

Prisoners and Captives

By H. S. MERRIMAN

CHAPTER XI.—(Continued.)

After dinner Easton at last condescended 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 thoughtful 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.

"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—consumptive."

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 other's face. 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 blusterers, 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. They are 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 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 befittingly disappointed. "She does not always care to leave the admirer, and he objects to dissipation 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 of any description is not a bad thing in these times. Indeed," she added, turning suddenly toward him, "a motive is 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 repose 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 vapid 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 my motives—their pleasures my 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."

He laughed in an abrupt way.

"No more than myself."

"That is a mere prevarication," she persisted, gayly. "Tell me, please, in what particular this coveted superiority lies."

"In a desire to appear more aimless than you are," he retorted, gravely.

"I deny that. I plead not guilty," she said. "I am a person of many motives, but the many receive their life from one source. That one source is an earnest endeavor to please myself in all things, to crowd as much pleasure and as much excitement into a lifetime as it will hold."

"Then," he said, after a pause, "you are only one of the crowd after all."

"That is all, Mr. Tyars. Did you ever suspect me of being anything else?"

"I believe I did," he replied, with a more direct gaze than is allowed by the dictates of polite society.

She returned the gaze with serenity.

"Then please get rid of the idea," she said, significantly.

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 gayly 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 into doing?"

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

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," returned the American; "ominous 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.

"Hung 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.)

concerning Rewards.

Many persons think they ought to be rewarded for simple honesty. The idea is not only wrong but silly, declares a writer in the Denver Post, and tells of an incident that roused his wrath:

A few days ago, while walking down an Omaha street, I saw a man ahead of me drop a pocketbook. A messenger boy picked it up. Just then the man missed it, and the boy returned it to him without looking inside. The man gave the boy a quarter. The boy accepted it, but was disgusted.

"Is that all I get for being honest?" he asked.

"There is just three dollars in that pocketbook," said the man.

"Well, you ought to give me a dollar, anyway," the boy replied, sulkily.

Had I been the man I would have added a kick to the quarter; and there are lots of persons like that boy in this world.

Pity the Working Woman.

"Poor woman! She works hard all day, and then she's up nearly all night with the babies."

"What's the matter with her husband? Why doesn't he help her?"

"O, he puts in all his time agitating for an eight-hour day for the working-man."—Philadelphia Press.

She Lost Out.

Mrs. Caller—It doesn't always pay to husband one's resources.

Mrs. Homer—Why not?

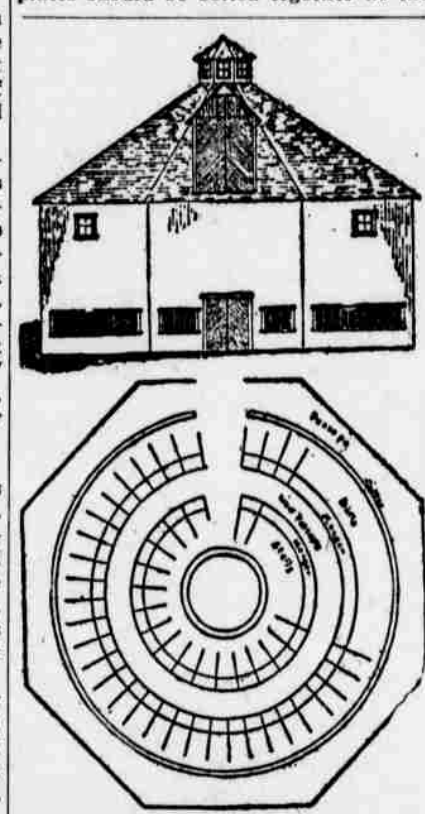
Mrs. Caller—Well, I judge so from Mrs. Backer's experience. She let her husband have the \$5,000 she inherited from her grandmother and he lost it all in speculation.

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.



An Eight-Sided Barn.

Here is a plan for a barn of the eight-sided or octagon shape. This octagonal barn is 25 feet on each side, providing accommodation for about fifty head of cattle. There is a considerable gain in floor space when the octagon form is used instead of the square form, the same amount of wall enclosing a greater number of square feet. The main objection to an eight-sided barn is that it is difficult to fill with a hay fork or sheaf carrier. This may be largely overcome by erecting a gable on one of the sides of the roof and running a track in from that height, which may be extended to within 20 feet of the opposite wall. The roof requires to be self-supporting and to secure this the plates should be bolted together at the



corners and held by a band of iron 4 feet long, bent to fit and solidly bolted so that the corners can never spread. In the stable part the larger cattle should be assigned to the outer circle, the smaller ones to the inner row. One feeding alley serves for the two rows, and a circular track can be arranged for carrying slage. In order to get sufficient light there requires to be an almost continuous window about three feet above the ground.—Montreal Star.

Drought Rather than Moisture.

It is much easier for one to be independent of dry weather than of wet unless the soil is naturally wet, so that it may be pipe drained and thus get rid of the excessive moisture and this is an expensive operation, but, notwithstanding, a most desirable one in the end. Potato growers are perhaps more interested in the problem of how to battle with dry weather than growers of any other crop and, under normal conditions, the secret is simply to see that the soil is properly supplied with humus or vegetable matter.

It is folly, or will be found so after a few years, to attempt to grow potatoes on the same ground year after year or to grow them wholly by the aid of commercial fertilizers. Here is where it pays to make every possible effort to grow clover for getting heavy crops of clover under the soil will add the required humus, which, in connection with first-class seed, care and cultivation, will enable one to grow heavy crops of potatoes in normal seasons and better than your neighbor's in dry seasons.

This question of getting humus into the soil is one that must be met sooner or later by every farmer and especially by those who pin their faith very largely to commercial fertilizers.

Rye for Pasture.

The early rye always shows itself soon after the weather begins to moderate in the spring, and some farmers usually then begin to use it for pasturage. It is a mistake to use the rye too early, as it may cause scours. It is very laxative in its effects, being watery, and a change from dry feed to young rye very early in the season may result in loss of milk.

The Plensing Garden.

If you have a garden it carries with it the satisfaction of going out early in May and gathering radishes, lettuce, young onions and spinach. A few weeks later early peas and beets are there for the taking. By the Fourth of July early potatoes, sweet and nutty, after a fashion never found in any store, can be dug. In succession follow snap beans, crisp cucumbers, tomatoes, corn that is sweet in some-thing more than name and muskmelons, fragrant, melting, delicious.

Profit in Forest Thinning.

A bulletin entitled "Improvement Thinning" has been issued by the State forester of Massachusetts. The author shows that the growth on considerable areas can be improved and made more productive by the application of moderate thinning while the stands are in the process of development. Thin as often as the material to be removed will pay for its removal is the rule laid down as to how often to thin. As to the degree to which it is safe to thin, the cover should never be broken to such an extent that it will not close again in two or three years and cast a dense shade. In answer to the objection that is sometimes urged that such work is impracticable under existing conditions of the labor and wood market, the author refers to the fact that thinning has been done and is going on now in Massachusetts and neighboring States, and that it has not only paid for itself, but has in some instances yielded a net profit of from twenty-five cents to \$2 on each cord of wood removed.

Prepare the Wool Well.

A wool grower sending wool to market in a heavy, dirty condition, leaving anything in the fleece to make more weight, and expecting to get more money is greatly mistaken. Buyers estimate the value of the clip by the net yield of clean wool. When growers do their best they secure for themselves the best results. The soundness of the fiber may be tested by stretching a small staple between the fingers. Staple $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length up, is classed combing below clothing. Labor expended in preparing the clip for sale is well bestowed and brings its own reward. The yolk in wool is the oily substance which gives color and lends softness to the fleece. It also promotes the growth of the fleece and prevents the wearing of the fiber. Good feeding, shelter and care promotes this secretion.

Fumigating the Orchard.

The insect tax upon this country's agricultural interests is something stupendous. Indeed, were it not for the ravages of insects, great and small, the life and profits of the horticulturist would be so attractive as to completely change the present attitude toward their occupation. The government experts are doing an enormous amount of educative work in determining the exact organisms that are responsible for each particular form of damage and the best method of combating same. Fumigation is one of the modern farmer's magic science wands by which, in a trice, he clears his crops of insect life that if not held eradicated would probably destroy his entire crop. In California immense balloonlike arrangements of canvas are used in fumigating fruit trees, and now a Texas inventor



proposes to modify the plan, with the idea of making it available for smaller crops, such as cotton and corn. The appliance consists of a supporting truck for movement over the ground, generally by the use of horses, a combustion chamber for the formation of the fumes, or gases employed as fumigant, and a framework, adjustable as to heights, and a hood covering the whole. At the rear a deflector curtain is provided, with a depending shield extending across the combustion chamber to deflect the fumes and force them into contact with the plants. With an apparatus of this general type it is possible to effectively and rapidly treat large numbers of plants, the deflector or hood extending over two full rows of plants.—Sacramento Bee.

Awake in Mexico.

Mexican farming interests are waking up under the example of their neighbors of the North, and a new school of agriculture is to be established under the charge of one of Luther Burbank's co-workers. This school is the first of the kind to be established in Mexico, and is located near the boundary line. The conditions there are similar to those in Texas and south California, and a high grade of agriculture may be expected under intelligent methods.