

# VANINKA

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ALEXANDRE DUMAS.

# VANINKA

*By*

**Alexandre Dumas, Pere**

FROM THE SET OF EIGHT VOLUMES OF "CELEBRATED CRIMES"

1910

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VANINKA

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ABOUT the end of the reign of the Emperor Paul I—that is to say, towards the middle of the first year of the nineteenth century—just as four o'clock in the afternoon was sounding from the church of St. Peter and St. Paul, whose gilded vane overlooks the ramparts of the fortress, a crowd, composed of all sorts and conditions of people, began to gather in front of a house which belonged to General Count Tchernayloff, formerly military governor of a fair-sized town in the government of Pultava. The first spectators had been attracted by the preparations which they saw had been made in the middle of the courtyard for administering torture with the knout. One of the general's serfs, he who acted as barber, was to be the victim.

Although this kind of punishment was a common enough sight in St. Petersburg, it nevertheless attracted all passers-by when it was publicly administered. This was the occurrence which had caused a crowd, as just mentioned, before General Tchernayloff's house.

The spectators, even had they been in a hurry, would have had no cause to complain of being kept waiting, for at half-past four a young man of about five-and-twenty, in the handsome uniform of an aide-de-camp, his breast covered with decorations, appeared on the steps at the farther end of the court-yard in front of the house. These steps faced the large gateway, and led to the general's apartments.

Arrived on the steps, the young aide-de-camp stopped a moment and fixed his eyes on a window, the closely drawn curtains of which did not allow him the least chance of satisfying his curiosity, whatever may have been its cause. Seeing that it was useless and that he was only wasting time in gazing in that direction, he made a sign to a bearded man who was standing near a door which led to the servants' quarters. The door was immediately opened, and the culprit was seen advancing in the middle of a body of serfs and followed by the executioner. The serfs were forced to attend the spectacle, that it might serve as an example to them. The culprit was the general's barber, as we have said, and the executioner

was merely the coachman, who, being used to the handling of a whip, was raised or degraded, which you will, to the office of executioner every time punishment with the knout was ordered. This duty did not deprive him of either the esteem or even the friendship of his comrades, for they well knew that it was his arm alone that punished them and that his heart was not in his work. As Ivan's arm as well as the rest of his body was the property of the general, and the latter could do as he pleased with it, no one was astonished that it should be used for this purpose. More than that, correction administered by Ivan was nearly always gentler than that meted out by another; for it often happened that Ivan, who was a good-natured fellow, juggled away one or two strokes of the knout in a dozen, or if he were forced by those assisting at the punishment to keep a strict calculation, he manoeuvred so that the tip of the lash struck the deal plank on which the culprit was lying, thus taking much of the sting out of the stroke. Accordingly, when it was Ivan's turn to be stretched upon the fatal plank and to receive the correction he was in the habit of administering, on his own account, those who momentarily played his part as executioner adopted the same expedients, remembering only the strokes spared and not the strokes received. This exchange of mutual benefits, therefore, was productive of an excellent understanding between Ivan and his comrades, which was never so firmly knit as at the moment when a fresh execution was about to take place. It is true that the first hour after the punishment was generally so full of suffering that the knouted was sometimes unjust to the knouter, but this feeling seldom out-lasting the evening, and it was rare when it held out after the first glass of spirits that the operator drank to the health of his patient.

The serf upon whom Ivan was about to exercise his dexterity was a man of five or six-and-thirty, red of hair and beard, a little above average height. His Greek origin might be traced in his countenance, which even in its expression of terror had preserved its habitual characteristics of craft and cunning.

When he arrived at the spot where the punishment was to take place, the culprit stopped and looked up at the window which had already claimed the young aide-de-camp's attention; it still remained shut. With a glance round the throng which obstructed the entrance leading to the street, he ended by gazing, with a horror-stricken shudder upon the plank on which he was to be stretched. The shudder did not escape his friend Ivan, who, approaching to remove the striped shirt that covered his shoulders, took the opportunity to whisper under his breath—

“Come, Gregory, take courage!”

“You remember your promise?” replied the culprit, with an indefinable expression of entreaty.

“Not for the first lashes, Gregory; do not count on that, for during the first strokes the aide-de-camp will be watching; but among the later ones be assured I will find means of cheating him of some of them.”

“Beyond everything you will take care of the tip of the lash?”

“I will do my best, Gregory, I will do my best. Do you not know that I will?”

“Alas! yes,” replied Gregory.

“Now, then!” said the aide-de-camp.

“We are ready, noble sir,” replied Ivan.

“Wait, wait one moment, your high origin,” cried poor Gregory, addressing the young captain as though he had been a colonel, “Vache Vousso Korodie,” in order to flatter him. “I believe that the lady Vaninka’s window is about to open!”

The young captain glanced eagerly towards the spot which had already several times claimed his attention, but not a fold of the silken curtains, which could be seen through the panes of the window, had moved.

“You are mistaken, you rascal,” said the aide-de-camp, unwillingly removing his eyes from the window, as though he also had hoped to see it open, “you are mistaken; and besides, what has your noble mistress to do with all this?”

“Pardon, your excellency,” continued Gregory, gratifying the aide-de-camp with yet higher rank,—“pardon, but it is through her orders I am about to suffer. Perhaps she might have pity upon a wretched servant!”

“Enough, enough; let us proceed,” said the captain in an odd voice, as though he regretted as well as the culprit that Vaninka had not shown mercy.

“Immediately, immediately, noble sir,” said Ivan; then turning to Gregory, he continued, “Come, comrade; the time has come.”

Gregory sighed heavily, threw a last look up at the window, and seeing that everything remained the same there, he mustered up resolution enough to lie down on the fatal plank. At the same time two other serfs, chosen by Ivan for assistants, took him by the arms and attached his wrists to two stakes, one at either side of him, so that it appeared as though he were stretched on a cross. Then they clamped his neck into an iron collar, and seeing that all was in readiness and that no sign favourable to the culprit had been made from the still closely shut window, the young aide-de-camp beckoned with his hand, saying, “Now, then, begin!”

“Patience, my lord, patience,” said Ivan, still delaying the whipping, in the hope that some sign might yet be made from the inexorable window. “I have a knot in my knout, and if I leave it Gregory will have good right to complain.”

The instrument with which the executioner was busying himself, and which is perhaps unknown to our readers, was a species of whip, with a handle about two feet long. A plaited leather thong, about four feet long and two inches broad, was attached to this handle, this thong terminating in an iron or

copper ring, and to this another band of leather was fastened, two feet long, and at the beginning about one and a half inches thick: this gradually became thinner, till it ended in a point. The thong was steeped in milk and then dried in the sun, and on account of this method of preparation its edge became as keen and cutting as a knife; further, the thong was generally changed at every sixth stroke, because contact with blood softened it.

However unwillingly and clumsily Ivan set about untying the knot, it had to come undone at last. Besides, the bystanders were beginning to grumble, and their muttering disturbed the reverie into which the young aide-de-camp had fallen. He raised his head, which had been sunk on his breast, and cast a last look towards the window; then with a peremptory sign; and in a voice which admitted of no delay, he ordered the execution to proceed.

Nothing could put it off any longer: Ivan was obliged to obey, and he did not attempt to find any new pretext for delay. He drew back two paces, and with a spring he returned to his place, and standing on tiptoe, he whirled the knout above his head, and then letting it suddenly fall, he struck Gregory with such dexterity that the lash wrapped itself thrice round his victim's body, encircling him like a serpent, but the tip of the thong struck the plank upon which Gregory was lying. Nevertheless, in spite of this precaution, Gregory uttered a loud shriek, and Ivan counted "One."

At the shriek, the young aide-de-camp again turned towards the window; but it was still shut, and mechanically his eyes went back to the culprit, and he repeated the word "One."

The knout had traced three blue furrows on Gregory's shoulders. Ivan took another spring, and with the same skill as before he again enveloped the culprit's body with the hissing thong, ever taking care that the tip of it should not touch him. Gregory uttered another shriek, and Ivan counted "Two." The blood now began to colour the skin.

At the third stroke several drops of blood appeared; at the fourth the blood spurted out; at the fifth some drops spattered the young officer's face; he drew back, and wiped them away with his handkerchief. Ivan profited by his distraction, and counted seven instead of six: the captain took no notice. At the ninth stroke Ivan stopped to change the lash, and in the hope that a second fraud might pass off as luckily as the first, he counted eleven instead of ten.

At that moment a window opposite to Vaninka's opened, and a man about forty-five or fifty in general's uniform appeared. He called out in a careless tone, "Enough, that will do," and closed the window again.

Immediately on this apparition the young aide-de-camp had turned towards his general, saluting, and during the few seconds that the general was present he remained motionless. When the window had been shut again, he



repeated the general's words, so that the raised whip fell without touching the culprit.

"Thank his excellency, Gregory," said Ivan, rolling the knout's lash round his hand, "for having spared you two strokes;" and he added, bending down to liberate Gregory's hand, "these two with the two I was able to miss out make a total of eight strokes instead of twelve. Come, now, you others, untie his other hand."

But poor Gregory was in no state to thank anybody; nearly swooning with pain, he could scarcely stand.

Two moujiks took him by the arms and led him towards the serfs' quarters, followed by Ivan. Having reached the door, however, Gregory stopped, turned his head, and seeing the aide-de-camp gazing pitifully at him, "Oh sir," he cried, "please thank his excellency the general for me. As for the lady Vaninka," he added in a low tone, "I will certainly thank her myself."

"What are you muttering between your teeth?" cried the young officer, with an angry movement; for he thought he had detected a threatening tone in Gregory's voice.

"Nothing, sir, nothing," said Ivan. "The poor fellow is merely thanking you, Mr. Foedor, for the trouble you have taken in being present at his punishment, and he says that he has been much honoured, that is all."

"That is right," said the young man, suspecting that Ivan had somewhat altered the original remarks, but evidently not wishing to be better informed. "If Gregory wishes to spare me this trouble another time, let him drink less vodka; or else, if he must get drunk, let him at least remember to be more respectful."

Ivan bowed low and followed his comrades, Foedor entered the house again, and the crowd dispersed, much dissatisfied that Ivan's trickery and the general's generosity had deprived them of four strokes of the knout—exactly a third of the punishment.

Now that we have introduced our readers to some of the characters in this history, we must make them better acquainted with those who have made their appearance, and must introduce those who are still behind the curtain.

General Count Tchermayloff, as we have said, after having been governor of one of the most important towns in the environs of Pultava, had been recalled to St. Petersburg by the Emperor Paul, who honoured him with his particular friendship. The general was a widower, with one daughter, who had inherited her mother's fortune, beauty, and pride. Vaninka's mother claimed descent from one of the chieftains of the Tartar race, who had invaded Russia, under the leadership of D'Gengis, in the thirteenth century. Vaninka's naturally haughty disposition had been fostered by the education she had received. His wife being dead, and not having time to look after his daughter's education himself, General Tchermayloff

had procured an English governess for her. This lady, instead of suppressing her pupil's scornful propensities, had encouraged them, by filling her head with those aristocratic ideas which have made the English aristocracy the proudest in the world. Amongst the different studies to which Vaninka devoted herself, there was one in which she was specially interested, and that one was, if one may so call it, the science of her own rank. She knew exactly the relative degree of nobility and power of all the Russian noble families—those that were a grade above her own, and those of whom she took precedence. She could give each person the title which belonged to their respective rank, no easy thing to do in Russia, and she had the greatest contempt for all those who were below the rank of excellency. As for serfs and slaves, for her they did not exist: they were mere bearded animals, far below her horse or her dog in the sentiments which they inspired in her; and she would not for one instant have weighed the life of a serf against either of those interesting animals.

Like all the women of distinction in her nation, Vaninka was a good musician, and spoke French, Italian, German, and English equally well.

Her features had developed in harmony with her character. Vaninka was beautiful, but her beauty was perhaps a little too decided. Her large black eyes, straight nose, and lips curling scornfully at the corners, impressed those who saw her for the first time somewhat unpleasantly. This impression soon wore off with her superiors and equals, to whom she became merely an ordinary charming woman, whilst to subalterns and such like she remained haughty and inaccessible as a goddess. At seventeen Vaninka's education was finished, and her governess who had suffered in health through the severe climate of St. Petersburg, requested permission to leave. This desire was granted with the ostentatious recognition of which the Russian nobility are the last representatives in Europe. Thus Vaninka was left alone, with nothing but her father's blind adoration to direct her. She was his only daughter, as we have mentioned, and he thought her absolutely perfect.

Things were in this state in the-general's house when he received a letter, written on the deathbed of one of the friends of his youth. Count Romayloff had been exiled to his estates, as a result of some quarrel with Potemkin, and his career had been spoilt. Not being able to recover his forfeited position, he had settled down about four hundred leagues from St. Petersburg; broken-hearted, distressed probably less on account of his own exile and misfortune than of the prospects of his only son, Foedor. The count feeling that he was leaving this son alone and friendless in the world, commended the young man, in the name of their early friendship, to the general, hoping that, owing to his being a favourite with Paul I, he would be able to procure a lieutenantcy in a regiment for him. The general immediately replied to the count that his son should find a second

father in himself; but when this comforting message arrived, Romayloff was no more, and Foedor himself received the letter and carried it back with him to the general, when he went to tell him of his loss and to claim the promised protection. So great was the general's despatch, that Paul I, at his request, granted the young man a sub-lieutenancy in the Semonowskoi regiment, so that Foedor entered on his duties the very next day after his arrival in St. Petersburg.

Although the young man had only passed through the general's house on his way to the barracks, which were situated in the Litenoi quarter, he had remained there long enough for him to have seen Vaninka, and she had produced a great impression upon him. Foedor had arrived with his heart full of primitive and noble feelings; his gratitude to his protector, who had opened a career for him, was profound, and extended to all his family. These feelings caused him perhaps to have an exaggerated idea of the beauty of the young girl who was presented to him as a sister, and who, in spite of this title, received him with the frigidity and hauteur of a queen. Nevertheless, her appearance, in spite of her cool and freezing manner, had left a lasting impression upon the young man's heart, and his arrival in St. Petersburg had been marked by feelings till then never experienced before in his life.

As for Vaninka, she had hardly noticed Foedor; for what was a young sub-lieutenant, without fortune or prospects, to her? What she dreamed of was some princely alliance, that would make her one of the most powerful ladies in Russia, and unless he could realise some dream of the Arabian Nights, Foedor could not offer her such a future.

Some time after this first interview, Foedor came to take leave of the general. His regiment was to form part of a contingent that Field-Marshal Souvarow was taking to Italy, and Foedor was about to die, or show himself worthy of the noble patron who had helped him to a career.

This time, whether on account of the elegant uniform that heightened Foedor's natural good looks, or because his imminent departure, glowing with hope and enthusiasm, lent a romantic interest to the young man, Vaninka was astonished at the marvellous change in him, and deigned, at her father's request, to give him her hand when he left. This was more than Foedor had dared to hope. He dropped upon his knee, as though in the presence of a queen, and took Vaninka's between his own trembling hands, scarcely daring to touch it with his lips. Light though the kiss had been, Vaninka started as though she had been burnt; she felt a thrill run through her, and she blushed violently. She withdrew her hand so quickly, that Foedor, fearing this adieu, respectful though it was, had offended her, remained on his knees, and clasping his hands, raised his eyes with such an expression of fear in them, that Vaninka, forgetting her hauteur, reassured him with a smile. Foedor rose, his heart filled with inexplicable joy, and without be-

ing able to say what had caused this feeling, he only knew that it had made him absolutely happy, so that, although he was just about to leave Vaninka, he had never felt greater happiness in his life.

The young man left dreaming golden dreams; for his future, be it gloomy or bright, was to be envied. If it ended in a soldier's grave, he believed he had seen in Vaninka's eyes that she would mourn him; if his future was glorious, glory would bring him back to St. Petersburg in triumph, and glory is a queen, who works miracles for her favourites.

The army to which the young officer belonged crossed Germany, descended into Italy by the Tyrolese mountains, and entered Verona on the 14th of April 1799. Souvarow immediately joined forces with General Melas, and took command of the two armies. General Chasteler next day suggested that they should reconnoitre. Souvarow, gazing at him with astonishment, replied, "I know of no other way of reconnoitring the enemy than by marching upon him and giving him battle."

As a matter of fact Souvarow was accustomed to this expeditious sort of strategy: through it he had defeated the Turks at Folkschany and Ismailoff; and he had defeated the Poles, after a few days' campaign, and had taken Prague in less than four hours. Catherine, out of gratitude, had sent her victorious general a wreath of oak-leaves, intertwined with precious stones, and worth six hundred thousand roubles, a heavy gold field-marshal's baton encrusted with diamonds; and had created him a field-marshal, with the right of choosing a regiment that should bear his name from that time forward. Besides, when he returned to Russia, she gave him leave of absence, that he might take a holiday at a beautiful estate she had given him, together with the eight thousand serfs who lived upon it.

What a splendid example for Foedor! Souvarow, the son of a humble Russian officer, had been educated at the ordinary cadets' training college, and had left it as a sub-lieutenant like himself. Why should there not be two Souvarows in the same century?

Souvarow arrived in Italy preceded by an immense reputation; religious, strenuous, unwearied, impassible, loving with the simplicity of a Tartar and fighting with the fury of a Cossack, he was just the man required to continue General Melas's successes over the soldiers of the Republic, discouraged as they had been by the weak vacillations of Scherer.

The Austro-Russian army of one hundred thousand men was opposed by only twenty-nine or thirty thousand French. Souvarow began as usual with a thundering blow. On 20th April he appeared before Brescia, which made a vain attempt at resistance; after a cannonade of about half an hour's duration, the Preschiera gate was forced, and the Korsakow division, of which Foedor's regi-

ment formed the vanguard, charged into the town, pursuing the garrison, which only consisted of twelve hundred men, and obliged them to take refuge in the citadel. Pressed with an impetuosity the French were not accustomed to find in their enemies, and seeing that the scaling ladders were already in position against the ramparts, the captain Boucret wished to come to terms; but his position was too precarious for him to obtain any conditions from his savage conquerors, and he and his soldiers were made prisoners of war.

Souvarow was experienced enough to know how best to profit by victory; hardly master of Brescia, the rapid occupation of which had discouraged our army anew, he ordered General Kray to vigorously press on the siege of Preschiera. General Kray therefore established his headquarters at Valeggio, a place situated at an equal distance between Preschiera and Mantua, and he extended from the Po to the lake of Garda, on the banks of the Mencio, thus investing the two cities at the same time.

Meanwhile the commander-in-chief had advanced, accompanied by the larger part of his forces, and had crossed the Oglio in two columns: he launched one column, under General Rosenberg, towards Bergamo, and the other, with General Melas in charge, towards the Serio, whilst a body of seven or eight thousand men, commanded by General Kaim and General Hohenzollern, were directed towards Placentia and Cremona, thus occupying the whole of the left bank of the Po, in such a manner that the Austro-Russian army advanced deploying eighty thousand men along a front of forty-five miles.

In view of the forces which were advancing, and which were three times as large as his own, Scherer beat a retreat all along the line. He destroyed the bridges over the Adda, as he did not consider that he was strong enough to hold them, and, having removed his headquarters to Milan, he awaited there the reply to a despatch which he had sent to the Directory, in which, tacitly acknowledging his incapacity, he tendered his resignation. As the arrival of his successor was delayed, and as Souvarow continued to advance, Scherer, more and more terrified by the responsibility which rested upon him, relinquished his command into the hands of his most able lieutenant. The general chosen by him was Moreau, who was again about to fight those Russians in whose ranks he was destined to die at last.

Moreau's unexpected nomination was proclaimed amidst the acclamation of the soldiers. He had been called the French Fabius, on account of his magnificent campaign on the Rhine. He passed his whole army in review, saluted by the successive acclamations of its different divisions, which cried, "Long live Moreau! Long live the saviour of the army of Italy!" But however great this enthusiasm, it did not blind Moreau to the terrible position in which he found himself. At the risk of being out-flanked, it was necessary for him to present a

parallel line to that of the Russian army, so that, in order to face his enemy, he was obliged to extend his line from Lake Lecco to Pizzighitone—that is to say, a distance of fifty miles. It is true that he might have retired towards Piedmont and concentrated his troops at Alexandria, to await there the reinforcements the Directory had promised to send him. But if he had done this, he would have compromised the safety of the army at Naples, and have abandoned it, isolated as it was, to the mercy of the enemy. He therefore resolved to defend the passage of the Adda as long as possible, in order to give the division under Dessolles, which was to be despatched to him by Massena, time to join forces with him and to defend his left, whilst Gauthier, who had received orders to evacuate Tuscany and to hasten with forced marches to his aid, should have time to arrive and protect his right. Moreau himself took the centre, and personally defended the fortified bridge of Cassano; this bridge was protected by the Ritorto Canal, and he also defended it with a great deal of artillery and an entrenched vanguard. Besides, Moreau, always as prudent as brave, took every precaution to secure a retreat, in case of disaster, towards the Apennines and the coast of Genoa. Hardly were his dispositions completed before the indefatigable Souvarow entered Triveglio. At the same time as the Russian commander-in-chief arrived at this last town, Moreau heard of the surrender of Bergamo and its castle, and on 23rd April he saw the heads of the columns of the allied army.

The same day the Russian general divided his troops into three strong columns, corresponding to the three principal points in the French line, each column numerically more than double the strength of those to whom they were opposed. The right column, led by General Wukassowich, advanced towards Lake Lecco, where General Serrurier awaited it. The left column, under the command of Melas, took up its position in front of the Cassano entrenchments; and the Austrian division, under Generals Zopf and Ott, which formed the centre, concentrated at Canonia, ready at a given moment to seize Vaprio. The Russian and Austrian troops bivouacked within cannon-shot of the French outposts.

That evening, Foedor, who with his regiment formed part of Chasteler's division, wrote to General Tchermayloff:

“We are at last opposite the French, and a great battle must take place tomorrow morning; tomorrow evening I shall be a lieutenant or a corpse.”

Next morning, 26th April, cannon resounded at break of day from the extremities of the lines; on our left Prince Bagration's grenadiers attacked us, on our right General Seckendorff, who had been detached from the camp of Triveglio, was marching on Crema.

These two attacks met with very different success. Bagration's grenadiers were repulsed with terrible loss, whilst Seckendorff, on the contrary, drove the French out of Crema, and pushed forward towards the bridge of Lodi. Foedor's

predictions were falsified: his portion of the army did nothing the whole day; his regiment remained motionless, waiting for orders that did not come.

Souvarow's arrangements were not yet quite complete, the night was needed for him to finish them. During the night, Moreau, having heard of Seckendorff's success on his extreme right, sent an order to Serrurier commanding him to leave at Lecco, which was an easy post to defend, the 18th light brigade and a detachment of dragoons only, and to draw back with the rest of his troops towards the centre. Serrurier received this order about two o'clock in the morning, and executed it immediately.

On their side the Russians had lost no time, profiting by the darkness of the night. General Wukassowich had repaired the bridge at Brevio, which had been destroyed by the French, whilst General Chasteler had built another bridge two miles below the castle of Trezzo. These two bridges had been, the one repaired and the other built, without the French outposts having the slightest suspicion of what was taking place.

Surprised at two o'clock in the morning by two Austrian divisions, which, concealed by the village of San Gervasio, had reached the right bank of the Adda without their being discovered, the soldiers defending the castle of Trezzo abandoned it and beat a retreat. The Austrians pursued them as far as Pozzo, but there the French suddenly halted and faced about, for General Serrurier was at Pozzo, with the troops he had brought from Lecco. He heard the cannonade behind him, immediately halted, and, obeying the first law of warfare, he marched towards the noise and smoke. It was therefore through him that the garrison of Trezzo rallied and resumed the offensive. Serrurier sent an aide-de-Camp to Moreau to inform him of the manoeuvre he had thought proper to execute.

The battle between the French and Austrian troops raged with incredible fury. Bonaparte's veterans, during their first Italian campaigns, had adopted a custom which they could not renounce: it was to fight His Imperial Majesty's subjects wherever they found them. Nevertheless, so great was the numerical superiority of the allies, that our troops had begun to retreat, when loud shouts from the rearguard announced that reinforcements had arrived. It was General Grenier, sent by Moreau, who arrived with his division at the moment when his presence was most necessary.

One part of the new division reinforced the centre column, doubling its size; another part was extended upon the left to envelop the enemy. The drums beat afresh down the whole line, and our grenadiers began again to reconquer this battle field already twice lost and won. But at this moment the Austrians were reinforced by the Marquis de Chasteler and his division, so that the numerical superiority was again with the enemy. Grenier drew back his wing to strengthen the centre, and Serrurier, preparing for retreat in case of disaster, fell

back on Pozzo, where he awaited the enemy. It was here that the battle raged most fiercely: thrice the village of Pozzo was taken and re-taken, until at last, attacked for the fourth time by a force double their own in numbers, the French were obliged to evacuate it. In this last attack an Austrian colonel was mortally wounded, but, on the other hand, General Beker, who commanded the French rearguard, refused to retreat with his soldiers, and maintained his ground with a few men, who were slain as they stood; he was at length obliged to give up his sword to a young Russian officer of the Semenofskoi regiment, who, handing over his prisoner to his own soldiers, returned immediately to the combat.

The two French generals had fixed on the village of Vaprio as a rallying-place, but at the moment when our troops were thrown into disorder through the evacuation of Pozzo, the Austrian cavalry charged heavily, and Serrurier, finding himself separated from his colleague, was obliged to retire with two thousand five hundred men to Verderio, whilst Grenier, having reached the appointed place, Vaprio, halted to face the enemy afresh.

During this time a terrible fight was taking place in the centre. Melas with eighteen to twenty thousand men had attacked the fortified posts at the head of the bridge of Cassano and the Ritorto Canal. About seven o'clock in the morning, when Moreau had weakened himself by despatching Grenier and his division, Melas, leading three battalions of Austrian grenadiers, had attacked the fortifications, and for two hours there was terrible carnage; thrice repulsed, and leaving more than fifteen hundred men at the base of the fortifications, the Austrians had thrice returned to the attack, each time being reinforced by fresh troops, always led on and encouraged by Melas, who had to avenge his former defeats. At length, having been attacked for the fourth time, forced from their entrenchments, and contesting the ground inch by inch, the French took shelter behind their second fortifications, which defended the entrance to the bridge itself: here they were commanded by Moreau in person. There, for two more hours, a hand-to-hand struggle took place, whilst the terrible artillery belched forth death almost muzzle to muzzle. At last the Austrians, rallying for a last time, advanced at the point of the bayonet, and, lacking either ladders or fascines, piled the bodies of their dead comrades against the fortifications, and succeeded in scaling the breastworks. There was not a moment to be lost. Moreau ordered a retreat, and whilst the French were recrossing the Adda, he protected their passage in person with a single battalion of grenadiers, of whom at the end of half an hour not more than a hundred and twenty men remained; three of his aides-de-camp were killed at his side. This retreat was accomplished without disorder, and then Moreau himself retired, still fighting the enemy, who set foot on the bridge as soon as he reached the other bank. The Austrians immediately rushed forward to capture him, when suddenly a terrible noise was heard rising above the roar of



the artillery; the second arch of the bridge was blown into the air, carrying with it all those who were standing on the fatal spot. The armies recoiled, and into the empty space between them fell like rain a debris of stones and human beings. But at this moment, when Moreau had succeeded in putting a momentary obstacle between himself and Melas, General Grenier's division arrived in disorder, after having been forced to evacuate Vaprio, pursued by the Austro-Russians under Zopf, Ott, and Chasteler. Moreau ordered a change of front, and faced this new enemy, who fell upon him when he least expected them; he succeeded in rallying Grenier's troops and in re-establishing the battle. But whilst his back was turned Melas repaired the bridge and crossed the river; thus Moreau found himself attacked frontally, in the rear, and on his two flanks, by forces three times larger than his own. It was then that all the officers who surrounded him begged him to retreat, for on the preservation of his person depended the preservation of Italy for France. Moreau refused for some time, for he knew the awful consequences of the battle he had just lost, and he did not wish to survive it, although it had been impossible for him to win it. At last a chosen band surrounded him, and, forming a square, drew back, whilst the rest of the army sacrificed themselves to cover his retreat; for Moreau's genius was looked upon as the sole hope that remained to them.

The battle lasted nearly three hours longer, during which the rearguard of the army performed prodigies of valour. At length Melas, seeing that the enemy had escaped him, and believing that his troops, tired by the stubborn fight, needed rest, gave orders that the fighting should cease. He halted on the left bank of the Adda, encamping his army in the villages of Imago, Gorgonzola, and Cassano, and remained master of the battlefield, upon which we had left two thousand five hundred dead, one hundred pieces of cannon, and twenty howitzers.

That night Souvarow invited General Becker to supper with him, and asked him by whom he had been taken prisoner. Becker replied that it was a young officer belonging to the regiment which had first entered Pozzo. Souvarow immediately inquired what regiment this was, and discovered that it was the Semenofskoi; he then ordered that inquiries should be made to ascertain the young officer's name. Shortly afterwards Sub-Lieutenant Foedor Romayloff was announced. He presented General Becker's sword to Souvarow, who invited him to remain and to have supper with his prisoner.

Next day Foedor wrote to his protector: "I have kept my word. I am a lieutenant, and Field-Marshal Souvarow has requested his Majesty Paul I to bestow upon me the order of Saint Vladimir."

On 28th of April, Souvarow entered Milan, which Moreau had just abandoned in order to retreat beyond Tesino. The following proclamation was by his order posted on all the walls of the capital; it admirably paints the spirit of the

Muscovite:

“The victorious army of the Apostolical and Roman Emperor is here; it has fought solely for the restoration of the Holy Faith,—the clergy, nobility, and ancient government of Italy. People, join us for God and the Faith, for we have arrived with an army at Milan and Placentia to assist you!”

The dearly bought victories of Trebia and Novi succeeded that of Cassano, and left Souvarow so much weakened that he was unable to profit by them. Besides, just when the Russian general was about to resume his march, a new plan of campaign arrived, sent by the Aulic Council at Vienna. The Allied Powers had decided upon the invasion of France, and had fixed the route each general must follow in order to accomplish this new project. It was decided that Souvarow should invade France by Switzerland, and that the arch-duke should yield him his positions and descend on the Lower Rhine.

The troops with which Souvarow was to operate against Massena from this time were the thirty thousand Russians he had with him, thirty thousand others detached from the reserve army commanded by Count Tolstoy in Galicia, who were to be led to join him in Switzerland by General Korsakoff, about thirty thousand Austrians under General Hotze, and lastly, five or six thousand French emigrants under the Prince de Conde in all, an army of ninety or ninety-five thousand men. The Austrians were to oppose Moreau and Macdonald.

Foedor had been wounded when entering Novi, but Souvarow had rewarded him with a second cross, and the rank of captain hastened his convalescence, so that the young officer, more happy than proud of the new rank he had received, was in a condition to follow the army, when on 13th September it moved towards Salvedra and entered the valley of Tesino.

So far all had gone well, and as long as they remained in the rich and beautiful Italian plains, Suovarow had nothing but praise for the courage and devotion of his soldiers. But when to the fertile fields of Lombardy, watered by its beautiful river, succeeded the rough ways of the Levantine, and when the lofty summits of the St. Gothard, covered with the eternal snows, rose before them, their enthusiasm was quenched, their energy disappeared, and melancholy forebodings filled the hearts of these savage children of the North.

Unexpected grumblings ran through the ranks; then suddenly the vanguard stopped, and declared that it would go no farther. In vain Foedor, who commanded a company, begged and entreated his own men to set an example by continuing the march: they threw down their arms, and lay down beside them. Just as they had given this proof of insubordination, fresh murmurs, sounding like an approaching storm, rose from the rear of the army: they were caused by the sight of Souvarow, who was riding from the rear to the vanguard, and who arrived at the front accompanied by this terrible proof of mutiny and insubordi-

nation. When he reached the head of the column, the murmurings had developed into imprecations.

Then Souvarow addressed his soldiers with that savage eloquence to which he owed the miracles he had effected with them, but cries of "Retreat! Retreat!" drowned his voice. Then he chose out the most mutinous, and had them thrashed until they were overcome by this shameful punishment: But the thrashings had no more influence than the exhortation, and the shouts continued. Souvarow saw that all was lost if he did not employ some powerful and unexpected means of regaining the mutineers. He advanced towards Foedor. "Captain," said he, "leave these fools here, take eight non-commissioned officers and dig a grave." Foedor, astonished, gazed at his general as though demanding an explanation of this strange order. "Obey orders," said Souvarow.

Foedor obeyed, and the eight men set to work; and ten minutes later the grave was dug, greatly to the astonishment of the whole army, which had gathered in a semicircle on the rising slopes of the two hills which bordered the road, standing as if on the steps of a huge amphitheatre.

Souvarow dismounted from his horse, broke his sword in two and threw it into the grave, detached his epaulets one by one and threw them after his sword, dragged off the decorations which covered his breast and cast these after the sword and epaulets, and then, stripping himself naked, he lay down in the grave himself, crying in a loud voice—

"Cover me with earth! Leave your general here. You are no longer my children, and I am no longer your father; nothing remains to me but death."

At these strange words, which were uttered in so powerful a voice that they were heard by the whole army, the Russian grenadiers threw themselves weeping into the grave, and, raising their general, asked pardon of him, entreating him to lead them again against the enemy.

"At last," cried Souvarow, "I recognise my children again. To the enemy!"

Not cries but yells of joy greeted his words. Souvarow dressed himself again, and whilst he was dressing the leaders of the mutiny crept in the dust to kiss his feet. Then, when his epaulets were replaced on his shoulders, and when his decorations again shone on his breast, he remounted his horse, followed by the army, the soldiers swearing with one voice that they would all die rather than abandon their father.

The same day Souvarow attacked Aerolo; but his luck had turned: the conqueror of Cassano, Trebia, and Novi had left his good-fortune behind in the plains of Italy. For twelve hours six hundred French opposed three thousand Russian grenadiers beneath the walls of the town, and so successfully that night fell without Souvarow being able to defeat them. Next day he marched the whole of his troops against this handful of brave men, but the sky clouded over and the wind

blew a bitter rain into the faces of the Russians; the French profited by this circumstance to beat a retreat, evacuating the valley of Ursern, crossing the Reuss, and taking up their position on the heights of the Furka and Grimsel. One portion of the Russian army's design had been achieved, they were masters of the St. Gothard. It is true that as soon as they marched farther on, the French would retake it and cut off their retreat; but what did this matter to Souvarow? Did he not always march forward?

He marched on, then, without worrying about that which was behind him, reached Andermatt, cleared Trou d'Ury, and found Lecourbe guarding the defile of the Devil's Bridge with fifteen hundred men. There the struggle began again; for three days fifteen hundred Frenchmen kept thirty thousand Russians at bay. Souvarow raged like a lion trapped in a snare, for he could not understand this change of fortune. At last, on the fourth day, he heard that General Korsakoff, who had preceded him and who was to rejoin him later, had been beaten by Molitor, and that Massena had recaptured Zurich and occupied the canton of Glaris. Souvarow now gave up the attempt to proceed up the valley of the Reuss, and wrote to Korsakoff and Jallachieh, "I hasten to retrieve your losses; stand firm as ramparts: you shall answer to me with your heads for every step in retreat that you take." The aide-de-camp was also charged to communicate to the Russian and Austrian generals a verbal plan of battle. Generals Linsken and Jallachieh were to attack the French troops separately and then to join the forces in the valley of Glaris, into which Souvarow himself was to descend by the Klon-Thal, thus hemming Molitor in between two walls of iron.

Souvarow was so sure that this plan would be successful, that when he arrived on the borders of the lake of Klon-Thal, he sent a bearer with a flag of truce, summoning Molitor to surrender, seeing that he was surrounded on every side.

Molitor replied, to the field-marshal that his proposed meeting with his generals had failed, as he had beaten them one after the other, and driven them back into the Grisons, and that moreover, in retaliation, as Massena was advancing by Muotta, it was he, Souvarow, who was between two fires, and therefore he called upon him to lay down his arms instead.

On hearing this strange reply, Souvarow thought that he must be dreaming, but soon recovering himself and realising the danger of his position in the defiles, he threw himself on General Molitor, who received him at the point of the bayonet, and then closing up the pass with twelve hundred men, the French succeeded in holding fifteen to eighteen thousand Russians in check for eight hours. At length night came, and Molitor evacuated the Klon Thal, and retired towards the Linth, to defend the bridges of Noefels and Mollis.

The old field-marshal rushed like a torrent over Glaris and Miltodi; there he learnt that Molitor had told him the truth, and that Jallachieh and Linsken had been beaten and dispersed, that Massena was advancing on Schwitz, and that General Rosenberg, who had been given the defence of the bridge of Muotta, had been forced to retreat, so that he found himself in the position in which he had hoped to place Molitor.

No time was to be lost in retreating. Souvarow hurried through the passes of Engi, Schwauden, and Elm. His flight was so hurried that he was obliged to abandon his wounded and part of his artillery. Immediately the French rushed in pursuit among the precipices and clouds. One saw whole armies passing over places where chamois-hunters took off their shoes and walked barefoot, holding on by their hands to prevent themselves from falling. Three nations had come from three different parts to a meeting-place in the home of the eagles, as if to allow those nearest God to judge the justice of their cause. There were times when the frozen mountains changed into volcanoes, when cascades now filled with blood fell into the valleys, and avalanches of human beings rolled down the deepest precipices. Death reaped such a harvest there where human life had never been before, that the vultures, becoming fastidious through the abundance, picked out only the eyes of the corpses to carry to their young—at least so says the tradition of the peasants of these mountains.

Souvarow was able to rally his troops at length in the neighbourhood of Lindau. He recalled Korsakoff, who still occupied Bregenz; but all his troops together did not number more than thirty thousand men—all that remained of the eighty thousand whom Paul had furnished as his contingent in the coalition. In fifteen days Massena had defeated three separate armies, each numerically stronger than his own. Souvarow, furious at having been defeated by these same Republicans whom he had sworn to exterminate, blamed the Austrians for his defeat, and declared that he awaited orders from his emperor, to whom he had made known the treachery of the allies, before attempting anything further with the coalition.

Paul's answer was that he should immediately return to Russia with his soldiers, arriving at St. Petersburg as soon as possible, where a triumphal entry awaited them.

The same ukase declared that Souvarow should be quartered in the imperial palace for the rest of his life, and lastly that a monument should be raised to him in one of the public places of St. Petersburg.

Foedor was thus about to see Vaninka once more. Throughout the campaign, where there was a chance of danger, whether in the plains of Italy, in the defiles of Tesino, or on the glaciers of Mount Pragal, he was the first to throw himself into it, and his name had frequently been mentioned as worthy of dis-

inction. Souvarow was too brave himself to be prodigal of honours where they were not merited. Foedor was returning, as he had promised, worthy of his noble protector's friendship, and who knows, perhaps worthy of Vaninka's love. Field-Marshal Souvarow had made a friend of him, and none could know to what this friendship might not lead; for Paul honoured Souvarow like one of the ancient heroes.

But no one could rely upon Paul, for his character was made up of extreme impulses. Without having done anything to offend his master, and without knowing the cause of his disgrace, Souvarow, on arriving at Riga, received a private letter which informed him, in the emperor's name, that, having tolerated an infraction of the laws of discipline among his soldiers, the emperor deprived him of all the honours with which he had been invested, and also forbade him to appear before him.

Such tidings fell like a thunderbolt upon the old warrior, already embittered by his reverses: he was heart-broken that such storm-clouds should tarnish the end of his glorious day.

In consequence of this order, he assembled all his officers in the market-place of Riga, and took leave of them sorrowfully, like a father taking leave of his family. Having embraced the generals and colonels, and having shaken hands with the others, he said good-bye to them once more, and left them free to continue their march to their destination.

Souvarow took a sledge, and, travelling night and day, arrived incognito in the capital, which he was to have entered in triumph, and was driven to a distant suburb, to the house of one of his nieces, where he died of a broken heart fifteen days afterwards.

On his own account, Foedor travelled almost as rapidly as his general, and entered St. Petersburg without having sent any letter to announce his arrival. As he had no parent in the capital, and as his entire existence was concentrated in one person, he drove direct to the general's house, which was situated in the Prospect of Niewski, at an angle of the Catherine Canal.

Having arrived there, he sprang out of his carriage, entered the courtyard, and bounded up the steps. He opened the ante-chamber door, and precipitated himself into the midst of the servants and subordinate household officers. They cried out with surprise upon seeing him: he asked them where the general was; they replied by pointing to the door of the dining-room; he was in there, breakfasting with his daughter.

Then, through a strange reaction, Foedor felt his knees failing him, and he was obliged to lean against a wall to prevent himself from falling. At this moment, when he was about to see Vaninka again, this soul of his soul, for whom alone he had done so much, he dreaded lest he should not find her the same as when

he had left her. Suddenly the dining-room door opened, and Vaninka appeared. Seeing the young man, she uttered a cry, and, turning to the general, said, "Father, it is Foedor"; and the expression of her voice left no doubt of the sentiment which inspired it.

"Foedor!" cried the general, springing forward and holding out his arms.

Foedor did not know whether to throw himself at the feet of Vaninka or into the arms of her father. He felt that his first recognition ought to be devoted to respect and gratitude, and threw himself into the general's arms. Had he acted otherwise, it would have been an avowal of his love, and he had no right to avow this love till he knew that it was reciprocated.

Foedor then turned, and as at parting, sank on his knee before Vaninka; but a moment had sufficed for the haughty girl to banish the feeling she had shown. The blush which had suffused her cheek had disappeared, and she had become again cold and haughty like an alabaster statue—a masterpiece of pride begun by nature and finished by education. Foedor kissed her hand; it was trembling but cold he felt his heart sink, and thought he was about to die.

"Why, Vaninka," said the general—"why are you so cool to a friend who has caused us so much anxiety and yet so much pleasure? Come, Fordor, kiss my daughter."

Foedor rose entreatingly, but waited motionless, that another permission might confirm that of the general.

"Did you not hear my father?" said Vaninka, smiling, but nevertheless possessing sufficient self-control to prevent the emotion she was feeling from appearing in her voice.

Foedor stooped to kiss Vaninka, and as he held her hands it seemed to him that she lightly pressed his own with a nervous, involuntary movement. A feeble cry of joy nearly escaped him, when, suddenly looking at Vaninka, he was astonished at her pallor: her lips were as white as death.

The general made Foedor sit down at the table: Vaninka took her place again, and as by chance she was seated with her back to the light, the general noticed nothing.

Breakfast passed in relating and listening to an account of this strange campaign which began under the burning sun of Italy and ended in the glaciers of Switzerland. As there are no journals in St. Petersburg which publish anything other than that which is permitted by the emperor, Souvarow's successes were spread abroad, but his reverses were ignored. Foedor described the former with modesty and the latter with frankness.

One can imagine, the immense interest the general took in Foedor's story. His two captain's epaulets and the decorations on his breast proved that the young man had modestly suppressed his own part in the story he had told. But

the general, too courageous to fear that he might share in Souvarow's disgrace, had already visited the dying field-marshal, and had heard from him an account of his young protege's bravery. Therefore, when Foedor had finished his story, it was the general's turn to enumerate all the fine things Foedor had done in a campaign of less than a year. Having finished this enumeration, he added that he intended next day to ask the emperor's permission to take the young captain for his aide-de-camp. Foedor hearing this wished to throw himself at the general's feet, but he received him again in his arms, and to show Foedor how certain he was that he would be successful in his request, he fixed the rooms that the young man was to occupy in the house at once.

The next day the general returned from the palace of St. Michel with the pleasant news that his request had been granted.

Foedor was overwhelmed with joy: from this time he was to form part of the general's family. Living under the same roof as Vaninka, seeing her constantly, meeting her frequently in the rooms, seeing her pass like an apparition at the end of a corridor, finding himself twice a day at the same table with her, all this was more than Foedor had ever dared hope, and he thought for a time that he had attained complete happiness.

For her part, Vaninka, although she was so proud, at the bottom of her heart took a keen interest in Foedor. He had left her with the certainty that he loved her, and during his absence her woman's pride had been gratified by the glory he had acquired, in the hope of bridging the distance which separated them. So that, when she saw him return with this distance between them lessened, she felt by the beating of her heart that gratified pride was changing into a more tender sentiment, and that for her part she loved Foedor as much as it was possible for her to love anyone.

She had nevertheless concealed these feelings under an appearance of haughty indifference, for Vaninka was made so: she intended to let Foedor know some day that she loved him, but until the time came when it pleased her to reveal it, she did not wish the young man to discover her love. Things went on in this way for several months, and the circumstances which had at first appeared to Foedor as the height of happiness soon became awful torture.

To love and to feel his heart ever on the point of avowing its love, to be from morning till night in the company of the beloved one, to meet her hand at the table, to touch her dress in a narrow corridor, to feel her leaning on his arm when they entered a salon or left a ballroom, always to have ceaselessly to control every word, look, or movement which might betray his feelings, no human power could endure such a struggle.

Vaninka saw that Foedor could not keep his secret much longer, and determined to anticipate the avowal which she saw every moment on the point of



escaping his heart.

One day when they were alone, and she saw the hopeless efforts the young man was making to hide his feelings from her, she went straight up to him, and, looking at him fixedly, said:

“You love me!”

“Forgive me, forgive me,” cried the young man, clasping his hands.

“Why should you ask me to forgive you, Foedor? Is not your love genuine?”

“Yes, yes, genuine but hopeless.”

“Why hopeless? Does not my father love you as a son?” said Vaninka.

“Oh, what do you mean?” cried Foedor. “Do you mean that if your father will bestow your hand upon me, that you will then consent—?”

“Are you not both noble in heart and by birth, Foedor? You are not wealthy, it is true, but then I am rich enough for both.”

“Then I am not indifferent to you?”

“I at least prefer you to anyone else I have met.”

“Vaninka!” The young girl drew herself away proudly.

“Forgive me!” said Foedor. “What am I doing? You have but to order: I have no wish apart from you. I dread lest I shall offend you. Tell me what to do, and I will obey.”

“The first thing you must do, Foedor, is to ask my father’s consent.”

“So you will allow me to take this step?”

“Yes, but on one condition.”

“What is it? Tell me.”

“My father, whatever his answer, must never know that I have consented to your making this application to him; no one must know that you are following my instructions; the world must remain ignorant of the confession I have just made to you; and, lastly, you must not ask me, whatever happens, to help you in any other way than with my good wishes.”

“Whatever you please. I will do everything you wish me to do. Do you not grant me a thousand times more than I dared hope, and if your father refuses me, do I not know myself that you are sharing my grief?” cried Foedor.

“Yes; but that will not happen, I hope,” said Vaninka, holding out her hand to the young officer, who kissed it passionately.

“Now be hopeful and take courage;” and Vaninka retired, leaving the young man a hundred times more agitated and moved than she was herself, woman though she was.

The same day Foedor asked for an interview with the general. The general received his aide-de-camp as usual with a genial and smiling countenance, but with the first words Foedor uttered his face darkened. However, when he heard the young man’s description of the love, so true, constant, and passionate, that

he felt for Vaninka, and when he heard that this passion had been the motive power of those glorious deeds he had praised so often, he held out his hand to Foedor, almost as moved as the young soldier.

And then the general told him, that while he had been away, and ignorant of his love for Vaninka, in whom he had observed no trace of its being reciprocated, he had, at the emperor's desire, promised her hand to the son of a privy councillor. The only stipulation that the general had made was, that he should not be separated from his daughter until she had attained the age of eighteen. Vaninka had only five months more to spend under her father's roof. Nothing more could be said: in Russia the emperor's wish is an order, and from the moment that it is expressed, no subject would oppose it, even in thought. However, the refusal had imprinted such despair on the young man's face, that the general, touched by his silent and resigned sorrow, held out his arms to him. Foedor flung himself into them with loud sobs.

Then the general questioned him about his daughter, and Foedor answered, as he had promised, that Vaninka was ignorant of everything, and that the proposal came from him alone, without her knowledge. This assurance calmed the general: he had feared that he was making two people wretched.

At dinner-time Vaninka came downstairs and found her father alone. Foedor had not enough courage to be present at the meal and to meet her again, just when he had lost all hope: he had taken a sleigh, and driven out to the outskirts of the city.

During the whole time dinner lasted Vaninka and the general hardly exchanged a word, but although this silence was so expressive, Vaninka controlled her face with her usual power, and the general alone appeared sad and dejected.

That evening, just when Vaninka was going downstairs, tea was brought to her room, with the message that the general was fatigued and had retired. Vaninka asked some questions about the nature of his indisposition, and finding that it was not serious, she told the servant who had brought her the message to ask her father to send for her if he wanted anything. The general sent to say that he thanked her, but he only required quiet and rest. Vaninka announced that she would retire also, and the servant withdrew.

Hardly had he left the room when Vaninka ordered Annouschka, her foster-sister, who acted as her maid, to be on the watch for Foedor's return, and to let her know as soon as he came in.

At eleven o'clock the gate of the mansion opened: Foedor got out of his sleigh, and immediately went up to his room. He threw himself upon a sofa, overwhelmed by his thoughts. About midnight he heard someone tapping at the door: much astonished, he got up and opened it. It was Annouschka, who came with a message from her mistress, that Vaninka wished to see him immediately.

Although he was astonished at this message, which he was far from expecting, Foedor obeyed.

He found Vaninka seated, dressed in a white robe, and as she was paler than usual he stopped at the door, for it seemed to him that he was gazing at a marble statue.

“Come in,” said Vaninka calmly.

Foedor approached, drawn by her voice like steel to a magnet. Annouschka shut the door behind him.

“Well, and what did my father say?” said Vaninka.

Foedor told her all that had happened. The young girl listened to his story with an unmoved countenance, but her lips, the only part of her face which seemed to have any colour, became as white as the dressing-gown she was wearing. Foedor, on the contrary, was consumed by a fever, and appeared nearly out of his senses.

“Now, what do you intend to do?” said Vaninka in the same cold tone in which she had asked the other questions.

“You ask me what I intend to do, Vaninka? What do you wish me to do? What can I do, but flee from St. Petersburg, and seek death in the first corner of Russia where war may break out, in order not to repay my patron’s kindness by some infamous baseness?”

“You are a fool,” said Vaninka, with a mixed smile of triumph and contempt; for from that moment she felt her superiority over Foedor, and saw that she would rule him like a queen for the rest of her life.

“Then order me—am I not your slave?” cried the young soldier.

“You must stay here,” said Vaninka.

“Stay here?”

“Yes; only women and children will thus confess themselves beaten at the first blow: a man, if he be worthy of the name, fights.”

“Fight!—against whom?—against your father? Never!”

“Who suggested that you should contend against my father? It is against events that you must strive; for the generality of men do not govern events, but are carried away by them. Appear to my father as though you were fighting against your love, and he will think that you have mastered yourself. As I am supposed to be ignorant of your proposal, I shall not be suspected. I will demand two years’ more freedom, and I shall obtain them. Who knows what may happen in the course of two years? The emperor may die, my betrothed may die, my father—may God protect him!—my father himself may die—!”

“But if they force you to marry?”

“Force me!” interrupted Vaninka, and a deep flush rose to her cheek and immediately disappeared again. “And who will force me to do anything? Father?”

He loves me too well. The emperor? He has enough worries in his own family, without introducing them into another's. Besides, there is always a last resource when every other expedient fails: the Neva only flows a few paces from here, and its waters are deep."

Foedor uttered a cry, for in the young girl's knit brows and tightly compressed lips there was so much resolution that he understood that they might break this child but that they would not bend her. But Foedor's heart was too much in harmony with the plan Vaninka had proposed; his objections once removed, he did not seek fresh ones. Besides, had he had the courage to do so; Vaninka's promise to make up in secret to him for the dissimulation she was obliged to practise in public would have conquered his last scruples.

Vaninka, whose determined character had been accentuated by her education, had an unbounded influence over all who came in contact with her; even the general, without knowing why, obeyed her. Foedor submitted like a child to everything she wished, and the young girl's love was increased by the wishes she opposed and by a feeling of gratified pride.

It was some days after this nocturnal decision that the knouting had taken place at which our readers have assisted. It was for some slight fault, and Gregory had been the victim; Vaninka having complained to her father about him. Foedor, who as aide-de-camp had been obliged to preside over Gregory's punishment, had paid no more attention to the threats the serf had uttered on retiring.

Ivan, the coachman, who after having been executioner had become surgeon, had applied compresses of salt and water to heal up the scarred shoulders of his victim. Gregory had remained three days in the infirmary, and during this time he had turned over in his mind every possible means of vengeance. Then at the end of three days, being healed, he had returned to his duty, and soon everyone except he had forgotten the punishment. If Gregory had been a real Russian, he would soon have forgotten it all; for this punishment is too familiar to the rough Muscovite for him to remember it long and with rancour. Gregory, as we have said, had Greek blood in his veins; he dissembled and remembered. Although Gregory was a serf, his duties had little by little brought him into greater familiarity with the general than any of the other servants. Besides, in every country in the world barbers have great licence with those they shave; this is perhaps due to the fact that a man is instinctively more gracious to another who for ten minutes every day holds his life in his hands. Gregory rejoiced in the immunity of his profession, and it nearly always happened that the barber's daily operation on the general's chin passed in conversation, of which he bore the chief part.

One day the general had to attend a review: he sent for Gregory before daybreak, and as the barber was passing the razor as gently as possible over his

master's cheek, the conversation fell, or more likely was led, on Foedor. The barber praised him highly, and this naturally caused his master to ask him, remembering the correction the young aide-de-camp had superintended, if he could not find some fault in this model of perfection that might counterbalance so many good qualities. Gregory replied that with the exception of pride he thought Foedor irrefragable.

"Pride?" asked the astonished general. "That is a failing from which I should have thought him most free."

"Perhaps I should have said ambition," replied Gregory.

"Ambition!" said the general. "It does not seem to me that he has given much proof of ambition in entering my service; for after his achievements in the last campaign he might easily have aspired to the honour of a place in the emperor's household."

"Oh yes, he is ambitious," said Gregory, smiling. "One man's ambition is for high position, another's an illustrious alliance: the former will owe everything to himself, the latter will make a stepping-stone of his wife, then they raise their eyes higher than they should."

"What do you mean to suggest?" said the general, beginning to see what Gregory was aiming at.

"I mean, your excellency," replied Gregory, "there are many men who, owing to the kindness shown them by others, forget their position and aspire to a more exalted one; having already been placed so high, their heads are turned."

"Gregory," cried the general, "believe me, you are getting into a scrape; for you are making an accusation, and if I take any notice of it, you will have to prove your words."

"By St. Basilus, general, it is no scrape when you have truth on your side; for I have said nothing I am not ready to prove."

"Then," said the general, "you persist in declaring that Foedor loves my daughter?"

"Ah! I have not said that: it is your excellency. I have not named the lady Vaninka," said Gregory, with the duplicity of his nation.

"But you meant it, did you not? Come, contrary to your custom, reply frankly."

"It is true, your excellency; it is what I meant."

"And, according to you, my daughter reciprocates the passion, no doubt?"

"I fear so, your excellency."

"And what makes you think this, say?"

"First, Mr. Foedor never misses a chance of speaking to the lady Vaninka."

"He is in the same house with her, would you have him avoid her?"

“When the lady Vaninka returns late, and when perchance Mr. Foedor has not accompanied you, whatever the hour Mr. Foedor is there, ready, to help her out of the carriage.”

“Foedor attends me, it is his duty,” said the general, beginning to believe that the serf’s suspicions were founded on slight grounds. “He waits for me,” he, continued, “because when I return, at any hour of the day or night, I may have orders to give him.”

“Not a day passes without Mr. Foedor going into my lady Vaninka’s room, although such a favour is not usually granted to a young man in a house like that of your excellency.”

“Usually it is I who send him to her,” said the general.

“Yes, in the daytime,” replied Gregory, “but at night?”

“At night!” cried the general, rising to his feet, and turning so pale that, after a moment, he was forced to lean for support on a table.

“Yes, at night, your excellency,” answered Gregory quietly; “and since, as you say, I have begun to mix myself up in a bad business, I must go on with it; besides, even if there were to result from it another punishment for me, even more terrible than that I have already endured, I should not allow so good, a master to be deceived any longer.”

“Be very careful about what you are going to say, slave; for I know the men of your nation. Take care, if the accusation you are making by way of revenge is not supported by visible, palpable, and positive proofs, you shall be punished as an infamous slanderer.”

“To that I agree,” said Gregory.

“Do you affirm that you have seen Foedor enter my daughter’s chamber at night?”

“I do not say that I have seen him enter it, your excellency. I say that I have seen him come out.”

“When was that?”

“A quarter of an hour ago, when I was on my way to your excellency.”

“You lie!” said the general, raising his fist.

“This is not our agreement, your excellency,” said the slave, drawing back. “I am only to be punished if I fail to give proofs.”

“But what are your proofs?”

“I have told you.”

“And do you expect me to believe your word alone?”

“No; but I expect you to believe your own eyes.”

“How?”

“The first time that Mr. Foedor is in my lady Vaninka’s room after midnight, I shall come to find your excellency, and then you can judge for yourself if I lie;

but up to the present, your excellency, all the conditions of the service I wish to render you are to my disadvantage.”

“In what way?”

“Well, if I fail to give proofs, I am to be treated as an infamous slanderer; but if I give them, what advantage shall I gain?”

“A thousand roubles and your freedom.”

“That is a bargain, then, your excellency,” replied Gregory quietly, replacing the razors on the general’s toilet-table, “and I hope that before a week has passed you will be more just to me than you are now.”

With these words the slave left the room, leaving the general convinced by his confidence that some dreadful misfortune threatened him.

From this time onward, as might be expected, the general weighed every word and noticed every gesture which passed between Vaninka and Foedor in his presence; but he saw nothing to confirm his suspicions on the part of the aide-de-camp or of his daughter; on the contrary, Vaninka seemed colder and more reserved than ever.

A week passed in this way. About two o’clock in the morning of the ninth day, someone knocked at the general’s door. It was Gregory.

“If your excellency will go into your daughter’s room,” said Gregory, “you will find Mr. Foedor there.”

The general turned pale, dressed himself without uttering a word, and followed the slave to the door of Vaninka’s room. Having arrived there, with a motion of his hand he dismissed the informer, who, instead of retiring in obedience to this mute command, hid himself in the corner of the corridor.

When the general believed himself to be alone, he knocked once; but all was silent. This silence, however, proved nothing; for Vaninka might be asleep. He knocked a second time, and the young girl, in a perfectly calm voice, asked, “Who is there?”

“It is I,” said the general, in a voice trembling with emotion.

“Annouschka!” said the girl to her foster-sister, who slept in the adjoining room, “open the door to my father. Forgive me, father,” she continued; “but Annouschka is dressing, and will be with you in a moment.”

The general waited patiently, for he could discover no trace of emotion in his daughter’s voice, and he hoped that Gregory had been mistaken.

In a few moments the door opened, and the general went in, and cast a long look around him; there was no one in this first apartment.

Vaninka was in bed, paler perhaps than usual, but quite calm, with the loving smile on her lips with which she always welcomed her father.

“To what fortunate circumstance,” asked the young girl in her softest tones, “do I owe the pleasure of seeing you at so late an hour?”

“I wished to speak to you about a very important matter,” said the general, “and however late it was, I thought you would forgive me for disturbing you.”

“My father will always be welcome in his daughter’s room, at whatever hour of the day or night he presents himself there.”

The general cast another searching look round, and was convinced that it was impossible for a man to be concealed in the first room—but the second still remained.

“I am listening,” said Vaninka, after a moment of silence.

“Yes, but we are not alone,” replied the general, “and it is important that no other ears should hear what I have to say to you.”

“Annuschka, as you know, is my foster-sister,” said Vaninka.

“That makes no difference,” said the general, going candle in hand into the next room, which was somewhat smaller than his daughter’s. “Annuschka,” said he, “watch in the corridor and see that no one overhears us.”

As he spoke these words, the general threw the same scrutinizing glance all round the room, but with the exception of the young girl there was no one there.

Annuschka obeyed, and the general followed her out, and, looking eagerly round for the last time, re-entered his daughter’s room, and seated himself on the foot of her bed. Annuschka, at a sign from her mistress, left her alone with her father. The general held out his hand to Vaninka, and she took it without hesitation.

“My child,” said the general, “I have to speak to you about a very important matter.”

“What is it, father?” said Vaninka.

“You will soon be eighteen,” continued the general, “and that is the age at which the daughters of the Russian nobility usually marry.” The general paused for a moment to watch the effect of these words upon Vaninka, but her hand rested motionless in his. “For the last year your hand has been engaged by me,” continued the general.

“May I know to whom?” asked Vaninka coldly.

“To the son of the Councillor-in-Ordinary,” replied the general. “What is your opinion of him?”

“He is a worthy and noble young man, I am told, but I can have formed no opinion except from hearsay. Has he not been in garrison at Moscow for the last three months?”

“Yes,” said the general, “but in three months’ time he should return.”

Vaninka remained silent.

“Have you nothing to say in reply?” asked the general.

“Nothing, father; but I have a favour to ask of you.”



“What is it?”

“I do not wish to marry until I am twenty years old.”

“Why not?”

“I have taken a vow to that effect.”

“But if circumstances demanded the breaking of this vow, and made the celebration of this marriage imperatively necessary?”

“What circumstances?” asked Vaninka.

“Foedor loves you,” said the general, looking steadily at Vaninka.

“I know that,” said Vaninka, with as little emotion as if the question did not concern her.

“You know that!” cried the general.

“Yes; he has told me so.”

“When?”

“Yesterday.”

“And you replied—?”

“That he must leave here at once.”

“And he consented?”

“Yes, father.”

“When does he go?”

“He has gone.”

“How can that be?” said the general: “he only left me at ten o’clock.”

“And he left me at midnight,” said Vaninka.

“Ah!” said the general, drawing a deep breath of relief, “you are a noble girl, Vaninka, and I grant you what you ask—two years more. But remember it is the emperor who has decided upon this marriage.”

“My father will do me the justice to believe that I am too submissive a daughter to be a rebellious subject.”

“Excellent, Vaninka, excellent,” said the general. “So, then, poor Foedor has told you all?”

“Yes,” said Vaninka.

“You knew that he addressed himself to me first?”

“I knew it.”

“Then it was from him that you heard that your hand was engaged?”

“It was from him.”

“And he consented to leave you? He is a good and noble young man, who shall always be under my protection wherever he goes. Oh, if my word had not been given, I love him so much that, supposing you did not dislike him, I should have given him your hand.”

“And you cannot recall your promise?” asked Vaninka.

“Impossible,” said the general.

"Well, then, I submit to my father's will," said Vaninka.

"That is spoken like my daughter," said the general, embracing her. "Farewell, Vaninka; I do not ask if you love him. You have both done your duty, and I have nothing more to exact."

With these words, he rose and left the room. Annouschka was in the corridor; the general signed to her that she might go in again, and went on his way. At the door of his room he found Gregory waiting for him.

"Well, your excellency?" he asked.

"Well," said the general, "you are both right and wrong. Foedor loves my daughter, but my daughter does not love him. He went into my daughter's room at eleven o'clock, but at midnight he left her for ever. No matter, come to me tomorrow, and you shall have your thousand roubles and your liberty."

Gregory went off, dumb with astonishment.

Meanwhile, Annouschka had re-entered her mistress's room, as she had been ordered, and closed the door carefully behind her.

Vaninka immediately sprang out of bed and went to the door, listening to the retreating footsteps of the general. When they had ceased to be heard, she rushed into Annouschka's room, and both began to pull aside a bundle of linen, thrown down, as if by accident, into the embrasure of a window. Under the linen was a large chest with a spring lock. Annouschka pressed a button, Vaninka raised the lid. The two women uttered a loud cry: the chest was now a coffin; the young officer, stifled for want of air, lay dead within.

For a long time the two women hoped it was only a swoon. Annouschka sprinkled his face with water; Vaninka put salts to his nose. All was in vain. During the long conversation which the general had had with his daughter, and which had lasted more than half an hour, Foedor, unable to get out of the chest, as the lid was closed by a spring, had died for want of air. The position of the two girls shut up with a corpse was frightful. Annouschka saw Siberia close at hand; Vaninka, to do her justice, thought of nothing but Foedor. Both were in despair. However, as the despair of the maid was more selfish than that of her mistress, it was Annouschka who first thought of a plan of escaping from the situation in which they were placed.

"My lady," she cried suddenly, "we are saved." Vaninka raised her head and looked at her attendant with her eyes bathed in tears.

"Saved?" said she, "saved? We are, perhaps, but Foedor!"

"Listen now," said Annouschka: "your position is terrible, I grant that, and your grief is great; but your grief could be greater and your position more terrible still. If the general knew this."

"What difference would it make to me?" said Vaninka. "I shall weep for him before the whole world."

"Yes, but you will be dishonoured before the whole world! To-morrow your slaves, and the day after all St. Petersburg, will know that a man died of suffocation while concealed in your chamber. Reflect, my lady: your honour is the honour of your father, the honour of your family."

"You are right," said Vaninka, shaking her head, as if to disperse the gloomy thoughts that burdened her brain,—“you are right, but what must we do?”

"Does my lady know my brother Ivan?"

"Yes."

"We must tell him all."

"Of what are you thinking?" cried Vaninka. "To confide in a man? A man, do I say? A serf! a slave!"

"The lower the position of the serf and slave, the safer will our secret be, since he will have everything to gain by keeping faith with us."

"Your brother is a drunkard," said Vaninka, with mingled fear and disgust.

"That is true," said Annouschka; "but where will you find a slave who is not? My brother gets drunk less than most, and is therefore more to be trusted than the others. Besides, in the position in which we are we must risk something."

"You are right," said Vaninka, recovering her usual resolution, which always grew in the presence of danger. "Go and seek your brother."

"We can do nothing this morning," said Annouschka, drawing back the window curtains. "Look, the dawn is breaking."

"But what can we do with the body of this unhappy man?" cried Vaninka.

"It must remain hidden where it is all day, and this evening, while you are at the Court entertainment, my brother shall remove it."

"True," murmured Vaninka in a strange tone, "I must go to Court this evening; to stay away would arouse suspicion. Oh, my God! my God!"

"Help me, my lady," said Annouschka; "I am not strong enough alone."

Vaninka turned deadly pale, but, spurred on by the danger, she went resolutely up to the body of her lover; then, lifting it by the shoulders, while her maid raised it by the legs, she laid it once more in the chest. Then Annouschka shut down the lid, locked the chest, and put the key into her breast. Then both threw back the linen which had hidden it from the eyes of the general. Day dawned, as might be expected, ere sleep visited the eyes of Vaninka.

She went down, however, at the breakfast hour; for she did not wish to arouse the slightest suspicion in her father's mind. Only it might have been thought from her pallor that she had risen from the grave, but the general attributed this to the nocturnal disturbance of which he had been the cause.

Luck had served Vaninka wonderfully in prompting her to say that Foedor had already gone; for not only did the general feel no surprise when he did not appear, but his very absence was a proof of his daughter's innocence. The general

gave a pretext for his aide-de-camp's absence by saying that he had sent him on a mission. As for Vaninka, she remained out of her room till it was time to dress. A week before, she had been at the Court entertainment with Foedor.

Vaninka might have excused herself from accompanying her father by feigning some slight indisposition, but two considerations made her fear to act thus: the first was the fear of making the general anxious, and perhaps of making him remain at home himself, which would make the removal of the corpse more difficult; the second was the fear of meeting Ivan and having to blush before a slave. She preferred, therefore, to make a superhuman effort to control herself; and, going up again into her room, accompanied by her faithful Annouschka, she began to dress with as much care as if her heart were full of joy. When this cruel business was finished, she ordered Annouschka to shut the door; for she wished to see Foedor once more, and to bid a last farewell to him who had been her lover. Annouschka obeyed; and Vaninka, with flowers in her hair and her breast covered with jewels, glided like a phantom into her servant's room.

Annouschka again opened the chest, and Vaninka, without shedding a tear, without breathing a sigh, with the profound and death-like calm of despair, leant down towards Foedor and took off a plain ring which the young man had on his finger, placed it on her own, between two magnificent rings, then kissing him on the brow, she said, "Goodbye, my betrothed."

At this moment she heard steps approaching. It was a groom of the chambers coming from the general to ask if she were ready. Annouschka let the lid of the chest fall, and Vaninka going herself to open the door, followed the messenger, who walked before her, lighting the way.

Such was her trust in her foster-sister that she left her to accomplish the dark and terrible task with which she had burdened herself.

A minute later, Annouschka saw the carriage containing the general and his daughter leave by the main gate of the hotel.

She let half an hour go by, and then went down to look for Ivan. She found him drinking with Gregory, with whom the general had kept his word, and who had received the same day one thousand roubles and his liberty. Fortunately, the revellers were only beginning their rejoicings, and Ivan in consequence was sober enough for his sister to entrust her secret to him without hesitation.

Ivan followed Annouschka into the chamber of her mistress. There she reminded him of all that Vaninka, haughty but generous, had allowed his sister to do for him. The, few glasses of brandy Ivan had already swallowed had pre-disposed him to gratitude (the drunkenness of the Russian is essentially tender). Ivan protested his devotion so warmly that Annouschka hesitated no longer, and, raising the lid of the chest, showed him the corpse of Foedor. At this terrible sight Ivan remained an instant motionless, but he soon began to calculate how much

money and how many benefits the possession of such a secret would bring him. He swore by the most solemn oaths never to betray his mistress, and offered, as Annouschka had hoped, to dispose of the body of the unfortunate aide-de-camp.

The thing was easily done. Instead of returning to drink with Gregory and his comrades, Ivan went to prepare a sledge, filled it with straw, and hid at the bottom an iron crowbar. He brought this to the outside gate, and assuring himself he was not being spied upon, he raised the body of the dead man in his arms, hid it under the straw, and sat down above it. He had the gate of the hotel opened, followed Niewski Street as far as the Zunamenie Church, passed through the shops in the Rejestwenskoi district, drove the sledge out on to the frozen Neva, and halted in the middle of the river, in front of the deserted church of Ste. Madeleine. There, protected by the solitude and darkness, hidden behind the black mass of his sledge, he began to break the ice, which was fifteen inches thick, with his pick. When he had made a large enough hole, he searched the body of Foedor, took all the money he had about him, and slipped the body head foremost through the opening he had made. He then made his way back to the hotel, while the imprisoned current of the Neva bore away the corpse towards the Gulf of Finland. An hour after, a new crust of ice had formed, and not even a trace of the opening made by Ivan remained.

At midnight Vaninka returned with her father. A hidden fever had been consuming her all the evening: never had she looked so lovely, and she had been overwhelmed by the homage of the most distinguished nobles and courtiers. When she returned, she found Annouschka in the vestibule waiting to take her cloak. As she gave it to her, Vaninka sent her one of those questioning glances that seem to express so much. "It is done," said the girl in a low voice. Vaninka breathed a sigh of relief, as if a mountain had been removed from her breast. Great as was her self-control, she could no longer bear her father's presence, and excused herself from remaining to supper with him, on the plea of the fatigues of the evening. Vaninka was no sooner in her room, with the door once closed, than she tore the flowers from her hair, the necklace from her throat, cut with scissors the corsets which suffocated her, and then, throwing herself on her bed, she gave way to her grief. Annouschka thanked God for this outburst; her mistress's calmness had frightened her more than her despair. The first crisis over, Vaninka was able to pray. She spent an hour on her knees, then, yielding to the entreaties of her faithful attendant, went to bed. Annouschka sat down at the foot of the bed.

Neither slept, but when day came the tears which Vaninka had shed had calmed her.

Annouschka was instructed to reward her brother. Too large a sum given to a slave at once might have aroused suspicion, therefore Annouschka contented

herself with telling Ivan that when he had need of money he had only to ask her for it.

Gregory, profiting by his liberty and wishing to make use of his thousand roubles, bought a little tavern on the outskirts of the town, where, thanks to his address and to the acquaintances he had among the servants in the great households of St. Petersburg, he began to develop an excellent business, so that in a short time the Red House (which was the name and colour of Gregory's establishment) had a great reputation. Another man took over his duties about the person of the general, and but for Foedor's absence everything returned to its usual routine in the house of Count Tchermayloff.

Two months went by in this way, without anybody having the least suspicion of what had happened, when one morning before the usual breakfast-hour the general begged his daughter to come down to his room. Vaninka trembled with fear, for since that fatal night everything terrified her. She obeyed her father, and collecting all her strength, made her way to his chamber. The count was alone, but at the first glance Vaninka saw she had nothing to fear from this interview: the general was waiting for her with that paternal smile which was the usual expression of his countenance when in his daughter's presence.

She approached, therefore, with her usual calmness, and, stooping down towards the general, gave him her forehead to kiss.

He motioned to her to sit down, and gave her an open letter. Vaninka looked at him for a moment in surprise, then turned her eyes to the letter.

It contained the news of the death of the man to whom her hand had been promised: he had been killed in a duel.

The general watched the effect of the letter on his daughter's face, and great as was Vaninka's self-control, so many different thoughts, such bitter regret, such poignant remorse assailed her when she learnt that she was now free again, that she could not entirely conceal her emotion. The general noticed it, and attributed it to the love which he had for a long time suspected his daughter felt for the young aide-de-camp.

"Well," he said, smiling, "I see it is all for the best."

"How is that, father?" asked Vaninka.

"Doubtless," said the general. "Did not Foedor leave because he loved you?"

"Yes," murmured the young girl.

"Well, now he may return," said the general.

Vaninka remained silent, her eyes fixed, her lips trembling.

"Return!" she said, after a moment's silence.

"Yes, certainly return. We shall be most unfortunate," continued the general, smiling, "if we cannot find someone in the house who knows where he is. Come, Vaninka, tell me the place of his exile, and I will undertake the rest."

"Nobody knows where Foedor is," murmured Vaninka in a hollow voice; "nobody but God, nobody!"

"What!" said the general, "he has sent you no news since the day he left?"

Vaninka shook her head in denial. She was so heart-broken that she could not speak.

The general in his turn became gloomy. "Do you fear some misfortune, then?" said he.

"I fear that I shall never be happy again on earth," cried Vaninka, giving way under the pressure of her grief; then she continued at once, "Let me retire, father; I am ashamed of what I have said."

The general, who saw nothing in this exclamation beyond regret for having allowed the confession of her love to escape her, kissed his daughter on the brow and allowed her to retire. He hoped that, in spite of the mournful way in which Vaninka had spoken of Foedor, that it would be possible to find him. The same day he went to the emperor and told him of the love of Foedor for his daughter, and requested, since death had freed her from her first engagement, that he might dispose of her hand. The emperor consented, and the general then solicited a further favour. Paul was in one of his kindly moods, and showed himself disposed to grant it. The general told him that Foedor had disappeared for two months; that everyone, even his daughter, was ignorant of his whereabouts, and begged him to have inquiries made. The emperor immediately sent for the chief of police, and gave him the necessary orders.

Six weeks went by without any result. Vaninka, since the day when the letter came, was sadder and more melancholy than ever. Vainly from time to time the general tried to make her more hopeful. Vaninka only shook her head and withdrew. The general ceased to speak, of Foedor.

But it was not the same among the household. The young aide-de-camp had been popular with the servants, and, with the exception of Gregory, there was not a soul who wished him harm, so that, when it became known that he had not been sent on a mission, but had disappeared, the matter became the constant subject of conversation in the antechamber, the kitchen, and the stables. There was another place where people busied themselves about it a great deal—this was the Red House.

From the day when he heard of Foedor's mysterious departure Gregory had his suspicions. He was sure that he had seen Foedor enter Vaninka's room, and unless he had gone out while he was going to seek the general, he did not understand why the latter had not found him in his daughter's room. Another thing occupied his mind, which it seemed to him might perhaps have some connection with this event—the amount of money Ivan had been spending since that time, a very extraordinary amount for a slave. This slave, however, was the brother

of Vaninka's cherished foster-sister, so that, without being sure, Gregory already suspected the source from whence this money came. Another thing confirmed him in his suspicions, which was that Ivan, who had not only remained his most faithful friend, but had become one of his best customers, never spoke of Foe-dor, held his tongue if he were mentioned in his presence, and to all questions, however pressing they were, made but one answer: "Let us speak of something else."

In the meantime the Feast of Kings arrived. This is a great day in St. Petersburg, for it is also the day for blessing the waters.

As Vaninka had been present at the ceremony, and was fatigued after standing for two hours on the Neva, the general did not go out that evening, and gave Ivan leave to do so. Ivan profited by the permission to go to the Red House.

There was a numerous company there, and Ivan was welcomed; for it was known that he generally came with full pockets. This time he did not belie his reputation, and had scarcely arrived before he made the sorok-kopecs ring, to the great envy of his companions.

At this warning sound Gregory hastened up with all possible deference, a bottle of brandy in each hand; for he knew that when Ivan summoned him he gained in two ways, as innkeeper and as boon companion. Ivan did not disappoint these hopes, and Gregory was invited to share in the entertainment. The conversation turned on slavery, and some of the unhappy men, who had only four days in the year of respite from their eternal labour, talked loudly of the happiness Gregory had enjoyed since he had obtained his freedom.

"Bah!" said Ivan, on whom the brandy had begun to take effect, "there are some slaves who are freer than their masters."

"What do you mean?" said Gregory, pouring him out another glass of brandy.

"I meant to say happier," said Ivan quickly.

"It is difficult to prove that," said Gregory doubtfully.

"Why difficult? Our masters, the moment they are born, are put into the hands of two or three pedants, one French, another German, and a third English, and whether they like them or not, they must be content with their society till they are seventeen, and whether they wish to or not, must learn three barbarous languages, at the expense of our noble Russian tongue, which they have sometimes completely forgotten by the time the others are acquired. Again, if one of them wishes for some career, he must become a soldier: if he is a sublieutenant, he is the slave of the lieutenant; if he is a lieutenant, he is the slave of the captain, and the captain of the major, and so on up to the emperor, who is nobody's slave, but who one fine day is surprised at the table, while walking, or in his bed, and is poisoned, stabbed, or strangled. If he chooses a civil career, it is much the same.



He marries a wife, and does not love her; children come to him he knows not how, whom he has to provide for; he must struggle incessantly to provide for his family if he is poor, and if he is rich to prevent himself being robbed by his steward and cheated by his tenants. Is this life? While we, gentlemen, we are born, and that is the only pain we cost our mothers—all the rest is the master's concern. He provides for us, he chooses our calling, always easy enough to learn if we are not quite idiots. Are we ill? His doctor attends us gratis; it is a loss to him if we die. Are we well? We have our four certain meals a day, and a good stove to sleep near at night. Do we fall in love? There is never any hindrance to our marriage, if the woman loves us; the master himself asks us to hasten our marriage, for he wishes us to have as many children as possible. And when the children are born, he does for them in their turn all he has done for us. Can you find me many great lords as happy as their slaves?"

"All this is true," said Gregory, pouring him out another glass of brandy; "but, after all, you are not free."

"Free to do what?" asked Ivan.

"Free to go where you will and when you will."

"I am as free as the air," replied Ivan.

"Nonsense!" said Gregory.

"Free as air, I tell you; for I have good masters, and above all a good mistress," continued Ivan, with a significant smile, "and I have only to ask and it is done."

"What! if after having got drunk here to-day, you asked to come back to-morrow to get drunk again?" said Gregory, who in his challenge to Ivan did not forget his own interests,—"if you asked that?"

"I should come back again," said Ivan.

"To-morrow?" said Gregory.

"To-morrow, the day after, every day if I liked..."

"The fact is, Ivan is our young lady's favourite," said another of the count's slaves who was present, profiting by his comrade Ivan's liberality.

"It is all the same," said Gregory; "for supposing such permission were given you, money would soon run short."

"Never!" said Ivan, swallowing another glass of brandy, "never will Ivan want for money as long as there is a kopeck in my lady's purse."

"I did not find her so liberal," said Gregory bitterly.

"Oh, you forget, my friend; you know well she does not reckon with her friends: remember the strokes of the knout."

"I have no wish to speak about that," said Gregory. "I know that she is generous with blows, but her money is another thing. I have never seen the colour of that."

“Well, would you like to see the colour of mine?” said Ivan, getting more and more drunk. “See here, here are kopecks, sorok-kopecks, blue notes worth five roubles, red notes worth twenty five roubles, and to-morrow, if you like, I will show you white notes worth fifty roubles. A health to my lady Vaninka!” And Ivan held out his glass again, and Gregory filled it to the brim.

“But does money,” said Gregory, pressing Ivan more and more,—“does money make up for scorn?”

“Scorn!” said Ivan,—“scorn! Who scorns me? Do you, because you are free? Fine freedom! I would rather be a well-fed slave than a free man dying of hunger.”

“I mean the scorn of our masters,” replied Gregory.

“The scorn of our masters! Ask Alexis, ask Daniel there, if my lady scorns me.”

“The fact is,” said the two slaves in reply, who both belonged to the general’s household, “Ivan must certainly have a charm; for everyone talks to him as if to a master.”

“Because he is Annouschka’s brother,” said Gregory, “and Annouschka is my lady’s foster-sister.”

“That may be so,” said the two slaves.

“For that reason or for some other,” said Ivan; “but, in short, that is the case.”

“Yes; but if your sister should die?” said Gregory. “Ah!”

“If my sister should die, that would be a pity, for she is a good girl. I drink to her health! But if she should die, that would make no difference. I am respected for myself; they respect me because they fear me.”

“Fear my lord Ivan!” said Gregory, with a loud laugh. “It follows, then, that if my lord Ivan were tired of receiving orders, and gave them in his turn, my lord Ivan would be obeyed.”

“Perhaps,” said Ivan.

“He said ‘perhaps,’ repeated Gregory,” laughing louder than ever,—“he said ‘perhaps.’ Did you hear him?”

“Yes,” said the slaves, who had drunk so much that they could only answer in monosyllables.

“Well, I no longer say ‘perhaps,’ I now say ‘for certain.’”

“Oh, I should like to see that,” said Gregory; “I would give something to see that.”

“Well, send away these fellows, who are getting drunk like pigs, and for nothing, you will find.”

“For nothing?” said Gregory. “You are jesting. Do you think I should give them drink for nothing?”

“Well, we shall see. How much would be their score, for your atrocious brandy, if they drank from now till midnight, when you are obliged to shut up your tavern?”

“Not less than twenty roubles.”

“Here are thirty; turn there out, and let us remain by ourselves.”

“Friends,” said Gregory, taking out his watch as if to look at the time, “it is just upon midnight; you know the governor’s orders, so you must go.” The men, habituated like all Russians to passive obedience, went without a murmur, and Gregory found himself alone with Ivan and the two other slaves of the general.

“Well, here we are alone,” said Gregory. “What do you mean to do?”

“Well, what would you say,” replied Ivan, “if in spite of the late hour and the cold, and in spite of the fact that we are only slaves, my lady were to leave her father’s house and come to drink our healths?”

“I would say that you ought to take advantage of it,” said Gregory, shrugging his shoulders, “and tell her to bring at the same time a bottle of brandy. There is probably better brandy in the general’s cellar than in mine.”

“There is better,” said Ivan, as if he was perfectly sure of it, “and my lady shall bring you a bottle of it.”

“You are mad!” said Gregory.

“He is mad!” repeated the other two slaves mechanically.

“Oh, I am mad?” said Ivan. “Well, will you take a wager?”

“What will you wager?”

“Two hundred roubles against a year of free drinking in your inn.”

“Done!” said Gregory.

“Are your comrades included?” said the two moujiks.

“They are included,” said Ivan, “and in consideration of them we will reduce the time to six months. Is that agreed?”

“It is agreed,” said Gregory.

The two who were making the wager shook hands, and the agreement was perfected. Then, with an air of confidence, assumed to confound the witnesses of this strange scene, Ivan wrapped himself in the fur coat which, like a cautious man, he had spread on the stove, and went out.

At the end of half an hour he reappeared.

“Well!” cried Gregory and the two slaves together.

“She is following,” said Ivan.

The three tipplers looked at one another in amazement, but Ivan quietly returned to his place in the middle of them, poured out a new bumper, and raising his glass, cried—

“To my lady’s health! It is the least we can do when she is kind enough to come and join us on so cold a night, when the snow is falling fast.”

“Annouschka,” said a voice outside, “knock at this door and ask Gregory if he has not some of our servants with him.”

Gregory and the two other slaves looked at one another, stupefied: they had recognised Vaninka’s voice. As for Ivan, he flung himself back in his chair, balancing himself with marvellous impertinence.

Annouschka opened the door, and they could see, as Ivan had said, that the snow was falling heavily.

“Yes, madam,” said the girl; “my brother is there, with Daniel and Alexis.”

Vaninka entered.

“My friends,” said she, with a strange smile, “I am told that you were drinking my health, and I have come to bring you something to drink it again. Here is a bottle of old French brandy which I have chosen for you from my father’s cellar. Hold out your glasses.”

Gregory and the slaves obeyed with the slowness and hesitation of astonishment, while Ivan held out his glass with the utmost effrontery.

Vaninka filled them to the brim herself, and then, as they hesitated to drink, “Come, drink to my health, friends,” said she.

“Hurrah!” cried the drinkers, reassured by the kind and familiar tone of their noble visitor, as they emptied their glasses at a draught.

Vaninka at once poured them out another glass; then putting the bottle on the table, “Empty the bottle, my friends,” said she, “and do not trouble about me. Annouschka and I, with the permission 2668 of the master of the house, will sit near the stove till the storm is over.”

Gregory tried to rise and place stools near the stove, but whether he was quite drunk or whether some narcotic had been mixed with the brandy, he fell back on his seat, trying to stammer out an excuse.

“It is all right,” said Vaninka: “do not disturb yourselves; drink, my friends, drink.”

The revellers profited by this permission, and each emptied the glass before him. Scarcely had Gregory emptied his before he fell forward on the table.

“Good!” said Vaninka to her maid in a low voice: “the opium is taking effect.”

“What do you mean to do?” said Annouschka.

“You will soon see,” was the answer.

The two moujiks followed the example of the master of the house, and fell down side by side on the ground. Ivan was left struggling against sleep, and trying to sing a drinking song; but soon his tongue refused to obey him, his eyes closed in spite of him, and seeking the tune that escaped him, and muttering words he was unable to pronounce, he fell fast asleep near his companions.

Immediately Vaninka rose, fixed them with flashing eyes, and called them by name one after another. There was no response.

Then she clapped her hands and cried joyfully, "The moment has come!" Going to the back of the room, she brought thence an armful of straw, placed it in a corner of the room, and did the same in the other corners. She then took a flaming brand from the stove and set fire in succession to the four corners of the room.

"What are you doing?" said Annouschka, wild with terror, trying to stop her.

"I am going to bury our secret in the ashes of this house," answered Vaninka.

"But my brother, my poor brother!" said the girl.

"Your brother is a wretch who has betrayed me, and we are lost if we do not destroy him."

"Oh, my brother, my poor brother!"

"You can die with him if you like," said Vaninka, accompanying the proposal with a smile which showed she would not have been sorry if Annouschka had carried sisterly affection to that length.

"But look at the fire, madam—the fire!"

"Let us go, then," said Vaninka; and, dragging out the heart-broken girl, she locked the door behind her and threw the key far away into the snow.

"In the name of Heaven," said Annouschka, "let us go home quickly: I cannot gaze upon this awful sight!"

"No, let us stay here!" said Vaninka, holding her back with a grasp of almost masculine strength. "Let us stay until the house falls in on them, so that we may be certain that not one of them escapes."

"Oh, my God!" cried Annouschka, falling on her knees, "have mercy upon my poor brother, for death will hurry him unprepared into Thy presence."

"Yes, yes, pray; that is right," said Vaninka. "I wish to destroy their bodies, not their souls."

Vaninka stood motionless, her arms crossed, brilliantly lit up by the flames, while her attendant prayed. The fire did not last long: the house was wooden, with the crevices filled with oakum, like all those of Russian peasants, so that the flames, creeping out at the four corners, soon made great headway, and, fanned by the wind, spread rapidly to all parts of the building. Vaninka followed the progress of the fire with blazing eyes, fearing to see some half-burnt spectral shape rush out of the flames. At last the roof fell in, and Vaninka, relieved of all fear, then at last made her way to the general's house, into which the two women entered without being seen, thanks to the permission Annouschka had to go out at any hour of the day or night.

The next morning the sole topic of conversation in St. Petersburg was the fire at the Red House. Four half-consumed corpses were dug out from beneath the ruins, and as three of the general's slaves were missing, he had no doubt that the unrecognisable bodies were those of Ivan, Daniel, and Alexis: as for the fourth, it was certainly that of Gregory.

The cause of the fire remained a secret from everyone: the house was solitary, and the snowstorm so violent that nobody had met the two women on the deserted road. Vaninka was sure of her maid. Her secret then had perished with Ivan. But now remorse took the place of fear: the young girl who was so pitiless and inflexible in the execution of the deed quailed at its remembrance. It seemed to her that by revealing the secret of her crime to a priest, she would be relieved of her terrible burden. She therefore sought a confessor renowned for his lofty charity, and, under the seal of confession, told him all. The priest was horrified by the story. Divine mercy is boundless, but human forgiveness has its limits. He refused Vaninka the absolution she asked. This refusal was terrible: it would banish Vaninka from the Holy Table; this banishment would be noticed, and could not fail to be attributed to some unheard-of and secret crime. Vaninka fell at the feet of the priest, and in the name of her father, who would be disgraced by her shame, begged him to mitigate the rigour of this sentence.

The confessor reflected deeply, then thought he had found a way to obviate such consequences. It was that Vaninka should approach the Holy Table with the other young girls; the priest would stop before her as before all the others, but only say to her, "Pray and weep"; the congregation, deceived by this, would think that she had received the Sacrament like her companions. This was all that Vaninka could obtain.

This confession took place about seven o'clock in the evening, and the solitude of the church, added to the darkness of night, had given it a still more awful character. The confessor returned home, pale and trembling. His wife Elizabeth was waiting for him alone. She had just put her little daughter Arina, who was eight years old, to bed in an adjoining room. When she saw her husband, she uttered a cry of terror, so changed and haggard was his appearance. The confessor tried to reassure her, but his trembling voice only increased her alarm. She asked the cause of his agitation; the confessor refused to tell her. Elizabeth had heard the evening before that her mother was ill; she thought that her husband had received some bad news. The day was Monday, which is considered an unlucky day among the Russians, and, going out that day, Elizabeth had met a man in mourning; these omens were too numerous and too strong not to portend misfortune.

Elizabeth burst into tears, and cried out, "My mother is dead!"

The priest in vain tried to reassure her by telling her that his agitation was not due to that. The poor woman, dominated by one idea, made no response to his protestations but this everlasting cry, "My mother is dead!"

Then, to bring her to reason, the confessor told her that his emotion was due to the avowal of a crime which he had just heard in the confessional. But Elizabeth shook her head: it was a trick, she said, to hide from her the sorrow which had fallen upon her. Her agony, instead of calming, became more violent; her tears ceased to flow, and were followed by hysterics. The priest then made her swear to keep the secret, and the sanctity of the confession was betrayed.

Little Arina had awakened at Elizabeth's cries, and being disturbed and at the same time curious as to what her parents were doing, she got up, went to listen at the door, and heard all.

The day for the Communion came; the church of St. Simeon was crowded. Vaninka came to kneel at the railing of the choir. Behind her was her father and his aides-de-camp, and behind them their servants.

Arina was also in the church with her mother. The inquisitive child wished to see Vaninka, whose name she had heard pronounced that terrible night, when her father had failed in the first and most sacred of the duties imposed on a priest. While her mother was praying, she left her chair and glided among the worshippers, nearly as far as the railing.

But when she had arrived there, she was stopped by the group of the general's servants. But Arina had not come so far to be, stopped so easily: she tried to push between them, but they opposed her; she persisted, and one of them pushed her roughly back. The child fell, struck her head against a seat, and got up bleeding and crying, "You are very proud for a slave. Is it because you belong to the great lady who burnt the Red House?"

These words, uttered in a loud voice, in the midst of the silence which preceded, the sacred ceremony, were heard by everyone. They were answered by a shriek. Vaninka had fainted. The next day the general, at the feet of Paul, recounted to him, as his sovereign and judge, the whole terrible story, which Vaninka, crushed by her long struggle, had at last revealed to him, at night, after the scene in the church.

The emperor remained for a moment in thought at the end of this strange confession; then, getting up from the chair where he had been sitting while the miserable father told his story, he went to a bureau, and wrote on a sheet of paper the following sentence:

"The priest having violated what should have been inviolable, the secrets of the confessional, is exiled to Siberia and deprived of his priestly office. His wife will follow him: she is to be blamed for not having respected his character as a minister of the altar. The little girl will not leave her parents.

“Annouschka, the attendant, will also go to Siberia for not having made known to her master his daughter’s conduct.

“I preserve all my esteem for the general, and I mourn with him for the deadly blow which has struck him.

“As for Vaninka, I know of no punishment which can be inflicted upon her. I only see in her the daughter of a brave soldier, whose whole life has been devoted to the service of his country. Besides, the extraordinary way in which the crime was discovered, seems to place the culprit beyond the limits of my severity. I leave her punishment in her own hands. If I understand her character, if any feeling of dignity remains to her, her heart and her remorse will show her the path she ought to follow.”

Paul handed the paper open to the general, ordering him to take it to Count Pahlen, the governor of St. Petersburg.

On the following day the emperor’s orders were carried out.

Vaninka went into a convent, where towards the end of the same year she died of shame and grief.

The general found the death he sought on the field of Austerlitz.



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\*\*\* END OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK VANINKA \*\*\*



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