MISTHER O'MARA FROM MEATH

By Seumas MacManus.
(Author of "A Lad of the O'Friels," "Ballads of a Country Boy," "The Leadin' Road to Donegal," "Donegal Fairy Stories," etc.)

TOMAS DHU and I had splendid shooting, and an altogether delightful time, that week. Tomas was a capable game keeper; he was a capital shot, and a charming companion—charming if you humored his little whimsicalities and gave him his own way.

But it is difficult for me to say, even now, which Tomas Dhu was born to be—a story teller or a sportsman. He invariably hit his mark in both.

If poachers—but in particular the Red Poacher—has been the bane of Tomas' life, they at least gave him inexhaustible matter for fresh and racy, and ofttimes startling yarns.

And Tomas seems to have begotten for the Red Poacher that homage which genius alone commands. The first year in which the unlucky red head of that arrant rascal dawned upon Tomas' world, he tricked Tomas into helping him (the red scoundrel) poach the land which Tomas was employed to gamekeep—and Mr. McCran of Belfast (very naturally) dismissed Tomas with 24 hours' notice. The following year the Red Poacher (to Tomas' genuine delight) poached the land again, with the able help of Tomas' successor, and of the London gentlemen who had the shooting rented.

Tomas was reinstated in office. No one would rent the shooting from McCran, after those two seasons of ill-luck. Mr. McCran, on the second year, determined to take a few weeks' leave of his Belfast factory, and come down and shoot Meenavalla (with Tomas' aid) himself. The sequel was not pleasant for poor Mr. McCran, for, whilst he lay in durance vile in a Donegal police barrack, with the awful charge of poaching his own land over his head, the Red Poacher, who had coolly caused it, poached the land with Tomas' aid once more.

"Tomas Dhu," said I, "that was the last you ever heard of the Red Poacher?"

We were lolling and smoking on opposite sides of the hearth fire in Tomas' little hut after a long and fatiguing, but good—remarkably good day's sport and likewise after a long and good—remarkably good—supper.

Tomas, by way of reply, simply gave utterance to that peculiar grunt an indolent man uses to convey, "I have heard you." And out of Tomas' impassive features I could not read anything satisfactory, either. So I repeated my remark in different shape.

"I said, Tomas, did you ever hear anything of the Red Poacher after?"

Tomas slowly lowered his gaze (which had been following the smoke wreaths) and halted his eyes upon me.

"When did you say it?"

Tomas was in one of his captious moods. But I rather liked that for the compliance he thereby exacted from you was generally forehand payment for a story.

"Well, I meant that."

"Oh I beg your pardon. I thought ye were jist offerin' me a bit of news, tellin' me that I never did hear of the Red Poacher afther. It's a good plan, young fells, if ye give news, give news, if ye ax queskins ax queskins."

"I daresay you're right. Well, now I'm askin' o' ye a question—Did ye ever afther hear tell of the Red Poacher?"

"Well, I should think so!"

"Oh!"

Tomas Dhu lay back once more and contemplated the curling puffs, which he now sent up thickly from his age-brown dudeen.

I lay back and puffed as quickly and contemplated, too.

Suddenly, out of the smoky silence, Tomas, when the spirit moved him, spoke:

"To my bitther sorra I heerd of the Red Poacher again. The curse of the Crammil be on him—an' the curse iv the crows.

"Afther Misther McCran himself had been takin' in an' so cru'lly misused, there was a great cry-out entirely all over the counthry. The jintlemen sportsmen there was no houldin' or tyin' of, to l'arn that sich a vagabone was allowed at large, laughin' in his sleeve at them, at the polis, and at the law of the lan'; and' the papers, too, all over the three kingdoms took it up an' made the divil's own thiraw about it—an' run over again the oul' story of Irelan' being the quare place anyhow, an' that nobody should be astonished at anything would happen in it. To be sure, there was many's an ill-minded vagabone in all parts of the counthry that laughed hearty at the tarrible thing, an' the dhrollest lad they'd ever heard tell of, seyed the Red Poacher was, by a long chalk.

"But, anyhow, the noise was made over the country about it, didn't help Misther McCran wan little bit only what it dindered him. For whatsomiver chance there was of his gettin' the shootin' of Meenavalla let to some sportin' chap or other afore, there was sorra take the chance at all now. So nixt year it went vacant, an' nixt year again, an' the year afther that. Ivery wan of the years Misther McCran advartised the shootin' in the papers on the lame chance of catchin' some poor divil that didn't know its histhory. But, farior! there wasn't a half-witted jackdaw atween the four says of Ireland—or of Englan' and Scotlan' for that part—that didn't know as much about Meenavalla an' the Red Poacher as Misther McCran himself. So, the dickens as much as a tent of ink was wasted replyin' to wan of the advartisements. Then Misther McCran put the consarn up for sale, an' put it in the papers. But the divil resaive the man there was, even then, to come forrid an' offer him as much as tuppence—ha'penny in bad ha'penny for it. An' even when, on the fourth year a company of half a dozen young English bucks, just fresh out of college, tuk, atween them, a whole dhrift of shootin's in varrus parts of the county Donegal, intendin' both to have the sport of shootin' the game an' the profit besides of sellin' them to London game merchants, an' tuk the three shootin's that surrounded Meenavalla, the sorra wan of them would take Meenavalla for love or money. It was unlucky, they sayed; they'd have nothing whatsomiver to do with it on no account.

"But behold ye, Misther McCran, to his exceedin' great joy, as you may well suppose, got Meenavalla let this year. On wan of his trips to Glasgow, which he used to take the first night of ivery month, he fell in an' made acquaintance with a County Meath egg merchant, be name of Misther O'Mara, an' findin' out in the coorse of their discoorse that Misther O'Mara had been intendin' to hire a small shootin' for himself be way of diversion on holidays. Misther McCran toul' him he was delighted to know it, he had the very thing to suit him, an' as Mr. O'Mara was a daicent, friendly man, he'd let him have his place, be name Meenavalla in the County Donegal, on very modherate tarms indeed. He sung its praises to the skies—but divil a whisper of the Red Poacher. An' as good luck would have it the poor County Maith egg marchant didn't know a thing at all about the red rascal. Misther McCran (who agreed with his friends in considherin' himself a purty cliver cute business man) didn't laive Misther O'Mara till he persuaded him intil hirin' Meenavalla for the saison—an' at a longer price, too, nor ever it had been let for in its best days, afore the bad name got out on it.

"Misther McCran, as ye may well suppose, was purty plaised with himself over how he had hooked the poor divil O'Mara, who mightn't know a grouse—if he saw one—from a geeraffe.

"Me an' Misther McCran hadn't been on the best of terms for lee an' long, but as soon as he left the shootin' till O'Mara, he writ me a letter wantin' to know if I wouldn't take over the gamekeepin' of Meenavalla wanst more. He done me wrong, he confessed—for since the Red Poacher had been too able for himself, 'twas small wonder he was too able for me. He pitched upon me now, as bein' the man who was ablest to meet an' match the rascal if he dar'd make attempts on the lan' again. For, ye must understan', if the red fella hadn't throubled Meenavalla or its neighborhood for three years or so, he wasn't idle elsewhere; the sorra a saison went by that there didn't come some new story, or a bunch of stories, from some unlucky corner or other, about him. An' Meenavalla, besides, not bein' let an' so not well watched, was poached an' double poached every year of them be some poacher or other, an' it might as well as not have been by the lad himself. Anyhow, Misther McCran sayed we wor goin' to put our best foot forrid this saison, an' win back for Meenavalla its good name an' fame, an' make it of some valey to its owner; he'd come himself, he sayed, to identify Misther O'Mara, so there couldn't be no mistake, an' to give me directions an' advice, an' to keep a partickler watch upon Meenavalla. I wasn't on no account to breath a syllable about Red Poacher or poachin' to O'Mara, laist we'd frighten the life out of the poor divil, an' have his heels takin' near cuts for the County Maith an' his little egg store again.

"Misther McCran made offer of very fine tarms entirely to me, as I threw up a job I had, workin' a hoss an' cart for Owen Melley, of an' come an' took charge of Meenavalla.

"That was early in July. On the twel'th of A'gust, to the hour, Misther McCran an' Misther O'Mara with him, both of them havin' joined, together at the Sthrabane Junction, was dhriven up till the doors on Paddy Boyle's car, of Glenties, an' I give them cead mile failte, both. Misther McCran stopped all that day an' overnight, an' we walked O'Mara roun' a part of the shootin' an' from the top of the hill give him a look at most of it. Thrue, he didn't knok much about grouse or game fowls, but he wouldn't be tired boastin' about the daith an' destruction he often wrought among crows an' pigeons. I promised, if he could only manage to look level along the barrel of a gun, I'd mighty soon initiate him intil the mystheries of grouse killin', an' he'd think crows an' pigeons purtikierly silly child's play afther. 'Red Poacher' niver crossed wan of our lips while we wor in his hearin'. But Mr. McCran afore he left went intil the polis barracks in Aadhara, an' red them a lecturing about the red fells, an' let them know he'd hould them responsible if they let that highway robber an' cutthroat come slouchin' around his lan' wanst more. The sergeant of polis promised that a bee wouldn't buzz in all Meenavalla that saison that there wouldn't be a polisman at its lug makin' a note of it. Misther McCran laid on me as many directions as would make a dixonary—an' then he went off contented.

"'Twas plottin' in me own mind how I'd keep Misther O'Mara from hearin' tell of the Red Poacher, an' a purty ticklesome parable it was, bekase ivery man an' his mother standin' within twinty mile of ground had Meenavalla an' the Red Poacher coupled together on the tip of their tongue. But I might well 'a' saved meself the thought, for behould ye! the very second mornin' he was there young Edward Hughan's son Jimmy, who had been at the office lookin' for an Ameriky letther from Francie (God bless the boy, an' prosper him!), brought back a letther addressed to 'Misther O'Hara of Maith, now shootin' at Meenavalla.' An' when he opened it I seen that he read it no less nor four times over, an' afther that fourth readin' calls upon me, an' says he, 'Can ye read?' 'I can,' says I, 'if it's prent or nice writin'.' 'It's nicer writin' nor it is readin',' says he, 'so far as I can undherstand it. What does it mane?' I tuk the letther out of his han' an' read: 'Dear Misther O'Mara, of Maith—I am told there's fine shootin' to be got at Meenavalla this saison. I'm comin' along as soon as I finish a big Englishman's (bad luck till him!) that I'm doing now. Yours thruly, The Red Poacher'—or words to that effect. Faith, it tuk more nor a hop out of me. This Red Poocher was the coolest scoundhril I ever calculated upon. The cat, too, was out of the bag at a jump. There wasn't anything for it but make a clane breast of the whole matther. An' I up an' done it. An' when I say that Misther O'Mara stormed and swore at both my masther an' myself, I'm puttin' the case as calm as I can. There wasn't a bad name in his stomach he didn't bang at both of us, an' sayed that as the devil made us, he matched us. I knew we wor both in the wrong, I as well as me masther, for not layin' a full program of the whole case afore him earlier in the business; so I sat down an' smoked till O'Mara's win' gave out an' he could barge an' abuse no longer. An' then he ordered out wan of his men—he had two men with him—an' a thrap, an' tuk me also, an' niver dhrew rein till he was at the Ardhara polis barracks. We went in an' he put the letther intil the sergeant of police's hands, an' dimanded their purtection. The sergeant read it, an' sayed it was deuced cool of the red villian surely. But he toul' Misther O'Mara all the engagements he had made for polis pathrols to watch Meenavalla night an' day, an' he sayed ..from wan end of the shootin' to the other a frog jumped unknowest, he'd be willin' to offer him his head on a side-dish. But, though the sergeant's arangements was good an' very good, an' wouldn't let a snipe sneak out or in on the sly, they weren't half good enough to plaise Misther O'Mara, who went so far as to demand that even two policemen should for the nixt ten days live at the Meenavalla house. An' to plaise him, the sergeant even give in to this.

"From there he dhriv off an' away to pay his respects to an' have the counsel an' advice of the young English bucks who had taken the neighborin' shootin's. An' upon my davy, he sthrikes the six lads of them all congregated in the house on the Carkir shootin', ivery wan of them with a billyducks from the Red Poacher in his list—same as Misther O'Mara had got. But the English college chaps were enjoyin' the thing rather. They sayed they wanted a good Irish adventure, an' this looked purty like the commencement of wan. They only wished to heaven the Red Poacher would be as good as his word an' come along till they'd put a slug or two in his tail to ballast him. They'd give half their grouse, they sayed, for the excitement, an' they prayed God the red villain might turn up. An' when they found the state of flusthration O'Mara was in, an' the elaborate arrangements he'd been makin' with the polis for protection, they did laugh their hearts skinful, I tell you. O'Mara he wasn't more nor half plaised that they'd make so light of the thing, an' of him. 'Time enough till hallo, boys, when yous is out of the wood,' he says. 'An them laughs last laughs best,' All which set the English lads off in fresh kinks. An' when they l'arnt from Misther O'Mara that he was an egg merchant from the County Maith, an' that he had big practice shootin' crows an' pigeons, they went outside the house in reliefs to aise themselves of all the laughter was weightin' their stomachs, an' which they didn't want to laugh out into his face.

"Well, O'Mara, he wished to the Lord he was safely through with his shootin', anyhow — an' he didn't care how soon he'd be finished, now that the dhread of that Poacher was hangin' like a rotten roof—three over him.

"'I'll tell your oul' fella,' says they at last, 'if you don't mind, we'll give you a few days, an' lower every wing on the lan' for ye.' Faith, O'Mara jumped at it. 'Upon my word,' sis he, 'I'll not aisly forget it to yous if ye do.' It was only an exthra bit of sport, come chaps, to them, an' they agreed with a heart an' a half—an' toul' him, moreover, he could come afterwards, if he choose, an' amuse himself gettin' in the way of their guns on their shootin' though they couldn't promise him neither pigeons nor crows, they were afeered. O'Mara himself joined them in the laugh at this, for he was in purty good humor now he seen he'd have but little to dhread from the Red Poacher.

"Still he didn't slacken wan bit in his watchfulness. He arranged with the polis that very day the English lads 'ud be helpin' him on Meenavalla they'd have to do their pathrollin' upon the lands of the college chaps, lest the Red Poacher 'ud step in, on the grand opportunity, an' not laive a kickin' thing upon their grounds. But, in all cases, he ordhered as afore, that the two polis should stay day and night by his own place, an' sit an' dhrink in his own house.

"He likewise planned that me an' his own two men should take the hampers of game nightly intil Glenties to the railway station, an' have them shipped. H'd lend me his men, an' his conveyance also, to the English chaps to carry in theirs further on; an' they could, for safety's sake, add wan or two of their men to the contingent. From all the stories,' sis he, 'I'm toul' of the Red Poacher, we can't be too cautious.' 'Faith! ye're right,' says the college chaps, winkin' the wan at the other.

"The very nixt mornin' the whole six of them, with three of their men, an' O'Mara an' wan of his men, an meself, was on Meenavilla bangin' away like a rajiment of armins in the war. They were all purty fair shots; the college chaps; an' Misther O'Mara himself, seeing that he was only used at tumblin' pigeons an' crows, didn't do at all so badly, an' give the bucks a deal less laughin' than they expected. An odd time he conthrived to get wan of the lads right in the line of his fire, which always give five of them a hearty laugh, of course, but generally he went wan betther nor the man who could fire at a mouse an' hit a mountain. Afther the dozen of us were on the lan' three days ye might catch all the grouse we left livin' by putting salt on their tails. Every evenin', too, meself an' the rest of the escort took off the day's baggin' for the Glenties railway station. An' it's meself was noways sorry to go the same journey, bekase Dan (wan of O'Mara's men) was the best sowl in the wurrl', an' niver let us pass Jimmy Kinny's public house without we'd go in an' wet our whistle. An' he'd give us two or three dhrinks no less, afore he'd let us out. O'Mara's other man, Tarance, was a grumpy, growlin', good-for-nothin', dog-in-the-manger kind of divil that wouldn't ax ye had ye a mouth on ye if ye thravelled with him from Cork to Christmas, an' begrudged seein' Dan thratin, moreover. He'd not go intil Jimmy Kinny's with us, whether we'd stayed a minute or an hour, but 'ud remain danglin' his heels over the baskets of game, an' countin' the stars to keep himself warm till we'd come out again. An' then Dan tuk us in to see if Jimmy Kinny was still alive, on our way back. Them was mighty pleasant evenin's, I tell you.

"An' for 10 days this kind of thing went on, bekase O'Mara tuk himself an' his own two men to help to weed the game out of the three shootin's of the college chaps. An' we had always wan or two, or maybe three, of their men with us by way of escort to Glenties every evenin', an' Dan, who must have laid hands on a leprauchan—or had so much money—ever an' always halted the crowd at Jimmy Kinny's till we'd sloke our thirsts.

"O'Mara, when he had four or five days' practice, come to handle like a man was intendin' to become a good shooter; an' there was no more talkin' of pigeons an' crows, for he run the English lads purty close. What the lads used to enjoy, though, was shot an' the game gone safely off, he that wanst O'Mara got his own han' shot an' the game gone safely off, he quickly lost all tarror of the Red Poacher, an' hadn't the ghost of another curse left in his liver for that scoundhril. It didn't seem to give him wan bit of concern whether the red fella 'ud come ni an' carry off every wing on his neighbor's lands or not; an' so they upcasted till, bantherin'. 'Och, well,' he'd say, 'it's each man's cry when his own cow's sick.' But for that part of the sorra muc concern did the Red Poacher give any of the lads, especially when they seen he didn't turn up durin' the first four or five days. An' they were more nor half sorry he didn't, an' give a O'Mara a good roun' mouthful of curses for bein' so deuced purtickler with his polis pathrols an' polis guards. An' there was small doubt but it was this kept the rascal off. Many's the bit of a debate they all had about how the Red Poocher would a' been likely to have gone to work if he had ventured on the lan' an' how they'd have nonplushed him, an' got hold of him, an' played him like a cat might a mouse afore marchin' him into Ardhara polis barracks with a yard of rope decoratin' his neck.

"They would have had the dickens's own gay time with the buck, there was no manner of doubt, if he'd only been foolhardy enough to let his shadow fall on a daisy on wan of their lands. But they wan an' all agreed—an' Misther O'Mara with them—that the red rascal had method in his madness, an' if he was within a big radius of them he had tuk particular good care to lie very low, an' sing very, very small.

"Well, on the last night of the shootin' we had regular big jollification, all hands of us, I tell ye. An', poor devil, the Red Poacher would have found his ears burnin' if he had been within any sort of reasonable distance of us—bekase there's no doubt of it we jerked a fair share at his expense. An' small blame to us, seein' he made such an impudently bould start, writin' his threatenin' notices to all hands, as if he was goin' to do the dickens-an-all, an' walk right over all our heads. Far intil the night—or intil the mornin'—the spree ran; an'—I'm half ashamed to tell it, but the thruth's the thruth—every man lay where he fell. The English chaps knew how to get round a quart of Irish whiskey about as well as if they had been broken to it when they were on suckin' bottles, but they give in. An' when I give in meself, Misther O'Mara an' Dan an' Tarance seemed as fresh as a May mornin', bad luck till them.

"The sun was purty high up in the sky nixt day when we were shouted an' shuk up. An' when we got our eyes opened, an' some of our senses back again, behold ye, wasn't it the sergeant himself of polis an' a band of his men was standin' over us. 'Well, what's the row now?, says we when we seen this army crowdin' the kitchen.

"'Nothin',' says the sergeant himself of the polis, with a heavy sigh, 'only the Red Poacher, be hanged to him.' 'What,' says wan of us, an' 'What!' says all of us,' jumpin' for our firearms. The Red Poacher! Hurroo! Show us him, sergeant, aviry, till we get the chance of a pink at the hinder end of his breeches,' an' ivery mother's sowl bruk for the doore. 'Arrah!' says the sergeant, 'to pot with yous for blatherin' idiots. Stand yer grounds till I ax ye wan queskin—Has any of yous got any returns or replies from the game yous has sent off?' No, none of them had. For the past three or four days they had sent a messenger to the office, an' then abused the London men for not bein' promp'er in replyin' an' sendin' cheques. 'I thought as much,' says the sergeant. 'What the dickens do ye mane?' says they. 'Are all of yous here?' says the sergeant. 'All of us,' says they, lookin' around an' thryin' to count wan another. 'Barrin',' says they, then, 'Misther O'Mara an' his two men. They must have been afoot earlier, an' sthrolled back to Meenavalla.' 'Oh, indeed!' says the sergeant. 'Yis, indeed, I was just thinkin' they took a rather early sthroll this mornin'. There was a little more from him, 'informin' me as much, dhropped at the barracks doore this mornin', an' advisin' me to come an' look after yous, or yous would be apt to oversleep yourselves an' miss the early worm. I called by the Meenavalla house just to satisfy meself, an' it's as lone as an anshint abbey, Here's a note I picked up on the table here when I come in. I'm thinkin' that's the name of the six of yous on the cover of it. Purty well addressed, anyhow.'

"With their mouths open so ye might turn yer fist in them, an' their six pairs of eyes like bow-windies in a castle, they had the note tore open in half a jiffy, an' every man of the six let out of him a curse might kill a crow in a crab-tree, for the note was something like this—'Misther O'Mara of Meath, presents his compliments, an' hopes the six nice, bright, clever young Englishmen is well as he'd wish them, an' as full of self-consait as iver. He is very sorry he has been called of suddint, for he should have liked much more of their improvin' company. But if his good friends wouldn't mind callin' round by his egg store in the County Maith, on their way home to their dear mothers in England, he promises them plenty of pinkin' at pigeons an' crows. — Yours truly, The Red Poacher.'"

"I said, after a little, 'May I ask you wan question, Thomas Duhl?'"

"Throt it out quick, and be done with it," between whiffs of his freshly lit pipe.

"Didn't those Englishmen themselves tack on the proper labels on the hampers before they sent them off?"

"Did I tell ye that while Dan was makin' the rest of us merry in Jimmy Kinney's, Tarance, the growler, remained without to keep count of the stars?"

"Oh!"

"DID YOU EVER HEAR ANYTHING OF THE RED POACHES AFTER?"

HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO LIVE IN RUSSIA?

Continued From the First Page of This Section

for only 42 per cent of Russian children today receive schooling of any kind.

If 11 years old at the last census, to 1897, and a man grown now, you were past the age when you could go to school, the odds are close to 5 to 1 that you would be a complete ignoramus, for the percentage of illerature was .79.

Should you, your wife or your child fall sick, you would find only one physician to attend every group of 7,930 persons in the population. Is it any wonder that your yearly chances of death would be 37 1-3 out of 1,000—a death rate higher than that of any other nominally civilized country?

If you worked until your back was bent and your heart was broken under the incessant strain of your exertions, you would earn only $31.50 a year to keep body and soul together.

You would live in daily dread of the one chance out of 112 that you would be forced to become that miserable wretch, a Russian soldier. You would be tempted by the despicable opportunity, one in 900, to save your carcass from starvation by becoming a policeman, uniformed or spy. You would be tempted at all times to evade the doom of your dire and chronic need by joining secretly that irregular, enormous class of police hangers-on who are informers and stool pigeons, variously estimated as comprising from one twentieth to one tenth of the entire population.

The Russian authorities have just compiled the statistics of people who, during the year 1905, were wounded by firearms. Your chance of being shot was then just twice as good as it was in 1904; in 1905 64,310 people were wounded with guns, revolvers and bombs, as against 32,000 in 1904.

If they missed you, there was still hope; between 6,000 and 7,000 people were stabbed and slashed with swords, while as many more fell under the blows of other weapons, from flails to horses' hoofs.

There are some 6,000 people in the jails of St. Petersburg alone. The "houses of detention" held 1,513 prisoners, at last reports, and their chances were four times as great for disease as they ought to be, because their number was four times as great as the detention accommodations amount to. But Russia can always stretch her prisons, as America can always stretch her trolley cars.

You would have been better off had you breathed your breath of resentment against oppression in a more distant place, like Bielostock, where the odds of typhoid against your intestines are only three to one.

But if you had gone as far as Warsaw, where the courts did quite a lot of execution a year or so ago, you might not have had to wait for dysentary or typhoid. They killed 112 objectionable subjects of the czar during a scant nine months—and they didn't stop to count how many they shot, besides, under the drumhead courtmartial.

The whole land being afterward practically declared "in a state of extraordinary defense," the drumhead courts-martial became too slow. The regular courts were speeded up, with a safe point of departure for all trials, that everybody was guilty until proved innocent, and nobody need be given a chance to prove innocence. With this, and with a cost-iron rule that every case must be decided within 72 hours, the overcrowding of the jails has been considerably reduced. So has the population.

Siberia is helping a good deal, too. The interminable processions of such intelligence as Russia has developed toward the Siberian mines constitute simply long martyrdoms, in which women and men are maltreated alike, whipped naked alike, beaten alike, starved alike and worked alike. If you work, you die; if you don't, you are killed. The statistics of Siberia have not yet appeared. The statisticians are still adding up.

As for the death sentences, Tolstoy's observations recently made him estimate them as some seven per day, about 2,500 a year. His opinion, expressed last summer after living in Russia some 80 years, was that he would rather be dead.

"That," declared Tolstoy, "is why I write this and will circulate it by all means in my power, both in Russia and abroad; that one of two things may happen—either that these inhuman deeds may be stopped or that my connection with them may be snapped and I put in prison, where I may be clearly conscious that these horrors are not committed on my behalf; or, still better—so good that I dare not even dream of such happiness—they may put on me, as on those peasants, a shroud and a cap and may push me also off a bench, so that by my own weight I may tighten the well-soaped noose around my old throat."

Ah, but you have read your Russia; Siberia is a veritable Promised Land of fertile plains, and the government encourages emigration, giving opportunity to the Siberian voluntary settlers to acquire ample acreage among the crown lands.

Well, more than 68 per cent of the peasants who, in 1902, made the journey of 1,500 miles to the Altai, the finest of the Siberian tracts, returned total failures.

It seems, indeed, very hopeless for the peasants. But they are ignorant, beggared wretches, anyway.

Suppose you were at the other extreme of Russian fortune—a gentleman, a landed proprietor, one of the ruling classes, living on your inherited acres, with your chateau that is all but a castle, with the laws artfully framed so that all your peasants must work for you for nothing, and with the army and the police at your beck and call, ready to shoot and hang upon the first provocation in the way of a peasant revolt.

Not three years have gone by since, as the compiled statistics show, those overwearied peasants turned upon the mighty, astute, dominant landlords, and plundered 2,000 estates, with fitting accompaniment of arson and murder.

The landlords in 161 districts suffered; the loss was $15,000,000; the area of those razing riots covered 37 per cent of European Russia.

But if you were a woman, how would al these miseries and disasters affect you—not your husband, not your children; but you yourself, in your own proper person?

There would be only one difference: Your condition would be worse.

A peasant girl of, say, Lystcheffka or Gschatsk or Sarov, might be bought in her local marriage market, by a peasant husband with a sharp eye to the main chance of securing a profitable investment.

For a day—for one brief day—you would have the happiness of the bride. Yet over it would lie the shadow of the whip that the government evidently has no objection to seeing encouraged.

You may expect, as part of the ceremonies of your bridal, that you shall have made, with your own hands, a gaily-colored yet effective punitive whip, which you are required to present to your bridegroom. He will lash you with it on the shoulders, saying:

"I love thee as my soul—and I beat thee as my serf. I am thy master, and thou shalt obey me."

For that day—if your luck hold—the lash of the whip is ceremony only. But wait. The government sees to it, for the protection of the autocracy, that your peasant husband is brutalized down to that level of instinct and habit which shall deprive him of the initative that might make him an intelligent conspirator with his fellows. It has vouchesafed him, after long, persistent agitation, the rudiments of education for half the alcohol-poisoned children he forces you to bring into your afflicted, gruesome world. But it takes good care to crowd upon him the vodka that takes from him the kindly and protecting instincts of husband and father as we know them.

For all day's labors, for all visitations of brute wrath, you are your husband's chattel. But let any one of the numerous other brutes who are in authority over him desire the woman who is his. It has happened many times of late; it happens still as often. The brute who is your husband may murder you; the other brute may have him murdered, as a matter of precaution.

You would conspire? Others have. The more intelligent and the more highly born they are, the more they conspire. It is one way out—and in.

Xenia of the terrorists conspired. Her comrades gave her a bomb, for Lieutenant-General Rudiger, minister of war, a year ago. Her courage failed her, for she was only 18 years old. She dropped the bomb in the Neva, swallowed the poison she carried, and fell dying in the Tsarkoe-Selo railway station.

You would do better? The Princess Meshthirski last winter did better, when she hurled her bomb at the governor-general of Moscow. It failed to kill him; but, at worst, she had done her daring part. They hanged her.

Ekatarina Mille, daughter of a rich Russian merchant of the Baltic, was her friend. Ekatarina fled to Paris, and gave to the poor, among the Russian exiles, there, all but a starvation tithe of the monthly remittance of $250 which her wealthy father sent her.

Regularly, for two months, she pleaded with the Paris branch of the Terrorists for a commission in Russia which might permit her to avenge the ignominious fate of her friend. But the terrorists refused, for at that time their porgram called for no assassinations. Ekatarina blew out her brains last January.

Katherine Breshkovskaja, "Russia's Joan or Arc," the beloved "Babushka" of the Russian party of freedom, has conspired for 30 years. The daughter of a nobleman, she was inspired to educate the peasants on the family estate. They responded with all the latent talent inherent in the Russian race; hope was born; pity was born; mercy was born; they showed such signs of becoming humane that they were almost human.

The the Russian government jailed 2,000 of them, the high-souled daughter of nobility as their leader. She awaited her sentence in prison for four years, and she was given five years in the awful mines of Kara, with 14 years more in a terrible penal settlement on Lake Baikal.

When at last she was freed, to find her son corrupted to hatred of the mother who bore him, she founded the social revolutionary party in Russia. Again she was marked for capture; but this time she escaped.

We have seen her here. In America, that old, white-haired woman who, a couple of years ago, told throngs of thousands the wrongs of Russia; that gentle lover of her kind who had come in the end to see in the bomb the only possible means of deliverance from the agonies in which her people strangle.

They have "Babushka," too. From the first day when she conceived her peaceable, gentle plan of educating the poor that they might learn to win prosperity she was marked by Russian autocracy as the most dangerous woman in the empire. The close of last year drew her, sunken with age and the barbarities of her punishments, yet indomitable still, back to the land of life in eternal hell.

The omnipresent Russian police captured her. She has vanished from the light of day like some stray ray of living sunlight ravished from earth by the powers of perpetual gloom.

If you were the czarina? You would be what she is now, for all the loftiness of her station—a neurasthenic wreck in woman's pallid form, perishing in your prime, of seeing your husband handle letters which, when you tear them from his incautious grasp, prove to be filled with nitroglycerin; anguished with the thought of your children ever unsafe, although immured in a playhouse that is in reality a fortress for their defense.

But you are not a woman, let us say. You are a man, with a man's courage, a man's resources, a man's determination. So, suppose you were the czar.

One day, out in the open, boldly before the douma proclaiming your imperial will that the nation should have its giant powers freed, and you would have as your sworn allies every Terrorist, every Nihilist, every peasant, every man who makes the Russian people what they actually are, all that they ever can be. You would have as your enemies, passionate for assassination, every member of your family save your wife and children, every nobleman, every official in a land where all who are not officials want to be.

If you were Count Tolstoy you would be the only human being in that vast empire, who dare say, as Tolstoy said recently:

"I deny my individual responsibility for the nation's crimes."

Suppose you lived in Russia?

As peasant or as czar, as peasant's wife or as the high czarina, suppose you lived in Russia——

What would you do?

WHEN OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS ON THE DOOR IN VAIN—By George L. Knapp

Master of human destinies am I!
Fame, love and fortune on my footsteps wait.
Cities and fields I walk; I penetrate
Deserts and seas remote, and passing by
Hovel and mart and palace—soon or late
I knock unbidden once at every gate!
If sleeping, wake; if feasting, rise before
I turn away. It is the hour of fate.
And they who follow me reach every state
Mortals desire and conquer every foe
Save death. But those who doubt or hesitate
Condemned to failure, penury and woe
Seek me in vain, and uselessly implore.
I answer not, and I return no more!

SO sang John J. Ingalls, in a sonnet more or less borrowed from Gigliotti. It was worth borrowing, however. It was worth stealing, for that matter, for it packs in 14 stately lines a deal of human history.

In 1832 the Virginia legislature came within one vote of abolishing slavery. One vote more, and the Old Dominion would have taken her place among the free states. What an opportunity that was for any one of the recalcitrant legislators! Never on this continent assuredly, and perhaps never anywhere else, was such a chance to change history for the better presented to common men. It was not confined to the palaces of kings and emperors. On the contrary, it was hawked about the street, so to speak, and offered without money and without price to a score of men. And not one of them heard the call. Not one of them suspected that there had been a call, and the elusive goddess passed on.

The same blindness and deafness were shown a century later, when the Moriscoes were cast out from the Spanish peninsula. The Moriscoes were Moors who had been forcibly baptised, and about whose thorough orthodoxy there were grave doubts in high quarters of church and state. They were not less than 1,000,000 in number. They were the best agriculturists and factory workers in Spain. They raised sugar and cotton in that country—which no one has done since they had a monopoly of several industries; they were universally admitted to be quiet, peaceable citizens. It is probably true that Spain was the only land blind enough, cruel enough, infatuated enough to drive out such aids to prosperity as these. But the fact remains that no other nation was wise enough to profit by Spain's folly. Here was opportunity blowing her lungs out through a trumpet, and beating a tattoo on every kingly door in Europe. And not one of all the kings and princes heard the clamor. Not even the shrewd, cold blooded, hard headed, ungrateful free thinker, Henry IV of France, could see that here was a chance to set his land above all the lands in Europe. He had purchased Paris, he said, at the price of a mass. He would doubtless have been willing, so far as conscientious scruples were concerned, to have purchased Constantinople by avowing his abiding faith in the Koran. But he could not see and he could not hear; the bigotry which he despised had none the less warped his mind, and opportunity at last reluctantly turned away.

And so opportunity has walked up and down the world, and gone to and fro therein, knocking unbidden once at every gate, and finding a most amazing proportion of the dwellers on this earth asleep. On the occasion mentioned she has found apparently the whole world asleep and the cases in which a favored individual has failed to hear or answer the summons are countless. Hannibal, after the battle of Cannae, might have dictated terms of peace at the gates of Rome. Huxley walked right up to the verge of the theory of evolution, but could not pass that verge until Darwin showed the way. Napoleon—guided, one must admit, by his savants—turned down the steamboat that would have availed to land his army in England. Charles I wouldn't let Cromwell emigrate. Louis XIV refused a commission to Prince Eugene of Savoy.

Indeed, King Louis XIV is of all men in history the one on whom opportunity wasted the most time and effort, and who most persistently ignored her. When he came to the throne France was the first country in Europe. A little decency, a little common honesty, a little common sense and tolerance on the part of the king would have kept France at the head of the procession. Peace and justice were all the land needed. Louis turned instead to war and tyranny and did not even know where to make war. To the south lay the Mediterranean, waiting to be made a French lake, and the Barbary state and Egyptian colonies ready to fall into the lap of any power that would share the Turkish tree. Louis instead turned to the north, fastened a silly quarrel on Holland, meddled with the internal affairs of England, persisted in his evil course till he drew the wrath of all Europe down on him—and then the deluge.

So perhaps the Virginia legislators were not the dullest of mankind after all. They missed the magic summons, it is true; but most princes have done no better. And perhaps it is just as well to have as many gates as possible at which opportunity may knock, instead of staking the weal of a whole nation on the wakefulness of a king. That is the American verdict, anyhow, and history seems to justify it.

Strain on the Imagination.

By James J. Montague.

Henry Watterson finds the New York newspapers somnolent—putting no strain on the imagination.—News item.

Too bad that the sad Metropolitan papers
Don't furnish their readers diurnal
Successions of brainstorms and physical capers
Like Watterson's Courier-Journal.
In reading plain news we believe we are lucky
Cerebral exhaustion to miss,
But supposing we lived out in poor old Kentucky
And chanced on a sentence like this:
The star-eyed goddess, holding in her right hand William Jennings Bryan, in her left hand J. W. Kern, with one eye fixed on the empyrean, the other on the amaranthian depths of the universal cosmos, with one foot on Maine and the other on Mexico, constantly, steadily, forward and backward, never ceasing—that—Gentlemen, is what is the matter with this down-trodden country:
Would you rather read childishly simple narration
Or analyze that and get nervous prostration?
No wonders that feuds are the daily diversions
Of people who once in a while
Are forced to make long and brain-fagging excursions
Through Watterson's erudite style.
Any thoughtful twelve men on a criminal jury
Would promptly and freely acquit
A murderer goaded to terrible fury
By reading as follows, towit:
Reform spreads its pinions over French Lick Springs, and plucks forth the tail feathers of the bird of liberty. Down with the myrmidons of plutocracy, up with the banner of Ryan and Belmont. The one makes a market for the votes of our colored brother, the other makes a market for the thoroughbred quadruped without which Kentucky would be nothing more than a body of real estate surrounding Paducah. We have supported Mr. Bryan since we were a little child, and now the years come apace, we are still supporting him, and will leave his candidacy, like a precious legacy, to our posterity. We are Mr. Bryan's press bureau, his publicity agent, his booster. Maybe Mr. Bryan will carry Kentucky, but such of our readers as have money had better not make any bets till they have paid up their back subscriptions. Erat ego omnivera optimo.
If you had to read that do you fancy that you
Should be called to account for the things you might do?