

DARKEST RUSSIA

BY H. GRATTAN DONNELLY.

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CHAPTER VIII.—Continued.

"I warn you that your act, even if you accomplish your purpose, will do more injury to the cause of Russian liberty than any decree of the autocrat, however severe, could accomplish. Educate the people!"

"Bah! I have no patience with theories and theorists. This is no revolutionary kindergarten. We are men and women imperiling our lives in this movement, and I tell you that success can only be won by blood, by blood!"

A murmur—"Ay, that's the talk! Blood! blood! blood!" showed that the sentiments of the majority were in favor of the one who had last spoken.

"There is no precedent in history to prove that a people's wrongs were righted by assassination," began the first speaker. "You know, Oraminsky, that history—"

"History be damned—and precedents, too. We are here to make history—to establish a precedent if need be. No! no! Let the timid withdraw if they will. I, for one, will carry through our plan. What! Act as weaklings after all these years of waiting, after all these months of preparation, after all these weeks of work in silence and in secret to overthrow the tyrant! Never! by the God of the people of Holy Russia, never, never, never!"

Loris Oraminsky, the man who had last spoken, turned to those around him as he uttered the last words of his impassioned speech. He looked every inch a man who would dare—a man whom nothing could turn aside from a purpose once fully determined upon. The strongly marked face, with its heavy, square jaw; the deeply black eyes, sunken beneath shaggy eyebrows, and the massive head with its wealth of coal black hair, which was almost as luxuriant as a woman's—these, with a giant's frame and the strength of a Hercules, would have made Oraminsky a man of mark in any assemblage.

Of all the members of the moderates, none had opposed the extreme views and aims of Oraminsky and his following with greater zeal and earnestness than Ivan Barosky. The son of an exile—an exile as he believed cruelly and unjustly punished—Ivan was as intense in his enmity to the existing powers in Russia as was Oraminsky himself. But he was too able and farseeing, too progressive and cautious to commit himself to what he truly believed to be a course of action that would alienate from the Russian revolutionists the support and sympathy of the friends of liberty in every country in Europe.

Oraminsky's impassioned reply, and the favor with which it had been received, convinced Ivan that further discussion would be futile.

"You have heard our views," he said, "and it is now for me to declare our purpose."

There was a pause.

All looked at him with every appearance of intense interest.

"After this night," began Ivan, "we will never—"

He stopped suddenly. His ear caught on the outside the sound of a hurried footstep, and raising his hand for caution and silence he listened intently.

The footsteps grew nearer.

Oraminsky lifted his hand, and as he did so a singular transformation took place.

All in the room who were seated, or who were working with the implements before described, arose and silently as so many specters stepped softly back toward the sides of the room. Each carried something—a battery, a bit of wire a shell, a conical vessel handled with great care and whose proximity was evidently not desired by any but the man whose duty it was to hold it in charge.

There they stood, lined by the

walls, like so many automatons, silent, motionless.

All this had taken less time than it takes to write it.

The footsteps stopped—there was a knock at the door.

A peculiar knock it was—a loud tap, two short quick taps, and then a pause and a final knock.

Evidently a signal for the expression of intense anxiety changed instantly to one of relief; the people resumed their seats, and Ivan, with a commanding gesture, which Oraminsky himself submitted to, exclaimed, "A friend! Open the door, Aronsky."

Running up the steps that led to the door of the underground apartment, Aronsky, removing a long oak- en bar that fastened it, threw open the door.

"Ilda Barosky!"

The words were uttered with a spontaneous impulse by all present as Ilda Barosky, for it was she who had given the friendly signal, stood for a second at the door, until, her eyes having lighted upon Ivan, she swiftly descended the steps and came into the midst of the expectant group.

Her face was flushed with excitement, her fine hair disheveled, and her whole appearance indicated that she was laboring under some intense mental strain.

Ivan sprang to her side.

"Ilda, my sister, what has happened?"

Ilda gazed wildly for a moment, and then, her voice quivering with emotion, she spoke in quick, disjointed sentences: "Oh, infamy! Oh, cruel— coward—the lash—Alexis—I will be avenged—terribly avenged—do you hear? The cruel Nazimoff; oh, it was cowardly—" and, overcome by the recollection of the terrible ordeal through which she has passed, the girl sank into a chair, burying her face in her hands, and shaking like an aspen leaf from the violence of the conflicting emotions.



"...BY BLOOD!"

After having recovered in some degree, Ilda told the story of the night. The sudden illness of Anna Dorski had deprived the famous orchestra of its great soloist, and at the last moment Anna appealed to Ilda to take her place. In vain Ilda urged that she had a reason for not going to the Nazimoff mansion, and it was only when the famous leader himself begged her, with his daughter, not to place him in a false position before the assembled aristocracy of the capital, that she gave a reluctant consent.

When Ilda reached the part of her story where she was brought by violence into the room, her audience manifested intense interest, and she proceeded amid deepest silence. But when she told of Nazimoff raising the whip, the indignation of all present could no longer be restrained.

"Coward!" "Wretch!" and "Wom-

an beater!" were some of the maledictions hurled at Nazimoff, and threats, deep and earnest, of dire vengeance for the deed, were uttered on all sides.

But it was when she spoke of her refusal to play "God Save the Czar," and of her sending the violin crashing into a thousand pieces at the foot of Nazimoff, that the excitement broke all bounds.

"Death to the Nazimoff!" was one remark, and the refrain was taken up by all present.

"Let me avenge our sister's wrong," spoke up one young and powerful man who came into the group. "Give me the right and I shall find a way to his heart with this—" and he drove his dagger into the table and left it quivering in the wood.

"Not so! I am her brother," said Ivan, "and I am the one to avenge her."

"Well spoken," exclaimed Oraminsky. He saw that the feeling produced upon Ivan by the story of his sister was intense, and he determined to make the most of it to win Ivan as a supporter of his own. "But it must not be. This wrong has been done to the sister of a brother of our order—none the less a brother because he differs with us on some minor points. The vengeance for Ilda's wrongs belongs to us all, but we must be guided by our rules."

"Ay, by our rules," was the response. They knew the rules. It was not the first time that the rules had been invoked for private revenge.

Ivan had taken Ilda a little apart from the rest, and was doing what he could to restore her to calmness. He seemed anxious to gain every particular, even to the smallest and apparently most unimportant detail of what had occurred. But particularly was he concerned about Alexis Nazimoff. "What did he look like? How did he act? What did he say?" with these and a score of other questions Ivan plied his sister, getting of course little or no information beyond what Ilda had told him at the beginning.

In the meantime, under the direction of Oraminsky, the assemblage began putting in operation the "rule of the order" to decide upon whom should fall the task of avenging Ilda's wrong by Count Nazimoff.

"Bring the bag, Hersy," said Oraminsky.

In response, one of the women produced a small bag made of chamols in which Oraminsky, after rapidly counting the number of persons present, placed a handful of roubles—exactly as many roubles as there were those in the apartment.

"And now for the Red Beauty."

From around her neck, fastened by a string, Hersy produced a small leathern case, which she opened.

The movement was watched with intense interest, and as Hersy drew from the case a coin and handed it to Oraminsky, all present gazed at the piece of money with some such expression as a Hindoo might regard an image of his favorite god.

The piece of money was a silver rouble.

It was a deep red.

"Le Rouble Rouge," sometimes called "The Red Beauty," was celebrated throughout Europe. It had been found by the side of the Czar Alexander II., when he sank in blood after the bomb had done its fatal work, and the red upon the coin was the life-blood of the autocrat of all the Russians when he fell a victim to the Nihilists' vengeance.

"Now," said Oraminsky, "as he softly jingled the bag which contained the roubles, 'there are as many pieces here as we have brothers present. Plump! In goes the Red Beauty, and he who draws her wins the prize—he it shall be who must take revenge on the cowardly brute Nazimoff!'"

As he dropped the red rouble in with the rest, Oraminsky shook the bag and one by one the men approached and drew. Ivan took his chance with the rest.

"Keep your hands closed until I give the signal—then hold them aloft and show your coin," directed Ora-

minsky as he tossed the empty bag to Hersy, the last coin having been drawn.

"Now, then, one, two, three, show!" and all the hands went up.

"Ivan draws the prize!" was the exclamation as it was seen that Ivan displayed the Red Beauty.

"Glad I am that it is so!" exclaimed Ivan. "I will wipe out Nazimoff's insult in a way that will show to all the world how a Russian can avenge a sister's injury. And now, friends," he went on, as he made a motion to Ilda to prepare to accompany him, "what is your last answer—the final reply to the leaders of our section? Will you defer action longer, or will you take issue with us and act alone?"

Oraminsky advanced.

"Say to—" he spoke no further. Half a dozen hands went up at once



"OH, INFAMY!—OH, CRUEL—!"

with the signal for silence. Footsteps were again heard at a distance in the frosty night.

With a movement Ivan and Oraminsky both raised their hands.

The people in two rows ranged themselves along the walls.

The footsteps grew nearer, louder, approached the door and stopped.

Then came a strong single knock—but no faint knocks followed. Evidently, whoever came to the door did not possess the signal.

Now it was that Ivan Barosky showed his powers—dominating even the strong will of Oraminsky himself. With a whispered word to Ilda, he pointed back to a dark corner behind the stairs in which was a scarcely visible door. "The secret passage to the banks of the Neva," he whispered "use it if necessary." Ilda disappeared.

Then, turning to Oraminsky, Ivan said in an undertone: "I am best to deal with this—is it so?"

Oraminsky nodded quickly. Then pressing Ivan's hand, with the word "Caution," he took his place by the wall and stood as impassive and as silent as the others.

Ivan alone now occupied the center of the room.

Again the knock—louder this time—two or three times louder.

"Open the door!"

Raising his left hand, Ivan made a simultaneous motion like that of a swimmer with both arms.

Ivan stood alone!

All the others disappeared as silently as so many shadows.

The room was empty!

(To be continued.)

Quick Work on Shirts.

The up-to-date song of the shirt lasts just six and one-half minutes, according to a factory inspector for whose edification the foreman of a shirt factory started a piece of cloth on the rounds and made it come out ready for a customer's back before the second hand on a watch had revolved seven times. In this time seven girls had contributed their efforts to the finished product. One machine in this shop makes 16,800 buttonholes a day, or twenty-eight in a minute, and in a ten-hour day a man can cut 250 dozen shirts.