

DARKEST RUSSIA

BY H. GRATTAN DONNELLY.

Copyright, 1905, by Street & Smith. All rights reserved.

CHAPTER XV—Continued.

"Ay!" shouted Karsicheff, "ay! so they do, Katherine; but not such convicts as these—not such convicts as Alexis Nazimoff and Ivan Barosky!" Katherine sprang to her husband's side and grasped the paper, Nicholas, as she did so, looked at it over her shoulder.

On the very top of the list of the convicts were the names Alexis Nazimoff and Ivan Barosky.

With a cry of fiendish joy Katherine Karsicheff grasped the hands of her husband and, looking him straight in the face, exclaimed: "Here—here in our power. What will you do?" Constantine answered: "Wait and see."

In a few minutes the sharp command "Stoy!" (halt) rang out on the frosty air, and the ring of the lances of the Cossack guard was heard as they rested on the ground.

Another knock on the door.

"Enter!"

The Nachalnik entered and saluted.

"The convoy is here!"

"All present."

"All present, your excellency."

"Thirteen men and two women?"

"The number is correct, excellency."

"March them in. I will issue their ration numbers here and then they can be marched to the camera."

The command was given.

Through the door there entered two Cossacks. They took their places one on each side of the entrance.

The convicts followed.

With faltering steps, their irons keeping a continuous clanking as they moved, the unhappy wretches, two by two, entered the room.

With downcast faces the two in front took the place assigned to them by the Nachalnik, the others following mechanically until all had entered.

With but two exceptions all were ironed—the exceptions were the last to appear.

They were Alexis and Ivan!

"Halt!"

It was Karsicheff gave the stern command.

As he uttered the word Alexis and Ivan raised their heads to meet the gaze of deadly hatred in the faces of Constantine, Katherine and Nicholas.

"The infamous Karsicheffs!" Alexis muttered the words between his compressed lips.

"Silence, dog!" said Karsicheff. He had heard Alexis speak, although the exact words had not reached him.

"Silence! Guard, why are these men, and Karsicheff waved his hand, indicating Ivan and Alexis, "not ironed like the other convicts?"

"By order of the commandant at Chitka, to whom they gave their word of honor not to attempt to escape," said the nachalnik.

"Their word of honor!" Karsicheff laughed derisively.

Katherine and Nicholas took the cue instantly and laughed in chorus.

"Their word of honor," continued Karsicheff; "there is no such thing as honor among such cutthroats as these. Let them be ironed immediately like the other convicts."

"I only obeyed my orders, excellency," said the guard apologetically, "and—"

"You are under my orders now," interrupted Karsicheff, "obey me!"

"Obey!" exclaimed Alexis, making a step forward.

"Seize him!"

"Down with the dog!"

The Karsicheffs, father, mother and son, spoke simultaneously, and the soldiers, in their eager zeal to please the new superior, sprang upon Alexis and bore him to the ground.

"Oh, wretches that you are!" exclaimed Ivan, who could no longer control himself.

Nicholas sprang forward and struck him, and at the same moment he was also seized by the soldiers and thrown to the floor.

"Bring irons—double irons," ex-

and they are destined to suffer more.

That young man," she continued, pointing to Alexis, "was once a brilliant officer in the service of the czar. He was betrothed to the daughter of a noble. But he must needs fall in love," and she laughed ironically, "with a street girl of St. Petersburg. Her music charmed him," Katherine laughed again.

Alexis could only glare at her in helpless agony.

Katherine fairly gloated over his sufferings.

"Yes," she went on, "he was charmed by the music of the siren, and she dragged him to her depths. She was a street vagabond with half a dozen lovers before his time, and she is now the mistress of an officer at the fortress of Arca!"

"Liar—false woman, you lie!" shouted Alexis.

"Gag him—gag him!" shouted Karsicheff.

To hear the order was to obey, and in two minutes Alexis was lying on the ground, shackled, gagged and helpless.

Katherine turned to Ivan.

"This other—this ruffian with the marks of the convict upon him—he was once a student who was lifted out of obscurity by a lady of nobility. He betrayed his benefactors by taking advantage of a young girl who visited her house and whom he, with devilish art, persuaded into a secret marriage. She was the daughter of a noble house. Once freed from his presence, she confessed that she hated him; a decree of divorce was granted her and she is now the wife of a noble in Russia, hating and despising the low-born dog who made her forget her duty to herself and her family!"

As Katherine began speaking a door at the top of the stairs leading to the sleeping apartment of the house softly opened, and by degrees a pale, agonized face appeared at the entrance. As Katherine finished the door opened full and Olga appeared. With a cry of mingled joy and sorrow, of deepest anguish and of passionate devotion, she screamed as she saw Ivan:

"No, no, my love, my love! I am true, Ivan, true always, true till death!"—and before any one could prevent her, Olga had flown down the steps and cast her arms around the neck of her husband!

Katherine, with speechless rage, sprang to her daughter, and grasping her, strove with desperate strength to tear her from Ivan. Olga, with all the power she possessed, clung to her helpless husband. "Trust me, Ivan; trust me. I'll be true. I love you now as I loved you then. Oh, God!"

She ceased, for her mother's fingers tightened around her throat till the delicate skin was bruised by the cruel, merciless grip of the talons of Katherine.

"Take her away!" shouted Karsicheff.

Nicholas with a brutal wrench tore his sister from Ivan, and while with one hand he attempted to stop her cries, with the other he half carried, half dragged her, aided by his mother, to her room. Olga's frantic cry: "Ivan trust me. I will be true," rang out even after the door closed—and then there was silence, for the hapless Olga had fainted.

"Merciless mother, inhuman wolf!" exclaimed Ivan. "Your cruel lie could not have deceived me. Oh, God! Were I able, I would brain you with these shackled hands!"

He could say no more.

One of the soldiers with superservicable zeal sprang up and knocked him down.

"Brave fellow," said the countess, pouring out a glass of vodka and handing it to the cowardly soldier, "you know your duty."

The soldier drank the liquor and turned to his comrades with a smile.

They looked at him with contempt. The act had been too much, even for them.

But among the convicts there was that painful agony with which a sympathetic heart sees suffering of whatever kind while helpless to avert it or alleviate it. They began to murmur.

"Silence, cutthroats! We will have no mutiny here!" shouted Nicholas, who had returned to the room.

The word "mutiny" caught the ear of Katherine.

"What easier," she said. "Mutiny—a shot—" and she looked at Ivan and Alexis.

"Hush! not before witnesses; we will find the time."

Just as Nicholas finished there came across the air the sound of a bugle. It was followed by a shot!

"Hark!"

All present recognized the sound!

"It is the signal of an imperial courier!" said Nicholas; "we must wait."

Some of the guards got ready to present arms.

Constantine moved to the door.

The sound of bells was heard, and in another minute a sleigh drawn by three horses reeking with foam and with dilated nostrils, which sent forth steaming streams on the frosty air, pulled up at the etape!

A tall, bearded man jumped out, and in another second he had entered the house.

The imperial courier had arrived!

CHAPTER XVI.

The Imperial Courier.

"Who is commandant here?"

The imperial courier uttered the

words in the sharp, authoritative voice of one accustomed to command.

When he heard the words, Constantine Karsicheff felt that he was no longer the autocrat of the etape. Before the courier's arrival his will had been supreme and his word law. At his command any of the Cossack soldiers would have with unquestioning obedience sent a bullet crashing through the brain of any of the prisoners Karsicheff might have indicated. But now he felt that a stronger will than his was present—that a power superior to his own had arrived, and that he was now subordinate to an authority that could and would make itself respected.

For the corps of couriers imperial of Siberia possessed a rank and rights and powers and privileges far exceeding those of an ordinary commandant of an etape. The requisitions of an imperial courier for fresh horses, for supplies, for accommodations, must be filled with promptness and his orders take precedence of all others. In a word, under the code of regulations, from the moment an imperial courier arrived at any station on the road his powers were supreme, and he superseded the commandant as authority for the time being.

"I am," said Karsicheff, in response to the demand of the courier.

A frown passed over the face of the

courier. The half sulky tone in which Karsicheff had spoken, together with the fact that he had failed to salute, produced a bad impression on the mind of the courier.

His voice assumed a harder tone, and his air of command was intensified.

"A sleigh with some travelers has broken down on the edge of the pine forest yonder. They are surrounded by wolves. The pack is growing larger—hark!"

The howling of hundreds of wolves was borne across the night in a blood-curdling chorus.

"We must to the rescue," hurriedly resumed the courier. "Let your soldiers follow me." And as he stepped to the door he turned an instant, and waited for Karsicheff to give the command.

"I have no soldiers to spare."

As Karsicheff uttered the words he turned half way from the courier.

(To be continued.)

WANTED NO WHISTLING GIRL.

Might Be the "Thing," but Escort Had No Use For It.

When Mr. Dolby and the girl in blue struck the stretch of pavement opposite the vacant lot Dolby was amazed to hear some one close beside him begin to whistle a merry tune. He stopped and looked about.

"Who was that," he asked.

"Me," said the girl in blue. "I forgot there was anybody with me."

"Thanks," said Dolby. Presently he added, "Even if you thought you were alone, I don't see why you should go along the street whistling."

"Don't you?" asked the girl in blue innocently. "Why, lots of women do it. Haven't you noticed them? It is really quite the thing. Possibly few women whistle as loud as I did just then, but they walk along with their lips puckered up all ready for the exercise, and every little while they break out into sound. Sometimes the whistle is a mere emission of breath, again it swells into a piping tune. If you will listen you can hear them. Their repertoire ranges all the way from snatches of grand opera to the merry roundelays of their childhood. Personally, I incline to trills and tral-las. When I whistle I generally do this—"

"Oh, for heaven's sake, dont," interrupted Dolby. "It may be the proper thing for a girl to whistle in the street, but I'll be blessed if I want to walk with her while she is doing it."

—New York Times.

The Right One.

"You know," said the man on the car, "we have two telephones in the office, and whoever answers the phone is expected to say at which one you are wanted."

"Well, we've got a new office boy, and the bell rang the other day. He answered it, and went to the manager. 'You're wanted at the telephone,' he said, 'by the lady.'"

"Which one?" asked the boss, thinking of the phones, of course.

"Please, sir," stammered the boy, "I-I think it's your wife."—Philadelphia Bulletin.

A Real Hero.

"You don't believe in divorce, then?"

"No, sir; I've got too much sports' blood."

"What has that to do with it?"

"I believe in a fight to the finish."

JEST NUTS

Harmony.

Friend—And suppose there is a matrimonial deadlock?

The Bride—Why, matrimonial deadlocks are unconstitutional. In case of a tie I cast the deciding vote, and George just makes it unanimous.

Attractive.

Tom—And is she pretty?

Jack—Yes, figuratively speaking.

Tom—What do you mean by that?

Jack—She has a bank account that is rather prepossessing.

His Artistic Temperament.

"Now, then!" cried Mrs. Luschman, letting him in at 6 a. m., "what have you to say for yourself, you brute?"

"Brute?" protested Luschman, "why, m' dear, I'm a poet; been 'mirin' shunrise—beau'ful shunrise. Shtayed up all night 't' shee it."

Criticism.

Joe—What do you think of Miss Gableton? Fine intellect, eh?

Fred—Yes; but her intellect isn't in it with her conversational abilities.

VERY EARLY EVERY MORNING.



The Boss—I need a boy about your age. I'll give you \$2 a week.
The Boy—Will I have a chance to rise?
The Boss—Sure. You'll have to be here every morning at 6 o'clock.

No Wonder.

"How does breakfast food affect you? Make you fatter?"

"None."

"Thinner?"

"None."

"Does it keep you at exactly the same weight?"

"None."

"Now, see here, it must have some effect on you."

"None. I don't eat it."—Cleveland Plain Dealer.

A Money-Making Scheme.

"I was talking with one of your regular cute Yankees the other day," stated one of the trainers at Highland Park.

"Had a scheme, of course."

"Yes. He's trying to form a syndicate to buy running horses and take them to Russia. Says he can get his own prices from the military officers."

—Detroit Free Press.

Keyed Up to the Mark.

"Gee whiz! Ethel!" exclaimed the young lady's beau, "this toothache is simply frightful!"

"Oh! George, it's too bad," said the dear girl. "Of course you won't speak to papa to-night."

"Won't I, though? I'm just in shape for it. Bring on your old man! I don't care what happens to me!"

Romeo and Juliet Up to Date.

"Romeo! Romeo!" sobbed the swarthy Juliet. "They will notta letta us love-a ana more. My people tella me I mus' notta marry you."

"What I care?" replied Romeo, savagely. "I will trowa deesa bomb on da fron' porch. I will blowa youa people all over deesa ward."—Newark News.

She Had Been on the Same Car.

"No, I never saw him offer a seat in a street car to a lady, and I ride home on the same car with him nearly every day. Now, you wouldn't think to look at him that he was that kind of a fellow, would you?"

"Pshaw!" she replied, "I know the answer. He never gets a seat to offer."

His Disposition.

"Yes," said the benevolent man, "I thank heaven for my happy disposition. I am satisfied with what the day brings forth, and quickly forget the pain and trouble that has passed."

"Ah!" exclaimed the physician, "that explains your overlooking my little bill."

Rare Forethought.

"Think of having a bicycle, do you?" remarked his father. "Come, now, that's not a bad idea. I suppose you've got something towards it, of course?"

The youth looked hopeful. "Oh, yes," he said, "I bought the trouser clips two weeks ago."

Slightly Mixed.

Friend—An' y-your young—y-ongesh girl, she (hic!) she married, too? (Hic!)

Brown—n-no—er—n-not 'shackly. (Hic!) Fac—fact ish, my—my youngsh girl, she—(hic)—shesh a boy.

Unanswerable.

Mr. Steele—Why is it that with such a name you are so awfully wicked?

Mr. Goode—Why is it with such a name you are so awfully soft?

This Is Awful.

"I discovered a peculiar thing in my room last night," remarked the cheerful idiot at the breakfast table. "It had four legs and only one foot."

"My goodness!" exclaimed the landlady, excitedly. "What was it?"

"A bed," answered the c. i. as he winked at the pretty waitress.

More In It.

"Of course," said the legislator, "the arguments offered by the bill's opponents were good, but those of its supporters were better."

"How much better?" asked the plain citizen.

"Well, at least a thousand dollars."

How Little Willie Died.

Little Willie, from the mirror, licked the mercury all off, thinking in his childish error, it would cure the whooping cough. At the funeral Willie's mother smartly said to Mrs. Brown, "Twas a chilly day for Willie when the mercury went down."

What Did She Mean.

Plodder—My wife told me to-day she wished I took after my brother.

Newitt—Oh, yes; your brother became rich. That's what she meant, eh?

Plodder—Well, she's got me guessing. He died rich, you know.

Real Thing.

Native—See those two men standing over there on the corner?

Stranger—Yes. What of them?

Native—They are professional high-waymen.

Stranger—What are you giving me?

Native—Facts. One is a lawyer and the other is a doctor, so it's a case of your money or your life.

A Little Encouragement.

Young Sorreltop—Then you utterly cast me off, Esmeralda?

Miss Esmeralda, (with great gentleness)—Why, no, Sylvester; but—but it would be so silly for a girl to say yes the first time. If—if you are of the same mind you might ask me again some day, you know.

Real Genius.

Jigsmith—That fellow Piker is certainly a clever, ingenious chap, isn't he?

Browning—Why, I never heard of his doing anything remarkable.

Jigsmith—That's just it. He manages in some way to get along without doing anything.

Ease.

"You appear to take life pretty easy," said the housewife, as she mixed some sawdust with milk and palmed it off as breakfast food.

"Yes, indeed, mum," grinned Sandy Pikes, stretching out in the wheelbarrow. "De whole world is a 'cozy corner' wid me."

Some Omissions.

"Does he advertise all the comforts of home?" inquired Mr. Tiredout.

"No," replied Mrs. Tiredout, "the advertisement simply says, 'No mothers-in-law, cross cooks, or crying babies.'"

"We'll go," asserted Mr. Tiredout, emphatically.

Could Make Use of That Dog.

"Simkins' dog is a nuisance."

"Is that so?"

"Yes, I wish I owned him."

"I thought you said he was a nuisance."

"He is. But I would like to get him to bother Simkins the way he bothers me."

At Niagara Falls.

"Ah!" exclaimed the lady excursionist from Boston, "what a stupendous waste of water!"

"Yes," rejoined Col. Peppers of Kentucky, "but think, madam, how much more terrible it would be if it was corn juice?"

Too Costly Aspiration.

Godfrey—I am sorry to hear that Squallup is in a bad way financially. What is the cause of it?

Scorjel—As nearly as I can learn, he has been trying to maintain an automobile position in society on a bicycle income.

She'll Get Him Yet.

"Miss Chellus married Mr. Gayman, I understand."

"Oh, yes, some time ago."

"So she caught him at last, eh?"

"No, she hasn't caught him yet, but she has her suspicions."—Quincy Herald.

OF COURSE.



She—I suppose you remember that Lot's wife turned around and was turned to salt.

He—That's nothing. When you were on the beach yesterday I saw three men turn to rubber.

At the Country Club.

Ernie—Miss Passy doesn't seem strong enough to drive a golf ball any more. She is almost old enough to play tennis.

Ida—Tennis? Why, she's getting old enough to play croquet.

They are Strangers Now.

Edyth—Jack proposed last night, and after I accepted him I thought he would never stop kissing me.

Mayme—How nice of him! But then that's the way he always does.

Counting the Cost.

"Isn't your wife's gown cut too low?" asked a friend at the reception.

"It may be," replied the host, "but it comes high, just the same."



"I AM TRUE, I AM TRUE ALWAYS, TAKE TILL DEATH!"

claimed Karsicheff, wrought up to uncontrollable excitement.

A minute later the soldiers had completed their work, and Ivan and Alexis, pale and trembling, were assisted to their feet, and stood helpless with their shackled hands.

Alexis was speechless. He could scarcely breathe. His breast heaved convulsively, and he tottered and would have fallen, but for the grasp of the guard who stood behind him.