

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 Grand Transcaucasian, 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 his 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 to 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 embarrassed 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 Transcaucasian? 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," I exclaimed.

"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, unimpeachable British voice.

Twenty-five years is apparently about her age, she has an Albion 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?" says 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 critical 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! It was for supplying the dentists of the old and new worlds; it was for sending teeth as far as China, that their factory required fifteen hundred horse power, and burned a hundred tons of coal a day! That is quite American!

The bell is ringing for the last time. All the passengers are aboard. The Astara is casting off her wards. 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 Apcheron, 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 end 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.)

Had Feathered His Nest.

The gage by which worldly prosperity is measured is not always the same. But it does not so much matter what standard is used so long as it shows accurately the amount of gain or loss.

"I remember Bill Gasset as a shiftless young ne'er-do-well," said a former neighbor of Mr. Sands, revisiting his old home after many years' absence, "but I hear he left his widow quite a substantial property. How did he manage it?"

"He made choice of an excellent wife, and she took him as the smartest woman often take the poorest specimens of the men-folks," said Mr. Sands thoughtfully, "and what's more, she made something of him, put some gimps into him, and what all. Why, sir, when he married her, all he had for a mattress was an old makeshift stuffed with dried leaves; and when he died he had no less'n three mattresses stuffed with live-geese feathers. I guess that tells the story."

Jenious.

Bookkeeper—The boss came in and caught me taking a kiss from the pretty stenographer. Actually said I was dishonest.

Mail Clerk—In what way?

Bookkeeper—Said I was taking something that belonged to him.



Boys And Girls

LITTLE STORIES AND INCIDENTS

That Will Interest and Entertain Young Readers.

The Shearing. The day they cut the baby's hair. The house was all a-fidget; such fuss they made, you would have said.

He was a king—the midget! Some wanted this, some wanted that; some thought that it was dreadful to lay a hand upon one strand of all that precious headful.

While others said, to leave his curls would be the height of folly, unless they put him with the girls and called him Sue or Molly.

The barber's shears went snip-a-snip, the golden stuff was flying; Grandmother had a trembling lip, and aunt was almost crying.

The men folks said, "Why, hello, Boss, you're looking five years older!" But mother laid the shaven head close, close against her shoulder.

Ah, well; the nest must lose its birds, the cradle yield its treasure; time will not stay a single day for any pleader's pleasure.

And when that hour's work was weighed, the scales were even, maybe; for father gained a little man when mother lost her baby! —St. Nicholas.

STRANDED LAD A YANKEE. Demonstrated that Fact When He Told of "Skim Milk" Folsom. A good story is told of the way in which Nathaniel Hawthorne, when he was Consul at Liverpool, tested a Yankee boy. The boy had gone to the Consul's office one day to beg for a passage back to his home. He had gone abroad to seek his fortune, and, not finding it, had become almost penniless. He told a clear story, but the clerk who heard it doubted his truth.

"You are not an American," he said to the boy; but the applicant for the passage to America persisted in waiting at the office until he saw Hawthorne himself. At last the Consul appeared, gave a quick glance at the boy and began to question him:

"You want a passage to America," he asked.

"Yes, sir," said the boy eagerly.

"And you say you are an American?"

"Yes, sir."

"In what part of America were you born?"

"The United States, sir."

"What State?"

"New Hampshire, sir."

"What town?"

"Exeter, sir."

Hawthorne waited a moment, and then bent toward the boy.

"Who sold the best apples in your town?" he asked.

The boy's eyes shone and the homesick longing in them deepened.

"Skim Milk" Folsom, sir!" he cried.

"It's all right," said Hawthorne to the clerk. "Give him his passage." And he took the boy's hand and bade him godspeed on his homeward way with much heartiness.

His "Carrying" Voice. "I never have known just why," remarked Mr. Alken, meditatively, "but I do seem to have a faculty of making father hear what I say without shouting."

"You!" exclaimed his wife, in honest surprise. "Yes. I often think of it when you lift your voice in the shrill way you did just now. I never have to do that. It must be I have what they call the 'carrying' voice."

"What's that you're saying, son?" inquired the serene old gentleman at the side of the breakfast table.

"I was telling Helen, father," repeated Mr. Alken, complacently, "that, even with your hearing as it is now, you always understand me easily."

Father Alken looked mystified. Then he reached his hand toward the salt.

"Hand you—what?" he asked.

"Oh, nothing!" Mr. Alken raised his voice only a trifle, but made an evident effort to articulate. "I was just speaking of the fact that I can always make you hear so well. I told Helen I believed I must have the 'carrying' voice!"

Father Alken slowly shook his head. "I don't quite get it, my boy," he said, gently.

The younger man felt his wife's amused eyes upon him, and his color heightened.

"It was nothing at all, father," he protested, speaking louder, although still in repressed tones. "I was only saying that you seem to hear me better than you do Helen, even when I talk low. I said—enunciating very distinctly—'It was—because—I—have—a—'carrying' voice.'"

"You have—what?" demanded Father Alken.

"A 'carrying' voice!" roared his son in desperation, beginning to look absolutely foolish.

"Helen," appealed the gentle old man, turning to his daughter-in-law, "for mercy's sake, speak up and tell me what the boy is talking about!"

"Youth's Companion."

Deep Man. "Sometimes," confided Mrs. Longwood to her intimate friend, "I think my husband is the patientest, gentlest, best natured soul that ever lived, and sometimes I think it's merely laziness that ails him."

TELLS WHAT THE AUTO DID.

Device Indicates to Owner the Movements of His Chauffeur.

An ingenious German instrument has been imported which will prove to the owners of automobiles just what their cars have been doing in the hands of the hired operators, which may prevent those worthy men from taking theater parties out at night and riding through the streets at railroad speed.

It is called a velograph, and besides registering the speed of the car in motion it keeps a record of the number of stops and varying speeds. In other words, the record will show just what the car has been doing without a word from the man who drove it, and should prove an effectual check to the indiscriminate use of the car by men hired to drive them for their owners. The device, though both a speed register and a chronograph, is simple. An ordinary timepiece, with the dial revolving, instead of fingers, furnishes the chronograph. The dial, or clock face, is a separate cardboard disk, which can be removed at will. The spaces between the dial numerals, instead of being divided into "fives," as in ordinary clock faces, are divided into four sections of fifteen each, thus making sixty in all, to denote the minutes in each hour.

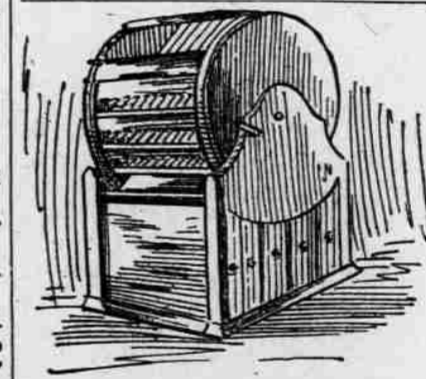
Attached to the timepiece is an ordinary speed register, connected with the hub of the vehicle. This speed register shows the usual rotary set of figures denoting the number of miles traveled. "At the end of every mile, however, a marker, which protrudes above the rim of the clock dial, shoots forward and registers the fact that it has been recorded. This marker being stationary and the dial chronograph revolving, it follows that as every mile is recorded on the dial cardboard the lapsed time will also be shown.

Similarly when the vehicle is stopped the marker still continues to register while the disk revolves. There being no miles to be recorded, the register will show a line parallel to the circumference of the dial, denoting that the vehicle was motionless during the hours on the dial corresponding with such straight line.

COIN-SORTING MACHINE.

Wheel Which Picks the Quarters from the Pennies.

That trite saying that "necessity is the mother of invention" may be repeated once more in connection with the coin-sorting machine shown here-with, which is the subject of a recent patent. It is fitting that such a device should have originated, of all places on the globe, at Atlantic City, which vies with Coney Island in its numerous catch-penny amusements. While rather limited in its field of application, a mechanical coin assorter is doubtless justified by the necessities of the



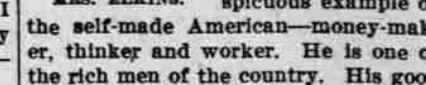
COIN-SORTING MACHINE.

amusement business, where a great number of small coins are handled daily. After a monotonous scooping in of innumerable nickels, dimes and pennies during the course of a long day, it must be a great relief to dump them into a hopper, turn a crank a few times and remove the coins sorted into denominations, and possibly counted. The device is based on the simple principle of graded openings formed by bars arranged in tiers at right angles to the axis of the cylinder. As only coins which will go through the openings of corresponding size are retained, the smaller pieces travel successively through tiers until they reach their proper place.

MRS. STEPHEN B. ELKINS.

One of the Most Splendid Types of American Womanhood.

In this land of splendid homes none possesses a greater charm of hospitality, or is more thoroughly appreciated and enjoyed by its inmates, than where Senator and Mrs. Stephen B. Elkins, of West Virginia, make their dwelling. There are several places which they can properly call "home," the two principal ones being at Washington and at Elkins, W. Va.



Elkins is a conspicuous example of the self-made American—money-maker, thinker and worker. He is one of the rich men of the country. His good fortune is not due wholly to his own energy, though that has been the chief factor in his success. He has had the aid of an exceptional wife. Mrs. Elkins has made her home far more attractive to her husband than any club could be. She is possessed of culture and intelligence that make her a congenial companion for a brainy husband. The daughter of a former Senator and a multi-millionaire, Henry G. Davis, there are none of the graces of womanhood she has not acquired. As Hallie Davis she was a popular girl. As Mrs. Elkins she has won many new social laurels. Her country house, Hal-lehurst, at Elkins, is one of the finest places in the South.