

THE FLIGHT OF A SERF

Wolves in Front and a Pursuing Master in Rear

By EDGAR L. THOMPSON

During the first half of the nineteenth century a Russian gentleman, Count Koronief, living in Finland, owned a beautiful serf girl named Sonia. Admiring the Koronief estate lived a small farmer named Orloff. Orloff's son Peter and Sonia were wont to play together as children and when they grew to manhood and womanhood became lovers. Unfortunately, for them while Peter was a free man Sonia was a serf.

Now, the count was a firm supporter of the government, while even at that early date there were evidences of discontent among the people. The murmurings were heard mostly among the higher classes, for the serfs were too ignorant, too degraded, too used to condescend their master, the czar, a divine being, to protest against anything that emanated from him. Young Orloff was far in advance of the small farmer class, to which he belonged, supporting the few nobles and many intellectual commoners who desired to see the autocracy of the government curbed and the lower classes educated.

When, therefore, Orloff senior offered to buy Sonia and give her to his son, the count refused to sell her. "No one belonging to my estate," he said, "shall pass under the influence of these new notions which are intended to interfere with the will of the emperor. In Russia we have always needed and always had a single power to rule. Certain people are now beginning an agitation which if persisted in will educate the lower classes. They will become discontented with their lot, and we shall have anarchy."

When the farmer gave the count's answer to his son, advising him to think no more of Sonia, a rebellious fire flared in the young man's breast. He dare not tell Sonia, for she would undoubtedly feel that the hope of happiness which had been born to her had been quenched, since she would never dream of disputing her master's will. The law gave her to him as a serf, and if she rebelled the law would punish her. Indeed a marriage without the count's consent was impracticable. If her lover attempted to defy the count he would be sent to Siberia. Sonia's master told her that the proposition had been made, that he had declined it, and there was an end of the matter.

Peter brooded over the matter till he was ready to take any risk to possess Sonia. He had expected to work his father's farm after his father had passed away, as each son had succeeded his father from time immemorial. With Sonia for his wife he would have been content to do so. If he should possess her he must do so by running away with her, and if caught the consequences would be terrible not only for him, but for her. But Peter would take any risk. Peter had heard of America. There the people were their own rulers. If he could only get Sonia out of Russia and take her to America they could be united. But any attempt to carry her away would be fraught with great danger, and there was every chance of failure. The only chance for such an attempt to succeed would be by bribery, always a common method of accomplishing objects in Russia, but Peter, so long as his father lived, could not raise much money. The old man was not minded to cripple himself by raising funds to carry out any wild scheme of his son's to satisfy a whim. He wiled, sons and daughters in Russia were not supposed to choose mates they were provided by their parents.

Peter secretly saved what money he could, knowing that even if he succeeded in getting Sonia out of Russia he could not take her to America without means. In one way and another he got together enough to pay a passage. Then he began to weigh the different plans he had been forming for kidnaping his love. He dared not trust her with any intention of what he had in mind, fearing that even a knowledge of it would cause her unwillingly to betray it. Then, too, he had no assurance that she would consent to take a risk fraught with such frightful consequences to her and him as in case of failure.

The plan he chose embodied its responsibility solely in himself. No other was to share the secret with him, not even Sonia. It was to kidnap the girl and carry her around the gulf of Bothnia into Sweden. The country through which they must pass was cold and desolate. The only thing that rendered the scheme at all feasible was that the route from which they would start was only a hundred miles from the Swedish border. But to pass over this distance without being caught and returned was a dangerous undertaking. Peter had enough money to hire a two horse sleigh, including the necessary repairs, besides sufficient to take him to a sailing point for America. His arrangements were perfected in September and, with loverlike impatience, in spite of being satisfied to wait till the next spring, he planned to carry out his attempt before the winter set in.

Knowing Sonia's habits and that she had an afternoon to herself once a week, when she would usually visit a friend, he watched for her on one of these holidays, driving back and forth in his sleigh. He was fortunate enough to meet her and asked her to go for a ride with him. Fearing that if she went with him she would be punished, she demurred, but he finally persuaded her, and when well on their way he told her that they would not stop of their own accord till they reached America. She agreed herself to the risk, and from that moment Peter pushed forward. Unfortunately the pair were seen by a member of the count's family, who as soon as possible gave information that they were driving rapidly westward. As soon as horses could be harnessed the count himself started in pursuit.

Peter had provided everything that he and Sonia would be likely to need. In the sleigh were warm fur rugs, provisions, a bottle of liquor and an armament of rifles and pistols. The latter were to be used in case the escape was dependent upon resistance, for Peter argued that to be caught meant Siberia for him and possibly for Sonia, and the punishment could not be worse if he killed a dozen people. Should the pursuers come to close quarters he would fire at them, trusting to disable the horses or those attempting to overhaul him.

The autumn had set in, and already there was plenty of snow, well beaten for easy going. The pursuing party lost time by taking a wrong road and having to retrace their steps. It was therefore near midnight before they came into the vicinity of the fugitives. The moment Peter heard the sound of bells behind him ringing in gallop tune he heard the bark of a single wolf ahead, then another and another till a whole pack were howling.

Sonia and he turned and looked at each other. Sonia with despair. He well knew that there was now a double danger. If they drove on they would be eaten by the wolves. Behind them were capture, separation and Siberia, Peter, rising to the occasion, gave the reins to Sonia and took up such arms from the bottom of the sleigh as he might have occasion to use. He had intended them for human pursuers. Now he might need them for both man and wolves.

The lovers heard the jingling behind slacken. Evidently the barking had been heard by the pursuers. But it was not long before the bells again bespoke a gallop.

"It's the count," said Peter. "I know him well. He would face certain death rather than forego an act of tyranny." As they drew nearer the wolves the barking not only grew louder but came from more fronts. The moon was near the full and lit the dark bodies of the animals coming to meet them. The horses frightened started to turn, but Peter gave them the whip and they continued in their course. Handling the whip to Sonia he seized a rifle and as they shot through a dozen wolves one making a lodgment on the sleigh was driven off with the iron barrel brought down on its head. The next instant another springing at Sonia received a bullet in its breast between its fore legs and dropped dead. This gave the pack two carcasses to fight over and the fugitives a brief respite.

Meanwhile the sounds of the approaching party behind them grew nearer. Peter attributed the count's pressing on, knowing that he was chasing a pack of wolves which would turn upon his party and devour them to his mind and desire to get possession of Sonia. He sent her to the rear and probably her to Siberia. In this he did the man injured himself. Doubtless if he caught them he would take his revenge, but he was a brave man and ready to risk his own life to save that of others.

As soon as the wolves had devoured the two of their number that had been killed they came on again. It seemed to the fugitives that some of fire were pursuing them, the eyes of the beasts shining out brightly. Again they overtook the lovers, and again Peter fired into the pack. But by this time while the double danger added to his desperation, his nerves were not so steady as at first. He fired three shots before he dropped a wolf. Then he killed two more.

Sonia laid on the whip, though it was not necessary, and the lovers drew away, while behind them they could hear their pursuers approaching the wolves. Then there was a cracking of rifles, a yelping of wounded animals, the cry of a horse, and the sound of bells ceased.

"The brutes have saved us," said Peter exultingly. "They have downed a horse." The fugitives sped on, hearing again and again the cracking of a rifle till at last either the firing ceased or passed out of hearing. The count and two of his servants had not been as fortunate as those they followed. By the time they reached the pack the number of wolves had doubled. They fought well, but one of the wolves sprang at a horse's throat and disabled him. Overwhelmed, the three men, one after another, succumbed. And so it was that a man who was trying to recover a fugitive serf lost his life and carried down with him the lives of two other persons. The lovers, being freed from their pursuers, proceeded with deliberation. The next evening they reached the Swedish line, at the head of the gulf of Bothnia, where they left their conveyance at an unfrequented spot, on the east side of the Tornea river, and, crossing, found themselves in Sweden. From there they made their way to Christiania and from thence to America. Setting out toward the west, they at last reached the new territory, which is now the state of North Dakota, where they found many of their countrymen and became prosperous farmers and Peter, one of the principal men in that region.

Pure English.

"My dear, I wish you would speak more carefully," said a stickler for pure English to his wife. "You say that 'Henry Jones came to this town from Sunderland.' Don't you see that it would be better to say that he 'came from Sunderland to this town?'"

"I don't see any difference in the two expressions," rejoined the lady. "But there is a difference in the two expressions—a rhetorical difference. You don't hear me make use of such awkward expressions. By the way, I have a letter from your father in my pocket."

"Oh, dear! Is my father in your pocket?" inquired the wife. "You mean that you have in your pocket a letter from my father?"

"There you go with your little quibbles! You take a delight in harassing me. You are always taking up a thread and representing it as a rope,"

"Representing it to be a rope, you mean, dear?"

And then he grinned a sickly grin and wished he had never started the discussion. *London Answers.*

Advice to the Trustee.

In handling other people's money the principal must be kept intact. If, as a trustee, those to whom you are responsible insist upon an income which you in your heart know cannot be obtained without taking some slight chance, give up the trust without hesitation, says *World's Work*. There is no more bitter experience through which an honest trustee or executor can pass than the rendering of an accounting for a lost or depleted trust. No reason or excuse can weigh for an instant against the neutral result which he faces. A single slip in the handling of funds like this may doom all future generations of that family to lives of poverty. This is the greatest responsibility ever laid upon a trustee, an executor, a banker or an adviser, and no honest man should assume it unless he is prepared to endure for the sake of the future all the criticism that may center upon him on account of extreme conservatism in the present.

Reminders of Napoleon.

"I never knew Missouri was filled with reminders of the Napoleonic wars until I took a trip over the Missouri Pacific river branch to Booneville," a traveling man remarked. "Thoughts of the great struggle in France came to me when I saw when the blackman went through the train calling 'Napoleon! I recalled the career of ambition of the great Corsican general and was absorbing my thoughts to wonder in that vein when the next station was announced. Waterloo! I began to recall further incidents and thoughts of the glorious general who blighted Napoleon's hopes of a great empire. Imagine my surprise when I found the next station was Wellington. The next stop had nothing to do with the French wars, so I thought the incidents were over. But I wanted to learn the why of it all, so I asked the conductor. He didn't answer. He was *Graciously*." *Kansas City Journal.*

A Chinese Printing Office.

The difficulties of making up a font of Chinese types are very great. King Hsia's dictionary, the standard and most comprehensive work of its kind, contains 40,000 characters, but it has been found that for all practical purposes a font need contain only about 7,000. With a font of this size the Chinese printer in the course of setting up a book will frequently find that he lacks a dozen or so unusual characters, a difficulty which he meets by having these missing symbols hand-cut on blank type by skilled engravers. Although generally all Chinese newspapers and books on modern topics are now printed from movable metal type books pertaining to old China, such as the Confucian classics and the commentaries on them, are still produced by the time-honored method of printing from wooden blocks.

Press Enterprise in the Early Fifties.

A bit of up to date enterprise on the part of the *Pleynure* in 1853 was the early publication of the president's message. Printers were sent on a steambent to Mobile by the paper to secure the message. A son as they arrived there they boarded the Northern steamer, which, of course, reached Mobile before New Orleans, and put the message in type on their way home aboard ship, so that on arriving at the office of the *Pleynure* it was all ready to be printed. From R. F. Zeller's "Recollections of the Early Fifties," in *New Orleans Pleynure*.

A Philosopher.

"My? You wanted fried potatoes, didn't you?" said the careless waitress as the customer in the restaurant finished his meal and rose to leave.

"That's all right," answered the patient man. "I've wanted so many things all my life that I didn't get that I'm used to it." *Newark News.*

Wonderful Man.

"Where is he from?"

"I don't know, but I think he was raised on a desert island."

"What in the world makes you think that?"

"He says no woman ever made a fool of him." *Houston Post.*

Study and Discipline.

By the tollsome road of study a scholar learns to get joy out of books and stones and trees. By the hard road of discipline a man learns to get joy out of everyday living.

He Saw It.

"There was a terrible accident at our home last night," said a wag. "As I was sitting in the dining room I happened to look out, and I saw the kitchen sink."

Congressional Magistrate.

The custom of "lifting" a brother congressman's bills without sanction or permission has resulted in a warm discussion concerning the ethics of legislation. In newspaper work, novel writing or any other strenuous employment the appropriation or use of another man's words or ideas entitles him to credit and legal protection. Not so, however, in the legislative hopper. If one man falls to have a resolution or bill passed another takes it up, transferring such paragraphs and clauses or ideas as he wishes, without credit, and labeling the result with his name in such a way as to secure full and undisputed possession.

The only question considered is, "Will it pass?" for if it does not pass it represents only so much white paper snugly tucked away in pigeonholes until the advent of the next legislator whose inclination runs to fathoming bills. The pigeonholes and crypt at the capitol are filled with documents suggestive of the faded hopes of many an enthusiastic congressman whose bill failed to "get by" and is ready for the appropriation of another ambitious legislator. *National Magazine.*

Butter From Birds.

A century ago butter birds were milked to beat the band by the natives of the northern part of South America. In midsummer the Indians went into the great caverns where these strange birds had built, and with long poles the nests were broken and destroyed, something like the way the Yankee boys in barns used to break up the holes of mud daubers and barn swallows. Butter birds built nests in the tops of the caverns in niches and holes worn ages ago by water. A pole or two with a pole and the nest of gray clay looking like a big cheese came falling down, the young birds scattering on the floor of the cavern. The great lumps of fat between legs and under the tail of the nestlings were torn from them and piled into earthen pots and melted down into bird butter. The butter bird is about as large as a chicken and so sweet is the bird butter that it keeps a year or so without turning rancid. It is oily, clear and without smell. *New York Press.*

Decay of Diplomacy.

Diplomacy is not a career which encourages the growth of a strong personality. The diplomatist is necessarily the tool of other men. Wandering from capital to capital, he is the mouth piece of successive ministers, to whose divergent policies he must adapt himself with the good grace that leads to the swift promotion. If he develops a mind of his own or allows himself to cultivate embarrassing sympathies he is apt to be marked as a dangerous and uncomfortable subordinate to whom there are presently seen some obscure and distant line in a South American legation. The great ambassadors lived in the days when no telegraph had yet been invented to make bureau-rats omnipresent. It wants only some further perfection of the long distance telephone to abolish the diplomatist altogether. *London Athenaeum.*

Game of Oratory.

Here are some gems of oratory from the Austrian parliament.

"I have already said that I wish to say and therefore withdraw."

"I might still say."

"I cannot longer keep silent without saying some words."

"Locomotive engineers stand with one foot in crime and with the other grasping the necks of hunger."

A funeral procession a ways, something mournful about it, especially when the deceased was a human being."

"If I am a parliamentary deputy I am still human."

Free Freight.

Every railway carries more or less freight for its own use, and therefore without pay, and in some countries both freight and passengers are occasionally carried free on governmental or other account. As such gratuitous service does not increase the monetary receipts, it is ordinarily omitted from the companies' earnings. The term "revenue train miles per mile of line" indicates the train density of trains that have added to the earnings. *New York Times.*

A Critic Who Served.

"I like pointed criticism," said a theatrical man. "Criticism such as I heard in the lobby of the theater the other night at the end of a play."

"The critic was an old gentleman. His criticism, which was for his wife's ears alone, consisted of these words: 'Well, you would come!'" *Detroit Free Press.*

Just Like a Lady.

Lola aged five, had spent the afternoon at a neighbor's. "I hope you be loved like a lady," said her mother when she returned.

"Sure I did," replied Lola. "Every time I yawned I put my hand over my mouth!" *Chicago News.*

Poetic Justice.

Poll-cleaver When long to rest the world had sunk I found this person roaring drunk. Prisoner—Denial, sir. I cannot plead, drunk I was, oh, blind indeed! Magistrate—To show how poorly drinking pays I'll send you up for thirty days.

Three Letters.

Bill—He's considerable of a letter writer. He wrote me three yesterday. Jill—Three, did you say? Bill—Yes, I. O. U.—Yonkers Statesman.

Think of your own faults and probably you will talk less about the faults of others.

Alring our grievances does not always make their odor any sweeter.

The First Japanese in America.

The first Japanese who ever came to America as far as is known was Manjiro Nakahama, a fourteen-year-old lad, who was picked up by the captain of an American fishing vessel in 1841, twelve years before the coming of Commodore Perry to Japan. Nakahama, with four companions, had sailed out into the ocean on a fishing expedition, their boat had been wrecked by a storm, and they were finally washed ashore on a desert island in the northern Pacific. Three months of dire privation were passed on the island before the little party was rescued by the American vessel. His companions were left in Hawaii, but Nakahama, who became a great favorite of the captain, was brought to the United States and sent to a New England school. And when Commodore Perry came to Japan, Nakahama was able to act as interpreter in the negotiations carried on between the American envoys and the Japanese feudal government authorities.—Dr. Jokichi Takamine in *Oriental Review.*

Beavers' Work.

The beavers not only cut down trees for the purpose of making dams, but also use the smaller upper branches as a storage supply of food for winter use. These branches, from two to four inches in diameter, are cut into lengths of two or three feet and then by wonderful engineering ability are carried beneath the water and into the beavers' houses, or the burrows, with which the bank of every beaver's dam is honey-combed. Here they are carefully stored. The green bark is the staple article of food throughout the winter. The dams are of varying height and length, according to the particular location. I found a dam in Mesa county, Colo., which was just six feet from bottom to top and impounded a body of water six feet or more in depth and covering an area of several acres. This dam was perfect in construction. It was composed entirely of willow bushes, as no large timber grows in the vicinity.—Our Dumb Animals.

His Cheapest Poker Game.

In a mining locality is a miner who feeds his money into the games around town as regular as pay day comes around. One Sunday, as the story goes, the "gang" was "sitting in" a game at the regular meeting place. There was no room left at the board for any one else to "sit in." Presently the habitué heard the familiar tread of the miner. He knocked on the door with the regulation secret tap as a sign that he wished to deposit some more money in the bank. The crowd was very busily engaged, and one wit in the crowd yelled out to the miner, "No room in this game for you, Skinny. Just throw your money over the transom, and we'll divide it up." And Skinny shot that night he met the regular down-town. "Say," he exclaimed, with a grin, "that was the cheapest poker game I ever 'sat in.'"—*Indianapolis News.*

Handy With His Fiets.

Admiral Wilson of the British navy won his Victoria cross at the battle of El Teb in 1884. There was a gap in the square, and five or six of the enemy made a vicious rush forward, attempting to get inside Captain Wilson, who was present with the naval brigade, advanced to meet them alone, but his sword broke in the endeavor to cut one of the intruders down. Hereupon the officer, instead of beating a hasty retreat, stood his ground and began bowling over the enemy with his fists. Either from the nature of the ground or as the record puts it, "The surprising nature of his attack," Captain Wilson escaped with a few wounds and was rescued by the square closing up round him. Sir Redvers Buller described the act as the most courageous he ever witnessed.

Not Likely.

Mrs. Morton (angrily)—Tommy Horton, what made you hit my little Johnny?

Tommy Horton—He struck me with a brick.

Mrs. Morton (angrily)—Well, never let me hear of your hitting him again. If he hits you you come and tell me.

Tommy Horton (sneeringly)—Yes, and what would you do?

Mrs. Morton—Why, I'd whip him.

Tommy Horton (in disgust)—What! He hits me with a brick and you have the fun of licking him for it? Not much!—*London Telegraph.*

Matched.

Towne—Met Gabbie and Perkins at a smoker last night and introduced them to each other. Brown—Oh, say, it's a shame to introduce a bore like Gabbie to anybody. Towne—It's evident you don't know Perkins or you'd see the humor of it.

The Proper Head.

Husband (studying his wife's accounts)—There are several items you haven't entered here: Doing up the furniture, your hairdresser, dentist, trip to the sea, for instance. Wife—Oh, those all come under "repairs."—*Fliegende Blätter.*

A Will and a Way.

"Where there's a will there's a way," quoted the wise guy.

"Yes," assented the simple mug; "there's generally a way out of it."—*Philadelphia Record.*

Will Persist in Trying It.

"What is an optimist, pa?"

"An optimist is a man who comes home late and thinks he can get in without his wife knowing it."—*Cincinnati Enquirer.*

Alring our grievances does not always make their odor any sweeter.

A Girl Who Was Tired.

In the American Magazine there is a story entitled "The Home-Town Feeling." One of the principal characters in it is Mercedes Moron of the Morning Glory Burlesque company. Here is what Mercedes says about the alleged gay life that she leads:

"I'm dead sick of this. Who cares whether I live or die? It's just one darned round of grease paint and sky blue tights, and new boarding houses, and bumping over to the theater every night, going on, and bumping back to the room again. I want to wash up some supper dishes with egg on 'em, and set some yeast for bread, and pop a dishpan full of corn, and put a shawl over my head and run over to Millie Krause's, to get her limousée sleeve pattern. I'm sour on this dirt and noise. I want to spend the rest of my life in a place so that when I die they'll put a column in the paper, with a verse at the top, and all the neighbors'll come in and help bake up Here—why, here I'd just be two lines on the want ad page, with 50 cents extra for 'Kewaskum paper please copy.'"

Forged Postage Stamps.

Bad money and spurious banknotes are as common as sparrows, but forged postage stamps are seldom heard of. The most glaring case of stamp forgery in Great Britain occurred in 1872 and 1873, and its origin has never been discovered. In those days the minimum rate for telegraphic messages was 1 shilling, and the stamps that were forged were all for such amount, each being passed through the Stock Exchange telegraphic office. One of the principal reasons against postage stamp forgery is the knowledge of philatelists. The vigilance of the collector would speedily bring to light the existence of any faulty stamp. Of the many thousands of varieties of stamps issued, only about 100 are known to have been forged, and these specimens have usually been skillfully faked more with the object of trapping the collector than robbing the postal authorities.—*London Standard.*

Keep the Machine in Repair.

Think, for a moment, a man who would no more run his motorcar on deflated tires or with sand in the gear box than he would use sulphuric acid for motive power will keep going right on as his business when the tread of his own physical mechanism is fastening out and the gear box of his mind is flung out with the wrong kind of grit. The impatient optimism that shakes off a vague oppression with the snarl "I'll be all right tomorrow" has had as much to do with lengthening out the list of bankrupts as any other one thing I could mention. You can't correct a bad condition by persisting in the things that cause it. You will only make it worse. You can easily enough, if you are obstinate enough, make it so much worse that it will "be the death of you," or, anyway, put you out of business.—*National Food Magazine.*

Stone That Bends.

"Firm as a rock," "unbending as a flint" are phrases often used; but, as a matter of fact, there is a sort of stone that is as flexible as wooden fiber. It is, of course, very rare, and the few specimens known are now in the museum. One of the finest is in the Hartley Institution in Southampton, England, having been found near Delhi, India. It is lathe-like in shape, about an inch thick and two feet long. It is a particularly flexible specimen and can with the hands be curved several inches from the horizontal, otherwise it is hard and mineral like, having the grain of ordinary gray sandstone.

Hard on the Ladies.

Very few remember the existence of a certain remarkable statute which was passed in the early days of George III. If indeed they ever heard of it, it runs to the effect that if any woman "entices any of his majesty's male subjects into marriage by the use of any powders or paints or false hair or wigs on the cheeks she shall be prosecuted for sorcery." What a cause celebre it would be if any of his present majesty's male subjects were to endeavor to put the law into action! What a rush there would be of fashionable ladies to secure front seats in court for the hearing!—*London Tatler.*

His Belief.

"I used to believe there was a pot of gold at the end of every rainbow."

"Well," his wife replied, "you don't seem to have thoroughly outgrown the belief. At least you seem to believe there's a pot of gold at the end of any highly colored story that a promoter cares to tell you."—*Judge's Library.*

Question and Answer.

"What's that big iron thing?" asked Laura.

"Locomotive boiler," replied Tom.

After a moment's silence Laura inquired, "Why do they boil locomotives?"

"To make 'em tender!" said Tom.

Sounded Interesting.

"How about the sermon?"

"The minister preached on the sinfulness of cheating at bridge."

"You don't say! Did he mention any names?"—*Kansas City Journal.*

Daily Cares.

The everyday cares and duties, which men call drudgery, are the weights and counterpoises of the clock time, giving its pendulum a true vibratory and its hands a regular motion.

Not Always Loaded.

Gabbie—They say that language is the vehicle of thought, you know. Keene—Yes, but a lot of times it travels empty.—*Boston Transcript.*