

Then the Tsar gazed slowly round upon the boyars, and having summoned his Oprichinniki bade the fellows take the names of all present excepting those six who had fallen upon Krapatkin.

"These curs who dared not fight for their master," he said, "shall be made to yelp. Let each boyar pay ten score of roubles, Oprichinniki, and if they find not the gold, ye shall obtain the value the best way ye can."

Then the Tsar stalked from the audience chamber, leaving a roomful of pale-faced boyars, who bargained and argued with the sweepers, cursed, wept, entreated, promised, threatened, and in the end paid, every man his fine.

"Better this than to lie where Krapatkin lies!" they told one another.

"He will feed the dogs in an hour!" said a pale boyar; "but he broke the Cæsar's dubina and defied the devil to his face, and to have seen that sight I am ready to pay my fine, ay, and glad of it!"

"For that which we have seen this day," said another, "I shall pray daily for Krapatkin's soul, though it cost me two fat candles a week at St. Cyril's ikon."

## CHAPTER XXVI.

WHEN first I came forth from prison, released by Krapatkin, who had—though I knew it not—now taken my place in the same cell, I was much put to it to determine where to hide myself; for if the Tsar should consider my poor self worthy the trouble of a search, he would certainly have me sought for, and the end would be worse than the beginning.

To Muirhead's quarters, wherein I had had hospitable accommodation, I could not of course return; this would be to imperil my friend as well as myself, and to make him but a poor return for his kindness.

I could indeed leave Moscow altogether for a while, and hide myself in some village within a league or two of the city, or even in the forest if matters came to the worst, though that would be a most undesirable matter indeed, for it was now winter, which in Muscovy is a period of great cold and severity.

In the end I decided that I would go to my

old friend Kiril, my lieutenant in the custodianship of the wolf-dogs, and to him appeal for sanctuary during the days of my trouble. Both he and his assistant Stepan were, unless I was too easily persuaded to my own advantage, inclined to like me well, whether for the reason that I seemed to understand the nature of the dogs and to be loved by the brutes, or for some other, I know not.

So to Kiril I repaired, informing him that I had incurred the anger of the Tsar for no better reason than that I had accidentally slain the hound Boorya who had savagely attacked me during the episode of Krapatkin's foolish display of bravado.

"Boorya was the most devilish of all our beasts," said Kiril. "I have many scars from his teeth, even I. Our father the Tsar should be told we are well rid of this dog, then may-be he will forgive thee."

"I have no doubt this will be told to his Grace on my behalf, and that his anger will not last long; meanwhile I am in danger, Kiril, and know not where to lay my head; give me shelter, thou shalt be well paid for it."

"A whole skin is dearer than money," said Kiril, scratching his shaggy head, which was

like a bear's coat. "Will the Oprichinniki come to seek thee?"

"I cannot tell," said I. "But even if so they should not find me, for in case of extreme need I should go into the very kennel of the dogs, where, be sure, no Oprichinnik shall thrust his nose to seek me."

"Good! lie within their shed, if thou wilt; or, stay, there is the *lyédnik*, the ice-cellar, wherein is stored our food and the dogs'—it is no fit chamber for a courtier like thyself to sleep in, indeed, but at a pinch——"

"Good! make me a bed of sacks behind the ice-blocks in the pit of the cellar," said I; "it would be a clever Oprichinnik who found me lying snugly there like a maggot in an apple. Come, we will see to it at once. If I should be found, thou shalt know nothing of my hiding. I am there unknown to thee and to Stepan."

Both of my friends grinned at this and scratched their heads, after the fashion of the Muscovish moujik or commoner. Stepan bade me not forget that so great a service as the deceiving of the Tsar's men was surely worth a present in money, and that it would perhaps be safer, all things duly considered, if payments were made beforehand, lest accident should

happen to either or both parties. I therefore paid each man the value of some two shillings, which for them was wealth indeed and the occasion of much gratitude and rejoicing.

During the day came notice from the palace that the dogs should be kept hungry. The meaning of such an order was well known to my friends and to me, and when they brought me food at noon they informed me of the message received.

"God have mercy upon his soul!" said Kiril, "whoever it be; for it is a fearful death to die, and it is to be hoped amends will be made in a better world."

"Amen!" said Stepan, crossing himself. "At least we are safe from such a fate as this, we three."

"Nay, I think it is we whose souls need praying for," I rejoined, "for assuredly the evil one will take a new grip upon each of us for every fellow-creature we send to his death in this manner; it is the worst wickedness to condemn a man to such an end. Let the Tsar see to his soul for this greater part of the crime; but our share is devilish enough if we carry out the orders of the Tsar." Both men crossed themselves.

"Are we, who are helpless instruments," said

Kiril, "to be held responsible for the *ukases* of the Tsar?"

"Ay, if we make no effort to stand between him and the devil by hindering his most hellish desires."

"Who are we so to stand? Doubtless there is wisdom hidden in thy words, *Barin*, but to us they appear only foolishness."

"There might be opportunities to save a man. When he is brought and left for you to cast among the dogs why should you not soil the sand with blood, leaving a few scattered rags of clothing, if you will, as evidence of his end, but let the man himself go free; there are many who would gladly pay half their substance to escape naked into the forest rather than come to such an end."

The double argument of danger to the soul and profit to the pocket prevailed, I think, with these good fellows, and I trust that it may have since brought forth fruit in the saving of a life or two, though of this I cannot be sure, for I was soon to take my leave of both dogs and keepers, as shall presently be seen, never again to set eyes upon either the one or the other.

"At any rate," I now said, "go one of you to the kitchen of the palace and learn the news;

let us know who is this latest victim of the Tsar's rage destined, if we permit it, to be torn by the dogs to-night." Truth to tell, I had my suspicions as to this.

Kiril went to the palace and made some inquiries among the serving people, bringing back a garbled version—which did not lack in luridness by passing through many lips—of the quarrel between the Tsar and Krapatkin.

"It is thought that no less a boyar than Prince Krapatkin himself should be the victim," added Kiril, "though at the palace kitchens they know nothing of the order sent to us."

"It is a deed the Tsar would scarcely dare to blazon abroad beforehand," said I. "This boyar is only a little less than the Tsar himself."

"Nay, have you not heard of the Regent Shuisky and his fate, thirty odd years ago?" said Kiril. "The Cæsar was then but a youth of some fifteen years, yet he suddenly rose in his wrath and condemned this great boyar—greater, in a manner, than himself—to instant death by the dogs."

"It may be that the Tsar is wiser now," said I, "being older; moreover, he has now many enemies. He is wise, be sure, to see to it that so devilish a crime as this he intends for to-night

should not be spoken of beforehand. But thou hast discovered his intentions, Kiril, good man; let us see whether there is not a way to save our souls a devil-grip. Krapatkin is rich, moreover—rich as a Tsar!"

"Saint Vladimir, equal to the Holy Apostles, have mercy upon us; how should we do that!" exclaimed Kiril, and Stepan scratched his head and crossed himself after his manner.

"How many men will bring the victim?" I asked; and Stepan replied that he had taken part in six such executions during his twelve or more years of service in the present office, and there had never been more than two men—armed soldiers, however.

"Their arms matter nothing," I replied, "for there shall be no force used. Buy drink for the fellows beforehand, and invite them to drink in your hut in order to gain nerve for the devil's work to be done. While they drink the victim must be placed somewhere: let him lie here, in the *lyédnik*—the rest is easy; I will see that the dogs go hungry and that you are well paid. If there is blame, it will fall upon the soldiers, but be sure they will not stay in Moscow to meet the trouble half-way!"

"By St. Vladimir," murmured Kiril, "the

equal of the Apostles, it is a good scheme, but a whole skin is better than——”

“There is your soul to think of as well as your skin,” said I; “be sure the evil one has a special furnace for those that have no pity for their fellow-men! Such shall scorch and writhe a thousand times for each cruelty done here below.”

Kiril spat on the ground. “*Noo*,” he said, “*ladno*, I agree!” and Stepan concurring, the matter stood arranged.

It was a dark night when, as I lay shivering upon my sacks behind the ice-blocks in Kiril’s cellar, I heard the tramp of feet and the scrape of a sledge upon hard snow; they were bringing their victim to his execution upon a hand-sledge. Now, would Kiril’s offer of strong drink prevail? Would the fellows be tempted to delay for half an hour their hateful work? If not, I must be ready for other action, for in any case the dogs should not feast to-night, ay, even though their starved howls already so rent the air that it was difficult to make sure by hearing of what passed.

Nevertheless I heard the sledge arrive and stop, and the voices of Kiril and others began to reach my straining ears.

The dogs heard them also, and where a pair of hungry beasts had howled, the full eleven now joined in the piteous chorus, and drowned, for me, all other sound.

But presently steps approached the cellar; there was the squeak of the sledge-runners—thanks be to God! then my scheme had worked, they were bringing their victim.

“Lift him in here, sledge and all,” said Kiril’s voice, “the poor devil will be warmer here than outside; he is a boyar, by his dress, and soft.”

“A boyar! yes, and a boyar of the boyars,” said another voice, “curse him! They say he is next to the Tsar, therefore I hate him next to the Tsar; all that are rich and powerful I abhor in proportion to their power and their riches!”

“Better a live dog than a dead lion,” said Kiril, “and this poor devil has but half an hour to live.”

“Ten minutes at most,” said the other, pushing the hand-sledge into the cellar so violently that it turned over, and the wretched gagged victim bound to it now lay beneath, his face upon the wooden boards.

“Leave him so, it is useless to trouble one-

self needlessly," said the rascal who owned the strange voice! "If the meat is bruised the dogs will not notice!"

Both men withdrew laughing, and out came I forthwith from my sanctuary, for to waste time were foolishness, even though the ten minutes should grow into an hour.

I had provided myself with the wherewithal to cut the bonds of the victim, but until I had turned the sledge over and, fumbling clumsily in the darkness, at last removed the gag, I knew not for certain that I had to deal with Krapatkin.

But no sooner was the voice of that sturdy boyar released from its bondage than he employed it so lustily in cursing the Tsar and his present plight that I was left not another moment in doubt as to his identity.

It seemed that he must first relieve his mind by this exercise before inquiring as to who should be his present benefactor.

As for me, I let him curse on, while I cut the bonds which secured him to the sledge—no light task, for they had bound the man as though they had to deal with the strength of an ox.

"It is thou, Shadwell, doubtless?" he said at last.

"None other," I replied, laughing. "Curse on, if it doth thy soul good!"

"I guessed it; I had great hopes of thee!" said Krapatkin.