The Tower of Dago

by Mór (Maurus) Jókai, 1825-1904

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Illustrations
[Indicated in text; no illustrations were included.]

Chapter I

The Tower.

As the steamer from Stralsund is approaching the Gulf of Finland, the passenger's attention is attracted by an object which projects high out of the sea. He will hear the seamen call it the Tower of Dago. An old and wealthy Englishman, he may be told, on one occasion felt impelled by curiosity to ask the captain what it would cost him to examine the ruin close at hand. The answer was clothed in language less polite than forcible: "Merely the shrivelled skin and dried-up bones you carry about with you, sir!"

For hitherto the Tower of Dago has been spared an appearance in our art galleries only by the circumstance that it cannot well be got before the painter's easel. It is built upon the outermost point of a rocky promontory of the great island of Dago. The projecting headland lies obliquely across the northern current, and the sea makes a ceaseless seething whirlpool round the obstruction. The sea-bottom all around is strewn with most perilous reefs. Among their intricate labyrinths even the skiffs of the most adroit boatmen are in danger of being dashed in pieces.

And yet, for a sight of the Tower of Dago one might well risk one's life, especially at a time when the raging storm is clothing it with all its picturesque grandeur.

The extreme ledge of the promontory is a great block of reddish-brown rock. It rises precipitously out of the dark green waves, which incessantly storm it with their foam-crested dragon-heads. Some spring-tide monster will often lash itself aloft to the very summit, frightening the seagulls and eagles that love to range themselves along the verge of the rock.

From this ledge rises a six-sided tower some hundred and fifty feet high. The lower part is built in Cyclopean fashion, of massive uncut blocks of rock. The upper portion is of red stones. These reach to the very summit of the tower, the

battlements of which are to-day surmounted by the luxuriant green of juniper shrubs. And when the setting sun, bursting through a cloud, casts his rays upon the dead giant rising there in his solitude, while round about the low ashen clouds seem almost to touch his head; when the sea roars beneath and breaks in foam against his feet; when the reflected sunlight streams back, like the rays of a lighthouse, from some window the panes of which are haply still unshattered--then the glowing colossus seems a very Polyphemus, who with his one eye dares to defy the gods and wage eternal feud with men. That is the Tower of Dago.

But in perfect calm the scene is changed. Veiled in translucent mists, the tower rises aloft in grand repose beneath the hot, unclouded summer sky. Towards the summit it shows a great semi-circular gap like a mighty mouth petrified in the act of making an imprecation—a mouth gaping wide as if to salute the sea, or hail yonder craft that glides along the horizon. At ebb-tide, too, the great rock's hidden companions, the sunken reefs, begin to show themselves all around. Among them, half sunk in the sand, are seen the shattered remains of masts, rusty anchors and guns, all overgrown with seaweed and shell-fish. Here and there the eye perceives a human skull still encased in a helmet, a skeleton still protected by a shirt of mail, and innumerable remnants of stranded ships with their inscriptions and marks still readable. At one spot is seen the bottom of a vessel, whose copper plates, now hidden, now disclosed, by the restless motion of the waves, are green with verdigris. And everywhere the great sea-spiders and monster crabs--lords of the abyss—crawl and gloat unceasingly among the wreckage. Then the spectator, shuddering at this terrible arrangement of still life, is forced to ask himself, "Who could have been so mad as to build a tower like this on such an accursed spot, and who the madmen that could steer their vessels hither on these cruel rocks?"

And could there be any link of destiny connecting that forbidding edifice with the wreckage that lay around?

Chapter II

Back to the Sea.

In the time of Catherine II. a baron of the Von Ungern family, in the province of Brandenburg, migrated to the court of St. Petersburg. He had some Slavonic blood in his veins, and shortly after settling in the Russian capital he married the daughter of a Muscovite nobleman. His wife's dowry brought him several extensive estates in Volhynia. In spite of their German name his two sons were perfect Russians. The elder, Feodor, was a naval officer. He was a thorough seaman, and the terror of every Swedish seaport and merchantman. Zeno, the younger brother, was also a seaman, but his tactical abilities were exercised only at court, and particularly among the ladies. The fame of the elder brother naturally lent brilliancy to Zeno's name also. Feodor, however, willingly left to him all the pleasures of court life and all its dazzling distinctions. Such things were not for him. The storm-tossed sea and its perilous combats were for Feodor his chiefest

joy. Yet, when storm and fight alike were lulled to rest, he loved his quiet home—a little castle buried in an old forest, where his dear and beautiful wife dwelt with her little son. The boy, whose name was Alexander, was now four years old, and the father was not less proud of his domestic fortune than of his naval laurels.

Feodor had just accomplished one of his most heroic exploits against the Swedes. One stormy night he had suddenly surprised the convoy fleet at Karlskrona and burnt a large portion of it. He had captured several richly laden merchant-ships which tried hard to get out of range, plundered them of their most valuable contents, and then sent them to the bottom. He had also carried off the magnificent bell which had been taken by the Swedes from Hamburg city, and was then on its way to adorn the cathedral of Kalmar. Then he returned, unmolested, with booty and fame to Kronstadt.

Upon arriving there he considered it his first duty to deliver an account of his actions to the Admiral of the fleet. At that time the shore at Kronstadt was covered with a great number of small huts inhabited by the workmen in the port. As Captain Feodor leaped ashore from his boat, a girl, who had been watching the spot for some time, came out of one of the huts and approached him. The girl was young and pretty, and was dressed in the picturesque costume of the Volhynian women. She hurried up to the officer and seized his hand to kiss it. He recognised her immediately as his little son's nurse.

"What!" he exclaimed in surprise. "Mashinka! Why, what brings you here?"

The girl raised her finger to her lips and glanced timorously round about. Only when she had assured herself that there was no one listening did she begin to speak.

"Oh, my Master!" she exclaimed in a low tone; "have a care! Muffle yourself in your cloak! If you are recognised here you will certainly be taken!"

"Taken!" cried the Captain. "What foolishness is this, Mashinka? Why should any one wish to take me, think you?"

"Why!" echoed the girl. "To make you dig for lead in the Urals, most likely. You are an outlaw!"

"Are you raving, woman?" asked Feodor. "What crime have I committed?"

"That you will soon learn," replied Mashinka. "Last winter did you not shelter Krazinski in your house?"

"Krazinski! Why, he was a dear friend of mine—a brother-in-arms of the old days."

"That may be. But now they say he is a conspirator."

"But what is that to me? I knew nothing of that then. He came to the castle for the hunting, and after having had as much of that as he wanted he went off again. But I see I had better go off to the Court at once and tell them all about the matter."

"Nay, Master; go not there!" whispered the girl imploringly. "There you have a most powerful enemy whom your death alone will pacify."

"An enemy! Who is he?" asked Feodor in surprise.

"Your brother," replied Mashinka.

"What! Zeno?—he whom I loved so much that I made over to him my inheritance and even the title of Count as well, reserving only a minor's portion for myself?"

"Ay; and now he means to have that portion also," said Mashinka. "He has seized your castle in the forest; and even that seaman's whistle at your breast—he has already been promised that."

"Well, well! Fool that I am!" muttered Feodor. "Was he not all his life a miserable cur? After all, it is not to be wondered at. But what can he know of Krazinski?"

"This much—that Krazinski, in leaving, forgot to take with him a certain leather writing-case, and that it contained many dangerous papers."

"But I myself delivered that case to my wife, in order that she might take charge of it until Krazinski should demand it. She was to give it up to no one else."

"And yet, she has given it up to your brother. And because of that you have been outlawed."

"My wife!" exclaimed Captain Feodor, turning pale.

"She only was your wife. Now she is your brother's. Whoever is banished for life to the Ural mines is at the same time separated for ever from his wife, and she can at once marry again. That is how it happened. You were too long gone, and love in absence, they say, is difficult."

"But she had her son!" cried the Captain in a tone of agony. "Was not he enough to love? And such a son, too! Tell me, what have they done with my son?"

"You know well the custom, surely? When the father is banished the child is outlawed also. Son must follow father, and in order that he may never return, he is branded with a red-hot iron on the shoulder."

The Captain seemed about to reply, but the words died away upon his lips.

Suddenly he seized the girl's shoulders in his powerful grasp, and began to stare intently into her eyes. For it is a common belief in Volhynia that there are many unhappy mortals possessed by the Evil One in such a way that he takes up his abode in their eyeballs. Then, by means of all manner of phantoms and illusions, he causes them to "see the things that are not." About such sights the victims talk as if they were perfectly real. But it is believed that if a truly brave and upright man who fears not the Evil One seizes the possessed person firmly by the shoulders, gazes unflinchingly into the bewitched eyes until he perceives the demon lurking within, and then quickly and unexpectedly spits into them—then the Evil Spirit is confounded and flies in confusion from the possessed one's eyes. Thus did Captain Feodor.

"Ah, yes! It may be—it may, indeed, be so," said the girl resignedly, as she wiped her eyes with the hem of her apron. "Often have I asked myself whether all I have seen and heard is not merely falsehood and deceit. It may be all the devil's work. Oh, would to God it were so! I would bless you every day of my life for driving the curse out of me. But, Master, I beseech you, cross the threshold of that hut and look within. If you see nothing, then the Evil One has indeed been at his juggling tricks with me, making me see and speak the things that are not."

Feodor stepped into the tumble-down hut to which Mashinka had pointed. The first thing that met his gaze was his little son lying on a heap of dirty straw. The little shirt had slipped down over one shoulder, and upon this the mark of the branding-iron was clearly seen. Feodor knelt down, buried his face in the straw beside the boy, and clasped him in his arms. But he uttered no cry and shed no tear.

"Why, my good Master," said the girl, "surely you, too, have become possessed, and see things that do not exist."

Meantime the child did not cry. He trembled violently; for fear, and pain, and fever were working together. The father wrapped him in his cloak, and laid him tenderly across his knees.

"Now listen," said Mashinka, "to all that the Evil One must have put into my eyes and ears, if, indeed, it is all nothing but his black magic. Your own steward had orders to bring all your treasure in a great iron chest along with the child to Tsarskoye Selo. Your brother and your wife were already in St. Petersburg—together. The treasure was to be divided among I know not how many of the high court officials. Your wife, of course, fell to the informer's portion, and the child was sent off later in order to be transported to the Urals along with you. As the boy begged most piteously for me I was allowed to travel along with him. He cried during the whole journey with the pain caused by the branding-iron. At last the steward could no longer bear his constant moaning in the carriage, and ordered me to get down and gather some poppy-heads in the field, so that I might make an infusion of them and put the child to sleep. So I gathered a great many poppy-heads and made them into a good strong tea at our next stopping-place. But I did not give it to the boy to drink. I mixed it among the brandy which the steward, the driver, and the Cossacks were drinking, and it was not long before their heads were nodding under it.

"I then took the keys of the iron chest from the steward's pocket, flung him out of the troïka and the driver after him, seized the reins and drove off with the boy. But when the Cossacks had become a little sober they came galloping after us. When I saw that we must soon be overtaken, I opened the treasure-chest took out great handfuls of gold and silver, and flung them on the road. Of course, they could not let stuff of that kind lie, and by the time they had scraped it all together we were far away over hill and dale. On reaching the forest of Pleskov the middle horse became lame, and I saw that I could not hope to save both the money and the child. I should have had to sacrifice either one or other. So I told the boy to clasp me tightly round the neck, and away we fled together across the steppe. I had previously turned the horses loose with the troïka. No doubt the Cossacks overtook the carriage with all the treasure. But I brought the child here through the forests and across the moors, for I knew that you would land here when you returned from the sea. But you are not angry with me, Master, for bringing only the boy with me instead of all the gold?"

As yet not a tear had risen to the rugged seaman's eyes. He sat staring with frenzied look at the cruel brand upon his son's shoulder. But suddenly, as Mashinka finished speaking, a flood of hot tears burst from the father's eyes. He wiped them away. The white handkerchief was stained with crimson spots. He held it up before the girl's eyes.

"Remember!" he exclaimed in hollow tones, "once in your life you saw a man weep tears of blood."

"Now," he added sternly, after a pause, "take the boy in your arms and follow me."

"But whither are you going, Master?" asked the girl.

"Back again to the sea."

When Captain Von Ungern, with his child and Mashinka, regained the deck of his vessel, the GLADOVA STRELA, he found the plenipotentiary of the Admiralty already on board. That official was charged with the ukase depriving Feodor of his rank, and appointing his brother Zeno to the post of frigate-captain in his place. The crew were looking on in gloomy silence, ready for any turn which events might take.

"Throw both ukase and messenger into the sea!" shouted Feodor.

The order was exactly to the mind of the crew, and right promptly did they execute it.

"And now," he called out, "which of you will come with me wherever I may go?"

"We will all go with you against Hell itself!" shouted the men.

"Nay, my men; against the powers of Hell we will never fight, but only against those of Heaven and Earth. Henceforth we will league ourselves with all the fiends of Darkness and the Storm!"

The weather was tempestuous and the sea was running high. Not until the following day did the Admiralty decide to pursue the vessel which had vanished so suddenly in full sail. It was then too late to overtake her.

It was shortly afterwards that the sad news reached St. Petersburg that the fugitive vessel had run upon the rocks of Dago. Her mainmast and bowsprit were all that was ever picked up, so it was plain to all men that the GLADOVA STRELA, with her fifty men and seven guns, had gone to the bottom. So after all, men said, things had perhaps happened as they ought. At all events, the name of Captain Feodor Von Ungern was utterly forgotten.

Chapter III

The Observatory.

It was in the following spring that the lofty tower arose on the promontory of the Isthmus of Dago. The building was quite unnoticed except by the inhabitants of the island. The ordinary track of vessels was then far distant from the spot.

At that time the island of Dago still belonged to Finland. Although under Swedish rule, it formed a small republic standing by itself, in whose internal affairs no one interfered. The governor of the island had, of course, made inquiries regarding the inhabitants of the tower, and had learnt that they were foreign seamen, whose vessel had been wrecked in the neighbourhood. Their commander was reported to be a most cultured gentleman, capable of conversing fluently in Latin as well as in Dutch. He had purchased the whole of the waste promontory from the authorities of the island with hard cash, and had then had the stupendous edifice built by his own men and in accordance with his own plans. When it was completed the whole company lived together in the tower. How many of them there might be was never exactly known, for they never showed themselves outside their fortress walls. But what, it was often asked, could be the occupation of the men within? That, however, was a mystery to the islanders.

But the mystery of mysteries was: What did the inmates eat?

For to build such a tower some fifty men at least must have been necessary. Even had they succeeded in bringing all their provisions to land from their stranded vessel, these must have been consumed in a very short time. They had already been living there a whole year, and had never once come forth from their rocky retreat to buy provisions in the neighbouring village. They could certainly not have lived on sea-spiders and mussels alone; and yet their rocks produced nothing else.

It was evident, nevertheless, that they possessed abundance of money. For, in summer, the old women of Dago (but never the young girls) would carry great baskets of fruit and flowers to the locked door which guarded the entrance to the courtyard of the tower. Some one would then appear in response to their knocking, open a small window in the door, receive the baskets of flowers, and hand out real money in exchange for them. No; that was no spurious coin. At one time it was a Russian imperial, at another an English sovereign, while sometimes it was German thalers and Spanish dollars, intermixed with a few Venetian zecchini, that were given in payment. But who within, it was often wondered, could require flowers? And if they had money to give in exchange for flowers, then why not for food also?

At length the spiritual overseer of the island, the Very Reverend Jeremiah Waimoener, resolved to ascertain by personal inquiry what manner of men really dwelt in that mysterious edifice. With this object he one day made bold to call upon its self-imprisoned proprietor.

He was at once admitted. Strange to say, although he came quite alone, his eyes were not even bound—as he had fully convinced himself they would be—before he was conducted to the Master's presence. He was allowed to look all around and see everything. On returning home there would be absolutely nothing to prevent him telling everybody that the tower, with all its inner staircases, was built of massive stone, and that it was divided internally into very many stories. On reaching the twelfth story the reverend gentleman was received by the Master of the tower. This portion of the building had the appearance of an observatory, and was surmounted by a lofty dome. The room was six-sided, and had three large windows looking towards the sea, the three opposite walls being covered with wainscot. Everything in the room indicated that it served as the study of a man of science. There were astronomical instruments, musty books, and numerous chemical tubes and retorts. In addition there were all kinds of superstitious designs, alchemistic abracadabras and symbols, in which no man of sense any longer believes.

The Master himself was a grave-looking personage, whose features never betrayed the slightest emotion either while speaking or listening. He requested his visitor to be seated beside him on a semicircular bench which enclosed a sort of chemical furnace. The clergyman introduced himself and, after hinting that he had heard of the Master's great love for science, observed that he had long ardently wished to make his acquaintance, as science was his own darling pursuit. They might be able, he suggested, to exchange ideas to their mutual advantage.

The Master hereupon welcomed him warmly as a guest. Presently he pressed a secret spring, and a bright fire suddenly blazed up in the furnace before them. In a

moment the Master had drawn forth from the oven a supply of bread, meat and dried figs, just as if they had all been freshly baked and prepared within. He then turned a tap in another part of the same apparatus, and at once a stream of fresh foaming beer flowed into a large tankard beneath. This he placed with the other good things on the table before his guest.

The Reverend Herr Waimoener convinced himself by tasting that everything was really what it appeared to be.

"But tell me, my good sir," he exclaimed in astonishment, "whence do you procure all these provisions?"

"That is perfectly simple," replied the Master gravely. "Everything on earth, as you know, is produced by the transformation of matter. The alchemists of old used to puzzle their brains to discover how to make stones into gold. But I have solved a much deeper problem than that—how to make the rocks into bread, meat and fruit, and the waters of the sea into sparkling wine and foaming beer."

"You are pleased to make sport of me, I see," said the clergyman with a somewhat sickly smile.

"Quite the contrary, my friend," said the Master. "The proof is before you. Beneath and around me, as you see, there is nothing but rocks and water. As you know, I have not stirred from this spot for years, and could not do so if I wished, for I have no vessel. Yet I live here with some fifty companions, without asking a single thing from any one on your island. Besides, what is there in my theory that is incredible? Are not the constituents of bread, flesh and fruit already present in the rocks, the air and the ocean? You are a scientific man and, of course, know well that it is as I say. In truth, the only secret in the business is how to hasten Nature's tardy process of the transformation of matter. That is my discovery. Just look here for a moment. In this vessel you see a black, sticky fluid. You may tell it by its smell. It is tar. And here before us is a heated furnace. Now, every chemist knows that by means of fire and sal-ammoniac he can produce ice. I now place the vessel in the flue of the furnace—so. We will take our watches in our hands and count the time. In seventy-seven seconds the transformation will be complete... Let us open the aperture. Look at the dish now—and taste it too. It is a pineapple ice."

Illustration:
“It is a pineapple ice“

A shiver ran through the reverend gentleman's whole body at the mere sight of the mysterious delicacy.

"Taste it! Never!" he cried in horror. "Such things are not to be done without the help of the foul Fiend himself!"

"Without that, indeed, it were impossible," said the Master calmly. "Everything of that nature is done only with the aid of the powers of Darkness. But, my friend, have you any special objection to them?"

"Have I any objection to the powers of Darkness?" exclaimed the horrified ecclesiastic.

"Ah! You have, I see. Well, well; that's a somewhat antiquated notion--a relic of those times when the theory prevailed that the earth was governed by God. But

nowadays we have changed all that. It is an absolute necessity for all species of life on this apple-skin of an earthcrust to have the forces of Hell immediately beneath them. The breath of Heaven chills and stiffens everything. It is the agents of Satan that produce everything—trees, fruit, beast and man."

"But, my dear sir," expostulated the clergyman, "these are strange geognostic theories! Notwithstanding your assertions, man, at least, is in no wise the work of Satan."

"And why not?" demanded the Master. "Man is so fashioned that he must freeze to death unless he murder some other brute that happens to have a fur skin. To appease his hunger, also, he must slay some other animal. And his thirst—does he not even thirst for the blood of his fellow man—of his own brother? Could such a monster, think you, be fashioned in any other region than the place of perdition itself?"

"But you forget the human virtues!" interrupted the ecclesiastic. "There are many men, you will admit, who rule their whole lives by the law of Heaven."

"Of all things that, surely, is the most opposed to Nature. Those laws of which you speak have been made merely to torment the human race. The virtues are simply so many revolts against Nature. That alone is good which satisfies the body."

"And the soul, my dear sir! What of the immortal soul!" said the minister solemnly.

"The soul!" echoed the Master contemptuously; "the most execrable imposture with which the world has ever been befooled! For the body's torment a tyrant was invented to chastise it by means of fasting and renunciation, thus to reduce it to desperation. The soul, sir, is simply a tyrant that forces its monstrous feelings on the body. And we are to suffer thus merely because that tyrannous fiction comes from above—from Heaven, and the body from beneath—from Hell! But how if it were to occur to the body that it is really the master and the other the slave, and the soul were to be trodden under foot?"

"Sir, your dogma seems to me perfectly frightful!" said Herr Waimoener aghast.

"I prosper well enough under it, however. My whole confession of faith, indeed, is contained in these words: 'That which is agreeable to me is right; that which is hurtful to another is not wrong.'"

"Sir, do your companions all practise this religion also?"

"I preach them no other, and they appear quite content with it."

"Have you a family also?" asked the clergyman anxiously; "I sincerely trust not."

"Oh yes," answered the Master lightly. "There dwell with me both a female anthropopithecus and an undeveloped specimen of the *simia anthropos, masculini generis*."

"And what religion, pray, do you teach your son?"

"The same that I have just enunciated."

The reverend gentleman raised his hands in righteous horror. Then, after fervently murmuring the first lines of Luther's hymn, "A safe stronghold our God is still!" he rose to go.

"Farewell, sir," said he. "Never again can I come here. When I reach home I shall at once make a representation to our authorities to compel you to build up your

exit on the island side, so that you and yours may never come forth to trouble and contaminate our people."

"Fear not, friend," said the Master, calmly and emphatically. "We never shall go out to trouble you; but it will not be long ere you come here to us. Listen! In this very year a famine will visit your island. I have learnt as much already from those demons of mine. Ay, and your people will come crawling on their knees to me who possess the power to turn the rocks into bread, and they will sing *Hallelujah Satanas!* in chorus."

The clergyman pulled his gown over his ears in order to shut out such blasphemy, and rushed precipitately down stairs and out at the lower door. Never again had he the least inclination to pay a further pastoral visit to the Satanic Apostle of Dago.

Chapter IV

The Sorcerer.

The Master of the Tower of Dago spoke the truth. It was really the powers of Darkness that helped him to make the rocks and water into bread and wine. He also stated a simple fact when he declared that the agent in the transformation was the furnace in the observatory at the summit of the tower. It was in the following manner that this work of sorcery was accomplished.

On a day when the position of the barometer and the cries of the sea-gulls announced the approach of a storm, the Apostle of Dago assembled his companions in a subterranean chamber of his tower. This vault was called the "chapel." It contained a pulpit, from which the Master himself was in the habit of exhorting his flock. It was, indeed, a strange chapel!

And what frightful exhortations were these! Exhortations to the perpetration of all manner of misdeeds and cruelty; the ten commandments of God reversed; perpetual enmity towards all mankind, and especially towards their own land, their dearest friends, their fathers and brothers; sin in its deepest depths of depravity raised aloft as a virtue; faithlessness and treachery the highest duty; and the malediction of the world the most perfect bliss! Such was the gospel of Dago.

While the Master uttered these doctrines his little son sat on the pulpit steps at his feet, so that he might early imbibe the frightful precepts in all childish simplicity, and continue their propagation when his father should have gone to his own place. The song of praise was never raised in that chapel; only the sound of scornful, scoffing laughter was ever heard.

"Overthrow the ten commandments! Be false; covet what is thy neighbour's; kill, steal, dishonour thy father, thy father's father, and the greatest father of all—the Tsar! Seek out for thyself a lovely flower whose name is woman; pluck it—then crush it, and cast it away when all its fragrance is fled!"

Doubtless the child understood but little as yet of such doctrines as those to which he was compelled to listen.

"To-night or to-morrow we hold high festival!"

Upon this announcement being made the inmates hastened to bring their small boats out of their concealment in the vault. These vessels were constructed to hold three men each, and were made of light wood covered with stout leather. They were then placed in readiness in a narrow creek leading from the vault out into the open sea.

As the storm at length began to break, the men were certain to be sitting ready in their boats, awaiting the expected "sacrifice."

And as certainly it came.

As night began to fall the Master ascended alone to the observatory. He at once lighted the furnace, and heightened its brilliancy by means of lime and oxygen. He then removed the wainscot from the three walls opposite the large windows facing the sea. Behind the wainscot were immense concave mirrors of burnished steel. These now reflected back the dazzling light from the furnace in three directions away to the distant horizon.

Before the exercises of the night it was customary to ring the "chapel" bell. This was an enormous bell, which had once been taken as booty. It was suspended in a secret chamber beneath the observatory, and on being rung, its rumbling notes sounded through a semicircular window of the tower far out into the night. The tower had no opening on the land side, and the inhabitants of the island could neither see the light of the furnace nor hear the tolling of the bell. Every ship which appeared on the horizon in a stormy night must inevitably fall a prey to this diabolical stratagem.

In the channel connecting the Baltic with the Gulf of Finland there were two lighthouses—one on the Swedish coast at Gustavsvarn, and another on the Finnish coast near Revel. Even on a stormy night seamen might easily have steered their course by these two lights. But the Devil's apostle in the Tower of Dago confused them with his light and the sound of his bell. The mariners imagined that one of the two lighthouses known to them lay before them. They felt sure that the light beckoned them on to safety. So, with heartfelt thanks to God for His mercy, they steered directly towards it, and about an hour later were dashed against the rocks of Dago.

Then, as signals for help and cries of terror rose above the roar of wind and sea, the small boats swarmed forth from their concealment and boarded the stranded vessel. The crews killed all who were still alive on board, and plundered everything of value to be found—money, bales of goods, and provisions. They then carried everything ashore and stored it in the lower vaults of the tower. Such an expedition would often have to be repeated twice or thrice in a single night, for the deceptive light enticed vessels from three different quarters, and all went into the trap. The Master was careful to extinguish the light about two hours before daybreak, in order that no vessel should make towards his stronghold in broad daylight. Of his victims not one man was ever left alive.

They had, indeed, leagued themselves with all the fiends of Darkness and the Storm, in defiance of both Heaven and Earth.

This, then, was the sorcery by which they drew bread, meat, wine and fruit from the rocks and the sea. It was the stranded vessels that filled the chambers and vaults of the Tower of Dago with everything dear to the heart of man, and covered the rocky shore beneath the tower with that which was now dearest of all to its inmates' hearts—the fleshless bones of their brother men.

Chapter V

The Famine.

It came to pass as the Master of the Tower of Dago had foretold. A year of famine visited the island.

There in his loneliness he had taken continual counsel of that great vital principle which he chose to associate with the Prince of Evil, but to which the learned give the name of "Gæa"—Earth.

And the Earth-demon has, in truth, diabolical humours. Between Earth and her minions, and the favourites of Heaven, there is eternal strife. It pleases Earth to let the ill weeds grow. The poppy and the corn-flower are her darlings. And yet, that child of Heaven, man's finer nature, forces her to bring forth white wheat for him! The Earth-spirit favours the savage and grosser instincts, while man does her violence by pressing upon her his nobler fruits and virtues. Man, doubtless, has a right to ask, "Why has the Creator brought forth these myriads of caterpillars and cockchafers that devastate my fruit-trees?" But surely the caterpillar and the cockchafer have an equal right to demand, "To what purpose has Earth given birth to that misshapen, two-legged creature that delights to sweep me down from my tree, and trample me under foot?" But, after all, the Earth-spirit is not the gardener's friend, but rather the caterpillar's.

The hermit in the Tower of Dago included in his studies that centre of the other infernos, the sun. He had observed that the spots and eruptions on the sun's disc exercise an influence upon the weather of our planet. He had, moreover, imbibed the wisdom of the wind and waves. He had carefully noted the migrations of whales and kingfishers, as well as the displays of the aurora borealis and the shooting stars. All these had told him that the hot days of May, which so quicken the growth of the crops, would be succeeded by a frost that would blight utterly the whole field produce of the island of Dago in a single night.

And so it happened. Not on that island alone but throughout the whole of northern Russia, the hopes of the agriculturists were shattered by that terrible frost. The capricious weather brought in its train that pestilence which attacks only the poor—Starvation.

In such circumstances larger and more powerful States may easily procure money, and tide over the evil day by purchasing grain in lands more blessed than theirs, and distributing it among their people. But a small and poverty-stricken republic like the island of Dago could not so easily get gold and silver to give in

exchange for bread. The poor people had to fall back upon such nutriment as fish and cheese. "This year," they said, "we must eat no bread." That was the solution.

The old women of the island now came much more frequently to the tower to sell their flowers. But instead of gold they now begged for a little corn.

"Listen to me!" said the Master of the tower to them one day. "You want bread. Well, I know a secret which enables me to transform earth at once into corn and barley. Bring me earth, then—but rich and fertile it must be—and I will give you corn in exchange for it. However large the sack may be in which you bring the clods, just so large will be the sack of corn I will give you in return."

At first it was only the women that made the trial. They brought the magician good, dark loam in small sacks. For this they received a like quantity of wheat. The grain was such as they had never before seen. At once the strong young men were seized with the desire to participate in such profitable barter, and soon they too were carrying to the tower as heavy sacks of mother earth as their brawny arms and broad shoulders could support.

The Very Reverend Pastor Waimoener did, indeed, pronounce his anathema against all who dared to make such pilgrimages to the Satanic shrine in order to barter their own blessed earth for a stranger's accursed corn. He warned them that grain grown in such a mysterious and suspicious soil could not but give them the itch and elflock, and that one day their souls must inevitably sink for ever in the pool of fire. His threats and warnings, however, were of no avail. The people's skins did not turn black with eating the mysterious corn, neither did their hair become entangled. Their souls' welfare, they therefore reasoned, might well be equally secure.

The grain was, in fact, the best ever reaped in Brandenburg. The Russian Government had had it shipped for their northern ports. That year so many grain-laden vessels had gone on the rocks beneath the Tower of Dago, that its inmates had soon no more room to store the booty. Thus it was that they came to exchange it with the islanders for earth.

Earth! But for what purpose could the Destroying Spirit require earth?

To create!

[Illustration]

There was a little hollow on the south side of the tower which was sheltered from the wind on every side. This hollow the Master filled with the earth, and planted the little plot all over with flowers. In this way he soon had a perfect flower-garden laid out.

There was, then, one human being in the tower who took pleasure in flowers.

But did the terrible doctrines professed by the Master permit him to act thus kindly towards any living creature?

Alas! Nothing in creation is flawless—not even the Satanic confession of faith. Even Satan is sometimes tricked by his disciples, and unbelief itself has its hypocrisy.

To his own thinking, this man had succeeded in banishing every human feeling from his heart—but this one still remained. He had, he thought, been able to renounce every virtue in favour of its opposite vice—but this one he could not renounce. He could not fight down the kindliness that filled his heart for the poor girl, Mashinka, who had saved his child, who had accompanied him into exile, and

who had become a loving mother to his boy and a devoted companion to him. So he felt grateful to her.

But that was surely a heresy against the religion he professed and preached—a positive breach of the all-denying dogma! For Gratitude is itself a virtue and closely related to Love. Gratitude being merely a tyranny of the soul over the body, how could the body, which had now become master, admit it? And if the body be indeed the ruling lord, the right of thought also belongs to it. Its philosophy must, then, determine the course of both action and feeling. Was it not plain that this one contradiction in the Master's principles might—nay, must, overturn the whole edifice of Babel?

Nevertheless, the Master found it impossible to shut his heart against this one feeling. With the most painstaking art he had laid out this garden—bought at a higher price even than the gardens of Semiramis; and that, too, for a poor peasant girl who alone in that Babel of hate had retained in her heart the priceless feeling of Love.

When the garden was finished and planted with all the flowers the island could afford, the Master led Mashinka to the door, which had hitherto been closed to her, opened it, and said simply:

"The garden is yours!"

Illustration:
"The garden is yours!"

And as the girl, weeping with joy, threw herself at his feet, pressed his hand to her lips and covered it with her tears—did not the captive spirit throb rebelliously within its weak bodily prison, and ask: "Is not a single tear like these—a single cry of joy—sweeter far than a sea of blood, and a chorus of death-shrieks from the throats of thousands of vanquished enemies?"

At the thought, he pushed the girl away from him and rushed up to his laboratory, there to continue the work of destruction.

Chapter VI

Compensation.

One day, while the inmates of the tower were preparing for one of their fiendish festivals, the Master's little son came into Mashinka's room. He had just come up from the underground "chapel." The boy's face looked sorely troubled. When Mashinka asked what ailed him, he whispered softly to her:

"Something makes me so sad—what it is I cannot tell. But this at least I know—I hate my father!"

Then Mashinka took the boy's cold hand in hers and tried to soothe away the pain that filled his heart. She taught him how he ought to love both his Heavenly

and his earthly father, even though both should chastise their child so severely that love was moved to give place to fear.

Thus the evil seeds which the Master was perpetually striving to sow in his son's heart by night, were ever rooted up again in the daytime by the poor Volhynian peasant girl.

Chapter VII

The Meeting.

This terrible life had now gone on for twelve long years. Most of the actors in the drama had become grey. Several had died, and the total number in the tower had now fallen to forty. Even the master-spirit of Dago had snow-white hair, and seemed some twenty years older than he really was.

During that time some six hundred vessels had been shattered on the rocks of Dago. Some eighteen thousand men had perished, and a fortune of a hundred millions of thalers had been destroyed.

But still the demon of revenge and destruction was unsatisfied. Twelve years of blood had not sufficed to quench the fire of hate that consumed his heart.

All those whose bodies lay scattered among the rocks beneath him were men quite unknown to him. He never even learnt their names, nor was he present when they were struck down.

But one thing he still yearned for—of one thing he was ever dreaming. His sole remaining wish was to hold in his destroying power those who had made him so miserable; to meet them for a moment face to face; then to drink in the curses of their despair as they were thrust down into their graves. That, indeed, would be the very crown of his life-work!

During summer the work was discontinued. In northern regions lighthouses are of little service in the short and light summer nights. During these months of inactivity the Master, as became a dutiful father, instructed his son in all those arts whereby the mighty powers of Nature are made serviceable to man. He exercised him also in the use of arms—not in true knightly fashion, but with all the tricks approved of bandits and corsairs. He took the boy with him in his boat among the reefs along the shore, so that he should learn early to be reckless and defiant of all danger. Many a time he would throw the lad from the boat right out into the eddy. At first he was unable to get out without help, and then the father would leap in after him and bring him back by the hair of the head. In a little time, however, the lad was expert enough to dispense with all help, and would swim in and out of the most dangerous positions alone.

About the end of autumn in the twelfth year an imperial Russian gunboat was wrecked upon the rocks of Dago. Among the papers found in the cabin by the plunderers was an Admiralty order addressed to all the commanders of war vessels. This document stated that during the past twelve years a vast number of maritime disasters had occurred in the Baltic, and particularly (so, at least, it was

believed) in the passage between Faro and Gustavsvarn. As not a single soul was known to have survived, the general voice of terror and exasperation had at length decided the ruling powers to move in the matter. The order went on to express the opinion that these seas must be the haunt of some piratical vessel which captured ships in stormy nights, and sent them to the bottom after slaughtering their crews. For, strangely enough, no one had ever found a single fragment of any of the missing vessels. Seamen (it was stated) were in the habit, when a disaster was imminent, of committing a short account of the catastrophe to the waves in a sealed bottle which, in all likelihood, would one day be picked up by fishermen. But out of some six hundred missing vessels no such memorial had ever made its appearance. Human hands, it was therefore concluded, must be at work, and search for them must be diligently made. The document, therefore, required the commander of every man-of-war and gunboat to take every possible step to track out the mysterious destroyer.

How the Apostle of Dago laughed sardonically as he read the order.

"So they are coming at last!" he cried; "those for whom I have waited so long! Right well shall they be received!"

At that season of the year dense fogs begin to be prevalent in the Baltic. These are of the utmost danger to seamen, for the rays from the lighthouses cannot penetrate the atmosphere, and the attention of vessels can only be attracted by the sound of bells.

On one such hazy and sultry night the Master of the Tower of Dago rang the bell for evening "service." That night, surely, they should hold high festival. Vessels of war were certainly scouring the seas all around. One such vessel was still wanting on the rocks of Dago. Smaller ships, such as gunboats, brigs and corvettes, were lying there in plenty, forming excellent places of retreat for the hydra and nautilus. To them the company of a full three-decker could not but be welcome.

Presently, in response to the sounds which had so often proved a mariner's death-knell, an answering signal was borne in from the open sea. It was the familiar, long-drawn tones of a great sea-horn, which can be heard many miles off in foggy weather.

They were coming, then, at last!

Only a little while ago, no doubt, they had thought that they had lost their way. But now, thank God! they were sailing towards a safe harbour. By daybreak they should be beyond all danger!

"Not God in Heaven can save them now!" muttered the Master, as with such thoughts he gazed intently into the gloom.

But, nevertheless, it appeared that He could save them.

Just as the approaching sound of the fog-signal indicated that the vessel could now be scarcely a mile distant from the tower, the fog suddenly lifted, and the rays of the rising sun disclosed the outline of a ship of the line.

She immediately dropped her anchor. For, now that the fog had cleared, the seamen perceived the danger of their position, and arrested their vessel's course. And that not a moment too soon. She lay-to about a gunshot from the tower, and presently hoisted the Russian colours. In response, the Master of the tower at once saluted her by running up the corresponding flag.

The vessel's long-boat was now lowered. The Commodore, a midshipman, and four and twenty marines and seamen took their places. All were fully armed.

They steered for the entrance facing the sea. Although well concealed, they had soon discovered it with the aid of their powerful glasses. They succeeded in making their way safely through all the rocks and breakers which threatened their approach.

The strangers were received at the lower door by an old, hunch-backed porter, who was, to all appearance, nearly stone deaf. The Commodore had to shout with all his might into the fellow's ears before he could be made to hear anything. Then he gave an answer of which not a word could be understood, for the old man spoke the purest Platt-Deutsch. By means of signs, however, he at length gave them to understand that he was the only servant in the establishment, and that if the gentlemen would like to speak to any one they might go upstairs and see "Mynheer."

The Commodore ordered his men to land, and the entire company then followed the old porter. At each door which they passed on their way the officer took the precaution of stationing two armed men. When he reached the observatory floor only the coxswain and the midshipman—the latter quite a lad—remained with him. But these were evidently more than sufficient. For the Master of the tower was quite alone in his study and had beside him no other weapons than those of science.

The Commodore saluted him in good French:

"You are the Master of this tower, I believe?"

"At present, indeed, I am."

"And for what purpose did you have it built, pray?"

The Master glanced sharply at his questioner.

"May I first inquire," said he, "what entitles you to ask such a question?"

"You shall hear," replied the officer. "You see, of course, by my uniform that I am Commodore on a ship of the line in the service of his Majesty the Tsar of all the Russias. The three-decker lying out there is my vessel the ST. THOMAS. Of late years an enormous number of ships have been lost in the Baltic, and that in the most mysterious circumstances. I have therefore received orders to stop and search every suspicious vessel on the high seas, as well as to make any investigations upon the coast which I may consider advisable. My name is Count Zeno von Ungern."

Surely the Master's features must long ago have assumed the repose of death itself not to have been convulsed with every evil passion at the very mention of that name—the worst passion of all being joy.

It was his brother who stood before him.

The two sons had never seen each other since their earliest childhood. Zeno had visited his elder brother's house only in Feodor's absence at sea, while Feodor had never once appeared in the brilliant salons of the court. The elder brother, moreover, now looked much older than he really was. It was impossible, therefore, for Zeno to recognise him.

Feodor acknowledged his visitor's mission with a polite bow.

"I am delighted," he said, "to have this pleasure. My name is Baron Helmford."

"Ah!—a Swede?"

"My ancestors may have been so. I am from Friesland."

"And for what purpose do you live here?"

"I live here," answered the Master calmly, "mainly for scientific pursuits. There is, indeed," he added hesitatingly, "another reason as well, but one which, after all, I have really little reason to conceal from you."

"Why, then, do you not inform me of it at once?"

"Because a child might also hear it."

The Master here glanced significantly at the young midshipman who was also in the room.

"Oh, that is my son Paul," said the Commodore, with fatherly pride. "He is anything but a child. He is a midshipman on his Majesty's ship the ST. THOMAS, and has already been through many a deadly fray."

"I do not doubt it. And yet, he can hardly be more than—ah!—thirteen years old?"

"That is, in fact, exactly his age."

"I also have a son," said the Master. "He is sixteen years of age, and he too has seen and heard many fearful things. But one thing, you know, he must not hear—tales in which a woman—"

"Ah! you are right," said the Commodore hastily. "If it is a question of that sort I need ask no more."

"Now, Commodore, if you wish it, I will myself show you all the rooms and passages in the building. Be good enough to accompany me."

Feodor led the way down the stone steps connecting one floor with another. The smallness of the rooms into which each story was divided easily made the stranger imagine that he was seeing the whole of the space between the walls, whereas he really saw only about two-thirds of it. A vertical partition, running from the vaults beneath up to the upper story, shut off a portion of the space. It was here that all the plundered treasure, ammunition and guns were carefully concealed. Through this section a secret passage led down to the rooms in which the provisions were stored, and to the subterranean "chapel" in which the armed men were hidden, waiting for the signal to force their way by means of a trap-door into the upper portions of the tower.

The living rooms through which the Commodore was conducted had quite the appearance of such as might be used by some contemplative and learned recluse. They contained naturalists' collections, shell-fish and corals, antiquities, and book-cases filled with yellow-edged folios.

Presently the officer glanced out of a window in one of the rooms and saw away beneath him the flower garden with the asters and chrysanthemums blooming in the autumn sun.

"Ah!" he exclaimed; "that garden tells plainly enough that this tower has also a mistress."

"I am very sorry that I cannot conduct you thither, Count von Ungern," said the Master; "we should have to pass through the lady's boudoir."

"The lady is your wife, is she not?" inquired the Commodore.

"It is ill answering that question. Yes, and yet No."

"Ah! A secret, I perceive."

"Yes, Count. But to show you that the secret is in no way a suspicious one, I will make a suggestion. Where a man may not enter, a guest who is still a child may fitly enough be seen."

So saying, he opened a door and called:

"Alexander!"

In response, a tall sunburnt lad stepped from the adjacent room. His face betrayed much perplexity upon perceiving the strangers.

Feodor gently pushed him towards the younger youth.

"See," he said; "this is Count Paul von Ungern, a midshipman. Take him with you to see your mother; and be sure that you make good friends with each other."

Alexander gazed in wonder with his great dark eyes, first at his father and then at the strange lad. He then silently held out his hand to Paul, drew him towards him, and embraced him. Finally he linked his arm in Paul's and led him away to see his—mother.

The frank wonder expressed by the boy's flushed face quite disarmed the Commodore's suspicions. He began to believe that, after all, those walls might merely conceal the secret of some tragedy of passion. One might well have grounds, he imagined, for shutting oneself off from the world along with a woman whose face no one might look upon except a child no older than the tower itself.

And yet, had he but known it, the woman might have been safely seen by any one on earth except Zeno von Ungern alone. Had he seen her, he must at once have recognised the nurse of his brother's child—the girl he had so often seen when visiting Feodor's castle. The features of women, too, do not alter like those of men. Had Zeno seen her, therefore, he must at once have guessed who the Master of the tower really was.

The party had just stopped at the entrance to the dining-room. The little table was laid and luncheon was ready. A small cask of fresh beer stood tapped on the floor. Everything seemed most inviting.

"We might, perhaps, remain here," suggested the Master. "Your coxswain can examine the other rooms and the stores. There is nothing very remarkable about them. My old porter will open all the lockfast places for him. He can then report the result of his inspection on his return."

He laughed lightly as he concluded, and the Commodore laughed also. Their laughter seemed to be echoed by the voices of the two boys which sounded from the garden below. As Count Zeno again looked down through the window he saw that the lads were playing together. They were having a trial of strength. The clear voice of a woman, which seemed to sound through an open door, admonished them to be careful not to injure each other. But she apparently did not dream of admonishing them for trampling down all her flowers in their struggles.

As he looked on at the havoc caused by the lads, Count Zeno could not but feel that the inhabitants of the tower appeared to be quite the most hospitable and complaisant people he had ever met.

Chapter VIII

Reconciliation.

For the first time in his life since the joys of his earliest childhood Feodor's son Alexander experienced a real pleasure. It was now when, pointing to Mashinka, he was able to say to his guest:

"See, here is my mother."

For to him she was really so. Since his earliest years this woman had indeed filled a mother's place to him. His real mother had now other cares. This woman alone loved him. From her alone he had learnt that there should be any other feeling than anger and hate on earth.

Still greater, however, was his pleasure as he presented his guest.

"Look, mother!" he cried. "This is Paul—Paul von Ungern. Father told me to bring him to see you. He said we were to be good friends."

Tears were glistening in his eyes. For well he knew who this Paul von Ungern really was.

There was, in fact, one secret which Mashinka had never disclosed to Feodor during all these years. This same Paul, she well knew, had already entered the world when the great catastrophe overcame her master. It was, indeed, mainly this boy's birth which had caused the catastrophe. Two people whom a sinful passion had made to fall had their reasons for preventing Feodor from learning their guilt. The woman, having committed the first fault, was compelled to conceal it with fresh sins. The husband, therefore, had never learnt this secret.

In an hour of confidence, however, when the boy had fled to her in horror from the frightful teachings of his father, Mashinka had told young Alexander the truth. Under her breath she told him that he had mighty enemies in that world which had vanished from him in childhood: that they were his uncle and his uncle's son--a half-brother. It was because of them, she told him, that he was compelled to waste away his life in that dreary rocky fortress. But she also taught him that it was the duty of good men who wish to please God to forgive their enemies; and taught him, too, a simple prayer which a good man might pray for his enemies—a prayer that God might turn their hearts, that they might cease from persecuting him, and that they should become reconciled with him, free him from that life of captivity, and once more hold out to him the hand of friendship. She had taught him even to pray for the welfare of that brother who from his very birth had unwittingly been the boy's persecutor.

So, now that he was able to say to Mashinka, "Look, here is Paul von Ungern," it seemed to him as if these words said simultaneously, "My prayer has at length been answered. My enemy is reconciled, and has come to free me. And God is indeed good, and so is my father. Now I can love both God and my father—yes, and my enemy also."

Mashinka understood the boy's thoughts well. She threw her arms round both their necks and kissed them.

"Yes, yes," she said smiling, "you must indeed be good friends."

She then brought forth from her cupboard a host of dainties, and spread quite a little feast for them. While partaking of this Paul began to tell Alexander of the great world of adventure so well known to him, and of his frequent encounters with the pirates of the northern seas. Here it occurred to Alexander that the swordsmanship of pirates is distinguished by its peculiar cuts and thrusts, with the exercise of which he was but too familiar. He therefore brought out his weapons and gave Paul some lessons in these useful devices, so that he might be able to put them into practice if he should again find himself in any piratical fray.

How happy he felt in having for once the companionship of a lad like himself—a true playmate. How his heart throbbed with joy when he looked at this brother of his. How glad he was, too, to find that Paul was such a fine strong fellow. As they fought, he took good care not to hit his opponent with his blunted weapon so hard as to hurt him. And if Paul, in return, chanced to give him a good sturdy blow, he would laughingly cry, "No, no; it didn't hurt at all!" And then he would praise him for his dexterity.

Mashinka stood at her window and silently looked on as they knocked each other about in the garden. And as she looked up she wiped away the tears that rose to her eyes. They were indeed tears of joy.

Chapter IX

The Minster Bell.

The Master of the tower and Count Zeno were still conversing together. The marines had now searched every corner of the building, and their leader returned with the report that nothing of a suspicious nature was to be found.

Feodor hereupon took a speaking-trumpet in his hand.

"Permit me," said he, "to give my castellan orders for the refreshment of your brave men. The fellow hears badly."

So saying he spoke through the trumpet into the porter's ear. No one else was able to make out what he said. The castellan, however, appeared to understand the command. He made a sign to the sailors and marines who stood at the door, and begged them to seize hold of the beer-cask on the floor and carry it out. Of this, surely, they might quite safely drink. The liquor, they reflected, could not well be poisoned, for both the Master and their own commander had drunk from the cask.

When the men had disappeared Feodor rose and took from a small cupboard in the wall a bottle of sherry and two wine glasses, which he filled. The two men were once more alone.

"I am in no great hurry to leave this place," observed Count Zeno, after a pause. "I should like to take advantage of your hospitality for the night, if you can make that convenient. I will explain to you my motive for such a request."

"Before doing so," said Feodor rising, "allow me to inform the lady of the house that her guests are to stay over night. It will give me the utmost pleasure to make

provision for yourself and your company. She, of course, will attend to the comfort of her guests."

"You are most kind," observed Zeno as the Master made his way into the adjacent room, which was Mashinka's. Feodor left the door ajar so that Zeno might hear what was said.

"There is only one bed in Alexander's room, but they can sleep together well enough for one night, I suppose."

Of course they could! Alexander would be only too pleased to have Paul actually beside him before falling asleep. No longer would he need to repeat the old nightly petition. That which he had so long asked was at length within his very embrace.

Feodor now returned to Zeno.

"Now, sir," said he, "I can hear all you may have to say. But first let us drink to each other."

They touched glasses, bowed to each other, and drank.

"In the first place," began Zeno, after a short silence, "I may as well inform you that all last night I and my entire crew thought we heard something very like the tolling of a bell away in the distance before us."

"Indeed," observed the Master with the most perfect calm.

"Yes," Zeno went on; "the tolling quite confused us. My officers, who, I fear, are by no means too expert with the compass and chart, declared that the sounds must have proceeded from the lighthouse of Gustavsvarn, whose lights, of course, could not then be seen in the dense fog. On the other hand, my coxswain, who, it is true, is a clumsy fellow enough, swears that it is impossible for the sound of a bell in Gustavsvarn to be heard in this quarter, for Gustavsvarn lies due north-east, while the sound we heard came more from the east. In his opinion the bell-ringing is simply nothing but the pranks of evil spirits. Just about here, he declares, there is a sunken town on the deep sea-bottom, and on foggy nights seamen always hear its minster bell tolling under the sea. The sound is too often their destruction, for the spectres' bell invariably leads them wherever the most frightful reefs and cliffs are to be found. There is quite a legend on the subject, I believe. Do you know the story at all?"

"Oh yes," said Feodor quietly, "I know it well."

"Pray have the goodness to tell it me."

On the spur of the moment Feodor composed and embellished a legend of a sunken town, from which on dark and foggy nights was heard the tolling of a minster bell. A Russian, he reflected, even although a commodore, is by nature superstitious. Possibly, he imagined, he would be satisfied with such an explanation.

"But do you yourself believe in this legend?" asked Zeno with a searching look, when he had finished.

Feodor met his questioner's gaze without a tremor, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Pooh!" he ejaculated; "why should I believe such stuff?"

"And yet," pursued Zeno, "there must be some truth in the story. The tolling of the bell had actually drawn us into such a dangerous position that, had the fog not lifted just before daybreak, I and my vessel should by this time have been at the bottom together. We dropped anchor not a moment too soon. But whence do the sounds come? One might conclude that they proceeded from some church

spire on the island of Dago itself. But then, of course, no church bells are ever rung at night except at the service on Christmas Eve. Now, Baron Helmford, can you explain this mystery to me in any way?"

"Tolerably well, I fancy," said Feodor. "Without having recourse to any ghost stories, I think these sounds are capable of being explained quite satisfactorily—and that on purely scientific grounds. The sounds, I take it, do, in fact, come from Gustavsvarn lighthouse. The heavy atmosphere, of course, depresses the sound, which is then carried along the smooth surface of the water twice as far as it would be in fine weather. Sound has admittedly much greater travelling power in such an atmosphere than in clear weather."

"Yes, I know that," said Zeno. "But the altered direction?"

"That also has quite a simple explanation. The fog itself proceeds from the south-west. This, of course, prevents the tolling of the bell from coming in a perfectly straight line from Gustavsvarn. Moreover, the vibrations, being echoed back by the cliffs of Dago, seem even louder, and in this way, too, it may appear as if they actually proceeded from the island itself."

"That is true. But if, as you say, the cliffs of Dago merely echo back the sound of the bell at Gustavsvarn, then one must also hear the tolling perfectly well from here."

"That is so," said Feodor; "I have often heard it here."

"Very well, then," said Zeno; "I should like to convince myself of the matter, and will therefore accept your hospitality for the night."

"That," said the Master, with a bow, "I need hardly repeat, you are most welcome to do."

During the remainder of the day Count Zeno acted as if he were most deeply interested in all the sciences. He requested his host to instruct him in the various uses of all the instruments which lay around. He even pretended never to have seen a galvanic battery or a theodolite.

There was, however, one object in the room the purpose of which he was really unable to divine, but to inquire about which might have seemed the height of simplicity. It was a long, thick silken cord which hung down from the ceiling. What could it be? A bell-rope? But what purpose, he asked himself, would that serve? The only servant in the building was stone-deaf, so it would be of little use ringing for him.

Feodor had moved his chair in front of this hanging cord in such a way as to make it impossible for any one to approach it.

The two men sat and discussed various scientific experiments and, from time to time, the wine. While they were engaged in these occupations night began to fall. They could hear the two boys talking in the next room. The lads wished Mashinka good-night, and then went off to their bedroom. Shortly afterwards the men heard a deep sigh, followed by the opening words of a prayer. The woman was evidently commending her soul to Heaven during the night. All three, therefore, would soon be asleep.

"Now we may go up to the observatory," said Feodor, rising from his chair. "There we can listen better to the sound of the bell."

He stepped over to the fireplace in order to light a small hand lamp with which to show the way.

As soon as Feodor had risen from his seat and turned his back on Zeno, the latter stepped swiftly and noiselessly towards the silken cord and pulled it violently.

Immediately the deep tones of the hidden bell sounded from above.

"Ha!" he cried in triumphant wrath; "so the bell is here!"

"Wretch!" hissed Feodor beneath his breath; "you yourself have given the signal!"

Zeno drew his sword and sprang to the door opening on the staircase. Feodor was quite unarmed. The Commodore threw the door open and shrilly blew his seaman's whistle.

Immediately, as if in response to the shrill sound, the hurried footsteps of men were heard ascending the dark staircase.

"Seize that man and put him in irons!" ordered Zeno, pointing with his naked sword to Feodor.

But the men seized Zeno himself, tore the sword from his grasp, and bound his hands behind him. They were not his own seamen as he had expected, but the Master's hidden companions. In a few moments he was bound fast in the armchair in which he had been comfortably seated a few minutes before, and ere he could utter a word he was securely gagged.

"Well," said Feodor, placing himself calmly before his prisoner, "so you have discovered where the bell-ringers are, and for whom they ring! Doubtless you would like also to know who it was that rang. I am Count Feodor von Ungern, the brother whom you betrayed, whom you falsely accused, whom you had condemned to lifelong exile, whom you made a wretched fugitive, whose wife you carried off, and whose child you branded with shame. Since those days I have had no other thought but that of vengeance. I built this tower here merely that I might see your accursed nation's vessels dashed in pieces beneath it. Six hundred of them have I destroyed already, and your proud three-decker will be the first of the seventh hundred. The very moment you pulled that cord, my trusty men burst forth from their concealment, overcame your company, and, without a doubt, slew every one. And now they will put on your men's uniforms, and row off in your own boat to your ship. Then there will be a bath of blood! When every life has been destroyed they will set fire to the ship and let her burn to cinders. Ay! and you will be able to see the magnificent spectacle from the tower windows. There you may enjoy it until at last, with a final crash, the hull bursts into the air. At this sound our two boys will rush out of bed half dressed. To my son I will say: 'Look! That brand on your shoulder which has banished you for ever from the world, which prevents you from ever calling any honourable woman your wife, or disclosing your true name; that mark of infamy, which buries you alive and damns you for ever before you have even sinned—it was that man who stamped it upon you! He it was who robbed you of your heritage, who robbed you of your mother's heart—of everything on earth. He has turned your father into a devil, and of earth he has made a hell for you. That man has a son. There he stands. That stripling is to blame for all your misery. He had no right even to come into the world; by his very birth he utterly destroyed both you and me. He is a thief who has stolen away your good name. Well, you have there two swords. Fall upon each other!' I will say all this, and then you will enjoy the sight of my son killing yours. It may be, of course,

that they will kill each other. But what matters that? We will both look on, quite calm and silent. When they have done with each other I will loosen your cords. It will then be our turn. For do not think that I intend to murder you like an assassin. No; I will place your own sword in your hand, and then—then may the Devil and Hell judge us! … Men! Take him away!"

The bound man writhed in an agony and his eyes gazed beseechingly at his brother.

But Feodor's face remained cold as marble.

Chapter X

Weakness.

Thus, then, was the diabolical work to be completed. For Satan is not wont to betray those who are true to him.

But had Feodor really been true to him?

Had he not, he asked himself, secretly sinned against his master and his religion in suffering beside him a human creature who whispered a prayer to Heaven before laying her head upon her pillow?

And was that head really on the pillow now? Was Mashinka really asleep?

Might not she have heard all that had just been spoken—all those frightful things which she could not hitherto have imagined? … Might not she betray him?

With these thoughts rushing confusedly through his brain, Feodor took the lamp in his hand and entered the next room. The woman lay before him with closed eyes. He threw the lamp-light on her face. Her hands were clasped across her breast, which gently rose and fell.

Something whispered to him that the woman must die. She might have heard everything and might only be feigning sleep.

He set down the lamp. Placing one hand over her heart, he held in the other a keen dagger, so that its point just touched her breast. Had but a single quickened beat betrayed that she was aware of the danger so near her, the weapon would have pierced her heart. But Mashinka lay perfectly still.

Presently a smile flitted across her face, and her lips began to mutter words as sleepers often do in dreams.

"Do not tickle me so with the blade of grass, Shasha," she murmured coyly.

The Apostle of Dago had not the heart to drive the blade of steel into her bosom.

But something within him admonished him.

"Thou art not wholly mine," said the voice; "a single good feeling yet lingers within thee! By it thou art corrupted--thou art lost!"

Yet he could not kill her.

He consoled himself with the thought that she must certainly have been asleep and could, therefore, have heard nothing. It would be sufficient, he reflected, to take the precaution of securing the key of the door which opened on the outside

steps leading down to the garden. Mashinka and the two lads would thus be all securely locked in.

He left the room and went up to the observatory.

* * * * *

Mashinka was not asleep. She had heard every word.

With almost superhuman strength she had fought down the terror that rose within her, and was able to appear asleep even while the dagger was pointed at her heart by the hand of the man whom she now knew in all his infamy.

She sprang from the bed as soon as the sound of Feodor's footsteps had died away, rushed to the little room where the two sleeping boys lay clasping each other's hands, and called them.

"Wake, children, wake!" she cried in despair; "prepare yourselves for death—it is close at hand!"

She then hastily told them all she had heard.

"And you are to be made to fight each other to death before your fathers' eyes!" she exclaimed as she concluded.

Alexander and Paul tremblingly embraced each other. It was not the thought of death that made them tremble, but the thought that their fathers should hate each other so.

"Oh! if you could but fly from here!" cried Mashinka.

"But how?" exclaimed Alexander. "Ah!—the door to the garden! Impossible—it is locked!"

"Here!" cried Mashinka suddenly; "through this window you can reach the garden—then over the outer wall and on to the rocks on the shore! There you will find a boat. In it you may reach the ship."

"But you—you must come with us too," they cried together.

But Mashinka had already begun to cut up the bed-clothes and tie the pieces together into a stout rope. The clothes were not long enough. Swiftly she passed into the dining-room, and cut off the bell-cord which hung from the ceiling. With this the rope was soon completed.

The night was dark and favoured the flight of the fugitives.

Chapter XI

The Severed Cord.

The two brothers were now alone in the observatory. Zeno had been carried thither and bound in the easy-chair before the great open window. Feodor sat at his big telescope watching the anchored vessel. At intervals as he sat he informed his prisoner of what he saw passing on board.

"The roll of the drum is summoning the crew to evening prayer. The fools! … The watch is being set for the night… Now they are hauling down the flag… The captain has gone into his cabin and his lieutenant has taken the quarter-deck…

Now the look-out in the main-top is taking a pull from his bottle. In a moment he will drop off to sleep... One by one the lights are being put out; only those from the captain's windows are now to be seen... Soon they will all be asleep—in the Lord! So—good-night!"

"And now, brother," said Feodor, "the entertainment I promised you is about to begin. My fellows are already sitting in your long-boat and their own skiffs. The sound of the bell is the signal that all is ready."

With these words he left Zeno alone in the observatory and hurried downstairs to give the signal.

With a violent effort, Zeno succeeded in getting one foot so far out of his bonds that he could reach the ground with his heel. With this foot he gradually pushed himself nearer and nearer to the edge of the low open window. Then, with a desperate effort, he tilted the chair forward, and precipitated himself and it together into the depths beneath. For him there was neither entertainment nor spectacle any more on this earth.

Meantime Feodor strode down to the dining-room where he usually rang the bell in the concealed room by means of the silken cord. He stopped suddenly and turned pale with fear when he discovered that the cord had been cut.

Illustration:
„The cord had been cut“

He burst into the next room. There Mashinka's bed was empty. He hurried into his son's bedroom. The boys were nowhere to be seen. The open window and the rope dangling outside in the wind told him plainly enough of their flight.

It was too late now. In vain his cry of wrath sounded through the fortress. In vain he pierced with his sword the empty bed from which his victim had escaped. In vain he now beat his breast for having harboured a human feeling within it. That weakness, he now saw, had indeed been his ruin.

In his boundless wrath he rushed up to the observatory to wreak all his baffled vengeance on his one remaining victim. He consoled himself with the thought that he at least could not escape.

But Zeno too had vanished. He was no longer where he had left him.

Feodor stretched his body far out of the open window and shrieked his brother's name. There was no response but the dull dashing of the waves against the rocks below.

When he raised his eyes again and looked towards the war-ship an icy chill ran through his heart. The windows of the vessel were all lighted up, and the crew were lining the bulwarks.

"Betrayed!—utterly betrayed!" he cried in despair as he cursed and abjured the Devil and all his works. "Nay, there *is* no Devil!—there is nothing!—nothing!"

Chapter XII

Nemesis.

It was not until the next day that Feodor learned all that had taken place in the outer world.

A company of armed men were now advancing against his fortifications from the direction of the island, while the war-ship had turned her broadside with its triple row of guns against the tower.

After landing a party to storm the building from the land side, the ST. THOMAS had stood off for the attack.

In conformity with custom, the besiegers, before beginning the assault, summoned the fortress to surrender in order that the shedding of blood might be avoided.

The Very Reverend Herr Waimoener, accompanied by a herald, came as a messenger of peace to the great door of the tower and, with the blast of a trumpet, called upon its commander to take part in peaceful negotiations.

Feodor sent him the hunchback who acted as his castellan. "The fellow is stone-deaf," said he; "let them negotiate with him!"

But the hunchback was not stone-deaf—at least when he cared to hear. He merely chose to deceive the deceivers.

Right well did he understand the reverend gentleman's summons. According to it, every man would be granted free departure, immunity from all punishment, and as much of the tower's treasure as his shoulders could bear, if only the Master were delivered alive into the hands of justice.

The castellan first returned and imparted the news to those of his companions who were keeping watch at the door. These passed it on to the others.

At this juncture the Master appeared in their midst. As of yore they gathered round him and listened attentively to his words.

"Men!" cried Feodor, "we have now to stand the test of fire, and show the world what forty fellows like us can do in a stronghold like this. We have magnificent guns and enough ammunition and provisions to last till doomsday. We will sweep away all who attempt to creep along that rocky ridge, and will send that ship to the bottom should she dare to come within range of our guns."

He paused as if to observe the effect of his words upon those around him, but there was not the spirited response which he had expected.

"Even if we be overcome," he went on desperately, "is it not enough if we send the tower and our enemies into the air together, our hands gripping their throats to the last? Thus, either they will bear us aloft with them to Heaven—or we will drag them down with us to Hell. Up, then, and ready with fire and sword!"

Time was when such an address would have been greeted with a storm of applause. Now it was received with silence and strangely sullen faces.

Presently the hunchback stepped forth from the band.

"Master," he said, "I have heard all your fine words—for, you see, I am not always deaf—and must say now that it is a very beautiful religion, this that you have taught us. 'That which is agreeable to me is right; that which is hurtful to another is not wrong.' Fidelity, too, is a virtue—then it is not for us, the Devil's children! All you say is good—vey good indeed. However, we have been promised freedom and a sackful of your treasure if we only deliver you up alive. That is quite

agreeable to us; so it is right. You will certainly be quartered. That is, indeed, hurtful to you; so it is not wrong. If we do not remain true to you we shall still please the Devil perfectly, for fidelity—as you have ever preached—is a virtue. Therefore we will rather give you up than accompany you in the aërial flight you speak of."

They all laughed loudly in chorus, and Feodor laughed strangely along with them.

"What is agreeable to me is right; what is hurtful to another is not wrong!" the men shouted derisively in his very face.

This, then, was to be the triumph of his religion!

They had evidently learned their lesson only too well from him.

"But you will get nothing by your treachery!" exclaimed the Master suddenly.

And ere they could lay hands on him he had drawn a pistol from his belt; there was a click and a flash, and Feodor von Ungern fell dead in their midst.

* * * * *

Alexander and Paul returned to Russia, and like brothers shared the property of their estranged parents between them.

* * * * *

But the Tower of Dago still rises high above the rocky promontory of the island, and serves as the safe untroubled haunt of the wild sea-birds for miles around.