

press Anne, that he would not learn the Russian, because he could not bear to read before her Majesty all the reports and memorials which were daily transmitted to him.

Biron was undoubtedly a man of very great capacity; during his whole administration, the external splendour of the Russian empire, and its internal tranquillity, announced the wisdom of his measures; and he shewed his judgment in employing such a statesman as Osterman, and such a general as Munich.

He was a sincere friend and an implacable enemy; and it was justly said of him, that he seldom forgot a benefit, and always remembered an injury.

He amassed an enormous fortune in money and jewels; and on public occasions his magnificence far exceeded the magnificence of the Empress.

He had so long directed the affairs of a great Empire, that he could not brook retiring into Courland. He accordingly prevailed upon the Empress, on her death-bed, to appoint her great nephew, Prince Ivan, her successor, and himself regent, until the Prince had attained the age of seventeen; and he managed this whole transaction with so much art, that he seemed only to accept the regency at the earnest request and recommendation of Marshal Munich, the Chancellor Osterman, and the principal Russian nobility, as it were for the good of the empire, and not to satisfy his own ambition.

Having thus secured the regency, to the exclusion of Anne, the mother of the young Emperor, the first act of his power in that capacity, was to obtain for himself a clear revenue of 500,000 roubles per annum, and the title of Imperial Highness.

But the power which he had thus acquired by intrigue, he attempted to secure by repeated acts of arrogance, persecution, and cruelty. Piquets were placed in the streets to prevent commotions. The numerous spies which he entertained brought him vague accounts of contemptuous expressions, and ill formed plots. Such numbers were arrested, that scarcely a day passed in which persons suspected were not imprisoned and tortured in order to force confession. But instead of disarming the envy and jealousy of the natives, who were disaffected at being governed by a foreigner, he increased his own unpopularity by the haughtiness of his demeanour, and treated even the parents of his sovereign with the most extreme brutality.

It was natural that Prince Anthony Ulrich and the Princess Anne, the father and mother of the infant Emperor, should be disaffected at being set aside, and a foreigner preferred to the regency; and Anthony Ulrich, who was a Prince of great spirit, even expressed his disapprobation in the strongest terms to the regent himself.

The Duke of Courland, suspecting that the Prince was forming cabals against his government, called on him early one morning unexpectedly, and without being announced; 'Your Highness,' he said, 'does not deal fairly with me; for you promised to inform me if any disaffected persons caballed against me, and you now know what intrigues are carrying on against me.' 'I know not,' replied the Prince, 'that any thing is now in agitation which will be detrimental to the Emperor and the country.' 'I will take care,' returned Biron, 'to place this empire in such a situation as no other person is capable of doing; for I am neither deficient in knowledge or in power.' 'The nobles must assist you,' said the Prince, 'and you must all be accountable to the Emperor.' 'Am I not regent,' replied Biron, 'with absolute authority? Such assertions, Sir, may occasion great commotions; and your Highness must know, that whenever factions arise, the Emperor and the country are in danger; and what must be the inevitable consequence, if you and I should be at variance?'—'A massacre!' returned the Prince with great warmth, putting at the same time his hand upon his sword.

After much altercation, the Prince accused Biron of having forged the testament and signature of the Empress; and the Duke quitted the apartment with these words: 'This affair, Sir, is of such importance, that it must be laid before the principal nobility of the realm.' Repairing instantly to his palace, he summoned the cabinet council, the senate, and the principal nobility, and acquainted them with the conversation which had passed between him and the Prince. But when the Imperial Minister, Count Kesslering, who was present, endeavoured to justify the Prince, he called the Prince a liar, who had misrepresented the conversation; and turning to Keyserling, said, 'We want here no advocates, and no lawyer's quirks;' and walking up and down the apartment in great agitation, exclaimed, 'Am I a poisoner! or do I contend for the throne and sceptre!'

The Princess Anne, who had been informed