

The Cross-Surety

By Unknown

Once upon a time two merchants lived in a certain town, just on the verge of a stream. One of them was a Russian, the other a Tartar; both were rich. But the Russian got so utterly ruined by some business or other that he hadn't a single bit of property left. Everything he had was confiscated or stolen. The Russian merchant had nothing to turn to—he was left as poor as a rat.² So he went to his friend the Tartar, and besought him to lend him some money.

‘Get me a surety,’ says the Tartar.

‘But whom can I get for you, seeing that I haven't a soul belonging to me? Stay, though I there's a surety for you, the life-giving cross on the church!’

‘Very good, my friend!’ says the Tartar. ‘I'll trust your cross. Your faith or ours, it's all one to me.’

And he gave the Russian merchant fifty thousand roubles. The Russian took the money, bade the Tartar farewell, and went back to trade in divers places.

By the end of two years he had gained a hundred and fifty thousand roubles by the fifty thousand he had borrowed. Now he happened to be sailing one day along the Danube, going with wares from one place to another, when all of a sudden a storm arose, and was on the point of sinking the ship he was in. Then the merchant remembered how he had borrowed money, and given the life-giving cross as a surety, but had not paid his debt. That was doubtless the cause of the storm arising! No sooner had he said this to himself than the storm began to subside. The merchant took a barrel, counted out fifty thousand roubles, wrote the Tartar a note, placed it, together with the money, in the barrel, and then flung the barrel into the water, saying to himself: ‘As I gave the cross as my surety to the Tartar, the money will be certain to reach him.’

The barrel straightway sank to the bottom; everyone supposed the money was lost. But what happened? In the Tartar's house there lived a Russian kitchen-maid. One day she happened to go to the river for water, and when she got there she saw a barrel floating along. So she went a little way into the water and began trying to get hold of it. But it wasn't to be done! When she made at the barrel, it retreated from her when she turned from the barrel to the shore, it floated after her. She went on trying and trying for some time, then she went home and told her master all that had happened. At first he wouldn't believe her, but at last he determined to go to the river and see for himself what sort of barrel it was that was floating there. When he got there—sure enough there was the barrel floating, and not far from the shore. The Tartar took off his clothes and went into the water; before he had gone any distance the barrel came floating up to him of its own accord. He laid hold of it, carried it home, opened it, and looked inside. There he saw a quantity of money, and on top of the money a note. He took out the note and read it, amid this is what was said in it:—

‘Dear friend! I return you the fifty thousand roubles for which, when I borrowed them from you, I gave the life-giving cross as a surety.’

The Tartar read these words and was astounded at the power of the life-giving cross. He counted the money over to see whether the full sum was really there. It was there exactly.

Meanwhile, the Russian merchant, after trading some five years, made a tolerable fortune. Well, he returned to his old home, and, thinking that his barrel had been lost, he considered it his first duty to settle with the Tartar. So he went to his house and offered him the money he had borrowed. Then the Tartar told him all that had happened, and how he had found the barrel in the river, with the money and the note inside it. Then he showed him the note, saying

‘Is that really your hand?’

It certainly is,’ replied the other.

Every one was astounded at this wondrous manifestation, and the Tartar said:

‘Then I’ve no more money to receive from you, brother; take that back again.’

The Russian merchant had a service performed as a thank-offering to God, and next day the Tartar was baptised with all his household. The Russian merchant was his godfather, and the kitchen-maid his godmother. After that they both lived long and happily, survived to a great age, and then died peacefully.’