

## A CHILD'S ESCAPE FROM SIBERIA.

A few months ago the readers of the *Messenger* were interested in the life and work of Mr. George Kennan who has done so much to make the world acquainted with the terrible condition of the Russian political exiles in Siberia. The interest of people in England is just now being drawn towards two of these exiles, Mr. Felix Volkhovsky and his little ten year old daughter, Vera. Mr. Volkhovsky has lately been engaged in delivering through England a series of lectures on behalf of the society entitled "Friends of Russian Freedom." Unlike the famous Nihilist Executive Committee their work is only to talk and to write, and their organ, *Free Russia*, manifests a very different spirit from that shown in other publications devoted to the same work. Yet, says the *Daily Graphic*, from which the sketch is taken, Mr. Volkhovsky has suffered enough to embitter his feelings, and it must be at times difficult for him to maintain the calmness of tone and language suited to his English friends.

When a student at Moscow, Mr. Volkhovsky formed part of a benefit society, which was suppressed in 1866, and this first brought him under the notice of the police. Subsequently he joined the Rolling Rouble Society, organized by the celebrated Revolutionist Lopatine. For this he was arrested, as the society sought to spread education among the peasantry of Russia, and this, of course, is a political crime. Mr. Volkhovsky was detained in solitary confinement for eight months, liberated for eight months, and then re-arrested. He was now accused of being in connection with Netchaev, the celebrated conspirator, who afterwards became known as the Father of Russian Terrorism. This was not true, but to prove his innocence Volkhovsky would have had to call witnesses and compromise persons who were not yet arrested, so he was kept in solitary confinement for two and a-half years.

After all these persecutions and imprisonments, Mr. Volkhovsky at last became a genuine revolutionist, and founded a secret society at Odessa in 1874. Here he was again arrested and kept in prison and in solitary confinement for three years. At last he was brought up for trial, together with 108 other prisoners, and convicted of "being a member of a revolutionary society." In those days the revolutionary party had attempted no terrorist action, had perpetrated no deed of violence; nevertheless Volkhovsky was sentenced to the deprivation of all his civil rights and to banishment for life. This sentence did not put an end to his persecution, for, in Siberia, he found that his papers were marked by some secret sign which informed the authorities that he was considered dangerous. Consequently it was extremely difficult for him to obtain employment so as to earn his living. Driven from town to town, from place to place, working sometimes as a banker's clerk, sometimes as a book-binder, and then as a house decorator, but always persecuted by the police, Volkhovsky at last determined to try to escape from Siberia. He hit upon the very original plan of travelling eastwards. All other exiles escape westwards towards Europe. Volkhovsky started in August, 1889, and in October reached Vladivostok, the Siberian port on the Pacific. Here he succeeded in persuading the captain of an English steamer to take him on board; and, after many adventures and narrow escapes, got off. When he rowed out to the English steamer he found two Russian officials on board, who were there to see that no prisoners or exiles escaped on the English vessel. When, however, the captain saw Mr. Volkhovsky approach he invited the Russian officials to take some refreshments in the cabin. During their absence, Mr. Volkhovsky stepped on deck, and was met by the steward, who promptly put him in a safe hiding place. This, Mr. Volkhovsky humorously remarks, was his last experience of solitary confinement. From Vladivostok, Mr. Volkhovsky reached Japan, and thence went on to Vancouver, travelled through Canada and a portion of the United States. Finally he crossed the Atlantic and came to London.

Though now free and safe, Mr. Volkhovsky was not yet content and at peace. The sufferings and hardships of Siberia had killed his wife and one of his children; but he had still remaining one child, Vera, a

little girl ten years old. It was impossible for him to have taken this child on his long tramp to Vladivostok. Vera was left to the care of fellow exiles far away in Eastern Siberia. Now it became necessary to compass the child's escape; and this little girl, though only ten years old, bravely set forth to join her father in Europe. How a child of that age could by herself have escaped from Siberia seems as marvellous as it is incredible. Of course, as the child of a notorious political exile, she was closely watched, and had it been suspected that she intended joining her father, she would at once have been arrested. The journey took in all six months. During all that time the child had to keep her ultimate intentions secret from all various and chance travelling companions who from stage to stage helped her. She always pretended she was going to join some relations in Russia. At times she was obliged to disguise herself as a little boy, and had many adventures on the road. These, however, cannot be related for fear of compromising those who helped her and who are still under the heel of the Russian gendarme. The greatest difficulty, of course, was at the frontier. Here, fortunately, a gentleman was found who had a passport for himself and child. The passport had been carelessly drawn up, and no very precise description of the child given. Vera was, therefore, able to pass herself off as this gentleman's child, and thus finally escaped the grip of the Russian police.

In Siberia Vera had been carefully taught

hanging below her waist. Her tunic is made of finely striped cotton, blue and white, and below are seen very full trousers of blue which reach to her ankles. Little red slippers are on her feet, a red girdle around her waist is fastened by a large silver clasp, and she has on a red zouave jacket trimmed with silver braid. She wears a red cap, and a fringe of silver coins is hung half way around the pretty face. She has silver and gold about her neck and on her arms, for Donik is a little Armenian bride.

There is a determined look in her big black eyes, as she stands before the copper-mixing pan, which is almost as large as a small wash-tub. This was the problem: Given, a mass of dough, enough when baked to last a family two weeks, and a pair of small hands, used only in embroidering, to mold it into perfect plasticity within half an hour.

Donik looked thoughtfully at her wrists, felt her arms, and shook her head. Then she looked at the dough again, then at her feet (for you must remember that both dough and feet were on the level), and then a sparkle came into her eyes.

"Very well," she said: "what must be, must be!" and running into the courtyard, she pulled off her slippers by the fountain and proceeded to wash her feet very thoroughly, and afterwards her hands. Drying them on a towel she daintily picked her way back to the bread-pan, and then stepping carefully into the pan began treading the

which is taken out at night and spread on the floor.

Following Myriam into a small adjoining bake-room, we find her making a fire in a hole in the floor. This hole is about two feet in diameter at the top, and slopes down gradually to a point at the bottom, and is lined with bricks and cemented. Behold the oven that is to bake Donik's bread! By the time the bricks are hot, the bread is light, and neighbor Goohar is come prepared to work and gossip. Myriam proceeds to scrape out the coals and all the ashes that she can rake together without burning herself. The two women sit down beside the oven with the bread-pan between them. Each takes out a piece of dough, quickly gets it into shape—most often in the form of a ring, and deftly slaps it on the sides of the oven, so on until the dough is all moulded and the sides of the oven are lined. An iron cover is put over the hole, and Donik, who has been obediently watching the performance, is told to take away the pan and wash it.

Goohar says to her: "You made that bread well, Donik. Young ones do not often make the dough so smooth and elastic. And her first time, remember, Goohar!"

Myriam is not a little proud of her pretty, docile daughter-in-law.

The bread came out of the queer oven smelling as delicious as ever it does in our land of ranges and stoves. The rings of bread were strung on a cord and hung in a dark, cool place, while the rest was put away in baskets.

It was a fortnight before baking-day came again. Donik had anxiously watched the disappearance of the bread, and kept from eating any herself that it might last longer. But at length she had to hear the dreadful words: "You must make the bread to-day, Donik. I am not going away this time, for I wish to see to it that you do it all in the best way."

With increased fear Donik stirred together flour and salt and water and yeast, according to Myriam's direction, and making the process as long as possible. But all too soon it was ready to knead. What should she do? There was no way of escape, either by truth or falsehood. Her eyes downcast, she stood trembling before the pan of dough. The mother-in-law was amazed. "What does this mean, Donik? Obey me instantly or I will beat you!"

Great tears rolled down the girl's cheek.

"Ah, my mother, but I dare not! Such will be your displeasure. You will surely beat me when I show you."

"Surely you will be punished if you do not tell me; so make haste!"

Sobbing and shaking Donik went out into the court-yard and washed her feet and hands, just as she had done before, but with a much heavier heart. In imagination she could feel the scourge cutting into the soles of her tender little feet; and the tears came faster and faster.

Myriam's stern face had relaxed very much, and she looked as if she were trying to keep back a laugh, as Donik returned slowly, very slowly to the bread pan.

"You did well to wash your hands, child, but why cleanse your feet?"

Donik hesitated, then pushed up her sleeves and held out her arms to Myriam. "My mother, you see these arms; they are not strong. I could not knead the bread as you do, and I feared your just anger if I did not have the work done on your return, and so—and so—my feet being strong, and—and clean, I—I used them."

What! Was the mother-in-law really laughing? Yes, there was no mistaking that deep-toned chuckle.

Now was Donik's turn to be amazed. Instead of being beaten to be laughed at! O joy!

"I will not punish you, my daughter, because I understand your difficulty. You will never have to make bread with your feet again, for I will give you only small quantities until your arms grow stronger."

All this happened many years ago. Now Donik has little girls of her own, who go to school and study the same lessons as quickly and as well as if they had been born in America instead of Turkey. Their own dear mother teaches them housework, rather than a strange, unloved mother-in-law. It was while showing little Donik how to make bread that mother Donik told her this true story.—*Standard*.



A CHILD'S ESCAPE FROM SIBERIA: VERA VOLKOVSKY AND HER FATHER.

to speak English, in the hope that it might be of use to her during her travels. In London she has made already a large circle of friends, every one being curious to see a child who, though so young, has been through such dangers and such adventures. But the hard school of Siberian exile has taught Vera the virtue of prudence. A child in most things, she knows full well what risks her Siberian friends incurred in helping her, and nothing in the world can induce her to talk about them. There is, indeed, something profoundly pathetic in the prudence displayed by so young a child. Vera's silence about herself and her escape is more eloquent than the bitterest denunciations of Russian tyranny. What can that tyranny be like if it can teach children so young so extreme prudence?

## HOW DONIK MADE THE BREAD.

BY S. F. O. B.

"Sister Donik! the bread is now ready to knead. Do you work it well, and have it set to rise by my return. I go to Muxie Goohar's to help with her baking."

The speaker, Myriam, then took up her street garment, the *ezar*, and covering her head and face, she deftly folded the sheet around her and departed.

Donik is twelve years old, straight and slender, with heavy braids of black hair

dough, up and down, back and forth, around and around! Occasionally she would step out of the pan upon a towel spread beside it, turn the dough over, and sprinkle in flour, then the treading was resumed.

When Myriam, the mother-in-law, returned a half-hour later, the bread was standing in one corner, nicely covered, and Donik was covered up demurely on a cushion in another corner, embroidering a handkerchief. Myriam inspected the bread.

"You have done well, daughter. Goohar is coming to help me bake to-day, but I wish you to watch that you may be able to help another time."

Donik kept her eyes upon her intricate pattern; she was not expected to make a reply. In the Orient, the less a girl says to her superiors the greater are considered her virtue and modesty.

This room in which Donik is working is the living-room of the family. There are no chairs, only a low seat extending around two sides of the room, piled with cushions of red and blue. The dining table is that huge copper salver leaning against the wall. At meal times it is placed in the middle of the room upon a low stool, and the family, first the men and boys, then when they have finished, the women and girls, sit on the floor around it. Those openings in the sides of the bare stone walls are closets where clothing is kept, and the bedding,