

THE COLUMBIA SPY.

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\$1.50 PER YEAR IN ADVANCE; \$2.00 IF NOT IN ADVANCE.

VOLUME XXIX, NUMBER 36.1

COLUMBIA, PENNSYLVANIA, SATURDAY MORNING, MARCH 19, 1859.

[WHOLE NUMBER, 1,493.]

PUBLISHED EVERY SATURDAY MORNING

Office in Northern Central Railroad Company's Building, north-west corner Front and Walnut streets.

Terms of Subscription. 31 50
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Selections.

The Old Russian's Story.

"NEAR THE CAZAR, CLOSE TO DEATH."
"One of my friends was hunting about a hundred wersts from Moscow, in September, 1855. His amusement had carried him too far for him to think of returning home that evening. He was near a small house which belonged to an aged man of noble birth, who had lived there for seven and fifty years. This old man had taken possession of the house in his twentieth year; but nobody knew how he had purchased it, nor from whence he had come, nor who he was. He had never once quitted it—not even to go to Moscow—since the day he entered upon possession. The first ten years he lived there, he had no acquaintances, saw nobody, and never spoke except to ask for what was absolutely necessary to him. He had never married, although his estate, containing two thousand desiatinas of land and five hundred serfs, brought him in five thousand silver roubles a year. Although this old man was said to be very inhospitable, my friend did not hesitate to ask permission to spend the night in his house. A place at the store no Russian peasant ever refuses to the stranger. The old man invited him in, and my friend found seated at the table with his host a near neighbor of my friend. Conversation was consequently easy, for they were no longer strangers. The old man was a well-preserved person, of five and seventy years old. His eye was bright, but rather unsteady looking. His health was robust, and his noble white hair and white beard in no wise diminished his appearance of vigor. He wore the true Russian costume: boots which came above his knees; black velvet pantaloons, with large folds; gray frock coat and cap, trimmed with astrakhan. The conversation turned on subjects of contemporary interest. They talked freely, and this very freedom seemed a pleasure to men who had been doomed to silence for three-and-thirty years. The Czar Nicholas had died on the 18th of February previous, and the Czar Alexander II had begun his reign by words and acts which opened a future career to Russia. Russians had ceased to hope. The old man—unlike most persons of his age who are always regretting the past—seemed glad to have witnessed a change of reign, and to breathe like a free man. He seemed like a man long buried in a dungeon and set at liberty; he enjoyed light, and air, and liberty.

sword around my waist to be ready for any contingency. My uneasiness increased when I saw my guide go down a small stair case leading into the cellars of the immense barracks, instead of carrying me out by the main door. He lighted the way by a small blind lantern. After several windings he went to a door whose very existence was unknown to me before. We had not met a soul in the whole building; it seemed as if the great barracks were deserted, and yet I knew it contained several thousand men; I thought indeed once or twice I saw a shadow flitting in the obscurity, but these faint shadows disappeared, or rather vanished in the darkness.

"When, after walking for some time, we came to a closed door, my guide rapped in a certain way. The door was instantly opened. When we entered it, I saw a man close it, and follow us; it was he who opened it so suddenly, and he was evidently waiting for us. The passage where we were was evidently a subterranean vault, some seven or eight feet wide; the humidity of the ground sweated through the bricks which lined it inside. About five hundred paces farther on, there was an iron grating gate, which my guide unlocked and fastened after he had let us in. On we went. I then began to remember that I had heard there was a subterranean passage between the Red Palace and the barracks of Paulovsk's grenadiers. I supposed that we were on our way to the palace. We reached another door, and rapped as he had rapped before; it opened as the other had done, and when we went through I saw a man sitting behind it. Now we walked up a staircase. It opened into the rooms on the ground floor, but the atmosphere showed that we were in a house carefully and comfortably warmed. This house soon assumed the proportions of a palace. Then all my doubts fled. I was led to the Emperor—the Emperor had sent for me—for me, an humble ensign in his guard. I remembered that young ensign he met in the street, and made get up behind his carriage, and raised successfully, and in less than fifteen minutes, Lieutenant, captain, major, colonel and general. But I dared not hope he sent for me with any such intention. We now reached another door still; a sentinel paced before it. My guide laid his hand on my shoulder, saying, 'Take care, you will be in the Emperor's presence in a minute.' He whispered to the sentinel; the latter stood on one side. My guide, I will not say unlocked the door, but opened it by touching a secret spring, or something of that sort, so at least it seemed to me. The noise we made in entering the room made a small man, dressed in the Prussian style, with boots which came half way up his thighs, a coat which hung down to his spurs, wearing a gigantic three-cornered hat, although he was in his bed chamber, and in full dress, although it was 12 o'clock at night; I saw the noise we made caused this man to turn around. I recognized the Emperor. It was not difficult, for I saw him every day of my life. I remembered that, at our review that morning, he had looked at me, and had called my captain to him, and had, keeping his eye fixed on me the while, asked him a good many questions in a whisper, and then had given some order to one of his staff; and all these recollections increased my uneasiness. 'Sir,' said my guide, 'there is the young ensign to whom you desired to speak.' The Emperor came up to me, and, as he was of very low stature, he stood on tip-toe to look at me. He doubtless saw that I was the same person he had selected that morning; for he nodded his head approvingly, and, turning on his heel, said, abruptly, to my guide, 'You may go.' My guide bowed and went out, and left me alone with the Emperor. I do declare to you, I had rather have been left alone with a lion in his cage than with that man in his chamber.

"The Emperor did not seem to pay the least attention to me at first. He walked rapidly up and down the room, stopping occasionally before a window with a movable pane in it, which he would open and breathe the cool night air. When he had inhaled it, he would return to a table where his snuff box was lying and take a pinch.— This was the window of his bed chamber, where he was afterward killed. I have heard that it has never been open since his death. I had time to examine everything in the room, each piece of furniture every chair. Near one of the windows was a writing desk, and on it a paper which was open. At last the Emperor seemed to perceive that I was in the room; he came up to me. His face seemed to me to be furious; nevertheless it was merely agitated by the contraction of his nerves. He stood just in front and said: 'Dust, dust, do you know you are nothing but dust, dust of the earth, and that I am lord over all and master of everything?' He never spoke to anybody, not even to ladies, except in this way; he called everything, and treated everybody as if they were nothing but dust and earth and ashes. I do not know how I managed to reply; 'Ay, sire, you are the elect of Heaven, the great arbiter of men's destiny.' 'Ah, ha!' said he, as he turned the back on me, and walked up and down the room again, and opened the movable pane of glass, and took another pinch of snuff, and came up to me a second time:—'You know, ay, sire, that when I command I must be obeyed without refusal, observations, commentary?' 'As we obey God, I know that, sire,' I answered. He stared at

me full in the face. There was such a strange expression in his eyes I could not return his glare. I looked another way.— He seemed satisfied with the influence he exerted on me. He attributed to respect that which was nothing but disgust. He went to his writing desk, took the open paper, read it again, folded it, placed it in an envelope, sealed the envelope—not with the imperial seal, but with a ring on his finger. Then he came to me. 'Recollect,' said he, 'that I have selected you from among a thousand to execute my orders, because I believe you will faithfully execute them.' 'I shall never forget the obedience in all things I owe to the Emperor.' 'Take this letter, carry it to the Governor of the fortress, go with him wherever he pleases to carry you, observe what he does and come back here, and tell me, 'I have seen it.' I took the letter and bowed. 'I have seen it, remember, I have seen it.' 'Ay, sire, 'Begone with ye!' He himself opened the door by which I entered; my guide was awaiting there for me. The Emperor closed the door, saying: 'Dust, dust, dust, remember!'

"I stood dumb, staggered with what I had seen and heard, until my guide said to me, 'Come on!' We walked on, but by a different path from that we came by. A sleigh waited for us in the court-yard, into which he and I got. The fortress gate opened on Fontanka bridge. The sleigh moved rapidly. We crossed the Campus, and crossed the Neva on the ice. The night was as dark as pitch, and the wind blew in a violent and lugubrious manner. We were soon at the fortress gate. My guide gave the soldier the password, and in it we entered. The sleigh was before the Governor's house.— The password given, we entered the Governor's house as he had entered the fortress. The Governor was in bed, asleep. He instantly rose when he heard the potent phrase, 'It is the Emperor's order!' He came to meet us, concealing his uneasiness with a smile. With a man like Paul there was no more security for gaolers than for captives, or executors than for victims. He looked at us as much as to say, 'What do you want?' My guide pointed to me to show that I was the principal. He looked at me more attentively; nevertheless, he hesitated about speaking to me. My youth probably surprised him. To end his evident anxiety, I gave him the Emperor's order without saying a word! He took it to the candle, looked at the seal, saw it bore the impress of the Emperor's private signet ring; the sign of secret orders. He bowed, made an almost imperceptible sign of the cross, and opened it. He read the order once, looked at me, read it a second time, and said to me, 'You are to see it? Yes, I am to see it.' 'What are you to see?' 'You know.' 'But do you know?' 'I do not.' He remained pensive a moment, and then he said, 'Didn't you come in a sleigh?' 'Yes.' 'How many persons can your sleigh hold?' 'Three.' 'Does this gentleman come with us?' he pointed to my guide, 'I am to wait.' 'Where?' 'Here.' 'What are you going to wait for?' 'Until it is over.' 'Very well.' 'Prepare a second sleigh,' said he, speaking to an attendant; 'select four strong soldiers; let one of them take a lever, the other a hammer, and the two others, hatchets.' The attendant so addressed instantly left the room. The Governor turned to me, saying, 'Come along, and you'll see.' He led the way. I followed him. A turnkey walked behind us. We went on until he got opposite the Exchange, as well as I could suspect, judging from the distance I remembered. The Governor pointed to a door.— The turnkey opened it, went in, lighted a lantern, and showed us the way. We went down ten steps, and found a double file of dungeons, each one side; but we did not stop here. We went down ten more steps, but we did not stop here. Then we went down five other steps, twenty-five steps in all. Here we stopped. The doors were all numbered. The Governor halted before a door marked 'No. 11.' He made a sign to the turnkey. It seemed as if in this house of graves the quick lost power of speech as well as the dead. It was a good many degrees below zero out of doors. In the depths where we were, this cold was increased by a humidity which penetrated the very bones. The marrow in my bones was frozen, and yet I wiped the thick beads of perspiration pouring from my forehead.

"The turnkey opened the door. We went down six steep, slippery steps, and entered a dungeon some eight feet square; I thought I could discover by the glimmering lantern a human form moving at the bottom of the dungeon. The Governor remained on the last step, for the floor of the dungeon was covered with a humid slime several inches deep. I heard a low and strange murmur, and I looked to see whence it came; I discovered a loop-hole a foot long by four inches wide. The wind came through the aperture and made a current with the opened door. I saw now what was the noise I heard: It was the ripples of the Neva beating against the walls of the fortress, for the dungeon was below the level of the river.— 'Get up and dress,' said the Governor. I wondered to whom he gave this order, so I told the turnkey to light up the dungeon. The turnkey directed his lantern's rays toward the bottom of the dungeon. I then saw an old man rise from the floor. His hair and his beard were very long, and as white as the driven snow. He doubtless had been incarcerated in this dungeon habitually in the clothes he wore when arrested; but he had

"One fault, Ursule! Why Gustave de Felsheim has run through two fortunes—his own and then his mother's. He is a gambler, and a rouse besides."
"Well, Eulalie, that's just the kind of a man to take a woman's heart. I am rich and I dare say I could reform Gustave."
"Reform—do you think that possible?"
"Well, there would be more excitement in marrying him and trying it than in marrying such a piece of perfection as your M. Mirecourt; a man who, of high family, dropped his title because he was poor; a man who studied at an age when all other men were amusing themselves; a man who was never guilty of any of those charming excesses that vary life; a man whose name was never connected with a single intrigue."
"Stop there!" said Eulalie; "I can at any rate correct this defect. M. Mirecourt is said to be the present chosen favorite of the celebrated queen of the vaudeville, Mme. Doche."
"Just what one would expect of these model men," said Ursule, her lip curling with scorn. "To take up with such a woman as that! A—well, you what know she is. I hated M. Mirecourt before—I despise him now."
"Well, I may be mistaken," said Eulalie; "he may only visit her on account of the play he is bringing out, which was accepted through her influence, and in which she is to bear the principal part."
"Mme. Doche, indeed! Why, she has red hair; she is not even pretty—not even young."
"Ursule, this may all be true to us, but men admire her universally; and you—I have seen you admire her."
"On the stage, certainly, as I do a mountebank on a light-rope, or a picture in a gallery. I certainly shall not speak to M. Mirecourt again; I don't think any respectable woman ought to—connecting his name with that of such a woman, and taking to the stage, too, after his polytechnic honors. Ha! ha! it is perfectly laughable."
"You are a good later, Ursule," said Eulalie. "I never saw you so excited. I wonder what you would do if you loved?"
"Loved! I never shall love any one—Good bye, till we meet at the Italiens to-night. I have invited Gustave de Felsheim to visit us in my box."
"Then M. Mirecourt will come, of course, they are inseparable."
"Well, you can entertain him; I shall take no notice of him."
So saying, Mme. de Sorel proceeded to her carriage, and, whispering something to her footman, who in turn whispered it to the coachman, the carriage drove off.
In about a quarter of an hour the carriage stopped in the Rue du Rocher, in front of a neat little private house; and, after inquiring of the porter who answered the summons of the knocker whether the lady of the house was at home, Mme. de Sorel descended from her carriage and entered the house.
She walked up the well-carpeted stair through several tasteful, simple and richly furnished drawing rooms, and was finally introduced into a small boudoir, where she was told by the respectful, neat servant, to await his mistress.
Ursule looked round her with intense curiosity. For a woman of her class to be where she now was—in the boudoir of the most renowned belle of the demi-monde—a taste which all her daughters have inherited from her.
The walls, hung with dark blue damask, had no ornament but a small gilded moulding, one large mirror, and a beautiful copy of Guido's Cenci, supposed to bear a great resemblance to the owner of the mansion.— The light came through rose-tinted glass from above. The furniture was in dark oak of the austere fashion of Louis XIII.— On the heavy marble table in the centre was a golden vase filled with hot-house flowers. There were no gawgaws, no picture books, no playthings for grown up people. All was simple, severe and in admirable taste. Presently the blue velvet portiere was drawn aside, and Mme. Ursule de Sorel stood in the presence of Mme. Doche.
Mme. Doche, on perceiving Ursule, with the quickness of woman's tact, immediately understood that her visitor, unlike all her other visitors, owed not her position or elegance to her beauty, striking and excessive as it was. Mme. Doche stood for a moment gazing at her, and Ursule, spite of her good breeding, fixed her eyes curiously and searchingly upon the woman who stood before her.
She was just above the middle height, but her round, slender, yet exquisitely proportioned figure gave her the appearance of being taller. She was dressed in a high, tight-fitting velvet dress of the deepest brown, a point-lace collar was round her throat, and contrary to the fashion, the sleeves fitted tightly to the arm, having the old heavy point lace about the wrists. Her hands were exquisite, and had literally the transparency of alabaster. Her complexion was as pale and transparent as her hands; there was not a particle of color save in the full lips, which were of the deepest scarlet.— Her nose was too short for Grecian; the oval of her face was too prolonged; her forehead was low, and her hair bound in immense masses round and round her small head, was unmistakably red. But her eyes—here was the resemblance to the Cenci—it was there were the light blue which accompanies hair of her color, but large, deep, lustrous,