



HELEN AND OLGA.

A Russian Tale.

THE AUTHOR OF "MARY POWELL."

O'er the far blue mountain,
O'er the salt sea's foam,
Come, thou long parted one,
Back to thy home
When the bright fire shineth,
Sad looks thy place,
And the true heart pineth,
Missing thy face!
Sisters are weeping thee,
Mournful and lone,
Come, thou dear parted one,
Back to thine own

MRS. HEMANS

LONDON:

25, Paternoster Row.



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HELEN AND OLGA.

CHAPTER I.

VIRTUE'S REWARD.

THE plaintive sounds of a funeral hymn were heard slowly approaching the burial-ground that crowned a hill overlooking an old cathedral town. A Russian priest, with a censer in his hand, was preceded by a boy who bore an *obraz*, or sacred picture of the Saviour. Four persons followed, carrying a shabby open coffin of fir-planks roughly nailed together, over which was cast an old mortcloth; and a few poor people attended as lookers-on rather than as mourners.*

Having reached the grave, the priest swung his censer once or twice within it, as if to perfume it;

* See the graphic account of this funeral in the Rev. Dr. Pinkerton's "Russia," p. 273 (2d edition, 1833), to which indeed it is owing that this story was ever written.



but, as the bystanders observed, the live coal in the censer was already extinguished, and it shed forth no incense. How often is the live coal extinct in our own hearts, while the semblance of a good action, destitute of all its real spirit, is valued at just its real worth by those whom we think we are deceiving!

The priest accompanied this act with a chanted prayer for the peace of the departed; after which, the cover of the coffin was brought. There was a rent down the middle of it, which did not escape the notice of sundry idlers who, by this time, had gathered round the grave.

"See what kind of a master she had," muttered one. "Poor creature! though she faithfully served him and his father seventy years, he has not at last bestowed on her a decent coffin!"

"God knows how it will fare with such masters at last," murmured another, who was a man-servant, "for the manner in which they treat us."

"Their own turn will come," rejoined the first; "'a golden bed won't heal the sick.'"

"What's the good of minding it?" grumbled a third; "'the cow has a long tongue, but may not speak.'"

"And 'the ass feels the goad, but dares not complain,'" added the first speaker.

Meanwhile the coffin was lowered into the grave;

after which the priest cast a handful of earth on it, and departed. A couple of women remained weeping.

"Is no one going to fill up the grave?" rather indignantly said the young man-servant, who seemed to have the oversight of the proceedings. "Here! run you,"—to a couple of young fellows, who immediately set off with alacrity, and returned with a couple of shovels. Each one present then threw a handful of earth on the coffin; after which, the two youths began to fill in the grave.

"Poor soul! her troubles are ended," said one of the women who had shed tears.

"Who was she?" said another who had just come up.

"Who? why, Katrina, the nurse of Boris the miser."

"Ivan Petrovitch Boris," said the man-servant quietly. "You know, if you call my master names in my hearing, I must take notice of it."

"'The roof-tree makes its comments to the floor, and the wall takes no notice of it,'" said the woman, ironically.

"Walls have ears, but no tongues, luckily," he returned; "but you are not the roof-tree."

"Well, but now, Kostia,* is there a greater skin-flint in Russia than Ivan Petrovitch? Did he not

* Constantine.