

**THE DEATH OF IVAN THE
TERRIBLE: A TRAGEDY IN FIVE
ACTS. TRANSLATED FROM THE
RUSSIAN OF COUNT A. K.
TOLSTOI**

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I. HENRY HARRISON

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A Tragedy

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TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN OF COUNT A. K. TOLSTOI,
(WITH THE AUTHOR'S PERMISSION.)

BY

J. HENRY HARRISON.



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INTRODUCTION.

INSTEAD of troubling the reader with a Preface of apology and explanation, I shall attempt a brief historical sketch, which may, perhaps, assist him in forming a judgment of the Play. In doing so, I shall keep chiefly in view the person and character of Ivan The Terrible, and shall avoid many details that would find their place in a fuller historical account.

After the Mongol era, the strength of which lasted during the greater part of the thirteenth century, Moscow had gradually risen into importance, and the grandfather and father of Ivan, Ivan III. and Vasili III., had put an end to that ruinous division of the country into separate and independent principalities, which, after being the chief cause of the success of the Tartars, had survived their fall. When Ivan IV. mounted the throne, at the age of three years, in 1533, his dominions were very far from being of the extent which we now associate with the name of Russia, and on all sides were surrounded by active

enemies. On the south the Crimean Khans were troublesome neighbours, continually breaking over the frontier to ravage, burn, and slay, and the Little Russians, known at Moscow as Tcherkasses, used to plunder the caravans that journeyed to Moscow. On the west the Kings of Poland, and the Teutonic Knights of Livonia, were ever ready for war. On the east the Tcheremèes and Nogay Tartars were ever breaking out, and Mahometan Princes, the enemies of the Greek Church, ruled in Kazan and Astrachan. Sweden, on the north west, often threatened the security of the Muscovite kingdom. Nor was the internal position of the kingdom better. Robbers ravaged all the plains washed by the Volga, and half-savage Kozacks wandered along those of the Don. Internal commerce and communication were impeded by the want of roads and by heavy customs duties. The people were universally robbed and oppressed by the Boyars, the Nobles, and the Dignitaries set over them by the Government. Manners and morals were at a low ebb. Composition by fine for murder was openly practised, while every festival led to some occasion for it; prisoners of war, on all sides, were sold as slaves; every fire—and fires were frequent, for the largest towns were chiefly of wood—was a scene of robbery. Famine, and plague, and contagious sores year after year swept off incredible numbers of the

population. In 1552, in Novgorod and round it, died 279,594 souls, and in 1553, at Pskoff alone, 25,000 men. A very interesting work, written by Ivan's Confessor and counsellor, the Priest Sylvester, gives us a clear idea of the position of the Russian woman of that day. Sylvester says, in his "Household," that women should be housekeepers, always working, and never talk of anything but housekeeping, and that the husband should correct his wife's faults by a beating administered with kindness. The art of printing had not yet found its way into Russia, and all that could be called literature consisted of Sacred Books, mostly in the Slavonic dialect, and a few Chronicles, in which historical events were mingled with fables and legends. Education among the people there was none, few of the Boyars could sign their names; and, notwithstanding the efforts of Vassili III. to encourage intercourse with foreigners, Russia was almost isolated from the rest of Europe. Novgorod and Pskoff were then the towns most known for their trade and their craftsmen, but a general want of skilled workmen was felt throughout all Russia.

Such was the kingdom to which Ivan succeeded. Can it be surprising that, under such circumstances, in the sixteenth century, in a country whose civilization was less developed than that of Saxon England in the tenth, an infant, born to all the flattery and

dangers of a throne, should become a tyrant, and earn the name of *The Terrible*? However well that name was deserved, it is more surprising to find a period in that infant's after life when he was the benefactor of his people, the guardian of his country's welfare, her regenerator, and her idol. It is a strange fact that the worst tyrant to whom the history of Russia can point, should be remembered in the traditions of his people, more as the lawgiver and consolidator of his empire, the civilizer who established the bases of her civic privileges and laws, the hero who put an end to three Mongol empires, than as the torturer of his nobles and the exterminator of his subjects. Such is, nevertheless, the fact, and it is explained by the double nature of the man, due to his natural gifts and many high qualities, and the evil effects of an education that must have brutalized a far higher nature than his. This contrast in the character of Ivan is well sustained in the Play of Count Tolstoi, and is corroborated by his diametrically opposite conduct in the two distinctly opposed periods of his reign.

Ivan really began to reign only in 1547, in which year he was crowned and married to Anastasia. He was then eighteen. During the first five years of his minority his mother Eléna, and her favourite Télépneff, had governed the country. After her death the chief power resided in the Council of the Boyars. The two

princely houses of Shoûiski and Belski alternately replaced each other as the leaders of the Council, and during the whole period each victory in the constant struggle was followed by the most cruel vengeance on the losers ; to be murdered or starved in prison was usually their fate. The uncles of the young Tzar were among the victims of the jealousy of his mother and of the factions of the Boyars. The only eminent man of that time who possessed any generosity, honesty, or honour was Ivan Belski, and he paid with his life the imprudence of not using like the rest the hour of victory to exterminate his foes. It may be supposed that, in such an atmosphere of intrigue and crime, but little was done for the education of the young Prince. Even Ivan Belski gratified all his whims : he was accustomed to noisy games and the chase as his chief pursuits ; encouraged to rush into the streets and knock over women and old men ; and allowed to amuse himself by throwing tame animals down the palace steps. After such exploits the rough Boyars would praise him for his boldness. His early favourites, Telepneff, Belski, and Vorontzoff were snatched from him and done to death, his tears being either laughed at or disregarded. He was ten years old when Vorontzoff, at a meeting of the Council in the palace, was torn from his arms by the Shoûiskis and nearly killed in his presence. The Boyars treated him with a brutal