

beria—whatever you think best! Halt, Alexis, we must try this tour over again. But, indeed, I think I shall acquit myself very well in it.”

“Heavenly!” cried Alexis. “Once more, then! One, two, three—la, la, la, tra la!”

CHAPTER XVII.

PUNISHMENT.

“PUNISH them all, all!” had Elizabeth said, “but the regent, her husband, and her son—they you will permit to return to Germany!”

“We must accomplish the will of the empress, and therefore let them go!”

“We will obey her commands,” said Lestocq to Alexis Razumovsky. “We must let them go free, but it would be dangerous to let them ever reach Germany. With their persons they would preserve their rights and their claims, and Elizabeth would always stand in fear of this regent and this young growing emperor, whose claims to the imperial Russian crown are incontestable. You alone, Razumovsky, can turn away this danger from the head of the empress, by convincing her of its reality, and inducing her to change her mind. Reflect that the safety of the empress is our own; reflect that, as we have risen with her, so shall we fall with her!”

“Rely upon me,” said Alexis, with a confident smile; “this regent and her young Emperor Ivan shall never pass

the Russian boundary! Let them now go, but send a strong guard with them, and travel by slow marches, that our couriers may be able to overtake them at a later period. That is all you have to do in the case.”

And, humming a sentimental song, Alexis repaired to the apartments of the empress.

Before the back door of the palace Elizabeth had occupied as princess, a travelling-sledge was waiting. Gayly sounded and clattered the bells on the six small horses attached to the sledge; gayly did the postillions blow their horns, and with enticing calls resounded the thundering *fanfares* through the cold winter air.

To those for whom this sledge was destined, this call sounded like a greeting from heaven. It was to them the dove with the olive-branch, announcing to them the end of their torments; it was the messenger of peace, which gave them back their freedom, their lives, and perhaps even happiness. They were to return to Germany, their long-missed home; hastening through the Russian snow-fields, they would soon reach a softer climate, where they would be surrounded by milder manners and customs. What was it to Anna that she was to be deprived of earthly elevation and power—what cared she that she henceforth would no more have the pleasure of commanding others? She was free, free from the task of ruling slaves and humanizing barbarians; free from the constraint of greatness, and, finally free to live in conformity with her own inclinations, and perhaps, ah, perhaps, to found a happiness, the bare dreaming of which already caused her heart to tremble with unspeakable ecstasy.

Again and again the *fanfares* resounded without. Anna, weeping, tore herself from the arms of Julia. She had in vain implored the favor of taking Julia von Mengden with her. Elizabeth had refused it, and, in this refusal, she had pronounced the sentence of the favorite—this was understood by both Julia and Anna.

They held each other in a last embrace. Anna wept hot tears, but Julia remained calm, and even smiled.

"They may send me to Siberia, if they please, my heart will remain warm under the coldness of the Siberian climate, and this great happiness of knowing that you and yours are saved they cannot rend from me; that will be for me a talisman against all misfortunes!"

"But I," sadly responded Anna—"shall I not always be tortured by the reflection that it is I who have been the cause of your misfortunes? Are you not condemned because you loved and were true to me? Ah, does love, then, deserve so hard a punishment?"

"The punishment passes, but love remains," calmly responded Julia. "That will always be my consolation."

"And mine also," sighed Anna.

"You will not need it," said Julia, with a smile. "You, at least, will be happy."

Anna sighed again, and her cheek paled. A dark and terrible image arose in her soul, and she shudderingly whispered:

"Ah, would that we were once beyond the Russian boundary, for then, first, shall we be free."

"Then let us hasten our journey," said Prince Ulrich; "once in the sledge, and every minute brings us nearer to

freedom and happiness. Only hear how the horns are calling us, Anna—they call us to Germany! Come, take your son, wrap him close in your furred mantle, and let us hasten away—away from here!" The prince laid little Ivan in the arms of his wife, and drew her away with him.

"Farewell, farewell, my Julia!" cried Anna, as she took her seat in the sledge.

"Farewell!" was echoed as a low spirit-breath from the palace.

Shuddering, Anna pressed her child to her bosom, and cast an anxiously interrogating glance at her husband, who was sitting by her.

"Be calm, tranquillize yourself—it will all be well," said the latter, with a smile.

The postilion blew his horn—the horses started; gayly resounded the tones of the silver bells; with a light whizzing, away flew the sledge over the snow. It bore thence a dethroned emperor and his overthrown family!

Rapidly did this richly-laden sledge pass through the streets, but, following it, was a troop of armed, grim-looking soldiers, like unwholesome ravens following their certain booty.

At about the same hour, another armed troop passed through the streets of St. Petersburg. With drawn swords they surrounded two closely-covered sledges, the mysterious occupants of which no one was allowed to descry! The train made a halt at the same gate through which the overthrown imperial family had just passed. The soldiers surrounded the sledges in close ranks; no one was allowed a glimpse at those who alighted from them.

But these extra precautions of the soldiery were unnecessary, as nobody wished to see the unfortunate objects. Every one timidly glanced aside, that they might not, by looking at the poor creatures, bring themselves into suspicion of favoring men suffering under the displeasure of the government. But though they looked not at them, every one knew who they were; though they dared not speak to each other, every one tremblingly said to himself: "There go Münnich and Ostermann to their trials!"

Münnich and Ostermann, the faithful servants of Peter the Great—Münnich, whom Prince Eugene called "his beloved pupil;" Ostermann, of whom the dying Czar Peter said he had never caught him in a fault; that he was the only honest statesman in Russia—Münnich and Ostermann, those two great statesmen to whom Russia was chiefly indebted for what civilization and cultivation she had acquired, were now accused of high-treason, and sent for trial before a commission commanded to find them guilty and to punish them. They were to be put out of the way because they were feared, and to be feared was held as a crime deserving death!

Firm and courageous stood they before their judges. In this hour old Ostermann had shaken off his illness and thrown away the shield of his physical sufferings! He would not intrench himself behind his age and his sickness; he would be a man, and boldly offer his unprotected breast to the murderous weapons of his enemies!

For, that he was lost he knew! A single glance at his judges made him certain of it, and from this moment his features wore a calm and contemptuous smile, an unchange-

able expression of scorn. With an ironic curiosity he followed his judges through the labyrinth of artfully contrived captious questions by which they hoped to entangle him; occasionally he gave himself, as it were for his own amusement, the appearance of voluntarily being caught in their nets, until he finally by a side spring tore their whole web to pieces and laughingly derided his judges for not being able to convict him!

He was accused of having, by his cabals alone, after the death of Catharine, effected the elevation to the throne of Anna, Duchess of Courland. And yet they very well knew that precisely at that time Ostermann had for weeks pretended to be suffering from illness, for the very purpose of avoiding any intermingling with state affairs. They accused him of having suppressed the testament of Catharine, and yet that testament had been published in all the official journals of the time!

Ostermann laughed loud at all of these childish accusations.

"Ah," said he, "should I be sitting in your places, and you all, though innocent, should be standing accused before me, my word for it, I would so involve you in questions and answers that you would be compelled to confess your guilt! But you do not understand questioning, and old Ostermann is a sly fox that does not allow himself to be easily caught! The best way will be for you to declare me guilty, though I am no criminal; for as your empress has commanded that I should be found guilty, it would certainly be in me a crime worthy of death not to be guilty."

"You dare to deride our empress!" cried one of the judges.

"Aha!" said Ostermann, laughing, "I have there thrown you a bait, and you, good judicial fishes, bite directly! That is very well, you are now in a good way! Only go on, and I will help you to find me guilty, if it be only of simple high-treason. It will then be left to the mercy of your empress to declare me convicted of threefold high-treason! Go on, go on!"

But Münnich showed himself less unruffled and sarcastic in the face of his judges. These never-ending questions, this ceaseless teasing about trifles, exhausted his patience at last. He wearied of continually turning aside these laughably trivial accusations, of convincing his judges of his innocence, and making them ashamed of the nature of the proofs adduced.

"Let it suffice," said he, at length to his judges; "after hours of vain labor, you see that in this way you will never attain your end. I will propose to you a better and safer course. Write down your questions, and append to each the answer you desire me to give; I will then sign the whole protocol and declare it correct."*

"Are you in earnest?" joyfully asked the judges.

"Quite in earnest!" proudly answered Münnich.

They were shameless enough to accept his offer; they troubled him with no more questions, but wrote in the protocol such answers as would best suit the purpose of his judges. In these answers Münnich declared himself guilty

* Levecque, vol. v., p. 225.

of all the crimes laid to his charge, acknowledged himself to be a traitor, and deserving death.

When they had finished their artistic labor, they handed to Münnich the pen for his signature.

He calmly took the pen, and, while affixing his signature, said with a contemptuous smile: "Was I not right? In this way it is rendered much easier for you to make of me a very respectable criminal, and I have only the trouble of writing my name! I thank you, gentlemen, for this indulgence."

Quick and decisive as were the hearings, now followed the sentences. Ostermann was condemned to be broken on the wheel, Münnich to be quartered, and the two ministers, Löwenwald and Golopkin, to the axe!

But Elizabeth had promised her people that no one should be punished with death; she must abide by that promise, and she did. She commuted the punishment of the condemned, as also of Julia von Mengden, into banishment to Siberia for life. What a grace! and even this grace was first communicated to Ostermann after his old limbs had been bound to the wheel and his executioners were on the point of crushing him!

But even in this extreme moment Count Ostermann's calm heroism did not forsake him.

"I was convinced that such would be the result!" he calmly said, quietly stretching his released limbs; "this Empress Elizabeth has not the courage to break her oath by chopping off a few heads! It is a pity. On the wheel it might have become a little warm for me, but in Siberia it will be fearfully cold."

From the windows of her palace Elizabeth had witnessed the preparations for this pretended execution; and as she knew that at last their punishment would be commuted, she was amused to see the solemn earnestness and the death-shudder of the condemned. It was a very entertaining hour that she and her friends passed at that window, and the comical face of old Ostermann, the proud gravity of Count Münnich, the folded hands and heaven-directed glances of Golopkin and Löwenwald, had often made her laugh until the tears ran down her cheeks.

"That was a magnificent comedy!" said she, retreating from the window when the condemned were released from their bands and raised into the vehicles that were immediately to start with them for Siberia. "Yes, it was, indeed, very amusing! But tell me, Lestocq, where are they about to take old Count Ostermann?"

"To the most northerly part of Siberia!" calmly replied Lestocq.

"Poor old man!" sighed Elizabeth; "it must be very sad for him thus to pass his last years in suffering and deprivation."

Lestocq seemed not to have heard her remark, and laughingly continued: "To Münnich I have thought to apply a jest of his own."

"Ah, a jest!" cried Elizabeth, suddenly brightening up. "Let us hear it. You know I love a jest, it is so amusing! Quick, therefore, let us hear it!"

"Perhaps your majesty may remember Biron, Duke of Courland," said Lestocq. "Count Münnich, as you know, overthrew him, and placed Anna Leopoldowna in the re-

gency. Biron has ever since lived at Pelym in Siberia, and, indeed, in a house of which Münnich himself drew the plan, the rooms of which are so low that poor Biron, who is as tall as Münnich, could never stand erect in them. The good Münnich, he was very much devoted to the duke, and hence in pure friendship invented this means of reminding him, every hour in the day, of the architect of his house, his friend Münnich!"

"Ah, you promised us a jest, and you are there repeating an old and well-known story!" interposed the empress, yawning.

"Now comes the joke!" continued Lestocq. "We have transferred Biron to another colony, and Herr Münnich will occupy the poetical pleasure-house of his friend Biron at Pelym."*

"Ah, that is delightful, in fact!" cried Elizabeth, clapping her little hands. "How will Münnich curse himself for cruelty which now comes home to himself! That is very witty in you, Herr Lestocq; very laughable, is it not, Alexis? But, Alexis, you do not laugh at all; you look sad. What is the matter with you? Who has disobliged, who has wounded you?"

Alexis sighed. "You yourself!" he said, in a low tone.

"I?" exclaimed the astonished empress. "I could not be so inhuman!"

"No, only to wound me by refusing the first request I addressed to you!"

* Leveque, vol. v., p. 235; Mannstein, Mémoires, vol. iii., p. 96.

"Name your request once more, I have forgotten it!" said Elizabeth, with vehemence.

Alexis Razumovsky fell upon his knees before her, and, imploringly raising his hands, said :

"Elizabeth, my empress, have compassion for my care and anxiety on your account; leave me not to tremble for your safety! Grant me the happiness of seeing you unthreatened and free from danger in your greatness and splendor! Oh, Elizabeth, listen to the prayer of your faithful servant—let not this Anna Leopoldowna pass the boundary of your realm—let not your most deadly enemy escape!"

"Oh, grant his prayer," cried Lestocq, kneeling beside Alexis; "there is wisdom in his words; listen to him rather than to the too great generosity of your own heart! Let not your enemies escape, but seize them while they are yet in your power!"

"Elizabeth, greatest and fairest woman on earth," implored Alexis, "have compassion for my anxiety; I shall never laugh again, never be cheerful, if you allow these your most dangerous enemies to withdraw themselves from your power!"

Elizabeth bent down to him with a smile of tenderness, and laid her left hand upon his locks, while with her right she gently raised his head to herself.

"Love you me, then, so very much, my Alexis," she asked, "that you suffer with anxiety for my safety? Ah, that makes me happy—that fills my whole heart with joy! Only look at him, Lestocq; see how beautiful he is, and then say whether one can refuse the prayer of those heavenly eyes, those pleading lips?"

"You will, then, grant my prayer?" exultingly asked Alexis.

"Well, yes," tenderly responded she, "since there is no other means of rendering you again cheerful and happy, I must, indeed, consent to the fulfilment of your wishes, and not let my enemies quit the country if it be yet possible to retain them."

"They have proceeded by slow marches, and can hardly now have arrived in Riga, where they are to rest several days," said Lestocq. "There will consequently be time for a courier yet to reach them with your counter-order."

"And he must be dispatched immediately!" said Alexis, pressing the hand of the empress to his lips. "In this hour will my kind and gracious empress sign the command for the arrest of Anna Leopoldowna, her husband, and her son!"

"Already another signature!" sighed Elizabeth. "How you annoy me with this eternal signing and countersigning! Will it, then, never have an end? I already begin to hate my name, because of being compelled so often to write it under your musty old documents. Why did the emperor, my dear deceased father, give me so long a name?—a shorter one would now relieve me of half my labor!"

But in spite of her lamentings, Elizabeth nevertheless, a quarter of an hour later, subscribed the order to arrest the regent, her husband, and son, and shut them up, preliminarily, in the citadel of Riga.

"So now I hope you will again be happy and cheerful," said she, throwing away the pen, and with a tender glance

at Razumovsky. "Come, look at me—I have done all you wished; let us now be gay and take our pleasure."

And while Elizabeth was jesting and laughing with Alexis, Lestocq, taking the newly-signed order, hurried away to dispatch his courier.

At length they had reached the borders of this feared, pernicious Russian empire. They now needed no longer to tremble, no longer to glance anxiously around them, or listen with fear at the slightest sound. Only a short quarter of an hour and the boundary will be passed and liberty secured!

They had made a halt at a small public house near the boundary. The horses were to be changed there, and there the soldiers of the escort were to get their last taste of Russian brandy before crossing the border.

Anna and her husband have remained in the sledge. She holds her son in her arms, she presses him to her bosom, full of exulting maternal joy: for he is now saved, this poor little emperor; Anna has now no longer to fear that her son will be torn from her—he is saved—he belongs to her; she can rejoice in his childish beauty, in the happy consciousness of safety.

She has thrown back the curtains of the sledge. She felt no cold. With joy-beaming eyes she looked forward to that blessed land beyond the boundary! There, where upon its tall staff the Russian flag floated high in the air, there freedom and happiness were to begin for her—there will she find again her youth and her maiden dreams, her cheerfulness and her pleasure—there is freedom—golden, heavenly freedom!

She is so happy at this moment that she loves all and every one. For the first time she feels a sort of tenderness for her husband, who, patiently bearing all in silence, had complained and wept only for her. Gently she reclined her head upon his shoulder, and with a cry of ecstasy the prince encircled her neck with his arms.

"Oh, my husband," she whispered, with overflowing eyes, "look there, over there! There is our future, there will we seek for happiness. Perhaps we may unitedly find it in the same path, for we have here a sweet bond to hold our hands together. Look at him, your son. Ulrich, you are the father of my child! Grant my heart only a little repose, and perhaps we may yet be happy with each other."

Prince Ulrich's eyes were suffused with tears; he experienced a moment of the purest happiness. He impressed a kiss upon the brow of his wife, and in a low tone called her by the tenderest names.

The child awoke and smilingly looked up from Anna's bosom to both of his parents. Anna lifted up the little Ivan.

"Look there, my son," said she—"there you will no longer be an emperor, but you will have the right to be a free and happy man. No crown awaits you there, but freedom, worth more than all the crowns of the world."

Little Ivan exultingly stretched forth his tiny arms, as if he would draw down to his childish heart this future and this freedom so highly lauded by his mother.

And, like the child, the parents looked smilingly out upon the broad expanse that stretched away before them.

Look only forward, constantly forward, where the skies are clear, and dream of happiness! Look forward—no, turn not backward your glance, for the horizon darkens in your rear; misfortune is closely following upon your track! You see it not, you look only forward, and still you smile.

It draws nearer and nearer, this black cloud of evil. It is the ravens, the booty-scenting ravens who are following you!

Look forward, dream yourselves happy, and smile yet. What would it help you to look back? You cannot escape the calamity.

Nearer and nearer, with a wild cry, rush on these ravens of misfortune; the air already bears detached sounds to Anna's ears.

She trembles. It is as if her boding soul scented the approaching evil. Pressing her child closer to her bosom, she gives her husband her hand.

The horses are attached to the sledge, and the soldiers leave the public house. All is ready for the train to go on over the boundary. The postilions draw the rein! Now a wild cry of "Halt! halt!"

The soldiers bear up, the postilions halt!

"Forward! forward!" shrieks Prince Ulrich, in mortal anguish.

"Halt! in the name of the empress!" cried an officer who came rushing past upon a foaming steed, and he handed to the commander of the escort an open writing, furnished with the imperial seal.

The commander turned to the postilions.

"To the right about, toward Riga!" ordered he, and

then, turning to the trembling princely pair, he said: "In the name of the empress, you are my prisoners! I am directed to conduct you to the citadel of Riga!"

With a loud groan, Anna sinks into the arms of her husband. He consoles her with the most soothing and affectionate words; he has thought, sorrow, only for her—he feels not for himself, but only for her.

For a moment Anna was overpowered by this unexpected horror; then she calmly rose erect, and pressed her son more closely to her bosom.

"We are all lost," whispered she, "prisoners forever! Poor child—poor, unhappy husband!"

"Despair not," said Prince Ulrich, "all may yet turn out well! Who knows how soon aid may reach us!"

Anna lightly shook her head, and, thinking of the last words of her friend, she murmured low: "Punishment passes, but love remains!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE PALACE OF THE EMPRESS.

THE new empress, Elizabeth, had rewarded and punished, and with that she thought she had finished her imperial labors and forever dismissed all her difficulties.

"I have shaken off my imperial burdens," said she to her friends; "let us now begin to enjoy the imperial pleasures. Ah! we shall lead a pleasant life in this splendid palace. My first law is this: No one shall speak to me of