

COMPLETE, PRICE SIXPENCE.

THE
SONS OF THE WHITE EAGLE;
OR,
THE PATRIOTS OF POLAND.



By COUNT ALEXIS BENIOWSKI.

(Recently Escaped from the Russian Police).

BEAUTIFULLY ILLUSTRATED.

LONDON: PUBLISHING OFFICE, 112, FLEET STREET.

THE SONS OF THE WHITE EAGLE: OR, THE PATRIOTS OF POLAND.



THE KNOUT CUT.

CHAPTER I.

WHICH IS INTRODUCTORY.

I AM about to tell to the free people of happy
No. 1.

England the story of my wretched country—a
terrible tale of wrong, of treachery, of brutal
violence—a tale, too, of heroic resistance to op-
pression, a tale of murdered patriots and out-



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raged women, who have died under the flesh-cutting knout and the fiendish tortures of the God-abandoned spoilers of my own dear Poland.

My name is Alexis Beniowski. "Count," I used to be called in the days departed, ere the knout had cut my back to pieces, ere my wife and children were ruthlessly butchered, ere I myself was a wretched prisoner in that snow-bound hell upon earth called Siberia, with the iron of a despot entering into my soul, as it scarred my limbs long ago.

I am a young man still—young in years, old in sorrow. My hair is turned grey—and my heart is broken as now, an exile in a foreign land—in that England which has been from time immemorial almost the last refuge left on earth for unfortunates like me—I sit down with tears in my eyes to tell you all I have seen and all I have suffered, and much more of the sufferings of others.

Much more did I say?

Aye, indeed! God help me, I shall tell you much more! Enough to make your free English blood boil to think that on God's earth, among men for whom more than eighteen hundred years ago Christ died, such scenes should be enacted in the face of indignant Europe.

Aye, it is time to speak now!

I have been driven almost mad with suffering! In despair I have looked up agonisingly to heaven, almost as if to ask if there really was a God there.

But I am not mad now, and I will speak out ere I die; and fear of tyrants shall not stifle my bitter cry any more than Polish earth can hide the blood of my murdered fellow-countrymen and countrywomen from the eyes of an all-avenging God!

"Poland for the Poles!" was my battle cry in those days; I repeat it now.

Ever since we have been a nation, tyrants have striven to make us their prey; they have divided Poland into parts at their lying congresses—part, the sovereigns of Europe arranged among themselves in 1815, to give to Russia, part to Prussia, and part to Austria.

In all these countries they have striven to crush us. But they have found it no easy task.

They have murdered our men, and ravished our women and flogged them to death! They have shed our blood like water, they have sent us away by thousands to perish in their prisons, but Poland lives to fight yet!

They may kill us, but our country is not destroyed.

They may ride our people down with their Cossacks. Russian Judases may betray our sons to the scaffold. They may forbid our wives to go into mourning even for their butchered husbands, and may make the wearing of our national costume a crime.

But we and our children will never surrender till either Poland is free or there is not a single Pole left to bleed for her.

Men of England, if you will not help us in our fight, at least hear us!

Hear me while I speak, and as you shall answer to your God, say whether we are right or wrong so to fight for the freedom of our country against women-floggers like Russian Mouravieff and wholesale murderers like De Berg! They call us insurgents, and compare us to robbers and disorderly cut-throats, because we try to shake off their yoke and kill their villainous spies; because at last we have got together a national government whose object is

never to rest till they have—it may be years in waiting—driven every foreign enslaver home howling out of our country. We do not want your country, say we. At least give us ours.

But no! not content with this, they abuse us. As well might a cook curse the poor eels he is frying alive for quivering in agony on the gridiron, as the Russian ravagers slander us Poles for fighting for poor Poland.

With these feelings I write my story.

If I show warmth, bear with me. Only bad men could be calm under trials such as ours. My wife's blood cries to me from the ground. I have shed my own ere now to avenge it, and now I am a poor, half-starved cripple in England. But my tongue *here* is not tied, thank God!

Englishmen, listen to me, and when I have done, you will no longer wonder why Poles and Russians can never be reconciled on this side the grave! Never, my friends in England—never!

Felinska, dear, dead wife of mine! from thy resting-place in heaven, look down upon thy wretched husband! and ere he tells the world the awful story of thy wrongs, pardon him, if without thy angelic meekness, he sometimes forgets that even a Russian butcher is still a man!

CHAPTER II.

MY BIRTH.—A RUSSIAN NOBLEMAN TWENTY YEARS AGO.—THE BET.—SERF V. BEAR.

FARAWAY from happy England, in the year 1832, in that hardy northern country, which extends from the foot of the snow-clad Carpathian mountains and the fertile plains of the Ukraine—where Mazeppa was born—to the stormy Baltic Sea, I first saw the light in a little village some fifteen versts (a *verst* is something less than an English mile) from the city of Warsaw, the capital of Poland, on the left bank of the river Vistula.

For centuries my family had resided there.

Count Paul Beniowski, my father, a few weeks before my birth, had fought at Warsaw against the Russians, when Nicholas's soldiers were soundly thrashed by the Polish patriots.

He there received a severe wound; that did not hinder him, however, from joining his brothers in arms from time to time, till at last the Poles were beaten, and he himself was taken prisoner utterly disabled.

What follows I only know by hearsay. Enough for me now to state that he was, in spite of his wound, *knouted to death*, by order of the colonel of those blood-thirsty Cossacks, whose lances pierced him as he lay helplessly gasping on the bloody battle-field.

My mother died in giving me birth. I was an only child; my patrimonial estates were given over to a Russian general, who, out of compassion, allowed my old nurse to live on the property still, and take care of me.

My title of "Count," of course, after these events, was worth nothing.

Nicholas, the then Czar of Russia, had pronounced an *oukaz* (ukase, the English call it) that the Beniowskis of my family should for ever after be incapable of bearing any title of nobility.

Still, out of respect to my race, my Polish neighbours always persisted in calling me "Count Alexis," though I had hardly a *copeck* (less than an English farthing) to bless myself with, the

greater part of my life, unless I earned it by the sweat of my brow.

This is no unusual thing. You will find in Poland now waiters at roadside inns, who are "Counts" and "Marquises" in their own right; just as you may, even now, find lounging about Leicester-square, London, a few ragged old Frenchmen, who, years ago, ere Napoleon III. drove Louis Philippe from the throne, were Marquises and Viscounts in France.

The first few years of my life were marked by no event worth recording.

Poland was then quiet—though it was only, indeed, like the quietness of a man who has been stunned by a blow, and who will on recovery instantly fly at his would-be assassin's throat.

True, from time to time, petty riots ensued; but they were generally put down by indiscriminate massacre. The spirit of Poland seemed to sleep. That was all.

The general, Count Aksakkof, the then proprietor of the broad lands which once owned a Beniowski's sway, was not, perhaps, a bad man at heart,—for a Russian, I mean.

It was not his fault—poor, easy-going bandog of a tyrant—that the Russians cuffed the Poles about as they pleased.

He never did it himself on his own estate. I will give him that much credit, on the principle of giving even the devil his due!

But when he died, and his son, Ivan, succeeded him, we had an awful time of it.

Count Ivan Aksakkof, was, unlike his father, a perfect demon in man's form.

He was about thirty, though he looked younger, when he succeeded to the property. Ere that time he had been an officer in a Cossack regiment, had seen a little service against the brave mountaineers of the Caucasus, and had now made up his mind to enjoy himself as he pleased.

When it is known that a Russian proprietor has almost absolute power over his serfs, and some of us on his estate were no better, you can readily guess what a monster of lust and cruelty a bad one is tempted to become.

Speaking of Russian serfdom, I may here mention that Count Ivan's father had, beside his Polish estate, a large property in Russia. The serfs, at the time I mention, were Russians originally brought from the old man's own country to Poland.

Nevertheless, though he had about five hundred of these serfs altogether in Russia and Poland, and miles of land, Count Ivan, thanks to his extravagance, was comparatively poor, being head over ears in debt.

Every year he went off to St. Petersburg. In that gay Russian capital he gambled and debauched away in a few weeks the revenues of half a year at home.

On his return to Poland, where he mostly lived, he would spend his days in disgusting orgies of lust, drunkenness, and cruelty.

Let me give a few incidents; and, recollect, I am telling fact, not fiction.

It is necessary to your right comprehension of my story that I should tell you these things ere I come to worse. These are but some few of the bitter, bad beginnings that brought about this man's bloody end.

On one occasion when the frosts and snows of our cold country had set in, so that going out of doors in the driving snow was not pleasant and hardly safe, Count Ivan was almost at his wits' end to know what to do with himself.

For a week past he had been drunk, riotously drunk, and vicious.

One day he would have a dance, that is to say, he would get together the prettiest girls on his estate and make them dance before him, dressed in the thinnest possible costume so as to show off their voluptuous figures to best advantage in his old hall, which was heated by stoves to suffocation, while he sat by drinking *kwas* (sort of Russian beer).

Another day he had amused himself by packing off to prison the father of one of the girls whom he had subjected to his licentious violence, on the father objecting thereto.

On a third, he had passed away half an hour in flogging with twigs, previously steeped in water, one of us Poles, who had happened to be overheard singing a song in praise of our greatest patriot Kosciusko.

It was in vain to complain to the nearest officer of police, who happened to be a Russian.

So the man flogged had to grin and bear it, till his time came.

But all these little amusements grew stale.

Something original in the way of brutality was wanting to give this Count Ivan a new sensation.

He hit it off at last.

Among his peasants was a certain man about forty, called Iashka.

In those days, Iashka was an immensely tall, powerful, and courageous fellow.

He could thrash every serf Count Ivan owned, which is not saying much, perhaps.

Even the Poles on the estate—and, thank God! Polish, like English, courage is undeniable—feared Iashka.

Yet brave to his fellows, he was, like them, a mere beaten cur before his terrible master.

Do not despise him for this, you who were born free.

From birth, poor Iashka had been used to regard this master of his as a being far superior to himself.

And no wonder. The count, Iashka knew, could sell him, imprison him, flog him, almost exactly as he chose. Who would take a serf's word in those old days against a Russian *boyar's*, or nobleman's? Nobody—at any rate, nobody in authority.

Count Ivan had once loved the chase. He was a splendid shot, and many a bear far away in the mountains of Carpathia had fallen to his terrible rifle.

But he had grown too debauched and indolent to care for these things now.

Young as he was, even his iron frame began to feel the effects of deep potations and licentious orgies.

So he stayed at home smoking cigarettes, quaffing fiery spirits, toying with pretty peasant girls, and setting his dogs to fight a tame bear of his, called Mishka, in whose unwieldy antics the count took delight at such times.

A certain Colonel Pechersky, from Moscow, was staying with him.

They were sitting with their feet stuck up on a stove in the great hall, some two centuries old—of the house where my fathers once dwelt in feudal splendour—talking and drinking, when the colonel said—

"That Iashka of yours, count, is a very fine fellow. I wish he belonged to me. How many hundred roubles will you take for him? I'll play you a game of *ecarté*—(the Russians are as fond of French games as of speaking French in good

society; indeed, at court, French is almost universally spoken)—for him. What, no? Why then I'll—"

"Stop, colonel," said the count, "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll lay you a little bet."

"What is it?"

"Listen. You know my bear Mishka?"

"Of course I do. But what has she to do with Iashka?"

"Well," continued his friend, "I'll bet you—so well is the bear trained to it—that Iashka and she shall have a fair, stand-up wrestling bout—no biting or other foul play—you shall back Iashka and I'll back the bear who shall be muzzled, or—"

"I see what you mean. You will reverse the bet, if I like it better. I do."

"Exactly. Well, then, I stake 500 roubles that the bear fairly throws Iashka to the ground in five minutes, and keep him there without injury for as long as she likes."

He shouted to a servant.

"Michael, tell Iashka I want him."

"Yes, your excellency," said the servant, bowing to the ground.

Iashka entered, and, as his custom was, bent on his knees till his head touched the floor before his master.

He was by far the finer man of the two in face and figure.

I cannot say in mind, bad as the count was in that way, for Iashka was a mere animal, and nothing more.

His manly spirit, before his master at least, died within him.

If his master struck him, he bore it in silence, with his eyes meekly dropped to the floor, like the serf he was, poor fellow.

But those who knew Iashka best, noticed sometimes an awkward little twitching of the mouth on these occasions, which boded no good to the count if the serf ever once forgot his habitual obsequiousness.

"Iashka!" said the count, without once turning his head, just as if the man had been a dog, "I want you to bring in Mishka. Ere you bring her, you may go to Dmetri and ask him to give you a pint of *vodka* for yourself.

This may seem a large draught at one time to an Englishman.

But a Russian serf, though it is seldom he gets so much at once, will toss it off almost like water—so great is the cold of the atmosphere.

This *vodka* is something like Irish whiskey in taste, though somewhat weaker.

In a quarter of an hour Iashka returned.

He had brought Mishka with him.

She was a brown bear, not particularly large, and very tame to all appearance.

To the count she was like a dog, and I believe he loved her like a child.

Directly she entered, at a sign from her master, she ran up to him, stretched out her clumsy paws, took him round the neck, licked his hands, and then lay down, with a growl at the colonel, who edged off slightly, and almost unconsciously tightened his grip on his sword-hilt.

"Iashka! Mishka and you had a fine piece of fun last month. I want you to show Colonel Pechersky how well you two can wrestle to-day."

The serf bowed as before.

True, an expression of annoyance he could hardly conceal passed over his handsome but stolid features.

But he said nothing.

"You are a fine fellow, Iashka—the finest man on this estate," said the count, more patronisingly than was his wont; "and I want you to show the colonel which of you two, bear or man, can throw the other first to the floor, and keep him or her, as the case may be, there. Iashka, all you have to do is to play with the bear and throw her if you can. Muzzle her first. I know you fear nothing; besides, you know Mishka is as tame as a dog."

The colonel could not help colouring up at these remarks.

He felt the affair had gone a little too far.

He knew, too, however playful the bear was, she might turn spiteful—and then, though she was but a small bear and Iashka had a giant's strength, she might break her muzzle and use her teeth. So he said—

"Really, my dear count, I must beg to be off my bet."

Unheeding the colonel, the count told Iashka to wrap a shawl or two round his arms, in case of a chance scratch. He then added—"I will give you ten roubles if you throw the bear. If Mishka throws you, look out."*

The serf needed no other admonition.

He prepared for the conflict. Colonel Pechersky looked on disgustedly. The count patted Mishka, who ran up to Iashka and jumped upon him as if they had been playmates all their lives.

"I told you, colonel, that no harm could come of this little bit of sport," said the count, smilingly. "If it should, why, it won't matter. Iashka will never allow himself to be beaten, and Mishka will never be able to bite him when she has her muzzle on. Come here—bring her muzzle."

Iashka strapped it on.

Mishka did not seem to like it.

"Now then," said the count, lighting another cigarette and passing the decanter to his friend. "Begin, Iashka—remember ten roubles, or—"

"I see, excellency, I'll do my best," said the serf.

At a signal from her master, the bear stood on her hind legs.

Then Iashka took hold of her by the fur of one of her shoulders, allowing her in turn to collar him.

Of course it would not have done to let the bear get the hug on, breast to breast—as that would have given the man no chance at all.

"Are you ready, Iashka?"

"All ready, most noble excellency," was the reply.

The count clapped his hands and then patted Mishka's black snout.

At it in good, playful style at first they went.

The bear thought the whole thing mere play, and the serf feared he would get a broken skin, if he failed.

It was evident after a minute's struggle that the man had all the best of it.

In vain did the bear, licking her chops through the greasy old muzzle, try to get to close quarters.

The serf's enormous strength kept her fairly out at half-an-arm's distance.

In vain did she try to grip Iashka round the neck.

* Incredible as this may seem, the incident is strictly true. A similar story appeared only a few years ago in the *Russian Messenger*, published in St. Petersburg.

The serf knew better than to suffer this, as he could see, however playful she might be at present, Mishka might at any moment turn spiteful.

"The best out of three events, I suppose, count?"

"Da" (yes), was the reply.

"Then I shall win the first," said the colonel.

As he spoke, Iashka's arm seemed tiring.

He slightly relaxed his grasp.

"Fool!" said the count. "I shall lose my bet—and you will be——"

The words were hardly out of his mouth, when down went Iashka and over him in high glee rolled the bear, who tried through her muzzle to lick his face.

"Go and pat your champion, colonel," said the count with a smile.

Then turning on his serf with a frown, he dealt him a somewhat severe slap in the face.

Not a muscle quivered—but a deep flush mounted to the serf's brow as with a bow he prepared once more to renew the mock combat with his strange opponent.

Iashka this time was more fortunate. He threw the bear.

In the third struggle, after he had pulled Mishka half over the boarded floor of that ancient hall, she lost her temper, and, snapping her muzzle, contrived with one bite of her sharp white teeth to take his left ear clean off.

Master and serfdom alike forgotten now, the serf's long dormant passion blazed out of his eyes.

"Accursed one!" muttered he, "thou'lt never bite another man!"

Then fumbling in his caftan, he produced a long knife, and ere the count could utter one word of remonstrance, had driven it home to the infuriated brute's heart. She made a few struggles and fell dead at his feet.

"Villain!" shouted the count, furiously seizing the colonel's sword; "thou shalt die!"

But the colonel, who was a gentleman at heart, interposed.

The count clapped his hands.

A servant entered.

"Michael, send five of the men, and let them lock up Iashka in the stable, till I give further orders."

Iashka mutely submitted.

The count then resumed his conversation, after patting his four-footed friend's head fondly, just as if nothing had happened.

But the next day he ordered Iashka's right ear to be cut off also; and, I need hardly add, the brutal order was duly executed.

Such was Count Ivan Assakkof.

I have told you this little story, to show you under what a fiend incarnate I spent my early years.

Those who doubt it could, if necessary, be referred, even now, to proofs of similar barbarity.

I don't say such instances are, by any means, common.

On the contrary, I know after this the count was deservedly "cut" by most of his acquaintance.

But only think, how brutalising must be the system of serfdom under which such things could possibly be done, without the least shadow of redress to the maimed sufferer.

I could indeed fill a volume with tales of this kind about this man, now gone to his last awful account.

But I will not. My tale is about other matters—about our Russian tyrants and Polish patriots; about police spies of the czar; about woman-floggers, wholesale hangmen, and the like; about midnight marchings and counter-marchings in the solemn woods of dear Poland; about battles between freemen, whom they call "insurgents," and hell-hounds in the czar's uniform, whom the Russian papers call "brave soldiers;" about woman's love and agony; about all that can make a country great and virtuous; and, alas! I must add, about all that has now turned Poland into one terrible human slaughter-house.

Read it—doubt it if you will. But such things, in all their naked horror, as I shall have week by week to relate, have been enacted, are being enacted, and, alas! will, I fear, be enacted again in my unhappy land!

CHAPTER III.

THE MIDNIGHT MEETING IN THE FOREST OF SINKIEVICZ. — I TAKE THE OATH. — THE FATHER-CONFESSOR, AND THE TERRIBLE ALTERNATIVE.

I AM not about to speak in this story of the Poles of Galicia under Austrian, or the Poles of Posen under Prussian, rule. Hardly as they have been used, I have here at least no words for them but silent prayers.

My story is of the Poles of Russian Poland—my God! to think two such words as "Russia" and "Poland" should come together; they sound like murderer and victim!—of the Poles of my own native land, with whom I have plotted, fought, and suffered agonies, to which death seemed as nothing.

When I was fifteen, a distant relative of mine, who had, by selling his country, as some said, contrived to get a good appointment under the Government about fifty miles from Warsaw, died, and left me about three hundred pounds English.

The legacy seemed a perfect mine of wealth to me in those days.

Till I got it, I lived by manual labour, working on the farm like any other of the peasantry.

True, the country people who had known my family pitied my misfortunes, and treated me, in private, with far more respect than they would have shown to the Count Ivan, had they dared to act up to their opinions.

But still I felt I was a Beniowski of the old blood.

And I wished to be something better than a mere day-labourer.

What to be I had never yet thought of.

But still, one thing was now clear to me.

I would at least enter myself as a student at the University of Warsaw, and pick up my lost time a little. I then might be able—for I felt I had brains and courage—to be, at some future time, of service to poor, trampled Poland. I kept my resolve; the little education I had had, I made up for by almost incredible hard work. Indeed, for the first year of my student-life, I nearly worked myself, late and early, into my grave. My lamp was always the last out in college. I was always up at dawn, reading away. So I made great progress, and, ere I was seventeen, had taken a good place among the rest.

We were all Poles to the back-bone. "Poland

for the Poles!" was our cry, though, as yet, we dared do little. When the time came, many a gay student of my old university died with that cry on his parted lips.

Gradually I found myself drawn, by some irresistible fascination, into the society of two or three men, who have since been knouted to death, or butchered in other ways, by the Russians.

We formed a secret society among ourselves. When we left college we tried to keep it up, by enlisting into it other Poles.

I remember well the night of the 10th December, 1850; for on that night I first became a member of that secret society, bound to each other by the most solemn oaths, called "The Sons of the White Eagle." I was not then living near Warsaw, but was on a visit to a brother student, Krasinski by name, who lived on the borders of a mighty forest—our country abounds in such—many versts from the old city.

His father was a small landholder, and Julius, my friend, was, like myself, an only son.

I remember the tall, stately figure of my poor murdered friend well. Methinks I can still see those dark, earnest eyes of his, and hear the rich enthusiastic tones of his voice now stilled for ever.

A keen, steely-bright night was that same 10th of December, when, so soon as the family were all snug in bed under no end of sheepskin coverlets, we two stole quietly out of his father's house, and taking the horse out of the stable, harnessed him to the sledge.

We did not want the services of our *isvostokik*, or driver, that night; for our errand was a secret and dangerous one.

So away we sped alone in our sledge.

The night was glorious—as light as day!

There had been a heavy fall of snow which had hardened in the biting frost, and the ground was as rugged as iron, and looked, as it glittered in the moonlight, as though paved with millions of diamonds.

Talk about the beauty of a fine frosty night! You don't know what it really is, I assure you, in England.

There is seldom any wind in intense frost in those latitudes; so, wrapped up in our furs we were warm enough as, pipe in mouth, we dashed away!

Our sledge had a fan-like front and our horse was a thoroughly staunch one. So on we went like lightning, the hard ground crunching under our sledge as it now jolted, now guided like a skater over it.

What cared we for the hard lumps of snow that were occasionally kicked over the sledge-front into our faces?

What cared we for the howl of a distant wolf or two baying madly at the moon?

Were we not going that night to become members of the *Society of the Sons of the White Eagle*?

Truly that was the proudest hour of our lives!

The night was splendidly clear and bright!

Occasionally, indeed, a snow-laden cloud obscured the moon's splendour.

But it soon passed away.

And then—my heart beats to think of those times even now!—when the moon shone down on the glittering white snow, which covered the level ground for miles, like one vast carpet of brilliancy, the whole scene was as bright as mid-day, only a softer, more melancholy light—and

those glorious nights were indeed worth a lifetime almost to be out in, wrapped up warm, in high spirits, bent on a noble errand, and still in one's teens. Alas! to me those nights may come no more! God's will be done!

As we neared the woods, we saw the tall, graceful birch trees, with their white, silvery bark standing out ghost-like, in the moonlight, and their delicately fringed branches tipped with flashing icicles, like lumps of spun glass, in the clear, frosty air.

On the frozen ground the shadows of the trees were as clear as the lines of a copper-plate engraving, while ever and anon the ear was charmed by the "tinkle, tinkle; clash! clash!" of some distant sledge's bells, which floated tremulously to us in the holy silence of the night from afar.

As for ourselves, we had, for obvious reasons, taken off our own sledge bells, so we jolted along more quietly.

Our moustaches were long ago frozen as stiff as sticks, and our noses every now and then wanted a pinch or two to keep them from being frost-bitten. As for the rest we were right enough. We had a flask of *vodka* and some excellent tobacco, plenty of warm young blood, and what the English call "pluck"—is not that the word?—and what more, in the name of common sense, did we want to make us contented?

The shadows of the trees grew thicker across our path. We had entered the depths of the wood at last.

We had not proceeded far when we saw a bough of a tree broken off and lying on the side of the road.

One end of it had the bark cut off, and it pointed due east. A little farther on we met a peasant, who bade us good night.

Then recognising Julius, he respectfully raised his hand to his fur cap and said—

"The society hold their meeting to-night in the house of Petro, the charcoal-burner. Only ten members are there as yet, and, cold as it is, they make the little place hot enough. A great prince is there to-night. His name I know not. God be with you, gentlemen!"

And the good peasant trudged along his weary way once more.

The ground off the road under the trees was very uneven.

But, notwithstanding this, we dragged the sledge over it safely for nearly a mile in the direction indicated by the whittled ends of the broken boughs, aforesaid.

We reached the charcoal-burner's hut at last. It was a long, low building, not unlike an English cart-shed, turned into a human habitation, and made of hurdles, twisted boughs, dead leaves, and mud, mixed up together.

We could not see any light shining there through the chinks, though the smell of tobacco was strong enough.

Giving three sharp knocks, and whistling in a low key the first bar of the Polish national hymn, we were soon admitted.

On the threshold stood a man with a drawn sword.

"Whence, and for what, come ye?" said the sword-bearer.

We told him.

"I knew it," said the man; "enter, and take the oaths."

At the top of the room sat a noble-looking man, with silver-gray hair, whiskers closely

shaven, and a long, drooping' moustache,—a very tall man—a man whose eye denoted genius and iron courage of no ordinary sort. In short, it was Prince — (his name I will not give, as he is still in Poland), the Grand Master of the Society of the Sons of the White Eagle, which is widely spread throughout Poland, as the Russians know to their cost.

"Your name," said the Grand Master to my friend, "is —"

"Julius Krasinski, your highness."

"And yours?"

"Alexis Beniowski, prince."

"What! you know me, sir?"

"I do, your excellency. You were, I have heard, at my poor father's side, when he was speared by the Cossacks long, dreary years ago," said I, sadly.

"Ha! I remember Count Paul Beniowski well. He was a brave gentleman, and my dear old friend. I am sure his son will be a worthy member. Let the gentlemen be sworn."

"Administer the oath, Iashka!" said a member.

I started! It was, indeed, my old crop-eared acquaintance.

By blood, he was partly a Pole; and, though born in Russia, he had at last shaken off all prejudices of early ideas, and become one of us for the liberation of Poland.

A grim smile played over Iashka's face; and with a muttered "God bless you, young count!" he proceeded to administer the oath to us thus, we saying after him.

The rest kept a solemn silence. This was that oath:—

"I, Julius Krasinski, and I, Alexis Beniowski, do hereby swear by the blood of Christ, and our hopes of salvation, that we this night wish to become true members of the Society of the Sons of the White Eagle; that at all times, and in all places, we will obey the rules delivered unto us by the Grand Master, or the person or persons acting for him, even to the death; that we will spare neither ourselves, nor our own family, should such sacrifice be necessary, to the accomplishment of the objects of the said society. And furthermore, we hereby devote heart, soul, life, and limb, to the furtherance of our country's freedom against Russian oppressors. We swear to love and cleave to our brothers. We declare war to the knife against all who would stand in the way of Polish freedom. We are willing at any time, should we fail in our allegiance, to suffer the inevitable punishment of traitors, viz., death at the hands of the secret executioners of the Grand Master's decrees, so help us God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost!"

A priest of our own holy religion (the Catholic—the Russians are, on the contrary, of the Greek Church) then advanced, and, as we pronounced the last awful words, handed to us a crucifix, which in turn we reverently kissed.

The Grand Master, and all the members present, then embraced us.

After which, the business of the night went on.

Thus, till death, I became a member of this secret society.

Though an exile in England, lame, weak, and prematurely old, let no man think I have abandoned the cause yet.

I am one of its many members here in London.

We meet weekly; and many a cargo of rifles and swords that reaches Poland in safety is sent by us out of funds kind English friends provide.

The rules of the order, which I may not here divulge, were then read to us.

This much I may say, that, in spite of Russian police vigilance,—in spite of every obstacle, a fact,—it is well nigh impossible for any member of the society, should he turn traitor to the cause, to escape, no matter in whatever country he may be, the dagger of some Polish patriot, sworn before God to punish the villain who would betray his bleeding, trampled country, for lucre or any other reason.

No matter if the righteous avenger should die the next minute; vengeance must be executed.

I will just give you one case in point, which occurred only the other day.

A member of the society was taken prisoner, while fighting against the Russians.

His courage bore him up; but at last, with death staring him in the face, and with the agony of his wounds weakening his mind, he showed a few faint signs of wavering. Of this the Russian secret police were not slow to take advantage.

They plied him with hopes of pardon, of extra comforts to be supplied in gaol, &c., &c.

But it was vain.

The poor dying Pole only asked for a Catholic priest to attend him, and then he could die happy.

But at last he wavered again, and said if they would only let his sister, who was also a prisoner, go free, he would tell all the next day.

Before doing so he asked to see a Catholic priest once more.

That night, a Catholic priest, at least one to all appearance, applied at the gaol for leave to see the prisoner.

Inhuman as the Russians are, they still have reverence for religion.

The priest was at once admitted—a grave, aged, reverend man.

He entered the prisoner's cell.

"My son," said he, "I have come to confess you."

The *boutoschnik* (policeman) left the room.

"My son," said the supposed priest, "have these men, within the last few days, asked you to tell all? They often do, I know."

The prisoner coloured and said "Yes."

"And you refused, my son? Is that so?"

"I did, holy father. I have a dear sister who will perhaps be sent to that horrible Siberia if—"

"If you do not betray your country," said the priest, sadly, in a sepulchral voice.

"But, oh! my father! her life is dear, and I cannot see why I should not save her. Besides, what harm can I do by telling what the police already know?"

"They know little, my son. Besides, one like you is always dangerous. Son, you are half in heart even now a traitor to our country. Like you, I am a Pole. I know my death will follow yours instantly; but alas! you must die!"

So saying he stabbed the prisoner to the heart. When the *boutoschnik*, hearing a heavy fall, entered, he saw two corpses.

The stern infliator of the decree of the society had given up his own life, as well as that of the prisoner, to the cause.

He had committed suicide!

Terrible as the tale is, the fact occurred only a few months ago.

Let the Russians deny it, if they can.

Think how awful must be the state of poor Poland when she requires such terrible services as these at the hands of her devoted sons!

* * * * *

Years passed. Secretly and silently the society worked on. There was no smoke, perhaps, but much hidden fire about it. True, it did not seem to do much, but it laid the foundation of a great deal. Poets were among its members, whose songs stirred the hearts of the Poles. Soldiers were among us who planned and plotted, and died sword in hand at last. Statesmen were among us, and foreign emissaries too, who collected funds and agitated for us all over Europe. And now the time has come! Poland is awake at last!

Years passed—years of apparent quiet to me, for as yet I had not fought.

I remember well the year 1855. There was a mere street-row in the town of —, in Poland, then, got up by the Russian police themselves, in order that they might drag off to prison and transport to Siberia—of which penal hell I shall have in a future chapter to give you fearful revelations—all suspected persons. And among them the Russians carried off to prison one Andrew Zawiska, a student and an acquaintance. I met him in Siberia afterwards.

What I suffered then, I will tell.

CHAPTER III.

A RUSSIAN RAVISHER AND A POLISH MAIDEN.—HER OATH AND HOW SHE KEPT IT.—THE SENTENCE OF THE COURT.—WHAT THE KNOT IS LIKE.

THIS Andrew Zawiska had a sister, the beautiful but ill-fated Natalie.

The colonel of *boutoschniks* stationed in her native town became madly enamoured of her. Marriage was out of the question. So seduction was the idea that struck him, and if not seduction, thought he, force might be used.

For he was all-powerful there.

One night Natalie was missing. For a week no tidings could be heard of her. At last, in the dead of a summer night, just before daybreak, a tap came at her father's door. Thinking it was some prying *boutoschnik* he got up.

And there, breathless, sobbing, with her dress torn, and her beautiful bust bare to the night wind, stood on the threshold his unhappy daughter.

When she entered, she fell at the old man's feet, and hid her burning blushes in her garment. "What is it, child? Speak! Whence come you? Oh! my God, she is dead!" said the poor old man.

She had only fainted.

Her mother came down and fell upon her child, loading her with caresses.

When the wretched girl came to herself, she told them her sad story with many tears.

That night she told them how Colonel N——'s agents had dragged her away to a lonely house, and how that infamous sensualist had there, aided by his myrmidons, subjected her to unheard-of indignities which no decent pen can write.

Not content with effecting her ruin, he had, to gratify his jaded appetites, descended to more revolting indecencies, compelling her, at the

point of the sword, actually to dance in a state of nudity before him.

At last he had left the room, and then, God knows how! ere morning she had effected her escape.

From that hour the girl's mind was bent on vengeance on her ravisher.

Colonel N——! better meet a pack of wolves in the Oural Mountains than ever once more be alone with Natalie!

Her father, poor man, indeed, complained to the officer commanding in chief in the district. But Colonel N—— easily bribed men to swear her tale was false—only a pack of lies to extort money, &c.

In a few months the old man died, and his wife soon followed him.

Natalie had an elder brother, besides Andrew, before mentioned,—a fine, brave fellow, whom, however, she had never seen since he was a boy, and then he had been condemned for his patriotism to serve for twenty years in the Russian army quartered in the Caucasian country. So Colonel N—— rejoiced over his villainy till his time came.

One day, a tall, dark-eyed stripling, with a complexion almost as fine as a girl's—that clear, pale, Polish complexion, I mean, that, coupled with glossy black hair, arched eyebrows, pearly teeth, and brilliant eyes, is so lovely in Polish women—called at Colonel N——'s police office.

He had, he said, some important revelations to make.

Colonel N—— ordered the stranger to be shown in. The *boutoschnik* left them alone.

Producing a paper, the stranger handed it to Colonel N—— to read.

While he was bending over it, the unknown drew a pistol, and, stepping back, presented it full at the colonel's heart.

Colonel N——, though a villain, was brave in a certain way—and he sprang towards his assailant.

"Scoundrel! ravisher!" cried Natalie—for she it was; "take your fate!"

She fired; but the ball missed his heart, and sped through his shoulder, inflicting a terrible wound.

The officers rushed in, and overpowered her. She was carried off to gaol, glorying in what she had done, and only regretting she had been such a bad shot.

Three weeks afterwards she was tried.

The judge and prosecutor made out that it was merely an attempt at political assassination: so an example must be made, said they.

Sentence was pronounced accordingly.

"Natalie Zawiska, you have been convicted of a base and murderous attempt on the life of a most valuable public servant. The charge you have made against him he has long ago proved to be as utterly groundless as it is infamous. That you are only the agent of the Polish secret society I know well. Sad though it be, I still feel it my duty to pass upon you this severe sentence, which is, that you receive three strokes with the knout on Monday next in the public market-place of this town, after which you are to be sent to Siberia for the term of your natural life. *Boutoschnik*, remove the prisoner!"

There was a deep groan, which the officials vainly strove to repress in the court-house, as Natalie was dragged off to prison.

After which the judge and Colonel N—— dined together sumptuously at the police barracks.

From that hour Natalie's heart seemed dead within her. Death would have been far preferable to the shame of such exposure of her half-naked form in the open street.

And now that I have spoken of the knout, I will tell you exactly what it is. The knout, then, is a strip of hide, which is first, ere used, soaked for days in some glue-like preparation; after which it is glazed, as it were, with metal filings.

Then it becomes both heavy and hard.

Before it thoroughly hardens, the edges, which are thin, are doubled down.

In this way, you see, a regular groove runs all along it, except at the end which the executioner holds.

To the other end sometimes, but not always—and it was not so in Natalie's case—a small iron hook is attached.

As the awful knout comes down on the victim's back, the grooved edges cut like a knife!

Moreover, the agony is sometimes aggravated by the executioner dragging towards him horizontally, instead of lifting up, the knout across the quivering mass of bleeding flesh.

Such is the knout: five strokes of which, ere now, have been known to kill a person, when laid on, as the saying is, "without mercy."

In the case of women, possibly, a little less rigour may be shown; but this is only surmise.

It is certain that, however "merciful"—heaven save you from such mercy!—the executioner may be, the agony must be unspeakable.

Only fancy the pain of having the back, with all its tender nerves and sinews through it, literally cut to raw rags!

Fancy this occurring to the strongest man, and you will shudder!

But fancy it applied to the tender, plump, white back of a lovely young girl, and words are lost to convey your horror!

Yet such agony had poor Natalie to suffer on that awful coming Monday!

The *knout*, I know, is not so often used as what is called the *plète*—a milder kind of torture—viz., three things weighted with balls of lead, which, though they grievously bruise the skin, do not tear it up so terribly as the dreadful knout; though people constantly die under the *plète* for all that.

CHAPTER IV.

HOW NATALIE ZAWISKA SUFFERED UNDER THE KNOT.

SUNDAY night had come. On the morrow, poor Natalie would undergo the first part—many, indeed, doubted whether she would live to see the second—of her sentence.

Some said she would commit suicide, and indeed had tried it.

But the gaolers were on their guard now.

The agonies of that night, who shall tell!

Despair at first took possession of her—and then rousing herself she prayed—and peace descended from on high upon her.

"Oh! but—" would say a Russian—"this girl deserves her fate. She is a would-be assassin and she glories in her crime!"

And, say I, who dare blame her—her maiden modesty outraged, her shrinking form subjected to every brutality that the raging lust of a ravisher could meditate and accomplish—who

No. 2.

shall blame Natalie, if in a land where there was no justice for such as she against her oppressor, she took the law into her own quivering hands?

Not I, not *you*, dear English readers, I feel sure!

In the next cell to her were several political prisoners, whose hearts bled, despite their own sufferings, for the poor creature.

And there in the dead of the night, in her wretched cell that brave Polish girl sang this hymn—song it cannot be called—that has touched many a sad Polish heart since to tears.

You would not understand it in the original. The translator of my story has, I hope, given its meaning correctly in your own language.

Thus sang, the night before she suffered, poor Natalie Zawiska, in tones which will haunt even her gaoler's memories for years.

I.

How long, O Lord, shall our tyrants triumph?

They lead us through blood and tears to death;

Our ruined land our spoilers ravage;

Europe to save us no word saith!

How long, O Lord, how long?

II.

Poland! dear Poland! hearts with waiting,

And eyes with weeping ached long ago!

Arise, just God, from Thy throne in Heaven,

And Thy strong right-hand to our tyrants show;

How long, O Lord, how long?

III.

Like dew on a flower, hope oft descendeth;

Like dew on a flower, 'tis dry ere noon!

We watch for more light—'tis weary waiting!

Surely deliverance cometh soon!

How long, O Lord, how long?

The song ceased—Natalie could sing no more for tears.

She had just ceased, when the *boutoschnik* on duty entered her cell with tears, too, in his eyes.

"God help you, my poor damsel! But you really must not sing any more. These are my orders. Poor thing! poor thing! so young, so brave, so beautiful. By St. Vladimir, 'tis shameful that they should knout such as thee!"

So saying, with a husky voice, the tender-hearted police officer left the cell.

Ah! Michael Gregorovitch, poor, degraded, semi-brutal *boutoschnik* though wert thou, those same half-shed tears, and those tremulous, half-choked tones of thine—though the great czar of all the Russias might think thee only worthy of all the Russias might think thee only worthy of the *skvos-stroi* (or, in other words, "running the gauntlet"), for giving way to such weakness—may yet plead for thee in that world to come, where czars are no more than poor *boutoschniks*, and where the Angel of Doom reckons up earth's totals in quite another way!

They brought Natalie out to be knouted at last!

It was a dull, cloudy morning, and a spirit of universal gloom had spread all over the little town.

Some people had resolutely, in spite of the police frowns, donned mourning, as if to shame their tyrants.

They took her, clad in her ordinary costume, but bareheaded, into the market-place. There four or five hundred people were assembled. Before, behind, and on all sides, mingling with the crowd, were Russian soldiers, horse and foot, Cossacks and *boutoschniks*. It is usual when

men : re knouted to fasten the sufferer to a scaffold, or what in Russia is called "a wooden mare"—so that the person knouted can neither move hand nor foot.

Perhaps, as an extra degradation, this same scaffolding was dispensed with in Natalie's case.

For she was to be flogged upon a brawny Cossack's shoulders, as depicted by our artist, while another muscular ruffian officiated with the terrible knout.

As she took her stand against some wooden booths the hearts of hundreds burnt within them—and men muttered of a rescue!

But it was vain!

Nearly 300 Cossacks and policemen were in the town and on the spot—and we had no arms to fight them with; even if we had had men!

And now all was ready!

A Cossack took hold of her hands and dragged her on to his shoulders. Then they tore with brutal violence her sarafan off her back, and then—O God, this crowning indignity was too much for her!—the brave girl burst into tears, as her white skin reddened at the insult—and then a groan burst from the crowd as the executioner stepped back for the *first blow!*

CHAPTER V.

HOW NATALIE ZAWISKA UNDERWENT THE TORTURE OF THE KNOT.

The first blow of the flesh-mangling knout had at last fallen!

As it fell, an irrepressible groan of mingled rage and disgust burst from the lips of the Polish bystanders. Despite the presence of the scowling Cossacks and evil-eyed *boutoschniks*, these people felt, and could not help showing their feelings, like human beings. I venture to say there was not a man or woman there that morning who, if arms had been in their hands, and a fair chance only vouchsafed them, but would have flown to her rescue, even had it cost them life or limb. As it was, there was no hope. So they gazed, with compressed lips and tearful eyes, on the brutality before them, in sad silence more eloquent than words.

I have seen many horrible things in my life. I have seen men torn to pieces by shot and shell in the field of battle without my cheek blenching. I have seen brave men haged like dogs by Russian murderers in the guise of general officers. I have fled for my life before hordes of cruel Cossacks. From prisons I have risked my life to escape. But never, never did I feel aught so horrible, so terribly sickening a sensation at my heart, as when I saw poor Natalie's white skin cut to ribands by the knout that day.

I know not what strength human or superhuman was Natalie's then, but she certainly bore the first frightful cut without a groan, a sigh, or even a quiver of her frame.

For all the life she showed, but for her fast flowing blood, as she hung suspended on the broad back of the Russian, who clutched her delicate wrists till they met round his bull neck almost, she might have been some lovely, half-clad statue of exquisitely chiselled Parian marble.

As if to intensify her agony, the executioner allowed a minute or more to elapse ere the second blow fell.

That minute seemed to us to pass like a

lead-en-winged century of breathless horror! What her feelings were in that awful interval none may tell. You cannot measure suffering by minutes any more than you can judge of a man's age properly by his years alone. By what we see, hear, feel, and endure, alone can our age rightly be computed. To continue. After the first lash fell, she half turned round on the back of the man who served instead of the ordinary "wooden mare," or *kobyła*, before described.

I shall never forget the pale, patient, dauntless face of the sufferer. It wore an expression of agony subdued by saint-like courage.

Her voluptuously rounded figure was exposed to view; and as the thought of the indignity struck her, she doubtless observed the ardent gaze of a Russian officer some distance off to the front, who, eye-glass in hand, was enjoying the scene, a burning blush succeeded the pallor of her cheeks.

Several of the crowd who were standing under the lee of some booths saw this inhuman wretch feasting on the agonies of Natalie.

A hiss arose among them, and a stone was hurled at him with so true an aim by a woman that it smashed the glass out of his hand and struck him on the temple, inflicting a severe wound.

Unhesitatingly he commanded the nearest *boutoschnik* to fire in the direction whence the stone came.

The brutal order was obeyed, and a poor woman, perfectly guiltless of the deed, fell with her baby in her arms dead to the ground!

There would have been a terrible riot now had not the Cossacks closed up! "Drive back these curs of Poles!" cried their officer.

They obeyed by brutally striking the people with the butt-ends of their lances. In five minutes the crowd was once more still.

Then stepping back, to give his knout greater sweep, the executioner prepared for number two. The knout went whirling aloft, and I felt sick and faint. Down it came, cutting up the delicate flesh of the poor girl like a knife. The agony was insupportable this time. A fearful shriek was heard. Her head fell backwards on her bleeding shoulders. Her eyes glared frightfully. In her pain she had completely bitten through her nether lip, and the blood trickled down on to her breast!

Not satisfied with the agony he had inflicted, the executioner, instead of at once lifting up the knout from the wound it had inflicted, drew it towards him slowly in a horizontal direction, thereby lacerating the already raw flesh still more horribly.

A convulsive shiver ran through her agonised frame.

"Surely they'll stop this now," said a young, boyish Russian officer of police, in spite of himself turning half sick away.

"*Son nadzieje?*"—a phrase equivalent to the English, "is there any hope of it?"—said a Polish gentleman who stood by, grasping a knife he carried in his breast pocket, half unconsciously.

"Alas! no! I fear not. But see—my God! she's fainted! Demons that you are, remove her!"

But they dragged him away by the neck like a felon to the town gaol.

It was true: she had fainted, and a blessed relief to her agony was that same swoon.

The Cossack on whose back she lay released her.

A surgeon came up, felt her pulse, laid his hand on her heart, and then opened one of her eyes. It was quite glazed. They thought she was dead.

Fumbling in his pocket, the surgeon produced a small phial filled with some restorative. He forced her mouth open, and with the help of a *bouoschnik* forced a few drops down her throat.

A shudder ran through her bleeding body once more. Then she gave a long-drawn sigh; and her dark eyes gently opened. As consciousness returned she glanced piteously around her as if to ask for mercy.

But there was none in the cruel, God-abandoned place for such as she.

"Hoist her up again!" was the next order—and once more did the ruffianly Cossack seize her wrists, drag them over his shoulders, nearly dislocating her joints by his unnecessary violence, and lay her on his back.

"Are you ready, Fedor?" said a captain of police—police are soldiers in the Russian dominions.

"Yes, excellency—when you give the word."

"Ready, then. Let the punishment proceed."

Fedor, the executioner, again stepped back, and up aloft into the air whirled the lash of the knout, like some huge snake thirsty for blood! And there, with her eyes turned backwards in agony, did poor Natalie await the falling of the dreadful thong that in a second would cut into her quivering flesh. Silently, miserably did she await its fall. Not a tear, not a sigh, not one motion of one limb.

Down came the knout on her back, cutting again like an anatomist's scalpel into the tenderest portion of her now bleeding back! This time she neither shrieked nor fainted. But she groaned out through her clenched teeth, "My God! my God! give me strength to bear this—or I die!"

The keen wind blew over her wounds, stinging her to madness. The crowd prayed mentally for her. And then the police and Cossacks closed up round her, a sheet was thrown over her mangled shoulders, and she was borne away on a stretcher to the infirmary near by, after which she would have to undergo the horrors of a Siberian exile—and, what is still worse, the terrible journey thither over the snowy wilds and sorrow-haunted *steppes* of that exile's hell! As I shall have to describe all these things soon, I will say no more of Siberian matters here.

Thus did Natalie Zawiska undergo the first part of her terrible sentence.

I had never seen a woman, or even a man, knouted before.

This sight alone was wanting to make me feel the immeasurable abyss of wrong, cruelty, and hate that divides, and must ever divide, the Polish patriot from his Russian oppressor.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CAVE IN THE FOREST.

THE news of this event soon reached the ears of the Grand Master of the Society of the Sons of the White Eagle, though he was at that time far away. I knew well such cruelty would not long be allowed to go unpunished; for though, in those days, our society was not nearly so powerful or well organised as at present, there were never wanting brave hearts and strong

hands to execute the wild justice of revenge on such scoundrels as those who had caused poor Natalie to be well nigh knouted to death.

There is a German saying, which has been well turned into your own language by a poet, many of whose writings have found their way even into Poland in a Polish form.

I never found its truth fail. It is this—

"Though the wheels of God grind slowly,
Yet they grind both great and small;
If you bide your time, my brothers,
They will grind exactly all!"

* * * * *

And Colonel N——'s time was soon to come.

The very next time I attended at our lodge, I found the tortures of Natalie formed a great part of the conversation. Men wept as they heard it—and terrible to see are the tears of brave men.

"This must be seen to!" said Count Sierinski, sternly. "You, Beniowski, on your return to the place where Colonel N—— lives, will report yourself to the head of the society there, and with him concert measures for the speedy punishment of this execrable villain."

I could not repress a shudder.

I was new to the thing in those days, and I knew what the count meant—death!

I would not so much have minded killing this man in a fair duel myself. But the idea that, possibly, the lot might fall on me, and I then should be ordered to be his secret executioner, staggered me.

If a Pole called him out, we knew he would simply have his challenger locked up in prison, and possibly knouted.

So that the only way to punish him properly would be by the knife of one of the executioners—or officers—of the society which took cognizance, more or less, even in those days of such things.

A fortnight after this I was in the forest of O——, not very far from the City of Warsaw.

I had been summoned there to take part one stormy night in the deliberations of the mysterious order, to which, for better or for worse, I had attached myself.

After walking along as quickly as my heavily-furred garments would allow, I halted at a cross-path.

I heard a low whistle, and a tall, dark figure rose up, as it were, out of the earth before me.

"Whence come you, and whither are you bound?"

So saying, the strange apparition, who was clad, by-the-by, in a long white fur cloak, and spoke very unghostlike Polish, made the sign of our order, which I am not at liberty to reveal, for obvious reasons.

I returned it—and told him my business, seeing now that he was a brother conspirator.

He then conducted me for two *verst*s through the densest parts of the forest over the ridges of frozen snow. There was no moon that night, but the snow made the wood lighter than it would otherwise have been. For more than a *verst*, we progressed in silence. Our hearts were too full for much speech. I know mine was.

At last my newly-found friend spoke.

"Brother, do you know what is the main object of this night's meeting? Do you know also where it will be held?"

To both of these questions, I replied in the negative.

"I will tell you. Listen. You knew Natalie Zawiska?"

"I did—slightly."

"You know Colonel N——?" pursued my interrogator.

"By sight only."

"Good: you can guess what to-night's meeting is about when I put these two names together. Who was made a member with you the night you became one of us, brother?"

"Julius Krasinski," replied I. "A good man and true," said my guide. "He will be here to-night."

"Indeed!" said I, no less surprised than pleased.

And so will another man you know—that great serf of Count Aksakof's, the earless Iashka, one of the most useful men we have," added he, with a significant wink, which was half lost on me in the deepening darkness of that dreary place.

"It is a long way, brother, to the lodge? Is it not?" said I, somewhat pettishly.

"Not more than half a *verst* hence. You'd never find it alone unless you had been there several times before. The Russian police are keen after their prey, but they have never yet found it either."

"Where is it, then, brother?"

"Wait, and you'll see. Firstly, I may tell you it is deep down underground. For months at night, years ago, did I and others work at it, delving in the hard ground, like foxes scratching their holes—and now there is room and to spare for fifty of us, besides arms and powder."

"Carrying powder there must have been rather dangerous work with these sharp-eyed *boutoschniks* about—eh?" said I.

"Not at all, if a man only takes a pound in his pocket at a time. But here we are at the lodge."

I confess I stared. I could indeed see nothing but one trackless waste of snow-clad ground stretching away for miles into the night, and a few huge trees; one of which, by its enormous dimensions, attracted my attention.

"You are standing over the brotherhood now," said my guide, smiling. "One of the entrances is close to you."

I was still more puzzled than before.

"Come on," said he, "turn your back to that tree, walk on a few yards, then turn round—and then walk right up to it, taking care, lest no more snow should fall to-night, which indeed is not likely to be the case, not to make more tracks than you can help—and walk backwards. So—you see."

I obeyed. He then said to me, with a low laugh—

"Years ago, I and a dozen more dug out this cave. At first we made the mouth of our little tunnel come out yonder among the brushwood. But we found that did not answer well; so we tried another plan. We worked away till we had driven, as it were, a tunnel right up under the roots of yonder enormous tree. It is hollow; though you would not think so, unless you climbed up, as you will have to climb, a few feet and looked down it from above."

"But you surely don't mean to say that hollow tree forms the only entrance you have? It must be a very awkward one."

"Gently, gently, brother, I did not say exactly that. But by that tree is the entrance we most frequently use. We have tunnelled right through, without particularly weakening its

foundation, up to its base below. When you have climbed up, you must carefully let yourself down by your arms, till you touch a rope fastened in the trunk some few feet down. Then you catch hold, and slide down, sailor-fashion, till you touch the ground. Follow me."

Giving one glance round to see that all was right, *i.e.*, that we were unobserved, he climbed up the gnarled bark of the old tree, with cat-like agility, and soon disappeared.

I followed him, somewhat fearful of breaking my neck, I must own. I found things exactly as described.

Grasping the rope, I slid down, and alighted on *terra firma*.

All was dark. I groped about till I felt him touch my arm.

"Are you all safe, brother?" said my strange guide, whose real name, as he still lives near Warsaw, I shall withhold. "Stay here while I go and summon the sword-bearer, who keeps watch at the entrance to our subterranean hall. I will then pass you in."

Dropping on his hands and knees he crawled away, like a snake, on all fours.

In a few minutes, he crawled back to me, and leading the way bade me to follow. I found it rather awkward travelling, as there was little room between my back and the earth above, and pitch dark besides.

The tunnel widened at last, and we rose to our feet.

He evidently knew his way well, for he walked straight up to a thick door; apparently, by the sound it gave forth when he rapped on it five times, of iron.

It slowly opened, and then I saw there was another door dimly visible a few feet ahead. Between the two stood a man with a drawn sword.

My guide's replies to his queries, couched in mystic words, being satisfactory, we were allowed to pass on.

Then the second door opened, and there, in a cave of considerable extent and about seven feet high, sat some of the members of the Society of the SONS OF THE WHITE EAGLE.

From the ceiling hung by an iron chain, a copper vessel filled with oil, in which floated sundry cotton wicks which shed a dim, lurid light over the strange, wild scene. All present save my guide and myself, I should add, wore crape masks.

At first, as I stood there staring about me, I could have fancied I was in a dream. I had, indeed, often read of such things in romances of the middle ages; but I could with difficulty bring myself to believe that the scene before me was real, in Poland, too, of 185—!

The sides of the cave had been planked with pine boards, to keep out damp and cold. How air and ventilation were managed, at first puzzled me. I found out all these things in time.

To render a recurrence to them unnecessary hereafter, I may as well here tell you that over our heads—and we were some eight or ten feet under ground, measuring from the ceiling of our cave—at intervals were a few bushes and stunted trees, tangled in one impassable brake for twelve or fifteen feet's space.

Right up through the very heart of these, some Indian rubber pipes had been laid.

Painted to resemble in colour the barks of the trees, these pipes were trained, looking exactly like one of the many ivy plants that climbed there, right up to the tallest of the group.

Some of them let out foul, and others let in fresh, air. It would not have done to have left them lying along the ground, for the simple reason that when the snow fell, they would, in that case, have been quite useless. Whereas, up the tree, by giving their opening a downward twist, no such catastrophe can occur.

It also struck the inventors of this queer way of ventilation, &c., that even supposing during the summer the pipes could have been safely laid along the ground, that plan would be still dangerous.

The night air is sharp and frosty even in the summer, in Poland, and the steam rising out of the pipe, if lying low, would infallibly be noticed, unless at a height far above any chance-comer's ken.

As to fire, we had none; yet we did not feel cold; the temperature of our cave being of course far warmer than that of the external air.

As to "creature comforts," these we had in plenty, caviare, baked meats (cold, of course) cold fowls, &c.; and, last, not least, a Russian dish called *tolokno*, which, however, is far more common in Siberia than in Poland.

One of the society, thanks to a dreary sojourn as a political convict in those penal settlements, had learned how to prepare this.

Here is the receipt, though I doubt whether any of my English friends will care to follow it.

Bake some oats in an oven; than carefully sift and pound them into meal. Then put the mass into a dish and pour some cider over it, stirring as you pour. Then eat it, and I assure you there are worse things than *tolokno*. Good also to a Russian or Polish palate is *caviare*—which is neither more nor less than the somewhat odorous roe of a sturgeon.

But I am digressing terribly. Let me return to the cave.

"Welcome, brother;" said the president, of whose face I could see nothing, save two piercing eyes which seemed almost to glare at me through the eye-holes of his crape mask; "this is your first appearance in this lodge. I believe you joined the society elsewhere. Be seated. It may surprise you that we wear masks. The fact is, we have latterly apprehended treachery, I grieve to say. One of our members (he only joined the other day), I heard, had been seen in earnest consultation with a police officer; but as good luck would have it, he did not then betray our cave's whereabouts. We were that night about to hold a meeting on an important matter, connected with the safe transport of some arms to this place. He doubtless thought he could worm more out of us, by not betraying all he knew to the police at once; and get more credit from the Russians for his ingenuity besides. So he meant to come to our lodge again. He never got so far, however; the next morning his body was found under a tree stiff and cold; on his breast was penned a piece of paper with these words:—'Thus perish all who would betray the *Sons of the White Eagle!*'"

To such terrible necessities are honest patriots now reduced in unhappy Poland. "But how knows your excellency," said I, "that this false brother has not betrayed us?"

"Simply for this reason: if he had, we should have long ago been surprised by the Russian myrmidons of Gortchakoff. Not that surprising us, even if the passward were known, would be a safe matter; as one resolute door-keeper—as comers here in most places, can only walk or

rather crawl on all fours one by one—could easily kill half a score intruders."

"How long has the society held meetings here, sir?" asked I.

"Oh! off and on for some years. We could not, though so near to our mortal foes, have a better place, I fancy; albeit the air might be a little purer, and the mode of access a trifle less detrimental to the skin of one's hands and knees. And now to business."

I took a seat upon a roughly hewn stool, made out of a pine block, as clearing his throat, the masked president of the meeting thus addressed us:—

"My brothers, we live in strange times. What seems wrong in some phases of society, is right in ours. Thus, it is wrong to kill a fellow-man under ordinary circumstances. Under our's it is, I may almost say, a duty—for, save by the knife of the assassin that walks in darkness we cannot punish the crime and tyranny, the violence of brutal lust, the cruelty of privileged oppression, and the treachery of Judases, with Polish tongues and Russian hearts, that daily disgrace this dear land. You have heard how Natalie Zawiska was knouted almost to death. You have heard of the diabolical outrages which she has previously undergone at the hands of the Russian Colonel N—. You have heard how promptly she strove to avenge her outraged chastity—you know the rest."

There was a deep, stern hum went round the cave, as men bent their brows and bit their lips.

"And now," continued the president—"since there is no law to meet the case of such as she—since perjury would beat truth any day—since our poor outraged sister in the bonds of Polish nationality has been so terribly wronged—how say you, brothers, what shall be the punishment of the wretch who brought her fate about? I pause for a reply."

"Brother," said he, beginning at the top of the room, and addressing the nearest member to him—"what say you?"

"Let him die the death of a brutal ravisher and oppressor! Death is my word!"

"Death! death!" said every member in turn.

I had to speak at last. Though, knowing well Colonel N— deserved nothing less, I own I felt a strange, stifling sensation in my breast as I, too, said "Death!"

For I knew the terrible nature of these decisions, and in fancy I could even now see the ravisher of Natalie lying weltering in his blood.

"And I, too," said the president, "say—Death!"

There was a dead silence for some minutes after this solemn voting. Then began a more terrible proceeding still.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SONS OF THE WHITE EAGLE CAST LOTS
—ON WHOM THE LOT FELL.

"BROTHERS," said the president, rising; let us now cast lots, to see upon whom shall devolve the duty of doing justice on this God-abandoned wretch. But first let every man swear that, should the lot fall on him, he will obey the rules of the order, and rest not till Colonel N— meets

his deserved doom. Swear one and all. I will take the oath first myself."

We all in turn swore to this by the most solemn oaths known to man.

May God keep any English reader of mine from the necessity of taking such, is my prayer to-night!

"Brothers, here are nineteen of us here; see, there is a cap. Here are nineteen slips of paper, numbered from 1 to 19. He who shall draw No. 13 must be Colonel N——'s executioner, be it soon or late, sleeping or waking, by whatever means which may suit. Are you agreed to this, all of you?"

"We are!" was the reply from one and all.

The slips were cast into the cap with perfect fairness.

Then the lamps were put out.

And then the president said to me. "You, sir, will draw last."

I breathed afresh. Hope stole across my mind. After all, I should probably escape the awful number 13.

Surely, out of all the eighteen drawing before me, one of them would get the fatal figure!

The drawing began in solemn silence.

The first man who drew was Antony C——, one of those adventurous Poles who, after breaking his ban when confined in the prisons of Kam-schatka, whither he had been sent for what was coolly called "treason" by the Russians, had made his way mostly on foot to Behring's Straights, whence, God knows how! he had actually got as far as Madagascar, where he became a great man in the native court, till hearing that he could be useful in his own dear Poland, regardless of the fact that a heavy price was on his head, he once more returned with a false passport in disguise to Warsaw.

The next was Charles S——, who had been long since he had undergone the punishment of the *skvoos-stroi* before mentioned, in the Russian army; had then deserted, and gone to Paris, where he for some time supported himself as a teacher of languages.

After which, he scraped all he could together and went off to Algeria, where he enlisted in a regiment of French Zouaves, in which he served till he had attained the rank of lieutenant.

He, too, after innumerable escapes with his life, had again come to Poland.

He was often seen in later days, at the head of the gallant Polish Zouaves, under the command of the daring Frenchman Rochebrun, of whom, perhaps, I shall have much to say anon.

The private history of the others would present, in more or less degree, similarly romantic incidents.

At last, a very tall, muscular man rose to take his chance.

As he did so, I could not help staring at him.

I saw he had no ears.

Though far away from him and my home, I knew him at once.

It was Iashka, the earless serf of Count Aksakkof!

He drew the fatal No. 13!

"The lot has fallen on our brother, who last drew," said the president.

Every one I fancied drew his breath now more freely.

For as Iashka, he seemed not the least moved.

I saw him take up the terrible slip of paper, and look at it coolly, as if it had been a pipe-light.

Yet he knew perfectly well what the result must be. Indeed, he had ere now drawn with the same ill-luck in other lodges of our society.

Yet really poor Iashka, though sadly debased by the wretched life he had led so long, was by no means a bad fellow at heart.

When I was but a child, I had seen him on one occasion plunge into the frozen Vistula, through an ice-hole, after a boy who had fallen in, and dive down into the frozen water at the risk of his own life to save the boy's.

Though his strength, when roused, was terrible, he never, save in self-defence, exerted it to another's injury, always excepting cases where he was bound to execute the commands of the Grand Master, of course.

I really (no doubt everyone there present would have thought me a fool for thinking so much of what is now a matter of every-day occurrence in Poland) could not help feeling sorry for him.

I don't, however, believe he himself cared one jot about his ill-luck that night. Probably he gloried in it.

And yet, to say nothing of the necessity of blood-shedding, his was a very dangerous mission. If he failed, Colonel N——, who always went armed, and was a deadly shot, was certain to kill him.

If Iashka succeeded, it was probable that in a week after he would be arrested and knouted to death.

So, at least, I thought. But I did not know then so much as I now know of the wondrously clever organisation of that band, to which I had linked my fortunes in these terrible matters.

In the year 1853, such things are still better managed. In the year 185—, they nevertheless were carried out with a swiftness and secrecy that has always staggered me, as it staggered the Russian authorities.

Let me explain a little of the way in which the "National Government" in Poland do their business.

In the first place, plentiful as are Russian spies all over the world,—and in Poland just now especially,—the Poles themselves are not behind them in this respect.

Hundreds of Poles are content to feign loyalty to the hated czar (Tsar is the more correct spelling, by-the-bye; I may as well inform an English reader), and to bear all the hatred their countrymen, not in the secret, dare show them, merely that they may thus the better be enabled to serve Poland at a pinch.

Instances have been known, over and over again, of these reviled patriots gladly suffering cruel deaths, at the hands of their Russian masters, for allowing Polish prisoners to escape from gaol "at the very nick of time."

Great as are the precautions taken by the Russian police against the secret execution of the sentences of the "National Government" of Poland upon Russian oppressors, it nevertheless happens that those sentences, in spite of everything, are carried out by these Poles in disguise.

If it were not so, how can you account for the sudden death the other day of General —?

That tyrant was always surrounded by plain-clothes spies and regular *boutoschniks*.

He seldom slept two nights in the same place. He always was heavily armed. Whenever he stirred out in the streets of Warsaw by night or day, a policeman or two dressed in every-day costume as an ordinary loungeur was close to him.

And yet one fine morning in the bright sunlight, in a crowded street, within fifty yards of the "Lyceum of General Education," this man was found lying dead, with a dagger in his breast, to which was attached a paper thus worded, "THE SENTENCE OF THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT ON A TYRANT!"

Doubtless there was more in the heart of the supposed *boutoschnik* behind him, than most men, if Poles, would care to have known the night before!

And so on Iashka, the earless, devolved the sacred duty of avenging the outrage on hapless Natalie Zawiska.

That Iashka would do his duty, the *Sons of the White Eagle* knew well.

May God forgive those who have driven the patriots of Poland, in despair of obtaining justice in any other way, to such awful necessities as these!

CHAPTER VIII

COLONEL N——'S LAST DRIVE.

A MONTH had passed since the lot had fallen on Iashka; and yet Colonel N—— was daily seen swaggering about on foot, or cantering, with a cigar in his mouth, through the district he so terribly abused.

He was a bold, bad man, on whose life no less than three attempts had already been made without success.

He didn't care a *copeck* for the sentence of the National Government, not he!

His first assailant he had pistoled as he advanced on him one night in the streets of Warsaw. That man was hanged in the marketplace, and died singing the Polish Hymn.

His second assailant still more narrowly missed killing the detested colonel.

In the guise of a Russian merchant trading at Wilna, this man had come all the way thence to Colonel N——'s quarters by night, saying that he had important communications to make of a recently organised Polish plot in the densely wooded districts to the left of the police barracks.

This supposed merchant was, of course, none other than a Polish *gendarme* of the National Government, on whom a lot, as in Iashka's case, had fallen.

He had even contrived, during his few hours' stay in Warsaw, to ingratiate himself with one Stephanos Ionides, an important Greek spy, in the service of the Russian government in Poland.

Even that man's acuteness could not penetrate the Pole's disguise, for so well connected was his story, so thoroughly consistent throughout was its every detail, and so admirably, in look, language, and manner, did the supposed Russian merchant keep up his character, that Stephanos was fairly caught in the trap.

The next day the Pole was formally introduced by the spy to Colonel N——, who received him in his own private quarters, and asked him to dinner the same night. The Pole feigned a previous engagement, not, perhaps, to eat the bread of a man whom he was ordered to kill.

That circumstance possibly sealed his fate.

The next day, on coming to Colonel N——, on a sign from the latter, he was seized, searched, two daggers and a revolver, besides papers, found

upon him, and marched off to gaol, where, after being tried, he was hung up like a dog to a gibbet as a warning, greatly to the delight of all Russian sympathisers in the district.

Colonel N——'s third assailant, as the reader knows, was poor Natalie.

But in spite of the fate of his predecessors, Iashka was not in the least daunted.

He could bide his time, he said.

How to get at Colonel N—— was the difficulty. Once burnt, a child dreads the fire. It was so with the colonel, who was, though seeming careless, ten times more suspicious than ever.

There was a certain *istvostchik*, or driver, in the service of the colonel, named Daniel Veleki. This man, though of Polish extraction, had begun life as a Russian soldier, and had afterwards been transferred to the police department of the empire.

Now, one of the colonel's pet weaknesses was an intense fondness for horseflesh. He would give almost any sum for good horses for his *troika*, a sledge with three horses harnessed abreast. Few persons drove faster, or with more skill, than Daniel, as the colonel soon found out, ere he appointed him as his own driver.

No one, though Daniel was known to be a Pole, would have suspected him of Polish tendencies. He always seemed more Russian than the Russians themselves.

But though a brutalised fellow enough, like many others of his class, he was terribly bigoted, and a Pole, in the disguise of a Russian priest, had at different times worked upon his feelings so much that he began to wish he had never eaten the bread of dependence at a Russian's table. But his loyalty was still spotless.

Iashka had contrived to make friends with this man, and had often cemented their friendship by getting drunk with the *istvostchik* to their hearts' content.

Then he had praised his driving accomplishments, extolled the excellence and the good condition of the colonel's team, ran errands for him, and so forth. So that, to see the two, Iashka and Daniel, together, you would have thought them the dearest friends in the world.

The colonel's *troika*, with Daniel's driving, was a pretty sight. Let me describe a vehicle of this kind as well as I am able.

In a *troika*, then, three horses are harnessed abreast in a way which will strike you as peculiar.

One horse is harnessed in the shafts, the two others are harnessed *outside* the shafts.

The greatest peculiarity is this: that while the horse in the shafts, whose head is upheld by a bow, with a little bell suspended from the top is trained to *trot*, and never to leave that pace, however hard he may be driven, the two who are harnessed outside must *gallop*, even if they only gallop six miles an hour. Double that speed is the rule.

Again, the *troika*, to look sportsmanlike, must exhibit a perfectly fan-like front. This could not be effected unless the driver pulled up the outside reins till the heads of the two outside horses stand out at a considerable angle from that of the horse in the shafts.

Thus the horse who is obliged to trot carries his head high in the air, while the two outsiders who are doomed to gallop have their noses pulled down almost to the ground, almost like a dog's running on scent.

With a costly fur cloak and rug, a bright

scarlet net flapping away on the white shaft-horse's back, and Daniel in a picturesque fur-cap trimmed also with scarlet, Colonel N—'s *troika* was the envy of the district.

Daniel had received orders from his master to prepare for a longer drive than usual on the morrow. So, at least, he told Iashka over a glass of *vodka* the same night.

What was the object of that long drive Daniel knew not, but Iashka did.

The colonel was as amorous as he was base.

A Polish widow's bright eyes had allured him often of late in his rides round the district to her roadside hostelry. Not that she cared one jot for him, but she found it to her interest, perhaps, to hold out hopes to the enamoured Russian which she never meant to realise.

To see this syren, then, was the object of N—'s journey. Iashka, by putting circumstances together, had arrived at that conclusion.

Daniel had a brother much younger than himself. On reaching home that night, after parting with Iashka, he heard that this brother had been cruelly beaten with rods, by the colonel's orders, for some trifling mistake.

The *istvoschik's* heart burned within him. But what could he do? Nevertheless, he relieved his pent-up feelings by cursing his master roundly next morning at daybreak, ere they started, as he and the earless Pole sat quaffing *kvass* together at their favourite drinking-shop.

Iashka took care to add fuel to the fire already kindled in his friend's mind by the colonel's cruelty. But of course he did not reveal his own intentions.

It was bitterly cold when the colonel's *troika* dashed off towards K—, at which village, a very long way off, the pretty widow aforesaid dwelt.

But ere the *troika* started, Iashka, who was wondrously fleet of foot, had started off too, and in less than three hours had got over a good many *verst*s of frozen ground.

He then took his stand, despite the bitter cold in the loneliest part of forest through which the *troika* would have to pass, and waited patiently.

Away started the *troika*. It was so cold that morning that, wrapped up as he was, the colonel cursed the *istvoschik* for not driving faster.

Every man's moustache out that day was speedily frozen till it stuck out stiffly, as though glazed. In the woods it was not quite so cold, perhaps, but the colonel inwardly swore that when he got to the widow's, if she did not respond to his advances more kindly than heretofore, he would never take any more trouble about her, save in the way of revenge for the insult put upon so dashing a colonel of *boutoschniks*.

"Faster, slave, faster! make the sledge fly!" shouted N—.

"I am driving as fast as I can, your excellency," whined Daniel.

"Silence! son of a Polish harlot," cried the colonel, stooping forward and striking him a severe blow with the stick he carried underneath his rug.

Daniel took the blow meekly, but passed it on with interest to the horses.

They had not driven very far, when, in spite of his good driving, down came the shaft-horse, a very valuable one, and out tumbled the two riders.

"Dog!" shouted the enraged colonel, springing up on his feet and bestowing a shower of kicks and cuffs on the hapless Daniel, "if that

horse's knees are injured, even by one hair, you shall, by the soul of the czar I swear it, undergo a little gentle correction by the *plète* (before described).

Daniel said nothing aloud, but, with a mental curse, resumed his seat.

They reached a thick forest at last.

Beyond a few ravens and a stray wolf that galloped over the path, there were no signs of any living thing besides themselves in sight.

Away went the *troika* at breakneck speed, and the faster it crunched along the more the colonel cursed Daniel, and told him he was a bad *istvoschik*, knowing nothing of his business, and only worthy of the *plète*.

It was evident Daniel's master was in a very bad temper that day.

That the *istvoschik* would get severely flogged on his return home, he felt sure, and he heartily wished the colonel, the next time they came to grief on the road, would break his neck. Of course he held his tongue for the sake of his skin. For, bad as the *plète* was, the knout was a great deal worse.

They had progressed two or three *verst*s further on their way after the tumble down just recorded, when all of a sudden at a turn of the road, they came to a dead stop.

There were some fallen trees, whether by accident or design I know not, lying across the road, half hidden by the snow.

The horses cleared this safely, but the hinder part of the *troika* jolted up in the air, and out came the colonel, like an arrow from a bow, on to his back.

At that moment, and ere he could regain his feet, a man sprang out upon the prostrate figure, with a tiger-like bound, and clutching Colonel N—'s throat bore him backwards on to the snow.

"Villain!" gasped the colonel, feeling for his pistols; one had fallen out on the snow, and the other was on the *troika* seat.

Daniel, for the first few seconds, was too much astounded, even if he had been inclined, to offer any assistance to his master.

When he saw it was Iashka, he was still more surprised.

And so he sat on his seat like a statue rather than the real, big, flesh-and-blood *istvoschik* he was.

The colonel was far inferior to the earless serf both in size and in strength, but he struggled desperately for his life. But the serf had not only the advantage of longer reach and greater power, and he was also uppermost.

Once under the grip of those powerful fingers, few mortal beings could ever hope, save by a miracle, if their possessor had serious intentions, to save their lives.

In vain the colonel writhed, kicked, clutched at Iashka. His time had come. The serf had already plucked his long knife from its sheath. It glittered in the frosty air ere it descended.

At that moment, the colonel's good fortune seemed not to have deserted him.

The earless serf's first foot slipped in the snow, and he fell.

Then with a desperate effort Colonel N— succeeded in freeing himself from Iashka's grip.

As he did so, he drove his teeth through the serf's wrist till they met the bone.

With a bitter curse the serf again grappled with his foe.

"Help! help! Daniel, and no *plète* for you!" cried the Russian.



NATALIE'S AVENGER.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ASSASSINATION OF COLONEL N——.—A
MAN-HUNT.—THE WALKER ON THE SNOW.

"BACK, fool!" growled Iashka to Daniel Veleki, as he saw his quondam boon companion leap out of the *troika*. "His time's come."

But the colonel evidently was not of that
No. 3.

opinion, for he redoubled his efforts to shake off his foe.

In the scuffle, Iashka's dagger fell out of his hand.

A terrible wrestling match now ensued.

The colonel, from his youth up, like many of the Russians, had been a proficient in all kinds of athletic sports, and so his scientific knowledge stood him in good stead now against Iashka's marvellous strength.

But science was soon found useless against the fury of his assailant's attack.

The "tinkle, tinkle, tinkle," of a distant *troika's* silver bells was now heard ringing out sharply and clearly in the frosty air.

Grasping his foe round the body with a hug like that of a bear, the serfhurled Colonel N—— to the earth once more, and fell upon him.

In that position Iashka contrived, by one outstretched foot, to kick his dropped dagger within his reach.

He seized it with a fierce glare in his dark flashing eyes.

Again the dagger flashed in the sun.

Again did the colonel make one more frantic effort to avoid the coming blow.

"Mercy!" gasped he; "three thousand roubles and silence if you spare my life."

Iashka secured silence in another way, by gripping his throat still tighter.

"What mercy did you show to Natalie Zawiska? Die, dog, die, as you have lived; and may all the torments of hell catch hold on your felon soul!" cried the serf.

Down came the knife, like a lightning flash!

It pierced the Russian's heart!

His head fell back—a convulsive shudder ran through his wiry frame from head to foot—and with one groan the ravisher of Natalie, the tyrant, the spy, and the butcher who had done deeds enough to curdle any honest man's blood, in his wasted life, fell back a ghastly corpse!

Daniel Veleki stood there, as if thunderstruck, as Iashka slew his master.

But when, at last, he found his tongue, he said in his thick, stupid voice, "This is a bad business, my friend; but the good God above us knows he deserved his fate. What will become of me, I know not! As for you, fly at once!

Ah, me! ah, me! I shall be knouted first, and then sent to Siberia, if not worse."

"Fool!" said Iashka; "do as I tell you, and all will be well. *Verst* hear yonder *troika* bells? They are not three *dests* off now."

"Alas! alas! I do, too well."

"Then listen, and obey. Yonder lies one of your master's pistols. I'll take the other. Now I'm ready. Directly I am out of sight, fire, and yell murder with all your might. But first let me inflict a scratch or two with my dagger on your body."

Daniel made not the least objection. It might save his life.

Then Iashka, with the fatal dagger, inflicted a slight flesh-wound in the *istvoschik's* arm, and, advancing towards the *troika*, said—

"I must now ham-string your horses, my friend, for they are fleet, and I may be taken when the next *troika* comes up."

Hitherto Daniel had borne everything philosophically; but at the bare idea of cruelty to his beloved horses, his blood boiled, and, clutching his heavy whip, he told Iashka he would die ere he would allow it.

The serf's eyes flashed, but he said nothing angrily.

"As you will, friend; as you will. Only, if I am taken, remember, my ghost shall haunt you. But why should we quarrel? Farewell! Do as I bid you, and swear you will never truly reveal how this man met his death at my hands. Say a robber rushed out as your *troika* came to a standstill, and poignarded your master ere you could help him effectually. On your attempting to do so, the robber stabbed you, and made off. You fired at him, and that's all. Remember!

Swear fit, or beware of the vengeance of the Sons of the White Eagle. Swear now, Daniel Veleki, ere I go."

The *istvoschik* swore a terrible oath accordingly.

The "tinkle" of the *troika's* bells in the distance were now more distinctly audible.

"Fly, fly, Iashka! I think I can manage the rest now."

Iashka was not long in taking the hint. The snow was frozen so hard, that he had no fear of his steps being tracked. Daniel fired the pistol, and on came the *troika*, whose bells they had heard.

Daniel Veleki trembled as he heard them. To his fears the musical tinkle of those silver bells, whose sound came rippling towards him through the frosty air, was like a funeral knell.

Those *troika* bells conjured up in his mind frightful images of the *plète*, the knout, and the horrors of an exile to the dreary, snow-bound region of Ekaterinski Zavod, in far-away Siberia.

For to that hope-deserted purgatory of prisoners he felt sure, if not executed, he would be sent, unless his excuse was accepted.

Daniel Veleki was no coward, reader; but it is an awful thing to cling to life by a thread, and to know that thread may snap at any moment.

And so let none wonder that the *istvoschik's* face grew ghastly pale as the *troika* drew nigh.

It was within sight now. Driven by an *istvoschik*, gorgeously-attired, like Daniel himself, its other occupants were two subaltern officers of the Russian military police.

They knew Daniel well; and he positively shivered with fear, not with cold, as they shouted to him—

"Halloa! there, you fellow! where's Colonel N——?"

Ere he could reply, a glance told them the terrible truth. There, on the trampled snow, lay the cruel colonel of *boutoschniks*, dead, with his life-blood dyeing the ground crimson all around the corpse.

Used as the two officers were to scenes of horrors, they were fairly staggered. Leaping out of their *troika* they rushed up to Daniel, and both, at the same instant, presented their pistols at his head.

"Villain! how comes this? Speak, or thou shalt die like a traitor to thy master, our dear friend!"

I suppose even this brutal Colonel N—— had his admirers. Wolf likes wolf; tiger likes tiger, no doubt.

Just so have I read, that when the hateful Roman tyrant, Nero, was assassinated, in spite of the almost universal joy that followed his death, some few loving hands, nevertheless—probably the hands of those who had shared alike his crimes and his pleasures—were found to scatter flowers on the dead wretch's grave!

Ere Daniel Veleki could stammer out an answer, they saw that he, too, was slightly wounded.

One of them knelt down by Colonel N——, and gazed sadly on his corpse.

"Speak, slave! Who slew your master?"

"Alas! alas!" sobbed Daniel; "I know only this. A while ago, some robbers jumped out of yonder thicket, just as my horses had stumbled over these logs, purposely laid in the road. Almost ere I could lift a finger in self-defence, they had stabbed him, and wounded me, as you see.

They then beat a retreat, and I fired after them. Perhaps your honours heard the shot?"

He said these words with an air of such sorrow and simplicity that they believed him.

"Hark you, Daniel. This matter must be seen into; and if you would save your skin, you will at once at your best speed drive off to the nearest police-barracks, and bring a dozen men to hunt after these wretches. We will drive on with poor Colonel N——'s body to the nearest *szboucha* (a kind of halting-place for travellers), and will there await your return. Halloa! hark! here comes another *troika*. We'll make them drive in another direction. In this manner we'll soon rouse the country, and hunt down the assassins. If we hunt them half over Poland, they shall die ere we'll let the chase subside. Halt, there!"

The *troika* accordingly stopped. Its driver got his orders, and turned off by a byeway to execute them, not without secretly cursing every *boutoschnik* in or out of Poland, to his heart's content.

* * * * *

Night was fast coming on, but not for that, so swore the two officers, should their pursuit of Colonel N.'s murderers or murderer abate. Never, by St. Vlademir! till they had them safe and sound with irons on their hands and feet, and the knout in perspective!

All this while Iashka had not been idle; fear lent him wings. He knew the forest in its most intricate windings well; but still he began, after an hour or two, to feel somewhat tired, encumbered as he was by his warm clothes.

But there was no help for that.

On he must go! He felt hungry! No matter! If he entered a cottage, and there were few indeed in that quarter for miles, he might be arrested by some prowling *boutoschnik*.

If a snow-storm came on, it might indeed stop pursuit; but then it would also cause him to halt or lose his way. Moreover the forest bore an ill name, that of being haunted, and Iashka, though a brave fellow, was, like all his class, very superstitious.

That forest stretching away blackly over the snow for miles, was, as he had often tremblingly heard, haunted by an awful spectre in man's shape, called "The Walker on the Snow."

Whoever was spoken to by the terrible figure striding along in his nightly walks was a dead man ere morning!

So said the peasantry, at any rate.

There were, to an English reader, too, still more formidable foes than the said apparition, which every peasant for miles round decidedly believed in. Those other foes were the wolves, gaunt, hungry, and grim, that Iashka could now hear howling away frightfully, far off in the dim recesses of the vast forest.

But Iashka feared the "Walker on the Snow" far more than the wolves. And yet at any moment they might come down upon him by hundreds; for a sturdy serf is an excellent supper to a starving Polish wolf at any time; and cowardly as the wolf is singly, these animals when in droves are frightful neighbours to any man, armed or not.

If I were to put Iashka's thoughts into words, I fancy they would run much as follows:—

"Never was an unhappy fellow in such a fix as I am! Behind me, before me perhaps, and on both sides of me are very deadly foes, certainly by this time in pursuit. Before me lies the haunted track, where I've heard the dreadful

"Walker on the Snow" wanders in the night-time. If I meet him, I shall die with fright. And then—ah! hark! there they go—over yonder are wolves howling away in droves! Moreover, it's more than likely, from the look of the sky, that there will be snow ere morning, and then whatever shall I do? I don't mind the snow so much, it is not that, because unless I wander about and lose my way and come to grief in that manner, it won't do a man like me, used to sleeping out, much harm, especially if I don't get tired and sleepy before I have scratched out for myself a nest for the night. But then I shall be near the 'Walker on the Snow!' Holy Virgin! look down upon me and keep me from him this night! 'Tis terrible to sleep on his ground! But what can I do, if the snow comes on? Flight were impossible then on the snow!"

As he spoke he thought the wind changed, and he was right in his surmise. Then the sky grew black and frowning, and then, exactly as he had guessed, in about half an hour down came the snow whitening his coat, half blinding him, and covering the ground for miles on every side in flakes.

But he was a long way ahead of his pursuers, or else he would have feared their now tracking him in the snow.

But so far now the snow really was his friend. If it stopped his flight, in still greater degree it stopped their pursuit.

So, with the philosophy of a man in hardships, he resolved to make the best of it and trudge along, so long as the snow did not fall very thickly. When it did, stopping would be compulsory.

But if he only had once the chance to-night of getting shelter in a hut, he would risk anything rather than a possibility of coming in contact with the dreaded "Walker on the Snow."

I am not a superstitious man myself particularly, I have over and over again heard the story of this "Walker on the Snow." I have even met men, strong, bold men, too, who solemnly assured me that they, in their wanderings through the forest I speak of, had seen him. I can't say at all times I believed them, and yet it is hard, indeed, altogether to doubt every man, especially when I consider that none could gain any possible good by telling me lies.

I confess I never saw the apparition myself.

I confess, also, that at the time Iashka was wandering about the forest there might have been one or two hapless fugitives from "justice," so called, like himself perhaps, and that one of these, meeting another, might have scared him, and in turn been scared himself.

But still, for all that, I won't go the length of saying I don't believe in similar apparitions; for, say what men will, it is hard to affirm that a notion of this kind, which in all ages and countries has found more or less ground, is and was utterly absurd and irrational.

Anyway I am about to tell you how Iashka met the "Walker on the Snow," as he afterwards told me.

CHAPTER X.

"THE WALKER ON THE SNOW."—A NIGHT IN THE FOREST.—SNOWED UP.

NIGHT was coming on apace, the snow fell lighter and lighter, and still, with an instinct

like that of a hunted beast, Iashka threaded the mazes of the forest.

In this way he wandered on for several *verst*s. At last almost worn out, he threw himself down on the snow for five minutes' rest at the foot of a huge pine tree.

His rest was soon interrupted. Darkness was fast closing in; the snow indeed made the wood somewhat lighter, but still night had come and with it, to Iashka's horror-stricken mind, came thoughts of that awful "Walker on the Snow," the ghost of those dreary woodlands.

The sun had, something like an hour ago, sunk down behind the purple bars of frosty sky; the few birds the forest could boast were nestling away in their hollow trees, save an old raven with an iron beak and a glossy blue-black coat that had defied years of frost and heat alike.

The raven, with an ominous croak, flew over the fugitive's head and settled on the fallen stump of a rotten tree hard by.

"Carriion-loving black devil!" muttered Iashka, "thou thinkest thy beak will tear my lifeless corpse ere morning, but, by the Holy Virgin's grace, thou yet shalt be cheated of thy prey. For I will not die yet!"

So saying he rose to his feet and making a snowball hurled it at the bird with so good an aim that it broke on the stump and scattering covered the bird's glossy plumage with white.

"Cr-r-r-oak! cr-r-r-oak!" went the raven and away he flew. As he left his stump, Iashka, with a hearty curse on all birds of ill-omen, walked on briskly.

He emerged, after a quarter of an hour's trying walking, for he had no snow-shoes and the drift was tolerably thick, from the deeper part of the forest into a more open space. Once there, for the snow-storm had now ceased, he pressed on boldly.

His shadow, in the dim light of the pale stars which just twinkled weirdly out through the dark clouds, fell upon the snow, lengthening as he walked.

But what is this that causes that stalwart wayfarer's heart to beat so wildly, and his every nerve to thrill?

He glares wildly round him!
Is it fancy or does he see aught—any terrible, blood-curdling apparition near?

Reader, he did see *something!*

Not ten yards from his side, keeping up level with him, as with big beads of perspiration on his brow, despite the bitter cold, he toiled on, was a tall, gaunt, spectral-like figure, clad in old-fashioned garments of a by-gone time, as far as he could see by that uncertain light.

Muttering a prayer to heaven between his clenched teeth, with a speed augmented by terror, Iashka strode along.

He was a splendid walker, and he knew it. Few men, indeed, could ever cope with him at that. But to-night, with a fast-failing heart and trembling knees, he owed to himself he had met his match as he marched on through the glittering snow, into which at times, by a false step, he would plunge almost up to the waist—to find almost ere he could extricate himself, his unwelcome fellow wanderer still at his side, keeping ever the same distance between them; as with long, limber strides he got over the dreary ground untiringly, more like a machine than a man!

"Holy angels speed me!" gasped the wretched Iashka. "It cannot be against aught human I'm walking. But no—no—no—it cannot be;

and yet—and yet—my God! it must be the 'Walker on the snow!'"

* * * * *
Whoever that ghastly companion of the fugitive's wanderings might have been, he knew not.

But this Iashka told me, that the figure kept level with him, walk as he would; run as he would, with his eyes turned straight ahead of him, just as one of your own English poets; whose name I now forget, and whose verse I have only seen in a French dress—I bought it in Paris the other day in its translated form*—so well describes:—

"Like one that on a lonesome road
Doth walk in fear and dread,
And having once turned round, walks on
And turns no more his head;
Because he knows a frightful fiend
Doth close behind him tread!"

On—on—on went the assassin of Colonel N—, half beside himself with horror, and ever as he walked, there close to him marched his mysterious, grimly, silent companion.

Desperate with superstitious awe, Iashka stopped, made the sign of the holy cross, took out his rosary (he was of my own, the Catholic, and not the Greek Church, to which the Russians belong) and told his beads.

As he did so, he looked round him, and there in deepening gloom he saw the mysterious wayfarer standing stock-still, too!

"Man or devil!" yelled Iashka; speak!
"Who art thou? Speak, if man, or I fire!"

Was it fancy or did he really hear an unmistakably mocking laugh?

Anyway, with a trembling hand, regardless now of the sound of the shots possibly giving any of his pursuers a hint as to his whereabouts, Iashka drew a pistol—one of Colonel N—'s—and fired!

Ere the smoke cleared away, he thought he heard the same mocking laugh again!

With a wild cry of horror he dashed on, and there, yard for yard as he went, kept up with him the supposed spectre, apparently without the least effort or sign of distress!

This was too much for Iashka's superstitious terror.

With a convulsive shudder and a low moan he fell flat on his face on the snow.

How long a time passed while he lay there, he never knew.

On recovering consciousness, he glared wildly round him through the gloom.

His horrible companion was gone!

Thanking God fervently, he pressed on. He had been walking till utterly worn out, when the snow that had for a long while kept off, again began to come down in huge, flaky gusts, as if it would never cease.

He was dog-tired now. So much so, indeed, that he felt sleepy, and more than half inclined to lie down at the foot of the nearest tree once more, and never get up again.

But a moment's thought told him that if he did so, he would never wake.

Iashka was well acquainted with camping out, even in the coldest weather. Many a night in vast forests had he scooped out, just as the Ostiak tribes do in their frozen wilds, in a deep

* The Count is here, no doubt, alluding to a recent French translation of Coleridge's fine poem, *The Ancient Mariner*.

hole in a snow-heap and there snoozed away, snugly enough in a bed, which, if rough, is still very warm, I can assure you.

But now that the snow was coming down, he cared not to try this Ostiak style of dormitory, as he feared if he did so, ere morning he would be suffocated.

The snow-drifts beat in his face and eyes, half blinding him. As he struggled on, he found himself frequently sinking almost overhead in the deeper parts where the ground fell and where the wind accumulated the snow.

He was hungry, dead tired, and sleepy; and he knew that sleep in his case was but another word for death! But still he staggered on! He dared not light a fire, even had there been no snow; and if he had now, the snow would soon have extinguished it!

If he lay down on the ground, he would fall asleep, and the fast-falling snow would soon suffocate him. If he climbed a tree—and it was doubtful whether he had strength to do so, he might, indeed, fasten himself to a bare bough, and dose where the snow would not lodge in any quantities. But then if he did this, he would certainly be frost-bitten to death.

So taking a sip at the little leathern bottle of *votka* which he carried in his pocket, he strode on again hopelessly.

The *votka* might have been vile spirit, to which the worst naphtha to any other man would have seemed delicious; but it did Iashka good, and he smacked his lips gratefully after he had poured a dram of it down his hairy throat.

At last he came to a hut, made of mud and wattled hurdles—probably the late abode in warmer weather of some poor charcoal-burner. It was empty now.

Regardless of the chances of being regularly snowed up in a few hours' time, Iashka, with some difficulty, after a long time spent in scraping and scratching away the snow from the low doorway, entered it, resolved finally to sleep there, and leave the rest to Providence.

CHAPTER XI.

IASHKA IS VISITED BY SOME UNINVITED GUESTS.—AN AWKWARD PREDICAMENT.

HE had not long been inside the hut when, after collecting into a heap the dry leaves with which the rude floor was thickly bestrewn, he made himself a tolerably comfortable apology for a bed, and throwing himself down, and covering himself over as best he could, he fell into a profound sleep.

And still as that hunted man slept as peacefully as any rich man on a bed of down, the snow fell thicker and thicker till the doorway was fairly choked up again, and there was barely enough air in the little place to sustain life.

If Iashka's sleep, worn out body and soul as he now was, had not been unusually heavy, he could not fail to have heard sounds without, which would have cowed even his stout heart.

Howling like demons from the farthest recesses of that gloomy forest, lured by the scent of human flesh, on came in yelling droves gaunt, grisly wolves. Iashka was dreaming in his terror-haunted sleep by this time of *boutoschniks* in full pursuit after him.

Alas! poor fellow, he little knew that all this while foes worse even than *boutoschniks* were

gathering round his temporary resting-place by hundreds.

Cruel as death and hungry as the grave on swept that frightful pack of wolves with flaming eyes, bristling coats, and long, snapping jaws, with their sharp white fangs glistening in the light of the paling stars.

They had smelt him out at last. In spite of the snow which almost blinded them, on they dashed. The foremost of the pack an enormous, rusty-coated old wolf stopped at the snow-stopped doorway of the hut, and throwing up his head, gave utterance to a sharp, prolonged howl.

A hundred others instantly followed his example, and the forest glades rang with yells and howls enough to wake the dead!

With a start and a shiver Iashka turned on his side, stretched himself out at length stiffly, and awoke to realise in all its horrible phases the misery of his situation.

He knew the wolves would sooner or later succeed in scratching a way into his refuge—and then he would be eaten up in a twinkling.

Even if they could not affect this for an hour or two and then retired in disgust, he knew that if the snow kept on he would be snowed up and suffocated—and then when a thaw came, all that the prying *boutoschniks* would find would be his corpse!

And his strong heart grew sick and faint, and as he grasped his dagger, he half felt inclined to put an end to his misery then and there with its point!

But even in that terrible moment hope revived in the wretched man's heart. He would, at least, make a struggle for his life. Unless the wolves scratched away the snow on every side the hut, and began gnawing away through the mud-and-hurdle walls of it, they must enter by the door, and that was hardly wide enough to admit two of them abreast, even were all the snow cleared away.

He had a double-barrelled pistol, late the property of Colonel N—, and Daniel Veleki had not prevented his taking the caps, balls, and powder-flask appertaining thereto out of the *troika*.

With these he might at any rate maintain a state of siege for some time. Ere he died, he would at least kill a few of his enemies.

"Yo-w-l-o-w-l!" went the wolves outside. "Scratch, scratch, scratch!" went their claws shortly afterwards into the hard snow.

"Curses on ye," cried Iashka, "I'll send a bullet or two into your ribs ere ye polish your teeth on mine."

But regardless of a threat, which the thickness of the snow no doubt prevented their hearing, the wolves scratched away.

In half an hour's time they had cleared away a good quantity of snow, in spite of the thick fall.

Crouching down near the doorway, on his safely holding of which against the besiegers so much depended, Iashka prayed fervently to all the saints whose names he recollected to aid him in his need.

One of the wolves by this time had climbed up on to the roof of the hut, and had fairly scratched his way to the wattled hurdles and mud that served for a ceiling.

The serf heard him, and knew that in a few minutes the fierce beast would gnaw his way right through and gain admission. Once through, he would be followed by half-a-dozen

more, unless Iashka could find some mode of preventing a repetition of this ingenious *ruse* for "turning the enemy's flank."

The wolf on the roof had now gnawed a hole through the ceiling big enough to admit a paw. Iashka jumping on a log that had served the former tenant for a chair, with all the force of his iron left hand, grasped the obtrusive paw aforesaid, and with his knife in his right hand prepared to give the wolf a severe lesson as to the imprudence of venturing anywhere again without leave!

The wolf howled away fearfully and tried to extricate himself. He was far more frightened than the man.

Pulling at the paw, till it cracked again, with all his strength, Iashka, with one keen cut of his knife, amputated it as cleanly as ever did a hospital surgeon a mortifying leg or arm.

With a terrific yell of rage and agony the wolf retired. Another soon leaped up, however, and received this same treatment; then another—and another—and then finding the game an unprofitable one, the hideous pack went to work at the doorway with redoubled energy.

There could not be now more than five or six feet of hard snow between Iashka and his besiegers. When once that was cleared away, he had his pistol only to depend on, and then the end of all would come, and he would be torn to pieces!

What to do he knew not. All was dark within—and so he could not tell exactly how long it wanted to daylight.

Then he guessed if he could only hold out so long, his assailants might possibly—it was only a chance—go away.

But even if they did, they might return! Altogether the poor creature was fast losing hope and his senses.

A thought struck him. He acted upon it. It was just possible—for the hut had evidently been occupied within a short period—that there might be left about an axe or some other implement that might serve as a weapon.

Thank God! he found a heavy, if somewhat rusty and blunt, axe, in a corner of his refuge.

Armed with this, he soon split up some timber he found in the room into rails. With these he made a barricade at the doorway.

Stationed behind them, he patiently awaited the time when, having scratched through the snow, the wolves would try to force their way in to him.

He fastened his knife like a pike on to the end of a long piece of wood. He laid the axe down for use close to the barricade, and listened. The wolves were growling and scratching away more fiercely than ever!

He had in his pocket a small glass phial filled with holy water. A new idea struck him. Truly necessity is the mother of invention! He would—"Holy Virgin, forgive me for the profanation!" muttered the poor fellow, as the thought entered his head—fill this with gunpowder, and, by wetting a strip of his shirt and applying some powder to it, make a kind of fuse.

Then, after ramming down the powder tight, he would, by firing a cap, light this queerly contrived fuse, calculated to burn five or six minutes ere it exploded the charge, and after boring a little hole through the snow, would push it towards the wolves at the end of a stick.

He carried out his notions admirably.

Just as the wolves were tearing away at the snow, the phial shattered into ten thousand

pieces, blinding some and terrifying the others, who went yelping off.

But they soon returned to the charge.

At last they forced their way right up to Iashka's barricade. It was, though made in such a hurry, pretty strong, and as they pressed on in disorderly fashion, the gallant fugitive speared them right and left, with his oddly contrived spear, through the apertures, wherever he could see their flaming eyes.

Crouching down on his belly, one wolf, bolder than the rest, had thrust his head through a vacant space between the bottom of the barrier and the floor.

Ere the animal could draw it back again, Iashka had seized his axe, swung it aloft, and cloven the intruder's skull.

With a yell, the others fell back helter-skelter. Returning again, however, he had all his work to do to keep them at bay.

Through the holes in the snow, made by the wolves, Iashka could see daylight struggling in now.

"God help me!" he murmured, "in a few hours, when these devils of wolves have gone, if I can keep them off even so long, the *bout-oschniks* will be here after me!"

On came the wolves again like four-footed fiends. Again and again were they chopped with the axe, blended with the spear, and battered over the head with billets of wood, which Iashka hurled through the apertures on them.

In this way—for the fight had lasted a long while now—Iashka must have killed half-a-dozen of them at least, to say nothing of the frightful wounds he had inflicted on the others.

No sooner was one wolf disabled, than his companions fell upon him and worried him to death, wolf-like.

"Ah!" thought Iashka, "the devil speed ye in that work! After all, so far ye are just like men in this trick!"

The low of a stray cow that had lost itself, probably some half-mile off, was now heard through the frosty air.

It gladdened the prisoner's heart, for he guessed the wolves would soon leave him for the pursuit of a more easily-taken game.

He was right in that supposition, for after one or two bootless charges at the barricade, they gave up the attack and skeltered off after the hapless stray cow, which doubtless was speedily hunted down and devoured.

Falling on his knees, Iashka, in his rude style, returned fervent thanks to the God alike of high and low; and then, crossing himself, he crept out through the doorway, and hurried off into the thickest parts of the forest.

Two days thereafter, in spite of the hot pursuit maintained by the police, he got clear off, and in one of the lodges of the Society of the Sons of the White Eagle found a place of temporary refuge.

CHAPTER XII.

I VISIT ST. PETERSBURG ON A SECRET MISSION.
WHAT I SAW AND HEARD THERE.

ST. PETERSBURG! Who that has ever once wandered through thy streets will forget thee—city of strange contrasts, with thy ragged street-folk and extravagant luxury, with thy great pretences to French or English civilization, which, like the snowy ice on a stagnant pool, only serves

to hide the black reality of the foul corruption beneath?

"The frost of St. Nicholas," that is to say the first really severe—for Russia—frost had set in when I got there on my first visit on a secret mission to a Polish nobleman staying there.

The river was frozen, the wind cut like a knife—or, in the words of the popular author, Gregorovitch, "howled like a dog, and, like a dog, bit the feet and calves of those who had not duly provided themselves with fur goloshes and doubly thick pantaloons."

There had been, by way of heralding in the feast of frosty St. Michael, a couple of heavy snow-storms. The first had thawed in a week, the second in a fortnight. But on the day I got there a third followed, that would not thaw for the next five months!

Droskies, as being now useless, were replaced by sledges. On all sides you saw snow, and shivering Russians wrapped up to the eyes in furs.

If you took out a soft cambric pocket handkerchief, after five minutes' exposure to the air, it would get as stiff as canvas; while a lady's veil would as speedily get as hard as millboard.

I had not been long in St. Petersburg before I came heartily to agree with that sarcastic remark of Prince Tallyrand's concerning the Russian people—"scrape a Russian, and you'll find underneath a Tartar"—in other words, peel off the superficial polish, and you'll see the barbarian basis. It is true.

The Russians are, to me, a puzzle; so luxurious, and yet, in some things, so coarse and dirty. Even in palaces, vermin dropped by dirty domestics abound.

When I walked upon the frozen river Neva, an arm of which flows through the principal streets, I noticed an unpleasant national peculiarity of the Russians. High or low, they carry about with them an odour which is not pleasing to my notions and nose. Thus the higher classes smell of musk like a perfumer's shop, and the lower of cabbage mixed with the fumes of onions and leather.

The city itself is ugly, but pompous; large without grandeur; and, in some places, costly without taste.

In a word, the police there are treacherous, cruel, venal, and overbearing; the state of society unfavourable to a man's ever speaking his mind honestly, one man out of ten probably being a spy; the gloom of despotism, of a country governed by the will of one man, instead of the will of a free people, hangs over everything; and you miss in St. Petersburg that delightful briskness and gaiety that makes a walk through London, or even Paris, which, under Napoleon III., cannot yet be called free, a positive recreation of itself.

As soon as I had seen the Count —, to whom I was sent on a secret mission from Poland, the details of which would be of no interest, I resolved to spend a few days in looking about me. After which I had to return to one of the lodges of the Sons of the White Eagle.

A short time after my arrival in St. Petersburg, at the request of Count —, the Polish gentleman to whom I had been sent by our society, I went with him to the house of a certain Russian man of fashion, who had issued invitations to some fifteen bachelor friends, I, having been introduced by the count, made the sixteenth. Our talk turned principally on politics: the assembled party being all ultra-liberals, and

as such no doubt suspected already by the police. Our wealthy host, a Russian by birth, was nevertheless, a Polish sympathizer, the rest of the party entertained like views, and for a wonder, though Russians, were, to say the least, thoroughly agreed as to the universal corruption which day by day is eating out the heart of all that is honest and free in Russia. They favoured me with sundry anecdotes concerning the police in St. Petersburg, enough of themselves to make any free-born Briton thank God that he dwells in a land where such things are well-nigh impossible.

I give the pith of these anecdotes in the following summary, as it were, of these purport. You will then see how small must be our hopes of ever getting justice from any Russian administration, in whose hands such rascally officials are pliant tools for any amount of evil both in their own and in our unhappy land.

The *boutoschnik* there is a privileged robber and oppressor, whose game is to live by extortion and rascality. A *kwartalny* (commissary of police) in St. Petersburg will manage, out of £40 a year salary, to keep a carriage and a couple of clerks to do his work. Woe to you if you are a trader living in his district, you will have to "tip" him right and left, or be fined and imprisoned every month of your life. If you are a noble you are safe, for your *kwartalny* "loves a lord."

At the hotel where I stayed, I was robbed of my trunk. The police got three profits out of it. They made me pay for lodging my complaint; ditto my landlord for suffering things to be stolen at his hotel; and they took a bribe from the thief for letting him escape from them, after he had restored the property! And they do still worse.

"One night," said my friend, Count — "I was returning home from a friend's house, where I had been to hear a plan for revolutionising Wilna propounded by some of our order. I had had already one or two hints that I was suspected by the police, and I confess all the way back I expected to see a man following me. I had not gone far before I met Dr. —, a Polish physician, practising in St. Petersburg, a friend of mine and also one of the society. Our road home lay near the bank of the frozen Neva. Hardly a soul, save ourselves, was stirring thereabouts.

"We had not walked far before I saw a sledge holding a young and richly-dressed man, driven by an *istvoschik*.

"From the way in which the young gentleman lolled about in the sledge we naturally concluded he was dead drunk, and as his driver was a big, burly, villainous-looking fellow, I confess I suspected foul play was intended.

"Dr. —, said I, 'we'll watch this pair.'

"Agreed!" said my friend.

"The night was dark; on the ice we could see broken boats frozen up, moored to posts or piles by the shore, a few belated *istvoschiks* driving their sledges home along the glassy, frozen highway, and nothing more.

"Wrapping our furs around us we resolved to watch the *istvoschik*. He soon drove past us out of sight on to the ice. We followed quickly. There was little or no light save that of the stars. We ran as hard as we could; but as the *istvoschik*, had he chosen, could easily have been half a mile off or more when we got up to the place on the ice where he had pulled up, we suspected he was about to dispose of a victim by a mode com-

mon enough there. He did not see us, that was clear.

"See!" muttered my friend, "murder's meant! see!"

"I looked and saw enough then. Not a hundred yards from us was the *istvoschik* standing near a hole in the ice!

"The villain had dragged his fare out of the sledge—the gentleman seemed dead—and was about to thrust his body through the broken ice when we darted out from the shadow of a wall and cried out—

"Stop there! help! police! murder!"

"In an instant the *istvoschik* had dropped his lifeless burden into the hole and getting into his sledge, flogged his horse into a gallop and was off!

"Police! murder!" shouted we, dashing helter-skelter after him; now falling, now sliding along on the ice. It was vain. The man got clear off.

"In ten minutes' time we heard two deep, stern voices challenging us from the shore.

"Who goes there? Stand! And up came two savage-looking *boutoschiks*. Of course we stopped, told our story, and were taken back to the hole in the ice aforesaid. To our horror, when we got there, one of the *boutoschiks*, who happened to be a *kwartalny*, accused us point-blank of the murder, and whistled long and loud.

"Up came one of his myrmidons from some hiding-place, whence, possibly, he might have seen the very murder we had vainly striven to prevent.

"Aha! count," said the *kwartalny* to me; "I know you well for a Polish traitor; and you, too, Dr. —. I see your game well. See, this is a Russian gentleman of repute, with whom I have often seen you in company (a greater lie never was told), and I suspect you two of having murdered him."

"I laughed in his face, resolving inwardly next day to report the man to the chief of the police for his insolence. But Dr. — knew St. Petersburg and its ways better than I did, and he whispered—

"Dangerous as it may seem as a partial acknowledgment of guilt, we had far better give these fellows a handsome present, and say no more about it, or we may find ourselves in an awkward fix to-morrow, for they'll swear anything; and then, we both are Poles, suspected of loving our country, which is a sin here!"

"This advice went greatly against the grain, but I took it; and the next day, after we had been allowed to go home in peace, heard that a drunken man had been found dead in the Neva, answering in every way to the victim of last night. Nothing more came of it: and yet people in Russia vaunt of the security of St. Petersburg, and the admirable system of police!"

"But surely," said I, "the police, when they choose are efficient enough."

"Aye, when they choose, and it's worth while to do their duty. But, after all, I don't think they can, for five minutes, be compared with the police of Paris, who are not such rascals, though twenty times sharper."

"Ah!" said an old gentleman, who had lived in Russia all his life; "things weren't managed so when I was a boy, when Count Gorgoli was Grand Master, or, as the French would say, Prefect of the Police, towards the close of last century. He caught with his own hands one of the cleverest swindlers that ever I heard of, who

had practised his tricks in every capital in Europe, and had, they said, seldom been caught before. 'Tis a good story."

"Do tell it to us," said the count and myself in a breath.

"Well, then," said the old gentleman; "Ah! Gorgoli was a clever man, the handsomest, wittiest, boldest general officer of his day. It was in the spring of 1789, towards the close of the reign of Catherine the Second, that degradation-licentious, yet, withal, great empress, with a mind grand enough for empire, yet lascivious enough to stoop to amours that would disgrace a soldier's trull, that there arrived in this capital a certain Greek, who, after having been hunted out from every city in Europe, resolved to try his luck in the capital of the Czars. This man bore a wonderful resemblance to the Grand Master, both in countenance, age, and stature. In fact, so close was the resemblance, that, when placed in juxtaposition, a beholder would at first sight have experienced some difficulty in deciding which was the original or the copy.

The Greek, as soon as he became aware of this circumstance, resolved to turn it to his profit; and, to accomplish this, assumed the uniform of a major-general, and the grey cloak usually worn by the Prefect of Police; procured a *drosky* (species of cab) exactly similar to that used by the Count Gorgoli in his daily rambles through the city; horses of the same colour, and a driver in the count's livery. One morning, having traced the count to an opposite quarter of the city, he sallied forth on his tour, and suddenly pulled up before the shop of the wealthiest merchant in St. Petersburg, and politely addressing him, said—

"Sir, no doubt you know me; I am the Count Gorgoli, the Grand Master of the Police."

"I do, your excellency," replied the merchant; "how can I serve your excellency?"

"You can; for in order to bring to a conclusion a certain affair I have undertaken, I want 40,000 roubles; and as I am at this moment too far distant from my office to procure that sum, which is required *instantly*, will you oblige me with the loan of that sum? If you will call at my office at nine o'clock to-morrow morning, you shall be reimbursed."

"Your excellency," replied the merchant, "does me too great an honour in affording me the opportunity of serving you. Even should your excellency require a larger sum, believe me it is at your service."

"Well, then," replied the Greek, "you may make it 50,000."

"Here they are, your excellency," replied the merchant, taking out from his breast-pocket a large, well-filled leather pocket-book, and counted out fifty notes of 1000 roubles.

"Thank you," replied the other. "To-morrow, at nine o'clock, you shall be repaid." So saying, he remounted his *drosky* and drove off, full speed, in the direction of the Summer Gardens.

"The next day, at the appointed hour, the merchant presented himself at the count's office. "Your excellency, I have been robbed," said he. "No sooner had the count heard this than he resolved to start off himself in pursuit of the thief."

"He had his notions as to what manner of man the said thief was.

"So he got into his *drosky*, and, telling the merchant to await his return, departed.

How he succeeded my next will unfold.



G. F. SARGENT, DEL.

HOW THINGS ARE MANAGED IN ST. PETERSBURG.

CHAPTER XIII.

CLEVER CAPTURE OF THE THIEF.

"COUNT GORGOLI ordered his driver to take him to the shop of the merchant, and followed the same route as the thief, inquiring of the sentinels of the police, that are placed at a certain distance from each other in the streets, said—

No. 4.

" 'I passed you yesterday afternoon at three o'clock, did you see me?'

" 'Yes, your excellency.'

" 'Which way did I go?'

" 'Towards the Bridge of Tolskoy.'

" 'And the general directed his way towards the bridge, where another sentinel was stationed, to whom he said, 'Did you see me pass by here yesterday, at ten minutes past three?'

" 'I did your excellency.'

"Your excellency-crossed the bridge." The prefect crossed the bridge, and stopped before the cabin of Peter the Great, and the *boutoschnik*, who was in his sentry-box, came out.

"The general said, 'I passed you yesterday at half-past three; did you see me?'"

"Yes, your excellency."

"Where did you see me go?"

"To the quarter of Vibourg."

"Good." The general continued his route; at the corner of the military hospital he encountered another sentinel, and made the same inquiries, and found that the thief had directed his course towards the brandy depot. Thither did the prefect repair, when he learns that the chase had fled in a straight direction down the street called the Great Perspective, and at the extremity of the shops near the National Bank, Count Gorgoli again questioned the sentinel.

"At half-past four yesterday, did you see me pass here?"

"I did, your excellency."

"Which way did I go?"

"You went to No. 49, Catherine-street."

"Did I go in?"

"You did, your excellency."

"Did you see me leave the house?"

"No."

"Very good, let one of your comrades relieve you, and direct the officer at the next guard-house to send me a picket of soldiers."

"In the course of ten minutes the man returned accompanied by the picket of soldiers. The general entered No. 49, and ordered the doors to be closed, and learnt from the landlord that the man he was in quest of resides on the second floor; the general ascends, accompanied by two soldiers, and forces the door, and finds himself face to face with his second self, who, guessing the purport of the general's visit, makes a full confession, and restores the money."

CHAPTER XIV.

SLAUGHTER OF THE POLES BY THE RUSSIAN SOLDIERS.—THE AGED PRIEST.—SAVING A LADY'S LIFE.

At the time of the Crimean war, the heart of Poland, never wholly crushed, awoke to new life once more. Russia's work was then "cut out" for her, and in such cases, Russia's need is Poland's opportunity. But our hopes were doomed to disappointment.

Then came the congress of Paris. The claims of Italy were urged and acknowledged. But to the poor Pole's cry "Give us our country," there was only the faintest possible response. The subject was, indeed, to have been brought forward; France and England were willing enough; but all was vain. Russian craft was too much for the sense of justice entertained by the rest of Europe, and Count Orloff managed to "burke" the matter. The Russian diplomatists promised fairly enough, of course. "Only let Europe leave the czar (*Tsar*, by-the-bye, is the correct Russian spelling) alone, and all would be equitably settled.

Yet hardly one month after these things, Alexander II. coolly told the Polish nobility, at Warsaw, while giving out an amnesty for past political "offences," that what his father did, was well done and he would maintain it, and "above all, no dreams, gentlemen, no dreams!"

Merciful God! no dreams—no dreams of liberty—no more heaven-sent aspirations—nothing but a soulless apathy and the dreary dry rot of despair! But no! Poland laughed him to scorn.

This was in May, 1856. Meanwhile the Sons of the White Eagle were not idle. A revolution was already on the cards. We only bided our time.

The patriots in and near Warsaw, knew things could not go on much longer in this way. But their orders were to keep quiet, for there is a wonderful force, so to speak, in the resolute, yet calm attitude of an opponent, whose heart and soul is in his cause. So the Russians found it, as I will tell you.

I remember the month of February, 1861, too well.

Prince Michael Gortchakoff, of Crimean celebrity, was then the czar's deputy in Warsaw—a good soldier, a brave man; an honest one, too, according to Russian notions, and one of whom, when his blood was warm, it might truly have been said that he would as soon or sooner strike than hear. Yet, by nature, he was by no means cruel.

Meanwhile, matters were fast coming to a crisis. We were sick of daily police bullyings and espionage; sick of seeing Russians everywhere striving to crush out our existence as a nation, by doing all they could to put down the use of our language and the wearing of our national garb. The long smouldering fire broke out into flames, at last, once more!

The morning of the 25th February broke upon us cold, bitterly cold, and cloudy. On that day, thirty years since (in 1831), was fought the bloody battle of Grochow, in which the Poles, for three days, kept the might of Russia at bay.

Polish students, from all parts of the country, flocked into Warsaw that morning to honour the heroes! who fell on that fatal field, and say masses for their souls.

They had ulterior objects, however, at least most of them; of course including all who belonged to our society had—viz., the presentation of an address to the czar, asking him to give us a constitution.

On that memorable morning, as if with one heart and soul, thousands of us Poles flocked through the streets of Warsaw—men, women, and even children—in perfect order, like a long line of soldiery, with prayers on our lips and torches in our hands.

Before us all went a banner with our national white eagle, and as we walked, up to heaven from those crowded streets of poor, dear Warsaw went up the Polish hymn, called "Swiety Boze," to God, the Succourer of the oppressed, Father of all, great God of heaven,

To Thee our prayer from full hearts we pour,
Though our country's ravaged, down-trodden,
riven,
God! give us our Poland back once more.

Oh! holy Virgin, hear our praying,
Pray for our land to thy holy Son;
From traitors flinching, and tyrants slaying,
We appeal unto Thee, most Holy One!

Mourning we wear for the dear departed,
Sleeping in God are our brethren blest
"Give us our Poland!" weary hearted
We cry to Thee in our wild unrest!

* * * * *

I remember well, too, that ever as we walked a long, from time to time a venerable, gray-haired Polish patriot besought us earnestly, with tears in his mild eyes, in case the Russians interfered with us, to offer no resistance.

"My children!" said the wise old priest, "for dear Poland's sake, do as I say, oppose to Russian barbarity calm, saint-like, quiet endurance. Die, if you must—die, and let Europe know that these tyrants murdered ye simply for going to do honour to the memory of your heroic brethren who fell unavailing at Grochow. The time for fighting has not yet come. And if the Russians this day seek to disperse a peaceful assembly by armed force, on their heads be the sin of all the guiltless blood that is shed in the eyes of God and of the world."

In this almost saint-like fortitude of non-resisting heroism, lay the great strength for good which these meetings exercised.

They paved the way well for later deeds, and while drawing the eyes of Europe towards Russian brutality, taught her to honour the Poles who could die like martyrs, fearless and resigned, with prayers on their lips as their life-blood ebbed away.

Of a truth, that venerable man was right. He is dead now. God rest his soul!

Yet I must own—for young blood is hot, and mine, as well as that of some hundreds of young men there that day, was perhaps of the hottest—these peaceful counsels at first galled me sadly.

"What!" said I, "die without one blow struck for vengeance? Never!"

But the old priest was right, and I was wrong, no doubt. Besides few or none of us had arms.

On, then, we marched, a vast procession, patriots of all ages and conditions, many of whom were that day commemorating the anniversary of a battle that had slain their kith and kin.

As yet the government had made no sign.

We might be interrupted, or might not, that was about the total of our information, till a cry arose that the police were coming!

They came indeed. Two squadrons of them, well-mounted, well-armed men, burning to cut down us defenceless, unresisting, Poles.

The tyrannical Colonel Trepow headed them—gallant man, riding on proudly to sabre unarmed men! A noble deed truly, and one that will do our cause, in the end, more real service than Europe yet thinks of!

"Down on your knees, my brothers!" cried the old priest, his gray hair floating in the air, as with eyes upturned to heaven he sang once more—

"Father of all, great God of heaven,

To Thee our prayer from full hearts we pour;
Though our country's ravaged, down-trodden,
riven,

God! give us our Poland back once more!"

It was an awful sight to see strong, armed men riding in, slashing away like demons, among a helpless crowd, as kneeling on the stones we prayed to God to pardon us our sins, save our country, and receive our souls.

And then, while the slaughter went on, our hymn at intervals rose up to God, in accents of thrilling fervour, that for a while cowed even our brutal assailants!

A score of hapless Poles by this time lay dead and dying around me.

I saw one boyish patriot's skull cloven in two just as he was breathing a prayer to his Maker, by one of Colonel Trepow's butchers!

I saw a tender woman's shoulder slashed through and through, as she vainly strove to protect her husband, who in turn received his death-wound in striving to save that noble wife!

I saw one of these mounted police sabre a man who, on his bended knees, was praying for mercy, for the sake of Him who died on the cross for us all; and then my head swam, and I thought all was over.

But not so: my time was not yet come!

As I glanced wildly around, with a death-like sickness creeping over me, I saw a lovely girl, about sixteen, kneeling a few yards off.

At her side was a Russian policeman, who had quitted his horse, or been knocked out of his saddle, possibly by a stone from some one of the more irascible of our number.

I had several times seen her at mass, but that was all. What her offence might be in the eyes of this Russian scoundrel I knew not; he was, however, about to drag her along by her long, black hair, when I threw myself in his path, and implored him sternly to spare a helpless girl the indignity of further violence.

"Dog!" growled he through his teeth, "I know you well. I will not loose her."

Roused to fury, I seized his collar.

He, in turn let go his prey, and grappled with me. Just then I saw the mob opening out a little, as, tired of their bloody work, the police had relaxed in their endeavours to cut us up like sheep.

"There is one chance for you, lady," cried I—"fly in yon direction—enter that house—or worse may happen!"

With tearful eyes she thanked me, and I felt happy! Was this love at first sight? Alas! it was.

"And you, my preserver? what will you do?" sighed she.

"Care not for me, lady, I fear not this man," cried I, shaking off my opponent's grasp.

Drawing a heavy horse-pistol from his belt, the Russian fired it point-blank at my head.

It grazed my left cheek, inflicting a superficial wound, from which the blood poured in torrents. Just then, luckily, an officer gave the mounted police orders to wheel round and retire in open order.

Through their ranks at the double, I could see coming up some foot soldiers, who, I guessed, had orders to fire on us all. I was right.

"Lady, do as I say, or you will be killed!" muttered I, seizing her hand and pressing it tenderly.

Methinks she returned that warm pressure even then.

"We must both fall flat on our faces or the shower of bullets will slay every mother's child of us here present!" I murmured.

With gentle force I followed up precept by practice, and the next minute we were both stretched side by side on the ground.

Bang! bang! bang! went a score of rifles. Ping! ping! went bullets right and left over our heads! But they harmed us not! Ere the men could re-load, I glanced round, and saw Colonel Trepow waving them back with his hand. We were saved!

But the mandate of mercy came almost too late. More than forty Poles were that day murdered in cold blood by our ruffianly tyrants!

CHAPTER XV.

LOVE AND FELINSKA.—GLEAMS OF SUNSHINE
AFTER RAIN.—DARK CLOUDS ONCE MORE.

WEARILY, drearily we two crept along, with bitter tears, down that dreadful street, where the dead were lying in their last long sleep, and where the wounded were bleeding in sight of their neighbours and kin.

We reached her father's house at last.

Ladslaus Wysocki, was at that time a merchant of good repute in Warsaw, and in happier times his house had been the resort of the best and truest patriots in our country's capital. He was now advanced in years and a widower, with only one child, the lovely Felinska, whose praises many an enamoured young Polish gentleman had already sung in tender ditties after the manner of ardent youth.

Ah me! well and wisely did Dante Alighieri, the great Italian poet, sadly sing in his "Inferno"—

"Nessun maggior dolore
Che ricordarsi del tempo felice nell miseria."

(there is no greater woe than to recall to mind a happy time, when we are in misery). I feel that myself to-day, as I sit writing far away from all I used to love, an exile, young in years, old in heart, here in London!

The good Ladslaus was an ardent patriot, and one ready, whenever a time came, to make any personal sacrifice for Poland.

But it happened that he had for some time past been confined to the house by illness, or he would have been one of us in that fatal procession. Better for him he stayed away, or his grey head might have been laid low.

On my conducting Felinska home he fell upon my neck, and wept like a child.

From that hour I was dear to the good man as a son.

On the 27th February, as if to show Gortchakoff we were not cowed, arrangements were made for a new funeral service, in honour of some patriots slain by the Russians.

More than 30,000 persons flocked to it. They were again attacked, and ten persons were slain, and sixty wounded.

Remonstrances from the most influential Poles in Warsaw poured in. Prince Gortchakoff, who, as a brave soldier, must in his heart have hated all this butchery, at once denied that it had taken place by his orders, professed his willingness to dismiss Colonel Trepow; to hold a court martial on one of the generals, Zabolotsky, who had been concerned in it; to shut up the soldiers in barracks till our murdered Poles had been buried; to allow Count Zamoyski, one of our noblest patriots, to act, jointly with Marquess Pauluci, a Russian, in good repute among us in Warsaw, in a "Commission of Public Safety;" and to grant the students who had volunteered to keep order, permission so to do, in place of the hateful police. So far, so good. But it came too late! The nation's heart was in a frenzy now!

That night an address to the Emperor was in general circulation—every respectable Pole in Warsaw signed it, and all the Poles who were in Russian offices in the city resigned.

This effect was produced by the butchery of unarmed men. See, in the words of scripture,

"how great a matter a little fire may kindle." But why do I waste words on these things? The world knows them now too well. I return now for a while to the sweetest, tenderest hours of my unhappy life—to love and Felinska.

I saw her, and I loved her almost at first sight. But a short while, counting merely by months and years, has passed since she stood before me in her bright young beauty; and now—and now—God help me!—what has the end been?

But a short time did I say? Alas! no; it is not a short time—for in those few years I have gone through a century of sorrow. To love and to lose has been my lot. To see day by day, all that was brightest, purest, fairest, dearest, fading out from my young life; to feel my heart grow gray, as it were, almost ere time and grief could whiten my hair; to pray for death madly—and yet to die not! All these things have I known and suffered. Yet, thank God, this day, from the very depth of lonely misery, I can look up to Thee as to a father, and say, with streaming eyes yet patient heart, "My God, Thy will, not mine, be done!"

Through all my trials I have kept a miniature of her, painted by a young artist-friend of ours in those days, next to my heart. As I write, it lies on my desk in this poor garret of mine, before my eyes; and I see it now through hot, half-blinding tears.

That portrait represents—alas! how far behind the truth—the features, almost faultless in their classic regularity, of my lost Felinska, with her dark, melancholy eyes, and raven hair, and thoughtful brow, whereon sorrow had scarcely time to plant a wrinkle ere she went to God, and heaven gained one angel more. Ah! well, well! it is best thus: "Whom the gods love, die young," even an old heathen author told us.

From the hour I saved her from the *boutoschniks* our two hearts clung together. It was, to both of us, a first love—and who, that has ever felt that purest feeling man or woman here can know, dare sneer now at this recital of mine?

I had not, when my country might any day require my services, much time for mere courtship; but our love was none the less.

I cannot—I ought not—for it seems almost a profanation to me, now my darling is dead—dwell at length on these things now.

We plighted our troth in this wise:—

We two were sitting in the dim twilight of a cold March afternoon, in her father's house, by ourselves. In a few brief, but burning words, I had told her my lover's all—how, without her, the world would be but a waste to me; how, nevertheless, I could not bear the thought of her linking her fate to mine, when any day I might, in obedience to the iron rules of the Society of the Sons of the White Eagle, have to leave her to risk death or imprisonment, in my country's cause; how, still, I could not but love her, and wish her to be my own little wife.

With her dark eyes downcast, and her breast heaving, she gave me her small, white hand; and there, as we sat in the quiet twilight, I pressed that hand to my heart, and then, clasping her to my bosom, I said only—

"Dost thou love me as I love thee, my Felinska?"

And then our lips met in one long, loving kiss; and I heard from hers, quivering in wild emotion, the sweet "Yes," that made that little room seem like a veritable Eden, and Felinska

the Eve in it, and myself as blissful as the sinless Adam ere he fell away from God!

Dreams—day-dreams, reader, they may have been—to end in such a bitter awaking as mine! But I swear to you, that to live that brief hour over again, I would give the hopes—few, few, they be—of the future, and all else that joy has ever known of the past.

And so we two plighted our troth; and, with her father's consent, were to be married soon—in ten days.

We were wedded accordingly, according to the rites of our holy Catholic faith, at the church of the Carmelites, in Warsaw; and, for a while, I was as happy as ever was mortal man.

But dark clouds were hanging over us. Poland was in throes; and it has often since been almost a matter of self-reproach to me that, knowing this, I could, even with my Felinska, have been so selfishly happy.

On the 4th of April, as I was walking home to her father's house, where we both dwelt—I at that time acted as the old man's secretary—I saw a stranger standing by the threshold.

Eying me hard, he gave me the secret sign of our society, and I at once asked him in.

"Brother Beniowski," said he, when the door was shut, "the lodge to which you belong is going on the 7th, with all good Poles in Warsaw, in solemn procession, to pray for the repose of those who were slain in February.

"My God!" said I; "this is only rushing like sheep to the slaughter."

A scornful smile passed over the firm lips of the man, as he said—

"The Russians, I fancy, will not dare again to outrage public opinion by another massacre. If they do, they will only bind our nation more firmly together than ever. Even so, what cares a good Pole for death, brother? Go we will; go, without violence on our part—go to protest, in the sight of God and the sun, against our oppressors. We are not strong enough, not united enough, yet, to do more than oppose passive resistance to our tyrants. When we are, Poland will awake, and we shall once more be a free nation in Europe. You will come?"

"Of course, of course," said I, hastily, thoroughly ashamed of myself.

"You will bring your wife with you? Mine is going."

I own I did not like thus risking Felinska's life; but, as he told me most of the Polish ladies were going, I consented.

On the 7th of April an enormous crowd thronged to the cemetery, to pray for the souls of the slain. The Russians did not disturb us, and Felinska and I returned in safety home.

The next evening they went in still greater numbers, to repeat a manifestation which had been set on foot the night of the funeral prayers of the 7th. Prince Gortchakoff in vain tried, with honied words, to make them disperse.

"What do you want, in God's name, you Poles?" cried he, at last, in a rage.

Then from thousands of mouths, of men, women, and children, went one great shout, "We want our country!"

Again began the game of murder. Fifty persons were killed, and hundreds wounded. From that hour peace was impossible; and every drop of Polish blood so shed went to form a gulf, as it were, between Poland and Russia.

From this date my story, so far as Poland's later struggles for freedom are concerned, begins.

CHAPTER XVI.

SECRET CONCLAVES ONCE MORE.—TRAITORS ▲▲ WORK.—THE SPY.—THE ARRESTS.—DEPORTATION.

TIME passed. Each day matters looked blacker in Warsaw; and, in proportion as they grew worse, so the more was my presence ordered at the secret meetings of the Sons of the White Eagle.

"The Russians," said one of our lodge's head officers, "are fast filling up the cup of their iniquity to the brim, and then it will be war to the knife, and we shall conquer! France—England will interfere; and then, hurrah for the White Eagle!"

"Aye," said our Grand Master, in a burst of fervid eloquence, "thou shalt yet conquer, White Eagle, stainless bird! thou that was wont to distribute crowns to others, and art thyself so crownless now! Float above thy brothers, and cry to the four quarters of the earth that thou art living still! Call together thy children, thine exiles, and thy defenders of old; and still, still point the way! Thou shalt suffer, thou must suffer much; but one day thou shalt rise, rise higher than in the past, and spread thy glorious, timeless wings over a people which at last is free!"

"Amen!" said twenty voices, as we rose to our feet, and hand clasping hand, swore fidelity, again and again, to the cause.

"My brothers," said our Grand Master, "I regret to tell you that there is treason in our camp. How I know it matters not. Many of our body, I see, are absent to-night; but there is only one traitor of all, and he is in almost daily communication with the police, our foes. Terrible as bloodshed is, Poland demands his death. But let us be just, and let him live till his treason is proven beyond possibility of doubt before you all here—aye, here, in this very lodge."

"But how is that possible, sir?" asked I.

"Our friend is but a young member," said the Grand Master, with a smile; "wait, and you will see."

I forgot to mention, that our secret conclave was held that night at the lodge referred to in the forest of O——.

My heart burned within me to know who the traitor might be; but I was not to learn that yet.

The month of October, long and bitterly remembered, had now come. The Emperor of Russia had granted the Poles a few favours—only hollow ones, however—and revolution again was on the cards. Into mere Polish politics, as being uninteresting to many of my readers, I have no wish here to go. Suffice it to say, that when Count Lambert, the new Russian plenipotentiary, came to Warsaw, we were to have a new government. Now we saw that if any other persons than true Poles were allowed to be elected and sit at the new Council, we were just as far off freedom as ever, and were determined to show our feelings by another political open-air meeting.

On the 18th October two addresses were to be sent in from the Poles. On the 15th we were to get up a fête in honour of our immortal patriot, the great Kosciusko.

On the morning of the 15th the churches filled. Ere long they were surrounded by Russian

soldiers, fierce Circassian and brutal Cossack troops, who committed frightful outrages, sacking houses, cutting down people right and left, and ravishing women.

Then the Archbishop of Warsaw told us we had better shut up all our churches, so as to give the Russians no cause for defiling them with our blood—and then on the 17th, along the electric wires flashed the news to startled Europe that Warsaw was in a state of siege.

And then the Sons of the White Eagle began their work in earnest. Hundreds of Poles for no fault were arrested by perjured police and clapped into prison, or sent off to Siberia. Exiles who had returned thence with pardons were coolly sent back again. The best men in the town were arrested and sentenced to various terms of imprisonment, and even death—and all for what?

Let the Russians themselves tell you!

Some for daring to wear mourning for their murdered friends, others for prayers, hymns, processions, &c., and some for actually daring to make gestures of displeasure when reading the Russian proclamation calling them traitors, stuck up under their very noses in the capital too of their own country! If *this* is treason, God bless all such traitors, say I!

What after all does all this mean?

Simply, O English reader of mine! that the Emperor of Russia feels his cause to be rotten to the core—feels that might and not right is now his game—feels that if he cannot bend, he must crush Poland to the earth—if possible.

Aye, indeed, if possible—but there is a deal in that *if*!

At the time of these bloody massacres, Russia could not lay a finger on any one conspiracy.

But nevertheless she grew daily, ten times more severe.

Then came in with three-fold rigour enactments stating that no one should go out at night without a lantern, and that walking about in certain localities should be altogether disallowed. Wearing mourning (!) was to be, and still is, a high misdemeanour without leave of the police. And so matters went on.

One dark night, I, with several others, had made our way to our lodge in the wood of O——. There was a goodly gathering. Something of terrible moment was evidently looming before us all.

Men spoke with bated breath of a traitor in the camp—but who he was, few or none, save the Grand Master and the heads of the order, knew. But something was evidently coming off that night. The police had that morning arrested three of our body. A warrant also, I heard now for the first time, was just out for my own apprehension; and, worse than all, on the perjured evidence of the member of our body who had turned police spy, the father of my poor Felinska, an infirm old man, would in a few days be arrested on a charge of concealing “infernal machines,” mortars, bombs, &c., on his premises. The result of which accusation would, I knew, be conviction, imprisonment, and speedy death in one of the noisome dungeons of Orenbourg or Nerzhinsk, in Siberia.

Then my heart sank within me for his and Felinska's sake. And as for myself, my liberty now hung on a hair. If I was taken, Siberia would be my certain fate. And if I kept in concealment, it would only be without her—my love—my life—my all!

I heard a noise near the door of our underground retreat.

“It is a new member, I expect,” said a brother to me—“one or two are going to be introduced to-night by Michalski, one of our band, I believe.”

I nodded and said nothing.

The usual formalities having been gone through, Michalski stepped forward to reply to the Grand Master's questions.

“You will answer for the new brother's fidelity with your life?” said the Grand Master.

“I will, sir,” was the reply.

“Administer the oath. Is the new comer ready?”

“I am, sir,” said the stranger, who gave the name of Basil Koszakiwicz.

“You come, I understand, but lately from Posen. How were the Prussian Poles there when you left—rising or about to rise?”

“About to rise—and true as steel to the good cause.”

Gazing intently at the speaker, our Grand Master said—

“Though, through my face being masked, you know me not, I think I have heard that voice of yours ere now in Warsaw?”

“I never was in Warsaw till yesterday,” said the stranger.

The Grand Master made no further reply than, “Swear him.”

Slowly did the stranger take the awful oath, as though he felt the solemnity of the occasion.

I remember his face well—a strange, keen, clever face, with a wonderful look about it of intelligence and resolution, it was.

The brethren murmured to each other, “He's a good man for the cause. A man with a rare head-piece, I'll warrant.”

I confess I did not like his look, and yet it might only be prejudice. Let me describe him.

Basil Koszakiwicz was a tall, powerfully-built man, about forty, with hair as black as a coal, keen gray eyes, a huge moustache and beard, and a large mole on the left side of his cheek—a mole so large indeed as at once to strike the most careless observer. We all looked at him, and were certain at once that we had never seen him before, or we must have noticed this.

The Grand Master sat still on his seat till, having taken the oaths, the stranger advanced and shook each of us by the hand heartily. He then sat down by the side of his sponsor Michalski.

“Brother,” said the Grand Master, to the new member, “you have heard, perhaps, that there are traitors in the camp; and also that warrants are out for some of us. You have heard how a certain Polish merchant was brutally shot down by the policeman, Bojany, on the false plea that he was resisting their authority on the 15th of October?”

The new member bowed in acquiescence, and added—

“Brother Michalski told me of this.”

“You have heard,” continued the Grand Master, “that a rising is contemplated in Gallicia, and that hundreds of Poles are about to take the field?”

“All these things also brother Michalski told me,” said the new member.

I thought Michalski fidgeted on his chair while this conversation was going on. I might be mistaken.

“Did you hear of one, Charles Z——, who last night was dragged off secretly by the police

to the citadel, whence he will only come out to die on the gallows?" said the Grand Master.

"I did not; and I hope the report is not true," said the new member, coolly rolling up a cigarette and preparing to light it.

Whatever might be passing in the Grand Master's mind, I knew not, but he certainly seemed inclined to be more than usually frank in his communications to this new member—"a matter of questionable prudence," thought I, "in these times!"

"And now, friend," said the Grand Master after a long conversation, "what do you think should be done to the traitor who would sell his brethren for gold, and to the accursed, perjured, Russian spy, who would hang men like dogs by a breath of his lying mouth?"

"I should recommend that they be speedily put out of the way," said the stranger, calmly, "if it be only known who they are."

"It is so known," said the Grand Master.

"I rejoice to hear it," said Michalski.

"And so do I," said the new member, an ugly smile playing over his somewhat sinister face.

CHAPTER XVII.

"DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND."

THE brethren, Michalski and Koszakiewicz, were seated in the middle of our subterranean chamber facing the Grand Master. The rest of us were scattered about the place. At the Grand Master's side, however, stood two brothers whose names I knew not, and who, from time to time, had been conferring with the Grand Master in whispers.

"You said well, brother," said the Grand Master, "the safety of our country demands that such knaves should die. If one man murders another, men say he is worthy of death; and surely if a man murders not only his brethren, by treason or perjury, unblushingly for filthy lucre, but, nay more, would even help the oppressor to crush our bleeding country, the laws of God and man alike allow of his death!"

"You say truly, sir," said the stranger, not a muscle of his visage moving as he puffed at his cigarette.

As he spoke, I thought I saw the Grand Master and the two unknown brothers exchange glances of fierce import out of the eye-holes in their crape masks.

Michalski also noticed it, I think, and to my surprise he turned pale—or was it the shade of the oil lamp, I wondered.

The Grand Master rubbed his hands carelessly and said, in a deep voice—

"Then, gentlemen, we are all agreed on one thing, and that is death to the traitors and oppressors. Long live Poland!"

The words were hardly out of his mouth when I saw Michalski and the new member slowly rise, and bowing to the Grand Master and the brotherhood, prepare to retire with a cordial good night to all.

At a signal from the Grand Master, given while the two retiring members' backs were towards him, we stepped back towards the wall.

"Hold, there!" cried the Grand Master, in stern tones, "I denounce you, Andrew Michalski, and you, Basil Koszakiewicz, the one as a perjured traitor, and the other as an accused Russian spy and midnight assassin of innocent Poles in Warsaw."

Michalski turned pale, and stammered out, in tones of surprise, an oath that he was true, so help him God, in heaven!

But Basil Koszakiewicz simply bowed, and, with a bitter smile and a deprecatory bow, said—

"'Tis a pity that your excellency should have taken the trouble of admitting me to-night merely for the sake of telling me that I am a Russian spy, which God knows I am not. Really I must say, sir, this accusation is to me utterly inexplicable. I am a true brother, and—"

"Liar!" said the Grand Master, sternly. "Guards, seize Michalski and that Russian police-spy yonder, calling himself Koszakiewicz."

In an instant five men had seized and bound the arms of the two false brothers behind them.

"Now, friends," said our President, "hear me! Nicholas Bojany, paid spy and *boutoschnik* of Warsaw and elsewhere, I know you well. Your voice, your hair, your manner, your everything are false, and yet poor disguise! In your pockets will be found enough to condemn you and Michalski, our false brother. He cannot deny it. Search the prisoners!"

They were instantly thrown down and thoroughly searched.

While being searched their cords slackened, I thought; but on their rising to their feet neither of them, if it really was the case, attempted to avail themselves of the fact.

Before our astonished eyes, the Grand Master now held up a list of members of our lodge who were one by one, when alone, to be dragged off to prison and denounced to the Russian government as traitors to the czar!

Against my name and that of two others, one the Grand Master himself, were black crosses.

"Aha!" sneered the Grand Master, "you and I, Beniowski, were to be hanged. Were we not, Bojany? Speak!"

The spy was a villain, but a brave one, utterly unlike the wretched traitor Michalski.

"Mercy! mercy!" gasped the latter. "I have important secrets to reveal. Spare my life!"

"Pshaw!" said the Grand Master, "this is childish and impossible. Bojany, you both must die in an hour's time. Make your peace with God."

But Bojany simply smiled. He had nerved himself for the worst, and the traitor, now that all hope was gone, was prepared to die as hardened and godless as he had lived.

His hands were red with Polish blood; yet this much will I say for him—I never saw his equal for cool effrontery and iron nerve in my life.

Michalski threw himself on his knees and gasped out, clutching at the garments of the nearest brothers—

"Mercy, brothers, mercy; for God's sake save me! save me!" in tones of agonising entreaty.

But we all shrank from him as from a pestilence.

Bojany meanwhile gave one rapid, searching glance round the place with his keen grey eyes.

In the late scuffle his admirably made false hair, beard, and moustachios had fallen off, and he stood before us with a closely-cropped head of red hair!

The huge mole, at a sign from the Grand Master, on the application of a little water and a good pull, came off. It was false too!

He saw all was over, and resolved, wolf-like, not to die ere he had inflicted some mortal hurt on his pitiless denouncer.

"Michalski, and Bojany, ere sun rise you will die!" said the Grand Master calmly.

Not far from Bojany's side stood, in gaping astonishment at the whole scene, a young peasant who had recently joined our order. In his belt was a well-finished pistol. This caught Bojany's eye.

With one burst from his powerful arms the spy unloosed the cords that bound him, and seizing the aforesaid pistol, levelled it at the Grand Master's head and fired.

"Die, too, Polish hound, and meet me in —!" cried Bojany, savagely.

Ere the smoke had cleared away, I saw the Grand Master jump to his feet.

The next moment the spy leaped full a foot into the air, and then fell dead on his face, with a bullet in his brain.

"So perish Poland's enemies!" said the Grand Master, solemnly. "Charles D—, remove that carrion," pointing to the dead spy; "I will then pass sentence on the other."

Sentence of death, to be executed ere the morrow's sun rose, was then passed on Michalski, who was to be allowed time to pray for his soul.

"Any man," said our Grand Master, "who thinks I have done wrong can take my life. On this table lies a pistol. Speak, brothers!"

But there was no answer.

White as a sheet, with his arms tightly bound, and two sentries over him, with their pistols close to his head, the wretched villain Michalski gave himself up to the frenzy of despair.

Calling us up to the table, the Grand Master said, in low tones—

"All of us must have a hand in this man's death, brethren, for the lives of all of us would be risked if such a scoundrel were allowed longer to cumber Polish ground. I propose, then, that when his time expires, he be taken out of this place gagged, and that a rope be fastened round his neck, and thrown over an arm of the tallest tree, a mile hence by the road through this forest, and that we all then lend a hand in putting him to death. On his breast shall be pinned a paper, and on it shall be written, in large letters, *The punishment of a traitor to his country. By order of the Society of the Sons of the White Eagle.* Are you all agreed?"

It was a terrible but a just resolve; and we all—many of us doubtless, myself included, with heavy hearts—assented thereto.

All this while the wretched Michalski moaned out petitions for mercy.

"Ask mercy of God, not of man, unhappy wretch!" said the Grand Master, with a touch of sadness even in his sternest tones; "you must die; but we would not destroy body and soul together. On your own head rests your death. By your treason, countless lovers of their dear country have died already. By your perjury, hundreds of homes have been desolate; many a wife's heart broken; many a father's grey head brought down in sorrow to the grave. What mercy here on earth can there be for such as you? Pray, Michalski, pray; and we will join our prayers with yours, that God will, in His infinite forgiveness, have mercy on your miserably guilty soul! To pardon you would be as bad as sealing the death-warrant of all of us. Justice, patriotism, and self-preservation, alike forbid your pardon. You swore to solemn oaths of fidelity, and broke them. You wickedly leagued yourself for gold with that dead spy and Russian assassin, Bojany, now gone to his

account. You stand here a self-convicted man, and you must die!"

* * * * *

As the thick dews of that chilly autumnal night were falling heavily, all of our lodge who were present at the scene just described started cautiously for the place of execution.

Half-a-dozen had been previously sent out singly to reconnoitre. All was clear—no *boutoschniks* in the way—and so we led Michalski to his doom.

Finding that he must die, the wretched man had at last made up his mind to do so with more courage than we expected.

Ours was a terribly repulsive task, reader, but we could not shrink from it. Mercy to him would have been treason to Poland.

Slowly, sadly, solemnly, we led him along to his death.

The night was dark; but, acquainted as our leaders were with the most intricate paths, we soon reached the fatal tree. I have seen it in my dreams many a night since then!

All this time the prisoner was gagged securely. And now all is ready.

The rope was round his neck, one end of it was dexterously thrown over the projecting arm of the tree by the Grand Master, and the other was grasped by us all.

Then, placing the prisoner under it, we awaited the fatal signal.

"Andrew Michalski, may the Lord have mercy on your soul!" said the Grand Master, fervently.

"Amen!" echoed the Sons of the White Eagle.

"Brethren!" said the Grand Master "do your duty. One, two, three. *Now!*"

The next moment Michalski was hoisted into the air by more than a score of strong arms, and there in the darkness we could see—and oh! what a sickening sight it was!—the poor wretch conclusively twisting round and round over our heads.

His struggles, thank God! soon ceased, and then we slacked the rope, and he fell to the ground a livid corpse—the victim of his own black perjury and treason to the brotherhood and his country alike.

And now, reader, whenever I think of these things, I feel my heart burning within me, to know that so shocking a duty should ever devolve upon honest men as that of ours that night.

On the heads of our Russian tyrants be the guilt of driving a noble people to acts of retaliation like this in pure self-defence!

Bojany's body we buried in the wood, on our deeming it better for certain prudential reasons that his Russian masters should not yet know how great a loss they had sustained in the death of this detestable sample of a spy in Poland.

The next afternoon, as Captain K— and half-a-dozen mounted police were riding through the forest, they saw what they at first thought was a man sitting down against a tree.

On approaching him they saw the lifeless body of Michalski, with the notice affixed to his breast.

"It's Michalski!" said the officer, coolly stroking his stiffly-waxed moustachios. "Well! the devil has got a good subject, and the czar's service has lost a most accomplished scoundrel."

Let that stand for this traitor's epitaph in these pages. He died as he deserved.



"SKVOSTROI."

CHAPTER XVIII.

MORE RUSSIAN BARBARITY.

It is necessary, if I would not inflict tedious details on the reader's patience, that this history should in some places be fragmentary rather than consecutive.

If I told things exactly one by one I should

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certainly be a more accurate chronicler, but, probably, my narration would be far more dry for my pains. I propose, therefore, to give pictures of the more startling events of my life, rather than a minute record of every detail, great or small, that has made me what I am—a poor exile in a foreign land.

If, therefore, I am not over careful in telling you things in the order in which they happened, believe me that it is from no fault of mine, but

simply because I want you to know what will interest only.

And now to my tale once more.

One morning I had stolen out of one of my hiding-places to meet Felinska. It seems she had been followed by an agent of the police, for just as we were parting, I heard a low whistle, followed by a second, and three men rushed out from a deserted old house upon me, and ere I could offer any effectual resistance, the blood was fast flowing from my head, and my hands were in handcuffs.

In vain did poor Felinska go down on her knees, and implore them to release me. What had I done? Whither would they take me? Would a thousand roubles purchase my release?

But they only shook their heads, and laughed aloud. Then with one wild, ear-splitting scream my wife fell to the ground as if dead. But she revived only to see me dragged off to prison.

I had a few influential friends—but that only saved me from the knout, or, possibly, death.

Instead of execution, I was condemned to serve for twenty years as a private in one of the Cossack regiments then stationed in Siberia.

Felinska had rich relatives, merchants at Wilna. To their charge I was obliged to leave my poor darling. In a fortnight I was sent under a tolerably strong escort on the way towards Siberia.

With me there was a young Englishman, by name Edgar D—, who it seemed had led a life of romantic interest, had served in several foreign armies as a private, though he was a gentleman of refinement and considerable intellect.

He was being "deported"—that's the Russian phrase—like myself to Siberia, for having assisted sundry Polish patriots to smuggle fire-arms, bayonets, &c., into one of the hiding-places of the Sons of the White Eagle. We soon became, during our dreary journey, great friends, and contrived by conciliating our escort to live rather better than do most men on their road to frosty, dreary Siberia.

Speaking of enforced military service reminds me of a little episode that I saw with my own eyes. For brutality it was hard to equal it. God in heaven will punish its perpetrators, I know right well.

A revolt had broken out in a certain regiment composed mainly of "deported Poles," at Omsk. The ring-leaders were apprehended, and two of them sentenced to receive each seven thousand blows with rods—or, in the exact words of their sentence, "Seven thousand blows without mercy" (*bez postchadi*). At daybreak the butchery began. Three battalions, in one of which I myself had to do duty, were ordered into a large piece of ground. Their sentence was read out and they began the *skvosstroj* (running the gauntlet).

Down came the rods, fetching blood right and left, as the two men were marched through the ranks of the Russian regiment with their hands tied to a bayonet pointed to their chest, so that stooping was impossible.

Poor M—, of whom I knew a little by sight, had had his head shaved in prison, and there before us all—for though only the Russians executed their czar's cruel order, all of us in Omsk had to see them obeyed—marched the poor wretch to his death. Of course we knew he would never live to receive seven thousand lashes. Think of that, men of England, seven thousand!

"Harder! harder!" cried the general in command, and the rods whistled through the air and fell cutting the flesh on M—'s broad shoulders. Almost in defiance of them he sang one of the patriotic songs then common among us.

Even his iron nerve gave way at last, and he fell fainting on the snow which was stained with his blood. He revived, but was too weak to walk. Then the ruffians actually put him on a cart, and lying there, he received blow after blow till he screamed for mercy as the heavy vehicle slowly lumbered along. But his voice was soon stilled by death, more merciful than his Russian torturers, and the last of the three thousand lashes only mangled a corpse!

But this tale is getting too sad, perchance. Let me tell you a story that this Englishman, Edgar D—, told me while we were in the guard-room one night, about a Spanish bull-fight he was present at some years before.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE ENGLISHMAN'S STORY.

PUFFING hard at his pipe, and rubbing his hands before the fire, he thus begun:—

Our English author, the great Dr. Johnson, has told us that some men are born with natures "too restless to be happy," and I think I come under this category. All my life, in all sorts of odd places, I have been a wanderer, by sea and by land, in all sorts of company—good, bad, and indifferent. In this way I have necessarily seen some very queer things, and rubbed shoulders with the queerest of people of almost every shade of complexion as of creed. Thus, to give a few illustrations of a vagabond life at random, I have camped out with gypsies by the week together in the sunny green lanes in England; carried a rifle with the American trappers; smoked chibouques and sipped coffee with the Moors near Gibraltar; and tramped about, intent on a pleasing idleness, Dr. Syntax-like, in search of the picturesque, with a knapsack on my back, a pipe in my mouth, and a very few gold pieces in my pocket, among the simple dwellers in rocky Savoy, for a longer period of a very desultory life than I now care here more particularly to chronicle.

But of all the strange people with whom it has been my lot to become intimately acquainted, none at the time seemed stranger to me than one, Juan Carvalho, the darling of the Spanish "sporting"—Heaven save the mark!—public, the hero of a hundred (bull) fights, the admired of all the dark-eyed senoritas who ever saw him in the most graceful of attitudes with the keenest of small swords, in his capacity of matador, give the *coup de grace* to an unhappy bull at a grand Fiesta de Toros in Madrid.

Brutal and debasing as that sport undoubtedly is to our commonplace, English notions, in Spain there are still many of the haughtiest nobles who are proud to hob-a-nob with the favourite peccador, banderilla, or matador—all which terms I shall have to explain presently—of the hour.

I can assure you that, however squeamish I may have felt at the onset, I, nevertheless, in those days thought myself peculiarly fortunate, as a curious traveller, in having a chance of seeing the national sport of Spain under the

auspices, as it were, of one of its most accomplished exponents, my quondam acquaintance, Juan Carvalho.

But let me, like a faithful chronicler, "begin from the beginning," and explain under what circumstances I first found myself a wanderer about Madrid.

It is some few years—it matters not how many—ago that I first set foot in the capital of Spain, towards the close of a blazing hot summer day, the like of which I have seldom known. In my pocket still lingered something like fifty pounds of our money, the residue of a certain legacy bequeathed me by a good-natured old maiden aunt of mine, which sum, to last me an indefinite period, was all I could now call my own. Like most young people, I had not the faintest notion of the value of money. "Enjoy yourself to-day and let the morrow take care of itself" was then about the sum total of my very free-and-easy philosophy; and my practice in every way corresponded with that theory, I fancy.

I had merely come so far from a want of aught better to do, and I intended, when my money was reduced to the price of the cheapest route to England, to return to London, there to settle down on a crust and a few very remote expectations, as I best might.

But I had enough to do that morning to look about me at my ease, without troubling myself about future disagreeables possibly in store for me on my return home, as with a cigarette in my mouth I strolled about the Prado—a large space of ground planted with avenues of handsome trees and watered with fountains, whose splash! splash! drip! drip! was strangely soothing, alike to eye and ear in that sultry weather—listlessly gazing on the motley group before and around me.

There on his Andalusian horse, with its red nostril and eye of flame, rode by me with an air of grave superiority, the *hidalgo*, whose pedigree was as well known to his compatriots as their country's history. And there, within a few feet of him, in his slouched *sombrero* and long cloak somewhat the worse for wear, but still wrapped round him with a grace to which none but a Spaniard can ever hope to attain, lounged along one of the many beggars who, in Madrid, are as numerous as flies in August, here.

There, lolled back in carriages, which would have greatly scandalised, so rackety was their general appearance, any London coach-builder, one or two dark-eyed beauties of the court, with their clear, olive complexions, and gracefully flirting fans.

And there with shaven skulls and bare feet, of doubtful cleanliness, protected only by sandals, stalked monks of the Order of St. Dominic or St. Francis, in the full "odour of sanctity," garlic and tobacco, consumed in some fiery cigar shop an hour ago.

Yes, it seemed, as a passer-by remarked, as if half the city had come eastward to the Prado that evening, to see and be seen. So, after strolling about till I was somewhat tired, I sat down on a bench, and wandered away into dream-land—that "Tom Tiddler's ground" of the mind.

I was roused from my reveries by an exclamation which seemed to come from 'out of a knot of idlers who were gravely gossiping under a tree near me.

Knowing the usually imperturbable manner of your regular Madridians, I was somewhat

puzzled to account for the vehemence with which one of the party pointed out to the rest a remarkably well-made young man, about twenty yards off.

"'Tis he! look!—'tis none other than Juan Carvalho, the best matador in all Spain! I saw him twelve months ago in Seville; it's his first appearance in our city, and I think I ought to know him."

The party thus addressed bowed blandly in acquiescence, puffed at their cigars, and honoured the said Juan with a long stare of languid interest from under their black eyebrows.

I, in turn, scrutinised him narrowly, and I don't think I ever saw a better made young fellow, and I have seen a few fine-limbed specimens of mankind in my time.

I did not know that Carvalho and I should ever become better acquainted, or I might, perhaps, have listened with more curiosity than I did to the running comments with which the man who had just spoken favoured his audience on the young matador's mental and physical advantages. As it was, not wishing to act the part of an unasked listener to other people's talk, I slowly rose from my seat and turned away.

I knew few people in Madrid, and one of these was a young merchant with whom I had been at a public school some years before.

My knowledge of the Spanish language amounted to the algebraic x , or "the unknown quantity" in mathematical parlance; and, therefore, my only mode of amusing myself, till such time as I had called on my friend, lay in wandering about the city with widely open eyes. In this way I strolled along till I came to the Puerta del Sol, where I once more sat down near the fountain in the middle of it.

I had not been there very long ere, to my great delight, I saw my old school-fellow, Walter Moreton, walking towards me with his head bent to the ground as though he was just then engaged in some intricate calculation connected with his business.

To rush up to him, and shake him by the hand—we had been on the same "form" at school, where we were fast friends—was the work of a moment. When he had returned my grip with thorough English heartiness, I had time to indulge in an exclamation of surprise at the change a few years had effected in him.

The bright-eyed, thick-set, merry "fifth-form" boy had grown into a tall, remarkably handsome, if somewhat prematurely aged, man, with an almost Spanish stateliness of manner, and a business-like gravity that would have done honour to the oldest merchant on our English "Change."

"But though time and the cares of commerce had so far altered my old friend, I rejoiced to find that the heart of one with whom I spent some of the happiest hours of my life in "auld lang syne," was to me, at least, the same as ever; and that all I needed now to take up the missing links in our acquaintance was to spend a few hours with him over a cigar that evening.

Walter Moreton at that time resided in a handsome house in the Plaza Major, a large square of something like two thousand feet in circuit, containing some of the best mansions in Madrid.

His wife was a Spanish lady, and he was the happy father of two pretty little children, a girl and a boy, who shared in no small degree the dark-eyed loveliness of their mother, and the healthy, English bloom of their father. Things

had gone well with Walter, his name was as "good as gold," his banker smiled on him when they met in the street—and he was then, and I hope is still, the *beau-ideal* of a well-to-do transplanted English trader.

When we had chatted away for an hour or two after dinner, and not before he had administered to me one or two richly-deserved and good-natured reproof as touching my aimless course of life, we began to talk of schemes for my seeing as much as possible of Madrid and the Madrilians in the shortest time.

"I know," said he, "you are fond of studying character. You could not possibly have arrived here at a better season. There is going to be—now, mind, between ourselves, I must say I don't approve of the thing myself at all—a regular *Fiesta de Toros* in a week's time. All Madrid will flock to see this cruel national sport; and, disgusting as it may seem to you in most of its details, I have no doubt you will still think it worth while, once in a way, to see a Spanish bull-fight, especially when, as they tell me, so celebrated a matador as Juan Carvalho is engaged. You, who are unacquainted with Spanish human nature, can form no idea of the intensity of a true Spaniard's love for this degrading sport. Neither sex nor age are exempt from this hankering after the excitement produced by seeing a good Estremadura bull butchered in the blood-stained arena by a matador of renown. Of course you have read all about bull-fights. No matter; believe me, you have yet much to learn, and till you have seen one, you cannot possibly form any notion of the fascination a *Fiesta de Toros* has for the Spaniards, any one of whom would pawn his cloak at the Monte-de-Piedad, rather than miss a chance of getting a seat, no matter where, at one of these affairs. Indeed, as a Spanish popular saying *Pan y Toros*, (bread and bulls) may sufficiently prove to you, what your English Derby is to the Cockneys, so is a bull-fight, in tenfold intensity, to your true-bred Madriliano—and you'll see, no-doubt, some very 'fine sport' next week, for besides the matador Carvalho, we shall have arriving here shortly some wonderful picadors and banderillas."

"Cruel though the amusement be," said I, "for once I must plead guilty to a wish to witness it. As you say, I may not have another chance; and as I shall have the advantage of your escort—"

"I never go to bull-fights now;" interrupted Walter, gravely; "I detest cruelty; and, what is to me more, I hate to see Spanish ladies, many of whom I am in the nightly habit of meeting in society, gazing with eager eyes on the revolting spectacle of a disembowelled horse screaming in agony, while his brutal rider spurs him on again to meet the terrific onslaught of a tortured bull; they, meanwhile, clapping their hands with delight, just as if the arena were the stage of an opera house in London, and the picador the favourite tenor singer of the hour."

"That is right: but as I am going for once to see it, I should not like to go alone. Don't you know some Spaniard who speaks English well, who could accompany me? I keep a journal, you know, and I want to learn as much as possible of this so-called 'national sport' of Spain."

"Well, I know a gentleman, a certain Count Calixto Juarez, who will exactly suit you. He's sure to go to the *Fiesta*, and I will introduce you to him to-morrow. You will find him, bar sundry prejudices, a very liberal-minded Spa-

niard. He has lived a good many years in England, speaks English with the slightest possible accent, and last, not least, for your purpose, old fellow, is what in Madrid passes for a 'thorough sportsman;' that is to say, he is a veritable connoisseur in all matters appertaining to torreadors, bulls, and bull-fights. In his company you are certain to get a good place. Indeed, one of his bulls—it is usual here for noblemen to give bulls now and then bred on their own estates—will, I hear, be experimented on, and heavy bets are now pending as to the sport he will show. Moreover, as the count is one of our greatest bull-fight patrons, you may be sure all engaged in the arena will do their best to win his approval. He has been known, ere now, to make or mar a bull-fighter's fortune by merely clapping or hissing him, as the case might be. Altogether, if you searched Madrid through, you could not find a gentleman better suited for your 'guide, philosopher, and friend,' on one of these occasions."

"I'm sure I'm much obliged to you, Moreton," said I, eagerly; "and I hope the count and I shall agree; though I am afraid at first sight I may show a little squeamishness, as he may think it. I suppose he knows Juan Carvalho?"

"He knows every bull-fighter of note," replied Moreton. "Indeed, I fancy the person to whom you refer first, came out before the public under the count's auspices at Valladolid, some years ago. Juan Carvalho was then a mere nobody, whereas now he is 'the great gun' of the arena; a personage whom noblemen of sporting tendencies are delighted to honour in private as in public; and, barring his cruel profession, I really believe Carvalho, whose acquaintance, no doubt, you will soon make, merits the support he receives, as he is, I hear, as modest, civil, and well-conducted a man as you will often meet. Strangely enough, though he bears a regular Spanish name, he is half English, or rather Irish, by extraction. Carvalho—the name of his choice, being that of his mother; while the thoroughly Irish appellation, O'Connor, was that of his father, who came to Valladolid many years ago as a political refugee, and settled down there as a small trader. Once introduced to him by the count, you can, if you please, soon be hand-and-glove with the bull-fighters generally; though, except for literary purposes, I don't think their acquaintance particularly desirable for a young fellow like you, with an excess of animal spirit, and—pardon me—a deficiency of cash. But here comes a visitor—perhaps Count Juarez himself."

A servant entered, ushering in that gentleman, a tall, handsome Spaniard, about forty, with a winning smile, and the quiet dignity that distinguishes the old "blue blood" of Spain.

After I had been introduced to him and the usual conversational preliminaries had been got over, Moreton explained my own wishes. The count was delighted, he said, at the chance of showing one of the "valorosos Inglezes," as he was good enough to call us, "some real sport."

"And it is sport, I can assure you," continued Count Juarez, seeing Moreton's shy smile. "To believe me, you must see it. Carramba! sir, there's nothing else like it on earth. I have seen sport in most parts of the world. I have seen the English Derby race, and have seen some English boxers. I liked that a little. I have hunted the pig bison on the American prairies. Once, but that is years ago, when I was a boy, I was nearly killed by a wild

boar in Germany, when Count Pumpernickel—God rest his soul!—one of the grand Duke of Baden's equerries, saved me just in time. But all these things are but as nothing to a Madrid bull-fight. To see some twelve thousand eager faces turned in the intensity of anticipation towards the folding-doors through which the bull will presently pass; to see the procession of stacadors, picadors, banderillas, and matadors slowly stalk round the arena with a couple of men mounted on mules, and clad as heralds; to listen to the herald's proclamation impatiently, till, the harangue over, the procession departs, and silence—deep, breathless silence—once more reigns, till a trumpet's blast rings throughout the amphitheatre, and every heart beats quicker, and every eye beams brighter, as, amidst deafening shouts, some splendid bull rushes into the arena, lashing his tail with fury, his eye blazing while he spurns the ground with his feet, or throws the dust up into the air like water with his horns; that, that I say, is sport indeed!"

The count paused, breathless with enthusiasm and a long sentence, every word of which I listened to. As for Moreton, he smiled, and simply said—

"Well, count, I declare I'm almost afraid you'll make my friend here a proselyte."

"*Quien sabe?* (who knows?)" said Juarez, stroking his silky moustache meditatively, as though proselytism of this kind were desirable rather than otherwise. "But any way, I don't think he'll repent seeing Juan Carvalho, who, by-the-bye, is coming to see me to-morrow morning. You, Moreton, I know 'tis no use inviting on such occasions. Possibly your friend will come?"

I replied that I should have much pleasure in accepting the invitation, and shortly after the count took his leave.

So I was once more to become acquainted with one more strange character; and he, no less a person than the most famous matador in Spain.

That night I did little else, I fear, than bore Moreton with all manner of questions about bulls and bull-fights; and when after a too hearty supper I went to bed, it was only to dream, thanks to the visitations of nightmare, that I was myself a bull-fighter within an inch of the horns of an infuriated black bull, bent on pitching me up into the air before a thousand or two of Madridianos, delighted with the spectacle!

Next morning I rose early, for I slept but little after shaking off the nightmare, and lounged about the quiet streets of Madrid for an hour or two, till it was time to go to breakfast with Juarez. He received me with the greatest cordiality. A polished man of the world, his society was to me delightful. He seemed to know almost everything and everybody worth knowing in half the capitals in Europe whither he had travelled in his time. He knew London and its sights, as well as a "country cousin," as we say, at the end of a fortnight's sight-seeing. With Paris he was still better acquainted, and regaled me with many an admirably-told anecdote touching Parisian life as seen through Spanish spectacles. He then spoke of America, and told me tales of nights spent in vast forests with trappers for his companions, and a buffalo rug for his only covering, that would have made the fortune of any professional narrator of wild life in those regions. All the while I noticed one thing, and that was his charming modesty;

his almost entire forgetfulness of self. For the count was too much of a gentleman to make himself the hero of every tale he told, like too many of our popular story-tellers now-a-days.

When the meal was concluded, the inevitable cigar followed, just as I was yielding myself up passively to the soothing influence of the weed as I lolled back in a deliciously-easy chair, Senor Juan Carvalho was announced, and that worthy entered the room. After bowing modestly to my entertainer and myself, at a sign from the count, the celebrated matador seated himself with easy grace on an ottoman at my side.

While he and Juarez were conversing in a learned manner about the noble art of bull-fighting generally, and a certain splendid bull from Estremadura, which the said Carvalho purposed despatching at the next *Fiesta* in particular, I had time to "take stock" more closely than I had hitherto done of the new-comer's appearance. About thirty years of age, and five feet seven or eight inches in height, to a form in which it would have been hard for me to say whether agility or strength predominated, so closely knit, so muscular, and so elastic was every part of the matador's body, in Juan Carvalho were found the extra advantages of a dark, handsome, intelligent face, with a kindly straightforward smile, and an expression that spoke volumes in favour of his marvellous daring and cool nerve at a pinch.

As I gazed upon him, I absolutely sighed to think so prepossessing a sample of mankind should have followed so cruel a calling. There was in this man, despite his trade, nothing coarse or brutal in mien. So far he exhibited, in his own well-formed person, a striking contrast to our modern English gladiators, with their low foreheads, beetle brows, deep-sunken eyes, broken noses, animal mouths, and heavy, bull-dog-like jowls. In short, he was a modest, brave, good-natured, civil young fellow, whose greatest fault, perhaps, was, that he preferred keeping his old father and mother comfortably in their old age at Valladolid, out of his handsome earnings as a popular matador, to following any more creditable calling.

I found he, too, like the count, only with nothing like Juarez's fluency, could talk English, and we soon "got on swimmingly" together.

So I was coming to see the *Fiesta* next week—he hoped I should like it—it was a fine sport, when bulls were worth a matador's trouble. As for accidents—why, no, the English senior need not trouble himself much about them, they did not happen very often, unless it might be when a picador (or mounted bull-fighter) lost his saddle, and then, of course, things were a little awkward to the silly fellow. "But it is cruel to the bulls," says the English senior. Faith, not one whit more cruel than hunting a poor stag to death with dogs, as he had heard was done in England. Did the horses like being disembowelled? Why, certainly not; but they liked bull-fighting for all that, he supposed, as I might soon see. Did the Englishmen's race-horses like being galloped to death, or being spurred and flogged into a foam? He did not know; perhaps they did, after all, or they would pull up. Had he himself ever been injured? Why, yes, he had, he must tell the English senior; but it was a mere trifle, and partly his own fault. Did he like his calling? Certainly he did, especially when he had so many kind friends and noble sportsmen like Count Juarez, who really know what bull-fighting is, to patronise him to-morrow. But it

was dangerous and difficult, did I say? Ah! well, yes; it was a little, perhaps, and, like everything else, had to be learned under good masters. In that, as in everything else, there were trade secrets. If I liked, one morning before a performance, he would take me into the amphitheatre, and show me a thing or two. Lots of Spanish noblemen—the count here, for instance—could kill a bull as neatly as most professional matadors. Did they often do it? Sometimes—not often, certainly—because it was not their trade; that was all. He would tell me more after I had seen a bull-fight for myself, &c., &c.

So far Juan Carvalho. Then Juarez took up the conversation, and told me divers anecdotes, which I need not here repeat, about the noble art, till I was thoroughly posted up, theoretically at least, as to its merits and demerits.

All this while I observed Carvalho neither drank nor smoked. He looked, indeed, in perfect training, in every sense. He was always in good condition, or he would never have reached the "top of the tree." Whether in or out of business, he was always the same strictly temperate, modest, and well-conducted man; and this, too, among people of position, who were always ready to *fête* and flatter the renowned bull-fighter wherever he went.

Shortly afterwards he took his leave. On his departure, the count told me one or two rather romantic passages in his career. Among other adventures, Carvalho had, while at Seville, by his gracefulness and daring in the arena, so fascinated a certain wealthy widow, Donna Serafina Carreras by name, that wherever he was to be found following his calling, there, to a certainty, would be seen that proud but—in Carvalho's case—infatuated beauty, gazing with intense interest on the young matador, who, by this time, had begun to guess how matters stood.

The count told me that he had often bantered Carvalho on his conquest; but the matador contented himself by simply saying, that he had no wish to wed above his station; and that all he wanted was to secure a sufficient sum to render his aged parents and himself independent of the world, when he hoped to win the hand of a pretty girl at his native place, Valladolid. He had not done so bad up to the present date.

Heavy bets were pending on the manner in which he would or would not kill a certain far-famed bull shortly in the Madrid amphitheatre. One of his numerous patrons had guaranteed him a large sum if he won his bet for him. With this and his savings, after two or three more *Fiestas*, he meant to retire into private life, in spite of the Count Juarez's friendly expostulations.

He told me as much, indeed, himself, the next day, as I was smoking a cigarette and chatting to him in the amphitheatre, where the workmen were getting ready for the approaching *Fiesta*. I remember now, with something like pain in the recollection, how his dark eyes half-filled with unshed tears, as he spoke tenderly—though he was but a cruel bull-fighter, dear English reader, after all—of his old mother and father, and of pretty Isabella de Castro, who had only that morning written to him, to say that she had arrived in Madrid, on a visit to an uncle of hers there.

"Ah!" said the matador, "I am sure to win my bets, now Isabella will be there; and if I don't excel myself when her bright eyes are looking on me, *senor*, why I ought to be gored

to death by the fiercest bull that ever delighted a Spaniard. But how will she like, says the *senor*, to see her betrothed facing a savage, cunning bull, that has seen three seasons at the game? How, *senor*? Why, Isabella will, I hope, be prouder than ever of her poor Juan; and I would not exchange one glance of her bright eyes for as many *reals* as would buy up half Valladolid, shops, streets, and all!"

In spite of my acquaintance's enthusiasm, I sighed. Perhaps that sigh was prophetic. But to my story.

CHAPTER XX.

THE AMPHITHEATRE

THE day came at last.

All Madrid seemed restlessly on the move towards the quarter where the Plaza de los Toros is situated. The amphitheatre is capable of holding, as near as I could guess, between twelve and fourteen thousand spectators. Of course, thousands who were flocking thither would not enter. But, nevertheless, those who were too poor to pay for admission—and very poor, indeed, must be a Madridiano who cannot screw up enough to get a place somewhere, even in the worst part of the house—crowded in towards the doors, so that if they could not see, they might, at least, have the secondary pleasure of hearing what was going on from time to time by the shouts of those inside. Count Juarez, as one "of the fancy," and myself, as his friend, had no difficulty in getting a private view of some half a dozen bulls destined for that day's amusement (?).

Among others, we saw a particular bull—a brindled, ferocious beast, of great power and symmetry, that was expected to tax all the daring and skill of his tormentors ere he bit the dust. This bull—Pedro, they called him—had, in his time, killed many horses and three men. He had escaped death himself, thanks to the golden opinions he had gained from the populace. He and Juan Carvalho had, however, never yet met in the arena; and so savage, as well as so crafty, was this animal, that, despite Carvalho's well-earned reputation, heavy bets were laid that even this clever matador would fail to "kill him cleanly"—an expression which shall presently be explained.

"If you make a bet at all, back me," said Juan to me, in a whisper. But I told him I was not about to bet either way. The count had a bull of his own there, too; and I heard him bet a Spanish grandee a good stake that he would show more sport than a bull of his.

Then we went away, and took our places in the count's snug private box, with its gay silk hangings. And here I may as well describe the place more particularly.

The arena itself is very large, and surrounded by strong barriers, about six feet, more or less, high. Behind these palings runs a passage about ten feet wide, which divides the people in the lower seats from the arena. Over this barrier, when hotly pressed, the bull-fighters leap with wondrous agility; though it sometimes happens that an enraged bull will leap after them, and then the scene that follows baffles all description; for not content with cramming the house from top to bottom, some of the spectators actually occupy, regardless of the risk, this spare space.

Beyond this passage run benches, one above another, till you come to two galleries, which go round the place; the first open in seats, the second divided off into private boxes, occupied by the aristocracy and the wealth of the city. These boxes are screened from the sun by awnings, but the arena itself is open to the sky, and you pay, more or less, according to the amount of shade or sun you get there.

As for myself, I was doubly lucky in having so excellent a place, and the company of so "knowing" an amateur as Juarez. I shall never forget the strange, bewildering impressions indelibly, since that day, fixed on my mind by the scene then before me. But for the object with which all these people had flocked together, it was a grand sight!

Imagine a place, three or four times bigger than our own Drury-lane Theatre, crammed full with a motley group, such as one sees nowhere else, save in Spain at a bull-fight, attired in an infinity of costumes of all provinces, of all colours: ladies in black mantillas, soldiers, monks, smug cits, grave hidalgos, courtiers in glittering uniforms, water-carriers, fruit-sellers, and other street folks, all huddled up in one edifice devoted to a national pastime, which has been the rage ever since the Romans, when they conquered Spain, introduced their gladiatorial games and baiting of animals into that glorious land.

Lovely women were there, with eyes that only poets and painters dream of in our own country, and voices as rich in tone as silver bells, as they spoke in their sonorous tongue of the coming fray in the arena below. Grave statesmen, keen lawyers, gallant sons of Mars, venerable ecclesiastics, gossiping courtiers, who, for a while, had forgotten even the last political intrigue in their love of a bull-feast, calculating traders, bronzed peasants from distant villages, and ragged rascaldom from city slums and by-ways; all these had that warm morning flocked to the amphitheatre to see a bull tortured to death—men risking their lives, and horses dragging their lacerated bowels after them over the blood-stained arena. But, for my all-overpowering curiosity, and the novelty of the scene, I think I must then early have quitted the place in disgust at my own reflection. Not so Juarez, who took snuff, or bowed with a winning smile from our box to his friends beside us, just as if we were at the opera.

"Look!" said he; "do you see yonder pretty woman in yonder box? That is the Donna Serafina Carreros, of whom I spoke to you as being quite beside herself with admiration of young Carvalho, who, I fancy, cares not one whit for the honour. And there, see! in the gallery below us, to the left, talking to that fat old citizen in his black capote there, is no other a person than Carvalho's sweetheart, pretty Isabella De Castro, who comes from his native place, Valladolid. I'll warrant her heart beats faster than that of any of us now. But, hark! there go the trumpets! Now for it!"

Huge folding-gates now opened, and out came a procession, headed by two men on mules, of bull-fighters; the stacadors, whose business it is to goad the bull to madness, by waving a red mantle, or handkerchief, in his face; the banderillas who, active as tigers, dodge before, around, and behind the bull, to stick arrows, charged with gunpowder, which explodes, giving the bull exquisite torture, in the animal's neck; the picadors, who fight on horseback, receiving the bull's charge with a lance; and the matadors, whose

task is the most dangerous, and who finish the brutal business with their swords, as will shortly be described.

Then the two men on mules blew trumpets once more, and proclaimed a combat; then the bull-fighters bowed low, and retired.

One of the heralds next took up position on a raised place, as general referee and director of the affair. Then a loud blast of a clarion rang through the building; and then, amidst a breathless silence, soon followed by ten thousand shouts, bellowing with rage and fear, a splendid bull burst into the arena.

Glaring round him at the spectators, he lowered his horns, sniffed the ground presently doomed to be sprinkled with his blood, and again bellowed appallingly.

The stacadors soon entered in gaudy costumes and darted round him, flourishing their gay cloaks in his face altogether, till at last furious with some one stacador bolder than the rest, the bull would charge him viciously.

Away like the wind sped the stacador, till dexterously turning on his heel when some feet ahead of his angry pursuer, with his gaudy cloak stretched out on one side of him, he would coolly await the bull's terrific rush. The next minute, amidst thunders of applause, I saw the cloak hanging in tatters on the bull's horns, and the stacador flying for his life to the barrier, over which he vaulted like lightning, just in time to escape the horns behind him which came thundering up against the barrier with a "thud" that resounded through the house.

The dexterity of these men is almost incredible. One moment, with their bodies half an inch from the bull's horns, they dart before him, and the next you see them, having leaped for their lives over the barrier, coolly chattering to the nearest spectator. I took great interest, unmixed with disgust, in this part of the performance, for there was no positive cruelty to an unhappy animal in it, at any rate, compared to what I was soon to see.

The trumpet again sounded, and in rode the picadors on wretched horses that would, if in London, have speedily found their way to a knacker's yard. Their dress was a short loose jacket of velvet richly laced, on their heads was a flat broad-brimmed hat and feathers, while their legs almost from the hips downwards were swathed up to an enormous size in thickly-padded pantaloons of leather which protected them from the bull. Their only weapons were lances about a dozen feet long, and of course in the manner in which they used them, defended not only the lives of their horses, but of themselves.

A stacador or two remained in the arena to take off the bull's attention in case of an accident to the picador.

Half puzzled, the bull, perhaps, for a moment would glance stupidly at the picador, who in turn would keep goading him to charge.

Then ere you could draw your breath, up would go the bull's tail, and with horns low he would rush furiously at his new foe, who, with lance firmly couched, compressed lips, and flashing eye, would await his coming. Let this lance only once miss the bull's back just above the neck, and you will soon see man and horse rolling in the dust—the horse gored to death, and the rider within an ace of receiving the same treatment.

Even if the lance be successfully planted, at times the bull's rage and strength are so great that he will press on, till, owing to the horse

swerving, his horns pierce the hapless steed's bowels.

But still the wretched horse is spurred on to further efforts till he and the bull alike are covered with blood, and the amphitheatre rings to the echo with excited acclamations.

This part of the performance is the most disgusting of all to me.

The horse staggers on with the bull's horns in his very vitals. The horse's bowels sometimes might be seen actually trailing on the ground after him, as, with fast-glazing eye, the poor creature, in obedience to his brutal rider, pressed on, marking his course with his blood; till at last, with a desperate effort, the bull overthrew horse and man.

Then a stacador would rush up, and by waving a red rag in the bull's face, would try to divert his fury till such time as the picador would again get on horseback and spur on some other wretched animal to its doom. I shall never forget the look a poor mangled horse gave his rider as, his strength gone, he sank to the earth with his bowels dragging between his legs. It haunted me for many a day, long after the unlucky animal was sold for dogs' meat.

* * * * *

I felt sick and faint. Perhaps Count Juarez noticed my fast-paling cheeks, for he said, in tones half of kindness, half of ill-conceived surprise, "I see you can't stand this. Had you not better retire?"

Stung by the implied taunt, I struggled with my fast-rising qualms of conscience, and feigned deep interest in the horrible sight before me.

I wanted, I said, to see Juan Carvalho give the finishing stroke to the business—and then I vowed after to-day's "sport" was over never to see a bull-fight again.

This bull, however, was not that by killing which "cleanly" Juan hoped to win a heavy stake. On the contrary, according to the count, it was an Andalusian bull of his own, whose performance had greatly disappointed him.

Another trumpet sounded, and in came the banderillas with their short darts in their hands. To win applause a bandarilla must await the bull's attack coolly, and then at the very moment when the horns are close to his breast, must bend his body with a jerk, and stick one of these darts on each side of the bull's neck, and get away as best he can. It will readily be conceived how dangerous this is when you reflect that during that operation the horns are never more than a few inches from the operator's side.

The least slip is probably fatal. Yet I saw no accident occur to any one banderilla that day; though once, an infuriated bull leaped right over the barrier after his tormentor, and fell on his knees among the affrighted group of people who had squeezed into the narrow passage between the lower seats and the arena before described, whence, however, he soon returned to tempt the arena once more.

The trumpet now blew for the matador, or espada, as he is sometimes called. With bare head, a keen small sword in his hand, and a red cloak hanging on his left arm, Juan Carvalho entered, and faced the bull amidst thunders of applause. At that moment I looked towards Donna Serafina, the pretty widow, and young Isabella De Castro, Juan's betrothed. I expected, in the faces of these two women at least, to see some emotions of fear or possibly disgust. But no;

they only waved their handkerchiefs and leaned forward with eager eyes to see the man they both loved gored to death, for aught they knew, by a tormented bull.

"Will he kill the bull at one thrust?" I asked the count.

"Certainly, my friend, or he is a matador not worth his salt. But no fear. Carvalho is a workman."

With flaming eyes the bull stood stock still, and watched his lithe, resolute foe. Without one muscle of his handsome face moving, Carvalho watched him for more than a minute.

You could have heard a pin fall throughout the amphitheatre then. But things could not go on in this way for long, or the people would get angry.

So slowly advancing with a graceful stride, like that of a ballet dancer, Juan waved his cloak in the bull's face, keeping his keen, glittering blade, extended at full length.

The bull dashed in at last; but stepping lightly aside, the matador balked him, and stood on the defensive once more.

The inimitable grace with which this was done took the house by storm.

"What a darling is that matador!" said an old wrinkled Donna of seventy in a box close to us—"bless him, I could go down now and throw my arms round his neck, that I could!"

What Isabella found below thought, I leave my readers to guess after this sample.

In this way the matador dodged the bull till the spectators were as frantic with admiration of his skill, as was the bull with fury at the ill success of his own rapid rushes.

Another trumpet sounded. It was the signal for the death of the bull.

"I'll bet five to one for any sum," said Juarez, "that Carvalho kills him cleanly with one thrust."

The bull and the matador were facing each other when the signal was heard. Stepping back a few feet Juan drew in his breath and grasped his sword tightly.

Then waving his cloak to and fro under the animal's very nose, he stopped and waited for the result. In rushed the bull with closed eyes. Like lightning the matador leaped aside, and just as the bull was within reach, plunged his sword right into the top of the vertebrae, or just where the head and neck join.

The thrust was fatal. The bull staggered back, gave one ghastly glare with his bloodshot eyes, and with a low moan of agony, while every limb quivered, sank dead at Carvalho's feet!

I looked at Isabella: she was beside herself with joy, and I saw Juan's dark eyes flash as he saw her sitting up there screaming "Vivas!" till she was hoarse.

"Bravo, bull; bravo, matador," said Juarez, stroking his moustache. "I hope when the champion bull comes, we'll see Carvalho kill him as cleanly. If he don't, I would not insure his own life for a dollar, that's all."

Then the doors were flung open, and some mules gorgeously decorated with ribbons were brought in. They were soon harnessed to the dead bull, and he was dragged out of the arena. In this way I saw three bulls slain with unvarying success by Carvalho that morning.

The last bull was to come—and he was, so Juarez said, "the wickedest bull in all Spain."

He, indeed, was a splendid beast; coal black, in the height of condition, every muscle showing like those on a prize-fighter's arm.



THE ADVENTURE OF A NIGHT.

I need not waste ink in describing how he knocked down and gored an unhappy stacador, upset three picadors, killed three horses, and fairly scared the boldest banderilla Madrid could produce. I only know that when Carvalho entered the arena once more, every one, except myself, was hoarse with shouting, and even Juarez had quite lost his usual *nonchalance*.

As the "champion bull" went bellowing round the arena, I thought I saw Isabella De No. 6.

Castro's face turn some shade pale—but perhaps that was only fancy, or the dimness of the count's opera-glasses.

I also thought the young matador looked a little graver than usual; but that was only natural, as there was a heavy stake depending on his failure or success.

Brutal as the sport was, I confess, by this time, I had lost every feeling save one of breathless, painful interest in what was to follow, as I

saw that splendid animal and that gallant matador eyeing each other ere the death-struggle came.

At last as Juan fluttered his mantle, the bull rushed in. Leaping nimbly aside, the matador just escaped a "ploughing" gash from the right horn. Ere the bull could charge again, Juan was out of all distance.

Again did the matador advance—the bull watching him with fury in his eye. The mantle fluttered before the angry creature's nose, but he seemed in no way anxious to risk another desperate rush till he saw a chance of fairly catching his foe on his horns. In this way, for nearly five minutes, man and bull stood looking at each other. I felt sick and faint while Juarez, coolly quaffing a glass of iced sherbet, explained sundry devices in vogue with matadors to escape with their lives in case of a slip of the foot or a false thrust with the small sword. To me the suspense was positively awful.

It is strange how, even at such times, snatches of verse, read long ago under far different circumstances, will recur to a man. At the very time when the last baulk or slip on the part of Carvalho would inevitably terminate his career as a matador,—while Juarez was coolly twirling his long moustachios, and Donna Serafina, the pretty widow, and young Isabella De Castro, Carvalho's betrothed, were watching him with intent interest in their dark eye—I was thinking of those splendid lines of our English poet touching this brutal sport of Spain. They are these, I think, quoted from memory:—

"Thrice sounds the clarion; lo! the signal falls,

The den expands, and expectation mute

Gapes round the silent circle's peopled walls.

Bounds with one lashing spring the mighty brute,

And wildly staring, spurns with sounding foot

The sand, nor blindly rushes on his foe.

Here, then, he points his threatening front, to suit

His first attack, wide waving to and fro

His angry tail; red rolls his eye's dilated glow.

* * * * *

Foiled, bleeding, breathless, furious to the last,
Full in the centre stands the bull at bay,

'Mid wounds, and clinging darts, and lances
brast,

And fowc disabled in the brutal fray;

And now the matadors around him play,

Shake the red cloak and poise the ready brand;

Once more through all he bursts his thundering way;

Vain rage—."

Alas! in this instance the bull's was not "vain rage," for just as Carvalho had poised his sword for one terrible last thrust, the bull rushed in, the matador's foot slipped, and two wild, ear-splitting shrieks rang out through the amphitheatre—they came from Donna Serafina and Isabella De Castro—as with one effort of his mighty strength the bull tossed Juan Carvalho like a dog into the air.

Ere a soul could rush to the matador's rescue, the bull's horns had pierced Carvalho's prostrate form again and again; and in less time than it takes me to tell it, all was over, and the best

matador in all Spain lay a bleeding, battered corpse before us.

"Poor fellow! I never thought he'd be so clumsy," was all Juarez said.

As for me, I felt sick and faint, and hurried home, vowing never more to witness a *fiesta de toros*.

I have kept that now. Isabella died a raving maniac. Within two months of that date Donna Serafina retired into private life for ever. Thus ended the strange career of poor Juan Carvalho. Pity so good a fellow was a matador.

Thus ended the Englishman's story.

CHAPTER XXI.

FELINSKA.

POETS have wearied themselves in writing of the love, constancy, and, I had almost written, the angelic tenderness of good women. I was now to experience in my darling Felinska's case a proof of the truth of all I had read in prose or verse, touching female devotion in those romantic chronicles so dear to youth of both sexes in the happier past ere romance had given place to terrible reality.

I remember how, soon after I arrived at my destination, I felt without Felinska, who was almost second life to me. I remember the bitter sense of wild unrest with which every night I lay down, when off duty, on my hard soldier's pillow, to dream of her till day broke. In those dreams my darling was ever with me. I felt her arms round my neck in fancy, almost ere I closed my eyes. I heard, or seemed to hear—and ah! how different those two phrases are!—her child-like "good-night" murmured lovingly into my drowsy ear ere that sleep which I may never know more fell upon me, and then I dreamed long and tenderly of her, and awoke in the morning with an aching heart and sad eyes, that would have given worlds for the blessed luxury, the ineffable relief of tears! But now I had no tears to shed. What use were they? We were parted. I had told the young Englishman, Edgar D—, my story. His was a kindly heart, though externally a little case-hardened by the world, and, as he wrung my hand hard, I thanked God, that though all else was lost, I had still one warm, true-hearted friend left me.

Oh! how little at such times does a little sympathy, a few kind words cost? and yet how few, few there are to say them!

I had striven to harden my heart. It was as well, but all day pursuing the rebellious tribes, the Kirghis, across the snowy steppes of Siberia in the service of the hated Tsar, and at night sitting drearily round the watch-fires, or sleeping, when in quarters, among a score of dirty Cossack comrades, my life indeed was a wretched one. But I bore it well enough, I think. What cared they for my sufferings? If I told them my bitter feelings, they would only have laughed at me, perhaps. But this Edgar D—, my young English friend, did not; and I well remember one day how, when we were alone together I burst into tears at some rough but kindly words of comfort he whispered to me. I think that long flood of poor, silly tears saved my weary, dreary brain from turning.

* * * * *
Felinska, as I have said, had a few influential

Russian connections. With a heroism that has had few parallels, perhaps, she started off, soon after I was sentenced to Siberia, for St. Petersburg, where, backed by sundry powerful personages, she implored the emperor to allow her to follow me, and if she could not mitigate, at least share some of my troubles. Leave once given, this would not be difficult, as by this time my regiment was ordered for two years garrison duty at the station of O—.

After hard pleading her request was granted, and my heroic girl started off at once. The journey was a terribly tedious one, but she reached the place where I was in safety, though looking terribly worn and haggard, as she well might.

The only thing that relieved the awful weariness I felt at O— was Felinska's society, which, by a special order, was occasionally allowed me.

I had, however, too soon to find my poor girl's cheek getting thinner and her strength failing day by day. In vain did she assure me that it was nothing, and that so long as she could see me she was happy. I saw she would die, like a plant shut out from the sun, unless the light of liberty soon shone on us both. Leave me she never would, I knew.

All this while, day by day, I had been plotting how best I could escape.

I knew the terrible consequences of failure, and I knew it was about a hundred thousand chances to one that I should fail.

But still I had sworn solemnly to myself that escape I would—or die.

Yet I had not by one-half so much to complain of as many of the Siberian exiles. True, I was a despairing prisoner still; but then I escaped *katorga* (penal hard labour), and there was just enough excitement in my daily life to keep my soul from sheer stagnation.

I kept my health well, too—and Felinska, supported by her love for me, bore up wonderfully.

True, sometimes I did not see her for weeks. But then anything was better than knowing that we might never meet again.

Lost darling! first, last love of my boyhood, angel that didst too soon fly away from me to join thy white-robed sisterhood in heaven, look down on me now! The mention of thee has been too much for me, and I can write no more to-day.

Other loves—lower, coarser loves—God knows I may form yet ere I die—for it is bad for a man to live so utterly alone in heart as I live now—and yet after all I am not lonely when I have such tender memories granted to me of my poor first love who is now a saint with God.

Aye, I may bow at other shrines, but my heart of hearts never knew but one pure love! for which I thank Him who sent it to gild my life like a sunbeam.

Oh! foolish ingrate that I am, to say that I am alone. Alone? Never, while I have memory to whisper sweet things from the past. I wrote these lines awhile ago as sitting by my fireside in my quiet little garret I watched the embers—and thought of Felinska till all swam before my eyes in a flood of blinding tears.

Reader, bear with and pity me. I am not as I have been this dreary day. I take shame to myself now, that even this very morning a regretful recollection of a woman utterly unworthy to be spoken of in the same page with poor Felinska, has haunted me very painfully. Yet why? She deserted me in my hour of need and

sorrow, and I am rightly punished, having had one good, pure, holy woman, all heart and truth, to love me, ever to think of supplying her place, even in the slightest degree, by—but no matter. There is one thing better than second-hand affection—it is self-respect. There is one thing better than hate in these cases—it is manly pity. But what care you for these things? Yet my mind, in spite of myself, will run on this to-day.*

These are the lines I wrote. Well, I give them you, dear reader, praying that you may never have occasion yourselves to feel such, or if you should, that even in your sorrow, you may find as much comfort in thinking of the loss of a first, pure affection as I do this day, while still smarting over the ingratitude I ought to have expected, and which I find so hard to bear, from one of those people of the every-day world, who seem born to prove the truth of the bitter saying—that "there is one thing a person never forgives—and that is an obligation!"

DREAMING BY MY FIRE.

"Sitting alone I watch the firelight's gleams,
As the red embers fitfully expire;
Feeding my heart with fancy's empty dreams,
Dreaming alone beside a failing fire.

"Lonely I sit, yet I am not alone:
Here, ushered in by memory, comest thou,
Dearest of all to dreamy boyhood known,
Dearer, though dead, than fairer maidens now.

"Idols I've made—I've found them coarsest clay—
Since first I lost the light of those dear eyes
Winning me back to virtue's purer way,
Preaching to me like saintly homilies.

"Sit by my side—and be my penance this,
Sadly to think of all I used to be,
When with pure heart I met thy girlish kiss;
Thus, in my shame, I may grow worthy thee.

"Though thou art dead, mine was a craven part—
Weakly to weep, or madly sin, I ween;
Shame to degrade, by coarser love, the heart
That once for thine and thee a shrine had been!

"Sit by my side—ah! 'tis a fool's request;
Fool! she is dead—and I am fancy's slave:
Pale, poor pale form, thou art, indeed, at rest;
Droops now the long grass o'er thy quiet grave!

"Yet it is well that I sit here forlorn,
Watching my fire with dim, tear-clouded eyes;
Thus to this heart the world hath sadly worn,
Angel-like come these purer memories!"

* And now I resume the pen I laid down in sorrow once more. To my story then, most patient of readers to whom in my loneliness to-day, I find it a sad kind of relief to talk in this

* It is at all times hard to translate poetry well. How much more so, when the task concerning poetry that reads as if wrung out of the heart!

way though we are strangers, and may never meet till heaven's hereafter, when God will wipe away all tears from all faces, when the wicked cease from troubling us, and the weary one is at rest!

CHAPTER XXII.

A STRUGGLE FOR LIFE AND LIBERTY, AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

I HAD by this time sketched out in my mind's eye a plan of escape. I communicated it to Felinska, who on the plea of sickness was to proceed, thanks to the kindness of the Russian commandant to a town called D— there to recruit her strength. So she was to say, at least; our real object being to save her the trouble and risk of starting off with me; instead of which soon after she had got safely to D—, she was to get another passport, and meet me at Archangel, whence we hoped, after I, if lucky enough to survive the long, dangerous, dreary escape thither, had joined her, to take ship for England. So agreed, so done. She left me at last!

I was on duty one night by the side of the river — which bounded our barracks, when I noticed a boat which lay moored close under the window of one of the cellars of our quarters, in which were stowed arms, &c., &c.

Next night I picked the lock of the place—got in, found some civilian's clothes there—a fusty old sheepskin coat (*armiak*) thick trousers, cap, &c., and resolved, come what might, armed with a file, to break out of the place, get into the boat, and drift away, leaving the rest to God and the intense darkness.

The night was wild and stormy, but the wind and strong stream were in my favour. I soon succeeded in getting into the frail craft; but as to navigating it, it was difficult, as I could scarcely see a yard before me.

However, hope was strong within me, and away I went down the roaring stream, Ere morning broke I was miles away from —

I had some money, part of a sum supplied secretly by Felinska—I had health, strength, courage; and desperate as the attempt seemed, I did not despair of getting away. The best route was the thing that most puzzled me. I chose at last to make tracks northward, cross, if possible, the dreary Oural mountain range, and so get on over the howling desert lands of Petchora to Archangel.

I was not, I knew, likely to meet many human beings that way at any rate, and wild beasts I did not fear.

I don't wish to boast, but if you will only take a map and see the ground I had to travel ere I reached Archangel, you will own I have some little reason to feel proud of my feat.

A passport, I forgot to say, I had previously forged. But I travelled all that day without meeting a soul. I had provisions for three days only, but I trusted to fall in ere they were gone with some peasants who would for a few roubles hold their tongues, even if they suspected me, and give me food.

I had not been very long on my way, when I was overtaken by a sledge, driven by one of those wandering traders one occasionally meets in Russia.

I saluted him in that language, and as we

were alone, told him, I thought he looked very like a Pole.

"And you, friend, look very like a Russian," said he, with a peculiar smile.

"I am one," said I, nervously. "Nonsense;" said he, intertwining his fingers in a peculiar way, though with affected carelessness.

Gracious heavens! it was one of the many signs of the Sons of the White Eagle.

He, indeed, belonged to the society, and even now was travelling in his pretended capacity of trader through Siberia, to organise a deeply-rooted conspiracy there among the exiles.

His name I may not reveal: suffice it to say, after proving him, I knew him now to be one of the most accomplished conspirators our society could boast!

Here was luck! He took me many *verts* on my way, and we parted with a brotherly grip and "God speed you!"

The next day I met more people, all going to the great annual fair at Petchora. At first I feared detection, but on second thoughts it struck me that I should be safer in a crowd of almost all nations—wily Greeks, Polish Jews, Russian traders, Siberian pilgrims to the shrine of St. Somebody, emigrants to another part of the Russian empire, priests, beggars, and even children.

With three or four Frenchmen, long naturalised in Russia, as far as I could guess by their conversation, I chatted away an evening very pleasantly, for my "make-up" was admirable; and though I spoke Russian with a queer accent, it passed well enough in a crowd, each one of whom was too intent on his own affairs to mind mine.

With the police it might be different; but then my *plakatny* (passport) was so admirably forged—royal arms and all—from a die I had made, ere I started, that I feared little.

My story was simply this; that I was making the best of my way to Archangel, there to meet some merchants, in whose office I hoped to find that employment I could not hope for at home.

I remember a story told me that night by one of my French companions. As a ghastly recital of almost unprecedented horror, I give it *verbatim* as I heard it.

After which I will continue my own adventures.

CHAPTER XXIII.

HENRI DU BARRE.

"HENRI DU BARRE, a young French artist, became enamoured of the only daughter of a wealthy *aubergiste* in the town of Carcassone, in the south of France. Lucille Montaigne had beauty and money, and Henri Du Barre had wit and talent; but these latter were no fair equivalent for the former in the eyes of the purse-proud father, who declared that no daughter of his should marry a poor man, though he were blessed with the wisdom of a Solomon.

"Now, Lucille loved Henri—at least, she told him so; but she was too prudent to elope with him, and risk disinheritance: for, after all, what was love without money?—poverty coming in at the door would send it flying through the window.

"Poor Henri was in despair. He really did love Lucille, whether she did him or not—loved her madly; and his was one of those dark, fiery

natures, which make love a wild, terrible passion.

"How much money was necessary to make him her equal, in the eyes of her worldly father? The *aubergiste* named the sum. It was large, and Henri sighed, and felt more despair at his heart than ever. Suddenly he brightened up with the recollection that he had youth and genius, and that in some large city—Paris, perhaps—where the latter would be appreciated, he might acquire both fortune and fame.

"But would Lucille wait? Well, Lucille was willing to wait a while; for just then, as she admitted to herself, she could think of no one she liked better than the poor artist; but everything earthly must have a limit, and the fair coquette thought her patience ought not to extend beyond a year.

"A year is a very short time for a man to acquire fame and fortune, with the latter depending on the former; but Henri was young, and youth is sanguine; and, at all events, he would make a trial, hoping great things, and knowing he could do no worse than fail.

"So he finished his engagements hurriedly, declined any new ones, sold the few pictures on hand for a moderate sum, gathered together his scanty effects, bade his friends and Lucille adieu, and with a hopeful but heavy heart, set off for the great metropolis of France.

"It was a long, long journey from Carcassone to Paris, in the slow conveyances of the period when Henri Du Barre made it, and it was nearly two weeks before he reached the gay capital; and then began his struggles with poverty, which clung to him, in spite of his hopes, his exertions, and his prayers for six weary months, when he gave up in despair, and secretly left the city, to beg his way back to Carcassone, see his Lucille once more, bid her an eternal adieu, and end a life no longer of any value to its possessor.

"Henri Du Barre set out from Paris afoot and alone, depending solely upon the charity of French peasants for food and lodging. He had six sous in his pocket when he started, and these he invested in a deadly poison, which he carried as a *dernier resort*, determined not to suffer beyond what nature might reasonably bear, but which it was his hope to retain till he had again seen Lucille.

"In this manner he reached and passed through Lyons, footsore, ragged, and disheartened—an object, indeed, for commiseration. Twenty leagues beyond Lyons, in passing through a long, dark lonely wood, he met a Jew carrying a heavy pack on his back. The poor artist asked the Israelite for charity; his appeal was answered with a few coins, for which he thanked the giver, and then offered to carry his pack for him.

"Oh, no—it is nothing—it is nothing—a few old clothes only!" returned the Jew, hurriedly—so hurriedly, and with such evident uneasiness, in fact, as to awaken suspicion in the mind of the young artist that it contained something of great value.

"Then it was that a wild, vague, undefined desire to possess it first took possession of the man who was now going home to die wretchedly, but whom now two thousand francs might yet bless with life and happiness. When the mind of man takes a highly criminal bent, it seems as if some evil demon whispers in his ear the most plausible reasons for a wicked course to happiness.

"The Jew wished him good day, and was trudging onward, at a slow, steady pace. Suddenly he stopped, produced a little flask, and raised it to his lips. Ah! that flask! The fiend was tempting young Du Barre to crime, and here was the opportunity.

"My good friend," called the artist to the Jew; "I am very faint; will you give me a few drops of that wine?"

"I will give you half," said the Israelite, halting.

The artist advanced tremulously, produced the poison, and concealed it in his hand as he approached his victim, and, under pretence of wiping the mouth of the flask, dropped it in. Then he pretended to drink, and handed it back with thanks, begging the Jew to drink his health at their final parting. Isaac complied, and they separated, each going different ways.

"As soon as Henri was out of sight of the Israelite, he entered the wood, and returned in an oblique direction, until he came in sight of his victim, who was now writhing in the agonies of death, and groaning for mercy. A few minutes more, and he was still—the dread work was done.

"Dragging the body from the road, and concealing it, the murderer next carried the pack far back into the forest, tore it open, and found it did indeed contain old clothes. He was nearly frantic. He had murdered a harmless old man, and got nothing for it. He threw the garments from him with the wild action of remorse and despair.

"Suddenly he heard a clink as of money. Then he began to examine the old garments, and found, to his almost mad joy, that they contained immense treasures in gold and jewels, diamonds, sapphires, pearls and rubies, to the value, as he thought, of ten thousand francs, but, in reality, more than a hundred thousand.

"Far in the depths of that dark wood, the murderer hid the most precious stones, to be brought forth in after time. There were two thousand five hundred francs in money; and with this amount he started for home, no longer a poor man, but, alas! even further than ever from being a happy one.

"He travelled in his ragged clothes as far as Nismes, fearful of spending one of his ill-acquired coins sooner; but at Nismes he ventured to purchase a new and genteel suit; and in this, shortly after, he appeared before Lucille, showed her father the sum required, which he represented as having been honestly obtained in his profession, and claimed her hand.

"In due time, Henri Du Barre married Lucille Montaigne, and happy were all at the wedding but the guilty groom, who was never to know happiness again. He kept his secret, however, and profited by it, making an occasional journey to the dismal spot of his crime, under pretence of travelling on business. He took away and disposed of the jewels one by one, and gradually grew opulent, and was regarded by all who knew him as an honest man of mark.

"But the remembrance of his crime had a strange fascination for him, and much of his time was spent in brooding over it in secret.

"Being an artist, he at length naturally conceived the idea of painting the scene of the murder; and he finally drew it in miniature on ivory, picturing himself in the act of dragging the dead body of the Jew into the forest, whose features, from memory only, he delineated with wonderful fidelity. And as if this were not

not enough to satisfy his morbid infatuation, he wrote underneath—'Isaac, a Jew, murdered by Henri Du Barre, artist, September the tenth, in a dark wood, about twenty leagues south from Lyons.'

"It was a strange, insane idea, that of preserving a memory of the horrible deed in this manner; but this miniature he had set in a neat little frame, and carried it in a belt around his waist.

"But the strangest part of this horrible affair is yet to be told. On his last visit to the forest for the last jewel that yet remained of the proceeds of his awful crime, he was shot dead by a highwayman, who, on searching his person, found the miniature, and recognised in the features of the murdered Jew—*his own father*.

"This produced so strange an impression upon the second murderer, that he carried it to the authorities, and made a full confession of his own crime. A full and thorough investigation took place; and among the papers of Du Barre was found one containing the statement of the whole transaction as we have here recorded it.

"The second murderer, the son of the Jew, was subsequently executed, and so ended the chain of dark and terrible events.

"Truly, the ways of Providence are wonderful and mysterious."

CHAPTER XXIV.

I MEET FELINSKA.—THE CORPSE IN THE CHEST.
THE LAST OF LOVE!

WHEN I began this narrative, I intended to carry it out to completion. It would have then made a large volume. But, alas! how little we know, when we take anything in hand, how we shall finish. Ill health, and the painful nature of these my sad reminiscences, have jointly been too much for me; and with this number, I must bring my story to a close.

Well, I reached my wife at last, after undergoing incredible hardships among the frosty ranges of the Oural Mountains, where I slept out all night so many times in hollow trees, and even in holes scraped, Ostiak-Indian fashion, in the snow.

She was overjoyed to see me; but our perils were not yet ended. We had to get to Archangel. To get there, after I rejoined her, I had still in her company to cross miles and miles of barren steppes covered with snow.

Luckily, we had some money, so it was not very hard, bad as was the travelling, to get means of locomotion. The worst of it was, the poor girl shortly expected to be confined; and if that interesting event happened in the middle of a frozen desert, then—God help us both!

Had we not better stop, I urged, where we were, for some while longer?

But, no; she would not hear of it. On we must go, if I loved her, she said. So off we started. I heard along the road that there was a revolt among some of the wild tribes that infest that dreary region, and that a regiment of Cossacks had been sent to quell it. That news made us tremble, stout as were our nerves; and when I tell you, by-the-bye, a little adventure that befell Felinska on her way to join me at one of those lonely *izbouchas*, which are erected at great distances apart from each other, I think you will own she was a brave girl, or her brain would have turned with fright.

One night she and another female, who had been travelling together in the company of a Polish Jew, the husband of the latter, had retired to rest at an *izboucha* in the middle of a dreary wood. Ere undressing, Felinska narrowly examined every part of the bedroom allotted to her.

She had heard terrible tales of murders committed in these places for gain; and when her eye fell on a huge chest that stood in the room, a thought flashed through her brain that it was possible, perhaps, that that same chest, ere then, might have held a victim. More sinister scoundrels than the landlord and his two sons could not well be imagined; and, altogether, my wife wished herself well out of the place. Fortunate was it for her, the people of the house did not suspect, in either her or her travelling companions, the possession of much money, or she and they would never have lived to tell the tale.

Ere getting into bed some mysterious attraction urged her to open the chest.

She did so, and oh! my God, the sight she saw froze her very soul.

There in its shadow lay a dead man not long murdered!

To rush stealthily out of the room and tell her friend what she had seen, was the work of a moment.

"Impossible!" cried the Jewess.

"Awful! what will become of me and my money?" said the Jew. "But it can't be true; we would never put a chest, holding a dead body in it, into a lodger's room, if murder had been committed."

It was true, however; for by one of those unaccountable oversights that criminals are so often liable to, the servant of these murderous scoundrels, who, perhaps, was not privy to the deed, had put the strange lady into the room lately occupied by this murdered man, whose body the landlord intended to bury that night!

"Whatever shall we do?"

"What can we do?"

"I know what we ought to try, but it would hardly be practicable, after all," said my wife; "so better wait till morning, go away then, quietly, and tell the nearest *boutoschnik* what we have seen. We can do nothing."

But then in a moment flashed across Felinska's mind the thought that if she informed against the wretches she would be detained to give evidence, and then all might come out, and my safety, or life perhaps, would be risked past hope of redemption.

So they sat there till morning and then paid their reckoning, and departed shuddering.

To return to ourselves, we made the best of our way on as quickly as the bad travelling and our crazy old sledge would allow. We saw no Cossacks, though we heard from our driver—whom, by-the-bye, we resolved to dismiss at the next stage—that plenty of these gentry were about.

At the next stage I bought a sledge, and guided by a plan, sketched rapidly down by myself from the landlord's dictation, we pushed on, on, on, for many a *verst* without seeing a soul.

Hitherto my Felinska's spirits had kept up marvellously, but now her strength began to fail her, though she never complained, poor dear!

One night we came within half a mile of a Cossack bivouac, as I could see by their fires, round which they boozed the night away in half-drunken stupor.

My heart was in my mouth with dread.

But by a dexterous twist, at the great risk of smashing our sledge, we avoided them, and turning into a wood, resolved to rest till morning.

At daybreak I was roused from my wretched slumber by a crackling in the bushes, and a man dashed up to us in wild alarm.

No sooner did he see me—and I could tell by his manner, no less than his garb, that he was an escaped convict—than starting back he presented a pistol at my head.

"Hold there, friend," said I, in the prison slang, which my Siberian experience had taught me only too well. "I'm a pal, my boy. Dog should not bite dog. What's up?"

"Only this, that I am flying from the *katorga* and the Cossacks after me. And you, my chicken, if you're the man with the woman they've got scent of, had best cut it, that's all. As for me, I won't be taken alive, by St. Nicholas! God speed you, my pal!"

And he tore off at a break-neck speed. This news completely took away hope. Poor Felinska murmured a prayer, and cast her eyes up to heaven. And I—and I, the man, readers—I wept.

For her, not for myself. I was past that.

If I was taken, I knew well my fate would be the knout. If I fought to the last, what would become of Felinska? for I was certain to be slain.

"Let us not give up all hope yet, darling," said my devoted wife, struggling to her feet. "I can walk; I will try to walk several *versts* yet. And we may possibly baffle these Cossacks."

But I knew better. I saw her lips grow whiter and whiter, and her limbs quiver as she tried to quicken her speed.

"Come on! come on!" shouted a brutal fellow in the uniform of a Cossack lancer.

I shuddered at the sound. It proceeded from a clump of trees about five hundred yards off, but owing to the cold clearness of the atmosphere, I heard it quite distinctly.

All was over now, I knew well. Before me lay a vast forest; so far, so good. Behind me the Cossacks. Behind them the loss of all I held dearest threatened me.

"My darling, my poor darling," said I, tenderly, to Felinska. "I can only die now. But you are surely safe. You they never will injure. Let me go back at once and give myself up to them. That may, perhaps, induce them to look with greater tenderness on you."

"What! Alexis, are you mad? Oh! cruel, cruel so to speak to your own Felinska. While there's life there's hope. Ah! me, ah! me, I have been a shocking drag to you this wretched day. Oh! that I had never come here. But for me, you still would have had a good chance of freedom! Come on."

"No, darling," said I, sadly, "'tis only wasting your precious strength. It will kill you, Felinska."

She burst into tears, and implored me to use the few minutes that possibly yet remained to us in flight.

Overcome at last, I yielded to her prayers. Her love and her fears seemed to revive her. She leaped along over the dreary paths like a young roe.

But I knew this could not last long. The end was coming fast. Let me draw a veil over that last painful scene as far as may be.

* * * * *

We had reached a little sheltered nook hidden from the view of any chance wanderer by a rise in the ground, when my lost one laid herself down to die.

The pangs of maternity were upon her, and I, the agonised husband, was alone in the awful stillness of that great forest alone, save for the enemies who thirsted for my blood.

I am a young man yet, but my hair is grey. Who hereafter can wonder thereat?

What agony she suffered is known only to her and that God who hath taken her to Himself.

I heard the Cossacks' brides jingle-jangling through the by-paths of the forest, but I cared nought for them now: I was mad.

"Help!" I shouted, in my desperation, "help! for Christ's dear sake."

But the echoes mocked me, and all the answer I got was their sound and the fast-ceasing moans of Felinska.

Her lips moved in prayer. Her dark eyes were upturned in the wildest agony, and I knew that soon she would be a mother, if she did not die. Alas! alas!

I fell down on my knees and prayed to God. Then I rose and shouted again and yet again.

"Silence, love; for my, for your sake. They will pass us by yet. This is nothing, dear one. We will escape yet. I shall be better directly."

Aye, poor child, I knew she would, but it would only be in the better land of God!

It seems they had hit on our track, for I heard them coming on at a walk towards us, though the brushwood was so thick I could scarcely see them.

Felinska's voice was now almost inaudible. I saw all was over, and I mentally resolved to blow out my brains directly her eyes closed in death.

"Ho! there! here they are!" cried a rough voice. "By St. Vladimir, we have caught the pair at last."

In a moment afterwards twenty Cossacks rode up with their lances couched.

Drawing a pistol I prepared to take aim and fire, when a well directed shot from an officer's revolver hit me full on the shoulder and down I went.

Ere I could stagger up, covered with blood, two dismounted troopers had seized me.

I offered no further resistance.

"Your name," said the Captain, scowling at me, "is Alexis Beniowski? That woman is your wife?"

"My name," said I, recklessly, "is Alexis Beniowski, and that dying lady is my wife, sir, as you say. For humanity's sake draw off your men. She will shortly be a mother. I would give my life for a surgeon now."

The officer was really at heart a kind man, only his trade had hardened him.

"That," said he, "is impossible. Turn about, men. This is no sight for us. Prisoner's escape is impossible. We shall surround the place. If you attempt to fly, you will be shot."

"I will not," said I, "and I thank you, sir, for your kindness."

Then down upon my knees fell I, with bitter tears, beside Felinska.

She was dying fast. She knew it. Her last thoughts were of me.

As she lay there on my sheepskin coat, I kissed her poor, pale brow tenderly—then I felt her squeeze my hand tightly; then the pressure grew weaker and weaker, and I heard a prayer

escape through her quivering lips, and then one convulsive shudder passed through her frame—and then—and then, alas! that I should live to write it, my tears fell fast upon the face of the dead!

* * * * *

What more have I to tell? That I was taken back again and well nigh beaten to death, so soon as my wound was healed—that I was then sent to another prison-house whence I again managed to escape (how I must not here reveal) that at last, reckless of my future, I joined an insurgent band and fought against the Russians, the accursed murderers of my Felinska.

What more have I to tell? But a little, for I feel I am fast dying of want and misery, and that I shall soon meet her in heaven. Let this conclude all.

* * * * *

It was a glorious moonlight night. The noble Langiewicz, one of Poland's purest patriots, stood with his staff around him in a wood. The Russians were coming up to us, we expected, in an hour. There will be a bloody engagement, thought I, thank God. May He forgive me for the words!

I was right. On they came, yelling like wolves. But our men, armed with scythes fastened on the ends of poles, made fearful havoc of their cavalry, who vainly charged us, and then fell back and charged again.

"God and Poland!" cried Langiewicz on his white horse, riding like the Phantom Horseman of Burger's "Leonora."

"God and Poland! Poland for the Poles!" shouted five hundred voices after him. "Die! but yield no foot of ground. Now for it! Charge!"

And we *did* charge them, so that they fled before us like beaten curs.

They retired to form up once more. In their midst, as I saw by the moonlight, rode an officer I knew well. It was the man who had gazed on the knouting of poor Natalie Zawiska, with the opera-glass, as before recorded.

I singled him out at once. I would have known that man amongst a thousand; and I set

my teeth hard, and as they came on again, I rode straight at him, slashing away more like a devil than a man.

We were close up now.

"Dog of a Russian!" cried I, "dost fear a Pole? Fight or die!"

He struck desperately at me. I parried the cut and returned with a point which grazed his sword arm.

He cut at me again.

"Villain—remember Natalie Zawiska," cried I, as with one blow I clove his skull in twain.

That night, in a mere affair of outposts, I was severely wounded, and but for prompt aid of some kind friends of the brotherhood, I must have again fallen into the hands of the Russians.

* * * * *

But I have written too much for my strength. I fear I shall never write more. If it be so, my last words shall be—"God, give us our Poland back once more."

My lamp of life is flickering out. My brain is feeble—my eyes are dim. Felinska, I shall soon be with you!

To-morrow, readers, I will finish this story by bidding you farewell.

* * * * *

POSTSCRIPT BY THE TRANSLATOR.

I have a painful duty to perform—to announce, in short, that our poor friend, Count Alexis Beniowski was found dead in his bed the very morning after these lines were penned. He is, let us hope, with the spirits of the noble Poles who, like him, have shed their blood for their country, and with his dear Felinska now.

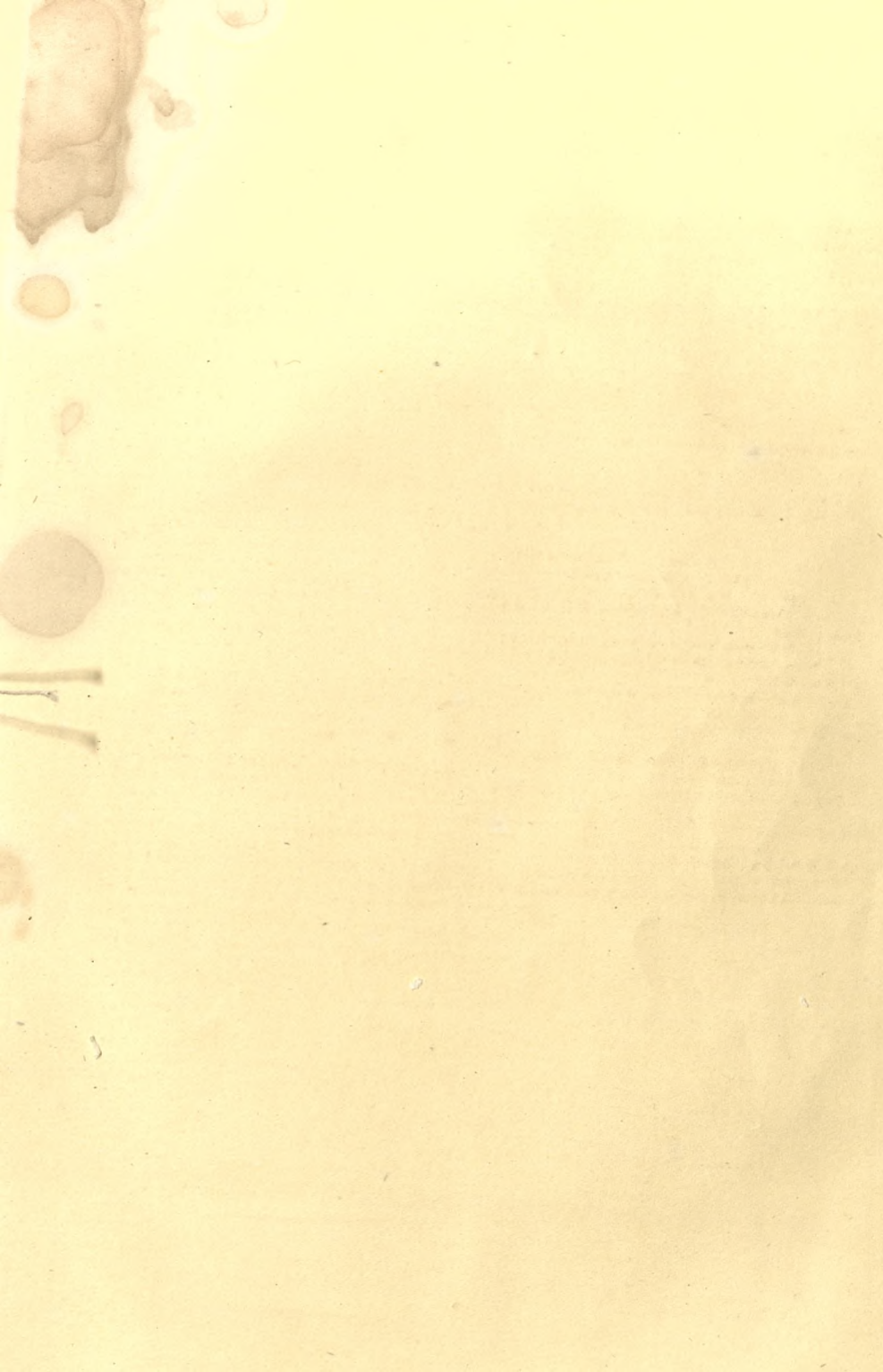
Reader! the tale is ended—a terrible tale of Russian cruelty and Polish resistance—a tale which in other phases has gone up to God trumpet-tongued for vengeance for centuries.

It would have been longer, perhaps, had God spared our unhappy friend, or it might have ended where it does.

But reflections of this kind are weak and vain. Count Alexis Beniowski, than whom few nobler patriots have bled for Poland, is gone to his account. Peace to his ashes!

THE END.





BIBLIOTEKA KÓRNICKA

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