

AN INNOCENT MAN 50 YEARS IN SIBERIA

TOLSTOI'S "RESURRECTION" OUTDONE.

St. Petersburg, Russia.—In some respects Count Tolstoy's powerful novel, "Resurrection," is not so dramatic or absorbing as the true story of a worn, sad-faced old man who a few days ago stepped feebly from the Moscow express at the central station here, and with the help of a young man in his company entered the sleigh waiting to convey him to the family residence of the Kazimoffs. This old man was Count Theodore Kazimoff, who has now returned from Siberia, whither he was exiled exactly 50 years ago for the murder of his best friend, Count Demetri Dolgorouki.

For 50 years Count Kazimoff prayed for death in a Siberian penal settlement, crushed by the severity of his punishment, and by the knowledge that all his relatives and friends believed him guilty of the atrocious crime for which he had been condemned. Now, after all these years of physical suffering and mental agony, it has been discovered that Count Kazimoff was innocent of the crime of which he was accused and a pardon granted by the czar has enabled him to return to his old home in St. Petersburg, to die in liberty with every stain removed from his character.

THE HEIR OF A GREAT HOUSE.

The beginning of this remarkable story takes us back to the year 1852, when Count Theodore Kazimoff was a gay young officer in the cavalry guards. His father was the head of the Kazimoffs, one of the foremost noble families of the Russian empire, and being the eldest son, Count Theodore was the heir to the greater part of the vast estates and wealth which his forefathers had accumulated. The magnificent inheritance that awaited him consisted of 500,000 acres of land in various parts of Russia, 13 palaces and castles, besides some score of hunting lodges, summer villas and smaller residences, and a fortune estimated at \$15,000,000.

He was 25 years old, tall, handsome, and the darling of St. Petersburg society; a beautiful girl of high character and equally noble birth had promised to become his wife, and his superior officers prophesied for him a distinguished military career. In short, Count Kazimoff seemed to possess everything required to make a young man happy, and certainly few men can hope to enjoy life more than he did on the eve of the tragedy that was about to overwhelm him.

Count Demetri Dolgorouki, his most intimate friend, was a young man in similar circumstances. He, too, was an eldest son and the heir to immense wealth and estates, hardly less extensive than those of Count Kazimoff, on which they bordered. Count Kazimoff and Count Dolgorouki had been schoolboys together, had gone through the university together, had made a foreign tour together and were the best of friends till a woman came between them. This was a girl named Fedora Tebloff, the daughter of the house porter at the club, which both the young officers frequented.

Fedora Tebloff was at that time 19 years old and beautiful, according to the standards of her class, a fact of which she herself was well aware. She was coquettish in the extreme and always had a bevy of admirers in her wake. Count Kazimoff was her chosen favorite until one day, in an evil hour for all concerned, he introduced his friend, Count Dolgorouki, to her, and the fickle maiden quickly transferred her affections to the newcomer.

Count Kazimoff spared no pains to regain Fedora's favor, but Dolgorouki did his utmost to supplant his comrade, so that the old friendship between the young men developed into the fiercest hatred. Many stormy encounters took place, and once, when Count Kazimoff found Count Dolgorouki in Fedora's company, angry words led to blows and a savage hand to hand struggle.

A DUEL OVER A PORTER'S DAUGHTER.

A duel was the inevitable result, and this was fought on the following day in a field on the outskirts of St. Petersburg. Swords were used, and the two noblemen, both skilled in the use of the weapon, fought as only the deadliest enemies fight—with intent to kill. It soon became clear that Count Kazimoff had found his master, and in the fifth round he received a wound in the right arm which disabled him and caused the seconds to put an end to the duel.

The combatants shook hands at the finish, and Count Kazimoff expressed a desire that their old friendship might be revived and the cause of their enmity forgotten. The reconciliation seemed complete, and not long afterward Count Dolgorouki accepted an invitation from Count Kazimoff to go hunting on his estate at Lubiana, in the province of Novgorod.

On the third day of their stay came the tragedy that meant death to the one and lifelong penal servitude to the other. Kazimoff and Dolgorouki were hunting together and the rifle of Fedora Tebloff seemed to have been raised again, for the hunters and beaters in attendance on them noticed that the two noblemen were engaged in a hot dispute. Their voices were raised in anger and the attendants heard Count Dolgorouki threaten to inform Count Kazimoff's fiancée of his fondness for Fedora Tebloff, to which Kazimoff replied that he would kill him if he did.

At the height of their quarrel, when both men were beside themselves, they suddenly found themselves at close quarters with two wild boars and started off in hot haste to get a shot at the game. The attendants were left far behind, but they heard the sound of many gunshots, and concluded that the two noblemen were having good sport.

Nearly an hour later Count Kazimoff returned the party of beaters and inquired where Dolgorouki was. Dolgorouki, however, had not been seen, and as he did not put in an appearance when darkness set in a search was made for him, but in vain. The next day the search was resumed, and, guided by marks of blood, the party found his dead body buried in 10 feet of snow about half a mile from the spot where he had last been seen in the company of his host, Count Kazimoff, who was at once arrested on suspicion of having committed the murder.

Of course the evidence against the count was overwhelming. The enmity between the two young men which had led to the duel, the sudden reconciliation, the invitation to hunt on Kazimoff's estate, the renewed quarrel and the gunshots heard by the beaters all pointed to Kazimoff's guilt. He was accused of having feigned reconciliation with Dolgorouki in order to lure him to his remote estate and there to butcher him in the woods, confident in the assumption that his own retainers would not give evidence against him. No stranger had been seen in the neighborhood for weeks of the late season in that part of the forest when the crime was committed.

TO LIFE IN SIBERIA.

Kazimoff protested his innocence, but

his protestations were disregarded and sentenced to death. This sentence was commuted to one of lifelong banishment to Siberia, with penal servitude for the first 10 years. Before his start eastward Count Kazimoff had to undergo the terrible ordeal of being formally degraded from his rank as an officer. This ceremony, which is more relentlessly severe in Russia than in any other country—worse even than the ordeal Dreyfus had to undergo in France—was performed in the presence of all the officers and men of Kazimoff's regiment. Count Kazimoff was brought to the parade grounds in chains and two common soldiers stripped him of his uniform and dressed him in convict garb before the eyes of the assembled regiment. This accomplished, they took his sword out of its scabbard, broke it and beat him with the blunt edge of the severed halves.

Next, one-half of Kazimoff's head was shaved bald and the hair on the remaining half cropped close. Finally he was led around in front of all the ranks, while the two soldiers showered blows on his bare back with the dreaded knouts used by the Cossacks. This process, it is interesting to note, is still practiced in Russia in case of degradation of officers from their rank.

Count Kazimoff broke down utterly before the degrading ceremony, as half over, wept and toward the end had to be dragged around in a fainting condition. A day or two later he started on his long and terrible journey to Siberia. To put the finishing touch to it, all the last two items of news that he heard from the outside world before leaving St. Petersburg were that his fiancée had become the betrothed of another man and that Fedora Tebloff had cursed him as the murderer of Dolgorouki.

Kazimoff was henceforth "Convict No. 108," and was dispatched into exile in company with a gang of other unfortunates condemned to the same fate. They were chained together, and, as was customary in those days, they did the whole of the journey on foot, goaded by the cruel knouts of the Cossacks sent to escort them.

CHAINED TO FOUR OTHERS.

Their destination was Zlatina, some hundred miles north of Tomsk, and on arrival there they were put to work in the mines. Kazimoff was chained night and day to four other convicts, all coarse, brutal fellows, and all undergoing punishment for crimes of exceptional violence. What torture this permanent lack of privacy and this forced association with four ruffians was to a man of Kazimoff's stamp may well be imagined.

For 10 hours every day the five prisoners had to work together in the mines, and at night they slept together in a miserable hut. When there was work to be done the four pliant criminals combined to give their aristocratic companion the biggest share of it, and when rations were served they took care that he received the smallest share. When they found that he would not participate in their coarse conversation and their vile jokes they beat and kicked him to "knock the pride out of him," as they put it.

Kazimoff was not always chained to the same ruffians and sometimes his immediate companions were kind enough, if rough and far too uneducated to be real company to him, but during all the 10 long years that it lasted this penal servitude in chains was literally hell on earth for the ex-favorite of high society in St. Petersburg.

It is a mystery how Kazimoff lived through these terrible years at all, for when they were over he resembled a broken down man of 70 though he was only 35. Thenceforth he was allowed to inhabit his own little hut and to do practically what he liked so long as he did not leave the village and reported himself to the authorities twice a day. Rations were served to him and he received a small allowance of money for necessary expenses.

Since his condemnation and departure from St. Petersburg Kazimoff had not received any kind message from all his relatives and friends, and his heart was bitter against them.

MARRIED A PEASANT IN SIBERIA.

After three years of solitude Kazimoff obtained permission to marry the widow of a workman who had been exiled for a political offense, and who had died before his term had expired. The woman belonged to the working classes, but she was kind and affectionate, and Kazimoff considered marriage with her preferable to the awful solitude which he had been enduring. On the day of the wedding Kazimoff had a portrait of himself and his peasant bride taken, and this he sent to his relatives in St. Petersburg with a reminder that their first-born would be the heir to the Kazimoff wealth and estates. The union, however, was childless, and Kazimoff, who died five years later, leaving him alone again.

For over 30 years he dragged on a solitary, miserable existence, limited to the society of ex-criminals and deprived of everything that makes life worth living. In the earlier years he still retained a hope that his innocence might be established, but as year after year went by without bringing one favorable sign he resigned himself to the inevitable and prayed that death might end his earthly suffering.

The truth about the mystery came out before the death of a workman named Tebloff recently. Tebloff was the brother of the pretty Fedora, who had been the cause of the quarrel between Kazimoff and Dolgorouki, and on his deathbed he sent for a priest to hear his confession that he had murdered Count Dolgorouki. The count, he told the priest, had seduced his sister Fedora, and he, the brother, had sworn to avenge her wrongs. He had waited for his opportunity, and had murdered him in the wood and buried his body in the snow. He had come and gone without seeing anyone and without being seen, and after the crime was committed he escaped from the neighborhood without attracting attention.

SWORE TO IT ON A CRUCIFIX.

He had heard that Count Kazimoff had been condemned for the murder, but he had not had the courage to come forward and admit that he himself had been the real culprit. He decided, however, to unburden his mind of this secret before his death and to obtain forgiveness for the double sin which he had committed. Tebloff swore to his confession on the crucifix and it was considered sufficient to justify Count Kazimoff's immediate pardon and release.

Count Kazimoff returned to St. Petersburg only to find that nearly all of his old companions had preceded him to the grave. He is now the head of a family again, but he has willingly renounced his rights in this respect. He has even declined to live permanently in the palatial family residence, preferring to occupy a modest apartment where he can converse with all commoners and countrymen. He totes about the streets of the capital and is glad to be a free man again, though he has been done too late to be of much value to him. He is broken down in health and in spirits, consumed in fiber by hardship and suffering, unable to enjoy the luxuries that surround him, and with only a short span of life before him.—Curtis Brown in Kansas City Star.

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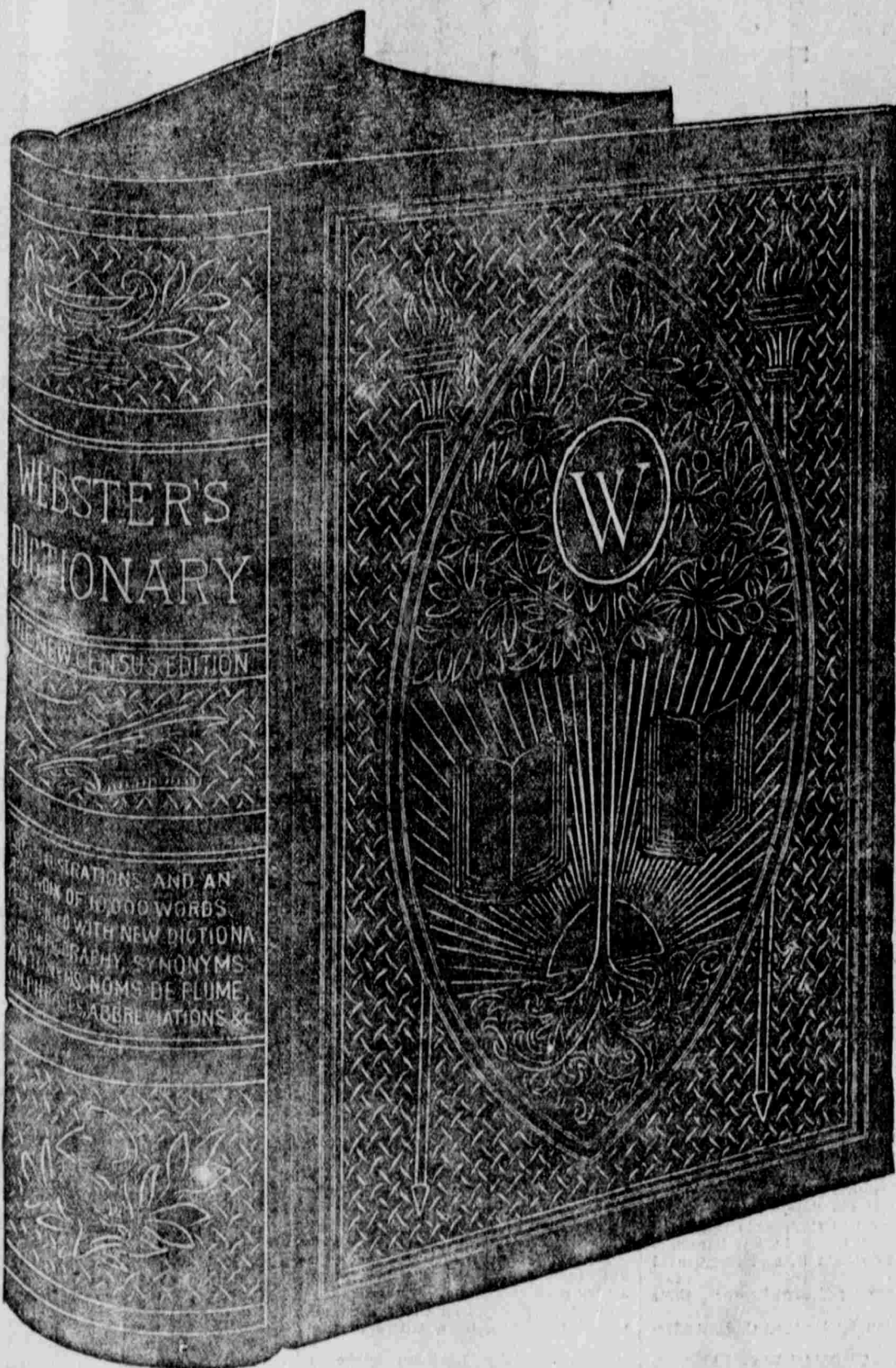
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