

DARKEST RUSSIA

BY H. GRATTAN DONNELLY.

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CHAPTER IV.—Continued.

Once more Ivan carelessly turned the leaves, and then without looking up asked, in a matter-of-fact way: "You desire to sell the book—what is the price?"

"I preferred to leave that to the judgment of one who is better able to form an opinion of its value than I am myself."

Ivan bowed.

"You will pardon me if I say that the book is not of sufficient value to find a place, as a rare volume, among the Baroness von Rhineberg's collection; but since you desire to dispose of it, and under the circumstances, I may say that the value of this volume in St. Petersburg is twelve roubles."

Radloff arose.

"I shall not trouble you further. My impression was that it is worth three or four times as much, or I should not have troubled the baroness to examine it."

"I hope you do not think I under-value it," said Ivan.

Radloff shrugged his shoulders slightly. "My compliments to Madame the Baroness," he said, with a movement toward the door from the library into the great hall, "and please say that Professor Kasovitch regrets that he should have trespassed on her kindness with a book from the learned Professor Muller worth only twelve roubles."

Ivan rang the bell.

A servant appeared.

"I shall convey your words to the baroness. Meanwhile, in case you still doubt my judgment as to its value, if you will turn to the page next the last you will find the price in the publishers' figures in Russian characters, and judging by the freshness of the marks, written only a short time ago! Good afternoon. Batof, show the gentleman out."

CHAPTER V.

The Fete in the Nazimoff Palace.

The grand fete in the Nazimoff palace, given by Paul, Count Nazimoff, in honor of the arrival home of his only son, Colonel Alexis Nazimoff, had begun. Paul Nazimoff, a tall, soldierly-looking man of some fifty-seven or eight years, dressed in full uniform of a general of cuirassiers, stood welcoming his guests as they arrived. The haughty expression on the face of the old soldier, an expression of lofty superiority, sat well upon him. For perhaps there was not among the



Russian nobility a family whose name was greater. Paul, Count Nazimoff, as he stood there, bore right worthily the pride and dignity which came to him by inheritance and the added honors which a grateful sovereign had hastened to bestow for gallantry on many a field. For himself the fete had no particular pleasure, except in so far as it emphasized the welcome

back from the sterile plains of Turkestan to his only son, who had won his spurs as became a Nazimoff.

Mingling with his guests, with a word to one, and a smile to another, and a gentle, almost tender sentence or two to the beautiful Olga, the count passed through the brilliant throng and congratulated himself on the fact that even royalty could hardly have surpassed him in the magnificent splendor of the entertainment.

The Countess Katherine Karsicheff was, next to the host and to her daughter Olga, the most observed of the hundreds in the brilliant throng. Wearing a curious but exceedingly picturesque and becoming Russian costume of the XVII century, a costume which rumor had it was a counterpart of that in which a famous ancestress of the countess had married a younger son of the reigning royal family, Countess Karsicheff moved through the salon with an air of conscious pride and evident triumph which she took no pains to conceal. The goal of her ambition was in sight. Within three weeks Olga would be the bride of Alexis Nazimoff, and the countess herself would see her child reign in this magnificent Nazimoff palace as a very queen in the social realm of the capital.

Olga Karsicheff presented a strikingly beautiful picture, and the hum of admiration which followed her appearance showed that the assemblage was fully appreciative of her surpassing charms. In striking contrast to most of those present she wore no jewelry save a diamond spray, which glittered in her wealth of beautiful hair; and this absence of ornament heightened and emphasized the beauty of the patrician face. Her eyes were of that rarely beautiful color, a deep dark brown. The wistful expression lent to them, large and lustrous as they were, an additional charm. In a word, Olga Karsicheff was the perfect type of a beautiful and attractive girl.

The great clock had just rung out the hour of eleven when Nicholas Karsicheff, pushing his way as rapidly as possible through the throng, approached his father, and with a meaningful look indicated that he desired to speak with him alone. The appearance of General Karsicheff at this moment indicated that he was ill at ease. Already he had sent three different messengers in search of Radloff, only to receive the answer that Radloff had not returned.

"Well, what is it, Nicholas?" impatiently asked the general, when a few minutes later he found himself alone with his son. Then, as his eye fell again upon Nicholas and he noted the expression of the face, he added, with an appearance of anxiety he could no longer conceal: "What is it? Don't keep me in suspense."

"There is a rumor in the clubs to-night that a change in the ministry is imminent."

"Well, there are always rumors. Is that all? That is nothing."

Nicholas hesitated.

"Well, well, well?"

"There was a rumor as I came here that another proclamation of the Nihilists has been found in the winter palace."

"My God."

General Karsicheff as he uttered the words staggered with the force of the blow. If this news were true it meant but one thing—his official end, his social doom, his political death.

A moment more and he recovered himself.

His face was deathly pale and he gave evidence of laboring under intense excitement.

"Who—who found it?"

"I have not heard."

"My God! if this is known to Gortschakoff I am undone. Have you heard? tell me the worst."

"I fear it is worse than even that—

I have heard that the proclamation was shown to the czar himself!"

Karsicheff sank into a chair. His head fell upon his hands as he bent over, the figure of a broken man. Nicholas Karsicheff, cold, bloodless, heartless, even when his own family was concerned, felt a touch of pity for his father. Placing his hand on the shoulder of the general, he said, in a voice with a strain of concern: "Is it as bad as this?"

There was no answer.

And now Nicholas Karsicheff began to realize that even more than his father's position was at stake. The peril to his own future; the blow to his mother's pride; the danger to his sister's happiness; all these flashed through his brain. What could be done? Something must be done to avert the threatening lightning bolt which might strike at any moment.

"His mother."

That was it! Her influence, her favor at court, the power of her fam-



ily connections—all, all of these must be invoked to avert the danger, to prevent at least a change in General Karsicheff's position until after the marriage of Olga.

"I will summon my mother," began Nicholas, leaning over the general.

Karsicheff raised his head, and grasping Nicholas by the arm with a grip of iron held him fast. "No, no, not that. To tell the countess now were madness. It would drive her insane. Wait, wait, let me think."

With white lips and deeply marked brow the minister of police, his hand pressed hard against his fevered brain, rose to his feet.

"If Radloff—" he thought.

Ay, "If Radloff had but succeeded then he could do something."

And if Radloff failed!

Suddenly his face brightened a little. A feverish energy possessed him. He would stake all on Radloff. "Go, at once, take the carriage and drive to the Gortschakoff palace. Say that I am now on the trail of the conspirators, that I have them in the hollow of my hand, and that before daybreak I will arrest every Nihilist in St. Petersburg."

"But—"

"Go, I tell you, and at once. I have two hundred suspects on my list—no evidence against them—but what of that? This latest outrage, this proclamation will justify extreme measures. Tell Colonel Helfman to have his men ready. I will give him the list to-night. Yes, I will strike a blow. I will do something that will at least give me a breathing spell until I can find the fountain head of this damnable stream of revolution and stop the spring at its source."

Five minutes later Nicholas Karsicheff was on his way, as fast as horses could carry him, to the residence of the prime minister of the imperial council, and General Karsicheff, having recovered in some degree his composure, was once more mingling with the guests. He had been in but a moment when Count Nazimoff approached him with a rather amused expression on his face. He held a letter in his hand.

"I say, Karsicheff," said the count,

"you remember that extraordinary American we met at the dinner given by the American minister some three years ago?"

"The man who had a scheme to build elevated railroads in St. Petersburg, to open telephone lines to Moscow, to—"

"Exactly; well, he is here again, and what is more remarkable, has met Alexis in Asia, and brings a number of letters from him which he writes to me he will do himself the honor to present in person."

"Met Alexis—how!"

"He has been in Turkestan and has been having all sorts of adventures. We will have him here to-night."

"Will he not be rather—that is, out of his element?"

"Not at all. I have never found an American gentleman who was not quite at home in any society, however high. From what I have seen of Americans they seem to have an easy, natural way of adapting themselves to any circumstances in which they may be placed. Besides, in this case, I could hardly be discourteous enough to receive letters kindly brought by this gentleman from Alexis and then ignore the gentleman himself. I—"

Before he could finish the sentence the attention of Count Nazimoff was directed to the great hall. There was some commotion and an expression of curiosity among the guests grouped at the entrance.

"Thank you—that's all right; I can find my way. I am a friend of the family."

These words, in choice English with a marked American accent, were uttered as he entered the room by a gentleman who had evidently just arrived. He was a man of some forty-five years of age, with a clean-cut figure, and a face which betrayed a singular mixture of earnest resolution and good humor. The costume of the newcomer was in marked contrast to the brilliant uniforms which were the rule, but there was something in the easy, self-possessed air of the man, dressed in the conventional evening suit, which bespoke the thorough gentleman and stamped him as the peer of any in the room.

Count Nazimoff, who had advanced toward the door when he heard the voice, was ready with outstretched hand. "General Cobb, is it not?"

"Count Nazimoff!" and the stranger grasped the hand held forth in kindly welcome.

"I was not aware that your house was the scene of such a brilliant party to-night, or I should have hesitated about coming; but as I leave St. Petersburg to-morrow and was anxious to meet the father of Colonel Nazimoff as well as to deliver these letters, I—"

(To be continued.)

Czar Nicholas and the Press.

The present Czar is the first of his race to recognize the legitimate claims of the press. At the outbreak of the present war he granted an interview to Melville E. Stone, formerly of this city, and now general manager of the Associated Press. Soon thereafter he received a deputation of St. Petersburg newspaper men, and a week or so ago he gave audience to an English journalist, Henry Norman, M. P. The last named, by the way, did not find his majesty the mental and physical weakening he has been described so often. Instead, Nicholas seemed to be in the best of health and presented his views on Oriental questions in clear and strong fashion.

W. K. Vanderbilt Is Hard Working.

William K. Vanderbilt, the only member of the family who has shown a special aptitude for business, is gradually increasing the sum of his daily labor in looking after the immense interests of the family. Chauncey M. Depew, besides having duties of a public nature, is getting along in years and he will soon expect to be relieved of the actual work in connection with the affairs of the New York Central railroad. It is understood that he looks to W. K. Vanderbilt to equip himself with a perfect knowledge of the business before he retires.