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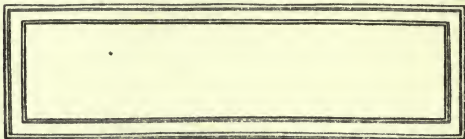
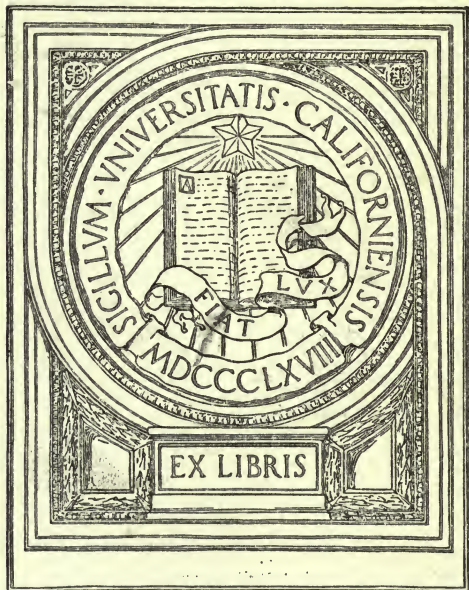


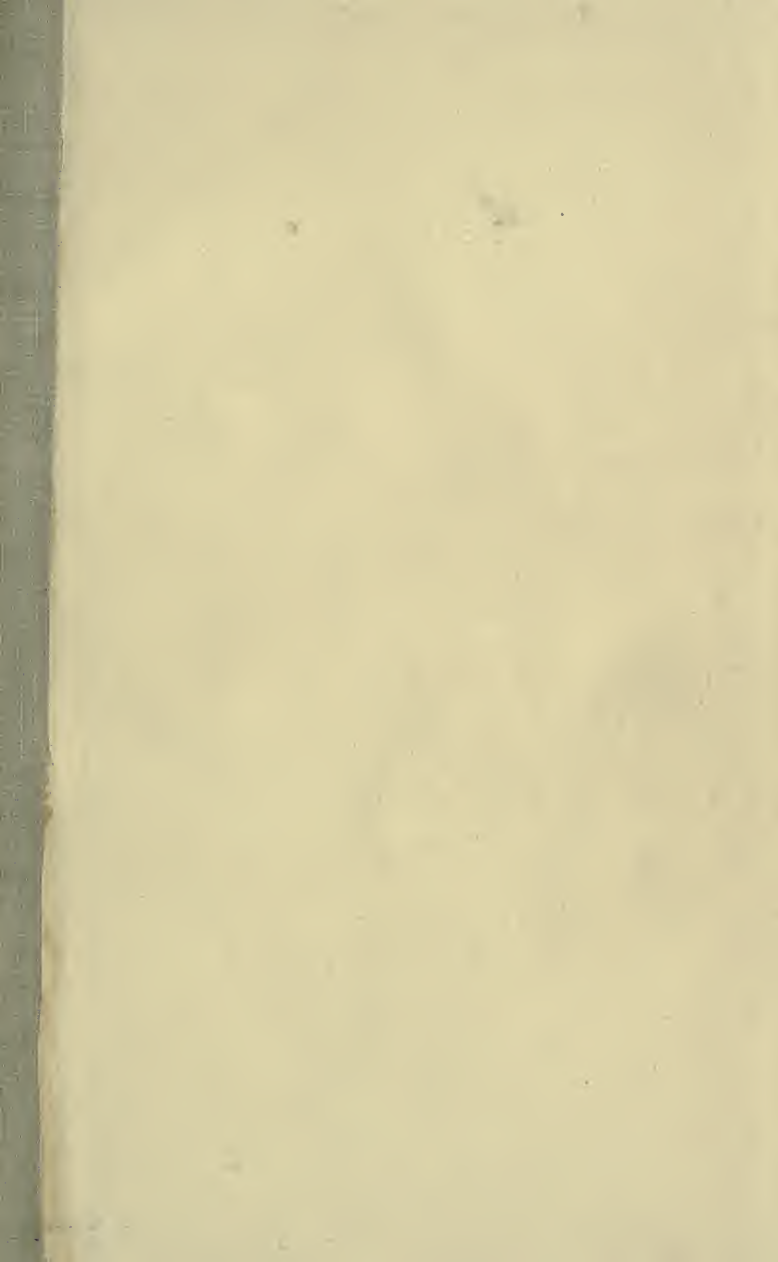
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"HERE IS YÉGOR, SÉMÉNOFF," SAID NADÈGE.

ESCAPED FROM SIBERIA

THE ADVENTURES OF THREE DISTRESSED FUGITIVES

BY

HENRY FRITH. (*Translator*)

AUTHOR OF "ON THE WINGS OF THE WIND," ETC.

Victor Tissot and Constant Améro.



LONDON

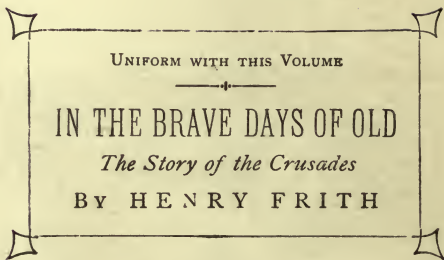
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1894

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DEDICATION.



TO

M Y M O T H E R,

TO WHOSE LOVING INSTRUCTION I OWE MY ACQUAINTANCE

WITH ANY LANGUAGE, I DEDICATE

This Translation,

IN AFFECTIONATE RECOGNITION OF THE TROUBLE

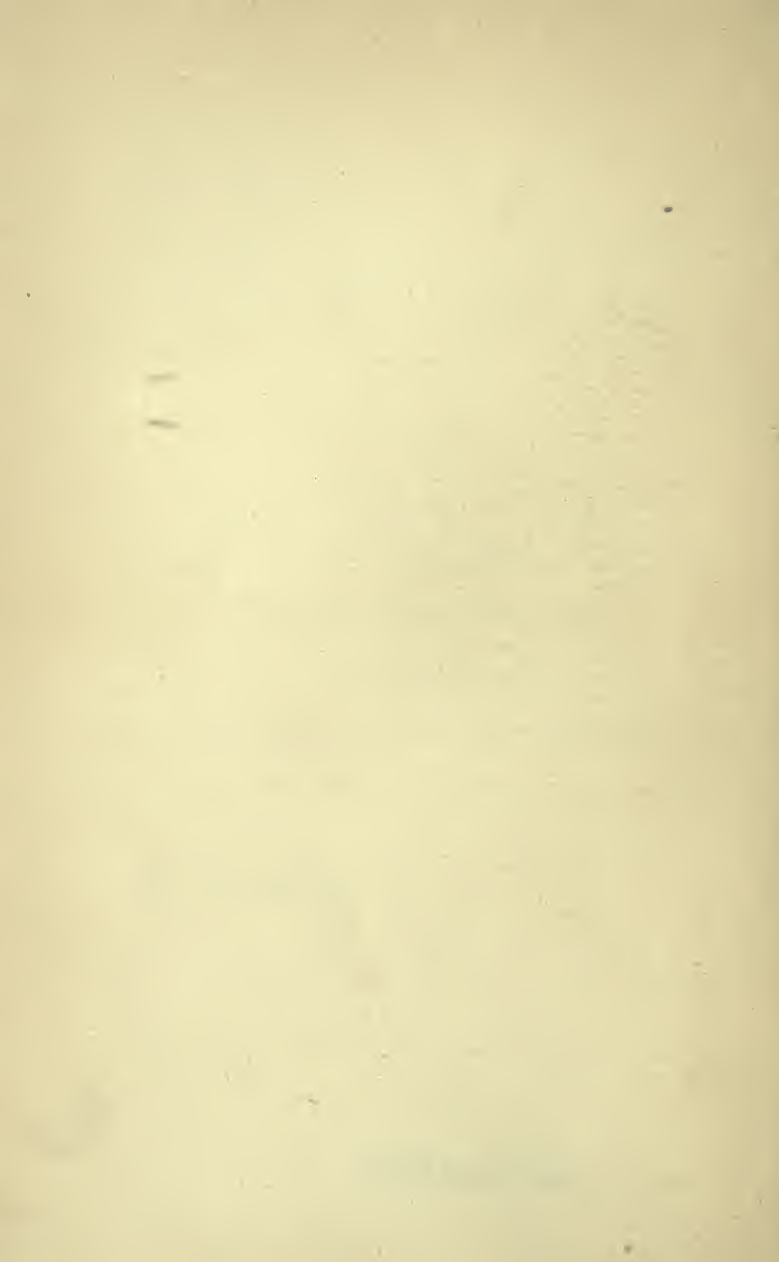
SHE SO UNSELFISHLY BESTOWED

ON

THE TRANSLATOR.

August, 1885.

M265980



P R E F A C E.



THIS narrative of the adventures of three fugitives from Siberia will appeal to all readers. The cruelties which probably still exist in the mines where so many wretched Russian convicts eke out their miserable existences, incite many of the toilers to attempt escape ; but few succeed. This tale doubtless rests upon a substratum of fact, but we are pleased to find the hero is not ill-treated in his captivity for an alleged political offence. He seems to have enjoyed considerable liberty ; and, in his capacity of secretary, to have had opportunities to arrange and carry out his project of evasion in company with the daughter of another exile. The resources of M. Lafleur, the *deus ex machinâ* of the tale—of course, a Frenchman—will surprise most people. The character of the Police Inspector is well drawn and consistently retained even unto death. The boldness of Yégor, the endurance of the lad Ladislas, the patience of Nadège, and the exciting

PREFACE.

adventures through which they all pass, keep the reader's attention alive throughout.

It only remains to be said that the Translator has in no way interfered with the Authors' work. His share in the transaction has only been to put into as fluent and familiar English as possible to him, the French original. To do this words have necessarily been added, and sentences adapted to the mother-tongue and the ears of Britons; but the adventures, the characters, the general treatment and the geography of the tale, are all the results of the literary partnership of MM. TISSOT and AMÉRO.

H. F.



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The Arrival.

ESCAPED FROM SIBERIA.

CHAPTER I.

THE CONVICTS—THE DANCING MASTER—THE MINE AND THE
GALLEY-SLAVES—A CURIOUS GUARDIAN.

MANY years ago, upon a cold October morning, a carriage containing two persons drove up to the wooden house occupied by the Government Inspector of the Oukboul Mines in Siberia.

One of the occupants was a policeman: the other, a young man of about five-and-twenty, was his prisoner. The latter, who had been sent to Siberia as a convict, appeared quite exhausted

by his long journey, which had been accomplished, without change of conveyance, in a *kibitka* from Kieff to Nertchinsk. For at least two months he had never been freed from his fetters, which he wore over his boots and rivetted round his ankles.

The gendarme who had accompanied him was dressed in a blue tunic and wore a helmet. As soon as the carriage pulled up, he entered the house of the Inspector to hand him the papers concerning the deportation, and the particulars of the sentence of the convict.

On the very threshold of the door he was encountered and almost knocked down by a man who was coming out, and with difficulty restrained by a gendarme. The man's face was terribly swollen and hideous to behold. His hands were tightly bound behind his back. He was a convict condemned to hard labour.

This man had attempted to make his escape from the dockyard of Okhotsk, and his captors were now conducting him to the mysterious and dreaded fortress of Akatonia situated in the vicinity of Nertchinsk—a place which was never mentioned without a shudder, and which possessed a reputation for cruelty terrible even in Siberia.

The unfortunate fugitive had disfigured himself fearfully with sulphuric acid in the attempt to obliterate the letters upon his cheeks and forehead, which stood for the word "*Vor*" or thief. His condition was pitiable in the extreme.

"I thirst!" he cried, in a choking voice. "I thirst! Give me something to drink, you! I am devoured by fever."

But for all answer he was securely tied up to the wheel of a carriage which happened to be waiting under a shed close by.

From the interior of the house issued the notes of a violin. Someone was playing the Belle Helène Quadrilles with considerable spirit. At the same time a voice might be heard speaking through the music, and indicating the figures of the dance to some invisible people, whose steps echoed upon the sonorous pine flooring, and mingled with fresh and childlike laughter.

“Only a drop of water—only a drop!” cried the suffering convict, who was kneeling in the mire and rolling his sinister-looking eyes in agony, while he foamed at the mouth as much from rage as from thirst and pain.

The new arrival looked at him, and then withdrew his gaze from such a disgusting object, to take in the surroundings in which he would have to work out his own sentence.

Before him were scattered about a hundred small cabins and *yourtes*, the refuge for the workers in the mines, overlooked by some wooden houses which were apportioned to the employés of the Government, such as the captain of the mine, the “pope” or priest, and the doctor. The barracks of the convict guard, the chapel, and the hospital were also to be seen close by; but the whole of the surroundings were of the most miserable and depressing character.

Beyond these buildings rose the mountain chain of Yablonoï, whose snow-laden summits stretched away into the dim distance, and beyond the range of vision to the eastward. In a ravine 3,000 feet in depth—the perpendicular sides of which rose to an elevation of

quite 2,000 feet—was the mine. Beneath the blood-red rocks the cold had already covered with a film of ice the water which flowed down from the snow, and the hydraulic wheel, active enough in summer, now motionless, standing up erect and terrible like some gigantic instrument of torture.

The cold wind which came through the ravine, carried with it tiny needles of ice, which pricked the skins and faces of the transported prisoners.

The new comer raised his eyes to Heaven in sad and mute resignation, as if he renounced life then and there, and was passing out of the world a martyr. But in another moment the hopes of youth were rekindled in his bosom. The consciousness of having done no wrong buoyed him up. His dark eyes flashed fiercely, he drew himself up with a proud and haughty movement which almost destroyed the hideous effect produced by the grey cape of "convict" cloth, and the little black ugly cap which covered the close-cropped head whereon the prison barber had worked his wicked will.

As he drew himself up so proudly his gaze swept the horizon, as if to measure his chances and the way of escape.

At this juncture the re-captured man began to groan and howl lustily, and two little girls, whose curiosity was excited by the noise, put their fair and curly heads out from the half-open door, as their dancing-master, violin in hand, came out in a rather hesitating manner, as if uncertain what was outside.

The dancing-master was a good, worthy fellow, past forty years of age; he walked with a firm step and wore a jovial—not to say

a grotesque air. There was something comical in his physiognomy. His appearance was certainly neither that of a Russian nor a slave—he was evidently neither in authority nor under it.

He first advanced to the convict, and enquired in bad Russian, what he was complaining about so loudly. His question was couched in the accents of a man who was really interested in the answer.

“These dogs are killing me with thirst,” exclaimed the unhappy man. “I am all on fire here,” he added, opening his mouth as widely as his lips, so terribly corroded by the acid, would permit.

The man with the violin was seized with an idea. Drawing a small empty bottle from his breast-pocket, he made signs to his little pupils to fill it with water. Then, when his request had been complied with, he let the liquid filter drop by drop into the parched and swollen mouth of the recaptured convict.

The man gazed at him as a grateful beast might have done.

“Thank you,” was all he said ; but he was already revived.

“So you have got yourself re-captured,” said the dancing-master
“Do you know what is in store for you?”

“Well, what?” said the convict.

“Fifty lashes of the knout and more.”

“Well, I daresay I shall live through it. When it is all over I will drink a good cup to the health of the Czar—the father of us all.”

The dancing-master then approached the carriage in which the latest arrival was still seated, and said to him in a low tone——

“He speaks lightly enough now! but by the time they have inflicted twenty lashes he will be a corpse!”

The young man shuddered as he thought, “That is what is waiting for me if I attempt to escape and am re-captured. There is no difference in the eyes of the Czar’s officers between yonder fellow and me.” Then extending his hand to the dancing-master he said——

“For your generous and humane conduct towards that unfortunate man, let me say in my turn, ‘Thank you!’”

“It gives me much pleasure to shake hands with you,” said the musician, who had, however, remarked the clothing worn by the new-comer, and which indicated the political prisoner. “No thanks for me, if you please, though. Thank God! I need not be on my guard continually. I am quite independent of prison, police, or mine. I am a Parisian and a dancing-master. You are perhaps acquainted with Paris, sir? Yes? Well, there I was born, in the Place de la Bastille, right in front of the Column. And, *Vive la liberté*, I am not ashamed of it.”

The gendarme who had escorted the new arrival, now came out to put a stop to this conversation. The inspector was waiting.

“One more shake of the hand,” said the dancing-master. “Yes, I offer it this time. Come, courage!” he added, in a lower tone, as he warmly grasped the young man’s hand.

The latter drew back, murmuring, “If he were but a friend, now.”

The inspector, a little man, cleanly shaven, with angular features

and inscrutable eyes, commanded the prisoner to strip himself to the waist, and then proceeded to identify him with the official description.

A locket depended from the young man's neck. The prisoner blushed and quickly placed his hand upon his chest, as if to defend the trinket from any outward violence, or from any attempt to take it from him.

This movement was misunderstood by the inspector.

"Allow me," he said quietly.

"Oh," said the prisoner, "I do not suppose the portrait of a young lady is fraught with any great danger to the state—even though she be a martyr—the daughter of Davidoff, the poet, a convict like myself. She followed him into exile."

"I know Davidoff and his daughter," said the inspector simply. "He has been working in the mines."

"Yes, and after that?" enquired the prisoner eagerly.

"They remitted a portion of his labour-sentence, and interned him at Irkoutsk."

Having given this information the inspector wrote the entry of the prisoner in his convict-register, adding the number 1367, which was next in order. Then he gave directions for the young man to be taken to the mine.

Accordingly, a few minutes afterwards the prisoner was handed over to the Corporal of the Convict Guard.

"Yermac," said the guardian, "here is another to fill up a gap in your ranks."

“Three of them have died only this week,” observed the corporal, as he drew a tablet from his pocket and prepared to write. Then he took a good look at the prisoner.

“Yégor Séménoff;” said the latter, thinking he wished to have his name. “Shall I write it down for you?” he added.

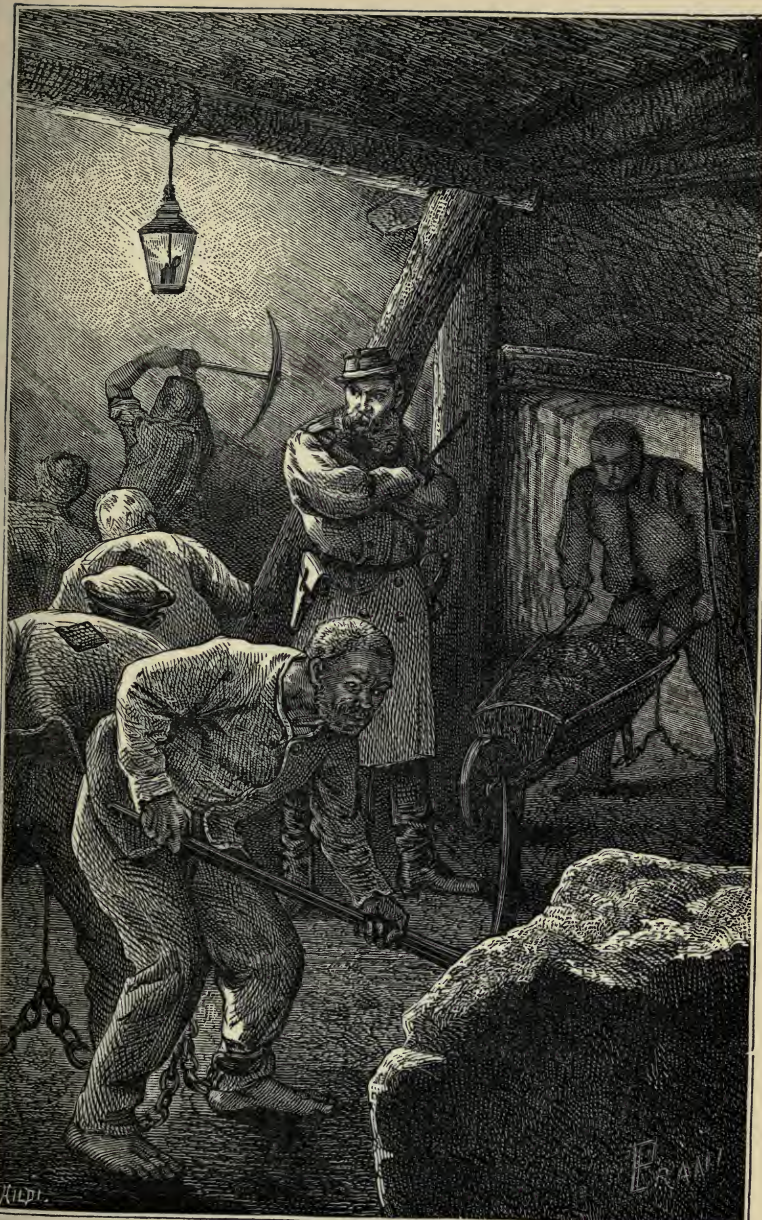
“Oh, I know how to write,” replied the corporal, with an almost imperceptible smile. “Besides, I only want a few figures. What number is it?”

“Number 1367;” replied the inspector, “He will be lodged in the fifteenth *yourte*, where there are two others already.”

While the overseer was speaking, Yégor Séménoff was studying the features of the man armed with the wire whip, in whose charge he had been placed. He perceived that he was a grave-looking man, with bronzed but regular features which told of straight-forwardness. There was nothing of the galleys-officer about him—rather the contrary: he had more of the air of a magistrate, though it was scarcely in keeping with his business.

“To work” exclaimed the corporal Yermac. Then he flourished his wire whip. “That is the way,” he added, indicating a spot where several miners were at work, digging laboriously. “And, remember, I am close behind you.”

The miners, in tattered sheepskin garments, steeped in dirt, and with naked feet, regarded the new arrival sourly. He was warmly clad, had good thick boots of dogskin, and, with the money he had, was able to purchase many little trifles for his comfort. This made a great contrast.



One of the men going before him indicated the way he had to take. The road was simply a ladder about four hundred yards long, apparently interminable. Yégor commenced the descent followed by the workman and the corporal. The dim lamps placed in the cavities of the wall only served to make the darkness more apparent, without in any way dispersing the gloom. Occasionally a resting-place was reached, but the "landings" were of very rare occurrence, and far apart.

Yégor could hear the noise of hammering at the bottom of the pit as he descended. This strident noise, the thick darkness, the mournful groups of workers across whose emaciated forms a bright gleam of light was occasionally cast, the air laden with dust and unpleasant vapour, strangely impressed and oppressed the young man, who was, however, only at the commencement of his apprenticeship to prison and exile.

Farther on the surroundings were even more terrible, if that were possible. The greater number of the convicts, bearded, long-haired, unkempt, and unshorn, grimed with dirt and perspiration, were branded upon the face with the infamous *v. o. r.* These men were assassins, thieves, forgers. They were also recognisable by the square piece of cloth let in at the backs of their capotes. This piece of cloth was red for the murderers, black for the robbers, yellow for the incendiaries.

The remainder belonged to the class of political prisoners, and were pitiable objects: their pallid faces, their wasted bodies undermined by fever and excoriated by the handling of the

ore, which disengaged arsenic from tin ore and verdigris from copper.

They might have been taken for living skeletons. Some were actually green, with bald heads as white as chalk. Their eyes were half shut and seemed ready to close for ever in the sleep of death. They rose and disappeared suddenly behind rocks, passing away like phantoms in the dark galleries. Every now and then the swishing sound of the corporal's cruel whip beating upon their ribs was audible ; loud groans and cries of agony succeeded.

Yégor had been pushed forward to the end of a newly dug gallery. Here, alone, in a narrow hole like a cave, he seemed to be buried alive. He felt suffocating—an indefinable sensation of nervous terror shook his body convulsively.

He endeavoured to use his hammer or pick, but his arms fell helpless by his side—he seemed paralysed.

The guard to whom he had been consigned and whom he must obey advanced towards him.

“Do you wish me to set you going?” asked this fellow, raising his scourge.

“Don't touch me!” screamed Yégor. “Don't touch me, or I will kill you, wretch that you are.”

Then, as if seized with a sudden madness, he rushed upon him and inflicted a sounding buffet upon the face of the corporal. “You may kill me if you like,” he screamed.

The young man certainly expected to be thrown to the ground and almost cut in pieces. But the galley guard only rolled his

eyes savagely and then, strange to relate, looked fixedly at the young man without speaking a word. After a pause, he cast his whip from him, for fear he should be tempted to use it, and merely answered the insult of the convict in the following remarkable words spoken without the least irritation :—

“I could flay you alive,” he said, “if I chose. This time I forgive you. I accept the punishment in expiation of my son’s crimes.”

Then, as if fearing to say more, this singular guard hurried away and disappeared at the end of the gallery, leaving Yégor Séménoff in profound astonishment, to his reflections.





“He had a right to sell spirits.”

CHAPTER II.

THE MINES—THE EXILE DAVIDOFF—YÉGOR CONTEMPLATES SUICIDE—
A PROVIDENTIAL ESCAPE.

THE little town of Nertchinsk, a short time before the opening of our story, had been greatly disturbed by the murder of an engineer who was known as Major Dobson. He was a *concessionaire* of a district in which gold was found at some ten or twelve miles from the town.

This Englishman lived upon the ground he was exploring. Thanks to the mechanism applied to modern mining, he had been able to extract considerable quantities of gold in a place disdained and abandoned by his predecessors in the district.

The major perhaps laid himself open to attack by the reputation for originality—which he sustained for thirty miles round—as much as by his wealth, which was immense. We may form an opinion of this eccentric individual from the following incident. He came every morning to the huts in which the machinery was placed, clad in enormous boots put on over three pairs of stockings. He then examined the machines most attentively. If the least speck of rust were visible he would pull off one of his stockings and rub the machine till it was bright again. When he had used his stockings he threw them at the heads of his men, who were obliged to bring them back under pain of instant dismissal.

Contrary to the habits of the generality of gold-diggers, who spend all they make, the major lived economically with a single domestic, an old woman. People said that, far from sending all he got to Barnaoul—for the mines belong to the government, and all the ore is sent to Barnaoul on the Obi to be smelted—the major appropriated large quantities which he carefully concealed.

One morning he and his servant were found murdered; the crime had evidently been committed with an axe or hatchet. In any case the assassins had not been able to discover the hidden treasure. They only succeeded in carrying away some paltry sum in silver. The major had no doubt transmitted his possessions to England.

Three weeks later another murder and a great robbery of money by the assassins stirred the district. A Russian named Khabaroff, from the Crimea, was *concessionaire* of a district out of which

no one had ever succeeded in extracting a nugget. Surveys of the neighbourhood had however given excellent results. So this man conceived the idea of making gold and money which the government could not interfere with, without depriving his fortunate rivals of the rebate of 15 per cent. which they received from the government for the results of the surveys.

As proprietor he had a right to set up a store in which he could sell spirits for the workmen, but as he employed none, he sold the drink to his neighbours' men, at the "reasonable" price of about ten shillings a bottle. Thus, two casks of brandy, which cost him little more than ten pounds a-piece, realized at a profit of more than three hundred per cent., brought him in a handsome sum. It need scarcely be said that the gold seekers paid with the ore and dust for the brandy they consumed, magnificently.

Khabaroff, however, was robbed of much of his unworthy gains and left for dead. But while he was carefully attended to, the authorities managed to ascertain how he had at the expense of the state enriched himself.

In consequence of these reports the authorities opened an investigation with much zeal, and while thus laudably engaged they found out that a band of gold-robbers—already notorious—had committed both outrages; and more than that the son of the "Ispravnik" of Nertchinsk had for some time been connected with the band of assassins and thieves.

Everybody respected the Ispravnik. He was a Russian of good family named Yermac, a descendant perhaps of the Cossack who

had conquered Siberia, leading the chivalrous band so well depicted by Gogol in *Tarass Boulba*. Yermac had been for some time in Nertchinsk in disgrace—exiled in fact. It was said that he had occupied a responsible post in Moscow, and being incorruptible himself had denounced the peculations of his colleagues. They had accordingly leagued themselves against him, and had succeeded in ruining their associate.

Such a man could not remain indifferent to the suspicions only too justly harboured against his son. He resigned his position, and as he could not very well return to Russia, he sought and obtained an independent position as superintendent of the working gang in the mines of Oukboul. Yermac was thus the guardian whom Yégor Séménoff had struck in the face.

No doubt, had Yégor known the circumstances and position of the man with the whip, he would not have behaved as he did, or would have repented of his violence; for he was quite capable of appreciating in others the qualities which he himself possessed.

Yégor Séménoff, we must inform the reader had been transported for a political offence. Arrested at Kieff, where he was studying at the university, he did not even know what crime he had committed. One evening, the police made a swoop upon his house, seized his papers and money, and conducted him to prison.

Fifteen days after, he was bumping over the roads which led him eventually to Siberia, and had left Russia for the bourne whence no convicted traveller returns. As he was of noble blood, the

government kindly accorded him a conveyance, the only concession made after an arbitrary and unjust condemnation.

When he came to consider the circumstances of his arrest, and examined his thoughts by the few gleams of information he picked up on the way to his prison, he came to the conclusion that the severities of the police were owing to his friendship for the old Poet Davidoff, who had been exiled to Siberia three years previously.

Davidoff had been voluntarily accompanied into exile by his only daughter—this was Nadège, whose portrait the young man wore in the locket round his neck.

For him in this world she was no more. The little romance which had opened between the student of twenty-one and the girl of sixteen had had a very sad epilogue. They had their destiny in common at any rate. Fate had condemned them to pass the remainder of their lives far from Kieff, where they had first met.

Yégor, who on his first arrival in the country had been studying its features with a view to escape, suddenly relinquished the idea when he learnt that Davidoff and his daughter was interned as Irkoutsk.

He then endeavoured to accustom himself to the terrible existence of a miner hoping to be deported to the prison in consequence of his exertions. "Who knows," he would say, "but they make up their minds to remit my labour-sentence?" He was quite innocent of the crime imputed to him, only guilty of cherishing sympathy for some victims of the inexorable "justice" of the Czar.

At Omsk, offended by the rude tone of the functionary who communicated to him the fact of his sojourn in Siberia, the young man had answered angrily and with insolence. This man had, after consultation with his colleagues, found a cruel enjoyment in communicating to "Monsieur" Yégor, that he was condemned to the copper mines of Nertchinsk. Was it not possible that this severe sentence might be reconsidered? He would take courage at any rate and cherish hope.

His gang worked in one of the passages already dug out in the vein. Two miners beat turn about, until they were exhausted, upon the iron bar which a third held in his trembling hands. The continued strokes of the hammers gave out sparks which scintillated in the gloom of the mine; the air was foul, and contained poisonous vapour as well as impalpable and deleterious dust. When the rock had been disintegrated the pick-axes came into play, and so the passage was dug out—the sides or roof often falling upon the miners, and burying them at times under the mass of rubbish. This work was continued for ten hours a day.

The unfortunate Yégor fell down exhausted when he reached the opening of the mine-shaft that evening, after an ascent of nearly two hours, which had given him violent palpitation of the heart. He struggled bravely against this weakness, but in vain. After a time fever ensued, bringing with it all the terrors of delirium and weakness. He was unable to take food, his throat was dry and painful, his ears were incessantly filled with a buzzing noise from which he could not obtain any relief.

Under these circumstances the poor young man was at first haunted by ideas of suicide. He endeavoured to repress these temptations as he would have resisted an approach to any other great crime. But the dark thoughts kept returning to his mind persistently. It seemed to him that, as he must die before long, a few hours more or less would make little difference; and so he made up his mind to end the slow torture and suffering to which he had been condemned.

The means were at hand. There was no difficulty in the execution of his plan. He had heard of miners who, desperate, had been crushed by the blocks of stone which they had permitted to fall upon them. He would do the same.

For three days he had worked hard to loosen a rock, and he set himself with redoubled ardour to accomplish his perilous task, having made up his mind to place himself underneath it when it fell.

He would require three days and all his unflinching determination to succeed. A year of his life seemed to be cut off each time he used his pick-axe, but without weakening his ardour

So he continued, but such work undertaken with such an object quite exhausted him, and one morning he told his two companions that he was quite unable to get up.

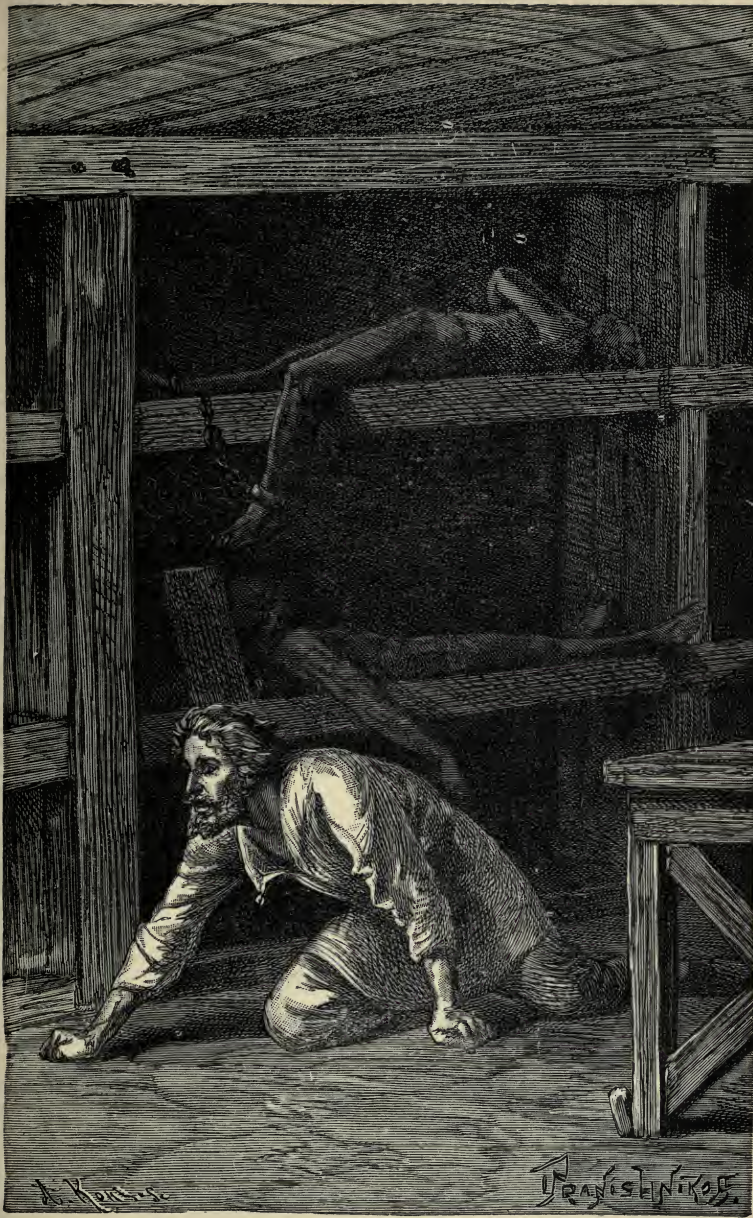
One of these two men was a condemned political prisoner, a Russian, who had been transferred from Minousink to Oukboul for more severe punishment. The other was a Tongoose, an assassin and a thief. Both these men, like Yégor himself, were late arrivals,

and the government had placed them in one of the *yourtes* while a hut for them was being erected. They had only a few *kopecks* between them on which to subsist, as salary from the "concessionaire" of the mine; receiving besides from the government thirty kilogrammes of rye flour, and five francs a month. Like their companions in misfortune they had at their disposal one week out of four.

Seeing Yégor was so ill, the other two convicts conveyed him to the hospital, a regular charnel-house. When the sick man recovered his senses after eight-and-forty hours, he found himself in a kind of wooden berth like those on board ship. Each berth contained an invalid, and in the cabins the least sick attended to those who were worse than themselves. Nothing but bare planks were supplied for beds. The air was stifling, and laden with horrible stenches. The cries of the dying mingled with the complaints of the suffering. It was too horrible! too like the pit of torture!

When Yégor had grown accustomed to the obscurity, he perceived close by him two naked bodies in an advanced stage of decomposition. He was seized with a fearful paroxysm of terror and loathing; he managed to crawl from his "bunk," and make his way on hands and knees along the floor, with a view to seek the mine-shaft, and put an end to his existence the following day.

The next day, he had determined, should be his last on earth. He rose from his pallet and went forth trembling with weakness to his work in the mine. But ere he reached his destination, M. Nadéfief



"He made his way along the floor."

the proprietor (or *concessionaire*) of the mine, who had only arrived at Oukboul the previous evening, sent for him.

The *concessionaire* had, as it were, come up to Omsk and had remarked the young convict on his passage through the town, and knew where his residence had been assigned. He was also aware that Yégor was acquainted with several languages; that he could speak and write English, German, and French; that he had considerable acquaintance with science and mathematics—all this he learned from the passport. It therefore appeared to M. Nadéief, who was a selfish and cold-blooded personage, that he would gain more by employing Yégor in the post of secretary, than in sending him to work with the other offenders in the mines.

This M. Nadéief was a short, thick-set man, possessing the large Kalmuk face, black piercing eyes, a flat nose, thick lips, the strong white teeth displayed between them. He wore a black beard, as woolly and curly as his sheep-skin cap.

“My principle,” he said to Yégor, “is to get the greatest possible profit from my people. A man like you is only a bad workman with crow-bar and pick-axe. You can use a pen better, I daresay?”

“I have graduated in the University of Kieff,” said Yégor, modestly.

“Yes! yes! I know all about that. I know besides that you might have become a distinguished engineer had you not mixed yourself up with other things—which did not concern you.”

“But I assure you——”

“Enough, I am not a judge. I can only do this much for you : I can employ you on work which will be less laborious and more adapted to your tastes and strength than mining, and at the same time more beneficial to myself. I have to write a Memorial to the Czar, in which I wish to point out that Siberia, notwithstanding the richness of its soil and the productiveness of its mines, is simply an abode of misery and desolation ; that the system pursued is radically vicious.

“Now, I want a secretary who is skilful and clever enough to embody my ideas. You are such a person. The captain of the mine has already been informed of your departure from his gang. To-morrow one of my coachmen shall bring you to Irkoutsk, where you will be accommodated in one of my houses.”

Irkoutsk ! Oh, how delightful was the sound of that name in Yégor’s ears ! Was it not at Irkoutsk that the inspector had told him that Davidoff and his daughter were interned ! Suppose he were to meet his old friends again ! This would be indeed happiness almost too great. He did not dare to dwell upon the idea. This was really an intervention of Providence on his behalf.

At Irkoutsk ! far from the mines, from the terrible lash, from the rock already undermined and tottering in its place, far from thoughts of suicide. At Irkoutsk ! in a civilized world again : in the very same place with Davidoff and his daughter, the adorable Nadège !

How Yégor now blessed his sentence of exile which had brought him once more near his adopted sister whom he loved so devotedly,

His heart beat with rapture, but he did not dare to display his feelings of delight. M. Nadéief might misconstrue them and change his mind.

So the young man replied quietly, "I am quite at your disposal, sir. I will do all in my power to satisfy you and to carry out your wishes."

"That is well ; I like to be spoken to so. To-morrow at eight o'clock my coachman shall fetch you in a *troïka*. I shall not reach Irkoutsk for four or five days yet. You will therefore have time and opportunity to rest yourself and look about you before I arrive."





The Journey.

CHAPTER III.

A RETROSPECT—DAVIDOFF, THE POET—ARRIVAL AT IRKOUTSK—
THE EXILE IS SUMMONED HOME.

THE morning was fine, but cold. Autumn was advancing, but nevertheless the few trees which rose here and there still retained all their sombre foliage, unrelieved by any red or golden fruit. In Siberia the trees produce no fruit, not because there is any want of heat, but because the extreme cold of winter damages the roots and destroys the action of the sap. The cloudless sky that morning was clear as a blue lake across which flocks of wild geese seemed to be swimming.

In the midst of the monotonous plain, the road, scarcely marked

by the few vehicles which ever traversed it, extended until it was quite lost to view in the dim distance. The long line was only broken by the rapid *troïka* drawn by three horses of the small bony Siberian breed.

The carriage was proceeding all the more quickly as it carried only a solitary traveller whose light baggage consisted of a leather bag.

This traveller, as the reader has already anticipated was Yégor Séménoff.

He appeared altogether a different being since he had again been able to breathe freely the pure air and enjoy the sunlight and his liberty. He was perfectly transformed. He held himself more upright, his eyes had regained their former lustre. At that particular moment he was gazing into the dim grey mists which hung over the horizon. He was thinking of the past without much bitterness, and had no fears concerning the future.

The memories of his youth came crowding upon him in a merry company, and he smiled in the midst of the mournful and depressing scenes through which his road lay.

No longer an exile in Siberia, he was in spirit now back again in the old manor-house in which he had been born, and which he ought never to have quitted. He was again running with his sister under the beautiful trees in the park, or cantering with her on horsback through the open country. Oh, those happy, happy years! How tenderly he recalled them, and the balls and *fêtes*.

Once again his mind turned back to the illuminated saloons,

the well-lighted staircases, the numerous attendants, the terraces crowded with beautiful and fashionable women from all the neighbouring country-houses.

One day the festivities were prolonged later than usual. It was the occasion of the marriage of Yégor's sister to a captain in the merchant marine, and the wedding had been celebrated at the Séménoffs' country seat. Six months later Yégor himself, who had deeply lamented the departure of his sister, in his turn quitted the paternal mansion to pursue his studies at the University of Keiff.

There he found a second home in the family of the poet Davidoff, the professor of Slav Literature in the University. Yégor discovered a new sister in the poet's daughter the beautiful Nadège—an only child.

Thus the young man's memories and thoughts, soothed as he was by the gentle swaying of the carriage and the measured sound of the horses' feet, carried him once again to the interior of the well-remembered house—the hospitable mansion in which so much of his youthful time had been passed at the University, where he was always warmly welcomed. Every evening there was some meeting at which those present discussed literary topics, read poetry, or played some music from operas not yet published. Nadège on these occasions presided over the tea equipage, or took her place at the piano to sing one of the popular Russian songs, whose words and melody are so soothing, so melancholy, and so sweet.

One Sunday this house, lately so full of life and innocent enjoyment, was found silent and deserted. To those who came according to custom the answer was given that M. Davidoff and his daughter had gone upon a long journey. The truth was that the police had become uneasy concerning those meetings, and had taken umbrage at them. The old poet, suspected of belonging to the advanced liberal party, had been arrested early that morning and conveyed away to Siberia by the simplest administrative process. In consideration of his great age his daughter, whom he adored and from whom separation would have been death, was permitted to accompany him into exile. This unhappy event made Yégor very angry and very wretched. But the meetings were not interrupted by it. The student invited the poet's guests to his house, and the consequence was that three years afterwards Yégor was arrested in his turn, without any legal formalities whatever, and, uncondemned, transported, like Davidoff, to Siberia.

These latter reminiscences recalled to him the horrors of the night when he was roughly taken out of bed, thrown into a dungeon, and quickly carried away thence, driving for three long months in a *kibitka*, manacled, on the dreary road to exile.

At length his lot had become in a measure ameliorated in a sudden and unexpected manner. He had almost regained his liberty now in the employment of M. Nadéfief the *cessionnaire* of the mines.

“If I go I shall only find Davidoff and his daughter, even if alive—really interned at Irkoutsk!”

He could not divest himself of the idea that they might have died in consequence of ill-treatment and numerous privations. He had a great wish to see his old friends again, and had made up his mind to devote himself to them, to alleviate the hardships of their lot, and to carry them words of consolation and hope . . . But if they were no more——?

He adroitly questioned the driver of the carriage. "Have you ever heard people at Irkoutsk speak of a man named Davidoff?" he asked.

"I know none of your convicts either there or anywhere else," replied the *yemshik* surlily. He had no doubt been forbidden to give any information to his passenger.

So Yégor's attempt failed at once.

On the third day—after two nights had been passed in the *troïka* in which he had been compelled to remain—Yégor perceived the towers and cupolas of Irkoutsk, its white minarets and the green domes illuminated by the rays of the setting sun. He could not repress an exclamation of joy at the sight.

Situated upon the high bank of the Angara, whose waters sparkled in a thousand ripples, and gilded with a Byzantine gold-colour in the dying light of the sun, the capital of Eastern Siberia appeared to the fascinated eyes of the exile, the baseless effect of a splendid mirage. His ravished gaze dwelt upon the long line of crenelated walls and defences of the town, and rested upon the iron crosses which surmount the cupolas of the Greek churches, descending again upon the groups of white and black roofs,

while he wondered beneath which of them Davidoff had found a shelter.

The *troïka* crossed the Angara upon a wooden bridge, entered the town by a gate guarded by Cossacks, and then traversed a large open space surrounded by monuments, and in no way differing from the spaces in the other large towns in Russia.

Irkoutsk, which at present contains about 35,000 inhabitants, is the residence of a Governor-General, who exercises his authority over a country ten times more extensive than France. The importance of this town has lately been increased, in consequence of the acquisitions made by Russia upon the Amoor. Some of the merchants are enormously rich, and can compare with our Western millionaires. Their luxurious dwellings are furnished with every comfort and refinement of Parisian taste, including conservatories, to stock which tropical plants have been exported with great care and cost across Europe and the Siberian steppes. Nothing appears too dear to these extravagant people, who only appreciate the value of things by what they cost. More *pâtés de foie gras* and champagne are consumed at Irkoutsk, on the borders of civilization and savagedom, than are used in all the towns of France put together. "France produces wines, Siberia drinks them" is a local proverb.

Yégor Séménoff was perfectly astounded when he passed the bazaars in which Europe and Asia appeared to have poured all their most valuable products:—Silks from Lyons, cashmeres from Thibet, French china and Chinese porcelain, Parisian dolls and

Japanese games, English cutlery and Swiss musical-boxes, Russian *balalaikas* and Chinese gongs.

Mantchoo merchants in sky-blue robes, and waddled casaquins; their heads adorned with the little cap to which are attached the false plaits of hair which fall nearly to their feet, with enormous spectacles on their noses, were squatting behind chests of tea, their pointed fingers touching each other as they hung over the perfumed chafing-dishes. There were also Jews in greasy caftans and fur collars, their Astrakan head-dress pulled down upon their foreheads, their motionless faces adorned with pointed beards, but their quick eyes taking in everything. Nomad chiefs from Lake Baikal, and the steppes thereby, remained seated cross-legged before enormous bales of wool which had been exported on rafts down the Angara.

Around the bazaar were erected the stalls or booths of comedians, rope-dancers, and jugglers. While crossing the vast open space, which is 1,500 feet long, the *troïka* of the traveller passed many French vehicles and English "drags," drawn by four horses, with grooms behind in livery; *Drochkis*, *tarentasses*, *teleguas*, and *kibitkas*.

Quitting the "Place du Bazar," the traveller soon left the fashionable quarter, with its footpaths and macadamized roads, to plunge into narrow streets winding amid squalid houses, and intersected by open drains and deep ruts. In Russian towns, generally, all that borders upon civilization is of modern institution, and there is only a step between the palace and the wooden hut.

It was in the semi-darkness of the unwholesome and wretched alleys of the town that the unfortunate victims of Muscovite "clemency" existed, after they had been unearthed from the mines, where they had been dying by inches.

Now permitted to work for themselves, and thrown upon their own resources, the exiles had instituted certain petty industries to gain a precarious livelihood. Old general-officers had become cobblers and shoemakers; journalists had turned barbers; doctors of law were now small merchants, and dealers in sables and furs.

Yégor, while passing through this district of misery and misfortune, gazed eagerly into every open door and window, in the hope of seeing the graceful head and charming features of Nadège, crowned with her golden hair. But in vain. At length the *troïka* stopped in front of one of the last houses in the *faubourg*.

"Here we are," said the coachman. "This is the place my master told me to bring you to."

The man then assisted Yégor to alight, and to carry his valise into the little house. After this attention, the *yemschik* mounted into his perch again, and drove away.

Yégor had by this time recovered all his former energy, with the impressionability and sensitiveness common to all Slavs, he quickly passed from one extreme to another. Thus, a few days previously he had been quite overwhelmed and discouraged,—“dead-beat.” Now he was himself again, endowed with new vigour, and ready to fight to the death against destiny, if need were.

Without pausing even to glance at the domicile in which he had

been so unceremoniously deposited, Yégor went out into the street again immediately, and stopping the first person he met, enquired of him concerning Davidoff, and whether he was acquainted with any convict of that name.

“Davidoff? Let me see,” replied the person addressed, “Davidoff! The name seems familiar to me. Just enquire at the end of the street at the cabaret-keeper’s house. Issakoff has good reason for knowing everybody, for he is obliged to give credit to them all.”

“Thank you,” replied Yégor, as he parted from his informant. Davidoff was alive then!

The Jew Issakoff, when appealed to, gave the grateful information that Davidoff, the poet, and his daughter, lived in a small hamlet just outside the town.

“How long would it take a good walker to reach the place?” enquired Yégor.

“Twenty minutes,” replied the Jew.

But as night was coming on, Yégor begged the cabaret-keeper to find him a guide, for he was determined to see Davidoff and Nadège that evening.

“Ah! if you are carrying a pardon to the old man, you will be performing a good action. He has not long to live, poor fellow, and the news will do him good,” said Issakoff.

Yégor made several eager enquiries concerning the old poet’s condition, and the state of his health; but the inn-keeper only gave him monosyllabic replies which were exasperating.

One of the Jew's sons, who was a waiter at the inn, accompanied Yégor. At the gate of the city they were challenged by the sentries, and had to declare whither they were going.

The sky was brilliant with stars. Every one in the country thereabouts was already in bed. Behind the pedestrians the river meandered, winding along like a great silver snake on a line of molten metal. They reached the little hamlet, which consisted of but one street of small dilapidated wooden houses, some roofless, and presenting a very fantastic appearance in the semi-darkness. Here and there a light was visible through the sheets of oiled paper, which did duty for windows. Not a sound was audible, the whole hamlet seemed dead. One might have fancied oneself in the midst of a graveyard at the time the corpse candles were dancing on the tombstones.

The innkeeper's son at length pointed out to the Yégor an *isba* of more than ordinarily dilapidated appearance. At the same time he extended his hand to receive the gratuity, and having pocketed it, he returned to the town.

Yégor, with a fast-beating heart, and almost breathless with agitation, remained standing motionless before the door, afraid to announce his arrival.

At last he plucked up courage, and knocked gently with his stick.

The door was opened almost immediately.

Upon the threshold stood a young girl, clothed like a Siberian peasant; a small corsage supported by a pair of braces, crossed over

a white chemise with puffed sleeves; a gown of red serge completed her costume.

Yégor advanced and said——

“Nadège, do you not remember me?”

She recoiled in alarm, but the tones of the voice awakened an echo in her heart; she came forward again, and having examined the young man's features for an instant, uttered a cry of joy.

“Yégor,” she exclaimed; and fell into his arms.

Taking her up gently, Yégor supported her into the inner apartment of the *isba*, wherein was seated, upon a heavy chair, a pale, elderly man, with long white hair and beard, which he wore after the fashion of the country; a long caftan, trimmed and slashed with red, and yellow boots were all his outward clothing.

“Here is Yégor; Yégor Séménoff!” exclaimed Nadège, joyfully, as she led the young man into the room.

“Yes, father, I am here,” added Yégor, as he embraced the old man.

“You!” exclaimed Davidoff: “what has brought you here?”

Yégor hesitated a moment before he replied——

“I am an exile.”

“An exile, you too!” muttered the old poet, as if to himself.

“Ah, poor lad!”

Then Yégor told them how he had been arrested, and all the circumstances concerning his transportation to the mines of Nertchinsk, and how he had fortunately encountered M. Nadéief,

the contractor for the mines, who was in want of a secretary, and with whom he had taken service.

“Father, why do you not look at me,” said Yégor at last; for he perceived that the old man kept his eyes shut all his time.

“Look at you!” returned the old man; “I am blind, my son. But I can see you nevertheless,” he added, as he put his hand upon his heart.

Yégor made a gesture of compassion, but said nothing.

Then, after awhile, the conversation became more general, and they talked long about their far-distant country, and the sufferings they had passed through. Davidoff gave Yégor a description of the journey with Nadège in the sleigh, through the snow, without any repose for days and nights, in consequence of which and the privations he had undergone, the old man lost his sight.

Yégor remained with his old friends until the following day, and every day after he came to see them.

He found Nadège seated constantly at her spinning-wheel, just like a true Russian peasant, or occupied in preparations for their meal. A boy of thirteen, named Ladislas, son of a Polish exile, assisted Nadège in her domestic duties. Thanks to his sweetness of disposition and pleasant manners, this child was a great source of comfort to the exilés, and helped to soften the trials they endured.

M. Nadéief soon returned to Irkoutsk, and Yégor worked for several weeks under his orders. The great contractor appeared well pleased with his secretary. He granted Yégor as much liberty as

possible, and not a day passed without the young man visiting his old friend. Unfortunately, Davidoff's strength was rapidly waning, and they could perceive his life daily flickering more and more towards the inevitable end, like a lamp without oil.

One evening Yégor found Nadège and Ladislas weeping bitterly; the old man lay extended upon his pallet almost breathless. A few drops of brandy were administered, and these had some little effect; but the relief was only momentary. The pulse ceased to beat, the eyes closed, the lips became livid.

"Father!" cried Yégor, bending down towards him.

Davidoff turned his pallid face towards the speaker. He endeavoured to open his eyes, as if he could still see, and he murmured a few inarticulate words.

With Nadège's assistance, Yégor attempted to raise the old man, whose frame was already stiffening. His lips moved again: he had recognised the voice of Yégor speaking to Nadège, and telling Ladislas to go for a doctor.

"That will do, thank you," he murmured. "We have reached Kieff, have we not? Oh what a long journey it has been!"

He was delirious, and was soon addressing his old pupils, speaking of the future of Russia, and of the triumph of Liberty.

Yégor and Nadège stood hand in hand, weeping.

At length the doctor arrived. He was also an exile, like the others.

The dying man had again lost consciousness. It was a bad sign.

The doctor felt the patient's pulse, and listened for the beating of his heart. Then he whispered to Yégor—

“He will not survive the night.”

Towards eleven o'clock Davidoff regained consciousness again, and emerged from the stupor into which he had fallen. Yégor assisted him to rise, and gave him some cordial.

“Drink this, father,” he said: “it will do you good.”

The old man did as he was bidden, like a child. Then, after awhile, his hands were spread out over the coverlet, as if searching for something. His fingers encountered those of Yégor, which he seized quickly and retained in his feeble grasp. Then he said faintly—

“Nadège, your hand.” Then, having taken it, he put hers into Yégor's and said—

“Yégor, to you I confide Nadège. You will be as her father, her protector. Swear to me that you will never abandon her.”

“I swear,” replied Yégor, in a voice almost suffocated with tears.

“Will you marry her?” demanded the dying man.

“I will,” replied Yégor.

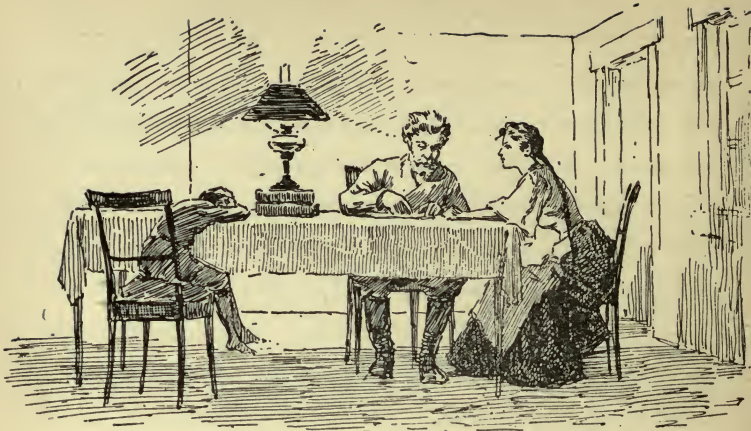
“Ah, my darling, your father can now die in peace.” He fell upon the pillow as he spoke, as if the last effort had been too much. It had snapped the cords of life.

Nadège uttered a piercing cry and threw herself upon the almost lifeless form of her father, to receive his last sigh, and his last kiss. She embraced him, calling upon him by every endearing epithet,

smiling through her tears, as if he could see her. But he passed away the next moment, though the expression of his features was as peaceful as if in sleep—only a tired sleep.

It was the repose of Death and the exile had “gone Home” at last!





They began to study the chances of escape.

CHAPTER IV.

PROJECTS OF ESCAPE—A NEW APPOINTMENT AND AN OLD
ACQUAINTANCE—A MEETING.

IT was only in her deep despair—in the void in which the death of her father had plunged her—that Nadège realized the value of the little Ladislas. The lad endeavoured to snatch her from her deep melancholy, and did all in his power to assist her in the thousand and one things which she found it necessary to do. The care which he in his turn required at her hands also, in a great measure, diverted her thoughts from her troubles.

Yégor Séménoff, thanks to the influence of M. Nadéief, was soon provided with a house in the little hamlet where Nadège and

Ladislas still lived ; and he occupied a hut opposite to that in which Davidoff had passed the last years of his life.

Every hour which was not demanded by his business or duty to his employer Yégor spent with his *fiancée*, who was assisted in many ways by the wives and daughters of other exiles in the vicinity. But he often thought with some anxiety concerning the promises he had made to the poet concerning his daughter, and for the following reasons :—

It is ordained no exiles in Siberia may marry without the permission of the Czar. Besides, if any children are born of these permitted marriages, they become serfs of the crown. If the condemned exiles even subsequently are pardoned by the state, and amnestied, the pardon is not extended to the children of such parents : they remain serfs still. The ukase of 1861 relative to the abolition of serfdom has in some degree modified this deplorable state of things. Nevertheless, Yégor thought that he could and ought to delay to carry out the promise made to Davidoff.

The prospect of the future alarmed him : not without reason.

“If you would prefer it,” he said, at last to Nadège, “we will postpone our marriage until we can be united upon a free soil.”

“I am quite willing,” she answered, blushing. “You speak as if you counted upon recovering your liberty.”

“Yes ; by flight. My liberty and yours.”

“You have only to command, I will obey,” replied the brave daughter of Davidoff, simply.

Then Yégor felt himself stronger. He confessed to his *fiancée*

that as soon as ever he had put his foot in Siberia, he had occupied himself with projects for escape. If he had thus, as a prisoner—and when death was hanging over him—rushed to free himself from the hateful toil, would he not be now much more anxious for her sake to escape and be worthy of her? He did not wish her to become the wife of a “convict.”

From that time Yégor began seriously to study the chances of escape which might present themselves to him. He skilfully questioned hunters and merchants whom he encountered in the tea-shops at the bazaar, selecting those men who came from the frontiers of China or Kamchatka, or from the Tchoukchts districts; for he had no idea of escaping towards the west or north-west.

The frontier, so to speak, touched the gates of the capital of the province. The town of Kiakhta was three or four days' journey by sledge in the winter; and there China was entered. But Yégor could not expose the delicate Nadège and the little Ladislas to all the perils included in the crossing of the desert of Gobi. To put himself into the hands of the Chinese would entail cruel persecution and final extradition. He made up his mind finally that it would be easier to endeavour to reach the Sea of Okhotsk—that is the Pacific Ocean—by following the shores of the Lake Baikal, cutting across the slopes of the Yablonoï and descending the river Lena as far as the *embouchure* of the Aldan; then to ascend this river to its source, and finally to cross the Stanovoï mountains. Once at Ouelskoï on the border of the Sea of Okhotsk they could

wait for some friendly vessel to carry them away, under the protection of the French, English, or American flag.

He got no farther than this plan of action ; but he would not retreat, either on his own account or on theirs, before the terrible difficulties which he had to encounter in crossing the immense plains, in avoiding habitable places, and in traversing routes where there were no marked roads.

In the evening when Ladislas was asleep, the young couple spoke in whispers concerning their projects ; and, passing them, of the future still more distant. Yégor pointed out to Nadège upon a small map which he had designed the proposed route, and explained to her what obstacles they most probably would have to overcome. Far from making any objection, she at once said,

“I am quite ready to follow you.”

But an unexpected incident occurred which threatened to upset all their arrangements.

One evening Nadège perceived her *fiancé* approaching with a very troubled expression on his face. “All is lost !” Yégor exclaimed as he entered the house.

“Have they discovered anything ? have they divined our plans ?” exclaimed Nadège.

“No ; but a most unfortunate event will nullify them all,” said Yégor as he threw himself upon the bench by the wall.

“Perhaps you exaggerate its importance,” ventured Nadège,

“You shall judge for yourself,” replied the young man. “The governor of Yakoutsk came here this morning on a visit to his col-

league of Eastern Siberia. He had occasion to speak to me in Nadéief's office,—what have I done to give him such an exalted idea of my capacity!" exclaimed Yégor bitterly. "After his departure M. Nadéief told me that the governor, struck by my intelligence and talents, had begged my employer to give me to him."

"What did M. Nadéief do?"

"He did not dare to refuse such a powerful personage, though he was very sorry, I can assure you, to lose the services of his secretary; but it is the memorial to the Czar that will suffer. They would not dream of asking my consent, as you may well imagine. So I am appointed to do a little work in the chancellor's office, pending my removal with my new proprietor."

"We must endeavour to gain time," said Nadège, "and speak to the authorities concerning our marriage, for which we are waiting."

"I have already done so in vain; and I was obliged to confine myself to beg the favour of their permitting you and Ladislas to accompany me."

"But what will the governor say? Could he not interfere in our behalf, and retain you near him since he has such a liking for you?"

"General K—— at once gave his assent for our departure!" replied Yégor.

This was a crushing blow which could not be avoided. The young people were obliged to request some friends to sell the house for them, as well as the furniture which could not be carried with them.



M. LAFLEUR HIMSELF, AS FRESH AS HIS NAME WOULD INDICATE.

A few days afterwards they began their journey in the suite of the governor of Yakoutsk. They took with them Wat, a splendid brown dog of Himalayan breed, which had been given to Yégor soon after his arrival in Irkoutsk. The party had to travel six hundred leagues in a rigorous season, partly in light carriages, partly in flat-bottom boats upon the Lena, which was already thinly coated with ice. Night set in at that time of year about three o'clock in the afternoon, and the journey was estimated to last a month.

At length, after many days, the governor and those whom he called his *protégés* reached Yakoutsk.

In this town in the extreme east, where Yégor never expected to recognize a face, the very first person he met was M. Lafleur—M. Lafleur, the dancing master, whose chest was always puffed out by the violin he had buttoned beneath his coat in his breast-pocket—M. Lafleur himself, as fresh as his name would indicate, ever smiling, always polite, and continually as lively as a dancing-master ought to be.

To see him there in his swallow-tailed coat—now out of fashion—with its yellow buttons, his white cravat, his thin legs in very tight pantaloons of a washed-out grey tint, his shining pumps, and his violin, one would have said that he was equal to giving lessons all over Siberia, and that is really very much what he did do.

In Yakoutsk he was quite at home. Some years previously he had brought his wife, a Parisian like himself, who was a milliner, to make hats for the ladies of Yakoutsk until consumption carried

her off. Since that time the workrooms had been under the intermittent care of the dancing-master.

M. Lafleur was a kind of universal genius as well as a cosmopolitan. He united the talent of a dancing-master to the taste of a milliner and *modiste*. He was capable of manufacturing champagne, which was sparkling and "beady" from the fresh sap of the birch tree; and added to these accomplishments a little business in furs, glass-ware, and tea. But his true vocation was to "beam" upon the natives, and to civilize them by the sound of his fiddle.

Now let us not rob M. Lafleur of his due. We must in fairness add that he was a herbalist and well acquainted with natural science. He had a good collection of plants, minerals, and fossils, which he proposed to offer to the town of Chateau-Thierry—"the cradle of his race," as he called it—where he had formerly passed his holidays, where he still hoped to finish his days in independence, the result of an accumulation of roubles amassed in foreign lands, and in the renown brought upon him by his collection, which he deemed unique of its kind.

"Eh!" he exclaimed, when he perceived Yégor, "so the pandemonium of the mine has not swallowed you up! It was only a purgatory for you, I see; and now you are entering paradise in the company of angels," he added, bowing politely to Nadège and tapping Ladislas playfully upon the cheek.

"How well you put things, M. Lafleur," said Yégor as he shook hands heartily with the volatile Frenchman.

The latter, with a warmth thoroughly French and with all the

old courtesy of the nation, immediately put himself at the disposal of the travellers. The cheerful Parisian appeared to be very happy in being able to render the young man's lot less irksome, for Yégor's open and honest face had entirely won his sympathy at their very first meeting. The daughter of the unhappy Davidoff also interested him greatly when he learned the circumstances which had led to her exile, and he took a great fancy to the little Polish lad on the spot.

"I am attached to the governor's official department," said Yégor, as he thanked him for his kindness. "I accept all your offers in the hope and expectation of being, in my turn, of some use to you."

"All right," quoth M. Lafleur, "so much the better. You have done well in coming here; I may flatter myself that I am already in the good graces of the general's wife, a tall thin woman, and we are very good friends, very good friends indeed. I make the most charming bonnets of the Parisian style; and I furnish champagne—of my own manufacture—for the parties to which the natives are invited. The only indispensable quality is it must be sparkling, and 'fizz'!"

"There are two young ladies here," he continued, "whose presence lends a charm to this inhospitable country: you shall see them. The elder Agraféna is a headstrong girl, of a hardy, healthy complexion, and somewhat masculine beauty; but the younger—I call her 'Miss' Eléna—pleases me more. She is a thorough little English girl of about eighteen; somewhat languid, and with

such an appetite! But very pretty too. Both of them rule the governor absolutely—despotically! But *apropos*—or rather *sans apropos*, since I am passing from a very pleasant to a very unpleasant subject—you remember the escaped thief who was re-captured at Oukboul?”

“Ye^e,” replied Yégor, “through him I first became acquainted with your goodness of heart. Well, what of him?”

“He managed to escape from the *gendarmes* who were conducting him to the fortress of Akatonia, and this time they did not succeed in catching him.”

“Poor devil,” exclaimed Yégor.

“Anything would be better than the fortress,” said M. Lafleur; “anything!”

Under the guidance of M. Lafleur, Yégor hired a small wooden house, the very last one in the town, on the bank of the Lena. It was the only one not surrounded by those lofty defensive palisades which rob the houses in that district of all appearance of sociability. The new secretary to the governor hastened to have some partitions put up, so as to make a kind of boudoir for Nadége and a smaller room for the Polish lad. The occupation of the house was quickly arranged. In Siberia beds are unknown quantities; people sleep upon rugs or skins, and cover themselves with other skins or rugs. The young housekeeper, bearing in mind the probability of his escape, dispensed with all furniture not absolutely necessary.

It was now the middle of November, and there were but three

hours of daylight and two of twilight in all the twenty-four. The certain prospect of total darkness during the months of December and January had also to be faced; giving one an anticipation of eternal night. The earth can then no longer be seen under its deep mantle of snow which overlies it for many months. So it proved.

Sometimes the storms would beat in upon the houses with great severity, and the snow would be driven underneath the roofs, or completely bury the wooden structures. On these occasions the wind would rise to a terrible violence and the thermometer fall as far as 40° (Cent.) Such were the wintry conditions of Yakoutsk.

One day M. Lafleur came to pay a visit to his new friends.

“Brou!” he exclaimed as he took off his fur pelissc; “fortunately there is no scarcity of wood in this dreadful country. Fancy the natives who are living under this snow as under so much wadding. How do you think they manage to exist? In this dark night which envelopes us, they hunt the sable, the reindeer, the foxes of all kinds, and bears to pay tribute to the Czar. In the summer they fish, in the winter they hunt!”

“Ah!” murmured Nadège, “when shall we see spring, I wonder?”

“Spring, mademoiselle,” said the dancing-master one day, “is more unpleasant and harder to endure than the winter. One can sink up to the chest in the soft ground then, and plough through the soil, which is like so much marmalade.”

The existence of Yégor in the society of the governor, notwith-

standing all drawbacks, would have been very supportable had the young man had no anxieties concerning the future, and had not all his plans of escape been frustrated and so much time wasted—precious moments never to return. He did his work, made sketches, and painted water-colour drawings in the general's album. played quadrilles for the young ladies, and backgammon or draughts with the general himself; got up charades, and organised dances to which the few available ladies were invited. All this for one hundred roubles a month.

M. Lafleur was, of course, included in all these little arrangements at the governor's house, where the dancing-master came out very strong indeed. He was quite in his element. Nothing could be more comical than to see him marking the time of the "Siberienne" by gentle manipulation of his violin, interrupted by the capers he cut and supplementing his instrument by his voice. Then he would adopt the attitudes of the old French school, which had descended to him somehow, and then as suddenly breaking off he would throw himself about and fling his thin shanks high as his head, like the extraordinary dancers at the Barrier Balls in Paris; and mingle these antics with the classic grace of the *divertissements* of the old *régime*.

At length Yégor, to his great joy, obtained permission to go out hunting or shooting with the general's guns. He had already purchased a double barrelled fowling-piece and a brace of revolvers, but these arms he kept carefully out of sight.

This hunting served him as an opportunity to study the neigh

bouring country. During the winter he made many excursions, accompanied on one or two occasions by Mademoiselle Agraféna, with an escort of Cossacks. At times he quitted the town in a sleigh, and remained away two or three days so as to accustom the governor to his prolonged absences.

Yégor was treated with much kindness by the governor and all his family. Nevertheless he never brought Nadège to the palace. He excused her on the plea of indisposition from any visiting.

Spring came, and early one morning Yégor had his sleigh brought out upon the melting snow. He drove with all the speed of his fine horses along the main western road, and in his course he passed another sleigh, in which sat a traveller enveloped in furs; but as he passed, Yégor fancied he recognized in him the man who wielded the whip in the mines of Oukboul, the corporal whom he had struck, and with whom he had exchanged defiant words.

Such a meeting was unaccountably strange and very startling. Yégor was, however, confirmed in his supposition by the start which the traveller experienced when they met. There was no room for doubt. This new comer was the Russian—Yermac.

That he had arrived Yégor was made aware that very day.

Yermac had been released from his vow of humility and expiation.

The Governor of Eastern Siberia, when he understood the reasons for the dismissal of the Ispravnik from Nertchinsk, and his engagement in the mines, made up his mind to endeavour to

persuade the honest official to change his determination. He made it his business to induce Yermac to reconsider his decision, and succeeded in overcoming his Quixotic scruples. Yermac at length yielded, but only on the condition of banishment. So General K—— gave him a letter of recommendation to the Governor of Yakoutsk, and facilitated his departure thither.

The day after meeting him upon the main road, Yégor saw the ex-convict guard enter the private apartment of the governor. In a few moments the secretary was summoned to his patron's presence also.

“Monsieur Séménoff,” said the governor, “this is our new superintendent of police, M. Yermac. You will place yourself at his disposal, so that he may make himself acquainted with his duties, &c. M. Yermac has served the state for many years, and indeed, needs little if any assistance in his employment.”

The general remarked the constrained air with which the two men regarded each other, their ironical smiles and strange glances.

“Perhaps you have met each other before?” said the governor.

“Your Excellency is not mistaken,” replied the new Chief of Police. “Monsieur appears very much surprised to see me here.”

“Yes, I confess I am; after meeting you in the convict guard at Oukboul,” said Yégor.

“Ah, I understand,” said the governor. “I see how it is.”

“But,” continued Yermac, “I beg ‘monsieur’ to believe that the Chief of the Police of Yakoutsk has left at the bottom of the mine the remembrance of the sometimes rigorous discipline which

he had to enforce upon the convicts under his care. And," he added, "I remember only one thing—the strict accomplishment of my duty."

"I congratulate you, monsieur," replied Yégor, "and I regret that the somewhat supercilious manner in which you announce it, prevents me from thanking you personally."

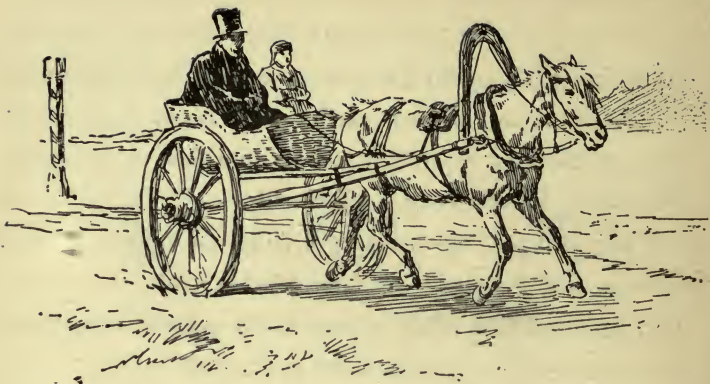
"Very well, gentlemen, that will do for the present," said the governor, who was afraid lest these speeches would end in ill-feeling; "you will have plenty of opportunity to renew your acquaintance under different and pleasanter conditions."

These words cut short an interview which had been devoid of all cordiality.

Yégor divined in the advent of the new chief of police an obstacle to his most cherished projects. "This Yermac," he thought, "cannot have forgotten the blow I gave him, and if he finds an opportunity he will surely revenge himself, and will do so under the cloak of 'duty.' He is an attentive observer, and will make an excellent police-officer. He will watch me closely. . . .!"

Some secret presentiment warned him to be on his guard with this man.





M. Lafleur aids Ladislas.

CHAPTER V.

PREPARATIONS FOR ESCAPE—THE FIRST EFFORT—AWAY!—PURSUED
BY YERMAC—A DESPERATE DEED.

SUMMER came round again: the Fair-season commenced, and the merchants of Irkoutsk brought in their commodities, while from the regions of the icy seas, from the shores of the sea of Okhotsk, and even from Kamchatka the fur-hunters came laden with the spoils of the chase, and the ivory-seekers brought to market the teeth and tusks of moose and mammoth.

Yégor Séménoff took advantage of the occasion to make certain purchases of provisions and clothing, which he deemed indispensable to the execution of his project.

But secretly as he made his preparations—for there was no open fair-field, but the merchants waited at the doors of their wooden houses and bargained with those who came to purchase—the inspector of police, who spied out every action of Yégor's with the evident intention of taking him at disadvantage, knew that the young secretary of the governor had secretly laid in considerable stores.

On the other hand the permission requested for the marriage had arrived from St. Petersburg and had passed through the police-bureau. The inspector could not understand why the young people did not immediately take advantage of the permission. What could be their reasons for delaying their union? Perhaps because they hoped to gain freedom by flight. The former *Ispravnik* of Nertchinsk knew quite well what repugnance the banished had to enter into matrimonial bonds, as the taint of banishment would always cling to their children. So his attentions to the secretary redoubled, and assumed the character of very close observation indeed.

Yégor did not hesitate to provide himself with every information that he thought might be useful to him in his first attempt at escape. He studied minutely all the maps he could procure: he questioned merchants and hunters: he even learnt some phrases and idioms of the natives in order to pass the more easily. Finally he arranged a plan to the following effect.

Furnished with a passport from the governor for himself and his *fiancée*, he would at the outset of his journey benefit by the

relays of horses established upon the right bank of the Lena as far as the place where the Aldan flows into the great Siberian River.

At Aldanska—the town situated at this meeting of the water—he would find the horses purchased by M. Lafleur and a Yakout guide posted there by the same gentleman, whose kindness was inexhaustible.

The Parisian, in his hatred of all tyranny, had placed himself entirely at Yégor's disposal. He had provided and sent forward one of the little country carts, which served to transport the purchases. Besides the tent, the provisions, and the winter clothing, he had brought away the young Polish lad, so that one or the other might again at any time leave the city for an indefinite period without exciting any observation or remark, at least they believed so!

M. Lafleur would accompany the fugitives as far as the Verk-hoyansk hills. This mountain-chain traversed, the runaways would be able to conceal themselves in one of the dense forests which cover the region lying beyond the hills, and there they would await the first snows of the season. They depended upon the winter to aid them in their flight, for the cold would harden the roads, freeze the rivers, and so make them passable, and would conceal them by its long hours of darkness. Only by means of a sleigh could they hope to make their way northwards towards Nijni Kolimsk, the last Russian town, situated at the spot where the Kolima pours its waters into the Polar Sea, not far from the place

where Nordenskiöld has reached and confirmed the existence of the North East passage.

According to Yégor Séménoff's calculations, he and his companions would be able to penetrate into the country of the Tchouktchas during the long wintry season and favoured by its gloom. Even if the various tribes of that inhospitable region did not prove as hospitable as he anticipated, Yégor was not going to flinch from the difficulties and trials of the situation. Nothing could be more terrible to him than the existence he was at present leading—the life of a convict: that he would escape at any hazard.

Once arrived in the country of the Tchouktchas he would be free. He would then have to find means to reach Behring's Sea by the return of summer and the season of open water, which would bring up the English and American whalers into those seas.

The daughter of Davidoff the poet looked upon Yégor as someone almost supernaturally endowed, and she ardently lavished upon him all the affection he merited, and encouraged him in every way calculated to stimulate the ardour which prompted him to risk his life for her sake, in order to release her from the stigma of the convict's daughter.

Nadège could never forget that Yégor, thanks to the favour, with which he was regarded by the governor, had considerably ameliorated and rendered supportable the conditions under which she lived; and that he had done all this in fulfilment of the sacred

promise made to her father—that it was chiefly for her sake he desired liberty.

This freedom Yégor had already caught sight of. But, looking at this enthralling prospect, what a terrible expiation would be theirs if he failed! What would not they suffer for non-success! Yégor, in his moments of doubt and weakness, recalled the image of the unhappy convict, so cruelly disfigured by sulphuric acid, whom he had seen when he reached the mines of Oukboul, the object of every sort of indignity. What a future might he himself be preparing for his poor Nadège and the young Pole, Ladislas. For himself, an ignominious death—for them, the prison; that is to say death, only a slower one, but not less sure!

But at length he made up his mind to hesitate no longer.

One evening in the beginning of September, when the season was pleasant and mild, Yégor and Nadège quitted Yakoutsk. Yégor had for some time previously spoken in the governor's family of a trip he wished to make along the right bank of the Lena—a journey which he said would occupy him two or three days in that unknown region. It was fortunate that the society of the elder daughter of the governor was not forced upon him on this occasion, for she had more than once been directed to accompany him in his expeditions.

The fugitives, as we may now designate them, had provided a boat wherewith to cross the Lena, which is studded with islands, and thus separated into many channels. One of the arms of the river is not less than a league in width.

Grave and serious at the commencement of their most perilous enterprise, they looked their last, as they hoped, upon the mournful capital, with its great deserted streets, its sad-looking houses, hidden behind the jealous palisades; the towers of the churches, and the convent and the bazaar dominating the miserable huts.

The night was clear and starlit. Not a sound came from the country in front of them. No shadow was cast behind them. After a while a light in the east came to them as significant of a future happier and brighter than the past—the dawn of an existence happy and free.

“Courage, Yégor,” whispered Nadège, pressing the young man’s hand.

“Ah, my dearest girl,” replied Yégor, smiling fondly upon her, “I am carrying you away, and you permit me to do so. Born far distant from each other, it seems that I have been fated to seek you amid the snows of Siberia, to carry you back again to the warmth of friendship, devotion, and love. Have you any regret in thus leaving the country?”

“Yes—but only one!”

“What is that?” exclaimed Yégor.

“Yonder tomb, scarcely closed. I am leaving that behind me.”

The girl’s eyes filled with tears at this reference to the resting-place of her beloved father. Yégor turned his head aside to conceal his own emotion.

A moment afterwards Nadège again spoke——

“You do really love me, Yégor?” she said. “It is not only a

generous obedience to the last wishes of my father that prompts you to this?"

"Oh," exclaimed Yégor, reproachfully. "Do I *really* love you? ask my life—my all: you shall then prove my sincerity and love!"

"Your life, Yégor! what would become of me in this land of exiles without you? No, *live* for me, if you love me. Be as free as you are good and true, and free me with yourself. I will then be doubly yours!"

Yégor folded her fondly in his arms

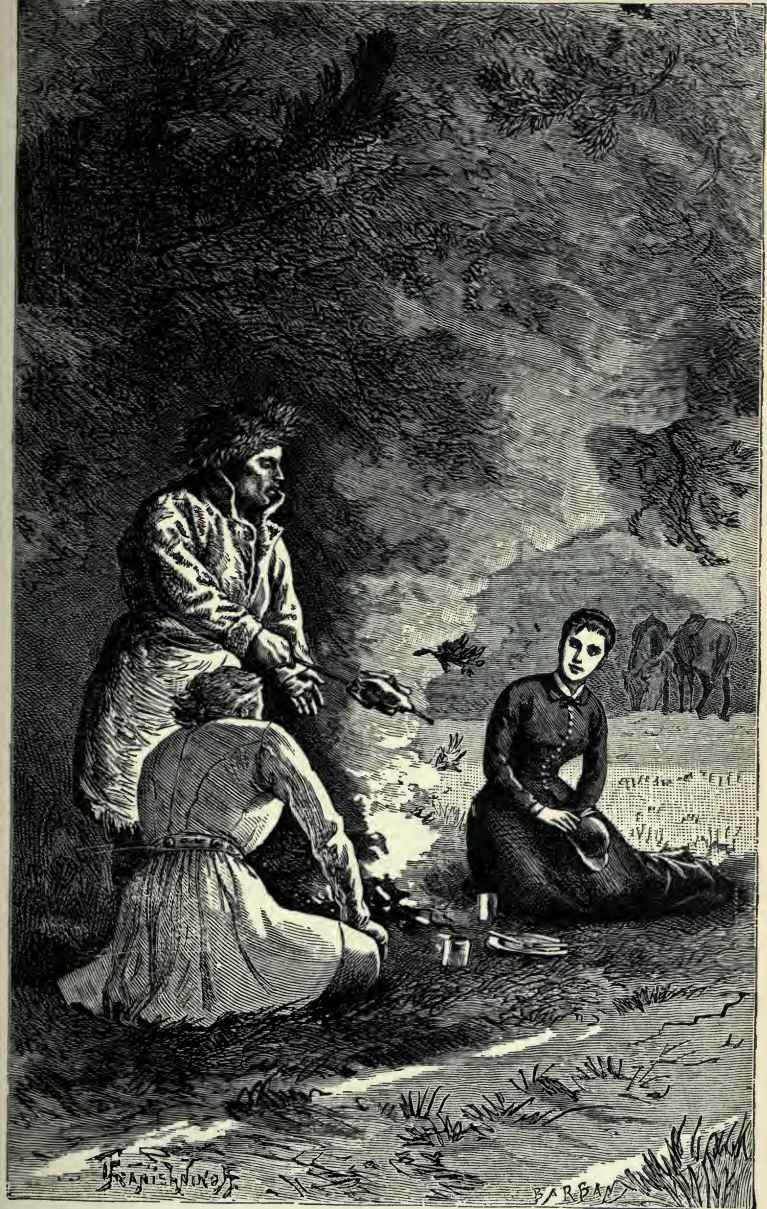
Half an hour later they disembarked up the right bank of the river. Thanks to his "pass" Yégor managed to obtain two horses (relays) held by the Yakouts.

The journey had now commenced in earnest.

Nadège was seated on horseback in a most bewitching costume. Modest as all well-bred girls are, she possessed all the vivacity and freedom of one who has travelled and observed.

Guided by a Yakout running before them, the young couple pursued the narrow path which turned in and out amongst the woods, or cut across plains studded with small lakes. The middle of the day found them close by one of these pools or tarns; and Yégor, who was armed with a fowling-piece, one "borrowed" from the governor, fired at some wild ducks which had risen, and killed three of the birds.

Upon this the cavalcade dismounted: the guide soon lighted a fire, trussed the wild ducks, and prepared the mid-day meal as well as circumstances would permit.



THE MID-DAY MEAL.



The day was chilly, and the travellers gladly clustered round the fire. The wild ducks, served up on some of the bread which Yégor had carried in his provision-sack, and sprinkled with *koumis* offered by the Yakout in exchange for a little brandy, were found excellent by all. The kettle was filled with water from the neighbouring tarn, and some tea was quickly prepared as an accompaniment.

“Ah, if we only had our dear Ladislas with us!” said Nadège.

“Who knows that he is not suffering from cold or hunger?”

“Do not worry yourself about him, dearest,” replied Yégor.

“M. Lafleur is a man of much resource, and, you may depend upon it, Ladislas will want for nothing. They have already passed by here,” added Yégor, indicating the recent tracks of wheels and the impression of hoofs on the damp ground, which proved that the brave Parisian and his young charge had preceded the fugitives.

Yégor had scarcely ceased to speak when his attention was caught by the appearance of a horseman riding along the winding path they had lately traversed.

Nadège shivered with apprehension.

“Yégor,” she whispered, “do you think we are pursued?”

Yégor, who had become very serious, continued to gaze in the direction of the cavalier’s approach.

“He may be a traveller, but certainly not a native: I can see that by the manner in which he rides. He is a European, probably a Russian.”

The Yakouts have keen eyes. The guide set himself carefully to examine the man who had attracted their attention, and he described minutely his dress and general appearance.

“If it is the inspector of police,” muttered Yégor sternly, grasping the barrels of his gun, “I will——”

“Is there any danger, Yégor?” cried Nadège, who was now alarmed. “Do you think there is any danger?”

“What danger could there be” replied the young man, bestowing a warning glance upon the girl while he turned his face away from the guide, so that the latter should not perceive his anxiety. “We are only going to Aldanska, are we not? Well then, we shall have only one additional traveller. The new comer has no guide: we can act as his conductors.”

“I know well, my friend, that it is incumbent on us to do so much; without us he might wander aimlessly; you know what frightful roads these are——”

“At intervals I fancied I heard the sound of horses’ feet behind us: now all is explained. In any event, Nadège, be assured who ever dares to do us an injury will pay dearly for the attempt.”

Nadège approached Yégor and whispered—

“Yégor, if we were to mount at once we could escape, could not we?”

“Impossible,” he replied in the same tone. “We must not make our guide an accomplice: we should compromise everything.”

“But at least you will not expose yourself to danger?”

“What do you mean, Nadège? Do you imagine that after I

have waited all these months, that on the very first day of our liberation I am going to submit to a summons to surrender? Do you know what awaits me—what await you—and your adopted brother, if we are convicted? It is question of life or death to resist or yield.”

“To defend yourself; but by what means, Yégor?”

“By any means—by all means,” he answered. Then, looking at the new-comer, he continued:—“Tis Yermac. Yes, it is indeed the police inspector: he is following us. I fancied he had forgotten. For a man of this stamp, death alone will bring forgetfulness.”

“Yégor, you frighten me,” murmured the girl. “I do not understand you; you are unlike yourself.”

“Ah, ’tis because I love you, and yonder man would try to separate us.”

“Yégor, my dearest, I beg of you——”

“I will do all in my power to be friendly, and do all I owe to honour and the feelings of humanity. Were I a vulgar criminal, I would submit to the police; but as I am perfectly innocent of any crime, and the victim of an odious persecution, I will resist. I have the right, and perhaps the strength to do so.”

The Yakout all this time was enjoying the wild ducks alone. He was consuming with good appetite the fragments that the travellers had left, and was taking them with copious libations of *koumis* and tea.

Yégor was right. The new-comer was the chief of the police,

and he had not struck the trail of the travellers by mere chance. For some time previously, on every occasion when the secretary of the governor left Yakoutsk for any journey, Yermac had caused him to be followed. This time the policeman's suspicions had taken a solid form, and he determined to follow the track in person.

When he had satisfied himself that the exile had quitted the town with his *fiancée*, preceded by the adopted child of Davidoff, and M. Lafleur—the incorrigible Lafleur,—Yermac arrived at the conclusion that the party did not intend to return any more. So he determined to give himself the satisfaction of arresting Yégor with his own hands as he was endeavouring to make his escape. He did not do this in revenge, he was not instigated by the recollection of the blow he had received. No, he was influenced by a higher feeling—a more noble motive : he considered himself as the instrument of the law ; that he was only obeying his orders, and doing his duty.

When he had come within about twenty paces of the place where Yégor had dismounted, the chief of police also got off his horse and tied the animal to a tree. He then advanced towards Yégor, who rose as he approached.

“So you are out for a ride, M. Séménoff,” said Yermac with a smile : not the smile of affection nor hypocrisy, but the smile of pride and satisfaction—of triumph.

“Yes, we are making a little ‘promenade,’ as you see,” answered Yégor.

“And here is a young and charming lady,” continued Yermac, turning to Nadège, “who fears neither bad roads nor unpleasant encounters on the way.”

Nadège bowed, and turned white and red alternately.

“We are proceeding to Aldanska,” said Yégor with affected *nonchalance*. “My *fiancée* and I are very glad to get some notion of this part of the country, which we have hitherto had only very vague ideas of by hearsay——”

“From merchants who came up to the fair at Yakoutsk,” retorted Yermac with a subtle meaning which did not escape Yégor. “I am also going to Aldanska,” he added.

“Really,” said Yégor, with ironical emphasis.

“My only trouble is that I have no other guide to the way but by following the right bank of the river,” said Yermac.

The chief of police was not escorted by the guide who had furnished him with his horse.

Yégor was determined that the man should not pass before him. He saw in him an irreconcilable enemy, and if he permitted him to get ahead, his own escape would be cut off. So he invited Yermac to make use of the guide, and remain in their company as far as Aldanska.

Yermac was somewhat surprised at this proposal, but he accepted it with every outward appearance of pleasure. He thanked the exile and said—

“Who would have fancied, when you and I were face to face in the bottom of the mine-shaft at Oukboul, that we should meet thus

one fine September morning by the marshes in the Yakout territory?"

"Do not mention the mine," said Yégor. "You recall to my mind—and greatly to my confusion I say it—some facts which I greatly regret, I honestly assure you, monsieur."

"Let us say no more about it," replied Yermac, drily.

He flushed as he spoke, and Yégor noticed that he had indicated no means whereby a reconciliation could be effected, nor had he said anything to lead up to such a hope.

"I thought that this road was not practicable for carriages," remarked Yermac, as he indicated the wheel-marks left by the little cart which M. Lafleur had provided. Yermac looked steadily at the exiles as he said this.

"Yes, I thought so too," replied Yégor, simply. "So they told me, at least, but now I see to the contrary. We are about to breakfast," he continued, "on the produce of our hunting, you see. We shot some ducks in yonder pond, and I am going to try for a few more, so that we may have something better than dry biscuit to depend upon."

"I will wait here for you," said Yermac.

"Do you not shoot? What kind of gun do you carry, then?"

The police-inspector fancied he perceived dimly some after-thought underlying Yégor's question and his invitation. But he disdained to feel afraid and replied boldly—

"Well, after all, why should I not take part in your sport? I'm your man!"

Yégor then gave the guide orders to proceed, and requested Nadège to mount her horse. With a gesture he sent his dog Wab after the latter, while the guide, singing to himself some improvised song, walked on, holding the bridle of Yégor's steed as well as that of Yermac's horse.

Nadège, ere she turned away, threw Yégor a glance suppliant and persuasive. Yégor understood all its generous signification.

The sportsmen, with mutual distrust—a distrust lately conceived in the heart of the exile—began their shooting along the margin of the lake, the banks of which were thickly clothed with a number of dwarf cedars. Nadège heard several shots, and she perceived some large birds fall to the earth. But this only partly reassured her, and if she could only have seen the haggard eyes, dry lips and clenched hands of her *fiancé* she would scarcely have doubted his violent intentions. Yégor, quite upset and desperate, did not hesitate in his criminal intent and action. He loaded his fowling-piece with ball, and at the moment that Yermac was taking aim at a waterfowl which had risen from the sedges, Yégor presented his piece and fired.

The chief of the police heard the leaden messenger whistle past his ear. Not the little pellets of shot, but a bullet, which broke the peak of his cap. He had no longer any doubt of the intentions of the convict, and he himself was tempted to reply in kind; but that would be to engage in a duel. The scrupulous and rigid functionary put aside this idea as a weakness and the result of fear. He had no desire to kill his adversary, no matter how

criminal he might be: his duty forbade that except in the last extremity. It was living, with his hands tied behind his back, that Yermac intended to carry back his prisoner to the seat of government.

Nevertheless, he was not hero enough to await a second shot which Yégor intended for him: he fell prone amid the brushwood just as the discharge of Yégor's second barrel came down to him. As soon as he had dropped out of sight, Yermac slung his gun over his shoulder and crept away on hands and knees, gliding silently amid the cedar-trunks. So he put himself entirely out of range.

Yégor meantime, having reloaded his gun, advanced very cautiously, his finger on the trigger, towards the spot at which the chief of the police had disappeared. Yégor feared a trap, a surprise, a sudden attack; but he found nothing at the place he had expected to find Yermac. He beat about the spot, proceeding always with the greatest caution, and ended by losing his bearings, and the exact places which he and his enemy had respectively occupied when he had assailed the too zealous agent of the police.

At length Yégor found himself upon the track which led him across country. His face was livid, his eyes were staring, and his limbs shook under him.

"Perhaps I have killed him," he muttered; "or wounded him, which in this place would be much the same thing without any help at hand. It is his own fault!"

He then hurried on to rejoin Nadège, and soon recognised the sound made by the horse's feet over a stony piece of ground. Ten

minutes later Nadège saw him approaching alone and looking greatly discomposed. She experienced a sudden faintness, and glided from her saddle into Yégor's arms.

"Ah, what have you done?" she murmured, when she again opened her eyes. She then gently pushed Yégor from her.

"It was for your sake," he answered. "For you and your adopted brother. Two lives! If it had been only for my own life, I might have hesitated. Yes, I swear it!"

"What must we do now?" asked Nadège, after a pause equally irksome to both parties.

"We must first mount our horses," said Yégor.

So saying he assisted his companion into the saddle; and then, detaching a brace of partridges and a water-hen from his girdle, he called to the guide, who was already in advance.

"Here is something to eat. Now, *en route!*"

"But what about this horse?" inquired the Yakout, indicating the animal lately ridden by the chief of the police.

"That horse—let him go; he will not stray far, and his master will soon rejoin us. Now, march."

The party then proceeded. The guide resumed his singing, which had been interrupted by Yégor's summons; and Yermac's horse, left behind, after having sniffed the air two or three times, began to neigh loudly.

"Poor beast!" Yégor could not help ejaculating, when he heard the sound.

"Poor man—and unhappy Yégor!" murmured his companion.



A Welcome!

CHAPTER VI.

THE FLIGHT CONTINUED—M. LAFLEUR—A TERRIBLE JOURNEY IN PROSPECT—“HE IS DEAD!”

“WHERE is the next relay?” asked Yégor of the guide.

“At Miouré,” replied the man. “But we find shelter for the night before we get so far.”

“Good!” was Yégor’s answer: and the party proceeded.

The path became less and less distinct. The travellers were obliged to skirt numerous little lakes whose rocky sides were bristling with larch trees. From time to time Yégor held his ear to the ground, to assure himself that they were not being pursued by the chief of the police. Nadège feared Yermac no longer,

believing he was dead ; but that sad incident of their flight made her fear a thousand dangers in anticipation.

“Are we far from Aldanska ?” she inquired hour after hour, and generally received the same reply—

“Courage, dearest, courage ; we are progressing. The guide assures me that we shall see the Aldan to-morrow.”

The fugitives passed the night in a hut pointed out by the guide ; and while Yégor and Nadège slept soundly, enveloped in their travelling rugs, the Yakout lighted a fire in the midst of this curious abode of the nomad tribes—called a *yourte*.

A *yourte* is a hut, something like a truncated pyramid in shape, and consists of a light framework covered with dried rushes and grass. In that particular specimen occupied by our travellers, two small openings which served as windows were “glazed” by a transparent material made from the swimming bladders of fishes. The floor of the hut was three feet below the outside level of the ground. Some large seats were erected in the interior, and these served as sleeping places. The proprietors of the *yourte* had no doubt abandoned it temporarily for their tent, or *ourouse*, which they inhabited during the summer months.

At daylight our travellers proceeded for Miouré, which is a “basin” some square leagues in extent, the bed of an old dried-up lake, with fine pastures, in which, however, are numerous poisonous tarns or ponds. Here there is a large village of *yourtes* dominated by two church-towers. In this place there was considerable animation, and a movement which contrasted vividly

with the silence of the solitudes hitherto pursued by the fugitives.

Large troops of horses trotted about the village streets, for the inhabitants employed themselves in rearing cattle and in trafficking for hides. It is at Miouré that relays are kept.

Here the fugitives found fresh horses and a new guide. Then they had prepared a soup composed of fish, milk, grease, some flour, and a considerable amount of the rasped birch-bark; and having done much honour to this purely local form of sustenance, the travellers continued their journey. Yégor was in a great hurry to reach Aldanska, for there he would not only find M. Lafleur and the Polish lad, but he would be able to regain some of the confidence so necessary for his expedition, and which had already become shaken.

The roads continued bad, and they were often obliged to make detours to avoid dangerous marshes. At length they arrived at Aldanska, and perceived, at the very confines of the town, the little cart of M. Lafleur. The young Ladislas was guarding it, and ran towards them joyfully as soon as he perceived them.

And M. Lafleur?" enquired Nadège, anxiously, when she had embraced Ladislas affectionately. "Where is he?"

"Don't you hear him?" said the lad.

From a neighbouring *yourté* the notes of a violin were heard in joyous strains, accompanying the movements of some half-dozen young people of the district, girls and boys. M. Lafleur was not long before he appeared upon the door-step, continuing to play

his violin. Between two movements he managed to clasp Yégor warmly by the hand, and to kiss the fingers of Nadège with all the courtesy of the Regency, ere he resumed his occupation.

But the party whose happiness he had secured, did not intend to let him escape so easily.

“We are pursued,” whispered Yégor to the Frenchman. “We have not an instant to lose.”

The young people had come out from the *yourte*, attracted by the new arrivals. Nadège, in her riding habit, excited considerable curiosity and attention; and Yégor took this opportunity to tell M. Lafleur how he had been compelled to act so cruelly towards the chief of the police, in order to get rid of him.

“But,” he added, “Yermac may be followed by some Cossacks; and the moment our flight is suspected, we shall be in the greatest danger.”

“You are right,” replied M. Lafleur, “We must proceed with all haste.”

“Monsieur Lafleur,” said Yégor, “your devotion to us has indeed been put to the test sufficiently. Leave us here. Let us rather proceed alone; and, whatever may happen, believe that I will never forget your kindness while I live.”

“No, no,” replied the Frenchman. “I do not intend to relinquish your society until we have crossed the mountains of Verkho-Yansk. Besides, I intend to utilize my opportunities, to enrich my herb collection; the collection which I design to offer to my native place—Château-Thierry. So I tell you that.”

Nadège here joined Yégor, but they could not by any means persuade the dancing-master to alter his determination.

Almost immediately after this the Yakout whom M. Lafleur had agreed to meet at Aldanska was presented by him to Yégor. This man's name was Tékél, and he was prepared to accompany the fugitives as long as they had need for his services. He was a man of about thirty years of age, small, but strongly made, and his features indicated "sharpness" and good nature.

It was he who, when the fugitives were concealed in the great Bouroukan forest which is entered after the mountains of Verkho-Yansk have been crossed, went on foot as far as Zachiversk, a small town situated upon the right bank of the Indiguirka, four hundred kilemètres from the forest, and, as soon as the frost set in, brought back a sleigh (or *narta*) with a strong team of reindeer attached.

M. Lafleur had taken the precaution, as soon as he arrived in Aldanska, to purchase a horse for Yégor, and another of smaller size for Nadège, as well as a horse to draw the *carriole* which Tékél would have to drive and in which Ladislas would have to be conveyed. This animal, at present employed as a draught-horse, would eventually become the property of the Yakout. The horses of the relay were then sent back with the guide, who was liberally rewarded.

After an hour's rest, the little cavalcade again set forth. In his minute calculations concerning the journey, Yégor had counted upon the hard frosts of September, which alone would harden the



Crossing the Aldan

saturated ground. Fifteen days sooner some almost impassable obstacles would have presented themselves to the travellers.

The country was decidedly undulating for a very considerable distance. Large trees, amongst which the larch was prominent, covered the hills. The valleys were full of rank vegetation in consequence of the flood-water. Towards the north the fugitives caught sight of a chain of peaked summits covered with snow.

In order to cross the Aldan it was necessary to procure a flat-bottomed boat and to have recourse to the assistance of the natives, for the river was at least fifteen hundred metres in breadth just there. Once across the water the travellers arranged their tent for the first time. It was square-shaped, and made of reindeer skin, and of the kind called in the country a *pologne*. M. Lafleur had purchased it in Aldanska. It could be easily carried rolled up, in the *carriole* at first, or subsequently on a sleigh.

Provisions were carried in sacks, a repast was quickly improvised; but, though everything was pleasant, there was very little gaiety indulged in, notwithstanding all the efforts of M. Lafleur to amuse his associates. The horses were at first fastened to some trees by their halters, with their heads tightly tied up to prevent them cropping the frozen herbage. Subsequently they were set at liberty, and wandered into the neighbouring prairie.

Yégor and Nadège had good reason to be thoughtful.

The chief of the police, as we have already seen, had managed to obtain from Yégor the information that Aldanska was the first halting-place which the fugitives aimed at in their flight from

Siberia. On the other hand, the broken peak of the cap, furnished sufficient evidence of criminal intent. Now why had the secretary of the governor sought the life of the police official if the presence of the latter had not been a bar to the projects of the former? The discharge of the gun by the convict was sufficient to lead up to his arrest.

As soon as Yermac was able to leave the place where he had concealed himself, he set about to find his horse, which he had heard whinnying frequently, and judged that the animal had been abandoned. At length he perceived the steed wandering aimlessly about, sometimes approaching, sometimes cantering away again under the influence of terror.

Yermac attempted to reclaim his horse, but his strength failed him. When he had quitted Yakoutsck he had carried with him only such light provisions as could be found in the saddle-pockets. So he was hungry, and it was absolutely necessary to recapture the horse.

Fortunately the animal recognized his master after a while, and trotted towards him. But more than three hours had elapsed, and the fugitives had gained a long start of him. Nevertheless, the chief of police determined to pursue them still. Once arrived at Aldanska he could, he thought, procure a messenger to acquaint the governor of the escape of the transported ones, and to demand an escort of Cossacks.

Let us now return to the fugitives themselves, and to the brave man who was assisting them in their flight.

After some hours' rest, the travellers again proceeded. There were only swamps in front of them; grass became rarer, and the hillocks got fewer and fewer. Clouds came up over the sky, and some snow began to fall—the first snow of the autumn—while the thermometer fell below freezing point. Next time the tent was pitched they found a fire necessary. They passed many water-courses, of which the most rapid was the Toukoulane. From the distant gullies of the Verkho-Yansk hills, the roar of a torrent was plainly audible.

Next day they crossed the river by fording—an operation which caused them considerable fatigue: the banks of the torrent were encumbered with trunks of trees and enormous blocks of stone, which had been carried down from the neighbouring hills. At length, when they had traversed the marshes, they approached the Verkho-Yansk—and safety!

As they continued to advance, the woods which had been scattered here and there upon the face of the country became closer and thicker; enormous trees interlaced overhead; the dry earth nourished dwarf cedars, which mingled with the brushwood and the pines. In these thickets grouse abounded, so M. Lafleur and Ladislas—who was an excellent shot—bagged many a brace.

At length the passage of the formidable mountain-chain had to be looked boldly in the face. The wind blew strongly and whistled dismally that day, greatly increasing the difficulties of the situation.

The *carriole* continued its course with difficulty amid the many

obstacles of the route, embarrassed by the fallen rocks and other interferences in the narrow path. The ascents upon these rough slopes presented real peril. The fugitives had to work round enormous masses of rock of black schist, which overhung for many feet, and to cling tightly on precipitous paths, over deep abysses. Sometimes they struggled up a slippery *couloir* beaten and buffeted by the angry wind.

When they had emerged from this corridor of stone, M. Lafleur advised Yégor to put up the *carriole* in a small cleft in the rocks, and gave Nadège and Ladislas an opportunity to repose for a time, so as to continue the journey with unimpaired strength. This suggestion was adopted, and the party halted. The horses were tied to the trees.

While the young lady and her adopted brother were taking out some provisions from the sacks, Yégor, M. Lafleur and Tékél the Yakout, ascended the mountain to obtain a better view; and as they proceeded the loose stones came rolling down behind them. They at length reached a narrow rocky platform, over which the wind swept in hissing gusts. Behind them the mountains rose menacingly; heavy clouds raced over-head; and the roar of a mountain torrent was at intervals borne towards them by the wind.

From this commanding position they perceived, as if a curtain had been raised, the imposing chain of mountains in all its grandeur. Far as the eye could reach, the hills trended away to the polar sea, into the midst of vast solitudes. They appeared like the enormous waves of a stormy ocean suddenly congealed—

a *mer de glace*—to which the quivering eye imparted movement.

The appearance of these masses of snow and ice, and the dark trees, made a sublime picture. The jagged peaks powdered with snow, the crystal glaciers embedded in the slopes, the sombre defiles, scarped by lightning, the scene of many a fierce thunder-storm; the precipitous rocks of inaccessible height—all these made the heart quiver, and froze the senses while troubling the soul.

Under the black sky could be perceived an infinity of parallel and cross chains of mountains, with rare plateaux and long ramifications of desolate valleys cutting narrow gorges, deep unfathomable ravines whence issued bluish vapour—the foam of cascades, amid towering peaks, immense “bosses” and piled up rocks.

The place was lugubrious, desolate, mournful—more than mournful—sinister; and appeared suited for the accomplishment of a crime.

Suddenly from his post of observation the Yakout perceived, upon the southern slope which the travellers had ascended, a man on horseback, who was advancing with difficulty, and doggedly struggling against the wind which came rushing furiously from the ravine. The native signed to the two Europeans.

“Eh! my goodness!” exclaimed M. Lafleur. “It is the chief of police!”

“So much the better,” murmured Yégor, from whose heart an immense load seemed to have been suddenly lifted.

“You say. ‘So much the better.’ That is very charitable of

you. But he is advancing straight towards Mademoiselle Davidoff," said M. Lafleur. "Perhaps he has already perceived her. Now, what can the man want?"

"Alas!" murmured Yégor, "the unhappy man is not touched by our misfortunes. He has no pity for our misery. He demands my life and the lives of those poor young creatures whom I have rescued from infamy and oppression."

As they thus observed him, the chief of the police found it necessary to dismount and lead his horse, the wind being so strong against him.

"What do you think of doing, my poor friend?" said M. Lafleur to Yégor.

"What would you do in my place?" replied the latter, who was a prey to the keenest anxiety.

M. Lafleur wore the air of a man who was making up his mind to some great event.

"*Ma foi,*" said he, in an easy way, "I would not make two bites at a cherry. I would say, since this man is so blindly obstinate, and desires my death—since one or the other of us *must* perish—well, then, let him be the one!"

"But think what I suffered when I thought I had killed him," murmured Yégor.

"All the more reason; he owes you something!"

While he was speaking, the dancing-master made a sign to Tékél, and indicated an immense block of rock almost suspended upon the edge of the platform. A strong push would suffice to

detach it and send it plunging into the ravine below. The Yakout understood immediately that he was to get rid of an enemy. The man and the horse were just passing underneath the place threatened by the fall of the rock.

“Oh, you will never do such a thing!” cried Yégor, who at once divined the Frenchman’s intention.

“I certainly will not do it—if I am not strong enough. But I will do it, if you and Tékél will join forces with me,” said M. Lafleur, calmly. “You will not fail me, Yégor?”

“Ah! to what extremity would you reduce me?” exclaimed the young man.

“Do you prefer the knout?” suggested M. Lafleur.

Already he had begun to use the long stick he carried, as a lever to loosen the rock.

The Yakout, on his part, was all the while extended over the precipice, endeavouring to remove the smaller pieces which sustained the great block in its position.

“Come along, Yégor: try a *coup de main*,” said the Parisian. “I will take all the blame on myself. It is absolutely necessary for you and for Nadège: for Nadège, my friend.”

“It is he who wishes it,” muttered Yégor, as he seized the bâton to displace the rock.

Between them, the three men managed to loosen the stone, and get it into such a position that a slight push would launch it over the precipice.

Yermac had been advancing without seeing his enemies, who

were right above him and hidden by the great rock and the brush-wood which clothed the edge of the platform.

The dancing-master kept attentively observing the advance of the man underneath, whom he had devoted to death. He pointed the rock as an artilleryman might lay a gun. The Yakout guide merely awaited the word of command.

“One, two ; let it go !” cried the Frenchman.

“Oh, Heaven forgive me !” muttered Yégor.

“*Vive la liberté !*” exclaimed M. Lafleur, loudly.

The immense mass tottered and fell ; accelerating its pace as it descended, tearing the almost perpendicular sides of the ravine, and detaching two great pines which it encountered in its headlong course. From rock to rock the mass rebounded, scattering the fragments in all directions, until it struck the ground with a “thud” which resounded amid the rocks like the discharge of a cannon.

The three men, giddy for a moment in front of the opening which they had made, recoiled terrified ; and covered their faces with their hands.

Already the echoes had leaped from side to side of the cliffs like the rolling of thunder, till they died away in the distant recesses of the hills.

The Yakout was the first to regain his presence of mind, and to advance to gaze down into the defile. *Débris* covered the earth in all directions, and lay upon the snow which had fallen the previous day. The grey horse was dead—stretched upon the

ground—crushed to death. The rider—what had become of him? Had he hidden amid the pines, or had he been crushed beneath the mass of rock? . . . He had disappeared!

As they gazed Nadège was heard calling for assistance.

“Mademoiselle Davidoff!” exclaimed Yégor, pale and trembling.

“The poor girl is alarmed,” said M. Lafleur. “She thinks we have met with some accident. Go and reassure her. Now the success of your enterprise is certain, I must leave you as soon as you have passed these defiles, unless this affair—this murder—! *Eh bien*—yet here I am at present in my dress as an honest merchant and dancing-master. But my Yakout dressmakers, my champagne! my glass-ware! and my collections for the museum of Château-Thierry!—what will become of them?”

“I will make it all good, my dear M. Lafleur,” said Yégor, rousing himself from his despondency.

“Don’t you worry yourself about such trifles,” replied the Frenchman. “What does it all matter as long as you are saved! Look here: I will follow you everywhere. I would rather; indeed it would be much more pleasant to return to the Faubourg Saint-Antoine by Kamtschatka on the North Pole. Ah, it is man who plays the violin, but Providence arranges the dance!”

“You really overwhelm me——” began Yégor.

“*Vive la liberté!*” exclaimed M. Lafleur. Then he added more soberly, “Let us go at once, and calm the fears of your charming *fiancée*. We shall have less trouble in descending hither. Come along!”



“Under a sky studded with countless stars.”

CHAPTER VII.

THE CAMP—M. LAFLEUR MEETS WITH AN ADVENTURE.

NIGHT came upon the travellers, and with it profound silence. Not a sound broke the stillness; not even the creaking of the trees nor the cracking of a branch. The mysterious whispers of the leaves—the confidences of the trees to the night-wind—were unheard. Yégor frequently lay flat upon the ground and applied his ear to the earth, but no vibration conveyed notice to his listening mind that any living creature was approaching.

In the rough, winding, and rocky gorge, overhung by trees of

great size and thickness, the darkness was profound. Yégor lighted the dull little lantern he had, and attached it to the collar of his dog. It appeared as if the animal was quite aware of the trust reposed in him, for he proceeded with great caution, and with ears erect turned every now and then to assure himself that his master was following him.

Ladislav was asleep in the cart. Nadège walked beside it, and M. Lafleur, plunged in a sea of melancholy thoughts, brought up the rear holding his violin affectionately to his side as if to keep it warm. Ah! poor M. Lafleur! No more dancing for him. He who preferred a quiet peaceful life undisturbed by strong emotions, he who had saved up some thousands of roubles wherewith to retire as soon as possible to the cultivation of his cabbages at Château-Theirry, was compelled to fly like a criminal or an assassin, tracing out the roads, if roads they could be called, in the middle of the night, and pursued by the *gendarmérie*.

Assassin! He was asking himself if he were not one!

Had he not been Yégor's accomplice? In his impulsive generosity had he not espoused the cause of the fugitives? Had he not suggested to Yégor the advisability of throwing the rock down upon Yermac? M. Lafleur said to himself that he had not been quite conscious of the act. The strangeness of the situation, the necessity for action caused by his interest in the fugitives—for he would rather have died than by a passive attitude have endangered the safety of his friends,—all carried him away. These had been the motives which prompted him to act, as it were, unconsciously,

and to cause him to become the champion and defender of a criminal act.

All kinds of incoherent thoughts were rushing through M. Lafleur's mind. Sometimes he would stop with the idea of returning and assisting Yermac. Perhaps the police-officer was still breathing. But the Frenchman would put himself within the grasp of the law, were he to accept the responsibility of the crime. No, such a course was out of the question. So, doubling his pace, he overtook his companions again, panting, and they would inquire where he had been, or at last, "Have you heard any noise?"

"No, nothing," he answered. "I fancied I heard a voice!"

The voice was Conscience reproaching him for his conduct.

After a long and fatiguing march, the fugitives, to their intense satisfaction, emerged from the defile. The moon's rays filtered through the thickly interlaced branches of the trees, changing the dark trunks into silver stems, and transforming into velvet piles the thick mosses which grew upon the pines and larch trees.

Leaving the sleeping valley behind them, they crossed the *col* under a sky studded with countless stars, a sky which somewhat justifies the Muscovite boast that Siberia is the Italy of Russia.

The massive peaks of the Verkhoyanian chain lifted their stone pinnacles right and left; the newly fallen snow covering the ground like an ermine cloak.

At daylight the fugitives reached a plateau, beautifully wooded,

which offered every advantage for a prolonged stay. This was the forest of Boroukan.

Dominating a ravine, at the bottom of which runs a torrent, the plateau is protected north and south by the mountain chains; the thick forest which covers the plain extends some six kilomètres, and thus forms the centre of an impregnable fortress.

Yégor, who had taken advantage of a short halt to explore the place, and to study the position from the double points of view of flight and defence, called a council, and gave it as his own opinion that the place was well adapted for wintering in.

That the winter was approaching was evident from signs all about them; and, while they camped in the forest, Tékél, the Yakout, would proceed to Zachiversk to procure two reindeer sleighs, for two were required now. M. Lafleur was of the party. These sleighs were indispensable for the continuation of the journey during the winter, when the marshes and streams would be frozen over and covered with snow.

Tékél was to bring with him a second conductor for the sleighs, and they would at once proceed by the Tchoukthas' country—a territory nominally subject to Russia—whence, in the spring, the Gulf of Anadyr might be reached.

M. Lafleur made no objections. He did not altogether abandon the hope that he might some day return to Yakoutsk. For, if Yermac were dead, no disagreeable consequences would arise. There was no witness of the drama that had been acted in the defile



of Verkho-Yansk, except Tékél; and the Yakout guide was devoted to the Frenchman.

The trees of the forest were found to grow so closely that the little cart could not pass through, so they could not but abandon the vehicle. Yégor therefore dismounted, unharnessed the horse, and the provisions and baggage were transported to the chosen spot for the encampment. The animals were laden with the rugs and the tents, and then led with much difficulty into the forest, where, round a small clear space, the larches and pines formed a formidable barrier.

When the fugitives believed themselves in safety, the conviction was forced upon them that they had not eaten anything since the day before, for they had marched all the night. They all felt very exhausted, but the Yakout cut down some branches and lighted a fire, whereupon a solid meal was prepared from the provisions which M. Lafleur had brought with him in the cart. After the meal was finished, no time was lost by Yégor in commencing to build a hut for Nadège; little Ladislas helped, and soon a dwelling, consolidated with turf and mud, was erected after the fashion of the Yakout *yourtes*. M. Lafleur, always polite, spread a number of wild-beast skins upon the ground to serve as beds for Nadège and Ladislas. Then Yégor and M. Lafleur built a hut for common use under a colossal larch-tree which spread its protecting arms over the house.

Next morning at daybreak Yégor gave the Yakout his instructions and a small roll of paper roubles which he had held jealously in reserve.

Tékel set out for Zachiversk, carrying with him all the hopes of the fugitives. On his return depended the success of the expedition and escape which had presented so many difficulties.

Yégor himself accompanied the native to the banks of the torrent which flowed at the bottom of the valley. He cut a place in the brushwood with his hatchet, which he always carried as well as his gun and revolvers.

“By this sign,” he said to the Yakout, “we shall be able to find the place again. In a fortnight the torrent will be frozen. If you call we will answer you.”

“In fifteen days I will be here,” replied Tékel, simply. Then, crossing the torrent by leaping from stone to stone, he waved an adieu to Yégor and disappeared in the woods beyond.

The exile returned to the encampment, preceded by his dog, which gambolled joyfully about, barking and wagging his tail.

Suddenly the animal stopped as if he had seen or heard something unusual. Yégor halted too, and, taking his hatchet in both hands, stood motionless. But around him all was silent; not a movement could be perceived.

The dog had disappeared in a thicket, and soon came back, looking appealingly, evincing by his agitation that something was the matter, and that he wished his master to follow him. Yégor therefore penetrated the brushwood which flourished in places, and more than once he had to crawl almost upon his face to pass under the thickly interlaced shrubs and bushes. After a time he reached a place where the flexible reeds denoted the presence of water,

which proved to be a swamp fed by a spring in which grew a profusion of aquatic plants and herbs.

The dog immediately bounded forward, and, clearing the wild-briar and gooseberry bushes which intercepted his view, began to bark loudly, and a human voice replied.

Yégor shuddered. Then, with as much caution as a red Indian on the war-path, he made a *détour* and, still in hiding, reached the edge of the marsh.

“M. Lafleur!” he exclaimed, “how came you here?”

The dancing-master wriggled about, embedded as he was in the ooze up to the waist, and, clinging sturdily to the stem of a tree which extended above him.

“Yégor! Yes: I have been waiting for you—with patience and philosophy, truly; for in this country of Cossacks and wolves one learns both philosophy and patience without books.”

“But how came you here?” asked Yégor.

“I was seeking plants. From flower to flower I passed like the butterfly, until I reached the brink of this treacherous swamp. I wanted to pick a piece of the morochka (*Rubus chamæmorus*, as we call it scientifically,) when I slipped and became in my turn an object of curiosity in the marsh.”

Yégor, having clasped M. Lafleur in his arms, managed to extricate him from the oozy bed of the quagmire, and place him on firm ground.

“But—my shoes—my pumps,” exclaimed the dancing master, who was seated shoeless upon the grass; for by way of diverting

suspicion, M. Lafleur had quitted Yakoutsck wearing only his light shoes, as if he were on one of his usual teaching tours, or in search of curiosities and business.

“Ah, my dear M. Lafleur,” said Yégor, “it is only right that you should make a little offering to the marsh. It might have engulfed you entirely, and it has restored you almost complete.”

“Pumps which I had made in Paris,” continued the dancing-master. “They came from the Rue Richelieu, opposite the Théâtre Français.”

“And probably the only pair you have with you?” said Yégor.

“Quite right: they are the only ones—a unique pair of shoes. I shall now be reduced to the necessity of walking in my socks amid all these bristles and brambles,” said M. Lafleur, with the most moving and pitiful voice.

“No, no, my friend,” replied Yégor. “We will see whether the industry of man cannot make shoes even in the wilds of the Verkhoyanain solitudes.”

So saying, he approached a birch-tree, and cut long strips from its bark. With these strips he managed to make the foot-coverings known as “laptis” worn by the Russian peasants exclusively.

“They are not elegant, I must confess,” continued Yégor as he put them on M. Lafleur, “and you would probably be somewhat embarrassed in them if you attempted to dance a ‘Sibériene’ just now. But we are not going to a ball!”

“Ah, no ; we are *not* going to a ball,” replied M. Lafleur, as he gazed comically at his new “shoes.”

Then he and Yégor set out together to regain the camp, where Nadège and Ladislas were awaiting them.





The Bear Trap.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE FOREST—APPROACH OF WINTER—THE CONFLAGRATION.

THE "Esaoule"* of Nijni Kolimsk (a town situated upon the *embouchure* of the Kolima in the Polar Sea, on the frontier of the Tchouktcha country), was a Russian officer named Toumanoff, who having one daughter and a son about the ages of Nadège and Ladislas respectively, had sent them to the house of a relation at Yakoutsk to be educated.

The boy and the young lady were also pupils of M. Lafleur, who

* This title is given to the functionaries placed to watch over the relays—an official appointment.

at distant dates gave lessons in dancing to the girl, and taught the boy to play the violin.

Yégor perceiving that he would have to pass near Nijni Kolimsk, the last and most northern of the Russian towns, and that he would have to exhibit—perhaps more than once—the false passport which he had issued to himself upon the official paper, and had made it out in the name of the children of the “Esaoule,” accompanied by their cousin of the same name. There was now a pressing necessity to find some plausible reason for such a hurried journey in the depth of winter. So Yégor endeavoured to find a pretext; but even in consultation with Nadège and M. Lafleur he could not arrive at any conclusion.

The profound solitude which reigned in the midst of the forest, and the obligation to remain concealed, so as not to betray their presence, rather exercised their minds as well as their bodies in seeking to supplement their provisions with certain things they lacked. They had to devise means of capturing game without shooting it, and to catch fish without showing themselves upon the banks of the river, where they might encounter an enemy.

Yégor had remarked traces of wild goats near the marsh in which M. Lafleur had left his shoes, and the idea occurred to the exile that these animals might be taken in snares. A cord with a running noose provided the desired trap, so he was enabled to give Nadège and Ladislas goat's milk, while the kids which followed their mother into captivity remained with her, and amused the younger fugitives by their games and antics.

In another part of the forest, Yégor fashioned a more formidable trap with which to capture a bear, after the plan employed by the Kamtschadalians, who suspend the trap in the air, and bait it with the flesh of some animal. The bear is attracted, and so soon as he lurches heavily in his ungainly manner against the suspended pole, it falls and crushes his skull. On the second day after he had set the trap Yégor found a bear—one of the brown species, and of a respectable size—caught in it. The skin of the animal made a welcome addition to their stock of furs; and from the flesh M. Lafleur prepared many savoury dishes, maintaining that there was nothing to equal bear-steaks, underdone.

Next day Yégor shot a wild ram which had come to make a raid upon the larder. Ladislas was charged with the duty of catching birds and fish. The lad pulled some hairs from the tails of the horses with which to form his snares, which he set in every way he could think of; and M. Lafleur had to exercise all his ingenuity to prepare the various birds for the table; for partridges, turkeys, geese, and many other fowls were frequently taken. Nadège, on her part, busied herself in making pasties of the partridges, the crust of which had been kneaded with a flour made from dried fish, and reduced to powder mixed with wheat-flour.

The little Pole had also constructed a kind of hoop nets with osiers which he fixed under water in the ravine. Into these snares the fish could enter but could not escape from. The fish which came to hand were mostly small, but once a magnificent specimen of the "Karioussé" (*Salmo thymallus*) came to the net.

While Nadège thus occupied herself in confectionery, and in the manufacture of winter garments, in doubling or preparing skins of the rodents, while Yégor erected his traps to beguile the animals, M. Lafleur was by no means at the end of his resources. Perceiving that the birds were becoming daily more wary of the snares of Ladislas, the Frenchman devised another plan.

“I have lost my shoes,” said he, “so I have no need of my over-shoes of india-rubber.” So he melted them down with some resin, and thus obtained an excellent birdlime. This he placed upon the bushes and briars, so that when the innocent song-birds and others perched upon the twigs they could not escape. Then M. Lafleur would run up and put them in his immense pockets though Ladislas had first been entrusted with this duty. But it was found that the little birds found favour in the boy’s eyes, and he let more escape than he brought home.

One day the excellent M. Lafleur came in with a radiant face ; so they thought he had a greater “take” than usual. He smiled knowingly and winked as he held one hand behind his back.

“Ladislas, my lad, come here,” said he.

When the boy approached, the Frenchman gave him a beautiful flute made out of a reed.

“Now,” said he, “blow into it.”

M. Lafleur covered the holes with his fingers, and the lad blew strongly, when the most charming sounds issued from the reed—like those from a magic flute.

Ladislas spent many hours in practising on his new instrument,

and in the evenings M. Lafleur would bring out his violin and accompany his pupil in his improvised airs.

Is there not a fairy in every young girl? It seemed so in Nadège's case, for her hut became more and more charmingly embellished every day, thanks to her care and taste and her love for propriety and order. She had made of the humble leafy shelter, a thing of beauty, a downy nest lined with moss and scented with flowers. At the entrance was suspended a large curtain of bark which had been detached by Ladislas from some tree; the thick furs were rolled up on the beds of leaves which served as resting places. Yégor had made a table and chair for his *fiancée* out of the branches of a tree which had been blown down.

Upon this table, between two small boards, were placed the most prized of the young girl's possessions. The last poems of her father, written in those days of trial and sorrow, which she intended to publish as soon as she reached some free country. Above the poem was suspended a crucifix (which Nadège had always clung to in her exile) surrounded with a garland of moss.

Meanwhile the good M. Lafleur suffered less from the loss of his shoes than from the want of tobacco. Believing he should return to Yakoutsck in a few days, he had laid in no supply. His prominent nose, planted in the midst of his somewhat wrinkled face, had become melancholy, and appeared to be dwindling away. Tobacco was evidently as necessary, in the form of snuff, to those extended nostrils, as the watering-pot is to the plant. M. Lafleur was continually taking his snuff-box from his waistcoat pocket,

and opening it with a sad expression of countenance. He would then shake his head, rub his nose, and finally put the snuff-box back again in his pocket with a deep sigh.

M. Lafleur, who pretended that his ideas were quite gone now his tobacco supply had failed, nevertheless managed to find one. "Tobacco," he said to himself, "was imported from America into Europe. Suppose I seek an analogous plant! Bread in some countries is replaced by potatoes, and even by the bark of the trees." So he set about his search, and, as all who seek find, he succeeded in discovering the leaves of a plant, the *timyan*, which the natives use as a substitute for tobacco. This plant he found in abundance in his various expeditions. He then dried the leaves upon an iron plate, and succeeded in producing a passable snuff.

The first enjoyments of this new-fangled tobacco made M. Lafleur sneeze for half-an-hour. One might have fancied his nose had been turned into a mitrailleuse, so frequent were the reports and thunderings of that mighty organ. He laughed at himself, while tears stood in his eyes. "Ah," he exclaimed, "I believe my nose will break itself with joy."

Thus the fugitives, occupied in their varied avocations, managed to get through the first week in their encampment. There were still eight days more to elapse before the Yakout was expected with the sleighs and reindeer. It was liberty, almost freedom! Yégor, without permitting his anxiety to be noticed, counted the hours and minutes till Tékél would arrive; and M. Lafleur flat-

tered himself more and more with the hope that he would be able to return to Yakoutsk.

So far nothing had occurred to alarm the fugitives in their retreat. They nevertheless did not relax their vigilance. There was all round the encampment an elevated ridge or circle, clothed with enormous pines, which overlooked the rest of the forest. Every morning and evening Ladislas scaled one of these big trees and took a general survey round from his "watch-tower," as he called it. From this post of observation, his gaze commanded the whole of the immense forest, which extended like a sea of leaves, of which the conical points of the pine-trees might be supposed to represent the waves. Far beyond it again lay, at the end of a verdant perspective, a chain of bare mountains like the cliffs bounding the sea of green. High in the air, great birds wheeled and floated like rags, carried about at the will of the wind in a stormy sky.

One morning the fugitives found the ground and trees sprinkled with snow. The flakes continued to fall one by one, slowly, silently, wrapping the earth in a winding-sheet and putting a girdle as of swansdown upon the old pine trunks, the branches of the larches, and forming little waxen stalactites on the twigs and sprays. The bushes, powdered with the snow, had a very picturesque effect, and the air was quite still, not a breath of wind disturbing the leaves and spines. No song of bird, no sound of insect broke the depressing and mournful silence of the place. One might have supposed that this sudden irruption of winter in

a verdant forest had frozen the inhabitants with terror. But for the fugitives, winter cold and snow hardening and covering marshes, rivers, and sloughs, were instruments for their deliverance.

M. Lafleur grumbled and appeared vexed, but towards the middle of the day the snow ceased to fall, and the Frenchman was enabled to get a view over the country, which looked like an immense glacier.

That same day, after the few hours of daylight, which now only composed it had waned, the great copper lamp which was destined to provide both warmth and light in Nadège's hut was lighted, and tea was served by Nadège to her companions. While thus occupied she related to M. Lafleur all the sufferings which she and her father had endured during their journey into exile in the rigorous winter season, and while the terrible hurricane so frequent in the Ural was raging. They had had wolves running alongside their sleigh, ready to pounce upon the horses if they fell or slackened speed. These were no light trials for an aged man and a young girl, and they did not arrive at Nertchinsk till they were nearly exhausted by the journey of seven thousand versts; accomplished under the most terrible conditions.

"My poor father," murmured Nadège, as she finished her narrative.

"Poor Nadège," said Yégor, extending his hands to his fiancée.

"You well deserve a better lot, my friends," said M. Lafleur. "Have patience, it will come. Your filial devotion, mademoiselle,

will be recompensed ; and the energy and courage of him who is your companion will also meet with its reward."

Night came on as they talked, M. Lafleur smoked a last pipe, discreetly puffing the smoke outside so as not to annoy Nadège. When she began to make preparations for arranging the beds, Yégor and the Parisian bade her and Ladislas good night, and retired to their own hut.

The men made no elaborate preparations for sleeping. They each put on a furry garment or "kuchdanka," which was worn instead of the usual night-dress ; then they dived, feet foremost, into a sack made of reindeer skin, which they pulled up under their chins and were soon fast asleep. Wab, the dog, watched for all the party.

A little before midnight, the inhabitants of the forest were suddenly awakened by a mysterious sound of cracking and creaking, which mingled with the noise of falling trees and rustling of the branches. The cries and bellowing of animals resounded, and Wab barked furiously.

When Yégor and his companion opened their eyes they saw, as it seemed to them, the heavens on fire ! Masses of lurid smoke rolled past in volumes, and a strong smell of burning wood extended in every direction.

At this terrible spectacle they were utterly paralysed and speechless, for a time.

"The forest is on fire !" exclaimed M. Lafleur, after a pause.

Yégor was already on his way to Nadège's hut. He found her

up and dressed. She had perceived the first indications of the fire reflected in the sky, but for a few moments fancied it was only an aurora. Ladislas now awoke and sat up rubbing his eyes, thinking it was all a dream.

“The forest is on fire!” cried Yégor.

“Then we are lost!” exclaimed Nadège, with a gesture of despair. “Oh, my Yégor, to have gone through so much suffering and reached the confines of hope—only to die here is dreadful. If I had only known, then I could have died with my father.”

So saying, and weeping loudly, she threw herself into his arms.

“You alarm yourself unnecessarily, dearest,” said Yégor, as he caressed her: “you despair too soon. Am not I with you? We are all resolved to perish if necessary in our endeavours to save your life, are we not?”

“Oh, look at the flames, they are advancing rapidly!” she cried.

“Fear nothing, my Nadège, I will save you,” said Yégor. “We shall all escape. But do not give way and hinder our efforts.”

“Be calm, be calm, my children,” said M. Lafleur. “Let us make our retreat together in good order—we must not separate. I will be your guide.”

“But we cannot abandon our provisions and clothes,” cried Yégor: “what will become of us?”

“And the horses,” said Ladislas, who had noticed the poor animals straining at their halters in terror.

“The horses!” replied M. Lafleur. “We need only loose them.

Their instinct will guide them: they will manage very well without our assistance."

Yégor at once went and set the animals at liberty. Nadège meantime collected hastily all her little treasures and manuscripts, her father's poems. Ladislas tied them up in bundles, while Yégor and M. Lafleur collected some provisions and clothing.

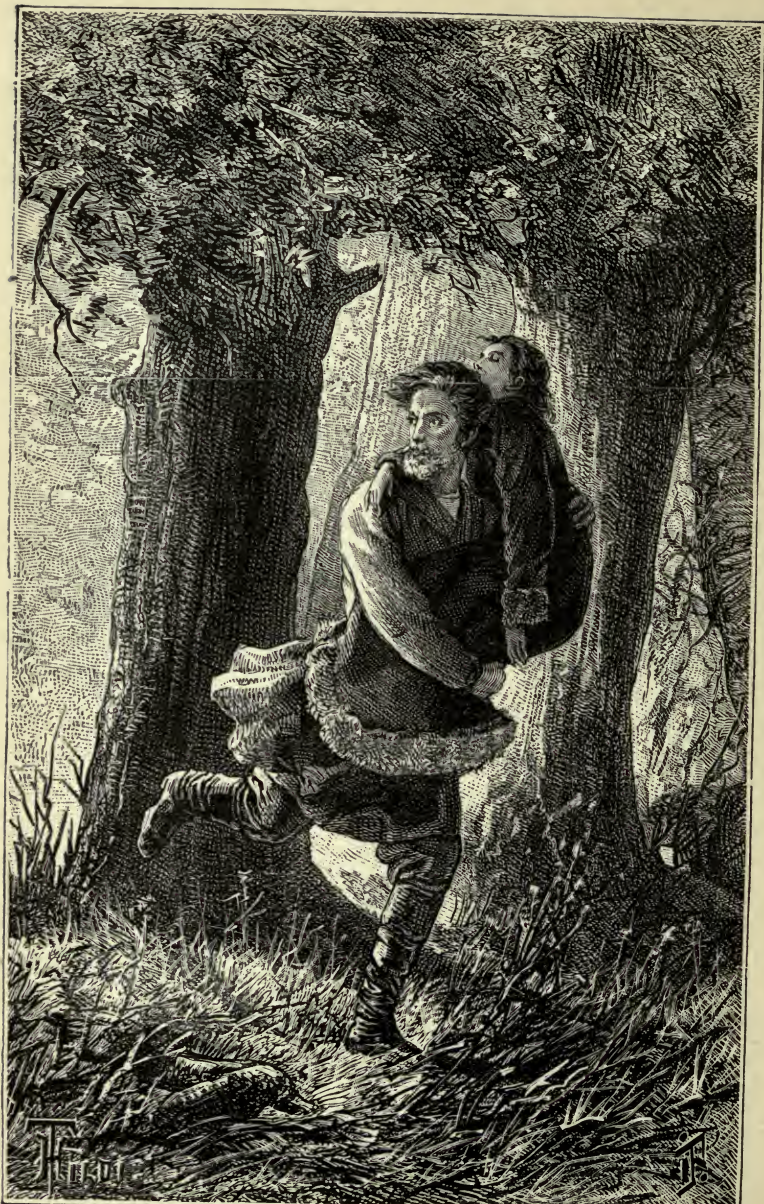
"Let us take care to put the gunpowder out of reach of the fire," said Yégor, as he continued working with ardour.

At length the party was ready to start, and they hurried away, sometimes followed, sometimes preceded, by Wab.

The fire spread with alarming rapidity. The larches and pines, and all the resinous trees flamed like immense torches, the highest of these trees which were burning had the appearance of enormous pillars of fire. The flames, carried onward by the wind, seized upon other trees, even at a distance, and extended their ravages. Great branches, detached from the trunks, fell crashing to the ground; and immediately after, some monster of the forest, burned to death, would fall with a thundering sound, which echoed heavily through the air.

Burning embers and falling brands came in all directions around, and created new conflagrations where they fell. A shower of sparks accompanied every such fall, and in some places the grand burning trees resembled the flaring lights of a lighthouse dominating a burning sea.

The heat radiated from this burning fiery furnace was tremendous, and changed a polar to a torrid zone. Occasionally some unfortunate



bird would be caught in the whirlwind of smoke and flame, and fall helpless, or perhaps struggle forth again like the fabled phoenix.

Wolves, foxes, argalis, hares and brown bears came hurrying on to escape the destructive flames which pursued them, and the grouse scratched the ground, uttering all the while piteous cries.

The fugitives, borne down by the weight of their burdens, though they had to leave a quantity of their belongings behind them, marched straight on without looking back, possessed by one thought only—one idea—escape from the fire. The flames almost surrounded the travellers, and gained upon them, threatening to close in upon them in front, and arrest all further progress. Yégor noticed with haggard eyes the advances of the fire, but he took care not to give vent to his dire apprehensions for fear of alarming his companions.

At length Nadège stopped him by saying mournfully, "I can go no farther, Yégor."

"What is the matter, dearest?" he asked anxiously.

"I do not know—faintness: fear perhaps: my limbs seem unable to support me—I can go no farther."

"Well then, I must carry you," he said resolutely.

Then, dropping from his shoulders the load he carried, he took the young girl in his arms and proceeded rapidly.

Nadège noticed the advances made by the fire, and saw, as Yégor had already perceived, that it would soon cut off their retreat.

“Ah!” she cried, “I am hindering your progress; I see it all; I am exposing you to peril.”

“No, no,” replied Yégor; “we are making good progress, and you are not at all heavy to carry.”

“So you say! But, Yégor, look at the flames yonder, they are gathering underneath the trees and will cut off our retreat. They are very near, the smoke is already almost suffocating. Save yourself, save Ladislas; go faster; let me remain, if necessary for your safety.”

“Sacrifice you, Nadège? How can you speak like that? If death do overtake you, I shall have died first.”

“Oh! I am terribly frightened. I can bear it no longer. I am dying, I think,” murmured Nadège. “Yégor, adieu, but do not forget me ever.”

These words were pronounced by Nadège in such a faint voice that, had not Yégor put his ear close to her mouth, he would not have distinguished them amid the roaring of the flames and the crashing of the trees. He at once perceived that the poor girl had fainted.

Yégor did not see how pale she was, but by the lurid gleam of the conflagration he could perceive that her eyes were closed, and he thought he too must have given way.

“Well!” cried M. Lafleur, who with Ladislas had gone on a few paces, “is all well?”

“Look, look!” exclaimed Yégor; “she is dying!”

“No, no,” replied the Parisian, quickly, “there is nothing

serious. But the accident is regrettable. What has become of the bundle you were carrying?"

"I left it at the foot of a tree. It contained all the effects of this poor child. The torrent is not far off, is it?"

"No, I can hear it," said M. Lafleur. "A little cold water will revive her."

"Let us hurry on," said Yégor.

But it was not so easy. Blazing logs and branches fell near them, and encumbered the path. Nadège's dress was very near catching fire more than once. The smoke drove very quickly across, and made their progress uncertain. Fortunately they were already within hearing of the torrent, which now made itself audible above the roaring of the flames.

M. Lafleur soon perceived the watercourse. "We are saved!" he cried.

The ravine in which the water ran was sufficiently wide to stop the course of the fire, and oppose to it an impassable barrier. Yégor sought a ford, and by the light of the blazing forest he tried the passage. While the boy and M. Lafleur let their burdens fall upon the ground, Yégor crossed the torrent, clasping Nadège convulsively in his arms, and quickly deposited her safe and sound upon the opposite bank.

M. Lafleur assisted Ladislas to pass from stone to stone. At the place where Yégor had laid Nadège upon a mossy bank a rock gave them some shelter from the heat.

"I confide her to you, M. Lafleur," said Yégor. "I

will now endeavour to return and find the bundle I had to abandon."

"How, Yégor! would you retrace your steps?" said M. Lafleur.

"Do not let him go, M. Lafleur!" cried Ladislas, who, kneeling beside Nadège, was bathing her temples with water.

But Yégor had already departed.

"Go?" whispered Nadège, anxiously, "who is going?"

"Yégor," replied the lad, sorrowfully.

"Where is he?" asked Nadège, raising herself and opening her eyes widely. "Oh, I remember: he carried me, he saved my life. Ah! where is he?"

"He will soon return," said M. Lafleur, affecting an assurance he was far from feeling.

Nadège clasped her hands and gazed in anguish upon the blazing forest. The rapid pulsation of her heart told of the suffering she was enduring.

"Oh, why, why did he rush back into yonder furnace?" she murmured. "Was it not enough to escape from it? You ought to have prevented him, M. Lafleur."

"It is for your sake he went back," replied the Frenchman in an attempt to justify himself. "He went to bring your effects, mademoiselle, if not too late."

Meantime Ladislas had crossed the ford again, and had penetrated a little distance through the underwood in search of Yégor.

"Here he is!" exclaimed the boy at last.

“Ah!” cried Nadège; and the joyous convulsion she so suddenly experienced nearly caused her to faint a second time.

Yégor appeared upon the scene, carrying the bundle. His faithful dog, which had remained watching over the abandoned parcel, now ran before him.

“So you are here. You have come, have you?” said M. Lafleur. “What do you mean by giving us all such a fright?” he added, half-angrily.

The young man made no answer, but merely placed the bundle containing all Nadège’s treasures at the girl’s feet. He had regained his cheerfulness, and beheld his *fiancée* radiant with joy and happiness at his return.

“Oh!” she exclaimed, reproachfully, “why did you thus expose yourself to danger?”

“Do you think I could have permitted your treasures—your only relics—to be destroyed—could have let such sacred legacies perish?”

“Thank you, my Yégor,” said Nadège, simply; and, seizing his hand, she kissed it, and he felt a tear of gratitude fall upon it as she did so.

“What do you think of this for a fire?” said M. Lafleur, who, standing with his hands in his trousers pockets, was watching the conflagration as he might have contemplated a display of fireworks at the Barrière du Trône. “It certainly is a splendid sight. See, the sky is almost as red as the burning mass which marks the limit of the forest. Poor forest! Nothing will be left of it but

cinders very shortly. How pleasant it would have been to have watched the fire from these 'upper boxes,' if we had not had to pay so dearly for the amusement!"

Indeed, the fugitives had lost a great deal in their precipitate flight, and had been obliged to abandon a great quantity of the stores so laboriously collected, and carried away with such trouble to ensure the success of their perilous enterprise.

"Yes," said Nadège, following M. Lafleur's thoughts, "and our poor goat, too!"

"And the little kids," added Ladislas.

M. Lafleur replied with an affectation of indifference which he was far from feeling.

"Bah," said he, "who would trouble about a goat, unless one wanted its milk?"





“Here they are at last!”

CHAPTER IX.

YERMAC RE-APPEARS—THE GOLD ROBBERS—A SKIRMISH, A TRAGEDY,
AND A DISCOVERY.

WHAT could have caused such a terrible conflagration? Who were the authors of it? Ought it to be regarded as simply an accident—the consequence of a hunter’s imprudence, as Yégor had first supposed—or as an act of aggression?

To explain the incident, we must take up the thread of our narrative where it connects itself with Yermac.

Yégor Séménoff and M. Lafleur, having launched the rock down upon the police inspector, thought they had crushed him to death,

or that he had been overwhelmed by the *débris* of the falling stones. But they were mistaken : Yermac was still living.

He had perceived the rock oscillating above him, and had at once let go the bridle of his horse and thrown himself against the vertical wall, which at some distance above his head protruded a little. This projection saved him, but he received some severe bruises upon his right leg. He had thus only to lament the loss of his steed. Yermac—covered by the pine trees, which had been torn from their roots by the fall of the rock, and blocked in, in front, by the mass itself which had fallen in the road—remained hidden completely, and prudence warned him to stay in his concealment all night.

Next day, thanks to the compresses of cold water which he had applied, the inflammation of his leg subsided. So, having cut for himself a staff, he managed to reach a Yakout hut which had been erected on the slope of the mountains of Verkho-Yansk. He remained there only long enough to take some refreshment, and to obtain the loan of a horse—then, notwithstanding his hurts, he immediately continued his pursuit of Yégor and his companions.

Almost immediately after his departure he encountered a patrol of Cossacks on horseback. These men, when questioned by Yermac respecting the fugitives, whom he thought they must have encountered, declared that they had met no one.

Yermac then informed them that he was the police inspector of Yakoutsck, and established his identity to their satisfaction. He then instructed the Cossacks to give information to the superintendents of the posts, or *ostrogs*, that certain convicts were

endeavouring to escape from Siberia, accompanied by a foreigner—a Frenchman; and Yermac also supplied descriptions of the runaways and of those with them.

Some hours later Yermac reached and skirted the great forest in the depths of which Yégor and his companions were concealed. He passed on without discovering any footsteps or other indication of their passage. But, feeling sure that they must have taken refuge in the wood and had not yet quitted it, he retraced his steps.

Why were they waiting there? No doubt to put off the scent anyone who might be following them, with a view to their arrest. But how could he discover or dislodge them? He was alone and even wounded, they were numerous and well armed! He was one individual, and the forest extended for miles. The conquest was too unequal.

For a long time he reflected upon what he would do. Then he fancied he had found an auxiliary. Why should he not employ the same means as people did to destroy wild beasts—viz., fire the forest? In his eyes the fugitives were criminals. Yégor, Nadège, and the lad had been condemned as convicts, or transported—M. Lafleur was simply an assassin.

He resisted the idea at first, but it returned to him persistently day after day; and he ended by accepting it, and regarding it even as reasonable. Did not trappers set fire to woods merely to destroy the swarms of mosquito which annoyed them? Besides, the small supply of food which he had obtained was already giving out, and the horse lent by the owner of the hut, becoming disgusted at

the daily inactivity, returned home one morning of his own accord.

While endeavouring to decide upon his future course, Yermac ascended a low eminence which overlooked the entire plateau. The pines and firs, all pressed down closely together, favoured the idea of a conflagration; and he considered in what place he should set the forest on fire. Should he start it from the east or the west? Two parallel ridges, like walls, enclosed the vast forest. If he fired one end, the fugitives must escape in the opposite direction. From the eastern side they could not escape without crossing a steep defile with bare, treeless sides. So Yermac decided that he would take up his position there and hide behind a rock.

When he had thus made up his mind and arranged the manner of his action, he decided to give the whole forest to the flames. He cut down some dry branches and brushwood, and piled the mass under the resinous trees: when night fell he set this heap on fire.

Yermac then skirted the forest and posted himself upon the side opposite to the fire, at the entrance of the defile, which was the only means of exit. There, concealed behind the rocks which were studded with a few dwarf cedars, he looked anxiously for the outbreak of the conflagration.

He had not long to wait. The plateau soon bore the appearance of a sheet of flame, and the heavens to the horizon were as red as blood with the reflected blaze. Yermac crouched down involuntarily when he beheld the result of his work of extermination. Anxiously he passed the hours, and kept asking himself whether he had not

gone too far—if he had not devoted to a sure and cruel death the unfortunate people who had taken refuge within the forest. At length the tardy streaks of dawn mingled with the glare of the fire.

Shortly after daybreak, the inspector of police saw coming towards him two Siberian horses. They were rushing hither and thither, and he recognized two of the steeds which Yégor had had with him—the third, no doubt, had perished in the flames.

The correctness of his surmise was quickly verified. He had no doubt whatever that these horses belonged to the fugitives. But why did they themselves tarry so long?

Yermac kept putting this perplexing question to himself, and had propounded it for the twentieth time, when he noticed, debouching from the defile, a group of fugitives whose shadows were thrown in fantastic shapes far in front of them by the fierce blaze at their backs.

“Here they are at last!” he exclaimed.

He examined his weapons—his rifle and his pistols—and found them in good order. But how great was his astonishment when, raising his head again, he perceived seven men, accoutred like true robbers of the steppes, and armed to the teeth. They had also perceived him, and were advancing in ambush through the bushes. They imagined they were being tracked by a party of Cossacks, who had tried to smoke them out, so they prepared to sell their lives dearly.

When they came within range, two of the men knelt down, and, taking steady aim, fired.

“Declaration of war,” muttered Yermac, as the bullets hummed past his ears like angry bees. “I have to do with a formidable band. They are robbers, whom I certainly did not expect to meet, and, though my authority does not extend so far as this district, I must not fail in the new duty these brigands have imposed upon me. Now for my answer!”

With that he withdrew into a thicket which completely shielded him, and discharged both barrels of his rifle at the party advancing.

Then the men opened out in skirmishing order, and while continually advancing took care not to expose themselves more than necessary. From time to time, as they closed in, they fired at the man who had the hardihood to withstand them.

Yermac soon found that his adversaries were closing round him, and that he was entirely at the mercy of his assailants. They took up their positions behind rocks, trees, or any inequality of the ground, and deliberately made Yermac a target; aiming as surely by the light of the fire as in daylight.

The police inspector, however, did not lose his presence of mind, and bravely sustained this unfair attack. Three times he loaded his rifle, and discharged five shots at one individual who was nearest of all on his left. Then, suddenly wheeling round, he fired at an assailant on the right, who was just then passing from one tree to another, a few paces in advance. The shot took effect, and struck him full in the breast.

A yell from the dying man was echoed by the cries of his com-

panions, who perceived the fatal shot. The band of gold-robbers, the terror of the country, had lost their chief.

In an instant Yermac was the centre of a storm of bullets.

He would have infallibly to surrender; for, putting aside the idea of flight, which he despised, he knew that, if he turned his back upon his adversaries, the danger would be much increased. Suddenly a cry was uttered by one of his assailants; it was a signal to his companions to desist: and Yermac was surprised to perceive the man on the left—his most dangerous assailant—advance towards him, unarmed. This young man had no beard or whisker. He had dark eyes, and the complexion of a slave. He was clothed in the skin-dress of the Yakouts.

The stupefaction of Yermac may be imagined, when, in the Brigand of the Steppes, he recognized his son Dimitri.

“Father,” said the latter; “it is I!”

“Unhappy boy!” exclaimed Yermac. “It is indeed my son with these gold-robbers!”

“Fear nothing,” continued Dimitri, as he made a sign to his companions to withdraw.

“So, robber and assassin, you would become a parricide!” said the unhappy Yermac, who was a prey to despair.

“Father,” cried Dimitri, “I have never taken human life. Never; I swear it!”

“A parricide you are already,” continued Yermac, without listening to him; “you became so when, in depriving me of honour, you robbed me of more than life. Are you aware of what

I have been obliged to submit to in order to expiate your crimes? Can you doubt my humiliation when you learn that I voluntarily resigned my position as 'Ispravnik'? Have you thought of the degradation, of the insults which I have had to endure as a convict-guard?"

"Father, it is this undeserved misfortune, this odious degradation, of which you have been the victim, that troubles me. I have indeed suffered greatly in seeing you suffer. I am up in arms against the blind and criminal society of which you have so much cause to complain. I will avenge you!"

"One may be revenged by clearing oneself in the eyes of those who believed one guilty, or pretended to believe so, and affirmed it," replied Yermac violently. "It is necessary to make them feel their injustice. But now——"

"Yes; now what do you wish me to do?" interrupted Dimitri. "I cannot associate with honest men; that is certain. Leave me to my fate. I will live despised by all, even by myself——"

"No," said Yermac. "You shall die!"

"What do you say?"

"I say that you shall expiate your crimes, redeem your shame, and give me back my honourable name."

"How?" asked Dimitri, anxiously.

"By death!" said Yermac, firmly.

"You wish me to die?" said Dimitri, with a faint smile. "I have often thought of it, for my life is heavy, and I will welcome

the last hours of it as a deliverance. Patience, father ; before long you will no doubt hear of the death of your son !”

“That is not what I mean. It is necessary, in cases of public prosecution, that atonement less voluntary and more swift should be made, bearing the brand of punishment. An infamous death is the penalty demanded ; and that you are about to receive at my hands !”

“A father kill his son !” exclaimed the young man.

“There is no question here of father and son. Here, far from any tribunal, is a man whom the law has appointed a judge, who has done nothing to forfeit his position notwithstanding his unmerited degradation. He has pronounced your sentence—death ! This sentence I am about to execute. Follow me !”

So saying, Yermac dragged his son behind the rocks, out of sight of Dimitri’s companions ; who, perceiving that a stormy discussion was taking place between father and son, were holding themselves ready to rush to the assistance of the latter.

Dimitri, perfectly livid, regarded his father in the manner a martyr tied to the stake would regard his executioner. And then the young man understood that his death was resolved upon, and that it would come by the hands of his father.

“Father, thy will be done,” he said.

“Do not profane those words by repeating them,” said Yermac, severely. “Give me your girdle.”

“What for ?”

“To tie you to a tree,”

“That will be no use. You will see that I know how to die; and as I must be killed, I may as well fall dead. Will it be necessary to push me down?”

“Obey me! The ‘pinioning’ is a humiliation to which you must submit.”

“If it must be, I consent. There it is!”

Dimitri then unrolled the long scarf, and gave it to his father. Yermac then pushed the young man against a tree, and passed the bandage round his son’s body and the tree. Then he resumed his place before his son, and drawing from his belt the revolvers, he said with deep emotion, which he did not attempt to hide——

“You are about to die, Dimitri. Alas, in such a place! If anyone had told me this when you came into the world! Ah, if your mother——Dimitri, commit your soul to God. Pray, my son, pray!”

“Father, let me first ask, shall I have your forgiveness when I am dead?”

“Yes, when you have atoned for your crimes!”

A cold perspiration broke forth upon the face of the inspector of police. The judge was growing weaker under the influence of the father’s feelings.

“Adieu, father, I die repentant,” murmured Dimitri.

He closed his eyes as he spoke and waited.

Yermac retired three paces; he held a pistol in each hand; he aimed at his son’s heart. This terrible drama was illuminated by the blood-red glow of the burning forest.





Suddenly Yermac shuddered and fell fainting upon the ground ; he seemed to have been struck down by the hand of death which he had raised against his son.

“Father!” cried Dimitri, with an agonizing sob. But Yermac could not hear him ; he lay, motionless, with distorted features and upturned eyes, upon the ground.

“Father,” again cried Dimitri, “I ought to die, not you. Father, come back to life. Listen to me!”

Just then the companions of Dimitri, uneasy at his long absence, came up ; and while some released him the others bent over the stiffened form of his father.

“Does he still live?” inquired Dimitri, as he came up anxiously.

“No, he is dead. He is quite cold.”

“Oh, my father, my father, forgive me!” the young man cried, quite beside himself with remorse. “I have killed you. Yes, he said truly, I am a parricide.”

And as if he feared that the arms of the dead man would only rise to smite him, he did not dare to embrace his father’s corpse.

Then one of the band of robbers, imposing silence, and so directing attention to himself, spoke. He was a fine, well-built fellow, and was blessed with an intelligent countenance.

“Dimitri,” he said, taking the young man by the arm, “you must be our chief. Your father has slain Koskintine.”

“Why should Dimitri be our chief?” said another of the men, a violent and ill-favoured ruffian. “We shall see about that,” he added, without waiting for an answer to his question.

“Because such is our law, Ivan. The oldest was chief : now he is wiped out, the youngest steps in, and so on. Dimitri is the youngest of all of us.”

“I will settle this matter,” said Dimitri. “My friends, I am going to leave you. Let me go. If my father should revive——”

“If he do, he will kill you,” said Ivan, “He is not the kind of man to give quarter. But you may make your mind easy ; he is quite dead. Come with us.”

“No, go your way without me. Leave me here,” said Dimitri ; “and try to do better in the future !”

“Who are you, to preach to us ?” exclaimed Ivan. “You are our chief, come with us. You can make moral reflections after.”

“Ivan is right !” exclaimed the band.

Dimitri would have resisted, but the men drew him away in spite of his remonstrances.

A moment afterwards nothing remained to testify to the drama which had been played upon the spot but the inspector of police, whose body had been hurriedly covered with branches. At some distance lay the body of the late chief, Koskintine, half naked ; for he had been stripped of all his warm clothing.

In the distance the forest continued to burn. Here and there great heaps continued to smoulder, sending forth heavy columns of smoke like great ribbons. The day, slow to appear and hasty to decline, had at length come, paling what still remained of the great forest-fire.

At that moment, behind an undulation of the ground, an

enormous brown bear was prowling. His great limbs were black, and he had a band of white across his shoulders, like a collar.

The animal stopped, and then, excited by hunger, made a point for the dead body of the robber which was lying upon the snow, still rose-coloured by the reflection of the flames. The bear walked round the body, and, having smelt at it, took up a convenient position, and began to devour it—calmly and quietly, as a repast sent by nature for its special behoof, which necessitated neither hunting nor fishing; for your Siberian bear is a very skilful fisherman on occasions.

When the bear had finished his horrible repast, he turned his attention to the inspector of police, and smelt around the body. Would he devour it also? The bear turned the body over—the man remained motionless—and then seated himself on the ground to consider what he should do. It would not be good economy to devour another meal so soon. He had had enough, and here was provision sufficient to last him for many days, in case of accident.

In pursuance of this reflection, the bear seized Yermac by the arm, and without hurting his prey, without any intention of hurting the intended feast—and warm flesh too—he dragged the body in the direction of a little thicket.

There he dug a hole in the ground—a *cache* as the hunters would call it—and when he had satisfied himself that the hiding-place was sufficient, he dragged the body of the inspector gently and even delicately to the hole.

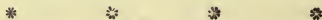
Here he deposited the booty, and proceeded to fill up the hole;

then, breaking off some branches, he deposited them upon his "larder," and covered them with snow, which he scraped up with



his paws until he made a little mound, like a grave, patting it all down nicely with his paws.

This done, he went away to get an appetite, or perhaps to pick a quarrel with, and feast upon, some less substantial brother, and one less active than himself.



Meanwhile the fugitives—Yégor, Lafleur, Nadège, and the young Pole—after having escaped the fire, which spread from west to east, returned upon the track they had traversed some days before, and on which they anticipated Tékél, with his sleighs and horses, would approach.

They had succeeded in recovering two of their horses, and had loaded them with the furs, arms, clothing, and such supplies of provisions as they had succeeded in saving from the fire. Yégor and Lafleur each led a horse by the bridle, and the party advanced slowly amid the charred portions of the forest.

An hour after the entombment of the inspector of the police, Yégor and his party arrived at the place where the engagement had been fought between the gold-robbers and Yermac. The travellers noticed the indications of a struggle, and the remains of the dead robber. The fugitives stood speechless at this revelation, and, while

examining the ground, Ladislas perceived a trace of blood upon the snow, as if a wounded man had been dragged for some distance.

He told Nadège of this discovery at once.

“There is a wounded man not far from here” cried the girl. “Look at these blood-traces and the snow pitted with the drops. Oh, if we have arrived in time to save one of the poor creatures!”

“Let us see what this means,” said Yégor.

So they fastened the horses to the trees. In the valley hard by they heard a grunting, a token of satisfaction, it seemed. The bear was saying his grace after dinner.

“We must not go too far,” remarked M. Lafleur, holding his gun prudently in readiness, and ready for any emergency.

All four fugitives then proceeded cautiously to the mound under which Yermac was buried, waiting—no doubt passing from life to death—until the bear would devour him in his turn. This hiding-place appeared very mysterious to the party.

Yégor and the Polish lad knelt down and began to sweep away the snow with their hands, while M. Lafleur, his rifle ready, watched over them at their work.

The snow removed, and the branches thrown aside, in the dim light which the cloud of smoke permitted to appear, Yégor and his companions all perceived the face of a man—a buried body.

“A dead man!” they exclaimed simultaneously, with some emotion.

A sigh was the response from the ground.

“But he is not dead,” said Yégor, as he placed his hand upon the man’s heart. “It beats strongly,” he cried hopefully.

“Oh, how glad we ought to be!” exclaimed Nadège. “My friends, we have been enabled to perform a noble action This will console us a little for the cruelties you have been obliged to commit. This is a life you can save in exchange for the one you destroyed in the defile yonder. Proceed, Yégor. Have confidence. That which is now in store for us is a good augury for the success of your enterprise.”

The quasi inspector of police was extricated and laid on his back by Yégor and M. Lafleur, in utter forgetfulness of the bear and his growlings.

Yégor was greatly alarmed when he recognised the disfigured features of the inspector, and believed he was under some hallucination.

“Ah, Nadège,” he said, “do not refer to the man in the defile. You trouble me.”

M. Lafleur looked round him with an alarmed expression, and his mouth wide open with astonishment.

At length Yermac opened his eyes.

“Thank you,” he said.

“Why, it *is* the inspector of police, after all,” stammered Yégor, in an access of emotion.

“I thank you, whoever you are,” pursued the exhumed man. “You have taken a great weight from my mind—and body.”

The daylight was struggling with the flames, which had again

broken out as if some new food for it had been found, and the light increased.

“Eh, what?” exclaimed Yermac. “So it is you, M. Séménoff; you too, M. Lafleur. To you I owe my life. To you! Where is my son? What have you done with Dimitri? Where are the gold-robbers? Night came upon me suddenly. But I am wounded in the right arm; I am bleeding. Séménoff, and you, M. Lafleur—is it possible that you wished to bury me alive? Did you bury me living under the snow, as you endeavoured to do under the rocks? That is cowardly. But explain yourselves—and speak!”

Both Yégor and M. Lafleur were for the moment speechless; Nadège was near fainting: Ladislas, after stepping back several paces, remained gazing helplessly from one to the other, crossing himself devoutly and rapidly.

“Monsieur Yermac,” said Yégor at length. “This is indeed an intervention of Providence. We came here to your assistance. Fear nothing. If I have evinced animosity towards you, I am ready to repair the wrongs I have done. But you must not attribute this strange meeting to ‘chance’ after we left you for dead in the mountain defile. We will release you from this strait; you are wounded, we will take care of you.”

M. Lafleur added a few suitable words which informed Yermac how they came to find him in the ditch; and, by way of commentary and confirmation, the bear kept growling not far off. As additional evidence, M. Lafleur indicated the remains of the unfortunate robber-chief, and then all was explained.

"I thank you, messieurs," said Yermac, standing upright. "I can get on better than I imagined. Now we are quits, M. Sémenoff. Now you can no longer deny that you are in full flight, as well as the lady you call your *fiancée* and her 'brother.' I arrest you three!"

Yégor made an impatient movement. Nadège grew pale. Little Ladislav began to cry. But M. Lafleur said with a sneer—

"You are pleased to joke, my poor Yermac. How can you talk like that when you can scarcely stand up? You are alone, wounded, far from any assistance; and yet you speak as if you had an escort of Cossacks behind you! Do not put yourself out about us. We shall continue our journey quietly, and if you are not content, we will leave the Siberian bears to devour the agent of government next time!"

"Gentlemen," replied the inspector of police, "I represent the law;" and he made a gesture full of dignity.

"On the faith of a Frenchman, that is a singular assumption," remarked M. Lafleur.

"Force remains with the law," said Yermac, simply.

"Well, then, if you have the force, produce it," said M. Lafleur.

Yégor then intervened, and said—

"Don't you know quite well that your force will fail, Yermac? And your demand is not made on any principle of justice. You see before you innocent victims. I pass over the incidents of your pursuit of us. We are martyrs of tyranny and oppression. You could make no impression upon us by any appeal to our con-

sciences. That is why you are weak ; without *prestige*, and really disarmed."

"We shall soon see, gentlemen. You are proceeding eastward, but I shall return westward. Let each keep his own counsel."

M. Lafleur made a sign to Yégor, and the friends held a rapid consultation, while Yermac was already studying the various paths, uncertain which he would take for his return.

"You are in our power," said Yégor to him.

Yermac made a movement, but his face betrayed no emotion.

"You are many, I am alone," he said. "The parties are not equal. I must yield," he added, simply.

"Your submission is not sufficient," continued Yégor. "We may encounter patrols. We may fall in with some Cossack post. What would you do in such a case?"

"My duty."

"You would denounce us!"

"Yes."

Yégor remained silent for a moment in admiration of the firmness and courage of Yermac, and seeking some means to secure the silence of the inspector without committing a crime.

"We could kill you," he continued at length, in a stern tone. "We could tie you up to a tree and leave you here. You would then be devoured by the bears. But we do not wish to do that. You have only done your duty. Free, you are a hindrance to us: that is why we have decided to keep you in custody. Now that

fate has yielded you into our hands, will you give us your word of honour not to attempt to escape!"

"No," replied Yermac firmly.

What a singular nature was his! This man was carrying out the duties assigned to him without any temper or ill-feeling, with an utter absence of self interest. "Duty," "the Law," these words were his epitome of life—the world, society, sentiment, and obligations. His conscience—clear, upright, sincere, with no idea of double-dealing—had made him a stern, austere, impassible, and impenetrable man, as we have seen. He looked his adversaries boldly in the face like a lion at bay, without being in the least intimidated by their superior force. Incapable of hiding himself, and of crouching in a corner to spring upon his prey unawares, he acted openly, boldly, loyally, even with adversaries in league against him.

"Sir Inspector of Police of Yakoutsck," said M. Lafleur at last: "we do not look upon things in the same light as you do. You will remain with us, if you please, until such time as we deem your desertion will not imperil our safety. You are our prisoner."

"But I am wounded?"

"All the greater reason why you should remain. We will cure you. I have some acquaintance with leechcraft."

"You! A dancing-master—a bonnet-maker—a manufacturer of 'champagne!'"

"I began life as a herbalist, monsieur. But do you not under-

stand how one must practise different avocations to gain a livelihood?

You have no weapons, have you?"

"I have a rifle and pistols," replied the inspector, glancing at the place where he had sustained the late attack.

As he finished speaking, Ladislas returned, carrying the weapons: the rifle slung over his shoulder, and the pistols in his belt.

"Take care of those arms, my boy," said M. Lafleur.

"So you will disarm me," Yermac said. "Nevertheless my safety is assured——"

"We will protect you, monsieur," replied the dancing-master.

"The time will come, M. Yermac," said Yégor, "when I will hand you the governor's rifle and beg you to return it to him for me with my acknowledgments. Well, gentlemen," he continued, looking round, "shall we set up our tent and prepare our camp for the night?"

While they were thus engaged, the last hours of the short day passed away; and the forest at length ceased to burn.

"You are our prisoner, on parole," said M. Lafleur once more to the inspector of police; for the Frenchman wished to put things upon a clear basis.

"I am your prisoner—be it so," replied Yermac, resignedly; "but you are no less the prisoners of the Czar, arrested in the very act of flight by me, Yermac, inspector of Police at Yakoutsik. Your friends still remain under the accusation of attempting to escape with arms in their hands; and you have aided and abetted them!"

“I will not dispute with you on that point,” replied M. Lafleur.

It was not an easy matter to arrange a resting-place for the night. Snow began to fall heavily. Yégor and M. Lafleur arranged a bed for Nadège and her adopted brother, under a high rock, and utilized all the rugs in order to keep the girl and her brother warm. Some young trees, bent together, formed a kind of frame-work for a low roof, which was then covered with a thick cloth.

While these preparations were being made, Nadège took from her little bag, which had fortunately been rescued from destruction, a quantity of meal, with which she half filled a large wooden porringer. To this she added some cold water, brought by Ladislas from the stream, and stirred the mixture well with a spoon. This oatmeal, warmed and carefully strained, was distributed by Nadège to her companions; and, all things considered, it was very agreeable. Yégor, the Parisian and Yermac were at length able to wrap themselves up in the remaining furs. The dog, Wab, kept walking about the tent and the men's bodies, which were already being heavily sprinkled with snow. Under his guardianship they could all sleep undisturbed after the varied troubles of the day.

The first to awake was the inspector of police, who perceived that his companions sleeping in the open air were now only little mounds beneath the snow, which had covered them, and which kept them as warm as in a bed of down.

Yermac, getting anxious at their immobility, shook them one after the other.

M. Lafleur had some difficulty in disengaging his head from the snow-wreath, and appeared something like old Father Christmas, as represented upon cards and cakes in December, with his hat over his eyes, and his white beard and hair, a red nose, and his clothes whitened like a miller's.

“Verily,” he said, “it is a good thing that there is no ‘police



M. Lafleur awakened by the Inspector of Police.

station' near at hand; as, in my capacity of vagabond, I have been sleeping in the open air, and find myself awakened by an inspector of police, without any danger of being sheltered for a few nights in prison!”

Yermac remained impassible. Since he had been wounded by the bear, his arm had been exquisitely painful, but he permitted no one to perceive his agony. M. Lafleur then remembered the

wound, and wished to dress it. The inspector made no resistance, but on the other hand, he evinced no gratitude, and when the Frenchman had finished, Yermac said—

“I presume it is not your intention to remain in such a place as this, exposed to every wind of heaven and every change of weather?”

“No,” replied Yégor, who here interposed. “We are only waiting for a native guide, who has been sent to Zachiversk, to fetch us two *nartas*,* and reindeer to draw them.”

“But,” remarked Yermac, “it seems to me that you are taking me into your confidence about——”

“About our intended movements? What matter? Your loyalty— notwithstanding the language you used towards me yesterday— is a guarantee to us that I can speak freely to you.”

“You may be over-confident!” said Yermac.

“Well, we have a right to your good offices,” remarked M. Laflour. “But for us, the bear with the white collar would be breakfasting off you at this moment.”

“Yes, yes; I see: you wish to attach me to you by the bonds of gratitude.”

“We must, for the reason I have given you,” continued Yégor, “remain as long as possible in this forest, or rather, I should say, in the place the forest was. Can you explain the cause of this terrible fire, M. Yermac?”

* The “narta” is the Siberian sleigh.—TRANS.

“Yes,” replied the inspector. Then in his usual tone he added, “I set the forest on fire!”

“You!” exclaimed all the fugitives with one voice.

“Yes, to dislodge you. I could not afford to wait your pleasure for an indefinite period!”

“But, you wretched man,” said Yégor, “you nearly roasted us alive.”

“Well, I knew there was a chance of that,” replied Yermac.

“And you did not hesitate at the thought of such a horrible crime?” enquired Nadège.

“Well, M. Yermac,” said the Frenchman, “I do think we are quite ‘quits’ with you now—and more. We were equal, I think, before the episode of the bear. Between you and me, that little rock in the defile was as nothing—a mere feather—when weighed against the means you employed to destroy us!”

“And what of the attack by the lake?” said Yermac, looking at Yégor.

“We are quits, I repeat,” said the Frenchman. “Twice, it is true, you have been in danger of losing your life—but you are only one! We are four and were all in danger of our lives. You can reckon up the difference. You have drawn on us largely in that little draft on the Bear’s Bank yonder!”

“You calculate very closely for a *savant*, M. Lafleur!”

“You perceive I am something of a business man,” replied the Parisian, “and I can keep books. Your account is now balanced; and I debit you with a miraculous resurrection.”

“But how will you arrange concerning your service as doctor?”

“I will write that off to Profit and Loss,” he replied.

All this while M. Lafleur had been thumping himself after the manner of coachmen, but this exercise did not prevent him from retorting promptly to Yermac’s badinage.

That day was marked by a discovery made by Ladislas after *déjeuner* — a meal which rivalled in frugality the supper of the evening before.

The lad had been busily engaged in sweeping away with branches the snow which had accumulated around Nadège’s resting place; and when he had finished he seated himself upon the ground and began examining the pebbles, &c., as he had seen M. Lafleur do, so that he might add to the little collection he had already commenced—imitating in this also the dancing-master’s tastes.

The lad’s eyes were particularly attracted to a number of small stones of a yellowish-green which sparkled upon the rocky soil. He snatched them up, and after showing them to Nadège, he began tossing them up and catching them again in his hand cleverly.

M. Lafleur, who watched him for a moment, was at once struck with the form and colour of the stones, and murmured something expressive of the result of his observations:—

“Prisms — cylindrical;—*striæ* — longitudinal. — Yes, this is a ‘find’ indeed!” he exclaimed joyously. “These are emeralds of a rare size and of immense value.”

“Are you quite certain, M. Lafleur?” asked Nadège, who already

—and a woman will never lose her rights—perceived, in perspective, some brilliant ornaments for *fête* days in the future.

“I assure you, mademoiselle, that these are magnificent emeralds: there are none like them in any Court in Europe.”

The inspector of police overheard these words. He approached M. Lafleur, followed by Yégor.

“Look here, M. Yermac,” said Ladislas. “M. Lafleur pretends these are emeralds.”

“I can scarcely believe him,” replied Yermac, after a short examination of the stones.

“Your doubt quite upsets me,” replied M. Lafleur, laughing. “Look here, see how this stone is broken: the cleavage shows a vitreous and polished surface as emeralds should do.”

“Then I have done a good day’s work,” exclaimed Ladislas.

“My young friend,” said the inspector of police, “perhaps you are not aware that all precious stones discovered in Siberia are the property of the Czar. These emeralds must, therefore, be forwarded to him without any reservation.

“You are joking, M. Yermac,” said Yégor. “It is always ‘the Czar’ with you!”

“But what I say is law”! retorted Yermac.

“Must we then retrace our steps to lay these playthings at the feet of the emperor, who has treasure enough and to spare?”

“You may laugh, if you please. I will take upon myself to restore them without troubling you in the matter at all.”

“You are laughing now—and at our expense,” said Yégor.”

“Well, you see that, though I must leave here in your company, I shall make a point of drawing up an official report of the discovery, the first opportunity,” said Yermac.

“Report as much as you like, Yermac,” said M. Lafleur. “By all means report at your leisure. But as for us, we are going to retain these pretty little stones: they will serve as a *souvenir* of our experiences—and of the time we passed in your society.”

The incident had no other consequences for our travellers.



CHAPTER X.

ATTACKED BY WOLVES.—THE BEAR DANCE.—ARRIVAL OF THE
SLEIGHS.

ONE day passed ; then another ; and there was so much less time to elapse before the expected appearance of the sleighs. The snow fell occasionally at more frequently recurring intervals, and began to harden upon the ground. The way for escape was being prepared ; was growing firmer, more consolidated, vaster ; too vast indeed !

The inspector of police, his arm in a sling, assisted Nadège in the preparation of the meals. Dried fish, smoked salmon, which the Russians call *oukale*, with some grouse and hare that Yégor had succeeded in bagging, made the staple of their food during this period. Subsequently M. Lafleur shot a wild sheep, which supplied the travellers with cutlets and legs of mutton for a time.

On the third day, just as they were about to prepare for their evening meal, a native woman, attracted by the bivouac fire, came into the encampment on her way to her *yourte*.

When her footsteps were heard crunching the frozen snow, the travellers looked up, and were surprised at the miserable and ragged appearance she presented. The poor *nomad* was bronzed by

exposure, her little eyes were scarcely visible, but she appeared to be nursing something very carefully under her cloak.

Nadège welcomed her and bade her seat herself by the fire. She offered the woman some portion of the bird they had cooked, which the Yakout devoured greedily, glancing quickly and cautiously around her all the time. She still carried some living thing, wrapped in her bosom.

“Well, nurse, what is your baby like?” enquired M. Lafleur playfully.

The Yakout understood the question more from the actions by which he accompanied his speech than from the words themselves, spoken as they were in a peculiar and novel dialect in which the Russian and French languages were mingled.

The woman, however, complied with the request, and very carefully removed the reindeer-skin covering from her shoulders, and exhibited three little blue foxes which she was keeping warm.

The travellers were greatly surprised at this revelation. M. Lafleur, however, explained to his companions that it is a well-known habit amongst hunters to bring up little foxes with the object of selling them for their furs when the animals attain a proper age; and, speaking of this, the Frenchman made his hearers open their eyes when he told them the enormous sums which Western ladies—particularly the English—will pay for blue-fox fur. He told Nadège that the four paws only of the animal are considered valuable, and that a cloak of this kind is worth in Russia

thirty or forty thousand francs. No part of the animal, besides the paws, is considered of any value.

Ladislas continued to question M. Lafleur on this subject ; and while the Yakout woman—having finished her repast—was smoking her pipe or *ganzi* full of strong Tcherkask tobacco, the Frenchman gave the lad some curious and interesting details concerning the manners and customs of blue foxes. He told his young hearer that these animals are very brave and full of cunning when hunted, and only leave their lairs at night. It seems, however, that Behring's companions found them in great numbers by the Strait, and they were so tame and incautious that they permitted themselves to be killed with sticks. These foxes are great thieves and very voracious : they will steal anything, even the boots and clothes of sleeping men ; they devour dead bodies, and even attack the sick. At times when explorers have buried provisions and placed great stones over the supplies, the blue foxes will find means to pillage the depôt by insinuating themselves beneath the stones, assisting each other with rare intelligence. If provisions are hung up in the open air the animals will dig around the poles which support the food until they fall ; or even, with incredible address, make a kind of ladder of their bodies to enable the rest to pull down the meat.

M. Lafleur, who had evidently picked up a good deal of information in his travels, then explained that the *isatis* is found upon the shores of the polar sea and of the rivers which flow into it. The blue fox is smaller than the ordinary fox, which, however, it greatly

resembles, though the head is more like the dog's. The hair is very long, soft and thick, an ashen blue, or white. The tip of the muzzle is black, and the ears almost round; and it makes a sound resembling at once the bark of the dog and the yelping of the fox. These animals are gregarious and are met with in large packs, preferring places which are open and cold.

"One distinctive peculiarity," continued M. Lafleur, "is that the blue fox, unlike other foxes, will cross the water with facility, and is accustomed to swim across inlets and arms of the sea to ravage the nests of wild-fowl. When game becomes scarce in any district these foxes migrate, which is an unusual characteristic amongst flesh-eating animals."

"I have," pursued M. Lafleur, "for the collection which I hoped would gratify Chateau-Thierry, some splendid specimens of skins of all the Siberian foxes at various ages. Some at six months old are a pure white, except, perhaps, a dash on the back and a bar upon the shoulders. They are called *krestowiki*, or 'crossed.' The grey species take their colour more quickly, particularly when the tint is a slaty one. There is also the silver fox and the black fox—but alas, I shall have to form my collection all over again, for I never shall be able to return to Yakoutsk," he added sadly.

After supper the Yakout woman requested permission to sleep near the camp fire, and Nadège made no objection. The woman then lay down upon the snow, her feet towards the fire, without troubling herself to ascertain whether it would be kept up or not. Then, wrapping her head and shoulders in her *sanayak* of rein-

deer's skin, she was soon snoring. The three little blue foxes still reposed beneath her mantle.

The night was far from being a quiet one. Three quarters of the sheep shot by M. Lafleur remained, and the smell of the flesh attracted the wolves. They came prowling round the camp, notwithstanding the growling and baying, and sometimes the furious barking, of Wab. M. Lafleur—always useful—found it at last absolutely necessary to take the dog with him to the nearest thicket, where he went to bring some branches to build up the fire.

The renewed blaze seemed to intimidate the wolves whose eyes could be perceived glittering in the darkness beyond. While Wab held some of them in check, others boldly attacked the remains of the mutton and disposed of it in a twinkling.

But the number of the animals soon increased to an alarming extent, and at a signal given by Yégor a volley was discharged at the assailants. Yégor and M. Lafleur fired several times, and Ladislas emptied Yermac's revolvers. The inspector of police—unarmed, and prevented by his wound from any active part in the defence—remained quiet.

The wounded wolves uttered dismal howls, and the travellers fancied them writhing upon the ground in agony. The others drew off a little, but returned to the charge, until it was again necessary to fire another volley.

After a while the travellers succeeded in repelling the wolves but at daybreak—which at that season is very late as we know—

they came again to the attack in greater force than ever. They fought over the dead bodies of their companions, and greedily devoured them; but that was but a poor repast for so many famished animals

Yégor and his companions loaded their guns, thinking that the wolves, having only whetted their appetites, would make a desperate attack upon them. Ladislas handed the revolvers to Nadège and kept for himself Yermac's gun. Yermac himself wielded a good-sized club in his unwounded hand, ready with the rest for any emergency.

At this juncture an enormous grey bear appeared above the rock on which Nadège's tent had been pitched. The animal descended very leisurely and made his way towards the wolves. The latter, disturbed in their contemplation of the banquet they had counted upon, turned boldly upon the intruder. Then the bear, retreating a few paces, placed his back against the rock and raised himself upon his haunches. Then, advancing with widely extended jaws and fore-paws crossed upon his chest, he awaited the attack. Seeing him assume this defiant attitude, the wolves extended themselves in a semicircle in front of him, keeping at a safe distance, however.

Yégor and his companions stood amazed. After a rapid consultation they determined to leave the wolves to the tender mercies of the bear before they interfered, as it was necessary to husband their powder.

The grey bear and the wolves continued to gaze upon each other;

but as this grew monotonous, the wolves thought it time to open the attack, which they did by annoying and aggravating the bear by snarlings, as if to reproach him with cowardice. The bear, however, took no notice, and permitted the sneers of his enemies to pass unheeded.

At length some of the braver members of the pack, or the most indignant, rushed upon the hairy monster, who remained as firm as the rock against which he supported himself. Those venturesome animals attacked him on all sides at once.

The enormous beast then raised his paws, and, striking right and left as if he were wielding a club, he struck down an assailant at each blow. Every time his terrible paw descended, a wolf fell with a fractured skull.

“Shall we assist this new ally of ours?” said Yégor to M. Lafleur. The Parisian nodded affirmatively.

Then the two friends, with considerable courage, ranged themselves alongside the bear, and made a very effective diversion in his favour by firing at the nearest wolves. For a moment the bear seemed alarmed by the detonations, but he quickly recovered himself and appeared to understand that the men were giving him material assistance.

The enraged wolves, far from retreating as one might have expected they would, rushed in a body upon the bear. Those who boldly advanced with heads erect were put *hors de combat* by the teeth or claws of the formidable beast. Yégor and his companion waged war with the wolves who came insidiously and treacherously

to the attack, those who crawled in under the animal's belly to pounce upon him unawares. Thus the *mêlée* soon became really terrible.

The bear dashed his enemies howling to a distance as soon as ever they came within reach of his formidable paws. The wolves, thus mortally wounded, rolled upon the ground in agony, snarling and gnashing their teeth. The remainder soon discontinued the encounter and drew off. A few discharges from the rifles accompanied their retreat. But many assaults of this kind were made, and intrepidly sustained by the bear and his allies. At length the wolves, seeing so many of their number slain or wounded, lost heart, and definitely abandoned the encounter.

The grey bear remained impassible as ever, perfectly astonished at, but in no way proud of, his victory.

“Shall we attack him now?” asked Yégor of M. Lafleur.

“Wait a while,” said M. Lafleur. “He has been of great assistance to us. These bears are not ferocious. I will repay him for his alliance by a dancing lesson, a course which in my country they call payment in *monnaie de singe*, that is by laughter instead of coin; always provided that he does not anticipate my intention by devouring me, and so settling me and the bill at once!”

While he was speaking M. Lafleur had taken his violin from his pocket, and the bear watched him closely, not losing a gesture. Without waiting to indicate the time, the dancing-master stepped gravely forth at a measured pace and proceeded to execute the solemn steps of the old and graceful minuet of a bygone age.



AT A SIGNAL GIVEN BY YÉGOR, A VOLLEY WAS DISCHARGED AT



The bear at first yawned as if he considered the whole thing a wearisome performance, but the notes of the violin astonished and perhaps charmed him. He began to nod his head in approval, for we know that the ears of the bear, which are incapable of hearing thunder or the roar of avalanches, can distinctly receive the most delicate impressions and the sweetest sounds. The animal in question seemed at length to appreciate the dancer and his music. The bear belonged to a species which is seldom dangerous, as they feed upon roots and fish. At the beginning of every winter the Ostiaks bring troops of these bears to Berezoff, where the flesh of the animals is sold in the butchers' shops.

Carried away by the music, the bear began to sway about in his heavy fashion, moving his head in time to the air played by M. Lafleur, who all the while managed to draw the animal farther and farther from the encampment, and the bear followed him as if attracted by a magnet. Yégor had much trouble to prevent Wab rushing upon the new guest which had suddenly rendered himself so agreeable to the charms of music.

At length M. Lafleur, thinking all danger was over and perhaps fearing to lower the great art he professed, suddenly turned round and began to scrape upon the first string in a most inharmonious manner. The bear, evidently annoyed at the sudden cessation of the music, retired to his lair in a very mystified and generally puzzled state of mind.

Some hours later a troop of carrion crows swooped down upon the bleeding carcasses of the wolves, and obliged the travellers to

leave their encampment and move to a distance in the direction from which they anticipated the arrival of Tékél with the sleighs.

The female Yakout, however, did not accompany them in their advance. She retreated to her own people, carrying the three little blue foxes in her bosom.

At length, on the evening of the next day, just as night fell—though, to be accurate, it was dark nearly all day then—a strident noise and some trampling on the hard snow announced the approach of Tékél and the long-expected conveyances.

Before long they came in sight. The reindeer were proceeding at a rapid pace. Yégor was delighted beyond measure. Nadège's eyes filled with tears, and Ladislas clapped his hands for joy.

“First-rate sleighs,” said M. Lafleur, who knew what they ought to be.

But the inspector of police looked very glum indeed, he could not conceal his chagrin.

Yermac's position was certainly a strange one. The old judge was quite incapable of any compromise with conscience; he always walked upon the strict path of duty: the written law of right was his guide, he never permitted himself any deflection from the path, nor any examination or misinterpretation of the rules of duty.

Distrustful of his abilities, of his authority, he remained deaf to the inner voice which warns everyone of right and wrong, and he weighed down his intellectual capacity by the addition of the strict application of the law to it. From his point of view men were made to obey the laws; not that the laws were made in the

interests of humanity. He, as we have already seen, would never hesitate to sacrifice himself to his sense of duty. Yet, here he was, obliged to assist, or at any rate connive at, the escape of people who were braving the law and defying him personally. He was now compelled to follow them. Whither? For how long? The fugitives themselves only could say!

Yermac felt quite incapable of submitting to such humiliation. It would have been better for him had he succumbed to their former attacks, than to remain now in their hands, an object of pity and derision.

But supposing they encountered a patrol of Cossacks, what was he to do? Should he denounce the fugitives, Yégor and Nadège, as his strict sense of duty dictated; should he brand M. Lafleur as a criminal accessory?

On the other hand, he owed his life to these people. What a cruel fate was his; what a perplexing problem he had to solve; what a terrible conflict was exercising his conscience at that time!

Tékel, although he continued to advance, did so with some hesitation. He could not recognize the locality. The remains of the burning forest gave quite a different appearance to the country. The Yakout was very much surprised when he approached the encampment, to find it occupied by Yégor and his friends, the employers of his services.

Tékel leaped lightly from the *narta* he was driving, and exhibited the sleighs, which met with general admiration. His

Yakout comrade was introduced after the reindeer. This young man was of very pronounced Tartar type, and rejoiced in the name of Chort.

The costume of the two Yakouts presented a medley of the clothing of the Russian peasant and the aborigines of the Fur Country. They wore long pelisses of grey cloth, like the Muscovite: trousers of tanned reindeer-skin, and *torbassas* or boots of the same material. These boots are made very easy, and are turned up at the toes like skate-irons. They reach as far as the knees, and are bordered by a band of black cloth. All the seams of the clothing worn by Tékél and Chort were also covered with a band of this cloth. We may add that their boots were confined round the ankles by leather thongs.

Let us now glance at the sleighs, or *nartas*.

The *narta* is the Siberian sleigh, and is long and narrow. It holds two persons besides the driver, whose position is not very secure, or pleasant; and he must be prepared to leap off at the slightest appearance of accident.

In the lockers of every *narta* are placed provisions for a journey across uninhabited districts, and certain necessary implements and utensils.

Tékél had had the forethought to furnish the lockers of both sleighs on this occasion with wheat-flour—notwithstanding its cost—and barley meal, dried or smoked fish, &c. ; and an abundant supply of lichens showed that the reindeer had not been forgotten. He had also provided hatchets and knives, implements for hunting, and

fishing nets. A covering of felt extended over each sleigh, and could be used as a tent, if necessary.

Each *narta* was drawn, as is usual, by three strong reindeer.

The Russians generally harness dogs to their vehicles. They are less difficult to feed on a journey, for they eat the flesh of the animals which may be killed *en route*, and, if necessary, fish; but the reindeer must be fed with mosses, which have to be sought, and are not always procurable without trouble, and going out of the way.

As for the reindeer themselves, they were certainly not irproachable. Three of the six were white. Two had splendid antlers measuring four or five feet. The rest were *minus* one horn—the left or right. One animal which had been ridden had his horns sawn off within six inches of his head. Besides, it was then the season for the shedding of the cuticle of the horns, and long ragged pieces were hanging to the antlers.

The head of the reindeer somewhat resembles that of the young cow, but the body is thinner, the limbs finer. The large feet of the animal enable it to pass easily over the snow. Without reindeer the inhabitants of the extreme northern regions could not live. These animals fulfil for them all the uses of the horse and the ox for us, and are as necessary as the goat and the camel to the Arabs. The reindeer serves as a beast of burthen and as a food-producer—it yields milk and clothes to its owners besides.

Yégor put Tékél in possession of all the circumstances which had occurred since his departure, and the former was very glad to

hear that his servant had made such an excellent provision for the journey. The supplies would replace those lost by the conflagration.

That evening their meal was almost luxurious, thanks to the provisions brought by the latest arrivals. There was Yakout butter—without salt—hardened by the cold and cut up by the hatchet; *strouganina*, or raw dried-fish cut into thin slices; reindeer brains, and black bread in nice cakes—all delicious and choice viands.

The Yakouts also added some wild onions which they had gathered close by.



After supper the two natives made the arrangements for the night.

The reindeer were unharnessed and set at liberty. Then Nadège and Ladislas took possession of one of the *nartas*, and were tucked well in under the felt covering. The inspector of police was, in consideration of his wound, accommodated with the other sleigh. Yégor and M. Lafleur wrapped themselves up in their furs; while the Yakouts made the most simple preparations and took so little precaution against the cold that they fully bore out the reputation of the "men of iron," as they are generally called in Siberia.

At the first gleams of daylight the travellers intended to resume their journey.



“The *nartas* were drawn with very considerable swiftness over the snow.

CHAPTER XI.

ARRESTED—THE “OSTROG.”—A HEAVY BRIBE.

BY the refracted atmospheric light the travellers made their way along the Eastern road, guiding themselves with the little compass which Yégor carried amongst other “charms” upon his watch-chain. The larger compass provided by Yégor had been lost in the fire, as well as the map of the almost unknown countries through which the fugitives had to pass. But fortunately the map was photographed upon the mind of the “convict” after the long and anxious study which he had bestowed upon it while planning his escape.

A severe frost—20 degrees—made all the resources for keeping

warm very acceptable to the travellers even upon the very first stages of their journey.

The *nartas* were drawn with very considerable swiftness over the snow, the pace of the reindeer averaging nearly nine miles an hour. In the first sleigh, driven by Tékél, were Yégor, Nadège, and Ladisias. Yermac and M. Lafleur took their places in the second.

An apparently interminable plain presented itself to the gaze of the fugitives, not with distant perspectives — there was not sufficient light for that—but with a dreadful uniformity of white surface of which the *nartas* always occupied the centre; and had not the trampling of the reindeer upon the snow, and the grinding of the sleigh-runners been audible, the travellers might have fancied they were standing still.

They traversed many frozen lakes, notably the great lake of Orinkine. The camp, on the first evening of the transit upon sleighs, was actually formed upon the surface of one of those marshes which remain always frozen underneath, and are called *toundras*. Here and there were a few stunted trees whose roots, unable to penetrate the frozen ground, twisted and coiled above it.

The second day's journey was ushered in by a black frost, which promised some good stages to the fugitives, who directed their course so as to avoid all inhabited places, and particularly the Cossack posts where it would be difficult to furnish satisfactory explanations as to the object of a journey between the Indiguirka and Kolima at such a severe season.

Suddenly a Cossack, driving a sleigh drawn by a number of dogs, crossed the track of the *nartas*. He presented a very odd appearance did this Cossack with his lance slung behind him and his head-covering drawn over his eyes. He looked like a "hobby horse" seated in an iron chair placed on its back, and drawn from a long distance by a pack of dogs. This man was a courier sent by the commandant of the post established to the north of the plain which the fugitives were traversing, parallel to the Stanovoy-Grébète mountains—where the Indiguirka, the Kolima, and the Omolone rivers take their rise.

The Cossack, having passed the *nartas*, turned round and showed some intention of overtaking them; so Yégor and M. Lafleur desired their drivers to go faster and put the reindeer to their utmost speed.

They had so much the appearance of wishing to escape that the Cossack was piqued. He thought he would like to have a closer examination of these travellers who were so hurried, and who, contrary to the usual habits of travellers in the steppes, seemed unwilling to hold any communication with people they happened to meet.

In less than five minutes he had overtaken the *nartas*. So it became a matter of necessity for Yégor and his companions to pull up and enter into conversation with the man.

"I wish you a pleasant journey, gentlemen," cried the Cossack "Let me give you a piece of advice: bear more to the left if you do not wish to miss the *Ostrog* of Verkné-Kolimsk."

The *ostrog* was the post from which the Cossack had been despatched.

“*They* do not wish to go to the *ostrog*,” said Yermac.

“Oh! then where do *they* wish to go to?” asked the Cossack, who was more puzzled than ever, for he could not understand why the men should object to halt at one of the posts which are generally looked upon as blessed refuges by those who have to cross the steppes.

“Have you your passports in order?” he inquired of Yégor; who, having quitted his sleigh, was advancing to speak with him.

“We have our passports in order,” said Yégor. “If you had any authority to verify them, I would exhibit them with pleasure. But what good would it be? You are quite ignorant of them.”

“Not so ignorant as you suppose,” replied the Cossack. “I am sent as a courier to the neighbouring posts, a bearer of the descriptions of the convicts who have escaped from Yakoutsk. There are four of them,” continued the soldier, as he counted the party and perceived five persons; “and you answer very well to the descriptions. So I am compelled to beg you to visit our Esaoule.”

The Cossack, perhaps fancied he had made an easy capture, and without remorse or false sensibility one may believe so; for the convicts were held in such contempt by the people of the country that they said—“When you kill a squirrel you get only one skin; when you kill a *varnak* you find three—his coat, his shirt, and the skin of the man.”

Yermac was going to speak, but the Frenchman anticipated him.

"We will not refuse," he said to the Cossack, "and if you wish to show us the way we will follow you willingly. I could very well put up with something hot in the way of food. Have they a good kitchen at your *ostrog*? I believe my companions will not object to some good pemmican soup, or even a venison pasty."

M. Lafleur said this in an easy and unembarrassed tone, making at the same time a sign of intelligence to Yégor, so as to make him comprehend the impossibility of declining the pressing invitation of the Cossack.

Yégor then resumed his place, after having studied the features of the inspector of police. The latter appeared absorbed in meditation, of which Yégor divined the object.

Had not the inspector been present Yégor would certainly have "taken French leave" of the Cossack. But an attempt of this kind, in which Yermac would have opposed him, could not have been made without great risk.

Nadège appeared greatly alarmed at the presence of the soldier, and Ladislas was on the verge of weeping. Yégor reassured them, and gave Tékél orders to regulate his pace with the sleigh of the interfering Cossack who had crossed their path in such an unwelcome manner.

The three *nartas* proceeded. The Cossack soon amused himself by trying the speed of his dogs against the reindeer. Tékél and Chort entered into the spirit of the racing and urged their cattle to their utmost speed, so that in less than a quarter of an hour they all came within sight of the *ostrog*; and Yégor had scarcely made

up his mind what course to adopt in this terrible eventuality. His heart beat violently as they approached.

The *ostrog* was a small ruined fort, the walls formed of a rough arrangement of girders or beams. At each corner—withstanding the primitive construction of the block-house—was a tower, the whole surrounded by a palisade. The fort was the ruined remains of one of the old fortifications erected in the seventeenth century to protect the first Russian pioneers against the attacks of the natives.

Near the fort was a little village, and the houses which composed it remained empty all the summer. This was one of the most distant of the northern stations. In the fort ten Cossacks composed the guard under the orders of the Esaoule.

By means of this armed force the Czar's officer found it possible to impose a tax upon the furs provided by the nomads of the district.

Yégor and his companions were carried before the Esaoule, who occupied the largest house in the village. He was an aged Russian—an old fox grown white in his “earth;” perhaps, an old non-commissioned officer; perhaps, a functionary detected in some peccadillo and punished by this species of banishment. In the presence of such a man firmness was absolutely necessary, and Yégor summoned all his determination to his aid.

He began by complaining of the treatment he and his friends had received at the hands of the soldier, stating that he (Yégor) was accustomed to be treated with more respect.

M. Lafleur thought that his friend was carrying matters with rather too high a hand and intervened.

"Look here," he said, "my friend. My gluttony had quite as much to do with our appearance here as anything that abominable Cossack said or did. I am hungry, I want something warm to drink," he added, turning to the Esaoule.

"Then you had no intention of stopping here?" said the officer "You did not intend to re-victual your sleighs, nor to change your animals?" (This officer, who was all-powerful in the district, had the exclusive right to supply reindeer and provisions.)

"We come from Yakoutsck," replied Yégor, but our reindeer, which came from Zachiversk, are not fatigued, and we have an abundance of provisions."

"And whither are you going?"

"To Nijni-Kolimsk—this lady and her brother are the children of your colleague, the Esaoule of the town; their father is ill, and I am bringing them to him."

"Ah, Toumanoff is ill; dying, eh? I have heard nothing of his illness," said the old officer. "I knew that his son and daughter were being educated at Yakoutsck."

"You see them before you," said Yégor, blushing at the bare-faced assertion which he felt compelled to make.

His confusion and his blushes did not escape the notice of the Esaoule.

"You have your passport, I suppose?" he asked.

“Certainly,” replied Yégor, drawing from his breast-pocket the forged warrant.

“Let me look at it,” said the officer.

He seized the stamped document as he spoke: read and re-read it, turning it about in his hands, and every now and then staring at the fugitive in a way which embarrassed Yégor very much.

Yermac smiled: he did not lose a movement of the Esaoule; and Yégor’s embarrassment pleased the inspector mightily, for he suspected his own presence tended to increase it.

“The passport is quite regular,” said the officer at length. “But it is not a question concerning you and my colleague’s children. These two men with you have also permits, I suppose?”

“Here,” said Yégor whose position incited him to extraordinary flights of imagination, “here is one of them, M. Lafleur,”—he introduced the herbalist to the Esaoule as he spoke—“a Parisian, a most distinguished naturalist; the author of the ‘Flora Altaica’!”

“All this is not a passport,” remarked the officer drily.

“M. Lafleur is in possession of a *billet de circulation* for Aldanska where I met him, and he took the chance of accompanying me simply for love of science and research.”

“Hum!” growled the Esaoule, but half convinced.

“I have never been asked for my passport,” cried M. Lafleur; “no never. All through the year I travel in Siberia, from the Oural to Kamtchatka, from the Altaï mountains to the Polar Sea. The remainder of my time I pass in the family of the Governor of

Yakoutsk. I enjoy the intimate acquaintance of the governor, the esteem of his lady wife, and the friendship of Mdles. Agraféna and Elléna, their daughters. Are you satisfied? For a master of relays you are absurdly exacting! Look at me well. I am a Frenchman, born in Paris, in the Place de la Bastille. My spine is straight, and I have not the appearance of having been treated to the knout, as you know very well. Respect me as the friend of your superior officer, and let me alone without your ridiculous formalities."

Then M. Lafleur, notwithstanding his protestations, handed his permit to the officer.

"I beg your pardon, monsieur," said the latter, when he had respectfully perused the document; "but the inspector of police of Yakoutsk" (here the fugitives could not repress a movement of surprise) "has already warned me by my Cossacks, of an escape attempted by some felons, and advised me of their appearance; of you, mademoiselle, of your brother, and of the young man who accompanies you."

Yermac drew himself up proudly at having succeeded so well. Yégor believed the man was about to denounce them. He made a desperate attempt to secure his silence.

"You do not ask who our other companion is," said Yégor to the Esaoule. "Allow me the honour of presenting to you one of the four or five Polish priests——"

As Yégor proceeded the astonishment of Yermac visibly increased.

“One of the Polish priests whom the Russian Government permits to travel in Siberia to visit once a year the convict establishments, and to find the political prisoners exiled from their own country. These priests travel boldly through the Siberian snows, from Tobolsk to the colonies of the Amor, and from the mines of Nertschinsk to the dockyards of Okhotsk.”

“He ought to have a regular passport,” said the Esaoule.

The inspector of police possessed no other papers but those which established his true identity. To exhibit them would be tantamount to denouncing the fugitives.

“Permit me to finish,” continued Yégor, to whom the sense of danger supplied imagination. “The devotion of our new friend does not always secure the reward it deserves. In the mountains yonder we drew him out of the jaws of a bear, so to speak.”

“Which had already cruelly lacerated his arm,” added M. Lafleur.

“But the passport!” said the officer.

“That was devoured by the bear,” began M. Lafleur.

“Lost; lost with a valuable portfolio in the terrible conflict with the animal,” said Yégor drowning the remark of the Frenchman.

The Esaoule, surprised at the continued silence of the Polish priest, looked at him as if inviting him to confirm or deny the statements made by his companions.

The inspector of police, thus silently interrogated, replied in a hesitating way—

“I have nothing to add to what the gentlemen have stated

concerning the mountains of Verko-Yansk, the bear, and my wound. It is all quite correct."

This statement caused Yégor and Nadège immense relief, but the sense of security could not last.

"All this, you know, is very irregular," said the Esaoule scratching the back of his head.

"What can I do then!" said Yégor.

"You, nothing. But I must do as my duty dictates under the circumstances. I arrest you: and will seek instructions from the Governor of Yakoutsik, and his inspector of police. Meantime I will send a Cossack to Nijni-Kolimsk to announce to the Esaoule there the pending arrival of his children—if you have told the truth."

Yégor was thunderstruck at this announcement, and Nadège grew as pale as death. She appeared ready to faint.

"As you please," said Yégor to the Esaoule; "no matter how odious a proceeding it will appear to detain children from the bedside of a dying parent. But you would do better, monsieur," he added, firmly, "when travellers are forced to present themselves to you, fatigued by a long journey, accomplished under very arduous conditions, to gain a few precious hours—those hours which you so lightly cause us to lose,—you would do better by exercising in their favour a little of the boasted Siberian hospitality, at least; particularly when you have to deal with delicate young people like this lady and her brother."

The Esaoule, somewhat confused, immediately offered Nadège a chair, and made some friendly overtures to Ladislas.

“Monsieur,” he said to Yégor, “consider my house as your own ; all it contains is at your service. You may dispose of yourself as you please until my couriers have returned from the governor, and from Nijni-Kolimsk. In the meantime, I assure you, I will spare no pains to diminish the inconvenience of this forced detention, for you and your companions.”

“But think of the time lost,” said Nadège.

“Mademoiselle, I will undertake to furnish you with the best pack of dogs I possess.”

“For my part,” said Yermac, “I can only congratulate you, M. Lavrenti Kantier, upon the manner in which you interpret the duties of an official of the empire.”

“Do you know me then ?” exclaimed the Esaoule, who was considerably astonished at hearing himself addressed by name by the supposed Polish priest.

“Never mind,” replied Yermac. “Be assured that my compliments are sincere. Let that suffice.”

The Esaoule, perceiving that these words were spoken seriously, accepted them in good faith.

“I do all I can,” he said, “to perform my functions satisfactorily. My duties are anything but agreeable sometimes.”

Yermac was radiant at the state of affairs ; for, without having had to repay his companions with ingratitude, without in any way having broken his implied engagement with them, he was accomplishing his own ends, thanks to the message he had sent by the Cossacks to the four most important posts, forming a huge quad-

rilateral in the solitary district between the Indiguirka and the Kolima. Force still was on the side of the law. He would recover his liberty of action without having in any way failed in his duties as inspector of police. "Sit down, gentlemen, and tell me something of the burning of the forest of Boroukan," said the Esaoule. "You surely must have seen something of it."

"Ah! I should think we did," said M. Lafleur, who had in no degree lost confidence.

Then he entered into a vivid description of the terrible scene, interspersed with numerous Latin quotations culled at hazard from his recollections of rudimentary class-books, by a mode of proceeding borrowed from the *Medécin malgré lui*, so as to keep up the appearance of being the learned man Yégor had represented him to be. Every sentence, delivered by him with such coolness, brought equal calm and ease of mind to the fugitives.

While M. Lafleur was describing the conflagration, a Cossack, by the Esaoule's orders, was laying the table for a meal. The prudent officer wished that his unwilling guests should not have to complain of the circumstances in which they were placed. He had already gained the goodwill of the pretended Polish priest, and he now desired to gain over the friend of the governor; the talented author of the "Flora Altaica."

The warmth of the apartment comforted the travellers, and they were glad to take off their outer clothing. Yégor insisted warmly that Nadège should do honour to the viands served by the Esaoule. Her melancholy might be attributed to the sad cir-

cumstances under which she had undertaken the journey in winter time.

Yermac ate with an appetite to which he had been long a stranger.

The guests were served with "tchi" of meats accompanied by loaves of barley bread, hot from the oven, and sweetmeats made of a kind of gooseberry which had yielded an exceptional crop during the previous summer.

"I will send messengers immediately," said the Commandant of the *Ostrog*. "My courier shall be despatched within an hour."

"Wait a little," said Yégor boldly. "Your messenger shall carry a communication from me to the father of these young people, your colleague at Nijni-Kolimsk."

"And a letter from me to the governor's wife," said M. Lafleur, "to inform her of your treatment of us, and to report particularly of the excellence of your sweetmeats, Esaoule."

The Esaoule seemed somewhat put out of countenance. He was evidently afraid to run counter to such important people as the travellers were. Yermac, who perceived this hesitation, laid down his knife and fork, and frowned gloomily.

"And while your couriers are absent," continued Yégor, "I would advise you to take measures for the continuation of our journey, and the harnessing of our sleighs. Besides, you must understand I will recompense you fully for your trouble."

The Esaoule immediately pricked up his ears. At the word recompense, his face beamed. He promised himself a profit out of

this windfall, though he would neglect no precautions to clear himself officially.

“Let us see,” muttered Yermac (the old judge of the Moscow court), “to what depth the honesty of this Russian official extends.”

The Esaoule then attempted to snuff a candle, and extinguished it!

“That means an unexpected visit,” said M. Lafleur, who knew the popular Russian sayings.

But he had no idea that his remark was so near the truth. At that instant, the door was opened, and there successively entered the low room, a long nose, a bony head, and an emaciated face, crowned with a skin skull-cap, much the worse for wear. The general appearance was not prepossessing. Yégor recognized the man as a Jew pedlar.

The intruder, perceiving so many people in the room, drew back his body, his head, and finally his nose, fearing he had been indiscreet.

Yégor thought the man was an itinerant merchant—a dealer in little things—some of which he might purchase for his host, in recompense for his hospitality, forced though it was; for he judged he might produce a better effect by so doing.

The Jew—for he was a Jew—remained in the ante-room, a small, dark apartment, feebly lighted by means of a sheet of ice, fixed in its place with cold water, as is the custom in these regions where the extremely low temperature would shatter glass. The man

understood that some one would come to him. He seized the tunic of Yégor in a mysterious way, and said in a low voice—

“Esaoule, I have some more of it, purer, and in a larger quantity than before.”

“I am not the Esaoule,” said Yégor. “What do you sell?”

“You are not the Esaoule,” repeated the other, alarmed and fearing that, in the dark, he had said too much.

“I will buy willingly anything you offer. I wish to make a present to the kind-hearted Esaoule, to whom I am under obligations. What have you to sell?”

The Jew scratched his forehead with his long nails.

“Will you speak?” cried Yégor.

“Well—what I have to sell I would not offer to everyone. Whence come you?”

“I—come from Barnaoul.”

“And whither go you?”

Yégor began to think this man a little inquisitive.

“I am going to Nijni-Kolimsk,” he replied.

“I have just come from there,” said the Jew.

“You have just arrived from Nijni-Kolimsk,” exclaimed Yégor alarmed. “Don’t tell a soul here, and I will give you twenty roubles for your discretion. Is it a bargain?”

While the fugitive drew the paper from his pocket-book, the Jew said as he extended his hand for the money—

“If you have secrets also——?”

“Well——?”



“FEEL THE WEIGHT OF IT—TWENTY-ONE OUNCES.”

“We shall understand one another.”

“Speak out.”

“This is gold-dust that I have to offer, in good condition.”

“Stolen gold-dust !”

“Hush, not so loud. Gold-dust which came to hand without people having had the trouble to collect it.” This, he added, pulling a small bag of squirrel-skin from his breast—“this came from the sands of the Amou-Daria. Feel the weight of it. Twenty-one ounces; and scarcely any silver, much less copper, mixed with it.”

“And you will give me all this gold-dust for a little of my money?”

“Yes—gold money—or even paper !”

Yégor could not repress a smile at the idea of thus exchanging contraband gold against the state currency.

“How much do you estimate that gold dust is worth?” he asked.

“There is quite six hundred roubles’-worth. But I will take one hundred and fifty. Is that too much?”

“No, certainly not too much. But I am not rich. I wish to give the bag as a present to the Esaoule.”

“You must have some very great favour to *beg* or buy !”

“Perhaps—and so I will give you one hundred roubles.”

“No: I would rather try the Esaoule himself; and besides I have a message for him from the Esaoule of Nijni-Kolimsk.”

“And the note I have just given you—and our agreement?”

“I had forgotten them,” said the Jew. “Very well, I will not see the Esaoule—but you must give me one hundred and twenty roubles.”

“Agreed, my friend: give me your bag. There are some people within who are anxious for my return.”

The exchange of the gold-dust and paper was made; and curiously enough, both buyer and seller were satisfied with the bargain.

“This is for you, monsieur,” said Yégor, as he entered the room. “The Jew had business with you. He begged me to hand you this.”

The Esaoule weighed the little bag in his hand. He then opened it and saw the yellow dust glittering within—and of great value.

He did not hesitate for a second.

“I know,” he said; “thank you.”

He took the bag and nodded to Yégor. This signified that he depended upon his discretion.

“Miserable wretch,” muttered Yermac, who had not lost anything of this by-play or dialogue. “He has permitted himself to be bought.”

This reflection was too much for the inspector, and he made up his mind to speak out and denounce the fugitives. He would also reproach the Esaoule for his venality and make a scene. He made up his mind that there existed in him two separate individualities, morally independent—the functionary and the man. If the man

had contracted a debt of gratitude, he was free to pay it when and how he could—as an official, he was obliged to acquit himself of obligations however strict, and however rigorous.

“Esaoule,” he began.

Yégor and Nadège perceived by the expression of his face that he was about to denounce them.

But the Esaoule had just conceived an idea—a happy thought—as he fancied. So he quickly cut short the inspector’s sentence.

“Excuse me,” he said. “Gentlemen, I think I have found out a way out of this difficulty which will suit all parties.”

“What way is that?” asked Yermac, the great drops standing on his forehead in his anxiety.

“This. You may all continue your journey—to-morrow, I mean, after reposing here for one night and getting thoroughly warmed and comfortable. I will send two Cossacks with you to Nijni-Kolimsk who will assure me on their return of the truth—which meantime I do not dispute—of the reasons you have given me for your journey.”

“I accept your offer willingly,” said Yégor quickly; although he had anticipated with much alarm the offer the Esaoule was about to make, and was not at ease at the prospect it held out. Nevertheless, he greatly preferred to be accompanied by two Cossacks on the road than to be handed over by Yermac at once—the danger was less immediate; and there was a chance of escape in the suggestion.

The inspector of police on his part, when he heard the suggestion

made by the Esaoule, felt less fixed in the determination which he had formerly taken—though it cost him much—when he saw Yégor and his companions escape, thanks to the complicity of the master of relays. He held his tongue, believing he would get the better of his adversaries before long, and do so too without giving them any cause to think he had conspired against them.

Yégor who was watching him, understood what was passing in his mind, and said lightly to the Esaoule—

“Well then, monsieur, all you have to do now is to provide the teams for our sleighs.”

“Make yourself quite easy,” replied the official. “You shall have for each of your sleighs fifteen or eighteen of the best dogs the country can furnish.”



A number of dogs were lying by the *nartas*.

CHAPTER XII.

IN THE HUT.—M. LAFLEUR'S STRATAGEM.—THE COSSACKS ELUDED.

THE day following the incidents just recorded, a merry company might have been perceived seated round a bright fire in one of the *yourtes* of refuge which are erected at certain distances for travellers upon the Czar's highways of Siberia. The smoke arising from the fire in the *yourte* passed out through the rounded top.

Outside the hut a number of dogs were lying by the *nartas*. The animals had burrowed deeply into the snow to keep themselves warm, and rested with their tails covering their muzzles. The two horses, attached to a post, were supplied with a meagre ration of forage.

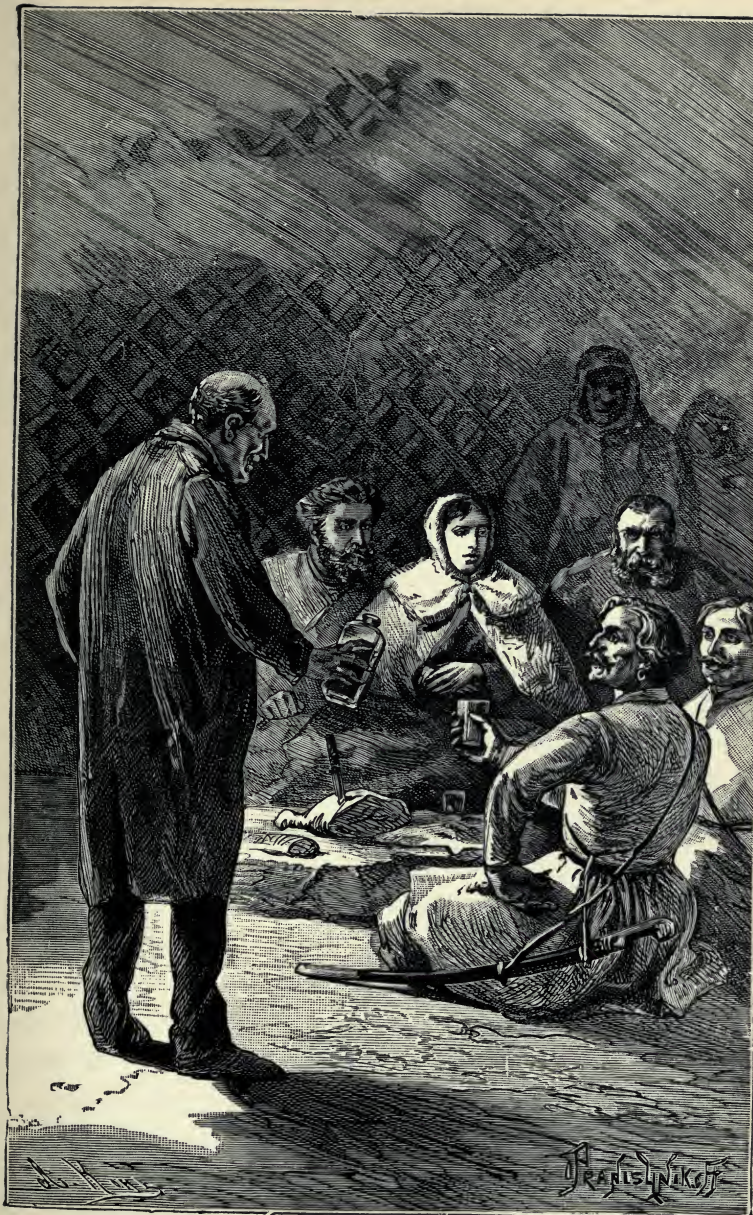
In a saucepan (or cauldron) on the fire inside the hut the dogs' dinner was being cooked.

The moving spirit of the party was M. Lafleur—the irrepressible Lafleur. He, having dressed the dinner and laid the cloth, so to speak, was now exhorting each member of the party to partake of the excellent repast which was laid upon a flat stone that served for a table, on which the roast quarter of *argali* was the principal dish.

The far-seeing Parisian had supplied himself with an abundance of this savoury food when he quitted the *ostrog*, which had so nearly been the termination of the expedition for all the fugitives. Great slices of salmon, smoked, had already made their appearance with the roast mutton; and this salmon had only one fault—it made those who consumed it very thirsty, and the travellers were now seeking to qualify that defect.

The *convives*, seated cross-legged upon the ground, are well known to us all: Yégor, Nadège, Yermac—the last-named in the place of honour; then the two Cossacks, who had magnificent appetites; and finally M. Lafleur, with the faithful Yakouts, Tékél and Chort.

Nothing appeared likely to be stinted by M. Lafleur that evening, for he uncorked without regret a third bottle of brandy—a prodigality of proceeding which had been arranged beforehand with Yégor Séménoff. It appeared very advisable to treat the two Cossacks very liberally, and a large breach in the provisions brought by Tékél from Zachiversk must be made. Did M. Lafleur hope to



M. LAFLEUR UNCORKED, WITHOUT REGRET, A THIRD BOTTLE OF BRANDY.

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make friends of the guards? to detach them from Yermac? to treat with them? Such a course would appear very hazardous; extremely difficult and dangerous. But Yégor, assisted by M. Lafleur, was aiming at nothing less than the complete intoxication of the Cossacks, so that the fugitives might leave them and make their escape.

“Except at the *ostrog* we have not had a substantial meal for many days,” M. Lafleur was saying. “Unfortunately this dried fish is very salt, and has made me thirsty, as well as the rest, I suspect.”

Then he held out another bumper to the two Cossacks, who smiled “all over their faces” and exhibited their teeth fully. They seemed as if they would protest against the restrictions of their generous cupbearer as regarded the “misfortune” of the salted salmon.

“Come,” said M. Lafleur, “I perceive you like the smoked salmon.” Then he continued, “How can I address you, comrade?”

“Nicolai,” replied the Cossack.

“And you?” asked M. Lafleur, turning to the other.

“I? Ardalion.”

“Well, then, Nicolai and Ardalion, an idea has just occurred to me, and it is that *vodka* would go very well with the salmon.”

The Cossacks thought the very same thing, and began to laugh loudly. When their guttural “hi, hi,” had ceased, Yermac, who

was becoming somewhat anxious, and who had been very abstemious, remarked—

“Monsieur Lafleur, you are giving those men too much to drink.”

“Ah, I know that,” replied the Frenchman, in a cheery manner. “These fellows have already made a fine hole in our provisions.”

“Fortunately we are not very far from our destination,” added Yégor.

Yermac bestowed a stern glance at Yégor, with such as he might have regarded a liar.

Yégor understood it, and averted his eyes.

“I tell you, you are giving these men too much to drink,” continued Yermac. “Really, monsieur—‘Toumanoff,’” he added, appealingly: “when one is charged to conduct a well brought-up young lady, like mademoiselle, one ought to be careful to keep her away from any questionable display——”

“Oh,” exclaimed Nadège, “I have neither the right nor the leisure to think so greatly of the proprieties.”

“He wishes us to knock off drinking,” said one of the Cossacks, nudging his companion.

“Just as we are beginning to enjoy ourselves. Has this Polish priest any sense, think you?”

“He is a Dominican of Samogitia,” murmured M. Lafleur in the ear of the last speaker.

“*Biacha — biacha,*” said Nicolai, passing his hand over the back of the inspector of police, as if he were patting a sheep.

“My friends,” said Yernac, “you are making somewhat too free. If you only knew who I am you would regret your familiarity—I could crush you both.”

“Well then, who are you?” asked the Cossack named Ardalion.

“Who am I?” retorted Yernac, who no longer hesitated to recall the Cossacks to their duty at any price. “Who am I? I am the Inspector of Police of Yakoutsk.”

He fancied that these words would fall like a thunderbolt upon the audience.

But he was greatly mistaken.

“That’s a good notion, I must say,” exclaimed Ardalion, slapping Yernac, familiarly upon the shoulders, heavily.

“He does not want us to drink,” said the other Cossack. “But I verily believe the idiot is already the worse for liquor himself.”

“You will repent your insolence,” cried Yernac.

“This is the worst of *vodka*,” remarked Nicolai, in an abstracted tone.

“It gets the better of you, and drives you to the devil,” said Ardalion.

“Let us not speak with him any more, there is no good to be gained by it,” said Nicolai.

“Will you suffer this, M. Sémenoff—I mean, Monsieur Toumanoff?” cried Yernac. “Am I to be thus insulted in your presence?”

“What do you wish, monsieur? I have a good deal to put up with just now, myself,” replied Yégor.

“Come, peace, peace,” cried M. Lafleur. “Let us all drink a bumper of reconciliation!”

The Cossacks were very much inclined to obey this suggestion, and tendered their wooden goblets to be filled. Nicolaï said, “Exactly so, your highness,” while Ardalion remarked that “No one had a headache who drank at the expense of another person.”

M. Lafleur immediately filled first the goblet held by the inspector of police. Yermac, furious at the part he had been obliged to play, threw the liquor into the fire, which blazed up and filled the *yourte* with smoke, the blue flame of the spirit passing through the roof.

“Don’t you see,” he said to the soldiers, “that this man wishes to stupefy you and play you a trick?”

The two Cossacks looked at each other in half-tipsy astonishment. One scratched his head, and the other his back.

“Suppose it were true!” muttered Ardalion. “Why don’t they themselves drink?” he asked of his companion.

M. Lafleur, who was pouring out some *vodki* for the two Yakouts, whom he had managed up to that time till the opportunity arrived, put them forward to pledge the Cossacks, who threw off all suspicion and clamoured for more brandy, striking the great flat stone, that served for a table, with their goblets. Nadège and Ladislas retreated before all this noise to the farther extremity of the hut.

Yermac now determined to make a last effort.

“My friends,” said he to the Cossacks, “will you endeavour to collect what little sense remains in your heads, and listen to me if you can?”

“The friar of Samogitia wants us to say our catechism,” remarked Ardalion.

“He is like our thirst, we cannot get rid of him,” replied the other.

“As sure as I live it is a question of life or death with you,” said Yermac.

His tone was almost supplicating, but the Cossacks were in no condition to understand him. They began to give vent to all kinds of jokes at his expense. At length, completely overcome by laughing and brandy, they lay back and went to sleep on the floor of the *yourte*.

“That is what you wished for, I suppose?” exclaimed the inspector of police, addressing Yégor.

“Perhaps,” he replied in an undertone.

Yégor seemed afraid of waking the Cossacks, and, at a sign to Nadège, Ladislas and M. Lafleur, they noiselessly made what little preparation they could for sleeping. But M. Lafleur and Yégor never closed their eyes. As for Yermac, he continued to walk back and forwards across the floor, a prey to the keenest anxiety.

At length he could stand it no longer, and he advanced towards the Cossacks to awaken them. Already one of them—Ardalion—who had partially recovered, had roused himself, and was en-

deavouring to arouse his companion, to whom he was speaking in a low tone.

They got up together, and Yermac then thought it possible that they would hear him.

Nicolaï made him a mysterious sign, while he with stealthy step, and followed by his comrade, made his way towards the door of the *yourte*. The sign was an invitation to them to follow, and Yermac followed the men, notwithstanding the terrible cold which awaited him outside.

“In which *narta* shall we find the *vodki*,” enquired Nicolaï. “We must just have a little drop more while they are asleep.

“Miserable wretches, have you not already had enough?” exclaimed Yermac. “Mind what you are about: you will be lost!”

“What! are you beginning again? Well, then, we will find the *vodki* without your assistance!” said Nicolaï, shrugging his shoulders.

Meantime, the other Cossack was searching the *nartas*. He was a fortunate man, and had a lucky hand, for he almost immediately discovered the spirit he sought—a large bottle of brandy. He seized it, uttering a cry of joy.

Then the comrades re-entered the *yourte* together, and Yermac walked sullenly behind them, with little hope that they would attend to him now. Nevertheless, he made one more effort.

“Lookye,” he said, “in the first place you are committing a robbery.”

“Not so loud,” said Ardalion ; “you will wake the others.”

“But, passing by the theft,” continued Yermac, “if you will take my advice you will drink no more, and will not put yourselves in a condition in which you cannot do your duty—your mission.”

“I believe he is going to preach to us again,” remarked Nicolai to his comrade.

Then, skilfully uncorking the brandy-bottle, he carried it to his mouth and drank several mouthfuls of the spirit.

“My turn now,” said the other Cossack, snatching the bottle unceremoniously from his friend.

“Don’t drink it all,” cried Nicolai, as Ardalion contrived to swallow the brandy without taking breath.

“Here, take it, I’ll make you a present of the remainder!” said the latter, as he heaved a deep sigh.

Then with tottering steps he made his way to the place on the floor where he had lain previously.

Yermac made an attempt to take the bottle from the other Cossack, who intended to empty it, do doubt.

“Would you like a drink?” said Nicolai, as he held the flask to the inspector of police.

“No, I do not wish to drink, you wretched animal,” exclaimed Yermac, indignantly ; “I wish to save you, for all this will fall heavily upon you later.”

“If you don’t want a drink, let me alone ;” said Nicolai. So saying, he seated himself upon the ground, clasped the bottle

between his knees, and extended his hand to take a goblet from the "table." When he had succeeded in seizing it in his unsteady hand, he filled and emptied it after many attempts, gazing at the time unsteadily, but with an air of tipsy defiance, at Yermac.

Yégor and M. Lafleur, without saying a word, had watched this scene with the greatest interest. Turning round, Yermac perceived them both wide awake.

"Well," said he to Yégor, "you have completely succeeded, without a doubt."

"Not yet," replied Yégor.

At this moment, the Cossack, letting his head fall on one side, stretched himself upon the floor of the hut. He was quite intoxicated—like his comrade.

Then Yégor arose, awakened the two Yakouts, and gave them orders to harness the dogs to the sleighs.

"Master," replied Tékel, "you shall be obeyed."

In a moment the baying of the dogs announced that the orders of Yégor were being carried out. Without any delay, Yégor and M. Lafleur, took counsel in whispers, and the result of their conference was that they decided to take the inspector of police with them. To leave him behind would have been a very dangerous experiment.

Yermac perceived that they were speaking of him, and he said quietly—

"What do you intend to do with me, M. Séménoff? I can address you now by your real name."

“You are correct in thinking that we will not abandon you here while your wound is scarcely healed,” said Yégor.

“But you are leaving these soldiers here?”

“They have horses; but you, what could you do on foot? But, to tell you the truth, your society is so very agreeable to us that we should be quite unhappy if you did not go with us.”

“I understand,” said Yermac, who was angry with himself for being thus played with. “I can only submit; but beware! A time will come when I shall be quits with you!”

“Quits!” exclaimed M. Lafleur. “Have you forgotten the bear? Where would you have been now—I ask you—where would you have been now, but for us? You are ours from the tip of your toe to the tip of your nose; all that the bear would have eaten, in fact, belongs to us. So let yourself be carried away peaceably, my friend, peaceably!”





The Settlement of Zalivina.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CHIEF'S CABIN—A “SORCERER'S” CURE—THE STORM—
LADISLAS LOST.

THE right bank of the Kolima river rises perpendicularly from, and even in some places overhangs, the current. But at the spot where the Omolone unites with it, the right bank of the Kolima becomes level, and is occupied by the settlement of Zalivina, where all—whether Cossacks or Russians, descendants of convicts or Cossacks from the *Ostrog* of Anadirsk—live harmoniously with the Yakouts and Youkaguires.

On the Kolima, stopped at about the twentieth degree, are fogs which descend from the Polar sea, and are then solidified by the

frost. These fogs have already moderated the temperature when the "hot wind" blows bringing with it more than thirty degrees of warmth.

Let us penetrate into one of the cabins of the settlement. The huts are all built of the wood which is carried down the Kolima and left high and dry on the banks by the subsidence of the spring floods. The walls are simply constructed of beams laid one on top of the other, the interstices being filled in with mosses and wet earth. Each hut is surrounded by a *talus* of earth to keep the cold out. The roof is covered with earth also.

The interior of the cabin is divided by low partitions into several smaller rooms.

In the principal apartment, which is illuminated by a feeble lamp, one corner is occupied by the *tchouvale*, a kind of (Yakout) fireplace or stove, made of branches coated with clay, a tube leading from it through the roof to permit the escape of the smoke. This room is at once the kitchen and common room of the house. Here all the family work and eat. Two openings of about a foot square are in the summer closed by a transparent curtain, and in winter by a sheet of ice, which respectively admit some struggling rays of daylight into the room.

In the hut we enter we find two elderly women, and one young one who is ill, and lying upon a large "dresser" or "locker" which serves for a bed.

The women are Yakouts, with wrinkled cheeks and small eyes; clothed in reindeer skin (the hair inside), tinted red, and trimmed

with beaver or otter skin. Pantaloons of deer-skin are also worn, and over all a kind of tunic (*kamley*) of the untanned material, to which the smoke of the fire has given a yellow tinge.

On the fire is a saucepan in which some fish for the dogs is being cooked. On the table provisions have been arranged luxuriously as for a *fête*.—a splendid joint of reindeer, smoked reindeer-tongues, frozen fish, of various kinds, *strouganina*, *youkoula* and *tchir*, the latter a much-esteemed delicacy. There is also *caviare*, small tarts or *pâtés*, with a few other comestibles, supplemented by a large supply of tea.

We are now in the hut of Métek, one of the most important natives, who had formerly been chosen *oulouse* or supreme chief of his tribe, but has lately lost a good deal of his authority.

Métek has not yet returned with the sleighs laden with the spoils of the chase captured during the long summer in which for fifty-two days (15th May to 6th July) the sun never descends below the horizon, but it is so low that it gives light without much heat, and is so wanting in brightness as to be regarded without injury to the eyes.

No one could compare with the old chief in the pursuit of the reindeer on the great lakes, and in strangling them in the waters whither they had fled for refuge. He had slain one hundred head during the last season, and was now about to return for the herring fishery. Shoals of these fish come up the Kolima, and the squatters on the banks have at times taken as many as a thousand in each cast of the net. However, Métek had not yet returned to his tribe.

The sick girl in the hut was arrayed, in addition to more simple and warmer clothing, in a loose overdress or mantle of cotton-tissue, woven in curious patterns and ornamented with a collar of martens' tails. Her dark hair was arranged in long tresses and confined on the forehead by a band.

She was suffering from a curious nervous malady to which all the inhabitants of Northern Siberia are more or less subject. It is called the *miryak*. Upon this occasion, the girl was a prey to violent convulsions.

The elder of the two Yakout women, was the mother of the girl; the other female was a visitor from the tribe.

At this time, a voice was heard from without saying in a loud tone—

"Have you a tea-kettle inside there!"

"What must we say?" asked the neighbour of her friend.

"How many are they?" said the mother of the invalid.

"How many are you?" enquired the woman; but the loud baying of the dogs drowned the answer.

"How many?" she called out again.

"Seven." They heard the answer this time.

"Open the door," said the elder Yakout to her companion.

The old woman did so.

Yégor and Yermac appeared. On their outer garments the hoar-frost lay more than an inch thick. Nadège followed them into the hut, supported by M. Lafleur. Tékél carried little Ladislas, who was nearly paralysed with cold. Chort remained on

the threshold receiving the outer garments of the travellers as they took them off on entering.

Yégor stepped forward; and then, perceiving the sick girl, he called M. Lafleur's attention to her. The Parisian advanced towards the invalid.

"Do not come near," said she motioning him away: "you come from the cold."

"What is the matter with her?" enquired M. Lafleur of the mother.

"Ah! always the same. Ogropono-Djiganskoy," replied the old woman.

It was not the first time that M. Lafleur had heard of the sorceress Agrippina of Djigansk, who is supposed to be tormenting and troubling the girl, and all Siberia to this day. The woman lived in the last century. Woe to any one who did not treat her with the consideration she exacted.

Turning herself into a raven, she would pursue the unhappy offender in his hunting expeditions, in his travels; raising tempests against him, causing him to lose his baggage in the water and nearly driving him out of his mind. Even after a lapse of eighty years the eyes of the sorceress were as brilliant as the morning star, and her voice had the clear ringing sound of ice when struck sharply.

A new crisis came upon the young native girl when the name of the dreaded sorceress was mentioned. M. Lafleur had a sudden inspiration. As a commencement to his proceedings he took from

his pocket his violin and placed it on the table beside the good things laid thereon.

He then signed to his companions to seat themselves on the benches by the walls.

"What is the meaning of all these festive preparations?" he asked, indicating the *pâtés*, fish, etc.

"We expect the 'father' to-day," replied the old Yakout women. "He has not yet returned from his summer hunting, and my daughter is under the bad influence. Two such misfortunes are enough at once!"

"How old is your daughter?" asked M. Lafleur.

"It has snowed sixteen times since she was born."

"I intend to cure your daughter."

"You are a *chaman** then?"

"Yes, and I come from a far country."

M. Lafleur perhaps intended to convey to her the idea that a doctor, like a prophet, is not without honour save in his own country.

Then, speaking with authority, M. Lafleur directed his companions to take some of the provisions spread on the table. "We are very hungry," he said, "and we are going to eat all this because your husband will not come to-day nor to-morrow."

"Will he never return?" asked the old woman anxiously.

"He will return, my art guarantees that," replied M. Lafleur,

* A "doctor" and "conjurer."

decidedly, as he entered upon his new part of sorcerer by telling a falsehood. Then he added, "You shall judge of my power."

With that he grasped his violin, and, notwithstanding the numbness of his fingers, he played very well. He executed a pretty air, a "cradle-song" or prayer.

The very first notes aroused the attention of the sick girl, who soon changed her attitude and sat up. Then she rose shuddering, and in a kind of ecstasy advanced towards the "doctor," bowing before him, joining her hands and bending her body when he played low notes; rising with the higher ones; charmed, radiant, stepping lightly with outstretched arms and fingers. Her nervous attack had entered upon a new phase.

As the last note of the music died away she threw herself heavily upon the ground as if she had been actually suspended by the melody. M. Lafleur raised her up and carried her to the bench which she had previously occupied. Then addressing the old Yakout he said—

"Now, mother; tea, tea; plenty of tea, and your daughter will be out of danger, will be cured for a long time, for all her life perhaps!"

The poor mother cried for joy. The other Yakout woman, who was unmarried—a hideous brown tattooed creature—came and embraced M. Lafleur warmly, after the fashion of her tribe. She appeared very much astonished at the result of the music.

Nadège then said to Yégor: "How good M. Lafleur is. He has done all this on our account, to assure us a hospitable reception."



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Yégor, on his own part, could not do less than unite in congratulating M. Lafleur on his success as a sorcerer.

As for Yermac his piteous face was a marvel to behold. It only wanted this—to be considered the companion of a quack-doctor! He was humiliated.

“You are welcome,” said the old Yakout to the travellers. “Now you shall partake of the best we have. You are in the hut of Métek, the chief of the tribe. He was chief before we came to settle on the Kolima.”

Assisted by the elderly spinster who had embraced M. Lafleur, Métek’s wife pushed the heavy table into the angle of the room in which the travellers were seated. Placing herself at the board she encouraged them to eat, and set them the example without delay. The invalid who had been cured of the “demon” by the “doctor,” seated herself by the side of her preserver.

M. Lafleur did not waste time. He ate ravenously, though there was an utter absence of salt in all the viands.

“We must not forget the tea by any means,” he cried, when he had taken the edge off his appetite. “Tea is necessary for the invalid and ourselves.”

Three days had elapsed since the fugitives had given the Cossacks the “slip,” and they had had nothing warm since they had quitted the *yourte* refuge.

The suggestion of tea was favourably received by the elderly spinster, who assented at once and charged herself with the distribution of it. The tea was excellent.

Just then Chort appeared. "What about the dogs?" he asked.

The animals were howling outside as if they were protesting against being excluded from the feast.

"We will give them the fish we intended for our own," said Métek's wife; "so they will not have to wait."

Chort then was instructed to carry out the cauldron in which the fish had been cooking on the stove.

As for Wab he perambulated the table, snatching a morsel here and there as opportunity offered.

"You will sleep here," said the old woman to her guests after supper. So it was arranged.

Yermac had hardly eaten anything. Resting his head in his hands and his elbows upon the table, he remained plunged in thought. Surely never had such a curious adventure happened to a representative of law and authority before! To find himself obliged by circumstances to share the fortunes and privations of a set of rebels, against whom it was his duty to proceed with severity. Was not this the moment to break the compact of complicity which had already existed too long? His promises——But is a magistrate bound by his promises to a malefactor? If Métek returned, in his capacity of chief of the tribe could he not be called upon to assist the law and to help its representative to carry the fugitives back to Sredné-Kolimsk—a village avoided by the travellers—where a picket of Cossacks would be found under the orders of the *ispravnik*, who would be sufficient to assure the triumph of the law

However, on the following day, the inspector of police found himself again seated in the sleigh with M. Lafleur as on previous days. The fugitives very quickly left far behind them the hut in which they had received such hospitality.

Why had Yermac not carried out his resolution of the previous day? Simply because Métek, upon whom he had counted, had not returned. So Yermac was obliged to proceed without making any resistance. He was a very docile personage in the hands of the all-powerful "sorcerer," M. Lafleur.

The *nartas* skirted the precipitous bank of the Kolima, and directed their course towards Nijni Kolimsk, with the intention to pass by that Russian station, the last in that region, and make their way to the Polar Sea.

Yermac thought that perhaps he could recover his liberty when the fugitives had reached the Tchouktcha country.

In the middle of the day, after they had quitted the hut, the weather suddenly changed. The grey mists rose above the wooded hills which the fugitives left on their right hand.

There were signs of a storm, a *pourga*, the tempest peculiar to Siberian regions, and one of the greatest obstacles to a winter transit across the snow-fields. Like the "norther" of other latitudes, the *pourga* arises with scarcely any warning, and passes, sometimes for more than a week, through every phase of tempestuous violence and fury.

Generally this tempest is not accompanied by any fall of snow, but it is characterized by immense drifts which the wind lifts from

the plain. The violence of the wind carries these thick suffocating clouds of snow to an immense distance, and in them it is impossible to see in any direction, more than a few paces. The atmosphere is literally crowded with flakes, which in a few seconds fill the eyes and nostrils. The force of the wind renders an upright position impossible. To attempt to advance against such a tempest is out of the question. The unfortunate traveller surprised in one of these storms can only bury himself in his furs, and shelter himself behind his sleigh to wait—half suffocated, and half frozen, perhaps for days and nights—until the storm has passed.

If, before the wind was lulled, the traveller's stock of provisions has waned, death is certain. No cries for help could be heard in the noise of the hurricane. Exhausted by cold, weariness, and hunger, the traveller will sink beneath the snow, whose white winding-sheet will soon efface him, and nothing but a mound will remain to mark the place where the dead man sleeps his last, long sleep.

The black cloud which had remained for an hour resting on the horizon, now extended rapidly towards the west, and enveloped in a sombre veil the declining twilight of the Arctic region. The wind came moaning hoarsely from the Polar Sea, and rushed down upon the plains, raising whirlwinds and clouds of snow, which advanced like gigantic ghosts across the dark body of the cloud which followed after.

Yégor had scarcely given the order to bring the two sleighs alongside each other, when the storm fell upon the fugitives.

Every sound was quickly swallowed up in the roar of the tempest, while snow and icy particles filled the air, and made respiration extremely difficult.

Yégor and Nadège could not even see the packs which were harnessed to their sleighs, but in a short lull they did perceive that the other *narta*, containing M. Lafleur and the inspector of police, was missing.

Five minutes, ten minutes elapsed, and neither Yégor nor Nadège could distinguish anything. They cried out loudly. Yégor fired his pistols, and sent Tékél back as far as he dared to seek the sleigh. But the man returned unsuccessful, having seen nothing. The terrible whirlwind had quite obliterated all traces of their companions.

Yégor wished to wait in the hope that the other sleigh would join them. He recommended Nadège and Ladislas to get out and shelter themselves in their furs behind the *narta* which presented but a feeble barrier to the storm. It was as much as the young people could do to breathe as they held their faces close to the earth.

It was too dark to see the compass, so Yégor could not tell whereabouts he was. But even had he been able to distinguish the way, he could not have proceeded in the teeth of such a storm, which would have compelled him to go its own way and no other. The white clouds gathered more thickly, and darkness became more intense. Suddenly through the obscurity ran a despairing cry for help, which rose above the din of the tempest.

“Monsieur Lafleur! Monsieur Lafleur?” exclaimed Yégor, Nadège, and Ladislas simultaneously, as the indistinct outline of a sleigh passed them with bewildering speed, carried away apparently by the whirlwind.

“Let us get into the sleigh again,” cried Yégor, “and follow our friend.”

The wind was furious, and swept the plain with impetuosity, roaring like a pack of wolves. Tékél had no need to incite his dogs to speed; they were frightened, and raced along rapidly.

“Hold me tightly,” said Nadège to Yégor, as she came closer to him. “I feel as if the wind would carry me away.”

After an hour of a terribly swift course—an hour which seemed like a century to the fugitives—they perceived that they were entering the confines of a wood which presented some shelter from the ravages of the storm of snow and ice.

They wondered by what miracle they had been preserved. Before them was the sleigh of M. Lafleur, anchored alongside the trunk of a tree which in the snow looked like a white reef.

“Monsieur Lafleur!” cried Yégor.

“Here I am,” replied the Frenchman.

“You have escaped in a wonderful manner, Monsieur Lafleur,” replied Yégor; “I had begun to think of putting on mourning for you!”

“Ah, *ma foi*, I thought the end of the world had come. The *savants* tell us we shall perish from cold. I suppose that such a hurricane as this night will accompany the end of all things.”

While this conversation was taking place, Tekel, the Yakout, had been collecting branches, which he now set fire to.

The branches and twigs threw up sparks merrily, and the fugitives uttered cries of joy when they perceived the fire, to which they hurried and warmed themselves, covered with snow and unrecognisable as they were. Yermac continued to make the most singular grimaces.

“Ladislas! oh! where is Ladislas?” suddenly exclaimed Nadège, looking round her in every direction for the little Pole.

Alas! he did not answer. He had been turned out of the sleigh by one of the tremendous gusts of wind.

Yégor called Wab, and fastening a lanthorn to his collar, he pronounced the name of Ladislas several times. Then he sent the dog into the plain to find the lad.

In about an hour Wab returned alone. The animal was shivering with cold, and his paws were bleeding, a sign that he had gone some distance in vain. He had returned to the wood, else he would have died from exhaustion.

Nadège sobbed bitterly, calling upon Ladislas her adopted brother. Yégor and M. Lafleur remained sorrowful and despairing, thinking of the poor child lying out in the deep snow, struggling for life against the furious wind and icy tempest. Yermac even was moved by the grief of the fugitives, and he attempted to comfort them and give them an encouragement he was far from feeling.

The two Yakouts prepared a bed-place by digging an immense

hole in the snow. In this the fugitives, well wrapped up, and covered with rugs, took refuge till the storm should abate.

The dogs having been unharnessed herded together in the snow, in which they burrowed to keep themselves warm. Another fire was lighted at the outskirts of the forest, by Yégor's orders, in the hope that by its light Ladislas might be guided to the place, and rejoin his friends.





“The last exploit of the band had been the robbing of the mail.”

CHAPTER XIV.

THE GOLD-ROBBERS AGAIN—SOME PARTICULARS CONCERNING THEM—
A HUNTED DEER AND A RESCUE.

WHEN the band of gold-robbers, of which Yermac's son was a member, had cleared the forest of Boroukan, leaving the inspector of police for dead, Dimitri had assumed the command.

The young man had told the truth when he declared to his father that he had had nothing to do with the assassination of Major Dobson and his servant, nor with the murder of the Russian Khabaroff. The band to which Dimitri was affiliated had been

many times thinned, and when the attack was made upon the inspector of police there only remained of the original number who had committed the crimes named the chief Koskintine, who was subsequently shot by Yermac.

The others, associated in many deeds, had, nevertheless, nothing more weighty upon their consciences than the very doubtful means they used to procure the gold they coveted. This metal they transported into China by the Amour frontier, employing sometimes force and sometimes cunning against the Cossacks who were guarding the banks of the river. They frequently hid the gold-dust in loaves; they introduced it in little ingots into their horses' shoes, or, better still, into the interior of fishes, and thus transformed themselves into merchants or fishermen.

The alarm spread by Yermac by means of the Cossack posts produced an extra measure of vigilance all along the river; for when a convict has made his escape no means are left unemployed to secure him. The Russian Government put an army in motion to capture an individual, and so they discourage such attempts at evasion.

Thus the bandits commanded by Dimitri found themselves under the necessity of changing their route, and to give up the passage of the Amour for the present. So they made for the Gulf of Penjinsk, situated at the most northerly point of the Sea of Okhotsk. They had to cross the Stanovoï mountains in following the Omolone to its source, to gain the desired refuge.

They managed to procure from the Yakout villages a number

of reindeer sufficient to draw their sleighs; and by forced marches they arrived in good time amongst the rocky spurs of the Stanovoi chain, whose rugged summits were covered with snow. They did not hesitate to penetrate amongst these terrible mountains, whence it is difficult to emerge after the entrance into the dark labyrinth of peaks has once been made.

Yégor also had had, at one time, some idea of taking this way. Thanks to his investigations, he was aware that every summer the natives and the half-breeds of the Russian dwellers on the shores of the Sea of Okhotsk unite at a village called Tchimikan, at the mouth of the Ouda, to exchange furs, fresh meat, fish, with spirits, calico, and tobacco, brought by the American whalers; but the fear of encountering Russian ships in that interior and thoroughly Muscovite sea, dissuaded him; so he abandoned his projected route.

The gold-robbers could find "business" to their mind more easily amongst the trappers at the *promichléniks*, and that was in reality their object.

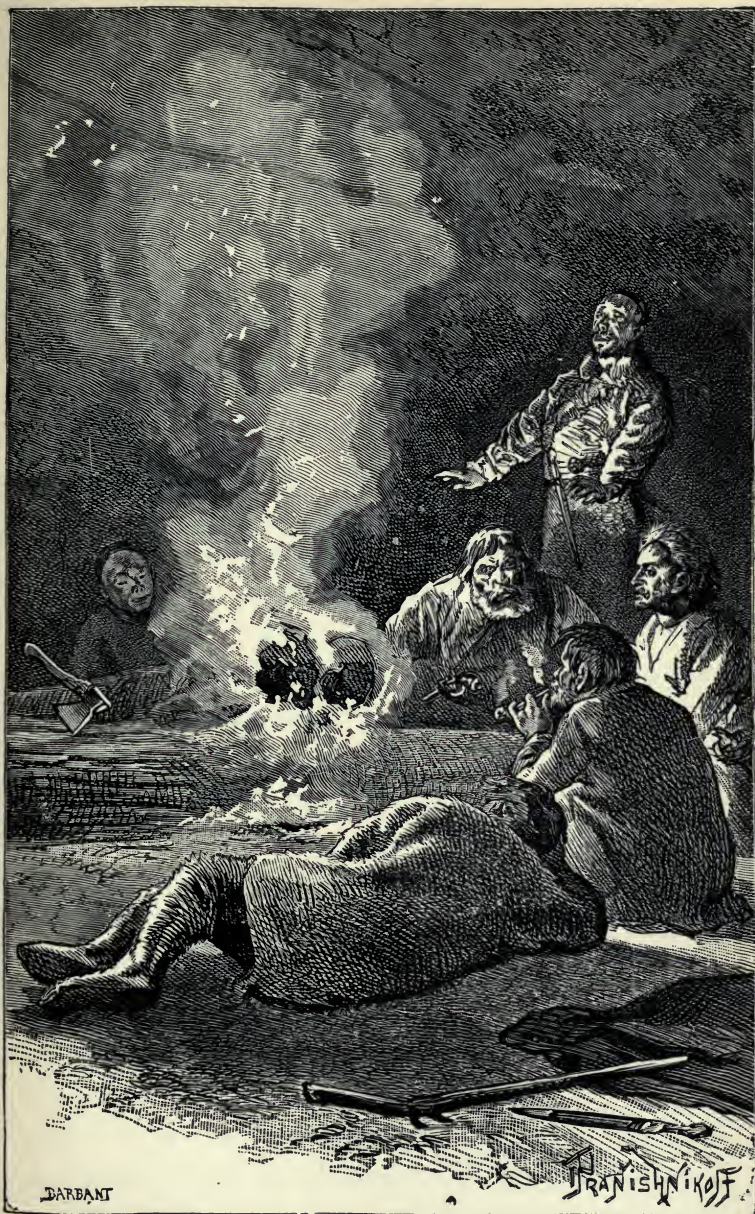
The last exploit of the band had been the robbing of the mail which passes every month from Ajan—a station established in the Okhotsk district in 1848 by a Russian-American Fur Company. (We may add, in passing, that the post-road, a single track cut through forests from Ajan to Yakoutsk, was used by the government at the time of the Crimean War, for the transport of arms and ammunition to the Pacific possessions of the Czar.) Post-stations are found at distances of thirty to forty *kilomètres*, wherewith

reindeer can be procured for the government service, and for the use of the few travellers who ever penetrate into these inhospitable regions.

The mail in question carries monthly about a dozen letters, and the bag is confided to a courier, who takes usually about ten days to reach Yakoutsck, travelling day and night. In winter the journey is made with reindeer, in the summer with horses, a pair of each respectively. This postal route connects Irkoutsk, the capital of Eastern Siberia, with Kamtchatka. The pillage of the mail was an enterprise of no profit to the banditti; it simply furnished them with an opportunity to affirm their condition of revolt against the usages of civilization, law, and authority.

One evening the bandits halted in the gorge of a narrow valley, and encamped in the open air. The night was dark, but the sky was clear and the temperature not very low. Besides Dimitri, the party consisted of two Tongouse, a Lamout from the Bay of Täusk, a Korak, a Ghileak fisherman, a Russian convict who had escaped from Saghalien, the grim Cossack Ivan whom we have already mentioned, and finally the escaped miner whose acquaintance we made in the early pages of this history, the convict with the letters V.O.R., who had been noticed by Yégor at Nertchinsk when being conducted to the fortress of Akatonia, whence he had again escaped.

This man had still the same repulsive countenance, disfigured as it was by sulphuric acid. He was attired in a garment of skins, a pelisse, and wore enormous boots over socks of deer-skin. An



DARBANT

FRANISHNIKOFF

ONE EVENING THE BANDITS ENCAMPED IN THE OPEN AIR.



immense knife depended from his girdle, from which hung also a pipe and bark box of tobacco such as the natives use. The convict, having tramped the country for a long time, had met the band of gold-robbers and united his fortunes with theirs.

The Lamout had taken from his pocket one of those large agates that are found at the bottom of the rivers of Siberia, and which the natives call fire-stones. With this he began to strike a light, using the dried fungus of the birch-tree as tinder. This tinder, dipped into sulphur which was carried in a little box of bone, produced a flame sufficient to kindle the wood and make a fire.

While this operation was proceeding, Ivan, axe in hand, was busily engaged in cutting down some pine branches, which the convict Koshevine was carrying to supply the fire.

The two Tongouse, easily recognizable by their bronzed skin, protruding cheek-bones, and little bright eyes like the Tartars', had already established themselves in the vicinity of a dead horse, the flesh of which they were devouring with much relish in a nearly raw state, only just warmed at the fire. The animal had belonged to one of them—an old hunter named Ephraim, a great bear-killer of the Okhotsk district, who had the reputation of having fought and captured twenty of these animals every summer. Ephraim, who had been too hardly oppressed by the *ispravnik* of his village, had one day treated him as the bears had been treated—had slain the young Russian, and taken flight.

He had not encountered the band of robbers many hours previously, but had at once enrolled himself in their company

and agreed with them. His horse, vying with the reindeer, had broken its leg, and was accordingly killed. The old Yakout, who was not much troubled with sensibility, had put the animal out the way after the native method. The Yakouts, although generally kind and merciful, are very cruel when the lower animals are concerned. Thus, it may be stated, their favourite mode of killing a horse is to throw him on the ground and tie his limbs tightly with cords. Then they open the chest, and, plunging in an arm, compress the heart till the animal dies. They pretend that this method of killing makes the flesh taste better.

Old Ephraim and his friend were just the kind of men to see the last of that horse before they quitted the camp.

The latter Tongouse was named Avaram, and came of the tribe from the south-east of Siberia. Clothed entirely in reindeer-skin, his chief garment consisted of a species of large overcoat of fur, which was open in front. To his neck was attached a kind of hood, in case of necessity, a *malachi*, of red, black, and grey fox-skins, alternately arranged, with a border of sea-otter skin; a kind of drawers also of skin, which reached nearly to the knee. His feet and lower limbs were encased in boots of reindeer-skin, soled with sealskin.

The Tongouse had joined the robbers in the hope of gaining sufficient to pay the price demanded for his affianced wife, the daughter of one of the *golovas* or grand chiefs of his tribe, a lady of rare beauty, valued at the price of a hundred reindeer, which represent a veritable fortune. Amongst the Tongouse of the

south-east the price of a wife ranges from one reindeer to a hundred. Some inferior beauties have been quoted at "a pipe of tobacco;" but this does not prevent them from being married by a Russian priest.

The other bandits of the *toundra*, having killed a reindeer which was by no means in its prime, were engaged in roasting the meat cut from the carcase. The Korak and the Lamout were preparing a savoury soup from the green herbs found in the deer's stomach.

The Korak was a young man, the sole survivor of a family which had been starved to death. He would tell his companions how each year, at the end of the winter-season, famine decimated the inhabitants of Toumane because the stores of fish failed.

"Why don't you catch some more?" inquired one of the bandits.

"Ah," he replied, "the Russian Government supplies us with cord to make nets, but we give it to the Lamouts on condition that they will catch our fish for us; but then, unfortunately, we eat all the supplies during the first months of the winter."

The Lamout carried suspended from his neck a large silver medal, a recognition on behalf of the Czar, for services rendered during one of the periodical famines which are the scourges of Siberia. This medal, placed singularly enough on the breast of a bandit, commanded much respect for the band on the part of the natives.

The Ghiliak fisherman was a native of the lower Amour,

who had been forced to fly the country for having killed one of his relations, who had stolen the flint from his gun. He feared, and not without reason, that the friends of the deceased would exercise the doctrine of reprisals after the Ghiliak code, which demands an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. This barbarian, though very superstitious and given to idolatry, had been baptised into the Greek Church, and wore suspended from his neck many little metal crosses. He called himself Michaeloff.

As for Ivan, he had given up the Cossack regiment, and abandoned his post on the Amour, when he was at one time serving as a soldier-labourer and as a colonist of Russia.* The Cossacks serve fifteen years, for which duty they receive an annual salary of three roubles (perhaps ten shillings), the government finding them besides in black bread and sometimes tea. Their food consists chiefly of the salmon they catch for themselves, and which, with wild fruits and roots, does not make a greatly varied dish. The troops who are stationed by the Bay of Castries can enjoy oysters in addition to other supplies.

Ivan, who got tired of the life of a colonist, had deserted. He often told his companions of a curious fact he had noticed: viz., that on the banks of the Asiatic river he had encountered animals

* The Amour was visited by the Russians for the first time in 1843. But ten years later they succeeded in wresting from China the portion extending from the left bank of the river to the old border of Siberia, gaining by this rectification of the frontier an immense and fertile country.

both belonging to Arctic latitudes and those which inhabit hot climates. The reindeer thus becomes the prey of the Bengal tiger, while the wild boar and the badger live side by side with the Polar bear and the glutton.

When the bandits had satisfied their hunger, they filled the brazier with wood, and set fire to it. They then wrapped themselves in their warmest clothes and furs, and made ready to sleep beneath the open canopy of heaven.

The night was fine, and seemed likely to pass without interruption, when suddenly loud cries were heard in the tones of a child.

The bandits seized their weapons, and in a moment were afoot. In a short time after they heard the sound of footsteps crunching the freezing snow, a reindeer appeared, hauling a sleigh behind him and pursued by a pack of yelping wolves.

As the reindeer approached the bivouac, the hungry, howling concourse of wolves fell away, frightened. The child in the sleigh continued to scream loudly in his terror, and when the reindeer's course was arrested, the lad fell out insensible upon the snow into the arms of Dimitri and Koshevine, which were extended to receive him, while the other banditti sent a few well-directed arrows and bullets amongst the crowd of wolves, and compelled them to retreat.

The child had fainted—he was already half dead with fear and cold and hunger. It was Ladislas!

The Lamout perceived his condition at a glance; so, taking

from his pouch a piece of frozen milk, he broke off a bit with a hatchet, and put the fragments into a saucepan, which he placed upon the fire. The milk soon boiled, and was then administered to the lad. The first few drops restored him to consciousness.





“After a few hours’ riding, Ladislas came within sight of a Yakout village.”

CHAPTER XV.

LADISLAS AND THE ROBBERS—THE FUGITIVES CONTINUE THEIR FLIGHT—THE DOG TEAM—A DREARY PROSPECT.

HOW did it happen that Ladislas had not perished when he was shipwrecked, so to speak, a sole survivor apparently in the ocean of snow?

When he was thrown from the sleigh in the midst of the whirlwind, he lay beneath some bushes, where he passed a weary night in pain and terror. Next day the lad set himself courageously to follow the tracks of the sleighs. He knew that the fugitives were proceeding northwards, and he had learned the

manner of reading the points of the compass from the natives, by studying certain undulations formed in the snow by the wind.

The plain extended on all sides—a terrible solitude, covered with the white mantle of Winter. A few bent and stunted trees here and there, rising from the winding-sheet which Nature had laid, looked like white-cowled monks in prayer over a tomb. The sun disappeared red and fiery below the horizon, and deep crimson rays darted across the snowy waste. Night came, and Ladislav had not perceived a living thing. He sought shelter in a forest; and having munched a morsel of bread, which he had found in his pocket, hardened by the cold, and swallowed the few drops of brandy that still remained in the little flask suspended round his neck, he lay down to sleep at the foot of a tree around which the snow had formed a kind of rampart.

Waking very early, he waited for several terrible hours for the tardy dawn. Judge of his surprise when he perceived close by him a reindeer browsing upon the twigs of the trees.

Ladislav ran towards the animal, which, as he perceived by the saddle and bridle, was one of those intended for riding, and which had strayed from its companions. The animal made no opposition when the lad approached it and seized it by the rein. Then, leaping upon the deer's back, Ladislav believed himself quite safe, as the unerring instinct of the animal would indicate to it the proper direction, and lead it to a place of safety.

In fact, after a few hours' riding, Ladislas came within sight of a Yakout village, half-buried in the snow. He was soon in the midst of the houses, which seemed to have been dropped down without any regularity, though strongly built of the trunks and the branches of trees.

The natives knew a little Russian, and received Ladislas with kindness and hospitality. They warmed his chilled frame, and provided him with an excellent meal, and next day they made him a little sleigh to which he could harness the reindeer. He obtained from them some information concerning the district, and the direction in which he ought to proceed to reach Nijni-Kolimsk, for he knew his only chance of finding Yégor and Nadège lay in his proceeding in that direction, and leaving the town on his left, for they would avoid it going to the east.

Two hours later the lad started alone, driving a sleigh for the first time in his life. Certainly the vehicle was of the most elementary character; but the youth, well wrapped in his furs, proceeded steadily, holding in his hand the pole which served to control the carriage and retard its progress when going down hill. In this manner he journeyed with great speed, hoping to overtake the *nartas* of Yégor next day. He took no rest, and at night-fall, as the sky was clear, he directed his course by the stars.

Of all this narrative, Ladislas only told the banditti among whom he had fallen such portion as he judged fitting. They

questioned him closely, being much astonished to meet a youth and a stranger in these solitudes.

“And the wolves?” asked Dimitri. “Were you not afraid of them baying around the sleigh?”

“The wolves!” replied the lad to the man, who by his dress and tone appeared the chief of the band. “The wolves! Oh, yes, indeed! They pursued, and kept company with me for many hours!”

“There must have been a hundred of them at least,” said Ivan.

“When first I turned round I saw only one,” continued Ladislav, “which did not frighten me very much. It ran along, keeping always at the same distance, relaxing or increasing its pace as the sleigh went slower or faster. But another wolf soon joined the first; and when, some time afterwards, I looked round I counted three of them. Then others came—four, five; then six, seven, eight, ten, a dozen, twenty! I did not dare to turn round any more. I could not count them, the number increased rapidly. But I pressed my reindeer, and hurried him on as fast as I could. At last I saw your fire, and I hoped to find in the camp those—but no matter—you have saved my life, my friends, and I am very, very grateful.”

The boy spoke with such assurance and firmness that he quite captivated his audience—rough men, deprived of all family ties. They helped the lad to the choicest morsels in their larder, which under the circumstances were really dainties.

“Whither do you intend to go?” inquired Dimitri.

The chief of the robbers had a pleasant face and gentle manner when addressing Ladislas, and the lad was reassured. Nevertheless, he hesitated to reply to the question.

“You may speak,” continued the chief, taking the lad a little aside. “You have nothing to fear from me, notwithstanding all this display of knives and pistols. I come of an honest race, and my father—dead for some time—left me a reputation for right-dealing. In Moscow everyone appreciated Yermac.”

The lad was struck by the name.

“I know,” he replied. “I know him—he was the inspector of police at Yakoutsik.”

“The inspector of police. Well, yes, boy; he was my father.”

“He may be dead,” said Ladislas, alarmed for the safety of Yégor and Nadège. “But three days ago he was still with us.”

“How? With you? With whom?”

“With my adopted sister and the man who is going to marry her, and with M. Lafleur. Do you not know M. Lafleur, the dancing-master?”

“I left my father, dead as I thought, far from here, near the forest of Boroukan, at the foot of the Verkho-Yansk mountains,” replied the bandit chief.

“Well, it was just there that we met him, recovered him, dug him up, as I may say.”

“Dug him up, boy?”

“Yes, it is a curious tale! Look, this revolver belongs to him.”

“My father living!” exclaimed Dimitri in surprise; and then a great wave of hope surged over his heart, and told him that perhaps he might yet find his parent and obtain his forgiveness.

“Do you know,” continued Dimitri, “where we could find him and your friends too?”

“Yes,” replied the boy: “in the neighbourhood of Nijni-Kolimsk, near the frontier of the Tchouktcha country.

“Not another word,” said Dimitri. “When all the rest are asleep I will tell you what we can do to see your friends again—and my father.”

Although this little dialogue had been spoken aside, the robber Koschevine had overheard the name of M. Lafleur mentioned. Now he had caught the name that day when the dancing-master had given him some water to drink and had addressed to him a few kind words. He had then promised himself that he would remember the name and do the bearer a good turn whenever opportunity offered. So he advanced towards Dimitri, and putting skilfully a few questions to him, satisfied himself that M. Lafleur was the same generous Frenchman, and claimed permission to be associated in any adventure which Yermac's son might undertake in favour of the little Pole and the fugitives.

* * * * *

It was not until after every possible attempt had been made to

recover the missing Ladislas, that Nadège would consent to resume the journey. She was broken-hearted at the loss they had sustained.

The days succeeding this new departure were the saddest of all. The fugitives had decided that they would pursue their route along the right bank of the Kolima. Ladislas had been lost not far from that river, and he knew that his friends were proceeding in a northerly direction, with the intention to reach the Polar Sea. If he were still alive he would perhaps perceive the fire which they lighted whenever they encamped, and which they kept up all night upon some elevated spot.

Besides this, Yégor had other reasons for not leaving the banks of the river. The supply of food had considerably diminished during their traverse of the snow-plain. But along the course of the Kolima between the rivers Bolchoy-Aniouy and Mali-Aniouy which flowed into the larger stream, are plains, quite sheltered from the north, in which vegetation was luxuriant. In these places flourished the poplar, the aspen, the willow, and the cedar; after having crossed the icy steppes the plains were veritable oases in the desert. The forests which fringe the hill-sides are inhabited by bears (both black and brown), which are often met with. Yégor thought it would be an easy matter to kill some of these animals, whose carcasses would furnish food for many days.

With lightning-like rapidity the two sleighs glided over the frozen waste, without leaving a trace of their passage. Nadège, her eyes red with weeping, silent and sad, was ever thinking of

her missing Ladislas. She could not believe that he was lost beyond hope of recovery. Some secret presentiment bade her hope, and told her she would see him again. M. Lafleur, usually so talkative, sat as silent as she, plunged in thought, his head hanging down, his lips compressed, endeavouring to console himself in the present by thinking of the future. He formed plans and made combinations. His thought, quick as the electric spark, flew from Yakoutsk to the icy regions of the Pole, thence to Paris and the sunny Place de la Bastille. From Paris it travelled to Château-Thierry, and to the little house which he had inherited from his uncle. In that house he would establish the collection or museum which would bear his name and attract crowds of visitors to the town which gave birth to the great French fabulist.

The old dancing-master had definitively renounced his idea of returning on the first convenient opportunity, and resume the teaching of the quadrilles to the youthful daughters of high functionaries in Siberia. He had left behind him, it is true, his milliner's shop, but there was very little in it. He was quite willing to make the sacrifice. M. Lafleur was a prudent and far-sighted individual. He had not hidden his treasure in a napkin, nor his money in a stocking or in a drawer; nor had he confided his means to the tender mercies of the Jews for usury. Twice a year did the Frenchman remit his money to Paris to the care of a most respectable firm, MM. Vernes & Co.

Thus M. Lafleur, though tied to the material world, was without any engrossing care, and was approaching the age when men

wish to repose from their labour and enjoy the fruits thereof. He had certainly a long way to go yet ere he could reach Paris and Château-Thierry, but at the rate he and his companions were travelling the distance was being very rapidly diminished.

As for Yermac, enveloped in skins and furs, he had very much the attitude and appearance of the animals whose spoils he was wearing.

Guided by Yégor, who scarcely looked away from the compass, and the small map, which he had copied from a chart hanging upon the wall of the *ostrog*, Tékél drove the sleigh skilfully, and the fugitives were confident they were travelling the surest and the shortest way.

The packs of dogs furnished by the Esaoule of Sredné-Kolimsk performed wonders under the guidance of Tékél and Chort. The dogs of Northern Siberia bear some resemblance to wolves: their muzzles are long and pointed like the wolf's; the ears, always erect, are slender; the tails are bushy; some have straight hair, others curly and marked in various ways. Their bark resembles the baying of the wolf.

At the head of each team is found a very intelligent animal, the most clever dog of the pack. He leads his less intelligent companions, and keeps the restive ones in the way they should go, preventing them more particularly from turning out of the line in pursuit of any game. On one occasion, Yégor's team precipitated themselves upon the tracks of a fox which were visible in the snow. The whole pack except the leader were in full cry, and

nothing appeared likely to stop them; when the leader turned suddenly in the opposite direction, and began to bark as if he had found something more attractive, thus bringing his followers into the proper course again.

Tékel and Chort encouraged their dogs by whistling, and by peculiar cries to which the intelligent brutes were well accustomed. The packs were driven after the Siberian method, without a whip, which is replaced by the *ostle*, a solid pole about four feet in length shod with iron. The drivers throw this *ostle* at any offending dog, and catch it dexterously as the sleigh glides by. In the sleighs of the sedentary tribes of Siberia, every dog is provided with harness complete, which consists of a large girdle worn in front of the chest by means of which the pulling power is utilized. This girdle, or band, is kept in its place by another strap fastened to it, and passed round the body of the dog. The animal is harnessed to the principal strap by a short trace. The dogs, when attached to the sleighs, generally indulge in a prolonged howl before they start on their journey.

An ample provision of dried fish is made, on which travellers feed their dogs. The fugitives had a supply, and their own food was no better and no more agreeable than the dogs' rations.

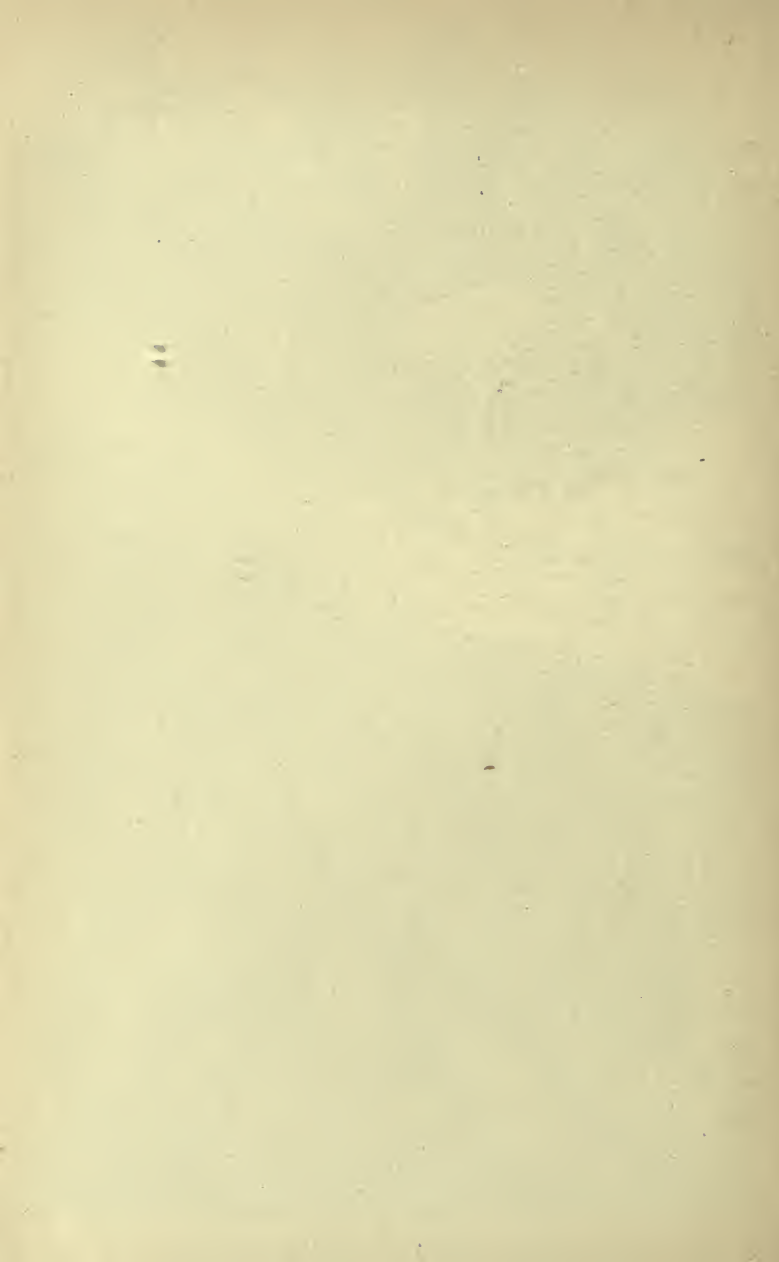
That day when the sleighs halted, Tékel searched for a suitable place for the encampment in which to pass the remainder of the day and all night. He soon returned and made Yégor a sign to accompany him. The place was entirely sheltered, and they cut down branches of trees to form a resting-place. With these



BARBAV

RANISHNIKOFF

“‘Those are elands,’ said Tékél in a low voice.”



and some reindeer skins, they made a kind of tent for Nadège, and hastened to light a lamp within to warm the temporary structure. The ice brought from the Kolima was broken up and melted to supply the water required. The ice was not then very thick, it only was about two feet in depth. A great fire, furnished and fed by the branches of the surrounding trees, radiated a welcome heat. The important question then arose, what had they got in the way of substantial food to roast upon such a fire?

Yégor and Tékel took each a gun and, preceded by Wab, made their way cautiously amongst the trees and brushwood in search of game, biped or quadruped, furred or feathered. The Yakout, with the instincts of a trapper, examined the twigs of the trees and bushes, in the endeavour to ascertain if they had been nibbled by deer or elands. Occasionally he would halt and listen attentively, signing to Yégor at the same time to remain motionless and silent.

Wab also on these occasions would remain quiet, with one paw raised as if pointing, interrogating with his eyes the native and his master alternately.

Suddenly Tékel dropped and concealed himself behind the trunk of a tree, where he remained perfectly quiet, crouching in the snow. He had evidently spied some animal. Yégor, his hand on the trigger-guard of his gun, was ready to fire at the first signal.

In about a minute afterwards the Yakout rose to his feet, and,

making a sign to his master to follow, descended towards the river.

“Are these traces of deer?” inquired Yégor, indicating some marks upon the snow.

Tékel shook his head.

“Those are elands’ tracks,” he said, in a low tone. “The hoofs are thin, straight, well cloven, and united at the top by a membrane, which permits the foot to enlarge itself and to descend upon the soft snow or yielding soil without sinking deeply.”

Yégor knew that elands, like deer, wander in herds of fifteen to twenty at a time, and was in hopes that he and Tékel would be able to secure some, or at least one, though the animals are very wary, agile, and courageous. The male eland attains the dimensions of an ox, and weighs nearly as much as the average “beast.” The long head is terminated by a thick large muzzle, which gives it somewhat the appearance of an ass, and is surmounted by branching antlers, which extend in triangular points in the form of a shovel. The eland is equally useful as the reindeer to the inhabitants of the northern latitudes. The meat is smoked and preserved; the skin, being strong and supple, makes excellent clothes, and the hard white bones are formed into divers utensils.

Yégor and Tékel had reached a place where the bank fell perpendicularly towards the frozen stream. A hundred paces further on they perceived through the twigs and branches of the aspens. a small clearing, in which grew thyme, whortle-berries, and the blackberry heath, called *chikcha*, with some weeping-willows.

Concealed behind the bushes, the hunters, who had carefully observed all the imprints converging to that spot, waited patiently.

Suddenly Wab made a movement as if he were about to spring forward, but Yégor restrained him in time. Just then an eland of great size came out from under the willows, followed by his family, which consisted of seven individuals : an old female without horns, two adults, two younger ones, and a couple of fawns.

The cracking of the snow under the hoofs was plainly heard by the hunters. The male eland led the way, pushing his head far in advance of his high shoulders. He halted at the border of the wood, bent down the branch with his head, and then, breaking the stem, began to devour the branches.

Yégor and Tékél, who were ready, took advantage of the halt, and fired simultaneously.

A gleam of light flashed through the dark branches. Wab had dashed out in pursuit. The female eland, which Tékél had sighted, ran away, and then, uttering a growling noise, dropped dead. The elder ones darted off, carrying the young ones with them in their flight. As for the male which Yégor had wounded, he had run for a moment, but quickly turned to bay. Wab however rushed upon him, and fixed his fangs in the beast's neck.

The eland, thus seized by the throat, plunged into the thickest part of the wood, in the hope to rid himself of his assailant by crushing him against a tree.

Wab, brave as he was, would no doubt have been crushed, had not Yégor hurried forward and planted a bullet in the eland's head. The animal fell dead in his tracks.

"He is ours," exclaimed Tékel, with delight, as he ran up with his hunting-knife in his hand.

"A splendid fellow," said Yégor, mentally calculating the size of the animal, which was fully eight feet long.

"We will only carry away the choicest morsels," said Tekel, as he proceeded to remove the cartilaginous horn of the eland, which, with the ears and tongue, are considered the prime bits by the northern tribes.

The operation finished, Tékel skinned the animal, and cut off the haunches. Yégor did the same with the female eland, and the hunters then returned, very well contented, to the encampment, where the supply of eland flesh was highly appreciated.

M. Lafleur, who had never before tasted roast eland, assured his companions that it was quite equal to blanc-mange with *béchamel* sauce.

Unfortunately Ladislas did not rejoin the party all that day, nor the next, nor the next.

Yégor and M. Lafleur—even Nadège, who had hoped longer than they—had now come to the conclusion that Ladislas, exposed as he had been in the icy solitudes, without any assistance, without food, and exposed to the attacks of wild beasts, must have succumbed and perished. Yégor's heart quivered each time he thought of the poor little lad.

Nevertheless, Yégor had no reason to reproach himself. All that could have been done by man, had been done to recover the boy. It was no use waiting any longer, when delay involved the safety of Nadège, M. Lafleur, and himself; and for the safety of his friends Yégor held himself responsible.

The fugitives encamped many times on the banks of the Kolima, which they continued to follow like a clue.

As they approached the Polar Sea, the high, rugged, and precipitous banks fell away. The country became more open, and soon the eye could perceive nothing but an extensive plain, reaching to the border of the ocean, and through this great plain, a number of rivers flowing to the sea.

The fugitives skirted a tributary of the Kolima, which does not unite with the main stream until it has formed a low and marshy island, upon the southern shore of which is erected the *ostrog* of Nijni-Kolimsk. Twenty-five leagues farther on, the Kolima divides anew into two arms. The travellers followed the right branch, which is only a league-and-a-half in width, and is called Kamennaya-Kolima. A little farther on, a third arm is perceived, which, with the other two, forms the *embouchure* of the Kolima. This great mouth of the river is about sixty-five miles wide.

On the fourth day, Yégor perceived a young deer which had lost itself. This was the time when these animals emigrate in herds, and seek a warmer climate than those extreme northern latitudes. The skin of the animal was of a reddish brown, but it

is not by any means unusual to see them quite white all the year. Yégor, who was holding Wab back, though ready to let him slip, was admiring the graceful appearance and movements of the young brocket, more elegant than a stag, with its shorter and thinner legs, its less robust frame and slender neck. As it was alone and to windward, it was easy for Yégor to approach, more particularly as the animal was frisky and not at all suspicious.

As they were in want of provisions to continue their journey, Yégor shot the young brocket, of which he carried away the best portions.

Some hours later, about mid-day, the fugitives reached the mouth of the Kamennaya-Kolima. The weather was bitterly cold, the thermometer marked twenty-four degrees of frost.

“The sea, the sea!” exclaimed the Yakouts, standing on tip-toes and pointing to the frozen expanse of ocean which extended afar, till it was lost in the northern mists.

“The Arctic Ocean!” remarked M. Lafleur, shivering in spite of himself, as if he had suddenly beheld something mysterious and terrible.

“We run no risk of being looked for here,” muttered Yégor.

The Arctic regions have a character peculiar to themselves. In the dim, dull atmosphere, the shadows are scarcely perceptible, the line of the horizon is effaced. Height and distance no longer exist: sea and land, under the common covering of snow, cannot be distinguished from each other, while the utter absence of life in these regions prevents the formation of decided contours, the

sharp outlines of the coast observable in inhabited places, and gives one the idea that a new world is being formed there. The silence and immobility of nature in these latitudes are something very grand, but at the same time rather gruesome.

Yégor, Nadège, and M. Lafleur all felt a secret terror, as if they were advancing into a perfectly unknown land. Yermac alone—insensible to all emotion—remained quite impassable. He believed that under the conditions of extreme cold and in the long dark night which was about to commence, he would be almost unobserved, as the supervision of his companions would be lessened. Would he then be able to escape? Should he endeavour to fly, or wait until some unexpected event changed the aspect of things?

All around our travellers, the depressing influences of the Arctic regions were manifest. More than a month before, the sea had been covered with ice. There was not a sound, a cry nor a whisper audible.

The earth, so far as our travellers were concerned, might have been an empty and depopulated planet, destroyed by some terrible cataclysm. In the distance arose great mountains of ice, and above them wheeled white birds, ghostly and indistinct; turning slowly and aimlessly, like wandering, disembodied spirits. The day was dying, and so weak that objects had no form nor colour in the fading light.

At length the fugitives had reached the place in which they would have to pass the winter. They at once proceeded to erect a

hut, which they took care to fortify against the attacks of the winter storms. They could not dare to make any attempt to reach the Gulf of Anadyr through the Tchouktcha country until the spring had come.

In their dangerous and eventful journey they had lost all idea of time and dates.

"I should like to know what year this is, and what time of year," said M. Lafleur. "We have not kept any account of the days."

"To-day is the 20th of November," replied the inspector of police with decision.

"Really!" exclaimed Yégor. "That accounts for the days being so ephemeral. After to-morrow we shall be in darkness for a space of thirty-eight days."

"Complete darkness—night?" inquired Nadège, growing pale.

"Yes, the sun will not appear again until the 28th December; I have informed myself precisely on all these points."

"But how shall we manage to live in the dark?" asked Nadège.

"The night will not be so perfectly dark as you imagine, mademoiselle," replied M. Lafleur. "Thanks to the effects of refraction, the whiteness of the snow, and the frequent appearance of the aurora borealis, the darkness will be less than you, perhaps, anticipate, and less irksome. Besides, we shall have the moon with us ten times within the twenty-four hours. What we have most to fear is the extreme cold, and, above all, the scarcity of

food. We are only six, since we have lost our poor little lad; but——”

“You needn’t count me,” interrupted Yermac.

“Why not?” asked M. Lafleur.

“Because now my arm is well, and I am unwilling to be a burthen upon you one day longer than is absolutely necessary. I know very well how to cater for myself. I do not wish to embarrass you in any way!”

“As you please,” said Yégor. “Monsieur Yermac,” he continued, “you may have your liberty—when we quit these solitudes—in the early days of spring. That is to say, unless you wish to accompany us as far as Anadyr, and quit Siberia, Russia, and Asia with one effort.”

“That is a question for consideration,” replied Yermac, ironically.





“ An embankment of snow was erected as a shelter.”

CHAPTER XVI

IN CAMP—WINTER—ARRIVAL OF DIMITRI—A FUNERAL.

THE fugitives, and the inspector of police whom they were carrying with them, halted at the brink of a little frozen stream the water of which was known to be good, and on the banks of which they would be able to collect logs which had been carried down by the current, to serve as fuel during the winter. The place the fugitives had chosen was in the neighbourhood of Cape Baranoff or Ram's Head, studded with rocks of strange and fantastic forms. In these the imagination would find the semblances of men and animals scattered amongst ruined towers and dismantled walls, like the remains of a strong and extensive fortress. The north and north-western faces of the

Cape are composed of schist rocks, which fall perpendicularly to the sea and are cut at intervals by lateral ravines.

To the north, on the horizon, the eye could perceive the indistinct outlines of the great icebergs; while in the foreground extended a vast open space in the ice, called *polynia*. It is somewhat remarkable that on the Siberian shores of the Arctic Ocean we do not encounter the same kind of extensive ice-fields as are found in Greenland. Nevertheless, as the current of the Polar Sea passes from west to east, one can understand how it is that the great masses of ice are carried towards Behring's Strait. For this reason the height of the icebergs increases in accordance with their distance along the coast.

The locality selected by our travellers was precisely the place whereat the dwellers on the Kolima camp reside when they come to hunt the fur-producing animals. It extends to the border of the district adopted by the Tchouktchas—a neutral and otherwise uninhabited zone, and was a very favourable spot for the fugitives to camp in.

The sea-coast, like the banks of the river, was covered with drift-wood, a precious supply to be used in the construction of a hut, or for firing during the long and severe winter which was to be expected.

Without taking a day to recruit themselves, the travellers, including Yermac, set about the construction of a hut. The interior of this cabin was so planned that, in addition to the common sitting-room, a chamber was allowed to Nadège. The

men arranged to sleep all together in another apartment upon a wooden bed. A reindeer skin shielded the door of the hut. Outside, an embankment of snow was erected as a shelter, and a covered way was made by which the cold air was diverted from rushing in at the door when it was opened. The outer defence, of ice-blocks, prevented the hut from being covered with snow, or too severely attacked by the storms which would surely arise.

Then Yégor made an inventory of his possessions. He found that, besides a number of skins and furs, he had a plate of sheet-iron for the hearth, mounted on four "legs," an iron tripod, a boiler and a cauldron, some spoons, knives and forks, a lanthorn, a saw, two hatchets, two hunting-knives, guns and pistols, with a hundred cartridges for each arm, Yermac's carbine, a thermometer, the little compass which hung on Yégor's watch-chain, and, finally, his watch.

Unfortunately provisions were scarce. From the first day of the flight the inspector of police had refused, as he had declared, to partake of anything offered by the fugitives. A saucepan was placed on the fire to make soup of reindeer flesh for all, except Yermac, each one then drinking his supply with his own spoon. Yermac made his supper apart from the others, upon biscuit and a kind of dried fish.

Yégor and M. Lafleur watched the inspector, and were greatly grieved at his determination to remain apart from them.

"What will you do when you have eaten all your biscuits?" inquired the Frenchman.

“To-morrow I will go hunting,” replied Yermac.

“In that case you ought to have a gun ——.”

“And you have taken possession of mine — ah! No matter, I must set snares. You will let me have a hatchet, I suppose?”

“Certainly,” replied Yégor, who admired the determination of the man.

“You will also require something to bait your traps with,” remarked M. Lafleur.

“True—I had forgotten that,” replied Yermac, who at once put aside a portion of the dried fish for the purpose.

Yermac declined to partake of the tea which had been made, and, after this primitive repast had been consumed, all the party retired, after changing their shoes, a precaution which is very necessary in such a climate to obviate the danger of frostbites.

Next day a dozen “traps” were set and baited. Twenty-four hours after, the inspector visited his snares and found them all empty. As he returned to the hut he pulled up some roots, and they constituted his breakfast, dinner and supper for that day.

Yégor begged Nadège not to pay too much attention to Yermac, as that was the only way by which his stoical resolution would be shaken.

Let us see how they managed to pass the time in the hut. Early in the morning they were all astir. The fire was relighted, and each individual performed his ablutions with melted newly-

fallen snow, which had not yet frozen very hard. Then the cauldron was placed upon the fire and tea was made. After breakfast the preparation of dinner and supper occupied them, for their limited means of cooking prevented any rapid arrangements, while provisions and utensils were equally wanting. Yermac did all his own cooking apart.

The cold was becoming intense. The thermometer ranged between fifteen and twenty-five degrees of frost, and the hut was still far from comfortable when the wind began to blow from the north-west, and caused the room to be filled with smoke, which was driven back by the gale into the interior of the cabin.

The pipes of the Yakouts were frozen. Iron blistered the hands when it was touched without protecting gloves; the excessive cold, which at first seemed to excite, now threatened to induce atony (helplessness). M. Lafleur was the first to be attacked. A kind of intoxication seemed to possess him; his teeth and jaws chattered and trembled. His movements became uncertain. Sometimes at night he was so affected by the intense cold, notwithstanding the warm coverings and the fire burning in the middle of the room, that after many attempts he would rise from his bed, and run round the hut to restore circulation and suppleness to his limbs.

The long thirty-eight days' darkness commenced on the 22nd of November. Yermac began seriously to think of making his escape in the darkness, but he could not hope to reach Nijni-Kolimsk

without one of the guides. Tékél appeared to him to be too devoted to his employers to fall in with the suggestion. But with Chort the inspector fancied he would succeed better.

Yermac alarmed Chort first by telling him that he was exposing himself to punishment by aiding and abetting the fugitives in their escape. Finally he begged the guide to fly with him in the *narta* which Chort was accustomed to drive, for that team would be obedient to him; the guide was promised a handsome reward as soon as he succeeded in reaching the dwellings by the Kolima.

The Yakout asked for time to consider the proposition. He would, no doubt, eventually, have yielded to the temptations of the inspector of police, had not Yégor, innocently, upset all their calculations.

Yégor Séménoff had come to the conclusion that he could not afford to sleep for sixty days until the end of the winter. Many things more important were wanting for the success of his hardy project. So he consulted with M. Lafleur, and agreed to dispatch the two Yakouts with one of the sleighs to Elope-Balo, where were some villages on the Omolone (to send to Nijni-Kolimsk would have been too dangerous), in which they could purchase a quantity of reindeer skins to make an *ourouse* or "marquee" in readiness for the time when a resumption of the journey would become necessary; some timber and planks for the construction of a boat—a flat-bottomed punt—which, though made of skins and wood; would enable the fugitives to cross the water-courses, with other very necessary appliances for passing across the snowy

waste, including a plentiful supply of dried fish and reindeer flesh for the dogs and their owners respectively. Yégor then handed to Tékél some gold and paper money which passes current with the natives, although tobacco and spirits are the usual "monetary" units for exchange and barter.

The Yakouts arranged to leave the camp within forty-eight hours, and Yermac perceived that it was impossible to make Chort come to a decision on the eve of his departure with his comrade Tékél.

The following night the dogs began to bay most furiously, and the Yakouts were convinced that the Tchouktchas were approaching their neighbourhood. Yégor and M. Lafleur kept awake, and placed their weapons loaded beside them. At length Yégor became impatient and went out. He heard a strange sound in the distance. What could it signify?

Suddenly in the sky there appeared white rays of light which extended in a kind of "milky way" across a portion of the heavens. Objects on the ground became more and more distinct, and at length were quite visible under the light, which was as brilliant as that shed by the full moon. The ice-fields scintillated like molten silver in the distance.

Soon the flame illuminated the horizon and increased as far as the eye could reach, throwing out tongues of flames and long fiery swords which seemed to pierce and draw blood from the sky. Drops of red light fell like drops of blood; and, as nothing is more changeable in nature than the aurora, green tirts succeeded

to the ruddy tinge. One would almost have declared that an immense "Bengal" light was illuminating the horizon. Then, as if a rainbow was forming, an arc resembling a mosaic of precious stones—diamonds, rubies, amethysts, sapphires and garnets—sparkled in the firmament.

By the leaping and capricious light which filled the air Yégor was enabled to perceive a sledge drawn by several reindeer making its way through the snow and ice by the margin of the sea in the direction of the hut, but holding its course still some hundred *mètres* from the coast. Yégor at first fancied that some people had come in pursuit of him, and he called the Frenchman, to communicate to him his apprehension. M. Lafleur, having put on all his protectors for ears, nose, and forehead, came out into the air.

At first the Parisian believed that his friend had only called him out to look at the beautiful display of the aurora borealis, which was somewhat novel to them; and M. Lafleur uttered an exclamation of delight at the sight.

"Silence," whispered Yégor. "Look yonder. What kind of people are those who are approaching us?"

The howling of the dogs had prevented M. Lafleur from immediately distinguishing the crackling made by the sledge "runners" upon the frozen surface of the snow. He gazed for a moment in the direction indicated by Yégor.

"In any case," he said, "there are not many of them—two or three at most. If they had any business with us, they would find means to speak. But, listen!"

The *narta* had by this time come near enough to bring the travellers within earshot of the camp, and across the snow and ice several sentences were distinctly heard by the fugitives.

“I know that lad’s voice!” exclaimed M. Lafleur.

“So do I,” said Yégor.

“May I never see the Place de la Bastille again, if I do not believe it is the voice of Ladislas!”

“You are right, Monsieur Lafleur. Wait—the sleigh is proceeding in the direction of the baying of our dogs.”

Two minutes later the little Polish lad was being embraced by Yégor and Lafleur. They all shed tears of joy at the meeting. The *narta* and its driver remained on the frozen waters of the ocean.

“Who is with you, my dear lad?” inquired Yégor.

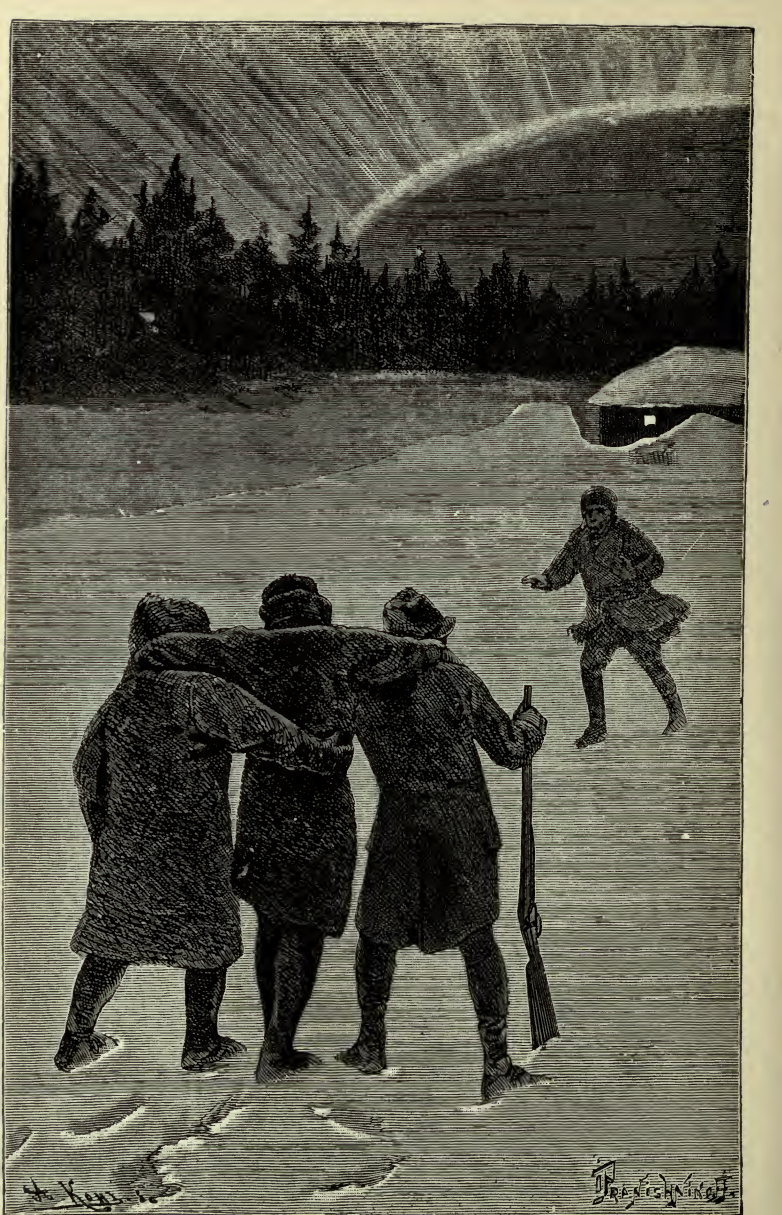
“The son of the police inspector,” replied Ladislas; “he has brought me back to you!”

“The son of Yermac!” exclaimed M. Lafleur, who anticipated something disagreeable from this meeting.

“He is very ill—wounded. Thanks to the money he had, he prevailed upon a rich Tongouse, who had some fine reindeer, to lend them to him, and bring us here.”

“I will go to him, Yégor,” said M. Lafleur, “while you conduct Ladislas to his sister. But take care—prepare her as well as you can, for the great surprise.”

So saying, M. Lafleur descended cautiously towards the *narta*, for meantime the aurora had paled. When the Frenchman had come near the travellers, he said:—



HIS FATHER CAME RUNNING OUT TO MEET THE PARTY.

“Come : you have friends in us ; fear not !”

“Is my father with you ?” inquired Dimitri, faintly.

“He is yonder in our camp,” replied M. Lafleur.

“Then I shall see him before I die,” murmured the wounded man.

“Before you die ? Well, I see you are wounded, my friend, and very ill, no doubt ; but we will nurse you. Come quickly and warm yourself at our fire—you and your driver.”

The Tongouse thus encouraged, raised up Dimitri, and with the assistance of the Frenchman, the son of Yermac was enabled to traverse the distance between the sleigh and the hut. His father came running out to meet the party.

“Father,” said the young man, as soon as he perceived him, “you must give me credit for a good action. I have brought back the lad to you ——”

Yermac folded Dimitri to his heart, but he could not avoid saying—

“Considering this is your first good action, I cannot say you have been very fortunate in your selection.”

“Why not ?” asked the wounded man.

“Because he is a child of banished parents, and he will now be able to accompany the others in their flight.”

“I did not know that,” replied Dimitri.

“There—there—let the merit remain with you,” said Yermac. “Now that you have restored the child, I consider myself quits with these fugitives—and that is certainly a great satisfaction.”

Dimitri could not and did not understand this.

His father then noticed how very weak and ill Dimitri was, and inquired the reason.

“When I once made up my mind to quit the band,” replied Dimitri, “I did so. I was already far from them, with one of my companions, an old ‘Vor,’ and the lad here, when they fired at us for the men rightly judged that we were deserting them. The brigand was mortally wounded, and a bullet hit me in the left shoulder. I could not stop on the way to take any care of the wound, or to dress it; and here I am, as you see!”

“You unfortunate fellow! you have exposed yourself to the rigour of the climate, and yet worse!” exclaimed Yermac.

“Then, you do not now wish to see me dead, father,” said Dimitri, with a sad smile. “But I have at length seen you again, and will yield to you my last sigh. Then, perhaps, you will pardon me all the trouble I have given you, and all the pain.”

“Ah, Dimitri!” cried Yermac, who was deeply moved; “do not speak thus. Everything is now forgotten. But how have you managed to come hither? and how did you succeed in tracking us so far?”

“The bravery of the young lad has accomplished everything,” replied Dimitri. “For my own part, I did not wish to delay an hour. I felt I was dying, and I wanted to see you before my death, and turn your curse from me.”

This affecting and solemn scene—this touching reconciliation

of father and son—took place in the wild and snowy waste, illumined by the last beams of the aurora, the dying rays of which were mingling with the soft twilight of the wintry sky.

The night passed quickly in the hut, where Ladislas and Nadège chatted happily together, and Dimitri conversed with his father. The young man informed him that he would never have been able to follow the track of the fugitives, but for the fires which they had kindled at their various encampments; and under other circumstances he and his young charge would never have reached the Polar Sea. (The Yakout guides meanwhile were feasting the Tongouse driver.)

Yermac then said to Yégor—

“Thanks to my son, I am enabled to restore to you this child, whom we all have mourned as lost, and who would certainly have died but for the bravery of Dimitri. Do you not think, Yégor, that this counts for something?”

“Yes, we are in your debt, Yermac: you were in ours,” replied Yégor. “But do not all these circumstances induce you to reflect? Will you not now put an end to the adverse attitude you have assumed towards us, and which has made us enemies?”

“No. That is impossible!”

“We mutually esteem each other, and yet we cherish hatred!”

“I feel no hatred,” replied Yermac.

“But,” exclaimed Yégor, “I would rather be the object of your hatred—you, the blind instrument of a barbaric legislature, with an inflexibility of character which nothing can touch, which

nothing can convince, and nothing enlighten. Your dislike must be extinguished now, at a time when you have put us under so great an obligation. But you can neither hate nor love."

"I obey the most elevated motives," replied Yermac.

"Very well—take back your weapons, Yermac. No matter what you may say henceforth, I fear you not. I intend to return you your gun. I at least owe you so much," he added, as he gazed at the emaciated and apparently dying Dimitri.

From that time M. Lafleur took upon himself the part of hospital nurse; but it was no easy task to attend Dimitri. The bullet had penetrated a considerable distance, and M. Lafleur was in want of surgical instruments. So the condition of the unfortunate young man grew worse. There was no hope for him—he was doomed!

A few days later—at about the hour when Dimitri had arrived at the camp—three men—the Yakouts and the Tongouse—might have been perceived lighting a fire by the margin of the ocean and digging a grave by its light.

By the time the fire had burned down, the men had made a considerable impression on the soil by means of their "picks" of hardened wood. After working for an hour, they had thrown up a mound which received their shadows whenever the fitful moon struggled through the clouds, and the workers soon returned to the hut to announce that the grave was ready.

Almost immediately they came out again, carrying between them a corpse wrapped in a sheet. Ladislas preceded them with a

lanthorn, Yermac walked behind him, and Yégor with M. Lafleur brought up the rear of the sad procession.

All round the hut the dogs kept howling in a most melancholy fashion. It was the only requiem.

The men advanced slowly over the rugged ground, amid the lugubrious obscurity, and under a sky across which the clouds chased each other rapidly. The temperature indicated more than thirty degrees of frost.

They reached the grave. Then the frozen body was deposited in the frozen ground with a mound of snow for the dead man's only monument. The bereaved father gazed at all the proceedings with dim eyes.

The two Yakouts had prepared a cross of wood, which they erected. It stood out black against the white background of snow; and when the spectators raised their eyes to heaven they were surprised to perceive an immense cross, repeated with a sinister effect six times in the mist by the brilliant light of the full moon.

The polar night had spread its vast veil, through which the stars shone with extraordinary brilliancy. Through the freezing atmosphere a clear light fell upon the icebergs, the snowy peaks, and the glassy sea of ice. The deep silence, only broken by the howling of the dogs, affected the senses in an indefinable manner with a kind of fear and uneasiness, as a nightmare might do.

One identical thought came into the minds of the three prin-

principal actors in that scene, so far away from their homes. Yégor, Yermac, and the good M. Lafleur, were all simultaneously transported in imagination to sunny climes. Who could tell whether they would ever see their native places again, or whether they would not equally fill a grave in the polar regions of ice and snow? Yégor and M. Lafleur both shook hands with Yermac in their attempts at consolation and to fortify their own resolutions.

“Yermac,” said Yégor, “at this tomb—beside this grave—are not you willing to promise us assistance and succour?”

“No, Yégor,” replied the inspector of police; “you have dragged me hither—indeed, I have followed you without much resistance—and for that reason your courage has greatly impressed me; but you must ask no favour at my hands.”

The Yakout guides departed next evening on their mission, followed by the south-west—usually called the “hot”—wind, which had prevailed all the day and caused an elevation of the temperature. The thermometer rose above zero, and the snow became softer, and melted on the hut. The moon gave them plenty of light for their journey, and if the dogs did their duty the guides ought to compass a speed of seven miles an hour.

Yermac, when he perceived the *nartas* speed away, felt greatly discouraged; and, enervated as he was by the death of his son, lost all hope of escape. More taciturn than ever, he repulsed all attempts at consolation. Nadège endeavoured, but without success, to make him take food, which she sent in by Ladislas.

When the guides had quite disappeared he went and sat down by the grave of Dimitri, when the cross appeared in the moonlight, the centre of a vast cemetery.

In the distance, over the sea, the hummocks of ice and the smaller bergs were creaking and cracking under the disintegrating influence of the warm wind; and with these weird sounds was mingled the hoarse roar of the waves which were beating against the promontories. The Polar Sea had, for a time at any rate, cast off the yoke of winter.





“His difficulty now lay in bringing back the animal to camp.”

CHAPTER XVII.

FAMINE—YERMAC'S ACCIDENT—A WINTER IN THE ICE.

YERMAC was hungry.

For many days he had subsisted solely on two lemmings, a kind of rat, which he had taken in the snares set in the marshy plain by the margin of the sea.

The foxes and gluttons, in a most unaccountable manner, declined to be captured in the traps so artistically formed for their reception.

Yermac discovered many hiding-places wherein the foxes had collected numbers of lemmings which they had killed. The numbers could be easily estimated by the skulls of the little rodents pierced by the sharp canine teeth of their captors. In one of these *caches* Yermac found half a white hare. But all the flesh he discovered was only fitted to bait his traps.

So he naturally felt very hungry, and he did not like to accept any food from his companions. He did not regret this, notwithstanding his sufferings, for he put himself voluntarily out of the pale of the society of his late associates. Nevertheless he realized the fact that, unless he soon took some decided step, he would perish of inanition. The low temperature, too, aggravated his sufferings and requirements. His limbs failed him, his sight grew dim, his skin became dry, parched, and discoloured, it became stretched upon his bones like parchment, so greatly was he emaciated. His pulse grew weak, his body lost all natural warmth, and his very breathing became, as it were, frozen. He dragged himself about like a man who had just recovered from some severe illness.

He could no longer sleep, and recuperation by this natural means was denied him. At times he fell into a lethargic condition which seemed the precursor of the death-agony. He thus was undergoing the most terrible privation which, even in his life of trial, he had ever experienced. Yet, with all this, he was not

afraid of giving way and begging favours of his companions, and of putting himself at the mercy of the fugitives. He was only afraid that death would cause him to give up his pursuit of them ; that he would succumb, on one of his nocturnal expeditions in the access of great discouragement and physical failure which so frequently beset him.

These nocturnal expeditions of the starving man across snow and ice, in intense cold, in the dull moonlight, which gave the huge ice-blocks such fantastic forms, served to weaken him rapidly. Sometimes the moon would be obscured—a thick fog would hide everything, or a terrible snowstorm would set in, and wrap him in its embrace.

Armed only with a pole, Yermac would under such circumstances glare around him with eyes rendered wild by hunger and the hallucinations of an impoverished brain. His teeth seemed to grow longer, his tongue worked in his mouth incessantly, and his jaws were continually in motion chewing—nothing. Empty, fasting, seeking food, and forgetful of self, emaciated even though he was, he might become the victim of any polar bear desirous to make a fresh meal. Yermac stumbled blindly on, seeking some sustenance in a kind of blind rage. Had there been grass he would eagerly have devoured it. If only the newly fallen snow had been manna ! But it was only snow, and as such but capable of quenching his burning thirst.

Though wide awake, he had dreams of eating. A temperate man always, he suddenly beheld the ice-blocks covered with white drapery and laden with abundant and varied supplies of food—savoury victuals from all parts of the globe, and thus he endured all the tortures of Tantalus. At other times his disordered imagination pictured to him horrible banquets of human flesh.

So when, bruised but still unconquered, he looked mournfully around him, the phantom form of Hunger appeared to him the only occupant of the vast solitudes he had penetrated.

Yégor had returned Yermac his gun, but he had no idea what had become of his ammunition, and was he to be too proud to beg a supply from his companions? No. He determined he would not be; for without ammunition he knew he could not exist. Nevertheless he wished to live independently, and he wanted to win over the driver Chort, when the *nartas* returned, for he had almost succeeded in gaining him to his side. If he could now escape (he felt quite quits with Yégor Séménoff and his friends) the party would be equal.

Winter had as yet scarcely commenced. Nijni-Kolimsk—which represented force of law—was not far off. What did his sufferings matter if he succeeded finally in his attempt, repelling indeed, even perilous; but for this very reason worthy to furnish

encouragement to all who acted in support of the dictates of conscience.

Next day—it was necessary to make haste, for the moon was waning and the nights were getting as dark as the days—Yégor and M. Lafleur perceived the inspector of police depart, dragging himself along with great difficulty, evidently prepared to proceed to a distance. A curious specimen of a hunter was he, staggering along, supporting himself by his gun, and grown so thin that his furs hung about him like the costume of a masker in “the Dance of Death.”

Yermac made his way in an easterly direction towards Cape Chélagask, across the hummocks of ice, and was so fortunate as to come across some reindeer of the particular species which lives in the vicinity of the Polar Sea, and does not migrate to the woods. Yermac fired at the deer and one fell.

Then all the man's confidence returned. His difficulty now lay in bringing back the animal to camp. Full of ardour and proud of his exploit, he seized the dead animal by the horns and managed to drag it towards the hut. He had now subsistence for many days.

The inspector visibly improved in appearance thenceforth. He resumed his moral attitude of spy, though living as much as possible apart from his companions. Notwithstanding the cold he remained out of doors, only coming in when the rest were all

asleep for necessary repose, and going out again first of all in the morning.

One evening, however, Yégor was sure Yermac had not returned, and he became very uneasy in consequence. He was certain that something had happened to his tormentor, and at an early hour next morning Yégor proceeded in search of the inspector of police, taking the direction towards the sea, while M. Lafleur went to the places where Yermac had established his "traps" and "gins."

Yégor advanced cautiously in the darkness, which was but little relieved by the brilliancy of the stars. He stood still and listened. Not a sound broke the sepulchral silence save the moaning of the wind, which saddened him.

Suddenly, as he turned round by an enormous block of ice, he found Yermac in a hole up to his middle in the nearly frozen inlet.

The inspector, with extended arms, was supporting himself by his elbows on the ice, quite incapable of getting up unassisted. He was waiting there, calm and resigned. What was he waiting for?

"What are you doing there?" cried Yégor to him.

"I am waiting to see which will come first, deliverance or death," replied the inspector. "I have fallen into a fissure in the ice ——"

“So I perceive. I must pull you out,” said Yégor, and he extended his gun-stock to Yermac as he spoke.

Yégor had considerable difficulty in extricating Yermac, who had become partially frozen into the ice.

“Once again I owe my life to you,” murmured Yermac. “Everything conspires against me. I shall never get out of your debt.”

“Why does this debt cost you so much to contract?” asked Yégor.

Yermac made no answer; and the men proceeded together in silence to the hut, where M. Lafleur arrived almost immediately afterwards.

“This is a regular day for accidents,” exclaimed Yégor, as he gazed at the Frenchman. “My good M. Lafleur, your nose is frozen!”

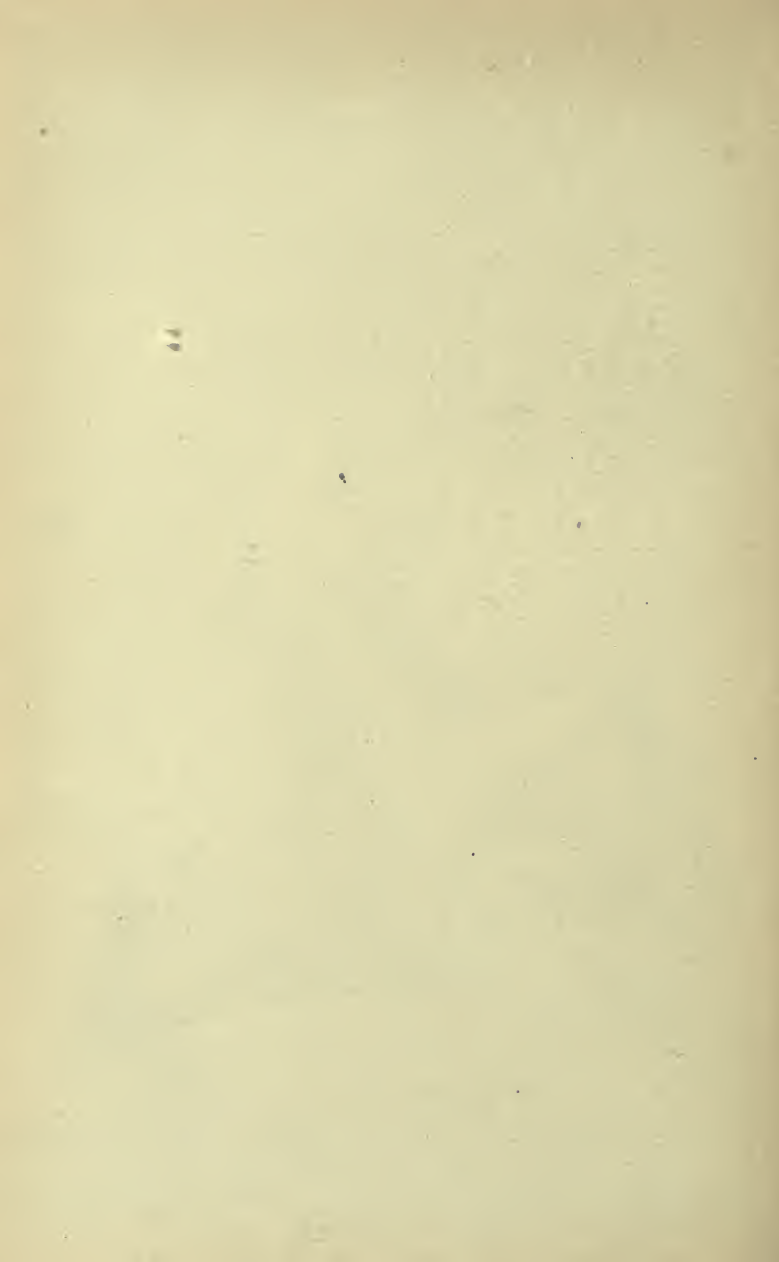
Ladislav, hearing this, immediately ran out for some snow; and a moment after M. Lafleur, paler than his nose, was rubbing it vigorously to restore the circulation. At length he succeeded; and then, blowing the offending organ, he exclaimed impatiently, as he threw himself upon a bench,—

“It seems to me this is a disgustingly long winter!”

“My dear friend,” replied Yégor, “the winter has but just commenced. Have patience. On the 28th of December the sun will reappear upon the horizon. But the cold will not diminish.



“The inspector, supporting himself by his elbows on the ice.”



Quite the contrary indeed. For my own part I am content to think that your friendship has not congealed already—like your nose.”

“My friendship!” replied the Frenchman. “My dear Yégor, it would not fail you so quickly. Pardon me that momentary impatience. One cannot perceive one’s nose freeze without a little natural warmth—or shall I say, emotion?”

When Yermac had eaten enough of his reindeer—he had offered Yégor and his friends some of the choicest portions, but they declined, thus imitating him in his refusals of their hospitality—he utilized the remainder for his traps. Thanks to the enticing smell of the flesh, Yermac quickly became possessed of three fine “gluttons,” which he found sufficiently palatable. The valuable furs of these animals were put carefully away, for Yermac, in his determination to escape, did not neglect to lay up a store of “circulating media” for the expenses of his journey, and such furs as those he had just obtained fetched a high price amongst the natives of Northern Siberia.

The Yakouts did not hurry back, and the fugitives began to fall short of provisions. They, in their turn, employed themselves in devising means to subdue the attacks of hunger. At that time one of the touching contests of generous natures began. M. Lafleur pretended that the cold had begun to affect him in a manner quite contrary to previous experience. He had no appetite

—food “went against him,” he said ; and he insisted upon Nadège and Ladislas having the best parts. Ladislas, too, pretended to his adopted sister that he had too much to eat, and with considerable self-denial obliged her to eat what he declared he could not touch.

Yermac, considerably surprised to perceive the fugitives so soon reduced to these straits, studied the expression of their faces. The more they failed the more he assumed strength and courage, for things would then be equal between them. His satisfaction would have been complete had he not partaken of the fears of the others concerning the absent guides.

Yégor and his friends endeavoured to find excuses for the delay in the return of the guides, and they economised the food. Yermac was particularly uneasy concerning Chort. He was afraid he had said too much to Tékél’s companion concerning the condition of the people he was engaged by.

Perhaps, fearing to compromise themselves, the guides would not return at all ! In that case Yermac perceived that his escape would be impossible : but was not the flight of the fugitives equally impossible ?

What could they do without their sleighs, their dogs, and supplies, in the deserted regions of the Polar World ? The fugitives would be compelled to admit themselves vanquished, incapable of proceeding to the end of their journey ; and would be

compelled to return, under the escort of the inspector of police, to Yakoutsck.

The fugitives were soon compelled to dispute for their food with Wab and the two Siberian dogs which Yégor had taken care of.

These animals, left without food, continually howled in the most lugubrious manner. The Siberian dogs usually howl four times a-day, but these animals cried day and night incessantly. The condition of the fugitives could not be much worse. And with that the bitter frost caused them all kinds of suffering. One morning Ladislas complained very much of the cold which he felt terribly in his feet. M. Lafleur took off the lad's boots, and uttered a cry when he perceived that the woollen socks had frozen to his feet and were adhering to them. It was necessary to be cautious in removing this icy covering. Fortunately the extremities, although stiffened, were still safe. M. Lafleur succeeded in restoring the circulation of the blood by rubbing them vigorously with brandy.

The difficulty of existence also increased by reason of the cold. It became necessary to cut the food with a hatchet, and if one touched a piece of iron a blister was formed by the contact with the uncovered hand. If Yégor, when consulting his compass, did not hold his breath, it was at once frozen on the glass. Outside the hut the eyelids became covered with

an icy crust. Yégor's watch no longer went, although he had taken the greatest care of it, and kept it under the bed-coverings at night.

Although the fugitives were very warmly clad in flannel and furs, and their beds were covered with skins, the intense cold, added to the pangs of hunger, kept them from sleeping. The poor travellers were worn down by sadness: they had only escaped from the captivity of men to fall under the power of the elements.

Nevertheless, all these privations, amid the snow and darkness, had consolations when contrasted with what Yégor had suffered in the mines of Nertchinsk, and what Nadège had endured. Here Hope buoyed them up.

As soon as the sun returned they would be able to continue their journey. They compared themselves to the heroes and heroines of the Fairy Tales who awaited their deliverance in the forest or in the castle where they had been shut up by magic power. The chances of safety would be increased every day.

Ah! if Hunger had not claimed his rights so inexorably and made them feel his tyranny!

They had passed through the greater part of the long Polar night which, in those latitudes, lasts more than a month. Mid-day was just the same as midnight. In the south a pale and yellowish

gleam of light was visible. The sun had descended so many degrees below the horizon, that to perceive it, it would have been necessary to ascend a mountain ten leagues high! When the moon was not visible, or when the Aurora did not appear, only luminous traces of the "shooting stars" were occasionally visible: a rapid thread of light in the profound darkness—a star had fallen and been extinguished in space!

The only sounds which broke the terrible silence, which was harder to bear even than the want of light, were the noises produced by the cracking of the ice-blocks or the crunching of the masses against each other in those spots which had been incompletely frozen—noises which tended to impress the hearers strangely. Sometimes they were deep and continuous, like the distant booming of the waves; sometimes sharp and strident, like the squeaking of ungreased wheels; sometimes loud and sudden, like the detonations of cannon.

Yégor and M. Lafleur applied themselves to hunting, but without success. The shores of the Polar Sea appeared quite barren of game.

The smell and the howling of the dogs had banished the bears. On one occasion they had the chance of killing a pair of seals, the fat of which they devoured with some tea. M. Lafleur thought seal-fat something like rancid butter, but he got accustomed to it.

Finally, Yégor and M. Lafleur decided to make an expedition in search of some white bears upon the frozen ocean. The daylight which had, by this time, been visible for a week, rendered such an excursion possible.





Yégor and his friend, with the two Siberian dogs

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN EXPEDITION ON THE ICE—THE BEAR HUNT—A PERILOUS
POSITION—RESCUED.

NEXT day, when the pale yellow tint in the south heralded the rising of the sun, Yégor and his friend descended, well armed, upon the ice, taking with them the two Siberian dogs. Soon afterwards the sun itself appeared with its ruddy disc circumscribed by the mist. The snowy lines of the coast and the great ice-blocks assumed a softer hue of rose colour, and the blue tints passed into violet.

After an hour's march amongst accumulated blocks—broken, pointed and crushed into shapeless masses which are called “hummocks” by English explorers, and which have the appearance of an immense field turned up by a gigantic plough—the hunters reached a perfect labyrinth of ice-blocks in which they recognized in the snow traces of white bears, of foxes which are the “parasites” of the bears, and which are enabled by their superior agility to snatch a portion of the prey of their formidable adversaries. Soon afterwards the men discovered a lair from which the game was absent. These caverns, which are about five feet deep, have two exits; and a couple of bears scarcely find space in it to lie down together.

A little farther away our hunters perceived two bears in hiding. Near one of the round crevasses in the ice at which the old walrus come up to breathe the air—to enjoy the light, and the sun when it is visible—the bears had built up a snow mound behind which they were crouching. At the base of the little mound they had pierced a hole through which a paw could be passed. They were watching their prey with so much attention, that they did not hear the approach of the two hunters.

After waiting a few minutes, Yégor and M. Lafleur perceived an old walrus emerge very cautiously from the water. The quicker of the bears at once gave him a blow with his paw, which stretched him half dead upon the ice. Then both bears threw themselves

upon the walrus, despatched him, and commenced to make a meal of him.

This was a favourable moment for the hunters to attack. Yégor, who hitherto had had very great difficulty in restraining the Siberian dogs, let them slip. When their barking was heard by the bears they seemed undecided whether to fight or beat a retreat. But while they hesitated M. Lafleur fired at each in turn. The animals hesitated no longer; and, perceiving that they had to do with determined hunters, made off behind the ice-blocks.

Then the chase commenced in earnest. Yégor and M. Lafleur advanced, guided by the furious barking of the dogs. But the bears gained on them: from time to time the hunters caught sight of them clinging to the hummocks as white as themselves, and quite out of range.

As Yégor and M. Lafleur proceeded, the latter entertained his companion—who, however, did not give the narrative implicit credence—with some account of the manners and customs of the Polar bears. He said that when the ice is beginning to form, in September, the female “Bruin” captures and kills a number of seals, which she hides in the openings of a rock. After that, she proceeds inland and gorges herself with lichens so as to make a kind of stop-gap. When this little arrangement is satisfactorily concluded, she returns to her stock of seal-meat and stuffs herself

with the fat until she can hold no more. When this meal is finally concluded, she spends three-quarters of the winter in the hole she has excavated for herself in the ice.

After a certain period of seclusion it frequently happens that she gives birth to two and sometimes three cubs. In this crystalline *crèche* she moves about and teaches her children to walk until April sets in, when the seals begin to bring up their little families. Then the bears quit their icy lair, their mother leading them and sniffing the air. She seeks and follows by scent the invisible trail of the seal to the place where she has built her "home," which is as easy to recognize as the *igloo* of the Esquimaux. Then Madame Bruin makes a spring, crushes down upon the frail habitation of the seal, and very quickly seizes the young seals to feed her cubs withal.

Yégor, on this, remarked to M. Lafleur, that there were so many fables circulated concerning the Polar bear that he did not feel disposed to credit all that was said about the animal, particularly his voluntary interment during the winter.

Suddenly, while the hunters were proceeding, a third bear, putting the dogs at fault, rose from behind a block of ice and advanced towards the invaders with full confidence in his strength, or the contempt of danger which characterizes the Polar bear.

Yégor perceived the animal as he was slowly advancing, and

presented his gun. M. Lafleur, suddenly turning, fired but missed. Yégor waited until the animal had come nearer, and then fired twice at ten paces. The bear, feeling wounded, turned round and fled away, leaving tracks of blood upon the snow.

It was in vain that M. Lafleur fired again. The bear ran away, and finally disappeared behind the blocks of ice, whither it was impossible to follow him.

The dogs, badly trained, persisted in following the first trail for an immense distance, and the hunters ran a great risk of being left in the lurch—a prospect far from agreeable when the empty condition of the larder was taken into consideration.

Nadège and Ladislas, who remained in the hut by the fire, were much alarmed at the long absence of Yégor and M. Lafleur. Yermac, seated opposite, said nothing, looking at Nadège without speaking, and only replying, even when addressed directly, by a movement of the head or a shrug of the shoulders.

The looks of this taciturn person weighed upon Nadège's spirits. Wab also, who had no doubt heard the barking of the Siberian dogs, began to howl in a manner scarcely calculated to make the girl cheerful.

She dressed herself as warmly as possible, and, accompanied by Ladislas, ventured out. The twilight had begun early, and the sea appeared disturbed. Heavy clouds, the harbingers of the

storm, were packed in the east. The fog began to rise, and soon she was enabled to perceive the ocean, agitated by a fierce wind, cast up in great waves which fell upon the white cliffs with a thundering sound.

Under the influence of a strong north-easter, the water, now free from ice for some distance, threw enormous blocks of ice upon the frozen fields which they broke through. Masses of ice were tossed upon the summits of the waves; and, broken up with great noise, disappeared in the spray. The waves engulfed these blocks, but an instant afterwards they reappeared, and, hissing in the foam, were precipitated against other blocks and mounted upon them. A continued cracking was audible as the broken ice mingled with the waves, tossed into foam by the wind.

Arctic explorers tell us that no language can render justice to this sound. There is at first, under the convulsed ice, which trembles like the whistling of a thousand arrows, a most horrible uproar, in which strident tones mingle with deep noises and groanings becoming more and more savage. The ice breaks up into concentric fissures, the fragments rolling one on the other. Then commences a wild Titanic contest which recalls the battle of the elements in the first ages of the world. These masses advance and meet each other; and fighting, struggling, dashing against each other impelled by a hidden force, appear to be

obeying their own blind passions. Above all, the sombre and supernatural light caused by the reflection of the ice, gives the sky a strange appearance.

Wab, who had not quitted his mistress's side, began to bark, and continued to do so.

Then Ladislas endeavoured to calm the anxieties of his sister. He repeated, what was true enough, that Yégor and M. Lafleur were hunting amongst the hummocks towards the west, and that the open water could not reach them there.

But Nadège, who was much distressed, would not listen. She proceeded bravely over the sea in the direction she trusted to meet her beloved Yégor, whom she regretted having permitted to go so far away from her. The girl hoped that in the semi-obscurity that prevailed, the hunters would be able to guide themselves by the barking of Wab. She also counted upon the intelligence of Yégor's dog, and she followed the faithful animal, which to all appearance had chosen the direction in which the travellers would be found.

Suddenly it seemed to her, and to Ladislas also, that the ice upon which they were walking began to tremble. They were not mistaken. The oscillations became more marked. The ice cracked under their feet. Some dark rays extended, and showed themselves through the snow; crevasses were being formed. Nadège wished to retrace her steps, but behind her a passage opened

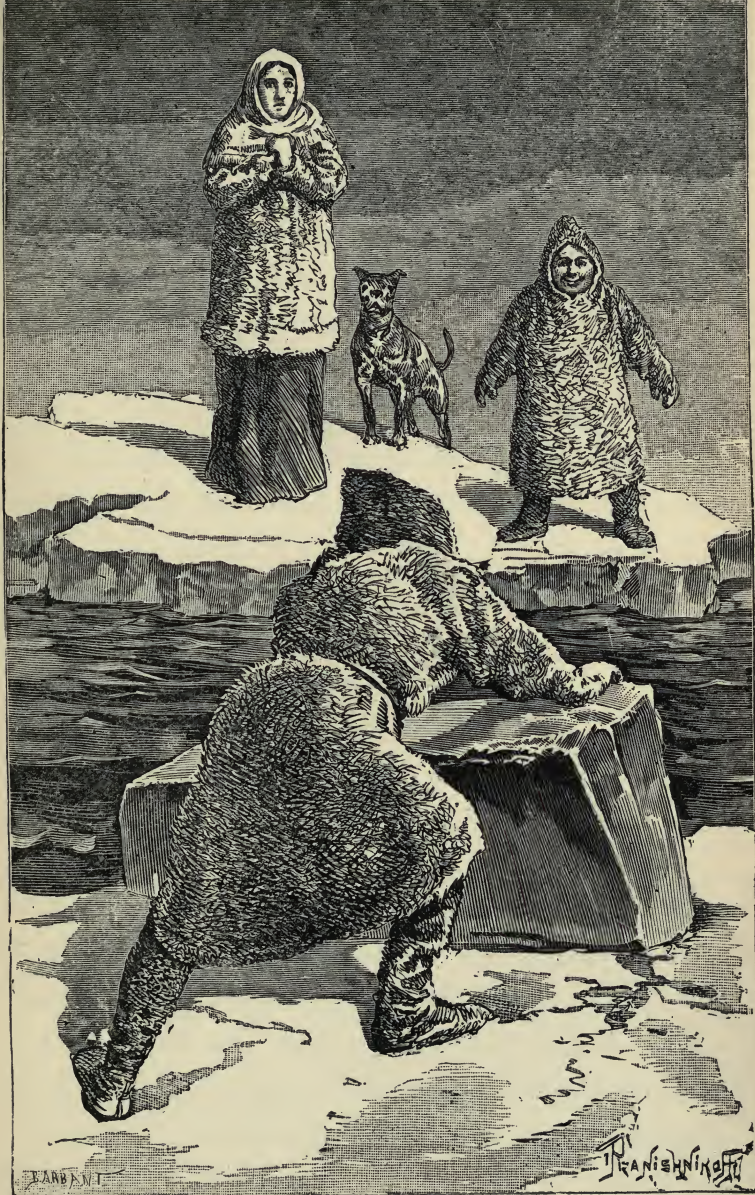
studded with ice-blocks. At this sight the young lady uttered despairing cries, while Ladislas in vain endeavoured to calm her. Wab began to bark louder than ever. The immense mass of ice on which they were standing began to float away, and then a wave broke over it and hurried it along.

The shock was fearful. A terrible cracking resounded under their feet, and they felt convinced that the receding water would carry away a large portion of the ice. However, they could still stand without danger. Guided by Wab, they moved away to the leeward side and took refuge upon a mound of ice many feet thick, which appeared to be motionless, and which resisted all the efforts of the waves to disintegrate it. But the bristling ice presented a thousand obstacles to the retreat of the unfortunate fugitives.

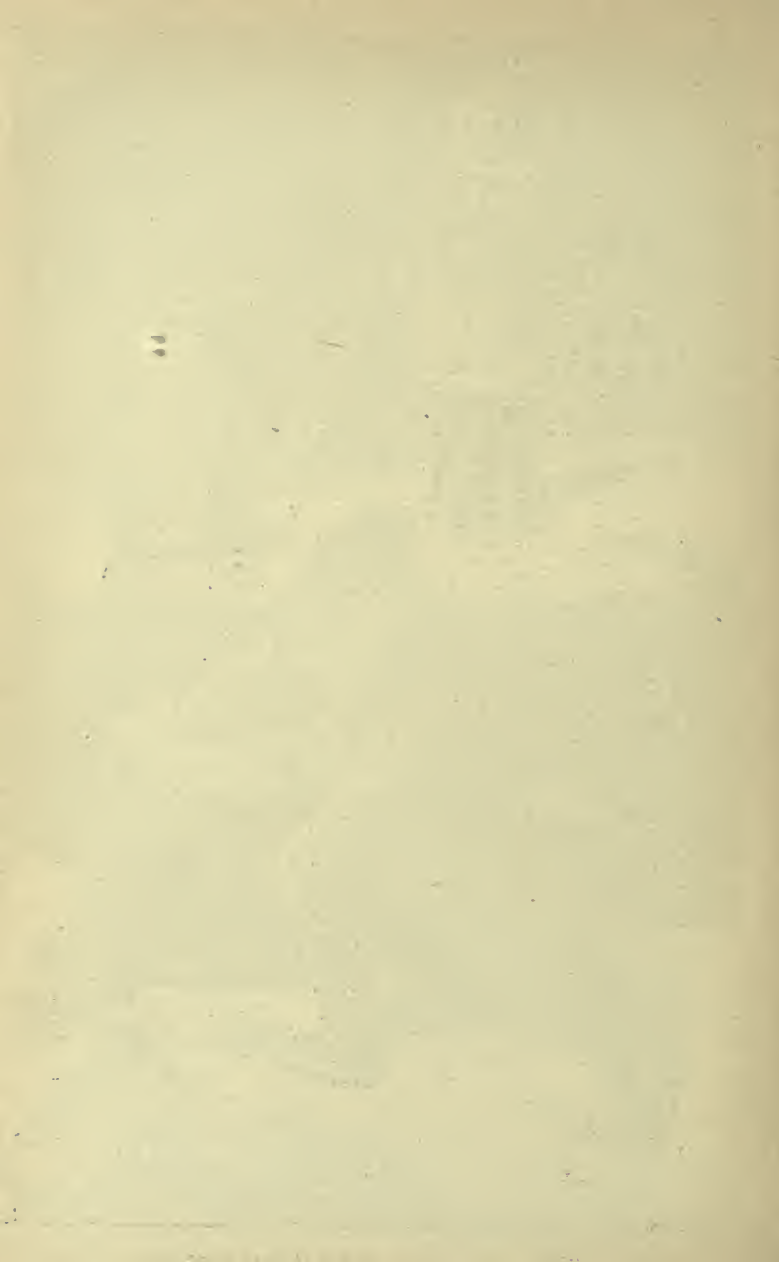
Ladislas was quickly exhausted, and declared he could proceed no farther. Nadège then took him in her arms, and she who a few moments before had nearly given way, now found strength to proceed and carry him to a place of safety.

As she was searching for some place, and wondering from which side assistance would arrive, she perceived Yermac, who had been called from the hut by the roar of the tempest and the loud barking of Wab.

The inspector of police came towards the lady and her companion, but found his progress barred by a crevasse which Nadège



"Yermac devised a method of Prompt succour."



had not perceived, but which she reached almost simultaneously with the inspector. The girl uttered a cry of despair when she perceived the impassable obstacle which separated her from Yermac. The fissure was long and deep, and the waves washed to and fro. It was bounded only on the right by precipitous peak-shaped hummock ice, and the gap was about seven or eight feet wide. Nadège and Ladislas had no alternative but to wait where they were until the wind abated and new ice formed upon the surface of the water, strong enough to bear them. This could not occur for several hours. But their clothing, drenched with spray, would quickly freeze upon them, and, in the absolute impossibility of moving about, death was almost certain to overtake them.

Yermac, however, devised a method of prompt succour. Masses of ice of varying size lay strewn about, and he fancied he could construct a kind of "pontoon" across the fissure. This idea he immediately put in practice. Nadège at once perceived his intention, and felt hope revive within her.

Some blocks of ice were drifting in the channel ; others consolidated at the sides of crevasses, and soon all these being united, Ladislas first and Nadège afterwards were enabled to cross. The boy had scarcely let go his sister's hand when Yermac came and caught him by the other. After this test Nadège crossed the "pontoon" of ice without assistance. Wab followed Ladislas

and then returned to Nadège as if to beg of her to have no fear.

Ladislav embraced the inspector of police. Nadège did not know how to thank him for his quick appreciation of, and for releasing them from, the grave danger they had been in.

At that moment Yégor and M. Lafleur returned, preceded by the dogs from the westward.

They had also had a rough time of it. The wind had rendered their progress very difficult, as it raised the snow in little storms right in their faces. This dry snow, like sand in the desert, destroyed all traces of the route, raising little hills and forming valleys and mounds which they were obliged to avoid if they did not wish to sink leg-deep in the snowy dust.

The surprise of the hunters was extreme when they perceived Nadège and Ladislav on the ice—their clothing bristling with icicles, and Yermac beside them also, glistening with hoarfrost, for he had not been careful of himself when working. Ladislav at once ran to his friends and told them all that had happened since their departure.

“Ah, Monsieur Yermac,” said Yégor, “you are better than your word. To-day you have saved all our lives!”

But after all the joy of returning safe and sound to the hut, there was a disappointment. The hunters had brought back nothing!

The inspector of police regarded the day as a lucky one for him.

Once again he had cried "quits" with Yégor. That was to Yermac a good omen.





“M. Lafleur waited whole days and nights to catch a seal.”

CHAPTER XIX.

THE NATIVES—A SEAL-HUNT—AN UNPALATABLE SUPPER—M. LAFLEUR
AND THE BEAR.

NOTHING appeared changed in the condition of the travellers, except the manner of the inspector of the police. Yermac appeared less reserved. He permitted himself a degree of amity with the young lady and the lad whom he had rescued from almost certain death ; but they felt nevertheless that there was a barrier between them and him. Yermac’s cold politeness was rather that of a gaoler—his looks, his attentions never passed a

certain fixed limit. He still continued to decline any share of the meat which so seldom appeared upon the common table.

In the midst of this misery, with famine certain if the Yakouts did not soon make their appearance—the fugitives had a stroke of luck.

Wab set off on his own account after a reindeer of the same species as that recently killed by Yermac, and brought it down. This exploit was accomplished at a distance of nearly three-quarters-of-a-mile from the hut, and the brave dog came back there: he managed to attract Yégor's attention by his movements, and his master followed him. The other dogs were keeping guard. The reindeer was carried in triumph to the hut, and the dogs, especially Wab, were not forgotten in the feasting.

Yermac, still inflexible, maintained that his reindeer was larger than Wab's quarry.

M. Lafleur, recognizing the difficulty of catching a bear, thought he would try his hand at "sealing." He fashioned a harpoon, and fancied he might make use of the Siberian dogs to discover the retreat of the amphibious ones. The dogs found many of the narrow apertures which the seal makes in the ice, through which he breathes fresh air, and through which he is harpooned. M. Lafleur, notwithstanding the cold and hunger, waited whole days and nights to catch a seal which defied his inexperience as a fisherman, as the bear had evaded him when hunting so unskilfully.

At length real assistance arrived in the persons of two old Tchouktchas—a man and a woman. Dying of hunger, they came from the Bay of Tchaounsk, and were proceeding along the coast in search of some native settlement in which to find victuals. They had perceived the smoke from the hut, and came to request hospitality

“*Toroma*,” said they when they entered. This is equivalent to “Good evening.”

Yégor regretted the absence of his faithful Tékél, who knew something of the language of the Tchouktchas, and replied at a venture, “*Toroma*.”

By the appearance of the new arrivals and by signs, the fugitives managed to understand what was required, and although provisions were extremely scarce the new-comers devoured all that had been intended for the meals of the next and the following days. They were extremely hungry, and their appetites were not easy to satisfy.

The appearance of these people recalled the type of the Mongol of the old world, combined with that of the North American Indian; Behring's Strait, which was frozen solid the greater part of the year, serving as the connecting link between the races, as between the two continents.

The man was thickly enwrapped in reindeer skins; he wore upon his head a cowl which fell down and covered his shoulders

over his exterior body-garment. His wife, clothed in many tunics, fastened them like trousers at the feet and legs; the sleeves had likewise openings for the hands. Her face was tattooed with some blue markings.

Notwithstanding his hunger, the man could not take his eyes off Nadège, so impressed was he by her beauty. He proceeded to explain this to his wife, and used the word "*kamakay*" frequently. "*Kamakay*" means the chief of a tribe.

Perceiving in a corner the harpoon which M. Lafleur had manufactured, the Tchouktchas appeared astonished that they had not been treated to seal-meat. M. Lafleur, by his gestures, gave them to understand that he had tried but failed in his fishing. Then the native smote his chest, and, pointing to the harpoon and dogs, promised to give M. Lafleur, whom he took for a Russian, a lesson in seal-catching.

Next day accordingly the native was not long in harpooning a seal. Guided by the dogs, he soon arrived at a breathing-hole. Then he sounded the snow with his harpoon to a depth of two or three feet; for the seal makes the hole across the ice, but often stops at a mound of snow. The small aperture discovered, the fisherman waited silently until a seal came up to breathe the air. At the second or third respiration the harpoon, projected strongly through the snow, pierced the animal's head.

The seal plunged and ran out all the rope which had been

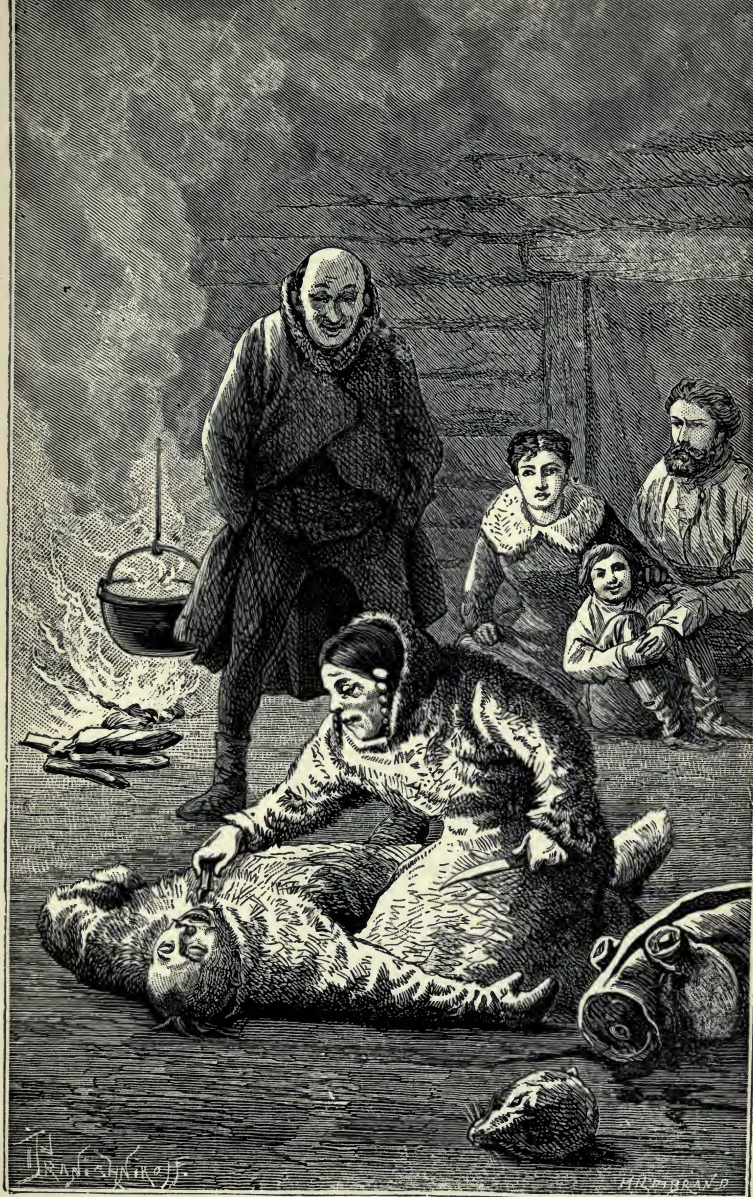
fastened to the harpoon in view of this contingency—about fifty yards. The other end was in the hand of the harpooner. The breathing-hole, afterwards cleared of the snow which concealed it, was enlarged to permit the body of the animal to pass through it, which feat was accomplished when the seal ceased to struggle. The native quickly drew him out, and carried the carcass to the hut.

Then, after a lesson in fishing, came a lesson in cookery. While the native man decapitated the seal, his wife, to make herself useful, procured some oil for the lamp from some morsels of fat of the animal. She was so skilful in her manipulation that in a very short time she had filled a large wooden vase with lamp-oil.

When the seal was cut up, the native man, to set the example, lay down upon his back and caused his wife to stuff him with seal-fat as one would cram a fowl.

Perceiving, after this relish, that his companions were not very anxious to eat the uncooked flesh, the Tchouktchas prepared enormous slices, which they boiled with water and the blood of the seal in the cauldron suspended over the fire. After about three hours' cooking, the woman distributed the pieces, taking care to suck them one after the other for fear any of the gravy should drop on her hosts' clothing. Any small piece of skin or hair, or the like, which still clung to the slices, she licked off with her ready tongue.

The fugitives remained still only spectators of these nice atten-



THE NATIVE CAUSED HIS WIFE TO STUFF HIM WITH SEAL-FAT.



tions, and declined to partake of the food. At the risk of offending the lady they searched for their own bits in the cauldron ; and with their forks found some remains, although they passed for ill-mannered folk in her eyes.

The Tchouktchas then offered the Europeans—but without meeting with many acknowledgments—pieces of raw flesh with raw lard ; and showed how much they themselves enjoyed these delicious portions of the animal. The female then proceeded to further cookery of the seal's interior, and served it round to all the guests.

M. Lafleur at length succeeded in devouring this, and even in eating the lard, and swallowing the “gravy.”

“There—that is done?” he cried, after this exploit. “You need never have any fear of me, my friends, so long as the inside of a seal—*Phoca hispida*—is to hand with ice ; and I will let you have all the remainder.”

Yermac had permitted the natives to pile up before him seal-broth, raw flesh, slices of fat, “interior,” and hesitated what to do. He had not tasted the reindeer which Wab had run down, and for many days his food had been very limited and inferior in quality. The seal-flesh was offered to him by the native ; he decided to taste it, and he followed the Parisian's example.

The Tchouktchas, seeing that success had attended their efforts, made no longer any scruple of eating all the morsels they could

reach. They ate pounds and pounds of the flesh, and when they could hold no more they lay down to digest their dinner.

Next day the natives, thus refreshed, departed without any ceremony, carrying with them the remains of the seal, and appropriating besides a small skin-bag in which the matches were kept. The travellers were very sorry indeed that they had received the natives so hospitably.

However, M. Lafleur profited by his lesson. One day, after having harpooned a seal, he was drawing it out of the water, and while he was kneeling upon the ice he felt a familiar tap on the shoulder, but thought that Ladislas was behind him. He was about to withdraw the harpoon from the seal, when the pressure upon his back compelled him to turn round; and he nearly fainted at perceiving an enormous white bear, which had noticed the fishing, and claimed the prey. The bear, taking advantage of the deference paid him by M. Lafleur—who at once made way for him, as you may imagine—took up the seal and departed to his den. After this incident M. Lafleur never went sealing without his gun.

The inspector of police, as it seemed, began to like seal-flesh. After having followed M. Lafleur's example once or twice, he borrowed the harpoon and succeeded in killing a large seal, which he cut up and laid aside.

This conduct surprised Yégor.

“What is he about to do with all that supply of fat?” he asked of M. Lafleur.

What but laying in a stock of provision for his journey; for, seeing the Yakouts did not return, he was thinking seriously of running away!





“Uttering an exclamation of joy, he pointed out the vessel to M. Lafleur.”

CHAPTER XX.

THE DUTCH WHALER—A TERRIBLE ENCOUNTER—DESPAIR!

NADÈGE and Ladislas disliked the flesh of the seal so much—perhaps having tasted the curious culinary preparations of the natives—that M. Lafleur persuaded Yégor to go once again in search of the white bears.

Famine had made itself felt in the fugitive's hut, when one morning Yégor and his friend started courageously upon the frozen surface of the sea. The cold, which had been very severe

for some days, had quite solidified the ice, and it was perfectly safe.

The hunters proceeded more than a league amongst the hummocks? the dogs accompanied them as before. Wab had been left in the hut to protect Nadège and Ladislas.

They reached the immense masses of ice, which had come from some long distance westward no doubt, or probably from Greenland, whence icebergs break away continually, with a noise like thunder; leaving the numerous glaciers from which they have detached themselves still many miles in extent.

As Yégor gained the summit of one of these icebergs, he suddenly perceived a ship embedded in the ice. Uttering an exclamation of joy, he pointed out the vessel to M. Lafleur, who just then rejoined him.

Upon the frozen surface of the sea, on which the white patches of snow suggested the crests of the waves, the black hull of the vessel stood out in relief against the white. But the deck, the masts, the yards and rigging were all incrustated with snow crystals, which glittered brightly in the sun, like stars.

The first idea of both Yégor and M. Lafleur was to hide themselves as soon as possible behind one of the slopes of the ice-hills, so as to observe whether they had to do with friends or enemies. The vessel had no sails hoisted, and no bunting was displayed. Her strong build and broad beam suggested that she was one of

the fishing fleet that annually braves the perils of the polar seas. The dogs began to bark just then, and the observers silenced them.

After about half a minute, during which M. Lafleur had been attentively watching the ship, he observed on board some creature enveloped in a fur costume. Perhaps the look-out man had noticed them. The fugitives continued to observe him.

"They have perceived us," said M. Lafleur.

"Wait a little, my friend," said Yégor, who was watching the dogs; which, with bristling backs, were intent upon the ship. Then, without waiting for a reply, Yégor levelled his gun and took aim at the supposed "look-out" man.

"What are you about?" exclaimed M. Lafleur.

"I was quite sure that was not a man," replied Yégor. "Let us loose the dogs."

Just then an immense white bear appeared jumping about the deck, as Yégor's bullet whistled past his ears.

"It is an enormous bear!" exclaimed M. Lafleur, "the first we have seen to-day."

The dogs had already hurried in the direction of the vessel, barking loudly, but keeping, nevertheless, at a respectful distance from their adversary.

"But what do you think of the vessel?" said Yégor, cautiously.

"It is the 'phantom ship' of the legend perhaps!"

"These legends have no currency on the banks of the Seine,"

replied the Parisian. "So far as we are concerned, the hull of yonder ship is only the lair of an enormous bear—it is some vessel abandoned by the crew."

"That may well be," replied Yégor; "and, in that case, we may perhaps find something which will compensate us for our unlucky hunting."

"The bear certainly is upon ground which belongs to us more than to him," said M. Lafleur.

"The best we can do is to turn him out," replied Yégor.

Meanwhile the bear had disappeared: he had taken refuge in the companion hatch.

The two hunters quickly glided down the sloping mass of ice and hastened towards the vessel. Yégor quickly recognised it as a Dutch whaler, and they were soon alongside. They hailed loudly, but no one answered them.

"Evidently there is not a living soul on board," said Yégor.

"Under other circumstances we should have to believe the bear was a tame animal," said M. Lafleur.

The two hunters climbed on deck, leaving the dogs on the ice; and when they had gained the vessel, a terrible sight met their gaze. Five men—five skeletons dressed in sailors' clothes—were lying on deck in the midst of all kinds of objects, which were strewn about.

“Poor fellows!” said Yégor, compassionately.

The two men remained in sad contemplation, forgetting all about the bear. However, a movement below was audible, and M. Lafleur said :—

“Look out, our bear is coming!”

The dogs then began to bark loudly, as if to give the alarm, and to put their owners on their guard.

Just then the white head of the bear appeared at one of the hatchways, his mouth open threateningly, red eyes, and generally ferocious aspect.

Yégor, without pausing an instant, lodged a ball in the animal's neck. Mortally wounded, the bear sprang angrily towards its assailant. M. Lafleur then fired, but the ball only touched the bear on the ear and had no effect upon him.

Yégor, perceiving that the infuriated animal was still advancing upon him, had no resource but to use his axe, which he carried in his belt. He seized it, but it had become fixed in consequence of the frost, and resisted all his attempts to withdraw it. It would have been a very unfortunate moment for Yégor had not the Parisian rushed forward, and dealt the bear a terrible blow with the stock of his gun, which broke the musket, but discomposed the white bear very little. The animal paused for a second or two, evidently divided in his mind as to whether he should attack Yégor or M. Lafleur. The former just then managed to release



"Yégor crashed his axe down on the skull of the terrible beast."



his axe, and lifting it high with both hands, crashed it down upon the skull of the terrible beast. The bear fell, and while it lay on the deck, Yégor finished it with a few more blows delivered with all his might. He did not mind cutting the fur on that occasion.

“Well done!” exclaimed M. Lafleur. “Now we shall have meat enough.”

“Oh, never—not for our table,” cried Yégor, with a movement of disgust. Then he reminded his companion that the bear had been feeding upon the dead bodies of the sailors.

“The bear we have killed is evidently that which we saw keeping watch,” said M. Lafleur. “Take care, though, for the dogs are still barking.”

The Parisian was right, for scarcely had he spoken than another enormous bear—a female—came on threateningly from behind a heap of wooden cases covered with snow.

“Attention,” cried Yégor.

He raised his hatchet. M. Lafleur, retreating a few paces, drew his great hunting-knife. The bear, astonished at the warlike reception, made a half turn, and retired growling, turning now and then to assure herself that she was not followed. The hunters let her go without attempting to prevent her: she made her way along by the side of the vessel, pursued by the loud barking of the dogs; and when they perceived her disappear behind the hum-

mocks by the icy hills, the animals felt much easier in their minds.

“Decidedly, this kind of hunting is a little too exciting for my temperament,” remarked M. Lafleur. “If we could only find some boxes of biscuit, we might take some for our winter quarters.”

“But if the bear has eaten it all?” suggested Yégor.

M. Lafleur made a grimace.

“We had better go and see,” he remarked.

They descended accordingly into the cabin, where a more horrible sight than any they had seen met their gaze. The bones and skulls of at least a dozen men had transformed the cabin into a charnel house.

“How has it happened that those who died first were not buried by their companions?” said Yégor to his friend.

“The fact is,” replied M. Lafleur, “that—as I suspect—the whole crew were suffering from scurvy. People afflicted with this terrible disease get very stiff in the limbs; they are lame, and can neither sleep nor rest themselves; they lose all appetite; their gums become inflamed and are extremely painful; a great lassitude pervades their limbs, and this is the beginning of the end. These brave fellows must have died last winter. But in this close cabin—in which the air has not been renewed—do we not run some risk of catching the disease?”

“Is it so easily contracted!”

“Yes, indeed, under such conditions as these!”

“Well! we will not be in such a case. Let us have fresh air, and then go in search of provisions.”

Yégor with his hatchet, which he still grasped, knocked away the lashings which secured the “dead-lights,” and threw open the ports, thus admitting both light and air into the cabin. “We inherit everything,” said M. Lafleur. “All will be ours.”

“Yes, on one condition,” said Yégor.

“What is that?”

“That we bury the remains of the unfortunate sailors.”

“That will be done. But see—there is an organ!”

“They had it, no doubt, to enliven the dreary monotony of the long winter’s night.”

Beside the stove opposite the box of charcoal, they found on a low table a barrel-organ. M. Lafleur turned the handle, and with a grim touch of irony there came forth a cheerful lilting dance-tune in mockery of the scene. Then, much moved by the contrast of this lively music with the horrible sight presented to their eyes, M. Lafleur and Yégor felt their eyes fill with tears.

Upon the barrel-organ lay a large volume. Yégor glanced at it. It was a Dutch Bible. In the fly-leaf could be read the names of the sailors who had died first, and appended to them some sad reflections, traced by the failing hand of the captain. Yégor, who

was acquainted with the English and German languages, understood sufficient Dutch to make out the explanation of the sad scenes of this drama of the polar seas. The whaler had been caught in the ice near Barentz Island, one of the Spitzbergen group; and M. Lafleur had not been wrong in his suggestion that scurvy had been the cause of the mortality amongst the crew.

The captain's name figured upon these lugubrious pages a little farther on. The mate had then taken the pen, and he had in his turn passed it on to a survivor. The last marginal note was couched in these terms:—

“There are only four of us left now. Molis Stoke, of Haarlem, sailor; Dijk Hooft, surnamed the Spreker, of Medenblik, sailor; Haymann Jaarsveldt, of Elburg, our cabin-boy; and myself, Alberdingk Huijdecoper, of Rotterdam, ship's cook. We have no longer the strength to assist each other. A horrible fate is in store for us if the white bears which prowl around the vessel should come upon us and devour us—alive!”

“Poor creatures!” exclaimed Yégor, “that, probably, was their fate!”

Meanwhile, M. Lafleur was hunting around in the lockers, and when Yégor was deciphering the gruesome notes in the Bible, the Parisian cried out—

“Here is lard, biscuit, rum, condensed milk—fifty tins! The preserved meat has been devoured by the bears. Twenty pots of

pemmican. Sugar—oh, and flour! Some bottles of red wine; a box of candles, intact. More biscuit—a full barrel! Vermicelli, chocolate! But, oh! what damage and waste! The foxes have helped the bears. Beans in bottles. Sardines!”

“Well, my dear friend,” said Yégor, “let us make a parcel of some of these things, and carry them away with us. We can close the hatchways carefully after us.”

“Suppose we do not find the ship again?”

“Oh; the sea is quiet enough, and the ice firm. But we will take as much as we can conveniently carry.”

“I see some matches.”

“Take them. They will replace those the Tchouktchas stole the other day.”

“Here is some charcoal too!”

“We need not trouble about that. Let us rather select the supplies which will serve to restore Nadège’s strength, and ‘set up’ Ladislas.”

Two hours later, Yégor and the Parisian, bending under their burthen, carried away to the hut the first instalment of the stores which they had found. M. Lafleur had at first an idea of bringing away the organ, pretending that a little music would benefit the moral tone of the company. Ladislas could turn the handle, and M. Lafleur would accompany him upon his pocket violin. Yégor had some trouble to dissuade the Frenchman from carrying out this idea; but he himself took the Bible.

They approached the hut, joyously anticipating the warm welcome they would receive.

“We shall soon see,” said M. Lafleur, “whether Yermac will turn up his nose at the milk and sugar, the sardines and the lard !”

The Siberian dogs hurried on in advance.

Yégor was surprised that Wab did not come out to meet them. He had a terrible presentiment ; and, putting down his load upon the ice, he hurried forward to the hut, calling upon Nadège and Ladislas.

He gained the hut. It was empty. Neither Nadège, Ladislas, Yermac, nor the dog was there. The fire had gone out some time, evidently ; and there were indications that a struggle had taken place.

When M. Lafleur joined Yégor he found him prostrate on the ground.

“What is the matter ?” he enquired.

“I do not know—I do not understand—I am losing my reason—I shall die !”

“Where have they gone ?”

“I cannot understand—but I am sure they have met with some terrible misfortune. The furs are all tumbled about ; the embers of the fire have been scattered even to the door. They have taken our gun !”

“And my harpoon!” added M. Lafleur. “Would Yermac have dealt us a blow in this fashion?”

“What could he have done?” enquired Yégor, who awaited the answer to his question with fear and trembling.

“He may have carried off Nadège and the lad,” replied M. Lafleur, “in order to oblige us to follow him, and to yield to him when he met with assistance from any force.”

“Oh, that is horrible!” exclaimed Yégor. “What are we to do? Let us lose no time. We should pursue them at once. But I am faint and cannot move a step. Look at the traces on the snow.”

They lighted the lanthorn, for the day had already declined, and went out. The snow was trodden all around the hut. The footsteps led to a dip in the ground, behind which the two men at once perceived that a reindeer sleigh had been hidden. Thence they could follow the track of the sleigh.

“A *narta*!” exclaimed Yégor; “and we can only follow it on foot. We shall never be able to overtake it. Oh, what a terrible day this has been! And as for Yermac——”

“I am beginning to think that he is in no way concerned in this affair,” said M. Lafleur.

“If he were not the author of it all, he would be here. He would have defended Nadège and the boy. In his place I would have let myself be killed before any harm came to them. No; he

has certainly done this. He has taken advantage of some circumstance or other, some chance, and——”

“But,” interrupted M. Lafleur, “the *narta* has not gone towards Russian territory.”

“That is true,” replied Yégor, very much astonished that he had not observed this before.

“At this late hour, and fatigued as we are, it would be very difficult to follow them,” said M. Lafleur. “Believe me, Yégor, it will be best to wait till to-morrow. Perhaps by that time we shall have had some indication of the truth. Come, my friend, after all our exertions and our fatigue, the cold may affect us; come.”

Yégor then suffered himself to be led into the hut without making any resistance.





“Wab has brought back the bag they took away.”

CHAPTER XXI.

THE EMPTY HUT—YERMAC PROPOSES TO ESCAPE—DEPARTURE OF
YÉGOR AND M. LAFLEUR.

THE evening passed very miserably in the empty hut while the wintry storm howled outside furiously.

Yégor and M. Lafleur sat looking at each other, without daring to exchange their sad reflections and thoughts. They had brought back quite a festive supply of provisions, but neither of the men could eat a morsel.

“Even the dog!” murmured Yégor. “Even the dog. All gone! It is unaccountable? Wab would never have followed Yermac voluntarily. What is one to believe? Which way is one to turn?”

Just then a loud barking was heard outside.

“Those are the Siberian dogs,” said M. Lafleur.

Yégor listened intently, and then said, as he rose, “No, it is Wab; but he is hurt, wounded perhaps.”

Then Yégor went and opened the door for the animal.

It was really Wab: the dog bounded in, and laid at his master’s feet a small bag of reindeer skin embroidered with silk, the same which the Tchouktchas had stolen a few days previously.

“Look at this,” said Yégor. “Those mendicants who came here the other day have had something to do with our misfortune. Wab has brought back the bag they took away. The animal must have followed Nadège to their hut.”

Wab rushed at his master and licked his hands, whining and uttering little joyous whimperings. Yégor caressed him with a tenderness fully deserved by the animal for his intelligence and fidelity.

“We might have noticed,” said M. Lafleur, “that the Tchouktchas, who came from the east, had retraced their steps, instead of going westward as was probably their original intention. The sleigh-track led towards the east. Evidently Wab went back to

their hut—a fact which tells us that their village is not far off. But what part in this are we to attribute to the inspector of police?”

“That is very difficult to determine,” said Yégor.

“At length we have some indications to go upon,” said the Parisian. “Now I remember the strange manner in which the native regarded Nadège when speaking to his wife of the *kamakay*.”

“You have hit it, my friend,” exclaimed Yégor. “The chief of the tribe has come here on the report from the two natives. Oh, my poor Nadège! What a terrible trial for her. But the inspector of police——”

“That is the puzzle,” said M. Lafleur. “We are always coming back to that!”

The Parisian had hardly finished speaking, when he heard his name pronounced in a stifled voice.

“Who calls me?” said he.

“Monsieur Lafleur,” continued the voice.

The two watchers looked up. The voice came through the hole in the roof of the hut which served as chimney.

“Hallo, that is the inspector up there,” said Yégor.

“Open the door,” continued the voice.

“Do you think it is he?” asked M. Lafleur, somewhat reassured.

“I will open it, then. The fact is, those skeletons and the horrors

we have seen to-day, with the strange surprise which met us here, have rather unmanned me."

In a moment afterwards, Yermac entered the hut behind M. Lafleur.

"May I ask whence you come?" said the latter to the inspector, brusquely. "It is true we do not often trouble ourselves concerning your movements; but such things have happened here, that it is almost necessary to be told why you have returned at this hour of the night."

"Eh, what things?" asked the inspector, who was gazing round at the disordered appearance of the hut, and then ascertained the absence of Nadège and her brother, with the consequent dejection of Yégor. "Has anything happened, then?" he asked, instead of replying to M. Lafleur. "Where are Nadège and Ladislas?"

"Gone!" replied Yégor.

"Out to sea, perhaps, as they did the other day! Or have they wandered along the coast?"

"Carried off," said M. Lafleur. "When we returned, we found everything in the greatest confusion."

"Carried off—violently," muttered Yermac, suddenly dropping into his rôle of police inspector. "But," he continued aloud, and almost in a triumphant tone, "what possessed you to expose a young girl and a child to such an adventure as you have undertaken? It would have been a hundred times better if you had

yielded to my first summons to return. I would have interceded with the Governor of Yakoutsk on your behalf. While now," added he, changing his tone, "this young lady and her brother, the little Polish lad, are in the power of a bloodthirsty tribe, rebels against the authority of the Czar, who are practically lawless, and notwithstanding that a number of them are baptised, the natives still perform human sacrifices. That is what you have brought about with your ingenious combinations, M. Séménoff."

"We shall all die, perhaps," replied Yégor, with a deep sigh. "But we shall at least die free."

"Free! That is only an expression," said Yermac.

"An expression, Mr. Inspector!" exclaimed the Parisian. "With that word one can do many things. I can talk to you seriously, for I was born in the Place de la Bastille. *Vive la Liberté!* But," added M. Lafleur, checking himself, "you have not told us whence you have just arrived."

"Whence I came! Ah, don't ask me that," replied Yermac. So saying, he went and seated himself by the fire, leaning his elbows on his knees, and resting his head in his hands. Yégor and the Parisian exchanged nods, as if to say, "Leave him alone."

As the inspector turned half round, he noticed the table spread with the provisions, which M. Lafleur and Yégor had brought from the whaler, all nicely arranged.

“The *nartas* have returned, then,” said Yermac, with sudden vivacity.

“No,” replied M. Lafleur. “We have obtained all these provisions somewhere else.”

“From whence?” asked Yermac, in astonishment.

“Ah! don’t ask me that,” retorted the Parisian, mimicking the inspector’s tone and answer made a few minutes previously.

Yermac understood the allusion, and turned again to his corner as silent as before.

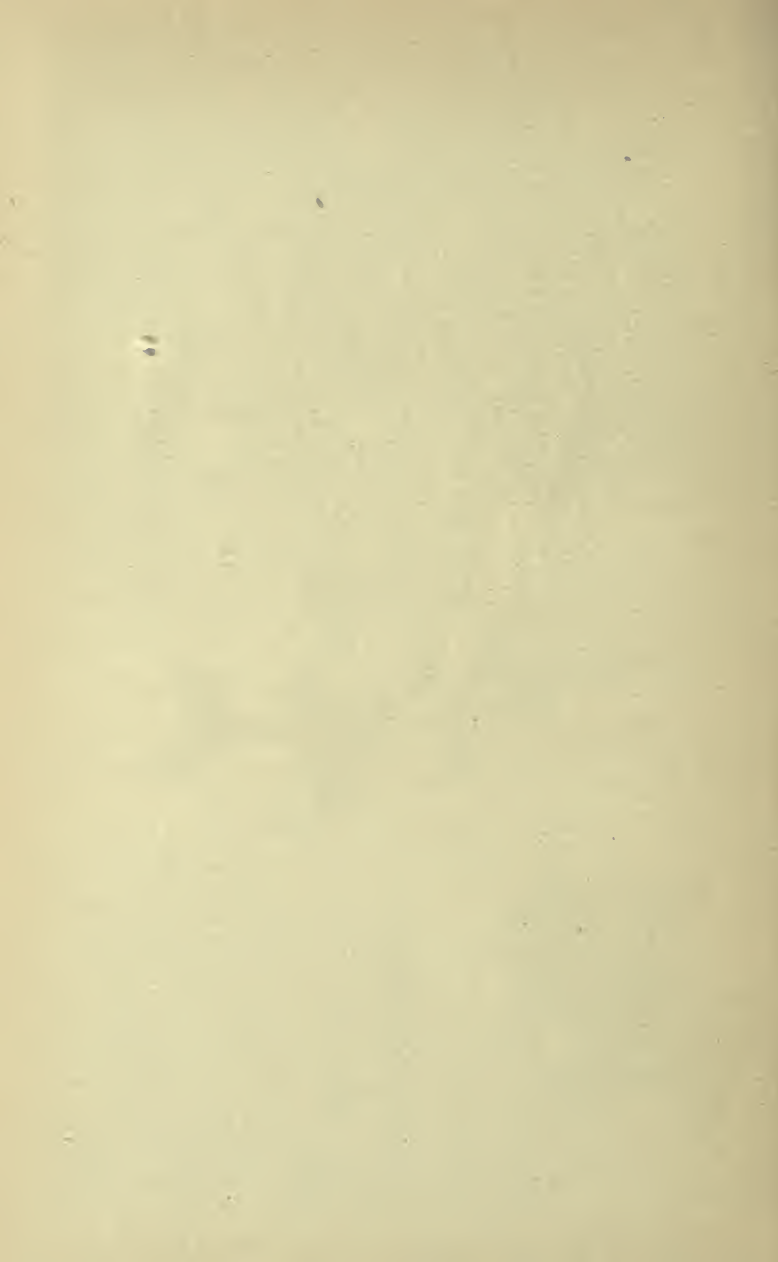
We must now relate the mysterious cause of the long absence of Yermac, which had extended for a whole day and part of the night.

The inspector of police, despairing of the return of Chort and Tékél, had made up his mind to endeavour to effect his escape on foot; and as he started immediately after the departure of Yégor and M. Lafleur on their hunting expedition, he only carried with him the provision of seal-lard, which he had saved. When he had walked five or six hours, heavily clad, in the intense cold, he stopped, undecided whether he should continue his route.

Some foxes, attracted by the smell of the seal-flesh, began to hover around him. He threatened them with his staff; but they did not run away very far. This was rather a bad beginning. Then the wind began to blow violently—not a nice prospect for



“Yégor and Lafleur, guided by Wab, following the traces of the sledge.”



the night. Where should he sleep? If he established himself in the middle of the *toundra* ("snow field,") the foxes would carry off his provisions, and perhaps attack him. Without his supplies, no journey, no escape was possible. Was he even sure of the route which he was pursuing? The sky was clouded—there were no stars to direct him. There were no trees, which, by the lichens on the bark, would tell him the cardinal points of the compass. His attempt at escape appeared to be simple madness: under such conditions he could never arrive at Nijni-Kolimsk.

It would be far better, he concluded, to retrace his steps and endeavour to find the track homewards. That is what he did. He threw away the greater part of the provisions he had carried; and, thus relieved, he found his way to the coast, but still at a great distance from the hut. Once there, however, he recollected the configuration of the headlands and bays. Some hours afterwards he reached the cross which marked the resting-place of his son. He kneeled down by the grave. When he continued his way, he had great difficulty in reaching the hut, against which the snow had drifted high; but he recognised the thin column of smoke from the chimney.

Yégor and M. Lafleur, when they missed, next day, the portions of the seal which Yermac had set aside—believing his surprise truthful, and his sorrow sincere, when he had been informed con-

cerning the disappearance of Nadège and Ladislas—suspected the truth.

But now what a hazardous task was imposed upon them! To find Nadège and Ladislas: to snatch them from the hands of their ravishers. Yégor could not continue his journey, so courageously undertaken hitherto, until he had succeeded in this attempt.

After a sleepless night—during which the three men remained seated round the fire without speaking—Yégor and M. Lafleur again sought the tracks of the *nartas*. They were still visible. Yégor's dog barked along the way the sledge had taken, so that they might follow it; he then returned and went through the same performance.

"Thanks to Wab, we shall find them," said M. Lafleur.

"I hope so," said Yégor. "But ought we to abandon the hut? Shall we go on and take Yermac on to the Gulf of Anadyr when we have found Nadège and Ladislas?"

"And the *nartas* which we expect?" said M. Lafleur. "What will become of our guides? How can we hope to accomplish such a journey on foot? No, take my advice; let us leave the hut in charge of the inspector of police, and let us go on with as little baggage as possible. We will all return here."

They then came back to the hut, and made some hurried preparations—taking only a little provision with them. But they did not forget their arms. Yégor carried his gun and pistols; the

Parisian a hatchet which he had found on board the whaler, and which he had taken to replace the gun, that had been broken in the attack on the bear.

As they were about to leave, Yégor said to Yermac that the provisions in the hut were quite at his service.

“It is useless to press that matter, M. Séménoff,” replied the inspector of police. “I would rather die of hunger than touch them. But you may satisfy my curiosity by telling me where you found these supplies.”

“I will tell you,” replied Yégor, “and then your repugnance to them may be removed.”

So he told Yermac of the discovery of the Dutch whaler.

“But,” said the inspector, “it is necessary to save the wreckage of this ship; what is its name?”

“I do not know,” replied Yégor.

“We must, nevertheless, find out at once. I will ascertain. I will take note of the port from which she sailed; the freighters will be indemnified to a certain extent by our government. If one could only sell the cargo, the cordage, masts, sails, at Nijni-Kolimsk, or at the fair of Ostrovnoyé! But that is impossible. We can only get at the provisions; and those in a limited quantity, suited to our wants.”

“Then you will consent to use the resources which you obtain from the whaler?” said Yégor.

“Certainly,” replied Yermac. “This time it is on account of the Government of the Czar, which will pay——”

“You may arrange matters as you please, Monsieur Yermac,” replied Yégor. “The chief point is, we cannot see you suffer and perish with hunger; now we can leave you provisions with the certainty of finding you alive when we return.”

Yermac, being a man of few words, did not reply, though he was sensible of the solicitude expressed on his behalf. So he felt embarrassed, but only turned his back to Yégor in silence.

The latter, now satisfied concerning Yermac’s fate, set off, accompanied by M. Lafleur, and led by Wab, who hurried along in advance.

Soon in the east they perceived, at a distance of a hundred versts, the mounts Vayvanine, Geyla, and Raoutane, as well as the sharp rocks of Cape Chélagk.* The dog led the travellers in a south-westerly direction, across the steep and icy hills. When night came on a halt was called in the snow for some hours, though the men had nothing with them to mitigate the rigour of such an encampment.

Next day, they found themselves in a country dotted with a number of deep lakes of various sizes, separated from each other

* The “Cape of Schelagskoj” of Nordenskiöld.

by a series of natural banks, about a foot thick, and formed, like the mainland, of eternal ice, covered by a little mould or earth. After a difficult walk, the travellers at length reached the western side of the Bay of Tchaounsk.

Still guided by Wab, and following the traces of the sledge in the snow, they skirted the slopes of the hills parallel to the coast; upon a stretch of sand whereon they noticed remains of sea-cabbage leaves, and some other marine plants.

The wind blew strongly. The sky was clear. At mid-day a most beautiful celestial phenomenon absorbed their attention, and even caused them to pause in the middle of their arduous way. Around the sun appeared four other suns, united by rainbows of most brilliant hues. The whole formed a circle forty degrees in diameter. There was, besides, another horizontal rainbow, which must have been eighty degrees in length, passing across the true sun and the mock suns which surrounded it. At the extremities arose two small fog-bows, the pale tints of which were opposed to the larger bows.

This phenomenon lasted two hours. The wind dispersed it by degrees; then snow fell, which was drifted up considerably by the wind.

Yégor and M. Lafleur sheltered themselves as well as they could; but were much depressed at the sight of the snow, which would obliterate the tracks of the sleigh.

Would the dog be able to find the trail? That was the question.

When the storm had passed away, Wab was encouraged to continue the route which the sleigh had taken.

The dog at first appeared somewhat at fault: he followed and abandoned many trails; at length, he seemed to make up his mind; and Yégor, who had begun to despair and gave way to his disappointment, took courage. He and his companion decided to trust to the animal, and they continued their advance.

Meanwhile the inspector of police had gone in search of the whaler; and, by following Yégor's directions, he had no difficulty in finding it.

His first care was, as he had declared it would be, to find out the name of the ship—*Hugo and Maria*.

He had already ascertained the names of the captain, the mate, and those of the sailors, from the Bible which Yégor had brought to the hut. He then made an inventory of all the ship contained, in tackle and stores and furniture.

When he had done this he began to transport to the hut such things as were not too heavy to be carried nor likely to be embarrassing: going to and fro to the ship, as indefatigable in this work of salvage as he had been in his endeavour to prevent the escape of the fugitives from Yakoutsk.

If anyone had seen him—muffled up in his dress of skins,

crowned with a fur cap, which came low down on his head; a hatchet and an augur thrust into his girdle of leather; a small barrel under his arm, a gun upon his shoulder, and also managing to trail behind him a saw, a bag of biscuits, and some boxes of cartridges—one would have taken him for a Crusoe on the ice.

One evening the Yakout guides returned, making a great noise with their thirty-two dogs, and awakening the echoes of the Arctic regions.

Yermac was delighted; he could now carry out his project of escape, and this time under the best possible conditions, thanks to the absence of Yégor.

He was much distressed that he could not carry the fugitives with him; but he knew whither they had gone. From Yakoutsk it would be possible, by employing couriers, to put all the inhabitants of the coast on their guard, all along the littoral of the Pacific which bordered on the Gulf of Anadyr. In the spring Yégor and his companions would only reach the gulf to be captured.

The guides—to whom Yermac related the fact of the capture of Nadège and Ladislas and the departure of Yégor and M. Lafleur in search of them—thought that their masters would never find their way to the hut, and even if they pursued their way to a distance nearer the Pacific than to the Arctic Ocean, they would

never retrace their steps. They appeared to give a ready consent to the suggestion of the inspector of police, but requested three or four days to decide: this time was also necessary for the repose of the teams of dogs.

Yérmac, believing he was near the realisation of his hopes, thought of utilising these remaining days.

He caused all that was of any commercial value to be raised from the wreck, and, by means of a *narta* and a pack of dogs, proposed to carry the booty to Nijni-Kolimsk, particularly the powder, the harpoons, and the firearms.

Afterwards he caused the bones and skeletons found on deck and in the cabin of the vessel to be interred near the remains of his son; in this particular carrying out the pious intentions of Yégor.





“A large team drew the *narta*, which was driven by a slave.”

CHAPTER XXII.

IN THE TENT OF THE “KAMAKAY.”

ONE hundred leagues to the east of the Bay of Tchaounsk is the Bay of Kolioutchine, where the *Vega* wintered from the 27th of September, 1878, to the 18th of July of the following year.

Everyone now is aware of the surprising expedition directed by Nordenskiöld, which resulted in the discovery of the North East Passage. This, assuredly, was the grandest geographical feat accomplished since the discovery of America.

We are aware how the Swedish *savant*, after many voyages for exploring purposes undertaken to the north of Russia and Siberia, succeeded in reaching Behring's Strait and the great ocean; realising by this means a very ingenious hypothesis, to wit—that along the coast of Siberia there ought to be a navigable channel in consequence of the warm water, which, in summer, debouches from the Asiatic rivers.

Nordenskiöld, during his ten months' winter in the Bay of Kolioutchine, lived amongst the Tchouktchas, then but little known people; but long feared by the other tribes of Siberia with whom they came in contact, and whose ferocity had been much exaggerated.

The celebrated Swedish navigator was not the first who had penetrated to the Tchouktchan peninsula. So far back as 1823, Lieutenant, now Admiral Wrangel of the Russian navy, had reached the peninsula of Kolioutchine, and even before him the illustrious Cook had (in 1778) discovered the North Cape (the Cape Irkaïpi of Nordenskiöld) and the island of Kolioutchine, which he called Burney's Island. In 1791, Captain Billings, after having disembarked at the Bay of St. Laurent in the Sea of Okhotsk, had returned by land to the Bay of Kolioutchine, and thence to Cape Chélagk.

It was upon the narratives of Wrangel, and his lieutenants Matiouchkine and Kozmine, and also upon what he knew concern-

ing Billings's expeditions, and others of lesser note, such as the merchant Chalaoureff of Yakoutsk and Captain Saritcheff, that Yégor had founded his itinerary. He was not ignorant that the Tchouktchas were people to be feared, and to be appeased; but he never thought that they would be so hardy as to carry off a girl like Nadège by main force.

The unhappy girl, imprisoned in the double tent of the chief of the tribe, established to the southward of the Bay of Kolioutchine, no longer expected to be released, unless by the intelligence and courage of her adopted brother.

Ladislav, without being made prisoner, had followed her, hoping to be able to protect her, and be useful to her. The men who had carried Nadège away were seven in number. Accompanying them were the old Tchouktchas, who had come to claim hospitality of the travellers a few days before.

The commander of the band was a young chief, who had, for a time, taken up his quarters in the Bay of Tchaounsk, but whose usual fishing-grounds were in the Bay of Kolioutchine. This *kamakay*, or chief, of the Tchouktchas, finding himself in too close proximity to the white men who came from the west, gave the signal for departure, and all the tribe followed him; the richest bringing with them their slaves, no doubt the descendants of former prisoners of war.

Nadège, who was at first treated with some consideration, made

this new journey in a well-protected *narta*, having her dear Ladislas with her, whom she embraced closely, as if she feared he would be torn from her arms. A large team drew the *narta*, which was driven by a slave running on foot beside the vehicle. As the tribe continued their course towards the east, Ladislas, who had from the very first been planning his escape, and who intended to return and inform Yégor of the route taken by the ravishers of Nadège, perceived with terror the lengthening way he would have to traverse to reach the hut again.

He would have quitted Nadège, but she prevented him. She made him understand he must not abandon her while he was still uncertain of her ultimate destination. How otherwise could Yégor recover her, or gain any information concerning her? It would be better for him to remain with her altogether, and trust to the devotion of Yégor to discover them both.

After quitting Cape Chélagisk, the coast appeared covered with villages of a dozen houses or so each—sometimes fewer. These were the dwellings of the Tchouktchas, a sedentary race who inhabit the sea-coast, and who are thus distinguished from the nomads, or Tchouktchas with reindeer. Their huts are made of poles or whale-ribs, covered with reindeer skins. Nadège remarked that the houses were built in the form of cones, and were much rounded towards the north, in contrast to the opposite sides which were flat. On this side was an opening, concealed by a curtain of reindeer skin,

which served as a door. A second opening in the roof of the hut gave passage to the smoke of the fire within it.

At length the *narta* reached the Bay of Kolioutchine, where already a portion of the tribe had arrived. There Nadège and Ladislas were installed in the tent of the *kamakay*, which was much more comfortable and much more commodious than the others.

She found two other women there. These shrews were small of stature, with black eyes, long hair, and yellow-faced, very like the Esquimaux of Greenland. Divining in Nadège a rival, they set about to torment her, to put her to heavy work—to maltreat and disgust her in every way in their power.

There was underneath the front or large tent a smaller one raised on a wooden platform, about a foot above the ground—a kind of alcove kept at an elevated temperature by means of an oil-lamp. In this inner tent lived the two wives of the chief.

These two women forced Nadège to remain in the outer tent, which was always very cold, notwithstanding the fire for domestic purposes ; but, at any rate, the unfortunate young girl there breathed a less vitiated atmosphere than she would have breathed in the inner chamber, where the Tchouktcha ladies were a trifle "too much at home."

Nadège had thrust upon her the hardest and most menial occupations—she had to melt the snow for the household requirements, to collect floating wood from the coast, and, in default of mosses,

bones, or whale-ribs, to keep up the fire. The wives of the chief were continually occupied in making a species of net in which the seals were captured, or in the preparation of wolf-traps. The latter were made of pieces of whale-fin, cut in two after the extremities had been sharpened. The fin thus prepared is sprinkled with water, which promptly is turned to ice. Thus, in default of binding, the ice is sufficiently strong to keep the two ends of the rib together, and they are baited with fat. The wolf then rushes at and swallows the bait. When he has eaten it, the warmth of his stomach melts the ice which unites the pointed ribs, and they divide—the ends enter his sides, and the wolf dies.

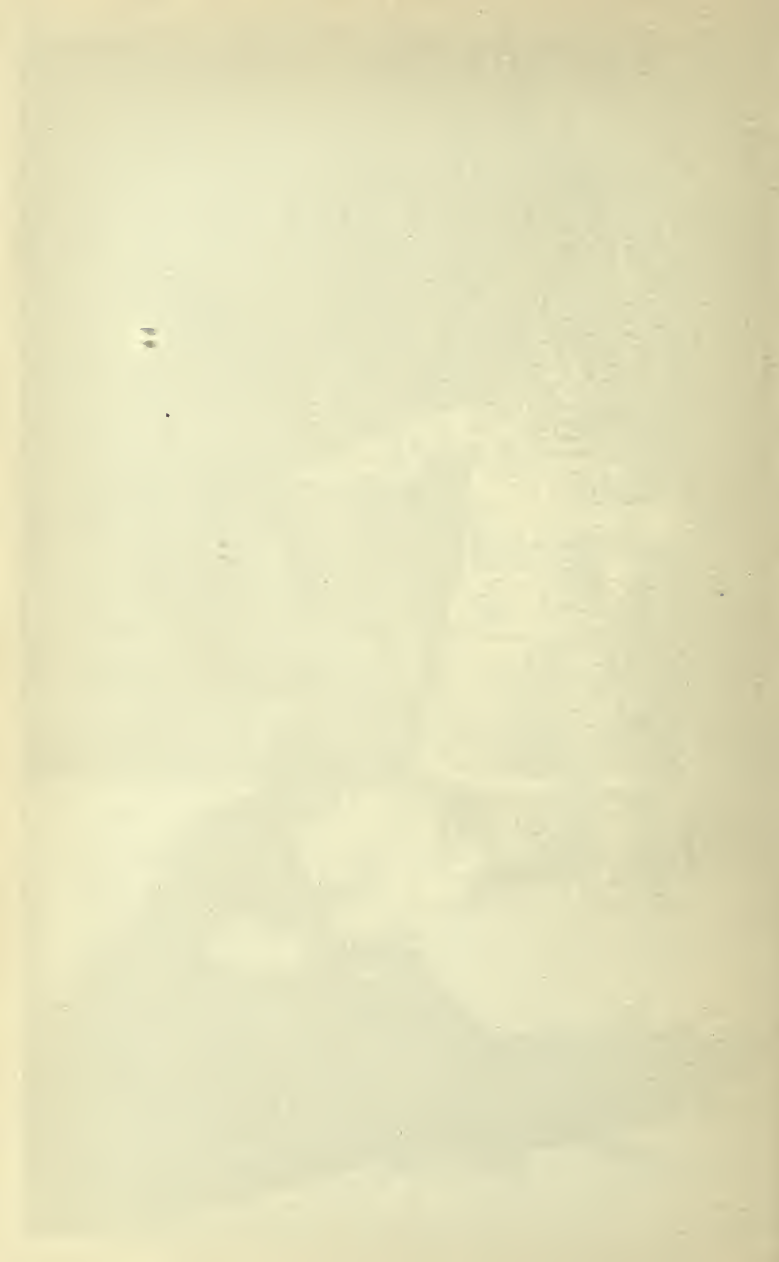
The *kamakay* was forced to maintain order in his household by administering a few beatings to his wives. Not knowing any language but his own, he had not yet succeeded in putting Nadège in possession of his sentiments, other than counting, in English, up to three, and pointing to his two wives successively. He gave her thus clearly to understand that he destined for her the high honour of being "Number 3."

"One, two, three," he would repeat continually, holding up the fingers of his left hand as he spoke.

Poor Nadège pretended not to understand him, but she did understand only too well.

"One, two, three," repeated the *kamakay*, with the usual gestures. Then, impatient at the slow progress of his matrimonial





affairs, he would drink several mouthfuls of *eau-de-vie* of American production, and roll upon the floor of the inner chamber quite overcome.

The *kamakay* had provided a white reindeer to be offered as a sacrifice by the tribe. The first day of the new moon was the period fixed upon for that ceremony. Ladislas had occasionally ridden on the animal, for he had some idea that it might ultimately prove useful, and serve him as a steed.

One evening the barking of a dog was heard close to the chief's tent. Nadège and Ladislas recognised Wab's voice at once, for Wab did not bark like the Siberian dogs. Davidoff's daughter, filled with hope and joy, believed that Yégor had arrived to her rescue. But no one appeared. The dog continued to bark throughout the night.

Then Ladislas persuaded Nadège that the time for his departure had arrived. Mounted upon the white reindeer, he felt assured that, by following the coast-line as closely as possible, he would reach Cape Baranoff and the hut. Wab would guide him. Perhaps, also, he would not go far before meeting Yégor; for how could he believe the dog would come alone for such an immense distance and across such wastes.

Nadège, disappointed in her anticipation, agreed to all the young lad desired; and the same night, after laying by a stock of reindeer-meat, cooked in seal-fat, Ladislas ran after the white deer,

which roamed at liberty amongst the tents. He made ready, mounted, and started off towards the west, preceded by Wab.

The young Sarmatian—gifted with uncommon force of character, and rejoicing, besides, in a robust constitution, which permitted him to brave the rigours of the climate and its privations—was capable of carrying this somewhat foolhardy proof of his devotion to a satisfactory termination.





“Imagine Yermac’s surprise—he found Ladislas at the hut.”

CHAPTER XXIII.

DELIVERANCE—THE GUIDES ARRIVE—THE KAMAKAY IS CHECKMATED.

THE inspector of police had agreed with the two guides to abandon the hut, and to leave it for Nijni-Kolimsk. Yermac gave up a portion of the provision he had brought—especially the fish, which would serve as food for the dogs—and loaded the *nartas* with great quantities of tobacco, sugar, powder, and some pieces of sail-cloth which he had taken from the whaler, *Hugo and Maria*. The guides, having already stipulated for a certain delay, had no valid reason to urge for a longer rest. Tékél and Chort

were moreover convinced that their masters would never return to the hut, and they made no further objection.

The day fixed for their departure at length arrived. It was a lovely winter day: clear, not too cold—all that travellers in such inhospitable regions could fairly have expected.

Yermac glowed with satisfaction. He was at length “quits” with the fugitives.

He had given his final orders, and went for the last time to visit the grave of his son.

But when he returned, imagine his surprise. He found Ladislas at the hut. The lad, already informed by the guides of the proposed abandonment of the hut, had immediately forbidden them in the name of Yégor Séménoff to obey Yermac’s orders. He pretended that Yégor had sent him to order them to go and meet him with the *nartas* at the Bay of Kolioutchine, bringing with them the inspector of police—by force if necessary.

It was in vain that Yermac—who beheld the edifice he had so laboriously raised tumbling to the ground—endeavoured to oppose this proceeding. He was obliged to yield. The teams which had been drawn up facing the west were turned in an opposite direction. The loading was not interfered with, for the little Pole was well aware that the tobacco and the powder were valuable articles of barter. He only added to the cargo some light wearing apparel belonging to Nadège, and several objects which she

particularly valued—not forgetting the manuscript poems of Davidoff.

The white reindeer was set at liberty, somewhat lame, it is true, but having escaped the death that had threatened it.

The *nartas* started, Wab once again acting as guide. It was necessary first to reach the Bay of Tchaounsk, without keeping far away from the coast. With the dog's assistance they would then perhaps find the trail of Yégor and M. Lafleur.

Nadège, more unhappy than ever after the departure of Ladislas and the white reindeer, was made the object of much ill-treatment. She was condemned to pass whole days in the most repulsive occupations, and her nights in tears. She suffered from cold and hunger—refused a place in the warmer inner alcove, and disgusted by the unpleasant morsels which were given her to eat. Day and night she was obliged to remain in the exterior tent, where the cold was intense. The poor girl made up her mind to die, for she thought nothing but death could deliver her from her sufferings.

One morning she—the daughter of the poet Davidoff, now the servant of a savage with the prospect of becoming his wife—was cooking some reindeer flesh in a saucepan placed in the centre of the small circle of stones which served as a fire-place in the middle of the hut. While she was watching the boiling of the water, her delicate hands were drawing the intestines of the animal to make a savoury dish for the chief.

She was assisted by an old domestic, greasy and evil-smelling, who was suffering from rheumatism in her back and left side. The old woman finished by putting over her head her long jacket and extending herself upon the floor, and requesting by signs the young lady to rub the afflicted parts with her hands. The swarthy skin of the woman was hidden under a thick layer of dirt. Nadège endeavoured to do as the woman wished, while at the same time she served the meal to the three principal guests in the tent, the *kamakay* and his two wives, who lay with their heads and shoulders only protruding from under the alcove, the remainder of their bodies not so warmly clothed remaining inside it.

The meal consisted of raw sea-calf accompanied by draughts of warm blood of the same animal, and a dish of a kind of *saurkrout*, made of fermented willow-leaves.

One of the women, who was less tattooed than the other, Madame Nuketou—the other was called Kokerjabin—was forcibly stifling the cries of a little brat which she was nursing. Between the mouthfuls of the polar *saurkrout* she would employ herself in washing the creature's face by licking it, just as one of the lower animals would have done.

Three warriors, armed with pikes pointed with sharp morse teeth, were loquacious visitors. Seated on the ground they exchanged opinions with the occupants of the alcove upon the white stranger with fair hair and such a commanding figure.

In the corner was another servant—a slave—who, with naked arms steeped in blood to the shoulders, was occupied in cutting up seal-flesh.

Near her another, perhaps a neighbour, was munching a piece of reindeer skin in order to soften it and render it fitting for the fabrication of boots and gloves.

Beside the platform was a female dog surrounded by her litter of puppies, whose plaintive whinings mingled harmoniously with the wailings of the wretched infant who was engaging the attentions of the principal wife of the chief.

The snow was falling thickly, stifling all noises outside, and flakes continually fell upon the hearth through the opening in the roof. The snow-storm made the day more gloomy, and the fire lit up the interior of the tent with a ruddy glow.

There was a great number of articles, utensils and vessels and vestments, which encumbered rather than furnished or ornamented the tent. These consisted—taking them as they come before the eye—of a great leathern net, various fishing utensils, the inevitable drum of the *chaman*, wooden plates scattered about, a saw and augers also of wood, some stone tools recalling the primitive ages of mankind, two or three copper coffee-pots of American importation, a wolf's skull suspended as a charm, two skin sacks of the sea-calf, regular bottles which contained a quantity of seal-oil: on cords were hanging some light and impermeable clothes for

summer wear, fashioned from the intestines of the morse. Suspended from the blackened framework of the tent and bestowed around the apartment were garlands of dried fish, hunches of seal fat, and, farther on, the skins of the beavers which had come from America, with the furs of white and red foxes destined for the fairs of Irbit or of Ostrovnoyé. In one corner was a skin-boat resembling the *kayak* of the Esquimaux, in another corner were horns of reindeer fixed in the frontal bone, and here and there rough pieces of timber which served for seats.

After dinner the *kamakay*, Tchikine, whistled to him the dog, and passed around its neck a circlet of dried moss, as a sacrifice to the spirit of evil.

At the same moment, from the round hole in the roof which served as a chimney, somebody—a visitor—spat into the fire. Everyone looked up, even Nadège, who was beginning to accustom herself to the habits of the locality.

The *kamakay* called out for the visitor to enter, and the newcomer—who had not perceived the low door, which was concealed by the snow—descended unceremoniously by the chimney by means of the wooden supports.

He dropped down at the feet of Nadège, who at once recognised the intruder as Tékél!

The young lady uttered a cry of surprise and joy

“Yégor?” she asked, hurriedly.

“He is yonder,” replied the guide, “with M. Lafleur and the lad, with the inspector of police.”

“Is it possible !” cried Nadège.

“What do you want here ?” said the *kamakay* to Tékél at this juncture ; for the chief had been astonished at the conversation that had just taken place in a language he could not understand, between the “stranger lady” and the new-comer, Tékél.

“You will very soon understand what I want,” replied Tékél in the Tchouktcha tongue. “Where is the door ?”

While he was speaking Nadège had already removed the curtain of reindeer skin which concealed the entrance to the hut. From outside, assistance was immediately forthcoming to clear away the snow which obstructed the aperture. The young Polish lad passed through first, and rushed forward to embrace Nadège.

Then it dawned upon the *kamakay* that this unlooked-for invasion of his hut had some sinister meaning for him. So he armed himself with his *batase*—a long spear-like weapon—and advanced against his importunate visitors. The three warriors also, seeing him thus on the defensive, quitted their places and ranged themselves behind him as a support.

Yégor, M. Lafleur, and Yermác successively entered the tent. Yégor had eyes for no one but poor Nadège, who was weeping for joy. He embraced her warmly. M. Lafleur at once advanced to

the *kamakay*, and kept him at bay by his determined attitude. The Parisian, drawing one of his pistols from his girdle, prepared for a sudden attack, while he bade the guide explain to the *kamakay* the reason of their appearance.

While Wab was being held off from the other dog to prevent canine hostilities, Tékel began to explain to the chief that before him were the relatives and friends of the young Russian lady, who had been carried off from Cape Baranoff, and that the *kamakay* would do well to make no resistance, but to surrender her quietly.

“But I want her for my third wife,” exclaimed the *kamakay*.

“There is the husband of her choice,” replied the Yakout, indicating Yégor.

The *kamakay* launched at Yégor a glance of defiance, and he posed himself like a warrior who was determined to retain his captive *vi et armis*.

“I could shoot him like a dog,” said Yégor drawing a pistol “but I wish to do him the honour to ‘take up the gauntlet.’ Tell him to stand forward,” he added, addressing the guide.

“Advance, if you have the courage to do so,” said Tékel to the chief of the Tchouktchas.

The *kamakay* made two steps backward, so as to obtain space for his charge, holding his spear at the charge as he rushed upon Yégor, and tried to run him through with it.

Nadège, as quick as lightning, seized the wooden portion of the



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weapon, while Yégor aimed steadily at his adversary. But Yermac intervened, and put Yegor's revolver aside, while he placed himself between the combatants.

Since the time when the inspector of police had been compelled to accompany Ladislas and the two Yakout guides across the Tchouktcha territory, he had this thought continually present in his mind: Would it not be possible to utilize the relations which existed between the native tribes of the peninsula and the Russian government to obtain the arrest of the fugitives, and to imprison them until such time as measures could be concerted for their removal to Yakoutsk? Yermac had persuaded himself that this could be accomplished. So he was about to make use of the authority of the Czar, which was more nominal than effective, first to the advantage of Yégor and his people. If he succeeded, the fugitives would be afterwards in his power. It was with this intention and with these views that he interfered.

When the combatants had calmed down a little, Yermac, with the assistance of the interpreter, announced to the *kamakay* that the Russian law forbade subjects of the Czar to have more than one wife; and, besides, that the act of violence of which he had been guilty in carrying off the young lady to his tent would fall on him in a tenfold punishment.

The *kamakay* only shrugged his shoulders.

Yermac then spoke with the authority of the "White Czar,"

“the son of the sun,” without making any deeper impression upon the impervious *kamakay*. He knew that there existed, somewhere near the confines of the earth, by the setting sun, a great village called Yakoutsk, in which a powerful chief resided. His political knowledge was bounded by this idea, with this vague notion. He was also aware that beyond the sea, to the eastward, were merchants who traded in brandy; trappers and whale-fishers, Americans, who possessed wealthy establishments. So far as the laws were concerned, he only knew that they emanated from his predecessors and himself, and were exercised for the well-being of the tribe over which he reigned so despotically.

Yermac, at the very first attempt, perceived that he could not hope to obtain any assistance from the *kamakay*. Nevertheless, as it was important to him—the future might bring him some more favourable chance—he insisted that Nadège should not remain in the hands of the savage chief, and he determined that she should be restored to her affianced.

This appeal was made in vain. Then the inspector of police, through the interpreter, of course, endeavoured to obtain the young lady in exchange for certain objects which would excite the curiosity, the vanity, or the cupidity of the native chief.

Yégor immediately concurred; and a gun, a brace of pistols, with ammunition, a considerable sum in rouble paper, the charms from Yégor's watch-chain, were successively offered, and refused.

The chief, Tchikine, obstinately determined to retain the young white girl, whom he desired to make the greatest ornament of his throne.

The situation was becoming embarrassing. Nadège was shedding tears, which were not now tears of joy. From tears her grief increased, until she uttered piercing screams. Her desolation and sorrow were harrowing to behold, threatened as she was with an existence in the hut of this horrible *kamakay*, with his flattened nose, his bronzed skin, and pervading seal-oil perfume.

“Take me away,” she cried to Yégor and M. Lafleur, “or kill me. Do anything rather than abandon me.”

Yégor was turning over very extreme measures in his mind. His eyes were extended and menacing. He was ready to dare anything to deliver his *fiancée* from the hands of the savage *kamakay*.

All of a sudden M. Lafleur, who feared some sanguinary encounter, conceived an inspiration. He took down the sorcerer’s drum, and, assuming the inspired air of a *chaman*—he had already had some success in the part—began to beat the drum vigorously.

“A *chaman!*” said the two wives of the *kamakay*.

“A *chaman?*” whispered the three warriors of the tribe, who had hitherto remained silent spectators of the scene.

“Yes, a *chaman*,” replied the Yakout, who at once understood the intention of M. Lafleur.

The *kamakay* paled a little under his *bistre* tint when he first heard the magic drum struck with no common dexterity by the stranger. This interference in his business by a person gifted with supernatural powers rather troubled him.

When he had beaten the drum, which he treated tambourine fashion, tapping it, and striking it with fingers, elbows, knees, and upon his forehead, to the great alarm of the audience, M. Lafleur drew from beneath his fur garments his beloved pocket violin, which, in all his extremity, he had never abandoned. Taking advantage of the astonishment of the assembly at the mere appearance of the instrument, which he seemed to extract from his own chest as if from a violin case, the Parisian executed a series of *tremolos* of his own composition—hurried, fantastic, irresistible music.

The dog in the corner began to howl, and was sustained in her protest by the yapping of the puppies. Nuketou, still seated and nursing her child, seemed to be imploring pardon for herself and her infant. The other wife of the *kamakay* imitated her in her supplicating gestures. These two low-type creatures perceived already in this music the wrath of some great spirit—Tornasul, or another Superior Intelligence—pointed against them through this stranger whom their husband had wished to give them as a companion and rival.

“What do they want?” said the Parisian to Tékél, without ceasing to play.

"They are asking pardon," replied the guide.

"Let them appeal to the *kamakay*," replied M. Lafleur.

Tékel interpreted these words by an expressive sign. Then the women crouched before the Tchikine, fully determined, as it seemed to him, not to arise until they had obtained their petition, and his consent to what the white man demanded, the restitution of the girl to her fair-haired friends.

But the *kamakay* was obstinate. For fear of yielding he left the hut, taking with him the three warriors, and uttering some words of threatening import.





The abashed native before M. Lafleur.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE KAMAKAY DEFEATED—DIPLOMACY—THE AUSTRIAN SHIP—FATE
OF YERMAC—CONCLUSION.

THIS was the beginning of success for M. Lafleur. He took
breath.

Then the fugitives looked around the hut and examined with curiosity the horrible place, reeking with filth, in which Nadège had been compelled to live for so many weeks. Of the usual occupants there only remained the two wives of the chief and the two slaves, all completely subjugated by the strange sorcerer who yielded in no way to any other *chaman*.

These *chamans* or sorcerers, feared and respected by the Tchouktchas, are recruited amongst the young people of weak intellect, to whom the elders have recounted so many mysterious and terrible things which form the basis of popular superstitions, that one day their reason gives way. The long hours of solitude, the extreme cold, the frequent hunger, have also, it is believed, a real influence upon certain nervous constitutions, so that the individuals become crazy; and it is in all good faith, and without any *arrière pensée* of deceit that the new *chamans*, without any other consecration than their half-witted condition declares, assume a ghostly—almost priestly—influence in a country given over to idolatry, although traces of Christianity are met with, but almost entirely on the surface only.

As to the latter fact the fugitives had an immediate proof. Scarcely had the *kamakay* disappeared than a native entered the tent, he having been informed that a *chaman* was present.

The new-comer was an elderly man, but distinguished from the other inhabitants by a kind of elegance in his dress. He wore, suspended from his neck above his *kuchlanka*, two images and four crosses; upon his chest were two certificates framed between two small boards, and people were made aware by his verbose declarations that one of the certificates attested that he and his three sons had been baptised; the other that he had received from a powerful chief—he did not know whether from the Czar—a

kamley of red cloth, in return for having sent him a skin of the black fox.

In order to establish his orthodoxy he made many times the sign of the cross. The Parisian promised himself that he would make Annawa—for so the native was named—a useful auxiliary for the deliverance of Nadège.

He began by informing him through Tékél that the party intended to remain in the hut of the chief so long as they were obliged to stop in the country. It was now March, and the fugitives could not think of returning to take possession of their hut again at Cape Baranoff, having no other plan but to gain time. So soon as the days got longer and less cold, they intended to plunge into the interior from the Tchouktchian peninsula. It would be necessary for them to reach the banks of the Aniouy, then, ascending towards the source of the river, to cross a hilly country, to "strike" the Anadyr, and to descend alongside it to Behring's Strait.

The tent of the *kamakay*, notwithstanding the unpleasant odour which emanated from the "alcove," was unquestionably the most comfortable habitation in the whole region. To have thus taken possession of it by means of "occult science" was indeed a master-stroke. The Parisian, compelling the elder of the tribe (who never ceased to make the sign of the cross) to follow him, made three circuits of the tent, striking the magic drum. After that he

declared to the abashed native, that, if anyone should attempt to enter the hut without his (M. Lafleur's) permission, he would be struck dead at the time of the new moon.

During this singular ceremony, Nuketou and Kokerjabin (the wives), assisted by the two slaves, caught hold of all they could carry away ; and Nadège saw the cruel women who had caused her so much suffering fly away in haste to avoid the maledictions which seemed likely to rain upon them under the conjurations of the *chaman*.

After "tidying" up the tent—an operation in which all assisted—the fugitives established themselves as well as they could in the tent of the *kamakay*. They kept their arms all ready in case of emergency. Tékél and Chort stood sentry and relieved each other, turn about, day and night. Wab also kept guard. When Yégor and M. Lafleur did venture out, they were both armed to the teeth.

But the fugitives perceived that they were seriously menaced by the hostile disposition of the whole tribe. They perceived dark and threatening faces ; the few natives addressed by Tékél by way of politeness gave him no answer. They all remained persistently silent, and silence is amongst that race the sign of anger, just as a torrent of words is a sign of irritation with us.

The Parisian at length learned through Annawa, who was something of a "babbler," that the natives wished to reduce the fugitives by famine.

This was a terrible blow, which the pretended *chaman* resolved to parry. Assisted by Annawa, he fomented an insurrection against the *kamakay*, and he succeeded in gathering half the warriors to the side of the mysterious spirit, whose manifestations he enunciated.

This bold attempt had cruel consequences for the *kamakay*. The terrible *chaman* commanded the sacrifice of three white reindeer, and at the moment when the butcher was killing his victims he pronounced the deposition of the chief and his exile. The choice which M. Lafleur made of Annawa to succeed the *kamakay*—the spoiler of young ladies—was of a too politic nature not to ensure success. The day after this solemn sacrifice no one heard anything of Tchikine. He had resigned his position, and fled from his tribe, without even inducing his wives and slaves to follow him.

“It is simple justice,” muttered Yermac. “What was the use of giving this fellow a hint? He did not even know he was the subject of the Czar, and as such amenable to the laws of the empire.”

The inspector of police was very anxious to impart his ideas, and to win over to his views the new *kamakay*, who was a Christian, and certificated by imperial decree; but M. Lafleur took care that things should keep well, and as Tékél was the only means of interpreting, Yermac again saw himself deprived of the new resource which had presented itself to his fruitful mind.

At length the time arrived when it was possible for the fugitives to start. It was with great joy that Yégor, having Davidoff's daughter by his side in one of the sleighs, quitted the dwelling which he had sought with such a sinking heart; where rejoined by Ladislas, the guides, and Yermac, he had found his innocent *fiancée* calling upon him for assistance.

Yégor busied himself in endeavouring to ascertain the course of the Aniouy, which was no easy task, seeing how little the guides knew of the country. They first traversed the stunted forests. The new mosses began to appear, and troops of birds already arose from the marshes. They arrived at length at the deserted encampments of the wandering Tchouktchas, which were recognizable principally by the black traces of the *dimokours*, disinfectants formed of herbs and moss which are burned in the summer to keep off, by the smoke which spreads in all directions, the myriads of mosquitoes, which are a terrible torment to men and animals during the warm season.

In the larch woods the fugitives always chose in preference the places which were most exposed, where still there were traces of reindeer, for they had now reached the region of the deer-keeping Tchouktchas. By the bank of a stream they found several traps set for sables and foxes—snares which seemed to have been abandoned. A little farther on they found by the bank of the torrent an enormous tusk of a mammoth elephant, which must have

weighed at least fifty kilogrammes. It was so solidly embedded in the ice that they could not move it. Beyond the forest a vast marshy plain extended, which had been at one time wooded apparently.

The dogs advanced painfully amidst the snow, newly fallen, still soft or half melted by the sun, and the eternal icy crust of which the ground was composed.

In the evening the travellers camped wherever they happened to be. Nadège and Ladislas always had their tent put up for them. The men slept in the *nartas* or embedded in the snow.

In fact, during this latter portion of their journey, the same features presented themselves to Yégor and his companions as at first—with less intensity, it is true, but amid all the dangers, sufferings, and fatigue which had already marked their course, wild warring of the elements, privations, and the attacks of hungry wild beasts.

But the days had lengthened out. With the spring the birds had reappeared; the reindeer, quitting the forest, had come up towards the margin of the sea to avoid the mosquitoes; the young plants also offered some nourishment. The androsaces, saxifrages, gentians began to sprout up, with other charming plants from the green moss.

The snow appeared here and there to be veined with blood, rusted by the lichens, or shaded with green or yellow by the

cryptogamous flora. The various roots served for relishes with the reindeer flesh, and the almost exhausted supply of tea was replenished by a certain moss which the travellers mixed with a kind of aromatic fern.

Hunting was now much less difficult, particularly the chase of the *argali* and the reindeer ; and when the fugitives broke the icy crust of the rivers, and used their nets, they pulled out a rich supply of fish of the trout and salmon species, the *sterlet*, the *mouksoune*, and the *tchir*.

One morning about daybreak the sleepers in the open air were awakened by loud cries. These were uttered by an immense flock of geese, which were flapping about in a semi-thawed pond near at hand. Yégor, M. Lafleur, and the two Yakouts, armed themselves with poles, and hurried down to the tarn. Wab rushed through the half-frozen lake, through ice and water, and spread panic among the geese, which flapped ashore in numbers, when they were warmly received by the travellers, who killed about thirty of the birds in a moment. The Yakouts particularly distinguished themselves in the use of the baton.

Yermac looked on and smiled. So long as the *nartas*, laden with the provisions brought from the whaler *Hugo and Maria*, had furnished the daily supply of food, the inspector of police, who determined that the shippers should be indemnified, had had no scruples in taking his share. Besides, he had displayed con-

siderable skill in fishing, and to him was relegated the preparation of the soup *au poisson* ; this *oukha* was very nourishing.

Some days later they killed a number of swans with the batons. These birds moult later than the geese. The travellers also encountered a herd of reindeer, which permitted them to approach closely ; and this circumstance caused the fugitives to believe that the deer were private property. They were not mistaken in this supposition ; but the Tchouktchas, to whom the animals belonged, had hidden themselves at the approach of a band of white men.

The party continued, with infinite trouble and very great danger, to pass the mountainous region, beyond which they hoped to reach the sources of the Anadyr. The country had the most wild and desolate appearance. Threatening peaks rose high beside the long valleys ; tempestuous winds came rushing through the defiles and *couloirs*, bringing down great masses of rock, and rendering the passage of the defiles both difficult and dangerous. It was frequently necessary for the travellers to get out of the sleighs and walk beside them along the precipitous paths, where the least false step would have been fatal in its results. The dogs had the greatest difficulty in making their way along.

Fortunately for the travellers, in some of the most dangerous places the snow had frozen round the blocks of stone, and prevented them from slipping down.

On other occasions, however, thick fogs would suddenly descend

and envelope the travellers, blotting out the view of their route, and causing the peak upon which they happened to be to appear like an island tossing in the midst of a tempestuous sea.

At length they reached the Anadyr, the course of which runs north and south parallel to the mountain chain that intersects the Tchouktchan peninsula, and reascends to the north-east. They followed the banks of the stream, and many times had to make use of the light skin-boat, which they carried with them, the materials for which had been brought from the hut at Cape Baranoff by the Yakouts, to cross the tributaries of the Anadyr, which are of considerable size.

They halted for eight days at the mouth of the Krasnaïa, one of the affluents of the Anadyr—three hundred versts from the sea-coast. This was a favourable place for hunting. Besides, the paws of the dogs were much injured and bleeding; so repose was absolutely necessary for the packs.

When the fugitives recommenced their journey, they made up their minds to reach in less than ten days the place where the Anadyr ceases to be a river, and becomes the Bay of Onemène. Arrived there, it became necessary for the travellers to avoid the Ostrog of Anadyr. They accordingly skirted the coast in a southerly direction, advancing with great caution, keeping near enough to the ocean to be able to see it, yet far enough away from the coast to be unperceived from the sea,

The ocean was then still encumbered with masses of ice. It would be necessary to wait until all these began to move, and until great spaces of water could be perceived. Till then no hope of a sail could be entertained.

One day from an elevated promontory the fugitives witnessed an immense *débâcle*, a breaking up of the ice, which is one of the grandest, yet one of the most alarming spectacles that can be imagined or witnessed. The icebergs first displaced themselves slowly and as with effort. Crevasses, caused by the thaw, and widened by the influence of the waves, fell asunder with an appalling noise. Other icebergs advanced, floating in the more open water already agitated by a high wind. These were very threatening masses, with their knife-like *arêtes* and their tottering pointed peaks. The newly fallen snow, swept away by the wind, rose in white dusty clouds to the sky which they concealed. From time to time enormous masses of ice would detach themselves from the bergs with detonations like the discharge of artillery!

The foaming waves then advanced to hurry on the process of disintegration. The collisions of the floating masses of ice became incessant. They rushed one upon the other with a repeated series of shocks which tended to reduce them to mere fragments. All nature seemed rending itself, and swirling down in the terrible disruption of the icebergs.

On this occasion the sun launched his rays upon the scene, and cast rosy gleams upon the snowy layers and the blue surface of the ice. The sea-green water, stimulated by its long rest, invaded the ice-fields, overturned, battered, plunged remorselessly over the blocks and covered them with foam. The old ice remained attached to the margin all along the Bay of Onemène, and the hummocks advanced, powerfully borne upon the seething waters of the ocean.

But out at sea the blue of the waters rivalled the colour of the sky. The waves rolled their grand forms from the Asiatic to the American side of the strait—the Sea of Behring was at last open.

In proportion as the sea and sky cleared, Yermac's brow became more clouded. He was conscious that the time had now arrived, the decisive hour had struck, when he would be obliged to permit his prey to escape; for there were actually moments when he believed that he was following the fugitives. He understood that however pitiless he might seem to be, he would have to give a proof of his audacity and courage, and it would cost him dear; for, notwithstanding all that had passed, after suffering so much in common with the fugitives, he had ended by becoming attached to them, who, strong in their innocence, were seeking to escape infamy and degradation.

The fugitives were awaiting a vessel which would take them

away : Yermac was also waiting for this ship—but only that he might arrest them in their flight. Inexorable justice, which he personified so entirely, dictated to him this course ; and he did not quail from the task which he had set himself, cruel though it would be.

The party had established themselves at the bottom of a ravine, where, under the shelter of a rock of red granite many hundred feet in height, they had set up a hut as a means of concealment as well as a habitation. All the time which was not occupied in hunting in the birch-woods or fishing in the stream which ran through the defile, was occupied in watching the sea. Yermac did not sweep the horizon with his gaze with any less interest than his companions.

But the month of June came and went : no whalers appeared. July came, and still no whalers !

Yégor, almost despairing, began to form projects for escape, each one more wild and impracticable than its predecessor. He would reascend the Anadyr, cross the mountainous region again, and descend to the Sea of Okhotsk to the Gulf of Penjinsk ; he would go to the Aleutian Islands, or better still to Kamtchatka ; and thence, following the example of the convict Beniowski, bear away for Canton : he would go in a canoe—in the skin-boat—to the Spice Islands, and so to the American Islands as the intrepid Tchouktchas did : or even await the return of the cold season and

traverse in a sleigh—still following the example of the brave Tchouktchas who go trafficking for furs—the eighty-eight kilometres which separate Asia from America, the East Cape from Prince of Wales's Cape. With Nadège, with Ladislas, all these means of safety, born of a troubled spirit, had but a very little influence: the difficulties would only be met with under different circumstances, and in different localities—that was all!

Thus commenced the long and painful hours of a discouraging sojourn: waiting for hope.

Although the mornings were still cold on the sea coast, Yégor would leave the hut before daybreak to take up his position upon a high rock. The sun had not yet risen, but a single white star scintillated in the east with diminishing lustre as the orange tint of dawn appeared, and the profiles of the snow-clad mountains became more and more sharply defined. When the sun showed between the distant peaks a little segment of his golden disc, he lit a hundred scintillating fires in the hoar-frost and ice crystals which hung upon the shrubs after the night fogs. But these were beauties of Nature to which Yégor had become quite insensible.

One morning he had brought his *fiancée* with him. They remained seated side by side, sadly meditating. Suddenly Nadège, looking from the south side where the plain stretched away to the distant mountains, exclaimed—

“A mirage!”

Yégor, looking in the same direction, was then enabled to realize all the fantastic illusions of the opium smoker. The old *chaman* at the Pole had touched with his magic wand the distant mountains, and from a blue lake lost in the horizon rose the walls and domes of a marvellous city, an immense town in the country of the Sun. On the borders of the lake were masses of foliage of dark green tint, bathed in the waters and reflected in its surface as in a mirror; while, a little behind, the white cupolas glittered in the rays of the rising sun. Never amid those winter snows had there ever been a more complete illusion of summer than this; life in death.

Instinctively Yégor turned round to assure himself that he was not dreaming. The astonishment of both spectators was extreme. But as soon as they turned their eyes again to the east the splendid blue lake and the grand lines of the mirage once more confounded their reason by their supernatural beauty; and the grand minarets of the mosques, the high towers of the palace appeared, as they asserted themselves more strongly, to protest against any supposition of illusion.

However, little by little, the magical appearance weakened its tones, then burst forth anew, and finally disappeared in a confused mass, while from its ruins immense columns of rosy marble were elevated. These gradually inclined their capitals to each other, forming a gigantic portico—a vast gate of Heaven—under which



SAID NADÈGE, SUDDENLY, "LOOK YONDER—THAT IS NO MIRAGE!"

the spectators almost expected to see defile a brilliant procession of the glorious inhabitants of the marvellous world of Mirage. This portico, in its turn folding upon itself, became a castle with massive bastions and numerous embrasures, high crenelated towers, an impregnable refuge, the lines and shadows of which were as natural as the reality itself could have been. Then, at last, all became confused—the mirage faded away.

The *fiancés* then looked towards the sea and the coast-line. There nothing had changed, the mirage had found its limit.

“But,” said Nadège, suddenly, and breathing quickly; “look yonder—that is no mirage—yonder. See!”

“Yes, I see,” stammered Yégor, turning pale with emotion. “It is *the ship!*”

Nadège threw herself into Yégor’s arms.

“Are we saved, Yégor? Are we saved?” she cried in her anxiety.

“Yes; that means safety,” he replied.

“But suppose the ship should sail away?”

She kept regarding the vessel with burning eyes. After a pause of some minutes—it seemed a long time—Yégor said,

“I do not think I am mistaken. That ship is approaching. It is endeavouring to avoid the icebergs which block the entrance to the Bay of Onemène, and it would not continue a useless and dangerous struggle if it were bound for the Strait.”

“Ah! this is, perhaps, the last day we shall pass on this coast, Yégor. But what if it be an enemy—a Russian vessel?”

“Let us hope for the best,” replied Yégor, in a shaking voice, for the same idea had occurred to him also.

“When shall we know what fate is in store for us?” asked Nadège, clinging to him.

“This evening—to-night—to-morrow morning at the latest, according as the ice renders the navigation more or less easy. I will go on board in the canoe,” replied Yégor.

“But suppose they take you prisoner; you will be lost to me—to us all!”

“Rest assured, Nadège. You look upon the dark side of things too much.”

“No, I do not wish you to leave me; I will go with you. We will take the emeralds with us, and offer them for our ransom.”

“Go with me?” exclaimed Yégor. “In the canoe—in that cockle-shell which would upset on the slightest provocation?”

“I have been courageous enough until now, so you need not doubt me at the last moment. If they see us together, perhaps they will be touched by our misery; so undeserved as it is——”

“I will go alone, Nadège. On that I am determined,” said Yégor, firmly.

“You will expose yourself to needless danger, Yégor,” said M. Lafleur, who had come up unperceived, and heard the latter

part of the dispute between the young people. "I will go on board this ship."

"You?" exclaimed Yégor and Nadège, simultaneously.

"Yes, I. I have nothing to fear, being a Frenchman. I will clear the ground for you——"

"Ah, this will, I hope, be the last service you will have to perform for us, dear M. Lafleur," said Yégor, pressing the hand of the Parisian.

"The last service?" replied M. Lafleur in a protesting way. "Indeed, I hope it will not be."

Yégor wished M. Lafleur to escort Nadège back to the hut, where she might repose after the excitement of the morning, and also prepare for eventualities. As for Yégor himself, he remained at his post of observation. In the evening M. Lafleur and Nadège found it necessary to come and tear him away from it. The vessel had anchored to an ice-field, as closely as possible to the margin of the bay.

Next morning, at daybreak, M. Lafleur and Tékél, dragging the skin canoe across the ice towards the water, advanced in the direction of the three-masted vessel. When the opening in the ice was reached, the canoe was launched, and sustained its reputation. M. Lafleur, in quitting the hut, was surprised not to see Yermac, upon whom he wished to make a last attempt, with a view to dissuade him from his ideas, and at the same time to persuade him to abandon Russia.

Although he was little versed in maritime matters, M. Lafleur had not gone very far out in his canoe when he discovered that the ship sailed under the Austrian flag.

He proceeded on the deck, the canoe being wonderfully manœuvred by Tékél. The first face he saw on the deck was that of the inspector of police.

Yermac had, indeed, made up his mind that the fugitives would seek to go on board in harbour, and so he came out to tell the captain of the strange ship the circumstances, and how he and the proscribed ones were situated. He had finished by demanding the captain's assistance. In order to go on board the ship, the inspector of police had been obliged to make a long detour over the loose and disconnected ice-blocks. In the morning he was within hail of the ship, and they sent a boat to his rescue; but twenty times he had very nearly disappeared amid the hummocks.

So M. Lafleur found the captain in possession of all the particulars.

There was nothing very terrible about this captain, who was a young man full of energy; a Russian by birth, but then in command of an Austrian ship, hailing from Trieste. He had been despatched to Behring's Straits—on some mission connected with Nordenskiöld, and to meet him, if possible—by the shipowners of that port. The latter—being aware from letters from the Swedish voyager, which had been carried to Europe by the enterprise or

some Tchouktchas, and by the Siberian posts, of the fortunate results of the expedition, which opened up all the Siberian rivers to commercial enterprise, and to immense supplies of ivory in the archipelago of Lyakoff—had decided to choose, without loss of time, some point upon the shore of Behring's Sea where a commercial centre might be established, and where whale-oil might be prepared.

The first instructions were for the captain to put himself in communication with the illustrious navigator, and then to get clear of the strait where he had been wintering since the end of September in the preceding year, blocked by ice, only a few hours being now required to set him free.

Meanwhile, Nadège and Yégor, who had also noticed the absence of Yermac, began to feel really anxious. Seated together on the shore they awaited, in terrible suspense, the return of M. Lafleur. Ladislas was near them.

When they perceived M. Lafleur returning to land in one of the ship's boats, pulled by many sailors, who made a detour to follow a narrow channel opened in the ice, they did not know whether they were lost from that moment or saved.

M. Lafleur leaped on shore, or rather on the ice, and ran towards them.

"Well," cried Nadège, her eyes brimming with tears.

"Saved!" exclaimed M. Lafleur. "But no thanks to Yermac."

"We might have guessed as much," muttered Yégo.

“The traitor went away in the night to denounce us.”

“Ah!” cried Nadège. “Then you think we have nothing to fear.”

“The captain of the *Francis Joseph* awaits you, awaits us all,” said M. Lafleur.

“Suppose it is all a snare!” said Nadège. “Why does Yermac remain on board?”

“There is no snare to fear at all,” replied the Parisian. “The captain of the Austrian ship is Boris Andréyeff, the husband of your sister, Yégor.”

“My brother-in-law!” exclaimed Yégor.

“Yes, your brother-in-law—who, after your banishment, disgusted with the arbitrary proceedings of the Russian government, quitted Riga, and took service in the Austrian merchant marine. Your brother-in-law is yonder, and is burning to welcome you and the amiable companion whom you have snatched from so much misery and such indignity. He has the unspeakable happiness to deliver you from your captivity. You may well understand how he has received the denunciations of Yermac. Captain Andréyeff will carry you wherever you please—to King George’s Archipelago—to New Norfolk—to New Hanover or California, if you please. Where would you like to go?”

“Where would I like to go?” replied Yégor. “Well, after our marriage I wish to go to France!”

“That is to Château Thierry,” said M. Lafleur, smiling. “We will all go together, if Madame Séménoff will permit !”

Nadège blushed as red as a cherry at this.

“*Vive la liberté !*” exclaimed the Parisian. “Now,” he added, “embrace me, my friends.”

Yégor, Nadège, and Ladislas threw themselves into his arms.

“Take care, take care,” he cried, as he furtively wiped away a tear with the back of his hand ; “you will crush the pocket violin !”

One hour later the fugitives were all comfortably installed on board the Austrian vessel, and feeling quite at home. Tékel and Chort had been dismissed and remunerated. Yégor abandoned to them the *nartas* and all they contained, including the firearms, all except the gun which he had borrowed from the Governor of Yakoutsk, and the curiosities which belonged to M. Lafleur. Yégor also gave the Yakouts nearly all the roubles he possessed in money and paper—no inconsiderable sum.

The two Yakout guides took leave of the travellers with tenderness. They proposed to await the return to land of the inspector of police, and then they would at once start upon their journey.

Captain Andréyeff had been very cheerful, and had made no secret of his delight. His happiness would have been complete could he have persuaded Yermac to break with his past, to for-

get all that had occurred, and to recommence his life anew. But he spoke to deaf ears. Yermac was obstinate.

M. Lafleur wanted to speak to the inspector about his behaviour, but Yégor's brother-in-law interfered, and, taking Yermac's part, said firmly :—

“He is an honest man !”

The dinner table was laid on board the vessel. Captain Boris Andréyeff was anxious that Yermac should take his place beside him. But in the midst of the general conversation the inspector of police remained reserved and taciturn. He felt he had been conquered.

“Will you not remain with us ?” said Captain Andréyeff to Yermac, for the tenth time.

Yermac made a sign in the negative.

“I am sorry for it,” said the captain. “At any rate, I will put my boats at your disposal to go ashore.”

“Thank you very much for your insistance,” replied Yermac, “and for your kind offer ; but I will return as I came—on foot.”

“The sea is very stormy,” replied the captain.

Then he turned aside to where the others were making plans for living together in Austria, in a villa on the Adriatic.

“I have my emeralds still,” said Nadège, looking fixedly at the inspector of police.

He smiled very kindly at her.

The moment of separation had now arrived.

Yermac, after shaking hands with all quietly and coldly, and having embraced Ladislas effusively, handed to Yégor a paper on which were some pencilled memoranda.

“What is this?” enquired Yégor.

“The inventory of the utensils and stores which were found on board the whaler. You will perhaps be the first person who will be able to turn it to the profit of the owners. . . .”

As he spoke Yermac let himself down upon the ice to which the vessel was moored. Captain Andréyeff was right—the sea had become more boisterous. Yermac seemed to pay no attention to it.

“Will you not at least take the canoe?” said M. Lafleur. His only answer was a gesture of farewell.

All on board watched him. Several times Yermac disappeared for a minute or two between the ice-blocks, whence they saw him again emerge. Suddenly, when he had reached an elevated place, his foot seemed to slip. Nadège and Ladislas cried out. Yermac did not reappear.

“Oh! captain, I beseech you; send some of your men to help him,” cried Nadège. “Perhaps an accident has happened.”

The captain yielded to the girl’s importunity, and was about to give orders accordingly, when he perceived the two Yakouts crossing the ice-field to the assistance of Yermac—in search of him, in fact, for he had quite disappeared.

When they arrived at the spot where he had missed his footing, the Yakouts searched in every direction, but without succeeding in discovering the inspector of police. The masses of ice between which he had fallen had come together again, and had buried him beneath them.

Tékel and Chort came to this conclusion at once.

Then Tékel mounted upon a block of ice, on which he had some difficulty to maintain his equilibrium. Putting his hands to his mouth to serve as a speaking-trumpet, he shouted to the ship—

“Disappeared! Dead!”

The voice of the Yakout came over the ice with a very lamentable intonation.

“He is dead,” said Captain Andréyeff to those around him.

“The death of the inspector of police,” said Yégor, “has occurred under such circumstances as to give rise to a suspicion of suicide.”

“I feared as much,” said the captain. “Why was he so obstinate?”

“It is his own fault, his own fault,” murmured the Parisian
“But what a headstrong fellow he was.”

“Unhappy man!” said Nadège. “We may lament him when we remember the assistance he rendered us at the peril of his life.”

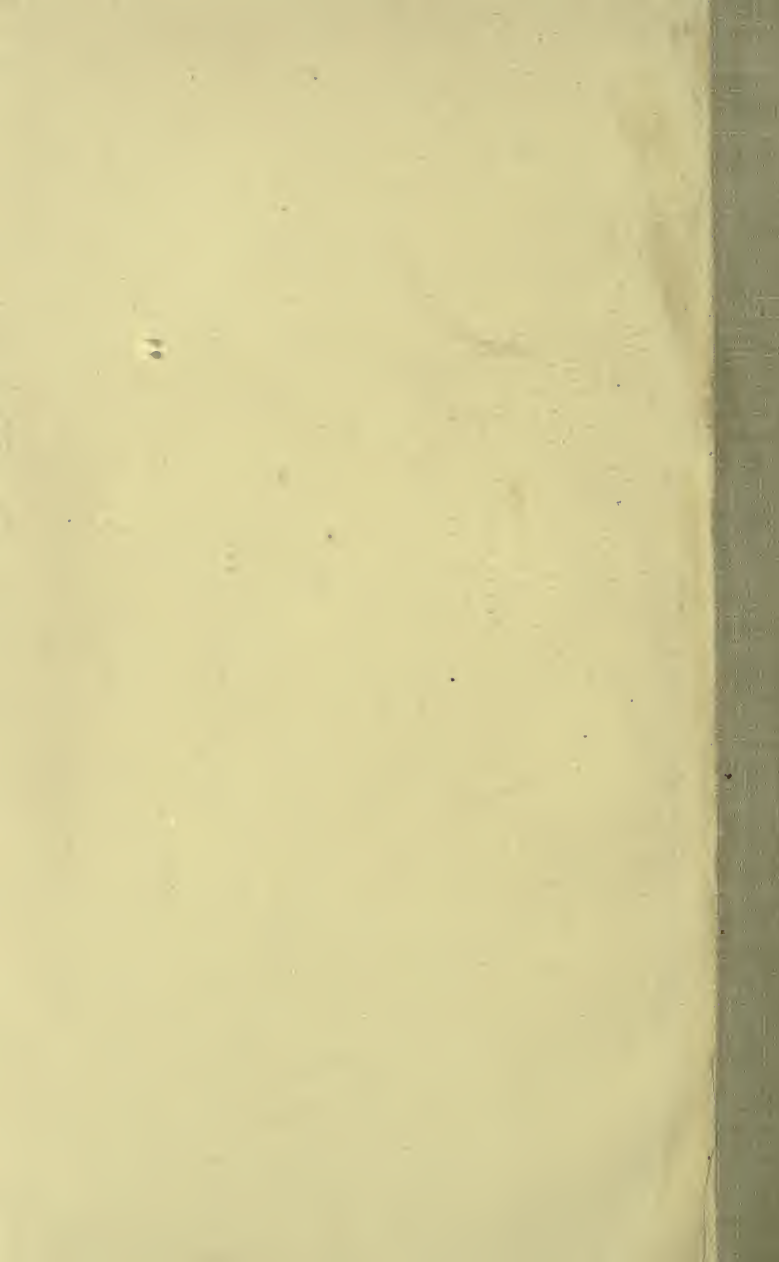
“The assistance?” exclaimed the astonished captain.

“Yes, my dear Boris,” said Yégor. “In the midst of the Polar night, on the ice, amid a fearful tempest. Without his assistance, neither Nadège, nor Ladislas, nor I myself would be here now.”



THE END.

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