

# The Secret Dispatch

By JAMES GRANT

## CHAPTER IX.

"So—he is safe," said Nicholas Paulovitch, looking upward with a grin of savage satisfaction at the closed trap, as he replaced the torch on the table, and then closely scrutinized the corporal, whose eyes had already become red and inflamed.

"Hush!" said Podatchkine, "take care!"

"Why?" asked Nicholas, in a hoarse whisper.

"Because all may not be yet as you wish it, and in Russia sometimes the tongue flays the shoulders and cuts off the head."

"True," said the hitherto taciturn Stepanik, who was carefully feeling the keen edge of his hatchet, "as the Tartars have it, when you have spoken the word, it rules over you; while it is yet unspoken, you rule over it. But it seems to me, Michail Podatchkine, that you have taken a great deal of trouble, and wasted much time in the matter of this dispatch. As you passed through the forest together, why did you not give him a good prod in the back with your lance?"

"Because, if a wound is found on him, folks might say he had been murdered; and he must not bear a scar."

"And neither shall you, friend Podatchkine," said Paulovitch with a cruel grin.

"Come—don't make unpleasant jests," growled the corporal, with a yawn and a shudder. "I have no desire to travel with the next caravan to Siberia, with one side of my head and face shaved, and an iron rosary, some five pounds in weight, on my wrists."

"Fear not—you will never see Siberia."

"Then you have made all sure about Ivanovitch Balgonie?" said Podatchkine, whose utterance was becoming somewhat inarticulate.

"Ay, sure enough; the cups—the cup, I mean—was dragged with those black berries which grow in the forest hereabout; the same stuff used by fine ladies to whiten their hands."

"But why the cup and not the cordial?"

"For this reason; I might have been constrained to drink with him; and I had no desire to fall, like some one else, into a trap of my own making."

Podatchkine, on whom the powerfuloporitic with which his cup had been drugged—the sleepy nightshade—had been rapidly taking effect, and whose small cunning eyes had been opening and shutting alternately, while a numbness stole with a weariness over all his faculties, seemed suddenly to grasp at the terrible meaning of the speaker. He gave a start—he essayed to rouse himself and shout, but in doing so, toppled off his stool, and sank on the clay floor in a profound slumber.

"At last!" said the half-breed, administering a kick to the prostrate figure; "at last he has gone to sleep; now to make sure that he shall never waken more. Ah! the Asiatic! he was just getting suspicious at the end."

"There are two coins in his pockets," said the Stepanik, after investigating the garments of the snoring Podatchkine, who was now breathing heavily through his red snub nose, which, between his scrubby beard and his shock hair, was almost the only feature of his face that was visible.

"Leave the coins where you found them!" said Nicholas.

"Wherefore?" asked the Stepanik, with surprise.

"It will seem all the more honest in thee, my good Stepanik, when you take the body—bodies, I should say—to the nearest military post. You have but to say you found them dead in the forest."

"And the wet clothing?"

"Dew or rain—what a head you have!"

"True—true; ah! what a man you are, Nicholas Paulovitch, so full of bright thoughts! That idea would never have occurred to me."

"Nor the other either. Quick now; we have not a moment to lose!"

They extinguished the pine torch, and tying the corporal's hands securely with a cord, carried him forth to the draw-well before the cottage. Then they substituted that worthy warrior's heels for the bucket which was usually appended to the rope, and permitting the winch to revolve softly and gently, lowered him down, snorting and gasping in his unnatural slumber, head foremost, into the deep, dark water below!

The Stepanik turned the iron handle of the windlass, while the gypsy guided the rope with its heavy burden. He was deliberately lowered down until his heels remained above water, as the two wretches could see by the starlight when stooping and peering into the darkness below.

The snorting had ceased now. The dying corporal was heard to struggle with his hands, as if he sought to free them from the cords; a few bubbles filled with air rose to the surface and burst. This continued for a minute, during which all was silent everywhere, save the half-suppressed breathing of the two assassins, and the dreary sound of the night wind as it shook the dark branches of the giant pines that towered in solemn gloom around them.

Nicholas Paulovitch listened intently, and kept his eyes fixed on the cottage where their other victim lay, as he doubted not, sunk in what was intended to be his last sleep.

Anon, all became still—deathly still—in the depths of the dark well; the rope

ceased to vibrate, and the bubbles came no more.

"Let us leave him here for a few minutes, and now for the captain and his dispatch! By the time that we return the corporal will be as stiff as if he stood for sale in the frozen market on the fete of St. Nicholas!" said the gypsy, with one of his diabolical grins, while the Stepanik, with a smile of satisfaction that showed his huge yellow teeth, smoothed down to his eyebrows the thick, coarse black hair that grew from the apex of his conical caput.

They now re-entered the cottage, and again lighted the torch. All remained just as they had left it; the pitcher, the wooden bowls, the two cups, and the empty bottle were on the table, and the platters, with the debris of their rustic supper; but the superstitious gypsy felt a species of shudder come over him, for when the torch flared up in the night wind and cast strange shadows on the dingy and discolored walls of the log hut, it seemed to his diseased imagination, for a moment, as if the outline of the drowned corporal still occupied the stool on which he had been seated.

"Come," said he huskily, "the dispatch!—and then for the other!"

They listened intently, and placed the ladder against the trap door. All was still—not even the breathing of Balgonie was heard. Ascending first, with a knife in his teeth, in case of unexpected resistance, the gypsy knocked thrice on the trap without receiving any response. He then withdrew the wooden bolt, pushed it up, and introducing his head and shoulders, held aloft the pine torch, and turned toward the bed of skin.

It was unoccupied; and in a moment he saw that the bare and desolate chamber was without a tenant!

"Malediction!" he shouted; "he has escaped us—but how? Search—search! He cannot be far off, after the dose I have given him; search—and we must use our hatchets now!"

## CHAPTER X.

Balgonie had scarcely thrown himself at length on the soft but not very odorous pile of skins which formed his couch, when a face appeared at a little window, which was pulled open, and a voice called to him in a low and earnest whisper:

"Hospodeen—Carl Ivanovitch! Hospodeen, attend to me! but oh, be silent, as you value your life!"

He started up, softly approached the window, and saw, by the dim starlight, a fair female face with very dark eyes, white and regular teeth, and long, glittering earrings.

"I have seen this face before," thought he; "but when, and where?"

Balgonie, in truth, was too much of a lover to have more than one female face ever before his eyes—that of Natalie Mierowna.

"I am Olga, the gypsy," said the girl humbly.

"Olga! Olga! whom I saw at the house of Mierowitz this evening?"

"The same, Hospodeen!" Balgonie expressed an exclamation of astonishment to find her, as he thought, so far from that place. "You gave me a coin once upon a time, at Krejko, when passing through that town with Michail Podatchkine; and this evening you saved me from the whip of the steward, when for the third time I had ventured near the mansion in a vain search for you or the Hospoza Mierowna."

"In search of us—and for what purpose, girl?"

"To warn you that for nearly a month past a plot has been formed to deprive you of a valuable paper, and even of your life."

"My life? By whom, and where, girl?"

"Here in this solitary hut—even now your assassins are in consultation—listen."

He placed his ear to the trap door, and heard the murmurs of coarse whispers below.

"Hush," said Podatchkine, "take care!" Then followed the question of the subtle and ferocious Stepanik as to why he had not given Balgonie a "prod" with his lance in the forest; and the whole conversation in all its horrible details, up to the moment when the wretched corporal with death and terror mingling in his soul, fell from his seat in a stupor.

"Great heaven!" exclaimed Balgonie, full of despair and horror, as he mechanically felt for his fatal dispatch, to ascertain that it was yet safe. "I have drunk of this drugged stuff, and am also lost!"

"Nay," said the gypsy, hurriedly; "not from the cup which was intended for you."

"How?—speak!—speak!"

"The cordial and the cups too were all stolen by Podatchkine, with many other things, at different times, from the household of Mierowitz. This night you were duly expected here, and thus a plan was laid to destroy both you and your treacherous guide. Two cups were fully and deeply drugged by my brother Nicholas; and knowing well that it was to be set before you, I abstracted it barely an hour ago, substituting another of the same kind, and now I have it here. Oh, Hospodeen, a narrow escape you have had!"

Balgonie began to breathe more freely; but assured that never had he run so narrow a risk of death, he felt, though enraged and furious, his blood run cold when contemplating the fate intended for

him. Peeping through a chink of the hatch or trap door, he saw that the ladder of access had been removed, and that the door of the squalid cottage was open now, for the torch flared more than ever in the night wind. It was then extinguished; but still he could see and hear them dragging forth the passive form of Corporal Podatchkine, whom he supposed to be dead.

"If you would save your life and the dispatch of the empress, follow me this instant, and get your horse before they return; you have not a moment to lose."

It was the gypsy girl who spoke again, in her low earnest whisper, and with perfect decision.

"Then I owe my escape—my safety—"

"To my gratitude. Pass through the window and descend by the wall."

Balgonie found that the courageous girl to whose guidance he now trusted himself had been enabled to reach the window by standing on the roof of the shed, in which Podatchkine had stabled their horses. The whole edifice being built of square logs, was not very high; and it afforded easy means of ascent and descent, by the interstices consequent to its rude construction by the hatchet. He soon leaped to the ground, and softly assisted her to descend.

"Here is your horse; you see, Hospodeen, that your kindness to the poor gypsy girl was not thrown away."

Balgonie looked rapidly to his bit and girth, adjusted himself in his saddle, hooked up the bit of his saber and shortened his rein, almost unaware of the black tragedy being so coolly and deliberately acted on the other side of the cottage.

"Ten miles further from this will bring you to the monastery of the Troitze, which you will know by its domes. You have but to ride straight westward by the forest path; heaven keep you, and may you and the beautiful Hospoza be happy in your loves!"

He slipped into her hand the largest coins he had, and in a moment more was galloping over the soft grass of the forest path she had indicated.

After traversing a green valley some five or six miles in length, bordered on each side by forests of fir trees, he drew his bridle at the gates of the Troitze Monastery, where its white walls, its three great cupolas, shaped each like a gigantic onion inverted, covered with plates of burnished copper, and all painted and bestarred, were shining gayly in the morning sun.

There he was made welcome by the monks—quaint-looking men, in high black caps without brims, and having black veils floating behind over their long, straight hair.

A large party of pilgrims on horse and foot were returning to St. Petersburg that afternoon. With them Balgonie traveled for the remainder of his journey; and, after traversing a wild and desert tract of country, on the evening of the next day he had the pleasure of beholding, in the distance before him, the vast and splendid capital.

Balgonie's satisfaction on finding himself so near the end of his journey was somewhat clouded by a trivial circumstance.

After entering the city by a palisaded barrier, where stood a guard of the Regiment of Valkindutz, he checked his horse's pace, while the caravan of pilgrims, whom he now wished to quit, traversed a long street of small wooden houses that lay beyond. Here close by the margin of the Neva lay a man wet and dripping, and a piece of sack or old canvas spread over his face. On his breast lay his fur cap, as if to receive alms for his burial, for none doubted that he was a poor drowned fellow just fished up from the Neva, and that money was required for his obsequies. So all the pilgrims from the Troitze threw something into the fur-cap, while the passers mumbled prayers and made signs of the cross.

All the caravan had passed; so the chatter of Balgonie's charger, steel scabbard and accoutrements seemed to create a different effect on the attentive ear of the seemingly drowned man, for the knave, who had only been acting, started up and, with his spoil, fled like a hare down one of the little alleys that opened off the wooden street. He vanished in the twilight, yet not so quickly but that Balgonie was able to recognize in his face and form the bulky and muscular half-breed, the gypsy, Nicholas Paulovitch.

What had brought him to St. Petersburg? Was he still dogging the luckless dispatch bearer, or had he only fled thither that, among its thousands, he might elude the punishment with which Mierowitz would be sure to visit him, if the murder of the corporal was discovered?

This episode made Balgonie feel uncomfortable and suspicious that other and hidden dangers yet menaced him as he rode steadily but watchfully through the densely crowded streets.

Along the northern margin of the Neva, deep, blue and transparent as crystal, lined with solid granite quays and bordered by many stately palatial edifices, Balgonie pursued his way; but the stars were shining at midnight on the vast sheet of water called the Lake of Ladoga before he, weary and worn with fatigue, dismounted beneath the formidable gates of the castellated prison of Schlüsselburg.

(To be continued.)

## The Fly in the Ointment.

Mrs. Henpeck—I understand young Poorman, who was married last June, has unexpectedly fallen heir to the property of a rich uncle.

Mr. Henpeck—Well, well!

Mrs. Henpeck—Talk about luck!

Mr. Henpeck—Yes, it is tough. If he had only gotten it before last June.

## An Expert.

She—I am not the only girl you have ever kissed.

He—How do you know that?

She—Well, I've had some experience myself.—Detroit Free Press.

## Science AND INVENTION

Paper car wheels, made by pressure from rye straw paper, are usually in condition for a second set of steel tires after the first set is worn out by a run of three hundred thousand miles.

Radium constantly generates heat, and Wien has now shown that it may constantly generate electricity. It gives off both positive and negative electrons, and the former—several hundred times as large as the latter—may be held back by a sieve of glass or any other of a variety of substances.

Suggestive at least are the conclusions of Hon. R. J. Strutt, of Bath, England. Helium—which Sir William Ramsay has found to be slowly given off by radium—exists in the gases of the city's largest hot mineral spring, and at a test of the deposits in the spring has revealed a small proportion of radium. It is believed that these substances are brought up from a large deposit of radium deep in the earth.

All admirers as well as cultivators of carnations are much concerned about a new disease that the Department of Agriculture has recently detected affecting these plants in the District of Columbia and Pennsylvania. The disease is manifested by the appearance of ringed spots on the leaves and stems. The spots are shown by the microscope filled with bacteria, which are different from the micro-organisms causing previously known diseases in carnations. A careful study of the new disease is under way.

The German government is developing a plan to have its customs officials instructed in chemistry, physics and mechanical technology. At the most important custom houses in every province of the empire there is to be established a laboratory and a library of technical books for the use of the customs officials. The officers of high rank are to instruct the minor officials, and will themselves be trained in a great laboratory which it is proposed to erect in Berlin in connection with the chief customs office. Teachers for this institution will be drawn from the staffs of professors in technical colleges.

The Bureau of Forestry finds that sugar culture, the greatest industry of the Hawaiian Islands, depends upon the preservation of the native forests. These are mainly confined to the rainy east and northeast sides of the mountains, and they conserve the water that is needed to irrigate the dry plains where the sugar plantations exist. The value of these forests consists not in the trees, which are frequently low, crooked and sparsely scattered, but in the impenetrable undergrowth, composed of vines, ferns and mosses, and so thick that it holds water like a sponge. This undergrowth is, however, very delicate, and cattle and goats quickly destroy it. It is proposed to save the forests by fencing.

Condensed into a few words, these are the "Modern Views of Matter," as expounded by Sir Oliver Lodge: "Electricity is a substance, the only kind of substance, and all matter is merely an accumulation of electric charges. It appears probable that these electric charges are all of exactly the same amount, although some are positive and some negative, and that the atoms of the chemical elements are formed by varying numbers and arrangements of these charges, or electrons. There are about seven hundred electrons, 250 positive and 350 negative, in the hydrogen atom, which has been so long regarded as the final and indivisible unit of matter; there must be about sixteen times as many in an oxygen atom; and about 255 times as many, say 160,000, in a radium atom, the heaviest known."

## HERE'S A HOMILY ON HUNTING.

Called Forth by a Dead Young Stag at the Market.

"Far be it from me," remarked the Coarse, Bristal Man, "to attempt to bring the blush of self-reproach to the bronzed cheek of our mighty Nimrods, high and low, particularly at this season of the year; but, walking down the street a couple of mornings ago I saw a dead young stag hanging head downward in front of a market store, and it didn't look to me like as if that young stag belonged there at all, with all of the life gone out of him, and his nice, honest, on-the-level brown eyes closed for good and all, and him tried up there in front of a butcher's shack. I stood off and looked at the clean young chap for a long while, and the longer I looked him over the more it puzzled me to understand how any civilized man could have it in his heart to kill a fellow like that. I wouldn't do it, boy, for a five thousand dollar note, and I need the money at that, and I'm no more of a slow-music-on-the-E-string, out-in-the-snow, sentimental Clarissa Harlowe than my neighbors, either. I couldn't help but think, as I stood leaning against an awning

pole, feeling sort o' sorry and gumpy about that young stag, that no man with the right kind of gravities of kindness in his system would do a thing like that, either in the name of 'sport' or commerce. The man who can let an unsuspecting deer, or elk, or b'gee, even a bull moose—any wood roving, inoffensive horned beast—come 'down the wind' on him, with nary a care in life, and looking with interested curiosity around him—any man that can stuff a bullet into a gun and poke that bullet into the heart of such an animal, that's minding his own business, and only asking for a chance to roam unmolested and free under God's blue sky, is suffering from a kind of ossification of the heart and gizzard that wouldn't have all me for a hull lot of minted money.

"There isn't anything much more square or honest or trustful in this world than the look that a deer gives you out of his two eyes, and that's a fact. He isn't looking for the worst of it, unless he's been hunted before. To his view you're just something alive that's moving around under the blue dome of heaven same as he is, and his clean nostrils crinkle as he sniffs curiously and probably wonders why you haven't got four legs, just like he has. He isn't trying to butt into and interfere with civilization. He's sticking to the environment in which he found himself when he came into the world. He isn't bothering anybody. And to plug a chap like that, so honest and four-square to all the winds as he is and cut a gash in his neck when he falls in his tracks, seems to me to be about as low-down and ornery a piece of work as a white man could do. I've had a hull lot of preening chumps take me into their libraries or smoking rooms and, pointing to antlers stuck up above the lintels of their doors perkily, and with a foolish sort of vanity, say to me, 'I killed that fellow myself,' but I've never had a man say a thing like that to me that I didn't feel like replying, 'Yes, you abject ass, and if you got your deserts you'd have about a thousand years in purgatory for it.'—Washington Post.

## CLIMATE IN THE PHILIPPINES.

Health on the Islands Depends Upon the Resident.

Secretary Taft has suggested that the newspapers can "help the American government in the Philippines by denying the lies circulated about the terrible climate there." In this good work we gladly offer our co-operation.

The climate of the Philippines is not at all terrible. Many people live there all the year round. As a climate the Philippine article has much to recommend it. The resident or visitor has no uneasiness regarding his raiment. He does not go to business in a liner "buster" and curse himself on his way home for not having carried an uister. In its reliability the Philippine climate is endlessly the superior of our American brand. The absence of snow and frost is not necessarily a proof of either uncomfortable or unwholesome conditions. On the contrary, from time immemorial the great majority of world dwellers have been resident in either tropical or subtropical regions and many have lived to a ripe old age.

Health in the Philippines, in Cuba, in Porto Rico and in all other similar regions, barring those having vast areas of low-lying and miasmatic marsh lands, depends primarily upon the resident, upon his ability and readiness to adjust himself and his habits to his environment. The same law holds in New York city with equal force. In no place on earth may nature's laws be violated or ignored with impunity. Due obedience to those laws in the Philippines or elsewhere will insure a corresponding degree of health, comfort and longevity. Those to whom hot weather brings real physical suffering, and there are such, will do well to avoid the tropics or the edge of them. But there are many who find cold weather a cause of suffering and who find real delight in a mean temperature of 85 degrees. The question of heat and cold is largely a matter of individual preference.

So far as salubrity is concerned Secretary Taft is entirely right and justified in deprecating any attempt to malign the climate of our Philippine possessions. Those who have the desire to participate in the economic development of the islands may get there entirely fearless of any climate terrors, providing they will carry with them a modicum of common sense.—New York Sun.

## He Didn't Know How.

"Charles, dear," said young Mrs. Torkins, "I have done you a great injustice."

"In what way?"

"I suspected you without reason. I asked several of your friends that you go out with of evenings whether you knew how to play poker and every one of them thought a minute and said you didn't."—Washington Star.

Civilization is making such rapid strides that some day we will hear of a missionary getting cooked in a chafing dish.

If a man wears three collars a steel some people look upon him as stuck up.