

A SOLDIER OF COMMERCE

By JOHN ROE GORDON

Copyright, 1902, by F. R. Toombs

CHAPTER XII.

THE SEARCH FOR THE FUGITIVES—THE HAYBOAT STARTS.

CHARKA of Ashkar pretended to waken from a deep slumber as four soldiers, led by a subordinate officer, came rushing down the wharf.

"Ho, there, on board this hayboat," shouted the officer.

"Masters, I am here," said Charka, rubbing his eyes and blinking in the light of the lanterns they carried.

"What has happened?"

"A prisoner of the czar has escaped! Assisted by a woman who is a traitor, he escaped from the prison at Tiflis tonight and must be, with his companion, somewhere in the city."

"Well, am I the prisoner?"

"No, you pig."

"Am I, then, the woman?"

"Curses upon you!"

"Why am I awakened with these shouts? I am a peaceful man from Ashkar, trying to sell my hay."

"Oh, your hay!" shouted one of the soldiers, with a laugh. "With the business of finding a prisoner of state on our minds, we must think of your hay!"

As he spoke he thrust his bayonet deep into the hay.

"By the gods," exclaimed another, "that is an idea! This man is from Astrakhan and would no doubt assist the American to escape."

"Shut your mouth, fool!" said the officer. "There is no American. It was a Russian who escaped."

"Pardon! I forgot. But the Astrakhan does not love the czar."

"How much you love the czar!" replied Charka. "It is fear, not loyalty, that makes you curse me and stab my hay."

"By heaven, we will stab you! What did you come to Tiflis for?"

"To sell my hay. It has been purchased, but not yet paid for."

"Insolent pig! And do you think we want hay from you?"

"It is for beasts of a higher class I keep my hay," said Charka calmly.

A volley of curses answered him and a bayonet pricked his leg.

"Charge the hay!" said the officer. "They may be hiding in it."

"Burn the hay!" laughed a soldier. "That will settle it."

"Burn it if you dare! I have something in my pocket."

The abductor of Koura started with an American, joined in the hunt. Officers in the brilliant uniforms they had worn at the ball rushed with those in working garb and searched bazaars, coffee houses and churches. There was not a square foot of ground in Tiflis that was not searched nor a building that was not entered.

Mystified, baffled and enraged, Jurneff raved and cursed as he paced the prison corridor. But while he raved, and soldiers searched, Charka and his boat continued slowly down the river.

By daylight Charka had made twenty miles and tied up at the rotting wharf of a small town. Leaving his men in charge, he went ashore to buy food. He returned with a sufficient supply for the day, and the boat went on. A little steam launch containing soldiers came puffing up behind him.

"Who are you?" demanded the officer. "Why do you leave Tiflis with a load of hay? The markets are there."

"There are no markets for me," said Charka, with a sad wail. "Many days have I spent on the journey. Many nights I lay and thought of my profits. At last, when I reached Tiflis, there came a merchant who owned five camels. He purchased the hay and promised to come and take it away and pay me for it. But, alas, the soldiers of the czar came in the night and drove me away! I am Charka of Ashkar. They said that because I follow the mollah I am not fit to sell my hay to camels."

"Enjoy yourself, fanatic. Go ask the mollah to buy your hay. He has many camels."

"Aye, and men and guns," muttered Charka as the launch sped on.

"Have you seen two escaped prisoners?" came back a voice.

"I have seen many men. No one informed me he was an escaped prisoner."

"One was a woman."

"Then let a woman hunt. It is the only way."

A curse for his insolence came floating back. The launch continued down the river.

In the little box of a house Charka prepared a meal. Before he or his men partook of anything he called to the refugees.

"It is safe," he said. "The launch is out of sight, and we are passing swampy lands where there are no villages or farms. We shall meet no one. Come from under and eat. It may be some time before you reach a place of safety."

Harvey was the first to appear, and then the shining boots of Alma came wriggling from under the hay. They looked into each other's eyes and laughed. It was so good to be free. They went into the little house and ate the meal Charka had prepared.

"Charka, you have done well," said Alma. "I took the precaution to bring my purse. In it you will find enough to pay you—for your hay."

Charka took the purse and opened it. The shining gold brought a gleam to his eyes.

"Let them ask again," he said. "You have kept your word with Charka. No Muscovite dog shall take you from this boat while I am alive."

"Good Charka!" said Alma. "It is so good to find a faithful friend."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE STORM ON THE CASPIAN.

TWO days and two nights they continued thus, traveling constantly. Two of the men did the polling while the third man slept. At times, under the cover of favoring darkness, Harvey would emerge from his hiding place, and while Alma kept watch for pursuing Russians Irons assisted with the boat to give one of the hardworking Astrakhan a rest. On the third day they saw a boat overhauling them.

"We must keep well under cover till that boat has passed us," said Harvey. "What do you make it out to be, Charka?"

It was a long, low vessel, without masts, with high bow and stern. It was propelled by four rowers, two on each side, and a fifth man sat in the stern with a paddle to steer.

"We have nothing to fear from that," said Charka. "That is a Turkish cayik. Some rich merchant perhaps from Constantinople has brought his pleasure boat all the way to the fair. Think of carrying a boat across land!"

"That may be so or not," said Harvey. "A boat might be built at Tiflis after the Turkish model. It is safer for us to be out of sight."

The long boat came on rapidly, and Harvey and Alma again crawled under the hay.

Charka grumbled enviously as he saw the four rowers bending to their task. The Turkish cayik seemed more anxious to avoid the hayboat than Charka was to avoid the cayik. It steered to the opposite side of the river, and at a burst of speed it went by.

At night they were within sight of the village of Salain. Though it was a dark night, Charka, who had the lives of his passengers in mind, forbade them coming from under the hay.

"The steamboat of the Muscovites has not yet returned up the river," he said. "It is lying at Salain to watch

the boats that go out upon the Caspian." This was too much for the inquisitiveness of Harvey. He crawled to the edge of the hay to observe what was going on.

"Charka," he said, "that Turkish boat is up to something. I notice the Russian is going to intercept it. There's business of some kind going on. Get nearer, that we may hear the conversation."

As they came opposite the lights of the town they saw the Russian boat shoot out from the land and in the radius of the strong electric light in her bow saw the cayik evidently trying to escape.

"They are after the Turk! We are in for it, too!" wailed Charka. "Keep a cool head, Charka," said Harvey. "Remember, a precious life depends upon your shrewdness."

"I know."

"Stop where you are!" came a voice from the Russian. "We will inspect you."

Knowing the uselessness of refusing, Charka made his way toward the launch, which had now steamed up alongside the cayik.

"It is true, most excellent sirs," a Turkish voice from the cayik was saying. "I am an Osmanli. It is also true that I am Hafiz Effendi, who once acted as merchant in those goods the men of Georgia and Circassia had to sell. I stole nothing, but when a father wished to place his beautiful daughter in the house of a wealthy prince I carried on the negotiations. But that is all done. Even the other day a girl was stolen, but it was an American, not an Osmanli, who stole her."

"Yes, and we want that American now!" growled the officer in command. "What have you in those sacks?"

"Nothing, excellent sirs, but some of the goods I took to the fair and which I did not sell. I shall return to Astrabad and thence to Constantinople by way of the caravan."

"Go on," said the officer, and the cayik shot away.

"Now, you," said the officer to Charka. "Hello! It is that slow old hayboat. Well, my friend, where are you going?"

"I, too, my master, am going to Astrabad," said Charka.

"Does every one who goes to the fair at Tiflis go from there to Astrabad?"

"Not all, excellent captain; but at Astrabad there are many caravans gathering, and I can sell my hay. The camels need it. To ascend the Volga to the big fair at Nijni Novgorod would take too long."

"Go on. There will be a fine mingling of races at Astrabad."

"No finer than at Tiflis," said Charka as the hayboat slowly drew away. "The scum of the earth and the cream were at Tiflis."

The launch turned back to the wharf where it had been lying.

Charka felt that he was safe, and as there was a slight breeze he raised his sail. He had but one thing more to fear, he reasoned, and that was a Russian gunboat. Boatloads of hay were not infrequent on the Caspian, and he felt assured that it would not be difficult to hockwind the captain of the gunboat.

Under sail the boat made better progress and was soon out on the Caspian, where in the inky darkness nothing could be seen. The slight wind that had promised so well soon died away, and the boat, now in deep water where the poles were useless, was almost helpless. Its big lateen sails flapped against the rude masts, and the men grumbled. This was not getting to Astrabad, and they had had enough of watching over the lives of a Muscovite woman and a man from what they considered another world. The boat got into a current that carried it out farther and farther, and Harvey, feeling secure in the darkness, called to Alma to come out from her hiding place. They sat together in the little deck-house waiting for the breeze that must surely come sooner or later.

"By this time they are well in pursuit," said Alma, with a shudder. "It is death to be taken now."

"It would have been death at any time, my darling. We must be cheerful. I wish we had a cayik instead of this old hayboat."

"The cayik is faster, dear M. Irons, but would it be as safe? I fear that a storm is coming. In that little boat I would be afraid."

"I'd take my chances in that as soon as in this old hulk, and there would be the additional advantage of getting somewhere before the storm came."

"Ah, M. Irons, it is a long way across the Caspian."

"I am aware of that, Alma. I've been long enough trying to make the trip. Even now I am a good many days from my windmills."

"I fear you will never see them again, dear M. Irons."

"The storm you feared has come, little girl, but do not be afraid. I'll go outside and see what I can do to help."

"Can I be of use?" he asked, raising his voice to a shout.

"Use! Yes, you can be of use!" bawled Charka. "Help me and my men."

Charka's voice showed his agitation. His men were working like leavers to unite the rope that had parted. Harvey assisted, and soon the sail was bellying out before the steadily growing wind.

"Now!" cried Charka exultingly as the old boat gathered speed. "Now the Turk's cayik would not be so fast!"

But his jubilation came too soon. A sudden gust of wind tore the rope he was holding from his hand, and one that had been fastened to a pin at the side of the boat snapped with a report like that of a pistol. It cracked two or three times in the air and then wound itself around Charka's neck. A smothered curse came from him as he struggled with the rope. As Harvey stepped forward to assist him the sail gave an extra pull, and Charka was dragged over the side of the boat into the sea. A cry came from him as he sank, and his men muttered their prayers as they stood shivering, realizing the uselessness of trying to aid him.

"Don't stand there like idiots!" shouted Harvey. "You've got a small boat. Get it into the water and save Charka!"

"It cannot be done!" cried one. "He is already left far behind."

"Get out the boat, and I will go with you to rescue him."

"No, not you! You are the one who brought this upon us. Many times have we called upon the Caspian, but never before did this thing happen to us. It serves us right for taking an unbeliever and a Muscovite woman on the boat. That was our curse."

"Nonsense! Get out the boat."

The two consulted a moment, speaking so low that Harvey could not hear.

"We will go to rescue Charka," said the one who had done the talking. "But you cannot go. You would bring as another curse."

Harvey went into the cabin to get a lantern. With the aid of this he watched the two men get the small boat off.

"Look well for him. He was a good man," said Harvey.

"He was," came the answer as the boat moved off. "We shall not return. We will not remain on a boat with a Muscovite woman and an unbeliever. We do not wish to kill, so we leave."

Harvey stood aghast. Alone he could not handle the sails. He shouted to them to come back, but they paid no attention to him. He returned to Alma.

"The foils have left us! Charka was thrown overboard by a broken rope, and I told them to go in the small boat to rescue them. They took the boat, preferring that in the storm to remaining on this boat with us. They say, my darling, we have brought a curse upon them."

The wind howled. The boat shivered as it was driven along at increasing speed. The timbers surely would not hold together long.

"My darling! What a terrible experience for you!" said Harvey, taking her in his arms. "It is impossible to control the boat. The only thing I can do is to try to cut away the sails."

"Dear Harvey, I will help you."

But they had nothing save the sword of the inspector general of prisons with which to work. With this they hacked at a few ropes they could reach, but the sails were held by ropes that had wound themselves around the masts. One mast broke and fell to the deck. It was beyond the power of both to move it. The speed of the boat seemed to be none the less for the loss of that mast. The rain now came down in torrents. The boat rocked and rolled and the waves swept completely over it.

"We cannot remain here," said Harvey. "We must climb up on the hay."

They soon had a perch in the hay which they kept by clinging to the cords that bound it to keep it in place. One of Harvey's arms was around the girl. They rushed along hour after hour, each moment fearing that the boat would sink or turn over. Suddenly there was a loud crash. The remaining mast broke and went plunging into the sea. The boat lurched frightfully, and it now seemed impossible for it to live in the foaming waters much longer.

"Darling one!" cried Alma. "My dearest sweetheart! Kiss me! Tell me once again that you love me, and with your strong arm around me I am content to die."

He kissed her passionately.

"It is hard, my beautiful darling, to die when liberty is almost ours! But I see no hope. The boat is filled and must surely sink. If this be God's will, let us not cry out against it. Kiss me again. God grant that this may not be our last farewell!"

We should like to know what these confounded cucumber and squash beetles live on when we do not grow vines.

Ditching machines are doing more for many sections of the west than all the pedagogues, parsons and politicians in the wet sections.

Benevolent legislation in New Zealand gives the old duffer of sixty-five who spent all his earnings for booze an annuity of \$150 a year so long as he lives.

There has been a surfeit of good things the week this item is written—strawberries, green peas, sweet girl graduates, June brides and house cleaning.

The Champion of England peas we sowed this spring along the picket fence inclosing the garden are a great success. Four feet high, and half the pods on the neighbors' side of the fence.

One bad phase of the present war in the far east is that the combatants seem to be getting along without the Missouri mule, and until this beast takes a handle in the scrap no one can tell how it will end.

Either the Japanese or the Chinese would get rich in short order if they could have the waste land on our highways and railroad rights of way to cultivate. Some day we shall be compelled to use these waste acres ourselves.

Whenever a farmer gives a note for anything purchased he should always be sure and see that it is made payable at his own bank or in his own town. It not, he is, in the event of being sued on it, liable to be trotted off a hundred miles or more to meet the suit.

One packing house alone owns and operates 7,500 refrigerator cars for its outshipments of meats, and thus is in shape to almost control the fruit shipments in. The rates charged for the use of these cars by fruit shippers is calculated to make them but enough so that they feel like getting in the car to cool off.

The average family cannot profitably buy large quantities of groceries at any one time, even if a little can be saved by this method of buying. Spices, teas and coffee soon lose flavor; dried fruits are apt to get wormy; salt fish gets rancid. We tried this plan once, buying a six months' supply for a family of seven, and while we saved \$4 in buying in large quantities we lost \$8 at the tail end on spoiled and deteriorated goods.

The college athletes will give the wheatfields of Kansas another whirl this summer. The fullback, the sprinter, the pole vaulter and the discus whirler, wearing the laurels of victory won on hard fought fields, will find that life on Kansas farms is real and earnest from 4:30 a. m. to 8:30 p. m., even with four meals and \$150 per day. Most of them will wish at the end of the first week that they were with Caesar crossing the Rubicon.

We all remember the Belgian hare craze of three years ago, a get rich quick scheme which was a dandy, depending upon being able to find suckers enough to sell the surplus to, to raise more hares for still more suckers. The ginseng craze, which just now is attracting not a little attention, is a scheme of the same stripe. If the corn crop of the country was only as certain each year as the crop of American suckers it would not be worth 10 cents a bushel.

We had a job of pruning done on a part of our orchard last September which we do not want to have repeated. A very vicious hailstorm swept over it, the hailstones being rough and jagged and very large. This so barked and scarred the new growth of wood that most of it was dead last spring, the injury being done at a time of the year when the trees had no recuperative or healing power, and so the bruised branches just dried up and perished. A very vigorous and healthy growth of wood is pushing out, however, and the damage will be repaired by another year.

An old man, a miser, ever grasping for more and denying himself the comforts of life, is a very pitiable sight, but hardly more so than that of the old man who at the end of a wasted and prodigal life finds himself without a dollar and dependent for existence upon the charity of others. There is no higher duty coming to any man than to so labor and save during his effective working years that his old age and that of his old wife shall be made as pleasant and enjoyable as it is in the power of money to make. Save while you are young, boys, and spend when you get past sixty. You will know the worth of a dollar then.

State of Ohio, City of Toledo, Lucas County, ss.

Frank J. Cheney makes oath that he is senior partner of the firm of F. J. Cheney & Co., doing business in the city of Toledo, County and State aforesaid, and that said firm will pay the sum of ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS for each and every case of catarrh that cannot be cured by the use of Hall's Catarrh Cure.

Sworn to before me and subscribed in my presence, this 6th day of December, A. D., 1886.

A. W. Gleason, Notary Public.

Hall's Catarrh Cure is taken internally, and acts directly on the blood and mucous surfaces of the system. Send for testimonials free.

F. J. Cheney & Co., Toledo, O. Sold by all druggists, 75c. Take Hall's Family Pills for constipation.

The man may not know when he has had enough, but when he is unable to pull his money the barkeeper makes a decision.

Every load of gravel put in the proper place on the dirt road and every load of manure put on the pasture or cornfield is well worth \$1.

It is unfortunate that the best time to work the highways is the very busiest season on the farm, for road work conflicts with corn plowing.

The two great problems which more than any other are receiving attention all through the west are how to get water on the land and how to get it off.

We found a few days ago, hanging by a fine piece of twine, a robin dead by the side of its nest. It was not a case of suicide, but of miscalculation, as in trying to weave the string into the nest it became entangled and was strangled.

The rights of way of the railroads through the western prairie country are alone preserving specimens of much of the native grasses and flora. These strips of land are never plowed or pastured, while all the rest of the country is.

An electric light company hunted for long to find the cause of the failure of a lot of its lights to burn and found at last that a pesky sparrow in building its nest had woven into it a piece of fine wire in such a manner as to short circuit the current.

The long horned Texas steer has been nearly obliterated from the plains of Texas as the buffalo. A pair of those gigantic horns, properly mounted, now commands a big price. Its place has been taken with good grade Shortorns, Herefords and Anguses.

If you have come to that period of life where your nose is trying to touch your chin, don't get oily and grumpy. Nature intended all her work as it became old to become more and more beautiful. Old dogs sometimes become cross, but an old man never should.

We incline to the tropical method of living during our hot summer days—early rising and a good snooze in the middle of the day. As a matter of fact the early morning hours during the hot season are the most delightful part of the day, altogether too nice to waste in bed.

The lately opened Indian Territory, properly rated as the choicest tract of unutilized land in the United States, seems likely to become more noted for its oil and mineral deposits than for its fertile acres. It is not at all unlikely that in this territory will be developed the greatest oil and natural gas field in the country.

The Tamworth hog, that heavy jowled, long bodied, ugly looking brute, a direct descendant of the wild boars of the Black forest, in Germany, is in spite of his ornery looks making a most valuable record for himself right in among his aristocratic and handsome fellows, the Poland-Chinas. He takes to grass and clover like a steer and makes the best of bacon.

It is the general adaptability of some plants which makes them so valuable. Here is corn, for instance, of scores of types and varieties, adapting itself to the radically varying climatic conditions extending from Minnesota to the gulf; here is the Irish potato at home in Texas and Manitoba; then we have the tomato, one of the most valuable of our garden products, growing equally well in Florida and New England.

Because a man lives on a farm it is no excuse why he should violate the fish and game laws of his state. The law gives him only a common right so far as the fish in the streams and lakes are concerned, but it gives him an exclusive right to the game which may be raised on his farm in most states by preventing any shooting on his farm without his consent, and still some of the worst violators of these wholesome laws are farmers and farmers' boys.

We are asked which possesses the greater intelligence—the horse or the dog. There is but little difference. Individual dogs and individual horses have been taught to do some remarkable things. Of the two, the dog is the more easily trained. And, while speaking of animal intelligence, there is nothing very slow about the pig. When a hog can be taught to play cards he is not much behind the horse which will pump his own drink or the dog which will steal for his master.

The value of deep plowing depends altogether upon what sort of soil you have and what the rainfall is. In a general way it will do no harm to plow any clay or loam lands deeply in the early fall or at any time of the year in all those sections where it is desirable to conserve all the moisture possible, but deep spring plowing is death to the crop for that year on all light sandy or gravelly soils. We like eight inch plowing on stiff soils about once in six years, keeping inside of five inches the balance of the time.

One of the greatest pleasures in conducting a farm is to have well bred stock to care for. It is not at all a difficult matter to get rid of all scrubs on the farm and replace them with animals and fowls of good breeding. The fact should never be lost sight of that well bred stock always responds more profitably to proper care and food than do the mongrels and scrubs. Then such stock always brings a better price when sold and is more pleasing to care for. While we are for peace as a general proposition, we still advise an unrelenting war on scrubs of all kinds.

RANGE LANDS.

We have several inquiries as to the character of the western Nebraska land which the government will soon make available for homestead settlers in 640 acre tracts. This land has been for many years a vast cattle range for the stock barons, over the fencing up and use of which there has been so much controversy between the barons and the government. It is included within the limits of what was for so long known as the Great American desert, a territory of scant rainfall and hot winds, of sparse vegetation, where the range was based on giving ten acres or more to a steer. While often tried, it has been found that the ordinary field crops of the country east of it cannot be successfully there raised, but within a few years past it has been shown pretty conclusively that on much of this land winter wheat, alfalfa, bromo grass, speltz, macaroni wheat and Kafir corn can be successfully raised. Where these crops can be grown the land is of much value, for with them meat can be made, and meat always means money. We believe that any land which will produce fair crops of alfalfa can be made very profitable indeed. We should consider this proposition worth looking up if we wanted some cheap land.

The best fowl.

We very frequently receive inquiries as to which is the best breed of hens. It is not an easy question to answer, for there really is no best breed in hens any more than there is in cattle or hogs. Some breeds of fowls—for instance, the Silver Laced Wyandottes and the Partridge Cochins—are especially desirable for their good looks and handsome plumage; the Buff Cochin and the White Brahma are valuable as winter layers and because a thirty inch wire fence will keep them in the yard; the Dominiques, Minorcas and Leghorns are good as foragers and nonsitters, but will fly over a twenty foot fence and prefer a tree to a house for a roosting place; the Houdan is the standard fowl of France—great layers of large, white eggs, but a tender breed for the north country. The Rocks, buff, white and barred, probably come the nearest to an all round, useful and profitable fowl for the average man. They are good winter layers if properly fed and cared for and make good fowls for the market. No other thing which man keeps on the farm depends so much on proper care and food as the hen, and when cared for and fed as it should be almost any breed is a good breed, and when neglected the best breeds are unprofitable.

A pestilent brigade.

We should think that Pharaoh would have promptly let the Hebrews go when the bug plagues were let loose on him. These summer days have started the whole infernal brigade of bugs, beetles, borers, lice, aphids, fungous and vegetable microbe and bacteria. They are doing a land office business right and left, stripping gooseberry and currant bushes stark naked, sucking the life out of squash and melon, stinging plum, peach and apricot, putting worms in the apples and blistering webs in the apple tree foliage; an army of silks, crawling, pestering, baneful life, with powers of almost instantaneous reproduction beyond conception and queerly exempting in their raids every form of pestilent vegetable life—dandelion, burdock, purslane, quack grass, ragweed, pigweed and grass—only after the good things; spiders and slugs on the roses and alderman potato bugs after the mulberries, flies breeding by the million