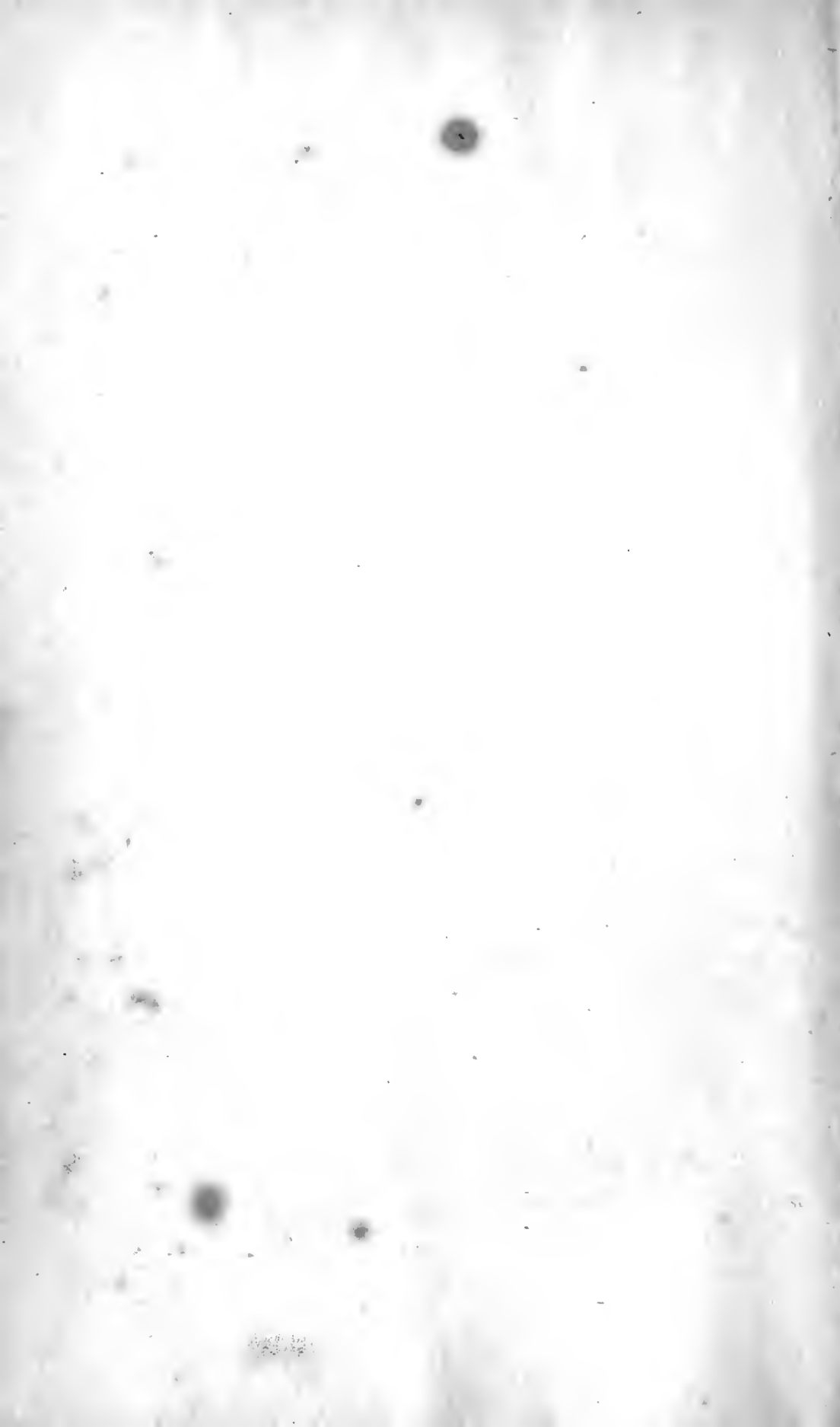




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REVELATIONS

OF

SIBERIA.

BY A BANISHED LADY.

EDITED BY

COLONEL LACH SZYRMA.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

Third Edition.

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REVELATIONS OF SIBERIA.

CHAPTER I.

Fabulous account of the bear—Degeneracy of the Russians, and courage of the natives—Bear-hunting—Superstitious veneration of the bear—White bears—Ceremonial observance of a husband's death—Winter aspect of Berezov—Ostiak costume—Probability of early communication between Siberia and North America.

FROM the moment of the rumoured appearance of the terrible Bruin in this vicinity, nobody dared to stir beyond the precincts of the town; and whoever happened to possess a black cow was in extreme trepidation for the safety of his cattle. Still no one was bold

enough to make one step in the forest, to ascertain how far the report was founded on truth.

Though the thickets of the district of Berezov are deemed to be the birthplace of bears, still it is not the custom of these animals to venture near human habitations, and they usually remain in the depths of the forest. The town of Berezov is, it is true, surrounded on every side with wood, but the appearance of these animals, and the damage they cause to the inhabitants, are facts gathered rather from ancient traditions than from experience. Most of the accounts circulated with respect to the pranks and characteristics of this shaggy and ungainly animal, are fabulous, and are rendered still more so by the admixture of new stories of the same wonderful stamp. With the Berezovians the bear forms, during the long winter evenings, the favourite topic of conversation, and the anecdotes related of him are commonly listened to with as great curiosity as ghost stories with us. A popular myth, moreover, contributes in a great degree to heighten their effect. According to this fable,

the bear is a fallen man, doomed for his sins to pass through the animal shape, but during his metamorphosis still preserving a portion of his former disposition and inclination. He is believed even to be able at times, and under certain conditions, to resume his primitive human form and nature; though not frequently, and only for a short time.

I felt tired of sitting for several days in the room, as if in a prison; and, at last, to the great dismay and astonishment of every one, I went to the forest, and was the first who attempted the feat. But, in my ramble I met neither bear, nor man, nor could I see any trace of the bear; though I went to the very spot where he was seen devouring a black cow. On my way home, I met four men with hatchets on their shoulders; they were carpenters, who were just proceeding in search of the bear, in order to relieve the neighbourhood from depredations, as well as from fright. These carpenters were not Siberians, but Russians, who arrived to seek employment in their trade.

Accustomed as I had been, to witness hunting-parties in Lithuania, and to hear ac-

counts of the courage, if not fool-hardy intrepidity, with which all sorts of ferocious beasts were attacked by the Lithuanian hunters, I could not account for the craven spirit of a people born in the midst of forests, and from the very nature of the locality destined to make hunting their vocation ; and the wonder was the greater, as venison is their principal food, and the skins of animals their only clothing.

In this respect, the Berezovians may be considered to be wholly unfit for their most natural pursuit. Indeed, the men are, with very few exceptions, effeminate and cowardly. Enjoying undisturbed security, they have lost all courage ; and the facility with which they obtain from the Ostiaks, for a mere trifle, ample supplies of food, as well as commodities for commerce, has rendered them incapable of any vigorous exertion. They do not dislike hunting, if it be easy, and they are not exposed either to much hardship or danger. Nets and traps are their instruments of venery, and they cannot even handle fire-arms with anything like skill.

The Ostiaks are the reverse of all this : the

skill and courage persons of that race display in hunting is astonishing. I have often seen Ostiaks lacerated all over by personal conflict with a bear, a result which, it is said, cannot be avoided by the most dexterous hunters. Hunting a bear requires great courage, and a particular skill and presence of mind. When the Ostiaks are on these expeditions, they endeavour, in the first place, to find out the bear's lair. This done, one of the hunters, armed with a large sharp knife or cutlass, goes to the spot, and does everything he possibly can to irritate the animal. The bear, at length, excessively provoked, stands up on his hind feet, and in that posture rushes at the offender, who allows him to advance, and just at the moment that the bear is about to give him a rude embrace, rips up his belly.

The Ostiaks evince a degree of veneration for the bear, ludicrously inconsistent with their treatment of him. Though they kill him, and eat his flesh, they never omit, after they have flayed him, to ask his pardon. His paws, when cut off, are hung beside the

images of their household gods, and they are all worshipped alike.*

The bears of Berezov are in colour a dark brown. Their coats are valued at from ten to fifteen assignat rubles. Four skins make

* This superstitious awe is easily explained by the superior sagacity of the bear in the presence of danger, by the love it shows for its offspring, and the wonderful instinct with which it is endowed by nature. The Kamtschadales, as Cook during his sojourn among them observed, regard the bears as their instructors in the little science they possess. "They confess themselves indebted," he says, "to those animals for all their knowledge of physic and surgery; for, by observing what herbs they have applied to the wounds they have received, and what methods they have pursued when they were languid and out of order, they have acquired a knowledge of most of these simples which they have now recourse to, either as external or internal applications. But the most singular circumstance of all is, that they admit the bears to be their dancing-masters. The evidence of our senses places this matter beyond all dispute; for, in the bear-dance of the Kamstchadales, every gesture and attitude peculiar to that animal was faithfully exhibited. All their other dances are similar to this in many particulars, and those attitudes are thought to come the nearest to perfection, which most resemble the motions of the bear.

a fur cloak called a *shuba* ; but this kind of garment is seldom worn, partly because it is too heavy, and partly from its being such a common material. A little farther towards the ocean, and more especially at the mouth of the river Oby, there exists a species of white bear, which is an object of terror to the fishing parties in those parts. Still, I heard a fisherman relate its visits are more annoying than dangerous : for, after he has alarmed the fisherman, and put them to flight, he confines his depredations to what can be devoured ; and having satisfied his appetite, retires without doing any farther injury.

Madame X.—celebrated the anniversary of the death of her first husband in honour of which she baked a variety of wheaten rolls and cakes, garnished with various preserves, berries, and chopped raisins. These she sent round to the kindred and friends of the deceased. She then boiled some rice, which she mixed with honey, and putting it into an urn, carried it to the church. There she was met by the relatives and friends of the deceased, who were assembled at her own invitation.

Divine service was then performed, after which the name of the deceased was audibly pronounced by each person present, when the rice in the urn was distributed among them. Those who happened to be absent received a dish of the prepared rice at their own dwellings.

The funeral service at church in commemoration of the deceased having terminated, Madame X—— invited all present at the mournful celebration to accompany her home to breakfast, when the ceremony of tasting the rice was again gone through. This being done, the breakfast, or rather luncheon, was served in such abundance that it might have passed for a dinner.

Towards the end of this strange feast, it was proposed to have a game at boston, for which indeed preparations were made, but the greater part of the guests, after partaking of a sumptuous meal, became drowsy and anxious for their customary after-dinner siesta, and began gradually to steal away, till at last all took leave. I was not at all sorry when I saw myself alone ; for this feasting, be it remembered by the reader, took place in our lodgings, and in our rooms.

September opened with a heavy fall of snow. All the environs of the town now looked as clean as they had been previously dirty, and one could hardly recognise the scene, so totally was it changed. Not a trace of mud, not a patch of dirty brown surface was visible. Far and wide was spread a spotless sheet of white. All the inhabitants appeared in the street clad in the Ostiak costume, which consists of a complete suit of reindeer skins, with the hair turned inside out. Finding myself on a sudden in the midst of such men, it was with difficulty I could persuade myself, at first sight, that these shaggy moving forms, incased in the coats of beasts, and wearing such a strange appearance, were human beings. In his exterior, the Ostiak differs materially from the people we are accustomed to see, and without personal experience, it is impossible to form any exact idea of the impression produced by his strange and grotesque figure.

These tribes tear out the hair of their beard, until it loses the power to grow, which makes them look like women, although far from softening the outlines of the face, it

renders them more rugged and harsh. They do not shave their heads like the Samoiedes, but divide the hair into two parts on the top of the head, and plait it behind the ears into two thick braids. Others, who are less cleanly, let it fall loosely and in disorder over their shoulders. The plaited braids are intertwined with strings of beads. Similar strings of beads, mostly of glass, and of a larger size, adorn the neck, from which they also suspend a small cross of brass, in token of their being converted to Christianity.

Their every-day dress consists, first of the so-called *malca*, a shirt of reindeer skin, with the hair turned inside; in the *yourta*, within doors, if the frost is not more than ordinarily severe, this is a sufficient covering, but outside they put over it another garment, or fur, very similar in appearance, except that it is larger, and not open in front, and the hair is turned outside. This second garment is called a *parka*, and is worn with a hood behind, which, on going out of doors, is drawn over the head, and tied with a leather strap under the chin. Falling over the forehead, it almost envelopes the whole

face, and except at the apertures for the eyes, nose, and mouth, renders it quite inaccessible to the action of the atmosphere. The hood is formed of the skin of the reindeer's head, and the ears of the animal figure prominently above.

Large gloves of shaggy fur, lined inside with fur of a more delicate character, form a constant appendage of the *parka*; there being but one opening left between them to allow of the insertion of the hand. When the gloves are not needed, they are tucked up over the sleeves in the fashion of cuffs. To protect the feet, the Ostiaks wear long stockings, made of reindeer skin with the hair inside. These stockings reach above the knees, and are called *tchize*. Boots, likewise of reindeer skin, are worn over them, and have the hair outside. The hair on the boots is much shorter than that on the stockings, the skin being taken from the animal's legs, and stitched together in strips. They are called by them *pymy*, and ascend over the thighs, where, to prevent them from slipping down, they are secured by straps of leather to the girdle. The soles, like the

legs, have the hair outwards, and this is found a great convenience when walking on ice.

When an Ostiak leaves home on a journey during winter, his travelling dress consists, in addition to the *malca* and the *parka*, of a third garment, much more capacious than the others, and which is likewise made of reindeer skin, with a hood for the head, and no opening in the front. This garment is put on over the two others, and is called a *gusia*. A man so clad loses the last vestige of human form.

Under such a heap of furs one may, without fear, expose himself to cold fifty degrees below the freezing point; and that people, so dressed, can, without injury, defy the most intense frost, I may adduce in proof that the inhabitants of Berezov cannot remember a single instance of any person having perished from cold in their vicinity; whereas, in our own country, where the winter is comparatively mild, such incidents are of frequent occurrence. I did not wonder at this fact, when I compared the clothing of the northern Siberians with that worn

by our peasantry. For what protection against cold can he derive from a sheep-skin coat (*kozuch*), accessible on all sides to external air, though it is the chief article of his clothing? Or what comfort from his boots, or the wretched rags or straw round his feet? Can these be any way compared with the boots and large fur stockings which incase the feet of the Ostiaks?

When the frost is most intense, and mercury itself freezes, it no doubt happens that some parts of the face, if at all exposed, are frost-bitten. In such cases, brandy is applied to the frozen part, and the frost gives way to a red spot, such as is produced by a blister. These spots, in course of time, gradually diminish, and in a few weeks entirely disappear.

Even during the summer, the Ostiaks make scarcely any difference in their wearing apparel; except that, perhaps during the warm season, they wear garments which, from being long in use, have become very thin, and have the hair rubbed off. On their gala-days and festivals, the summer dress consists of a shirt, commonly of red or yellow cloth,

and sometimes of white linen. In the latter case, the collar as well as the borders below are of black cloth, trimmed with divers-coloured beads, and shining-tin or brass plates ; shoes of cloth, of all colours, very clumsily made, with long pointed toes much too large for the foot, complete this costume.

The every-day apparel of an Ostiak woman resembles in all points that of the man, except that she wears a veil, which cannot be laid aside even when in her own *yourta*, as she may meet persons of her own family before whom it is deemed indecorous to appear with uncovered face—as her father-in-law, and her husband's eldest brother. She is not forbidden to uncover her face in the presence of strangers. The veil, when worn with the every-day dress, is a sort of coloured neckerchief of Russian manufacture.

But, notwithstanding that the ordinary costume of the two sexes so nearly correspond, the holiday attire of the Ostiak women differs materially from that of the men. They are indeed wont, like the men, to plait their hair in braids, one on either side of the head ; but their braids admit of much

more adornment. Hanging down from their shoulders, their ends are united by a string, or flattened cord, about three inches broad, richly studded with beads. From this point the two braids fall together; and at certain distances, several other strings of beads are attached, and in that manner the hair descends almost to the heels. Each string of beads is, at its termination, fastened to a circular metal plate of the size of half-a-crown, which, at the least movement of the head or body, striking against the glass beads, keeps up an incessant jingle, not unlike that of the Cracovian horse-harness. This kind of head-gear is exceedingly cumbersome and heavy, and constrained the Ostiak belles, I observed, to hold their head constantly erect, and in a backward position. With this head-dress is united a costume, composed of a shirt, of various colours, over a cloth petticoat, trimmed with fringe. Over all is a caftan, also of cloth, and invariably of some bright colour, with the borders embroidered, to a breadth of from two to three inches, with various-coloured glass beads, intermixed with glistening small tin

plates. This short, tight caftan is tied with leathern straps; and at each knot, exactly where the leathern straps are sewn, are small bells of the size of our billiard-table bells, whence it may easily be imagined what a jingle there must be when several Ostiak women make their appearance attired in their holiday dresses. This dress is remarkably short, which renders it the more striking. The shoes are of coloured cloth, similar in shape to those of the men, and nearly as clumsy. Some are ornamented with beads. The whole attire is completed with the veil, which commonly is of rose-coloured taffeta, with borders of light blue, or these colours are reversed. The borders of the veil are trimmed with large fringes, and when thrown over the head, it is broad enough to cover both the face and shoulders. This veil is called the *wakshim*.

A singular custom prevails among the Ostiaks, both men and women, of puncturing the skin with figures, which, by the infusion of a bluish liquid, become indelible. This custom, if I am rightly informed, they have in common with some wild tribes of North

America, which seems to prove that the people of the two disrupted continents were at some early period in communication with each other;* for it is otherwise incomprehensible how a custom, as *bizarre* as it is unnatural, and arising from no local necessity, should be merely the result of accident, occurring to two nations inhabiting regions so distant, and separated by a vast ocean.

The inhabitants of Berezov, of Russian extraction, soon learning how little our European costumes are adapted to this rigorous climate, are in the habit, as soon as winter sets in, of adopting the Ostiak dress, and never go out of doors without it. The Russian functionaries are then alone seen perambulating the streets, in their cloaks and furred *shubas*, to preserve the dignity of their rank; but even they, when going out of town, or on a journey, don the shapeless but more comfortable clothing of the natives. Ladies

* Certain very ancient and undecipherable characters have been found carved on a rock in Southern Siberia, and the very same on a stone in North America.—*Cottrell's Recollections*, p. 72.

whom I have seen at evening parties conspicuous for the elegance of their dress, wear in winter the Ostiak costume, both within and out of doors.

I trust this description will suffice to justify my having at the outset compared the streets of Berezov, on the first fall of snow, to a park occupied by a herd of white bears. At first sight, the spectacle riveted me to the spot, so strange and unearthly did it appear.

CHAPTER II.

Refusal of marriage at Church—Purchase of wives—
Figure of Shaitan, and his worship—Priesthood of
Shamanism—Their influence, juggleries, and sooth-
saying—Treatment of women in child-bed—Funeral
and laments—Pictures in the church—A black thief
—Integrity of the natives—Cattle in search of pas-
ture—Artificial system of breeding—Instinct of a
cow.

Two young Ostiaks, after a twelvemonth's trial of matrimonial life, arrived at Berezov, to be married at church; and as the young man was an acquaintance of our landlord's, who had had some commercial transactions with him, they put up at his house.

I was present at the toilette of the young

bride, who was dressed in a caftan of green cloth, adorned with strings of beads and jingling plates and bells. Thus attired, she proceeded with the bridegroom to church, where, however, the priest refused to marry them, as the loving couple had actually forgotten their Christian names.

Neither bridegroom nor bride seemed to be much annoyed at this awkward circumstance, though the latter was visibly approaching the happy state in which she might expect to be entitled to a more dignified name. But, without bestowing a moment's thought on the event, or even thinking it worth while to try to remove the obstacles which stood in the way of their legal marriage, they both returned together to their *yourta*.

It is the custom with the Ostiaks, as well as other wild tribes inhabiting Siberia, to adopt for themselves such names as they like, and by which alone they become known among the people of their tribe. Such adopted names commonly express some particular quality, or profession of the individual. By these they address each other, and are

known to the Russians ; while their Christian names are used only in legal acts.*

Marriages among the Ostiaks combine many of the usages of Paganism with those of Christianity, to which a considerable portion of the race has apparently been converted. The destined bridegroom pays the *kalim*, or required price, for his betrothed to her parents, and considers himself before God and man her husband. He then takes her home as his wife, postponing the marriage ceremony, according to the Christian Church, till a more convenient season. Often many years elapse before this act is accomplished ; and even then it is only on the interference of the ecclesiastical authorities, who are compelled by law to see the Christian ritual enforced, that the ceremony is gone through.

* A parallel instance of religious deception is furnished by some savage tribes in the British possessions in the Eastern Archipelago, who, converted from Buddhism to Christianity, adopt their new faith in so far only as it secures them the enjoyment of certain privileges ; but otherwise they call Christianity “ the East India Company’s religion.”

The Ostiaks usually purchase their wives ; and the marriage therefore is more a transaction of commerce than one in which affection or generosity is concerned. The higher the price set on a maid, the more honour does it reflect on herself, on her family, and on the bridegroom. Rich parents, though they accept what is offered them in the shape of a *kalim* for their daughter, give her in turn a dowry either in reindeer or in furs ; the poor people disposing of a daughter are content with a small *kalim*. The wife of a poor Ostiak often does not cost him more than the value of a reindeer, which is about five assignat rubles ; whereas, the daughters of rich parents are frequently ranged at a price varying from one hundred to two hundred rubles.

According to the Shamanic creed, which the Ostiaks formerly confessed, and to which a great part of them still adhere, polygamy is not prohibited ; yet those who have accepted Christianity confine themselves to one wife. Nevertheless, though they are baptized, and every means taken to introduce among them Christian doctrine and feelings,

they cling so pertinaciously to their old manners, usages and superstitions, that an Ostiak cannot live without them. He may wear the symbol of redemption on his breast, but he follows his idolatrous prejudices in every act of his life. Finding himself unable to comply altogether with either ritual, the Pagan or the Christian, he endeavours to reconcile as well as he can his ancient faith with the new ; and according to his judgment, the cross on his breast and the Shaitan in his pocket effect this desired end.

Shaitan is the household god of the Ostiaks, and no family circle is complete without him. As the guardian of all they possess, he receives from them both worship and tribute. Being afraid after admission to the rite of Christian baptism, to place the idol in his *yourta*, the Ostiak conceals him in his pocket. During a search made on an Ostiak by a Russian *employée*, one of these idols accidentally fell out of his pocket ; and being immediately confiscated by the officer, was by him presented to me.

This Shaitan idol was the figure of a man, carved in wood. The body was belted with

a girdle, enclosing a small silver coin, and over this was a dress of the Ostiak fashion, including no less than seven shirts and caftans, with ample hoods, and decorated with beads and other ornaments. The Ostiaks who have not yet accepted Christianity openly, exhibit these idols in their *yourtas*. They are then much larger, and have a place assigned them in one of the corners. To Shaitan they first offer their meals, all the dishes being placed before him; and they abstain from partaking of anything until the idol, who eats invisibly, has had enough; whereupon the family then sit down with their guests. Sometimes the master of the house, as a token of reverence and good-will towards Shaitan, besmears the idol's lips with the food, previously to helping himself. The Ostiaks, as I have before observed, also worship old larch trees; but young ones come in for no share of their veneration.

Their priests are designated Shamans, and being regarded as the depositories of the sacred mysteries of religion, as well as of prophecies, exercise a great influence on their minds. The cast of the Shamans are sup-

posed to be versed in magic, and to possess the power of working miracles. That the priests resort to every kind of jugglery to encourage this belief may readily be conceived, and none of their disciples doubt that they stand in immediate and most intimate connection with the supernatural world. The priests are able—as I was assured, not only by Ostiaks, but also by Russians, who said they had been witnesses of the spectacle—to plunge the whole blade of a long knife into a man's breast, and draw it out without leaving a single trace of a wound. These thaumaturges can also chop all the limbs off a body, and then restore them uninjured. I was told that they burnt Russian paper-money before a number of spectators, and afterwards picked the notes out of the ashes entire. Many other marvels of a similar kind were related to me, but none came under my own observation, the Shamans taking good care, when selecting witnesses of these astounding performances, to require in the first place belief.

In my own country these legerdemain tricks, and even much greater feats of jug-

glery, would be passed by unheeded, without astonishing any one, even of the lowest class, as our Jews, who have possessed themselves of all these necromantic secrets, will exhibit them at any time for a few farthings. But it is not so in the land of the Ostiaks, where not only the natives, but the Russians of all classes hold them to be the result of supernatural agency.

Belief in supernatural powers is general among the inhabitants of Northern Siberia. Not knowing the boundaries between what is real, probable, or possible, imagination takes unbounded flights, predisposing the mind to believe what is marvellous. The very tales that are narrated in the domestic circle, the more wonderful and more improbable they appear, are the more eagerly listened to; and, in fact, are alone considered worth hearing or reading. Many go so far as to assert that the Shamans possess the power of reconstructing the human body after it has been cut in pieces, and by some means known only to themselves, restoring it completely to life. I was told of a number of instances, in which this resuscitation had been effected.

The Shaman priests enjoy the reputation of being excellent soothsayers, and much weight is attached to their predictions. Both Ostiaks and Russians, of all religious sects, frequently consult them about what is to happen to them in the most important proceedings of life ; and such applicants are said to have been invariably satisfied, and never to have doubted, even for a moment, the truth of the revelations made to them.

The Shamans keep up this reputation by making as sparing a use as possible of their faculties of soothsaying. It is not at everybody's call that they prophesy ; and when they do, it is after the most earnest solicitation ; besides, they must be liberally remunerated. No revelation of the future can be obtained from them at a lower price than the value of a reindeer, which is equivalent to five rubles, and is an amount which such poor people as the Ostiaks cannot well afford. Hence it is very rarely, and only in most extraordinary cases, that the Shamans are applied to ; and it may be chiefly owing to this policy that their character as soothsayers is held in such high respect.*

* Shamanism—the most flagitious system of imposture

This policy indeed operates as a charm on the mass of the people, and they are not able to dispel it.

ever practised upon mankind—is founded on the alleged agency of evil spirits, and, under a threat of their haunting them in this world and in the next, the priests terrify their followers into everything they desire. According to Cottrell, the only boast of the Shamans is their power of doing mischief, and by this they extort from the credulous Mongols everything that a person under the influence of fear can perform. They are by their own desire buried in cross-roads, or some conspicuous spot, in order, as they assert, to have the greater power after death, of tormenting the ill-fated population. They act as physicians, exorcists, and judges in cases of crime, among the northern tribes who hold their faith. Both men and women are initiated into what may be called a compound of sorcery and conjuring, rather than religion. In case of illness, they make use of incantations and sacrifices to expel the evil spirits, as everything is attributed to their agency. They are supposed to be driven from the person diseased into some animal, which the Shaman designates. This process is attended by the most absurd ceremonies, accompanied with frequent and deep potations of the intoxicating kumiss. Spells and prayers, and a most unintelligible jargon, are employed to divine the fate of the person labouring under any illness for which they are called in. If the patient recover, the credit is theirs; if not, they excuse the failure by discovering that the sacrifice was not acceptable to the evil spirit.

In proof of this, I need only refer to one case mentioned to me by a Russian ecclesiastic, as having occurred to himself; and he was, I must say, in other respects clear-sighted enough, possessing intellectual powers far in advance of his flock. On one occasion, when on his tour of visitation to the parishes placed under his jurisdiction, he happened to be overtaken by a sudden snow-storm, and was obliged to seek shelter in an Ostiak yourta, situated a short distance from the road. He met with an hospitable reception, and shortly afterwards was informed by his guides that a celebrated Shaman of the country was just at that time under the same roof. As the snow-storm continued with unabated violence, the Russian prelate was compelled to remain in this company for several days; and to beguile the time, rather than from any feeling of curiosity, he conceived the idea of requiring the Shaman to tell him his fortune. The latter, however, aware of the rank and functions of his fellow-guest, and perhaps fearing to excite persecution, had no inclination to accede to his wishes. But getting more intimate, the prelate succeeded in gaining his confidence, and the Shaman

was at last induced to grant his request.

His prediction, I could observe, had produced a fearful impression on the prelate's mind; and though many years had elapsed, he could not, when relating it to me, suppress the horror he felt at it. He most solemnly assured me that, in addition to the incidents of his previous life, which the soothsayer had recounted to him exactly as they had happened, he foretold the change that was then approaching in his situation, and predicted the death of his son, a most hopeful youth, as well as the marriage and subsequent death of his daughter.

“Everything happened just as the Shaman predicted,” added the prelate, in a mournful tone. “I was transferred from my former place to another, an event I could not even have dreamt of; soon afterwards I lost my son; and my daughter married, and is now dead. In short, everything, in its minutest particulars, was fulfilled as he had said it would occur. Nothing now is left to me but to wait calmly for the accomplishment of what still remains—and that is my hour of death, which will not be long coming.”

The emotion by which he was agitated in relating all this, failed not, as if by contagion, to communicate itself to me. I saw that his imagination was full of it; and in order to dispel the train of melancholy associations it had conjured up, I said:

“It was unpardonable in the Ostiak Shaman to disseminate such prophecies; for although they must be false, they cause painful impressions.”

“The fault was mine, not his,” replied the prelate. “He long refused to gratify my curiosity, but being strongly pressed, he said: ‘The first appearance of a grey hair on thy head, shall be the signal for thy departure from this world.’”

Whereupon I saw him smooth with his hand his long glossy beard and hair, both yet raven-black.

“I am presently treading on the threshold of fifty,” said he, “and yet, against all order of nature, not a single hair of my head has turned silvery. Manifestly, it has pleased God in His mercy to prolong my life; but it cannot be so much longer.”

During a great part of September, the

attention of all here was mainly engrossed, first with the sufferings, and lastly with the death, of a young and amiable lady, a merchant's wife, the object of envy to all the women of the place, not so much from her great wealth as from the affection she received from her husband. He loved her, indeed, most devotedly, more like a lover than a husband. She died in her confinement, a victim to prejudice and a murderous mode of treatment.

Neither midwives nor physicians are wanting at Berezov, practitioners being sent by Government ; but so deep-rooted are the ancient prejudices of the people, and so strictly are they adhered to, in the most critical periods of human life, that all the efforts made to eradicate them have hitherto proved ineffectual. Though a midwife or a physician may sometimes be called in, it is rather to tolerate their presence than to follow their advice.

Here, the tyrannical custom will have it, that the poor patient before giving birth to her infant, must swallow several doses of a barbarous nostrum, prepared of soap, gun-

powder, and the like disgusting mixtures ; and in addition, her body is violently pulled to and fro, and tortured into all imaginable positions, producing a total exhaustion of strength. If the woman is strong, she may pass through such a barbarous ordeal without danger, but not so a delicate constitution. Immediately after the child is born, the mother is fed with fish, prepared in a peculiar manner for the occasion, and then conducted to a steam-bath (*laznia*), whither the infant is also carried.

In consequence of such treatment, our young and beautiful friend, after several days' suffering, expired ; I attended her funeral, which, as her husband was one of the wealthiest merchants at Berezov, was on a grand scale. The coffin was covered with crimson silk, ornamented with fringes of gold lace ; and on arriving at the church, was placed on a bier in the nave. There her husband's family, which was very numerous, ranged in a circle round the coffin, and commenced their lament over the body. The strangers present now retired to some distance, making room for this circle of mourners,

who were to chant the funeral *coronach*. This was commenced by the deceased's mother-in-law, who raised a lugubrious cry, and with sobs and moans enumerated all the virtues and accomplishments of the deceased, showing how every member of the family must suffer from her loss. This strain being finished, the subject was taken up by the husband's sisters, each of whom lamented the departed lady in her own way, with intonations and expressions peculiar to herself. Meanwhile the spectators commented on the manner in which each mourner performed her part, speaking with the greatest freedom and *nonchalance*.

“How beautifully Madame N—— is lamenting!” said a woman behind me to her nearest neighbour. “None of her daughters can equal her. She is what I call a matchless woman!”

“What we witness to-day is nothing,” replied the other. “Had you but heard her at the funeral of her husband you would have been delighted. Not only does she excel her daughters, but everybody in the whole town.”

The fact was, that the studied lament of Madame N—— produced quite a contrary effect from what should have been aimed at. The scene, so grave and mournful by itself, was deprived, by this performance, of all its solemnity, and sank into a mere theatrical representation. Such loud manifestations of grief, by sobbing, moaning, and cries, fell all the more discordant on the ears of those who heard them, as they indicated that the sorrow was feigned; and in this case it was well known that the deceased, though so esteemed by her friends, was not at all liked by the members of her family, who had long felt aggrieved at the love which her husband entertained for her.

The husband's anguish was indeed poignant. His despair was really heart-rending. He was so sadly changed as to be scarcely recognised; and for three days after his wife's death he did not touch a morsel of food. Drooping, and ashy pale, he wandered about distracted and inconsolable. The three children of whom he was now the sole parent, and who were too young to comprehend their own or their father's loss, formed a touching feature in the picture.

They could not understand the cries of their grandmother and their aunts, the number of burning tapers which flashed around, and the other paraphernalia of the funeral; and they stood unconcerned, and almost benumbed, in the midst of the circle, with gaping mouths, and eyes straying from one object to another, wholly unable to fathom what was going forward.

The funeral ceremony completed, the body was carried to the Zarutchai cemetery, to be buried in the husband's family vault; and as it left the church, I joined the mournful procession. On our arrival at the cemetery, the theatrical lament of the relatives was repeated by the same performers, and the coffin was then let down into the grave. At this moment several handfuls of earth were thrown on the coffin, and a great confusion arose. The bereaved husband was about to precipitate himself into the grave, and was only prevented by the interference of his friends, who drew him away by force, and the grave was filled up as expeditiously as possible.

Everybody now went home, conversing on the way with his neighbours, as gaily as if

returning from a dinner-party, or a name's-day *fete*. I joined some members of the family whom I had seen so despairingly lamenting over the remains of their relative, and I found that, while so fresh from this melancholy scene, their conversation was carried on calmly, and referred to indifferent and every-day topics.

The Spaska Church is of brick, and is a large and stately edifice, which might even be called splendid, were it not for the hideous figures of the saints which deface the interior. The heads of these worthies are monstrously large and of a faded ashy colour, and their bodies are shockingly lacerated and mangled. Fortunately, the images are clad in dresses of silver and gold, decorated with precious stones, and thus a part at least of their horrible ugliness is concealed.

An occurrence took place in the church during the funeral, illustrative of the ideas and manners prevailing among the people at Berezov. There was a Russian woman residing in the town, who had been sent here a few years previously, it is not known for what offence. Her dress was that of a Black Nun (*tchernitza*) of the Greek Church,

and she affirmed that she had once belonged to that sisterhood. She was in the habit of talking a great deal of her pilgrimages to holy places and shrines, at some of which, according to her account, she had even sojourned for years. She had visited the *petchery* subterranean crypts of the city of Kiov, and been to Irkutzk to adore the miraculous image of the Holy Virgin in the cathedral of that town. There seemed to be no sacred place or shrine in the whole extent of the Russian empire which she had not visited in the performance of her acts of devotion. It will scarcely be credited that this devout nun picked up and secreted a shawl, which, in the excitement of the funeral, slipped off the shoulders of a young lady. A young man, walking close behind them, saw her appropriate the garment, and as she was stealing out of the church, denounced her as a thief, and compelled her to restore the shawl to its lawful owner. The spectators were so scandalized at the nefarious act, that they unanimously forbade her ever entering again into the church, under pain of being forcibly ejected from it.

The sentence of the public was soon reported to the ecclesiastical authorities, who, however, could not be brought to concur in it, alleging that no one had a right to shut out a sinner from the means of supplicating God for pardon ; and therefore it was wrong to close the doors of the church against this offender. These arguments, however, were far from allaying the irritation to which her conduct gave rise ; and for several days it continued to be the only topic of conversation among all classes. Meanwhile the pretended nun thought it prudent not to stir from her room ; and was even obliged to apply for protection to the police.

At Berezov, a theft is almost an unheard-of occurrence. Not one of the residents, either Ostiak or Russian, has ever been found guilty of such an offence. Whenever a theft has been committed, the guilty party has, on investigation, invariably proved to be a stranger—one who, fostered amidst a higher civilization than the natives of this remote region can boast, came here to disgrace it. Only such persons as have been banished from other parts have ever been detected in

this crime, and they are not many in number. It is not only on this account that robberies are rare, but also from a want of accomplices, and a place at which to dispose of stolen goods. Thus habits and circumstances combine to preserve the natives of Berezov from spoliation.

No measures are taken, indeed, to provide for the security of property; and if such were required at all, I doubt whether any legislature, even by the wisest enactments, could institute effective safeguards. But now all property is left under the protection of the public faith, insomuch that houses are void both of locks and bolts, and still are never plundered.

The land is held almost in common. As soon as the grass begins to spring up, all the cattle, oxen, and horses, are driven out for pasture into the forest, there to remain as long as summer lasts. Only cows are kept in the town, for the sake of their milk. The inhabitants do not see, nor care to see, the rest of their herds till the winter sets in, and the ground is covered with snow. Then they scour the wood in search of them, and

not unfrequently find them at twenty versts from the town. Nevertheless, there is no instance known of an Ostiak or Russian having ever committed the crime of cattle stealing, though it might be done easily and without the least danger. This is the more to be wondered at, as the Ostiaks are generally very remiss in accumulating provisions for winter; and it often happens, in seasons of failure in hunting and fishing, their only means of subsistence, that they are doomed to endure all the miseries of famine. Here it would not, I think, be out of place to say a few words respecting the domestic animals of this portion of the globe, in so far as, being allowed a larger share of freedom, they may be said to excel our own domesticated cattle by the superiority of their instincts. I had many opportunities of observing whole herds of cattle, after they had consumed the pasture in one place, migrate in a body to another. Yet before they took this step, a large number, not unfrequently belonging to different proprietors, would congregate together on the bank of a river, none of them touching a blade of grass,

but all standing as if they were in deliberation as to what should be done. At length, some of the strongest have plunged into the river and swum across; others have then gone over—and finally, all have followed. In this way they frequently traverse a considerable extent of water, till they reach some green island, with its grazing ground yet untouched; and when the grass on that island has been consumed, they again start in the same manner, in search of a new pasture. Nor was I less struck by the maternal instinct, and I might almost say, sagacity, shown by the cows of that country. But before touching on the subject, let me remind the reader of what I have before stated, that the artificial mode of rearing children, which is generally prevalent throughout Siberia, is extended also to the young ones of domestic animals. Mothers of Russian origin rarely nurture their children themselves; but from the moment of birth, accustom their infants to cow's milk, for which purpose they employ a thin horn, the end of which they cover with the teat of a cow. Calves are reared in a similar

manner. No sooner are they born, than they are taken away from the cow, and fed from the human hand ; at first with the mother's milk, and after the interval of a few days, with a mess made of groats or flour, flavoured with milk. This nurture is continued till the calf gains strength, and can subsist on coarser food. In the case of cattle, this artificial rearing is not without its advantages, one of which is, that a calf so reared, being wholly unknown to its mother, can be sent out to the same pasture-ground, or even placed in the same shed with her, without any risk of it ridding the cow of her milk ; and another, that the cow, being separated so early from her offspring, never fails, year by year, to bring forth a calf.

The cows appear to have an instinctive knowledge that they will be deprived of their offspring ; for as soon as they feel the hour of birth approaching, they use all imaginable cunning to withdraw themselves from the observation and guardianship of man ; and it is astonishing what dexterous manœuvres they will resort to with this view.

When the period of calving draws near,

the cow is shut up in a stable, where she is supplied with food and drink, and every care is taken to prevent her from escaping. This is the province of the mistress of the house, who is unremitting in her vigilance.

At first the cow enjoys her food as usual, but after a few days' confinement, will no longer eat or drink. She is then, to recruit her appetite, let out to inhale the fresh air, but carefully attended by the mistress, who, taught caution by experience, will not suffer her to pass out of sight. The cow walks at first with a slow step, with her head bent to the ground, as though she were thirsty, and looking for water. But her feigned weakness lasts only till she sees a favourable moment for escape, when she darts off at her full speed, clearing ditches and swimming streams with surprising nimbleness, and making straight for the forest, to hide herself in the thicket from the sight of man. Nor does she fix her asylum in the outskirts of the wood, but continues her flight for several versts, until she supposes herself perfectly safe; and then, in the same sagacious spirit, chooses the most convenient place for calving. When the calf is born, she covers it carefully with

fallen leaves ; and to divert observation from the spot, proceeds to some distance to pasture.

It is a matter of no small difficulty to bring the fugitive back, when she has once effected her escape. Concealed in some retired spot, she tends the calf until it is grown up, and is able to rely on the swiftness of its feet. Then the mother ventures to go with the calf to her old grazing-ground. If she happens to be perceived, and notice is brought of her place of concealment, the owner proceeds with all the inmates of his house, some on horseback, others on foot, to give her a regular hunting ; and it often takes days and even weeks to effect her capture.

The cattle are guided by an instinct somewhat similar, and no less wonderful, in their search for food in winter. Should the stock of hay or other fodder fail, their owners feel little concern, and only turn them loose to seek sustenance in the forest, in which they wander to a distance of several versts, and never fail to find where the grass is most abundant under the snow. They then scrape away the snow with their hoofs, and pasture on the spot till the return of spring.

CHAPTER III.

A dream of Home—Murder of a wife by her husband—
Barbarous notions of matrimony—An Ostiak cradle
—Zarutchai cemetery at night—Walk through an
underwood—The ideal and every-day world.

ONE night, before going to bed, I prayed most fervently to God, that I might be permitted once more to see my children, though it should be in a dream; and the all-bountiful Father granted my prayer. I did see my dear Pauline, and my dear little Victoria. But why was it that my dream proved such an imperfect illusion? Why did I not enjoy the consolation in full, and the bliss of beholding my children in all its purity? Why, even in dreams, when imagination, unfettered by reason, is soaring free, does the soul preserve the impress of the

sorrow which bows it down? What felicity would it have been to have lived again, though but in a dream, among my dear children, with a heart full of joyous feelings, and relieved for the moment from all sense of grief! And of a verity, the pleasures of real life are akin to dreams, as fleeting and as ideal. Nor are our sorrows and trials permanently painful. Often in the midst of the greatest anguish, sufficient to overwhelm the stoutest heart, I have experienced a power of re-action which made me, as it were, equal to my weight of suffering; and if it did not impart complete resignation, at least reconciled me to existence. When that aid has been wanting, I have felt an insupportable weakness, and been ready to sink under the load of hardship. At such times I would exclaim: "Oh, God! if by this despondency I should offend Thee—offend Thee who art Almighty—mercifully pardon the infirmity of a creature who is all feebleness! or rather inspire my heart with that assurance and courage, which we can expect only from Thy hand."

In the course of September an event

occurred here, horrible to relate, and which filled the whole town with consternation. One of the inferior officials of the police, a Russian, became inspired with hatred of his handsome, good, and virtuous wife, heightened by the influence of another woman, whom he kept in his house. The unhappy wife suffered persecutions of all sorts from her reprobate husband, who refused her and her children the commonest necessities of life, while all his income was spent on his mistress, or in drinking—for he was an habitual drunkard. In the midst of this misery, his wife gave birth to a child.

On such occasions, it is the custom for parties visiting the mother to present her with gifts in money, which, on their departure, are usually deposited on the bed. In this manner, a considerable sum had been presented for the poor woman's use; and the visits being ended, the husband, aware of the fact, demanded of her all the money, which she, having long been deprived of all assistance from him, and considering it as a donation from her friends to herself, refused to give up. This unexpected resistance on

the part of his wife, who was very mild and obedient, and had never before opposed his wishes, put him in such a rage, that without the least regard to her state of health, he snatched up the ramrod of his musket, and beat her with it until she gave up the money.

Next day, in consequence of this ill-treatment, the wife died. The public felt horrified and indignant at the husband's brutal conduct, and severely commented upon it. But when at her funeral they saw him sorrowfully following her coffin with loud lamentations, enumerating, on the one hand, all her excellent qualities, her patience, her habits of industry, and all her other virtues; and, on the other hand, condemning himself for his passion and anger, and protesting his repentance for having so unjustly slain her, the affectionate mother of his children, they were not only disarmed of their just anger, but, on hearing him thus spontaneously confess his guilt and do justice to the memory of his unfortunate wife, they even felt commiseration for him.

With regard to matrimony, it must be said, that the notions prevalent on this

subject at Berezov are still barbarous. It may be true that the inhabitants, who are of Russian extraction, do not pay the so-called *kalim*—that is, do not purchase their wives with money; but it is the received custom that a woman, after she is married, is the absolute property of her husband, and nobody is held justified in calling him to account for any abuse of the right vested in him. Such abuse, therefore, is by no means a rare occurrence, and I have heard many instances related of husbands who, either from drunkenness or in a fit of passion, have murdered their wives. The public certainly are struck with horror at these atrocities, and the murderer is generally condemned for his inhumanity; but nobody comes forward to propose that the perpetrator of such a barbarous act should be brought before a court of justice, and rendered accountable for the crime he has committed against society.

As September advanced, we were released from the constant presence of Madame X—who, to our great satisfaction, took other apartments. A day or two afterwards, a married Ostiak couple who had been living

at a distance of about fifty versts from Berezov, arrived in the town with a new-born infant, to have it baptized. The child was but six days old, and the mother, in spite of her long journey during the cold of early winter, was looking as fresh and healthy as if no such event had happened. As they were not rich, the parents had some difficulty in finding sponsors for their child. Our landlord, therefore, an honest Cossack, offered his services for this Christian act, as godfather, and my servant stood as godmother.

I approached the infant, curious to see it, and to ascertain in what manner children are kept by the Ostiaks at that early period. The child was lying, not in a cradle, but in a hamper made of the bark of a tree. This receptacle was flat and narrow, so as scarcely to allow room for its occupant, and in lieu of a mattress, was filled with dry powder from rotten trees. The pillow was formed of shavings of young willow. Over all was a reindeer skin, on which the infant lay without any swaddles, or so much as a rag of linen, but merely wrapped over with this hairy coverlid.

To the top of this hamper, on both sides, were attached two folds of leather, which opened when the child was to be taken out, and closed over it when within, forming as it were a cover to the interior. On the child being laid in, this folding cover is fastened with straps, which prevents the infant from falling out, or throwing off the reindeer skin in which it is enveloped. The face of the babe was uncovered, so as not to impede respiration.

During journeys, this hamper-cradle, with the child inside, is thrown over the shoulders of one of the parents, and secured by a leathern strap, in which way it is carried a great distance.

The willow shavings of the pillow are exceedingly soft. They are obtained by passing the edge of the knife lightly over the surface of young branches, so as to produce tiny threads or fibres, which, when collected in sufficient quantity, serve the Ostiaks as towels. With these they wipe their face and hands when they wash; and wipe their new-born children after bathing them in cold water in summer, or rubbing their tender limbs with snow in winter.

The Ostiak mothers are accustomed to nurture their children themselves, and do not imitate the example of Russian mothers, who, as I have before stated, feed them with cow's milk. In other parts, as in the colony at Irkutzk, the new-born child of a Russian is given to a Takouta woman to nurse; and when old enough, learns to read and write, after which he is brought up to the fur trade, and his education is finished.

The days in October grew very short. At four o'clock it was completely dark. I felt this diminution of the light of day very much, and the more so from not being able to work on canvas by candle-light—a work of which I am extremely fond, and which was almost my sole amusement here.

Madame X—— brought us a hare which she said she had herself shot, that she might have the pleasure of presenting it to us. In the environs of Berezov there are immense numbers of hares, but the Russians do not eat them, as they hold the flesh of the hare to be unclean, and consequently this excellent game is never seen on their tables. Nobody kills them, and, therefore, they absolutely swarm.

On my giving the hare to our landlady to roast for our dinner, I saw her shrug her shoulders, at the same time making a wry face and spitting on the floor, as if a most disgusting thing had been placed in her hand. This, however, did not make us enjoy our dinner the less when the hare was served.

When it grew perfectly dark, and our canvas work could no longer be continued, we laid it reluctantly aside, and went out for a walk. Josephine, however, discouraged partly by cold and partly by darkness, soon returned home ; but as I wanted exercise, and solitude perhaps still more, I continued my walk further.

I went as far as the Zarutchai Church, situated, as I formerly mentioned, beyond the precincts of the town, and separated from it by a deep ravine. This is a most retired and lonely spot, with a cemetery, surrounded by a venerable wood of larch trees, which having survived hundreds of years, a long epoch of importance and renown, and having once, as tradition says, formed a sacred grove of the Ostiaks, seemed not unlike mighty potentates when shorn of all their power and dig-

nity, and with nothing around them but crumbling tombs, pensively musing over the vanity of worldly glory.

The living generation, as though from respect for the last resting-place of those who were sleeping, and who were not to awake until the sound of the Archangel's trumpet, deemed it right to remove their own habitations to some distance, though raising here an edifice for prayer and contrition, to be, as it were, a solemn threshold, beyond which, through the medium of death, their mortal life entered on immortality.

Night, silence, solitude, and the rivulet with its indistinct murmuring at the foot of the hill, all appeared like a sombre veil of mourning over the snow-white garment of the place. The full moon now above the horizon, bathing her orb in the dark blue abyss, gleamed from on high on this secluded scenery of the nether world. The pale lunar light shed on every object, imparted to the picture an unusual and most solemn aspect, more particularly when its rays fell on the bare towering trunks and leafless branches of the ancient larch trees—monuments of the

past, amidst vestiges of a new civilization, amidst tombs composed of stone, of marble, and of iron, with the church watching over all. The scene at that solemn hour, seemed to open to me a glimpse of the secret purposes of the creation, speaking in a tongue unintelligible but to the spirit, but full of significance.

Oh ! how marvellous was the light of that night, with its rainbow colours reflected from the mica-slate windows of the church, and from that gold cross raised high on its cupola ! How the strongest rays of light were concentrated around it, insomuch that it alone was seen above, as in the clouds, shedding the brightest light on all this earth around. The view sunk deep into my soul, awakening an infinity of associations and feelings which it is difficult to give an account of. My thoughts plunged into this abyss, seeking after the unfathomable future ; but I soon perceived how incompetent I was to pursue the subject, and how it teemed with mystery and doubt. Soon indeed I felt that my reflections were becoming confused. I fell on my knees, tears gushed in a torrent

down my cheeks, and my feelings burst forth in prayer. Then I learnt how feeble and yet how presumptuous is man, and was taught to seek all my light and all my solace only from on high.

More than two hours I remained on this lonely spot, before I became sensible that it would be imprudent to stay longer, and that I must now return home. But it was hard, I thought, to suffer this interruption, to be obliged to tear myself away from objects so much in keeping with my thoughts—the sombre trees, the murmuring stream, and the vast wilderness—a world which was so beautiful and so divine, and in which every one of the created things addressed the mind in harmonious accents, in that spiritual language in which the Creator is wont to speak to His creatures, clearly and truly, though so silently. It is hard to exchange such a world for one of man's contrivance, so narrow, so distorted, and so odious.

In order to prolong the pleasure of these agreeable impressions, and not to sink them at once in the turbid pool of common-place life, instead of taking a direct way to the

town, I proceeded farther beyond the cemetery, and traversed the woodlands extending along the banks of the Soswa to its confluence with the Waygulka, forming part of the great forest by which Berezov is encompassed. The whole of these environs is overgrown with underwood, bushes of juniper, dwarfish larches, and diminutive firs and cedars. The trees here are constantly felled for the use of the inhabitants, and from being invaded by man, have evidently lost their naturally graceful form, and degenerated into defective crooked stumps. Their appearance contributed much to cool my imagination, which shortly before had perhaps been too much exalted.

After I had wandered awhile through the bush, I began at last to feel, as my companion did before, that it was too cold and too dark to prolong my ramble, and turned my steps towards the town. Soon I perceived the glimmering of lights from the windows of the houses, and almost regretted that home was so near, as it brought me again within the range of human habitations. Finally I found myself within the four walls of my dwelling.

Instead of the deep blue firmament strewn with stars, I saw overhead only wooden planks—our humble ceiling. Instead of the nocturnal beacon of the sky, pouring a silvery stream of light on all quarters of the horizon, a tallow candle stood on the table. Instead of the freshness of the balmy air, perfumed with odorous exhalations from the larches and cedars, a disagreeable rancid smell from some fat dish placed in the oven to be warmed, saluted my olfactory nerves. Instead of the calm whispering murmur of the river rolling its stream of water over its narrow bed, the murmur of countless hosts of cockroaches, which at night come out of their hiding-places and cover the walls, made my ears tingle, while the sound of their crawling movements resembled a pelting thunder-shower.

But this was not all—I was overwhelmed with questions. Where had I been? What had I been doing? And in the end, I got admonished for my indiscretion, and I must own, most deservedly. No one should outstep the bounds of the circle within which it is his destiny to move. What matter to him

though some other world flit for a moment through his mind's eye? Can that short moment of enchantment compensate for the bitterness of every day's experience?—a life intertwined with our manners, and wrought out amidst circumstances familiar from infancy?

Despite the unwillingness with which I crossed the threshold, on entering the room, I did not find the genial heat of the stove at all too much, my limbs being benumbed with cold; and even the smell which at first had so disagreeably affected me, ceased gradually to be offensive, after I had appeased my hunger with the savoury food taken out of the stove; so that we speedily become reconciled to the routine of existence.

CHAPTER IV.

Herds of reindeer—Capture of a horse—Scarcity of water—Novel employment for dogs—Freezing of rivers—Excursion in sledges—Wave-like surface of the ice—An encounter.

As October advanced, the frost increased in intensity. Herds of reindeer returned from their summer pasture in the Uralian Mountains, stalking with stately gait along Soswa, the hard, frozen soil serving them for a highway. It was a charming sight to look upon large herds of these useful animals, bearing, as it were, a forest of antlers over their heads, and moving on through the woodlands like a compact army.

One morning our landlord, after much trouble, protracted through several days, per-

formed a great task—he succeeded in catching one of his horses in the forest, where a great number had been at pasture the whole summer. During this interval they wander freely in the woods, without any restraint, and commonly turn wild to such a degree, that, when the winter sets in, their owners have the greatest possible difficulty in catching them, and even when caught it is hard to bring them to anything like subjection.

The successful capture of the horse filled the whole house with joy, and this not without sufficient reason. The river Soswa had now retreated to its narrowest bed, and the minor streams near the town, were either frozen or dried up; consequently, not a drop of water could be got anywhere, except at a distance of a verst; and, in the absence of a horse, all the water had to be fetched from that distance in buckets. I must here observe, that the town does not boast a single well. The inconvenience arising from want of water is not so much felt during summer, as the river, inundating widely all the low ground, and overflowing all the ravines,

brings it nearly to the door of every house ; but in winter, the inhabitants are exceedingly distressed from this cause, and in case of fire there appears no hope whatever of rescue. The great fire of 1817, which caused so much destruction at Berezov, is well remembered by the inhabitants ; and even in the current year the town ran great risk of being entirely burnt down. Fortunately, it was saved ; but several government offices, and public archives, and the Russo-Greek monastery, became one heap of ashes.

In my opinion, wells might easily be dug at Berezov, the water being usually found not very deep beneath the surface of the earth. What, however, I doubt is, whether means could be found to prevent their waters freezing in winter.

Those Berezovians who have no horses—and they are many in number—employ dogs to bring their supply of water to their houses. Indeed, it is painful to reflect to what an extent man is apt to tax the physical power of these faithful and obedient guardians of his household. The dog, on such occasions, is put to the sledge, and has to draw a huge

cask of water, often up-hill, for a considerable distance. The poor animal, though he may be of the larger breed, exerts himself to the utmost, stretching forth the whole length of his body in dragging the load along. I saw some people cruel enough, when the dog was thus loaded, to add the weight of their own bodies, and while sitting on the sledge, flog the sinking animal in the most merciless manner. Our house, which was situated on a hill, not far from the river, overlooked the sloping ground below; and I often had the misfortune to witness with my own eyes, from my window, these revolting exhibitions.

As the frost increased in intensity, smaller rivers were entirely frozen over. The Soswa, too, began to be covered with ice. This river, from the excessive rapidity and volume of its waters, did not freeze, I was told, till the cold was at least seventeen degrees below the freezing point. The interval before the complete freezing of the river I found most irksome, interrupting, as it did from five to six weeks, all communication by post. The reason of this long interruption is, that

the different rivers do not freeze simultaneously, and all intercourse by water is cut off, and there is no road by land. The deprivation is the greater, as writing affords a sweet consolation. The heart in the course of time becomes habituated to the fortnightly intervals during which the post goes and returns. Human nature thus, gradually, adapts itself to circumstances.

As the frost increased, the people of Berezov repaired with great curiosity to the river side, to see the water freeze; the period which intervenes between its transition from the fluid state into that of solidity, being regarded with great interest. The only road, which had previously led to and from Berezov, is then destroyed, and the town is thenceforth cut off for some time from all communication with the rest of the world.

Though the bulletin of the state of the river circulated every moment through the town with the utmost accuracy, and with as great expedition, and though there was nothing known of which I could not have made myself cognizant, still I could not help

directing my steps, like the rest, to the banks of the Soswa, to see with my own eyes in what state it was.

On my approaching it, I heard from time to time a deep rumbling sound, not unlike that of thunder at a distance, or of heavy chariots rolling over a pavement. I saw the water on both sides of the river, close to the banks, already frozen ; and only in the middle of the stream a current was flowing in the narrow bed, carrying onward huge masses of ice. These it was that, by crushing and knocking against each other, produced the rumbling noise I have described. Masses accumulating on the shores, or pressed by succeeding floes when unable to pass farther, after a few minutes of struggle, became stationary, and soon formed a part of the frozen pack. In this manner, the surface not yet covered, was gradually diminished ; and the probable hour when the whole river would be frozen over, was foretold by some of the more experienced spectators with as great confidence as skilful physicians designate that at which a patient's pulse must cease to beat.

On coming home, I found my chin was frost-bitten, and I experienced, besides, a severe pain in my hand, so that I was unable to hold my pen. This, I thought, was an attack of neuralgia.

Scarcely was I seated, when in came Madame X——, bringing intelligence that the river Waygulka was entirely frozen; and, as she had her own sledges and a horse, and was eager to take a drive, she requested my company in the excursion. I most willingly assented to her proposition, and having muffled myself with shawls, and put on a warm pelisse, went, thus armed against the frost, with Madame X——, hoping I should enjoy a most delightful airing on ice as even and smooth as a table.

Having from my early years been used to carriage exercise, I much longed for so rare a pleasure here, and I even felt the necessity of it for the benefit of my health, as I know from long experience that a drive does me much more good than even the longest walk on foot. The eagerness with which I accepted Madame X——'s proposition, could therefore but be equalled by the pleasure

with which I set out on our trip. But at the very outset, at the first sight of her sledge, I could not help experiencing some disappointment. It appeared to be of so singular a shape and construction; for though the external appearance resembled that of the sledges used in my own country, it was not, like them, hollow in the middle, but the cavity which in our sledges serves us as a receptacle for the feet, was completely planked over. I was quite at a loss how to take my seat in a vehicle so strangely constructed, until Madame X—— informed me that the seat was taken sideways, so that the feet hung down, and holes were cut in the wooden frame, on both sides, for the accommodation of those who might be afraid of sliding down when placed in that position, and these holes afforded a hold for the feet.

I took this uncomfortable seat, according to her directions, and as well as I could. But another difficulty now arose. We had no driver; and Madame X—— proposed to take his place. This, doubtless, was very civil on her part, but was far from pleasing to me. I was not ignorant, however, of her

pretensions to proficiency in manly exercises, and perfect knowledge of everything; and as the worst that could happen would perhaps, as I thought, be an upset, I did not long hesitate to intrust myself to her charioteering.

Luckily, we were not upset—not once. We at first drove along the banks of the Waygulka, and finding them everywhere frozen, ventured on the sheet of ice in the middle of the river; but here, instead of the ice being smooth and even, as I had fancied, we found it rugged in the extreme, the water having congealed in the shape of waves—a circumstance which could not but render our progress extremely unpleasant, the sledge being jostled and thrown about on all sides.

On our traversing these protuberances of solid waves, at every step the horse made they broke under his feet, leaving deep apertures behind, not only disagreeable to look at, but which might have caused a serious accident, particularly as we were the first who had ventured on the river, and no sledge had passed that way before us.

I began at last to grow heartily tired of this irksome pleasure trip; and to say truth,

I had every reason to apprehend, that in driving at random over unexplored and pathless places, the ice would break, and we should sink into the river, sledge and all. My companion, however, appeared not to mind that, and was only rejoiced at being able on this occasion to give a proof of her courage and dexterity in masculine exercises. For my own part, rather than betray my timidity, I offered no opposition to her proceedings, and so we foolishly let our sledge bounce from one rugged wave to another amid the crackling and breaking of the ice, the noise of which was like the report of fire-arms.

Most luckily for me, Madame X—— caught sight of another sledge, which was drawn by reindeer, and immediately drove towards it. We found it occupied by the Police Director's wife, who was also taking an airing; and Madame X—— being, whenever amusement was concerned, as inflammable as a lucifer match, she began to envy her neighbour's reindeer, and would have got into the other sledge, but felt embarrassed what to do with her own and with me. On

perceiving this, I proposed that she should take her seat with the Director's wife, and leave her sledge in my charge. She eagerly jumped at my suggestion, and I no less eagerly grasped the horse's reins and instantly turning towards the land, I found an even and more convenient road, on which I proceeded safely to the town. Finding no pleasure whatever in traversing the streets, I repaired straight to my lodgings, where I alighted cold and tired, but with the blood circulating more briskly in my frame.

CHAPTER V.

Drive in a *narta*—Peculiarities and use of the reindeer—Their pasture Their herds in the Ural—Use of their skins and flesh—Their swiftness and powers of endurance—Manner of travelling in Siberia—Fish-skin and mica-slate windows—Fuel—Tremulous state of the atmosphere—Three hours of daylight—No clock in town—Manner of notifying the hours—Tale-telling party—Two Ostiak tales—The Hunters—Old Friend's Reindeer.

ON the 5th of November, the frost was 30° Reaumur. One of the citizens obligingly called on us with a *narta*—a sledge drawn by reindeer—inviting us to take a drive in it. We accepted the offer most cheerfully; and, wrapped up as warm as possible in such a severe frost, we started on our excursion, with him for our driver, and a most gallant and experienced one he proved.

The reindeer is much about the size of a well-grown calf of two years. Its head and hoofs are similar to those of our horned cattle; the hair under the chin hangs like that of a goat: and the tail is short. In shape, especially when seen from behind, it resembles a deer, though the latter, with its long slender legs, is much more elegant. Its magnificent antlers constitute the reindeer's principal beauty. Its hair is white or chestnut, or a mixture of both those colours.

The reindeer sheds its antlers annually, and they are as often renewed, with the addition of a fresh branch every year. During the period of shedding, the animal is very feeble, and is not employed for any hard work.

The sledges for which reindeer are used, are of a different shape and size from those drawn by horses. They are called *nartas*, and are much longer than the common sledges, which are employed for heavy loads. There is nothing clumsy or cumbrous in their construction, but everything is light and elegant, and proportioned to the animal's strength, which is not great. The

two lateral *polozy* (slides) underneath, are more distant from each other, to obviate upsetting, and the upper part is bridged over with thin light boards evenly fitted, and smooth as a table, with no cavity, as in common sledges, for the feet; and it appears like a wooden litter laid on slides. In travelling, the litter serves as a seat, and the feet are let down on the side. There are neither steps to support the feet, nor anything to lay the hand on in case of upsetting; and the traveller has absolutely nothing to depend on for security but his own dexterity and caution.

If there is any luggage to carry it is placed on this upper wooden structure, and covered with skins of reindeer, fastened with ropes. Tied up in this manner, it is safe from falling out, even if the *narta* should be upset. The *narta* is commonly drawn by three reindeer, of which only one, in the middle, has reins attached to his antlers, and whichever way it is directed, the others obey the impulse. A brace over the neck, with a leathern girdle under the belly, and attached to the *narta*, is the only harness required.

The reindeer being in this manner put to the sledge, the driver takes his seat sideways, and is provided with a thin, but sufficiently strong pole, from eight to ten feet long, covered with iron at one end, with which he is enabled to stop the deer when needed, by thrusting the capped end into the snow, and winding the reins around it. The deer are so light that they run over the surface of the snow when it is hardened with frost; and, in this respect, may be said to be most invaluable in this part of the earth, where there exist no regular roads, and where every traveller must make one for himself. They run with the rapidity of the wind; neither hills nor valleys stop them, nor make any difference in their speed. In going down hill they are even obliged, the higher the hill is, to run the faster, as the very speed of the *narta*, when pressed downwards by its own weight, compels them to accelerate their pace, or their legs, which are thin and slender, would be broken.

The drivers here either cannot or have not skill enough to manage the deer as we do our horses. They never have power to

abate their speed in turning angles or passing perilous places, and indeed the deer can sooner be brought to a sudden stop than made to slacken his velocity when in full career.

On taking our seats in the *narta*, I experienced, when we started, a disagreeable sensation, a sort of giddiness, such as is felt in a swing. The deer set off as if they strove to outstrip the winds, which, in so far, might not have been unpleasant, had it not been accompanied by a sense of fear; for we could not forget that we were entirely at the mercy of these animals, with nothing like a rational control to direct their course.

After proceeding some distance, and seeing that, though cast to and fro, and up and down, the *narta* was not overturned, I began to recover confidence, and my fears subsided. On our way, however, we came up with a sledge that had been upset. It was that of the police master's wife, who had been enjoying a similar airing. But our valiant conductor confidently assured us that we should not meet with any such misadventure—and he spoke truth.

Upsets indeed are, on the whole, rare ; and this may be accounted for by the extraordinary length and breadth of the base of the *narta*, the latter of which is equal to the dimensions of the upper portion. Still, considering the nature of the ground on which they are used, it is impossible not to expect some accidents ; but, even when overturned, the *narta*, in consequence of its peculiar construction, usually rights itself without any aid on the part of the traveller. If, however, any one loses his seat on the *narta*, he must employ all his agility to regain it before the reindeer sets off ; for, should he fail to do so, he will have to make his weary journey home on foot.

The food of the reindeer is moss, similar to the Icelandic moss. No provision whatever is made for their maintenance, but they go in herds to browse on the moss wherever they can find it in the forest. The persons owning them keep regular shepherds to attend them. These shepherds have their *tchoums*, or tents, on the spot where they graze, and remove from place to place as the herds change their pasture ground. The

reindeer is gifted with a peculiar instinct for the discovery of localities abounding in moss; and whatever may be the depth of overlying snow, they scrape it away till they reach the moss, and thus depend for their sustenance, not on man, but entirely on themselves. A herd having found some tract of moss and scraped off the snow, makes no farther explorations, but remains there till the moss entirely fails. This, however, does not often happen, the moss-pasture being found almost everywhere in abundance.

An owner of reindeer, intending to proceed on a journey, orders as many as are needed to be brought to him from the forest; and on returning home, sends them back to the herd. It is considered an utter impossibility to keep them in stables. They receive nothing at the hand of man. Even during a journey no fodder is carried, but when hungry, they are unharnessed, and driven to some place where pasture may be found. To prevent their being lost in the wood, they are tied with a long rope to a post, and the traveller waits till their hunger is appeased.

This mode of travelling is extremely tiresome, as the baiting of the deer often occupies several hours. In order to obviate this loss of time and the discomfort arising from it, those who possess herds are accustomed, before they set out, to despatch previously a troop of deer, as relays, to different stations; and those who have not a sufficient number of their own, hire some for this purpose.

The reindeer can endure hunger and fatigue very long, and commonly run from twenty to thirty versts without stopping; but no sooner do they find their strength failing, or their driver exacting more than they can perform, than they fall flat on the snow for rest. No amount of castigation will induce them to rise until they have sufficiently recruited their strength, but then they voluntarily get up. Travellers may, however, without much overtaking their powers, go as far as a hundred versts before stopping to bait them: but no considerate person will oblige them to run more than about fifty versts.

The reindeer is, from his nature, born, as

it were, expressly for these northern regions. He cannot bear any degree of heat; and hence at the close of April, or the beginning of May, before the spring comes on, or the snow thaws, the owners of herds make out a list of the old and young ones, and having marked each, send them in charge of their shepherds to the Ural Mountains. Amid these mountains, more particularly on the chain bordering the Frozen Ocean, the snow never disappears, and intense cold prevails throughout the year. Here there are no musquitos, which the reindeer cannot bear; and the herds remain on the mountains until the return of autumn, when the rivers and swamps are frozen over, and the snow is covering the ground. Then they return to their former winter quarters, where their services render them invaluable.

The reindeer may be said to be the greatest boon conferred on Siberia. The fur is used by the inhabitants instead of linen, clothing, and bedding: it is also made into boots and caps. The skin of the young reindeer, which is in common use, and in commerce is known by the name *pieshki*, excels

far the softness and the lustre of the fur, and forms lighter and more elegant garments. With this, ladies' mantles and cloaks are lined, and men use it for caps and *trioushki* (three eared hoods). The skin of a reindeer a year old, known by the name of *neplouyè*, is used for making wide *touloubas*, or *shoubas*, called also *yagi*.

The *neplouyè* skins have a short and lustrous hair. The chesnut-coloured alone are used for *yagi*, as an upper covering. The hair is turned outwards, and the inside is commonly lined with flannel, and sometimes also with some other inferior fur. There is a great demand for this sort of furs at the fairs of Irbit and Tobolsk.

The chesnut *neplouyè* and the *pieshki* are held in great estimation, and form the principal article of the export trade; the darker or the browner they are, the more they are esteemed, and the higher prices they fetch in the market. The white and the striated are devoted solely to home consumption.

Reindeer flesh, if not lean, is savoury enough, tasting like venison, with the flavour of an elk. The Russians, however, are averse

to eating it; and even when they use it as food, do not like it to be known, there being a prejudice against it among the people, merely because it is the favourite food of the Ostiaks. Contempt of that subjugated race, and of anything belonging to them, is general among the Russians; insomuch, that any admixture of Ostiak blood in children is considered a degradation. Reindeer tongues are of exquisite flavour and much esteemed; when smoked, they are exported to Tobolsk, Moscow, and St. Petersburg.

The reindeer is an indispensable animal with the Ostiaks and Samoiedes; and its absence is felt as grievously as that of a member of the family. With the reindeer at his disposal, the inhabitant of the North may be said to be swift, quick, free, and valiant—fit to traverse a distance of hundreds and even thousands of miles without fatigue or fear, but without him he is as unable to move from the spot, as if deprived of his limbs and feet. Nor is this the only benefit he derives from the reindeer. When he is unsuccessful in hunting and fishing, it becomes his only means of subsistence. Industrial pursuits

and commerce may, at such dismal periods, enable the Russian part of the population to ward off the evil by the importation of corn and other necessary provisions ; but the poor Ostiaks and Samoiedes, who have become but little acquainted with traffic, and never yet depended on foreign produce, have no security whatever from famine, but the ever available reindeer.

But to return to our excursion. Our reindeer were brave, and the skill of our conductor in managing them unquestionable. Yet, despite all this, I could not help wishing ourselves at home, as it was exceedingly cold. Though I had taken care, before we set out, to wrap myself up in a bundle of warm clothes, furs, and shawls, and had on my feet thick worsted woollen boots, knitted in the fashion of stockings, in which I had made my journey through Siberia, yet nothing could keep out the piercing cold ; and though my boots with their thick leathern covering seemed proof against frost, my feet were as benumbed as if they were naked—perhaps the more so from hanging down from the

sledge, and being thus exposed to the external action of the air.

But, observing the gratification our driver derived from the fleetness of his reindeer, and the exhibition of his own skill as Jehu, I did not request him to abridge his career; and it was not till after a protracted drive that we reached home. Fearing that my feet would be frost-bitten, I immediately, on my return, put them into a pan of cold water; but it appeared that I had nothing to apprehend, and their numbness fortunately proved to be but momentary.

When women and invalids, or persons peculiarly sensitive to cold, are starting on a long journey, it is usual to surround the *narta* on all sides with boards, giving it the appearance of a chest. Over this, a piece of coarse thick cloth is extended in the shape of a tent, with openings on each side, by which to enter and emerge from the vehicle; and these openings again are secured by curtains. The inside of the sledge is then stuffed with feather-beds and pillows, and on these the traveller lies covered with a warm blanket of

fur. Throughout Siberia—at least in those parts which I have visited—no other mode of travelling in sledges is known, except in the reclining position I have described; such being the taste of the natives. The Siberians cannot even conceive how any one can travel otherwise with comfort.

It is the custom at Berezov, when the winter has set in, for every householder to take out all the glass windows, except in the more stately apartments, and to replace them with windows of fish skin. It is believed that the latter material admits less cold; and that, besides, they have this advantage, that the thick incrustation of ice covering them can be scraped off with a knife. This, however, failed to reconcile me to its use; and, moreover, though windows of fish-skin may be made to transmit light, I felt sure that nothing could be seen of what was passing outside; and, therefore, I insisted that our glass windows should not be removed. I must, however, confess that I did not gain much by my obstinacy; for a strong frost coming on, it produced such a thick incrustation of ice on the glass, as to make the

windows appear overlaid with mortar, depriving them of all transparency. Yet, even in this condition, we were not without some compensation for being thus immured, as the least heat in the apartments melted the thick ice, and we, at least, obtained a peep of the wide world without.

Some time previously to my arrival, mica-slate had been used at Berezov for windows. Numerous relics of these windows could be seen on heaps of rubbish, before the houses and in the streets. Glass being introduced, it gradually superseded mica, which is now altogether abandoned. I cannot satisfactorily account for the houses at Berezov, in spite of such intense frosts, being so warm, particularly as they are so defective in construction, and have such an excessive number of windows, some houses being completely riddled by them. But though these windows are badly finished, and the stoves are not heated more than once in twenty-four hours, the dwellings are warm. This, I presume, is chiefly attributable to the extraordinary thickness of the trunks of wood used in building, and to the depth of their founda-

tions, as well as to a superior species of stove, with flues doubly secured with iron plates, to prevent the least particle of heat from escaping.

The wood used for the construction of building is principally cedar, which is also used as fuel in preference to all other kinds of wood ; fir and larch not being thought so agreeable, on account of the crackling noise they make when burning.

In October the nights are the longest, and we had hardly three hours of day. This brief morning, however, was far from being cloudy, the sun indeed shone brightly, though for so short a space. The air was clear, but was in incessant motion, I might say, tremulous agitation, almost visible to the eye ; as though it were composed of a solid mass of tremulous atoms, ever revolving, moving and vibrating.*

* This peculiarity of the air is not limited to Siberia, but may occasionally be observed in portions of northern Europe. The editor happened to witness a remarkable instance of it in his early youth, on the southern boundary of Prussia, near Oletzko, on a clear hot day in August, when the atmosphere seemed not only to consist of moving atoms, as described by our authoress,

The three hours of day passed so quickly, as to be scarcely perceptible; but the nights were drawn out to an immense length; and proved the more irksome from our want of all means of computing the hours. The town of Berezov, in fact, has no clock, whereby the hours of the day may be ascertained, or the daily occupations of the citizens regulated, as is usual elsewhere. There exists, indeed, an hour-glass, called the clepsydra, at the Police office; but this ancient means of measuring time is of but little avail to the generality of the inhabitants, and was most imperfect in its operation. To those of my readers who may not have seen, and will, perhaps, never see such a

but was like a hard compact mass, tremulously shaken, and even resounded audibly. This condition of the atmosphere, and its elasticity in connection with the stellar system, may possibly have suggested to Pythagoras his bold theory of "The harmony of the Spheres." That the air, or at least the atmosphere surrounding us, is composed of atomic particles, in constant movement, and revolving around each other, there is no longer any doubt; and recent attempts to observe the component parts of the air, by means of microscopic instruments, appear to have satisfactorily established the fact.

primitive time-piece, it may not be out of place to give a short description of this instrument. It was composed of a pair of oblong glasses, the thinner extremities of which joined the other; and had a small opening in the middle as a passage of communication. One glass was filled with sand, and turned upward, so that the sand it contains may gradually run through the aperture at the bottom into the glass beneath, which is empty. The quantity of sand is measured for an hour; and it takes just half an hour running from the glass above into that below, and *vice versa*. A Cossack is placed as a sentry to watch it, with the injunction, when the sand has run, to turn the glasses, so that the sand may in turn pass from the replenished glass into the empty one. In this way the hour-glass, after being turned twice, measures one hour; which being observed by the Cossack on duty, he is bound to run directly to the church, and give as many strokes on the bell as there are hours.

Such a singular mode of notifying the hours must, of course, be liable to great irregulari-

ties. Any negligence on the part of the Cossack in turning the glass at the nick of time, however trifling, will throw the computation of time completely out of order.

Notwithstanding all our ingenuity in varying our occupations, so as to render the long winter evenings less irksome, I cannot say we were successful; and this I attribute to the nature of our employments, which necessarily were more artificial than real, being wholly without an object. The cook, at her work in the kitchen, preparing the simplest of meals to which our hungry family is to sit down, was more fortunate in possessing the happy power of filling up the hours without prolonging them. Needle-work, reading, and talking were our only resources; but our needle-work is destined to be of no use whatever to any human being; reading is but a state of wasteful passiveness, if the train of ideas which it awakens cannot be embodied in acts; and as for conversation, a chief requisite is, that our observations should call up corresponding or antagonistic sentiments, and give rise to new ideas and thoughts. Failing to accomplish any such ends, con-

versation becomes blank, motionless, and dead.

Of all evenings, the holiday evenings are the most irksome ; as on such days all sorts of work is erased from our short catalogue of occupations. While the light lasts, we spend our time in sorting worsted for our weekly labour ; then follows the wearisome interminable evening. My eyes ached with reading, my lips, as though they were sealed for conversation, opened only to yawn ; *ennui*, with its heavy weight, oppressed me, bringing in its train an array of dark melancholy images. By what means could I overcome that terrible foe ? I seated myself, and again took up a book, but the next moment found myself walking the room, distracted with anxious thoughts. To disperse them, I went at last to the rooms opposite, to see how my landlady and her family spent their time. I found them all assembled ; they cracked their nuts—that is, did nothing. Soon, however, I perceived that they were prepared to listen to a story-teller, and I was easily prevailed upon to make one of the party ; but I requested them, as we were rather crowded, to come with

the story-teller to my apartments, where we should have more room. They willingly accepted my invitation, and returning with me, took their seats in the centre, while the story-teller planted himself on the threshold. The circle was increased by the servants, and all waited with impatience, though knowing by heart what was to be related. Amidst perfect silence, uninterrupted but by occasional cracking of cedar-nuts, the story-teller at last entered upon his task.

Some of his tales were of Russian origin ; but, as they may be known from other publications, I do not mean to reproduce them here. I will speak only of the Ostiak stories, which, from their originality, may be read with interest. Simple though they may be, they exhibit, apart from their literary value, a picture as genuine as it is faithful, both of the northern scenery and the employment of the natives ; and I might almost say, are the embodiment of their ethics.

THE OSTIAK HUNTERS.

Once upon a time a party of seven Ostiaks went hunting in a distant forest. Each had a

narta and three reindeer, and each took some provisions for his use ; but, above all, an excellent bow and a good share of arrows. They had therefore but little need of their provisions, as their arrows could everywhere procure a supply. They appointed a spot where their sledges were to meet, and from that spot they joyfully started together. But, as if ill-luck would have it, the hunting happened to prove unsuccessful ; and the Ostiaks were for several days traversing the forest in all directions, and did not meet with any game.

But experienced hunters are never discouraged by ill-success. Our Ostiaks proceeded onwards in their search, for how could they return home empty-handed, remembering well that they had left a vacant pantry, and that their wives and children were looking to them for food.

After several days of fruitless labour, they emerged from the thicket on a vast boundless *tundra*,* on which, as far as their eyes could

* A *tundra* means lowlands, or an extensive moor, without any wood, swampy, and incapable of producing anything but moss.

reach, they could not see a single tree, nor descry any other object that could serve them as a landmark, on their way through the wilderness. Only a few osiers and stunted stalks of grass were discernible, and these were covered with snow. There was nowhere any other sign of life—no trace of any animal, fox, reindeer, or ermine, on the whole extent of the virgin snow.

The hunters, although the environs all around, far and near, had previously been well known to them, lost at last all recollection of the country where they were. Still, they stopped not, but pushed briskly onwards, hoping that they might reach the banks of some river, or discern some forest, where they would be able to find their way. But the farther they proceeded, the more boundless seemed the vast *tundra* spread before their eyes.

They looked to the right, they looked to the left, and still saw only the same interminable wilderness. They looked behind, but even the forest from which they came had disappeared from their sight. Bewilderment, and almost despair had overcome them.

“What is to be done?” they asked each other. Their scanty store of provisions, not being augmented by any game, was nearly exhausted—hunger gnawed their vitals—home was far off, and even at home they had no supplies.

While they were lamenting their hard lot, they perceived at a distance something like a cloud rising above the horizon : it was a tremendous column of snow.

“Do you see that frightful drift of snow ?” asked one, “and there is neither a ravine nor a forest, where we can take shelter.”

“There are no other means of safety,” replied one of his companions, “than to dig a hole in the snow, as fast as we can, to protect us against it.”

They had scarcely time to commence the work, in accordance with this advice, when they saw the snow-column, which moved with fearful rapidity, less than a hundred paces from them. What was their joy to find, however, that what they feared to be the *buran*,* was but a cloud of snow raised

* A *buran* is, in the language of the natives, a whirlwind, which mixes the falling snow with that which it

by the hoofs of a white reindeer, harnessed to a most elegantly wrought *narta* of mammoth bones, bearing a stately hunter, armed with a mighty bow and arrows.

The unknown stranger no sooner perceived the Ostiaks than he pulled up, and saluting them, inquired whither they were journeying. They replied, by stating what a deplorable plight they were reduced to, apprising him that they had been many days searching for game and had found none, and that they did not even know how far they had wandered from home, or how to trace their way back through the snow.

The stranger pointed to the eastward, and said that in that direction was a *mys*,* crowned by three ancient larch trees, surrounding an enormous stone, by the side of which lay the decaying trunk of a cedar. Here, he assured them they would find plenty of all sorts of game.

raises from the earth, thereby preventing a traveller from seeing his way, and is often attended with serious disasters, those who are exposed to it being sometimes cased in snow, and frozen to death.

* A *mys* means, in the Ostiak romance, a piece of land in the shape of a knee.

On hearing this, the Ostiaks looked at each other in some perplexity. Quite worn out and fatigued, they would fain have profited by the stranger's advice ; but were quite at a loss how to find out the reported land of plenty, seeing around them nothing but an extensive sheet of snow, everywhere wearing the same monotonous aspect, and having nothing to fix the eye in its whole extent. These difficulties stared them in the face, and, after a little hesitation, they ventured to represent them to the stranger, who, on hearing their doubts, meditated for an instant, and then took out from the *narta* an arrow, and fitting it to his bow, exclaimed :

“ Proceed in the direction in which I shoot my arrow.” As he spoke, the string twanged and the arrow whizzed through the air ; but in flying touched from spot to spot the surface of the earth, leaving behind traces in the snow, which marked distinctly the course of its flight. The hunters, having so excellent a conductor before their eyes, without hesitating a moment, set off, resolved to speed in the traces of the flying arrow ;

thankfully bidding the stranger a cordial and grateful farewell.

They journeyed very long and very far, and though they had lost sight of the arrow, beheld its traces everywhere. At last, after a long journey, the traces disappeared, and they perceived the arrow sticking in the snow. All seven rushed forward at once to seize it, each being desirous to get possession of so wonderful a hunting weapon, invested with such powers as no living man had ever seen exhibited before.

The foremost thrust his long iron spear in the snow, to make his reindeer halt; and then leaping from the sledge, rushed towards the arrow, in order to appropriate to himself the coveted prize; but he was sorely disappointed, for he found, to his great astonishment, the arrow was so heavy, that he was quite unable to lift it. His companions, in succession, attempted the same feat, but were equally foiled; nor could they even united raise it from the earth. At length, they desisted from making any further efforts, wondering at the extraordinary strength of the unknown, whom they had seen, with

their own eyes, handle the arrow as easily as though it were a feather; and at the same time, they were puzzled as to how they should find their promised *mys*, or knee-land, now that they had lost their miraculous conductor. While meditating on this subject, one of them happened to descry, at no great distance, three larches, a stone, and the trunk of a large cedar; and closer examination left no doubt that this actually was the spot indicated by the hunter.

The Ostiaks were enraptured at this discovery; and as it flashed upon them, they beheld a number of young reindeer, martins, foxes, squirrels, and every kind of game flitting about in every direction. Each forthwith grasped his bow and arrows, and poured their shafts into the midst of the throng, and not one failed of its mark. This sport they continued, till all their *nartus* were loaded with game; whereupon, full of joy and glee, they started on their way homeward.

They were now not in the least perplexed as to the road, for they saw the furrows of their sledges on the snow, and these were a

sufficiently safe guide ; but on arriving at the spot where they had met the unknown hunter, and finding the traces of his mammoth *narta* still visible, they began to consider whether they should not proceed on his track, with the view of paying him a visit, and thanking him for the good advice he had given them.

This they instantly resolved to do, but they had scarcely proceeded a few furlongs on their road, when they saw on either side of them large numbers of reindeer roaming about on pasture grounds ; and these became more and more numerous as they progressed, so that they could not but wonder at the immense wealth of the owner of such vast herds. On one of the extensive plains they saw numbers of bucks, adorned with high-branching antlers, scraping up the snow, in search of moss for food. In another, they beheld herds of *pieshkis*, or young ones, some white, others of chestnut colour, and all as gay and healthy as fish, gambolling playfully on the *tundras*, gracefully tossing their heads, or sucking the teat of their smooth-skinned and sleek-looking dams ; while others strayed

in an adjacent forest, where, climbing with their slender fore-feet and with their bodies half upraised, they picked the rich lichen from the trunks. In short, herds of these useful animals were seen grazing in countless numbers in every direction, as far as the hunters could see. At last they perceived a *tchoum* (tent) at a distance, and as they drew near, observed that the traces of the mammoth *narta* were disappearing; whence they inferred, that this was the habitation of the unknown hunter. At the tent, therefore, they halted.

On stepping inside, they beheld the owner of the *tchoum*, and immediately recognised their benevolent adviser, who knew them at a glance, and bade them welcome.

The Ostiaks recounted all the incidents of their journey, as well as its prosperous results; and it being the close of the day when they arrived, he invited them to spend the night in his *tchoum*, and then went outside to arrange for their entertainment.

The host's family consisted of his wife and his aged father. After leaving his guests, he slaughtered a number of his choice reindeer,

two for each hunter, and these he delivered to his wife to prepare for their use; but before doing so, he cut off the heads of all the slain animals, and placed them in front of the hunters. The Ostiaks wondered that he should have killed so many reindeer, and declared that they should not be able to consume a quarter of the feast.

“This be as it may please you,” replied the generous host; “I mete out this quantity to you, as it is our accustomed ration. You may do with it as you like.” So saying, he ordered his wife to bring in a large brass cauldron, and pointing it out to the hunters, recommended them to boil so much of the meat as they would require, and make use of the remainder in any manner they thought proper.

The Ostiaks cooked only two of the deer, stowing the remainder in their sledges; but even the portion they cooked was more than they could consume. But what astonished them most was, that the host and his wife, at their own table, cut off the heads of the deer destined for themselves, and presented them to the old man, and then ate up the whole of the enormous quantity remaining.

This mighty repast being finished, both the family and the guests retired to rest. Each hunter found a comfortable couch prepared for him, composed of *yagas* of precious fur of black fox, of blue reindeer skins, with sables and grey squirrels (*siwodushki*), and these valuable *yagas* were afterwards presented to them as a gift.*

Next morning, the hunters, quite refreshed by sleep, and enchanted at the reception they had received, were preparing for departure, when the aged father, stepping forward, addressed his son in these words :

“Behold, my son ! thy guests are about to leave thee. Wilt thou let them depart from thy house without gifts ?”

The Ostiaks, who could not find words enough to express their thanks for the hospitable welcome and the costly present they had already received, observed in a deprecating tone that, after such generous treatment, combined with so splendid a present, they could not desire, or becomingly accept, anything more. But the son, making light of

* *Yaga* is a large, warm garment, or cloak of fur.

their excuses, and in obedience to his father's wish, took a long leathern leash which was hanging on the wall, and with which he was accustomed to catch his reindeer, and requested his guests to go with him outside the *tchoum*. The leash was so exceedingly long, that on being coiled round his arm, as is usual on such occasions, it appeared like a large pillow.

"Look !" said he ; " I will cast this leash all its length for each of you in turn, and whatever be the number of reindeer I catch in it at one cast, they shall be given to each of you respectively as a gift."

So saying, he whistled to the reindeer, and they pressed in crowds around him. He then threw his leash amidst them, and with such force that about thirty were entwined in it by their antlers, necks and legs, all of which he gave to the Ostiak for whom he had cast the leash. He then cast the leash for the others in succession, and strange to say in each case with the same result, so that every Ostiak had an equal number.

Thus laden with gifts and having their sledges stored with game, the Ostiaks left the

residence of their generous host, and turned towards home, passing, on the road, the countless herds of reindeer which they had seen in coming. As they proceeded, they could, of course, speak of nothing but their host. They enlarged upon the immense wealth they had seen in his house, and what they saw before them, and they began to covet it.

All the munificent gifts which he had bestowed on them, appeared but a mere trifle when compared with the riches which he possessed. Every one thought so, though he durst not at first communicate his thoughts to the others. But the viper of covetousness gnawed at their hearts, and at length they sunk into sullen silence, all inwardly intent upon the same scheme.

“What enormous wealth!” cried one at last. “How happy the owner of these immense riches, though probably he does not himself know how much he possesses!”

“I quite agree with you, and I was just thinking the same,” replied another.

“Where does he keep all his riches?” added a third. “From the presents of costly furs which he has given us with such liberality, I

should infer that he has as great a store of them as of reindeer."

"Hang his furs !" said a fourth ; " but if any one took some of the reindeer which are here on the pasture-ground, he certainly would not find it out."

" That is the very idea that this moment occurred to me," rejoined a fifth.

" Why should we hesitate then to add some of these reindeer to those he has given us ?" asked another. " His herds being innumerable, he will not even perceive that any of them are missing."

While six of the Ostiaks were thus speaking together, one of their party did not join in the conversation ; but, observing that they were seriously meditating the execution of their knavish design, he interposed.

" What is this you are plotting ?" he cried. " Certainly you cannot be in earnest ! Is this a fit return for the benefits we have received ? Through his kindness it was that we were enabled to kill so much game, and he besides received us hospitably at his house, bestowing on us munificent gifts ; so that for six months at least our homes are provided with plenty,

and our wives and children are saved from starvation. Is it possible that, instead of being thankful, you are intent on doing him such injury ?”

“ You are a fool !” retorted one of them. “ What harm can he suffer from so trifling a loss, possessing so much as he does ?”

“ Never mind listening to what he says,” observed the first speaker ; “ but let us do what we have decided on.”

“ We had better not lose time in vain discussion,” replied a third. “ Let us do at once what we meant to do, and hasten home with our booty.”

“ For my part, I will on no account share in such a dark deed,” said the Ostiak who disapproved of this scheme.

“ We shall not want you,” replied the originator of the plot.

“ Away with all such foolish scruples !” ejaculated the others. “ Let us exclude him from our company ! let us drive him away !”

And then, almost simultaneously springing from their sledges, they separated a drove of a hundred and fifty reindeer ; and having united them with those which their host had

presented to them, they took, as fast as they could, to flight, with their ill-acquired booty.

“Look, and beware to claim thy portion when we shall distribute the reindeer!” they called out, tauntingly, to the honest Ostiak who had opposed them, and in a short time disappeared from his sight.

Being thus excluded from his party, and left behind alone, the honest Ostiak was continuing his weary journey with his small drove of reindeer, at a slow pace; and hanging down his head, was mournfully meditating on the ingratitude of his companions, when all on a sudden he heard a tempestuous gale approaching from the rear, as if all the forest were shaken by a violent whirlwind. Looking round in alarm, what should he see but the well-remembered mammoth *narta* drawn by the white reindeer coming along, like in a cloud, bearing aloft the Unknown Hunter, who was driving with fearful speed. The Ostiak was now awe-stricken, and felt dismayed, as though he were an accomplice in the evil deed of his brethren.

Drawing up by his side, the Unknown

Hunter commenced upbraiding him for his ingratitude; but the Ostiak, to vindicate himself, showed all he had in his *narta*, and bade him observe that he possessed only the thirty reindeer which the hunter had given him. The hunter was appeased by this defence, and, like a storm, started in pursuit of the others. On reaching the fugitives he convicted them of the evil deed, and while they were speechless with terror, strung an arrow on his bow, and with it pierced at once the guilty six.

Meanwhile, the seventh Ostiak came up; and seeing on the road the corpses of his companions, all transfixed with an ivory arrow, he was terrified out of his wits. But the Unknown bid him fear nothing; and to dispel his terror, he took all the booty of the guilty hunters, and bestowed it on him, as a reward for his honesty and good faith.

OLD FRIEND'S REINDEER.

Two Ostiaks, one old, the other young, inhabited two separate *tchoums*, situated but

a little distance from each other. The elder had no issue of his own ; and, in his loneliness, he got exceedingly fond of the young one, and liked him as much as though he were his own son. The youth likewise behaved towards him as a son would towards his father.

It was their custom to go hunting and fishing together, and in the case of the elder being wearied or disinclined for the exercise, the youth willingly exerted himself for the advantage of both, placing *stanki** in the wood to entrap game ; cutting holes in the ice to catch fish, with nets and seines ; and, when severe frosts set in, to spare the aged man any trouble, he most frequently went alone to distant places to fetch the game which was entrapped, and the fish caught in the seine. All this the obliging youth used faithfully to deliver to his adopted parent. The old man happened to possess some white reindeer, which were remarkable for their swiftness, and to which his young friend took a particular liking ; which he perceiving,

* *Stanki* are traps and snares to catch animals.

proposed that he should purchase them of him for the skins of three black foxes.

Such a high price was unheard of, as it was equivalent to at least a hundred reindeer. Nevertheless, the young Ostiak, who knew the excellent qualities of the animals, and on that account very ardently wished to acquire them, was not at all discouraged by so high a price ; and as he at that time happened to have great success in hunting, and killed three black foxes, he brought the skins to the old man, and demanded the reindeer. The other, well pleased with the confidence the youth placed in him, was not unwilling to conclude the bargain, and said : “ I will give you, if you like, in addition, three does, just as white, and of the same breed as these bucks, if you will give me in return three sables.”

His young friend was not discouraged even by this proposition ; and without further bargaining or haggling, brought him the three sables.

“ In addition to these, I will give you three striate reindeer,” said the old man, “ if

you will give me the skins of three young blue reindeer.”

The young man agreed even to this exchange, as he had to the former ones, without uttering a single word more; and acquired by the bargain the striated reindeer.

On becoming their owner, the young Ostiak proposed to try them; and having an elder brother residing about two hundred and fifty versts from his abode, he resolved on taking a pleasure trip to see him. Pursuant to this resolution, on the following day at dawn, he put the striate reindeer to his *narta*, and set out on his journey. The reindeer proved to be so swift, that he traversed the great distance before his sister-in-law had sufficient time to prepare her *burdiuk*.* His brother was quite astonished at his arrival, and asked him what time he had left home?

“At one *kettle*,”† was the reply.

* The *burdiuk* is a meal of the Ostiaks, consisting of fish, boiled with a small quantity of flour.

† Among the Ostiaks, the division of time by hours is not known: hence time is measured after the ordi-

On hearing this, the elder brother was astonished the more, knowing that, after their father's death, when the property was divided between them, he had cheated his brother, in keeping the best reindeer for himself, and had given the worst to him.

After they had discussed their meal of *bur-diuk*, the elder brother suggested that, by way of diversion, the reindeer of each should run a race, to which proposal the other readily acceded. The best reindeer that the elder brother possessed were then brought from his herd; but when both *nartas* set off, the reindeer of the younger brother ran almost as swift as the wind, leaving their competitors far behind.

"From whom did you get such brave and superior beasts?" asked the elder brother, in surprise at this result, and burning with envy.

"Oh, these are but mean animals, when compared to my white reindeer, to which nobody can find equals," replied the other.

nary transactions of their daily life, one of which is the boiling of a kettle for a meal.

“But does their strength equal their swiftness?” inquired the first. “Shall we go with them on a hunting excursion? If you like, it might take place in a few days, and we can then see whether your reindeer are as excellent in hunting as they are in racing.”

The younger brother, without a moment's hesitation, accepted the challenge, and, on the day appointed, arrived with his white reindeer at his brother's house.

The elder brother, as may be imagined, made choice of the best white ones in his herd, that he might not, as on the former occasion, be surpassed. But no sooner had they started, than the younger, borne along with the celerity of the wind, vanished far from his brother's view. In his rapid course he encountered some foxes and a herd of young reindeer (*pieshki*), and no sooner did his team perceive them than they trampled them beneath their hoofs; so that before the elder brother could come up, the younger had a load of vension in his *narta*. This appeared so strange to him, that he suspected such extraordinary luck in the chase must be

a trick, and that the slain animals had been brought by him from home, and after being secreted in his sledge, were now produced as a proof of skill. While he was ruminating on this idea, a black fox was descried at a distance, and both simultaneously started in pursuit of him; but the elder brother was left far behind, while the white reindeer of the younger outran the fox, and, as before, trampled it under their hoofs.

The elder brother acquiring thus an undeniable proof of their superior qualities, tried everything to induce the other to make an exchange; but the latter would on no condition part with them. In the end, however, he was prevailed on to promise him the young ones, should they ever yield any.

After the lapse of three years, the elder brother paid him a visit, and reminded him of his pledge; and in compliance with it, he handed him over the young ones. But the gift turned out most unlucky to the covetous man, as the young reindeer, accustomed only to one master, would not obey their new owner, and turned stubborn and restive; so

that the more the latter tried to bring them into subjection, the wilder and more unmanageable they grew. At last, one day when they were put to the *narta*, they overturned it, and he was thrown out and killed. Then they ran away with his corpse, which unfortunately caught in their head-reins, and dragged it to the threshold of his dwelling, where they came to a stand.

The son of the ill-fated man not being ignorant of the bitter hatred his father had borne to his brother, supposed that the latter hated him with equal intensity, and that the good understanding which had apparently existed between them, had been, in fact, but a mask ; and he now imagined that his father had been slain by the other, who had adopted this method of covering the crime, to avert suspicion from himself. Harboured these thoughts, he went one day to his uncle's abode with the view of surprising him, and taking his life in retaliation. On coming, however, within a short distance of his uncle's *tchoum*, he recognised the young reindeer which had caused the mischief, and which were grazing on the pasture-ground in the

forest ; and covetousness getting, for the moment, the better of revenge, he resolved in the first place to carry off the animals, and seek his uncle afterwards.

Taking his own reindeer from his sledge, he put to those of his uncle, and directed his course homewards, flattering himself with the hope that he would traverse the whole distance in a few moments ; but scarcely had he stirred from the spot, when the reindeer, growing wild and unruly, and impatient of control, started on their mad career through the forest, and ran till they had killed him ; when they came back to their master's home, dragging his nephew's dead body after them.

In this manner, the reindeer of his old and trusty friend, though purchased at a high price, amply repaid their cost, and twice saved his life.

CHAPTER VI.

The Arctic region north of Berezov—Obdorsk fair—Zirani — Fur-tax — Perfidy of Russian merchants—Division of the native population of Watahy—Chiefs of the tribes—The Prince of Obdorsk—Catherine II.—The Prince's threat to burn Tobolsk—Assault on him—Curious trial—Integrity of the native races.

OUR landlord being, like most of the inhabitants of Berezov, engaged in commercial pursuits, went in December to the Obdorsk fair, which lasts four weeks. It is held in the town of Obdorsk, the most northern point of the government of Tobolsk, or rather, its extremity, beyond which no human habitations are found. There exists, indeed, a large peninsular territory extending along the Oby Gulf northwards, and advancing far into the Polar Ocean; but that stretch of land is entirely uninhabited. Occasionally, no doubt,

parties of Samoiedes and Ostiaks may be met straying in these barren regions of eternal snow, driven there by the accidents of the chase, but are merely wanderers, who make no sojourn.* The town of Obdorsk, therefore, may justly be considered the last inhabited point of the province of Berezov, in the direction of the Frozen Ocean.

Obdorsk is situated at the mouth of the river Oby, where that great river falls into the gulf to which it gives its name, and which is likewise called the Oby Sea. The number of its inhabitants, of course, is exceedingly small ; but owing to its famous fair, the place is not without some importance.

Once every year, about the middle of December, the nomadic Samoiedes and Ostiaks, and their different families and *watakas* (clans), not only of the district of Berezov and the more remote government of Yeniseï,

* This is the farthest northern region described by our authoress; and her account of it acquires the more importance from the tract of land lying, if not exactly within the range, close on the boundaries of the unknown regions, which Lieutenant Pim proposed to explore in search of Sir John Franklin.

but of all the wildernesses bordering on the extensive shores of the Frozen Ocean, repair to Obdorsk for the purpose of barter, and to provide themselves with the objects they require.

These tribes of native savages bring with them skins and furs of all kinds, and the Russian merchants from Tobolsk, Surgut, and Berezov, and even more distant towns, bring other exchangeable commodities ; travelling a distance of many thousand versts to dispose of their wares, as needles, pins, ribbons, tape, and the like trumperies ; together with horrid pictures and engravings, such as the Susdal school alone is able to produce. Many arrive even from the government of Archangel, and among them are the Zirani, a people dwelling on the banks of the Petchera, and constituting a peculiar race, well-built, courageous, and eminently skilful, and possessing a distinct language of their own, though they speak Russian remarkably well.

At the first fall of snow, as soon as the rivers are covered with ice, these people start from the Petchera, on *nartas* drawn by reindeer, and crossing the Uralian Mountains, a

distance of many thousand versts, arrive at Obdorsk, and some even at Berezov, to dispose of their produce and their manufactures. These, for the most part, are butter, worsted stockings, woollen vests, harness, ropes, fishing nets, thread canvas, and linen. In exchange, they take eider down, skins of reindeer and other animals, mammoth bones, furs of all kinds, and flour.

Though nearly the whole population of the district of Berezov is nomadic, living for the most part dispersed in forests and amidst morasses, and constantly moving to and fro, yet, on assembling at the time of the fair at a single point, it becomes as it were, once in the year, stationary. Trade and barter bring natives and strangers together, and on this occasion, the Sprawnik (Director of Police) of Berezov proceeds to Obdorsk, to collect the annual *yasak*, or tax on furs, for the Imperial treasury.

The Director, immediately on his arrival, publishes a proclamation, prohibiting any attempt at barter in furs and skins, until the fur tax has been duly paid. In the meantime, however, an immensity of mischief is

done. The Russian dealers, who surpass the whole world in perfidy and cunning, ferret out those Samoiedes and Ostiaks who have the greatest stock of valuable furs, and calling on them in their *tchoums*, frighten them with all sorts of fabrications, making it appear that the Imperial functionary had learnt from his spies, what a large collection they had brought with them, and that if they ventured to appear in the town, he would invent some pretext for confiscating the whole. When these representations have infected the poor Cossack with a panic, they offer in a friendly way, to purchase clandestinely whatever they may have to dispose of, and by this means possess themselves of the furs at a fourth of their value.

The Samoied and Ostiak population, like all people in a semi-barbarous state, is divided into different tribes. The government raises no objection to these divisions, as they in a great degree assist it in carrying out its measures of administration. In the government phraseology, the various tribes are called *watakas*. At the head of each *wataka* is a patriarch, or chief, whose dignity is here-

ditary, descending from one generation to another, and in him is vested the judicial and administrative power. In his relations with the Russian government, he is considered merely in the light of an elder, (*starchina*), and such is his official appellation. The government communicates to him all its intentions and orders; it receives through him from the people of his *wataka*, the *yasak*, the appointment of which is left to his judgment, according as he chooses, to impose it on the different families of his *wataka*. He also stands in a peculiar position, with respect to the government of the tribe, who pay absolute obedience to his commands; while he as the hereditary chief, administers justice, watches over the public security, and in years of famine, procures means of subsistence for the population.

In discharging this duty, he is sometimes obliged to give up all his own store of provisions, and even to kill his reindeer, while, at the same time, he makes the rich contribute to the support of the poor; and should these supplies prove insufficient, he heads the most courageous men of his tribe, in an expedition

to a neighbouring district, demanding with arms in his hand, relief for their suffering families. The Russian Government is frequently called upon to put down these lawless forays; but the natives, so far from deeming them as unlawful, view them as warlike expeditions, and all who join in them are very highly thought of, and loved among their tribes.

The amount of respect and obedience paid to the chief, is in proportion to his personal qualities, and the sagacity, prudence, and energy which he displays in the government of his clan.

Each *wataka* consists of several hundreds of *tchoums*, or tents, inhabited by separate families.

Obdorsk is the residence of an Ostiak prince, who bears the same name as the town. From time immemorial the supreme chieftainship over the Ostiaks has been preserved in this family, and handed down from generation to generation. The Empress Catherine the Second, far from infringing upon their dynastic prerogatives, sent a diploma sanctioning the dignity, and accompanied the document with a present of a

kaftan of red cloth and a pair of boots with pointed long toes. Ever since, on all important occasions and gala days, especially on the arrival of the Governor-General, or any other Imperial official, when presentations take place, the Prince Obdorsk makes his appearance at the levees in this costume, and bearing the Imperial diploma in his hand.

Yet, with all this, the Prince retains the simplicity of the native character. His every-day dress is like that worn by the rest of the Ostiaks; differing neither in make nor material—which is reindeer fur. Nor is his habitation superior to the common *yourta*, or tent; except at Obdorsk, his capital, where it is constructed of logs of wood, and is spacious and lofty, as it is here that he receives the orders of the Government, and any officials who visit the place.

The natives show respect for individuals, by the same ceremonies as exist among the other tribes in Southern Siberia. A man, whether Ostiak, Samoied, or Kirghies, testifying respect for a high personage, does not take anything during a meal with his own hands, but waits till he is served by others.

When eatables are brought in, persons appointed for the purpose cut up his meat and even put it in his mouth, bit by bit, with their fingers. Should the guest thus honoured happen to spit, etiquette requires that the spittle should instantly be wiped up. Reindeer's head, in a raw state, is a standing dish, and considered a great dainty ; it is always placed before the principal guest, or the person most honoured in their society.

The Prince of Obdorsk has not attained a higher degree of civilization than the rest of the natives ; it even appears that he is, in common with the lowest of his countrymen, fanatically averse to any attempt at improvement. The following is characteristic of him :—

Not many years ago, the Governor of Tobolsk intimated to the Prince that he might send his son to Tobolsk, where he should be placed in the Gymnasium, and by the education he would receive, might be made instrumental in communicating civilization to his whole tribe. But scarcely had the project been mentioned, through an interpreter, to the Prince, than he fell into a

violent passion, declaring “that he would never surrender his son into foreign hands; and that, should an attempt be made to carry him off by force, he vowed he would burn Tobolsk to the ground.” The Governor, of course, thought it would be desirable, under these circumstances, to take no further trouble in the matter.

The Prince’s obstinate temper, and his opposition to the introduction of anything like European civilization among his tribe, renders his *wataka* an arena of abuses and intrigue. For such a sphere none are better fitted than the Russian officials, especially those of the inferior class. Being very ignorant, and utterly incapable of comprehending the real intentions of the Government, they are constantly exceeding their power, as often as they can do so with impunity. In proof of this, I will mention an occurrence, merely to show in what a sorry predicament the Prince Obdorsk, despite his exalted title, may be placed:—

A few years since, a physician of the district, who resided at Berezov, happened to be sent to the northern part of the province, in

order to make a medical inspection. Though he had money given him by Government for his travelling expenses, yet, following the bad example set by the generality of the *employés*, he demanded relays from the Prince of Obdorsk for himself and suite, without any payment. A physician in those parts of the country never travels alone, but is accompanied by several assistants, an interpreter, and surgeons, to aid him in operations.

The Prince, not being ignorant that, in such cases, the expenses of Government officials are defrayed by the public treasury, refused to give the relays ; and the physician, irritated by the unexpected firmness of the refusal, and forgetful of the injustice of his cause, took the law into his own hands, and literally horse-whipped the Prince. Obdorsk complained of his conduct to the head of the police, but in vain. He could obtain no redress against the Director's colleague and personal friend. It happened, however, that not long afterwards, the Governor of Tobolsk, wishing to inspect this distant region, arrived at Obdorsk during the time of the fair. Such an event was, of course, a most memorable

one, as the oldest inhabitant had no recollection of ever having seen so great a personage in their remote town, even Berezov being only thus honoured at very long intervals ; although, in the strict discharge of his duty, the Governor-General should annually visit every town in the province. This tour of inspection, however, is usually assigned to an inferior official, who is not very likely to report the misdoings of his colleagues.

On the Governor's arrival at Obdorsk, the Prince, mindful of the injury he had received from the physician, brought a complaint before the great functionary ; but being unacquainted with the Russian language, he was obliged to employ an interpreter, and could find no one to fulfil this office but a person attached to the Governor's suite, who had been recommended for the post by the Director of Police.

The interpreter knew all the circumstances connected with the case, but had an interest in screening from the Governor the malpractices of the officials, and so made it a point of misrepresenting the Prince's statement, telling just the reverse of what he communicated to him in his own language.

The injured Ostiak, though he could not speak Russian, was keen enough to detect this cheat; and made an effort, by a few Russian words, and by supplying the rest with gesticulation, to plead his own cause. By this means the Governor was enabled at last to suspect something of the truth, and in an authoritative tone called the interpreter to account. But the latter, nothing daunted, nor in the least losing his presence of mind, said that what the Prince so warmly insisted upon was, that physicians were not at all wanted by his tribe; and that, instead of curing the people, they only dosed them with bitter drugs. He begged, therefore, that his Excellency would represent to the Emperor that he was wasting money in sending them to Obdorsk, as they were really only a source of annoyance.

In his reply, the Governor endeavoured to convince the Ostiak, how much the Emperor loved his people, and that money was no consideration to him when expended for their good; and further, that though physicians did administer bitter drugs and draughts, they were a very valuable and indispensable body of men.

The Prince listened to the Governor's answer with great attention, and it did not escape his penetration, that he was still misunderstood; so, to cut short all further explanation, he threw off his state dress, and pointing to his scarred shoulders, showed how shamefully he had been treated. Being a humane and just man, the Governor cast a severe look at the interpreter, and again demanded an explanation; but the interpreter, though unprepared for this disclosure, retained his presence of mind, and said with great unconcern, that the real reason why his Highness complained so bitterly of the physician was, that he had had blisters applied to his shoulders while suffering from sore eyes, and was thus covered with scars. On this the Governor could not help smiling, and good-humouredly tapping the Prince on his shoulders, recommended him to dismiss his anger, as the physician had only acted for his good.

The Prince was now quite in despair, seeing that his case was, after all, not comprehended. Meanwhile, the Director of the Police and other officials, hearing what was

going on, began to press into the audience-room, and prevented the Governor, by their representations, from arriving at the truth. Thus the injured Prince was, from lack of knowledge to make his case understood, obliged to give up all hope of obtaining redress.

To the credit of the Ostiaks and the Samoiedes it must be said, that they are eminently distinguished for integrity and truthfulness. They are never detected in lying or prevarication, even though they might often become gainers by resorting to artifice. They faithfully fulfil their engagements, and are punctual in paying their debts—characteristics which redound the more to their honour, as from their nomade life in such vast wildernesses, they could easily baffle the coercive power of the law.

They observe the same integrity and good faith in paying the public taxes. These are collected by a Government functionary, who, on arriving at the Obdorsk fair, sends a despatch to the chiefs, or elders of the different tribes, requiring them to pay the annual *yasak*, at the same time ordering the

police of the locality to permit no sales until the tax has been duly paid. In obedience to this order, the Ostiaks and the Samoiedes of the different tribes are enjoined by their chiefs to bring in their quota of the impost. This is immediately done, and the prohibition against sales is then rescinded, and the market for barter opened to all comers. It often happens that there is a decrease in the receipts of the tax, but this is owing solely to the bad success of the tribes in hunting, and never to any breach of good faith. These poor savages scrupulously discharge what they consider to be a sacred obligation, and do not understand either evasion or fraud.

CHAPTER VII.

Christmas—Masquerades—Visit from a party of masks
—Custom of preserving wedding-clothes—New Year's
Eve—Superstitions—Professor Kalmikow's delusion
—Fiendish pranks—Phantasmagoria.

THE Christmas festivities, which commenced here at the usual time, were protracted till Twelfth-day, or the term of Epiphany. They had not, however, the sweet attractions, or any of the endearing customs, observed in my native land and in other countries of Europe. There was no distribution of the consecrated wafer among the family circle, no Christmas-eve dinner or joyous meeting of friends at the social board, no busy preparations for baking Christmas cakes (*strucle*). The only observable result

of the festival was the termination of a six weeks' fast ; for not until that day did the people begin to eat meat. They also paid visits to each other's houses, and on the evening of the second day the whole town swarmed with masks.

Before touching, however, on the subject of the masquerade, I should say a few words on the round of visits which it is the custom to pay at this season.

The first day of Christmas is assigned to visits from men, the day following is given to ladies, who, apparelled in their best dresses, go round to see all their acquaintances. The whole town is then simultaneously in motion, and the streets are filled with groups of women in elegant, or at least costly dresses. During these holidays the toilette of the Berezovian ladies is seen in all its splendour ; and, among the number, may be found dresses which have cost their wearers several thousand rubles. It is, indeed, a curious display, embracing costly Chinese silks, blonds, sables, gold, pearls, precious stones, and exquisite furs.

It cannot be said that the Berezovian

ladies show much taste in the arrangement of their dress, as they constantly combine stuffs and colours wholly unsuitable ; while with the above display of costly materials, they might, if they possessed any tact, easily make a brilliant choice.

The principal and most favourable amusement at Christmas, in which all the Bere-zovians are delighted to take a part, is that of disguises ; or, what is called here a masquerade. This pastime commences, as I before remarked, on the second day after Christmas, and lasts to Epiphany. Every evening, people make their appearance in a variety of disguises ; nor is the diversion confined to the higher or richer classes, as Government functionaries and merchants ; but is shared by the humblest, and by old and young alike. Fancy costumes and masks are procured by the wealthier inhabitants from Tobolsk, and are thus brought into use from year to year, while the lower classes present themselves in less costly dresses, but which answer the same purpose. They who are too poor to procure a different costume, borrow any garments, however old

and common, from others, and disguised in these, with a handkerchief drawn over the face instead of a mask, divert themselves as well as the best. A merry heart makes everything go pleasantly.

On the approach of dusk the town is crowded with maskers, some on foot, others in sledges, proceeding from house to house ; and all frolicsome and happy—the more so if, as frequently happens, they find the doors of houses not bolted against them, and their owners willing to give them a welcome. Most of the masked parties enter the house without saying anything, or even having anything to say, and after lounging in the apartments for a few minutes, depart as they came, continuing their visits in this manner through the town. Personal acquaintances and friends, if they like to awaken curiosity venture on some pantomimes agreeing with the characters they have assumed, but do not speak. These more licensed visitors, although they may not be recognised, are requested to remain longer in the house. After perambulating the whole town, the masked parties usually terminate their visits

in some friendly circle, where they have been invited to pass the rest of the evening.

The most distinguished of our masked company consisted of Government functionaries, with a sprinkling of the principal aristocracy of the town. Among them we recognised the Director of Police in a Cossack costume ; the judge of the district dressed as a Hussar ; and the paymaster-general as a Lancer ; while the postmaster wore the costume of a civilian of the seventeenth century ; the physician disguised himself as a woman ; the lady of the Director of Police appeared in a costume resembling a Cracovian ; the professor's sister wore a dress of a nondescript character, suggested by her own fancy, and lastly our friend, Madame X——, and her brother, were disguised as Turks.

This numerous party were preceded by a violin-player, an addition which was considered a great novelty, and on that account much admired. They came to a stand before my apartments, and I could not, of course, do less than invite them in. Directly they entered, the violinist, drawing his bow

from behind his ear—as is the custom with many of these artists—struck up a popular Polish mazourka, awakening in my troubled heart a throng of recollections. The masks then danced—or rather attempted to dance, for the Berezovians have no true conception of that elegant art. But each couple performed their gyrations in the way nature prompted, and after spending an hour in such a manner as appeared to afford them great diversion, they left me, and proceeded to another house.

A custom exists at Berezov with which I was very much pleased, which is to preserve the articles of dress worn by members of the family at their marriage, and these are laid up in the wardrobe chamber from generation to generation. It is, however, considered no desecration of these valued mementos to use them on the occasion of the Christmas masquerades ; and thus one may, at such seasons, behold a series of costumes of past ages brought again to light : and it must be owned that the living scene of the identical wedding-dresses worn at different periods, recalls the past more vividly than could be done by any

records, or the most faithful traditions. For my own part, I examined them with the zeal and interest of an antiquary.

The exceeding long nights of the Christmas season are connected with a number of superstitious observances and ceremonies. The eve of the New Year, in particular, is believed to be invested with marvellous attributes, enabling individuals under certain conditions and influences, to look into the secrets of the future. Indeed, the people of Berezov in general are exceedingly credulous, and prone to believe anything supernatural and wonderful, such as the existence of apparitions, the efficacy of incantations, and all sorts of shams. They are passionately fond of having their destiny foretold, and not only greedily listen, but give implicit faith to all kinds of tales, however marvellous they may be, not allowing any doubt to be cast upon them. Every one possesses an inexhaustible fund of such stories; and though they are, for the most part, inconsistent with the ordinary course of nature, they are as firmly convinced of their truth, as if they related to something quite simple and self-

evident. One story which I happened to hear, is not a bad specimen of these wondrous tales, and will show to what an extent the credulity of the people is carried. It was narrated to me by no less an authority than a professor at the school of Berezov, and turns on an incident which he said had occurred to himself.

M. Kalmykow, for that is the teacher's name, was, during the last winter, at a friend's house where there was an evening party, forming a large circle. The company did not break up till unusually late; and he himself left about an hour after midnight, and went towards home with a Secretary of Police, whose house was situated in the same part of the town as his own. But when they were passing the police-office, the Secretary intimated that he would stop there, instead of going home, and sleep at the office, adding—"I do not wish to disturb my mother, who must have long since gone to bed, and perhaps would rebuke me for being out so late." Accordingly, they parted, and Professor Kalmykow continued his way alone. He had, however, gone but a few paces, when

he perceived his former companion by his side, and on expressing his surprise, learnt that he had found the police-office shut, and was therefore compelled to go on ; but, not to disturb his mother, he would pass the remainder of the night in the streets, till the people got up to light the fires, and he entreated the Professor to remain with him, and share his vigil. Kalmykow, however, being sleepy, would not assent to this proposition ; but, as he was much pressed, he at last acceded. The night was very cold, and there was a piercing wind ; and, to protect himself from the blast, Kalmykow drew the hood of his fur shuba over his face, and led the way into a bye-street.

Having traversed a couple or more streets, the Professor's weariness became overpowering, and he begged his companion to go home ; but he replied that they had now to wait but a short time, and they still walked on, only at a quicker step, being benumbed with cold. After walking for some time, M. Kalmykow thinking that they could not be far from his house, uncovered his face to see where they were, and was much surprised, on looking

round, to find that he was in a place which he did not recognise. He instantly turned to his companion to inquire where they were, and found that he had vanished.

He was now perfectly amazed, and made the sign of the cross. At last, through the twilight of daybreak, he discovered that he was far from town, in a lonely spot by the river Waygulka. He repeated the sign of the cross, and gaining strength from fear, ran as fast as he could towards the town, arriving quite breathless at his own house, while all its inmates were yet buried in sleep.

Up to this moment everything appears natural, and all might easily be accounted for. But next morning, the Professor meeting the Secretary, asked him why he had played him such a trick; and the latter, hearing to his astonishment the whole account of the incident, assured him that after he had parted with him in front of the police-office, he had been admitted into the police-office, and there remained for the rest of the night. The rest of the policemen, not excepting even the watchman on duty, bore testimony to what the Secretary stated. A few days after I had

heard this story, I happened to meet the Secretary, and asked him concerning the real facts of the case ; but all I had gained in reply was that he could only testify to his having been in the Professor's company till they arrived at the police-office, where they had parted, and he did not again see him till the next day.

This is but one of thousands of stories circulating at Berezov, which during the long winter evenings are recounted as something extraordinary and mysterious, and are received by the auditors as unquestionable truths. It may, indeed, be conceded that some of the narratives, however absurd they may be made, are not altogether without foundation ; but the real facts are completely perverted by superstition. It is believed that the devil appears in a variety of forms, and plays his pranks on both men and women. At times he assumes the form of some animal of the chase, and leads the hunter, flattered with the hope of an easy conquest, from place to place in pursuit, until at last he becomes entangled and bewildered in the forest. In such cases, the sign of the cross and prayer dispel the

hellish illusion, and extricate the betrayed hunter from the difficulties of his situation. Such incidents are multiplied, and repeated with various embellishments, by those who relate these stories, without exciting the least surprise in the hearers, or awakening the smallest scepticism. It is even believed that in the interval between Christmas and Epiphany a person may discern in mirrors, arranged in a certain manner, any one they may think of and wish to see, though he may be at any distance from the place. New Year's Eve in particular is considered peculiarly favourable to this species of magic ; and the belief in the appearance of the apparitions is so strong, that it is only a fear of coming in contact with evil spirits, or want of nerve to face the apparition invoked, that prevents the universal practice of the spell.

Having heard so much of such things, I became curious to know how the people could believe them ; and on the eve of the New Year, I requested that mirrors should be arranged in the manner prescribed, that I might test the efficacy of the charm. My request was carried out with the strictest

observance of all the conditions appertaining to the magic art. Shortly before midnight, a mirror was placed obliquely on the table, with its top leaning towards the wall, and having in front of it two lighted candles. Another mirror of smaller dimensions than that was put in my hands, with the glass turned from me, and held in such a way that I could only see over the upper part of the frame into the mirror before me. All being arranged, I was left alone in the room, and the doors carefully shut, which is considered an indispensable condition.

On casting my first look on the enchanted mirror, I saw two long rows of burning candles disappearing in a distant vista before me; and between them a darkened corridor of immense length terminating in impenetrable darkness. The fantastic play of lights reflected from the darkened ground, and which were very trying to the sight, did indeed represent to my imagination some undefined phantasmagoria; yet none of them could by any stretch of fancy be taken for distinct figures, and still less be recognised as those of friends.

After half-an-hour of experimentalizing, I gave up in despair. My failure excited surprise, and was attributed to my want of belief.

On my return home—the experiment having been tried at a friend's house—I related what had occurred to my landlady and her daughter, who were both strong believers in the spell. They would indeed scarcely admit the truth of my statement, and protested that if I had not succeeded, it was owing solely to the wrong arrangement of the mirrors. They urged me, therefore, to make another trial, and I willingly agreed, but more with the view of convincing them of superstition than a hope of making any new discovery. Everything was arranged as previously, all went out, and left me by myself.

Seated before the mirror, I saw for a considerable time only the same appearance as before—two rows of candles, and a long corridor between; and becoming weary, I was on the point of rising from the table, when a tiny little figure, with most distinctly defined human features, sprang from behind one of

the rows of lights, and glided into the middle of the corridor. This sudden apparition arrested me. I resumed my seat, and began to look intently at the mirror. The figure was of very diminutive dimensions. Apart from its features, which were quite distinct, it appeared to be diffused on the darkened background of the corridor, so as to leave its shape and dress hardly discernible.

A few moments afterwards the figure suddenly vanished, and the whole space of the illumined vista of the corridor became quite vacant. But this time I did not lose my patience as before, but kept my eyes fixed steadfastly on the mirror. While thus gazing, I saw another figure in the vista, which, after remaining a few moments, vanished like the first; but was speedily followed by a succession of fresh phantoms, who came and went in the same manner.

This testimony of my own senses tended in a great degree to sharpen my curiosity ; still, I must confess, it did not in the least excite my imagination. Accustomed as I have ever been to subject everything to the scrutiny of reason, I coolly considered what all this might

mean ; and not arriving at any satisfactory solution, I went on with my experiments. What, however, struck me most was, that none of the faces which I had hitherto observed, perfectly resembled each other. Some were long, others short, some broad, others oval or round. Still they appeared all to preserve the same attitude and colours, and the same braiding of the hair on their heads.

This accidental observation suggested to me the question, whether the figures seen in the mirror were not reflections of myself, caused by a process of manifold refraction, from one mirror to the other, and modified by the inclination of rays in such a manner as to appear to my eyes with the characteristic features I have described.

With a view of convincing myself how far this supposition might be true, I placed my hand on my head, and from that moment all the figures appeared with white ribbons on their heads.

To test the matter farther, I rose and put on a cap. After I changed my position, I could not, for a considerable time, find the exact inclination of the mirrors towards each

other to enable me to bring about the desired result. I turned them in different directions again and again, but nothing would appear but the two rows of lighted candles. Tired and vexed at my fruitless labour, I was about to abandon future investigation, when, by a casual movement, I hit just on the very point I wanted, and the diminutive little figures commenced leaping out anew—but now with caps on their heads.

Here I obtained an undeniable proof that these figures were but a refraction of my own person. One difficulty only remained yet to be solved—namely, how my own figure, which was covered by the mirror before me, could be reflected in full in the mirror opposite.

After a minute investigation, I perceived that the edges of the mirror standing on the table formed a polished border with a somewhat oblique deviation; from which obliquity, it appears, the radii of my figure were reflected on the mirror I held in my hand, and from it again on that beyond. I ought to add that besides the diminutive figures, there presented themselves in the

mirror other optical phenomena, which it was difficult satisfactorily to account for—for instance, I saw a turret with balconies, which were both of regular dimensions; and a garden, or rather sort of grove, formed of leafless trees.

I most carefully examined all the surrounding objects in my room, without finding for a long time a single one by which these phenomena could be explained; but the difficulty stimulated me to further inquiry. Finally, I unravelled the secret. The mirror in my hands was broken at one of the angles, and the fracture glued over with a tiny slip of paper. The fractured part, being many times reflected in the other glass, was transformed into a perfect garden or grove, and had arisen simply from the reflection of a thread which had accidentally come in contact with the frame on the very spot where I held my hand.

There remained yet one phenomenon to be explained, and this cost me by far more trouble than any of the others. At times, I perceived at the end of the darkened corridor sudden gleams of light, appearing in

the shape of a sun ; their rays and their luminous centre being so dazzling, and vanishing so quickly, as to render it quite impossible to determine their precise character. For some time, the phenomenon was of frequent recurrence, but soon afterwards it entirely vanished, and I was unable by any means to bring it back.

After a few minutes' examination of everything around, I obtained a solution of the mystery. On the wall, just opposite the mirror, hung a cloak, from the hood of which dangled an orb of brass, shining brilliantly ; and this, when the cloak moved, threw the rays of light in a certain angle on the mirror, where they were concentrated, and being refracted in the looking-glasses, appeared in the background as I have described.

Having in this manner discovered the causes of the different visual phenomena, I proceeded triumphantly to my hostess's room to communicate the result, flattering myself with the hope that the experiment I had made would in a great measure tend to destroy among the Berezovians their belief

in supernatural revelations. But I was grievously disappointed. No one would so much as listen to the explanations I wished to give them; but all exclaimed with one voice that the figures I had seen were those of my children, and that I only refused, through obstinacy, to believe in the evidence of my own senses. The worst of it was that, on the day following, the whole of the town was put in possession of all the particulars of the discoveries I was alleged to have made, accompanied with still more wonderful additions; and thus, instead of diminishing, as I had hoped, I only added to the stock of fabulous lore already in circulation among these simple people.

CHAPTER VIII.

New Year's Day—Letters from home—Evening party—Various games and songs—Judge Slobodzki—Expelling the Devils—The town in alarm—Arrival of a Polish physician—Fair at Berezov—Fur trade—Berezovian foxes—A walk in a severe frost.

THE first day of the New Year, 1840, was ushered in by the ringing of the church bells, the merry peal of which reminded every one of the visits and felicitations which were to be interchanged with their friends. This custom of mutual congratulations, an unmeaning formality when there is nothing to be congratulated upon, wrung a deep sigh from my bosom. "Would to God," I exclaimed, "that the new year were already at an end!"

Early in the morning, the men set out to

call on their friends, and about mid-day the ladies went on their round of congratulatory visits. They were attired in expensive and splendid dresses, as on Christmas-day. The universal merriment and gaiety, far from inspiring me with cheerfulness, impressed me with the deeper melancholy. What I most wished for was to shut myself up, and remain alone in my solitude; but could I close my door against the friends who were so kind to me, especially on a day which brought them so much felicity? And on that very day Heaven illumined even my horizon with a beam of happiness. The post arrived; and I received letters from home. Thus, amidst universal rejoicing, and expressions of good will from strangers, the tender voices of my children reached me from afar. Never could I have commenced the new year in this place with more pleasant feelings.

To render that day a complete festival to me, I was invited by the lady of the Director of Police, to an evening party at her residence, to meet many of my Berezovian acquaintances. The company, which consisted of the principal persons of the place, was numerous, and the

reception was as cordial as munificent. The entertainment commenced with coffee, tea, confectionary, and a variety of sweetmeats. These were followed by various amusements, and dancing not being yet the fashion, social games were resorted to in lieu of it. Some of these pastimes belong exclusively to the day. One, which bears the name of dish-songs, (*podbliudnié piesni*), is conducted in the following manner:—

The persons who take part in the game, and who are usually young maidens, deposit some article of jewellery, as a ring, ear-ring, brooch, or clasp, in a deep dish, which is presented to a married lady who can sing the dish-songs. The choice, on the present occasion, fell on Madame X——, who, accordingly, took the dish with the forfeits, covered it with a napkin, and gathering up the corners, made it look like a tambourine, or a drum. The maidens then formed in a circle, and Madame X——, holding the dish or urn of fate in her hand, began chanting in a slow and solemn tone some stanzas of a song appropriate to the occasion, at the same time shaking the urn so as to

mingle the forfeits together. Every one of the party joined in her song, forming thus a kind of chorus, which was noisy and joyous enough, though not throughout harmonious.

At the termination of the different stanzas, each of which bore some prophetic allusion to matrimony, a maiden approached the dish, and thrusting her hand under the napkin, drew forth at random one of the articles of jewellery. This done, all crowded round the vase to learn what was symbolized by the trinket, and every one was obliged to take to herself the prophecy contained in the chanted verse, whether it were good or bad, flattering or sarcastic. Thus the several stanzas gave rise to much merriment, and the company indulged in jokes, allusions, inuendoes, and frequently perverted interpretations of the prophetic verse, as the position of the person to whom it referred admitted of such familiarity. The songs in circulation for this game are very numerous. I have seen a collection of them published in a book.

This pastime was succeeded by others, most of them not unknown in our country,

and which may even have been transplanted from it—as the Censure, the Toilet (*gotowalnia*), and the Gift (*darowang*).^{*} Others

^{*} Our author's conjecture on this subject is fully borne out by history, one part of the ancient inhabitants of Berezov having originally come, as she has before shown, from the Don and the Dnieper, and having been since augmented by the exiles from the Lithuanian and Polish provinces, who carried with them many of their own usages and customs. These have been preserved, not merely in tradition, but in actual practice, as the dearest remembrances of the land of their birth. Hence the identity between many other Siberian customs with those existing now-a-days among the people of the Dnieper, the Niemen, and the Bug, may easily be accounted for ; such as the *posedienki*, or sittings in summer after the shades of evening have interrupted all out-of-door labours, and which, under the plea of rest, are often protracted, at the house of some hospitable neighbour, till late in the night ; and the *wetcherinki*, or evening meetings, during the long nights of winter, which, like the former, are spent by young people in playing various games, and singing and dancing to music of the *balabaïka*, a kind of cithern. All the ceremonies of courtship and marriage are copied by the Siberians from the land of their forefathers. Among these is a *diewishnik*, or maiden festival, in which the friends of the bride are the actors. Having been regaled with cedar-nuts and wine, the maidens, under the

were exclusively national, among which were the Czar, the Choristers (*korowody*), and the Boyars. I shall describe one or two of them, and the rest will be easily understood, as they are all nearly of the same character.

In the game of Choristers, the players, who are of both sexes, range themselves in a ring, resembling that of the Mazurka dance, after which they move gravely round in a circle, singing together stanzas of songs composed for the purpose. In one of the stanzas a person is required to step into the middle of the ring, where he is encircled, as it were,

leadership of the *swacha*, sing in chorus certain ancient wedding songs, in which the bride is compared with a swan, or some other aquatic bird, about to be torn from them, and there is much wailing and lamentation at her fate. The same is done at the ceremony of loosing the bride's tresses, which takes place in the presence of the bridegroom, and by which the cessation of the bride's independence is symbolised. These ceremonies are followed by others at church, where, according to the ancient Slavonic custom, the bridegroom and the bride are either crowned, or led around the altar, with crowns carried above their heads. In ancient songs, throughout Slavonia, the bridegroom is represented as a king, and the bride as a queen.—Ed.

with an ever-moving wreath, out of which he has to select a partner. The chorus, meanwhile, chant an appropriate stanza of the song; and when this, which is supposed to operate as a charm, is ended, the choice must be made, which is done by dropping a handkerchief on the ground before the elect, who, taking up the handkerchief, enters the circle, and places it on the shoulders of her partner. They then move about together, chanting an appropriate stanza. Having finished their song, the couple give each other a kiss, when the first person unites with the ring, while the second remains in the middle, where, after the same ceremonies, she chooses another partner, and is herself emancipated. Thus the game proceeds, till all the players have had their turn in the ring.

The game of Czar is something similar. It commences with a choral song by a circle of players. After the first chant is over, the Czar is called upon by the choir to choose a wife—a king's daughter. Accordingly, one is named by the Czar, and he endeavours to seize her, but she tries to escape outside the ring. The Czar pursues her, and after she

has evaded him for some time, succeeds in making her a captive. He then leads her into the midst of the circle, and the company begin a chant, describing their mutual duties towards each other. The princess is admonished not to fly from the Czar, but to respect and bow to him; and, accordingly, she instantly makes a low curtsey to the monarch. After this, she is ordered to jump; and this she must also do, as well as anything she may be commanded. Then the Czar is addressed, and admonished to treat this king's daughter well, and not to upbraid her, nor to beat her, but to love and kiss her. The Czar, in proof of his readiness to fulfil these conditions, immediately gives the princess a kiss, which she returns, in token of her obedience and love. This terminates the career of the two actors, and their places are taken by others.

The game of Boyar is, with some slight variation, conducted in the same way. Indeed, most of the games of the Berezovians terminate in kisses. All penalties for forfeits and for the recovery of them are thus dis-

charged, kisses being established as the standard medium of exchange.

These amusements were protracted till four o'clock in the morning, at which hour the guests sat down to a plentiful supper. The proceedings had frequently been interrupted by various masks, and persons in disguise, who, forming no part of the invited company, seemed to have good-naturedly come in to make a display of their costumes; and after walking for a while about the apartments, retired unknown.

At this New Year's assembly I made a new acquaintance, in the person of a functionary named Slobodzki, a judge of the Berezov district. He was by name as well as by birth a Pole. He still continued a Roman Catholic; but having been for a number of years in the service, he had forgotten the customs and even the language of his native country.

The day preceding the eve of Twelfth Night, that is, the 4th of January, is the last allowed by the Church for the favourite diversion of masks, and on this closing day the public outdid all the others in the

variety and splendour of their costumes. Some persons appeared seized by madness. I saw with my own eyes a dame of sixty dance on a large shovel (*lopata*), her grey, dishevelled hair covering her face instead of a mask—conduct which not only struck me as a disgrace to her age, but which painfully recalled to my mind what ancient tradition recorded of the revels of the witches on the Bald Mountain (*Lysa Gora*)*—filling my mind with horror and aversion.

I here likewise saw engaged in these mad revels, a mother who but a few weeks ago had lost her daughter, her only child; over whose bier I had myself shed tears, deeply

* *Lysa Gora*, meaning literally Bald Mountain, and according to tradition, it was in Poland what the Blocksberg was in Germany—a spot where witches anciently held their assemblies. The Polish witches used to ride to the rendezvous through the air on shovels, while the German rode on broomsticks. The *Lysa Gora* is celebrated in Polish history as the site of a temple devoted to a Slavonic deity. Subsequently, on the conversion of the Poles to Christianity, a church, called the Holy Cross, was built on the spot, with a monastery of the Benedictines; and both these edifices are still in existence.—Ed.

compassionating the parent, whose wounds I had thought to be so deep as to remain for ever incurable. Yet now she presented a spectacle as unsuited to her age as to her position—a breach of good feeling at which I could not but be shocked. At length all this madness came to an end, and was followed by a fast-day—the eve of Twelfth Night.

Early next morning—that is, on the 5th of January—just as we were getting up, our landlady entered our apartment, holding in one hand a vase filled with holy water, and a sprinkling brush in the other. Astonished at this apparition, I asked what it meant; but without suffering a word to escape her lips, she commenced sprinkling the holy water in all directions. First she threw it on the walls and in the corners of the room; afterwards she crept under the beds and sofa; and then climbed up the stove, and behind it—and so, successively, to the innermost recesses and crevices of the apartments, besprinkling them all copiously with the contents of her vessel. We soon saw that the formula would not admit of her gratifying

our curiosity by a single word until she had performed what she had to do, and therefore we waited the result in silence. When the sprinkling was finished, she began to explain her proceedings.

“You have,” said she, “received masks in your apartments, and with the masks devils intruded into the house; for, without their aid, how could the maskers turn round and dance as they did?” She then further informed us that, although the favourite season of these hellish spirits was past, they were unwilling to abandon the society of man, with whom they had been fraternizing; and they were in the habit, when the festivities were over, of secreting themselves in corners, whence they occasionally emerged to play off their pranks, causing a good deal of mischief. She assured us, however, that we had now nothing to fear on this score, as she had taken care to penetrate every nook, even to the smallest chink, so that they could find no refuge in the house. This speech she ended with a hearty laugh at the discomfiture of the infernal imps.

On the following night there was a violent

storm, and the wind beat against the window-shutters in such a manner that we could not sleep. In the morning our landlady came in, and asked us how we had passed the night. On giving her a favourable account, as we did not wish to distress her, she was extremely rejoiced, and attributed our quiet slumbers to the precaution she had taken ; assuring us, at the same time, that the storm and the knocking at the window-shutters were simply owing to the malignant spirits. These gentry, we found, having been expelled by the power of the holy water, had been attempting to come back through the window, but not finding the smallest chink unconsecrated, they were obliged to give up the project, and in revenge endeavoured to beat down the window-shutters.

The Berezovians may be said to be still moving within the precincts of the invisible world, where their excessive credulity keeps their minds enthralled ; and those who should endeavour by the force of reason to emancipate them from these superstitions, would, I fear, destroy the most poetical element of their existence.

I was told by a young and jovial wag here, that having exhausted all imaginable means for disguise during the previous season, he had conceived the absurd idea of besmearing his face with soot, and putting on a black costume, with a tail attached behind, according to the popular conception of the Evil One. In this disguise he waited till the masks visited his house. Soon a numerous party of them arrived in sledges, and not wishing to be seen, he concealed himself in the lobby till they were departing, when he mixed with the crowd, and then took his seat in one of the sledges.

They halted before another house, and were all alighting, when he was perceived, and their consternation and fright may be more easily imagined than described. Before many minutes elapsed all the sledges were deserted. The maskers flew in different directions, and spread terror among the inhabitants in whose houses they took refuge, and the whole town was soon filled with consternation. The young man who was the cause of the panic, afraid of incurring a censure from the party whom he had so frightened, himself flew

home as fast as he could, threw off his obnoxious disguise, and took good care to keep the secret of the wild prank he had played. An incident like this, of course, was not forgotten, and went far to confirm the people in their belief that devils often mixed in the masquerades.

Soon after Christmas our society here received a most agreeable accession, by the arrival of Dr. Wakulinski, who had been long expected, having been appointed by the Government a physician at Berezov. He had been educated at the University of Wilna, at the expense of the Government, and was sent to this distant place to complete the period of public service assigned to the *alumni* of that class. This welcome incident was followed by the fair of Berezov, of which I had previously heard so much, that I had great expectations of it. I imagined, indeed, that it would be something like our own fairs, and expected to see more people, more movement, than is usual in ordinary life. But in this I was disappointed. A few merchants of Tobolsk and Sargat, in their way home from the Obdorsk fair, lingered awhile at Berezov,

and were lodged in the houses of their old acquaintances. During their sojourn, they employed themselves in reloading the skins they had brought from the Obdorsk fair, and despatching the cargoes to Irbit. The remainder of these goods was disposed of by wholesale among the mercantile houses in town trading with the Ostiaks, and also in small portions to the Ostiaks themselves, settled in the vicinity of Berezov. These mercantile operations, however, are transacted in the various offices, and in so quiet a way as to be scarcely perceptible out of doors.

The little stir that pervades at Berezov fair, is excited by traders from Susdal on their return from Obdorsk. This class of pedlars carry about boxes of sundry commodities, such as needles which are as thick as spikes, pens as blunt and clumsy as nails, ribands, tape, incense, &c., and sell them in retail. Canvas for worsted work and designs of gorgeous colours, however tasteless and *bizarre*, find a ready market at Berezov. Some of the rich amateurs have the walls of their apartments adorned with this sort of tapestry, and women take them as patterns for their beadwork. During

the fair the wholesale merchants of Berezov buy up kinds of fur from the small dealers, who may have acquired them from the Ostiaks and Samoiedes. These articles they pack on sledges, and go with them direct to the Irbit fair. In this way considerable quantities of furs are despatched yearly from this place, consisting of the skins of white reindeer, squirrel, ermine, fox, young reindeer (*nepluyè*), and *norniki*.* These skins form the basis of the fur trade. The value fixed on them in this place is accepted as a standard value everywhere, and their prices remain fixed, scarcely ever varying. The price of other furs, on the contrary, varies very much in the market, depending frequently on their excellence and beauty. Such is the case with grey fox skins (*siwodushki*), the price of which frequently ranges from twenty-five to one hundred and twenty assignat rubles; and in like manner the skin of the black fox and of various species of striate fox, as well as the fur of blue reindeer and sables, is very uncertain.

* *Norniki*, animals little known elsewhere, and living in subterranean holes—*nora*, in Slavonic, meaning a hole.

In my estimation, however, no fur is equal in beauty to that of the black fox. The hair is long, soft and glossy, and as black as charcoal, without any admixture of brown, except a very narrow yellow stripe running from the throat to the belly in the shape of a cross. On its legs a silvery hair, shooting out from the black, contributes to heighten the effect of the jet and throws out its lustre. These skins fetch four hundred assignat rubles, and are such a rarity that at the latest Obdorsk fair only twenty-eight could be procured.

The skins of foxes from the district of Berezov are far more prized than those brought from the steppe—not to speak of the commonest foxes, as *bialodushki*,* a name derived from their colour. This is a yellowish-white, intermixed in some parts with spots of black hair. Even these obtain a higher price than those of the steppe. The latter are commonly browner; but their hair is dry and rough, and liable to be soon rubbed off; whereas the fur of the more northern region is distinguished

* *Bialodushki*, literally, means “white souls.”

by a dense soft hair, and usually is much more durable.

The fur trade extends to the skins of a species of ducks, called *gogarki*; which are most beautiful in appearance, and much in demand. Their colour is a dark violet, and the skin is very strong and elastic. They are used for little caps, and for outside coverings of fur shubas. A quantity of feathers and swan skins are also exported from this place.

Though Berezov is admitted to be the seat of trade for the most valuable and most costly skins, yet, strange to say, it is very difficult to procure in the town any fur garment ready for use. There are, in fact, no proper furriers or tanners here. All the hides and skins are sent either to Irbit or Nijni Novogorod, where they are sold by fur dealers in their raw state, and undergo the process of tanning and dressing by others; and not till then do they find their way back in a finished condition to Berezov. Thus fur garments of the choicest quality are obtained in these towns at a much more reasonable price than at the original market.

The whole of the furs sold at Obdorsk as

yasak, are in the first instance brought to the Custom-house at Berezov, and afterwards transported to the Government stores at Tobolsk. Here the skins of inferior quality are sold, and the more valuable portion sent to St. Petersburg. The last frequently includes most exquisite specimens.

The severe frost of the winter did not keep me in-doors. Even when the mercury had frozen, and the alcohol, or spirit thermometer was at 50° Reaumur, I went out to try what effect it would produce upon me, and particularly on my skin and lungs. Much to my surprise, I did not experience any unpleasant sensation. I observed, however, that my breath was immediately transformed into a visible thick column of condensed vapour; and in all probability that very column surrounding me in a great degree screened my lungs from coming into immediate contact with the external air. The saliva, before it reached the ground, was congealed in the air. Owing, perhaps, to the quantity of clothing which I put on, the frost could not much affect my skin, and the little portion of my

face that I had left uncovered could hardly be made the subject of an experiment.

At the approach of winter, all the birds, unable to sustain the severity of frost, leave Berezov in flocks, with the single exception of the magpie ; which, while keeping close to the precincts of the town, remains in undisputed possession of the aerial regions. There are no animals in the forests but those covered with thick warm fur, which is impervious to cold, and which Nature, in bountiful regard to their condition, has made denser and richer than that of any animals of their kind inhabiting more southern regions.

Despite the intensity of the cold, our landlord sent out his servants to the river-side to fetch some hay. Two of the servants returned with frost-bitten faces. Brandy was applied to the frozen parts, and the application repeated until the smarting pain diminished. The parts continued for some time red, as if they had been subjected to blisters.

CHAPTER IX.

Matrimonial alliance—Twelfth Night, or the Maslanca *fete*—Regulations restricting the sale of spirits—Visit from an exiled Tartar Khan—His dress and orders—Ceremony in Lent, and its effects—Remarks on duelling—Lenten diet—Its effects on health—Assimilation of Russian settlers to the Ostiaks.

DR. WAKULINSKI, whose arrival I have already noticed, had not been long at Berezov, when an attachment sprung up between him and my friend Josephine. She received his declaration, and the feeling being reciprocal, their marriage only waited the consent of the Emperor.*

* Persons banished to Siberia, whatever their previous rank, become serfs of the crown, the property of the Czar, and cannot even marry, as in the instance here mentioned, without his consent.

Nothing could be more gratifying to me than this event. Berezov would no longer be lonely and solitary to Josephine. Love, when mutual, can render any place pleasant and agreeable. If the impediments arising out of Josephine's peculiar position could be only removed, and the alliance consummated, I felt confident that they would make a happy couple; Dr. Wakulinski being a man of excellent disposition, with youthful and unsullied feelings, and Josephine's character mild and affectionate.

On the day which brought about this happy event, sitting at nightfall by my framework at the window, I heard a tinkling of bells in the streets, and a tumultuous noise from a crowd of people. Amidst the complete silence which prevails at Berezov, and an existence so uniform, the most trifling incident is apt to attract attention. I tried to look through the window to see what had happened, but the thick incrustation of ice on the panes debarred all sight. Meanwhile the noise approached nearer, and grew more audible. At last I found one spot in the window more transparent, and looking

through, I saw a multitude of people assembled round a cart of extraordinary construction, drawn by a number of horses, adorned with bells of various sizes, which tinkled at every movement.

The long, huge sledge bore on the top a large wheel, in a horizontal position, from the centre of which, placed in the axle-hole, rose a high mast, surmounted by another wheel of smaller dimensions. A number of ropes were secured to the upper wheel, whence they descended outside the lower one to the base of the sledge, forming a sort of cone, which was covered with coarse canvas, so as to present the appearance of an Ostiak *tchoum*. This moveable tent was occupied by about fifteen persons in masks; while one man, also masked, stood on the upper wheel, at the very summit of the mast, a spectacle altogether amusing, though one could not but feel alarmed for his safety. The car was surrounded by a vast crowd of people, every one here being eager for novelty and frolic, and it came to a stand just in front of our house.

Some of the masked persons now descended

from the platform, and entered my apartment, asking me whether I would receive their wayfaring crew. I could not do otherwise than comply with their request, and thereupon the whole company of masks entered, followed by as many of the spectators as our rooms would hold.

The costumes of the maskers were a most extraordinary burlesque, comprising coats of matting, edged with *galons* and rich embroidery, dresses made of shavings of wood, and the like oddities. As soon as they entered, they began to dance, and the performance was most grotesque. Their music was the *balabaïka*, a sort of guitar, which excited the greatest merriment and delight among the spectators. After they had thus amused themselves for some time, the itinerant actors again mounted their Thespian car, and, followed by a crowd of spectators, which increased at every step, proceeded to visit other houses, where they went through the same performance.

I was afterwards informed this mummary is called *maslanca* (butter-milk), being commenced on Thursday after the so-called

Cheese-Sunday, amidst great rejoicings and shouts, and continued without interruption till Saturday. On that day the car is drawn with great pomp and solemnity, and amidst a vast concourse of people, to the outskirts of the town, and there broken in pieces; and this operation is called the burial of butter-milk.*

* This *Maslanca fete*—or *Maslinica*, as it is otherwise called—is celebrated in many parts of European Russia, though everywhere varying in its features, and often modified by European manners. A curious account of its celebration at St. Petersburg, which terminated in a dreadful catastrophe, is given by M. Jermann, a modern German writer. “Some years ago,” he says, “the performances of the pantomime company of the German Lehman were the chief attraction of the *Maslinica*, the greatest and most thoroughly national festival of the Russians, which occurs in the last week of the carnival. There was a perfect rage for these pantomimes; all Petersburg flocked to see them; and although they were repeated every two hours, the temporary theatre in which they were played, upon the Admiralty Square, was continually filled to suffocation. During one of the performances, while the pit was in full glee and uproar of delight, the Harlequin suddenly rushed upon the stage, and exclaimed: ‘Fire! *sauve qui peut!*’ The announcement was received with a general burst of laughter at what was taken for a stupid joke. The

As merry-making is the beginning, so it is the end of this droll festival; and the funeral is accompanied with copious libations, which

misapprehension was fatal, for it shortened the brief space during which escape was possible, and in a few moments the flames burst out from behind the scenes, and the wooden building was in a blaze. The audience, with wild terror, rushed to the doors; unfortunately these opened *inward*, and the pressure of the frantic crowd closed them as effectually as iron bars and bolts. Exit was impossible. A workman outside of the theatre, who had assisted in its construction, stepped forth, and declared that he knew every joint of the boards and beams, and could quickly open a passage, and wished to make an aperture with an axe. But the *budnik*, or policeman on duty, would not permit this to be done till his superiors came to decide upon the matter. At last urgent necessity overcame every other consideration; the punctilious police agent was pushed aside, several men seized axes, and soon a large opening was made in the side of the building. A dense cloud of smoke made the crowd recoil, and when it had cleared away, a horrible spectacle presented itself. In closely packed masses sat men, women, and children, apparently still gazing on the stage, which was a sheet of flame. Rescue had come too late; the sudden smoke, filling the crowded building, had stifled the entire audience: not one was saved!"—*Bilder aus St. Petersburg, von E. Jermann. Berlin, 1851.*

do not cease until the last moiety furnished by the liberality of the spectators has been expended.

Drunkenness is said to be the vice of this northern region, and temperance is the rarest of virtues.

From the humblest Ostiak to the highest Imperial functionary, with very few exceptions, all evince a strong propensity to the immoderate use of ardent spirits; even among women intoxication is not uncommon. An Ostiak who once gives way to this pernicious habit, will sacrifice his last fox-skin for a few glasses of brandy. This propensity in the natives is not unknown, and is but too often taken advantage of by designing Russian traders, who, being actuated by nothing but their love of gain, secretly procure these poor ignorant people abundant supplies of spirits, and deprive them of all the earnings of their labour.

To obviate these vile practices, the Government has framed regulations restricting the exportation of ardent spirits into the interior of the country, and regulating the consumption by law. Not only at Berezov, but

throughout the Siberian provinces, wherever stores of brandy are to be found, the inhabitants are unable to obtain at one time more than a certain quantity of spirits. This restriction extends even to the Government officials, who, when sent on a journey, are not permitted to take more spirits than is absolutely required for their personal use. Still means are found by all parties to evade the execution of the law.

One day I received a visit from a Tartar Khan, who was brought here a few weeks previously, having incurred a sentence of banishment in consequence of the revolt of the Tartar horde of which he was the chief. Not knowing a word of Russian, he came accompanied by a Tartar interpreter, as well as by some Kirghies who formed his suite. He was a man of about sixty years of age, hale, vigorous, and very corpulent, and rather given to garrulity. He expatiated on the splendour of his house, his riches, his children, and the number of his wives, mentioning one wife in particular with great emphasis. As this was all said in the Tartar language, it had to be repeated to me by the

interpreter; but either distrusting the integrity of his spokesman, or fearing that he did not rightly understand him, he accompanied the narrative with explanatory gesticulations, which made it rather impressive. With tears in his eyes, he compared his present miserable condition with his former prosperity, complaining that from the moment of his banishment he had not even once tasted foal's meat, which he considered a great grievance. He was now obliged to subsist on the allowance of fifty assignat kopeks (about ten pence) per day. He expressed a great veneration for the Emperor Alexander, who had presented him with a golden medal emblazoned with his effigy, encircled by a double row of brilliants, and on the obverse bearing an inscription in Arabic. This he wore suspended from his neck by a blue ribbon. He also said that the same Emperor presented him with a splendid sword, the handle of which was studded with precious stones; but he regretted that he had it not with him.

He wore a long and capacious silk dress, in the fashion of a dressing-gown, and a

pointed velvet cap with ear flaps, and lined with sable. This he took off on entering the room, keeping on the head only a small round scull-cap of black velvet, embroidered with gold, and resembling the *krumka* worn by the Polish Jews.

The Khan complained bitterly of the state of emaciation and leanness into which he had fallen, though it did not at all strike me, seeing his broad treble chin hang down on his chest, and the folds of his thick neck reposing on his shoulders. But in proof of his assertion, he called my attention to his capacious garment, which, he said, was formerly but just wide enough to envelop his body. I found, indeed, that the Tartar estimate of beauty was regulated by the amount of fat, for even when dilating on the beauties of his favourite wife, he laid the greatest stress on her *embonpoint*, and did all he could, by means of gestures, to impress me with a clear idea of her extraordinary rotundity.

I observed that the medal which dangled from his neck was so covered with dirt, that, instead of being an ornament, it was an object of disgust; and I proposed that he

should leave it with me, and I would have it cleaned for him. He was much pleased with this proposal, though it caused him some surprise, and he was, I could see, rather disinclined to part with the decoration, even for a moment. Still, he had so much confidence in me, that he did not scruple to leave it.

On the first day of Lent, it is customary at Berezov for every one, without any exception, to call upon their neighbours and ask pardon for the transgressions and offences they may have committed against them. The junior branches of a family especially, whatever is their degree of relationship, are expected to perform this most solemn act towards their seniors. Not being at all aware of this custom, I went to pay a visit to Madame Nizgorodtyow, whom I found receiving these penitential calls from the numerous members of her family—for a lady like her, both from her age and superior position, and also from having a number of children, grand-children, and other young relations, necessarily had a great number of visitors on this solemn day. Among others were most of the Imperial functionaries,

with their wives and children, and many of the citizens of Berezov, who were connexions of her wealthy house, and who were dressed in their holiday garments. All were bowing reverently before the old lady, and soliciting pardon for their offences. Her sons and daughters, sons-in-law and daughters-in-law, and relatives near and remote, were falling at her feet, and humbly supplicating her forgiveness. The venerable matron received these marks of homage with becoming dignity, and as not beyond what was her due. When this part of the ceremony was accomplished, the members of the family asked pardon of each other in the same humble manner, in the order of their age and rank.

To me this spectacle presented something deeply affecting—something akin to my ideas of primitive Christianity. With the inhabitants of this remote part of the world, the custom is not a mere empty ceremony, but is really directed by religious feeling, and is accompanied by the most beneficial effects. I was assured that many persons, who were known to have entertained a

mutual grudge and hostility towards each other, on joining in this devotional act, so intimately connected with religious sentiments, have been led by the example of others, to forget their differences, and become reconciled friends; and in case of parties showing no such feeling, their friends have interposed, and have hardly ever failed to bring about a reconciliation.

Here it may be as well to remark that the quarrels and disagreements which prevail here, differ as much in character from those arising among civilized communities as they do in their origin, and anger and revenge are manifested in a more striking manner. I will adduce but one example. In a quarrel which recently took place, one man bit off his adversary's nose, and the sufferer was obliged to appear in public minus that important feature. Yet such acts are attributed to violent impulses of passion rather than a malevolent disposition. With these people, in fact, revenge is unpremeditated, and the result of ungovernable fury at the moment.

The savage practice of duelling, which is

so much condemned both by religion and reason, but which Europe, the centre of civilization, will not relinquish, has not yet penetrated to this remote corner of the world. In the event of their passions being aroused to a high pitch, the Berezovians will, indeed, come to blows, and even inflict wounds; but as soon as their rage subsides, they take a rational view of their quarrel, and are easily prevailed upon to make it up. Moderation and forgiveness of injuries are thus commonly practised, and are commended as the highest virtues.

I will relate one instance of generous forbearance which came under my own knowledge. The day before Lent commenced, one of the most respectable and wealthy citizens of Berezov was assaulted in the street by a young man, a merchant's son, who was tipsy, an occurrence not uncommon during the carnival. In this state he was inclined to pick a quarrel with any one he chanced to meet, and happening to encounter this quiet *pater familias*, he, without any provocation, fell upon him, and beat him severely. The injured citizen, when calling at my house on

the following day, asked me if I had witnessed the assault, as it took place just in front of my window. I replied in the negative, and he then told me everything that had happened, adding: "Had I been inclined to defend myself, I could have repaid him with tenfold severity, as I was perfectly sober, and am much stronger than he, and he was both drunk and lame. But as the incident happened just in front of your house, I was ashamed to retaliate. What would you have thought of me had you seen me outstepping the bounds of forbearance? And what satisfaction could it be to me to have beaten a drunken man, who, besides, was a cripple?"

And here I must bear witness that the moderation of the injured man was by no means attributable to cowardice, as he was vastly superior in strength. Still I could not conceal from myself how very strange his conduct appeared, being totally at variance with my ideas on such matters; and, in fact, it grated on my feelings when I heard the story related by the sufferer himself. But whatever may have been my

preconceived opinion, I could not help expressing my approval of the course he had pursued.

Lent, with the Siberians who belong to the Greek Church, is very strictly observed, even fish being excluded from their table; and as the country produces no vegetables, or fruit, their food is for the time necessarily very poor. The national *kivas*, and dishes made of flour, grutz, and barley, with the addition of some turnips and radishes, the only vegetables growing at Berezov, constitute nearly the whole of their culinary resources.

In the preparation of their Lenten dishes the fat of fish is used, and the smell of this accessory is unbearable. Every Russian house, during Lent, is filled with the odour. Linseed and hempseed oils, disagreeable as their smell is, are, in comparison with the strong rancid stench of fish, absolute perfume. The slush is obtained by frying the entrails of the richer species of fish in the oven. When the fat has been thus extracted, the more solid portions of the fish are packed in casks, and preserved, under the name of *warki*. The

stench from the *warki* is even more repulsive than that of the fat; yet the Siberians are extremely fond of it.

Oil of cedar-nuts is sometimes imported from Tobolsk; but as the article is reckoned a dainty, it makes its appearance only at the tables of the rich, and even then only on the occasion of great festivities.

Berezov, indeed, is not unprovided with a considerable quantity of vegetable oil, though it is never used for human food, and the inhabitants do not believe that it can be made available for such a purpose. They employ it solely for the lamps before the images of their saints.

Among the most exquisite dainties of the table on fast-days, may be reckoned the berries, golubitza and brusnitza. They are kept throughout the winter in a frozen state, and dissolved only when wanted for use. Syrups, refreshing juices, and various kinds of sweetmeats are made of them. They are also introduced into the pirog cakes, and are even very good in their natural state. The common, or every-day pirog, used on fast-days, is most frequently prepared from turnip; it

is served at table quite hot, immersed in the fat of fish. It cannot be called a great dainty, but it is more palatable than many other Lenten dishes.

The Berezovians are passionately fond of raw fish. In winter they eat it in its congealed state, cut into small thin slices. They eat it cold, before it is freed from frost. Sometimes the slices are peppered, but they are never salted; and this horrid mess is greedily swallowed. As soon as the dish is brought in, every one pounces upon it, and helps himself to some slices, which he instantly devours. While the parties are thus regaling themselves, the hostess hastens to the pantry to fetch another dishful of the fish, and it is renewed again and again before all are satisfied. Fresh fish, eaten as it is taken from the river, is esteemed a great delicacy in summer. Indeed, so much and so universally is it prized, that when the fishermen are seen drawing their nets from the river, people of all kinds will flock to the spot, and as the fish are tossed out on the shore, join in the common feast.

Persons composing a fishing party, are all

provided with knives, and the instant that the net is drawn up, they spring upon it; and every one selecting the fish he considers best, scrapes off the scales, and swallows it piece-meal, not only while the fish is yet alive, but actually quivering with pain. This banquet is discussed without either salt or bread.

I had frequent opportunities of witnessing these scenes, and, seeing how much all the inhabitants relished this sort of food, I began at last to think that the aversion I felt to it, was but a prejudice, contracted by my education, and consequently I resolved to conquer it. With all the courage I could muster, I took up some fragments of fish, yet quivering with life; but, alas! all my attempts to swallow them were vain. Chew them as I might, they would not go down; and I was obliged, in defiance of my strongest determination, to spit them out.

I was more successful in an experiment on a frozen fish, of which I was able to swallow a few slices; and, though I cannot boast that I relished them much, or should choose it for my daily food, I at least succeeded in conquering my repugnance to it; so that I may

absolutely aver, that, had it not been for the total absence of salt, and for the blood streaming from the fish while chewed, when it begins to thaw, and above all, for the idea, ever present to my mind, that I was actually eating raw fish, I should almost have attributed to it a delicate flavour. This I can affirm on the authority of the Berezovians themselves, particularly those who are in the habit of fishing in the Oby Sea, where they spend several months yearly, that raw fish is not only their daily food, but is considered by them the most wholesome and most palatable, and, on the other hand, they declared that boiled fish soon palls, and becomes distasteful to the stomach. The fishing parties, consequently, subsist almost entirely on raw fish, biscuits, and tea.

The Berezovians also consider raw fish to be the most efficacious means of curing chronic diseases; and in cases of any one suffering from them a long time, losing strength and gradually declining, and the malady baffling all medical care, the patient is usually taken on the sea-shore, and there fed on raw fish, and frequently brought home in perfect health.

I have myself seen an invalid, whose recovery had been despaired of, and who was given up by medical men ; but who, after sojourning for several months on the sea-coast, and using the raw fish diet, had completely recovered his health.

Whether it be owing to climate, or local necessities, or to continual intercourse with the natives, the Russians at Berezov eat both fish and meat in their raw state, especially in winter when they are frozen. Others delight in sipping the warm blood of slaughtered reindeer ; and most of them eat their food without a particle of salt, though that condiment can easily be obtained at a trifling cost ; a sufficient quantity of it being always kept at the Government magazine, and sold at a moderate price. Indeed, were the price of salt even much higher, it could make no difference to the wealthier class of the inhabitants, who can so well afford every indulgence, and procure for their table the most expensive luxuries. But salt is not at all in use, and hence I am led to the conclusion that their taste is such as not to require with their food that condiment, which is everywhere else

considered indispensable. Their soups, vegetables, and even roast meat, are eaten and prepared without salt.

I have further observed, that the Bere-zovians are not particularly distinguished for their delicacy of smell. They not only disregard, in their houses, the suffocating and almost deadening fumes of charcoal, but I have seen them eat horribly putrid meat, not from hunger or necessity, but merely because they liked it better.

CHAPTER X.

Walk on a frosty day—Mode of preserving meat—Improvidence of the Ostiaks—Distressing case of a starving family—Cockroaches—Message from the Kirghies' Khan—Going to communion—Easter reflections and visits—Cause of blindness among the Ostiaks—Meteorologic phenomena—Appearance of a crow—Snow-birds—The 3rd of May.

IN March, though the weather was frosty, we had some beautiful days. The sunbeams encircling the blue vault of the sky in its huge bow, and brilliantly reflected from the crystallized surface of the snow, presented to the eye a circle radiant with myriads of brilliants profusely spread over a white sheet, extending far beyond the reach of the

eye. The air was quite still and intensely cold; but I ventured out for a walk. And delightful it was to inhale with free lungs the pure air of this desert. What a solemn, majestic stillness was around: I was all alone amid this solitude. My thoughts fled upward, they soared through infinite space: there was nothing to stop them in their flight. I felt that thought alone was mistress of this immense wilderness, and on its unfolded wings, and shooting through immeasurable space, it roamed on the one hand to Behring's Straits, and on the other took rest on the rugged summits of the Uralian Mountains. Nothing could stay its progress through all these desolate regions. All nature seemed in accord with the spirit of solitude, and, as though in reverence of him, preserved a profound silence. Not a breath of wind stirred; not a single bough moved; no living being rustled through the thickets of the immense forests; no bird disturbed, with its wings, the serenity of the clear air. There was something solemn—a charm indescribable—in this total and profound stillness. Gladly would I have spent whole days

in the midst of it ; continue my solitary walk, and never return to my exile home. Home ! how feebly does it represent that sacred place ! how void of all its endearing associations !

While my thoughts were thus busy, the frost attacked my limbs and compelled me to think of my physical wants. I felt that neither my European clothing nor my boots were sufficient to protect me any longer from the piercing cold of Berezov. One must needs be a native of this inclement wilderness, reared and brought up amidst its snows—must, in fact, become an Ostiak or a bear, or at least adopt their peculiar habits and manners, to be able to face the rigours of its climate.

Not wishing to be frozen to death, I bent my steps homeward, though not without regret, as I scarcely could expect to find such another opportunity for a solitary walk at a distance from town. The depth of snow is usually so great, that a pedestrian cannot diverge even one step from the highway without danger ; and thus one is obliged to follow the only beaten track existing, which

runs from Berezov to Tobolsk. There you encounter people of the strangest aspect; groups of Ostiaks, clad in reindeer-skins, or Siberian Russians, with axes at their girdles, baskets in their hands, and fishing-nets on their shoulders, all moving about with the greatest caution and in the most perfect silence. The extraordinary silence and complete lethargy which prevail at this season is easily accounted for, as all the feathered tribes, unable to bear the extreme cold, take flight, at the approach of winter, to southern climes; and all the animals that remain, clad so as to brave any degree of frost, shun the vicinity of man, and seek refuge in the impenetrable recesses of the forest, where they cannot easily be tracked. Thus the country wears the appearance of a desert.

The animals found in the forests adjacent to Berezov, are—the elk, the bear, the reindeer, foxes, squirrels, martins, ermines, and white hares. The latter are so little esteemed that they are not considered worth chasing. The Russians, from prejudice, do not eat them; and hare-skins are so cheap as scarcely to repay the transport to Tobolsk, where they

are tanned and brought to market. Hence, if a hare be ever killed, it must be by some unlucky chance to the animal, just as some are caught in traps placed for other game.

Neither wolves nor boars come near Bere-zov, and the neighbourhood probably does not furnish proper food for them, especially acorns, on which the boars principally subsist, no oaks growing in this latitude.

Game constitutes the chief article of food of the inhabitants of Siberia, and more especially birds. But as all the birds are migratory, flying away for the winter, the most is made of the season while they are here. Autumn is the most favourable period for catching them. It is then that the people pack their pantries with the spoil, partly through their own efforts, and partly from supplies purchased from the Ostiaks.

The preservation of this stock of provisions all the year round does not cause any trouble. The birds are kept fresh in a frozen state. On the approach of spring, when the atmosphere gets warmer, all the game which has not been consumed is stowed in cellars filled with ice, and covered with snow. The snow,

by keeping off all access of air, preserves the game perfectly fresh till the hunting-season comes on. On the winter setting in, when the frost is strong and the roads good, supplies of beef are sometimes brought from Tobolsk. This meat is called *Kirghies meat*, and is very fat. It is sold by puds to the inhabitants, and when buried in snow, in the same manner as the game, it is kept in a complete state of preservation till June and July, without losing a particle of its freshness, or even of its colour.

In imitation of the Russian Berezovians, the Ostiaks keep their stock of game in a congealed state, only in smaller quantities, relying for their means of subsistence mainly on fishing and hunting. They, however, often suffer severely from want, in case of their failure in those pursuits, and their winter provisions being prematurely exhausted, they run the risk of being starved. The Government, as far as it can, has taken steps to obviate this evil, and established at Berezov stores of corn and flour, to be sold to the natives in their need, at most moderate prices. Yet, beneficial as this measure may appear,

only families which are settled in the immediate neighbourhood can conveniently profit by it ; while by far the largest part of the population living at a distance, separated from the town by large rivers, which, at different seasons of the year, are quite impassable, are absolutely debarred from obtaining this relief. There is, moreover, another obstacle to its extension, namely, that the Ostiaks neither have any ovens nor any knowledge of the art of baking ; so that if they even possessed any flour, they know not how to use it in any other way than boiling it with fish and water.

In order to convey an idea of the frightful situation to which these poor people are frequently reduced through want of provisions, I shall relate one occurrence, which took place in the district of Berezov, a few years before I arrived there. An account of it is preserved in the archives of the town, and I heard it confirmed by eye-witnesses, competent judges of the case.

An Ostiak family, consisting of an aged mother and two sons—one married and the father of two children, and the other a boy of

twelve years old, and consequently not able to give much assistance to his elder brother, on whom the maintenance of the family had devolved, happened to fall short of provisions at the end of the year. The fishing season had not yet commenced; the return of the birds was unusually retarded by the cold; hunting proved unsuccessful; and even fish bones, from which in time of dearth a sort of nutritive jelly is obtained, began at length to fail. Situated as the family then were, hunger deprived them of all energy and strength, and nothing remained but to await a lingering and cruel death from starvation. In this conjuncture a council was held, and it was decided that rather than all should perish thus, one should be made a sacrifice for the food of the others. Meanwhile, the spring, which was fast approaching, opened them a sure prospect of deliverance; in a few days, they thought, birds in flocks would return from their winter-quarters, and afford them plenty of food, and could they hold out but a short time, they would be saved.

Having adopted this awful resolution, which appeared to be the only means of saving

their lives, they proceeded to draw lots, to see who should be the victim. The lots were drawn, and the fatal one fell on the eldest married son.

The consternation of the whole family at this result may be imagined. The aged mother, considering how much her elder son was required for the support of all, represented to the family that, were they to kill him, they could not even, when the spring should arrive, improve their situation, for who would then be able to procure them subsistence? therefore, they had better all perish at once.

This representation was acknowledged by all the members of the family to be perfectly just. But who was to replace the appointed victim? A pause of dreadful significance ensued. At last the aged matron interrupted this silence, and said: "Kill me! let me be eaten before you kill my son. I am old, and my life is of no use. Besides, I am not attached to life, and if I have lived long, it is because I could not help it."

The matron's voluntary offer was accepted. She was killed, instead of her son, and her body afforded temporary sustenance to the

family. A few days afterwards fishing became practicable, and the whole family was saved from starvation.

The Ostiak *yourtas* standing alone and dispersed amidst forests, do not admit of outward observation and scrutiny, and the inhabitants are unable to investigate the conduct and daily occupations of their neighbours. The incident I have described, would, in all probability, have never transpired, if the perpetrators of the horrible deed had not themselves voluntarily brought it to light, without in the least suspecting that they would be called to account for the confession. The case came to be known in this manner. When the spring arrived, and communication by water was re-established, one of the Berezovians who had, for many years previously, had mercantile relations with the ill-fated family, happened to visit them; and observing the absence of the mother, inquired what had become of her. "Our mother is no more," replied the eldest son. "We have eaten her, to save ourselves from perishing."

Astonished beyond measure, the visitor

made further inquiries, and afterwards communicated all the particulars to the authorities. The entire family were then brought to trial; and the consequence was, that the elder son was sentenced to the mines for life, and the younger, as the least guilty, not being of age, was banished to Surgut, a town situated three hundred versts from Berezov.

It was with great satisfaction that I hailed the close of the long great Lent at the beginning of April, being heartily weary of its irksome restrictions. Though I felt no particular desire for animal food, and still less for amusements, yet Lent, as observed in this place, caused me a kind of agony not easily described. Its close was the signal for some new arrangements in our house, turning all our apartments topsy-turvy, and forcing me out of the ordinary routine, so that I was compelled to leave off my every-day occupations, which had become habitual to me. In all houses at this season, a war of destruction is waged against cockroaches, hundreds and thousands of which are engendered during the winter. They are here called *tarakina*, and in Lithuania, *prusaki*; and are a species

of insects known in Vollhynia. Frost is called in aid as the only effectual auxiliary against them. The inmates of one half of the house are first dislodged, all the windows taken out, doors and stoves opened; and a few days afterwards the same operation is performed in the other half of the house. The cold air is not without its good effect; for, though it exposes the family to a fortnight's discomfort, at the expiration of that period, the number of these tiresome insects is much diminished. They are not, indeed, wholly destroyed, as that is beyond all possibility, but they cease to be in a state of unceasing perpetuation. No sooner are the stoves again heated, than a new progeny rushes forth from hidden nooks and crannies, proving the indestructibility of the race.

Amidst the disorder into which the house was thrown by this crusade against cock-roaches, I received a solemn embassy from the Khan of the Kirghies. Three Kirghies entered my apartments, one of whom bore a folded sheet of paper on the top of his head, and they were followed by the Tartar interpreter, who had accompanied the Khan on

the occasion of his paying me a visit. This functionary announced that the three Kirghies envoys were the bearers of a present to me from the Khan, designed and made by himself. Then, turning to the Kirghies, he took the folded paper from the head of the foremost, and presented it to me. I found it to contain another paper, cut in various designs and figures, which being executed by the Khan's own hand, was certainly a great curiosity. I desired the envoys to present my acknowledgments to the Khan, and they then took their departure. The Khan's work had nothing to recommend it, beyond his good intention. The figures consisted of arabesques, among which figures of palm-trees predominated. It was evident that in exercising his skill in this work, he was only beguiling the weary hours of exile.

The week before Easter at Berezov is not distinguished by the observances of any particular rites, connected with repentance and cleansing from sin, since confession is not strictly insisted on. To confess once a-year is considered, even by the most devout persons, quite sufficient. Even before marriage,

confession is dispensed with, as not obligatory; and those who do confess, do so in a spirit more worldly than religious.

On the occasion of taking the Communion, the toilette of the communicant is commonly the richest her means will admit of. Young ladies make their appearance with their plaited hair falling in rich tresses on their shoulders as if it was their wedding. Costly ear-rings, dresses of rich silk, and a variety of trinkets, adorn their persons. No female communicant approaches the altar in a pelisse, or any warm upper garment, but is attired in complete ball-costume. After the communion, it is usual to have a *fête* at home. On that day no work is done, either by the communicant or her family; but, immediately on her return from church—nay, on her way home—she invites her friends, relatives, and acquaintances to tea, and all are liberally regaled with the best her house possesses. Wealthy families do not limit their reception to tea, but give a regular evening party, entertaining their guests as on a great festival, with the most cheerful sports and pastimes. This mode of celebrating one of the most

important rites of Christianity is, I think, as imposing as it is exhilarating; yet I could not but conceive that it ought to be accompanied by some acts of repentance, which seem so suitable to such an occasion.

The last week of Lent, or the grand week as it is called in my own country, is not devoted here to the baking of cakes and the preparation of viands for Easter, but to scraping the floors with knives; an operation which, however needful, is excessively disagreeable, but is never omitted on the approach of a great festival. There was a time when I felt delighted at the advent of Easter. From my earliest childhood to my maturer years, this festival had to me ever been associated with many cherished reminiscences, which up to this moment remain most precious. But apart from this, Easter, in my own country, is welcomed as the beginning of spring—a season associated with all that is lovely in the year, as well as with what is pleasant in our lives. This place, again—what a contrast did it present to my native land! There is not a single thing that they have in common. Nor is

the feast celebrated in the same way. There were no sort of cakes, no babies, no hams, no roast pigs with stuffing—not even the custom, as in Russia, of the consecrated egg. The meagre Lenten soups were merely succeeded by a *shtchy* with meat, or by pirog of turnip, and a game pasty. And the spring—the sweet, blissful spring, where was it? Snow was lying like a wide out-spread sheet everywhere; the earth and rivers were ice-bound; and ice even encrusted the windows. Where was the fresh verdure? where the joyous choirs of birds? the still more joyous groups of children? and where the cheerful assemblages of villagers?

Where were you, my own dear children, who coming from school full of glee and joy, used to play gaily amid the vernal gifts of Divine bounty, watching every flower that burst forth from its bud, and espying every bird that built its nest? Where were you, my young companions—my helpmates, who, according to your powers, have shared with your mother her domestic cares and troubles, and who at this season made merry around me at your little feast, in company with your

innocent playmates? All this had vanished in the past; but to think of it, to dwell upon it, relieved my heart of a load of anguish.

In the midst of these reflections, I observed some visitors coming to call on me. I hastened to bolt the door, leaving an excuse with my hostess, that I was indisposed. This, I confess, may seem to have been rude, but at such a moment it would have been most painful to me to have received congratulations, as if I had indeed been happy. The congratulation is expressed in these words, *Christos voskres*, "Christ is risen," accompanied by three kisses. Omission of the ceremony would have been considered a want of good breeding, nay, an unpardonable affront, no allowance being made for the difference between their own and European manners. But I shut myself up for three days in my sick chamber, and saw no one.

As April advanced, the sun moved in a large orbit, so that we had but very short nights; yet the rays did not communicate any warmth. They were cold smiles, like those of the coquette. The glare of the snow dazzled the eyes, but obscured the

sight. This overpowering splendour of the sun, combined with the whiteness of the snow, is indeed the cause of the numerous instances of blindness among the Ostiaks. The large fires we keep, also operate most injuriously on the vision. Inflammation of the eyes is a prevailing complaint among the Ostiaks, and not unfrequently ends in a complete loss of sight.

Not a day passed that we had not some curious meteorologic phenomenon. Sometimes stupendous fiery pillars appeared above the sun, or on each side of it, and sometimes three *parahelia*, or mock suns, might be seen at once. These phenomena, however, are common here, and from their frequency, scarcely attract any notice.

One morning I heard in the street a shout of "The crow ! the crow !" This word was taken up, and echoed loudly by many other voices. At last the door of my apartment was opened, and a boy about fourteen years old, putting in his head, exclaimed, "The crow is come !" and then ran away, slamming the door behind him.

"God bless them, what has happened?"

I mentally exclaimed. "Have they become crazy?" I put aside my tapestry-frame, at which I was sitting, and went out to inquire what could have occasioned all this hubbub.

Scarcely had I passed the threshold when I saw that all eyes were fixed on me, and every one pointed before me, still crying: "See the crow, the crow!"

"And where is it?" I inquired. "Am I, too, to see it? What does it mean?"

"The crow brings the spring," was the joyful answer.

I then comprehended that the crow at Berezov was what the sky-lark is in our country. Of all the feathered tribe, that bird is the first that, at the close of winter, makes its appearance here after its migration, and thus is hailed as the harbinger of spring.

The crow is followed by the snow-birds (*sneigurki*), which are very small in size, with white and black spotted feathers. They arrive at the beginning of spring, in immense numbers, and may be seen in dense flocks. The appearance of these birds puts all the young boys on the alert; and to allure them into captivity they spread corn on the snow,

leading into snares made of hair, in which the poor birds get their feet and bodies entangled—and so are caught. By this means, hundreds can be captured in a day. Another mode of catching them is by extending a large net on the ground, with some corn strewed underneath, and when a great number are feeding, to draw the net over, by means of a cord at the end, so as to fall on them, and so take them by the score.

The snow-birds may be considered the first game brought by the returning spring. They make one of the nicest and most delicate dishes that can come on the table. They are so fat, that when put into the oven to bake, the fat must be constantly poured off, or there will be such a quantity, that the birds, when served up, will taste as if they had been boiled rather than baked.

Despite all the indications of coming spring, the whole surface of the earth continued to be covered with snow. Some days, indeed, the frost was not so severe, and there were appearances of a contest between the sun and the snow, but victory always remained on the side of the winter. The

window-panes were still thickly encrusted with ice, and the ice even encased the leaves of a cucumber, which I was trying to rear, and had placed in a box in the window to catch the rays of the sun. The ice on the river was a little broken, but to no extent, and May had considerably advanced without confirming the tokens of spring.

This unsettled state of things frequently prevents the transmission of the mails. It is usual, when the mail is stopped at a great distance from town, in consequence of the melting of ice, to forward the letter-bags by means of sledges drawn by dogs. This, however, seldom happens, and the custom of using these animals as a means of conveyance is wearing away in favour of horses when near home, and of reindeer on more distant journeys. Only poorer people, who have no horses, do sometimes still employ dogs in winter.

The Berezovian dogs are somewhat larger than our Polish watch-dogs. Their hair is long and dense, and for the most part black; but some have white and yellow spots about their neck. They are extremely docile, and

though possessed of great strength, never attack strangers, nor even bark to frighten them, except at night. In this respect their instinct is wonderful, inasmuch as it might seem that they understood how misplaced their excessive vigilance would be in a place like Berezov, where the security both of person and property has much stronger guarantees in the character of the people, than is elsewhere afforded either by personal watchfulness or by the protection of the law.

The rays of the sun, though not strong enough to melt the snow while subject to the reaction of frost, added in a great degree to the cheerfulness of our apartments by pouring a stream of brightness through the window. This semblance of spring awakened in us a desire for a walk ; and as it was the 3rd of May*—a day ever memorable to us, and so dear and so sacred throughout our native land—we determined to celebrate it by breaking

* The third of May is the anniversary of the celebrated Polish constitution of 1791, for which Kosciuszko fought, and for the destruction of which Russia, Prussia, and Austria combined, and then dismembered the ancient Kingdom of Poland.

the bounds of our prison, and breathing the pure air. We consequently strolled out, but soon found reason to repent our boldness. The ground was so excessively slippery, that it was impossible to walk on it, and Josephine was afraid of falling at every step. I assisted her for a time as well as I could, but my own footing was very precarious, and in the end I proved but a treacherous support ; for one of my feet slipping, we both fell in the snow together. This convinced us that it would be unsafe to prolong our ramble, and happening to be near the residence of the Director of Police, we embraced the opportunity to make a call and get a little rest.

On entering the house, we found his young wife just engaged in despatching a servant with a present to us. It is customary with the Berezovian merchants, on their return from the Irbit fair, to bring some trifling articles of European manufacture, as *souvenirs*, to their friends at home. This amiable lady received a present of this description, and being desirous that we should share it, had appropriated a portion to us, consisting of a frozen apple and a frozen lemon. Our calling

saved her the necessity of transmitting these rare dainties, and we were invited to eat them on the spot.

The frozen apple was cut in small thin slices, spread over with sugar, and together with other preserves and sweetmeats, was, as a great novelty and curiosity, distributed amongst the persons present. The lemon was served in the same manner, and distributed among the company at tea.

On our return home, we found a similar present sent us by the same merchant who had made the gift to the Director's lady. Following the fashion of Berezov, I also cut up the apple into small slices, and spreading them over with sugar, invited the whole family of my landlord to partake of them, repeating with pride, "*This grows in our country.*"

It is strange what shapes vanity will assume, and into what extravagancies it leads us. Here was I perfectly charmed at the admiration which these poor simple people expressed at the flavour of the apple, as if it were a homage rendered to myself, and I had contributed to its taste and smell. What

wonder, then, that people boast with so much pride—as we see them daily—of the great deeds of their ancestors, or of the high dignities they have possessed, or of some celebrated relatives to whom they are allied in the remotest degree! The apple on which I expatiated had not, perhaps, even come from my native country, yet I hailed it as a token of its superiority!

On the same day, the son of my landlord brought home a wild goose, which he had killed, proving that the shooting-season had commenced, which was a great satisfaction to us all.

CHAPTER XI.

Beginning of a thaw—Wild fowl—Arrival of the birds
—Shooting excursion—Native sport—Breaking up of
the ice—Violent gale—The waves of the Soswa.

SPRING at last approached in all its imposing splendour, such as can hardly be witnessed elsewhere. The snow, yielding to the glowing rays of the sun, gradually disappeared, and vast volumes of water poured with deafening fury and in innumerable torrents into the capacious channel of the Soswa, which, held fettered during the long winter in icy bounds, now began to throw off the frost, leaving ice only in the mid-stream. The waters rose to a great height, and waged

unceasing war with the masses of ice, but they still rose up like an impregnable rampart in the midst of the flood, forming a spectacle that could not be contemplated without wonder and awe.

Despite this menacing aspect of the river, man did not hesitate to assert his dominion over its rapid currents and eddies. Heedless of danger, hunting parties, composed equally of young and old, hastened to enjoy the field sports, from which winter had so long debarred them; and with rifles slung over their shoulders, or nets and snares in their hands, crossed in their boats the swollen stream, drawing them over the ice in the mid-channel by main strength, and launching them again in the clear water. Then they sought the most favourable spot for the pursuit of game, which at this season consists of swans, wild geese, and wild ducks.

At these points on the banks of the river, where the swans congregate in great numbers, a booth is erected to conceal the hunter. After a little time, the swans become used to the hut, and cease to be afraid of it. It is occupied by a hunter, who, to draw them,

near the booth, lays out decoys on the water, formed of swan-skins, stuffed with hay ; and when the birds thus allured to the spot alight in the midst of them, the sportsman fires upon them from his retreat, and destroys a great number.

The flesh of swans is hard, and by no means savoury. Having plenty of superior game, the Russian population never eat it, but shoot the swans for their skins, which are much in demand. The Berezovians convert them into blankets, and they are very warm, soft, and agreeable. The only other bed-covering used here is fur. The swan-skins are usually dressed by Ostiaks, who have a peculiar mode of preparing them, which consists chiefly in sucking out the fat from the fleshy protuberances, and then tanning the skin.

The flesh of wild geese is also little esteemed, and is commonly very lean. Of all birds, the most prized are wild ducks, which form the principal food of the Siberians. They are met with on the opposite bank of the Soswa, where the country is level, and for a great part of the spring under water ;

while forests of willows, rising from innumerable little islets, afford the birds a favourite resort. The citizens of Berezov, conversant with their ways and habits, select as the best place for sport, the narrow neck of one of the islands, leaving an open sheet of water on either side, where poles are stuck in the ground, about fifteen yards high, terminating at the top with prongs, which support wheels or pulleys, as a means for winding up nets. With the aid of this small machinery, a large net-work, made of threads, is extended between the poles, and across the passage, which it shuts up like a gate.

The net being arranged, one of the sportsmen gathers into his hands all the cords by means of which it is held in the air, and winding them fast round with a stick, remains concealed behind the trunk of a tree till a flock of birds approaches. Just as the grey hour of twilight—which at this season is the only night of Berezov—is drawing near, swans, geese, and ducks appear in clouds in the air, which resounds with the flapping of their wings. Indeed, their numbers surpass anything that can be imagined, and must be

seen to be believed. Each species of bird has its own particular note, and it struck me as a chaunt marvellously solemn—a hymn raised by so many myriads of creatures, in accents which the Creator himself had taught them. What are our organs with their grand diapasons, in comparison with an anthem so sublime, chorussed by the voice of Nature?

With their notes thus mingled, they enter the passages between the islands, and approach the nets of the sportsman, who, as soon as he sees a sufficient number within range, draws his net together, and encloses a host of captives. But as May advances, night entirely disappears, and it is then very difficult to pursue this sport, as the ducks see the net, and will not enter the passage.

The number of the feathered tribe that come to spend the summer in the environs of Berezov is prodigious, and beyond all power of description. Being called by our landlord to the river side to witness the first flight of birds, I felt quite stupified, so great was my amazement at the extraordinary scene that presented itself to my sight.

Far as the eye could reach, appeared countless chains of ducks, geese, swans, and cranes, traversing the sky without any interruption, like so many streams, all in the same northward direction, insomuch that not for a moment was there a clear space in the air ; and the immense expanse of water below was completely covered with them, as thickly as the stars stud the firmament on a clear night. I adored, in silent reverence, the all-provident Wisdom which extended such a large share of its bounty to so desolate a place as Berezov.

At moments like these the soul is disinclined to solitude, and we ardently long to communicate our impressions to others. I therefore hastened home to relate to my companions all I had seen on the river. On hearing my account, Dr. Wakulinski immediately took a fowling-piece and sallied forth, and Josephine and myself accompanied him to witness the sport.

On beholding such a quantity of game in every direction, we flattered ourselves that every one of the Doctor's shots must secure a rich booty ; and that we should return

loaded with game. But it was not long before we were convinced of our error, and found that success was not so easy as it at first appeared. Every time the Doctor approached, the birds, without betraying the least alarm, gravely withdrew beyond gunshot, and there remained in security; and no sooner had he discharged his piece, than they returned to their former quarters. Thus the booty, in proportion as it was rich and attractive, eluded his grasp just as he stretched forth his hand to seize it. Our sport, therefore, ended as it began, and we returned home, tired, and covered with mud; having on our way to wade through numerous pools and rills of water, which rendered the walk anything but pleasant. Our friend, Madame X——, who went out with nets, had better luck, and caught thirty-seven ducks.

The Berezovians have various methods of procuring supplies of game, but they are very indifferent marksmen. None of them can kill a bird in flight, or an animal in running, nor can they conceive how this can be done. They think it is impossible to take

aim without having some fixed point to rest the gun on. When they cannot find the trunk or branch of a tree for this purpose, and have not the assistance of a pitch-fork, with which their arms are usually accompanied, to serve as a stand, they rest the gun on their knee.

The Ostiaks are reputed to be far better marksmen than the Russians. They shoot admirably with the bow, which is still in use among them, and manage their fire-arms with some skill. And this is not to be wondered at. Necessity is a far better teacher than art. An Ostiak's subsistence depends on his own efforts, and even that of the Russian population is for the most part obtained from him, in exchange for other commodities. The former, consequently, becomes superior in personal skill, while the latter excels in those qualities required in commercial transactions. The bows used by the Ostiaks are of enormous size ; and no small amount of strength is required to bend them properly.

The 13th of May was one of the great days of the year in our little community.

The mass of ice on the Soswa, which had previously been immovable, and despite the increased volume of currents beneath, and the deluge of waters above, blocked up the river with its frozen masses, at last, after so long braving the shocks of the hostile elements, gave way, and began to move with all its stupendous bulk northward, carrying everything before it.

Gradually, before our eyes, the different localities began to change with the moving ice; the road over the river to Tobolsk, planted on both sides with green cedar branches, the various paths trodden across the ice by human steps, the holes cut for fishing, and those for the use of cattle, and which were fenced around with branches of fir and larch, looking like so many beautiful green bowers on a white plain—all these objects, on which our eyes had been accustomed to dwell with delight during the winter, now broke up; and with slow, silent, and solemn motion, set out on their distant pilgrimage.

This migration to distant regions, of things so familiar to us, and which we had no hope

of ever seeing again, had something in it peculiarly mournful; and the objects themselves, as though responding to our feelings, seemed, by their lingering movements, to depart with regret, still murmuring to us their eternal farewell. Thus it fares always in this world. Everything is transient, and all in turn pass away.

The whole pack of the ice, with its paths, and pits, and branches, suddenly halted lower down the river, at a distance of about a verst from Berezov, where a sharp angle impeded the current; and here it seemed to bid us a reluctant adieu. Prompted by I know not what motive, I walked to the spot, and felt delighted to behold once more each well-remembered object. Not until some hours had elapsed, did the huge pile take another start, and pass away for ever. The close of the day saw the river free, and its blue waves floating tranquilly and proudly along, without encountering any obstacle.

The moment was a solemn and impressive one; for I knew that there was now no road to Berezov, either by land or water, and communication with other communities being

for the time impracticable, a lull seemed to fall on my own emotions. My feelings became dormant and torpid. It seemed as though I had already passed the threshold of eternity, and was cut off from my kind.

But this isolation was not of long continuance. After the lapse of another day, the mail unexpectedly arrived; having been stopped only a short distance from the town, and come on as soon as the river was clear of ice. How much consolation did that mail bring me after such great anxiety and apprehension! So many letters from so many persons, and this all at once! My heart beat violently; my tears flowed; my spirit, prostrated by feebleness, again gathered strength from reliance on God. I felt as if regenerated; and my soul was again alive to impressions from the outward world.

It was now spring; but how different from the spring of our own country! There was no genial heat, no verdure, no flowers sprouting from the soil as in our fields and meadows. What is called spring here, is a deluge of water inundating the country; the looming of boats on that vast expanse, and the catching

and shooting of birds, pursued with more activity than ever at this season. Every night secures fresh booty, and every one is stocked with all kinds of birds. Geese, swans, and ducks lie heaped, like corn in a barn, up to the roof, awaiting the thrifty housewife's hand and art, to preserve them for use during the summer.

There was now no possibility of stirring out of doors, it was so wet and cold; and yet we could not but long to inhale the fresh air of spring. We, therefore, agreed to take a boat, and, like the rest of the inhabitants, proceed on a duck-catching excursion. A sharp day seemed to guarantee us against rain, and confirmed our determination.

Our party consisted of Dr. Wakulinski, Josephine, Madame X——, and myself; and besides ourselves, there were several of the Doctor's dependants, whom he brought to assist. Our landlord lent us his nets. Providing ourselves with everything necessary for the intended sport, and taking some provisions for our supper, we set out at an early hour for a place situated about fifteen versts from Berezov, and considered to be most

favourable for the purpose. Unluckily, before we could reach the spot, and indeed when we were scarcely midway, we were overtaken by a violent storm. Our boat was fearfully rocked by the furious waves, which seemed as if they would engulf her, and beating against the sides, covered us with their spray. It required the utmost skill of the steersman to prevent her from capsizing. In this dilemma, we came to the resolution not to proceed any farther, but to disembark on the nearest spot that we could reach with safety, and wait till the storm was over.

But even this was not accomplished without difficulty, the gale blowing furiously. We were obliged, to our great peril, to recross the river where the waves ran highest, and we had to struggle against both them and the current; but at last we succeeded in running into a bay which, protected by a forest of willows, afforded comparatively smooth water. Here we disembarked with all our things, and lit a fire.

The tea-kettle, which we had taken care not to forget, was now placed on the glowing embers, and preparations made for tea.

Meanwhile, Madame X—— and the Doctor went off with their guns, promising to bring us some game for our supper, so that we might have a sufficient stock of provisions when we reached the field of sport, for which we proposed to start when the storm should abate.

Our tea was at last ready ; but the party who went shooting returned, to our great disappointment, without a single sparrow, after having expended all their ammunition, and pleaded a thousand reasons for their ill-luck, which we readily accepted. We kept up our spirits as well as we could, and drank our tea pretty cheerfully, in the hope that it would clear up : but we awaited this result in vain. Our repast was over, and the hurricane still continued.

At length the night came on, and we could no longer think of pursuing our voyage ; we were, indeed, obliged to remain for the night on the spot where we were ; and here, to make the most of the occasion, we resolved to spread our nets for the ducks. Those who professed to be expert in the sport looked for a place where they could be most

advantageously extended ; and when they returned from their reconnoissance, we collected all our baggage, and entering our bark, shoved off from the shore.

The water was smooth and calm, and we fastened our boat to a willow, and set about spreading the nets.

We found the work by no means so easy as we had fancied. Even in that sheltered place the wind was too strong, blowing down the poles to which we tried to fasten our net, and causing us no small trouble. By perseverance, however, we succeeded in overcoming the difficulty, though it did not secure us success. There was, indeed, no want of ducks, as we saw numberless flocks of them ; but the night being as clear as the day, and the wind waving our net to and fro, made the cords too visible, and instead of catching, it frightened the ducks, and they flew away.

Having thus completely failed, and being benumbed with cold, we let the net flutter with the wind as it would, and sat down to warm ourselves at the fire. Meanwhile, we saw the sky on the eastern horizon assume a

crimson tinge, betokening the approaching sunrise; but the storm was still unabated, and the wind blew and roared in a tremendous way, shaking the net as though it would tear it to shreds.

At length we saw the sun rising over the horizon. We had been ardently longing for his advent, in the hope that, as frequently happens, it would allay the tempest; but our expectations were fallacious. The sun shone brightly, but the wind blew as furiously as ever, sweeping over the tops of the trees with a voice of thunder. We now began, therefore, to ponder seriously on our situation, and consider what was to be done.

The spot where we had bivouacked was on the opposite shore to that on which Berezov stood, and, owing to the lowness of the ground, was entirely uninhabited. Had we gone fifty or even a hundred versts, we should not have found a single human dwelling. The storm might last many days, and while it did last, it would have been madness to attempt to re-cross the river in so frail a bark; the more so, as our steersman was far from being an expert one. We had,

however, no provisions, and all the gunpowder, which would have enabled us to procure supplies, was spent. What was most prudent to do in this conjuncture, we could not decide.

Patience and reliance on God were our watchword. Seeing no possible means of extricating ourselves from the difficulty, some of our company sat down to warm themselves at the fire, others mechanically dropped on the ground close to the net, where they watched with wistful looks the flocks of ducks as they kept rising and flying by; and I myself, not knowing how to while away the time, wandered about on the shores of the bay; but at length, having gone a considerable distance, I felt a desire to proceed to the Soswa, thinking how grand a spectacle the great river would present, when its billows were lashed by the storm. Prompted by that impulse, I proceeded about a verst farther, and at last caught a glimpse, through the opening between the intervening willows, of its broad sheet of waters. I approached nearer the banks; and what was my surprise to find that, though the wind was

blowing a hurricane, bending the tops of the trees to the earth, the whole surface of the Soswa was but slightly rippled ; while on the previous day, when the wind was less violent, its waves ran exceedingly high !

I scarcely could credit the evidence of my own eyes, and asked myself whether I was not mistaken, and was not looking on some sheltered bay instead of the great river. But, surveying the locality more narrowly, I found that there was no error, but that the sheet of water before me was really the Soswa. Glancing once more at the placid stream, and more firmly convinced that I was under no delusion, I hastened to communicate the agreeable intelligence to my companions. They received it with joy, and we lost no time in collecting our baggage, and preparing to return home. Nor were we wholly without spoil ; for though the night had been unpropitious, four ducks, blinded by the sun, had fallen into our nets, and saved us from the humiliation of utter failure.

The real cause of the becalmed state of the river was, that the wind, which on the previous day blew from the north, and thus

acted in opposition to the current of the river, causing the waves to rise to a considerable height, now came from the south, which, falling in with the current, had no effect on the water.*

With joy we found ourselves once more on the river Soswa, and as if distrusting the evidence of our own senses, or apprehensive that treachery might lurk beneath, we all pulled at the oars, in order to get across the river, and reach some point on the opposite bank, from whence we could return home, if necessity arose, on foot. But our fears were unfounded; and without further danger we arrived before the town, and landed on the *bairak* (pier), just opposite our own house.

There is great truth in the assertion, that it is only through anxieties, troubles, and privations, that we can discover the real value of our daily enjoyments; for in an even tenor

* This is one of the many passages in the book by which a hit is made at the Government. Where authors are not allowed to express their thoughts freely and without reserve, recourse is had to analogies and figurative language. "Æsop's Fables," composed by their ingenious author under a reign of terror, might be adduced in illustration of the fact.

of life, their value would never be observed, and they would glide away unprized. But let us be bereft of them, though for ever so short a time, and we then learn how much they contribute to our comfort. On this occasion I returned home to my cleanly, comfortable, snug room, with more delight than I can express.

The whole family were already up, and busily engaged at their *samovar*. We followed their example; and after a refreshing breakfast, closed our window-shutters, and sought in our comfortable warm beds a little repose.

CHAPTER XII.

Ungenia spring—The annual supplies of provisions—
Visit to one of the vessels—Visit from a Frenchman
—Characteristics of the Siberians—The Frenchman's
adventures—Sudden heat—River scenery—Promenade—
A tempest—Conservatories of plants—Kozlow's departure for the Oby Gulf.

A YEAR had now elapsed since my arrival at Berezov. I asked myself if this interval had wrought any change in my condition or in my spirits? and my heart answered—none. One year of anguish had been struck off my life, and this was all I had gained.

The spring here is cold and melancholy, and has no pretension to the name; it is a misnomer. The term was associated in my

mind with ideas of genial heat, of life, of beauty, and of rapturous delight ; but it has none of these attributes under this clime ? May brought no appearance of grass, no budding of trees ; the water was still frozen, and continual fires were kept in-doors. It is true that the buds of the trees looked considerably swollen, and birds flitted through the air ; but these, after all, are but the signs—the first harbingers of spring, and but a poor instalment of the loveliness and luxuriant verdure which it spreads over the rest of the world.

Vessels now began to arrive from Tobolsk and other places, on their way to the fisheries in the Oby Gulf, and the town became a scene of unusual activity. These barges were freighted with a variety of provisions for the inhabitants ; and the river in consequence had the appearance of a large market-place. At this season it is customary at Berezov to procure a stock of provisions for the whole year, and the river-side is thronged with purchasers of flour, eggs, candles, soap, tar, earthenware, iron nails, and other household implements. Numberless

boats are seen plying from the town to the vessels, and returning to the shore laden or empty. Passengers and crews exchange visits with the inhabitants; as they are all old acquaintances, and like the migratory flocks of birds, move periodically backwards and forwards to the Arctic Ocean.

Apart from this external movement, an internal one is also in progress. The wealthier part of the Berezovians, who are the owners of the vessels, are fitting them out to take part in the fishing expedition to the North. Men are busy in loading their vessels; women in baking biscuits and providing the necessary victuals, taking care at the same time to keep back a sufficient stock for the subsistence of the family. Some persons are welcoming their arriving friends; while others are mournfully taking leave of those who are sailing away. Wives accompany their husbands—children their fathers—to the river, whence they are to start on the long and perilous expedition, and with tears and tender embraces bid each other farewell. Every hour the report of a gun is heard—a signal that some new vessel has arrived, or

that some other has weighed anchor, and departed.

Among the various arrivals in May, was the vessel of a merchant of Tobolsk, Brahın, which, in the previous year, had brought us to Berezov. We had a visit from her steward, who called on us as his old acquaintances, and requested us to honour him with a visit on board. We assented; and immediately after dinner, our landlord placed his boat at our disposal, and accompanied by him, we went to the vessel, which, on account of her greater size, lay anchored in the middle of the river. We met with a most polite reception, and were treated with tea and sweetmeats.

I felt delighted to find myself once more in the vessel, which had, for two weeks, afforded me a shelter, and in which every rope was perfectly known to me. I beheld the identical berth in which I had slept, the same table, the same shelves, and the inscriptions of my hand, which were still preserved undefaced on the sides of the ship. How is it that our retrospect of the past, however painful and distressing, affords us so much pleasure? This question awakens such trains of thought,

that, far from answering it, I dare not even breathe one word on so pregnant a theme.

On returning home I had a visit, certainly as strange as it was unexpected. It was from a Frenchman—a Frenchman at Berezov! was not that a strange phenomenon? And such he really was; for the number of the curious who assembled to see him, not only filled my reception-room to suffocation, but even my bed-room—though it were only to catch a glimpse, through the chink of the door, of this extraordinary visitor.

A rumour of the French campaign of 1812 had found its way indistinctly even to this remote region, and the particulars were overlaid with fables, poetry, and all sorts of exaggerations. It may, therefore, be imagined what a sensation the appearance of a real Frenchman must have created among the residents.

The Frenchman was as polite and as full of vivacity as persons of his nation usually are, yet being clad in a coarse and unshapely sailor's jacket, with large boots made of thick leather, and reaching up to the girdle—such as are worn by all who take part in Arctic

fisheries—he did, I must confess, cut a most comical figure. With all this was mingled the mercurial humour of his nation, and a sense of personal dignity, which rendered the impression more striking, and his appearance more burlesque.

To account for the visit of this individual, it will be necessary to relate the whole of his history, which, indeed, is somewhat extraordinary.

I must premise, that biographies of persons in Siberia are by no means so monotonous, trivial, and prosaic as those of European life. In this country every exile—and nearly all are exiles—be he from the category of great or of petty criminals, is, with scarcely any exception, either a hero, or, at all events, a character; and consequently, his life is interwoven with incidents as diversified by their variety as their interest, and revealing the inmost secrets of the human heart; forming, in this respect, a striking contrast to the usual common-place occurrences of conventional life.

Only a Walter Scott is wanted in Siberia, or some one with a magic pen like his, and

literature would be enriched with works superior in colour and character to those now in general circulation, and which, from the peculiar composition of the society which they portray, cannot be otherwise than inane and trivial.

The Frenchman's name was Le Brun, and his age about thirty-two. He spoke the language of the higher French society; his features were expressive, his figure slim and elegant, but his garments, as I have before remarked, were worse than neglected—even worse than coarse; for they were covered with mud, and soaked through with tar.

Le Brun's father had been an officer in Napoleon's grand army, in 1812. Taken prisoner during the campaign, he contrived to save his son, then a little boy, from injury; and he shared his captivity. They were both sent prisoners to Siberia, where the father, to gain his subsistence, learnt boot-making; but, unfortunately for the son, soon died.

Young Le Brun having spent his early life in Siberia, was more reconciled than his father to the mode of existence in that country; and, seeing no possibility of being ever

liberated, married a Siberian girl, on attaining the age of manhood, and gave up all thoughts of returning to France.

But after he had been married many years, one of the Russian nobles—Count Tolstoy, I believe—arrived in that part of Siberia on a government mission. Le Brun profiting by this opportunity, recounted his whole history to the Count, and solicited his interest to free him, if possible, from his singular position.

The Count naturally felt a strong interest in a foreigner thus situated, suffering for guilt not his own, and took a memorandum of his request. On his return to St. Petersburg he made known the case to the French ambassador, who, in the name of his court, demanded Le Brun's liberation. The Government complied with the request. Le Brun received a passport with permission to return to his country, and the Russian Count sent him some money to defray the expenses of his journey.

Up to this point everything had happened as Le Brun desired; but as he had a wife and children, he was now at a loss as to what course to pursue. In the end, com-

bining his love of country with the affection he bore his family, he resolved first to proceed to France alone, and when he should have found a settled place there, to come back to Siberia for his wife and children.

He set out on his distant journey, *via* Petersburg, more from choice than necessity. Here he presented himself to his protector, Count Tolstoy, and was recommended by him, instead of continuing his journey to France, to remain in the Russian capital as a teacher of French. Le Brun followed this advice, and obtained through the Count's recommendation a place in a Princess's family, as French master to her children.

Released from Siberia, and delivered from his semi-barbarous condition, Le Brun found himself, on a sudden, surrounded by all the comforts and even luxuries of civilized life. But not ten months elapsed when the sedentary occupation of teacher grew irksome, or rather, lost its charm of novelty; and the Frenchman becoming restless, began again to yearn for his country, although, in fact, he scarcely knew anything of it, beyond what had been related to him

by his father. He determined, however, at all hazards, no longer to delay visiting France.

The Russian Count, his patron, did all in his power to dissuade him from this enterprise ; but perceiving that he had an ardent desire to accomplish it, felt for the poor fellow, and assisted him in his views. A short time afterwards, Le Brun—the expatriated wanderer—trod the soil of his native land.

What was his astonishment to find the country he so loved in imagination, and after which he had so long been sighing, very different from the France of his traditions, as described in the glowing pictures of his father ! No relations came forward to welcome him, and he found no friend on whom he could rely. In a word, in France, the cradle of his childhood, Le Brun found himself a greater stranger than in Siberia. In the latter country he at least had a wife and children, and the reminiscences of his youth, nor could he forget that it had given his father a grave.

Nevertheless, some persons to whom he

applied on his arrival in France, though he was a stranger to them, touched by the singularity of his position, and the misfortunes he had encountered, procured him a situation with a moderate stipend on which he could subsist; but no sooner was he thus settled, than he began to pine for his wife and children, from whom he received no news whatever, a circumstance which greatly afflicted him, and preyed daily more and more on his spirits. Perhaps, too, the new mode of life he was obliged to adopt, so different from that which he had led in Siberia, where personal liberty is not limited at every step by artificial constraints, became disagreeable; but he bore it patiently for some time. Four years had elapsed from his arrival in France, when, actuated by affection for his family, he determined to return to Siberia, and bring them away to his own country. Accordingly he sold all that he possessed, and with the addition of a sum collected for him by subscription, set out for this cold and inhospitable region.

He performed his journey with as little expense as possible; going part of the way

on foot; and at length reached Tiumien, a district town of the Government of Tobolsk.

Only those who have made long journeys can understand in what degree impatience increases the nearer we approach the point of our destination. Just as this feeling completely absorbed Le Brun, an opportunity was offered of proceeding direct to Ishim, also a town in the Government of Tobolsk, where his father-in-law was domiciled, and with whom, when he departed for France, he had left his wife and children. Unfortunately his money was nearly exhausted, but relying on his father-in-law's kind feelings, and his wife's affections, he hesitated not to enter into an agreement with the coachman; paying him all the money he had, and promising the rest on his arrival at Ishim, at the same time giving his passport as a pledge of his integrity. They were not long before they arrived at Ishim. Le Brun was entering the house, to him so well known, when he was met on the threshold by a man whom he had never seen before.

"Where is my father-in-law?" asked Le Brun.

“He is dead,” was the reply; “and his house has been sold to me.”

“Where then is my wife?”

“She has married another, and gone with her children to Irkutsk.”

All his fond and cherished hopes were thus at an end. He would not follow his faithless wife, who was at a distance of six thousand versts ; but another difficulty presented itself. How was he to settle for his fare with the coachman ? He was ready to surrender to him all his luggage, but the coachman was not satisfied with this proposal, and would not return his passport.* In this dilemma, quite at a loss what to do, he was advised to engage himself as a boatman in a merchant vessel for the summer, by which means he procured an advance of about seventy rubles, enabling him to redeem his passport.

Accustomed not to lose his good spirits in adversity, Le Brun consoled himself under these vexations with the hope that, though a

* Loss of passport, in Siberia, is tantamount to loss of freedom. Persons without a passport are liable to be treated as convicts, and sent to the mines.

fishing expedition to the Oby Gulf was not likely to be very pleasant, it might not be altogether unattractive, and would at least afford him the advantage of visiting regions little known, and scenery totally different from that of the rest of the world.

As long as objects are contemplated at a distance, imagination is wont to represent them only under a poetical aspect; while reality, from its nature prosaic and stern, follows close behind, dragging its heavy leaden steps in our track, so that the nearer we draw to the enchanted land of our vision, the more rugged and unpleasant does it seem, defacing, disfiguring, and spoiling the whole of the captivating landscape. Such a disenchantment had just fallen on our Frenchman. The cold was piercing, while his clothing was but indifferent; and bad food, hard labour, stings of musquitos and coarse company, combined to dissolve the imaginary charms with which his fancy had clothed the Arctic regions. What he now most longed for, was that his ill-advised voyage should be speedily brought to an end, and what he seemed to prize highest was the thick heavy fur

wrapped round his body, in odd contrast to the slender delicate frame of the wearer. In this unenviable condition and pitiable state of mind, Monsieur Le Brun presented himself to me on his passage through Berezov.

I must leave my poor Frenchman, to speak of the weather, which here suddenly changed from cold to intense heat. On the 7th we were perishing with cold, and fires blazed in the stoves. On the 8th the heat was excessive. We cast off our winter clothing, but the lightest summer dress was not cool enough. A basin of water, containing a lump of ice, was placed on the table, to refresh our languid frames, quite overcome by the heat. All the doors and windows were thrown open, and the people were enraptured at the return of summer.

The river swarmed with boats of all sizes; and flags of various colours adorning their masts, fluttered in the light air. Here and there on the broad waters the white sails of vessels might be seen, expanded by the breeze, and little elegant boats were towed behind. The sails, bathed in sunshine, beamed with dazzling whiteness, appearing

to skim the water with outspread wings, like graceful swans. The blue waves, streaming with sunbeams, twinkled with myriads of moveable lights, which shone for an instant, and then vanished in the deep.

How wonderful is Nature on every spot in the world; how great and enchanting, when casting her maternal smile of love on man! It is impossible for the soul not to overflow with rapture and thankfulness at the sight of her bounty.

I felt my room too narrow in so hot an atmosphere, and could only breathe freely under the clear vault of heaven. Out, therefore, we went, but it was not long before we found that the heat of the sun was insupportable. Luckily the house of our friend, Mrs. S—, the Justice's wife, happened to be close by. There we took shelter, and were able to rest ourselves. Everything in the house indicated the return of summer. The doors were all ajar, the windows open, and the lady of the house lightly and elegantly attired, as if in celebration of this awaking of Nature. Refreshments of sweetmeats were brought in, and iced water to drink;

and with a little pleasant conversation mingled with complaints of the heat, we whiled away the time, waiting for some abatement of the sultriness; which, however, seemed only to increase.

We remained at the house full two hours, the amiable hostess detaining us with a promise that she would accompany us home. We were just on the point of setting off, when, looking through the open window, I observed a small but peculiarly dark cloud in the sky. Scarcely had I time to direct attention to it, when a violent gust of wind suddenly rushing into the apartments, hurled everything on the floor. Seeing that a tremendous tempest was coming on, we ran to close the windows, but were almost too late. One pair of window-sashes, wrenched by the whirlwind from our hostess's hands, fell in fragments on the ground. Josephine and myself, however, were more successful; for by our joint efforts we contrived to secure the other windows. Almost simultaneously with the whirlwind, came down torrents of rain, amidst thunder and lightning.

We were obliged to remain at our hostess's till the tempest blew over ; and the streams of water that were running down to the river rendered the streets less difficult to cross. Several hours thus elapsed, and we were unable to reach home till sunset. After the shower, the air grew cool, but the thunder was still heard growling at a distance. The paths, saturated with moisture, were soon passable. The air and the earth parched by drought, absorbed the rain so quickly, that in a short time scarcely any traces of it remained visible. The sun, as if after a bath, emerged from beneath the clouds more brightly ; and all was again calm and joyful, as if nothing had occurred to disturb the repose of Nature.

We were returning home ; and, again, what a wonderful sight ! Green grass covered the meadows, as if it had grown in the twinkling of an eye. The hollyhock was in full bloom ; the buds of the larch trees were beginning to burst forth, decking those graceful trees with most delicate verdure, and filling the air with a delicious fragrance. In a word, the whole environs of

the town presented a totally different appearance from that which it wore in the morning, as if by an enchantment.

Arrived at home, I immediately betook myself to gardening; and began by transplanting my cucumber plants from the wooden box in the window, which I had carefully reared during the winter.

It was from Colonel Krzyzanowski that the inhabitants of this town first learnt to construct conservatories and glass-houses for rearing and preserving vegetables and plants. During his banishment here he had been the tenant of the lodgings now occupied by us; and I found in the garden a small wooden conservatory constructed by him, and three glass windows belonging to it.

About the middle of June, our landlord set out at eleven o'clock at night—for in the summer there is no difference between night and day—on the usual fishing excursion to the Oby Gulf. On such occasions, it is customary that the family and acquaintances of the voyager should accompany him to the place of embarkation. The more he is respected or connected, the greater is the

number of his attendants. This custom is observed towards all travellers, whether by land or by sea. In winter, they are accompanied by a number of sledges, and in the summer by boats. Those who are nearly related go with them on board the vessels; friends and acquaintances usually take leave on the shore.

There is such a dearth of incidents here, that the commonest event of every-day life is invested with importance, and any change, however trivial, becomes a solemn act. Birthdays, name's-days of every member of the family, to the most distant relatives; days of confession, anniversaries of defunct persons, arrivals and departures, are all celebrated with particular rites and observances.

Josephine and myself gladly offered to accompany the train of old Kozlow, our landlord, to the place of embarkation. Several boats attended him, and ours was among the number. On our arrival in the middle of the river, a gun was fired thrice—a signal of farewell to the town. Most of our party then returned home; but we went on with the vessel, and proceeded to the

Little Ostiak. Here we observed a beautiful island, on which we landed. I discovered a raspberry-bush, which was not yet in foliage, and dug it out, in order to transplant it to my garden. Dr. Wakulinski, who accompanied us, went to shoot ducks; but not being successful, we were not encumbered with a load of game, and our boat took us the speedier home.

CHAPTER XIII.

An examination at a school—St. Peter's fête—Ostiak dance—Patron Saint's festival—Solemnity of the procession—Another sporting excursion—Fishing—Bathing.

THE 29th of June at Berezov is devoted annually to two public acts—namely, the closing of the district school, and the annual promenade on the banks of the Waygulka.

Before breaking up at the school for the holidays, there is a public examination of the pupils. But this examination, instead of being as it ought, a report to the public of the progress the pupils have made, has degenerated into a mere formality and empty ceremonial.

The whole scholastic body of Berezov consists only of an inspector, and two teachers. On the day of examination, one of the principal conditions is, that all the functionaries of the town, and the principal inhabitants, should assemble at the school, and that the pupils should in their presence be examined by the teachers.

But this most distinguished assembly, the learned jury, instead of listening to the interrogatories of the teachers, or taking any interest in the answers of the pupils, enjoy a *siesta matinale*, or, in most cases, do not even comprehend a single syllable of what is taught, and often wonder of what earthly use such trash as the grammar, or the higher branches of arithmetic, can be to their children. The most important part of the usual programme is a *déjeuner à la fourchette*, and not until that is served up do the company begin to shake off the nightmare of somnolency, by which they have been enchained.

An occurrence which happened at the examination, was ludicrous enough, and will suffice to show to what extent learning

prevails among the Berezovians. Dr. Wakulinski, who, in his capacity as Government physician, belonged to the body of public functionaries, was, like the others, invited to be present at the examination. As is the practice on such occasions, the teacher requested the assembled guests to put, on their part, such interrogatories to the pupils as they pleased, on any subject connected with their studies. This, though repeated year after year, had come to be regarded as a mere form, and none of the functionaries would trouble themselves with such a task. All shook their heads, as was their wont, in sign of refusal, with the single exception of Dr. Wakulinski, who, to the surprise of every one, availed himself of the privilege, and asked the pupil a question in fractions.

The honourable assembly, startled from their drowsiness by such an innovation, stared at the Doctor with angry eyes, giving him by their looks to understand how much they condemned this intrusion on mysteries inaccessible but to the initiated. This was all that passed at school, but a storm was

brewing which the Doctor was to feel afterwards.

The examinations usually terminate to the satisfaction of all parties. The scholars are released for the space of two months from the necessity of moping over their lessons, and full of joy at their emancipation, hasten to their homes ; while the teachers and examiners are in the habit of crowning the ceremony with a substantial repast, abundantly provided for the occasion.

Before Dr. Wakulinski had well left the school, Fame—the hundred-mouthed—spread through Berezov the astounding intelligence that he possessed a knowledge of fractions ; and this fact was telegraphed from one person to another as something perfectly incredible.

The Doctor little suspected that he was an object of such lively interest to the Berezovians, and was surprised when, on returning home, he was stopped in the street by a merchant, who said he came purposely to ask him whether it was true that he knew fractions. The Doctor smiled at the questioner, and, of course, answered in the affirmative.

“ If it be so,” added the merchant, “ please to tell me, sir, whether it is likewise true that those who know fractions can determine how many pecks are contained in a quarter? ”

Matters did not, however, end here ; but a number of other persons whom he met asked him similar simple and silly questions.

The daily fare on the tables of the inhabitants now promised to be more nourishing, and more savoury ; the long fast, which had lasted several weeks, being over. This fast is observed also by the Russian population in Poland, and is called by them *Piotrowka* (St. Peter’s Fast). On the afternoon of St. Peter’s Day, immediately after dinner, the inhabitants all resort for a promenade to a meadow on the banks of the Waygulka, where the Government stores of flour and of salt are situated, which, with the single exception of the Government hospital, are decidedly the best edifices in this place. The meadow at this season of the year is usually dry, and forms a glade surrounded with forest, and with a beautiful sheet of water in front, forming altogether a fine pleasure-ground. The whole surface of the

country being covered with wood, any plot of clear and open meadow, if only dry, cannot fail to prove attractive. For my part, as I was never fond of crowded assemblies, but preferred a solitary ramble, I did not join in the general amusement, and thought to pass the whole day alone at home; but it happened otherwise.

A party of Ostiaks, who had arrived in town on some business, happened to put up at the same house where we lived, and having had an opportunity of getting an abundant supply of *wodka* (brandy), they all got tipsy, and in this state began dancing. The landlady, much annoyed at the disturbance, attempted to drive them out, but this was not easily effected, as the whole party obstinately resisted.

Hearing the uproar in the house, I inquired what was the matter. On learning what it was, I could not view the conduct of the Ostiaks with the same severity as the landlady, and I invited them to dance in my apartment, having long wished to see a performance of this description. They readily accepted my invitation, but disconcerted me

by asking me to play for them. Not having any instrument but a guitar, I struck the chords of a Cossack air, beating time with my foot. They were delighted with the tune, and began to caper about with great briskness.

From what I saw, the Ostiak dances are not unlike a theatrical representation, or a pantomime. They imitated the habitual sports of the chase, and the gambols of wild beasts, but the representations were not always perfect, and it was not often easy to guess, without the aid of an interpreter, what they signified. The dancing consisted mainly of sudden leaps, violent turns, and other similar movements, which put the whole muscular powers of the body to a severe test.

Only two of the Ostiak party performed the national dance. In coming forward, they skipped and leaped as high as they could, rising high and bending low, and then whirling round as in a waltz. In one instance, they both clenched their fists, and violently stretched out their arms, as if on the point of menacing or attacking some foe. They then

threw themselves on the floor, as if totally exhausted, and again, on a sudden, started up, and all this so rapidly and so violently, that it was shocking to witness.

In this manner they continued dancing without a moment's cessation, and with the greatest vigour, for more than half an hour. I then insisted that they should stop, as I saw that they were quite worn out, but in their excitement, they would not listen to my representations. Even when one of the dancers fell on the ground quite motionless, the others did not cease dancing. I was much alarmed, thinking that the excessive exertion of the man had caused a fit of fainting, or perhaps apoplexy; and I was the more horrified at seeing that, while I was so entirely occupied with this apparently dreadful accident, not one of his companions appeared to be in the least concerned about it.

While I was thus all anxiety, the man started up from the floor, and began his dancing anew with more violence, as if his fainting fit had served but to renew his strength. Meanwhile, the rest of the party

sat on the floor, with their feet cooped up in the Oriental fashion, and were much amused by the feats of the dancers.

These did not stop until they were completely knocked up by their exertions. Then the whole party rose to depart, and thinking that perhaps it might give them satisfaction, I presented one of the dancers with a few *kopeks*. He accepted the gift, but immediately opened his hand to show the money to his companions; on which they all began to speak together in their own language. After a good deal of discussion, which was quite unintelligible to me, one of the Ostiaks, who could speak a little Russian, asked me, "Why I had given the money?" I replied that it was to obtain them something to drink my health.

"If you have *wodka*," replied the Ostiak, "very well, then give it us, for we are very fond of it; but to take money from you, would be too bad: we cannot accept any money."

The answer put me to shame; but I said: "I have seen you dance, and you were much

wearied ; and as I have no brandy in the house, I gave you money, that you might have wherewith to buy it, to refresh yourselves."

"It is not for you that we have danced, but to please ourselves," replied the Ostiak. "You have permitted us to dance in your room ; and therefore, we owe you thanks for your kindness. We want no money : take it back. When we come again to town, we will bring you a present of fresh ducks."

I was astonished at this delicacy of feeling, which might be called instinctive, among a race so barbarous, and comparatively so poor. In speculating on this incident, I asked myself the question, whether what is commonly vaunted as civilization—namely, proficiency in the arts and the development of the higher wants and refinements of life—does really contribute to awaken the noble impulses of man's nature in that degree it is supposed to do ; or whether it does not rather tend to produce quite the contrary result ? I could, I think, render a ready answer to this vexed question ; but as I might probably

give offence, perhaps the less I say of it the better.

Among the Ostiaks there exist no divisions into castes—no distinct hierarchical orders as in our civilized communities, and they have not the slightest notion of the artificial classification of ranks, so zealously preserved in European society, and which exercise such immense influence in moulding our manners. They pay respect, indeed, in the fullest sense of the word, to their chief, if wise and valiant; but this homage is voluntary, and founded on personal regard, and not a prerogative of his position.

The following occurrence may serve to illustrate the general prevalence of this peculiar feeling among the native tribes. A few years since, the Governor-General came from Tobolsk, to visit in person the fair of Obdorsk; and on his arrival there, a multitude of the Ostiak population thronged to his house to see a functionary so high in rank. This was no difficult task, as the Governor, who was known to be a most humane and enlightened man, ordered that every one of the natives should be allowed free access to

him. The influx, however, proved to be so great, that the whole of the reception rooms were soon crammed to excess. Some of the throng grew so weary with long standing, that, at length, they threw off all restraint, and unceremoniously accommodated themselves with seats on the floor. This excited the indignation of the officers of the Governor's suite, who construed it into a want of respect to his Excellency, and rebuking those who sat down, they made them relinquish their seats, explaining that it was not right to sit in the Governor's presence.

"And what matters it to him?" asked the Ostiaks with astonishment. "We did not take his place. And if his own feet ache, he surely has room enough left to seat himself."

The Governor, who was a more considerate and amiable person than his subalterns, being informed of what had taken place, directed that the Ostiaks should not be disturbed, as they could have no knowledge of the etiquette of Courts.

The 1st of July, the day of St. Procopus, the patron saint of the town, is a grand festival at Berezov. After divine service at

church, a procession with a cross and flags goes round the town, accompanied by the entire population. Nobody remains at home, except, perhaps, some aged invalid to guard the fire, or those who are bedridden or cripples. Government functionaries, merchants, elegantly-dressed ladies, old men bent down by age, shrivelled old women, vigorous lads and joyous children, in a word, the whole of the town, without distinction of age, rank, or sex, take part in the solemnities of the day. It was imposing and deeply affecting to behold such a heterogeneous mass of people gathered around the symbol of salvation, and for that single moment meeting as if one family, animated with but one faith and one hope, in the body of the church. Nor did we pause to reflect that ere an hour elapsed, the solemn train, now linked together by one thought, would be broken up and dispersed into units. I could remember only that a great and paramount thought, which, for the time, emancipated them from the shackles of every-day life, was enshrined in their hearts, and bore testimony to man's dignity and to their own.

Those who are prevented by domestic occupations from taking part in the religious ceremony, hasten forth on the approach of the procession, and stand at the door till it has passed. Then they ascend to the roof of the house, or some elevated spot, from which they can trace its onward progress ; and, as often as they catch sight of the sacred banner, however distant it may be, they make the sign of the cross and bow their heads, thus rendering reverence to the emblem of their faith.

Our attention was not wholly taken up by the observances of the festival. Dr. Waku-
linski had for some days been meditating on a new sport, of which he knew nothing himself, but which had been recommended to him. This was to catch ducks after their moulting, when, being extremely heavy, and without feathers, they cannot fly. In this condition they lie concealed in the reeds and high grass ; but it is not easy to get at them. The ordinary mode is to spread out nets on a piece of water near the place where they are supposed to be in great numbers. This done, people approach from the opposite side, and

with the aid of dogs, drive the ducks from their shelter into the clear water, and then, in boats, cut off their retreat, and so force them into the net.

The Doctor wished Josephine and myself to join in the sport; and neither of us being particularly engaged, nor having any duty to keep us at home, we disposed of our time as a spendthrift would of his wealth, and gladly accepted the invitation. We set out in full confidence of success, having, apart from human assistance, two boats, a net two hundred yards long, and a dog. We took our own seats in the larger boat, with four assistant-surgeons of the Doctor's staff, the dog, and the large net. The smaller boat was occupied by an Ostiak and two boys, furnished with a fishing-net. The fishing-net had been added by our landlord, who probably had some misgivings about the ducks, and recommended this provision to the Ostiak, in case of failure, that, at least, we might catch a few fish.

We left home full of joy and with great expectations. Dr. Wakulinski, the commander-in-chief of our expedition, and his medical assistants, knew nothing of the

locality, and still less of the intricacies of the sport; and our Ostiak, not having been consulted, gave us no counsel, but followed with his coat at a distance, in the taciturn mood which is peculiar to that race.

Having formed no plan whatever, nor fixed on any particular landing-place, we proceeded quite at hap-hazard, little heeding whither we went. The banks with which we were familiar disappeared from sight, and we arrived on a broad expanse of water, where the river formed a number of islets, all nearly alike. From the appearance of the place, we concluded that there must be a number of ducks here; but though we cruised about the various channels, we could not discover any. After some time spent in this fruitless search, we ran into a bay, where we saw that it would be hazardous to proceed farther, and that we must return. This was about seven or eight versts from Berezov.

During our whole passage, not one wild duck, much less a flock, fell in our way. Meanwhile, the sun reached the meridian, and the heat was so overpowering, that we were all fairly scorched by it. At length half hoping that ducks might be concealed in

the high grass and reeds with which the banks were covered, and exhausted by our long cruise, we determined to stop a short time in the bay, and try our chance. Accordingly we spread our net on the bank, and then tried to land on the opposite one, but the water being too shallow, our boat could not be got sufficiently near, and we were obliged to wade ashore through the water.

As the heat was excessive, this half-bath was not altogether unpleasant; but we found it very annoying, on reaching the shore, to be assailed by a swarm of musquitos. Still we were not discouraged, but set to work directly, to drive the ducks out of their hiding-places. The grass with which the banks were overgrown was high and dense, and completely covered our sportsmen, who depended on the assistance they should derive from the dog in tracing and frightening the game. But all our anticipations of success were now miserably disappointed. The grass was so exuberant and so high, that the sportsmen, themselves unseen, could not even see each other. The dog was let loose, but disappeared in the same manner; and the ducks,

if any were there, could not be prevailed upon to show themselves.

After many ineffectual attempts to arouse the invisible game, the sportsmen at last returned to the spot where we had disembarked, not knowing what else to do. A grand council was held. Some were for trying our fortune again ; others advised our return home ; and when, through politeness, the ladies were asked their opinion, I proposed that we should first eat our dinner, which by a lucky forethought of mine, we had brought with us, and decide what should be done afterwards.

It is said that women's heads are not made for council ; and yet common experience often disproves the assertion. In the present case, my proposition was no sooner made, than the gloomy faces of the company all brightened up. One received it with a smile, another with a significant lick of his tongue ; and nobody raised the least objection to it. The proposal was even hurrahed, and carried by acclamation.

Our meal consisted of a pike stewed in the Jewish fashion, and a pudding called *pirog*, with cream ; and directly it was spread

out, we began the work of demolition. It is a common saying, that the stomach is akin to the brain, which probably is true; for when we had fortified the inner man, our thoughts grew rational, and the idea flashed through every one's mind that it would be unwise to persist in seeking ducks where none were to be found.

Meanwhile, our Ostiak, who had not followed us into the bay, seemed to have deserted our company with his little boat and the two lads. We were quite in the dark as to what had become of him; but as he had taken the fishing-net with him, concluded that he had lagged behind to fish. Now, however, it became necessary to seek him, and collecting all our things, we got into the boat, and pushed off. We had scarcely cleared the bay, when we discerned him on one of the islands, drawing his net out of the water. We instantly rowed towards the spot, and disembarked; but the Ostiak no sooner saw us land, than without speaking a word, he took up the fishing-net, put it in his boat, and pulled off to another point. We followed our dumb companion,

and landed at the same spot, close to the Raw Myss, a celebrated headland in the topography of Berezov, to which I had often extended my walks.

Here dry and sandy banks, and water not very deep, held out a promise of sport. We cast our net, and in a few minutes drew it out filled with various kinds of fish. In an instant the whole of the party, with the exception of the Doctor, Josephine, and myself, pounced on the spoil, and commenced eating the fish alive. At the same time, we were attacked by swarms of musquitos, which regaled themselves on our hands and faces with equal avidity and relish.

In vain we combated these foes, and struggled against their furious assaults. Fresh nests came upon us thick and fast. We lit a large fire, and tried to sit cooped up together, enveloping our faces in handkerchiefs; but do what we might, the insidious tormentors penetrated every barrier, and kept us in misery. Josephine and myself could at length endure the affliction no longer, and we availed ourselves of an opportunity to steal away from the company,

and, taking refuge behind a promontory, enjoyed a plunge in the water.

What a luxury is a bath ! This was the first we had enjoyed since our departure from Poland ; for the Soswa in the vicinity of the town is too exposed to view, and the banks too thronged with spectators to admit of such a thing.

The water, fresh and clear, invigorated our frames, enervated from the effect of the burning sun. It was delightful to behold the even sandy bottom through the clear transparent stream, and immerse ourselves in its crystal depths. The gradually sloping shore allowed us to proceed to any depth we pleased ; and we could even advance to such a distance as to be beyond the reach of the musquitos. These terrific insects, however, ventured to pursue us further than we expected, and our bodies were covered with scars and blotches inflicted by their venomous stings.*

* In confirmation of our authoress's statement, respecting the intense heat in this country, we find the following passage in Sir J. Richardson's " Arctic Narrative :"—" The power of the sun this day, in a cloudless

While we were enjoying our bath, Dr. Wakulinski went shooting, and brought down a bird of enormous size, with white plumage, called by the natives a *cholewa*. This species of bird is found in great numbers in the vicinity of Berezov, and feeds on fish. Wherever it perceives a party of fishermen, the *cholewa* follows in flocks, flying round the spot till the nets are drawn from the water, and fearing neither man nor fire-arms. In fact, they have nothing to apprehend, as from some prejudice they are

sky, was so great, that Mr. Rae and I were glad to take shelter in the water, while the crews were engaged on the portages. The irritability of the human frame is either greater in these northern latitudes, or the sun, notwithstanding its obliquity, acts more powerfully upon it than near the equator; for I have never felt its direct rays so oppressive within the Tropics, as I have experienced them to be on some occasions in the high latitudes. The luxury of bathing at such time is not without alloy; for, if you choose the mid-day, you are assailed by the *tabani*, who draw blood in an instant with their formidable lancets; and if you select the morning or the evening, then clouds of thirsty moschetoës, hovering around, fasten on the first part that emerges. Leeches also infest the still waters, and are prompt in their aggressions.

never killed ; and the fishermen even throw them a portion of their spoil. But the Doctor, who did not recognise the prevailing superstition, regarded them with little reverence, and levelled his piece at whole flocks. He took a close aim, as they never fled far ; and we saw the feathers fly from their bodies as they were struck by the shot ; but generally this was the only result, and they continued to soar unharmed overhead, as if in mockery of the attempt on their lives. At last, the Doctor succeeded in hitting one under the wing, where it had but few feathers, and thus disabled it from flying. The wounded bird fell to the ground, and we bore it off in triumph.

The *cholewa* is the same size as the wild goose. The feathers are quite white, and so remarkably thick and compact, that the small shot is thrown off without injuring the bird. The feet are yellow, and the beak crooked.

We brought our captive home alive ; but had much trouble with him on the way, as he struggled much, and bit us fiercely. How-

ever, his sufferings were not of long duration, for he died the next day.

There is another species of bird here of equally white plumage, and feeding likewise on fish, but much smaller. These birds are sea-gulls, called by the natives *martishki*. Like the *cholewas*, they hover over the fishermen, to participate in their booty.

CHAPTER XIV.

Beginning of Autumn—Walk on the banks of the Soswa—New street—Tamelessness of Berezovian dogs—Encounter with an Ostiak—Civilised and primitive life contrasted.

AT the latter part of July we had already had hoar-frost ; and, throughout the month of August, the whole country bore a mournful autumnal aspect. The river, which but a few weeks before was overflowing its banks, had now dwindled to a moderate stream. The grass had become yellow, the trees lost their foliage, and the leaves scattered on the ground were whirled to and fro by the wind. It grew cold, cloudy, and gusty. The whole atmosphere was impregnated with humid vapours. The days, formerly so clear, became a dim twilight.

Such was the uninviting bleak aspect of nature out of doors ; and within, things were not less mournful. My Josephine was sorrowful and pensive. She was startled and discomposed at the slightest blast of wind. Her betrothed had gone on a journey to Obdorsk, whither he had been called by duty ; and to her great agony, a violent storm had prevailed for two days, lashing the waves of the Soswa into fury, and beating unceasingly against the window-shutters. Josephine, overwhelmed with anxiety, moaned, and sighed, and sobbed without intermission.

With such melancholy objects around, my thoughts, whether I would or not, naturally assumed the same tint. I had also reasons of my own for being sorrowful, and was often at a loss how to drag through the long and wearisome hours of evening.

Sometimes the weather changed for the better ; and although it continued chilly, at least it did not rain. The streets were more or less dry ; and one day, anxious to enjoy the few hours of fine weather which nature here so sparingly granted, I resolved to take a walk ; autumn at Berezov being most

favourable for such recreation if not wet, as the myriads of musquitos have then disappeared. Accordingly, towards evening I wrapped myself up in a warm pelisse, and with a handkerchief tied round my face, sallied forth, together with Josephine, who had expressed a wish to accompany me. I guessed her motive, and we went straight to the bank of the Soswa.

The sun was still over the horizon, and was just laving his glorious orb in the river when we arrived. We came in good time to behold him sink into his nocturnal couch, when a lurid lustre spread over the sky, and was reflected in the depths of the river, while it illumined with uncertain light all the surrounding objects. Once more we cast a look far up the river, till our sight was lost in the distance—a desert without end; but the being sought by the anxious eyes of Josephine, was nowhere to be seen. My friend heaved a deep sigh, and returned home. As for myself, having for some days taken no exercise, I continued my walk, and sauntered away in another direction. This brought me to a new street, projected by the government,

and, as yet, only partly inhabited. Here and there rose a wooden hut, narrow and high, and some for want of proper attention, were falling into decay. Grass grew in the road, and felled trees, destined for the construction of the houses, lay about in piles, covered with toadstools and *fungi*.

The universal stillness, the grey twilight, and the utter loneliness of the spot, were calculated to dispose the mind to grave and mournful reflections, and I could not repress them. Why is it that autumn, however radiant with sunshine, always produces melancholy, and leaves the heart no sense of gladness? Why is it that spring invariably makes us cheerful, be the days ever so gloomy, wet, and chilly? I cannot tell, but such is always the effect on myself.

I still walked on. All was silence and solitude. Here and there, from the windows of solitary dwellings, single lights began to glimmer like lonely stars. Numbers of dogs were silently prowling about, or lying on dunghills before the houses, and caused me some alarm. The Berezovian dogs are large and ugly, and not calculated to inspire con-

fidence. My first idea was flight; but the dogs, as if they guessed my thought, lifted up their heads so complacently, and cast such a calm look upon me, that I felt reassured. They seemed as if they would say: "You may pass in peace, we have no concern with you," and in peace I passed accordingly.

Suddenly I perceived some form looming indistinctly in the distance. It moved towards me; and, at length, I saw it was an Ostiak, clad in his shaggy *malca*, his pallid face dingy with smoke, and his hair hanging in a cluster of plaits down his shoulders. He was hurrying on his way, as fast as he could, leaping lightly from one plank to another, and carried a *lukoshko* of freshly-caught fish in his hand. He was accompanied by a boy, pale and smutty as himself, but vigorous and light in his frame. He glided along at the side of the man, and easily kept pace with him, carrying on a lively, animated conversation, which, however, was quite unintelligible to me.

I turned aside to avoid meeting them, which, perhaps, caused them to regard me with more curiosity; but they said nothing, and went on their way.

CHAPTER XV.

The Aurora Borealis.

OF all the northern lights which I have seen at Berezov, the most splendid is the Aurora Borealis: it occurs so frequently as to be deemed an ordinary phenomenon, and we saw it several times during autumn. It commonly commences with a red glare on one spot of the sky, gradually extending more or less over the horizon, and encompassing it with its radiance. Frequently the light is distinctly seen moving in different directions, sometimes with rapidity, sometimes slowly, while its form and outline constantly change.

But of all the Auroras I ever saw, none can compare with one I witnessed on the 9th of September, 1840, of which I will attempt a feeble description.

At ten o'clock at night, a loud crackling noise was heard in the air, as though coming from a distance. The Berezovians were not slow in divining what this uproar in the atmosphere betokened, but almost before they could rush to their windows, the whole of the environs were enveloped in one blaze of illumination. Called by our landlord, we hurried into the court-yard to contemplate the phenomenon, and were enraptured at what we saw ; but to describe the spectacle is beyond the power of my feeble pen.

The night was frosty and clear. Every object around the earth, the forest, and the town, were white with snow. Berezov was no longer a miserable collection of huts, but radiant with lights, reflected by its covering of snow, looked like a world of enchantment. The different parts of the strange scenery seemed to form but a single grand and stately structure—a structure with walls of flame, surmounted by a cone-like cupola of fire,

which towered over our heads. The light was neither red nor lurid, but beamed with mild, soft, indescribable lustre, unlike anything that can be imagined.

The entire fabric, as it seemed, gradually threw off the cupola, and assumed the form of a sugar-loaf. It was narrow at its base, but the summit or apex of the cone rose to such an immense height, as to bewilder the vision. It appeared as though it even penetrated the vault of heaven, and at that hour of extraordinary solemnity, permitted mortals, though but for a moment, to catch from their earthly vale a glimpse of that mysterious region inaccessible but to the spirits of the blessed.

The walls of the wondrous cone were formed by light floating clouds of silvery brightness, which, curling upward like volumes of thin smoke, spread their luminous rays in every direction. These clouds rose like vapours from the base, as if they were engendered in the earth* and rolled rapidly up to the summit,

* This phenomenon is referred to in the "Cosmos," by Humboldt, who says: "The connection of the polar light (Aurora) with the most delicate cirrous clouds de-

where, after covering the apex, they vanished as quickly as they had ascended. Their disappearance, however, did not in the slightest degree interrupt or diminish the splendour of the spectacle, and fresh volumes of cloud continued to roll up in all kinds of fantastic shapes, and with the same brilliant effects.

These floating walls completely blocked out the sky, so that nothing could be seen of the blue veil of heaven or the countless stars. The eye could only behold the wonderful evolutions of masses of light, set in motion by an invisible hand, while the ear was enchained by majestic strains of harmony, with which the whole atmosphere resounded.

The Aurora was undiminished in brilliancy for several hours, but afterwards its motions were less rapid, the coruscations of light faded gradually away, and at two o'clock all

serves particular attention, because it shows us the electro-magnetic evolution of light as part of a meteorological process. The magnetism of the earth is here exhibited in all its influence on the atmosphere, and the condensation of vapour." The clouds thus influenced by terrestrial magnetism, Humboldt calls "polar bands."

had vanished. The stars, which up to that hour had been obscured or only partially visible, appeared in all their former glory; the moon shone brightly as it sailed over its clear azure path, and everything resumed its usual aspect.

Wishing to ascertain what the Berezovians, who have not the slightest knowledge of natural philosophy, thought of the Aurora, I made inquiries with this view. The explanation I obtained from the wisest among them was that the waves of the Arctic Ocean, reflecting the light of the moon, threw back a radiance on the sky, whence arose all the effects of the Aurora.

CHAPTER XVI.

Lieutenant Pim's proposed journey across Siberia—Difficulties of its execution as stated by the Russian Government—Rebellion of a Samoied chief—His capture at Obdorsk—Alarm at Berezov—Belief in witchcraft.

IN considering the peculiar complexion of the events which are related in the present chapter, the Editor thinks he will be excused, if, in order to make the contents of the original text more fully understood and appreciated by the reader, he prefaces it with a few particulars connected with the expedition lately proposed by Lieutenant Pim to the north-east coast of Siberia, in search of Sir John

Franklin, and the views taken by the Russian authorities on the subject. What may have been the ulterior motives of the Imperial Government for discountenancing the project, we shall not stop to inquire, but the doubts at St. Petersburg, as to the possibility of carrying the undertaking into effect, appear to be genuine and well-founded.

These doubts," as Baron Brunnow expressed in his letter to Sir Roderick Murchison, "are more than mere conjectures: they amount almost to a certainty." But it may be doubted whether the subsequent assertion be entitled to equal credit, that "under these circumstances it was not to be expected that the Imperial Government should be induced to put in jeopardy the life of a British officer sacrificing his safety to a bold experiment, without any reasonable chance of success," though, as to the obstacles to a journey through Siberia, the Baron's testimony is fully borne out by the description our author gives of that Arctic wilderness. These obstacles are not only immense, but at certain seasons of the year are absolutely insurmountable. Had Lieutenant Pim been per-

mitted to make the attempt, he would have had to cross tracts of pathless snow, and in spring, swollen rivers and inundations, impenetrable forests, and ravines swarming with venomous reptiles, and rapacious wild beasts, with no succour within reach, and hostile tribes of fierce and lawless aborigines to encounter at every stage. Add to this, the depredations and knavery of the perfidious Russian settlers, always alert to prey on the stranger. To bear its discomforts without repining, one must be born there, or inured by long custom to the mode of living.

The Russian authorities at St. Petersburg, appear to have been so little prepared for such an expedition as that proposed by Lieutenant Pim, that they were startled with amazement at the enterprise. After expressing the Emperor's and their own admiration of his noble devotedness, they proceed, in their report, to make the following observations.

“But, unfortunately, between the conception of such a project and its realization, physical difficulties and insurmountable obstacles exist, which Mr. Pim, guided by his generous devotion, does not seem to have

sufficiently foreseen, and concerning which it is the duty of the Russian Government to enlighten him.

“It is easy to trace in the map of the world, across the immense wilderness of Northern Siberia, an itinerary which might lead to the end desired to be reached by Lieutenant Pim; but, in executing such a project, it must not be forgotten that, in addition to the enormous distances to be traversed, vast deserts must also be passed over, which, buried under eternal snows, offer neither means of transport nor provisions—unexplored regions, in which tribes of savage people are scattered at wide intervals—people over whom the Russian power exercises only the slightest influence, and whose warlike character, barbarous customs, and hatred of strangers, are such that the Imperial Government would find it impossible to guarantee the personal security of Lieutenant Pim and his party.

“To give an idea of the difficulties that such a journey presents, it is well to call to mind the expedition undertaken some years ago by Admiral Wrangel. Prepared during

two preceding years by the local authorities, this expedition, though undertaken on a scale of research much less extensive than that now contemplated, had to be diminished in consequence of a disease among the dogs employed to drag the sledges, and yet fifty sledges and six hundred dogs were required.

“From this example, it is easy to judge of the fate which would attend Mr. Pim and his companions in the endeavour to execute a journey almost treble the extent of that accomplished by Admiral Wrangel, and in which the British officer, having to be accompanied by interpreters, must be provided with more considerable means of transport.

“To define more precisely the nature of these difficulties, and to establish the basis of an approximate estimate, it is sufficient to remember that as Admiral Wrangel was compelled to employ fifty sledges and six hundred dogs (each sledge being supplied with from fifty to seventy salt herrings per diem), Lieutenant Pim’s expedition would call for from one thousand two hundred to one thousand five hundred dogs, and provisions in

proportion. Now, these animals are only kept in sufficient number for the use of the inhabitants, and it is doubtful if it would be possible to collect such a quantity of dogs, even if the complete ruin of the natives, which must ensue, were entirely put out of the question.

“As to the idea of setting on foot such a journey at present, and without having made the necessary preparations, the Imperial Government does not hesitate to view it as physically (*‘materiellement’*) impossible.”

These remarks will prepare the reader for the revelations of our author, to which we will now return.

A great panic was created at Berezov, by the reported approach of a Samoied, named Waul, a chief of a Samoied *wataha*, or clan, who two or three years before, being pressed by famine, had ravaged the lands of the neighbouring *watahas*. Waul was not looked upon as a common robber. Popular imagination and custom invested him with extraordinary characteristics, so that he every day gained more ground among the natives, exciting their admiration by his exploits and prowess.

The number of his partisans was increased by those who suffered from want, or sought his protection ; and others joined him from fear of persecution.

But in proportion as his successes and the power of his *wataha* increased, so did he augment the number of his enemies. Most of the neighbouring clans, which he had conquered and compelled to pay tribute, became his adversaries ; but nothing daunted, and confident in the courage and attachment of his partisans, he turned a deaf ear to their murmurs, and treated them with utter contempt.

At length a fatal hour struck for the Samoied chieftain. Through the instrumentality of the Prince of Obdorsk, Waul was captured, and delivered a prisoner to the Russian Government. He was tried at the tribunal of the Berezovian district, and sentenced to be banished to Surgut, a small settlement in the same district, eight hundred versts from Berezov.

Brought to the place of exile, it was not long before a man so shrewd, courageous, and adroit, contrived to escape, and returned to

his native wilderness on the coast of the Arctic Sea. No sooner did a rumour of his return get abroad, that he was released from prison in consequence of his innocence, than all his former adherents flocked around him once more, and he was soon at the head of a large force. Many were actuated by feelings of affection towards him, and confidence in his bravery ; and others were deluded by the false colouring he gave to the whole transaction. Thus he declared that during his long absence he had had a personal interview with the White Czar, as the Emperor is called by the common people in Russia ; and though he had been admonished at first, that he afterwards restored him his freedom, and intrusted him at parting with many confidential orders.

This was more than enough to augment the number of his adherents. His bold and imposing attitude—his enterprising and adventurous spirit—and, above all, his Shamanic character and rank, which made him a depository of all the secrets and mysteries appertaining to the priestly order, led the Samoieds to look on him as some superior being ; and thus, partly from fear of giving

him offence, and partly from the confidence which they were accustomed to place in him, several hundred families recognised him as their chief.

As soon as he found himself sufficiently reinforced, he threw off all concealment, and began to act openly. His first operation was against the Sassadätel of Obdorsk—an officer of police, whom he considered his personal enemy, and determined to deprive of his office. This official was an habitual drunkard, and never appeared in public except in a state of intoxication. He was disliked both by his subordinates and by the inhabitants, towards whom he was accustomed to behave with exceeding harshness, and frequently with injustice.

Waul was not aware that, by attacking this man, he violated the law. He thought only of administering justice according to the law of right.

His first step was to issue an injunction to his followers not to pay their fur-tax, until the police official was discharged. But by this hostile demonstration he unfortunately put himself in opposition to the government,

and became exposed to all the consequences of such an act. But his measures of retribution did not stop here, and he next denounced the Prince of Obdorsk, who had been instrumental in effecting his first capture. Waul wished to avenge himself on him, and, if possible, to depose him, and conceived himself strong enough to dictate any conditions to his enemies. At length, weary of acting on the defensive, he determined to become the aggressor ; and just at the time of the fair of Obdorsk, he advanced at the head of a considerable number of people, and encamped within one day's march of the town.

The news spread a panic as far as Berezov ; and the inhabitants, accustomed to think of nothing but traffic and the comforts of life, were terrified beyond measure. The director of police issued an order to the inhabitants to surround their houses with every available defence, and to have all gates and doors well fastened, and all passages blocked up, in order to repel any irruption, should an attempt be made in the night. The night-watch was doubled, and a strong injunction

given to keep a sharp look-out. In a word, the region so long buried in lethargy, was on a sudden awakened to life and activity.

This alarm, created by Waul's approach, and the general excitement it occasioned, led to an incident which nearly terminated in a tragic catastrophe. One of the Cossacks, resident at the place, observing the panic among the people, conceived a mad plan of amusing himself at the expense of his family. On his return home, at a late hour in the night, he began to knock violently at the door, demanding admittance in the Samoied language. The accents of the enemy were so well feigned, that his voice was not recognised; and a lad of fourteen, his own son, armed himself with his father's sword, and prepared to rush out directly the door should be forced. The Cossack, having played off his joke, proceeded to open the door, when his son struck out with the sword, which, however, happily for the father, fell not on his head, as intended, but on the handle of the door; thus a fatal tragedy was averted.

While the consternation of the public was still at its height, news arrived which changed

our mourning into rejoicing. Waul, the terror of the country from Berezov to the Arctic Ocean, was captured, and brought prisoner to Berezov. The formidable chief had been seduced by a treacherous stratagem, concerted by the Russian officials, into visiting Obdorsk, the Prince of which town had concluded an amicable arrangement with him, which he intended to carry out with perfect good faith, but was made a dupe, in the hands of the officials, for effecting Waul's arrest. This took place at the house of his enemy, the Sprawnick, who, by flattery and pretended submission, induced him to enter the domicile to partake of a glass of whiskey. No sooner did he cross the threshold, than the Sprawnick exclaimed in a loud voice : " This is Waul ! " and at this signal, a band of Cossacks, who stood near, disguised as Ostiaks, rushed on the defenceless chief to secure him.

Waul endeavoured to save himself by flight, but being closely pursued, at last sank into the deep snow, and was discovered, and captured. His faithful retinue, who had not accompanied him into the town, hearing that

they had been betrayed, extinguished all the lights, and afterwards mixed with the Ostiaks belonging to the *wataha* of the Prince of Obdorsk, in common with whom they succeeded, at daybreak, in escaping to the forests. Only four, who would not forsake the person of their chief, were captured on that day. They were bound, like himself, and brought to Berezov under a military escort. Among them was Waul's brother, who, according to report, is as violent as Waul himself.

A blacksmith was called to forge irons to fetter Waul, but on his arrival at the prison, he declared that all the irons in the world would be useless, as the strongest chains would be inadequate to resist the spell of the Shamanic incantation. But the roguish son of Vulcan, seeing that these words produced a great effect, added that he possessed a secret, by availing himself of which he would be able to forge chains of an anti-magic character, which all Waul's witchcraft would fail to break. As may be supposed, he was instantly set down for a wise and great man, who could save the town by his ingenuity.

The irons were soon forged, and even his secret was revealed, as a great favour, to two or three chosen spirits, one of whom communicated it to me. Here it is: Smelt the nail from a horse-shoe with the iron, and it will then be proof against all charms."

CHAPTER XVII.

Arrival of Chinownik—An evening party—Letters from home—A maid-servant—Special commission—Official insubordination—Search for mammoth bones—Josephine's marriage—Authoress transferred to Saratov—Preparations for the journey—Noble conduct of the Berezovians—Farewell.

A CHINOWNIK, or Imperial functionary with a special commission, arrived at Berezov at the end of January, 1841, to revise the different branches of the judicature, and also to be a member of a commission appointed to try Waul, who, thanks to the blacksmith's secret, had been unable to set himself free, and still continued in prison.

I got an invitation from the Greek Proto-

pope's wife to an evening party at her house. As I was suffering from a severe rheumatic complaint, I would gladly have absented myself, but the hope that I should meet the Chinownik, and possibly hear from him news of my friends at Tobolsk, induced me to make an effort.

In a place so isolated as Berezov, which is a prison without walls, the most trivial occurrence presents itself with the dimensions of a grand event, and engrosses every one's attention. The accidental arrival, therefore, of a new-comer, and that from a place where I had left friends, sufficed to make me shake off all my listlessness, my indolence, and indifference; and I hastened to the Proto-pope's house.

I happened not to be one of the first visitors, for I found the whole of the Berezovian fashionables already assembled, and divided, as usual, into two camps. One was composed of gamblers, and the other of negatives.

Having made my own way through both circles, I entered an adjoining room, to take my place among the galaxy of women. Im-

mediately sweetmeats and various other sorts of preserves were presented to me ; and as it was the name-day of the lady of the house, I expressed my felicitations to her, and repeated them to the reverend Protopope (who, by the bye, bore the Polish name of Zaborowski), and so, in succession, to all the members of their family, such being the custom at Berezov. This ceremony being over, was followed by another, namely, inquiries respecting the health of every person present, as well as that of all the lady's relations. On such occasions, it is indispensable to be acquainted with the Christian names of all the race, as well as their patronymics, which must be invariably added at every question. Unfortunately, I could not remember so extensive a nomenclature, and the good Berezovian ladies would often suggest to me the names of their relatives whose names I happened to forget. I owed much to their kind aid in such large parties as this, and thus assisted, I went pretty well through the whole ordeal.

These formalities over, nothing remained for the evening's amusement but cracking

cedar-nuts, which Siberian custom is absurdly called conversation (*rosgaworki*); when, contrary to the manner of the country, we saw a gentleman coming in the ladies' room. This proved to be the Chinownik.

By this unusual proceeding, he attracted the attention of all. It was not long before he introduced himself to me. His name was Kazaczynski, and he was an agreeable young man, with European manners and education. His easy, graceful air, and cultivated mind, made him a welcome acquisition to our society, and what was more acceptable, he brought me letters from my children. I was indebted for this to the kindness of the Governor-General, who, not waiting for the departure of the post, which arrives here but once a fortnight, had availed himself of the opportunity to send them by this gentleman.

Thus the evening party proved more pleasant than I had anticipated. I received tidings of my cherished children, of my dear Stephen at Moscow, and my beloved Julia at Kiov; and their letters were so genuine and so full of tenderness, that my heart overflowed.

I felt happy, and proud of my children. It appeared that the whole assembly read in my countenance that I was a happy mother, and that in my maternal affections I found solace sufficient to counterbalance all the other sufferings which I endured.

As if to increase my happiness, the same gentleman brought me tidings from my friends at Tobolsk; and my mind was refreshed with remembrances of the past. The evening did not drag on so drearily as usual, and on returning home, I again and again perused my letters, and thanking God for having vouchsafed to me such comfort in my children, I committed them to his protection and blessing.

On my arrival home, I presented a few dainties which I had brought from the table to my waiting-maid; but I observed that she accepted them with indifference. Soon afterwards she asked me, with a look of grief, why I did not rather tell her the news I had received from my children. I could not do otherwise than satisfy her curiosity, which was as guileless as affectionate.

For several months I had had a Polish servant who was sent to me from Tobolsk,

but with whom I had so much trouble that I was obliged to discharge her. I then hired a Siberian girl, who, though not knowing the duties of a lady's-maid, was good-natured, simple, and unsophisticated. She was, however, free and easy in her manners, as if she were an equal ; though she could not be said to be without some idea of the distinction of classes. This I remarked when she was one day combing my hair. As she could never arrange it properly, I told her that she should do it just like her own. But this she opposed with tears, and said that she would never agree to such a thing, as I should then look like a common person and not like a lady. I was therefore obliged, whether I would or not, to look like a lady, a great privilege indeed, but which she made me enjoy at the cost of a handful of hair every morning. She maintained a more respectful demeanour towards me, as the senior, but she treated Josephine without the slightest ceremony. In her merry mood she would pat her cheek, slap her shoulder, and say everything that passed through her brain. She regularly bade me good-morning and good-night, kissed my hand on going out to visit

her parents, and when she came back, presented their compliments to me. Having handed round the tea to visitors, she would seat herself in a chair until they had finished. I was extremely amused at her originality ; and never said one word to check it.

The winter of this year will no doubt be long remembered in these parts, on account of the number of extraordinary incidents which occurred. The consternation into which the country was thrown by Waul's irruption, and the subsequent capture of that chief, made a strong impression on the minds of the inhabitants, and the circumstance was looked upon by them in the light of a regular campaign. This being over, a special commission, composed of Count Tolstoy, aide-de-camp to the Governor-General, and two councillors of state, Kazaczynski and Sokolow, arrived to inquire into all the proceedings.

The visit of these important personages created great alarm among the government officials, who, in so distant a place as Berezov, being left entirely to themselves, without any control over their actions, lose all discipline, and having very little or nothing to do, are

generally addicted to drunkenness. This disorganisation of the body of *employés*, occasioned many comical scenes. One functionary, on the arrival of Count Tolstoy, presented himself before him in his shirt, but armed with a sword; another in his comfortable *shuba* and large fur slippers. The Count, who is a military man, and accustomed to strict discipline, was exceedingly shocked at such neglect of the government regulations, and sent a courier to Tobolsk to acquaint the Governor-General with the great disorders which had crept in among the officials of the province; and the consequence was that a number of them lost their places.

From this town, the Commissioners proceeded to Obdorsk, which was the principal scene of Waul's exploits, for the purpose of taking evidence in reference to his proceedings there. Here they were met by another instance of insubordination. On their arrival, the notorious Sassadätel being drunk, refused to recognise the Commission, and would not co-operate in the inquiry, haughtily declaring that he alone was master at Obdorsk, and that he acknowledged no superior authority.

Count Tolstoy was obliged to despatch another courier to Tobolsk for new instructions. The result was, that the unworthy *employé*, who had for a long time been a scourge to the inhabitants, was dismissed, and declared incapable of holding any office under the government.

The Commission was entrusted with another subject of inquiry, which was left principally to Kazaczynski. Reports having reached the authorities, that some mammoth bones had been discovered in the vicinity of Obdorsk, Governor Ladyzynski, an eminent lover of science, was desirous to have the whole of them dug up and secured for some museum of natural history. As to the existence of the mammoth remains in these parts, there seems to be no doubt. The head of that wonderful animal (*Elephas primigenius*) had been accidentally discovered in an upper stratum of earth; and some parts had been broken off and worked into a variety of implements, for which the bones of the animal are commonly used. The rest of the gigantic skeleton, with its flesh and skin, was supposed to be congealed in a lower stratum. The above-named

gentleman, during his sojourn at Obdorsk, did all in his power to discover the spot, but could not succeed. The inhabitants would give no information, and it was impossible to find it unaided, in the deep snow which, at that season, covered the whole earth. The reason why the inhabitants refused to point out the place, as I afterwards learned, was merely the fear that they would be forced to dig for the remains, which would have given them much trouble.*

The work of the Commission of Inquiry having been brought to a conclusion, Waul was conducted to Tobolsk to be tried by the

* A nearly entire fossil skeleton of the mammoth is preserved in the Museum at St. Petersburg, in a small room, alone with an elephant, which is comparatively a dwarf by its side. It was discovered in 1799, on the eastern banks of the Lena, in a mass of earth and ice, which had disconnected itself, and lay for some years a prey to every depredator, before any notice was taken of it. The fossil remains were first recognised by a Mr. Adams, an Englishman, who accompanied Count Golowkin in his embassy to China, in 1805, and made a tour in that district, in order to prosecute his scientific researches. Singularly enough, relics of this animal have also been discovered in the British islands.

court-martial. I saw him in a waggon, surrounded by a strong escort of Cossacks. His stature was robust, and he was broad-shouldered, and had a bold, intrepid look.

After a long interval of suspense and uncertainty, Josephine at last obtained permission to marry Dr. Wakulinski. The happy bridegroom got leave to go to Tobolsk to be married. They accomplished their journey just at the time that the Roman Catholic priest was passing through that town, coming from Tomsk. They were married on the 15th of March, when they returned to Berezov. The young couple never expressed a desire for separate lodgings, nor wished that I should look for another residence for myself; so they stayed with me, and we divided our rooms between us.

In honour of their wedding, they gave an entertainment to their friends at Berezov; but want of space in our suite of apartments for a numerous assembly caused us much trouble. My apartment was the reception-room, and to give more space, my bed, books, &c., were all turned out for the occasion.

At length the necessary preparations were made for the reception of guests ; the table was loaded with confectionery, sweetmeats, and all sorts of dainties, customary here on such festivals. But seven o'clock had passed, and nobody was visible. We began to fear our messenger, who had been sent out with the invitations, and was not noted for sobriety, had committed some blunder, or that perhaps we had, in our ignorance, violated some rule of etiquette. But we were soon undeceived. All the company arrived, though somewhat later, as is the custom here. They ate and drank, chatted and played at cards, and at twelve o'clock, having enjoyed their supper, the ladies took their departure, and the gentlemen remained till three o'clock playing at boston.

From over-fatigue, I felt so drowsy that, as soon as the guests had departed, I closed the window-shutters, and threw myself down on my couch, beside the table covered with plates, knives, remains of creams, jellies, sweetmeats, and sundry other relics of the repast, rejoicing at the prospect that I should

next day return to our quiet life and the comforts of my domestic habits.

The long winter passed, and as June opened, there was again a sudden leap to summer. One day was piercingly cold, the next oppressively hot; and thus I entered on the third year of my residence at Berezov.

Still there was change in my lot. My anxiety had reached the highest pitch, and the more as the celebration of the marriage of the heir apparent to the crown had flattered me with a hope of liberation, but which now seemed illusive. In this gloomy frame of mind I had traced some desponding words to my family. The letters were ready for dispatch, when, just as I was sorrowfully folding them up, I received a communication from the Horodnitchi.

It was an invariable custom here, that at the return of every post, I received a paper from this functionary for my signature, setting forth how many letters I had received from him, which certificate was forwarded to the Governor. Supposing the present document was of the same character, I took the pen to sign it; but on glancing at its con-

tents, could scarcely believe my eyes. The document contained my liberation from Berezov, and an order to transfer me to the government of Saratov.

I was now to recross the Ural Mountains, and be nearer my children by at least five thousand versts; but I could scarcely believe in such happiness. I instantly ran to Josephine, the dear companion of my exile, and learned from her that she was comprised in the same act of mercy. We now spread out the map before us, traced the distances and the positions of places, and were endeavouring to sum up all the advantages resulting to me from the change of abode.

Before the sun had set, I paid hurried visits to all the families with whom I was intimate, to inform them of the glad news. The good Berezovians most cordially congratulated me upon it, and in their anxiety for my welfare, gave me advice how to continue my voyage to Tobolsk with safety and comparative comfort. Their advice, in the present instance, was valuable. Just at this season of the year, vessels were sailing only to the Oby Gulf, and there was none to

Tobolsk; and therefore I could hardly hope to find one so large and commodious as that which had brought me to Berezov, unless I determined to wait three months longer, when the vessels would return from the fisheries. There was now no alternative but to make the long voyage to Tobolsk in a small post-boat, which was the more intolerable, as it was changed at every station, and the luggage would be obliged each time to be unloaded.

While I was thus perplexed, not knowing what to do, one of the Berezovian merchants generously proposed to lend me one of his own boats, with four oars. I gladly accepted his kind offer, and caring little for any minor arrangements, I immediately went to the banks of the Soswa to see the barge, and accelerate my preparations for the voyage.

The transport which I now experienced was so excessive, that it did not allow me to taste any food, nor could I sleep the whole night. Accustomed as I had been to traverse, in thought and deed, immense distances, the thousand versts which would still separate me from my children, seemed to me but a thin

partition. Berezov was divided from Tobolsk by a thousand and some hundred versts, but the Berezovians and myself were wont to consider it a neighbouring town, and resorted to it for the most trifling necessities of life. A journey of but a couple of months was needed, and I should find myself brought nearly to the threshold of my home, nearly within the embraces of my children. Oh, how sweet was this reverie after years of yearning—yearning with so little hope !

The good ladies of Berezov, in their friendship for me, vied with each other in loading me with provisions, so that I found my boat half filled with delicious cakes and game ; with a plentiful addition of sweetmeats, jams, and even wine.

I left Berezov on St. Anthony's Day, 1841. At my departure, all my acquaintances assembled to accompany me to the place of embarkation. There was such a concourse of people, that the river-side appeared like a fair. All tried to take leave of me, and blessed me on my journey with all the sincerity of their hearts. I was deeply affected whilst parting with this out-of-the-

world community of simple-minded, sincere people, by whom I had been so long befriended and consoled, and whose kind services I shall ever hold in grateful remembrance. Some of their number accompanied me in their boats about two versts further, and among them were my good friends Dr. Wakulinski and his amiable young wife, whose society proved a soothing balm amidst my severe trials. At the last firing of the gun, I waved my farewell to the inhabitants, who were still lingering on the shore, following my bark with their eyes. My tears fell in a torrent, as I looked back for the last time on the groups I was leaving for ever, and who had given me, a stranger among them, so many proofs of hospitality. I pressed Josephine to my throbbing heart, but could not say a word.

THE END.



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