A RUSSIAN SHAKESPEREAN.
A CENTENARY STUDY
BY C. H. HERFORD, M.A., LITT.D.
HONORARY PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH LITERATURE IN THE UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER.
DEDICATED to the memory of Arthur Skemp.

Arthur Rowland Skemp, a former student of the writer's at the University of Manchester, afterwards professor of English at the University of Bristol, fell in battle in November 1918. The University of Bristol has since established a series of Skemp Memorial lectures, to be delivered there biennially. The present lecture, delivered at Bristol by the invitation of the University early in the present year, was the first of the series.

Mr. Vice-chancellor, Ladies and Gentlemen,
I am deeply honoured by your invitation to deliver the first of the Memorial lectures which you have founded in commemoration of our lost friend, once my pupil, Arthur Rowland Skemp. What I wish to say of him I shall, with your permission, reserve to the close, and enter without further preface upon my subject,—an episode in the story, not wholly unlike his, of a poet, a patriot, and a soldier, cut off even more tragically in his splendid prime.

I.
I will ask you to cast your minds with me through some two thousand miles of space to the north-east, and exactly a hundred years backward in time. In a large country house, the seignorial mansion of the village of Michaelovskoe, in the Baltic province of Pskov in northwest Russia, a young Russian nobleman sat, in the summer of 1825, at work upon a tragedy. Alexander Sergejevich Pushkin, then aged twenty-six, was already a poet famous in society and a dangerous person in the eyes of the Tsar, whose sentence of banishment to a
remote province he was now in fact undergoing. This tragedy, the principal fruit of his exile, reflects both preoccupations; for it is permeated by the influence of Shakespeare, then at the height of his vogue in literary Russia; and Shakespeare is for him above all the dramatic historian of those English Plantagenet kings who most nearly recall the Tsars of Muscovy.

Both the cosmopolitan Russia which faced the West and its civilisation, and the Russia of native tradition, which faced the East and the past, had their part in the making of her greatest poet, and shared, if unequally, in the moulding of his principal drama. In Moscow, Pushkin's birthplace, the two Russias met in picturesque encounter, and more nearly on equal terms than anywhere else. In the vast patriarchal mansions of the nobility the old Russia of folklore and folk-custom lived on intact in the servants' quarters; while the Russia of European culture held uncontested sway in the salon. It was in one of these patriarchal mansions that Alexander Pushkin, on May 26, 1799, was born, and the two cultures mingled to an unusual degree in the atmosphere in which he grew up. Neglected by his parents up to his seventh year, he was thrown upon the company of two elderly dependants of the household, Marya Alekseyevna and Arina Rodionovna. Marya was a woman of large experience and keen wits, whose memory was crowded with the stirring events of her youth, and with the traditions and customs of the Russian society of the eighteenth century. Arina, his nurse, later celebrated by him in song, a yet more frequent type of the aged servants of Russian patriarchal homes, was a mine of traditional folklore and fairy tales, whose every sentence was a rustic proverb or byword.1 But the Pushkin palace was also a focus of the fashion and the letters of the capital. There, as a boy, he met the famous historian Karamzin, the leading figure in Moscow letters, and an enthusiastic Shakespearean who was to befriend him in after life. Various tutors and governesses helped to equip him with the tongues of cultivated Europe; he learned German with reluctance, became a perfect master of French, and acquired (with a Miss Bailey) at least the elements of English. But already at twelve he was withdrawn completely from the native and old-world influence of his Moscow environment, and plunged into the European milieu of a fashionable and aristocratic Lyceum near St. Petersburg. Seven years later, at the

1 Skabichevsky's Sketch of Pushkin's Life, prefixed to his Works.
close of his course, he entered the society of the northern capital, and
flung himself, with the perilous privilege of his birth and rank, into the
whirl of its amusements, interests, and dissipations.

The St. Petersburg of 1817 was still that 'open window upon
Europe' which its founder had designed it to be. All through the
eighteenth century its society, brilliantly polished at the surface, if
infantine or savage at the core, had watched Europe through that
open window, and few observers anywhere in Europe were more
intimately acquainted with every part of the commanding prospect, or
followed with more understanding its changing moods. They read
Addison's *Spectator*, like the ladies of Kensington, over their breakfast-
tables, were thrilled by the tragedy of *Clarissa*, fed the luxury of
grief on Young's *Night Thoughts*, and discovered the charm of
'Sentimentality' in Sterne's *Journey*; *Candide* and the *Nouvelle
Héloïse* and the *Sorrows of Werther* were as familiar in St. Peters-
burg as at Paris or Berlin; and the most original man of genius in
France, Denis Diderot, had become the guest of the imperial blue-
stocking Catherine II, who, in the intervals of importing English
racehorses and Wedgwood china, signing death-warrants and writing
bad verses, held vehement debate on equal terms with her eloquent
and pugnacious guest over a table, fortunately interposed. In the
eighties this society discovered Shakespeare, and Catherine translated
the *Merry Wives*, not the less willingly perhaps, because another
great queen was said to have commanded it from Shakespeare himself.

The European war, in the issue of which Russia was to play so
fateful a part, did not check the tide of European influence. But it
added volume and momentum to the current derived from England,
and diminished the vogue of that derived from France. The year
'Twelve' which saw the Russian triumph so magnificently told by
Tolstoy, almost coincided with the phenomenal apparition of Byron;
and Byron, the poet of revolution, became the idol of a society intox-
icated with national exultation. What Herzen has called the golden
age of Russian literature, the dozen years which intervened between
the great 'Year Twelve' and the beginning of the iron despotism of
Nicholas I in 1825, was the age of a triumphant romanticism on
which Byron set the stamp of his rhetorical splendour, his demonic
personality, and his defiance of accepted canons in art and life. In
St. Petersburg, if anywhere in Europe, Byronism was to be seen in
action. And Byronism itself provided a brilliant mirror for the purpose.

The young poet who now, at eighteen, entered this society has left an enduring description of it. In the First Canto of his masterpiece, *Eugénie Onyégin*, written six years later, its outward splendour and inner corruption are displayed with a union of wit, eloquence and poetry which presuppose *Don Juan*; but it is *Don Juan* not so much imitated as emulated, by a man of equal genius, still in his earliest prime. And Pushkin, young as he was, knew the society he painted. The best houses were open to him, and he mingled without reserve in the wildest orgies of gilded youth. He had not a trace of the temper which led his contemporaries Wordsworth, Shelley, and even Byron himself at moments,—the Byron of *Manfred* and the Third Canto of *Child Harold*—into the solitude of Nature. The roar of a great city, the talk and music and dance in crowded drawing-rooms, the midnight revel of the clubs, drew him irresistibly; and to their fascination was soon added the subtler lure of applause. He threw off verses, satires, epigrams in great and facile abundance, and became a literary lion before he was twenty.

But this impetuous career underwent, in 1820, a sudden check. A satire imprudently outspoken awakened the attention of the fatherly Tsar, Alexander I. ‘We must send this young man to Siberia,’ said the ruler, now in his old age a devout mystic, and more than ever concerned to bring his erring children to reason. But Pushkin’s old schoolmaster, and his father’s friend Karamzin, intervened, and the sentence was changed to an appointment in the south, as a clerk in the local administration at Kishinev and Odessa. It was a mild banishment, which permitted him to travel by way of the Caucasus, and to spend delightful weeks in the house of his friend Rayevsky, on the beautiful shore of the Black Sea, translating Voltaire and learning to read Byron in the original.¹ The four following years developed still further the unsolved dilemmas of Pushkin’s complex and fiery nature. His escapades in the motley cosmopolitan society of Kichinev and of the great Black Sea port were the despair of his official chief. But all the time he was producing lyrics and verse-tales of classical finish and beauty. It is

¹Skabichevsky, *u.s.*, § iv.: ‘Praktikovalsja v Angliiskom yazyke, i eta praktika sostoyala v chtenii Bairona.’ This is important as bearing on his power to read Shakespeare in the original.
natural to think of the life that Byron was leading, in these very years in Italy, and the whole society which Pushkin frequented and led was here as in the capital passionately Byronist. But the parallel is incomplete. Pushkin's outward life resembled Byron's as much as the excesses of a young civil servant can resemble those of a nobleman of fortune. But there is nothing dissolute in Pushkin's verse. Byron's artistry, whatever his genius, was as imperfect as his moral self-control. His splendours are mostly impulsive or capricious, like his noble deeds, and intermingled, like them, with abysmal falls. His style is rich, coloured, figurative, charged with a rhetoric sometimes inspired, sometimes meretricious. But Pushkin, during these days of boisterous adventure, was giving the first example in Russia of a poetry classically pure, simple, reticent, flawless, and this in a generation carried away by the Romantic cult of whatever, in style or subject, is violent, emphatic, and impassioned, or mysterious, suggestive, indefinite, and incomplete.

Once more, however, the incurable exuberance of Pushkin the young official deflected the fortunes of Pushkin the impeccable poet. Some of his classically chaste and flawless verses having taken the annoying form of a satire on his chief, Count Vorontsov, the latter complained to St. Petersburg. Even more shocking to the devout government of Alexander was a letter, opened in the post, from Pushkin himself to an intimate friend, in which the poet described himself as 'taking lessons in pure atheism' from an Englishman who had 'proved' it in a book of a thousand pages. Incidentally we learn from the same letter that he was reading Shakespeare, as well as Goethe and the Bible: unluckily he added that he preferred both the two former to the last.¹ The Foreign Minister of all the Russias and his official deputy in Odessa discussed in horrified tones what must be done to prevent this double offender from encouraging the others. They decided to send him, in forced retirement, to his father's country house, at the family village of Michaelovskoe, near Pskov, in N.W. Russia. On July 30, 1824, he set out on his journey, of nearly a thousand miles, by a route carefully prescribed to prevent any meetings with evil-minded, or unduly impressionable friends, on the way; and on August 9 he arrived. In spite of painful friction with his father, a timid conservative, who saw in his son's disgrace a prelude to his own ruin, Pushkin's

¹Letter to an unknown friend in Moscow, from Odessa, March-April, 1824.
two years at Michaelovskoe were the happiest and most fruitful of his
short life. They are vividly reflected in the picture of his hero’s life
in the country in the Fourth Canto of Onyégin. Rising early, after a
bathe in the river or in an ice-cold bath, he spent the morning in
writing, the afternoon in long walks or rides, always with poetry as
his companion, and the evening in talks with his old nurse Arina, now
housekeeper, but still the mine of folklore and country ways and
sayings that he had known as a child; or in the convivial and
congenial society of a neighbouring country-house. To be sure the
rus insitertum was not his affair, and he longed for the roar of town.
But such a retreat, with leisure, society, and solitude, friends, books,
and poetry without stint, was no unendurable punishment for a young
poet lately tied to an office-desk in Odessa.

II.

It was under such conditions that Pushkin came at length seriously
under the spell of Shakespeare. And somewhat strangely, as it may
seem to us, the part of Shakespeare which specially arrested and
impressed this Russian was the part which is most purely, almost
provincially English, those ‘long jars’ of York and Lancaster of
which Ben Jonson spoke so disdainfully,—the sequence of the
Plantagenet Histories.

But it is not difficult to see why, in Shakespeare’s work at large
and the Histories in particular, Pushkin found great poetry shaped
out of an experience and a cast of genius which in at least four points
touched his own. At these four points there was fertilizing contact;
and these still imperfectly vitalized aspects of his experience and genius
became articulated and explicit in Pushkin’s original creation.

1. He found in the Histories the poetry of the national past. The
Russian national past, represented by its folklore and feudal
traditions, had been familiar to Pushkin from boyhood; Shakespeare
showed him, as he had shown Goethe in Goetz and Schiller in
Wallenstein, and was already showing to the French Romantics,
what treasures were to be won from the drama of the national political
history.

1 The two daughters of this family, Anna and Evpratsia Osipov, were
the originals of Tatiana and Olga in Eugénie Onyégin.
2. The drama of Russian political history was, even more than that of Plantagenet England, woven of sanguinary dynastic feuds. Pushkin in his own person had known something of the arbitrariness of autocracy. The history of crimes like those of a John or a Richard III had, for the subjects of Alexander I, the fascination of experiences which might at any moment be their own.

3. Shakespeare's Histories move almost wholly in the great world of nobles and statesmen. Pushkin already as a young man had mixed intimately in the corresponding world of St. Petersburg. His own ancestor Pushkin had played a great part under the Tsar Ivan the Terrible and his successor. Shakespeare's Histories showed him how the plots and intrigues of high life could be turned into living drama.

4. (and this was the greatest thing): Pushkin found in Shakespeare a drama which was fundamentally real; a creation like life, not a projection of his own personality under other names; and a drama which was not afraid of reality or of any part of it. In the light of Shakespeare's profound veracity Byron now looked meretricious and even Corneille and Racine stilted and artificial. The great Spaniards he did not know, but all other dramatists grew pale in comparison. 'I have not read Calderon nor Lope,' he wrote to a friend in September, 1825, 'but what a man is this Shakespeare! I can't get away from him! How poor is Byron as a tragic poet beside him; Byron never conceived but one character.'

It was under the influence of these four attractions that Pushkin, in the course of his sojourn at Michaelovskoe in 1825, formed and executed the plan of making a historical tragedy of the usurpation of Boris Godunov. It went swiftly, and without effort, as one supposes Shakespeare's did. 'I am alone,' he writes that summer, 'with no company but my cat and an old housekeeper. But my Tragedy goes ahead and I am happy.'

1 To N. N. Rayevsky, Sept. 1825. "Other dramatists, he goes on (and he is still thinking chiefly of Byron), when they have conceived a character, insist on making everything he says bear its impress. A conspirator says, 'Give me some drink' in his quality of conspirator, and it is only absurd. Hence their stiffness and timidity in dialogue. But read Shakespeare, he is never afraid of compromising his men; he makes them talk with all the impulsiveness of life, being confident that they will speak in character when place and time require."
Let us glance first at the subject of this tragedy. Boris Godunov's story is well known in England from a famous Russian opera. Enough to say that this powerful and astute man seized the throne of Muscovy after the death of Ivan the Terrible in 1598. He secured his position, as he thought, by having Ivan's lawful heir Dmitri, a boy of twelve, secretly murdered. He is accepted as Tsar, by the Church, nobles, and people. But he has no friends. The nobles fawn on him, but he knows, and they know that he knows, and he knows that they know that he knows, that they are playing their game, and biding their time. The people are malleable, their hearts are easily won, and no less easily lost. For five years (1598 to 1603) he holds his ground. Then appears a Pretender, professing to be Ivan's son and rightful heir, the boy universally believed to have been murdered. He is in reality a young monk, with a genius too daring for the cloister. This 'False Dmitri' escapes to Poland, the hereditary foe of Russia, where he is received with open arms and equipped with an army and a bride. He then marches on Moscow, nobles and people turn against Boris, and the usurper and his children are destroyed.

It is easy for us to see, as Pushkin saw, that this lurid passage of Russian history is almost a transcript, in Russian terms, of the type of situation to which Shakespeare in the Histories most constantly recurs. From King John to Richard III, through all that surging complexity of historic circumstance, we are occupied with a dynastic struggle for power, a struggle carried on most often by men whose own possession of power is precarious, or unlawful, or both. The great sequence of nine plays opens with a challenge to one usurper and ends with the overthrow of another. John has usurped his throne, Richard II is driven from his, Henry IV displaces by force the king by right, and involves his successors in his wrong. Henry V, at the height of his power, prays that God's anger may not be visited on him at Agincourt. Henry VI

1 Boris Godunov was taken as the basis of an opera to which two of the greatest of Russian composers have contributed, Mussorgski's Boris Godunov was produced at the Imperial Theatre Marie at St. Petersburg in 1874; it was received with enthusiasm by the younger generation and performed twenty times in the same season. Twenty years later, in 1896, the orchestration was remodelled by Rimski Korsakov. (C. Nabokoff in *Times Lit. Suppt.*, 19 June, 1924.)
is destroyed by the enemies of his House, and Richard III, the destroyer, himself usurps the throne and is himself destroyed. Two of these usurping kings try to secure themselves by secretly putting the rightful heirs, young boys, to death; and the murder both of Arthur and of the young princes in the Tower is the false step which makes the ruin of John and of Richard inevitable. We have searching glimpses into their minds as they contrive these crimes, or shudder at the memory of them, or are struck with fear at the menace of the Nemesis they had not foreseen; we see John dropping his dark hints to Hubert, Richard with more cynical self-possession, but still in a whisper, giving his death-commission to Tyrrell. All these rulers, again, have to face, master, or make terms with, the same formidable peril,—the power of their own nobles. John, Richard II, Henry VI, and Richard III after a struggle succumb; Henry IV after a struggle masters them; Henry V wins them to his side.

It is easy, then, to understand how the story of events like these, re-enacted for Pushkin in the living pageant of Shakespeare's Histories, would illuminate for him the kindred story of Boris. In that story, too, he found material for just what was most exciting to him in Shakespeare, because most consonant with his own gifts and his own experiences,—national traditions, dynastic feuds, diplomatic finesse.

No doubt these similar events happen in a political environment profoundly different. A Russian Tsar was more dangerous, and also less secure, than an English king. He had absolute power, but he had not either with or against him the strength of enthroned law and established custom. When Henry V succeeds his father, he laughs at the fears of those who expected him like the Turk to send his rivals to the block:—

Not Amurath an Amurath succeeds,
But Harry Harry,

and a like contrast held between England and Boris's and Pushkin's Russia. In the tenser atmosphere of peril and fear created by autocracy, political rivalry becomes more secret, strategy more profound; appearances more deceptive, professions more hollow. Pushkin, too, an aristocrat and a descendant of one of Boris's bitterest opponents, could interpret Boris's dilemmas and strategy from a nearer vantage-ground than any from which the Stratford player could interpret those of Richard or John.
But in the story of Boris, Pushkin also saw an opening for that which, as I said just now, most deeply impressed and kindled him in Shakespeare, his fearless truth within the sphere of poetry. He approached Shakespeare, we must remember, from the side of Racine, whose characters he wrongly regarded as abstract types, and of Byron, who could draw, he thought, only one character, his own. He saw, (as the letter to Rayevsky quoted above shows) that Shakespeare’s characters were not only infinitely various, but that, like real men and women, though always true to their character, they were not always exemplifying it. That Shakespeare’s conspirators, for instance, as in *Julius Caesar*, are not, like Jonson’s, too absorbed in their task to do anything but conspire. They will conspire with entire competence when the time comes; but meanwhile they are cool and detached enough to talk about the weather or to discuss at what point of the horizon the sun will rise. His heroic figures can unbend; his villains can be gay and jocular; Caesar has sublime, but also childish, moments. And then, Pushkin revelled in Shakespeare’s fearless introduction of everything in life that he wanted for his play,—homely folks, like the cobbler who exchanges gibes with the tribune, or the rustic scarecrows whom Falstaff leads to Shrewsbury; fools and clowns and grave-diggers; and then his delightful children,—Brutus’s boy Lucius overcome by sleep as he reads, or little York gaily chaffing uncle Richard.

All this has left its decisive mark on the characterisation of Pushkin’s Tragedy. The persons are not only numerous, but every one is individual. He shows us the crafty tyrant Boris, for instance, in undress, in his nursery amusing himself with his boy and girl. And being no docile copyist, but a rather headstrong and self-assertive young man, he sometimes goes beyond Shakespeare on Shakespeare’s own path—introducing, for instance, not only children but a baby in arms, coaxed and threatened by its mother.

And he carries out too in a way of his own the veracity which he rightly recognised in Shakespeare’s dramatic speech. Shakespeare can make a highly figured diction, which no one would ever use in ordinary life, seem natural, because it is charged with the emotion which the speaker feels, but which ordinary words only haltingly convey. But Pushkin seeks the same truth by way of a perfectly limpid and unadorned simplicity. Such unforgettable lines as Elizabeth’s
address to the Tower, as her two boys are led in, never to return alive—

'Rude ragged nurse, old sullen playfellow
For tender princes, use my babies well,'
could never be found in Pushkin.

That Pushkin did not employ this simple, unadorned dramatic speech merely from the realist's desire to imitate life as literally as possible is plain from his habitual use of verse. He follows Shakespeare's example both in adopting this ideal form for the most part, and in not adopting it uniformly. Most of the scenes are in blank verse, which Pushkin was among the first to use in Russian, as Lessing fifty years before had been in German; and his blank verse, like Lessing's, is noble and beautiful, if rarely touched with Shakespearean magic. But Pushkin, contrary to all but Elizabethan precedent, intermingles the blank-verse scenes with scenes in prose; while an occasional scene in lyric stanzas can only be partially paralleled, even amongst the Elizabethans, by the banquet scene in Romeo and Juliet or the scene with Adriana in the Comedy of Errors.

Lastly, there were features in the story of Boris which had no parallel in Shakespeare's Histories. Such was the old convent chronicler Pimen, who had witnessed the murder of the boy, the son of Tsar Ivan and the rightful heir, and recorded it in his chronicle for posterity to know; such was the heroine, Marina, a type of worldly coquette unknown to Shakespeare; while the Pretender's adventures and character resemble those of the French, rather than the English, Henry IV, and are confessedly reproduced with him in mind.¹

IV.

I now propose to summarise the play itself, translating portions of a few crucial and characteristic scenes in the metre of the original.² It consists of some twenty-four scenes, about the number usual in a Shakesperean play, but not divided into acts. The action opens at the moment when Boris is being urged to accept the Tsardom, and is

¹ App. § 5.
² These scenes were translated without any knowledge of Mr. Hayes's excellent version of the entire play. Subsequent comparison has enabled me to correct some inaccuracies. In a few passages the version is compressed.
refusing the offered crown more stubbornly than Caesar (Jul. Cas., I., 2), and with even better reason. For Caesar has only to conciliate republican suspicion; Boris has to silence the suspicion that he has murdered the little Tsarevitch. For what could be his motive, people are meant to ask, if he will not be Tsar himself? Two of the nobles, Shuisky and Voratynski, are discussing the situation. Shuisky, the astutest of the court circle, and the most intimate with Boris, is convinced that he is the murderer, but holds the secret for future use, assuming meantime a show of devoted loyalty. The scene then changes to an open Place, where the ceremonial humbug of the proffered, refused, and finally accepted crown is being enacted before the eyes of the Moscow populace, assembled in their thousands to watch and applaud. Most of them are eager that he should accept, but there are some caustic fellows too who only feign devotion. A few sentences will illustrate how far Pushkin, with Julius Caesar in mind, was ready to go beyond Shakespeare in that realistic painting of the humours of a crowd, which had offended the classicist taste of Voltaire:

BORIS.

Cit. How is it going?
Second Cit. Still
He holds off obdurately, but there's hope.
Woman (with a child).
Tu, tu! don't cry! See bogy, bogy, coming,
He'll carry thee off with him! Tu, tu, . . . don't cry!
First. C. Can't we get nearer in beyond the fence?
Second C. Impossible! Why the whole place is thronged.
All Moscow's crowded here. See, walls and roofs
And every story of the belfry spire,
The domes of churches, and the very crosses
Are crammed with people. . . .
First. What is that noise?
Second. Ay hark . . . what is that noise?
The people's murmur; there they fall like waves
Row after row, still more and more! Now brothers,
Now it's our turn: quick, down upon your knees!
People on their knees, cries and weeping.
Ah, mercy, little father! Be our ruler!
Be our father, our Tsar!
First Cit. (aside), What do they weep for!
Second C. How should we know? That is the Nobles' business,
Not ours.
Old Wom. Why, what! Just when we've got to cry
   You must be mum! I'll do for thee! The bogy!
Cry, you spoil't rogue (child cries). Now then!
One. They're all crying.
Boys, let us cry a bit!
Second. I'm trying, brother;
No good.
First. I too. Has anyone an onion?
Let's rub our eyes red.
Second. No, I'll spit and smear them.
What is up now there?
First. Cannot make it out!
People. The crown for him! He's Tsar! He has accepted!
     Boris our Tsar! Boris! Long live Boris!

The five years that followed Boris's coronation saw no outward disturbance of his power, and offered little material for that part of drama which consists in action and event. But the quiescence was only on the surface. The ominous symptoms which Boris's triumph could not conceal became steadily more formidable and continuous, and his resolute efforts to play the part of the benevolent autocrat only increased the tension between ruler and people. By the close of the fifth year (1603) the imposing edifice of his power is shaken to its foundations, and a slight interference from outside will suffice to overthrow it. Hence the swift and easy triumph of the Pretender. But Boris, like Macbeth, is a tragic figure long before his fall. The bitterness of disillusion is upon him already: he can say with Lady Macbeth: 'all's had, all's spent when our desires are had without content.' Sovereignty has lost its relish when once enjoyed, and added to that satiety, he is haunted by the horror of his crime. In an impressive soliloquy he lays bare the situation:

'I have reached the height of power,
   Already for five years I have reigned in peace,
   But yet I am not happy.'

He had tried to win the people by generosity; but all in vain, 'they love only the dead.' If their houses burnt down, he built them new ones, and they accused him of the fire. Whoever died he was the cause of their death. Who can get the better of malignant calumny? A man with a good conscience, perhaps:
'But if there be a single flaw in it
The soul's enflamed as with a festering wound,
The heart o'erbrims with poison; accusations
Knock as with beating hammers in our ears,
All things are loath to us, our head goes round
And boys blood-dabbled hover before our eyes.'

To this inner tragedy the outer is about to be added. The next scene opens in the convent cell, where the young monk Grigor Otrępyov, is sitting with the venerable chronicler Pimen. Grigor's imagination has been fired by the records of successful usurpation, and his hot blood is eager to live them instead of copying them. The aged chronicler Pimen himself had known that brilliant life of adventure in his prime, and had only withdrawn to the quiet of the convent cell as an old man to describe it. Grigory finds himself a monk in the years when he ought to be a soldier and a lover, and he resolves to be ruled by his years and not by his vows. And the old chronicler unwittingly gives him the cue, by describing graphically the murder of the Tsarewitch, which he had himself witnessed, and how the murderer had confessed that Boris had ordered it. 'He would be just your age now, and would have reigned, but God willed otherwise. There ends my chronicle,' the old man closes, 'and now I am weary; and I hand over my old pen to you, Grigory; do you continue my work.' But Grigory has other ideas:

Boris! Boris! Before thee Russia trembles,
None in thy presence dares so much as mention
The fate of the unhappy Tsarewitch;—
But here meantime a hermit in a cloister
Is making of thee terrible report,
And thou wilt not escape from the world's judgment,
As thou wilt not escape the wrath of God.

So Grigory escapes from the convent and hurries to the Lithuanian border, where we next see him in a picturesque and exciting tavern scene, on the frontier, in grave peril of his life from the guards whom Boris has posted there to stop precisely the runaway monk. There is nothing at all resembling it in Shakespeare,—it is more like a scene from Scott,—but we may think of the way in which the action of Henry IV takes its ease in the Eastcheap tavern, and sports with its

1 This title, in Russian accented Tsarewitch, is in the translation treated as an English word and accented as is usual in English.
revellers and its voluble hostess, in the intervals of the high matters of state policy and civil war.

A Tavern on the Lithuanian Frontier.


**H.** What can I serve you, honoured fathers?

**M.** What God provides, Hostess. Hast thou wine?

**H.** Surely, my fathers! I'll bring it anon. (Exit.)

**M.** (to G.) Why so downcast, comrade? Here's the Lithuanian frontier thou wast so anxious to reach.

**G.** Till I am across it I shall not be at ease.

**V.** What is Lithuania to thee? Look at Misail and me a sinful man, when once we had slipped out of the monastery, we cared nothing whether it was Lithuania or Russia, fiddle or dulcimer, it was all one to us if only we had some wine,—and here it comes! . . .

**M.** Well said, brother Varlaam.

**Host.** Here it is, my fathers.

**M.** Thanks. God bless thee! (Sings).

**G.** Not inclined. . . .

**M.** Everyone to his liking.

**V.** But, Paradise to the drinker, father Misail! Drink a cup to our hostess.

And, faith, when I drink I dont like sober men. Tipsiness is one thing, stiffness another; if thou wilt live like us, good,—if not, take thyself off. Get away, a vagabond is no companion for a priest. . . .

**M.** Let him be, father Varlaam.

[**Grig.** inquires of the Hostess as to the road to Lithuania, and the distance.]

**H.** Not far, by night you may be there, but for the barriers and imperial guard.

**Gr.** What, barriers! what does that mean?

**H.** Someone has escaped from Moscow, and there are orders to hold up everyone, and examine them.

**Gr.** (to himself) There's for you, my son.

**V.** Ha, companion! Hobnobbing with the hostess. Thou dost not want vodka, but thou likest a young woman.

**M.** Well said, father Varlaam.

**Gr.** (to hostess) And what do the guards want? Who has escaped from Moscow?

**H.** Lord knows, if its a thief or a highwayman they want; tis only certain they stop honest folks from going forward. And what will they get? Nothing at all, not so much as a spotted dog; as if there weren't another way over the frontier, besides the high road! Why, from here you take the turn to the left, then go by a path to a chapel on the Chekan brook, and then straight across the marshes to Hlopino, and
from there to Zaharyév, and then any child will guide you to the hills. As to these guards, we only know that they bother passers-by, and rob us poor folks.

(A noise is heard.)

What's that? Ah, 'tis them, cursed fellows, going their rounds.

Gr. Hostess, isn't there another bit of a corner in the cottage?

H. Nay, friend, I'd be glad to hide myself. . . .

(Guards enter.)

Gd. Good-day, hostess!

H. I beg you to be heartily welcome, honoured guests.

1st Gd. (to the other) Here is a bit of drinking going on; a find for us.

(To the monks) Who are you?

V. We are old and holy men, peaceful fathers, on our way to the villages to collect Christian alms for the monastery.

1st Gd. (to Gr.) And thou?

M. Our companion.

Gr. A lay brother of the suburbs; I have accompanied these fathers to the frontier; now I am on my way home.

M. So you have changed your mind. . . .

Gr. (aside) Whisht.

1st G. Hostess, bring more wine, and we'll drink with these fathers, and have a bit of talk with them.

2nd G. (aside) The young fellow seems bare; nought to be got from him but the old fellows—

1st G. Hold thy peace, we'll settle with them directly.—

Well, my fathers, and how goes business?

V. Ill, my son, ill! Present-day Christians are niggards. They love money, they hide it. They give little to God. . . . They are all out to make money and cheat, they think of worldly wealth, not of saving their souls. You visit and visit, you pray and pray; sometimes you don't pray a farthing out of them in three days. What a sin! A week, two weeks, go by, you look in your bag, and there's so little, you're ashamed to show it at the monastery: what's to be done? you are so sad, you drink the rest, and a poor comfort too. Ah, bad it is! it seems our last days are come.—

H. (weeping) The Lord keep us and save us!

(While V. is speaking, 1st G. examines M. attentively.)

1st G. (to G. 2), Hast thou the Tsar's edict on thee?

2nd G. Ay.

1st G. Give it here.

M. Why dost eye me so fixedly?

1st G. Look here, a vile heretic has escaped from Moscow, Grigor Otrépyov. Hast heard that?

M. Nay.

1st G. Thou hast not heard. Good. And the Tsar has ordered this runaway heretic to be taken and hanged. Dost thou know that?

M. Nay.

1st G. (to V.) Can't thou read?
A RUSSIAN SHAKESPEAREAN

V. I learnt it as a boy, but have forgotten it.
1st G. (to M.) And thou?
M. The Lord has not taught me.
1st G. Look at this imperial edict.
M. What is it to me?
1st G. I guess this runaway heretic, thief and rogue is—thee!
M. I? My good sir, what do you mean?
1st G. Stand! Hold the doors, we'll soon find the truth.
H. O these cursed torturers! And they won't leave this old man alone!
1st G. Who is here that can read?
Gr. (coming forward) I can read...
1st G. (giving him the edict) Read it aloud.
Gr. (reads) Grigory, an unworthy secular of the Chudov monastery, of the
family of Otrepyov, fell into heresy, and dared, at the devil's bidding,
to annoy the holy brothers by all manner of illegal devices. And
inquiry being made, he escaped, this accursed Grigory, to the
Lithuanian border—
1st G. (to M.) Who's that but you?
Grig. And the Tsar orders him to be taken?
1st G. And hanged!
Grig. It doesn't say hanged.
1st G. A lie! They don't put it all in writing. Read: 'taken and hanged'.
Grig. And hanged. And the age of the thief Grigory (looking at V.) is
fifty; medium stature, forehead bald, beard grey, belly stout.
(All look at V.)
1st G. Boys! Here is Grishka! Seize him, hold him! I never thought it
or guessed it!
V. (snatching the paper.) Stay, rogues! What sort of Grishka am I?
Look, fifty years old, beard grey, and belly stout! No brother! The
young man has played a trick on me. I have not read for years, and
can't make it out well, but I shall make it out as hanging's in question
(spells it out) 'And his age is 20.' How, brother, where is your '50'?
Do you see that '20'?
2nd G. Ay, I mind, it was 20; they told us so.
1st G. (to Grig.) So, brother, you seem to be a joker, (during the reading,
Gr. stands with his head hanging and his hand in his bosom).
V. (continuing). Of low stature, chest broad, one hand shorter than the
other, eyes blue, hair reddish, a wart on his cheek and another on his
forehead. Isn't that you, friend?
Grig. draws his dagger suddenly, they all scatter before him, he rushes to
the window.
1st and 2nd G. Hold him! hold him!
(All pursue him in disorder.)

In the very next scene we learn in a very dramatic way what has
ensued. Place and time are handled with more than Shakesperean
boldness. It would have formed in Shakespeare the beginning of a new
Act. We are back in Moscow, and some weeks at least have elapsed. For Grigory has already reached Poland, has declared himself to be the Tsarewitch, and has been accepted with Polish enthusiasm by Polish society and the Polish king; while the first intimation of these sensational events has just reached his friends in Moscow.

The scenes in Moscow which follow are the crucial scenes of the tragedy. The position and tension of the opposed forces is not unlike that in the Fourth act of Richard III, where Richard broaches the murder of the princes to Buckingham, receives an evasive reply, and presently learns of the approach of Richmond. But as imagined by the young Shakespeare the game of politics is still comparatively elementary; diplomatic duplicity is not long maintained, disguises are impatiently thrown off and suspicions declared. Richard having confided his plan to Buckingham and meeting with only a hesitating response, has no further use for him, and roughly repels him. Buckingham knows that he is lost, and flies. In Pushkin, the descendant of generations of nobles versed in the astute diplomacy for which Russia has always been famous, the strategic game is on a far more advanced stage of duplicity.

The first scene is in the palace of Shuisky. It is the close of a brilliant evening party; the guests are just taking leave. One of them, Pushkin (the ancestor of the poet) lingers behind, a hint that he has important news, and then, in the utmost secrecy, after dismissing the servants and closing doors and windows, reveals that the Tsarevitch is alive in Poland. Shuisky is incredulous, but sees how powerful an engine even a false claimant will be for overthrowing Boris. The thing is to be kept absolutely secret. But already Boris's friends are aware of this suspicious meeting, and proceed to disclose it to him. These high matters of state are not introduced at once; Boris as yet knows nothing, we see him with his children, unsuspecting of peril, like Lady Macduff with her boys. The girl, Kseniya, had been betrothed to the murdered Dmitri and is still mourning for him. Her father ironically consoles her.

Why, Kseniya! Why, my beloved girl!
Already a widow and still a plighted maid!
Still grieving for your bridegroom's sad decease?
My dearest child, I clearly was not fated
To be the founder of your wedded bliss.
I very likely have offended heaven
Too far to be the builder of your fortune.
Innocent creature! why should you be hurt?
Then he turns to his boy Feódor, the Tsarevitch, who is busy making a map of his father’s empire. The boy explains it:

A map of Muscovy! our entire dominion
From end to end. Here you see Moscow, here is
Novgorod, Astrachan, and the Black Sea,
Here the impassable forests of Perm, and here
Siberia. . . .

Ts. Capital! There’s the fruit of education!
You see as in a bird’s eye glance the whole
Tsardom at once, frontiers and towns and rivers.
Study, my son, knowledge abridges for us
The experience of our swiftly flowing life.
Some time or other, and it may be soon,
All the dominions you have just been plotting
So cleverly on paper, will be yours;—
Study, my son, and you will understand
More clearly and easily what it is to rule.

[His brother Semjón Godunów enters.]

But here comes Godunów with a report.

[He dismisses his daughter and her governess: Feodor remains.]

What have you got to say, Semjón Nikititch?

.Sem. To-day at dawn the Chamberlain—his servant
And Pushkin’s came to me with information.

Ts. Well?

.Sem. Pushkin’s servant stated, first of all,
That yester-morning at their house arrived
A courier from Cracow, and an hour
Later without dispatches was dismissed.

Ts. Arrest the courier. Men are in pursuit.

Ts. And of Shuiski?

.Sem. He was entertaining
His friends to supper,—both the Miloslawksis,
The Buturlins, Michaël Saltykov,
And Pushkin, and some others. It was late
When they broke up. Pushkin alone remained.
And with his host in closest secrecy
Held further long discussion.

Ts. Instantly

Summon Shuisky.

.Sem. Sire! He is here already,

Ts. Call him to me.

(Sem. exit.)

Dealings with Lithuania? What is this?
The rebel race of Pushkin are my enemies,
And Shuisky does not deserve my trust,
Pliant, but bold and cunning—
Prince, I want

A word with you. Apparently, however,
You come yourself on business; pray speak first.

Shu. That is so, sire; in duty bound I bring you
Important information.

Ts. I attend.

Sh. (pointing to Feodor) But, sire?

Ts. Whatever prince Shuiski knows
The Tsarevitch may know. Speak freely.

Sh. Tsar,
From Lithuania we have news—

Ts. The same
Is it not, that a courier brought last night
To Pushkin?

Sh. (aside) He knows all.—I had not thought,
Sire, that these secrets could have reached you yet.

Ts. No matter, prince. I wish to check and sift
This information; otherwise I shall not
Learn the whole truth.

Sh. All that I know is this,
That a Pretender has appeared in Cracow,
And that the King and nobles are behind him.

Ts. (agitated) What are they claiming? Who is this Pretender?
Sh. I know not.

Ts. But . . . Why is he dangerous?

Sh. Beyond doubt, Sire, your empire is secure.
By kindness, care, and liberality
You have won the hearts of all your subjects. But
You know yourself how thoughtless is the mob,
How treacherous, unstable, superstitious,
Lightly seduced by every idle hope,
Beguiled by every momentary lure,
Deaf and indifferent to truth, and fed
On fables. It delights in shameless daring.
If therefore this unknown adventurer
Once cross the Latvian frontier, he will draw
The senseless people to him by the magic
Of his mere name—the resurrected name
Of Dmitri—

Ts. Dmitri! What? That boy?

Dmitri! (to Fedor) Leave us, Tsarevitch.

Sh. (aside) He colours:
There'll be a storm now.

Fedor. Sire, will you allow me,—

Ts. Impossible, my son, withdraw.

(Fedor exit.)

Dmitri!
Sh. *(aside)* So he knew nothing.

Ts. Listen, prince; order measures instantly;
Let Russia all along the Latvian march
Be lined with guards; that not a single soul
Cross, not a hare run hither out of Poland,
And not a crow fly here from Cracow. Hence!

Sh. I go.

Ts. Stay. Is it not a fact, this news
Is fabricated? Did you ever hear
Of dead men rising from their mortal graves
To question monarchs, monarchs lawfully
Named and elected by the people's voice,
Crowned by the most high Patriarch? Laughable
Isn't not? Why don't you laugh then?

Sh. I, my lord?

Tsar. Listen, prince Shuisky. When I received
The news that this boy—of this boy's demise,
I sent you to investigate; I now
Conjure you in the name of Christ and God,
Upon your conscience tell me the very truth:
Did you identify the murdered youth,
Or was it a bogus body? Answer me,

Sh. I swear to you—

Tsar. No, Shuisky, do not swear.

But answer: was it the Tsarevitch?

Sh. 'Twas he

Tsar. Consider, prince. I promise to be kind.
Bygone betrayals with vain banishment
I will not punish. But if now you should
Play double with me, by my own son's head
I swear, a dire death-doom shall overtake you,
Such a death-doom, the Tsar Ivan himself
Will quake with terror in the grave at it.

Sh. Not doom I dread but your unkindness, Tsar.
Should I with you dare play the hypocrite?
And could I be so blindly taken in
As not to know Dimitri? For three days
I visited the body in the church,
Escorted by the fathers one and all.
Round him lay thirteen corpses of men torn
To pieces by the people, where decay
Already had perceptibly set in.
But the child Tsarevitch's body still
Was fresh and ruddy and calm, as if in sleep.
In his deep wound the blood was not yet clotted,
His features still were utterly unchanged.
Nay, Sire, there is no doubt at all, Dimitri
Sleeps in his grave.
Tsar. Enough, withdraw.
(Exit Shuisky.)

Air! Air!
I stifle—let me breathe! I felt
All my blood rush into my face, and sink
Heavily back. . . . This, this is why I have dreamt
Thirteen years nightly of the murdered boy,
Yes, yes,—so comes it—now I understand.
But what then is he, this my threatening foe?
What's he to me? An empty name, a shadow—
And can a shadow snatch the purple from me,
Or a voice seize my children's heritage?
Fool that I am! Of what am I afraid?
Breathe on this phantom—and it vanishes.
So, I'm resolved: never a sign of fear—
O heavy art thou, crown of Muscovy!

And then the scene shifts to the Pretender's new court at Cracow.
The Poles who surround him, ardent and facile, volcanic and volatile,
are drawn with caustic irony by the Russian, a master of reticence.
The false Dmitri plays his part like a born diplomat and a finished courtier;
winning the priests by a promise to bring the Eastern Church under the papacy,
the king by the prospect of an advantageous league with Muscovy, and the brilliant ambitious beauty, Marina,
by the promise of the Tsaritsa's throne.

We seem here to be on the verge of a love-episode such as
Pushkin, like Alfieri, thought out of keeping with tragedy, and which
is foreign also to the temper of Shakespeare's Histories. In nothing is
Schiller's Wallenstein less like Shakespeare than in the love story of Max and Thekla. We see Marina and her maid Rosa dressing for
the ball, and they hold a very un-Shakesperean discussion, whether she
shall wear the ruby brooch or the diamond bracelet. The historical Marina
was a soulless coquette who gave herself to any man who offered her the hope of power. We may measure the force of Shakespeare's example when we find
Pushkin's Marina reminding us of the Portia of Brutus. But this is only a single moment in a scene of great power and beauty, a game of strategy between two persons both young, both

1 In the original 'Monomach,' an imperial title.
2 Pushkin borrowed a trait from Richard's wooing—his offering her his sword— for a genuine form of love, Juan's courtship of Lady Anna (whose husband like Richard, he has murdered), in the Stone Guest.
3 Pushkin to Rayevsky, 1829; see App. [2].
perfectly unscrupulous, one baiting love with power, the other power
with love. Marina has met the Pretender by appointment in a
garden, by night, beside a fountain; but not for love. He is begin-
nning to explain how impatiently he had waited all day for this
rapturous meeting, but she cuts him short—

The hours are flying, and my time is precious—
I did not come to hear a lover's speeches.
Words are unnecessary. I believe
You love me; but attend: I am resolved
To join my fate, for better or for worse,
With yours; but one thing, Dmitri, I have a right
To ask: that you discover to me all
The secret hopes and purposes of your heart,
So that I may with confidence enter on
Life by your side;—not blindly, like a child,
Nor like your harlot, a she-slave obeying
Speechless the trivial orders of her lord,
But as your true and honourable wife,
The consort of the Tsar of Muscovy!

In vain the Pretender begs her, for one hour only, to forget politics
and think of him as the lover. He even declares that Muscovy and
its throne are nothing to him beside her love. She indignantly stops
him, with the plain assurance that she is giving her hand not to the
young lover infatuated with her beauty, but to the heir of Russia,
miraculously preserved by fate. He audaciously puts the case, suppose
he were not Dmitri after all? Could she love him? And then he
tells her the truth, that Dmitri the Tsarewitch is dead, and he him-
self just a poor runaway monk. She is overcome for a moment; but
then proceeds to reproach him for giving up to her his well-kept
secret. She will not betray him; his sham rank is as powerful as
ever so long as it is believed in, and above all, it can strike down
Boris, and seat him on the Russian throne, and her beside him. Let
him, true or false, destroy Boris, and she will have him, but on no
other condition. And she leaves him.

'No,' he reflects;—
'Tis easier to get even with Godunov
Or with a cunning Jesuit of the court,
Than with a woman. . . .
A snake! a snake! 'twas not for nought I trembled;
Another moment, and I was undone.
But now the die is cast: I march to-morrow.
So he crosses the frontier with all his forces; the people flock to his banner, as they flock to join Bolingbroke in *Richard II*; reports of his success come into Moscow, and Boris hastily summons his council.

Camp scenes, follow, with rough soldier-types;—a Russian prisoner plain-spoken to his captors, as the Boy at Agincourt to his prisoners (each poet giving his own countryman the best of the encounter), and an eccentric captain, like Fluellen, venting scraps of foreign tongues. 'Then we return to Moscow. In a prose scene we hear the people, now frank and bold; and an 'Idiot,' like one of Shakespeare's Fools, hustled by the crowd, voices the deadly truth to Boris: 'The lads are killing me. Order them to be killed, as you killed the little Tsarevitch.' This 'Fool' is not, like Shakespeare's, a wit kept for the amusement and profit of courts, but a poor outcast, one of the class of wandering 'Idiots,' religious ascetics who wore iron caps and chains, and whose reputed 'idiocy' gave them a privilege of free speech no less serviceable for the dramatist than the chartered licence of the English court-Fools. Yet no one, but for Shakespeare's Fools, would have thought of putting a Russian 'idiot' on the tragic stage.

And now the Pretender's forces are closing in, aided by the nobles and by the people. Boris in his palace is attacked and brought in dying. He summons his son, Feódor, and addresses to him, as Henry to Hal, a last speech of counsel. 'I am Tsar still,' he cries, like Antony at bay after Actium. The Nobles declare for the Pretender, and secure their heads by the fervour of their appeal to the people to make an end of Boris and his family. In the final scene his young son and daughter are seen under guard; a beggar asks alms of the boy. 'Go,' replies Feódor, 'you are happier than I, you are free!' In a little while they are dead, not without pitying protests from among the people, and the curtain falls on a loud summons to cry 'long live Dmitri Ivanovitch.' The people receive it in silence, a significant sign that if the tragedy of Boris is ended, another drama, of no less sinister auspice, is about to begin.

The close is stern—almost the last we hear is the cry of Boris's slaughtered children. While the doom of Boris himself, if a righteous Nemesis, is inflicted upon him by another usurper, whose claim to the Tsardom is as hollow as his own, and who has won it by the help of men as double-faced as himself.
Yet intercourse with Shakespeare seems to have communicated to this young Russian poet something of the indefinable faith in goodness, and in the final prevalence of good, which emanates somehow from the most harrowing of Shakespeare's tragedies, as it does not always from the grimmer darkness of Ibsen's, and as it does not from this. In the overwhelming pathos of the death of Desdemona and of Cordelia, we yet must think the world not without hope in which beings of such heavenly beauty can be born. Nor does Shakespeare even show us man in the grip of a heritage ruthless and irresistible as fate, as Ibsen does in Ghosts. Pushkin was still unripe, and his tragedy ends without any complete expression either of nobility of character or of the ethical background of tragedy. Yet there are, as I said, signs that he felt Shakespeare's indefinable faith in goodness.

The so-called 'December' conspiracy in which Pushkin escaped being implicated only, as he bravely told Nicholas, because he was not then in St. Petersburg, was discovered, and its leaders, some of the most eminent men in Russia, arrested. Their fate was still hanging in the balance when Pushkin wrote to a friend (in Jan. 1826): 'I await impatiently the verdict upon these unhappy men. . . . I have definite trust in the generosity of the young Tsar. We will not be superstitious nor yet one-sided, like the French tragic poets, but watch the tragedy with the eyes of Shakespeare.' Unhappily, trust in the generosity of the Emperor Nicholas was then and always in the highest degree misplaced; and almost a century was to elapse before the old regime, in the person of another Nicholas, was finally dismissed by the Russian people.

"We will not be superstitious, nor yet one-sided, but watch the tragedy with the eyes of Shakespeare." I do not think I can find a fitter text than this fine utterance of our Russian Shakespearean's generous hope and faith, for the few sentences in which I wish to speak of him whom we commemorate to-day.

After his appointment here I only twice or thrice met Arthur Skemp, once on the occasion when he received an honorary degree from his old University. But I followed his career at a distance, and I knew how great an impression his teaching and his magnetic

¹Letter to Baron Delwig.
personality had made upon academic and popular audiences alike. He sent me also much of his verse; in particular, his Arthurian drama, vibrating with passion and poetry. And then came the sudden heroic and tragic end, which stirred grief and sympathy in circles far wider than had ever known him; while those who did know and love him, best knew how far his great powers were from being completely unfolded, and how much of what he had to say was still unsaid. And yet Arthur Skemp had time to show what he was, and to leave, in the community where he lived and laboured, as in the home where he loved and was loved, an ineffaceable memory behind. The memory of one who, in his life and in his death, brought vividly back to us, as few men do, the ideal of chivalry;—the chivalry evolved by generations of knighthood in feudal service for the crown, or the cross, or a lady's grace, but in this modern knight divested of all that is merely archaic or mediaeval, and re-clad in the radiant garb of those who fight not for a class only but for humanity; the chivalry of Hamlet, who was scholar, soldier, and courtier at once, equally equipped with eye, tongue, and sword;—a Hamlet whose mind was a belfry of sweet sounds, not jangled, but full of heartening solace for all who heard. Or, if I may be allowed to resort once more to our literature in describing a great teacher of it, I would say that it was the chivalry of one in whom the temper of Chaucer's knight,—with his passion for 'truth and honour, freedom and courtesye,' and his port 'as meek as is a maid,' was enriched with the intellectual passion of his 'Clerk,' who would 'gladly lerne and gladly teche'; and also, for surely the spirit of eternal youth was in him, the young ardour of that Squier, singer and poet and lover, who left his story half untold. If Skemp, both as man and poet, had but half told his story, Milton, we know, in his meditative hour, preferred the Squier's unfinished story before all the rest. Will it not cheer the meditation and quicken the idealism of many, who without Milton's genius do battle no less strenuously than he for the things of the spirit, to remember the half-told story of Arthur Skemp?
The salient points of this important letter, so far as bearing on the technique and intentions of Boris Godunov, are extracted below. The numbers are referred to in the text.


[1] Following Shakespeare’s example, I have limited myself to the representation of an age and of the historical persons, not pursuing theatrical or romantic effects. The style is mixed. It is low and gross where I had to introduce gross and vulgar persons.

[2] I dreamed with satisfaction of a tragedy without love; but besides that love was an essential element in the romantic and passionate characters of my adventurer, I make Dmitri fall in love with Marina, the better to express her own passionate character. In Karamzin she is only sketched. She was simply the most passionate of all good-looking women. But she had only one passion, the passion for power, and that to a degree of violence hard to imagine. . . .

She appears only in a single scene, but I shall return to her if God gives me life.

[3] Gavrilo Pushkin is one of my ancestors; I have represented him as I found him in history and in my family papers. He possessed many talents, being at once an accomplished soldier, a courtier, and above all a master of plotting. He and Pleshcheev secured the success of the Pretender by their unheard-of audacity.

I find him later among the defenders of Moscow in 1612, then in 1616 in the Duma, . . . then Vervode in Nizhni, then among the deputies who crowned Romanov. He was everything, even an incendiary, as a paper shows which I found in the ‘Burnt-out City.’ . . .

[4] Shuisky. I also propose to return to Shuisky. He represents in history a strange mixture of boldness, cunning, and strong character. A servant of Godunov, he alone among the chief courtiers passed over to the side of Dmitri, he is the first to conspire, and observe, he is the first to profit by the mêlée, calling out and accusing, and turning from a commander to a ruffian. He came near to execution, but Dmitri pardons him on the scaffold, banishes him, and with that light-hearted magnanimity which distinguished this amiable adventurer, again calls him to his court, and loads him with honours and gifts. And what does Shuisky do, the man who had been on the point of falling on the block and under the axe? He makes haste to conspire again, succeeds, comes into favour, falls,—and in his fall shows more character and spiritual force than in all the rest of his life.

[5] Dmitry. Dmitri strongly recalls Henry IV [of France]. He is valiant, magnanimous, and boastful, like him; indifferent to religion; both for political reasons change their faith; both love amusements and war; both are inclined to chimerical enterprises, and both seek their end by conspiracy.
But Henry had not Ksenia on his conscience—it is true that this dreadful charge has not yet been proved, and I hold it my sacred duty not to believe it.

[6] On Tragedy. While composing my Godunov I reflected on tragedy, and if I thought of writing a preface there would be a sensation,—this perhaps the least investigated kind of literature. They try to deduce its laws from probability, but that is excluded by the nature of drama; not to speak of time and place, etc., what probability in the devil's name can there be in a hall divided into two halves, one of which contains 2000 people, who suppose themselves unseen by the persons on the stage. . . . The tragic poets of real genius never troubled themselves about any other probability than that of characters and situation. See how bravely Corneille managed in the Cid: ah, you want the law of 24 hours! Your pardon! Instead he tosses his events about over 4 months. But nothing is more ridiculous than petty corrections in received laws. Alfieri feels deeply the ridiculous significance of the aside; he suppresses it, but in its place exalts the monologue. What childishness!