

THE Geneva Review

No. 15

© 1984, Geneva Ministries

Nov, 1984

(There was no Geneva Review No. 14.)

THE CZAR AND THE ANGEL

Author Unknown

Somewhere, nowhere, in a certain empire, time out of mind, and in no land of ours, dwelt a Czar who was so very proud that he feared neither God nor man. He listened to no good counsel, but did only that which was good in his own eyes, and no one dared to put him right. And all his ministers and nobles grieved exceedingly, and all the people grieved likewise.

One day the Czar went to church and he listened to the priest who was reading from the Scriptures. Now there were certain words in the Holy Book which pleased not the Czar. "Why say such words to me?" thought he, "words that I can never forget, though I grow grayheaded." After service the Czar went home and bade his servants send the priest to him. The priest came.

"How darest thou to read such words to me?" asked the Czar.

"They were written to be read," replied the priest.

"Written indeed! And wouldst thou then read everything that is written? Blot out those words and never dare to read them again, I command thee!"

"It is not I who have written the words of the Holy Scripture, your Majesty," said the priest; "nor is it for me to blot them out."

"What! Thou dost presume to teach me? I am the Czar, and it is thy duty to obey me."

"In all things will I obey thee, O Czar, save only in sacred things. God is over them; men cannot alter them," answered the priest.

"Not alter them!" roared the Czar. "If I wish them altered, altered they must be. Strike me out those words instantly, I say, and never dare read them in church again. Dost thou hear?"

"I dare not," said the priest. "I have no will in the matter."

"I command thee, fellow!"

"I dare not, O Czar!"

"Well," said the Czar, "I'll give thee three days to think about it. On the evening of the fourth day appear before me, and I'll strike thy head from thy shoulders if thou dost not obey me!"

Then the priest bowed low and returned to his home.

The third day was already drawing to a close and the priest knew not what to do. It was no great terror to him to die for the faith, but what would become of his wife and children! He walked about, and wept, and wrung his hands:

"Oh, woe is me! woe is me!"

At last he lay down on his bed, but not until dawn did he close his eyes in sleep. Then he saw in a dream an Angel standing at his head.

"Fear nothing!" said the Angel. "God hath sent me down on earth to protect thee!"

So, early in the morning, the priest rose up full of joy and prayed gratefully to God.

The Czar also awoke early in the morning and shouted to

his huntsmen to gather together and go hunting with him in the forest.

So away they went to the hunt, and it was not long before a stag leaped out of the thicket beneath the very eyes of the Czar. He galloped after it. Every moment the stag seemed to be faltering, and yet the Czar could never quite come up with it. Eager with excitement, he spurred on his horse.

"Faster, faster!" he cried; "now we have him!"

But here a stream crossed the road, and the stag plunged into the water. The Czar was a good swimmer. "Surely I shall take him now," thought he. "A little longer, and I shall hold him by the horns."

So the Czar took off his clothes, and into the water he plunged after the stag. The stag swam across to the opposite bank, but just as the Czar was extending his hand to seize him by the horns, there was no longer any stag to be seen. It was the Angel who had taken the form of a stag. The Czar was amazed. He looked about him on every side and wondered where the stag had gone.

At that moment he saw someone on the other side of the river, putting on the Czar's royal clothes, and presently he mounted the Czar's own horse and galloped away. The Czar thought it was some evildoer, but it was the selfsame Angel, who had now gone away to collect the huntsmen and take them home. As for the Czar, he remained all naked and solitary in the forest.

At last he looked about him and saw, far, faraway, smoke rising above the forest, and something like a dark cloud standing in the clear sky.

"Perhaps," said he to himself, "that smoke is from my hunting pavilion."

So he went in the direction of the smoke and came at last to a brickkiln. The brick burners came forth to meet him and were amazed to see a man without clothing. They saw that his feet were lame and bruised, and his body covered with scratches.

"Give me to drink," said he, "and I would fain eat something also."

The brick burners had pity on him; they gave him an old tattered garment to wear and a piece of black bread to eat. Never from the day of his birth had the Czar had such a tasty meal.

"And now speak, O man!" said they; "who art thou?"

"I'll tell you who I am," said he, when he had eaten his fill; "I am your Czar. Lead me to my capital, and there I will reward you!"

"What, thou wretched rogue!" they cried. "Thou dost presume to mock us, thou old ragamuffin, and magnify thyself into a Czar! Thou reward us, indeed!"

And they looked at him in amazement and scorn.

"Dare to laugh at me again," said he, "and I'll have your heads chopped off!"

For he forgot himself and thought he was at home.

"What! Thou!" shouted the brick burners, and they fell upon him, and beat him most unmercifully, and then they drove him away, and off he went, groaning, into the forest.

He went on and on till at last he saw once more a smoke rising up out of the wood. Again he thought:

"That is surely from my hunting pavilion," and so he went up to it.

And behold, he had come to another brickkiln. There, too, they had pity upon and kindly treated him. They gave him to eat and to drink. They also gave him ragged hose and a tattered shirt, for they were very poor people. They took him to be a runaway soldier or some other poor man; but when he had eaten his fill and clothed himself, he said to them:

"I am your Czar!"

They laughed at him, and again he began to talk roughly to the people. Then they fell upon him, and thrashed him soundly, and drove him away. And he wandered all by him-

self through the forest till it was night. Then he laid himself down beneath a tree and slept until the morning, when he continued his journey.

At last he came to a third brickkiln, but he did not tell the brick burners there that he was the Czar. All he thought of now was how he might reach his capital. These people, too, treated him kindly, and seeing that his feet were lame and bruised, they had compassion upon him and gave him a pair of very old boots. And he asked them:

"Do ye know by which way I can get to the capital?"

They told him; but it was a long, long road and a weary journey.

But he followed the road which they had pointed out. He went on and on till he came to a little town, and there the roadside sentries stopped him.

"Halt!" they cried.

He halted.

"Whence art thou?" asked the soldiers.

"I am going to the capital," answered the Czar.

"Thou art a vagabond!" they cried.

So they took him to the capital and put him in a dungeon. After a time the custodians came round to examine the prisoner.

"Who art thou, old man?" they asked. Then he told them the whole truth.

"Once I was the Czar," said he, and he related all that had befallen him. They were amazed, for he was not at all like a Czar. For indeed he had been growing thin and haggard for a long time, and his beard was all long and tangled. And yet, for all that, he insisted that he was the Czar. So they made up their minds that he was crazy and drove him away. "why should we keep this fool forever," said they, "and waste the Czar's bread upon him?"

Never did any man feel so wretched on God's earth as did that wretched Czar. Willingly would he have done any sort of work if he had only known how, but he had never been used to work and therefore was obliged to beg his bread, and could scarce beg enough to keep body and soul together. He lay at night at the first place that came to hand, sometimes in the tall grass, sometimes beneath a fence.

"Who could have thought that it should ever come to this!" he sighed.

Now the Angel, who had made himself Czar, had gone home with the huntsmen. And no man knew that he was not a Czar but an Angel. The same evening the priest came to him and said:

"Do thy will, O Czar, and strike off my head, for I cannot blot out one word of Holy Scripture."

And the Czar said to him:

"Glory be to God, for now I know that there is at least one

priest in my land who stands firm for God's Word. I'll make thee the highest bishop in this realm."

The priest thanked him, bowed down to the earth, and departed, marveling.

"What is this wonder," thought he, "that the haughty Czar should have become so just and gentle?"

But all men marveled at the change that had come over the ruler. He was now mild and gracious; no longer did he spend all his days in the forest, but went about inquiring of his people if any were wronged or injured by their neighbors and if justice were done. He took count of all, and rebuked the unjust judges, and saw that every man had his rights. And the people now rejoiced as much as they had grieved heretofore, and justice was done in all the courts, and no bribes were taken. But the Czar, the real Czar, grew more and more wretched.

Then, after three years, an order went forth from the palace that all the people were to come together to a great banquet given by the Czar; all were to be there, both rich and poor, both high and lowly. And all the people came, and the unhappy Czar came, too. And so many long tables were set out in the Czar's courtyard that all the people praised God when they saw the glad sight.

They all sat down at table and ate and drank, and the Angel Czar himself and his courtiers distributed the meat and drink to the guests as much as they would, but to the unfortunate Czar they gave a double portion of everything. When all had eaten and drunk their fill, the Angel Czar that ruled over the land began to inquire whether any had suffered injustice of wrong. And when the people began to disperse, the Czar stood at the gate and gave to everyone a piece of money.

And again, after three years, he made yet another banquet and proclaimed that all should come, both rich and poor. And all the people came and ate and drank and bowed low before the Angel Czar and thanked him and made ready to depart. The unfortunate Czar was also on the point of going, when the Angel Czar stopped him, and took him aside into the palace, and said to him:

"Lo! God hath tried thee and chastised thy pride these many years. But me He sent to teach thee that a Czar must have regard to the complaints of his people. So thou wast made poor and a vagabond that thou mightest pick up wisdom, if but a little. Look now, that thou doest good to thy people and judgest righteous judgment, as now thou shalt be Czar again, but I must return to Heaven." And when the Angel had said this, he was no more to be seen.

Then the Czar prayed gratefully to God, and from henceforth he ruled his people justly, as the Angel had bidden him.

The Geneva Review is published eight times a year by Geneva Ministries, and is mailed with The Geneva Papers. Those wishing to receive these mailings should address requests to Geneva Ministries, P. O. Box 8376, Tyler, TX 75703. A donation, tax deductible, is requested. Checks should be made out to The Geneva Papers. Permission to reproduce these reviews, in whole or in part, is granted, provided the name and address of The Geneva Review is included.