new strength in some new locality, and only died when a short time ago the ban was removed by the expiration of the patent. At that time the number of men and amount of capital invested in the till then illegal business was shown by the appearance of so many competing torpedo companies springing at once into existence fully equipped. Now no longer carried on so largely by the uncertain light of the moon, or of early dawn, but in the broad light of day, the handling of torpedoes has been shorn of its charm of venture, much of its danger, and therefore of its great profits.

In 1864, Colonel Roberts obtained a patent covering the use of explosives in oil wells, to increase their production. His torpedo was a cylindrical tin canister, filled with gunpowder, and with percussion cap on its upper end. This, when lowered into the fluid of a well, was exploded by dropping a weight upon the cap. His idea was that the oil occurred in seams or crevices of the rock, and that by the explosion, fissures were opened to these cavities. It was with some difficulty that well owners could be persuaded to let the experiment be tried, since they feared that it would merely fill the hole with broken fragments; but the wonderful success of a few shots proved their utility. Nitro-glycerine was soon substituted for gunpowder as being more certain and easily handled, and shots of eighty quarts of nitro-glycerine, equalling in effect over a ton of gunpowder, are frequently used. The patent has proved a fortune to the owner, the torpedoes used in 1880 being valued at over a million dollars.

With declining production and prices, the torpedo became to the oil producer a necessity and an enormous expense, since Roberts' prices were high, the cost of a large shot amounting to hundreds of dollars. The materials for a torpedo are cheap, and the manufacture not difficult; so many men, to avoid the heavy royalty, began to make their own nitro-glycerine, and to use it secretly, doing the work by night, trusting to the light of the moon, hence the term "moonlighters."

The professional moonlighter did not acknowledge any wrong-doing in his occupation, but if convicted posed as a martyr to unjust and corrupt decisions of the courts. He could not appreciate the nice distinctions of the lawyers between a principle and a method. He was told that it was not torpedoing itself which was covered by this patent, but the method of putting in the torpedo, which method was the only one possible. For instance, he might torpedo a well, provided there was no fluid in it; but how could he avoid having some fluid in the hole short of turning the whole country upside down to drain? To him it seemed a parallel case to being told that he could explode torpedoes under the surface of a lake, providing there was no water in it.

The fight went on in the courts and in the field. To punish infringers it was necessary for the Roberts Company to have witnesses who could swear to the facts, and as informers are detested even by the law-abiding, and their lives were sometimes in danger in the rougher part of the country, it was necessary to employ men cunning as a fox. They were not to interfere with the moonlighter, but to see everything without arousing suspicion. Thus many a well-owner, who had had his wells moonlighted months before, and had almost forgotten about it, was dismayed at the summons to appear before some distant court, where, if the offence was proved, the royalty fees, costs and expensive delays proved a most serious penalty.

A description of one moonlighting experience may serve to give some idea of the business. Accidentally hearing that a friend's well was to be shot, and happening around the engine-house after dark, an invitation to stay and see how it was done was accepted. The owner of the property was the contractor, who had just finished cleaning out the well, a work of several days.

He was a strong, daring fellow, formerly a driller, and, having had long experience, set up business for himself, taking contracts to drill new wells, clean out old ones, and, like many of the men following that occupation, was glad to get an occasional job of shooting the well on which he worked, more especially if it was in an