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I. A. Rostk -
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DMITRI

πολλὰ μορφαὶ τῶν δαιμονίων,
πολλὰ δ' ἀέλπτως κραίνουσι θεοί,
καὶ τὰ δοκηθέντ' οὐκ ἐτελέσθη,
τῶν δ' ἀδοκῆτων πρόρον ἦυρε θεός,
τοιόνδ' ἀπέβη τόδε πρᾶγμα.

EURIPIDES.

D M I T R I

A TRAGI COMEDY

BY

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FELLOW OF ALL SOULS COLLEGE, OXFORD

PERCIVAL AND CO.

KING STREET, COVENT GARDEN

London

1890

955
B162
dmi

TO
MY UNKNOWN FRIENDS
OF
NOV. IV. MDCCCLXXXIX

NOTE

DEAD WORDS are but a sorry makeshift for action: when they step out of their province and attempt to express feeling, character, emotion,—poor bunglers, they want an Interpreter. Like busy, glibly chattering guides, they can only show us round and round the *outside* of the cathedral, gesticulating at the dull grey windows. Only to MUSIC is it given to open the door with her skeleton key, that fits all locks, and let us in to the glories of the stained glass.

Whoever, then, knows the twenty-second of Chopin's Mazurkas, knows more than words can tell him of the story of MARINA; and the Overture to Bizet's Carmen is the 'Open, Sesame!' to the fortunes of DMITRI.

I have only to add that the story is true.

I

. . . *l'essentiel, c'est la légende* . . .

DOSTOIEFFSKY.

I

‘NASTASIA!’

The shout rang out into the still afternoon, startling a passing raven, which flapped hastily away over the steppe.

‘*Nastasia!* NASTASIA!’

The door of the farmhouse suddenly burst open, and an old man, obviously drunk, in a dirty, slate-coloured smock, reeled out unsteadily into the yard, kicking over unconsciously a trough standing before the door, in which a meagre-looking dog was feeding in a timid way, its tail between its legs. Half a dozen fowls, who were assisting the dog in his meal, fled clucking in all directions.

‘Where can that devil of a girl be? Nastasia, where are you? She’s off again; plague take the jade.’

He staggered across the yard, and peered into a dilapidated barn that did duty for a stable.

‘The horse gone. I thought so; ay, she’s after some young devil of a Cossack, I’ll be bound. Here, Osip! Osip!’

A half-grown youth, picturesquely clad in nothing whatever but a shirt, to which bits of hay and dust were sticking, appeared suddenly round the barn, rubbing his little eyes with one hand, and carrying a bucket, as though to mark his occupation, in the other. He did not wait to be questioned, but said at once, in a whining tone—

‘I heard the hoofs an hour ago; she went *there*,’ and he pointed towards Jitomir. ‘She always goes that way.’

‘And why didn’t you tell me?’

‘You were asleep.’

‘*You* were asleep, you mean, you lazy good-for-nothing scamp. Look at that dog’s pan lying there upside down; you’ve been in the loft sleeping, any one can see by your shirt. I believe you would sleep all day if you could. Don’t stand there yawning; be off, and clean up all that—at once, do you hear?’

‘Curse that girl, the Tartars will teach her to go scampering about one fine day! Devil take her, I’ll make her hide smart for it.’

He turned and shuffled back into the house, leaving the door open behind him. Osip forthwith retired to his lair in the barn, and was soon asleep again. The cur and the fowls sneaked cautiously back, and resumed their interrupted meal. The steppe was once more quiet.

II.

The dying sun threw his yellow beams over Volhynia, past the low range of hills of the Ukraine, and lengthened the shadows cast by the spires of Jitomir. A waving track in the tall prairie grass marked the passage through it of a traveller, as yet invisible below. Presently he emerged on to the side of the hill, and drew his rein for an instant, as he turned to look at the scene.

His easy seat on horseback seemed out of keeping with his dress, which was merely that of the Russian peasant—a coarse shirt, wide

trousers, and big boots. His heavy brows, square jaw—hidden by neither beard nor moustache, for he was not more than two or three and twenty,—and the calm of his grey eye, gave an expression of great decision to his face; while his reddish hair seemed to contradict the otherwise thoroughly Russian thickness of the nose and prominent cheek-bones. His position disguised the fact that he was below the ordinary height, though it accentuated the extraordinary breadth of his shoulders.

His horse grew tired of waiting—while his master looked over the country, apparently more occupied with his own thoughts than the beauty of the landscape—and began cropping the grass.

Presently the young man came to himself with a start, and began to gather up his rein.

‘Poor Natacha; I wonder how she will take it. She will manage. Anyhow, she must get over it how she can. I daresay, perhaps, she doesn’t care so *very* much about me, after all. Yes, I must be off. I wish I hadn’t got to say good-bye to her; somehow, I wish it was over. Well, it’s got to be *done*.

‘After all, what fools we are. It seems so absurd. The whole thing is simply—ridiculous, *impossible, mad*. Yes, I believe I must be mad. However, anything’s better than this unendurable, idle, obscure existence. I am getting like a cabbage. Yes, *anything* rather than this. Well, Otrépieff shall decide.’

He kicked his horse, and went off at a gallop.

III

Meanwhile, a mile away, in a little dell, where, by one of Nature’s happy accidents, two or three trees combined with a dip in the ground to form an arbour, as it were expressly designed for such idyllic uses, the demon of impatience devoured the eager soul of Nastasia.

She had been there two hours already. She had come an hour *before* her time, but had not bargained on waiting yet another hour *after* it. Having tied her horse to a stump, first she sat and waited. Then she frowned, tried to sing, cried, and thought of going home

again, but immediately reproached herself for the thought; counted the leaves on the nearest trees, pulled a few flowers to pieces, and then cried again.

Finally she jumped up, and had recourse to a little country magic. Seating herself cross-legged on the ground, she stripped off one by one the young shoots of a fresh twig, crooning to herself the while an old Lithuanian charm—

The young men of our town—are fair as the day,
But my young man—is fairer than they.

I went to Kaminietz—to the fair,
But among the dragoons—he was not there.

I went into—the meadows green,
But there my darling—was not to be seen,

Little lark,—that soarest on high,
Dost thou see—my beloved nigh?

Wind, wind,—that blowest so free,
Blow my darling—here to me.

Suddenly her horse whinnied. With a cry of joy she broke off, and caught the sound of hoofs rapidly approaching. The next minute she threw herself into the arms of DMITRI.

IV

She quite forgot to scold him for being late. She clung to him in her delight as only a woman very much in love can cling.

All at once she broke away :

‘ You don’t love me now ; you don’t kiss me like you used to. Oh, Dmitri, and I love you so much ! ’ And she burst into tears.

Dmitri felt a twinge. But he said :

‘ Little fool, you mustn’t judge everybody by yourself. I didn’t know you thought so much of a squeeze. But come, now you shall have one. ’

He held out his arms, but she drew back.

‘ No, you bad boy, you shall not touch me ; you shall only *look* at me. And I’m worth looking at to-day, Dmitri dear ’—she smiled coquettishly through her tears.

Dmitri, thus admonished, stood and looked at her—her honest, expressive, loving eyes sparkling half with joy, half with tears ; her pale green skirt, white shirt, and red embroidered bodice ; her tiny feet in yellow boots ; and her dark hair

surmounted by the *kakoshnik*, and braided with strings of gold and silver coins—and felt that she had but spoken the truth.

‘Yes, Natacha, you are quite right; you are far too pretty to go roaming about the country by yourself. No, Natacha, there aren’t many girls hereabouts who could sit beside you.’

‘What do you know about other girls hereabouts? You are not to talk of them. Dmitri,’ she suddenly said, coming back to him, ‘where are your nice red boots and things, and why are you dressed like that? You are not *my* Cossack, in those horrid old rags!’

‘No,’ said Dmitri, ‘I don’t look very smart in these clothes; but make much of me, Natacha, all the same, in spite of the horrid old rags. I’m going away.’

‘Going away!’ she almost screamed, clutching his hand tight, and turning pale. ‘What do you mean?’ And suspicions, hitherto latent, rose on the instant into her heart.

‘Natacha,’ he began awkwardly, ‘you remember, I told you before, I might perhaps—that is, I should have to go away. I told you

some one might summon me ; well, he *has*, and I shall have to go.'

'To go !' Natacha's heart sank down, down, away from her ; she leaned against him for a moment, and her brain went round.

'Where are you going ? Why must you go ? *Who* has summoned you ? What are you going to do——'

'Stop, not so fast ; I can't tell you, Natacha, what I'm going to do—I hardly know myself. It sounds so strange. But I *must* go. I promised Otrépieff——'

'Ah, Otrépieff, that horrible man ; so *that's* it ! Well, you promised *me* too, and—don't go with him, Dmitri. He has the evil eye ; he is a bad man ; he scowled at me that day,—you will be killed. Dmitri, Dmitri, you *said* you would never leave me ! *Don't* go, *don't* leave me behind,—take me, take me with you. I can ride and shoot ; I will dress like a Cossack too ; I will be your groom. Do, *do* ; I will go *anywhere*——' She spoke with extraordinary rapidity ; a ray of hope darted into her soul.

'No, Natacha, you *can't* come. If you only knew ; it's impossible—you would be in the way.'

‘*In the way!*’ Fatal word. She grew cold and hard as a stone. Her suspicions became certainties and throttled her.

‘Ah! you are tired of me, that’s it! *In the way*—yes, you are right, I should be in the way.’ Her breast heaved.

‘Natacha, don’t look like that. You *won’t* understand——’

‘Yes, yes, I understand. It’s all right; I knew it would come. You are tired of me. I felt it before. I must go; I must get home—it’s getting late.’

‘Natacha!’

‘Good-bye!’ She ran to the entrance, and immediately ran back again. ‘Let me look at you; here, let me look at your face. There, now, you *want* to go? Yes! Don’t speak, don’t! Shall I ever see you again? Shall I ever——’ She clutched his hand without knowing it, despair in her eye; while her energy left him cold and awkward, and gave the proof to her terrible suspicions.

All of a sudden she ran out, jumped on her horse, and galloped away.

Dmitri followed her, irresolute and ashamed,

and stood watching her till she disappeared in the ocean of grass. Thus he remained a long while, his eye vacantly fixed on her track in the prairie.

Finally he drew a long breath, untied his horse, mounted, and rode away to Kieff.

V

The moonlight falls on the cold dark waters of Dnieper, and one long tremulous silver streak dances on the ripples. Across the stream, the double hill of Kieff with its sleeping monastery, a mingled mass of black and silver, juts up into the sky. Between, the deep hollow is buried in gloom. Here and there an isolated spark, the scanty ray of some midnight lamp, peers out into the night.

But all round the Russian Jerusalem the red fires of the pilgrims assembled together from all quarters of Holy Russia cast a lurid glow on their moving figures, or throw them into strong relief as they stand or sit in dark groups over the plain. The low hum of innumerable voices—the faint, mysterious, indescribable noises of a great

multitude—falls on the ear. Above, the dark blue vault of heaven, the silent, watchful, eternal, un pitying stars.

In one of these groups, on the very bank of the river, the flickering firelight falls on a tall man in the habit of a monk, his dark face wasted by privation or excess, his eye flashing with the glitter of enthusiasm, as he holds his circle of listeners spellbound with one of the old legends of Russia.

‘And as I wandered at sunrise on the shore, lo, I heard a sound coming from the sea. And I looked seawards, and saw a bark, and at the prow and the stern sat rowers, but their faces were hidden in mist. And in the middle, all shining in purple robes, stood the two sons of St. Vladimir, the holy martyrs, Boris and Gleb. And thus spoke Boris: “Brother Gleb, bid the rowers make haste, for we must bring help to our kinsman Alexander, the son of Yaroslaf.”

‘Then over me,’ said the Finn Pelgousy, ‘there fell great fear and trembling. And as I looked, behold, the ship vanished from before my eyes.

‘Then when Alexander heard his story he rejoiced, for he knew that the Lord and the

Blessed Brethren were on his side. And he fell on the pagans, and smote them with the edge of the sword, and drove them back into the Neva, and there was not one pagan left in the land. And hence he is called Nevski, the hero of Neva, to this day.'

The orator paused, his lips quivering, his whole frame trembling with emotion. His audience drew their breath, but remained silent.

'There are no heroes now,' observed at length a Bashkir from Tobolsk, whose face, like a ripe walnut, brown and dirty, looked out from a nest of furs—'no heroes, now that Yermak is dead. He was the last, but he is dead; there are no more.'

'No heroes now!' cried the monk, and his voice rose to a scream; he threw up his arms, and made a step nearer the fire. 'No heroes now, and why? Why? Because the Russians have forgotten their God, and lost their line of Rurik; because they have a pagan and a Tartar for a Tsar, who calls his Tartars into holy Russia and poisons our Tsars; who sets fire to our houses, and brings plagues and famines on the people. Why have we famines? Because God is angry with us, and

so He sends His famine to starve us to repentance. Ay, it is Boris Godunoff the Tartar; he is the curse of Russia. But the Lord will send a deliverer. Ay, I tell you, the day shall come, shall come soon, when a deliverer shall arise. I have had a dream, and the Lord spoke to me: "Behold, I will send my people a deliverer, even as I delivered them of old by the hand of Dmitri Donski, of the line of Rurik; for ye think that he is dead, but he shall come, and smite Boris, and drive him out, and take possession." Yes, the Lord spoke in a vision, and I tell you no lie. Prince Dmitri is not dead, but shall come again,—soon, O Lord, soon; let it be soon.'

He fell back exhausted, but his lips muttered. The spectators moved uneasily. 'A shaman, a great shaman,' murmured a converted Kalmuck, who stood near.

'He speaks truth!' exclaimed a pilgrim excitedly; 'tis the plagues and famines and the evil Tsar, who has made the Russians serfs, and not free, and loves not the Russian people.'

'How should he love the Russian people, Boris Godunoff?' sneered another; 'he is not of their blood, nor their father; how should he love

them? But what means he, that Prince Dmitri is alive?’

‘You must live a long way off,’ rejoined the first, ‘not to have heard the rumour. They say Prince Dmitri Ivanovitch is alive, and will soon come to save the Russians from the evil Tsar.’

‘Why, he was killed at Uglitch—Boris poisoned him.’

‘No, he did not,’ put in the Bashkir eagerly. ‘My wife’s father is a man of Pelim, and he was at Uglitch when the Tsar Boris sent all the people of Uglitch to Pelim, and he says no one knows what the truth was, but that some say Prince Dmitri escaped from Uglitch in a boat, but did not die at all. And the evil Tsar tried hard to find him to kill him, but could not, for he had disappeared.’

The monk raised his head. ‘No, he could not. I, who stand here, I know. I am of Yaroslav, and I was at Uglitch that same night, and I came in a boat to Nijni-Novgorod. And another boat passed us, rowed very quickly, and they said it was the boyar, Ivan Mtislavski, with his godson, Prince Dmitri, escaping from the Tsar.’

‘Yes,’ said the Bashkir, with an approving nod, ‘I heard that too. My wife’s father——’

‘To-morrow,’ observed the Kalmuck, ‘we will all pray to the blessed St. Antony of the holy Catacombs to send us his help.’

‘Much help you will get from dead men’s bones,’ sneered a dirty-looking old Jew, who, true to the custom of his race, was there for the purpose of trading on a religious enthusiasm he despised, and whose feelings for once got the better of his caution. ‘You had far better rise against your evil Tsar yourselves.’

‘Dog of a Jew!’ yelled the Kalmuck, ‘do you scoff at the holy saints? Here, let us throw him in the river.’

‘Yes, yes, to the river!’ shouted half a dozen voices, and as many strong arms seized the imprudent Jew and hurried him along.

‘Holy Moses!’ ejaculated the terrified son of Israel. ‘Mercy, mercy! I meant no ill. Mercy!’

There was a short scuffle; but a moment more, and he was lost. Suddenly a young man, who had remained silent in the shadow behind the monk, nudged him, saying, ‘Otrépieff, help me;

this fellow may be useful to us,' and stepping forward, seized the Jew on his side.

'Enough, enough ; let the poor devil go. He's nearly dead already with fright.'

Bigotry glared at him from the eyes of the orthodox enthusiasts. 'Let go the dog, or you shall go with him!' shouted the zealous Kalmuck.

But the monk sprang forward. 'St. Antony, St. Nicolas, and Our Lady of Kieff, what are you about? Accursed Kalmuck, would you poison the holy river with the body of an infidel Jew? Let him go, or I will blast you with the black plague.'

The Kalmuck, proof against physical fears, shrank back affrighted from the 'shaman' and his spells, muttering to himself; and the crowd followed his example. The monk turned at once, and left the fire at a rapid pace; the young man accompanied him, and the Jew, hastily seizing a large bag that lay near, hurried after his protectors.

VI

‘Then you think the time’s come, Grishka?’

‘Yes, yes; the pear’s ripe at last, now the shaking the tree begins. This famine and plague have done the business for the Tsar. I was at Moscow three weeks ago; people have been dying there like rotten sheep. Since then I’ve been up and down the country, spreading rumours and seeing how the people feel, and I tell you, they’re ravenous, they simply gobble the very idea of you. That fat Bashkir, now, last night,—did you notice how he abused the Tsar for bringing the plague,—well, all over Russia it’s just the same. Yes, the moment’s here; we want nothing now but a flag, a name, to rally round. Why, the very name of Dmitri will flare up like fire in the dry steppe!’

‘Last night, at any rate, the spell worked,’ said the young man; ‘why, Grishka, you surpassed yourself! Not a man there but would have cut his throat for you. What an orator you are!’

‘Orator!’ said Otrépieff, with a bitter laugh; ‘ay, something like it. You’d be an orator if you’d gone through all I have. Aha! Boris Godunoff, you’ve had your chance, but it’s my turn now. ’Twas a sly trick, fox that you are, to get *me* to kill the Prince, and then put *me* out of the way as well. Dead men tell no tales.’

‘’Twas you killed me, then, really, Grishka?’ said Dmitri, with a laugh.

‘Ay, no one but Boris himself and I knew it. He thought that would be the safe thing; but that’s just what will be awkward for him. *Who saw him die?* Why, no one. I daresay he rubbed his hands, the old scoundrel, when he thought how he’d do for me, and enjoy his secret all to himself. They say he laughed when he heard that Dmitri was dead. But ’twas my turn to laugh when I dropped down the river to Nijni-Novgorod, with Dmitri’s seal and diamond cross in my pocket. He thought he’d easily get rid of the poor monk after the job was done—did he? It’s twelve years ago, and I’ve not wasted my time.’

He got up, and walked feverishly up and down the room. ‘Ah! Boris Godunoff—Boris God-

unoff, you shall pay for all you've done these twelve years. No, I've not wasted my time. Scoundrel! you would give twenty years of your life — dear life — to get back the last twelve. Was there a fire in Moscow? did the Tartars pour into Russia? did Fedor die? did any one die? was there a plague, a famine?—there was the monk hurrying about the country, laying it all to the door of the Tsar—the *evil Tsar, who kept the people hungry, and poisoned the Russian Tsars.* Ah! dog of a Tsar! ah! cur, you shall pay for it! Yes, give me a year, and Boris Godunoff and Gregory Otrépieff shall cry quits.'

His eye blazed with half-insane enthusiasm as he walked to and fro. Dmitri watched him quietly, but made no remark.

'Dmitri,' suddenly said Otrépieff, turning to him, 'you're my very life. You're the breath of my nostrils. Why, your very look will be enough! For the last ten years I've told every man in Russia exactly what Prince Dmitri Ivanovitch was like: not a man in Russia but will recognise you at the first glance. Every soul in Russia knows him by heart; every soul

in Russia will swear to him,'—he laid his hand on the young man's shoulder,—'*will swear to the man who's got one arm longer than the other, and two warts on his face,—one just under his right eye, and the other on his left cheek.* Providence has been working for you all the time, without your ever thinking of it.'

'You are Providence, then, I suppose; well, it sounds good. But now, what's the first thing to be done, Grishka? I'm ready. God! I thought I should have died in that cursed seminary at Kieff before I learned to read and write, and gabble a Latin word or two! But it's all over now—I can write like a priest; and, thanks to you,' he added with a laugh, 'I know all about my fine relations. But what's to be done first?'

'You'll do,' said Otrépieff. 'Yes, I was right. Ever since I pulled you out of the burning house at Bratslav, I knew you were the man for me. But we're in luck. That dirty old Jew you saved last night—he'll do for us to start with. These Jews, they are mixed up in everything in Poland. I've been talking to him; I asked him if he could get you a place as groom, or something like that, to any grandee in Poland;

and it seems that Prince Adam Wisnowiski owes him or his brother money. He said he could get you into the Prince's suite. And look you! the poor devil is devoutly glad you saved his life, and he's not so poor as he looks. These Jews, they do everything in Lithuania. They lend the nobles money, which they never get paid back; but no matter, they've plenty more, and it's useful now and again to have a friend at court. But whenever there's a war the Jews gain, they don't mind seeing the Christians cut each other's throats—not a bit. It's death to the Christian, but it's the Jew's living; he makes shekels out of it all. This Jew may do you a good turn, once we're started; in the meantime, here's his letter to Prince Adam. Once you've got in with Prince Adam, we can begin our plan. But we mustn't lose time—not a moment; a month from to-day you can begin. As for me, I'm off to rouse the Cossacks. Send me word as soon as you are established among these Poles—you can't fail; I know them; the very idea of war makes them wild with delight. Have you got the jewels?'

‘Yes; they’re here.’ And Dmitri laid his hand on his breast.

‘Well, then, good-bye; and good luck to you!’

‘A moment, Grishka; don’t begin to rouse the Cossacks till I’m in with the Polish nobles.’

‘In a month’s time—a month will do.’

‘Yes, perhaps. Very well; in a month.’

‘A month from to-day, then. Farewell, *Prince Dmitri Ivanovitch*. The Saints protect you; especially the holy brothers, Boris and Gleb,’ he added with a sneer. ‘Good luck to you!’

He left the room. Dmitri remained, plunged in thought.

‘A Jew’s letter, a signet, and a diamond cross; it’s not much. What did the old black-coat at Kieff say? —“The game to the bold player.” It seems *absurd*. I must be mad, I believe! Otrépieff certainly is. No, I’m not mad. Kind Saints! help your descendant, now or never. Yes, the world would say I was mad. But will they say so *then*—that is to say, *if . . . if . . .*’

And he went out.

VII

The good people of Brahin rushed out of their houses as Prince Adam Wisnowiski and his brilliant train clattered through the main street, amidst the tooting of horns and shouting of huntsmen, on its way back to the castle. Proceeding at a smart trot, the cavalcade turned suddenly to the right just outside the village, and in two minutes passed under the archway into the courtyard of an old Lithuanian *château*.

The Prince leapt off his horse and threw the reins to a page. 'Bem!' he shouted to the chief huntsman, 'look to Matthias, poor beast. That second bear nearly tore him to pieces. I wouldn't lose him for all Courland!' And he ran up the steps, his face wearing the satisfied expression of the fortunate sportsman.

As he hastily crossed the hall, a valet, bowing obsequiously, stopped him. 'My lord, the Reverend Father Sismondi has been waiting these two hours till your lordship returned.'

He says his business is of the greatest importance.'

'Bring him up, man,' said the Prince, 'at once. I shall be in the Jagello Gallery.'

Five minutes later a domestic ushered the confessor into a long gallery adorned with portraits of the dynasty of Jagello, whence it took its name.

'Well, Father!' exclaimed Wisnowiski, 'what is the matter? You seem disturbed.'

'My lord,' said the confessor, taking the seat to which the Prince motioned him, 'the news I bring is so extraordinary that I hardly know how to begin. You have lately, I believe, engaged a new groom?'

'Ay, Jablonsky; what of him? He didn't come out to-day. I understood he was ill.'

'Sire, as I said, the matter is so strange that I can scarce find words. Did you observe the young man?'

'I did not see anything particular in him,' said the Prince. 'I left him to Bem, who examined him; and as he reported him well suited for his post, I engaged him without further inquiry.'

‘Prince Adam,’ said the Jesuit, ‘the young man—I am afraid you will think I am raving, but there it is,—the young man has revealed a secret of such importance that, though I am not new to the confessional, I must confess nothing like it has ever come to my ears before. And though, by the rules of my Order, I am bound to bury everything in my breast, I prevailed on the young man to let me tell your lordship all about it at once.’

‘Out with it, man; why all this preamble!’

‘Well, sir, this young fellow claims to be the rightful Tsar of Muscovy.’

‘Why, he must be out of his mind!’

‘That’s what I thought, but he seems sane enough. Still, that *was* my first thought—my first, I say, because I own I’m half inclined to think there’s something in what he says.’

‘What, man! How in the name of all the Saints can he be the Tsar of Russia?’

‘*Rightful* Tsar,’ said Sismondi. ‘Your lordship knows, of course, that some ten or twelve years ago Prince Dmitri, the third son of the Terrible, was done to death at Uglitch.’

‘Ay, so they said; the story was, that Boris

Godunoff made away with a life that stood between him and the throne.'

'The very point. Well, the young man your groom asseverates, very positively, that he is himself that same Prince Dmitri, who was said to have been murdered, but was, on the contrary, by the grace of Heaven, miraculously preserved.'

'A likely story, on my word ; why, Sismondi, you, an Italian, do you mean to say you are his dupe?'

'My lord, I think I'm as little wont to be gulled as most men, but Heaven's ways are strange ways, and this is a strange affair altogether. Believe me, there's no trick in one way : certain it is, this young fellow is no groom. His manner and bearing would do credit to any court in Christendom. Then he can read and write ; speak Latin as well as Russian and Polish ; is well informed on Russian history and affairs ; and has, he says, certain papers and jewels which will leave no doubt of his identity.'

Violently excited, the Prince bounded from his seat, and ran to the door.

'Here, one of you!' he shouted to the servants waiting outside, 'go and fetch the new groom,

Jablonsky, at once. We'll sift this to the bottom, on the instant, Father. By ——, if there was anything in it, it would be no laughing matter for Boris Godunoff. They say the Muscovites hate him worse than the Tartars.'

'So they do,' said Sismondi; 'the Muscovites are waiting for a deliverer like the Jews for their Messiah, and news like this would put the whole country in a blaze. The young Prince—if it were indeed the Prince—would be a tremendous weapon in the hands of King Sigismund, and, if properly handled, the thing might be of great service to Holy Church, which sorely needs the help of Providence at this moment.'

'By the white eagle of Poland—why, Father, we should hold the Muscovites in the hollow of our hand! Will the man never come? Why——'

The door opened, and Dmitri entered the room.

VIII

In his eagerness, the Prince made a step towards him; but before he could speak, Dmitri began:

‘Prince Adam Wisnowiski, I know why you have sent for me, and I know too that you are prepared to think me out of my senses. I see that Father Sismondi has told you all; but I hope I shall be able to make good all my claims by substantial proofs, and convince you that I am no impostor. Ask me what questions you choose—I will satisfy you. I desire nothing better than that you should put me to the test.’

His appearance, and the calm assurance with which he spoke, though he was very pale, produced a far stronger effect on the Prince than his words; so true is it that beauty is the best of all recommendations. So powerful an argument, indeed, was his bearing, that Wisnowiski—hardly knowing how to address a man who was at once his groom and the claimant to a throne—remained silent and half in doubt. The Jesuit came to his rescue.

‘Young man,’ he said, ‘I have communicated to Prince Adam the revelation you made me. He is naturally anxious to have the truth of the matter. You spoke to me of proofs in your possession—jewels and papers—which would

establish your identity; it is incumbent on you to lay them at once before the Prince.'

'Twas well for Dmitri at this moment that he had triple brass around his heart. It swelled within him almost to bursting when he saw, by the attitude they adopted towards him, that his story was half credited. A false step—a hesitation—an expression of delight—a bad actor—would have ruined all. He was equal to the emergency.

'Prince,' he went on, 'I chose you for the first repository of my secret, because report spoke of you as one of whose honour and generosity there was not a doubt. Who but myself can know the shrinking and the qualms that seize on me at this moment? Even as I speak I feel half an impostor, so long is it since I have done anything but think of my secret in my inmost self. But I now see I was right. In your hands I am safe. I did well to come to you. The proofs I have are many, but I will even now give you more than words.'

He opened his coat at the neck, cut with a knife a cord, apparently long worn, and handed to the Prince two jewels.

‘When my preserver, a monk of whom I will tell you more, carried me secretly down the Volga from Uglitch on the fatal night, he did not forget to bring with him something that should help me to assert my rights in better days. This diamond cross was the gift of my godfather, Prince Ivan Mtislavski. And this was my signet, in the days when Dmitri was not as yet a fugitive from the palace of his forefathers.’

The Prince mechanically took the jewels, but did not look at them. He stood for a moment meditating, and then raised his head :

‘Where did you steal these jewels, you scoundrel, and what do you mean, coming here with these miserable stories? Are you mad? or do you take me for a fool, that you try to palm yourself off upon me as the Tsar of Muscovy in this rough and ready fashion? But we’ll see if a good flogging won’t cure you of all these fine pretensions.’

Dmitri drew himself up scornfully.

‘I half expected this,’ he said, as if to himself. ‘Yes, I should have known. . . . Give me back my tokens, Prince Adam . . . and consider

me once more as your groom. Yes, I am mad—stark mad, ever to have supposed I should get a hearing for my story. But forget it, forget it . . . I am nothing but your groom,—and as to the flogging’—he laughed in derision—‘do what you please. Flogging! God in Heaven! what is a flogging to the agony of torture I suffer at being spurned as a cheat and a lying blackguard? Pish! man; you speak as a fool,—but I forgot, I am your groom. Very well, let it be the flogging.’

He turned to go, his breast heaving, and his eye flashing with indignation and contempt; but he was interrupted by Wisnowiski, who swore an oath which made his confessor jump.

‘Beg pardon, Father,’ he said; ‘I will do penance for that oath another time. Prince Dmitri, accept my sympathy, and with it all the assistance that Adam Wisnowiski, an unworthy descendant of Jagello, can give you. Forgive me, when I say I *was* prepared to consider you an impostor; but after what you have said, and I have seen, I can do so no longer. No, the very devil himself couldn’t act like *that*. How angry you were, Prince; what an *insult* it was

to doubt your word,—so you thought I spoke as a fool? Ha! ha! not quite such a fool as you thought, ha! ha! To-morrow my brother is coming here, and in a few days I will carry you to Sandomir, and afterwards introduce you to King Sigismund. I think I may say that I will ensure you a favourable hearing. I've heard people say a good deal about you, but I hardly thought you would be *real*, till to-day. But we'll talk about it again. Father Sismondi, be so good as to inform the Princess I will shortly present to her a royal fugitive. Will you honour me, Prince, by making use of me in the meantime—my purse is at your service. I am not without influence among my countrymen. I shall always consider it a great honour that you thought me most worthy of your first confidence; you did well; yes, I think you will find your choice was wise.'

Dmitri bowed. At that moment, had his life depended on it, he could not have uttered a single word.

IX

In a luxurious room in one of the many magnificent palaces which adorned the Polish capital, Cracow, there sat, late one evening, or rather, early one morning, in 1603, some dozen young nobles, talking, laughing, and betting eagerly on a game at piquet which was going on between two of them. The door opened, and a young man entered abruptly, dressed in the very height of the fashion—the fashion of France under Henry IV,—to wit, in light blue silk trunk hose and doublet, slashed with black, a dark green velvet shoulder-cloak, and a black hat blazing with jewels, and adorned with a white eagle feather.

‘Iwanicki!’ shouted half a dozen voices at once. ‘Hurrah! where have you dropped from?’

‘Just back to-night from Sandomir, gentlemen,’ said Iwanicki quietly, as he gave his hand to one after another. ‘I’ve been staying with Konstantin Wisnowiski at Jalojicz. Put up

your cards, you two, and come all of you and listen. I've news that will stop all cards for all of us for a long time to come, and for some of us for ever.'

'Fire away with it then.'

'Guess,' said Iwanicki, as he settled himself in a chair and took a pull at a cup presented by the host.

'Oh, Sigismund's turned Protestant?'

'No.'

'Snake worshipper, then?'

'Something far more wonderful than that.'

'Pooh! man. What *could* be, unless the dead were to come to life again?'

'But that's just what *has* happened.'

'What do you mean?'

Iwanicki lay back and enjoyed his triumph.

'Did you ever, any of you, hear of that business at Uglitch about Prince Dmitri?'

'What! the fellow that Boris Godunoff murdered?' exclaimed a young noble called Pac.

'The son of the old devil incarnate, Ivan Vassilovitch?' added Niemkiwicz.

'The same. Well, he's come to life again.'

'He hasn't.'

‘Fact, gentlemen. Adam Wisnowiski found him at Brahin.’

The young men looked at one another.

‘Look here, Iwanicki, you’re joking; this is one of your old tricks,’ said the host, one Soltikoff.

‘No, mine host, not this time; it’s as true as my name’s Boleslas.’

‘But how do you know it’s really Prince Dmitri?’ asked Pac.

‘Why, it’s a long story, but it’s certain enough. He told it all to Adam’s chaplain, who told it all to Adam. You must ask Adam for particulars. Then he’s got a lot of jewels, signets, and things of that sort; and he gives a very good account of himself; knows all about Russia; knows everything he ought to know—in fact, Adam’s mad about him.’

‘Has he got a long beard?’ ‘Is he anything like those awful ambassadors that turn up here every now and then, like bundles of old bear-skins?’ ‘Have you seen him?’

‘Seen him! Why, I’ve been living with him for the last fortnight. Adam brought him to Jalojicz, and the moment he arrived, one of the servants—an old Russian fugitive—without

being in the secret, recognised him at once by the marks, and called him Prince Dmitri.'

'What are the marks?'

'Oh! he's got a couple of big warts on his face, and one arm a good deal longer than the other. Then we went on to George Mniszek's place at Sandomir, where he was recognised again by an old soldier who was taken prisoner at Pskof, and saw him ten years ago at Uglitch.'

'I suppose he's rather a barbarian—queer fish, isn't he?'

'Barbarian!—queer fish!—gentlemen,' said Iwanicki. 'He's a cut above all of us here, let me tell you. He's got the finest manner I ever saw, wears the clothes Adam finds for him as if he'd never been out of purple and fine linen all his life.'

'He must be the real chap,' said Soltikoff decidedly. 'None of this *canaille* can wear clothes. Can he ride?'

'Ride! I believe you. Rides like a Cossack; shoots, hunts—does everything. He saved my life the other day.'

'Saved your life!'

'Why, we went bear-hunting: I caught in

some bushes, and the bear got me: the Prince dashed in with his spear, and did for Master Bruin all by himself.'

'Come now, what *can't* he do?' queried facetiously a rather heavy-looking young man.

'Well, I doubt if he could see your jokes, Chlopicki.'

'One for you, Chlopicki,' said Pac, amidst the general laughter at the disconcerted Chlopicki.

'And I tell you what,' added Iwanicki, 'the women are all mad about him. I didn't get a chance with Marina Mniszek. She wouldn't look at me; her eyes are all for the Russian fellow. A little bird sang in my ear we should hear more about that business, though.'

'Get out, Iwanicki, you're laying it on too thick. He *must* be an Apollo if he can cut you out, with your great black eyes.'

'Laugh away, you disbelieving Jews; only wait till you see him, but don't laugh *at* him, for he's a handy man with his weapons, let me warn you. He's coming here next week, and he's going to put up with me. And I tell you what—there'll be a war with Russia. He's going to make it hot for Boris Godunoff.'

There was a cheer from every throat in the room.

‘Hurrah!’ ‘How splendid!’ ‘A war!’

‘Gentlemen!’ yelled the host, leaping on the table, ‘bumpers! bumpers all round to Prince Dmitri and the war with Russia!’

‘The new Tsar!’ ‘Prince Dmitri Ivanovitch!’ ‘Dmitri for ever!’ ‘The war!—the war!’

X

The gardens of Prince George Mniszek, Palatine of Sandomir, stretched down along the banks of the Vistula. Leaning against the trunk of a large weeping willow that hung over the river, Dmitri—the same, yet how different, in his magnificent suit of dark crimson velvet, from the Dmitri of but a month ago,—Dmitri gazed at the new hornèd moon, and pondered on his situation.

‘How well you knew the hot-headed Poles, wise Otrépieff! How well you foresaw their eager enthusiasm! The month is out; by this time he will be flying about, playing with his cunning

tongue on the excitable Cossacks. Yes, I think I can count upon a few thousand Cossacks. Can he have got my letter? Yes; he must, anyhow, have heard of me by now—they have made noise enough about me! I wonder why I get no answer from that wily old villain, Rangoni! I can't do anything without his help. They say he does what he likes with King Sigismund. What does he mean to do, I wonder? Yes, I *must* get the Jesuits on my side!

‘What's that?’

He drew back into the shadow as light steps and the rustle of dresses sounded on the walk. A pair of young ladies presently appeared on the bank, the shorter carrying a lute, and seated themselves on a stone seat which looked out over the water, close by Dmitri's lurking-place.

‘What is Orlando doing, Marie?’ said the taller girl to her companion with the lute.

‘Oh, he's talking politics with papa in the library! We are safe for hours. Look, Lise, at that great black thing in the water, bobbing about. Isn't it like a man's head?’

‘Oh, never mind that! let's talk about Orlando.’

‘ Whom do you mean ? ’

‘ Why, the prince, of course ! *There’s* a man for you ! Isn’t he handsome, Marie ? ’

‘ No,’ said Marie ; ‘ he’s not ! ’

‘ Houghty-toighty ! how critical we are—all of a sudden. I say, Marie, how would you like to be Tsarina of all Muscovy ? ’

The kind night hid Marina’s blushes. ‘ How silly you are, Lise ! What do you mean ? ’

‘ Oh yes ! ’ said the malicious Lise. ‘ *What do you mean ?* A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid, you know.’

‘ Lise ! ’

‘ Do you know, Marie, how the Tsar chooses his wife ? He has all the girls in Muscovy collected, and then they are penned up like sheep in folds, and gradually sorted and thinned out by expert critics—just like a Turkish beauty market,—and the most beautiful of all becomes the Tsarina.’

‘ Don’t be so absurd, Lise ! ’

‘ It’s not absurd ; it’s true ! ’ said Lise. ‘ Count Iwanicki told me all about it the other day ; and the Russian ambassador told him last year. But you needn’t be afraid, Marie ;

you would get the prize anywhere—the future Tsar would give you the apple!’

‘*Don’t, Lise!*’

‘Look, Marie, sing something! I feel very sentimental to-night.’

‘I can’t, Lise; not to-night.’

‘Why did you bring your lute, then? Oh, coy little bird! Sing—sing something! I daresay the Muscovite prince will be lurking somewhere near!—you’d better sing!’

‘Lise!’ exclaimed Marie again.

There was a pause, and presently Dmitri heard her low, but very sweet voice, accompanied by an occasional chord—

I found in a dream, in the land of dreams,
 A silver shore:
 A blue, blue sea, with ivory ships
 All studded o’er.
 And there, on the beach, my hand might reach
 On a green tree
 (Be bold! be bold!) pippins of gold,
 Fair to see.

I stretched out my lily-white hand,
 That fruit to grasp:
 I saw not under the treacherous leaves
 The lurking asp.

The golden cheat as I did eat,
 Into my heart
(Ah, fool!) piercèd the cruel,
 Poisoned dart.

Vainly I seek that land of joy,
 The fairy sea ;
Nothing now but the aching heart
 Remains to me.
Far from home, exiled I roam—
 In vain ! in vain !
Never more to stand on the shore—
 Never again !

As she sang the last words her voice quivered, the lute dropped from her hands, and she burst into tears.

‘ Why, Marie ! Marie ! Dear heart ! what is the matter ? ’

‘ I don’t know, Lise. I feel—I’ve a presentiment—something is going to happen ! ’

‘ Foolish child ! ’ said Lise kindly. ‘ You shouldn’t sing these mournful ditties, you susceptible little thing !—they get on your nerves. Wait here a moment ; I’ll go and bring my smelling-bottle. Don’t move. I won’t be a minute.’

She rose and tripped away.

XI

As her footsteps died away on the path, Marie rose and took a step nearer the river.

‘Oh, Dmitri, Dmitri! why did you come here? What have you done to me? Why shouldn’t I jump in and end it all? He doesn’t care one bit for me. And then to think of his going away to Russia, and fighting, and never coming back again. It’s too *awful*. I wish it had been me, and not Count Iwanicki, the bear had seized! But then Dmitri might have saved me.’ She smiled through her tears at the inconsistency. ‘Oh, why *wasn’t* I a man?’

Could this be the proud and light-hearted Marina Mniszek—the Barbara Allen of Polish society—for whom the young Polish nobles sighed in vain?

Dmitri watched her a moment from his ambush; he marked her lithe figure in its full brocaded skirt and thin waist, her white throat surrounded by a huge ruff, against which her pretty head and golden hair stood

out irresistibly, and then emerged from the shadow.

‘One person, at least, is glad you are not a man,’ he said, simply.

Marina gave a little cry. ‘Prince—Dimitri!’

‘Forgive me for interrupting your *réverie*,’ said Dimitri. ‘I caught sight of you from the terrace, and came down. Aren’t the stars bright to-night?’

Marina gradually mastered her confusion.

‘I met a queer fellow last year,’ went on Dimitri, with a smile. ‘He was something in my line—an exiled prince. Gustav, I think, was his name. He ought to be King of Sweden, if he had his rights. He told me a lot about the stars.’

‘Oh yes! Prince Gustav Ericson,’ said Marina. ‘I know about him. I’ve seen him at Wilna. He came to Court once.’

‘Well, he was a great astrologer. He cast my horoscope. It was an odd one.’

As he spoke, a shooting star ran over the sky with a trail of light and disappeared.

‘There!’ said Dimitri. ‘Did you see it? That says it all; that’s just what he said.’

‘Oh, Prince!’

Dmitri looked at her upturned face, white in the moonlight, and read in it the expression, never to be mistaken—the look, half timidity, half fascination, which a girl, head over ears in love, but who is not sure of her love being returned, always wears when she looks at her idol. With the subtle intuition of genius he grasped the whole situation, divined her character, and pitched on the right thing to be done.

‘Marina!’ he suddenly said; ‘I’m a wandering fugitive. It may be that I never get back to the throne of my ancestors. Pish! throne of my ancestors!—what rubbish! Look! I will trust you with my secret. I am not Prince Dmitri at all—I am only an adventurer, but I was born under a lucky star, and I feel I shall win my game. I love you, Marie. Will you cast in your lot with me?’

She gazed at him for a moment, speechless with astonishment. The blow, metaphorically speaking, felled her to the ground. Then she threw herself into his strong arms with a sound that might have been a laugh or a sob, and wept like a child on his breast.

Five minutes later, Lise, returning with the smelling-bottle, came to the conclusion it was not wanted, and went softly back again.

XII

Over an oaken table, at the end of a long panelled room, sat Sigismund, King of Poland and Sweden. Round the walls rose long tiers of huge theological quartos and folios, not, as now, left undisturbed in their decorative repose, but frequently consulted by their royal owner on controversial points. A taper burned in one corner of the room before a huge image of the Virgin—the only ornament of the library, save a great full-length portrait of Catherine Jagellonica, who seemed to look down on her well-beloved son with perpetual sympathy and approval.

The King was poring over a memorial recently received from His Holiness Pope Clement VIII, dealing with the difficult question as to how to recover the lost influence of the Catholic Church in Sweden. The clock struck eleven, and as he

raised his head he was aware of a gentleman usher who had appeared through a curtain at the other end of the room, and was waiting till the King's eyes should fall on him.

‘Well, Chardon, what is it?’

‘Your Majesty, the Papal legate wishes to know when your Majesty could see him on a matter of great importance.’

‘Show him in at once.’

Of all the foreign ambassadors the Papal legate alone had the power of interviewing the king in private; and this, like most events more or less passed over in histories, had a decisive and fatal influence on the fortunes of Poland.

A minute afterwards, a dark, smooth-shaven man of middle height, with a keen, quiet glance, entered the room with the stealthy step noticed as peculiar to the Jesuit of that age—the palmy day of their Order.

‘Good day, Rangoni,’ said the King. ‘I can guess what brings you: this strange affair of the Russian Prince.’

The legate bowed.

‘I don't know quite what to think of it,’ said Sigismund. ‘I have been waiting eagerly for

your arrival. But already the pretender has turned the heads of half Poland with his story—whether true or false, I own I find it impossible to say.’

‘Your Majesty does well to suspend your judgment in the matter. It becomes us to consider the point with other heads than those of inconsiderate and hot-headed boys. Your Majesty remembers the saying, that the Poles do nothing but fight and hunt. A story like this carries them away.’

‘Well, Rangoni, but it’s not only the young men, but even old and experienced counsellors have declared their belief in him. Zamoisky, certainly, laughs at the whole affair; but then, as you know, he is apt to run counter to the accepted view on other matters as well.’

‘Sire,’ said the Jesuit, looking down at his feet, ‘I will not deny that the pretender—shall I call him—has the face of things on his side. I have had many letters from him. My agents at Sandomir and elsewhere have watched him closely at odd moments when he little suspected it, and they all report his bearing to be erect and honourable, and fully equal to his *assumed*

character, save that he manifests a greater readiness to be his own *valet* than is common with Polish nobles, which may be excused'—the Jesuit added with a smile—'in virtue of his acquired habits during his long exile. But, to be quite plain, we are statesmen, and it is not enough to examine the abstract justice of his claim. I would not advise your Majesty to further his schemes, even if he were in truth what he says, merely on that account alone; nor again would I recommend your Majesty to cast him off absolutely, even though he were a palpable impostor. The question for us is—How does policy point? And I will frankly tell your Majesty that, all things considered, the young man's appearance at the present critical moment seems little less in my eyes than a direct favour of Providence.'

'Go on, Rangoni,' said the King, as the Jesuit paused; 'tell me what you think about it.'

'Your Majesty is aware that recent events have tended in no small degree to discredit the cause of the Church in many ways. It is not only that in France the sacred name of Catholic is played with by artful politicians as a stalking-

horse for their own worldly advantage, and the principle of toleration with heretics, which is nothing else than a compromise with error, openly proclaimed; nor do I merely refer to the unfortunate course of events in Sweden' (Sigismund winced), 'though recent despatches inform me that the rebellious heretics propose shortly to raise Duke Charles of Sudermania to the throne. These are certainly grave matters; yet far worse than these is the spirit of internal discord which has appeared in Spain, especially within our own Order of Jesus. I need not remind your Majesty of what is so well known and deeply lamented already. But further, in spite of all the efforts we have made and are still making to further religious unity and concord in those very Polish provinces of the Holy See, your Majesty cannot but be too well aware that hitherto—we speak in private—the Union of the Catholic and Greek Communions in Lithuania and elsewhere has been little more than a phrase—nay, has even promoted new discords.'

'It is too true!' sighed the King.

'Further, your Majesty knows well,' con-

tinued Rangoni, 'that the attempts of His Holiness, when legate in Poland, and even those of Possevin and Comuleo, to further the cause among the Muscovites, were notable only for their failure. Now, this is the conclusion of the whole matter. Could we prevail on this young man to give us assurance that he will consider himself an instrument in the hands of Holy Church, it will be well worth our while to further his claims by all the means in our power.'

'I am quite of your mind, Rangoni,' said the King. 'Yes, you are right. You speak my own thoughts.'

The Jesuit bowed. 'Your Majesty will observe it is of no moment to us whether or no he be or be not what he claims to be. Heaven sends us an instrument which we must not reject, but rather use for promoting the honour and glory of God. It might even, I venture to think, be to the ultimate advantage of both Poland and the Church that the youth should be entirely dependent on Polish aid for his success. Then, as it is probable this will get him disliked by his subjects, I see no reason why Poland might

not, with luck and skill, acquire more than a voice in Muscovite affairs; for the race of their Tsars is extinct, and the puppet we have erected we might easily pull down again.'

'True, Rangoni,' said the King thoughtfully.

'But we must be very cautious,' pursued the legate, 'and avoid, above all things, giving offence at first to the prejudices of the Muscovites. The young man shall make private abjuration of his Greek errors in my house; for to proceed too openly at first would set the Muscovites against him, and spoil our game. We will take surety from him for his future conduct in writing.'

'The Palatine of Sandomir,' said the King, 'has actually asked my leave to marry his daughter to the future Tsar.'

The legate pondered a moment. 'There is no particular harm in that. Perhaps, even, if we managed it well, it might be yet another hold on him. Your Majesty knows the Italian proverb — *che a compagno a padrone?* We must further stipulate that he shall allow his wife and her train free exercise of their religion in Muscovy. Yes; it seems to me that this

would be a further gain—with little risk save to Mniszek and his daughter's private reputation.'

There was a pause.

'Then you think,' said the King, 'that, provided the young man give good security for his conduct, we should do well to further his designs? But we are in treaty with Boris Godunoff.'

'That can be managed,' said Rangoni. 'His Holiness, I do not doubt, would give absolution for the non-fulfilment of a treaty with a heretic, where the interests of the Church are so nearly concerned. But it will be better for your Majesty to permit volunteers to offer themselves for the youth's service, without publicly sanctioning his enterprise. And it will do no harm to get some hot blood out of the way; for your Majesty is aware that these nobles are getting very turbulent, and may, unless an outlet is found for their factious full-bloodedness, cause much trouble at home.'

'Very good, Rangoni,' said Sigismund. 'Let me know anything further that occurs to you on the subject. In the meanwhile I will think over the matter, and should I hear nothing from

you to make us change our plans, I will, in a few days, take steps to put what you advise into execution.'

The legate bowed and withdrew.

XIII

'Look out, sir! Oh, it's Oginski!'

'Sapiéha!'

'The very man! Where are you off too?'

'Oh, nowhere in particular! And you?'

'To Soltikoff's. Come along with me. Have you seen Prince Dmitri?'

'No; not yet.'

'Then are you going to Iwanicki's to-night?'

'Yes; of course he'll be there?'

'Oh yes! and every one else too.'

'I say, some people think all this is a fraud.'

'Who do?'

'Oh! Zamoisky and all his lot.'

'Zamoisky's a —— old fool! He's fearfully spiteful because he didn't find Dmitri himself! He's at daggers drawn with the Wisnowiskis, and thinks everything's bound to

go wrong if he hadn't a finger in the pie. Why, man, the whole world believes in the Russian fellow except the old fool Zamoisky,—even the Jews and the Jesuits !'

'Jews and Jesuits !' said Oginski. 'Then he's bound to be all right. He must be a crafty man, too !'

'I tell you, he's all right. Besides, what the devil does it matter who he is, so long as we're sure of a smack at the Muscovites ? All the same, what do you think I was told ?'

'What ?'

'That he is a son of our old Stephen Battori—*bar sinister*, you know.'

'By the Lord !' said Oginski, 'that's best of all. Why, I'll put money on him, if he's got that old bear-driver's blood in him !'

'Put it all on ; he's good enough. Look at Iwanicki ! how thick he is with him. You don't catch Iwanicki tripping ! But here we are. You won't come in ! Well, bye-bye—see you to-night.'

'*Au revoir !*'

XIV

Count Boleslas Iwanicki's great hall blazed with lights of all colours. Dinner was just over, and two hundred gentlemen of the best blood in Poland were each contributing his mite to the Babel of voices which precedes the speeches after a banquet. Servants and waiters in gorgeous liveries bustled about, handing wines of every known description. Flags waved above their heads, and the ancestral Iwanickis looked down from the walls at festivities such as they had themselves long ceased to assist at, save as impartial spectators.

At the top of the hall, in a huge carved chair on the dais, sat the gay and popular young host; on his right hand the guest in whose honour the flower of the Polish nobility were assembled.

Suddenly, a clattering of drinking cups abruptly stopped the conversation, and on one side of the chief table Prince Konstantin Wisnowski rose to propose the health of the host.

Loud and prolonged applause inaugurated his speech.

‘Gentlemen of Poland’ [*loud cheers*], ‘it is my pleasing task to propose the health of our generous host—Count Boleslas Iwanicki.’ [*Great cheering.*] ‘I will begin by saying he is an honour to his descendants—his ancestors, I mean.’ [*Great laughter and cheers.*] ‘I’m sure we all feel very much obliged to him for his hospitality, and all envy him the honour which is his to-night, of feasting the future Tsar of Russia.’ [*Furious applause.*] ‘Gentlemen, I will not enlarge upon a subject which will be handled presently by speakers far more able than myself.’ [*No! no!*] ‘But, as one who was immediately concerned in introducing Prince Dmitri to Poland, I will make but a single observation. After all we have heard and seen, I’m sure no one will require any further proof that Prince Dmitri is really and actually himself.’ [*No!*] ‘But there’s a thing just happened which is worth knowing, gentlemen, as being a strong confirmation of all we have already heard.’ [*Deep silence.*] ‘The usurper, Boris Godunoff’ [*groans*]—‘the usurper, Boris, has just offered

my brother and myself large bribes—large sums of money and estates—to deliver up the person of the man styling himself Prince Dmitri Ivanovitch to his custody. Gentlemen, it seems to me, Boris is getting uneasy, when he takes that method of ridding himself of an awkward apparition like the Prince.’ [*Roars of applause, during which Wisnowiski resumed his seat.*]

A pause, and then a second clattering interrupted the renewed buzz of conversation. Just as Iwanicki was about to rise, a servant touched his arm. ‘A courier from the frontier, my lord, for Prince Dmitri.’

‘Bring him in, just as he is!’ exclaimed Iwanicki.

A whisper went round the room. ‘What is it?’ ‘What’s the matter?’ In the silence the courier entered, and walking up along the whole length of the hall, handed some despatches to Dmitri. He opened them, glanced at them, and handed them to Iwanicki with a whisper. Almost immediately Iwanicki rose.

‘Gentlemen: I am too much flattered by the complimentary terms applied to me by Prince

Konstantin. I thank you with all my heart—both for myself, my ancestors, and my descendants, when I have any,—for your kindness in honouring my poor board. But you kill two birds with one stone, gentlemen! I feel quite sure that every man here to-night is prepared to do his utmost in the cause of justice and Prince Dmitri.’ [*Frantic cheers.*] ‘By your leave, I will read you an extract from the despatches just handed to me by the Prince.’ [*Silence.*] ‘Gentlemen, thus says Boris the Tsar: “*The Tsar has been informed that in Lithuania a certain rascal has been styling himself Prince Dmitri, son of Ivan, of Uglitch. The said rascal is none other than a certain runaway monk named Gregory Otrépieff, son of Bogdar, captain of Strelitz.*” Boris goes on, gentlemen, to describe the imaginary wanderings of this runaway monk, speaks of his *diabolical craft*, and so on. But I will not inflict upon you all the flowers of the pseudo-Imperial rhetoric. Then he winds up: “*The renegade, quitting his frock, came to Sandomir, and gave himself out to be the Tsarévitch, and there are numbers of people who have been taken in by the imposture.*”

Ay, numbers of people! Too many, I fancy, gentlemen, for the peace of mind of Boris Godunoff.' [*Thunders of applause.*] 'But, if numbers have been taken in, there is *one* whose life has been saved by the apostate.' [*Roars of applause.*] 'Now, gentlemen, did any of you ever come across a monk, or a Jesuit, who would kill a bear single-handed, and save your life at the risk of his own?' [*Frenzied cheers.*] 'Gentlemen, the health of the *renegade monk*, and success to his cause!' [*Deafening applause, and down sat Iwanicki in triumph.*]

Every voice was hushed, and every eye bent on Dmitri, as he rose to reply. He let his glance travel slowly over his eager audience for a moment, and then spoke in a firm voice.

'Nobles and gentlemen of Poland, I shall not even try to describe to you the multitude of emotions which well-nigh prevent me from speaking at all. I shall only say that, to all of you and to each of you, Dmitri is bound by a personal obligation which he can never hope to repay as it ought to be repaid.

'Gentlemen, if there is any one of you here who still retains a doubt or scruple' [*none!*]

none!] ‘as to my identity, or that wishes any point cleared, I shall be only too happy to furnish him with all the information I can give him, if he will come to me and ask for it. I am always to be found at the house of one whom I am proud to call my friend—Count Boleslas Iwanicki. But I will just say one word here now. You all heard how eager Boris Godunoff is to gain possession of the monk Otrépieff. Gentlemen, I am indebted to the monk Otrépieff for my life. ’Twas he that brought me down the Volga from Uglitch on the fatal night when all thought I was murdered, and ’tis he that has preserved me up to this moment. Whatever I am and shall be, I owe to him. He has not, for ability or fidelity, his equal in the world. During the last ten years he has been a thorn in the side of the usurper Boris, who has made every effort, but unsuccessfully, to get him into his power. Even at this moment he is flying from house to house, and from province to province, arousing the enthusiasm of my faithful subjects for their lawful prince.

‘Gentlemen, I am tiring you.’ [*Go on! go*

on!'] 'Well, I will give you but one *trait* in the character of this Boris Godunoff. When I was at Uglitch I had a buffoon, of whom I was very fond. This became known to Boris, whose spies were always around me. He accordingly commissioned his agent, one Bitiagovski, to get rid of my buffoon. They burst in upon me one evening, and hacked the poor buffoon to mince-meat as he clung to me for protection. One of the ruffians cut me with his sword on the forehead. Gentlemen,' said Dmitri, as he raised the hair on his temple, while a very peculiar smile showed itself on his face, 'here is the scar still. But deeper, and more indelible than the scar is the memory of that scene.

'Gentlemen, I have done. I am at this moment a helpless fugitive. It is in your power to hand me over to the usurper. I can but throw myself on your protection. But should Fortune smile on me—and how should she not, aided by the arms of the gallant Poles?—I hope one day to be able to show, otherwise than by words, to the friends of Dmitri that they were also the friends of the Tsar of Russia.'

The effect was terrific. The nobles leaped on their chairs and yelled like madmen for Dmitri, till the old hall might verily have shaken on its foundations. Again and again the cheers were renewed with fresh outbursts, and nearly a quarter of an hour elapsed before the commotion subsided.

But among all that tumultuous assembly only one man kept his head. Only one man knew and felt, as he gazed coolly, but with a beating heart, at the wild enthusiasm he had raised, the distance that lies between the warm creative thought and the cold and tardy execution. That man was Dmitri himself.

XV

‘Well, Prince, how do you feel this morning?’ said Iwanicki gaily, as he entered Dmitri’s room on the following day.

‘Oh, I’m all right!’ said Dmitri with a smile; ‘and you?’

‘Excellent, though we certainly kept it up after you left. Sorry you couldn’t stay last

night, though I daresay you were wise, too. Doesn't look well for the great man to exceed. Besides, you left just at the right time. Prince, you *are* an orator. Never heard anything like that speech. You've made every man in Poland your slave.'

'I hope not, Count.'

'Look here, Prince. May I give you a bit of advice?'

'Why, of course!'

'Well, then, *strike while the iron is hot*. We Poles, you know, are fiery devils, but it soon passes off. Be warned by me, and get away to the frontier as soon as you can. If you wait a month, something will turn up, and we shall be *cold* again.'

'That's exactly my own view, Count. I'm longing to begin. But there are one or two things I must do first.'

'What?'

'Well, I must sign the marriage contract with Mniszek. Look, here's the rough draft. It's odd, isn't it; here am I, without an acre, giving away whole provinces by the handful. Marina's to have Novgorod and Pskof. That

won't matter, as she comes to me as soon as I'm there myself. But here's more—Smolensk and Severia for King Sigismund and the Palatine of Sandomir—between them.'

Iwanicki drummed on the window with his fingers. 'H'm, Prince, you don't mind my speaking plainly?'

'Not a bit.'

'Well, then, George Mniszek's a grasping old bankrupt. He's only using you to *recoup* his own desperate affairs.'

'Let him, by all means. It does me no harm at present.'

'Well, what else is there?'

'Well, then, I must abjure and become a Catholic.'

'You had better do that quietly.'

'Right; but they will have it. Sigismund makes a point of it. It will be very secret, just to satisfy the legate.'

'These Jesuits, devil take them!' exclaimed Iwanicki; 'they are sapping Poland. Sigismund will find out that before long.'

'Well, then, King Sigismund gives me public audience next week. And after that

I say good-bye to Marina and to you, and off I go.'

'Not to me—I'm coming.'

'You don't mean it?'

'Mean it! What do you take me for? Do you think I'm going to stay cooped up here at home? No; I'm going to be one of your *subs*, General.'

'Iwanicki, there will be danger. Boris is strong yet.'

'Don't insult me, General.'

Dmitri grasped his hand. 'Come, Count, that's like a friend. I didn't like to ask you, but I'm as glad as if you were a whole army. You shall live to see I'm not ungrateful, if I ever,' he added, turning away, 'get back to my father's throne.'

Iwanicki looked at him with a comical expression, which would have startled Dmitri not a little if he had noticed it.

XVI

Now over the wide flat plains of Russia, from Dnieper to Volga, from Novgorod to Kazan, flies Rumour with her hundred tongues, crying aloud, *Dmitri is found! Woe to the evil Tsar! Prince Dmitri is coming to free his people from the hated Tartar!* Everywhere in town and village excited knots collect and discuss the wondrous news. Expectation is on tiptoe; the liberator is at hand. Where is he? Who has seen him?

Who shall venture to describe the creation of a popular legend?

From the hill at Nijni-Novgorod, from which the old city, with its fortified Kremlin, looks down on the two rivers and the marshy plain beneath, a motley crowd of every nationality and dress might be seen thronging the booths, whose long straight rows cover the triangular space between the rivers, the Volga and the Oka. There, jostling one another, were Finn and Russian, Pole and Tartar; there Armenian and Persian

elbow Kalmuck and Ostiak. There appears the local white tunic with the scarlet border, the close-fitting brown frieze or flowing many-coloured caftan, the striped trouser and bright petticoat, the fur cap and the turban, green, black, or white, jumbled together in kaleidoscopic permutations. Life in all its bustling brilliant variety outside, and all its dirty uniformity inside, tosses up and down, to and fro, like the sea, under the sweltering sun of July.

An eager group encircles the booth of the butcher Minin, and hot argument debates the question of the hour.

‘I saw him—I saw him with my own eyes!’ exclaimed a dirty, excited Cossack. ‘I saw him at Kieff.’

‘What was he like?’ asked the butcher.

‘He was a short man, with a dark face, and his right arm was longer than the other.’

‘That’s him!’ exclaimed one or two bystanders. ‘Yes, it is the Prince.’

‘How can it be the Prince, when he died at Uglitch?’ observed an Armenian, who listened attentively to the conversation.

‘He never died!’ cried a tall peasant. ‘I am

of Uglitch. I know all about it. The holy Saints protected him.'

'How should you know?' said the Armenian scornfully.

'They could not find him; the Tsar lied. I was in the crowd. I saw the body; it was not the Prince.'

'And what has he been doing all these years, then?'

'He became a monk,' said a little Russian from Rylsk. 'He wandered in the steppe. He stayed at the monastery at Novgorod-Severski; but they did not know him.'

'But he left a letter—a letter in his cell,' put in another.

'He was never a monk,' sneered the Cossack. 'He was a Zaporogue. I saw him myself. I fought by his side—our hetman knows—Gheras Evangel knows,—by his side, I tell you.'

'A Cossack! he, the Prince!' ejaculated the little Russian. 'Why, my brother saw him in Volhynia! He was not a Cossack.'

'Well, anyhow, he is in Poland now,' said the Cossack. 'I shall go to Kieff, and fight for him. We'll soon do for the Tartar Boris.'

‘Why did he go to the Lyakhs?’ said Minin; ‘the pagans. ‘Why didn’t he come to his own people?’

‘He will. He couldn’t at first. Boris would have caught him and poisoned him.’

‘I don’t like the pagans in Russia,’ went on Minin, shaking his head; ‘they will bring no good. Better the Tartars than these accursed Lyakhs.’

‘Pooh!’ said the Cossack. ‘Let Prince Dmitri Ivanovitch only come,—then we can drive out the pagans and the Tartar Boris, and then we shall be able to drink brandy cheap again.’

‘And be able to change our masters again,’ added a *moujik*, ‘when the scoundrel of a Tartar is dead and gone.’

XVII

On the banks of Dnieper, a score of miles above its outlet into the bad Black Sea, the lone and level steppe stretches out its dreary, marshy waste. A land of pool and morass, of swamp and snipe, wild duck and heron! Here the

bravest of the Cossacks, the Zaporogues—the ‘dwellers below the Falls,’—had their fortified camp, or Sizca. Hither came every bold spirit, the man of all nations, or of no nation, to cast in his lot with the sons of adventure, and take his chance in a wild uncertain gamble, carelessly staking life daily against death or booty. Here the crafty Armenian and ubiquitous Jew plied their trades and drove their bargains, equally flourishing whether Fortune blessed or cursed their free-handed and freebooting customers.

Here, in the great square, surrounded with log huts and gaudy booths, pushes and struggles a living sea of bandits, who pour from all quarters into this open-air assembly-room of the free and lawless Zaporogues. For the drums have beaten to summon the general council of war; the booths are deserted; the turbulent warriors pick themselves up, drunk or sober, from the streets where they loll or sprawl, awake or asleep, at full independence all day long when nothing is doing; and singing, yelling, quarrelling, press densely round the tribunal from which their chief or hetman is to harangue them.

Thus for a while they struggle and roar.

Suddenly a grizzled, weather-beaten old Cossack springs on the platform, and his appearance is greeted with a wild outburst of 'Korela! Korela!' which at first drowns all attempts on his part to make himself heard. Repeated waving of his horse's tail, the emblem of his office, at length produces a lull.

'Zaporogues, great news! great news! Are we to sit idle here till our knees are stiff and our hair is gray? Who longs for booty, glory, or the death of a hero? Let him listen to the valiant Otrépieff!'

Amidst furious shouts of 'Korela!' he descends, and a tall man in the habit of a monk takes his place.

'Korela! Korela!'

Through the uproar the monk vainly endeavours to gain a hearing. A Cossack leaps up and tries to hurl him from his position. The monk, seizing his antagonist fairly by the middle, tosses him with a prodigious heave on to the heads of the nearest shouters, and raising his voice to a scream, addresses them—

'Noble Zaporogues, a word! How long will you sit like women, babbling and squabbling with Jews, while your life runs on, and the

rust chokes the barrels of your guns, and locks the sword to the scabbard? No women in your camp? Why, you are *all* women! Your voices are loud, but your arms are soft.'

The crowd surged to and fro, but the din grew less; for his recent feat and his powerful figure commanded their attention.

The monk tore from his bosom a young raven, and tossed it into the air; it flew rapidly away to the north.

'Zaporogues, mark the bird. See how it hastens to the north! Why?—it smells blood. Zaporogues, which of you remembers Dmitri Ivanovitch? Which of you fought under Gheras Evangel?'

'I!' 'And I!' 'And I!' roared fifty voices.

'Zaporogues, a Cossack—one of yourselves—wants help. He is marching against the evil Tsar—the Tartar Tsar—who despises the Cossacks and steals their brandy. Does any one want brandy? Does any one want gold? What! Will any one stay behind when a Zaporogue wants assistance against a vile Tartar? Will you let a brother-in-arms fall, for want of a few brave comrades to fight at his side?

‘Zaporogues, do you know who you will fight for? Some say he is Prince Dmitri Ivanovitch, the son of old Ivan the Terrible, who has come to claim his rights, and drive away the Tartar Boris. And some say he is a son of Stephen Battori, who gave the Zaporogues their hetman and their privileges. And he asks your help against the Tsar. Will you let him fight alone, without a comrade? Will you sit at home when the eagles are collecting for a feast?’

Here he began to sing, in a kind of chant, an old Cossack war-song.

‘Over the mountain, lo! a cloud, a cloud rises! It rises, it thunders! The lightning flames over the Ukraine. ’Tis the Cossacks, the valiant Zaporogues. Hark! the drums beat, the horses neigh, the guns roar like the wind on the ocean.

‘I see a crowd! I see the flash of the steel. The blood flows like a river into the Dnieper! Ah! the raven will croak!—the raven will croak!—flying over the steppe—flying over the steppe! The cuckoo will mourn in the grove; the grey hawk and the swift eagle. Hark! they shriek for their brethren—the

Cossacks—that fear not the charge of the enemy! Where are they? Has the whirlwind buried them? Has hell swallowed them? They are gone on the steppe! They are no more seen on the plain! Hark! how the raven croaks! See where the white bones cover the earth, and the long hair clotted with gore lies stripped from the bare skull; there sits the black magpie—dark bird of ill omen! Have they gone, these warriors? Ay! but what have they gained? Glory, glory is theirs! Glory and eternal renown in the songs of the Cossacks—the songs of the warriors that fear not the enemy.’

‘Hurrah! hurrah!’ screamed the excited Cossacks. ‘Hurrah for the ravens and the glory!’ And a thousand voices took up the chant.

‘Zaporogues!’ shouted Korela, bounding up on to the platform again, ‘to-morrow we will start. Away with fine clothes and brandy pitchers—no more drinking and carousing. A curse on the man who deserts his comrades in the hour of danger, and fails at the roll-call!’

XVIII

At length the momentous day arrived on which King Sigismund had graciously declared his intention of according to the fugitive Russian Prince a public audience, and making known to him what attitude he would adopt to his claims.

The ante-chamber of the royal reception hall was thronged with Polish nobles, who pressed around Dmitri in the greatest excitement; for, though it was pretty generally known that the King was favourably disposed to him, yet it would make a vast deal of difference whether he should merely recognise his position, or actively further his schemes with money and troops. Dmitri himself preserved his calm, and maintained a uniformly dignified and reserved demeanour, but his more ardent supporters eagerly canvassed the chances, and speculated on the probable results of the timid character of the King.

‘Money and troops, my dear sir!’ Iwanicki

was saying; 'how little you know our excellent monarch, Soltikoff. No, no; in a case like this, trust me for it, fine words and prayers will be his little game. Recourse must be had to the spiritual arms of faith, which moves mountains, and perpetual fervent prayer. Why——'

The buzz of conversation suddenly broke off, as the door opened, and a master of ceremonies summoned Prince Dmitri, and ushered him into the presence of the King.

As the door closed behind them, the hum of voices again arose. 'What will he say?' 'Who's in there?' 'No one but the old fox Rangoni and the King.' 'I wonder what Sigismund will say?'

'Pooh! what does it matter what he says?' went on Iwanicki, rather too loud, to the asker. 'I should think the Poles don't want Sigismund's leave to fight when and for whom they choose.'

'Your tongue runs fast, Count,' replied the Chancellor, who caught his words. 'You should know better than to speak slightingly of your King. Who honours the King honours himself.'

Before Iwanicki could reply, the door opened again, and Dmitri reappeared.

‘Well, what said *His Majesty?*’ exclaimed Iwanicki, with a marked emphasis on the words and a glance at the Chancellor. ‘How went your petition?’

‘His Majesty,’ answered Dmitri, ‘gave me a very gracious reception. I explained my position to him as shortly as I could, and paused for a reply, when I caught the eye of a majordomo or something of the kind, who signed to me to withdraw, so I withdrew. His Majesty is speaking with the legate on the subject, I imagine.’

‘Taking advice from Holy Church, no doubt,’ said Iwanicki with a sneer.

At this moment the great doors were flung open, and the nobles poured into the hall. Rangoni came forward and led the Prince up to the throne through a double line of courtiers.

Dmitri, whose martial figure looked very striking in a suit of black velvet, his only ornament being the diamond cross which sparkled on his broad breast, advanced, his arms crossed on his chest in the Muscovite fashion for sup-

pliants, to within a few paces of the King. There he stopped.

The King considered him for a moment, then he made a step towards him and said—

‘God preserve thee, Demetrius Ivanovitch, Prince of Muscovy. Thy birth is known to us, and approved by trustworthy testimony. We do here assign thee a yearly revenue of 40,000 florins, and do grant thee permission, as our friend and guest, to accept the counsel and services of these our subjects.’

There was a low murmur of applause. Dmitri bent very low, and then, suddenly recovering himself, traversed the apartment with hasty steps, and went out.

A second murmur, of astonishment, followed his abrupt departure. ‘A fine Prince of Muscovy!’ exclaimed Zamoisky aloud. ‘He seems to have left his manners behind him at Uglitch.’

‘No doubt,’ instantly answered Iwanicki in a low voice, which, notwithstanding, was distinctly heard all over the room, ‘some of us here, if we were Prince of Muscovy, would have acted very differently on hearing we were suddenly about to recover our rightful heritage.’

The Chancellor shot a glance of anger at him, and even Sigismund was about to rebuke him for his breach of etiquette. But the Papal legate broke in—

‘Let not your Majesty take offence if at this trying moment the feelings of nature have proved too strong for courtesy. This sudden manifestation of Heaven’s blessing and your Majesty’s generosity might well overpower all minor considerations and work upon an exile’s heart. Your Majesty will excuse the young Prince and his breach of ceremony. I am well assured it was no mark of ingratitude, but the very reverse.’

‘It is well, Rangoni,’ said the King; ‘we bear no grudge to the young man for his apparent discourtesy. Know, gentlemen of Poland,’ he went on, looking round at the audience, ‘you have our permission to do what in you lies and your friendship may dictate towards the reinstating this royal fugitive in his kingdom. The sacredness of treaties forbids us to do more, and assist him with the forces of Poland against the usurper Boris. But, doubtless, the noble Palatine of Sandomir will

spare no pains to make the attempt of his future son-in-law successful.'

And with a wave of his hand he dismissed the assembly.

'Old hypocrite!' said Iwanicki to Mniszek, as they all trooped out. 'What a crafty scheme! To shift the whole peril on to his faithful subjects, and grab all the profit when it comes. Faugh! it smells of the Jesuits.'

'No matter,' said the Palatine; 'so long as we get his royal countenance for the affair, let the aid be what it may. Come along with me, Count; there's lots to arrange, and I want you to help me.'

'I'll be with you immediately. I must just go and discover what our ill-mannered or too sensitive general is about, and why he bolted like that. I'll be with you in a moment, and then, hey for Muscovy and a carouse in the Kremlin!'

XIX

Meanwhile Dmitri had dashed home, and there, burying himself in the farthest of his suite of rooms in Iwanicki's house, he was seized with

bout after bout of the inextinguishable laughter of the Olympians.

‘I thought I should have burst or died. It was too absurd. All those noble idiots and their priest-driven king decked out like the steppe in springtime, to restore the rightful heir to the throne of his fathers, the throne of Muscovy! And that idiot Mniszek, with the gleam of greed in his fatuous face. Yes, I should have died if I had tried to utter a word; or rather, I should not have died, but been hung, for these fellows wouldn’t see the joke at all in the same light.

‘I nearly spoiled it all; lucky I got away so quick. I wonder what they thought of it: rather unceremonious, leaving like that. I dare say they will excuse it—natural bashfulness—overcome by emotion—and so on. Why, so I was.

‘The fact is, I must get away. I must look sharp—“strike while the iron is hot,” as Iwanicki says. All this will cool down soon. And then Otrépieff’s hard at work among the Cossacks. Let me once get into the field, and then I think I know how to behave.

‘These Poles are fine fellows, all the same. They only want a leader. A leader!’—he drew

himself up unconsciously. 'What a thing it would be to win Russia, and then amalgamate with Poland! Why, even the Frenchman, the Béarnais, hasn't done anything like that!'

His heart beat a little as he flew along in his thoughts, and he longed to do something worthy of Henri IV.

'I mustn't waste any more time dawdling here!' he cried, suddenly jumping up. 'But some one's coming. Hollo, Count, here you are!'

'Here *you* are, you mean. Why, General, what possessed you to bolt away like that? Had you made an appointment, or did anything bite you suddenly—what was it? Your feelings too much for you, perhaps?'

'Why, yes, there you have it! It was very stupid of me, Count, but it's over. I must make my apologies to King Sigismund. Did you see Mniszek before you came away? Poor Mniszek, poor father-in-law; I suppose *he* will have to pay me that pension of 40,000 florins for the present!'

'Poor father-in-law? Poor son-in-law, rather. Why, Mniszek hasn't got a penny in the world, except what he can raise from the Jews on your

marriage with his daughter! But come along, he's waiting for us. I tell you what, General, we must pack up, and be gone. You must leave Marina behind till you've made her nest ready for her in the Kremlin at Moscow.'

'Of course, Iwanicki; were you afraid I should want to take her with me? No, no; remember what they say among the Zaporogues: "No women in camp."'

'Hurrah!' exclaimed Iwanicki joyously; 'you'll do, Prince. Yes, I *was* a little afraid of that. *Now* we shall win. Do you know, General, I daresay after all you didn't do yourself much harm, as it turned out, bolting away like that: it looked well. After all, you couldn't have done anything better. People are rather pleased with it on the whole. What a lucky fellow you are, Prince! Chance helps you better than any amount of deep-laid schemes would.'

Dmitri looked at him, but said nothing, and they went out.

II

'Jacta est alea.'

JULIUS CÆSAR.



XX

DARK was the soul of Boris Godunoff, as he sat alone in his palace within the Kremlin at Moscow.

‘ So it seems I am to be dogged by misfortune for ever, on account of that miserable business about Dmitri at Uglitch. Ten thousand curses on the day that I determined to do away with the brat! Great God! isn’t it enough that I have worn my very life to the bone in the service of these pig-headed Muscovites, without being worried to death by that one fatal mistake? The boy was dead—is dead—dead as Rurik—dead as mutton—but his spirit works. This Lithuanian scoundrel, whoever he is, knows the people and their damnable love for their Tsars and their accursed line. Yes, I shall have to give up the game. And yet, after

slaving so hard and so skilfully, to be beaten by a nameless vagabond!—to have to knock under to a mere ghost of a dead boy! No; I'll beat him yet, backed as he is by all the awful obstinacy and bigoted devotion of these detestable Muscovites. Well, Semen, is that you? What news from the South?'

'Sire,' said his brother, the chief police agent, as he entered, 'bad news travels fast.'

'Bad news?—of course!' said the Tsar bitterly. 'When did good news ever drop out of *your* mouth?'

'I wish my news was more palatable,' said Semen. 'It's not my fault if things go wrong. I stand or fall with you. Why should I be a willing croaker? But facts are facts, pleasant or otherwise. This Lithuanian impostor is making way. The Poles have taken him up; and, besides them, he has a large contingent of Cossacks from the Don and the Dnieper. Moravsk has opened her gates to him already.'

'Faithful governors I have!' exclaimed Boris.

'I wish it *were* only the governors; but it's the populace—the populace that welcome him

everywhere, and compel their governors to yield to their fatal prejudices. The governors either yield, or are handed over to the impostor in chains. All Severia is hailing him as their liberator. It is feared even Tschernigoff may fall into his hands. Stephen Godunoff was taken, but contemptuously set free again to bring word to Moscow that the legitimate Tsar is coming to claim his own, supported by a strong force of Cossacks and Polish volunteers.'

'Sigismund shall pay for it!' angrily exclaimed the Tsar. 'The hypocrite! Volunteers! A fine trick to evade the treaty! And the rascally Otrépieff,—is he captured yet?'

'His uncle has just come back from Poland; and I'm sorry to say, the attempt to identify the impostor with Otrépieff has not only failed, but even worked in his favour. But Smirnoi is outside. Shall I call him in?'

The Tsar nodded, and his brother, going out, presently returned with the uncle of the runaway monk.

'Well, Smirnoi, have you succeeded in laying hands on your thief of a nephew?'

‘Tsar, bid me to speak and live! I did what I could, but Gregory Otrépieff is still at large.’

‘Of course he is! and the more fool I, to expect to catch him! Damnable villain! Ah, if I could but lay hands on him! But Heaven itself must be against me—how else could such a wandering scamp have eluded my grasp, and baffled my efforts for this twelve years? Enough, enough! What! Boris Godunoff and the whole power of the State against a rascally monk and the popular hatred? Why, the struggle is unequal——’

‘*Vox populi, vox Dei!*’ said a deep voice behind him. ‘The danger must indeed be formidable when the people no longer pay respect to the excommunications of their patriarch. Did I not warn you, Tsar, that the thing would be troublesome? But, whatever happens, patience!—be firm!—struggle to the last!’

‘Struggle!’ exclaimed Boris bitterly; ‘and have I not struggled? Have I ever given way? Have I not made head these ten years against the most awful of all enemies—the people’s loathing? And what’s the result? No more—I am sick of life! Is there a plague?’

Is there a famine? a fire? a death? Lay it all to the door of the Tsar!—the Tartar, the poisoner, the people's enemy, who hates Holy Russia! Why, let the impostor come when he likes and take possession! I will struggle no longer against the will of Heaven.'

He flung from the room, and left his three confidential advisers staring at one another in amazement.

'Can this be the wily and politic Boris?' said the Patriarch Job, after a pause. 'Why, as he says, the finger of Heaven seems indeed to be evident! He's no longer the same man. This impostor seems to drive him out of his mind.'

'Let us hope he may stop there, and not drive him out of his kingdom,' said Smirnoi ominously. 'I don't like the look of things, or the progress which this Dmitri, risen from the dead, makes. The people are for him, wherever he shows his face. I wish the army may be faithful—otherwise . . .'

He supplied his *hiatus* with a meaning look, and left the room.

The Patriarch looked after him with distrust.

‘Semen,’ he said, ‘why does the Tsar put such confidence in this Otrépieff? How do we know that he isn’t a spy of his nephew’s?’

‘Bad, very bad—uncle and nephew,’ answered Semen; ‘not to mention that, according to accounts, the impostor is well informed of everything that goes on in the Kremlin. But if the Tsar is weak, *we* at least must be active. This new-found Tsarévitch wouldn’t leave *my* head on my shoulders if he ever got the chance of taking it off, and neither would his friends the Jesuits have much pity for the holy and orthodox Patriarch Job.’

The Patriarch nodded. ‘Semen,’ he said, ‘we must lay our heads together; perhaps we may hatch some scheme to supplement the Tsar’s weakness. But it’s most extraordinary. I never knew him taken like this before. I wish it was not our own people we had to deal with—better knaves than fools to fight against. But come, we must do what we can—without delay.’

XXI

In a large cowshed on the right bank of Dnieper, a few miles above Kieff, the heir-presumptive to the throne of the Tsars held a short council of war with the principal companions of his daring enterprise, amongst whom were the Palatine of Sandomir, Iwanicki, two Jesuit priests, one or two Polish nobles, and one or two Russians—boyars who had deserted Boris, and had come to pay their court or take their chance with a rising sun.

Here was Dmitri; yet what a change had a few short weeks and a new situation made in him! There, the confined and ceremonious air of courts and brocades had left on his dignified carriage the least possible suspicion of awkwardness and *gêne*. Here, in close jacket and military boots, sword on thigh, and the blood leaping in his veins, he looked a prince well worthy to gain and keep an imperial throne. So powerfully, indeed, did the sentiment of being in his element act on him that it made

a marked effect on his advisers ; insensibly they abandoned the somewhat patronising tone in which they had hitherto addressed him, and succumbed to the influence of character and genius.

‘Very good, gentlemen!’ he exclaimed, rising from a tub on which he had been sitting. ‘Then we cross the river to-morrow. Yes ; speed, speed is the word ! Come, now, let us go out and exhort our brave handful of warriors. The good cause will be a host in itself to us. It’s the small compact number that always wins. Hold together, gentlemen, and before a month is out, Moscow’s glittering cupolas will hail us as their deliverer.’

The door opened, and in the doorway appeared a grizzly, weather-beaten old Cossack, with an eye that twinkled with good humour, but which seemed to bore into the man on whom it fell like a gimlet.

‘Korela, by St. Nicolas!’ exclaimed Dmitri, springing forward. ‘Why, now, *now* we shall carry everything before us ! Why, Korela, when we fought together, who ever saw our backs ? And have you brought some of your brave fellows with you ?’

‘Ay, ay, Dmitri!—Tsarévitch, I mean,’ said the gratified veteran, with a kind of wink; ‘we’ll send the rascals helter-skelter. There’s four thousand stout fellows outside, just arrived. We’ve been rusting in camp, but we couldn’t stay at home below the Falls when there was iron clinking in the north. But I’ve something else for you, Hetman,—a despatch from a friend of yours, and a prisoner.’

‘A despatch and a prisoner?’ Dmitri took the packet held out to him, and breaking it open, ran his eye over the contents. They were as follows—

I send this by a safe hand. The prisoner is an old friend of ours; but suppose he says he is a Russian noble, one Kroustchov, why should you contradict him? It looks well to be recognised by stray nobles. I’ve given him details about things in Moscow; examine him publicly, and ’twill aid the cause. I shall be with you soon.

GRISHKA.

‘Ready brain that you are,’ thought Dmitri. ‘Come on, gentlemen,’ he said aloud; ‘we’ll examine the prisoner outside, in full view. I’ve no secrets from my gallant friends. Gentlemen,

let me present you the hetman Korela—braver comrade never breathed. Come.’

And they all left the shed.

Outside, the scene was inspiring. There were assembled the fragmentary forces with which to conquer the millions of Russia. Drawn up in somewhat irregular order for the review, on one side appeared about fifteen hundred Polish knights; their brilliantly caparisoned horses, their bright armour, the tall plumes that nodded from their helmets, the huge wings that in many cases, aping real eagles, flapped from their shoulders, and even their heads, their shining lances and the jewels that sparkled on their dress and accoutrements,—all this, brightened by the ardour and excitement of novelty and hope, combined to fill every heart with martial enthusiasm. In the centre, some thousand Russians; mounted or on foot, with their strange flowing robes, bows and arrows, or antique armour, produced an effect more picturesque than reassuring. But on the right—joyful spectacle for a military eye—were massed the new arrivals, the men whose trade was war. There were the red trousers and rusty firelocks, the splendid

horses and consummate riders that all lands adjacent to the Dnieper and the Black Sea knew and feared—the Zaporogues.

Mounting his horse, Dmitri, followed by his train, rode rapidly to a little eminence which, forming a centre, had been selected as the platform from which to address the troops. The three small regiments pressed around him, and, after a preliminary cheer had died away, he spoke to the motley throng.

‘Noble Poles, loyal Russians, valiant Cossacks, why should I waste words? You all know the great cause for which we have assembled here. Here am I, an exile; yet with your aid I hope soon to sit on the throne of my ancestors. To all of you I have but one thing to say—no, two things. One is, that while we are still but a little band of brothers, you will find in me a general who will share every danger with the lowest amongst you. The other, that when Dmitri—as he will soon be—is recognised as the rightful Tsar, he will not forget to share the glory and reward with his faithful allies—with the chivalrous Poles, who espoused his cause when it was still uncertain and obscure;

or with those faithful Russian subjects, who preferred danger and the glory of obeying their legitimate sovereign to the safe disgrace of crouching before the usurping tyrant; or with the gallant Cossacks, who left their pleasant life on the banks of the Dnieper to help a former companion-in-arms.'

Shouts rent the air, but Dmitri waved his hand, and went on—

'Fellow-soldiers, I have here a prisoner, a Russian noble taken by accident on the Don, who has important information to disclose. I know no secrets from my comrades. Bring forward the man there.'

A man, loaded with irons, was hurried before him. His dress was the customary long caftan, red boots, and fur cap of the Russian boyar. No sooner had he caught sight of Dmitri than he fell on his face, and grovelled on the ground.

'By St. Vassili, it is himself! Mercy, mercy! noble Tsarévitch, mercy! I knew not I was fighting against my Tsar—against the son of the Terrible. Holy Saints! how like him he is! It must be the Terrible Ivan himself come back to life. Mercy, mercy!'

A murmur of astonishment ran through the onlookers.

‘What is your name, fellow?’ said Dmitri. ‘If you want your pardon, you must gain it by your information. And what news have you?’

‘My name is Kroustchof—Ivan Fedorovitch Kroustchof—most mighty Tsarévitch. I was one of the usurper’s most trusted confidantes. I know the imperial plans as well as Boris himself; ay, better.’

‘Get up then, and tell me how matters go on at Moscow, Ivan Fedorovitch. Speak the truth, and it shall be well for you.’

Kroustchof rose as if unwilling to stand before his Tsar.

‘Most mighty Tsar, I will utter nothing but the truth. Boris is gathering all the troops he can, but they hate him, all of them—*boyars* or *moujiks*, noble or peasant. They smile with their lips, but their hearts are all for thee. He cannot trust them; he trembles on his throne; he is afraid of thy name and the might of truth. And they say he is sending all his treasures to Astrakhan, and means to escape to Persia.’

‘The dog!’ exclaimed Dmitri. ‘Do you hear that, gentlemen? But he shall not get far. Go on, Kroustchof.’

‘There is nothing more to tell. Wait—Boris has sent for thy mother from her convent.’

‘Well?’

‘He has interviewed her time after time,’ said Kroustchof. ‘No one knows what he has said, but he keeps her under strict guard.’

‘No doubt,’ said Dmitri, turning to his circle. ‘The old fox! Poor mother, you shall soon see your son, in spite of his locks and keys. Anything more?’

‘His sister, the Tsarina Irene, is dead,’ said Kroustchof. ‘They say he poisoned her, as he poisoned thy brother, the Tsar Feodor. He gives out everywhere that thou art an impostor, but no one believes him in Moscow. He has hanged two nobles for drinking thy health, and his police crowd the prisons with the people, who expect thee as their deliverer.’

‘Is that all?’ inquired Dmitri.

‘All, most mighty Tsar; absolutely all.’

‘Very good. Guards, remove the prisoner. I will deal with him presently. Fellow-soldiers,’

he went on, turning to the eager soldiers, 'some of you have heard this fellow's report. Let those who have not learn it from those who have, and then who can doubt our success? To-morrow we cross the river and set forth for Moscow. Let God and the holy Saints bless us, and in six weeks we shall be talking over our adventures in the Kremlin. Let every man be ready to-morrow by sunrise.'

And amidst cheers and the flourishing of trumpets he rode back to the shed.

'General,' said Iwanicki on their arrival, 'some of these Russian boyars have villainous plebeian countenances. What a stroke of luck for you, that fellow turning up in the nick of time! His story is worth a host to you.'

'Put thy trust in the Lord,' commented one of the Jesuits, who rode disguised as a man-at-arms; 'and He shall give thee thy heart's desire.'

'Yes,' observed Dmitri thoughtfully; 'it was odd how the man recognised me. I suppose there must be a resemblance—so many people have noticed it already.'

XXII

A month flew by.

From the window of an exquisite *boudoir* in her father's palace at Cracow, the beautiful Marina gazed wistfully at the thickly falling snow.

'Come!' suddenly exclaimed our old friend Lise; 'your Imperial Tsarinaship has been very dull this morning. Can you think of nothing but your Paladin, Dmitri? I daresay he is putting to flight, at this very moment, at least six hundred miserable Muscovites, panic-stricken at the glare of his terrible black eyes!'

'They're not black; they're grey!' said Marina; and she was silent for a moment. 'Oh!' she exclaimed, coming back into the room; 'I wish he would write! Oh, Lise! you don't think he is killed?'

'Killed! How could he possibly be killed? They've nothing but bows and arrows to fight with, those poor Muscovites. Unless, perhaps, he gets frozen up in an iceberg,—or eaten by a

bear,—or shot by your father, Marie!—he does shoot so badly. I never saw any one shoot so badly as your worthy papa, dear. Why——’

The sentence was never finished, for a servant entered the room.

‘A courier, Mademoiselle, from Russia.’

Marina sprang to the door. ‘A courier! Where is he?’

The wily François had anticipated this outburst, and drew aside. There, in the doorway, stood the long-expected and snow-speckled postman.

Marina caught from his hands the packet, tore it open, and there was the letter. Let us look over her shoulder.

NOVGOROD-SEVERSKI.

Little golden-haired Marie! first, I send you hundreds of kisses. I must take care not to put this in the wrong packet—it would startle some of my good friends if I made a mistake. Are you trembling with anxiety to know whether I’m dead? No; I’m alive still, little woman, and we’re getting on famously. I haven’t time to write much, but I expect I shall soon be able to send for you. All the people here are enthusiastic for me. But what does a little girl know or care about battles and sieges, except that we win? Lots of the towns have declared for me. I always fight behind a large shield, so

don't be afraid, Marie. We took a Russian convoy yesterday with nearly a hundred thousand ducats in it. We are besieging Novgorod-Severski, where there's a troublesome fellow called Basmanof, who has shut himself up inside ; but we shall take it in another week. Next time I write, it will be from Moscow, I expect.

Adieu, little Marie! I think about you in the huts and sheds I generally sleep in, while you are luxuriously rolling in your silky bed! But I'm pretty well off here. They've burned most of the houses, but one or two do to live in. I send you a bearskin—I killed its owner the other day when we were out hunting—and the head of an arrow, which stuck in my hand last week as I was looking at the ramparts here. The hand is nearly well again now, but it won't be *quite* well till you've kissed it once more. Good-bye, darling little girl! I've no time to write more. Your father is safe and sound, and Count Iwanicki says he looks after me, so you must not be afraid.

DMITRI.

'Dear Count Iwanicki!' murmured Marina.

'Why, Marina, will you never hear? The news! the news! I suppose you won't let me see the sweet epistle, so tell me all that I may hear with my profane ears. How is the Paladin?'

And Marina told her.

XXIII

It was night at Novgorod-Severski. Through the blackened ruins of the lower town, burned by the Russian governor, Basmanof, when he retired into the citadel, the troops of Dmitri were scattered here and there in such of the houses and huts as had escaped utter destruction.

Wrapped in a military cloak, Dmitri himself, accompanied by Iwanicki, stole from point to point, marking the disposition and wakefulness of the pickets, sentinels, and videttes. As they drew near a half-ruined wall, they heard on the other side talking and laughing, mingled with dispute. Cautiously approaching, they gained a position from which, unobserved themselves, they could see and hear the group of disputants.

‘Why, what do you know about it, Zarucki?’ they heard an old Cossack say to a young one who had just spoken. ‘A fine captain you would make, to be sure!’

‘Say what you like, the general is wrong. Why, here have we been three weeks before

this miserable wooden fort; and if we stay here three years we shall not take it! The Russians are close on us, with their whole army. Do you think we shall win if we take as much time as this over each wretched citadel we come to?’

‘Why, what would *you* do?’ said his critic, with a shrug.

‘Do? Why, if I were hetman, I would attack the Muscovite army to-morrow!’ said Zarucki, with an oath.

‘Do you know how many they are?’ said a Pole. ‘They are forty thousand if they are a man. And we—why, all told, we aren’t fifteen thousand!’

‘Pooh! what does that matter? The Muscovites are cowards; their generals drive them on with whips. Anyhow, if the general stays here much longer, he won’t have any men at all! I shall go back to the Sizca. I daresay there will be something to do against the Tartars. I’ve had enough of this sitting idle here, freezing.’

‘So have I!’ ‘And I!’ shouted two or three more.

Dmitri beckoned his companion, and they stole away.

‘Iwanicki, do you know, that fellow is right. I must do something. The Cossack is quite right; the men are getting restless. What do you say? Shall we fall on and try our luck to-morrow?’

‘I’m under orders, General. What you command, I do. But if you ask my opinion, I should half agree with the ferocious young Cossack fellow. My knees are getting stiff here. Besides, General, *the Poles are growing cold*—you remember?’

Dmitri marched on for a moment in silence.

‘To-morrow it shall be, then, Iwanicki. Look! will you go and bring Mniszek and the rest round to my quarters at once? Yes; we’ll stretch our legs against the Muscovites to-morrow!’

Iwanicki went off, and Dmitri stopped for a second before he went into his house.

‘Yes, I must be *doing!* The men are getting tired and impatient. By hook or crook, I must do something brilliant!—something to strike them! Curse this Basmanof! What fiend put *him* into Novgorod-Severski?’

‘Well, it’s a big risk, but it must be run. *If* we could only manage to beat the Russian army —if we could manage *that* — we’d soon have Basmanof and his fort. I must get that man on my side—he’s a valuable man!—but how?’

He shook the snow from his boots, and entered the house.

XXIV

Grey, cold, and sunless was the morning of the last day of December 1604. In spite of the snowy mantle in which she had wrapped herself, Nature looked grim and repulsive. But in the little camp of Dmitri all was bustle and stir. Joyously did every man, whether Pole or Cossack, learn the intention of his general to make trial of fortune in the open plain. Nor did the least anxiety appear on the face of Dmitri himself, as he rode rapidly from point to point, cheering the hearts of all his soldiers by his gay humour and kindly *bonhomie*.

‘Well, Zarucki,’ he said, as he passed the young Cossack, to whose opinions he had listened

the previous night, 'the Saints have remembered you, and you have your wish. Let me see you play the man to-day.'

'Trust me, Hetman,' answered the delighted Zarucki, as Dmitri rode on.

At this moment a Russian envoy, escorted by a Cossack on each side, rode into the camp; and dismounting, was brought before Dmitri, who addressed him in Russian.

'Well, what now? Are the rebels prepared to return to their dutiful allegiance?'

'Do I speak to him who styles himself Prince Dmitri Ivanovitch?' said the envoy.

'You do.'

'Then know,' answered the envoy, 'that Prince Fedor Ivanovitch Mtislavski, General-in-Chief of the Russian armies, sends his injunction hereby to the Palatine of Sandomir, bidding him withdraw on the instant from the Russian territory, which he is violating in time of truce, and abandon the cause of an impostor, now in revolt against his lawful Tsar in alliance with Sigismund, King of Poland.'

'Do you hear the injunction, gentlemen?' said Dmitri, turning to his suite. 'Well, well, we

bear no malice to Prince Mtislavski for obeying orders. But get back to thy quarters, fellow, and bid them look to themselves, or I will teach them their mistake and their duty before the sun is down. Away with thee. In five minutes I will string thee from the beam of that blackened roof if thou art still in my camp.'

The messenger did not wait to be told a second time.

Within half an hour Dmitri's little army forsook its entrenched position, and debouched on to the plain. Half a mile from the Russian lines he drew up his forces in three bodies. On the right wing were the mounted Cossacks, commanded by Korela; in the centre the contingent of Russians, with all those of the Poles or Cossacks who fought on foot. He himself, at the head of the Polish knights, occupied the left.

For nearly two hours he remained quiet, watching attentively the huge Russian army, spread as it were all round him on the horizon, as it slowly assumed position, numbering not less than forty thousand men. At length the expected moment arrived. By the carelessness of the Russian generals, two regiments, if the

irregular and ill-drilled Russian bodies may so be styled, advanced simultaneously to occupy a position almost exactly opposite the Polish forces. The mistake was discovered, and the order countermanded. One of the two began slowly to move along the line, presenting its flank to Dmitri's eager eye.

He instantly gave the order to advance.

'Now, gallant Poles, forward! God will bless the good cause. Iwanicki, remain behind, and see that Korela and his Cossacks support us, ready to dash in where we are pressed.'

With a blast of their trumpets the Poles, their plumes waving, their skin mantles floating behind them, their long lances with red pennons gleaming all in a row, rushed upon the point selected. Perceiving their intention, the Russians made a clumsy attempt to present a solid front to their onslaught; but the want of drill was fatal, and their confusion was complete. In five minutes the Poles were riding hither and thither amongst them, transfixing with their lances, or cutting and hewing with their swords, the disorderly crowd of terrified Russians, who, with

loud shouts of 'the Tsarévitch! the Tsarévitch!' abandoned their position, threw away their arms, and fled in utter panic. The whole army caught the infection, and the sudden charge of Korela with his Cossacks, half a mile farther to the right, turned the panic to a rout. In vain did the Russian general endeavour to rally his cowardly and disaffected troops; they paid no attention to any word of command. He himself was knocked off his horse, wounded, and nearly killed. The whole Russian army would have been annihilated, had not a few bands of German mercenaries, making a virtue of necessity, successfully withstood the Cossacks, while the Poles, bent on exterminating their opponents, fell into confusion on their side; the shout arising in the rear that Basmanof had made a sally from the fort and set fire to Dmitri's camp. This timely intervention, and the disinclination of Dmitri to tempt fortune too far, brought the sudden and temporary engagement to a close.

In half an hour it was all over. Dmitri recalled the Cossacks, and his troops returned half unwillingly to their camp, leaving the disorganised Russian army to collect itself a few miles

farther on the plain, and trusting to the effect of his victorious cavalry charge to finish what their swords had left half done.

XXV

‘Are you there, General?’

‘Come in, Iwanicki. What is it? I can see a shadow on your face.’

‘You have a keen eye, General. Why, what reason could there be for a shadow, after the glorious victory, and that reinforcement of twelve thousand Don Cossacks yesterday?’

‘Victory! Yes, that’s all very well; but there ought to be more deserters coming in. And what are four thousand killed and wounded to the Russians?—a mere flea-bite. It won’t do, Iwanicki. There’s a fresh army coming from Moscow; it must be close at hand.’

‘There’s something more dangerous than another army.’

‘What’s that?’

‘A house divided against itself shall not stand.’

‘Which means—what?’

‘General, a message has just arrived from Sigismund ordering all the Poles to return at once, on pain of forfeiting their goods. There are troubles at home.’

‘Well?’

‘Well, General, the noble and chivalrous Poles for once are going to obey their sovereign’s commands. They don’t do it often; but they must “honour and obey the King” once in a way, just to keep their hand in, you know, General.’ And Iwanicki laughed in derision.

‘And you yourself, Count?’

‘I? oh, I’m an insignificant person! I stay with the General, sink or swim.’

‘Brave heart!’ said Dmitri; ‘we’ll win yet, and win together. I knew something of the sort would happen soon. These hussars, they were furious at my giving that gold we took from Massalski to the Cossacks, and they are angry because Rome is not built in a day. I suppose my cautious father-in-law is one of the loyal returners?’

‘Oh yes! the prodigal father is quite anxious to get home. They’re getting ready now to go.’

‘Without orders?’ said Dmitri, with a scowl. ‘Oh, I forgot, they’re only volunteers. There’s their excuse for leaving me in the lurch, the pitiful wretches! Well, it’s a bad blow, Count. They were, between ourselves, the flower of the whole troop. But courage — courage, Count! Fortune’s not like the Poles; she never deserted a brave man in his need. We’ll manage without them yet.’

‘General, they’re not *all* going. I’ve a little influence left; there’s a hundred good fellows are going to follow my bad example and disobey Sigismund.’

‘And if he seizes their belongings, I’ll make it up to them—every ducat. They shall lose nothing by acting like brave men and true comrades. And you, Iwanicki, I’ll make you a home at Moscow worth all you’ve left behind you. As long as I live, what’s mine is yours. Come, let’s go and see these cowardly trimmers and my worthy father-in-law. Yes, we’ll make these fair-weather friends bite their lips for shame before six months are gone. We’ll succeed in spite of them, Iwanicki—and together; there’s my hand on it. Ay, by God, we will.’

XXVI

The little cavalcade of Polish knights pranced and curveted, manifesting a somewhat indecent eagerness to be gone. Some hundred paces higher up the hill, Dmitri, surrounded by Iwanicki, Korela, the two indomitable Jesuits, and a few Cossacks, watched them from his horse, while he listened abstractedly to the apologies offered by his future father-in-law, the Palatine of Sandomir, who came to make his *adieux*, and those of his party.

‘You must not take it ill, Tsarévitch,’ he was saying, ‘if we, the nobles of Poland, find it necessary to obey the summons of our King, in his difficult and perilous position, and return home. We shall soon, I hope, be able to come back to you with reinforcements, though, I make no doubt, only to find you firmly established on your throne, and in the hearts of your subjects. I wish, for my own part, I could remain to share whatever danger and glory may attend your enterprise, but my first duty is that to my Sovereign.’

Dmitri listened, apathetically, yet with a touch of scorn on his countenance, to the glib excuses that the Palatine poured out.

‘You are very right, my dear father-in-law, you are quite right; your obedience is exemplary. I am sorry you are going, more on your account than my own. You will win great reputation for prompt loyalty by getting back as quick as you can, but you will miss some honour and some interesting adventures. But you do best to follow your *conscience*, father-in-law. Don’t forget to tell your daughter the latest news of the camp, and say I will soon send for her to Moscow.’

And, moving abruptly forward, he drew near to the departing squadron. A crowd of Cossacks surrounded it, some contemptuous, some half inclined to go and do likewise. But at a little distance from the main body were drawn up, in silent reproach, a little troop of some hundred hussars—the hundred that were prepared to disobey their king, but careful of their military honour.

‘Noble Poles!’ he shouted to the departing squadron, ‘let me thank you here, before you go,

for your freely rendered services in my cause. I wish necessity did not compel you to draw back before we have gone to the end. Believe me, there will be many a stirring tussle where honour is to be won, at which we shall mourn your departure—we who stay behind. But as for you, generous gentlemen,' he added, turning to the remaining hundred, 'let me thank *you* here, and put off any other more substantial recognition till we feast together in the Kremlin. Trust me, it shall be soon. The fewer we are, the greater the glory. When did the stars desert a handful of brave men who stuck together?'

A shout burst from the Poles and the by-standing Cossacks, while there was a certain movement of hesitation in the larger body that were meditating a retreat. But one of the Jesuits spoiled the effect.

'Woe,' he cried aloud, 'to the backsliders, who put their hand to the plough but draw back in fear!'

'It does not sit well on you, Father,' said Mniszek instantly, 'to approve disloyalty, and sneer at those who merely obey their king. Nobles,' he cried to his companions, 'let us be off! Forward!'

and he rode away at the word. The whole cavalcade followed him, and with them, Dmitri could not but feel, went the sheet-anchor of his little army.

He watched them for a minute, as they grew less and less on the plain ; then, turning to those who had remained, he cried—

‘There is still time!’ And he pointed to the departing troop.

But an enthusiastic shout refused his invitation.

‘Very well, gentlemen,’ he said, ‘you believe in me now when I am weak ; I will remember you when I am strong.’ And turning his horse he rode back to his quarters.

Two hours later Iwanicki burst in upon him, as he sat discussing the state of affairs with the Jesuits.

‘What is it?’

‘General, four hundred Poles have come back again ; they were ashamed to desert you.’

‘A good omen,’ said Dmitri smiling, turning to the Jesuits.

‘One of them said, “I go not,” but afterwards

he repented and went,' observed the Father who had rebuked the deserters.

XXVII

Late that evening Dmitri pondered with himself as to the thing to do next.

'Well, they have gone; it's no use crying about it. What's to be done now? We must abandon this wretched siege; we must get away from Novgorod-Severski. The whole Russian army will be down on us in a few days, and how are we to make head against them? We can't repeat our victory without the Poles. No; perhaps we had better retire on one of these little towns, Rylsk, perhaps, or Voroneje, and wait and see what turns up. But then, the danger of waiting! My whole force will melt, just like this snow in the spring sun. Just what Boris would like. No, no; I must *do*—something; but what? Curse these Poles! A pretty hole I am in without them. I wonder——'

Zarucki, who was on guard, broke in on his meditations. 'A courier from Moscow, Hetman.'

A tall man, dressed as a *moujik*, entered the room.

‘Well, Tsarévitch.’

‘Otrépieff!’

‘I see you don’t forget old friends.’

‘Grishka, you again! Why, what an age it is since I saw you! Sit down. Where have you dropped from?’

‘An age! yes, centuries. But I’ve heard all about you, including the victory. We’re getting along.’

Dmitri shook his head. ‘Victory! yes; but the beard grows during the shaving. Their army is bigger than it ever was. No, Grishka, we’re not there yet.’

‘But we soon will be.’

‘You say you’ve heard all. Have you heard about the Poles?’

‘What?’

‘That they’ve gone back to Poland again.’

Dmitri told him. The monk listened, and swore fearfully. ‘Cowardly scoundrels! but we’ll manage—we’ll manage without them. The legend—the legend; that will do the work better than millions of Poles! You are Tsar already—

almost. I've just been at Moscow. News! news! It's all up with Boris.'

'How?'

'He's heard of your victory. He suspects every one—dare not punish any one. They're all against him. If not always *for* you, yet *against* him—that's the main point. He's just sent Shuiski—Prince Vassili Ivanovitch Shuiski—to take command of the army; Mtislavski's almost dead of his wounds. Shuiski loathes him, and is, besides, no good at all in the field. We shall beat him all to pieces, if we try; and then——' he winked significantly.

'And then—yes,' said Dmitri abstractedly.

'You mustn't stop here, though,' went on Otrépieff, after a pause. 'Look! you must throw up this siege, and get off to Putiol. Wait there a little while. I don't think you will have any more fighting to do; I've been working the Russian army. The men are nearly all half for you already; they only want a little coaxing. I can manage it.'

'Grishka, what a head you've got! Yes, you're right; avoid a battle, and let the charm work quietly.'

‘Look you, Dmitri! Boris is doomed; he can’t live long. As soon as he’s dead, they must have you; there’s no one else. Boris can’t last much longer.’

‘Are you sure about that?’

‘Pretty sure,’ said Otrépief with a grin. ‘I’ve a friend or two in the Kremlin, though Boris—shrewd man!—never suspects it. I’m afraid his food doesn’t always agree with him! That, and the state of mind he’s in—oh yes! we’re sure enough. Leave that to me. You draw off to-morrow, and go to Putiol; they are all *your* men there. We’ll do the rest—we—that is, the Russian army,—and we’ll manage to disgust all the peasants by burning a few villages. You won’t have to wait long. So now, I must be off. By the bye, what’s this I hear about a Polish Princess? Is it true?’

Dmitri was silent a moment.

‘Yes, it’s true.’

‘Fool—fool! Dmitri, you are too soft—’twill ruin you! Do you think the Muscovites will stand your marrying an “accursed pagan Lyakh?”’

Dmitri compressed his lips. ‘They *shall!*’

Otrépieff gazed curiously at him.

‘As I thought,’ he said at last. ‘Look! if we oust Boris, I’ve done my part! Mark my words, Dmitri!—this Polish woman will do for you. But the future must take care of itself; what will be, will be! I must see to the present. For the present, then, good-bye!’

‘Good-bye, Otrépieff!’

The monk went out, and Dmitri remained lost in thought.

‘I shouldn’t wonder if Otrépieff is right—he always is. But give me a careless life. The whole thing’s a gamble! No, no! let who will worry himself to death and spin out his miserable existence by cutting off his pleasures. As for me, Cæsar’s *my* master. Great Cæsar!—ay! I could die like you, if I could but live like you.’

XXVIII

At Moscow, in the Council-chamber of the Senate, sat a solitary boyar, awaiting the arrival of his brother nobles and the Tsar. To him presently there entered another.

‘ Good morning, Bielski ! ’

‘ Ah, Katiref ! is that you ? Well, have you heard ? ’

‘ What ? About the impostor fellow beating Mtislavski and the whole army with a handful of Poles and Cossacks ? ’

‘ Yes. Is it true ? ’

‘ I should think so ! But have *you* heard about Boris ? ’

‘ What ? ’

‘ Why, the news has killed him ! They say it’s broken him to pieces. ’

‘ Dear me ! how sad ! Hasn’t Shuiski gone to take command ? ’

‘ Yes ; if we wait a little, perhaps we shall hear things. ’

‘ What things ? ’

‘ Oh, I don’t know ! But Shuiski’s a deep man, and loathes our friend Boris, ’ and Katiref nodded significantly. ‘ How do you think, now, it would answer to recognise this Dmitri—just for a while ? We could easily get rid of him, when we’d had enough of him. ’

‘ And Boris was gone, eh ? ’ queried Bielski. ‘ Well, I would do a good lot to get rid of our *old*

Godunoff family, certainly; but you know the old fable—we might get out of the frying-pan only to find ourselves in the fire. This impostor seems an active man. Has that fellow Basmanof been really appointed as Shuiski's second in command?'

'Yes; but too many cooks,—you know. And, between ourselves, our army is a fraud. Not a hundred men to be depended on in it. Every other man is either a coward or a Dmitrist. Come now, how would a new Tsar—Dmitri, for example—suit you?'

'Oh, very well, I daresay! Perhaps he would let me marry. But hush! here comes the Tsar that is.'

The great doors were flung open, and a crowd of nobles, who had been waiting in the ante-room, appeared. They were followed by the Tsar himself, Boris Godunoff, the much-hated, leaning on the arm of the Patriarch Job. The extraordinary pallor and feeble worn-out look of the Tsar was marked by all, and subdued whispers went round the assembly.

An unusual silence prevailed as soon as all were seated; the presentiment of something impending weighed, as it were, on every tongue.

‘Most omnipotent Tsar,’ at length began Prince Vorotinski, ‘may thy slaves venture to ask the latest news from the southern provinces?’

‘His Imperial Majesty,’ replied the Patriarch, ‘has directed me to read to the Council a despatch received from the impostor styling himself Prince Dmitri Ivanovitch, who died, as we all, but more especially Prince Vassili Shuiski, now absent, knows, at Uglitch.’

The lips of Boris moved, but he said nothing.

The Patriarch, amidst profound silence, read the despatch, the tenor of which was that Boris was summoned to resign the crown in favour of the rightful heir. ‘Finally,’ the letter ran, ‘I will be merciful. Let Boris Godunoff hasten to vacate the throne he has usurped, and retire to a cloister. I will forget his crimes, and even assure him of my protection.’

The face of the Tsar grew still paler and more ashy.

‘From this we may see,’ continued the Patriarch, ‘how a momentary and accidental success over some scattered fugitives has blinded this scoundrel. How is it possible for us to

entertain to his pretensions any feeling but contempt? The Lord will protect His people. Under the able guidance of Prince Vassili Shuiski and Peter Fedorovitch Basmanof we shall soon see the Russians obliterate, with the blood of the criminal rascal, the passing dishonour reflected on their arms by his temporary success.'

'Tis a lie!' suddenly yelled Boris. 'He has not succeeded! He is dead! I saw him myself—Vassili Shuiski saw him—dead at Uglitch! Ah!' he screamed, as the astonished boyars rose in dismay, 'I see your guile! I know you, Bielski, Kurbski! I read your hearts! What! Would you leave the Council—my Council—for the usurper's? Traitors! are you so anxious to worship the new idol! Oh! you may smile and plot. Villains! I'll crush you yet——'

He raised his arms to heaven, and fell heavily forward on his face.

'Here, Vorotinski, Katiref, some of you!' exclaimed the Patriarch. 'Don't stand gaping there—help me!' And they carried off the unconscious Tsar back to his chamber.

The Council broke up.

‘All over!’ said Katiref to his neighbour, Bielski. ‘Now we may choose between Dmitri and—who? Which of us all is to be Tsar? Vassili Shuiski? He would like it, no doubt; but none of him for Katiref—no, thank you! Boris is doomed. If ever there was death in a face, it was *there* just now! Come round with me. We’ll send in an hour and see how he is; then we can settle what to do next. St. Nicolas! how white his face was!’

XXIX

A week later, as Dmitri was interviewing a deputation of the principal men at Putiol, where the inhabitants were all enthusiastic in his cause, the young Cossack, Zarucki, abruptly entered.

‘Hetman, the townspeople have brought three spies, who were going about the streets crying out you were an impostor, and offering a reward for your head. One of them says he knows you by sight, and will swear to you anywhere as a runaway monk.’

‘Take them to the great hall, Zarucki. We’ll be there immediately to examine them.’

‘General!’ cried Iwanicki, ‘an idea, an idea! What do you say? Let me be Tsarévitch for half an hour. Let’s see whether this fellow really does know you, or whether he is lying.’

‘Why, that’s a glorious idea, Iwanicki! Yes, Zarucki, keep the men under guard, and don’t produce them till I send word. Ring the great bell and let every one know there are some spies to be examined. We’ll have a splendid scene. Iwanicki, come and get into my clothes. I’m afraid you’ll look rather odd in them; never mind. Who’ll lend me some Cossack things for a while? Can you look dignified enough, Count? No; you’ll spoil the effect by some mad prank or other.’

‘Not I. I’ll be as solemn and stilted as Sigismund himself; as royal as Nebuchadnezzar. Look here! *Where are the prisoners? What! by the blood of Rurik!* There, what do you think of that? Why, I was born to be a Tsar!’

XXX

The hall was crammed. At the upper end, on a raised dais, appeared the Tsarévitch and his suite. The body of the room was filled with a tossing crowd of Cossacks, Russian refugees, or the good folk of Putiol, all struggling to get as near as possible to the platform.

‘Where are the spies?’ ‘Don’t push!’ ‘That’s not the Tsarévitch!’ ‘Oh, don’t you know?’ Suddenly a cry arose from behind, ‘Room—room for the prisoners!’ By force and magic a lane was opened, through which Zarucki and half a dozen Cossacks dragged forward the three miserable spies. As they passed, they were saluted with many a curse, blow, or kick from the throng. Two of them seemed half-dead already with terror, but the third returned these offerings with scorn, and made as though, had his guards allowed, he would have defended himself against them all.

Iwanicki stepped forward and extended his hand to the crowd. ‘Bring forward the prisoners.

Now, which of you rascals is it that can swear to the Tsarévitch ?'

The bold prisoner answered immediately.

'I know you, you renegade scoundrel, in spite of your little pagan beard and moustache. People!' he shouted, 'this is no Tsarévitch, but a runaway monk! His name is Gregory Otrépieff.'

'Are you sure?' demanded the counterfeit Tsarévitch.

'Sure? As if I had not lived with you for years in the monastery. Scoundrel, do you come here with your accursed pagan ruffians to poison the minds of the holy Russian people?'

'You hear the villain?' said Iwanicki. 'Good folk of Putiol, you hear his lies? You see, all of you, how he recognises me. Why, you rascal, you are quite right. I am indeed not the Tsarévitch, but a poor Polish gentleman.'

'Hear him! hear him!' yelled the prisoner.

'But here is the Tsarévitch,' went on Iwanicki, stepping back and pointing to Dmitri, who came forward disguised as a Cossack. 'Perhaps you were for years in the monastery with him too?'

The prisoner stared, bewildered; but a yell of

delight from the audience showed that they entered into the scene.

‘Good people,’ said Dmitri advancing, ‘you have all heard this fellow perjure himself. This is the man who says he knew me when I was a monk. Now, let me tell you another thing. These letters were discovered on him; in them the usurper Boris offers you large rewards to deliver up me and the brave fellows with me into his power. Here I am; what do you say?’

A roar of indignation.

‘One word more, good people. Do you want any more proof that Boris knows only too well who I am? This scoundrel had poisons hidden in his boots. Boris thought he would try to get rid of me in his usual way. You all know how he poisoned my poor brother, the Tsar Feodor, and his own sister.’

Another roar, louder and more dangerous than the first. ‘Hang the villains!’ ‘Drown them!’ The crowd surged towards the platform.

Suddenly from behind, a voice rose with a shriek above the tumult, ‘Tsarévitch Dmitri, Boris is dead!’

There was instant silence. All turned, and

saw a tall man standing on a bench at the back.

‘Look at me, good people. I am Gregory Otrépieff, the man that fellow said was the Tsarévitch. I come from Novgorod-Severski, and the news has arrived. Boris is dead. There is your Tsar.’

And he pointed to Dmitri.

There was a wild howl of delight, and a dash at the prisoners. In the midst of shouts of ‘Dmitri! Dmitri!’ ‘The Tsar! the Tsar!’ the miserable spies were whirled out of the hall, and paid the penalty of their untimely zeal at the hands of the furious partisans of the new Tsar.

XXXI

At Moscow the funeral of the unfortunate Boris was hurriedly performed. Immediately afterwards, his son Fedor, an ingenuous young man not yet eighteen years of age, with his uncle Semen Godunoff, the Patriarch, Basmanof, and a few of the nobles, assembled in the Council-chamber of the Kremlin to deliberate as to the

best method of dealing with the exigencies of the moment.

The consultation was short, nor indeed was there much choice of action.

‘To-morrow, then,’ said the Patriarch, finally, ‘your coronation shall be performed and the oaths administered. But you, Basmanof, will proceed forthwith to the army, and use all means to retain it in its allegiance, for it is not to be denied that alarming rumours have reached us as to the progress of this impostor.’

‘You will do well to make haste,’ added Semen, looking up from under his brows as was his wont. ‘My brother Ivan sends me word that things are come to a pretty pass with the army.’

‘Lose no time, Basmanof,’ said the young Tsar-elect, timidly; ‘and I will guarantee any promises you may find it necessary to make to keep my subjects in their duty. And I will be to you all, and more, that my poor father was, should you add the glory of destroying this impostor to that which you have already won at Novgorod-Severski.’

Basmanof prostrated himself, and kissed the hand outstretched to him with fervour.

‘And do what you can,’ added the Patriarch, ‘to compose this fatal dissension which, I am told, has arisen between Prince Mtislavski and the brother of the late Tsar. Is this a time for quarrelling? I would almost recommend,’ he went on, turning to the young Tsarévitch, ‘that Prince Mtislavski should be recalled; yes, and even Prince Shuiski, for they can do little good with the soldiery, and may do much harm by ill-timed rivalry.’

‘You are right,’ said Fedor. ‘Yes; let them know my instant desire to see them at Moscow.’

‘The Tsar cannot do without the chief of his boyars at this anxious moment,’ said the Patriarch. ‘Bid them return at once, Basmanof, and our confidence will repose in yourself alone.’

‘Do so, Peter Fedorovitch,’ said the young man to Basmanof, ‘and I will not forget your services.’

Basmanof bowed low and left the room, as the Patriarch retired with the Tsarévitch, and the consultation ended.

The Princes Tcherkasky and Romanoff were the last to leave. The former remained drum-

ming on a table for some time, while the latter looked out over the Moscowa.

Finally, Tcherkasky rose and joined Romanoff in the window. 'A penny for your thoughts, Prince.'

'Oh, I was thinking—of our late lamented Tsar and the name he took on becoming a monk, just before he died. Bogolep—remarkable name, isn't it?'

They looked at each other.

'What do you think about Basmanof's fidelity?'

'How will Shuiski like being recalled?'

'Well, he'll come back.'

'Yes, in time; but under which Tsar?'

'Who knows? Dmitri sounds more Russian than Fedor, and would dissolve, perhaps, still more easily into that of Shuiski.'

They looked at each other again.

'And then, where would Semen Godunoff be?'

'The scoundrel! With his sainted brother, I hope.'

'St. Semen and St. Bogolep! Ha! ha! Why, a second *Boris* and *Gleb*, on my word!'

'Well, time will show.'

XXXII

Two months flew by, while Dmitri still remained at Putiol, and smiling spring came round again. For six weeks had the little town of Kromy, held by Korela and a small band of picked Cossacks, defied every effort of the great sluggish Russian army that lay before it, separated into two camps by the little stream that runs into the Oka—one commanded by Ivan Godunoff, brother of the late Tsar, the other by Prince Galitzin and Basmanof. Shuiski and Mtislavski had, somewhat unexpectedly, gone quietly home on receiving the order for their recall.

Day after day, the Russians lay in slothful inactivity, nor had this been broken by the arrival, a month since, of Basmanof. The sole occupation of the idle soldiery was to gather in knots, and discuss in dangerous whispers the death of Boris, and the awkward question of the new Tsar. Had their leaders designed to secure the victory for Dmitri, they could not have adopted a method more certainly calculated

to achieve that end. Even the most sternly faithful of the Russians was not proof against this policy of masterly inactivity: the leaven of disaffection spread gradually through the whole lump.

‘Why do we not march against him?’ one soldier would say to another. ‘Is it because our generals are afraid?’

‘Why should we march against him?’ would his comrade reply. ‘Who is this Fedor Borisovitch, that we should fight for him? A Tartar.’

‘And this Dmitri—what do you think of him?’

‘What do I know? But how could he be Dmitri Ivanovitch, if he was murdered at Uglitch?’

‘Ah! but they say he did not die. No one saw him dead. And how could this one have done so much if he were not Dmitri Ivanovitch?’

‘It is the will of Heaven,’ said the other, with a shrug. Let us have some *vodka*. Now that the accursed Tartar Boris is dead, we shall be able to drink *vodka* in peace.’

At length, one fine May morning, an outpost

captured a young Cossack, who was attempting to get through the Russian lines with despatches for Korela in Kromy, and brought him into Basmanof's camp.

Basmanof forthwith summoned a meeting of the principal officers in his tent, and the prisoner was produced.

'Give up your despatches,' said Basmanof.

Zarucki, for it was he, did so; and as he gave them, a look of intelligence passed from his eyes to those of the general. There was a momentary pause, while Basmanof and Galitzin consulted over the contents.

'Where do you come from?' said the former at length.

The Cossack (who was in reality merely one of a small band of Cossacks and hussars under the command of Zaporski, a Polish noble, and whose capture was nothing else than a deep-laid scheme between Basmanof and Dmitri to give a colour to the events that followed) answered readily, that he was a scout of Prince Dmitri's advance-guard, which was rapidly approaching to relieve Kromy.

'And in what force?'

‘Two thousand Polish knights and eight thousand Russians.’

The officers looked at one another.

‘It agrees with the despatch,’ muttered Galitzin. ‘And where is the main army, and what are its numbers?’

‘It is advancing,’ said Zarucki. ‘A Polish reinforcement of forty thousand men is to join us four leagues from Putiol. A large body of our own people from below the Falls is expected every hour.’

Deep silence followed these words. As Basmanof looked from man to man, each officer averted his gaze, or bent his eyes on the ground. Basmanof darted a glance of meaning at Zarucki.

‘Gentlemen,’ he said at last, ‘the state of things is before you. I put it to you, especially to those who met the Polish forces at Novgorod: How are we to cope with this new army?’

Silence.

‘For me,’ continued Basmanof, ‘the chain of circumstances is too strong to leave any doubt on my mind. I cannot but think that in this matter the will of Heaven is declared. I will no longer beat about the bush. Between Fedor

and Dmitri our choice lies. Heaven has blessed the cause of Prince Dmitri, and I, for one, recognise him for my Tsar.'

'And I,' added Galitzin.

A momentary hesitation. Then a universal acclamation followed the lead of the two generals.

'Long live Dmitri Ivanovitch, Tsar of Russia!' yelled the Cossack, and the cry was taken up outside by a crowd of Basmanof's partisans. 'Dmitri!' 'The Tsarévitch!' 'Long live the Tsarévitch Dmitri!' The shouts grew and were repeated by knot after knot, till at length there was an indescribable uproar throughout the camp. Arrows and matchlocks were discharged into the air.

Honeycombed as the army of Basmanof was by the secret agents of Dmitri, but faint resistance was offered on this side of the little stream. But suddenly, across the water, Ivan Godunoff, followed by a tumultuous and growing band, rode up to the little bridge that connected the two camps, and loudly shouted to Basmanof and his party, who approached the bridge at the moment from the opposite side, to know what was the matter.

‘Support me,’ said Basmanof, turning to his party; ‘here comes an enemy.’ Then, riding on to the bridge, he shouted as loud as he could, ‘Soldiers, your rightful Tsar, Prince Dmitri Ivanovitch, is at hand with a large army. Who dares oppose the Tsar? Long live Dmitri, our Tsar!’

At the same moment, dashing across the bridge, he struck down Ivan Godunoff, who caught the whole situation, and was vociferating ‘Treason! treason!’

A frightful tumult arose. Seeing their leader fall, and not clearly understanding the position, some of Ivan’s men stood irresolute; others rushed up and began fighting with those who crossed the river. From behind them, however, shouts of ‘Dmitri!’ began to be heard. Yet his name was less potent on this side of the stream, and a general *mêlée* was commencing, whose issue might have been doubtful, when the cry was raised, no one knew how, that Korela was making a sortie from Kromy. And in fact, some hundred Cossacks were seen dashing towards them, with loud yells of ‘Dmitri! Dmitri!’ This turned the scale against the unnerved and

uncertain Fedor faction, and within half an hour from that moment every man in both camps was shouting for Dmitri, though none the less here and there a few knots of men were fighting vigorously, they knew not why.

Riding rapidly about, Basmanof and his staff at length succeeded in restoring order. The few who remained, in spite of all, faithful to Fedor, were partly cut down; part laid down their arms, and some fled, though no one pursued them.

Late in the afternoon Zaporski arrived with his hussars. By nightfall all was quiet again. Basmanof took the supreme command, and prepared to communicate the change of events to the new Tsar. Ivan Godunoff was thrown into chains, and the victory was won.

The same night a horseman left the camp at full speed, and directed his course towards Putiol.

XXXIII

‘You look very solemn, General.’

‘Is that you, Iwanicki? Solemn? yes; any

one but you would be solemn enough just now, in my place.'

'Pooh! what's the use; *che sara, sara*. What is it Master Rabelais says, "*Laugh and live.*" That's the true creed, General. All the same, this gets embarrassing. I wonder what will happen next.'

'Otrépieff said he had made sure of Basmanof, but it seems too good to be true. *If* that army would only declare for me. Just think of the effect. Why, every man in Poland would set off here as fast as he could!'

'Well, the gods will decide. Let's see what the dice say. Look here; here's for the other fellow—what's his name—Fedor.'

The dice rattled, and the total was seven.

'Now for you, General. There; sixes, by ——! You're all right, General; Venus is for you.'

'You and your dice,' said Dmitri, with a smile; 'well, let us hope they are true prophets for once.'

The door burst open, and Otrépieff, 'fiery red with haste,' entered the room.

'Long live Dmitri Ivanovitch, Tsar of Russia!'

The young men started up. Dmitri turned pale; his heart beat, and his voice failed him.

‘What do you mean?’

‘The Russian army has declared for you. Prince Galitzin will be here to-morrow, to ask you to take command.’

‘Hurrah!—hurrah!’ shouted Iwanicki; ‘the dice for ever! Sixes, General!—didn’t I tell you? What! solemn still? is the dream true? Aha! Look at me well, Boleslas Iwanicki, sorcerer in waiting to His Imperial Majesty, the Tsar! Hurrah! Otrépieff, you angel of light, here’s to you.’ And seizing the unwilling Otrépieff round the middle, he staggered about the room with him, shouting, ‘Venus, Venus! the Tsar for ever!’

But the blood rushed up into Dmitri’s head, and things swam before his eyes.

XXXIV

Why do the people so furiously rage together at Moscow, and what means this hurried gather-

ing of nobles, in the palace of Prince Vassili Shuiski on the Red Place?

‘Boyars,’ said Shuiski abruptly, ‘there is no time for words. Are we for Dmitri or against him? In five minutes it will be too late. The people are for him; his envoys are here; in a moment they will proclaim him. If we do not head the revolution we are lost. Look!’

He went to the window, and as he pointed to the scene outside, suddenly the bells in Ivan’s Tower burst into wild jangling, followed almost immediately by all the bells in Moscow.

Below, the entire population of the town seemed to have squeezed itself into the great square. The dull roar of a great multitude, assembled as for some forthcoming demonstration, mingled with the clang of the innumerable bells. Shuiski could hardly make himself heard.

‘There!’ he exclaimed, turning to the nobles behind him, ‘all that is for the impostor. There is just time to decide. Which is it to be? Unless we declare for him, our last hour has come. Choose:—Dmitri or death.’

And as he spoke, there arose from the lower

end of the square, just below them, a tremendous uproar, and the sea of faces all turned towards it.

Leaning from the balcony, the boyars who were nearest saw a band of citizens entering the Red Place, just opposite the Church of St. Vassili, and in their midst were two men, the envoys of the Tsarévitch Dmitri. With magical rapidity a hasty platform was put together of two or three trestles and planks carried by the new-comers, and upon these the envoys mounted. Discerning their intention, the shouts of the crowd gradually died away, yet only those close to the speakers were able to catch their words.

‘People of Moscow!’ cried the spokesman, ‘Prince Dmitri Ivanovitch, your rightful Tsar, is approaching at the head of an army devoted to him. He has commissioned us to offer free pardon to all those who return at once to their allegiance, but to all those who traitorously refuse to return to their duty, and recognise the declared will of Heaven, he brings a terrible and swift punishment.’

‘Long live Dmitri Ivanovitch, our Tsar!’

Not a voice was raised in opposition; the

Red Place rang with the tremendous acclamations of ten thousand throats. 'Dmitri Ivanovitch!' 'God bless the Tsar!'

'You see!' shouted Shuiski to his companions, and he leaned out over the balcony, motioning to them to do the same. At a loss to attract attention, he tore down a large red curtain, and began waving it in the air. He succeeded at length in gaining the notice of the crowd, to whom his person and his palace were familiar; and as soon as a lull in the storm of voices made it possible, he cried at the top of his voice:

'People of Moscow, who has a better right to address you at this moment than myself? I was the man who held the investigation at Uglitch when Prince Dmitri was said to be murdered. I know the facts. Learn, People of Moscow, DMITRI WAS NEVER MURDERED AT UGLITCH.'

A roar followed his words, and the tumult was again indescribable. But mingled with the shouts of 'Dmitri!' ominous voices were heard, 'Death to the usurpers!' 'Down with the Godunoff!'

All of a sudden, the anxious nobles saw

the crowd begin to move. Inspired by a common and mysterious impulse, it poured into the Kremlin through the Gate of the Redeemer, with a growl that boded no good to the family of the late Tsar.

‘We were just in time!’ cried Shuiski in the ears of his brother nobles. ‘Look, they’re going to massacre the Godunoff. That’s what would have happened to us if we had delayed another minute.’

‘Poor devils,’ said Vorotinski to himself; ‘I wouldn’t be young Fedor now, for all Muscovy.’

XXXV

‘Whither away, Repnin? Is it true? They say Fedor and his sister have been torn to pieces by the mob. What’s become of the Patriarch?’

‘Oh, he’s praying! Hollo! here’s Bielski. What’s the news? Are they dead?’

‘Dead! no, not yet; they’re all right, only rather frightened. The mob poured into the palace and seized them, but didn’t do *them* any harm.’

‘Who?’

‘Why, Fedor and his sister and the old Tsarina! But the Godunoff are in a bad way. They’re all being packed in carts, like bullocks, and sent off to the new Tsar at Kromy as a present from his loyal citizens of Moscow, after being kicked and cuffed by half the town; especially Semen.’

‘Serve him right, the scoundrel!’

‘It’s no joke, though, this rabble; they might have sacked the whole place; but I managed to get hold of the leaders and persuaded them to go and break open the German shops; by this time half of them will be dead drunk. I suppose our new lord and master will turn up soon to see his faithful subjects,’ went on Bielski, with a sneer. ‘Well, I must be off. Keep indoors, I should advise you, unless you want to be made to shout, “Dmitri for ever!” and drink bumpers of bad brandy till you burst.’

XXXVI

A week later, as Dmitri was sallying forth to hunt with a crowd of nobles and courtiers who had come to Tula, where he had fixed his headquarters, to pay their respects to the rising sun, he was met by a courier, with despatches from Moscow.

‘Tsar, thy enemies have ceased to live.’

‘What do you mean?’

Dmitri tore from his hands the despatch, and glancing through it, turned with black brows to his following.

‘Who has dared to do this? Here have young Fedor Borissovitch and his mother been murdered — strangled — as Prince Galitzin informs me—*by my order*. I gave no orders. Has any one dared to give them for me?’

A look from Otrépieff, who was amongst them, told him what he wanted to know.

‘My lords,’ said Dmitri, ‘go on; I will join you in an instant. Otrépieff, and you, Iwanicki, come back with me.’

As soon as they were alone, Dmitri turned upon Otrépieff.

‘Was it you who sent the order to murder this wretched boy?’

‘Dmitri,’ said Otrépieff, ‘it was necessary; alive, they might have been the cause of much difficulty.’

‘And how did you dare to use my name?’

‘*Dare?*’ said Otrépieff.

‘Ay, *dare*. I will have you know I am the Tsar, and no one else.’

‘Are you mad?’ exclaimed the monk. ‘Have you forgotten already how much you owe to me? A week ago, without me, where were you?’

‘Look you, Otrépieff, I forget nothing; but I am the Tsar. I will have none of this. I will be a father to my people. You have done me incalculable harm.’

‘Yet you yourself put Semen Godunoff to death.’

‘That is another matter; the people hated him. But what had this poor youth done, except happen to be the son of Boris? And to send bandits in to strangle him in prison!—it is too much. Luckily the girl is still alive.’

‘Dmitri, this pitiful soft-heartedness will ruin you.’

‘Ruin me, if you please, but I will have no bloodshedding; if I cannot stand without it, I will fall. Never dare to put yourself in my place again. I will not forget your services; but away, remember what I have said.’

Otrépieff stood, amazed and confounded; then, as if unwillingly, turned on his heel and went out.

‘General,’ said Iwanicki, ‘I scarcely know you; you are not the same man. I am quaking.’

‘The same for you, Iwanicki; but this monk, he thinks I am his baby, to lead about wherever he will. But I will have no more of that, and no cruelty. It was my father’s vice, and in that, at least, I will not resemble him. If he was *Terrible* to his people, I will be their benefactor. But come, and let us catch up these nobles, and have a gallop. These poor devils are dead, so let us forget them; it’s no use crying over spilt milk, or spilt blood.’

XXXVII

It was five o'clock in the afternoon.

Wearied out with long interviews and deputations, and the thousand and one necessary preparations for his entry into Moscow on the following day, Dmitri mounted his horse, and accompanied only by Korela and Iwanicki, left his camp, then situated about four miles to the south-west of Moscow, and galloped to the low Sparrow hills; those same hills from which, long after him, the great Corsican, in his last fatal expedition, surveyed the ancient capital of the Tsars, stretched out beneath his feet.

He surmounted the little eminence, and drew his rein. And there, before his gaze, lay the city of his dreams—fair as in a dream—Moscow.

Moscow!

On his left the river ran towards him, sweeping past the embattled walls of the Novo-Devitchi convent, curving round at his very feet in a huge half-moon, and running back

and away to the right, till it lapped with its blue waves the low mound on which arose the Kremlin. The Kremlin!—the white walls of the Kremlin, like gigantic ivory combs lying on their backs, there they were! His eye wandered from spire and belfry, tower and pinnacle, to spire and belfry, tower and pinnacle. Over cupola after cupola, blue and gold and green, the soft evening sun fell with its kindly glow, and high above all, on Ivan's great tower, emblem of the Tsar, stretching upwards to the sky. Away on the right, from over the river, the tinted bulbs of the monastery and fortress of the New Redeemer peeped out from their nest among the trees.

He gazed and gazed.

Could it be real?

For the first time, the strangeness of his enterprise came over him with a rush. Was he, Dmitri, actually the lord and absolute master of all?

Yes; it was no dream. It cannot escape him now. The real difficulties have all been overcome.

And he will be worthy of it. He will

be a Tsar such as Russia has not seen. Only let him get firmly on the throne, and then— Yes, and then? What may he not do? With his influence in Poland, — who knows? Perhaps the old dream of Stephen Battori,—the union of Poland and Russia, with himself as Emperor! And then the Tartars to be thrashed, and driven back, and Russia to reach to Caucasus, perhaps to Constantinople! And his name would be placed beside that of Henry IV. Dmitri Ivanovitch, Emperor of the East!

His thoughts oppressed him, and he turned instinctively.

Behind him lay the great plain. On his left was his camp. A sort of haze lay over the scene. The sun looked at him from out the barred clouds.

He felt he had been exactly in this position *before*.

With a sudden flash, memory brought back to him a yellow evening—an evening near Jitomir—a year ago. A year!—a century, rather! He seemed to have lived, since then, untold ages.

What of Natacha? What had become of her?

After all, what was it all worth, this ceaseless striving and struggling? How could it be compared with the peace of living, quiet and obscure, somewhere where there was no bustle?

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The evening was very still. Away, some miles to the right, the blue smoke from a little homestead rose straight up into the air.

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‘To-morrow, General!’ said a voice in his ear. He came to himself.

‘To-morrow, yes. And then, the power of rewarding my brave comrades, such as Iwanicki and Korela.’

‘And Otrépieff?’ said Iwanicki.

Dmitri frowned.

‘Forgive me, General; but—beware of Otrépieff! I watched him when you did not. You’ve mortally offended him, and—he’s dangerous.’

‘Pooh! a passing spleen. He’ll be all right again in a day or two.’

Iwanicki shook his head.

‘What harm can happen to me with my

faithful bodyguard of Poles and Cossacks ; eh, Korela ? ’

The cunning old Cossack looked sideways at the camp for a moment. Then he said—

‘ Hetman, there was a queer Indian fellow in our village on the Dnieper once. He used to say, “ Contempt pierces even the shell of the tortoise.” These Russian boyars, you treat them very shortly ; they do not forget it.’

‘ What ? You too, Korela ? ’

‘ You know my fellows, Hetman ; wild blood, wild blood ! Well, none of them ever loses a chance of calling these boyars bad names. Last night, for instance, I caught a lot of them pursuing Shuiski with shouts of “ filthy Jew ! ” And Zarucki heard one of these Russian fellows speak of you as “ the Cossack.” Forewarned is forearmed.’

Dmitri mused for a while.

‘ It’s getting late,’ he said at last ; ‘ we’d better go back to camp.’

XXXVIII

But for a very high wind, which perhaps rather assisted than marred the gay ceremonies, by spreading out to the utmost the innumerable flags that floated from every pinnacle and house-top, everything smiled on the day fixed for the entry of the long-lost Tsarévitch to his enthusiastic capital. The bells rang out madly all over the city; business and the bazaars were deserted, and the people swarmed excitedly in the streets. From an early hour in the morning old and young, male and female, thronged the ways, each decked out in his bravest attire. Joy and hope sat on every face. The long vexations, the abhorred police, and officious interferences of Boris the stranger were gone. No more captious and irritating penalties and prohibitions. Was not Dmitri the father of his people, a son of the line of Rurik?

‘Come along, Peter Petrovitch, we shall be late! What on earth are you about? There’s your hat.’

‘Where shall we go?—to the bridge? The procession begins at the bridge.’

‘No, no!—not the bridge! We shall never see anything. The Red Place, where they’ve put up the scaffolding, close under St. Vassili. The Tsarévitch—God bless him!—will speak to the people there.’

‘*What* a squeeze! Only look at that roof; it will fall in directly!’

‘I can’t hear what you say; speak up! Take care, sir! you’re tearing my dress. Don’t tumble over, whatever you do; you’ll never get up again.’

‘Let’s try and get close to the scaffolding. Doesn’t it look splendid? Here, take my hand, Dashenka! Now, push!—thank you, sir! Now we’re all right. We shall hear beautifully.’

‘Oh, there’s Ivan! Hollo, Ivan Ivanovitch! is the Tsarévitch coming yet?’

‘Yes, he’ll be here directly.’

‘St. Nicolas! what a lot of people!’

‘There goes a courier—that’s the twenty-seventh this half-hour! And how is little Peter, Daria Ivanovna?’

‘Oh, he’s very well! I couldn’t bring him

to-day ; he would have been crushed to pieces. Why doesn't the Tsarévitch come ?'

'He won't be long now ; he's receiving the deputations, just over the bridge. They'll be here directly. Hark ! there's the gun ! Now they've started. They'll be round the corner in a moment.'

The roar of cheering, about half a mile to the right, mingled with the blast of trumpets, was now heard. The crowd surged to and fro. Presently a large body of irregular cavalry, magnificently dressed in red, their horses' feet also dyed red, according to old custom, to show that the Tsar arrived bathed in the blood of his enemies, advanced, forcing the crowd back, and forming a lane through which the procession was to pass.

'Holy Mother of God ! I can't get any farther back !'

'Here, get up on this. Now, hold on here. There !'

With a blast of trumpets and clashing of cymbals now advanced a troop of Polish knights, themselves and their horses in full armour, which blazed with jewels and gold, their huge

plumes nodding ; before them the great white eagle of Poland floated on an enormous banner. These filed past, twenty deep, and took up their position immediately around the platform. After them came a regiment of foreign auxiliaries on foot—Turks, Scots, Germans, and Hungarians—in bright corselets and trousers or doublets of every hue ; their matchlocks on their shoulder. Next to them rode two thousand Cossacks, with wide scarlet trousers, long lances, rusty firearms, and very short stirrups, gaily decorated with ribbons. They were followed by ten thousand of the *strelitz*, the Russian national infantry, with their bows and quivers, their enormous axes, or long partisans. Next advanced five hundred Russian nobles, who formed the Imperial Guard for that day, in long, magnificently jewelled caftans, carrying long double axes, striving to outdo in barbaric splendour their rivals, the Polish cavaliers. Lastly, surrounded by the chief of the boyars and a few of his suite, and followed by three hundred picked Cossacks, came Dmitri himself, riding a beautiful white horse, which he managed with consummate skill, so as to display to the greatest

advantage his athletic figure, in a splendid military dress of scarlet velvet, sparkling all over with diamonds.

‘Mother of God! is that the Tsarévitch? What a handsome young man! Look, he’s bowing to us all. God bless you, Dmitri Ivanovitch.’

Amidst deafening shouts from every throat Dmitri pranced along, till he arrived at the red scaffolding. Here he dismounted and ascended the steps, followed by his suite, and took his seat in a huge throne of oak and silver prepared for him.

‘Long live Dmitri!’ ‘Long live the Tsar!’ ‘God bless and keep you!’ ‘God confound your enemies!’ ‘The Tsar! the Tsar!’

All being in their places, Prince Bogdan Bielski came forward, and raised his hand to command silence. The roar ceased. Except the tossing of the horses’ accoutrements, not a sound was heard.

‘People, behold your Tsar. Let us pray to God for his preservation—God, who has miraculously preserved and restored him to us; and be you all faithful to him, as to his father Ivan.’

Then drawing from his breast an image of St. Nicolas, he cried aloud—

‘People, honour and obey your lord the Tsar. Defend him from all his enemies.’

And with one shout they answered—

‘GOD GUARD OUR LORD THE TSAR, AND SCATTER HIS ENEMIES BEFORE HIS FACE!’

There came a blast of wind, and a cloud of dust whirled up and hid the Tsar from the eyes of the people below.

A shiver of superstition shook through every heart. But the next second it was gone, and Dmitri appeared again in all his effulgence. Stepping forward, he spoke to the crowd—

‘My children, pray to God for me, that He may send His blessing on us all.’

And as the Patriarch advanced, he kissed reverently the sacred *ikon* extended to him. The clergy, assembled in a body to his right, began a sacred chant.

‘’Tis our Tsar, our very Tsar; ’tis the true descendant of Ivan,’ murmured a hundred voices in the crowd delightedly.

But at that moment, by a mistaken zeal, the

holy chant was drowned by a long flourish from the Polish trumpets.

‘Listen to them, the accursed pagans,’ muttered Peter uneasily; ‘the second unlucky omen. I don’t like all these foreigners. What business have they in Moscow?’

A few bystanders shook their heads in gloomy acquiescence.

‘See, there he’s coming down!’ cried Dashenka. ‘Look!’

Dmitri in fact descended, and, surrounded by his nobles, entered the Kremlin through the Gate of the Saviour, before which he knelt down and bowed his head. Then crossing the square, he proceeded to the Cathedral of the Archangel Michael.

All who could find room pressed in after him, among them being our friend Peter and his wife. The Tsarévitch proceeded up the aisle, and, arrived at the tomb of Ivan the Terrible near the altar, fell on his face before it.

‘Oh, my father!’ he cried aloud, ‘look on thy son, who kneels before thy tomb. ’Tis to thy holy prayers he owes his restoration to the throne of his ancestors.’

The boyars exchanged significant glances ; but those of the people who had come in were seized with delight, and even shed tears of heart-felt exultation.

‘Listen to that, poor dear Tsarévitch!’ whispered Dashenka, profoundly moved. ‘Holy St. Michael bless and keep him! How like his father’s picture he looks! The Lord protect him!’

XXXIX

Two days afterwards the new Tsar was sitting discussing with Basmanof, with whom he now transacted all business, the advisability of annulling the late *ukas*, by which Boris Godunoff had chained the peasants to the soil, when a servant entered and announced that Count Iwanicki wished to know when the Tsar would be at liberty.

‘Bring him in at once. Come in, Iwanicki. What! this is not like you, to use all this ceremony with me.’

‘The Tsar of to-day is not the General of a week ago.’

‘What nonsense! He is the same for *you*. Do you think I will submit to be cooped up as these fellows would have me? Come whenever and as often as you please, and call me General, just as you used to; I like it.’

‘Well, General, it’s very good of you; but are you quite sure you are wise?’

‘How?’

‘These boyars are jealous of the Poles. I’m afraid I shall compromise you in their eyes. They don’t like it, nor me.’

‘Why, how cautious we’ve got all of a sudden, Iwanicki.’

‘Not for myself—not for myself, General; but I tell you, beware of these nobles. I have heard some funny things. They detest foreigners, and of all foreigners, Poles. They can’t bear the new Patriarch.’

‘What, Ignatius? Why, what’s the matter with him?’

‘Well, they think the whole thing’s a scheme to overthrow the national church. They loved the old Patriarch. My valet has heard a lot of loose grumbling. Whatever you do, General, respect their prejudices.’

‘Tsar,’ said Basmanof, ‘the Count is right. Count, I’ve just been telling the Tsar the same. All these boyars hate me for my influence. It’s rash enough to offend them; but at all hazards, the people must be carefully manipulated.’

‘Why, what croakers you are! Any one would think I was sitting on a mine ready to explode. You both seem to have forgotten the scene on the Red Place the other day. Why, the people must adore me! I never heard such a noise.’

‘Noise enough, yes,’ said Iwanicki; ‘but hollow, hollow. Half of that and more was merely the excitement of holiday-making. No, no, General, put no faith in the multitude. At least be wise; don’t tread on their corns.’

‘Well, well, perhaps there’s something in what you say, but life’s too short to be always afraid of things that might happen. Anyhow, the new Patriarch must stay—I can’t alter that.’

‘Where’s Otrépieff?’ asked Iwanicki drily.

‘I don’t know; I haven’t seen him lately. Never mind him. Tell me now, what do you

think about this business with the peasants? You know——’

And they went on with the matter in hand.

XL

The council was over. As the boyars left the council-chamber, Prince Vassili Shuiski whispered to Bielski and Galitzin, and then, accompanied by his brother Demetrius, took his way to his palace, followed by a huge train of more or less dirty but splendidly dressed attendants.

As they crossed the Place they were accosted.

‘Ho there, Shuiski!’

‘Who’s that? Pushkin!—the Grand Falconer himself!’

‘What do you mean by that?’

‘Why weren’t you at the council to-day, my dear Grand Falconer?—then you would know.’

‘I couldn’t come. But what do you mean by Grand Falconer?’

‘Come in with me and I’ll tell you.’

They went upstairs, and as soon as they were seated, Vassili Shuiski produced a parchment.

‘Here, my dear Falconer, is the explanation of the enigma.’

‘Out with it!’

Shuiski read aloud: ‘List of the Ecclesiastical and Secular Members of the Council of His Cæsarean Majesty——’

“‘Ecclesiastical and Secular!’ ‘Cæsarean Majesty!’ Who’s that?’

‘Our most noble Tsar, my dear sir, does not think the old title good enough for him, so he prefers to call himself *Cæsar*.’

‘Does he indeed?’

‘And he is so anxious for the good of the State that he has made a third part of his Council ecclesiastics.’

‘He hasn’t!’

‘He has indeed, and more. He has made a whole string of new officers. You, as I said, are Grand Falconer to Cæsar; Galitzin is his Major-domo; Bielski—imagine his rage!—is Grand Master of Artillery—but here he comes. Doesn’t he look pleased?’

‘How are you, Bielski?’ said Pushkin, as he entered. ‘Is it true?’

‘True? You’ll find it true enough when Cæsar sends for his Falconer!’

‘But suppose I don’t go?’

‘Then he’ll whistle for his Poles, or Basmanof, or a Cossack or two, and you’ll be hung.’

And Bielski swore a frightful oath.

‘Yes, that’s what we all feel,’ said Galitzin. ‘Shuiski, is there anything to drink? I want it badly.’

‘Gentlemen,’ said Shuiski, ‘I think we are all of one mind about this. I can count on you all. We must be cautious, for Cæsar is a shrewd lad, or he would never be here; and the people just now are mad about him.’

‘Basmanof, too, the low scoundrel!’ growled Bielski; ‘to think of him ruling the roast!’

‘Ay, Cæsar is no fool!’ put in Galitzin; ‘he has doubled the pay of the army.’

‘Anything more?’

‘Oh, a few trifles! All his dear relations, the old Nagoi lot, coming back to court in a swarm, anxious to make up for being kept out in cold exile all these years.’

‘Gentlemen,’ said Shuiski again, ‘let me entreat you all, don’t show any signs of indignation before Cæsar; don’t let your tongues cut your throats, as the Tartars say. All this popular excitement will wear off in a week or so; the people are already rather cross about the expulsion of the Patriarch. As soon as things get cooler, and he begins to show the cloven hoof, and sends for his accursed Polish woman, we’ll pull the strings, and see if we can’t manage for our poor Dmitri to die a second time.’

‘And this time we’ll leave no doubt about it,’ quoth Bielski. ‘What made you perjure yourself the other day, and swear he never died at Uglitch?’

‘What could I do?—it was touch and go with all of us that morning. But that won’t make any difference. Only keep quiet, and swallow your pride for a fortnight, and we shall have him.’

‘No doubt,’ muttered Galitzin to Bielski, as Shuiski left the room to order refreshment, ‘our friend Shuiski here would not mind replacing Cæsar on his throne.’

Bielski winked. 'The torch is dark at its own base,' he said.

XLI

'I say he *is* the Tsarévitch!'

'I say he is *not*!'

'How should you know anything? Has he not the marks? I saw him quite close—he has the wart beneath his eye.'

'What is a wart? Why, there's Nicolas there, he has also a wart under his eye; is he the Tsarévitch?'

The listeners in the filthy little drinking booth, its atmosphere heavy with brandy fumes and foul odours, laughed at this sally, while Pimen threw himself back, and looked round triumphantly. But Mitka did not give in.

'Oh yes! But his arm—his long arm? And did not Prince Shuiski say the Tsarévitch never did die at Uglitch?'

This was an awkward 'counter' for Pimen.

'No, he is not the Tsarévitch,' he said again, angrily, with a thump on the dirty table. 'When did a Tsar ride about everywhere alone, without

his boyars? He is a Cossack, a pagan, and no Tsar.'

'Yes; why else should he love the accursed pagans?' put in a boor from the farther end of the room.

'How could he know what to do?' shouted Mitka. 'Has he not been wandering among Lyakhs and pagans for ten years?'

'Well, Mitka,' said the host, who sat majestically with nothing on but a pair of loose blue pantaloons, for the heat was stifling, 'if he is the Tsarévitch, why does he not go to see his mother, the Tsarina, at Vyksa?'

'Ay!' exclaimed Pimen, delighted at this reinforcement, 'tell me that. What good son would not hurry to see his poor mother?'

'He will go,' said Mitka hardily; 'he has not had time.'

'Time! Why, it is a month since he came.'

'A month! What is a month? The Tsar has more to do than you. He will go as fast as he can; he has not had time yet.'

A flood of drinkers poured in suddenly, and the host went to supply their wants.

'We shall see,' said Pimen, 'whether the

Tsarina will know him for her son. A fine son, to keep his mother waiting a whole month, after ten years !’

XLII

Four days afterwards, Mitka, triumphantly standing, harangued a crowded audience in the little booth with enthusiastic vehemence. It was late in the evening. A wretched oil lamp, which smelt abominably, to make up for its miserable failure as a light-giver, threw a sickly gleam on his little pig eyes, sparkling with excitement over his shiny fat cheeks, and the stains, half dirt, half brandy, on his blue shirt. In fact, he was at this moment obviously intoxicated, and kept casting glances of scorn at the disconsolate Pimen, who sat opposite, drinking in silence, with his head on his hands.

‘Now, who will say he is not the Tsarévitch ? I said he would see his mother. I said she would know him for her son. I saw it all. I knew he had not had time.’

‘Tell us about it,’ said the host, who had

heard it ten times already, but foresaw a large demand for *vodka*.

Mitka took another long pull at his bottle, and set it down with a bang.

‘I went in the morning. The Tsar went, with all his boyars and all his friends, and all the people who could go went too. And I went with them. The Tsar went on his horse—*such* a horse! how it reared and plunged!—and after him came a carriage, all shining with gold, and all red inside, to bring back the Tsarina in. And the boyars, all in their fine clothes——’

‘And you in yours,’ observed Pimen, parenthetically.

The listeners laughed. Mitka’s garments were certainly anything but fit for a procession. But he was not disconcerted by this sally.

‘Ah! you are angry, Pimen Pimenovitch, because you were wrong, and he *is* the Tsarévitch! But I do not mind. Well, we went to Toininsk, and there we came to a splendid tent made for the Tsarina, all white and gold, and she was inside. And the Tsar stopped, and got down from his horse, and went in, and brought out his

mother, the Tsarina, and she seized him in her arms, and he seized her in his, and they cried; and we all shouted—I shouted!’ cried Mitka, frantically waving his bottle in the air, and sprinkling his neighbours freely with the contents—‘“The Tsar!” “The Tsarina!” “God bless the Tsar!” And at last the Tsar took his mother by the hand and led her to her carriage, and she got in; and he walked beside it all the way back, just like a footman. And we all followed, shouting. And at last we got back, and the Tsarina went into the Kremlin, and into the monastery of St. Cyril. And she is to live there till the Tsar can build her a fine new monastery all for herself. And now, who dared to say she would not admit him to be her son? Who says he is not the Tsar? Here’s to the Tsar!’ And Mitka drained his bottle, and shouted excitedly for more.

‘How do you know it was really the Tsarina?’ asked the incredulous Pimen.

‘How do I know?’ stuttered Mitka, inarticulate with rage and surprise. ‘Why, all the people knew!—they knew. How could it not be the Tsarina?’

Pimen laughed sardonically.

‘Do you say it was not the Tsarina?’ demanded Mitka unsteadily.

‘Yes, I do.’

Mitka threw his bottle, but missed Pimen, and hit the next toper on the chest. His neighbours forthwith seized him, and held him down, struggling furiously, and shouting, ‘Tsar! Tsarina!’ while Pimen took himself off.

‘Be quiet, you scoundrel!’ roared the host. ‘Do you want the police to come in? Throw him out at the door, Fedka.’

Mitka was accordingly pitched out into the dark. The cool night air completed the work of the bottle, and after staggering a little way he fell in the road, and lay, muttering at intervals, ‘Tsar!’ ‘Who says he is not?’ till his senses left him.

XLIII

The public meeting of the newly found Dmitri with the widowed Tsarina, and the enthusiastic mutual recognition of mother and son, had finally dispelled all doubts as to his identity, except in

those minds whose doubts were not to be dispelled by any means whatever.

On the following morning the boyars in council had already waited nearly half an hour for the Tsar, and were beginning to grow more than restive.

‘I will wait no longer!’ exclaimed Pushkin. ‘’Tis intolerable.’

‘Calm yourself, Grand Falconer; be calm,’ said Shuiski. ‘What could our Tsar do, should he arrive and miss his Grand Falconer. No doubt he has been weeping on the neck of his saintly mother, and is but drying his eyes.’

‘Or perhaps,’ said Mtislavski, ‘he is playing cards¹ with his inseparable, the Polish Count.’

As he spoke the door opened, and Dmitri actually appeared, unceremoniously attired in a tightly-fitting hunting-dress of Polish cut, followed by Afanassi Vlassief, the secretary of the council.

‘Excuse my delay, my lords!’ he cried brusquely, as though he did not much care whether they excused him or not, ‘and this

¹ This was a social crime in Russia at that epoch. Cards were forbidden by law.

dress. I am just off to Toininsk. I hope you are all coming. There are some bears there. There's nothing to do this morning of any importance. I only want to tell you that I am sending for my bride, the Lady Marina Mniszek. Vlassief will start immediately; so, if you have any messages to friends in Poland, now is your chance. Vlassief will bring back the latest thing in caftans for you from Paris,'—and the slightest sarcasm pierced through his expression.

'We are much obliged to your Imperial Cæsarean Majesty,' said Shuiski, 'but the old Russian methods of making our clothes are quite good enough for us.'

'Well, well, please yourselves; anyhow, Vlassief is off this afternoon. Any one of you who would like to go with him and see Poland has my permission. I make no doubt they would welcome you. There's plenty to see there. 'Twould be only fair, now that the Poles visit Moscow, to return the call; eh, Mtislavski? 'Tis a great mistake to stay at home as much as you do, gentlemen. You should travel; it opens the mind. What the devil! one gets sleepy and stupid by always sticking to the

domestic hearth. There are lots of excellent people in Poland, though you may not think so.'

'We have the opportunity of judging for ourselves, without leaving Moscow, Sire,' said the irrepressible Bielski. 'There is plenty of material here at present to teach us what Poles are like.'

Dmitri cast a glance at him, for there was a shade of insolence in his tone.

'I hope, sir, you will understand that any Poles here have particular claims on my gratitude, and treat them well. We ought to be above all these petty national antipathies. We have much to learn, ay, *much*, from our cousins the Poles. But enough. Who is coming to hunt? There is no time to lose. We start in twenty minutes. I hope to see you all, gentlemen.'

He disappeared, and left them gazing at one another.

'Mtislavski,' said Shuiski, 'are you going to hunt?'

'Not I. I have a bad cold,' said Mtislavski significantly.

'Well, come to my house, and you, gentlemen, unless you prefer the chase. I have some Armenian silks I should like your opinion on.'

XLIV

‘By God! it’s too much; did you hear what he said to me? What, am I to sit and hear this cursed impostor cast his damned Poles in my teeth?’ And Bielski stamped about the room.

‘Patience, Prince,’ said Vassili Shuiski. ‘You mistake; we ought, on the contrary, to admire our new Tsar’s cosmopolitan sympathies, and rejoice that we have a ruler who stands in no need of his faithful nobles’ advice.’

‘Rejoice!’

‘Ay, and one who makes no scruple of telling his boyars that they are a pack of ignorant boobies,’ added Pushkin.

‘And who gibes at their customs and costumes,’ said Galitzin.

‘——!’ burst out the choleric Bielski. ‘To be kept waiting for half an hour, and then for his Cæsarean Majesty to dash in half-dressed, and tell us he did not want us, but was off to hunt bears with his infernal Cossacks!’

‘Well, we shall soon have the pleasure of kissing the hand of his beloved Polish woman.’

‘Shuiski, you jest!’ exclaimed Bielski, ‘but I do not. A pretty jest, all this!’

‘I do not talk; I act,’ answered Shuiski; ‘but as for you, you are a boy. You will be betraying our whole scheme one fine day, if you cannot refrain from indulging your temper as you did to-day. You *must* control yourself. I have good evidence that the proper moment is approaching. Cæsar is a clever lad, but he has dismissed his Polish guards. That is one for us, and if we are patient the time will soon come. The people are being cured of their frenzy already.’

He summoned a servant, and gave him an order. In a minute or two the servant returned, and ushered in two monks.

‘Here are my *Armenian silks*, Mtislavski—fellow-workers in the good cause. Well, Father Nicolas, how are the people—still out of their senses?’

The elder monk bowed profoundly. ‘My lord, the usurper is losing ground in the people’s affection. They are beginning to dis-

trust a Tsar who is entirely without dignity. Why, he runs about the streets like a pedlar, talking to every one he meets.'

'That's true enough,' said Galitzin. 'He got lost in some of the back streets the day before yesterday. 'Twas all we could do to find him again. He was, by your leave, sitting discussing the price of beef with a butcher.'

'He is no son of the Terrible Ivan,' said the monk; 'and the people are beginning to see it. Worst of all, he is a pagan, a Latin heretic, I fear. Never does he salute the sacred images.'

'He will do worse than that soon,' said Shuiski. 'Do you know, Father, that he means to seize the goods of the Church to defray the expense of providing for his Poles?'

The monk shuddered at the impious thought.

'Yesterday morning, when I was talking to him,' said Galitzin, 'he scoffed at the Councils of the Church, and he talked to me of "*your* religion"—as much as to say, "*not mine.*"'

'You see what is in store for you, Father,' said Shuiski. 'But we will discuss the point another time. I will be with you when I have settled a little business with these gentlemen.'

The monks withdrew, and Shuiski turned to his conspirators.

‘These monks know the people ; but we must not be in a hurry. Let us wait till the Polish woman and her attendants swarm into Moscow. Then the mob will grow really disgusted, and we shall have them on our side. Then we can wipe out old scores. ’Tis but a few weeks’ patience. Can you keep quiet, do you think, Bielski? Really, if not, you had better go away and wait somewhere in the country. You will spoil everything.’

‘I’ll try,’ growled Bielski. ‘But I must keep out of his sight, or I shall get up and wring his pagan neck for him some morning.’

‘Perhaps not,’ said Galitzin. ‘Don’t try, Bielski. He’s a tough customer in a squabble, is this same Polish impostor. I’ve seen him do very funny things with bears and men, out hunting. You’re a bit of a bear yourself, but you’d find him your match, I expect.’

XLV

Thus then did the exasperated boyars plot dark treason against the heedless Tsar; he, in the meanwhile, had entirely forgotten their existence.

Accompanied by a band of Cossacks, Poles, and Russians, he had ridden out to Toininsk, and there for some time they amused themselves by riding races, Dmitri giving prizes to the victors, and occasionally winning himself. Many of the younger Russian nobles, who cared less for politics than sport, had not the same grudge against him as their elders; and if they thought him very unlike their idea of a Tsar—who should before all things have been dignified and invisible—they liked him none the less for that. Their joyous shouts mingled with the hurrahs of the Cossacks; and they looked on with admiration while their new Tsar vied with the boldest Cossack present in riding his horse at full gallop, standing on the saddle—a feat which may still be witnessed by the traveller among the Cossacks of the Don.

Growing tired of this, they turned to sterner sport. A large number of bears, captured for the purpose, were enclosed in pens within a kind of arena, upon which the Tsar and his suite looked down from a raised platform. Several of these bears had been slain by cunning arrows from above, when Dmitri, yearning for more exciting, if more dangerous amusements, proposed a change.

‘Here, gentlemen, this is all very well. I remember now, my brother, the late Tsar Fedor Ivanovitch, was very fond of this kind of innocent make-believe; but he was always a bit of a monk, and somewhat timid—Heaven rest his soul! But, I must confess, it is very dull work. What do you say? Shall we let the biggest bear out, and one of us, or each in turn, go down and bait him till we settle it—fair play, man and bear?’

The young men looked at one another.

‘Tsar,’ said Iwanicki, ‘we all know—*some* of us at least know—that you are good at bear-baiting, but let me beg of you not to think of it. Your life is too valuable; the game is not worth the candle. Nobles of Muscovy, you will support me in dissuading the Tsar?’

With difficulty could they succeed, but at length Dmitri gave in.

‘Well, now that I am somebody, I see I must give up all the old sports I loved when I was nobody; yet I should dearly love to kill another bear. Anyhow, we’ll look at him. Let loose another!’ he shouted to the attendants.

In two minutes a gigantic old bear came rolling along just under them, and several marksmen prepared arrows.

‘Stop, gentlemen!’ said Dmitri. ‘If *I* am so precious, *you* are not, all of you. Who will gain a day’s glory and a gold chain? No, Iwanicki, not you. I forbid you; I cannot spare you.’

‘But you can spare your own subjects, Tsar,’ observed one young Russian haughtily.

And, in fact, no one seemed particularly anxious to hazard his life against the glory, or even the gold chain Dmitri took off his neck, heavy though it was.

Dmitri suddenly tossed it at the bear, and it fell close to him.

‘Now, whoever will get it may keep it. Any of you man enough to try?’ he said, turning to his guards.

There was a pause, then a short, very thick-set, muscular man stepped forward. 'Tsar, I will get the chain.'

'Brave fellow!' said Dmitri; 'in with you. I wish I was you. Get the chain and I will double your pay for this year.'

The man laid aside his cloak and his match-lock, felt if his Tartar yataghan was loose in the scabbard, and seizing his long pole-axe, with a double blade curved like a crescent each side, descended the steps, and going round to the back, entered the arena through one of the empty dens, and cautiously advanced towards the bear.

The spectators leaned forward and held their breath. Bruin, who was sniffing at one of his dead brethren, did not for a moment perceive his enemy; but the noise of steps fell upon his ear, and he looked round. With an ominous growl, he rolled towards the bold invader. Already he was within six paces of him, and stood erect on his hind paws.

'Now, man!' cried Dmitri.

The soldier raised his axe, but in his anxiety to keep his eye on the bear, he did not mark well

where he stepped. As he swung back his weapon for the stroke, his foot slipped in a puddle of blood. The next moment, Bruin had him in his arms.

A groan burst from the onlookers. 'He's a dead man!' shouted one or two.

Quick as thought, Dmitri seized a short bear-spear, leaped over the wooden paling that ran along in front of him, and dropped ten feet into the arena. Before any one was aware of what was happening, he reached the bear, and pricked him severely enough to make him drop his victim and turn with outstretched paws upon his new assailant.

The next instant, Dmitri's spear, driven home by a cunning hand, pierced the bear's heart, and he fell dead.

A shout of admiration fell on his ear from behind, and a hand grasped his arm. He turned and saw Iwanicki, who had followed him.

'General,' said Iwanicki, 'there's another man besides me now owes you a life; but you've dishonoured me. But for your command, I should have been on the scene before you.'

'I know it, Iwanicki,' said Dmitri, pressing

his hand. 'Why, man, 'tis nothing. I have done it without spectators fifty times. Only keep cool, and there's no danger. Here, some of you,' he called, 'look to this fellow; he's not hurt, only badly frightened, and a little squeezed. Tell him to come and see me this evening in the Kremlin.'

There was no more bear-fighting that day. The whole party returned to Moscow. Among some at least of his new subjects Dmitri could now count on staunch friends.

XLVI

That night, as the Tsar was leaning with Basmanof and Iwanicki over some plans for the new palace he was about to build in the Kremlin, the soldier whose life he had saved in the morning presented himself.

'Well, Koulikoff,' said Dmitri cheerfully, 'how are you; none the worse for your squeeze?'

The soldier held himself erect in a military attitude, but did not answer. Round his left arm was the chain of gold.

‘I see your arm is in a very good sling,’ went on Dmitri. ‘Well, ’twill be something to remember. Your pay is doubled, and I will not forget you.’

‘Tsar,’ said Koulikoff hesitatingly, ‘I owe thee a life, and I will repay it by saving thine.’

‘Why, that’s excellent, and as it should be, good Koulikoff. What else should a soldier do for his general? You shall have many a chance before we grow much older—the Tartars fight well.’

‘Tsar, may I speak and live? ’Tis not the Tartars, but thy boyars I will save thee from. Tsar, they are conspiring against thy life. They do but wait to have thee at their mercy. There is a plot, and this morning I was of them; but I owe thee my life, and I will tell thee all.’

‘Speak,’ said Dmitri; ‘name thy accomplices.’

‘Tsar, Prince Vassili Shuiski is their chief, and the clergy love thee not. Half thy guards are with them. I can tell thee all their names. They will kill me, but that is as God wills.’

‘And the people—do they hate me?’

‘No, Tsar, they would not harm a hair of

thy head; but the boyars and their men are stronger than the people.'

'Are they?' exclaimed Dmitri. 'They shall not be, ten years hence. Here, come with me, and you, Basmanof; we'll get the details of this plot. Iwanicki, will you go and bring Korela and some of his fellows, but say nothing: I will have all these mutineers in the trap. The people! the people! Why, let me but have *them* on my side, and I care not two straws for these old nobles, these clumsy conspirators in dressing-gowns!'

XLVII

An hour later, Koulikoff had been removed under a guard, while Dmitri, left alone with Basmanof, was rubbing his hands with glee at the thought of the mine he would spring next morning on the conspirators.

'Think, Basmanof, think of the length of their faces to-morrow in council!'

'Tsar, you are too rash; you will repent it. Let me go at once and arrest Shuiski; he may hear of it.'

‘To-morrow, to-morrow, Basmanof; there is lots of time. We will have some fun to-morrow in council. The old traitor—he deserves to die. See how the Saints must love me, Basmanof. But I won’t keep you. Be early at council to-morrow. Korela and his Cossacks will do the work. Good-night. Don’t be late to-morrow.’

Hardly had Basmanof gone when Korela, who was on guard outside, presented himself.

‘Hetman, there’s an old friend wants to see you; shall I let him in?’

The old friend walked in unceremoniously. Dmitri frowned slightly, but nodded to Korela, who departed.

‘Ah, it’s you, Otrépieff, at last! Well, where have you been?’

‘At Yaroslav; I had business there.’

‘Well, I hope you managed it all right. As you see, we are getting on famously here. The people know their Tsar.’

‘Dmitri,’ said Otrépieff, ‘you play the Tsar well. I know all about it. But you are too familiar and easy of access. You must mend that. The Russians love their Tsar to be dignified and invisible. You should take more care

about these little matters; but you are young and don't know the world. At this very moment even, there is danger. You need me. It was not well of you to treat me with such scant courtesy as you did at Tula.'

'Much obliged for your advice, Grishka; but though I'm young, as you say, I'm fairly well able to take care of myself.'

'You are careless,' said the monk. 'Now, you ought to beware of being thought too much given to the Poles. Now that you are Tsar, you can do without them. That young Count Iwanicki, for instance; I passed him but now. You see him too much. They talk of it in Moscow.'

'Grishka,' said Dmitri, turning away; 'let me be judge in my own affairs.'

'You trust too much to your own wisdom,' angrily answered the monk; 'and you insult me. What could you have done without me? I tell you, even now, you are mistaken if you think you can get along without me. Yes, at this very moment—— But come, tell me that you didn't mean to treat me harshly at Tula, and let us take counsel together once more.'

‘I *meant* what I said,’ replied Dmitri quietly; ‘no one gives any orders here but me.’

The monk bit his lip.

‘Do you mean to cast me off—*me*, the ladder you mounted by?’

‘That’s just what you would have me do to the Poles.’

‘Very good; then you think you can stand by yourself; good, very good. Well, I’ll not force myself on you. What, throw me aside like an old boot! fool, fool!—you will know when it’s too late—— But I will say no more. I came to save you, but have it as you will. Don’t blame any one but your own black ingratitude when the fatal moment arrives. Fool that I was to lend you my aid! No; can this be you? Ay, no doubt you think yourself safe on the throne, but you know what I can do—I’ll not be trampled on for nothing. Take your own way, most omnipotent Tsar; there is life in me yet:—I will make you sorry for this, soon—very soon. Trust to your Poles and your new friends. Friends—ha! ha!—perhaps not so very friendly. We’ll see, we’ll see—ay! You shall feel the difference between *Grishka*

the *friend*, and *Otrépieff* the *enemy*. Wait a little, my fine young Tsar—we'll see, we'll see——'

He turned to go, his whole frame trembling with rage and indignation.

'Go, by all means,' said Dmitri. 'Now listen to me, Grishka; you fancy you have me under your thumb, and can order me about, and that I can't do without you, so you give yourself airs. But I'll show you I can stand by myself, and want no nurse to lead me up and down; no, nor master to come here hectoring me, and giving me advice. If you choose to see that, I will do something for you, but none of your threats to me. What do I care for your secrets and your counsels! I know what you came here to say. Don't flatter yourself I want it. It's no news to me. Do you think these foolish old mole-eyed boyars can burrow and plot without my discovering them?'

The monk stared at him, really surprised.

'Ay, and I'll do you a favour, in return for those you're always throwing in my teeth. I might have you arrested at this moment for being privy to a plot to overthrow me. I know

it all; but I will overlook it and pardon you,—you can go where you like—free.’

And he waved his hand at Otrépieff with a sneer.

‘Dog of a Tsar!’ screamed Otrépieff, stung to the quick by this contempt; ‘do you spit on the hand that set you up? Next time we meet, look to yourself.’

And he hurried out.

XLVIII

Leaving the room by another door, Dmitri descended some steps, and proceeded along a gallery hung with tapestry. Arrived at the end of this, he did not open the massive oak door which led to the *terem*, or ‘woman’s apartments,’ but raising a magnificent hanging representing Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, he pressed a spring and entered a small ante-room, through which he passed. He drew aside a curtain, and stepped into the room beyond.

A dark-haired, pretty, but very fragile-looking young girl, clothed, after the Russian fashion,

in a shapeless sort of quilt of yellow silk, sewn with pearls, whose stiff rectangular folds completely concealed the outlines of the figure—a figure too bulky, according to Western ideas of beauty, to be graceful, started up to meet him. This was the Tsarina Xenia, daughter of the late unfortunate Boris.

‘Ah, you are here at last! Why were you so long?’

‘I was quarrelling, Xenia, with a man you wouldn’t like me to name.’

Xenia shuddered. ‘The man who—gave the order?’

‘Yes.’

‘And you sent him away?’

‘Yes, he’s gone; we’ve quarrelled. It wasn’t very wise of me, perhaps, but I promised you?’

‘How kind you are to me, Tsar.’

‘How could any one be anything else to you, poor little orphan? I wonder why you Russian ladies wear such hideous dresses. You look like a little bundle.’

Xenia played with the cross on his breast.

‘You—will—soon—have—a nicer dress to look at.’

‘What do you mean?’

Xenia averted her face.

‘When is—*she*—coming?’

‘Who?’

‘The Polish lady.’

‘How did you find out about her? Who told you?’ said Dmitri with a frown.

‘Oh, *don't* frown, Tsar; it was Afanassi Vlassief. I saw him before he went.’

Dmitri felt rather nonplussed.

‘She won't be here for a long time yet.’

Xenia hung down her head, and spoke very low.

‘I ought not to love you, but I can't help myself. You are the only friend I have left, since — And you tried to save my poor mother and Fedor. You will promise me, Tsar, you will *promise*—to let me go into a convent—as soon as *she* comes. I will pray for you till I die?’

‘Don't talk about it.’

‘Promise, promise.’

‘Well, I will promise. You shall be a nun. What a nice little nun you will make. But the time hasn't come yet.’

Xenia threw her arms round his neck.

XLIX

The next morning those of the boyars who came as usual to council were much perplexed to see a number of workmen engaged in erecting a sort of scaffold on the Red Place, immediately before the Gate of the Redeemer.

‘What is this tribunal that is being fixed up in the Square?’ asked Sotoupof of Bielski, as he entered.

‘I don’t know; no one knows. Cæsar is going to dance on it, probably, or stand on his head, for the edification of his faithful people.’

‘Do you know, Shuiski?’

‘Not I, indeed. Why should the Tsar consult *me* as to his doings?’

‘Why, indeed?’ echoed Dmitri, who entered at the moment with a radiant face. ‘Why should I? You are perfectly right; you have hit it exactly. Any one would think you were a prophet. Well would it be for *Princes* if they always took counsel before any important design; but they are headstrong, very headstrong, and

they have a most fatal confidence in themselves. Haven't they, *Prince Vassili Shuiski* ?'

'Your Imperial Majesty seems pleased,' observed Shuiski, not entirely at his ease. 'Has your Majesty any good news for your council this morning ?'

'The best—the best! I have some most important matters to lay before them. *Basmanof*, you will act as secretary while *Vlassief* is away. Well, then, to business. No; first I will tell you a story,—a most interesting story, gentlemen, that I've just heard,—I want your opinion on it. Once on a time, my lords, it came about that the fox, highly indignant that the lion should be king over the beasts, laid a plot; and having obtained the assistance of a great quantity of beavers and moles—ay, *moles!*—he dug a pit, and overlaid it cunningly with earth, so that the lion, when he went forth on his rounds, should fail to detect it, and fall in—you follow me, gentlemen ?'

The nobles stared, not without qualms.

'Twas a very cunning contrivance, my lords, oh, so cunning! but it so happened that, just as the lion drew near to the pitfall, he saw a *bear*,

who, being hungry, had caught one of those same beavers, and was on the point of making a meal off him. The poor beaver cried out to the lion, who was seized with compassion and slew the bear, and so the beaver was saved.

“Lion,” said the beaver, “don’t go farther along that walk. I was digging a pit there yesterday, and you might fall in.”

The Tsar stopped. ‘How do you like the story, Shuiski? Are you anxious as to the fate of the *fox*?’

Shuiski’s countenance fell.

‘Koulikoff!’ shouted Dmitri.

Koulikoff entered.

‘Here is my beaver, gentlemen; a fine specimen, isn’t he?’

And as the nobles stood thunderstruck, Dmitri altered his tone.

‘Aha, Vassili Shuiski! how do you like the application? I don’t take advice from my faithful boyars, you think! Traitor, so you thought Dmitri was asleep! Had you forgotten, you scoundrel, how my father the Terrible had your grandfather Andrew torn to pieces by hounds for daring to insult him when he was a boy?’

Did you wonder, all of you, what the Tsar had erected that scaffold on the Red Place for? Well, I will tell you: *'Twas to execute one of the house of Shuiski, who plotted against his Tsar.'*

He clapped his hands, and the grey moustache and coppery visage of Korela, at the head of thirty Cossacks, appeared in the doorway.

'Korela,' said Dmitri, pointing to Vassili Shuiski, 'there is your man.'

Shuiski offered no resistance; the blow was too sudden.

'Consider it a proof of my clemency,' went on Dmitri, 'that I condemn no one else. Don't suppose I am not well aware of who it is I have to deal with. But I will be a father, and not an executioner, to my people; and even when they fail in their obedience, I will have mercy. Let me have no more plotting—you cannot escape my vigilance. Be wise in time, and remember; next time I will sing another song. And you,' he went on to the ecclesiastical lords, 'mark me! let this be a lesson that the Tsar has a respect for the Church. I know you; see that you keep to your duty for the future. I

pardon you for this once. To-day the ringleader only shall expiate his crime on the Red Place.'

He went out, while the guards led off Shuiski to execution. The boyars sneaked out, like beaten curs, without a word.

L

The great bell rang. An anxious crowd gathered on the Red Place. 'What is it?' 'Have you heard?' 'A plot against the Tsar?' 'An execution!' 'Who?' 'The boyars?' 'Look, there they come!'

A strong body of troops arrived and surrounded the scaffold. Presently Korela and his Cossacks followed; in their midst the unfortunate Shuiski, who yet showed no sign of weakness. His face was very pale, his lips twitched, but he did not flinch.

They mounted the scaffold.

A crier came forward, and announced that the Tsar, having discovered a deadly plot against himself and the Imperial State, had selected the ringleader to suffer death on the scaffold, but

graciously granted pardon to all minor accomplices.

Dead silence followed his proclamation.

Two officers led Shuiski forward, and divested him of his rich caftan. Stripping off next his tunic and shirt, they tied him securely to a post.

An executioner then advanced with a knout, and scourged him till the blood ran down upon the scaffold, and the miserable victim fainted.

He was untied, and revived. His back was roughly dried, and he was forced to kneel at the block.

Half unconscious he laid his head down upon it. The headsman waved his great axe—suddenly a cry was raised from behind, ‘Stop, in the name of the Tsar!’

The executioner lowered his weapon.

An official came on to the stage and read aloud his warrant. The Tsar, of his gracious mercy, and in consideration of the birth and high position of the prisoner, had, owing to the prayers and intercession of his mother, the Tsarevna Maria Fedorovna Nagoi, granted a pardon, on condition that the criminal gave his promise to take part in no more rebellious

movements. Instead of death, the sentence was commuted to banishment for life to Siberia.

The criminal was forthwith removed, and placed in a cart, which set out straightway for Siberia under a strong guard. The crowd dispersed in silence. The scene was over.

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Ten miles from Moscow, a courier overtook the escort. The Tsar granted full pardon to the criminal, restored him to his former position, and his former favour at Court.

Shuiski was accordingly brought back to Moscow, and his liberty was restored.

LI

‘Tsar, I am not cruel ; but as you value your own life, don’t pardon him *now*.’

‘Oh, he’s punished enough by this time ! Let the scoundrel live. We have but one life each after all.’

‘General,’ said Iwanicki, ‘Basmanof is quite right. If you had pardoned him *before*, well ; but after all this disgrace, *he* must die—or *you* will.’

‘Let him live—let him live!’

‘General,’ persisted Iwanicki, ‘you read Macchiavelli; remember what he tells his prince: *Treat your enemies well, or put it out of their power to do you harm.* Be warned; don’t sign it.’

‘Iwanicki—Basmanof,’ said Dmitri, ‘thanks; but look here’—and he signed the pardon. ‘Look you, I have sworn I will not lightly shed Russian blood. I will keep my oath. Believe me, there are two ways of governing an empire. Terror?—That is not my way. Generosity? Yes; *there* is the alchemy that works wonders, *there’s* the key that unlocks all hearts. You say, I shall die. Very well, be it so. But I will not live under your conditions. While I live, I will let live. They shall not say, in future ages, that Dmitri Ivanovitch took away his subjects’ lives to preserve his own.’

‘General,’ said Iwanicki after a while, ‘you have a great soul, but you are doomed. Now, swear to me that you will never go anywhere without me!’

‘No, I will not swear,’ said Dmitri with a

smile ; ' but I will do it, as a rule, without swearing. Why, do you think I could exist, with no one but these rusty old Russian curmudgeons to talk to ? Death would be welcome, after a single month of them.'

III

CHILD OF ADAM, LET NOT HOPE MAKE GAME OF THEE.
FOR, BETWEEN THE CLOSING OF AN EYE AND ITS OPENING,
GOD BRINGETH ABOUT A CHANGE IN THE STATE OF
AFFAIRS.

The City of Brass.

LII

‘WE never thought to see you again after that morning, Shuiski,’ said Bielski to the reprieved criminal, as he lay in bed.

‘Strange things happen,’ answered Shuiski. ‘By the way, how is *Cæsar* this morning?’

‘Oh, very cheerful. I wonder how you can speak of him.’

‘You are a mere child, Bielski. I hope he’s well. I shouldn’t like anything to happen to him now till I’m sound again. Hands off, all of you; he’s my game.’

‘Keep him, by all means,’ said Vorotinski; ‘we want none of him. The very sound of his laugh makes me ill.’

Shuiski laughed sardonically. ‘They laugh best who laugh last. Wait: *the fox will dig his pit without beavers* next time. Bielski, hand me that cup, and put a little brandy in it.’

LIII

The Polish envoy ceased speaking, and looked at the Tsar for a reply.

He had just been admitted by Dmitri to a public audience in the Palace of Facets. It was over, and the Tsar himself, the Envoy, the nephew of the Papal Legate in Poland, and the two Jesuits, who had accompanied Dmitri on his adventure, were discussing the knotty difficulty, how to introduce the wedge which was to split asunder the Russian heresy.

Dmitri listened impatiently to the Envoy's expostulations, and took a turn in the room.

'What you say, Gonciewski, is perfectly clear. I can understand the extreme anxiety of all my very good friends in Poland to see the true faith established here, but they do not appreciate the difficulties of the thing. I tell you, they are gigantic. Why, I am hardly on the throne; I have only just crushed a conspiracy. 'Tis absolutely impossible to do anything definite yet. These reverend fathers will tell you the same.

Why, it's as much as their lives are worth—ay, and my own—for them to be seen in the streets in the habits of their order. Say, isn't it so, Father Brancaleoni ?'

'Tis so indeed,' answered the Father, whose outward man was that of a Polish cavalier. 'Prince Gonciewski, the Tsar is speaking the simple truth. The frenzy of these barbarians for their heretical errors is beyond all belief.'

'There is doubtless difficulty,' observed Gonciewski ; ' nevertheless——'

'Look you here,' interrupted Dmitri. 'What we want is policy and patience. You don't know these pigheaded Muscovites. One false step, and we lose all. What, man, Rome was not built in a day! See here, here are some plans for a Catholic church to be built on the site of the Convent of the Ascension, close by here, where my mother is living at this moment ; but I don't dare to propose it till I'm much more firmly seated than I am yet. If the thing got wind, there would be a revolution.'

'Gonciewski,' observed Count Alexander Ragoni, the nephew of the Papal legate, 'it's all quite true. Michiawicki told me exactly the

same thing yesterday. He was mobbed in the streets a week ago, because he is known to have Mass celebrated in his house.'

'Well, well,' said the Envoy, reluctantly, 'I will represent to his Majesty what you say. It sounds reasonable. I daresay His Holiness Pope Paul does not sufficiently appreciate the greatness of the obstacles. But to turn to another subject, Tsar, His Majesty is ill pleased with the attitude you have adopted to Duke Charles of Sudermania. 'Twas understood, and even stipulated, by King Sigismund that you should distinctly refuse to recognise him as King in Sweden.'

'Now, there you are again,' said Dmitri. 'Cannot you see it's all a matter of time? I must cajole where I can't oppose. How is it possible for me at this moment to do anything but dissemble? A quarrel with Charles at this moment would bring five thousand Swedes into Kurland, and I cannot trust my army. We must be patient; all in good time. What we need, before any strong measures can be taken, is some victories over the Tartars. We shall soon be in the field. I'm only waiting till Mniszek arrives with my Tsarina; and then we

start for the South. But we'll discuss this another time. Come and let me show you my new foundries. I've got some guns casting which will make some big lanes in the ranks of these Turkish savages. You shall see for yourself. Give me a year—only one—and I will undertake to have all these obstacles and all this disaffection under my thumb. Rangoni, will you come? Brancaleoni, you are going out:—will you tell Margeret to come and escort us with a batch of his men? You see, Gonciewski, it's hardly safe, even for me, to wander about my own capital without a guard. I used to at first; but since these disturbances, perhaps it's as well to take precautions. What's this? Despatches from Poland? Wait for me a moment. I'll be with you as soon as I've thrown my eye into them.'

LIV

My own dear, *dear* Dmitri; and yet I hardly dare to call you Dmitri now, you seem so high up and so far away. To think of your being Tsar of all Muscovy! Actually *you*, my Dmitri! It doesn't seem real. Oh, Dmitri, have you forgotten all about me? How I have waited since

you went away ! And sometimes a letter came. I used to give the men who brought your letters *such* a lot to drink—far more than was good for them, I should think. And how good it was of my darling to write to me, in the middle of all your battles and sieges. I was terribly afraid you would get killed, but, thank God, your battles are all over now. You won't fight any more now, Dmitri, will you ?

Dmitri smiled.

When my father and the others came back and said they had left you by yourself, I thought I should have died. I wouldn't see my father for months. I cried all day, except when I was praying. Now it's all over. I blessed Count Iwanicki for staying with you ; tell him I will pray for him all my life long.

And so I shall see you soon ; your Envoys arrived last week. We shall be starting in ten days. What a funny old man Vlassief is ! They laugh at him a great deal here ; he is so stiff and proud ; and yet so reverent to me. He will hardly stand up before me ; he makes me feel so nervous. He behaves just as though he thought I should *break* if he touched me. I like Buczinsky better ; I have seen him very often. He told me all about you, and all about Moscow, and the horrible boyars who plot against you. And, Dmitri, what beautiful pearls you sent me, and what a sledge ! Do you know, I think my father likes you twice as well since you sent him all that money. He is always in debt, poor man ! The King has given him leave to come to Moscow with me.

I am going to be married to Vlassief—for you—next week, but I shall be married again, to you yourself, when

I get to Moscow, Vlassief says. I hope so. Then we shall start at once. How strange it will be, coming all the way to Moscow in a sledge, and how cold! I shall put on all those great furs you sent me. And I've learned by heart all the things you told me to remember in your letter, and I've got presents for all the boyars who are to meet me. Will they all behave like Vlassief? I shall be glad when I'm really at Moscow and with you. I feel frightened sometimes. I feel as if some terrible end would come to all this. I think perhaps I shall never get to you: something will happen—just like as in a dream things suddenly change. If you weren't at the end, I could never *dare* to leave my dear Poland and set out on such a journey. It seems like going to another world, and so cold and dreary. Do you remember the song I was singing on *that* night? It's coming true. I *shall* be an *exile* after all. But I will come *anywhere* to you.

Good-bye, my Dmitri. I hope the time will go fast. I wish I could go to sleep till I saw you, as Count Iwanicki used to say some of the bears do all winter. How is the Count, is he well? I'm going to do my letter up in a great packet; it looks just like a *treaty*, or something like that. To think of it going all the way through the snow to Moscow? Good-bye, my darling. I'm almost afraid to send you a kiss.

Your own MARINA.

Dmitri read and re-read the letter, and then fell into a brown study.

Outside, the Polish ambassador groaned with impatience, and made a mental note to put the

worst colour on the Tsar's behaviour, as soon as he got back to Poland.

LV

Late in the evening, Prince Vassili Shuiski tossed uneasily on his couch, vainly seeking a position which should give rest and relief to his excoriated shoulders, still sore from the effects of his knouting ; but this he sought in vain.

'Ah, scoundrel of a Tsar !' he thought, 'there shall come a day of reckoning between thee and me. Accursed impostor, it shall go hard with me but I wipe off old scores. Thou hast chastised me with whips, but I will chastise thee with scorpions. St. Nicolas, St. Sergius—all the Saints in the calendar—will these infernal shoulders of mine never stop aching ?'

A servant entered. 'My lord, there is a man—a monk—below, who says he is a great doctor, and is come to cure your back.'

'Cure my back, you villain ? What do you mean ?'

‘My lord, the man insisted on my using those exact words.’

‘Flog him out with the dog-whips, and—no, stay! Bring him in here first; perhaps he may be the new buffoon Vorotinski told me of. Anyhow, the distraction may help me to forget this excruciating torture.’

Shuiski looked curiously at the man as he entered. ‘Who are you, and what do you mean by sending such an extraordinary message?’

The monk dropped his hood, and fixed his eyes on the Prince. ‘Prince, I meant what I said; I am a doctor.’

‘I have five already, and if you are no more use than they are, beware of the scourge, you rogue!’

‘The best men don’t always escape scourging,’ replied the man; ‘and there are more wounds than those inflicted by the knout. Prince, the iron has entered into thy soul. As I said, I come to cure you.’

‘The man is mad,’ thought Shuiski, as he watched his strange visitor’s gleaming eyes and twitching mouth. ‘You are a bold rascal,’ he said aloud. ‘What is your cure?’

‘I will tell you that, and your own hurt, in one word. I know what you were thinking of as I came in. Revenge is a fine thing, Prince Vassili Shuiski : is it not so?’

‘He must be a spy, sent by the impostor to try me,’ thought Shuiski again. ‘Very cunning trick, but I will be even with him.’

‘You may be something of a doctor, but you are no sorcerer, you scamp! I was thinking when you came in what sort of a woman this Polish bride of our young Tsar will be.’

‘You are lying!’ said the monk coolly, ‘because you are afraid I am a spy of the Tsar. Listen! Look at me, Prince, and you will think so no longer. Did I not say, revenge is sweet? Well, we both want it—I more than you, perhaps. Do you know me yet, or must I tell you who I am? I am Gregory Otrépieff. We saw each other at Uglitch, twelve years ago.’

‘Otrépieff!’ cried Shuiski, with a start that made his shoulders ache again; ‘why, fool that I am, of course! Yet I might be forgiven if I forgot you; twelve years have left their mark on *you*. Well, you renegade scoundrel, fine work you have made here! They say you were

this impostor's right hand ; and they say, too, he has cut you off and cast you away—ah, there's the sting ! I see it in your face.'

'Ay,' said Otrépieff, without emotion, 'it is so. He thought, poor young fool, he could kick away the ladder by which he had mounted. Well, Prince, you see now I am no spy. Do you understand me yet ? I come to cure you.'

'Why, no doubt we have all heard fine stories of your deeds on behalf of this scoundrel, my good Otrépieff. They say—he said himself—you had put him on the throne ; but as to getting him off again, who are you ? What can *you* do ?'

'I'm the only man in Russia who can undo my own work.'

Shuiski laughed derisively. 'You don't like being pushed contemptuously away, I suppose ; but you know the proverb, "The runaway monk blackguards his own convent."'

'You think I'm bragging,' said Otrépieff. Well, it's not easy. But think, who knows the Tsar as well as I do—I who pulled him out of a fire at ten years old, and have been a father to him ever since ?'

Shuiski laughed again. 'It's a wise father that

knows his own child. You didn't know, did you, your adopted son would play you such a dirty trick as this ?'

'No,' said the monk quietly, 'I did not ; but let that pass. Shall I prove to you that you cannot do without me ?'

'Yes, by all means.'

'If I tell you the one thing you must do to overturn him, if I tell you the way to do it, and show you how to do it—nay, do it myself—will you believe me ?'

'Perhaps.'

'Then,' said Otrépieff, 'listen : *There must arise another impostor.* You did not think of that, you boyars, cunning as you are ; yet that is the only way.'

'How will that do any good ? We shall only have two impostors instead of one.'

Otrépieff smiled scornfully. 'I told you, you needed me. You do not know the people ; I do. If there should arise a new impostor, they will begin to doubt about this first one. Now, do you see ?'

Shuiski uttered an ejaculation. 'By ——, Otrépieff, you are the devil ! Another *impostor* !'

what an idea! A *new* claimant! Yes, you must be the devil himself. But where are we to find him?’

‘Leave that to me,’ said the monk. ‘Only, let a month from to-day go by before you attempt any new schemes. And in the meantime you must change your attitude. Do not oppose anything the Tsar may do that tramples on old customs and observances. Rather try and incite him to violate national prejudices in every possible way; the end will come all the sooner. Do you see?’

‘Otrépieff,’ said Shuiski, ‘you are a miracle. You are right; we are all babies compared with you. We needed you—needed you badly. I tell you, when the impostor has fallen, I will not forget you.’

‘I know what you are thinking of,’ answered Otrépieff, with a peculiar smile; ‘you mean to be Tsar yourself. Advice is always thrown away, but I warn you, do not think of it; if so, you will come to a bad end. As for me, I shall not need your rewards by then. I want no rewards; I work for my own hand, and for no one else.’

‘Remember, wait for a month. Before it is over you shall hear strange news.’

He turned and went out.

LVI

The days flew by. March was dying, but it was icy cold at Moscow. The snow lay deep upon the ground.

The council broke up. ‘In three months, then, we shall be all ready, and then, woe to the Tartars!’ exclaimed Dmitri. ‘But practice, my lords, practice is what we want now. I hope you are all coming out to Viazema this morning, gentlemen, to see our sham fight. Those who find themselves too old to brave the deadly snowballs will find plenty of sport in looking on. We begin at two.’

‘Three months hence,’ muttered Shuiski under his breath, as the Tsar left the room, ‘the Tartars will trouble you no more.’

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Over the white snow the gay sledges flew along, the bells tinkling, the whips cracking,

the young nobles shouting with delight as they vied with one another in the race to be first on the field of action. Among them the Tsar himself, who had put his driver behind, and looking like a huge bear in his thick furs, leaned over his three fine horses, and drank in the glorious pleasure of existence, the rapturous excitement of incomparable motion. What is the poor, sluggish, rolling on wheels to the gliding, flying, whirring, whistling, voluptuous intoxication of a sledge?

The afternoon was growing old before they arrived at *Viazema*, for they had started late, and the days were short.

Half a mile from the convent a huge fort of snow had been erected on a rising mound. A high wall of snow ran round it, encircled itself by a deep ditch. The plan of action was soon formed. About fifty young nobles, commanded by *Basmanof* and *Galitzin*, entered the fortification, and prepared to repel the attack of a select detachment of the Tsar's bodyguard, led by *Dmitri* himself. Those who did not fight flew about in their sledges, and occasionally stopping close to the works, excited the com-

batants to do their utmost by their plaudits and cheers.

The signal was given by the discharge of a musket, and the game began. The depth of the ditch, and the slippery sides of the wall, at first defied all the efforts of the besiegers. From the summit of the snowy palisade the besieged Russians rained down a hail of snowballs ; and loud was the laughter as man after man, as he all but scaled the rampart, struck full in the eyes with a well-aimed shot, lost his balance and rolled in the snow.

Gradually, as one or another lost his temper a little, the fun grew somewhat more earnest. The besiegers, repeatedly repulsed, grew less careful in their choice of weapons, and began to hurl lumps of snow frozen into ice, or mingled and made hard and dangerous with gravel and stones. More than one of the defenders had his face badly cut, and the game soon became a fight in good earnest. The Russians within the fort, afraid of hurting the Tsar, who hurried about, attempting any point which seemed to offer the best opportunity, did not dare to retaliate in kind. The Tsar at length, with a

small force of four or five of his best men, amidst a hail of inoffensive missiles, succeeded in effecting an entrance, partly owing to the sudden fall of part of the wall, and rushing in with a shout of delight, followed by his supporters, appeared suddenly on the top of the interior castle, and the victory was won.

‘Gallantly done, my men!’ he cried joyously, brushing the snow from his fur, ‘admirable! Next summer, by God’s help, we will take Azof as easily from the Tartars. Truce, gentlemen, truce for ten minutes.’

The action stopped; but the besieged, many of whom were seriously cut and wounded on the face with fragments of ice and stones, stood sulkily apart, and conversed in small knots.

‘We’ll begin again in five minutes!’ shouted Dmitri gaily, after a pause, ‘and reverse the positions. Some one repair the breach in the wall there.’

But as he stood laughing and talking with his men, a young noble approached, and drawing him aside, said—

‘Tsar, forgive me, but don’t begin again. The game may be sport to you, but it’s very

serious earnest with some of them. They dare not use the stones and ice that your men do; they don't love you, some of them; they are hurt and angry, and they carry sharp knives. It may be fighting in real earnest in another ten minutes.'

Dmitri started, and looked at the discomfited ranks of the besieged. He saw enough to corroborate the young man's advice; some of the young nobles were throwing sidelong ugly glances at himself and his more prominent companions, many of whom were Poles or Cossacks.

After a minute's hesitation he decided not to reopen the combat. Announcing that the day was getting dark, and that it was too late for a second engagement, he re-entered his sledge and drove home, followed by the rest of the company, in a spirit very different from that in which they had started in the morning.

Night was falling as they entered Moscow. The knots of people gathered together in earnest conversation, and their fixed curious stare attracted the Tsar's attention. As soon as he reached the Kremlin, he got out, and sent his driver back to find out what was the matter.

The man soon returned.

‘Tsar, bid me not to be chastised, if the news is unwelcome.’

‘Speak out.’

‘Tsar, there has been a great disturbance in the town. The people thought—it was said—that the Tsar was massacring the principal boyars at Viazema, by means of his Poles and Cossacks.’

Dmitri said nothing, but went in.

LVII

As he entered, Iwanicki came towards him.

‘Ah, Iwanicki, you should have been with us ; we had some grand sport. It ended a little seriously, but it was splendid. What a pity you had a bad ankle.’

Iwanicki stretched out his foot. ‘There’s nothing the matter with my ankle.’

‘Why, I thought you said——’

‘Yes, I told you this morning I had. I thought it would be as well, this morning, to have a sprained ankle.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Viazema is a long way from Moscow.’

‘Well?’

‘And a good many boyars didn’t go with you.’

‘Well?’

‘Well, I thought it would be as well to have a bad ankle. One can never tell; when the cat’s away the mice will play, and you might have found it difficult to get in, *perhaps*, when you came back.’

Dmitri looked at him. ‘Do you really think it’s as bad as that?’

‘General, have you heard the rumours?’

‘What! about my massacring the boyars? oh yes.’

‘That’s not the worst; that only arose from the other.’

‘Which?’

‘It’s rather a curious thing. They say a pretender’—Iwanicki turned away—‘has arisen on the Don, giving himself out to be the Tsarévitch Peter Fedorovitch,¹ and that a good many Cossacks are for him.’

¹ The ‘Tsarévitch Peter’ was supposed to be a son of Dmitri’s brother, Fedor, who had died in infancy.

Dmitri started, this time in good earnest.

‘You see, General, there is probably not much danger, but it will make people talk—and compare. In fact, I was rather glad when you came back. They were beginning to get restless, these Muscovites,—and they looked at your humble servant,’ said Iwanicki, laughing, ‘in no very pleasant manner.’

‘Iwanicki, you are right. I’ve noticed a good many things myself. This new Tsarévitch,—yes, I see through it all. Do you know who is at the bottom of it? It’s that restless busybody, Otrépieff; I know the look of his work. It was not wise of me to make the man my enemy. So this is his game,—well, no, I didn’t anticipate this move,—but we’ll see, even now. These foolish old boyars would never have thought of a trick like that. Yes, it’s Otrépieff. The rogue; he’s the very devil at intrigue.

‘The fact is, we want *action*; a victory or two over the Tartars,—there’s what I need. Only let Marina come, and we’ll be off.’

‘Iwanicki,’ he went on presently, ‘it was good of you; you are a true friend; but you shall

have no more bad ankles while I'm away. I'll not leave you behind to be slaughtered by a rising of these villains. Ah! wait a bit, my conspiring boyars; next time I'll be a heavy weight to you all. The great thing is, how to deal with this rumour well. Let me see.

'How do you think it would do to accept it as true, eh, Iwanicki? and send and invite the Tsarévitch Peter to come and see his uncle, and prove his claim, and assure him of being well treated. That's it, that's it. That's the plan. Aha! Otrépieff, I'll beat you at your own game. I'll see about that the first thing in the morning.'

LVIII

Near Moscow, on the very spot where Dmitri had pitched his camp before entering his capital for the first time, a spacious pavilion had been erected for the reception of Marina and her escort. They had arrived in the morning, and after discussing a sumptuous collation that had been prepared for them, the Palatine of Sandomir, the Princes Wisnowiski, and a few other

Polish nobles, Vlassief and his suite, Marina herself, and a few Polish maids of honour, were assembled chatting in the principal room, when an orderly entered with several parcels, which he stated to have just arrived from the Tsar.

‘More presents!’ exclaimed the Palatine. ‘Well, Marina, you certainly have a generous lover. This is at least the hundredth man who has brought you wedding presents from the Tsar since we started.’

On opening the packages they were found to contain several bags of roubles for distributing to the crowds who should welcome her arrival, and a magnificent tiara of pearls.

The tiara passed from hand to hand.

‘My lord,’ said the orderly to Mniszek, ‘the courier who brought these is waiting outside. He has a verbal message from his Imperial Majesty to her Imperial Majesty, which can only be communicated to her in private.’

The Palatine looked at his daughter. ‘I suppose your Imperial Majesty,’ he said with a smile, ‘must order us all out of her presence.’

‘Oh no!’ said Marina, with a blush; ‘that

is not necessary. I will go into the next room, and he can come in there.'

Mniszek nodded to the orderly, as Marina finished speaking. 'I suppose there is no harm, Vlassief?' he said to the Russian representative of the Tsar, who stood by, stiffly disapproving this familiarity with his Imperial mistress.

'His Imperial Majesty has spoken,' answered Vlassief. 'No son of Russia would offer violence to his Tsarina.'

The courier, almost concealed by his furs, and the huge cap pulled down over his ears and eyes, till nothing but the tip of his nose was visible, entered and made a salute.

'Go in there,' said Mniszek, pointing to the door by which Marina had gone out, 'and you will find her Imperial Majesty.'

Marina looked nervously at the man as he entered. 'I believe you have a particular message from the Tsar for me?'

The man removed his hat.

'Dmitri, Dmitri!' she cried, and rushed into his arms; 'oh, Dmitri! this is better than the pearls. Now, I am safe.'

'You did not know me till I took off my hat.'

‘How could I know you, wrapped up like a great bear?’

‘You always know a bear by his hug,’ said Dmitri, smiling, and suiting the action to the word.

LIX

Two days afterwards, the whole population of Moscow was massed on the northern bank of the river to witness the *entrée* of their new Tsarina into her capital. On the opposite bank, close to the bridge, a shining tent of white silk had been set up, wherein she might receive the homage and addresses of the nobles and the deputations from the city, which were drawn up on the bridge in order.

At half-past eleven, a splendid carriage of ebony, lined with yellow silk, and drawn by six dapple-grey horses, their manes, tails, and feet dyed scarlet, drew her and the Palatine of Sandomir to the tent. Behind followed in other carriages her maids of honour and the cavalcade of Polish knights who formed her escort.

Here she dismounted and went inside the

tent. One after another the boyars¹ came forward and kissed the hand of their new mistress. Outside, the Tsar, dressed as a cavalry officer, waited *incognito* on his horse, for etiquette forbade him to receive her in his own proper person till she arrived at the Kremlin.

This lasted an hour, during which Marina patiently presented her hand to the interminable series of nobles who came to welcome her. A sense of indefinable nervousness possessed her. Half-way through the ceremony she glanced aside and caught the eye of Vassili Shuiski contemplating her with a smile of sinister irony.

Coming forth from the tent when all was over, she was assisted by the six leading boyars into a new carriage, this being of inlaid cedar, with cushions of red velvet, embroidered with pearls, and drawn by twelve cream-coloured steeds. The procession, led by the boyars on foot, wound slowly over the bridge and up the street towards the Spaski Gate. The Polish knights followed close behind, their band playing Polish national airs. The bells rang joyfully; peal after peal of Dmitri's new ordnance drowned from time to time the music and the shouting.

‘Look, look at her!’ exclaimed Dashenka to Peter, who stood at hand. ‘Isn’t she beautiful? But who ever saw a decent woman in such tight-fitting clothes?’

‘I don’t care about her clothes,’ returned Peter; ‘but those Poles, why do *they* come here? They look just as if they were entering a captured citadel, with their arms and their trumpets, St. Nicolas blast them!’

Nevertheless, the crowd cheered lustily as the *cortége* arrived by degrees at the Redeemer’s Gate, and was there met by the Tsar in his robes of state, the stuff of which it was impossible to discern, so overstrewn was it with jewels flashing in the sun. Taking his Tsarina by the hand, he led her to the door of the Convent of the Ascension, where she was received by the Dowager-Tsarina Maria, the mother of the Tsar, and conducted within.

Amidst such apparent rejoicing did the beautiful Pole enter her new abode, but with a heavy heart; for, as she slowly moved through the streets threading the vast crowd, many a scowling eye had struck a chill into her soul.

LX

An eager crowd of gutter politicians was assembled in the little drinking booth, and lent an attentive ear to the fervent denunciations of Pimen, who now had public opinion on his side.

‘What are all these accursed Lyakhs, these pagans, doing in our Moscow?’ he shouted. ‘Why do they all come here armed to the teeth, in crowds? Answer me that!’

But this time Mitka did not accept his challenge.

‘What can they want here, these vile pagans, but to attack our faith? When were pagans ever in the Kremlin before? And the foreign woman, is she not in the Ascension Convent? And has she not brought her cooks and her musicians with her?’

‘What does she want with cooks?’ asked one of the drinkers.

‘Want? She wants to eat unholy meats in the sacred convent.’

‘Ay,’ said another; ‘and the Tsar, he eats veal. He is not a Russian.’

‘Who told you he eats veal?’ asked Mitka.

‘The butcher, Rustok, told me; he sends veal to the Kremlin.’

‘Of course he eats veal!’ exclaimed Pimen. ‘Did not he have Prince Tatischev flogged for telling him he ought not?’

A tall man in the corner raised his head. ‘It would be very well if that was all. But he is a pagan. He has seized the property of the Church, and built churches for his Wends and foreigners with the money.’

‘It is a plot! it is a plot!’ cried Pimen. ‘They are all in it, these Poles and Wends. They want to get our country into their hands. They are all Cossacks. The Tsar is a vile Cossack, just like this other new Tsarévitch on the Don.’

‘Who is he?’ asked a toper.

‘Did you not hear? Another dirty Cossack says he is the Tsarévitch Peter Fedorovitch.’

‘Soon we shall have two Tsars!’

‘And both Cossacks, both pagans!’ cried Pimen.

‘How can we have anything but pagans for Tsars, when we Russians are all half pagans ourselves?’ said the tall man in the corner. ‘What we have to do is to remember our Saints, and pray to them. But the day of the Lord’s vengeance will come soon, sooner than these pagans imagine. No, the Lord will not abandon His people if they are faithful.’

‘Who is that?’ asked Pimen, as the tall man went out.

‘I don’t know,’ answered the host. ‘He has been here a good deal this last day or two. He comes from the South. ’Twas he that brought the news of this new impostor on the Don.’

‘Perhaps he is a spy,’ suggested a timid-looking little man.

‘Not he,’ said Pimen. ‘When did a spy sit without drinking anything?’

‘You would be a good spy if drinking makes a spy,’ observed the irritated Mitka.

‘Well, you wouldn’t,’ retorted Pimen; ‘for you pour half all you drink on to your clothes.’

‘No quarrelling!’ said mine host. ‘There are no spies here, I hope,’ and he went to get brandy for a new-comer.

‘I believe *he* is a spy himself,’ muttered Pimen to his neighbour, who shook his head oracularly.

LXI

‘And you aren’t going to stay with *me* to-night, Dmitri?’

‘I can’t, little woman; I must be at the banquet. The guests would fight if I wasn’t there to keep the peace.’

‘And how long will the horrible banquet last?’

‘Oh, hours! Up to any time in the morning, I should think.’

Marina pouted. ‘I wanted you all to myself this evening; and it’s so long since I’ve seen you. And I don’t feel *safe* without you,’ and she nestled close up to him. ‘These people look at me so—I don’t know how. I heard a man in the crowd this morning cry, “Polish woman.” He looked at me so terribly, I’m sure he had the evil eye. Oh, Dmitri! I wish you hadn’t got to go.’

‘Foolish little thing, what are you afraid of?’

‘I can’t help it, Dmitri, I feel so nervous.’

And that horrible, *horrible* old man, Prince Shuiski, I *don't* like him.'

'I must tell him that.'

'Don't let him see me,' said Marina, shuddering. 'Oh, Dmitri! I shall be so glad when to-morrow's over, and we're married. I can't bear being alone in that dismal convent, I feel so lonely. And they want me to wear such *hideous* clothes to-morrow, just like great sacks, to be married in, though I've brought such a beautiful wedding dress with me! They told me I mustn't wear it. But I may, mayn't I, Dmitri?'

'I don't know,' said Dmitri. 'They are very silly about little things like that here; they think it's impious not to wear the old Russian garments, or dress differently from other people here. So you don't like your pretty head and this beautiful hair to be buried under a *kakoshnik*. Well, I daresay you're right, little woman. I'll see what I can do; but I'm afraid you may have to be a Russian lady to-morrow, Marie. I have had a fearful trouble about your priests; they are very stupid and very obstinate about religious matters. You can't argue with them; it only makes them hate you.'

‘ Yes ; I know that already. They were very angry with me in the convent because I have brought my own cooks. But I *can't* eat the fearful *messes* they give me.’

‘ Well, anyhow, it can't last long, Marie. To-morrow you will be installed here with me, and then we'll be able to manage better. But try and do as they want for a little while. Now I must go ; I've lots of things to look after. And whenever I'm not about your people are always squabbling with my faithful subjects.’

‘ *Our* faithful subjects, Dmitri.’

‘ Yes, *ours*, if you like,’ said Dmitri, smiling. ‘ What a pretty little hand you've got, Marie. I envy my boyars. It must have been quite sore this morning with being kissed. Now, good - night, I really must go. Take care what you do, and I'll see you early to-morrow morning.’

Marina's women were summoned, and she went back to the convent by a private gallery.

LXII

It was two o'clock in the morning. The wearisome dinner and the drinking bout that followed it were at last over, and the guests broke up and sallied forth into the night. The Russian nobles left the Kremlin, for the most part, silent and reserved; their long trains of attendants with torches flaming gave the scene the aspect of some strange ceremony. The Poles reeled out into the air, their brains whirling with the strong uncouth liquors they had been obliged to consume, making the grey night hideous with their uproarious shouting and unseasonable laughter, and arousing the rage and indignation of the Russians with their outspoken criticisms and unseemly demeanour.

'Good Lord, Iwanicki!' exclaimed a young Pole, leaning on the arm of the person he addressed, 'was there ever such a dinner party before since the world began? I thought I should have died! To see the Tsar perched up all by himself, togged out like—like Solomon in all his

glory! And the two miserable Wisnowiskis jammed together at a little button of a table with the Palatine! Lord! how wretched they did look for six mortal hours! Hollo! there's Konstantin Wisnowiski! How did you like it, old fellow?'

'Like it? I feel as if I was dead and buried,' grunted Konstantin.

'Don't make such a row, Soltikoff,' expostulated Iwanicki. 'You'll wake all the people up.'

'Let 'em wake. I say, look at that old owl; he's got all his clothes on at once. Hi, sir, you there, isn't it cold?'

'For Heaven's sake, Soltikoff! Wisnowiski, help me to get this drunkard home,' said Iwanicki. 'You don't know these Muscovites. There'll be a fight. Why, that's Prince Bielski you're insulting!'

'Bielski!' yelled Soltikoff, on whose heated brain the night air was beginning to work. 'Hurrah for old Bielski! I say, Konstantin, did you have plates? We had—ha! ha!—what do you think? We had *slices of bread* for plates. The Tsar sent us one each. I thought it was the right way to begin dinner, and I ate half mine to

start with before I found out. Ha! ha! Plates! ha! ha! ha!—just like a picnic. *Slices of bread!* oh! ho! ho! I shall die!’

‘Yes, you will in a minute if you don’t stop shouting like that. Look at those fellows glaring at us.’

‘I say, Iwanicki,’ Soltikoff suddenly sang out at the full pitch of his voice, ‘see old Moses there with the big beard! He sat opposite me. He drank forty-seven great tankards of Russian wine, and he’s still alive. Let’s go and——’

But the desperate Iwanicki, trembling for the consequences, fell upon him, and with the assistance of two or three fairly sober companions lifted him, struggling and shouting, bodily up, carried him off to his own quarters, and forced him into bed.

LXIII

But in the house of Prince Vassili Shuiski a crowd of excited and furious Russians were gathered together. One after another of those who had just assisted at the banquet kept coming in, among them the ungovernable Bielski,

fresh from Polish insults and spluttering with rage; there too were many spies employed by Shuiski in different quarters of the town; a few ecclesiastics; a few officers who were not on guard that night, and one or two Cossacks, deserters.

‘What need is there for me to waste words?’ Shuiski was saying. ‘What is the good of long speeches, when the things are flagrant before your eyes? This influx of abominable Poles, armed to the teeth; this pollution of our sacred places with their loathsome rites; this Lithuanian woman for our Tsarina; these vile pagan upstart youngsters publicly insulting us and deriding our customs—is it not enough? Are we agreed?’

A unanimous growl of indignation answered his appeal.

‘Then why should we delay? To-morrow at this hour the Polish impostor will be drowned in wine and the arms of his Polish woman. To-morrow at this hour—is that our time?’

‘Yes, yes; to-morrow, to-morrow!’

‘As for the nobles, I will answer for them,’ went on Shuiski; ‘they distrusted me at first, and I nearly paid the penalty of my daring with my life. But they have learned wisdom by now;

they doubt no more. But the people—Otrépieff, you know them,—how are they disposed ?’

‘They are *for* us, in a sense,’ said Otrépieff. ‘That is to say, they are beginning to chafe at the wild enormities of the Tsar, but they are not wholly against him. We cannot depend on them. They still, most of them, believe him to be the son of Ivan. It would be well if we could devise some scheme to deceive them. One thing is certain, they execrate the Lithuanian strangers. What do you say? To-morrow, when we rush into the Kremlin, let us raise the shout, “*The Lithuanians are killing the Tsar!*” That will madden them against the foreigners, and while they are cutting the throats of the Poles, we can settle quietly with the impostor.’

‘Good!’ exclaimed Shuiski; ‘very good! That is the thing to do! Yes, that’s the plan! Listen, every one. To-morrow, after the ball—’twill be about three in the morning, let us say,—we all assemble in the Red Square, just outside the Redeemer’s Gate. The guards are ours; they will let us in. Some dozen of us—Otrépieff, you will choose them—wait outside, and raise the cry against the foreigners. While the mob are

after them, we can do the rest. It will go hard with us if there is a single Pole left alive to-morrow morning. Remember, surround the palace and seize the vile Cossack while he sleeps. Don't listen, don't let him speak, kill him, any of you, stab him where he lies. He can't escape. We must post a detachment at every gate and along the river bank. Do you see ?'

'Yes, yes.'

'Away then till to-morrow ; and the God of Russia fight for us.'

'One word !' cried Otrépieff. 'Let us beware, *beware*, BEWARE of betraying our plan. Not a sign, not a look, not a wink. The impostor is as cunning as Satan ; a hint, and we are all dead men. Let him have his way ; bear with every insult or outrage, 'twill soon be over.'

'You hear ?' said Shuiski. 'Otrépieff is right. It is only twenty-four hours' waiting, and I—I have waited months.'

'Let us kneel,' said the ousted Patriarch, who sat at Shuiski's side in disguise, 'and ask a blessing of the Lord.'

They knelt, and the Patriarch raised his voice—

‘Set a watch, O Lord, before our mouth, and keep the door of our lips, and grant us Thy grace that we may wipe out the stains and insults they have offered to Thy holy altars in the blood of the offenders.’

‘Amen,’ came from every lip.

‘To-morrow,’ said Shuiski, posting himself at the door, to each one as he went out; ‘to-morrow, at *three* in the morning, before the Church of St. Vassili.’

LXIV

‘Then, my lords, I understand you will not give way in this small matter to oblige me. Very well, I will not forget it,’ and the Tsar rose angrily from his throne.

‘Your Imperial Majesty must not suppose that his councillors offer any opposition. Least of all would Vassili Shuiski presume to pronounce on the delicate question of a lady’s dress. Only, the thing involves an old custom. The Russian people will certainly consider the appearance of the Tsarina in a foreign costume—so indecent in their eyes—as in the highest degree offensive.

But let the Tsar decide how far he can afford to set old customs—prejudices—at nought. His councillors dissuade nothing, recommend nothing; they merely state facts and their probable effects on the people.'

'All very fine, all very smooth, Prince Vassili Shuiski,' answered Dmitri. 'It seems to me, on the contrary, that I get on perfectly with my people, but that my senators are too fond of giving me good advice. What absurdity! to make such a fuss about an affair of clothes—a girl's clothes!'

'But a girl's clothes may cover a nation's obedience.'

'Have it your own way then, gentlemen, since you will insist upon it. I yield, and the Tsarina shall conform to the old Russian manners and customs. *To-day, to-day* she shall look like a walking mountain, to please you; but *to-morrow* she shall please herself, and look like what she chooses.'

And he went out abruptly.

'*To-morrow!*' The boyars looked at each other, but they said nothing.

LXV

The uproarious Soltikoff was in so evil a plight after his night's debauch that he was unable to attend the wedding of the Tsar, but sat at home cursing his hard fate and his racking headache in the house of Iwanicki, with whom he was staying, till it was all over. At last his host returned in company with another young Polish grandee, one of Cracow's exquisites, by name Count Stanislas Niemciwicz.

'Well,' asked the invalid as they came in, 'all over? How went the thing?'

Niemciwicz always spoke in a very high sing-song voice.

'Oh, my dear Soltikoff,' he replied, 'quite the funniest proceeding! What a thousand pities you weren't there! The very drollest thing! Poor Marina Mniszek in a sort of bed-quilt, that looked as if it had been smeared with honey and then dipped in pearls. Her face stuck out at the top; and such a singular affair on her head, quite ridiculous!'

‘The ceremony go off well?’

‘Oh, fairly well, fairly well. The whole business was extremely laughable. No chairs, nothing to sit down on; every one stood up all the time. Most fatiguing ceremony, wasn’t it, Iwanicki? I was ready to drop, so down I dropped, and sat on something or other; heard a great noise; people grumbling; found I was sitting on Ivan the Terrible’s face, or something of the kind. Most absurd! eh, Iwanicki?’

But Iwanicki, who seemed abstracted, looked very grave.

‘Do you notice now, Soltikoff, how serious Iwanicki’s got since we saw him last. Quite Russian, I declare. The cold has that sort of effect, I believe. Everybody is very grave here. They don’t understand a joke here, these Muscovites. If you had only been there; why, who but a Muscovite would not have laughed to see the Tsar and his bride hoisted about the cathedral by half a dozen venerable boyars,—grey-haired old curmudgeons in long gowns? Yes, the sense of humour is gone among these Muscovites—quite gone. I thought I should split with laughing. Poor Skzyrnowski can-

not recover; he is doomed. We all laughed so!’

‘Yes, too much, a great deal too much,’ observed Iwanicki. ‘I thought the people would set upon you.’

‘Oh, come! now you really are too severe. We *did* laugh a little; but how could we help it? The whole thing was so supremely ridiculous!’

‘It will be a bad joke for some of us before you’ve done,’ answered Iwanicki. ‘You don’t know this place or these people. Now, I do, and I’ll give you a piece of advice. Don’t stop too long at the ball to-night, and don’t roam about the streets *after*. There’s something in the air just now.’

‘Dear me, Iwanicki, what a sage you are! The fact is, my dear Soltikoff,’ went on the inexhaustible Niemciwicz, as Iwanicki left the room, ‘our friend here is a little out of humour about something. Stands a little on his dignity, and gives a little too much advice.’

Niemciwicz was jealous of Iwanicki, who always outshone him in society at Cracow.

‘Well, anyhow, *I* shan’t do much roaming,’

groaned Soltikoff. 'Oh! these Russian beverages, what *can* they be made of? I *must* go and just look in at the ball, but I shall come back early, and go to bed as soon as I get back.'

'A very bad plan, my dear fellow,—the worst in the world if you've been living a little fast. There's only *one* receipt—a hair of the dog that bit you. Sit up all night and play baccarat. I've often done it; it's infallible. If you go to bed early, the whole room goes round with you, and you don't know where you are in the morning.'

LXVI

The dinner had long been over. But in the imperial palace, where a grand ball was given in honour of the Tsar's marriage and of his young Tsarina, the dancing went on into a late hour of the night.

Through the tapestried chambers and galleries, lit up by torches, flaring from long gold and silver branches on the walls, with here and there a lamp of strange shape, the Russian boyars, in their most magnificent caftans, moved with their

spouses, mixing majestically with the Polish strangers and the ladies of Marina's train—*mixing*, but not mingling; tending rather, like oil and vinegar, to keep sharply distinct, and gravitate in small exclusive knots: the Russians silent, dignified, and icily reserved; the Poles noisy, laughing, and critical.

In the uniform of a captain of *strelitz*, Dmitri moved from group to group, doing his best to smooth away difficulties and promote intercourse, but unsuccessfully. The Russians viewed all his efforts to mitigate their sullenness as proof that he was himself half a Pole, while the Poles laughed at him in their sleeve as one of the barbarians. Over the whole company there hung a vague and undefinable atmosphere of incongruity: a feeling of general antagonism, as it were latent under an amicable social veneer, lurked in every heart. The hours flew by, and each hour, as it died, left behind it a more distinct and unmistakable sentiment of oppression and constraint.

The dances caught the prevailing tone, and the want of anything approaching to gaiety produced a solemn and almost overpowering impres-

sion on the guests. A presentiment, not to be accounted for, robbed the festivities of all that sparkle and life without which such ceremonies are as flat champagne. There was, indeed, plenty of noise, mainly from Polish throats, but no light-heartedness. The evening wanted a soul; or more exactly, every one in the room bore himself as if his shoe pinched.

In the midst of all this uneasiness, the Tsar alone seemed a stranger to it; but his isolated merriment only accentuated the universal gloom. As he left a knot of Poles, he felt a touch on his shoulder. He turned and perceived Iwanicki.

‘Ah, Iwanicki, are you as solemn as all the rest?’

‘General, have you made sure of your guards to-night?’

‘Of course! Why?’

‘Are you *sure* of them?’

‘Why, certainly! Why not? What do you mean?’

‘General, I wish you had not sent away Korela and his Cossacks to disperse those disturbers on the Don. There’s something curious about every one to-night. Perhaps you’ve not

noticed it; but look at all these boyars; they keep exchanging glances. I've seen a lot of things that escape you.'

At this moment the Palatine of Sandomir came up. 'Tsar, you don't happen to have a score or two guards to spare to-night, do you?'

'What! you too, father-in-law? What are *you* afraid of?'

'Why, things seem rather unsettled. Some of our fellows have been rather roughly treated and insulted in the street. A dirty ruffian had a scuffle with one of my grooms, who told him the Tsar should hear of it in the morning. "Ah," says he, "wait till to-morrow comes!" Then I was warned by an odd-looking rascal who said he was a Pole, to stay indoors to-night. There seems to be something in the air. These townspeople are behaving very strangely.'

'Why, what are you all afraid of? How can you expect anything else? You Poles are always fighting with my people, and of course they say anything that occurs to them. They don't mean anything. It's all noise. But as to your fellows who were beaten in the street, I'll look into it in the morning. Iwanicki, you are

fearfully solemn. You want a cup of something and a partner.'

'No, General, I must be gone. I've got an invalid to look after. All the same, I wish you had your Cossack guards; or, anyhow, I wish *I* was on guard in the Kremlin to-night.'

'I wish you were. But don't be afraid. I'm going myself in a minute or two. Marina's very tired. We're going sledging to-morrow; come and hold her in while I drive, will you?'

'All right! Good-night, General!'

'Good-night.'

As soon as the Tsar and his bride had gone, the guests gradually dropped away by twos and threes. A few lingered talking and drinking. The Poles went home in small knots with less hilarity than on the previous night. By one o'clock, save for the laughing of here and there a couple of returning guests, Moscow was buried in quiet and repose.

LXVII

‘ Ah, Dmitri, I’m so glad I’m with you to-night! That dreadful ball! Do you know, all night the boyars kept looking at me?’

‘ Of course they did, Marie! Every one did!’

‘ No; not like that. I don’t mean *that*, but—somehow—it was awful. At times I almost screamed. Oh, that horrible Prince Shuiski. I shall have nightmare. His eyes sneered at me so. I am afraid of him, Dmitri.’

‘ Well, now, he’s gone, and forgotten all about you.’

‘ Put your arms round me, Dmitri. There, now I feel safe.’

‘ Why, you’re all cold. What is it?’

‘ I don’t know. I feel so—unhinged. I’m afraid——’

‘ You’re overtired, little woman. You’ll be all right to-morrow.’

‘ You won’t let him hurt me, Dmitri?’

‘ Foolish little Marie!’

‘ I’m so sorry. I *can’t* help it. They all

seem enemies to me. I feel so lost and friendless here. Dmitri, do you remember *that* evening?’

‘At Sandomir? Yes, I should think so.’

‘And—my song?’

‘Yes.’

‘Well, it’s come true. I *am* an exile after all.’

‘Foolish little exile; why, you’re in your own house. Now go to sleep.’

LXVIII

‘Are we all ready? Are the men prepared, Otrépieff? Good! Comrades, you know the plan. To the Spaski Gate; not a sound till the bell rings. Who’s that? Vlassief? Come in!’

‘Everything’s quiet,’ said the newcomer. ‘They suspect nothing. The Poles are making merry in one or two houses.’

‘Have you set the watches at the gates, Otrépieff? Are the men come in from the suburbs?’

‘They’re all there.’

‘Come on, then. Remember the signal: the big bell. Now, then, every man to his post. In an hour it will be all over. Quietly now!’

LXIX

It was three o'clock in the morning. Moscow was still as death. The night was very cold. A faint light hung in the sky, but the streets were pitchy black.

* * * * *

Clang—boom—whirr—boom.

The great bell rang out into the startled air. A noise of shouting, the trample of hurried feet.

Doors flew open. People leaped out of their beds, and hurried on their clothes.

‘What’s that?’ ‘Lord, have mercy upon us!’
‘What’s the matter?’ ‘Get up!’

The streets filled like magic. Torches dashed about; soon a stream of people began to pour along in affright.

‘What is it?’ ‘The Kremlin’s on fire!’
‘The Poles, the Lithuanians are murdering the Tsar!’

‘The Lithuanians—down with the pagan dogs! Come along!’

Every now and then half a dozen soldiers hurried by. The bell boomed on into the night. Church after church took it up, and the clamour became infernal.

At the Spaski Gate Shuiski, at the head of his band of conspirators and a detachment of soldiers, shouted to the mob that grew every moment—

‘Christians, to the work! The accursed impostor and his Lithuanians have sold Russia and the holy city to the King of Poland. You have seen how they laugh at our customs and defile our churches; how they desecrate our monasteries and convents. People, the time has come! All good Christians, follow me. Death to the impostor and the Poles!’

The gate, held by some treacherous guards, flew open, and the conspirators rushed in. Behind them, the cry grew: ‘*Death to the Lithuanians!*’ Shuiski and his band, with shouts of ‘*Death to the heretic!*’ hurried across the Square, brandishing hatchets, swords, and spears. Arrived at the Tsar’s palace, they began to batter at the doors.

Within five minutes the whole city was in an uproar. The infuriated mob, led by sections of the conspirators, poured in detachments to the different quarters assigned to the principal Poles, and began to beat in the doors. A few of those in the plot rapidly collected a heap of prepared materials, and an enormous bonfire suddenly flared up on the Red Place; its red uncertain flickering flames gave the weird Church of St. Vassili and the crowds of startled citizens pouring past into the Kremlin an effect almost unearthly.

LXX

Asleep in his palace in the Kremlin, Dmitri dreamed a dream.

He thought he was flying along in his sledge after two bears, one black and one white, which ran like the wind. They always kept just ahead of him. He felt, somehow, that his life depended on his catching them up. They flew along, the wind whistling in his ears. He could see their little short tails, always at the same distance, just in front of him. He noticed suddenly he had

no horses in his sledge, and wondered how he got along, but it did not seem at all strange.

Then, with a kind of jerk, he became aware he was not moving along at all, nor in a sledge; he was in the ballroom. Before him were the two bears; how absurd, they were not bears at all,—the black one was Shuiski, and the white one Marina!

How could he have mistaken them? They were dancing furiously side by side on a table. He could see Marina was in mortal agony; she looked ready to drop. But they danced furiously up and down, never stopping. They got quicker and quicker, faster and faster. Their feet kept growing bigger and bigger; he could hear the loud thumps they made. The thumping got louder and louder, till it became quite a roar.

Something shook him violently; he opened his eyes. There was Marina, her face blanched and ghastly with terror, close to him.

‘Dmitri!’ Her tongue clove to her mouth.

He bounded out of bed. The thunder was real; an infernal uproar fell on his ears.

‘Dmitri! My God! what is it?’

He dashed on a few clothes, and hurried to the door.

‘Dmitri!’ she screamed in terror, ‘don’t leave me!’

He darted out, and bumped up against Basmanof rushing in.

‘What is it?’

‘Tsar, they’re after you. Not a moment to lose. The gates will be broken in in a moment. Away, fly! Don’t mind me!’

‘And Marina?’

Basmanof shrugged his shoulders. ‘I shall die too,’ he said.

He dashed downstairs as he spoke. With the speed of light Dmitri flew back. As he entered, Marina fell heavily to the ground in a swoon. Catching her up in his arms, and seizing a short Turkish scimitar, he flew out again along the gallery. As he came out on the staircase, he heard the door below go crash, and through it poured a mob of howling assailants. ‘The impostor, the Cossack dog, give him up!’

He ground his teeth. ‘If Marina were only safe, we would see.’ Desperation seized him; they were coming up. He caught a glance from Basmanof, who had posted himself on the first landing with a score of guards. Springing back

into the gallery, he raised the tapestry, burst open a door in the wall, laid Marina on the floor, and returned. 'God grant they don't find her. 'Tis all I can do. Ah no! I have it!' He hurried in and caught her up again, then out and across the stairs. As he passed he saw Basmanof fall, cut down by a man with a hatchet. He penetrated through the tapestry into another suite of rooms, traversed these, and gained another staircase.

No use; they are mounting by this too. A few Germans and Scots were defending it, step by step.

He laid Marina down on the floor, and for one brief instant thought of stabbing her where she lay. 'No, she may get through it yet: I *can't*.'

He ran down the stairs. No sooner did they catch sight of him than a storm of execrations arose. 'Ah! scoundrelly impostor—dog of a Cossack——'

'Villains!' shouted Dmitri, cutting down the foremost man, 'do you attack your Tsar? Aha! do you think you have to do with another Boris?' Two or three shots were discharged, missing him, but one more of his guards fell.

‘Come back!’ shouted Dmitri, seeing the impossibility of holding the staircase against numbers; ‘up, all of you!’ They hurried up and slammed the door, but it could not last long.

‘Here, two of you—never mind me—take the Tsarina—there is still time—back to my room, through the wall. No, stay with her *in* the wall; you cannot reach the Terem. If they find you, do your best for her.’

‘Now, my brave fellows, keep the doors while you can. If I could get out I could save you all; but how? God! to die like a rat in a hole! Ah, Shuiski, if I get through——Look out! the door’s giving; come back, this next is stronger.’

They retired to the inner room. The mob burst with a yell into the first.

‘My brave men,’ said Dmitri, ‘I’m afraid it’s all over. Forgive me. Lay down your arms and save yourselves how you can.’

He disappeared with a run into the inner room, and threw open a window which looked out at the back of the palace. There was no one below, but it was thirty feet from the ground. It was too dark to see where or how to fall.

‘Now, Fortune, one more good turn. If only I don’t break my legs.’

He tore down a curtain, wrapped his legs in it, threw down a few hangings and cushions to break his fall, if he happened to pitch on them. Then he jumped himself.

LXXI

Long after he left the ball, Iwanicki sat up in his room, partly to keep Soltikoff company—who, having been ill all day, had now suddenly become lively and anxious to converse,—and partly because he felt he could not sleep. But gradually he removed his clothes, one after another, and the two young men sat half-dressed before the fire, discussing the events of the day.

‘A fine girl, Marina,’ observed Soltikoff; ‘seems a pity she should be thrown away on these savages. I wouldn’t be her for something. I shall be glad enough to get back to Cracow. Another dinner would kill me, stone-dead.’

‘The place is not so bad; it’s the people.

There's very good fun here sometimes. But these Muscovites——'

'Yes; they seem very slow. I say, what an extraordinary ball it was.'

'Fearful bore! I'm getting sleepy,' and Iwanicki yawned portentously.

'Sleepy? Why, I feel as if I'd only just got up! Put on your clothes again, and we'll go out and see what Moscow looks like in the dark.'

'Not for me,' said Iwanicki. 'How on earth do you suppose I could get all my clothes on again without my man?'

'By ——! what's that?'

As the affrighted bells clanged in their ears, the two young men started up, and stared at each other in amazement. Iwanicki's heart stopped; all his suspicions leaped into his throat, and sent a shiver through his frame.

They ran to the window. The shouts grew louder. '*Death to the Lithuanians!*' '*Death to the pagans!*'

'By ——! this looks queer!' exclaimed Soltikoff again. 'What on earth is the matter? Are all the devils loose? Why, what in the

name of —— ! Why, Iwanicki, you're not going out ?'

Iwanicki threw on his clothes with a rapidity that showed how little real need he had for his man.

'I suspected this,' he said. 'The Muscovites are up against the Tsar. I knew they would ; it's been hatching for some time. You'd better get the servants together, and guard the door, Soltikoff ; it's strong, and will hold out a bit with a few men behind it. There's not a minute to lose ; don't wait——'

'But, my dear Iwanicki, you're never going out ? Why, you'll be killed——'

'Don't talk, but listen ; I haven't time to argue. Here, Soltikoff,'—he took off a chain and locket from his neck,—'I daresay I shan't see you again. If you get back to Cracow, give this to my mother ; tell her all about it. Good-bye, old fellow, I can't stop.'

'Iwanicki — good God !' Soltikoff almost wept ; he loved Iwanicki — it was about the only genuine sentiment in his soul. 'Why, he's gone ! What's to be done ? I wish I knew my way about this infernal place—I'd go after

him. I suppose we'd better guard the doors. My God! Iwanicki——'

LXXII

Darting along by-streets, and avoiding the crowds as far as possible, thanks to the darkness, Iwanicki succeeded in gaining the Red Place. Crossing this at a run, he entered the Kremlin, and, pursued by shouts of 'Mark the Pole!' 'A pagan!' 'Down with him!' flew across the square inside. The seething crowd at the principal entrance to the palace told him it was too late to attempt to force his way in there.

He ran round inside the wall to the back. 'Perhaps the back gate is still free.' As he came round the corner a heavy body fell through the air from an upper window, and the sound of the fall was followed by a deep groan.

Iwanicki ran up. 'General—hurrah!—saved!—up with you—there's still time. Are you hurt?'

'Iwanicki, is that you? Fly!—get away! Go, go! Don't stand; save yourself. Leave me; it's all over—my leg's broken.'

‘ Let me carry you.’

‘ No, no ! Go, man ! I thought you at least would be safely out of it. Fly, fly !—I *order* you !’

‘ General, I disobey to-night, just for once. To-morrow, you know, you mayn’t be able to punish me for it. Can you stand ? Here, let me carry you.’

The yelling mob drew near them round the corner.

‘ Too late,’ murmured Dmitri. ‘ Ah, Iwanicki ! well, we’ll die together. Give me your hand. Ah, if I could but stand !’

The shouts came nearer.

‘ General, one word,’ said Iwanicki with a smile, as he supported the wounded Tsar. ‘ I can’t die happy till I know.’

‘ What ?’

‘ Were you really the Tsarévitch ?’

‘ Rogue, you knew I was not ?’

‘ I liked you all the better. Good - bye, General.’

The crowd surged round the corner.

‘ If I could but stand !’ exclaimed Dmitri ; ‘ one looks so pitiful on the ground. Help me.’

‘There he is! There’s the Cossack—look!—with his accursed Lithuanian!’

‘Villains!—traitors!’ roared Dmitri. ‘Dare you come here to murder your Tsar?’

But a spasm of agony twisted his features; he sank back into the arms of Iwanicki, and his words lost their force.

A crack, and Iwanicki fell with a smile, shot through the heart.

‘Seize the dog!’ They struck at him. ‘Don’t kill him; bring him along. Bring his pagan.’

They dragged him along by his wounded leg into the Red Square, and propped him up in the light of the bonfire, against the dead bodies of Basmanof and Iwanicki.

‘Here, let’s see whether he can play while we dance!’ cried a ferocious rioter, with a laugh; and he stuck a pipe into the Tsar’s mouth. ‘Now, pipe to us, foul Cossack.’

Dmitri’s lips moved convulsively.

‘Dog of a pagan!’ screamed another, ‘will you not play? then take that,’—and he discharged a musket into his face.

Then they fell on him, one and all, and

hacked him to pieces. As his life fled, the firelight fell on a tall man in the habit of a monk, who watched his last agonies, standing apart, with a quivering lip, but bright vengeful eyes.

NOTES

CHAPTERS III, XVII. See Latham's *Nationalities of Europe*, vol. i. pp. 30, 388 ; and *passim*.—The legend in Chapter V is a paraphrase from Ralston's *Early Russian History*, p. 69.—The fair at Nijni-Novgorod is an anachronism ; it was not moved there till 1817 ; at the period this story deals with it was still at Kazan. But for our purposes it was better to place it at Novgorod.—The recognition of the false Dmitri by the Tsarina as really her son, given in Chapter XLII, is a historical fact ; though, like the similar wonder in the case of the Tichborne claimant, it is, as Dundreary would say, 'one of the things no fellow can understand.'—The words and expressions used by Dmitri at important crises throughout the book are historical ; especially his opinions of Cæsar and Henri IV, and his exclamation about Boris in Chapter LXX, given in an old anonymous tract in the Bodleian Library.—The best idea of the costume will be derived from some plates in the sixth volume of Racinet's *Costume Historique*, among which is a portrait of Boris Godunoff himself.—The best complete modern account of the career of Dmitri is that by Prosper Mérimée, to which I am much indebted. I have not read his drama on the same subject, and I

doubt very much whether the genius which could achieve perfection in 'Lokis' and 'Colomba' was equally well suited to draw Dmitri.

There is an old book in the Bodleian, entitled, *The Reporte of a bloudie and terrible Massacre in the City of Mosco, with the fearefull and tragicall end of Demetrius the last Duke before him raigning at this present, 1607.* It contains the following interesting account of our hero, which readers will be grateful to me for transcribing:—

'For his own person, he maintayned his greatnesse verie well: he was a man of mean stature, browne of hew, prompt to choler, but quickly appeased: he hath broken many a staffe and given sentence of death upon the Marshalls and other officers when they did but a little swarve from their dutie: he liked well to be on horseback, and loved to go often on hunting, being a man of great expedition and that would quickly order whatsoever came before him, and commanded with excellent forecast, even in the least matters: he was a great enterpriser, of wonderfull courage, and inwardly conceived that all the countrie of *Muscovia* was not sufficient for him to purchase any great renowne, so that he aspired after other countries also and monarchies. At the beginning he was verie affable, giving free accesse even to the meanest, but after he grew to know and understand the *Russians'* false pranks he provided himself of a guard,' etc. etc.

THE END



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