

The Secret Dispatch

By JAMES GRANT

CHAPTER XXII.—(Continued.)

"Heaven be blessed for this new union of success!" exclaimed Balgonie in French. "And you were not drowned?" "No; I swam down the Neva, under water, escaping many a bullet—got ashore and reached the old place in the wood where Olga, the gypsy, stained my face, trimmed and dyed my beard, as you see. She is quite an artist, that girl! Even Mariolizza would not know me now."

Balgonie sighed as the poor fellow spoke. He evidently knew nothing of the barbarities to which she had been subjected, so Balgonie resolved, mercifully, to keep him in ignorance; and they proceeded at an easy pace together; he keeping his horse close by the shaft of the wagon, on which the pretended peasant rode; and, as they spoke in French, a language unknown to their ignorant and half-savage escort, Usakoff, in referring to the late event and its failure, poured out all the bitterness, the hate and fury of his soul against the government, the councillors and the rule of the empress; and, of course, entered with fervor into the scheme of an escape with Natalie. But still their ultimate plans were undecided when they saw the red flash of the evening gun, as it pealed from Schlusenburg, amid the murky haze of a wet and stormy sunset; and ere long they saw the lights that glittered at times from amid the massive towers and black outline of that old castle streaming and wavering on the turbulent waters of the lake and the wet slimes of the sluices and ditches.

When, all dripping and jaded, the escort halted and dismounted under the castle arch, Balgonie found that some changes were taking place in the executive of the fortress.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Bernikoff, whose wounds had been inflamed to gangrene, was at that moment actually on his deathbed, with Father Chrysostom kneeling by his side. The old sinner was in all the agonies and terrors of reviewing his past life on one hand and anticipating the coming change on the other. Bernikoff was dying in the habit of a friar, with cowl, cord, beads and sandals, hoping even on his deathbed, as Ivan the Terrible hoped, when similarly arrayed and disguised, to cheat the devil if that dread personage came for his sinful soul.

Leaving this scene, Balgonie presented the order of Gen. Weymarn and that of the treasurer to Captain Vlasief, who was now in command, and to whom he stated that "the prisoner referred to was Mademoiselle Natalie Mierowna."

"Carl Ivanovitch," said the captain, "you cannot think of leaving to-night in such a storm of wind and rain?"

"I've seen worse in Silesia," said Balgonie, looking to the locks of his pistols. "What of that?"

"But the verbal order of the general was most peremptory."

"Ah! and you have brought a wagon for the money?"

"A wagon for the prisoner also—so be quick, captain."

"This a large sum in roubles," mused the other.

"I am in haste to be gone! the prisoner—you hear me, sir?" said Balgonie, impatiently.

"You seem more anxious about the prisoner than the treasure?" responded Vlasief, sulkily, but still delayed to move.

"You have my orders—I come in the name of the empress—let there be no delay, Captain Vlasief," was the curt reply.

"Bring in two Cossacks of the escort; the money is here in seventy bags, each containing a thousand roubles."

"Excuse me, but the order of the imperial treasurer says expressly eighty sealed bags of a thousand each," said Balgonie, trembling with anxiety, yet compelled to appear to take an interest when he really felt none.

"Ten thousand are missing," said Vlasief, leisurely. "Suppose," he added, in a whisper, "suppose we divide the lost sum and offer a thousand to the treasurer?"

"Impossible, sir!" said Balgonie, with a fiery and impatient manner.

"Well, well—there are the other ten sealed bags," added Captain Vlasief, with a dark and stealthy frown of greed and hate, as the Cossacks tossed the whole among the straw of the wagon. "It matters little; but I hope you may not find the road beset, and so lose the whole."

"To be forewarned, sir, is to be forearmed," said Balgonie, touching his pistols, for he quite understood the treachery implied, and only trembled lest it might mar his dearest plans. "And now, sir, for my prisoner."

"If she be not drowned, for the lower vaults are apt to be flooded on such a night as this," said Vlasief, spitefully.

Writhing under the keen glances of this lowborn Muscovite, Balgonie felt that all now depended upon his outward and assumed bearing of coolness and carelessness. Night favored him in this, and his face was almost concealed. Could anyone then have read his heart, as he, Usakoff, two Cossacks and two soldiers of the main guard made their way down, down through dark and slimy passages and stairs, till they were foot deep and then knee deep in the water that flooded the low and humid corridors, off which were the arched doors of numerous cells—corridors where spiders spun their

webs, rats were swimming and terrified bats flew wildly to and fro!

Ere long they reached the door, through the crannies of which despairing cries and painful gaspings had been heard, and after unlocking forced it open by main strength.

A great flood of water poured from the aperture amid the darkness, and with it came the body of poor Natalie, who was well-nigh drowned.

So the red light seen by Natalie was no fancy, but that of the lamp which was borne by one of those who came just in time to save her from the same terrible death by which the Princess Orloff perished.

Least all might be perilled by a recognition, Balgonie was compelled to retire and leave her in the chaplain's hands till she was restored to consciousness, to warmth, and till she was habited anew; and he passed three dreadful hours of doubt and anxiety, while pacing to and fro in the cold and gloomy archways of the fortress, and having to conceal his face when she was brought forth and supported into the wagon. Usakoff sprang on the shaft and flourished his whip; then the Cossacks and Balgonie put spurs on their chargers, and clattered over the wet drawbridge just as the passing bell for the departure of Bernikoff's tortured spirit rang ominously and solemnly on the stormy gusts of that black and gloomy night.

Balgonie, instead of proceeding by the way he had come, avoided the town of Schlusenburg and wheeled off to the right, committing himself partly to the guidance of Usakoff, and quite in ignorance that, about an hour before, Vlasief, who could by no means let so many roubles escape without paying toll, had beset two of the roads by chosen followers of his own—men whom he hoped might pass for some of the adherents of the late Prince Ivan, rescuing the daughter of the exiled Mierowitz.

A strange incident occurred before the interment of old Bernikoff, who had a pompous military funeral. The bottom of his grave was found to be on fire. A Scottish doctor attempted to explain this phenomenon, as resulting from a species of iron-stone, which was saturated with the phosphorus supplied by the bones of old interments, and which had been ignited by the friction of the sexton's shovel; but the superstitious Russians took a very different and much more diabolical view of the matter, and laughed to scorn the learned opinion of the Scottish pundit.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Their horses were tolerably refreshed by the halt at Schlusenburg, and so the whole party pushed on at a brisk pace by the road toward the frontiers of Finland—the Cossacks of the escort, whatever they thought, making neither remark nor inquiry, as they trusted obediently and implicitly to the driver who led them; but the darkness of the October morning, the deep and muddy, stony and rough, nature of the roads, and the evidence of the storm, ere long began to have a severe effect upon their cattle, and, to the great satisfaction of Balgonie, two of the troopers gradually dropped to the rear and were seen no more.

Now the corporal of the Cossacks ventured to hint that "perhaps they were not pursuing the way they had come, as the lights in St. Isaac's Cathedral must have been visible long ago"; but Balgonie replied, laughingly and briefly, that he "had special orders."

Then the corporal urged a short halt, as the horses were sinking; but again Balgonie replied, that he "had peculiar orders, and must push on."

After passing a little village with a windmill, several miles from the shore of the Lake of Ladoga, the road dipped down into a dark hollow, between impending crags of granite, the gray faces of which were beginning to brighten in the first light of the lagging October sun. The rain and wind were over; the hollow way was full of rolling and perplexing mist; but Usakoff affirmed with confidence that he knew the country well.

Out of the gray vapor, from both sides of the path, there flashed, redly and luridly, five or six muskets! One bullet struck white splinters from the wagon, eliciting a shriek from its occupant; another whistled through the mane of Charlie's horse; and a third killed one of the Cossacks, who died without a groan.

The way was beset by armed men, whose numbers and disposition, the dim light, or rather the darkness and the mist, alike served to conceal.

"Make way, in the name of the Empress!" cried Balgonie, dashing forward with his saber drawn; "nay, I command you, on your peril and allegiance!" he added, as the threatening words of Vlasief occurred to him; and, to his astonishment and dismay, he saw that personage actually appear, mounted and armed. His party, who seemed all on foot, were clad like peasants, but were armed with muskets, which they were rapidly casting about and reloading.

"Halt! In the name of the Empress—halt, I command you! for this is not the way to St. Petersburg, whither the prisoner and treasure were to be conveyed. Treason! treason!" shouted the Staff Captain Vlasief.

Balgonie fired a pistol at his head; but the Captain's horse reared, or was compelled to do so by bit and spur, for the bullet pierced its throat; and with an oath, Vlasief fell on the pathway, entangled in the stirrups as the animal sank under him.

The three remaining Cossacks, who were somewhat bewildered by the attack, by the appearance of Vlasief, whom they knew, and whose confident bearing confirmed certain gathering suspicions that something was wrong as to their route, now drew their sabers, aimed several blows at Usakoff's head, and endeavored to cut the reins of his horse, or stab it between the shafts, as he lashed the animal almost to racing speed, and the light wagon jolted, rolled and bounded along the rough road behind it.

By another pistol shot Balgonie rid himself of the Cossack corporal, whose bridle arm he broke, while facing about and galloping in the rear of the wagon, and now, with wild halloes, the entire party of armed men followed it on foot, with all speed, up a steep slope, over which the path wound.

Usakoff ground his teeth, for he was without weapons, and passive in the flying combat; but, being fertile in expedients, he tore open a bag of roubles, and scattered them on the upland road with a ready and reckless hand.

The bright coins proved too exciting for the cupidity of the pursuers, who loitered to pick them up, tumbling, scrambling, rising and falling over each other, with shouts, curses and maledictions; their firearms sometimes exploding the while; and so the whole were speedily left behind, as the wagon, guarded now by Balgonie alone, was driven along a lonely and unfrequented road that led to the little town of Pamphele.

"Thanks, dear Usakoff—thanks for your presence of mind," said Balgonie; "I had forgotten all about those roubles. To lighten the wagon let us throw out those remaining bags—this perilous lumber, the intended recapture of which has nearly cost us our lives—honor—all, at the hands of Vlasief."

"Nay, nay, never! Lumber, say you? The roubles are Natalie's—hers and mine—hers and yours, when you wed her; they have saved us once, and may do so again," replied Usakoff, cheerfully, as the sun burst forth in his clear October splendor, and they saw the dome shaped cupola of the Church of Pamphele rising with a golden gleam from amid the white morning haze.

There Balgonie's uniform and display of gold roubles operated powerfully on the postmaster, who, without asking for passports or other papers, at once, and in the name of the Empress, supplied them with fresh horses for the frontier, toward which, after procuring some proper nourishment and restoratives for Natalie, they pushed on without a moment of unnecessary delay.

"Ah," thought Balgonie, with a shudder and a prayer; "had Jagouski's name not been omitted in that order of Weymarn, where would she have been now?"

Pale with sorrow and long suffering, her face was still beautiful, though sorely wasted; the deep, thoughtful eyes had yet a wealth—a world of tenderness in their liquid depths; and the long, dark hair was thick, soft and wavy as ever, as it fell in masses behind the small, compact and finely formed head.

All was changed now, and, as she laid her head on Charlie's breast, she felt content—almost happy; and the horrors that hung over her family alone prevented her, as yet, from being completely so.

No trace of pursuers was behind them now, though their flight must by this time have been known both in the capital and at Schlusenburg. But in those days there were neither railroads nor electric telegraphs; so, riding on more leisurely, Balgonie changed horses again near Viborg, and ere long the great Lake of Saima appeared before them, with the distant hills of Swedish Finland beyond its friendly waters.

A boat was procured there; the wagon was abandoned; and with a shout of joy, Usakoff assisted the Finnish boatman to hoist the great lug-sail to catch the breeze of a balmy and beautiful evening, as they bade a long farewell to Russia and all its terrors.

In a quaint old church of Finland, by the eastern shore of the Lake of Saima, and in view of its little archipelago of granite isles—a lonely little fame, buried amid groves of plum and cherry trees, built of wood and painted red, with a little bell jangling in its humble belfry—Charlie Balgonie and his future bride were united by the old curate; and there a thousand roubles spent among the poor spread in the primitive district a happiness the tradition of which is still remembered with many a grateful exclamation.

After this, poor Usakoff, finding himself perhaps, as a third person, rather in the way, left them to become a soldier of fortune; and he is supposed to have perished in one of the Polish struggles for freedom; at least they heard of him no more after their final journey to Scotland.

Two years before these events Charlie's uncle, Gamaliel Balgonie, merchant, magistrate and elder, had departed in peace to sin no more, leaving the lands and possessions of Balgonie unimpaired; and a long tombstone records at length all the virtues which his contemporaries believed him to possess.

So Carl Ivanovitch became once more Balgonie of that ilk; and the roubles of Natalie added many a turret and many an acre to his patrimonial dwelling in beautiful Strathearn.

(The end.)

The Lesser Evil.

Mrs. Phamley (in the sitting room)—As long as Mary is playing the piano, Henry, we may be assured she isn't spooning with that Mr. Huggard.

Mr. Phamley (whose ears are weary)—Well, if the rule works the other way I wish you'd go down and tell them to go ahead and spoon.—Philadelphia Ledger.

Many a man who marries an heiress lives to regret monkeying with a get-rich-quick game.

GOOD Short Stories

The story is told of a bookkeeper who wrote a glowing eulogy of his employer—just deceased—making use of his remarkable estimate: "His keen pre-ception and indomitable will led him into the grocery and feed business, and subsequently induced him to embark in the coal business."

Mrs. Van Rennselaer Cruger tells a story of a Washington hostess who invited an attaché of one of the foreign legations to dine with her. The invitation was formally accepted, but on the morning of the appointed day a note, written by the foreigner's valet, was received which read: "Mr. Blank regrets very much that he will not be able to be present at Mrs. Swift's dinner to-night, as he is dead."

The fondness that some people have for contact with notables is not always shared by the notables themselves. It is told by the late Baron Huddleston that he once tried to obtain a seat next to a duke at the table d'hôte in a hotel where both were guests. That this proximity to the great man might be brought about, the baron gave the waiter a sovereign. The servant proved a traitor, and an explanation being demanded, he confessed that the duke had given him two sovereigns not to give the baron the coveted seat.

During the campaign of 1900, when people made pilgrimages to Canton, Ohio, to call on President McKinley, a delegation of commercial travelers came, one day, and were cordially received by the President. The spokesman, in thanking Mr. McKinley for their reception, said: "We are nearly all your enthusiastic supporters—I say nearly all, for there are seventeen of us, and we are all good Republicans but one." Instantly the President responded: "Gentlemen, I am glad to see you represent exactly the issue of the campaign—sixteen to one."

Jake, the colored servant of Lionel Barrymore, has quite a flock of children, all of them with Biblical names, as their father is very religious, and a great student of the Bible. A boy was added to the family not long ago, and Jake confessed himself puzzled as to a name for him. "You see," he explained, "we've 'bout 'snaused all dem characters—such as David an' Amos an' Solomon. De woman suggests Balaam, but I see calculatin' on Hallowed." "Hallowed?" "Yas, sah; de books sigs it foh itself. 'Hallowed be Thy name,' sah. I reckon we'll leave it dah, sah."

Princes—even crown princes—are not all free of parental rule. Kaiser Wilhelm believes in the iron hand in household as well as state affairs, as Crown Prince Frederick William has found to his discomfort. The Kaiser dislikes horse-racing, especially steeple-chasing, and forbade the Crown Prince to indulge in the sport. He disobeyed, and the punishment inflicted by his royal father was the young man's confinement to his room. The Crown Prince's inclinations toward disobedience are probably hereditary. The Kaiser was a small and saucy boy at the time the present king and queen of England were married, and was an interested spectator of the ceremony. He was also a rather noisy one, so the Duke of Connaught, his uncle, administered a quiet but forcible spanking. The future kaiser did not whimper, but sliding quietly to the floor, he closed his teeth on the calf of his uncle's leg with such energy that he drew blood.

PROSPECTOR REEVES' MINE.

He Discovered It and His Wife and Daughter Helped Develop It.

From abject poverty to riches in practically a day is an experienceouchsafed to few mortals, but a man has been in Los Angeles several days who has enjoyed this sensation, says the Los Angeles Times.

C. H. Reeves, of Burke, Idaho, is the fortunate individual who can now draw a check written in six figures, whereas two short years ago he was without a dollar.

"Huckleberry" Reeves, as he is familiarly known throughout Idaho, is a character in mining history. His money comes from the Hercules mine in such a steady stream that he has never found time to spend it and that is why he came to Los Angeles a few days ago with his wife and daughter, just to see something of the country.

Reeves' pseudonym was not applied to him because he resembled Mark Twain's famous character of the Mississippi River, but because the little blueberries which grow so plentifully in the slopes of Idaho's mountains enabled him to make his fortune out of the Hercules.

For many weary years Reeves had followed the life of a prospector, always hopeful of striking it rich some day and patiently enduring the hard knocks that are always a feature of the business. Finally the Hercules was located, and the tedious work of

developing a mine was begun. Of course, all locations of a prospector are "mines" to begin with, in their imagination, but this one looked especially attractive. But powder cost money, and a prospector had to be fed and clothed, and here is where the wife and daughter came in for their share in the mine's development. While Reeves stuck to his drill, Mrs. Reeves and her daughter picked huckleberries and sold them. Then the big ledge was opened up—"Presto, change!"—another American millionaire.

That was less than two years ago, and now the mine is owned by men and women, who are said to have refused \$10,000,000 for their property. This is the story which has gone out from the Coeur d'Alenes, but Mr. Reeves prefers not to discuss the matter. As the story goes, the Gould and Rockefeller people, who have recently invested many millions in the Coeur d'Alenes, approached the owners of the Hercules with an offer of \$10,000,000, but the owners had seen only the seamy side of life until the Hercules changed the order of events, and one of them tersely remarked:

"We don't want to sell our mine to no capitalist."

This sentiment was heartily concurred in by all, so it is probable that the Hercules will go on grinding out dividends for its nine fortunate owners for many years to come.

BENEFITS OF A VACATION.

Why Every One Should Try It, Especially Mother.

A well-known woman, one who is also a charming hostess and model and mother, said to a representative of the New York Tribune that she is morally certain neither friends nor "home folk" would find her so agreeable were it not for the fact that she makes it a point to take periodical vacations from all of them. "It is impossible," she says frankly, "for human beings made after the average patterns not to bore each other to extinction if they have to look into each other's faces 365 days out of the year. A woman is infinitely more attractive to her husband if he hasn't seen her for a little while, and a man is far more lovable to a woman if there is some variation in the periods of his home-coming."

Certain it is that any woman who has wrested with the servant question for a whole year, who has thought up 1,095 regular meals and several hundred irregular ones, who has had to cater to fastidious appetites on a quick-lunch basis of expenditure, that woman without doubt has earned a vacation from servants, appetites and eaters of meals, and all of these will fare the better if the vacation is taken.

Uninterrupted matrimony can become the greatest bore on earth. In six months a man has told his wife pretty much everything he knows that he has any intention of telling her, and has listened to her opinion on every subject under the sun times without number, and the best thing they both can do is to go foraging for three months for something new to think and talk about, and give absence a chance to make the heart grow fonder. If people were married only three days in the week instead of seven there would be fewer divorces.

Somebody says that the reason many a man is able to endure his home is that he has the business day respite from it to brace him up, and that the insane asylums are so overcrowded with women, married women, simply because their lives are crammed so full of the same people, prejudices and points of view day after day.

The summer begira is distinctly a "first aid to domestic peace." This is possibly not the conventional vacation point of view, but it is unquestionably one that commends itself to the seeker after things harmonious as well as the student of sociology. At least it behooves the homemaker to consider the vacation recipe as a cure for the domestic distemper that sooner or later seems to attack the average man.

Oldest American University.

That the University of Pennsylvania is the oldest university in America has been established by Charles W. Dulles, a graduate of Pennsylvania. The university is not the oldest college, though it was established in 1740, but it was first to take steps toward the enlargement of the curriculum by the addition of a separate department for graduate study, the school of medicine having been founded in 1765. This was the first actual realization of the university idea in the colonies, but the idea of a university was in the minds of the founders as early as 1755, when the College of Philadelphia was given the power to grant "the usual university degree."

What Started It.

First Awful Punster—Who is that slab-sided man with the board look?

Second Awful Punster—Why, he's a lumberman. I knew that as soon as I saw dust on his clothes and the way he planked down his money when the hotel clerk thought he had him stumped with his charges.

And when the policeman found who they were he let them fight it out, in the hope that one or the other might be killed.—Philadelphia American.