

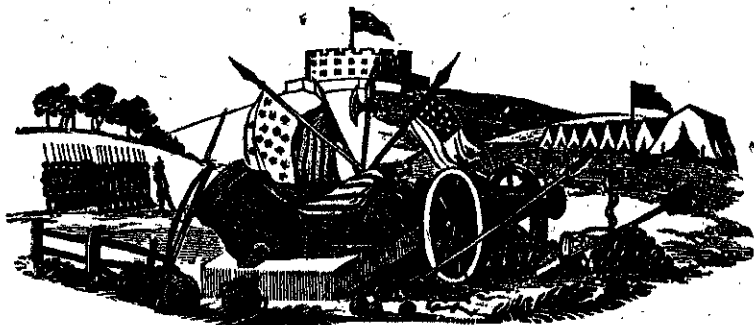
IVAN THE SERF:

—OR,—

THE RUSSIAN AND CIRCASSIAN.

A Tale of Russia, Turkey, and Circassia.

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IVAN THE SERF.

CHAPTER I.

THE SENTENCE.



BRILLIANT was the display of soldiers who were assembled upon the wide parade ground in St. Petersburg, on one mid-day in summer. They had been called thither to exhibit their skill in arms. The sunbeams danced upon their bright trappings, and the gentle breeze played with their floating plumes. Near the centre of the ground, mounted upon a superb and richly caparisoned charger, was a man towards whom all eyes were directed. He was very tall, and powerfully built, and of that majestic presence which indicates one "born to command."

His countenance, naturally stern, was now covered by a cloud, and his nether lip was drawn up with a look of hard, harsh meaning. His uniform was rich, but yet somewhat worn and dusty. The polished helmet upon his head was

surmounted by a heavy, flowing plume, which served to give an additional grandeur to his magnificent form. The jewelled insignia upon his breast showed him to be the Emperor, for such he was—Nicholas, of Russia.

[SEE ENGRAVING.]

For some time the emperor had been allowing his horse to prance about in unequal circles, and at times his eyes would be bent to the ground, and then they would flash darkly upon the long line of officers who seemed to be awaiting his orders. These who saw the curl of his mid-tucked lip, and noticed how nervously he grasped his riding-whip, knew that something had provoked him, and there was not an officer there but stood in fear, for none could tell what purpose or cause of wrath might have entered his iron soul. At length he curbed in his horse and beckoned to an officer who was stationed at a short distance from him. The man thus called rode forward and with a low bow and a trembling look awaited the will of his royal master.

"Major," said the emperor, "go and send Colonel Ruric here. I would speak with him." The messenger rode off towards a spot where

a number of officers were assembled, and to one of them he delivered the emperor's order. It was a young man who was thus called out from among his companions. He was not over four-and-twenty years of age, but for several deeds of more than ordinary bravery, he had been promoted already to the rank of a colonel. In both form and feature he was the very picture of a soldier—not such a soldier as was the emperor, but such an one as finds a place in the heart as well as in the head. He was tall, and of admirable proportions, with a face of great personal beauty and regularity of feature. Such, in appearance, was Count Feodor Ruric. He had been left an orphan at an early age, and from his father he had inherited a title, though his countship came to him with but little property to make it valuable. All who knew the young colonel count loved him. They loved him because he was bold and frank, kind and generous, and because they knew that he was ever ready to risk his life in the sacred cause of true friendship. We said all who knew him loved him. So all did who knew him truly. But there were some who cared not to know his heart—some were jealous of the love he received—and such there were who hated him. It would be difficult to find a bold, handsome, generous man, who could live without enemies; and we shall generally find that the more love and respect a man is capable of inspiring, the more rank will be the jealousy from those who envy him. So the Count Feodor Ruric, so generally beloved, had a few most bitter enemies.

We must go back now to the evening previous to the day on which we have opened our story. An old man—a man who had once been a Polish officer—was confined in the prison awaiting the doom of death. His crime was that he had lent his influence secretly towards exciting the Poles to join with the Hungarians in a general revolution. He had boldly acknowledged that such was his desire, and he was very unhesitatingly condemned to die. Count Ruric had charge of the prison in which several state prisoners were confined, or, at least, he had immediate control of the prison guard, and was responsible. At a late hour in the evening a woman came to the room in which Ruric was seated. She was a young woman, and possessed a winning, natural loveliness which was well calculated to enlist sympathy in her behalf. The count could see traces of tears upon her cheeks, and her whole countenance was expressive of

the most intense anguish. Ruric bade her to be seated, and then he asked her business.

"You are Colonel Ruric?" she tremblingly said. To which he of course answered in the affirmative.

"And you have charge of the prison?"

"Yes."

"I must go in there, sir."

"Impossible, lady."

"But my father is confined there, and he is under sentence of death. O, I must see him."

"Your father, lady?"

"Yes—Slavinski."

"The Pole?"

"Yes—a poor old man who is sentenced to die. I am his child—his only child. I must see him once more on earth—once more before he dies. It will make his death easier, and it will be a lasting blessing to me." She sank upon her knees as she spoke, and with her hands clasped, and the big tears streaming down her fair cheeks, she begged for the simple boon she sought.

It was a hard case for the young count. He knew the duty which was imposed upon him, and he knew that he was answerable for the fulfilment of that duty with his life. Yet the weeping, imploring woman had moved his heart, and when once his heart was moved, it was hard for his judgment to go the opposite way. He struggled a while between inclination and duty, and then he gave his heart the victory.

"You shall go," he said; and then he tore a leaf from his pocket-book and wrote an order.

The woman blessed him as she received the paper, and Ruric felt gratified to think he had contributed to the happiness of a suffering fellow-creature.

On the next morning, however, the young officer's feelings of happiness received a severe check. He was in his private room, just raising a cup of warm wine to his lips, when one of the guard hastily entered and informed him that the Polish prisoner had escaped, and that a young woman had been found in his place. Ruric hastened to the cell, and, sure enough, there he found his visitor of the previous evening.

"Alas, lady, what have you done?" cried the count, as soon as he had convinced himself that the startling tidings he had received were true.

"I have given liberty to my father," nobly returned the female. "I gave him a portion of my own dress, and he has escaped. I know what my fate must be, and I am ready to re-

ceive it. I told my father that I could escape, else he would not have gone and left me. I must die, but I shall die happy since I know he is safe."

"Ah, lady, it will not be you who shall die," said Ruric, in a painful tone.

"Not me! Surely they will not catch my father."

"No. I am the one who must die. You do not know the temper of our emperor, if you think I shall escape the fatal result of this."

The woman gazed up into the face of the handsome officer, and at first she could not believe that what he said was true, but as soon as she was made to realize it, she tore her hair with frenzied anguish. Ruric tried to calm her, but her grief was too deep. He saw that she now had a real agony on his own account, and he forgave her for what she had done. She knew that she was forgiven, and then her strength gave way beneath the weight that had come upon her. And thus the count left her.

The emperor sat there upon his horse, with the terrible frown growing more dark upon his massive brow, as the count approached. Feodor Ruric was very pale, but he did not tremble.

"Dismount! dismount!" ordered the emperor, in a tone like the premonitory rumbling of an earthquake.

Ruric slipped from his saddle and bowed before his royal master.

"Colonel Ruric," said Nicholas, "where is Slavinski?"

"He has escaped, sire," returned the count, summoning all his fortitude—for it was no small task to stand unmoved before such a master.

"Did you not have charge of the guard, last night?"

"The guard was under my official control, sire."

"So I supposed. Now how did the Polish rebel escape?"

Ruric related the circumstances as briefly as possible.

"So," said the emperor, with a look of ineffable scorn, "you have thrown off your allegiance, and own rule now by strange women. You forget your duty to your imperial master when a woman bawls in your ear."

"Sire, I meant not to have done wrong."

"So much the worse, for I gave you some credit for judgment, but now I find you are void of both judgment and obedience."

"Sire—"

"Stop! Did you not know your duty?"

"Yes, sire."

"And yet you violated it. See now how base you are. Knowing your duty, you did it not; and possessing a free mind you throw away your judgment. Ah—here comes Menzikoff. We shall see."

The individual thus alluded to was the Prince Alexander Menzikoff, a general in the imperial army, and a man who had much power—that power mostly resulting from his vast wealth.

"How now, Menzikoff?" hastily inquired the emperor. "What of the Pole?"

"He has escaped, sire," returned the prince, with a shake of his head. "Search has been made, but in vain. He could not have escaped by the river, but must have gone off some other way."

"You are sure he has gone?"

"Perfectly sure."

Nicholas turned towards the count. His movements were heavy and deliberate, and the expression of his countenance was an index to a determination that was not to be easily changed.

"Feodor Ruric," he said, "for your individual sake I might overlook what has transpired by simply banishing you, but there is more at stake. We must have an example. You must die! I have heard of your other acts of treason."

"But one word, sire," uttered the count, in an imploring tone.

"No sir, not a word."

"But my motives, sire?"

"I care not for your motives. Facts are what the world sees, and by facts alone must such cases be judged. I will hear no more. Take him off, Menzikoff, for he is your prisoner till to-morrow, and then he shall be shot. You shall answer for him."

"I will, sire," returned the prince; and as he spoke there was more of exultation upon his countenance, than of sorrow. The very glance which accompanied the words seemed to signify, "With pleasure."

Feodor Ruric's horse was led away, while he himself followed Menzikoff from the spot. It was easy to see that most of the officers were pained deeply by what had transpired. They dared not murmur, for they were in the presence of their master, but they could not repress the expressions which worked upon their countenances. It was evident that Menzikoff was not in very high esteem among the imperial guard.

He was known to be a sort of spy—a self-constituted spy—who reported all that he saw, and who, it was believed, oftentimes reported what he did not see.

After the prisoner had been led away, the emperor went on with the review. He saw the

troops exercise, and he passed his orders as usual. It may be that he was more taciturn than was his wont, but no one could have told from his manner that anything unusual had happened.

CHAPTER II.

THE SERF.

INTO one of the strongest dungeons of the prison was Count Ruric thrown, and Menzikoff himself took the keys. The young noble knew that his fate was sealed so far as any will of the emperor was concerned, and he knew that his fault was one that would not be overlooked. The old prince had, on his part, taken every precaution in his power, for he knew that the young count had numerous friends, and he felt sure that some of them might even dare to attempt his rescue if they had opportunity. The afternoon passed slowly, heavily away, and as the gloom of night began to gather about the cold, damp prison-house, the young man's spirits sank within him. He sat down upon the low stone bench that projected from the wall, and bowing his head he called up the images of the past. He remembered the mother who used to smile upon him, and he could almost fancy that he heard her sweet voice now, sounding as it did of yore, to calm the youthful passions of his soul. And he remembered his father—the brave, generous man who was prodigal only in charity—and once more he heard those words of counsel which had been the foundation of his own life. And he remembered a sister, too, with whom he used to laugh and prattle. And there was a little brother who, years ago, came to shed a ray of sunshine across his path. But the grave had closed over them all! He alone was left of all his family—and how long should it be ere he, too, should pass away into that land of shades whither his kindred had gone before him. He knew that there would be some to regret his loss

when he was gone, but he would leave none to mourn for him as kin do mourn for kin.

The hours passed on—the deep darkness of night was full upon the earth—and the only sound that broke the death-like stillness was an occasional cry from the distant sentinels, and the scratching of the rats that worked in the prison walls. Feodor had wept some—he had wept when he thought of the death-scenes he had witnessed in his own family—but now the thought of re-union had come to him, and he had sunk into a state of prayerful meditation.

The hours passed on. The brazen tongue upon the distant cathedral had told the hour of midnight, and yet Ruric had not thought of sleep. Once, just at the stroke of twelve, an officer put his head in at the door to see that all was safe. The count recognized him as one attached to Menzikoff's staff, and he asked him if he could not have some refreshment.

"Not to-night," returned the visitor, hesitating at the door.

"But I have had nothing since the morning. Let me have a drop of wine."

"Not to-night. If you need it in the morning, perhaps you can have it."

"I may not need it in the morning," said the count, in a thoughtful tone. "But stay," he added, as his visitor turned once more to close the door. "Am I to be shot to-morrow?"

"Yes."

"At what time?"

"At noon, so I heard the prince say. He will send you a priest in the morning."

The officer withdrew as he spoke, and locked and bolted the door after him, and once more Ruric was alone. The distant clock told the hour of one, and the count had almost sunk into a dreamy slumber, when he thought he heard footsteps in the passage that led to his cell. He started up and listened, and he was sure that he was correct. It might be some one bringing him the refreshment he had asked for, he thought, and moving back to his seat he sat down again, for the chain that confined him was so heavy that he stood with difficulty. At length the bolts upon the outside were slowly moved back, and the key was turned in the lock. A strange sensation crept through the young man's frame as he heard that key move, for he noticed that it was moved with the utmost caution, giving back hardly a sound to tell that the bolt was giving up its hold. In a moment more the door was slowly opened, and the prisoner could hear that some one had entered, though he could not even catch an outline through the thick darkness.

"—sh! Speak not a word!" whispered a voice which Ruric could not recognize, but which nevertheless seemed to have a welcome sound to it.

The count started again to his feet, and just as he did so, the rays of a lamp flashed upon him which came from a lantern his strange visitor had opened. As soon as Ruric could bear the glare of the light, he gazed upon the form and feature of him who had so unexpectedly presented himself. It was a tall, stout man, somewhat past the meridian of life, and dressed in the garb of a serf. His complexion was quite dark, and his hair, which must have once been as black as night, was well sprinkled with silver. His countenance denoted a vast degree of firmness, but yet 'twas kind.

"Who are you?" asked Ruric, as soon as he had taken a hasty survey of the man.

"My name is Ivan, and I am a serf of the prince Alexander Menzikoff."

"I have seen you."

"Ay, count, you have seen me often."

"And I have heard much of you, too," said the young man.

"Ah," uttered the serf, with an inquisitive gesture.

"Yes. I have heard much of your skill in military engineering. I suppose I am correct?"

"Yes," returned Ivan, setting his lantern down upon the stone floor, and taking a moderate sized, flat bundle from beneath his coarse

drugget shirt. "Yes—so Menzikoff sometimes employs me."

"And he has sent you to me with food, has he not?" asked Ruric, the reception of refreshment being the only hope he now had, since he found out who was his visitor.

"Not exactly," returned the serf, in peculiar tone and emphasis. "Menzikoff would sooner send the headman or the knout. No, no, Feodor Ruric, I have come of my own accord." "And wherefore?" quickly asked the prisoner.

"Wherefore should the oppressed seek each other but for aid?" returned the serf, standing erect and gazing full upon the count. "I know what Russian oppression is. I feel it in every bone—in every nerve. I know what it is to suffer with a proud heart. I know, too, sir, how slight and fragile is the thread of the true man's life in the empire. Count Ruric, I have come to set you free."

"To set me free! You—a serf! Come to snatch me from death?" uttered Ruric, incoherently.

"Ay, for serf though I be, yet I have heard of you, and I know you to be one not deserving of death. Do you wish to flee?"

"I do not think the emperor will pardon me," muttered Ruric, half to himself.

"Nor do I," returned Ivan, "for his mind is most bitterly poisoned against you. Menzikoff hates you—he hates you with a perfect hatred, and he has determined to ruin you."

"But why should he hate me? Surely I never did aught against him, even in thought."

"He hates you as Satan hates the saints. He hates you because others love you—because you are better than he is; and far more than all else, because you are braver than his son, and have received more marked distinction, and he has resolved to destroy you; but in the present instance he has found the chance without seeking it, only you may be assured that he will not fail to make the most of it."

"And why should you come to save me?" asked Ruric, giving way to a spirit of curiosity, for there was much to excite curiosity in the speech and bearing of the serf.

"You should not stop to question me on that point," returned Ivan. "Suffice it for you to know that I have come to save you, and perhaps you may at some time know me better if you follow my instructions. Will you go with me?"

"Most assuredly I will, if you are sure that you can lead me safely away from here."

"That I can do easily. I managed to get the keys of the prison from Menzikoff's own room, and you may rest assured that the guards are now all asleep upon their posts. They drank more than wine to-night, for I handled their drink. Come, here is a seaman's dress. It is large enough to slip on over your own. Put it on quickly, for we have little time to lose."

Then Ivan knocked off the chains, and Ruric began to put on the rough dress which the serf had provided, and as he did so he had time to reflect somewhat upon what had transpired. Of one thing he felt morally sure, and that was, that Ivan had really come to save him; but why he had come was not so apparent, though the count fancied there must be some hidden motive. In regular sequence came the thought of where he should find refuge after he had got clear of the prison.

"Ivan," he said, with this thought upon his mind, "how far do you mean to guide me?"

"Farther than you probably imagine," was the rather odd reply. "But get you ready, and we will talk of that as we move clear of present danger."

"I am ready now," responded the count, as he placed the glazed hat upon his head, and made a movement as though he would shake himself into the strange clothes he had donned.

"Then come. Tread carefully, now, and keep close at my heels, for though the sentries may sleep, yet danger never sleeps in Russia. Come."

Ivan led the way out from the cell, and Ruric followed. The iron door was retlosed and locked, and the serf placed the keys back in his pocket, and as soon as he reached the steps that led up to the entrance door he closed his lantern and hid it beneath his shirt.

"See," whispered the guide, as he pointed to where a dusky form could be seen reclining against the wall, "that fellow dreams not of danger, and I think he sleeps too soundly to dream of anything."

Ruric merely glanced at the sleeping soldier, and without making any reply he hastened on. The prison yard was somewhat wide, but it was traversed in safety, and at the outer gate they met another sleeping sentry. The serf had a key to the wicket, and in a few short moments more, Ruric was in the street. He felt the fresh air of heaven, and it was grateful to him, but a

shudder ran through his soul when he thought that the presence of one of his fellow-men—one with whom he had been wont to associate—could never be enjoyed again beneath the breeze of his native land without danger. But another train of thought ran through his mind—he remembered that he had none of kin in Russia—that he could live at best but in the breeze of favor that might at any moment change into a deadly simoon—and he felt not so much of grief at the separation.

At length they reached a secluded spot near the lower end of the great quay, and here Ivan stopped. At a short distance lay a small lighter-built craft, and Ruric thought he saw one upon her deck. He mentioned the circumstance to his companion, but an assuring nod of the head was the only reply. The serf cast his eyes about him in all directions, and then laying his hand upon the count's arm, he spoke:

"Feodor Ruric, I am your friend. You have no kindred in Russia, and I know that you had better form attachments somewhere else. I can see in your soul what others have only imagined. I can see that you have more of the spirit of republicanism in your soul than would ever be safe here. Nicholas likes brave men, but he wants those men all changed to instruments which he can hold in his own hand. Menzikoff has told him of some of your republican speeches at the festive board, and—"

"My republican speeches!" uttered Ruric, somewhat surprised.

"Yes, for you have spoken them when you knew it not. They are the natural growth of such a heart as yours. You may have thought that you paid all allegiance to the emperor, but yet you never respected the régime under which you have served. Your soul has longed for something more noble than the atmosphere of tyrants and kneeling serfs."

"So it has—so it has," murmured the count, first giving a thought to his own feelings, and gazing with wonder upon the serf who spoke such words of truth. He now knew indeed that Ivan was at least an extraordinary man, he he an occupant of what social sphere he might. "So I have," repeated the young noble. "I have indeed felt how little of true humanity finds a place in the empire."

"I know it," resumed the serf. "I know it well. But time is passing, and you must be off before your escape is discovered. Now you must place yourself wholly under my guidance.

This small vessel is going down the gulf, and she will land you at Kolganp. The captain is a man to be trusted, and he has his orders, and you will find it to your advantage to trust him implicitly."

"But where shall I find a final refuge? I cannot remain at Kolganp."

"Of course not; but the captain will find you a hiding-place there, until he can get you a passage to the Levant. Here is a packet in which you will find full instructions for your future course, and if you hope for peace and happiness hereafter, you will follow them out. Your father, when he lived, once did me a great service, and I will now repay him by being kind to his son. Take the packet, and read it after you have got safely on your way. Come, we will go on board."

Ivan turned towards the small vessel as he spoke, and Ruric followed him. The captain was upon the deck, but it was too dark to distinguish his features. There were one or two men forward, but they could only be seen in outline.

"Ludowitz," said the serf, addressing the commander of the craft, "have you got your sailing permit?"

"Yes. It's all right. I am at liberty to go when I please."

"Good. This is the young man of whom I spoke to you this evening, and if you owe me ought for the kindness I have shown you, you will be faithful in this. Get him the first passage to the Levant you can. His money is safe."

"Yes."

"Ruric," said the serf, turning to the count,

"I have made rather free with your money bags. I went to your house this evening, and obtained four thousand ducats in golden imperials. Our friend Ludowitz has them, and of course they are at your service. Now go. Follow the instructions of the packet, and you shall be happy."

"But one word," exclaimed the count, to whom all this was passing more like a dream than a reality. "When shall I see you again? When shall I know what all this means—the secret of this strange movement?"

"If we both live it shall not be many years, and perhaps not many months. But when we do meet again, I shall come to you. Be faithful to my instructions, and all shall be well. Adieu, now, and may God bless you."

The serf turned, and was gone. Ruric heard his steps as they grew faint in the distance, and when he could hear them no more, he bowed his head upon his hands and sank into a puzzling, wandering mood of thought.

"Don't fear, sir," said Ludowitz, "for I will do the best I can for you. The run to Kolganp will be safe enough, and I think there will be no trouble beyond there. Take heart, sir. I know your trials."

The captain stopped to hear no reply, but turning to his men, whom he had ordered up from below, he proceeded at once to get underway, and ere long the light vessel was making her way out from the mouth of the Neva. Feodor Ruric saw the last dim outlines of the island shore, and then he sought a place of rest, for he was nearly overcome by the fatigue and excitement through which he had passed.

CHAPTER III.

A PRINCE AT HOME.

NICHOLAS of Russia was in one of the rooms of the imperial palace. He had eaten his simple breakfast, and was now engaged in reading the correspondence of some of his ministers. His face was as firm and cold as ice, and his great brow was dark and heavy. Ever and anon he made notes upon the margins of the missives he read, and at such times there would come a slight change over his features, but whether the emotions which gave them birth were of satisfaction or dislike none could have told.

"By the hand of Saint Peter," he muttered to himself, as he moved aside the papers, "I must bring the Turk to his knees. The Euxine is mine, and why should the infidel Moslem hold its keys in his foul hand? Why should my ships have to take the favor of another? Why should not the forts of the Bosphorus wear the cross of Russia upon their flags? O, I hate that crescent. It is the bane of my life!"

The emperor clasped his hands as he spoke, and commenced pacing the room with long, heavy strides. There were towering, dark schemes in his mind. Away in the south lay the golden gate of the east, and the monarch of Russia would plant his power there. He was not content with the dominion of half of Europe. He was in this mood, when he was interrupted by the entrance of the Prince Menzikoff.

"Ah, what now?" the emperor asked, stop-

ping in his walk. "What brings you out in such haste?"

"Bad news, sire," returned Menzikoff, trembling.

"Bad news? Don't come to me with bad news now. I've enough of such already. By my soul, Menzikoff, I've had enough this morning to make me mad. The world is turned upside down, and rank republicanism is running riot. Poor Francis Joseph wants my aid against the insurgent Hungarian, and the wave of rebellion is rolling on. But what came you to tell me?"

"Ruric has escaped."

"The Count Feodor?"

"Yes."

"But he was in prison—in chains—under guard—and you the sponsor?" uttered Nicholas, in quick, excited tones.

"I know it, sire; and I did all my duty; but this morning his cell was found empty. The doors were all locked as usual, but he had gone."

"Then he must be found, or there shall be suffering in his stead. Mark me, Menzikoff—there shall be suffering in his stead. It was you who first discovered his republicanism, and it is you who are responsible."

"But sire," urged the frightened noble—

"Don't stop to waste words, now," sternly

interposed the emperor, "but go and find the fugitive. Has any vessel left the river?"

"One, sire, left sometime during the night."

"Then send our fleetest yacht after her, and send off scouts, too, on the roads. Ruric must be taken, for if rebellion rankles in the heart of our empire, it shall be plucked out, even though half the noble heads should fall. Find him, sir, dead or alive, and in the meantime other matters shall be looked to. I would know how he escaped—there must be treachery somewhere."

"I have been to the prison, sire, and I have made all the inquiry I could. The guard have been arrested, but I can learn nothing save that the prisoner has escaped."

"Well, go and find him, and I will visit the prison myself."

Menzikoff bowed and withdrew, and after he was gone the emperor commenced once more to pace the room.

"I don't know, Menzikoff, exactly what your character is worth," he muttered to himself, with a curious shake of the head. "At all events I shall look after you. I think you care more for my gold than you do for my authority."

Nicholas had begun to doubt the prince; and he had reason, too, to doubt many others; but he kept his own counsel. His eagle eye was open. He knew where his power rested—not in the hearts of his people, but in the iron rule of his own will.

It was in the afternoon that Menzikoff, faint and weary with fatigue and excitement, sat down in one of the apartments of his palace and sent for his serf Ivan. The serf came and asked his master's will. The prince gazed up into the face of his bondman, and a shudder ran through his frame. He almost always felt a strange, secret dread when he found himself in the presence of Ivan, but he could not tell whence it came. The serf had come to him, through a purchase, with an estate, about two years previous, and he was valuable on account of the various talents he possessed—talents which he professed to have gained from a friendly priest.

"Ivan," said the prince, "did you know that the Count Ruric was imprisoned yesterday?"

"Yes, my lord," returned the serf, showing no signs of perturbation.

"And did you know that during last night he escaped?"

"I heard he had escaped, but I hardly gave credit to the story."

"Well, it is true. He has escaped, and he must have had help. Two of the sentinels were found asleep upon their posts at two o'clock this morning, and under such circumstances as leave no doubt that they were drugged with some powerful sleeping potion. Do you not think that you could help me arrive at the mystery of the thing?"

The serf eyed his master most keenly, but he could discover no traces of suspicion in his countenance. His face exhibited only suspense and perplexity.

"I know not what I can do," Ivan replied. "I know nothing of such matters. The soldiers should be the ones to take the track."

"But the soldiers all loved the young fellow, and I hardly think they would catch him if they could. I am afraid he will fully escape, and in such case I know not how much of the emperor's wrath I shall receive. I have sent off two vessels down the gulf in pursuit, and scouts have gone out the other way; but after all, Ruric may be in the city. I think he must be, for he could not have got out so easily. What I want you to do is to look through the city. I know you are keen and witty, and I think you would stand a better chance of succeeding than any one else, for people will not mistrust such a mission in a serf, and consequently the alarm will not be so quickly taken. Ivan, if you will bring Feodor Ruric to me I will give you your liberty. What say you?"

There was a flush upon the face of the serf, and his nether lip trembled, and there was a bright spark in his black eye, too, but his master noticed not his emotion.

"I will look through the city," he said, "but I can have no hopes of success."

"Remember—you shall have your liberty, if you do succeed."

"I will try, though I am not for the present over-anxious about my liberty."

"Ah. I had thought that a person of your intellect would chafe under the restraint of serfdom."

"So perhaps I might were it not that I am well cared for where I am. You, in a measure, are as much the serf as I. You fear the emperor more than I fear you. I have seen it in some English book set down that that man is most wretched who hangs on princes' favors. Have you never found it so?"

Menzikoff looked up and found the serf gazing upon him most intensely, and again he

trembled. There was something in the look that met his own that affected him he knew not how. He could not account for it—he could only know that it was so.

"There could be little use in arguing such a question," the prince at length said, with something of uneasiness in his manner; "though have no doubt that you are in every way qualified to support your side of the question. But go now and commence your search. Find him if you can. Find Ruric and bring him to me, and you shall be amply rewarded."

The serf left the apartment, but Menzikoff little dreamed of the real character of the man to whom he had given his mission.

"Upon my life," said the prince to himself, "there is something about that man that puzzles me. He seems trustworthy, and yet I tremble when I trust him. He is useful to me, but yet I would give him his liberty to be rid of him, for his presence makes me uneasy. If he brings me the count he shall be free whether he wishes it or not. I am determined to have him by me no more."

But Alexander Menzikoff was not to be rid of his serf so easily. He had several times previously made up his mind to the same effect, but his plan had never been carried out. He had found Ivan too valuable to be easily parted with, and he had tried to banish the strange fears that sometimes took possession of him; but he could not do that, though he sometimes fancied that they were all imaginary. But there were other things that sometimes troubled the Prince Menzikoff. He knew that people bowed to him on account of his wealth, but they hated him because of himself. No matter how hard the heart may be, nor how callous to humane emotions; but the soul cannot be thrown into that state where the hatred of good men will not produce a certain degree of misery. Menzikoff tried to live content upon the spirit of reckless disregard of all things that opposed him, but he could not make it work. Conscience would sometimes speak; and then there was one other thing that kept up a loud whispering in his ear—a companion of every tyrannizing coward—

FEAR!—and there the serf had a place.

CHAPTER IV.

A DARK BEGINNING.

FEODOR RURIC found Captain Ludowitz to be a kind, generous-hearted man, and ready to do anything to serve his friends; but he could give little information concerning Ivan, the serf. The count had hoped to find out from the captain something more particular relating to his strange friend, but all he could learn was, that Ivan had once, about a year before, saved Ludowitz from the terrible knout. When daylight broke over the waters of the gulf, the little vessel was well on her way, and during the day she hugged the southern shore, at the same time keeping a good lookout astern. It was not until afternoon that Ruric thought of opening the packet he had received from Ivan. Then he went down into the small cabin and drew it from his bosom. It was contained in a small envelope, and having broken the seal he found a note addressed to himself. It was written with evident haste, but in the pure Slavonic style, and ran as follows:

"FEODOR RURIC,—I have not had time, since I first learned of your sudden arrest and imprisonment, to write much for your future guidance. It may seem strange that I, who am no kin of yours, should thus assume your guidance, but you may rest assured that in so far as you follow my instructions will your after life be happy and peaceful. You must at once make up your

mind to trust me, and the time shall assuredly come when you shall thank me for it. If we both live we shall meet again, but never in Russia. This land is not the place for the home of him who has yearnings above mere serfdom. I know the land of one's birth is sweet, but when one's kindred are all gone, then there must be some tie of soul to the land if we would find joy. But the very atmosphere of our empire is like the food of the Lotophagi.

"In Circassia, for the while, you must find a home. Find a passage as soon as possible for the Black Sea, and make your way at once to Mamai, on the Caucasian coast. There you will find a guide who will conduct you across the mountains to the little hamlet of Stamyl, and when there inquire for the home of Albec. You will find an old man and his daughter there, and they will receive you with open arms when you tell them who you are, and who sent you. In that retreat, upon the banks of the Karakouban, you will find a peaceful home. Live there in content until we meet again, for there I shall come to find you. Obey me in this, and all shall be well. Trust me, for I would serve you. God be with you to the end. IVAN."

Young Ruric pondered long upon the contents of this note. He had no earthly reason to doubt the sincerity of the writer, but he rather

had an innate foreboding that the path thus marked out for him would result in good. Yet it was a ponderous question, and the young count considered upon it for a long while; but he finally made up his mind to follow out Ivan's instructions. The plan had novelty in it, and moreover, there was no other plan to oppose it. Had Ruric entertained any plan of his own forming, his determination might have been different, but as such was not the case, he gave himself up more readily to the guidance of one whom he feared not to trust as a friend.

It was quite dark when the little vessel arrived at the pier in Kolganp, and while she was being examined by the officers, Ruric passed for one of the regular crew, and Ludowitz obtained permission for himself and steward to go up into the town that evening. Accordingly, at about ten o'clock, the young count concealed his money about him, and with his extra clothing all arranged upon his person he followed the captain up from the dock.

"I sha'n't be able to conduct you to a very nice place," said Ludowitz, as they entered a narrow street.

"Never mind that, so long as it is a safe place," returned Feodor.

"It will be safe enough, never fear. You shall remain there to-night, and to-morrow I will come and tell you what chance there is to get away."

At length the guide stopped in front of a low wooden house, and having knocked at the door, he was answered by an old man whose garb showed him to be in humble circumstances. He had a lighted candle in his hand, and casting a shade upon his eyes, he peered out to see who it was that thus disturbed him.

"It's Ludowitz," said the captain, "so don't fear, Malsman."

"Ugh," uttered the host, with a sort of grunt that seemed to issue spontaneously from his great fat paunch. "Any liquors on hand this time?"

"No, no, not now. I've got a friend here who wants safety for the night. He's one of us, and you must shelter him. You shall be paid."

Old Malsman had not before noticed the presence of our hero, but at the representation of Ludowitz he looked kindly upon him, and motioned for them both to follow him into the house. The first apartment was a sort of store in which appeared almost everything for sale which was of no value to anybody but the poor-

est of the poor. But old Malsman did not expose all the goods he had for sale, for there were some things in his line of trade, that he chose not to be questioned about. He bolted the outer door as soon as his guests had passed in, and then led the way to a little back room where there was a coal fire burning in a small portable furnace which stood in a fire-place below the chimney; and, from the few tools which lay about, it was evident that the old man had been engaged in mending old pottery.

"You will bring us some wine," said Ludowitz, as soon as he had taken a seat.

Malsman gave an affirmative grunt, and started off.

"Now," resumed the captain, turning to the count, "you had better let yourself pass while here as a smuggler. Malsman owes much to that class of people, and he will do all in his power to protect one of them. On that point he is fixed. It will do you no harm, and it will help to preserve your real identity. I will tell him that you have escaped from Saint Petersburg, and you may be sure of his help and sympathy. But I am in hopes that you will not have to remain here long."

Ruric made no objections to this, for he felt bound to consult the wishes of those who were assisting him, and when Malsman returned, Ludowitz told him the story as he had planned it. The old huckster regarded the young man very favorably, and promised to do all in his power for him. In the course of half an hour the captain left, but before he went he promised once more to be on hand in good season on the following day. Ruric conversed awhile with his quaint host, and then he signified his desire to retire. The sleeping apartment to which he was shown, was a small attic with a little square gable window.

"Suppose you have your breakfast up here?" said Malsman, as he set the candle upon the table. "You'll be safer up here; and of course you know it's best to be on the safe side."

"Certainly," returned Ruric, rather liking the idea, for in truth he did not want to be exposed to the old man's questioning any more than he could help.

"You shall have breakfast in good season, and when Ludowitz comes, I'll show him up."

When Ruric was left alone he prepared at once to retire. The room was far from being clear, and, under ordinary circumstances, the man must have been weary indeed, to whom

such a place of rest could have been inviting; but our hero found it better than one of the imperial dungeons, and he made himself quite contented as far as the accommodations were concerned. But he did not feel safe. He was a fugitive—not from justice, but from tyranny—and he knew that death awaited him if he were to be detected. He was yet in the realm of the cold-hearted emperor, and he expected not safety until he could reach some other land.

The young count did not sleep until long past midnight, and when he awoke he heard the grunting voice of his host at the door. He could see through his window that the sun was shining upon the tops of the neighboring houses, and leaping out of bed, he put on his clothes as quickly as possible, and then opened the door.

"Seems to me you are late this morning," growled Malsman, as he entered, with a tray in his hands.

"Yes, so I am," returned Ruric, gaping. "I did not sleep till very late, and I was much fatigued."

"But didn't you hear me call you?"

"Yes, and I dressed myself as quickly as possible."

"Dressed yourself? My soul! Why, what sort of a man are you? I should advise you hereafter to sleep with your clothes on. You aint out of danger yet."

"Nothing new, is there?" asked Ruric.

"Not that I know of, only I thought that a man of your profession would keep his eyes open a little wider."

"So I should, only I knew that I was safe so long as you were on the watch."

This bit of flattery had the effect of pleasing the old man, though he felt bound to inform his guest that he could not be entirely safe in Kolganp. He had brought a very decent breakfast upon the tray, and as soon as he had gone, the young man commenced to make way with it. He had hardly finished eating when Ludowitz unceremoniously entered the room. His face was flushed, and he seemed to be in great haste.

"By the saints, Count Ruric, there's danger after us!" the captain exclaimed, as he closed the door behind him and sat down upon the edge of the bed, for he seemed much fatigued.

"Danger?" uttered the youth, starting from his seat. "Have we been discovered?"

"One of the imperial yachts has arrived here from Saint Petersburg, and officers are after you. They traced my vessel here, but I don't

think they'll find her, for I have sent her down to Balki Bay. She was off before daylight. The yacht came in about two o'clock this morning," answered Ludowitz.

"But they will not find me here?" said Ruric, exhibiting much alarm.

"I'm afraid they will," returned Ludowitz, speaking very quickly, and like a man who is used to emergencies. "There have half a dozen officers come down in the yacht, and half the soldiers in town will be on the search before noon."

"But they do not know that I came in your vessel?"

"Yes, I think they do. That diamond upon your finger betrayed you to the officer last night, and the emperor's messengers are on your track. We were seen to enter this street by the very officer who boarded us, and I overheard him giving the particulars to one of the guard. Of course they do not positively know that it was you, but they know that there was a man of your age, height, and complexion on board my vessel, and that he wore a diamond like yours. And they furthermore know that that man was seen in this very street; so of course this house, with all the others about here, will be thoroughly ransacked. You know what powers of penetration these fellows possess?"

"Yes, I know," said Ruric, in a troubled tone. "O, I cannot go back to my death now. I can die—die like a man, for I have faced death a thousand times without a thought of fear; but to die thus—like a criminal—I cannot—indeed I cannot."

"Say you will not," responded Ludowitz, with his teeth firmly closed. "I have brought you thus far, and I will not leave you now. I have sent my vessel down to the Balki, and if we can contrive to join her there, I will keep on to Stockholm. We can procure disguises here, and that done we will set out and make the trial."

Ruric stretched forth his hand and gave his companion a hearty grasp, for this was a friendship that had substance—a friendship that was palpable.

"I will not ask you to risk your life with me," he said, with much emotion, "but I will not reject your offer. I think I should do the same, under like circumstances."

"I told Ivan that I would do all for you that I could, and I will keep my promise. Come, let us go down to Malsman's back shop, and

there we shall find any quantity of clothing. We must make all haste."

The captain led the way down the dark, narrow stairs, and Ruric followed. After descending the second flight they came to a small store-room which was literally crammed with all sorts of second-hand clothing. They had just reached this place, when the fat host came puffing in, in great trepidation.

"Good mercy!" he uttered, with a frightened countenance, "you must make all haste, for the soldiers are after you. You did not tell me that you were—"

"Never mind what he is now," quickly interrupted Ludowitz, "but tell us how near the danger is."

"It's right here—in the street—in the very block next above me," gasped Malsman. "The soldiers have gone in, and they'll be here before long, for there are more coming. You know how I am situated—you know—"

"Yes, I know all about it," said the captain, "but if you would have us gone you must make haste and help us off. You have a peasant's dress of the Luga—two of them."

"Yes, a score of them," answered the host, spinning around like a top.

"Then hand them over quickly, and while we put them on, do you find us two baskets. Come, hurry now."

Malsman pulled out the clothes that were wanted, and poor enough they were, but they answered every purpose. Ruric was somewhat nervous, for the situation was one entirely new to him—that of fleeing from Russian soldiers. Yet he was cool in his purpose, and ere many minutes both he and his companion were arrayed

as the poor peasants of the Luga—sandals, shirts, caps, and all; and by the time they were dressed, Malsman had procured the baskets.

"Now," said Ludowitz, "we are almost ready. Take off that ring, and then brown your face and hands with this dirt. — So, that's it. These short swords we can conceal beneath our shirts, and also these pistols. We may need them. Now shoulder your basket—don't be awkward, and don't appear in a hurry. I will settle with you, Malsman, when we meet again," he added.

"If I see you again alive," groaned the host, with a shudder.

But the fugitives did not stop to reply. Ludowitz walked firmly to the outer door, and passed out into the street, followed closely by the count.

"See! there are the soldiers coming this way. Be firm, now, and follow me."

And so, with a quickly beating heart, the Count Ruric started forth. He did not dare to turn, for he could hear the voices of those who sought him, and one of them he recognized as that of an officer from the capital whom he knew.

"Ha," uttered Ludowitz, "they have gone into Malsman's. We escaped in time, from there, at least. How is your heart, Ruric?" he earnestly inquired.

"Firm," replied the count.

"Then keep it so, for we shall most assuredly be followed. Here comes a gang of soldiers to meet us. Bow your head and shade your face with your basket, and step slow and clumsily. We must be witty now, for strength of arm will not avail us."

CHAPTER V.

TRIALS FOR LIBERTY.

Ruric was not unmindful of how much might depend upon the proper management of the character he had assumed, and he did all in his power to appear the clumsy peasant he would have people take him for. He saw the party of soldiers that were approaching him, and his heart beat quick as he saw that one of the officers from the capital accompanied them. He knew that officer.

"Let us cross over," he whispered to Ludowitz. "There is one with those soldiers who knows me. If he should recognize me we are surely lost."

"No, no," said the captain. "Hide your face all you can, and keep boldly on. They may suspect us if we evade them. If they speak to us I will answer them. I have been in such passes before, and I know something of them."

By this time the soldiers were close at hand, and the fugitives turned out to let them pass. Ruric bowed his head and drew his great basket forward. His heart may have beat painfully, but he showed no outward tremor. They met—and they had passed—and then the officer turned and hailed them.

"Stop, there, fellows," he cried. "Have you seen any soldiers about here?"

"Yes," returned Ludowitz, with a strong Pakovian idiom, "we saw some about here, and

they went into an old huckster's shop some way up on this side of the street. They seemed to be in a terrible hurry—what are they after?"

"No matter. But hold, perhaps you may know something."

And thereupon the officer described Ruric's appearance very minutely, and then asked the seeming peasant if he had seen such a person.

"No," said Ludowitz. "We came in before daylight this morning, and I am sure we didn't meet any body on the road. But I hope you'll catch him, for I don't like to see the proud ones escape and the poor ones die."

During this colloquy the count had stood with his dirt-begrimmed face turned towards part of the soldiers, but carefully hidden from the officer. He came nigh exposing himself when his person was being so minutely described, for it appeared to him that those who were looking upon him must see through his disguise; but he was not suspected, and ere long he was once more on his way down the street, with his companion close by his side.

At length they turned off into a narrow passage-way, and there they started into a brisker pace. They met many persons, but no more soldiers, and in half an hour they were clear of

the town, and had struck into a road that led to the westward across the Yamburg marshes.

"Now," said Ludowitz, "we have a fair road before us, and it is not more than ten miles to the Balki. If we are not followed all will be well."

"Let us throw aside our baskets," suggested Ruric, "for mine is more of a burden than I find comfortable."

"Wait till we reach yonder stream," returned Ludowitz, "and then we will sink them. There may be danger in leaving them by the road-side, for we know not how soon we may be followed."

Accordingly, when they came to the stream, they procured some stones and sank their baskets, and then they moved on more easily. At the distance of about five miles they came to a spot where the road wound around the foot of quite a hill, and upon this hill stood a windmill. The fugitives had joined the western side of the hill, and were thinking of stopping a few moments to rest, when they were startled by the sound of horses' hoofs behind them. From the tread they could tell that there were a number of them coming, though they were yet at some distance.

"They must be after us," said Ruric, stopping and listening to the sound.

"It may be so, and it may not," returned Ludowitz; "but I think it most probable that we have been suspected. At all events we had better seek some place of refuge."

The road, after it swept away from the foot of the hill, was built for more than two miles over a low, quick marsh, so that to keep on in that direction, was out of the question. The only place of an available kind was the mill, and thither the fugitives quickly turned their steps. It was a stone building as far as the tower, and combined the mill and dwelling all under one roof. The mill was now in motion, and hurrying up the hill, Ludowitz entered just as the horsemen appeared at the bend of the road.

"In, in quick!" he cried out to Ruric, "or we shall be seen."

But the warning was of no use, for the pursuers had stopped and were gazing up at the mill, and they must have seen the fugitives ere they got into the building. There were two outer doors to the building, one that led to the mill-room, and at which the disguised men had just entered, and the other at the back side of the dwelling department. The miller was a small, middle-aged man, and he was not a little sur-

prised at the sudden appearance of the two fleeing peasantry.

"Hark ye," uttered Ludowitz, addressing the startled man, "if you value your life, don't you make a movement to oppose us. Only keep quiet, and you shall not be harmed."

The poor fellow was too much frightened to offer any resistance, and without waiting to hear if he would make any reply, Ludowitz sprang towards the back door to bolt it, at the same time directing Ruric to fasten the door of the mill-room. The captain found an old woman and a boy in the kitchen, but he quieted their fears as well as he could, and by the time he had returned to the mill, the soldiers were at the door. They knocked and demanded admittance in the name of the emperor.

"I will speak to them," said Ludowitz, turning to Ruric with a deep expression of countenance; "but before I do so, I wish to know your mind. Are you determined to stand by your liberty?"

"I have been most unjustly condemned to death," returned the count, with a flashing eye, "and I have, with the help of yourself and Ivan, thus far escaped the power of the imperial lion. I shall not allow him to place his claws upon me again. If I am carried back to St. Petersburg, it will be my dead body they shall carry. I am ready to defend myself, Ludowitz, to the last drop of my blood."

"Good," uttered the captain, extending his hand, "and you shall find that I will stand by you. Now let's go up stairs, and I will see what's to be done."

The miller was kept quiet by being made to feel that his life would answer for his conduct, and he was directed to bring the woman and child into the mill and keep them there. After this the two fugitives went up into the loft back of the tower, where there was a small square window that overlooked the spot upon which the horsemen stood. Ludowitz looked out at this window and asked what was wanted.

"We want the two peasants that left Kolganp this morning, one of whom we believe to be the Count Feodor Ruric, and the other the captain of the vessel that brought him from St. Petersburg," was the answer of the officer who led the party, which consisted in all of five men.

"Ah, that's the very chap," cried one of the soldiers. "That's the very one we spoke with this morning. Of course the other one must be with him."

"Hark ye, fellow," resumed the officer, "we are after you with an order direct from the emperor. Will you deliver yourselves up, or shall we have to resort to force?"

"Now, hark ye," returned Ludowitz, in a firm, defiant tone, "whoever we be—for there are two of us—if you want us you must take us; but yet I should advise you to turn about and go back, for I tell ye now, we are determined to lose our lives before we lose our liberty."

"Come down, and open the door quickly, or we'll burst it open, and, dead or alive, you are ours. Down, I say, or the worst shall be your own."

"Stand ready, count," whispered Ludowitz, "for the pinch has come. They will force the door easily if they try. Cock your pistols, and stand by to take my place."

As the captain spoke, he turned once more to the window and looked out.

"Are you going to surrender?" asked the officer.

"This is my answer," returned Ludowitz, and as he spoke he aimed his pistol and fired. The aim was sure, and the officer reeled in his saddle. Another pistol was as quickly and as truly aimed, and a second soldier fell from his saddle.

Ludowitz had to drop his head now, for the three remaining men had drawn their own firearms, and two pistol-balls came whizzing through the window. After this, everything was quiet for a few moments, and then the voices of the soldiers could be heard. They were going to enter by the house window.

"Quick, quick!" whispered Ludowitz, who had had time to reload but one of his pistols. "Let's make for the window, and we'll shoot them as they come."

So the fugitives started at once for the dwelling, where they arrived just as one of the soldiers had beaten open the sash, and was putting his head through. Ruric took his turn now, and with an unerring aim he sent a ball through the fellow's brain. On the next instant Ludowitz sprang forward. He felt sure that he should find a mark for his pistol when he reached the window, and he was not mistaken. He fired and then sprang back, and the movement was so sudden and adroitly made that those upon the outside had no chance to either defend themselves or take revenge.

"We have but one left now," cried Ruric,

drawing his second pistol. "Let's open the door and go out."

"Come on," returned the other. "By the fates, fortune favors us. Every shot has told. What a glorious fortress this old mill makes."

The door—the mill-door—was unbarred, and Ludowitz looked out just as the live soldier had mounted and was making off.

"Fire at him if you like."

"No," returned Ruric. "Let the poor fellow go. I would not shed blood unnecessarily. He cannot return to Kolganp in time to send any more pursuers after us, for we shall have horses now."

"Right," responded Ludowitz. "Two of these horses will carry us to the Balki in less than half an hour, if we put them to it."

Then turning to the trembling miller, he added:

"You must excuse us for the liberty we have taken with your place, but men in our situation have no choice. But here is a golden imperial. That's more than you can make here in a month, at grinding corn. You must make the best excuse you can to the officers, if they come here after us."

"O mercy," cried the affrighted man, with his hands clasped, "they will swear that I helped you, and then I shall be hanged."

"But you must tell them that you didn't help us."

"And then they won't believe me. O do me one more favor before you go. Lash the old woman into a chair, and tie my hands behind me. I'll tell them you did it, and then they'll believe me."

Both Ludowitz and Ruric smiled at this proposition, but it was by no means a bad one, and they hastened to carry it out. Both the miller and the woman were securely bound, and as the child was not old enough to help them, he was left free. The bodies of the dead soldiers were left where they had fallen, and having secured two of the horses the fugitives mounted and set off at a gallop. It was just about noon when they reached the little bay of Balki, and there they found the schooner safely riding at single anchor. The horses were set at liberty, and ere long Ludowitz once more stood upon the deck of his own vessel, with the count by his side.

"Now for a breeze to carry us out of this," uttered the captain, as he placed his hand upon the wheel and looked around upon the crew.

"If we can only run clear of the imperial vessels till dark, I'll ask no more. To the windlass, now, all hands, and heave that anchor up as though there was a life at stake in every turn."

In less than half an hour the little vessel was walking out from the bay as though she knew the wish that lay in her commander's soul, and with a fresh breeze from the eastward she leaped off towards the Baltic like a bird. Ruric stood by the taffrail and watched the receding shore, and he had plenty of material for reflection. He thought of the strife through which he had just passed, and of the cause in which it had occurred, and he felt that in all that had transpired, he had no cause to blame himself. His soul was all honor, and yet he felt not that he had cast any stain upon the name he bore. The

land grew faint and dim, and at length it mingled with the sky, until the horizon showed nothing but a line of water upon which to rest. Was that the last of Russia? Should he never again see the land of his birth? Such were the questions that arose in his mind as he gazed off to where he had seen the last of his native shores, and if there was one thought to give him pain, it was that he was leaving the spot where reposed the bones of his earthly kin. But his thoughts were not long to remain fixed upon the point he had left in the past, for there was before him a theme of vast moment, and when at length he turned towards the west, he gave his thoughts up to that subject which involved the time to come—that time through which it seemed that fate alone was to guide him, and in which happiness could only lay in hope.

CHAPTER VI.

AN ADVENTURE.

On the morning of the third day the little vessel reached Stockholm, and there Ruric was fortunate enough to find a ship bound for Toulon, and in this he secured a passage. When he came to bid Ludowitz farewell his heart was tried to its utmost, for he had formed for the noble-hearted captain a tender and lasting attachment. That seemed to be the last tie, and it surely gave the most pain in severing. The young count had seen all his effects safely conveyed on board the ship, and the order had already been passed for manning the windlass-bars. Ruric held his friend by the hand.

"Ludowitz," he said, with tears in his eyes, "I must leave you now. I am going I hardly know whither, but be it wheresoever it may, my heart shall never lose the grateful love you have planted there. There are a few things on earth I shall ever hold in the most holy remembrance, and the friendship you have shown me is one of them. We may never meet again, for you know that the portals of my native home are shut against me."

"And we may meet again," said Ludowitz, with moistened eyes. "Russia is no more a home for me than it is for you. I hope we shall meet again, for I think I could find happiness in the society of such as you. But that is beyond our ken. If we should meet again it will be a

happy meeting for me. I have done all now in my power—all that I promised—and I must bid you adieu. God help you safely to your journey's end!"

Ruric returned the warm grasp, but he did not speak. Ludowitz, however, saw in his tears the full sentence that lay in his heart, and he knew that he had one friend upon earth at least. And without speaking further they separated. Ludowitz descended to his boat and pulled away towards the city, and Ruric watched him until he was lost to sight amongst the distant ship-ping.

In a short time the ship was on her course down the Baltic, and our hero began to feel that he was safe. It was fortunate for him that he had this point upon which his thoughts could so favorably turn, for otherwise all might have been dark and dreary upon the trackless way he was pursuing; but the thought that he was safe from a tyrant's power—that the sword of death was stayed—made a light spot in his soul, and in the midst of gloomy recollections he could fall back here for relief.

Time passed on. Days lengthened into weeks, and the weeks became months. Toulon was reached in safety, and from thence Ruric took a steamer for Tripoli, and from thence he easily found a passage to Constantinople. He had only

to wait a week at the Turkish capital before he found a small vessel bound for Mamai, and in this he took passage. At Mamai he had to wait some time before he could find a guide to take him across the mountains, but he at length succeeded in finding one who knew where the hamlet of Stamyl was, and who was willing to conduct him over the rugged passes of the Caucasus. Mules were procured for the journey, and when all was ready our hero set out on his rough passage. His guide was a Circassian named Lafal, a stout, good-natured fellow, about thirty years of age. It was early in the morning when they set out, and late in the evening they reached a stopping-place at the foot of the mountains. There were no buildings there, but it was a delightful valley through which ran a small mountain stream, and here travellers were wont to pitch their tents if they were so fortunate as to have any; but our two friends were not burdened with any such luggage, so they sought a place where they could sleep comfortably beneath their blankets.

The moon was up, and Ruric left his guide by the blankets while he went to take a stroll through the valley, for he felt not like sleep. His spirits were somewhat heavy, heavier than they had been for a long while, and the hour and the scene were congenial with his soul. He extended his walk towards the upper end of the valley, and at length he saw, at some distance ahead, a white tent upon which the silver moonbeams were resting. Curiosity in part, and in part an inclination which had no definable point, led him to approach it. As he came nearer he saw three mules feeding near by, and he thought he saw two men just disappearing around a clump of olives that grew near the stream. Slowly he moved on, and his thoughts were busy with that strangely opening life-way that lay before him, when he was startled by hearing a sharp, quick cry that seemed to come from the tent. He stopped to listen, and in a moment he heard it again. It was surely the voice of a female, and that, too, as of one in distress. He did not stop to consider—he did not wait to reflect upon the circumstance—but with the impulse of a soul that was always open for the distressed, he bounded quickly forward. He reached the entrance to the tent, and by the light of a lamp which hung from the pole he saw a female struggling in the grasp of a powerful man. As before Ruric did not take time to consider, but seizing one of his pistols by the muzzle he leaped

forward and dealt the ruffian a blow upon the head that sank him upon the earth.

"Who are you, and what means this?" asked the count, as he turned from the prostrate man to the trembling female.

"O, mercy! mercy!" she ejaculated, with clasped hands. "Save me, save me, sir, and you shall be blessed."

"But what does all this mean? Who is this man?"

"He is one of those who tore me away from my home. They tore me away from the side of my poor sick father, and they will carry me to the sea-coast and sell me. O, can you not save me?"

"Yes. But where are your other captors?"

"They went out a few moments since, sir—there were but two more of them—and when they had gone I thought to make my escape. They will be back shortly. Let me go with you from here?"

Ruric began to think that he might have taken some serious business upon his hands, but it was not in his nature to retract now. As near as he could see by the imperfect light of the lamp, the female was young and beautiful, and all his sympathies were enlisted in her behalf. He went up to where lay the man whom he had felled, and he found him to be evidently a Cossack. The fellow had not moved, though life was by no means extinct.

"Come, lady," said the young count, turning to the female and extending his hand, "you had better follow me, and I will do all for you that I can. I have a companion at a short distance, and I think he will stand by me."

The fair being sprang to Ruric's side on the instant, and took his hand.

"Let us hasten," she cried, "for the others will be back shortly. O, I hope you can save me, or at least let me die."

"They shall not take you while I live," was Ruric's reply, as he passed out from the tent. "Come with me, and if there are not more than two or three to combat, you need have little fear."

The girl trembled violently, and with a murmur of thanks she walked on by the count's side. When they reached the spot where the blankets had been spread, Ruric aroused his guide and explained to him what had transpired.

"Eh?" uttered Lafal, starting to his feet and rubbing his eyes. "But do you mean to say

that they stole you, lady? Did they take you without paying them that owned you?"

"Owned me?" uttered the girl, with a startling accent. "I am not serf-born. I am as free by birth as the mountain stream that runs at our feet. My poor old father lay sick and helpless, and these wicked men came at night and stole me away. They bound my mouth so that I should not cry, and then they bore me off."

"But who were they that seized you?" asked Lafal, showing by his manner that he was interested.

"They were three men—three Black Sea Cossacks."

"Ah, I know them well, and they are three great villains. I have thought they stole women when they could not buy them, for I have met them in the mountains with women who were trying to escape. They bring a good many such to Mamai."

"And will you stand by me in her defence?" asked Ruric.

"Certainly I will," returned Lafal. "By the beard of the Prophet, the villains can't have her now, if she says so."

"And you will defend her even to the death?"

"Certainly," answered Lafal, with the air of a man whose mind is not only quickly made up, but who follows that mind with his whole energy. "There is no other way with these fellows. I know them well, and it's either life or death with them, and so it must be with us."

Both Ruric and his guide were satisfied that the girl had been wrongfully taken away from her home, and accordingly they were determined to protect her. The blankets were spread in a suitable place, and she was directed to lie down on them, and after this the two men set themselves upon the watch, for they had no doubt that the Cossacks would soon be after their lost treasure.

"I suppose you see a great number of women sold who are perfectly willing to go," said Ruric, while they watched for the safety of their charge.

"O, bless you, yes. I believe that half the lower Circassians would sell their daughters tonight, if they could get a good price for them; and the girls, poor things, would jump at the chance, for they think that they will be taken into the harem of a Grand Vizier at least, and she who is confident of her beauty looks for nothing short of the Seraglio. But there are

some who go not so willingly; and some, I know, are forced away from their homes, for I have seen them landed at Mamai when I knew that they would rather die than go. But most of them are eager to change the rough hills of Circassia for the sumptuous couches of the Ottoman."

Ruric was pondering upon what he had heard when he was touched by his companion, whose experienced ear had caught the sound of approaching footsteps, and in a few seconds afterwards three men were seen hurrying down towards them.

"Let me speak with them first," said Lafal, "but do you stand in readiness. Don't be afraid of your pistols, for they are savage fellows."

By this time the three Cossacks had come so near that their faces could be seen by the moonlight, and Lafal hailed them, and asked them what they wanted.

"We want a girl who has escaped from us," returned one of them. "Have you seen her?"

"Yes. She is here, and under our protection. You have stolen her, and you cannot have her."

"Ah, Lafal, I know you. You are the Caucasian guide. We want the girl."

"If you know me, you know that I will not break my word; and I know you, too, for great villains. You cannot have the girl."

The Cossacks conversed together for a few moments, and at length they all three drew their swords.

"Look out!" whispered Lafal, turning towards Ruric. "When they come they will come with a rush. They are like wild boars in a fight. A steady aim will be our only hope."

Hardly had the guide ceased speaking, when one of the Cossacks uttered a loud yell, and on the instant they bounded forward. Ruric took a deliberate aim and fired, and so did the guide. Ruric's man staggered and fell, but the one at which Lafal had aimed kept on. Two more pistols were fired, and at the second shot Lafal brought his man to the ground; but the third man was unharmed, and with a yell of defiance he sprang upon the guide, and would most assuredly have overcome him, had not the count come to his assistance. The Cossack was a most powerful man, and as Lafal closed with him he could not use his sword to advantage, but he brought down the pommel with such force upon the guide's skull as to settle him upon the ground; but it was his last blow, for in another

second Ruric's sword had passed through the Cossack's body.

The blow Lafal had received had made him somewhat dizzy for the time, but he soon overcame it and sprang to his feet.

"They are gone," said Ruric, as he noticed his companion place his hand on his sword-hilt.

"Good," uttered the Caucasian, as soon as he comprehended the truth. "I am glad neither of them escaped, for he would have sought revenge while he lived. Now let us down and sleep, and in the morning we will pull the carcasses up out of the way."

Ruric would have attached more importance to the presence of the dead Cossacks, but the coolness of the guide was contagious, and he let them rest where they had fallen. The fears of the maiden had been quieted, and having moved

to a respectful distance, both the count and his companion lay down to sleep.

This was a strange beginning for the young Russian's entrance upon the soil of his new home, but it possessed the charm of excitement, and it had called into life the nobler impulses of his nature. He did not think of those he had slain, but he thought of the innocent being he had saved from a cruel fate, and of the power of evil he had helped to crush, and in his soul he felt that he had done but his duty. The stars of heaven looked down upon him with their twinkling eyes of light, and the moon threw its silver sheen about him, and thus he slept, and sleeping, he dreamed, but he did not dream of the real spirit he had called up for the future, nor of the new thread he had begun to weave into his warp of life.

CHAPTER VII.

THE EMPEROR AND THE SERF.

On the very same day that the Count Feodor Ruric had travelled from Mamai to the foot of the Caucasus, Nicholas of Russia had travelled from Dolgovka to St. Petersburg. It was late in the evening when the emperor reached his palace, and he went at once to one of his private rooms where a warm fire had been kept for his coming, for the season was early spring, and the air had been cool and sharp. As soon as he had thrown off his extra garments he ordered a light supper, and while he ate it he seemed to be revolving over in his mind some matter of more than ordinary moment. There were plenty of circumstances in the political horizon of Europe which were calculated to make the mighty emperor uneasy. Hungary had indeed been crushed beneath the heel of the Austrian and the Russian combined, but the spirit of the people was not dead. There were breathings of liberty which reached even the autocrat himself; and in more than one plan had he been foiled. He had finished his supper, and was waited upon by one of his confidential secretaries.

"Poscovitz," said the emperor, through his firmly clenched teeth, "have you heard the news?"

"The news, sire?" repeated the secretary, interrogatively.

"Yes—the news. Have you heard what an

answer I have received from the infidel Saracen, from the Sultan of Turkey?"

"Yes, sire—I have heard that he refuses to give up the Hungarian refugees."

"Ay—so he does—so he does, Poscovitz," exclaimed Nicholas, starting up from his seat and pacing the room savagely. "Ay, the sultan refuses me—me, Nicholas of Russia. I have sent to him for the rebel dogs who have fled to his dominions, and he will not give them to me. There's that foul, rank rebel, Ludwig Kossuth—the very hydra of rebellion—in whose brain the maggots of republicanism breed most thickly—and who would give his life to see our thrones all crushed—he is safe in Turkey, and the sultan throws the protection of his arm over him."

"It's high-handed, sire, and bold," said the secretary, wishing to say something, and yet not daring to express any extended opinion until he knew more of the mind of his master.

"Bold, say you? Ay, so 'tis bold!" returned Nicholas; "but, by the eternal fountain of our holy church, I'll make that young sultan tremble on his throne. The sacred sword of Osman shall not save him. *Boy!* Does he think to beard me thus, and go unscathed? I tell you, Poscovitz, the time shall come when his cheek shall blanch at the sound of my name. From the Danube to the Bosphorus is but a

step for me! Let him beware, or I will take it! There must be a crushing of this spirit, for 'tis taking root most wondrously. By mine inmost soul I think both England and America smile to see me thus turned back from my prey. But I'll heel them yet—ay, with an iron heel!"

Nicholas ground his heavy heel upon the floor as he spoke, and his eyes seemed to flash sparks of living fire. His massive breast heaved like a laboring mountain, and his hands were clasped with an iron grip. For some time he walked up and down the room without speaking, and at length he became more calm, for his mind had turned upon a subject that lay nearer within the sphere of his immediate power.

"Poscovitz," he said, stopping and seating himself, "what have you seen, or heard, of the Prince Menzikoff?"

"Well, sire," returned the secretary, resuming the wonted ease from which his imperial master's ebullition had thrown him, "I have gained some intelligence, and I think the prince deceives you."

"Ah-h," uttered the emperor, with a long, significant accent. "Can you tell me how?"

"I think in many ways. He is much more wealthy than you suppose. He has many thousands of ducats of which he has given no account, and he has deceived you with respect to many whom you have punished at his instigation."

"I should like to have ocular proof of this," said Nicholas, speaking half to himself.

"I have found a way in which I think you may succeed fully," returned the secretary. "There lives with the prince a serf, called Ivan, a fellow well skilled in engineering, and who enjoys much of Menzikoff's confidence. He has access to much of his master's private business, and might, I think, be used to advantage."

"I have heard of this serf," remarked the emperor, "and I have a curiosity to see him. How came the prince by him?"

"He belonged, I believe, on one of the estates of Basilowitz, and a year or two since he requested to be brought to the city, and Menzikoff complied."

"And do you think he can be trusted?"

"I am confident of it, sire, for I know that he does not love his master much, though he helps him."

"Then send the serf to me. Let him come to-morrow early."

"I will see him if I can."

"But don't startle the prince."

"No, sire, I will look out for that."

The secretary withdrew, and when the emperor was left alone, he set himself down to the work which he trusted not to secretaries or ministers, and there he worked until after midnight. On the following morning, while he sat in the same apartment, he received a message informing him that there was a serf without who would speak with him. He gave an order for his immediate admittance, and shortly afterwards Ivan entered.

"Ah, who are you?" uttered Nicholas, as he beheld the form and features of the visitor.

"Ivan, the serf," was the reply.

The emperor arose from his chair, and advanced a step, and for a full minute he gazed upon the man without speaking. He seemed to take in every line of feature with his eagle eye, and he manifested some little signs of incredulity.

"Are you Menzikoff's serf?" he at length asked, very slowly and meaningly.

"Yes, sire. Menzikoff is at present my master."

"And do you like him?"

"Do you mean the master, or the man?"

"I mean the man," returned Nicholas, with a slight start.

"Then I may not too boldly judge of one of your imperial majesty's most powerful nobles. If you wish for light on the subject I might collect proof for you, and then let you form your own opinions."

The emperor sat down again in his chair, and leaning his brow upon his hand he seemed to meditate, and yet a close observer could have seen that one eye rested keenly upon the face of his visitor. Whether Ivan noticed the scrutiny of which he was the subject, or not, he did not allow it to move him, for he stood there and looked steadily upon the reclining autocrat. After a while Nicholas started up, and with his whole face changed as if by magic, he said:

"Go you and watch Menzikoff most narrowly; for I think he aims to imitate his illustrious namesake—the pastry-cook's errand boy of Catharine's brief reign. You have heard how that cook's boy became prime minister and ruled the nobles, eh?"

"Yes, sire. I have heard the story; but I think that Menzikoff did honor to the station he held."

"So he did—so he did. But let that pass. More than a century has rolled away since then, and our nobles are not fond of going back so far

after illustrious examples. And now for this present Menzikoff—will you watch him narrowly, and bring me the proof of which you speak?"

"Yes, sire," returned Ivan, with a slight show of uneasiness in his manner. He saw how the emperor's manner had changed, and he knew not what might have been suspected. "Yes, sire," he repeated, "I will do all I can, though I cannot tell how long it may take me to do the work."

"All I can ask is, that you will do it as soon as possible, for I have enemies enough abroad without having them at home. Set about your work at once, and prosecute it with all vigor. I will trust you."

"I will do so, sire; and I can do it the better now that I have your sanction."

"Ah, then you have thought of this thing before?" uttered Nicholas, with a sort of intelligent smile breaking over his bronzed features.

"Yes, sire, I have," returned the serf, having now fully recovered his composure, even though he saw that the emperor's suspicions were now fully aroused.

"Well, well, go and prosecute it, and let me know the result. I would know the whole of Menzikoff's character. My eyes are open, and I shall not be long in seeing."

Ivan turned away from the imperial presence, and as he went forth into the street his step was slow and his head was bowed, for there were mighty emotions at work in his soul. So powerful were they that they even forced a glistening teardrop to his dark eye.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DISCOVERY.

WHEN Ruric awoke from his sleep the sun was shining into the valley, and his companions were already astir. Lafal was arranging the mules, and the maiden who had been rescued from the Cossacks was coming up from the brook. The blush of the morning was upon her cheek, and the softening tints of gratitude were upon her features. The count started as he saw her—the same as he would have started had he seen a spirit from the celestial home. She was the most beautiful creature upon whom his eyes had ever rested. Her form was light and graceful, possessing a sort of ethereal lightness in its motions, and its turnings were as faultless as the form of the bow that rests in the heavens. In feature she was lovely beyond comparison. Her hair, which was of a golden hue, waved itself into massy ringlets, and its glossy curls danced upon shoulders as pure in their whiteness as the untrodden snow. She could not have seen her twentieth year, though her form seemed fully and healthfully developed. Ruric did not wonder that she should have been the prey of wicked traders—he only wondered that she could be so beautiful.

The maiden came forward, and though she blushed beneath the admiring gaze of the youthful count, yet she greeted him with frankness, and smiled upon him while she spoke. Her

voice was as sweet as were her looks, and our hero felt himself enwrapped by an emotion that seemed to lift his soul up from its wonted sphere. But he was soon called from the enchanting presence by the guide, who wanted help in disposing of the bodies of the Cossacks.

"We'll pull them up here among the olives," said Lafal, "and if they are here on my return, I will see that they are buried."

"But we might bury them now," suggested Ruric, whose ideas were of revolt at the thought of leaving the corpses exposed.

"It would take too long," returned the guide, "for we have nothing at hand with which to dig, and we are already late. We must reach the eastern valleys to-night, or we shall have to camp on the mountains. I will attend to them when I come back, so give yourself no uneasiness. What money they have I will turn over to the prince, and you may be sure that that will stop all questions."

Accordingly the count helped his guide to move the bodies up out of the way, and then they went to fix one of the Cossacks' mules for the maiden. They selected the one which they supposed would be the easiest and most gentle, and having arranged the saddle the girl was assisted to her seat. She assured her friends that she was used to riding, and that they need be

under no apprehensions on her account. With matters thus arranged they set out, Lafal taking the lead, and Ruric and the maiden following side by side. The way soon became rugged and tortuous, now winding through a deep ravine, anon upon the summit of some rocky swell, and then upon the edge of a chasm whose depths were lost in the gloom of distance. It was a wild, thrilling passage, but the guide sang as he lay back carelessly upon his mule, and his followers naturally imbibed some of his ease and assurance.

At length, towards noon, they came to a place where there was an easy, gradual ascent of some miles in extent, which wound around the foot of a giant peak of the mountains, and for the first time since the mountain path had been taken Ruric rode perfectly free from care. The maiden was by his side, but thus far he had said nothing to her, save to pass an occasional remark upon the various scenes as they were passed. He had wished to speak—he had wished to converse—to find out who she was, and whither she would be conducted, but there was about her such a halo of maidenly modesty—such an atmosphere of holy purity, that he feared the charm would be dispelled were he to break through it.

"You are used to these mountain passes?" he at length said, while a strange fluttering of the heart told him that his captivity was near at hand if he ventured much nearer to the fount of loveliness that had so strangely sprang up by his side, for the erotic darts were already flying thick about him.

"Yes, from earliest childhood," returned the maiden.

"Then you were born in Circassia?"

"Yes. These mountains have been my playground. My home is on the Kuban border, upon the banks of the Karakouban. But perhaps you are a stranger here?"

She spoke with a most winning grace and frankness, like one whose shield is virtue, and whose buckler is truth itself; and then she wore a smile upon her features while she spoke—not a light, trivial smile, such as comes from the surface of a passing thought, but a noble, generous smile, such as comes from a grateful heart.

"I am a stranger here, lady," the count replied, "and in all the country I know no one by name save our guide. Might I know yours?"

"I am called Myrrha, sir—so your knowledge of the land is already extending."

"Ay, to a knowledge of its beauties, certainly," said Ruric, now perfectly enchanted.

The maiden's eyes dropped for a moment, but she quickly raised them again, and seeming not to have noticed the gentle bit of flattery which her companion's words had conveyed, she said:

"I am sure you must be a Russian?"

"I am."

"Then I must confess that I have been somewhat mistaken," she resumed, gazing up into the handsome face of the count, "for I had thought that the Russians were all savage and morose—that they were more like beasts of prey than like human beings."

"Ah, lady, if my appearance has dispelled that illusion, then for the sake of my native land I am glad that I have met you. No, no, all my countrymen are not what you have thought."

"Alas, but they bear that name," said the girl, in a very low tone, and with a sad motion of the head. "The Russian government is savage enough. Your emperor has long tried to place his foot upon the necks of my people. The Caucasian valleys are all spotted with blood which the Russian has spilled here, and many a seared and blackened spot can I show you where the fire of the tyrant has swept away our hamlets. They tell me your emperor's name is Nicholas."

"Yes," returned Ruric, in a whisper.

"Ah, he may enjoy his ambition now, but the time must come when a Monarch mightier than he will have to be answered. Excuse me, sir, for this, for perhaps you love your emperor."

"I am escaped from his deadly power, lady. He would have put me to death had I staid in his capital."

"Put you to death?" repeated the maiden, with a sudden start. "But surely you could have done nothing to merit death."

"Nothing of which I could ever repent. I had charge of the guard of the prison, and within the walls was an old man condemned to death. That old man's daughter came to me and begged of me to see her father before he died. She fell upon her knees and wept till her tears rolled upon my feet. I could not refuse her, and I sent her in. She exchanged clothes with her father, and he escaped."

"And for that act of kindness you were condemned?" said the maiden, with a shudder.

"Yes. He was a rebel, and my orders were

strict. But I escaped with the aid of a friend, and for the present I have come to make Circassia my home, for henceforth Russia can be no more to me."

The count spoke in a low tone, and there was a tinge of melancholy in his manner. After a few moments of thought, during which the events of the past whirled like flashes through his mind, he looked up into the face of his companion and found that she, too, looked sad and downcast. Perhaps it was sympathy that made her so. At any rate that was the idea which entered his mind, and in a moment all thoughts of the past had vanished.

"You said your home was upon the banks of the Karakouban?" resumed Ruric, after a silence of some minutes.

"Yes," returned Myrrha, starting out from the reverie into which she had fallen.

"I expect to find a home near there, for so I have been directed."

That was surely a look of gratification which danced upon the maiden's features as she heard this. The count saw it, and he felt another thrill at his heart.

"It is a beautiful spot," she said; "and for many years the Russians have not molested us there. I think you might be safe."

"I go to the hamlet of Stamyl," resumed Ruric.

"Ah, to Stamyl's village!" uttered Myrrha, with a look of surprise mingled with pleasure.

"Yes. I am to find an old man named Albec, and beneath his roof I expect to — Ah, you do not ride easy. You are not well."

"It's nothing—nothing, sir," said the fair maiden, quickly overcoming the strange emotion which had seized her. "Only the coincidence is remarkable. Albec is my father."

It was remarkable, and so powerful was the effect upon Ruric, that it was some moments ere he could speak.

"I was sent hither," he said, "by a man named Ivan. Do you know him?"

"Ah, dear, good Ivan!" ejaculated Myrrha, with moistened eyes. "I remember him well, for it is he who made us happy. He has been my father's best friend. He saved us once from the Russian soldiers, and to him we owe the home which we now enjoy. Is not your name Ruric?"

"Yes—Feodor Ruric," answered the count, with feelings which even he himself could not have described. "Ivan sent me here, and here he said I should find a home until he came to

find me. It was he who helped me to escape from the Russian prison."

"He is a noble, generous man," murmured the maiden, with her head bowed.

At this moment the guide came to a point where the track entered upon a ravine in which was a spring of water, and here he stopped to take dinner and rest the mules. He was much astonished when he learned the peculiar circumstances under which his two companions had found out that their points of destination were the same, and the merry twinkle of his eyes as he regarded them, evinced that he had a suspicion that circumstances had not yet done all their work. But he said nothing on the subject, however; only he kept his tongue running on various other topics during the season of rest.

At the end of an hour the trio started on again, and shortly they began to descend the mountain upon the eastern side. This was far more difficult than the ascent had been, and Ruric had to exercise more care in keeping his saddle, for he found a wonderful degree of difference between riding the clumsy mule down the rugged Caucasus and parading the field upon a trained war-horse. But he found no difficulty, however, though he found but little ease. During the afternoon he spoke but little with Myrrha, nor did she seem inclined to be a bit more communicative. What she was thinking of was a secret in her own bosom, but we are supposed to know that Ruric was thinking of the beautiful being who rode so near him, for such, indeed, was the fact; and he dared not speak too much lest he should expose the feelings to which those thoughts had given rise.

Just at nightfall the party reached the spot which Lafal had marked out as the stopping-place for the night. It was a lovely little valley, shut in on three sides by the mountains, with a living spring near its centre which gave rise to a gentle brooklet that ran away out through the narrow mouth of the valley. On one side there was a sort of natural cave in the face of the rock, the mouth of which was nearly covered by wild vines and shrubs. In this small cave blankets were prepared for Myrrha, while the two men took lodgings outside with the mules.

The moon shone as it had done the night before, and the stars peeped down full as merrily, and beneath their combined light our hero lay down to sleep. But he had new thoughts now to occupy his mind. He had found the Lotus tree, and he had eaten of its fruits, and he had begun to forget the land of his birth.

CHAPTER IX.

ALBEC.

EARLY in the morning our three travellers were up and on their way. A night's rest had given new impulse to Ruric's energies, and he opened a lively conversation with his beautiful companion, and she on her part seemed equally inspired, for her silvery voice was almost joyous in its tones, and her fair features were wreathed with smiles. Shortly after noon they began to ascend a rugged slope, and when they reached its top, Ruric saw before him, in the valley beyond, a wide, sparkling stream, the banks of which were dotted with simple dwellings.

"That is the hamlet of Stamyl," said the guide, as our hero reined in his mule to dwell for a moment upon the enchanting scene.

"Ah," responded Myrrha, "and yonder is the cot of my father. O, let us hasten, for he may be dying in my absence."

"On, on, then," exclaimed Ruric, whose desire to view the scene was as nothing compared with his solicitude for the welfare of his companion.

And so they started down the slope, and at the end of an hour they rode up to a small cot which stood near a grove of heavy oak trees, and about a dozen rods distant from the river. It was at some distance from the other dwellings, and in a most lovely spot. Myrrha slipped from her saddle as soon as the mules stopped and

hastened into the cot, and as soon as Ruric could secure the two animals which were thus left to his charge, he followed. When he entered he found an old man, sitting upon the side of a low bed, about whose neck Myrrha's arms were fondly wound. He was well advanced in the winter of life, as his furrowed brow and white locks testified, and though his frame must have once been powerful in the extreme, yet he was now bent and infirm, though he was at present suffering a weakness which was not his wont.

"Ah, Myrrha," Ruric heard him say, "I feared I should never see you again. I could not have lived much longer in your absence."

"But you will fear no more, father," the fond girl returned, "for I have come back to you safe and well. I am not harmed. Here is the man who saved me." And then turning to our hero, she added: "This is my father, sir, and you see that my fears were not groundless."

Albec seemed too weak to move from his bed, but he extended his hand to the young man, and with tears in his eyes he uttered:

"God bless you, sir—God bless you for this! You know not the value of the treasure you returned to me. If I had lost it my own lamp of life would have gone out in utter darkness; but I think I shall live now."

At this juncture Lafal entered the cot. He

knew Albec by sight, for he had often seen him among the mountains, and the old man at once recognized him.

"And he, too, has saved me," said Myrrha. "Both he and the Count Ruric risked their lives—"

"The Count Ruric?" uttered Albec, with a sudden start. "Where is he? Who is the Count Ruric?"

"I am the person," returned Feodor.

"You?"

"Yes."

"Then you were coming here? You were coming to find me?"

"Yes, a friend, named Ivan, directed me here."

"Then you are at home. Myrrha, he is our guest. Did you know him?"

"Yes, father, for he told me his story on the way."

The old man regarded Ruric for some moments in silence, and then he sank back upon his pillow. The shock he had received in the loss of his child had completely prostrated him, and he was very weak—much weaker than he was willing to own. His weakness made Myrrha feel stronger, and she quickly prepared some cordial which he drank with thankfulness. After this she procured some refreshment for Ruric and Lafal, and while they sat down to it, she went to attend to her father.

Towards evening the guide took his leave, intending to reach the first stopping-place that night. He was urged to remain, but he said that he must be back at Mamai as early as possible, and he intended to take the moon for his guide a good part of the way.

"I shall see you again ere long," he said to Ruric, after the latter had settled with him, "for I often come across the mountains. I will see to the Cossacks as I return. Adieu till we meet again, and if you do not find joy beneath this roof, then I mistake your own nature and the character of her whom we have brought with us."

Lafal's countenance wore a mysterious smile as he gave utterance to this last sentence, and the rich blood mounted to the count's temples, for he knew well what was meant; but before he could make any reply the guide was gone.

When Ruric re-entered the cot he found that Albec had fallen asleep, and Myrrha was by his bedside. One of her small white hands was

resting upon the old man's bosom, and upon her face there was a look of deep concern.

"Alas, sir," she whispered, turning to her guest, "I fear my father is very ill. He breathes faintly, and I can feel that his heart beats very irregularly. I think he should have more aid than we can render. Only at a short distance there is a man well skilled in medicine, and if you will watch here I will go and bring him hither."

Ruric would have gone, but the maiden knew the way best, and as she would be likely to perform the mission with the most expedition, it was arranged that she should go, and that the count should remain with the invalid. Accordingly he saw her safely in her saddle, and then he returned to the cot and took his seat at the side of the bed. It might have been twenty minutes that he had sat thus when the old man awoke.

"Where is Myrrha?" was his first question, as he gazed about him.

"She has gone for a physician," replied Ruric, drawing his seat nearer to the bed.

"So—has she? Well, she knows best; but I do not think I am so bad as that. Last night at this time I was in the mountains. I was strong then."

"But you are very weak now," said Ruric, "and a physician may be of benefit. This weakness has come upon you suddenly."

"Yes—very suddenly, and I think I shall soon be rid of it. But let the physician come. He is a good man, and will not hurt me."

The old man closed his eyes as he ceased speaking, and for some moments he remained silent, and during that time he breathed very heavily, and his limbs were ever and anon moved by an involuntary action of the nerves and muscles, and at such times low moans—almost imperceptible—would fall from his lips. At length, however, he turned again towards his watcher.

"You spoke of Ivan," he said, in a voice scarcely raised above a whisper. "Of course, you saw him?"

"Yes," quickly returned Ruric, startled by the idea that he might now gain some knowledge of the serf.

"And did you leave him well?"

"Very well."

"Do you know how he is succeeding?"

"To what do you refer?"

"To his business."

"I know not exactly what you mean. He is a serf of the Prince Alexander Menzikoff?"

"Ah, then he told you nothing more?"

"No, he had not opportunity to tell me much. But perhaps you can tell me more of him. I only know that he liberated me from prison, and that he was once the friend of my father—or rather that my father was his friend. What can you tell me of him?"

"Did Ivan say nothing of when he might come here?" asked Albec, seeming to disregard the young man's question.

"He said it might be in a few years, and perhaps in a few months. But you did not answer my question. You can surely tell me something of Ivan?"

"Nothing more than you know now," returned the old man. "But I should like to see him. He is a good man—a good man, and though he be now a serf, yet his blood runs purer in the sight of God than does that of the emperor who rules in the land that gave him birth. But you shall be welcome here, sir. This is your home and the lands are at your service while it shall please you to stay with us. When I am stronger I shall take pleasure in showing you how we Circassians live."

Ruric saw that Albec spoke with difficulty, and he asked no more questions; but he would not have had an opportunity even had he desired it, for at that time Myrrha returned in company with the physician. The maiden hastened at once to her father's side, and the man of medicine sat down in the seat which Ruric had been occupying.

"I am not very sick," said the old man, in a tone that indicated the question more than the assertion.

But the physician shook his head very dubiously. He felt of the invalid's pulse, and after counting its beatings for a while he placed his ear upon the old man's breast. When he had finished his examination he moved back from the bed and turned to the little portmanteau he had brought with him.

"I can leave you some simple medications," he said, "but care is what you most need. You are very weak, Albec, and you need the utmost caution in your case for some time to come."

"But I am not very sick. I shall live," urged the old man.

"O, you may outlive us all yet," returned the physician, with a light laugh; "but you want care, you want care, Albec."

And as he thus spoke he dealt out his medicine, and gave Myrrha directions how to prepare it. After this he spoke a few words of cheer to Albec, and then turned to leave the cot; but Ruric followed him.

"One moment, sir," said our hero, after the physician had mounted his horse; "will you not tell me exactly what you think of Albec?"

The moon was up, and by its light the physician closely scrutinized the young man's features, but he asked no questions.

"I will tell you, sir," he at length replied: "The old man may get up from this shock, but his life cannot be much longer continued. Old age has done much towards wearing him out, and this blow has made a crashing in his system from which he cannot recover. He may live some months, but not many. But take good care of him, and I will see him again before long."

Thus speaking the physician turned his horse away, and Ruric re-entered the cot. It was now quite late, and the count proposed that Myrrha should retire, and allow him to keep the first watch by the sick man's bedside. At first the maiden objected, but she at length consented, on the condition that she should be called at midnight.

The cot had three rooms below, one of which was Myrrha's, and for the present it was arranged that Ruric should occupy the small room which had been used as a store-room, and whither the girl had carried a good quantity of bedding. After Myrrha had retired the young man sat down by the couch, and there he remained until near daybreak, and most of that time he spent in reflecting upon the strange events that were gathering about him. It seemed a marvellous fate that had led him thus to such a home, for in no particular had he been governed by his own will—but simply had he consented to the plans of others. But there were "shadows from coming events" that fell towards joyous hopes. His heart was young and buoyant, and he felt a strange presentiment that fate was going to be very kind to him in the end.

Myrrha tried to scold him when she awoke of her own accord and found the eastern horizon already streaked with the golden tints of dawn, but he smiled at her reproof, and she seemed happy to feel that her comfort was cared for.

CHAPTER X.

THE DECLARATION.

FEODOR RURIC had been in his Circassian home a month, and during that time he had contrived to make himself very happy. Albec had so far recovered from his sickness that he could ride very comfortably by being helped into his saddle, but the moiety of strength which had returned to him had brought with it a degree of reason which opened his eyes to a sense of his failing powers.

"Ah, Ruric," he said, one day, after the young man had helped him into his saddle, "I did not use to be thus. I did not think I should ever live to be lifted to my horse's back. I must be growing very weak."

"You have been weak," said Ruric, in a flattering tone, "but perhaps you are growing stronger now. You sit in your saddle firmly, and your horse knows your will."

"Ah," he old man uttered, with an expressive shake of the head, "I sit in my saddle because it is my nature. My limbs have become fashioned to it, and when that shall fail me the earth will have seen the last of poor old Albec. No, no, Ruric, you cannot flatter me into a belief that I am ever to be strong again. I cannot live much longer; but I must live to see Ivan. I hope he will come soon."

It was thus that Albec conversed, and Ruric knew that his old frame was fast wearing out. Our hero had learned to love that old man, for

he had found him to be one of the most noble and generous of souls. And Albec, too, had learned to love the noble youth who had come to find a home beneath his roof.

"Ah, Myrrha," he once said, with his trembling hand upon the fair girl's brow, "I once thought that my love could never find another object upon earth on which to rest, but I do love Feodor Ruric, for he is worthy of it. What a pity it is that emperors would not try to cultivate such jewels in their realms."

And Myrrha was foolish enough to go and tell to Ruric what her father had said.

It was a new atmosphere in which the young count had breathed for the past month. Everything about him was pure and elevating, and the very nature of the rugged scenery was such as to lift his soul above mere earthly self. And during that month he had been almost constantly in the society of Myrrha, and if he thought her beautiful when first he saw her, he thought her ten times more so now that he had become acquainted with the intrinsic purity of her mind. He had lived in the light of her sweet smiles, but he had not yet spoken to her of the deepest thoughts that moved his soul.

It was near the middle of the afternoon, and Ruric had just returned from an excursion with Albec. The air was so sweet and soft, and the thousands of opening blossoms were so fragrant,

that the cot seemed like a prison. Albec had taken his accustomed seat by the window, and he asked Myrrha if she would not like to go out.

"You and Ruric must go out and smell this delightful air," he said; "for the young man has little chance for enjoyment when he rides with me, seeing that all his attention has to be bestowed upon my poor weak self."

"And that is surely an enjoyment," quickly returned the count, in a frank, heart-felt tone. "When I cannot find enjoyment in making comfort for an infirm old man, then let my pleasures pass from me, for I should deserve them no more."

This was spoken so sincerely that it brought tears to the old man's eyes, and Myrrha showed plainly by her looks how well she appreciated it.

But the two young people waited not for more urging on Albec's part, and as soon as they saw that he was comfortable they set forth. They took their way up the river, and for a long distance they kept close upon the bank. They did not talk as was their wont, for each seemed to have deep thoughts in silence. For some time not a word had been spoken, but at length Ruric broke the spell.

"Myrrha," he said, in a low, tremulous voice, "do you know how I have begun to like my new home?"

"Yes," she replied, "for you have told me so before."

"So I have. I have told you how I loved the wild scenery, and how I loved your father, but I have more to tell you; I have to tell you of a love deeper than they all."

The young count hesitated, for he felt how Myrrha's hand was trembling. He gazed upon her, but her eyes were bent to the ground; yet he could see how the blood had mounted to her sweet face, and how the golden tresses upon her pure neck moved as though a fitful breeze were playing with them.

"I need not be afraid to speak," he continued, "for I know that you will pardon me, even if you do not meet me with approval. But I do not believe that you will reject the offer my soul would make. I have long watched the light of your mild eyes, and I have read their silent language as best suited my own feelings. Myrrha, I love you best of all I know on earth. Have you not guessed my secret ere this?"

"I had surely hoped you loved me," returned the maiden, with her eyes still bent to the ground, but with less of tremulousness in her manner.

"Then you must love me," cried the count, in a joyful tone, "for we never seek or hope for the love of that which is a stranger to our affections. Am I not right?"

For a few moments Myrrha was silent, but at length she gazed up into her companion's face, and while a flood of strange light danced in her moistened eyes she murmured:

"I know not why I should attempt to deceive you or myself, nor do I know the forms of the society in which you have been brought up. I only know my own heart's love, and that I have no power to conceal it."

"And that love is mine—mine—all mine. Say that it is, Myrrha?"

Again was the maiden silent, and again were her eyes bent to the ground; and when she once more looked up there was more of earnestness in her features than had before been there.

"I do not know," she said, with a return of her tremulousness, "what may be the meaning of the love you bear me. You cannot fear that my friendship would ever be withdrawn."

"Ah, Myrrha, there can be but one meaning to such love as mine. It must either live in full fruition, or die in utter despair. The object of such a love must be ever near me—ever with me—a life-companion of my own soul—a light that shall ever shine in my path—a voice that shall ever whisper comfort to my ear, and a presence that shall ever inspire me with holy, happy thoughts. You can be all that to me. Become my wife—my own wife—and Heaven itself shall smile upon our union. Can you do this?"

Myrrha gazed calmly up into her companion's face, and what of emotion she had was shown in the bright tears that gathered in her eyes.

"You would lay a fearful responsibility upon me," she whispered, not daring to trust her feelings with a more palpable tone.

"No, no," quickly returned Ruric. "It is I who am to have the responsibility. We enjoy our treasures just as we do our duty by and with them. Those most holy gifts of God can only make us happy in so far as we cherish and protect them, and appreciate them. I have read your heart, and I know how pure it is. Give it to me, and give me your hand with it, and upon me shall rest the responsibility of all those joys I have pictured. I will speak with your father."

"There is no need of that," said Myrrha, with a look of joy which was not to be mistaken. "I know my father's wish."

"Ah, and what is it?"

"Simply to see me happy."

"And would you not be happy to become my wife?"

"Yes."

The word was spoken plainly, frankly and yet so very low that it seemed but the breath of the passing zephyr. But Feodor heard it, and he bowed his head upon his sweet companion's shoulder and thanked God for the joy of that moment. All else of earth seemed shut out then, for he had no room in his soul far more thoughts than came wildly up from the fount that had thus been opened.

Ere long the lovers turned their steps homeward, and their hearts were as light and joyous as the breath of the flowers that grow in their path. When they reached the cot they found Albec still sitting by the window, and as soon as he had opportunity, Ruric told him what had passed between himself and Myrrha.

"Bless you, bless you," ejaculated the old man, when he had heard the tale of love. "I have hoped that this would be so, for I knew—I knew when you had been here only a few days—that Myrrha loved you, and I think her heart would have broken if you could not have loved her. But it is well now. O, Ruric, she is a noble girl. She will make you most happy."

"I know it, I know it," returned the youth; and then he bowed his head as though he would think of something that was not yet present.

"Albec," he at length resumed, with a perceptible tremor in his features, "I have yet one thing to ask. I am not in haste, but yet

my cup lacks its perfect fullness. Myrrha is not yet fully mine."

"I understand—I understand," said the old man; and while he spoke there came a cloud over his brow—not a cloud of pain, or of doubt, but one of anxious hesitation. "I know what you mean, but the end is not yet. Wait a while ere you make Myrrha your wife."

"But why should I wait?" asked the youth.

"Because I wish it," was the old man's reply.

"You know I would not make the request without good reason."

"But how long must it be?"

"Perhaps not long. But be it as long as it may, you will still have the company of Myrrha to make you happy. I will tell you when the time has come. Trust me, Ruric—trust me, and in the end you shall not be disappointed. Myrrha shall be yours—you need not fear."

The entrance of the physician at this moment put an end to the conversation, and Ruric went to seek Myrrha to come and receive any instructions the doctor might wish to give. In the evening the count related to the maiden what Albec had said.

"Yes," she returned, "I know that he has some peculiar reason for wishing our nuptials put off, but we have nothing to fear. He spoke with me only a few moments since, and I know that the earnest wish of his heart is to see us happy."

"Ruric had hoped to find out from Myrrha what the old man's reason might be, but she knew no more than he did, so he tried to content himself with things as they were.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MARAUDERS.

TIME passed on to early summer, and Ruric had become acquainted with nearly all the people of the hamlet, and he not only liked them, but they had learned to set much by him. Old Albec still rode out almost every day, for exercise, but he dared not go alone, for he grew weaker and weaker. And Myrrha—she was the very sun of the count's existence. He loved her more and more as each dawning day developed new charms in her mind—he loved her so well that even a short absence was painful, and when, by chance, the thought that he might lose her entered his mind he shuddered as man shudders at the most dreadful calamity that fate can hold in store. Several times had he repeated his request to Albec that Myrrha might be secured to him by the rite of marriage, but each time the old man had bid him wait.

"And wherefore shall I wait?" the count had asked, in almost a frenzy of anxiety. "Nothing can separate us—nothing can divide our hearts. Why, then, shall we be doomed thus to be kept asunder?"

"Because," the old man had replied, "the time has not yet come. I am not responsible, so let the matter rest.—It cannot be much longer that the probation shall last. Be quiet, my dear friend, be quiet, and all shall yet end well. You need not fear for any clouds if you but trust me."

But Albec was not a prophet. There was a storm gathering upon the borders of the Stamyl of which he did not dream; and the quiet hamlet, as it lay there in its mountain-girt retreat, slept all unconscious of the doom that hung over it.

It was late in the day that Albec and Ruric had turned the heads of their horses towards home. The air was so clear and beautiful that they had ridden further than usual, and when they turned they were upon the summit of a hill that overlooked the deep valley of Stamyl, while upon the opposite hand they could see the uneven country, for many miles in extent, sweeping away with its crags and ravines, and its brooks and verdure. While Ruric gazed upon the wild scene he thought he saw something glisten suddenly upon the edge of a little wood that lay at the foot of one of the distant hills. At first he thought it might be some little streamlet that he had not before detected, but he soon found that such could not be the case, for the glittering points were multiplied, and ere long he was sure that he saw mounted men.

"Why do you stop?" asked Albec, who was becoming impatient.

"I saw something in yonder woods that arrested my attention," returned the youth; "but I am ready now."

"And what do you think you saw?" asked the old man, as they both moved as though they would start down the hill.

"O, I saw something glittering in the sunbeams, and felt a curiosity to know what it was, but it proved only to be some horsemen."

"Horsemen!" uttered Albec, reining his horse suddenly in. "Glittering in the sunbeams!" he added, with increased emotion. "By the prophet Elijah, this needs looking to. Come back, come back, Ruric, and show me."

Wonderingly did the count turn his horse back, and when he reached the top of the hill, he could distinguish the horsemen very plainly.

"They are armed, I think," he said, pointing his finger towards the wood.

The old Circassian shaded his eyes with his withered hand, and gazed off to where the horsemen were to be seen. There were as many as a dozen of them in full sight, and it was evident that there were a number more in the wood, for the glittering of more arms could be seen there. Albec's eyes were yet keen for long distances, and he gazed long and steadily upon the distant men. His aged form trembled as he continued to gaze, and when he at length turned towards his young companion his thin hands were doubled firmly up, and his eyes sparkled with a keen fire.

"What is it?" asked Ruric, full of wonder, but knowing not what to apprehend.

"I think there is one of the uzdens of the Hatukai with a troop of his followers," said Albec, again turning his eyes upon the wood.

"The Hatukai?" repeated Ruric, interrogatively.

"Yes," answered Albec. "They are a tribe that live off here beyond the Laba, and they are surely out now on one of their predatory excursions. They are a savage, bold people, and I fear they mean evil to our hamlet. I think from the glittering of their armor that I am correct."

"Mean evil to us," said Ruric. "Do you mean that they are enemies?"

"Ah, you have not yet learned all of Circassian manners," replied the old man, with a melancholy shake of the head. "Know, then, that many of our tribes live chiefly by plunder, and we are as likely to be plundered as any one."

"And surely they will find but little booty in our village. I think I have the most money, and they cannot find that without my help."

"Alas! Ruric, you know but little of them," groaned the old man, shaking his head more sadly than ever. "There are beautiful daughters in Stamyl, and the Hatukaiaans know it. Alas is me if they conquer here. On, on! Let us arouse our men, and be on the watch. By the prophet, they must not find us asleep."

"Daughters!" uttered the count, while a fearful shudder ran through his frame.

"Ay, our daughters will be turned into the harem of the Ottoman, or, what is worse, sold off into the hands of the insatiate Persian. O, Ruric, if they should lay their hands upon Myrrha!"

The thought was like a death-dart to the soul of the count, and as he gathered in the rein he felt a giant's strength moving within him.

"Can you ride fast?" he asked of Albec, with impatience.

"Yes—yes. On, Ruric, on! We'll rouse our people, and have them on the watch. The Hatukaian uzden is aiming for Stamyl—I am sure of it."

As the old man spoke, he took one more look at the armed men in the distance, and then he dashed down the hill at full speed. Ruric was at first startled at seeing the invalid's movement, but when he found that Albec kept his saddle firmly, he threw aside all fears for the old man's safety and dashed on after him. It was nearly sundown when they reached the village, and the inhabitants were at once apprized of the approach of the Hatukaiaans. The uzden of Stamyl was a middle-aged man named Orfa, and as he placed the utmost confidence in the judgment of Albec, he at once set about preparing for defence, for he well knew the character of the people of Hatukai, and he knew that capitulation would be out of the question. The able men of the hamlet amounted to forty-three. Two of the men were too old to be of actual service, and some of the younger ones were excluded from the able list. Old Albec was determined to take his carbine, even though he had to sit while he handled it, and others who were not included in the able list begged to be classed among the defenders of the place.

Upon one side of the village stood a rude mosque, where the people worshipped, and as this building was shielded in the rear by an almost perpendicular hillside, it was resolved that all the women and children should be collected there, and that the men should defend it. Before dark the men were all armed, and the wo-

men and little ones had been safely conducted to the mosque. Myrrha did not weep, but she was pale and trembling, for she knew too well what would be her fate if the hamlet were taken.

"Fear not," said Ruric, as he pressed her hand. "We are well armed, and they will have to be many in number, if they overcome us."

"'Tis not for myself that I fear," returned the noble girl, "but for you. Ah, if you should be—be—"

"Speak it not, speak it not, Myrrha. Let me not hear a word of failing. My whole soul is strung with hope, and I am strong. Our men are all confident of their prowess, and let them see that you feel confidence in them. I shall fight with the strength of two souls. Adieu for the while, and God be with us all."

Once more Ruric pressed her hand, and as he felt the slight, quick tremulousness that moved her nerves, he felt a pang of misgiving; but he did not show it to her. He received her blessing, and then he hastened away to where the men were assembling under the directions of the uzden Orfa.

"Ah, Ruric," uttered the noble, as he noticed our hero. "I have been looking for you. You are used to battle."

"Yes," returned the count.

"And you have led an attack?"

"Yes—many of them."

"Then I must give you charge of our left wing, and I mean that you shall lay concealed among those olives at the foot of the hill. With fifteen men you can take up your station there, and if we succeed in engaging the whole body of the enemy in front of the mosque here, then a sudden sally from you might prove effective. What do you think of it?"

"The plan is most assuredly a good one," returned Ruric, "though I would advise you to form your men as though you had the whole of them with you. You cannot deploy another wing."

"Of course not," said the uzden. "We can only leave you out upon the wing. And remember, we shall trust much to your moving up at the proper time."

"You need not fear, sir. I will do my duty. But it will be dark work—we shall have no moon."

"No moon, I know," returned Orfa, with a peculiar shake of the head, "but I fear the enemy will not be long in the dark when they find we are prepared for resistance. I would give

much if there were some good point where we could lay in ambush and take them at a disadvantage, but there is none such. We will fight by our wives and children, and God be with us. Your men are all detached, and ready to follow you. I shall give you no further orders, but leave you to exercise your own judgment."

"But Albec—what will you do with him?"

"He is determined to fight, and I will keep him back towards the mosque, where he can be out of danger as much as possible. He may do something with his carbine."

"Keep an eye to the mosque," uttered Ruric, as he was about to turn away.

"I have a wife and four children there," was Orfa's significant answer.

It was now fully dark, and our hero took his station at the head of the fifteen men who had been selected for the reserve, and led them to the olive copse. It was a good place for the purpose, as he could see the whole of the open space in front of the mosque, and was yet entirely hidden from the view of others. After Ruric had taken his appointed station he spoke a few words of encouragement to the men under his charge, but he found them all prepared for the worst, and ready to fight till the last breath.

"Ha!" uttered one of the men, who had been lying with his ear to the ground, "I can hear the tramp of horses' feet. They must be coming over the hill."

All eyes were turned to where the outlines of the hill could be seen in the distance, and Ruric thought he could see dark bodies moving against the starry sky. For some time he watched, and at length the objects disappeared.

"Those were horsemen," he said, to a man who stood by his side, "and there must be a large number of them."

"They generally go in good round numbers," was the reply, "and there is no use in disguising the fact that they are hard men to deal with."

The tramp of horses could now be heard very plainly, and the horses of Stamyl, which were secured upon the western side of the mosque, gave back an answering neigh, but this latter noise was stopped by a few applications of the lash, though Orfa knew that the animals could not be kept silent after the enemy should have come nearer.

The minutes crept on, and nearer came the Hatukaiaans. — Their voices could be heard as they stopped at Albec's cot, which was the first in their way. Then came the tramp again,

quick and heavy, and there seemed by the sound a hundred horses of them at least. Another cot was reached—and then another—and then the confined horses by the mosque sent forth a simultaneous neigh that made the valley echo. The enemy had stopped. They must by this time have mistrusted that the people of Stamyl were prepared for them, for three cots, at least, they had visited and found empty.

For a few moments all was still save the neighing of the horses, and then came the low hum of voices from the enemy. In another minute a dim light broke out from a distant cottage, and then a second from a cot nearer at hand. These two lights grew larger and more bright until long forks of flame began to leap up into the air and eat away the darkness. Two of the light wooden cottages had been set on fire to light the marauders in their work! Higher and higher, and wider and more wide spread the flames, until the valley was as light as day. The enemy were now to be seen with their light polished armor sparkling in the fire beams, and they numbering seventy-five men at least. They, too, discovered the people of Stamyl in front of the mosque, and with a yell of defiance they set forward upon the charge. Orfa gave his orders promptly, and with a deliberate aim his men discharged their carbines. The effect of the fire was at once apparent, but it did not stop the oncoming mass. It only unseated some dozen of them, and the remainder dashed on more furiously.

Orfa now sprang to the front of his men, and by the time he could speak a word of encouragement the enemy were upon them. The long pikes of the Stamylites were firmly set in the ground, and though the advancing foe were thus checked, and some of their horses killed, yet the fight soon came on hand-to-hand.

Now was Ruric's time, and with a shout that made the valley ring he and his men sprang forward. The men of Hatukai were startled by this movement, but by the glaring light of the

burning houses they quickly saw the number of the new comers, and they gave forth an answering shout as they prepared for the reception. The count and his men came to the work with stout arms and stout hearts, and their onset was terrible, for they slew a number of the enemy almost equal to their own force before they were checked.

But the marauders were brave men, and they were stout men, too, and they outnumbered the villagers two to one. What could be done in such a case? Orfa and Ruric now fought side by side, and by their example they encouraged their comrades to deeds of more than common valor. But the ranks of the defenders were growing thin—one after another dropped off until not more than a dozen men bore Orfa company.

"Let us fall back to the mosque," uttered Ruric, as he saw that the enemy were making a movement that way. "There we will stand and die."

"So be it," was Orfa's response, and accordingly the handful of Stamyl's defenders fell back.

It was now growing dark again, for the small houses which had been fired had yielded their light material to the flames until all had been consumed, but it was not to remain dark long. When Orfa and Ruric retired to the mosque the enemy ceased their fighting for a while, and gathered their forces for consultation.

There was just light enough now from the smoking ruins to make the darkness more gloomy, and as the last bit of frame fell with a low crash the valley was left in a gloom as deep as midnight. There were two fretful piles of snapping ruins, and ever and anon a serpent-like tongue of flame would dart forth as some jet of liberated gas caught the heat of the embers. At such moments the sparkling arms of the invaders could be seen for an instant, but it was quickly dark again, and the hum of the distant voices alone marked the position of the enemy.

CHAPTER XII.

THE WORK IS DONE!

It was evident that the enemy were engaged in a consultation, and both Ruric and Orfa turned towards the door of the mosque and entered. Within there was a light burning, and they could see that the women were pale and trembling—that mothers were kneeling with their children, and that the maidens were gathered together with clasped hands and fear-wrought countenances. Myrrha saw her lover enter, and with a cry of hope she sprang towards him.

"Are we saved?" she asked, as she laid her trembling hand upon the youth's shoulder.

"Not yet, Myrrha—nor are you yet lost. The enemy are consulting, and we are gaining breath. We can die."

"I know it—and I am ready," returned Myrrha.

"But do not yet give up all hope," quickly urged Ruric, "for all hope is not yet gone. We can make a strong defence here."

At this moment a woman advanced from the crowd bearing an infant in her arms. It was the wife of Orfa. She moved to the side of her husband, and asked him if he had been harmed? She blessed God when she found him safe; and then she asked him if there could be no honorable means of capitulation.

"Alas, I fear not," replied the uzden. "If we would give up to them all they ask they

might capitulate, but 'tis to save that very boon that we fight."

"But do you hope to conquer? Tell me truly, Orfa. Do not deceive me. Is there the least hope of holding out in your defence?"

Orfa was silent. He dared not own the truth, even to himself.

"How many men have the enemy?" asked the anxious wife.

"As many as thirty or forty."

"And how many have we?"

"Not more than half that number, if we have so many," returned the uzden, with painful hesitation.

"Then," said the wife, with strange firmness, "you must at least confer with them, for by so doing we may at least save our children. Let our property go, but not our little ones. Speak with them, Orfa."

The husband embraced his wife and kissed the infant, and then turned away.

Ruric still stood by the side of Myrrha, and he had heard all that had passed between the uzden and his lady.

"Where now is our hope?" the maiden asked.

"In God, at least, we may trust," replied Ruric. "But let the end decide. Where is Albee? I have not seen him since the attack."

"He is here in the mosque. He fainted from over-exertion shortly after the fighting commenced, and we brought him in. Alas! my poor old father! I fear he will not survive this."

At this moment a dull, flickering light broke through the darkness without, but it soon increased in power, and once more the valley was light as day. More houses had been set on fire. As quickly as possible the men were once more formed in front of the mosque, and, all told, they numbered fourteen souls. Orfa bade them be on their guard, and then he set forward alone to speak with the enemy, and the Hatukaian chief rode forward to meet him.

"How now?" cried the latter, as Orfa approached. "What would ye?"

"I would know your wish, and on what terms you will leave us in peace?"

"Our terms are easily made. Let us take what shall suit us, and the rest shall be left unharmed."

"Our flocks and our goods are at your disposal," returned Orfa, "and we will pay you such moneys as we have. Can you ask more?"

"Your flocks we do not want," said the invader; "but we will take your horses, and some of your fair daughters."

"And will nothing else satisfy you?"

"Nothing."

"Then come and take them after their fathers are dead," was Orfa's reply, as he turned and hastened back to the mosque; and when he reached his men he told them the result of his conference.

"Then we will fight while we live," said Ruric, as he loosened his gory sword in its scabbard, and then raised his carbine. "They shall not enter the mosque till they walk over our dead bodies."

"The men of Hatukai are resolute," said Orfa, "but they will find us even with them on that score. Be firm, now, and take care of your bullets."

The flames of the burning buildings now leaped high up into the air, and the faces of the enemy were boldly revealed. Orfa counted forty-three of them who yet kept their saddles. At length the shout of the onset broke upon the air, and the marauders came down like an avalanche. The carbines did their duty well, but they thinned the ranks of the foe but little. Once more the conflict raged hand-to-hand, and the defenders of the mosque fell back.

"To the door—to the door," cried Ruric, as

he and Orfa stood almost alone. "Let us fight there now, for we can do nothing here."

"To the door it is," returned the uzden, as he swept his reeking sword above his head, and cut down a stout man who thought to push by him.

Accordingly they fell slowly back, fighting as they went, and when they reached the broad stone step they were alone together. Others of their men were alive, but they were either wounded severely or bound prisoners. Orfa and Ruric stood face to face with twenty of the foe, and with deeds of wondrous valor did they hold their position. But mortal strength is not proof against danger and exhaustion. As soon as one of the foe fell, another was there to take his place, fresh and strong.

"Give way!" shouted the invading chief, as he pressed forward. "You are mad to die when you may live."

But Orfa did not speak. He knew the treasures that lay exposed, and a sweep of his sword was the only reply he vouchsafed; but that sweep was his last, for on the next instant he staggered back, and the foe rushed madly forward. Ruric received a blow upon the head that would have felled a weaker man, and dizzy and faint he, too, staggered back into the mosque. He felt a pair of arms encircling his neck, and looking about he met the gaze of Myrrha.

"Alas!" he groaned, "all is lost! Life—love—joy—all, all are gone. I am faint, Myrrha."

Ruric still held his dripping sword in his hand, but his grasp was weakening. Myrrha clung to him with all the energy of her strong soul, and she forgot for the moment to fear for herself, now that the man whom she loved better than life was in danger.

"I will die with you, Feodor," she murmured, as she smoothed the hair back from his sweat-streaming temples. "To live, or to die, they shall not tear me from you. You are not much hurt?"

But before Ruric could reply a stout man came up and laid his hand upon Myrrha's arm.

"Ha—you are my prize, fair damsel," said the Hatukaian, as he attempted to draw her roughly away.

"Not yet!" gasped Ruric, while a spark of new life darted through his veins and lent its electric force to his nerves. "Not yet!" he repeated, as he raised his sword above his head; and, weak as he was, he felled the robber to the floor; but the act cost him the last force of his

strength, and as he sank fainting upon Myrrha's bosom his sword fell from his powerless grasp.

"O, Feodor, Feodor! You are not going to die!" shrieked the maiden, as she clung frantically to the sinking form of her lover.

But Ruric could not speak. He looked vacantly up, and he saw the sweet face that bent over him, and then all was darkness to him. He

heard the hum of many voices—the wailing of mothers, and the cries of children—but even that was soon lost, and the world of joys and sorrows, of hopes and fears, was shut out to him. In his utter weakness he was spared the pangs of hearing Myrrha cry out to him in vain.

CHAPTER. XIII.

THE SERF IN BUSINESS.

On the night that the marauders of Hatukai attacked the hamlet of Stanyl, and burned the homes of the quiet people, there was being enacted a scene at St. Petersburg which has a bearing upon our story, and which cannot be wholly uninteresting to our readers.

In a small garret in a wing of the Prince Alexander Menzikoff's palace sat Ivan the serf. He was seated at a small table which was covered with papers, and he was very busy in noting their contents and arranging them in parcels. It was quite late, and without the weather was stormy and tempestuous. The heavy drops of rain fell like scattering shot upon the roof, and the wind howled around the sharp angles of the building like some devouring monster. But the busy serf noticed it not. He had enough before him to engage the whole of his attention, if one might judge from the zealous cast of his countenance. Paper after paper did he examine, and then lay in its appropriate place, and the longer he worked the more earnest did he seem to be.

At length he had arranged all the papers, and then he arose from his seat, and commenced pacing the floor. Ever and anon he would take a watch from his pocket and examine its face, and when he put it back he would do so with a gesture that evinced considerable impatience. But finally he looked relieved on consulting the dial, and in a few moments after he had put it up for the last time, the bell upon the distant cathedral spoke with its brazen voice to those who were awake in St. Petersburg that it was midnight.

As soon as the tones of the bell had been lost in the howl of the storm Ivan took up his station at the door of the garret, and there he listened until he heard the sound of a heavy footfall from below. Ere long the steps were heard upon the upper stairs, and shortly afterwards there came a quick, peculiar rap upon the door. Ivan opened it, and the man who entered had to stoop to clear his head. The rain was dripping profusely from his garments, but he quickly threw off the large cloak, and when his cap was removed the glimmering rays of the lamp fell upon the broad features of the emperor.

"This is a stormy night," he said, as he shook his cap, and then hung it upon the back of a chair.

"So it is, sire," returned the serf; "but it is all the better for us."

"Yes. It is well enough if you are ready for me."

"I told you at midnight, sire, and I gained just half an hour. I believe all is ready."

"And you have the full proof?"

"Ay—and most of it in Menzikoff's own handwriting. Here are the papers, sire, and you will examine them when you feel disposed."

"Let it be at once," said the emperor, "for I must not be away too long."

Accordingly two chairs were drawn up to the table, and the emperor and the serf sat down.

"Here," said Ivan, as he pulled the first bundle towards him, and opened the uppermost paper, "is an inventory of the Basilowitz estates. You will see that Menzikoff receives an annual

income of thirteen thousand ducats from them, whereas he only returns to you four thousand. In this paper," continued Ivan, opening a second, "it is made to appear that the Estovan estate, which, you are aware, was long since made a part of the Basilowitz property, yields a further income of seven thousand ducats. With regard to his property in the city there is not much discrepancy."

"But how did you get at the state of the other property so exactly?" asked Nicholas, as he picked up the schedule, and ran his eye over it.

"Partly by secret access to the books of the prince, and partly by knowledge which I possess independent of his inventories," returned the serf; and then, as if desirous to avoid present questioning, he resumed, taking up another paper:

"Here we have something in the prince's own hand, and it carries some weight with it. You know the Count John Galitzin?"

"Yes—I know him well—a little odd, but a loyal man."

"The same. You but do him justice, sire, when you call him a loyal man. Well, this letter was written to him. You know his vast estates join those of Basilowitz. Will you read it?"

"Yes. But first let me ask you how you obtained it?"

"The Count Galitzin himself gave it to me."

"It appears to me, that for a serf, you are on strange terms of intimacy with the noble count," said Nicholas, eyeing Ivan sharply.

"And I suppose Galitzin would think I was on strange terms of intimacy with the Russian emperor, were he to see us now," was Ivan's laconic reply.

Nicholas looked into his companion's face, and again that look of intelligence, which we have before seen there, broke over his features; but without speaking further he opened the paper and read as follows:

"TO THE COUNT JOHN GALITZIN, greeting:

"I am going to address you upon a delicate subject, for I believe your feelings are with me. It cannot have escaped your notice that Nicholas, our headstrong emperor, is aiming to break down the power of his nobles. It is a part of his policy—and a great part, too, to gain our power into his own hands, and to this end he is not only creating powerful officers in the army from the common classes, but he is trying to in-

duce us to free our serfs, and come down to a level with the *canaille* of his army. I plainly see his drift. See to it that you relinquish not one iota of your power. Cling to your serfs, and if the time shall come when more forcible measures are needed, Nicholas shall find that he has trodden upon something that shall bite. The last days of Alexander were made bitter by knowing that there was a conspiracy on foot for his destruction. Nicholas may be destroyed before he knows it.

"Burn this, and then look to your power, for be assured that our rights are fast becoming centred in one man.

"ALEXANDER MENZIKOFF."

Nicholas of Russia read this over the second time, and when he had done so he crushed it in his hand and gazed full upon the face of the serf.

"That is Menzikoff's hand-writing, for I know it well," he said, in a sort of rumbling whisper.

"Yes, sire—it is most surely his. But he mistook his man when he wrote to Galitzin."

"And that is the man to whose flattering tongue I have listened."

"Not all flattery, I ween," said Ivan.

"To me he has been flattering."

"Ay, but not towards others. I do not think he has been guilty of speaking words of flattery concerning others of whom he has spoken to you."

"No, no,—but enough of this. Menzikoff's doom is sealed. I wish to hear no more."

"And I know not that I could tell you more with such proof as this. But there is one other subject upon which I must ask your attention."

"Then speak quickly, for I must be gone. I allotted half an hour for this interview, and that time has already passed."

"I will not detain you here," said the serf, as he drew towards him a bundle of papers; "but if you will take these with you and peruse them at your leisure, you will find much in them to interest you."

"But of what do they treat?" asked Nicholas, as he took the package and balanced it upon his broad palm.

"You will find there a subject that may have passed from your mind, but 'tis none the less important for that. Menzikoff figures there, but not alone. Read them, sire, and you shall not regret it. Read them carefully, for the plot and the key are there."

Nicholas laid the package down while he folded the letter he had read, and having placed the latter document within the folds of his pocket-book, he took the package up again and placed it in his bosom.

"I will read them," he said, arising from his chair. "I will read them, and then I may send for you. I wonder if Menzikoff sleeps while this storm rages so furiously!"

This last remark did not need a reply, and Ivan made none. Nicholas put on his cap and cloak, and without further words he left the place. It was business he came for, and he had accomplished it.

Ivan slept in the same garret where this interview had taken place, and after having put away the papers which the emperor had not taken, he retired to his rest. On the next morning he did not arise so early as usual, and just as he had finished dressing himself he was somewhat surprised by the entrance of his master. The prince looked much agitated, but it was with anger more than fear.

"Do you seek me, my master?" asked the serf, unable to guess what the visit might mean, but yet suspecting that the prince had discovered some of his movements.

"Yes—I do seek you," replied Menzikoff, with spiteful emphasis. "I have begun to see through your real character. I have watched you, and I know your business."

"If you have watched me, then you have found me doing nothing for the result of which I can fear," returned Ivan, not quite at ease.

"We shall see how much occasion you have of fear. At all events, I have occasion to fear you, for," the prince added, in a sort of thrilling whisper, "I know you!"

"Know me?" uttered the serf, with a sudden start.

"Yes—I know you, and I know, too, what you do here. Of course I know what must be your mission. I ought to have seen this before, seeing how open is the proof you carry in your face. But it is not yet too late."

"But what do you mean?" asked Ivan, not able to conceal his agitation.

"I mean that I know you."

"And whom do you take me for?"

"Never mind. I'll not speak the name here, nor shall mortal lips ever more address the name to you. I know your game, but I have conquered!"

As the prince spoke he clapped his hands with startling force, and on the next moment two stout men entered the room, and at a motion from him they advanced quickly to Ivan's side and seized him by the arms. The serf struggled mightily, and succeeded in knocking one of his assailants down, but the other one managed to lock his arms behind him, and from that moment he was powerless.

"What do you mean? Why am I seized thus?" the serf gasped, fearing the worst of fates.

"Because you have no business in Russia," was Menzikoff's reply. "Your last hour has come. You have played the game well, but fate will not let you beat. I cannot live, and have you here at the same time. One of us must die, and I have chosen that it should be you. You, no doubt, meant the same fate for me."

"I would have him die who most deserves it," returned Ivan, gathering firmness, "and you know, Alexander Menzikoff—"

"Silence! You may tell too much. Bind his mouth, and then away with his life. Be quick!"

The two men, who were reckless, servile tools of the prince, clapped a handkerchief over the serf's mouth, and then forced him upon his knees, but before they could strike the death-blow they were startled by a sound of many feet upon the stairway, and the clanging of steel sword-scabbards was mingled in the sound.

"Stop—stop the execution!" cried the prince, in alarm; "unbind him—unbind him—quick! Here are to be witnesses—some message from the emperor, perhaps. Ivan, if you mention a word of this, you die on the instant. Beware!"

Hardly had the rope been taken from the serf's arms when the door was thrown open and a dozen armed men, of the imperial guard, entered.

"By our church, sir prince," said he who led the soldiers, "you choose a strange place for your business. We have looked for you this half hour."

"Business may take us any where," returned the prince, trying to smile. "But why do you seek me?"

"At the order of the emperor."

"Ah, I thought so. Go tell our imperial master that I will wait upon him soon."

"Under ordinary circumstances that might do," returned the guardsman; "but at present you must go with us. You are a prisoner."

"A prisoner!" iterated Menzikoff, instinctively dropping his hand upon his sword-hilt, and starting back as though he would defend himself.

"Yes," said the officer, smiling at the old noble's movement, "we are ordered by the emperor to make a prisoner of you; so you can go with us as you choose—quietly, so that people shall think you only bear us company, or in irons. Which will you do?"

"I will go," groaned the prince, as his head fell upon his bosom. "I will go," he repeated; and then, with a flushed, quickening expression of countenance, he turned to his two assassins, and in a quick, low whisper he bade them stay and do the work they had commenced.

"And here is Ivan, too, if I mistake not," resumed the officer.

"Yes—my serf," said Menzikoff, hastily. "But come—I am ready."

"In a moment; but the serf must bear us company, for so the emperor has ordered."

"And what wants Nicholas with my serf?" hurriedly asked the prince, again starting back.

"I know not, nor do I care," responded the guardsman, impatiently. "We are ordered to take you both. Will you come?"

There were a pair of polished irons brought into sight as the messenger spoke, and Alexander Menzikoff was subdued in a moment. He liked not the idea of being led through the streets with his hands in irons, and with a look half of fear and half of anger he suffered himself to be escorted from the place.

Two hours later, and the Prince Menzikoff was confined in a deep, damp dungeon—and Ivan the serf was riding away towards Penza, where dwelt the Count John Galitzin.

CHAPTER XIV.

DAYLIGHT, AND THE LOST.

WHEN the first dawn of returning reason came upon Feodor Ruric he found himself upon a comfortable bed, and the rays of the sun were resting warmly upon his brow. He felt much pain about his limbs, and he tried to move to a more comfortable position, but he found that there was no answer to his will—not a limb could he move. His mind was yet somewhat confused, full of wild phantasies and startling dreams—and he closed his eyes again. Gradually he collected his scattered senses, and when he again essayed to move he found that he was bound down to the bed with strong cords. What could this mean? Was he a prisoner? He tried to think what had happened. He could remember the last of his conflict at the door of the mosque, and he could remember of resting upon Myrrha's bosom—then came a wild, terrible dream, but no more of sound memory. Thus he lay for a while, and then he cried out for assistance. In a few moments he heard a voice, but it was too soft and sweet for the guardian of a prison. He turned his head and saw a female, and he was not long in recognizing her as Zoe, the wife of Orfa. She gazed upon him a while with solicitous anxiety, and finally a happy look broke over her features.

"You have found your senses," she said, approaching nearer to the bed and bending over.

"My senses have found me, it seems," responded Ruric, with another effort to move. "But why am I thus bound?"

"To save your own life. Ah, dear count, you have been most raving, and but for these cords you would have sacrificed your life to the mad phantoms of your brain. But the bonds shall be removed now, for I see that you are your self."

"One moment—one moment," cried Ruric, as Zoe turned away. "I have much to ask you."

"Not now, not now. Be rid of your bonds first." And thus speaking, the woman left the room.

Ere long Ruric heard other footsteps approaching, and on turning his head he beheld the good-natured face of the physician who had ministered to Albec.

"So, so," he cried, as he caught the intelligent expression of the count's eye, "you have come back to sound reason once more! Good. I thought it could not last much longer. Now for your release from these bonds, for they must be burdensome to you."

And without further remark he proceeded to cast off the cords from the young man's limbs. They had been lined with small bags of wool where they came across the flesh, so that they had not been cankering or wearing in their con-

tact. When they were all off our hero moved over on to his side, and felt much easier. He drew his limbs up, and though they were of course somewhat stiff and weak, yet they moved at his will, and gave promise of much more service.

"I must have been very bad," he said, regarding the physician earnestly.

"Most truly you have," was the reply. "I never saw a worse man to deal with in my life."

"And where am I?"

"In Orfa's dwelling."

"Have I been here long?"

"Nearly three weeks."

"So long as that?" murmured Ruric, closing his eyes, and trying to think.

"Yes; but you will soon be on your legs again now."

"And who else is here?" the count whispered, showing that his soul was tortured with anxiety.

"Orfa is here, but he is not so strong as you are. He was wounded badly, but you were not."

"And Myrrha—where is she?"

For a while the physician was silent. He sat down by the bedside and looked the youth in the face, and Ruric saw plainly that he was troubled.

"Can you not tell me where she is?" said our hero, speaking in a sad, yet earnest tone.

"Not now—not now, count," returned the man of medicine. "Wait until you are stronger, and then I will tell you all I know. But I will not tell you one word now. I have saved you from death, and I mean to bring you once more to health, but you must obey me, for I claim the authority. Remember—you owe me your life, but all I ask is obedience."

The count saw something in the countenance of the physician that was too stern to be trifled with, and he asked no more questions. He felt that he would soon be strong, and he knew that the more quiet he kept, he sooner he would be up. He received a little nourishing food, and some invigorating cordial, and after a while he sank into an easy slumber. When he next awoke he felt like asking more questions, for his anxiety had got the upper hand, but he found only a small boy to answer his summons, and from him he could get no reply, save a peculiar shake of the head with an accompanying shrug of the shoulders.

The truth was, the physician had determined to keep away from his patient, for he knew well

the inquisition to which he would be subjected if he made his appearance. So for four days Ruric remained with no companion but the boy; but on the morning of the fifth day he found the old doctor again at his bedside, and he received the welcome information that he might get up and dress himself. He felt quite strong now, and a thrill of peculiar satisfaction shot through his frame as he found himself once more dressed and able to walk.

"Now see how much you have gained by keeping quiet," said the doctor, as he ran his eye over the youth's fair proportions.

"I do feel strong," returned Ruric. "Can I not have a horse?"

"Let us walk first. Take a draught of this wine, and then we will find the outer air; and perhaps when we return you may see Orfa."

Ruric took the proffered wine, and then he followed the physician from the room. He walked with more ease than could have been expected, and he felt stronger than he had even dared to hope. When he reached the open space in front of the uzden's dwelling, the first object that arrested his attention was the spot where the mosque had stood. The place was all bare and blackened now, and a few charred beams were alone left to tell where the house of worship had stood. From this point the youth's eyes swept the sides of the valley, and on all hands he saw the black fiend-track of the destroyer. Where peaceful cottages had stood, were now only to be seen heaps of ruins, and the verdant hillside no longer bore upon its green bosom the flock or the herdsman. Of the twenty buildings which had been the homes of the people of Stamyl, only four were left standing.

Ruric leaned upon the arm of his companion and gazed sadly about him, and it was a long while ere he could speak.

"It's dreadful!" at length said the physician.

"Ay, Galba," returned our hero, addressing his companion by his family name. "But now you must tell me all," he continued, with a fearful shudder. "Who of our people were saved?"

"But very few," answered Galba, with a mournful shake of the head. "Alas! but very few. Six men, of all our hamlet, are alive to see the ruins of their homes, and some of those are yet dangerously ill."

"And what of Albec?" asked the count.

"He lies beneath the sod in yonder little vale," said the physician, with a tear in his eye. "The old man died in the mosque. His life

went out there from pure exhaustion, and the women brought him forth when they came out. But he had lived his life, and under no circumstances could he have been spared much longer."

Ruric dwelt for a while upon the death of the good old man; but his mind soon ran into another channel. Now was to come the most weighty question of all, and in a hoarse whisper he asked it:

"Where is Myrrha?"

Galba gazed into the young man's face, and for some moments he was silent.

"Alas! Ruric," he at length uttered, "they have taken her away."

"They! They! Who?"

"The marauders of Hatukai."

"O, God have mercy!"

"But, my dear young friend, you must not—"

"Stop! stop! O, for the love of God do not speak to me now! Gone! O, Myrrha, Myrrha! Thou more than life—thou whole of heaven to me here on earth—art gone from me in the darkness of despair. Why do I live! Why does God torture me with life when its light is gone out!" And the stricken youth bowed his head and sobbed aloud.

"Have you no courage left?" asked the physician, taking the count kindly by the hand.

"Courage?" repeated Ruric, starting from his companion's hold, and raising his clenched hands high above his head. "Yes—I have more than belongs to mortal man, for I have the courage of the dark angel now. I could face ten thousand deaths, so that I could but sweep the marauders from the earth. O, Myrrha! Myrrha!"

Galba was deeply moved by the count's misery, for its poignancy was touching in the extreme; and then the black witnesses of ruin that lay about upon all hands spoke their silent language of wailing and sorrow. But the doctor soon overcame his outward emotion, for he was to minister to a mind more shattered by sorrow than his own.

"Count Ruric," he said, in a kind, persuasive tone, "I know how much occasion you have for sorrow—I know how deep must be the wound that has eaten into your soul, but all is not yet surely lost."

"Not all lost?" uttered the youth, starting with hope. "How—what is the point upon which my soul can cling?"

"Upon a point of hope. Myrrha is not surely dead. She has been stolen away, and may have been ere this sold, but no search has yet been made."

"And why was not some search made? Why were not the villains followed?"

"You forget, my young friend," returned the physician, with a melancholy smile. "Ah, there were none able to follow. I alone of all our people was left unharmed. When the hottest of the fight was raging, I was helping some of our poor people who had been wounded, and in the midst of my occupation I was spared. Alas, Ruric, there were none to follow!"

"And Myrrha was defenceless," groaned the youth, with new tears. "O, I remember, that when my arm was all drooping and faint, I struck down one villain who dared to lay a hand upon her. But I could defend her no more. O, Myrrha, Myrrha!"

"But now your arm will soon be strong again," quickly returned Galba, desiring to draw the youth from his unhappy thoughts as much as possible. "Look not upon Myrrha as lost; but look upon her as in danger, and be you her saviour, for I tell you all may not yet be hopeless. Circassian maidens sometimes remain for months in the bazaars of the Turkish capital, and especially is that liable to be the case where they are very beautiful, and at the same time full of grief, for the owner wishes to see them cheerful and happy ere he will risk them for sale."

"Then she was taken towards Constantinople?"

"Yes."

"And ere this time some insatiate Turk has her within his power!"

"I do not think so," said the physician, with real sincerity. "Let me assure you that the Turk is not the man you take him for. He wants no unwilling wife in his harem. He loves beauty, and will sacrifice much to obtain it, but I tell you he wants love and obedience in return. He has sensuality, but it is indolent—it turns aside from all obstacles, and seeks its accomplishment where there is the least of turmoil. Go to Constantinople, and you may find her," he added, encouragingly.

"But are you sure she was carried thither?"

"Not sure, but I think so. Such wondrous beauty as hers would not be consigned to a place short of the capital."

"And if she should already be in the se-raglio?"

"Then get her out."

"By the heavens above me, I will!" cried the youth, starting up from his dejection. "To-morrow I will set forth, and I will not sleep until I have—"

"Not too fast—got too fast," interrupted Galba. "If you would save Myrrha, you must first save yourself. You are not fit to set out now, but obey me, and I will soon make you so."

Ruric had sense enough to understand the justice of this, and he offered no argument in opposition, and after looking about him for awhile longer upon the desolated valley, he accompanied his companion back to the dwelling

of the uzden. They found Orfa awake, and they went into his room. His wife was by his bedside, and an observer could not have failed to see that in her sweet, kind face lay the power that was drawing the invalid back to health.

Orfa started up in his bed when he saw the youthful hero, and his grasp, though weak, was yet ardent and impulsive. They talked for a while of what had passed, and as Orfa began to weep over the fall of his people the physician drew Ruric away, lest the weak noble should suffer from the re-opening of his griefs.

So Feodor embraced Orfa once more, and then went to his own room, where he prayed that his own lost strength might be soon returned to him.

CHAPTER XV.

ON A DUBIOUS TRACK.

In four days—and long days they were to him who was most concerned—Ruric was told that he might set out upon his search. He was quite strong now, and he felt equal to any task that might oppose him. He had been to the cot where he had first found a home in Circassia. It had been ransacked, but his money was safe. Albee's cot had been one of those spared from the flames, for it was the first to which the marauders had come. Ruric secured his gold, and then he returned to the dwelling of Orfa, from which point he was to set forth. He could have no guide, nor no companion, but he felt sure that he could follow the track to Mamai.

"And so you are going," said Orfa, as he sat up in his bed, and held Ruric by the hand.

"Yes," returned our hero. "I cannot remain longer here. You know why I go."

"Ay, count—I do know, and I wish I could go with you; but I can do one thing for you, and that I will do with my whole soul: I will pray for you. I do not profess to be a prophet, but yet something tells me that you will succeed. I feel a strange confidence that Myrrha will be restored to you."

Perhaps Orfa was not a prophet, but yet his words had a wondrous power in raising up the hopes of his youthful friend, for he spoke as one with experience, at least, and we all know

how sober, earnest words of cheer can operate upon the human heart.

At length the parting came, and both Orfa and Ruric wept; and when they separated each had a word of hope and comfort for the other. The physician accompanied our hero a short distance towards the mountains, but ere long he turned back, and Ruric was alone, with only his stout mule and faithful weapons for company. He looked back upon the valley, and there ran the sparkling river the same as ever, the fields were all green, and the foliage was bespangled with flowers and blossoms; but yet how desolate! There were the black spots where the destroyer had trodden, and the low wind that murmured through the vale seemed only to whisper a requiem for the rest of those who had gone. Ruric uttered a fervent prayer for those who had fallen asleep in the arms of the death angel, and tears came to his eyes when he whispered the name of Albee in his prayer.

It was fully dark when the count reached the first stopping-place at the eastern foot of the mountains, and having secured and fed his mule, he made up his own bed in the little cave, and lay down to sleep. Early on the following morning he was again on his way, and as he began to ascend the mountain he found that the path was more easily to be traced than he had even

dared to hope. Without difficulty or danger he passed the mountain barrier, and again he spread his blanket upon the spot where he had first met Myrrha. He would have kept on direct to the coast, but there was no moon, and he dared not trust himself in the dark; but by the time the first streak of dawn had made itself palpable in the east he was again on his way, and by the middle of the afternoon he was in Mamai.

Our hero's first movement was to hunt up Lafal, his old guide, and at the end of an hour's search he was successful. They repaired at once to an inn, and there Ruric told his sad story.

"Yes, yes, I know," was Lafal's response, after he had heard the tale. "I saw the party, and I knew they had been upon some excursion of the kind. They remained here in Mamai a week before they could find a sale for their goods."

"And did you see Myrrha with them?"

"I am sure that she must have been with them, though I did not see her, for I heard one of their women spoken of as of surpassing loveliness."

"Do you know if she was sold?" asked Ruric, with nervous anxiety.

"I am pretty sure she was, though she was retained several days. But the host here can tell us. He was at the sale. Shall I call him in?"

"Yes. Anything to throw light upon this."

The host was accordingly called. He was a stout, oldish man, with a frank, open expression of countenance, somewhat rounded in form and feature by good eating and drinking, for he was not a strict follower of the prophet in matters pertaining to wine, as the formidable array of bottles in his cellar could testify.

"Hamor," said the guide, as soon as the publican had entered and closed the door after him, "you attended the sale of the women that were brought here by those fellows of the Hatakai?"

"Yes—I did, Lafal. I went, and I staid and saw them all sold but one."

"All but one?" uttered Ruric, catching at the words as though he felt sure that Myrrha must have been the exception.

"Yes, all but one," repeated Hamor, while a shade of honest sadness passed over his face. "Yes, there was one they did not sell then. I saw her, and she was the most beautiful creature I ever set my eyes upon. She was as handsome and pure as the prophet's own daughter Fatima. Poor thing! she took it hard. She wept and

sobbed as though her heart would break. Most of the women laughed when they were told of the rich houses to which they would be carried, but she—this one I speak of—only wept and sobbed the more. No one would buy her, for no one wished to make her miserable."

"It was Myrrha!" uttered Ruric, with clasped hands. "It must have been Myrrha. She had rich golden hair—"

"Yes."

"And a dark blue eye—"

"Yes. O, she was a lovely creature."

"It was Myrrha. And she was not sold?"

"Not then, but she has been sold since. She was sold five days ago to a merchant who sailed the next morning."

Ruric's hopes were crushed again. Sold—and gone!

"Do you know who the merchant was?" asked Lafal.

"Only that he was a Turk."

"And do you know where he was bound?"

"I think to the Bosphorus. The vessel, I believe, was to touch at Sinope, but Constantinople was her destination."

"Then," resumed Lafal, turning to our hero, "you must be off as quickly as possible, and you may overtake her before she is finally disposed of."

"But even then I may not be able to wrest her from her owner," said Ruric, in a hopeless tone.

"Buy her, buy her," was Lafal's reply, "and that will save all trouble. If she continues to weep and bemoan her fate, as I think she will, it will materially lessen her value in the eye of the indolent, beauty-loving Turk. Five hundred ducats, at the very outside, will buy her. Have you not that sum?"

"Yes, thrice told," quickly answered the youth, with a new gleam of hope in his soul.

"But when can I start for Constantinople?"

"I think there is a vessel to sail to-morrow morning," returned Lafal. "I am sure there is."

"Yes," added Hamor, "you are right, and she is bound direct for the Bosphorus, too. The captain will be here this evening."

But Ruric would not trust to the captain's coming to the inn. He persuaded Lafal to accompany him to the wharf, and having found the vessel he at once engaged a passage to Constantinople. On the following morning he sailed, and with a fair wind he began once more to pass the dark waters of the Euxine.

It was on the evening of the fourth day that the vessel reached the harbor of Constantinople, and on the next morning Ruric went on shore. He was now alone in a strange place, with no one to counsel or guide him, and for a while he was made dizzy by the strange scenes that met his gaze. He saw some things that were rich and sumptuous, but he saw more that were squalid and miserable. His first object was to find some comfortable inn, and this he did with the assistance of the captain who had brought him from Mamai. His next object was to procure a dress, and in this particular he was for a while undecided. He knew not what might have been the intelligence sent to the Russian minister of his crime and escape, nor who there might be in the Moslem capital to recognize and arrest him. After pondering for awhile upon this matter he resolved to procure the dress of a Greek, and such a dress he found at the very inn where he had taken up his quarters.

Thus equipped, Ruric would have set forth at once for the market where females are kept for sale, but he was informed that the place was closed, and would not be open again until the next day, and so till the next day he was forced to wait. But he was astir early in the morning, and when he reached the market-place he commenced a search among the merchants, pretending that he wished to buy.

"But you must be very particular," said the old Jew, who had shown the count twenty girls at least. "You won't find better ones, nor prettier."

"And yet they don't suit me," returned Ruric, after he had come out from the tapestried apartment where the women were seated. "I must look further. I have made up my mind as to the girl I want, and if I do not find such an one I shall go without."

"But think of that Georgian—the second one you saw. If you will promise to make her your wife—"

"I shall make a wife of the one I buy," interrupted Ruric.

"Then why not take the Georgian?" earnestly entreated the Jew. "Is she not beautiful?"

"Yes, she is beautiful enough."

"And you may be assured that she is kind," resumed the merchant, showing how anxious he was to trade. "I wouldn't recommend her for a slave, for she is too proud and delicate, but she will—"

"Never mind," interrupted the count, grow-

ing impatient. "I do not want a Georgian—I have set my mind upon a Circassian."

"Ah," uttered the Jew, rubbing his hands, and shaking his head, "you should have been here earlier. Only the day before yesterday I sold the handsomest Circassian that ever entered the city. You should have seen her. But it's too late now—she's gone, and you won't find her like again."

"Did you?" uttered the count, trying with all his might to keep back the emotions that had sprung into life.

"Indeed I did, my fair young master. As fair as an houri, and yet I let her go for a mere trifle."

"Ah. How was that?" inquired Ruric.

"I'll tell you. But I don't wonder you feel concerned about it, for you may be sure you lost a rare chance."

"O, I am not at all concerned," quickly replied the count, "only—"

"Ah, yes—I see, I see," broke in the Jew. "You feel a little disappointed, and don't like to own it. I know. But never mind. I let her go cheap because I knew she would fade on my hands. She was on the road to a sort of decline."

"Ah," uttered Ruric, biting his fingers till the blood came nigh starting.

"Yes. It interests you, don't it?"

"Somewhat, for I think I should like to have bought her."

"O, I am sure you would, and then I think she would have taken to you. But she took on badly. I don't think she ever came to Constantinople willingly. She cried, and sobbed, and prayed, and to tell you the truth, I was in a hurry to get rid of her for fear she would kill herself."

At this juncture Ruric was obliged to turn away to hide his emotions, for he doubted not that it was Myrrha of whom he heard. But the Jew had no other customers, and he waited the youth's pleasure.

"I think some of your snuff got into my eyes," said our hero, when he once more turned towards the merchant. "But I am really sorry that I did not come here sooner. I suppose you didn't learn her name?"

"O, yes, I always take their names."

"And could you tell me what it was?"

"I have it in my book," said the Jew, turning towards his desk and opening a dingy book

composed of strips of parchment stitched together at one end. "Yes—here it is—*Myrrha*."

Again Ruric turned away, but the Jew was busy with his book and did not notice him.

"To whom was she sold?" he at length asked.

"To Selim, the merchant."

"Do you think he would sell her?"

"I hardly think he would. He is a very rich man, and I think a very stout-willed man," replied the Jew.

"Where does he live?"

"Over towards Pera, just back of Galata. But there's no use in your going," said the Jew, with a shake of the head. "He'll be sure to hang on to such a prize."

"But if she utterly refuses to obey him—"

"She won't dare do it. No, no, my young master, Selim will not look long upon a stubborn wife. Let him alone for that."

"Then he bought her for a wife?" uttered Ruric, with a groan.

"Surely he did. But stop. Look at the Georgian once more."

But the count could not stop. With all his speed he hastened back to his inn, and when

once there, he shut himself up in his own room. For an hour he staid there, and when he could overcome his emotions sufficiently he would study upon the best course to be pursued; and thus he wept and pondered by turns. At length, however, he sought the keeper of the inn, and from him he learned where Selim lived, and also obtained somewhat of a glimpse of the merchant's character.

But this latter intelligence was not such as to give him much hope. It rather made the way more dark, for he found that the present possessor of *Myrrha* was noted for his sternness of manner and utter disregard of everything opposing him. Yet he resolved to go forth towards the suburb of Pera and see what fate might have in store for him. He might at least, he thought, find some one who could tell him of her—some servant who had seen her, and knew her situation. He knew he had no power—no authority—no friends. He did not dare to apply to one of his own countrymen, for from his native land he was but a fugitive, and the sword of death hung pending from the flag that might have been his bulwark of safety. He was all alone against the dark fate that opposed him.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE HAREM. FATIMA.

LET the reader picture a place the most sumptuous in conception—where the sensualist shall find all he can know of wealth, and where the voluptuary shall realize all he can hope for in pleasure's power, and the fanciful picture will most surely fall immeasurably short of the reality which was manifest in the harem of the merchant Selim. The room was spacious, with the walls hung with golden tapestry and the most costly of eastern fabrics—the lounges and ottomans were of the softest and most pliable materials, and literally groaning with their weight of wealth—the floor was lost beneath a carpet that swallowed up the feet in its luxurious softness—in the centre of the apartment played a silvery fountain of richly perfumed waters, while the lattices upon the high windows were curtained with roses that breathed forth such odors as might tempt the gods from the pure atmosphere of their celestial abodes. Selim was one of the most wealthy men in the Moslem capital, and in his abode he made it all palpable.

leaving only the grief-marks of a crushed soul upon those sweet features. Sorrow could not mar such beauty as hers, nor could grief blot out the angel that virtue had inspired within her.

Upon a rich cushion at *Myrrha*'s feet sat a young female, beautiful in the extreme, but with a beauty totally different from her companion; and yet she was a Circassian, and her name was *Fatima*. Her hair was black as the plumage of the raven, and her large eyes were like the depths of a starlit night. Her nature was all impetuous, rigid in excitement, strong in love, but powerful in hate. She was gazing up into *Myrrha*'s face, and the kindest of sympathy was palpable upon her features.

"Be calm, be calm," she said, in a tone of soft entreaty, at the same time raising one of her jewelled hands and resting it upon *Myrrha*'s arm. "Why should you bewail your fate more? It can do you no good, and it may do you much harm. Selim is not a man to be trifled with. Ah, *Myrrha*, I know his nature well."

Fatima spoke in a tone so strange and full of import, and her face bore such a stamp of meaning upon it, that *Myrrha* was startled.

"What mean you?" she asked, raising her brow from her hand, and gazing inquisitively upon her companion.

"I mean that Selim *will be obeyed*," was Fatima's reply. "I know him well. He can be kind—very kind—and to you I know he can be most kind; but beware of his wrath. I have seen it, Myrrha, I have seen it."

"But how? In what?" uttered Myrrha, moved for the while from the first cause of grief.

"If I should tell you, I should risk my own life."

"Tell me," said Myrrha, anxiously, and perhaps with some curiosity.

"I might risk my own life, and yet I might save yours," responded Fatima, casting her eyes upon the carpet as though she were meditating.

"But you must tell me. You mean something—something of importance. I would surely know my master's character."

"So you ought to know it," resumed Fatima, looking up again. "But can you be secret?"

"As the grave!" said Myrrha.

Fatima clasped her hands and shuddered.

"The grave is very secret," she replied, with a mournful, meaning tone. "So many tongues in Constantinople are hushed."

"But tell me of Selim," urged Myrrha, growing more anxious.

"I said that you had better obey him," returned Fatima, "for he will not long brook disobedience. I have seen those who disobeyed him, and I know how terrible is his judgment. Do you see those rippling waves that now dance in the sunlight?"

"Yes," whispered Myrrha, gazing out upon the waters of the Bosphorus, for thither had the speaker pointed.

"Well, they are dancing over the graves of those who have been false to Selim!"

Myrrha trembled and clasped her hands upon her bosom. For some moments she gazed into her companion's face without speaking, for she was slowly sifting out the meaning of what she had heard. At length she seemed to have comprehended it fully, for she earnestly asked:

"And is there no law in Constantinople to prevent this?"

"Ah, yes. There is a written law, made by the present sultan, but who shall apply it to Selim? The law does not know what he does. If Abdal Medjid knew of it he might punish our master; but the dark, deep waters of the Bosphorus do not tell his secrets. Beware, Myrrha."

Myrrha had heard it all, and she knew well its meaning. At first she was moved by a terrible fear, but gradually she overcame it, and as

her thoughts had freedom to go on to the pursuit of other things, a new idea seemed to have possessed her, for a glimmering light shone in her eyes, and with one hand upon her companion's shoulder she said:

"Fatima, you are content to remain with Selim?"

"Yes. Surely I am," returned the dark-eyed girl, looking up with curious surprise depicted upon her countenance.

"You love him?"

"Yes—I do love him."

"Then how can you share his love with me? I could not love a man, and then calmly see his heart divided with another."

Fatima started upon her knees, and threw off the light hand that rested upon her shoulder. A dark cloud had gathered upon her brow, and her black eyes flashed. A moment she remained thus, and then she bent forward and rested her head in Myrrha's lap.

"You came nigh making me hold a terrible thought," she murmured; "but I know you are not to blame. It is not your fault that you are here. No, no—I would rather love you, for you are of my own country. And I would save you, too, for Selim will be very angry. He asked me to try and—"

Fatima hesitated, and again that dark cloud flitted upon her brow, and her eyes flashed once more.

"What did he ask you to do?" whispered Myrrha.

"To make you love him—to tell you how kind he would be to you."

"Then you may give over your labor, for I cannot do it. But I will tell you what I can do."

Myrrha spoke very slowly and very calmly.

"What is it?" asked Fatima.

"Sleep there!" She pointed out upon the waters of the Bosphorus as she spoke, and not even her finger trembled.

Fatima was moved more by that simple expression and motion than by all else that had been said, for she saw that it was all meant.

"No, no," she uttered, after she had regarded her afflicted companion for some moments with a feeling approaching to awe, "you would not do that. You had better try to love Selim."

"O, you know not what you say, nor the nature of the soul to which you speak," quickly returned Myrrha, starting up and clasping both of Fatima's hands in her own. "I will tell you all—you shall know the very secret of my soul,

and then you will know how to pity me. In my own fair home was a man whom I loved with the whole strength of my heart. He was all the earth to me, and I to him. Our loves were pledged—our vows were made when all was bright and fair. So long as I live my love is his, nor can time, nor place, nor trials, nor afflictions, nor fears, nor threats, move that love from me. They tore me from him and sold me away among strangers. He was young and fair—as fair as the golden morn when she first blushes in the east—as fair as the stately cedar upon which the rose-vines cling—and as noble and generous as the summer's sun that invigorates all nature with its presence. Alas! he is lost to me for the while, but I cannot give up the hope that I shall see him again."

Fatima indeed understood this, for she bowed her head, and the teardrops of sympathy stood upon her long dark lashes; but before she could make any reply, Myrrha continued:

"It may be that when we meet again, it will be in heaven, but be it wherever it may, my heart is all his own. When I saw him last he was weak and faint, and his best blood had been spilled in my defence. But he was not dead then. I hope he lives."

"Ah," uttered Fatima, with a sad shake of the head, "you must not hope too much. You may as well acknowledge the truth at first. Your early love is dead to you, for from this place you will find no escape."

"None?" said Myrrha. "Do none ever escape from their prisons?"

"I never knew it, though I know not that I ever knew one who wished it; but I know there is no escape from here. Selim's harem is guarded by most jealous eyes. Between here and liberty there are a score of cimeters that are never sheathed. You would escape his power only to fall into the arms of death. I love you, Myrrha, and I would save you. Were it another, or were you of any other country but Circassia, I would let you die ere you should share Selim's love."

"You need not fear," returned Myrrha, with a grateful look, "for I shall take none of his love from you."

"But you cannot help it, for he already loves you. Hark! here he comes. I know his step."

"Then God save me!"

"No, save yourself. Try to please him. Take my advice, now, for I know him well."

"He may kill me if he pleases."

"Beware! or you may find how quickly your prayer can be answered. For one that he loved not he might feel only anger; but for one that he loves as he loves you, he has but one other feeling, and that is most deadly—sh! He comes. Beware! Let us live happily together. Love him, and I will be all I can to you."

As the footsteps sounded upon the corridor Fatima glided away into an adjoining apartment, and Myrrha was left alone to meet her master, and in a moment more the heavy silken arras was drawn aside, and Selim entered.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DRUG.

SOMETIMES, under the force of pressing circumstances, the human mind can form and grasp at a plan of operations that might have puzzled the brain for hours when there was room for arguing each point separately—and this can be done, too, almost instantaneously. So it was with Myrrha. From the time that Fatima left her, to the entrance of her master, which was not half a minute, she had made up her mind. Of course the plan was wild and crude, but still it served for a basis of action. She was ready for the meeting.

Selim was not an old man—not past forty, at the furthest, and he was far from being ugly to look upon. He was somewhat stout in his build, but rendered physically weak by sensual indulgence, the marks of which he carried plainly upon his features. But he showed in his countenance how strong were his passions, and how much of the tiger he could be. Long indulgence had made him reckless, and he had now reached that stage where nothing could check his desires. There was many a death-secret locked up in his bosom, and there was room for many more. He cared not for the law so long as he had slaves about him who dared not speak, and who yet stood ready to do his will. Fatima had told his character truly.

advanced to the lounge upon which Myrrha

was reclining, and a smile rested upon his face when he saw how calm she was.

"Ay, my Gleam of Sunlight," he said, as he took her unresisting hand, "you are more calm to-day. You begin to feel contented here?"

"I am more contented than at first," was Myrrha's reply.

"Ay—I should know that by your speech," said Selim, with much joy. "I thought you would find my home a pleasant one. You shall be very happy here, Myrrha. But you were very sad when you came here."

"Because I had just been torn from my home," returned the maiden.

"Ah, then you came not willingly?" uttered the Moslem, with some pity, and some surprise.

"No. I was forced away, and almost the last object upon which my eyes rested was the cold body of my dead father. He died before my eyes, but they would not let me stop to see him laid to rest. Alas! how could I help weeping! And even now my mourning is not passed. Bear with me, my master—bear with me awhile."

"Most surely I will bear with thee, fairest of the fair."

"Let me have a week to myself?" pursued Myrrha, gaining courage, but yet with tears in her eyes. "Let me have time to heal over the wounds that yet bleed in my soul."

"Take it, take it," cried Selim; "but you must allow me to come here and sit with you. You must allow me to bask sometimes in the light of your sweet smiles, for I know you can smile."

For an instant the gleam of hope that struggled to the bosom of the maiden made her feel happy, and she did look up and smile. It was only a passing movement, but Selim caught it, and in a transport he exclaimed:

"O, by the beard of the Prophet, you shall be most happy here. Of all the wives I have had, Fatima is the only one left to me. In a week you shall take the place of all those that are gone, and you are well qualified to fill their places. I don't think I shall want another."

A cold shudder crept through Myrrha's frame as her master thus alluded to his lost wives, but not a motion betrayed the knowledge she held. Her point for the present was gained, and she felt an ease that was manifest in her speech and manner.

For more than an hour Selim remained in his harem and conversed with the beautiful maiden, and by his every word and look he showed that he was perfectly enraptured. And yet through his very words of endearment and love, Myrrha could see that spirit which would surely be fatal to one that excited it in enmity—it was so deep, so passionate, so jealous, and so reckless. Selim kissed her upon her fair brow as he arose to take his departure, and even then she did not shrink nor betray her loathing; but when he was fairly gone she sank back upon the couch, and burst into tears. When she was aroused, it was by the presence of Fatima, who had come and sat down once more by her side.

"He loves you—O, how madly!" uttered the wife, in a strange tone, as Myrrha arose to a sitting posture. "I heard him—I heard his every word. I did not think he loved you so well. He will forget me. He will forget his Fatima now."

She spoke in a most sad tone, and great tears stood in her eyes. But there were no tears in her eyes while she was listening to the words of love which Selim had spoken to the maiden. She had given life then to more dangerous expressions than tears. But when she saw the sweet face of Myrrha, and saw her tears, too, she was softened, and her love was awakened once more.

Myrrha was no longer blind. She saw now that Fatima could not divide the love of Selim,

that she had a true woman's heart, and that she could not bear to have another take her place in his affection.

"Ah, Fatima," she said, "your heart is like my own. You cannot see the object of its love turn towards another."

"You mistake me, Myrrha. I care not how much Selim may toy with those that please him, so long as I have the freshest place in his heart. But you are more beautiful than I am; and Selim will love you best—I know he will. O, I heard him speak to you, and I marked his every look."

And as Fatima thus spoke she began to weep. Myrrha threw her arms about her neck and tried to quiet her.

"I will not take his love from you," she said.

"You cannot help it," sobbed the wife.

"I can help it!"

"Can help it? How?" cried Fatima, starting back and gazing full into her companion's face.

"By escaping from here."

"Alas, that cannot be."

"But would not you help me?"

"How?"

"If you will obtain for me one simple drug, I will make the attempt."

"No, no, you must not harm him," said Fatima, in alarm.

"I will not harm him. Get me the drug, and by my hopes of immortal life I will not harm Selim. He shall not touch it, nor shall it be used in any way upon him."

"Then how will you use it?"

"I have a charm to work by the aid of that drug. Get it, and no one shall suffer unless I fail, and even then I should suffer alone. Get it, Fatima, and you shall have the whole of Selim's heart. He loves me—he loves me too well. If I remain here we shall both be miserable. Get the drug, and we may both be happy. Will you not do it?"

Fatima trembled like an aspen. There was something in Myrrha's vehement manner that inspired her with awe, and she had just superstition enough to think that the maiden might work some strange charm.

"I trust I can get it," she said, at the end of an anxious pause. "I think I could get it, Myrrha, for I have confidants here whom I can trust, and who would not dare to betray me; but I fear Selim may suffer."

"And why should that trouble you? He would soon forget me if you were kind to him."

"Forget you?" repeated Fatima, looking inquisitive. "I do not understand."

"Why, I mean that Selim can suffer only because I am gone. Did you fear he would suffer more than that?"

"Ay—the drug—the drug, Myrrha. O, I would not have Selim hurt. I love him."

"But I will not hurt him," earnestly uttered Myrrha. "Upon my soul I will not. Get me the drug, and neither you nor he shall know aught of its effects. You shall then have all of Selim's love."

This appeal touched Fatima's heart. She remained for some time in a silent, thoughtful mood, and when she again looked up there was a shade of anxiety upon her face, but yet she was calm.

"I will get it," she said—"I will get it if I can. But remember your promise."

"Fatima, you know, that even to save my own life, I would not deceive you. I have spoken truly."

This was said in a tone not to be mistaken, and Fatima's doubts were all swept away.

In the household of Selim there was an old woman who had free ingress and egress to and from the harem. She performed most of the errands for the merchant's wives, and bought them perfumes and *bonne bouches*. She passed the eunuchs when she pleased, for Selim knew well her fidelity. She was a Nubian woman, of medium stature, and black as night, and her name was Dido. Fatima had always been very kind to this old slave, and Dido would do anything in her power to please her—and she did it

the more readily, too, because she knew that Fatima was faithful to her master.

To Dido then, did Fatima apply for the drug. The old woman knew nothing of the nature of the article she was to get, nor did she care to know. She thought it might be some new perfume or cosmetic, and she promised to obtain it.

On the second day, Fatima came to Myrrha's sleeping apartment with the drug in her possession.

"Here it is," she said, as she handed the maiden a small paper parcel. "I think Dido has made no mistake."

Myrrha took the paper and smelled of it.

"It is right," she whispered, while she trembled at every nerve with the excitement of the moment.

Fatima gazed into her face with an eager, anxious look, and it was plain that her mind was not wholly free from doubt.

"Myrrha," she said, laying her hand softly upon the maiden's arm, "tell me wherein lies the charm of that drug. I will not betray you."

"I cannot tell you now," replied Myrrha, "but you shall know ere long. Let me try its power first, and then you shall see. I have not told you falsely."

"You will not harm Selim?"

"No. If I do, may my hopes of salvation be lost in the night of eternal darkness. Selim shall be all your own. Trust me, my dear friend."

And Fatima did trust her, though she could not help wondering what should be the end of the work she was blindly aiding.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE EMPEROR ON THE ROAD.

ONCE more let us go back to St. Petersburg. It was early in the day, and the emperor was alone in his great study. He was unwashed, and not more than half dressed. Even the prisoner in his dark dungeon, with the doom of death hanging over him, was not more ill at ease than was Nicholas of Russia. His imperial crown did not save him from the head-ache, nor did the insignia upon his breast save him from the heart-ache. His massive brain had worked hard, and the result was only disquiet and misery. At times he could make himself easy by viewing his vast resources of power; but he knew that he did not rule all Europe, and he was dissatisfied. Again he could receive gratification in contemplating the vengeance he held in store for his enemies; but the phantom could not please him long, for he knew not who his enemies might be. He could not hide from himself the fact that there were few men on earth who loved him. Many obeyed him, and many feared him, and many gazed upon him with awe, but there were few sincere prayers that went up to heaven for him. He was as a lion in the great Russian forest of humanity, and thousands trembled at the roar of his dread voice—and while they trembled they hated him. Nicholas knew this too well—he knew that his power all lay in the steel and lead of his army, and in his own wonderful force of physical command. He was "Autocrat of all the Russias," but he could not be an Alexander, nor yet a Napoleon. People bowed to him, but it was because his

foot was on their necks, and they could not rise.

All the morning had Nicholas been busy in building plans for the future, and all his plans were for conquest and revenge; but at length he passed from these thoughts, and after one or two turns up and down his room he rang for his secretary, and the summons was soon answered. It was no uncommon thing for the secretary to find his master unwashed and even slovenly in appearance, and he took but little notice of the present state of affairs.

"Pascovitz," said the emperor, as soon as the door was closed, "what do people say of Menzikoff's imprisonment?"

"They wonder at it, sire."

"And is that all?"

"I have heard little else. The prince was not a man greatly beloved."

"Nor respected," added the emperor.

"No, sire."

"For," continued Nicholas, with a cloud upon his great brow, "I am jealous of these men who are much beloved. Men are not like dogs. They do not love the master who rules them with the rod, and where I find a noble who is so much beloved I fear that he gives power to the people. I must beware of them. — But you say Menzikoff was not even respected?"

"No, sire. He was known to be double-dealing and treacherous."

"So he was—so he was, Pascovitz. And do the people wonder if he is to die?"

"Yes, sire."

"Well, let them wonder. But fate has saved us the trouble of satisfying them. I did not mean to kill the prince. I meant to have sent him to wear out the rest of his life amid the eternal winter of Siberia. But I am spared the trouble of even his banishment. He died in his prison last night."

"Died!" uttered the secretary, somewhat startled at first, but soon overcoming the surprise.

"Yes," returned the emperor. "I think he died of pure fear and mortification, for he knew that I had weighty charges against him. But let him go now. I wish I could have had some few words from his lips, but I know all. He could not have deceived me. He had lived in villany for a long while."

"I think he had," said the secretary.

"I know he had," was the emperor's quick reply. "But he is dead now, and he must answer for his crimes to a power higher than mine. And now of Ivan the serf: Have you been able to learn anything of him?"

"No, sire—not a word."

"It is curious. I sent him off after the Count John Galitzin nearly two months since, and not a word have I yet heard. Pscovitz, that man must be found."

"Perhaps he has fled."

"No, no—I know better than that. He had nothing to fear from me, but everything to gain. There must have been some accident befallen him, or else he would surely have been here ere this. I had hoped to have confronted him with Menzikoff in Galitzin's presence, but it's too late now. Ha, there's the bell. The courier has arrived from Moscow. I want his budget much."

"It must be the courier," said Pscovitz, as he went to the window and looked down the court.

"Go you and bring up his load."

The secretary left the apartment, and when he returned he bore in his hands a large package of papers. Nicholas took them and laid them upon his table, and having set down to the work he commenced to overhaul them. He looked first at those from Moscow, and though there were changes upon his countenance as he read, yet an observer could not have told from his looks whether a robbery had taken place, or whether a nation had crumbled to atoms. Next he opened a packet from Odessa, and the very first letter he read drew from him an utterance of interest; but it was only a simple "Aha," and then the letter was laid by itself. After he had read all the rest he took this first letter from

Odessa in his hand and leaned back in his chair.

"Pscovitz," he said, "I have found light upon the subject of our conversation."

"Ah, how so?"

"Ivan the serf is at the other end of my empire, on the shores of the Black Sea. He is in Odessa. This letter is from Galitzin."

"Then it seems to me that they have both got at a respectable distance."

"So they have, but 'twas no fault of theirs. When Ivan reached Penza he found that Galitzin had gone to Odessa, and thither he posted after him. But when he reached there, he found the count sick in bed, so he is waiting for his recovery."

"Then I suppose you must await his return?"

"I don't know," said the emperor, laying down the letter and starting to his feet. "Go you, Pscovitz, and give orders that the body of Menzikoff be given to his friends. Say that he was arrested for treason, and would have been banished had he lived. Then go to his banker and order that every ducat of the prince's property be kept in strict account until I call for it. Do this, and be back here in half an hour."

When the emperor was left alone he finished his morning's toilet, and then he sat down and looked over the letters once more, and those who were acquainted with him could have seen from his thoughtful manner, that he was reading and digesting, and planning, all at the same time.

Punctual to the half hour the obedient secretary entered.

"Is all done?" asked Nicholas, refolding the last letter.

"Yes, sire."

"Then haste you now to my grooms. Bid for me the best *drojeka* and four of the fleetest horses. See you that our bedding is put on board, for we must sleep upon the road. On the third night from this we must sleep in Moscow, and, on the eighth, at Odessa. Nothing beyond that—but sooner if possible. You will accompany me."

Pscovitz was too well acquainted with the hardy emperor's habits to be surprised at this order, and without question of any kind he hastened away to obey it. In the meantime Nicholas hastily wrote out a few necessary directions for his ministers, and having folded and sealed them, he went to take leave of his wife.

In an hour from that time, a substantial *drojeka*, with the emperor and his secretary on board, was dashing along towards the confines of the province of Novgorod.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FLIGHT.

It was towards the close of the day, and Selim had just left Myrrha's side, where he had spent an hour in conversation. The week was drawing to a close, and the time was high at hand when the Moslem counted upon the possession of the most beautiful wife within the city. After he had gone, Fatima came to the maiden's feet and sat down upon her cushion. She looked very sober, and could not have been far from unhappy, for she had again heard Selim's words of love bestowed upon another and her heart had been again pained. But Myrrha did not speak as usual. She was silent, and her eyes were filled with tears. Fatima looked up in surprise.

"What has happened?" she asked.

"Nothing—nothing," returned Myrrha. "I am only thoughtful, and I was thinking how much of gratitude I owed to you. I always weep when I feel very grateful."

"Then you must love me," whispered Fatima, raising herself to the lounge and throwing her arms around her companion's neck.

"Indeed I do love you," fervently responded Myrrha, returning the warm embrace. "I shall never forget to pray for you, for you have been very kind to me."

"And I mean to be kind," cried the wife, forgetting all her own sorrows now. "I will al-

ways be kind. O, I wish Selim had two hearts, two souls."

"But you forget that I have a heart—a soul—that is all mine—one that beats truly for me," whispered Myrrha.

"Yes—I did forget," murmured Fatima, bowing her head. "But your charm," added she, looking up with a quick expression. "Will that do as you thought? Have you tried it yet?"

"Not wholly. To-morrow I will tell you how it works; but to-night I must have to myself. To-night, Fatima, ere I lay me down to sleep I shall know both your fate and mine."

"You are sure of that?"

"I think so. Come to my room in the morning and you shall know."

"I will come, and if you sleep I shall awake you."

"I think you will not find me asleep, for my anxiety will be equal to your curiosity."

"Ah, Myrrha, it is not all curiosity. I, too, am anxious. I hope we may all be happy. You said you would not harm—But I am not suspicious. I trust you, Myrrha."

Again the two girls embraced each other, and at the end of half an hour they separated. Myrrha strained the faithful Fatima to her bosom and kissed her many times, and when she turned away there was a pang in her heart, for she

thought came to her soul that she had seen her sweet companion for the last time.

It was fairly dark when Myrrha entered her own private room, but the attendant had lighted the great lamp, and the perfumed fluid sent forth a sweet odor as it burned. The maiden stood for a while in the centre of the room and gazed around upon the sumptuous trappings which wealth had spread out to make her happy.

"O," she murmured to herself, as she still gazed upon the scene, "what a mockery is wealth to the breaking heart! All the gold in the world is but as a single feather when balanced against the heart's rest. And does Selim think a golden cage can heal the heart-wounds? Ah, he does not know all."

She shook her head with a sad motion as she spoke, and then went and sat down upon a silken divan. For half an hour she sat there and listened to the evening breeze as it played with the flowers at her window, and at the end of that time she was perfectly calm. She arose and pulled the bell-cord that hung near her, and shortly afterwards a eunuch looked in at the door. She requested the attendant to send Dido to her room. At length the old negress made her appearance, and wished to know the pleasure of her young mistress.

At first Myrrha was so agitated by her emotions that she had to turn away her head, but by a powerful effort she overcame them, and she was soon calm again.

"You are not well," said Dido, whose quick eye had detected something out of the way.

"Not very," returned Myrrha, fully sensible of the strength she required, and being determined to maintain it. "Not very. My head is light. I fear I have drank too much sherbet. I am not used to the drink."

"No, I suppose not," replied Dido, with a sort of appreciating chuckle and a smack of the lips. "Wait till you have drank as much as I have."

"O, I shall soon get used to it," said Myrrha, with a forced smile. "But I sent for you, Dido, to know if you could perform a mission for me."

"When?"

"This evening."

"That depends upon what it is?"

"O, it is nothing which you could object to, only I did not know as you could leave the house in the evening."

"Certainly. I can go and come when I please."

"And they will not question you?"

"Nobody but Selim dares to question me."

"Then you are indeed privileged."

"Yes—if to be always on one's feet is a privilege. But for my part, I should think you and Fatima were the privileged ones."

"So we are—so we are," said Myrrha, in a tone so well assumed that no one could have detected it.

"Yes—that you are. My soul, what an easy life. But what is this errand?"

"Ah, yes. Do you know where to find the Jew of whom Selim bought me?"

"Yes."

"O, I wish I had not drank so much of that sherbet—but it tasted so delicious I could not help it. I have a mind to throw the rest away, for it will surely tempt me to further excess."

"What! throw away sherbet? Out upon thee for a wasteful— But I will not say that. Give me the drink."

"Certainly—though I think that would be throwing it away, for I do not think you need it."

As Myrrha thus spoke she lifted a silver flagon from the basin of the fountain where it had been setting that it might keep cool, and with a smile she handed it to Dido.

"Ah-h-h! that is delicious!" uttered Dido, as she lowered the flagon from her lips and stopped to take breath. "What! throw such nectar away! Why, Selim himself would be thankful for it. But you have put just a jot too much almond in it."

"Then I wouldn't drink any more."

"O, I like almond," and again Dido raised the vessel and drank. When she had done the flagon was empty, and having set it down and wiped her lips, she turned towards the maiden.

"Now I suppose I must do your errand out of pure gratitude," she said, with a chuckle of pleasure that told how well she had enjoyed the draught. "But it must be nothing out of the way, mind you, for I never deceive Selim."

"Of course I would ask you to do nothing wrong," returned Myrrha, with some little show of anxiety. "But do you always see Selim when you go out in the evening?"

"O, no. He is off before this time drinking coffee and smoking with his friends at the cafe."

"Then you can go out very easily?"

"Yes—if there's nothing wrong in it. Mind that. I said if there was nothing wrong in—"

Ah-r-r-r. Why, bless me, how sleepy I am. What can— Ah-r-r-r—"

Dido yawned and gaped, and with one or two more attempts to speak she rolled over upon the floor perfectly insensible.

"So, so," murmured Myrrha, as she bent over the prostrate woman, "the drug begins its work. It won't hurt you, Dido. It will only make you sleep soundly till morning. Ay," she added, starting up, "the drug has done its charm, and now comes my part. Be strong and firm, O, my heart—be strong. The way is open, and God help me to pass through. Give me but egress from here, and I can find protection somewhere."

Myrrha stooped down, and with a strong hand she removed the fantastic articles of dress with which Dido was clothed. One by one she took them off, and though the task was a tedious one, yet she accomplished it, and when it was all done she commenced to put the quaint garments upon herself, and by stooping a little they fitted her well. As soon as this was done, she drew from her bosom a mask of dingy black silk, which she had fashioned herself, and having fixed it upon her face she took Dido's coil of crimson and white, and bound it about her head, taking care that her hair was tucked up out of sight, and that an end of the coil was left so that it might flap about her face. When it was all done she went and surveyed herself in the mirror, and she fairly started at the strange appearance she made. The black mask fitted snugly to her face, and though her features were not like Dido's, yet the rest was, so perfect that it would require a close examination to detect the deception.

After this the maiden went and sat down to rest and gain strength, for but a slight part of the real work was yet done. She had indeed taxed her ingenuity to a good purpose, but now came the strength of nerve and resolution. But she dared not stop long. She only calmed her nerves, and then she arose and moved towards the door. She opened it and passed out into the ante-room, and from here she gained the gallery. At a short distance was a watching eunuch, but without hesitation she kept on and passed him. He did not oppose her, nor did he speak. He only moved aside to let her go by, and then resumed his watch. This gave the maiden courage, and she moved on with more confidence. At the end of the gallery she came to a point where there were two flights of stairs running

down opposite ways, and a eunuch was there to guard them. Myrrha knew not which flight to take, but she knew it would not do to hesitate, so she at once turned to the left.

"You'll not get out that way, Dido," said the eunuch, "for the front passage was locked half an hour ago."

There was a lamp hanging directly over the centre of the space between the two stairways, and our heroine had the presence of mind to pass directly underneath it as she turned to take the opposite passage. This helped to keep her face shaded, and she passed on without being stopped. At the foot of these stairs she hesitated, for she knew not now which way to turn. She found herself in quite a large hall, and there were a dozen doors, at least, in sight. But there was not a moment for thought, for a grim, ever-present eunuch stood leaning against one of the walls, so she walked directly to the door that seemed the nearest to the outside of the building and opened it. She passed quickly through, and when she had closed the door behind her she found herself in the dark; but there was a fresh current of air upon her cheeks, and hope sprung up in her bosom.

As soon as Myrrha had become in a little degree used to the gloom she discovered a lattice, and upon approaching it she found that she was indeed in one of the outer rooms. She groped her way along the wall until she found a door, but it was fast. Quickly, and almost wildly, she ran her hands over its surface to see if she could find a key. No such thing was there, but she found a button, though, and upon turning it the door yielded to her touch. She pushed it open and passed through, and a wild thrill shot through her frame as she found herself in the open air. The stars were above her, and the sweet breeze swept past her, and for a moment the whisper came to her soul that she was free. But she knew not yet where lay her point of refuge. As soon as she could gather strength to look carefully about she became satisfied that she was in the garden. She had seen this garden from the windows of the harem, and she knew that it was surrounded by a high, impenetrable wall, but she hoped to be able to surmount it at some point, and with this hope she moved quickly on through one of the by-paths towards the extremity of the enclosure.

Myrrha had gained about half the distance from the porch to the wall, when she was startled by hearing footsteps behind her. For a sin-

gle instant she stopped to listen, and then she hurried on again. She found herself more weak than she had supposed. The ordeal through which she had already passed had tried her nervous strength to its utmost, and the few moments of quiet in the garden had for the while eased the burden; but this new source of alarm came upon her when she could not bear it. She fled on, but she still heard the footsteps behind her.

"Stop! stop!" cried the pursuer.

Myrrha heard, and she tried to gather her scattered energies. She kept on, but it was more under the force of the impetus her body had already gained, than from the result of her will.

"Stop! stop! you cannot escape me!" came in quick, hurried accents from the pursuer.

One more effort—one more thrill of fainting hope—and the maiden came to the end of the path. She could neither turn to the right hand nor the left. Before her was an arbor, beneath the vines of which played a small fountain. Behind her she heard the coming steps. She would have dashed around the arbor, but the high wall was beyond. She would have turned, but the pursuer was there. She clasped her hands, but before she could pray, a hand was laid upon her shoulder, and with one wild cry she sank fainting upon the flowery earth.

CHAPTER XX.

A SUNBEAM, AND A CLOUD.

MYRRHA did not remain long insensible, for she soon realized that the silken mask had been pulled from her face, and that her brow and temples were being bathed with cool water. She heard her name pronounced in low, thrilling accents—the voice was familiar—she knew its tones—and she came back to life. She looked up, and in the dim starlight she saw revealed the features of Feodor Ruric.

"Myrrha! Myrrha!" he cried, as he raised her head to his lap, "O, I am not mistaken. You are safe. I am here. You know me, Myrrha."

The maiden pronounced his name in a low whisper, and at the same time raised her arms to his neck.

"Can we get out from here?" she asked, gazing eagerly about her as soon as she realized the nature of her position. O, thank God, thus far, Feodor, I am safe. I am the same as when you lay upon my bosom in the mosque. But we must escape from here."

"The way is open."

"And it was you who followed me. It was your footfall I heard—and your hand that was laid upon me."

"Yes," quickly returned Ruric, lifting the maiden higher up. "I saw you, and I thought you were the old woman whom I have seen

about here, and I determined to speak with you if possible, and ask for Myrrha. But all is mine now. Come—we must tell our stories in a safer place. Do you think you can walk?"

"Yes. I am stronger now."

The new hope had given power to the maiden's limbs, and she arose to her feet and took her lover's arm.

"Now let us go," she said, "for ruin hangs over us here. You are sure you can find the way out."

"Yes. But draw on your mask again, for it may be of service."

Myrrha took the silken disguise, and having adjusted it, she once more leaned upon the youth's arm, and then they hastened away towards one of the angles of the wall where there was a stout rope hanging down. It was one which Ruric had left there, and by dint of much exertion he succeeded in helping Myrrha to the top of the wall, and when he had followed her he pulled up the rope and let it down upon the outside, it being fastened to the coping by a grapple. The descent was easy. Then Ruric shook the rope down and threw it away, and then he gave his arm to his companion and hurried off towards the harbor.

Without difficulty Ruric reached the inn where he had taken his lodgings, and he decided to

take Myrrha secretly to his own apartment, fearing that if any one saw her it might lead to her detection. When they reached the room the maiden sank upon a seat, but she was only fatigued with over-exertion—she did not feel faint nor dizzy. The door was closed and secured, and then they told their stories. Myrrha told all that had befallen her—how she had been sold, and how she had passed her time in Selim's dwelling. And in return Ruric told his own adventures. He related his recovery at the house of Orfa—his passage of the Caucasus—his meeting with the guide, the inn-keeper, and finally with the Jew.

"I at once sought the dwelling of Selim," he continued, "and there I watched. Twice I spoke to some one who came out, but I could gain no tidings of you. Yet I kept up the watch for four days and nights without gaining one word. To-night I resolved to approach the house by the garden, and with that intent I procured a rope and scaled the wall. I had not been there over fifteen minutes before I saw some one come out into the garden from the house. I was close by, and I supposed it was an old negro woman whom I have seen several times about the premises. I did not dare to hail her too near the house for fear I might frighten her, so I let her get some distance off, and then I followed. I cannot describe to you what were my feelings when I first saw your own sweet face. But you know the rest."

Ruric clasped the maiden to his bosom as he ceased speaking, and for a long while they remained silent. They were both thinking of the past; but their minds could not dwell there long, for there was yet a dubious path before them. Myrrha was the first to speak.

"I shall be searched for in the morning," she said, "and perhaps they will discover my flight before. Do you think I shall be safe here?"

"I have been thinking of that," returned Ruric, thoughtfully. "If I have been noticed hanging about the merchant's dwelling—and of course I have—they may take the hint and trace me here."

"You know you asked of some one who left Selim's house concerning me," suggested Myrrha, not trying to conceal her apprehensions.

"I know I did," returned Ruric; and after a few moments of reflection he added,—"It will not be safe for you to remain here. I must find some other place of refuge. You can stay here awhile, and I will go out and seek some place.

Not far from here there is a Greek tailor. He is poor, and I think that for a few pieces of gold he will give you shelter. I am confident he may be trusted. You will be safe here while I am gone."

"But you will come back soon," murmured Myrrha, clinging fearfully to her lover.

"Yes, yes, dearest. Rest you upon this couch while I am gone, and when I return I will have a place of safety looked up. Do not fear."

"I cannot help trembling," she uttered; "but you may go. I think I shall be safe."

She spoke in a very low, tremulous tone, but she did not show all the fear she felt. It seemed dark to her to be left there alone, but she yet saw that 'twas for her own safety that Ruric should go, and she tried to throw off the emotion.

The youth kissed her, and having spoken a word more of cheer, he hurried away from the room, and with as little noise as possible descended to the narrow, dirty street. It was now nearly midnight, but he found the residence of the Greek tailor without difficulty, though the task of arousing him was not so easy. But even that was at length accomplished, though not without startling a sleepy policeman who was dozing at the corner of the next square. The nocturnal guardian came up and wished to know what was the trouble.

"They've locked me out, that's all," returned Ruric.

"Eh? Locked you out. Then I've a great notion to take you before the cadî. We can't be disturbed in this way by you troublesome Greeks. Do you think the whole city must be waked up when you are left out?"

"If I troubled you, why—here. Here, that'll fill your pipe enough to make up for all the sleep you've lost."

Ruric placed a couple of piastres in the fellow's hand as he spoke, and the policeman gave a genial grunt and then moved slowly back to his place of rest. The Greek tailor had heard all this from his window, and as soon as the guardian had gone he came down and opened the door. The count went in, and then in as few words as possible explained the object of his visit. The Greek considered upon the proposition, but the color of the gold overcame his fears, and he consented that the maiden should be brought at once to his house, and he would conceal her as long as necessary.

With eager steps Ruric hastened back towards

his inn. He had been gone nearly an hour, but amid the excitement and anxiety of the occasion he had taken little note of time. He knew that he had done the business as quickly as possible, and that was all. When he reached the steps of the inn he heard steps in the narrow hall, and he found that the outer door was partly open. He entered, and met the host.

"Eh!" uttered that individual, with a look of surprise. "Where you been?"

"Been walking. But what are you up after?"

"I'm up for enough. By the beard of the prophet, I came nigh having my house pulled down about my ears. Who are you? or what are you?"

"What do you mean?" stammered the youth, seized with a fearful apprehension.

"I mean who are you, that you kick up such a dust about my inn?"

"I don't understand. I've done nothing. Explain."

"Explain? By the black rock of the Kaaba, that's more than I can do. All I know is, that there's been folks here after you. They described your dress and looks exactly."

"But they did not find me."

"No,—of course not. But they'll be likely to next time, so I advise you, if you have done any crime, to take yourself out of the way."

"I am no criminal," uttered Ruric.

"You know best," rejoined the host; and as

he spoke he turned towards his own apartment.

Ruric hastened up to his room. He pushed open the door and entered. The lamp was burning, but there was no Myrrha! He gazed about him, but he was alone! He called the name of his beloved, but he gained no answer. In a frenzy he rushed down stairs and called up his host.

"Who were those people that came here for me?" he asked.

"I don't know," returned the Turk, a little startled by the young man's manner.

"But you know something of them," persisted Ruric.

"I know there was a cadî with them, and that is all."

"And did they go to my room?"

"To be sure they did."

"And who came down with them?"

"The same as went up, I suppose. I didn't see them all,—I only saw the cadî, and he was shaking some pieces of gold in his hand. You'd better let me rest now, and if you want to know any more I'll tell you in the morning."

The sleepy host slammed his door as he spoke, and Ruric went back to his room. He closed his door after him and sank down upon the couch. He had little power to plan—he had power only to groan in his utter anguish, for he had no doubt that Myrrha had been torn away from him forever.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SHIP.

LONELY and sad, for half an hour perhaps, Ruric had lain bemoaning, upon the low couch, his sad loss, when he was aroused by an unusual bustle below, and by the time he had started up there came the sound of feet upon the stairs. He did not move away from the place where he stood, for he had no object—he only awaited the result of this movement, little dreaming what it was, and little heeding. In a few moments more his door was pushed open, and a cadi entered, followed by three men, each wearing a nondescript sort of dress; but the moment Ruric saw their features by the light of his lamp, he knew them to be Russians.

"Is this the man?" asked the cadi, turning towards his followers.

One of the Russians, who seemed by his very bearing to be a leader, approached the young man, and looked into his face.

"This is the man," he said, with a triumphant look.

"You are sure?" suggested the cadi, seeming anxious that there should be no blame or mistake upon his hands.

"Of course I am sure," returned the Russian. "I know him as well as I know myself."

"But who am I? What means this?" ut-

tered the youth, gazing first upon the Turkish cadi, and then upon the Russians.

"Who are you? Why, you're Feodor Count Ruric. Will you deny it?"

"No sir. It is a name I am proud of," returned the count, with a flush of indignation.

"Well, I suppose you are," said the Russian; "but yet it's a name that I shouldn't like to own under present circumstances."

Ruric turned pale. He gazed hard upon his interlocutor, and he recognized him as some one whom he had before seen, though where he could not determine.

"You don't seem to know me," resumed the man, as he noticed Ruric's scrutiny. "Didn't you ever see me before?"

"I think so."

"Well—my name is Peter Bonzo, and I am captain of the merchant ship Vologda. I am last from Saint Petersburg, and am bound for Odessa. Now do you know me?"

But Ruric did not answer. He mistrusted the mission of the merchant captain, and new terrors arose before him.

"If this is your man," said the cadi, "then the sooner you get him away the better."

"Hold! hold!" uttered our hero. "I claim

the protection of the Turkish flag. I am here, a quiet citizen of the capital, and I claim the sultan's care."

The cadi looked uneasy. He turned towards Bonzo, and said:

"You promised to get him away without trouble or disturbance."

"I know it—I know it—and I will do it. You need not fear," returned the captain. And then turning to Ruric he added: "You know that you are an escaped prisoner, and that a price has been set upon your head?"

"I know that I escaped from a Russian prison, but I was guilty of no crime."

"Oho—not quite so fast. I know all about your letting the old Pole free, but how about those dead soldiers you left by the old mill? You mustn't flatter yourself on the score of innocence. Now the business is just here: The emperor has offered a heavy reward for you, and I am going to claim it. I shall deliver you up to the authorities at Odessa, and with them you may argue the case as best you can."

Ruric now comprehended the whole of the mystery. He knew that he had been seen and recognized by Bonzo, and that for the sake of the price he had been waylaid. He also saw that the cadi had been bribed to give apparent legality to the proceedings, or rather to conduct them clear of the interference of the police. He saw that Bonzo was a heartless man, and he knew that in his mercy he had no hope. His sword hung upon a peg near the head of the couch, and with a quick bound he seized and drew it.

"Stand back!" he cried. "You have no right to drag me away from here, and I claim the rights of a free man. The whole neighborhood shall be roused."

"By the sword of Solymán," uttered the cadi, in terror, "you must do this work quickly, or you cannot do it at all. You cannot get him out of the city if he makes his situation known."

"We will look out for that," Bonzo replied, in a confident tone. And then turning to Ruric he added: "You must be mad to draw your sword upon us. What do you expect to do against four of us?"

"Only three—only three," interrupted the cadi, with earnestness. "You know I have nothing to do with any of your movements further. I only brought you here."

"But you will conduct us clear of the police?" said Bonzo.

"Ah, yes—I will do that."

"And that is all we want. We will do the rest. Now, Count Ruric, you had better submit quietly, or you may repent it."

"Take me if you can," was Feodor's reply, standing upon his guard. "I know my rights, and you may be assured that I shall not yield them without a struggle. I know that you have no authority to take me from here."

"But we have the power," cried the captain, springing quickly forward and aiming a pistol at the count's head. "Move but a single step, or make but a motion with your sword, and you are a dead man. It is too late for you to escape us now."

"Stop! stop!" uttered the cadi, in alarm. "If you fire that pistol you'll be exposed and lose your game. You should know better than that."

As the Turk spoke, he seized the Russian's arm and lifted it up. This movement drew Ruric's attention from the other two Russians, and one of them, taking advantage of the circumstance, sprang upon him and felled him to the floor by a blow upon the head. The count was not stunned by the blow, but before he could recover himself his enemies were upon him, and he was bound and gagged without even the power to cry out.

"Now," said Bonzo, with a triumphant expression, "you are safe. I don't know as I wish you any particular harm, but I'm a poor fellow, who's been trying for a lifetime to get money, and this is the first real chance I ever had, and of course I ain't a going to lose it. I shall get a good round sum for your body. So come along."

Ruric was not without reason, and he saw at once that resistance would be useless. If he could have spoken, so as to have given an alarm in the street, it might have availed him, but that power was effectually taken from him, and his struggles would amount to nothing, for even should they attract attention, the presence of the bribed cadi would hide the truth and prevent an investigation. So Ruric suffered himself to be led down into the street, and when once there two of his captors walked upon either side of him, holding fast by the arms, while the third walked behind, the cadi going ahead to make peace with any of the police who might be in the way. In this manner the prisoner was led through the narrow streets until they reached the harbor, and after following along upon the quay nearly half

a mile, they came to a boat which was in charge of a single keeper. It was not so dark but that Ruric could see that the man in the boat was habited in the garb of a Russian seaman.

The count was assisted into the boat, and as soon as he was safely seated the cadi turned back towards the city. After this, Bonzo and his two companions followed their prisoner, and the boat was soon shoved off. Ruric did not take much note of time, nor did he notice the direction in which the boat was being pulled, for he sat with his head bowed in sorrow and pain. At length, however, he was startled by a sharp concussion, and on raising his head he found that he was by the side of a heavy ship.

"Come," said Bonzo, laying his hand upon our hero's shoulder, "here we are alongside of my ship. Start up, now, and when we get on board you shall have that bandage taken from your mouth."

Of course, Ruric could make no reply, but he arose at the summons, and having had the lashings taken from his arms he ascended the side of the ship and passed over the gangway.

"Now," said the captain, "I'll take the bandage from your mouth, but if you make a noise you'll repent it."

The count signified that he would be quiet, and the gag was removed. For a few moments he gazed silently about him. The ship's crew had all come on deck, and by the manner in which they conversed among themselves, it was evident that they knew the character of the prisoner, and why he had been brought on board.

"Captain Bonzo," said Ruric, speaking nervously and with pain, "I have a question to ask you, and I hope you will answer me truly."

"I shan't object to tell you anything I know," was the captain's reply.

"You went up to my room in the inn once before you found me there?"

"Yes."

"And was there no one in my room?"

"I found nobody there but the cadi, whom I sent up."

"The cadi?"

"Yes. You see we let him go up first to clear the way."

"And did not he find some one there?"

"Not that I know of."

"You did not see a woman?"

"No—not a blessed woman have I seen in the city."

"And the cadi—you do not know if he saw one?"

"If he did, he said nothing to me about it. He was up there some time poking about before I went up. But who was it?"

"Never mind. It's nothing now!" groaned Ruric, as he turned his head away. "This is the end of my struggle. Come, sir, lead me to my place of rest!"

Bonzo made no reply, but taking a lantern from the wheel-house, he led the way down the after hatch to a small room where a lot of old sails were stored.

"Here," he said, as he opened the door, "you will find good snug quarters, and if you behave yourself you won't be molested. I'm sorry that you're in so bad a fix, but I can't help it. Somebody'd have to take you, and I may as well do it as any one else."

The count made no reply, for he knew the sordid nature of the man with whom he had to deal. He waited until he was left alone, and then he laid down upon the sails. He thought of Myrrha, and he thought of what his own fate might be—but he thought of Myrrha most.

CHAPTER XXII.

A DISCOVERY.

ONE week more, and Feodor Ruric was in a Russian prison! He had been brought to Odessa, and delivered up to the Russian authorities, and after a slight examination—for he denied nothing—he had been placed in a dungeon, there to await the first opportunity for a passage to St. Petersburg. His cell was low and damp, but yet he had plenty of fresh air from two apertures near the top of one of the walls, so that the place was not so unhealthy as it might otherwise have been. It was on the third day of his confinement, and towards the middle of the afternoon, that he heard some one treading in the narrow passage that led to his cell, and shortly afterwards the bolts upon the outside of his door were withdrawn. It was not the season for the bringing of his food, and he was yet wondering what the intrusion could mean, when the door opened and the jailor looked in. He seemed to satisfy himself that all was secure, and then he stepped back and spoke to some one who followed him. Ruric looked up and saw a stout man enter the cell, and then the jailor closed the door and went away.

"Count Ruric," spoke the man who had thus gained entrance to the cell. "I did not think to find you here."

Ruric started up, for he recognized the voice, and when he had gazed more closely, he saw the bold, frank features of Ivan the serf.

"Ivan!" uttered the young man, starting forward and extending both his hands.

"Yes," returned the serf, gazing earnestly into the prisoner's face. "Yes," he added, with a deep emotion. "I have come to visit you in prison once more."

"And have you come to free me?" whispered Ruric.

"No. I have not that power now. But how came you here?"

"I was recognized by some Russian seamen, and they seized me for the reward which has been offered."

"But what were Russian seamen doing in Circassia?"

"It was in Constantinople that I was recognized."

"In Constantinople! What were you doing there?"

"Alas, Ivan, 'tis a sad, sad tale!" murmured Ruric, sinking back upon his low pallet and bowing his head in his hands.

Ivan sat down by the youth's side, and his stout frame trembled violently.

"What is the tale?" he asked, laying one hand upon Ruric's arm and gazing anxiously into his face. "You have been to Stamy!"

"Yes—yes."

"And you found Albec—and Myrrha?"

"Yes—yes. O, God, have mercy!"

"Speak, speak!" cried Ivan. "Tell me what has happened. O, Ruric, you have not—"

"Hold," interrupted the youth. "I can tell you all. I have done all I could. O, Ivan, no blame can rest on me."

After a lapse of some moments, during which Ruric seemed to be trying to gain strength for the purpose, he commenced to tell his story. He told of his meeting with Myrrha at the foot of the Caucasus—of his rescuing her from the Cossacks, and of his conducting her home; and then he told of Albec—of his sickness, and of his kindness. Then, in a lower tone, he told how he had loved the gentle Myrrha, and how she had returned his love, and of their plighted vows. Then he told of the coming of the Hattukian marauders—of the onset—the battle—the burning dwellings—the fading away of Stamy's people—the fall of Orfa—the death of Albec—and of his own fall in the mosque. Then he told of his recovery from the subsequent sickness, and of the fate which had befallen Myrrha. He stopped here, for his emotions were too powerful, and he had to give way to the sobs that struggled for utterance.

"Go on—go on," gasped Ivan, grasping the count by the arm. "Tell me of Myrrha."

In a few moments, Ruric continued. He told of his passage to the Turkish capital, and of all that transpired there; and when he had finished he bowed his head again and wept. The serf started to his feet and took two or three quick turns across the cell, and then came and sat down again.

"And do you think Myrrha has been carried back to Selim's house?" he asked, in a voice of painful calmness.

"I fear she has," was Ruric's response.

"It must be—and yet I cannot think fate would have been so cruel."

"Fate seems to hold nothing in store but cruelty for me," resumed Ruric.

"O, Myrrha! Myrrha! Thou fairest, sweetest child!" groaned Ivan, covering his face with his hand and sobbing as though his stout heart would break.

"You loved Myrrha well," said the youth, not having dreamed that the serf could have been so moved.

"Ay, as the apple of my eye—as the very heaven of my soul."

A new suspicion was awakened in Ruric's mind.

"Myrrha often spoke of you," he said, in a low, candid tone.

"Did she? did she? And what did she say?"

"That you were noble, generous, and kind—and that she loved you."

"O, she did!" murmured the serf. And then raising his head he gazed into his companion's face. "Ruric," he continued, "why should not I love her? O, she was my own child!"

"You loved her as a child," whispered the count.

"Ay—I did—for she was of my own flesh and blood—the child of my love, the daughter of my bosom."

"But Albec—"

"He was her grandfather—the father of Myrrha's angel mother."

"But Myrrha does not know this," said Ruric, in amazement.

"Yes, yes, she knows her parentage."

"But she told me that Albec—"

"I understand," interrupted Ivan. "She was not to blame for that. I will explain: Years ago I went to Circassia to find a home. I was a widower then—I had placed a young and childless wife in the grave—and I sought a home away from the haunts of my countrymen. I found a shelter beneath the roof of the hunter Albec. He had a child—a daughter—named Myrrha, and she became my wife. She lived with me twelve years, and during that time I was a happy man. We had one child—a daughter—a perfect type of its mother, and she, too, was named Myrrha. After my wife died I ventured once to Azof, and there I met the Count John Galitzin. From him I learned something that made me resolve to go to Russia; and to Russia I went. I left my child in Albec's care, and I made her promise that under all circumstances until my return, she would call Albec her father. I went back once to visit them after I went to Russia; but, alas, I can visit them no more!"

The count was puzzled now, and for the time he forgot part of his grief.

"Why should Myrrha have been forbidden to speak of you as her father?" he asked.

"She was not forbidden to do so. I only requested that she would acknowledge Albec as her parent, and it seems she strictly carried it out. My reason was very simple. A girl in Stamy, with neither father nor mother, could have been given away in marriage by the uzden,

for that is the decree of the prince. But there may have been other reasons."

"Myrrha knew me, and called me by name, when I told her that you had sent me."

"Yes—when I was there last I spoke of you. She knew you by the description I gave."

Again Ivan got up and paced the floor of the cell, and as Ruric watched, he could not help wondering what manner of man he was. He had ceased weeping—he had ceased sobbing, and the only marks of emotion now visible, were in the heaving chest and the tightly compressed lips.

"Selim's house shall be torn down about his ears," the serf uttered, stopping in the middle of the cell, and gazing upward. "By my holy faith, if he have injured my angel child, his best blood cannot answer for it. I will hunt him though I have to dress in the guise of a wolf. I will not leave—Hark! What means that?"

At this moment the booming of a cannon shook the prison walls, and it was followed by another, and another, and yet another. On they went in quick succession—boom after boom—until the whole great city shook with the concussion.

"What does it mean?" asked Ruric.

"Hark!" returned Ivan. "Ha, there go the bells. By my soul, Ruric, the emperor is here! That is an imperial salute."

"Nicholas in Odessa?" uttered the count, thunder-struck.

"Yes, it must be."

"Then my case is hopeless," murmured our hero, in a despondent tone. "I had hoped to make my escape between here and Saint Petersburg, but it cannot be now."

"Do not despair yet," said Ivan. "While there is life there is hope. But I must go now. I must see the emperor, and then for Constantinople. Courage, courage, Ruric, I shall see you again. I may have some influence with Nicholas."

As Ivan spoke, he turned towards the door and passed out. Ruric heard him speak with the jailor, and then the door was closed and bolted again. Our hero now had something to occupy his mind besides his grief, and even his grief was not so utterly black as before, for Myrrha had now a helper beside himself, and for even himself he had a little hope. He knew not where the foundation of this hope could rest for a certainty, but there was something in the manner of Ivan the serf that inspired him.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ANOTHER DISCOVERY.

EARLY ON the morning following the visit of Ivan to the prison, Ruric was aroused from a dreamy slumber by the entrance of the jailor.

"You sleep well this morning," said the visitor, as he entered the cell, and found Ruric just waking up.

"Because I did not sleep in the night," returned the count, rubbing his eyes.

"Ah? Well—I have news for you. The emperor is in Odessa, and has sent for you. You can judge best whether the news be good or evil."

Ruric sat down again, and remained for some moments in thought. He called to mind the scene of his first arrest—of his escape, and of his resistance to the soldiers who were sent to capture him. It was a dark picture to be presented to the iron-souled emperor.

"You will let me wash and shave?" he said, starting up.

"Yes, if you hurry."

So Ruric followed the jailor out, and he was conducted to a small room where there were a few simple dressing materials; but the count managed to perform his toilet in a very respectable manner, and when he had finished, he was conducted out into the yard where he was taken in charge by a party of soldiers. He had not to walk far before he stopped before a large

brick building, and after a little delay, during which a sentinel at the door went in with some errand, and came back with an answer, he was conducted up the high steps into a spacious hall. Here there was another delay, and at the end of a few minutes the prisoner was delivered over to two officers, and by them he was conducted on through the hall to another flight of steps, having ascended which they stopped at a door which was guarded by soldiers. No opposition was made by these sentinels, and the official conductors pushed open the door and passed through, one of them leading the prisoner by the arm. The place thus entered was a spacious apartment, and several officers were seated at a desk engaged in writing. At the head of the hall, walking impatiently to and fro, Ruric saw the emperor. His massive frame was slightly bent beneath the weight of thought that was upon him, but he started up on hearing the doors open, and when he saw the prisoner he stopped in his walk.

"Your majesty," said one of the officers, bowing low as he spoke, "this is the prisoner for whom you asked."

"Ay, so I see," uttered Nicholas, in a tone resembling the rumbling of distant thunder; and as he spoke he fastened his stern gaze upon the count.

Ruric's eyes drooped before that lion-like gaze, but he did not lose his thoughts. He knew the nature of the man with whom he had to deal. He knew that insolence would be sure death—and he knew, too, that cowardice would be equally fatal, for Nicholas, though he liked an obedient tool, yet hated the craven.

"So you are the Count Ruric—the fugitive from justice?" said the emperor, with a bitter sneer.

"I am Feodor Ruric, sire, and a count by birth," replied the youth, calmly, firmly, but yet modestly.

"And you are a fugitive from justice?" resumed Nicholas.

"I fled from prison, sire."

"Because you feared death?"

"Not so, sire. It was the ignominy I feared. Go ask your generals of the imperial army, if I fear death. No, no, sire. For long years I held my life in my hand, and at any moment was ready to give it to Nicholas of Russia. My life and my good sword have been offered often upon the altar of your empire, though fate did not take the sacrifice."

"But you disobeyed a strict order," said Nicholas, in a tone less stern.

"I know I did wrong, sire, and for a long while I stood out; but a poor woman fell at my feet and begged to see her white-haired father once before he died. When her tears fell like rain upon my feet, I forgot that I was a soldier, and remembered only that I was a man. I meant no wrong—I dreamed not that evil could happen. I may have deserved punishment, but I did not deserve death."

"Do you dispute my justice?"

"I am a condemned man, and so have a right to speak, and why should I hide my own belief? I do but speak as I think, and I would not tell a lie even to gain your own imperial favor."

"You are bold, sir."

"Because I am speaking with a bold man."

The emperor gazed hard into the face of the count, but he met only a calm, steady look in return.

"But you slew the men whom I sent to apprehend you."

"I escaped from your prison, sire; and those men whom you sent to take me, were but so many bolts and bars between me and liberty. I moved them out of the way. They willingly set

their lives against my liberty—we played the game—they lost."

For a while the emperor was silent. He took a turn down the hall, and then came back again.

"You may not have been so deserving of death in all this, as would at first appear," he resumed, stopping in front of Ruric, and again addressing him; "but other things combine with them to make your guilt fatal."

"Will you name them, sire?"

"Yes. You have given utterance to sentiments opposed to the stability of our empire, and you have even dared to scoff at the sanctity of our most holy church."

"By my soul, sire, the man who says this—is a—a mistaken man. But who told you that? Let me face him and dare him to the proof."

"The Prince Alexander Menzikoff told me."

"O," uttered Ruric, with a look and tone of most bitter scorn, "the prince is powerful, but he—"

"Well—speak on."

"I will speak. He is a villain, sire—an enemy to his God, to his emperor, and to his fellows. You know him not."

Ah! Yes, I do know him, Count Ruric. I know him well. He is dead now."

"Then God have mercy on him, for he needs it!"

There was something in the tone and look of the young count, that was so noble and fearless, and yet so modest and truthful, that Nicholas could not but look upon him with admiration. The truth of his soul was manifest in every line of his handsome features, and the sparkle of his dark hazel eyes told of a spirit that could take its life only in the soul of honor. The emperor was meditating upon what he had heard, when the lower doors of the hall were once more thrown open, and two men entered. One of them was an old man, wearing the insignia of a Russian count, and the other was Ivan the serf. They advanced up the hall until they came near to the imperial presence, and then they bowed.

"Ah, Galitzin," uttered Nicholas, extending his hand. "How fare you?"

"Slim, slim, sire. I have been very sick."

"So I have heard. And you, too, Ivan. No one would accuse you of being sick."

"No, sire, I am remarkably well. I should have returned, but I stopped to nurse the count."

"Right—right," replied Nicholas; "though

the presence of the count at my capital is not so necessary now. Menzikoff is dead."

"Dead, sire?"

"Ay, he died in prison."

"In prison?" murmured Ruric, at the same time moving further back, seeing that the emperor did not notice him. And the thought gave him a new point of hope.

The two officers who had accompanied Ruric to the hall now approached him as though to take him in custody again.

"Back, back," said Nicholas, noticing their movement. "I will see to him. Leave the hall."

They accordingly left, and again the emperor turned towards his two new visitors.

"Galitzin," he said, "I learned that you were sick here in Odessa, and I found other business enough to make it the object of a visit to see you. But whatever you may hold of evidence against Menzikoff cannot affect him now. He died from shame and chagrin, I think. Yet his estates are not settled, and what he may have done in times past will have much bearing upon their disposal."

"It should have much bearing that way," returned the old noble, "for he has wronged many a man of his birthright."

"I saw a letter which he wrote to you," pursued the emperor. "Ivan showed it to me."

"Yes, sire, I gave it to Ivan. I should have sent it to you before, but Ivan was collecting evidence of Menzikoff's guilt, and I let him have this."

"You did well enough—though I should really like to know how many more of my nobles received letters of like description."

"Not many, I think," said Galitzin. "He probably wrote to me first, and I think my answer must have damped his ardor. I simply wrote to him that he had mistaken his man."

"He must have mistaken his man, if he thought to turn John Galitzin into a traitor," said Nicholas, with a momentary glow upon his features.

There was a pause of some moments, during which the three men regarded each other earnestly. Ivan had grown uneasy, and he seized the present opportunity to speak.

"Sire," he said, "I left some papers with you in hopes that you would give them a careful perusal, you remember."

"Ay," returned Nicholas, with a kindling eye, "I do remember, and I have read them every one. I have them with me at this moment."

As the emperor spoke he drew a packet from his pocket and cast off the string which bound it. Then he drew forth a paper and opened it. His countenance changed as he ran his eyes over it, and when he again looked up his lip trembled.

"By this paper," he resumed, "I am informed that Menzikoff was the only evidence against the Prince Michael Basilowitz. I remember that the prince was banished to Siberia by my brother Alexander."

"Ay, sire, so he was," earnestly responded Ivan. "But have you read the other papers—the others that tell how false was Menzikoff's accusation? Have you read the paper there in Menzikoff's own handwriting, where he proposed to Slamskov for the overthrow and disgrace of the Prince Michael Basilowitz?"

"Yes—I have read them all."

"And do you understand their meaning?"

"Yes, every feather of it."

"You remember the Prince Michael?"

"Indeed I do," returned Nicholas, with a strange look. "We were at school together. He was with me under the severe tutelage of old General Emendorf; and even when Adelang and Storch took my mastership Michael was with me. Ay, I loved the prince of Tula as though he had been my brother."

"And what now is your opinion?" asked Ivan, with increased emotion. "What think you of Michael's banishment?"

"That it was most unjust."

"And why should he remain in banishment longer?"

"He should not."

"And why should he not have the vast estates which were once all his own, and which were so wickedly wrested from him?"

"He should have them," said the emperor, eyeing Ivan sharply.

Ivan bowed his head and trembled, but at length he looked up and said:

"Do you not know me, sire?"

"To be sure I know you!" was the emperor's reply. "I mistrusted you the moment when I first set my eyes upon you. Yes, yes, Michael Basilowitz, I knew you before I trusted you with my first mission. Nicholas of Russia has eyes."

"Michael Basilowitz! Prince of Tula!" uttered Ruric, who had heard all, and who was unable to repress his astonishment. "Can this indeed be so? Are you the Prince Tula, whom we all thought in Siberia?"

"Yes, Feodor," returned Ivan, "I am the true Prince of Tula, and your father was my best friend. O, sire," he continued, turning to the emperor and sinking upon his knees, "spare the Count Ruric. He is young, and I know he is noble and brave."

"Get up, get up, prince," said Nicholas. "I have some questions to ask of thee first."

6

Ivan arose to his feet, but before the emperor could speak further, there came the sound of a disturbance from the passage-way that led to the hall. The clamor rose higher and higher, and there was surely the sound of a violent struggle. For the instant all eyes were turned in the direction whence the sounds proceeded, and the parties who had been so deeply engaged in the details we have given regarded the movements with some solicitude. At length the emperor arose to his feet.

"Wait," said Nicholas. "I'll see to this." And as he spoke he moved towards the door.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE FLAME FLICKERS.

THE emperor was moving down the hall at a quick, angry pace, when he was suddenly brought to a stand by the bursting open of the doors, and on the same instant a light form, clothed in the garb of a Greek boy, rushed into the place. The light velvet cap fell from the intruder's head, and a mass of golden curls swept down over the neck and shoulders.

"What have we here?" uttered Nicholas, in astonishment.

But the intruder did not notice him. 'Twas a female, as the hair and features plainly showed. She rushed on to where Ruric stood, and with a wild cry she fell into his arms.

"Myrrha! Myrrha!" he exclaimed, folding her to his bosom. It was all he could say, for the wild thrill that shot through his soul was too overpowering for further utterance.

"O, Ruric! am I not safe here?" uttered the fugitive. "Cannot you save me now?"

"Here is one who can save you!"

Myrrha started up and met the gaze of Ivan. She moved quickly from her lover's embrace, for she had found the arms of a father, and upon his broad bosom she pillowed her swimming head. She did not speak, for she could not. She knew that she was safe now, and with a low moan she burst into tears.

"Upon my soul," spoke Nicholas, coming

up at that moment, "this is a most strange interruption. Speak, Basilowitz, and tell me what it means?"

"It simply means, sire, that this is my child. She has escaped from the hands of a Turk."

"Aha! The Turks again!" uttered the emperor, with a nervous movement. "I'll reckon with them."

"The emperor!" whispered Myrrha, starting up from her father's bosom and gazing upon the giant form of the man who had just spoken.

"Yes, my child. This is our emperor."

"And he called you *Basilowitz*. Have you gained your rights?"

"I do not know, but I think we have nothing to fear. Look up, Myrrha."

Nicholas was much moved by the matchless beauty that now dwelt before him, for he gazed steadily into the maiden's features, and his eye burned as it always burned when he saw something to admire. But gradually there came a cloud upon his brow, and slowly and thoughtfully his eyes turned towards Count Ruric.

"It seems that she recognized our young friend first," he said, in a meaning tone.

"Yes," answered Ivan, "for they are bound heart to heart by the mutual pledge of love. Ruric met her in her Circassian home, and—"

"Stop," interrupted Nicholas, pulling out his

watch and looking at its face. "I have the time to spare, and I would have this enigma solved in regular sequence. Let me hear your story first, Ivan—for I suppose you still acknowledge that name?"

"Yes, sire," returned the prince, passing his daughter over to Ruric's care. "I can tell you my story in a very few words. When I was banished to Siberia by the Emperor Alexander, I was a widower. I knew that I did not deserve the disgrace, for I knew that the emperor had been deceived, and I resolved to escape if possible. At length I effected my purpose, and took my way at once through Tartary to the shores of the Caspian sea. From thence I passed over into Circassia, intending to seek some other part of the globe. But in a little village called Stamy I was taken sick, and beneath the roof of a kind hunter I found a home. The hunter's daughter ministered to my wants—I loved her, and she became my wife, and from her I received this sweet child. But at length, after the lapse of years, she died, and for the hunter I consented to visit Azof. There I met with Galitzin. He knew me, and advised me to try and get back my estates, and a pardon, at the same time promising to assist me in tearing the veil from Menzikoff's face. I consented to the proposition.

"Then I went back to Circassia, and having taken leave of my child, I returned to Azof, and from thence I accompanied Galitzin to Tula, where my estates lay. There I took the character of a serf, and the count wrote on to Menzikoff stating that upon the estates of Basilowitz, there was a serf named Ivan, who was a ready scholar, a capital engineer, and who was also anxious to live in St. Petersburg. As was expected, Menzikoff sent for me at once, and I went to the capital. He did not recognize me at first, nor did he hold a suspicion, though he had discovered my secret when he last saw me. It is now nearly three years since I became his serf, and, as you know, sire, I have accomplished all I could have hoped. I gained his full confidence, and piece by piece I worked the proofs out. You have them all, and you know how great a sinner I am."

The emperor listened with marked attention to Ivan's recital, and when it was concluded he shook his head with a movement that showed some remaining doubt.

"I understand all this," he said; "but there is yet one thing to be explained. How came

the Count Ruric to hit so plainly upon this village where your daughter dwelt?"

Feodor trembled when he heard this question, for he saw that the emperor's quick mind had divined the truth. But Ivan did not hesitate.

"I directed him there, sire."

"Aha—you did? And how did you see him?"

"It was I who liberated him from prison."

"Beware, prince—beware!" uttered Nicholas, in a deep tone.

"I am not afraid to own the truth, sire," quickly returned Ivan, determined to speak before the emperor could have opportunity to make a decision on the subject. "The Count Ruric was Menzikoff's prisoner, and I knew that Menzikoff had lied most basely to you about him. I knew that for months he had been plotting for the young count's destruction. Once Peter Menzikoff, the prince's son, aspired to be a colonel; the day of trial came, and he got nothing but reproof for his ignorance from your lips, while to Ruric you gave the colonel's commission. Then it was that Menzikoff determined to work his ruin. I knew all this, and I knew, too, that if you could but gain a shadow, even, of the truth, you would not harm him."

"And why was not I told of this?" asked Nicholas, with his countenance already changed.

"Because my own plans were not complete—I had not yet wholly trapped the scheming prince, and I dared not run the risk of exposure. I took the only means in my power, trusting that when they should be known to you, your mercy would pardon them."

"Indeed, you flatter," said Nicholas, with something like a sneer upon his face. "Had I known it then, even a grand dukedom could not have saved your life. Michael Basilowitz, I loved you, but you have done something that—"

The emperor hesitated and turned away. His face was very cold and stern, and his brow was contracted. He walked twice across the hall, and then he beckoned for the soldiers who stood near the great door.

"Take your prisoner back to his cell," he said.

"No, no, sire," interrupted Ivan, with extended hands. "Pardon him, pardon him."

"Away with him, I say."

"Sire," urged the old Count Galitzin, "hear me speak but a word."

"There'll be time enough for that after the Count Ruric is gone," was the emperor's reply.

Myrrha moved to spring forward, but her father held her back.

"Speak not," he whispered, "for you might as well urge the whirlwind. He is not to be moved, and we must not chafe him."

"Sire," spoke Ruric, after the soldiers had taken him by the arms, "I will not beg your mercy, but humbly crave your justice. Try your own heart, and see what I have done that you would not have done."

Ruric saw the stern, cold face of his imperial master, and he saw the light form of her he loved as it sank fainting into Ivan's arms. He did not groan aloud, nor did he weep, but with his head bowed he was led from the hall.

Once more Count Ruric was in his prison. The iron door was locked upon him, and he was alone. Now he knew not which way to turn for the hope he sought. He was in the emperor's power, and who should read the will of that iron-hearted autocrat!

CHAPTER XXV.

CONCLUSION.

NICHOLAS was alone in the apartment which he had occupied since his arrival in Odessa, and by the manner in which he walked the floor, it could be plainly seen that he was waiting for some one. At length the door was opened, and Ivan entered.

"You have sent for me, sire, and I have come," said the serf-made serf, bowing as he spoke.

"Ay, I did send for you," returned the emperor, taking a seat, and motioning his visitor to do the same, "for I have made up my mind. I have conversed long with Galitsin, and I know that you are free from all the blame which was cast upon you under Alexander's reign; but you have been much to blame since."

"In what, sire?"

"In opening the doors of my prison. Stop—speak not yet. The moment I saw that girl clasp Ruric about the neck, and found that she was your child—that moment I knew 'twas you who set him free. O, Michael, it came hard upon me. But for that I could have given you back all your estates and your titles. It makes no odds to me how innocent, or how guilty, the prisoner was—he was under my condemnation, and you snatched him from me. What would an emperor's authority be, if such an example were followed? Let me tell you that that same

Slavinski—the Pole whom Ruric suffered to escape—is already hatching rebellion in Poland. So much for interfering with my will."

Nicholas hesitated, and raised his hand to his brow, but in a moment more he continued:

"Michael, I have loved you as a brother—to be sure it was long years ago, when we were both young—but I have not forgotten it. I love you yet, but I know you are no longer Russian in your feelings. Nay, do not start. I know what I say. I have watched you well, and I know that you came back more to punish Alexander Menzikoff than to gain your standing in the empire. I know it is so."

"I will not deny it, sire."

"It would avail you nothing if you did," coolly replied Nicholas. And then drawing a small packet from his bosom, he added: "Here, take this. I have given my judgment in there, and you can go to Galitsin, and he will help you translate it. I am not wholly ungrateful. Ah, here comes my secretary. We have business. Adieu, Michael."

Pascovitz came in, and Ivan turned to go out. He looked once more upon his emperor, but those dark eyes were turned from him. It may be that Nicholas felt a pang at that moment, and thus hid it.

* * * * *

It was early morning that Feodor Ruric was visited in his cell by the jailor. The man of the prison came in and looked upon the prisoner, and then turned towards the open door. He spoke a single word, and then passed out. In a moment more the door-way was darkened by the stout form of Ivan. Ruric saw him, and sprang forward. There was something in the presence of the strange man that carried hope with it.

"Ivan," the youth uttered, "speak. What is this visit for?"

"To lead you hence."

"Whither?"

"To liberty."

Ruric put forth his hands and bowed his head. The words were soft and sweet to his ear, and he knew that they meant all he could ask of life. He spoke not, but with both his hands in Ivan's stout grasp he walked forth from his prison-house. The guards gave way for them to pass, and when they reached the street our hero asked if he was again to see the emperor.

"No," said Ivan, with a meaning shake of the head, "we are not to see the emperor. But we will not talk of it here. Let us walk on."

In fifteen minutes they reached a dwelling which Ivan entered. In a large drawing-room, Ruric saw Myrrha sitting alone.

"Go in," said the father. "She is yours now, Feodor."

The youth moved forward and sank upon his knees at the maiden's feet, but she seemed to have anticipated his movement, for she was instantly kneeling beside him.

"Myrrha," spoke the count, as he clasped the fond being to his bosom, "I know now that the sun of peace has come. I think my prayers are answered."

"Yes," murmured Myrrha, while the warm tears rolled down her cheeks like rain, "God has surely let the season of tribulation pass from us. We should praise him, Feodor."

And they did praise him. With fervent words they offered up their thanks, and Ivan stood by and wept while they prayed.

When the season of quiet came the trio sat down. Ruric's first question was to know by what means Myrrha escaped from Constantinople, for on that point he was anxiously in the dark.

"When you left me to go to the house of the Greek," said the maiden, "I remained quietly upon the couch until I heard loud voices below, and among other words I heard your name. I

sprang to the door and listened, and I heard one whom I supposed to be the keeper of the inn say that he had no wish to resist the cadi. There was a cadi there, and I thought they were surely after me. I heard them coming up the stairs, and I sprang to the window and threw it open. There was a vine grew up beneath it, and upon that I made my way to the ground. I saw an alley that led to some outbuildings, and at the end of it I found a stable where I secreted myself. In the morning there came a boy to feed the horses, and I determined to trust him with at least a knowledge of my presence; so I went down to him, and with a piece of gold I easily bribed him to secrecy, and with a second piece I got him to bring me a suit of his clothes. He brought them, and they fitted me. I tucked my hair up out of sight, and having begrimed my face and hands I ventured to the inn, where I learned from the landlord that you had been carried off by a cadi and some Russian sailors. Of course, I at once suspected the truth. I hastened away to the harbor, and I saw a Russian ship just sailing away towards the Euxine, and one of the Greek boatmen told me that her boat was off the night before. I felt sure that you were there, and three days afterwards I got a chance to follow you. I arrived here after a slow passage, and heard that you were with the emperor. I know not what gave me the courage, but I was resolved upon flying to you. I learned where you were, and thither I went. The soldiers at the door would have stopped me, but I rushed past them—and I saw you. You know the rest."

"But it's all past now," said Ivan. "We have come up out of the valley of trouble, and hope is before us. Ruric, I loved your father, and I have loved you. I hope that we may be separated no more on earth."

"So I will ever pray," fervently responded the youth.

"And now," resumed the old man, "you shall understand what has happened. Nicholas has the heart of an emperor, and sometimes he can feel the power of kindness, but 'tis not his nature. We are both pardoned, but he will not give us our ranks as nobles. He will not have nobles about him who have once thwarted his purposes. Yet he has not been wholly unjust. My vast estates he will take to the crown, and he has given me in return three hundred thousand ducats. To you he will give nothing; but I have enough, and more than enough. We

can stay in Russia if we please, or we are at liberty to leave the empire."

"And which will you do?" asked Ruric, after some moments of deep, troubled thought.

"I should prefer to leave the empire," said Ivan.

"So should I," responded the youth. "But whither will you go?"

"I know of but one country on the earth where we can find that perfect liberty for which our souls yearn," said Ivan, in low, thrilling accents. "I would seek a home in AMERICA! I can see in the political horizon of this country nothing but notes of tyranny, and oppression, and bloodshed. I should joy to fight for the liberty of the people, but I can see that Russia is to be the tyrant, and I cannot raise my hand against her, for she gave me birth. We must go, Ruric—nor must we stop until we reach that land where the blessed torch of liberty lights every hearthstone, and where every honest man is a king. What say you?"

"You have touched the holiest wish of my heart," was Ruric's reply.

"And you, Myrrha—what say you?"

"Ah," returned the beautiful girl, raising her

beaming eyes, "wherever you and Feodor find a home, there will be my earthly heaven."

"Then," added Ivan, "we will go at once. Nicholas has returned to his capital, and he has taken Galitzin along with him. He may not miss us in his vast empire, but God knows he has lost two honest souls—two stout, true hearts, from his realm. Ah, the time may come when Nicholas of Russia shall need true souls to counsel him; but he will not take counsel except of his own towering ambition. I do not envy him."

* * * * *
Months rolled away, and when the bright summer came again, Ivan had purchased a noble home in the sweet valley of the Ohio. He was no longer the Prince Michael Basilowitz—but the simple Ivan—Michael Ivan, he wrote his name when he claimed the privilege of becoming an American citizen. There was his home, upon the banks of the great river, embowered with sycamores and chestnuts, and there, with him, were Ruric and Myrrha, made one for life, companions in word and deed, living for each other, and learning the lessons of liberty that belonged to the institutions by which they were surrounded.

THE END.

[FROM "THE FLAG OF OUR UNION."

BIANCA: OR, THE MONK'S PLOT.

BY DR. J. H. ROBINSON.

"Purify your heart from this earthly attachment, Bianca, and devote to kind Heaven the years of your youth," said the monk.

"And is it, think you, the duty of mortals to sunder all earthly ties? Is it necessary so to do to gain the favor of God and the blessings of an approving conscience?" inquired Bianca, averting her face.

"I believe I have often expressed my views on this subject, daughter, and there is little need that I should repeat them. The first duties of mankind are certainly due to Heaven," answered the monk.

"But if all persons should suddenly resolve to devote themselves to Heaven in the way you propose, where would convents and monasteries be found to contain them; and whence would the means of subsistence be derived?" continued the maiden, timidly.

"There is but little possibility that such a revulsion in public feeling may occur, and it becomes you not to employ such gross and worldly reasoning to escape the responsibility of a life which the virgin has evidently marked out for you. You must cease to think of Don Gonzalvo, and instead of giving your vows to earthly and erring man, become the bride of Heaven," added Geraloma, pacing the room with an appearance of great concern.

"Urge me not, Geraloma. I am in no haste—I prefer to act deliberately. This is indeed an important matter, and it behooves me not to decide without thought."

"The saints forgive your impiety. You tempt Providence by your delays and silly excuses. I know well the reason of this reluctance—it is because an earthly passion has crept into the portal of your heart, to absorb all its thought and all its worship. I tell you, Bianca, that the blessed mother is already displeased with your inexcusable tampering. The path of obedience lies straight before you, and it is the way of peace and tranquillity. Refuse to walk in it on your peril!" exclaimed Geraloma, angrily.

"Nay, good father, threaten me not; my mind is sorely perplexed. Give me time, I say," rejoined the maiden, weeping.

"Time!" cried the monk, with a sullen frown, "do you talk of time when I have been pressing the subject on your consideration for three months? 'Tis your unhallowed love for Gonzalvo that keeps you back."

"And is love an unhallowed passion?" cried Bianca.

"Surely it is, where it diverts the mind from heavenly contemplation. Daughter, let this Gonzalvo look to himself, nor attempt longer to

lure my lamb from the fold. I have the power to —"

"To what, father Geraloma?"

"To better his fortunes," responded the monk, turning away from the maiden's startled looks, and gazing from the window into the street beneath.

After a few more remarks on the part of the monk, that savored more of bitter reproach than Christian admonition to the performance of a duty, he left the dwelling abruptly, and, judging by his expression, not in a very pleasant mood of mind.

Bianca was the only daughter of a gallant knight and noble gentleman, Bernadino Caravajal, who had fallen fighting in foreign wars. The brave senor left ample wealth to his wife and child, which excited the cupidity of a neighboring monastery, and Geraloma, the confessor of the Lady Caravajal had been selected as an instrument to bring about this purpose. The monk had obtained the honor of being the fair senora's confessor on account of the sudden decease of the worthy and conscientious man who had long and faithfully discharged his duty in that capacity. Whether the good father died naturally, and according to the common course, is not for us to say; but certain it is that Geraloma filled his place through the influence of several church dignitaries, among whom was the abbe of the convent alluded to.

Geraloma prepared to acquit himself of the trust reposed in him to the best of his abilities; but a trial awaited him which he did not expect; the beauty of Bianca so won upon his hitherto cold and phlegmatic nature, that he soon entertained for her a deep and fervid passion. We will not affirm that that soft, gentle, refining and ennobling sentiment which is truly love, had really entered his selfish heart; for it would be doing injustice to that best attribute of the soul to make such an assertion.

The more Geraloma was in the society of Caravajal's daughter, the less he became master of his thoughts, and the more her fair image became impressed upon his imagination. He strove but faintly to subdue this earthly flame which the unsuspecting maiden had innocently kindled; he suffered it to go on, gathering strength and violence, despite the sacredness of the character which he had assumed. And soon another feeling took hold of his being—the consuming emotion of jealousy; for Senor Gonzalvo, her equal in birth and wealth, was her favored suitor.

Bitter indeed were the reflections of Geraloma, and dark and relentless was the hatred which he cherished for the happy lover. There was a terrible conflict in his breast. What should he do? How could he best carry out his own designs, and serve his employers at the same time? Difficult task—and so he resolved to serve himself first. With consummate cunning he laid his plans. He sought out Gonzalvo, and cultivated his acquaintance with unremitting zeal. His attentions finally won the young man's confidence, and he used to talk freely of Bianca in his presence.

It was not the monk's policy that the young caballero should become fully informed respecting his continued solicitations for Caravajal's daughter to enter a convent; but of course he had received hints of this character from the maiden herself, which had given him just cause for uneasiness. Finding himself on such friendly terms with the confessor, he begged of him to dissuade Bianca from the thought of devoting her life to the gloomy solitude of a convent, little suspecting that Geraloma was daily persecuting her for her unwarrantable tardiness in complying with the duty which Heaven had made so manifest to him.

Lady Caravajal was easily influenced, being naturally of a superstitious disposition, and having a profound veneration for the church. The monk took good care to lay his plans with prudence, and therefore enjoined it upon both mother and daughter to say little concerning his exhortations, and the earnestness with which he desired to see Bianca the "bride of Heaven." Over the mind of the maiden he would probably have exercised far less influence, had it not been for her mother, whom she did not dare disobey, believing disobedience to be an act of almost unpardonable filial impiety.

So the secret of Geraloma's continued urgency was for a long time comparatively unknown to Gonzalvo; but when he did at length learn enough to convince him that the confessor interested himself much in that subject, he took the first opportunity to speak of the matter to the monk, and the reader will see how adroitly he turned it to his own advantage.

"Yes, Senor Gonzalvo," he said, seriously; "it is quite true that I have advised Bianca to renounce the sinful world. She is too fair and delicate a flower to be exposed to the rude winds of temptation, and the rough stormy billows of the wicked world. It is better, far better

that she should devote her young years, her strength, her beauty—"

"And her riches," added the young knight, ironically.

"Her youth, her beauty, and her strength to kindly heaven," continued Geraloma, without heeding the interruption.

"Such a thought is the height of folly, madness, and impiety!" exclaimed Gonzalvo.

"Beware that you offend not God in your misdirected enthusiasm," said the confessor.

"Talk not to me of such absurdities. Can she not serve Heaven just as well out of a convent as in? Think you such a sweet flower was unfolded to shed all its perfume in the area of a monastery, pent up by the cold, soulless stone walls? No, no! 'tis mockery and not piety—a sin against nature, and not true worship," added Gonzalvo.

"I pity your distress," rejoined the monk, pensively. "Love for Caravajal's daughter has made you rash. I would gladly serve you, so much do you excite my sympathy."

"You can do me much kindness, if disposed, Father Geraloma, and I will see that you lose nothing by it. You are well aware that the maiden herself has little relish for a convent."

"Alas, I know it but too well. A less pure flame has been kindled in her heart by one I will not mention."

"Not so, worthy monk; the sentiment that attracts the sexes to each other, when properly understood, is of the most sacred and elevating nature, despite the narrow views of ungenial ascetics, and the harsh verdicts of mistaken piety."

"Senorita Caravajal will doubtless be governed by her virtuous mother," resumed the confessor.

"And the abbe of yonder monastery," added Gonzalvo, bitterly.

"My dear senor, I sympathize with you truly; I can well imagine that her beauty of person has greatly won upon your feelings, and that your insinuating speech and goodly person, coupled with your fame, have had a corresponding influence upon her unsophisticated heart," said the monk, blandly.

"Take this, and always endeavor to keep the facts you have mentioned in mind," continued the lover, placing a fat purse in the monk's hand, who took it without hesitation.

"All goes well," he muttered, as he walked away. "I shall want this gold. Let him please

himself with delusive dreams of halcyon days with the daughter of Caravajal. Idiot! he knows not the passion that makes me miserable. Ah, one glance into my heart would make him shudder."

That evening Gonzalvo had an appointment with Bianca; she was to meet him in the beautiful garden attached to the mansion, as she had often done before. He was as prompt as lovers are wont to be; nor was he long kept waiting, soon perceiving the graceful figure of his adored approaching. She affected to be light-hearted and happy, yet the watchful lover discovered that really she was not so; though she smiled, tears stood in her eyes, and when she spoke hopefully of the future, her voice trembled with emotion, as if her heart did not trust what her lips were uttering.

"Banish forever this absurd idea of a monastic life. The favors of God can be propitiated anywhere, when the heart is earnest. Doubt not but your wealth is sought by these plotting monks," said Gonzalvo.

"I fear you are uncharitable. Do not speak lightly of the church."

"Good angels forbid that I should speak lightly of religion, for I am a firm believer in its sanctifying and hallowing power! But of poor sinful men I may be permitted to speak, when I judge them by their fruits; for it is thus that we shall know them. It is true I have much confidence in Geraloma, but I hope he will relinquish his purpose, and suffer you to follow the dictates of your own conscience, unbiased by well meaning, though misdirected arguments; which are, at best, but silly sophistry."

"He is the most self-denying of men, and looks only to my highest interest, Gonzalvo—my spiritual exaltation and eternal welfare."

"Doubtless he is sincere, but all my faculties unite to tell me that he is mistaken in the ends and aims of religion," he continued.

At that moment, Bianca placed her hand on Gonzalvo's lips.

"Look," she said, in a whisper. "I see the shadow of a man yonder in the shrubbery."

Instantly the eyes of the lover were turned in the direction indicated, when he plainly perceived the object that had excited Bianca's attention—it was obviously a figure muffled in a cloak, and there for no friendly purpose.

"It is probably some venturesome robber; remain here, and I will punish his temerity."

With his hand upon his sword hilt, Gonzalvo

advanced toward the intruder, who, seeing he was discovered, turned and fled. The knight pursued him so closely that before he reached the wall he was obliged to turn and defend himself; but their swords had scarcely crossed when Gonzalvo stumbled and fell. The unknown stood over him a few seconds, as if undecided whether to strike, then with great effort leaped the wall and disappeared. Bianca, on seeing her lover fall, uttered a piercing scream, thinking he was slain. Her cries reached the ears of Lady Caravajal, who instantly threw up a window and looked down into the garden, when to her surprise, she perceived her daughter supported by the arm of a young caballero; for the sudden revulsion from terror to joy had made Bianca feel faint and require the timely aid which Gonzalvo had proffered.

But a short time elapsed before the excited and indignant mother appeared on the spot, and taking her daughter by the arm, and darting an angry look at Gonzalvo, led her unresistingly away. Just as the flowing robes of the Lady Caravajal were sweeping from his sight, he awakened from the temporary stupor which this unexpected event had produced, and began to explain the circumstances of the case, and to exculpate the maiden and himself; but the senora heeded him not, and he was left alone, overwhelmed with vexation and mortification. He went home in a disturbed and anxious frame of mind, wondering whether the denouement of the evening would prejudice his suit in the eyes of Lady Caravajal, when the cause of her agitation had been fully elucidated. The interviews which he reckoned among the happiest moments of his life, had been stolen pleasures, having neither the knowledge nor consent of the lady mother—a circumstance which must be pardoned, for love scorns all restraint.

Two days elapsed before he heard from Bianca—days of interminable length to one so anxious. On the third day he met the monk and ran to embrace him with a cordiality he never before felt for him.

"Heaven be praised, my good Geraloma! What news do you bring from Caravajal's mansion? Is the senora deeply offended—speak and relieve my burning impatience!" he exclaimed, with nervous haste.

"Moderate your eagerness, good youth; I have rare news for you," said the monk.

"Well," cried the caballero, anxiously.

"Bianca Caravajal has been sent to a convent and you will see her no more," said Geraloma.

Gonzalvo recoiled, staggered by the violence of the emotions consequent upon receiving this communication.

"Gone to a convent?" repeated the lover, looking vacantly at the monk.

"To a convent," added the confessor.

"Pity my misery, worthy Geraloma."

"Alas, what can I do! Should I not rather rejoice to see this sweet flower shielded from the bitter blasts of the world?" returned the monk, in a pensive tone.

"Come, be human—assist me to take Bianca from the convent," resumed the caballero.

"Santiago!" cried the confessor. "The man is mad!"

"Lend me your aid, and I will make your fortune; and in such a cause, Heaven will certainly forgive you," resumed the knight, taking the monk's arm and leading him toward an unfrequented spot.

"Should you violate the sanctity of a convent, all Spain would be ready to launch its thunders upon your head. The king himself dare not do such a deed," added Geraloma.

"Because the king does not love as I do. Do not try to dissuade me—I am firm. Say, good father, will you lend me your aid to this enterprise and make your fortune, in a worldly point of view?"

"Impossible!" muttered the monk, rubbing his forehead. "The risk would be fearful."

"The risk would be comparatively slight; for have you not used your eloquence to persuade the maiden to this step?"

"That is well known to the abbe; but I fear my poor eloquence would have availed little, had not your own imprudence backed it up by arguments far more powerful with the watchful and pious mother."

"It will be easy for you to give her an opportunity to meet me outside the walls of the convent, when swift horses shall bear us far beyond pursuit."

"But think you the fair one would give her consent to so wild a project?"

"Si, padre; give me but the opportunity to use my influence, and I will quickly subdue her objections."

"You excite my sympathy, brave Gonzalvo, and I will see what can be done. Be on the western side of the walls this evening at a late hour, and I will, in sheer pity, allow you to

“speak a few words with the daughter of Caravajal. Be prudent and wary, or all may fail, and you will go home disappointed.”

“Numberless thanks!” cried the delighted knight. “I will be there; and, kind monk, while I have the chance let me arrange a plan for her escape.”

“Cease to tempt me from duty!” exclaimed the confessor, with affected emotion.

“Ah, good friend, you relent,” said the lover, seizing the hand of the perfidious Geraloma.

“You manage me as if I were a child. How weakly and sinfully I yield. Yes, arrange it all, and perhaps on the third night from this—”

The monk paused and appeared to be struggling with a sense of duty.

“Do not revoke the words—on the third night from the ensuing one, Bianca shall be ready to fly with me from the dark, cheerless walls of the convent?”

“Hush, my son, speak not so loud; ears that can hear, may be nearer than we think. I will consider this project more fully, and you shall see me again soon.”

Gonzalvo was now elated with hope. That he had won the monk over to his interest was to him quite evident, and with his efficient aid could he not succeed in bearing his lady-love away in triumph? It was a bold deed that he contemplated, but his affection for Senorita Caravajal was sufficient to endow him with needful courage.

At the hour named by Geraloma, he was on the spot designated, awaiting the appearance of Bianca. The monk was true to his promise; a private door was softly opened, and his beloved stood before him. He hastened to tell her his wild scheme, and used many gentle words to convince her that it was both feasible and reasonable. Love lent persuasiveness to his tones, and strength to his arguments; and so the maiden consented to be guided by him.

The interview was brief, and to the knight success seemed certain. The next day he saw Geraloma again, and the details of the plan were duly canvassed and mutually agreed upon. There was, in the mind of our hero, not a doubt concerning the good faith of the monk, for now he had fully committed himself to the plot.

At a certain hour by means of keys which Geraloma had given her, Bianca was to meet her lover as she had done on the previous night. Not far from the convent two fleet horses were to be in readiness, to bear them away to some place of security.

Anxiously did Gonzalvo await the appointed time, and sanguine were his expectations. Just as the shadows of evening were falling, not being able to control his impatience, he walked the streets with hurried strides, going from place to place without aim or object, save to while away the lingering moments.

“A trifling alms, in the name of the virgin!” said a female voice close at his elbow, but he kept on without heeding the suppliant.

“A few *scudi*, caballero, and it shall profit you much,” repeated the voice.

Gonzalvo turned and beheld a woman of middle age, holding out her hand for the expected favor.

“And what can you do for me of so much advantage?” he asked, with a smile.

“More than you think, sir knight, I dare say,” returned the woman, giving him a meaning look.

“Well, here is what you ask for; now go in peace.”

“Not until I have told you an important secret,” she added, beckoning him to follow her to an obscure spot. “Surely,” she added, “Heaven has directed your footsteps hither, that you might have your eyes opened to the fearful danger that surrounds you.”

“Your speech is not over and above plain, good woman,” rejoined Gonzalvo.

“I am not just what I seem, senor. You have probably taken me for what my present appearance would seem to warrant—a mendicant, or a gipsy; but I am neither. My name is Theresa, and I am a sister of charity.”

“Now I think I recall your looks; I have seen you in the streets more than once carrying cheer and consolation, doubtless, to the sick and dying. Now make haste to tell me this mighty secret, for soon my time will be otherwise occupied than in listening to your gossip.”

“Hear, and then call it gossip if you will. Last night while returning from the bed of a dying woman, I passed the mansion of Caravajal, when the thought occurred that I would call and solicit food and wine for the sick child of a poor soldier. I approached the little postern at the rear of the dwelling by which the servants usually enter, and was about to knock, when I heard persons advancing, and believing that they might be poor people coming to solicit broken pastry, bread or cold meats, given daily by the charitable lady to such applicants, I stepped aside to allow them to proceed first. It was

quite dark, but I perceived that the gate opening into the garden was ajar—a thing unusual at that hour. The better to conceal myself from observation, I entered the grounds and had scarcely done so when I became conscious that the persons whom I heard were following in the same direction. I concealed myself among the clustering vines, resolving to leave the spot as soon as the individuals, whoever they might be, had passed me. They came on, and I immediately recognized the voice of Geraloma; he was completely enveloped in a large cloak, and so was his companion. They began a conversation when very near me, that kept me dumb with surprise.”

“Go on—go on!” exclaimed Gonzalvo.

“Geraloma soon proved himself to be a villain,” resumed sister Theresa.

“The abbe knows with what zeal I have labored to persuade Caravajal’s daughter to enter the monastery, and can he possibly suspect me of having had any agency in getting her out of it, think you?” said the monk.

“Certainly not—the plot is right well laid,” said his companion.

“The stigma of taking her away will fall on Gonzalvo, while I shall remain here for a time in perfect security and unsuspected; but meantime you will be conducting Senorita Bianca safely to France where I will join you as soon as I can without exciting suspicion. When once away from here, I will pray his holiness, the pope, to annul my vows of celibacy, and wedded to Caravajal’s daughter, pass a very contented and happy life,” added Geraloma.

“Quite a domestic picture,” said the other, laughing. “But have you arranged it so there will be no mistake—no fatal error to mar the plot?”

“There will be no error on my part; the most important part of the business remains with you. When the fugitives have reached the hills just outside of the town, where your associate will be concealed, decoy Gonzalvo aside on some pretence, and strike him to the heart. Leaving your companion to conceal the body, don the knight’s apparel and press forward with the maiden. When it becomes so light that your disguise will no longer serve you, assure her that you are acting by the express commands of her lover, who will join her in a few days. Amuse her with tales such as your ingenuity can best suggest, until you reach France. Here are ample means to defray your expenses.”

“This,” continued Theresa, “was the purport of the conversation which I heard, and so, Gonzalvo, you see you are betrayed. All this day have I sought you to give timely warning, and was beginning to despair of success when I met you.”

“Can this indeed be true!” exclaimed the knight. “Am I thus deceived, betrayed, and given up to the assassin’s dagger, by the man in whom I have trusted? O perfidious Geraloma, what shall be thy punishment?”

“You may rely upon all I have said,” rejoined Theresa.

“And the man whom you saw, was—”

“Your servant Diego, whom I learned by a casual remark was once a mountain brigand.”

“The knave! Excellent sister Theresa, counsel me. What shall I do?”

“Bianca must not leave the convent in the manner you have designed. As she has not yet taken vows, she is still subject to her mother’s authority, and the Lady Caravajal must be near with a carriage to receive her child.”

“But you forget that she knows nothing of the matter.”

“It shall be my care to acquaint her with the whole, and have her on the spot at the time. The perfidy of Geraloma will make her anxious to take her from the convent as soon as possible. Believe me, she will be grateful for this fortunate discovery of the baseness of her confessor, and will soon be brought to forgive the steps which you contemplated taking. When you meet Bianca at the convent, lead her to the arms of Senora Caravajal, and thank God that she has escaped the machinations of the false monk.”

“I will do it, although I lose her forever!” exclaimed Gonzalvo. “But this knavish servant! What fate is too hard for him?”

“Have him arrested to witness to the hypocrisy of the monk,” replied Theresa.

“That is well; but if he was not unworthy of my vengeance, I would dispose of him in a shorter way. Let Geraloma look to it that he keeps out of my way, or I may not have the same scruples in regard to him. Well does he deserve an ignominious death! It was he who watched me in the garden, and so narrowly escaped feeling the quality of my blade.”

“Yes,” added Theresa, reflectively; “the monk spoke of being in the garden, and of running to elude you.”

"Accept, gentle sister of charity and mercy, my warmest acknowledgements, and soon you shall receive more weighty proofs of my gratitude. But time is wearing away. Go to Senora Caravajal and unfold this complicated plot, and extenuate, as much as possible, my own rashness; tell her that love for her fair daughter engrossed all other considerations. Plead well my cause, and if she is not near the convent at the hour, I will conduct Bianca to her mansion, and thus fulfil, as far as possible, my duty."

Gonzalvo parted from Theresa with his mind in a state of feverish excitement; but indignation at the perfidy of Geraloma was the paramount feeling. It was in vain that he tried to stifle his anger and keep down his emotions; the wild tumult in his blood would not be allayed, and he walked the streets with frowning brow and his hand upon his dagger. He could not forego the idea of punishing the treacherous Geraloma; he wished a thousand times that he was a belted knight, that he might meet him in the field as became an *hidalgo* and a brave man. The advice which Theresa had given him was good, but yet he determined to differ from it enough, not to have anything to do, for the present, with the enforcers and executors of the laws of the land.

Banishing as much as possible the evidences of resentment from his countenance, when the proper time arrived, he ordered Diego to proceed to a certain spot with two led horses, as previously arranged. He then armed himself with unusual care, and sought the convent which contained the object in whose welfare he was so much interested. It was not without some misgivings that he approached the little postern from whence he momentarily expected to see the figure of the maiden issue. The Lady Caravajal might not forgive him for planning an enterprise which would be looked upon by all good Catholics as the greatest piece of mendacity possible. What! violate the sanctity of a monastery, and carry off one who had avowed her intention of becoming a nun? Rash and impious thought! The exemplary mother of the beloved *senorita* would shrink from him with fear.

While he was indulging in these uncomfortable reflections, he heard a light and well known step approaching; and presently the sound of a key turning softly in the lock; the postern was timidly opened, and Gonzalvo sprang to press the trembling maiden to his heart.

"I feel that this is rash and unmaidenly, and I tremble for the result," she said, hurriedly.

"Quiet your apprehensions, and thank the ever blessed madonna for her kindly protection; for we have escaped, this night, deadly peril. Be calm—Geraloma is false!"

"St. Ursula!" she exclaimed. "It cannot be!"

"Si, *senorita*, it is but too true; we shall not leave Seville—you will return to your mother, who before this time is fully acquainted with the plot. Come, do not linger, for every moment of delay is fraught with danger. In sister Theresa, whom the good angels have made an instrument of unmasking the villany of the monk, we have an able advocate."

With Bianca clinging nervously to his arm, Gonzalvo hastened from the convent in the direction where he expected to find the Lady Caravajal with a carriage. They reached the spot, but there was no vehicle in sight, and the knight began to entertain serious fears that it would not come. This served greatly to increase his perturbation of mind, and every instant his agitation became more painful to bear. The victim of a thousand apprehensions, the *donzella* leaned heavily upon Gonzalvo for support, dreading alike to hear the reproaches of her mother, and those words of farewell from the lips of her lover, which she had every reason to suppose would be final. While they stood waiting and undecided, he briefly related to her the nature of the developments which sister Theresa had made. He had scarcely finished the relation when the sound of wheels reached their ears, and soon a carriage was in sight.

"Thanks to interceding saints!" exclaimed Gonzalvo. "Your mother approaches; the terrible danger which threatened you is well nigh passed. In a moment you will be in her arms, and safe from the dark machinations of Geraloma."

The carriage rolled rapidly to the spot and stopped. Gonzalvo opened the door with a tremulous hand.

"Senora Caravajal," he said, in a voice full of emotion, "I restore your daughter. Take her, and in your gratitude that a smooth-tongued hypocrite has been unmasked, forgive one whose love has made him rash and imprudent."

The Lady Caravajal extended her arms and Bianca sprang to her embraces.

"Say, *senora*, am I forgiven?" added Gonzalvo.

"You are, most freely. Enter the carriage and attend us home," returned the lady.

"That would indeed give me pleasure, but I must attend to my knavish servant, who was to assassinate me in the first dark pass. Let me entreat of you, dear lady, to keep the transaction of to-night as far as I am concerned, a secret to all save to the abbot. To him I would advise you to address a private note requesting his immediate presence at your mansion, where you can make known to him what his friend Geraloma has contemplated. I think also it would be well to let Geraloma labor under the supposition that the scheme has been successful, and that your daughter is really on the way to France, under the care of Diego; and yet I would not have the name of Bianca blazoned abroad in connection with a name like his. Let me beg of you—forgive my freedom—to prevail upon the abbe, who, though avaricious, is a kind-hearted man, to keep this matter entirely within the walls of the convent, nor allow it to be bruited abroad. These suggestions may seem to come ungratefully from one who contemplated the daring act which is now known to you; but under the present circumstances, such a course appears to me proper."

"I will consider what you have said. I would see you at my mansion soon."

With these words the widow Caravajal's carriage drove away.

Gonzalvo, with a lighter step and a better conscience, now proceeded to the place where Diego was waiting with the horses. He found him sitting calmly in the saddle, holding the reins of the animals intended for his master and Bianca. He appeared considerably disappointed when he perceived the caballero advancing alone.

"Diego," said the latter, suppressing his indignation, "we can do nothing at present. Geraloma thinks the moon shines too brightly for such a deed; the undertaking must be postponed until to-morrow night. Turn the horses' heads toward home."

With evident reluctance the fellow obeyed, and the caballero followed close behind him. As soon as they reached the stables, Gonzalvo sprang upon him and knocked him down with the heavy hilt of his sword, when he was firmly secured and lodged in a damp vault beneath the knight's mansion. This unexpected event took him greatly by surprise, and put him in such terrible fear for his life, that of his own accord

he confessed his guilt. It appeared that he had formerly been a soldier, and when his services ceased to be wanted, had, with many of his comrades, taken to a more lawless life in the mountains, and it was while leading this kind of an existence that he first saw Geraloma, who, although he would not rob a cavalier openly with force and arms, would nevertheless incite and encourage those to do so over whose rude minds he held complete sway. Having again met at Seville, after the lapse of several years, Diego was surprised to find that his former associate in crime had taken orders, was esteemed a good man, and admitted into the best families, in the sacred character he had assumed. Their acquaintance had been renewed for the purpose already known to the reader, which object had been happily frustrated by Theresa.

Meantime Bianca did not appear at matins, and after the services the abbe sent for the monk to know from him the reason of her non-appearance.

"I fear," said Geraloma, in a sad voice, "that Caravajal's daughter is ill-prepared for a life of penitence and prayer."

"What mean you?" inquired the abbot.

"Alas, worthy father, it grieves me to say that the *senorita* has committed a most flagrant breach of decorum; she has fled the convent with Gonzalvo."

"Holy St. Peter! monstrous levity!"

"Well may you say it," rejoined Geraloma, crossing himself.

"This must be looked too right speedily," added the abbe. "Are you well assured that Gonzalvo has done this unheard-of piece of wickedness?"

"I have good evidence of it. He has long entertained for her a sinful affection, which has greatly hindered my efforts to bring her to a sense of her duty. I once surprised them in the garden attached to the Caravajal mansion, and heard this rash caballero persuading her to fly from paternal restraint, that they might be united in some other country. Out of pity to his youth and inexperience, I forgave him and kept the matter secret; but you see what has come of my misdirected kindness. Early this morning as soon as I discovered the flight of the maiden, I sent to inquire if Senor Gonzalvo was at home, and received word that he left for his castle in the country last night."

"There appears to be no doubt of his guilt," said the abbot.

"None at all, and I have already sent horsemen in different directions to trace the fugitives."

"But without success, probably?"

"I have heard nothing as yet from them," returned Geraloma.

"Then I have done better than you," replied the abbe, and instantly threw open a door near him.

"Look, good Geraloma!" he added, very sarcastically.

The monk raised his eyes and beheld to his consternation the Lady Caravajal, Bianca and Gonzalvo.

"What pleasant surprise is this?" he stammered, vainly striving to recover his equanimity.

"We will call the vile and dissolute companion of your wicked plotting, and he shall answer," retorted the abbot, in a stern and rebuking voice, while his eyes shot angry glances at the now agitated Geraloma. He stamped upon the floor as he ceased speaking, and immediately Diego was dragged in by two monks.

"Betrayed!" cried Geraloma, smiting upon his breast in the pain of his disappointment and the vehemence of his rage.

"Yes, designing man!" replied the Lady Car-

avajal. "Your wicked scheme was overheard in the garden."

The monk frowned fiercely, but made no reply.

"This transaction has convinced me that my child needs a protector," resumed the senora, "and I shall bestow her upon Gonzalvo, who, though guilty of imprudence and rashness, is nevertheless a gallant cavalier and a noble gentleman."

"He shall not live to enjoy your gift!" cried Geraloma, snatching a dagger from beneath his domino, and springing upon Gonzalvo with the fury of a maniac. But the quick, eagle eye of the knight was upon him; and recoiling to avoid his savage fury, he drew his good sword from its sheath, and received the villain on its point. Geraloma fell at his feet, pierced with a mortal wound.

A few days after these events the abbot united Bianca and Gonzalvo in the little chapel attached to the convent; and the usual rejoicings and festivities followed. The kind-hearted Theresa was not forgotten by the happy parties, but remembered in a manner suited to the service which she had rendered.

THE END.