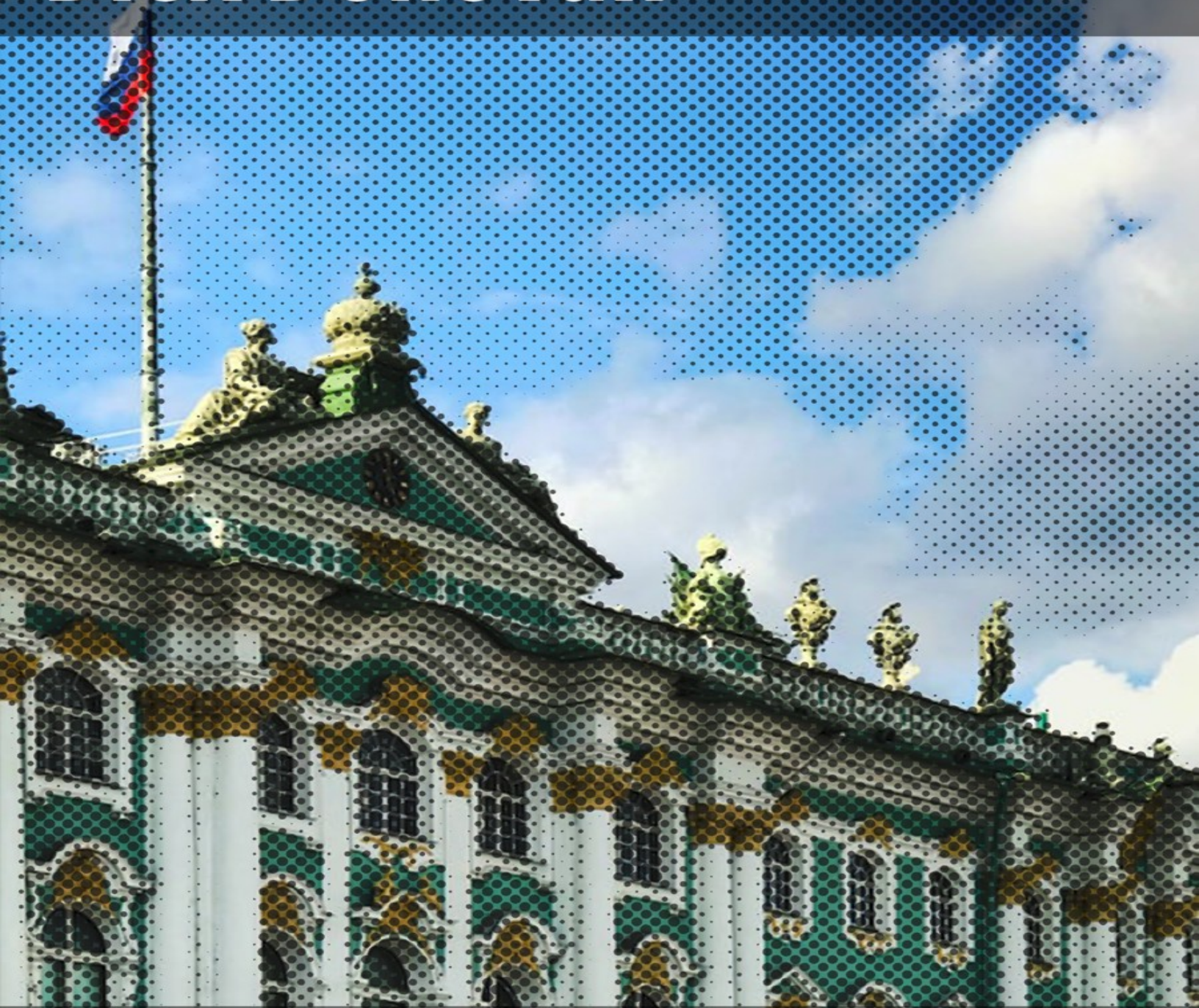


Dick Donovan



*The chronicles
of Michael Danevitch
of the Russian
Secret Service*

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INTRODUCTION.

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A YEAR or two before the outbreak of the Franco Prussian War a daring attempt was made upon the life of the Emperor of Russia. He had been out shooting in the neighbourhood of St. Petersburg, and was returning at dusk in company with numerous friends and a large suite. As the Royal carriage passed an isolated house on a country road, which was bordered on each side by a dense pine forest, a bomb was hurled from an upper window of the house. Fortunately it did not strike the carriage, as was intended, but, going over it, fell between the horses of two of the Royal Guard. The horses were blown to pieces, the riders were killed on the spot, and several other men were more or less injured. For some minutes a panic ensued. The Emperor's driver whipped his horses into a gallop, and everybody seemed at a loss what to do. The house, however, was soon surrounded, and a man and woman were seized as they were in the very act of escaping. It was soon made evident that this man and woman were mere tools, and the arch-conspirators had availed themselves of the confusion caused by the bursting bomb to get off. Darkness favoured the fugitives, and though the forest was scoured they were not captured. Subsequent investigation brought to light that the plot for the Emperor's taking off had been the work chiefly of a daring and notorious Nihilist, whose

capture the Russian Government had long been trying to effect. His connection with this dastardly attempt caused a heavy price to be set upon his head, and every effort was made to arrest him. But, extraordinary as it seems, he succeeded in evading his pursuers, and, after travelling many hundreds of miles through the country in various disguises, he managed to get on board of a vessel bound to Constantinople—so much of his flight was subsequently learnt when it was too late; but at Constantinople all trace of him was lost, though there was reason to believe that he had escaped to either France or England, and a large staff of the most able Russian and Polish detectives were sent out to scour Europe.

One winter night of that memorable year, I was on my way from Paris to London viâ Calais. It had been a wild and stormy day; a high wind, bitter cold, snow, sleet, hail, rain—such were the atmospheric conditions. We had had an assortment of the worst samples of weather, and as night approached it was only too evident we were in for ‘a buster.’ There were very few passengers by the night train from Paris. It was not a night when anyone was likely to be travelling for pleasure. On our reaching Calais Station the wind had attained the force of a heavy gale, causing a tremendous sea to run in the Channel, and we who were pressed for time heard with dismay that the boat was not likely to attempt the crossing before the morning.

The cramped and starved passengers made a rush for the buffet, but I had to see the guard of the train, owing to a hand-bag of mine having gone astray. This bit of business occupied me for quite twenty minutes, and then, almost

frozen to the marrow, I made my way to the buffet. The large stove in the centre of the room was surrounded by the passengers, so I seated myself at one of the long tables and called for hot soup. It was not until I had finished the steaming bouillon, and had begun to thaw, that I became conscious I had a *vis-à-vis*. On the opposite side of the table, on the carpeted settee in a corner next the wall, sat a man with his legs upon the settee, his arms folded on his breast. The place was lighted by lamps. The light was dim, and the man was in partial shadow; but I noted that he wore a heavy fur coat, he had a peakless fur cap on his head, and was puffing away at a long and strong cigar. At his elbow on the table was a large basin of tea, and floating in the tea were three or four slices of lemon.

I really don't know how it was that I was suddenly attracted to this stranger. Some people may try to explain it by saying it was animal magnetism, odic force, or something of the kind. I shall offer no explanation myself; I merely state the bare fact. My eyes having got accustomed to the semi-gloom, I was enabled to observe that he had a clean-shaven face, with a rather prominent nose, a clean-cut mouth, which, taken in connection with the formation of the chin and jaw generally, indicated an iron will, a dogged determination. It was altogether a very striking face, full of character, and with points that removed it far from the category of the commonplace.

Having partaken of the rest of my supper, and feeling more comfortable and cheerful, I lit a cigar, called for coffee and a *petit verre*, assumed an easier position at the end of the seat, so that I was enabled to lean my back against the

wall, my shoulders being thus parallel with the stranger's, the table separating us; then I spoke to him in French—made some ordinary remarks about the weather, and expressed a fear that we were doomed to pass the night there in the buffet. He answered me very affably, and in a rich, well-modulated voice. Fancying that I detected a foreign accent in his French, I politely asked him if he was a Frenchman. He smiled pleasantly, and expressed a wish to know why I doubted his being French. I told him frankly, whereupon he laughed again, and in perfect English, except that it betrayed a foreign tongue in its pronunciation, he said:

‘I guess *you* are an Englishman.’

I admitted that I was, and we chatted away first in French and then in English for a long time; we exchanged cigars; he drank with me, I with him. Now, throughout the conversation there was one thing I was conscious of—the whole drift of his talk was to elicit information. This was done so delicately and skilfully that the majority of people would not have been aware of it. But I was. It was part of my business to know when I was being pumped, to use a vulgar but expressive phrase; I was also, even as he was, a seeker after knowledge, and I fancy I framed my questions perhaps not much less skilfully than he. At any rate, we seemed to become *en rapport*, and it is safe to say we interested each other. There was a reciprocal attraction between us. After a time the conversation flagged; tired nature was overcome, and we slept where we sat. At about seven in the morning a porter with stentorian lungs came in and aroused us from our uneasy slumber by bawling out that we were all to get

on board the boat, as she was about to start. Confusion at once reigned; there was a hasty gathering up of bags, wraps, rugs, and other impedimenta, and a stampede was made for the steamer, each man trying to be first, in order that he might secure the best place in view of the stormy passage we were likely to have. For myself, I went leisurely; I was too case-hardened a traveller by land and sea to concern myself even about the Channel in its anger. I had, in the confusion, lost sight of my acquaintance of the night, and for the moment had forgotten him, when suddenly I heard his voice behind me. He had caught me up.

‘You, like me, don’t give yourself much concern,’ he remarked. ‘We shall have a rough crossing, no doubt, but it doesn’t alarm me; I have been sodden with salt water too often.’

This struck a keynote again; we passed on board. As we reached the deck, he asked me if I was going below; I said no, I preferred to remain on deck. So did he. We therefore secured two camp-stools, placed them so that we sat with our backs to the funnel for the sake of the warmth, enveloped our knees in rugs, buttoned up our coats, battened our caps down, and made ourselves as snug as it was possible to do under the circumstances.

It was a wild and wicked morning, and still very dark, though in the far east there was an angry gleam of glary light. The crossing was a rough one—as rough a one as I ever remember to have experienced. When we reached Dover we were all bedraggled and weary-looking, and thankful indeed for the hot coffee that was served out to us at the refreshment-bar. It was now broad daylight, and for

the first time I was enabled to distinctly see my companion's face. It was altogether a remarkable face. A more pliable and mobile one I never saw. It never seemed to be quite alike for five minutes at a time. His eyes were small, but with, as it seemed, an almost unnatural brilliancy; and there was a suggestiveness about them that they were looking you through and through. His complexion was olive; his eyes were black. In stature he was about the middle height, with a well-knit frame. I noted that his hands and wrists indicated great muscular strength. He trod with a firm step; he walked upright; he was a man whose presence asserted itself. None but a fool would be likely to overlook him even in a crowd. There is one other thing I must mention: his manner was that of an exceedingly well-bred man; he was the pink of politeness.

The 'something'—call it by what name you will—that had drawn us together, kept us together, and we became the sole occupants of a first-class compartment, in which we journeyed to London. Long before our destination was reached, I had made up my mind that my *compagnon de voyage* was no ordinary man, and from certain things I made a guess at his profession, and wishing to put my opinion to the test, I alluded to the attempt that had been made some time before on the Czar's life. At this his eyes transfixed me, as it were. Question and answer followed, and at last, when I was sure that I should not make any mistake, I led him to understand that my visit to France had indirectly been in connection with the crime in Russia. When we reached London, I found he was going to stay at a hotel

close to Trafalgar Square. I gave him my card. He gave me his, which simply bore the name

MICHAEL DANEVITCH.

I knew then from the name that I had formed the acquaintance of one of the foremost detectives in the world—a man who had had more to do with unravelling political crimes than any living being; and there was hardly a civilized Government that had not, at some time or other, availed itself of his services. He was endowed with wonderful gifts, and having once got on to the track of a criminal the criminal was to a certainty doomed. Danevitch's visit to England on this occasion was in connection with the attempt on the Czar's life. He ultimately succeeded in unearthing one of the criminals in London, and though the English Government would not give the rascal up, Danevitch lured him to France by a wonderfully clever ruse. There he was arrested; in due course the French handed him over to Russia, and he expiated his wickedness on the scaffold. The story of this thrilling capture will be told in the course of this series. The acquaintance which I struck up with Danevitch on that ever-to-be-remembered night ripened into a very warm friendship, which continued for many years. The result was he promised me that if he predeceased me he would leave me all his notes and papers that had any reference to his professional career, and give me full permission to do what I liked with them. Subsequently he was in a terrible railway accident in Russia: the train by which he was travelling came into collision with another train, and there was an awful smash. Poor

Danevitch was so injured that both his legs had to be amputated. For several weeks he seemed to be doing well, but a change took place, and he realized that his fate was sealed. He sent for me, and during the fortnight that passed after my arrival he told me his history to a large extent, and handed me the promised records of the extraordinary cases in which he had played so important a part. It is from these records that I now compile this series of stories.

THE MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE OF A MILLION ROUBLES.

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ONE evening, towards the end of summer, four Government officials left Moscow for St. Petersburg in charge of an enormous amount of money, partly in specie, but for the most part in Russian rouble notes. The money was consigned to the Treasury in St. Petersburg. All the officials had been in the Government service for a long time, and were selected for this special duty on account of their trustworthiness and the confidence reposed in them by the heads of the department to which they belonged. The oldest man, and the one in command of the little party, was upwards of seventy years of age. He had been in the Government service for forty years, and was greatly trusted and respected. His name was Popoff. The next in seniority was Ivan Basilovitch, who had been thirty-three years in the service. Then came Strogonoff, with twenty-eight years' service, and lastly a young man named Briazga, with ten years and a half to his credit in the service of the Government. In addition to these four Government officers, four gendarmes, fully armed, accompanied the treasure as a guard of safety. The party travelled by the ordinary train, but had a special saloon carriage, the packages of money being placed at one end. The only doors to the carriage were at the opposite end, one on each side, the off-side door being locked by means of a secret lock, which could not be opened except with the proper key.

The bullion was carried in oak boxes fastened with iron bands. The notes were in small square boxes, sewn up in strong canvas. In addition they were securely corded with fine but extraordinarily tough cord, which was made especially for the Government, and could not be used except for Government purposes. Every package bore the State seal. Anyone unlawfully breaking the seal was guilty, according to the law of Russia, of treason, and liable to death or banishment to Siberia. In due course the train reached St. Petersburg, where the packages of money were examined, counted in the train, and found correct. They were then loaded into a covered Government waggon, counted and examined again, and also found correct; and all being ready, the waggon drove off, accompanied by the four officials and the gendarmes. At the Treasury the packages were once again counted, examined, and found correct, and the deputy of the Minister of Finance himself gave the necessary receipt to the head-officer. The important duty being thus completed, the gendarmes were dismissed to their quarters, and the officers went to their respective homes. In the course of the next day Danevitch received a sudden command to attend without a moment's delay at the bureau of the chief of the police. He found that important functionary looking very grave and serious, and it was obvious he was disturbed by something of more than ordinary importance. With official brevity he told Danevitch about the money having been removed from Moscow to St. Petersburg the previous night, and added:

'This morning, in the presence of the Minister of Finance himself and the official staff, the various packages were

opened. Two of the note boxes, although intact as regards seals and cords, and which ought to have contained five hundred thousand rouble notes each, were found to be stuffed with blank paper. There has been some clever hanky-panky business, and you are wanted at the Treasury immediately. Now, it strikes me, Danevitch, that though you've cracked some very hard nuts in your time, this one will prove too much for you.'

'Why do you think so?'

'Why do I think so! Well, because the whole business has been managed so cleverly that the thieves have calculated every chance, and are not likely to have left any trail behind them that can be followed up. However, see what you can do. You may succeed, but I'm afraid you won't.'

Danevitch made no comment on his chief's remark, but at once betook himself to the Treasury, where he found everybody in a state of great excitement. He was at once conducted into the presence of the Minister of Finance, with whom he had a long interview, and from whom he learnt all the details of the transit of the money. Necessarily the detective sifted these details, examined them one by one, and took such measures as occurred to him to prove that they were absolutely correct. In the end he was satisfied that they were. The Minister then showed him a long telegram he had received from the Treasury Office in Moscow, in which it was stated that the money was packed in the usual way in the presence of the cashier-in-chief, six of his subordinates, and a large staff, all of them proved and tried servants. Every box was numbered, registered, and sealed, and there was not the shadow of a doubt that when

the boxes left Moscow each contained the full sum marked against it in the books of the department. Danevitch saw at once that if that was correct it proved that the robbery must have occurred in transit, which obviously necessitated a prearranged plan of a very ingenious nature; moreover, it pointed to the confederacy of every man, including the gendarmes, engaged in safe-guarding the treasure. It was difficult to believe in such a conspiracy; but on the first blush it seemed the only rational conclusion that one could come to, otherwise the officers and the police must have been culpably negligent of their duty to have allowed a stranger to have walked off the boxes, leaving dummy facsimiles in their place. However, Danevitch would express no opinion then, although the Minister was anxious that he should do so; but it was the detective's invariable rule to keep his opinions to himself until he was in a position to speak with something like certainty. As he himself was in the habit of saying, he never prophesied until he knew. It was a safe rule, and it saved him from many an error.

Having completed his investigations in St. Petersburg so far as he could at that stage, he proceeded without loss of time to Moscow, where he satisfied himself, from the evidence laid before him, that the money really left the Moscow Treasury all right; and it was impossible the boxes could have been exchanged between the Treasury and the station. The treasure was conveyed in a closed waggon, which was locked and barred, and in its passage through the city it was guarded by twelve mounted soldiers specially told off for the duty. At the station the waggon was backed right up to the railway-carriage, and was unpacked in the

presence of quite a little army of officials. Again, unless there had been a huge conspiracy, the boxes could not have been abstracted there. This narrowed the inquiry somewhat, because it made it clear that the exchange must have been effected while the train was on its journey between the two cities. But admitting that to be the case, it at once suggested that the eight men, that is, the four officers and four gendarmes, were in league together. To that, however, was opposed the fact that the gendarmes were only told off for the duty an hour before they started, and up to that time had had no intimation they were going. Therefore, assuming the four clerks had prearranged the matter, they must have corrupted the gendarmes *en route*. That, however, was such a far-fetched theory that Danevitch would not entertain it.

The next phase of inquiry upon which Danevitch entered was that of ascertaining as much as possible about the four Government officials who travelled in charge of the treasure. These inquiries elicited the fact that they bore irreproachable characters, and were held in high esteem in the department. Popoff was a married man with a family. He was in receipt of a good salary, and appeared to be free from financial worries of any kind. The same remarks applied to Basilovitch and Strogonoff. They were both married and family men, and to all appearances in comfortable circumstances. Briazga was unmarried, but he was regarded as a very steady, well-to-do young fellow, and was known to be the main support of his father, mother, and an only sister, whose name was Olga. She was younger than her brother, and, owing to an injury to the spine when she was a child, she had been more or less an invalid all her life.

Danevitch realized at this stage, even as the chief of the police predicted he would, that he was called upon to crack a very hard nut indeed, and he did not feel confident about being able to crack it at all. The minutest investigation had failed so far to elicit anything that would have justified a suspicion of a conspiracy amongst the eight men. And yet without the connivance of them all it seemed impossible that the boxes could have been changed. But there was the indisputable fact that they had been changed; nevertheless, there was not a single item in the list of circumstances that supported the hypothesis of a conspiracy. How, then, had the robbery been worked? Of course the Treasury people, as well as everyone connected with the Finance Department, to say nothing of the higher authorities themselves, were in a very perturbed state of mind, for apart from the largeness of the sum carried off, the robbery proved that, in spite of the safeguards employed when money was being conveyed from one town to another, there was a risk which up to that time had not been suspected. It was decided at last by the head officials to offer a reward of ten thousand roubles for any information that would lead to the capture of the thieves and the recovery of the stolen money. Danevitch was opposed to the offering of a reward, and pointed out the absurdity of it; as he said, even supposing the whole of the eight men of the escort had been concerned, they were not likely to betray each other for the sake of ten thousand roubles, when they had a million to divide amongst themselves. And if anyone else had come to know who the thieves were, he would not be blind to the fact that he could blackmail them to the tune of a much greater sum than ten

thousand roubles to induce him to hold his tongue. Therefore, as Danevitch anticipated, the reward brought forth no informer. In the meantime he had been working on his own lines, and had satisfied himself the money had been put into the train all right at Moscow, and that, unless with the connivance of ever so many people, the boxes could not have been changed between the St. Petersburg station and the Treasury Office; consequently, the business must have been done while the money was in transit between the two towns. Further than that, it was as clear as daylight that the robbery had been prearranged, because the facsimile boxes had been prepared beforehand; the cord used to bind the false boxes was Government cord, and the Government seal was so cleverly imitated that the forgery could only be detected after close inspection. All this proved unmistakably that there was a traitor in the camp.

In one of many interviews that Danevitch had with the Minister of Finance, that gentleman said:

‘Danevitch, you must bring the thief to light. It is absolutely necessary that an example should be made of him as a deterrent. Although the loss of the money would be a serious one, we would rather lose it than let the thief escape.’

‘I think, sir, that the thief will not escape; and it is possible, even probable, that the money may be recovered.’

‘Have you any clue?’ asked the Minister quickly.

‘None whatever.’

‘Then, why do you speak so hopefully?’

‘Because it seems to me that sooner or later I am sure to find a clue, and then—well, then I shall succeed in bringing

the criminal to justice.'

His belief that sooner or later he was sure to find a clue was quite justified, although he had been doubtful at first. It was pretty clear now, however, that the thief had an accomplice, otherwise it would have been impossible for him to have carried out the robbery. Now, Danevitch knew too much of human nature to suppose that two or three men and more than likely a woman, as he shrewdly suspected, would be able for all time to conceal the fact that they had suddenly acquired wealth. A something would leak out—a something that would betray them to the keen eyes that were watching for the sign. Danevitch had learnt the great lesson of patience. He did not aim at accomplishing the impossible, but he knew where it was a case of human ingenuity he had the best chance, inasmuch as he was an expert in the ways of criminals. From the moment that he had gathered up all the details of the robbery, he had set a watch upon the movements of every one of the eight men who had travelled with the treasure from Moscow to St. Petersburg. The gendarmes belonged to Moscow, and had returned, but they were watched, nevertheless; though not a movement of theirs was calculated to arouse suspicion. The four Government officials were also watched, but no sign came from them. But of course they knew they were being watched; they would have been dolts indeed if they had remained in ignorance of what everyone else knew; for Government treasure to the tune of one million roubles could not be abstracted without causing a sensation and setting the populace on the tip-toe of expectation and the tenter-hooks of curiosity. The theory by which Danevitch

was guided was this, that one or more of the eight men who travelled that night when the money was stolen between Moscow and St. Petersburg must certainly be in a position to throw some light on the robbery. On the other hand, every one of the eight knew for a fact, or by instinct, that he was suspected of some complicity, consequently he would take particular care not to do anything calculated to give emphasis to that suspicion, and justify active legal measures being taken against him.

Although Danevitch, by reason of the eminence he had attained in his calling and the originality of mind he had displayed in dealing with some of the most notorious crimes of his day, was allowed more latitude than his confrères, he was nevertheless subordinate at this time to the chief of the police, and that functionary, having an eye to a decoration or promotion if the mystery should be cleared up, strongly advocated the wholesale arrest of the eight men, and flinging them into a dungeon in the infamous fortress of Peter and Paul, or the still more infamous Schlüsselburgh in Lake Ladoga, there to remain until misery and madness loosened their tongues. Against this inartistic and brutal measure Danevitch set his face, and he asked to be allowed to work out the problem in his own way. The Minister of Finance, and it was said even the Czar himself, supported Danevitch, so that he was not hampered with the red-tapeism of the bureau.

A month passed; no arrest had been made, and apparently not a trace of the criminal discovered. The Treasury officers were in despair, and the chief of the police showed a tendency to lower Danevitch from the high

standard of estimation to which he had previously elevated him. It is true that Danevitch had many big successes credited to his score, but even a successful man cannot afford to make a big failure. The chief told him this, and Danevitch replied quietly:

‘I have not yet made a failure.’

‘But you have not recovered the money; you’ve brought nobody to book.’

‘No, not yet.’

‘Not yet! Are you still sanguine, then?’

‘Certainly.’

The chief laughed a little bitterly as he replied:

‘Well, perhaps it is good to be sanguine, even in a hopeless cause. It keeps a man’s spirits up, doesn’t it?’

The chief was comparatively new to his office; that is, he had only held it two years. He had received very rapid promotion owing to strong influence at Court, and influence in Russia often counts a good deal more than merit; indeed, it does in most countries. It was said that the chief had certain friends of his own he was anxious to move into the front rank, hence he was not averse to see Danevitch go down a bit.

About a week after this conversation between the chief and Danevitch, an old peasant woman left St. Petersburg by the Moscow train. She did not book to Moscow, however, but to a place called Vishni Volotchok, about midway between the two cities. She was an uncouth, clumsy, burly-looking woman, wearing the big mob frilled cap, the heavy woollen wrap crossed over the breast, the short homespun linsey-woolsey gray skirt, coarse gray stockings, and big shoes of

her class. She bore with her a ponderous basket, containing a stock of slippers, boots, shoes and sabots, and, being a travelling pedlar, she was furnished with an official license, a formidable-looking document, stamped and viséd. In due course she reached her destination. Vishni Volotchok is a small town of some importance. The station is the principal refreshment place between St. Petersburg and Moscow, and a long wait is generally made by the trains going and coming. The old woman's license having been duly examined and viséd, she was allowed to go her ways, and soon after she proceeded to a fairly large house situated close to the railway, and facing a road that crossed the track. It was a detached house, built for the most part of wood. There were numerous outbuildings—a large barn, stables, cowsheds, and similar places. It was the residence of a landed proprietor named Ivan Golovnin. It was almost dark when the old woman reached the house; she tried to sell some of her wares to the servants, but was not successful. Then she pleaded illness, and begged, as she was a stranger in the town, to be allowed to pass the night in the barn. With true Russian hospitality, the servants took her into the great kitchen, and made her up a bed by the stove. As she had not recovered her health the next day, she was allowed to remain, and, in fact, finding herself in comfortable quarters, she stayed for three days; then she took her departure, before doing so presenting the three principal servants with a pair of shoes each. Being market-day, she went into the market, disposed of the rest of her stock-in-trade, and returned at once to St. Petersburg.

It chanced that a couple of days after the old woman's return to the capital, Danevitch was at the Bureau of Police, having some business to transact with the chief, who was excessively busy and excessively bad-tempered.

'By the way,' said Danevitch, as he was on the point of leaving, when he had transacted his affairs, 'concerning the robbery of the Treasury notes, I shall *succeed* in bringing the criminals to justice.'

The chief glanced at the detective and smiled. It was not a smile of satisfaction, but of doubt; and yet he knew that Danevitch had the reputation of never speaking with anything like certainty unless he felt absolutely sure. But the chief was somewhat sceptical; it was even possible he was not altogether free from jealousy, knowing as he did that Danevitch was looked upon with great favour in high quarters.

'There's a cocksureness in your statement,' said the chief brusquely. 'I suppose you've discovered something?'

'Yes.'

'What?'

'You must pardon me, but I am not justified in disclosing even to you at present what I know.'

The chief's face darkened. He was aware that, though Danevitch was nominally his subordinate, he had but little control over him. Nevertheless, it galled him to think that he, the chief of his department—in Russia it is a very influential and important position—should not be considered worthy of the confidence of Danevitch the detective, high as he was in his calling. He was weak enough to display his chagrin, and remarked with some warmth:

‘Well, you have your own way of working, of course; and perhaps you are right, though on the other hand you may be wrong. But since you do not choose to take me into your confidence, and as the authorities expect that my department will unravel the mystery, I must now inform you that unless you produce evidence within the next twenty-four hours that you really are on the track of the criminal or criminals, I shall take the business out of your hands, and put it into the hands of others.’

Danevitch was not the man to be affected by any such empty threat as this. Conscious of his own strength, and firm in the resolve to pursue his own undeviating course, as he had done for years, uninfluenced by jealousy, criticism, or the opinions of others, he bowed to the chief and merely remarked:

‘If in the course of the next twenty-four hours I am in a position to reveal anything, I will do so. If I am not you are at liberty to act according to your own views. Permit me also to remark that, though you are pleased to doubt my abilities, people in high quarters do not.’

This galled the chief, though he had sufficient tact to refrain from provoking further argument, which would not only be profitless, but beget ill-feeling, so he allowed Danevitch to withdraw.

A fortnight later a wedding was celebrated at the Church of St. Sophia. It was rather a stylish wedding, and a good many minor Government officials were present, principally from the Treasury office. During that intervening fortnight Danevitch had not given any sign to the chief that he was making progress; nor had the chief taken any steps to put

his threat into execution. Nevertheless, he had displayed some impatience, and one day, during an interview with the Minister of Finance, he said:

‘I am sorry, your Excellency, that we have made no progress in the Treasury robbery business; but the fact is, Danevitch’s self-assurance and enthusiasm somewhat misled him. He speaks confidently where he ought to doubt, and is hopeful where other men would despair.’

‘Hopefulness is rather a good trait in his character, isn’t it? You know the old saying, “He who despairs never succeeds.”’

‘True, your Excellency,’ answered the chief, somewhat crestfallen. ‘But light-heartedness does not always command success.’

‘No, perhaps not; but it deserves it.’

‘Well, the fact is this, your Excellency, I am of opinion myself that more active steps should be taken to bring the culprits to justice. Now, we have to deal with facts, not fancies. A very ingenious robbery has been committed, and the Treasury of the State is a heavy loser. The thieves must still be in existence, and, being in existence, it ought not to be beyond the ingenuity of a trained mind used to working out criminal problems to discover where they are.’

‘I admit the force of your argument,’ answered the Minister sedately.

The chief bowed. He was pleased with himself. He believed he had made an impression.

‘Of course,’ he went on, ‘it is most desirable that the culprits should be brought to book, and punished in such an exemplary manner that it would stand out as a warning for

all time, and deter others who might feel tempted to tamper with the coffers of the State. But desirable as this is, it is even more desirable that the whole of the stolen money should be recovered. Your Excellency, however, will readily see that every day that passes lessens the chances of that, because the rascals will be revelling in their ill-gotten gains, and squandering them with the recklessness peculiar to criminals who enrich themselves dishonestly.'

'That is not Danevitch's opinion,' answered the Minister.

'Possibly; but presumably he has no warrant for his opinion. It is a mere expression of opinion, after all—nothing more.'

'Let us grant that. Now, what do you suggest?'

What the chief wanted was to have all the credit for unravelling the mystery. It meant to him promotion, and strengthening his influence in high quarters. As matters then stood, there was no confidence between him and Danevitch, who had so consolidated his position as to be independent. The chief therefore suggested that Danevitch should be put upon a case of secondary importance then occupying the attention of the authorities, and another man of the chief's choosing should be selected for Danevitch's work. This other man was a creature of the chief, though he kept that little fact strictly to himself.

The Minister was not deceived by the specious arguments of his visitor; nor was he so obtuse as to fail to see the jealousy and ill-will underlying those arguments.

'Personally, I should object to anyone else taking up the matter at this stage,' he said, 'and as far as my influence goes I should use it to prevent any change being made. For

myself, I have confidence in Danevitch. He is an able man, and until I find that my confidence is misplaced I shall continue to believe in him.'

The chief was nonplussed, and he felt that it would be imprudent to pursue the subject any further. He therefore took his leave. But just as he was in the act of bowing himself out, the Minister exclaimed:

'Oh, by the way, on Thursday next there is to be a marriage in the Church of St. Sophia. A daughter of one of my subordinates is to wed one Peter Golovnin, the son, as I understand, of a wealthy landed proprietor. Curiously enough, I met Danevitch last night by chance, and he asked me if I was going to the wedding. I told him no, I had had no invitation; whereupon he expressed surprise that my subordinate had not paid me the compliment of inviting me. At the moment there did not seem to me anything out of the way in the remark, but subsequently, on pondering over it, I could not help feeling that it was full of significance. Danevitch had a deep motive in what he said. Have you any idea what the motive was?'

The chief was not only utterly amazed, but deeply annoyed. He tried, however, to conceal his annoyance, though it was very hard to do so. In his own mind he was perfectly sure that Danevitch had a motive, though what that motive was he could not possibly guess, and his annoyance was occasioned by having to confess his ignorance.

'And does your Excellency intend to go?' he asked.

'Well, yes, I think I shall. I fancy developments may take place.'

As the chief went away, he resolved that he, too, would be present at St. Sophia, for he knew Danevitch too well to suppose for a moment that his remark to the Minister of Finance was a meaningless one.

The marriage was rather a grand affair. The bridegroom was a good-looking young man, about six or seven and twenty; but he had the appearance of one who had led a reckless and dissipated life. There were incipient lines in his face, and a want of brightness about the eyes that was not good in one so young. The bride was, perhaps, two years younger, with rather pretty features and an abundance of dark hair. Some affection of the spine, however, had cruelly distorted her figure, and she was twisted out of shape. Her name was Olga, and she was the only sister of Briazga, the Government clerk in the Finance Department, who was present during the ceremony. The Minister of Finance was also present, thinking from Danevitch's remark that something was to happen. The wedding went off all right, however, and the whole party seemed very jolly and happy, until Briazga, suddenly espying the Minister, went up to him and, looking very confused and a little excited, said:

'You do us an honour, sir, by gracing the ceremony with your delightful presence. I scarcely expected you would have been here.'

'I suppose not,' answered the Minister dryly; 'but as you did not honour me with an invitation, nor even condescend to mention that your sister was to be married, I thought I would be a witness on my own account.'

Briazga grew more confused, and stammered out a lame apology, adding:

‘The fact is, sir, I have endeavoured to keep the matter secret from all except my most intimate friends, for the simple reason that, as we are comparatively poor people, we could not afford to have much ceremony, and I felt it was too humble an affair to ask you to come to it. But since you have come, may I venture to hope that you will now do us the supreme honour of joining the luncheon-party at my house?’

The Minister excused himself on the score of business engagements; but five minutes later, when Briazga had left him, and he was going out of the church, Danevitch came up to him.

‘I saw you talking to Briazga,’ the detective remarked.

‘Did you? Where were you? I didn’t notice you in the church.’

‘Perhaps not; but I haven’t been far off. Briazga has invited you to the luncheon?’

‘How do you know?’ asked the Minister, in surprise.

‘I guess it.’

‘Then, you must have the power of a seer.’

‘Not at all, your Excellency. Nothing could be simpler. You being here, your subordinate would have been guilty of an unpardonable rudeness and affront if he had not paid you the compliment to invite you. But, of course, it was a mere formality. He doesn’t wish and does not intend you to go if he can prevent it.’

‘I suppose not; nor do I wish to go.’

‘But I should like you to go,’ answered Danevitch. ‘Indeed, I consider it of some importance that you should

go. A little drama may be enacted in which you can play a part.'

The Minister looked hard at Danevitch, as if trying to read his thoughts, and asked pointedly:

'Do you suspect Briazga of having stolen the Treasury notes?'

'Will you pardon me for simply saying at this moment that it would be imprudent for me to answer your question?'

'Will you be there?'

'Again I must respectfully decline to answer the question.'

'But you have an object in wishing me to be present.'

'Undoubtedly.'

'Then I will go.'

Whereupon the Minister hastily pencilled a note on a slip of paper torn from his note-book, and sent it by one of the church attendants to Briazga. In the note he simply said he had changed his mind, and would do himself the pleasure of being present at the wedding-feast, as he found he had a couple of spare hours on his hands. Danevitch moved off, and had not got far away, when he was accosted by the chief of the police, who remarked sarcastically:

'I understood there were to be some developments at this wedding.'

'From whom did you understand that?' asked Danevitch, without any attempt to conceal the annoyance he felt.

'It is not necessary to mention names. I heard that you were to be here, and the Minister of Finance was to be here. The information was significant, so I came too. You suspect somebody amongst this marriage-party?'