

Nikolai Leskov



*The Steel
Flea*

Nikolai Leskov

The Steel Flea



Published by Good Press, 2022

goodpress@okpublishing.info

EAN 4064066462932

TABLE OF CONTENTS

[Cover](#)

[Titlepage](#)

[Text](#)

The Steel Flea

[Table of Contents](#)

Preface

[Table of Contents](#)

I CANNOT tell precisely where the first germ of the Legend concerning the Steel Flea had its birth—that is to say, whether it originated in Tula, the Izhma, or Sestroryetzk; but, evidently, it came from one of these places.

In any case, the tale of the Steel Flea is a legend which distinctly belongs to the Armorers' Guild and expresses the pride of Russian gunsmiths. It depicts a contest between our workmen and English workmen, from which our artisans emerged the victors, having utterly routed and humiliated the Englishmen.

Herein, also, is explained a certain secret cause of military disasters in the Crimea.

I jotted down this Legend in Sestroryetzk from the lips of an aged gunsmith, an emigrant from Tula, who had removed to the Sestra River during the reign of Alexander the First. The narrator was still hale and hearty two years ago, and of sound memory; he was fond of recalling the days of yore, cherished great respect for the Emperor Nikolai Pavlovitch, lived "according to the ancient faith," read devout books, and bred canary-birds. People treated him with much consideration.^[1]

The Steel Flea^[2]

I
WHEN the Emperor Alexander Pavlovitch had finished the Congress of Vienna he took a fancy to travel all over Europe and view the marvels of the different realms. He journeyed through all lands, and everywhere, by reason of his amiability, he always held the most internecine^[3] discussions with all men, and all amazed him by one means or another and sought to incline him to their side. But he had a Cossack of the Don, named Platoff, attached to his personal service, who did not like this inclination, and, being homesick for his own hearthstone, he constantly sought to lure the Emperor to his home.

So, as soon as Platoff perceived that the Emperor took a deep interest in any foreign thing and all his suite held their peace, he began to say immediately: "Thus and so, and we have the same thing of our own at home, not a whit worse,"—and then he would turn him aside in one way or another.

The English people were aware of this, and had prepared various cunning devices against the Emperor's arrival, to the end that they might captivate him with foreign things, and in many cases they attained their object, especially in the great assemblies where Platoff could not express himself perfectly in French; but he did not mind that over-much because he was a married man, and regarded all French conversation as mere emptiness, unworthy of his imagination.

But when the English began to invite the Emperor to all their arsenals, armories, shops, and soap-sawing factories,