

DARKEST RUSSIA

BY H. GRATTAN DONNELLY.

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CHAPTER V.—(Continued.)

"My dear sir, you are very welcome, believe me. My son in his letters from Asia had already spoken of you in terms which show his high regard and esteem, and believe me, it would have been a matter of sincere regret had you not given me an opportunity of expressing my thanks in person. Karsicheff!"

The general had been observing the scene and approached.

"You remember meeting General Cobb at the American minister's?" And the ice thus broken, General Cobb was soon introduced by the count to most of the celebrities present, and particularly to those with whose fortunes we are more immediately concerned.

It was now approaching half-past eleven.

General Karsicheff, leaving the American enjoying a tete-a-tete with Baroness von Rhineberg, who, after vainly endeavoring to converse with the stranger in French and German, had fallen back on English, walked across the room in obedience to a glance from his wife, who had just rejoined her daughter.

"It is true, papa, and will Colonel Nazimoff not arrive to-night?" asked Olga, as her father approached.

"Oh, not so bad as that; the train is late, that is all. Why do you persist in speaking of your future husband as 'Colonel' Nazimoff, Olga? He was 'Alexis' to you before. Surely nothing—" and Karsicheff paused, looking his daughter full in the face.

A servant approached as General Karsicheff spoke, and bowing respectfully said: "Pardon, your excellency, but a gentleman from 203 desires to see you."

"203!"

Radaloff's official number on the private lists of the ministry of police.

"Olga, remain with your mother; I will join you presently," and so saying Karsicheff followed the servant from the room.

He had forgotten Olga's rather cold expression, "Colonel Nazimoff;" had forgotten the half-formed thought that began to take shape in his mind; had



GENERAL COBB

forgotten Olga herself—everything but Radaloff, the man upon whom all depended now.

The servant led the way to a small apartment adjoining the library, opened the door, and General Karsicheff and Radaloff were face to face.

In a few brief words Radaloff told of his discoveries; of how in the Baroness von Rhineberg's house he had found the evidence which connected her secretary, Ivan Barosky, with the Nihilists, and as he spoke he exhibited the documents taken from the secret drawer in the desk. One was a copy of the interdicted Geneva publication, and the other:

Could Karsicheff believe his eyes? A list of one hundred and sixty-three names of "Friends of Russia!"

The great prize! with this in his possession he had it in his power to strike Nihilism a death blow, and by the immediate and simultaneous arrest of all whose names were on the paper there was reason to believe that he could stamp out the revolutionary fires in St. Petersburg at once and forever.

What wonder that when Constantine Karsicheff entered the salon again he seemed transformed. There was an energy in his step, a firmness in his voice, and a glitter of triumph in his eyes that spoke volumes.

"At last," he kept repeating to himself, as if finding pleasure in the words; "at last I can do something."

To-night—before another dawn—he would deal Nihilism such a blow as would destroy it; he would make all Europe ring with his praises as the great official of the empire who had saved the czar!

As his imagination pictured the gratitude of his sovereign, there broke upon the night air the sound of distant sleigh bells coming nearer and nearer.

A flutter of excitement began among the throng of guests.

Paul Nazimoff, his face flushed with pleasure, suddenly appeared. "Alexis is coming," he announced.

The sleigh bells sounded nearer.

There was borne across the frosty air the cheery "hi, hi" of a driver and the quick echo of the hoofs of flying horses as they approached the Nazimoff palace.

The guests crowded to the doors and the band, the famous band of Dorski, struck up the welcome march.

The foaming horses stopped, the sleigh bells gave a last merry jingle, and, as a loud cheer broke from the crowds of servants gathered at the entrance, Alexis Nazimoff sprang out, and in another moment was clasped in his father's arms.

CHAPTER VI.

Alexis Nazimoff at Home.

Alexis Nazimoff was a splendid specimen of the young Russian officer, and as he stood by his father a moment after his arrival and received a greeting from the Karsicheffs, whose welcome quickly followed his entrance, he looked the ideal of the dashing cavalryman. His great coat, cap and sword had been handed to a servant, and his finely proportioned figure was revealed to a perfection in the uniform which became him so well.

His dark eyes, softened by the expression of the emotion with which he had met his father's greeting, lighted up a face of singular attractiveness. His hair, of a deep chestnut brown, matched well the sun-tanned complexion; and the slightly aquiline nose, finely chiseled, indicated at once the high birth and the strength of character; while the well-formed mouth showed under the dark brown mustache such lines of decision as to indicate that once the lips were drawn together in evidence of a purpose formed, that purpose would be carried out at any cost.

Alexis, after greeting his father, had turned to Olga, whom he kissed on both cheeks, but those who noticed the salutation could hardly help coming to the conclusion that there was little of ardor in the act. It was rather the perfunctory salutation of a sister than the ardent greeting of an affianced wife after a presumably cruel separation of two long years. As he was greeted by one friend after another, Alexis' face indicated the pleasure he felt at the warmth of his reception. He was the center of a group, most of whom were old acquaintances, when his father, who had observed General Cobb standing

half-concealed at a curtained window as he talked to the Baroness von Rhineberger, approached the latter.

"My dear baroness, you must not be last with your welcome to Alexis—he was always a favorite with you, and general Cobb. Come along!"

So saying, Paul Nazimoff, offering his arm to the baroness, escorted her down to the group where Alexis stood the central figure in a joyous throng.

"My dear baroness," was the hearty greeting of Alexis, as he recognized her, and he was about to continue when his father spoke:

"And here is another old friend—"

He had no opportunity to finish the sentence.

Alexis turned and saw Cobb.

His face fairly glowed with pleasure as he impulsively sprang forward with outstretched hands.

"What, Cobb! my friend, my dear friend! Here, here, beneath my father's roof. This is indeed a pleasure! Welcome ten thousand times. To see you here when I thought you back in America makes my happiness this night complete!"

The warmth of Alexis' words, no less than the evident pleasure and sincerity with which they were utter-



"203 DESIRES TO SEE YOU!"

ed produced a feeling of profound surprise in the assemblage.

With the exception of the meeting with his father, when his emotion was apparent to all, Alexis had given no evidence of other than the natural pleasure with which he had met the welcome of his friends. His manner was not wanting in warmth, but in no case had he shown anything like the spontaneous and heartfelt pleasure with which he had greeted Cobb.

There were glances of surprise and inquiry between the guests, and on the face of the Countess Karsicheff there was an expression of annoyance which she found it impossible to avoid.

Four hundred curious eyes had seen the meeting of Alexis and Olga, and she felt that gossip would be busy with its significance in a hundred places in St. Petersburg. The warmth of Alexis' greeting to Cobb made his coldness before doubly apparent, and Katherine Karsicheff, raising her haughty head, made no effort to conceal the significance of the inquiry which her eyes directed to those of Alexis.

Alexis quickly realized that some explanation was required. Taking General Cobb by the arm he advanced from the group. "Father, friends," he said, looking at the company, "has he not told you? Do you not know?"

The puzzled looks answered the question.

"Evidently not," proceeded Alexis, as he stopped the protest of Cobb. "Then I shall tell you. Aid me to show my gratitude, your regard to my friend, my preserver!"

"His preserver!" Astonishment gave way to curiosity, and an eager expectancy pervaded the assemblage as Alexis spoke:

"Ay, my preserver, the man but for whose steady hand and resolute heart I should now be filling an unmarked grave in Asia."

"Oh, come now, none of that," began Cobb, "I—"

"The story—tell us the story."

The request came from a dozen voices.

Paul Nazimoff, as Alexis spoke of Cobb as his preserver, laid his hand on the arm of the American with a kindly gesture, while the baroness, with an eagerness she made no attempt to hide, exclaimed: "Preserver? the brave American!"

Alexis began: "About a year ago, while our command, under General Kaufman, was pushing its way across the Tartary steppes, we had a sharp conflict with a body of Turcoman cavalry. We were apprehensive of an attack by the enemy in force, and promptly took a position to repel any advance. Night fell, and my troop was assigned to outpost duty. I was ordered to advance as far as possible, so as to get some idea of the Turcomans, if they should prove to be in force. We fell into an ambuscade, and I was captured and hurried to the Turcoman headquarters, where I was thrust into a tent and my fate speedily decreed. In the conflict of which I have spoken, the Turcoman chief's son was killed, and it was determined to kill me by way of reprisal.

"While deliberating on my fate, I overheard the Turcomans allude to another prisoner whom they captured, and his death too was urged. It was pleaded in extenuation that he was not a Russian; that he was a civilian and that he would evidently be heavily ransomed. Toward daylight I became conscious that some one was gaining entrance to my tent from a tent adjoining, and I received a whispered word of warning in English to preserve silence, that the intruder was a friend. There in the darkness I felt the grasp of a friendly hand, and soon the stranger began to unfasten the bonds which held me fast, hands and feet.

"While thus engaged, he muttered 'hush,' and silently drew back into the darkest part of the tent. A movement at the entrance caused me to look in that direction. There, as a silhouette against the light of early dawn, stood a Turcoman. His face gleamed with deadliest hate. It was the chief whose son had been killed, and who had demanded my life. In his hand he bore an uplifted dagger. I could see the gleaming steel. He advanced. I closed my eyes, murmured a prayer, and waited. I could almost feel his hot breath on my face! Suddenly there was a flash and a report. The Turcoman fell, shot through the brain. At the same moment our troops with a wild cheer charged the Turcoman camp, and we were saved. Cobb, my friend, my dear friend here, was the man who fired that shot and saved my life at the risk of his own!"

"Bravo! Bravo!" "Brave Cobb!" "Noble American!" "Gallant soldier!" were some of the exclamations which followed the recital of Alexis' thrilling adventure and rescue. As he finished he turned, and grasping Cobb warmly by the hand, he added:

"Now friends, aid me to show our brave American that we Russians are not ungrateful!"

(To be continued.)

Precaution.

Mr. Upson Downes (seated by a stranger in a railway carriage)—What time is it by your watch, if you please?

Stranger—I don't know.

Mr. Upson Downes—But you have just looked at it.

Stranger—Yes; I only wanted to see if it was still there.—Stray Stories.

Mosquito Experiments.

Dr. Quitman Kohnke, president of the New Orleans Board of Health, is in Texas to determine by experiments the feasibility of fighting the mosquito as a germ-carrier.

He that studieth revenge keepeth his own wounds green, which otherwise would heal and do well.—Bacon.