A CRIMINAL CASE IN RUSSIA.

It is now more that twenty years ago, that a Jew named Abraham, the son of Abraham, made his appearance one day in November at the office of Captain Ispravnitz, the head of the police in the district of Radomyset, in the province of Kiev. This Abraham, the son of Abraham, was a tavern-keeper, and, in fact, had the post-house at the little village of Semenowe-Lozy under his management. Like all other Jews, not only in Russia but elsewhere, he was strongly averse to any regular agricultural pursuits, and consequently, in a country agricultural *par excellence*, was driven to the alternative of eking out his pittance in life by retailing spirits, jobbing horses, and making as much as he could of whomsoever the ill destiny of thirst, or hunger, or fatigue might lead to his wayside house.

When, therefore, Abraham, the son of Abraham, deposed before the head of police that Francis Salezy Krynezloft, lord-proprietor of the village of Semenowe-Lozy, a rich and respectable man, was an impostor who bore a false name, and had acquired his wealth and station by the most complicated system of roguery, the head of police gave evident signs of incredulity. He observed, at the same time, that an accusation of so serious an nature required the most irrefragable proof; and that the peril was great, which he Abraham, the son of Abraham, incurred in thus attacking a powerful and wealthy individual, who enjoyed the reputation of civic virtue and christian charity. But Abraham, the son of Abraham, persisted, and gave substance to his accusation by the following recital:—

'In the year 1800, there lived at Mozir a poor gentleman, who was a widower, and had two sons—Francis Salezy Krynszloft, and Joachim Krynszloft. Being without any means of existence, the three took service under Major Fogel, receiver of the taxes at Mozir. The father died at that town on the 26th of May 1802, as can be proved from the public register of deaths. The elder son, Francis, entered the military service of Russia, became captain in the regiment of dragoons of the Zver, and was killed at the battle of Borodino in 1812. An official communication of this glorious death was made to the authorities of Mozir. As to the younger son, Joachim—accused in 1814 of having poisoned the Countess Sero-Komoleska, and, moreover, of having drowned the young Count Edmund Sero-Komoleska, grand-nephew of that lady—he was thrown into the prison-fortress, and arraigned before the criminal court. But in the course of his trial, he died suddenly at Mozir, on the 13th of November 1819.

'You see, your honour,' added the Jew, 'that there can no longer be a family of the name of Krynsloft: 'tis a dead race. Consequently, the actual proprietor of Semenowe-Lozy is either a spirit or an impostor.'

Struck with the logic of this argument, and with the warmth with which Abraham, the son of Abraham, concluded his deposition, and half persuaded by the appearance of sincerity which pervaded the general tone and language of his informant, Captain Ispravnitz bethought him, that the affair might be worth investigating, and despatched an officer to Semenowe-Lozy to commence the research.

To this officer, the lord-proprietor shewed his family documents, and, among others, the register of his birth, with the name of Francis Salezy Krynszloft upon it, born at Mozir the 22d of September 1777. This date exactly tallied with the age which the captain of dragoons, who was killed at Borodino, would, if still living, have attained. But in spite of the coincidence, the officer thought it is his duty to conduct the lord-proprietor to Radomyset, where he was thrown into prison, and made the subject of an indictment.

The fact of a wealthy landowner being suddenly torn from his home, incarcerated in the public jail, and threatened with a inquisition which should prove him an impostor, both in rank and title, was sufficient to arouse the attention of the public. No one could imagine what possible cause the feigned Francis Salezy Krynszloft could have had for assuming an extinct name, that had *even no connection with the property*. With the most minute precision were the facts of the case entered into by the authorities. More than three hundred witnesses were heard, and more than two hundred registers, civil and military, examined. Officers and soldiers who had served with the real Francis Salezy Krynszloft were brought from the army of the Caucasus, and even from the distant garrisons of Siberia, to prove his death at the battle of Borodino.

On all sides, the proofs of the death of the two brothers Krynszloft seemed established beyond a doubt. The lord-proprietor was therefore an impostor, and, as such, must be exposed before the public tribunal of justice, and punished according to his deserts.

Pressed on all sides by the evidence of these facts, the pretended Simon Pure at last made a full confession. He admitted that he was not entitled to the name he bore: but that he *was* entitled to that of Joachim Krynszloft, who was supposed to have died in prison in the year 1819, he firmly asseverated; and this view of the question he confirmed by the following recital:—

'After the death of my father, I was in the service of Major Fogel. The major took kindly to me, and I soon became his secretary, his confidential servant, but never his confidant. I fulfilled to the letter all the orders he gave me; but I knew nothing of his projects and designs.

At that time there lived at Mozir a very rich widow, the Countess Sero-Komoleska. She had no children; and every one supposed she had left all her property to the Father Capuchins of Mozir. It was even added, that a will to that effect had been executed by her; and people went so far as to name some of the most distinguished persons in the town as witnesses of her last dispositions. Rumour said, that the will was contained in a little box, which the countess always kept under her pillow.

Major Fogel contracted a lively friendship with the countess, and visited her house daily. This friendship grew into absolute confidence on the part of the lady; and to the great annoyance of the Capuchins, she finally abandoned to the major the management of all her affairs and property. With the countess lived a young orphan of great beauty: her name was Julia Krynewieska. At first sight, I fell desperately in love with her, and was happy in meeting with an equal return of tenderness; but the countess was opposed to a marriage, and said that Julia was too young to think of settling in life.

One day the major brought the countess some bottles of Tokay, which he represented as more than a hundred years old. The countess tasted it, and found it excellent. 'Then don't give any away,' said Major Fogel; 'but keep it all for yourself. Each of these bottles is a treasure; and I hope you will not give a drop to anybody—not even to Julia,' added he smiling.

The countess followed his advice only two strictly. She got into the habit of taking every day, after her dinner, one glass of this exquisite wine; but from that moment she became, an invalid, and her health habitually so excellent, declined day by day, till at last she was forced to keep her bed. The major passed whole nights by her side, in rivalry with the Capuchins. Julia, who is now my wife, has told me, that one night when the sick lady had dozed off, and the attendant monk had also subsided into a profound sleep Major Fogel gently raised the countess's pillow, took the little box which was under it, and abstracting a large paper, put in its place one of equal size; then replaced all things in their former state. In less than half an hour after, the countess awoke, and the major hastened to give her the medicine which the surgeon Isailoff had prescribed the evening before. But scarcely had the countess taken the draught, ere she was seized with convulsions, and gave up the ghost in horrible agony.

I do not know whether Major Fogel suspected Julia of having witnessed, from the little side-chamber in which she slept, the evil action which he had committed; but he said, as though to pacify the grief with which the orphan gazed on the dead body of her benefactress: 'I take upon me to marry you to Joachim, and to give you a marriage-portion.'

When the decease of the Countess Sero-Komoleska had been legally verified, the little box containing her will was opened. But to the great astonishment of every one, and particularly of the monks, the will—signed by the countess, and witnessed by four Russian functionaries of Mozir—made a general bequest of all the property of the deceased to Major Fogel, on condition that if, within three years, any heir to the countess should be found, all the subject-matter of her will should go to that heir, with the exception of one-fourth part, which should belong to Major Fogel. The property of the countess was valued at two thousand roubles.

Five months had scarcely elapsed since the death of the countess, when there arrived at Mozir the young Count Edmund Sero-Komoleska, grand-nephew of the deceased. The right of this young man to the succession was a secret to no one and Major Fogel knew it as well as we. He received the last and only heir of the countess with a great demonstration of friendship; nay, his kindness was all but paternal. He welcomed him to his own house, surrounded him with the most delicate and continued solicitude, and provided him with affectionate attention everything his guest desired.

Unfortunately, the young Count Edmund in quitting Cracow, where he usually lived, had forgotten the certificate of the death of his father and mother, thinking that the titles and other documents he had brought with him would more than suffice to prove his identity. Major Fogel pointed out to him this deficiency in the family papers, but added at the same time: 'As to myself, my dear friend, I am convinced that you are really and truly the legitimate heir of the Countess Sero-Komoleska, but law requires great formalities, and it is necessary for *us* to submit to them.' The count at once admitted the justice of this remark; and a confidential servant was sent to Cracow to find the documents, without which the affair could not be brought to a termination.

During the time which was absolutely necessary for the accomplishment of the messenger's journey, the major sought all possible means of amusing Count Edmund. I was his daily companion. Once when we were going out shooting, the major gave me a fowling-piece, and said: 'Load it well, for Count Edmund will use it.' I loaded it as you usually do a fowling-piece, and yet the barrel burst at the first fire, and the count received a contusion on his cheek and his arm. Fortunately, the wounds were not serious, and the cure was speedy.

On another occasion, the major bought a horse for the count—a horse which appeared very docile. The major had it saddled with his own saddle, and shewed me himself that every part of the horse-gear was in perfect order. He then bade me accompany the count, who wished to take a ride into the country. But scarcely had we got beyond the walls of the town, when the horse, which had appeared so docile, began to kick and rear; the saddle-girths broke, and the count, although a good horseman, fell and dislocated his arm. He might have been killed, for the road was scattered over with pieces of rock and pointed stones. Again, however, the count escaped with a few bleedings and a little forced reposed. Still I thought there was nothing but fatality in all this. Said I to myself: 'There are persons who cannot change countries, without exposing themselves to perils and tribulations of all kinds. Count Edmund is one of that sort.'

[Let me here interrupt the narrative of my deponent by remarking, that there is a general belief in Russia to the effect, that certain persons cannot change their country, nor even their dwelling place, without incurring misfortune, sickness, or death. And this belief attaches the Russian peasantry more strongly to locality, than any other agricultural population in Europe.]

But suddenly a circumstance occured which tore the veil from my eyes. One day the major, taking me aside, informed me in a mysterious manner, that the count was making love to Julia, and intended to seduce her. This deceitful communication did not give me the slightest uneasiness: I knew the honour and delicacy which distinguished Count Edmund, and I felt sure of the virtue of Julia. But the conduct of the major turned my suspicions upon him, and I sought to clear up certain doubts. I commenced by examining the gun which had burst in firing. It was still in the house, and I became convinced that holes had been designedly made in the barrel in several places. I also succeeded in ascertaining that the horse which all but killed the young count, had been bought with the perfect knowledge that in town it was docile; while in the open country it became fierce and uncontrollable, even in the hands of the most experienced grooms.

I would gladly have spoken out, but my servile condition prevented me from venturing. No one would have believed *me*: are men who have no social position ever believed! I was silent then both to the young count and the rest of my acquaintances.

We now went—the major, the count, and myself—to the country retirement of the deceased countess at Pynski, situated on the border of some huge marshes. Encouraged by the major, who never ceased telling us that we were young, and that pleasure ought to be our principal occupation, the count and myself often boated over the marshes in pursuit of ducks, which were very abundant there. I rowed, and the count shot. Nothing ever crossed the even tenor of our success, and I began to think, that the fatality which hovered over the count's head was entirely gone. Even the result of my examination with regard to the burst barrel and the vicious horse was gradually effaced from my memory, and I no longer harboured a shadow of suspicion.

One day, the major invited Count Edmund to pay a visit to a nobleman whose chateau was on the other side of the marshes. 'You will see there,' said he, 'one of the most magnificent monuments of the middle ages. Besides this attraction, and the beauty of its situation, the manor-house, which I am sure you will admire, possesses one of the most complete libraries in Russia.' This was enough to fix the determination of the young count, and he acceded to the major's proposition. Unlike most men of his years, the young count loved study nearly as much as pleasure; and his knowledge of art and literature rendered interesting to him everything that bore the aspect of grandeur or antiquity.

In our passage over the marshes, it was agreed that we should have some sport among the wild ducks; but the major not caring for this amusement, said he would join us on the other side of the water.

The count and I took the same little boat we always used on our aquatic excursions. When in the middle of the marsh, our frail bark began filling with water. I saw the danger, and rowed hard for the shore. The count grew nervous—he could not swim. 'Do not stir, my lord,' I said; 'there is still hope!' He did not heed my counsel, threw himself about, and caused the boat to fill so quickly, that in a few minutes we were under water. 'Cling to the boat!' I cried; 'I am coming to you.' I tried to catch hold of him by the hair, but his terror prevented him from hearing me, and he struggled for the land. I soon saw him twenty or thirty strokes from me, battling with the waters: he appeared, and disappeared again: then finally sank to rise no more. With an effort, I gained the shore, and called for aid. Some fisherman arrived, swept the waters, and at the end of an hour brought me the corpse of the unfortunate young count.

I was stupified; scarcely comprehended the nature of the misfortune I had witnessed. The fishermen, less excited than myself, examined the boat, and to their great surprise, found that its keel was pierced in several places with a borer, and that the holes had been cleverly concealed by crumbs of black carrazin bread. A gardener who lived on the border of the marshes added, that he had seen the major at dawn of day inspect the fatal boat with the most minute attention.

Some one had gone in all haste to the major. He arrived. I then at length gave utterance, though in measured terms of indignation, to the suspicions which formerly beset me, and which now revived in consequence of the last and irreparable misfortune; but the major, unrestrained by the moderation of my language, assumed the appearance of despair, assailed me with a thousand curses and maledictions, and had me manacled like a criminal and sent to Pendiz: thence I was removed to Mozir, incarcerated, and treated in all respects as the murderer of the young Count Edmund Sero-Komoleska.

The inquiry proceeded. I was amazed at such audacity in wickedness—at such perversity of human nature. I declared my innocence, I invoked every means for my defence; but a deaf ear was turned to all my cries. I learned that I was to be condemned to the utmost severity of the knout. The thought that I, a gentleman's son, should perish in such a manner! it made me shudder. I beseeched, and at last the jailer gave me some paper, and pen and ink. I addressed a petition to the 'Marshal of Nobility' at Mozir. In this petition I exposed the whole affair in its hideous fidelity. The sympathising jailer, who began even himself to think me innocent, undertook to place my supplication in the proper hands. He succeeded, and three days after I learned that a fresh inquiry was to be set on foot.

One night when, with eyes dilated and brain heated with feverish excitement, I was grasping mentally at the hope of acquittal, the door of my dungeon opened, and my accuser appeared.

'Led by the attachment which I formerly felt for you,' said he in a muffled voice, 'I come to save you.'

'Save me!' I exclaimed; 'it is very late.'

'There is still time,' rejoined the major; 'but the moments are precious—you must not lose them in vain words. Again, I wish to spare you an infamous punishment and the tortures of the knout. Are you willing?'

'Am I willing! O say, say!' cried I, forgetting, in the invincible love of life which attaches to human nature, that I had before me the author of all my misfortunes, and that I was about to owe life, honour, liberty, to—a murderer!

The major then told me I must feign sickness, and afterwards death. 'On your resurrection,' added he, 'you must take the name of your elder brother, he who was killed at the battle of Borodino.'

'That will be an imposture,' said I.

'No, no!' answered the major. 'Will it not, after all, be the name of your father and your family?' The play enacted—and it only depends on you whether you enact it well or not—your brother's name assumed, I will provide for your fortune, and, believe me, it will not be a bad one.

There is an old proverb which says: 'A drowning man will catch at the edge of a razor!' I was that man. I consented to everything. I complained, I feigned sickness. A doctor was called in, who, smiling, ordered me some potions. I asked for a priest; he came to confess me, and declared, as also did the doctor, that I was in great danger. The doctor, the priest, the jailer, were all in the secret. In short, they did not long leave me to counterfeit death before they put me in my coffin, and carried me to a chapel, whence the major delivered me in the night-time. Next day, I had the pleasure of beholding, from Major Fogel's window, my own burial performed with the usual funeral ceremonies.

'There you are, free at last,' said the major, embracing me; 'but I have still my promise to fulfil.' Singular mystery of the human heart! that man, whose cupidity had twice led him to commit murder, wept as he pressed me to his bosom.

The following day, the major gave me fifty thousand rubles, and married me to Julia, the ward of the deceased countess. A week after, I set out with my wife for Bessarabia, where I lived several years. Having learned the death of Major Fogel, I could not resist the desire of revisiting the home of my childhood. I returned to the district of Radomyset, and bought some domains, whereon I intended to end my days.

Such was the deposition of the accused. It was duly signed by the deponent, who swore, with the usual ceremonies, that he had therein told the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Julia, the wife, confirmed the statements of her husband. By a piece of good luck, the gardener who had seen Major Fogel at the boat on the morning of the day on which Count Edmund was drowned, still survived, and was met with at Pendiz; and the retired officer who had sold the vicious horse to the major, also lived to give his share of evidence.

The four functionaries who had witnessed the substituted will of the countess, had been transported to Siberia for robbing the imperial treasury. It was unknown whether they were dead, or still living at Tobolsk, the capital of Siberia; but from the nature of their characters, it was not supposed that their testimony would be of much value.

The lord-proprietor of the Semenowe-Lozy was acquitted, with an injunction that he should resume his old name of Joachim, and was completely re-established in his goods, honours, and dignities.