

THE ELEPHANT SOLDIER.

Long, long ago, on India's plains,
There reared a battle fierce and strong;
The din of musketry was heard,
And cannon's roar was loud and long.
Old Hero marched with stately tread
His part to act in the affray;
And on his back, above all heads,
The royal ensign waved that day.

Fondly the soldiers viewed their flag,
Which shook its colors to the air,
Proudly the mahout rode, and sent
His watchful gaze now here, now there.
Till "Haft!" he cried; and Hero heard,
And instantly the word obeyed.
When, lo! a flash, a shriek, and then
His driver with the slain was laid.

Oh, fierce and hot the conflict grew!
Yet patiently old Hero stood
Amidst it all, the while his feet
Were stained, alas! with human blood.
His ears were strained to catch the voice
Which only could his steps command,
Nor would he turn when men grow weak,
And panic spread on either hand.

But yet the standard waved aloft:
The fleeing soldiers saw it—Lo!
We are not conquered yet," they cried,
And rallying, closed upon the foe.
Then turned the tide of conquest, and
The royal ensign waved at last
Victorious o'er the blood-stained field
Just as the weary day was past.

Yet waited Hero for the word
Of him whose sole command he knew—
Waited, nor moved one ponderous foot,
To his own captain's orders true.
Three lonely nights, three lonely days,
Poor Hero "halted." Briefer nor threat
Could stir him from the spot. And on
His back he bore the standard yet.

Then thought the soldiers of a child
Who lived a hundred miles away.
"The mahout's son! fetch him!" they cried:
"His voice the creature will obey."
He came, the little orphaned lad,
Scarce nine years old. But Hero knew
That many a time the master's son
Had been the "little driver" too.

Obediently the brave old head
Was bowed before the child, and then,
With one long, wistful glance around,
Old Hero's march began again.
Onward he went. The trappings hung
All stained and tattered at his side,
And no one saw the cruel wound
On which the blood was scarcely dried.

But when at last the tents were reached,
The suffering Hero raised his head,
And trumpeting his mortal pain,
Looked for the master who was dead.
And then about his master's son
His trunk old Hero feebly wound,
And ere another day had passed
A soldier's honored grave had found.

THE LITTLE RUSSIAN SERVANT.

"Who's that?" said the Countess, stepping in
front of a young girl of fifteen or sixteen, bent
over an embroidery frame. The young girl rose,
prostrating herself three before her mistress,
then getting up remained standing, her hands
hanging by her side, her head slightly bent for-
ward under the investigating gaze of the Coun-
tess, who through her eyeglass closely scruti-
nized her.

"It is the new girl, Your Highness," an-
swered the head lady's maid, coming forward
with the air of importance that thirty years'
employment gives to matter what functionary.
"She is the daughter of Foma, of the village of
Ikonine. She is come in her turn to pay her
father's debt—he is in Moscow."

"These peasant girls can do nothing," said
the Countess, with a weary air. "What do
you expect to get out of this one?"
"She can't embroider badly, Your High-
ness; pray look yourself. She can be put to
the embroideries—not to the ground, but to the
trimmings. This is for the toilet table of Ma-
dame la Comtesse."

The noble lady, who could hardly see, being
shortsighted from her birth, examined the em-
broidery frame so closely that the tip of her
nose grazed the cloth.

"That's not bad," she said. "Come here,
little girl."

The little girl advanced, and the Countess in-
spected her as minutely as she had done the em-
broidery.

"How pretty she is! What's your name?"
"Mavra."

The word came like a breath from the rosy
lips.

"You must speak louder if you want us to
hear you," said the head lady's maid angrily.

Mavra turned her large blue startled eyes
toward her, let them drop, and said nothing.

"Sit down to your work," said the Countess,
amused at her new toy. With a quick, graceful
movement the young girl resumed her seat on
the wooden chair, and the needle firmly held
between her agile fingers went in and out of the
stuff with that short, sharp noise that stimulates
the action of the hand.

"That's right, you may go on," said the
Countess, her nerves irritated by the regularity
of the movement.

Then turning her back upon the young girl,
and trailing the heavy, rumptuous folds of her
dressing gown along the carefully washed pine-
wood floor, she disappeared through the door,
which was respectfully closed after her by the
head lady's maid. The Countess, an accom-
plished mistress of a house, made a practice of
paying a daily visit to this room, which was re-

served for the women of her service. Mavra was
left alone in the workroom—a large, well lighted
chamber, furnished simply with tables and
chairs for the use of the innumerable women and
girls invariably attached to the service of those
noble ladies who knew so well how to maintain
their rank in that blessed time of serfdom. At
this hour the workroom was empty. Some of
the women were washing, others ironing, some
cleaning and turning up ide down everything in
the private apartment the Countess had just
left. The young peasant girl, with her needle
uplifted, rested her ruddy hand upon the edge
of the frame and looked around her.

What multitudes of embroidered gowns, with
their rich lace trimmings, hung there on the
wall, waiting some slight repairs!—what end-
less petticoats, with their ornamented flounces
all freshly ironed, on cords along the huge room!
—what countless lace caps, worn hardly an
hour, pinned to a pin cushion as large as a pil-
low, used only for this purpose! and there, in a
basket on the corner of the table, what piles of
cambric chemises, delicately piped and pleated,
trimmed with Valenciennes lace and ornamented
with bright ribbons! And all this for one
person, without counting the silk stockings in
that other basket and the rings by dozens worn
by the Countess on her thin fingers. In this
world of living beings under God's heaven, what
importance given to one person that needed so
many other persons to serve her! and how the
nothingness of these was made more emphatic
by the dominance of that! Mavra sat wonder-
stricken. The head lady's maid, coming into
the room, found her still in a state of stupor,
stupidly staring above all at having made these
reflections.

"Well, you are lucky!" she said to her, with
a boastful look. "Our Countess took a fancy
to you at the first glance; you are now on the
list of embroiderers! You may thank God for
it. It is not often the Countess takes a fancy
like that at first sight."

"I—she, then, unkind?" innocently inquired
the girl.

"Unkind! Oh, no; capricious, like all
mistresses, but the kindest lady in the world,
and generous! Besides, this is a rich house;
nothing is counted—nothing at all."

This was true, nothing was counted; neither
plate, nor gold, nor precious objects—in short,
nothing; and yet nothing was ever stolen.
What was the good of stealing? What could be
the use of stolen things in a place like this, re-
mote from towns, where you could not wear
them, since you might be detected and arrested,
nor sell them, as there were no tradespeople?
In this lordly mansion, the doors of which were
never shut, nothing within the memory of man
had ever been pilloined. As a set-off to this
the candle was kept burning at the two ends;
but are not candles made to be burned, and if
so, is it not the right thing to burn them up as
quickly as possible, since there are others ready
as soon as these are consumed? This was the
economic principle that ruled this old provin-
cial seigniorial mansion, where very little else
had to be purchased save tea, coffee, sugar and
wine—all other things being furnished by the
bounteous earth which produced the harvests
and fed the cattle.

"This is better than your village," continued
Dacka, proud of belonging to such noble mas-
ters and desirous to impress on the mind of the
simple peasant girl the importance and dignity
of the functions she was promoted to.

"It is more beautiful," replied Mavra, bend-
ing intently over her work.

"It was lucky they taught you to embroider,
else you would have been sent to the poultry
yard to feed the cocks and hens and look after
the calves. How did you learn?"

"My mother taught me. She was formerly
in service; she was a *devoevia* in the time of
the late Countess. She married a peasant."

"Ah!" said Dacka, "I thought your manners
were not quite those of a peasant girl; if your
mother was in service, that's another thing.
Come, take a cup of coffee with me. Prepare
the coffee pot and make haste before the others
come. I can't ask every one, you understand."

In this way, honored by the Countess's eye-
glass and favored by the lady's maid's coffee,
Mavra began her life as an embroideress, which,
to all appearance, was destined to go on in-
definitely, to save her father from more irksome
toil without remuneration. The arrangement
suited the Countess, and as she had a passion for
embroideries, a passion shared by most Russian
ladies, she preferred having a good embroideress
in her workroom to having a peasant at the
plough.

To Mavra there was but little difference be-
tween the *isba* of her father and the workroom
of the seigniorial mansion. Here, as there, her
life was spent in assiduous work from sunrise to
sunset. There her mother, an austere, sombre
woman, like most village matrons to whom life
had proved no light matter; here, the lady's
maid, often grumbling, but at times kind and
even condescending. The chief difference be-
tween the two modes of life consisted in the
daily visit of the Countess, who generally said
nothing, but passed with a solemn air through
the roomful of silent, awe-stricken women. But
one thing was lacking to Mavra, and this nothing
could replace—the evening hour of rest which
she used to spend by the fountain when sent to
draw water for her mother, or on the threshold of
their old cabin watching the spring rain falling
soft and warm, melting the snow so quickly that
its thickness might be seen visibly diminishing;
or, again, in the month of May, standing at the
edge of the forest listening to the nightingales

singing on the delicate golden branches of the
perfumed birch tree.

Winter passed fairly well, but when the first
breath of warm air set the melted snow stream-
ing down the roofs, which again the night's
frost transformed into long stalactites of ice,
Mavra felt a strange vague aching in her heart.
The house was overheated, and the close, nau-
seous air made her sick. What would she not
give to run as of old over the moors to see if the
moss were beginning to appear under the crys-
tallized transparent carpet of snow.

"What is the matter with this little girl?"
asked the Countess one day as she stopped
before the frame at which the young peasant
girl was diligently working. "She was as fresh
as a rose, and now she has grown yellow. Do
you feel pain anywhere, Mavra?"

Mavra raised her blue eyes to the noble lady
who, for the second time in her life, deigned to
address her, and replied in her low voice—

"Nowhere, Your Highness."

"Then why are you so yellow?"

"I don't know, Your Highness."

The Countess dropped her eyeglass and looked
kindly at the young girl.

"I know," said she after a moment's pause,
"the child wants air. She came here from her
village, and has passed the whole winter stoop-
ing over her frame. Henceforth, little girl, you
must go out into the fresh air twice a day, and
must learn the service of my bedroom; this will
give you exercise."

Thereupon the Countess quitted the room, fol-
lowed by Mavra's grateful eyes now filled with
tears. From that day Mavra worshipped the
Countess; to approach her, to touch what she
had worn, to serve her, to receive her orders and
to execute them with the utmost speed and
dexterity was the great joy of the humble girl.
Her mistress, wrapped in all this gorgeous
luxury, the elements of which had been so long
under her eyes in the workroom, appeared to her
as some august being nearer her Creator than
any other of her fellow creatures. Not only did
Mavra pray to God for her, but at times she
inwardly prayed to her as to a saint, thinking
the pleadings of a being so superior must have
equal weight with the powers of heaven as with
those of earth.

That mouthful of fresh air that Mavra drank
in twice a day soon brought back the bloom to
her cheeks. Happiness had a share in it. But
spring, that came with strides to make up for
lost time, was the chief worker of this miracu-
lous cure. The days went on lengthening, ready
to melt into each other as they do at the sum-
mer solstice. And during these long evenings
the young girl loved to stand leaning against
the barrier of trelliswork serving as gate to the
courtyard of the seigniorial mansion, watching
the young peasant girls slowly wending their
way to the fountain with their empty pails, and
coming quickly back bent beneath their burden,
their heads stooping under the wooden yoke that
connected the buckets. Their time had passed
in gossip, and the mother or the mother-in-law
was waiting with a sharp reproof at home.
Mavra would gaze at the tall birch tree by the
gate as it gently waved in the evening breeze its
long branches, like those of a weeping willow,
and low and then see through them a pale star
in the pale sky, shining and seeming to be say-
ing something to her. The noises from the
river, the last horses returning from their even-
ing drink passing at a quick trot before her
shaking their wet manes, the distant songs, faint
as an echo, of the peasants returning in their
telegues from their day's labor—all these rustic
familiar things brought back the sweet memory
of the past and made her live in joyous anticipa-
tion of the future, a soothing and brightening
her path.

The young grooms noticed the pretty girl
that came out and stood every evening by the
gate to breathe the air "by order of the Coun-
tess." They mustered courage at first to say
"Good evening," then to add a few words.

Young Russians of this class are neither rude
nor forward so long as brandy does not flow in
their veins, and the Countess was implacable on
the score of drunkenness. Mavra answered in
her sweet voice, and sometimes laughed, show-
ing her white teeth. But no one dared ven-
ture further with her. She would slip, as it
were, through their fingers, and run scared into
the house. After a few attempts the young lads
grew accustomed to her reserved ways, and, to
speak frankly, they liked her all the better. The
coachman Simeon alone, who was not used to
such dainty damsels, his superb beard and black
velvet garments always winning at least a kiss,
taken and given back with good grace—Simeon
tried one evening to steal close to the pretty
girl while she, in her reverie, was gazing at the
stars. He approached without letting himself
be heard, and succeeded in getting his magnifi-
cent beard close to the young dreamer's cheek.

Warned by a rustling, she started suddenly,
turned her head, and in the movement received
the kiss she wished to avoid.

"Oh!" she said, with inexpressible horror,
wiping her cheek so violently with her sleeve
that she tore the fine skin.

All the servants around laughed, for Simeon
had prided himself on a better reception.

"Don't try this again, Simeon, or I shall tell
the Countess." Her eyes filled with tears at
the insult, and she looked at him with a menac-
ing air.

She spoke in a tone so earnest, so deeply
hurt, that the head lady's maid stopped the
laughter by saying with a voice of authority:—

"Mavra is a good girl and is right to reserve
herself for her future husband. You are a good

girl; and you Simeon are a lubber to have
frightened her in this way."

The coachman tried to pass it off with a joke,
but Dacka was more than a match for him; it
was no easy matter to have the last word in a
discussion with her. Simeon soon gave it up.
Mavra silently disappeared, and while the dis-
pute was still going on, she, with head buried
in her pillow, was sobbing bitterly.

She cried with shame at the rude liberty that
had been taken with her in the presence of all
the others, and for something besides that; for
her wounded modesty; for invincible disgust.
Had no one been witness of the scene she would
have shed the same burning tears. She could
not have said why; had she been questioned,
her only answer would have been, "I don't like
it." But to say why, she was incapable.

And so in tears she fell asleep, before the
other girls, less sensitive, had returned from
their daily stroll with their sweethearts.

From this day forth all treated with deference
the girl's reserve. The story was told to the
Countess by the discreet head lady's maid, and
the noble lady looked scrutinizingly at the
young girl when she came to attend on her, but
not a word of praise or blame was uttered; and
Mavra took for granted that no one thought
more of the adventure.

Summer was already on the wane when the
noble mansion, habitually so tranquil, was sud-
denly filled with noise and gaiety. The young
Count Serge had sent his carriages on before
him; saddle horses and hounds were stamping
and neighing in their stalls and barking in
their kennels as though the one aim of life were
to make the most noise possible in a given
time.

"How handsome he is, our young Count!"
Dacka kept on saying the livelong day, to while
away the tedious hours in the silent workroom.
"It was I received him in my arms when he was
born."

And she repeated again and again, with inex-
haustible complacency, the history of Serge's
birth, and the legend of his boyhood up to the
moment when this dear treasure of her heart
had gone to join the corps of pages, his trunks
laden with cakes, jams, and all that could pos-
sibly be eaten under heaven.

The work-girls gave listless heed to these
hundred-times-repeated narrations, but Mavra
was never tired hearing them; it was like re-
ceiving gospel into her heart. Her good and
revered protectress made all things dear and
venerated that touched her nearly, and this
only son, loved, adored, longed for, became a
supernatural being, a kind of Messiah to her.

One morning at the end of August as Mavra,
who had risen early, was crossing the courtyard
to go waken up the laundress, who had over-
slept herself, she saw galloping along the en-
closure a *troika* of black horses with their heads
covered with bells.

"It's the young master," thought the little
servant; and without giving herself time for
reflection she ran to the ponderous gate and
threw it wide open. At the same time the bril-
liant equipage arrived; the coachman pulled
together his noble beasts, and without slacken-
ing their gallop they shot like an arrow past
Mavra, and ten steps further on stood still at
the foot of the steps. Dazed, her heart thrilled
by she knew not what impression of fear and
joy, she received full in the face the gaze of two
large, black, amazed and amused eyes.

"How like his mother!" thought Mavra as
she closed the huge gate that shut with a heavy
bang.

She turned slowly toward the steps as Serge,
jumping down from the carriage, looked round
at her again; he smiled when he met her blue
eyes full of simple admiration, and, giving her
a friendly nod, entered the house of his fathers.
A minute after he was by the Countess's bedside,
pressed lovingly in her arms.

When they had chatted two whole hours, as
they finished their tea, Serge, re-collecting him-
self, suddenly said to his mother—

"What is this new acquisition you have
made, mother? A little fair haired Raphael
opened the gate for this morning?"

The Countess thought for a moment.

"Ah! I know," said she; "it's Mavra—a
virtue—my dear child. A strange little creature
who adores me."

"She is quite right," replied the son respect-
fully. "What do you do with her?"

"She embroiders in the afternoon, and in the
morning she attends to me; but, Serge, you
must be prudent. My house is strictly kept;
don't you go and amuse yourself making gallant
speeches to my girls."

"Oh, mother! what do you take me for?"
carefully replied the young man. "I think of
a woman only when she is in a casket suited to
her style of beauty. Now, here you may have
pearls, but the casket is totally wanting."

They burst out laughing together. Only those
who thoroughly understood these two beings
could have guessed beneath this light talk the
strict propriety of the mother and the son's
respect for the maternal home. But Russians
of the *grande monde* are so constituted that
when they have no vice they take all imagin-
able trouble to affect it.

On leaving the dining-room the Countess and
her son directed their steps towards the garden.
In front of the house, in the courtyard, they
met Mavra stooping under the weight of an en-
ormous pile of linen which she was carrying
from the laundry. The sheets held in under
her crossed hands reached so high that she had
to raise her chin and turn her head sideways in
order to see before her.