

THE GUNMAKER OF MOSCOW.

A Tale of the Empire under Peter the Great.

CHAPTER I. TIME time at which we open our story is midwinter, and towards the close of the seventeenth century. Russia is the scene.

In the suburbs of Moscow, and very near the river Moskwa, stood a humble cot, which betrayed a neatness of arrangement and show of taste that more than made up for its smallness of size.

The master of this tenement was the hero of our tale, Ruric Nevel. We find him standing by his forge, watching the white smoke as it curled up towards the throat of the chimney.

Near by stood a boy--Paul Peepoff--a bright intelligent lad, some fifteen years of age, who had bound himself to the gunmaker for the purpose of learning the art.

Claudia Nevel, Ruric's mother, was a noble looking woman, and the light of her still handsome countenance, was never brighter than when gazing upon her boy.

"It is snowing again, faster than ever," remarked Paul, as he took a seat at the supportable in company with the others.

"Ah," returned Ruric, resting his knife a few moments while he bent his ear to listen to the voice of the storm.

"Never mind," spoke the dame, in a trustful easy tone, "it must storm when it listeth, and we can only thank God that we have shelter, and pray for those who have none."

The meal was at length eaten, and the table set back, and shortly afterwards Paul retired to his bed.

Ruric drew his chair close up to the fire-place, and leaning against the jam he bowed his head in absorbing thought.

But when the elder Nevel was slain in battle, Ruric was yet a boy, and the widow and her son remained poor and obscure; while Valda, more fortunate, had risen to a high rank, and dying, left Rosalind a title and a fortune.

"Here--give me your hand--There--now come!"

The youth found the thickly gloved hand--gloved with the softest fur--and having led the invisible applicant into the hall he closed the door, and then led the way to the kitchen.

"How now, Zennie?" asked Rosalind, as he was waiting maid entered.

"But it is Ruric Nevel, my mistress."

"Ruric!" exclaimed the fair maiden, starting up, while the rich blood mounted to her brow and temples.

"I think I speak with Ruric Nevel," said the Count, moving forward.

"You do," returned Ruric not at all surprised, by the visit, since people of all ranks were in the habit of calling at his place to order arms.

Ruric Nevel started at these words, and he clasped his hands to hide their tremulousness.

"And why have you come to me with this information, sir?" he asked.

"Ruric Nevel, you shall not say that I did not make myself fully understood, hence I will explain."

"So a simple denial from you, to the effect that you can never claim your hand, is all that is necessary."

"Sir Count," he said calmly and firmly, "you have plainly stated your proposition, and I will as plainly answer: I can not sign the paper."

"Do you refuse?"

"I should like to sign it," hissed Damonoff, turning pale with rage.

"I might not require much more urging to induce me to make my mark in a manner not all agreeable to you, sir."

"Do you seek a quarrel with me?"

"I thank you, Orsa, for your kindness thus far, and you may rest assured that I shall be prompt."

"Suppose I call here in the morning for you," suggested the visitor.

"I should be pleased to have you do so," the gunmaker said; and thus it was arranged.

On the following morning Ruric was up betimes, and at the breakfast table not a word of the one all-absorbing theme was uttered.

"By St. Michael," said the gunmaker to his boy, "Moscov does not contain another blade like that. Damascus never saw a better."

"I think you are right, my master," the boy returned, who had beheld the trial of the blade with unbounded admiration.

"God bless you, my mother--I shall come back!" He said this, and then he kissed her.

"I have, Ruric said, quietly; "and one which has stood more tests than most swords will bear."

"Have you a good weapon?" asked Orsa, as the horse started on.

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So, before God and man, be the result upon your own head."

"Hold," cried the surgeon, laying his hand heavily upon the Count's arm.

"An angry reply was upon Damonoff's lips, but he did not speak it."

"I am well satisfied as it is," replied Ruric.

"Then take your ground--Are you ready?"

"The two swords were crossed in an instant, with a clear sharp clang."

"The above is all of this story that will be published in our columns. We give this as a sample. The continuation of it from where it leaves off here can only be found in the New York Ledger, the great family paper, for which the most popular writers in the country contribute, and which is for sale at all the stores throughout the city and country where papers are sold."

Remember and ask for the New York Ledger of March 19, and in it you will get the continuation of the story from where it leaves off here.

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"And the weapons?" asked Ruric.

"Swords," returned Orsa. "The Count will bring his own, and he gives you the privilege of selecting such an one as you choose."

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