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# "The Review."

"Yes—but he met with an accident to-day."

"Look ye, Kopani," the young ruler cried, who saw in an instant that something unusual had happened, "think not to conceal anything from me. What is it, now?"

"Sire, I meant not to hide anything from you. The Count has been engaged in a duel."

"Ha!—was he challenged?"

"No, sire—he was the challenger."

"So, so. And who was the other party?"

"An humble gun-maker, sire, named Ruric Nevel."

"Nevel—Nevel—" soliloquized Peter. "The name is familiar."

"His father was a captain in the last war with the Turks. He arose from the ranks under Feodor, and was one of the bravest of the brave."

"Captain Nevel—Ah, yes. I remember now. He and Valda were the two who first mounted the ramparts at Izium. So the old dispatches read."

"Yes, sire. Poor Nevel was shot a month afterwards while leading his brave company against a whole squadron of Turkish infantry, while Valda came home and got a colonel's commission."

"And afterwards received a title," added Peter.

"Yes, sire."

"And this gun-maker is this captain's son?"

"Yes, sire."

"And methinks Valda left a child."

"He did, sire—a daughter, who is now with Olga—she is his ward."

"Yes, yes. And the Count fought a duel with young Nevel, and got beaten, eh?"

Before the surgeon could answer, a page entered the chamber and announced that the Duke of Tula wished to see his imperial master.

The Emperor directed that he should be admitted; and ere long afterwards the proud Duke entered the apartment. He was a tall, stout man, with light hair and blue eyes, and not far from five-and-forty years of age. His bearing was haughty, though he was forced to a show of respect now that he was before his master.

"Sire," spoke the Duke, after the usual salutations had passed, "I have come to demand justice at thy hands. My young friend, the Count Conrad Damonoff, has been most brutally murdered."

"Ha! Say ye so, Olga?"

"Yes, sire."

"But how was it?"

"Thus it was, sire: On the day before yesterday, I sent the Count with a message to one Ruric Nevel, who is a gun-maker in Sloboda. He went as I wished, and while there, the gun-maker, who is a huge fellow, provoked a quarrel, and knocked the nobleman down. Of course the Count was offended, and as the ruffian threatened to repeat the offence, and as he furthermore grossly insulted a noble lady whom the Count held most dear, he could hardly help challenging him. The fellow accepted the challenge, and has succeeded, by the most cowardly manoeuvring, in inflicting upon him a mortal wound."

"This is a serious affair," said the Emperor, who had not failed to note the astonished look of the surgeon while the Duke was telling his story.

"It is most serious, sire; and surely the ruffian should be at once executed."

"But did you not say that the Count challenged him?"

"I did, sire; but you must remember that it was an instinct of self-preservation with the noble Count. The fellow would have undoubtedly murdered him had he not taken this course."

"Were you present at the duel, my lord?"

"No, sire; but I have a friend without who was present."

"Then you may bring him in."

The Duke departed, and when he returned Stephen Urzen bore him company.

"This is the man, sire," Olga said, as he led his companion forward.

The Emperor gazed upon Urzen a few moments in silence and then he said:

"You were present at this duel, were you not, sir?"

"I was, sire," the man answered, bowing low.

"And he was at their first meeting also, sire," interposed the Duke.

"Ah—yes. Then you know all about the affair?"

"Yes, sire," answered Urzen.

"Then tell me about it."

"First, sire," commenced the man, casting a sort of assuring glance at the Duke, "the Count went to the gun-maker's shop to get him to—"

"Let me explain here, sire," interrupted the Duke, as his puppet hesitated. "This man may not know properly about the mission. Living with me is a young girl—a ward of mine—a gentle, timid being, who has been somewhat a comfort to me in my loneliness. In childhood she was acquainted with this Ruric Nevel, and now the fellow has presumed thereupon several times to insult her of late with his disgusting familiarity. She dared not remonstrate with him for fear of violence so she referred the matter to me. The Count has been anxious to win her for a wife, so I thought him not an improper person to send on the delicate mission. Accordingly I wrote a sort of promise—"

in the form of voluntary assurance—pledging the signer not to make himself familiar with the lady any more. And

at the same time he received the assurance 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 gun-lock, I think. He received the note but refused to sign it. The count urged him to sign in 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 gun-maker 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 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 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 Khitigorod 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 I not be, sire, when I stand before one whom I honor and respect, and do not fear?" So spoke Ruric calmly, and with peculiar 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 gun-maker, "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 mistakes—"

"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 gun-maker.

"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.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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