Henty George Alfred

Condemned as a Nihilist: A Story of Escape from Siberia

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Содержание

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PREFACE

There are few difficulties that cannot be surmounted by patience, resolution, and pluck, and great as are the obstacles that nature and the Russian government oppose to an escape from the prisons of Siberia, such evasions have occasionally been successfully carried out, and that under far less advantageous circumstances than those under which the hero of this story undertook the venture. For the account of life in the convict establishments in Siberia I am indebted to the very valuable books by my friend the Rev. Dr. Lansdell, who has made himself thoroughly acquainted with Siberia, traversing the country from end to end and visiting all the principal prisons. He conversed not only with officials, but with many of the prisoners and convicts, and with Russian and foreign residents in the country, and his testimony as to the management of the prisons and the condition of the convicts is confirmed by other independent writers personally cognizant of the facts, and like him able to converse fluently in the language, and writing from intimate knowledge of the subject.

G. A. HENTY.

CHAPTER I.
A GREAT CHANGE

HALF a dozen boys were gathered in one of the studies at Shrewsbury. A packed portmanteau and the general state of litter on the floor was sufficient to show that it was the last day of term.

"Well, I am awfully sorry you are going, Bullen; we shall all miss you. You would certainly have been in the football team next term; it is a nuisance altogether."

"It is a nuisance; and I am beastly sorry I am leaving. Of course I have known for some time that I should be going out to Russia; but I did not think the governor would have sent me until after I had gone through the school. His letter a fortnight ago was a regular stumper. I thought I should have had another year and a half or two years, and, of course, that is just the jolliest part of school life. However, it cannot be helped."

"You talk the language, don't you, Bullen?"

"Well, I used to talk it, but I don't remember much about it now. You see I have been home six years. I expect I shall pick it up again fast enough. I should not mind it so much if the governor were out there still; but you see he came home for good two years ago. Still it won't be like going to a strange place altogether; and as he has been living there so long, I shall soon get to know lots of the English there. Still I do wish I could have had a couple of years more at Shrewsbury. I should have been content to have gone out then."

"Well, it is time for us to be starting. I can hear the omnibus."

In a few minutes the omnibus was filled with luggage inside and out; the lads started to walk to the station. As the train drew up there were hearty good-byes, and then the train steamed out of the station, the compartment in which Godfrey Bullen had taken his seat being filled with boys going, like himself, straight through to town. All were in high spirits, and Bullen, who had felt sorry at leaving school for the last time, was soon as merry as any of them.

"You must mind what you are up to, Bullen," one of his companions said. "They are terrible fellows those Nihilists, they say."

"They won't hurt Bullen," another put in, "unless he goes into the secret police. I should say he would make a good sort of secret policeman."

"No, no; he is more likely to turn a Nihilist."

"Bosh!" Bullen said, laughing. "I am not likely to turn a secret policeman; but I am more likely to do that than to turn Nihilist. I hate revolutionists and assassins, and all those sort of fellows."

"Yes, we all know that you are a Tory, Bullen; but people change, you know. I hope we shall never see among the lists of Nihilists tried for sedition and conspiracy, and sentenced to execution, the name of one Godfrey Bullen."

"Oh, they wouldn't execute Bullen!" another said; "they would send him to Siberia. Bullen's always good at fighting an uphill game, and he would show off to great advantage in a chain-gang. Do they crop their hair there, Bullen, and put on a gray suit, as I saw them at work in Portsmouth dockyard last year?"

"I am more likely to see you working in a chain-gang at Portsmouth, Wilkinson, when I come back, than I am to form part of a convict gang in Siberia – at any rate for being a Nihilist. I won't say about other things, for I suppose there is no saying what a fellow may come to. I don't suppose any of the men who get penal servitude for forgery, and swindling, and so on, ever have any idea, when they are sixteen, that that is what they are coming to. At present I don't feel any inclination that way."

"I should say you were not likely to turn forger anyhow, Bullen, whatever you take to."

"Why is that, Parker?"

"Because you write such a thundering bad hand that you would never be able to imitate anyone else's signature, unless he couldn't go farther than making a cross for his name, and the betting is about even that you would blot that."

There was a roar of laughter, for Bullen's handwriting was a perpetual source of trouble to him, and he was continually losing marks for his exercises in consequence. He joined heartily in the laugh.

"It is an awful nuisance that handwriting of mine," he said, "especially when one is going to be a merchant, you know. The governor has talked two or three times about my going to one of those fellows who teach you to write copperplate in twenty lessons. I shouldn't be surprised if he does let me have a course these holidays. I should not mind if he does, for my writing is disgusting."

"Never mind, Bullen; bad handwriting is a sign of genius, you know. You have never shown any particular genius yet, except for rowing and boxing, and I suppose that is muscular genius; but you may blossom out in a new line some day."

"I don't want to disturb the harmony of this last meeting, Parker, or I should bring my muscular genius into play at your expense."

"No, no, Bullen," another boy said, "you keep that for Russia. Fancy Bullen polishing off a gigantic Cossack, or defending the Czar's life against half a dozen infuriated Nihilists. That would be the thing, Bullen. It would be better than trade any day. Why, you would get an estate as big as an English county, with ten thousand serfs, and sacks upon sacks of roubles."

"What bosh you fellows talk!" Bullen laughed. "There is one thing I do expect I shall learn in Russia, and that is to skate. Fancy six months of regular skating, instead of a miserable three or four days. I shall meet some of you fellows some day at the Round Pond, and there you will be just working away at the outside edge, and I shall be joining in those skating-club figures and flying round and round like a bird."

"What birds fly round and round, Bullen?"

"Lots of them do, as you would know, Jordan, if you kept your eyes open, instead of being always on the edge of going to sleep. Swallows do, and eagles. Never mind, you fellows will turn yellow with jealousy when you see me."

And so they laughed and joked until they reached London. Then there was another hearty good-bye all round, and in a couple of minutes they were speeding in hansoms to their various destinations. Godfrey Bullen's was Eccleston Square. His father was now senior partner in a firm that carried on a considerable business with the east of Europe. He had, when junior partner, resided at St. Petersburg, as the firm had at that time large dealings in the Baltic. From various causes this trade had fallen off a good deal, and the firm had dealt more largely with Odessa and the southern ports. Consequently, when at the death of the senior partner Mr. Bullen returned to England to take up the principal management of the affairs of the firm, it was not deemed advisable to continue the branch at St. Petersburg, and Ivan Petrovytch, a Russian trader of good standing, had been appointed their agent there.

The arrangement had not worked quite satisfactorily. Petrovytch was an excellent agent as far as he went. The business he did was sound, and he was careful and conscientious; but he lacked push and energy, had no initiative, and would do nothing on his own responsibility. Mr. Bullen had all along intended that Godfrey should, on leaving school, go for a few years to Russia, and should, in time, occupy the same position there that he himself had done; but he had now determined that this should take place earlier than he had before intended. He thought that Godfrey would now more speedily pick up the language again, than if he remained another two or three years in England, and that in five or six years' time he might be able to represent the firm there, either in conjunction with Ivan Petrovytch or by himself. Therefore, ten days before the breaking-up of the school for the long holidays, he had written to Godfrey, telling him that he should take him away at the end of the term, and that in two or three months' time he would go out to St. Petersburg.

Mr. Bullen's family consisted of two girls in addition to Godfrey. Hilda, the elder, was seventeen, a year older than the lad, while Ella was two years his junior.

"Well, Godfrey," his father said, as, after the first greeting, they sat down to dinner, which had been kept back for half an hour for his arrival, "you did not seem very enthusiastic in your reply to my letter."

"I did not feel very enthusiastic, father," Godfrey replied. "Of course one's two last years at school are just the jolly time, and I was really very sorry to leave. Still, of course you know what is best for me; and I dare say I shall get on very well at St. Petersburg."

"I have no doubt of that, Godfrey. I have arranged for you to live with Mr. Petrovytch, as you will regain the language much more quickly in a Russian family than you would in an English one; besides, it will be handy for your work. In Russia merchants' offices are generally in their houses, and it is so with him; but, of course, you will know most of the English families. I shall write to several of my old friends, and I am sure they will do all they can for you; but I shall write more to my Russian acquaintances than to my English. The last are sure to call upon you when they hear you have come out; but it is not so easy to get a footing in Russian families, and you might be some time before you make acquaintances that way. Besides, it is much better for you to be principally in the Russian set than in the English, in the first place, because of the language; and in the second, because you will get a much better acquaintance with the country in general with them than among the English.

"There are not many English lads of your own age out there – very few indeed; and those nearest your age would be young clerks. I have nothing whatever to say against young clerks; but, as a rule, they consort together, spend their evenings in each others' rooms or in playing billiards, or otherwise amuse themselves, and so learn very little of the language and nothing of the people. It is unfortunate that it should be so; but they are not altogether to blame, for, as I have said, the Russians, although friendly enough with Englishmen in business, in the club, and so on, do not as a rule invite them to their houses; and therefore the English, especially the class I am speaking of, are almost forced to associate entirely with each other and form a sort of colony quite apart from native society. I was fortunate enough to make some acquaintances among them soon after I went out, and your mother and I were much more in Russian society than is usual with our countrymen there. I found great advantage from it, and shall be glad for you to do the same. You will have one very great advantage, that you will be able to speak Russian fluently in a short time."

"I don't think I remember much about it now, father."

"I dare say not, Godfrey; that is to say, you know it, but you have lost a good deal of the facility of speaking it. You have always got on fairly enough with it when we have spoken it occasionally during your holidays since we have been in England, and in a very few weeks you will find that it has completely come back to you. You spoke it as you did English, indeed better, when you came over to school when you were ten, and in six years one does not forget a language. If you had been another five or six years older, no doubt you would have lost it a good deal; but even then you would have learnt it very much more quickly than you would have done had you never spoken it. Your mother and the girls have been grumbling at me a good deal for sending you away so soon."

"It is horrid, father," Hilda said. "We have always looked forward so to Godfrey's coming home; and of course it would be better still as he got older. We could have gone about everywhere with him; and we shall miss him especially when we go away in summer."

"Well, you must make the most of him this time then," her father said.

"Have you settled where we are going?" Godfrey asked.

"No, we would not settle until you came home, Godfrey," Mrs. Bullen said. "As this was to be your last holiday we thought we would give you the choice."

"Then I vote for some quiet sea-side place, mother. We went to Switzerland last year, and as I am going abroad for ever so long I would rather stop at home now; and, besides, I would rather be

quiet with you all, instead of always travelling about and going to places. Only, of course if the girls would rather go abroad, I don't mind."

However, it was settled that it should be as Godfrey wished.

"But I do think, father," Godfrey said, "that it will be a good thing if I had lessons in writing from one of those fellows who guarantee to teach you in a few lessons. I suppose that is all bosh; but if I got their system and worked at it, it might do me good. I really do write badly."

The girls laughed.

"I don't think that quite describes it, Godfrey," his father said. "If anyone asked me about your accomplishments I should say that you knew a good deal of Latin and Greek, that you had a vague idea of English, and that you could read, but unfortunately you were quite unable to write. According to my idea it is perfectly scandalous that at the great schools such an essential as writing is altogether neglected, while years are spent over Greek, which is of no earthly use when you have once left school. I suppose the very worst writers in the world are men who have been educated in public schools.

"Well, I am glad you have had the good sense to suggest it, Godfrey. I had thought of it myself, but I was afraid you would think it was spoiling your last holidays at home. I will see about it to-morrow. I cannot get away very well for another fortnight. If you have a dozen lessons before we go, you can practise while we are away; and mind, from to-day we will talk nothing but Russian when we are alone."

This had been indeed a common habit in the family since they had come home two years before, as the two girls and Mr. and Mrs. Bullen spoke Russian as fluently as English, and Mr. Bullen thought it was just as well that they should not let it drop altogether. Indeed on their travels in Switzerland they had several times come across Russians, and had made pleasant acquaintances from their knowledge of that language.

The holidays passed pleasantly at Weymouth. Godfrey practised two hours a day steadily at the system of handwriting: and although he was, at the end of the holidays, very far from attaining the perfection shown in the examples produced by his teachers of the marvels they had effected in many of their pupils, he did improve vastly, and wrote a fair current hand instead of the almost undecipherable scrawl that had so puzzled and annoyed a succession of masters at Shrewsbury. After another month spent in London, getting his clothes and outfit, Godfrey started for St. Petersburg. On his last evening at home his father had a serious talk with him.

"I have told Petrovytch," he said, "that you may possibly some day take up the agency with him, but that nothing is decided as to that at present, and that it will all depend upon circumstances. However, in any case, you will learn the ins and outs of the trade there; and if, at the end of a few years, you think that you would rather work by yourself than with him, I can send out a special clerk to work with you. On the other hand, it is possible that I may require you at home here. Venables has no family, and is rather inclined to take it easy. Possibly in a few years he may retire altogether, and I may want you at home. At five or six and twenty you should be able to undertake the management of the Russian part of the business, running out there occasionally to see that everything goes on well. I hope I need not tell you to be steady. There is a good deal too much drinking goes on out there, arising, no doubt, from the fact that the young men have no family society there, and nothing particular to do when work is over.

"Stick to the business, lad. You will find Petrovytch himself a thoroughly good fellow. Of course he has Russian ways and prejudices, but he is less narrow than most of his countrymen of that class. Above all things, don't express any opinion you may feel about public affairs – at any rate outside the walls of the house. The secret police are everywhere, and a chance word might get you into a very serious scrape. As you get on you will find a good deal that you do not like. Even in business there is no getting a government contract, or indeed a contract at all, without bribing right and left. It is disgusting, but business cannot be done without it. The whole system is corrupt and rotten, and you will find that every official has his price. However, you won't have anything to do with this for the

present. If I were you I should work for an hour or two a day with a German master. There are a great many Germans there, and you will find a knowledge of the language very useful to you. You see your Russian has pretty nearly come back to you during the last two months, and you will very soon speak it perfectly; so you will have no trouble about that."

Godfrey found the long railway journey across the flat plains of Germany very dull, as he was unable to exchange a word with his fellow-passengers; but as soon as he crossed the Russian frontier he felt at home again, and enjoyed the run through the thickly-wooded country lying between Wilna and St. Petersburg. As he stepped out at the station everything seemed to come back vividly to his memory. It was late in October and the first snow had fallen, and round the station were a crowd of sledges drawn by rough little horses. Avoiding the importunities of the drivers of the hotel vehicles he hailed an Isvostchik in furred cap and coat lined with sheepskin. His portmanteaus were corded at the back of the sledge; he jumped up into the seat behind the driver, pulled the fur rug over his legs, and said, "Drive to the Vassili Ostrov, 52, Ulitsa Nicolai." The driver gave a peculiar cry, cracked his whip half a dozen times, making a noise almost as loud as the discharge of a pistol, and the horse went off at a sharp trot.

"I thought your excellency was a foreigner," the driver said, "but I see you are one of us."

"No, I am an Englishman, but I lived here till I was ten years old. The snow has begun earlier than usual, has it not?"

"It won't last," the Isvostchik said. "Sometimes we have a week at this time of year, but it is not till December that it sets in in earnest. We may have droskies out again to-morrow instead of the sledges."

"The sledges are the pleasantest," Godfrey said.

"Yes, your excellency, for those that travel, but not for us. At night when we are waiting we can get into the drosky and sleep, while it is terrible without shelter. There are many of us frozen to death every winter."

Godfrey felt a sense of keen enjoyment as the sledge glided along. There were many rough bumps and sharp swings, for the snow was not deep enough to cover thoroughly the roughness of the road below; but the air was brisk and the sun shone brightly, and he looked with pleasure at the people and costumes, which seemed, to his surprise, perfectly familiar to him. He was quite sorry when the journey came to an end at the house of Ivan Petrovytch. The merchant, whose office was on the ground-floor and who occupied the floor above (the rest of the house being let off by floors to other families), came out to greet him. "I am glad to see you, Godfrey Bullen," he said. "I should have sent to the station to meet you, but your good father did not say whether you would arrive by the morning or evening train; and as my driver did not know you, he would have missed you. I hope that all has gone well on the journey. Paul," he said to a man who had followed him out, "carry these trunks upstairs."

After paying the driver Godfrey followed his host to the floor above. Petrovytch was a portly man, with a pleasant but by no means good-looking face. "Wife," he said as he entered the sitting-room, "this is Godfrey Bullen; I will leave him in your hands for the present, as I have some business that I must complete before we close."

"My name," Mrs. Petrovytch said, "is Catharine. You know in this country we always address each other by our names. The high-born may use titles, but simple people use the Christian name and the family name unless they are very intimate, and then the Christian name only. I heard you speaking to my husband as you came in, so that you have not forgotten our language. I should have thought that you would have done so. I can remember you as quite a little fellow before you went away."

"I have been speaking it for the last two months at home," Godfrey said, "and it has nearly come back to me."

"And your father and mother and your sisters, are they all well?"

"They are quite well, and my father and mother begged me to give their kind regards to you."

At this moment the servant came in with the samovar, or tea-urn.

"It is four o'clock now; we dine at five o'clock, when the office is closed. Many dine at one, but my husband likes it when he has done his work, as then he does not need to hurry."

After drinking a tumbler of tea and eating a flat-cake or two with it, Godfrey went to his room to have a wash after his long journey, and to unpack some of his things. He thought that he should like both Petrovytch and his wife, but that the evenings would be dull if he had to spend them in the house. Of this, however, he had but little fear, for he was sure that between his father's friends and the acquaintances he might himself make he should be out as much as he liked.

In the course of the next week Godfrey called at the houses of the various people to whom he had letters of introduction, and left them with the hall porter. His host told him that he thought he had better take a fortnight to go about the capital and see the sights before he settled down to work at the office; and as not only the gentlemen with whom he had left letters of introduction and his card – for in Russia strangers always call first – but many others of his father's friends called or invited him to their houses, he speedily made a large number of acquaintances. At the end of the fortnight he took his place in the office. At first he was of very little use there; for although he could talk and understand Russian as spoken, he had entirely forgotten the written characters, and it took him some little time before he could either read the business correspondence or make entries in the office books. Ivan Petrovytch did his best to assist him, and in the course of a month he began to master the mysteries of Russian writing.

At five o'clock the office closed. Godfrey very frequently dined out, but if he had no engagement he took his meal with the merchant and his wife, and then sallied out and went either alone or with some of his acquaintances to a Russian theatre. With December, winter set in in earnest. The waters were frozen, and skating began. The season at St. Petersburg commenced about the same time, and as Godfrey was often sent with messages or letters to other business houses he had an opportunity of seeing the streets of St. Petersburg by day as well as by night. He was delighted with the scene on the Nevski Prospekt, the principal street of St. Petersburg. The footways were crowded with people: the wealthy in high boots, coats lined with sable, and caps to match; the poorer in equally ample coats, but with linings of sheep, fox, or rabbit skins, with the national Russian cap of fur with velvet top, and with fur-lined hoods, which were often drawn up over the head.

The shops were excellent, reminding Godfrey rather of Paris than London. But the chief interest of the scene lay in the roadway. There were vehicles of every description, from the heavy sledge of the peasant, piled up with logs for fuel, or carrying, perhaps, the body of an elk shot in the woods, to the splendid turn-outs of the nobles with their handsome fur wraps, their coachmen in the national costume, and horses covered with brown, blue, or violet nets almost touching the ground, to prevent the snow from being thrown up from the animals' hoofs into the faces of those in the sledge. The harness was in most cases more or less decorated with bells, which gaily tinkled in the still air as the sledges dashed along. Most struck was Godfrey with the vehicles of the nobles who adhered to old Russian customs. The sledge was drawn by three horses; the one in the centre was trained to trot, while the two outside went at a canter. The heads of the latter were bent half round, so that they looked towards the side, or even almost behind them as they went. An English acquaintance to whom Godfrey expressed his surprise the first time he saw one of these sledges replied, "Yes, that is the old Russian pattern; and, curiously enough, if you look at Greek bas-reliefs and sculptures of the chariot of Phœbus, or at any other representations of chariots with three or four horses, you will see that the animals outside turn their heads in a similar manner."

"But it must be horribly uncomfortable for the horses to have their heads turned round like that."

"It is the effect of training. They are always tied up to the stables with their heads pulled in that way, until it becomes a second nature to go with them in that position."

"It is a very curious idea," Godfrey said, "but it certainly looks nice. What magnificent beards all the drivers in the good sledges have!"

"Yes, that again is an old Russian custom. A driver with a big beard is considered an absolute necessity for a well-appointed turn-out, and the longer and fuller the beard the higher the wages a man will command and the greater the pride of his employer."

"It seems silly," Godfrey said. "But there is no doubt those fellows do look wonderfully imposing with their fur caps and their long blue caftans and red sashes and those splendid beards. They remind me of pictures of Neptune. Certainly I never saw such beards in England."

Besides these vehicles there were crowds of public sledges, driven by the Isvostchiks, long rough country sledges laden perhaps with a dozen peasant women returning from market, light well-got-up vehicles of English and other merchants, dashing turn-outs carrying an officer or two of high rank, and others filled with ladies half buried in rich furs. The air was tremulous with the music of countless bells, and broken by the loud cracking of whips, with which the faster vehicles heralded their approach. These whips had short handles, but very long heavy thongs; and Godfrey observed that, however loud he might crack this weapon, it was very seldom indeed that a Russian driver ever struck one of his horses with it.

Sometimes when Ivan Petrovytch told him that there was little to be done in the office, and that he need not return for an hour or two, Godfrey would stroll into the Isaac or Kasan cathedrals, both splendid structures, and wonder at the taste that marred their effect, by the profusion of the gilding lavished everywhere. He was delighted by the singing, which was unaccompanied by instruments, the bass voices predominating, and which certainly struck him as being much finer than anything he had ever heard in an English cathedral. There was no lack of amusement in the evening. Some of his English friends at once put Godfrey up as a member of the Skating Club. This club possessed a large garden well planted with trees. In this was an artificial lake of considerable extent, broken by wooded islets. This was always lit up of an evening by coloured lights, and twice in the week was thrown open upon a small payment to the public, when a military band played, and the grounds were brilliantly illuminated.

The scene was an exceedingly gay one, and the gardens were frequented by the rank and fashion of St. Petersburg. The innumerable lights were reflected by the snow that covered the ground and by the white masses that clung to the boughs of the leafless trees. The ice was covered with skaters, male and female, the latter in gay dresses, tight-fitting jackets trimmed with fur, and dainty little fur caps. Many of the former were in uniform, and the air was filled with merry laughter and the ringing sound of innumerable skates. Sometimes parties of acquaintances executed figures, but for the most part they moved about in couples, the gentleman holding the lady's hand, or sometimes placing his arm round her waist as if dancing. Very often Godfrey spent the evening at the houses of one or other of his Russian or English friends, and occasionally went to the theatre. Sometimes he spent a quiet evening at home. He liked Catharine Petrovytch. She was an excellent housewife, and devoted to the comfort of her husband; but when not engaged in household cares she seldom cared to go out, and passed her time for the most part on the sofa. She was, like most other Russian ladies when at home and without visitors, very careless and untidy in her dress.

Among the acquaintances of whom Godfrey saw most were two young students. One of them was the son of a trader in Moscow, the other of a small landed proprietor. He had met them for the first time at a fair held on the surface of the Neva, and had been introduced to them by a fellow-student of theirs, a member of a family with whom Godfrey was intimate. Having met another acquaintance he had left the party, and Godfrey had spent the afternoon on the ice with Akim Soushiloff and Petroff Stepanoff. He found them pleasant young men. He was, they told him, the first Englishman they had met, and asked many questions about his country. He met them several times afterwards, and one day they asked him if he would come up to their room.

"It is a poor place," one said laughing. "But you know most of us students are poor, and have to live as best we can."

"It makes no odds to me," Godfrey said. "It was a pretty bare place I had when I was at school. I shall be very glad to come up."

The room which the students shared was a large one, at the top of a house in a narrow street. It was simply furnished enough, containing but two beds, a deal table, four chairs, and the indispensable stove, which kept the room warm and comfortable.

"We are in funds just at present," Akim said. "Petroff has had a remittance, and so you find the stove well alight, which is not always the case."

"But how do you manage to exist without a fire?"

"We don't trouble the room much then," Petroff said. "We walk about till we are dead tired out, and then come up and sleep in one bed together for warmth, and heap all the coverings from the other bed over us. Oh, we get on very well! Food is cheap here if you know where to get it; fuel costs more than food. Now which will you take, tea or vodka?"

Godfrey declared for tea. Some of the water from a great pot standing on the top of the stove was poured into the samovar. Some glowing embers were taken from the stove and placed in the urn, and in a few minutes the water was boiling, and three tumblers of tea with a slice of lemon floating on the top were soon steaming on the table. The conversation first turned upon university life in Russia, and then Petroff began to ask questions about English schools and universities, and then the subject changed to English institutions in general.

"What a different life to ours!" Akim said. "And the peasants, are they comfortable?"

"Well, their lives are pretty hard ones," Godfrey acknowledged. "They have to work hard and for long hours, and the pay is poor. But then, on the other hand, they generally have their cottages at a very low rent, with a good bit of garden and a few fruit trees. They earn a little extra money at harvest time, and though their pay is smaller, I think on the whole they are better off and happier than many of the working people in the towns."

"And they are free to go where they like?"

"Certainly they are free, but as a rule they don't move about much."

"Then if they have a bad master they can leave him and go to someone else?"

"Oh, yes! They would go to some other farmer in the neighbourhood. But there are seldom what you may call bad masters. The wages are always about the same through a district, and the hours of work, and so on; so that one master can't be much better or worse than another, except in point of temper; and if a man were very bad tempered of course the men would leave him and work somewhere else, so he would be the loser, as he would soon only get the very worst hands in the neighbourhood to work for him."

"And they are not beaten?"

"Beaten! I should think not," Godfrey said. "Nobody is beaten with us, though I think it would be a capital thing if, instead of shutting up people in prison for small crimes, they had a good flogging. It would do them a deal more good, and it would be better for their wives and families, who have to get on as best they can while they are shut up."

"And nobody is beaten at all?"

"No; there used to be flogging in the army and navy, but it was very rare, and is now abolished."

"And not even a lord can flog his peasants?"

"Certainly not. If a lord struck a peasant the peasant would certainly hit him back again, and if he didn't feel strong enough to do that he would have him up before the magistrates and he would get fined pretty heavily."

"And how do they punish political prisoners?"

"There are no political prisoners. As long as a man keeps quiet and doesn't get up a row, he may have any opinions he likes; he may argue in favour of a republic, or he may be a socialist or anything he pleases; but, of course, if he tried to kick up a row, attack the police, or made a riot

or anything of that sort he would be punished for breaking the law, but that would have nothing to do with his politics."

The two young men looked in surprise at each other.

"But if they printed a paper and attacked the government?" Akim asked.

"Oh, they do that! there are as many papers pitch into the government as there are in favour of the government; parties are pretty equally divided, you see, and the party that is out always abuses the party which is in power."

"And even that is lawful?"

"Certainly it is. You can abuse the government as much as you like, say that the ministers are a parcel of incompetent fools, and so on; but, of course, you cannot attack them as to their private life and character any more than you can anyone else, because then you would render yourself liable to an action for libel."

"And you can travel where you like, in the country and out of the country, without official permits or passports?"

"Yes, there is nothing like that known in England. Every man can go where he likes, and live where he likes, and do anything he likes, providing that it does not interfere with the rights of other people."

"Ah! shall we ever come to this in Russia, Akim?" Petroff said.

Akim made no answer, but Godfrey replied for him. "No doubt you will in time, Petroff; but you see liberties like these do not grow up in a day. We had serfs and vassals in England at one time, and feudal barons who could do pretty much what they chose, and it was only in the course of centuries that these things got done away with." At this moment there was a knock at the door.

"It is Katia," Akim said, jumping up from his seat and opening the door. A young woman entered. She was pleasant and intelligent looking. "Katia, this is an English gentleman, a friend of ours, who has been telling us about his country. Godfrey, this is my cousin Katia; she teaches music in the houses of many people of good family."

"I did not expect to find visitors here," the girl said smiling. "And how do you like our winter? it is a good deal colder than you are accustomed to."

"It is a great deal more pleasant," Godfrey said: "I call it glorious weather. It is infinitely better than alternate rains and winds, with just enough frost occasionally to make you think you are going to do some skating, and then a thaw."

"You are extravagant," the girl said, looking round; "it is a long time since I have felt the room as warm as this. I suppose Petroff has got his allowance?"

"Yes, and a grumbling letter. My father has a vague idea that in some way or other I ought to pick up my living, though he never offers a suggestion as to how I should do it."

The young woman went to the cupboard, fetched another tumbler and poured herself out some tea, and then chatted gaily about St. Petersburg, her pupils, and their parents.

"Do you live at the house of one of your pupils?" Godfrey asked.

"Oh no!" she said. "I don't mind work, but I like to be free when work is over. I board in an honest family, and live in a little room at the top of the house which is all my own and where I can see my friends."

After chatting for some time longer Godfrey took his leave. As soon as he had gone the girl's manner changed.

"Do you think you are wise to have him here, Akim?"

"Why not?" the student asked in turn. "He is frank and agreeable, he is respectable, and even you will allow that it would be safer walking with him than some we know; we do not talk politics with him."

"For all that I am sorry, Akim. You know how it will be; we shall get him into trouble. It is our fate; we have a great end in view; we risk our own lives, and although for the good of the cause

we must not hesitate even if others suffer, I do hate with all my heart that others should be involved in our fortunes."

"This is not like you, Katia," Petroff said. "I have heard you say your maxim is 'At any cost,' and you have certainly lived up to it."

"Yes, and I shall live up to it," she said firmly; "but it hurts sometimes, Petroff; it hurt me just now when I thought that that lad laughing and chatting with us had no idea that he had better have thrust his hand into that stove than have given it to us. I do not shrink; I should use him as I should use anyone else, as an instrument if it were needful, but don't suppose that I like it."

"I don't think there is any fear of our doing him harm," Akim said; "he is English, and would find no difficulty in showing that he knew nothing of us save as casual acquaintances; they might send him out of the country, but that would be all."

"It would all depend," she said, "upon how he fell into their hands. If you happened to be arrested only as you were walking with him down the Nevski Prospekt he would be questioned, of course, but as soon as they learned who he was and that he had nothing to do with you, they would let him go. But if he were with us, say here, when we were pounced upon, and you had no time to pull the trigger of the pistol pointing into that keg of powder in the cupboard, he would be hurried away with us to one of the fortresses, and the chances are that not a soul would ever know what had become of him. Still it cannot be helped now; he may be useful, and as we give our own lives, so we must not shrink from giving others'. But this is not what I came here to talk to you about; have you heard of the arrest of Michaelovich?"

"No," they both exclaimed, leaping from their seats.

"It happened at three o'clock this morning," Katia said. "They surrounded the house and broke in suddenly, and rushed down into the cellar and found him at work. He shot two of them, and then he was beaten down and badly wounded."

"Where were the other two?" Akim asked.

"He sent them away but an hour before, but he went on working himself to complete the number of hand-bills. Of course he was betrayed. I don't think there are six people who knew where the press was; even I didn't know."

"Where did you hear of it, Katia?"

"Feodorina Samuloff told me; you know she often helps Michaelovich to work at the press; she thinks it must have been either Louka or Gasin. Why should Michaelovich have sent them away when he hadn't finished work if one or the other of them had not made some excuse so as to get out of the way before the police came? But that is nothing, there will be time to find out which is the traitor; they know nothing, either of them, except that they worked at the secret press with him; they were never much trusted. But Michaelovich is a terrible loss, he was always daring and full of expedients."

"They will get nothing from him," Petroff said.

"Not they," she agreed. "When do they ever get anything out of us? One of the outer-circle fellows like Louka and Gasin, who know nothing, who are instruments and nothing more, may tell all they know for gold, or for fear of the knout, but never once have they learned anything from one who knows. Fortunately the press was a very old one and there was but little type there, only just enough for printing small hand-bills; we have two others ready to set up."

"Were there any papers there?"

"No, Michaelovich was too careful for that."

"I hear that old Libka died in prison yesterday," Akim said.

"He is released from his suffering," Katia said solemnly. "Anything else, Akim?"

"Yes, a batch of prisoners start for Siberia to-morrow, and there are ten of us among them."

"Well, be careful for the next few days, Akim," Katia said; "don't do anything in the schools, it will not be long now before all is ready to strike a blow, and it is not worth while to risk anything until after that. I have orders that we are all to keep perfectly quiet till the plans are settled and we each

get our instructions. Now I must go, I have two lessons to give this afternoon. It tries one a little to be talking to children about quavers and semiquavers when one's head is full of great plans, and you know that at any moment a policeman may tap you on the shoulder and take you off to the dungeons of St. Nicholas, from which one will never return unless one is carried out, or is sent to Siberia, which would be worse. Be careful; the police have certainly got scent of something, they are very active at present;" and with a nod she turned and left the room.

"She is a brave girl," Akim said. "I think the women make better conspirators than we do, Petroff. Look at her. She was a little serious to-day because of Michaelovich, but generally she is in high spirits, and no one would dream that she thought of anything but her pupils and pleasure. Then there is Feodorina Samuloff. She works all day, I believe, in a laundry, and she looks as impassive as if she had been carved out of soap. Yet she is ready to go on working all night if required, and if she had orders she would walk into the Winter Palace and throw down a bomb (that would kill her as well as everyone else within its reach) with as much coolness as if she was merely delivering a message."

CHAPTER II.
A CAT'S-PAW

One evening a fortnight later Godfrey went with two young Englishmen to a masked ball at the Opera. It was a brilliant scene. Comparatively few of the men were masked or in costume, but many of the ladies were so. Every other man was in uniform of some kind, and the floor of the house was filled with a gay laughing crowd, while the boxes were occupied by ladies of the highest rank, several of the imperial family being present. He speedily became separated from his companions, and after walking about for an hour he became tired of the scene, and was about to make his way towards the entrance when a hand was slipped behind his arm. As several masked figures had joked him on walking about so vaguely by himself, he thought that this was but another jest.

"You are just the person I wanted," the mask said.

"I think you have mistaken me for some one else, lady," he replied.

"Not at all. Now put up your arm and look as if I belong to you. Nonsense! do as you are told, Godfrey Bullen."

"Who are you who know my name?" Godfrey laughed, doing as he was ordered, for he had no doubt that the masked woman was a member of one of the families whom he had visited.

"You don't know who I am?" she asked.

"How should I when I can see nothing but your eyes through those holes?"

"I am Katia, the cousin of your friend Akim."

"Oh, of course!" Godfrey said, a little surprised at meeting the music mistress in such an assembly. "I fancied I knew your voice, though I could not remember where I had heard it. And now what can I do for you?"

The young woman hesitated. "We have got up a little mystification," she said after a pause, "and I am sure I can trust you; besides, you don't know the parties. There is a gentleman here who is supposed to be with his regiment at Moscow; but there is a sweetheart in the case, and you know when there are sweethearts people do foolish things."

"I have heard so," Godfrey laughed, "though I don't know anything about it myself, for I sha'n't begin to think of such luxuries as sweethearts for years to come."

"Well, he is here masked," the girl went on, "and unfortunately the colonel of his regiment is here, and some ill-natured person – we fancy it is a rival of his – has told the colonel. He is furious about it, and declares that he will catch him and have him tried by court-martial for being absent without leave. The only thing is, he is not certain as to his information."

"Well, what can I do?" Godfrey asked. "How can I help him?"

"You can help if you like, and that without much trouble to yourself. He is at present in the back of that empty box on the third tier. I was with him when I saw you down here, so I left him to say good-bye to his sweetheart alone, and ran down to fetch you, for I felt sure you would oblige me. What I thought was this: if you put his mask and cloak on – you are about the same height – it would be supposed that you are he. The colonel is waiting down by the entrance. He will come up to you and say, 'Captain Presnovich?' You will naturally say, 'By no means.' He will insist on your taking your mask off. This you will do, and he will, of course, make profuse apologies, and will believe that he has been altogether misinformed. In the meantime Presnovich will manage to slip out, and will go down by the early train to Moscow. It is not likely that the colonel will ever make any more inquiries about it, but if he does, some of Presnovich's friends will be ready to declare that he never left Moscow."

"But can't he manage to leave his mask and cloak in the box and to slip away without them?"

"No, that would never do. It is necessary that the colonel should see for himself that the man in the cloak, with the white and red bow pinned to it, is not the captain."

"Very well, then, I will do it," Godfrey said. "It will be fun to see the colonel's face when he finds out his mistake; but mind I am doing it to oblige you."

"I feel very much obliged," the girl said; "but don't you bring my name into it though."

"How could I?" he laughed. "I do not see that I am likely to be cross-questioned in any way; but never fear, I will keep your counsel."

By this time they had arrived at the door of the box. "Wait a moment," she said, "I will speak to him first."

She was two minutes gone, and then opened the door and let him in. "I am greatly obliged to you, sir," a man said as he entered. "It is a foolish business altogether, but if you will enact my part for a few minutes you will get me out of an awkward scrape."

"Don't mention it," Godfrey replied. "It will be a joke to laugh over afterwards." He placed the broad hat, to which the black silk mask was sewn, on his head, and Katia put the cloak on his shoulders.

"I trust you," she said in a low voice as she walked with him to the top of the stairs. "There, I must go now. I had better see Captain Presnovich safely off, and then go and tell the young lady, who is a great friend of mine – it is for her sake I am doing it, you know, not for his – how nicely we have managed to throw dust in the colonel's eyes!"

Regarding the matter as a capital joke, Godfrey went down-stairs and made his way to the entrance, expecting every moment to be accosted by the irascible colonel. No one spoke to him, however, and he began to imagine that the colonel must have gone to seek the captain elsewhere, and hoped that he would not meet him as he went down the stairs with Katia. He walked down the steps into the street. As he stepped on to the pavement a man seized him from behind, two others grasped his wrists, and before he knew what had happened he was run forward across the pavement to a covered sledge standing there and flung into it. His three assailants leapt in after him; the door was slammed; another man jumped on to the box with the driver; and two mounted men took their places beside it as it dashed off from the door. The men had again seized Godfrey's hands and held them firmly the instant they entered the carriage.

"It is of no use your attempting to struggle," one of the men said, "there is an escort riding beside the sledge, and a dozen more behind it. There is no chance of a rescue, and I warn you you had best not open your lips; if you do, we will gag you."

Godfrey was still half bewildered with the suddenness of the transaction. What had he been seized for? Who were the men who had got hold of him? and why were they gripping his wrists so tightly? He had heard of arbitrary treatment in the Russian army, but that a colonel should have a captain seized in this extraordinary way merely because he was absent from his post without leave was beyond anything he thought possible.

"I thought I was going to have the laugh all on my side," he said to himself, "but so far it is all the other way." In ten minutes the carriage stopped for a moment, there was a challenge, then some gates were opened. Godfrey had already guessed his destination, and his feeling of discomfort had increased every foot he went. There was no doubt he was being taken to the fortress. "It seems to me that Miss Katia has got me into a horrible scrape of some kind," he said to himself. "What a fool I was to let myself be humbugged by the girl in that way!"

Two men with lanterns were at the door of a building, at which the carriage, after passing into a large court-yard, drew up. Still retaining their grip on his wrists, two of the men walked beside him down a passage, while several others followed behind. An officer of high rank was sitting at the head of a table, one of inferior rank stood beside him, while at the end of the table were two others with papers and pens before them.

"So you have captured him!" the general said eagerly.

"Yes, your excellency," the man who had spoken to Godfrey in the carriage said respectfully.

"Has he been searched?"

"No, your excellency, the distance was so short, and I feared that he might wrench one of his hands loose. Moreover, I thought that you might prefer his being searched in your presence."

"It is better so. Take off that disguise." As the hat and mask were removed the officer sprang to his feet and exclaimed, "Why, who is this? This is not the man you were ordered to arrest; you have made some confounded blunder."

"I assure you, your excellency," the official said in trembling accents, "this is the only man who was there in the disguise we were told of. There, your excellency, is the bunch of white and red ribbons on his cloak."

"And who are you, sir?" the general thundered.

"My name, sir, is Godfrey Bullen. I reside with Ivan Petrovytch, a merchant living in the Vassili Ostrov."

"But how come you mixed up in this business, sir?" the general exclaimed furiously. "How is it that you are thus disguised, and that you are wearing that bunch of ribbon? Beware how you answer me, sir, for this is a matter which concerns your life."

"So far as I am concerned, sir," Godfrey said, "I am absolutely ignorant of having done any harm in the matter, and have not the most remote idea why I have been arrested. I may have behaved foolishly in allowing myself to take part in what I thought was a masquerade joke, but beyond that I have nothing to blame myself for. I went to the Opera-house, never having seen a masked ball before. I was alone, and being young and evidently a stranger, I was spoken to and joked by several masked ladies. Presently one of them came up to me. I had no idea who she was; she was closely masked, and I could see nothing of her face." He then repeated the request that had been made him.

"Do you expect me to believe this ridiculous nonsense about this Captain Presnovich and his colonel?"

"I can only say, sir, what I am telling you is precisely what happened, and that I absolutely believed it. It seemed to me a natural thing that a young officer might come to a ball to see a lady who perhaps he had no other opportunity of meeting alone. I see now that I was very foolish to allow myself to be mixed up in the affair; but I thought that it was a harmless joke, and so I did as this woman asked me."

"Go on, sir," the general said in a tone of suppressed rage.

"There is little more to tell, sir. I went up with this woman to the box she had pointed out, and there found this Captain Presnovich as I believed him to be. I put on his hat, mask, and cloak, walked down the stairs, and was leaving the Opera-house when I was arrested, and am even now wholly ignorant of having committed any offence."

"A likely story," the general said sarcastically. "And this woman, did you see her face?"

"No, sir, she was closely masked. I could not even see if she were young or old; and she spoke in the same disguised, squeaking sort of voice that all the others that had spoken to me used."

"And that is your entire story, sir; you have nothing to add to it?"

"Nothing whatever, sir. I have told you the simple truth."

The general threw himself back in his chair, too exasperated to speak farther, but made a sign to the officer standing next to him to take up the interrogation. The questions were now formal. "Your name is Godfrey Bullen?" he asked.

"It is."

"Your nationality?"

"British."

"Your domicile?"

Godfrey gave the address.

"How long have you been in Russia?"

"Four months."

"What is your business?"

"A clerk to Ivan Petrovytch."

"How comes it that you speak Russian so well?"

"I was born here, and lived up to the age of ten with my father, John Bullen, who was a well-known merchant here, and left only two years ago."

"That will do," the general said impatiently. "Take him to his cell and search him thoroughly."

Naturally the most minute search revealed nothing of an incriminating character. At length Godfrey was left alone in the cell, which contained only a single chair and a rough pallet. "I have put my foot in it somehow," he said to himself, "and I can't make head nor tail of it beyond the fact that I have made an ass of myself. Was the whole story a lie? Was the fellow's name Presnovich? if not, who was he? By the rage of the general, who, I suppose, is the chief of the police, it was evident he was frightfully disappointed that I wasn't the man he was looking for. Was this Presnovich somebody that girl Katia knew and wanted to get safely away? or was she made a fool of just as I was? She looked a bright, jolly sort of girl; but that goes for nothing in Russia, all sorts of people get mixed up in plots. If she was concerned in getting him away I suppose she fixed on me because, being English and a new-comer here, it would be easy for me to prove that I had nothing to do with plots or anything of that sort, whereas if a Russian had been in my place he might have got into a frightful mess over it. Well, I suppose it will all come right in the end. It is lucky that the weather has got milder or I should have had a good chance of being frozen to death; it is cold enough as it is."

Resuming his clothes, which had been thrown down on the pallet, Godfrey drew the solitary rug over him, and in spite of the uncertainty of the position was soon fast asleep. He woke just as daylight was breaking, and was so bitterly cold that he was obliged to get up and stamp about the cell to restore circulation. Two hours later the cell door was opened and a piece of dark-coloured bread and a jug of water were handed in to him. "If this is prison fare I don't care how soon I am out of it," he said to himself as he munched the bread. "I wonder what it is made of! Rye!"

The day passed without anyone coming near him save the jailer, who brought a bowl of thin broth and a ration of bread for his dinner.

"Can't you get me another rug?" he asked the man. "If I have got to stop here for another night I shall have a good chance of being frozen to death."

Just as it was getting dark the man came in again with another blanket and a flat earthenware pan half full of sand, on which was burning a handful or two of sticks; he placed a bundle of wood beside it.

"That is more cheerful by a long way," Godfrey said to himself as the man, who had maintained absolute silence on each of his visits, left the cell. "No doubt they have been making a lot of inquiries about me, and find that I have not been in the habit of frequenting low company. I should not have had these indulgences if they hadn't. Well, it will be an amusement to keep this fire up. The wood is as dry as a bone luckily, or I should be smoked out in no time, for there is not much ventilation through that narrow loophole."

The warmth of the fire and the additional blanket made all the difference, and in a couple of hours Godfrey was sound asleep. When he woke it was broad daylight, and although he felt cold it was nothing to what he had experienced on the previous morning. At about eleven o'clock, as near as he could guess, for his watch and everything had been removed when he was searched, the door was opened and a prison official with two warders appeared. By these he was conducted to the same room where he had been first examined. Neither of the officers who had then been there was present, but an elderly man sat at the centre of the table.

"Godfrey Bullen," he said, "a careful investigation has been made into your antecedents, and with one exception, and that not, for various reasons, an important one, we have received a good report of you. Ivan Petrovytch tells us that you work in his office from breakfast-time till five in the afternoon, and that your evenings are at your own disposal, but that you generally dine with him. He gave us the names of the families with which you are acquainted, and where, as he understood, you

spend your evenings when you are not at the Skating Club, where you generally go on Tuesdays and Fridays at least. We learn that you did spend your evenings with these families, and we have learned at the club that you are a regular attendant there two or three times a week, and that your general associates are: " and he read out a list which included, to Godfrey's surprise, the names of every one of his acquaintances there. "Therefore we have been forced to come to the conclusion that your story, incredible as it appeared, is a true one. That you, a youth and a foreigner, should have had the incredible levity to act in the way you describe, and to assume the disguise of a person absolutely unknown to you, upon the persuasion of a woman also absolutely unknown to you, well-nigh passes belief. Had you been older you would at once have been sent to the frontier; but as it is, the Czar, to whom the case has been specially submitted, has graciously allowed you to continue your residence here, the testimony being unanimous as to your father's position as a merchant, and to the prudence of his behaviour while resident here. But I warn you, Godfrey Bullen, that escapades of this kind, which may be harmless in England, are very serious matters here. Ignorantly, I admit, but none the less certainly, you have aided in the escape of a malefactor of the worst kind; and but for the proofs that have been afforded us that you were a mere dupe, the consequences would have been most serious to you, and even the fact of your being a foreigner would not have sufficed to save you from the hands of justice. You are now free to depart; but let this be a lesson to you, and a most serious one, never again to mix yourself up in any way with persons of whose antecedents you are ignorant, and in future to conduct yourself in all respects wisely and prudently."

"It will certainly be a lesson to me, sir. I am heartily sorry that I was so foolish as to allow myself to be mixed up in such an affair, and think I can promise you that henceforth there will be no fault to be found in my conduct."

In the ante-room Godfrey's watch, money, and the other contents of his pocket were restored to him. A carriage was in waiting for him at the outer door, and he was driven rapidly to the house of the merchant.

"This is a nice scrape into which you have got yourself, Godfrey," Ivan Petrovytch said as he entered. "It is lucky for you that you are not a Russian. But how on earth have you got mixed up in a plot? We know nothing about it beyond the fact that you had been arrested, for, although a thousand questions were asked me about you, nothing was said to me as to the charge brought against you. We have been in the greatest anxiety about you. All sorts of rumours were current in the city as to the discovery of a plot to assassinate one of the grand-dukes at the Opera-house, and there are rumours that explosive bombs had been discovered in one of the boxes. It is said that the police had received information of the attempt that was to be made, and that every precaution had been taken to arrest the principal conspirator, but that in some extraordinary manner he slipped through their fingers. But surely you can never have been mixed up in that matter?"

"That is what it was," Godfrey said, "though I had no more idea of having anything to do with a plot than I had of flying. I see now that I behaved like an awful fool." And he told the story to Petrovytch and his wife as he had told it to the head of the police. Both were shocked at the thought that a member of their household should have been engaged, even unwittingly, in such a treasonable affair.

"It is a wonder that we ever saw you again," the merchant's wife exclaimed. "It is fortunate that we are known as quiet people or we might have been arrested too. I could not have believed that anyone with sense could be silly enough to put on a stranger's mantle and hat!"

"But I thought," Godfrey urged, "that at masked balls people did play all sorts of tricks upon each other. I am sure I have read so in books. And it did seem quite likely – didn't it now? – that an officer should have come up to meet a young lady masked whom he had no chance of meeting at any other time. It certainly seemed to me quite natural, and I believe almost any fellow, if he were asked to help anyone to get out of a scrape like that, would do it."

"You may do it in England or in France, but it doesn't do to take part in anything that you don't know for certain all about here. The wonder is they made any inquiries at all. If you had been a Russian the chances are that your family would never have heard of you again from the time you left to go to the opera. Nothing that you could have said would have been believed. Your story would have been regarded by the police as a mere invention. They would have considered it as certain that in some way or other you were mixed up in the conspiracy. They would have regarded your denials as simple obstinacy, and you would have been sent to Siberia for life."

"I should advise you, Godfrey," Ivan Petrovytch said, "to keep an absolute silence about this affair. Mention it to no one. Everyone knows that something has happened to you, as the police have been everywhere inquiring; but there is no occasion to tell anyone the particulars. Of course rumours get about as to the action of the Nihilists and of the police, but as little is said as possible. It is, of course, a mere rumour that a plot was discovered at the Opera-house. Probably there were an unusual number of police at all the entrances, and a very little thing gives rise to talk and conjecture. People think that the police would not have been there had they not had suspicion that something or other was going to take place, and as everything in our days is put down to the Nihilists, it was naturally reported that the police had discovered some plot; and as two of the grand-dukes were there, people made sure it was in some way connected with them.

"As nothing came of it, and no one was, as far as was known, arrested, it would be supposed that the culprit, whoever he was, managed to evade the police. Such rumours as these are of very common occurrence, and it is quite possible that there is not much more truth in them this time than there is generally; however, of one thing you may be sure, the police are not fonder than other people of being outwitted, and whether the man for whom they were in search was a Nihilist or a criminal of some other sort you certainly aided him to escape. You are sure to be watched for some time, and it will be known to the police in a very few hours if you repeat this story to your acquaintances; if they find you keep silence about it, they will give you credit for discretion, while it would certainly do you a good deal of harm, and might even now lead to your being promptly sent across the frontier, were it known that you made a boast of having outwitted them.

"There is another reason. You will find that for a time most of your friends here will be a little shy of you. People are not fond of having as their intimates persons about whom the police are inquiring, and you will certainly find for a time that you will receive very few invitations to enter the houses of any Russians. It would be different, however, if it were known that the trouble was about something that had no connection with politics; therefore, I should advise you, when you are asked questions, to turn it off with a laugh. Say you got mixed up in an affair between a young lady and her lover, and that, like many other people, you found that those who mingle in such matters often get left in the lurch. You need not say much more than that. You might do anything here without your friends troubling much about it provided it had nothing to do with politics. Rob a bank, perpetrate a big swindle, run away with a court heiress, and as long as the police don't lay hands on you nobody else will trouble their heads about the affair; but if you are suspected of being mixed up in the most remote way with politics, your best friends will shun you like the plague."

"I will take your advice certainly," Godfrey said, "and even putting aside the danger you point out, I should not be anxious to tell people that I suffered myself to be entrapped so foolishly."

For some time, indeed, Godfrey found that his acquaintance fell away from him, and that he was not asked to the houses of any of the Russian merchants where he had been before made welcome. Cautious questions would be asked by the younger men as to the trouble into which he got with the police; but he turned these off with a laugh. "I am not going to tell the particulars," he said, "they concern other people. I can only tell you that I was fool enough to be humbugged by a pretty little masker, and to get mixed up in a love intrigue in which a young lady, her lover a captain in the army, and an irascible colonel were concerned, and that the young people made a cat's-paw of me. I am not going to say more than that, I don't want to be laughed at for the next six months;" and so it became

understood that the young Englishman had simply got into some silly scrape, and had been charged by a colonel in the army with running away with his daughter, and he was therefore restored to his former footing at most of the houses that he had before visited.

Two days after his release a note was slipped into Godfrey's hand by a boy as he went out after dinner for a walk. It was unsigned, and ran as follows: —

"Dear Godfrey Bullen, my cousin is in a great state of distress. She was deceived by a third person, and in turn deceived you. She has heard since that the story was an entire fiction to enable a gentleman for whom the police were in search to escape. She only heard last night of your arrest and release, and is in the greatest grief that she should have been the innocent means of this trouble coming upon you. You know how things are here, and she is overwhelmed with gratitude that you did not in defence give any particulars that might have enabled them to trace her, for she would have found it much more difficult than a stranger would have done to have proved her innocence. She knows that you did say nothing, for had you done so she would have been arrested before morning; not improbably we might also have found ourselves within the walls of a prison, since you met her at our room, and the mere acquaintanceship with a suspected person is enough to condemn one here. By the way, we have moved our lodging, but will give you our new address when we meet you, that is, if you are good enough to continue our acquaintance in spite of the trouble that has been caused you by the credulity and folly of my cousin."

Godfrey, who had begun to learn prudence, did not open the letter until he returned home, and as soon as he had read it dropped it into the stove. He was pleased at its receipt, for he had not liked to think that he had been duped by a girl. From the first he had believed that she, like himself, had been deceived, for it had seemed to him out of the question that a young music mistress, who did not seem more than twenty years old, could have been mixed up in the doings of a desperate set of conspirators; however, he quite understood the alarm she must have felt, for though his story might have been believed owing to his being a stranger, and unconnected in any way with men who could have been concerned in a Nihilist plot, it would no doubt have been vastly more difficult for her to prove her innocence, especially as it was known that there were many women in the ranks of the Nihilists.

It was a fortnight before he met either of the students, and he then ran against them upon the quay just at the foot of the equestrian statue of Peter the Great, opposite the Isaac Cathedral. They hesitated for a moment, but he held out his hand cordially.

"Where have you been, and how is it I have not seen you before?"

"We were afraid that you might not care to know us further," Akim said, "after the trouble that that foolish cousin of mine involved you in."

"That would have been ridiculous," Godfrey said. "If we were to blame our friends for the faults of persons to whom they introduce us, there would be an end to introductions."

"Everyone wouldn't think as you do," Akim said. "We both wished to meet you, and thank you for so nobly shielding her. The silly girl might be on her way to Siberia now if you had given her name."

"I certainly should not have done that in any case. It is not the way of an Englishman to betray his friend, especially when that friend is a woman; but I thought even before I got your letter that she must in some way or other have been misled herself."

"It was very good of you," Petroff said. "Katia has been in great distress over it. She thinks that you can never forgive her."

"Pray tell her from me, Petroff, that I have blamed myself, not her. I ought not to have let myself be persuaded into taking any part in the matter. I entered into it as a joke, thinking it would be fine fun to see the old colonel's face, and also to help a pair of lovers out of a scrape. It would have been a good joke in England, but this is not a country where jokes are understood. At any rate it has been a useful lesson to me, and in future young ladies will plead in vain to get me to mix myself up in other people's affairs."

"We are going to a students' party to-night," Petroff said. "One of our number who has just passed the faculty of medicine has received an appointment at Tobolsk. It is a long way off; but it is said to be a pleasant town, and the pay is good. He is an orphan, and richer than most of us, so he is going to celebrate it with a party to-night before he starts. Will you come with us?"

"I should like it very much," Godfrey said; "but surely your friend would not wish a stranger there on such an occasion."

"Oh, yes, he would! he would be delighted, he is very fond of the English. I will answer for it that you will be welcome. Meet us here at seven o'clock this evening; he has hired a big room, and there will be two or three dozen of us there – all good fellows. Most of them have passed, and you will see the army and navy, the law and medicine, all represented."

Godfrey willingly agreed to go. He thought he should see a new phase of Russian life, and at the appointed hour he met the two students. The entertainment was held in a large room in a traktar or eating-house in a small street. The room was already full of smoke, a number of young men were seated along two tables extending the length of the room, and crossed by one at the upper end. Several were in military uniform, and two or three in that of the navy. Akim and Petroff were greeted boisterously by name as they entered.

"I will talk to you presently," Akim shouted in reply to various invitations to take his seat. "I have a friend whom I must first introduce to Alexis." He and Petroff took Godfrey up to the table at the end of the room. "Alexis," Akim said, "I have brought you a gentleman whom I am sure you will welcome. He has proved himself a true friend, one worthy of friendship and honour. His name is Godfrey Bullen."

There was general silence as Akim spoke, and an evident curiosity as to the stranger their comrade had introduced. The host, who had risen to his feet, grasped Godfrey's hand warmly.

"I am indeed glad to meet you, Godfrey Bullen," he said.

"My friends, greet with me the English friend of Akim and Petroff."

There was a general thumping of glasses on the table, and two or three of those sitting near Alexis rose from their seats and shook hands with Godfrey, with a warmth and cordiality which astonished him. Room was made for him and his two friends at the upper end of one of the side tables, and when he had taken his seat the lad was able to survey the scene quietly.

Numbers of bottles were ranged down the middle of the tables, which were of bare wood without cloth. These contained, as Petroff told him, wines from various parts of Russia. There were wines similar to sherry and Bordeaux, from the Crimea; Kahetinskoe, strongly resembling good burgundy, from the Caucasus; and Don Skoe, a sparkling wine resembling champagne, from the Don. Besides these were tankards of Iablochin Kavas, or cider; Grushevoi Kavas, or perry; Malovinoi, a drink prepared from raspberries; and Lompopo, a favourite drink on the shores of the Baltic. The conversation naturally turned on student topics, of tricks played on professors, on past festivities, amusements, and quarrels. No allusion of any kind was made to politics, or to the matters of the day. Jovial songs were sung, the whole joining in chorus with great animation. At nine o'clock waiters appeared with trays containing the indispensable beginning of all Russian feasts. Each tray contained a large number of small dishes with fresh caviar, raw herrings, smoked salmon, dried sturgeon, slices of German sausage, smoked goose, ham, radishes, cheese, and butter. From these the guests helped themselves at will, the servants handing round small glasses of Kümmel Liftofka, a spirit flavoured with the leaves of the black-currant, and vodka.

Then came the supper. Before each guest was placed a basin of stehi, a cabbage soup, sour cream being handed round to be added to it; then came rastigai patties, composed of the flesh of the sturgeon and isinglass. This was followed by cold boiled sucking pig with horse-radish sauce. After this came roast mutton stuffed with buck-wheat, which concluded the supper. When the table was cleared singing began again, but Godfrey stayed no longer, excusing himself to his host on the ground

that the merchant kept early hours, and that unless when he had specially mentioned that he should not be home until late, he made a point of being in between ten and eleven.

He was again surprised at the warmth with which several of the guests spoke to him as he said good-night, and went away with the idea in his mind that among the younger Russians, at any rate, Englishmen must be much more popular than he had before supposed. One or two young officers had given him their cards, and said that they should be pleased if he would call upon them.

"I have had a pleasant evening," he said to himself. "They are a jolly set of fellows, more like boys than men. It was just the sort of thing I could fancy a big breaking-up supper would be if fellows could do as they liked, only no head-master would stand the tremendous row they made with their choruses. However, I don't expect they very often have a jollification like this. I suppose our host was a good deal better off than most of them. Petroff said that he was the son of a manufacturer down in the south. I wonder what he meant when he laughed in that quiet way of his when I said I wondered that as his father was well off he should take an appointment at such an out-of-the-way place as Tobolsk. 'Don't ask questions here,' he said, 'those fellows handing round the meat may be government spies.' I don't see, if they were, what interest they could have in the question why Alexis Stumpoff should go to Tobolsk.

"However, I suppose they make a point of never touching on private affairs where any one can hear them, however innocent the matter may be. It must be hateful to be in a country where, for aught you know, every other man you come across is a spy. I daresay I am watched now; that police fellow told me I should be. It would be a lark to turn off down by-streets and lead the spy, if there is one, a tremendous dance; but jokes like that won't do here. I got off once, but if I give them the least excuse again they may send me off to the frontier. I should not care much myself, but it would annoy the governor horribly, so I will walk back as gravely as a judge."

CHAPTER III
A HUNTING PARTY

Two days later Robson, an English merchant who had been one of the most intimate of Godfrey's acquaintances, and to whom he had confided the truth about his arrest, said to him:

"You are not looking quite yourself, lad."

"Oh, I am all right!" he said; "but it is not a pleasant thing having had such a close shave of being sent to Siberia; and it isn't only that. No doubt the police feel that they owe me a grudge for having been the means of this fellow, whoever he was, slipping through their fingers, and I shall be a suspected person for a long time. Of course it is only fancy, but I am always thinking there is some one following me when I go out. I know it is nonsense, but I can't get rid of it."

"I don't suppose they are watching you as closely as that," Mr. Robson said, "but I do think it is likely that they may be keeping an eye on you; but if they are they will be tired of it before long, when they see that you go your own way and have nothing to do with any suspected persons. You want a change, lad. I have an invitation to join a party who are going up to Finland to shoot for a couple of days. It is more likely than not that we shall never have a chance of firing a shot, but it will be an outing for you, and will clear your brain. Do you think you would like it?"

"Thank you very much, Mr. Robson, I should like it immensely. Petrovytch was saying this morning that he thought I should be all the better for a holiday, so I am sure he will spare me. I am nothing of a shot, in fact I never fired a shot at game in my life, though I have practised a bit with the rifle, but I am sure it will be very jolly whether we shoot anything or not."

"Very well, then, be at the station to catch the seven o'clock train in the morning. It is a four hours' railway journey."

"Is there anything to bring, sir?"

"No, you can take a hand-bag and sleeping things, but beyond a bit of soap and a towel I don't suppose you will have need of anything, for you will most likely sleep at some farm-house, or perhaps in a woodman's hut, and there will not be any undressing. There are six of us going from here, counting you, but the party is got up by two or three men we know there. They tell me some of the officers of the regiment stationed there will be of the party, and they will have a hundred or so of their men to act as beaters. I have a spare gun that I will bring for you."

The next morning Godfrey joined Mr. Robson at the station. A Mr. White, whom he knew well, was one of the party, and the other three were Russians. They had secured a first-class compartment, and as soon as they started they rigged up a table with one of the cushions and began to play whist.

"You don't play, I suppose, Godfrey?" Mr. Robson said.

"No, sir. I have played a little at my father's, but it will be a long time before I shall be good enough to play. I have heard my father say that there is better whist at St. Petersburg than in any place in the world."

"I think he is right, lad. The Russians are first-rate players and are passionately fond of the game, and naturally we English here have had to learn to play up to their standard. The game is similar to that in England, but they score altogether differently."

The four hours passed rapidly. Godfrey sometimes looked out of the window at the flat country they were passing through, but more often watched the play. They were met at the station by two of Mr. Robson's friends, and found that sledges were in readiness and they were to start at once.

"We have ten miles to drive," one of them said. "The others went on early; they will have had one beat by the time we get there, and are then to assemble for luncheon."

The road was good and the horses fast, so that the sledges flew along rapidly. Most of the distance was through forest, but the last half-mile was open, and the sledge drew up at a large farm-

house standing in the centre of the cleared space, and surrounded at a distance of half a mile on all sides by the forest. A dozen men, about half of whom were in uniform, poured out from the door as the four sledges drew up.

"You are just in time," one of them said. "The soup is ready and in another minute we should have set to."

The civilians all knew each other, but the new-comers were introduced to the Russian colonel and his five officers.

"Have you had any luck, colonel?" Mr. Robson asked.

"Wonderful," the latter replied with a laugh. "A stag came along and every one of us had a shot at it, and each and every one is ready to take oath that he hit it, so that every one is satisfied. Don't you call that luck?"

Mr. Robson laughed. "But where is the stag?" he asked, looking round.

"That is more than any one can tell you. He went straight on, and carried off our twelve bullets. Captain Fomitch here, and in fact all my officers, are ready to swear that the deer is enchanted, and they have all been crossing themselves against the evil omen. Such a thing was never heard of before, for being such crack shots, all of us, of course there can be no doubt about our each having hit the stag when it was not more than a hundred yards away at the outside; but come in, the soup smells too good to wait, and the sight of that enchanted beast has sharpened my appetite wonderfully."

Godfrey entered with the rest. Large as the farm-house was, the greater portion of the ground-floor was occupied by the room they entered. It was entirely constructed of wood blackened with smoke and age. A great fire burned on the hearth, and the farmer's wife and two maids were occupied with several large pots, some suspended over the fire, others standing among the brands. The window was low, but extended half across one side of the room, and was filled with small lattice panes. From the roof hung hams, sides of bacon, potatoes in network bags, bunches of herbs, and several joints of meat. A table extended the length of the room covered with plates and dishes that from their appearance had evidently been brought out from the town, and differed widely from the rough earthenware standing on a great dresser of darkened wood extending down one side of the room. At one end the great pot was placed, the cloth having been pushed back for the purpose, and the colonel, seizing the ladle, began to fill the earthenware bowls which were used instead of soup plates.

"Each man come for his ration before he sits down," he said. "It would be better if you did not sit down at all, for I know well enough that when my countrymen sit down to a meal it is a long time before they get up again, and we have to be in the forest again in three-quarters of an hour."

"Quite right, colonel," one of the hosts said; "this evening you may sit as long as you like, but if we are to have another drive to-day we must waste no time. A basin of soup and a plate of stew are all you will get now, with a cup of coffee afterwards to arm you against the cold, and a glass of vodka or kümmil to top up with. No, colonel, not any punch just now. Punch in the evening; but if we were to begin with that now, I know that there would be no shooting this afternoon."

"What are the beaters doing?" Mr. Robson asked as they hastily ate their dinner.

"They have brought their bread with them," the colonel said, "and our friends here have provided a deer almost as fine as that which carried off the twelve bullets. It was roasting over a fire in the forest when we went past, and I saw some black bottles which I guessed were vodka."

"Yes, colonel, I ordered that they should have a glass each with their dinner, and another glass when they had done this afternoon."

"They would not mind being on fatigue duty every day through the winter on those terms," the colonel said. "It is better for them than soldiering. We must mind that we don't shoot any of them, gentlemen. The lives of the Czar's soldiers are not to be lightly sacrificed, and next time, you know, the whole of the bullets may not hit the mark as they did this morning."

"There really is some danger in it," Mr. Robson said to Godfrey, who was sitting next to him; "in fact, I should say there was a good deal of danger. However, I fancy the beaters all throw themselves down flat when they hear the crack of the first rifle."

"I see most of them have got a gun as well as a rifle."

"Yes, there is no saying what may come along, and, indeed, they are more likely to get birds than fur. I was told there are a good many elk in the forest, and the peasants have been bringing an unusual number in lately. A friend of mine shot two last week; but as our party did not get one in their first drive they are not likely to get any afterwards. Occasionally in these big drives a good many animals are inclosed, but as a rule the noise the soldiers make as they move along to take up their places is enough to frighten every creature within a couple of miles. I told you you were not likely to have to draw a trigger. Expeditions like this are rather an excuse for a couple of days' fun than anything else. The real hunting is more quiet. Men who are fond of it have peasants in their pay all over the country, and if one of these hears of a bear or an elk anywhere in his neighbourhood he brings in the news at once, and then one or two men drive out to the village, where beaters will be in readiness for them, and have the hunt to themselves.

"I used to do a good deal of it the first few years I came out, but it is bitter cold work waiting for hours till a beast comes past, or trying to crawl up to him. After all, there is no great fun in putting a bullet into a creature as big as a horse at a distance of thirty or forty yards. But there, they are making a move. They are going to drink the coffee and vodka standing, which is wise, for after standing in the snow for four hours, as they have been doing, they are apt to get so sleepy after a warm meal that if we were to stop here much longer you would find half the number would not make a start at all."

The sledges were brought up, and there was a three miles drive through the forest. Then the shooters were placed in a line, some forty or fifty yards apart, each taking his station behind a tree. Then a small bugler sounded a note. Godfrey heard a reply a long distance off. Three-quarters of an hour passed without any further sound being heard, and then Godfrey, who had been stamping his feet and swinging his arms to keep himself warm, heard a confused murmur. Looking along the line he saw that the others were all on the alert, and he accordingly took up his gun and began to gaze across the snow. The right-hand barrel was loaded with shot, the left with ball. Presently a shot rang out away on his right, followed almost immediately afterwards by another. After this evidence that there must be something in the forest he watched more eagerly for signs of life. Presently he saw a hare coming loping along. From time to time it stopped and turned its head to listen, and then came on again. He soon saw that it was bearing to the left, and that it was not going to come within his range. He watched it disappear among the trees, and two minutes later heard a shot. Others followed to the right and left of him, and presently a hare, which he had not noticed, dashed past at full speed, almost touching his legs. He was so startled for the moment that the hare had got some distance before he had turned round and was ready to fire, and he was in no way surprised to see it dash on unharmed by his shot. When there was a pause in the firing the shouting recommenced, this time not far distant, and he soon saw men making their way towards him through the trees.

"It is all over now," Mr. Robson shouted from the next tree. "If they have not done better elsewhere than we have here the bag is not a very large one."

"Did you shoot anything, Mr. Robson?"

"I knocked a hare over; that is the only thing I have seen. What have you done?"

"I think I succeeded in frightening a hare, but that was all," Godfrey laughed. "It ran almost between my legs before I saw it, and I think it startled me quite as much as my shot alarmed it."

The bugle sounded again, and the party were presently collected round the colonel. The result of the beat was five hares, and a small stag that had fallen to the gun of Mr. White.

"Much cry and little wool," Mr. Robson said. "A hundred beaters, twenty guns, and six head of game."

Another short beat was organized, resulting in two stags and three more hares. One of the stags and the three hares were placed on a sledge to be taken back to the farm-house, and the rest of the game was given to the soldiers. A glass of vodka was served out to each of them, and, highly pleased with their day's work, the men slung the deer to poles and set out on their march of eight miles back to the town.

"They will have done a tremendous day's work by the time they have finished," Godfrey said. "Eight miles out and eight miles back, and three beats, which must have cost them four or five miles' walking at least. They must have gone over thirty miles through the snow."

"It won't be as much as that, though it will be a long day's work," the colonel said. "They came out yesterday evening and slept in a barn. Another company come out to-night to take their place."

It was already dark by the time the party reached the farm-house, and after a cup of coffee all round they began to prepare the dinner. They were like a party of school-boys, laughing, joking, and playing tricks with each other. Two of them undertook the preparation of hare-soup. Two others were appointed to roast a quarter of venison, keeping it turning as it hung by a cord in front of the fire, and being told that should it burn from want of basting they would forfeit their share of it. The colonel undertook the mixing of punch, and the odour of lemons, rum, and other spirits soon mingled with that of the cooking. Godfrey was set to whip eggs for a gigantic omelette, and most of the others had some task or other assigned to them, the farmer's wife and her assistants not being allowed to have anything to do with the matter.

The dinner was a great success. After it was over a huge bowl of punch was placed on the table, and after the health of the Czar and that of the Queen of England had been drunk, speeches were made, songs were sung, and stories told. While this was going on, the farmer brought in a dozen trusses of straw. These his wife and the maids opened and distributed along both sides of the room, laying blankets over them. It was not long before Godfrey began to feel very drowsy, the result of the day's work in the cold, a good dinner, the heated air of the room and the din, and would have gladly lain down; but his movement to leave the table was at once frustrated, and he was condemned to drink an extra tumbler of punch as a penalty. After that he had but a confused idea of the rest of the evening. He knew that many songs were sung, and that everyone seemed talking together, and as at last he managed to get away and lie down on the straw he had a vague idea that the colonel was standing on a chair making a final oration, with the punch-bowl turned upside down and worn as a helmet.

Godfrey had not touched the wine at dinner, knowing that he would be expected to take punch afterwards, and he had only sipped this occasionally, except the glass he had been condemned to drink; and when he heard the colonel shout in a stentorian voice "To arms!" he got up and shook himself, and felt ready for another day's work, although many of the others were sitting up yawning or abusing the colonel for having called them so early. However, it was already light. Two great samovars were steaming, and the cups set in readiness on the table. Godfrey managed to get hold of a pail of water and indulged in a good wash, as after a few minutes did all the others; while a cup or two of tea and a few slices of fried bacon set up even those who were at first least inclined to rise.

A quarter of an hour later the sledges were at the door, and the party started. The hunt was even less successful than that of the previous day. No stag was seen, but some ten hares and five brace of grouse were shot. At three o'clock the party assembled again at the farm-house and had another hearty meal, terminating with one glass of punch round; then they took their places in their sledges and were driven back to the town; the party for St. Petersburg started by the six-o'clock train, the rest giving them a hearty cheer as the carriage moved off from the platform.

"Well, have you enjoyed it, Godfrey?" Mr. Robson asked.

"Immensely, sir. It has been grand fun. The colonel is a wonderful fellow."

"There are no more pleasant companions than the Russians," Mr. Robson said. "They more closely resemble the Irish than any people I know. They have a wonderful fund of spirits, enjoy a practical joke, are fond of sport, and have too a sympathetic, and one may almost say a melancholy

vein in their disposition, just as the Irish have. They have their faults, of course – all of us have; and the virtue of temperance has not as yet made much way here. Society, in fact, is a good deal like that in England two or three generations back, when it was considered no disgrace for a man to sit after dinner at the table until he had to be helped up to bed by the servants. Now, White, you have got the cards, I think."

Godfrey watched the game for a short time, then his eyes closed, and he knew nothing more until Mr. Robson shook him and shouted, "Pull yourself together, Godfrey. Here we are at St. Petersburg."

Three days later, when Ivan Petrovytch came in to breakfast at eleven o'clock – for the inmates of the house had a cup of coffee or chocolate and a roll in their rooms at half-past seven, and office work commenced an hour later – Godfrey saw that he and his wife were both looking very grave. Nothing was said until the servant, having handed round the dishes, left the room.

"Has anything happened?" Godfrey asked.

"Yes, there is bad news. Another plot against the life of the Czar has been discovered. The Nihilists have mined under the road by which he was yesterday evening to have travelled to the railway-station. It seems that some suspicion was felt by the police. I do not know how it arose; at any rate at the last moment the route was changed. During the night all the houses in the suspected neighbourhood were searched, and in the cellar of one of them a passage was found leading under the road. A mine was heavily charged with powder, and was connected by wires to an electric battery; and there can be no doubt that had the Czar passed by as intended he would have been destroyed by the explosion. It is terrible, terrible!"

"Did they find any one in the cellar?" Godfrey asked.

"No one. The conspirators had no doubt taken the alarm when they heard that the route was changed, and the place was deserted. It seems that the shop above was taken four months ago as a store for the sale of coal and wood, and the cellar and an adjoining one were hired at the same time. There was also a room behind the shop, where the man and woman who kept it lived. They say that arrests have been made all over the city this morning, and we shall no doubt have a renewal of the wholesale trials that followed the assassination of General Mesentzeff, the head of the police, last autumn. It is terrible! These misguided men hope to conquer the empire by fear. Instead of that, they will in the end only strengthen the hands of despotism. I have always been inclined to liberalism, but I have wished for gradual changes only. For large changes we are not yet fit; but as education spreads and we approach the western standard, some power and voice ought to be given to all intelligent enough to use it; that is to say, to the educated classes. I would not – no one in his senses would – give the power of voting to illiterate and ignorant men, who would simply be tools in the hands of the designing and ambitious; but the peoples of the great towns, St. Petersburg, Moskow, Kieff, Odessa, and others should be permitted to send representatives – men of their own choice – to the provincial councils, which should be strengthened and given a real, instead of a nominal, voice in the control of affairs.

"That was all I and thousands like me ever wished for in the present, but it would have been the first step towards a constitution which the empire, when the people become fit for it, might enjoy. That dream is over. These men, by their wild violence, have thrown back the reforms for half a century at least. They have driven the Czar to war against them; they have strengthened the hands of the men who will use their acts as an excuse for the extremest measures of repression; they have ranged on the other side all the moderate men like myself, who, though desirous of constitutional changes, shrink with horror from a revolution heralded by deeds of bloodshed and murder."

"I quite agree with you," Godfrey said warmly. "Men must be mad who could counsel such abominable plans. The French Revolution was terrible, although it began peacefully, and was at first supported by all the best spirits of France; but at last it became a hideous butchery. But here in Russia it seems to me that it would be infinitely worse, for it is only in the towns that there are men with any education; and if it began with the murder of the Czar, what would it grow to?"

"What, indeed!" Ivan Petrovytch repeated. "And yet, like the French Revolution, the pioneers of this movement were earnest and thoughtful men, with noble dreams for the regeneration of Russia."

"But how did it begin?"

"It may be said to have started about 1860. The emancipation of the serfs produced a sort of fever. Every one looked for change, but it was in the universities, the seminaries, and among the younger professional men that it first began. Prohibited works of all kinds, especially those of European socialists, were, in spite of every precaution at the frontier, introduced and widely circulated. Socialistic ideas made tremendous progress among the class I speak of, and these, by writing, by the circulation of prohibited papers, and so on, carried on a sort of crusade against the government, and indeed against all governments, carrying their ideas of liberty to the most extreme point and waging war against religion as well as against society.

"In the latter respect they were more successful than in the former, and I regret to say that atheism made immense strides among the educated class. They had some profound thinkers among them: Tchernyshevsky, Dobroluboff, Mikhailoff, besides Herzen and Ogareff, the two men who brought out the *Kolokol* in London in the Russian language, and by their agents spread it broadcast over Russia. The stifling of the insurrection in Poland strengthened the reactionary party. More repressive edicts were issued, with the usual result, that secret societies multiplied everywhere. Then came the revolution and commune in Paris, which greatly strengthened the spread of revolutionary ideas here. Another circumstance gave a fresh impetus to this. Some time before, there had been a movement for what was called the emancipation of women, and a perfect furore arose among girls of all classes for education.

"There were no upper schools or colleges open to them in Russia, and they went in enormous numbers to Switzerland, especially to Zurich. Girls of the upper classes shared their means with the poorer ones, and the latter eked out their resources by work of all descriptions. Zurich, as you know, is a hotbed of radicalism, and those young women who went to learn soon imbibed the wildest ideas. Then came a ukase, ordering the immediate return home of all Russian girls abroad. It was undoubtedly a great mistake. In Switzerland they were harmless, but when they returned to Russia and scattered over the towns and villages, they became so many apostles of socialism, and undoubtedly strengthened the movement. So it grew. Men of good families left their homes, and in the disguise of workmen expounded their principles among the lower classes. Among these was Prince Peter Krapotkine, the rich Cossack Obuchoff, Scisoko and Rogaceff, both officers, and scores of others, who gave up everything and worked as workmen among workmen.

"Innumerable arrests were made, and at one trial a thousand prisoners were convicted. So wholesale were the arrests that even the most enthusiastic saw that they were simply sacrificing themselves in vain, and about 1877 they changed their tactics. The prisons were crowded, and the treatment there of the political prisoners was vastly harder than that given to those condemned for the most atrocious crimes, as you may imagine when I tell you that in the course of the trial of that one batch I spoke of, which lasted four years, seventy-five of the prisoners committed suicide, went mad, or died. Then when the authorities thought Nihilism was stamped out by wholesale severity the matter assumed another phase. The crusade by preaching had failed, and the Nihilists began a crusade of terror. First police spies were killed in many places, then more highly placed persons, officers of the police, judges, and officials who distinguished themselves by their activity and severity. Then in the spring of last year Vera Zasulitch shot at General Trépoff, who had ordered a political prisoner to be flogged. She was tried by a jury, and the feeling throughout the country was so much in favour of the people who had been so terribly persecuted that she was acquitted. The authorities were furious, and every effort was made to find and re-arrest Vera; and a verdict of the court acquitting many of the accused in one of the trials was annulled by the Czar.

"Well, you know, Godfrey Bullen, I am not one who meddles with politics. You have never heard me speak of them before, and I consider the aims of these men would bring about anarchy. An

anarchy that would deluge the land with blood seems to me detestable and wicked. But I cannot but think the government has made a terrible mistake by its severity. These people are all enthusiastic fanatics. They see that things are not as they should be, and they would destroy everything to right them. Hate their aims as one may, one must admit that their conduct is heroic. Few have quailed in their trials. All preserve a calmness of demeanour that even their judges and executioners cannot but admire. They seem made of iron; they suffer everything, give up everything, dare everything for their faith; they die, as the Christian martyrs died in Rome, unflinching, unrepentant. If they have become as wild beasts, severity has made them so. Their propaganda was at first a peaceful one. It is cruelty that has driven them to use the only weapon at their disposal, assassination.

"One man, for example, in 1877, Jacob Stefanovic, organized a conspiracy in the district of Sighirino. It spread widely among the peasants. The priests, violating the secret of the confessional, informed the police, but these, although using every effort, could learn no more. Hundreds of arrests were made, but nothing discovered. Learning that the priests had betrayed them the peasants no longer went to confession, and to avoid betraying themselves in a state of drunkenness abstained from the use of brandy; but one man, tired and without food, took a glass. It made him drunk, and in his drunkenness he spoke to the man who had sold him spirits. He was arrested, and although he did not know all, gave enough clue for the police to follow up, and all the leaders and over a thousand persons were arrested. Two thousand others, who were affiliated to the society, were warned in time and escaped. You can guess the fate of those who were captured.

"Last year, three months before you came here, General Mezentsoff, the head of the police, was assassinated, and since then we know that it is open war between the Nihilists and the Czar. The police hush matters up, but they get abroad. Threatening letters reach the Czar in his inmost apartments, and it is known that several attempts have been made to assassinate him, but have failed.

"One of the most extraordinary things connected with the movement is that women play a large part in it. Being in the thick of every conspiracy they are the life and soul of the movement, and they are of all classes. There are a score of women for whose arrest the authorities would pay any money, and yet they elude every effort. It is horrible. This is what comes of women going to Switzerland and learning to look upon religion as a myth and all authority as hateful, and to have wild dreams of an impossible state of affairs such as never has existed in this world. It is horrible, but it is pitiable. The prisons in the land are full of victims; trains of prisoners set off monthly for Siberia. It is enough to turn the brain to think of such things. How it is to end no one can say."

But it was only in bated breath and within closed doors that the discovery of the Nihilist plot was discussed in St. Petersburg. Elsewhere it was scarcely alluded to, although, if mentioned, those present vied with each other in the violence of their denunciation of it; but when society from the highest to the lowest was permeated by secret agents of the police, and every word was liable to be reported and misinterpreted, a subject so dangerous was shunned by common consent. It was known, though, that large numbers of arrests had been made, but even those whose dearest friends had suddenly disappeared said no word of it in public, for to be even a distant acquaintance of such a person was dangerous. Yet apparently everything went on as usual: the theatres were as well filled; the Nevski as crowded and gay.

CHAPTER IV.
A PRISONER

Soon after this St. Petersburg was startled at the news that there had been a terrible explosion at the Winter Palace, and that the Czar and royal family had narrowly escaped with their lives. Upon the following evening Godfrey was walking down the Nevski, where groups of people were still discussing the terrible affair. He presently met Akim Soushiloff and Petroff Stepanoff. He had not seen them for some time, and as they had omitted to give him the address of the lodging into which they had moved, he was really glad to see them, for he liked them better than any of the Russians of his acquaintance, for both had an earnest manner and seemed to be free from narrow prejudices, sincere admirers of England, and on most subjects very well informed.

"It is quite an age since I have seen you both," he said. "Where have you been hiding?"

"We have been working harder than usual," Petroff said; "our last examinations are just coming off. But you said that you would come to see us, and you have never done so."

"You did not tell me where you had moved to," Godfrey said, "or I should have done so long ago."

"That was stupid indeed!" Akim said. "Have you an hour to spare now?"

"Yes, I have nothing to do, and shall be very glad to come round and have a talk. This is a horrible business at the Winter Palace."

"Horrible," Petroff said; "but it is just as well not to talk about it in the streets. Come along, we will take you to our place; we were just thinking of going back."

A quarter of an hour's walking took them to the students' room, which was, like the last, at the top of the house. A lamp was lighted, the samovar placed on the table, and a little charcoal fire lit under it. A glass of vodka was handed round to pass the time until the water was boiling, pipes were brought out from the cupboard and filled, for cigars, which are cheap and good, are generally smoked in the streets in Russia by the middle and upper classes, pipes being only used there by Isvostchiks, labourers, and Englishmen. The conversation naturally for a time turned upon the explosion in the Winter Palace, the Russians expressing an indignation fully equal to that of Godfrey. Then they talked of England, both regretting that they were unable to speak the language.

"I would give much to be able to read Shakespeare," Petroff said. "I have heard his works spoken of in such high terms by some of our friends who have studied your language, and I have heard, too, from them of your Dickens. They tell me it is like reading of another world – a world in which there are no officials, and no police, and no soldiers. That must be very near a paradise."

"We have some soldiers," Godfrey laughed, "but one does not see much of them. About half of those we have at home are in two military camps, one in England and one in Ireland. There are the Guards in London, but the population is so large that you might go a week without seeing one, while in very few of the provincial towns are there any garrisons at all. There are police, and plenty of them, but as their business is only to prevent crime, they naturally don't play a prominent part in novels giving a picture of everyday life. As to officials, beyond rate-collectors we don't see anything of them, though there are magistrates, and government clerks, and custom officers, and that sort of thing, but they certainly don't play any prominent part in our lives."

So they chatted for an hour, when at short intervals two other men came in. One was a tall handsome fellow who was introduced by Petroff as the son of Baron Kinkoff, the other was a young advocate of Moscow on a visit to St. Petersburg. Both, Godfrey observed, had knocked in a somewhat peculiar manner at the door, which opened, as he had noticed when they came in, only by a key. Akim observed a slight expression of surprise in Godfrey's face at the second knock, and said laughing:

"Our remittances have not come to hand of late, Godfrey, and some of our creditors are getting troublesome, so we have established a signal by which we know our friends, while inconvenient visitors can knock as long as they like, and then go away thinking we are out."

Godfrey chatted for a short time longer, and then got up to go. Akim went to the door with him. As it opened there was a sudden rush of men from outside that nearly knocked him down. Of what followed he had but a vague idea. Pistol shots rang out. There was a desperate struggle. He received a blow on the head which struck him to the ground, and an instant later there was a tremendous explosion. The next thing he knew was that he was being hauled from below some debris. As he looked round bewildered he saw that a considerable portion of the ceiling and of the roof above it had been blown out. Several bodies lay stretched on the floor. The room was still full of smoke, but by the light of two or three lanterns he perceived that the young baron, bleeding freely from a sabre wound across the forehead, was standing bound between two policemen with drawn swords. Policemen were examining the bodies on the floor, while others were searching the closets, cutting open the beds and turning out their contents. Akim lay on his back dead, and across him lay the young advocate. Of Petroff he could see nothing; the other bodies were those of policemen. Three of these near the door appeared to have been shot; the others were lying in contorted positions against the walls, as if they had been flung there by the force of the explosion. All this he saw in a state of vague wonderment, while the two policemen kneeling at his side were passing cords tightly round him.

"This one still lives," one of the policemen said, stooping over the young advocate, "but I think he is nearly done for."

"Never mind, bring him along with the others," a man in plain clothes said in tones of authority. "Get them away at once, we shall have half St. Petersburg here in a few minutes."

Godfrey was lifted by the policemen, one at his head, and one at his feet, carried down-stairs, and flung into a vehicle at the door. Dully he heard a roar of excited shouts and questions, and the sharp orders of the police ranged round the vehicle. Three policemen took their places inside with him, and the vehicle drove off, slowly at first until it was free of the crowd, and then at a sharp gallop. Godfrey was conscious of but little as he went along; he had a vague idea of a warm moist feeling down the back, and wondered whether it was his own blood. Gradually his impressions became more and more indistinct, and he knew nothing more until he was conscious of a sensation of cold at the back of the head, and of a murmur of voices round him. Soon he was lifted up into a sitting position, and he felt that bandages were being wrapped round his head. Then he was laid down again, he heard a door slam and a key turn, and then he knew nothing more. When he awoke daylight was streaming in through a loophole high up in the wall. He tried to sit up, but could not, and looked round trying to recall where he was and what had happened. He was in a dark cell with no furniture save the straw on which he was lying.

"It is a prison certainly," he muttered to himself. "How did I get here?"

Then gradually the events of the night before came to his mind. There had been a terrible fight. Akim had been killed. There had been a tremendous explosion. The police had something to do with it. Was it all a dream, or was it real? Was he dreaming now? He was some time before he could persuade himself that it was all real, and indeed it was not until the door opened and two men entered that he felt quite sure that he, Godfrey Bullen, was really lying there in a prison cell, with a dull numbing pain at the back of his head, and too weak even to sit upright. One of the men leaned over him. Godfrey tried to speak, but could not do so above a whisper.

"He will do now," the man said without paying any attention to his words. "He must have a thick skull or that sword-cut would have finished him. Give him some wine and water now, and some soup presently. We must not let him slip through our fingers."

Some liquid was poured between his lips, and then he was left alone again. "Certainly it is all real," he said to himself. "Akim must have been killed, and I must be a prisoner. What in the world can it be all about?" He was too weak to think, but after another visit had been paid him, and he

had been lifted up and given some strong broth, he began to think more clearly. "Can it have been a Nihilist arrest?" he thought to himself. "Akim and Petroff can never be Nihilists. The idea is absurd. I have never heard them say a word against the government or the Czar."

Then he thought of their friend Katia, and how she had got him to aid in the escape of a Nihilist. "It is all nonsense," he murmured, "the idea of a girl like that being mixed up in a conspiracy." Then his ideas again became more and more confused, and when the doctor visited him again in the evening he was in a state of high fever, talking incoherently to himself. For seven days he continued in that state. There was no lack of care; the doctor visited him at very short intervals, and an attendant remained night and day beside him, applying cold bandages to his head, and carefully noting down in a book every word that passed his lips. Then a good constitution gradually triumphed over the fever, and on the eighth day he lay a mere shadow of himself, but cool and sensible, on a bed in an airy ward. Nourishing food was given to him in abundance, but it was another week before he was able to stand alone. Then one morning two attendants brought a stretcher to the side of his bed. He was assisted to put on his clothes, and was then placed on the stretcher and carried away. He was taken through long passages, up and down stairs, at last into a large room. Here he was lifted on the stretcher and placed in a chair. Facing him at a table were nine officers.

"Prisoner," the president said, glancing at a large closely-written sheet of paper before him, "you are accused of taking part in a Nihilist conspiracy to murder the Czar."

"I know nothing of any Nihilist conspiracy," Godfrey said. "I was accidentally in the room with my friends Akim and Petroff when the police entered."

The president waved his hand impatiently. "That of course," he said. "Your name is Godfrey Bullen?"

"Yes, sir."

"Born in St. Petersburg, but of English parentage?"

Godfrey bowed his head.

"Three months since you took part in the plot by means of which the notorious Valerian Ossinsky escaped from the hands of the police, and you were the accomplice of Sophia Perovskaia in that matter."

"I never heard the name before," Godfrey said.

The president paid no attention, but went on: "You said at the time," he continued, reading from the notes, "that you did not know the woman who spoke to you, but it is known that she was an associate of Akim Soushiloff and Petroff Stepanoff, at whose place you were captured the other day. There is therefore no doubt that you know her."

"I knew her under another name," Godfrey said; "but if I had been told she was Sophia Perovskaia, it conveyed nothing to me, for I had never heard of her."

"You are committing yourself, prisoner," the president said coldly. "When examined you denied all acquaintance with the woman, and declared that she was a stranger."

"Excuse me, sir," Godfrey said, "I said it was a masked woman, and that I did not see her face, which was perfectly true. I admit now that I did know who she was, but naturally as a gentleman I endeavoured to shield her in a matter concerning which I believed that she was as innocent as I was."

A murmur of incredulity ran round the circle of officers.

"A few days after that," the president went on, again reading from his notes, "you were present with Akim Soushiloff and Petroff Stepanoff at a supper in a trakir in Ossuloff Street. There were present on that occasion" – and he read a list of six names – "four of whom have since been convicted and punished, and two of whom, although not yet taken, are known to have been engaged in the murderous attempt at the Winter Palace. You were greeted there with significant enthusiasm, which was evidently a testimony on the part of these conspirators to the part you had played in the affair of Ossinsky."

Godfrey felt that the meshes were closing round him. He remembered that he had wondered at the time why he had been received with such great cordiality.

"Now," the president went on, "you are captured in the room of Akim Soushiloff and Petroff Stepanoff, who were both beyond doubt engaged in the plot at the Winter Palace, with two other equally guilty conspirators, and were doubtless deliberating on some fresh atrocity when interrupted by the agents of the police. You shared in the desperate resistance they made, which resulted in the death of eight police officers by pistol shot, or by the explosion of gunpowder, by which Petroff Stepanoff, who fired it, was also blown to pieces. What have you to say in your defence?"

"I still say that I am perfectly innocent," Godfrey said. "I knew nothing of these men being conspirators in any way, and I demand to be allowed to communicate with my friends, and to obtain the assistance of an advocate."

"An advocate could say nothing for you," the president said. "You do not deny any of the charges brought against you, which are, that you were the associate of these assassins, that you aided Sophia Perovskaia in effecting the escape of Valerian Ossinsky, that you received the congratulations of the conspirators at the banquet, and that you were found in this room in company with four of the men concerned in the attempt to assassinate the Czar. But the court is willing to be merciful, and if you will tell all you know with reference to this plot, and give the names of all the conspirators with whom you have been concerned, your offence will be dealt with as leniently as possible."

"I repeat that I know nothing, and can therefore disclose nothing, sir, and I venture to protest against the authority of this court to try and condemn me, an Englishman."

"No matter what is the nationality of the person," the president said coldly, "who offends against the laws of this country, he is amenable to its laws, and his nationality affords him no protection whatever. You will have time given you to think the matter over before your sentence is communicated to you. Remove the prisoner."

Godfrey was laid on the stretcher again and carried away. This time he was taken, not to the room where he had been placed while ill, but to a dark cell where scarce a ray of light penetrated. There was a heap of straw in one corner, a loaf of black bread, and a jug of water. Godfrey when left alone shook up the straw to make it as comfortable as he possibly could, then sat down upon it with his back against the wall.

"Well, this is certainly a go," he said to himself. "If there was one thing that seemed less likely than another, it was that I should get involved in this Nihilist business. In the first place, the governor specially warned me against it; in the second place, I have been extremely careful never to give any opinion on public affairs; and in the third place, if there is one thing I detest more than another it is assassination. I cannot say it is cowardly in these men. The Nihilists do more than risk their lives; they give their lives away to carry out their end. Still, though I own it is not cowardly, I hate it. The question is, what next? Petrovytch will, of course, write home to say that I am missing. I don't suppose he will have the slightest idea that I have been arrested as a Nihilist. I don't see how he could think so. He is more likely to think that I have been made away with somehow. No doubt my father will come out; but, of course, he won't learn any more than Petrovytch, unless they choose to tell him. I don't suppose they will tell him. I have heard that generally families of people they seize know nothing about it, unless they are arrested too. They may guess what has happened, but they don't know. In my case I should fancy the police would say nothing.

"They will hear from the inquiries that my father makes that he has no suspicion of what has happened to me, and they will know if they did tell him our ambassador would be making a row. But even if the governor were to learn what had become of me, and were to insist upon learning what crime I am accused of committing, I do not see that things would be much better. They would hand over the notes of the evidence on which I was convicted, and, taking it altogether, I am bound to say I do not see how they could help convicting me. Short of catching me like a sort of Guy Fawkes blowing up the palace, the case is about as strong as it could be. I certainly have put my foot in it.

I was acquainted with these two conspirators; through them I got acquainted with that confounded woman Katia, though it seems that wasn't her name. Then through her I helped this fellow Ossinsky to escape. Then, trying to shield her, I make matters twenty times worse; for while my answer before led them to believe that she was a perfect stranger to me, I was ass enough to let out just now that I knew her. Then there was that supper. I could not make out at the time why they greeted me so heartily. Now, of course, it is plain enough; and now, just after this blowing-up business, here am I caught with four notorious conspirators, and mixed up in a fight in which eight or ten policemen are killed, and the roof blown off a house. That would be circumstantial evidence enough to condemn a man in England, let alone Russia.

"I don't suppose they are going to hang me, because they publish the names of the fellows they hang; but imprisonment for years in one of their ghastly dungeons is bad enough. If it is to be, it will be Siberia, I hope. There must be some way of getting out of a big country like that – north, south, east, or west. Well, I don't see any use bothering over it. I have got into a horrible scrape, there is no doubt about that, and I must take what comes."

Godfrey was essentially of a hopeful nature, and always looked at the bright side of things. He was a strong believer in the adage, "Where there is a will, there is a way." He had been in his full share of scrapes at school, and had always made a rule of taking things easily. He now examined the cell.

"Beastly place!" he said, "and horribly damp. I wonder why dungeons are always damp. Cellars at home are not damp, and a dungeon is nothing but a cellar after all. Well, I shall take a nap."

The next day Godfrey was again taken before the tribunal, and again closely questioned as to his knowledge of the Nihilists. He again insisted that he knew nothing of them.

"Of course I knew Akim Soushiloff and Petroff Stepanoff; but I had only been in their rooms once before, and the only person I met there before was the young woman who called herself Katia, but who you say was somebody else. This was at the lodgings they occupied before."

"But you were found with Alexander Kinkoff and Paul Kousmitch."

"They only arrived a short time before the police entered. I had never seen either of them before."

These two prisoners had been examined before Godfrey entered, and had been questioned about him. Kousmitch had declared that he had never seen him before, and the court knew that the spies who had been watching the house had seen him enter but a short time before the police force arrived. As the two statements had been made independently it was thought probable that in this respect Godfrey was speaking the truth. Not so, however, his assertions that he was unacquainted with any of the other conspirators.

He was again taken back to his cell, and for the next week saw no one but the warder who brought his bread and water, and who did not reply by a single word to any questions that he asked him. Godfrey did his best to keep up his spirits. He had learnt by heart at Shrewsbury the first two books of the Iliad, and these he daily repeated aloud, set himself equations to do, and solved them in his head, repeated the dates in Greek history, and went through everything he could remember as having learned.

He occasionally heard footsteps above him, and wondered whether that also was a cell, and what sort of man the prisoner was. Once or twice at night, when all was quiet, he heard loud cries, and wondered whether they were the result of delirium or torture. His gruff jailer was somewhat won by his cheerfulness. Every day Godfrey wished him good morning as he visited the cell, inquired what the weather was like outside, expressed an earnest hope that silence didn't disagree with him, and generally joked and laughed as if he rather enjoyed himself than otherwise. At the end of the week an official entered the cell.

"I have come to inform you, prisoner, that the sentence of death that had been passed upon you has, by the clemency of the Czar, been commuted to banishment for life to Siberia."

"Very well, sir," Godfrey said. "I know, of course, that I am perfectly innocent of the crime of which I am charged; but as the Czar no doubt supposes that I am guilty of taking part in a plot against his life, I acknowledge and thank him for his clemency. I have no peculiar desire to visit Siberia, but at least it will be a change for the better from this place. I trust that it shall not be long before I start."

As the official was unable to make out whether Godfrey spoke in mockery or not, he made no reply.

"These Nihilists are men of iron," he said afterwards. "They walk to the scaffold with smiling faces; they exist in dungeons that would kill a dog in twenty-four hours, and nothing can tempt them to divulge their secrets; even starvation does not affect them. They are dangerous enemies, but it must be owned that they are brave men and women. This boy, for he is little more, almost laughed in our faces; and, in spite of his stay in that damp cell, seemed to be in excellent spirits. It is the same with them all, though I own that some of them do break down sometimes; but I think that those who commit suicide do so principally because they are afraid that, under pressure, they may divulge secrets against each other. Ossip, who attends that young fellow, says that he is always the same, and speaks as cheerfully to him every morning as if he were in a palace instead of in a dungeon."

Two days later Godfrey was aroused in the night.

"Why, it is not light yet," he said. "What are you disturbing me at this time for?"

"Get up," the man said; "you are going to start."

"Thank goodness for that!" Godfrey said, jumping up from his straw. "That is the best news that I have heard for a long time."

In the court-yard seven prisoners were standing. They were placed at some distance from each other, and by each stood a soldier and a policeman. A similar guard took their places by the side of Godfrey as he came out. An official took charge of the whole party, and, still keeping a few paces apart, they sallied out through the prison doors and marched through the sleeping city. Perhaps Godfrey was the only one of the party who did not feel profoundly impressed. They were going to leave behind them for ever family and friends and country, and many would have welcomed death as an escape from the dreary prospect before them. Godfrey's present feeling was that of exhilaration.

He had done his best to keep his mind at work, but the damp and unwholesome air of the cell had told upon him, enfeebled as he had been by the attack of fever. As he walked along now he drew in deep breaths of the brisk night air, and looked with delight at the stars glistening overhead. As to the future, just at that moment it troubled him but little. He knew nothing of Siberia beyond having heard that the prisoners there led a terrible life. That he should escape from it some time or other seemed to him a matter of course. How, he could form no idea until he got there; but as to the fact he had no misgiving, for it seemed to him ridiculous that in a country so enormous as Siberia a prisoner could not make his way out sooner or later.

When they reached the railway-station a train stood in readiness. Each prisoner had a separate compartment, his two guards accompanying him. Godfrey addressed a word to his custodians. The policeman, however, said, "You are forbidden to speak," and in a minute or two the train moved off.

Godfrey dozed occasionally until morning, and then looked out at the dark woods through which they passed for hours. Twice the train stopped at lonely stations, and the prisoners were supplied with food. In the afternoon Godfrey saw the gilded and painted domes of a great city, and knew that it must be Moscow. Here, however, they made no stay, but steamed straight through the station and continued their way. Godfrey slept soundly after it became dark, waking up once when the train came to a standstill. At early morning he was roused and ordered to alight, and in the same order as before the prisoners were marched through the streets of Nijni Novgorod to the bank of the Volga. Few people were yet abroad in the streets, but all they met looked pityingly at the group of exiles, a sight of daily occurrence in the springtime of the year. Ordinary prisoners, of whom from fifteen to twenty thousand are sent annually to Siberia, are taken down the Volga in a convict barge, towed by a steamer, in batches of six or seven hundred. Political prisoners are differently treated; they are

carried on board the ordinary steamer, each having a separate cabin, and during the voyage they are allowed no intercourse whatever, either with each other or with the ordinary passengers.

Of these there were a considerable number on board the steamer, as the season had but just begun, and merchants, traders, and officials were taking advantage of the river's being open to push forward into Siberia. At present, however, these were all below. The prisoners were conducted to the cabins reserved for them, and then locked in. Presently Godfrey heard a buzz of many voices and a general movement in the cabin outside, and the fact that he was a prisoner and cut off from the world came to him more strongly than it had hitherto done. An hour later there was a movement and shouting overhead. Then he felt the paddles revolving, and knew that the steamer was under way. He could, however, see nothing. A sort of shutter was fastened outside the scuttle, which gave him the opportunity to take a glimpse of the sky, but nothing of the shore or water. Nothing could be more monotonous than the journey, and yet the air and light that came down through the port-hole rendered it far more pleasant than existence in a prison cell. He knew, too, that, dull as it was in the cabin, there would be little to see on deck, for the shores of the rivers were everywhere flat and low.

After twenty-four hours' travel the steamer stopped. Since Godfrey had been in Russia he had naturally studied the geography of the empire, and knew a good deal about the routes. He guessed, therefore, that the halt was at Kasan, the capital of the old Tartar kingdom. It was a break to him to listen to the noises overhead, to guess at the passengers who were leaving and coming on board, to listen to scraps of conversation that could be heard through the open port-hole, and to the shouts of farewell from those on board to those on shore as the vessel steamed on again. He knew that after two hours' more steaming down the Volga the vessel turned up the Kama, a large river running into it and navigable for 1400 miles. Up this the vessel steamed for three days and then reached Perm. In the evening Godfrey and his companions were disembarked and, strictly guarded as before, were marched to the railway-station, placed in a special carriage attached to a train, and after twenty-four hours' travel at the rate of about twelve miles an hour reached Ekaterinburg. This railway had only been open for a year, and until its completion this portion of the journey had been one of the most tiresome along the whole route, as the Ural Mountains intervene between Perm and Ekaterinburg; their height is not great here, and the railway crosses them at not more than 1700 feet above sea-level.

On arriving at the station half the prisoners were at once placed in vehicles and the others were sent to the prison. Godfrey was one of the party that went on at once. The vehicle, which was called a telega, was a sort of narrow waggon without springs, seats, or cover; the bottom was covered with a deep layer of straw, and there were some thick rugs for coverings at night. It was drawn by three horses. Godfrey was in the last of the four vehicles that started together. His soldier guard took his place beside him, four mounted Cossacks rode, two on each side of the procession. The driver, a peasant, to whom the horses belonged, cracked his short-handled whip and the horses sprang forward. Siberian horses are wiry little animals, not taking to the eye, but possessing speed and great endurance. The post-houses are situated from twelve to twenty-five versts apart, according to the difficulty of the country, a verst being about two-thirds of an English mile. At these post-houses relays of horses are always kept in readiness for one or two vehicles, but word is sent on before when political prisoners are coming, and extra relays are obtained by the post-masters from the peasants.

To Godfrey the sensation of being whirled through the air as fast as the horses could gallop was, after his long confinement, perfectly delightful, and he fairly shouted with joy and excitement. Now that they were past Ekaterinburg, Godfrey's guard, a good-tempered-looking young fellow, seemed to consider that it was no longer necessary to preserve an absolute silence, which had no doubt been as irksome to him as to his companion.

"We can talk now. Why are you so merry?"

"To be in the air again is glorious," Godfrey said, "I should not mind how long the journey lasted if it were like this. How far do we travel in carriages?"

"To Tiumen, 300 versts; then we take steamer again, that is if you go farther."

"You don't know where we are going to then?"

"Not at all, it will be known at Tiumen; that is where these things are settled generally, but people like you are under special orders. You don't look very wicked;" and he smiled in a friendly way as he looked at the lad beside him.

"I am not wicked at all, not in the way you think," Godfrey said.

"Do not talk about that," the soldier interrupted, "I must not know anything about you; talk about other things, but not why you are here."

Godfrey nodded. "If we go on beyond Tiumen we go by steamer, do we not?"

"Yes, through Tobolsk to Tomsk, beyond that we shall drive. You are lucky, you people, that you drive, the others walk; it is long work, but not so long as it used to be, they say. I have been told that in the old times, when they started on foot from Moscow it took them sometimes two years to reach the farthest places. Now they have the railway, and the steamers on the river as far as Tomsk."

"How do they take them in the steamers?"

"They take them in great barges that are towed; we passed two on our way to Perm. They hold five or six hundred, there is a great iron cage on deck, and they let half the number up at a time in order to get air. They are always going along at this time of year, for they all go early in the season so as to get to the journey's end before the frosts set in."

"But surely all these men cannot be guilty of great crimes," Godfrey said, "for I have heard that about twenty thousand a year are sent away?"

"No, many of them are only lazy fellows who drink and will not work. We sent away three from my village the year before I was taken for a soldier. They were lazy and would not do their share of work, so the heads of the village met and decided that they should go to Siberia. They drew up a paper, which was sent to be confirmed by the judge of the district, and then soldiers came and took them away."

"But you don't mean to say," Godfrey said, "that men are sent to prison all their lives because they are lazy."

"Oh no, no one would think of such a thing as that! Men like these are only sent to the big towns, Tiumen, or Perm, or Tobolsk, and then they are settled on land or work in the towns, but they are free to do as they like. The country wants labour, and men who won't work at home and expect the community to keep them have to work here or else they would starve. Then there are numbers who are only guilty of some small offence. They have stolen something, or they have resisted the tax-gatherer, or something of that sort. They only go to prison for the term of their sentences, perhaps only three or four months, and then they too are free like the others, and can work in the towns, or trade if they happen to have money to set them up, or they can settle in a village and take up land and cultivate it. They can live where they like in Siberia. I had many rich men pointed out to me in Tobolsk who had come out as convicts."

"You have been here before then?" Godfrey said.

"Yes, this is my second journey. I hope I shall come no more. We get a little extra pay and are better fed than we are with the regiment, and we have no drill; but then it is sad. Last time I had one with me who had left his wife and family behind; he was always sad, he talked to me sometimes of them, there was no one else to talk to. He was here for life, and he knew he should never see them again. She was young and would marry again."

"But she couldn't do that as long as he lived," Godfrey said.

"Oh yes; from the day a prisoner crosses the frontier his marriage is annulled and his wife can marry again. She may come with him if she likes, but if she does she can never go back again."

"And do many wives come?"

"A good many," the soldier said; "but I only know what I have heard. I was with one of you last time, and it was only on the way back that I heard of things about the others. Formerly the guards remained in Siberia if they chose, it was too far to send them back to Russia; but now that the journey

is done so quickly, and we can get back all the way from Tomsk by the rivers, except this little bit, we go back again as soon as we have handed over our charges. I did not go farther than Tomsk last time, and I was back at Nijni in less than three months after starting. What part of Russia do you come from?"

"I am an Englishman."

The soldier looked round in surprise. "I did not know Englishmen could speak our language so well; of course I noticed that your speech was not quite like mine, but I am from the south and I thought you must come from somewhere in the north or from Poland. How did – " and here he stopped. "But I must not ask that; I don't want to know anything, not even your name. Look there, we are just going to pass a convoy of other prisoners."

In a minute or two they overtook the party. It consisted of about a hundred and fifty prisoners escorted by a dozen mounted Cossacks. The men were in prison garb of yellowish-brown stuff with a coloured patch in the back between the shoulders. They had chains fastened to rings round the ankles and tied up to their belts. They were not heavy, and interfered very little with their walking. The procession in no way accorded with Godfrey's preconceived idea. The men were walking along without much attempt at regular order. They were laughing and talking together or with their guards, and some of them shouted chaffing remarks to the four vehicles as they swept past them.

"They do not look very unhappy," Godfrey said.

"Why should they?" the soldier replied; "they are better off than they would be at home. Lots of men break the law on purpose to be sent out; it is a good country. They say wives get rid of their husbands by informing against them and getting them sent here. I believe there are quite as many husbands with scolding wives who get themselves sent here to be free of them. As long as they are on the road or employed in hard labour they are fed better than they ever were at home, better a great deal than we soldiers are. Even in the prisons they do not work so very hard, for it is difficult to find work for them; only if they are sent to the mines their lot is bad. Of that I know nothing, but I have heard. As for the rest, from what I have seen of it I should say that a convict here is better off than a peasant at home. But here we are at the post-house."

CHAPTER V.
AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE

The stay at the post-houses was very short. As soon as the vehicles were seen coming along the straight level road, the first set of horses were brought out, and the leading tarantass was ready to proceed in two or three minutes. The other horses were changed as quickly, and in less than ten minutes from their arrival the whole were on their way again. While the horses were being changed the prisoners were permitted to get out and stretch their legs, but were not allowed to exchange a word with each other or with anyone else. At every fourth stage a bowl of soup with a hunch of bread was brought to each prisoner by one of the guards at the ostrov or prison, where the convicts were lodged as they came along. There were rugs in the vehicles to lay over them at night when the air was sharp and chilly, although in the day the sun had great power, and the dust rose in clouds under the horses' feet.

There was little of interest to be seen on the journey. Only round the villages was there any cultivation, and the plains stretched away unbroken save by small groups of cattle, horses, and sheep. Although Godfrey had not minded the shaking of the springless vehicle for the first stage or two, he felt long before he reached the journey's end as if every bone was dislocated. As a rule the road was good, but in some places, where it passed through swampy tracts, it had given in the spring thaw, and had been cut into deep ruts. Here the shaking as they passed along at night was tremendous. Godfrey and his companion were dashed against each other or against the sides with such force that Godfrey several times thought his skull was fractured, and he was indeed thankful when, after forty hours on the road, they drove into Tiumen.

Tiumen is a town of over 15,000 inhabitants, and is the first town arrived at in Siberia proper, the frontier between Russia and that country running between Ekaterinburg and that town. Here the prisoners were at once placed on board a steamer, and Godfrey was glad indeed to throw himself down upon the bed, where he slept without waking until the steamer got under way in the morning. He was delighted to see that the port-hole was not, as in the first boat, blocked by an outside shutter, but that he could look out over the country as they passed along. For a time the scenery was similar to that which they had been passing over, bare and desolate; but it presently assumed a different character; fields of green wheat stretched away from the river side; comfortable-looking little villages succeeded each other rapidly as the steamer passed along, and save for the difference of architecture and the peculiar green domes and pinnacles of the little churches he might have been looking over a scene in England.

The river was about two hundred yards wide here, a smooth and placid stream. The steamer did not proceed at any great pace, as it was towing behind it one of the heavy convict barges, and although the passage is ordinarily performed in a day and a half, it took them nearly a day longer to accomplish, and it was not until late in the afternoon of the third day that Tobolsk came in sight. Through his port-hole Godfrey obtained a good view of the town, containing nearly 30,000 inhabitants, with large government buildings, and a great many houses built of stone. It is built in a very unhealthy position, the country round being exceedingly low and marshy. After passing Tobolsk they entered the Obi, one of the largest rivers in Asia. The next morning the steamer again started for her sixteen-hundred-mile journey to Tomsk. The journey occupied eight days, the convict barge having been left behind at Tobolsk.

The time passed tediously to Godfrey, for the banks were low and flat, villages were very rare, and the steamer only touched at three places. Herds of horses were seen from time to time roaming untended over the country. The only amusement was in watching the Ostjaks, the natives of the banks of the Obi. These people have no towns or villages, but live in rough tents made of skins. He saw many

of them fishing from their tiny canoes, but the steamer did not pass near enough to them to enable him to get a view of them, as they generally paddled away towards the shore as the steamer approached. He heard afterwards that they are wonderfully skilful in the use of the bow, which they use principally for killing squirrels and other small animals. These bows are six feet long, the arrows four feet. The head is a small iron ball, so as to kill without injuring the fur of small animals, and the feats recorded of the English archers of old times are far exceeded by the Ostjaks. Even at long distances they seldom fail to strike a squirrel on the head, and Godfrey was informed by a man who had been present that he saw an Ostjak shoot an arrow high into the air, and cut it in two with another arrow as it descended, a feat that seemed to him altogether incredible, but is confirmed by the evidence of Russian travellers.

Tomsk is situated on the river Tom, an affluent of the Obi. The town is about the same size as Tobolsk; the climate of the district is considered the best in Siberia; the land is fertile, and among the mountains are many valuable mines. Although a comparatively small province in comparison to Tobolsk on one side and Yeneseisk on the other, it contains an area of half a million square miles, and, excluding Russia, is bigger than any two countries of Europe together. It contains a rural population of 725,000-130,000 natives, chiefly Tartars and Kalmucs, and 30,000 troops.

Here Godfrey was landed, and marched to the prison. Of these there are two, the one a permanent convict establishment, the other for the temporary detention of prisoners passing through. Godfrey slipped a few roubles into the hand of his guard, for his watch, money, and the other things in his pockets had been restored to him before starting on his journey. After two days' stop in the prison the journey was continued as before, a soldier sitting by the driver, a police-officer taking the place of the soldier who had before accompanied him. He began to speak to Godfrey as soon as they started.

"We are not so strict now," he said. "You will soon be across the line into Eastern Siberia, and you will no longer meet people through whom you might send messages or letters. As to escape, that would be out of the question since you left Ekaterinburg, for none can travel either by steamer or post without a permit, or even enter an inn, and the document must be shown at every village."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.