

## A Silver Rouble.

('Chambers's Journal')

(Concluded.)

## III.

'I was born in the outskirts of Moscow, and early in life worked in one of the many print-works in that town. I had completed my eighteenth year when I became imbued with the revolutionary doctrines held by so many of my fellow-workmen. About this time, too, I made the acquaintance of Toukanka Fedovoritch, a girl of about my own age, living with her parents at a small village close to Moscow. I cannot convey to you, a stranger, all the passionate love this girl awoke in me; suffice it to say that for two years we remained lovers, and I worked hard during that time to provide a home where I could take her to when we married. At last my hopes were crowned with success. The foreman of the department in which I worked was one afternoon passing through the engine-room, when carelessly passing too close to the moving machinery, his clothes were caught in the revolving wheels, and in a moment he was flung down a crushed and lifeless mass. This accident procured me my long-hoped-for promotion, and I took his place as foreman. Within a week of that time I was married, and the world held no happier mortal than I.

'I think I told you I had become a revolutionary—in other words, I had been for some time a member of a secret body of Nihilists; and it was only when I had been married a few months and had learned how much happiness and joy life held for me, that I began to regret my vows of allegiance to them. But as you are no doubt aware, there is no recall from those vows once taken; and had I dared openly to show that the views of the Brotherhood were no longer mine, my life I knew would pay forfeit for my apostasy.

'I had been married nearly two years, when, owing to various causes in the country, Nihilism became a stronger force amongst the people, and it was then that were first whispered those plots against high officials, and even against our 'little father' the Czar himself. I had been working late at the mill one evening, and on leaving, proceeded cautiously to the rendezvous of the revolutionary lodge to which I belonged. I had, after much hesitation, determined to announce to them my altered views; and whilst promising strict secrecy as to anything I had learnt or heard, beg them to release me from a position which had become harder than I could longer bear. I found the Council assembled when I arrived; and after stating my case, they unanimously decided that my vows must be held binding; and did I shirk any duty they might see fit to allot to me, I knew the consequence—death! I had half expected this reply to my entreaty; and I was endeavoring to shake their decision, when we were startled by hurried knocking at the outer door; and before we had time to plan any means of escape from the coming danger, the door of the meeting-room was flung open, and in rushed a body of police with an officer of the secret service at their head. Resistance was useless; and in less time than it takes to tell, we were all securely handcuffed and marched out as prisoners to the police barracks; and in a damp dirty cell of that building I had time to survey my position. I knew no compromising papers would be found upon us, as it was our rule to do everything by word of mouth and place nothing in writing; but at the same time I knew the police were in great terror of a general revolution, and would probably take the first opportunity of

showing that they meant to crush it out with a heavy and cruel hand. Bitterly did I now repent my youthful folly in binding myself to such men, and the thought of my dear wife at home waiting my coming only added to my misery. At last, after a most wretched and sleepless night, the morning broke, and I was taken before the chief of police. I saw none of my fellow-prisoners, and without waiting to hear any defence from me, the officer read out my sentence in slow monotonous tones: "Ivan Dolgatcheff, being suspected of being a Nihilist, and found attending a secret meeting of that body in Moscow, you are sentenced to five years' transportation to Siberia as a convict of the second class."

'I heard no more! I was stunned by the suddenness of this end of all my hopes, and unconsciousness mercifully ended my sufferings. I awoke to find myself again in the cell; and after a few hours, I was hurried off with many others to the railway station to begin my long exile. One idea was ever uppermost in my mind, to let my wife know what had happened to me. I had noticed that one of the police who was present at the breaking-up of our meeting glanced sometimes at me, and I was emboldened to try to gain his help. With some difficulty I approached nearer to him, and telling him where I lived, begged him to acquaint my wife with my fate. This he promised to do; and with that small amount of comfort I left Moscow for Nijni-Novgorod. Arrived there, we were packed on board a large barge covered with strong iron netting, effectually cutting off all means of escape, and for days we were towed down the Volga river. But why describe the anguish and misery of that journey? At last we reached Ekaterinburg, and here we were separated into different parties, and prepared for the long tramp of months to our several destinations in Siberia; some to the quicksilver mines; others, myself amongst the number, to the salt mines of Irkutsk.

'And now the hardest trial of all was to happen to me. Whilst standing waiting for orders at the Siberian gate, on the outskirts of the town, I heard my name was called by the guard; and on going to him, was taken to the guardhouse, and there, travel-strained and worn by grief and fatigue, I found my dear wife. She had received my message; and after selling everything in our home to get sufficient money, had set out to follow me across Russia. After hardships innumerable, she had at last found me, and owing to the kindness of the Chief Inspector at Ekaterinburg, received permission from him to say good-bye to me. Afterwards, we should be lost to each other for five long years. Need I dwell on the touching scene of our final adieus? After kissing me for the last time, she took from around her neck the charm that every Russian wears, and placed it around mine, calling down God's blessing on me, and assured me that her daily prayer would be that it might preserve me from every danger to my life. That charm consisted of a silver rouble, given to her when a child by her father, and roughly engraved by him with the image of a Greek cross. I have never seen her since! We were hurried off that afternoon.

'I lived for two years in the salt mines, doing work that killed those around me in hundreds. Day and night in semi-darkness we labored, our only rest being two hours in every twelve. For two years, I say, I suffered; but the wild longing for freedom grew in me stronger and stronger, until one day, with six others, I escaped, and found shelter in the neighboring woods. What became of

my companions I never knew. For days, weeks, months, I wandered westwards, living on the charity of the people in the occasional villages through which I passed, sometimes getting rough work to do, but more often suffering the pangs of hunger. Fortunately for me, my escape took place in the early spring, and the warmth of the summer months enabled me to live and sleep in the open air without hardship. One day, almost famished, I had begged for food at a wayside posthouse, but without avail, and driven at last to desperation, I remembered my silver charm. The temptation was too great to withstand; and I enjoyed the first food I had tasted for two days at the expense of my wife's parting gift. Can you blame me? It saved my life then, and I little thought, when I handed it to the fellow, that I should ever set eyes on it again.

'The summer of 1874 slowly passed. After many adventures I reached Tomsk, and found work. But my thoughts were ever on Moscow; and as I regained strength, I determined to save all I could to enable me eventually to reach my home. I had written to my wife; but no answer came to me, and it was two years before I had saved enough and started again on my journey. At Perm I learned that the war in Servia had broken out. Every one passing through the country was closely questioned, and being unable to satisfy one particularly troublesome police-sergeant, I was marched off to the nearest station for inquiries to be made. Afraid to give them my real name or destination, my evasive answers made them suspect all was not right, and I was drafted off to the barracks to find myself enrolled a soldier of His Majesty the Czar.

'The Servian war ended, the troubles with Turkey commenced, and my regiment was ordered to the front, to take its place in the army then forming on the south-east frontier.

'You now know my history. After being in many hard-fought engagements and being twice slightly wounded, our conquering hosts crossed the Balkans, and you know the rest. You also know why your silver rouble has such an interest for me.'

At this stage, exhaustion overcame him, and when I left, he had sunk into a heavy slumber. The following day I heard from the doctor that he had had a relapse; and feeling that perhaps my long interview the preceding day had something to do with causing this, I determined to find better nursing for him than he could possibly get at the hands of the one overworked doctor in the place.

Events favored me. The Turks, beaten back at all points, were even then falling back from the Pass; and during that day our numbers were increased by the arrival of some hundred and fifty wounded, in charge of a Red Cross ambulance. No sooner had they found quarters in the village than I went to request that a nurse might be sent to the wounded Russian. This they promised me should be done.

That evening, after my frugal dinner was finished, I walked up the street with the intention of seeing how he was going on. All was quiet in the house, and entering softly, I pushed open the door of his room. There, on the floor, her arms around his neck, with her white cheek pressed to his, I saw the hospital nurse; and at that moment I understood what it did not require words to tell me—Ivan Dolgatcheff had found his wife!

Within three months from then I was again in London, with the memory of their waving farewell to me as the steamer in