

SAVING THE CZAR'S LIFE

By GEORGE BARTON

Gen. Trepoff's Great "March 13" Coup—Its Accomplishment

Face to Face with Death the Most Famous of Russian Detectives Frustrates Plot to Take Nicholas' Life—Monarch Sees Only Quietude of Crowd as Evidence of Vicious Plans Being Nipped—How Chief Did It. *By George Barton*

Gen. Trepoff, one time chief of the St. Petersburg police, ranks with the most famous detectives in the Russian empire. He was in control of the secret service department of the police of St. Petersburg during the lawless period extending from 1875 to 1880. He seems to have been successful in this difficult position because he won the warm commendation of the czar, and at the same time, the hearty detestation of the people. His immediate predecessor was assassinated and his own life was in danger on more than one occasion. Vera Zassoloff, a young nihilist, shot at him while he was seated in his office in the early part of 1880. Trepoff was seriously injured but recovered and soon after that was honored by the czar who made him a councillor of state.

In the early part of March, 1887, the czar of all the Russians determined, as a mark of confidence in the loyalty of his subjects, that he would drive in state, in full view of the populace, from the Cathedral of St. Sophia to the Winter palace at St. Petersburg.

The importance of this statement may be understood when the reader is reminded that for a period of years the nihilists of that unhappy country had been making determined efforts to take the life of the emperor. Only three months before it was announced that the czar, while out hunting, met with an accident in which he was seriously injured. It is significant that several persons who were near the scene of the "accident" were immediately arrested. One was hanged and the other transported to Siberia. Again there had been an "accidental" explosion in the Winter palace while the czar was attending a state dinner. Nothing ever came of this incident although it was proven later that nihilists had entered the palace disguised as plumbers.

Now, however, it was believed in high official circles that the country was to enter upon an era of internal peace. The emperor issued a manifesto of conciliation. Arrears of taxes were remitted; certain criminals were released from prison; exiles to Siberia had their life sentence commuted to 20 years of prison servitude. The nihilists, on hearing this, were passive but unsatisfied. They had clamored for certain constitutional rights which were denied them. Nevertheless, it was determined by officialdom that the czar should celebrate the return of "the era of good feeling" by a public appearance in the capitol of the nation. The time agreed upon was Sunday, March 13, 1887.

Five days before that date a cadet in one of the military schools—a young man with royal blood in his veins, and a prince of a reigning house of Europe—killed himself. The tragic act was attributed to melancholia due to a hopeless love affair. It would be supposed that a small romance of this sort would be left to the district police.

Not so. At this stage of the narrative there enters upon the scene M. Trepoff, a general in the army, the chief of the secret police of St. Petersburg, and one of the favorites of the czar. He was a burly man, brusque in manner and not over nice in his methods. Hated by the people, he treated their attitude with supreme indifference. Whatever his disposition, he possessed the unerring instincts of the real detective. His investigation of the little cadet's suicide was characteristically prompt. It developed a startling fact. It can be stated in a single sentence.

The nihilists of St. Petersburg had determined to assassinate the czar on Sunday, March 13, 1887.

One of the functionaries attached to the palace heard rumors of the plot and rushed to Gen. Trepoff.

"It is unsafe for his majesty to venture out. Shall we countermand the order for the procession?"

The chief of the secret service answered with an expression of annoyance:

"The program is to be carried out as arranged—down to the smallest detail."

"But—"

Trepoff interrupted the speaker by banging his heavy fist on the desk before him.

"I take all of the responsibility. If it is necessary to make any change I shall inform the czar in person."

By Saturday March 12, the general had a regiment of men at work. The mildest mannered person in St. Petersburg was considered fit subject for suspicion. Innumerable arrests were made and some of these were upon such flimsy basis that even the rigor of Russian police could not justify their detention. Hourly reports were handed in to Gen. Trepoff. He devoured these with eager interest, pursuing up his shaggy eyebrows—and thinking all the while. Presently one of his officers brought in a printed circular—a sort of proclamation—and this bit of paper was given more attention than any of the regular reports. After that he sent out other squads of police and they, in return, brought in other reports. There was great activity at the secret service quarters but, it must be confessed, not much positive evidence of the alleged conspiracy.

It was the eve of Sunday, March 13. One of the personal attendants of the czar called on Gen. Trepoff.

"Don't you think it would be wise

"Let the procession proceed."

The route over which the czar traveled was lined with police. They stood alone, in pairs, and in squads. They were conspicuous and yet not unduly so, for hundreds of them in plain clothes mingled freely with the people.

Just before the parade started Trepoff arrested four students. They were young men waiting to see the royal show. The people protested against the arrest as an outrage, but the grizzled head of the St. Petersburg police grinned—and said nothing. Indeed the calm demeanor of the prisoners seemed to justify the protest of the people. One of the men carried a book under his arm, evidently, from the gilt lettering on the outside, a devotional volume; another had a green bag containing legal documents; the third, apparently with a desire to get a good look at the czar, carried a pair of opera glasses, while the fourth had nothing unusual about his person, unless a roll of music be so regarded. They were hustled off to the nearest

usual intelligence. The other female was her servant. One of the men was rather aristocratic in appearance. He said he occupied a minor ministerial office and color was given to his statement by the portfolio which he had in his hand. The other man, named Lubkin, was a consumptive, about 23 years of age.

"Where is your printing press?" demanded the officer.

Madame shrugged her delicate shoulders and outstretched her hands in a manner which said plainly enough that the police were welcome to any printing presses they might find in that place.

A printing press is a bulky thing. It should not be hard to find. But the officers searched the house from cellar to garret without result. All the while the quartet sat in the large dining-room, prisoners. On the return of the police, the two men and the two women were put through the "sweating" process, but they revealed nothing. The aristocratic-looking young man laid his portfolio aside for a moment. One of the policemen picked it up and opened it. Astonishment made him speechless. He silently handed the portfolio to his chief. It was filled with manuscripts and proofs of a prohibited nihilist paper called "Land and Liberty." The aristocratic-looking person with the portfolio merely smiled at the consternation of the officials. He realized the gravity of his offense. He knew the penalty. But he never quailed for an instant.

"Come," shouted the chief, "you're convicted already. You might as well confess. Where is the press?"

The quartet remained silent. It was the silence of submission—but not of fear. Suddenly the chief gave a shout of surprise and pointed to the cupboard. The other policemen followed the course indicated by his accusing finger. They saw nothing and their blank countenances said as much.

"Don't you see?" almost shrieked the official.

"No," replied his chief lieutenant. "What is it?"

"A daub of ink on the door of that closet."

"A daub of ink?" repeated the other, parrot-like and with no indication of intelligence.

"Yes! Yes!" he retorted, "a daub of printer's ink."

Slowly a consciousness of the meaning of his words penetrated their dull heads. At the same moment they made a simultaneous dash for the cupboard. To their amazement they met with resistance. Mme. Kriloff, her servant, the aristocratic man of the portfolio, and the consumptive compositor were lined up in front of the cupboard. All were armed and Mme. Kriloff, pointing her pistol at the head of the chief officer, said with great deliberation:

"Advance a single step and I'll blow out your brains. We're desperate. Life means little to us now. Save yours."

Here was a dilemma. The chief knew if he made a move to reach for his pistol this frenzied woman would carry out her threat. Only two other policemen were in the room with him and they were covered by the aristocrat and the consumptive compositor. The remainder of his men were in other parts of the house. He backed out by degrees. It was politic. He must have time to think and plan. His two companions retreated with him. As they reached the outer sill of the floor the consumptive compositor slammed the door violently and one of his associates bolted it. The racket brought the other policemen to the aid of their chief. There on the landing they held a council of war. The besieged nihilists, on their part, were sparing for time—they had something to conceal or destroy.

The house was already strongly guarded on the outside and the siege held out for less than a minute. The door was broken in and after a fierce resistance the four nihilists surrendered. The aristocrat fought like a demon and at the last asked quarter only for the women. While the police were completing their work the consumptive compositor had a violent paroxysm of coughing and asked permission to lie on a cot in an adjoining room.

The cupboard proved to be a veritable magic closet. It contained a complete printing outfit. Needless to say the paraphernalia was extraordinarily simple and adapted peculiarly to the purposes of the conspirators. There was a large cylinder covered with cloth which answered the requirements of a press; a roller of a sort of gummy substance; several fonts of type, display and otherwise; a few jars of printing ink, benzine brushes, and sponges. This was all packed to be taken to police headquarters. Just as the prisoners were being rounded up a sharp pistol shot was heard from the adjoining room. The chief hurried

in and found Lubkin, the consumptive compositor, in the death agonies. He had shot himself.

In half an hour's time the remaining prisoners and all of the facts in the case were in the possession of Gen. Trepoff. He rubbed his clumsy hands with satisfaction.

"Move the second in the game of life and death," he muttered. "We shall postpone our third move until morning. Not because we like to, but because we must."

In the morning, as already stated, the arrest of the four students occurred. Their innocent-looking possessions were taken from them at the police headquarters. The book, the green bag, the opera glass, and the roll of music each contained bombs which were to have been thrown at the emperor. They were stripped. On each student was found a small vial suspended with a string from his neck and resting against his breast. These frail bottles each contained a most active poison. The purpose was evident. Failure or refusal to do their frightful work on the part of either of the students would have brought forth secret agents of the nihilists, whose duty it was to strike the unsuccessful or delinquent conspirator on the chest, thus smashing the bottle and permitting the poison to enter the wounds caused by the broken glass. Little wonder that the unsuccessful students took their arrest stoically. They were merely exchanging one fate for another.

Gen. Trepoff had made other arrests of those who were directly concerned in the attempted assassination. He counted them over.

"Nine fish in the net; we need more."

His chief of staff and a squad of his trustiest men had already started off for Paulovnia on the Finnish railway. He wired them to act immediately. They found what he had suspected—a bomb manufactory. It was there that the deadly missiles of the four students had been devised. Six more arrests were made in connection with this private arsenal.

On the day following March 13, Gen. Trepoff had 15 prisoners in all on his hands. Each one represented a stage in the conspiracy; the compositors and pressman who published the proclamations; the girl who distributed them; the students who were to throw the bombs, and the men who manufactured the deadly missiles.

The 15 were condemned to death, but, on the recommendation of the court, eight escaped hanging and were sentenced to penal servitude for life in Siberia.

The czar learned all of these details later. On the evening of the 13th of March, as he entered the Winter palace, he was credited with saying:

"The people were very polite and respectful. The details were nicely planned—and by the way, tell Trepoff I was pleased with the police arrangements."

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Home-Loving Montenegrins.

Nowhere is love of country more intense than among the Montenegrins, to whom exile is the greatest of punishments. When W. J. Stillman was there in the seventies all the men were away fighting, and he observed that when a messenger was wanted the official took a man out of the prison and sent him off, with no fear that he would not return. One such messenger was sent to Cattaro, in Austrian territory, with a large sum of money for the bank, and he duly came back.

Another asked a Russian at Cattaro to intercede with Prince Nicholas for his release from prison. "But you are not in prison!" said the Russian. "Oh," said the man, "I have only come down for a load of skins for So-and-So, but I must go into prison again when I get back to Cetinje."

One prison guard watched all the prisoners when they sunned themselves out of doors, and if he was called away a prisoner would take his rifle and act as sentry for the time.

American Teacher's Life in Japan.

An American teacher, Miss Helen Hyde, is now living in Japan and using the life there as material for her prints. Miss Hyde has her house and studio at Akasaka, where she lives in Japanese style, but still retains "all the comforts of home." Into the little Japanese house, with its bamboo frame, and walls of sliding screens, Miss Hyde has introduced the American push-button toilet, American chairs (the Japanese prefer to sit upon floor mats), and even the unheard of luxury of an open grate fire. By designing most of her furniture herself, along Japanese lines, and having it made by Japanese workmen out of their native material, Miss Hyde has made a house and studio equally compatible with American ideas of comfortable living and the Japanese standard of art.



"ADVANCE A SINGLE STEP AND I'LL BLOW OUT YOUR BRAINS!"

to postpone the procession to-morrow?"

Trepoff raised those eloquent eyebrows in surprise.

"What," he cried, "and confess to the world that the emperor of Russia fears to appear in the streets of his capital?"

"Yes," protested the other, "but the danger—"

"The danger is for me to consider," he said, each word carefully measured.

The messenger bit his lips in perplexity. The chief of the secret service looked up suddenly.

"Does the czar know of the plot?"

"No; not a word; but he is timid."

"Reassure him. Tell him that Trepoff says there is no danger—that he will guarantee the safety of his majesty."

"All right," replied the attaché, bowing himself from the room.

Late on the night preceding the procession an inoffensive-looking young woman was arrested and lodged in jail. Early on the morning of the historic day several compositors and editors—apparently innocent of any wrong—were taken into custody. Still those who surrounded the czar were apprehensive. An hour before the time they appealed to Trepoff. He gave them a curt but comprehensive answer:

police station and in a minute the curious multitude, accustomed to constant police interference, forgot all about the incident. Simultaneously six persons were being arrested at Paulovnia on the Finnish railroad.

Tens of thousands of the people stood on the sidewalks on that chill, gray, March morning awaiting the gorgeous procession. It came presently, with the czar in an open barouche, seated with one of the ministers of state. His majesty was attired in semi-military dress, and if he felt any apprehension, did not betray it. The official who accompanied him glanced furtively about as if constantly expecting the unexpected. The czar bowed to the right and the left and received in return cold, curious stares from the people. If they felt any enthusiasm they did not show it. Was their silence intended as a mark of respect for their sovereign? An onlooker from another country would not have so regarded it. The procession moved quickly and safely to the Winter palace. It had been accomplished without a single mishap of any kind. The telegraph carried the news to all quarters of the world—the czar had appeared in public and received the homage of his people. The day of assassination was past, and the delusion of a contented people was hurred by the autocratic ruler.

was literally loaded down with the documents which were being distributed to those in the conspiracy. She admitted that the young cadet who had committed suicide had been selected to assassinate the emperor. But when he realized the meaning of his assignment he killed himself. She stopped at this stage of her confession. Neither persuasion nor torture nor threats of death would induce her to give the names of the others concerned in the plot.

But Trepoff had a foundation on which to build his case. Here was a bit of paper. It would have to be traced to its origin. It was evident that an illicit printing press had been set up somewhere in the city. All this time the two men who had talked incautiously in the restaurant were being followed. They were seen to enter a house in the Jewish section. The records of the police showed that the house was occupied by Aaron Zondelevic, who, at one time, had been a printer.

That was sufficient. In less than an hour afterward the house was raided. An officer with a squad of police broke into the place without notice. What they found did not seem very damaging. Four persons were at home at the time—two men and two women. Mme. Kriloff, the head of the house, was a woman of about 45 and of