

DARKEST RUSSIA

BY H. GRATTAN DONNELLY.

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CHAPTER VI.—Continued.

Paul Nazimoff said little. But it was evident that the story had made a deep impression upon him, and that his gratitude to Cobb was too great at the time to trust himself to its expression in words.

Cobb found himself the center of an admiring audience, and all the warmth of congratulation he received would have made any man feel proud to be the hero of the hour. He tried hard to put an end to the scene. It was becoming somewhat embarrassing to find himself the center of attention. In vain he protested that he had done no more for Alexis than any man would have done for another under the circumstances.

"But you forget," urged one of the Russian naval officers present, "that your own life was to be spared. You were merely to be held for ransom. By this act you periled that life to save that of a stranger."

"Well," replied Cobb, with a smile, "we've all got to take chances in this world."

A score of interrogations as to why he was alone followed, and Cobb, in spite of his desire to let the matter drop, found it impossible to avoid an explanation.

Septimus Cobb was a Kentuckian by birth. From his earliest youth he had been of a roving, adventurous disposition. At the outbreak of the war he had raised a company of cavalry, and step by step had won promotion until he was in command of a brigade. The close of the war found him with the possession of the title "General," a fund of splendid physical health, indomitable courage, restless energy, and an unsatisfied ambition. He was poor. He wanted wealth, and he went to California.

For years after he led the life of thousands of restless adventurers in the far West. Editor, miner, speculator—everything by turns. Two fortunes made—and lost. He came East, got into oil, made a third fortune—and lost that. It was while casting about for the easiest and quickest means of making a fourth fortune that, hearing of the marvelous development

in Europe and America, it was as certain that thousands would flock to the scene as it was that the diamond mines of Africa, and the gold discoveries of Australia, attracted adventurers from all parts of the world. Taking a small steamer, Cobb crossed the Caspian Sea, and guided by a rough map of the country, pushed into the interior. He had a march of weeks, perhaps months, ahead of him, but he was undaunted. His escort supposed him an American missionary, and he took no pains to undeceive them. It is true that his missionary labors produced no fruit, nor was the faith of his escort, whether Greek Church or Mohammedan, unsettled by his arguments. But he pushed on for a field that promised to reward his exertions, and had just begun operations when he was surprised, seized and overpowered by the roving Turcomans. He had really no fear of death, nor was his life in much danger; but he was placed in confinement until his disposition could be determined upon by his captors and the amount of his ransom agreed to. Alexis told the rest of the story.

Cobb had explained much of his career as accounted for his presence, and when he concluded the avalanche of congratulations began once more, and was only stopped by the sound of music.

Everybody became silent and listened!

The air was strange to most of those present.

But when Cobb's face brightened, and he exclaimed, "The Star Spangled Banner"—for that was the air—everybody understood the delicate compliment conveyed when Paul Nazimoff had given a whispered order to a servant and the American air was played in honor of the American guest.

As the last notes died away, Paul Nazimoff taking one hand and Alexis the other, led Cobb in front of the assemblage and "Viva la America!" was given with hearty good will and enthusiasm.

Then the assemblage began to gather into knots and groups—but everywhere Cobb and Alexis and the adventure formed the subject of conversation. A score of invitations to the greatest houses in Russia had already been showered on General Cobb. He had accepted half a dozen—one in particular, that had been pressed with great earnestness. That one came from the Baroness von Rhineberg.

"You are so grand, brave," said the baroness. "You will in St. Petersburg long stay?"

"Not very long, I am afraid," answered Cobb. "You see I am a bird of passage—always on the go."

"Always on ze go," repeated the baroness. "How is which?"

Cobb smiled. "How is which" struck him as a perfect gem.

"Always on the go," he explained, "means that I remain here a little time—then go somewhere else—then travel again—and so on."

"It I now understand," replied the baroness. There was the suggestion of a sigh as she spoke. It did not escape the notice of Cobb. "I would to be always on ze go, like sometimes myself, but I must be always on ze stay—I am alone," and the voice became softer as the baroness cast down her eyes.

Cobb was about to reply when Lord Fitzroyal, who had been an interested spectator, sauntered up. The baroness was betraying altogether too much interest in the stalwart American to please his lordship, who had been wavering for some time on the verge of a proposal.

"Well, baroness, our American friend seems to have covered himself with glory."

Cobb detected a covert sneer in the remark.

"Zat is so! He is a brave man, and

a big man. Big men are brave, is it so not?"

The baroness looked innocently enough at Lord Fitzroyal as she spoke, but her glance had first rested on the American. There could hardly have been a greater contrast. Cobb strong, straight, massive and magnificently proportioned; Fitzroyal thin, puny and narrow chested.

The shot told.

Fitzroyal looked annoyed.

He turned his attention to Cobb.

"Mr. Cobb seems quite at home in Russia," he said.

Cobb measured him with his eye. "Yes," he drawled in reply. "Americans generally are more at home in Russia than Englishmen are. We never tried to kick them when they were down."

"Zat is good—zat is so—is it so not, Lord Fitzroyal?" exclaimed the baroness.

Before Fitzroyal could reply a hush fell on the assembly. From beyond the masses of tropical plants which



"A WOMAN!"

masked the apartment where the orchestra was concealed came the exquisite strains of a Russian air, played on the violin by a master hand.

As the last notes died away the storm of applause broke out with spontaneous enthusiasm. "Bravo! encore!" came from all points of the room.

"Exquisite!" "What a master touch!" "What splendid technique!" "Superb!" were expressions heard on all sides.

Paul Nazimoff was delighted.

"Father," said Alexis, "that is indeed a treat. It is years since I have heard anything that approached such a brilliant performance." He sighed.

His father watched him narrowly. The wound then, had not entirely healed.

Katherine Karsicheff broke the silence. "I sometimes wonder how the lower classes can cultivate such tastes."

"Yes, it really is extraordinary," replied Fitzroyal, answering the countess, who had spoken loud enough to be heard by all who were near. Then Fitzroyal saw still another chance. "The lower orders, Mr. Cobb, have some things that we don't possess by birthright of nobility."

The fact that every person in the room, except Cobb, so far as Fitzroyal knew, had a title, made the remark suggestive.

Looking his questioner straight in the eye, Cobb said: "Yes; brains for example."

"Let us have 'God Save the Czar'—one solo." It was Alexis who spoke.

"By all means." "Yes! Yes!" "God Save the Czar!" came from all sides.

Paul Nazimoff raised his finger and a servant approached.

"Tell the man who played to come into the salon. I desire him to play before my guests."

The servant retired.

A minute later he returned, and hesitatingly approached Count Nazimoff, who was seated with Countess Karsicheff.

The count looked up. "Well?"

The servant said something in a low voice.

"What!" Count Nazimoff arose. "Say that I command it."

The words were uttered too loudly not to attract attention, and inquiring looks were directed to the speaker. Paul Nazimoff laughed. Not a pleasant laugh this time. He was annoyed. "What think you, friends? This great genius, whose playing you did him the honor to admire, actually had the insolence to send me a reply begging to be excused!"

A chorus of laughter followed.

The idea was too absurd. A dozen explanations were offered; the servant had not understood; the player did not know; the man was insane; and so on. It never occurred to any that a mere musician would send such a message to Count Nazimoff.

The servant entered again.

This time he was in terror. The man fairly shook.

"Come here!" said Count Nazimoff. There was a painful silence in the great apartment.

The man approached.

Again he whispered in a low voice and then stepped quickly back, as if fearful of a blow.

Paul Nazimoff looked up. His face was livid with rage. His eyes fairly blazed with anger. "What, dog of a serf! This message to me!" In spite of himself he fairly shouted the words.

The group of servants near the entrance were trembling now.

The guests were aghast at the terrible outburst of their host. But Nazimoff was beyond control. "Hanajka!" he shouted to an upper servant, "follow Azof here! Stop! Bring your whip! Drag the player here by force—by force, do you hear!" and with a terrible oath, which fortunately was lost in the confusion, Nazimoff, almost choking with rage, sank into his chair.

The silence was only broken when a moment later Count Nazimoff arose. "Your pardon, friends, your pardon." His voice was hoarse. "But what think you of this last reply that yonder dog dared to send to me by my servant: 'I am neither the servant nor the serf of Count Nazimoff! I shall not play God save the Czar!' By Heaven! we shall see! I shall make the dog play here before you until you bid him go, and then he shall be flogged before he is flung from my doors."

"A hundred lashes at least," suggested the countess.

"With the double knout," added General Karsicheff.

The other guests said nothing. They waited, with bated breath and painful interest, the ending of the scene. Men stood with compressed lips; ladies sat in nervous apprehension; Paul Nazimoff walked up and down like an enraged lion.

There was a sound outside—a scuffle. Some confusion. All eyes were directed toward the spot, and a moment later, with an astonishment none could repress, came the simultaneous exclamation:

"A woman!"

(To be continued.)

His Family Record.

Representative Littlefield of Maine tells this:

"A really good minister generally has a ready answer for him who would cast a slur on the Bible or on religion. It seems that the good Lord has furnished them with the ammunition which is always ready to be fired into the scoffer and sinner.

"In my state a good minister had an appointment to preach at one of the small places, a rough-and-ready sort of joint, where the men didn't care much how things went. It was Saturday evening when the minister rode up to the only hotel or boarding house in the place, and he was soon surrounded by several of the men who had been imbibing in the speak-easy. One of them asked:

"Be you the parson who has come here to preach?"

"Yes, sir," calmly and politely replied the minister.

"Well, parson, can you tell me and my friends how old the devil is?"

"Keep your own family record, my friend," was the quick answer as the minister dismounted and walked into the house."—Washington Times.



"Always on ze go," repeated the baroness. "How is which?"

of Russian oil territory on the shores of the Black Sea, he determined to investigate its possibilities. A syndicate was formed, and Cobb, as its representative, with unlimited credit, and plenary powers, was sent to prospect the new oleaginous territory. After some years spent in the neighborhood of Baku, the center of the Russian oil country, stories began to reach Cobb of marvelously rich gold deposits in Turkestan. To think, with him was to act. It was necessary to keep his destination a secret, for, if the tales of the new El Dorado were true, the moment they became known