

THE DAUGHTER OF AN EMPRESS.

CHAPTER I.

COUNTESS NATALIE DOLGORUCKI.

"No, Natalie, weep no more! Quick, dry your tears. Let not my executioner see that we can feel pain or weep for sorrow!"

Drying her tears, she attempted a smile, but it was an unnatural, painful smile.

"Ivan," said she, "we will forget, forget all, excepting that we love each other, and thus only can I become cheerful. And tell me, Ivan, have I not always been in good spirits? Have not these long eight years in Siberia passed away like a pleasant summer day? Have not our hearts remained warm, and has not our love continued undisturbed by the inclement Siberian cold? You may, therefore, well see that I have the courage to bear all that can be borne. But you, my beloved, you my husband, to see you die, without being able to save you, without being permitted to die with you, is a cruel and unnatural sacrifice! Ivan, let me weep; let your murderer see that I yet have tears. Oh, my God, I have no longer any pride, I am nothing but a poor heart-broken woman! Your widow, I weep over the yet living corpse of my husband!" With convulsive sobs the

trembling young wife fell upon her knees and with frantic grief clung to her husband's feet.

Count Ivan Dolgorucki no longer felt the ability to stand aloof from her sorrow. He bent down to his wife, raised her in his arms, and with her he wept his youth, his lost life, the vanishing happiness of his love, and the shame of his fatherland.

"I should joyfully go to my death, were it for the benefit of my country," said he. "But to fall a sacrifice to a cabal, to the jealousy of an insidious, knavish favorite, is what makes the death-hour fearful. Ah, I die for naught, I die that Münnich, Ostermann, and Biron, may remain securely in power. It is horrible thus to die!"

Natalie's eyes flashed with a fanatic glow. "You die," said she, "and I shall live, will live, to see how God will avenge you upon these evil-doers. I will live, that I may constantly think of you, and in every hour of the day address to God my prayers for vengeance and retribution!"

"Live and pray for our fatherland!" said Ivan.

"No," she angrily cried, "rather let God's curse rest upon this Russia, which delivers over its noblest men to the executioner, and raises its ignoblest women to the throne. No blessing for Russia, which is cursed in all generations and for all time—no blessing for Russia, whose bloodthirsty czarina permits the slaughter of the noble Ivan and his brothers!"

"Ah," said Ivan, "how beautiful you now are—how flash your eyes, and how radiantly glow your cheeks! Would that my executioner were now come, that he might see

in you the heroine, Natalie, and not the sorrow-stricken woman!"

"Ah, your prayer is granted; hear you not the rattling of the bolts, the roll of the drum? They are coming, Ivan, they are coming!"

"Farewell, Natalie—farewell, forever!"

And, mutually embracing, they took one last, long kiss, but wept not.

"Hear me, Natalie! when they bind me upon the wheel, weep not. Be resolute, my wife, and pray that their torments may not render me weak, and that no cry may escape my lips!"

"I will pray, Ivan."

In half an hour all was over. The noble and virtuous Count Ivan Dolgorucki had been broken upon the wheel, and three of his brothers beheaded, and for what?—Because Count Münnich, fearing that the noble and respected brothers Dolgorucki might dispossess him of his usurped power, had persuaded the Czarina Anna that they were plotting her overthrow for the purpose of raising Katharina Ivanovna to the imperial throne. No proof or conviction was required; Münnich had said it, and that sufficed; the Dolgoruckis were annihilated!

But Natalie Dolgorucki still lived, and from the bloody scene of her husband's execution she repaired to Kiew. There would she live in the cloister of the Penitents, preserving the memory of the being she loved, and imploring the vengeance of Heaven upon his murderers!

It was in the twilight of a clear summer night when Natalie reached the cloister in which she was on the next

day to take the vows and exchange her ordinary dress for the robe of hair-cloth and the nun's veil.

Foaming rushed the Dnieper within its steep banks, hissing broke the waves upon the gigantic boulders, and in the air was heard the sound as of howling thunder and a roaring storm.

"I will take my leave of nature and of the world," murmured Natalie, motioning her attendants to remain at a distance, and with firm feet climbing the steep rocky bank of the rushing Dnieper. Upon their knees her servants prayed below, glancing up to the rock upon which they saw the tall form of their mistress in the moonlight, which surrounded it with a halo; the stars laid a radiant crown upon her pure brow, and her locks, floating in the wind, resembled wings; to her servants she seemed an angel borne upon air and light and love upward to her heavenly home! Natalie stood there tranquil and tearless. The thoughtful glances of her large eyes swept over the whole surrounding region. She took leave of the world, of the trees and flowers, of the heavens and the earth. Below, at her feet, lay the cloister, and Natalie, stretching forth her arms toward it, exclaimed: "That is my grave! Happy, blessed Ivan, thou diedst ere being confined; but I shall be confined while yet alive! I stand here by thy tomb, mine Ivan. They have bedded thy noble form in the cold waves of the Dnieper, whose rushing and roaring was thy funeral knell, mine Ivan! I shall dwell by thy grave, and in the deathlike stillness of my cell shall hear the tones of the solemn hymn with which the impetuous stream will rock thee to thine eternal rest! Receive, then, ye sacred waves of the Dnieper, receive

thou, mine Ivan, in thy cold grave, thy wife's vow of fidelity to thee. Again will I espouse thee—in life as in death, am I thine!"

And, drawing from her finger the wedding-ring which her beloved husband had once placed upon it, she threw it into the foaming waves.*

Bending down, she saw the ring sinking in the waters and murmured: "I greet thee, Ivan, I greet thee! Take my ring—forever am I thine!"

Then, rising proudly up, and stretching forth her arms toward heaven, she exclaimed aloud: "I now go to pray that God may send thee vengeance. Woe to Russia, woe!" and the stream with its boisterous waves howled and thundered after her the words: "Woe to Russia, woe!"

CHAPTER II.

COUNT MÜNNICH.

THE Empress Anna was dead, and—an unheard-of case in Russian imperial history—she had even died a natural death. Again was the Russian imperial throne vacated! Who is there to mount it? whom has the empress named as her successor? No one dared to speak of it; the question was read in all eyes, but no lips ventured to open for the utterance of an answer, as every conjecture, every expression, if unfounded and unfulfilled, would be construed into the

* "Notice sur les Principales Familles de la Russie. Par le Prince Pierre Dolgorouky," p. 30.

crime of high-treason as soon as another than the one thus indicated should be called to the throne!

Who will obtain that throne? So asked each man in his heart. The courtiers and great men of the realm asked it with shuddering and despair. For, to whom should they now go to pay their homage and thus recommend themselves to favor in advance? Should they go to Biron, the Duke of Courland? Was it not possible that the dying empress had chosen him, her warmly-beloved favorite, her darling minion, as her successor to the throne of all the Russias? But how if she had not done so? If, instead, she had chosen her niece, the wife of Prince Anton Ulrich, of Brunswick, as her successor? Or was it not also possible that she had declared the Princess Elizabeth, the daughter of Czar Peter the Great, as empress? The latter, indeed, had the greatest, the most incontestable right to the imperial throne of Russia; was she not the sole lawful heir of her father? How, if one therefore went to her and congratulated her as empress? But if one should make a mistake, how then?

The courtiers, as before said, shuddered and hesitated, and, in order to avoid making a mistake, did nothing at all. They remained in their palaces, ostensibly giving themselves up to deep mourning for the decease of the beloved czarina, whom every one of them secretly hated so long as she was yet alive.

There were but a few who were not in uncertainty respecting the immediate future, and conspicuous among that few was Field-Marshal Count Münnich.

While all hesitated and wavered in anxious doubt, Mün-

nich alone was calm. He knew what was coming, because he had had a hand in shaping the event.

"Oh," said he, while walking his room with folded arms, "we have at length attained the object of our wishes, and this bright emblem for which I have so long striven will now finally become mine. I shall be the ruler of this land, and in the unrestricted exercise of royal power I shall behold these millions of venal slaves grovelling at my feet, and whimpering for a glance or a smile. Ah, how sweet is this governing power!

"But," he then continued, with a darkened brow, "what is the good of being the ruler if I cannot bear the name of ruler?—what is it to govern, if another is to be publicly recognized as regent and receive homage as such? The kernel of this glory will be mine, but the shell,—I also languish for the shell. But no, this is not the time for such thoughts, now, when the circumstances demand a cheerful mien and every outward indication of satisfaction! My time will also come, and, when it comes, the shell as well as the kernel shall be mine! But this is the hour for waiting upon the Duke of Courland! I shall be the first to wish him joy, and shall at the same time remind him that he has given me his ducal word that he will grant the first request I shall make to him as regent. Well, well, I will ask now, that I may hereafter command."

The field-marshal ordered his carriage and proceeded to the palace of the Duke of Courland.

A deathlike stillness prevailed in the streets through which he rode. On every hand were to be seen only curtained windows and closed palaces; it seemed as if this usu-

ally so brilliant and noisy quarter of St. Petersburg had suddenly become deserted and desolate. The usual equipages, with their gold and silver-laced attendants, were nowhere to be seen.

The count's carriage thundered through the deserted streets, but wherever he passed curious faces were seen peeping from the curtained windows of the palaces; all doors were hastily opened behind him, and he was followed by the runners of the counts and princes, charged with the duty of espying his movements.

Count Münnich saw all that, and smiled.

"I have now given them the signal," said he, "and this servile Russian nobility will rush hither, like fawning hounds, to bow before a new idol and pay it their venal homage."

The carriage now stopped before the palace of the Duke of Courland, and with an humble and reverential mien Münnich ascended the stairs to the brilliant apartments of Biron.

He found the duke alone; absorbed in thought, he was standing at the window looking down into streets which were henceforth to be subjected to his sway.

"Your highness is surveying your realm," said Münnich, with a smile. "Wait but a little, and you will soon see all the great nobility flocking here to pay you homage. My carriage stops before your door, and these sharp-scenting hounds now know which way to turn with their abject adoration."

"Ah," sadly responded Biron, "I dread the coming hour. I have a misfortune-propheying heart, and this

night, in a dream, I saw myself in a miserable hut, covered with beggarly rags, shivering with cold and fainting with hunger!"

"That dream indicates prosperity and happiness, your highness," laughingly responded Münnich, "for dreams are always interpreted by contraries. You saw yourself as a beggar because you were to become our ruler—because a purple mantle will this day be placed upon your shoulders."

"Blood also is purple," gloomily remarked the duke, "and a sharp poniard may also convert a beggar's blouse into a purple mantle! Oh, my friend, would that I had never become what I am! One sleeps ill when one must constantly watch his happiness lest it escape him. And think of it, my fortunes are dependent upon the eyes of a child, a nurseling, that with its mother's milk imbibes hatred to me, and whose first use of speech will be, perhaps, to curse me!"

"Then it must be your task to teach the young emperor Ivan to speak," exclaimed Münnich—"in that case he will learn to bless you."

"I shall not be able to snatch him from his parents," said Biron. "But those parents certainly hate me, and indeed very naturally, as they, it seems, were, next to me, designated as the guardians of their son Ivan. The Duchess Anna Leopoldowna of Brunswick is ambitious."

"Bah! for the present she is in love," exclaimed Münnich, with a laugh, "and women, when in love, think of nothing but their love. But only look, your highness, did I not prophesy correctly? Only see the numerous equi-

pages now stopping before your door! The street will soon be too narrow to contain them."

And in the street below was really to be seen the rapid arrival of a great number of the most splendid equipages, from which alighted beautiful and richly-dressed women, whose male companions were covered with orders, and who were all hastening into the palace. There was a pressing and pushing which produced the greatest possible confusion. Every one wished to be the first to congratulate the new ruler, and to assure him of their unbounded devotion.

The duke's halls were soon filled with Russian magnates, and when at length the duke himself made his appearance among them, he everywhere saw only happy, beaming faces, and encountered only glances of love and admiration. The warmest wishes of all these hundreds seemed to have been fulfilled, and Biron was precisely the man whom all had desired for their emperor.

And, standing in the centre of these halls, they read to Biron the testament of the deceased Empress Anna: that testament designated Ivan, the son of the Duchess Anna Leopoldowna and Prince Ulrich of Brunswick, as emperor, and him, Duke Biron of Courland, as absolute regent of the empire during the minority of the emperor, who had now just reached the age of seven months. The joy of the magnates was indescribable; they sank into each other's arms with tears of joy. At this moment old enemies were reconciled; women who had long nourished a mutual hatred, now tenderly pressed each other's hands; tears of joy were trembling in eyes which had never before been known to weep; friendly smiles were seen on lips which had usually

been curled with anger; and every one extolled with ecstasy the happiness of Russia, and humbly bowed before the new sun now rising over that blessed realm.

With the utmost enthusiasm they all took the oath of fidelity to the new ruler, and then hastened to the palace of the Prince of Brunswick, there with the humblest subjection to kiss the delicate little hand of the child-emperor Ivan.

Münnich was again alone with the duke, who, forgetting all his ill-boding dreams, now gave himself up to the proud feeling of his greatness and power.

"Let them all go," said he, "these magnates, to kiss the hand of this emperor of seven months, and wallow in the dust before the cradle of a whimpering nurseling! I shall nevertheless be the real emperor, and both sceptre and crown will remain in my hands!"

"But in your greatness and splendor you will not forget your faithful and devoted friends," said Münnich; "your highness will remember that it was I who chiefly induced the empress to name you as regent during the minority of Ivan, and that you gave me your word of honor that you would grant me the first request I should make to you."

"I know, I know," said Biron, with a sly smile, thoughtfully pacing the room with his hands behind his back. But, suddenly stopping, he remained standing before Münnich, and, looking him sharply in the eye, said: "Shall I for once interpret your thoughts, Field-Marshal Count Münnich? Shall I for once tell you why you used all your influence to decide the Empress Anna to name me for the

regency? Ah, you had a sharp eye, a sure glance, and consequently discovered that Anna had long since resolved in her heart to name me for the regency, before you undertook to confirm her in this resolve by your sage counsels. But you said to yourself: 'This good empress loves the Duke of Courland; hence she will undoubtedly desire to render him great and happy in spite of all opposition, and if I aid in this by my advice I shall bind both parties to myself; the empress, by appearing to be devoted to her favorite, and the favorite, by aiding him in the accomplishment of his ambitious plans. I shall therefore secure my own position, both for the present and future!' Confess to me, field-marshal, that these were your thoughts and calculations."

"The regent, Sir Duke of Courland, has a great knowledge of human nature, and hence I dare not contradict him," said Münnich, with a constrained laugh. "Your highness therefore recognizes the service that I, from whatever motive, have rendered you, and hence you will not refuse to grant my request."

"Let me hear it," said the duke, stretching himself out on a divan, and negligently playing with a portrait of the Empress Anna, splendidly ornamented with brilliants, and suspended from his neck by a heavy gold chain.

"Name me generalissimo of all the troops," said Münnich, with solemnity.

"Of all the troops?" asked Biron. "Including those on the water, or only those on land?"

"The troops on the water as well as those on land."*

* Levecque, "Histoire de la Russie," vol. v., p. 209.

"Ah, that means, I am to give you unlimited power, and thus place you at the head of all affairs!" Then, suddenly rising from his reclining position, and striding directly to Münnich, the duke threateningly said: "In my first observation I forgot to interpret a few of your thoughts and plans. I will now tell you why you wished for my appointment as regent. You desired it for the advancement of your own ambitious plans. You knew Biron as an effeminate, yielding, pleasure-seeking favorite of the empress—you saw him devoted only to amusement and enjoyment, and you said to yourself: 'That is the man I need. As I cannot myself be made regent, let it be him! I will govern through him; and while this voluptuous devotee of pleasure gives himself up to the intoxication of enjoyments, I will rule in his stead.' Well, Mr. Field-Marshal, were not those your thoughts?"

Münnich had turned very pale while the duke was thus speaking, and a sombre inquietude was depicted on his features.

"I know not," he stammered, with embarrassment.

"But *I* know!" thundered the duke, "and in your terror-struck face I read the confirmation of what I have said. Look in the glass, sir count, and you will make no further attempt at denial."

"But the question here is not about what I might have once thought, but of what you promised me. Your highness, I have made my first request! It is for you to grant it. I implore you on the strength of your ducal word to name me as the generalissimo of your troops!"

"No, never!" exclaimed the duke.

"You gave me your word!"

"I gave it as Duke of Courland! The regent is not bound by the promise of the duke."

"I made you regent!"

"And I do *not* make you generalissimo!"

"You forfeit your word of honor?"

"No, ask something else, and I will grant it. But this is not feasible. I must myself be the generalissimo of my own troops, or I should no longer be the ruler! Ask, therefore, for something else."

Münnich was silent. His features indicated a frightful commotion, and his bosom heaved violently.

"I have nothing further to ask," said he, after a pause.

"But I will confer upon you a favor without your asking it!" proudly responded the duke. "Count Münnich, I confirm you in your offices and dignities, and, to prove to you my unlimited confidence, you shall continue to be what you were under the Empress Anna, field-marshal in the Russian army!"

"I thank you, sir duke," calmly replied Münnich. "It is very noble in you that you do not send me into banishment for my presumptuous demand."

Clasping the offered hand of the duke, he respectfully pressed it to his lips.

"And now go, to kiss the hand of the young emperor, that you may not be accused of disrespect," smilingly added Biron; "one must always preserve appearances."

Münnich silently bowed, while walking backward toward the door.

"We part as friends?" asked the duke, nodding an adieu.

"As friends for life and death!" said Münnich, with a smile.

But no sooner had the door closed behind him than the smile vanished from his features, and was replaced by an expression of furious rage. He threateningly shook his fist toward the door which separated him from the duke, and with convulsively compressed lips and grating teeth he said: "Yes, we now part as friends, but we shall yet meet as enemies! I shall remember this hour, sir duke, and shall do my best to prevent your forgetting it. Ah, you have not sent me to Siberia, but I will send you there! And now to the Emperor Ivan. I shall there meet his parents, the shamefully-slighted Ulrich of Brunswick, and his wife Anna Leopoldowna. I think they will welcome me."

With a firm step, rage and vengeance in his heart, but outwardly smiling and submissive, Field-Marshal Count Münnich betook himself to the palace of the Duke of Brunswick to kiss the hand of the cradled Emperor Ivan.

CHAPTER III.

COUNT OSTERMANN.

FOUR weeks had passed since Biron, Duke of Courland, had commenced his rule over Russia, as regent, in the name of the infant Emperor Ivan. The Russian people had