

Stroecius grew grave, although the papers that the Finn handed him seemed right enough. Tolki's eldest son was a small official in St. Petersburg, who owed the Government wheels in the interests of the inhabitants of Ahrensburg, whither he was frequently called on business. It was years since he had visited the island; many ascertained that he was a zealous proselyte of the Greek Church. And even if this were mere gossip why did Tolki ask Stroecius to solemnize the marriage when his second son was a Protestant divine and it would be only natural that he should officiate at his brother's wedding? The bride's family was one of the best in Ahrensburg. Tolki was fond of display, and it was preposterous that he should prefer the little church meeting on the island to an imposing ceremony and feast in the city. Tolki plausibly explained away every objection, and it only remained for the parson to publish the banns and trust that some objecting voice would be raised or some incriminating evidence reach him from the mainland, if all was not as it should be. The Greek Pope, with whom he consulted, shared his doubts and they sent for the religious records of the Tolki family; but ere these reached Oesel the bridal party came to the parsonage begging Stroecius to perform the ceremony, as old Tolki was desperately ill and nothing would procure him comfort save the knowledge that his son's marriage had been happily consummated. As, apparently, every regulation had been complied with and the wedding had been fixed for the morrow, Stroecius performs consented.

The following day was Sunday, and the bride, her husband, and their respective families attended the Lutheran Church accompanied by old Tolki, who had been miraculously restored to health—a few hours after blessing the union. The parson had prepared a sermon from the text, 'Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's,' with the object of awakening the patriotism of the islanders, who were loudly grumbling over a fresh tax. He explained at length how Christ had taught cheerful obedience, and how he had especially bidden the Jews who came to him agitated by what was an enormous impost, to be submissive to the will of their superiors. Protection of life and property and many other good things came from the Government in return for the money it required, and he had finished by saying: 'How much more are these words applicable to you, as you have on the tax money the picture of your own Emperor?'

The people had seemed deeply moved by his eloquent words, so that while changing his robes in the sacristy, the good man felt consoled—almost forgot the news he had received on entering the old church that had caused his anger to rise as he observed Tolki in the congregation. He found the wedding party waiting for him in the porch, and Tolki greeted him with an invitation to the banquet. The parson declined sharply and then exclaimed: 'How darest thou appear here before God?—thou who hast lied to Him in the person of His priest! I asked thee, Jappe Tolki, in my official capacity, hadst thou become of the Emperor's faith *exram puolestis*? and thou didst swear. Doubly hast thou lied, perjured thyself and sinned against thy God in Heaven! Away from me, and may thy unclean foot never cross this threshold again!'

Rage formed the face of the Finn as the parson explained to the bride's family how he had just received proofs that the old man, his wife, and the bridegroom had been for years Greek Catholics. The strict Protestant father was heart-broken at the cruel deception which had been practised to steal his daughter, from him and secretly registered a vow to punish the Finn and save the parson from the persecution to which he had unwittingly exposed himself by blessing a mixed union. At present, however, there was nothing to be done but leave for home. So he begged his daughter to leave her husband and join him and her relatives. But the girl refused; she had been fascinated by the clever man; and Tolki's sneer, 'A wedding is a wedding,' expressed her views.

Jappe Tolki was not of the kind to brook interference with his plans. All the village had witnessed the scene at the church door and he determined to doubly punish Stroecius for the scandal his words had awakened. He had long wished to see his second son, Parson Tolki, established on the island; and his first move caused the summoning of Stroecius by the Synod, to answer for the mixed marriage, and the sending of this young clergyman to fill the vacant rectory.

Carloescha could not help associating the estimable young divine with his crafty father; he concluded that he had had a hand in her uncle's undoing, whereas in reality he had welcomed the call as a summons to protect her during the elder parson's absence. He had secretly loved her for years, and hoped that some day he could earn her affection. He had thoughtfully arranged that his bright young sister Thilo should accompany him to the parsonage, trusting that her companionship would relieve the anxiety of Carloescha; but to her his presence was a desecration of her uncle's parish which she would not condone. She left the parsonage for the isolated cottage of a devoted old German shepherd, which was little more than a hovel; and neither the pleading of her friend Thilo, nor the offer of parson Tolki to leave the island, would induce her to return to her former home.

Nobody on the island but sly old Tolki knew that the worthy clergyman would never return, for he lay already in one of the noisome dungeons of an impregnable fortress prison, having been arrested in Ahrensburg, spirited away and locked up without a trial, on the grave charge of having called the Czar, his benefactor, an infidel, in a sermon preached to the islanders already dispersed by the new taxes. This was more than enough to condemn the righteous man to perpetual imprisonment and death by inches, and Tolki had known it when he had travelled to the mainland and in conjunction with a bought confederate brought accusation against the worthy divine.

The winter advanced and no news came to Carloescha either from her uncle or her sister Julinka. Just before her uncle's summons to the Synod, Julinka had written and announced the arrival of Axel Wendland at the Polish castle, saying that he was studying again at the theological seminary in the neighbourhood and was a constant and welcome guest in the house, from which he and Julinka knew that he had robbed the greatest ornament. Carloescha, as well as her uncle, had been shocked at the news; neither could understand how those they loved could participate in such a breach of hospitality, and for weeks her sole consolation came from the fact that Julinka and the Poles had started for St. Petersburg and left Wendland alone to pursue his studies.

Mail seldom arrived at icebound Oesel in winter, but at last a courier came on a Government business and brought with him a letter from Julinka to Carloescha and one for Parson

Tolki announcing the secret incarceration of Stroecius. The young man immediately rode over to the cottage and broke the bad news to Carloescha, telling her some enemy of her uncle had been at work and he intended to leave the island at once, seek out the good man's friends in Ahrensburg, and arrange, if possible, for his escape. Flight, they knew, was the only road to freedom left, for no cry could pierce the fortress walls or rise from their humble homes to that quarter from which alone an honorable liberation could come.

Julinka's letter to Carloescha was full of her joyful life in St. Petersburg. She wrote that she was sought after by the highest in the land, money poured in, and success crowned her every effort. She filled pages with news of Axel. He had followed her to St. Petersburg; and she confessed that weak, miserable, and vacillating as she knew him to be, she loved him with her whole heart.

Poor Carloescha knew, too, that Axel was weak, and realized that he could not long resist the charms of her brilliant sister. She seized the opportunity of the returning courier and wrote telling him of her misfortune, and that, worst of all, Julinka loved him. She begged that he would explain to her about their betrothal, and help the poor sister to quell this unfortunate passion. Then followed tender expressions of unalterable devotion, passionate love and longing, the outpouring of which brought her in some sort of solace.

Alas, Julinka's letter had been long in reaching Carloescha, and ere the answer was written, her influence had secured for Alex Wendland an honorable and remunerative Government position, and their approaching marriage had been publicly announced.

The cry from the lonely girl's heart reached Wendland on the morning of his wedding-day. He found it on his break-

ere he was carried to the island, whence Parson Tolki hoped he could arrange for his escape across the frontier.

Stroecius at once wrote a letter to Julinka, telling her of Axel's engagement to Carloescha. He had been made anxious ere his departure for the Synod by the arid's letter about Axel's constant visits to the family he had wronged, and he determined to write her of his secret engagements to her sister; but the sudden incarceration had effectually silenced him.

It was the evening after the wedding. Julinka lay upon her sofa in the bright lamplight dreaming listly of her own happiness and planning for the relief of her dear ones. The bell rang and a letter was brought in. She seized it with an exclamation of joy; she had recognized her uncle's handwriting, and this meant that he was free. She began to read with avidity, but horror froze her blood when she reached the part about Axel and Carloescha. She was forced to go over the lines several times ere she could grasp their portent. Terrible pictures of the future unrolled themselves before her. There was not an instant to lose. She rose, rang, and ordered a carriage. She dressed hurriedly for travelling, while a maid packed a trunk. She enclosed her uncle's letter in a fresh envelope it, sealed it, addressed it to her husband and laid it where he would observe it on his return. She had not added one word. Why should she? It explained everything.

Secured by her remorse at having wronged her sister, though unwittingly, Julinka travelled night and day to reach the island. The telegram could not be stopped, but in the winter news was often delayed for weeks. She might arrive before it, and in any case she would be there to share Carloescha's agony and help her nurse their uncle.

Fate was not so kind. A Government sledge started from the mainland just as the dispatch arrived and bore it to the



'SHE SANK DOWN UPON THE BEACH.'

fast tray. 'How horrible! he mused; 'how cruel at this time of all others!' He was about to burn it, unopened, then decided to read it. As he did so he grew livid. He could not stand the upbraidings of his own conscience. He must confess all. Two or three times he started towards the door, then turned to walk up and down the room, groaning as one in pain. Presently his features became calm; he had for once arrived at a decision. His smile returned as he lit a candle and watched the flames slowly consume the letter until nothing was left but a little grey ash which he indifferently blew off the sleeve of his immaculate wedding garment.

Julinka, too, was depressed on the nuptial morning. She had received a letter from Carloescha telling of her anxiety over her uncle's protracted absence, and the Lutheran clergyman she had summoned to perform the ceremony had sent in news of the parson's incarceration for treason, so that anxiety oppressed her. How could she rejoice when her dear ones were suffering?—her uncle in a vile dungeon and her sister in a solitary shepherd's hut!

'What happiness! Axel and I have a home to offer Carloescha!' What consolation there was in the thought that she had influence now, much influence, and would be able to help her uncle. Meantime her poor little sister was suffering privation; she must join them at once, and Julinka sent off to her a telegram announcing her marriage to Wendland and begging Carloescha to come to St. Petersburg.

Stroecius' existence in the fortress was one of extreme misery. He was exposed to no actual physical torture, but his cold and dark cell was alive with vermin, his food contained maggots, and the foul water which was sparingly doled out to him emitted a stench. His only consolation was his righteous conscience and the fellowship of an estimable officer who had been in prison for years without knowing why, whose philosophical, cheerful disposition and acquaintance with the possibilities and impossibilities of Russian justice proved of invaluable assistance to the simple-minded man. It was he who acted as interpreter of the signs of liberation, and it was he who guided the wreck of the once vigorous clergyman when, on a certain winter's night, they found the doors of their prison open and creeping out of the fortress entered a sleigh which stood waiting in the road. Young Tolki was the driver and carried them swiftly to the distant home of a friendly parson, where the poor man sought in vain to recuperate from his terrible ordeal

village. Thilo Tolki did not delay an instant, but mounted and carried it on a fall gallop to the hut. She was in her brother's confidence and was sure it contained news of the old parson's escape.

Carloescha tore open the envelope in brightest anticipation, while Thilo and the shepherd were caring for the horse, and when she had read it she stepped back into the hut. As they entered they found her sitting before the open door of the stove gazing stolidly at the flames; and in answer to their inquiries she explained in a low, hoarse voice that the telegram contained only a greeting from Julinka, in which she expressed the hope of being able to aid their uncle.

The others concluded that the deferring of her hopes had unstrung Carloescha, already weakened and broken by the long months of anxiety and privation; so Thilo penitently excused herself and rode home, as dejected as if her friend's disappointment had been due to her.

The shepherd pressed Carloescha to eat something and she struggled to swallow a cup of tea before retiring to her room. Here she listened until the stillness of the cottage told her that the old man had laid himself to rest upon the stove, as is the custom of the humble in Russia. She rose, opened her window noiselessly and stood looking out into the darkness, her hand caressing its rough frame. How deliciously cool the night air felt upon her aching brow! It tempted her forth. She slambled through the little casement and started across the moors in the direction of the sea. It was snowing hard, and the farther she went the more difficult the way became. After what seemed an eternity she reached the dunes. She felt them beneath her feet. The snow in places was so deep she could barely struggle through, and in others the ground was firm and hard where the wind had swept it clean. She stumbled and fell often, but dragged herself up again and still pressed forward.

'Oh, it must be near! Yes, here it was! At last! and with a little cry from her breaking heart she sank down upon the ice-bound beach between the chalk cliffs.

It was a soft, low cry, and yet it rang into the heart of eternity and reached the throne of the Most High. On black wings the angel of Death flew downwards. He divided the hurrying snowflakes and carried in his unspotted hands her pure soul to God, where it was soon to be joined by that of her martyred uncle.