LITTLE RUSSIAN MASTERPIECES

In Four Volumes

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Can the End Justify the Means—Coward or Hero?

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Inspecting the Bride.

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Three Deaths.

★★★★

Constantine Mikhailovitch Staniukovitch
Bobtail—The Convict.

V. G. Korolenko
"The Slayer"—Winter.

Little Russian Masterpieces

Chosen and Translated from the Original Russian by

Zénaïde A. Ragozin

With an Introduction and Biographical Notes by

S. N. Syromiatnikof

★ ★ ★ ★

Stories by

Staniukòvitch—Korolenko

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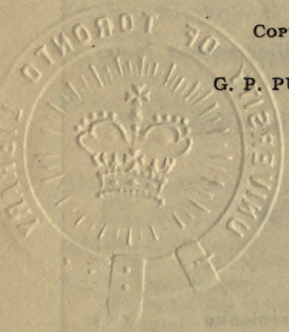

Introduction

MORE than ninety per cent. of the Russian people never read "short stories." They create them, tell them, listen to them. The popular Russian short story, is the *skazka* or fairy tale, which belongs to the province of folklore, probably the richest, most varied, wise, and clever of all folklores of Europe, having absorbed all the richest elements of the East and some of the West. But the short story in the sense in which it is understood by Americans, is the product of the journalization of literature, of the daily press, which did not develop in Russia until the seventies of the nineteenth century. The predecessor of the newspaper, the big monthly, created the "serial," the three-volume novel, usually covering the year with its twelve voluminous instalments.

Up to the eighties of the last century life

moved in the immense country at a slow pace; time was cheap, and the middle and higher classes demanded of writers either big novels or stories of some thirty to forty pages, which could be read through in the course of a long winter evening around the family samovar.

Modern Russian literature took its beginning from the great Pushkin who produced matchless examples not alone of poetry, but also of prose. He gave us our first short stories, those selected for the present set. But all that is really great in Russian literature must be sought in novels, not in stories. Until quite lately, the latter were but crumbs from the rich banquet of Russian literature. To select from these crumbs what is most typical, most beautiful, most artistic, what gives the deepest insight into the Russian national character and nature, what is finest not alone as to mastery of form, but also as to matter—such is the object of the present collection.

Russia is a deep, wide, abundant river,

slowly winding its way over the vast expanse of history. Foreigners are fascinated by its tempests, but the waves these tempests raise affect but slightly the deeper layers of its waters. At the time of great wars and revolutions the life of the rural population, however disturbed on the whole, flows along the same lines, ruled by the same laws of climate and soil,—as it did at the time of the great intestine disturbances of the beginning of the seventeenth century. The aristocratization of life goes steadily on; the upper classes undergo a gradual process of weathering, new layers take their places, but the bulk of the agricultural population remains, now as before, the great reservoir of physical, moral, and intellectual forces, determined by conditions of climate, soil, and a past, lived on the boundary between Europe and Asia.

In her choice of material the editor has by no means made it her object to supply sensational reading. Were the majority of the Russian people composed of assassins, revo-

lutionists, mystics, dreamers of abstractions, Russia would not have outlived the great wars with the Turkish nomads of the ninth to twelfth centuries, the great Tartar invasion of the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, and the great invasions from the West which have succeeded each other with mathematical regularity at the beginning of each of the four last centuries: 1612 by the Poles in Moscow, 1709, the Swedes in Little Russia; 1812, the French in Moscow; 1917, the German in Riga and possibly farther east. . . .

The last three volumes will be devoted to the short story of the latest period from the abortive revolution of 1905 to our own days,—when the short story has been forced by the demands of the daily and weekly press into the form familiar to England and the United States.

S. N. Syromiatnikof.

From the Editor

IT is a trite, but everlastingly true axiom, that a people's life and spirit (and what is literature but the quintessence of both?) are fashioned chiefly by the nature of the country it inhabits. Now Russian nature is not jocose, not sensational; she is serious, severe half of the year; in places stern; and where and when she smiles, her smile is serious, gentle, winning, not conquering; pensive and a wee bit sad, but all the more penetrating and endearing—more deeply, enduringly so than the gorgeous, dazzling landscapes of East and South.

Accordingly, until quite lately—and that mostly in imitation of others—Russian literature has not been sensational or unchaste; it has been chiefly sympathetic and educational, sincere throughout and altruistic in spirit; serious always, if anything, too serious,

lacking vivacity, unbending—as is Russian life itself—meaning the life of the millions and millions, not that of a thin layer of city idlers imitating "the West," and after the manner of imitators, taking the worst of their model and leaving out the good. This, by the way, applies to much of the sensational fiction of these latter days, too often glaringly brutal and licentious.

The main difficulty to be encountered in the selection of material for the present set lies in the comparative scarcity, up to a recent date, of really short stories. Most of our best writers have shorter stories, which, on their merits, it would be desirable to include, but they are not short enough,—they would go as *novelettes*. A selection of such stories might at some future time form an interesting separate collection.

After Tchekhof, there is no lack of material. The abortive revolution of 1905, the Japanese war, the present war, and the present revolution yield an inexhaustible mine, in which,

however, comparatively few nuggets repay a long and tedious search.

Here again the recent rush of translations from the Russian make it difficult to avoid "overlapping" in the choice of stories, since it is impossible, in the number, to know exactly which have already figured in the lists of published translations.

For the present it is the editor's object and hope to present American readers with a selection which may not only prove acceptable in itself, but reveal to them some less familiar aspects of Russian thought and character and so help to complete their conception of this richly and variously gifted race.

Z. RAGOZIN.

PETROGRAD,

Contents

Constantine Mikhaïlovitch Staniukòvitch

Constantine Mikhàïlovitch Staniukòvitch

1844–1903

STANIUKÒVITCH was born in Sebastopol, where his father, whom he later on described as "The Terrible Admiral," was commander of the military port. He began his education in the "School of Pages." His father, however, wished him to enter the navy, and transferred him to one of the government naval schools. But his whole nature powerfully drew him towards literature as a career; so his father, in order to save him from so pernicious a vocation, got him, when only sixteen, sent off on a voyage round the world, in the course of which he sent home his first sketches, one of which was published as early as 1861.

On his return home from Singapore, in 1863,

he demanded his father's permission to leave the navy, threatening, in case of refusal, to commit some such serious offence as would entail expulsion. The "terrible admiral" then gave his consent, adding that the rebel thenceforth would be no son of his.

The young lieutenant, having recovered his freedom (1864), plunged headlong into the "liberating movement" which broke out with such vigour in the sixties of last century; he even accepted the humble position of rural schoolmaster in central Russia, for the sake of the opportunities which it offered for propaganda among the peasantry, a stratagem much in vogue among the radical youth at that time and since. He published novels of the well-known "liberal" type, in which all the "new men" are heroes and all the "old men"—monsters. He also wrote in the daily press. To make a living he had to serve in various joint stock companies, and at last started a radical magazine of his own, which, however, was suppressed in 1885.

Staniukòvitch himself was then exiled to the province of Tomsk, in Siberia, for the space of three years. It was there that his memory conjured up the scenes of his brief maritime life, and that he wrote his famous stories of life on board during the transition period from the fiercely disciplined navy created by Peter the Great, to the "liberal" navy, which perished at Tsusima, and degenerated into the "Red Navy" of 1917. Lovingly he portrayed the old-time sailors, who, under the iron discipline of the time, had preserved deals and many noble qualities.

His other writings are but of passing temporary interest.

S. N. Syromiatnikof.

Bobtail

By C. M. Staniukòvitch

I

ON a wonderful early morning in the tropical roadstead of Singapore, where the Russian Pacific squadron was then assembled (sometime in the sixties of the nineteenth century), the newly appointed first lieutenant of the corvette *Mogútchi* (the "Mighty"), Baron von der Bering, accompanied by the senior boatswain, Gordéyef, was going the rounds of the ship, poking into its most obscure nooks and crannies. The baron was a man of about thirty-five, fair-haired, tall and lank of build, with an extremely serious expression of countenance. He had come on board only the evening before, being transferred from the clipper *Góloub* (Dove) by the admiral's

order, and now was making himself acquainted with his new vessel.

It was his earnest desire, in his capacity of new broom, to discover something to find fault with, but this proved impossible. Bound on a voyage round the globe, the vessel, though now already two years from home, was kept in exemplary order, and shone with refulgent neatness from top to bottom. This was the doing of the former first lieutenant, now appointed to the command of one of the clippers, Stepán Stepánitch, the beloved of officers and crew, who gave up his whole kindly, guileless soul to the one object of having his ship, in his own words, "bright as a toy," the admiration of any seaman who knew anything at all about the matter.

And, in fact, the *Mogútchi* was admired in all the foreign ports which she visited.

Baron Bering, with his slow, slightly waddling gait, had just completed the circuit of the lower deck, containing the officers' quarters, when he suddenly stopped short in the orlop-

deck, extending a long, white index finger, on which glistened a ring with the family arms of the ancient Courland baronial house of Bering. This finger was pointed at a big, shaggy, reddish-yellow dog, which sweetly slumbered, with outstretched, homely, anything but high-bred muzzle, in a quiet, cool corner of the men's quarters.

"What is that?" sternly and majestically inquired the baron after a second or two of solemn silence.

"A dog, your honour," the boatswain hastened to explain, thinking that the officer had not made out the animal in the semi-darkness of the orlop-deck, and had taken it for something else.

"*Dou-ràk!*" (fool). The baron chopped off the word calmly but emphatically, without raising his voice. "I can see for myself that it is a dog, and not a mop. What I want to know is: how comes the dog here? Is it permissible to keep a dog on a man-of-war? Whose dog is it?"

"The 'convert's,'[1] your honour."

"Boatswain . . . What is your name?"

"Gordéyef, your honour."

"Boatswain Gordéyef, express yourself more clearly. You mean the 'corvette's.' What is that, a corvette's dog?" the baron went on in the same slow, protracted, monotonous tone of voice, uttering his words with the precision with which Russo-Germans speak Russian, and fixing on the boatswain's face his large, cold, light-blue eyes.

The middle-aged boatswain, whom everybody, so far, had seemed to understand perfectly well, excepting, possibly, such times when he happened to return from a spree on shore the worse for drink, looked perplexedly at the officer's impassive, elongated, smooth-shaven, white face, just now slightly flushed, and framed in reddish mutton-chop whiskers. Evidently put out by this tiresome question-

[1] The men formerly invariably used thus to mispronounce the word "corvette."—TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.

ing, the man, instead of answering, began violently to blink his small grey eyes.

"Well, what of this 'corvette's' dog?"

"The men's, your honour, their common property," gloomily explained the boatswain, at the same time thinking to himself: "Can't you understand, you beanpole?"

But the "beanpole" apparently did not understand, and said so: "What nonsense are you talking? Every dog must have a master."

"This one hasn't, your honour. He was a vagrant."

"A what?" asked the baron, evidently ignorant of the word's meaning.

"A vagrant, your honour—homeless, as you might say. He followed one of our men, and came on board while the vessel was arming in the harbour. From that time on 'Bobtail' has made the voyage with us. We call him that on account of his tail, your honour," added the boatswain by way of further explanation.

"Dogs on board men-of-war are a nuisance

and against rules. They do nothing but befoul the deck."

"Permit me to observe, your honour, that 'Bobtail' is an intelligent dog and well-behaved. And as to that, nothing of the kind can be laid to his charge," warmly protested the boatswain. "The former first lieutenant, Stepán Stepánitch, allowed us to keep him, seeing that 'Bobtail' is a decent dog, and the men are fond of him."

"You have been allowed too much, I can see, and given altogether too much liberty, I am going to change all that and pull you up short, do you hear?" sternly spoke the baron. He thought the boatswain's manner of speaking rather too familiar, and the man himself did not appear overmuch awed in his, the first lieutenant's, presence.

The baron stood for a moment absorbed in thought, frowning and revolving in his mind Bobtail's fate, while the boatswain, devoted to the dog, awaited his decision in much trepidation.

The officer at length spoke again:

"If I ever see on the deck any filth of this dog's, I shall have him thrown overboard. Do you understand me?"

"I do, your honour."

"And remember that I never repeat an order," emphatically added the baron, still without raising his ereaky, monotonous voice.

Boatswain Gordéyef, grown old in the service, had known in his time a great variety of officers, and, being a good judge of men, did not need this warning in order to come to the conclusion that "the beanpole," though speaking so quietly, dispassionately, was a veritable "pest," under whom to serve would be a constant strain, very different from the conditions under Stepán Stepánitch.

Now Bobtail, hearing his name repeatedly mentioned, stretched himself, opened his eyes, rose to his feet, took a few steps out of his dark corner to a lighter spot, and as became an intelligent, well-trained dog, seeing an unknown gentleman in an officer's uniform

several times respectfully wagged his stump of a tail.

"Faugh, what a loathsome dog!" disgustedly exclaimed the baron through his set teeth, casting a contemptuous glance at the big, homely, ungainly mongrel with the hard, reddish, rumpled coat, the torn, upsticking, pointed ears, and the broad muzzle, bald in patches as though moth-eaten. His uncommonly intelligent, kind eyes alone, now attentively regarding the baron, in part redeemed his ungainly appearance. But the baron was not one to notice these eyes.

"Don't let me ever meet the horrid beast," said he in conclusion, and, with the words, turned on his heel and mounted to the upper deck, followed by the frowning and downcast boatswain.

With humbly lowered stump (the result of a Cronstadt cook's wicked practical joke), and slightly limping with one forepaw, broken long ago, Bobtail crept back into his dark corner, instinctively feeling, it may be sup-

posed, that he had not had the honour to please the man with the red whiskers, whose cold, cruel eyes, promised him anything but a happy future.

One of the men, who had overheard the first lieutenant's words, patted the general favourite, and the dog gratefully licked his work-roughened hand.

II

Pining under the feeling of uneasy dejection into which didactic speeches and "high-faluting" words are apt to throw the plain Russian man, the boatswain had to stand "on attention" for a mortal quarter of an hour, if not more, in the baron's stateroom, nervously plucking at his cap and listening to endless monotonous instructions and dissertations concerning the new order of things to be established on the ship, the demand to be made on the boatswains and lower officers, about the bearing to be observed by the men, on the essence of "true discipline" according to his,

the baron's, ideas, on how he would mercilessly punish drunkenness on shore, and so forth.

When he was at last allowed to escape, with a parting injunction to be sure and remember all that had been said and repeat the same to the men, the boatswain heaved a sigh of relief, and, red in the face as though coming out of the vapour bath, he rushed up on deck and to the forecastle, there to smoke a quiet pipe.

He was at once surrounded by nearly all the representatives of the forecastle aristocracy: the barber, the steward, the mate, the engineer, two clerks, a few non-commissioned officers.

"Well, Akím Zakháritch, what is he like? What did you think of him?" they eagerly questioned him from all sides.

The boatswain answered with a hopeless wave of his red, brawny hand and angrily spat into the vat, filled with water, which is kept for the purpose on the forecastle.

This gesture, together with the energetic spit and the vexed expression of his sunburnt, reddish-brown face, with the black whiskers sprinkled with grey, the red potato-like nose and the beetling brows,—in a word, his whole attitude clearly spoke, "Better don't ask."

"Bad-tempered?" someone asked.

But the boatswain even yet was in no hurry to answer. He took two or three desperately deep whiffs, and, casting a significant glance around on all the audience, who sat there, anxious for the opinion of so wise and authoritative a person, he at last delivered his verdict like a shot, not forgetting, however, to moderate somewhat his stentorian voice, which had won him the nickname of "Brass trumpet."

"A regular Turkish pest,—that's what he is."

So convinced and decided an appraisement strongly impressed all present. Naturally. After two years' navigation under a first lieutenant who, in seamen's parlance, was "kind and pitiful to the men," never overburdened

them with tasks and drilling, seldom gave his hands free play, and then only in the heat of the moment, never out of cold-blooded cruelty, and made allowances for the men's one weakness,—the prospect of having to do with a "pest" was far from attractive. No wonder that all the faces suddenly grew long and thoughtful.

There was a minute of concentrated, tense silence.

"Still, in what respects is he a pest, Akím Zakháritch?" inquired the young curly-pated barber and doctor's assistant, who, from his position, would be less exposed to the danger of colliding with the first lieutenant: all he had to do was just to stick to the doctor and the hospital, and he would be all right.

"In every respect, brother mine; just an all-round pest. A millstone of a man. He will nag, nag, without a respite, the German beanpole! He's been at me just now in his stateroom; stared at me with those fish's eyes of his; went z-z-z-, buzzing like a saw,"

reported the boatswain, mimicking the baron. 'I'll make things tight for you men,' sez he; 'I'll have order,' sez he; 'I,' sez he, 'won't tolerate drunkenness on shore, but proceed with the greatest severity.' . . . In short, it was nag, nag, nag, till he had me quite dazed."

"The non-com. who came over with him yesterday in the cutter from the *Góloub*, did not have much good to say of him either," put in one of the non-commissioned officers. "Said he was opinionated and obstinate beyond measure, boring people to death with his talk. They were all glad enough on board the *Góloub* to be rid of him, he said, because that he just sticks to one like pitch. He never strikes a man, and he does not flog, but he has punishments of his own: makes 'em stand in the shrouds barefoot; sends 'em up to sit for hours on yard-arms. Very fault-finding, they say, and thinks a lot of himself, this. . . . By the way, what's his name?"

"Bernikof, I believe," answered the boatswain, Russifying the German name, as

uneducated Russians have a way of doing. "Of the German barons. But if he thinks so much of himself, he is mistaken, I can tell him. He really has not so much to be proud of," authoritatively concluded Gordéyef.

"How so?"

"Why he hasn't got much sense that one can see. That shows in all his talk. And he is hard of understanding too. Just now he could not take it in, Bobtail's being the *convert's* dog. 'How is that?' sez he, 'the *convert's?*'—insisted that the dog must have one master."

"How did you come to speak of the dog at all?" inquired someone.

"Curious, isn't it? He took a dislike to our Bobtail at first sight, and there you are. 'You can't keep a dog on a man-of-war,' sez he. And he threatened to have him thrown overboard if he misbehaved on deck. 'And,' sez he, 'don't let me ever meet him.'"

"Say, what is Bobtail to him anyhow? One would think he was in his way."

"It seems everything is in his way, confound him. He won't let even a dumb beast alone. Yes, brothers,—a nice article the Lord has sent us. It's going to be a different life on board. More than once we shall think of our dear Stepán Stepánitch. God keep him in good health, the darling!" spoke the boatswain, knocking the ashes out of his pipe and slipping it into his trousers pocket.

"Our captain won't give him much headway, I don't think," remarked the young barber. "He won't let him play too many pranks. He'd better look out. Times are changed. The peasants are being set free, and all have their rights, according to law."

"The captain cannot see to everything. The trouble is that it is the first lieutenant who is in touch with us at every turn," replied the boatswain.

"If the worst came to the worst, who's to prevent us going to the captain, I'd like to know?" boasted the young barber, bristling.

"Not so fast, lad! Just consider that the

captain can not very well go against his own brother officer and shame him to please a non-com. That's where the hitch is! No, brother mine; going in singly with complaints, that's no way of doing; you'd only anger the captain and do no good; and catch it besides yourself. In old times there were other ways," reminiscently went on the boatswain, a staunch upholder of the traditions of what might be called "seamen's common law."

"What ways, Akím Zakháritch?"

"This among others, that if so it happened that officers senselessly as one might say, ill-treated the men and made their life a hell so that their patience finally gave out,—then the crew took a desperate step; they would all assemble, fall into line, quite orderly, as at manœuvres, and the boatswain, as spokesman, would expose their grievances."

"And what then? Did it work?"

"That depended on what kind of man the captain was. There were them as would, without looking into the matter at all, order

half the crew flogged. Then again, another would investigate and decide as his conscience prompted him. I mind me, once, at parade,—I was then in my first year,—we complained to Admiral Tchaplígin of Commander Zanozoff,—a regular wild beast he was,—and what do you think? Instead of an investigation, flogging went on all that day on our ship. I got a hundred myself,—and that's all that came of it that time. But on another similar occasion we complained in a body to Captain Tchulkof (he is admiral now), of the first lieutenant. That affair took quite another turn. Captain Tchulkof heard us out with bent brows and sternly set face, but promised to investigate."

"And he did?"

"He did. A week later the first lieutenant left the frigate on the plea of sickness, and we could breathe freely and suffered no evil consequences whatever. So you see, brother mine, how differently things turn out at different times. Of course, we took the risk."

"Well, our captain, no matter what, will not suffer his men to be abused."

"He is our only hope; but all the same, it is not possible for him to see everything. The German beanpole will nag us to death."

The men continued for some time longer to discuss the new first lieutenant. It was unanimously decided "to wait and see." He might possibly be afraid of the captain and abstain from interfering with the old order of things, as established by the lamented Stepán Stepánitch. These considerations to a certain extent laid the general excitement, —when a youthful clerk, a great dandy, wearing a small amethyst on his little finger, inquired:

"And how about shore leave, Akím Zakháritch? Will he let us have a glimpse of Singapore, think you?"

"No mention was made of that."

"Won't you ask him, Akím Zakháritch?"

"I will, by-and-by."

"Every man likes a spree on shore once in

a while. And Singapore, they say, is well worth a visit . . . what with natural beauties and restaurants. The shops, too, I am told, are fine. . . . Don't put it off, will you? For there's no saying how long we are to lie here, and we might easily be cheated out of our fun."

At this moment a young orderly came running at top speed:

"Akím Zakháritch, the first lieutenant wants you!"

"What's hurting him now?"

"Can't say. He sits in his stateroom, looking over some papers."

"Some more nagging, I suppose! Ugh!"

And delivering himself of a good round swear, the boatswain hurried off.

"Are you to stay with the new first lieutenant, Vania?" inquired several men of the orderly.

"I am, worse luck. No way out of it. Have to stand it somehow. . . . A nice plague God sends us in the place of Stepán Stepá-

nitch. He has been at me already about the innovations he intends to introduce. Says things are to run as by machinery!"

III

The news of the new first lieutenant's hostility to Bobtail and his threat to have the ship's dog thrown overboard were received with sullen grumbling. All seemed astonished at such stupid cruelty: depriving the men of their pet, who, during this two years' navigation, had kept them so well amused amidst the monotony of ship life, had proved such a kindly, affectionate, grateful creature, repaying with sincere devotion the kindness of these masters, with whom, after leading for years a vagrant's life, with all its attendant miseries, on the streets of Cronstadt, he had found a home at last.

Intelligent and apt, quick to assimilate the various items of a maritime education, there was no end to the tricks with which the comical, homely fellow could call forth the

general laughter and wonder at his really extraordinary cleverness. What a comfort he was to these unsophisticated sailormen, making them forget, for a while at least, the hardships and tedium of those long ocean passages and protracted absences from home! He could walk on his hind feet with the most serious expression on his clever face, could fetch and carry, climb up into the shrouds and stand there until ordered "Down!" He would show his teeth and growl angrily if asked, "Bobtail, how would you like a taste of the rope's end?" or grin amiably and wag his stump of a tail if asked, "Want to go on shore?" At the boatswain's whistle and shout, "All hands on deck!" he would rush upstairs whatever the weather, and wait on the forecastle for the whistle ordering the released watch down. And in stormy weather he almost always stayed on deck, diverting the men all through their wearisome watches. When the whistle called them together at midday for their daily dram, Bob-

tail felt it his duty to be present at the distribution of the vodka, after which, at dinner-time, he would walk on his hind feet from mess to mess, levying generous contributions and gaily barking his thanks.

After dinner, when the men who were not on watch had their nap, Bobtail invariably curled up at the feet of Kotchnef, an elderly, morose man, immoderately addicted to drink, but whom the dog regarded with the tenderest feelings and pathetic devotion. He would look up in his eyes, continually fidgeting around him, beyond measure delighted, if the man patted him, and invariably sharing his night watches. When Kotchnef sat at the prow on sentinel duty, with the single obligation to "look ahead," Bobtail frequently took the duty on himself. He conscientiously got drenched by rain, chilled through by the piercing wind, and, pricking his battle-torn ears, kept a sharp lookout into the dark night ahead, allowing his friend to doze, nodding, wrapped in his raincoat and warmed

by the dog's woolly body. If he sighted the lights of a vessel coming their way, or the suddenly emerging silhouette of a merchantman carrying no lights, as sometimes happens from carelessness, Bobtail would give a loud bark and waken the slumbering sentinel. It was always with Kotchnef he went on shore, when he would accompany him to the nearest saloon, absent himself for an hour or so, to take a look at the shore dogs, then would return to his friend, sometimes pretty badly bitten, not again to lose sight of him. Attentively and with visible sympathy he would listen to the sailor's drunken monologues, responding by energetic waggings and affectionate whines when the effusions became more than usually pathetic. When the sailor lay on the pavement in some street drunk to insensibility, Bobtail watched by him until his comrades found him and bore him away. In a word, he manifested a truly doggish devotion to the man who had procured for him, the persecuted vagrant, every

morning in danger of being lassoed by the dog-catchers, a pleasant home with plenty of food on board ship, among these good-hearted fellows, who from the first had shown the poor waif the warmest sympathy and such kindness as he had seldom, if ever, experienced.

The morose, uncommunicative sailor, in his turn, was strongly attached to his foundling, who had manifested the most brilliant capacities, not to mention his noble moral qualities, and the sailor, when drunk, carried on, apparently with him alone of all living beings, long intimate conversations. He told Bobtail how he had been illegally taken into the service "thanks to a certain mean scoundrel," told him about his wife, now living, as one might say, "like a born lady,"—of his daughter, who would not have anything to do with him. And Bobtail seemed to understand that this gloomy sailor, who drank glass after glass of gin in foreign public-houses, was telling him sorrowful things.

Staniukòvitch

His acquaintance with Bobtail was purely accidental. It happened in Cronstadt, on a cold and stormy Sunday, after dinner, some four days before the ship sailed. Kotchnef, half seas over, walking along unsteadily and describing with his feet the most intricate scrolls, was returning from a public-house to his ship, which was moored in the naval harbour, when he noticed in an alley a dog leaning against a rain-pipe and quivering with cold. The wretched looks of the poor creature, soaking wet, with prominent ribs, evidently homeless, and whose anything but attractive appearance at once betrayed the mongrel vagrant, moved the more than half drunk sailor's pity.

"You poor old thing, whose might you be? . . . Homeless, eh?" said he with reluctant tongue, stopping before the dog.

The animal glanced at him distrustfully with his intelligent eyes, as though considering whether to run for it at once or wait for the man to go away. But a few more words,

uttered in kindly tones, allayed any fears he might have entertained of the man's intentions, and he raised a pitiful howl. The sailor came nearer and patted the dog, who thereupon licked his hand, grateful for the caress, and howled the more.

Then Kotchnef began to fumble in his pockets. This gesture attracted the dog's hungry attention.

"Starving, boy, eh?" spoke the sailor. "Well, have a little patience. . . . Oh, here it is,—you're in luck!" he added at last, fishing a copper coin out of his trouser's pocket.

He entered a small grocery, and, a moment later, was throwing to the dog pieces of black bread and cuts of tripe.

The dog greedily devoured the food, and another moment was again looking at the man with questioning eyes.

"Come along then; on board the 'convert' . . . they will feed you up till you drop. . . . Sailors are good lads. . . . Don't be afraid! You can stay on board for the night. Where's

the good of soaking in the rain? Come on, doggie!"

He whistled gently. The dog started after him, clambered up the gangway, not without misgivings, and found himself on the forecastle in the midst of the crowd, rather frightened, and, it seemed, ashamed of his miserable appearance.

"Here, brothers, I've found a vagrant," announced Kotchnef, pointing to the dog.

The animal's sad plight appealed to the men's pity. They patted him and took him downstairs, to be fed, after which, his stomach well filled, he went to sleep in the neighbourhood of the caboose, but, as though unable quite to believe in such good fortune, often started in his sleep.

Next morning the dog, waked by the bustle attending the cleaning of the upper deck, looked about him in sudden alarm, but Kotchnef quieted his fears by placing before him a bowl of the light porridge which the men had for breakfast.

Later on, when the deck had been washed, Kotchnef took him upstairs to the forecastle, and, addressing the men, moved that he be allowed to stay.

The motion was received with warm approval, and the boatswain was asked to apply to the first lieutenant for permission. When it was granted the question came up, what name should be given the newcomer.

The men looked doubtfully at the very unprepossessing figure of the dog, who in acknowledgment of their kind glances, gently wagged his stump of a tail and gratefully licked the horny hands that patted him.

"We cannot possibly call him anything but 'Bobtail,'" volunteered one voice.

The name stuck. From that moment Bobtail was accepted as one of the crew of the good ship *Mogútchi*.

His elementary education was undertaken by Kotchnef, who showed brilliant pedagogical talent. It took Bobtail not more than a week thoroughly to master the doctrine of the

inviolability of the deck and the sailors' strict notions on cleanliness generally, and he at once became an absolutely well-behaved dog. At the very first spell of dirty weather in the Baltic he displayed extraordinary maritime qualities. He did not mind the motion in the least, ate with the same appetite as in calm weather, and showed no alarm at sight of the huge waves which broke against the ship's sides. In a very short time the intelligent, affectionate animal became the general favourite, and amused the men with his tricks.

And such a dear dog to be threatened with summary destruction! . . .

The news produced general consternation, but Kotchnef took it even more to heart than the rest, and resolved to take every measure so that the "long shanked devil" should not encounter Bobtail on his rounds. And on that same day, when the dog, on hearing the whistle calling the men to the daily dram, was rushing upstairs, gay and careless as usual,

he took him down again and made him lie down in the darkest corner, saying:

"Stay here quietly, Bobtail, by and by I'll bring you your dinner."

IV

A month went by.

The men had time enough to take the new first lieutenant's measure, and they disliked him more and more. True, the rope's end was never used, and he never struck a man, nor showed in any way a cruel disposition; nevertheless he was hated for his petty fault-finding, for "sticking like pitch," forever-lastingly "nagging" at a man for the most trifling offence. Then he had most ingenious punishments of his own invention, such as refusing a culprit shore leave, thus depriving him of the only pleasure attainable on long voyages; or sending a man up into the shrouds, or keeping him for hours sitting on the end of a yardarm, or, lastly,—and this the men felt

most keenly, as adding insult to injury,—depriving them of their daily dram.

If the baron was hated and feared for these punishments, he was detested still more for his heartless pedantry, which never overlooked the least infraction of regulations. Each and all felt weighed down by a sort of stubborn, soulless, machine-like oppression, and, above all, felt that the baron, in his heart, despised the Russian sailor, who, to him, was nothing but a "hand." Never a kind word, never a jest! Always one and the same even, calm, creaky voice in which the men's sensitive ear caught a note of contempt. Always the same unemotional look of the light blue eyes.

He did not even command respect as a sailor. The forecastle, that sailors' club, where the officers are subjected to most perspicacious estimations, decided that he was not by a long shot such an "eagle" as their beloved Stepán Stepánitch,—in fact, nothing but "drenched fowl," who had shown a faint heart on one

occasion, when the ship had been caught in a storm on leaving Singapore. Nor did he, in the older sailormen's opinion, know his business any too well, although he kept poking his nose into things. Obstinacy in him took the place of real mentality. The upshot was that the baron was detested and went by no other name than the "Devil's Nag." He was feared by all like a veritable pest.

In the early days of his rule, the baron had taken it into his head to alter the entire order of things existing on the ship, and, in the place of the former brief daily exercises, introduced drills lasting two and three hours at a stretch, which wore out the men, tired as they were by the six hours' watches they had to do in the course of their regular duties. But the captain, God bless him, had promptly curbed such excessive zeal. The men heard all about that from Yegorka, the captain's orderly, a smart lad, whom few things escaped.

"You see, brothers, he sent for the 'Devil's Nag' to come to his stateroom, and, says he

to him: 'You,' sez he, 'Karl Ferdinánditch, had no business to introduce all these new-fangled ways and worry the men with your drills. Let things,' sez he, 'go as they did before you came.'"

"Well, and what did the *Niémiets*[1] say to that?"

"Got as red as a boiled crawfish, the accursed nag, and replied: 'Very well, only I supposed that, for the good of the service . . .' 'Excuse me, baron,' the captain breaks in, 'but I know as well as you do what is for the good of the service. . . . And,' sez he, 'the good of the service demands that the men should not be worried for no reason at all. There is work enough for them to do without tiring them out with extra drills,—the watches and all . . . and our men,' sez he, 'are good workers, fine lads all. So don't you grieve your soul about

[1] *Niémiets*, the popular name for "German," literally meaning "dumb." In olden times, all foreigners were called that: not speaking Russian, they were "dumb."

the good of the service. . . . That's all,' sez he, 'I had to say to you.' . . . And so the long shanked devil left him, the same as he had been scalded," ended Yegorka to the general satisfaction.

All in all, Baron von der Bering, with his new ways and notions about discipline, did not "fit in." He was disliked in the wardroom as well, especially by the youngsters, who had imbibed the new spirit of the sixties, and were anxious to enact the new humane principles in their treatment of the men. The baron's views they felt to be the obsolete views of a hopelessly conservative adherent of the old order, including serfdom. Absolutely sincere in his convictions, he never concealed what he called his "sacred principles." Always somewhat pompous and intensely self-loving, disgustingly prim and correct in all his ways, he provoked antagonism in the merry young officers, who considered him a dull, narrow-minded, and dry-hearted prig, convinced of his own infallibility, and looking down on all men

from the height of his baronial eminence. Neither was he liked by those "pariahs" of the old-time naval service, the steersman, the gunner, and the engineer. Always sensitive and quick to take offence, they easily detected and resented in the punctilious politeness of his attitude towards them the supercilious condescension, akin to contempt, of the race-proud aristocrat, never for an instant forgetful of his own superiority.

No more was the new first lieutenant to the captain's taste. The latter was not particularly grateful to the admiral for having saddled him with this "German sausage," not suspecting, however, that his artful chief had sent the baron to him with deliberate intent, being well assured that he would very soon get rid of him in some way, when he, the admiral, would "wash his hands of him" and send him back to Russia with the squadron.

In the wardroom no one scarcely ever spoke to the baron outside of matters pertaining to the service; he was a stranger in the midst

of the officers, who formed one united family. The midshipmen alone sometimes could not resist the temptation to tease the baron by violent attacks against all conservatives and adherents of serfdom, who refused to acknowledge the value of the great reforms, and by singing the praises of his predecessor, Stepán Stepánitch. "It was a pleasure to serve under such a man! An excellent officer and a good comrade! And how beloved of the men! And how well he knew the men and loved them himself! There was nothing they would not have done to please him."

"Even Bobtail loved him!" exclaimed midshipman Koshútitch, a blond, curly-pated boy, who was particularly fond of "baiting" the "aristocratic German stick." "By the way, gentlemen, how is it we never see Bobtail around on deck any more? The poor old dog is forever hiding nowadays. Why is that, think you?" the midshipman would innocently ask, though he knew all about the first lieutenant's threat.

The baron would sulk and puff up like an angry gobbler. apparently paying no attention to all these insinuations, and, with the dull stubbornness of a narrow-minded man, persist in his line of action, utterly disregarding the general hostility.

In the course of this month Bobtail really did keep out of the first lieutenant's way. Once he caught sight of him from afar, on which occasion Kotchnef, pointing to the baron, said to the dog: "Bobtail, beware of him," in such a terrible tone of voice that the dog sat down aghast. From that day the whole course of his existence was changed. When the officer started on his morning rounds, the dog hid away in some darkest corner of the hold, or of the stoker's room, indicated by Kotchnef, who took no little pains to teach him to sit there without stirring. When all hands were busy on deck, Bobtail did not assist as formerly. Thanks to his instructor's teaching, it sufficed to say: "There's the nag!" for the dog to take to his

heels, with his stump between his legs, and squeeze himself into the remotest cranny, whence he emerged only when some sailor's low, reassuring whistle reached him through a hatch. He was brought out on the upper deck only when the baron sat at dinner or was asleep, and at such times he diverted the men with his droll tricks, as usual. "Never fear, Bobtail," they would say, reassuringly, "the nag is not around." In their anxiety for their favourite's safety, they even set out sentries to watch, while Bobtail gave his performances on the forecastle. Only at night, more especially during the dark, moonless, tropical nights, could he, after sleeping all day, enjoy the freedom of the forecastle, but, alas, he dared not share his friend's vigils, "look ahead," and bark at sight of a light. Kotchnef did not take him along, dreading the "Devil's Nag," whom the morose sailor hated, it seemed, even more than did the others.

And yet, in spite of all these precautions, poor Bobtail did not escape disaster.

V

It was a scorching hot day in the Chinese Sea. Not a cloud in the sky; a dead calm on the waters. The wind died at daybreak; the sails hung lazily flapping, and the captain gave orders to get up steam. Soon was heard the characteristic puffing of the labouring engine, the sails were taken in and the ship, starting at full speed, headed for Nagasaki.

The first lieutenant was particularly anxious that the ship should arrive at Nagasaki, where the admiral had appointed the meeting-place of the squadron, in splendid condition, and, with this object in view, was making his third round of the vessel, finding fault with everybody and plaguing the men to exasperation with his endless lecturing. He was visibly upset and out of sorts, although the vessel was in ideal condition, everything on deck burnished and shining in the dazzling light of the sun, which hung, like a gigantic, incandescent ball,

above the becalmed waters. The baron had just had a not very pleasant interview with the captain, and felt very much put out in consequence. For all his proposals, tending to the best of his knowledge, towards the greater good of the service, had been systematically rejected by that "weak-minded man," as he contemptuously styled the captain, and the relations between them were growing daily more strained. In addition to all this, the midshipmen were getting more and more ingenious in their teasing and insinuations, though they took good care not to lay themselves open to reprimands. And the baron, sullen and incensed, superciliously reflected how hard it is for a decent man to work with these stupid Russian "democrats," who have no notion of real discipline, and are ever ready to undermine the prestige of lawful authority.

Busy with his own thoughts he descended to the lower deck, peering from habit into various nooks and corners, when on his way

to the orlop, he saw Bobtail pass him and madly rush upstairs like a streak.

"Nasty beast!" muttered the baron, startled by the dog's sudden appearance, and, accidentally glancing at the place which Bobtail had so precipitously left, his eyes remained fixed on one particular spot right under the hatch of the ladder leading to the forecastle, and his face contracted into a disgusted grimace.

"Send the boatswain!" he shouted.

In a few seconds Gordéyef stood before him.

"What is that?" slowly hissed the baron pointing with his finger.

"Your honour can see for yourself . . ." But the boatswain gloomily answered the question.

The baron, after a pause, proceeded:

"You remember what I said to you?"

"I remember, your honour," replied the boatswain, still more gloomily.

"Then see that the dirty dog be thrown overboard within five minutes."

"May I make bold to inform your honour," began the boatswain in the most respectful, nay, supplicating tones: "the dog is sick. . . . The doctor's assistant examined him; he said the dog was sick with his belly, but would soon get over it. When in good health Bobtail would never dare. . . . Do pardon him, your honour!" entreated the man with unsteady voice.

"Gordéyef," retorted the baron, "I am not in the habit of repeating an order. You can, of course, talk any amount of rubbish. In five minutes you are to come and report to me that my command has been obeyed. And have the deck here scrubbed," he concluded, and with the words, turned on his heel and was gone.

"Ugh, the idiot!" angrily muttered the boatswain after the receding figure, then mounted to the forecastle and sought out Kotchnef, who was waiting to take Bobtail downstairs.

"Well, brother, we are done for," he

announced; the 'Devil's Nag' just now saw what happened to poor Bobtail, and . . ."

He did not end, only gloomily shook his head.

Kotchnef understood. An instant change came over his face. The muscles quivered and tightened; he stood for a few seconds as dazed, in a kind of mute despair.

"Nothing to be done with the mean scoundrel! But oh, the pity of it . . . the poor, poor dog!" moaned the boatswain.

"Zakháritch! Oh, Zakháritch!" suddenly cried the sailor in a beseeching, broken voice; "why, he is sick, Bobtail is! And, being sick, how can he be held responsible? He must have been taken pretty badly with his belly, if he did such a thing! You know how particular he is about that! He is so clever. Never did such a thing happen before. . . . And even so, how many times did he not run upstairs since this morning! . . . Zakháritch, old man, be a dear, go and talk to that devil!"

"Haven't I talked to him? Haven't I begged? Deaf as a post. In five minutes, he says, the dog has to be overboard, and there you are!"

"Zakháritch! Do go once more—beg him off! Make the dolt see that the dog is sick . . ."

"Sure, I'll go. But it's no use. . . . Beast!" exploded the boatswain as he went.

During this time Bobtail, dull-eyed and lean, visibly suffering and looking dejected and shamefaced, as though conscious of having disgraced himself, crept up to his friend and licked his hand. The sailor patted him with a sort of passionate fondness, and his stern face became illumined by the tenderest feeling.

A minute later the boatswain returned. His gloomy looks clearly told the story: his last attempt had failed.

"He threatened to have me cashiered," angrily reported he.

"Brothers!" impulsively exclaimed Kotch-

nef, turning to the men assembled on the forecastle, "you heard what the scoundrel has planned? By what right would he drown the 'convert's' dog? By what written statute?"

The gloomy sailor's face showed his excitement. His eyes blazed.

Loud murmurs broke out among the men.

"He is making game of us, the accursed nag!"

"He dare not, the Turkish pest!"

"What has the creature done, that he should want to drown it?"

"Let us rescue Bobtail, brothers! We will go to the captain. He is kind. He will judge between us and won't suffer this thing!" spoke the gloomy sailor under the stress of passionate excitement, keeping hold of the dog, as though afraid to let go of him.

"We will go!" cried several voices.

"Akím Zakháritch! you draw us up in line, the whole ship's company!"

The affair was assuming a serious aspect.

The boatswain ruefully scratched the back of his head.

At this juncture the young midshipman Koshútitch, the men's favourite officer, showed himself on the forecastle. At sight of him the talking quieted down. The boatswain's face brightened.

"Look here, your honour," he addressed the young officer,—"the first lieutenant has ordered Bobtail thrown overboard, and the crew are greatly distressed. Why should the innocent animal be drowned? The dog, as you know, is well-behaved, has been with us two years. And all his crime is, he has been taken sick with his belly."

The boatswain gave the story with all its details.

"Do not refuse us, your honour; take Bobtail's defence, beg him off, that we may keep him."

Here the dog, as though understanding that he was being spoken of, looked up lovingly at the midshipman and gently wagged his stump.

"See, your honour, Bobtail himself begs you to speak up for him."

Deeply indignant, the midshipman promised. The agitation on the forecastle subsided. Kotchnef's features were lit up by hope.

"Baron," excitedly began the midshipman, bursting into the wardroom, "the entire ship's company beg you to retract your order concerning Bobtail and to let him live under the sun. . . . For what reason, baron, deprive the men of their dog? What crime has he committed?"

"This is no business of yours, midshipman Koshútitch," replied the baron; "and I beg you not to forget yourself and not to come to me with your opinions. The dog goes overboard."

"You think so?"

"You will, please, be silent!" said the baron, growing pale.

"So you would drive the men into mutiny by your cruelty, is that it? Well, you shall not. I am going straight to the captain."

All who were present in the wardroom glanced at the first lieutenant with unconcealed hostility. Pale, his lips contracted into a contemptuous smile, the baron nervously pulled at one of his whiskers.

A couple of minutes later the captain's orderly appeared and reported that the latter wished to see him in his stateroom.

"What is that affair about the dog?" inquired the captain with evident displeasure.

"No affair at all. I simply ordered the dog thrown overboard," coldly replied the baron.

"For what reason?"

"I warned the men that if I saw any filth of the dog's I would have it thrown overboard. Today I did see filth, and I ordered the dog thrown overboard. I venture to presume that the first lieutenant's order must be obeyed, if there is such a thing as discipline in the navy."

"Oh, you German stick!" thought the captain, frowning, with a wry face.

"But I must request you, baron, immediately to revoke your order about the dog and to let it alone in future. It is on the ship by my permission. . . . I am sorry I have to ask you to revoke your own order, but you should not give orders which, for no reason whatever, arouse the men's discontent."

"In this case, captain, I have the honour to beg you yourself to revoke my order, as I do not find it possible to do so. And besides . . ."

"Besides—what?" drily inquired the captain.

"I am ill and unable to perform my duties as first lieutenant."

"If that is so, report yourself ill. Possibly you may find the shore climate more salubrious."

The baron bowed and left.

On the morrow of the day on which the ship arrived at Nagasaki, Baron von der Bering, to the general delight, left it, and another first lieutenant was appointed in his place. The men breathed freely once more.

Bobtail

After the baron's departure, Bobtail enjoyed the freedom of the ship as before he came, as well as the men's affection in a still higher degree, for was it not to him they owed their deliverance from their tormentor?

As in old times, Bobtail went on shore with his friend Kotchnef and took care of him, and shared his night watches, helping him "look ahead," or diverted the men with his tricks. And if he heard the warning cry, "The nag's coming!" he would scuttle away for dear life, but immediately return, knowing perfectly well that his enemy was no longer on the ship.

The Convict

A Reminiscence of the Author's Childhood

By C. M. Staniukòvitch

I

THE sun was rapidly mounting up into the turquoise-blue expanse of the cloudless sky, promising a scorching day and pouring its golden glory over the unruffled glassy surface of the bay of Sebastopol, cut deep into the land, and over the roadstead, studded with numerous war-craft, frigates, brigs, schooners, clippers,—of the old-time wooden fleet of the Black Sea; and the beautiful city, bathed in that living gold, rose gracefully above the sea in amphitheatre-like tiers, with its glistening forts, churches, houses, and

suburban cottages, buried deep in the verdure of gardens, shady walks and surrounding farms.

It was near to six o'clock of a delicious morning in August.

Work was in full swing on board the ships, which, for the raising of the flag at eight o'clock, had to be brought to the condition of unimpeachable order and dazzling neatness, characteristic of the entire Black Sea fleet.

From earliest morning thousands of sailors' hands rubbed, washed, scrubbed, polished decks, guns, brass,—in a word, all things on and below decks, down to the hold.

Work had been going on in the docks as well, in the admiralty buildings, in the different workshops of the harbour, distributed along the shore. Above the pounding noise of hammers and the creaking of saws at times rose the traditional singsong which somehow helps the Russian labourer to lift weights and handle heavy beams.

Deserted stood the gloomy blockships at their mooring-buoys, stationed, as though

fraught with contagion, at a great distance from the other vessels, at the farthest end of the bay.

These were the floating "dead-houses." Their unwilling inhabitants, sailors "doing time" in disciplinary companies, were taken, as early as four in the morning, to the several parts of the city, where they laboured at various public works. In their coarse linen shirts and trousers, ugly grey caps on their shaven polls and clanking their chains, they passed, convoyed by soldiers, along the still, deserted streets, and would return "home," to their floating quarters, only in the cool of the evening, at which time the entire population would pour out of the houses on to the "boulevards" and quays for a breath of fresh breeze.

Then, in the gloom of the glorious southern nights, the block-ships would blink with their small lantern lights, and in the stillness of the bay every five minutes would be heard the long-drawn-out calls of the sentinels:

"Hea-ark!" swelling and rolling from post to post.

Next woke the suburbs, skirting the city with their small white-washed cottages, occupied mainly by the families of serving or discharged sailors, artillerists, skilled workmen employed in government factories, and labouring people generally.

The market-place, that club of the poorer population, had been swarming with life for some hours. Noisy, animated groups were jostling one another between the stands, amidst the carcases of beeves, calves, and sheep, chickens, ducks, and various game, among heaps of every kind of vegetable, mountains of watermelons and fragrant melons, and a variety of fruit brought in from surrounding orchards. There was bargaining and bickering, quarrelling, exchanging of the latest news, selling off of old clothes and footwear.

At the very edge of the bay stood the fishing craft of the neighbouring town of Balaclava

with their wads of freshly caught fish. Such abundance! Such variety! Flounders, tunny, chubs, fat "cephals," and the small, golden-scaled "sultana," held by *gourmands* to be the tastiest fish of the Black Sea. Newly gathered oysters in baskets were specially commended to cooks of both sexes.

Right by the fish-market, in the pellucid, crystalline waters of a little emerald-hued cove, a crowd of small boys was bathing. With merry laughter they plumped into the water, floundered and splashed, flung it in handfuls at one another, swimming and diving like water-fowl, vying with one another in swimmers' tricks before the eyes of a curiously gazing public.

In the air above the market-place, bathed in the vivifying glow of the southern sun, was heard the unceasing hum of a talking, moving multitude, composed of elements of the most varied nationalities,—Russian, Greek, Armenian, Caucasian,—with their respective peculiarities of speech and accent; at times the

general, confused hum was overborne by the desperate screeches of scolding, swearing market-wives, whose choice vocabulary of objurgation, frequently enriched by ingenious improvisations, provoked the approving horse laughter of an appreciative audience. A typical picture of the life of a great and active seaport at full tide.

And no one in all that motley, noisy crowd foresaw that soon — so — soon! — Sebastopol would be nothing but a heap of ruins, the beautiful, animated bay would become desert, and in the harbour, where the Black Sea fleet now stood in its pride, nothing would be left but the masts of sunken vessels, their ends showing above the surface of the waters, like crosses above graves in a cemetery.

II

About eight o'clock of that bright, cheery morning, in the large government house occupied by the military governor of Sebasto-

pol and commandant of the harbour, a small boy of eight or ten, rather pale and thin, but with uncommonly mobile features and lively hazel eyes, was hastily finishing his morning toilet with the help of his old nurse Agatha.[1]

"Oh, nurse, do hurry up, please! You are such a slow-patch!" impatiently commanded the boy, while the short, thick-set old woman was leisurely combing and brushing his copious, rebellious, curly auburn locks.

"Did you ever see such a jumping-jack! . . . Not a minute's quiet! For ever hurrying as to a fire!" grumbled the nurse, at the same time that her eyes dwelt lovingly on the child, her heart's delight. "Don't wriggle, I tell you! I'll never get your hair done if you

[1] The military governor of Sebastopol, Admiral Staniukòvitch, was the author's father, a just and upright man, but a stern disciplinarian, severe to cruelty, known among the men as "the terrible admiral," though they appreciated his care for their material well-being. The "little boy," hero of this true story, is the author himself.

carry on like this. You will be unkempt, like a street urchin."

But the boy, evidently little impressed by these remonstrances, and unspeakably bored with having to stand still during the protracted operation with his hair when the sunbeams were playing so merrily in the room, and currents of fresh breeze wafted into the open window the fragrances of the flower garden, jerked his half-done mane out of the nurse's hands, and, smiling, joyous, all aglow with animal spirits, began pulling on his jacket.

"Vássinka, just let me smooth down these wild locks of yours," begged old Agatha.

"They will do quite well as they are, nurse."

"Nice manners, I must say! An admiral's son, and his hair sticking out in tufts every which way! Just let papa see you; he won't be any too well pleased, I can tell you."

But Vassia was already out of hearing of his old nurse, whom he dearly loved but did not mind in the least, knowing that she was as

wax in his hands and would always do his will. So now he ran out of the nursery, buttoning his jacket as he ran, and having raced through the entire suite of rooms, stopped short before the closed door of his father's study.

His face at once assumed a troubled expression. For several seconds he stood before that door, irresolute; for one moment he even thought (as he did every morning), that this daily going to his father, just to say good-morning, was a very disagreeable function, which might much better be dispensed with.

"All the same, I have to," he mentally urged himself on, and softly opening the door, entered.

At the writing-desk in the middle of the spacious apartment, bending over some papers, sat a tall, spare old man, in a light summer dressing-gown, his wrinkled cheeks clean shaven and covered with a healthy roseate hue; his dark hair, showing but little silver, was arranged after the fashion of the first half of the nineteenth century, with a tall forelock

carefully brought forward, and rising above the brow, somewhat after the manner of a rooster's comb. Over the lip, bristled a short, evenly clipped mustache.

This bristly, prickly mustache was particularly obnoxious to the boy; he quaked all over when it moved nervously and rapidly, betraying, together with a quick shrug and quiver of the cheeks, ill-temper of the stern and inflexible admiral, the terror of every member of the household, beginning with the admiral's wife.

"Good-morning, Papa," softly, very softly spoke Vassia with unsteady voice, coming up to the desk, unable to take his frightened, fascinated eyes from his father's face, at which he gazed with such an expression as might come into a small bird's eyes at sight of a vulture.

Whether the father did hear his son's greeting and purposely, as happened more than once, paid no attention, leaving the boy to stand there motionless for an endless minute

or two, or whether he was so absorbed in his papers that he really did not hear, it were hard to tell. Anyhow, he did not turn his head.

Thus passed several seconds.

And all the while dense-leaved acacias and shady, broad-boughed walnut trees, impenetrable to the sun's rays, hung with big nuts in their green outer shells, looked into the open windows of the cool study, reminding Vassia of the fact that out there, in the upper garden far away from the house all sorts of delights awaited him, and among these certain pleasant meetings of which no one at home had the least suspicion.

The father's mustache did not stir, nor his cheeks quiver. So the boy felt emboldened to repeat his greeting in slightly raised tones of his high-pitched, soft, incipient tenor voice:

"Good-morning, Papa."

With a swift, brusque motion, the admiral threw up his head, and fixed his nervous,

concentrated, and, as it seemed, discontented glance on his youngest son, the family's Benjamin.

Then there was a momentary softening, even to tenderness, of the stern features, and in the look of these small grey eyes ordinarily sharp and imperious, which, the admiral's sixty years notwithstanding, still preserved the animation and brightness of youth.

"Good-morning!" he replied, curtly and crisply.

And, against all precedent, instead of simply nodding, thereby intimating dismissal, he patted with his bony hand his son's suddenly flushed cheek, and went on in the same brief, imperious tones:

"Quite well, of course? Soon go to Odessa, to school. . . . First of September, by steamer. Now run!"

Vassia did not wait to be told twice. In a twinkling he vanished from the study with a sigh of relief; it was with a joyful feeling, as of being rid of some oppressive burden, that he

found himself in the sitting-room adjoining the bedroom of his mother, who, as well as his sisters, was still sleeping.

Having hastily swallowed the glass of milk prepared for him by nurse Agatha, and surreptitiously appropriated and pocketed several lumps of sugar, he rushed out into the garden.

Past the flower-beds, the greenhouses and hothouses of the lower garden, he hurried, jumping the steps of the short stairs separating the terrace from the immense so-called upper garden, or rather orchard, the long avenues of which were bordered on both sides by luxuriant, espaliered grapevines, while on beds disposed in the centre of the terraces, and handsomely swarded, grew every sort of fruit trees in regular rows, bearing a profusion of big downy peaches, juicy pears, large green-and-yellow plums, amber pippins, almonds, walnuts, white and red mulberries.

This vast terraced orchard and garden, facing three streets and enclosed by a stone

wall, with its wonderful flower-beds around the house, its greenhouses and hothouses, its arbours concealed under fragrant, blooming vines, and its large "belvedere,"—a wooden construction from which opened a splendid view of the city and its surroundings, and from which Vassia used to observe through a field-glass the movements of the French troops as they wound, a long blue ribbon, across the Inkerman Valley on their way to the southern part of the city, this garden was kept in exemplary order and delighted the eye by its perfect neatness, maintained principally by convict labour.

In the very early morning when the sun just rose above the city, a gang of twelve or fifteen convicts entered the upper garden from the street by a wide back door and worked there until three or four of the afternoon, while their convoy, consisting of two soldiers, simple souls, dozed the time away leaning on their guns, by the door or somewhere about the grounds.

The convicts who came to the commandant's garden to work, were usually the same day after day. From some place known to them they hauled big buckets of water, weeded and watered the flowers and sward, clipped and trimmed the trees, swept the walks, strewed the avenues with fresh gravel, which they rammed down; in a word, did all that was demanded of them by the head gardener, a learned and precise German.

It was not heavy work, and the men, visibly content that their lines had fallen into such pleasant places, worked with a will.

It was to these men, bearing so severe a punishment for offences to him unknown, that Vassia was now hurrying.

III

In spite of his mother's strict orders that he should not converse with these reprobates, and not even go near them, the boy gaily ran down from terrace to terrace, attentively

peering down the long avenues, looking forward to the pleasure of a chat with the convicts and a share of their luncheon, consisting of chunks of juicy, red-pulped watermelon and slices of thickly-salted black rye bread, which they offered "the young master," vying with one another in hospitable pressing.

He thought this luncheon the finest in the world, ever so much nicer than all the delicacies which were served at home; and in the society of these shaven, chain-clanking men he felt ever so much more comfortable and at ease than at home, especially at meals, when all the family sat there silent and depressed, and he himself had to force down spoonfuls of detestable soup, so as not to call down on himself the wrath of his nearly always morose father, and impatiently awaiting the end of the meal, speechless, afraid to stir.

It was only this summer that he had made the convicts' acquaintance and made friends with them owing to the liberty he enjoyed of roaming about the garden by himself, unre-

strained and unwatched. At first, he was very much afraid of them, and, on his brief visits to the "upper garden" for fruit, he strove to slip by them at a respectful distance, and invariably at a run. In those times he thought these grey-capped men, whom he saw digging in the garden and trundling sand in wheelbarrows, capable of any crime, ready even, as nurse Agatha assured him when he was naughty, to carry off a little boy and roast him and eat him, no matter if he was an admiral's son. These words of his nurse had profoundly impressed the child at the time, notwithstanding that other people, his mother, his brothers and sisters, did not go such lengths in their accusations; at least, he had never heard from any one a confirmation of nurse Agatha's assertions. Still, all that he did hear about them, words accidentally dropped in his presence, left him not the least doubt but that those men were a compound of innumerable vices, and that, if they were turned loose, they would show the world

what evil they could do. It was not for nothing they were shaved and kept in fetters!

Thus one day spoke a nice old general who had come to call on Vassia's mother and expressed great indignation at the convicts' daring to complain of the food and of not getting all they were entitled to by law. The nice old general, who, it appears, was somehow involved in the disappearance of certain convict appropriations, certainly did not dream that very shortly, when Sebastopol should be in mortal danger from the enemy, these same men would be liberated, unshackled, and would defend the beleaguered city as valiantly as the rest.

All these tales, however, had excited the boy's curiosity, and, in spite of the fear which these men inspired, he sometimes ventured to observe them, though, of course, from such a distance as should enable him, in case of danger, at once to run.

Yet their extremely peaceful talk, fragments of which reached him where he hovered,

bits of song carelessly hummed over their work, and various other observations did not at all fit in with the idea the boy had formed from what he had heard people say, and his faith in the truth of nurse Agatha's assertion was considerably shaken.

One spring day he saw how one of the convicts, a tall, elderly, dark man with deep-set, sullen eyes, overhung by black, shaggy brows, whom he thought the most terrible of all and feared accordingly, having seen a sparrow fledgling drop out of its nest, went up to it, picked it up, and very gently closing his hand over it, climbed the tree and returned it to the nest, to the great joy of the anxiously fluttering and twittering mother bird. And when he descended from the tree and again took hold of his wheelbarrow, the boy was astonished at the kindly gleam in his eyes.

Another day, the convicts found in the garden a deserted puppy, evidently thrown out there to perish,—a miserable little creature, emaciated, almost denuded of hair,—and

showed it much attention, even tenderness. Vassia saw how they fed it with bread crumbs previously chewed to softness, then laid it in a shady corner, carefully covering it with some kind of a rag, and heard them decide to take it along, a decision delightedly assented to by all.

"It would perish here," remarked the same "terrible" ruffian with the overhanging brows. "I shall take care of him, brothers,—sort of dry-nurse, you know," added he with a merry laugh.

From these facts Vassia drew the conclusion that these terrible men, were not, at all events, devoid of all kindly feelings.

To have his doubts solved for good, he at last had recourse to his father's orderly, Cyril, an old sailor who did doorman's duty in the house, and asked him point blank if it was true that convicts carried away little boys and ate them?

For answer Cyril, generally a serious, even somewhat gloomy man, broke into a fit of such ungovernable laughter, opening wide

his large mouth, that Vassia knew he had asked an absurd question and felt ashamed.

"Who told you that, little master?" Cyril at last inquired, still laughing.

"Nurse did."

"She just lied to you, and you believed her. Who ever heard of such a thing,—eating human flesh, save the mark! True, there is such an island, far, far away from here, beyond the oceans, inhabited by utterly savage people very like apes, and those do indeed, the devils! feed on human flesh; so a sailor told me, who had been round the world and seen everything. He said they would eat rats, and any kind of vermin, and snakes, and men, if strangers happened among them. But nowhere else in the wide world, except on that same island, do people eat boys. And of all people in the world no Russian would ever go in for such deviltry. Your nurse simply wanted to scare you,—just like a silly woman! Has no sense, —talking like that to a child!" concluded Cyril in a tone of profound disgust.

"Oh, but I did not believe her. I know very well that no one eats people," the boy hastened to assure him, stung in his self-esteem. "I just asked, that's all. And I know that the convicts here are not terrible at all," he added, though with less assurance, secretly wishing to have his impressions cleared by so well-informed a person as he considered Cyril to be.

"Why should they be terrible? They are men like the rest of us. Only that they are ill-fated men, unfortunates, that's all."

"But, Cyril, how did they come to this?"

"Well, little master, they did things which they shouldn't have done. They were soldiers, you know, all of them, or else sailors. The service is strict, so it is only too easy to stumble. Some of them, indeed, have done real bad things . . . stealing or robbery, and got caught; so now they are expiating their sin. . . . Others, again, suffer for their rebellious temper, for insubordination."

"How so?" asked Vassia, not understanding.

"Simply enough. Suppose a man has a masterful temper and happens under one of those wicked officers who flog their men senselessly, on the most trifling occasions. The man will stand it as long as he can, then comes a day when he can stand it no more, his patience gives out, and he is insolent to the officer. . . . Then they make short work of him, you may be sure. . . . He is carried to the hospital half dead, and when he comes out of it, he finds himself in a disciplinary company, a convict. . . . And don't you believe your nurse's nonsense about them, little master. You have nothing to fear from them, and it was wicked to despise them. They are to be pitied, that's all I can tell you," ended Cyril.

After those explanations, which fully confirmed the boy's own observations, he gradually lost his fear of the convicts, felt emboldened to approach them, examined attentively

those very ordinary, mostly good-natured faces, with nothing ruffianly about them. He saw that they conversed, joked, and laughed just like other people,—and ate, as it seemed to him, with remarkable appetite and relish.

So one morning, as Vassia enviously looked at them making away with their thickly salted slices of black bread and washing them down with spring water, one of the convicts so cordially invited him to taste of the "prison bread," that he could not refuse, and with much pleasure ate up two whole slices, and, after that, stayed with them a while. And they all looked at him so kindly, talked to him so good-naturedly, that he was very sorry when the hour of rest was over and they scattered to their several tasks, with a pleasant nod to their guest.

From that day on, a friendship was established between the admiral's son and the convicts,—a friendship which he very sensibly kept to himself, well knowing what they

would think of it at home. And the better he came to know them, the firmer grew his conviction that his nurse as well as his mother and sisters and the old general were decidedly in error when they made them out to be such dreadful men. In his opinion they were, on the contrary, nice, kind fellows, and he wondered for what merits of his they were so good to him, plying him with toys of their own fabrication, and entertaining him so hospitably; wondered also for what misdeeds they had had their heads shaved and chains riveted on their wrists and ankles, depriving them of the joy of running about free, like him.

He was on the best terms with all his new acquaintances, but had made friends more particularly with a blond, slender young fellow of rather less than middle stature, with kind, blue eyes. He did not know for what offence he was punished and did not care to know, having somehow decided in his mind that it could not have been a serious one.

He felt a peculiar affection for this convict

with the pensive, sorrowful look in his eyes. He liked him because he could tell such splendid stories, and because he was often sad; liked him for his soft, melodious voice, and for his kind, pleasant smile; in short, he liked all about him.

His name was Maxim. His fellow-convicts had surnamed him "the nightingale" because he often sang folk-songs at his work, and he sang them remarkably well.

When the boy listened to his singing, full of ineffable yearning, a feeling of infinite pity for this fettered songster took possession of his small heart, and his throat swelled with tears. And it frequently happened that he had to run away for sheer nervous emotion.

IV

Vassia was just in time.

The convicts had just struck off work for half an hour and were taking their ease, in groups or singly, at the end of one of the ave-

nues, in the shade of the garden wall, lunching on black bread and self-bought watermelon.

Running up to them, merry, flushed, full of the joy of living, he nodded gaily in acknowledgment of their morning greetings. Voices addressed him from various sides:

"Had a good night's sleep, little master?"

"Nurse frighten you any?"

"Have some watermelon, little master?"

"See mine: fine!"

"Little master will lunch with Maxim. Maxim purposely got an extra big piece at the market."

"And where is Maxim?" inquired the boy, looking around for his friend.

"There he is,—all by himself, moping under the grapevine yonder, away from the rest of us. Go to him, little master, and get him to stop fretting. The fit is on him again."

"What brought it on?"

"You better ask him. You see, he can't get used to the ways of this convict life of ours. He's as home-sick as a captive bird."

"And moreover, he got it last night from the sergeant," explained the swarthy, elderly man with the overhanging, shaggy brows, which gave his slightly pock-marked face rather a truculent expression.

"What had he done?" asked Vassia with much interest.

"Sooth to say, nothing much; in fact, nothing at all. He had not noticed the sergeant, so did not step aside for him to pass, and the devil fetched him one on the jaw, and another. Would not that get anybody's goat now. What do you think, little master? Had it been for some real offence, I wouldn't say nothing, but this was just sheer bullying"—thus the elderly convict ended his account of the case.

Vassia knew from experiences in his own life, brief as it was as yet, how sore it makes a body to be punished not quite justly in a momentary flare of anger or ill-temper, as sometimes happened to him at home with his mother; so he hastened to agree, that it *was*

hard, and that the sergeant was indeed "a devil, whose mug it would give him great pleasure to mash."

This last sentiment, expressed in words borrowed from the convicts' own slang vocabulary, was received with a burst of applauding laughter and the remark that the little master's judgment was correct. Vassia then hastened to seek his friend Maxim.

"Good-morning, Maxim," he said, crawling under the broad-leaved vine which half concealed the young fellow, by whose side lay a tempting array of neatly cut slices of black bread and of watermelon.

"Good-morning, little master," replied Maxim in his gentle voice with the strongly marked Little Russian accent. "Did you sleep well? Won't you try this nice watermelon? Have some, do," and he offered the boy a piece of the melon and a slice of the bread, smiling at him out of his large, sad eyes. "I was expecting you. . . ."

"Thank you, Maxim. . . . I will sit here a while with you. May I?"

"Why not? Certainly, sit down. It is nice here."

Vassia sat down, and, taking out of his pocket a few lumps of sugar and a pinch of tea, wrapped in a bit of paper, handed both to the convict, saying:

"Here, take this. You can make some tea."

"Thank you, little master. You are a kind little soul. Only see you don't get into trouble at home, filching tea and sugar."

"Don't worry, Maxim, I will not. And no one will know. They were all asleep at home. Only papa is up and sits in his study. Besides, we have lots!" he hurriedly explained, wishing to make his friend feel comfortable; after which he fell to on the juicy watermelon, which he greatly enjoyed, as well as the bread, caring very little that the juice ran down the front of his jacket.

Maxim slipped the tea and sugar into his trousers pocket and also started on his lunch.

"Have some more," he urged, noticing that Vassia had finished one piece.

"But then there won't be enough left for you," objected the boy, hesitating between the wish to eat one more piece and the fear of despoiling his friend.

"There's plenty. And besides, I don't feel like eating, somehow."

"Well, then, I will, just a little."

Soon both bread and melon were gone; then Vassia inquired:

"What's the matter, Maxim? You don't look a bit cheerful."

"There isn't much cheer in a convict's existence, little master."

"Do the chains hurt?"

"Captivity hurts, that's what it is. Service was hard enough; but this is harder."

"Were you a soldier or a sailor?"

"Sailor. You may have heard of poor Captain Bogatof; he commanded our ship."

"I know him; he visits at our house. Stout, with a big paunch."

"Well, it is owing to him I am here. May he be made to answer in the next world for ruining my life."

"You sassed him, didn't you?"

"I did, worse luck. I did my service quietly, uncomplainingly, but he drove me to exasperation. How he does flog the men, Heaven help us!"

"For what?"

"For anything and nothing. Twice I have been in the hospital. At length I went plumb crazy. I called him a beast to his face. And he is that. I was court-martialled. Better had I stood it a while longer. I might have been transferred to another ship and a less inhuman commander. Hard as is a sailor's life, I should at least have been a free man. While now you can judge for yourself what a convict's lot is like. You feel as though you must die of heartache. And anybody can lord it over you. Why not? A convict! who cares?" ended Maxim with a bitter laugh.

Vassia had listened with the deepest sympathy, and now, after a long moment's musing, he said with the utmost seriousness:

"If you are so unhappy, Maxim, why don't you run away?"

The convict's eyes kindled at the words. He replied:

"What do you think? I'd have run for it long ago, had there been any chance at all. I might have found my home."

"Where is your home?"

"In the province of Podolia. There is a town, Proskourof. You may have heard of it. Well, some ten versts away from it lies our village. I would have a look at mother and father, then cross the Austrian frontier and try my luck at something." Maxim was now talking in an agitated whisper, carried away almost against his will to betray his long-nursed dream of liberty. "Only see that you don't say a word to a single soul of what I am telling you: I should be flogged to death!" warned Maxim, frightened at his

own imprudence: entrusting such a secret to a little boy! How easy for him to blab!

Vassia solemnly crossed himself and protested with tears in his eyes that not a soul should hear a word of what Maxim had told him. He might make his mind easy; he should not be punished by his, Vassia's, fault. Though only a little boy, he could keep a secret.

When these assurances had apparently quieted Maxim's fears, Vassia himself grew enthusiastic over the idea of his friend's escape across the frontier, of which, by the way, he had the vaguest notion, and went on in a conspirator's mysteriously serious tones:

"You say it is impossible to run away; and I think it is possible, indeed easy."

"In what way?" asked Maxim, with his gentle smile.

"First, you must knock off your chains here in our garden. I will bring you a hammer. Then you must climb over the wall and make straight for the Austrian frontier."

Maxim smiled sadly.

"Just as I am, in my convict's garb? I should be nabbed at once."

"Go at night."

"You cannot escape from the blockships at night. We lie behind iron bolts and bars. Besides, the sentinels would fire."

Vassia's animated face darkened. Sorrowfully, he said:

"So, then, it cannot be done?"

The convict did not answer at once. There was a tense silence. It seemed as though some bright thought had occurred to him; his pale, emaciated face became extraordinarily animated, his eyes gleamed. He threw the boy a long, searching, anxious glance, as though he would have probed his very soul, would have said something, but could not quite make up his mind.

"Why so silent, Maxim? Are you still afraid I might give you away?" spoke Vassia at last in aggrieved tones.

"No, no, little master; you never would

hurt a poor man. You have a kind heart," replied Maxim, seriously and with conviction; then, apparently coming to a decision of the greatest importance, went on, almost in a whisper: "As to this matter of escaping—yes! it might be done, but not in the way you suggest."

"In what way then?"

"First thing, I should have to have some clothes."

"What kind of clothes?"

"Women's clothes; such, let us say, as your nurse wears."

"A woman's dress? . . ." repeated the boy thoughtfully.

"Yes, and a kerchief such as women wear on their heads. . . . Escape were possible then. . . ."

Vassia remained thoughtful for a long moment, then declared with sudden determination:

"I'll bring you nurse's dress and kerchief."

"Would you? Will you?"

In his agitation he was unable to say more, but he seized Vassia's hand, lifted it to his lips, and covered it with kisses. For answer, Vassia kissed the convict warmly.

"How will you manage? . . . Suppose you are caught?"

"Don't worry, Maxim. I shan't be caught. I shall wait until they are all asleep. Only tell me where to lay the clothes."

"Here, under this vine. And cover them with leaves, so they are not seen."

"Had I not better cover them with earth?" suggested Vassia with a serious, businesslike air.

"No. You need not go to much trouble, leaves will do. No one will look here anyhow."

"All right, then. Tomorrow morning quite early I shall bring it all. Or, better still, at night. I shall not be afraid of coming into the garden at night. Why should I?"

"God bless you, dear little master. I shall pray for you all the days of my life."

"Hello, there. To work!" came the guard's voice from a distance.

"I'll come round somehow once more, Maxim. Because tomorrow I shan't see you; you won't be here!" sadly said Vassia, with a break in his voice.

With these words he crept out from under the vine and went home.

V

All that day Vassia was in a state of the greatest excitement, his mind so busy with the forthcoming adventure that he did not even give a thought to what would befall him should his father somehow find out what he was about. The plan for purloining his nurse's dress and the hammer, which he had seen the day before in her room, absorbed him entirely. He had already reconnoitred that room, noted where the hammer lay, and in his thought had selected a dress which was hanging on a nail. The day dragged itself

to an insufferable length. From time to time he would run out into the garden, wander about the avenues in a preoccupied sort of way, and run up to Maxim whenever he found him alone to exchange a few mysterious words.

"Good-bye, Maxim, good-bye, dear. . . . Tomorrow, God willing, you will be far from here!" he said with tears in his voice when the convicts were preparing to leave the garden.

"Good-bye, dear little master!" whispered the convict, gazing at the boy with eyes full of unspeakable gratitude.

The convicts fell into line and marched off, clanking their chains. Vassia followed them long with his eyes.

Fortunately, no one at home noticed the boy's agitation. True, at dinner, his father threw him a look which made his heart sink with fright. It seemed to him that his father read his intention in his secret soul, and the next minute would thunder at him: "I know all, you little scamp."

Instead of which he only asked:

"Why don't you eat?"

"I do eat, Papa."

"Not enough. People should eat at dinner."

And poor Vassia although feeling not the least appetite, stuffed the food into his mouth, secretly thanking his stars that his father did not guess the truth.

Towards night the hammer already lay under Vassia's cot. He went to bed earlier than his wont, notwithstanding there were guests at tea, who told interesting things.

When he went up to his mother, she glanced at him rather anxiously and laid her hand against his forehead, saying:

"It seems to me you are not well, Vassia. Your face is burning."

"I am quite well, Mamma. . . . Tired, perhaps."

He kissed her soft, white hand, said good-night to sisters and guests, and ran to the nursery, well pleased that his father was not

at home and he had not to say good-night to him.

"Nurse, to bed!" he cried.

"You are early tonight. I suppose you have run your legs off."

"I suppose so. I am so tired," he said, trying not to look in her eyes and feeling remorseful in the presence of the person he was about to rob.

The nurse undressed him and offered to tell him a story, but he refused. He felt drowsy. He would go to sleep at once.

"As you please, darling."

She kissed him, made the sign of the cross over him, and was going out of the room when he called after her:

"Do you know, nurse, after my birthday I will make you a present of a new dress."

"Thank you, my pet. What made you think of that? What need have I of a new dress? I have plenty."

"How many?"

"About half a dozen, I should think, besides two woollen ones."

"Is that so?" the boy said, well pleased, and added: "Then I will give you something else. After my birthday, you know, I shall have lots of money."

"Bless your kind little heart. Thank you for thinking of it. And now go to sleep, that's a dear. I'll go to bed too."

Soon after he heard her snore in the next room.

His nerves were in too tense a condition for sleep. Besides, he intended to stay awake until all in the house should be asleep; so that he could safely steal out into the garden through the sitting-room, and softly open the door which was usually kept locked. His mother would not hear, and his father's bedroom was at the other end of the house. And, if need be, he could jump out of a window—they were not high from the ground.

He heard the distant sound of the ships' bells, striking the time every half hour; he

heard the monotonous, long-drawn-out call "Hea-ark!" of the sentinels far away, and persistently kept telling himself he must not and would not fall asleep; kept thinking how he would open the window, listen to assure himself that all was quiet, then steal on tiptoe into nurse's room for the dress; thought of Maxim, how glad he would be and how he would make straight for the Austrian frontier. And once there, he would be safe and happy, and they would not get him. And no one would know it was he, Vassia, who had managed his escape. He revelled in the consciousness that he would be his deliverer. Then these thoughts gave place to others in his excited brain: he too would run away to the Austrian frontier if he was unhappy in the school to which they were going to take him in September,—if they whipped him. His father did whip him at home, but that was his father; strangers should not. He would surely run away, look up Maxim, and live with him. This prospect looked fascinating,

but still more fascinating was another thought which suddenly took shape: he saw himself grown up, and a general, saw how, after a long absence, he would unexpectedly ride up to the house on a white steed, and how astonished all would be that he had got to be a general. His father would not whip him then, for he would be grown up, but would wonder that he, so young, should already be a general. And his mother, sisters, brothers, all would wonder, and all would offer their congratulations. And he would tell them why he had run away and how he had distinguished himself in the wars.

"Fine!" he thought, stretching himself in bed and not quite knowing whether he were dreaming awake or falling asleep.

"I must not sleep!" he muttered, and—was asleep! But something seemed to punch him in the ribs; he awoke with a start and sat up in bed, frightened at the thought that he had overslept and deceived his friend, and he

could not just at first make out what time it was. He rubbed his eyes and looked around; a pale gloaming was stealing through the white shade. Thank God! it was not yet too late.

He jumped out of bed, pulled the shade aside, and looked out of the window. Day was just breaking; there was a greyness in the garden.

"Just in time."

Scarce stepping with his little bare feet, he stole into the old nurse's room, took the dress from the nail and the kerchief from the chair by the bed, and stole back to his own room. In another minute he was dressed, and, with the help of two towels, had made a bundle of his booty.

He now had to solve the question: how to get out into the garden, through the window, or through the rooms and the door. He cautiously opened the window and looked down, he turned away: too high! So he took off his shoes, and in his stocking feet went

out of the room, his heart thumping wildly while he, holding his breath, listening for the slightest rustle, was stealing along the corridor, past his sisters' rooms, and at last entered the sitting-room. And here was the door. Gently he turned the key in the lock, —once, twice. . . . There was a click. . . . For one instant he froze to the spot in terror; then ran down the stairs and out into the garden for all he was worth, jumping steps as he went. Now he was at the second terrace from the top. At headlong speed he reached the end of an avenue, laid down the things on the spot agreed upon, heaped vine leaves on top of them, and ran back home.

When he got back without accident and crept into his bed, he was shaking all over with fever. He felt infinitely happy, and, at the same time, terribly afraid lest everything should be discovered and his father should order him put in the place of the convict.

VI

Vassia awoke late that morning. His nurse stood before him. In a flash he remembered all the happenings of the night and looked up at her. Nothing wrong there. She was as kind and loving as usual,—so, clearly, she had no inkling of anything. But she had another kerchief on her head.

"Ever see such a sleepy head? Come on, get up," she admonished. "It is going on nine o'clock."

Promptly he rose, dressed, and for once allowed his nurse to comb his refractory curls unhindered by him.

"Vássinka, did you not happen to see my head kerchief?" she asked, searching his bedcloths. "I've looked for it high and low; can't find it nowhere, you would think the earth had swallowed it up."

"No, nurse, I have not seen it."

"Queer," muttered the old woman.

"Don't worry, nurse. I'll buy you a new one."

"That's not the point. I don't care for it. But where can it have gone to?"

When Vassia was ready, she said:

"Papa is cross this morning."

"Why?"

"Something has happened."

"Happened! What?"

"A convict escaped this morning out of our garden."

Vassia's heart thumped joyously. But he managed to conceal his emotion and inquired quite casually:

"Escaped? How could he?"

"It is most singular. They have just missed him. He left his convict clothes behind, too. Everybody is wondering where he got others. He can't have gone away naked. They are investigating. The officer on duty is examining everybody. Papa had to be told. He was very angry. Just think: a convict escaping out of the Governor's own garden!"

It was a mortally scared boy who entered his father's study that morning. Sure enough, the admiral was out of sorts and acknowledged his son's customary greeting: "Good-morning, Papa," with the curtest of nods. The boy left him, relieved at heart by the certainty that his father had no suspicion, and soon heard him shouting and thundering away at the chief of police, who had come to report.

Through all that day the boy was troubled, expecting every minute that his father would send for him.

But he was not sent for. At dinner his father even was in good spirits and deigned to tell the news to his wife, a middle-aged woman, tall and rather stout, with traces of remarkable beauty:

"Did you hear what happened this morning? A rascal of a convict escaped out of our garden."

"How could he?"

"The others said that he carried a small bundle when he left the blockship. It must

have contained clothes. He changed and fled. The commandant is altogether too easy with them; I have given him a talking to. And the guards do not look after them properly. Well, he won't be long at large. Today or tomorrow he will be recaptured, then the nonsense will be taken out of him; he won't try it again."

Vassia's heart sank. Would he indeed be captured? . . .

But when, some days later, his mother asked whether the convict had been taken, his father answered crossly:

"No. One would think he had gone to the bottom like a stone. And it proves absolutely impossible to find out where he procured the clothes."

When, one morning, a week later, Vassia, relieved of all anxiety, ventured out into the garden once more, the elderly convict with the black, shaggy brows, while trimming dead boughs off a tree, beckoned to him, making sundry mysterious signs, and

when he approached, the man, with great precautions, so as not to be seen, thrust a small carved wooden cross into his hand, saying:

"From Maximka."

And, looking lovingly at the child, he added, in uncommonly tender tones: "God send you every blessing, dear little master."

V. G. Korolenko

"The Slayer"

By V. G. Korolenko

I

"CORMORANTS"

AS my post-troïka was nearing the ferry, evening was setting in. A cool, brisk wind rippled the surface of the broad river, which splashed against the steep bank with short, stiff breakers. The ferrymen, hearing in the distance the tinkling of a bell, stopped their flat-bottomed, broad-decked boat and waited for us. They put the drag on the wheels, helped the cart down the steep declivity, untied the mooring ropes. The waves struck the planked sides of the boat; the helmsman gave a quick turn to the wheel, and the shore began quietly to recede, as though pushed away by the swell beating

against it. Two other vehicles stood on the deck. On one of them I could make out a middle-aged man of solid build, apparently of the merchant class; in the other were three sturdy young fellows, seemingly burgesses. The merchant sat motionless, his overcoat collar pulled up high, to defend him against the autumn wind, paying not the slightest attention to his chance fellow travellers. The young men, on the contrary, were merry and talkative. One of them, cross-eyed, with a torn nostril, was continually playing snatches on an accordeon and sang in a wildly dissonant voice; but the wind cut short these discordant sounds, bore them away, and flung them over the broad and turbid river. Another, holding in his hands a bottle and glass, was treating my driver to vodka. The third alone, a man of about thirty, healthy, handsome, and vigorous, lay on his back at full length, with his hands under his head, and pensively followed with his eyes the grey clouds as they raced across the sky.

This was the second day of my journey from the capital of the province, and I was continually coming across these tiresome figures. I was travelling on pressing business, hastening for all I was worth; yet neither the merchant, in his two-wheeled cart, drawn by a well-fed, round-bodied little mare, nor the other three, with their lean jades, ever fell far behind me. After every stoppage, on business or for rest, I was sure to find them somewhere ahead of me, on the road or at a ferry.

"What people are these?" I inquired of my driver when he approached my cart.

"It's Kóstiushka with his comrades," he answered soberly.

"And who are they?" I asked again, for the name was unfamiliar to me.

The man seemed disinclined to give me further information, as our conversation could be overheard by its objects. He cast a backward glance at them, and pointed with his whip in the direction of the river.

I looked in the same direction. The wide

surface of the water was darkly streaked with fast-running ripples. The waves were dark and turbid, and above them restlessly circled large white birds, like gulls, alternately dropping down on the water and soaring up again with wild, plaintive cries.

"Cormorants," the driver explained when the flat-bottomed ferry-boat touched the opposite shore, and our troïka, taking the steep bank at a bound, brought us out on the road. "That's what these petty town-folk are, just 'cormorants,'" he went on. "Neither farms they have, nor trades of any kind. They did have a bit of land, so I heard, but sold it last year, and now they infest the highways like veritable wolves. They make life a burden."

"You mean they rob?"

"Don't they though! Cutting down a traveller's trunk, filching a box of tea out of a load, that's the work for them. If reduced to real straits, they will take the post-horses from a driver (*yamstchík*) returning to his

station from taking a traveller. The man may be tired and dozing, though he shouldn't, and there they are, right upon him. Did you notice Kóstiushka's nostril? One of our drivers tore it with his whip. Bear this in mind: Kostka is the veriest rogue. . . . There used to be a pair of them, but he has lost his trusty comrade; the teamsters killed him."

"Got caught, eh?"

"In the act. Ill luck. And didn't they have their fun with him—the teamsters, I mean!"

The narrator laughed in his beard.

"Tc begin with, they chopped off his fingers, one by one; then they burned him with fire and ended by impaling and disembowelling him. He died, the dog."

"How is it, then, that you seem to be acquainted with them? What did they mean by treating you to vodka?"

"You've got to be acquainted," gloomily replied the driver. "Not a little of the nasty stuff have I treated them to myself, for why,

I live in constant fear of them. Mind you, it's not for nothing Kóstiushka has taken to the road today. They wouldn't drive their horses such distances for the pleasure of it. He smells something, the devil, that's certain! . . . There is something about that merchant, too, that I don't like," the man added, speculatively, after a pause. "Aren't they after him? I shouldn't wonder; but no; it hardly looks like it. And there is a new man with him, one I never saw yet."

"You mean the fellow that lay in the cart by his side?"

"The same, yes. Must be one of the same feather. . . . A sturdy devil by the looks of him! . . . You, sir, I'll tell you what," he suddenly turned to me. "You better look out. Don't you travel at night. Could it be you, by any chance, they are after?"

"Do you know me?" I asked.

The man turned away and tugged at the reins.

"How should I?" he evaded my question.

"People said that a clerk of the great Kudinof works was to pass this way. No concern of ours."

Evidently I was known in these parts. I conducted the litigation of the Kudinofs with the Crown and had won the case a few days before. My patrons were very popular in the locality, indeed throughout western Siberia, and the lawsuit had produced quite a sensation. Now, having received from the treasury a very considerable sum, I was hastening to the town of N. N., where some term payments were due. The time was short, communication by mail unfrequent, wherefore I was taking the money myself. I often had to travel day and night, to save time, taking short cuts, by turning aside from the highway into field roads. In view of all this, the knowledge that I was preceded by a rumour capable of raising whole bands of greedy "cormorants" on my track was anything but comforting. I looked back. In spite of the fast-descending twilight I could make out the rapidly advanc-

ing troïka, and, a little way behind it, the merchant's light wagon.

II

THE HOLLOW UNDER THE DEVIL'S FINGER

At the post station—which I reached that evening—no horses were to be had.

"Come, my dear Ivàn Semiònovitch," coaxed the station-master, a fat, good-natured soul, with whom, in my frequent journeys along this road, I had picked up a sort of friendship, "this is my advice, as before God: hang it all! don't travel by night. Let business go for once. Your own life should be more precious to you than other people's money. In a circuit of a hundred versts you will hear nothing but talk of your lawsuit and that money. Those wretched 'cormorants' know all about it, you bet. Stay the night, do!"

I could not but realize the soundness of this advice; nevertheless I could not follow it.

"I *must* go. Please send somewhere for 'private' horses. I am losing too much time as it is."

"Such obstinacy! . . . Well, if you must, I can provide you with a trusty man. He will take you to B., to a respectable sectarian's house. But there you must spend the rest of the night whether you will or no. Remember, your way lies by the 'Devil's Hollow'; 'tis a lonely spot and the people around there are the worst kind. Stop at least until daybreak."

Some two hours later I was seated in the cart, listening to my friend's parting exhortations. The pair of well-fed horses started at a good pace and the driver, impressed by the promise of a good reward, kept urging them on, so that we got to B. in no time.

"Where are you taking me now?" I asked him.

"To a good man, a 'Molokan,' sectarian, who has horses to let. An honest fellow."

We passed several small log cabins scattered about the woods, and stopped before the gate

of a spacious, evidently well-to-do dwelling. We were met by an old man with a long white beard, of very respectable appearance, holding a lantern, which he raised above his head, and after looking me all over with dull, blear eyes, he spoke in a low, aged voice.

"Is that you, Ivàn Semiònovitch? So the boys were right who said, as they drove by here, that a Kudinof clerk would be passing here on his way from the city. 'See that you have horses ready,' they said to me. . . . And I said to them: 'What's that to you? I says. Maybe he'll want to stay the night. It will be dark, so. . . .'"

"What boys were they?" broke in my driver.

"How should I know? 'Cormorants,' I take it. Looked like that. From the city, I'm thinking, but who they be, I could not say. How is a man to know them all? . . . And you, sir, *are* you going to stay over night?"

"No. Let me have horses at once, please,"

I said, not particularly pleased at being heralded by such a rumour.

The old man reflected.

"Step into the house. No use standing around out here. . . . The trouble is, you see, I have no horses just now. Day before yesterday I sent them off to the city with a load,—the little lad took them. So what's to be done? Better stay?"

I felt greatly discouraged at this new obstacle. The night, meanwhile, darkened to such impenetrable gloom as is known only to a stormy Siberian autumn. The sky was one mass of heavy clouds. Looking up, one could, though with difficulty, follow their progress across space; but below, the darkness was absolute; you could not have seen a man two steps away. A drizzling rain beat against the leaves with a gently clashing noise; the forest was full of low rustlings and mysterious whisperings. And yet, go I must. As I entered the cabin I begged the host to send to some neighbour for horses.

The old man shook his grey head.

"Oh, sir, you are courting disaster by such haste, believe me. On such a night, too! Downright Egyptian darkness, the Lord forgive me!"

My driver came in and had a long conference with the old man. Then both together once more admonished me, begging me to stay. But I insisted. The men conferred in whispers, going over many names, objecting, rejecting, disputing.

"All right, then," at last said my driver in a tone of unwilling assent, then turning to me: "You shall have horses. I'll drive over for them to a farm near by."

"Is it really near? Will it not take you long?"

"No, it won't," affirmed the driver, and the host added, gruffly:

"What's your hurry anyhow? You know the saying that no good comes of too much haste. Time enough for all."

The driver stepped behind the partition to

dress for the road. The host went on giving him instructions in his jarring old voice. I dropped off into a doze by the stove.

"Well, lad," I heard the host's voice outside the door, "tell 'the Slayer' to get a move on him. You see how impatient *he* is."

The next instant the sound of a galloping horse came from the yard.

The old man's last words effectively banished all inclination to sleep. I sat down before the fire and fell to thinking. A dark night, an unfamiliar locality, unknown people speaking of things I did not quite understand, and now these last strange, ominous words. . . . My nerves were highly strung.

An hour and a half later the tinkling of a bell was heard under the window. A troïka stood in front of the porch. I got my things together and stepped out.

The sky had cleared just a little. The clouds raced swiftly, as though in a hurry to get away, out of sight. The rain had ceased, only now and then big drops were blown in by

gusts from somewhere, as if dropped by the rapidly scurrying clouds. The forest roared with a sound as of rushing waters.

The host came out with a lantern to see me off. This enabled me to have a good look at the driver. He was a man of huge stature, broad-shouldered, a veritable giant. His face was sternly calm, with that stamp which usually tells of some strong, enduring feeling or the presence of some long-cherished, saddening thought. His eyes had a serious, stubborn, gloomy look in them. I confess I had a momentary impulse to dismiss this saturnine giant and to stay for the night in this bright warm room, but it lasted only one moment. I felt my revolver and took my seat in the vehicle. The driver drew the robe over my knees and climbed up to his on the box.

"Look here, Slayer," was the host's parting injunction, "keep both eyes open. You know all about it. . . ."

"I know," replied the man, and we plunged into the dark, stormy night.

Two or three lights in the windows of scattered cabins flashed past us. In places, cloudlets of grey smoke curled against the black forest background, sparks flew out and at once went out, as though melting in the gloom. And now the last dwelling remained behind. Around us were only the black forest and the black night.

The horses, running at a brisk and even pace, were swiftly taking me to the "Hollow" of evil fame; but it was still five versts' distant and I had plenty of time to think over the situation. As sometimes happens in moments of excitement, it stood out with extraordinary clearness. Recalling the scoundrelly figures of the "cormorants" and their mysterious companion, and the strange persistence with which they all followed in my track, I came to the conclusion that some grim adventure awaited me in the "Hollow." The part which my stern-looking driver would play in it remained an enigma.

The solution of this enigma was fast ap-

proaching. The crest of the forest-topped mountain already was faintly silhouetted against the slightly clearing, but still murky sky; below, in the dark, a river plashed and rushed. At a certain spot towered a tall black cliff: the "Devil's Finger."

The highway clung to the mountainside above the river; just below the "Devil's Finger" it turned aside, and a field road branched off from it into "the Hollow." This was the dangerous spot, renowned for the exploits of the Siberian highway gentry. The narrow, stony track did not allow rapid driving, and the shrubs which lined it provided an excellent ambush. Now that we were nearing "the Hollow" the "Devil's Finger" seemed to advance upon us, looming larger and larger. The clouds raced above it and seemed to graze its summit.

The horses slackened their pace. The shaft horse cautiously set down its hoofs, attentively observing the road. The side horses pressed closely against the shafts and snorted un-

easily. The bell worked unevenly, by starts, and its gentle tinkling, heard for some distance above the voice of the river, was lost in the silence.

Suddenly the horses stopped. The bell jangled shrilly and was still. I raised myself in my seat. On the road between the dark bushes, something black was moving. Something stirred in the bushes themselves.

The driver had pulled up his horses in the nick of time to escape a flank attack; but the situation was still critical. To turn back or aside was equally impossible. I was on the point of firing at random but was prevented.

The huge figure of the driver, standing up in his place on the box, hid from my sight both road and bushes. Leisurely rising, he handed me the reins and stepped to the ground.

"Here! hold them," he commanded, "and don't fire."

He spoke quite calmly, but with absolute authority. It never entered my head to disobey him. My suspicions fell away, leaving

no trace; I took the reins, and the gloomy giant walked ahead in the direction of the bushes. The clever horses slowly moved on, following their master.

The noise of the wheels on the stony road prevented my hearing what was going on in those bushes. When we came abreast of the spot where we had noticed a stir, "the Slayer," stopped short.

All was quiet now, only, at a distance from the road, in the direction of the crest of the ridge, there was a rustle in the foliage and a crackling of broken twigs. Evidently, men were stealthily moving there. The foremost one was visibly hurrying.

"That's Kòstiushka; the rascal running ahead of the rest," remarked "the Slayer," listening. "Hallo! one of them, see, has stayed behind."

At this moment a tall figure emerged from the bushes close to us and quickly sneaked into the forest after the others. We now could clearly hear, at four different points,

the sound of steps scampering away from the road. "The Slayer," calm as ever, returned to his horses, readjusted the harness, touched the wooden bow above the shaft horse's head, making the bell tinkle, then prepared to resume his seat.

Suddenly a small flame flashed from a rock right under the "Devil's Finger" and a shot rang out, filling the emptiness and silence with an exaggerated volume of sound. Something splashed against the cart and rebounded into the bushes.

"The Slayer's" first impulse was to rush to the rock like an infuriated beast, but he instantly desisted.

"See here, Kostka!" he shouted, in a deeply agitated voice, "don't you play the fool, I tell you! If you have hurt my innocent cattle, I'll get you, though you keep at a hundred versts from me. . . . Don't fire, sir!" he sternly turned to me.

"Better look out yourself, Slayer," spoke a voice from the rock; but it did not sound like

Kòstiushka's. "What makes you meddle where you have no business?"

It sounded as if the speaker were afraid of being heard by the man he addressed.

"Don't threaten, your worship," contemptuously retorted my driver. "Don't think I fear you, even though you've taken to hobnobbing with 'cormorants.'"

In a few minutes more, the hollow under the "Devil's Finger" was left far behind. We came out on a broad, even road.

III

"THE SLAYER"

We drove some four versts in deep silence. I was thinking over what had just taken place; my driver was running the reins between his fingers, calmly urging on or checking his horses with his voice. I was the first to speak.

"Well, friend, I'm greatly obliged to you! But for you, I'm afraid it might have gone ill with me!"

"Don't mention it," he replied.

"Not mention it? Those fellows, I can see, are a desperate lot."

"Desperate; that's so!"

"And you know them?"

"I do know Kòstiushka. . . . But then, there's not a dog but knows him, the rogue. . . . The merchant, too, I have noticed more than once. But the one that stayed behind—I don't think I ever saw *him* before. You see, he relied on Kòstiushka, so he stayed. But that was a mistake. For Kòstiushka is not that sort. He is always the first to run. The other man, though, is bold enough."

There was a silence.

"It did not use to be like this,—never," he began again, in a low tone of voice, gently shaking his head. "I wonder where Kòstiushka got him from . . . It's me he is after, that's what he is collecting all these black ravens for, curse him."

"What makes them fear you so?"

"They do fear me, that's a fact! . . . You see, I did for one of their gang right here." He pulled up his horses and turned quite round to me.

"Look," he said, "see the hollow back there? You can just make it out. Look, look well! There, in that very hollow, I killed that man."

I had the impression that in making this confession, his voice trembled; I also thought I caught a look of profound melancholy in his eyes, which were feebly illumined by a reflection from the eastern sky.

The cart stood on the crest of the hill. The road looked westward. Back of us, against the brightening eastern sky, was silhouetted a bulky mass of stone, thickly wooded; the huge rock towered, like an upward-pointing finger. It seemed very near to the "Devil's Hollow."

On the summit of the hill we were met by the early morning breeze, the harbinger of day. Feeling the cold, the horses pawed the

ground and snorted. The shaft horse dashed forward, but the man instantly reined in the troïka and, bending down from his seat, looked intently in the direction of the hollow.

Then he as abruptly straightened, half rose in his seat, shouted, and the horses, starting with a rush, took us at a mad pace down the hill.

It was a crazy race. The horses laid their ears back close to their heads and tore along as if impelled by mortal fear, while the driver kept rising and waving his right arm without a word. The horses seemed conscious of the movement, although they could not see it. The ground ran away from under the wheels, the trees and the bushes rushed to meet us and seemed to fall behind us, laid low by a hurricane gale.

When we reached even ground we fell again into a reasonable pace. The horses were enfolded in clouds of steam. The shaft horse panted heavily; the side horses quivered, snorted, and wagged their ears. Gradually,

however, they quieted down. The driver slackened the reins and talked soothingly to the horses.

"Quiet, pets, quiet! . . . Nothing to be afraid of. . . . There's the horse, now," he turned to me, "a creature unendowed with speech, yet how much understanding does it not show! When they had reached this summit and looked behind them I could not have kept them back,—they felt there was something wrong there."

"I don't know," I replied, "it may be so; but this time you urged them on yourself."

"Did I? . . . Well, maybe I did. Oh Lord, if you but knew how I feel inside of my heart!"

"Tell me. Then I shall know."

"The Slayer" hung his head.

"All right," he said, after a silence. "I will. . . . Get up there, pets, get up. It's all right."

The horses stamped along on the soft road at a gentle, even trot.

"You see . . . It was long ago. . . . Not so very long, either, but so much has happened since. My life was turned into an entirely different channel, that's why the time seems so long. Men have wronged me badly, those in power, I mean, the authorities. And God was not good to me either. My young wife and my little son died, both in a day. My parents were dead,—so I remained all alone in the world; neither kin had I, nor friends. And the funeral took my last penny. I did some hard thinking then,—thought and thought and at last my faith gave way. I lost my old faith without finding a new one. Naturally, for I am ignorant. I can barely read and write, and I don't much trust my own natural reason. Brooding like that, I fell into melancholy, such terrible melancholy, I did not care to live in this fair world. I left my cabin, my bit of farming, what was left of it, threw away everything, took along nothing but my sheepskin coat, a pair of breeches and a pair of

boots, cut me a stout stick in the woods, and started."

"For where?"

"For nowhere. At one place I would stop and work for my food, help in the ploughing, at another I would be in time for the harvesting. I would stay a day here, a week there, or even a month, and wherever I was, I observed how people lived, how they prayed, and believed. . . . I was looking for righteous men."

"And what did you find?"

"How shall I tell you? . . . Of course, there are people of all kinds, and each one has some trouble to bear,—that's certain. The worst of it is, brother, they don't much mind God in our parts. You can see for yourself: is this how people should live if you go by the Divine law? Everyone thinks of himself, of satisfying his own mammon. What more? This: no reality anywhere; even the fettered thief and robber is not really a robber. Am I right?"

"Possibly. But go on."

"Well, my melancholy grew on me as I saw more of the world. I saw that nothing worked right; I tossed as a rudderless boat. Now, of course, I do have some notion of things, little as it is. But at that time I must have lost my wits. Thus, for instance, I made up my mind to get myself arrested."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply this: I gave myself out for a vagrant, so they put me in jail. I was sort of taking up a cross."

"And did you feel easier for that?"

"Easier indeed! Of course it was nothing but foolishness. Perhaps you never were in jail, so you don't know. But I found out fast enough what kind of a community it is. Worst of all, people live there without any work whatever and are of no mortal use in the world. A man pokes around from corner to corner, till he thinks out some nastiness or other. They are ever ready with some obscene word, some ribaldry; as to thinking of their souls or of God, that is the rarest

thing; indeed they laugh at such. The most desperate set you ever saw. . . . I soon got wise that I had blundered into the wrong place, so I declared my name, begging them to let me go. But they wouldn't. They began making inquiries, one thing and another. Then it was: 'How did you dare give false information about yourself?' They pestered the life out of me. I don't know how I should have ended; but that something happened . . . something which made it bad for me; yet, but for that it might have been still worse.

"A rumour spread through the jail that the one-armed penitent' was to be brought back. This caused much talk and disputing. Some said that it was true, some that it was not. I confess it did not matter to me at the time one way or the other. Some prisoners came in from the city where they had been working; they said, 'Yes, it was quite true: "One-arm" was under strong guard, and would be brought in that evening without

fail.' The crowd, moved by curiosity, rushed out into the yard. I went too. Not that I felt much curiosity, but just to kill the time. Indeed, as I walked, I fell to thinking and forgot all about 'One-arm,' when suddenly the gate was thrown open. I looked that way: they were bringing in the old man. Very old, very small and slight, his long white beard bobbing; he swayed as he walked, his legs giving way under him. And one of his arms hung useless by his side. Yet his escort consisted of five men, fully armed, bayonets and all. When I saw that, it gave me a shock. 'Good Lord,' I thought, 'what will men not do! Is that a way of taking a man around as though he were some kind of a tiger? There might be some sense in it if he were a giant, an athlete; but such a wisp of a little old man, with hardly life in him for a week.'

"I was seized with infinite pity. And the longer I gazed, the more my heart burnt within me. The old man was taken to the

office; the blacksmith was sent for, to put the irons on his wrists and ankles, and rivet them solidly. The old man took the irons, blessed them with the sign of the cross, after the manner of the 'Old-Believers,'[1] and himself placed them on his ankles. 'Do your work,' he said to the smith. Then he blessed the manacles and himself slipped his hands through them. 'Lord,'—he spoke, 'vouchsafe that I may wear these as a penance.'"

The man here paused and bowed his head; he seemed to live over again in imagination the scene which he had just described. Then, tossing his head, he proceeded:

"He fascinated me completely, let me tell you, gripped my heart. Curious, wasn't it? Later on I learned to know him thoroughly: the veriest devil, God forgive me, tempter and arch-enemy. But my, how he could act the saint! Even at this moment, as I

[1] Using two fingers, instead of three, in making the sign of the cross—TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.

recall the way he prayed, I disbelieve myself: he was a different man then, that's all."

"And I was not the only one to be taken in. Will you believe it, even 'the crowd,'—and you know what a jail crowd is!—quieted down. They all looked on in silence. The veriest jeerers grew still; more than one even crossed himself. What do you think of that now?

"As to me, he just had me. For I was at the time in a peculiar frame of mind,—something like a new convert, seeking and groping; and I took it into my head that this old man was a true saint, such as were in old times. I not only had made no friends, but hardly ever spoke to any of the men. I took to no one and no one took to me. Sometimes I would hear their conversation but it was like the buzzing of so many flies past my ears. Whatever I thought, I thought to myself, never asking anybody's opinion, whether it were right or wrong. So it was that I planned to find my way somehow to the cell where the

old man was kept in solitary confinement. At the first opportunity I slipped a copper into each of the sentries' hand, and they let me in. After that they frequently let me in free of charge. Looking in at his little window, I saw the old man pacing his cell, his irons trailing after him, his lips muttering. When he became aware of my presence, he turned round and approached the door.

"'What wouldst?'

"'Nothing,' I said: 'just a call. Dreary work, I fancy, being all alone.'

"'I am not alone,' he replied: 'I am here with God, and God is good company. Still, I am always glad of a word with a kind fellow creature.'

"I would stand there like a fool, so that he would look at me wonderingly and shake his head.

"At last one day he said to me:

"'Stand away a bit from the window, lad; I want to see the whole of thee.'

"I did as he bade me; he applied an eye to

the opening, was a long time looking me over, and said at length:

"'What kind of a man art thou? Tell me.'

"'What is there to tell?' I replied. 'The most lost of men,—that's all I am.'

"'Art thou to be relied upon?' he asked again. 'Wouldst not deceive?'

"'Never yet have I deceived anybody, and you I would deceive least of all?'

"He thought a while, then spoke again."

"'I need a man, to send to a certain place to-night. Wouldst go?'

"'How can I get out of here?' I objected.

"'I will tell thee how,'—he said. And he did; and, true enough, that night I walked out of the jail as I might have walked out of my own house. I found the man I was to see, gave him the message, and got back before morning. I must confess that, as I neared the jail, towards daybreak, my heart rebelled. 'What,' I thought, 'what forces me to return into that cage? Why not simply go away?' The jail, you know, stands at a distance from

the city, right by a wide road. The roadside grass glittered with dew, the rye stood high, the ears swelling; beyond the little stream a young wood was gently rustling in the breeze. . . . Such beauty! Such boundless space! Looking back, there stood the jail, glowering like an evil night-bird. Not so bad at night, when all is asleep; but when the morning comes and the day starts its monotonously revolving wheel,—horrible! My heart, I say, rebelled and powerfully impelled me to take the road that would lead me far away to freedom.

"But I thought of the old man: Should I, indeed, deceive him? . . . I lay down on the grass, with my face close to the ground; thus I lay for a little while, then arose, and deliberately turned towards the jail. I would not look back. As I approached the wall, I raised my eyes, and there, up in the turret, where the 'secret' cells were, on a window-sill, sat my old man, looking down on me from behind the grating.

"In the course of the day I succeeded in gaining admission to the turret and reported to him. He looked much pleased.

"'Well, child,' he said, 'I thank thee kindly. The service thou hast done me I shall not forget as long as I live. Say, lad,' he asked me a little later,

"'Sick at heart? And what about, thou knowest not thyself? That's no true penitence. True penitence is sweet. Listen to me, and remember this: God alone is sinless, while man is essentially sinful and saves himself by penitence alone. But penitence presupposes sin, and sin is in the world. Where there is no sin there is no penitence, and without penitence there is no salvation. Dost see?'

"Honestly, I did not at the time, not quite. I only heard the words, and they seemed good to me. Besides, I had more than once asked myself what kind of life I was leading. Other men seemed all right; but I seemed to be living in a manner apart from all, like grass

out in the field or a tree all by itself, away from the forest. No good to myself or others.

"'True for you,' I assented. 'Although the world is not without sin, still one at least lives there, which is better than pining one's days away here. The trouble is, I do not know how to order my life. And then, will they let me out of here?'

"'As to that,' replied the old man, 'let it be my concern. I have prayed on thy behalf, and it is given me to lead thy soul out of the prison-house. Wilt thou promise to obey me in all things? Then I will show thee the way to penitence.'

"'I promise,' I said.

"'On thine oath?'

"'Yes, on my oath.'

"I took the oath, for at that time he had gained entire possession of me; had he ordered me into the fire, I'd have jumped; or into the river,—just the same. I believed in the man. One of the prisoners one day tried to warn me. 'What makes you so chummy

with One-arm? Don't you be taken in by his ways of wanting to climb up to heaven alive. He was shot in the arm in the act of breaking into a shop; the owner shot him.'

"But I would not listen; all the less that the man was not sober. I turned away from him. So that he even was angry with me. 'Go, then, he said, and be damned to you, you fool head.' Yet I must say he was a just man, if he *was* a drunkard.

"Soon after this 'One-arm' got promoted: he was taken out of the solitary confinement cell into the common ward, where he could be with all the others. But even there, he, like me, kept mostly to himself. The prisoners sometimes would bother him, joke, and poke fun at him, but never got a word out of him. He would just give them a look which would disconcert the most impudent. It was an evil look. . . .

"Well, it was not long before he got his release for good and all. It was summer, and I was taking the air in the yard, when I

saw the assessor pass into the office, then 'One-arm' was taken to him. In less than half an hour he came out on the porch with the assessor, wearing his own clothes, as a free man, looking happy. The assessor also was laughing. 'To think,' I mused, 'under what brutal treatment the man was brought in while there was no guilt in him!' I confess I felt bad, sore at heart; I should again be all alone. But he swept the yard with his eyes, and, catching sight of me, beckoned to me. I approached, doffed my cap, and bowed low to the authorities; then 'One-arm' spoke:

"'Say, your worship, could you not hurry up a bit with this fellow's case? His offence is not much.'

"'What is your name?' asked the assessor.

"'Fiodor[1] Silin.'

"'Oh, yes. I remember. Well, it might be done. Indeed, he would not be tried at all, for foolishness is no triable offence. Take him out, speed him on his way with a kick or

[1] Fiodor—Theodore.

two, as a warning not again to intrude where he does not belong, and there you are. By the way, I did receive the required information quite a while ago. In a week he shall be free, you may depend on it.'

"'That's all right, then' said 'One-arm.' 'And see here, boy,'—he took me aside,—'the moment they get thee free, hie thee to the Kaldéyef homestead and ask for the master, Iván Zakhárof; I will tell him of thee, child. And mind thine oath.'

"They left. And, true enough, in a week's time I was discharged. I came at once to this place here, found Iván Zakhárof, and told him 'One-arm' had sent me to him. 'I know!' he said; 'the old man did speak of thee. Well, for the present stay with me as labourer; later on we shall see.'

"'And where may himself be now,—"One-arm," I mean?'

"'Absent on business. He is about a great deal on business. I expect he'll be round soon.'

"So I stayed. Not exactly as labourer, with no definite duties assigned to me. The family was not numerous. There were, besides the master, a grown son and a labourer. I was the fourth. Some women, of course, and 'One-arm's' visits at any time. They were of the old faith and strict in the observance of the law. Of tobacco or vodka never a trace. As to the labourer, Kuzmà, he was a sort of imbecile,—black as an Ethiopian, with a shaggy mane. The minute he heard a bell tinkle, he would run and hide in the bushes. Of 'One-arm' he was mortally afraid. If he as much as caught sight of him from afar, he ran for dear life into the forest, always hiding in one particular spot. Then, no matter how the master called, he gave no sign. But if 'One-arm' himself went after him, he followed as meek as a lamb and went about his work as usual. 'One-arm's' visits were not frequent, and he hardly spoke to me at all. He would sit talking to the master and look at me working

at something, but if I went up to him, he never had time for me. 'Have patience, child,' he would say. 'By and by, when I come here to stay, then we will talk. I am not at leisure now.' And all the time I was sick at heart. They did not, indeed, overwork me in any way, the food was good, I never heard an angry word. It was not often that they even sent me out with travellers. It was mostly the master himself who went, or else his son with the labourer, especially at night. But idleness was worst of all, because my thoughts had free play, and I did not know what to do with myself.

"I had been out of jail for five weeks or so, when, coming home one evening from the mill, I found quite a crowd. I unharnessed the horses and was making for the house, when the master came out to meet me.

"'Don't go in just now,' he said; 'wait a bit, till I call. Dost hear? Don't go in, I say.'

"'Queer; what can it mean?' I thought to myself, and betook myself to the hayloft. I lay down in the hay, but could find no sleep. Then it occurred to me that I had left my ax by the brook and I thought I would go for it, lest someone should carry it away when the crowd began to disperse. I had to pass the windows and casually looked in. The room was full of people, the assessor sitting at the table, with vodka before him, various relishes, and also a pen and paper; evidently an inquest being held. And, a little to one side, 'One-arm' was seated on a bench. Good heavens! I felt as if somebody had knocked me on the head. There he sat, matted hair hanging down on his forehead, arms pinioned, eyes like burning coals. He looked so gruesome to me then, I could not tell you.

"I sprang away from the window, to one side. It was autumn. A dark but starlit night. I don't think I can ever forget that night, the purling brook, the rustling forest, myself as in a dream. . . . I sat down on the

bank, in the grass, trembling in every limb. . . . Oh Lord!

"How long I had sat there, I could not have said, when I heard steps: a man in a white suit was coming along the path from the forest, waving a slender walking-stick. It was the clerk, who lived some four versts away. He cursed the little bridge and made straight for the house. Something drew me back to the window; what was going to happen? . . .

"The clerk went in, took off his cap, looked around him. He evidently did not know why he had been sent for. He went up to the table and as he passed 'One-arm' he greeted him: 'How-do, Iván Alexéyevitch?' The old man's eyes blazed out at him, two singeing flames, while the master pulled his sleeve and whispered something, which visibly astonished him. He approached the assessor, who, having already taken more wine than a little, looked at him with dull eyes, as though half asleep. They exchanged

greetings, then the assessor said, pointing at 'One-arm' with his finger:

"'Do you know this man?'

"The clerk looked and exchanged glances with the host.

"'Well,' I thought, 'that's queer! The assessor himself knows him perfectly well.'

"He spoke again,—I mean the assessor:

"'Is this not Iván Alexéyef, a resident of this place, surnamed "One-arm?"'

"'No,' replied the clerk, 'it is not.'

"The assessor thereupon took up a pen, wrote something on a paper, then began to read aloud what he had written. I listened from my hiding-place under the window and wondered. The paper made out that this same old man, Iván Alexéyef, was not Iván Alexéyef at all, that neither the neighbours nor the clerk knew him for such a person, and that he himself gave his name as one Iván Ivánof, his passport showing the same. Wonderful! Such a crowd and every one of them signed that paper, and not one knew

him for who he really was. True, the lot were well chosen, being one and all, as one might say, Zakhárof's bondsmen, deep in his debt.

"This business being done with, the witnesses were dismissed. 'One-arm' had been unbound before by the assessor's order. And now he brought out some money, handed it to the assessor, who counted and pocketed it, then said:

"'Now, old man, you are to go away from here for at least three months. And if you don't, don't blame me. . . . And now let me have horses, quick.'

"I slunk away from the window, got back to the hayloft, thinking that somebody presently would be coming out after the horses. I did not want to be caught near the window. I lay on the hay, between waking and sleeping, and I seemed to be dreaming, could not get my thoughts in order. After a while I could hear them seeing the assessor off. The bells tinkled, he was gone. The people in the

house went to bed, the lights went out. I was dropping off myself, when suddenly I again heard a bell, ding-ding-ding. The night was so still, I could hear it way off. And it kept coming nearer, nearer,—from beyond the river, as I made it out. Soon the people in the house heard it too and made a light. A troïka drove into the yard. A friendly driver from the nearest station had brought some travellers. This was an act of mutual friendliness: we used to take travellers to him and he brought us his.

"'I suppose they will stay the night,' I thought to myself. I was seldom sent out at night anyhow; the master would either go himself, or else his son with the labourer. So I was dozing off again, when, suddenly, I heard low voices right there under the shed; 'One-arm' was talking with the master.

"'What's to be done now?' the old man was saying. 'By the way, where is Kuzmà?'

"'Why, there's the trouble, 'replied the master. 'Iván went with the assessor; and

Kuzmà, as soon as he caught sight of the crowd, took to his heels, and he isn't in the bushes either. The boy is an arrant fool, seems to have lost his wits entirely.'

"'And what of Fiodor?' pursued the old man, meaning me.

"'Fiodor returned from the mill last night, was for entering the house, but I did not let him in.'

"'I suppose he went to sleep somewhere. He saw nothing, did he?'

"'Shouldn't think he did. Made straight for the hayloft.'

"'All right, then. It appears we'll have to send him on this business.'

"'But will it be safe?' objected Zakhárof.

"'Why not? The lad is a simpleton, but endowed with marvellous strength, and entirely subservient to me; I can twist him round my finger. And mind you: I shall have to stay away a good six months, so he must be broken in to the business. You never will get along without me else.'

"'All the same he looks doubtful to me,' persisted Zakhárof. 'Doesn't fit in somehow to my mind, foolish as he looks.'

"'Come, come,' the old man retorted, 'I know him well,—the simple-minded fellow, the like of him is just what we want. As to Kuzmà, we'll have to shed him somehow, before he gets us into trouble.'

"Then they started calling: 'Fiódor! Hello, Fiódor!' But I had not the heart to respond. I held my peace. The old man climbed into the loft, groped around for me. 'Get up, boy!' he said in his kindliest tones. 'Hast been asleep all this time?'—'Yes.'—'Well, that is good. Now get up, child, and harness the horses; there are travellers to be taken. Dost mind thine oath?'—'I do,' I managed to answer, while my teeth chattered and cold shivers ran down my back. 'Maybe,' the old man went on, thy time has come. Obey my orders. Meanwhile make haste and harness up. The travellers are in a hurry.'

"I hauled the wagon out of the shed, har-

nessed the shaft horse and put it in, my heart thumping all the time like mad and me wondering right along whether all this were not a dream, a vision of the night. My brain was in a whirl, but not a sensible thought took form in it.

"I noticed that 'One-arm' was saddling his own horse. Now that horse was a clever little beast, as obedient as any well-trained dog. He saddled it with his one hand, mounted, whispered a word to it, and it trotted out of the yard. As soon as I had put in the shaft horse, I stepped out of the gate and, looking around, saw him turn into the forest at a brisk trot. The moon was not up yet; still there was light enough to see by. When he disappeared into the forest my heart felt lighter.

"I drove to the house and waited. I was called in. The party of travellers consisted of a young mother and three small children, the oldest boy was about four and the youngest girl not more than two. 'You poor thing,'

I thought to myself, 'what in the world sends you travelling over such a country, alone, too, away from your husband.' She was a nice gentle creature. She made me sit down and have some tea; then she began to question me concerning this part of the country, whether it were safe for travellers. 'I have heard of nothing,' I replied, thinking the while, 'you're badly scared, you poor little woman, I can see that.' And how should she not be! Such a lot of luggage as she had; all about her belongings betokening wealth; and those children! A mother's heart is prophetic. It must be sore necessity that drives her.

"Well, we took our places and started. There still were some two hours of night before day would break. We got out on the road and had followed it for a verst or so, when one of my side horses shied. What could it be? I pulled up and looked about me: Kuzmà crept out of the roadside bushes and stood up, shaking his shaggy locks and grinning. I cursed him in my mind, I felt

bad enough as it was, a dozen cats scratching at my heart, and the little lady sitting there half dead with fright. The kids were asleep, but she was wide-awake, in torturing anxiety, tears in her eyes. Now she cried outright, 'I'm afraid,' she said, 'I'm afraid of you all.'

"'Why, God bless you, what ails you, dearie? Do you take me for a manslayer? But why did you not stop over night?'

"'What, *there?* That would have been still worse. The other driver said we should get to a village by night, and instead, brought us to that lonely place in the forest. And that old man,—he had such evil eyes. . . .'

"'O Lord,' I thought, 'what *am* I to do with her? She is just wild with fear, the poor child.'

"'Well,' I said, 'what would you be for doing now? Go back or push on?'

"I kept walking around her, not knowing what to say to comfort her, just aching with the pity of it. And the Hollow was not far now,—we had to turn down a field road into

it, past 'the Rock.' Now she noticed that I had grown as silent as herself. She laughed.

"'Well,' she said, 'take your seat and drive on. I shan't turn back. I should be more afraid there. I would rather go with you, for you have a kind face.'

"You see, people are afraid of me now; they call me 'the Slayer'—but in those days I was as harmless as an infant. I did not yet bear this Cain's mark on my brow.'

"I cheered up a bit, seeing as how she did. I climbed up on the box.

"'Let us talk,' proposed the lady. She began to question me about myself and told me about herself, how that she was on her way to join her husband, a wealthy political exile.

"'And you,' she inquired, 'have you been long with these people? Are you, as one might say, in their service?

"'I am,' I replied; 'I entered their service not long ago.'

"'What sort of people are they?'

"'Not a bad sort. Still, who can tell? They are strict in their ways,—don't drink, or smoke.'

"'That is unimportant,' she replied, 'it is not such things that matter.'

"'How, then, should we live?' I asked, for I saw that, though a woman, she had sense; so I thought: would she not tell me something worth hearing.

"'Can you read and write?' she next inquired.

"'I did learn a little.'

"'What, she went on, is the Gospel's greatest commandment?'

"'The greatest? Love.'

"'Right. Also it is said that no greater love is there than for a man to be willing to give his life for his friends. Therein is the whole law. But,' she added, 'judgment is needed, wherewith to distinguish what is essential and what is not. And all that stuff about tobacco and about crossing oneself with two fingers or three,—that's all nonsense.'

"'Maybe you're right,' I replied; 'still there is no harm in a little strictness, so as to keep a man mindful of his soul at all times.'

"So we jogged along, conversing, till we approached the forest and came to the little stream with its ferry. At low water it is quite narrow, so that you have only to push the boat off one side and it lands you on the other; no need of a ferryman. The kids woke up and looked on with wide-open eyes: the dark night, the whispering forest, the starry sky, the moon just showing up before day-break—all these wonders appeal to the infant soul. Poor innocents!

"Well, we entered the forest. I felt as though a cold breath chilled my inmost heart. As I looked ahead I seemed to catch glimpses of something running along the very path we were on, something that looked mighty like 'One-arm's' little grey, and now I could make out his quick, light step. My heart sank: what would happen? What brought the old man to this place? And

why had he reminded me of my oath?—Something was wrong . . . I fell into deep thought. Fear of the old man gripped me. I used to like him; but this evening had made me afraid of him; as I thought of those eyes of his, I shivered all the way down my body.

"I stopped talking. Not that I thought of anything or heard anything. The lady put in a word now and then,—I was dumb. At last she fell silent too. Just sat there.

"We got into a dark, narrow pass. The forest closed in upon us, black and dangerous. And in my soul was darkness, blacker than the night. I sat and felt not myself. The horses knew the way and ran straight to 'the Rock.' I did not have to drive. Then they stopped: it was as I expected. There was the grey, and the old man on top of him, and his eyes—as God hears me—live coals! The lines dropped out of my hands. The horses went right up to the grey and stopped of their own accord. 'Fiódor,' he said, 'get down.' I obeyed. He also dismounted and

stood the little grey across the road, right in front of the troïka. My horses stood still, did not move a muscle. I, too, stood still, as under a spell. He came up close to me, said something, I know not what, took me by the hand, led me up to the cart. I looked at my hand; it held an ax!

"I followed him. . . . I found no words to gainsay him, no strength to resist him. 'Go and sin,' he said; 'then shalt thou taste the sweetness of repentance.' I remember nothing clearly. We went up close to the cart. He stepped to one side. 'Begin,' he commanded; 'first the woman, right on the forehead.' My God! the little lady sat there like a stricken dove, covering the children with her arms and body and staring at me big-eyed. They were awake now and also stared. Did they understand or did they not?

"Those eyes fixed upon me seemed to rouse me out of a torpor. I looked away and lifted the ax. And something terrible stirred and seethed in my heart. I looked at him,—

he shuddered . . . he understood! I looked again: his eyes had turned green and rolled wildly. . . . My arm rose of itself and swung the ax; the old man dropped at my feet without a groan,—and, would you believe it, brother mine, I kicked the dead body, again and again. . . . I had myself turned into a wild beast, Heaven forgive me!"

The narrator caught his breath with a deep sigh.

"What next?" I asked, seeing that he was lost in thought.

He started. "What did you say? Ah, yes,—what next! I woke as out of a trance, and the first thing I saw was Iván Zakhárof coming down on us at a gallop on a spare horse, a gun in his hand. He rode up quite close; I faced him. He would surely have been lying by the side of the old man, but that, thank God, he saw what was coming. One glance at me, and he turned his horse, belabouring his flanks with the butt end of his gun. The beast, with an almost human

shriek, stood straight up on his hind feet and flew to beat a bird.

"I gradually came to my senses. I did not look at my passenger. I took my seat, whipped up the horses, but not a step would they budge! The little grey was still standing across the road. I had forgotten all about him. To think how thoroughly trained the little devil was! I crossed myself: evidently I should have to dispatch the fiendish beast as well. I pulled at the rein,—he braced himself and stood his ground. 'Get out, lady,' I said; 'the horses might take fright and bolt, and break the wagon to pieces, because, you see, the grey stands right in front of them.' She got out, as obedient as a child; the kids clambered out after her, pressing close to her. They too were frightened by this time,—the place was too uncanny, so dark, and I struggling with those devils.

"I backed my troïka some, took up the ax and again approached the grey. 'Get thee gone from here,' I said to him, 'or I'll kill

thee!' He just wagged one ear, as he would say, 'I won't! Hang you!' All turned black before my eyes, my hair stood up on end under my cap, I swung my ax with all my might and struck him one between the eyes; he tumbled down on his side with a feeble squeal and stretched all four legs from him. I dragged him off by the feet and laid him by the side of his master, just off the road: lie there, the pair of you! . . . 'Get in,' I said to the lady. She lifted in the two little tots, but the eldest was too heavy for her. 'Help me,' she said. I went up to her, the boy put out his little arms to me, and I was going to take him,—but suddenly remembered . . . 'Take him away,' I said; 'I am all bloody, not fit for a child to touch.'

"We got settled somehow. I touched up the horses; they snorted and balked. What was I to do? 'Let the smaller one sit on the box by me,' I suggested. She did, and held him in place with both hands. I slapped the horses with the lines—they just flew—as

you saw them do just now. They always will run from blood.

"In the morning I got the lady to the village and drove to the office. There I told what I had done: 'Take me. I have killed a man.' The lady told everything as it had happened. 'He saved our lives,' she said. They bound me. She wept, poor soul. 'What are you binding him for?' she cried. 'He did a noble thing,—defended my babes against a villain.' Seeing that no one heeded her words, she ran to me and began to undo the knots with her own hands. I had to stop her. 'Let be', I said, 'this does not concern you. It is for God and honest men to judge. 'Why, what guilt can you possibly be charged with?' she insisted. 'My pride,' I replied. 'Through pride and self-will I got myself mixed up with these evil-doers. I broke away from my own people, would take nobody's advice, but took my own way in everything. And this is where my own way brought me to,—within a hair's breadth of murder!'

"Well, she submitted and stepped aside. But when she was about to leave, she came up to say good-bye and embraced me: —'You poor dear!' She wanted the children to embrace me too. I would not have it: 'What are you thinking of? Do not pollute the infants, for I have taken life.' I was afraid of adding that the children might of themselves recoil from my sin. But she would not mind me; she lifted the tots up to me; the elder walked up to me himself. As his little arms encircled my neck I broke down and sobbed aloud, and the tears ran down my face. A kind-hearted little woman she was. Maybe the Lord, for the sake of her kind soul, may disremember my sin.

"'If,' she said at parting, 'there is in the world such a thing as justice, we will see you righted. I shall never forget you.' And she did not. You know yourself what our courts of justice are, with their everlasting delays; they would be keeping me in durance to this day, had not she and her

husband somewhere got hold of I don't know what papers."

"So they did keep you some time, after all, did they?"

"They did; quite a while, too. Money was at the root of it. The lady sent me five hundred roubles, with a letter from both herself and her husband. Soon as this money arrived there came life into my case. The assessor drove down and sent for me to the office.

"'Well,' he began, 'your case is in my hands. How much will you give me if I get you acquitted?'

"Did you ever! I thought to myself. Money, is it? And for what? Oh no, my friend. You try me strictly, but rightly, so I can see where the law comes in, and I will bow me to the ground before you. But you're after money, are you?'

"'Not a doit will I give,' I replied. 'Try me according to the law, to which I appeal.'

"'You blockhead!' he laughed. 'Accord-

ing to the law your case bears a twofold aspect. But the law is up on my shelf, and it lies with me which way to turn it. Whichever way I choose, that way you will go.'

"'How do you make that out?'

"'This is how,' he returned. 'Attend, silly! You defended the lady and her kids didn't you?'

"'Suppose I did; what next?'

"'You did. Very well. That may be credited to you as a good deed, may it not? Certainly, for it is one. This is one way."

"'And what might the other way be?'

"'The other? Why, just look at yourself, what a fellow you are. Here you are faced by an old man, the same as a child. He tempted you? Well, you should have neatly pinioned his arms and delivered him up to the authorities. Instead of which you went for him without a word and felled him like an ox, which is no way of doing. See?'

"'I see there is no truth in you, that's what I see. Had you explained it all to me with no

thought of gain, I should have thanked you kindly. But to act like this! Not a penny of my money shall you see.'

"He was mad now.

"'Very well then, my friend. I'll see that you rot in jail even before your case is called up for trial.'

"'Go ahead,' I said. 'No use threatening.'

"He was as good as his word, but the lady was one too many for him. She found ways and means, and one fine day there came such a paper that my friend the assessor had to give in. He had me in the office again, ranted and swore, and ended by discharging me that same day. So I got off without a trial. I don't understand it. People say we are going to have regular courts of justice as they have in foreign countries, so I'm waiting: God grant I may be tried by a jury—let them settle it."

"And what became of Iván Zakhárof?"

"Oh, he disappeared and left no trace. It appears he and 'One-arm' had fixed up a trap

for me that night: Zakhárof was to follow me at a distance, and, if I refused to do the killing, he was to have shot me out of his gun. But God, you see, ordered the thing differently. When Zakhárof rode up, it was all over and he was seized with panic. I was told later that, when he got home, he began at once to dig his money out of the ground, and, having done that, made for the forest without a word to any one . . . And that same morning, at dawn, a fire broke out on the place. Whether he had got it up himself, or it was Kuzmà who "let loose the red rooster," as some said, was never known. One thing is certain, that by evening nothing was left of the buildings but cinders. The robber nest was utterly destroyed. The women are begging their way from village to village,—and the son is doing time as a convict. There was no money to buy him off with. . . .

"Stop, pets! . . . Here we are, thank the Lord! And there, look! God's sun is just rising."

Winter

By V. G. Korolenko

I

WE were travelling southward, along the bank of the river Lena, but winter was overtaking us from the north; yet it seemed to be confronting us, too, coming down the course of the river.

September had been pretty mild around Yakutsk; not a particle of ice was to be seen on the river. At one of the stations nearest the city we were even tempted by the beauty of the moonlit night into refusing to spend it in the station-keeper's close hut, which had just been coated on the outside for the winter with dresh dung, still warm. So we made our beds on the river bank, inside boats, and covered ourselves with deerskins. In the

course of the night, however, I had a feeling as if somebody were burning my right cheek with a hot iron. I awoke and saw that the moonlit night had grown still whiter. Everything around me was covered with hoar-frost, so was my own pillow, and it was the touch of it that gave me the illusion of being burned. My companion, who slept in the same boat with me, probably had dreamed the same thing. The moon shone right in his face, and I could see the frightful grimaces which convulsed it from time to time. His sleep was profound and, probably, most painful. At the same time my other fellow traveller raised himself, in the next boat, partly removing the fur coats and robes that were heaped upon him. They were all white and fluffy with rime, and he looked like a white phantom born of the cold sheen of the frost and the moonlight.

"Brr-r," he shivered. "Eh, but it's cold, friends! . . ."

The boat swayed under him, and the movement caused a clanking in the water, like

that of broken glass. This was the first rim ice "setting" in places protected from the swift current, very thin as yet, showing traces of the long crystal-like brittle needles, which broke with a sound like fine glass. The river seemed to slacken in its course under the first heavy blow of Old Winter's club, while the rocks of its hilly banks, on the contrary, looked lighter, more airy, seeming to recede into vague, lucent distance, sparkling, almost phantomlike in their dress of white frost.

Such was the first greeting of winter at the start of a long journey: cheerful, challenging, almost playful.

As, slowly and with many delays, we moved farther southward, the winter gained strength. Vast shoals and shallows already stood thinly crusted with dark, pure, virgin ice, and a stone, thrown from the bank, would be long rolling and sliding over the smooth surface, causing a strange, chimelike tinkling, gradually swelling in volume and taken up by the mountain echoes. Farther on the ice, now

having firm hold of the river edges and of the quickly hardening shore strips, already withstood the impetus of the current. Winter extended his conquests. The frozen shore strips were widening and every step in the strife was marked by a line of broken ice cakes showing where the current, but lately swift and strong, had again retreated a couple of yards towards the middle.

A little later snow appeared here and there on the banks, contrasting vividly with the dark, dull water. Later still the small mountain streams joined the fight. Gradually descending from their river-heads, they continually kept breaking up the ice at their mouths and throwing it into the Lena, encumbering the current left free, and hindering the river's own struggle with the enemy. The broken line rose higher and higher, the ice cakes, thrown out by the current on the edges of the shore strips, grew thicker and thicker. They already formed actual ramparts, and, looking from the bank, we sometimes could

perceive the beginning of an alarming commotion among these ramparts. That was when the river angrily flung, against the immovable masses that fettered it, such ice cakes as still floated freely on its open channel, beating breaches in them, smashing the ice into bits, splitting it into long, sharp needles, crushing it into snow, only impotently to retreat in the end, and after a while it turned out that the white broken line had advanced some more, the frozen belt had grown wider and the river bed narrower.

As time went on, the fight grew more stubborn, the grandeur of it more striking. The river now no longer tumbled insignificant ice cakes, but hurled huge blocks, piling them up in monstrous disorder. The scene grew ever more disconsolate. Nearer to the banks the piles already froze solidly into shapeless masses, while in the middle they still heavily tossed and wheeled in chaotic confusion, screening from view the gradually closing channel, as a brutal crowd might screen from

the public gaze the place of execution. All nature seemed spellbound in fear and mournful, solemn expectation. The desert passes of the mountainous shores docilely reverberated the dry crash of the breaking ice-floes and the heavy groaning of the succumbing river.

Still a little while, and the dark stream in the middle of the river had grown slushy white, and on its surface, slowly shuffling and revolving, colliding, grazing, and shoving one another, and softly rustling, thickly floated the white cakes, ready to be welded into the icy pall which was finally to press the life out of the tamed and conquered current.

II

One day, watching from a small promontory, we espied, amidst these slowly moving masses, a black object, which stood out plainly against the yellowish-white background. In the wilderness everything attracts attention, and our little caravan at once broke out into animated talk and guesses.

"A crow," said one.

"A bear," suggested another.

Opinions divided. To some the black speck appeared not bigger than a crow, to others not smaller than a bear. The remote monotony of those moving masses, lazily floating along between high mountains, distorted the entire perspective.

"Whence should a bear have found his way to the middle of the river?" I demanded of the man who had emitted the bear hypothesis.

"From the opposite bank. Year before last a she-bear crossed from yonder island with three cubs."

"Animals even now are crossing all the time to our side; that promises a fierce winter," added another.

"The cold drives them," put in a third speaker.

Our entire caravan held up around the promontory, to watch the approach of the object which had aroused the general interest.

The white ice slush, meanwhile, was slowly drawing nearer and we could see that the black spot upon it was shifting its position, seeming really to advance towards our side of the river, stepping from one ice cake on to another.

"Why, brothers, that's a mountain goat!" at length exclaimed one of the men.

"Two of them," corrected another, looking more closely.

Sure enough, mountain goats they were, and there were, indeed, two of them. Now we could clearly make out the two dark, graceful little figures in the midst of that icy hell. One was somewhat bigger than the other. Probably mother and daughter. The ice cakes all around them tossed, clashed, whirled, and crumbled, and, at every collision, there was a seething and foaming, and throwing up of spray in the interstices between the cakes, and the dainty creatures, all alert, stood on a comparatively large cake, their slender feet bunched together, poised for a spring.

"Well, what's going to happen, I wonder!" spoke a young lad, deeply interested.

A huge ice cake, which was floating ahead of that on which the goats stood, slackened its speed somewhat, then began to revolve, hindering the movements of those behind it. This caused around the animals a chaos of splashing and destruction. The cakes stood up vertically, climbing on top of one another, splitting and breaking with a loud crash like the rattle of firearms. At times, dark chasms opened and closed between them. The two wretched little specks of life entirely disappeared for a moment in the chaos, but the next moment we caught sight of them on another ice cake, again bunching their poor little feet, ready for another spring. This was repeated several times, and each new spring brought them, with well calculated directness, nearer our side and away from the opposite side.

Already it was possible to perceive the plan followed by the intelligent animals.

Not far from us the promontory protruded in a sharp point into the river, and there the ice cakes, driven asunder by the current, broke with extraordinary violence. But the remoter ones, which avoided the line of shock, were at once seized by the receding counter-current and carried back to the other side. The elder of the goats, who evidently managed the operation, directed their course so that every leap brought them nearer to this promontory, groaning as it was under the thundering onslaught of the ice run. Whether or no she saw us, she took no notice of our presence. We were standing immovably on that same promontory, and even the large ferocious station dog, which had volunteered to follow us and was watching with pointed ears, plainly took a wholly impersonal interest in the issue of these daring and tragically dangerous manœuvres. When the goats were quite near the land, within some dozen yards of our little crowd, they still thought of nothing but the collisions of the ice cakes and their

own desperate leaps. As the cake on which they stood, slowly revolving, approached the critical point, we held our breaths. One instant. . . . A dry crash, a chaotic wreckage of fragments hurled up into the air, then falling down and creeping along the ice-coated edges of the promontory; then—two black bodies, flying with the lightness of well-aimed missiles over the chaos and landing on the bank. They landed safely. But just beyond the other edge of the narrow strip was a dark streak of water, and our crowd barred their progress. But the clever animal did not hesitate a second. I noticed the strangely confident look in her round eyes; then she made straight for us, showing the way to her young companion. The station dog, a big, shaggy Polkan, stepped aside in a dazed sort of way, when the elder goat, shielding the younger with her body, bounded past him, almost grazing his rough coat with her flank. The dog ran to one side with his tail down and a puzzled look, as though wondering at his

own forbearance and fearful lest it might be misinterpreted. But we applauded his self-restraint and gladly looked at the ridge above us, where two slender bodies seemed to be flying, stretching full length, over the crags, from summit to summit.

III

We had travelled the last stage with a casual companion, Ivan Radionovitch Sokólsky, the head of a prospecting party. I know not what life-tempest had cast him into that remote part of Siberia, and he had ceased from struggling to get away, having grown to like a prospector's existence, so rich in varied experiences. He was a large man, with a weather-beaten face, a mane of partly blanched hair, and features which seemed frozen hard, so difficult was it for them to express any emotion; his feelings were as safely hidden from sight under this impenetrable countenance as a river current under the fettering ice. In his vehicle, which I had

shared with him for this stage, he had a gun in a chamois-leather case, and, although it stood close by his hand, he had not stirred that hand to take it out. His hard grey eyes had never left the animals, and, for the first time in the course of my acquaintance with him—but brief, it is true,—I thought I caught in those grey orbs a gleam of something not quite cold and not wholly hardened.

When the little incident had thus been happily solved, we all took our seats again, and our caravan moved on, stretching in a long line under cover of the rocky river bank. We all somehow felt happy and discussed the daring feat of the animal, which had managed to preserve such self-possession in the midst of so many dangers.

"Still," I remarked, with a smile, "something must be credited to us too. It almost looks as though extreme cold has the faculty of awakening kind feelings."

"What makes you think so?" seriously inquired Sokólsky.

"The very unusual way in which the dog Polkan behaved, and also—if you will excuse the comparison—your own conduct: your gun stayed in its case.

"Yes," assented the prospector, "that is true. These poor animals had overcome so many dangers, right before our eyes, that even Polkan, I think, would have been ashamed to end it all with a vulgar murder on the river bank. By the way, did you notice with what self-abnegation the elder goat shielded the younger from the dog? Would every human have acted thus under similar circumstances?"

"Any mother, I should think," I replied, with a smile. "On the whole, this little episode appears to have impressed you deeply."

For Sokólsky's features bore the traces of inner emotion; his eyes had softened to sadness.

"True," he answered, meditatively. "This has reminded me of a man and an experience I had. . . . You just said something about

cold in connection with kind feelings. Well, no! Cold—that is death. Has it ever occurred to you, for instance, that it is possible for conscience to freeze to death in a man?"

"Not only that, but it is possible for the whole man to turn into a lump of ice, *i.e.*, to cease being a man," I replied, still smiling. I thought my fellow-traveller's mood more and more peculiar.

"No," he replied in the same gently sad tone; "no,—much sooner. I'll tell you, if you like to hear. . . . Curiously enough, the thing happened in almost this very locality, and now, riding here with you, I feel as though I am living over again the beginning of my story, while you will travel on and meet with its continuation."

IV

"It happened in 18—. At that time I had just received an appointment and was going to the placer with a companion. The autumn

had set in late, just like the present one; the winter was delayed, and our progress was slow. Somewhere about here we hit the first ice, the same as now; but, as we advanced, its grip on the river strengthened, the free current narrowed more and more, and, in places, was intercepted by ice jams. Look! You can see from here what it is like. On one spot, huge masses gather, jostle one another, and block the current. The river piles them up higher and higher, smashes the ice, forms rapids, roars, and rages. Miles around, the air is resonant with the rumble and thunder of it. Then the ice breaks through and floats down the current, and here and there, in the middle of the river, free spaces are left, above which hover vapours, dense with frost. I had a companion, an exiled Pole. He had taken part in the great insurrection and had been wounded. Those were cruel times and his wrists and ankles bore the lifelong marks of the irons which convicts had to wear on the long march to their place of exile, in severest winter

weather, without any bandages to protect the flesh against the bite of the frozen metal. He was, as a consequence, extremely sensitive to cold. Altogether he was a puny, feeble creature, body and soul just holding together, as the saying is. But in this frail shell lived a mighty spirit. Take him altogether, he was the strangest compound of contradictory qualities. His name was Ignatóvitch."

Sokólsky here paused, lost in thought, and, for some time we drove on in silence. This silence lasted quite a while, and I was just going to remind him of his interrupted narrative, when he again turned to me.

"I am afraid I cannot make you understand this man's nature,—idealistic, romantic, grown up on his great native poets, Mitskévitch, Krassinsky, Slovatsky. This state of mind, this, let us say, ecstatical hyperbolism, has always been foreign to us Russians. Mitskévitch has a strange poem: Somebody, a gigantic Self, has lifted his head into the superstellar altitudes. All around that head

is a crown of suns, the hands reach the stars and, at their touch, their choir, like the keys of some obedient instrument, burst into the symphony of the worlds, the creation of his brain. . . . That's the kind of thing. . . . Such images always left me cold, and it was with some astonishment I used to hear my friend (we lived together about a year in Yakutsk) roll them off with uncommon fire and enthusiasm. Still, while I do not myself perceive any plausibility or beauty in such imagery or such a state of mind, I had to admit that they are capable of awakening responsive emotions: under their influence my little friend seemed to grow, his voice became sonorous, his eyes shone, and something, not the images, which appeared to me as unnatural, as exaggerated and wildly strange,—as ever,—no, but the sound of his voice, appealed even to me.

"I suppose this may come under the head of romanticism, this hyperbolic conception of man, of the 'Divine' in him, of his titanic

import. But this mentality of my friend's lacked consistency. It was, I believe, at the time of those very insurrections which brought him to Siberia that human nature showed him its less attractive and, at all events, anything but divine aspects. Then there was something about a woman. Now, when woman is regarded as abiding in superstellar altitudes, a creature all of light, the wrong side of her essence naturally is apprehended with morbid sensitiveness. However that might be, he had long spells of misanthropy. At such times he became well-nigh unbearable, especially in the daily contact of cohabitation. In his look, cold and piercing, you felt something like contempt,—contempt towards you, a stranger, a passer-by, and towards himself as well. During those periods he was transformed into a materialist and cynic, so bitter of speech that I used to take myself off, anywhere, and stay away, several days if possible. In the meantime he would tend the animals with even more than usual solicitude.

"Love for animals was another striking feature of this strange man. There were lengthy periods when our modest dwelling positively was turned into a hospital. A week at a time he would fuss over some half-frozen crow which he had revived, would walk a sick horse twice a day, unheeding jeers and mockeries. And, curious to observe, the more wroth he was with man, the greater was his tenderness to animals. Pessimist and cynic (at such periods) in his relations to 'the king of creation,' he ended by extolling Nature's lesser children above him. He not only recognized in them intellect, memory, reasoning, conscience, but went the length of considering these intellectual attributes as belonging to them, to the exclusion of man. And when this mood was upon him, he became unbearably, devilishly sarcastic and witty, and sometimes, when I had no place to retire to during his spells of misanthropy, and absolutely wilted under his hail of paradoxes, I began, upon my word, to feel inferior to any dumb

beast, while some wretched cur, its back half broken by a missile from some idle loafer's hand, almost assumed in my eyes the proportions of a conscious sufferer and philosopher. But when the paroxysm had run its course, he recovered, was himself once more, again soared up into the empyrean, and spouted 'the symphony of the worlds.' It was at such a time he got his appointment to a position at the diggings, something like superintendent of a warehouse of materials. In practical questions I always was the better man. So it was I who found the position for him and persuaded him to accept it. He submitted passively, and we started as soon as we received the travelling money. Our circumstances were not the most brilliant.

"Still we travelled rather faster than you are doing now, and, in spite of our clothes being not of the warmest, we had not felt the cold over much until we got to Olekma, and even farther on. It was pretty cold, but we would get thoroughly warm when we stopped

for the night and feel all right when we started again next morning.

"Beyond Olekma the river was frozen solid, with just a few open spaces. Once, when driving past one of the holes, we beheld two ducks,—the driver pointed them out with his whip. I could not now make you realize what a pathetic sight it was. They were stragglers. The migrating flock had gone long ago, and these two, from sickness or failing strength, had lagged behind, and were left to perish on the freezing river. So long as the middle, at least, had been free, they had swum, somehow escaping from the ice, then the channel had narrowed more and more, till only these open spaces were left; when they should close, the birds must perish. Now they were tossing about in clouds of frosty vapour, and nothing all around but the cold, impassable mountains, frowning down upon them.

"I remember that the driver laughed, grinned, baring his white teeth. I felt uncom-

fortable and chilly, and wrapped my big fur coat closer about me, as though the dark, cold element were yawning under my own feet. But my companion flared up in the utmost agitation.

"'Stop!' he shouted at the driver. 'Would you indeed be capable of going on your way, leaving them thus? He turned to me with bitter reproof, and, without waiting for the driver to rein in the horses, he sprang to the ground; then, slipping and stumbling on the heaped-up blocks of ice, he rushed to the open water.

"The driver laughed like mad, and I myself could not help but smile at the sight of my companion bending over the narrow but long open channel and endeavouring to capture the ducks. They, naturally, rushed away from him. Then my little fellow traveller ran to the lower end of the channel, correctly calculating that the current would carry the birds to him, the more surely that I, getting interested in the game, also walked

out on the ice and drove them down river. They were afraid of diving, because the current would have drawn them under the ice. One of them managed to rise up into the air, but the other was too feeble to attempt flight, possibly having, at some time, had a taste of lead besides, and could only flap powerless wings. Then the other, after circling once or twice above the frozen river, returned to its companion.

"I cannot describe to you the effect this generosity had on my friend. He stood on the ice, following with his eyes the flight of the bird, as it flashed past, against the background of the stern, snow-clad mountains, and, when it plashed down into the water a few steps from the invalid, with the evident self-sacrificing resolve to share its companion's danger, tears stood in his eyes, and he positively declared that we might go on if we chose, but he would stay until he succeeded in securing both ducks.

"I knew that he would inevitably do as he

threatened, and so decided to take part in the peculiar hunt, which the driver ended by joining. It resulted in one bird drowning—the very one which had attempted to fly. It escaped out of my hands, dived, and was sucked under the ice by the current. The other one was caught by the driver; Ignatóvitch got a good wetting; the water poured down his sleeves.

"This was serious, as it was quite a distance to the next station. I bundled him up as well as I could; but when we reached the station it was all we could do to rub life into his half-frozen fingers, and we did not exchange a word for the next twenty-four hours. We took the duck along with us, but, although I had helped rescue it, and even got excited over this charitable sport, still I was conscious that it had been silly sentimentality, especially as this extra passenger was made much fun of at every station,—justly, as I had to admit. Ignatóvitch felt this my attitude and despised me.

"The duck died, after all, and we threw it away. For several days the snow fell unceasingly, thick and soft as down, and lay twenty inches deep on land and ice. Heavy loads of it burdened the trees and it sometimes fell from them in large lumps, which crumbled to fine dust in the frosty air.

"Then the real cold was upon us: 30–35–40° below zero (Réaumur). At last, at one station, we found the mercury frozen in the tube and were told that it had been so several days already.

"Birds lagged in their flight, flapped their wings convulsively, and dropped to the ground; bears, half frozen in their dens, came out, lean, scared, and wicked. Squirrel hunters had to desist for fear of the angry beasts.

"We, too, began to feel the cold. You know what it means, do you not? When breath fails you,—when, every time you blink, fine threads of ice form between your lashes, when the cold steals under your clothing, under your skin, into your muscles, bores into your

bones, into the marrow of them, as the saying aptly expresses it. . . . You begin to shiver, deep down in your inside, a piercing, disagreeable,—nay, humiliating feeling. You arrive at a station-house; it is midnight before you get really warm, and, when you start in the morning, you feel that something has gone out of you; you begin to suffer sooner than you did the day before, and you are still colder when you reach your night's lodging. Your spirits flag, your impressions are dulled, people become objects of dislike. You even loathe yourself. You end by muffling up as closely as possible, settling down as comfortably as you can, and moving, even thinking, as little as possible; you instinctively avoid the least expenditure of energy. And there you sit, gradually stiffening, only wondering, with a vague fear, when there will be an end of these terrible 40–50 versts relays.

"We at length neared Vitem. We had left the preceding station on a cloudless, brilliant morning. All nature, frigidly beautiful,

seemed dead in her amazingly rich attire. At noon the sun shone brilliantly, its slanting rays yellow and close set. Breaking through the dense gloom of the pine forest, they played in places on the trunks and boughs, plucking them out of the monotonous, white glimmering twilight.

"The stage had been unusually long. The driver (they did not travel the road very often) had at first been quite brisk and had even risked snatches of some absurd ditty of the diggings, then he had grown silent and every little while got down and alternately ran and hopped along beside the sleigh, violently stamping his feet and clapping his heavy-mittened hands. My fellow-traveller seemed quite numb. All through the day he had spoken only once, but his voice struck me as creaky and rough and I made a cross reply, hardly intelligible to myself. After that he kept silence, and I could well imagine his face, with its misanthropical and ugly expression. I also held my tongue and turned my face

aside, so that my frozen breath should not strike it through the opening in my *bashlik.*[1]

"The road entered the forest. The runners creaked; the horses every little while snorted; then the driver halted and, with his fingers, extracted lumps of ice out of their nostrils. The tall pines swept by like white phantoms, and somehow left no impression on the memory.

"Evening was coming on; the last sunbeams, still denser and more yellow, were retreating from the forest, creeping along the summits, while below, the even, white twilight assumed a cold, bluish tint. The jingling bell gave a peculiarly deep and hard sound, like that of a spoon striking a tumbler filled with liquid. This sound somehow irritated and grated on the nerves.

"In one place I received an unexpected impression: not far from the road a thin thread

[1] *Bashlik:* A hood with long ends which are crossed in front and thrown back over the shoulders and sometimes tied behind.

of smoke was swirling up from among some wind-fallen wood. A man was sitting on a stump, and his figure was the one dark spot in that white world. Over him, from all sides, hung broad white-furred boughs, still illumined from above by the departing sun and encompassed from below with the murkiness of approaching night. The thing just lashed past my fixed stare. At the last instant I thought that the figure stirred, and that the movement had something to do with us, with our jingling bell, our swift motion. But I did not turn my head, did not even look that way. The vision flashed past and was gone, and the impressions were conveyed to my brain, numb, lifeless, immovable, waking nothing in it and without stirring the imagination.

"The driver turned to us, said something, and I remember that he laughed. But to me these were only detached sounds, like the tinkle of clashing icicles. The words were void of meaning; they did not, at the moment,

convey anything to me. The driver's laugh also was no laugh to me; at least it did not produce on me the impression it would have produced under other conditions. I simply saw an unpleasantly yellowish face framed in a furred hood, and two eyes fringed with rimy lashes. The jaw belonging to the face was working, the mouth was disagreeably distorted, and out of it there issued, along with the vaporized breath, certain empty sounds, like the tinkling of glass. That was all. My companion stirred uneasily and also muttered something. It looked as though he were angrily bidding the driver hurry up.

"The brief day had long died out when we reached the station and made our arrangements for the night.

"It consisted, I mind me, like most such stations, of a group of wretched huts, huddled together under overhanging cliffs. In choosing sites for these stations, little regard was had to the comfort of future inhabitants. This particular station was located on an

open stony platform projecting into the river, which here turns in a bend, on a plain open directly to the north. Only a few versts farther on the hamlet might have been sheltered behind a jutting mountain spur, while here it stood absolutely unprotected, a prey to the terrible north wind.

"Ignoring its official denomination, the inhabitants called this 'the cold station.' And, truly, it would have been difficult to find anything more perfectly embodying the idea of cold than this wind-shaken heap of logs, clay, and dung on a snow-covered rocky platform. The forest, which we had left behind, ended where the low meadows began and yielded no protection to the hamlet, merely filling the air with long-drawn ominous soughing.

"All the same, we were glad of even such a shelter and were just in time to thaw out our benumbed limbs. Fortunately, there was, all round, enough wood belonging to no one but God, so that a great fire was soon blazing on

the hearth, and we lay down right before it on skins and blankets spread out on the floor after hastily swallowing a tumbler of tea. Our numb, stiffened hands could with difficulty hold the tumbler, and the sensation of heat was lost; we burned our throats with the scalding liquid, but it did not warm us, so we desisted and crept under our furs. My teeth were still chattering. I felt the shivering chill in my very bones.

"Our host, having finished our tea and given some to the half-frozen driver, added fuel to the fire and disappeared in some corner or other. It grew dark and very still. Outdoors the only sound was a sort of even, hollow rumble as of some giant at intervals treading the frost-bound earth, which then would subside into silence, until the giant started again and the rumble began anew. These spells grew more frequent and lasted longer as the night advanced. At times our hut seemed to rock and shiver, and the rumble would be inside of it, as in an empty wooden

box in which the wind plays. Then, in spite of my furs, I would feel the cold steal through the fissures in the floor; it would fan the fire into a brighter blaze and make the sparks fly in bunches up the chimney.

"'That's bad!' the host said on one such occasion, turning to the sleep-ridden driver. 'How ever will you travel? It's the north wind.'

"'Yes,' replied the other. 'And the cold has not moderated. With such a wind as that, even the mail won't travel.'

"'Heaven forbid!' spoke the host, yawning.

"I understood that this was the beginning of a comparatively rare phenomenon,—a frost-storm, when the wind, in a violent rush from some quarter, impinges on the frost-weighted air. The separate shocks and the rumble betokened the wind's first efforts, before it had acquired the power to displace the condensed atmosphere. Soon the shocks lasted longer, the rumble became even, uninterrupted. The air chilled down to 40° below

zero (R.), yielded to the pressure, and it was as though gigantic ocean waves were rolling over our denuded platform.

"It was to this weird sound I began to fall asleep, still incompletely conscious of what was going on, with merely animal enjoyment at the thought that I was under a roof, lying by a good fire, that all the unpleasant numbness and stiffness in me must soon thaw out and limber up.

V

"When and how I found myself wide-awake,—sleep entirely gone from me, I can not say. I awoke gradually and for some time seemed to be still dreaming or carefully treasuring in my memory fragments of a dream, as if fearful it might escape me and I be unable to gather from it something very necessary, very important. Yet the dream was very simple.

"I dreamed that I was again in the forest, travelling the same road, and again I was

cold, again I saw around me the frost-laden trees, the yellow, closely set rays of the sun, retreating from the forest and playing in places on the bare trunks and furry boughs. Only somewhere, beyond the forest, there was a dull, hollow reverberation of sound, as though some one were pursuing our sleigh.

"Then I saw a group of trees—standing so close together that their outspread boughs, white with their burden of snow, formed a sort of arbour—and a thin thread of seemingly expiring smoke, and a dark figure by the dying fire. And, with the absence of logical sequence habitual to dreams, all this somehow took the form of sharp icicles which pierced and chilled my heart.

"Then I saw the driver's face, at first stolid, empty of all expression, but gradually changing, growing familiar; and, under his glance, the icicles in my breast began to melt with torturing rapidity. At the same time the arbour in the forest rose before me with all the details which I had not noticed before,

and each such detail bred peculiar impressions in my imagination, and I was afraid to look at the face of the man, who seemed to be stirring on his stump, but the driver insisted that I should look. I grew angry, but the next instant it was not the driver at all, but Ignatóvitch, and, under the influence of his agonizing gaze, all that lay hidden in the depths of my memory as cold, colourless icicles suddenly melted and revived. . . ."

The narrator here paused, but, after a while, went on:

"You surely remember the legendary stories told by mediæval travellers of polar countries: how that words spoken in midwinter freeze and stay frozen, as little icicles, awaiting the return of the warm weather, when they thaw and become audible once more. If we take this as a metaphor, it holds a profound meaning. So I now suddenly remembered the words which the driver had spoken on the road and which until this minute had lain somewhere in the deepest recesses of my

memory, void of sense. Yes; undoubtedly he had spoken of that man in the forest, had said that he must have 'gone broken somewhere at the diggings,' and must be tramping it from camp to camp. . . . Only now did these words thaw in my mind and fill my breast with a dull ache.

"With an involuntary groan I opened my eyes. The fire had burned low. The wind was still raging outdoors; my fellow-traveller's face was bending over me.

"Never in my life, either before or after, have I seen anything more awful than that face, illumined by the tremulous flare from the hearth. It was absolutely distorted with horror and a torturing question. The lower jaw trembled, his teeth chattered as with ague.

"'What is it? For God's sake!' I cried, rising to my feet.

"'Don't you know?' he said, fixing me with dim, lustreless eyes. 'Tell me, is it but a dream?'

"'What is . . .?'

"'That which made you groan just now and awake,' he replied gruffly, then looked at me suspiciously, and, seeing I did not answer, he continued to scrutinize my face with the same expression of distrust.

"'Did you not notice, out there, in the forest . . . a man?'

"I remained silent and involuntarily looked away. He spoke again:

"'Look here, say something . . . I still think it was a dream. It cannot have been real. We cannot have . . .'

"'If not a dream, it was almost like one. . . . Such cold dulls any impression.'

"He made an impatient movement and abruptly sat down. His eyes flashed with a strange light.

"'Really?' He said this plaintively, but immediately went on with a sort of wild energy:

"'Don't lie! Don't squirm! I also lied. I knew it was real. We saw it all. All.

That man was rising; he tried to shout something. You know that; and I know it; we knew it then. You will look up excuses. . . . Conscience is frozen. . . . Oh, yes, of course, —it is always so. Let the body's temperature drop two degrees, and conscience straightway freezes. A natural law. But care for one's personal comforts and vile pharisaic hypocrisy, those do not freeze, oh no! . . . Oh, vile! Contemptible!'

"He seized his head in both hands, and several minutes passed in absolute silence. The hut still shivered from time to time, but the rumble had ceased, though I again felt the shocks and had the positive impression that some one, huge and heavy, was stamping with measured strides over the river, the forest, and the mountain passes.

"'Oh, do get up at last, you. . . you villain!' almost screamed Ignatóvitch, with frantic hatred. 'Why, you and I, we have murdered a man between us. Do you realize that, selfish animal that you are? Get up, man!' he

called to the host. 'Call them all. . . . My Lord! what's to be done now?'

"The host's frightened face appeared in the illumined space around the hearth. He had been stirring uneasily the last minute or two, listening to the, to him, unintelligible, excited talk of the strangers, who spoke of murder. Still half asleep, scared,—probably not so much at the words as at the wild energy which sounded in the voice of the all but crazed man,—he jumped up quickly and began to bundle on his clothes anyhow; then, without a word, he opened the door and went out into the night. Our driver also awoke, yawned, rose from his place on the floor and threw a few logs on the fire. He evidently did not understand what it was all about. A child began to cry in a corner, and we could hear a woman's voice soothing it.

"All these details remained for ever graven in my memory, and never shall I forget that terrible night: the dark hut with the crowd silently pouring into it, and the incessant

rumble. Do you know, there is at times something extraordinarily like conscious meaning in the voices of Nature, especially when she threatens."

VI

"See here, won't you tell me the rest?" I inquired after a while, seeing that my companion was lost in thought and appeared to have forgotten all about his narrative, staring straight in front of him at the sunlit hills on our side of the river; the river itself and the ice on it we could not see just then, as we were driving across a meadow. My fellow-travellers were jogging on ahead of us, merrily chatting with their driver.

"Oh, yes, pray excuse me!" the narrator caught himself up. "I got to thinking. These are very sad memories; but, of course, I will tell it all to the end. Where did I stop?"

"You were saying that a crowd was pouring into the hut, summoned, probably, by your host."

"Yes, yes; that's it. He had called them in, thinking there really were murderers to be secured. The men were coming in tumultuously yawning, crossing themselves, and pressed all to one side, leaving an open space around us. The corner by the door was soon filled with dark figures, whose frightened faces were turned our way with eager curiosity, those in the foremost rank stretching their necks, the better to see us. The last to come in was the *stárosta* ('elder') with his assistants. He walked right up to us with a determined air and addressed us rudely, visibly intent on getting up his courage and that of his men.

"'Well, what evil thing have you been after? Confess before God and our sovereign lord.'

"But when I began to explain, something like disappointment gradually settled on all those countenances. These men's lives were usually so dull and uneventful, and my story, confused and incoherent as it was, did not possess for them the thrilling, tragic meaning

it had for us. There was even a laugh somewhere in a corner.

"'Why, that must be Mitrókhin, the new settler,' said someone.

"'It's surely him. He has been hanging around the diggings, they say, for the last three weeks. He's a nuisance.'

"'That's so,' our driver put in his word as he entered. 'He was here day before yesterday, asked for a horse. "Take me, for God's sake," he said, "my feet won't carry me."'

"'Well, and did you?' gruffly asked the *stárosta*.

"'We are tired of all the trouble with these people. Besides, he had no paper,' replied the driver, turning away. 'If he had had a paper, or if he had been brought to us by the authorities, I don't say. But he came alone, and on foot. We do as others do?

"'On foot, did you say? How clever of him! It was warm then, while now we have a "norther"—you just figure that out. The man will freeze now. Are the assessor and the

doctor going to walk, do you think? Won't you have to take them back and forward? . . . And you, gentlemen, what do you mean by rousing the crowd for no cause whatever in the middle of the night?'

"'He had a fire,' put in our driver by way of exculpation.

"'For no cause, do you say?' I retorted, feeling the ground slipping from under my feet. 'A man is freezing to death,—isn't that cause enough? We must help.'

"'Help? And how? If God preserves him he will come, and we will take him in. You, Timothy, why did not you pick him up?' he turned again to our driver.

"'Where could I have put him? There were three of us as it was. . . . What's to be done now?'

"'He had a fire, so the Lord, maybe, will save him.'

"'Stay!' I cried in anguish. 'This will never do! The man may be dying now, this minute. . . . Just listen to this!'

"For a moment there was silence in the room. We could feel the shocks and hear the blows: it was as though something were being pounded in a mortar. And at times imagination added groans, in reality probably the rushing of the tree tops in the forest, or the crashing of the ice.

"Here and there a sigh was heard in the hut. Nevertheless, the door kept opening and closing: the men were dropping out one at a time.

"'The Lord save us!' whispered one voice, and another added roughly:

"'We are freezing ourselves. Never a winter but one of our drivers drops dead at one or other of the nearest stations, and more often two. The relays around here are fierce.'

"'Three years ago, Fedko froze dead in this same forest.'

"'Last year it was a woman with a boy.'

"'And was not my grandson frozen?' came an angry voice out of the crowd.

"'In this wind the mail does not travel,' remarked our driver.

The door creaked more and more frequently. The crowd was dispersing.

"'Wait!' I cried, desperately. 'Won't money do it? Ten roubles! Who will go with me?'

"At this moment my glance fell on Ignatóvitch's face. He sat on the bench by the table, speechless, deathly pale, and my heart ached for him. My voice broke. I remember that the *stárosta* just then looked at me with sympathy and moved uneasily.

"'Twenty! Thirty! All we have!' I cried, almost panting with excitement.

"'Stop, all of you,' the *stárosta* commanded with his loud, rough voice, which instantly arrested the men. 'Don't go, any of you! You heard? They are offering money for what we ought to do regardless of money. It is true that it is a sin we are committing. We should remember God. Well, whose turn is it to go? The old ones—speak up!'

"There was a recoil from the door to the middle of the room. The *stárosta* stood at

my side, and I never took my eyes off him. He was a middle-aged man, large of build, of swarthy complexion, with rather coarse,—yet pleasing—features and deep-set black eyes that had a determined and somewhat care-worn expression.

"'Oh man!' he turned to me gruffly, while the crowd started that clamorous hubbub which invariably precedes the discussion of a subject of common interest at a meeting. 'You have a fine conscience, but poor wit. It might have been better had you not mentioned money. I was just going to order a rescue. Now they will have to proceed according to their rules.'

"They did; and a painfully long and complicated proceeding it was. You must know that these post-station drivers (*yamstchiks*) here along the Lena form peculiarly organized station communities, survivals of bygone ages. Land they have none, only their wages. The unit of distribution and assessment 'per soul' is 'a pair of horses.' A 'soul' means

a part of a horse with a corresponding part of the salary. All the community's receipts and all the dues it pays are distributed or assessed on this basis. Now my money—casual money at that—had to pass through this distributing machinery; it was to be divided among all the members of the community, the *mir*, which had to appoint those whose turn it was to serve.

"The discussion turned into disputes. The fare by the verst, the parts of horses, old accounts, service by turn, the hauling of fire-wood, carrying the mail and officials, the orphans' share, the feeding of prisoners,—all these items were drawn into the calculation and were discussed hotly and circumstantially. Several times I attempted to stop the disputants by sorrowfully reminding them that a man might be perishing while they were squabbling here, but the man nearest to me replied with inflexible seriousness:

"'Can't be helped. Don't meddle. This

is *mir* business. If you interfere, you'll make it worse.'

"The bickering continued. The men did not seem near reaching a decision. The ominous rumble outdoors went on.

"The *stárosta* at length seemed to catch my impatience and intervened. He naturally understood the intricacies of the assessment machinery which was so noisily working before our eyes better than I did and saw that not a little time would still elapse before it accomplished its task to the general satisfaction. He stepped forward, with one loud call stopped the tumult of voices, then turned to the ikon in the corner and impressively crossed himself with a broad gesture. A few hands in the crowd instinctively were lifted to form the sacred sign. The evil night was beginning to affect even these tough nerves. . . .

"'Brothers,' he began, 'this won't do . . . in the sight of God and Christ's holy Mother. I'm out of it: no money for me. I am going

anyhow, turn or no turn. . . . If only the Lord will help. Put away your money, sir. If anything, light a taper in church.'

"There was a moment's silence. Then one of the men, who but a minute ago had been hotly disputing about some question of 'turn,' was the first to speak with quiet sympathy:

"'Well, may God help you. . . . If so it is your own wish . . .'

"Others followed:

"'It's your lookout.'

"'An extra job,—of your own free will. . . . After all, a man's soul is worth more than money. . . .'

"'Still, it's pretty nasty out. . . . Heaven help us! The mail is held, that's certain.'

"'Bother the money! . . . Our Lady protect thee, Sofrón Semiónovitch!'

"I looked with unreasoning relief towards the place where Ignatóvitch had been sitting. It seemed to me that in the *stárosta's* generous offer, and in the way it was received, there

lay a solution of the affair which somehow took the blame from us as well. But Ignatóvitch was no longer there.

"Soon the room was empty, except for the host, two or three tarrying men, and myself. My companion was nowhere to be seen. The men said that he had gone out, dressed for the road, before the breaking up of the meeting.

"A dire presentiment gripped my heart. I recalled his pale face while the debates were going on. At first it wore its habitual misanthropical expression with the addition of a certain spiteful contempt for himself and others. But at the last moment I could recall only one of profound, hopeless sadness. That was the moment when I offered money and the *yamstchiks* began clamouring.

"I stepped out on the porch, looked for him, called him, adding, in case he did hear, that it was all arranged, that I was going at once to the forest after the derelict. But there was no answer, the lights were going out in the windows of the station cabins, the wind

kept up its threnody; at times the walls of the smaller mild huts cracked aloud, while from a distance came the groan-like noise of bursting ice.

"'Calling your companion?' asked one of the men as he was passing the house. 'Why, he went to another cabin to sleep, it was so noisy here.'

"Presently the *stárosta's* low broad sleigh, drawn by a good pair of horses, held up before the cabin and he alighted from it, muffled up to the ears in furs, his hands hidden in enormous mittens, and approached me.

"'What is it?' he inquired. 'Anything new?'

"'Quick, quick, for God's sake!' I cried, seized with a nervous tremor. I suddenly felt to a certainty that I should find Ignatóvitch somewhere on the road.

"'Well, no,' he said. 'Wait a bit. You can't go like this. Your clothes are not fit to face this wind. Here, I've brought you something. Put it on.'

"He insisted that I should get into the furs he brought me. It was nearly daybreak when we started, taking with us more clothes in case of need.

"The wind was violent, and so cold that it burned you. A full moon rode high up in the sky. Below, a so-called 'ground storm' was racing along. Do you know what that is? It is this: the wind lifts the dry snow from the ground and carries it straight in your face, in one even, continuous sheet. It is not a snow-storm, but worse than any snow-storm. In such weather as that all traffic ceases. In confronting it, we certainly took risks: that ride cost me two fingers which had to be amputated later on."

"Did you find your man?" I asked impatiently, seeing that Sokólsky did not seem inclined to continue his narrative.

"We did," he replied in a flat, toneless sort of voice. "It was a grey morning; the wind had abated; a chill mist was settling down. . . . He had a fire, but it had gone

out long before. . . . He had probably fallen asleep. However, his eyes were open and there was frost on the pupils."

"And your companion? Had he really stayed behind in the station village?"

Sokólsky looked at me with dull, lustreless eyes.

"I was deeply convinced," he said, "that he had taken the road to the forest, and therefore I kept shouting and calling all the way and peering into the darkness of the wood. The *stárosta* endeavoured to calm me. For one thing, he could not conceive that a man should gratuitously have gone to certain death; then there was but one road from the station or village, broad, with guide poles planted all along, excluding the possibility of losing one's way, especially on a moonlit night.

"When we returned with our sad burden, well wrapped in furs, lying in the bottom of the sleigh, it was already morning. The wind had quieted and the cold had suddenly

abated. Then the sun rose. There were no traces anywhere."

"So you were mistaken after all?"

"We reached the station. He was not there."

Sokólsky was silent after this, and an expression of great tenderness softened his somewhat rugged features.

"He was unpractical and helpless as a child," he spoke again. "He never could find his way. He left the cabin intending to rescue the man, but . . . started in the opposite direction." Sokólsky turned quite round to me. "Can you imagine such a thing? Started in the opposite direction and kept straight on! Now the road on that side is just as broad as on the other and also soon enters the forest. And next day, in the more sheltered places of the dense growth, tracks were discovered. They made a straight trail, never turning right or left. He had walked a very long distance, without swerving until . . ."

Sokólsky was silent again, and kept looking aside for quite a while.

"Did he hope to save that unknown man? . . . I don't think so. He went, just as he was, taking nothing but tinder and steel, which, however, he hardly would have known how to handle. A perfect child, I tell you! He simply could not stand it any longer. . . . And another thing. . . . It occurs to me at times that he wanted to chastise in his own person the vile human nature, which allows conscience to freeze to death if the body's temperature sinks 2°. In him the romantic idealist sentenced and executed the materialist."

Another silence.

"You said, I believe, 'the vile human nature?' I began after an interval."

He looked round at me, as if somewhat astonished.

"Oh, yes. I see. . . . I don't know, I don't know! I simply know nothing. Or, I know just one thing: that often those

perish who should not, while we remain, who . . . "

He ended the sentence with a wave of his hand and all the rest of the time we rode in silence, until, from behind a declivity, appeared slight clouds of smoke, belonging to the station at which we were to part company. Sokólsky was in a great hurry to rejoin his prospecting party and hastened ahead, while we were compelled to travel more slowly.

VII

Some two days later we were traversing a dense wood, when our driver, a young lad, indeed a mere boy, showed me, pointing with his whip, a large stone cross, erected in the thickest of it, at the side of the road, and said:

"A man froze to death here, indeed two men. Sokólsky put up the cross,—the prospector, maybe you know him? He passed this way yesterday. See, those are his tracks."

And, really, there, on the deep snow, illu-

mined by some stray sunbeams which had found their way through the dense boughs, was, plainly, to be seen, a man's large track, leading to the cross and back.

"He never passes the place," went on the lad, turning round on his narrow driver's seat and smiling, "but he alights, stands there quite some time, then goes back, and drives on. He does not cross himself, but you can see that he prays, sometimes even with tears. Queer, but a good sort."

He flicked his horse and added, thoughtfully:

"Must have been friends of his."