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SIBERIAN PICTURES.

VOL. II.

SIBERIAN PICTURES

BY

LUDWIK NIEMOJOWSKI

EDITED, FROM THE POLISH,

BY

MAJOR SZULCZEWSKI

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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PART IV.

STUDIES OF HABITS AND CUSTOMS.

(CONTINUED.)



SIBERIAN PICTURES.

CHAPTER II.

THE MADMAN.

IT happened at Tobolsk. I had been unconscious for a long time. During this period a time came when I could see and hear all that was going on around me without being able to articulate a sound or make the slightest movement.

Several strangers were standing beside my couch; one of them, a middle-aged man wearing gold spectacles, was holding my hand and looking sadly at me.

‘The fever is strong, the sense of feeling almost gone. The case is dangerous; the sick man should be taken at once to the hospital.’

‘But, doctor,’ said a young man standing behind him, ‘it is quite out of the question—there is no more room there.’

‘The ward is over-full, I know, but he could be placed in a separate room with No. 6.’

‘With that one, and to leave them alone!’ cried the young man, evidently terrified.

‘Why not?’

‘But the other one is a dangerous madman.’

‘They won’t hurt each other, and, besides, they can be watched.’

And, without paying any further attention to the young surgeon’s protestations, he added, turning to the orderlies,

‘Carry the patient to the room occupied by No. 6.’

I was terrified. The sight of a human being afflicted in that manner used to move me to pity, but it was always mixed with the fear we experience of some inscrutable mystery of nature. To be shut up with a madman in a state of fever and general irritation was to me something terrible. I tried to speak. I could not. I felt the men take me by my arms and legs and carry me in the indicated direction. I lost consciousness once more.

* * * * *

How long I remained in this state I cannot tell. When I opened my eyes it was night. I found myself in a small room fully lighted by a lamp, beside me sat a venerable-looking old man, his face was gentle, a snowy beard descended down his breast, and the look in his eyes was one of kindness and sympathy. He was busily engaged in applying cold water to my head.

‘I have been uneasy about you,’ he said, in answer to my inquiring gaze, ‘but now, fortunately, the fever has gone; it was the crisis, and you have taken a favourable turn.’

‘What has happened to me? Where am I?’ I asked, trying to collect my scattered thoughts.

‘In the hospital. You were left, as is usually the case, without any care; the surgeon was ordered to look after you, but the local surgeons are not in the habit of troubling themselves much about their patients.’

‘And who are you?’ I asked.

‘A companion of misfortune.’

‘In hospital—a companion of misfortune; and, if I remember right, I was to be shut up with a madman.’

‘I am he,’ he said, smiling bitterly.

I looked at him with horror.

‘Oh! don’t fear me, I am a quiet madman; wicked with the wicked, I become docile with kind people. You will not be annoyed by me; on the contrary, I will try to assuage your sufferings by every means in my power.’

These words were spoken in the gentlest manner, and in his blue eyes there was so much kindness and sympathy that I was at a loss what to think. Madmen do not speak thus. He evidently guessed my thoughts, because he added,

‘Do not strain your mind in trying to understand it all, it will all come right in the end. Now you require perfect rest. God is good and merciful. If like Daniel you have been thrown into a lion’s den, our Heavenly Father will keep the victim from the claws of the wild beast.’

All this was to me incomprehensible. I tried in vain to collect my scattered thoughts, but I was too weak for the effort; present impressions and fears for the future were knocking against each other in my helpless brain, the patriarchal form of the old man, faintly lighted up by the dying lamp, glimmered now and then before my weakened sight till sometimes it seemed to reach to gigantic proportions. At last, worn out by what I took to be the creation of a diseased imagination, I fell asleep.

The next day I was awakened by a loud noise. Several persons were talking in my room.

‘This is not the first time,’ I heard the doctor say. ‘You cannot be depended upon.’

‘I was unable to leave the ward,’ answered the hospital surgeon.

‘Everything is possible where there is good will. It is lucky that no accident has occurred. No. 6 is off in the clouds.’

‘He is off,’ cried the old man ; ‘yes, he is off, only not he but I, and thou hast remained, thou brazen-faced wretch to drink my blood and eat my bread. Perhaps you all think I despaired—oh, no ! I laugh, see, I laugh,’ and he chuckled a wild laugh.

‘Remain here,’ said the doctor on leaving, ‘I will return in the evening.’

‘Easy to say remain,’ muttered the surgeon, under his breath ; ‘I daresay they will leave me here without my breakfast, and perhaps without my dinner too. Between a madman and a——’

He looked at me.

‘And that one already half-dead—a nice prospect, certainly.’

‘Then return where you came from,’ shouted the old man, rising from his chair and pointing

menacingly towards the door. 'I received you as a guest into my house, though you had the stamp of crime upon your brow, and you sold me, like Judas, for thirty pieces of silver.'

'Silence, old fellow, do you understand; if you will not leave off your ravings, I will have the orderlies in and have you tied up. You know I don't like joking.'

This threat produced an instantaneous effect on the old man; his face, which had been inflamed with anger, now expressed only fear and humility; pale and trembling, he folded his hands as if in prayer.

'Have pity upon me, don't kill me; and you, woman, remember that I wished to raise and ennoble; there will be a search-judgment. I will not blame you, I will take all on myself, only let me return home once more that I may once more see my birthplace—my poor old mother.'

'She must be very old, this woman, judging by your age—a hundred or so,' said the surgeon, cynically, twisting a cigarette.

'Oh, yes, old, very old, but she is dead. She loved me—mothers love differently from wives. How quiet and peaceful was our life! Birds sang in the evening, the woods were green—

everything was so still and happy; and now—' and the poor man bent his head and wept.

'Always the same story—after a storm rain, after rain a storm,' muttered the surgeon; 'one cannot even enjoy some fun with this fool of a madman, and the other one sleeps on.'

Horrified by all I heard, and weakened by illness, I did not open my eyes.

'Let him sleep,' added the surgeon; 'he is better off so.'

The old man was still sobbing, the young one smoked on, and silence reigned. I soon fell asleep; on awakening, I again found myself alone with my companion. I suppose the surgeon had availed himself of the first opportunity to slip away.

'Thank God,' said the old man, approaching my bed, 'the fever has quite left you. After a few weeks' convalescence, not a trace will remain of your long and dangerous illness.'

While he was speaking, I looked at him attentively. I remembered the violent scenes I had witnessed, the incoherent words I had heard him pronounce, and I knew not what to imagine.

He evidently guessed my thoughts, as a faint blush overspread his features.

‘I have very likely said something irrational,’ he said, in some confusion; ‘don’t pay any attention to it. Misfortunes have affected my temper—I become violent and angry without a cause,’ and, changing the conversation, he began to speak of something else.

He spoke rationally upon all things, and, what was more, he was a highly-accomplished man. In our long talks he touched upon almost every topic, and not only was he familiar with all the sciences, but in his judgments of men, things, and events, he gave evidences of an unusual tact and a great knowledge of human nature. Yet during the doctor’s or surgeon’s visits his whole demeanour completely changed, his usually calm face reddened, he frowned, his eyes sparkled with anger, and unconnected words escaped from his trembling lips. I was at a loss what to think of this man.

At last, emboldened by the many proofs of kindness he had given me, and anxious to elucidate what appeared incomprehensible, I said,

‘I fancy you dislike both the doctor and the surgeon.’

‘Dislike them!—why should I? I don’t know them, but they are the unconscious tools of my executioners. Old people act sometimes

like children ; unable to reach those who whip them, they revenge themselves upon the rod which hurts them.' And his eyes for a minute sparkled with anger, but he quickly calmed down, and, taking my hand, he added—'Never allude to that, I entreat you.'

Days passed on ; my health gradually improved. The old man's society was a comfort and a pleasure to me. We spoke upon everything but our personal affairs, as, following his example, I never mentioned my past life. He constantly gave me new proofs of affection, of almost paternal care, and during my long convalescence tried to forestal my slightest wish. I could see that he became daily more attached to me ; therefore, when one day the doctor told me that the hospital ward was empty, and that I could be placed there, I flatly refused.

'That entirely depends upon yourself,' said Esculapius ; 'but I should think that you would be more comfortable there, and certainly safer. If you remain here, be careful, agree to everything, and don't wonder at anything ; that is all the advice I can give you.'

My wish to continue with him so delighted my companion that, for the first time, his face expressed no hatred in the doctor's presence.

Further, my evident sympathy broke through the ice of his indifference. I felt that I had gained his confidence, and only the remains of his late distrust, or rather deeply-rooted habit of hiding his thoughts and feelings, stopped the words upon his lips. Guessing that he was anxious to relate his sorrows to me, I set him the example by recounting the sad events of my life. Having listened with great attention, he related what follows :—

‘There was a time when I was happy; those moments are long passed, yet their memory is so impressed upon my mind that I see as clearly to-day, after the lapse of many years, the smallest details of my early life as if they did not belong to the past. My name is K—; my family ranks among the noblest in the land; my ancestors filled important posts, and rendered great service to their country, and were often rewarded with titles and distinctions. My father died while I was still a child, and I can hardly remember that severe and dignified form, clad in a general’s uniform and covered with crosses and decorations. My mother brought me up. Do you know our matrons? If they have not fallen into the hands of a foreign governess, and imbibed French habits with their jargon,

and have breathed from childhood the pure and healthy air of our land, then all the Slavonic virtues develop themselves freely in their souls. Such was my mother, the daughter of a large landowner ; she did not seek idle pleasures in a foreign land, and was not even anxious for the gay life of the metropolis. Having boundless confidence in her husband, to whom she was tenderly attached, she left him to fulfil the duties of his high station, while her own life was spent in the management of their extensive possessions. She was universally beloved, as she was deeply imbued with the feeling that the thousands of families still remaining in serfdom ought to find in her help and protection. After my father's death, though mourning deeply her widowhood, she did not give way to unavailing despair, as do those who are deficient in strength of mind, but took up her work with redoubled energy. Her duties were numerous ; the improvement of the social state of her serfs, the management of a colossal fortune, and my education constituted the aim of her existence, while an unusual strength of mind and a deep sense of her obligations helped to carry her through her undertakings. How she loved me, that dear, dear mother ! I was her past, her

present, and her future; in me centred all her thoughts. Unwilling to part from me, and perhaps afraid of the pernicious influence of the habits and customs of large cities upon my youthful mind, she resolved to have me educated at home. When I reached a suitable age she chose my tutor, a man who had been a professor, full of knowledge, quiet, modest, and gentlemanly. He imparted his acquirements to me, while she moulded my character. Her boundless faith in humanity was instilled into me. Could she doubt virtue, she in whose pure soul a wicked thought never lurked, and I, living in this atmosphere of peace and happiness, having no communication with the world and its passions, could I guess that beyond the temple of family affections flourish wickedness, treachery, and baseness? Books teach theory, not experience. Round me I only saw smiling faces, and heard words of gratitude and love. I breathed the pure air of our home, and believed the whole world was the same.

‘My tutor had deep erudition, but knew little or nothing of social life; besides, his ideas were founded upon the times when it was thought that people of good birth occupied a position above, and had nothing in common with, the

rest of humanity. If sometimes I asked him a question outside the sphere of books he invariably answered,

“The world is for you, not you for the world. Highly placed by your birth and fortune, you will never have to mix with the life of the masses; why wish to fathom what you will but touch superficially?”

‘In my long conversations with my mother we touched upon all kinds of topics, and all of them, like the sun’s rays, gathered up into one focus, centred with her in our home circle. The real world did not exist for me, or rather it existed beautified and idealised. Often in my leisure moments I plunged into sweet dreams evoked by my awakening imagination. Such a state made me naturally partial to poetry. I did not write my ideas upon paper, but I eagerly read the works of our poets, and saw all my surroundings through a poetical haze. On emerging from childhood, I became fond of solitary walks, the beauties of Nature having always a powerful charm. My heart, brimful of love, saw in almost every creature a being like unto myself. I even suspected a mysterious world in the organic life of apparently unfeeling creatures. My imagination, inflamed by such

dangerous dreams, became eccentric and different from the accepted ideas of the world at large; having no connection with my contemporaries, I could not know that I was not as other men are.

‘My imagination once let loose was dissatisfied even with the purest Christian love. “Why,” I used to say, “should we call our brethren only creatures fashioned like unto ourselves? Why consider as slaves all other beings who feel and understand each other even as we do? God has created all, and has given all a right to live. We wish to be highest; have we any right to be so? Physically weaker, we rule by the power of our mind; but the natural reason of these animals, which we call instinct, is it not often far beyond all our book-learning?”

‘It is a well-known fact that the property of a sophistry is to engender a long line of succeeding sophistries. He who has once stepped within the charmed circle must evermore go on. I, having once entered upon this abstract road, waded deeper and deeper into senseless, self-born aphorisms. There were times when, buoyed up by a diseased imagination, I spoke to animals and birds, and believed that they understood me; and one day, when a rich meadow had

been mown near our house, I shed bitter tears at the death of all the beautiful flowers lying at my feet. My mother, a practical woman, far removed from the slightest exaltation, not only did not perceive these symptoms of a mind wrongly directed, but took them for ebullitions of childish innocence.

“It is better,” she used to say to the major, an old friend of the family, “that my Paul remains a child so long; in this way he will pass the age of passion, and will at once emerge into a man.”

‘My father’s old brother-officers, who visited us from time to time, failed to see any future evil which might arise from this unnatural state; on the contrary, they admired me.

“A girl—a real girl,” the old major used to say, with intense satisfaction. “This boy will not waste his health and love in an unworthy manner, and when he marries——”

‘Here a severe look from my mother used to stop him. Years passed in this way, and nothing came to disturb the monotony of our existence, except that my tutor, having finished my education, was presented with a farmhouse by my mother, where he went to live surrounded by his books. This man was naturally so silent,

and his spare time was so completely taken up by the compilation of an enormous grammar which he never finished, that he occupied an insignificant place in our house, and his removal was scarcely felt. I was now one and twenty, and, thanks to my mentor, I was so well-informed that many a young man educated in the best public schools might have envied me my erudition. I did not relinquish my studies; the natural sciences, by the aid of which I could partially penetrate the mystery enveloping the existence of so many beings, had an indescribable charm for me. I spent days in watching the habits of different animals, in admiring the industry of ants, in trying to discover by what means birds subsisted; and my imagination knew so well how to idealise every detail that I often tried to catch a sound in their twittering which would give me the key to their language. While this was going on, important business called my mother to St. Petersburg. She was loath to leave her summer residence, her daily occupations, her poor people, but there was no help for it. It never crossed her mind that she could be separated from me for a few months, and I, on my part, though much attached to this country house, which was the

whole world to me, never admitted such a possibility. I must even own that, though rather frightened at first, I soon became so curious to know this new life, of which I had gathered an imperfect idea from books, that I became feverishly anxious to experience the hitherto unknown sensations. Arriving in the metropolis, I was astounded and charmed. I gazed upon everything with respect, almost with fear.

‘The movement and noise of a great town seemed to me an abnormal chaos. I at first imagined that all these people must be mad, or that some extraordinary event had stimulated the inhabitants to sudden action; gradually I became accustomed to this tumult, and looked well about me. I could never, however, completely rid myself of my natural shyness, and perhaps because of the great contrast I presented to the youths of the day, or on account of my position as an only child and heir to millions, this shyness was not looked upon unfavourably by the upper society which I frequented with my mother; in fact, it was rather appreciated. All the senators’ and generals’ wives looked upon me with satisfaction, calling me “that biblical young man,” or

“New Joseph.” These people were relics of the past, living in the remembrance of days gone by. I had not therefore any opportunity of knowing the real great world, its glamour and inward hollowness. In the society with which my mother surrounded me, I perceived much that was ridiculous; a conventionality pushed to the very extreme, coldness and stiffness, while side by side with these faults flourished all the Slavonic virtues—probity, fear of God, and not a shadow of that gilded demoralization of which I had read in my books. So much was this the case that I took that vice for an invention of the writer, and, judging by my surroundings and my young and pure heart, I trusted humanity.

‘In our metropolis there are many coteries, living each in its own sphere, and separated from each other by the demarcations of social position and different ideas, the only point of general union being the charitable societies. The St. Petersburg ladies all take an active part in charitable institutions, and therefore hospitals, refuges, etc., become the points where all classes meet. In charitable institutions an aristocratic lady may often be seen sitting beside a rich but vulgar merchant’s wife, the

banker's wife making a collection, helped by a maid-of-honour; but these momentary fusions, created by the common interests of humanity, cease upon the threshold of the institution, and each patroness, having finished her work, returns into her particular circle. The sphere in which we lived was called satirically the "Pantheon of antique mummies," and was even more exclusive than the rest. To these remnants of the past not only was birth and dignity indispensable, but these serious matrons and high dignities had separated themselves from the rest of the aristocracy because they considered it too volatile, too much imbued with French ideas, and too lenient towards easy morals.

'The high birth, social position, and princely fortune of my mother were the reasons that, as soon as we arrived in the capital, the charitable community summoned her officially to take her part in its work. She was nominated patroness, and several wards were placed under her supervision, and she, full of Christian charity, spent all her leisure time in this occupation. There she often met a person called Anastasia Nikolayvna Diergun. Mrs. Diergun was the widow of a rich landed proprietor, but she did not belong to my mother's circle: her character

and ideas precluded her from it. In that set reigned a chilly past; she, though no longer young, lived in the present. The great world of the capital, with its bustle, glamour, and tumult, had an inexpressible charm for her. She was a woman of forty or more, but, thanks to a careful toilet, and to the best milliners and hairdressers, she appeared much younger. Her features were regular, her voice sweet and low, and, above all, she possessed the faculty of gaining the friendship of those whose good graces she desired. She lived in great style, and received the most distinguished personages; she was religious after the manner of women of the world, and she performed her charitable duties in the most exemplary manner, abandoning for them fashionable concerts and morning parties.

‘It was generally believed that her husband had left her large possessions in the Razan province, and her income must have been considerable, as she denied herself nothing. Ill-natured people whispered that she had caught an old millionaire, married him, and had completely obtained the mastery over him. In this way, having become the sole mistress of an enormous fortune, she proceeded to spend it in

dress, foreign travel, &c. ; and it was added that the unfortunate husband, shut up in the country while his wife shone like a star, died, fallen both in body and mind, having had recourse to drink to drown his sorrows. All these rumours were sometimes aggravated by whispers about an attaché to the Russian embassy in Paris, and even, such is human ill-nature, one of the pillars of the Russian stage. No one could, however, believe these scandalous reports, as Anastasia counted as many friends as she had enemies, so that every act of her existence was explained favourably or otherwise according to the source from which it proceeded. A striking proof of the versatility of human judgment was shown in the opinions of different people upon her conduct towards her only daughter who, though brought up at home, was never seen in society. Her enemies affirmed that it was the jealousy of an old beauty who, afraid of being eclipsed by her own child, had consigned her to solitude and *ennui*. Her friends took her part, explaining that she could not do otherwise, as it would be highly injurious for a young girl, almost a child, to be mixing in society, and that her studies were more fitting for her than balls or dresses. There were even some who said the

daughter was labouring under some natural defect.

‘ But all this was mere assumption, as no one, not even Anastasia’s most intimate friends, had ever seen the daughter; it was even not generally known how old the girl was, or whether she was ugly or pretty, and if an indiscreet person inquired after Paraksovia Ivanovna (such was her name) her mother invariably answered :

“ She is learning her history and grammar; let her learn, it is not right to take girls of her age from their studies.”

‘ Sometimes an old French governess, Mademoiselle Julie, made her appearance in the drawing-room, but she soon disappeared to go as she said to her “ chère élève.”

‘ My mother was not one of those persons who are eager to make new acquaintances; and she had a way of keeping people in their place without giving offence by the slightest rudeness, or repulsing them with studied coldness and pride; and without being aware of it she inspired universal respect. Her connections with Anastasia were constant; almost daily she met her in the institutions placed in her charge, and the latter came sometimes to ask for instructions with regard to charitable duties; beyond this my

mother had nothing in common with Mrs. Diergun.

‘During this time, being home-sick after our country life, my solitary walks, and woodland friends, I spent my time in studying the natural sciences, having brought the necessary books with me. I stole all the hours I could from my social duties to learn the habits of my favourites, and, in order to be as little separated from my mother as possible, I used to take my books into the drawing-room, and there I sometimes saw Anastasia.

‘My home education and the life I had led did not tend to make me very observant, and, even if I could have read character justly, the conversations I listened to, which touched only upon charitable subjects, would have taught me nothing. Busy with my books, I did not pay much attention to words which struck my ears like inarticulate sounds, but the sound remained unwillingly in my memory. Mrs. Diergun possessed a most melodious voice ; when she talked one was reminded of low, superhuman music. That musical voice once heard could never be forgotten. Her look, sweet yet piercing had something in it magnetic, yet she was not a sympathetic person. A chilling sensation seem-

ed to proceed from her ; she attracted and repelled at the same time, and her look filled me with an unreasoning fear. Such was her effect upon me : I looked at her with terror, I listened to her with pleasure. I felt that all in her was antagonistic towards me, and yet, when her carriage stopped before our door, I remained in the drawing-room.

‘My mother, from her character and age, was little inclined to absorbing outward impressions, and yet this stranger was slowly and imperceptibly gaining an influence over her, and, what was more, this inexpressible sympathy was not, as in my case, accompanied by an instinctive aversion. She liked her without caring to own it. I noticed several times that when the time approached at which Anastasia used to come to report what she had done, or inquire about new works of charity, my mother’s eyes would wander with impatience towards the door, and that her face wore a look of contentment when Mrs. Diergun appeared.

‘There are enigmas still unguessed in Nature ; to their number should be added the influence some people have over all their surroundings. This indescribable influence is unsupported by any lasting sentiment, springs from no percep-

tible cause, and there are even cases in which the voice of reason tries in vain to cool the unexplained impulse of the heart, the unnatural attraction being stronger than all reasoning. It is not affection, neither is it sympathy, as we often do not even know the character of the person who has such an effect upon us, and yet we follow the attraction. Our credulous forefathers called it witchery; we who endeavour to call things by names that are more in accordance with the times we live in think this enigma allied to magnetism; but even we are unable to explain the cause or the action of this sensation. Slowly and imperceptibly Mrs. Diergun changed from a stranger into an acquaintance, and then from an acquaintance merged into a friend. This all happened by degrees, until at last my mother became so accustomed to her society that she could not do without it, and neglected other society for that of her new friend. I must own that "the relics of the past" did not much care for this impersonification of the present, and she, knowing it, managed so as to meet them as little as possible. If at any time one of the ladies belonging to the aforesaid coterie wondered at her constant visits to our house, my mother

would invariably take her part, remarking that no one should take up unfounded dislikes. And an unfounded dislike it really could be called, as, though people said many things against Anastasia, nothing could be proved against her; no fact could be brought forward; and is there a person in the world against whom evil tongues will not wag? And even these great ladies, saturated with the chilliness of their lives, were they so free from slander when in their youth the bright world lay before them? The woman they disliked belonged to the first society, and it was no fault of hers, but rather the outcome of her character, that she preferred balls and parties to the dull propriety of their reunions. No one upon that account could brand her with any of the faults which the world does not forgive; her charming gaiety never outstepped the limits of good-breeding, while with a word or a look she often gained the good-will of those who formerly disliked her. She hardly ever spoke of herself, and only then when it could not be helped. Pious and religious, she managed so well that her charitable actions became known, as it were, by accident, against her wish and without her knowledge. If she helped a poor family or rescued an innocent girl, all St.

Petersburg soon knew of it through the indiscretion of her man-servant or her lady's-maid; she not only never mentioned such a thing, but appeared to be displeased at anyone having heard of it, affirming that in works of mercy the right hand should not know what the left one does.

‘Things came to such a state that not a day passed but either she came to us or we went to her. She lived in great style in one of the finest houses in the Nevski Prospect. The furniture, the servants, and the whole reception were in keeping with the position she occupied. It naturally happened in the course of events that we had opportunities of seeing her daughter, who was hidden from the world solely through a settled system of education.

‘This girl was neither deformed, as some said, nor a beauty. She was about sixteen, pale, thin, sickly, and looking much younger than her age—in fact, almost a child; while, like most girls of her years, she was timid and awkward, and answered, “*Oui, monsieur,*” to any question one asked her. Anastasia began often to bring her when she came to our house, saying that Paraksovia (*Pasza*, that was her name) had become very much attached to my

mother. And this must have been true, as the girl perfectly clung to her.

‘ Now, after the lapse of so many years, when I think of this period of my existence, which was the prologue of so many deceptions, I perceive that, though many things seemed to go naturally, yet an unknown instinct seemed to point out danger to me in the atmosphere surrounding us. The impression Mrs. Diergun used to make upon me was always transitory; in her absence I went back to my distrust of her. Yet I had not the slightest cause for it, and, seeing what pleasure my mother found in her society, I used to upbraid myself as if I had been guilty of ingratitude. Paraksovia seemed to take up so little space that I never even noticed her; she usually sat beside my mother, and appeared to be listening with the greatest attention to every word that fell from her lips. My mother would often draw the girl to her more closely, smooth her fair curls, and kiss her tenderly.

The business which had brought us to the metropolis was at last satisfactorily ended. There was no reason that our sojourn there should be prolonged, all the more as our country house and the poor and the sick needed our

presence at home. On the other hand, my mother was very loth to part with Anastasia, whose society had become indispensable to her, or with Paraksovia, whom she loved as a daughter. Mrs. Diergun, as if she guessed the wish, offered to accompany us. My mother accepted this proposal with the greatest gratitude, knowing full well how great a sacrifice it was for a person so fond of balls and gaiety to exchange the busy life of the capital for the solitude of the country for her sake. As for Paraksovia, she cried for joy.

‘We all left St. Petersburg together, except the old French governess, who remained behind.

‘After our return home I went back to my contemplative life, and to my lonely walks which had ever possessed such attraction in my eyes; thus I had fewer opportunities than in town of being with our guests. From the very first, Anastasia so managed as not to be in anybody’s way, and, occupied with needlework intended for the poor of the place, she gave her friend perfect liberty of action. Seeing her apparently so happy in this occupation, and so thoroughly imbued with the habits and ways of our establishment, who would have guessed that she had ever delighted in frequenting balls or parties?

All the servants were pleased with her, even the old major, usually so stiff with strangers, could not praise her enough. Pasza hardly left my mother's side, accompanying her in all her excursions and never seeming so happy as when with her. I still paid no attention to her; how could a child of that age interest a young man of my years, and of my character? Several times wishing to please my mother, I brought some small presents from the neighbouring town, presents which she received with a schoolgirl's bow and a scarcely audible whisper of "Merci, monsieur."

'So passed weeks and months, bringing no change with them. Mrs. Diergun spoke once or twice about leaving us, in the fear, she said, that a longer stay would be unwelcome to us. But it was evidently done for form's sake, as she well knew how necessary she had become to my mother; for herself she seemed perfectly satisfied with her lot. Her friendship with my mother came to such a pitch that I noticed there was a secret between them, which my mother, who had formerly shared every thought with me, did not communicate to me. They often whispered together looking at me, at other times they became suddenly silent when I en-

tered the room. I was hurt at this, but, accustomed to implicit obedience, I tried to hide my pain.

‘How often stillness reigning in the air bears in its bosom the greatest convulsion. The sky is serene, not a cloud mars the horizon, suddenly a fierce wind springs up, driving before it thousands of threatening clouds, while the thunderbolt, hidden within their dark bosoms, strikes a breast which but a moment ago was full of peace and happiness. The same thing happens in human life. From my earliest infancy I knew not the meaning of the word unhappiness; alas! it was to strike me as suddenly as it was unforeseen. I shall never forget that moment. It was in the spring. The day was one of those in which Nature, emerging from her wintry numbness, pours happiness into the soul of man. Anxious to profit by the fine weather, I strolled to a neighbouring wood, intending to start upon one of my long and solitary rambles. Mrs. Diergun and her daughter were in the drawing-room, and my mother was pursuing her daily occupations in her own room. Unconscious as we usually are of the blow about to fall, I inhaled with delight spring’s reviving air, and while I listened to the song of the birds my thoughts

were far, far away in the land of dreams. An old servant suddenly appearing before me interrupted these beatitudes. He was pale, agitated, and trembling.

“Our dear mistress is ill,” he stammered.

“The tone of voice struck my ear, though I did not take in the words. A few minutes before I had seen my mother smiling, cheerful, and happy. If in days gone by a shadow crossed my golden dreams, its form was undecided and impalpable; being happy, I could not understand misfortune. Not knowing what awaited me, and uneasy at the news of my mother’s illness, I ran quickly home.

“She was lying on her bed, pale, motionless, insensible. Mrs. Diergun was supporting her head with a pillow, Pasza was sobbing. With a cry of horror I rushed towards her; Mrs. Diergun bade me be silent.

““Courage,” she said, “all this may pass away; don’t be frightened. Everything has been done. She has taken reviving medicines and I have sent for the doctor who will be here immediately.”

““Good God, what has happened?” I groaned.

““A momentary weakness seized her while passing through this room and she became pale,

staggered and fainted ; fortunately my daughter and myself were near."

'I looked with gratitude at my mother's friend and at her daughter who, pressing the motionless hands to her lips, kept murmuring,

"I loved her so, I loved her so much!"

'These two women seemed to me guardian angels sent to save me from misery. My mother in the meanwhile had opened her eyes.

"My son—Pasza! are you both here? 'Tis well. I know not what has happened to me. I feel a pain in my heart that I never had before."

"Dear friend," interrupted Mrs. Diergun, "be easy, do not fear, we are near you."

"I know you all love me truly ; my son—Pasza, and you, Anastasia."

'It was the first time I had heard my mother call her by her Christian name. I did not then know it would also be the last.

'The sound of the doctor's carriage put an end to this sad conversation. The doctor entered the room. Shall I picture to you these moments of indescribable suffering, every second a torture, which seemed to have passed away all too quickly? The doctor declared that my mother was suffering from aneurism of the heart.

‘When, after all remedies had been vainly administered, the awful truth burst upon me for the first time, my mother made a sign to send away the doctor and the servants, and appeared anxious for a few minutes alone with me. Her friend was leaving the room with the others.

‘“Remain,” whispered my mother, feebly; “and you, Pasza, do not leave me; what I have to say chiefly concerns you.”

‘The room being cleared, my mother took my hand and said,

‘“My son, you have been all-in-all to me, my happiness, my comfort, my future; leaving you as I am now for ever, I desire a last proof of your affection—be a husband to her whom I love as a daughter. You will promise this, will you not?”

‘Thought did not exist for me then; despairing, annihilated, I only saw my dying mother, only heard her voice. I promised mechanically, hardly aware of what I was saying. A smile of satisfaction illuminated her wan face; she joined our hands and murmured faintly,

‘“Thanks, my son; now I can die in peace, because my warmest wish will be fulfilled—my children will be happy.”

‘I felt the convulsive grasp of her hand;

there was a murmur, a groan, and then no more. I fainted. The blow which fell upon me was so sudden, so unforeseen, that it shook my whole being. I thought it would be impossible for me to survive her who had been all-in-all to me. I remember nothing, neither the gathering of our neighbours, the funeral, nor the days that followed. I was in delirium; the doctor who had been called in for my mother did not leave the house. Youth and strong vitality conquered disease. Oh, why did I not then perish?

‘When I regained consciousness, I found myself surrounded by Mrs. Diergun’s watchful care. My slightest wish was anticipated; all was done that my dangerous state required, and every precaution was taken to keep my mind from dwelling upon painful subjects. My mother’s friend behaved with rare tact; she never offered empty consolation, which in such a case would but increase the sorrow; on the contrary, she spoke much about the many virtues and angelic character of the beloved dead, and, mingling her tears with mine, insensibly lightened my grief. Inexhaustible in her means of amusing my sick and tired mind, she was always by my side, and, when doubt or hidden despair threatened to overcome my Christian resolution

to submit to the decrees of Providence, she was able to pour into my soul, if not perfect peace, at least a momentary strength. Submitting to her guidance, I conceived a real gratitude towards her for her moral support, and the misgivings I had formerly nourished against her no longer found a place in my heart.

‘Her daughter never once made her appearance in my room. She occupied such an insignificant place in my life that at first I did not even notice her absence. Sometimes my mother’s last words came before me, but, weakened by illness, I took them for the creations of a diseased brain. It was only later, when my strength began to return, that I realised my life henceforth must be forced into a new channel. I never, however, fully fathomed my situation, nor realised the lot this change might bring to me. Benumbed, weighed down by illness and grief, I lived from day to day, never heeding what would come next. Besides, the future seemed very distant, as, not knowing Pasza’s exact age, I looked upon her as still a child.

‘At the end of two or three weeks, I left my room. Mrs. Diergun had taken the control of the household, and had in every respect altered the internal arrangements of our rooms. Be-

ginning by changing the furniture, she ended by altering the names of many rooms in the palace; everything was metamorphosed, and the consequence was that my first impressions were less painful than they would otherwise have been. External objects produce great impressions upon us; the dumb companions of our happiness become, after the loss of one we love, witnesses, as it were, of that which never can return, and by their presence re-open half-healed wounds. With wonderful tact, Mrs. Diergun spared me this first, and often most poignant, sorrow. Leaning upon her arm, I entered a room we had hardly ever used. A few moments afterwards, her daughter ran in, and muttered one of the usual phrases with which sick people are greeted on their recovery, and which she said in the most matter-of-fact manner.

‘For the first time I looked at her with some attention. There was no indication upon her pale, child-like features either of the consciousness which a girl would naturally feel in the presence of him with whom her life was to be spent, or of any other emotion. She bounded in, sat down beside me, and centered her whole attention upon a large bunch of flowers which

she intended to arrange into a nosegay. After some common-place sentences had been exchanged, her mother rose, pretending she was needed upon pressing household affairs, and adding,

“I leave you together, my children. Engaged couples should make ample acquaintance.”

‘Though these words only expressed our mutual relations, they hurt me. Bowed down by illness, and often only half-conscious, I had submitted to my fate without entering into details, or thinking of the importance of the impending event; but the name of “child” on strange lips seemed to me a blasphemy, and the word “engaged” grated upon my ear.

“And you,” I said, turning to Pasza, “have you become used to this idea?”

“To what idea?” she asked, without interrupting the arrangement of her flowers.

“To the thought of our union.”

“Ah! are you talking about that? That is quite a settled thing. You would do better to advise me what to do with this rose. I fancy these pinks would be more suitable in its place.”

‘My first conversation with my *fiancée* was thus carried on. I give it you as a sample of all the others we had together. Led by a natural curiosity, I sometimes tried to know her character, at least to become acquainted with her ideas and tastes, but I was never able to accomplish it. Every time I ventured upon a question which might help towards my enlightenment, Pasza would change the conversation, parrying my question with a trifle, or with some childish observation.

‘A few more weeks passed. The grief I felt for my mother’s loss gradually became a tender sadness; the mention of her name no longer evoked a burst of despair, but I experienced the silent and constant pain which follows upon any sudden shock. By degrees I became accustomed to my orphaned state, and to understand the necessity of submission to my fate. Matters, however, stood differently as to the change in my life exacted from me by my dying mother. I knew full well that this marriage must come to pass, but I looked upon it as an indefinite fact, the execution of which lay in the remote future. Often while watching her running in the garden, or occupied with some childish amusement, I used to speculate

what she would be like when years had developed her character, given her courage, and matured her judgment. In this small person, full of schoolgirl tricks, it was impossible to see anything but a child who would only in time become a woman.

‘Things were in this state, when one day, after the visit of some neighbours who had come ostensibly to condole, but in reality to satisfy their curiosity, Mrs. Diergun took my arm, and, telling her daughter to remain in the room, led me to the furthest part of the garden. She was much agitated; her lips tightly compressed, her eyes gleaming, with a bright flush upon her face that denoted hidden anger and indignation. She pointed to a seat without uttering a word, and we sat a few minutes in silence; she occupied in drawing figures upon the sand with the point of her umbrella, while I, fancying that something had happened, and unable to guess what, awaited enlightenment.

‘“This situation is unbearable,” she at last muttered.

‘I looked up with astonishment, and saw that her face was covered with tears.

‘“What is the matter? What has happened?”

“You ask it! Have you not seen it yourself—not heard it? You were in the drawing-room when they came.”

“I was. And this visit, and their condolences—which proceeded from etiquette, and not from the heart—appeared to me, if not in bad taste, unnecessary.”

“Nothing more?”

“What else could one see in the matter but that?”

“That is what hurts me most. I cannot think quietly that the honour of her who will bear your name is so indifferent to you.”

“I don’t understand. Your daughter is a mere child.”

“She is over sixteen. A girl of that age cannot be considered a child. But that is not the question. When these ladies entered the room, I saw by their smiles and innuendos that my daughter’s situation in this house, and my own, was the object of severe criticism. You were talking to the major, and you did not notice. I do not wish to upbraid you for your inattention; it is excusable after the severe loss you have sustained; but can you not understand that, in not wishing to forsake you in such a terrible moment, I have

exposed my daughter to the slander of evil tongues?"

‘I have already mentioned that, in spite of the impression Mrs. Diergun could make, she was not sympathetic. Her animated reproaches called out all my slumbering antipathy.

“I am very grateful to you for having remained in my house, but, having done it of your own free will, you must have been aware of the consequences. You ought then either to have escaped them in time, or, having accepted the situation, not paid any attention to the wagging of idle tongues, which in reality do not deserve to be taken in this way to heart.”

“You say so? But I ought not to wonder; you have never lived in the world, and are not aware of the consequences of a momentary indiscretion. Fortunately I am here, her mother; it is for me to remedy the evil, which will be more easily done as worldly considerations agree completely with my poor friend’s last wishes. I did not speak to you about it sooner, as the blow which fell upon us was too vividly before our eyes for anything else to find room in my mind. Now public opinion makes it necessary that I should. A few minutes before you stood

beside your mother's dying bed, she entreated me never to forsake you, begging me to be a second mother to you. 'I know,' she added, 'that such relations cannot exist without family ties, therefore I request that the marriage we used to look forward to as a distant termination of our dreams be celebrated without further loss of time.' These were her words; in remaining here I have but fulfilled my promise, the rest depends upon you."

'What could I do? Had I any right, knowing my mother's last wish regarding this marriage, to think that this unseemly haste, which offended my feelings, was not in accordance with her desires? Later, when I knew Mrs. Diergun more thoroughly, I became convinced that the emergency was of her own making; at that time, however, I was not able to know it. Besides, my home education, extreme youth, and complete ignorance of life made me easy to lead. My will, accustomed to bend to her whom I considered as a part of myself, had no chance of becoming strengthened. I looked upon what was now happening to me as irrevocable; ill-luck had placed a cunning, designing woman in my path—a woman who acted only for her own advantage—was it strange

that she was able to make me her blind tool?

‘All that followed appeared to my mind as a feverish dream. Preparations for our marriage were made, and all the necessary steps taken, while I, the chief actor in the drama about to be enacted, remained a powerless witness of what was taking place around me. Anxious to carry out my mother’s wishes, I gave my consent, and that was all they required. As if guessing that the ceremony, usually so gay and full of promise of future happiness, was to be the prologue of a terrible tragedy, I did not ponder upon the consequences, but, shutting my eyes to all that surrounded me, I plunged into the past which was never to return. Now and then I tried to begin a conversation with my *fiancée*, to become better acquainted with her character, tastes, and thoughts; but these efforts were never crowned with success. Pasza listened to me inattentively, answered at random, or interrupted me with some childish observation. If her mother was present, she always answered for her daughter, putting into her mouth ideas I am sure the girl never entertained.

‘At last the marriage day arrived. Some of our neighbours were present, as well as distant

members of my family, and the most significant act of my life was accomplished. It is hard to describe what my feelings then were ; my state partook of feverish excitement, hidden fear, and indescribable presentiment. A weight was on my breast which impeded my breathing, and seemed to paralyse my thoughts. Such a state can only be compared with the feelings we experience before sudden atmospheric changes take place. All around us seems so still, not a breath stirs the leaves or ruffles the surface of the water, and yet in the burning, stifling air we foresee the coming storm.

‘During the ceremony I stood motionless beside her to whom I was to swear eternal faith, and the grave voice of the clergyman, the pealing of the organ, and the sound of singing struck upon my ears only as a chaos of confused voices. I looked at her as she pronounced the sacramental words. There was no expression in her face, neither fear, joy, satisfaction, nor dissent. She seemed to be tired by the length of the ceremony, which interfered with her favourite amusements. Unwillingly I threw a look at Mrs. Diergun, and I trembled. In the eyes of that woman shone such a look of triumph and joy that for the first time the question rose

before me that I might be the victim of a base intrigue. But this thought passed like lightning, leaving no trace. Carried away by the force of new impressions, I was unable to account for my inward thoughts, and I left all to chance, not wishing, or perhaps unwilling, to ponder upon my new situation.

‘I had a wife given to me by blind destiny. I could not feel either love or friendship for her, and mutual sympathy arising from the exchange of thought had not had time to develop itself, as my wife was a complete stranger to me. All the events from my mother’s death to my wedding-day had taken place so rapidly that they appeared to me as a dream, and I awoke only when my fate was irrevocably sealed. Reality, however, soon presented itself in its natural form.

‘It did not require much time to discover that my wife’s character possessed no solid foundation upon which I could build for the future; it was wholly primitive, composed of most contradictory elements. This spoilt child was not entirely devoid of good instincts, but these, suppressed by bad influence, were not allowed fair play; besides, she did not possess any discrimination as to what ought and what

ought not to be done. There was no stability in her, no thought or decision which did not change under the smallest provocation. She had no convictions; her feelings and actions arose from a momentary caprice, and disappeared as fast to give place to perfectly opposite manifestations. Whilst crying bitterly at the death of a beloved bird, she at the same time showed herself pitiless to the misfortunes of a human being; generally kind and gentle in her behaviour to the servants, she would become suddenly despotic and unjust. There were days in which she prayed most ardently, and others in which she seemed to have no religious feelings whatever. In her relations with me, these contrasts were most glaring; now obedient and loving, she gave me hopes of a happy future; anon irritated, with flashing eyes and face aglow, she terrified me by her violence. These outbursts generally took place when anything was not done according to her wish, though now and then they flashed forth without any visible cause. Waking in the morning, I could never be certain of what the day might bring me, fair weather or stormy, as the change in her disposition was as sudden as it was unforeseen. I often tried by gentle

persuasion to make her reflect, showing her the necessity of some occupation consistent with her state and social duties; but my observations had not the slightest effect upon her. If I chanced upon a moment of good-humour, she allowed me to proceed, but it was evident that her thoughts were following some bird, some game, or preconceived mischief, instead of attending to me. It was much worse if my desire to show her the right road manifested itself when she was in a state of irritation; this small being then turned into a perfect fury. I also soon became aware that her education had been entirely neglected. Left from childhood to the sole care of governesses who obeyed her smallest whims, she had learnt next to nothing, so much so that her gross ignorance of facts generally known was quite shocking.

‘Though it seemed almost an impossibility to change such a disposition, especially coupled with my inexperience, I still think that this marriage, contracted in such strange circumstances, so adverse to peace and happiness, might possibly have endured for years, had it not been for the pernicious influence of Mrs. Diergun over my wife. After a short time, I became convinced that this woman was the

source of all the evil which had befallen me. She it was who, having obtained great influence over my mother, carried through this ill-assorted match ; she it was who, having gained her ends, determined to finish her work by depriving me of my free will ; the sole control of my large fortune in her daughter's name was her goal. Without her, Paraksovia would have remained but a spoilt child, and a long course of kindness might in time have softened the asperities of her character.

‘From the very first, a silent, systematic course of action was pursued, whose aim was to grasp at all household power. Not suspecting any treachery, I did not offer any opposition. My wife, taught by her mother, who pretended to maintain a strict neutrality, gradually got entire possession of my will, my acts, my occupations. To obtain peace I gave way, but every concession on my part only paved the way for new exactions. Mrs. Diergun would speak of her departure, but the very mention of a separation brought on bursts of despair from her affectionate daughter ; it was impossible to endanger the health, or perhaps even the life, of the loving child. It came to this, that I became a guest in my own house, a person

beneath anyone's notice. Becoming aware of the *rôle* I was made to play, I had no longer the strength to wage war. Having remained from childhood under my mother's tender care, I lacked the mental energy so necessary in like circumstances. I felt my unhappy position, I suffered from it; but I knew no means of escaping from the thralldom exercised over me by my wife and her mother. My only amusement or way of forgetting my sad lot was to return to my old avocations and tastes. I gave myself wholly up to them. I spent hours, days even, in the spacious park and amid the fields, surrounded by the works of Nature. I classified herbs, listened to the birds, and thus managed now and then to put away the remembrance of a repulsive reality. I never suspected that every action was carefully watched by bribed servants. You will soon learn the motive of this spying upon an innocent man.

‘I feel convinced that at that time Paraksovia was but a helpless tool in the hands of her unscrupulous mother, though as time passed, influenced by the constant system of falseness and cunning, she began to act independently. Slowly and insensibly our quiet house became filled with loud gaiety. Perfectly unknown guests

came from all quarters, such as artists, officers, and university students—in fact, a noisy, rollicking set, whom Mrs. Diergun affected and to whom she accustomed her daughter. The lack of education in my wife was the cause of her not enjoying serious conversation or communion with persons of deep insight; it was therefore hardly to be wondered that she found pleasure in the midst of such frivolous surroundings. At first it amused her as a thoughtless pastime; later, when the pernicious influence of flattery had awakened in her the unknown desire to please, she enjoyed this kind of life, regarding it as a suitable field for her coquetry. She was no longer the plain, pale child I had married. Her looks had much improved since, her sickly complexion now blossomed like a rose, her eyes deepened and brightened, and her lanky figure became rounded and undulating. She had become a beauty. But these gifts of Nature, which to a right-minded woman are only an added attraction, are to a heartless one a misfortune, as they only hasten her fall.

‘My mother’s friends had long since ceased to frequent our house, neither the new acquaintances nor the style of life suited their ideas or convictions. The old major alone, who loved

me as his own son, came now and then to visit the altered home of my forefathers. Too delicate to interfere in my marital affairs, he never touched upon that topic, though I could see how much he suffered when contemplating my unhappy situation. He always asked for me. Passing by the gay reception-rooms, he would spend several hours with me, conversing of reminiscences of my mother, and of the days when general love and sincere friendship threw such a halo of bliss over my youthful years. These were the only moments when I in reality awoke to life. The past, the sweet past, had such charms for me that, plunged in it, I forgot the present. Alas! they envied me even that semblance of joy. Mrs. Diergun, in whose presence the old soldier became freezing, hated him, and that hatred was increased by the fear that the influence of my mother's friend should in any way weaken the state of bondage in which she held me. She therefore made up her mind to put an end to our intimacy, and for that woman to conceive was to execute. Too cunning to act personally, she employed her daughter to carry out her intentions.

‘One day, soon after the major's visit, Paraksovia entered my room. Her coming, which

seldom happened, always heralded a new request. She used to appear wearing a sweet and soft expression of countenance, and, having gained her ends, would leave me immediately, without even taking the trouble to hide her indifference. I became so used to this state of things that on hearing the rustle of her silk dress I began to wonder about her new requirements, and when she entered the room I pretty nearly guessed the amount she required. The friendlier her greeting the larger the breach made in my purse. This time my calculations turned out wrong, as the request she was sent with was of quite a different nature.

“I am very uneasy,” she said, sitting down beside me.

“Why?” I asked.

“About my mother’s health; she has been far from well lately, and she has had nervous attacks.”

“Change of air is what she requires, she had better go to town. She never liked the country, besides, doctors are more at hand there.”

“You know that that is impossible, we could not live without each other; we love each other so, what is the use of urging that?”

“I am only answering your question and proposing the best plan, the only one perhaps.”

‘Unable to guess the upshot of the above conversation, I yet well knew what to think about the so-called nervous attacks of Mrs. Diergun ; it was one of the thousand means this woman employed to gain her ends. My wife believed in them then, later on, graduated in this school of hypocrisy, she learnt to make use of the same weapon. Taught by bitter experience I did not disclose my thoughts, the remotest hint of such a thing would immediately have brought down a storm.

“‘The way you suggest,” said she, after a moment’s pause, “bad as it is, cannot be acted upon ; she suffers, she does not complain, but my love for her makes me guess the reason of her sufferings. My darling husband,” she added, coming closer to me, “if you loved me ever so little, you would have long ago found out the cause of my mother’s unhappiness.”

‘This caressing tone and sweetness of behaviour verily frightened me, a year of married life had made me thoroughly acquainted with her. She had never addressed me thus, the request, therefore, that was hidden under this semblance

of affection must be an extraordinary one. I became watchful.

“Really, I cannot guess in spite of my best intentions.”

“What! at the very time when her bitterest enemy has scarcely left your presence. It is easy to see that the visits of this major, who plainly shows his dislike of her, is the cause of her trouble.”

“He is my only friend—nay, more, a friend of my mother’s. Besides, he comes to see me and avoids your society most carefully.”

‘As I mentioned before, Pasza’s character was so violent that the least opposition to her wishes brought forth a burst of anger.

“He is an enemy of mine, that is enough. I beg that this man should never again enter this house.”

‘She said this in a jerky, unsteady voice; her eyes shone, her lips trembled, and a vivid blush overspread her face. Hitherto her demands, however unjust, had never touched upon the past. All that had any reference to my mother was to me so sacred that disrespect to these feelings was closely allied in my mind to sacrilege. In spite of my long submissiveness, I found strength enough to oppose her.

“My dear wife,” I said, “I do all you ask me, though often your requests do not agree with my convictions. Neither the society you are surrounded with, nor the frivolous life you lead please me, yet I have always sacrificed my own pleasures to your whims; be, therefore, satisfied with this, and do not exact from me impossibilities. It would be more than weakness on my part if I shut my door against old friends of my family to satisfy your caprice.”

“My caprice!” And she looked at me in a fiendish manner. “My caprice!” she repeated. “You forget to whom and of whom you are talking, and you do not choose to understand me; know, then, that such is my mother’s wish.”

‘This single word painted, more faithfully than a long chain of facts could have done, the situation in which this unfortunate marriage had placed me. The will of the strange woman who had forced herself upon me was the only law. Deprived of an opinion, I was not even allowed to revere the past. Struck for the first time by the greatness of the humiliation they had gradually heaped upon me, I gave vent to all my pent-up feelings. I spoke gently but firmly, and with conviction. Knowing that this moment was one of the most solemn of my

life, I spoke with wonderful eloquence, bringing forward all the causes which constitute married happiness; I touched upon the tenderest chords, appealing to her heart, her soul, her reason. I am sure such reasoning would have induced any other woman to look into herself and reflect upon her conduct, but nothing in the world existed for my wife save her whims which were ruled by her mother. She was silent while I spoke. I believed she was listening to my words, but this hope was destined to be extinguished; she was silent because anger, carried almost to the verge of madness, was suffocating her. When, deluded by this apparent assent to my arrangement, I took her hand, she tore it away, and, with a look in which was painted intense hatred, she screamed out, furiously,

“Enough, not another word; you will repent what you have done.”

‘From that moment, although nothing was outwardly altered in my life, I felt that the abyss which divided us had deepened. These two women, the mother and daughter, were always together—the one sustained the other; they never addressed me unless they made some slighting observation. They paid and received visits, arranged parties without my

participation. Returning one day from a short excursion with the major, I found the arrangement of the rooms completely altered. Mrs. Diergun (under the pretext of her weak health) had ordered Pasza to live in her part of the house. It had come at last to a complete separation, mental as well as material. I only saw my wife at dinner-time; she addressed me with sarcasm; the servants, accustomed to see their true mistress in her mother, took their orders from her; guests did not even inquire for me. I was a stranger in my own house whom no one took the trouble to notice.

‘This humiliating position arose slowly, imperceptibly. The graduations were scientifically calculated, the shades so carefully arranged that one day seemed like the other, and yet almost every hour advanced this systematic undertaking to weaken my will. Seeing this, I often attempted to shake off the apathy which had overpowered me, and reconquer my lost position, but I could never find a sufficient motive; the ground I was treading had been so imperceptibly undermined that I only perceived every new breach made in my dignity and power when it had become an established and irrevocable fact. Too much success often blinds

even the very wisest. Mrs. Diergun was very dexterous, and took care never to give me cause to quit the passive *rôle* she had assigned me; but, in spite of all, a time came when her watchfulness failed her, and a real cause for energetic action arose.

‘Among the new guests who now visited our house, and who came oftener and stayed longer than the rest, was a Mr. W——, an old friend of my mother-in-law. He was one of those men who have used and abused everything. In his youth he ran through a handsome fortune, later on, unwilling to abandon his former life, and having a great dislike to all kind of work, he had recourse to dishonourable means for pampering his passions. He spent the best years of his life in bondage to old beauties, finally he took the convenient part of friend, confidant, and parasite to these ladies, to whom, in happier days, he had paid homage. Learning of the wealthy marriage of the daughter of one of these friends, he came from a great distance, surmising a good table, an idle existence, and perhaps some crumbs of his former capacity. His exterior was disagreeable, but did not arouse much attention, his type was too common a one to

interest even an observer of character. Pale, worn-out, and grisly, he used art to help Nature. There were days when he looked young, others when he looked prematurely old. In the first months of his sojourn he was silent, attentive to all, even to me, gradually sure of Mrs. Diergun's protection, he tried to attain a higher standing: first a humble adviser, then an inseparable confidant, he became at last one of the three links which, compressing my will and liberty, have *stamped* my life by a triple yoke.

‘Now, after so many years of terrible suffering and untold torture, when I reflect upon these events, I cannot admit that there can have been anything positively wrong in the connection of this brazen-faced intriguer with my wife. Besides, her mother's past life would have been an obstacle to it. There are crimes which even the basest have not got the courage to accomplish. The world, however, who did not know her past as I knew it, began to wonder at the long sojourn in my house of this well-known Lovelace. Wonder changed into scandal, and scandal gave rise to condemnation. At last it came to such a pass.

that the major—my only friend, who had never interfered in my family affairs—came home one day with a sorrowful countenance, and, having related what the world said, added, “This thing cannot go on. You must take a decisive step, and extricate yourself from this situation, if not for your own sake, at least for the sake of the name you bear.”

‘This speech made a great impression upon me. I remembered my mother, to whom the honour of our race was above riches, above domestic happiness. I understood that if I had once accepted in silence the lot which this unfortunate marriage had forced upon me, still I had no right to allow my hitherto unpolluted name to become a by-word. Weak in things touching myself, I gathered unusual energy when I found that it was time to remove appearances which threw a slur upon this family jewel. Filled with these impressions, I entered the apartment occupied by Anastasia. Both the women were there, as well as the inseparable Mr. W——. A very animated conversation was cut short by my appearance. They looked at me, seemingly astonished at my presence, but I was accus-

tomed to this behaviour. Confident in the sacredness of my mission, I told them my wish in a few precise words. I made them understand that I, who had been gradually relegated to a secondary position, was about to take the management of the household, as it was my duty to do as head of the family.

“I will gladly see all our kind friends, but I will make them see who is the real host. I will not allow myself to be counted for nought, as such a state of things throws suspicion upon our mutual family connections.”

‘I will not venture to describe the scene which ensued. You already know the despotic character of the mother, and the self-will of the daughter, and you can guess the brazenfacedness of their friend, who, safe in the protection he had hitherto received, instead of leaving the room at the very beginning of the discussion, raised his voice, as he said, in defence of the rights of his protectoress. This was too much. I showed him the door in silence. He was anything but a hero, and gave way before the smallest show of energy. In spite of a sign from Mrs. Diergun bidding him remain, he disappeared immediately.

‘Things went differently with the women. If

this just defence of my dignity had taken place soon after my marriage, perhaps the show of some strength of character from me might have influenced their behaviour. Now it came too late. Too accustomed to see in me but the blind tool of their wishes and fancies, change in me made no impression. In their eyes I was but an insubordinate slave, who, as he could not be brought back to obedience, it was right to punish and banish for ever.

‘After many tears, faintings, and spasms came a burst of anger, then a rupture, and their departure. Yes, so it was! Mrs. Diergun left my house, taking her daughter with her. Can you believe it, for the first time since my marriage I began to breathe freely! My conscience was clear. True, such a rupture sharpens the tongue of slander, but at least no one could any longer suspect me of a base connivance. I also felt that I was not blameless. I ought to have separated the mother and daughter immediately after the wedding, and then all this would not have happened; but it is easy to see the evil when the remedy comes too late.

In the detailed description of my wedded life which I have related, you can see how slowly and imperceptibly the canker that destroyed my future

worked into my hitherto sound body. One day did not appear to differ from another, and yet each measured a step towards a settled goal. In the situation I was placed in, I believed the solution that had occurred was the best that could have happened. I fancied that the hurried departure was but a diplomatic measure towards teaching the revolted slave humility, and towards an unconditional surrender. So, thought I, I will defy their calculations based upon my weakness; I will remain silent and wait, and the defeated antagonist, seeing her plans have failed, will bring back her daughter of her own accord. I, personally, will not be the cause of their return, but the fortune which must ever be an irresistible attraction to such a woman. I did not know Mrs. Diergun completely even then!

‘A few weeks after the events just related, two perfect strangers paid me a visit. Their names told me nothing; I heard them for the first time. One of them, a pleasant, gentle-spoken old man, introduced himself as a great admirer of the natural sciences. He said he was travelling in the cause of these sciences, and, having heard of the studies undertaken by me in the same field, had come out of his way to make my

acquaintance and learn my theories. The other, a tall, dark personage, was his friend, fellow-labourer, and travelling companion.

Not suspecting treachery, and finding my hearers well-up in the subject, I explained my experiences and theories with regard to the life of organic creatures, which to positive and prosaic people might have appeared the outcomings of a diseased brain. I looked upon these theories as the result of my labours, as the first glimmer by which naturalists, instead of merely describing the structure of the body of animals and superficially their habits and instincts, would learn to listen to their language, understand it, and thus build a new phase of science. When Felton first discovered the power of steam, he was thought a maniac by his contemporaries—futuraity alone reaped the benefit of his discovery. Encouraged by the real attention with which the old gentleman listened, I unfolded to him my wildest speculations, and if in the middle of my descriptions I returned to more practical views, the stranger led me gently back to feverish idealism. His friend, the dark man with eagle eyes, spoke seldom, but it was clear that he too was eagerly drinking-in our conversation.

‘When they left me, after having paid me a visit of several hours duration, I experienced an indescribable feeling of anxiety; my fictitious ardour, which had been well kept up by the stranger, now left me, and cooler reflection showed me that I had been betrayed into too much candour before complete strangers. I could not then account for this feeling; now I know it was a presentiment. A week later the sweet-spoken old gentleman made his appearance once more in my house; his friend was not with him this time.’ He gave me to understand that the Society for the Promotion of Natural Sciences in Moscow had elected me as a member on hearing the account given by him of my discoveries. Handing me the diploma he invited me to accompany him to a meeting of the naturalists which was to be held shortly.

“You must apprise the world of your theories, I am convinced that they will give a new direction to our ideas, and I shall always count it an honour that I was the first to discover in a remote country-place such a deep thinker, and one who will change the current of our old theories upon which our knowledge has hitherto been based. England prides herself upon Darwin, and yet all his theories are based upon

assumptions; whereas your conclusions spring from the language of animals, to which no one has yet devoted any attention."

'This speech awoke a new sensation in my heart, the thought of glory. Why, reasoned I, am I to hide from the world my studies? shall not I be the propagator of a new theory, and surround my name with the aureole of public recognition? Fate points that way and has given me one of the veterans of knowledge as a guide! I need not add that the hope of future triumphs so blinded me that it dispersed the black cloud of presentiment which had taken possession of me.

'We went to Moscow. My friend never left me for a moment from the time we reached the ancient capital of Russia. After a few days, he announced that the first sitting of the society had been fixed, and that my colleagues were expecting the new member. We both went to the imaginary meeting. Driving up to the place where my friend told me the society assembled, I was rather astonished by the sight of its dark and gloomy walls and huge oaken doors, which were closed upon us as soon as we entered. When I told my companion this, he answered, smiling, that these precautions were

taken to ensure perfect security during the society's deliberations. I was so overcome by the importance of the moment in which I should have to expose my theories to this learned Areopagus that I did not reflect upon the improbability of this statement. I was led into a spacious hall, in which were seated several men of various ages. There was no audience or table full of professional papers, not even a secretary to take notes—in fact, none of the characteristics of a scientific meeting. I also remarked that our entrance had not interrupted any discussion; all these dignitaries of science seemed to be awaiting our arrival to commence their labours. This great politeness was very flattering to me.

“I have the honour,” said my companion, “to introduce my colleague, Mr. K——, the newly-elected member of our society, of whose wonderful discoveries in the field of natural science I have spoken upon a former occasion.”

“Please be seated,” said one of the members, who by his age and dignity of behaviour seemed to be the president. “Our rules require that every new fellow-worker who shares our labours and investigations submits to a kind of

examination, and allows us by this means to learn his views and principles."

'After this preface, he put a good many questions to me with regard to my ideas respecting the life of animals and plants; the others helped him, presenting the same question in different forms, and exciting me by their feigned admiration for my theories. I cannot explain how gradually, almost without my knowledge, I fell into an unusual excitement, anxious to expound my theories. I mentioned to them what I had hitherto not even dared to put into words. The speech of birds and animals was no longer a distant speculation, but became an indisputable fact. I understood the sounds, formed them into words, and, delighted with my own conclusions, and rising higher and higher on the wings of imagination, I forgot where I was, what I was doing, and those who were listening to me with strained attention. When, after having carried my fantastic ideas to their uttermost bent, I stopped, overpowered by a feverish emotion, the president, who had first addressed me, said, in a dry, cold voice,

"Gentlemen, I presume we know now what to think about it?"

'The others nodded assent. My elderly friend

escorted me out of the hall. Overcome by my recent emotion, I did not reflect upon the oddness of this termination. Having traversed several corridors, we found ourselves in a moderate-sized room. My companion took my hand, smiled, and said, as sweetly as ever,

‘“This is your lodging for the present; you will enjoy in it the quietness you are so much in need of. Please do not allow anything to irritate you, do not think too much, and all will go well. I will come and see you every day, and, should you require anything in the meantime, here is the bell.”

‘Before I could answer, he was gone. Brought suddenly to my senses, I ran after him, but the door was locked. Unable to understand what had befallen me, and angered to the utmost by such behaviour, I ran to the bell and pulled it violently. A new personage appeared on the threshold. He was a strong, broad-shouldered man, and wore a white apron.

‘“What do you require?” he asked.

‘“I wish to leave this.”

‘“Only that! Really your request is most natural, but it cannot be complied with. You had better know once for all that no one leaves this place of their own free will; if you had

nothing else to say, you need not have troubled me.”

‘Saying this, he left me. Once more I was alone. For the first time I pondered seriously upon my situation. I was a prisoner, but why? under what pretext? Was it possible to deprive a man of his liberty in such a manner, in the midst of a town, in broad daylight, without incurring a terrible responsibility? Who were these people, and what induced them to play such a comedy?’

‘While such thoughts were passing through my mind, I pondered with my face buried in my hand, when suddenly a piercing shriek interrupted the stillness. I ran to my barred window and looked out into the court below. Opposite to me, in a window equally barred, I perceived the hideous, contorted face of the man who had given utterance to these animal-like bellowings.

‘Then the frightful truth dawned upon me. I was in a madhouse. Never shall I be able to describe all I felt in the first few days of my sojourn among these unfortunate creatures. Irritated to the utmost by the assault that had been committed upon my person, I received the pretended naturalist, who in reality was the

doctor, with reproaches and insults when he came with his usual sweetness to inquire after my health. Neither insults nor reproaches had the slightest effect upon him; smiling as ever, he recommended perfect tranquillity and submission to my fate. This was too much; human nature has its limits. I caught him by the collar, and insisted upon my instant release. He ordered me to be tied up, to have my head shaved, and frequently bathed with cold water. Seeing that violence only aggravated my situation, I suffered in silence. I was again treated with kindness, but, under the pretext of my violent disposition, I was not allowed to leave the room for a moment, and could not avail myself of a walk along the terrace which the other patients enjoyed.

‘Days passed on; at the end of several weeks I experienced the first pleasure I had had since I had ceased to belong to the world. The good old major came to see me. He threw himself into my arms, and tears—perhaps the first ones he had shed for years—ran down his noble features. He told me everything. My wife, urged on by her mother, intrigued so well that she had got me locked up in a madhouse. The whole affair was most skilfully managed, and

without a single legal formality omitted. The doctor employed by them came to my house, attended by a government official, and, having played the *rôle* of a naturalist, found out my eccentric theories, and sent in his report thereon to a medical committee, who, believing it, wished to see me personally. My own excitability helped the doctor. You know how I, imagining myself to be before an assemblage of natural philosophers, unfolded my most advanced ideas, and how, assuming speculations to be facts, and taking fiction for truth, I had prepared my own fate. The result could not be doubtful, my future was there and then settled; the medical men's verdict coincided perfectly with the wishes of the two women who had decreed my mental death. I was considered a dangerous maniac, whose sojourn in the family circle was inimical to the welfare and perhaps even the life of some of its members.

‘The old major alone, who knew my tastes and ideas, never for a moment admitted such a possibility; but, in spite of all his endeavours, he was unable to see me. According to the madhouse doctor, who was entirely devoted to Mrs. Diergun's interests and her daughter's, the state of my health required perfect quiet, and

the cessation of any intercourse which could remind me of the past. Then the major, guessing that I was the victim of a base intrigue, sent to the government an appeal, stating that I had been unjustly shut up, and succeeded in obtaining a police investigation in spite of the medical verdict. The servants, when questioned, did not help me, as they all told of my solitary walks and my frequent conversations with plants and animals, of which they had been secret witnesses, and these were regarded as sure proofs of a disorganised mind. The most insignificant occurrence takes colossal dimensions to prejudiced minds, and shook the conviction asserted by the major. The fiat which separated me from the living became irrevocable. To admit the possibility of my leaving the mad-house, I must be quite cured, and the verdict as to my state of health depended solely upon the doctor, who, being Anastasia's tool, would never speak that word which would open its doors to me.

‘Having made me acquainted with all these details, the old major said at last,

“This cannot go on; you cannot remain here—it would be too terrible. All means have

not been yet exhausted, and I have a plan, the surest."

'Buoyed up by the hope of leaving this living grave, I stammered,

"Which? Speak! speak!" and, catching his hands, I listened intently.

'He looked cautiously round to see that we were not overhead, and, putting his lips close to my ears, he whispered, "Flight."

'I gave a look at the thick walls, barred windows, oaken doors studded with nails, and sighed.

"Oh, no!" he said, understanding my thoughts, "our strength would not avail us here; we must have recourse to cunning."

'He then explained his plan to me, which was cleverly conceived. Unluckily, in arranging my flight from these walls, we were not aware that they possessed both eyes and ears. Those who had relegated me there were too much interested in my civil death, and knew too well the major's friendship for me to leave us alone, without keeping a secret watch upon our interview. It is a well-known fact that in mad-houses there are secret places built near the rooms of the patients, which allow of their being

watched at all times. In this way our conversation became known. The doctor reported all to my persecutors, who decided to avail themselves of my intended flight for finally crushing me. All seemed to be going on satisfactorily, and as the major had arranged it, with this trifling difference, that the men he believed he had bribed were in reality in the pay of my enemies. When all was ready, I was disguised and taken out of my cell; not a soul was visible in the long corridors we had to traverse, and a close carriage was waiting outside the gate.

‘Thinking that I was now on the road to freedom, I threw myself on the cushions, followed by my guide, whom I considered a devoted servant. We drove off rapidly, and so unsuspecting was I that I did not notice the direction we were taking, and was unaware that, instead of going west, we were proceeding northwards. The absence of the major, who was to have joined us at the first relay, made me rather anxious; but my guide assured me that he had altered his original plan, and was expecting us on the Prussian frontier. This seemed plausible enough, as we had settled that I was to leave the country on the first opportunity, and, being thus freed from the persecu-

tions of my enemies, endeavour to make the authorities annul the medical verdict which had pronounced me a madman. Yet when several days passed, and no frontier appeared, I began to wonder. My guide, while endeavouring to allay my anxiety, was at the same time busily engaged in hurrying the postboys and trying to avoid other travellers. All these precautions were construed by me as favouring my flight. But when days followed each other, and the country we were crossing became more and more desolate, my suspicions awoke, and, regardless of the wariness of my companion, who assured me that my safety lay in perfect silence, I seized the opportunity of a momentary stoppage to ask a government official, who put his head into the carriage, in what part of Russia we were.

‘The young man looked astonished, and said,
“In the province of Tobolsk.”

‘All my previous suspicions were now confirmed. I did not know what was to be my lot, but felt sure that, instead of freedom, greater misfortunes than those I had experienced were in store for me. I could not succumb without a final struggle. I jumped out of the carriage and declared that I would go no further. Then

my guide, who had evidently anticipated my conduct, produced documents showing that I was sentenced to banishment in Tobolsk. I need not add that these papers were obtained by my mother-in-law.

‘If such an intrigue astonishes you, remember that the events I am relating happened some forty years ago, when the administration was not so good as it is now. A bad man then, if backed by some one in authority, could attain his wicked ends, and in the central provinces of the country and beyond the Ural he could be sure of perfect impunity. It often happened that individuals crossing this chain, which divides Europe from Asia, never re-crossed it again. I have known cases in which travellers, visiting these inhospitable steppes, were detained by pure mistake; and a lost passport, or other slight informality, became a sufficient reason for keeping them prisoners.

‘My guide, who, as I found out later, was a detective in Anastasia’s service, was able to take me to Tobolsk with the help of the documents he possessed. These papers were the reason that no one paid any attention to my protestations, and, on our arrival, I was placed

in a mad hospital. No one seemed anxious about the real state of my health, but I was made to understand plainly that my fate was fixed, and that, by trying to fight against an established fact, I ran the risk of materially injuring my position.

‘Forty years! It is a lifetime. I suffered much. At first I tried to escape from the hand of Destiny, which pressed so heavily upon me. I tried everything that a man, brought to the last extremity, can do. I escaped. I was caught. I tried to bribe my jailors; my plan was discovered. I became obstreperous. They locked me up in a black hole, and fed me upon bread and water. In a word, every effort of mine was followed by renewed torture. I wrote many complaints, but never received any answer.

‘I heard at that time; through some exiles sent from Moscow, that my wife and her mother lived in luxury, spending shamelessly and scandalously the fortune they had stolen from me. Details were related to me which would curdle the blood of any honest man, and, if I allowed myself to doubt the accuracy of the tale, the next consignment of exiles were ready to prove their authenticity. This was too much

for human strength to bear. I gave way mentally and physically, and felt no longer the power or the will to fight any more. The beneficial changes which have come over my country, the new government to whom I could have appealed, found me broken-down and crushed by misfortune. And what should I return to the world for now? The old major and my own friends are long since dead. She who bears my name, having dissipated my fortune, ekes out her miserable existence by the dark and filthy life which converts passion into trade. All around there is only shame, sorrow, and abasement. A hundred times better foreswear the past, and die here, forgotten and unknown!

‘What more can I tell? The constant communion for so many years with madmen has had a fatal effect upon my mind; seeing nothing but warped understandings, I have myself become affected, and often my weakened thoughts overstep the limits of reason. In such moments, I do not see the people who surround me, the present does not exist; in its place pictures of the past present themselves before my fevered brain, and I become as one of my fellow-patients. Thus, what forty

years ago was a lie, has become a reality! Now I am in truth a madman. I have but seldom lucid intervals, and it is to your sincere sympathy that I owe this short awakening from the bonds that trammel my understanding.'

Such was the history of my companion in the prison at Tobolsk. A man who, except that he was devoid of manly energy, had in no other way deserved the fearful calamity he had endured.

I did not remain with him long. My health being restored, I was shortly ordered to prepare for a further journey. I felt real sorrow in wishing good-bye to this victim of human depravity. I knew that we should never meet again.

A year later, during my stay in the Yeniseisk province, I heard the news of Mr. K——'s death. He died a true Christian. With his last breath he forgave her who had mentally killed him.

CHAPTER III.

A PICTURE OF PRISON LIFE.

MUCH has been said and written against the practice of confining all classes of prisoners together. This topic, important in itself, has become one of those questions on the solution of which human welfare depends. All feel that a young and inexperienced criminal becomes degraded by contact with old and hardened ones, and that these dens of iniquity, containing consummate scoundrels as well as erring sheep, are schools of crime; yet habit, old routine, and the impossibility of speedy reform, are the causes of this evil existing almost universally.

It is not my intention to explain that a prison is a place of punishment, and not an educational establishment for young sinners, as the simplest

logic shows that putrefying matter should be kept apart from things that are still untainted and healthy, to save as much as possible from general gangrene. I only wish to give an example to enforce this truth. This small sketch of prison life is a simple account of daily occurrences, possessing neither well combined events nor dramatic effects. Thousands, nay millions, of such constitute prison history, and protest more forcibly against the system of common confinement than rare and startling incidents which are but exceptions.

My situation enabled me to study many types of criminals. Hardened ones bear in their faces, especially in the shifting look of the eye, something that distinguishes them from the less guilty. I do not allude to the disgusting faces where animal instincts predominate; these are exceptions, and awaken aversion and caution from the very first; but I speak of those whom mysterious nature has endowed with a handsome exterior and a blackened soul. For the greatest criminals are by no means always hideous; such are found in novels and on the stage, but rarely in real life. These things are different; coarse lineaments indicating not only low feelings, but want of courage and energy;

but their possessors are more frightening than powerful, and awaken in us a feeling of dislike.

Great criminals usually possess a savage boldness, strong will, and great acuteness. They are as a rule tall, powerful, and handsome. Their smile is sweet, voice musical, movements graceful, their look alone betrays them. Their eyes fall not, as is the habit of beginners in crime, when meeting those of an honest man; on the contrary, their look is assured and bold, but in its light there is from time to time an ill-omened flame, so like a tiger's that whosoever has once seen it does not forget it. Knowing this by experience, I have endeavoured, whenever I had the opportunity, to study eyes, and I can conscientiously say that I have never been mistaken.

Being placed temporarily in the prison of — I had full opportunity of putting in practice rules bred of former experiences. I had for security a separate cell, and was told that I could choose a servant from among the prisoners. Led for this purpose into the common hall, I saw myself surrounded by a crowd of these malefactors. There were fearful countenances, morose, savage faces, flat Mongolian ones, and finally the above-mentioned handsome physiognomies. All, incited by the hope of earning a few roubles or

by a less innocent purpose, begged to be taken into my service. Even the repulsive ones crawled up slowly and united their prayers to those of their comrades.

Among this crowd of different faces on which crime had set her seal, I perceived a young man very unlike his companions. His face was full and rosy, with a merry smile and open look, and in his manner, in spite of a slight cynicism learnt in his prison life, he had a remnant of primitive simplicity not completely obliterated. This boy I chose to wait upon me, and I was not wrong. During my short stay in the prison, he fulfilled his duties zealously. He was willing, careful, obedient, keeping his place, and, by his inborn good-humour which never deserted him, he often dispelled the sad thoughts which naturally assailed a man in my situation.

When the day for leaving came, while waiting for horses and guide to be ready, I began to talk with him, and gradually touched upon the reason of his imprisonment. This is a question which prisoners as a rule like to pass over in silence, but Andrushka, having confidence in me, related frankly his short history. In order to maintain its true colouring of simplicity and ignorance of the noble aspirations that remained

in his heart like a dying flame, notwithstanding his surroundings, I give it in his own words.

‘My father was a very rich farmer; he had the finest cattle in the village, the most numerous troupe of horses, and tilled the largest fields. When harvest came round, the stacks of his corn rose one beside the other like Government store-houses, and excited general envy. His house was spacious, the farm-buildings new and comfortable, the agricultural implements in good order. In a word, he had plenty of everything. God had blessed him in all things, blessed him also in his children; they came thick and fast. There were about ten of us boys growing up, and as many girls, small and big. It is good in a farm where there are three, four, or even six children, but where such a herd trots about the place, and have to be fed and clothed, then even a rich man will think twice about it. With girls it is an easy matter; as soon as they grow up and look well some one is sure to carry them off. But what is to be done with the boys? One or two can become soldiers, but those that remain are like millstones round one’s neck; the farm does not require so many hands, and boys, whether working or idle, eat fearfully. My father,

therefore, having retained on the farm the four eldest, would say to the others, as soon as their beards began to grow, "Listen, boy. Hitherto I have provided for you, it is now time you should provide for yourself; I cannot keep you on the farm as it does not require you; you must go into the world and get rich the best way you can, and here are two roubles to help you."

'Having said this, my father would take down the holy picture from the wall, give it to be kissed, bless his son, and, without more ado, show him the door. Several of my brothers had left in this way. Wanko joined the fishermen and is doing well; Ygorko took to drinking and died in some hospital; I, who liked freedom, selected the calling of a driver, therefore, when the time came, I left home and went straight to Tomsk, and there, working at the salt storehouses, made a little money and bought several horses. Having my own beast, I went on with my occupation for another year, transporting wares for the merchants of Krasnoyarsk, or bringing tea from Kiakhta to Russia.

'At the beginning of January last year, sitting one day on the doorstep of an inn, I noticed a merchant hiring some driver; I went up to him,

and, although there were at least ten others waiting, I was lucky enough to give him my number first. He gave me sixty copecks to start with, and I undertook to transport to — seventy “pood” of lard. I had scarcely gone a few steps when a stranger came up to me and said that he had also agreed to take seventy “pood” of lard to the same place. “All right,” said I, “we will journey together.” To improve the acquaintance we entered the inn and took some tea together, and so the friendship was cemented.

‘The next morning we each packed our load on a cart and started. After having made about fifty versts, I began to think of putting up for the night. My companion said he had a friend in a neighbouring village and we would put up there. To this I agreed, and in half an hour’s time we were sitting down in our new abode. The host was so pleasant that I was delighted with him. He gave us a dish of pelmeni* while waiting for the samowar, and, bringing out a black bottle, gave me a good sized glass of vodka. I had no sooner emptied it than I felt my head swimming and

* Pelmeni is paste and meat.

fell under the table—strange vodka! I fell asleep, and slept until past midnight.

“A nice thing,” was my first thought when I opened my eyes; “here am I asleep and the horses not fed.”

‘I ran to the stable and there was neither horses nor waggon to be seen. I began to shout, call for help, when the host and my new friend came out, caught me by the shoulders, and pushed me into the house.

“Quiet,” whispered the host, “say nothing and take this,” and so saying he put money into my hand.

‘I looked and saw it was one hundred roubles.

“Are you satisfied?” said my companion.

‘Dazed and half asleep, I did not know what to answer.

“Well, if you are satisfied, then the sooner you get out of this the better.”

‘I looked round me; my horses were poor, the cart old, the lard was not mine. I went away without asking any more questions. A hundred roubles silver is a large sum, but when one has a thirsty soul and many friends to treat? A month had hardly passed away, and I had spent every penny; there was nothing else to do but

to return to Tomsk and seek for work. Can you guess the rest? The devil brought that merchant there too, and I had hardly time to look round when he seized me by the collar and called the police; I was put into prison and questioned backwards and forwards, this way and that. From the very first I related exactly how the thing happened, so they sent me to this prison. I shivered when I first saw it. Half-dead I was led into a large, dark hall full of people. The noise was fearful. I was surrounded in a moment.

“Here is a new-comer,” one called out.

“Who are you?” asked a second.

“What have you been sent here for?” added a third.

“I was too frightened to speak.

“Don’t you see,” said a tall man with a black beard, “that he is a simpleton, Leave him alone. We will educate him in time.”

As the weeks went by I began slowly to get accustomed to my new dwelling. I made acquaintances and told them my story.

“Oh, you fool,” said the man with the long beard, “why the devil did you have such a long tongue? ‘I don’t know! I never heard! I have not seen!’ should have been your answer.

But you country boors are all alike, when once a man begins to talk, then, innocent or guilty, he will always be convicted."

'When I understood what they meant better, I began seriously to think if I could not remedy the evil. I put in a petition saying that the evidence had been illegal, my words misunderstood and wrongly taken down, that I knew of no merchant and carried no goods. I put in five petitions like that and felt quieter.

'Prison life is fearful at first, but later it wore another aspect in my eyes. We had pipes, tobacco, and refreshments, these were all procured from the jailor by general subscription; he was a good old fellow to be sure! Then the prison was visited by the wives, sisters, and daughters of the criminals, and these never came empty-handed; one had a bottle, another biscuits, a third a little money. They also sometimes brought old clothes and boots, and we would exchange it all for money and make a common purse and be right merry upon it.

'The man with the black beard managed the money; they called him Emiliashko. News came that his affair would soon be finished, and that he would be sent to hard labour. We were sorry for our comrade, who was up to

everything, were it singing a song or organising a collection to get some vodka. We could do nothing without him. What was to be done? After much talking and many discussions, we collected six roubles and sought our jailor.

“Here is half a rouble for you, you old mushroom, if you will bring down to us Paul Stefanowitz Swietylkin, the red-haired man who has charge of all our papers.”

‘Upstairs was the judgment-room, and Swietylkin was the clerk.

“All right,” answered the old fellow, and crawled upstairs.

‘Towards the evening Swietylkin came down and inquired what we wanted. We all fell at his feet.

“Dear father, kind friend, don’t let Emiliashko perish to the world in this manner; write a petition, or otherwise he will be sentenced to hard labour.”

“Well, what of that? he richly deserves it.”

“Oh no, help Emiliashko to compose his petition, and take this.” So saying we showed him a five-rouble note without, however, giving it him.

“Then if I write it,” said Swietylkin, turning to Emiliashko, “what is it to be about?”

“Bring your papers here and we will get our ideas from them.”

“Give me the stamped paper.”

“No, first you bring your documents and we will find the paper.”

Seeing that he could get nothing that way, the clerk went upstairs and in half-an-hour returned with a large folio of manuscript documents under his arm.

Then, when Emiliashko was handing the clerk the sheet of stamped paper, we all rushed at the documents and tore them into atoms.

Swietylkin turned as white as a sheet, and said, in a voice trembling with rage,

“Cowards, thieves, cheats!”

“Swear as much as you like, the case is lost now.”

The clerk, having regained his self-possession, said,

“Give me a second five-rouble note, or I will have you all sent to hard labour.” We had no money but he noticed I had new boots on. “Take off your boots or give the other rouble.”

There was nothing else to be done. I took off my boots, and having tied them in a red pocket-handkerchief and concealed them under

his clothes he departed. Emiliashko was saved and we went on as merrily as hitherto.

‘In a month after this Swietylkin came to us, saying,

“Listen, you good-for-nothing fellow: there will be an inquiry; not a word about it, do you understand?” and in reality we were all questioned, one after the other; but we were mute, saying that we knew nothing. The end was that the clerk came off scot-free, having laid the blame on the messenger, who must have lost the papers when taking them to the post.

‘A few months afterwards the man who stole the lard from me was caught and put in prison. But he was wiser than I, he denied everything from the very first. A year and a half later, in consequence of my numerous petitions, a new inquiry was instituted; hearing all this, my companions laid their heads together to teach me how I was to answer the questions put to me. After mature consideration the following plan was decided upon: Firstly, to invalidate the witness, who, being in the merchant’s service, ought not to have been allowed to give evidence; secondly, not to know my companions, and disown all transactions with the mer-

chant; thirdly, to declare that the former's statement was not written down according to my words, as I could not have owned a transaction I had never committed. My companion was ordered to appear as if not right in his head; he was to say nothing, but laugh in a silly manner. It happened as we expected, and now, thanks to the good offices of my friends here, I shall leave this place in a few weeks.'

'And now,' I asked, 'you have no wish to go to prison a second time?'

'Prison has its good sides,' answered Andrushka, 'because it teaches fools wisdom; but freedom is better still. I am very glad I have tried it, but he will be clever who catches me a second time. He who has once been here is not caught easily again.'

As I got into my cart I thought sorrowfully and pityingly of the man.

CHAPTER IV.

A TRUE STORY OUT OF THE ARABIAN NIGHTS.

FROM earliest childhood I have disliked all supernatural ideas. Nature has drawn around us certain limits of existence, any encroachment beyond these limits or any violent effort to reach inaccessible spheres is a crime against the laws of our existence, a road leading to mental alienation. We are surrounded by marvels of Nature, and in scrutinizing them we give wholesome food to our imagination. Educate our understanding and we obtain a real benefit; but, when we permit our thoughts to wander beyond the limits of the visible universe, we find but an empty delusion apt to lead us to an unhealthy state of mind.

Fevered imagination is to the soul what dissipation is to the body—a dreamer is a useless member of society; out of dreamland arise

Mesmers, Destons, Maxwells; dreamland too has to answer in great measure for the inmates of our asylums.

Luckily for me I passed the early years of my youth where every mystery has a subtle charm, every dream the vividness of reality, without any accident arising which might have led me astray from the straight road of common-sense; if anything happened which had for the moment a fantastic appearance, it was sure to resolve itself into a prosaic reality or to be explained in the most matter-of-fact way by my tutor.

In this way I attained to manhood without having once experienced very strong emotions of fear, curiosity, or bewilderment—emotions causing such great mental shocks to those who, through a diseased imagination, have sought for explanation in the supernatural. But what I had escaped for so many years under more favourable circumstances, in a warmer climate and more youthful time of life, overtook me amid the desert plains of the frozen north, and at that period of life when the first frosts of approaching age silver our hair and the thoughts are not so apt to be easily turned away from reality and calm discrimination. It

was in truth only for a moment, but during that moment I experienced the most intense feelings of wonder, horror, and disgust which a supernatural apparition can create.

This strange and fantastic incident, which, nevertheless, is perfectly true, is the subject of the following narrative.

During the first year of my sojourn in Siberia, one fine, frosty day I felt a longing to exchange the stuffy atmosphere of my hut for the fresh, biting air of the steppes. I therefore harnessed a fine, powerful horse to a tiny sledge, and set out on my excursion: the road I took, though perfectly unknown to me, was well beaten down by the sledges of the peasants, extended in so straight a line, and was so well lighted by the brilliant rays of the setting sun that I entertained no fear as to the possibility of losing my way. My drive had no definite object, and it was aimlessly, almost unconsciously even, that I turned my horse's head westward.

Having speedily crossed the entire breadth of the river Czuly, now covered with thick ice, I soon found myself in the midst of an endless snowy plain; my horse, accustomed to rapid motion sped on, and I, mechanically admiring the setting sun, fell into a reverie. Gradu-

ally the white houses of the village, the thick clouds of smoke ascending from their chimneys, and even the green roof of the tall Cerkief (Greek Church) disappeared, and I still went on unthinkingly, feverishly almost.

How long this mad drive lasted I know not ; lost in thought I paid no heed to the flight of time, buried in the past I forgot the present, and sped on without a thought of where I was, what I was doing, and what awaited me.

At last the approach of night put an end to this sweet lethargy. My horse came to a sudden stop and began to snort and paw. I looked around me wonderingly, like a man suddenly awakened from a dream ; I was alone in a boundless expanse of snow ; the cupola of the small village church had long since disappeared, and even the traces of my sledge on the powdery snow had become obliterated ; evidently my horse, in whose intellect I had confided too much, had lost his way. What was to be done ?

The only remaining guide was a faint streak of light in the west, and a lingering hope in the sagacity of my horse. Carefully examining my revolvers, from which I never parted company, I turned my horse's head eastwards, and, whistling to him in true Siberian style, I held the

reins loosely and left him to find the way home.

He started off rapidly in a straight line. Re-assured by this, I forgot my fears, thinking that such a rapid pace would soon bring me within sight of the village. Hour after hour went by, night had spread her dark shadows and still the village appeared not. I strained my eyes to discover ever so faint a glimmer of light indicating the vicinity of human habitations. Nothing was to be seen.

I stopped, and alighting from my sledge tried to survey the locality; not a track was to be seen anywhere, all round lay the untrodden desert. My situation was certainly not an enviable one. Alone, lost in the steppes at night, I might expect at any moment to be attacked by wolves, or worse still by the Bradiagi.

There was, however, no time to be lost in vain imaginings; to remain where I was would certainly not help me, whereas a drive even blindly undertaken might by chance bring me on the road I had lost. The horse's instinct having failed me, I made up my mind to redouble my watchfulness and try whether I could not discover some land mark. Who knows! perhaps by driving on I may come across some bush or

a pole stuck in the snow, which may show me where I am. And so I drove on.

Another hour passed and still my surroundings knew no change, not a hillock, not a tree, not a sign of life, the darkness seemed to become more and more intense. Doubt began to creep over me; who knows, thought I, that I may not be driving away from the village instead of approaching it.

Seized with this idea I resolved, in spite of the dangers that threatened me, to spend the night in the desert and wait for morning light to discover the track I had lost, when suddenly a faint glimmer appeared in the distance. This might proceed from the window of a human habitation, but it also might be the reflection of a fire lighted by a band of Bradiagi; in any case I felt I must put an end to this uncertainty. Without the loss of a moment, I drove straight in the direction of the glimmer.

Soon a large building appeared before me. It stood alone; all around stretched the white expanse of the steppes. A strange, almost incredible phenomenon met my eyes; this great building had neither windows nor chimney, and its perpendicular sides stood out like the walls

of a fortress, and seemed to isolate its interior from the rest of the world; a bright light shone through the open door and between the chinks of the wooden walls. Passing round to the back for fear of being discovered, I crept carefully up to a side wall and applied my eye to one of these apertures, anxious to see the interior. My eyes, blinded by the light, could distinguish nothing at first; several minutes elapsed before I realised the picture that presented itself to my gaze.

Oh horror! the sight was so fearful, so appalling that the blood froze in my veins, my hair stood on end, and a cold sweat ran down my face. To understand my feelings it is necessary that I should describe what produced them.

The interior of the building consisted of one spacious room without floor or ceiling; in the centre was a large opening, evidently the entrance to a cellar, and a little further on some symmetrically arranged faggots were burning and lighting up the hideous and fantastic picture. Six men were assembled, one of them, tall, thin, and pale, was dressed in an expensive fur cloak; he stood in the centre and was looking down the opening of the cellar.

Near him stood a stout, bestial-looking man, with his sleeves tucked up and a knife in his hand. The four others were peasants. The thick smoke ascending from the logs, and curling among the timbers of the roof, hung like a black cloud enclosing this picture.

At a sign from the pale man, who seemed to direct the [others, two peasants disappeared into the cellar from which they soon emerged carrying some object wrapped in white linen. They laid their burden on the ground, and exposed to view the stark, stiff corpse of a man. Then they disappeared again. The next was the corpse of a woman. In such wise they produced from that mysterious opening more and more dead bodies, grey-bearded old men, young girls, and even young children. I counted twenty. Then the pale man looking round this array of death said, gloomily,

‘Children, it is time to begin working.’

The four men approached, and the stout man silently examined the blade of his knife.

‘It is cold,’ said the chief, with a wicked smile, ‘we must warm these poor creatures.’

At this order, the dead bodies were lifted and tied to stakes in the ground, so that each of

them seemed to stand by its own strength. It was a terrible sight. All these stiff, dead bodies with wide open, glazed eyes, long icicles hanging to their hair, stood around the fire, whose flickering light, unable freely to illuminate the surrounding obscurity, seemed to lend them some wild, fantastic notions.

The silent man with the knife, who had hitherto taken no part in the proceedings, now approached the fire. Suddenly a dry noise was heard, like the striking together of two hard objects. It was the man striking one of the bodies with his knife.

‘Can’t begin yet,’ he said, in an aggrieved tone.

‘A moment’s patience,’ answered the paler one, ‘the heat will soon begin to act.’

As if to corroborate his words, in a few minutes all the corpses began to move as if worked by galvanism. One whose hands were crossed over its head let them fall with a loud noise, others hung their heads upon their breasts, while those who had not been firmly attached to their stakes bent in half or leant on one side. Warmth penetrating these dead bodies brought back matter to its normal state, viz., a mass of decaying corruption, and a disagreeable, death-like smell pervaded the atmosphere.

Terrified, I remained looking at the fearful sight, unable to account for what was going on. I looked without wish, will, or memory. I felt aversion and disgust, but I had not strength enough to avert my eyes from the hideous vision. There was a moment when I thought all I saw was a delusion. I often remembered that authors describing unreal and awful events, after having excited the imagination of their readers to the highest pitch, end by saying, 'I awoke and the sun was shining brightly,' etc., etc.

What is told in a story-book can happen in reality. I rubbed my eyes and tried to collect my scattered thoughts. No, I am not asleep. I feel! I see! I hear! Before me rises the high black wall, behind me is my horse tied to a stump, around me lie the white fields illuminated by the bright streak of light that shines through the open door of this mysterious abode of death.

What course was open to me? Flight! Where to? Shall I remain? How will it end? Half-dead with fright, I knew not what to do. I wished to move—my legs refused their office; to scream—I had no voice. A torpor seemed to take possession of me. I began to doubt

the soundness of my mind, and to disbelieve the evidence of my senses. I could not remember where I was, who were these dreadful men, or what was their aim. So the moment passed, the only moment in my life when I believed in a world of ghosts, in a supernatural and unreal world. That moment was short.

When the picture before me began to assume more hideous tones, and the stout man, approaching a dead body, plunged his knife into it and began to take out its rotting intestines, all at once a new individual appeared on the threshold.

A bucket of cold water poured upon a burning forehead could not have produced such a mental change in me as the sight of the newcomer; for, although all else was strange, fearful, and unexplained, the presence of this man changed the past hallucinations into prosaic reality.

The man standing at the doorway of the mysterious building was Alexis, and was government clerk in the village of Balachta. Seeing this individual, I stepped out of my hiding-place and approached him.

‘Ah,’ he cried, in astonishment, ‘you here. To what extraordinary circumstances is it owing?’

‘To the most natural,’ I replied, trying to hide my inward tremor. ‘I drove out of the village, lost my way, and this light led me here.’

‘And you became the unwilling witness of one of the most disagreeable functions of my office. Such a sight cannot be pleasant, especially to those who are not used to it. If you are anxious to return, here is the road that will lead you straight to the village. Balachta is not far off, and in half an hour you will be at home. If you wish to wait, I shall be ready in a quarter of an hour.’

‘Oh no!’ I said, ‘not a minute longer will I remain in this place.’

Jumping into my sledge, I drove off in the indicated direction and soon found myself at home.

Once more within the four walls of a small Siberian hut, I breathed freely. Though I now guessed what kind of function I had been an unwilling witness of, the impression produced upon me had been too great to enable me to shake it off all at once. Besides, many details were still incomprehensible.

A long conversation with the clerk, who called upon me on his return, enlightened me as to what still seemed enigmatic in the events of the night.

The whole thing was in truth natural and very matter-of-fact. It is well known that sudden and accidental deaths are very common in Siberia. Whatever may be the cause, the law does not allow the body of such a victim to be buried without a post-mortem examination and a police inquiry. Such is the law all over the world, as, wherever there are men, there exists bad passions, hidden wickedness, and secret crime. But, whereas in other countries the law interferes immediately after death, in Siberia, on account of the immense distances, such a course is impossible. How can a provincial surgeon be on the spot of a murder as soon as it is committed, when his province is larger than a first-class European kingdom? and sudden deaths in distant localities are almost of daily occurrence. To obviate this difficulty, the following plan has been devised.

The body of every person whose death arouses suspicion is placed in the ice house. The ice house is a spacious building situated generally beyond the village, and is used to preserve the dead bodies and for the performance of dissections. In its subterranean part the bodies are arranged, and the sharp frost keeps them from decomposition. When a

large number of corpses have accumulated, the provincial doctor and his surgeon travel from parish to parish, and, having heated the bodies in the presence of the local authorities proceed to carry out the law's demands.

It was the performance of this duty that I had witnessed and mistaken for a hallucination ; but it is a frequent event in Siberian life, and the natural consequence of its extent and local administration.

CHAPTER V.

THE BEGGAR'S STORY.

I WAS sitting moodily in my lonely cottage one winter's evening. The night was dark, the wind and snow were beating furiously outside, and the few inhabitants of the village were safely inside their huts; no sound was audible but the wind whistling over the Siberian steppes. How long I remained gazing into the dying embers of my fire I cannot tell, when all at once there came a knock at the door. A visitor at such a time and in such a place was an unheard of occurrence. I rose and opened the door.

‘Batuszki, matuszki, sotworitie swiatuju milost!’

It was an old beggar wandering in search of charity in these polar countries.

I was delighted to see him. I had associated

but little with the inhabitants of the settlement, and had not seen a human face for so long that a new one in the solitude of these long winter evenings was very welcome. I made him sit by the fire, gave him food and a glass of vodka, and entered into conversation with him. Leading from one subject to another, after he had complained of the bad roads, the stinginess of the Siberians, and the sharpness of the cold, I managed to make him relate his history.

He came from the province of Tula, and was the son of a rich fire-arms manufacturer. His father was anxious to give him a good education, and sent him to school; but young Andruszka had no intention whatever of learning, and one morning he ran away. He wandered for a few months from village to village, until at last, caught as a tramp, he was applied for by his father and given over to him.

‘My father did not like practical jokes,’ said the old beggar, sipping his vodka, ‘he leathered me nicely; I feel cold all over even now at the very thought of it. Afterwards he took me weeping and sore into his manufactory and put me under his foreman. “You won’t study books, learn then how the different parts of a

gun are made ; and you, Ivan," turning to the foreman, "don't treat him as your master's son, but as a common workman ; for every act of disobedience, laziness, or breach of discipline flog him as hard as you can. Do you understand?"

'Ivan did not require the injunction to be repeated twice. He was a strong, thick-set man, who looked upon the punishment he inflicted on his subordinates as a pleasant relaxation after the day's-work, and when he was drunk the devil himself could not have outdone him. You can easily imagine what kind of life I led. Tortured from morning to night over a thankless task, flogged and knocked about by Ivan, I never could find an opportunity to see my father and ask him to have pity upon me. Ivan had no measure in his treatment. When I asked him to explain some part of my work, he would say, "A screw is screwed on in this way," and he would twist my ear until it bled ; "A lock is put on so," and he would strike my head with his fists. In a word, I became the sport of this cruel man.

'I repeatedly tried to escape, but I was too well watched, and each attempt cost me more blows. One evening, having been

more ill-treated than usual, I determined to commit suicide. Behind my father's factory there was a large pond; I ran out and threw myself into it, and certainly should have been drowned had not some fishermen passed in their boats, who dragged me out by my hair. On regaining my consciousness I entreated them not to send me home again, as I felt sure that the flogging in store for me would be fully adequate to the offence I had committed. They agreed to grant my prayer, but one of them said :

‘ “ You cannot remain with us, as the authorities would soon discover that we were hiding a strange boy, and we would be punished. We have some friends going to K—— to-morrow ; you can go with them.”

‘ I agreed to all ; I would have gone to hell rather than return to my father. My deliverers sold me to the Kazan fishermen for two quarts of vodka and three paper roubles. This bargaining took place in a dark house, in one of the suburbs, and it was scarcely daylight when, seated on some fishing nets, I was speeding away in a “ kebitka ” with my new companions.

‘ From that time a new life opened to me, but not much better than the first. From morning

till night I was standing up to my waist in cold water, setting nets, without even a minute's respite. I was not beaten, but for the smallest neglect they would threaten to send me home to my father's; and the fear of Ivan's iron hand was sufficient to make me do their bidding.

'In spite of my wish, I learned fishing thoroughly. No one could set the nets as well, or knew the currents and eddies better; but my companions treated me as a machine, and never in any way repaid my services. They drank away in public-houses the profits of my labours, giving me as my recompense scanty food and an occasional glass of vodka to warm me when chilled to the bone. Such a state of things could hardly please me. Why should I serve these men and provide them with means for getting drunk, when I was able to earn my own livelihood? As soon as this thought struck me I lost no time in acting upon it. One fine night I ran away, carrying the best net with me.

'Luckily I escaped the watchfulness of my companions, and tramped from one settlement to another, selling the fish I had caught. This trade flourished, and I bought a large net and started fishing on an extensive scale. After a

year of this life I became emboldened by success, and transferred my trade to K——. I hired two apprentices and fished for sterlet, perch, and sturgeon, and as I was steady my pockets rapidly filled. I had quite forgotten my former patrons, but they had not forgotten me. One day when, having displayed my wares in the market-place, I was weighing a twenty-pound sturgeon, I felt some one lay his hand upon my shoulder. Looking round I recognized one of my old companions.

“I have found you at last,” he cried.

“Let me go, beggar, I don't know you,” I answered, trying to look indignant; but the new-comer, without listening to me, hung upon my collar. My two subordinates came to my rescue, and the public took my part. And naturally so. My old chief was ragged, dirty, and half-drunk; I had a new coat and a sheep-skin cap. Outward appearances always tell in such cases.

‘I should doubtless have escaped scot-free from the encounter had not the police, attracted by the noise, appeared and demanded further information.

‘I understood well what sort of information was demanded of me. I gave it, but the pro-

cess of clearing things up cleared out my pockets completely. And more; the police, having once approved of my explanations, were anxious to obtain more of them, and I was assailed almost daily, sometimes with an excuse, sometimes with none. Now the weights were wrong, then the fish was stale, then the place occupied by me in the market was unlawful. In a word, I had to pay so much and so often that my affairs suffered materially. One day, being in a very critical condition, and possessing nothing in the world but a large stock of stale fish which no one would buy, I remembered that my old masters used to steep such stale fish in a solution of corrosive sublimate. The effect of such a bath was that a fish ever so far gone lost its offensive smell and colour and could not be distinguished from a fresh one. Unfortunately, though I remembered the name of the drug, I had quite forgotten the quantity.

“Never mind,” I thought, “the more I put in, the fresher the fish will look.”

‘So thinking, I put in as much as the water would take. What joy! in a few minutes all my yellow, dry, and rotting fish assumed the colour of perfect health, their fins were blood-red, their flesh

firm, and their bad smell had completely disappeared.

“Buy some good, fresh fish,” I cried to the passing housewives, “fresh fish, just out of the water.” And they bought, filling baskets with goods they would not have looked at yesterday.

‘The day had not come to its close before the news spread over the town of the sudden death of one of its wealthiest merchants. An hour afterwards a whole family passed into another world. People began to talk of plague and cholera, and in the meantime new victims succumbed. About twenty people belonging to various classes of society died. Next morning the news reached the town of several cases having occurred in the village.

‘All those who had died had partaken of my fish. Such a coincidence could not escape the notice of the police. I was put in prison, and, on the analysis of some of the fish still remaining being taken, traces of poison were discovered.

‘My affairs began to look bad. I might expect the rope, or at least hard labour for life. Fortunately for me, there were other younger and cleverer prisoners with me, who knew per-

fectly well how to keep the neck from the noose and the back from the knout.

““You won’t escape,” they told me, “were you to lie ever so much, facts are too strong against you; they will either hang or imprison you for a certainty.”

““God forbid,” I answered, making the sign of the cross.

““You have only two ways of saving your hide—to buy yourself out——”

““But I haven’t a copeck.”

““Then only one way remains.”

““Which?”

““But that requires a great deal of sense.”

““Speak, for Heaven’s sake.”

““You must pretend you are mad. They will shave your head, bleed you, weigh you like a sheep, and send you to the hospital. Life there is not very nice among madmen, but still it is better than exile.”

“I begged and entreated my comrades to teach me how to proceed, and my good friends answered my prayers. In the course of a few days they made me well acquainted with the ways of men who have lost their senses. They showed me how to turn up my eyes, how to scream, how to go on repeating the same meaningless

words; and I repeated my lessons after them. I imitated the gestures, screams, and unintelligible words; in fact, I did my best.

‘When they considered I was sufficiently expert, they made me take a dose of some white powder, the effect of which was to make my face turn crimson and my pulse to rise to fever-heat. I then began to scream, rolling myself on the floor and shrieking at all who came near me. The turnkey came and I spat at him. The director of the prison came and I laughed at him, and repeated some wild, unintelligible words. The doctor was sent for; he examined me for some time and then had me taken to a separate room, my head shaved, and ice put upon it. They tried me in every possible way, promising instant release, questioning me when I awoke, and before I could collect my senses; but I was too well taught ever to forget my part for a second, and at every question I answered, “Fish, fish, fish.”

‘With my lips I simulated the splash of a fish, and spread my arms out like the fins of a fish when swimming. I was finally sent to the madhouse.

‘I do not know how such places are managed in your country, but in ours the worst prison is

preferable. Lack of space, dirt, filthy food, careless and ignorant doctors, and the freedom and insubordination of the attendants make these places a veritable hell. In prison, the inmates have at least the power of complaining, and the warders know that, if they were to overstep their duty, a police investigation would ensue, and they might be turned out of their places. In madhouses, keepers have not this salutary restraint. Here no one is likely to complain, and, if by chance a voice is raised in self-defence asking for justice, who would listen to it? It is only the voice of a madman, who knows not what he is saying! Therefore the local authorities treat these unfortunates as they please, certain of escaping with impunity.

‘The hospital is divided into two parts, male and female. In the latter reigns a directoress, a drunken old hag, with her subordinates taken from the lowest class of women. The former is managed by a keeper and his staff. Each part is again subdivided into a place for raving maniacs and for harmless ones. The distribution of inmates in the first or second category depends entirely on the caprice of the doctor, who, according to the humour he is in when he examines a person, sets him down in the con-

trol book as "furious" or "melancholy;" other phrases are unrecognised, only these two extremities are admitted.

The raving maniacs, or at least those they choose to call so, are bound with ropes, and even put into irons; the quieter ones are allowed to walk about, but at the least fault they are unmercifully beaten by the first keeper who happens to be near. Gentle behaviour is perfectly unknown, and fear alone keeps up the discipline. Add to this the rapacity of the attendants, who for the sake of a few copecks are ready to procure alcoholic drinks, and you will easily understand that if anyone ever leaves the hospital it is only between the boards of a coffin. Mention is never made of a patient having been cured.*

'I will not describe what I suffered, but will only say that weighed down with my misfortune I often forgot the part I had to play, and spoke rationally, hoping that my subterfuge would be discovered, and that I should be

* It should be borne in mind that the man relating this story was very old, and his sojourn in a madhouse took place some years ago. At present, Russian madhouses are well-managed. The skill of good medical men and careful nursing frequently produce good results, and many madmen return to their homes completely cured.

either transported or hanged. But alas! it was more easy to get in than to get out!

‘I had spent two years in that terrible abode, when a new regulation was issued allowing monks to visit us and try the effect of religion upon our obscured minds. Twice a week our hospital was visited by a priest who used to preach to us, but no one understood him. The madmen welcomed him with fiendish laughter, and were only kept in check by the whips of the keepers. I, however, saw a hope of escape in this incident. I listened attentively, asked numerous questions, and pretended to be full of religious enthusiasm, and to be possessed by a strong desire for monastic life. The monk was delighted to see that his teaching had made one convert, and he managed to have me transferred into a monastery (as being half cured by his eloquence), where I was to begin my noviciate ere entering into the blessed state.

‘I found myself in the monastery enveloped in a monk’s caul, and I had to sweep the passages, and fetch water, and study the lives of the saints. Such a life would have been bearable, especially after what I had endured, had it not been for the food, which was worse

than that of the hospital, the stripes inflicted while pursuing my distasteful studies, and the night watches beside dead bodies! Added to these trials was the complete absence of "vodka," to which I had taken a liking while in the madhouse.

'One day I had to learn by heart the life of a saint, who, persecuted by Tartars, ran away into the Orenburg wastes. The thought struck me, "Why should I not do as a saint had done?"

'I did not lose much time in putting the thought into execution. One evening, when no one was watching me, I threw away caul and gown and ran straight before me. I found myself, when I stopped, alone in a forest almost naked, hungry, and moneyless, and fearful of being overtaken, brought back, and punished.

'I managed to extricate myself from this uncomfortable position. How I did so would take too long to relate; suffice it to say that six months after my flight from the monastery I was in Moscow with several hundred roubles in my pocket.

'How I enjoyed myself only he can understand who knows what a first-rate place our old

Moscow is for a man who can pay for all his whims. I lived like a prince, rode a spirited horse, wore a fur coat with a collar half a yard in depth, ate caviare, drank strong liquors, and had a servant whom I thrashed twice a day, revenging on him all the beatings I had endured in hospital and monastery. But roubles quickly melt at this rate. After a few weeks, when I began to investigate, I found I had hardly a few "papers" (paper money) left. This was bad; it was time to think; but I resolved to continue my present life a little longer and think later on. So saying, I ate and drank well, and my good fortune led me to the door of the principal theatre. I paid my last rouble for a ticket and went in. They were performing a piece in which the chief actor played the part of a madman. In spite of the alcohol I had been drinking, I followed his acting with feverish interest, and, in spite of the applause I heard around me, I discovered how mean, poor, and insignificant was his rendering of the part after the comedy I had acted in the madhouse. The curtain fell amid a thunder of applause, and, struck by a new idea, I inquired the address of the manager, which I easily obtained.

‘He received me civilly, as I was well-dressed, and dress and manner succeed everywhere, more especially in Moscow, where an honest but ill-clad man will be taken up by the police, and a well-dressed swindler addressed as “Your Highness.”’

‘I offered to join the company. I spoke decisively, being sure of myself, and I turned into ridicule the play of the actor who had evoked such marked approval. I saw that I had impressed my listener. He still, however, wavered; a man in his position must hear daily so many similar propositions, that one cannot wonder. Now was the time to strike the great blow. I retreated to the end of the room, and a moment later approached him with my hair erect and my eyes fixed, and clutching his hand I mumbled out savage words.

“What does all this mean?” he cried, in a fright.

‘I only answered by a laugh, but such a terrible laugh that it sounded more like the mirth of a demon than a human being. The terrified manager seized the bell-rope.

“It is nothing,” I said, gently, suddenly altering the expression of my face. “I only wished

to show you how madness should be acted on the stage."

"Capital, first-rate," exclaimed the delighted manager, "you are an artist in the full acceptance of the term." And on the spot he engaged me.

'A few days afterwards, the same piece was performed and I sustained the chief part. It would be impossible to describe to you the enthusiasm of the public, it had neither measure nor limit. The house shook with applause.

'I was well-paid and well-lodged, but at the same time I had to learn ever so many different parts. Though endowed by Nature with an excellent memory, I had no inclination for study. At first the novelty amused me, but gradually I became very slack. I relied too much upon the prompter, and often made mistakes which at first were overlooked by an indulgent public, but finally caused great dissatisfaction. Though I certainly possessed an extraordinary talent in personifying madmen, and could do blackguards and criminals well, I had not the slightest ability for acting other characters. In a provincial repertoire there are all kinds of parts, and it is impossible to be always acting pieces with murders, treasons, and madmen. I

had therefore to act various parts, but somehow always acted them in the same style. The lovers looked like thieves about to be caught, respectable fathers like escaped convicts, and noblemen like madmen trying to imitate high personages.

‘ Besides these defects, I had no social polish, and shocked my companions by the coarse expressions I had learnt in my youth, so that I was disliked by them. The manager soon noticed that on the nights when I acted the theatre was empty, and, without much ceremony, he told me one fine morning that our bargain would be up in a fortnight, and that at the expiration of that term I would cease to belong to his company.

‘ It was time to consider the future. Seeing that a dramatic career was closed to me, I seized upon another way of settling down. During every one of my performances from the first night, I had noticed that one of the stage boxes was always occupied by a yellow, shrivelled-up old woman, the widow of an *employé*. This living mummy never took her eyes off me, and would throw monster nosegays to me, in which there was always a *billet-doux* full of the warmest sentiments. In the days of

my success, I had paid no heed to the advances of this antideluvian fright, and had laughed heartily at the writer; but when my good fortune was waning, and the time was approaching when I should be again homeless and penniless, I thought of this hag. I answered her sweet looks by looks still more expressive, her notes by more inflammatory epistles. Shortly I gained access to the drawing-room of the old sinner, and, when my time at the theatre had expired, I located myself with my kind protectress in the capacity of her secretary. From that day my life passed in wealth and comfort. I ate well, drank better, and did nothing. I accompanied the old woman in her walks and drives, and should have been completely happy had it not been for two defects in her character, which left me no peace. She was stingy and jealous.

‘She certainly gave me to eat and drink and dressed me like a prince, but would never let me have any money. I never could even look at a pretty woman but the hag would burst out crying and make a scene, calling me ungrateful, reminding me of her kindness, and threatening to have me kicked out. I bore it all patiently at first, knowing full well the diffi-

culty a man has of getting on in the world who does not wish to work; but at last the cup overflowed, and I found myself one evening in the streets of Moscow friendless and penniless, and without even the wish to undertake any kind of honest occupation.

‘But Moscow is large and wealthy; there is room there for anyone who has some sense and knows how to use it. I tried this and that, was here, there, and everywhere; served a shopkeeper, went into small speculations, made up medicines to cure all imaginable evils, kept an inn, attended to a steamer; and years passed on, until I was sent off to Siberia. In Siberia, my friend, only he can live who has money; those who have not any must either soil themselves with work or beg. I never had any inclination to work. Such being my nature, I preferred to beg. Life is hard. I was better off at the old woman’s, or even in the monastery; but it cannot be helped now God has willed it so.’

When the old man had finished his story, I said,

‘I see you have tried everything in the world, and, though the course of your chequered life might have been straighter, I am truly glad to

see that you have never committed robbery.'

'Ah! my friend, such a thing is done, but not spoken of. Everyone steals with us; the only difference is that, when a rich man is caught in the act, he is made to pay up, while a poor man is sent out in these snows.'

'And in Siberia?'

'In Siberia it is the same thing; but there is not much scope here for a clever man, as everything seems to end with a knife or a stick. The gain is small and the risk great.'

'You say true the risk is great,' said I, playing with my best pistols.

'For instance, these toys,' said the old fellow, smiling cunningly, 'prove that what I said just now was true,' and, getting up to go away, he added—'You have fed and given me money; for that I will give you some advice. Never be without those toys, and look well to the triggers every evening.'

I did not any longer detain the 'worthy' old man.

CHAPTER VI.

FASHION AND SOCIAL HABITS IN SIBERIA.

FASHION, as we all know, is imitation. It takes birth we know not where, grows we know not how, lives no stated length of time, and finally expires, giving way to some new phantasy. Its spring cannot be traced; it may rise in the street, in the boudoir of a celebrated beauty, or in the workshop of a fashionable tailor. When once fashion has established its ephemeral reign in a city, it spreads like lightning into all parts, dictating its despotic laws. Its chief centres are the large towns, smaller ones trying to copy their grander neighbours. Villages alone are passed by, the labouring classes in these primitive places keeping to their old habits and dress, and not regarding the

transitory whims of the capricious ruler of the universe.

Such is the case in most parts of our globe. Wherever civilisation penetrates through social intercourse or by railways, the nations are brought together into an outward uniformity of habits. European fashions reach wherever nations of European descent dwell, and the inhabitants of America and Northern Africa, from their likeness to those of the old world, partake of the same characteristics. In the streets of Algiers, Constantinople, New York, or Philadelphia we see little difference from those of Paris and Vienna; for in the former a white Arab cloak occasionally gleams, or in the latter the black face of a negro is visible; but these local exceptions do not affect the general look of the place.

Things are wholly different in Siberia. There the distances are not shortened by iron rails, and the severities of the climate oppose themselves to the most earnest desire of imitating western habits; and yet even in these Arctic regions live ladies who will not depart from the laws that govern the fair sex in almost all parts of the earth.

Fashion coming from western countries to

Siberia is always retarded, and often so changed as to be hardly recognisable. It has its heads who rule this acclimatised power, and many who copy second-hand from these leaders of fashion. These leaders are the wives and daughters of rich gold-diggers, or richer employés who take in St. Petersburg and even Parisian papers, hoping by their aid to hold the sceptre of good taste and *bon-ton* as well as the outward semblance of the current fashion in European costume. The ladies who live in smaller towns and more remote villages, have to be content to shine like planets with the light borrowed from the reigning suns.

One would imagine that a fashion reaching Siberia by the means of a good Parisian journal, and only retarded the month taken for its transit of a thousand miles, would appear there as the French modiste had made it; whereas the facts are quite different. The climate, local habits, difference of taste and ideas, and principally the Siberian tailors and milliners, who bring all novelties down to the level of their capabilities, are the reasons why the reigning mode on the banks of the Seine appears on the borders of Irtysh or Yenisei as like its predecessor as, according to Darwin, we are like monkeys, only

in a reverse relation. Everything is exaggerated; mantles as large as windmills, bonnets as small as walnut shells.

When chignons were worn, they were made in Siberia without the help of hair-dressers, and the materials used for stuffing them were generally from the sweepings of the stable. The shape was enormous, reminding one of ancient helmets or the insignia of a Pasha of three tails; bonnets upon such heads came down almost to the bridge of the nose, and settled there. Besides, the love of fine colours inherited from the Tartars and Mongolians, combining with the exaggerations of western fashion and the exigencies of the climate, produces such a combination that the characteristics of the fashion are entirely lost.

Such being the case in the chief towns, where the disciples of fashion procure Parisian models and copy them according to their taste and ability, what must happen in provincial villages and towns, where the proselytes blindly follow such leaders! There the flights of imagination partake of madness, and exaggeration turns to a perfect caricature.

In spite of all these difficulties, fashion has many followers. Excepting the aborigines,

who keep faithfully to their ancient customs, all classes bow down to this goddess, whose progress along the steppes has obliterated all primeval characteristics, and created a truly new polar type. Even peasant women, who in most countries have retained their national costume, are here attracted by the general love of imitation, and, having caught a glimpse in the town of a lady dressed in her best, endeavour to assimilate their dress and ways of wearing it to the model they have seen.

If ladies' toilettes pass through so many changes as to make them differ so materially from the models they are founded upon, what can be said of the social ceremonies which pass as part of a fashion, proceeding as they generally do from received and accepted principles? In the so-called aristocratic houses of Siberia all our European dances are danced, from the polka to the lancers, with an energy that smacks of the Mabelle. A stranger at a ball is struck with manners and customs which do not prevail on the other side of the Ural, *i.e.*, young ladies openly refuse some partners and choose others they prefer, the former showing no discomfiture, and seeking their fortune elsewhere. A curtsy on the part of a lady is often only a

nod of the head, which, owing to the rigidity of the body, gives the fair ones the appearance of porcelain figures.

The English hand-shaking is so much in fashion here that a new-comer welcomes everyone in the same way, friends and strangers being alike included in the round taken of the room. In every assembly there are separate rooms for ladies and gentlemen; the line of demarcation that divides the sexes in true Eastern fashion is at first sight scarcely perceptible, as the doors of communication between the two rooms are never closed; but in truth the barrier that separates the male from the female sex, though not absolutely impassable, is at least difficult to surmount. An antique custom, like unto a Cerberus, is ever on the watch, forbidding a friendly intercourse between all the guests. The conversation is so conventional that one can calculate beforehand upon what will be said and what answer will be given. A European is astonished to hear each guest thank the master and mistress of the house after a meal, or, when pressed to eat more, bluntly say, 'I cannot have any more—I am full,' instead of making an excuse.

French, which but few can speak, is con-

sidered the *ne-plus-ultra* of good taste and education. In some ladies' schools in Krasnydiarsk or Irkoutsk one comes across Frenchwomen, who, tired of remaining as nurses in European Russia, come to Siberia, and assume at once the rôle of governesses. Such specimens teach their pupils the various axioms and idioms of their native provinces. In this way a girl, after finishing her education, returns home with a large or small stock of phrases, according to her memory, the meaning of which she generally ignores, and which she uses at hap-hazard in conversation, and thus carries off the palm of feminine superiority. Mothers and fathers are very proud of this accomplishment of their daughters, and there have been cases when hearing this to them all the more prized because wholly unintelligible language, they have been unable to refuse anything to such highly educated children.

I heard that a young lady, the daughter of a high government official, fell in love with a young man of a much lower grade in official hierarchy. Her father, mindful of the dignity of his position, would not hear of the match taking place which was so much below his ambitious views; the poor girl wept over her love

in vain. Her despair might have lasted a long time had not a schoolfellow suggested that she should once more ask her father's permission, but this time in French. Agreeing to this proposition, the daughter again went to her father and exclaimed, in a tragic tone,

‘Du temps!’

The old man, hearing these loved accents, put aside his papers, and listened attentively to the child, who did him so much honour. She went on, in a voice broken by emotion,

‘Il fait beau, il y a du vent, il neige, il gèle, il pleut : prenez votre parapluie et allez vous promener.’

‘Well, well, my child,’ cried the father, weeping tears of joy, ‘I will give my consent. Let it be as you wish. Marry him.’

Later on he related to his friends,

‘I would never have consented to this marriage, but she begged of me in French, and I had not the heart to refuse.’

Another growth of the nineteenth century is the so-called ‘Lionne.’ This type first appeared in Paris some twenty years ago, and, after a short reign, gave way to a new fashion, whose aim is to equalise the rights of men and women.

Female emancipation in its most primitive garb could never exist in Siberia. There men read little, reason less, and never discuss any social question whatever. Instead of emancipated women, we have the so-called 'lioness.' This outgrowth of modern society, caricatured by local influences, occupies an important position in the annals of fashion, taste, and luxury. It is a sight which, like the Aurora Borealis, can only be seen in certain latitudes.

The lioness (*frantiha*) of Siberia in no way resembles her Parisian namesake. Other habits and customs, and a different climate, tend to make this difference. All the Siberian women are accustomed from childhood to home occupations, and to live in the narrow round of domestic duties, and many retain the habits of their youth after taking up the *rôle* of lioness.

Far be it from me to blame the love of work, which is honourable in any sphere; but the assimilation of some most prosaic household duty with fantastic dress and great mannerism in speech and gesture, produces a queer, unnatural effect, and borders on caricature. This incongruity is constantly to be met with. The kitchen for a Siberian woman has an attraction that is unsurpassed by all others.

Often when dressed in silks and satins, and while conversing with her guests, she is seized with a desire to fry a blin (pancakes). Without an excuse, without changing her dress, she leaves her friends, and betakes herself to her beloved pastime. She will do her own marketing, dressed sumptuously, much to the admiration of the peasants and Moudziks. The contrast of her fine clothes with the filthy condition of the market, and the incongruity of a hand clothed in lemon-coloured kid gloves, holding up a leg of mutton, cannot but strike the beholder, and the careful and thoughtful study of a lean sucking-pig or a plump beefsteak through a gold eyeglass has a truly comical effect.

The Siberian lioness does not ride or shoot; but she smokes countless cigarettes, sleeps the greater part of the day, and plays cards through the night. She is not troubled with hysterics or nerves; likes a drop of nalevka (Russian whisky); only fears her husband when he comes home tipsy, and can, when angered, use words completely devoid of classic beauty. Sometimes she tries to rise above her usual sphere of small-talk and scandal. Then arises a perfect chaos. During the Franco-Prussian

war, men used to discuss the facts of the struggle; the lioness, eager to show her knowledge of politics, repeated the names she heard mentioned, fitting them to any event just then uppermost.

I heard one of these ladies relate most interesting facts about the burning of MacMahon's house; of the great battle fought by the gallant Thiers at Strasbourg; and of the shooting of the Prussian emperor by the celebrated revolutionist, Moltke.

Having described the character and habits of a northern fashionable lady, I ought to add a few remarks upon the externals of Siberian fashion. Climate has much to do with the alterations of European patterns here. In this latitude, after a few weeks of summer, a fearful winter arrives, during which all living creatures have to struggle with a cold of 30 degrees below zero, and Fashion must then bow to Nature's laws.

Like a moth undergoing many changes is a Siberian lady while passing from her house to the outer air, only in an inverse sense. Suddenly from a gay butterfly passing from well-warmed rooms to a still warmer kitchen she becomes a furry caterpillar. A well-wrapped

up lady sitting in a sleigh might be a man. She is surrounded by furs, her head covered with a man's fur cap, her forehead, mouth, and cheeks are hidden—in a word, she is a shapeless mass. From the midst of these wraps only the nose projects, and, like a thermometer, by the brightness of its colouring indicates the state of the temperature.

It is difficult to understand the pleasures of sleighing under such circumstances, and yet it is an amusement that Siberian women are madly fond of. Beginning with quite small children up to the aged grandmother, and irrespective of all social standing, the women know of nothing so enjoyable as skimming fast over the hardened snowy surface. They can neither see nor hear anything, and become stiff with cold, and yet they never miss an opportunity for a sleighing expedition. The source of this doubtful pleasure is to be found in fashion. The Siberian fair sex feel themselves bound to imitate the St. Petersburg and Moscow ladies, entirely forgetting that the climate in these two last-mentioned places is very much milder than their own. To show one's equipage and sables is the first incentive, the wish to imitate others and an acquired habit do the rest.

In the choice of furs, Siberian ladies have no taste. Furs as a rule should be looked upon more as a protection to man than as an ornament; but by a judicious selection good effects can be obtained. The black or so-called blue fox is one of the finest furs in the world, it is soft and downy, and the peculiar sheen on its hair makes it most becoming to a fair-haired woman. But the native ladies, though blonde and blue-eyed, do not understand how to employ this grand production of the northern fauna. Living in Siberia, the native place of the blue fox, they very seldom use its fur, and then only for linings. They are not actuated by the spirit of economy, but by that of imitation. The sables they use are, in truth, very handsome, and hold rank next to that of the blue fox; but they are so profusely decorated with them that an ornament is changed into an excess. A dress is often trimmed with narrow sable, though such a manner of using fur has neither warmth nor beauty to recommend it. Less wealthy persons wear American squirrel, which abounds in Siberia. There are two kinds—the backs and the bellies. These last are white, with little black tails sewn on to them as in ermine. Large collars made with

the tails hanging all round are among the most unfortunate outbursts of local fashion.

The general absence of good taste is the reason that, in spite of the many treasures in which Siberia abounds, their adaptation to the requirements of dress do not realise our European ideas. And it cannot be otherwise. Good taste can only become universal by good example and education, as what is constantly before our eyes is unwittingly assimilated, and becomes a personal sentiment. However well the Siberian ladies know that the birthplace of fashion is on the borders of the Seine, or can be found near the Neva or Vistula, yet the constant sight of Tartar, Mongul, and Tunguz costumes influences their ideas more than a cold fashion plate.

Anxious to imitate the latter, they unconsciously assume the characteristics of the former, and the constant sight of the bright colours, high caps, and enormous furs worn by the aborigines has become the keystone to the formation of a fashion and a type essentially differing from the rest of the world. Besides, the local traders, going twice a year to the Irbit and the Nijni Novgorod markets, purchase their wares according to their own taste, which is anything

but artistic. The silks and satins they bring home are of the brightest shades, the shawls of the most fantastic patterns, and the bonnets of shapes that defy description. Had local influence not tended to spoil the good taste innate in women, the absence of choice would have produced the same effect. A buyer unable to purchase what she requires must take what is there, and purchases articles which could never have been sold in Europe. Any artistic instinct that might have existed is killed by an utter impossibility of either developing or retaining it.

Under such circumstances, poor fashion, half-starved and killed by cold, having in its long journey lost its most salient points, becomes unrecognisable, and, like a hot-house flower exposed to an ill-wind loses all its beauty and soon becomes but a withered stem, so fashion, shorn of its pristine beauty, seems to say to those who have seen it in happier climes, 'You know what I was; see what I have become.'

CHAPTER VII.

THE STEPPE TRAMP.

THE steppe tramp (Bradiaga) is a type seen only in Siberia. In every country there are people too lazy to work and without any fixed habitation, but the steppe tramp can only be found in Siberia. In this there is nothing wonderful. Travelling without a penny, but with a staff, may possibly be attractive to some, and will answer in a populated country; but tramping along the snows, cold and hungry, and always in danger, can only be the outcome of dire necessity—the necessity of choosing between bad and worse.

The criminal sentenced to hard labour makes his escape. Escaping, he is always caught sooner or later, further or nearer, and sent back. This they all perfectly well know, and yet at

the very first opportunity they run away again and again. They do not so much seek liberty from their hard lot, as to obtain a momentary respite. A fearful freedom it is. A never-ending struggle with a murderous climate, with the tortures of hunger, often allayed by the help of knife or stick, and a constant hiding from pursuit, to end in being finally caught, put in irons, and sent back to the place from which he had escaped. Such is the lot of the Bradiaga. Occasionally a whole life is spent in tramping, being caught, brought back, and running away again, and so on until death liberates the unfortunate one from the burden of life, and society from a dangerous pariah, a blot on humanity.

Flight during the journey of the convicts to their first destination is not difficult, but is seldom resorted to, as it is against the rules agreed upon by the convicts. If a man then escapes, his companions have to suffer for it, the soldiers guarding them increasing their severity and visiting it upon the remaining convicts. Therefore, only unsociable characters make their escape on their journey and are sought after by the whole party, or a whole gang will run away, Escape from hard labour is quite another mat-

ter; neither the authorities nor the fellow-convicts are held responsible, and the comrades, instead of hindering, afford every help in their power, pointing out the route and providing nourishment, without which no Bradiaga could possibly leave the mines and reach the Yeniseisk province.

Hunger almost invariably forces the Bradiaga, while crossing the Buriati settlement, to commit theft. The Buriati living there hunt the Bradiaga just as they do squirrels, as in their calculation the clothes of these unfortunate wretches, however bad, are worth more than five copecks ($2\frac{1}{2}$ d.) which sum is the price they obtain for the skin of an American squirrel.

When the Bradiaga is not in want of food, he neither molests nor is molested. Escaping from Schichtamy, Akatuga, the Kagan mines and other places of the Nertshinsk district, the tramp has a long, weary road before him. From the Baikal there is the choice of two ways, one across the lake and the other round the Kiakhtha. The courageous and determined choose the first; they have to cross a stormy and almost bottomless lake, of which the peasants have a tradition that it drowns all who do not honour it with the title of sea. (In

Siberia no one calls the Baikal a lake. In the town of Irkoutsk one of the streets, now called Amoor Street, was formerly known as the street beyond the sea.)

After a fearful crossing, two ways offer themselves to the deserter, a dry and a wet one. The former leads along the banks of the Lena, across the hilly wastes—the latter on the river Angara, down to the mouth of the Yenisei. But to accomplish this a boat is necessary, and how can it be procured? The fugitives are obliged to trust themselves to rafts. On the other hand, those who go by the way of Kiakhta have to encounter other difficulties besides hunger, which is the natural outcome of such a journey in such a country. They are forced to cross a great many very deep and rapid mountain streams. The fugitives who choose this road, having passed Irkoutsk, pursue the chief postal road. This road is the only line of communication uniting Eastern Siberia with Russia existing by the province of Irkoutsk. To forsake it would be impossible, as on both sides of it there is nothing whatever but a desert. The Bradiagi must perforce follow this track, hiding in the bushes when they hear the sound of post-horses. In some places,

such as when crossing a river, they creep away from the direct course to cross on rafts. If by a lucky chance they possess a hatchet, the raft is soon made, as they have but to collect the trees thrown down by the wind and tie them together. Trusting themselves to this improvised raft, many get drowned in the transit.

Often women accompany the Bradiagi, and their end is almost always a tragic one. Having relations with two or three of the men, they are the cause of numerous quarrels, till at last the men come to an understanding among themselves, and, anxious to put an end to the cause of the disputes, agree to drown or hang the woman at the first opportunity. Women have a very hard time. Looked upon as household chattels by the tramps, they are sold, bought, or gambled for by them; but, in spite of such treatment, there are always female volunteers whenever a convict makes his escape.

Having once reached the province of Yeniseisk, the tramps can avoid the chief road and travel along by-paths. They give a wide berth to Krasnydiarsk, but in the province of Tomsk they are obliged to visit the town, and it is there that they are mostly caught.

The ones that escape from the Altai mining district endeavour to reach the villages situated in the vicinity of the Teletska lakes, and winter there, resuming their journey towards the steppes of Kirghiz in the spring. Those who try the north, have a dangerous journey across the Ural mountains, as the villagers in that district institute regular hunts against the tramps. Of all the ways open, the one offering least danger is the road to Tiumen, through Turinsk and on by the northern part of the Vologodsk province. But as a rule the Bradiagi dislike that road, considering it a cold and hungry journey.

Some of the tramps have run away above thirty times, and in their peregrinations tried all the above routes. According to the police, the number of runaways from the mines last year amounted to five thousand, but in reality the numbers are smaller. The reason for this discrepancy is as follows. Let us suppose that Ivan the nameless (nameless are those who when arrested refuse to give their surname under the plea that they have forgotten it: in former days many went under that appellation) runs away from the Irkoutsk mines. He is caught under the name of Feodor Solowiew,

and is entered in another establishment from which he soon makes his escape. Caught a third time, he is now Theodor Orlow, and is sent somewhere else. Theodor Orlow disappears after a certain time, and changes his name into that of Peter Nicolaieff. Whenever he is caught, he gives a new name, and if some old comrades recognize him as the former Ivan the nameless, they keep his secret, saying, 'What does it matter whether he is Ivan, or Peter, or Theodor, he is a man like ourselves, that is enough.'

The tramps seldom provide themselves with false passports, though it is easy enough to procure them in the mines. But many take care to carry away a pair of light irons, so that in case they were caught, they should not have heavy ones put on, but allow the authorities to make use of those ready at hand. Almost all of them have light iron hoops sewn in leather, to wear on the feet under the heavy irons to prevent them from cutting into the flesh when marching.

In the whole of the Yeniseisk and Tobolsk provinces there is a sort of understanding between the villagers and the runaways. The peasants not only do not hunt the Bradiagi,

but give them food and other necessaries. The tramps on their side, even when in superior numbers, never attack the inhabitants, except in cases when it is absolutely necessary to do so to ensure their own safety. Such mutual concessions arise not only from habit, but from mutual interest.

When on a dark night (they only traverse villages at night) a peasant is roused from his slumbers by a loud knocking at the door, and his question is answered, 'The unfortunate ones,' he runs to his store-room, and, getting food, throws it over the wall as quickly as possible, without opening the gate or asking any explanation; the recipients thank him, and as quickly withdraw. The peasant knows that a refusal would lead to arson, and perhaps murder, that the inhabitants of an inhospitable village would lay themselves open to the vengeance of a sometimes numerous band of tramps.

They, on the other hand, are aware that by burning and murdering they mark the track they are pursuing, and thus facilitate their capture, besides the danger of the peasants inciting and throwing endless difficulties in the way of their flight. For these reasons, a per-

fect understanding exists between the convict and the villagers.

In towns things are very different. There, there are authorities who cannot wink at such goings-on, whose duties are to keep order and ensure public safety. That is why, when possible, the Bradiagi avoid towns.

What kind of people these tramps are can easily be imagined when it is known that the very worst criminals are sent to the mines, and that men who are sent to settle in Siberia for minor offences never have recourse to flight.

One of the leading characteristics of the Bradiagi, that distinguishes them from other murderers and freebooters, is their complete indifference and absence of irritation and passion when committing a deed of blood. A beginner, who has not passed the school of mines, is more or less excited when committing a murder, the fearful sight of blood driving him to frenzy, and forcing the more timid ones to seek courage in drink. The steppe tramps have no experience of these sensations. Hardened in crime, they kill with the greatest unconcern. What astonishes one most is the combination of the most hardened crime with some religious ideas, and also a certain degree

of humility, born of the severe discipline of hard labour, which produces a show of pity towards the victim they are destroying in the most cold-blooded manner.

Misfortune—and the Bradiagi is one of the most unfortunate of beings in creation—unconsciously turns their thoughts towards religion, while the absence of all moral rules leads them to ascribe all the sins they commit to fatality. I have on several occasions found myself in roadside prisons or criminal hospitals with these convicts, who, in justification of their crimes, invariably said, ‘We are poor sinners, but also most unfortunate, and therefore God will forgive us all our sins.’

Whenever they see a cross, they always take off their caps and cross themselves. In hospitals and prisons, and even when pressed with hunger, they seldom allow themselves meat upon fast-days. In conversation they are very fond of quoting what at first sight seem Scripture texts, but what in reality are phrases made up by themselves for their own justification, such as, ‘God hates the rich ones of this world.’ ‘Sin committed in perfect humility is no sin.’ ‘If you must kill a man, don’t kill his soul.’

Besides these religious sayings, they have a

great many proverbs which clearly indicate their lawless nature, viz.,

‘Prison is not death, the knout not a halter, a strap not a bullet.’

‘He is not a thief who steals, but he who allows himself to be caught.’

‘Dead men tell no tales.’

‘A fool gives, a wise man takes.’

‘What you can get is yours, what you cannot obtain is other people’s.’

To describe more fully this class of men, whose type is wholly unknown in Europe, I will relate the following fact:—

In one of the more important Siberian villages, called Balachta, lived two settlers sent there as punishment for some small offence; one a Russian called Intezgu, the other a Pole. They were both shoemakers, and entered into a partnership so as to work together and by their concentrated efforts earn a small living. One day they went from the village some ten or twenty versts with the intention of cutting small pieces of wood used by shoemakers in pegging boots. Reaching a few straggling bushes they separated and each began to cut the small twigs they required. As ill luck would have it, a party of twelve tramps just

then passed. Perceiving the Pole, they surrounded him in an instant. Intezgu, who was but a few paces off, hid in the bushes and witnessed what followed. He could not help his friend, as he knew that if he showed himself he would be at once killed. Trembling with fear and holding his breath he was compelled to remain an unwilling witness of the tragedy.

‘Hail, friend,’ said the tramps, taking off their caps. ‘Bad luck to you that you have met us, but you see it is not our fault. Such is the will of God. How much money have you got?’

‘Five roubles, which I will give you as well as my clothes if you will only spare my life.’

‘Your life is of no use to us, and we would really like to let you go, but you see, dear friend, we have our laws which we cannot avoid. If you were to escape alive, you would report us to the police, and we might be caught. Therefore forgive us poor sinners—but die you must.’

‘I swear I will not denounce you.’

‘Yes, yes ; one always says that when afraid and forgets it afterwards, we know. You had better lose no time talking, but pray a little like a good Christian. We don’t want to

torture you, you can choose your own way to die.'

All this conversation passed in a low, soft voice, as if in gentle persuasion. The countenances of the murderers bore no trace of anger or fierceness; they proceeded as if murder was an every-day fact that required no kind of thought.

The Pole tried to soften them by his prayers, when one of the tramps, who appeared the chief, took his hand kindly, kissed him and said, in a friendly tone,

'Good man, don't be a baby and ask for a life we cannot give you. You and we are both the children of one father. Let us finish this business in a brotherly fashion. By resisting, you will only suffer more when passing from life to death. Choose which death you prefer. The knife, or stick, or river, which is very deep. Or perhaps you would prefer to kill yourself. We will even allow that.'

The unfortunate man saw that nothing could save him, and courageously submitted himself to his fate.

'I will not wilfully take my own life,' he said. 'God has given it me, and I will not assail it. I shudder at the knife, and drown-

ing is a painful death. Kill me with your sticks, but pray kill me at once.'

'Be quite easy, we have had a good deal of practice, and you won't feel anything.'

'And now let me pray.'

'Certainly, but let us first wish you good-bye.'

And each of the tramps kissed him and said, separately,

'Forgive us, dear brother.'

He knelt down and entrusted his soul to the Most High. When he had finished, he looked at his murderers standing silently round him.

'Are you ready?' asked the chief.

'Ready,' he answered, in a low voice.

It was his last word; a few blows with a strong stick on the temple stretched him senseless on the ground. The tramps then stripped the corpse, tied a stone to the neck, and threw it into the river.

'A pity,' said the chief, walking away slowly, and lighting his short pipe, 'that some other man did not meet us instead of this one. I am very sorry for him.'

'True,' answered another, 'he seemed a good man.'

'So quiet and not at all quarrelsome,' added a third.

'In that he showed his good sense,' finished the chief.

And, after having thus sung the praises of their victim, they lost themselves in the wood. Their last words were his funeral oration.

CHAPTER VIII.

ONE YEAR OUT OF NINE SPENT IN THE DESERT.

I AM living in a province composed of almost endless wastes, without towns or villages, with but a few very small settlements, inhabited by various sectarians—such as those of the old faith—Sabaterians, etc.

Such settlements have no intercourse with other inhabited places. Not only the great distances which separate them, but also the vast moral difference existing between the religion of the inhabitants, tends to produce this isolation. No public roads run through it. In the winter, the whole face of the country is a sheet of ice and snow, with here and there, like dust scattered by chance, a few miserable cottages or native forts. In the summer, the steppes are covered with long

green grass, teeming with organic life, but fearful in its intense repose and stillness.

The colony I was forced to live in consisted of but seven cottages, or rather badly-built huts. They formed a sharp-pointed triangle, finished by a single hut. This latter was my dwelling.

The polar winter had come; the fearful long winter, benumbing all outward signs of life; freezing thought, stopping the breath, annihilating energy, will, and endurance. The dim light of day, that lasted but for *four* hours, could hardly penetrate through the bladder that did duty for glass in my window. The night of twenty hours' duration was black, sinister, and funereal. The population of the settlement was composed of believers of the old faith, some twenty in number. They were melancholy, silent, and unsociable.

In summer, these people are engaged in agriculture; in winter, they rest, shut up in their own cottages. On feast days they never drink or carouse, but pray and meditate. A man of another faith is considered by them as a lost being, a creature who can perhaps be tolerated, but never under any circumstances associated with. The life of a stranger, thrown amid

these sectarians, is never in the slightest danger, as they scorn any baseness; and there is no instance of a murder having been committed by them. But the stranger who has to live among them, remains a separate unit, outside the life surrounding him.

I knew of this, and could have chosen a merry, sociable village, ringing with song and dance, but I preferred this nest of the sinister sectarians, choosing rather to be surrounded by the external signs of a living tomb than to find a real tomb under the delusive marks of life.

The silence surrounding me is truly awful. The whole world looks like an enormous block of ice, dead, sterile, numb. The eye, wearied by incessant whiteness, finds no resting-place; the ear vainly strains to catch some faint pulse of life in this endless silence. Nothing! not even the barking of a dog, the lowing of a cow, the croak of a raven to show life. Men are not to be heard, animals are silent and half-perished with cold; only sometimes, in the dead of night, the howling of hungry wolves breaks the stillness.

The walls of my hut are lined inside with thick felt, which deadens any sound that may

arise. In the next room lives a whole family, and yet it seems to me that there is no one there; they never talk, or walk, or show signs of life in any way—they are always praying. Three times a day my landlady brings me my food. She is a tall, gaunt woman, with strongly marked features and ascetic, melancholy eyes. Like an automaton moved by a hidden string, she silently puts down my food, and disappears. If questioned, she answers in monosyllables or a nod, but frequently she does not reply in any way. The other members of the family I have not even seen; and, by an agreement entered into upon hiring my room, I am forbidden to go into their part of the cottage.

Only once during the long winter my landlord, the patriarch of the family, came into my chamber. The motive which induced him to break through their customs must have been a powerful one. I looked at him curiously. He was a venerable old man; his long white beard reached down to his waist, his deep-set eyes were full of fire—that intensity of expression which a fixed idea imprints upon the face, and that fire which is seen but in the eyes of madmen or fanatics.

‘Man,’ he said, slowly, ‘I have come to thee

not as a brother, as no one can be our brother who does not share our faith, but as an apostle of truth. To preach the truth and lead the erring ones aright is our duty. In allowing thee the shelter of our roof, I gave thee to understand what I expected, namely, quietness, a moral life, and the absence of evil habits. Thou didst agree, saying that thou wert fond of quietness, that morality was thy law, and that thou didst not possess any evil habits. The two first conditions have been faithfully fulfilled—thou art neither seen nor heard, and drink is never found in thy room; but unfortunately thou art not free from the frightful evil of smoking. I have come to tell thee that, unless thou canst forego this hideous habit, I will be forced to give thee notice to quit.’

Smoking a pipe is considered by people of the old faith as one of the greatest sins, and one for which there is no forgiveness. According to their belief, every crime can be expiated by repentance except this one. In any other circumstances I should have burst out laughing at such a request, expressed in such pompous language; but knowing their creed, and situated as I was, and fearing to lose this safe lodging, I answered, with equal seriousness,

‘I respect your ideas, and expect you to respect mine. I am doing no harm either to myself or others. I never disturb you in your ceremonies and prayers; leave me the enjoyment of the only pleasure I can have in this solitude; but, if you cannot agree to this, I am ready to depart.’

The old man tried hard to persuade me to give up such a pernicious habit, quoting passages from the ancient books to strengthen his arguments; but perceiving that I was immovable, and loth to lose a quiet and respectable tenant, he sighed deeply, and bade me farewell in the following words:

‘Do as you like. I have fulfilled my duty in warning thee—thy sin be on thy head.’

He left me, and I have never seen him since.

This was the only incident that marked the monotony of my life during the long polar winter. From that time the days followed each other slowly and heavily. The bladders with which the windows were protected admitted but a faint light, the darkness seemed endless, and this eternal night created most melancholy ideas.

Isolated as I was, I began to live in an inner life—a life full of illusions and fantastic visions,

and one that could only be understood by men living in a desert. A man struck down by sudden misfortune, but at the same time compelled to live amongst his fellow-beings, may wish to isolate himself, but cannot do so even with the best intentions. The teeming life around him percolates through the chinks of the moral seclusion he tries to build up, and weaves the thread of his being into the skein of social vitality around him. The quietest retreat, the convent, cannot wholly escape that law of Nature which forbids a man to be a unit apart from his fellow-beings.

In the steppes, where but a handful of men are scattered over an endless surface—a handful united by no ties, who ignore social duties, and dream not of social intercourse—such a severance from the world comes as easily as imperceptibly. In the first moments a man separated from society cannot be content with his enforced solitude. He knocks at the breasts of the automatons surrounding him, seeking a heart, and in trying to pierce the mental darkness in search of light plunges into ice and snow instead of any indications of human warmth. The automaton remains silent, and an icy dimness settles on the imagination, the

outstretched hand falls powerless, and, as a hurt snail shrinks into its shell, so the man retires into himself. Thought then is ever at work ; left to itself, it is apt to lead to despair and degradation ; helped by grace from above, it purifies and elevates the soul.

The greatest of life's mysteries is the knowledge of self. Were man able to fathom his own being in all its aspects, how near he would approach to the eternal truth ! But is there one of us able to examine himself impartially ? We strive after knowledge, surround ourselves with earthly affections, seek for fleeting emotions, and desire to know everything ; but we do not know ourselves. If perchance we turn our thoughts inwards, how soon do outward and passing events distract us, or self-love and vanity warp our reflections.

In solitude things are different. A man looks round for a starting-point to his thoughts and sees no human being ; unable to live in the present, his mind travels back. Bygone events pass before his eyes shorn of their illusions, naked, real ; he ponders, strives to understand the cause of each event, and finally sees from a new point of view. No longer blinded by vanity (which in a solitary life cannot live) he

perceives that most of the evil which has befallen him was of his own making. He was accustomed to complain of the indifference of those around him, and yet he had not tried to conciliate them; he grieved for the decadence of friendly feelings, and he did nothing to strengthen them; he grumbled at fate, when he had helped his own fall; blinded by self-love he had honoured himself and knew not how to honour others.

Having in this way reviewed his past life, and discovered that he himself had been the cause of most of his misfortunes, a man ponders over the causes that had insensibly influenced him, and upon his faults and vices. Alone amid a frightful monotony he weighs coldly the good and the bad, and assures himself how much the latter prevails. This knowledge is the true awakening of self. Then comes an apparently gigantic labour, but in truth an easy one; helped by God and misfortune, the crowning point is won of Christian humility.

Living this life, I was enabled to gradually overcome all my sufferings amid the horizon surrounding me. I created a mental world; without books or occupations, deprived of the sight of man, alone in a snowy desert, I did

not feel my solitude. When Polar cold benumbed all signs of organic life, when the wind, whirling madly along the steppes, threw a snowy dust against my windows, when hungry wolves joined their dismal howlings to the whistling of the hurricane, I, indifferent to the frightful reality around me, was carried far, far away on the wings of imagination; short days and long nights passed alike, weeks and months sped out and I felt not their flight; the present had ceased to exist for me.

There were moments when the mysterious tie uniting me to the rest of the world made itself felt. I remembered the person I loved in childhood, viz., Robinson Crusoe, and decided to imitate him. Observing the sun moving along one of the walls of my hut, I made lines marking hours and even quarters. This primitive clock had many imperfections, but it had the advantage of marking the time for the few short hours that the sun remained above the horizon. Subsequently I made an ozonometer. I proceeded in the following manner. Possessing some chemicals with which I had provided myself in case of sudden illness, as I was dependent upon my own medical skill, I took half a grain of camphor, the same of ammonia and

saltpetre, and melted these ingredients separately in spirit, applying heat to the camphor as being less soluble than the others. When all were liquified, I poured them into one bottle, sealed it hermetically, and hung it up facing the north. The crystals that formed at the bottom of the bottle showed me the state of the atmosphere.*

Possessing now a clock and a weather-glass, I endeavoured to procure for myself some society. Forsaken by man, I turned towards animals. A faithful dog had long shared my solitude; I now set traps and caught some half-frozen and starved birds. These poor little creatures did not seem to regret the loss of their liberty; they knew that out on the steppes death awaited them, and, though at first shy, they soon welcomed the hand that fed them.

In these occupations and amusements a long time passed. No signs indicated the termination of what seemed the normal season in these advanced latitudes, when suddenly, without any

* When there was a sediment at the bottom of the barometer, a frost was certain; when little flakes appeared, a storm was brewing; when large flakes, snow was coming on. Small clots indicated wind, the lower they descended the colder it became. A pin-hole must be made in the cork with which the tube is closed.

warning whatever, spring came on. You Europeans, accustomed to the gradual changes of Nature, can you understand this sudden metamorphosis, this jump from one extreme to another, which in a moment changes the whole aspect of the polar world ?

It was winter. A thick coating of snow covered the ground, uniting it with the grey horizon ; thick layers of ice imprisoned the mighty rivers like iron bucklers. No life was anywhere, no song of birds, no perfume of flowers, no hum of insects ; stillness, death, and numbness all around. All at once the pale, misty sun pours out warmer rays, icebergs tremble at their base and discharge countless streams, the icy rivers heave their mighty lungs, swell their bosoms and break their bounds with a sound like thunder. A few days go by ; the icebergs that shot almost into the sky are but shapeless masses, and, out of the streams that sap their bases, lakes, rivers, and waterfalls arise. The whole surface of the earth puts on the appearance of a limitless ocean. A few days pass, and all this water sinks into the thawing earth without leaving a trace behind. On the black, bleak surface where had risen mighty icebergs, and which later had been

covered with waves, the grass begins to spring. Before the eye accustomed to snow can well realise the change, the little grass has spread and turned the whole of the surface of the earth into smiling meadows, while millions of brightly-coloured flowers peep from this variegated carpet. The hitherto naked trees are covered with leaves, troops of birds warble noisily, insects fill the air with their incessant hum, the air is full of perfume, and the torpor of winter is turned into teeming life.

I too breathe more freely ; the bladders are removed from my little window, and my room is filled with radiant sunshine, instead of the half-light of twilight ; the oppressive heat of the stove has given way to a refreshing breeze. My landlord and his family have, with the rest of the villagers, gone to work in the fields ; only a few decrepit old people remain behind, who sit outside upon their doorsteps staring idiotically around them and saying their prayers. It is the custom among the peasants of Siberia, particularly amongst those in small settlements, to leave their houses in the spring and live in the distant fields during the time of work. There they build temporary huts, which they inhabit until the winter, and

leave their real homes in charge of old men who are no longer able to work.

I spend whole days in the fields, where the grass almost rises to my waist, or, tired with rambling, I rest in the welcome shade of a willow wood. What buoyant life there is around me! All simmers, boils, stirs with sap; noise, hum, song are everywhere. Everything, from the hardly-seen fly to the mightiest inhabitant of the forest, desires to make up for lost time, and profit by the short-lived smile of spring. Varied and unknown insects pass before my eyes, bright, transparent flies descend upon the soft grass, numerous birds wake the echoes with their song. Here and there the head of a little animal peeps between the branches, and watches curiously the life around.

In the evening, tired with my rambles in the fields, valleys, and mountains, I sit beside my little window. The sounds of day are dying, and the sun, sinking slowly towards the west, is dyeing with its last rays the waters of the distant Yenisei a blood-red.

Sometimes, while looking out mechanically, I am far-away in thought in other lands, beneath other skies. In the outline of the moun-

tains I picture cities and mighty castles, while blocks of granite scattered at their base take the shape of walls encircling fortresses, and the light summer-clouds become wreaths of smoke issuing from high factory chimneys. Thus I sought life for which my heart yearned, and during long hours I peopled the desert with the pictures of my imagination. I evoked out of nothingness fantastic shapes of bygone hours. Vain efforts. A moment came when reality asserted itself and scattered my fancies, as a cold Siberian wind sweeps away the morning mists hanging upon the earth.

When I allowed my thoughts to wander beyond the land I actually saw, I shuddered. These blue mountains melting into distance, these smiling fields, the animal life, and the few people who surrounded me were but an oasis in a desert. A few hundred versts further, and there was—nothing! Nothing—a fearful word.

A limitless expanse is there, hundreds, thousands of versts, a space thought cannot gauge, without villages, houses, men. These solitary lands have never been peopled, and will perchance remain for ever without an inhabitant. The few people near me are as nothing in this

space without end, and I am alone and isolated amid them.

Many years ago I read the story of a man who lived by himself in a planet. His sufferings were frightful, and the author, with a profound knowledge of human nature, painted in vivid colours his first thoughts and sensations and finally his doubt and despair. I compared myself to that man, analysed each feeling, watched each throb of pain, and felt a fiendish pleasure in thus irritating the wounds of my aching heart.

So passed days and weeks; the balmy warmth of spring gave way to the burning heat of summer, the hitherto gentle rays of the sun now fell scorchingly upon the earth, withering everything with their burning glare. The air became like the wind from a crater, water the molten lava, and light the flame. There was not even a passing cloud in the sky, a breath of air, or a drop of dew. The birds flew away to the woods, the animals that had lately played in the meadows hid again in their dens, and even the insects sought the shelter of the long grass from the rays of the polar summer sun.

Silence, heat, and glare are all around. In the evening, when the sun was less severe, mil-

lions of insects unknown in Europe obscured the air. Nature, which in milder latitudes we call mother, here enacts the rôle of step-mother. In winter she checks all organic life with her cold embrace, in summer she is chary of even giving air to breathe, poisoning it by the presence of myriads of Eumenidæ (a family of insects allied to wasps). Her only smiles are the few weeks of spring, but this passing caress seems like a sarcasm, followed as it is by the tortures of summer.

The only peaceful time in summer is night; it comes on quickly and unexpectedly. The beautiful half-tints of twilight are unknown here. Hardly has the sun set, when, like a pall covering a dead face, a dark mantle spreads upon the earth. The body enervated by the heat of the day longs for repose, yet the wish to breathe a fresher air keeps one awake in spite of fatigue. I sit at my window and enjoy the fresh air in contrast to the burning gas of the day. In the darkness I perceive small lights; they grow, spread, rise, and waves of fire soon cover the steppes and stretch along the mountains. It is the Siberian agriculturists who have set fire to the meadows they have not cut to ensure a plentiful harvest of hay next year.

This pernicious habit, against which everyone complains and which yet cannot be put down by the authorities, is the cause of many accidents. The sea of fire consumes all it comes across, trees, bushes, stacks, and sometimes villages. It is almost impossible to catch the offender, as the ignition of the steppes takes place with the full knowledge and consent of a whole settlement, and the execution is entrusted to a wandering herd-boy or a little child.

It is a grand and awful sight! From every side burst out volumes of flame, lighting up the horizon with their red glare. The illumination of the steppes has something mysterious in it. Amid uninhabited spaces the destroying element flows on like a burning tide, splashing sprays above the main sea in pillars of sparks and fire. The effect of light and shade are magnificent; every tree and bush met by the burning stream changes into a gigantic torch and feeds the conflagration which hisses, roars, and spreads until, finding no more materials to annihilate, it suddenly goes out, and the black veil covers the world anew.

The only witnesses of this fantastic scene are the beasts and birds, who fly scared from it in

terror ; the human inhabitant of the steppes is too busy just then to watch it.

Summer lasts but a short time. Nature, as if aware of the brevity of organic life in these parts, acts quickly, feverishly. Hardly have the last snows vanished, when the grain begins to come up, grows, ripens, and brings forth fruit. The farmer, anxious to fill his granaries before winter, must work incessantly and without rest. Three months of hard labour and nine of a snail-like existence in the small rooms of his dark hut, such is his life.

The settlement is empty with the exception of a few old people left in charge. Now and again one of the encamping farmers rides hurriedly in, and having obtained provisions rides off again without a word. Sometimes a little herd-boy passes with his flock of sheep, piping on a flute made out of willow bark. These are the only events in the monotony of my isolated life. Occasionally the bright sky is covered with heavy black clouds, the wind blows, the thunder roars, and all the elements seem at war with each other. On such days I breathe more freely ; witnessing these convulsions of Nature, I contrast my monotonous life with the hurricane of human passions, and feel that a hermit-

like peace is preferable to the maddening whirl of a civilized existence. Peace is not happiness. it is not even forgetfulness, but it creates a sort of lethargy which soothes unhealed wounds. There are sufferings for which medicine gives no relief and whose dying struggles last long.

The all-powerful queen of these spheres, winter, with her icy crown, snowy mantle, and aureole of Aurora Borealis is approaching with rapid strides to regain possession of her kingdom which she had yielded for a little while. Her frosty footprints are already visible, her icy breath is in the air, and her sad face is pictured in the grey clouds that overhang the horizon. The days shorten and the nights lengthen, the autumn winds whistle mournfully, the birds are away, the animals gone to their holes, the inhabitants of the settlement are home again and are snugly ensconced in their cottages. All is cold, dark, and fearful.

Just then, as if to try my moral strength, I came across a vestige of civilised life. Before me appeared a man full of social qualities, warm feelings, and eager thoughts. No automaton was he, no Siberian peasant with his best instincts degraded with drink, but an old friend of my youth who, travelling southward, had acci-

dentally fallen upon this out-of-way corner of the earth. I knew Mr. —— before leaving Poland. From his youth he was noted for his restlessness. He looked upon life as a loom where the raw materials of theory were to be worked into facts. Quietness he did not understand, rest he disliked, stagnation he loathed. Becoming acquainted with the details of my life, he could not hide his astonishment, nor understand how a man could intentionally condemn himself to such isolation.

‘It is mental death,’ he cried.

‘No, dear friend,’ I quietly answered, ‘he who lives internally dies not. The world of dreams, remembrances, and hopes is beautiful, and its horizon knows no bounds. In this ideal world no false notes of human baseness mar its perfect harmony. These,’ I said, pointing to my dog and birds, ‘are real friends; they do not return evil for good, do not betray, do not bite the hand that feeds them. My days pass monotonously but without bitterness. What happened yesterday will happen to-day and to-morrow. I meet with neither humiliation nor disappointment, the past has been my lesson, the present is my penance, and the future contains hope.’

‘And if a time should come when all that now interests you becomes stale and unprofitable, if black despair creeps into your heart, who can console and comfort you? Will you look to the living mummies, who are but men in name, who surround you, or to the animals who can but bark and twitter? Without a friend or companion, you will perish in this desert. Look at the void that surrounds you, and tell me is there anyone who can save you?’

‘There is,’ I answered.

‘Who?’ he asked in astonishment.

‘Who, the father of the orphan, the refuge of sinners, the comforter of the afflicted. He who in the heaviest trouble dries the tear and turns the torture of despair into the peace of truth and hope.’

My friend said not a word, he hung his head and sighed. With all his assumed cheerfulness and superficial trust in the strength of his character, how much to be pitied was he. He had no faith, unhappy man! he did not believe in religion.

CHAPTER IX.

GOLD-DIGGING IN SIBERIA.

WHEN, some twenty years ago, sand yielding gold was discovered in the Sacramento river masses of people flocked from all parts of the world to that place, eager to enrich themselves in a short time. It was an epidemic, an illness, and was called the 'Gold Fever.' Large cities soon arose where shortly before there had been a desert, but out of the thousands of emigrants few returned home rich, the rest mysteriously disappeared, killed by hunger or ending their miserable lives by their own hands.

The successful ones were those who understood where the real gain lay, and, abandoning the golden sand, turned their attention towards trade and handicraft, and, travelling along these abandoned paths, succeeded in making fortunes.

The quest for gold, like all other means of making a speedy fortune, is a matter of chance, and, out of the thousands who engage in it, hardly any succeed.

The Siberian soil, rich in all minerals, conceals this precious ore in its bosom, and from the moment of its discovery the local population and European speculators have been busily in search of it. The working for it is, however, quite different from the system pursued in California; the climate, the interminable forests, and some Government restrictions, combined with the small yield of gold, are the reasons of non-success, and what continues a 'fever' in California can only in Siberia remain as small traffic. The climate tends to cool any ardour; in that latitude the blood courses but feebly, the heart is not easily stirred, and, should a speculator by a lucky chance discover a rich vein of gold sand, the long, cruel winter soon checks his feverish ardour by covering the earth with an armour that no instrument can pierce.

Again, in California, a man endowed with health, desiring to enrich himself, can seek for gold unchecked, while in Siberia a concession from the government must first be obtained,

the ground must be hired or bought, machinery provided, workmen secured, and houses built to accommodate them. To provide all this, a man must be a capitalist. Lastly, the small amount of gold obtained renders the risk of loss very great. The average weight of gold found in Eastern Siberia annually is six hundreds poods; and, to give an idea how small is the yield, seventy poods of gold obtained in the Yeniseisk province were extracted from sand weighing sixty million poods. Few can get rich with such risks. They rub on from year to year much as other tradespeople do; a lucky summer enabling them to live through the idle winter. But gold-seeking in Siberia must be looked upon as a trade, and not, as in California, a quick way of making a fortune or becoming a beggar.

The yield of gold in Siberia decreases yearly; even now it is less than a few years ago, and a day is not far distant when the cost of working will surpass the profits. Even at first the mines did not bring in as much as they might have done, on account of the difficulties thrown in the way of those who worked them by the government. Concessions were only granted to certain classes. The works had to be ex-

tended over a given area, regardless of the large or small capital embarked. Small capitalists were not allowed to join together, and work in company. But latterly new and milder laws have upheld the tottering enterprises, and many of the first capitalists, who had worked their mines through their foremen, have disappeared, and in their stead small traders have arisen, who have formed companies and given a spurt to the enterprise.

The chief arteries of this new life are the points of junction; namely, the offices where workmen are hired. Business begins in winter by the purchase of food, the borrowing of money, and the exchange of bills, etc. Towns and villages gain by this activity, the peasant finding purchasers for his crops, the trader for his wares, and farmers for their cattle. Should the percentage rise, the land-produce fetches a higher price, and the activity that prevails rouses many who would otherwise be sunk in apathy.

There is therefore no fear that the absorption of capital by one kind of enterprise will be detrimental to another. If the Siberian manufactories are backward, it is not for the want of money to improve them, but because

of the carelessness of their owners. The capital of the Permialein iron works amounts to 60,000 roubles, that of the Issakow glass works to 40,000 roubles, and Gusiew new glass works, established in 1870, to 25,000 roubles; and, if the percentage upon this money is unsatisfactory, it is entirely owing to the neglect of the business, and to the production of articles of bad quality at high prices. The manufacturers are anxious to get back as much as possible of the money sunk in their enterprises, regardless of the wares they offer to their clients, and this is the chief cause of the non-success of their establishments. The mining companies cannot cramp their energies, and indeed are awakening commercial spirit, instead of hindering it. But to continue our story.

From the beginning of March, long trains of sledges are seen moving from towns and villages laden with meat, flour, and biscuits. Where driving communication ceases, all these commodities are transferred to the backs of horses, and thus taken, after a long and perilous journey, to the places where gold is obtained. These places are generally situated in the depths of virgin forests, and are almost inaccessible, save upon horseback, and still more

difficult is it to transport there the necessaries of life.

In order fully to explain the working for gold, I must enlighten the reader upon the way the land has first to be obtained. The enterpriser either chooses a spot for himself or buys one previously worked. In the former case, he starts for the desert, accompanied by several workmen, digs here and there, washes the sand, and, when he is satisfied, 'advises' the government, and from that moment is bound to pay fifteen copecks yearly for every pagonny sazen,* without any reference to the quantity of gold found thereon. The other way, viz., buying ground already provided with buildings and machinery, seems at first sight the most straightforward. But here the innate Siberian cunning steps in, and cheating commences. The true value of a lot is neither in its size nor situation, but in the quantity of ore likely to be found upon it. The seller endeavours to show an abundant produce; the

* The sazen differs in width and length. Sometimes it is four or five versts in length. The best places to find gold are valleys surrounded by mountains; and the length of the valley is measured, while its breadth is calculated from ridge to ridge, and is not measured.

buyer, knowing his countrymen, strains his attention to avoid being taken in. In spite of every care, he is generally the victim.

Before signing the agreement, some final experiments are made. The buyer, knowing that bribed workmen can easily mix golden ore in the sand they are raising, brings his own trustworthy men; but even with this precaution it constantly happens that places which during the trial yielded a fair amount of ore have subsequently been found to be barren. This phenomenon is thus explained:—While the workmen dug, the owner and his subordinates were present smoking cigarettes, shaking the ashes constantly over the newly-turned earth. These cigarettes were filled with gold sand. This trick is now so well known that I have been myself present at the drawing of an agreement in which it was distinctly stipulated that no smoking was to be allowed during the experiments. I have no doubt that some new dodge is now invented.

At the present time the gold-diggers in Siberia are formed of three classes. The rich capitalists, who possess many holdings, the moderately wealthy, with less extensive works, and the poorer men, who form companies and

divide the profits, if any. The second and third classes are the most *paying*, as want of capital limits the operations to a small sphere, and one which is more easily and conscientiously worked with personal supervision of the owners over the workmen to prevent robbery, the workmen being both low and demoralised. A rich man, living far away in towns, cannot overlook his works, and generally employs agents, who plunder him, and by their rapacity and carelessness paralyse the free development of commerce.

And, as the well-being of the farm-labourer is one of the greatest helps to agriculture, so are mining operations raised to a firmer footing by attention to the men who work there. Attention in Siberia should be directed to the ignorant and besotted miners who have through the force of circumstances sunk so low in the social scale that the labour of regenerating them will be a work of time, and will require both patience and sacrifice. Every pit-holder would gladly help if he could but be made to see how much his own interests are bound up in the well-being of these men.

We must describe the causes which have produced this state of things as well as the process of gold-finding.

It is sometimes the practice to send agents to remote villages before the gold-finding season opens, so as to secure workmen. These men are hired to commence work in the middle of March, at from three to five roubles monthly, at the most six roubles. The workman when engaged is paid from ten to fifteen roubles, and in return he delivers his papers to the agent of his employers. The money thus obtained, he drinks, and, when the time comes to begin work, he either hastens to the pit, or is conducted there by the police should he prove refractory.

Why is it that in Siberia, where wages are good, there are always men willing to forsake peaceful homes for a life of care and privation and sell themselves to the slavery of the mines, with the full knowledge of the life they must lead? Because the agents know the weak side of the men, dazzle them with the sight of money, and half-stupify them with drink and dissipation. The day of signing contracts is one of jollification. Wodka circulates freely, songs and laughter fill the air, and the men between a dance and a song sign their names.

‘Let us enjoy the present moment while we can. Why should we look forward?’

As soon as the agreements are signed, the agents disappear, wodka ceases, the musicians are silent, and there is sadness over everything. Still there is the money, the orgies recommence, and continue until the last copeck is spent, and the last coat and pair of boots have been sold for drink.

Then it is that the man, hoarse with shouting and singing, and heavy with drink, is told that the hour has come when he must work. Agents procure new boots and coats, taking out their cost from future earnings, watching to see that they do not share the fate of the former ones, and by persuasion or force the workmen are forwarded to their destination.

Now let us look at the diggings. They lie far away amid boundless forests or desert wastes, mostly in valleys surrounded by mountains. The various holdings are built over with dwellings for the accommodation of the workmen, foremen, &c. First rises a large wooden house, with small windows, the dwelling-place of the agents' agent, as the latter is generally too grand a person to bury himself in such an out-of-the-way spot so as to look after its inhabitants' requirements. On the contrary, he lives in one of the larger towns, entertains,

drinks champagne, cheats unblushingly, and sends monthly reports to the owner, in which he invariably asserts that all is prospering in the works confided to his care.

Next to the large house are stables, then houses for the foremen, and finally a long, low building, in which the workmen are crowded together in small rooms. Adjoining is a building pompously called a hospital.

From the 15th of March till May 1st the time is taken up in preparatory works, such as putting up the machinery, &c. This is light labour; the real business commences on the 1st of May. The machinery placed on the banks of the river is set in motion by water-power or horses.* Some of the workmen are employed in washing the sand, others dig and carry the sand. The first are always stationary, the latter in motion. Those who wash the sand are considered to have the lightest labour; but, standing as they do for hours knee-deep in cold water, they soon fall a prey to various diseases.

* The engines used in washing the sand are of American construction, and are very simple. A perforated cylinder and a tray with slits, into which the gold-sand settles after washing, is all they are composed of. Small owners do not even use these slight machines, and steam, though introduced, is hardly ever employed.

The other men have hard work ; two men and a horse are expected to dig and transport nine cubic feet of sand to a distance of sometimes a thousand feet. To do so they must work from dawn to night ; deducting two hours for meals, the working hours are from two a.m. until ten p.m., although the law limits them to five a.m. till eight p.m. The food is very poor, the allowance being a pound of meat (generally half-bone) a day, which is insufficient for a man doing such hard labour. A workman can, however, obtain more food on credit, the money to be paid at the end of the season ; but this facility of obtaining credit proves the ruin of many.

The agent's agent reigns over this small isolated community, the owner being neither seen nor known, the agent being seldom visible, and only appearing about once a year. His agent is the autocratic king. This man has usually led a chequered life, trying many things, and failing in all ; he therefore naturally clings to a lucrative post, and is anxious to please his superior, and also line his own pockets. Book-keeping is his chief occupation, as there are special men to watch the workmen. He dares not cheat his principal ; it

would be too dangerous; so there only remain those under his authority whom he need not have any scruples about. Surroundings favour him; the colony, being situated in distant, unrequented places, the requisites of life are almost impossible to procure, and though the men are in daily want of them, they may not absent themselves for an hour. The agent can here make his money, as the regulation rations are too small, and often too bad to be eaten, and the men must obtain food from him. This work of fleecing the poor starving colony is chiefly performed by the agent's wife or house-keeper, as he is too grand to attend to such homely details.

The work begins at daybreak. A loud call summons the workmen, and the stream is soon alive with them; some dig the sand, others wash it and throw away the gravel. Around them are stationed the guards, whose duty it is to watch that no gold is stolen, and to keep the men at work. The heat is intense, flies and mosquitoes swarm, and not a moment's rest can be taken; the relentless engine requires sand, gravel, and water. The hours of rest are insufficient to restore the wasted strength, and the food too scanty; and so it goes on for ever.

Soon these pale, starved spectres crawl to their dens, and fall fainting on the floor, not to sleep—hunger denies that; one discovers his boots are worn out, another cannot keep together the miserable rags he calls clothes, and lastly, the unfortunate wretch who seeks oblivion in drink yearns for a glass of the fiery liquid. This is the agent's golden opportunity. His wife possesses everything—good meat, needles, thread, ready-made clothes, and even in secret a bottle of vodka. These necessaries are priced most exorbitantly, but payment is not asked; all is entered in the books, and deducted on the day of reckoning. Who can resist such temptations? In the meantime, the workman's debts go on increasing, and when he thinks that the end of the year will see the end of his sufferings, he finds, to his horror, that he owes more than he has earned, and that to be free he must work another year; in that year his wants are the same, and so it continues without end.

The question of workmen's debts to their owners is one of great moment; much has been written about it lately, and means are being sought to remedy the evil.

According to government regulations, every

large establishment should be provided with a doctor, medicines, and an hospital ; in some of them good doctors, with a sense of their responsibility, are to be found, but more frequently the health of the colony is left in the charge of an ignorant apothecary, whose practice consists in alternate bleeding and blistering.

In spite of moderate pay and the high-price of all necessaries, a workman occasionally finds at the end of the year that he is in the possession of one hundred, two hundred, or even five hundred roubles. The reason of this is as follows. According to an universally-adopted system, only the gold sand belongs to the proprietor, all bits of gold that can be picked out without the help of the engine belong one third to the finder and two thirds to the owner. These finds are apart from the day's earnings, and some men are more lucky than others, some localities more favourable to them than others. Such lucky workmen are able to meet the exorbitant prices put upon everything, and to carry away a good sum of money. Reason would suggest that, taught by experience, these men would invest their earnings in some undertaking in trade or agriculture. Not so. The

man never thinks but of what is. As soon as all accounts are settled he hurries to the store, throws down his money, and buys everything he sees without thinking of bargaining. Purchasing new clothes and a red sash, and snatching up a harmonium, he departs without asking for change, singing one of the gay songs beloved by Siberian peasants. Now is the time for ambulatory speculators to bring sweatmeats, fruit, cakes, etc., to the mines; all things are bought up immediately without reference to price.

Last year a conjuror, seeing his tricks were not appreciated even in the small Siberian towns, set off for the diggings; he went without a copeck and returned with a thousand roubles.

A very few workmen are retained upon the premises during winter; they cut down and saw trees, repair houses, bring up materials; the rest by thousands must return to their homes. But how? that is the question; the shortest journey is expensive. The agent lends the money, deducting it from next year's pay. Thus those who for a short time have been rich, as well as those who are already in debt, return to their homes loaded with liabilities binding them for the future.

Many will say that these lost ones have but themselves to blame. Diggings are not a school, and workmen children. This is true; but this frenzy would not come upon them with such force when their labour is finished if that labour were not so hard and its duration curtailed.

As I have before remarked, many thinking men are endeavouring to remedy this state of things. Mr. Paul Pizzerykow, a native of the grand Duchy of Finland, who has inhabited the town of Minusinsk for many years, and lately become a part-owner of one of the diggings, has written several articles to the papers upon the question. His writings not only have been the cause of an improvement in the condition of the workmen, but have also shown the pernicious effect which the granted privileges have had upon the spread of this industry.

A new law permitting everyone to seek for gold has ruined the monopoly, and the activity which during the last year has prevailed over the whole gold surface, engenders the hope that this wise regulation will sustain the tottering enterprise.

In by-gone times a man, having a permit to explore for marble, coal, iron, zinc, or copper,

had no right to touch any gold he might come across. He had no alternative, when in his excavations he came upon the glittering metal, but to leave it to the mercies of wind and tide, useless either to himself or his country.

The new law, though disliked by the rich gold miners, is really for the public good. True, numbers of small enterprisers will dam up gold yielding water-courses to the detriment of those working lower down, and cause disputes; but is there a law framed by human hands that has not its drawbacks? When the benefits outweigh the drawbacks, the aim is attained, in spite of the objections of the few who place their own interest above public profit.

The next point is that the dark, morally blind and fallen mass of men, upon whom the whole work depends, should be raised from the mire in which they are wallowing. Let us hope that, with the abolition of the monopoly, this change will gradually be accomplished. Small holders, employing but few workmen, keep no agents, look into the smallest details themselves, and are better able to help their men and improve their condition than any law for their benefit; with physical improvement, mental will follow. To start fresh, past debts should be

forgiven and the system of unlimited credit should be crushed. This will cost two millions—a large sum; but when we bear in mind that its disbursement will be distributed among several thousands of owners, who have grown rich through the work of the wretched creatures whose cause we are advocating, we cannot but consider that it ought to be easily accomplished.

NOTE—I ought to explain that the decrease in the yield of gold spoken of by me is only experienced in the exhausted quarries of Tomsk, Yenisei, and Irkoutsk. The country of the Amoor and the immense land of the Yakutsk provinces contain unknown treasures in their bosom. A short time ago these lands were explored, and the results answered the expectations formed. In the Amoor country the new mines belonging to Messrs. Jakobson, Berinida, & Co. produce annually between one hundred and a hundred and fifty poods of gold, and the new mine of Messrs. Benardok & Co. has spread its ramifications far into the uninhabited deserts of the Yakutsk. Whoever is acquainted with this province, will understand the stupendous difficulties that had to be overcome. On the

banks of the Lena the settlements of the aborigines are often from one hundred to one thousand versts distant from each other, and leaving the river there are no traces of human habitation. To the mines situated in such deserts all necessaries of life have to be transported from immense distances, and there are not only no roads but no vestiges of human life on the way.

CHAPTER X.

SIBERIAN PEDLARS.

SIBERIAN merchants, inhabiting larger or smaller towns standing upon a large or small scale, are like in every respect to European Russian merchants, and, as these have already been minutely described by Russian novelists and authors it would be foolish to repeat what has been already said, and well said. A packman or pedlar is, however, a purely Siberian creation. I do not mean small shop-keepers, who exist in villages, and are placed there by wealthier merchants; these are already known by description.

The true Siberian pedlar is generally a well-to-do peasant, a Cossack on furlough, or a convict sent to Siberia for a crime, but not imprisoned. These men scrape a little money to-

gether, place it in business, buy at the nearest towns all sorts of useful articles, and sell them in different villages at double their value. This trade is not lucrative, despite the high prices asked, as the peasant, knowing that things can be bought cheaper and better in the small town, leaves most of his purchases until he can get there; and only deals with the pedlar when short of stores, or the bad roads or agricultural hindrances prevent the journey to town.

The pedlar has, therefore, generally another calling. If a peasant, he does not forsake his land, but makes wife or daughter serve in the shop, and during the busiest time of harvest, the shop is forsaken. Some trade in corn, in cattle, others again retain their shop as a cloak to a less creditable business and one amenable to the law. These different occupations are the reason that the Siberian packman like the god Janus is of two-fold appearance. In the morning, clad in a long dressing-gown, you can see him measuring calico and weighing sugar, and with a pleasant smile trying to give short measure and weight. In the evening, dressed in his peasant clothes, he becomes a member of the village administration, and judges various delinquencies with a severe countenance. One day he buys cheap, but sick

cows, the next as a magistrate forbids on sanitary grounds the slaughter of diseased cattle. If the pedlar is a Cossack on furlough, or a liberated exile, this double individuality shows itself differently.

In every case, Sundays and holidays make a great change, and whoever has seen a Siberian shop-keeper and family in the week-day would hardly know them on Sunday ; it is like a change of scene in the theatre.

Grigoriji Tarasicz Trosyen, the pedlar in the village of Balachta, is also the parish clerk. During the few hours spent in his office, his chief duty is signing the permits of gold-miners, that enable them to seek their livelihood elsewhere. His countenance is then grave and dignified, and he is evidently fully aware of the responsibility attached to his post, and the respect it commands. When conducting an inquiry, his penetrating eye strikes terror into the breasts of innocent people. He speaks little, and uses the plural 'we' in order to show that all the varied engines of the law are centred in him, who, though but a very subordinate official, is important to his unenlightened neighbours. As soon as official business is over, he throws aside his black coat, and with

it his judicial manner, assumes his peasant dress and fur cap, and becomes a shopkeeper. How sweet and pleasant he is then! How he smiles! how quickly he serves his customers! The poor moujik, who but a moment previously trembled before his stern, official gaze, now claps him on the back and indulges in the coarse jest so much liked by all Siberians. Grigoriji is by no means offended; on the contrary, he considers it a mark of friendship, and he who a short hour ago said, 'Everyone should be obedient before a magistrate,' now bends his back and murmurs, 'Your humble servant, at your service.' Thus in his earthly form are two characters, I had almost said souls.

As the head of the establishment thus changes in the day, so the other members likewise vary; but only on Sundays and holidays. On weekdays Grigoriji Tarasicz's house is that of a tradesman, on Sundays that of an important government official. During the week the shutters of the parlours are hermetically sealed, and the business of life is carried on in the kitchen, where lords Melanie Ignatiowna, the mistress of the house. She is an active, quarrelsome, fat matron. Children and servants all tremble at the sound of her harsh voice, which

is heard from morning till night. Even her husband, when returning from his business of an evening, draws his cap tighter about his ears and slips into the hay-loft, fearful of encountering her in an unlucky moment. The orders issuing from the kitchen, though apparently insignificant, are incessant. From dawn to night everyone is astir. Bread is baked, butter made, milk scalded, and kwas prepared.

The two daughters, Tassia and Tatiana, run about bare-footed, dirty, uncombed, unable to fulfil half that is expected of them. The eldest son chops wood and carries water; the younger, who is always in mischief, stealing eggs and playing ninepins, gets periodical beatings. The house is full of life, and the mistress is never idle, controlling everything and looking into every detail. This noise continues from Monday morning until Saturday afternoon; then a blessed calm settles on the house. From the bath-house, situated in the yard, a dense smoke issues. The whole family are taking a Turkish bath carried to an almost melting heat. After this test of fire, which no European could endure without instant apoplexy, the whole family appear, red in the face

and steaming. They partake of a slight repast and retire to bed.

The next day is the change. The house and people are the same, but the alteration is so great that a stranger to Siberian habits would hardly believe it. After church, the usually shut-up parlours stand open. These rooms are large and airy, the parquets well-polished, curtains at the windows, portières at the doors, little tables set about laden with china, and on the wall a large picture of the patron saint in a gilt frame, with a lamp before it. The place of honour on the sofa is occupied by Melanie Ignatiwna, dressed in silk or satin, with a kosinka (a head-dress worn by married women) on her head. Her daughters wear crinolines, and have stuffed out their hair with hemp to imitate frizettes. They pretend to look at some borrowed illustrated papers, which, as they cannot read, they do not much understand. Grigoriji walks up and down expecting his guests.

They soon arrive. First comes the pope (priest) and deacon, then the mayor and his wife, and other village dignitaries. All these people, though they meet every Sunday, look shy and embarrassed. The conversation em-

braces the weather, trade, cattle-disease, etc. The owner of the illustrated papers approaches the young ladies and asks,

‘How do you like the pictures?’

‘Not much—they are all black. Now trees should be green, water blue, and people’s faces pink.’

‘Listen,’ whispers Tarasicz to the pope, ‘how well my daughter talks about books. Not a stupid girl—is she?’

The cook hands tea round, and the mayor, taking up the guitar and striking it, asks the young ladies,

‘Do you like music?’

‘Who would not like it, especially when you listen to an accordion?’

‘When we lived in the province of Tomsk,’ adds another, ‘I heard the gipsies play; it was lovely. I imagine one played the fiddle, another a trumpet, and a third the flute, and—would you believe it?—although they all played together, they did not seem to interfere with each other.’

All this time Melanie sat immovable, like an idol in a pagoda. Her exalted social position required this dignity, besides which, her dress, and especially her boots, to which she was un-

accustomed, stopped her movements. Looking at her expensive dress, she counts the hours, and sighs for the time when she will return to a more congenial sphere.

Alas! dignities and grandeur have often to be heavily paid for. Many a king clad in purple longs for the time when he can enjoy himself amongst his friends. So Melanie, sitting on the sofa in silks and crinoline, sighs for freedom and the glow of the kitchen fire.

After tea more solid refreshments are handed round. The men drink many small glasses of strong spirits, conversation brightens, the faces redden, and the mayor, who as a savant considers he should lead the conversation, turns it upon thieves and robberies. This theme leads to the question whether criminals are unrecognizable or possess a distinct class of face and manner from honest people. The opinions are divided, some deeming that Nature has set a distinct seal upon all malefactors, others maintaining that they cannot be distinguished.

‘When we lived in the province of Tomsk,’ said one of the ladies, ‘a convict was sent to us there, a youth, lovely as an angel, twenty-three years old, fair hair, languid blue eyes, and a

sweet smile. He was gentle, quiet, and modest, and we all thought he had been convicted of some trifle, such as taking public money, which can befall—anyone; but fancy our astonishment when we learned he was a murderer.’

‘A murderer?’

‘Yes, and of the worst kind. He had been an officer in the Guards, and, notwithstanding his gracious manner, he was a malefactor of the deepest dye. He had taken two swords, given one to a lieutenant in his regiment, walked out with him outside the town, there fought him and killed him, and before two witnesses, too!’

‘Before witnesses?’

‘Yes, this criminal took witnesses to see him brave both heavenly and human laws. Is it not the refinement of crime! and for this he was merely exiled there; the knout or the gallows would have been more suitable.’

There was a pause—everyone wondered over the monsters of wickedness that occasionally come into the world. But we cannot improve the world! better have a drink! The men return to the table where the vodka is placed. The ladies retire into an adjoining room where, under the guidance of their hostess, who has

at last left her sofa, they partake of various refreshments. The conversation becomes noisy, and only detached phrases are heard.

‘Grigoriji Tarasicz.’

‘Fill your glass.’

‘Let all alive drink well.’

From the next room come the words,

‘Agafia Warlamoonna, don’t make any ceremony.’

‘Really, Melaine Ignatiowna, I cannot drink any more.’

‘Your wine-glass is still full.’

‘When we lived in the province of Tomsk.’

A man meanwhile continues to strum the guitar, humming an air, then the men take-up the chorus, gradually ladies’ voices chime in until they are all singing what follows.

‘A pretty girl one evening
Was minding her geese,
A dark-eyed girl
Called her geese thus:
“Tiega, tiega, tiega, tiega.”*’

After this song others follow, more energetic, about merry Vanca, the young officer, etc. All this well-sprinkled with frequent visits to the refreshment-table, until the

* The usual way of calling geese in Siberia.

songs become more and more mixed, and no vestige of harmony is left. The musician in despair throws down his guitar and accompanies the singers by hitting his tumbler with a knife. It is impossible to carry on any conversation ; one lady tries several times, but her words are smothered. The noise increases, one sings bass, another tenor, another whistles, putting his fingers in his mouth, a third claps his hands, drones out a psalm or a galop, while the host, quite tipsy, runs from one guest to another muttering the refrain, 'Tiega, tiega, tiega.'

No one remembers what follows. One thing is certain, that Grigoriji awakes next morning with a big bump on his forehead, while one guest has a black eye, and all an unaccountable pain in their bones. Except these casualties, everything resumes its normal condition on the next day. The pedlar sits behind his counter, the festive apartments are closed, Melanie's voice is heard issuing from the smoky kitchen, her daughters are barefoot, and run to the brook to wash the house-linen or prepare the pigs' food. Sic transit gloria mundi !

The above type of shopman and government

employé combined is the most defined one in Siberia; the others are shrouded in a mysterious obscurity, not easily pierced by the uninitiated.

With the Cossack packman everything is obscure; every action of his evokes a sign of interrogation. To begin with, no one knows the source of his stock-in-trade. He left the service with three roubles in his pocket, undertook a long journey, and returned with a large store of bank-notes, bought his goods, and settled in the first populous village, where he opened his shop. His business transactions are unknown, so are his profits; the half-closed shutters of his shop prevent an examination of his goods, while much is concealed in cellars, and never see daylight, and many things remain on view for years on account of the exorbitant price asked for them. He personally goes to the town, returning with cheap articles, the sale of which could not pay the expenses of his journey. But sometimes of a dark, moonless night strangers appear in his house, who unload from their carts many large cases and bundles. He confides in no one, trades alone, and will not take a copeck off, but he will occasionally sell at half-price a piece of silk or satin that has found its way accidentally among his small

rubbish. This he sells more willingly to some one from a distance than to a neighbour.

He is generally morose, silent, and short to his customers. On week-days he sits in his shop and smokes; on Sundays he does not invite in his neighbours, but shuts up his shop and seeks the nearest public, where silently and alone he gets drunk. His drunkenness never prevents his going home by himself. At night he sometimes fires out of a rusty gun to frighten away thieves, but his neighbours affirm that, soon after the report, unknown individuals crawl out of the bushes, with whom he holds secret conferences.

The Cossack pedlar is not matrimonially inclined, and, as a rule, he keeps no servant, but manages his own housekeeping. If by chance he marries, his wife is the most unhappy being in existence. Beaten on week-days from morning to night, her only chance of revenge comes on a Sunday or fête-day, when the drunken husband has not strength to escape from the whip freely used by his better-half. The tyrant of every day becomes a victim!

This man commands great respect from all the village officials; even the mayor touches his cap to him. The searches which his house

is frequently subjected to on account of the mystery enveloping it are simply matters of form, and nothing is ever found, whether owing to his roubles or his influence I have not discovered. No one likes him, but he is feared; his nearest neighbours, who suffer most by him, are afraid to complain openly, and only secretly advise the authorities. For this he cares nothing, bringing out a greasy bundle of bank-notes, and fully aware that this talisman will save him from all unpleasantness.

Such is the Siberian Cossack pedlar; if exceptions occur, it is but seldom, as almost all of them are banished for some grave crime; and in spite of the assertions of some philanthropists that a criminal can with time return to the paths of virtue, the examples taken from Siberian social life point in the opposite direction. Nothing contains so much truth as the common proverb, 'What is bred in the bone comes out in the flesh.'

This great truth is even more palpable when the sentenced criminals are more thoroughly known. Some successfully hide their bad instincts so as to earn a general esteem, but their true nature nevertheless remains the same. The Cossack pedlar is generally a man of no

education, and unable to read and write, but other criminals are often men of average, and sometimes of first-rate, education, and these are more to blame. Arriving in Siberia, they try all kinds of occupations, and, though bad to the core, they can dissimulate so well as almost always to hide their vices, and the public, unable to see beneath the surface, believes in their honesty. Many of them arrive with ill-gotten money sewn into their clothes, others marry rich Siberian women, and open a small shop as a cloak to a more lucrative, though less legal, business.

I will endeavour to show one of these men and his doings.

Saicz Gubanoff had been sent to Siberia some twenty years ago. What his social position had been no one knew; but, judging from his manner and conversation, he must have received a fair education. Those who saw him on his first arrival maintain that, in spite of his convict dress, he looked like a town dandy. But a quarter of a man's life passed in an out-of-the-way Siberian village will wear off external polish, and when I knew him all he retained of his old education was a certain dignified manner and a civilized speech, with an avoid-

ance of curses and coarse expressions. He was seldom angry, and, when so, used his fists in preference to profane words. 'God Almighty,' he used to say (differing from other convicts, who are careful not to trespass upon the second commandment), 'has given us this natural weapon of man to allow him to repulse an unjust assault, but a curse should never soil the lips of those who in prayer pronounce His holy name.'

Gubanoff, in the first year of his sojourn, married the daughter of a local peasant. His wife, like most Siberian girls, was ignorant and vulgar; besides being immoral, she was hump-backed and ugly. But these moral and physical defects were compensated by a dowry of five hundred silver roubles. Gubanoff, a man of experience, and only believing in the power of gold, was not troubled by scruples; he desired a start in life, and that his wife's dowry gave him. He at once took a packman's business, and was soon known for miles round, for his money, his ample means, and his dignity made him universally respected. Nothing exercises such influence over illiterate people as an assumption of superiority; not a man was to be found who spoke of him but with respectful

admiration, and should a murmur of dislike arise it was soon smothered by public indignation against the slanderer.

His money seemed to multiply miraculously. While carrying on a trade of small trumpery things, which gave little or no profit, he was accumulating a large capital, and no one imagined that this trade was but a blind to a more mysterious business. He was popularly thought to be extremely clever, and this reputed cleverness explained all. Such was Saicz Gubanoff in public, we shall soon see what he was in private life.

Gubanoff for a long time attended to his business single-handed, but with its increase, and other duties which took up much of his time, he decided to take an assistant. From a large number of applicants he selected a young man coming from a distant country, who had to reside in Siberia in consequence of some very sad events.*

Mr. Charles M—— belonged to a good family, and had received a good education; he was

*The author means a Polish political offender. But, had he expressed himself more clearly, his book would not have been allowed to pass through the censor's office.—
TRANSLATOR.

quiet, gentle, and, above all, thoroughly honest and honourable. The sphere he was entering was far beneath him, but it assured him a living, and he was sadly in want of that. He assented with joy to the pedlar's propositions.

'In crossing my threshold,' said Gubanoff, in his usual dignified manner, 'you become a member of my family. I am accustomed to treat my assistant like my son, and not as a servant. I hear you are a God-fearing man, and I am glad of it. Having given to God what is God's, endeavour to be grateful to people for what they do to you. Be assiduous, faithful, and sober, and your welfare is assured. I say nothing as yet about your wages, they will depend upon the value of your work. In any case, I have never yet given anyone cause to complain of me.'

Having delivered this speech, the pedlar introduced the young man to his family. It consisted of the hunchback wife, now old, half blind, nearly deaf, and stingy beyond expression, and three daughters, the eldest eighteen, and two much younger. This family-party was completed by Paraskowia, a servant girl of thirty, short, fat, and ugly, with

face pitted with small-pox. This woman, by dint of flattery and scandal, had wormed herself into the good graces of her master.

The pedlar was firmness itself in his home rule; he knew that, were he once to give way, anarchy would set-in; but, as his occupations kept him from home for days together, his power was but temporary, and as soon as he was gone petticoat government reigned supreme. The regent in these times was Masha, the eldest daughter. She was a truly lovely girl, fair-haired, blue-eyed, well made, with chiselled features. She looked the type of a repentant Magdalene. But, if Masha was like a Magdalene, the last qualification could not be applied to her. She was bad to the core, as bad as only these children of the desert can be when they once forsake the path of virtue. Her father knew of his daughter's behaviour, but was silent. What was the use of words, they will not turn paste into diamonds; besides, he was not sure whether such a state of things was not very advantageous to his pocket.

Having made the acquaintance of this respectable family, let us enter with Mr. M——.

‘Here is my new assistant,’ said Gubanoff. ‘I expect you to feed him well, and treat him as one of the family.’

The wife got down from the palata, came up to the stranger, and, having examined him all over, returned to her place, muttering,

‘Assistant, indeed! As if we had not enough mouths to feed without bringing-in strangers from the end of the world. He will eat us out of house and home.’

‘Silence, woman,’ cried her husband. ‘Don’t growl, and don’t count the pieces he puts into his mouth. I like my servants to be well fed.’

Masha, occupied with some household work, gave him a look out of her bright eyes, and whispered to the servant-girl. The tradesman returned to his shop, and Mr. M—— sat down and looked about him in silence. The beginning was not encouraging.

‘Do you know anything?’ growled the old woman. ‘Can you look after horses, chop wood, make hay? You are a stranger; and they generally only know how to eat.’

‘I have been hired as an assistant, and not as a ploughboy,’ said Mr. M——.

‘Really! Perhaps, then, you intend to sit

all day in the shop ; cheat us, stuff down food, and sleep on the palata.’

‘Shut up, mother,’ interrupted Masha. ‘You should not discourage the young man in this way. Perhaps all will go well. And now it is time to have something to eat.’

They put basins, with food in them, on the table. Masha, who at home exercised undivided sway, seated Mr. M—— by her side, gave him the best of everything, and, in fact, took him under her protection, which might have been a guarantee of a passable future, if this amability had arisen from kindness or pity.

After dinner, Mr. M—— took his master’s place in the shop. The business was not difficult. After a few directions, the new assistant performed his duties as if he had done nothing else all his life. Prices, previously doubled, had to be raised still more when selling, and only lowered as little as possible if the purchaser bargained. Credit was given to all ; people hardly ever paid ready-money. The name and debt were put down, and the master himself collected the money. He never allowed anyone to interfere with this part of his trade.

Towards evening the shop was shut, and the master, conducting his assistant into the court-

yard, threw down before the door some boards and a paliasse, and said,

‘You had better go to bed now, for you must be up early to-morrow.’

Mr. M—— looked at him with astonishment.

‘What! am I to sleep outside?’

‘And where else did you intend to sleep? The assistant ought always to mind the shop, and this is everywhere the custom. And you must not sleep too soundly, as thieves are very cunning. Here is a loaded pistol. Good night.’

The poor young man never closed his eyes all night. The cold was intense, and the sheepskins given him were not sufficient to keep him warm. But he had resolved to bear and not complain. Had he not thus to pay for the brilliant situation he had obtained, which had excited such general envy?

Thus passed my friend’s first days at the pedlar’s. The whole day behind the counter, the night outside in the cold. He spoke little, prayed ardently, and fulfilled his duties, carrying his mind far, far away to where his poor mother wept the loss of her son. In time he became accustomed to the cold nights and manifold discomforts, as necessity generally makes men used to things, and he would have

been at least content to let things go on but for an incident which had a great influence on his position in the house.

I have mentioned the character and habits of Masha. With such propensities on one side, and a hatred of all that was low and coarse on the other, a rupture soon ensued, and a cruel mortification to a hitherto very amiable beauty. Everyone knows what a woman's wounded vanity is, and Siberians are no exception to the rule. From that moment he was systematically persecuted at every opportunity. First, Masha tried to blacken his character in her father's eyes, but the cunning Gubanoff knew his daughter's character and his assistant's honesty too well to believe her stories.

Seeing this plan was useless, Masha put a few yards of cloth from the shop among the poor man's things, and then took her father to the corner where lay the scanty wardrobe. Gubanoff merely shrugged his shoulders, and rated his daughter soundly.

Then, seeing that all efforts to ruin him in her father's sight were unavailing, this vindictive enemy began a stealthy warfare without a moment's respite.

As soon as Mr. M—— had finished his morn-

ing's work and begun breakfast, he was reviled and ridiculed about his tattered garments and pretended large appetite.

'This glutton will starve us all. Look, Paraskowia, that is the fourth piece of meat he has eaten! It would be better to put him in the pig-stye, and feed him on pigs' swill.'

The old mother, from the palata, assented to all her daughter said, and re-echoed her sentiments.

'True, Masha; he will eat us up.'

The little girls, taught by their elder sister, used to bring him old bones and other refuse, and say, 'Here, you can eat these,' while Paraskowia laughed heartily at their witticisms. Then his old coat was the target for their shots.

'What a shame,' Masha would say, 'to keep such a tattered beggar in the house; and he wishes to be called an assistant. He had much better take a stick, and go from door to door begging.'

'He will bring vermin into the house,' chimed in the mother. And the children put pieces of paper or wood into his hands, and said, 'Here is a copeck for you, pray for us.'

The victim of this ill-usage suffered in silence, only sometimes, when the persecution was at its height, he used to glance at a badly-painted picture of Joseph and Potiphar's wife, which hung on one of the walls, and think how he too was suffering for his innocence and virtue.

Masha, seeing all her arrows fall harmless, tried other means. After many unsuccessful attempts, she at last came upon a bleeding wound. His whole past, and the love he bore his unfortunate, lonely mother, could not escape the animosity of this degraded wretch.

Touched to the quick, he gave vent to his indignation. In a moment the hubbub became general, Masha and Paraskovia seized upon pieces of wood. Mr. M—— defended himself with a stick and the old mother shouted for help. The husband ran in, and, finding out the cause, he scolded his daughter, beat the servant, and restored a momentary peace.

But Mr. M—— felt that this could not go on. He knew by experience that at Gubanoff's first absence the stifled feud would blaze out with redoubled force. When he explained this to his master, he fell into deep thought.

'I see no other way,' he said at length, 'of helping you, than by changing the nature of

your occupations. Henceforth you will go with me, buy the goods, and help to dispose of them in the villages.'

Mr. M—— joyfully accepted this proposal. He was glad to get away from the domestic hell he had fallen into at any price. From this time began a life full of work, labour, and discomfort. The whole day out in the cold, often without food, he had to sleep in the sleigh and be answerable for everything, the health of the horses, the safety of the goods from injury and thieves, and the life of the often inebriated master.

But he never complained. The pedlar, seeing his patience and long-suffering, exacted more and more from him, and when not travelling employed him in the hardest labours, under the pretence of keeping him out of the house. He had to go to the forest for wood, cut it, cut hay, carry water, etc. Months passed, he was half-killed with hard work, and still not a word spoken about wages. If he ever mentioned the subject, Gubanoff would say,

‘What do you want, boots or a coat? I can lend you these things for a time. I will not give you any money, as you have all you want, and the cash would only dissolve in your hands, and

you would have nothing when you left me! Be sure I know how to value such a man like you, and at parting you will be handsomely paid.'

M—— went on working, and the master laughed in his sleeve at such simplicity.

There was another inmate at Gubanoff's whom we have not yet mentioned. He was a quiet, sad old man. For years and years he tried many kinds of small government employments, but was dismissed from all for drinking. So passed his life, and when old age arrived he found himself destitute. Long practice in clerkship had made him a good writer; he could embellish the titles of acts with various flourishes, could shade the capital letters, and copy different handwritings perfectly. Such perfect caligraphy made in Siberia a learned man of him.

For the last two years the pedlar had received him into his house, fed and clothed him, and not only required no work from him, but was full of indulgence for his favourite fault. Twice a week Gubanoff would himself bring him several pots of 'vodka,' and lock him up in a garret where the old man would drink himself insensible. When sober he was let loose

again, and then no inducement would make him swallow a mouthful of his favourite beverage. Gubanoff used to say that this man was a distant relation of his, and that he was in the house out of charity, but he never broached the subject himself.

Mr. M—— was employed for months in the hardest labours, which he preferred to returning to his former occupation in the house; but notwithstanding his manifold works he did not fail to notice many incidents he could in no way explain. He noticed, for instance, that the silent old man would sometimes be for hours closeted with Gubanoff, who at such times would see no one, not even creditors bringing money. This was astonishing.

At times during the night, when the cold kept him awake, he would perceive a gleam of light through the shutters of the small room inhabited by the old man. Evidently this creature, who at first sight had nothing to do, must be occupied in important business. M——, not caring to interfere in other people's affairs, did not attempt to unravel the mystery, and would not have discovered it had it not been for his master's behaviour.

For some time past Gubanoff had evidently

tried to make friends with his assistant. Not by improving the young man's position—for a Siberian is generous only in words, and nothing can induce him to lighten a hard lot or part with his beloved money—but he praised M—— constantly for his honesty, sobriety, and good conduct. M——, delighted at this good disposition of his master, worked with redoubled energy, not suspecting a trap.

Things were thus, when one day Gubanoff called him in and said,

‘I have been watching you for some time; you are an honest man, and such men are rare here.’

M—— bowed in silence.

‘The occupations you have hitherto had are not fit for you; the time has come to prove to you my unbounded confidence in your honesty. I am a plain man and come to the point at once. Hitherto, unable to trust anyone, I have myself paid out the money used in my business; to-day I delegate this to you. You will be more than an assistant, you will be my cashier. Here are three hundred roubles,’ added he, taking out a roll of bank notes; ‘you will go eighty versts away to the yourts of the aborigines, and you will pay these Tartars whose names I

have written down the money for the furs and felt I have bought from them. Take also this form of receipt which you will make them sign.'

M—— was almost dumb with astonishment! Could it be possible? This shopkeeper who would not believe in anyone where money was in question, who was anxious about a single copeck, could he change like this towards himself? It was not natural.

'Thank you for your confidence in me, but I cannot undertake the business.'

'Why?' asked Gubanoff, with evident dissatisfaction.

'Because you put too great a responsibility upon me. Were I to lose this sum by accident or theft, I could never repay it.'

'Don't allow such a trifle to stop you. I am sure you will try your best to save me from loss, and, if in spite of all your care it were to happen, I shall not expect you to refund the sum, nor would the ties of goodwill which now exist between us be broken thereby.'

Here M——'s astonishment outstepped all bounds. Knowing his master for so many months, and aware of his suspicion and caution, he could not understand this sudden alteration in his conduct. He remembered how but a few

days ago, when counting up the day's sale, a loss of five copecks occurred, and the pedlar had given him no peace counting and recounting, and would not allow him to sleep until the money was found at the bottom of his master's own leathern pouch, where it had been put by mistake. Why this sudden change? Unable to account for it, he again decidedly refused, in spite of the growing ill-humour of his master.

Left alone with his thoughts, he pondered on what had taken place, and an indescribable fear took possession of him. The mysterious old man occurred to him and the unexplained submission of Gubanoff towards an individual who did nothing. He asked himself whether all these things were not connected by some secret link. Actuated not by mere curiosity but from a desire to get out of a disagreeable situation, he resolved to penetrate the mystery. Once on the road, a hundred details struck him. The looks he had noticed pass between Gubanoff and the old man, a whisper, a gesture, all clubbed together took gigantic proportions in his excited imagination, and gave rise to many speculations.

Several weeks passed without any change. M—— worked more diligently than ever in

order to recover his peace of mind, but his suspicions once aroused kept him in a fever; the people he lived with became unbearable to him, his task thankless, and the whole moral atmosphere heavy and suffocating. It is impossible to say what the end of such a mental state would have been, had not an accident changed the face of all things.

One night, in spite of his fatigue, M—— could not sleep. The cold was intense, and heavy drifts of snow, disturbed by the wind, covered his face. This physical discomfort, combined with sad thoughts of his loved ones prevented that solace which makes all forget for a time the sorrows of life. While he was thus lying on the steps outside the shopkeeper's door, whose house and money he was forced to watch dog-fashion, he fancied he heard a slight noise in the waggon-shed; at first he took it for the wind, but as he listened more attentively it became more and more distinct. In this waggon-shed stood the sledge ready packed for Gubanoff's journey on the morrow.

The thought occurred to him that thieves had got in; so, snatching up his pistol, he crawled cautiously to the wall of the outhouse. Through the chink of the door a faint light issued. M——

placed his eye to the aperture, and tried to see inside. At first the feeble light proceeding from a smoky lantern prevented his distinguishing objects, but when his eye became accustomed to the light he saw two men bending over the sledge. He was just going to open the door, the key of which he possessed, and assail the two thieves, when one of them said a few words to his companion. At the sound of his voice, M——'s hand fell powerless to his side; it was Gubanoff's.

‘All right,’ said he, ‘everything is in its place; it was a good idea to put the papers so that in case of a custom-house examination one could deny their possession, and say they had been put in by somebody else.’

‘Still the first thought was the best,’ answered the second man, in a low tone.

M—— recognised the mysterious old man.

‘Of course; but this fool would on no account undertake the payments.’

‘Perhaps he guesses something.’

‘Oh, no; he did it from an exaggerated honesty. Another man would have accepted the proposal, and I should have been only too glad if he had pocketed a few on his own account.’

‘I understand. Then he would have been ours.’

‘Even so; sooner or later he must be mixed up in this business. I have my plan. Should there be an examination, I will put the machine and dies amongst his clothes, in this way; either he will be answerable, or his compatriots will join to buy him off.’

‘Admirably imagined.’

‘By-the-by, I forgot to ask where you have hidden the little machine and dies.’

‘In the garden, under the fallen wall—the side near the stable.’

‘That is an unsafe place.’

‘There is no other. I could not keep them in the room.’

‘Never mind for the present; on my return home I will find a better place.’

Saying these words, Gubanoff and his companion left the waggon-shed by another door that communicated with the house. The poor assistant crawled back to his cold, hard bed, but he could not sleep. There was much to be thought over.

From the conversation he had overheard, he saw he was threatened by some misfortune the nature of which was hidden. He felt like a fly

in a spider's web, isolated from the world. How should he escape ?

Thinking thus, he remembered the old man's words, 'In the garden, beneath the ruined wall.' There was no time to lose in meditation, action must be prompt. M—— rose, and, first ascertaining from the snores issuing from Gubanoff's and the old man's room that they slept the sleep of the innocent and of Siberian criminals, he found an iron bar to break the ice, and sought the spot.

Once there, he sat down on the ground and began to remove the snow. It was soft and not frozen, and had evidently been lately disturbed. After half an hour's work, he came upon a hard wooden box. Taking it carefully out, he hid it under the doorsteps.

The next day, after the shopkeeper had gone on his journey, and while the family were still in bed, he ran to a fir-forest near with the box under his arm. With a beating heart he lifted up the lid. Inside were colours, paint-brushes, dies, printing-type, and irons like those used for making cubes. Some of the types were arranged in words screwed together. He tried to read them. They were as follows :—'One rouble silver.' 'Five roubles silver.' 'Ten roubles silver.'

In a moment the scales fell from his eyes. The mystery was cleared up and the terrible reality before him. He was living among forgers! He remembered many instances which he had forgotten. By giving him a commission to pay the Tartars a large sum in forged notes, his master wanted to lead him into crime and make an accomplice of him, and, in the event of a discovery, throw upon him the blame and punishment. He shuddered at the thought, as a man walking along blindly suddenly perceives under his feet an abyss. One step more, and all was lost!

The events that followed can be well imagined. While all the inhabitants were still asleep, M—— returned to the stable and hastily put the box back into its concealment, and awaited impatiently his master's return.

Gubanoff came back in a few days in excellent spirits; evidently the operation of circulating the false notes had succeeded. M——, seeing that his master was so well-disposed, explained to him that such very hard work, joined to sleeping out of doors, had an injurious effect upon his health, and was the reason that, much against his will, he felt himself obliged to look out for another situation.

At first Gubanoff tried to dissuade him ; but finding his resolution immovable, and warned by a faint sign from the old man not to press the matter for fear of exciting suspicion, he agreed.

‘My friend,’ he said, gravely, ‘you have served me faithfully for six months. To prove to you that even in Siberia we know how to value honesty, I bid you farewell, not merely in words, but with a gratuity. Here is money which will cover all your expenses until you find a new situation.’

So saying, the magnanimous master gave his assistant three roubles silver.

Most of my readers will imagine that after having read thus far they can guess the end. That the three rouble note was forged, that M— took it to the nearest government office, and that the pedlar was handcuffed ; in a word, that virtue triumphed and crime suffered a just punishment.

Such should have been the end ; but this is no tale but a real incident, and then the criminal often goes unpunished. Gubanoff was anxious to criminate his assistant, when he hoped through him to screen himself. But, when he

found it impossible to mix him up in the affair, he was careful and gave him a real government bank-note. It was in truth a miserable recompense for six months' hard work and discomfort, but does a man miraculously saved from danger count the lost advantages? M—, happy at having escaped an imminent peril, went elsewhere to seek his living, and Arkadi Saicz Gubanoff lived on extending gradually his operations and accumulating more and more capital.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PEASANT WOMAN'S SECRET.

NEAR the steppes on the Mongolian frontier, at the foot of the Sayan mountains, lies a large village inhabited by peasants who have voluntarily removed there from the Viatka and Perin provinces. I do not mention the name of the village, as some of the people whom I am about to describe are still living, and I can only say that even amid the picturesque Swiss Alps or beautiful Permean valleys it would be difficult to find a more lovely spot.

It must be remembered that in this southernmost part of Siberia, answering in latitude to that of Warsaw, Nature is niggardly of her treasures, and gives but three summer months, burying the rest of the year in a thick coating of ice and snow. But this brief summer shines

out with such a blaze of beauty and organic life that man looking at the bright blue sky, and breathing the perfume of the flowers, forgets how circumscribed is the time of their enjoyment.

Living in this village, I naturally wished during summer to make up for the forced confinement of winter in one small stuffy room. Every day, therefore, as soon as the sun rose, slinging my gun and tin canister over my shoulders, I started out to shoot and herbalise. The village was so situated that the narrow path leading to the farmers' fields crossed it from end to end. Of necessity, therefore, both in coming and going I had to pass the same way on my shooting and botanical excursions. At the end of the village stood a small cottage surrounded by a minute garden; this little place though poor had a cheerful appearance, and the garden bore signs of a tender care that was pleasing to the eye. Beside the neat rows of cabbages, carrots, and other vegetables, blew poppies, stocks, etc., and in the centre of all was a rustic seat shaded by willows and bird cherries.

In this village, where nearly all the population was composed of strangers, the people as a rule

took little pride in their dwellings, as, although born Siberians like to beautify the exterior of their houses, the new-comers, especially those from Viatka and Perin, show little care in this respect. However, the children of the first emigrants invariably adopt local habits, and take special care in keeping their houses and gardens neat. Thus this neat little cottage impressed one agreeably in favour of its inhabitants.

Coming home from my rambles, I never passed without a look of admiration at this peaceful, happy dwelling. In front of the cottage sat a woman spinning, and beside her a boy of about eleven was generally engaged in some heavy manual labour, such as chopping wood, carrying water, etc.

The woman was no longer young. She invariably welcomed me with the received Siberian formula, 'Putiem Dorozku,' (on the road), and I answered by the stereotyped phrase, 'I wam potojze,' (and for you on the same), and thus our conversation began and ended. So passed the summer months. The heat then became so intense that to continue my daily walks I was forced to take them at dawn or in the evening, and spend the intervening hours in my little room. Having thus doubled my re-

turns, I was forced to pass the little house still oftener.

The woman and boy were always busy over some household work, weeding the garden, watering the flowers, mending nets, minding the cattle, etc., but they never went into the fields as the other villagers did, or received any neighbours.

Whoever has thought of what life is in a small village lost amid endless steppes, without means of communication with the outer world, will understand how the smallest incident will interest the stagnant mind. The cleanliness of the dwelling, the quiet occupations of mother and son, so different from the noisy habits of the rest of the inhabitants, and the instincts of an inquiring mind, suggested that behind these humble walls was concealed a secret, the unravelling of which would help to reveal the dark side and the faults of our social organization. For it is not in the vortex of town life that the secret parts of the human character can best be seen; but sometimes in a small, forgotten corner of the universe the key is found to questions that concern the welfare and happiness of thousands.

The sorrow stamped upon the woman's face

convinced me more and more that some cruel fact or painful reminiscence poisoned her life. Different from all other Siberian peasant women in eager talk and readiness to make acquaintance, this woman never varied in her conventional greeting, and never tried to enter into conversation. Industrious, dignified in all her movements, and always busy in the affairs concerning her small household, she appeared to shun her neighbours and seek solitude. The only emotion which roused her from her apathy was her boundless love for her son.

Small hillocks, a spur from the Sayan mountains, rose quite near the village, and, hidden by the inequalities of the ground when returning from my walks, I had often seen her holding her boy in her arms, and weeping bitterly. I could not hear the words, but the actions conveyed the warmest expressions of maternal affection. One thing I could not understand. There was a large school in the village, to which almost all the inhabitants sent their children, but this mother, who seemed to love her son so intensely, never thought of giving him even this elementary education. She did not seem poor; her fat cows grazed in the neighbouring field, and the herd of sheep which

the boy brought home every evening showed comparative wealth; besides, the charge for village schooling is very small, and a great many poorer peasants sent their children. Why did she not follow their example?

Sometimes, when passing the cottage, I tried to begin a longer conversation, but all my endeavours failed. She answered my questions with the respect the villagers there always showed to people older than themselves, but very briefly, showing she evidently was anxious not to improve the acquaintance. I only discovered that, being a widow, and therefore not employed in tilling the ground, she made her living by having a 'Postoyanny Dwor,' which means a room or two hired by the authorities for the use of government officials when passing through the village. The person providing these rooms is bound to supply all necessaries, free of charge, to the guests, as she is paid by the year; but the officials are generally most liberal, therefore the more traffic the more gain the landlady counts upon.

As I have before mentioned, no thoroughfare crossed the village, so scarcely three times a year were her rooms occupied. Her income, therefore, chiefly came from the sum paid her

by the village authorities ; but this sum, though small, amply satisfied her modest requirements. These details I gathered from the villagers, as she carefully avoided all personal questions.

Once, when seeing the children going home from school, I asked her why, when she was so attached to her son, she employed him in working in the garden or house, instead of making him learn to read and write. She began crying, and, taking hold of my hand, sobbed out,

‘For goodness sake, never remind me of that! At the very name of school, I feel as if my heart was bursting.’

Another month went by. The Siberian summer was drawing to a close. The luxuriant vegetation had reached its climax. The fading flowers, yellowing leaves, and bare branches heralded the approach of the sad and death-like winter. Nearly all the population were in the fields busy collecting the year's crops, and had, for the time, forgotten the usual noisy songs and rowdy gatherings. The village looked solemn and quiet, and only in the widow's house did things remain unchanged. Every time I passed I saw the mother and

son occupied in the same way, which they followed almost mechanically.

I had stopped on the summit of a small hill one evening to admire the view, which, though circumscribed, was very lovely, lit-up by the last rays of the setting sun, when my dreams were dispelled by the noise of many voices. At the foot of the hill was a troop of children returning from the fields and in eager conversation. They were boys of different ages; the eldest might be fourteen years old. The object of their conversation was the widow's son taking the cow home.

'Look,' cried a red-haired boy, who seemed to take the lead, 'look, there goes silly Igorko.'

The boy answered not, but went on quietly.

'Stupid is no word, why, he cannot even speak,' said another.

'Where can he get wisdom when he learns nothing?' added a third.

'Listen, you fool,' said the red-haired one again, 'stop and answer when you are spoken to.'

'I did not speak to you, let me alone,' answered the child.

'What next? listen to his impertinence! We are talking to you, do you hear?'

‘We want to find out what you know.’

‘Do you even know your letters?’

‘How is he to know them, when he does not go to school.’

The boys surrounded poor Igorko, who looked around in a frightened manner as if seeking a way of escape.

‘Do you know what?’ cried the red-haired boy, with a malicious smile; ‘we will examine him the way our master does, and if he answers badly his skin will suffer.’

‘That’s right,’ shouted the others.

‘Let me go home,’ begged the frightened child. ‘Mamma will be so anxious.’

‘She ought to be grateful to us for trying to improve such a dunce.’

‘There, spell buka.’

The unfortunate creature began to sob.

‘You won’t answer, cry baby. Where is the ruler?’ cried the persecutor.

‘Here it is, professor,’ answered another, taking up the joke and presenting a strong switch.

‘Put out your hand, you fool.’

Loud sobbing was the only answer.

‘He won’t bear his punishment. Then, boys, stretch him out.’

No sooner were the words out of his mouth than the whole party fell upon the victim, threw him down, and began beating unmercifully. There is no crueller being than a child, especially among the lower classes, when encouraged by bad examples. It cannot understand the harm it is doing, and blindly follows a momentary impulse, which often leads to most lamentable results.

Such was the present case. In spite of heartrending cries, a rain of kicks and blows came upon the head and shoulders of the victim, and, before I could hurry down, the widow's son lay insensible upon the ground. At the sight of me the small persecutors ran away.

I knelt beside the fainting boy. A few bruises were visible upon his face. The child was naturally ugly, and looked more so after the catastrophe that had befallen him. My sympathy was all the more roused by the physical misfortunes of the poor creature.

Having ascertained that pain and terror, and not any serious injury, was the cause of his fainting, I brought some water from the stream, and, having wetted his head, saw him gradually return to life. The boy began to cry afresh.

‘It is not the first time they have beaten me,’

he said, 'and always because I do not know anything and don't go to school. I should like to learn. I often beg my mother to let me, but she won't hear of it.'

Having quieted the boy the best way I could, I took him by the hand and led him home. The widow, at the sight of her boy, lost her usual self-control, and with a great cry snatched him up in her arms. When I related to her all the details of the assault, she fired up and threatened revenge, law, punishment, till at last she dropped her hands helplessly by her side, and sat quiet, faintly whispering,

'Oh, how unhappy am I.'

'Neither anger nor despair will help you,' I said. 'The law will not listen to a complaint against children, and to take revenge upon the parents for the misbehaviour of their boys would be unsafe and unjust. You are one against many! I advise you to remove the cause of this assault, and send Igorko to school as other parents do.'

The woman looked at me horror-struck.

'Never, you don't know what you are saying.'

'I say what I think would be best; the child is anxious to learn.'

‘Yes, mother,’ chimed in the boy, ‘do send me to school.’

‘Madman! he wants his ruin. Do you know what school is?’

‘Yes, I do, it is where the teacher shows how to read, count, write. Mother, I will try to learn well, and then the others will not call me dunce, and beat me as they do now.’

‘Don’t you see the boy is right?’ I said.

She fell into deep thought; then shaking her head, as if to chase away a painful thought, she cried in despair,

‘No, never; one is enough.’

After a few moments she became calmer. I could see that she wished to say something, but could not make up her mind to speak. At last, overcoming a visible repugnance, she said:

‘You have always been kind and civil to me, and to-day, by taking my poor boy’s part, have saved him from a severe flogging, and perhaps worse injury. I am heartily grateful to you for it, and to prove to you my gratitude I will tell you why I will not send my child to school. It is the secret of my life, known only to God and myself, and which no one except you will ever know. Listen. Besides Igorka, I had another

son a few years older, named Nicholas. Becoming a widow early in life, I sought my comfort in the affection of these children. The boys were very unlike. Nicholas was merry, warm-hearted, open, but his mind was slow in developing itself: he talked much, laughed still more, but could not be made to remember the simplest things. Igorko, on the contrary, seldom spoke, but, when he did, you would have thought what he said came from a book. Their exterior also was unlike; the elder was handsome—so handsome that, when I took him to church on a Sunday, the people used to stop to look at him. The second was puny and stumpy, and, with his short nose and wide mouth, looked like a little bear. The good looks of the one and the ugliness of the other were the cause that I did not divide my love equally between them. Nicholas had all the caresses and kind words, Igorko all the scoldings, often undeserved.

I was unjust, and God has severely punished me. I looked to a brilliant future for my eldest; it seemed impossible that such a handsome fellow should follow the plough and herd the cattle. I wished to see him something better than a common labourer tilling the soil.

Such occupation would be good enough for clumsy Igorko. As soon as Nicholas was old enough, I placed him in the village school, pending a higher education. About the younger one I did not think; first, he was too young, and I argued that for such as he an elementary education would be ample. But it always happens in this world that man proposes and God disposes. I longed to see my boy one day in the uniform of a government official, and I have seen him in his coffin, and the younger one, whose abilities might have carved out a career, has remained a dunce, a victim to the malice of bad boys.'

Saying this, the poor woman could not restrain her tears. I remained silent, respecting her grief. She became calmer presently, and thus continued:

'My favourite went daily to school; but he was a bad scholar. Not that he was lazy, but because his ideas developed slowly. He would spend whole nights over his book, and, weeping, repeat his lessons over and over again. It was not his fault that he could not learn it. I noticed also that his character was changing. He became quiet, silent, and secret. In olden days he had shared all his thoughts with his

mother; but, from the time he began his schooling, he not only gave that up, but, when asked the cause of his gloom, he either gave some frivolous answer or refused to speak. Frightened at this, I sought the schoolmaster. You know the man, and therefore you know how proud and unapproachable he is. He received me haughtily, and answered my questions about Nicholas impatiently.

“Well, what of that? Of course the boy prefers sitting at home doing nothing to stewing over a book. All new pupils are the same; but in time they get used to school discipline. Your son is as great a donkey as ever breathed, but I can make men even out of such material.”

‘Though these words did not quiet my mind, I was forced to be content with them. At that time I did not know the mysteries of village schools. I was far from suspecting what took place in the spacious rooms designed for children’s education. I did not know that the fear which a hard master can create in his pupils’ minds overpowers the strongest natures, changes frankness into cunning, and closes the lips accustomed to the tenderest confidences. A few more weeks went by. The boy slowly

and at last changed completely, not only as to his character, but in his exterior as well. Rosy and strong once, he became pale and thin, his eyes sunk—in a word, he looked the shadow of his former self. I consulted all the old women in the place, and they assured me that it came from his rapid growth, and advised me to give him nourishing diet. But he would not eat. Sad and silent, with eyes bent down, he never complained; but, when the time drew near for school, he would tremble as in an ague fit. I noticed that several times his ears were quite violet from the blood rushing violently into them and I, the mother, did not guess the tortures he was enduring, and try to stop them in time.

‘One autumn evening two years ago, my son came home from school later than usual; he complained of headache. I put him to bed, and in a few hours fever set-in. The poor child threw himself about in his ravings, folded his hands as if in prayer, and called out, “Ivan—Ivan Andrezowitz, have pity on me!” Not understanding these words, and imagining them the ravings of fever, I tried to soothe him. But he did not see me, did not hear me, only repeated in a terrified voice, “Ivan, Ivan, have

pity! Don't strike so hard! You will kill me!"

'The sad truth only then appeared before my eyes in all its deformity. I understood it all. Sooner than I can relate, I tore off the bandages, soaked in vinegar, I had laid on his head, and saw—that the skull was fractured! After an hour of extreme agony, during which the unfortunate child writhed in pain, filling the air with his screams, the end came. My beloved Nicholas died without for a moment recovering consciousness.

'I stood for a long time over his bed plunged in the deepest despair. I did not know where I was or what had happened to me; I did not realise the blow that had fallen. At last I looked at the face of the dead child, and all became clear. I saw the flogging he must daily have endured, I heard his cries, understood his pain, and the terror a severe school-master could create in a frightened child, under the influence of which the poor thing dared not complain to anyone, hiding his torture even from his mother. And suddenly a wild madness seized upon me; half-dressed, with my hair flying, I ran to the village magistrate, and, trembling with indignation, I related to him

the atrocious conduct of the schoolmaster, begging that my son's murderer might be punished.

‘I was looked upon as having momentarily lost my senses through the heavy bereavement that I had undergone. My neighbours tried to soothe me, pitied me, and finally, at my request, the accused was ordered to vindicate himself. The wretch played his part admirably. He sympathized with me even more than the others, maintaining that a severe mental shock often produces a derangement of the brain, and finally he himself begged the village magistrate to examine his pupils, and find out from them how they were treated. These children, knowing what awaited them had they dared to speak the truth, said that their master's behaviour was always gentle and just, and that, though forced at times to punish, his chastisement did not exceed what a father would administer. Further investigations were even more adverse to me. The child's fractured skull was no proof; he might have fallen down accidentally, and my own want of caution might have caused his death. The pupils who swore to the master's good behaviour were the only witnesses; the poor victim's lips were closed for ever.

The schoolmaster, after the charge I brought against him, did all in his power to have me shut up in a lunatic asylum.

“The mania of the unfortunate woman,” he used to say, “who imagines that she sees in me her child’s murderer, may sooner or later be the cause of some misfortune; whereas the hospital treatment might bring her back to her normal state of health.”

‘This man had good connections and influence, and for a time I feared that I too might become his victim; but fortunately some friends of my husband’s, who belonged to the village administration, opposed this scheme. They did not deny that my mind might be impaired—unfortunately that fact was palpable—but they showed that, after the first outburst caused by the death of my beloved child, my madness had become a settled melancholy, a love of quietness and solitude which was not dangerous.

‘The administration took me under their care, and gave me the “Postoyanny Dwor,” the care of which, together with that of my garden, with relaxation from agricultural labour, and freedom from worries and vexations, would in time, the doctor thought, have a salutary effect upon my mind. But these good

people, though they respect my sorrow, are at the same time afraid of me. In an emergency any one of them would be ready and willing to help me; but not one will cross my threshold, within which there lives, according to their ideas, a woman worthy of pity and respect, but who might at any moment become dangerous. I live here alone with my last child, and he, my poor Igorko, is the only thing that links me with the world. Though apparently free, I feel a secret surveillance, and I know that my actions are watched. The fear that a word or a gesture of mine might be misconstrued, and I might be locked up in an asylum, makes me silent and uncommunicative. After the lapse of two years, you are the first to whom I have revealed my secret. Having discovered it, you will not be astonished that in spite of my great love for my son, in spite of the wish he has to learn, I will not send him to our village school and the tender mercies of Ivan Andrezowitz.'

A few days after this, I was passing the evening with the family of the village clerk. All the local authorities, civil and clerical, as well as the provincial doctor, who was *en route*, were assembled there. Ivan was there. His

pale face and quiet attitude made one think he was imbued with the solemnity of his duties rather than an executioner torturing the poor children given into his charge. This man had the power of changing his physiognomy according to circumstances.

The conversation soon took an interesting turn. The subject was a story of the doctor's relative to a madman who was in his charge, and who, after the death of a beloved child, fell into a queer monomania. He imagined that his daughter, who had died from croup, had been strangled by her own mother. Nothing could convince him, in spite of the clearest proofs shown him by the ablest doctors of the day.

'A similar case happened here a few years ago,' said the clerk. 'A poor widow, known and respected by all for her honesty and good conduct, lost a son through a fall and a severe cut in the head. From that moment the unfortunate mother, stricken by the unexpected blow, has imagined that the child had been murdered.'

'And by me,' added the pedagogue. 'You can imagine in what a disagreeable situation I found myself—threatened not only as to my

life, but in a thing much more precious to an honest man, my good name earned by thirty years of hard work. I had not a moment's peace. A suspicion thrown out by a mad-woman might be believed by others.'

'But everyone,' said the clerk, 'respects you still more since the sad business, seeing how you discharge your arduous duties.'

'The severity of the ordeal you have passed,' said another, 'shows us all your worth. A stone crumbles in the fire, but a diamond will shine with a brighter light.'

After these words, all the company rose and shook hands with the schoolmaster as a mark of their respect. Ivan's pale face was radiant, and a tear of joy ran down his withered cheek.

'I have not only heard of this occurrence,' said the doctor, 'but, passing here a year ago, I saw the poor woman. Her state is all the more worthy of commiseration, as her cure is almost hopeless. A complete aberration of mind is sometimes cured, if the patient is carefully and tenderly treated, as is now generally the case. But monomania which does not preclude lucid thought, and even allows the patient to reason, is all the more difficult to eradicate as the fixed idea which sways it has,

so to say, grown into the patient's very being. A man labouring under a monomania is quite rational in his speech, life, etc., and remains so until the disturbed chord is touched, and then all is disharmony. Pignel and Locke maintain——'

And the worthy doctor, having started a favourite topic, went on bringing to bear various citations, and the clerk's guests listened all the more intently because they did not understand a word he was saying. I, profiting by the general attention being taken up, left the house unperceived, pondering upon the drama I had so unexpectedly come across.

The widow's narrative was so simple, so straightforward, so full of Christian resignation and feeling, that it seemed impossible for it to have been the outcome of an unhinged imagination. On the other hand, numerous instances of people less susceptible than myself being deceived by madmen came to my mind. Going over all the details of my conversation with the peasant woman, I could not detect a gesture, a look which would point to a wandering mind; and yet again, the decided opinion of medical men could not be lightly set aside.

Unable to arrive at any conclusion, I thought

of the chief personage in the story, Ivan Andrezowitz, with his parchment face, forbidding aspect, shifting look, and evil smile. He appeared to me most antipathetic. It seemed impossible that such a face could belong to an honest man, but still the exterior often deceives us, and an ugly, repulsive body will hide a lofty, noble soul. Then the general respect he enjoyed, and the tear I saw in his eye! What, after all, can the opinion of short-sighted people be worth? And the tear? Judas shed a tear when he sold the Saviour.

For two hours I fought with conflicting thoughts, two opposite conclusions strove for mastery within me, but not a ray of truth appeared to lighten the darkness of this frightful story. The peasant's mystery will ever remain an unsolved riddle.

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CHAPTER XII.

THE HISTORY OF THE VILLAGE CLERK.

IT happened in the year 186—. I was then living in the province of Yeniseisk, in a village called Balachta. Balachta was one of those settlements in which about one-fourth part of the population is concentrated. Such places are usually built on the banks of the more important rivers, and on account of their situation, and the fertility of the soil, are chosen by the peasants of European Russia, who voluntarily come to settle in them, as well as by those banished to Siberia by the government. Under such circumstances, the villages rapidly increase, but, in spite of their size and large population, they always retain the designation of villages. The entire absence of communication with the outer world,

and the extreme distance from other inhabited places, as well as the peculiar character of their social life, prevent the merchants from visiting these settlements, and, without trade, a village cannot grow into a town.

Balachta, therefore, in spite of its population numbering several thousands, in spite even of its yearly fair, which provides the inhabitants with all the requirements of their daily life, remained a village, retaining all the characteristics of a Siberian agricultural settlement. From this may easily be understood the difficulty I experienced in finding a suitable circle of acquaintances. In addition to the peasants, whose occupations were alternately tilling the soil and drinking, there were three families which formed a sort of local aristocracy, and especially that of the former parish clerk. This man I found most congenial, and I frequently visited his house.

Do not for a moment imagine, dear reader, that I had found in Alexis Ewdokimowicz Czuchomoff and in Maria Andrejewna, his wife, anything in any respect reminding me of our old Europe. These people were common and vulgar, but honest and true-hearted withal; and these virtues, rarely met with even in

people of higher standing in society, made me like and respect them sincerely.

It happened that I was spending a winter evening with them. We were all three sitting in front of the fire. The night was dark, and the wind drove the snow outside into huge heaps. The room was only partially illuminated by the wood fire, whilst its corners were in darkness; in fact, it was one of those moments when everything seems to invite the exchange of thoughts, confidential intercourse, or long-buried reminiscences.

My host, after having as usual related all the daily grievances of his post—how the peasants quarrelled; how the Soltys was a fool; and the officials grasping—relapsed into silence. The only audible sounds were the crackling of the faggots on the hearth, and the whistling of the wind without, when I asked him to relate the story of his life.

It was a simple story, uneventful, as is the life of the inhabitants of the Siberian deserts. No soul-stirring adventures or even very exalted sentiment had any part in it; but its very simplicity pleased me, who loved to study the habits and customs of all those with whom I was brought in contact.

Czuchomoff was the son of a local agriculturist. His father, a wealthy farmer, sent his son to a school in the provincial town, in spite of the sarcasms of his neighbours, who did not relish the idea of one of their class departing from the usual routine. We shall see what induced him to take this step. Almost everyone nourishes in his inmost soul a secret thought, an idea which furnishes the motive power of all his actions, the goal towards which all his efforts tend. A farmer, wedded to agriculture, wishes to bring his land to the highest pitch of perfection; a merchant seeks the development of his trade; a poet dreams of fame which shall make his name immortal; the peasant alone, occupied all day long in manual labour, exists from day to day, and dreams only of bringing up his son to whom he will resign his toil, and enjoy repose for the remainder of his days.

It sometimes happens, however, and more especially amongst the wealthier peasants, who, not being too much weighed down by work, can afford to give play to the imagination, that their minds soar beyond the marked-out groove. Old Czuchomoff was one of these exceptions. He was oppressed by a thought which gave

him no rest, one dream that governed all his actions; and this idea had, as it were, become incorporated in his very existence. This dream was to see his son a deacon; and who knows? perhaps even a priest in his own parish.

That the full importance he attached to this choice of a profession for his son may be understood, I should mention that one of the old man's ancestors was once employed in waiting upon the priest and church. In Russia, such clerical service goes down from father to son; the son of a priest, having passed through all the lower grades and having married the daughter of a priest, generally ends by becoming one himself; and, if untoward circumstances oblige him to leave the profession in which he was born, in nine cases out of ten his sons or grandsons, remembering their former caste, endeavour to return to it. This was the reason why old Czuchomoff put his son to school at Aczinsk in spite of his neighbours' ironical remarks. When Alexis had completed his secular and theological studies and returned home, his father formally announced that he had chosen as a wife for him the daughter of the local deacon, and that this alliance would lead him to the dignity his father had so long coveted for him.

These plans were acquiesced in by both the young lady and her father; the deacon was poor, his daughter old, ugly, and of rather lax virtue. The very mention of marriage with the son of such a wealthy peasant was well received by him; and his daughter, whom no one wished to marry, was of course delighted at the prospect of a young, handsome, and rich husband. It was different with the young man. The thought of filling the important post of parish priest, the handsome costume, and solemn liturgy pleased his young imagination of eighteen years; but, on the other hand, an alliance with a woman, old, ugly, and immoral, had no attraction for him.

Without a moment's hesitation, he refused to obey his father; but the old man possessed an argument to back his paternal influence before which all discussion and opposition had to give way. This argument was a thick, heavy stick.

Sorely pressed by this very forcible argument, young Alexis submitted with tears to his father's wishes, and active preparations were commenced to hurry on the wedding. But what, after all, is human will, even the will of such strong-minded people as old Czuchomoff, or the ardent wishes of such a fascinating young woman as the dea-

con's daughter, when fate is against them? In spite then of all their efforts, destiny decreed that Alexis should never be a priest, and that the old-maid should remain to mourn her spinsterhood.

A tribe of gipsies made their appearance at Balachta. There was nothing unusual in that, gipsies are the same in Siberia as elsewhere; they lead a lazy, idle life, and, disliking steady occupations, tramp from village to village, telling fortunes, selling stolen horses, in fact swindling the superstitious inhabitants in every possible way; but to this tribe belonged a young gipsy girl of wondrous beauty. Though an orphan, she had a certain superiority over her companions, from the fact that she contributed the larger share of profits to their slender purse. Her work was not hard, and consisted only in playing the guitar, singing, and dancing; but her singing, dancing, and playing were things worthy of being seen and heard. Whenever she appeared in the market-square, clad in her muslin dress trimmed with spangles and a garland on her head, a murmur of approval rose from the assembled spectators; but, when she commenced her fiery, passionate, and wonderfully graceful dance, the acclamations of the public

were boundless. The heavy, uncouth men, unaccustomed to the fairy scenes acted on the stage, regarded her as an apparition from another world, such as hitherto they had never dared to imagine; the public-houses, the usual resort, were deserted; everyone hurried to the market-square to feast their eyes on the enchantress, and the copecks fell in showers at her feet.

The effect on young Alexis cannot be described. It was not love, but a frenzy, a passion that nothing could quell; he reflected not, dreamt not, thought not; he only gave himself up heart and soul to that new, and to him unknown, sensation. To approach her and declare his sentiments was the work of a moment. She listened patiently and calmly; then she told him she consented to descend from the position she had won by her talent and beauty, and become the wife of a peasant, but he must first gain his father's permission.

Here was an insurmountable difficulty; how could he broach such a demand to one who enforced his arguments with such energetic measures? Alexis did not even care to try; like lovers in general, he left all to fate, and spent hours, nay, even days, in admiring the

dance and listening to the songs of the gitana.

Plunged in these enchanting dreams, he knew not that there was one who watched his every movement. When the lovely gipsy danced or sang, receiving the homage of her numerous admirers, and young Czuchomoff, dazed by her beauty, fancied himself in the seventh heaven, then at one of the windows of her father's house the ugly, pitted face of the deacon's daughter kept watch. Jealousy is sharp-sighted, and the wounded vanity of an ugly woman is implacable. Alexis' betrothed ran to her would-be father-in-law, crying and lamenting, and told him all.

The old man did not like either a joke or a long discussion. He first made use of his most powerful argument, and then locked his son up in a barn on bread-and-water, swearing that he should only leave it for the altar ; finally he used his influence so effectually that the band of gipsies was driven from the village.

Were I writing a novel, I might fill pages with the sorrows and broodings of the young lover ; but, as this is merely a slight Siberian sketch taken from life, I must curb my imagination and only say that, after two or three days, Alexis dug his way out of his prison, and

ran away from his father's arguments and the squinting eyes of his betrothed—of course directing his steps towards the slowly-receding band of gipsies.

He found his goddess in front of a large cauldron, occupied in the prosaic work of cooking bacon and cabbage. Not being one of your æsthetic souls, in whom such a sight would produce a reaction, he told her before them all that he loved her, that he would never leave her, and wished to become her husband.

‘And your father?’ asked she.

‘I am not afraid of him,’ answered the lover.

This determination pleased the young gitana. What woman can remain untouched at the sight of a youth sacrificing all for her sake? The chief of the band had also his views; the gipsies were everywhere ill-treated, they were never allowed to remain anywhere long, and this outweighed the gain brought in by the young girl. Czuchomoff was learned, he had passed four classes, he might become a man of importance, and so help his wife's old associates; the father was certainly opposed to the match just now, but he would surely relent sooner or later. After an hour's discussion they agreed,

the band moved on, and Alexis married the young gipsy in the first church they came to.

The hopes of the elder gipsy were not realised after all. Old Czuchomoff would never see his son again, and, dying, bequeathed his fortune to some distant relative. Alexis passed many years in great poverty, trying successively all sorts of small and badly-paid places. But at last his hard work, honest character, and faithful discharge of his duties made an impression on his fellow-citizens, and they chose him as clerk in Balachta. He assisted his wife's friends as much as he could, either in allowing them to remain longer in the district committed to his charge, or in defending them from the injustice of government employés; but his power was limited, and elsewhere the gipsies were ill-treated as much as ever, though frequently they richly deserved it.

As to the gitana, contrary to all expectations, all predictions of old Czuchomoff, she turned out an excellent wife, and would no doubt have proved an equally good mother had God given her any children; but, in this, heaven had not blessed the marriage made against the father's will. In spite of thousands of candles burned before sacred images, in spite of the

many prayers which Alexis had offered up in many churches, they did not obtain that happiness which is the aim of every marriage. Mrs. Czuchomoff, or Mary Andreievna, as she was popularly called, changed completely. Bidding farewell to her old habits, she adopted the ways of her new station; instead of the transitory triumphs of old, she gave her attention to culinary matters and household management; instead of the old migratory life, she spent hours on the palata,* and became so devoted to the Turkish bath that, from the abuse of it, she became afflicted with chronic rheumatic gout.

Twenty-eight years had elapsed since Alexis' marriage when I made the acquaintance of his wife. She was then a little, bent, sickly old woman, in whom no one would now recognize the gipsy whose graceful dance delighted the spectators. Listening to her hoarse voice and frequent cough, one could hardly imagine that she had once been the siren whose thrilling notes drew forth so much admiration. Her black and still piercing eyes alone remained to remind one of her extraction.

* Palata is an inclined plane of boards near the ceiling of Siberian cottages, and is used as a resting place. See vol. i, page 199.

CHAPTER XIII.

A DRIVE OVER THE STEPPES.

IN July, 186—, I had to travel as far as the Chinese frontier on business connected with a merchant in whose employ I was. I took an interpreter with me who understood Tartar, Chinese, and Mongolian, and being well supplied with provisions I started across the steppes.

Tartar settlements are situated south of the town of Minusinsk (province of Yeniseisk) all along the banks of the river Yenesei. These settlements are about twenty or thirty miles apart, and beyond them lie the endless forests, then the dwellings of the Sayans, Mongolians, Chinese, and other tribes to whom I was taking European wares in exchange for fur.

Except for the gigantic Yenisei, the road leading from settlement to settlement was no way re-

markable; the vegetation was luxuriant on the steppes, and herds of wild horses pursued by Tartars were occasionally met. In the Tartar 'yourts' we always were welcomed with the hearty hospitality for which all eastern countries are famous. In reality, this hospitality was of the most primitive kind; a glass of mare's milk and a slice of mutton or horseflesh was all a traveller could expect, but this simple fare is always so heartily and disinterestedly offered that one is ready to allow the goodwill of the giver to make amends for the shortcomings of the cookery.

A Tartar yurt is constructed of a sugar-cone shape; the entrance is so low that one must stoop to enter, and a hole in the roof supplies the place of a chimney. The dwelling is made of the bark of trees and the skins of animals. Inside are a few mats and some cooking utensils. A certain number of these huts form a settlement. The Tartars usually live poorly, though as a rule they are not indigent. Many a one, who owns a hundred horses and large herds of sheep and cattle, besides pots of silver roubles and gold half-Imperials, will live with his family in a small, uncomfortable hut, full of smoke and stuffiness, and feed upon half-raw

horseflesh, not from stinginess but from total ignorance.

There are exceptions however. In a settlement not far distant from Minusinsk dwells a Tartar Croesus whose fortune in cattle, horses, sheep, plate, and money amounts to millions of roubles. His name is Kar-ki. I stopped at his house, and were it not that Kar-ki's name is well-known in the neighbourhood, and that those who experienced his hospitality can bear me witness, I would be silent, fearing I should be suspected of exaggeration. It was almost a picture from the Arabian nights.

His dwelling is composed of several yourts joined together and lined with precious carpets, real cashmere shawls hang across the doorways, and all the vessels used are either of silver or gold. The owner has some idea of civilization, speaks Russian fluently, trades largely, has heard of Europe and its customs, but his own manner of life is purely Tartar. He will give his guests Havannah cigars and best French wines, but he smokes Machorka and drinks Tartar arak (a drink prepared from mare's milk and called ariash). The food, though handed in silver dishes, is not better than that of the poorest Tartars, and his wife and daughters are children

of the steppes in the fullest acceptation of the term, though dressed in silks and velvets. After a meal of the above description, and several cups of tea out of the huge silver samovar, we inspected our host's treasures which he, like all those favoured by fortune, was eager to display. Several separate huts are his warehouses. His furs chiefly attracted my attention. Such splendid sables and blue fox skins, each of them at least of several hundred roubles value. After looking at his furs, our host ordered his horses to be led by, and the procession was closed by Tartar men and women singing a chorus and accompanying themselves upon whistles of their own manufacture.

Tartars as a rule cling to their language, habits, and migratory life, and are very little, if at all, influenced by western civilization. Even Kar-ki, in spite of his riches and position, had only superficially adopted a few Russian ways; in reality he hardly differed from his tribe. The one exception to the rule I found in a Mr. K——, a Tartar by birth, who, having started as a common workman at the mines, became first an agent and then a small proprietor. Having come upon a good vein of gold, he soon became a millionaire, gaining

wealth and assimilating European civilization at the same time. He spends his summer at Krasnydiarsk and winter in Paris, and travels with an armed body-guard, a French cook, two secretaries, and German footmen. His daughter is thoroughly educated, and has a decided talent for music. He is a pleasant man, and very charitable towards the poor. Yet even he, though for some years practising European life, cannot separate himself completely from his national habits. Whenever he arrives at Minusinsk, he leaves his daughter in charge of her governess, forsakes his house and servants, and, accompanied by a faithful Tartar, spends some time in the steppes, living in the yourts of his countrymen, eating 'szalalyk' (foal), joining in their games, and listening to their songs. Verily, nature is stronger than a lifetime's habits.

Leaving Kar-ki, we proceeded on our journey, and turned more to the south. The further we left Minusinsk, the fewer were the Tartars who understood Russian, and the evidences of the Shamanism (black faith), which had before been strictly hidden, appeared more and more openly as we left the abodes inhabited by people of European descent.

All the primitive tribes of Northern Asia have professed Shamanism for countless ages, but Russia, having annexed Siberia, has endeavoured to supersede this pagan faith with Christianity. Although Shamanism was tolerated, Tartar and other tribes were christened; but, as it usually happens in such cases, the conversion was superficial, and they in fact profess the faith of their forefathers. Sham (black), ni (faith), has been the religion since prehistoric times not only of the Tartars, Yakuts, Jakogirs, Buriatis, Cityns, Tunguz, etc., but of nearly all the northern tribes in Europe, namely, the Fins and Laplanders. It was professed by the now lost tribes of the Aloffitzs. There seems to be a kind of affinity between the Shamanism and later Buddhism. Brahminism was a kind of resurrection of Buddhism, and the latter seems to have been founded upon the much older faith of Shamanism. The ancient Chinese religion, Tao-see, existing before Confucius, appears to be nothing else than the black faith still practised by the northern Asiatic tribes, as the evidences of it in Monticules, made up of earth and stone, and dedicated to the friendly gods, can be seen not only in China, but over the whole surface

of Siberia. The central fount of this faith was Samarkand, and from thence it spread westward, northward, and southward into China, and even to the remotest confines of Eastern Asia, the Aleutian Islands.

The bloody rites of this faith, consisting of human sacrifices, gradually softened under the influence of the Yakuts, and now the only sacrifices are of animals to the gods. Tartars living near Minusinsk are very careful not to disclose their true religion on account of the law, and in many yourts I have seen the pictures of saints with lighted tapers before them, in others Bibles printed in Tartar language placed in conspicuous places; but, as we travelled further on, these signs of Christianity became more and more rare, and on the frontiers of the steppes the observances of the black faith were openly performed. The Shamans (Tartar wizards) performed the ceremonies publicly, turning round and round on one leg until they dropped, screaming frightfully all the time. They distributed 'swastica'*

* Swastici is derived from the old Sanscrit word swasti (blessing). These talismans are flat stones with hieroglyphics engraved upon them. A Shaman offered me one, assuring me that it would keep me safe from all evils while

(talismans possessing the power of guarding their owners from evil spirits), buried the dead, and blessed fire, earth, and wild horses all publicly.

As we drew southward from Minusinsk, the Tartar dress visibly changed. In the first visited settlements, the Tartars had bought pieces of silk and staring calico of European make, and had added these to their eastern dress; but this soon disappeared, and as we advanced towards the Chinese frontier the dress became of a more Mongolian type. Here and there are seen the pointed, round-brimmed hats, shaved heads, and shoes turned up at toes of true Chinese fashion. I did not see much change in the young girls' attire. Everywhere they dress their raven hair in an innumerable quantity of plaits, weigh down their ears with gold rings reaching sometimes to a circumference of eight inches, and wear wide trousers. Only in very remote settlements have I ever come across the taelsy (gold Chinese coins)

on my journey. These hieroglyphics can be met with in Norway. (See 'Trace du Bouddhisme en Norvege avant l'importation du Christianisme,' Holmboe, Paris, 1857.) And even in Poland the same signs were found on some funeral urns in Slavonic burial-grounds. (See 'Varhalle Europeischer Völkergeschichten. Karl Ritter, Berlin, 1820.)

pierced and threaded with the usual coral, and worn round the neck. The love of Tartar women for all ornaments, and especially for coral, is so great that every girl, even the very poorest, who cannot even afford clothing, possesses at least one majan (large coral), and maintains that this is the best ornament, as it never wears out.

The country from settlement to settlement is not picturesque, and consists of endless steppes and luxuriant grass. This monotony is only broken by tumuli, which have existed for endless ages, having been raised by the primitive tribes. They are scattered all over Eastern Siberia, and are pyramidal in shape, and surrounded with sharp stones like a fortress. Inside is a subterranean chamber full of human skulls and bones carefully arranged in a sugar-loaf shape; there are also a large quantity of forged iron objects, such as hatchets, rings, and chains, lying about, doubtless the property and insignia of their dead owners. These tumuli are considered by the Shamans to be the abodes of the guardian spirits of the departed families, and the removal of even the smallest object from them would, they think, be followed by calamities over the whole country.

The government, aware of the attachment of the natives to these mementoes, has strictly forbidden any attempt at excavation or removal of their contents. I visited these tombs several times, but mindful of the prohibition of the government, and anxious not to offend the Tartars, have always been accompanied by either a Shaman or a Kniaz (elder) of the village. They are all identically alike. In one of them, besides the usual iron objects and talismans carved on stone, I saw a clumsily executed little statue of their god Tengri. He is a spirit of a departed ancestor, whose duty it is to protect his descendants. All Tartar families possess a Tengri. The Persians name him 'Piri,' the Mongolians 'Bogda.'

A strange sight met my eyes on the first day of my travels. Towards the evening I perceived a large surface of snowy whiteness. Surely it could not be snow at a time when the scorching rays of the sun burn upon everything, and the heat is so oppressive that breath even fails. No, it was not snow, but an illusion only met with in these latitudes—it was butterflies.

Millions and millions of snow-white butterflies settle upon the long reeds and grasses

growing on the morasses, and whiten all the country with the hue of their tiny wings. For a verst or more the ground was covered with them. Myriads of these little creatures circled round us, and fell, I may say, in bunches into our 'kibitka' (Russian cart). We were obliged to shake off constantly a thick coating of them, while new white masses kept falling upon us like rain. At last we left behind this snow-mimicry, the steppes regained their former monotonous green, and we pursued our way in silence. After about an hour there suddenly appeared a heavy grey cloud spreading over all the plain. The driver, pointing with his finger to this new phenomenon, only said, 'Midge.'

'Midge,' repeated my companion, and immediately began to unpack his portmanteau. Before he had time to effect his purpose, the cloud was upon us. Immediately I felt a stinging pain all over my face and hands, my eyes filled with tears, my breath came with the greatest difficulty, and my ears were full of a tingling sensation. This cloud was entirely composed of minute midges with transparent wings, who are at this time the greatest plague in Eastern Siberia. They attack man unmercifully; they squeeze themselves into ears, eyes,

nose, and mouth, and it is impossible for the most enduring of mortals to appear abroad without a mask on his face and gloves on his hands in localities they infest.

‘Quick, quick,’ cried my friend; ‘put this on your head.’ So saying, he handed me a kind of linen hood with a knitted woollen net, which preserves the face without impeding the breathing. I swept off as many of the insects as I could, and followed his advice. The interpreter and driver were already covered with the steppe dominoes. We soon after reached a Tartar settlement where an amusing sight met our eyes. Men, women, and children all wore the same hoods and masks as ours. It looked like a monster masked ball, its saloon the steppes, its walls the firmament, the sun its chandelier. The flies themselves provided the music by the rustle of their tiny wings. This cloud extended over nearly twenty versts, and as soon as we were out of it we were able to divest ourselves of our masks, and breathe freely once more.

Next day the aspect of the country began to change; gradually the plain was broken by low hills, which rose higher and higher the further south we proceeded. These were the begin-

ning of the Sayan mountains, which extend in an unbroken chain towards Mongolia. Rocks here and there pierced the greensward, brooks became more frequent, vegetation increased in luxuriance, and now and then in the meadows appeared unknown flowers which would not have disgraced the finest European garden.

In a charming valley, lying at the foot of high mountains, there were about a hundred Tartar huts, the last settlement of the steppes. Knowing that beyond this village was an uninhabited desert to be crossed before gaining the Chinese frontier, I decided to spend the night there. We stopped, therefore, in front of the largest hut, and greeted the owner with the usual salutation—Anym dzoh.

An old man courteously invited us in. A large piece of foal was roasting on some sticks stuck in the ground, and the numerous family of our hosts were busy getting our food ready. The news of the arrival of strangers quickly spread, several neighbours came in and sat down with us upon large straw mats, folding their legs under them in eastern fashion, while the women and children stood apart and eyed us curiously.

After a little while, finding that, though

Bashka-ulus (foreigners), we were not very frightening, the young girls and children approached us and teased us with endless questions, touching each part of our clothing. My interpreter was able to answer them, but I had to have recourse to gestures. The habits of the Tartars who dwell in the remotest parts of the steppes are even more patriarchal than the others. They select the oldest men, fathers of families, to form a council and govern the whole colony. Hunting, shooting, fishing, and breeding horses, cattle, and sheep are their only occupations. Their dress approaches that of the Chinese; the men shave their heads and grow long hanging-down moustaches; the women, besides the usual wide trousers, wear short jackets and a handkerchief round their heads turban-fashion. Children of both sexes up to twelve years of age go about in summer naked.

I learnt through the interpreter that this village was celebrated for the best mare's milk (Koumiss), and in spring sick persons come from a distance to drink it and be cured. The doctoring of these invalids has become for the inhabitants not only a great source of gain, but a perfect mania. I shall never forget how,

dropping their eastern dignity, the Tartars went into raptures when relating to us the wonderful cures they had performed.

‘What a pity,’ said one of them, ‘that you are quite well!—we should have cured you at once.’

‘Many thanks,’ I replied through the interpreter, ‘but I prefer being in good health, however miraculous your cure.’

‘You can laugh,’ said an old Tartar, ‘but seriously, ill-health is in itself a pleasure when the means of removing it are so wonderful.’

Then they related anecdotes of the different sick who had come to them from all parts of the world. Among others, they mentioned a very rich foreigner, who was quite different from anyone they had ever seen.

‘He was,’ said my landlord, ‘rather pale, his hair was as red as fire, and instead of beard or moustache, like you or I, he grew two large tufts of hair on each side of his face; he put a piece of glass into his eye, or hung it round his neck with a string; he spoke little, and that in an unknown tongue, and did not understand a single word of Russian.’

‘What nation did he belong to?’

‘To the nation of my lords.’

‘My lords!’

‘Oh, yes; it is a country far away beyond the seas. His servant always called him by his nationality.’

In my journeys in Europe, whether amid the trading Germans, the witty French, or in the ruins of the Coliseum—in a word, everywhere I had come across these indefatigable tourists, but I did not expect to come upon an Englishman in these steppes.

In the course of conversation, carried on through the interpreter, I found that the traditions of this nation, both as to legends and historical facts, were most interesting. Were a scholar to collect them on the spot, and arrange according to data, science would be a great gainer; and this would not be difficult, as what among civilized people is obscured by age and time, here seems to have happened very recently. The fathers, or at most the grandfathers of the present generation, witnessed the miraculous wars in which fought superhuman beings. They vanquished Burteozino and Goa-morrel by the help of the hero, Orogo-lukaz, and performed feats which only take place in pre-historic legends.

The legendary history of these tribes still

continues, the Tengris often leave their sepulchres and appear to the living. The evil spirit Horus-lykas walks the steppes. Eclipses of the sun and moon, fogs, thunder, and lightning are all supernatural manifestations and connected with religious observances. In fact, these tribes are to-day in the same moral state as all the nations of Northern Europe were in before the teaching of Christianity. Our past is their present. It remains to be seen whether the influx of progressive European civilization will obliterate their characteristics. The fusion of their ideas with the western spirit has two great obstacles: one the close proximity to China, an essentially stagnant country; and second, a deeply-rooted Shamanism, built upon witchcraft and teaching a firm belief in the supernatural.

The next day we took leave of the hospitable Tartars, and, leaving behind this last settlement, proceeded along the steppe. As the tops of the yourts disappeared on the horizon, a sadness crept over me. I have read somewhere that the first sight of immeasurable, uninhabited stretches of land always creates such a sensation. Though for many years I had lived in the steppes, the so to speak real desert was unknown to me. When the last vestige of human life dis-

appeared, when looking ahead I reflected that there stretched an infinite space containing hundreds, thousands of miles without villages, houses, yourts, or human beings, an indescribable melancholy took possession of me. Man's nature is social, and the greatest beauties of Nature cannot entirely satisfy it. Looking at the various indentations of the mountains rising on the horizon, I tried to picture towns, castles, and villages about them. Sometimes the white stones at their feet appeared to me like the walls of a fortified city, and the fleecy little clouds about as smoke issuing from high chimneys. In this lonely wilderness I sought life after which I hungered with my whole soul. I spent hours buoyed up with the vain pictures of my imagination; reality soon blew my mirage pictures to the wind, as the cold Siberian blast sweeps the morning mists from the landscape.

For the greatest part of the day we followed a small track which was often lost among the high grasses, and now rose, now descended abruptly into deep gorges, but nowhere a trace of man. After a drive of five hours, the driver stopped and unharnessing his tired horses allowed them to graze. We found both coolness and shade from the scorching sun under the

overhanging mountains. I took out my provisions and feeling very thirsty pointed to a running brook.

‘Not for us,’ said the driver.

This fresh clear water was like a splendid past that returns to a hungry beggar in his dreams and sharpens his hunger.

‘Do you see those fresh green stalks growing between us and the stream,’ said my companion. ‘It’s a kind of weed that only grows in inaccessible marshes; if one of us tried to reach the brook, it would be to sink and never reappear again; see, even the horses avoid it, their instinct warns them that certain death there awaits them.’

After a few hours’ halt we again started; the sun was low in the heavens when I perceived a grey belt on the horizon—it was a forest.

The German Black Forest, the great Lithuanian, are as nothing compared with those of Siberia. The virgin forests of America in olden times might have borne some resemblance. We had before our eyes the beginning of a wood desert, the end was undetermined. I knew that it extended over Mongolia, but where did it end? Perhaps it reached the shores of the river Pei-ho, and perhaps it lost itself in the

plains of Persia or the confines of India. The maps of the Celestial Empire are too inaccurate to define its limits.

We were obliged to drive through a part of the forest having on the other side an immense lake which we skirted. The borders of Siberian forests do not differ much from other large European ones, except in the superior size and greater varieties of their trees. The migratory tribes which sometimes come here in the summer have cut down the outlying trees. Many stumps, among which young trees are sprouting, bear witness to the sojourn of Tartars or Tunguzs; but, the further one penetrates, the fewer marks of man are to be found, and the forest thickens and the trees increase in size.

A deep, stony river forced us to go deeper into the wood, and, instead of skirting it, we penetrated some twenty versts into the interior. Thousands of paths, tramped down by wild beasts, stretched before us. Fearful of losing our way, we endeavoured to follow as closely as possible the banks of the river. As we proceeded, our way became more and more difficult, and at every pace the wood thickened so considerably that the trees grew trunk to trunk, and formed an almost impassable barrier.

We had frequently to halt and use the hatchet before we were able to proceed.

Thousands upon thousands of cedars, growing almost one on the top of the other, rot there for want of space to develop, and, if by chance a tree has room enough to spread, its size astonished us. I saw there some birches whose diameter was nearly six feet, and some of the cedars measured forty to fifty feet round, and resembled mountains or gigantic towers built by Nature, to show man her power and his littleness. We continued to advance in the same direction. The dense mass of trees, entwining roots, and decaying trunks became so thick that the work of squeezing through was impossible in the direction we had chosen. We were far from all signs of human labour.

The driver stopped, dismounted, and, hatchet in hand, went off upon a voyage of discovery. He soon returned, bringing the welcome news that the river had changed its course, and that, by following it, we should soon be out of this wilderness. Night had, meanwhile, come on. To journey at night in these localities is most dangerous. Nothing would be easier than to miss the direction, to lose sight of the only guide, the river, and to perish; as, losing the

way in a Siberian forest, is certain death. Death, horrible, appalling—death by hunger or by wild beasts. We therefore settled to pass the night in the neighbourhood. We found a small meadow near the river's edge, surrounded by masses of trees; and here we lighted our fire. This tiny meadow, left clear by a strange freak of Nature, was a capital place for a halt. In the centre of it we saw the decayed ruins of a cedar, and in it we erected our domicile. The river provided us with pure, cool water, and the dense trees kept off the sharp north-wind. Having carefully examined our weapons, and settled the watches in turns, we prepared to pass the night. When my turn came, I threw fresh fuel on the fire, wrapped my fur coat around me, as the night was cold, and was soon lost in thought.

It was not quite dark, but, though the moon shone brightly in the sky, its light could with difficulty pierce the thick mass of foliage and dispel the semi-darkness that reigned beneath. The stillness was only broken by the cries of wild beasts. Now and then I could dimly discern their forms passing between the trees, but the sight of our fire kept them at a distance, and they were only visible for a

moment. The echoes were so far-reaching that the most distant murmur could be heard plainly; imagination, ever on the alert, helped the delusion. I sometimes fancied that the rustle of the leaves was the distant grunt of a bear; the noise of the river splashing along its stony bed, the tramp of a herd of wolves; and the sound of an owl's screech—an uncanny laugh. Sitting there by the fire, surrounded by these varied voices of the night, I felt that never before in the whole course of my chequered life had I so vividly realized God's omnipotence, the vastness of Nature, and man's nonentity.

Having reached the confines of the inhabited world, I penetrated in mind those endless regions where man's foot has never rested. What frightful solitudes! hundreds, thousands of miles that no one has seen. What may they contain of the mysteries of animal and vegetable organization. The mysterious extent of these Asiatic forests gives a faint idea of Infinity. In the presence of this vast, unexplored region, man's imagination becomes dwarfed, thought is paralysed, and his impotency is realized.

The night passed safely. At sunrise we were

ready to start. We followed the river, which took a bend here and flowed on in another direction. For the first few hours we still had to work our way among the trees, but as we neared the steppes they became less and less dense, finally the last of them were left behind, and we saw the clear sky once more. I breathed more freely.

The country was wild but charming. High mountains and steep rocks rose all round us in most fantastic shapes, and amid these glistened the waters of a large lake. What life, what varied sounds rose from this desert lake! Millions of birds, ducks, geese, herons, woodcocks, and swans flew and swam in every direction, giving utterance to their different cries. It was an indescribable chaos; this teeming life, concentrated in itself, gave one some idea of what the world must have been in the first days of the creation. What variety of form, what difference of kind was there among that cloud of whirling, flying creatures inhabiting the shores of that lake. Unused to the sight of man, they do not look upon him as an enemy, and they crowded round us; as in the first days of organic life, when the first innocent blood had not been shed.

My old sporting instincts awoke in me. I seized my gun several times, but as often laid it down again. I had not the courage to disturb their peace and betray their confidence. Live in peace, O birds! sing merrily; your happiness is that you do not know man!

Leaving behind us the clear water of this nameless lake that is not set down in any map, we wended our way amid the steep mountains whose summits, hardly visible to the eye, are covered with eternal snow. The distance from the lake to the first Chinese settlement is one hundred versts, and is wholly uninhabited; it differs but in the height of its mountains and greater wildness of scenery from the more northern regions. There is something truly grand in these great mountain masses overhanging fathomless abysses, and in the rushing mountain torrents tearing down their sides. We had to stop frequently during the day to rest the horses, and the night was spent in a crevasse of the rocks. Early next afternoon, descending a high pass, we suddenly came upon the pointed roofs of the last settlements before the Chinese frontier. These settlements are inhabited by the Roshkolinkis, Sabaterians, Scopts, &c.

These sects, being hardly tolerated by the

local authorities, have emigrated to the very frontiers of Siberia, in order to exercise in freedom their barbarous rites, A minute description of these sects would be too extensive a subject. I will therefore only say that the general character is a blind, questionless attachment to primitive, almost pre-Christian ideas, and a stern rejection of everything new, progressive, and civilising. Every sect has its own canons and observances. The Roshkolinkis keep literally to their books, reject clerical authority, and are ruled by the laws in existence before the purification of the eastern church from superstition. The Scopts consider the multiplying of humanity as a direct increase of sin, and maim themselves in an atrocious manner and bring life to its lowest ebb. The Sabaterians, in whose village we halted, practise a kind of Judaism mixed with Mahomedan ideas. Like the Jews, they keep Saturday, expect the coming of the Messiah, and follow the laws of Moses with respect to the food they eat. They perform frequent ablutions, throw seed to birds during prayer, and believe in the seven Mahomedan heavens with their houris and other material delights.

These people are taciturn, sombre, and of a

wild and repulsive countenance. Many stories are current about their mysterious ceremonies, in which human blood is used. These tales are doubtless exaggerated; but it is certain that these sects look upon the murder of every man of a different religion as a religious duty, whenever it can be done secretly and without attracting the notice of the authorities. Many merchants travelling this way with corn for Mongolia have been lost without a trace. The Sabaterians recite their prayers in Russian, dressed in white clothes; they bow frequently and kiss relics which they wear suspended round their necks. They eat with covered heads. They do not know Hebrew nor the ten commandments. They must be descended from the old Jews, have forgotten their language and some of the observances of their religion, retaining the sense of the books of Numbers and Genesis, though altering and mutilating them. They possess no written documents and rely solely upon tradition, and have widely deviated from the Mosaic record. Besides the occupation of the Creator, taken from the Talmud, of feeding the inhabitants of Paradise upon the fish Leviathan, they believe that a great abyss called Taran exists in the centre of the

earth, where avenging giants periodically throw all those who violate the sanctity of the Sabbath.

We put up in a hut whose owner, a strong, powerful man, tried to induce us to remain a night with him, and thus escape the discomfort which would beset us on the Chinese frontier. Saying which he kept examining the revolvers we carried in our belts, as if speculating upon the chances of attack and defence. But we were proof against his arguments, knowing that it would be sheer madness to spend a night among notorious murderers, especially as I had a large sum of money with me belonging to my employer.

After two or three hours' rest, we started for the frontier, only about twenty versts distant. I noticed that all the time we spent among the Sabaterians our driver was uneasy, pale, and had lost his usual appetite. 'Hospodi prosti,' he cried, crossing himself when the last house of the settlement was passed. 'I will give a candle to my patron saint, that we have escaped from the murderous hole.'

It was evident that in danger he would have been of little use. Two hours afterwards, the white yourts of the Mongols and Sayans appeared spread over the valley. It was the

Chinese frontier. The line between Eastern Siberia and Mongolia, like all localities inhabited by migratory tribes, is not permanently fixed. Where the ground is not tilled, a larger or smaller surface has hardly any value; the yourts can be taken up and placed anywhere as required, and the line dividing the two countries exists but in maps, no one having accurately fixed it. The Mongolians, constantly migrating northwards or retreating southwards, make an exact delineation still more difficult. Each settlement moves in the course of a few years, and no inhabitant can honestly say whether the land he occupies at the moment belongs to Siberia or the Celestial Empire.

The people inhabiting these plains are quite different from other Asiatic tribes I have seen. The Mongolian language is wholly unlike the Tartar tongue. Their appearance, dress, character, and habits are also dissimilar; the only point uniting these tribes is Shamanism, with all its observances. Mongolians, from having been so long under the Mantchurs, have Chinese habits and characteristics. The hospitality and childlike innocence of the Tartars are not to be found in them; on the contrary, they are greedy, distrustful, cunning, and dishonest in the high-

est degree. Cheating and stealing is considered by all tribes belonging to the Celestial Empire as a good quality, almost a virtue; and though the lives of Europeans residing among them are safe (as they are cowardly, and shrink from murder), still one ought to be fully prepared to lose all one's possessions at any time. Their adroitness in this is really so marvellous that the best conjurors would find something to learn from them.

Having some goods to exchange with them, I received instructions how to proceed with them before I left Minusinsk. I succeeded in this difficult undertaking after much trouble and endless caution. After having settled the exchange, I held the goods in my hand up to the moment that my interpreter received the fur given instead. At a given signal, I let go the piece of stuff, and at the same moment my interpreter snatched up the fur. In spite of these precautions, several yards of red cloth vanished suddenly from my hands before my companion could snatch a fur-skin, and, on the most minute research, could nowhere be discovered. The Mongolian who had stolen it in so masterly a manner declared, with every appearance of innocence, that I had never had anything in my hand.

The physiognomies of both the Mongolians and Sayans are frightful—very high cheek-bones, flattened noses, narrow, slanting eyes without eyelashes or eyebrows, and, deeply set in the head, give them a most repulsive appearance. The women are even uglier than the men. A common descent can easily be traced between them and the Tartars, but what is merely sketched in the latter is exaggerated in the former almost to a caricature. An artist would find some difficulty in taking a Mongol's likeness in profile, for there would be a lack of nose, no contour of the face, and only a shapeless line formed by a bulging forehead and a high cheek-bone.

Mongolians dress in the Chinese fashion, shave their heads, and smoke long thin chibouks; their greatest delicacies in the way of food are ants, beetles, and grasshoppers, which they eat raw in handfuls. Their Shaman priests wear high, pointed caps surrounded by tiny bells; and besides their usual offices, such as curing bewitched people, making cows give milk, and selling charms, they exercise the functions of magistrates, and settle domestic disputes. Like the Tartar priests, they bless and supply with talismans newly-married

couples. The matrimonial characteristics of Mongolian, Tartar, and, in fact, all tribes who profess Shamanism, is abduction.

When a young girl and man are in love with each other, the man makes an appointment with his lady-love as to the time and place when he is to carry her off without the knowledge of the parents. At night he collects his friends, steals towards the hut of his beloved, and runs away with her. Sometimes the village is aroused out of its slumbers, and offers opposition; but generally the loss is not discovered until the next morning. The villagers then mount their horses, and try to recover the girl; a fight ensues, in which both sides get black eyes and broken teeth or ribs. All is finished by a sum of money being paid by the bridegroom and a general festivity. When peace is restored, a Shaman is called to bless a marriage which has generally been consummated as soon as the young people became acquainted. Then the wedding takes place, accompanied by singing and dancing to the sound of a flat copper kettledrum called 'tam-tam.'

This habit of carrying off wives, which I witnessed during my sojourn among the Mongolians, is of a very ancient origin. It was a long

time in vogue with the Slavonians. Nestor mentions it among the Drerlaws and Krivit-zans; the Polans alone, who traded with Greece, had their women brought to them. In the province of Vitebsk to this day during the wedding feast the bridegroom pretends to carry off the bride, he driving her to a neighbouring forest, but returns her again. According to Ushold, abduction was the only form of marriage in the olden time. Vico considers it the outcome of the barbarian ideas of the primitive age, who, like the wild animals, carried off their prey to their lairs.

As man progressed, these customs gradually changed and disappeared, giving place to others more in keeping with the spirit of the age. But in Northern Asia, where the light of civilization has not penetrated, they have remained in their native coarseness.

Other distinct types can be seen, besides the Shamans, amongst the Mongolians and Sayans. One of them is a woman-doctor (Gonia), another the official clown. The woman-doctor, besides her natural office of midwife, is always called in as soon as sickness makes its appearance; she administers medicines of herbs, makes poultices, and even sews up wounds. Besides per-

forming these offices, she helps the Shaman during his incantations. These women-doctors are generally so very old and hideous that their like can only be imagined in disordered dreams.

The official clown's duty is to amuse the people during matrimonial feasts and other holidays. They dress ludicrously, black their faces, crack jokes, and are generally good acrobats. They have no other occupation, as they are maintained by the community, and, when not engaged in the duties of their calling, they are smoking and drinking ariash. I must add that their profession is generally looked upon as low and degrading, and that no Mongolian will enter into conversation with a clown, or even speak to him. Soon after my arrival, and not knowing local customs, I met one of these men. My curiosity was aroused by his exterior, and I told my interpreter to draw him into conversation, when an old man who was sitting near ceased smoking and suddenly exclaimed, 'Don't talk to him; he is not worthy of it. He is Zin.'

I must here close my imperfect sketches of the habits and customs of these almost unknown races. My time in their country was short, and

so entirely devoted to business, that I had hardly any at my disposal for observation; yet these details will, I venture to think, be interesting. When, in years to come, in consequence of new routes being opened up through the Celestial Empire, these wild and dangerous steppes and uninhabited regions will be safe and populated, Mongolia, now so little known even by its neighbours, will be accessible to all. It is now only visited by those who from circumstances are forced to go there.

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