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### THE GUNMAKER OF MOSCOW.

(Continued from Sixth Page.)

urance that his presence was very disagreeable to the person mentioned. This I supposed he would sign at once, and as the count aspired to her hand I deemed it no more than right that he should render her this service. Now, sire, this gentleman may continue."

Thus bidden Urzen resumed: "The noble count was desirous, sire, that I should accompany him, and I did so. Upon reaching the man's shop we found him at work upon a gunlock, I think. He received the note, but refused to sign it. The count urged him to sign in the mild, persuasive language until the fellow became insolent. Then he used some stronger terms, and I think he made some threat of what he would do if his insults to the lady were repeated, and thereupon the gunmaker struck him a furious blow in the face and knocked him down. I cannot remember all the threatening language which the fellow used, but it was fearful."

"And how about the duel?" asked the emperor.

In answer to this Urzen went on and related what he had prepared on the subject, and it need only be said that the report was about on a par with what we have already heard. He even went so far as to swear that the count had tried repeatedly to compromise matters after the conflict had begun, that he begged of Nevel to give up the battle, but that the latter, thirsting for the young nobleman's blood, kept hotly, madly at it.

It was at this juncture and without referring to the surgeon that the emperor sent for Ruric, and, having learned that a lieutenant of the Khatagorod guard was present at the duel, he sent for him also. Orsa arrived first and was present when Ruric came.

And now Ruric Nevel stood before his emperor. Peter gazed upon him for some moments, and then he said:

"Sir, thy bearing is bold."

"Why should it not be, sire, when I stand before one whom I honor and respect and do not fear?" So spoke Ruric calmly and with neu-

gular dignity.

"Not fear?" repeated the autocrat sternly.

"No, sire. Peter of Russia is not a man to be feared by those who love and honor him."

"Insolence!" uttered the duke. The emperor looked up into his face, and he added:

"Now, sire, you can see for yourself some of his traits of character."

"Aye," returned Peter, "I see. They are wonderful. I knew not that among my artisans there were men of such boldness."

The duke knew not how to interpret this, and he moved back a pace.

"Now, sir," resumed Peter, turning to the gunmaker, "how dared you strike a Russian nobleman?"

"I did not, sire. Conrad Damonoff came to my shop, and he brought me a paper in which I was required or ordered to relinquish all claims to the hand of—"

"Sire," interposed the duke, "he misstates—"

"Never mind," broke in the emperor, with an authoritative wave of the hand, "we will hear nothing about the lady here. Why did you strike the count?"

"Because, sire, he descended from his station and struck me. He threw away the shield which should protect the nobleman and struck me without provocation."

"And then you knocked him down?"

"I did, sire."

"And perhaps you would have done the same to me."

"Sire," answered the youth quickly, "when Damonoff tried by threats to make me sign his paper I told him there was but one man on earth at whose order I would do that thing. The man who has the right to command shall never have occasion to strike me."

There was something in this reply and more in the tone and bearing of him who spoke it that made the duke tremble. He saw plainly that the emperor's eyes sparkled with admiration as they rested upon the gunmaker.

"But now about this duel," resumed the emperor. "How dared you take advantage of the count in the conflict?"

"Advantage, sire?" repeated the youth in surprise.

"Aye. Did he not, Stephen Urzen?"

"He did, sire," replied the man thus addressed.

"And which of the two do you call the best swordsman?" Peter asked.

"Why, sir, the count is or was vastly his superior."

"And what say you, sir lieutenant?"

Alaric trembled, for this was addressed to him. He knew that the duke was anxious to crush his friend, and he feared to draw the wrath of that powerful nobleman down upon his head. But a happy thought came to his aid.

"Sire," he said, "I would rather you would judge of that for yourself."

"Me judge? And how am I to do that?"

"Let Ruric Nevel's skill be tried here before you. If I mistake not, you have some good swordsmen near your palace. There is Demetrius, the Greek."

"What, my master at arms?"

"Yes, sire."

"Why, he is the best swordsman in my empire. I think our young adventurer would fare badly in his hands."

"Never mind, sire. You could judge."

"Why," said Peter, with a smile, "Demetrius handles the count as I would a mere child."

"Sire," spoke Ruric modestly, but yet frankly, "it were surely no disgrace to be overcome by your tutor."

"And will you take a turn with him at the sword?"

"Yes, sire, if so it please you."

"By my soul," cried the emperor, leaping up, "we'll have some diversion out of this trial. What ho, there! Light up the chamber. Let every lamp be lighted, for we want sight now. Send Demetrius here and tell him to bring his round-edged sword!"

Both the duke and Urzen stood aghast at this new turn, but they dared not interfere, for they saw that their imperial master was all excitement now to see a trial of skill at that science which, above all others, he tried to make his officers learn. But then they had one hope—Demetrius might overcome the

gunmaker so easily that Peter should not see his real power.

Demetrius soon came, and under his arm he carried the sword. They were of the common size, but with round edges and points on purpose for play. The master at arms was a powerfully built man and possessed a splendid form. He was a Greek by birth and was now retained by the emperor as a teacher of the sword exercise.

"Demetrius," said Peter, "I have sent for you to entertain us with a show of your skill. Here is a man about whose power there is some dispute. Mind you, it is all in kindness. Ruric Nevel, take your weapon."

The youth stepped forward and extended his left hand for the sword, and the right hand he extended for the other to grasp. It was taken warmly, for the Greek saw in an instant that he had a noble man to deal with. And those two men were not much unlike in form. Demetrius was an atom the taller, but Ruric showed the more muscle.

The night had come on, but the great lamps were all lighted, and the room was as bright as day.

"Sir," said Ruric, addressing the Greek, "this is none of my seeking, though I confess that for a long while I have longed to cross a playful sword with you. I play well."

"I like you," the Greek returned bluntly and kindly, "and if you beat me I will not like you less. I can afford to be beat once, seeing that thus far I have never been since first I offered to fence."

"Come, come," cried Peter, who was impatient for the entertainment, "let's see the opening. Now, stand aside, gentlemen."

Like twins stood those swordsmen as their weapons crossed with a clear, sharp clang. The Greek led off carefully, and Ruric as carefully warded every stroke. Then the former assumed a guard, and Ruric led off in turn. Ere long the swords clashed with sharper ring, and soon sparks of fire flew out from the clanging steel. Louder and louder grew the clang, and quicker and quicker grew the strokes. The thrusts were made with skill and force, but as yet neither had been touched.

The emperor was in ecstasy. He clapped his hands and shouted bravo with all his might.

By and by Ruric's eye grew more intense in its sparkling fire. His opponent saw it, but he could not tell what it meant. The youth was about to risk the most daring feat of all he knew. Steadily burned his eye, and his lips were set like steel. At length he saw that the Greek was playing for a thrust, and he lowered his point. Demetrius saw the chance, and, drawing his arm quickly back, he made the thrust with all his power. He was sure now he had won, for there was no earthly way in which his point could be struck either down or up. But see! With a gliding motion, a motion almost imperceptible, Ruric raises his sword, and the other slides along upon its side, and the other point, instead of touching his breast, is caught in the cross guard of his haft. Then, quick as lightning and with all his might, Ruric bends his elbow downward with the whole weight of his massive shoulder and throws his wrist upward. On that instant the Greek sees and feels what meant that strange fire of the eye. He feels his point caught, but before he can close his grasp more firmly the haft is wrenched from his hand. It strikes the vaulted ceiling with a dull clang and, descending, is caught fairly on the hilt by Ruric Nevel.

For a moment all is still as death in that chamber. Ruric is the first to break the silence. He advances to the Greek, and as he hands back both the swords he says:

"Demetrius, remember your promise. I know you are a brave man, for I can see it in your forgiving glance. You will not like me the less for this."

"By heaven, no!" the noble Greek cries, dropping both the swords and extending both hands, which the gunmaker grasped. "I honor you, I love you."

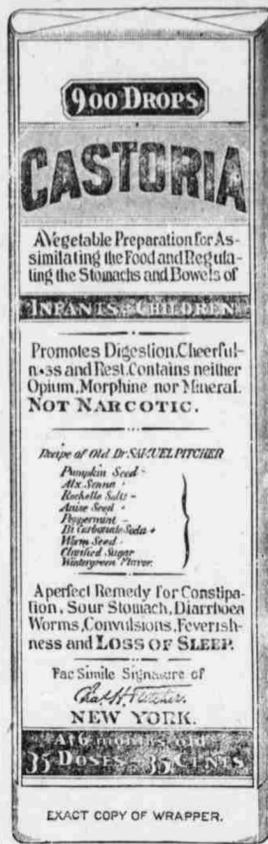
Peter Alexiowitz, the impetuous emperor, then in the zeal and fire of youth, leaped from his standing place and caught Ruric by the hand.

"By St. Michael," he cried earnestly and loudly, "you stand clear of all blame, for full well do I know that had you so desired you could have slain Conrad Damonoff at your first thrust."

"Sire," returned the youth, now speaking tremulously, "twice did I disarm the count and yet spare him. And when in my rage I broke his weapon in twain to bring him to his senses he seized a second sword."

"Sir duke, spoke the emperor, turning toward Olga, who stood trembling with rage and mortification, "you see you must have labored under a mistake. You can retire now. Not a word, sir!"

With a quivering lip and a trembling step the duke left the apartment, and after him went Stephen Urzen.



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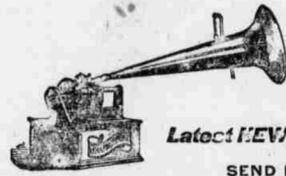
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### Re-Opening Biddings. LAND SALE.

W. W. Gibbs et al. vs. American Phosphate Co. et al.

Pursuant to a decree entered in above styled cause at the October term, 1901, on Minutes at page 908, I will, Until Monday, the 6th Day of January, 1902, at 12 o'clock M.,

receive bids in the office of the Clerk and Master in Columbia, Tenn., on the land described in said decree, and bounded as follows:

Lying and being in the 2nd civil district of Maury County, Tennessee, beginning at the southeast corner of the farm of Mrs. E. J. Ross, in the center of the public road; running north with line of said road to a large branch where said farm corners with the land of said Ross and the land of Mrs. R. G. Irvine; thence east with the various meanders of said branch to where the public road crosses said branch near Rutherford creek; thence south with said public road to the line of A. S. Godwin; thence west with the center of the public road to the beginning; bounded north by the land of said Irvine heirs; east by the lands of said heirs and A. S. Godwin; south by said Godwin; and west by Mrs. E. J. Ross, containing 192 acres, more or less. Being the same land conveyed to American Phosphate Co., by Mary L. Gowers, see Deed in Book 94, page 28, R. O. M. C. TERMS:—said sale will be made on a credit of six and 12 months, but notes to be dated July 20th, 1901. Sale free from the equity of redemption. Notes bearing interest from date, with good personal security will be required of the purchaser, and lien retained to secure the payment of the purchase money.

This the 6th day of December, 1901.

6-4 A. N. AKIN, C. & M.

"Now, Ruric Nevel, if you leave Moscow without my consent you do so at your peril. I would not lose sight of you. You are at liberty."

In an hour more Ruric was upon his mother's bosom. He told her all that had happened, all but the last words of the emperor. He did not tell her of those, for he knew not whether they boded him good or evil.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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