

The Special Correspondent

CHAPTER I.

Claudius Bombarnac, Special Correspondent Twentieth Century, Tiflis, Transcaucasia.

Such is the address of the telegram I found on the 13th of May when I arrived at Tiflis.

This is what the telegram said: "As the matters in hand will terminate on the 15th instant, Claudius Bombarnac will repair to Uzun Ada, a port on the east coast of the Caspian. There he will take the train by the direct Grand Transasiatic, between the European frontier and the capital of the Celestial Empire. He will transmit his impressions in the way of news, interviewing remarkable people on the road, and report the most trivial incidents by letter or telegram as necessity dictates. The Twentieth Century trusts to the zeal, intelligence, activity and tact of its correspondent, who can draw on its bankers to any extent he may deem necessary."

It was the very morning I had arrived at Tiflis, with the intention of spending three weeks there in a visit to the Georgian provinces for the benefit of my newspaper, and also I hoped for that of its readers.

Here was the unexpected, indeed; the uncertainty of a special correspondent's life. I had hardly arrived before I was obliged to be off again without unstrapping my portmanteau!

It was hard, but there was no way out of it. And to begin with, at what o'clock did the train for Tiflis start from the Caspian? I went to the railway station at a run, and rushed into the departure office.

"When is there a train for Baku?" I asked.

"Six o'clock to-night."
"And when does it get there?"
"Seven o'clock in the morning."
"Is that in time to catch the boat for Uzun Ada?"

The man at the trap door replied to my salute by a salute of mechanical precision. The question of passport did not trouble me. The French consul would know how to give me all the references required by the Russian administration.

At 5 o'clock, having secured my passport, I hurry to the railway station. There there is a crowd of Armenians, Georgians, Mingrelians, Tartars, Kurds, Israelites, Russians, from the shores of the Caspian, some taking their tickets direct for Baku, some for intermediate stations.

I take a ticket for Baku, first class. I go down on the platform to the carriages. According to my custom, I install myself in a comfortable corner. A few travelers follow me, while the cosmopolitan populace invade the second and third class carriages. The doors are shut after the visit of the ticket inspector. A last scream of the whistle announces that the train is about to start. Suddenly there is a shout—a shout in which anger is mingled with despair—and I catch these words in German:

"Stop! Stop!"
I put down the window and look out. A fat man, bag in hand, traveling cap on head, his legs encumbered in the skirts of a huge overcoat, short and breathless. He is late. The porters try to stop him. Try to stop a bomb in the middle of its trajectory! Once again has right to give place to might.

The Teuton bomb describes a well-calculated curve, and has just fallen into the compartment next to ours, through the door a traveler had obligingly left open. The train begins to move at the same instant, the engine wheels begin to slip on the rails, then the speed increases. We are off.

It is still daylight at 6 o'clock in the evening in this latitude. I have bought a time table and I consult it. Then I began to examine my traveling companions. There were four of us, and I need scarcely say that we occupied the four corners of the compartment. I had taken the furthest corner, facing the engine. At the two opposite angles two travelers were seated facing each other. As soon as they got in they pulled their caps down on their eyes and wrapped themselves up in their cloaks—evidently they were Georgians, as far as I could see.

In front of me was quite a different type, with nothing of the oriental about it; thirty-two to thirty-five years old, face with a reddish beard, very much alive in look, nose like that of a dog standing at point, mouth only too glad to talk, hands free and easy, ready for a shake with anybody; a tall, vigorous, broad-shouldered, powerful man. By the way in which he settled himself and put down his bag, and unrolled his traveling rug of bright-hued tartan, I had recognized the Anglo-Saxon traveler, more accustomed to long journeys by land and sea than to the comforts of his home, if he had a home. He looked like a commercial traveler. I noticed that his jewelry was in profusion; rings on his fingers, pin in his scarf, studs on his cuffs with photographic views in them, showy trinkets hanging from the watch chain across his waist coat. I should not have been surprised if he turned out to be an American.

If I am not mistaken, he will be just as glad to speak to me as I am to speak to him—and reciprocally. I will see. But a fear restrains me. Suppose this American should also be a special correspondent, and suppose he has also been ordered to do this Grand Asiatic. That would be most annoying! He would be a rival!

CHAPTER II.

At last I was about to open my mouth when my companion prevented me.

"You are a Frenchman?" he said in my native tongue.

"Yes, sir," I replied in his. Evidently we could understand each other. The ice was broken, and then question followed on question rather rapidly between us.

"Wait a bit," said my American. "I'll lay ten to one that you are a reporter!"

"And you would win! Yes, I am a reporter sent by the Twentieth Century to do this journey."

"Going all the way to Pekin? So am I."

"Same trade?" said I, indifferently.

"No. You need not excite yourself. We don't sell the same stuff, sir."

"Claudius Bombarnac, of Bordeaux, is delighted to be on the same road as—"

"Fulk Ephrinnell, of the firm of Strong, Bulbul & Co., of New York City, New York, U. S. A."

We were mutually introduced. I a traveler in news, and he a traveler in—what? That I had to find out.

"Have you ever been in the United States, Mr. Bombarnac?" he asked.

"No, Monsieur Ephrinnell."

"You will come to our country some day. Then you will not forget to explore the establishment of Strong, Bulbul & Co.?"

"Explore it?"

"You will see one of the most remarkable industrial establishments of the New Continent. Imagine a colossal workshop, immense buildings for the mounting and adjusting of the pieces, a steam engine of fifteen hundred horse power, ventilators making six hundred revolutions a minute, boilers consuming a hundred tons of coal a day, a chimney stack four hundred and fifty feet high, vast outhouses for the storage of our goods, which we send to the five parts of the world, a general manager, two sub-managers, four secretaries, eight under-secretaries, a staff of five hundred clerks and nine hundred workmen, a whole regiment of travelers like your servant, working in Europe, Asia, Africa, America, Australasia, in short, a turnover exceeding annually one hundred million dollars! And all that, Mr. Bombarnac, for making millions of—yes, I said millions—"

At this moment the train commenced to slow under the action of its automatic brakes, and he stopped. Our conversation is interrupted. I lower the window on my side, and open the door, being desirous of stretching my legs.

As soon as the bell begins to ring I return to our carriage, and when I have shut the door I notice that my place is taken. Yes! Facing the American, a lady has installed herself with that Anglo-Saxon coolness which is as unlimited as the infinite. My French gallantry prevents me from claiming my corner, and I sit down beside this person, who makes no attempt at apology.

Ephrinnell seems to be asleep, and that stops my knowing what it is that Strong, Bulbul & Co. of New York manufacture by the million.

It was nearly midnight. Weariness invited me to sleep, and yet, like a good reporter, I must sleep with one eye and one ear open.

In this way I heard the shouts of Geran, Varvara, Oudjarry, Kiourdamid, Klourdane, then Karasoul, Navagi. I sat up, but as I no longer occupied the corner from which I had been so cavalierly evicted, it was impossible for me to look through the window.

And then I began to ask what is hidden beneath this mass of veils and wraps and petticoats which has usurped my place. Is this lady going to be my companion all the way to the terminus of the Grand Transasiatic? Shall I exchange a sympathetic salute with her in the streets of Pekin?

I must gradually have fallen sound asleep. Withdrawn from exterior influences, I did not even hear the stentorian respiration of the Yankee.

"Baku! Baku!"
The word, repeated as the train stopped, awoke me. It was seven o'clock in the morning.

CHAPTER III.

The boat did not start until three o'clock in the afternoon. Those of my companions who intended to cross the Caspian hurried off to the harbor, it being necessary to engage a cabin, or to mark one's place in the steamer's saloon. Ephrinnell precipitately left me with these words:

"I have not an instant to lose. I must see about the transport of my baggage."

"Have you much?"
"Forty-two cases."
"Forty-two cases!" I exclaimed.

If he had had a voyage of eight days, instead of one of twenty-four hours, and had to cross the Atlantic instead of the Caspian, he could not have been in a greater hurry. He did not think of offering his hand to assist our companion in descending from the carriage. I took his place. The lady leaned on my arm and jumped—no, gently put her foot on the ground. My reward was a thank you, sir, uttered in a hard, dry, unmistakable British voice.

Twenty-five years is apparently about her age, she has an Albionese complexion, a jerky walk, a high dress like an equinoctial tide, no spectacles, although she has eyes of the intense blue which are generally short-sighted. While I bend my back as I bow, she honors me with a nod, which only brings into play the vertebrae of her long neck, and she walks off straight toward the way out.

As eleven o'clock strikes, I make my way to the restaurant at the railway. As I am entering Ephrinnell rushes out.

"Breakfast?" say I.
"I have had it," he replies.
"And your cases?"
"I have still twenty-nine to get down to the steamer. But, pardon, I have not

a moment to lose. When a man represents the firm of Strong, Bulbul & Co., who send out every week five thousand cases of their goods—"

"Go, go, Monsieur Ephrinnell, we will meet on board. By the bye, you have not met our traveling companion?"

"What traveling companion?"
"The young lady who took my place in the carriage."
"Was there a young lady with us?"
"Of course."
"Well, you are the first to tell me so, Mr. Bombarnac."

And thereupon the American goes out of the door, and disappears. It is to be hoped I shall know before we get to Pekin what it is that Strong, Bulbul & Co. send out in such quantities. Five thousand cases a week—what an output, and what a turnover!

When it is two o'clock I think I had better get down to the boat. I must call at the railway station where I have left my light luggage at the cloak room. Soon I am off again, hastening down one of the roads leading to the harbor.

At the break in the wall, where access is obtained to the quay, my attention is attracted by two people walking along together. The man is from thirty to thirty-five years old, the woman from twenty-five to thirty, the man already grayish brown, with mobile face, lively look, easy walk with a certain swinging of the hips. The woman still a pretty blonde, blue eyes, a rather fresh complexion, her hair frizzed under a cape, a traveling costume which is in good taste neither in its unfashionable cut nor in its glaring color. Evidently a married couple come in the train from Tiflis, and unless I am mistaken they are French.

They are too much occupied to see me. In their hands, on their shoulders, they have bags and cushions and wraps and sticks and sunshades and umbrellas. They are carrying every kind of little package you can think of which they do not care to put with the luggage on the steamer. I have a good mind to go and help them. Just as I am walking up to them, Ephrinnell appears, drags me away, and I leave the couple behind.

"Well," said I to the Yankee, "how are you getting on with your cargo?"

"At this moment, sir, the thirty-seventh case is on the road."

"And what may be in those cases, if you please?"

"In those cases? Ah! There is the thirty-seventh!" he exclaimed, and he ran out to meet a truck which had just come on to the quay.

The Astara is loaded up. The hold is not big enough, and a good deal of the cargo is overflowed on the deck. The stern is reserved for passengers, but from the bridge forward to the top-gallant forecastle there is a heap of cases covered with tarpaulins to protect them from the sea.

There Ephrinnell's cases have been put. He has lent a hand with Yankee energy, determined not to lose sight of his valuable property, which is in cubical cases, about two feet on the side, covered with patent leather, carefully strapped, on which can be read the stenciled words, "Strong, Bulbul & Co., New York."

"Are all your goods on board?" I asked the American.

"There is the forty-second case just coming," he replied.

And there was the said case on the back of a porter already coming along the gangway. It seemed to me that the porter was rather tottery.

"Wait a bit!" shouted Ephrinnell. Then in good Russian, so as to be better understood, he shouted: "Look out! Look out!"

It is good advice, but it is too late. The porter has just made a false step. The case slips from his shoulders, breaks in two, and a quantity of little packets of paper scatter their contents on the deck.

What a shout of indignation did Ephrinnell raise! What a whack with his fist did he administer to the unfortunate porter as he repeated in a voice of despair, "My teeth, my poor teeth!"

And he went down on his knees to gather up his little bits of artificial ivory that were scattered all about, while I could hardly keep from laughing.

It was for manufacturing five thousand cases a week for the five parts of the world that this huge concern existed!

The bell is ringing for the last time. All the passengers are aboard. The Astara is casting off her warps. Suddenly there are shouts from the quay. I recognize them as being in German, the same as I had heard at Tiflis when the train was starting for Baku.

It is the same man. He is panting, he runs, he cannot run much faster. The gangway has been drawn ashore, and the steamer is already moving off. Luckily there is a rope out astern which still keeps the Astara near the quay. The German appears just as two sailors are maneuvering with the fender. They each give him a hand and help him on board.

About a quarter of a mile out there is a sort of boiling, agitating the surface of the sea, and showing some deep trouble in the waters. I was near the rail on the starboard quarter, and, smoking my cigar, was looking at the harbor disappearing behind the point round Cape Apheron, while the range of the Caucasus ran up into the western horizon. Of my cigar there remained only the end between my lips, and, taking a last whiff, I threw it overboard.

In an instant a sheet of flame burst out all around the steamer. The boiling came from a submarine spring of naphtha, and the cigar had set it alight.

Screams arise. The Astara rolls amid sheaves of flame, but a movement of the helm steers us away from the flaming spring, and we are out of danger. The captain comes aft and says to me in a frigid tone:

"That was a foolish thing to do."
"Really, captain, I did not know—"

"You ought always to know, sir!" These words are uttered in a dry, cantankerous tone, a few feet away from me.

I turn to see who it is. It is the English woman who has read me this little lesson.

(To be continued.)



A Handy Garden Cart.

No one realizes how handy a small cart is on the farm until one has used it; the wheelbarrow is all right in its place, but there are times when the hand cart answers the purpose much better. The illustration shows how one of these carts may be made with a little lumber and any old wheels from a mower one may have. If there are no such wheels and shaft on the farm, the local blacksmith can probably supply the want from articles of the kind that come to him. The il-



HANDY GARDEN CART.

lustration shows plainly the mode of construction.

Have a box of convenient size, being careful not to make it too large, else it cannot be pulled except with considerable effort when filled. The width will, of course, depend upon the length of the axle. This may be made of any suitable material, if one cannot obtain a made pair, and if they are home constructed it will be easy to bring the outer ends nearer together by placing a two-inch block between the ends next to the box and the box. At the front end of the box a strip of board is placed, to which the single-tree is attached.

New Red Grape.

Although not yet tested in all grape-growing regions, the Regal shows promise wherever it has been grown. The vine is a most vigorous grower, strong and healthy and exceedingly productive. The quality of the berry is very good, though not of the best. The skin is a rich red, thin but very tough, and one of the chief characteristics of the variety is its long keeping qualities. As will be seen from the illustration, the bunch is compact, the berries of good size and uniform. A number of the State experiment stations have tested the variety and speak highly of it. If it does as well under general culture as it has on trial, it will



THE REGAL GRAPE.

be of distinct advantage as a market sort because of its color and its long-keeping qualities.—Indianapolis News.

Poultry Pickings.

Why don't you raise turkeys? The price is high and they are easy to raise, though some think it is difficult.

Special care must be taken in handling the eggs the first five days of incubation, when life is not firmly established.

Wyandottes have for the last few years taken a commanding position among the fanciers of this country, being of American origin and a great egg producer.

A great number of beginners who are just becoming interested in raising poultry, etc., do not know what breed to select. Try Barred Plymouth Rocks or Wyandottes.

The most necessary requirements in preparing fowls for the showrooms are the best possible shape, size and plumage that can be obtained, including clean and well-colored feet and legs.

The cause of fowls taking cold is allowing them to sleep where they are exposed to drafts and feeding them soft and sloppy foods.

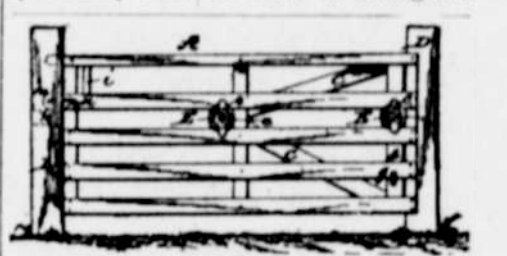
It requires capital to go into the poultry business on anything but a very small scale, and economizing on some things is the wrong thing to do.

Finding Age of Fowls.

A pullet will show rose-colored veins on the surface of the skin under the wings; there will also be long silky hairs growing there. After a year old these disappear, so, too, do the veins, and the skin shows white and veinless. The difference can be seen at a glance. Again, a pullet that has not laid, or has only just commenced to lay, will have the bones of the pelvis or basin almost touching. The bones gradually widen as the fowl continues laying, and at two years old are much further apart than they were at one year old. The third point of difference lies in the claws and shanks; in a young bird the skin of the claw is supple, and the scales thin and brilliant. The skin gets coarser and stronger and the scales harder as the bird grows, and the nail of the last toe, which does most of the work, when the bird scratches, gets much worn. There is also a difference in the eyelids. These acquire wrinkles as the bird gets older, and there is also a slightly shriveled look on the face. This, with age, gets more and more pronounced. In the case of cocks, above and beyond these points of difference (except the bones of the pelvis widening), there are the spurs to judge by.—American Cultivator.

New Farm Gate.

Serious defects to be overcome in gates are strain and leverage weight, which result in sagging. W. J. Slack, of Fort Wayne, Ind., has invented a gate which it is claimed will largely remedy these defects. A triangular



NEW FARM GATE.

frame is hinged to the post, with two rollers attached, whereon gate panel is supported and freely operates. The cut shows gate in usual low position, closed, and so supported at front end that no leverage weight or strain can incur to either gate or post. This improvement may be used as a small single or large double sliding or swing gate.

No Cabbage Snake.

Recently an absurd fear has developed in the minds of some eaters of cabbages relative to the so-called "cabbage snake." The superstition is that the snake poisons the cabbages and so renders them unfit to eat. The existence of such a creature is denied by our scientists, but so prevalent is the belief that at least one experiment station has issued a circular denying the existence of the so-called snake. In some parts of the country a small whitish "eel-worm" has been found to infest cabbages. The larvae of this worm prey upon the common green cabbage worm, and hence are doubtless a benefit rather than a detriment to the cabbage-growing industry. Some of the more superstitious people in the South imagined that these worms poisoned the cabbages, and tests were made by scientific people to clear up the matter. Extracts were made from the worms and injected into the human system. These injections failed to produce the least effect. It is therefore considered that the character of the little worm has been cleared of the accusation.

Gathered from the Garden.

The best thing for the garden—brains. Cut the black knot out of the plum and cherry trees.

A particular titbit of the San Jose scale is the currant. Radishes are usually ready for use in six weeks from sowing.

Bone meal and wood ashes in the soil are great for sweet peas. Probably no other small fruit will give more weight of crop for the space it occupies than the currant.

Don't trim the cherry trees now. Wait till June, and then be light-handed.

To bleed the grapevines by cutting during March, April or May is bad management.

Cold frames are useful for forwarding lettuce and cabbage in spring or early summer.

If the rhubarb is run out or more plants are wanted, it can be propagated by dividing the old roots. Each eye or bud when broken apart with a root attached forms a plant.