

NOTES AND COMMENTS.

Although, owing to the censorship which just now is enforced with especial rigor, it is difficult to obtain precise information concerning the disturbances in central and southern Russia the outbreaks are known to have agrarian aims, and they indicate that a revolutionary spirit has at last been communicated to the peasantry. Hitherto the agriculturists, who are the descendants of the serfs emancipated in 1861, and who constitute a vast majority of the Russian population, have exhibited a kind of religious faith in their "Little Father," as they call the Czar, and, consequently, have been looked upon as the bulwark of the absolutist system. Their loyalty has proved unshakable, although the economical situation of the village communities has been far from satisfactory, because of the severe pressure of an increasing population on the allotments of land made forty years ago, and because the redemption payments for those lands, exacted in the form of rents, have been acknowledged, even by the candid bureaucrats, to be excessive.

Now it appears that the agents of the revolutionary party have turned to account the trust imposed in the Czar by the peasantry, and have circulated a report that the "Little Father" has ordered that the lands, which in 1861 were reserved for the nobles, shall be divided among the emancipated serfs. In many parts of central and southern Russia the peasants have credited this report, and have proceeded to act upon it, distributing among themselves the lands and movables of the neighboring proprietors. It seems that the proceedings were orderly and peaceful so long as no resistance was offered by the proprietors or their resident agents, but, when the civil and military authorities were called upon for protection, riot, incendiarism and bloodshed ensued.

That the present uprising will be put down by the military power at the disposal of the bureaucracy cannot for a moment be doubted, but the shrewd upholders of the absolutist system will recognize an omen of grave future danger in the fact that the feeling of discontent and the feverish desire of change, which had already spread from the students in universities to the workmen in factories and shops, have come to be shared by the tillers of the soil, from whom at least nine-tenths of the rank and file of the standing army are recruited. It was demonstrated in Germany in 1848 that, from the moment that the revolutionary spirit animates a whole population, from the highly educated classes down to the laboring millions the officers and soldiers will sooner or later be infected in their turn, and will cease to be the docile instruments of an autocratic Government. It is, in truth, only a question of time when Russia, like the rest of Christian Europe, will have to acknowledge the right of the people to some share in the management of political and economical affairs, and the present upheaval among the stolid and conservative moujiks indicates that the time may not be distant.

We do not attach much credit to the report that the young Czar Nicholas II. proposes to adopt the scheme of constitutional government conceived and nearly carried out by Boris Melikoff in the spring of 1881. There is no doubt that a charter giving self-government to Russia had been signed by Alexander II., and was being printed on the day when that sovereign was murdered. After some hesitation, however, his successor, Alexander III., repudiated the document, and throughout his reign pursued a reactionary policy. We do not believe that a change of heart has been experienced by the bureaucrats, who, during the last twenty years, have brought to naught most of the preceding reforms, and who even at one time contemplated a re-introduction of manorial rights, which would have constituted a step toward the revival of serfdom. Neither have we any evidence for the assumption that the present sovereign is capable of the broad, humanitarianism and of the inflexible resolves for which his grandfather was distinguished. So long as the Russian Emperor is a man possessed of only ordinary strength of purpose, a Boris Melikoff is far more likely to share the fate of a Turgot or a Necker than to succeed in introducing drastic and regenerating reforms. Seductive promises may, indeed, be made from time to time at St. Petersburg for the purpose of allaying popular commotions, but when the storm blows over the promises are unlikely to be kept.

My £50 Engagement.

"Well," I said, addressing Harry Ilford as the door of his shop closed behind a departing customer, "I should have thought that a swell like that would have been able to run to something better than a three-halfpenny Manila. Out of cash I expect."

Harry smiled. "Possibly," he replied, "but it may be stinginess, one can never tell. Even a Sherlock Holmes might be deceived if he began making deductions as to a man's social or financial position from the brand of cigars he smokes. I don't say he would, but he might be. I remember once myself—but it's rather a long yarn, and you may be in a hurry, sir."

"Not a bit of it," I said, lighting a fresh pipe and settling myself comfortably in the chair Ilford provides for loungers. "I hope," I added, "the yarn deals with the interesting period of your life."

He nodded assent, fully understanding my delicate reference to his somewhat irregular "past." Then interrupted only by an occasional customer—for the night was wet and cheerless and few people were about—he told me the following story:—

One morning about a year since, just before my poor, forgiving old dad died and left me this business, I was sitting in my diggings looking over the paper when I came upon an advertisement that ran, as nearly as I can remember, like this:—

WANTED.—Immediately, for a few days only, a young gentleman of good manners and appearance to undertake a mission of some difficulty in the interests of suffering humanity. A large honorarium given at the conclusion of the enterprise.—Apply by letter to X., 15a, Embankment Court, Charing Cross.

Well, I thought to myself when I'd read the thing through two or three times, I wonder what the game is. Something risky, probably; anyhow, it'll only cost a penny stamp to try and find out. With which I sat down and wrote a letter applying for the post advertised there and then.

A little later on I went out and dropped my missive into the nearest pillar-box, and next morning I received a reply, signed "William Mynfield," asking me to call after six the same evening.

Accordingly, a few minutes after the hour named, I dismounted from a Favorite bus at the corner of Northumberland Avenue and soon found myself in Embankment Court—a narrow, out-of-date-looking thoroughfare in the vicinity of the Adelphi arches. Making my way to No. 15a, I had scarcely knocked before the door was opened by a youngish-looking man, who inquired in a low tone whether I was Mr. Ilford. When I had answered in the affirmative he conducted me upstairs to a small back room on the first floor, which contained two chairs, a bed, and a table strewn with newspapers.

the first. I shouldn't have answered your advertisement else."

"H'm," he remarked, "the other chaps who've been here were down-at-heel mugs who thought me mad, but you're evidently sharp enough, Mr. Ilford. Your dress and appearance, too, are all that could be wished. I should really think my advertisement had not been wanted, after all, if only I could be sure you're to be trusted."

I rose as if to go. "If you can't take my word for it, we may as well part company," I said. "I'll bid you good evening."

"Don't be a fool," he cried, with a sudden change of manner. "Sit down again."

I complied, with a shrug of the shoulders. "The pay?" I asked. "Fifty pounds, if successful."

"Ah, and the work?"

Mynfield again looked at me dubiously, but a moment later cried, suddenly, "Very well, I'll trust you. Time presses, and I can't do otherwise. The job must be done to-morrow, and it's one that needs a smart man. I bet you'll manage it, though if you'll only follow my instructions."

"I'll do my best; fire away."

"Very well, then. I must explain in the first place that until a fortnight ago I was for some years confidential assistant to Mr. George Codicot, head of the firm of Codicot & Co., the big West-end jewellers and pawnbrokers. I left his service hurriedly, under painful circumstances that need not be entered into now, but before doing so I took a few useful notes as to his future movements. To-morrow he goes to Brighton, and it will be your task, since it obviously can't be mine, to shadow him—on his homeward journey, that is; it'll be better to keep out of the way till then. He'll leave Brighton by the 7.10 train, which runs right through to Victoria without stopping, and he'll travel first class. You must get into the same compartment, and manage somehow or other to substitute the small black bag I shall give you to-night for a similar one he'll have with him. The latter you'll hand to me at Victoria, where I shall await you and in exchange I'll hand you fifty pounds in gold, and the transaction will be finished. What do you say? Will you take it on?"

"Supposing I were to say 'yes,' how should I know my man?"

"Easily enough. I'll describe him. He's a fellow of medium height, wears a beard, and an overcoat trimmed with astrachan; will probably be smoking a cigar, and, as likely as not, will have a drink in the refreshment room before the train starts. Then of course, there'll be the bag to look out for."

"H'm. Altogether I understand Mr. Codicot to be the sort of chap that emits an aroma of opulence, eh?"

"You've put it well."

"Now as to the contents of the bag."

"Jewellery. A tiara, a necklace, and several smaller articles, all placed together in a brown leather case."

"How do you know as much?"

Benefiting the Undeserving, I took my departure.

Well, sir, I need not describe my proceedings on the following day in detail. It will be enough to say that I went down to Brighton by a morning train, and, although the month was February and the air cold, I passed several pleasant hours in the King's Road. Just after six o'clock I turned into West street, and, making my way to the station, entered the refreshment room, where I obtained a bun and a glass of beer. Carrying this frugal fare from the bar counter, I placed it with my bag on a small table near the door and sat down to watch and wait.

At ten minutes to seven I was rewarded by seeing a bearded man pass me, who wore a coat trimmed with astrachan, carried a bag like mine, and seemed in every other respect to tally with Mynfield's description. "Codicot, without doubt," I murmured, as I saw him advance to the bar and, removing his cigar from his mouth, give some order to the barmaid. The next moment a small glass, apparently containing whisky, was set in front of him.

"Codicot, without doubt," I murmured again, as I turned and glanced casually round the room.

I was met by a most unpleasant sight, for there, coming through the door, was a second individual, closely resembling the first in appearance and attire, carrying also an ordinary black leather bag and smoking a cigar. Here was an unexpected dilemma, indeed. How on earth was I to identify my man?

I thought of the "aroma of opulence" I was to look for, and I soon made up my mind how to act. I would go behind the two men in turn—for the second, like the first, was drinking whisky by this time—and I would shadow him who was indulging in the more expensive smoke. It seemed impossible to imagine that a well-to-do pawnbroker could possibly affect any brand but the best—impossible!

I may perhaps remind you here, sir, that my poor father had brought me up to the tobacco trade, and that before I quarrelled with him and went astray for a time I'd acquired quite enough experience to tell a good thing from an inferior in the cigar line.

You will understand then, that my task proved an easy one, when I say that the first man who had entered the refreshment room was smoking a twopenny Mexican, while the second was on the point of finishing a high class Havana. I naturally at once decided that Mr. Codicot No. 2 should be honored with my attentions—of course, supposing that he went by the 7.10 train.

Well, to make a long story short, he did go by that train, and when I had seen him get into a first-class compartment, and settle himself in one of the farther corners, I pretended to be a friend of his and bribed the guard to put nobody else in the compartment. Then, when the train was on the point of starting and I had seen the other fellow also installed in a "first" some distance to the rear, I jumped in, and we were whistled off.

Before we had reached Preston Park I had come to the conclusion that I was in for a nice job after all. The difficulties I had expected, and some of which I had come prepared to meet, had not arisen. On the contrary, what could be better than that the bag I wanted should be on the rack opposite to me, while its owner reclined against the cushions underneath it fast asleep?

I waited a few minutes, then cautiously but swiftly I took down my own bag from the rack above me, and in a twinkling the exchange was effected.

Having felt that my friend's article contained a box-shaped article, which I was quite satisfied was Lady Gwilton's jewel-case, I put it on the rack and sat still watching the sleeper, in the hope that he would not awaken until the train was nearing its destination.

Here again the matter fell out as I wished, for we had left East Croydon behind us when at last my companion stirred, and opening his eyes looked blinking towards me.

His first remark, however, gave me a sort of shock. It was simply: "Well, I'm hanged!"

"No," I said, "you've been asleep, that's all. We'll soon be in now. I hope you've had pleasant dreams?"

I meant, if possible, to keep him engaged in conversation till we reached Victoria.



HERMOINE SHIRT-WAIST. An elaborately designed shirt-waist made over a fitted lining, has an exquisitely shaped yoke, tucks down the front and a fitted strap about the neck. The woman who desires to have considerable work on her shirt-waist cannot do better than to follow the Hermoine design, and the pattern is admirably adapted to any of the light woolen fabrics and also to silk. Quantities of material required.—Thirty-two and thirty-four bust measure will require four and one-half yards of silk twenty inches wide. Thirty-six bust measure will require four and three-quarter yards of silk twenty inches wide. Thirty-eight and forty bust measure will require five and one-fourth yards of silk twenty inches wide.

moths out and so forth. Codicot the bloke's name is; 'e was robbed by one of 'is chaps a week or two back, so I've heard; p'rhaps that makes 'im grumpy."

I was much too agitated to do more than nod; but seemingly quite contented to do the talking himself the chimney-cleaner went on:—"Yes, I've done the gentleman for the first and last time for six months. Only thing now to get 'ome, give my sister the shell work-box I've got in my bag up there—I ain't got a missus, but I always take my sister a little sovevencer—and then to work again."

With which he gave another chuckle and, to my relief, subsided into silence. A few minutes later we arrived at Victoria.

I seized the sweep's bag and, jumping from the train, with a muttered good-night to its owner, ran along the platform, wondering whether I should be able to bluff Mynfield into believing I'd brought him the cargo he wanted. I meant to try, and when I'd given up my ticket and found him duly waiting I whispered, hastily:—"It's all right; but hurry along; the boulder may discover what's happened. We'd better part as soon as possible. Got the coin?"

"Yes, yes," he answered, evidently as anxious to finish the business as I was, and he opened a purse crammed full of glittering sovereigns. "You'll find fifty there, sure enough," he added, closing the purse and putting it in my hand.

"Thanks, thanks," I replied, as I gave him the bag. "Good luck and good-bye."

He disappeared in the darkness and I never saw him again.

Well, sir, I think my adventure proves that a man's position can't be judged from his cigar, and when you've heard the end of it I expect you'll agree with me that, in spite of "combines" and things of that sort, it's better to look to the tobacco trade than to one's wits for a living.

When I got home to my diggings that night and opened the purse which Mynfield had given me, I had the pleasure of discovering that its glittering sovereigns were made of brass and bore the effigy, not of Queen Victoria, but of Mr. Kruger. They used to sell them in the streets at a penny each till the police stopped it.—London Tit-Bits.

SHE CAPITULATED. "May I dream that you will be mine?" pleaded St. Clair Maginnis, addressing the fair Minerva McGillicuddy.

"Really, Mr. Maginnis," replied the stately girl, "I should not presume to exercise a censorship over your dreams. Dream as you please; but do not fail to remember that dreams go by contraries."

A WORKER.

Stranger—"What do you do all day here?" Native—"Watch the tide come in." Stranger—"But when you're not doing that?" Native—"Watch 't tide goin' out."