

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

government business or state affairs. I will have nothing to do with such things, do you hear? For what purpose do I have my ministers and my council? Go you with such wearisome questions to my grand chancellor, Tscherkaskoy, and my minister, Bestuscheff; they shall govern for me. I can demand that of them, as I pay them for it. If you seek an office, if you have invented any thing for promoting the welfare of the country, if you have found any official abuse, or discovered any conspiracy, then go to Bestuscheff or to Woronzow, or also to Lestocq—spare me! But when you have a grace to demand, when you need money, when you desire a title or orders, then come to me, and I will satisfy your wishes. We have much money, many ribbons for orders, and as for titles, they are the cheapest and most convenient of all, as they cost absolutely nothing. Ah, a jest just now occurs to me. We will amuse ourselves a little to-day. We will have a title-auction. Call our courtiers, attendants, and servants. We shall have a gay time of it! We will have a game at dice. Bring the dice! I will at each throw announce the prize, and the dice shall then decide who is the winner!”

They all gathered around her; the noble gentlemen of her body-guard, consisting of the grenadiers who had been raised to nobility and created officers at the commencement of her reign. They came noisily, with singing and laughing, and saluting their empress, Elizabeth, with a thundering *viva*.

“First of all, let us drink your health, sir captain!” said she, ordering wine to be brought, as well as brandy of the costly sort she had lately received as a present from the

greatest distiller of her capital, to which she herself was very partial.

Loudly clinked their glasses, loudly was shouted a *viva* to the empress, which Elizabeth laughingly accepted by offering them her hands to kiss, and was delighted when they fell into ecstasies over the beauty and freshness of those hands.

“Now, silence, gentlemen of the body-guard!” she cried. “I, your captain, command attention!”

And, when silence was established, she continued: “We will have a game at dice, and titles and orders, gold and brandy, shall be the prizes for which you shall contend!”

“Ah, that is magnificent, that is a glorious game!” exclaimed they all.

“The first prize,” said Elizabeth, “is the position of privy councillor! Now take the dice, gentlemen!”

They began to throw the dice, with laughter and shouting when they had thrown a high number—with lamentations and stamping of the feet when it was a low one.

In the meanwhile Elizabeth listlessly stretched herself upon a divan, and laughingly said to Alexis, who sat by her side: “Oh, it is very pleasant to be an empress. Only see how happy they all are, and it is I alone who make them so; for out of these common soldiers I have created respectable officers, and have converted serfs into barons and gentlemen! I thank you, Alexis, for impelling me to become an empress. It is a noble pleasure, and I should now be unwilling to return to that still and uneventful life that formerly pleased me so well! I will so manage that the Em-

press Elizabeth shall be as little troubled with labor and business as the princess, and the empress can doubtlessly procure for herself more pleasures than could the princess! Yes, certainly, I will now remain what I am, an empress by the grace of God!"

A thundering shout and loud laughter here interrupted Elizabeth. The dice had decided!" The cook of the empress had won, and become a councillor of state.

Elizabeth laughed. "These dice are very witty," said she, "for certainly the cook must be a privy councillor! I establish you in your dignity, Feodor, your title is recognized! Now for a new trial. Two thousand rubles is the prize, which I think of more value than a title!"

There was a zealous pressing and shoving, a pushing and puffing; every one desired to be the first to get hold of the dice and struggle for the rich prize. There were many ungentle encounters, many a thrust in the ribs, many invectives, many a gross, unseemly word; the empress saw all, heard all, laughed at all, and said to Alexis: "These gentlemen are very practical! Two thousand rubles are estimated by them at a higher rate than the proudest title! I comprehend that a title is a nonsensical thing, of which no real use can be made, but what beautiful dresses can be bought with two thousand rubles! And that reminds me that you have not yet told me how you like this dress of mine! You take so little notice of my toilet, dearest, and yet it is only for you that I change my dress seven or eight times a day; I would, every hour, please you better and better."

"Oh, no dressing is necessary for that," tenderly re-

sponded Alexis; and stooping, he whispered some words in her ear which pleased her well, and made her laugh heartily.

Meanwhile the dicing continued. Blind luck scattered her gifts in the strangest manner; under-officers of the palace attained to high titles, and high officers with laughing faces won pipes of brandy; barons of the body-guard made of men who but a few days before had been serfs, were seen approaching the mirrors with vain coxcomby to see the effect of orders just won by a cast of the dice, or with greedy avidity pocketing the rubles which fortune had thrown to them!

It was a jovial and brilliant evening, and, in dismissing her friends, Elizabeth promised them many repetitions of it.

And she kept her word. Frenzied merry-makings, pleasures and festivals of the roughest sorts were now the principal occupation of the new empress. The amusement of her court, the providing it with new festivals and pleasures, she considered as the first and most important of her imperial duties; and these alone she endeavored to fulfil.

But who composed her court, and of what elements did it consist?

Elizabeth found the presence of her serious official councillors very tiresome, as they knew not how to make themselves agreeable; she found the surrounding of herself with the respectable ladies of her court to be very incommo-
dious, as there might some day be found among them one with a handsomer or more tasteful toilet than herself, or, indeed, one who might dare to be of a finer type of

beauty than she! She therefore gladly avoided inviting the distinguished men of her court with their wives, or the higher class of state officials. It was far more convenient, far more agreeable, to surround herself with frivolous and handsome young men. They knew how to laugh and be cheerful, and she was thus sure that no other lady would be there to dispute with her the palm of beauty.

Elizabeth was not proud. She cared not whether noble blood flowed in the veins of those who were invited to her festivals. The youth, beauty, and agreeable qualities which the empress found in any person, alone decided the question of their admittance to the court.

Peasants, grooms, soldiers, servants, abandoned reprobates, who by their beauty had won the favor of the empress, were seen to attain to the highest stations.*

On them were lavished the treasures of the state; they were adorned with orders and titles, and the magnates bowed to the ground before these potent favorites of the all-powerful empress, and the people shouted with transport when their beloved czarina, with her magnificent train of newly-created noblemen, made her appearance in the streets, and with gracious smiles returned the humble salutations of her kneeling slaves. That was a ruler in perfect accordance with Russian ideas; they sympathized with her inclinations and pleasures—she was blood of their blood and flesh of their flesh! The strangers were at length banished, and a real Russian sat upon the throne of the czars!

And yet Elizabeth trembled upon her imperial throne,

* Schlosser's "Geschichte des Achtzehnten Jahrhunderts." Zweiter Band, s. 56, folg.; 211, folg.

surrounded by the band of magnates and nobles of whom she could truly say, "I am their creator—they are my work!" She trembled before those secret daggers, those lingering poisons, which always surround the imperial Russian throne as its truest satellites, and lay low many a high-born head; she trembled before Anna Leopoldowna, who was sighing away her days in the closed citadel of Riga, and before Anna's son, the infant Ivan, whom the Empress Anna in her testament had named as Emperor of all the Russias! She, indeed, would not work and trouble herself for her country and her people, this good empress by the grace of God, but yet she would be empress, that she might be enabled to enjoy life, and no cloud must obscure the heaven of her earthly glory!

She therefore tore herself for some short hours from the pleasures in which she was usually immersed, from the arms of her lover, the object of her deepest interest; her own safety and her own peace were concerned. That was well worth the effort to take the pen once more in hand, and affix the troublesomely long name of Elizabeth to some few official documents.

She consequently signed the command to bring back Anna Leopoldowna and her husband from the citadel of Riga to the interior of Russia, and place them in strict confinement in Raninburg.

She also signed another order, and that was to rend the young Ivan from the arms of his mother, to take him to the castle of Schlüsselburg, and there to hold him in strict imprisonment, to grow up without teachers, or any kind of instruction, and without the least occupation or amusement.

"I well know," said she, with a sigh, as she signed the document—"I well know that it would be better for this Ivan to be executed for high-treason than to remain in this condition, but I lack the courage for it. It is so horrible to kill a poor, innocent child!"

"And in this way we attain our end more safely," said Lestocq, with a smile. "Your majesty has sworn to take the life of no one; very well, you keep your word as to physical life—we do not destroy the body but the spirit of this boy Ivan! We raise him as an idiot, which is the surest means of rendering him innoxious!"

Elizabeth had signed the order, and her command was executed. They took from Anna Leopoldowna her last joy, her only consolation—they took away her son, whose smiling face had lighted her prison as with sunbeams, whose childish stammered words had sounded to her as the voice of an angel from heaven.

They took the poor weeping child to Schlüsselburg, and his crushed and heart-broken parents first to Raninburg, and finally to the fortress Kolmogory, situated upon an island in the Dwina, near to that gulf which, on account of its never-melting ice, has obtained the name of the *White Sea*.*

No one could rescue poor Anna Leopoldowna from that fortress—no one could release her son, the poor little Emperor Ivan, from Schlüsselburg! They were rendered perfectly inoffensive; Elizabeth had not killed them, she had only buried them alive, this good Russian empress!

* Leveque, vol. v., p. 233.

And, nevertheless, she still trembled upon her throne, she still felt unsafe in her imperial magnificence! She yet trembled on account of another pretender, the Duke Karl Peter Ulrich of Holstein, who, as the son of an elder daughter of Peter the Great, had a more direct claim to the throne than Elizabeth herself.

That no party might declare for him and invite him to Russia, her ministers advised the empress herself to send for him, and declare him her successor. Elizabeth followed this advice, and the young Duke Peter Ulrich of Holstein accepted her call. Declining the crown of Sweden, he professed the Greek religion in St. Petersburg, was clothed with the title of grand prince by Elizabeth, and declared her successor to the throne of the czars.

Elizabeth could now undisturbedly enjoy her imperial splendor. The successor to the throne was assured, Anna Leopoldowna languished in the fortress of Kolmogory, and in Schlüsselburg the little Emperor Ivan was passing his childish dream-life! Who was there now to contest her rights—who would dare an attempt to shake a throne which rested upon such safe pillars of public favor, and which so many new-made counts and barons protected with their broad shoulders and nervous arms?

Elizabeth had no more need to govern, no more occasion to tremble. She let sink the hand which, with a single stroke of the pen, could give laws to millions of men, which could give them interminable sorrow and endless torments; she again took the heavy imperial crown from her head, replacing it with wreaths of myrtles and ever-fragrant roses. She permitted Tscherkaskoy to govern, and Bestuscheff to

sell to England the dearest interests of Russia. She permitted her ministers to govern with unrestricted power, and was rejoiced when no one came to trouble her about affairs of state or the interests of her people.

CHAPTER XIX.

ELEONORE LAPUSCHKIN.

Two years had elapsed since Elizabeth's accession to the throne; for her, two years of pleasure and enjoyment, only troubled here and there with occasional small clouds of ill-humor—but those clouds overshadowed only her domestic peace. It was not the affairs of state, not the interests of her people, that troubled and saddened Elizabeth; she asked not how many of her subjects the war with Sweden had swept away; how many had fallen a sacrifice to hunger in the southern provinces of her realm. She had quite other cares and anxieties than those which concerned only her ministers, not herself. What have princes to do with the happiness of their people.

Elizabeth was a consummate princess; she thought only of her own happiness, only of herself and her own sorrows. And it was a very severe, very incurable sorrow that visited her—a sorrow that often brought tears of anger into her eyes and curses upon her lips. Elizabeth was jealous—jealous not of this or that woman, but of the whole sex. She glowingly desired to be the fairest of all women, and constantly trembled lest some one should come to rob her of

the prize of beauty. And were there not, in her own court, women who might venture to enter the lists with her? Was there not, before all, one woman whose aspect filled the heart of the empress with a thirst for vengeance, of whom she was compelled to say that she was younger, handsomer, and more attractive than herself—and this one, was it not Eleonore Lapuschkin?

For two long years had Elizabeth borne about with her this hatred and jealousy; for two long years had she in vain sought to discover some punishable fault in her rival; for two long years had she in vain reminded Lestocq of his promise to find Eleonore Lapuschkin guilty of some crime. She had come out pure from all these persecuting pursuits, and even the eyes of the most zealous spy could find no blot upon her escutcheon. Like a royal lily she proudly bloomed with undisputed splendor in the midst of this court, whose petty cabals and intrigues could not soil her fair fame. Her presence spread around her a sort of magic. The most audacious courtier, the most presumptuous cavalier, approached her with only reverence; they ventured not in her presence to use such words and jests as but too well pleased the empress; there was something in Eleonore's glance that commanded involuntary respect and awe; an elevation, a mildness, a soft feminine majesty was shed over her whole being that enchanted even those who were inimical to her. Elizabeth had perceived that, with her eyes sharpened by jealousy; her envy was yet more mighty than her vanity, and her envy told her Eleonore Lapuschkin is handsomer than the Empress Elizabeth; wherever Eleonor appears, there all hearts fly to meet her, all glances in-