

The Gunmaker Of Moscow

By SYLVANUS COBB, Jr.

[CONTINUED.]

CHAPTER XVIII. STRANGE AND COMPLICATED.

Ruric Nevel dreamed that he was a great general and that he was upon the eve of an engagement. He gained a view of the commander of the opposing army, and he saw that it was the Duke of Tula. Yet the duke had an enormous hump upon his back, and instead of the usual uniform he wore the garb of a priest. This was very strange—at least so ran Ruric's thoughts in the dream. Soon the engagement commenced, and the loud mouthed artillery opened its thunder. The din was deafening and strange, and Ruric shouted in vain to his aids, for the roar of cannon drank up his words direct from his lips. Louder and more loud grew the crash, and finally Ruric started for the charge. His horse was shot under him, and with a quick leap, he reached his feet.

"Ruric, Ruric, my master!" Slowly the youth opened his eyes, and Paul stood by him in his night-clothes. He gazed about him and found that he had leaped from his bed and now stood shivering upon the floor.

"Don't you hear that racket at the door?" asked Paul.

"What? Ha! There is some one knocking," Ruric uttered as he heard the sound.

"And have you not heard it before?"

"No."

"Why did you leap up thus?"

"I was dreaming."

"I thought 'twas the noise below. Why, they've been making a perfect thunder of noise down there. Shall I go down?"

"Yes, go, Paul, and I will dress as soon as possible. What time is it?"

"It must be near daybreak."

And thus speaking Paul turned and went to his own room, where he threw on an outer garment, and then he went down. At the door he found a stout man wrapped up in furs, while close by stood a sledge with two horses attached to it. In the east the golden tints of morn were already visible.

"A gunmaker named Nevel lives here, does he not?" asked the applicant after having first made some passing remark on the trouble he had had in starting some one up.

Paul feared that there might be something out of the way, but he dared not tell a falsehood where it could not possibly be of any use, so he answered in the affirmative.

"Then let me see him as speedily as possible."

"He is preparing to come down, sir. If you will walk in, you may see him very soon."

The stranger followed the boy into the kitchen, where it was quite warm, the fire in the furnace having been burning all night. Ere long Ruric came down, and the visitor started up.

"How!" uttered the gunmaker, starting forward and extending his hand. "Demetrius?"

"Aye, my friend," the Greek replied, with a smile. "I am an early visitor, eh?"

"I should say so. But early or late you are welcome."

"Thank you. But we must not spend much time here now. My sledge is here at your door, and I wish you to accompany me."

"But wherefore is this?" asked the youth in surprise. "What has happened now?"

"I tell you. Last night Olga, the duke, came to see the emperor. I had just been giving his majesty some exercise at the sword, so I was present at the interview. The duke wished for power to arrest you, and in explanation of the request he stated that you were at the head of a band of robbers here in the city and that you had already committed several robberies. I needn't tell you all he said, but he made you out to be a most unmitigated villain, and with this the emperor granted his request. Olga wished for power to execute you at once, but Peter would not go so far as that. He gave the power of arrest, but ordered the duke to bring you before him."

Ruric stood for a few moments like one confounded.

"Then he must carry me to the emperor," he said at length.

"Ah," returned Demetrius, with a dubious shake of the head, "be not too sure of that. I saw a look upon his face when he turned away that meant more than he dared to speak. As sure as fate, he never means that you shall see the emperor. I know it—I saw it in his evil eye."

"But will he dare disobey the order?"

"Yes, for he hopes to escape by falsehood. How easy for him to swear that he had to kill you to take you!"

"I see, I see!" uttered Ruric.

"Then come with me."

"Did the emperor send you?"

"No; but I take the responsibility. I will take you to him myself. Be sure the duke's hirelings will be here before long. Trust to me, and all shall be well."

Ruric pondered a few moments, and he saw that his friend was right.

"Let me go and see my mother," he said, "and then I will go with you."

"But make haste," urged the Greek, "for the duke's men may be here soon, and I do not wish them to see you. And tell your mother to inform whoever may call that she knows not where you are gone, but that you will be back by night."

The youth nodded assent and then went into his mother's room, where he explained to her what had happened and what he was about to do.

"And how long must these things be?" the mother uttered, gazing eagerly upon her son.

"Not long," returned Ruric. "I may do much toward settling the matter today. But fear not, for I am now safe and shall be until I see you again."

The widow promised all that her son asked and soon became assured that all was well, but Paul was left with the duty of attending to those who might come for Ruric, though they might see the widow if they persisted. The boy promised to tell all that asked for his master that he was gone away on business and would not return till evening.

The mother came out before Ruric was ready to start, and her examination of the Greek's countenance seemed to be satisfactory, for the anxious look left her face, and she looked upon the visitor kindly.

As Ruric entered the sledge the dawn of day was plainly announced in the east and the stars were paling in the sky. The Greek did not take the direct road to the Kremlin, but struck off to the westward and so entered by the Neglina.

An hour later a party of five men drove up to the gunmaker's cot. They were dark, villainous looking men, and murder was plainly stamped upon their faces. They entered the dwelling, but they found not their prey. They stormed and swore, but to no purpose, and when they were convinced that the gunmaker was not there they went away.

An hour later still another party drove up to the same cot. It consisted of two men in a double sledge, one of whom was Vladimir, the monk. The fat, mystic man entered the cot, and there he remained for some time. When he came out, the widow and Paul accompanied him, and they all got into the sledge and drove off together.

What did it mean?

It was noon. The proud duke was once more alone in his private room, and he was pacing uneasily to and fro. There was a cloud upon his brow and trouble in his soul. His lips were firmly set and his hands clinched. Ever and anon he muttered to himself, and when he did so his hands would work nervously and emphatically. He looked often at his watch, and often he stopped near the door and hearkened.

At length came that well known shuffling, uncertain, cat-foot tread. He threw open his door, and the dark priest glided in.

"Ha, Savotano, I've waited for you," the duke uttered, sinking into a chair, for his nervous walking had made him weary. "Now tell me the work is done. Oh, for God's sake, don't tell me again of failure!"

"Alas, my lord!"

"Hold, Savotano! By the host of hosts, you are not going to tell me of failure!"

"Not really a failure, my lord," the priest returned nervously, "but our men did not find the gunmaker at home. He had gone when we got there, and no one knew where."

"No one knew? Did not his mother know?"

"No. She said he did not tell her where he was going. He only left word that he was going on business and should not return till evening."

"By heavens, I think he has fled!"

"No, my lord, I do not think so. I think he must have had business."

"But what time were you there?"

"Shortly after sunrise."

"And he gone then?"

"Aye! He had been gone an hour."

"It looks suspicious. But the men must be there this evening. He shall not escape me now."

"There is no fear of that, my lord. I will see that he is apprehended as soon as he returns."

"Right, Savotano, right! And now to the other matter. I am to be married this afternoon!"

"Ah! So soon?"

"Yes; I waste no more time. What is the use?"

"None, my lord—none at all."

"Then you must remain, for the ceremony shall be performed as soon as possible."

"And does the countess know of your determination?"

"Yes. She knew it ere she retired last night. I told her she should not escape again till she could carry my name with her. By the mass, sir, she sealed her own doom! Ha, ha, ha! The Duke of Tula will have his coffers filled again. Money must come somehow, and how else so easily as this?"

"Sure enough," returned the priest, with that old, coarse, wicked smile; sure enough, my lord—how?"

"In no way. Ho, I'll put the seal upon that budget and stamp it—mine! So here you remain until I am married. Today—until that ceremony is performed I am not sure. But tomorrow they cannot harm me. Oh, she shall be mine, Savotano! Today she is my wife, tonight she shares my bed, and tomorrow all heaven and earth and hell combined cannot undo the work. I have waited long enough. I have worked and schemed and have puzzled my brain to one great purpose, and yet each step I had marked out has failed me. Damonoff lives, the gunmaker lives, the black monk lives—but I, too, live! Ha! I live, Savotano, and now the work shall be done as it might have been done at first had I been so disposed!"

The duke had arisen to his feet while speaking thus, and his manner had been frantic and excited. As he ceased speaking he sank into his chair and gazed the priest in the face. He was all iron now. Every nerve and muscle was set, and a fierce determination was in his soul.

There is one more scene in the ducal palace, and it goes on at the very time while the duke and his tool were together.

Vladimir, the monk, was in the chamber of the countess, and the fair occupant and her maid were there with him.

"And you are sure he means to make you his wife today," said the monk in continuation of a conversation which had been going on for some moments; "that he will have the ceremony performed whether you consent or not?"

"Yes, sir," the countess murmured. She gazed into the strange man's face a few moments after she had spoken, and then, starting quickly up, she threw herself upon her knees before him.

"Oh," she cried, with her clasped hands raised toward him, "can you not help me in this bitter moment? Do not say so. Oh, I know you have some strange power, and you may help me. You cannot know the misery I suffer. Oh, earth has no pangs more cruel! In all the long catalogue of woes there is nothing more bitter! Sir—and the maiden raised both hands toward heaven as she thus continued—"sooner than be that man's wife I would with my own hand let my lifeblood out were not the act a sin against my God! But you may help me."

"Alas, lady, I cannot assure you now."

"Oh, say not so! You can help me flee from here; you can find some hiding place—some place where my days can be spent in safety from this great evil."

"But how can I help you away, lady?"

"Because you know some secret entrance to the palace. You know some secret passage, else you would not be here now."

"True," the monk replied in a perplexed tone, "I do know such a way, for by that way I came, and by that way shall I return, but I cannot convey you away thus. I am sorry that!"

The monk stopped here, for at that moment a heavy footfall sounded without. He had started up from his seat when the door opened and the stout duke entered. The countess uttered one low, quick cry and sank down. She would have sunk to the floor had not Zenobie caught her and bore her to the couch.

The monk stood erect, with his arms folded across his breast, but his right hand was hidden within the bosom of his robe. The duke started back like one thunderstruck, and it was some moments ere he could gain the power of speech. He turned first pale as death, and then the blood mounted, hotly, fiercely to his brow.

"By the living God," he gasped in a hissing, frantic tone, "how came ye here?"

"To learn of your wickedness, Duke of Tula," calmly responded Vladimir.

"Ha! Do you beard me in my very palace, dog? But you have ven-

ured here once too often. As sure as there is life in me, you go not hence alive!"

"Hold, Olga!" spoke the monk, and so strange and powerful was the tone that, though the duke had turned toward the door, yet he stopped. "This lady tells me you mean to make her your wife. Is it so?"

"Out, accursed monk! Who gave thee right to question me?"

"By my soul, proud duke, you shall know that anon. But listen. If you force this lady to that thing, you do it at your peril! You had better seek the fabled potion of the gods and drink and be a dog than do that thing!"

"Hold a moment, monk!" cried the duke, now nearly blind with passion. "You go not hence alive! What, ho, there! Without, I say! Zenobie, pull that bellcord—quick! Back, monk! You pass not here alive! What, ho! Without, there!"

"Beware, Olga!" spoke the monk as calmly as before, at the same time drawing a heavy pistol from his bosom and cocking it. "I would shoot you as I would a dog! Offer me one motion of impediment to my passage, and you die on the instant!"

Instinctively the duke moved to one side. There was something in the look and tone of the strange man that he dared not cope with then. The monk passed out, but as soon as he was gone the duke sprang to the bellcord and pulled it till he broke it. In a few moments more the servants came rushing in.

"Out, dogs," the madman shouted, "and stop that monk from leaving the palace! Kill him on the spot where you find him if he dares to offer the least resistance! Kill him! You have my orders, and I am alone responsible!"

Thus speaking, the duke rushed from the apartment to start up more of his household. First to the gate of the court he went. But the monk was not there, nor had he been there. Then he rushed to the postern, but that was locked, and the snow was untrodden before it. He returned to the hall, and one by one the servants came back from the search.

No monk could be found!

At first Olga was tempted to believe that his servants deceived him. But he quickly set that thought aside, for he could see by their countenances that they were as much astonished as he. The search was renewed, but the strange man was not to be found! There was some wonder and some uneasiness.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

VERY LENGTHY SHAVES.

Razor Travels Many Miles Over the Average Man's Face.

The distance a man shaves in an average lifetime, or the distance his razor travels over his face, will be a surprise to most people. From a multitude of examples an average measurement around the chin from ear to ear is found to be twelve and one-half inches. From where the beard starts on the throat to the chin and thence to the edge of the upper lip is four and one-half inches. You must reckon that it is necessary to give two strokes of the razor to each inch or fraction of an inch in order to cover all the surface and go over each section of the face twice in order to secure a clean surface.

So, multiplying the number of strokes by the number of times the razor is passed over the entire face, you get the figure 4, and four times the two above mentioned measurements gives you the figures 50 and 18 respectively, which, added together, produce 68. Therefore the average man, whether dark or fair, shaves 64 inches every twenty-four hours. With these figures we arrive at the result that every man wearing only a mustache shaves 2,068 feet 4 inches per year. Taking, then, the average life at seventy years and that the fair man starts shaving at eighteen and the dark man a year earlier, or at seventeen, we have the following result: That a fair man, if he lives till he is seventy, will shave in the course of his life 20 miles 650 yards 4 inches. The dark man, if he lives till he is seventy, will shave in the course of his life 20 miles 1,240 yards 1 foot 8 inches.—Kansas City Independent.

A Good Place to Avoid.

In the northern Shan states, on the border of Burma, there is a tribe called the Wild Was. These people propitiate with human skulls the demons whom they worship. Outside every village in their country there are many posts, all in one line, decked with human skulls. A niche is cut in the back of each post, with a ledge on which the skull can rest and grin through a hole in front of it. Every village has a dozen and some as many as a hundred of these head posts. Fresh skulls are in special request at harvest time and are purchased for large sums, those of distinguished visitors being particularly desired.

The Teacher's Fault.

Teacher—Why, Freddy, how did you get those black and blue welts on your arm?

Scholar—Them's your fault, teacher.

Teacher—My fault? What do you mean?

Scholar (sobbing reminiscently)—Why, you told me it was a poor rule that didn't work both ways. So when I went home I took pa's new two foot rule that doubles up on a hinge and bent it back till it worked both ways, and then pa said I'd broken the joints, and he went and got his razor stop.

STORY OF AN OYSTER

TOLD BY HIMSELF ABOUT HIMSELF AND HIS TRIBE.

The Trials and Tribulations of the Succulent Bivalve From the Time of Planting Until His Appearance on the Fishmonger's Counter.

There were about 900,000 of us when, as tiny flakes of spawn—or "spat," as the oyster spawn is called—we floated out into the water one day on "the flats."

At first we were white and apparently lifeless. Then we turned gray and finally black. At this stage we became visibly alive. For several days we floated, the sport of waves and tides. Some of my brothers were carried out to sea and so vanished; others were swallowed by fish. At last we all began instinctively to sink toward the bottom.

Then began again terrible destruction. Many fell on mud—the most fatal thing a young oyster can do. These perished at once. Others attached themselves to plants and weeds which grow at the bottom of the sea. They lived for a time—so long at least as the plant remained alive. Then, when the plant died, they perished as well.

Fortunately for myself, I drifted on to a bit of "cutch"—that is to say, one of the old shells which the dredgers and oyster men so carefully scatter all over the sea floor of an oyster bed. I settled with my deep shell uppermost and my flat or right shell nearer the ground. At the time I did not know why I did this. I have since realized that it was because in that position I should be more easily able to eject the sand and grit which a rough sea sometimes stirs up in shallow water. I attached myself firmly to my anchorage of "cutch" and felt myself at last fairly started in life.

Soon I noticed that every single morsel of shell or stone around me was tenanted by tiny oysters, all lying in the same position as myself and all firmly anchored.

There I lay, unmoving, for nearly a year. Food, in the shape of tiny animalcules, which an oyster loves best, was plentiful. When the water was thick with it, we all opened our shells wide, and making currents in the water by means of the tiny hairs which fringe our gills and which men call our beards, we washed the dainties into our mouths. Our choicest delicacies were the minute green algae, which give to full grown oysters that greenish tinge that is the mark of the aristocratic native.

When I first anchored myself, I was but the twentieth of an inch in diameter—so small, indeed, that a microscope would have been necessary to examine me. At that stage my shell was perfectly transparent.

At the end of ten months I had increased in diameter to fully the size of a dime and become what is called "brood."

During all this time I had been learning many things. I found out that it was necessary to close my shell tight when dangers of various kinds threatened, when the tide was low, in winter, when frost was severe. You may perhaps imagine that an oyster is a creature of such low organism that it cannot see or feel much of what is going on round about it. But you are wrong. The mantle fringe of an oyster is very sensitive. If you watched us from a boat in calm water, you would see that the mere shadow of the boat crossing an oyster bed will cause those of us upon whom it falls to close our shells immediately.

It was necessary to be most careful. Dangers were many and terrible. Sea urchins prowled among us and devoured many. But of all our foes the worst is the five fingered starfish. One of my sisters, anchored not a yard away, fell a victim to this terror of the oyster beds. It clutched her with its long fingers. She closed her shell.

But the creature was not to be shaken off. Hour after hour it clung there until on the second day after its first grip she, poor thing, opened her shell to get a mouthful of food. At once the starfish injected into her a fluid which stupefied her so that she could not close again. Then the monster turned itself inside out, shot itself into the open shell and devoured her.

Then, one day a year after I had floated as "spat," came a startling change in my existence. Something huge and heavy came out of the shadow of a boat above and approached, rasping and grating along the bottom. It was a great triangular dredge of wrought iron. At the bottom was a flat bar with a blunt edge, known to the dredgers as the "bit."

As the "bit" approached it scraped the bottom of the sea clean, and next instant I, too, found myself lifted and dropped into the net, together with hundreds like myself and a miscellaneous collection of small soles and other things.

One of the men sorted over the catch and, having selected all the oysters and spat, "shaded" the rest back into the sea through a porthole.

I, in company with enormous quantities of other brood, was put into a "wash"—a measure holding five and a quarter gallons—and relaid. Here life was less eventful and food most plentiful. To fatten well an oyster must have a certain amount of fresh water.

In this snug retreat I passed from brood to half ware and from half ware to ware, or full grown oyster. But I still went on growing and developing, until one day the dredge swept me up again, and I was raised once more into the upper air and rapidly brought in.

I was then dropped into a large bag and suspended in a tank of fresh sea water, which is constantly renewed. There I await my final fate, which will, I fear, be a fishmonger's counter.

—New York News.

Ten men have failed from defects in morals where one has failed from defects in intellect.—Munn.

NOT IN THE BIBLE.

Quotations Popularly Attributed to the Good Book.

"There are a number of sentences not in the Bible which everybody thinks are there," said a clergyman. "The chief of these sentences is, 'He tempests the wind to the shorn lamb.' You would search the Bible pretty thoroughly before you would find that sentence in it. Where you would find it would be in Sterne's 'Sentimental Journey.'"

"Sterne gets a good deal of praise for the origination of this sentence, but it was originated, as a matter of fact, before he was born. In a collection of French proverbs published in 1504 we find, 'Dieu mesure le vent a la breblotte.' That convicts Sterne of plagiarism.

"In the midst of life we are in death.' Everybody thinks that is in the Bible. It isn't, though. It is in the burial service.

"That he who runs may read.' This is another sentence supposed, wrongly, to be Biblical. It is not Biblical, though the Bible has something very like it—namely, 'That he may run that readeth.'

"Proned to sin as the sparks fly upward.' The Bible nowhere contains those words.

"A nation shall be born in a day.' The nearest thing to that in the Good Book is, 'Shall a nation be born at once?'"

Changing a Snake Into a Rod.

In a volume on the snakes of Egypt Hippolyte Boussac states that the incident referred to in the Scriptures of changing a snake into a rod is still practiced by the snake charmers. They touch the snake at a certain place in the neck, when it falls into a cataleptic condition and becomes straight and stiff. It is then restored to its former condition by taking its tail between the hands and firmly rolling.

Brain Work and Longevity.

In a lecture on longevity delivered before the Royal College of Physicians Sir Hermann Weber, himself an octogenarian, gave official support to the doctrine that brain work does not kill, but rather the reverse. A few of his instances were Sophocles, Plato, Galen, Cicero, Moltke, Bismarck, Mommsen and Gladstone, to whom we might add Hobbes, Carlyle, Spencer and Kelvin. The facts are that brain work increases the supply of blood to the nerve cells and promotes their nutrition and health. Mosso, an Italian, laid a man on a delicately balanced table and showed that the head end sank whenever the subject did a mental sum or any other brain work. The increased weight of his head was due to the life giving blood. The truth is that brain work, as such, never killed anybody.—London Chronicle.

Pence and Bones.

A writer in a London newspaper says: "The other day I heard an Englishman defending our system of coinage on the ground that we are the only nation on earth who can say that the system is bone of our bone. For there are 240 bones in the body and 240 pence in the pound; there are 120 bones in the head and trunk and 120 in the limbs and 120 pence in half a sovereign; each limb contains 30 bones, and a half crown contains 30 pence; in the spinal column there are 24 bones and in a florin 24 pence, and as we have 12 ribs on each side, so we have 12 pence in every shilling. See how the proportions of the skeleton of our commerce conform to nature's teaching. No wonder it is vigorous."

The Candle Nut.

The candle nut is a native of the Pacific islands, and the name is derived from the fact that the kernels are so full of oil that when dried they are stuck on reeds and used as candles. The people of Hawaii, after having roasted these nuts and removed the shells, reduce the kernels to a paste, which is flavored with pepper and salt and is said to be a most appetizing dish. The husk of the nut and the gum which exudes from the tree have medicinal values, while the burned shell of the kukui is used to make an indelible ink with which tattooing is done.

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