

THE GUNMAKER OF MOSCOW.

By SYLVANUS COBB, JR.

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lous looking man. "So he is," responded the count. "I never saw such a wicked look before in any human face."

"Ah!" uttered a voice close by the door. "Who comes in for the flatterer's remark, my friend?"

Both the count and Stephen turned, and the humpbacked priest himself stood in their presence.

"Ha!" he uttered as he noticed the position of the invalid. "Up? By the holy Virgin, you are recovering!"

"Aye," returned Conrad; "I am gaining fast now, as you may see."

The priest struggled hard with his feelings, and at length he managed to conceal the deep disappointment he felt—that is, he hid it from Stephen's eyes, but the count knew him too well.

"You have not been very punctual of late, father," the latter said, also trying to conceal his real feelings.

"No, no," returned Savotano in a perplexed manner; "I admit it. But the fact is I have been called away. Let's see. I have not been here since the evening on which I found a stranger sitting by your side while you were asleep."

"Who was the stranger?"

"I don't know. I think I never

saw him before. He was a good looking young man. Perhaps he was some relative of yours?"

This downright falsehood, so bold and audacious, astonished even the count, for he knew the conversation which the priest had held with Rurik on that occasion, and, quick as lightning, too, went the thought to the sick man's mind that this was to hide the probability of his being suspected in connection with Rurik's disappearance.

"I thought you knew that man," the count said, looking the priest sharply in the face.

"No. I may have seen him before, but I did not surely recognize him then. I asked him why he was here, but he would not answer me save by urging me to silence. Who was he, my son?"

The count was at first inclined not to answer, but he thought better of it and finally told the priest that it was Rurik Nevel. The villain seemed much surprised at this and professed to wonder why the fellow should come to that place.

Urzen, who knew nothing of the falsehood which rested under all this questioning, went on and explained the nature of Rurik's mission and its result. And thenceforth Savotano expressed a wondrous degree of joy and gratification, and he even presumed to bless God that such a reconciliation had taken place.

"And now," the priest resumed, after this matter had been disposed of, "how happened this sudden change in your disease, my son? The doctors thought you dying when I was here last."

"Yes, I know," answered the count, still hiding the deep disgust

that moved within him: "But a new physician was called in, and he prescribed a new medicine. He said the medicine I had been taking was unsuited to my case, and so he gave me now. You can see the result."

"Yes, I see," was the reply, "and as you seem to have very good company I'll take my leave. I have several calls to make tonight."

The count made no reply to this, and as the priest found that he was not needed to remain, he arose at once. He stopped twice before he reached the door, but in neither case did he speak. As soon as he gained the street he turned toward the upper part of the city, and he stopped not until he had reached the palace of the Duke of Tula. The old porter admitted him without question, and he made his way at once to the hall, where he inquired for the duke. One of the servants went in search of his master, and when he returned he bade the priest follow him.

The duke was in his private room, and as soon as the servant had withdrawn he bade his visitor take a seat.

"Now, Savotano, how is it?" he asked. "Have you seen the count?"

"Aye; I am from there now. By all that's bad, my lord, the villain is gaining!"

"Gaining?" repeated Olga, with surprise. "But you assured me he was well nigh gone."

"So he was, so he was. But he is recovering now."

"But how is it?"

"Why, he tells me he had a new physician and that the old medicine

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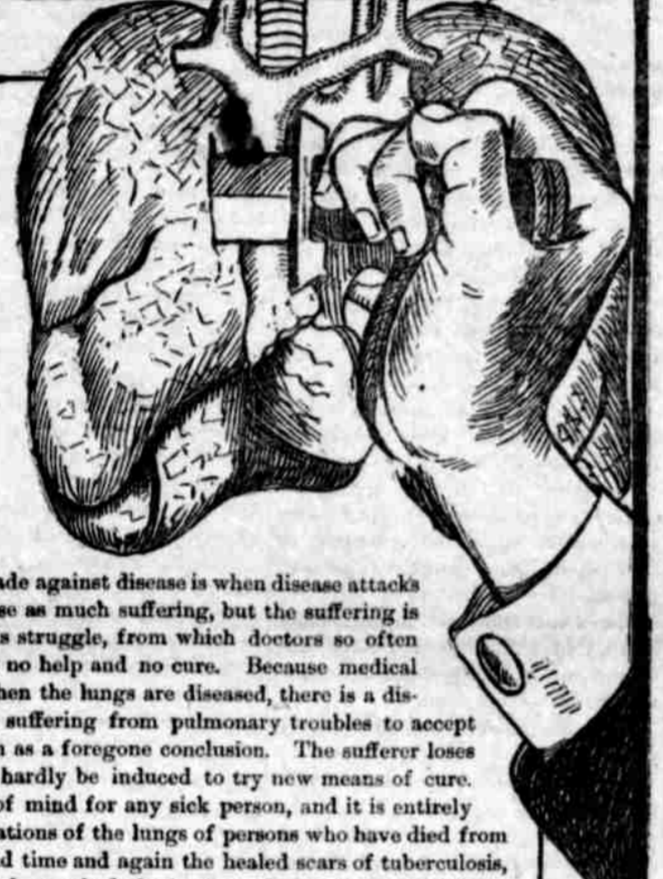
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