

## QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY.

Beloved Sovereign! Most Gracious Queen,  
We, thy devoted subjects in this distant land,  
To God do pray  
That ever, as on this thy Natal Day!  
He would his choicest gifts still pour  
Around thy life! granting thee hour by hour  
Token of His great love for thee.  
Thou art His own!  
Thy spirit bows submission at His Throne,  
While thou o'er thy great nation rulest all alone.  
Like Solomon, thou art endowed with wisdom from on High;  
Riches and honors too are thine, and yet thou art not proud.  
Nor lifted up thine own power to boast.  
But ever lookest to the Lord as leader of thy host.  
So thy victorious armies nobly onward move,  
Guided by Him, whose name alone is Love.  
Long mayest thou live o'er loyal hearts to reign!  
And may the blessing of the Lord—thy power and might sustain.  
And when, in life's far distant time  
Thy days shall near their close,  
Oh! may that loving heart of thine  
On memories sweet repose,  
As when the sun's reluctant orb  
Sinks in the golden west,  
And o'er the hills a rosy hue  
Comes from his bed of rest,  
So, may the evening of thy days  
In Heaven-like peace be passed,  
And glorious tints of well-spent hours,  
Around thy life be cast!

## THE RUSSIAN PRIEST'S SON.

In the June number of the *Lippincott's Magazine* occurs this fine story. About twenty years ago I was visiting my aunt's many estates while acting as her agent. The different village priests whose acquaintance I thought it my duty to make, seemed to be a monotonous set of men, all cut on the same pattern. But finally, in the last village I had to inspect, I came across a priest who was very unlike his colleagues. He was a very old man, almost decrepit, and had it not been for the urgent entreaties of his parishioners, who loved and respected him very much—a rare thing in Russia—he would long before have resigned.

Two things struck me in Father Alexis, for that was this priest's name: in the first place, he not only asked nothing for himself, but told me at once that he really needed nothing; and secondly, I do not remember ever having seen on a human face a sadder expression, one more completely detached from outside matters: it was what is called an expression of living death. His features were uninteresting and of the rustic type: his forehead was wrinkled; he had little gray eyes, a large nose, a pointed beard; his skin was red and weather-beaten. But the expression! In its dull indifference there lingered but a vague, sad trace of life. And his voice was dull and heavy.

I fell ill, and was obliged to keep my bed for some days. Father Alexis came to see me every evening—not to talk, but to play *douraki* with me. He appeared to take more pleasure in the game than I did. Once, when he had just beaten me several times in succession, I turned the conversation to his past life and the griefs of which traces were so manifest. Father Alexis did not comply at once with my wish, but at last he told me his story. I must have pleased him in some way or other, for certainly he would not have been so open with every one.

I shall try to give you the very words he used. Father Alexis talked very simply, clearly and logically, without any of the pompous expressions one hears at the seminaries and in the provinces. I have often noticed that those Russians who have had a hard experience of life, and become resigned to everything, use very simple forms of speech, whatever their social condition may be.

Father Alexis began: "I had a good, sensible wife. I loved her with my whole heart, and she bore me eight children, but they almost all died in infancy. One of my sons became an archbishop; he died not long since in his diocese. My other son, James—I am going to tell you about him.

I put him in the seminary of the city of T—. Soon I began to hear the most favourable reports about him: he was first in every class. While a little boy at home he was noted for his diligence and quiet, never uttering a word all day, but sitting quietly reading a book. He never gave either his mother or me the slightest uneasiness. He was a good little fellow; only sometimes he had strange dreams, and his health was very delicate.

Once a singular thing happened. He was just ten years old. He went out from the house at daybreak on the vigil of St. Peter, and stayed out all the morning. At last he came back. My wife and I asked him where he had been.

"I went out to walk in the woods," he said, "and I met a little green old man who talked a good deal with me, and gave me some little nuts which are very good to eat."

"Who was the little green old man?"  
"I don't know," he said: "I never saw him before. A very little old man, with a hunch on his back, who sprang about and laughed all the time. He was green—as green as the leaves."

"What! was his face green too?"  
"Face, hair and eyes."

Our son had never told a lie, but at this his mother and I began to have our doubts.

"You fell asleep in the woods, the sun shone on your face, and you dreamed about the old man."

"I did not fall asleep; and besides, since you don't believe me, here is one of the little

nuts which was left in my pocket." And with these words James drew the nut from his pocket and showed it to us. It was round, like a chestnut, but downy, and unlike ordinary nuts. I took it to show it to the doctor, but afterward I could never find it.

Then we sent our boy to the seminary, as I have already told you, and he delighted us by his success. We often said, my wife and I, that he would become a great man. It was a pleasure to see him when he came home for vacation, he was so pretty and well behaved, and kind to everybody, so that everybody praised him to us. Only his body remained very weak, and he seldom had a good healthy color. When he had entered his nineteenth year, and had nearly finished his studies, suddenly we received a letter from him. It was thus he wrote to us: "Do not be angry with me, my parents. Give me leave to enter a secular life. My heart is opposed to spiritual duties; I dread the responsibility; I am afraid of sin; doubts have risen within me. Without your consent, without your blessing, I shall not make a decision: I am afraid of myself, because I have begun to think."

Oh, what pain the letter gave me, my good sir! It showed me that I should have no successor to my office. My eldest son was a monk and this one wanted to abandon a spiritual life. This news was the more cruel to me because for two centuries all the priests of our parish had belonged to my family. Nevertheless, I said to myself, "Why knock my head against a stone wall? His destiny controls him. What sort of a shepherd of souls would he be who had doubts?"

I consulted my wife, and wrote to my son to this effect: "Oh, my dear James, reflect well: consider this step carefully before you take it. The difficulties and troubles of a secular life are great—cold, hunger and the contempt that is felt for the sons of priests. Be warned of this in good time, and know that no one will hold out to you a succoring hand. Do not expose yourself to the risk of regretting later what you will have no chance of taking up again. But if you have doubts about your calling, and your faith is really shaken, I must not compel you. God's will be done! Your mother and I do not refuse you our blessing."

James answered at once with a grateful letter: "You have filled me with joy, father, and I intend to devote myself to professional studies. I have friends, and I shall enter the university. I shall take a degree there, for I feel a grand interest in scientific studies." I read this letter of his, and was only made sadder by it. And soon I had no one with whom to share my grief, for my poor wife about this time took a cold and died. Was it on account of this cold, or from pity for her that God took her from this world? How often I had burst into tears, widower as I was, and quite alone! Yet what was to be done? Such was my fate, and at the same time I was expecting my son, for he had promised me a visit before his departure for Moscow. Indeed, he came home soon, but he did not stay long. Something seemed to be weighing upon him: he appeared to long for wings to fly more quickly to the university. I questioned him about his doubts, but got only vague answers. He had but one thought in his head.

When he left for the university he took hardly a penny with him, only a few clothes. He had great confidence in himself, and naturally. He passed the entrance examination very well, was matriculated, and arranged to give lessons in private houses, for he was very strong in the ancient languages. Would you believe it? He even sent me money. I was gratified not on account of the money, which I sent back to him with a scolding letter, but because I saw he would make his way. Alas! my joy was of brief duration.

He came home for the first vacation, and, strange to say, I did not recognise my James. He had become so sad and taciturn that it was hard to get a word from him. He seemed ten years older. Formerly he was timid, and at the slightest provocation he blushed like a girl, but when he raised his eyes one saw how clear his mind was. But now it was timidity no longer, but a sort of wolfish savageness that he showed: he kept his eyes cast down. When I questioned either he was silent or he lost his temper. "Doesn't he drink?—Heaven help him!—or has he been gambling, or has he got into trouble about some woman?" At his age such temptations are strong, and in a large city like Moscow there is no lack of bad example and opportunity. And yet nothing of the sort was true of him; he drank nothing but small beer and water; he did not even look at women, and he did not associate with young men of his age.

What pained me most was that he lost his confidence in me; he showed absolute indifference, as if everything had become insipid to him. I tried to talk to him about his studies and the university, but even on these subjects he gave me no answer, or at least no satisfactory answer. Nevertheless, he went to church, though with a certain strangeness: everywhere else he was silent and savage, but when there a slight smile never left his lips. He lived at home in this fashion for six weeks; then he left for Moscow. He wrote me from there several times, and I fancied I saw the traces of better feelings in his letters. But imagine my amazement when suddenly in the dead of winter, a few days before Christmas, James appeared before me! Why? how? for I

knew very well there was no vacation at that season.

"You have come from Moscow?"

"From Moscow."

"And the university?"

"I left it."

"Left it?"

"Yes, I have."

"For good?"

"For good."

"James, are you ill?"

"No," said he, "I am not ill, but don't torment me with questions, or I shall go away from here, and you will have seen me for the last time."

James told me he was not ill, but his face frightened me. It was terrible, that face—gloomy, barely human. The hollow cheeks, the projecting cheekbones, nothing but skin and bone, his voice sounding as if it came from a barrel, and his eyes—merciful Heavens! what eyes they were!—threatening, sullen, restless, impossible to catch, and his eyebrows scowling till they met. And his lips were for ever twitching. Ah, what had become of my James, the innocent little fellow! Hasn't he lost his mind! I sometimes thought. He wandered about like a spectre, did not sleep at night, would suddenly look in a corner and grow rigid, so that your blood would run cold. He had threatened to leave the house if I didn't leave him alone, but after all I was his father. My last hope was shattered, and I was to keep silence! Oh no! So one day, having chosen my time well, I began to entreat my James with tears in the name of his departed mother: "James, tell me, as your actual and spiritual father, what ails you! Don't make me die. Tell me your secret; unburden your heart. Have you not injured some one? In that case confess it."

"Well, father," he burst out—and this conversation took place about midnight—"you have moved me: I am going to tell you all the truth. I have injured no one. My soul is perishing."

"How so?"

"I will tell you!" and then he raised his eyes to mine for the first time for four months.

"For four months—" he began. But at this point his voice failed him and he breathed uneasily.

"Four months, do you say? What else? Speak! do not keep me waiting."

"It is now four months that I keep seeing him."

"Him, whom?"

"I mean him whom one don't like to mention when it's growing dark."

I grew cold from head to foot and began to tremble. "What him?" I asked. "Do you see him?"

"Yes."

"Do you see him now?"

"Yes."

"Whom?" At the same time I was afraid to look around, and we both talked in a low tone.

"There, over there," and with his eyes indicated the place—"ever there."

I made a mighty effort and looked at the place: there was nothing there. "But, James, there is nothing there. For Heaven's sake—"

"You don't see him, but I do."

I looked again, but there was still nothing there. I then remembered the little old man of the woods who had given him a chestnut.

"What color is he? green?"

"No, not green—black."

"With horns?"

"No. He is like men, except that he is all black." While speaking his upper lip was drawn above his teeth, he had become as pale as death, he leaned against me, and his eyes seemed starting from his head.

"But that is only an apparition," I said. "It is the darkness of some shadow you see, and you mistake it for a man."

"No, indeed it isn't. I see his eyes. There he's moving them; he's raising his arm, making a sign."

"Stop, stop, James! don't give way to this. I'll burn incense, pray and sprinkle you from head to foot with holy water."

James stopped me with a gesture: "I don't believe in your incense or your holy water; it's all not worth a farthing. I shall never be free of him. Since he first came to me one day, one summer's day—accursed day!—he is my continual visitor, and I can't get rid of him. Understand this, my father: don't be surprised any longer at my conduct, and don't torment me any more."

"What day was it he first came?" I asked, continually signing my son with the cross.

"Was it not the day you wrote me about your doubts?"

James pushed aside my hand: "Leave me. Don't make me angry, lest something worse should happen. It would not take much to drive me to desperation."

You can imagine, sir, what I felt in hearing that. I remember I wept all that night. "O Lord God!" thought I, "how have I incurred thy wrath!"

At this point Alexis drew from his pocket a great chequered pocket handkerchief, and while blowing his nose tried to dry his eyes with a corner of it.

Very sad—he resumed—was the life that then began for us. I had but one thought: "If only he do not forget himself and lay violent hands on himself!" I watched him all the time, but I took care not to say a word. We had at this

time a neighbour, the widow of a colonel—Martha Savitschna. I had a great respect for her because she was a sensible, quiet woman, although young and good-looking. I often went to see her, and she had no contempt for my condition. Driven by grief and suffering, not knowing what to do, suddenly I told her how things stood. She was at first alarmed, and then an idea came to her. She wanted to make my son's acquaintance and to have an interview with him.

I returned home and tried to persuade James: "Come, my son, come and see the widow of the colonel."

But he, stretching his arms and legs, cried out, "No, I shall not go. What could we have to talk about?"

However, I finally persuaded him, and having harassed my little sleigh I carried him to the widow's house; then I left him as we had agreed. Three or four hours later my son returned.

"Well," I said, "how did you find our neighbour?"

He made no answer, but I was not discouraged.

"She is a virtuous lady," I went on, "and certainly she has been very kind to you."

"Yes, she's not like the others."

Then, seeing him gentler than usual, I ventured to ask him, "And the temptation of the devil, eh?"

James gave me a look which produced on me a feeling as if I had received the cut of a whip, and he became silent again. I did not torment him any longer, but made my way to my room. An hour later, approaching his door, I looked through the keyhole, and—would you believe it?—my James was asleep. He was lying on his bed fast asleep. I prayed to myself at least twenty times: "May God, send all sorts of prosperity to Martha Savitschna! She, dear doctor, has known how to touch his hard heart!" The next morning I saw James take his hat without saying a word. Should I ask him where he was going? No, indeed. He is surely going to call upon her. And in fact he went there, and remained longer than the day before. And the next day and the next he went again. I felt myself taking fresh courage. I saw there was a change in my son, and indeed it was possible to catch his eyes again. There were signs of sadness still, but none of that former despair and alarm. Alas! I was not long happy. Soon everything went wrong. James became sullen again as before, it was impossible to go near him. He locked himself up in his room, and there were no more visits to the widow. "Can he have offended her?" I thought, "and can she have forbidden him her door? No, well, as he is, he cannot have forgotten himself to that point."

I could not restrain myself—I asked him: "Well, James, and our neighbour? It seems to me you have quite forgotten her."

"Our neighbour?" he cried like a madman. "Do you want Anna to make fun of me?"

"What?"

And James, clenching his fists, roared: "He used in old times to be always crouching there, now he has begun to laugh and show his teeth. Go away! leave me!"

I did not know exactly to whom these words were addressed. My feet could hardly carry me from the room.

I went that same day to Martha Savitschna, and found her very melancholy; she had even become thin. But she did not want to talk about my son with me; she said but one thing: "No human aid will be of any use; you must pray."

Oh, great God! as if I were not praying day and night!

At this point Father Alexis again drew forth his handkerchief and wiped his eyes—this time without making any effort at concealment. And after a moment's rest he resumed: "Then James and I glided toward our fate like an avalanche on a mountain. We both saw clearly the abyss below, but to what support could we cling? And concealment was no longer possible; everything in the parish was in confusion; it began to be whispered that the son of the priest was possessed, and that it was time to tell the authorities; and they would have done so had it not been that they felt pity for me. Meanwhile, winter had passed and spring had come. And the great lord had sent a pleasant, clearer spring than the oldest persons had ever seen. The sun shone all day long; there was no wind, and the air was neither hot nor cold. Suddenly an idea came into my head—whether I might not persuade James to undertake a pilgrimage with me to St. Mitrophanos of Voronej? If this last plan failed there would be nothing left but death. So one evening I was sitting on the steps of my house; the sunset still shone in the sky, and some larks were still singing; the apple trees were in blossom. I was seated, and wondering to myself how I could tell James my intention, when suddenly he came out of the house, stood surprised for a moment without stirring, and sat down by my side. I was almost frightened I was so glad. But hush! He sat there looking at the sunset without saying a word. It seemed to me as if he was moved. His eyes grew slowly clearer; a trifle would have brought tears. Noticing this change, I ventured to try. "James," I said to him, "listen to me without anger." And I began to tell him my plan at length—how we two should start for St. Mitrophanos on foot, with knapsack on back; and from our house to Voronej was about one hundred and fifty versts;