that Bernikoff might be laying some snare for him, by according this hitherto unwonted permission.

“Do you really wish to know?”

“Yes, Colonel—why I in particular—I only?”

“Because you are the safest man in Russia to have this liberty.”

“How?”

“As a soldier of fortune,—a stranger among us,—you can have no sympathy with anything but the strict and steady execution of your duty; and the line of that,” added Bernikoff, darting a keen glance at the Scot, “as with us all, lies in fidelity to the Empress.”

“True,” replied Balgonie, with something of sadness in his tone, and very little of enthusiasm.

“Thus, were I to order you to blow Ivan Antonovitch from the mouth of a cannon, I should expect you to obey!”

“I trust that no such test of my obedience will ever be necessary,” replied Balgonie, with a hauteur



which Bernikoff was somewhat unused to see among his subordinates.

“We shall have some other and more troublesome prisoners in Schlüsselburg ere long,” said the Governor, with knitted brows.

“Whom do you mean?”

“Old Count Mierowitz and his family. Warrants have been issued by the Chancellor to arrest them all.”

“All!” said Balgonie, in a faint voice.

“Yes, women as well as men: an escort of the Regiment of Smolensko arrived at St. Petersburg yesterday with the Count and the Hospoza Mario-lizza. His daughter, who seems to be deeply involved in some plot, has for the time effected her escape. But they will soon be all before the Secret Chancery, and then the knout and the wheel will be at work with a vengeance!”

The reader may judge how these and similar remarks affected poor Charlie; while the Governor, as if pleased that he could thus inflict pain, walked away with a malicious smile on his sombre visage, cramming tobacco into the bowl of his pipe.

There were times, however, when the captive Prince, after his acquaintance with Balgonie, was a little less resigned, and had strange longings to see something of the great world that lay beyond his prison walls, and the waves that lashed them; to see other faces than those of the fierce and bearded



Tchernemoski and Volga Cossacks who guarded him; a longing even to do something great and daring, to be remembered in after years with love and reverence; to be remembered, as he said, "in tradition, like Demetrius." Then, feeling all the utter hopelessness of such new aspirations, he would strive to be contented, to repeat with fresh energy the daily prayers set for him by Father Chrysostom, and to be grateful for life, lest he should die even as Demetrius died.

"Who is this Demetrius, of whom he constantly speaks, and whose fate he fears so much may be his own?" asked Balgonie one day.

"It is an old, but a strange and terrible story," replied the chaplain. "When Ivan Basilovitch died about the end of the sixteenth century, his widow was banished to Northern Russia by the new Czar Feodor, whose Prime Minister urged that he could never reign in peace or security unless he imitated the Turks by sacrificing all who were nearly allied to the throne; so he exiled his mother, as I have said, and ordered an officer to assassinate his younger brother Demetrius.

"The officer, being a humane man, was filled with horror on receiving an order so barbarous; but fearing alike to disobey, or to leave the terrible task to be fulfilled by one less scrupulous, he took the child with him to a remote district, travelling many days' journey from Moscow. Then he wrote some words



indelibly on the skin of the little Prince, tied a cross of brilliants about his neck, laid him at the door of a peasant's hut, and galloped away.

“To the tyrant Feodor he gave a circumstantial detail of how and where he had killed the infant Prince, and sought the promised reward.

“‘Receive it *thus!*’ replied Feodor, who plunged a sword into his heart, the further to suppress all proof of guilt.

“The young tyrant died of a poison administered by his Chancellor, and others inherited his crown; but all to perish miserably, in succession. And no less than four pretenders all appeared, each calling himself Demetrius, to contest for the throne; and all the land was deluged with blood.

“Some twenty years after the alleged death of the brother of Ivan, a young Cossack of the Volga was bathing in that river with some of his companions, who saw with surprise that he had chained round his neck a cross of brilliants, and that certain words in the old Muscovite character were pricked upon his back. They were examined by a neighbouring priest and found to be—

*‘This is Demetrius, son of the Czar.’*

“Then all exclaimed that the true Demetrius had been found at last, and that a miracle from Heaven had saved him. His life was soon in peril, so he fled to Holstein, the Duke of which, after keeping



him long in prison, sold him to the Emperor Michael, by whom he was savagely quartered alive. And it is the fate of this hapless heir of Russia, whose story he thinks in some points resembles his own (although he really knows but little of his own annals), that haunts the unfortunate Ivan in his gloomiest hours.”



## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE TRATKIR.

**W**ITH evident suspicion and mistrust, Bernikoff viewed the growing intimacy between his prisoner Ivan and the Scottish Captain; and though he neither recommended that it should cease or interdicted it, as he might and perhaps ought to have done, he made many mental notes thereof.

Though Balgonie sympathised with Ivan to the fullest extent, he knew too well the danger of doing more; and he felt that he had his own share of secret sorrow and anxiety, and might yet have greater to endure. The girl he loved with all the strength of a first and romantic passion was already a political fugitive; her father and cousin were prisoners, and perhaps in chains; her brother and his kinsman, Usakoff, already viewed as criminals; and with the terrors of despotism hanging over them all.

Natalie a fugitive—and where? In the wild forests, perhaps, where wolves and outlaws lurked, what perils and privations might she not be suffering! Natalie so delicate, so pure, so gently nurtured, and so highly bred.



Balgonie was aware, also, that intimacy with the family of Count Mierowitz, and the deep interest he had in their fate, was fraught with personal peril to himself in such a land of tyranny as Russia. Full of such thoughts as these one forenoon, he was leaning on a cannon in one of those deep embrasures of the fortress which faced the drawbridge communicating with the land. The guard was in the act of lowering the bridge to permit a man to pass out. This person was just parting from Bernikoff, with whom he had been for some time in close and earnest conversation, and from whom he was evidently receiving money—an unusual circumstance, as that distinguished field-officer generally lavished more kicks and cuffs than thanks or kopecs.

On beholding this man, as he bowed humbly, cap in hand, cross the bridge and disappear among the houses of the town beyond, Balgonie experienced a species of nervous shock. He could not doubt that this fellow, so gigantic in stature and powerful in muscular development, in the coarse caftan and leathern girdle, with the long lock of grizzled hair dangling behind his right ear, was Nicholas Paulovitch, the murderer of Podatchkine, the gipsy woodman, and the swindling mendicant of the barrier at the Neva.

“This man here in Schlüsselburg,” thought Balgonie, with indignation and alarm; “here in earnest



conversation with Bernikoff! The spirit of mischief seems to pervade the air again!"

A few minutes afterwards the Cossack Jagouski who, as related, had been so severely knouted by Bernikoff for pilfering a pipeful of tobacco, came forward with tottering steps, and looking painfully thin and feeble from recent suffering; and with the crouching bearing of the Muscovite towards a superior, said that his Excellency, the Governor wished to speak with him in his quarters, whither Balgonie at once repaired, after having, as military etiquette required, buckled on his sword.

"Carl Ivanovitch," said Bernikoff, who certainly had rather a perturbed air, "some suspicious characters are in our vicinity, and have actually been hovering in boats about the fortress. What think you of that?"

"Suspicious characters, Excellency—how?"

"In a *Tratkir* of the town, one dropped this coin—a silver rouble of the prisoner Ivan—Ivan the Unknown Person. To possess one, unless as I do *this*, for proof of treason, is to court death or Siberia."

"And from whom had you this?"

"A spy," replied the Colonel curtly.

"The man who has just left you?"

"The same."

"Nicholas Paulovitch," continued Balgonie, with increasing astonishment at the other's coolness;



“the assassin of the Corporal—the wretch of whom I told you when I first arrived here!”

“All that may, or may not be,” replied Bernikoff, with a stern air, almost amounting to rudeness: “when I require this devil of a fellow no more, you may impale him, if you please; but molest him not, at present.”

“I do not see, Excellency, that all this in any way concerns me,” said Balgonie haughtily, as he lifted his hat, and put his sabre under his arm, as if about to retire.

“It does concern you thus far. I shall anticipate any attempt that be made by those lurkers, whoever they may be. You must remember,” he added, lowering his voice, “the tenor of the dispatch you brought me?”

“Perfectly,” replied Charlie, in a somewhat faint voice, as he knew not how terrible or repugnant might be the duty assigned him by this military despot.

“Well, you shall pass forth into the town to-night, with a patrol of twenty men, armed with sabres and carbines. Surround and search the *Tratkir* in the main street, and compel all therein, who seem suspicious, to produce their papers; and, if they are without such, bring them to *me*, and I shall question them in a fashion of my own.”

By the laws of Russia, at that time, persons could not travel from St. Petersburg, or even from



place to place, without a passport—describing their occupation, appearance, and route, which they were not at liberty to alter; and in the rural districts, travellers required a pass from the lord whose estate they may have been upon, before they were at liberty to quit it. Without such a document, no one would dare to furnish them with food or shelter; nor would a postmaster give them horses, however high their rank, or great their offer of reward—to such complete subjection had the system of accepted despotism reduced the people.

“And I am to take twenty men with me?” said Balgonie, after an unpleasant pause.

“Yes! the bridge will be lowered for you after sunset. Whoever these lurkers are, they have been seen and overheard; and this coin is proof sufficient to warrant the transportation of a whole province. Be they who they may, by every dome in sacred Mother Moscow, they shall find *me* ready for them!”

And Bernikoff grimly touched his small dagger, a species of weapon which a Russian officer is seldom or never without, even in the present day; and when Charlie Balgonie remembered how that same dagger had been thrust into the throat of the half-strangled Peter III., a flush of indignant hate and aversion crossed his honest face. To him it was evident that the spirit of mischief or malevolence made Bernikoff select him, as one whom he suspected of a



friendly interest in the family of Count Mierowitz, for this unpleasant duty, instead of Captain Vlasief, the Lieutenant of Schlüsselburg, or any other officer, who must have been better acquainted with the adjacent town and all its places of entertainment, than he, a total stranger, could ever be.

But he was a soldier; he had no resource but to obey in silence; and an angry sigh escaped him as he stuck his loaded pistols in his girdle, when the sun sank behind the green painted roofs of the wooden town, and the evening gun boomed from the ramparts across the Lake of Ladoga.

Defiling in the twilight through the streets of Schlüsselburg, he marched straight to where he knew that the principal *Tratkir*, or tea-house, was situated; and while his heart sank within him in fear of *whom* he might arrest,—perhaps Natalie herself,—he at once surrounded the building, to prevent all egress, and to the evident alarm and perturbation of all who were within.

These tea-houses are no longer to be found in the capital of Russia now, for there all the *restaurants* are constituted and arranged upon the French and German models; but they still exist in Moscow and elsewhere; and under their roofs, the genuine Muscovite consumes what would seem a fabulous amount of the Chinese plant. They are chiefly the resort of soldiers, porters, and droski drivers, all of whom must behave in a polite and orderly manner while



there. All must enter the great room where the tea is served, cap in hand, alike out of respect for the company, and to the holy pictures, Souzdal daubs of SS. Sergius, Alexander Newski, and so forth, which decorate the walls; and all must salute the bar-keeper, after first saluting the Holy Image, which is to be found in every Russian apartment, and before which, a lamp of train oil is frequently burning.

When the crooked sabres of the dismounted Cossacks were seen flashing in the porch, and when Balgonie entered with his sword drawn, passing along the narrow way between the numerous tables, at which the groups were seated, amid an oppressive odour of strong tea, coarse tobacco, and Russian leather from boots, caps, and girdles—many a peasant in his canvas caftan, and many a stout moujik in his fur shoubah, felt his heart quail with apprehension, he knew not of what; and every saucer—the tea is not drunk from cups—was set down untasted, while one or two men nearly choked themselves with their lumps of sugar; for usually it is not put into the tea, but is retained in the mouth of the drinker, so that, in a spirit of economy, the poor Muscovite may indulge in two, perhaps three cups of his favourite beverage, and use thereto but one piece of sugar.

For his intrusion Balgonie apologised; this, though a very unusual proceeding in a country so despotic, failed to reassure the tea drinkers, who



were all hushed in silence and expectation; and a girl who had been singing for their amusement, crouched down in a corner for concealment.

Balgonie counted the number of persons in the *Tratkir*, and noted the exact hour by his watch; he then proceeded, with a heart full of anxiety and dread, to examine each person in succession, in reality looking for those he had no wish to find.

All who possessed the requisite papers, showed them; others proved, all in succession, to be soldiers in uniform, *moujiks*, and *droski* drivers, with their brass badges, sailors, and serfs; thus, after a time, a load seemed to be lifted from the mind of the young officer. As he turned to leave the apartment without a prisoner, the Cossack *Jagouski* rather roughly dragged the singing girl from the nook where she had sought concealment, and then Balgonie recognised the fine dark face, the black eyes, and the large glittering ear-rings of *Olga Paulowna*, the gipsy girl whom he had befriended at *Louga*—she who saved him from a terrible fate in the forest.

“Let the girl go free, *Jagouski*,” said Balgonie; “I shall answer for her if required.”

*Olga* drew a paper from her bosom and showed that it was her passport from the Commandant of *Krejko*, permitting her to travel to and from *Schlus-selburg*.

*Jagouski* saluted and withdrew a few paces; and now, as if the cloud of doubt and dread Balgonie’s



arrival had cast over all was dispersed, again the noisy hum of voices pervaded the long room of the tea-house, and laughter even broke forth at intervals.

“Olga,” said Balgonie, “you here—so far from home?”

“Yes, Hospodeen, for my home is anywhere, or wherever night finds me; but I have news for you.”

“News—and for me?”

“Yes,” said she, sinking her voice to a whisper; “I have news of Natalie Mierowna ——”

“Hush, for heaven’s sake, girl!—hush!” said Balgonie with a nervous start.

“She is here ——”

“Here in this house?”

“No, Hospodeen.”

“Where then?—oh, speak quickly!”

“In the neighborhood of Schlusselfurg.”

Charlie felt his heart die within him at this intelligence, for such a vicinity was full of peril.

“Be to-morrow at noon on the road that leads to Tosna, and you shall learn more; but do you know it, Hospodeen?”

“I shall soon discover it—and the place?”

“The skirts of the wood four versts from this.”

“Good—till then, adieu; and God be with you.”

Balgonie retired all unaware or heedless that his Cossacks were secretly jesting at his whispering with the pretty gipsy; and through the dark streets he marched them towards the great and sombre



masses of the fort which loomed between him and the star-lighted sky, his heart the while being literally sick with alarm and dismay, in the conviction that the long-dreaded crisis was coming—that Natalie was near, and the place of her concealment was known to a vagrant gipsy girl, the sister of Nicholas Paulovitch, who, if he knew it not already, might wrest the secret from her with the point of his knife, for the information of him whose spy he was—the hateful Bernikoff!

Ruin and sorrow was close at hand, indeed.

On receiving the official but verbal report of Balgonie, and learning that the visit to the identical tea-house where the dangerous rouble was found had proved abortive, and that there was no one to be knouted or hanged in the morning, Colonel Bernikoff became transported with rage, and lifted his cane somewhat threateningly. On this, Balgonie's hand was instantly laid on the hilt of his sword.

“Beware, Excellency,” said he firmly: “a blow to an equal is a foul insult; to an inferior it is mean tyranny; and, in either instance, blood alone should wash it out.”

On this the Colonel's rage assumed a new phase; he trod on his cocked hat, and ordered the wax candles which he had always burning before the image of his patron, St. Sergius, to be extinguished. He loaded the effigy with the bitterest reproaches, and



for that night left the poor saint in total darkness, despite the intercession of Father Chrysostom.



## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE WOOD OF THE HONEY TREE.

THE noon of the following day saw Charlie Balgonie—after an anxious and almost sleepless night—proceeding on foot along the road that leads southward to Tosna, a little town which stands on a stream of the same name, a tributary of the Neva, but some thirty versts distant from Schlus-selburg.

His military ardor was already fading, so far as the Russian service was concerned, amid his pressing anxiety for the dangers that menaced Natalie; and he felt himself only a species of serf in an imperial uniform. Unlike the Admirals Douglas, Mackenzie, Count Balmaine, and hundreds of other Scotsmen who served the Empress by sea and land, he had thoughtlessly omitted to stipulate, as they had more warily done, that he was to be at perfect liberty, as a British subject, to return to his native land whenever he felt disposed to do so. The poor friendless boy—the kidnapped Palatine, who had been rescued from the burning wreck of the *Piscatona*, while floating adrift in the North Sea—could know little how necessary such stipulations were



when he joined the Regiment of Smolensko as a cadet; and now he felt himself literally a military slave of the ambitious and lascivious Catharine II.

Before him rose the tall fir trees of the forest where he was to meet Olga—the Wood of the Honey Tree, as it was named from an episode (related by Demetrius, the ambassador, in his History of Muscovy) which occurred to a serf of Bernikoff's, Alexis Jagouski, father of the same man whom he slew so wickedly and ungratefully in the flight from Zorndorf; and the whole anecdote reads so very like one of the adventures of Baron Munchausen, or Sir Jonah Barrington's "bounces," that we may be pardoned translating it here.

"This man," says Demetrius, "when seeking honey, got into a hollow tree, where the bees had concealed such a quantity thereof, that it sucked him up to the breast, and being unable to extricate himself, he subsisted for two days upon honey alone; and finding that his shouts were answered only by the echoes of the vast forest, he began to despair of being freed from his sweet captivity. At last, to his terror, there came a large brown bear from the Neva, to eat of the honey which the old tree contained, and of which these animals are greedily fond. As the bear was descending with hinder part foremost, the poor serf caught hold of his loins. This sudden grasp among his fur so terrified the bear, that he started and fled, and in doing so, drew



the peasant from that sweet prison, which otherwise had proved his grave: hence was the forest named, the Wood of the Honey Tree.”

There, as Balgonie approached, all was still save the voice of the valdchnep, or woodcock, and the hum of insects; he lingered for a few minutes on the outskirts, just where the highway to Tosna dipped down into a deep and gloomy dingle of intertwisted branches, which formed a species of leafy tunnel overhead.

Three miles distant to the northward, he could see the place he had left, the gloomy Castle of Schlüsselburg, moated round by the Neva and Lake of Ladoga, jutting into the latter on its rock, its towers wearing a sombre brown tint even in the noonday sunshine, as if no light could brighten them; and the white flag of Russia was fluttering on the summit of the keep, where Ivan was pining away the years of youth in silence and seclusion.

Balgonie heard a voice waking the echoes of the dingle; three notes were struck on a tambourine, as a signal to him, and Olga approached singing a verse of that prophetic song, which is so soothing to Russian military and religious vanity:—

“ But when the hundredth year  
Shall three times doubled be;  
Then shall the end appear  
Of all our slavery.  
Then shall the warlike powers  
From distant climes return,



Egypt again be ours,  
While the Turkish domes shall burn !”

“ I have kept my appointment, Olga.”

“ And I mine,” she replied gaily, while tripping towards him in a playful manner; “ now follow me, Hospodeen, and I shall take you to those who will be right glad to see you.”

“ First let us be sure that we are unwatched.”

“ Right,” said she; and stooping in her earnestness, her keen, dark, and glittering eyes swept the whole landscape that lay between the wood and Schlüsselburg, and glanced keenly beyond the stems of the trees into the dingles and vistas; but, save the birds on the branches and the gnats revolving in the sunshine, no living thing was visible.

“ Follow, me Hospodeen,” said the gipsy; “ we have not far to go.”

They descended into the dark dingle, or hollow, and then quitted the highway; Olga gathering up her skirts that she might tread with greater facility among the thick gorse and long rank grass, displaying, as she did so, two very handsome and taper ankles cased in scarlet stockings with elaborate clocks of yellow braid.

She explained to Balgonie that, as there was no path to guide them, her chief clues were a set of notches, cut to all appearance carelessly, as if with a woodman’s axe, on the bark of the great pine trees.



“These marks seem fresh, and recently cut—who made them?” asked Balgonie.

“The Hospodeen, Basil Mierowitz,” she whispered.

“Poor Basil!” responded Charlie, in a low tone.

After toiling through the dense forest for more than half an hour, pausing ever and anon to listen and watch whether they were observed, they arrived at the foot of a grey granite cliff, the face of which was screened, or nearly covered, by masses of depending ivy, creepers, and green lichens, forming a background which, at a little distance, blended with the greenery of the woods.

“We have arrived,” said she, turning, with a flush on her dark face which made it radiantly beautiful. She struck three strokes on her tambourine, and shook its bells.

Charlie thought of her kinsman, Nicholas Paulovitch, and instinctively grasped one of the pistols at his girdle, on seeing the dark and bearded face of a man appear among the ivy leaves some twenty feet above him. A rope ladder was lowered, and whatever doubts or misgivings were in his mind, he felt himself constrained now to go through the adventure to its end.

He clambered up, and on the great screen of ivy being lifted aside, found himself face to face with his old friend Basil Mierowitz, the subaltern of his company, who, grasping both his hands with kindly



warmth of manner, led him into a cavern or grotto, one of a series of many, into which the granite rocks had there been hollowed by some long past convulsion of nature.

Another hand was instantly laid on his,—a smaller and softer one,—and two beautiful dark eyes were bending tenderly on his face.

“Natalie!” he exclaimed, in a tremulous voice, and would have pressed her to his breast, but for the presence of Basil and several other men.

Amid the twilight of the cavern, he could perceive its rough natural walls and arch, with hazy but sunny rays that streamed faintly in the background, athwart the obscurity, as if the vault communicated with other galleries in the rock, through which the upper light of day stole in by the crannies and chasms. He was also enabled to see, that, with Natalie, her brother Basil, and her cousin Usakoff, who had been a Lieutenant of the Valikolutz Grenadiers, there were about twenty men in the place, all clad in sheepskin shoubahs, canvas doublets, or the caftan, the invariable dress of the Russian peasant, and nearly all had red serge breeches, rough boots, and girdles of rope or untanned leather.

Though attired like woodmen or labouring serfs, all these men had unmistakably the bearing of well-trained soldiers: all were strong, active, and resolute in aspect; and Balgonie had no doubt that they were those natives of the Ukraine, the deserters from



the Livonian frontier, of whom Bernikoff had spoken; for against the walls of the cavern were ranged a number of muskets and bayonets, with sets of accoutrements, sabres, and pistols. There, too, stood a regimental drum, decorated with the imperial arms, and the forbidden name of the Emperor *Ivan!*

Every moment seemed to increase the perils that surrounded the luckless Balgonie, for now he was in the very den of the conspirators.

All carried in their girdles a dagger or knife and double brace of pistols. They seemed to be chiefly soldiers of the Regiment of Valikolutz: and his sudden appearance among them, in the full uniform of the Smolensko Infantry, evidently excited, if it did not alarm them; for discipline becomes so completely a habit—a second nature; and, as if the presence of an epaulette rendered them uneasy, they all withdrew into the back or more obscure portion of the cavern, leaving him and their two leaders together.

“Oh! Basil—Usakoff—my friends, if indeed I may yet dare to call you so, and live,” said Balgonie, in a voice that was broken by emotion, “for what rash and dreadful purpose do I find you and these unfortunate fellows here?”

“You, and all Russia too, shall learn ere long,” replied Mierowitz calmly and sternly; yet with a grave and noble air, with which his coarse canvas caftan assorted oddly.



“And poor Natalie!” exclaimed Balgonie, in a tone of grief and reproach; “have you no pity for her?”

“Until Natalie informed me, I knew not, my friend, Carl Ivanovitch, that *you* were the bearer of that secret dispatch, which might have cost you limb or life, when it was too late to arrest those I had set upon your track.”

“Well, certainly, I was not much indebted to the good offices of your rogue, Podatchkine.”

“The Corporal’s orders were simply to abstract the document, and bring it to me; not to slay its bearer, unless such a catastrophe became unavoidable.”

“He fell into his own snare—a dark and deadly one.”

“Happily you escaped it; and I have saved two hundred silver roubles, for the service of the Emperor.”

“Who do you mean?” asked Balgonie, in a whisper.

“Ivan—the Prisoner of Schlüsselburg!” exclaimed Usakoff, with enthusiasm.

“Alas!” added Balgonie, “you court but your own destruction.”

“Think not so; but join us, and share our perils and our glory,” replied the other.

“I am bound by allegiance to the Empress.”

“You are but a tool in her hands, Carl Balgonie.”



“Perhaps so; but one with a devilish sharp edge, I hope,” replied Balgonie, who felt only genuine sorrow; and a silence of nearly a minute ensued.

The manner and voice of Basil Mierowitz were singularly soft and winning, yet he was bold and resolute; and though a young man, he had all the free and easy bearing of a courtly soldier, blended with something of the calm severity of a priest—a manner that was very impressive.

The Polish and Cossack blood that mingled in the veins of Appollo Usakoff gave a freer and bolder, perhaps a wilder, bearing and style of language; his nose was aquiline, and expressed fierceness of disposition; yet his features otherwise were essentially delicate and noble, and his eyes were strangely beautiful in colour and variety of expression. They were dark gray, encircled by a ring of light, clear brown; and when he spoke, or became excited, the iris contracted and expanded, as the blood flowed and ebbed in his fiery and enthusiastic heart, for he was a grandson of the Hetman Mazeppa—that Pole, whose story is so well known, and who, after being bound naked on a wild and maddened horse, to punish him for having an intrigue with a noble lady of his own country, was carried by his steed through woods and wastes, and herds of wolves and bears, into the heart of the Ukraine, where he lived to become the prince and leader of those wild Cossacks who dwell upon the banks of the Dnieper.



Sleeping in a cavern, among rough soldiers, on a bed of dried leaves and moss, had not improved either the costume or the appearance of Natalie Mierowna. With pain and sorrow,—almost with agony,—Charlie Balgonie could perceive how her once rich dress of yellow silk, with its trimmings of narrow ermine, was faded and soiled—even tattered and worn; her laces and her soft hair alike dishevelled and uncared for; and that already had a hunted and haggard expression been imparted to her beautiful eyes, and soft, pale, delicate face. Anger and pride alone remained; but both were for a time subdued by the sudden presence of Balgonie, and the love she was compelled to repress outwardly, at least, when before so many eyes.

Katinka, the sturdy Polish attendant, who loved Natalie dearly, alone seemed unimpaired by the hardships of a forest life.

“Concerning the secret dispatch of the woman, Catharine Christianowna, to the Governor of Schusselburg,” said Usakoff, resuming the subject of conversation, “you, Carl, are perhaps aware of its contents?”

“Yes,” replied Balgonie, and then paused.

“Say on, my friend,” said Usakoff; “we can hear anything now.”

“They were to the effect, that a scheme had been formed to free the Unknown Person in Schusselburg, and that he was not to be permitted to fall *alive*



*into the hands of any one who came to seek him."*

"Savage orders, which there can be no mistaking."

"Orders which Bernikoff is quite capable of fulfilling," added Mierowitz in a sad and stern voice, while their listening followers burst into low and whispered, but fierce, imprecations against the Empress.

"Bernikoff is a man without one human sympathy," said Basil.

"And no marvel is it?" exclaimed Usakoff, while the strange light already described gleamed in his dark grey eyes; "his mother, like a true Tartar woman, is said to have anointed her breast daily with blood, as she suckled him—even as Dion tells us the mother of Caligula did, that her child might, in manhood, be merciless."

Vlasief they stigmatised as "the son of a goat," being originally a boy of the great foundling Hospital at Moscow, where, when the increase of children became so great that nurses could not be found, the lacteal food of animals was introduced, and a herd of goats adopted as wet-nurses for the establishment.

"Carl," said Basil, taking the hand of Balgonie, "Natalie has told me all."

"All!"

"Yes—all that passed in Louga. Dear Natalie has never had a secret from me."

"And you forgive me?" said Balgonie earnestly.



“I do—but on this condition.”

“Oh name it, Basil!”

“That if you do not join us, you will, at least, not actively oppose our scheme.”

“I scarcely know what it is.”

“Know this, then,” replied the other emphatically, yet softly, “that on its success depends the success of your love; for if it fails, then all our lives are lost!”

“You say that you love my cousin, Natalie?” said young Usakoff, in a somewhat loftier tone.

“With all my heart—with all my soul, I do!” replied Balgonie, pressing a hand of Natalie between his own.

“Yet, Carl, if you valued generosity and loved piety—if you loved glory and honor, as a soldier should, you would risk the loss even of *her*,—yea, give her up, if necessary,—and join us!”

“What would either life or glory be after such a sacrifice? Ah, my friend, you never loved as I do!” replied Charlie, with some irritation of manner.

“Perhaps; but I have always thought how grandly terrible a figure was made by Mohammed the Great, when, on a stage, before his discontented army, he struck off the head of a favorite Sultana to convince his soldiers that he preferred glory to love.”

“Cousin, cousin,” said Natalie, who felt all the



peril and delicacy of her lover's position, "you talk thus to-day, when last night you shed tears—yes, bitter tears for the loss of your sister. We were all taken prisoners together, Carl—my poor father, Mariolizza, and I. Bound with cords,—see, the marks are on me still," she added, showing her white wrists, while her dark eyes filled with a dusky fire,—“we were conveyed in a covered kabitka towards St. Petersburg, on the way to which it broke down, in a wood near Paulovsk, not far from the outer walls of the imperial gardens. There, in the confusion, I was enabled to escape, by the aid of the gipsy girl Olga, who, hoping some such chance might occur, had followed us afoot from Louga; and through her further knowledge and assistance, I was enabled to join my brother Basil here.”

“My dear old father—and my soft and tender Mariolizza—a blow must be rapidly struck if we would save them from greater horrors than those they now endure!” exclaimed Basil; “the die has been cast now: and if I cannot save them and our legitimate Emperor, we can at least all perish together.”

“Dangers menace you closely; the roads around the fortress are patrolled, and gun-boats watch the shores of the lake. A coin of Ivan found in a tea-house——”

“Malediction—yes 'twas I, Carl, who dropped it



there," exclaimed Basil: "well, and this coin?"

"Has roused all the suspicions of Bernikoff; and he knows that you and your cousin have deserted from your posts in Livonia."

"Already, does he know of this?"

"Yes, with many other details."

"Then," replied Basil Mierowitz, with growing sternness, "we have not an hour to loose. Who informed him?"

"Lieutenant-General Weymarn, by a special messenger, while I was loitering at Louga."

"So, so! By our Lady of Kazan, we must be prompt in action. I have cruised thrice round Schlüsselburg disguised as a fisherman, and know well all the approaches."

"Basil, Usakoff, I implore you by all you hold dear on earth and sacred in Heaven to pause while there is yet time—to abandon your wild scheme, and make your peace, if possible, with the Empress."

"You were right to add 'if possible,' my friend," replied the other calmly but bitterly. "Already compromised by desertion, my father and betrothed wife chained in a fortress by the Neva, what terms would Catharine offer us? Carl Ivanovitch," he added, with a lofty smile, "I do not press you to join us, or seek to lure you into the dangers of an enterprise the enthusiasm of which you cannot share. I do not seek even to turn your presence as a trusted staff officer in Schlüsselburg to account, though it



might further our objects, and be the means, perhaps, by strategy, of saving many a valuable life. Still less do I desire to turn to account your intimacy with the young Emperor Ivan, though I envy you that great privilege. Even in the love I bear my sister (though it might tempt you to cast your lot with us—*with her* shall I say?), I leave you unquestioned and free.”

“I thank you, Basil,” said Balgonie sadly, and with a heightened colour, caused by irrepressible annoyance at the last remark of Mierowitz.

“But we have all sworn before the altar of our Lady of Kazan, and the image of St. Sergius, to devote our lives to the matter in hand; so retreat is impossible—advice and entreaty alike unavailing.”

Balgonie felt an acute pang on hearing this; for he knew that in Russia no place was esteemed as more holy than the church of our Lady of Kazan in St. Petersburg. Around its shrine—the *sanctum sanctorum* of which no woman has ever entered—are the keys of conquered cities, the banners of a thousand slaughtered armies, and the bâtons and sabres of their leaders—the Frenchman, the Turk, the Pole, the Persian, and the Dane, the Swede and the German; and he knew, too, that no image, to the Muscovite mind, is more sacred than that of St. Sergius—the same absurd idol which the Kazan column bore with them at the battle of the Alma,



and displayed in vain to the advancing bayonets of old Sir Colin's Highland Brigade.

“The blow once struck,” resumed Basil, “we shall be joined by the Cossacks of the Ukraine and the Don, among whom we have many impatient adherents, and by all who hold of the Houses of Brunswick-Wolfenbittel, of Holstein Gottorp, and of all who *hate* Anhalt Zerbst; all Russia will soon follow, from the shores of the Black Sea to those of the White—from Revel to the Ural Mountains. We have not forgotten the reign of Elizabeth: how many noses were slit, how many foreheads were branded, how many ears cropped, and tongues shortened, and how many eyes were darkened for ever during the time of tyranny; how many backs flayed by the knout; how many nobles banished to Siberia, or drowned in prison vaults by the swollen waters of the Neva. Pure nationality is dying now; but we must revive Russia—not as it is ruled by a lascivious woman and her jealous lovers, but Holy Russia of Peter the Great—strong, invincible, and the terror alike of the Eastern and Western world. Let us save our country from those who oppress it, and replace upon its throne the Grand Duke, the Czar—the Emperor Ivan; for the right given by God and by inheritance, can never be destroyed!”

A murmur of applause from his followers succeeded this outburst (which we can render but feebly in English), and they clashed their weapons in ap-



proval, while, fired by her brother's energy, Natalie sung a verse of a well known Russian song:—

“ Now, as of old, the sabre's ready,  
And its might they'll feel afar,  
When but three short words are utter'd,  
*God, our Country, and the Czar!* ”

“ Without cannon, you cannot mean to assault a place so strong as Schlüsselburg, fortified as it has been by all the skill of Todlebin ? ” said Balgonie, after a pause.

“ Ask me not what we mean to do, Carl : for your own sake, my dear friend, the less you know of us, and of our plans, the better. We shall come upon you all when you least expect us, and in that hour take no heed of what you see or hear. Mix yourself up with it as little as you can : if we fail, we perish in our failure ; if we triumph, and Ivan is replaced upon his throne, be assured that Basil Mierowitz will not forget the lover of his sister—the comrade of many a brave and happy day with the Regiment of Smolensko. Now adieu—and come hither no more, lest your steps be watched.”

Balgonie pressed the hands of his two friends, whom he viewed as fated and foredoomed men ; he kissed Natalie with a tenderness that was alike sorrowful and despairing, for he trembled in his heart lest he should never see her more ; and, in another moment or so, like one in a bewildering dream, he had descended the rope ladder, and was traversing



the forest—the Wood of the Honey Tree—forgetful or oblivious of whether he was watched or not.

He foresaw but woe and ruin now ; and proceeded slowly back to Schlüsselburg, with his mind a prey to doubt, anxiety, and dread of what might be the sequel to the impending catastrophe. He felt assured of one thing only—that a deed, bold, reckless, and desperate, would be the result of his friend's desertion from Livonia, their political rancour, and personal desire for vengeance on the Empress and her favorites.

In that deed, and its too probable failure, he foresaw the destruction of his love ; and he felt bitterly that rather than have known and lost Natalie, it would have been better had fate drowned him when the Palatine ship was burned, or shot him when warring in Silesia !



## CHAPTER XVIII.

### DOUBT AND DREAD.

**N**EARLY all the events which followed the secret visit of Balgonie to the conspirators will be found in the more recent histories of Russia, and in the manifestos published by the Empress Catharine at the time—especially her *oukaz* subsequent to the revolt of Basil Mierowitz.

On returning to Schlüsselburg, Balgonie found the Governor, Colonel Bernikoff, in a very bad humor indeed. The Grand Chancellor had recently sent him a prisoner, with a note to the effect that he wrote verses, and was otherwise a dangerous fellow—to keep him for a week or two, and then get rid of him. He had thrice sent to the Chancellor, to learn under what name the man was to be *buried*, for the fellow was dead now—so much had the damp atmosphere of the lower vaults disagreed with his poetical temperament; but no answer had been returned, which was very annoying. So Bernikoff, whose patience was never very extensive, was furious; but he strove to soothe his ruffled feelings by several enormous pinches of the sharp snuff of Beresovski, from the box which—as we have before



hinted—had been found in the fob of the late Peter III.; and by batooning, or beating with his cane, the Cossack Jagouski, whom he had suddenly detected in the act of praying secretly before the little image of St. Sergius, which was his—Colonel Bernikoff's—own peculiar and particular property.

By the old laws of Muscovy, to be found worshipping at an image, erected by, or the property of another, designing thereby to have a share in the favor of the saint it represented, without being at any expense, was punishable by a fine, to refund “the owner some part of the money laid out for the said image;” but as the poor Cossack had not a copper *denuca* wherewith to bless himself, the Governor took it out of his back and shoulders (scarcely healed after his recent knouting), with the aid of a knotted walking cane.

“‘To steal and to lie,’ according to Bulharyn, a famous Russian writer, ‘are the two auxiliary verbs of our language,’” said the Colonel, panting with exertion, as the Cossack crept away with a glance of subdued ferocity in his stealthy eyes; “we take all that for granted; but this slave has been stealing the interest of my saint for himself!”

He ordered an extra supply of wax candles to be lighted before the image, and then he knelt, bowed, and muttered:—

“Holy St. Sergius, heed not the prayers of that rascal; he is only a vile serf, a slave, a Cossack from



Ukraine. Thou hast been very good to me, and shalt be treated handsomely. Candles of the finest wax shall burn before thee all night. I will love and pray for thee, so do thou protect and intercede for me, most holy Sergius?"

And so he prayed till the dinner drum beat; and then, muttering an oath as he tripped over his sabre, the old savage hobbled away, to commit at least two of the seven deadly sins at table.

"No tidings yet, Carl Ivanovitch, of those traitors!" said Bernikoff, when he had somewhat recovered his breath, after a deep draught of quass, the froth of which adhered to his grisly mustachio; "the Captain Vlasfief, and my faithful friend Tschekin, with forty picked Cossacks, and a clever guide \_\_\_\_\_"

"Nicholas Paulovitch, I presume."

"The same," continued Bernikoff, with a fierce grimace on his lips and a cruel leer in his eyes, as he masticated a huge mouthful of green *borsch* with beef and eggs: "the same, sir,—and what then?"

"Nothing, Excellency; but this *oukha* of sterlet is excellent. Well, these and the forty Cossacks \_\_\_\_\_"

"Are scouring all the roads between this and St. Petersburg on one flank, and between this and North Ladoga on the other; so the cursed Asiatics cannot escape me."

"Who will betray them to you?" asked Balgonie,



making a terrible effort to appear calm and unconcerned, as he played with his sword knot and the tassels of his sash, and forgot to eat.

“Who?” exclaimed Col. Bernikoff, grinding his teeth, and eating very fast. “Their own friends—their own dear comrades—adherents, which you will. Russia is full of people, yea of many nations. The Empress can reckon her faithful slaves by millions; yet, when a Russian hath his hat on his head, its rim contains the only friend on whom he can rely.”

“This is a severe libel on your country, surely, Excellency.”

“’Tis truth though; so Basil Mierowitz, Usakoff, and the rest, are all doomed men. No one was ever lost on a straight road; thus the soldier who diverges from the straight line of duty must speedily find himself face to face with degradation and death. Punishment to those traitors will be swift and sure! So, I only fear that the Grand Chancellor will never give me the pleasure of having them under my judicious care in Schlüsselburg. We have certain old vaults, built below the tide mark by Ivan the Terrible, for some of those people of Novgorod who leagued with the King of Poland. They are always full of fog; and I am curious to know how long an able-bodied prisoner might live there, or rather how long he would be in dying. But excuse me, Hospodeen, I confess me to-morrow, and there rings the



bell for vespers already ;” and making many Greek signs of the cross and other genuflexions, Bernikoff, after having gorged himself at table, hurried away to the chapel, where Father Chrysostom officiated.

Charlie gladly sought the solitude afforded by the stockades and outworks of the fortress on the side towards the Lake of Ladoga. There, as elsewhere, was of course, a chain of sentinels ; but they did not interrupt his lonely communing with himself.

By his interest in Natalie, by his deep love for her, and more than all, perhaps, by his recent visit and interview, he already felt himself ‘art and part’ (to use a Scottish legal phrase), or *particeps criminis*, with the rash adherents of Ivan. If one of these deserted the cause in which they had embarked, then would their lurking place be at once discovered, and the story of his recent visit be revealed.

He dreaded lest Bernikoff and others suspected his friendly interest in the family of Count Mierowitz, and that more might yet be learned of it ; thus he would have experienced neither shock nor surprise, had he, at any hour, in that land of treachery and espionage, seen either Captain Vlasfief, Lieutenant Tschekin, or any other officer of the fortress, advancing towards him sabre in hand, with an armed party, to demand his sword, to make him a prisoner, and march him off to the same prison which already held the old Count and Mariolizza, the innocent be-



trothed of Basil, and might soon hold another, who was dearer, still—Natalie!

“If I love her,” he would say to himself at times, “why should I shrink from sharing all that she suffers now—all she may yet endure? Yet it would be wiser to watch well for her sake, and seek to save, or bear her away; but how—and where to?” was the next bewildering thought.

And the generous Basil, the fiery and chivalrous Usakoff, oh that he might save them too! He mourned for Usakoff, who was the very soul of honor and heroism, the worthy grandson of that Mazeppa who, when Charles the XII. was retreating from Pultowa, swam the Borysthenes by the side of the fugitive king, and of whom the latter said in the words of a bard:—

“Of all our band,  
Though firm of heart and strong of hand,  
In skirmish, march, or forage, none  
Can less have said or more have done  
Than thee, Mazeppa! on the earth  
So fit a pair had never birth,  
Since Alexander’s day till now,  
As thy Bucephalus and thou;  
All Scythia’s fame to thine should yield,  
For pricking on o’er flood and field.”

So worthy of such an ancestor, was he, too, to perish?

This was, indeed, a miserable mood of mind in which to pass the nights and days of inactivity—of suspense and anxiety in which none could share, in



that strong, guarded, and somewhat lonely fortress, which was washed, as we have said, on one side by the Neva, and on the other by the Lake of Ladoga, the very ripples of whose waves sounded hatefully in the ears of Balgonie.

“Oh,” thought he, “to be with Natalie on the side of a green and breezy Scottish mountain—on any part of the shore of free and happy Britain! to be with her there in peace and security, far, far from this land of suspicion and ferocious despotism, of state intrigues and savage punishments, where every second man is the spy upon, and the betrayer of, his fellow.”

“Britain he might never see more; and now he found himself vaguely speculating on the probable comforts and public amusement afforded by Siberia, and those growing cities of the sorrowing and the banished, Tobolsk and Irkutsk, on the banks of the Lower Angara.

He feared to look much, or often, towards the distant Wood of the Honey Tree, lest watchful eyes might be upon him to gather hints therefrom; still more did he fear to visit Natalie again, lest, by doing so, he might lead to the discovery and arrest of all. So the days and nights of dread, of longing, and suspense, passed slowly after each other now.

The barriers of rank and wealth—the wealth afforded by the Count’s estates and mines, his populous villages of serfs, and vast forests of timber—



had all been removed now, and Natalie was reduced to a level lower even than her lover's; yet he cursed the mad schemes that had brought about such a revolution, and tossed feverishly and sleeplessly on his bed, when he thought of Natalie Mierowna,—his own loving and beloved Natalie,—so delicate and so tender, with her white soft skin and silky hair, her earnest and beautiful eyes, lurking among stern and outlawed soldiers in yonder damp cavern of the rocks, upon her bed of leaves and moss; at the mercy, perhaps, of any adherent of Basil's, who, to save his own head, might prove a traitor to them all! This dread was ever before him.

The whole affair reminded him of some of the old Scottish raids, or Jacobite plots, of years long passed away; and it was fated to resemble the former more strongly in some of its features, as the dark sequel will show.

The guards and sentinels at Schlusselfurg were doubled; the patrols were incessant by land, while on the lake the gun-boats of Admiral Mackenzie cruised near the walls; the canons were loaded; the watch-words changed sometimes twice within four-and-twenty hours; and the general state of preparation for a sudden attack was unremitting. But time passed on quietly until the night of the fifteenth of September, when the crowning catastrophe came.



## CHAPTER XIX.

THE NIGHT OF THE 15TH SEPTEMBER.

THE past day had been unusually gloomy for the season. The sun had set in fiery clouds beyond the spires of St. Petersburg. The night was without a moon, and a strong east wind rolled the waters of the Ladoga in billows of inky hue against the massive walls of the fortress in foam and fury on one side; while on the other, the waters of the Neva, swollen by recent rains, gurgled and chafed round the mouldy and moss-grown piers of the draw-bridge.

The wind moaned with a sullen sound past the mouths of the cannon, and whistled drearily through the deep embrasures and the loopholes for musketry in the casemates. Thunder had been heard at times, but afar; Elias, as the Russians poetically phrase it, was driving his chariot among the stars. Lightning had reddened all the lake, and cast the weird shadow of the castle athwart it for an instant; and, that a complete and melodramatic omen of impending evil might not be wanting, a huge sea-bird had perched upon the castle clock, and forcing round the hands, struck midnight four hours before the proper time.



Since morning roll-call, Jagouski, the knouted, beaten, and ill-used Cossack, had been missing; he had quitted the fortress on some trivial pretense and had not since returned; patrols had seen nothing of him. Then Colonel Bernikoff was more than ever on the alert; but Balgonie, who now deemed anything better than the torture of suspense, had gone weary and feverishly to bed, to court for a time the happiness of oblivion, after having spent nearly the entire day upon the lake with an armed boat's crew, patrolling by water.

From sleep, however, a sudden sound aroused him; he looked at his watch, and saw that the hands indicated twelve o'clock, midnight.

What had he heard?

In another moment the sound came again—the drums were beating to arms! He heard the clamor of hoarse Muscovite voices in court and corridor; the clanging of the castle bell; and he saw the gleam of torches reddening the old black walls and towers, and flaring on the grated windows as they were borne to and fro.

His heart was beating with wild anxiety as he threw on his staff uniform, belted his sabre about him, placed his pistols in his girdle, and hurried forth to meet—it might be to cross blades—with the only friends he had in Russia!

As he crossed the castle-yard by torchlight, he could perceive that the Cossacks, clad in their short



blue jackets, red loose breeches, short boots, and tall, black, woolen busbies, were falling into their ranks with musketoons and sabres; and that the gunners were standing by their cannon with port-fires lighted: the latter casting a pale, ghastly, and unearthly glare upon the yawning embrasures, the walls of the fortress, and on their own stolid visages, which were pale and cadaverous as those of people usually who are hastily summoned from sleep in the night.

As a staff officer who had no particular post, Charlie Balgonie knew that his duty attached him chiefly to Bernikoff, whom he now met hurrying forth in uniform, with a great cocked hat thrust angrily over his cunning and twinkling eyes, which were sparkling with anger, while every hair of his grizzled moustachios, though these were long and snaky, bristled with excitement. There was a dangerous pallor in his visage; his square jaw looked still more tiger-like in contour, as his teeth were clenched; and he had his sabre drawn.

By his side were his two favorite brother officers, who—in face, form, and bearing—bore indications of being each, originally, a serf of the lowest, basest, and most unthinking kind—Captain Vlasfief, cruel and hollow-hearted, with his unfathomable smile; and Lieutenant Tschekin, the slimy, savage, and unscrupulous Muscovite. With these came several officers of the Cossack guard, with their elevated eyebrows, black moustachios, their keen features,



the plumes and cockades in their black fur caps, and their glittering costumes, forming altogether a striking and picturesque group, when seen by the light of several torches, which streamed through the deep and small arch, or doorway, of the keep in which Ivan was confined.

The portcullis of this tower was up; and Balgonie could perceive its row of lower bars, like a line of black fangs in an open jaw, between him and the outline of the lighted archway.

“What is the matter, Colonel Bernikoff,” asked Balgonie; “what is the cause of all this alarm?”

“Matter enough! We have had an *alerte*—the place seems to be invested by troops—Infantry of the Line, by all the devils—the head of a column—look for yourself, Balgonie!” exclaimed Bernikoff, with an oath.

To omit the Christian name of a person addressed, and that of his father, also, is a direct insult in Russia; but Balgonie heeded it not then. He hurried to the curtain wall which faced the landside, the outer gate, and draw-bridge and then, by the light of a torch, he could see that which certainly seemed to be the head of a column—a front rank of nearly fifty men, clad in the hideous uniform then worn by the Russian army, before it was altered, a few years after, by the superior taste of the notorious Major Semple Lisle, a Scottish adven-



turer,\* who was well known as a loungeur about St. James's Park, London, in 1804. Their coats were green, lined and faced with red, very tight in the body, with preposterously long skirts, tight breeches, and boots to the knees, with cocked hats, having long flannel flaps to cover the ears in Winter.

By the light of the same torch, Balgonie could see the bayonets fixed; and that two officers, with their sabres drawn, and a drummer, were in front of their little line. Having possession of the parole and countersign, which, no doubt, had been betrayed to them by the absent Jagouski, the whole party had contrived to delude the *Putparooschick* (sub-lieutenant) in charge of the outer guard, and were now past the first barrier, and had actually taken possession of the drawbridge, which they had lowered across the Neva. The gate and guns of the second barrier were yet to be forced or passed; and thus these midnight visitors were in a species of trap.

Too well could Balgonie recognise in the two officers—Basil Mierowitz, wearing the familiar uniform of the Regiment of Smolensko; and Usakoff, in the gay trappings of the Grenadiers of Valikolutz; and now, for the second time, their drummer beat a *chamade*, or summons for a parley, but as yet there was no response.

Balgonie hastened after Bernikoff and the other

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\* *Vide* "Life of Major J. G. Semple Lisle, written by himself, London, 1800. Printed for W. Stewart, 194, Piccadilly."



officers. They had now ascended to the chamber of the unfortunate Ivan, from whose presence they had somewhat roughly expelled the chaplain, Father Chrysostom. On entering, he found that the royal recluse had sprung from bed—inspired by natural alarm, on finding his chamber suddenly entered at midnight, and full of armed men; but Ivan manifested no indignation—he was too gentle, too subdued, and completely broken in spirit for that.

His singularly beautiful face was very pale; there was a strange calmness in his manner; and whatever he thought or anticipated, there was more of calm inquiry than of fear in his tone and in the expression of his fine soft eyes. Over his night-dress he had thrown a *robe-de-chambre* of fine scarlet cloth edged with white ermine; and in this attire, with his long hair and delicate features, so chastened in expression by long solitude and complete seclusion from the outer world, he seemed more like a tall handsome woman, than a young man of three and twenty years.

“What is this you tell me, Colonel Bernikoff,” he was asking, as Balgonie entered; “my unhappy life threatened, say you?”

“Even so,” said Bernikoff hoarsely, while averting his stealthy eyes, from the young man’s open and earnest face; “even so, Ivan Antonovitch; but, your death will not be of our seeking.”

“Whose then, whose then?”



“Your friends.”

“Oh, what dreadful paradox is this?” asked the Prince calmly; “must I die, even as Demetrius died?”

“Yes,” replied the other hoarsely.

“And wherefore?”

“There are those without the gates who seek you, and you must not fall alive into their hands,” said Captain Vlasfief sternly, as he felt the point of his sabre with a finger.

“Alas! I do not understand who can come to seek me!” replied the poor Prince, shuddering now, while an expression of horror began to spread over his fine face,—a horror gathered from the fierce and relentless aspect he read in the visages of those around him,—and he withdrew a pace or so towards his bed, saying, in a touching voice:—

“Ah, do not leave me, good Colonel Bernikoff, or at least give me a sword—a sword——”

“Fool—child—dolt! thou with a sword, and for what purpose?” thundered Bernikoff, as he sought to lash himself into the requisite pitch of fury; “for what purpose, I say?”

“That I may defend myself.”

“’Tis needless,” said Tschekin, with a cold smile; “we shall take every care of you.”

“Oh, Carl Ivanovitch Balgonie, my friend, my good friend! you I can trust—you, I can command—come hither, and remain by my side,” said the



Prince, in an imploring accent, as a solemn foreboding came upon him when he saw the sabres stealthily drawn from their scabbards on every side, and even the terrible Nicholas Paulovitch drawing near, dagger in hand, with his long lock of hair, his scowling front, and a cruel expression, the very lust of blood, in his deep set stony eyes. "Carl, Carl," cried Ivan; "your hand!"

"Captain Balgonie—*he* here!" roared Bernikoff, with one of his terrible maledictions.

"Oh Excellency!" implored Balgonie, scarcely knowing what he should ask or urge.

"Begone, sir, to the barrier gate, and keep the guard there to their duty—begone, sir, I command you, on your allegiance to the Empress!"

To refuse or linger were alike impossible, though a wild cry of entreaty escaped the lips of the young Prince, who sprang forward, but was thrust roughly back towards his couch by many hands and many levelled weapons.

The sword of Damocles, which had hung over his unhappy head so long, was about to descend at last!

Balgonie, his heart swollen almost to bursting with shame, rage, and grief, rushed down the stair of the keep; but at the foot, and just as he passed where the old Chaplain Chrysostom was saying devoutly on his knees the prayers for the *dying*, he heard a shrill and protracted cry of agony ring



through the vaulted tower—a cry that made his blood run cold!

Humanity, generosity, and all his own good impulses would have drawn him back to the side, and, if possible, to the aid, of Ivan ; but the force of discipline, and a knowledge of his own utter powerlessness, made him pause : for he was but one man—a young officer—a foreigner, too, opposed to a whole garrison of ferocious and unscrupulous soldiers.

When, from the inner barrier gate, he looked up to the window of Ivan's room, he saw that the lights had been extinguished and all was darkness now.



## CHAPTER XX.

MORNING OF THE 16TH SEPTEMBER.

WHEN Bernikoff appeared with his group of officers, Charlie Balgonie perceived that there were spots of blood upon his long, white leather gauntlets, that his sabre blade was broken off within six inches of the hilt, and that a terrible expression of ferocity clouded his features and those of all around him, the glare of the uplifted torches now paling as the light of day stole in, adding to the sinister significance of their faces.

At that moment the drummer of the summoners beat a *chamade* for the third time, and Bernikoff, advancing to the klinket, or wicket, in the palisades of the second inner gate, opened it, and, with a great sternness of manner, demanded what they required.

“The release of His Imperial Majesty Ivan IV.,” replied Basil Mierowitz, in a firm voice, while courteously saluting Bernikoff, in recognition of his superior rank.

“If I refuse——”

“You do so at your own peril,” replied Basil, as sternly and as proudly as if, instead of a few discontented deserters and enthusiasts, the whole armies of Russia were at his back.



“You cannot be mad enough, Basil Mierowitz, to think of assaulting us?”

“That may or not be, Excellency, according to circumstances,” was the reply.

“What troops are these under your orders?”

“A guard of honour for the Emperor, if you peacefully comply—the first portion of an investing force, if you refuse,” replied Mierowitz; but a sinister gleam of triumph flashed in the malicious eyes of Bernikoff, who gathered more of his real weakness from this evasive reply, than the rash young noble intended.

“Listen, Colonel Bernikoff,” he continued, while drawing from his breast a long paper of official aspect, to which several green and scarlet seals were attached: “Her Majesty Catharine II.—for a time of all the Russias—having come to the conclusion of resigning the imperial crown (convinced at last that she has no claim thereto), and of replacing it on the head of the Emperor Ivan (son of Anthony Ulric, Duke of Wolfenbuttel), whom she now feels herself compelled to acknowledge as her lawful sovereign, though basely deposed in infancy by her predecessors, the Empress Elizabeth, and the Emperor Peter III.; therefore she hereby commands you, Colonel Bernikoff, Governor of her Castle of Schlüsselburg, to set the Prince at liberty, with all speed and honour.”

For a document and summons of this artful and



remarkable nature, Bernikoff was altogether unprepared. For a moment he grew deadly pale, but for a moment only, and glanced at the startled faces of those around him. Had he been too precipitate in bloodshed?

“Where is Her Majesty, just now?” he asked.

“In the palace of the Czars, at Novgorod.”

“Was Novgorod so empty of all the great nobles and officers of Russia, that a document of such a nature was entrusted to a mere Lieutenant of Infantry—a deserter from Livonia?” said Bernikoff, with sudden rage. “’Tis an imposture—a forgery; there is but one God in Heaven—one monarch on earth, the Empress Catharine; and you, Mierowitz, and all who league with you, are but base dogs and traitors!”

“Forward!” cried Basil, brandishing his sabre; “storm the gate—bayonet all who oppose us!”

“Long live Ivan Antonovitch—long live the Emperor!” exclaimed his soldiers, rushing forward. But the klinket in the palisades was at once closed, and secured against them by an enormous transverse beam of wood; and though a confused volley of musketry was exchanged between them and the main guard, no one was struck, save Bernikoff, who staggered back into the arms of Vlasfief, having been bayoneted in the breast by the deserter Jagouski, who drove his weapon between the palisades, nearly finishing what Basil had begun by the blow of a



musket, but which crushed the Colonel's hat and nearly fractured his skull.

“Ah! dogs and Asiatics, you have struck me!” shouted Bernikoff, whose voice was hoarse with rage and pain. “Dost know the penalty of wounding an officer—of striking a soldier who wears a decoration?”

“Accursed Tartar, I neither know nor care. I revenge my brother's death at Zorndorf, my own wrongs, and the murder of Peter III.!” replied the exulting Cossack, with a bitter laugh.

“May my right hand wither and my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, when most I need them both, if I have not a terrible vengeance for all this work!” cried Bernikoff. “Vlasfief, Tscheikin, show them their Prince!”

While the undaunted Basil and his friend Usakoff, with their soldiers, proceeded to wheel round a cannon of the outworks, a 32-pounder, for the purpose of blowing open the klinket of the inner barrier; and while Balgonie, a silent but excited and sick-hearted spectator of the whole affair, lingered close by, heedless whether the round-shot and grape, with which they were charging the gun, came this way, or not,—a window in the first story of the keep was dashed open, and while every torch and every eye were uplifted to the place, a terrible spectacle, which hushed all into momentary silence, was exhibited.



It was the dead body of the young and handsome Ivan, suspended by the neck, at the end of a rope, stripped even of his night-dress, cold and white as the marble of Paros, and gashed with ten gaping wounds; for, as we are told in the newspapers of the period, "the unfortunate prince had struggled some time for his life, and even broke the Governor's sword in the conflict; but assistance was called for, and another bloody assassin (Vlasfief) appeared, who finished the horrid work."

An exclamation of dismay and grief escaped Balgonie, on beholding this appalling spectacle; the weird and ghastly horror of which was enhanced by the uncertain light in which it was exhibited, and which imparted a wavering and almost life-like action to the corpse, as with its long hair floating, head and arms pendent, it swayed to and fro in the morning wind against the castle wall.

"*Hospodi pomilui! Hospodi pomilui!*"\* cried Basil Mierowitz, covering his face with his hands, and permitting the musket with which he had armed himself to fall to the ground with a clash, which, together with his most mournful exclamation, alone broke the silence.

"Behold," said Bernikoff, in cruel triumph, while blasphemously using the words of Ezekiel—"behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke!" Glory to God and to the Empress! This

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\*Lord have mercy upon us!



is your Emperor—now let him head your troops. Doubtless he will make a fine figure on the Imperial throne.”

“Oh! Bernikoff,” exclaimed Basil, “you are like Judas, as we may see him at the Kazan church—one hand on the mouth denoting treachery, and the other on a bag of money.”

“Thou liest, Lieutenant! my fingers know more of the grip of steel than of gold,” said the other furiously, as he hurled the hilt of his broken sabre at the speaker.

“So—so—this has been your work and decision?”

“Yes—how do you like it?” was the mocking reply.

“Thou art a cruel judge; but remember the law of Peter the Great——”

“Which makes the judge answerable for his decision?”

“Yes.”

“Then shall I content me, traitor, and be answerable for my decision as well as for its execution. I have done my duty to the Czarina.”

“You have done a deed for which hell must blush and angels weep,” was the forcible reply of Mierowitz, who seemed so overcome by grief and horror, as to lose all self-possession; for he now ordered his men to disperse to the woods—to seek safety in flight; and then calmly taking off his sword-belt and sash, he threw them on the ground saying:—



“Since my Imperial master is dead, further resistance would be vain in me.”

He was almost immediately afterwards struck to the earth, and made prisoner by Lieutenant Tschekin, who, with a party of dismounted Cossacks, had stolen through the casemates and galleries to a postern opening on the rear of the drawbridge, and these, after firing a confused volley with their pistols and musketoes, fell with their sharp crooked sabres upon the now thoroughly disheartened adherents of Mierowitz. Lieutenant Usakoff and Jagouski alone made any vigorous resistance, resolving not to be taken alive.

Fighting desperately, almost back to back, the former armed with the sabre of Mazeppa, and the latter with a musket, and both bleeding from many wounds, they were driven through the outer barrier towards the town. On the pathway Jagouski stumbled over a comrade, and was taken; but Apollo Usakoff, with a shout in which triumph and despair were mingled, leaped into the Neva, the waters of which swept him away, and he was seen no more by his pursuers.

When Tschekin's Cossacks joined in the *mèlée* with the fugitives, Balgonie sprang through the klinket, sword in hand, resolved to succour his friend at all hazards; and fortunately arrived just in time to save him (when struck down and trod under foot) from the bulky giant Nicholas Paulovitch, who, with



a clubbed musket, was about to give him a blow that must inevitably have proved fatal.

Paulovitch he ran through the heart—or at least the place where his heart might be supposed to have been—and spurning him off the blade with his foot, hurled the snorting ruffian to the ground, and raised his friend, with the assistance of a soldier and Lieutenant Tschekin.

“Made prisoner, and by *you* too, Carl!” said Basil, reproachfully and in a low voice, for he was faint with wounds and bruises.

“By me, but to save you.”

“Seek rather to save Natalie, if you can,” he whispered; “she is, she is—”

“Where, *where?*” said Balgonie, impetuously and imploringly.

But there was no reply. Basil had fainted, and was borne into the Castle of Schlüsselburg, a prisoner of State.

Balgonie never saw the face of his friend again!

So ended for a time, a scheme, the importance of which was only equalled by its bold recklessness—the scheme of two subaltern officers to revolutionize the vast empire of Russia, and to subvert the firm dominion of Catharine II., one of the most powerful and popular, though licentious, monarchs that ever sat on the barbarous throne of the Czars; and such was the terrible sequel to the *Secret Dispatch* of Balgonie.



Day had completely broken when he was summoned by Bernikoff. Shuddering as he passed through the court of the Castle and under the very window where the corpse was yet swaying mournfully to and fro in the morning breeze that swept from the broad waters of the vast lake, whose ripples were shining like gold in the first beams of the autumnal sun, Charlie sought the presence of this detestable personage, the thunder of whose wrath he feared was about to descend upon himself.

He found the Colonel in his shirt sleeves, and almost covered with blood, which was flowing from a wound in his breast and another on the head, from whence it was trickling to the ends of his long and snaky grey mustacheos. To both of these cuts the barber was about to apply dressings, while the patient solaced himself by scheming out some dreadful punishment for Jagouski, who, with several others, had fallen into his gentle hands, and by uttering deep oaths, and imbibing deep draughts from a great wooden bowl of quass, dashed with fiery vodka.

Balgonie, whose thoughts ran chiefly upon how to discover and succour Natalie, was roused to attention by Bernikoff saying grimly:—

“Carl Ivanovitch Balgonie, for aiding in the capture of the rebel Mierowitz, I thank you; suspicions I had, but they are gone. You are now, perhaps, to rejoin the Regiment of Smolensko, and shall bear a dispatch from me to Lieutenant-General



Weymarn and Lieutenant-Colonel Caschkin (who are both in St. Petersburg), relating the affair of the last twelve hours. Vlasfief shall prepare it, and I shall sign it. Place a feather in the seal, lest the Captain lingers as he did at Louga! Here, Carl Ivanovitch, taste the quass; 'tis the *trisna* of Ivan the Unknown person!"

There was something so horrible in this levity and impiety to the Cossacks, that even they exchanged uneasy glances; for the *trisna* at funeral feasts is a mixture of rum, beer, and wine, and is an ancient Slavonian beverage. When it is handed round, all stand up uncovered, the clergy recite a solemn prayer, and at its close the *trisna* is drunk to the health of the departed Christian soul; so Balgonie shuddered, as he thought of the gashed and dishonored corpse that swung by the neck without the castle wall.

This emotion did not escape the fierce eyes of Bernikoff, though his wounds were most severe, and his mind was wandering.

"Nay, look not at me thus, Scot," said the genuine old Russian fatalist; "God willed it that Prince Ivan should be put in my charge; and the devil, together with my duty to the Empress, inspired me to destroy him. What is done, is done, and is the will of God; and you know, or ought to know, our Muscovite proverb—the Czar is high, and God is everywhere!"



“Three times has this old reprobate mentioned that terrible Name, and each time bowing his sinful head!” thought Charlie, with disgust and wonder.

“Hah!” resumed Bernikoff, pursuing his own thoughts, and clenching his teeth in rage and pain, “did that suckling of a Lieutenant think to deceive me—I, who have been forty years in the Russian army, and have to deal with the most cunning scoundrels between the Black Sea and the Baltic! Jagouski, too, I’ll fill his mouth with gunpowder, put a fuse between his teeth, and blow his head off. By St. Sergius, I will! But, holy Saint, alleviate these pangs, by ever so little, and this night six pounds of the finest wax shall burn before thee.” He gnashed his teeth with pain, and added, “Be ready to ride in an hour. Captain; till then, leave me.”



## CHAPTER XXI.

### UNDERGROUND.

THE Empress's court of Secret Chancery soon decided on the fate of Basil Mierowitz; the Count, his father, and his cousin Mariolizza, who had been passive, though suspected in the matter, had their cases taken into future consideration, so they were kept close prisoners while their properties and possessions were given up to pillage and military execution. Basil was condemned to be broken alive upon the wheel; but the Empress, who had a particular tenderness for handsome men, "mitigated his punishment to the less severe one of being beheaded."

A brief paragraph in the *London Gazette* of the 23rd October records this brave fellow's death, just fourteen days after his rash affair at Schlussemburg:

"M. Mierowitz, in pursuance of his sentence, was publicly beheaded on Wednesday last; he behaved at his execution, as he had done throughout the whole transaction, with the greatest resignation. Six of the soldiers and under-officers who were engaged with him ran the gantelope the same day;



they were so severely whipped that it is said three of them are since dead. Many more are to be punished. One, Usakoff, a Lieutenant in the Regiment of Welikolutz (*sic*) who was privy to the design, was accidentally drowned."

Notwithstanding his rank and years, old Count Mierowitz was retained in a dungeon among a number of miserable Russian rogues and Polish prisoners, clad in filthy sheepskin shoubahs, many of them being afflicted with the terrible disease known as *plica polonica*, or matted hair, which hung over their necks in clotted lumps, every tube being swollen and dilated with globules of blood.

The lower vaults of Schlüsselburg were those built by Ivan the Terrible, for the reception of a few of the revolvers of Novgorod, after he had put twenty-five thousand of her citizens to the sword. They were such prisons as—let us hope—are no longer in use, even in Russia; although the London press has asserted that, until lately, exactly such *oubliettes* or dungeons were in active operation, and never without tenants, under the royal rule of the deposed Francis II., and prior to the remodelling of Italy by Victor Emmanuel.

They were like the frightful cells of the Bastille, which Victor Hugo has described in "Notre Dame;" those of the Inquisition at Goa or Madrid, or of old castles of the middle ages; but apart from the happily departed horrors of such places, even Eng-



lish jails have been little better than living graves within the memory of many now alive; for one of the greatest glories of modern civilization, in all countries, have been the amelioration of prisons and their government, and the substitution of mercy and protection in their general economy for that irresponsible despotism and wanton cruelty which have formed such ample materials for the romancer and novelist to excite compassion and even dismay.

Yet it is exactly such a place—a prison of the middle ages—a rival to that Chillon to which Byron's genius has given a greater name than ever its terrors won it—we are now about to describe: One of the lower vaults of Schlüsselburg, a den, the floor of which was below the rocks whereon the seals of Ladoga basked in the sunshine, and which was consequently liable to be flooded during those inundations that, at certain seasons, overflow all the country for a great way north, so that no crops will grow save upon the eminences.

Vaulted with stone, it was nearly square, and measured twelve feet each way, with a floor that sloped down at one end, having been unevenly hewn out when the rock was pierced; and from a portion of this rock sprang the solid arch of granite blocks which formed the roof. A narrow slit, six inches broad by twelve high, and having even in that small space a thick iron bar, admitted to the interior a feeble ray of light. This slit was partly



built of stone, but its sill was the living rock of Schlüsselburg. It opened towards the lake, but gave no prospect save the clouds, for it was high up in the wall; yet the melancholy cries of the waterfowl and of the seabirds, which often came up the Neva from the Baltic, were heard through it at times.

The prisoner, when seated on the stone bench which formed a bed or seat alternately, could only see the changing hues of the sky and patches of cloud, and know by the darkness which gradually obscured this mere shot-hole that day was passing away, and that another night, chill, dark, dreary, and hopeless, was at hand.

As the floor sloped down some twelve inches or more, the lower end was always full of water, into which the slime that gathered on the vault of the arch fell at intervals with a regular splash that, to the silent and apparently forgotten prisoner, became maddening in its monotony of sound, by day and night, by morning and evening, by dawn and sunset. Then, as the tides rose and fell, or as the waters of the vast inland lake of Ladoga are affected by the Baltic stopping the downward flow of the Neva, or by rains flooding the many tributaries that join them, so did this dark pool in the dungeon rise and fall, when the current oozed through secret and unknown channels or crannies in the granite rocks.



It was in this vault, or one of those adjoining—such a den as that in which Dante placed his Demon—that the betrayed wife of Count Orloff, the beautiful daughter of the Empress Elizabeth, was drowned, ten years after the date of this history, when the waters of the Neva rose ten feet; and, as they subsided, bore her body to the Gulf of Finland.

No one could live very long in such a place—low, damp, cold, and horrible. And well did Bernikoff know this, when, in the blind transports of rage and agony resulting from his double wounds, he barbarously consigned Natalie Mierowna to such a place—ay, even Natalie the soft and delicate, the high-bred and tenderly-nurtured daughter of Count Mierowitz; and she had now been in the underground vault for three days and nights,—seventy-two hours,—which to her had resembled a horrible and protracted nightmare.

She was ignorant, as yet, of her brother's execution, a week before. Betrayed by one of their most trusted adherents, as the price of his own liberty, she and Katinka had been taken. Of the fate of the latter she knew nothing; a mere Polish waiting-maid, a pretty soubrette, she had too probably become the lawful prey of the Cossacks, whom Natalie had last seen in the forest, with terrible significance rattling their dice on the kettle-drum head.

For herself, the poor girl only knew that she



was placed there to await the pleasure of her Empress and the Grand Chancellor.

Hope was dead, completely, in her heart; and though the desire to live was strong, her former life seemed all a dream; or something that had happened long, long ago!

Crouching on a damp pallet that lay on the couch of stone, her hair dishevelled, her dress more than ever torn, discolored, and disordered, her snowy arms and hands stripped of every ornament and ring, her tender feet well-nigh shoeless, her eyes half closed and surrounded by dark inflamed circles, her cheeks sunk and haggard,—it would be difficult to recognise in her the once beautiful and brilliant Natalie, whose coquetry had excited the ready jealousy of Catharine in that fatal Mazurka; the Natalie of the imperial *salôns* at Moscow, at Oranienbaum, or the palace of Tsarsky Selo; or the Natalie of that princely old *château* near the Louga—the proud, bright-eyed, and beautiful girl whom Charlie Balgonie had loved, and worshipped as a goddess.

As she crouched in a species of stupor beside a wooden bowl of stale water and a mouldy loaf of black bread, there seemed to be no breath in her tender nostrils, no sound in those little ears over which the black hair rolled in unheeded masses—no sound save the monotonous plash of the dropping slime. She was pale as white marble,—cold as



death,—a prey to utter confusion rather than profound grief. There were times when she felt and thought and knew of nothing; but there were others when all the past—the memory of her ruined house, her shattered love, her slaughtered friends, their fatal project, and her lost position in society—brought a cruel and keen pang to her heart, and made her writhe and start and wring her hands, but not weep; for she had not a tear left; and her hard dry eyeballs were the only warm part of her shuddering frame.

When she did rouse herself to calm reflection and the realities of her position, thought well-nigh drove her mad.

Her old father—his sturdy figure, his venerable beard and white eyebrows, his silver hair queued by a simple ribbon, his quaint old-fashioned costume of the first Peter's time, rose vividly before her; and with a gush of memory came all his peculiarities of disposition, his warmth of heart and temper, his kindness and irritability, his pride of race and family. Where were all these now?

Her lover, too—his voice, and eyes, and gentle manner came next, to add to her pangs—for him, too, must she relinquish for ever; no shelter was there now for her save the cold grave, which was perhaps to receive them all! Basil, Usakoff, and Mariolizza—alas! terrible though her own sufferings, she little knew those to which the fairer beauty and more



unwary tongue of Mariolizza had subjected that unhappy girl.

The excellent taste, the polished education, and high accomplishments of Natalie, which were so far superior to those of most ladies of her own rank and country then, gave a greater poignancy to the horrors of reality and imagination; yet imagination could supply no horror but what was real, and sternly so.

Their princely old dwelling amid the pine forests—never more would she see its dome of polished copper shining in the sun, or the wooded domain that stretched for uncounted versts around it; or her father's patrimonial village, nestling by the Louga, which bore his rafts of timber to the sea, and by night reflected the glare of those furnaces which were another source of vast wealth, and the means of procuring a thousand luxuries.

Better would it have been, had she and they and all succumbed to Catharine's iron rule, than sought the freedom of Ivan IV.; but it was too late—too late, now!

Was it all a dream from which she must awaken? Strange it was, that as weariness, sleep, or a stupor stole over her, scraps of songs, frivolous ones especially, airs from operas, and so forth, occurred to her drowsy ear, as if her brain was turning; and to these the filtering splash and the sound of the rising waves and wind without seemed to mark a cadence.



Suddenly a scream escaped her ; she was in total darkness. Amid her sleep or stupor, a fourth night had come on—a night of storm, too, for she heard the roar of the autumn rain, as it descended like a vast sheet upon the lake without.

Cold and slimy things had often crossed her slender ankles, making her shriek and shudder ; but now, she became sensible that her feet were completely immersed in water ; that the wind was bellowing without and rolling the waves against the rocks ; and that the current of the lake was flooding the floor of her vault, and rising fast within it.

It rose with appalling rapidity : and now the terror of a dreadful death made Natalie utter a succession of piercing shrieks, mingled with prayers to heaven. But her cries were unheard ; for the same cold, icy tide that flooded her cell, filled all the corridors by which it and others on the same floor were approached.

Rapidly it rose, this dark, silent, and terrible tide—rapidly and without a sound.

She sprang upon her stone couch, but already the pallet was floated away. Up yet rose the invading water, and it was soon nearly to her waist ; and gasping and shuddering cries were mingled with her prayers. A little more, and the narrow slit through which she could hear the bellowing wind and see the black clouds careering past one red and fiery northern star—the last gleam of life and of the



outer world—would vanish from her eyes, as she perished in that miserable tomb; even as the Princess Orloff and many others have done, helpless and unheeded in their dying agony—drowned miserably, like the prison rats that swam around them.

In the last energies of her despair, she made her way to the enormously thick door which closed this trap of stone, and, applying her lips to the joints, shrieked loudly again and again for succor, and beat wildly and fruitlessly with her tender hands upon its massive planks and iron bolts.

Her brain seemed bursting, for she was suffocating as the air lessened. She thought she saw a red light shining through the crannies of the doorway; but whether this were fancy or reality, it was impossible to say—as a faintness came over her, and she sank down choking and drowning in the flood that rose within the walls and against the door of the prison.



## CHAPTER XXII.

### OVER THEIR WINE.

**H**EAVY and sad was the heart of Charlie Balgonie when, on the evening of the 16th September, that which was subsequent to the episode at Schlusselfurg, he saw the domes and towers of St. Petersburg glittering in gold and bronze, in green and fiery or fantastic colours, amid the rich glow of a ruddy sunset; and where rising from the haze of the vast city, the polished cupola of St. Isaac's Cathedral, and the slender spire of the Admiralty, like a needle of flame, seemed to float in mid air.

As he entered the first guarded barrier, he met a party of Lancers riding at a trot, their tall fur caps having scarlet kalpecs and large plumes, their lances, each with a long bannerole of the same color waving in the wind. They escorted a covered kabitka, or wagon, and were led by the Count de Balmain, a Scottish officer, who, in after years, stormed Kaffa, in the Crimea.

“Whither go you, Count?” he asked.

“For Schlusselfurg—the place of sorrow.”

“With a prisoner, of course?”

“Yes, I regret to say, with the niece of Count



Mierowitz, with Mademoiselle Mariolizza. She is to be confined under a warrant from the Grand Chancellor—poor girl!”

Sadder and heavier grew the honest heart of Balgonie, as the escort and its hearse-like carriage passed on; and, as he looked after it, the fair merry face, the full and voluptuous figure, the gay manner and remarkable *finesse d'esprit* of the betrothed of poor Basil, as he had last seen her at Louga, came back vividly to memory now.

Balgonie was at St. Petersburg when Mierowitz was executed, and when other horrors followed. Moreover, he was closely and repeatedly interrogated by the Grand Chancellor, the Privy Councillor, the Count Panim, by Count Orloff (the present lover of the Empress), and by General Weymarn, as to all he knew and had seen of the conspirators—so closely, that nothing surprised him so much as to find that no suspicion was attached to himself. But being a soldier of fortune, who possessed nothing in the world but his sword and his epaulettes, he was not worth suspecting by the Imperial Government.

Ere long, the name of Natalie came before the Secret Chancery, as a prisoner in Schlüsselburg; and, like the rest, she was tried and condemned in her absence, undefended and unheard; and sentenced, too, amid the solitude of her prison.

To Balgonie the charm of life seemed to have passed away; and, during the week or two that



followed his return to St. Petersburg, dreary, weary, and unmeaning, indeed, seemed the routine of his duties as aide-de-camp at the vast parades, the brilliant receptions, the courts-martial, and other public affairs to which he followed his *chef*, General Weymarn, at the palaces of Tsarsky Selo, or Oranienbaum, and elsewhere, while ignorant of the fate of Natalie—while the very life of her he loved hung in the balance.

When compared with their fate, how happy seemed those lovers, who, though separated for a period, could look confidently forward through the long succession of hours, of days and nights, of weeks, and months, or even years, and reckon with certainty on the time of reunion! With him and Natalie, time stretched into a length that seemed interminable: their future had no background; their separation was one without hope.

Charlie, in his desperation, applied to the Marquis de Bausset and to Sir. George Macartney, then the Ambassadors from France and Britain; and both received his verbal prayers—he dared not write on such a subject—for mercy to the Count's family; but they were unheeded and the Ministers replied only by bows, grimaces, and shrugs of their diplomatic shoulders. Their interference was impossible—quite; and, unfortunately, his old patron, Admiral Thomas Mackenzie, was with the fleet in the Black Sea.



The suspicions excited against his Regiment and the Glenadiers of Valikolutz, might procure the banishment of both; he feared it in the form of service in Siberia, or at the Crimean lines of Perecop. In either case, unless Weymarn stood his friend, how could he hope to succour Natalie!

At every tea-house, hotel, and café, his uniform of the Smolensko Infantry, and the knowledge that he was the staff officer who had been in Schlussemburg, and who brought the first tidings of the late affair, made him an object of special interest; but the subject was alike a perilous and painful one. Walls have many ears in Russia; so he was compelled to be silent, or discreet, even to rudeness, though the following declaration, which was issued by the Empress, might have allayed his fears:—

“ We, Catharine the Second, by the Grace of God, Empress and Sovereign of all the Russias, &c., &c., make known to our Regiment of Smolensko Infantry that, according to the equity which we exert towards our faithful subjects, we cannot represent to ourselves, without profound grief, how much that regiment must be afflicted, for having among its officers a wretch in the person of Mierowitz; nevertheless, as the crime of one man cannot affect those who had no part in it, and that, besides, we know the bravery with which the regiment has distinguished itself upon all occasions, its attach-



ment to strict discipline, and its exactness in the military duty of our empire ; therefore we grant it, through our imperial good-will, the same assurances of protection which it has in all times deserved. In consequence, we forbid all and every one, to reproach or upbraid the said regiment concerning the treason of Mierowitz, under pain of incurring our indignation, and drawing on themselves the effects of our just resentment.

(Signed)

“CATHARINE.”

Hope seemed to revive a little after the issue of this conciliatory *oukaz* ; but it was speedily dashed, when Balgonie, on returning from Cronstadt, whither he had been sent by General Weymarn, suddenly met Captain Vlasfief face to face, near the palace of the favorite Lanskoi.

This personage he would have avoided like a toad or a leper ; but from him only might he learn something of her he loved in Schlusselfurg, that hateful place to which the Captain was returning ; so, overcoming or rather concealing, his repugnance, he adjourned with him to a café, and ordered wine.

“ I dare say you have heard,” said Vlasfief, with a strange leer in his eyes, as he tossed his hat and sabre on the sofa and deposited his jack-booted limbs on another, “ how the estates of the Count and those of Usakoff have been sold or gifted away ; pillaged and ravaged by Lanskoi with a



party of Tchernemoski Cossacks; and that the plunder has been stored up in Schlusselfurg?"

"Something of all this I have heard," replied Balgonie, when the waiter had filled their glasses and withdrawn, "and—and—but you have there two ladies of the Count's family?"

"True—Mademoiselle Mariolizza, who was engaged to Mierowitz, and the Count's draughter: one beautifully fair, the other black-haired like a Pole. Poor girls!" he continued, while leisurely filling the large china bowl of a tasselled pipe, which suspiciously resembled one Charlie had often seen the old Count smoking, "I remember them both in happier and brighter times; but those who play with fire will, you know, be burned. The sentences on all have been found, recorded, and, in two instances, executed; and they are truly terrible!"

"Executed—the sentence!" replied Balgonie, in a faint voice.

"Yes; you have been four days at Cronstadt: well, in those four days many things have been done—a light; thank you. The Count is now travelling towards Tobolsk under an escort of Balmain's Lancers. There he will have to hunt the ermine, cultivate asafœtida, or dig in the mines, with a collar at his neck, for the remainder of his days; but for the ladies of his family, a more severe punishment was reserved: ah! he is a stern fellow, old Panim!"



“How—what? Vlasfief, you jest?”

“’Tis no jest: we don’t jest on such matters in Russia,” replied Vlasfief, who was too thorough a *roué*—too “used up,” in fact—to care for what any woman might suffer or undergo; for every human emotion and sympathy were dead in this man now.

“What new horrors am I to hear?” exclaimed Balgonie, with passionate vehemence, as he dashed his heavy Turkish sabre on the table.

Vlasfief smiled sourly, and his cunning eyes twinkled.

“You are a Scot, like Balmain,” said he disdainfully; “and as the Turks—those accursed unbelievers—say, but truly, ‘Those who have never seen the world think it is all like their father’s house.’ Pass the bottle—’tis Cracow wine this, and not worth four ducats the flask. In short, the—the two ladies of the Count’s family, in the wildness of their grief,—Mariolizza especially,—on hearing of the death of Mierowitz, permitted their tongues to run riot, and to say such things of Her Imperial Majesty and some of her favorites, such as Count Orloff, Lanskoi, the Grenadier, and so forth, as no woman would pardon, you understand; so they are to be given in succession to *le maître d’entre les égaux*—the master of the shoulders,” added Vlasfief, with a species of laugh at the strange expression which he saw gathering in Balgonie’s face.

“Explain, I implore you, explain!” asked the



latter, with quivering lips, as he set down a crystal goblet of Hungarian wine untasted on the table.

“Mademoiselle Mariolizza—but you don’t drink fairly, Ivanovitch—has received six blows of the knout. The torturer is a new man, and mangled her cruelly. She has had her tongue cut out, and her forehead branded with the executioner’s mark,\* and she goes to Siberia as soon as she recovers; but she will never reach it alive, even if she escapes the fever that has now seized her; for as the whole family has been degraded,—declared infamous and without protection,—being tongueless, she will become the prey of the Cossacks *en route*. Once beyond the Volga, we never know what happens. The Count’s daughter will undergo exactly similar punishment; and, if she survives it, they will be mercifully permitted to travel together: and there ends the House of Mierowitz, which boasts of its descent from Ruric of Kiev—Ruric the Varagian of Old Ladoga!”

With wonderful coolness of manner, over his wine and pipe, almost with an occasional jest, the cruel and snakelike Vlasfief—who, as a *parvenu* of the foundling hospital (the son of a goat,) hated the hereditary aristocracy—detailed these matters; and Balgonie felt as if a black cloud enveloped him. He heard the Captain talking; but his mind and

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\* The latter punishment is abolished *now*.



thoughts were far, far away; and after a time he found himself alone.

Vlasief had mounted and ridden off; and mechanically, like an automaton, Balgonie had bidden him adieu at the portico of the café, and returned to finish his wine, as one in a waking dream: nor was it until the bell of St. Isaac's tolled midnight, when the lights were burned low, the fire in the peitchka had died away, the decanters were empty, and he saw a drowsy waiter hovering near him, that he rose to depart; for to him, now, all places seemed alike.

In the street a shower of tears revived him; and he wept unseen, like a great boy, while grinding his teeth and twisting his mustaches like a furious and desperate man. Russia, her laws, her rulers, her very air, he loathed and detested. But what was he to do?—which way was he to turn?—was he to permit these horrors, and live?

He had been present when the Regiment of Smolensko guarded the punishment of Madame Lapouchin, one of the most beautiful women of the Imperial Court, where she shone like a planet, was loved, admired, and more than once fought for. An alleged conspiracy brought her to the knout in all her nude loveliness, in the light of open day; and Charlie remembered that sickening scene, before the eyes of assembled thousands, and how, as the Abbé d'Anterroche records, "in a few moments all the skin of her tender back was cut away in small slips,



most of which remained hanging on her shift. Her tongue was cut out, immediately after; and she was banished into Siberia.”

“Oh Natalie, Natalie!” he could but repeat, while he wrung his hands; and thus the dawn of day found him.

After mature consideration of his position, his powerlessness, and the difficulties that beset him, with the horrors impending over Natalie, poor Charlie Balgonie felt maddened, crushed, and heart-broken. Could he see her perish without a struggle, an effort, however reckless, fruitless, and futile, on her behalf, even if he pistoled the executioner? Could he know that she too, probably, would die, in agony and mutilation, a horrible and ignominious death,—she, so gentle, delicate, and pure,—and would he survive it?

“Hearts will break in this life,” says a recent writer; “it is the nature of them; but if God wills it, and it were possible, it is honest, braver, and nobler to live than to die.” Most true; but to live is to hope. Balgonie vaguely, but sternly, resolved that he would do something, or—like the hero of a melodrama—“die in the attempt;” but being a poor, bewildered, loving young fellow, he could in no way practically see what that something might be.

Let not the reader flatter himself or herself that their own beloved country was entirely free from legal barbarism at this time; for in the very year



of Ivan's murder,—the fourth year of the reign of His Majesty George III.,—a woman was *burned* at the stake in Ilchester for poisoning her husband. During the reign of his son, more than one head was chopped off for treason; and women were flogged by the tap of drum, for petty theft, at the Market Cross of Edinburgh. Neither need the superstitions of the poor Muscovites excite surprise, when we find, in 1867, Highlanders in Scotland putting clay figures into running streams to bring consumption and wasting upon their enemies; burying a living cock (as the Pagan sacrificed to Hermes) to cure epilepsy; and a woman in Somersetshire\* cooking toads in a pan, exactly as the “black and midnight hags” did in the days of Macbeth, for the amiable purpose of bewitching her neighbors. So truly does the world reproduce itself, in spite of its boasted civilization.

The next day was not far advanced when Balgonie was summoned by General Weymarn, whose staff he had been resolving to quit; but for what purpose, or whether to go, he knew not. With something of a shudder, he beheld the Stepniak—the comrade and confederate of the late Nicholas Paulovitch—leaving the General's quarters.

Save that he wore scarlet livery of his new trade,—torture and death,—he was unchanged, and

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\* *Western Gazette*, September, 1867.



was the same hideous and ill-visaged giant—with square shoulders, enormous beard, mouse-like eyes, hair shorn off straight across the beetle brows, and the pine-apple shaped head—whom Balgonie had seen in the hut where the wretched Podatchkine perished. He was now public executioner of St. Petersburg; under his felon hands had poor Mierowitz and Mariolizza been, and ere long would Natalie be!

Weymarn was a grave and stern, yet not unkind, old soldier; and on preceiving that his young aide-de-camp looked pale, he spoke to him with unusual kindness, and added:—

“I am sorry to say, that I have a new duty of importance for you to perform.”

“Thanks, General; any excitement is better than—than idleness.”

“True. You will have to ride to Schlüsselburg with an escort, composed of six Cossacks of the Imperial Guard, and bring hither in a kabitka the sum of eighty thousand roubles, which are there in canvass bags, *sealed*. They have been levied on the estates of the Count Mierowitz. You will receive them from the officer commanding there; give a signed receipt, and deliver them into the Imperial Treasury.”

Balgonie bowed in silence.

The General, who, of course, knew well the corrupt venality of the Russian service, added:—



“If the sum is brought *entire* to the Treasury, Carl Ivanovitch, a reasonable gratuity will, of course, be paid you.

“Excellency, I require none for doing my duty, either in this or any other matter,” replied Balgonie coldly, even haughtily.

“As you please, sir,—as you please. Some among us might be less particular,” said the old General, tugging his grisly mustaches. “And stay; by-the-bye, there is a prisoner in Schlusselfburg, whose sentence is to be executed to-morrow, in presence of the assembled troops and people here——”

Balgonie thought of but *one* prisoner there; and an icy chill came over him, as Weymarn said—

“With the escort and the kabitka, Captain, you will, at the same time, bring the culprit here.”

“And—and this pris—on—oner, Excellency?” faltered the poor fellow.

“Is Jagouski, the Cossack, who so severely wounded Colonel Bernikoff when in the execution of his duty.”

Charlie breathed more freely.

“An order will be necessary for you—a special order: since the affair of that wretched young fellow Mierowitz, we cannot be too particular; so take this:—

“*To the officer commanding in Schlusselfburg.*

“You are hereby directed to deliver to



Captain Carl Ivanovitch Balgonie, of the Smolensko Regiment, the prisoner who is to be executed to-morrow.

“ ‘ WEYMARN, *Lieutenant General.*’

“ For the delivery of the money, here is a separate order from the Treasurer.—Adieu.”



## CHAPTER XXIII.

WILL HE SUCCEED ?

**A**S Balgonie left the presence of General Weymarn, a sudden light broke through the darkness of his mind—an unlooked-for thought ; and hope suddenly inspired him, and a prayer of thanks to Heaven rose to his lips therefore. No prisoner was actually designated by *name* in the written order of the General !

Thus, in lieu of the Cossack Jagouski, he would demand that Natalie Mierowna be given into his custody ; and with her he would escape, quit Russia and the service of the Empress at all risks.

He had no papers—no leave of absence, or passport ; but, as the epaulette is an all-powerful badge in Russia, his uniform and his sabre would be passports enough. For the rest, he must trust to his own love and courage, and to his knowledge of the country. But then there was the Cossack escort—how was he to rid himself of it ? The same kind Heaven which favored and inspired him now, would not fail to do so, he hoped, when the crisis came.

While his best horse was being saddled and accounted, and even when the escort was at the door,



he consulted, till the last moment, the map of Russia, and also that of Finland, which was not ceded to the latter till forty-four years after; and he made notes of his proposed route. Escape by sea, by the Lake of Ladoga, or by the shore of the Gulf, were alike impossible.

There was no way for it but to ride, at all hazards, toward the frontier of Finland, or the shores of the Lake of Saima; they would there be safe, beyond pursuit—safe among the hospitable Swedes, who are always hostile to the grasping and aggressive Russians. And so for nearly an hour he sat, compass in hand, calculating the chances and measuring the distances, while his brain grew giddy, and his heart was sick, with mingled hope, anxiety, and a love that was full of terror and compassion.

At last he saw his way clearly, as he thought, through Viborg, from Schlüsselburg, north-westward, in safety. He put all the money he possessed—not much certainly—about his person in gold; filled his cartridge-box with ammunition, and buckled on his sabre.

“By this time to-morrow,” he muttered, as he glanced at his watch “the game will have been won or—lost!”

He then mounted, with a resolute heart, and set forth, having with him a light kabitka, or covered wagon, drawn by a single horse, and attended by his escort—six Malo-Russian Cossacks, who wore



the uniform of Hussars, and who were all stout, athletic, and noble-looking fellows, whose clean-limbed, active, and hardy little horses, unmatched for strength and speed, made Balgonie speculate painfully and anxiously on his slender chance of outstripping them, if pursued.

It was considerably past the noon of an October day—a dark, lowering, and ominous day—when they set out for Schlüsselburg, and ere long the rain began to fall heavily, soaking the Hussar finery of the Cossacks of the Guard; but Charlie Balgonie rode silently on at their head, heedless of the blind-torrents and the bellowing wind; though he little knew that as the darkness increased, and the early night drew on, that the waters of the lake and river were rising fast, and that a peril, of which he had no conception, already menaced the existence of Natalie.

But her voice seemed to be ever whispering in his ear—

“Carl, Carl—my beloved Carl, come to my aid—save me—help me, if you love me!”

When they were mid-way to Schlüsselburg, the kabitka driver, who was either sleepy or tipsy, fell awkwardly from his seat, and broke his right arm. What was to be done now?

No Cossack of the Guard would condescend to supply his place, and for more than an hour the party remained halted in a desolate spot, near a



pine wood, while looking about to capture the first peasant, serf, or civilian of any kind, whom they might meet, and press him into the service, as a temporary whip, in the employ of the Empress.

A skulking and somewhat sulky boor, in a fur cap and canvas caftan, leather leggings and bark shoes, who had been smoking his pipe under a great tree, was, ere long, discovered, dragged forward, and, with sundry oaths and threats, commanded to mount the shaft and act as driver, which he did, with a reluctance he was at no pains to conceal.

Knowing how necessary it was to control or to conciliate this new acquisition, Balgonie asked him a few questions, with sternness, but yet with politeness.

The serf was a singularly handsome young man, with eagle-like eyes, and an aquiline nose, that was almost hooked; he was without his mustasche, which seemed to have been recently shaved off; but he had a curly red beard, with a complexion of well-nigh Asiatic darkness.

“Trust me, dear Carl Ivanovitch,” said he, in a low and impressive voice, that was strangely familiar to Balgonie. “My disguise, I find is complete indeed, when it deceives even you; but speak in French.”

“Your disguise—yours?”

“Yes,—I am Apollo Usakoff,” he added through his teeth.

“Heaven be blessed for this new omen of suc-



cess ?” exclaimed Balgonie, in French. “And you were not drowned ?”

“No ; I swam down the Neva, under water, escaping many a bullet—got ashore, and reached the old place in the wood, where Olga, the Gipsy, stained my face, trimmed and dyed my beard, as you see. She is quite an artist, that girl ! Even Mariolizza would not know me now.”

Balgonie sighed as the poor fellow spoke. Mutilated and disfigured as she was now, would he have known *her* ? He evidently knew nothing of the barbarities to which she had been subjected, so Balgonie resolved, mercifully, to keep him in ignorance ; and they proceeded at an easy pace together, he keeping his horse close by the shaft of the kabitka, on which the pretended peasant rode ; and, as they spoke in French, a language unknown to their ignorant and half-savage escort, Usakoff, in referring to the late event and its failure, poured out all the bitterness, the hate, and fury of his soul, against the Government, the Councillors, and the rule of the Empress ; and, of course, entered with fervor into the scheme of an escape with Natalie. But still their ultimate plans were undecided, when they saw the red flash of the evening gun, as it pealed from Schlüsselburg, amid the murky haze of a wet and stormy sunset ; and ere long they saw the lights that glittered at times from amid the massive towers and black outline of that old castle (the scene of so many



terrors, sufferings, and atrocities) streaming and wavering on the turbulent waters of the lake, and the wet slime of the sluices and ditches.

When, all dripping and jaded, the escort halted and dismounted under the castle arch, Balgonie found that some changes were taking place in the executive of the fortress.

Bernikoff, whose wounds had been inflamed to gangrene, by passion, rage, and vodka, was at that moment actually on his death-bed, with Father Chrysostom kneeling by his side. The old sinner was in all the agonies and terrors of reviewing his past life on one hand, and anticipating the coming change on the other. Many pounds of perfumed wax candles were flaming now round the effigy of St. Sergius, whom, in weak and querulous accents, he implored for intercession, alternately with the Chaplain, to whose cassock he clung tenaciously, and to whom he was mingling threats of punishment, if he permitted him to fare ill in the other world, or omitted masses for his soul's repose. And that superstition and absurdity might not be wanting amid this solemn but repulsive scene, from which Balgonie hurried away with more disgust than pity, Bernikoff was dying in the habit of a *friar*, with cowl, cord, beads, and sandals, hoping even on his death-bed, as Ivan the Terrible hoped, when similarly arrayed and disguised, to cheat the devil, if that dread personage came for his sinful soul.



The cowl and other paraphernalia he had obtained from the Chamberlain, or wardrobe-keeper, of the Troitza monastery near the Louga—a cowl that had laid on the mummy of the uncorrupted saint in the silver-shrine;—and almost with his last breath, he threatened Father Chrysostom with a drum-head court-martial for venturing to hint that this attempt to mask his past life was vain without true repentance.

Leaving this scene, Balgonie presented the order of General Weymarn and that of the Treasurer, to Captain Vlasfief, who was now in command, and to whom he stated that “the prisoner referred to was Mademoiselle Natalie Mierowna.”

“Carl Ivanovitch,” said the Captain, “you cannot think of leaving to-night in such a storm of wind and rain?”

“I’ve seen worse in Silesia,” said Balgonie, looking to the locks of his pistols.

“What of that?”

“But the *verbal* order of the General was most peremptory.”

“Ah!—and you have brought a kabitka for the money?”

“A kabitka for the prisoner, also—so be quick, Captain.”

“’Tis a large sum in roubles,” mused the other.

“I am in haste to be gone!—the prisoner—you hear me sir?” said Balgonie, impatiently.



“By all the devils, you seem more anxious about the prisoner than the treasure!” responded Vlasfief sulkily, as he knocked the ashes from his pipe, but still delayed to move.

“You have my orders—I come in the name of the Empress—let there be no delay, Captain Vlasfief,” was the curt reply.

“Bring in two Cossacks of the escort; the money is here in seventy bags, each containing a thousand roubles.”

“Excuse me, but the order of the Imperial Treasurer says expressly *eighty* sealed bags of a thousand each,” said Balgonie, trembling with anxiety, yet compelled to appear to take an interest when he really felt none.

“Ten thousand are missing,” said Vlasfief, leisurely, refilling his pipe.

“Missing!”

“Yes. Suppose,” he added in a whisper, “suppose we divide the lost sum between us, and offer a thousand to the Treasurer.”

“Impossible, sir!” said Balgonie, with a fiery and impatient manner.

“Well, well—there are the other ten sealed bags,” added Captain Vlasfief, with a dark and stealthy frown of greed and hate, as the Cossacks tossed the whole among the straw of the kabitka: “it matters little; but I hope you may not find the road *beset*, and so lose the whole.”



“To be forewarned, sir, is to be forearmed,” said Balgonie, touching his pistols; for he quite understood the treachery implied, and only trembled lest it might mar his dearest plans. “And now, sir, for my prisoner.”

“If she be not drowned; for the lower vaults are apt to be flooded on such a night as this, said Vlasfief spitefully.

Writhing under the keen glances of this low born Muscovite, Belgonie felt that all now depended upon his outward and assumed bearing of coolness and carelessness. Night favored him in this, and his face was almost concealed. Could any one then have read his heart, as he, Usakoff, two Cossacks, and two soldiers of the mainguard made their way down, down through dark and slimy passages and stairs, till they were foot deep and then knee deep in the water that flooded the low and humid corridors, off which were the arched doors of numerous cells—corridors where spiders spun their webs, rats were swimming, and terrified bats flew wildly to and fro!

Erelong they reached the door, through the cranies of which despairing cries and painful gaspings had been heard; and after unlocking, forced it open by main strength.

“A great flood of water poured from the aperture amid the darkness,” says the *Utrecht Gazette*, “and with it came the body of the poor lady, who was well nigh drowned.”



So the red light seen by Natalie was no fancy, but that of the lamp which was borne by one of those who came just in time to save her from the same terrible death by which the Princess Orloff perished.

Lest all might be perilled by a recognition, Balgonie was compelled to retire and leave her in the Chaplain's hands till she was restored to consciousness, to warmth, and till she was habited anew; and he passed three dreadful hours of doubt and anxiety, while pacing to and fro in the cold and gloomy archways of the fortress, and having to conceal his face when she was brought forth and supported into the kabitka, to which two *fresh* horses were now traced. Usakoff sprang on the shaft and flourished his whip; then the cossacks and Balgonie put spurs to their chargers, and clattered over the wet drawbridge, just as the passing bell for the departure of Bernikoff's tortured spirit rang ominously and solemnly on the stormy gusts of that black and gloomy night.

Balgonie, instead of proceeding by the way he had come, avoided the town of Schlüsselburg, and wheeled off to the right, committing himself partly to the guidance of Usakoff, and quite in ignorance that, about an hour before, Vlasfief, who could by no means let so many roubles escape without paying toll, had beset two of the roads by chosen followers of his own—men whom he hoped might pass for



some of the adherents of the late Prince Ivan, rescuing the daughter of the exiled Count Mierowitz.

A strange incident occurred before the interment of old Bernikoff, who had a pompous military funeral. The bottom of his grave was found to be on fire!

A Scottish doctor (named Rogerson, we believe) at Catharine's Court attempted to explain this phenomenon, as resulting from a species of ironstone which was saturated with the phosphorus supplied by the bones of old interments, and which had been ignited by the friction of the sexton's shovel; but the superstitious Russians took a very different and much more diabolical view of the matter, and laughed to scorn the learned opinion of the Scottish pundit.



## CHAPTER XXIV.

### CONCLUSION.

THEIR horses were tolerably refreshed by the halt at Schlüsselburg, and the nags which drew the light kabitka had been quite unused, so the whole party pushed on at a brisk pace by the road towards the frontiers of Finland—the Cossacks of the escort, whatever they thought, making neither remark nor inquiry, as they trusted obediently and implicitly to the officer who led them ; but the darkness of the October morning, the deep and muddy, stony and rough, nature of the roads, and the violence of the storm, ere long began to have a severe effect upon their cattle, and, to the great satisfaction of Balgonie, two of the troopers gradually dropped to the rear, and were seen no more.

Now the Corporal of the Cossacks ventured to hint, that “ perhaps they were not pursuing the way they had come, as the lights in St. Isaac’s Cathedral must have been visible long ago ; ” but Balgonie replied, haughtily and briefly, that he “ had *special orders.* ”

Then the Corporal urged a short halt, as the horses were sinking ; but again Balgonie replied,



that he "had peculiar orders, and must push on."

After passing a little village with a windmill, several miles from the shore of the Lake of Ladoga, the road dipped down into a dark hollow, between impending crags of granite, the grey faces of which were already beginning to brighten in the first light of the lagging October sun. The rain and wind were over; the hollow way was full of rolling and perplexing mist; but Usakoff affirmed with confidence that he knew the country well.

Out of the grey vapor, from both sides of the path, there flashed, redly and luridly, five or six muskets! One bullet struck white splinters from the kabitka, eliciting a shriek from its occupant; another whistled through the mane of Charlie's horse; and a third killed one of the Cossacks, who died without a groan, for it passed fairly through his temples.

The way was beset by armed men, whose numbers and disposition, the dim light, or, rather, the darkness and the mist, alike served to conceal.

"Make way, in the name of the Empress!" cried Balgonie, dashing forward, with his sabre drawn; "Nay, I command you, on your peril and allegiance!" he added, as the threatening words of Vlasief occurred to him; and, to his astonishment and dismay, he saw that personage actually appear, mounted and armed, wearing a regimental hat and plume, with a kind of dark green tunic, or patrol



jacket, richly braided with gold, and trimmed heavily with black fur. His party, who seemed all on foot, were clad like peasants, but were armed with muskets, which they were rapidly casting about and re-loading.

“Halt, in the name of the Empress—halt, I command you! for this is *not* the way to St. Petersburg, whether the prisoner and treasure were to be conveyed. Treason! treason!” shouted the Staff-Captain Vlasfief.

Balgonie fired a pistol at his head; but the Captain's horse reared, or was compelled to do so by bit and spur, for the bullet pierced its throat; and with an oath, Vlasfief fell on the pathway, entangled in the stirrups as the animal sunk under him.

The three remaining Cossacks, who were somewhat bewildered by the attack, by the appearance of Vlasfief, whom they knew, and whose confident bearing confirmed certain gathering suspicions that something was wrong as to their route, now drew their sabres, aimed several blows at Usakoff's head, and endeavored to cut the reins of his horse, or stab it between the shafts, as he lashed the animal almost to racing speed, and the light kabitka, jolted, rolled, and bounded along the rough road behind it.

By another pistol-shot Balgonie rid himself of the Cossack Corporal, whose bridle arm he broke, while facing about and galloping in rear of the



kabitka; and now with wild hallooes, the entire party of armed men followed it on foot, with all speed, up a steep slope, over which the path wound.

Usakoff ground his teeth, for he was without weapons, and passive in the flying combat; but, being fertile in expedients, he tore open a bag of roubles, and scattered them on the upland road with a ready and reckless hand.

The bright silver coins proved too exciting for the cupidity of the pursuers, who loitered to pick them up, tumbling, scrambling, rising and falling over each other, with shouts, curses, and maledictions, their fire-arms sometimes exploding the while; and so the whole were speedily left behind, as the kabitka, guarded now by Balgonie alone, was driven along a lonely and unfrequented road, that led to the little town of Pomphela.

“Thanks, dear Usakoff—thanks for your presence of mind,” said Balgonie; “I had forgot all about those roubles.”

“Silver has achieved for us what neither our lead or steel would have done!”

“But, to lighten the kabitka, let us throw out those remaining bags—this perilous lumber, the intended recapture of which has nearly cost us our lives—honour—all, at the hands of Vlasfief.”

“Nay, nay, never! Lumber, say you? The roubles are Natalie’s—hers and mine—hers and yours, when you wed her; they have saved us once,



and may do so again," replied Usakoff cheerfully, as the sun burst forth in his clear October splendor, and they saw the dome-shaped cupola of the Church of Pomphela rising with a golden gleam from amid the white morning haze.

There Balgonie's uniform and a display of gold and roubles operated powerfully on the Postmaster who, without asking for passports or other papers, at once, and in the name of the Empress, supplied them with fresh horses for the frontier, towards which, after procuring some proper nourishment and restoratives for Natalie, they pushed on without a moment of unnecessary delay.

"Ah," thought Balgonie, with a shudder and a prayer; "had Jagouski's name *not* been omitted in that order of Weymarn, where would she have been now?"

Pale with sorrow and long suffering, her face was still beautiful, though sorely wasted; the deep thoughtful eyes had yet a wealth—a world of tenderness in their liquid depths; and the long dark hair was thick, soft, and wavy as ever, as it fell in masses behind the small, compact, and finely-formed head.

Yet, withal, her wretchedness had been extreme, having been so suddenly and rudely rent from all those habits of luxury and tender nurture, which had become, as it were, a second nature; and often, very often, had it occurred to her in her later



misery of soul "that the repose of the grave is sweet, and that there cometh after death a levelling and making even of things which would at last cure all her evils."

But all was changed now ; and, as she laid her head on Charlie's breast, she felt content—almost happy ; and the horrors that hung over her family alone prevented her, as yet, from being completely so.

No trace of pursuers were behind them now, though their flight must by this time have been known both in the capital and at Schlüsselburg. But in those days there were neither railroads nor electric telegraphs ; so, riding on more leisurely, Balgonie changed horses again near Viborg, and ere long the great Lake of Saima appeared before them, with the distant hills of Swedish Finland beyond its friendly waters.

A boat was procured there ; the kabitka was abandoned ; and with a shout of joy, Usakoff assisted the Finnish boatman to hoist the great lug-sail to catch the breeze of a balmy and beautiful evening, as they bade a long farewell to Russia and all its terrors.

In a quaint old Church of Finland, by the eastern shore of the Lake of Saima, and in view of its little archipelago of granite isles,—a lonely little fane, buried amid groves of plum and cherry trees, built of wood and painted red, with a little bell jang-



ling in its humble belfry,—Charlie Balgonie and his fugitive bride were united by the old Curate, with the consent of the Lutheran Bishop of Heinola; and there a thousand roubles spent among the poor spread in the primitive district a happiness, the tradition of which is still remembered with many a grateful exaggeration.

After this, poor Usakoff, finding himself perhaps, as a third person, rather in the way, left them to become a soldier of fortune; and he is supposed to have perished in one of the Polish struggles for freedom; at least, they heard of him no more, after their final journey to Scotland.

Two years before these events, it would appear that Charlie's uncle, "the godly and upright" Gamaliel Balgonie, merchant, magistrate, and elder, had departed in peace to sin no more, leaving the lands and possessions of Balgonie unimpaired; and a long tombstone in that famous city of the dead, the Howff of Dundee, records at length all the virtues which his contemporaries in general and the Presbytery in particular believed him to possess.

So Carl Ivanovitch became once more Balgonie of that ilk; and the roubles of Natalie added many a turret and many an acre to his patrimonial dwelling in beautiful Strathearn.



## L'ENVOI.—ILLUSTRATIVE NOTE.

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TO convince the reader how nearly History has been followed in the previous pages, we shall take the liberty of inserting the subsequent manifesto, published with reference to the death of Ivan IV.

“By the Grace of God, we, Catharine the Second, Empress and Autocratrice of all the Russias, &c., &c., to all whom these presents may concern:

When by the divine will, and in compliance with the unanimous desires of our faithful subjects, we ascended the throne of Russia, we were not ignorant that Ivan, son of Anthony, Prince of Brunswick-Wolfenbittel, and of the Princess Anne of Mecklenburgh was still alive. This Prince, as is well known, was immediately after his birth unlawfully declared heir to the imperial crown; *but*, by the decrees of Providence, he was soon after irrevocably excluded from that high dignity, and the sceptre was placed in the hands of the lawful heiress, Elizabeth (daughter of Peter the Great), our beloved aunt of glorious memory.



“After we had ascended the throne, and offered up to Heaven our just thanksgiving, the first object that employed our thoughts, in consequence of *that humanity which is so natural to us*, was the unhappy situation of that Prince, who was *dethroned* by *divine Providence*, and had been unfortunate since his birth . . . .

“To prevent, therefore, ill-intentioned persons from giving him any trouble, or from making use of his name to disturb the public tranquility, we gave him a guard, and placed about his person two officers, in whose fidelity and integrity we could confide. These were Captain Vlasfief and Lieutenant Tschekin, who, by their long military services, deserved a suitable recompense, and a station in which they might pass quietly the remainder of their days. They were accordingly charged with the care of the Prince, and were strictly enjoined to let none approach him. Yet, all these precautions were not sufficient. ♥ . . . .

“A *Put-parooschick* (a sub-lieutenant) of the Regiment of Smolensko, a native of the Ukraine, Basil Mierowitz, (grandson of the first rebel that followed Mazzeppa), took it into his head to make use of this Prince, to advance his fortune at all events, without being restrained by a consideration of the bloody scene that such an attempt might occasion. In order to execute this detestable, dangerous, and desperate project, he contrived, during our absence



in Livonia, to be upon guard in the fortress of Schlüsselburg, where the guard is relieved every eight days; and the 15th of last month, about two in the morning, he called out the main guard, formed it in line, and ordered the soldiers to load with ball. Bernikoff, Governor of the fortress, came out of his apartment, and asked Mierowitz the reason of the disturbance, but received no other answer from this rebel than a blow with the butt-end of his musket. . . . .

“ Captain Vlasfief and Lieutenant Tschekin seeing that it was impossible to resist such a superior force, and considering the unhappy consequences that must ensue from the deliverance of THE PERSON who was committed to their care, after deliberating together, took the only step that they thought proper, to maintain public tranquillity, which was to *cut short the days of the unfortunate Ivan*. Mierowitz, on seeing the dead body of the Prince, was so confounded by a sight he so little expected, that he acknowledged his temerity and guilt, and discovered his repentance to the troops, whom, about an hour before, he had seduced from their duty, and rendered the accomplices of his crime.

“ Then it was that the two officers who had nipped this rebellion in the bud, joined the Governor of the fortress in securing this rebel, and bringing back the soldiers to their duty. They also sent to our Privy Councillor Count Panin, *under whose orders they*



*acted*, a relation of this event, which, though unhappy, has nevertheless, *under the protection of Heaven*, prevented still greater calamities. This Senator despatched immediately *Pulovnick* (Colonel) Caschkin, with sufficient instructions to maintain tranquillity on the spot (or where the assassination was committed), and sent us, at the same time, a circumstantial account of the whole affair. In consequence of this, we ordered Lieutenant-General Weymarn, of the division of St. Petersburg, to take the necessary information on the spot; and the confession of the villain himself, who has acknowledged his crime.

“Sensible of its enormity and consequences with regard to the peace of our country, we have referred the whole affair to the consideration of our Senate, which we have ordered, jointly with the Synod, to invite the three first classes and the Presidents of all the Colleges to hear the verbal relation of General Weymarn, who has taken the proper informations, to pronounce sentence in consequence thereof, and to present it to us, for confirmation of the same.

“CATHARINE.”

By a singular species of sophistry, the guilt of Ivan's death is thus, by a subsequent document, transferred to Basil Mierowitz:—

“As the violent death of the unfortunate Prince Ivan was the immediate consequence of the des-



perate attempt of Mierowitz, so must this officer be considered as the principle cause of this assassination—nay, even regarded as *the murderer of that unhappy Prince.*”

To this, five Russian Bishops appended their signatures.

Vlasfief was made a General, and his Lieutenant a Colonel, in the following year with a pension of ten thousand roubles each.





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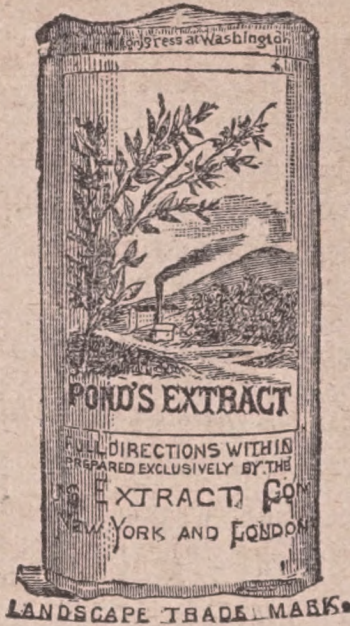
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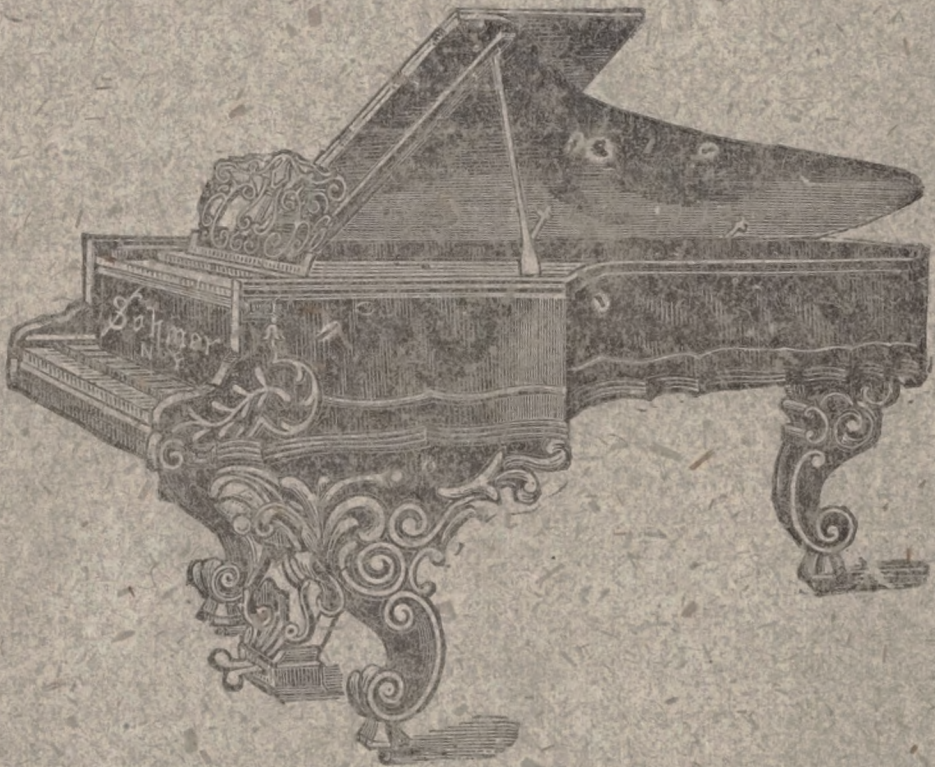
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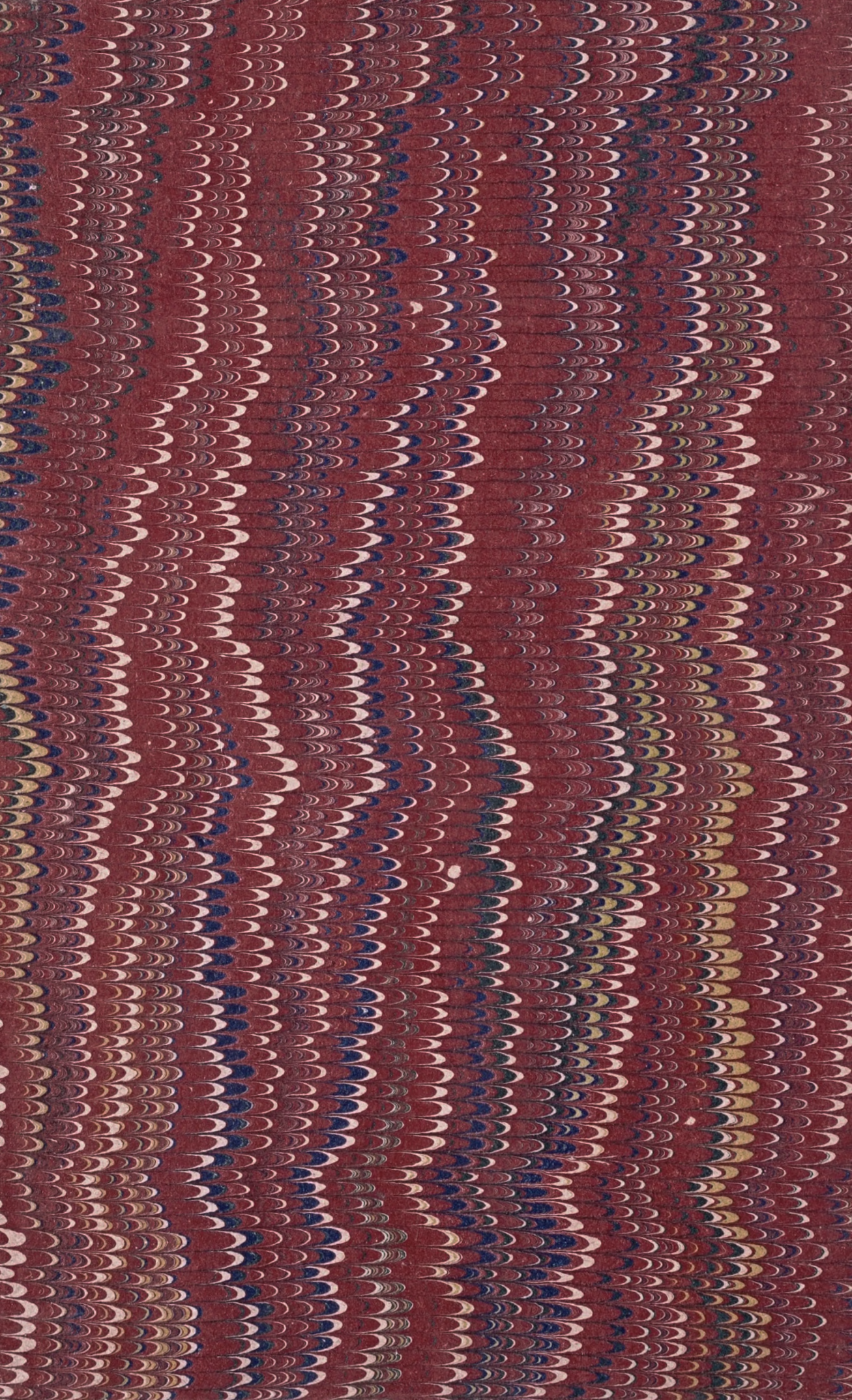




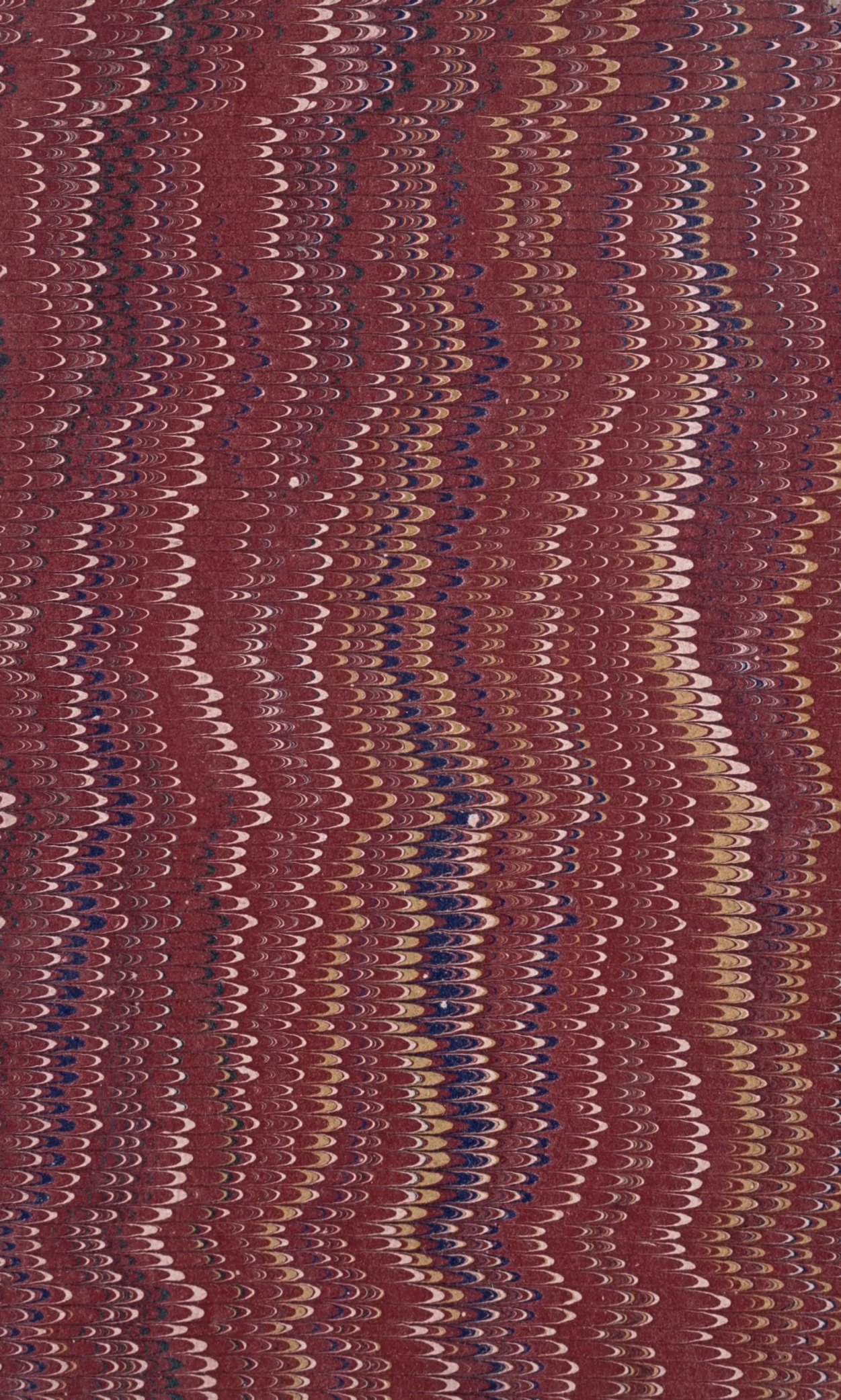














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