

CHAPTER IX.

THAT was a gorgeous, semi-barbaric, yet on the whole a pleasant procession through Muscovy, from Archangel to Moscow. My sledge was far behind that of Amy, who travelled in a splendid equipage in company of the two envoys, followed and preceded by other grandees in less gorgeous vehicles. I had for companion a young boyar named Nagoy, with whom I was destined to have much intercourse later. This was a proud young Muscovish noble, but not too proud to be very inquisitive. Our conversation was in his own language, for he had no English, and assuredly I think there was no question as to my position in England, in this embassy, Amy's parentage, virtues, accomplishments, religion, history, and so forth that was left unasked by him. As for the answers, it was easy for me to plead inability to express myself in his tongue when his curiosity ran in awkward channels. In the villages through which we passed, the peasants, when they did

not run away and hide themselves, as they sometimes did, the whole community disappearing, and leaving a deserted hamlet, prostrated themselves as we passed, touching the snow with their foreheads, and so remaining until we had gone by. Once a child ran under a sledge and was badly hurt, and the procession would have continued on its way unheeding, had not Amy heard the cry of the babe, and insisted—to the astonishment of her Muscovish companions—upon stopping to attend to its hurts, which she did with her own hands, giving the parents money for the child, and finally kissing it before she re-entered her carriage.

My companion—Nagoy—was scornful, and even shocked, when he saw all this.

“To stop a cavalcade of boyars and grandees,” he said, “for one of these beasts—bah! it is shameful!”

“They are human creatures,” I said, “like yourself.”

Nagoy glared at me as though he would eat me.

“You are a guest of the Tsar,” he said, “or you should not say that; they are beasts—a little better than the cattle and the pigs—not much.”

“I claim no privilege as guest of the Tsar!”

I laughed; "and I repeat that these people are human creatures like yourself, or me, or the Tsar himself. Have they no souls?"

"Have foreigners?" he said. Whereat I laughed aloud, to his astonishment and anger. After this we spoke little for the rest of the journey.

I afterwards discovered that the temper of Nagoy had suffered much in consequence of having had to wait nearly two months for us at Archangel, with the rest of those sent to meet us there. This must have been a trying period for all, but perhaps especially for those who, like this young boyar, had other fish to fry at Moscow.

We reached that great city in due course, having occupied, I think, some fourteen days in travelling from Archangel, which is the nearest, and some say the only, seaport of the Muscovish sovereign, and yet so distant from the capital.

Messengers had been sent on in front of us, together with a letter to the Cæsar or Tsar, from his envoy Peesemsky, in which it was explained that her Grace the Queen of England, unable to send over the seas that kinswoman whom she had first named, had despatched in her place one

even more beautiful, and related, like Mary Hastings, to the throne. "One beautiful as the stars," the envoy wrote, "whom to see is to love."

The messenger rode quickly, and returned presently, bringing the reply to Peesemsky's letter.

"Let the Queen's embassy come before me immediately on arrival," the Tsar wrote, "but without this lady whom they have brought in place of the Lady Mary Hastings whom I invited. This one I have not invited. I will first see what this Sir Jerome Bowes has to say; afterwards I will receive her or not receive her."

Peesemsky looked worried when he read the letter of his master. "I fear his Grace is not pleased with the turn of affairs," he said. "I tremble for myself and also for thee, Sir Bowes; I know not how he will receive us."

"Marry—will he chastise us?" Sir Jerome laughed. "We are not children, my friend, to be afraid of a bogey."

"It is very likely that he will chastise me," said the Muscovish envoy. "Be not offended if he shout and curse at thee also."

"If that be so, I shall take the bull by the

horns!" said Sir Jerome; and, indeed, the sturdy ambassador did not lag behind his words, for he treated the Cæsar with scant respect, as shall presently be recorded.

The Muscovish sovereign was surrounded by many boyars and officials when we came into his presence, having left Amy with her woman in the terem, or female quarter, of the wooden palace in which we were received, there to prepare herself in case she should be summoned.

The King's son sat in a prominent place upon the right hand of his Grace, and upon his left a very prominent boyar, by name Boris Godunof (a noble destined, before many years should pass, to imperial dignity, to be achieved by means of acts which are not to be judged by such as I, especially since they have nothing to do with my own experiences in Muscovy and Amy's, which are all I have taken upon myself to record).

The Cæsar or Tsar himself sat upon a very remarkable seat or throne, the like of which was surely never seen upon this earth. The chair itself was fashioned of some wood, dark in colour, of which, however, nothing was to be seen, for embedded in it were rows of the blue stones known as turquoises, set so close together that

nothing else was visible. It is said that the back alone of this marvellous chair contains no fewer than two thousand of these gems, all of a large and valuable size.

As for the Tsar himself, he seemed a thin, gaunt person of smallish size; his face bloodless and passion-worn, but with blazing eyes that rarely rested, but fixed themselves as he spoke now upon one object now upon another; unless, indeed, something in the conversation attracted his special attention, when he would suddenly gaze very intently upon the speaker, and often in a manner which was most disconcerting to him who must meet the stare, if not actually terrifying.

In the Tsar's hand was the oaken staff or *dubina*, with its ugly iron point, of which we had already heard.

He received us with scarce an inclination of the head, glancing from one to another of us as we entered. His eyes rested a moment upon me, and I saw them intensify as they looked. Doubtless the number of my inches surprised him, for he made some remark to Godunof, who now haughtily looked me up and down.

Sir Jerome Bowes advanced, introduced by Peesemsky; he bent his knee and bowed low

enough, but, to my astonishment, I perceived that his hat was still upon his head. The Tsar observed the fact at the same moment, for he said aloud, in querulous tones, addressing the interpreter:—

“Bid him take his hat off”.

“I represent the Queen of England,” said Sir Jerome, “and her Grace uncovers for no prince upon this earth.”

With the words he cocked his hat the more defiantly.

“Is your Queen not content with insulting me in her own person by breaking her promises to me,” said the Tsar, furiously banging the floor with the point of his staff, “but must needs add to her offence by sending an envoy whose manners reek of the stable?”

Sir Jerome now boldly declared that if any man, prince or noble, should say word to impugn the honour of his mistress, he was prepared to defend her honour to the death. With these words he threw his gauntlet upon the floor of the chamber, near the Tsar’s footstool.

Truly Sir Jerome fulfilled his threat of taking the bull by the horns, though in truth there were some who considered that he shamed his great mistress more than he honoured her.

Then followed an odd argument. For first the enraged Tsar declared that it was fortunate for Sir Jerome that his position as ambassador protected him, otherwise his head must have left his shoulders.

“Ambassador of the greatest sovereign upon earth, deny it who will!” cried Sir Jerome, ignoring the rest of the Tsar’s speech.

To this the Cæsar replied that he himself, at any rate, took leave to consider that her Grace was not his equal.

“Oh, your Grace may be sure,” cried Sir Jerome, “that my mistress is well able to make the greatest of princes—ay, even the Cæsar of Muscovy—sorrow of his malice.”

“Ha!” Ivan laughed derisively, “and what of the French King, and the Spanish?”

“I say that the Queen, my mistress, is as great as any of them both!” replied Sir Jerome, undaunted.

“And what sayest thou of the Emperor of Germany?” was the next taunt.

To this Sir Jerome replied that the King, the Queen’s late father, in his wars with France, had held the Emperor in his pay. “Such is the greatness of my mistress, which let no one dare deny!” he ended defiantly.

Then the Tsar became of a sudden furiously angry, and bade us withdraw, which command we promptly and gladly obeyed; and so ended our first audience of the Cæsar of Muscovy.

It was told us that the bluffness of Sir Jerome Bowes proved the cause of much ill-humour on the part of his Grace, which ill-humour being visited upon the courtiers around his person, in blows and curses and threatenings and every kind of ill-usage, Sir Jerome was not blessed by the Court for his sturdy championing of the Queen's honour.

Understanding the Muscovish tongue as I now did, I was able to learn more of the opinions of those around us than was Sir Jerome himself, of whom it was characteristic that he had declared he would not offend his tongue by causing it to struggle with the outlandish gibberish spoken by these barbarians. Consequently he had not a word of Russian, but trusted entirely to Muirhead, the interpreter.

CHAPTER X.

FOR many a day I never heard anything from Amy herself as to her first reception by the Tsar. Offended and mortified, but even more angered was she, that is certain, for never would she speak of that experience.

Nevertheless, there were others present from whose descriptions of the scene I may quote, Muirhead, as interpreter, being one. Muirhead has often declared that Amy has never looked finer, haughtier, more beautiful than when she walked proudly into the Tsar's presence. The anger of the Cæsar was still at its flood-height, for Sir Jerome had but a short while ended his audacious interview. The Prince Ivan still sat at the right of the jewelled chair of state, and Boris Godunof on the left, but there were few boyars present.

The Tsar did not fix his eyes upon Amy when she entered; he had turned his shoulder towards the door by which she entered the