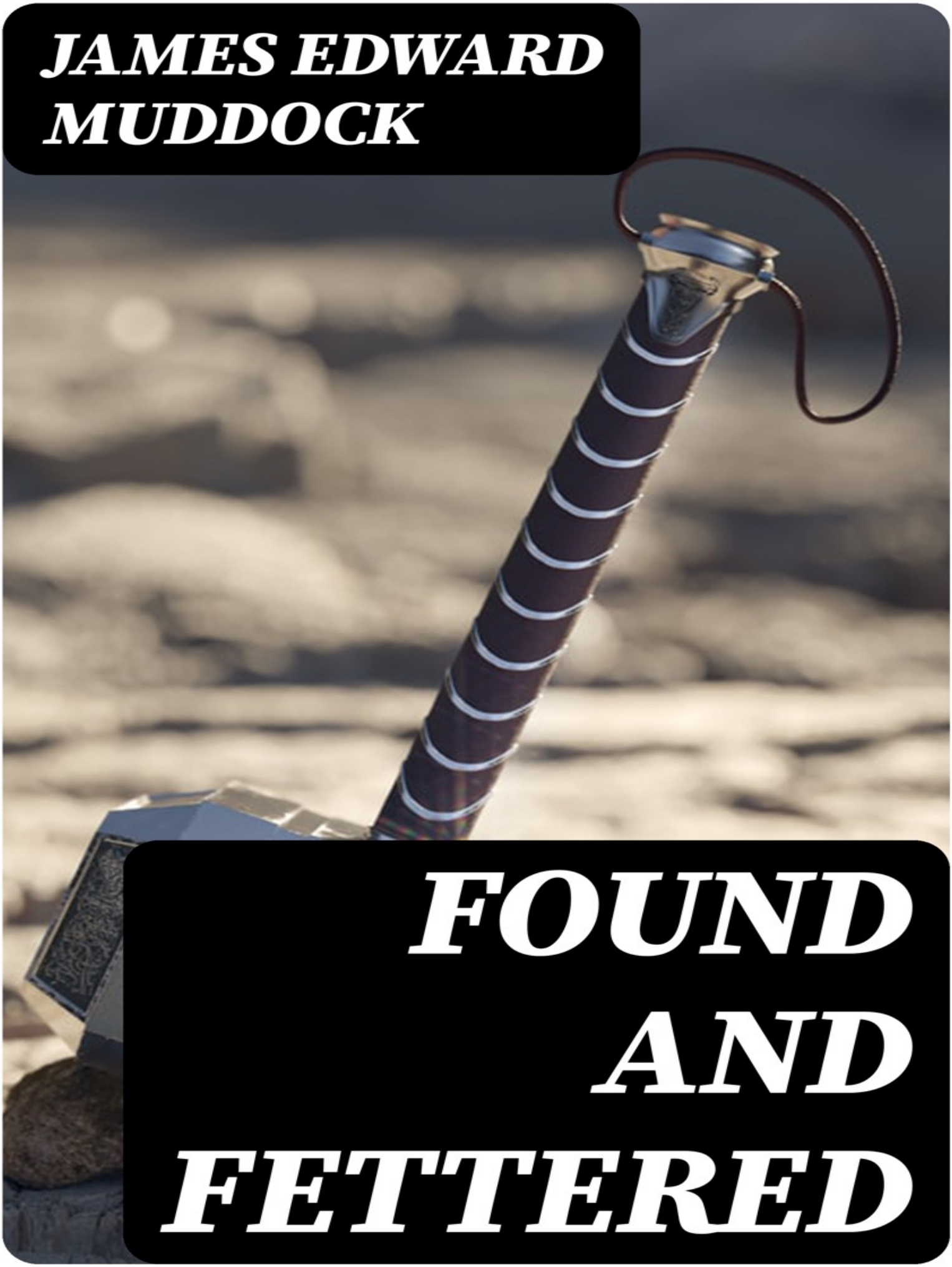
JAMES EDWARD MUDDOCK



FOUND AND FETTERED

James Edward Muddock

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1. THE TAKING OF TRESKIN, THE RUSSIAN ASSASSIN.

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IT is not *inapropos* for me to preface the remarkable story I have to tell by stating that, speaking in a general way, I am not in sympathy with things Russian. In spite of what may be said to the contrary by those who have an interest in misrepresenting facts, there is pretty conclusive evidence that the great and unwieldy Russian nation has in many respects scarcely emerged from mediaeval barbarism. It is impossible for any free-minded person to travel through Russia at the present day without being made painfully aware of this. It might very aptly and somewhat epigrammatically be said that every man in Russia who rules is a tyrant, and every man who does not rule is a slave. Freedom, as we understand it, is unknown in the dominions of the Czar. The press is muzzled, the mouths of public speakers are muzzled, and if a Russian or a foreigner dwelling in Russia holds views that are adverse to the ruling powers, let him not express them if he values his liberty, his happiness, his life. The stranger travelling in the country is liable to be pounced down upon at any moment by some Government myrmidon, who, in his narrow-mindedness, thinks he sees an enemy in him. And woe betide the man who gets within the clutches of the law. Under some frivolous pretext or another he may be detained without trial and without examination, until he moulders and his heart

rends in twain with unbearable despair, suspense, and hope deferred.

The Russian form of government is as despotical as it is obsolete, while those entrusted with its administration are not as a rule men distinguished by marked ability or enlightenment, but they are those who have friends at Court, and who have given evidence of being haters of the people. In no other country in the world can you find people sunk in such besotted ignorance as are the masses of Russia. Foreign literature of all kinds is absolutely unknown to them, while such native papers as may come into their hands are written through Russian spectacles, and with the fear—which is almost greater than that of death—of the Government censor. Hundreds of persons are at the present moment languishing in Siberia for no other reason than that in some unguarded moment they allowed their feelings to betray them into a too free expression of opinion. Then followed the inevitable result. They were arrested, accused of being "dangerous to the State," subjected in some cases to a trial that was all a farce, but as often as not there was no trial at all. They were then kept in some dreadful prison for periods ranging from months to years, and finally had to march with chained gangs into Siberia. To the world generally all this is a matter of tradition, if not of history, but to those who have travelled in the country with open eyes and unshackled minds it is more than tradition; it is a pitiable, a hideous truth.

Although I have thus freely expressed my opinion on the Government of Russia, let it not be supposed for a single moment that I countenance in any way the methods

adopted by the revolutionary societies in their efforts to redress their wrongs. Tyranny cannot be arrested by still greater tyranny, while the wild justice of revenge can in the end only serve to bring disaster on the heads of the weaker party. Yet, if ever political crimes can find justification in shameless oppression, they can do so in Russia; and in Treskin's case this was particularly so. The agitation that was caused in England at the time Treskin was arrested in London through my instrumentality will not be forgotten by those whose memories can carry them back for a generation. I venture to think, however, that it will add to the interest of my story, if I relate it in all its detail, from the very beginning to the pitiless end.

Some time before the Crimean War a young Pole by birth, named Egór Treskin, was living in St. Petersburg; he was employed as a clerk in a bank, and being very studious, and very industrious, he devoted his spare time to teaching languages in one of the public schools. In this capacity he met a young lady, who was destined to become his wife. She was a Russian, and an orphan. Her father had held a Government appointment as an inspector of mines, and in that capacity had ample opportunity of seeing the iniquity of the Russian exile system. Moved to deep pity and sympathy by what came under his notice, he allowed his feelings to get the better of his discretion, and his complaints of the tyranny and cruelty that were practised by governors, managers, overseers, and others, were many The result being he incurred the hatred of this class of people, and became a marked man. Revenge was not long in following. He was denounced as a conspirator. By some means he was

lured to a house of a well-known political suspect, who was under surveillance. The man was then accused of having visited this house. He could not deny it, and was at once arrested. In this country such a thing would be laughed at, for here you may spout treason and act treason to your heart's content, and nobody will take any notice of you. But in Russia it is different; only let the faintest whisper of treason be breathed against a man in that benighted land, and the chances are it seals his doom.

In this unfortunate fellow's case, he had too many political and other enemies for him to hope to escape from the effects of the accusation. The more he tried to explain, the more deeply did he seem to become involved. He was like a bird which once gets the ensnaring lime upon its wings. All its efforts to free itself from the tenacious substance are futile, and serve but to exhaust it. So in Russia with a man who is suspected of treason. Hope has gone for him. He can never be the same again. In the case I am citing the man was detained, first in one prison and then in another, for five years, and, having been financially and socially ruined, he was transported to Siberia, leaving a delicate wife behind, and three young children—two sons and a daughter, Catherine. The mother, soon after the departure of her husband, died, and the children were brought up by a relative. Three years later the father was shot in attempting to escape from his place of exile.

When Egór Treskin first made Catherine's acquaintance, she was about twenty and very beautiful. Her father, however, having been a political prisoner, his children were subjected to a shameful system of espionage. Catherine, in

particular, had suffered great annoyance, but she resolved to live it down, and was desirous of qualifying herself for a teacher. Treskin fell in love with her, and as soon as that was known, he was secretly warned that she was a member of a tainted family, therefore must be tainted herself. This was infamous, but, unhappily, it is common in Russia. Although Treskin knew, no doubt, the seriousness of the warning, he allowed love to prevail, and married Catherine. The first year or two of their married life would seem to have been happy enough. A child was born to them and there was nothing apparently to disturb their serenity. But the ways of the Russian Government are inscrutable and mysterious, like those of the "Heathen Chinee." One day, during Treskin's absence at his business, two police officers entered his house, and arrested his wife, on the baseless and shameless charge of conspiring against the State. When the husband returned he found that his wife had been dragged off, with her helpless infant, to some prison. Distracted, he flew to headquarters, and begged to know, firstly, of what his wife was accused; secondly, where she had been taken to; thirdly, he craved to be allowed to see her. With the brutal cynicism so characteristic of the Russian official, he was told that he had better go away and hold his tongue, lest he himself should be placed under arrest. It was hinted that he had chosen to marry a suspected woman in spite of warning given to him, and he must therefore abide by the consequences.

For two long, dark, dreary, and dismal years Treskin moved heaven and earth in his endeavours to try and see his wife and child, but without effect, until at last it was

intimated to him that she was to be exiled to Siberia. Broken-hearted and almost mad with grief, he vowed that he would accompany her. At last, with a diabolical refinement of cruelty, he was allowed to see her as she was on the eve of departure for the far east of Siberia. She had grown haggard and old with suffering. Her baby was dead, and it was only too evident her mind was unhinged.

Treskin applied for and obtained permission to accompany his unhappy wife, and they travelled together for many dreadful months, suffering the horrors of the steppes, and the hardships and privations of the dreadful journey. Poor Catherine's strength was unequal to the strain, and somewhere in the Trans-Baikal provinces she was stricken with mortal illness, and on her deathbed she told her husband a revolting and fearsome story in which a high Russian official, Count Cherékof, who was an inspector of prisons, was implicated. She said that she had intended to keep the shame and suffering she had endured a secret, but felt that she could not die until she had revealed it to her husband.

Over his dead and outraged wife's body Treskin swore an oath to God that he would be revenged, and having buried her in a convict's grave he set his face westward again, brooding deeply over his shame and wrong. In due time he found himself once again in St. Petersburg, but he was so changed that his most intimate friends failed to recognize him. Secretly and silently he allied himself with the enemies of the Government and became one of the most dangerous of conspirators, most pronounced of Nihilists. His wrongs

had turned his heart to stone and he was pitiless, terrible, and deadly.

I cannot follow his career in all its details during the three succeeding years after his return from Siberia, but it may be summarized as one of arch plotting against the Government and the institutions of his country. There is no doubt his wrongs and shame had made him a dangerous and insidious enemy, and it is certainly remarkable that during this period he managed to elude vigilance and escape suspicion.

It would seem that during all this time he never forgot his enemy, but no opportunity occurred for him to carry out his deadly act of vengeance. Count Cherékof had been sent on some secret mission to France and England. But Treskin evidently knew how to wait. He bided his time, and his time came at last. The Count returned to Russia, and for some reason or other was soon after entertained at a public banquet. That night late a note was slipped into the Count's hand as he was in the act of leaving the place where he had been entertained. The note was from a lady of his acquaintance, and begged for an interview. The Count, it appears, had drunk freely, and probably it was due to that that he displayed a recklessness which was fatal to him. He told his servants that he had an appointment to keep, and though he was pressed to allow attendants to accompany him he refused to do so, saying he was quite able to take care of himself, and, hiring a public carriage, he was driven to a street in the northern part of the city. There he alighted, and what followed is shrouded in mystery to a considerable extent. But what is certain is that he went to a house at the top of the street and a little later that house was found to be

on fire. An alarm was raised, the engines were called out, and the fire extinguished before much harm had been done. On entering the smoking building, the firemen found on a bed in one of the rooms the body of Count Cherékof. He was partly undressed. A dagger was thrust up to the hilt in his breast, and a bullet had penetrated his brain. Attached to the handle of the dagger by a piece of ribbon was a card, on which was written:—

"Thus are my wrongs avenged, and
Thus are destroyed the enemies of the people."

It was pretty clear now that the Count had been lured to the house under false pretences, and there assassinated. Whether the house had been wilfully set on fire to hide all traces of the crime or not was not proved; but in all probability the conflagration was accidental, otherwise what would have been the use of the card on the dead man's breast?

The strange tragedy, of course, caused an immense sensation in Russia, for the Count belonged to a very old and aristocratic family, being closely allied, in fact, to the Royal family itself. The Count, however, had never been popular amongst the people. Between the Russian nobility and the lower classes there is a wide line of demarcation, and they hate each other. Oppression in its very worst form is exercised by those in power, and consequently they are detested. It can well be understood, therefore, that the Count's dreadful and tragic end begot no sympathy amongst those over whom he had so long tyrannized, but official and aristocratic Russia was stirred to its depths. The

murder showed that the people were still dangerous and to be feared, and something like a panic displayed itself amongst the high-born and the favoured ones of royalty who knew in their hearts that they were all marked men and would meet with a similar doom to that which had overtaken the Count if opportunity presented itself. They lived, in fact, over a mine that might at any moment explode, and so a wail went forth about the inadequacy of the police, and a bitter demand was made that the Count's slayer should be brought to justice. Arrests were made wholesale and indiscriminately. It was as if a fisherman, wishing to catch some particular fish, cast his net into the sea and drew up thousands of other fish which he destroyed in the hope that the particular one he wanted might be amongst them.

It came out then that for some little time previous Treskin had been suspected, and now he was sought for and could not be found. His lodgings were searched and evidence discovered that he had been mixed up in a revolutionary movement that, had it succeeded, would all but have turned Russia upside down. The officials were aghast, the nobles terrified, for the conspiracy was so widespread, its aims so sweeping. More wholesale arrests followed. Men, women, young and old, as well as delicate children, were immured in the dreadful prisons, and the lady—a Miss Dicheskuld—who had sent the letter to the General, which was the means of luring him to the house, was, of course, arrested. There had been an intrigue between her and the Count. He had treated her badly, and in order to avenge herself on him, she had readily joined the conspirators. The letter she had written led the Count to suppose that she was desirous of a

reconciliation, and so he had fallen easily into the trap set for him.

This unfortunate young woman was threatened with death if she did not denounce her co-conspirator, and under the fear of this threat she confessed that it was Treskin's hand that had done the Count to death.

It is not an exaggeration to say that law in Russia is based upon a system of *persecution*, not prosecution as it is in most countries that lay claim to be ranked amongst the civilized nations of the earth. Let a man once bring himself under the cognizance of Russian law, and for ever afterwards, so long as he may live, he is a marked man. He can no more escape from its meshes than can a fly escape when once it has entangled itself in the web of the crafty spider. Only too painfully was this exemplified in the case of Treskin's ill-starred wife, and such cases might be multiplied *ad infinitum*. The people of the Czar's kingdom are ruled by terrorism in its worst form. The chained slave may writhe under the lash, but he cannot resist it. The caged tiger may roar never so loud, but his roaring has no effect on those who are protected by the iron bars. Give the Russian masses freedom, and what should we see? A mighty whirlwind of human passion—the result of centuries of cruel wrong, of hateful greed, of bitter oppression, of the exercise of power against right—sweeping from one end of the great Empire to the other—a whirlwind that would smite the nobles into the dust and hurl the Czar from his throne, crushed and shattered. This expression of feeling is the outcome of knowledge that has come to me since I unhappily gave up Treskin to his pitiless persecutors. Had I known then what I

know now I would have allowed my right hand to have withered before I had stirred a limb to aid the hunters.

If Mademoiselle Dicheskuld thought that in denouncing Treskin she would save herself, she must have been singularly ignorant of her country's law, or otherwise she was the victim of some strange delusion. Death might have been her portion otherwise. As it was, something more dreadful than death was meted out to her. After the hideous mockery of a trial that was not a trial, but an outrage on justice, she was sentenced to banishment to Verkhoyausk, in the Arctic solitudes of Northern Asia. What became of her I know not, but that she perished long before the awful journey of thousands of miles was ended is only too probable.

It might be thought that this act of pitiless vengeance would have satisfied the dripping fangs of the hideous monster termed Russian justice; but not a bit of it. Treskin still lived. Treskin was still at large. What mattered it that his wretched wife had been cruelly persecuted and done to death? What mattered it that his heart had been wrenched and torn and his brain turned by the shame and wrong he had suffered at the hands of a titled scoundrel? All that counted for nothing. He had slain the scoundrel, and that was a high crime in the sight of the Administration. He must be hunted and tracked until snared, and then—ah, what then! We shall see.

Everyone who has travelled in France knows to what an extent police espionage is carried on in that country, but it is nothing compared to what the espionage is in Russia. There your dearest relative may be in the secret pay of the

law, and your lightest whisper against the powers that be may lay you unexpectedly in a prison; and yet great crimes are committed, men and women escape, and revolutionary meetings are held. Nevertheless when once a man is suspected, he may be certain that he will have no peace. He will be shadowed night and day. His goings out and comings in will be marked. He is, so to speak, watched through a microscope, so that the most trivial act, which elsewhere would be treated with contempt, is magnified into an offence of the greatest importance. And when the hue and cry has been started it is taken up and repeated from every province, every town, village, and hamlet, and from every housetop, every street corner, every bazaar, market, and shop. A "suspect" who is wanted is, in the most literal sense, hunted. There was no exception made in Treskin's case. He was denounced as one of the most dangerous conspirators and criminals who had ever shown themselves in antagonism to the beneficent institutions of their country, and to the benign and humane rule of the "Little Father," the White Czar. Such a blackened ruffian must be taken. For the good of the countless millions of the free and happy people of enlightened Russia, he would have to be made an example of. The very earth would throb with indignation while he walked upon it. What mattered it that he had been wronged, outraged. What mattered it that his wife and babe had been torn from him, and murdered in the name of the law? What mattered it that his home had been broken up, his life blighted, his heart shattered? These were petty trifles unworthy of serious consideration. A noble of Russia had been assassinated by a plebeian, and a noble of Russia

couldn't do wrong, and so his slayer would have to be taken. It is one thing, however, to make resolutions, and another to carry them out. Russia was ransacked, but Treskin found not. By the extensive circulation of public announcements people were warned of the serious penalties they incurred if they gave harbourage to the hunted criminal, or afforded him shelter or support of any kind.

As is usually the case under such circumstances, the officials and the police were seized with a sort of panic. They saw conspiracy in the most harmless gatherings of the people, and wholesale arrests were made. But still the man who was so very much wanted was not forthcoming. Amongst the class to which Count Cherékof had belonged there was loud discontent expressed at the failure of the myrmidons of the law to seize the dreadful Treskin.

They declared that, so long as he was at large, no one of position could sleep safely in his bed. But protest, grumbling, and fear were unproductive of any result, unless it was of proving how unjust and unreasonable men and women can be. Treskin had gone, and, when two years had passed, it may safely be said that in a general way he was forgotten. Russia is always so busy with imprisoning, slaying, or sending political and other offenders to Siberia, that her attention cannot always be occupied with an individual, and so the excitement begotten by the death of Count Cherékof died down, and Treskin's name was uttered no more until one day a strange chance placed his enemies in possession of a clue to his whereabouts.

The clue was furnished to them in this wise. There had come to England as an exile a man by the name of Joseph

Pushkin. He was a Russian who had groaned with sorrow at the iniquities of Russian officials and the injustice of Russian law. Of good birth and with ample means at his disposal he might, had he been disposed to suppress his feelings and keep his thoughts to himself, have lived unmolested and have even gained high office in the State. But he was made of different stuff. His was not the nature to remain silent when he saw his humbler countrymen smitten into the dust with oppression and wrong; so he raised his voice, he used his pen, he brought all his influence to bear in a useless endeavour to sweep away the abuses which were such a standing disgrace in the country of his birth. But it was as if a man had attempted to overturn a mountain by pressing his shoulders against it. Pushkin's efforts were just as futile. He was persecuted, he was imprisoned, then banished to the wilds of Siberia. He managed, however, to make his escape *en route*, and succeeded in reaching our own land of liberty Then he went about lecturing in order that some truths of darkest Russia should be known to the enlightened people of these islands. In one of these lectures he alluded to Treskin's case. He did not mention him by name, but told the story of the wretched man's life as evidence of the barbarities that Christian Russia could perpetrate in the name of justice and right. One of the lynx-eyed spies, who resided in England in the pay of Russia, recognized the hero of the story. This spy was a woman, be it said to her disgrace. She was a writer in the public press, and having more regard for the blood-money that was paid to her than she had for the truth, she constantly described the Czar as a just and humane man, and Russia as a country of beneficent

and righteous laws. When she learned that Treskin was in England she lost no time in sending word to her employers, and then there came to London one Prevboski, a Russian detective of considerable fame in his own country. He was authorized to demand Treskin's extradition on the grounds that he was not a political refugee, but a common murderer who had been guilty of a revolting and cold-blooded crime. Of course, it goes without saying not one word was uttered of the fearful wrongs that Treskin bad suffered.

The arguments that Prevboski used, or rather the representations he was authorized to make in the name of the Government of his country, prevailed here, and after considerable discussion it was decided that Treskin should be extradited. But then came the question, Where was he? He had to be found, and the duty of finding him devolved upon me.

At this time my mind was a perfect *tabula rasa* so far as Treskin was concerned. Up to then I had never even heard his name, consequently I was in entire ignorance of his story, though I knew a good deal of Russian administration and Russian life, my knowledge being derived from residence and travel in the country. I was therefore not prepossessed by any means in favour of Russia. But I did not allow this to weigh when I undertook to look for the fugitive. He was represented to me as a scoundrel of the deepest dye. His crime was pictured as of exceptional atrocity. His victim, it was said, was one of the kindest, most just, virtuous, and humane of men. The cause of the crime—so I was informed—was an insensate and utterly groundless jealousy on the part of the "trebly-dyed villain" Treskin.

Now, making allowance for over-colouring and exaggeration, which your Russian official is much addicted to, it appeared as if Treskin was a vulgar murderer undeserving of sympathy; and it was to the interest of law and order that he should be taken.

Prevboski was a very typical Russian, or rather let me say he was a typical Russian official, for between the official and non-official there is a vast difference. He believed—or affected to believe—that the masses were very much like the wolves which haunt the wild and lonely steppes and the weird dark forests of his native land. They were dangerous when free, and chains and bars were the only things to keep them in subjection. He considered the mode of government and the forms of administration peculiar to his native land perfect, and a model for all other countries, and he regarded the Czar as a ruler by Divine right, who could not err, and who could commit no sin. Prevboski spoke no word of English, so that he was at a disadvantage, and it was arranged that he was to remain quietly in London and wait the result of my efforts.

Necessarily a good deal of publicity had been given to the fact that an application had been made for Treskin's extradition, and this made the task of taking him more difficult. For to be forewarned is to be forearmed, and unless he was an absolute fool he would take means to effectually conceal himself.

The reader need scarcely be told that in London there is a relatively vast Russian population. Many of these are exiles by necessity; others have banished themselves in the hope—often a delusive one—that they will secure a share of

English gold. But under any circumstances they enjoy a freedom here impossible in their own country; nor need they go in fear of molestation by the authorities unless they break the law. A great number of these people are Jews, and they may be found congregating together in little colonies in the East End. I began my quest by going into these colonies and making inquiries calculated to elicit some particulars of Treskin's whereabouts. Of course I had been informed that Pushkin had alluded to his compatriot in his lectures, and, therefore, the natural inference was that Pushkin knew where the fugitive was. But it was not in the least likely that he would betray his hiding-place. Having failed, however, in my East End search, I deemed it desirable to get into touch with Pushkin, and he being a public man it was not difficult to find him out.

I ascertained that he was a daily visitor to a restaurant in Soho which was kept by a Russian and was mainly supported by Russians. Here, having supped or dined in Russian fashion, he was to be found nightly, when in town, absorbed in his favourite game of chess, of which he was a passionate lover. I, too, began to frequent the restaurant, and had soon scraped acquaintance with Pushkin; and being myself a fair hand at chess I was enabled to challenge him and so strengthen the acquaintanceship. He was a reserved man under ordinary circumstances, but I soon learned that he could be drawn on Russian subjects, and waxed warm and indignant when the government of his country was alluded to. After a time, when I became more familiar with him, I traded on this weakness, and one evening ventured to ask his opinion of Treskin.

"Ah," he exclaimed, "they will never take Treskin—at least, I hope not. It would be a crime if the British Government should give him up."

"But he has been guilty of a crime," I remarked.

"He has," answered Pushkin, as an angry light gleamed from his dark eyes; "a justifiable crime."

"But surely you do not mean to say that murder is justifiable," said I.

Pushkin looked at me steadfastly for some moments, then he made answer:

"Sir, are you not aware that there are times when murder is not murder? When to remove a tyrant, an outrager of women, an oppressor of men, finds acceptance in the sight of heaven."

"I was not aware of that," I replied, somewhat ironically.

"Then you have much to learn," he retorted.

"So far as my knowledge extends," I said, "I have always understood that we are scripturally informed that 'vengeance is the Lord's.'"

"And yet we read in the Scriptures of men slaying men," he answered with something like a sneer on his face. "But do you not believe that there are times in our human affairs when a man may be made an instrument in the hands of God to remove a tyrant from the earth which he encumbers and darkens?"

I declined to express an opinion on that point, preferring to keep my views to myself; but I urged upon Pushkin that his countryman had certainly outraged man's laws in taking upon himself to slay a fellow without trial and without warning. This caused the Russian to become more and more

excited. He declared that Treskin had done a great and noble act; that Count Cherékof, being so full of iniquity and evil, his death was in the nature of a blessing, and that Treskin, instead of being prosecuted, should be hailed as one of the saviours of society I dissented from this view, whereat Pushkin grew more angry, and he vowed solemnly that he would do everything that lay in his power to do to defeat the "infamous design," as he phrased it, of the British Government to give up Treskin, and he added with fiery emphasis:

"But, take my word for it, sir, Treskin will not be given up, for the simple reason that Treskin will not be found."

"Unless he is dead," I responded, "I should say it is highly probable that sooner or later Treskin will be unearthed."

"Treskin is not dead," cried Pushkin, with a bitter smile, "and yet he will baffle the hunters."

I shrugged my shoulders, as if I wished him to understand I was indifferent one way or the other, but my views did not coincide with his, for I thought that, even if I myself failed in the task I had undertaken, somebody else would in all human probability succeed.

My argument with Pushkin had conclusively proved one thing to me, which was that he was not likely to betray his friend if he could help it. But it was very evident that he was aware of Treskin's hiding place, and I set to work to try and think out some plan for getting his secret from him. The only reasonable one, as it seemed to me, was to shadow him, in the hope that he would afford me a clue. Before leaving him on this particular night I said, as a sort of parting shot fired

apparently at random, and yet with a definite and deliberate aim:

"Well, if your friend is still in England, you may depend upon it he will be tracked down in time."

"Oh, my friend is still in England," was the answer, with a smile of self-assurance, "but you may depend upon it he will not be tracked down."

To some extent Pushkin had given himself away in his answer, and my object was so far served. He had admitted that Treskin was still in the United Kingdom, and deductively I felt it highly probable that he was in London, because London, being such a huge place, and its population made up of such a heterogeneous collection of nationalities, a man may more easily hide himself there than elsewhere. In London it is not a difficult matter for a man to lose his individuality, so to speak. You become part and parcel of a great whole, but the immensity of the mass of which you are a composing atom causes you in a general way to be no more conspicuous or distinguishable than one grain of sand is distinguishable from another grain of sand on the seashore. This may seem little more than theory, but it is daily borne out by fact, and many a hunted man has been able to lie *perdu* in the teeming Babylon until the scent has grown cold, and then he has slipped away for good and all. However, vast as London is, it narrows one's sphere of inquiry and action when you are assured that the person you are seeking is one amongst the millions. To him who watches and waits the law of chances are in his favour, and these chances are immeasurably increased when the watcher brings a trained mind to bear on the task he has in

hand; for then chance is reduced to something like certainty. There is an old proverb which expresses the fundamental essence of a great truth. It is, "Birds of a feather flock together." He who makes a study of human ways knows how apposite the proverb is to men and women. The ignorant gravitate to the ignorant; the refined to the refined; foreigners to their kind, and so on. A study of this law, which may be said for all practicable purposes to be immutable, enables anyone acquainted with the habits of a particular person whom we may be anxious to discover to turn to the quarter where he is most likely to discover him. Acting on the principle, therefore, I deemed it highly probable that, assuming Treskin was in London, he would be within touch of his compatriots, and particularly with Pushkin. So I watched Pushkin with, if I may so express it, a sleepless vigilance. I was morally certain that sooner or later he would inadvertently deliver his friend into my hands. Let me add point to my statement already made that at this time I believed Treskin to be a mere vulgar assassin, whose deed called for the very severest punishment which his fellow-man could award.

It was about three weeks later—that is, three weeks after I had commenced my shadowing of Pushkin—that I tracked him one day to a villa residence in the "classic regions" of St. John's Wood. It was a small detached house standing in about half an acre of well-kept ground. On the gate was affixed a brass plate bearing the legend, "Madame Marie Lablanc, Teacher of Languages."

Pushkin remained in the house about two hours. Then he came out and went away. A dozen reasons, of course, might

have been advanced to explain the motive of his visit to madame, but I said to myself, "When a man goes to a house and stays there for two hours, he must be well acquainted with the inmate or inmates, therefore the assumption is that Pushkin is very familiar with Madame Lablanc."

Arguing thus, I felt sure that madame and the man I was shadowing were friends. That being so, it was likely the lady might be in possession of information, which would be valuable if she could be induced to impart it. Lablanc was a French name, and I was curious to know what connection there was between this French lady and Pushkin, the Russian. A few inquiries pushed in the proper quarter elicited the fact that Pushkin was a pretty frequent visitor to that villa, and as it did not seem to me probable he went there for the sake of studying foreign languages, I thought it curious, to say the least, and I resolved on interviewing Madame Lablanc.

Three days later I knocked at the door of the villa, and inquired for madame, and a natty maidservant showed me into a small parlour that was strongly impregnated with the odour of stale tobacco. In fact I sniffed that odour the moment the front door was opened for my admission, and this was pretty conclusive evidence that someone residing there was a heavy smoker. A few minutes later the door of the parlour was pushed open, and an exceedingly pretty woman of about thirty years of age entered, and with a slight bow inquired my business in the English tongue, that bore not the slightest trace of a foreign accent.

"May I inquire if you are Madame Lablanc?" I asked.

"Oh, no," she answered, "lam madame's niece."

"But you are not French," I remarked with a smile.

"No, my aunt has English connections by marriage," was the somewhat haughty answer.

"I had no intention of being rude," I said apologetically. "May I see your aunt? I wish to make some inquiries about her terms for teaching French and German."

"I will give you a prospectus," replied the lady.

"I should prefer if you will allow me to see madame," I answered.

"Well, you will have to wait for a little while, as she is engaged at present."

I intimated that I was quite prepared to wait, and the niece left me. Twenty minutes or so later the door once more opened, and there entered a solidly-built, neatly-dressed woman with grey hair worn over the temples, brushed behind the ears, and done up in a knob at the back of the head. She wore dark blue spectacles, so that it was impossible to see her eyes, but she had a sallow complexion and a haggard, careworn-looking face. She spoke English fluently, but with an unmistakable accent, and her manner was subdued and reserved. She told me that she taught seven different languages, including Polish and Russian. The result of my interview was I arranged to take lessons in French and German, and to commence on the following day. French I spoke fluently, and German well, but I did not tell her that, and true to the appointment I was there on the following day at the appointed hour. I should mention that she had asked me if I wished to receive my instruction in a class or privately. Of course I decided on the latter, as my purpose would be best served thereby.

There was something about Madame Lablanc that struck me as peculiar. Her voice was harsh and rough, her movements ungraceful, her manner reserved, cold, and brusque. My aim, of course, was to find out if she knew anything of Treskin; but she was so strangely reserved that I did not think it likely she would allow herself to be drawn out, for certainly she showed no disposition to give information on any subject except that in which she was engaged, namely, her teaching. Once or twice I ventured to ask her a question about Russia, and she promptly snuffed me out by saying peremptorily:

"Monsieur, you are here to learn, not to question, except in so far as you may require explanations of any point you don't understand."

I bowed as if thoroughly rebuked, but I resolved to try what I could make of the niece. The one difficulty in the way was to get an interview with her, for let it be borne in mind that I had to be very careful not to arouse suspicion. Chance, however, favoured me. On leaving the house one day I met her returning to it. I stopped and spoke to her, flattered her aunt, and said I thought she was very clever.

"Yes," answered the lady, "she is. She is far too clever to have to grind her life away in the mere drudgery of teaching."

"Why does she not take to something else?" said I.

"What can she take to," replied the niece with some show of irritability. "She is no longer young, and the struggle to live nowadays is fearfully hard. The competition is so keen in every walk of life."

"True, true," I murmured sympathetically. Then after a further brief conversation I was about to part from her, when I stopped and said suddenly, as though the thought had only just occurred to me, "By the way, do you know Pushkin, the Russian?"

Her face coloured, and she seemed to me as if she was confused, nor did she answer me straight off; for her reply was: "Do you know him?" with an emphasis laid upon the "you."

"By sight," I said; "and I saw him coming from your house one day."

"Oh, yes," she answered, recovering herself; "He does come, though rarely. He took English lessons from my aunt."

"Really! That is rather strange, is it not?—that a Russian should go to a French lady to be taught English in England."

"I don't know that there is anything very strange about it. It's a free country, and people can do as they like."

"Certainly, the country is free enough," I responded. "If it were not there would not be such an influx of foreign scoundrels who find their native land too hot to hold them. There is a man by the name of Treskin, for instance—a brutal assassin, as I understand, who has managed to find snug quarters here, and to so far elude those who would like to meet him."

My remark caused the lady to grow very pale, and she seemed for some moments to be strangely agitated. Then in a voice that decidedly quivered she answered, almost passionately:

"Treskin is not a brutal assassin. That is only the tale told by his enemies, and if you knew anything of Russia you

would know that if a man has given offence to the Government, and the thousand and one fawning and lying sycophants who do its despotic bidding, he is for evermore marked, and no lie that human brain is capable of forging is considered bad enough to tell about him."

"You espouse Treskin's cause warmly," I said, looking at her fixedly, for I had no doubt from her manner and the way she spoke that she was well acquainted with him.

"As I would espouse the cause of anyone who was oppressed," she answered with composure, for she had quite recovered herself now. "Treskin is a cruelly oppressed man, and I pray to God that the hounds of his infamous Government will never get on his track."

"I should say myself that it is almost certain they will."

She laughed—a strange, sneering, chuckling sort of laugh; a laugh full of meaning, although its meaning was obscured to me then, and she said:

"You may safely venture to wager heavily that he will not be taken. But excuse me. I must go. Good-day." With this abrupt termination to our conversation she turned round and hurried off, and now a feeling took possession of me that I was at last on Treskin's track. It was obvious that he could be no stranger to this lady, and from the warm manner in which she defended him it seemed to me probable that he might be her lover. At any rate I determined to keep in touch with her, impressed with the belief that ultimately I should succeed in obtaining from her some clue to the fugitive's whereabouts. The emotion she had displayed when Treskin was discussed proved conclusively that she might be excited to a pitch when she

would in all likelihood make some admission which would prove valuable to those who were seeking the fugitive.

It was about a week later, during which I had not seen the niece, that I was with Madame Lablanc one morning reading German with her. It was cold weather, and she wore a loose sort of dressing-gown lined with fur. She rose somewhat suddenly from her seat to stir the fire, and in doing so something from an inside pocket in her gown fell heavily to the floor. To my astonishment I saw that it was a revolver. I stooped and picked it up, when with an angry movement she snatched it from me. The next moment she looked abashed and confused. "Excuse me," she stammered, apologetically, as she thrust the weapon into her pocket again. "I am a stupidly nervous woman and for years have carried a revolver, though I don't believe if the necessity were to arise I should have the courage to use the thing. Indeed I don't even know how to use it."

Her manner of saying this was insincere, and carried no weight with me, for I was sure that she could be a very ugly antagonist indeed with a weapon like that in her hand. Nor did it seem to me in the least likely that she was ignorant of its use, as she pretended to be.

"It is a somewhat dangerous toy for a lady to carry about with her," I remarked, "and you will pardon me for saying that you must be impressed with an idea that an occasion may suddenly arise when you will find it necessary to defend yourself with that weapon."

"Defend myself from whom and what?" she asked sharply.