

## *A Story of Russia*

There once lived in St. Petersburg an aged man, who, though poor, had always been noted for strict honor and integrity, and whose whole course of life was as regular as clock work. Each morning he left his modest dwelling at precisely the same hour, passed through the old clothes market to his bureau, and, after six hours' labor was accomplished, returned home by the self-same route. His garments were shabby from long service, and the covering on his cap was worn to shreds. The urgent solicitations of his daughters finally induced him to replace the latter article; and seeing some of a green color one day in a shop window, he went in and inquired the price. The shopman, however, refused to sell them, on the plea that they were already bespoken, and offered to show him others of a different hue; but the old man had set his heart on green.

“Well, then,” said the man, “if you must absolutely have it, take it, and if needs must I can finish another by tomorrow to take its place.”

The bargain was accordingly concluded, and the next day no small excitement was created by the appearance of the cap, which elicited from his colleagues smiling congratulations upon his successful purchase.

Two days afterward, the heat being intense in the bureau, he felt in his pocket for his handkerchief, in order to wipe the perspiration from his face, and he drew forth, to his great astonishment, one of fine India foulard silk. He showed it to his colleagues, and inquired if he had not by mistake appropriated another person's property; but one and all disclaimed all knowledge of it, and agreed unanimously that it must be a surprise from one of his daughters.

“Children,” said he, upon his return to his house, “who has done this? Do you wish to make me vain in my old age?”

His daughters also declared their ignorance of the matter, and, after some random guesses, finally made up their minds that it must have been put in his pocket by their cousin, who spent the last Sunday with them; and the handkerchief was carefully put aside by their father.

On the following day, as he was carefully spreading his coat tails, in order to seat himself at his desk, he felt something hard in both his pockets, and putting in his hand brought out from one a gold watch, and from the other a well-furnished purse. This time his reason was overwhelmed; but after long reflection he formed a sudden resolution. He had been more punctual than other officials, and was alone in the room; he therefore determined to say nothing to them of his discovery, and as soon as the office hours were over he went directly to the chief of police and solicited a private audience. He then produced the watch and purse, and related the history of the handkerchief. After the chief had fully possessed himself of all the particulars, he said:

“It is very singular! Has nothing of the kind ever happened before?”

“Never before last week.”

“Have you made any change in your dress within that time?”

“No.”

“Recollect!”

“O, yes; certainly, I bought a new cap.”

“Tell me how and where you bought it.”

The old man told him everything connected with the purchase, upon which the chief laughed heartily, and exclaimed:

“Poor, honest man that you are, you have become a member of a band of thieves! Do you not perceive? The twenty caps of the same shape and color were to serve them as a mark of recognition; and as every pickpocket seeks to divest himself as quickly as possible of his stolen goods, they have taken you for an accomplice, and transferred these articles to your pockets. We are greatly indebted to accident and to you. Take this money and buy another cap from one of the principal magazines; then bring this one back immediately; for as I hope to have the whole gang in my power tomorrow, you must not run the risk of being arrested also.”

The old man went into a shop and purchased another covering for his head, but as he was about to tie up the cap in his handkerchief, in order to take it back to the police office, he found in the crown, to his no small surprise, a costly piece of lace. He hastened to deliver this fresh booty into the hands of the chief, who again burst into a peal of laughter when he beheld the despairing countenance of the honest thief.

The necessary measures were immediately taken. Two dozen detectives were made acquainted with the form of the cap; and, simultaneously, at precisely the same hour, every possessor of the sign was placed in durance vile.

*The Flag of Our Union*, Oct. 6 1867