

Complete Story.

# The Footprints of Princess Trubetskoi.

By TIGHE HOPKINS.

Two things were to note in respect of the round which Captain Strode, Governor of John Howard Prison, N.W., made on a gusty morning of March. The first, that it was an early hour for him; the second, that he had put on his uniform in place of the old tweed shooting jacket which he wore in ordinary. These things being observed the staff concluded that Somebody was coming.

The common tourist of prisons arrives with a printed order from the Home Office, which allows him to walk through the building at a stated hour in the company of a "principal" warder, who shows him the clean corridors, the cleaner cells, and the prisoners, who are cleanest of all. The visitor may not speak to the prisoners, and the prisoners may not speak to the visitor, who goes away thinking that prison is a very clean, quiet place—whichever it is. But the governor does not put off his shooting jacket.

Having finished his round, Captain Strode called a parade of the warders who were not on duty and inspected them carefully in the outer square of the prison. Dismissing them, he turned to his chief warder and said: "I will go through C again."

"Yes, sir."

Chief Warder Sykes, stout and florid, his grey beard trimmed to a point, knew no more than the rest who was the Somebody that was unquestionably coming.

The steel-barréd gate of C hall was unlocked again, and the governor and the chief warder entered. Oh, the silence and the cleanliness of those halls! If one could shout or sing out once, or spill a bucket of water over that spotless concrete! The noiseless, shining hall, with its three tiers of cells on either side, had the faint smell of clean but caged humanity. There were three hundred prisoners locked in C—three hundred all but the half dozen whom a warder was teaching to stitch hags at a table in the centre of the long, narrow ward.

The governor stopped at a cell on the left side.

"Open C 23's door," he said to the chief warder, and the key turned in the lock, and the governor went in.

A tall, little wiry man sat at an iron hand-loom weaving towels. He let the beam go and stood up to attention, his hands at his sides, as the governor entered.

"Any complaints, Orloff?"

"No complaints, sir," answered the prisoner, who wore the knickerbocker suit of a convict, as distinguished from the trouser suit of a short-term man. "Your English prisons are too comfortable." His English was fluent, with a foreigner's stress on the wrong syllables.

"More comfortable than the Russian ones?"

"Much more comfortable than the Russian ones, sir."

"Then, I hope you won't be making the change again just yet."

Sentenced recently for a crime of violence in England, the prisoner Orloff lay under suspicion of complicity in a worse affair in Russia. He smiled.

"It will be time for me to think of that, sir, when I have finished my sentence here. I am very comfortable here."

Returning to his office, Captain Strode said briefly to his chief warder.

"A lady to visit the prisoner this morning. The Princess Trubetskoi.

Russian. She will be here at eleven."

It is a rule of the Home Office, very rarely departed from, that no lady may visit the main side of H.M. prisons. If she is unhappy enough to be the wife, sister, or lover of a convict, she sees him at an interval of months in the visitors' room, with a warder at her elbow—she is never admitted within the prison proper. During the service of Chief Warder Sykes one very august lady had been conducted as a visitor through the halls, and no other.

But the chief warder had taken to himself the governor's habit of silence. He waited for a further word, but Captain Strode walked ahead and said nothing. Mr Sykes followed him to the door of his office under the colonnade, with the pretty little garden plot in front, just against the boundary wall of the prison. Captain Strode passed into his office without a word.

"Very well, sir," said the chief warder, and withdrew.

Within, as without, there is no superfluity of ornament in prison (an economy which is, perhaps, not wholly of the wisest), and except for its pieces of strictly utilitarian furniture, the governor's room was only less bare than the cell he had just quitted. The unpapered walls, tinted a feeble mauve, had for their sole embellishments a map of England, a copy of the rules, and the table of the warders' hours; and the contents of the bookcase of varnished deal included nothing more alluring than a Blue Book. The table was heaped with papers, and the papers, like the books, were mostly blue. Unloading his drawer, Captain Strode took from it a letter (blue again) and a telegram.

The letter, which carried the printed address of the Home Office and the legend "Private and Confidential," was exactly a fortnight old; the telegram had been received by Captain Strode that morning. The letter, to which was affixed a signature well known in the service, ran to the effect that H.M. Commissioners of Prisons had granted special permission to the Princess Anna Trubetskoi to visit John Howard Prison on any day and at any hour of her choice. One sentence in the letter was given the dignity of a thin underline: "The Princess may express a desire to speak with the convict Orloff, and if this request is made it need not be refused." The letter was at once a formal mandate from the Home Office and a word of friendly instruction to the governor, who stood in favour at headquarters as a safe old watchdog of the service.

The telegram, addressed from Claridge's Hotel, was briefly that the Princess Trubetskoi would visit the prison that morning.

It wanted fifteen minutes of eleven when the governor had given a final glance at these despatches, but he had no further orders to issue. His prison was ready for inspection.

He felt a rather special interest in the coming of the Princess Anna Trubetskoi, but it was in no sense the interest of gallantry. The governor was a bachelor of fifty, with nothing of the beau in his appearance—short, thick-set, and small-eyed, but with a skin of diamond clearness. There was no thought in his mind of an aesthetic appeal when he put off his shooting jacket for his uniform. The interest of the governor in the Princess was strictly and entirely professional. She was known to him merely as an amateur of prisons,

who had visited (with the especial approval, it was hinted, of the Imperial Government) every goal of note in Europe. Her hostility to Nihilism was equalled only by her zeal of penal reform, and Captain Strode was entertaining himself with the assurance that she had seen no prison which would bear comparison with his.

On the stroke of eleven the gate-warder presented himself at the governor's door, saluted, and tendered a visiting-card. Scarcely glancing at it, Captain Strode rose and followed his messenger to the outer gate of the prison, where a small neat brougham with dark blue wheels awaited permission to enter beneath the archway. Captain Strode, standing at the wicket in the great double door, signalled the coachman to advance; the door was thrown open, the carriage passed in, and the door was closed and locked behind it.

An upright, soldier-like young man, with his dark moustache brushed out straight, stepped from the brougham and bowed to the governor as he handed out the lady. She was not an inch above the medium height, and the loose sack jacket with the collar that came above the ears seemed rather to accentuate than to conceal the slimmness of the figure within. What a pallid face showed through the light veil, and how strained the look it wore! Seemingly, the Princess had not passed emotionless through the prisons of Europe. The straight, black-brown hair that showed a little underneath her toque was slightly touched with grey, and the ivory cheeks bore two little lines, running from the corners of the eyes to the corners of the mouth. Yet the face was that of a woman below thirty. She had the eyes, thought the Governor, of the Nihilist Orloff.

He doffed his cap of office as he said to her: "I have your card, madame; and you, doubtless, have your passport."

"Ah, you are so strict, monsieur le gouverneur," and the wan face was lighted by the sweetest smile. "I did not know that I should need it, but I brought it."

The Princess drew from an inner pocket, and handed to the governor, a long blue envelope. Captain Strode, through his gold spectacles,

skimmed the enclosure.

"And this gentleman, madame, is your brother, Captain Poniatiéff, who is mentioned in the letter?" It was the customary missive in the fine round hand of the Home Office, signed with the spreading quill of the secretary to H.M. Commissioners.

"My brother, monsieur," said the Princess Trubetskoi. "You make me feel as if I were in St. Petersburg." "A compliment, madame! I think, however, that we are now quite in order."

He handed the official letter to his chief warder, who passed it to the gate-warder, who gave it to the warder at the door of the reception room on the right, who doubtless did the proper thing by it. The chief warder opened the light iron gate just beyond the big outer door of the prison, and the governor and his visitors passed through. At once the Princess became an animated being. Not often before had the governor of John Howard Prison been so famously enticed.

"This is the model prison of London, monsieur, is it not?" She paused on the gravel path, her eyes everywhere.

"It is the newest, madame, and the best that we have been able to build so far."

"Who built it?"

"Every stone was set up by convict labour."

"Vraiment! But how did you secure your prisoners before the wall was raised?"

"We had a little wooden boarding enclosing the ground, madame, and a wise governor."

"And nobody escaped?"

"Nobody attempted."

"You have notions of discipline," said the Princess.

"We have been trying for more than fifty years to better them, madame," returned the governor.

Wherever they stopped the Princess renewed her questions. Captain Poniatiéff, who had scarcely any English, said little but observed keenly, and required his sister to translate most of the governor's replies. The military bearing of the warders seemed greatly to impress him, and he made his sister ask whether, in the event of an assault, they relied solely upon their batons. The governor



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