

# Prisoners and Captives

By H. S. MERRIMAN

## CHAPTER XI.—(Continued.)

After dinner Easton sat last conceded to explanation. Chairs had been drawn around the fire. While he spoke the American kept his eyes fixed upon the fire, and at times moved his limbs nervously, after the manner of one who is more highly strung than muscular.

"Gentlemen," he said in his peculiar, slow drawl, and an immediate silence followed—"gentlemen, I asked you to come here to-night for a special purpose, and not from the warmth of my own heart. What I am going to tell you cannot be quite new to some, while to others I surmise that it will be very new. There is a country on the map called the Dark Continent, but during the last few years it has come under my notice that Africa is as light as the heavenly paths compared to another land nearer to this old country. I mean Siberia. Now, I am not going to talk about Siberia, because there are four men in this room who know more than I do. In fact, they know too much. Before I go I will explain for a spell who we all are. Four of us are Russians. Of these four, one has a wife living in the Siberian mines, condemned by mistake; a second has a father living in a convict prison, almost on the edge of an Arctic sea; a third has been there himself. These three undertake what may be called the desperate part of our scheme. The fourth Russian is a gentleman who has the doubtful privilege of being allowed to live in Petersburg. His task is difficult and dangerous, but not desperate. Two of us are Englishmen; one has given up the ease and luxury of the life of a moneyed British sportsman—has, in fact, become a sailor for the deliberate purpose of placing his skill at our disposal. In addition to that he has opened his purse in a thoughtless and generous way. Why he has done these things I cannot say. In Mr. Tyars' position I certainly should not have done so myself. His is the only name I mention, because I have seen the portraits of him in the illustrated papers, and there is no disguising who he is. The rest of us have names entirely unknown, or known only to the wrong people. Some of the Russian names, besides possessing this unfortunate notoriety, are quite beyond my powers to pronounce. The second Englishman is a naval officer, who, having shared considerable danger with Mr. Tyars on one occasion, may or may not think fit to throw in his lot with him again. His decision, while being a matter of great interest to us, lies entirely in his own hands. He is as free when he leaves this room as when we entered it. Lastly comes myself—

The little face was very wistful, while the thin lips moved and changed incessantly from gaiety to a great gravity. The man's hollow cheeks were singularly flushed in a patchy, unnatural way, and "I," he continued, with a little laugh, "well, I'm afraid I stay at home. I have here a doctor's certificate showing that I would be utterly useless in any but a temperate climate. I am—

He produced a paper from his pocket and held it in his hand upon his knee, not daring to offer it to any one in particular. There was a painful silence. No one reached out his hand for the certificate, and no one seemed to be able to think of something to say. At last the stout gentleman rose from his chair with a grunt.

"I, too, stay at home, gentlemen," he said, breathlessly, "and I have no certificate."

He crossed the hearth rug, and, taking the paper from Easton's hand, he deliberately threw it into the fire.

"There," he grunted, "the mischief take your certificate."

Then he sat down again, adjusting his large waistcoat, which had become somewhat rucked up, and attempted to smooth his crumpled shirt, while the paper burned slowly on the glowing coals.

"I only wished," said Easton, after a pause, "to explain why I stay at home. It is no good sending second-rate men out to work like this."

He paused and looked around. There was something critical in the atmosphere of the room, and all the seven men assembled looked at one another in turn. Long and searchingly each looked into the face of the other. If Easton had set down the rule that second-rate men were of no avail, he had certainly held close to it. These were, at all events, first-rate men. Not talkers, but actors! no blusters, but full of courage; determined, ready and fearless. The slight barrier raised by the speaking of a different tongue, the thinking of different thoughts, seemed to have crumbled away, and they were as brothers.

"Our plans," said Easton, "are simple. We fit out a ship to sail in the spring, ostensibly to attempt the northeast passage to China. Her real object will be the rescue of a large number of Russian political exiles and prisoners. The three Russians go to Siberia overland. Theirs is the most dangerous task of all, the largest, the most important. The fourth remains in Petersburg, to keep up communication, to forward money, food, disguises and arms. Mr. Tyars takes command of the steamer, which is now almost ready for sea, and forces his way through the ice, God willing, to the Yana river.

Easton stopped speaking. As he returned to his seat, he glanced inquiringly toward Oswin Grace, whose eyes had followed him.

"Of course, gentlemen," said Grace, glancing comprehensively around the group, "I go with Mr. Tyars."

"Thanks," muttered Claud Tyars, shortly.

## CHAPTER XII.

It was almost a month later that Matthew Mark Easton stepped fairly into the circle of which Miss Winter was to a certain extent the leading spirit. This lady had been five minutes in the brilliantly lighted rooms of a huge picture gallery before she singled out the little American. He happened to be talking to another insignificant, unobtrusive man, who tugged nervously at a gray mustache, while he listened. This was one of the ablest envoys ever accredited to the Court of St. James by the United States.

Miss Winter knew most of the faces in the room, and among others that of

the American minister. Moreover, she recollected perfectly the form and features of Matthew Mark Easton.

The occasion was a vast assembly of the fashionable, diplomatic, artistic and literary worlds for the collection of money and ideas toward the solution of a social problem. The tickets were a guinea each; there were choice refreshments at a stated and ruinous price; soft carpets, an exhibition of pictures, and the same of dresses. I believe also that several gentlemen read papers on the subject under discussion, but that was in the small room at the end where no one ever went. Claud Tyars was there, of course. During the last month or two he had been going out so much that one almost expected to meet him, just as one expects to meet certain well-known faces at every assembly. Miss Winter saw him immediately after noticing Matthew Mark Easton, and before long he began to make his way across the room toward her. Wherever they had met during the last few weeks, Tyars had invariably succeeded in exchanging a few words with Miss Winter, seeking her out with equal persistence, whether Helen Grace were with her or not. If, as the lady opined, he was determined to become one of their intimate friends, he displayed no indecent haste, no undue eagerness; and in so doing he was perhaps following the surest method. He had not hitherto showed the slightest desire to cross the line which separates acquaintances from friendship.

There was a mutual attraction existing between these two capable, practical people, who met to-night as they usually did with that high-toned nonchalance which almost amounts to indifference. There was a vacant seat, for a wonder, beside Miss Winter, which Tyars promptly appropriated.

"Who," she asked, after a few conventionalities had been exchanged, "is that gentleman talking to the American minister, and apparently making him laugh, which is, I should say, no easy matter?"

"He is generally making some one else laugh," replied Tyars. "His name is Easton—Matthew Mark Easton. The sort of name that sticks in the wheelwork of one's memory. A name one does not forget."

"And," added Miss Winter, lightly, "a face that one does not forget. He interests me—a little."

Tyars laughed at the qualification implied by the addition of the last two words.

"That is always something," he said. "A small mercy. He is one of my greatest friends—may I introduce him?"

"Certainly," murmured the lady, with a little bow of the head, and then she changed the subject at once.

"Helen," she said, "is not here to-night."

Tyars looked besetingly disappointed.

"She does not always care to leave the admirer, and he objects to disipation on a large scale. Is that not so?" he suggested.

"Yes. That is the case to-night."

She wondered a little at his intimate knowledge of Helen's thoughts, but said nothing. It was probable that he heard this from Oswin, and his singular memory had retained it.

"Miss Grace," said Tyars, presently, "has a strong sense of duty, and is unconscious of it. An unconscious sense of duty is one of the best of human motives. At least it seems so to me."

Although Agnes Winter was bowing and smiling to an old lady near at hand, she had followed him perfectly.

"Well," she answered, "a sense of duty in any description is not a bad thing in these times. Indeed," she added, turning suddenly toward him, "a motive in itself rather rare. Not many of us have motives."

Her manner implied as plainly as if she had spoken it: "We are not, all of us, like you."

There was something in the expression of his eyes that recalled suddenly their first meeting at the precise moment when he, entering the drawing room, overheard a remark of hers respecting himself. It was not an unpleasant expression, but it led one to feel instinctively that this man might under some circumstances be what is tersely called in France, difficult. It was merely a suggestion, cloaked beneath his high-class reserve of manner, but she had known many men of his class, some of whom had made a name in their several callings, and this same suggestion of stubbornness had come beneath her quick, fleeting notice before. He looked gravely around the room, as if seeking to penetrate the smiles and rapid affectation.

"Oh," he said placidly, "I am not so sure. There are a good many people who pride themselves upon steering a clear course. The prevailing motive to-night is perhaps a desire to prove a superiority over one's neighbors, but it is still a motive."

Miss Winter looked at him critically.

"Remember," she said, warningly, "that this is my element. The motives of all these people are their motives—their pleasures—their life, my life."

"Apparently so," he replied, ambiguously.

"So that," she pursued, "I am indicted of the crime of endeavoring to prove my superiority over my neighbors."

There was a short pause, but it was not the silence of people who have nothing more to say to each other. It was too tense, too restless for that.

"Shall I," inquired Tyars, rising suddenly, "go and find Easton? I should like you to know him."

"I shall be most happy," she said, with one of her gracious little bows. As he moved away she called him back almost as if she were loath to let him go, as if there were something still left unsaid between them.

"Tell me," she said in a gaily confident tone, "before you go, what is his specialty. I always like to know a stranger's chief characteristic, or, if he has no characteristics, his particular hobby—whether, I mean, he is a botanist or a yachtsman, a fisherman or a politician. It is so much more convenient, you understand, to know beforehand upon what topic one must conceal one's ignorance."

"Miss Winter," he said, deliberately, "you have not found out my particular hobby or my chief characteristic yet."

"Not yet," she admitted.

"I think," he said, "that Easton has no hobbies. His specialty is eloquence. He could almost persuade a certain stubborn quadruped to part with his hind legs. He was destined by the positive department of Providence for an orator, but the negative department, with its usual discrimination, gave him a weak chest, and therefore he is nothing."

"Thank you," she said. "Now I know something of him. I have to conceal beneath wretched smiles the fact that I know absolutely nothing of American commerce, American politics or oratory. I wonder," she added, as an afterthought, "whether there is anything he can persuade me to do?"

"He might," suggested Tyars, "persuade you into the cultivation of a native."

Then he turned and left her. Matthew Mark Easton saw him approaching, and broke off rather suddenly a waning conversation with his minister.

"Easton," said Tyars, "come here. I want to introduce you to Miss Winter."

"Miss Winter," turned the American; "omnious name. Who is she?"

"She is a person of considerable influence in the Grace household. Do you understand? It is in Miss Winter's power to deprive us of Oswin Grace, if she cares to exercise that power."

Easton's face expressed somewhat ludicrously a passing consternation.

"Hang these women!" he muttered.

"Does she," he inquired, "suspect something?"

"I think so," was the reply, "and, moreover, she is a clever woman; so be careful!"

(To be continued.)

## DOLLAR FOR DOLLAR.

Leonardo da Vinci, who painted the very souls of his subjects, might have found material for his brush in the trio seated one December day in Lawyer Norton's office—"Old Dan" Lyle, president of the village bank, sturdily, self-made, stern; another old man, of quite different type, mild, inadequate, unfortunate; and the wife of the second man, a woman whose Madonna-like face and silver hair seemed to harbor a certain sadness.

Old Henry Dawson was settling with his creditors—people wondered if he could pay 50 cents on the dollar. Everybody knew that old Henry was hard-working and honest, but people criticized his improvidence, and thought they saw in his easy-going ways the explanation of his sons' unfortunate careers.

But no one ever said one word against "Aunt Milly" Dawson, as everybody in the church called her. Cheerful and ready to help others, no matter what her own troubles were, unselfish, gentle, a "splendid manager" in her own home—in Aunt Milly no one saw anything to explain the family straits or the misdeeds of the Dawson boys.

It was generally hoped—and believed—in Brusseville that the home, at least, might be saved from the wreck for Aunt Milly, especially as the chief creditor, Old Dan Lyle, was a member of the same church and a lifelong friend.

And, as a fact, the close-fisted old bank president had displayed a leniency that left Dick Norton, the lawyer, familiar with his usual uncompromising "business" attitude, almost speechless with surprise.

But now that the papers were signed and everything finished, a tide of reaction set in in the mind of the old man—proud of his own "self-made" career and prone to judge severely when anything resembling incompetence was on trial.

"Well, Henry," he remarked, rising pompously, "some folks get out of things mighty easy. Now I"—he straightened himself—"have always paid dollar for dollar!"

To this little thrust old Henry had not the spirit to reply.

Through the proceeding thus far the woman had sat silent—sometimes restraining her tears with some difficulty. But at this point—as Dick Norton told us afterward—"Aunt Milly flared right up!"

"Yes, Brother Lyle," she said, rising also, and standing erect herself in gentle dignity, "everybody knows that that's so. But, Dan!,"—she fixed him with her motherly blue eyes—"I want to know one thing—do you remember every day to thank God that you've been able to pay dollar for dollar?"

There was a pregnant silence. Then a subdued and humbled Dan made reply.

"I guess maybe there is something to be said on that side, Aunt Milly," he said, mildly.

If a ton of coal is placed on the ground and left there, and another ton is placed under a shed, the latter loses about 25 per cent of its heating power, the former about 47 per cent.

## SOME LOCAL RESULTS OF CELEBRATING THE FOURTH.



## THE STAR-SPANGLED BANNER.

O say, can you see, by the dawn's early light,

What so proudly we hail'd at the twilight's last gleaming—

Whose broad stripes and bright stars, through the clouds of the night,

At the ramparts we watch'd were so gallantly streaming!

And the rocket's red glare, the bombs bursting in air,

Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there;

O'er the land of the free, and the home of the brave!

On that shore dimly seen through the mists of the deep,

Where the foe's haughty host in dread silence reposes,

What is that which the breeze, o'er the towering steep,

As it fitfully blows, now conceals, now discloses?

Now it catches the gleam of the morning's first beam,

In full glory reflected now shines on the stream;

'Tis the star-spangled banner; O long may it wave

O'er the land of the free, and the home of the brave!

And where is that band who so vauntingly swore

That the havoc of war and the battle's confusion

A home and a country should leave us no more?

Their blood has wash'd out their foul footsteps' pollution!

No refuge could save the hireling and slave

From the terror of flight, or the gloom of the grave;

And the star-spangled banner in triumph doth wave

O'er the land of the free, and the home of the brave.

to go into when he was cold and wanted to lie down, and so his school days were not at all dreary ones.

But the happiest time for "the chums" was when Willie put his books away for the long summer vacation—and he and Nero had the whole day together. Even when Willie had cut the kindling it was Nero who carried it to the house in a basket held tightly by his strong teeth, while Willie carried a bucketful of coal.

By and by Willie began to tell Nero of a great day that was coming, when all the boys would have firecrackers and Roman candles and torpedoes, and there would be flags flying and bands playing and everybody would have a good time.

Nero always listened to every word that his little master said, and now and then when Willie would give his head an extra hard pat by way of emphasis Nero would bark and set his tail going harder than ever. That tail always wagged when Nero was pleased. Sometimes Willie's mother would allow the dog to come into the sitting room, but one day the tall knocked a handsome vase off of the table and broke it, and after that Nero had to lie down very quietly if he got into the house.

Two days before the Fourth Willie bought his fireworks; there were five packages of firecrackers and five of torpedoes, four rockets, four Roman candles, two wheels and a long piece of punk. Nero went with Willie to the store to buy them, but he had to wait outside while Willie went in, and so as soon as they reached home Willie opened the package

and showed Nero everything it contained. "Now, we'll fire off a few crackers," said Willie to Nero, "but we'll have to save the most of them till the Fourth, b'cause us boys are going to have our crackers an' torpedoes together. Won't we have a fine time, marching to the commons, with our drums beating and horns blowing and flags flying! But there's one trouble about you, Nero, an' that is, you can't march with us, b'cause the boys decided that nobody can march without they have one of our flags, an' there's just ten flags an' ten boys. I'm to give out the flags an' if there was any boy that was sick you could have his place, if you could only wave a flag."

Nero dropped his head and waked very sad. Willie thought it was because Nero was so badly disappointed, but perhaps it was because the faithful fellow saw that his friend was troubled. As they sat there, Nero looking so sad and Willie with his elbows resting on his knees and his chin buried in his hands, they heard some one whistle and, looking up, saw Tom Evans coming toward them.

"Heard the news?" Tom asked. "No. What is it?" answered Willie, forgetting for a moment his trouble over Nero.

"Ed Bishop's going with his folks to the city for the Fourth, an' so you'll have to find some one else to take his place in our procession."

Willie gave Nero a quick look. "Oh, I wish you had hands!"

"Who'll you get?" asked Tom, after waiting a moment for Willie to speak.

"Dunno yet; I'll have to think about it first. See here, I've got lots of things. Twice as much as we have to have."

"I should say you have! You're lucky. All the other boys say they had a hard time to get what they had to. How'd you manage it?"

"I earned the money, getting coal and kindling," Willie explained.

"Well, you ought to have the right to give out the flags. We'll all meet here at 10 sharp," and Tom sauntered on.

When he was gone, Willie began to talk to Nero again. "Now, there it is. I have firecrackers an' torpedoes enough for you an' me, too, an' you helped me earn 'em, carrying kindling, didn't you? Oh, why haven't you some hands to carry a flag with!"

Willie was excited now, and up jumped Nero, waving his tail as hard as he could. Willie looked at him for a minute and then turned a double somersault, and came up shouting, "Hurrah! hurrah! You shall march with us. I know I can do it!"

At last the Fourth came, and at 10 o'clock all the boys except Ed were gathered in Willie's yard and Willie was talking to them.

"Now, boys," he was saying, "you left it to me to put some one in Ed's place, an' I have selected some one that you all know an' like. He has his share of crackers an' will wave his flag fine. Will you promise to give him a rousing welcome when he comes, so's he won't feel hurt at being asked to march with us at the last minute?"

They all promised, and then while they were asking who it was Willie ran into the house. A few moments later he came out, and who should come trotting by his side but Nero, carrying in his mouth the handle of a basket that was filled with firecrackers and wagging his tail, to which was tied a little flag, pole and all!

The boys all gave a great shout when they saw Nero, and then they formed in double column and started for the commons, Nero walking by Willie's side, the proudest dog that ever waded a Fourth of July flag.

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