

DARKEST RUSSIA

BY H. GRATTAN DONNELLY.

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CHAPTER II.—Continued.

Beginning with a glass of vodka, which evidently sharpened his appetite, Radaloff enjoyed with apparent zest the viands set before him, and having lighted a cigar paid his bill and withdrew.

The restaurant he had just quitted was only an occasional resort, but a visit there was necessary because Radaloff had need to interview this waiter. The fact is that Radaloff and the waiter both served the same master, and drew their income from the same source, the secret service fund of the imperial police. There was one customer of this restaurant regarding whom it was essential to ascertain certain facts. It was this particular individual to whom the obliging and observant waiter referred in his brief conversation with Michael Radaloff.

Radaloff after leaving the restaurant hailed a second-class drosky. A drive of some twenty minutes sufficed to bring him to another point in his allotted pilgrimage. This time the drosky was driven up to the door, the driver paid and dismissed, and Radaloff entered with the confident step of a visitor on familiar ground. The place was a bookseller's shop. Indicating a fine edition of Tennyson which was conspicuously displayed, Radaloff signified a desire to examine it more closely. With a polite bow the proprietor, taking the work, begged his customer to examine it at his leisure, at the same time leading the way to a private office in the rear of the store. We will leave Monsieur Radaloff to the perusal of England's famous poet-laureate. It would be useless to await his exit from the private office. As a matter of fact, when he did leave the establishment it was by the door of a house round the corner in another street, there being a secret means of communication between the two. And when he did appear no one would have recognized in the scholarly-looking professor, with the package of books under his arm, the trusted and trained police agent, Michael Radaloff.

CHAPTER III.

The Nihilist Propaganda.

Nihilism, at the time of which we write, was manifesting itself in many



"SAT IN HER LUXURIOUS BOUDOIR"

ways and was sufficiently aggressive to cause his excellency, the minister of police, no small degree of anxiety. In all revolutionary movements there are to be found two classes, the extremists and the moderates. The revolutionary party of Russia at this time was perhaps as striking an example of divided councils as could have been found in history.

Among the large class of educated and intelligent Russians who believed that the time had come for the substitution of a constitutional government instead of an autocratic and

despotic monarchy, the views of the extremists found little favor. Most of the ruling spirits of the party of the people were too well informed not to perceive that the assassination of any one man—or of dozens of men, for that matter—never accomplished the regeneration of a people. Those who held this view were no common conspirators. Many of them held positions of power and influence.

The end they sought, they were convinced, could best be obtained by a propaganda of education—using the word in its best and truest sense. They were au courant with the development of political economy in most of the countries of the world, and their friends kept them well supplied with such publications as were essential to keep them in touch with the advanced thinkers of the day. The rigid censorship prevailing in Russia at the time made it somewhat difficult on occasions for the leaders of the movement to obtain interdicted literature; but in spite of all the vigilance of the government many forbidden books and pamphlets had found their way into the hands for which they were destined. Especially was this true of a recent number of a publication bearing the imprint of a Geneva publishing house. It gave a thrilling account of the recent death by starvation of a number of political exiles in Tobolsk in Western Siberia.

"Let the monster," concluded this article, "pay the penalty of his crimes. His hands are bathed in the blood of the innocent, and the avenger who shall put an end to his bloody career will be blessed by the Russian people for all time to come."

Within four days after its publication in Geneva the article had found its way into St. Petersburg; had been reproduced and scattered broadcast throughout the empire. It was on the first discovery of this paper that Gortshakoff had summoned the minister of police. He had in no uncertain manner indicated that the perpetrators of this latest outrage against the peace and dignity of the czar must be discovered. It was then that he uttered the words still ringing in the ears of Constantine Karsicheff—"Do something." And it was in pursuance of his determination to "do something" that Karsicheff had sent Michael Radaloff on his mysterious mission.

Madame le Baroness von Rhineberg, widow of the banker Ferdinand von Rhineberg, of the great banking house of Von Rhineberg and Strauss, sat in her luxurious boudoir in her princely residence in the most fashionable quarter of the city. She was a true type of the upper class German, and although she had lived most of her life in Russia and spoke the language like a native, she had never entirely lost her national characteristics. Her pink and white complexion, light blue eyes and wealth of light golden hair, gave her somewhat the appearance of a great doll of the most approved pattern. A letter she had been reading had fallen from her hand and she sat, with a rather serious look upon her face, gazing out of the window.

"Poor child."

That was all; and having murmured the words, almost involuntarily, the baroness relapsed into her reverie. Alone in the world, for her marriage had been childless, the baroness found a certain degree of happiness in sharing other people's miseries. When Ferdinand von Rhineberg departed this life he left his disconsolate widow the possessor of a fortune which made her one of the richest women, in her own right, in St. Petersburg.

There was but one family, however, to whom she was always at home and in whose house she found congenial companionship. Strangely enough,

the house was that of Constantine Karsicheff, minister of police. Not that between the cold, haughty and ambitious countess and the warm-hearted and affectionate German lady there could be much in common. The intercourse between the baroness and the Countess Karsicheff was confined to those social amenities and everyday courtesies that pass current in society, and are sometimes mistaken for friendship.

Between the baroness and Olga, however, there was a deep affection. Had they been mother and child it could not have been more profound and sincere. In fact, Olga Karsicheff, loving and gentle as she was by nature, had never felt for her own mother anything like the love she bestowed on the baroness. Nor is this to be wondered at. Katherine Karsicheff was neither of a loving nor a lovable nature, and the gentle Olga could recall the tears shed in childish sorrow at many a repulse of the girlish affection offered to her mother only to be refused. And so it happened that the baroness became the repository of Olga's childish affections.

Always earnest and thoughtful, Olga now seemed to be under the in-



"IT IS A PRESENT TO ME . . ."

fluence of a deeper feeling than usual. With affectionate concern the baroness could not fail to perceive that Olga was daily becoming more and more preoccupied with her own thoughts, and that on more than one occasion her reveries were ended by a sigh. She knew Olga's melancholy to be due to the odious position in which she was placed. She was merely used as a pawn in her mother's social game, and compelled to marry a man in the selection of whom she had neither voice nor choice.

"Olga," soliloquized the baroness as she again glanced over the letter, "has not seen Alexis for two years. She doubtless feels that the rough and stirring life of the camp may have changed him since they parted—since the time when she had been informed by her mother that she was destined for the wife of Alexis and forbidden to refer to the matter again in any way, other than to regard it as a fact, settled beyond controversy. Alexis," the baroness recalled, "had been urged by his father to propose as a matter of form, and Alexis had proposed in a perfunctory way, been accepted in a half-hearted, listless style as something that could not be helped, and then he went off to the wars to win the glory that had gilded his career ever since."

The baroness sighed. Her mind went back some two and twenty years to another marriage de convenance—to another drama of high life in Europe in which she herself had played a part. Then there came across the vista of vanished years the memory of a young student.

A knock at the door interrupted the reverie.

"Come!"

Marie, the baroness' own maid, entered and presented a salver upon which was a card bearing the name:

"Prof. Nikolai Kasovitch,

"University of St. Petersburg."

"Herr Professor waits in the library,"

said the maid, "and begs the honor of a personal interview with Madame the Baroness."

"Very well. Say that I will come."

The great banker Von Rhineberg had been all his life a devoted bibliomaniac, and his reputation as a collector of the rare and curious in books and prints was well known. Hence it was no uncommon thing for the possessor of choice literary treasures to call to dispose of works that possessed sufficient value to be deemed worthy a place in such illustrious company.

When the baroness entered, a tall man, bearing in his every appearance the marks of the student and scholar, arose and bowing respectfully said: "I have taken the liberty, Madame Baroness, of calling to ask your gracious inspection of this work"—laying a large book elegantly bound on the table. "It is a present to me from an English friend—Professor Muller of Oxford. My circumstances are such that I am obliged to part with it—for—for—for" and a suspicious huskiness in his voice gave evidence that some strong emotion was struggling for expression.

The baroness became interested at once. "Pray, sit down," she said kindly, pointing to a chair.

There was silence for a moment.

"You were about to say—" the baroness sympathetically suggested. Then waited.

"I need the money this work will bring to send to my brother who is—who is—" and the voice became lower—"a political exile in Siberia."

"Poor fellow!" The baroness sighed. "What is the value of the work?" She had not even asked its name.

The story—rather the manner in which it had been told, for the story was an old one—she had heard it a score of times—had touched her.

"That is for Madame le Baroness to decide."

"Oh, no!" exclaimed the baroness. "I could not think of such a thing. Besides," she added, "I am no judge of the value of rare books."

"We professors have heard differently, madame, and it would be difficult to make the literati of St. Petersburg believe it of the possessor of the finest library in the city."

"What is the book?"

"A volume of the poems of Alfred Tennyson, and the rarest and most valuable edition published. It is too great a treasure for an humble professor like myself to possess, however much I may appreciate it. And," he added, after a slight pause, "its value will enable me to be of service to my poor, poor brother."

A sudden impulse moved the baroness. "I will gladly give you the amount you desire for the work—and—and you can keep the book if you—"

The old professor rose to his feet. "Pardon, madame," he said, with a touch of sad dignity in his voice, "I am poor, but I am not asking—"

"Pray, don't mistake me," interrupted the baroness, "and believe me, I had no desire to hurt your feelings in the slightest degree. But since you decline to place a price on the work, of the value of which I am totally ignorant, what am I to do in order to serve you?"

The professor paused a moment.

(To be continued.)

Woes of Authorship.

Mr. William Dean Howells' daughter when a very little girl made a childish literary venture in the form of a book of verses. The lines were copied out in a round, unformed schoolgirl hand and the sheets sewn together, a labor of weeks. The volume was put on sale at a church fair. The day after the fair the little girl sought her father to tell her experience with heartbreaking sobs. She had stood all day watching the book. A few had glanced at it, but no one had bought it. Mr. Howells soothed her. "My dear," said the distinguished novelist compassionately, "you are becoming acquainted too early with the woes of authorship."