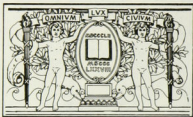


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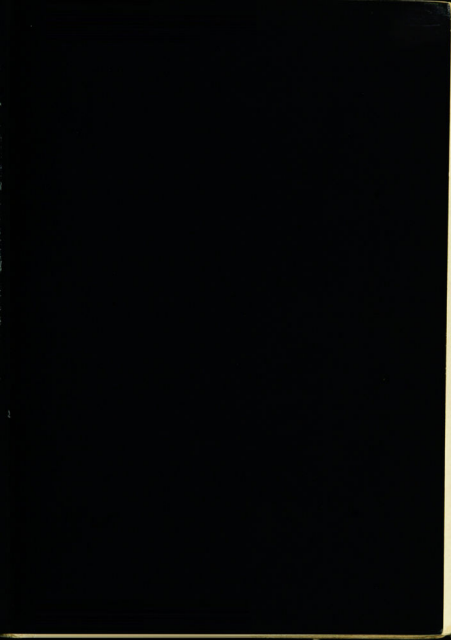
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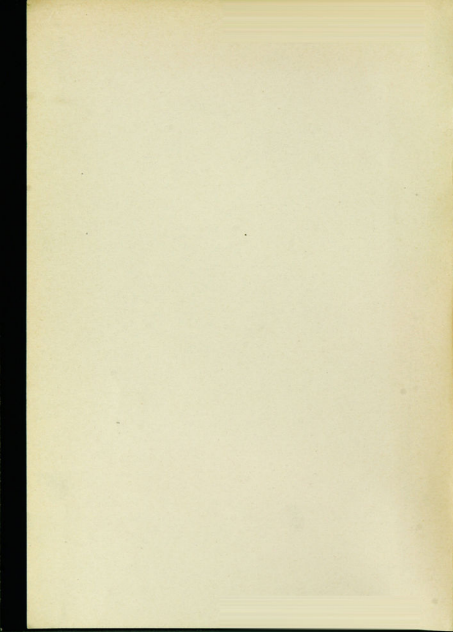
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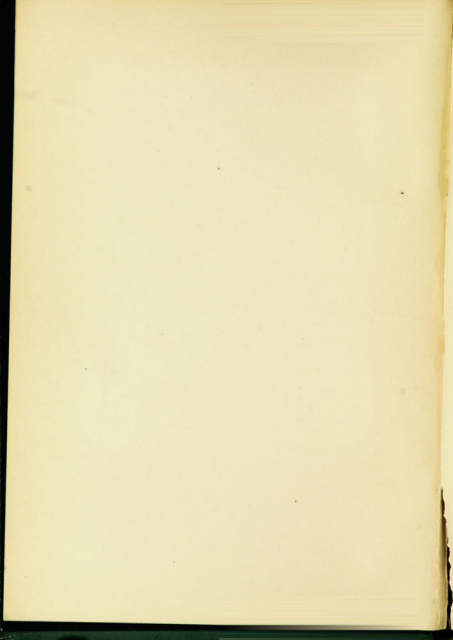
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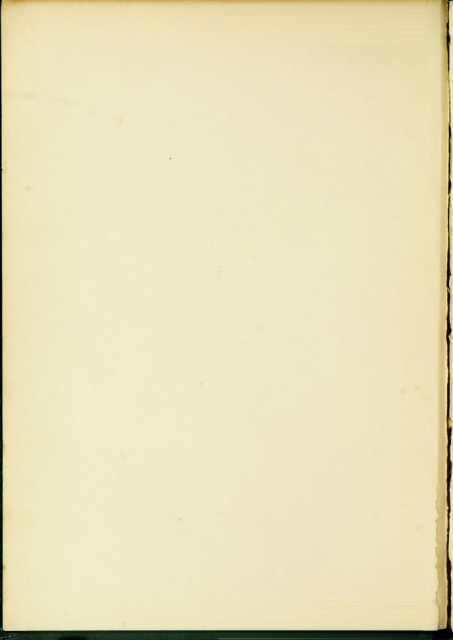




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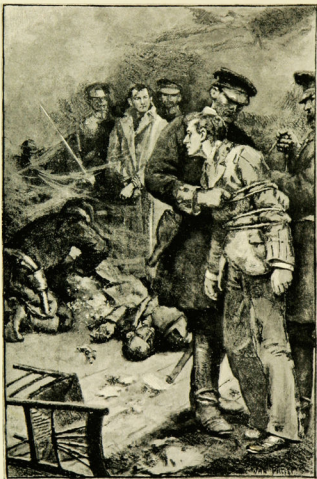


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GODFREY IS CAPTURED BY THE RUSSIAN POLICE

CONDEMNED AS A NIHILIST

A STORY OF
ESCAPE FROM SIBERIA

BY

G. A. HENTY

Author of "Beric the Briton," "In Greek Waters," "A Dash for Khartoum,"
"Redskin and Cow-Boy," "Held Fast for England," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY WALTER PAGET

NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

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PREFACE

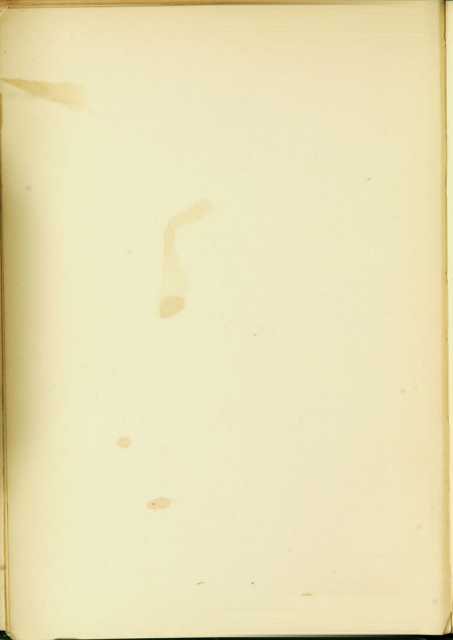
MY DEAR LADS,

There are few difficulties that cannot be surmounted by patience, resolution, and pluck, and great as are the obstacles that nature and the Russian government oppose to an escape from the prisons of Siberia, such evasions have occasionally been successfully carried out, and that under far less advantageous circumstances than those under which the hero of this story undertook the venture. For the account of life in the convict establishments in Siberia I am indebted to the very valuable books by my friend the Rev. Dr. Lansdell, who has made himself thoroughly acquainted with Siberia, traversing the country from end to end and visiting all the principal prisons. He conversed not only with officials, but with many of the prisoners and convicts, and with Russian and foreign residents in the country, and his testimony as to the management of the prisons and the condition of the convicts is confirmed by other independent writers personally cognisant of the facts, and like him able to converse fluently in the language, and writing from intimate knowledge of the subject.

Yours sincerely, .

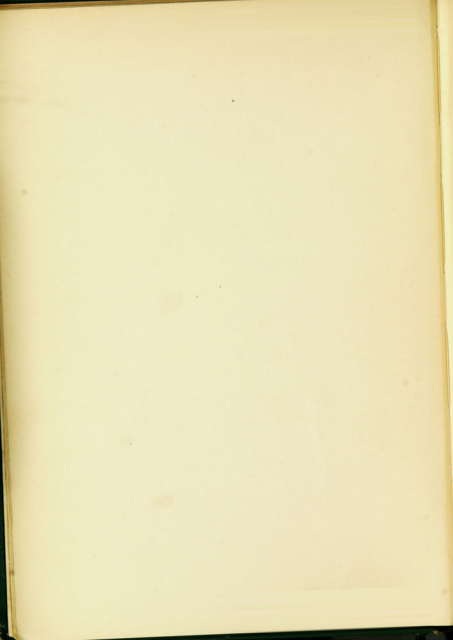
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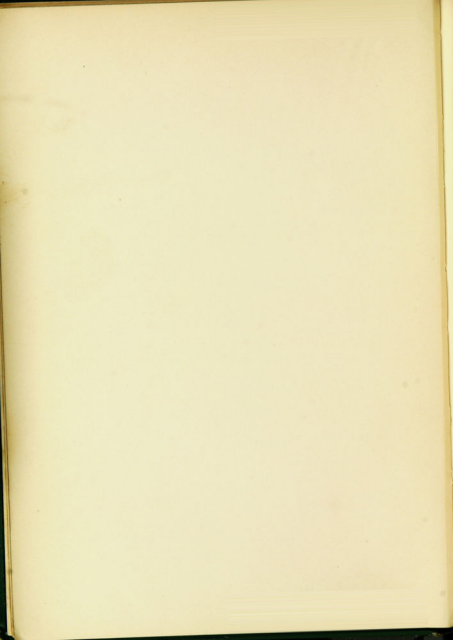
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CONDEMNED AS A NIHILIST

CHAPTER I

A GREAT CHANGE

HALF a dozen boys were gathered in one of the studies at Shrewsbury. A packed portmanteau and the general state of litter on the floor was sufficient to show that it was the last day of term.

"Well, I am awfully sorry you are going, Bullen; we shall all miss you. You would certainly have been in the football team next term; it is a nuisance altogether."

"It is a nuisance; and I am beastly sorry I am leaving. Of course I have known for some time that I should be going out to Russia; but I did not think the governor would have sent me until after I had gone through the school. His letter a fortnight ago was a regular stumper. I thought I should have had another year and a half or two years, and, of course, that is just the jolliest part of school life. However, it cannot be helped."

"You talk the language, don't you, Bullen?"

"Well, I used to talk it, but I don't remember much about it now. You see I have been home six years. I expect I shall pick it up again fast enough. I should not mind it so much if the governor were out there still; but you see he

came home for good two years ago. Still it won't be like going to a strange place altogether; and as he has been living there so long, I shall soon get to know lots of the English there. Still I do wish I could have had a couple of years more at Shrewsbury. I should have been content to have gone out then."

"Well, it is time for us to be starting. I can hear the omnibus."

In a few minutes the omnibus was filled with luggage inside and out; the lads started to walk to the station. As the train drew up there were hearty good-byes, and then the train steamed out of the station, the compartment in which Godfrey Bullen had taken his seat being filled with boys going, like himself, straight through to town. All were in high spirits, and Bullen, who had felt sorry at leaving school for the last time, was soon as merry as any of them.

"You must mind what you are up to, Bullen," one of his companions said. "They are terrible fellows those Nihilists, they say."

"They won't hurt Bullen," another put in, "unless he goes into the secret police. I should say he would make a good sort of secret policeman."

"No, no; he is more likely to turn a Nihilist."

"Bosh!" Bullen said, laughing. "I am not likely to turn a secret policeman; but I am more likely to do that than to turn Nihilist. I hate revolutionists and assassins, and all those sort of fellows."

"Yes, we all know that you are a Tory, Bullen; but people change, you know. I hope we shall never see among the lists of Nihilists tried for sedition and conspiracy, and sentenced to execution, the name of one Godfrey Bullen."

"Oh, they wouldn't execute Bullen!" another said; "they would send him to Siberia. Bullen's always good at fighting an uphill game, and he would show off to great advantage in a chain-gang. Do they crop their hair there, Bullen, and put on a gray suit, as I saw them at work in Portsmouth dock-yard last year?"

"I am more likely to see you working in a chain-gang at Portsmouth, Wilkinson, when I come back, than I am to form part of a convict gang in Siberia—at any rate for being a Nihilist. I won't say about other things, for I suppose there is no saying what a fellow may come to. I don't suppose any of the men who get penal servitude for forgery, and swindling, and so on, ever have any idea, when they are sixteen, that that is what they are coming to. At present I don't feel any inclination that way."

"I should say you were not likely to turn forger anyhow, Bullen, whatever you take to."

"Why is that, Parker?"

"Because you write such a thundering bad hand that you would never be able to imitate anyone else's signature, unless he couldn't go farther than making a cross for his name, and the betting is about even that you would blot that."

There was a roar of laughter, for Bullen's handwriting was a perpetual source of trouble to him, and he was continually losing marks for his exercises in consequence. He joined heartily in the laugh.

"It is an awful nuisance that handwriting of mine," he said, "especially when one is going to be a merchant, you know. The governor has talked two or three times about my going to one of those fellows who teach you to write copperplate in twenty lessons. I shouldn't be surprised if he does let me have a course these holidays. I should not mind if he does, for my writing is disgusting."

"Never mind, Bullen; bad handwriting is a sign of genius, you know. You have never shown any particular genius yet, except for rowing and boxing, and I suppose that is muscular genius; but you may blossom out into a new line some day."

"I don't want to disturb the harmony of this last meeting, Parker, or I should bring my muscular genius into play at your expense."

"No, no, Bullen," another boy said, "you keep that for Russia. Fancy Bullen polishing off a gigantic Cossack, or

defending the Czar's life against half a dozen infuriated Nihilists. That would be the thing, Bullen. It would be better than trade any day. Why, you would get an estate as big as an English county, with ten thousand serfs, and sacks upon sacks of roubles."

"What bosh you fellows talk!" Bullen laughed. "There is one thing I do expect I shall learn in Russia, and that is to skate. Fancy six months of regular skating, instead of a miserable three or four days. I shall meet some of you fellows some day at the Round Pond, and there you will be just working away at the outside edge, and I shall be joining in those skating-club figures and flying round and round like a bird."

"What birds fly round and round, Bullen?"

"Lots of them do, as you would know, Jordan, if you kept your eyes open, instead of being always on the edge of going to sleep. Swallows do, and eagles. Never mind, you fellows will turn yellow with jealousy when you see me."

And so they laughed and joked until they reached London. Then there was another hearty good-bye all round, and in a couple of minutes they were speeding in hansoms to their various destinations. Godfrey Bullen's was Eccleston Square. His father was now senior partner in a firm that carried on a considerable business with the east of Europe. He had, when junior partner, resided at St. Petersburg, as the firm had at that time large dealings in the Baltic. From various causes this trade had fallen off a good deal, and the firm had dealt more largely with Odessa and the southern ports. Consequently, when at the death of the senior partner Mr. Bullen returned to England to take up the principal management of the affairs of the firm, it was not deemed advisable to continue the branch at St. Petersburg, and Ivan Petrovytch, a Russian trader of good standing, had been appointed their agent there.

The arrangement had not worked quite satisfactorily. Petrovytch was an excellent agent as far as he went. The business he did was sound, and he was careful and conscientious; but he lacked push and energy, had no initiative, and would do

nothing on his own responsibility. Mr. Bullen had all along intended that Godfrey should, on leaving school, go for a few years to Russia, and should, in time, occupy the same position there that he himself had done; but he had now determined that this should take place earlier than he had before intended. He thought that Godfrey would now more speedily pick up the language again, than if he remained another two or three years in England, and that in five or six years' time he might be able to represent the firm there, either in conjunction with Ivan Petrovytch or by himself. Therefore, ten days before the breaking-up of the school for the long holidays, he had written to Godfrey, telling him that he should take him away at the end of the term, and that in two or three months' time he would go out to St. Petersburg.

Mr. Bullen's family consisted of two girls in addition to Godfrey. Hilda, the elder, was seventeen, a year older than the lad, while Ella was two years his junior.

"Well, Godfrey," his father said, as, after the first greeting, they sat down to dinner, which had been kept back for half an hour for his arrival, "you did not seem very enthusiastic in your reply to my letter."

"I did not feel very enthusiastic, father," Godfrey replied. "Of course one's two last years at school are just the jolly time, and I was really very sorry to leave. Still, of course you know what is best for me; and I dare say I shall get on very well at St. Petersburg."

"I have no doubt of that, Godfrey. I have arranged for you to live with Mr. Petrovytch, as you will regain the language much more quickly in a Russian family than you would in an English one; besides, it will be handy for your work. In Russia merchants' offices are generally in their houses, and it is so with him; but, of course, you will know most of the English families. I shall write to several of my old friends, and I am sure they will do all they can for you; but I shall write more to my Russian acquaintances than to my English. The last are sure to call upon you when they hear you have

come out; but it is not so easy to get a footing in Russian families, and you might be some time before you make acquaintances that way. Besides, it is much better for you to be principally in the Russian set than in the English, in the first place, because of the language; and in the second, because you will get a much better acquaintance with the country in general with them than among the English.

"There are not many English lads of your own age out there—very few indeed; and those nearest your age would be young clerks. I have nothing whatever to say against young clerks; but, as a rule, they consort together, spend their evenings in each other's rooms or in playing billiards, or otherwise amuse themselves, and so learn very little of the language and nothing of the people. It is unfortunate that it should be so; but they are not altogether to blame, for, as I have said, the Russians, although friendly enough with Englishmen in business, in the club, and so on, do not as a rule invite them to their houses; and therefore the English, especially the class I am speaking of, are almost forced to associate entirely with each other and form a sort of colony quite apart from native society. I was fortunate enough to make some acquaintances among them soon after I went out, and your mother and I were much more in Russian society than is usual with our countrymen there. I found great advantage from it, and shall be glad for you to do the same. You will have one very great advantage, that you will be able to speak Russian fluently in a short time."

"I don't think I remember much about it now, father."

"I dare say not, Godfrey; that is to say, you know it, but you have lost a good deal of the facility of speaking it. You have always got on fairly enough with it when we have spoken it occasionally during your holidays since we have been in England, and in a very few weeks you will find that it has completely come back to you. You spoke it as you did English, indeed better, when you came over to school when you were ten, and in six years one does not forget a language. If

you had been another five or six years older, no doubt you would have lost it a good deal; but even then you would have learnt it very much more quickly than you would have done had you never spoken it. Your mother and the girls have been grumbling at me a good deal for sending you away so soon."

"It is horrid, father," Hilda said. "We have always looked forward so to Godfrey's coming home; and of course it would be better still as he got older. We could have gone about everywhere with him; and we shall miss him especially when we go away in summer."

"Well, you must make the most of him this time then," her father said.

"Have you settled where we are going?" Godfrey asked.

"No, we would not settle until you came home, Godfrey," Mrs. Bullen said. "As this was to be your last holiday we thought we would give you the choice."

"Then I vote for some quiet sea-side place, mother. We went to Switzerland last year, and as I am going abroad for ever so long I would rather stop at home now; and, besides, I would rather be quiet with you all, instead of always travelling about and going to places. Only, of course if the girls would rather go abroad, I don't mind."

However, it was settled that it should be as Godfrey wished.

"But I do think, father," Godfrey said, "that it will be a good thing if I had lessons in writing from one of those fellows who guarantee to teach you in a few lessons. I suppose that is all bosh; but if I got their system and worked at it, it might do me good. I really do write badly."

The girls laughed.

"I don't think that quite describes it, Godfrey," his father said. "If anyone asked me about your accomplishments I should say that you knew a good deal of Latin and Greek, that you had a vague idea of English, and that you could read, but unfortunately you were quite unable to write. According to my idea it is perfectly scandalous that at the great schools

such an essential as writing is altogether neglected, while years are spent over Greek, which is of no earthly use when you have once left school. I suppose the very worst writers in the world are men who have been educated in public schools.

"Well, I am glad you have had the good sense to suggest it, Godfrey. I had thought of it myself, but I was afraid you would think it was spoiling your last holidays at home. I will see about it to-morrow. I cannot get away very well for another fortnight. If you have a dozen lessons before we go, you can practise while we are away; and mind from to-day we will talk nothing but Russian when we are alone."

This had been indeed a common habit in the family since they had come home two years before, as the two girls and Mr. and Mrs. Bullen spoke Russian as fluently as English, and Mr. Bullen thought it was just as well that they should not let it drop altogether. Indeed on their travels in Switzerland they had several times come across Russians, and had made pleasant acquaintances from their knowledge of that language.

The holidays passed pleasantly at Weymouth. Godfrey practised two hours a day steadily at the system of handwriting: and although he was, at the end of the holidays, very far from attaining the perfection shown in the examples produced by his teachers of the marvels they had effected in many of their pupils, he did improve vastly, and wrote a fair current hand instead of the almost undecipherable scrawl that had so puzzled and annoyed a succession of masters at Shrewsbury. After another month spent in London, getting his clothes and outfit, Godfrey started for St. Petersburg. On his last evening at home his father had a serious talk with him.

"I have told Petrovytch," he said, "that you may possibly some day take up the agency with him, but that nothing is decided as to that at present, and that it will all depend upon circumstances. However, in any case, you will learn the ins and outs of the trade there; and if, at the end of a few years, you think that you would rather work by yourself than with him, I can send out a special clerk to work with you. On

the other hand, it is possible that I may require you at home here. Venables has no family, and is rather inclined to take it easy. Possibly in a few years he may retire altogether, and I may want you at home. At five or six and twenty you should be able to undertake the management of the Russian part of the business, running out there occasionally to see that everything goes on well. I hope I need not tell you to be steady. There is a good deal too much drinking goes on out there, arising, no doubt, from the fact that the young men have no family society there, and nothing particular to do when work is over.

"Stick to the business, lad. You will find Petrovytch himself a thoroughly good fellow. Of course he has Russian ways and prejudices, but he is less narrow than most of his countrymen of that class. Above all things, don't express any opinion you may feel about public affairs—at any rate outside the walls of the house. The secret police are everywhere, and a chance word might get you into a very serious scrape. As you get on you will find a good deal that you do not like. Even in business there is no getting a government contract, or indeed a contract at all, without bribing right and left. It is disgusting, but business cannot be done without it. The whole system is corrupt and rotten, and you will find that every official has his price. However, you won't have anything to do with this for the present. If I were you I should work for an hour or two a day with a German master. There are a great many Germans there, and you will find a knowledge of the language very useful to you. You see your Russian has pretty nearly come back to you during the last two months, and you will very soon speak it perfectly; so you will have no trouble about that."

Godfrey found the long railway journey across the flat plains of Germany very dull, as he was unable to exchange a word with his fellow-passengers; but as soon as he crossed the Russian frontier he felt at home again, and enjoyed the run through the thickly-wooded country lying between Wilna and St. Petersburg. As he stepped out at the station everything

seemed to come back vividly to his memory. It was late in October and the first snow had fallen, and round the station were a crowd of sledges drawn by rough little horses. Avoiding the importunities of the drivers of the hotel vehicles he hailed an *Isvostchik* in furred cap and coat lined with sheepskin. His portmanteaus were corded at the back of the sledge; he jumped up into the seat behind the driver, pulled the fur rug over his legs, and said, "Drive to the Vassili Ostrov, 52, Ulitsa Nicolai." The driver gave a peculiar cry, cracked his whip half a dozen times, making a noise almost as loud as the discharge of a pistol, and the horse went off at a sharp trot.

"I thought your excellency was a foreigner," the driver said, "but I see you are one of us."

"No, I am an Englishman, but I lived here till I was ten years old. The snow has begun earlier than usual, has it not?"

"It won't last," the *Isvostchik* said. "Sometimes we have a week at this time of year, but it is not till December that it sets in in earnest. We may have *droskies* out again tomorrow instead of the sledges."

"The sledges are the pleasantest," Godfrey said.

"Yes, your excellency, for those that travel, but not for us. At night when we are waiting we can get into the *drosky* and sleep, while it is terrible without shelter. There are many of us frozen to death every winter."

Godfrey felt a sense of keen enjoyment as the sledge glided along. There were many rough bumps and sharp swings, for the snow was not deep enough to cover thoroughly the roughness of the road below; but the air was brisk and the sun shone brightly, and he looked with pleasure at the people and costumes, which seemed, to his surprise, perfectly familiar to him. He was quite sorry when the journey came to an end at the house of Ivan Petrovytch. The merchant, whose office was on the ground-floor and who occupied the floor above (the rest of the house being let off by floors to other families), came

out to greet him. "I am glad to see you, Godfrey Bullen," he said. "I should have sent to the station to meet you, but your good father did not say whether you would arrive by the morning or evening train; and as my driver did not know you, he would have missed you. I hope that all has gone well on the journey. Paul," he said to a man who had followed him out, "carry these trunks upstairs."

After paying the driver Godfrey followed his host to the floor above. Petrovytch was a portly man, with a pleasant but by no means good-looking face. "Wife," he said as he entered the sitting-room, "this is Godfrey Bullen; I will leave him in your hands for the present, as I have some business that I must complete before we close."

"My name," Mrs. Petrovytch said, "is Catharine. You know in this country we always address each other by our names. The high-born may use titles, but simple people use the Christian name and the family name unless they are very intimate, and then the Christian name only. I heard you speaking to my husband as you came in, so that you have not forgotten our language. I should have thought that you would have done so. I can remember you as quite a little fellow before you went away."

"I have been speaking it for the last two months at home," Godfrey said, "and it has nearly come back to me."

"And your father and mother and your sisters, are they all well?"

"They are quite well, and my father and mother begged me to give their kind regards to you."

At this moment the servant came in with the samovar, or tea-urn.

"It is four o'clock now; we dine at five o'clock, when the office is closed. Many dine at one, but my husband likes it when he has done his work, as then he does not need to hurry."

After drinking a tumbler of tea and eating a flat-cake or two with it, Godfrey went to his room to have a wash after his

long journey, and to unpack some of his things. He thought that he should like both Petrovytch and his wife, but that the evenings would be dull if he had to spend them in the house. Of this, however, he had but little fear, for he was sure that between his father's friends and the acquaintances he might himself make he should be out as much as he liked.

In the course of the next week Godfrey called at the houses of the various people to whom he had letters of introduction, and left them with the hall porter. His host told him that he thought he had better take a fortnight to go about the capital and see the sights before he settled down to work at the office; and as not only the gentlemen with whom he had left letters of introduction and his card—for in Russia strangers always call first—but many others of his father's friends called or invited him to their houses, he speedily made a large number of acquaintances. At the end of the fortnight he took his place in the office. At first he was of very little use there; for although he could talk and understand Russian as spoken, he had entirely forgotten the written characters, and it took him some little time before he could either read the business correspondence or make entries in the office books. Ivan Petrovytch did his best to assist him, and in the course of a month he began to master the mysteries of Russian writing.

At five o'clock the office closed. Godfrey very frequently dined out, but if he had no engagement he took his meal with the merchant and his wife, and then sallied out and went either alone or with some of his acquaintances to a Russian theatre. With December, winter set in in earnest. The waters were frozen, and skating began. The season at St. Petersburg commenced about the same time, and as Godfrey was often sent with messages or letters to other business houses he had an opportunity of seeing the streets of St. Petersburg by day as well as by night. He was delighted with the scene on the Nevski Prospekt, the principal street of St. Petersburg. The footways were crowded with people: the wealthy in high boots, coats lined with sable, and caps to match; the poorer

in equally ample coats, but with linings of sheep, fox, or rabbit skins, with the national Russian cap of fur with velvet top, and with fur-lined hoods, which were often drawn up over the head.

The shops were excellent, reminding Godfrey rather of Paris than London. But the chief interest of the scene lay in the roadway. There were vehicles of every description, from the heavy sledge of the peasant, piled up with logs for fuel, or carrying, perhaps, the body of an elk shot in the woods, to the splendid turn-outs of the nobles with their handsome fur wraps, their coachmen in the national costume, and horses covered with brown, blue, or violet nets almost touching the ground, to prevent the snow from being thrown up from the animals' hoofs into the faces of those in the sledge. The harness was in most cases more or less decorated with bells, which gaily tinkled in the still air as the sledges dashed along. Most struck was Godfrey with the vehicles of the nobles who adhered to old Russian customs. The sledge was drawn by three horses; the one in the centre was trained to trot, while the two outside went at a canter. The heads of the latter were bent half round, so that they looked towards the side, or even almost behind them as they went. An English acquaintance to whom Godfrey expressed his surprise the first time he saw one of these sledges replied, "Yes, that is the old Russian pattern; and, curiously enough, if you look at Greek bas-reliefs and sculptures of the chariot of Phæbus or at any other representations of chariots, with three or four horses, you will see that the animals outside turn their heads in a similar manner."

"But it must be horribly uncomfortable for the horses to have their heads turned round like that."

"It is the effect of training. They are always tied up to the stables with their heads pulled in that way until it becomes a second nature to go with them in that position."

"It is a very curious idea," Godfrey said, "but it certainly looks nice. What magnificent beards all the drivers in the good sledges have!"

"Yes, that again is an old Russian custom. A driver with a big beard is considered an absolute necessity for a well-appointed turn-out, and the longer and fuller the beard the higher the wages a man will command and the greater the pride of his employer."

"It seems silly," Godfrey said. "But there is no doubt those fellows do look wonderfully imposing with their fur caps and their long blue caftans and red sashes and those splendid beards. They remind me of pictures of Neptune. Certainly I never saw such beards in England."

Besides these vehicles there were crowds of public sledges, driven by the *Isvostchiks*, long rough country sledges laden perhaps with a dozen peasant women returning from market, light well-got-up vehicles of English and other merchants, dashing turn-outs carrying an officer or two of high rank, and others filled with ladies half buried in rich furs. The air was tremulous with the music of countless bells, and broken by the loud cracking of whips, with which the faster vehicles heralded their approach. These whips had short handles, but very long heavy thongs; and Godfrey observed that, however loud he might crack this weapon, it was very seldom indeed that a Russian driver ever struck one of his horses with it.

Sometimes when Ivan Petrovytch told him that there was little to be done in the office, and that he need not return for an hour or two, Godfrey would stroll into the Isaac or Kasan cathedrals, both splendid structures, and wonder at the taste that marred their effect, by the profusion of the gilding lavished everywhere. He was delighted by the singing, which was unaccompanied by instruments, the bass voices predominating, and which certainly struck him as being much finer than anything he had ever heard in an English cathedral. There was no lack of amusement in the evening. Some of his English friends at once put Godfrey up as a member of the Skating Club. This club possessed a large garden well planted with trees. In this was an artificial lake of considerable extent, broken by wooded islets. This was always lit up of

an evening by coloured lights, and twice in the week was thrown open upon a small payment to the public, when a military band played, and the grounds were brilliantly illuminated.

The scene was an exceedingly gay one, and the gardens were frequented by the rank and fashion of St. Petersburg. The innumerable lights were reflected by the snow that covered the ground and by the white masses that clung to the boughs of the leafless trees. The ice was covered with skaters, male and female, the latter in gay dresses, tight-fitting jackets trimmed with fur, and dainty little fur caps. Many of the former were in uniform, and the air was filled with merry laughter and the ringing sound of innumerable skates. Sometimes parties of acquaintances executed figures, but for the most part they moved about in couples, the gentleman holding the lady's hand, or sometimes placing his arm round her waist as if dancing. Very often Godfrey spent the evening at the houses of one or other of his Russian or English friends, and occasionally went to the theatre. Sometimes he spent a quiet evening at home. He liked Catharine Petrovytch. She was an excellent housewife, and devoted to the comfort of her husband; but when not engaged in household cares she seldom cared to go out, and passed her time for the most part on the sofa. She was, like most other Russian ladies when at home and without visitors, very careless and untidy in her dress.

Among the acquaintances of whom Godfrey saw most were two young students. One of them was the son of a trader in Moscow, the other of a small landed proprietor. He had met them for the first time at a fair held on the surface of the Neva, and had been introduced to them by a fellow-student of theirs, a member of a family with whom Godfrey was intimate. Having met another acquaintance he had left the party, and Godfrey had spent the afternoon on the ice with Akim Soushiloff and Petroff Stepanoff. He found them pleasant young men. He was, they told him, the first Englishman they had met, and asked many questions about his country. He met

them several times afterwards, and one day they asked him if he would come up to their room.

"It is a poor place," one said laughing. "But you know most of us students are poor, and have to live as best we can."

"It makes no odds to me," Godfrey said. "It was a pretty bare place I had when I was at school. I shall be very glad to come up."

The room which the students shared was a large one, at the top of a house in a narrow street. It was simply furnished enough, containing but two beds, a deal table, four chairs, and the indispensable stove, which kept the room warm and comfortable.

"We are in funds just at present," Akim said. "Petroff has had a remittance, and so you find the stove well alight, which is not always the case."

"But how do you manage to exist without a fire?"

"We don't trouble the room much then," Petroff said. "We walk about till we are dead tired out, and then come up and sleep in one bed together for warmth, and heap all the coverings from the other bed over us. Oh, we get on very well! Food is cheap here if you know where to get it; fuel costs more than food. Now which will you take, tea or vodka?"

Godfrey declared for tea. Some of the water from a great pot standing on the top of the stove was poured into the samovar. Some glowing embers were taken from the stove and placed in the urn, and in a few minutes the water was boiling, and three tumblers of tea with a slice of lemon floating on the top were soon steaming on the table. The conversation first turned upon university life in Russia, and then Petroff began to ask questions about English schools and universities, and then the subject changed to English institutions in general.

"What a different life to ours!" Akim said. "And the peasants, are they comfortable?"

"Well, their lives are pretty hard ones," Godfrey acknowledged. "They have to work hard and for long hours, and the

pay is poor. But then, on the other hand, they generally have their cottages at a very low rent, with a good bit of garden and a few fruit trees. They earn a little extra money at harvest time, and though their pay is smaller, I think on the whole they are better off and happier than many of the working people in the towns."

"And they are free to go where they like?"

"Certainly they are free, but as a rule they don't move about much."

"Then if they have a bad master they can leave him and go to someone else?"

"Oh, yes! They would go to some other farmer in the neighbourhood. But there are seldom what you may call bad masters. The wages are always about the same through a district, and the hours of work, and so on; so that one master can't be much better or worse than another, except in point of temper; and if a man were very bad tempered of course the men would leave him and work somewhere else, so he would be the loser, as he would soon only get the very worst hands in the neighbourhood to work for him."

"And they are not beaten?"

"Beaten! I should think not," Godfrey said. "Nobody is beaten with us, though I think it would be a capital thing if, instead of shutting up people in prison for small crimes, they had a good flogging. It would do them a deal more good, and it would be better for their wives and families, who have to get on as best they can while they are shut up."

"And nobody is beaten at all?"

"No, there used to be flogging in the army and navy, but it was very rare, and is now abolished."

"And not even a lord can flog his peasants?"

"Certainly not. If a lord struck a peasant the peasant would certainly hit him back again, and if he didn't feel strong enough to do that he would have him up before the magistrates and he would get fined pretty heavily."

"And how do they punish political prisoners?"

"There are no political prisoners. As long as a man keeps quiet and doesn't get up a row, he may have any opinions he likes; he may argue in favour of a republic, or he may be a socialist or anything he pleases; but, of course, if he tried to kick up a row, attack the police, or made a riot or anything of that sort he would be punished for breaking the law, but that would have nothing to do with his politics."

The two young men looked in surprise at each other.

"But if they printed a paper and attacked the government?" Akim asked.

"Oh, they do that! there are as many papers pitch into the government as there are in favour of the government; parties are pretty equally divided, you see, and the party that is out always abuses the party which is in power."

"And even that is lawful?"

"Certainly it is. You can abuse the government as much as you like, say that the ministers are a parcel of incompetent fools, and so on; but, of course, you cannot attack them as to their private life and character any more than you can anyone else, because then you would render yourself liable to an action for libel."

"And you can travel where you like, in the country and out of the country, without official permits or passports?"

"Yes, there is nothing like that known in England. Every man can go where he likes, and live where he likes, and do anything he likes, providing that it does not interfere with the rights of other people."

"Ah! shall we ever come to this in Russia, Akim?" Petroff said.

Akim made no answer, but Godfrey replied for him. "No doubt you will in time, Petroff; but you see liberties like these do not grow up in a day. We had serfs and vassals in England at one time, and feudal barons who could do pretty much what they chose, and it was only in the course of centuries that these things got done away with." At this moment there was a knock at the door.

"It is Katia," Akim said, jumping up from his seat and opening the door. A young woman entered. She was pleasant and intelligent looking. "Katia, this is an English gentleman, a friend of ours, who has been telling us about his country. Godfrey, this is my cousin Katia; she teaches music in the houses of many people of good family."

"I did not expect to find visitors here," the girl said smiling. "And how do you like our winter? it is a good deal colder than you are accustomed to."

"It is a great deal more pleasant," Godfrey said: "I call it glorious weather. It is infinitely better than alternate rains and winds, with just enough frost occasionally to make you think you are going to do some skating, and then a thaw."

"You are extravagant," the girl said, looking round; "it is a long time since I have felt the room as warm as this. I suppose Petroff has got his allowance?"

"Yes, and a grumbling letter. My father has a vague idea that in some way or other I ought to pick up my living, though he never offers a suggestion as to how I should do it."

The young woman went to the cupboard, fetched another tumbler and poured herself out some tea, and then chatted gaily about St. Petersburg, her pupils, and their parents.

"Do you live at the house of one of your pupils?" Godfrey asked.

"Oh no!" she said. "I don't mind work, but I like to be free when work is over. I board in an honest family, and live in a little room at the top of the house which is all my own and where I can see my friends."

After chatting for some time longer Godfrey took his leave. As soon as he had gone the girl's manner changed.

"Do you think you are wise to have him here, Akim?"

"Why not?" the student asked in turn. "He is frank and agreeable, he is respectable, and even you will allow that it would be safer walking with him than some we know; we do not talk politics with him."

"For all that I am sorry, Akim. You know how it will be;

we shall get him into trouble. It is our fate; we have a great end in view; we risk our own lives, and although for the good of the cause we must not hesitate even if others suffer, I do hate with all my heart that others should be involved in our fortunes."

"This is not like you, Katia," Petroff said. "I have heard you say your maxim is 'At any cost,' and you have certainly lived up to it."

"Yes, and I shall live up to it," she said firmly; "but it hurts sometimes, Petroff; it hurt me just now when I thought that that lad laughing and chatting with us had no idea that he had better have thrust his hand into that stove than have given it to us. I do not shrink; I should use him as I should use anyone else, as an instrument if it were needful, but don't suppose that I like it."

"I don't think there is any fear of our doing him harm," Akim said; "he is English, and would find no difficulty in showing that he knew nothing of us save as casual acquaintances; they might send him out of the country, but that would be all."

"It would all depend," she said, "upon how he fell into their hands. If you happened to be arrested only as you were walking with him down the Nevski Prospekt he would be questioned, of course, but as soon as they learned who he was and that he had nothing to do with you, they would let him go. But if he were with us, say here, when we were pounced upon, and you had no time to pull the trigger of the pistol pointing into that keg of powder in the cupboard, he would be hurried away with us to one of the fortresses, and the chances are that not a soul would ever know what had become of him. Still it cannot be helped now; he may be useful, and as we give our own lives, so we must not shrink from giving others'. But this is not what I came here to talk to you about; have you heard of the arrest of Michaelovich?"

"No," they both exclaimed, leaping from their seats.

"It happened at three o'clock this morning," Katia said.

"They surrounded the house and broke in suddenly, and rushed down into the cellar and found him at work. He shot two of them, and then he was beaten down and badly wounded."

"Where were the other two?" Akim asked.

"He sent them away but an hour before, but he went on working himself to complete the number of hand-bills. Of course he was betrayed. I don't think there are six people who knew where the press was; even I didn't know."

"Where did you hear of it, Katia?"

"Feodorina Samuloff told me; you know she often helps Michaelovich to work at the press; she thinks it must have been either Louka or Gasin. Why should Michaelovich have sent them away when he hadn't finished work if one or the other of them had not made some excuse so as to get out of the way before the police came? But that is nothing, there will be time to find out which is the traitor; they know nothing, either of them, except that they worked at the secret press with him; they were never much trusted. But Michaelovich is a terrible loss, he was always daring and full of expedients."

"They will get nothing from him," Petroff said.

"Not they," she agreed. "When do they ever get anything out of us? One of the outer-circle fellows like Louka and Gasin, who know nothing, who are instruments and nothing more, may tell all they know for gold, or for fear of the knout, but never once have they learned anything from one who knows. Fortunately the press was a very old one and there was but little type there, only just enough for printing small hand-bills; we have two others ready to set up."

"Were there any papers there?"

"No, Michaelovich was too careful for that."

"I hear that old Libka died in prison yesterday," Akim said.

"He is released from his suffering," Katia said solemnly.

"Anything else, Akim?"

"Yes, a batch of prisoners start for Siberia to-morrow, and there are ten of us among them."

"Well, be careful for the next few days, Akim," Katia said; "don't do anything in the schools, it will not be long now before all is ready to strike a blow, and it is not worth while to risk anything until after that. I have orders that we are all to keep perfectly quiet till the plans are settled and we each get our instructions. Now I must go, I have two lessons to give this afternoon. It tries one a little to be talking to children about quavers and semiquavers when one's head is full of great plans, and you know that at any moment a policeman may tap you on the shoulder and take you off to the dungeons of St. Nicholas, from which one will never return unless one is carried out, or is sent to Siberia, which would be worse. Be careful; the police have certainly got scent of something, they are very active at present," and with a nod she turned and left the room.

"She is a brave girl," Akim said. "I think the women make better conspirators than we do, Petroff. Look at her. She was a little serious to-day because of Michaelovich, but generally she is in high spirits, and no one would dream that she thought of anything but her pupils and pleasure. Then there is Feodorina Samuloff. She works all day, I believe, in a laundry, and she looks as impassive as if she had been carved out of soap. Yet she is ready to go on working all night if required, and if she had orders she would walk into the Winter Palace and throw down a bomb (that would kill her as well as everyone else within its reach) with as much coolness as if she was merely delivering a message."

CHAPTER II

A CATSPAW

ONE evening a fortnight later Godfrey went with two young Englishmen to a masked ball at the Opera. It was a brilliant scene. Comparatively few of the men were masked or in costume, but many of the ladies were so. Every other man was in uniform of some kind, and the floor of the house was filled with a gay laughing crowd, while the boxes were occupied by ladies of the highest rank, several of the imperial family being present. He speedily became separated from his companions, and after walking about for an hour he became tired of the scene, and was about to make his way towards the entrance when a hand was slipped behind his arm. As several masked figures had joked him on walking about so vaguely by himself, he thought that this was but another jest.

"You are just the person I wanted," the mask said.

"I think you have mistaken me for someone else, lady," he replied.

"Not at all. Now put up your arm and look as if I belonged to you. Nonsense! do as you are told, Godfrey Bullen."

"Who are you who know my name?" Godfrey laughed, doing as he was ordered, for he had no doubt that the masked woman was a member of one of the families whom he had visited.

"You don't know who I am?" she asked.

"How should I when I can see nothing but your eyes through those holes?"

"I am Katia, the cousin of your friend Akim."

"Oh, of course!" Godfrey said, a little surprised at meeting the music mistress in such an assembly. "I fancied I

knew your voice, though I could not remember where I had heard it. And now what can I do for you?"

The young woman hesitated. "We have got up a little mystification," she said after a pause, "and I am sure I can trust you; besides, you don't know the parties. There is a gentleman here who is supposed to be with his regiment at Moscow; but there is a sweetheart in the case, and you know when there are sweethearts people do foolish things."

"I have heard so," Godfrey laughed, "though I don't know anything about it myself, for I sha'n't begin to think of such luxuries as sweethearts for years to come."

"Well, he is here masked," the girl went on, "and unfortunately the colonel of his regiment is here, and some ill-natured person—we fancy it is a rival of his—has told the colonel. He is furious about it, and declares that he will catch him and have him tried by court-martial for being absent without leave. The only thing is he is not certain as to his information."

"Well, what can I do?" Godfrey asked. "How can I help him?"

"You can help if you like, and that without much trouble to yourself. He is at present in the back of that empty box on the third tier. I was with him when I saw you down here, so I left him to say good-bye to his sweetheart alone, and ran down to fetch you, for I felt sure you would oblige me. What I thought was this: if you put his mask and cloak on—you are about the same height—it would be supposed that you are him. The colonel is waiting down by the entrance. He will come up to you and say, 'Captain Presnovich?' You will naturally say, 'By no means.' He will insist on your taking your mask off. This you will do, and he will, of course, make profuse apologies, and will believe that he has been altogether misinformed. In the meantime Presnovich will manage to slip out, and will go down by the early train to Moscow. It is not likely that the colonel will ever make any more inquiries about it, but if he

does, some of Presnovich's friends will be ready to declare that he never left Moscow."

"But can't he manage to leave his mask and cloak in the box and to slip away without them?"

"No, that would never do. It is necessary that the colonel should see for himself that the man in the cloak, with the white and red bow pinned to it, is not the captain."

"Very well, then, I will do it," Godfrey said. "It will be fun to see the colonel's face when he finds out his mistake; but mind I am doing it to oblige you."

"I feel very much obliged," the girl said; "but don't you bring my name into it though."

"How could I?" he laughed. "I do not see that I am likely to be cross-questioned in any way; but never fear, I will keep your counsel."

By this time they had arrived at the door of the box. "Wait a moment," she said, "I will speak to him first."

She was two minutes gone, and then opened the door and let him in. "I am greatly obliged to you, sir," a man said as he entered. "It is a foolish business altogether, but if you will enact my part for a few minutes you will get me out of an awkward scrape."

"Don't mention it," Godfrey replied. "It will be a joke to laugh over afterwards." He placed the broad hat, to which the black silk mask was sewn, on his head, and Katia put the cloak on his shoulders.

"I trust you," she said in a low voice as she walked with him to the top of the stairs. "There, I must go now. I had better see Captain Presnovich safely off, and then go and tell the young lady, who is a great friend of mine—it is for her sake I am doing it, you know, not for his—how nicely we have managed to throw dust in the colonel's eyes!"

Regarding the matter as a capital joke, Godfrey went downstairs and made his way to the entrance, expecting every moment to be accosted by the irascible colonel. No one spoke to him, however, and he began to imagine that the

colonel must have gone to seek the captain elsewhere, and hoped that he would not meet him as he went down the stairs with Katia. He walked down the steps into the street. As he stepped on to the pavement a man seized him from behind, two others grasped his wrists, and before he knew what had happened he was run forward across the pavement to a covered sledge standing there and flung into it. His three assailants leapt in after him; the door was slammed; another man jumped on to the box with the driver; and two mounted men took their places beside it as it dashed off from the door. The men had again seized Godfrey's hands and held them firmly the instant they entered the carriage.

"It is of no use your attempting to struggle," one of the men said, "there is an escort riding beside the sledge, and a dozen more behind it. There is no chance of a rescue, and I warn you you had best not open your lips; if you do, we will gag you."

Godfrey was still half bewildered with the suddenness of the transaction. What had he been seized for? Who were the men who had got hold of him? and why were they gripping his wrists so tightly? He had heard of arbitrary treatment in the Russian army, but that a colonel should have a captain seized in this extraordinary way merely because he was absent from his post without leave was beyond anything he thought possible.

"I thought I was going to have the laugh all on my side," he said to himself, "but so far it is all the other way." In ten minutes the carriage stopped for a moment, there was a challenge, then some gates were opened. Godfrey had already guessed his destination, and his feeling of discomfort had increased every foot he went. There was no doubt he was being taken to the fortress. "It seems to me that Miss Katia has got me into a horrible scrape of some kind," he said to himself. "What a fool I was to let myself be humbugged by the girl in that way!"

Two men with lanterns were at the door of a building, at

which the carriage, after passing into a large court-yard, drew up. Still retaining their grip on his wrists, two of the men walked beside him down a passage, while several others followed behind. An officer of high rank was sitting at the head of a table, one of inferior rank stood beside him, while at the end of the table were two others with papers and pens before them.

"So you have captured him!" the general said eagerly.

"Yes, your excellency," the man who had spoken to Godfrey in the carriage said respectfully.

"Has he been searched?"

"No, your excellency, the distance was so short, and I feared that he might wrench one of his hands loose. Moreover, I thought that you might prefer his being searched in your presence."

"It is better so. Take off that disguise." As the hat and mask were removed the officer sprang to his feet and exclaimed, "Why, who is this? This is not the man you were ordered to arrest; you have made some confounded blunder."

"I assure you, your excellency," the official said in trembling accents, "this is the only man who was there in the disguise we were told of. There, your excellency, is the bunch of white and red ribbons on his cloak."

"And who are you, sir?" the general thundered.

"My name, sir, is Godfrey Bullen. I reside with Ivan Petrovytch, a merchant living in the Vassili Ostrov."

"But how come you mixed up in this business, sir?" the general exclaimed furiously. "How is it that you are thus disguised, and that you are wearing that bunch of ribbon? Beware how you answer me, sir, for this is a matter which concerns your life."

"So far as I am concerned, sir," Godfrey said, "I am absolutely ignorant of having done any harm in the matter, and have not the most remote idea why I have been arrested. I may have behaved foolishly in allowing myself to take part in what I thought was a masquerade joke, but beyond that I

have nothing to blame myself for. I went to the Opera-house, never having seen a masked ball before. I was alone, and being young and evidently a stranger, I was spoken to and joked by several masked ladies. Presently one of them came up to me. I had no idea who she was; she was closely masked, and I could see nothing of her face." He then repeated the request that had been made him.

"Do you expect me to believe this ridiculous nonsense about this Captain Presnovich and his colonel?"

"I can only say, sir, what I am telling you is precisely what happened, and that I absolutely believed it. It seemed to me a natural thing that a young officer might come to a ball to see a lady who perhaps he had no other opportunity of meeting alone. I see now that I was very foolish to allow myself to be mixed up in the affair; but I thought that it was a harmless joke, and so I did as this woman asked me."

"Go on, sir," the general said in a tone of suppressed rage.

"There is little more to tell, sir. I went up with this woman to the box she had pointed out, and there found this Captain Presnovich as I believed him to be. I put on his hat, mask, and cloak, walked down the stairs, and was leaving the Opera-house when I was arrested, and am even now wholly ignorant of having committed any offence."

"A likely story," the general said sarcastically. "And this woman, did you see her face?"

"No, sir, she was closely masked. I could not even see if she were young or old; and she spoke in the same disguised, squeaking sort of voice that all the others that had spoken to me used."

"And that is your entire story, sir; you have nothing to add to it?"

"Nothing whatever, sir. I have told you the simple truth."

The general threw himself back in his chair, too exasperated to speak farther, but made a sign to the officer standing next to him to take up the interrogation. The questions were now formal. "Your name is Godfrey Bullen?" he asked.

"It is."

"Your nationality?"

"British."

"Your domicile?"

Godfrey gave the address.

"How long have you been in Russia?"

"Four months."

"What is your business?"

"A clerk to Ivan Petrovytch."

"How comes it that you speak Russian so well?"

"I was born here, and lived up to the age of ten with my father, John Bullen, who was a well-known merchant here, and left only two years ago."

"That will do," the general said impatiently. "Take him to his cell and search him thoroughly."

Naturally the most minute search revealed nothing of an incriminating character. At length Godfrey was left alone in the cell, which contained only a single chair and a rough pallet. "I have put my foot in it somehow," he said to himself, "and I can't make head nor tail of it beyond the fact that I have made an ass of myself. Was the whole story a lie? Was the fellow's name Presnovich? if not, who was he? By the rage of the general, who, I suppose, is the chief of the police, it was evident he was frightfully disappointed that I wasn't the man he was looking for. Was this Presnovich somebody that girl Katia knew and wanted to get safely away? or was she made a fool of just as I was? She looked a bright, jolly sort of girl; but that goes for nothing in Russia, all sorts of people get mixed up in plots. If she was concerned in getting him away I suppose she fixed on me because, being English and a new-comer here, it would be easy for me to prove that I had nothing to do with plots or anything of that sort, whereas if a Russian had been in my place he might have got into a frightful mess over it. Well, I suppose it will all come right in the end. It is lucky that the weather has got milder or I should have had a good chance of being frozen to death; it is cold enough as it is."

Resuming his clothes, which had been thrown down on the pallet, Godfrey drew the solitary rug over him, and in spite of the uncertainty of the position was soon fast asleep. He woke just as daylight was breaking, and was so bitterly cold that he was obliged to get up and stamp about the cell to restore circulation. Two hours later the cell door was opened and a piece of dark-coloured bread and a jug of water were handed in to him. "If this is prison fare I don't care how soon I am out of it," he said to himself as he munched the bread. "I wonder what it is made of! Rye!"

The day passed without anyone coming near him save the jailer, who brought a bowl of thin broth and a ration of bread for his dinner.

"Can't you get me another rug?" he asked the man. "If I have got to stop here for another night I shall have a good chance of being frozen to death."

Just as it was getting dark the man came in again with another blanket and a flat earthenware pan half full of sand, on which was burning a handful or two of sticks; he placed a bundle of wood beside it.

"That is more cheerful by a long way," Godfrey said to himself as the man, who had maintained absolute silence on each of his visits, left the cell. "No doubt they have been making a lot of inquiries about me, and find that I have not been in the habit of frequenting low company. I should not have had these indulgences if they hadn't. Well, it will be an amusement to keep this fire up. The wood is as dry as a bone luckily, or I should be smoked out in no time, for there is not much ventilation through that narrow loophole."

The warmth of the fire and the additional blanket made all the difference, and in a couple of hours Godfrey was sound asleep. When he woke it was broad daylight, and although he felt cold it was nothing to what he had experienced on the previous morning. At about eleven o'clock, as near as he could guess, for his watch and everything had been removed when he was searched, the door was opened and a prison

official with two warders appeared. By these he was conducted to the same room where he had been first examined. Neither of the officers who had then been there was present, but an elderly man sat at the centre of the table.

"Godfrey Bullen," he said, "a careful investigation has been made into your antecedents, and with one exception, and that not, for various reasons, an important one, we have received a good report of you. Ivan Petrovytch tells us that you work in his office from breakfast-time till five in the afternoon, and that your evenings are at your own disposal, but that you generally dine with him. He gave us the names of the families with which you are acquainted, and where, as he understood, you spend your evenings when you are not at the Skating Club, where you generally go on Tuesdays and Fridays at least. We learn that you did spend your evenings with these families, and we have learned at the club that you are a regular attendant there two or three times a week, and that your general associates are:" and he read out a list which included, to Godfrey's surprise, the names of every one of his acquaintances there. "Therefore we have been forced to come to the conclusion that your story, incredible as it appeared, is a true one. That you, a youth and a foreigner, should have had the incredible levity to act in the way you describe, and to assume the disguise of a person absolutely unknown to you, upon the persuasion of a woman also absolutely unknown to you, well-nigh passes belief. Had you been older you would at once have been sent to the frontier; but as it is, the Czar, to whom the case has been specially submitted, has graciously allowed you to continue your residence here, the testimony being unanimous as to your father's position as a merchant, and to the prudence of his behaviour while resident here. But I warn you, Godfrey Bullen, that escapades of this kind, which may be harmless in England, are very serious matters here. Ignorantly, I admit, but none the less certainly, you have aided in the escape of a malefactor of the worst kind; and but for the proofs that have been afforded us that

you were a mere dupe, the consequences would have been most serious to you, and even the fact of your being a foreigner would not have sufficed to save you from the hands of justice. You are now free to depart, but let this be a lesson to you, and a most serious one, never again to mix yourself up in any way with persons of whose antecedents you are ignorant, and in future to conduct yourself in all respects wisely and prudently."

"It will certainly be a lesson to me, sir. I am heartily sorry that I was so foolish as to allow myself to be mixed up in such an affair, and think I can promise you that henceforth there will be no fault to be found in my conduct."

In the ante-room Godfrey's watch, money, and the other contents of his pocket were restored to him. A carriage was in waiting for him at the outer door, and he was driven rapidly to the house of the merchant.

"This is a nice scrape into which you have got yourself, Godfrey," Ivan Petrovytch said as he entered. "It is lucky for you that you are not a Russian. But how on earth have you got mixed up in a plot; we know nothing about it beyond the fact that you had been arrested, for, although a thousand questions were asked me about you, nothing was said to me as to the charge brought against you. We have been in the greatest anxiety about you. All sorts of rumours were current in the city as to the discovery of a plot to assassinate one of the grand-dukes at the Opera-house, and there are rumours that explosive bombs had been discovered in one of the boxes. It is said that the police had received information of the attempt that was to be made, and that every precaution had been taken to arrest the principal conspirator, but that in some extraordinary manner he slipped through their fingers. But surely you can never have been mixed up in that matter?"

"That is what it was," Godfrey said, "though I had no more idea of having anything to do with a plot than I had of flying. I see now that I behaved like an awful fool." And he told the story to Petrovytch and his wife as he had told it

to the head of the police. Both were shocked at the thought that a member of their household should have been engaged, even unwittingly, in such a treasonable affair.

"It is a wonder that we ever saw you again," the merchant's wife exclaimed. "It is fortunate that we are known as quiet people or we might have been arrested too. I could not have believed that anyone with sense could be silly enough to put on a stranger's mantle and hat!"

"But I thought," Godfrey urged, "that at masked balls people did play all sorts of tricks upon each other. I am sure I have read so in books. And it did seem quite likely—didn't it now?—that an officer should have come up to meet a young lady masked whom he had no chance of meeting at any other time. It certainly seemed to me quite natural, and I believe almost any fellow, if he were asked to help anyone to get out of a scrape like that, would do it."

"You may do it in England or in France, but it doesn't do to take part in anything that you don't know for certain all about here. The wonder is they made any inquiries at all. If you had been a Russian the chances are that your family would never have heard of you again from the time you left to go to the opera. Nothing that you could have said would have been believed. Your story would have been regarded by the police as a mere invention. They would have considered it as certain that in some way or other you were mixed up in the conspiracy. They would have regarded your denials as simple obstinacy, and you would have been sent to Siberia for life."

"I should advise you, Godfrey," Ivan Petrovytch said, "to keep an absolute silence about this affair. Mention it to no one. Everyone knows that something has happened to you, as the police have been everywhere inquiring; but there is no occasion to tell anyone the particulars. Of course rumours get about as to the action of the Nihilists and of the police, but as little is said as possible. It is, of course, a mere rumour that a plot was discovered at the Opera-house. Probably there

were an unusual number of police at all the entrances, and a very little thing gives rise to talk and conjecture. People think that the police would not have been there had they not had suspicion that something or other was going to take place, and as everything in our days is put down to the Nihilists, it was naturally reported that the police had discovered some plot; and as two of the grand-dukes were there, people made sure it was in some way connected with them.

"As nothing came of it, and no one was, as far as was known, arrested, it would be supposed that the culprit, whoever he was, managed to evade the police. Such rumours as these are of very common occurrence, and it is quite possible that there is not much more truth in them this time than there is generally; however, of one thing you may be sure, the police are not fonder than other people of being outwitted, and whether the man for whom they were in search was a Nihilist or a criminal of some other sort you certainly aided him to escape. You are sure to be watched for some time, and it will be known to the police in a very few hours if you repeat this story to your acquaintances; if they find you keep silence about it, they will give you credit for discretion, while it would certainly do you a good deal of harm, and might even now lead to your being promptly sent across the frontier, were it known that you made a boast of having outwitted them.

"There is another reason. You will find that for a time most of your friends here will be a little shy of you. People are not fond of having as their intimates persons about whom the police are inquiring, and you will certainly find for a time that you will receive very few invitations to enter the houses of any Russians. It would be different, however, if it were known that the trouble was about something that had no connection with politics; therefore, I should advise you, when you are asked questions, to turn it off with a laugh. Say you got mixed up in an affair between a young lady and her lover, and that, like many other people, you found that those who mingle in such matters often get left in the lurch. You need

not say much more than that. You might do anything here without your friends troubling much about it provided it had nothing to do with politics. Rob a bank, perpetrate a big swindle, run away with a court heiress, and as long as the police don't lay hands on you nobody else will trouble their heads about the affair; but if you are suspected of being mixed up in the most remote way with politics, your best friends will shun you like the plague."

"I will take your advice certainly," Godfrey said, "and even putting aside the danger you point out, I should not be anxious to tell people that I suffered myself to be entrapped so foolishly."

For some time, indeed, Godfrey found that his acquaintance fell away from him, and that he was not asked to the houses of any of the Russian merchants where he had been before made welcome. Cautious questions would be asked by the younger men as to the trouble into which he got with the police; but he turned these off with a laugh. "I am not going to tell the particulars," he said, "they concern other people. I can only tell you that I was fool enough to be humbugged by a pretty little masker, and to get mixed up in a love intrigue in which a young lady, her lover a captain in the army, and an irascible colonel were concerned, and that the young people made a cat's-paw of me. I am not going to say more than that, I don't want to be laughed at for the next six months;" and so it became understood that the young Englishman had simply got into some silly scrape, and had been charged by a colonel in the army with running away with his daughter, and he was therefore restored to his former footing at most of the houses that he had before visited.

Two days after his release a note was slipped into Godfrey's hand by a boy as he went out after dinner for a walk. It was unsigned, and ran as follows:—

"Dear Godfrey Bullen, my cousin is in a great state of distress. She was deceived by a third person, and in turn deceived you. She has heard since that the story was an entire

fiction to enable a gentleman for whom the police were in search to escape. She only heard last night of your arrest and release, and is in the greatest grief that she should have been the innocent means of this trouble coming upon you. You know how things are here, and she is overwhelmed with gratitude that you did not in defence give any particulars that might have enabled them to trace her, for she would have found it much more difficult than a stranger would have done to have proved her innocence. She knows that you did say nothing, for had you done so she would have been arrested before morning; not improbably we might also have found ourselves within the walls of a prison, since you met her at our room, and the mere acquaintanceship with a suspected person is enough to condemn one here. By the way, we have moved our lodging, but will give you our new address when we meet you, that is, if you are good enough to continue our acquaintance in spite of the trouble that has been caused you by the credulity and folly of my cousin."

Godfrey, who had begun to learn prudence, did not open the letter until he returned home, and as soon as he had read it dropped it into the stove. He was pleased at its receipt, for he had not liked to think that he had been duped by a girl. From the first he had believed that she, like himself, had been deceived, for it had seemed to him out of the question that a young music mistress, who did not seem more than twenty years old, could have been mixed up in the doings of a desperate set of conspirators; however, he quite understood the alarm she must have felt, for though his story might have been believed owing to his being a stranger, and unconnected in any way with men who could have been concerned in a Nihilist plot, it would no doubt have been vastly more difficult for her to prove her innocence, especially as it was known that there were many women in the ranks of the Nihilists.

It was a fortnight before he met either of the students, and he then ran against them upon the quay just at the foot of the equestrian statue of Peter the Great, opposite the Isaac

Cathedral. They hesitated for a moment, but he held out his hand cordially.

"Where have you been, and how is it I have not seen you before?"

"We were afraid that you might not care to know us further," Akim said, "after the trouble that that foolish cousin of mine involved you in."

"That would have been ridiculous," Godfrey said. "If we were to blame our friends for the faults of persons to whom they introduce us, there would be an end to introductions."

"Everyone wouldn't think as you do," Akim said. "We both wished to meet you, and thank you for so nobly shielding her. The silly girl might be on her way to Siberia now if you had given her name."

"I certainly should not have done that in any case. It is not the way of Englishmen to betray their friends, especially when that friend is a woman; but I thought even before I got your letter that she must in some way or other have been misled herself."

"It was very good of you," Petroff said. "Katia has been in great distress over it. She thinks that you can never forgive her."

"Pray tell her from me, Petroff, that I have blamed myself, not her. I ought not to have let myself be persuaded into taking any part in the matter. I entered into it as a joke, thinking it would be fine fun to see the old colonel's face, and also to help a pair of lovers out of a scrape. It would have been a good joke in England, but this is not a country where jokes are understood. At any rate it has been a useful lesson to me, and in future young ladies will plead in vain to get me to mix myself up in other people's affairs."

"We are going to a students' party to-night," Petroff said. "One of our number who has just passed the faculty of medicine has received an appointment at Tobolsk. It is a long way off; but it is said to be a pleasant town, and the pay is good. He is an orphan, and richer than most of us, so he is

going to celebrate it with a party to-night before he starts. Will you come with us?"

"I should like it very much," Godfrey said; "but surely your friend would not wish a stranger there on such an occasion."

"Oh, yes, he would! he would be delighted, he is very fond of the English. I will answer for it that you will be welcome. Meet us here at seven o'clock this evening; he has hired a big room, and there will be two or three dozen of us there—all good fellows. Most of them have passed, and you will see the army and navy, the law and medicine, all represented."

Godfrey willingly agreed to go. He thought he should see a new phase of Russian life, and at the appointed hour he met the two students. The entertainment was held in a large room in a traktar or eating-house in a small street. The room was already full of smoke, a number of young men were seated along two tables extending the length of the room, and crossed by one at the upper end. Several were in military uniform, and two or three in that of the navy. Akim and Petroff were greeted boisterously by name as they entered.

"I will talk to you presently," Akim shouted in reply to various invitations to take his seat. "I have a friend whom I must first introduce to Alexis." He and Petroff took Godfrey up to the table at the end of the room. "Alexis," Akim said, "I have brought you a gentleman whom I am sure you will welcome. He has proved himself a true friend, one worthy of friendship and honour. His name is Godfrey Bullen."

There was general silence as Akim spoke, and an evident curiosity as to the stranger their comrade had introduced. The host, who had risen to his feet, grasped Godfrey's hand warmly.

"I am indeed glad to meet you, Godfrey Bullen," he said.

"My friends, greet with me the English friend of Akim and Petroff."

There was a general thumping of glasses on the table, and two or three of those sitting near Alexis rose from their seats and shook hands with Godfrey, with a warmth and cordiality which astonished him. Room was made for him and his two friends at the upper end of one of the side tables, and when he had taken his seat the lad was able to survey the scene quietly.

Numbers of bottles were ranged down the middle of the tables, which were of bare wood without cloth. These contained, as Petroff told him, wines from various parts of Russia. There were wines similar to sherry and Bordeaux, from the Crimea; Kahetinskoe, strongly resembling good burgundy, from the Caucasus; and Don Skoe, a sparkling wine resembling champagne, from the Don. Besides these were tankards of Iablochin Kavas, or cider; Grushevoi Kavas, or perry; Malovinoi, a drink prepared from raspberries; and Lompopo, a favourite drink on the shores of the Baltic. The conversation naturally turned on student topics, of tricks played on professors, on past festivities, amusements, and quarrels. No allusion of any kind was made to politics, or to the matters of the day. Jovial songs were sung, the whole joining in chorus with great animation. At nine o'clock waiters appeared with trays containing the indispensable beginning of all Russian feasts. Each tray contained a large number of small dishes with fresh caviar, raw herrings, smoked salmon, dried sturgeon, slices of German sausage, smoked goose, ham, radishes, cheese, and butter. From these the guests helped themselves at will, the servants handing round small glasses of Kümmel Liftofka, a spirit flavoured with the leaves of the black-currant, and vodka.

Then came the supper. Before each guest was placed a basin of stchi, a cabbage soup, sour cream being handed round to be added to it; then came rastigai patties, composed of the flesh of the sturgeon and isinglass. This was followed by cold boiled sucking pig with horse-radish sauce. After this came roast mutton stuffed with buck-wheat, which con-

cluded the supper. When the table was cleared singing began again, but Godfrey stayed no longer, excusing himself to his host on the ground that the merchant kept early hours, and that unless when he had specially mentioned that he should not be home until late, he made a point of being in between ten and eleven.

He was again surprised at the warmth with which several of the guests spoke to him as he said good-night, and went away with the idea in his mind that among the younger Russians, at any rate, Englishmen must be much more popular than he had before supposed. One or two young officers had given him their cards, and said that they should be pleased if he would call upon them.

"I have had a pleasant evening," he said to himself. "They are a jolly set of fellows, more like boys than men. It was just the sort of thing I could fancy a big breaking-up supper would be if fellows could do as they liked, only no head-master would stand the tremendous row they made with their choruses. However, I don't expect they very often have a jollification like this. I suppose our host was a good deal better off than most of them. Petroff said that he was the son of a manufacturer down in the south. I wonder what he meant when he laughed in that quiet way of his when I said I wondered that as his father was well off he should take an appointment at such an out-of-the-way place as Tobolsk. 'Don't ask questions here,' he said, 'those fellows handing round the meat may be government spies.' I don't see, if they were, what interest they could have in the question why Alexis Stumpoff should go to Tobolsk.

"However, I suppose they make a point of never touching on private affairs where anyone can hear them, however innocent the matter may be. It must be hateful to be in a country where, for aught you know, every other man you come across is a spy. I daresay I am watched now; that police fellow told me I should be. It would be a lark to turn off down by-streets and lead the spy, if there is one, a tremen-

dous dance; but jokes like that won't do here. I got off once, but if I give them the least excuse again they may send me off to the frontier. I should not care much myself, but it would annoy the governor horribly, so I will walk back as gravely as a judge."

CHAPTER III

A HUNTING PARTY

TWO days later Robson, an English merchant who had been one of the most intimate of Godfrey's acquaintances, and to whom he had confided the truth about his arrest, said to him:

"You are not looking quite yourself, lad."

"Oh, I am all right!" he said; "but it is not a pleasant thing having had such a close shave of being sent to Siberia; and it isn't only that. No doubt the police feel that they owe me a grudge for having been the means of this fellow, whoever he was, slipping through their fingers, and I shall be a suspected person for a long time. Of course it is only fancy, but I am always thinking there is someone following me when I go out. I know it is nonsense, but I can't get rid of it."

"I don't suppose they are watching you as closely as that," Mr. Robson said, "but I do think it is likely that they may be keeping an eye on you; but if they are they will be tired of it before long, when they see that you go your own way and have nothing to do with any suspected persons. You want a change, lad. I have an invitation to join a party who are going up to Finland to shoot for a couple of days. It is more likely than not that we shall never have a chance of firing a shot, but it will be an outing for you, and will clear your brain. Do you think you would like it?"

"Thank you very much, Mr. Robson, I should like it immensely. Petrovytch was saying this morning that he thought I should be all the better for a holiday, so I am sure he will spare me. I am nothing of a shot, in fact I never fired a shot at game in my life, though I have practised a bit with the rifle, but I am sure it will be very jolly whether we shoot anything or not."

"Very well, then, be at the station to catch the seven o'clock train in the morning. It is a four hours' railway journey."

"Is there anything to bring, sir?"

"No, you can take a hand-bag and sleeping things, but beyond a bit of soap and a towel I don't suppose you will have need of anything, for you will most likely sleep at some farm-house, or perhaps in a woodman's hut, and there will not be any undressing. There are six of us going from here, counting you, but the party is got up by two or three men we know there. They tell me some of the officers of the regiment stationed there will be of the party, and they will have a hundred or so of their men to act as beaters. I have a spare gun that I will bring for you."

The next morning Godfrey joined Mr. Robson at the station. A Mr. White, whom he knew well, was one of the party, and the other three were Russians. They had secured a first-class compartment, and as soon as they started they rigged up a table with one of the cushions and began to play whist.

"You don't play, I suppose, Godfrey?" Mr. Robson said.

"No, sir. I have played a little at my father's, but it will be a long time before I shall be good enough to play. I have heard my father say that there is better whist at St. Petersburg than in any place in the world."

"I think he is right, lad. The Russians are first-rate players and are passionately fond of the game, and naturally we English here have had to learn to play up to their standard. The game is similar to that in England, but they score altogether differently."

The four hours passed rapidly. Godfrey sometimes looked out of the window at the flat country they were passing through, but more often watched the play. They were met at the station by two of Mr. Robson's friends, and found that sledges were in readiness and they were to start at once.

"We have ten miles to drive," one of them said. "The others went on early; they will have had one beat by the time we get there, and are then to assemble for luncheon."

The road was good and the horses fast, so that the sledges flew along rapidly. Most of the distance was through forest, but the last half-mile was open, and the sledge drew up at a large farm-house standing in the centre of the cleared space, and surrounded at a distance of half a mile on all sides by the forest. A dozen men, about half of whom were in uniform, poured out from the door as the four sledges drew up.

"You are just in time," one of them said. "The soup is ready and in another minute we should have set to."

The civilians all knew each other, but the new-comers were introduced to the Russian colonel and his five officers.

"Have you had any luck, colonel?" Mr. Robson asked.

"Wonderful," the latter replied with a laugh. "A stag came along and everyone of us had a shot at it, and each and everyone is ready to take oath that he hit it, so that everyone is satisfied. Don't you call that luck?"

Mr. Robson laughed. "But where is the stag?" he asked, looking round.

"That is more than anyone can tell you. He went straight on, and carried off our twelve bullets. Captain Fomitch here, and in fact all my officers, are ready to swear that the deer is enchanted, and they have all been crossing themselves against the evil omen. Such a thing was never heard of before, for being such crack shots, all of us, of course there can be no doubt about our each having hit the stag when it was not more than a hundred yards away at the outside; but come in, the soup smells too good to wait, and the sight of that enchanted beast has sharpened my appetite wonderfully."

Godfrey entered with the rest. Large as the farm-house was, the greater portion of the ground-floor was occupied by the room they entered. It was entirely constructed of wood blackened with smoke and age. A great fire burned on the hearth, and the farmer's wife and two maids were occupied with several large pots, some suspended over the fire, others standing among the brands. The window was low, but extended half across one side of the room, and was filled with small lattice panes. From the roof hung hams, sides of bacon, potatoes in network bags, bunches of herbs, and several joints of meat. A table extended the length of the room covered with plates and dishes that from their appearance had evidently been brought out from the town, and differed widely from the rough earthenware standing on a great dresser of darkened wood extending down one side of the room. At one end the great pot was placed, the cloth having been pushed back for the purpose, and the colonel, seizing the ladle, began to fill the earthenware bowls which were used instead of soup plates.

"Each man come for his ration before he sits down," he said. "It would be better if you did not sit down at all, for I know well enough that when my countrymen sit down to a meal it is a long time before they get up again, and we have to be in the forest again in three-quarters of an hour."

"Quite right, colonel," one of the hosts said; "this evening you may sit as long as you like, but if we are to have another drive to-day we must waste no time. A basin of soup and a plate of stew are all you will get now, with a cup of coffee afterwards to arm you against the cold, and a glass of vodka or kummil to top up with. No, colonel, not any punch just now. Punch in the evening; but if we were to begin with that now, I know that there would be no shooting this afternoon."

"What are the beaters doing?" Mr. Robson asked as they hastily ate their dinner.

"They have brought their bread with them," the colonel

said, "and our friends here have provided a deer almost as fine as that which carried off the twelve bullets. It was roasting over a fire in the forest when we went past, and I saw some black bottles which I guessed were vodka."

"Yes, colonel, I ordered that they should have a glass each with their dinner, and another glass when they had done this afternoon."

"They would not mind being on fatigue duty every day through the winter on those terms," the colonel said. "It is better for them than soldiering. We must mind that we don't shoot any of them, gentlemen. The lives of the Czar's soldiers are not to be lightly sacrificed, and next time, you know, the whole of the bullets may not hit the mark as they did this morning."

"There really is some danger in it," Mr. Robson said to Godfrey, who was sitting next to him; "in fact, I should say there was a good deal of danger. However, I fancy the beaters all throw themselves down flat when they hear the crack of the first rifle."

"I see most of them have got a gun as well as a rifle."

"Yes, there is no saying what may come along, and, indeed, they are more likely to get birds than fur. I was told there are a good many elk in the forest, and the peasants have been bringing an unusual number in lately. A friend of mine shot two last week; but as our party did not get one in their first drive they are not likely to get any afterwards. Occasionally in these big drives a good many animals are inclosed, but as a rule the noise the soldiers make as they move along to take up their places is enough to frighten every creature within a couple of miles. I told you you were not likely to have to draw a trigger. Expeditions like this are rather an excuse for a couple of days' fun than anything else. The real hunting is more quiet. Men who are fond of it have peasants in their pay all over the country, and if one of these hears of a bear or an elk anywhere in his neighbourhood he brings in the news at once, and then one or two men drive out to the

village, where beaters will be in readiness for them, and have the hunt to themselves.

"I used to do a good deal of it the first few years I came out, but it is bitter cold work waiting for hours till a beast comes past, or trying to crawl up to him. After all, there is no great fun in putting a bullet into a creature as big as a horse at a distance of thirty or forty yards. But there, they are making a move. They are going to drink the coffee and vodka standing, which is wise, for after standing in the snow for four hours, as they have been doing, they are apt to get so sleepy after a warm meal that if we were to stop here much longer you would find half the number would not make a start at all."

The sledges were brought up, and there was a three miles' drive through the forest. Then the shooters were placed in a line, some forty or fifty yards apart, each taking his station behind a tree. Then a small bugler sounded a note. Godfrey heard a reply a long distance off. Three-quarters of an hour passed without any further sound being heard, and then Godfrey, who had been stamping his feet and swinging his arms to keep himself warm, heard a confused murmur. Looking along the line he saw that the others were all on the alert, and he accordingly took up his gun and began to gaze across the snow. The right-hand barrel was loaded with shot, the left with ball. Presently a shot rang out away on his right, followed almost immediately afterwards by another. After this evidence that there must be something in the forest he watched more eagerly for signs of life. Presently he saw a hare coming loping along. From time to time it stopped and turned its head to listen, and then came on again. He soon saw that it was bearing to the left, and that it was not going to come within his range. He watched it disappear among the trees, and two minutes later heard a shot. Others followed to the right and left of him, and presently a hare, which he had not noticed, dashed past at full speed, almost touching his legs. He was so startled for the moment that the hare had got

some distance before he had turned round and was ready to fire, and he was in no way surprised to see it dash on unharmed by his shot. When there was a pause in the firing the shouting recommenced, this time not far distant, and he soon saw men making their way towards him through the trees.

"It is all over now," Mr. Robson shouted from the next tree. "If they have not done better elsewhere than we have here the bag is not a very large one."

"Did you shoot anything, Mr. Robson?"

"I knocked a hare over; that is the only thing I have seen. What have you done?"

"I think I succeeded in frightening a hare, but that was all," Godfrey laughed. "It ran almost between my legs before I saw it, and I think it startled me quite as much as my shot alarmed it."

The bugle sounded again, and the party were presently collected round the colonel. The result of the beat was five hares, and a small stag that had fallen to the gun of Mr. White.

"Much cry and little wool," Mr. Robson said. "A hundred beaters, twenty guns, and six head of game."

Another short beat was organised, resulting in two stags and three more hares. One of the stags and the three hares were placed on a sledge to be taken back to the farm-house, and the rest of the game was given to the soldiers. A glass of vodka was served out to each of them, and, highly pleased with their day's work, the men slung the deer to poles and set out on their march of eight miles back to the town.

"They will have done a tremendous day's work by the time they have finished," Godfrey said. "Eight miles out and eight miles back, and three beats, which must have cost them four or five miles' walking at least. They must have gone over thirty miles through the snow."

"It won't be as much as that, though it will be a long day's work," the colonel said. "They came out yesterday evening and slept in a barn. Another company come out to-night to take their place."

It was already dark by the time the party reached the farmhouse, and after a cup of coffee all round they began to prepare the dinner. They were like a party of school-boys, laughing, joking, and playing tricks with each other. Two of them undertook the preparation of hare-soup. Two others were appointed to roast a quarter of venison, keeping it turning as it hung by a cord in front of the fire, and being told that should it burn from want of basting they would forfeit their share of it. The colonel undertook the mixing of punch, and the odour of lemons, rum, and other spirits soon mingled with that of the cooking. Godfrey was set to whip eggs for a gigantic omelette, and most of the others had some task or other assigned to them, the farmer's wife and her assistants not being allowed to have anything to do with the matter.

The dinner was a great success. After it was over a huge bowl of punch was placed on the table, and after the health of the Czar and that of the Queen of England had been drunk, speeches were made, songs were sung, and stories told. While this was going on, the farmer brought in a dozen trusses of straw. These his wife and the maids opened and distributed along both sides of the room, laying blankets over them. It was not long before Godfrey began to feel very drowsy, the result of the day's work in the cold, a good dinner, the heated air of the room and the din, and would have gladly lain down; but his movement to leave the table was at once frustrated, and he was condemned to drink an extra tumbler of punch as a penalty. After that he had but a confused idea of the rest of the evening. He knew that many songs were sung, and that everyone seemed talking together, and as at last he managed to get away and lie down on the straw he had a vague idea that the colonel was standing on a chair making a final oration, with the punch-bowl turned upside down and worn as a helmet.

Godfrey had not touched the wine at dinner, knowing that he would be expected to take punch afterwards, and he had only sipped this occasionally, except the glass he had been

condemned to drink; and when he heard the colonel shout in a stentorian voice "To arms!" he got up and shook himself, and felt ready for another day's work, although many of the others were sitting up yawning or abusing the colonel for having called them so early. However, it was already light. Two great samovars were steaming, and the cups set in readiness on the table. Godfrey managed to get hold of a pail of water and indulged in a good wash, as after a few minutes did all the others; while a cup or two of tea and a few slices of fried bacon set up even those who were at first least inclined to rise.

A quarter of an hour later the sledges were at the door, and the party started. The hunt was even less successful than that of the previous day. No stag was seen, but some ten hares and five brace of grouse were shot. At three o'clock the party assembled again at the farm-house and had another hearty meal, terminating with one glass of punch round; then they took their places in their sledges and were driven back to the town; the party for St. Petersburg started by the six-o'clock train, the rest giving them a hearty cheer as the carriage moved off from the platform.

"Well, have you enjoyed it, Godfrey?" Mr. Robson asked.

"Immensely, sir. It has been grand fun. The colonel is a wonderful fellow."

"There are no more pleasant companions than the Russians," Mr. Robson said. "They more closely resemble the Irish than any people I know. They have a wonderful fund of spirits, enjoy a practical joke, are fond of sport, and have too a sympathetic, and one may almost say a melancholy vein in their disposition, just as the Irish have. They have their faults, of course—all of us have; and the virtue of temperance has not as yet made much way here. Society, in fact, is a good deal like that in England two or three generations back, when it was considered no disgrace for a man to sit after dinner at the table until he had to be helped up to bed by the servants. Now, White, you have got the cards, I think."

Godfrey watched the game for a short time, then his eyes closed, and he knew nothing more until Mr. Robson shook him and shouted, "Pull yourself together, Godfrey. Here we are at St. Petersburg."

Three days later, when Ivan Petrovytch came in to breakfast at eleven o'clock—for the inmates of the house had a cup of coffee or chocolate and a roll in their rooms at half-past seven, and office work commenced an hour later—Godfrey saw that he and his wife were both looking very grave. Nothing was said until the servant, having handed round the dishes, left the room.

"Has anything happened?" Godfrey asked.

"Yes, there is bad news. Another plot against the life of the Czar has been discovered. The Nihilists have mined under the road by which he was yesterday evening to have travelled to the railway-station. It seems that some suspicion was felt by the police. I do not know how it arose; at any rate at the last moment the route was changed. During the night all the houses in the suspected neighbourhood were searched, and in the cellar of one of them a passage was found leading under the road. A mine was heavily charged with powder, and was connected by wires to an electric battery; and there can be no doubt that had the Czar passed by as intended he would have been destroyed by the explosion. It is terrible, terrible!"

"Did they find anyone in the cellar?" Godfrey asked.

"No one. The conspirators had no doubt taken the alarm when they heard that the route was changed, and the place was deserted. It seems that the shop above was taken four months ago as a store for the sale of coal and wood, and the cellar and an adjoining one were hired at the same time. There was also a room behind the shop, where the man and woman who kept it lived. They say that arrests have been made all over the city this morning, and we shall no doubt have a renewal of the wholesale trials that followed the assassination of General Mesentzeff, the head of the police, last

autumn. It is terrible! These misguided men hope to conquer the empire by fear. Instead of that, they will in the end only strengthen the hands of despotism. I have always been inclined to liberalism, but I have wished for gradual changes only. For large changes we are not yet fit; but as education spreads and we approach the western standard, some power and voice ought to be given to all intelligent enough to use it; that is to say, to the educated classes. I would not—no one in his senses would—give the power of voting to illiterate and ignorant men, who would simply be tools in the hands of the designing and ambitious; but the peoples of the great towns, St. Petersburg, Moskow, Kieff, Odessa, and others should be permitted to send representatives—men of their own choice to the provincial councils, which should be strengthened and given a real, instead of a nominal voice, in the control of affairs.

“That was all I and thousands like me ever wished for in the present, but it would have been the first step towards a constitution which the empire, when the people become fit for it, might enjoy. That dream is over. These men, by their wild violence, have thrown back the reforms for half a century at least. They have driven the Czar to war against them; they have strengthened the hands of the men who will use their acts as an excuse for the extremest measures of repression; they have ranged on the other side all the moderate men like myself, who, though desirous of constitutional changes, shrink with horror from a revolution heralded by deeds of bloodshed and murder.”

“I quite agree with you,” Godfrey said warmly. “Men must be mad who could counsel such abominable plans. The French Revolution was terrible, although it began peacefully, and was at first supported by all the best spirits of France; but at last it became a hideous butchery. But here in Russia it seems to me that it would be infinitely worse, for it is only in the towns that there are men with any education; and if it began with the murder of the Czar, what would it grow to?”

"What, indeed!" Ivan Petrovytch repeated. "And yet, like the French Revolution, the pioneers of this movement were earnest and thoughtful men, with noble dreams for the regeneration of Russia."

"But how did it begin?"

"It may be said to have started about 1860. The emancipation of the serfs produced a sort of fever. Everyone looked for change, but it was in the universities, the seminaries, and among the younger professional men that it first began. Prohibited works of all kinds, especially those of European socialists, were, in spite of every precaution at the frontier, introduced and wildly circulated. Socialistic ideas made tremendous progress among the class I speak of, and these, by writing, by the circulation of prohibited papers, and so on, carried on a sort of crusade against the government, and indeed against all governments, carrying their ideas of liberty to the most extreme point and waging war against religion as well as against society.

"In the latter respect they were more successful than in the former, and I regret to say that atheism made immense strides among the educated class. They had some profound thinkers among them: Tchernyshevsky, Dobroluboff, Mikhailoff, besides Herzen and Ogareff, the two men who brought out the *Kokokol* in London in the Russian language, and by their agents spread it broadcast over Russia. The stifling of the insurrection in Poland strengthened the reactionary party. More repressive edicts were issued, with the usual result, that secret societies multiplied everywhere. Then came the revolution and commune in Paris, which greatly strengthened the spread of revolutionary ideas here. Another circumstance gave a fresh impetus to this. Some time before, there had been a movement for what was called the emancipation of women, and a perfect furore arose among girls of all classes for education.

"There were no upper schools or colleges open to them in Russia, and they went in enormous numbers to Switzerland,

especially to Zurich. Girls of the upper classes shared their means with the poorer ones, and the latter eked out their resources by work of all descriptions. Zurich, as you know, is a hotbed of radicalism, and those young women who went to learn soon imbibed the wildest ideas. Then came a ukase, ordering the immediate return home of all Russian girls abroad. It was undoubtedly a great mistake. In Switzerland they were harmless, but when they returned to Russia and scattered over the towns and villages, they became so many apostles of socialism, and undoubtedly strengthened the movement. So it grew. Men of good families left their homes, and in the disguise of workmen expounded their principles among the lower classes. Among these was Prince Peter Krapotkine, the rich Cossack Obuchoff, Scisoko and Rogaceff, both officers, and scores of others, who gave up everything and worked as workmen among workmen.

"Innumerable arrests were made, and at one trial a thousand prisoners were convicted. So wholesale were the arrests that even the most enthusiastic saw that they were simply sacrificing themselves in vain, and about 1877 they changed their tactics. The prisons were crowded, and the treatment there of the political prisoners was vastly harder than that given to those condemned for the most atrocious crimes, as you may imagine when I tell you that in the course of the trial of that one batch I spoke of, which lasted four years, seventy-five of the prisoners committed suicide, went mad, or died. Then when the authorities thought Nihilism was stamped out by wholesale severity the matter assumed another phase. The crusade by preaching had failed, and the Nihilists began a crusade of terror. First police spies were killed in many places, then more highly placed persons, officers of the police, judges, and officials who distinguished themselves by their activity and severity. Then in the spring of last year Vera Zaslitch shot at General Trépoff, who had ordered a political prisoner to be flogged. She was tried by a jury, and the feeling throughout the country was so much in favour of the

people who had been so terribly persecuted that she was acquitted. The authorities were furious, and every effort was made to find and re-arrest Vera; and a verdict of the court acquitting many of the accused in one of the trials was annulled by the Czar.

"Well, you know, Godfrey Bullen, I am not one who meddles with politics. You have never heard me speak of them before, and I consider the aims of these men would bring about anarchy. An anarchy that would deluge the land with blood seems to me detestable and wicked. But I cannot but think the government has made a terrible mistake by its severity. These people are all enthusiastic fanatics. They see that things are not as they should be, and they would destroy everything to right them. Hate their aims as one may, one must admit that their conduct is heroic. Few have quailed in their trials. All preserve a calmness of demeanour that even their judges and executioners cannot but admire. They seem made of iron; they suffer everything, give up everything, dare everything for their faith; they die, as the Christian martyrs died in Rome, unflinching, unrepentant. If they have become as wild beasts, severity has made them so. Their propaganda was at first a peaceful one. It is cruelty that has driven them to use the only weapon at their disposal, assassination.

"One man, for example, in 1877, Jacob Stefanovic, organised a conspiracy in the district of Sighirino. It spread widely among the peasants. The priests, violating the secret of the confessional, informed the police, but these, although using every effort, could learn no more. Hundreds of arrests were made, but nothing discovered. Learning that the priests had betrayed them the peasants no longer went to confession, and to avoid betraying themselves in a state of drunkenness abstained from the use of brandy; but one man, tired and without food, took a glass. It made him drunk, and in his drunkenness he spoke to the man who had sold him spirits. He was arrested, and although he did not know all, gave enough

clue for the police to follow up, and all the leaders and over a thousand persons were arrested. Two thousand others, who were affiliated to the society, were warned in time and escaped. You can guess the fate of those who were captured.

"Last year, three months before you came here, General Mezentsoff, the head of the police, was assassinated, and since then we know that it is open war between the Nihilists and the Czar. The police hush matters up, but they get abroad. Threatening letters reach the Czar in his inmost apartments, and it is known that several attempts have been made to assassinate him, but have failed.

"One of the most extraordinary things connected with the movement is that women play a large part in it. Being in the thick of every conspiracy they are the life and soul of the movement, and they are of all classes. There are a score of women for whose arrest the authorities would pay any money, and yet they elude every effort. It is horrible. This is what comes of women going to Switzerland and learning to look upon religion as a myth and all authority as hateful, and to have wild dreams of an impossible state of affairs such as never has existed in this world. It is horrible, but it is pitiable. The prisons in the land are full of victims; trains of prisoners set off monthly for Siberia. It is enough to turn the brain to think of such things. How it is to end no one can say."

But it was only in bated breath and within closed doors that the discovery of the Nihilist plot was discussed in St. Petersburg. Elsewhere it was scarcely alluded to, although, if mentioned, those present vied with each other in the violence of their denunciation of it; but when society from the highest to the lowest was permeated by secret agents of the police, and every word was liable to be reported and misinterpreted, a subject so dangerous was shunned by common consent. It was known, though, that large numbers of arrests had been made, but even those whose dearest friends had suddenly disappeared said no word of it in public, for to be

even a distant acquaintance of such a person was dangerous. Yet apparently everything went on as usual: the theatres were as well filled; the Nevski as crowded and gay.

CHAPTER IV

A PRISONER

SOON after this St. Petersburg was startled at the news that there had been a terrible explosion at the Winter Palace, and that the Czar and royal family had narrowly escaped with their lives. Upon the following evening Godfrey was walking down the Nevski, where groups of people were still discussing the terrible affair. He presently met Akim Soushiloff and Petroff Stepanoff. He had not seen them for some time, and as they had omitted to give him the address of the lodging into which they had moved, he was really glad to see them, for he liked them better than any of the Russians of his acquaintance, for both had an earnest manner and seemed to be free from narrow prejudices, sincere admirers of England, and on most subjects very well informed.

"It is quite an age since I have seen you both," he said. "Where have you been hiding?"

"We have been working harder than usual," Petroff said; "our last examinations are just coming off. But you said that you would come to see us, and you have never done so."

"You did not tell me where you had moved to," Godfrey said, "or I should have done so long ago."

"That was stupid indeed!" Akim said. "Have you an hour to spare now?"

"Yes, I have nothing to do, and shall be very glad to come round and have a talk. This is a horrible business at the Winter Palace."

"Horrible," Petroff said; "but it is just as well not to talk about it in the streets. Come along, we will take you to our place; we were just thinking of going back."

A quarter of an hour's walking took them to the students' room, which was, like the last, at the top of the house. A lamp was lighted, the samovar placed on the table, and a little charcoal fire lit under it. A glass of vodka was handed round to pass the time until the water was boiling, pipes were brought out from the cupboard and filled, for cigars, which are cheap and good, are generally smoked in the streets in Russia by the middle and upper classes, pipes being only used there by *Isvostchiks*, labourers, and Englishmen. The conversation naturally for a time turned upon the explosion in the Winter Palace, the Russians expressing an indignation fully equal to that of Godfrey. Then they talked of England, both regretting that they were unable to speak the language.

"I would give much to be able to read Shakespeare," Petroff said. "I have heard his works spoken of in such high terms by some of our friends who have studied your language, and I have heard, too, from them of your Dickens. They tell me it is like reading of another world—a world in which there are no officials, and no police, and no soldiers. That must be very near a paradise."

"We have some soldiers," Godfrey laughed, "but one does not see much of them. About half of those we have at home are in two military camps, one in England and one in Ireland. There are the Guards in London, but the population is so large that you might go a week without seeing one, while in very few of the provincial towns are there any garrisons at all. There are police, and plenty of them, but as their business is only to prevent crime, they naturally don't play a prominent part in novels giving a picture of everyday life. As to officials, beyond rate-collectors we don't see anything of them, though there are magistrates, and government clerks, and custom officers, and that sort of thing, but they certainly don't play any prominent part in our lives."

So they chatted for an hour, when at short intervals two other men came in. One was a tall handsome fellow who was introduced by Petroff as the son of Baron Kinkoff, the other was a young advocate of Moscow on a visit to St. Petersburg. Both, Godfrey observed, had knocked in a somewhat peculiar manner at the door, which opened, as he had noticed when they came in, only by a key. Akim observed a slight expression of surprise in Godfrey's face at the second knock, and said laughing:

"Our remittances have not come to hand of late, Godfrey, and some of our creditors are getting troublesome, so we have established a signal by which we know our friends, while inconvenient visitors can knock as long as they like, and then go away thinking we are out."

Godfrey chatted for a short time longer, and then got up to go. Akim went to the door with him. As it opened there was a sudden rush of men from outside that nearly knocked him down. Of what followed he had but a vague idea. Pistol shots rang out. There was a desperate struggle. He received a blow on the head which struck him to the ground, and an instant later there was a tremendous explosion. The next thing he knew was that he was being hauled from below some debris. As he looked round bewildered he saw that a considerable portion of the ceiling and of the roof above it had been blown out. Several bodies lay stretched on the floor. The room was still full of smoke, but by the light of two or three lanterns he perceived that the young baron, bleeding freely from a sabre wound across the forehead, was standing bound between two policemen with drawn swords. Policemen were examining the bodies on the floor, while others were searching the closets, cutting open the beds and turning out their contents. Akim lay on his back dead, and across him lay the young advocate. Of Petroff he could see nothing; the other bodies were those of policemen. Three of these near the door appeared to have been shot; the others were lying in contorted positions against the walls, as if they

had been flung there by the force of the explosion. All this he saw in a state of vague wonderment, while the two policemen kneeling at his side were passing cords tightly round him.

"This one still lives," one of the policemen said, stooping over the young advocate, "but I think he is nearly done for."

"Never mind, bring him along with the others," a man in plain clothes said in tones of authority. "Get them away at once, we shall have half St. Petersburg here in a few minutes."

Godfrey was lifted by the policemen, one at his head, and one at his feet, carried down stairs, and flung into a vehicle at the door. Dully he heard a roar of excited shouts and questions, and the sharp orders of the police ranged round the vehicle. Three policemen took their places inside with him, and the vehicle drove off, slowly at first until it was free of the crowd, and then at a sharp gallop. Godfrey was conscious of but little as he went along; he had a vague idea of a warm moist feeling down the back, and wondered whether it was his own blood. Gradually his impressions became more and more indistinct, and he knew nothing more until he was conscious of a sensation of cold at the back of the head, and of a murmur of voices round him. Soon he was lifted up into a sitting position, and he felt that bandages were being wrapped round his head. Then he was laid down again, he heard a door slam and a key turn, and then he knew nothing more. When he awoke daylight was streaming in through a loophole high up in the wall. He tried to sit up, but could not, and looked round trying to recall where he was and what had happened. He was in a dark cell with no furniture save the straw on which he was lying.

"It is a prison certainly," he muttered to himself. "How did I get here?"

Then gradually the events of the night before came to his mind. There had been a terrible fight. Akim had been killed. There had been a tremendous explosion. The police had something to do with it. Was it all a dream, or was it

real? Was he dreaming now? He was some time before he could persuade himself that it was all real, and indeed it was not until the door opened and two men entered that he felt quite sure that he, Godfrey Bullen, was really lying there in a prison cell, with a dull numbing pain at the back of his head, and too weak even to sit upright. One of the men leaned over him. Godfrey tried to speak, but could not do so above a whisper.

"He will do now," the man said without paying any attention to his words. "He must have a thick skull or that sword-cut would have finished him. Give him some wine and water now, and some soup presently. We must not let him slip through our fingers."

Some liquid was poured between his lips, and then he was left alone again. "Certainly it is all real," he said to himself. "Akim must have been killed, and I must be a prisoner. What in the world can it be all about?" He was too weak to think, but after another visit had been paid him, and he had been lifted up and given some strong broth, he began to think more clearly. "Can it have been a Nihilist arrest?" he thought to himself. "Akim and Petroff can never be Nihilists. The idea is absurd. I have never heard them say a word against the government or the Czar."

Then he thought of their friend Katia, and how she had got him to aid in the escape of a Nihilist. "It is all nonsense," he murmured, "the idea of a girl like that being mixed up in a conspiracy." Then his ideas again became more and more confused, and when the doctor visited him again in the evening he was in a state of high fever, talking incoherently to himself. For seven days he continued in that state. There was no lack of care; the doctor visited him at very short intervals, and an attendant remained night and day beside him, applying cold bandages to his head, and carefully noting down in a book every word that passed his lips. Then a good constitution gradually triumphed over the fever, and on the eighth day he lay a mere shadow of himself,

but cool and sensible, on a bed in an airy ward. Nourishing food was given to him in abundance, but it was another week before he was able to stand alone. Then one morning two attendants brought a stretcher to the side of his bed. He was assisted to put on his clothes, and was then placed on the stretcher and carried away. He was taken through long passages, up and down stairs, at last into a large room. Here he was lifted on the stretcher and placed in a chair. Facing him at a table were nine officers.

"Prisoner," the president said, glancing at a large closely-written sheet of paper before him, "you are accused of taking part in a Nihilist conspiracy to murder the Czar."

"I know nothing of any Nihilist conspiracy," Godfrey said. "I was accidentally in the room with my friends Akim and Petroff when the police entered."

The president waved his hand impatiently. "That of course," he said. "Your name is Godfrey Bullen?"

"Yes, sir."

"Born in St. Petersburg, but of English parentage?"

Godfrey bowed his head.

"Three months since you took part in the plot by means of which the notorious Valerian Ossinsky escaped from the hands of the police, and you were the accomplice of Sophia Perovskaia in that matter."

"I never heard the name before," Godfrey said.

The president paid no attention, but went on: "You said at the time," he continued, reading from the notes, "that you did not know the woman who spoke to you, but it is known that she was an associate of Akim Soushiloff and Petroff Stepanoff, at whose place you were captured the other day. There is therefore no doubt that you know her."

"I knew her under another name," Godfrey said; "but if I had been told she was Sophia Perovskaia, it conveyed nothing to me, for I had never heard of her."

"You are committing yourself, prisoner," the president said coldly. "When examined you denied all acquaintance with the woman, and declared that she was a stranger."

"Excuse me, sir," Godfrey said, "I said it was a masked woman, and that I did not see her face, which was perfectly true. I admit now that I did know who she was, but naturally as a gentleman I endeavoured to shield her in a matter concerning which I believed that she was as innocent as I was."

A murmur of incredulity ran round the circle of officers.

"A few days after that," the president went on, again reading from his notes, "you were present with Akim Soushiloff and Petroff Stepanoff at a supper in a *trakir* in Ossuloff Street. There were present on that occasion"—and he read a list of six names—"four of whom have since been convicted and punished, and two of whom, although not yet taken, are known to have been engaged in the murderous attempt at the Winter Palace. You were greeted there with significant enthusiasm, which was evidently a testimony on the part of these conspirators to the part you had played in the affair of Ossinsky."

Godfrey felt that the meshes were closing round him. He remembered that he had wondered at the time why he had been received with such great cordiality.

"Now," the president went on, "you are captured in the room of Akim Soushiloff and Petroff Stepanoff, who were both beyond doubt engaged in the plot at the Winter Palace, with two other equally guilty conspirators, and were doubtless deliberating on some fresh atrocity when interrupted by the agents of the police. You shared in the desperate resistance they made, which resulted in the death of eight police officers by pistol shot, or by the explosion of gunpowder, by which Petroff Stepanoff, who fired it, was also blown to pieces. What have you to say in your defence?"

"I still say that I am perfectly innocent," Godfrey said. "I knew nothing of these men being conspirators in any way, and I demand to be allowed to communicate with my friends, and to obtain the assistance of an advocate."

"An advocate could say nothing for you," the president

said. "You do not deny any of the charges brought against you, which are, that you were the associate of these assassins, that you aided Sophia Perovskaia in effecting the escape of Valerian Ossinsky, that you received the congratulations of the conspirators at the banquet, and that you were found in this room in company with four of the men concerned in the attempt to assassinate the Czar. But the court is willing to be merciful, and if you will tell all you know with reference to this plot, and give the names of all the conspirators with whom you have been concerned, your offence will be dealt with as leniently as possible."

"I repeat that I know nothing, and can therefore disclose nothing, sir, and I venture to protest against the authority of this court to try and condemn me, an Englishman."

"No matter what is the nationality of the person," the president said coldly, "who offends against the laws of this country, he is amenable to its laws, and his nationality affords him no protection whatever. You will have time given you to think the matter over before your sentence is communicated to you. Remove the prisoner."

Godfrey was laid on the stretcher again and carried away. This time he was taken, not to the room where he had been placed while ill, but to a dark cell where scarce a ray of light penetrated. There was a heap of straw in one corner, a loaf of black bread, and a jug of water. Godfrey when left alone shook up the straw to make it as comfortable as he possibly could, then sat down upon it with his back against the wall.

"Well, this is certainly a go," he said to himself. "If there was one thing that seemed less likely than another, it was that I should get involved in this Nihilist business. In the first place, the governor specially warned me against it; in the second place, I have been extremely careful never to give any opinion on public affairs; and in the third place, if there is one thing I detest more than another it is assassination. I cannot say it is cowardly in these men. The Nihilists do more than risk their lives; they give their lives away

to carry out their end. Still, though I own it is not cowardly, I hate it. The question is, what next? Petrovytch will, of course, write home to say that I am missing. I don't suppose he will have the slightest idea that I have been arrested as a Nihilist. I don't see how he could think so. He is more likely to think that I have been made away with somehow. No doubt my father will come out; but, of course, he won't learn any more than Petrovytch, unless they choose to tell him. I don't suppose they will tell him. I have heard that generally families of people they seize know nothing about it, unless they are arrested too. They may guess what has happened, but they don't know. In my case I should fancy the police would say nothing.

"They will hear from the inquiries that my father makes that he has no suspicion of what has happened to me, and they will know if they did tell him our ambassador would be making a row. But even if the governor were to learn what had become of me, and were to insist upon learning what crime I am accused of committing, I do not see that things would be much better. They would hand over the notes of the evidence on which I was convicted, and, taking it altogether, I am bound to say I do not see how they could help convicting me. Short of catching me like a sort of Guy Fawkes blowing up the palace, the case is about as strong as it could be. I certainly have put my foot in it. I was acquainted with these two conspirators; through them I got acquainted with that confounded woman Katia, though it seems that wasn't her name. Then through her I helped this fellow Ossinsky to escape. Then, trying to shield her, I make matters twenty times worse; for while my answer before led them to believe that she was a perfect stranger to me, I was ass enough to let out just now that I knew her. Then there was that supper. I could not make out at the time why they greeted me so heartily. Now, of course, it is plain enough; and now, just after this blowing-up business, here am I caught with four notorious conspirators, and mixed up in a fight in which eight

or ten policemen are killed, and the roof blown off a house. That would be circumstantial evidence enough to condemn a man in England, let alone Russia.

"I don't suppose they are going to hang me, because they publish the names of the fellows they hang; but imprisonment for years in one of their ghastly dungeons is bad enough. If it is to be, it will be Siberia, I hope. There must be some way of getting out of a big country like that—north, south, east, or west. Well, I don't see any use bothering over it. I have got into a horrible scrape, there is no doubt about that, and I must take what comes."

Godfrey was essentially of a hopeful nature, and always looked at the bright side of things. He was a strong believer in the adage, "Where there is a will, there is a way." He had been in his full share of scrapes at school, and had always made a rule of taking things easily. He now examined the cell.

"Beastly place!" he said, "and horribly damp. I wonder why dungeons are always damp. Cellars at home are not damp, and a dungeon is nothing but a cellar after all. Well, I shall take a nap."

The next day Godfrey was again taken before the tribunal, and again closely questioned as to his knowledge of the Nihilists. He again insisted that he knew nothing of them.

"Of course I knew Akim Soushiloff and Petroff Stepanoff; but I had only been in their rooms once before, and the only person I met there before was the young woman who called herself Katia, but who you say was somebody else. This was at the lodgings they occupied before."

"But you were found with Alexander Kinkoff and Paul Kousmitch."

"They only arrived a short time before the police entered. I had never seen either of them before."

These two prisoners had been examined before Godfrey entered, and had been questioned about him. Kousmitch had declared that he had never seen him before, and the

court knew that the spies who had been watching the house had seen him enter but a short time before the police force arrived. As the two statements had been made independently it was thought probable that in this respect Godfrey was speaking the truth. Not so, however, his assertions that he was unacquainted with any of the other conspirators.

He was again taken back to his cell, and for the next week saw no one but the warder who brought his bread and water, and who did not reply by a single word to any questions that he asked him. Godfrey did his best to keep up his spirits. He had learnt by heart at Shrewsbury the first two books of the Iliad, and these he daily repeated aloud, set himself equations to do, and solved them in his head, repeated the dates in Greek history, and went through everything he could remember as having learned.

He occasionally heard footsteps above him, and wondered whether that also was a cell, and what sort of man the prisoner was. Once or twice at night, when all was quiet, he heard loud cries, and wondered whether they were the result of delirium or torture. His gruff jailer was somewhat won by his cheerfulness. Every day Godfrey wished him good-morning as he visited the cell, inquired what the weather was like outside, expressed an earnest hope that silence didn't disagree with him, and generally joked and laughed as if he rather enjoyed himself than otherwise. At the end of the week an official entered the cell.

"I have come to inform you, prisoner, that the sentence of death that had been passed upon you has, by the clemency of the Czar, been commuted to banishment for life to Siberia."

"Very well, sir," Godfrey said. "I know, of course, that I am perfectly innocent of the crime of which I am charged; but as the Czar no doubt supposes that I am guilty of taking part in a plot against his life, I acknowledge and thank him for his clemency. I have no peculiar desire to visit Siberia, but at least it will be a change for the better from this place. I trust that it shall not be long before I start."

As the official was unable to make out whether Godfrey spoke in mockery or not, he made no reply.

"These Nihilists are men of iron," he said afterwards. "They walk to the scaffold with smiling faces; they exist in dungeons that would kill a dog in twenty-four hours, and nothing can tempt them to divulge their secrets; even starvation does not affect them. They are dangerous enemies, but it must be owned that they are brave men and women. This boy, for he is little more, almost laughed in our faces; and, in spite of his stay in that damp cell, seemed to be in excellent spirits. It is the same with them all, though I own that some of them do break down sometimes; but I think that those who commit suicide do so principally because they are afraid that, under pressure, they may divulge secrets against each other. Ossip, who attends that young fellow, says that he is always the same, and speaks as cheerfully to him every morning as if he were in a palace instead of in a dungeon."

Two days later Godfrey was aroused in the night.

"Why, it is not light yet," he said. "What are you disturbing me at this time for?"

"Get up," the man said; "you are going to start."

"Thank goodness for that!" Godfrey said, jumping up from his straw. "That is the best news that I have heard for a long time."

In the court-yard seven prisoners were standing. They were placed at some distance from each other, and by each stood a soldier and a policeman. A similar guard took their places by the side of Godfrey as he came out. An official took charge of the whole party, and, still keeping a few paces apart, they sallied out through the prison doors and marched through the sleeping city. Perhaps Godfrey was the only one of the party who did not feel profoundly impressed. They were going to leave behind them for ever family and friends and country, and many would have welcomed death as an escape from the dreary prospect before them. Godfrey's present feeling was that of exhilaration.

He had done his best to keep his mind at work, but the damp and unwholesome air of the cell had told upon him, enfeebled as he had been by the attack of fever. As he walked along now he drew in deep breaths of the brisk night air, and looked with delight at the stars glistening overhead. As to the future, just at that moment it troubled him but little. He knew nothing of Siberia beyond having heard that the prisoners there led a terrible life. That he should escape from it some time or other seemed to him a matter of course. How, he could form no idea until he got there; but as to the fact he had no misgiving, for it seemed to him ridiculous that in a country so enormous as Siberia a prisoner could not make his way out sooner or later.

When they reached the railway-station a train stood in readiness. Each prisoner had a separate compartment, his two guards accompanying him. Godfrey addressed a word to his custodians. The policeman, however, said, "You are forbidden to speak," and in a minute or two the train moved off.

Godfrey dozed occasionally until morning, and then looked out at the dark woods through which they passed for hours. Twice the train stopped at lonely stations, and the prisoners were supplied with food. In the afternoon Godfrey saw the gilded and painted domes of a great city, and knew that it must be Moscow. Here, however, they made no stay, but steamed straight through the station and continued their way. Godfrey slept soundly after it became dark, waking up once when the train came to a standstill. At early morning he was roused and ordered to alight, and in the same order as before the prisoners were marched through the streets of Nijni Novgorod to the bank of the Volga. Few people were yet abroad in the streets, but all they met looked pityingly at the group of exiles, a sight of daily occurrence in the spring-time of the year. Ordinary prisoners, of whom from fifteen to twenty thousand are sent annually to Siberia, are taken down the Volga in a convict barge, towed by a steamer, in

batches of six or seven hundred. Political prisoners are differently treated; they are carried on board the ordinary steamer, each having a separate cabin, and during the voyage they are allowed no intercourse whatever, either with each other or with the ordinary passengers.

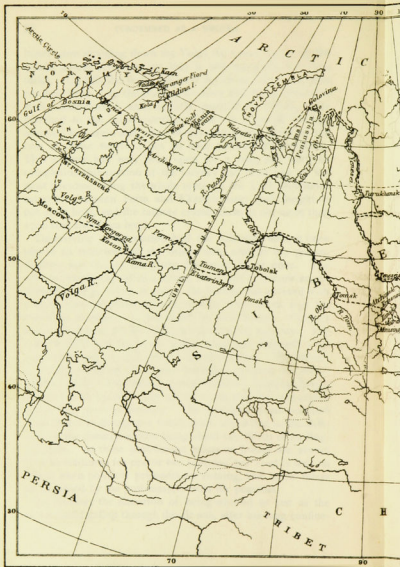
Of these there were a considerable number on board the steamer, as the season had but just begun, and merchants, traders, and officials were taking advantage of the river's being open to push forward into Siberia. At present, however, these were all below. The prisoners were conducted to the cabins reserved for them, and then locked in. Presently Godfrey heard a buzz of many voices and a general movement in the cabin outside, and the fact that he was a prisoner and cut off from the world came to him more strongly than it had hitherto done. An hour later there was a movement and shouting overhead. Then he felt the paddles revolving, and knew that the steamer was under way. He could, however, see nothing. A sort of shutter was fastened outside the scuttle, which gave him the opportunity to take a glimpse of the sky, but nothing of the shore or water. Nothing could be more monotonous than the journey, and yet the air and light that came down through the port-hole rendered it far more pleasant than existence in a prison cell. He knew, too, that dull as it was in the cabin, there would be little to see on deck, for the shores of the rivers were everywhere flat and low.

After twenty-four hours' travel the steamer stopped. Since Godfrey had been in Russia he had naturally studied the geography of the empire, and knew a good deal about the routes. He guessed, therefore, that the halt was at Kasan, the capital of the old Tartar kingdom. It was a break to him to listen to the noises overhead, to guess at the passengers who were leaving and coming on board, to listen to scraps of conversation that could be heard through the open port-hole, and to the shouts of farewell from those on board to those on shore as the vessel steamed on again. He knew that after two

hours more steaming down the Volga the vessel turned up the Kama, a large river running into it and navigable for 1,400 miles. Up this the vessel steamed for three days and then reached Perm. In the evening Godfrey and his companions were disembarked and, strictly guarded as before, were marched to the railway-station, placed in a special carriage attached to a train and after twenty-four hours' travel at the rate of about twelve miles an hour reached Ekaterinburg. This railway had only been open for a year, and until its completion this portion of the journey had been one of the most tiresome along the whole route, as the Ural Mountains intervene between Perm and Ekaterinburg; their height is not great here, and the railway crosses them at not more than 1,700 feet above sea-level.

On arriving at the station half the prisoners were at once placed in vehicles and the others were sent to the prison. Godfrey was one of the party that went on at once. The vehicle, which was called a telega, was a sort of narrow wagon without springs, seats, or cover; the bottom was covered with a deep layer of straw, and there were some thick rugs for coverings at night. It was drawn by three horses. Godfrey was in the last of the four vehicles that started together. His soldier guard took his place beside him, four mounted Cossacks rode, two on each side of the procession. The driver, a peasant, to whom the horses belonged, cracked his short-handled whip and the horses sprang forward. Siberian horses are wiry little animals, not taking to the eye, but possessing speed and great endurance. The post-houses are situated from twelve to twenty-five versts apart, according to the difficulty of the country, a verst being about two-thirds of an English mile. At these post-houses relays of horses are always kept in readiness for one or two vehicles, but word is sent on before when political prisoners are coming, and extra relays are obtained by the post-masters from the peasants.

To Godfrey the sensation of being whirled as fast as the horses could gallop through the air was, after his long confine-





RUSSIA IN ASIA

Route -----

Scale of Miles
 0 100 200 300

ment, perfectly delightful, and he fairly shouted with joy and excitement. Now that they were past Ekaterinburg, Godfrey's guard, a good-tempered-looking young fellow, seemed to consider that it was no longer necessary to preserve an absolute silence, which had no doubt been as irksome to him as to his companion.

"We can talk now. Why are you so merry?"

"To be in the air again is glorious," Godfrey said. "I should not mind how long the journey lasted if it were like this. How far do we travel in carriages?"

"To Tiumen, 300 versts; then we take steamer again, that is if you go farther."

"You don't know where we are going to then?"

"Not at all, it will be known at Tiumen; that is where these things are settled generally, but people like you are under special orders. You don't look very wicked"; and he smiled in a friendly way as he looked at the lad beside him.

"I am not wicked at all, not in the way you think," Godfrey said.

"Do not talk about that," the soldier interrupted, "I must not know anything about you; talk about other things, but not why you are here."

Godfrey nodded. "If we go on beyond Tiumen we go by steamer, do we not?"

"Yes, through Tobolsk to Tomsk, beyond that we shall drive. You are lucky, you people, that you drive, the others walk; it is long work, but not so long as it used to be, they say. I have been told that in the old times, when they started on foot from Moscow it took them sometimes two years to reach the farthest places. Now they have the railway and the steamers on the river as far as Tomsk."

"How do they take them in the steamers?"

"They take them in great barges that are towed, we passed two on our way to Perm. They hold five or six hundred, there is a great iron cage on deck, and they let half the number up at a time in order to get air. They are always going

along at this time of year, for they all go early in the season so as to get to the journey's end before the frosts set in."

"But surely all these men cannot be guilty of great crimes," Godfrey said, "for I have heard that about twenty thousand a year are sent away?"

"No, many of them are only lazy fellows who drink and will not work. We sent away three from my village the year before I was taken for a soldier. They were lazy and would not do their share of work, so the heads of the village met and decided that they should go to Siberia. They drew up a paper, which was sent to be confirmed by the judge of the district, and then soldiers came and took them away."

"But you don't mean to say," Godfrey said, "that men are sent to prison all their lives because they are lazy?"

"Oh no, no one would think of such a thing as that. Men like these are only sent to the big towns, Tiumen, or Perm, or Tobolsk, and then they are settled on land or work in the towns, but they are free to do as they like. The country wants labour, and men who won't work at home and expect the community to keep them have to work here or else they would starve. Then there are numbers who are only guilty of some small offence. They have stolen something, or they have resisted the tax-gatherer, or something of that sort. They only go to prison for the term of their sentences, perhaps only three or four months, and then they too are free like the others, and can work in the towns, or trade if they happen to have money to set them up, or they can settle in a village and take up land and cultivate it. They can live where they like in Siberia. I had many rich men pointed out to me in Tobolsk who had come out as convicts."

"You have been here before then?" Godfrey said.

"Yes, this is my second journey. I hope I shall come no more. We get a little extra pay and are better fed than we are with the regiment, and we have no drill; but then it is sad. Last time I had one with me who had left his wife and family behind; he was always sad, he talked to me sometimes of

them, there was no one else to talk to. He was here for life, and he knew he should never see them again. She was young and would marry again."

"But she couldn't do that as long as he lived," Godfrey said.

"Oh yes; from the day a prisoner crosses the frontier his marriage is annulled and his wife can marry again. She may come with him if she likes, but if she does she can never go back again."

"And do many wives come?"

"A good many," the soldier said, "but I only know what I have heard. I was with one of you last time, and it was only on the way back that I heard of things about the others. Formerly the guards remained in Siberia if they chose, it was too far to send them back to Russia; but now that the journey is done so quickly, and we can get back all the way from Tomsk by the rivers, except this little bit, we go back again as soon as we have handed over our charges. I did not go farther than Tomsk last time, and I was back at Nijni in less than three months after starting. What part of Russia do you come from?"

"I am an Englishman."

The soldier looked round in surprise. "I did not know Englishmen could speak our language so well; of course I noticed that your speech was not quite like mine, but I am from the south and I thought you must come from somewhere in the north or from Poland. How did—" and here he stopped. "But I must not ask that; I don't want to know anything, not even your name. Look there, we are just going to pass a convoy of other prisoners."

In a minute or two they overtook the party. It consisted of about a hundred and fifty prisoners escorted by a dozen mounted Cossacks. The men were in prison garb of yellowish-brown stuff with a coloured patch in the back between the shoulders. They had chains fastened to rings round the ankles and tied up to their belts. They were not heavy, and inter-

ferred very little with their walking. The procession in no way accorded with Godfrey's preconceived idea. The men were walking along without much attempt at regular order. They were laughing and talking together or with their guards, and some of them shouted chaffing remarks to the four vehicles as they swept past them.

"They do not look very unhappy," Godfrey said.

"Why should they?" the soldier replied, "they are better off than they would be at home. Lots of men break the law on purpose to be sent out; it is a good country. They say wives get rid of their husbands by informing against them and getting them sent here. I believe there are quite as many husbands with scolding wives who get themselves sent here to be free of them. As long as they are on the road or employed in hard labour they are fed better than they ever were at home, better a great deal than we soldiers are. Even in the prisons they do not work so very hard, for it is difficult to find work for them; only if they are sent to the mines their lot is bad. Of that I know nothing, but I have heard. As for the rest, from what I have seen of it I should say that a convict here is better off than a peasant at home. But here we are at the post-house."

CHAPTER V

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE

THE stay at the post-houses was very short. As soon as the vehicles were seen coming along the straight level road, the first set of horses were brought out, and the leading tarantass was ready to proceed in two or three minutes. The other horses were changed as quickly, and in less than ten minutes from their arrival the whole were on their way again. While the horses were being changed the prisoners were permitted

to get out and stretch their legs, but were not allowed to exchange a word with each other or with anyone else. At every fourth stage a bowl of soup with a hunch of bread was brought to each prisoner by one of the guards at the ostrov or prison, where the convicts were lodged as they came along. There were rugs in the vehicles to lay over them at night when the air was sharp and chilly, although in the day the sun had great power, and the dust rose in clouds under the horses' feet.

There was little of interest to be seen on the journey. Only round the villages was there any cultivation, and the plains stretched away unbroken save by small groups of cattle, horses, and sheep. Although Godfrey had not minded the shaking of the springless vehicle for the first stage or two, he felt long before he reached the journey's end as if every bone was dislocated. As a rule the road was good, but in some places, where it passed through swampy tracts, it had given in the spring thaw, and had been cut into deep ruts. Here the shaking as they passed along at night was tremendous. Godfrey and his companion were dashed against each other or against the sides with such force that Godfrey several times thought his skull was fractured, and he was indeed thankful when, after forty hours on the road, they drove into Tiumen.

Tiumen is a town of over 15,000 inhabitants, and is the first town arrived at in Siberia proper, the frontier between Russia and that country running between Ekaterinburg and that town. Here the prisoners were at once placed on board a steamer, and Godfrey was glad indeed to throw himself down upon the bed, where he slept without waking until the steamer got under way in the morning. He was delighted to see that the port-hole was not, as in the first boat, blocked by an outside shutter, but that he could look out over the country as they passed along. For a time the scenery was similar to that which they had been passing over, bare and desolate; but it presently assumed a different character; fields of green wheat stretched away from the river side; comfortable-looking little villages succeeded each other rapidly as the steamer passed along, and

save for the difference of architecture and the peculiar green domes and pinnacles of the little churches he might have been looking over a scene in England.

The river was about two hundred yards wide here, a smooth and placid stream. The steamer did not proceed at any great pace, as it was towing behind it one of the heavy convict barges, and although the passage is ordinarily performed in a day and a half, it took them nearly a day longer to accomplish, and it was not until late in the afternoon of the third day that Tobolsk came in sight. Through his port-hole Godfrey obtained a good view of the town, containing nearly 30,000 inhabitants, with large government buildings, and a great many houses built of stone. It is built in a very unhealthy position, the country round being exceedingly low and marshy. After passing Tobolsk they entered the Obi, one of the largest rivers in Asia. The next morning the steamer again started for her sixteen-hundred-mile journey to Tomsk. The journey occupied eight days, the convict barge having been left behind at Tobolsk.

The time passed tediously to Godfrey, for the banks were low and flat, villages were very rare, and the steamer only touched at three places. Herds of horses were seen from time to time roaming untended over the country. The only amusement was in watching the Ostjaks, the natives of the banks of the Obi. These people have no towns or villages, but live in rough tents made of skins. He saw many of them fishing from their tiny canoes, but the steamer did not pass near enough to them to enable him to get a view of them, as they generally paddled away towards the shore as the steamer approached. He heard afterwards that they are wonderfully skilful in the use of the bow, which they use principally for killing squirrels and other small animals. These bows are six feet long, the arrows four feet. The head is a small iron ball, so as to kill without injuring the fur of small animals, and the feats recorded of the English archers of old times are far exceeded by the Ostjaks. Even at long distances they

seldom fail to strike a squirrel on the head, and Godfrey was informed by a man who had been present that he saw an Ostjak shoot an arrow high into the air, and cut it in two with another arrow as it descended, a feat that seemed to him altogether incredible, but is confirmed by the evidence of Russian travellers.

Tomsk is situated on the river Tom, an affluent of the Obi. The town is about the same size as Tobolsk; the climate of the district is considered the best in Siberia; the land is fertile, and among the mountains are many valuable mines. Although a comparatively small province in comparison to Tobolsk on one side and Yeneseisk on the other, it contains an area of half a million square miles, and, excluding Russia, is bigger than any two countries of Europe together. It contains a rural population of 725,000—130,000 natives, chiefly Tartars and Kalmucs, and 30,000 troops.

Here Godfrey was landed, and marched to the prison. Of these there are two, the one a permanent convict establishment, the other for the temporary detention of prisoners passing through. Godfrey slipped a few roubles into the hand of his guard, for his watch, money, and the other things in his pockets had been restored to him before starting on his journey. After two days' stop in the prison the journey was continued as before, a soldier sitting by the driver, a police-officer taking the place of the soldier who had before accompanied him. He began to speak to Godfrey as soon as they started.

"We are not so strict now," he said. "You will soon be across the line into Eastern Siberia, and you will no longer meet people through whom you might send messages or letters. As to escape, that would be out of the question since you left Ekaterinburg, for none can travel either by steamer or post without a permit, or even enter an inn, and the document must be shown at every village."

"But I suppose prisoners do escape sometimes," Godfrey said.

"There have not been a dozen escapes in the last fifty years," the policeman said. "There are great numbers get away from their prisons or employments every year, but the authorities do not trouble about them, they may take to the mountains or forests, and live on game for a few months in summer, but when winter arrives they must come in and give themselves up."

"What happens to them then?" Godfrey asked.

"Perhaps nothing but solitary confinement for a bit, perhaps a beating with rods, just according to the temper of the chief official at the time. Perhaps if it is a bad case they are sent to the mines for a bit; that is what certainly happens when they are political prisoners."

"Why can't they get right away?"

"Where are they to go to?" the officer said with a laugh. "To the south there are sandy deserts where they would certainly die of thirst; to the north trackless forests, cold that would freeze a bullock solid in a night, great rivers miles wide to cross, and terrible morasses, to say nothing of the wolves who would make short work of you. The native tribes to the west, and the people of the desert, are all fierce and savage, and would kill anyone who came among them merely for his clothes; and, besides, they get a reward from government for every escaped prisoner they bring in alive or dead. No, we don't want bolts or bars to keep prisoners in here. The whole land is a prison-house, and the prisoners know well enough that it is better to live under a roof and to be well fed there than to starve in the forest, with the prospect of a flogging at the end of their holiday. Still there are thousands take to the woods in the summer. The government does not care. Why should it? It is spared the expense of feeding them, and if they starve to death or kill each other off in their quarrels (for the greater part of them would think no more of taking life than of killing a fowl) there is an end of all further trouble about them, for you understand, it is only the men who have life sentences, the murderers, and so on, that

attempt to run away; the short-sentence men are not such fools.

"No," he went on kindly, seeing that Godfrey looked depressed at what he had heard; "whatever you do don't think of running away. If you behave well, and gain the good opinion of the authorities, you won't find yourself uncomfortable. You will be made a clerk or a store-keeper, and will have a good deal of liberty after a time. If you try to run away, you will probably be sent to the mines; and though it is not so bad there as they say, it is bad enough."

But even this prospect was not very cheering to Godfrey. Hitherto it had seemed to him that there could be no real difficulty, although there might be many hardships and privations, in making his escape from so vast a prison. He had told himself that it must be possible to evade pursuit in so vast a region; but now it seemed that nature had set so strong a wall round the country that the Russians did not even trouble themselves to pursue, confident that in time the prisoners must come back again. But he was not silent long. With the buoyancy of youth he put the question aside for the present with the reflection, "Where there is a will there is a way; anyhow some fellows have got away, and if they have done it, I can."

Godfrey had not as yet realised his situation; the sentence "for life" had fallen upon his ears but not upon his mind; he still viewed the matter as he might have viewed some desperate scrape at school. He had, as he would have said, put his foot in it horribly; but that he should really have to pass his whole life in these wilds, should never see England again, his father, mother, or sisters, was a thing that his mind absolutely refused to grasp. "Of course I shall get away somehow." This had been the refrain that was constantly running through his mind, and even now a satisfactory reply to the assertion that not a dozen men had made their escape at once occurred to him. There was no motive to induce them to make their escape. They could not return to Russia, and in any other country they would be even more in exile than here, where everyone

spoke their language, and where, as far as he had seen, the climate was as good as that of Russia, and the country no more flat and ugly.

"There is nothing they can want to escape for," he repeated to himself. "I have everything to escape for, and I mean to do it." Having once re-established that view to his satisfaction, he began to chat away cheerfully again to his companion. "It is not everyone," he said, "who possesses my advantages, or who can travel five or six thousand miles by rail, steamer, and carriage, without ever having to put his hand in his pocket for a single kopec. The only objection to it is that they don't give me a return ticket."

"That is an objection," the policeman agreed, smiling.

"We are not going to travel night and day, as we did between Ekaterinburg and Tiumen, I hope?"

"Oh, no; we shall only travel while it is light."

"Well, that is a comfort. It was bad enough for that short distance. It would be something awful if it had to be kept up for a fortnight. How long shall we be before we get to Irkoutsk?"

"About a month. I know nothing as to what will be done with you beyond that. You may, for anything I know, go to the mines at Nertchinsk, which are a long distance east beyond Irkoutsk; or you may go to Verkhoyansk, a Yakout settlement 3000 miles from Irkoutsk, within the Arctic Circle. There are lots of these penal settlements scattered over the country. They do not send the ordinary convict population there. There is no danger from them; but the theory is that the politicals are always plotting, and therefore they are for the most part sent where by no possibility can they get up trouble."

Godfrey set his lips hard together and asked no questions for the next half-hour. Although the journey was not continued by night the telega was still Godfrey's constant place of abode. Sometimes it was wheeled under a shed, sometimes it stood in the road, but in all cases the policeman was by his side night and day. Godfrey was indifferent whether

he slept in a bed or in the telega, which, when the straw was fresh shaken up and a couple of rugs laid upon it, was by no means uncomfortable. The nights were not cold and no rain had fallen since he left Nijni. He further reflected that probably there would be fleas and other vermin in the post-houses, and that altogether he was a gainer instead of a loser by the regulation.

He was pleased with the appearance of Atchinsk, a bright little town a day's journey from Tomsk. It was, like all the Siberian towns, built of wood, but the houses were all painted white or gray, picked out with bright colours. It stood in the middle of a large grass plain, with inclosed meadows of luxuriant herbage and bright flowers, among which large numbers of sheep and cattle were feeding. Beyond this the country again became dull and monotonous. Krasnoiarsk was the next town reached. Between this town and Kansk the country was again cultivated.

Scarce a day passed without large gangs of convicts being overtaken on the road. For some distance Godfrey suffered terribly from mosquitoes, which swarmed so thickly that the peasants working in the fields were obliged to wear black veils over their faces. Fortunately he had been warned by his guard at Atchinsk that there would be trouble with these pests on further, and the man had, at his request, bought for him a few yards of muslin, under which they sat during the day and spread over the telega at night. It was, however, a long and dreary journey, and Godfrey was heartily glad when at last they saw the domes of Irkoutsk, a city of fifty thousand inhabitants.

They drove rapidly through the town to the prison, where he was placed in a cell by himself. The morning after his arrival the warder entered with a man carrying a basin and shaving apparatus.

"Confound it!" Godfrey muttered. "I have been expecting this ever since I saw the first gang of convicts, but I hoped they did not do it to us."

It was of course useless to remonstrate. His hair, which had grown to a great length since he left St. Petersburg, was first cut short; then the barber lathered his head and set to work with a razor. Godfrey wondered what his particular style of hair was going to be. He had noticed that all the convicts were partially shaved. Some were left bare from the centre of the head down one side; others had the front half of the head shaved, while the hair at the back was left; some had only a ridge of hair running along the top of the head, either from the forehead to the nape of the neck or from one ear to the other.

"He is shaving me like a monk," he said to himself as the work proceeded. "Well, I think that is the best after all, for with a cap on it won't show."

When the barber had done he stepped back and surveyed Godfrey with an air of satisfaction; while the jailer, as he wrote down the particulars in a note-book, grinned. Godfrey passed his hand over his head and found that, as he supposed, he had been shaved half-way down to the ears; but in the middle of this bald place the barber had left a patch of hair about the size of half-a-crown which stood up perfectly erect. He burst into a shout of laughter, in which the other two men joined. The jailer patted him approvingly on the shoulder. "Bravo, young fellow!" he said, pleased at seeing how lightly Godfrey took it, for many of the exiles who had stood bravely the loss of their liberty were completely broken down by the loss of a portion of their hair, which branded them wherever they went as convicts.

Godfrey was then taken out into a large court-yard and out through a gate into another inclosure. This had evidently been added but a very short time to the precincts of the prison. It was of considerable size, being four or five acres in extent, and was surrounded on three sides by a palisade some fourteen feet in height, of newly-sawn timber. The wall of the prison formed the fourth side of the square. In each corner of the inclosure was placed a clump of six little

wooden huts. Two low fences ran across the inclosure at right angles to each other, dividing the space into four equal squares. Where the fences crossed each other there was an inclosure a few yards across, and in this were two sentry-boxes with soldiers, musket in hand, standing by them. A few men were listlessly moving about, while others were digging and working in small garden patches into which the inclosures were divided. The policeman who accompanied Godfrey led him to one of the little huts. He opened the door and went in. A young man was sitting there.

"I have brought you a companion," the policeman said. "He will share your hut with you. You can teach him what is required." With this brief introduction he closed the door behind him and left. The young man had risen, and he and Godfrey looked hard at each other.

"Surely we have met before!" the prisoner said. "I know your face quite well."

"And I know yours also," Godfrey replied.

"Now that you speak I know you. You are the young Englishman, Godfrey Bullen."

"I am," Godfrey replied; "and you?"

"Alexis Stumpoff."

"So it is!" Godfrey exclaimed in surprise, and, delighted at this meeting, they shook hands cordially.

"But what are you here for?" Godfrey asked. "I thought that you had obtained an appointment at Tobolsk."

"Yes, I was sent out as assistant to the doctor of one of the prisons. I suppose you understood that it was not the sort of appointment one would choose."

"I was certainly surprised when I heard that you were going so far away," Godfrey said, "as my friends told me that you had property. It seemed almost like going into banishment."

"That was just what it was," the young doctor laughed. "I had been too outspoken in my political opinions, and one or two of our set had been arrested and sent out here; and

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when I was informed, on the day after I passed my examinations, that I was appointed to a prison at Tobolsk, it was also intimated to me that it would be more agreeable to go there in that capacity than as a prisoner. As I was also of that opinion, and as, to tell you the truth, some of our friends were for pushing matters a good deal farther than I cared about doing, I was not altogether sorry to get out of it."

"But how is it that you are here as a prisoner?" Godfrey asked.

"That is more than I can tell you. Some two months ago the governor of the prison entered my room with two warders, and informed me briefly that I was to be sent here as a prisoner. I had ten minutes given me to pack up my things for the journey, and half an hour later was in the cabin of a steamer, with a Cossack at the door. What it was for, Heaven only knows. I had never broken any regulations, never spoken to a political prisoner when in the hospital except to ask him medical questions, and had never opened my lips on politics to a soul there."

"I think perhaps I can enlighten you," Godfrey said; and he related to him the attempt to blow up the emperor at the Winter Palace, and the fate of Petroff Stepanoff and Akim Soushiloff.

"That does indeed explain it," Alexis said. "I was very intimate with both of them, and it is quite enough to have been intimate with two men engaged in a plot against the life of the Czar to ensure one a visit to Siberia. So that is it! I have thought of everything, and it seemed to me that it must have been something at St. Petersburg—that my name had been found on a list when some of the Nihilists were arrested, or something of that sort; for I certainly did join them, but that was before there was any idea of taking steps against the Czar. No wonder you are here, after being mixed up in that escape of Valerian Ossinsky, and then being caught again with four Nihilists just after that terrible attempt to blow up the Czar. I wonder they did not hang you."

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"I wonder too," Godfrey said. "I suppose if I had been a year or two older they would have done so; but I can assure you I had not the slightest idea that Petroff and Akim were Nihilists. I do think that the country is horribly misgoverned, but as a foreigner that was no business of mine; and however strongly I felt, I would have had nothing to do with men who tried to gain their end by assassination. I was just as innocent in the affair of Ossinsky. I behaved like a fool, I grant, but that was all. I had met the woman, who as I now know was Sophia Perovskaia, but she was only known to me then from having met her once in Petroff and Akim's room, and she was introduced to me as Akim's cousin Katia. I met her at the Opera-house, and she told me a cock-and-bull story about a young officer who had come to see a lady there, and had left his regiment at Moscow without leave to do so. His colonel, who was at the Opera-house, had heard of his being there and was looking for him, and I was persuaded to change dominoes with him to enable him to slip off."

"Oh that was it!" Alexis said. "I wondered how you got mixed up in the affair, and still more why they let you out after your having been caught in what they considered a serious business. Well, here we are, victims both, and it is a curious chance that has thrown us together again."

"Well, what is our life here?" Godfrey asked.

Alexis shrugged his shoulders. "As a life it is detestable, though were it for a short time only there would be nothing to grumble about. We are fairly fed; we have each a patch of ground, where we can grow vegetables. The twelve men in these huts can visit and talk to each other. When that is said all is said. Oh, by the way, we are also permitted to make anything we like! that is, we can buy the materials if we have money, and the work can be sold in the town. There is one man has made himself a turning-lathe, and he makes all sorts of pretty little things. There is another man who was an officer in the navy; he carves little models of ships out of wood and bone. Another man paints. I have not

decided yet what I shall do. I had two or three hundred roubles when I was sent off here, and as I only spent four or five on the road, I have plenty to last me for some time for tea and tobacco."

"But how do you get them?"

"The warders smuggle them in. It is an understood thing, and there is no real objection to it, though they are very strict about bringing in spirits. Still we can get vodka if we have a mind to; it is only a question of bribery."

"How long are you here for, Alexis?"

"Fifteen years."

"I am supposed to be in for life," Godfrey said.

"Fifteen years is as bad as life," the young doctor said. "What is the use of your life after having been shut up here for fifteen years?"

"Well, I don't mean to stay, that is one thing," Godfrey said. "There can't be any difficulty in escaping from here."

"Not the least in the world," Alexis said quietly. "But where do you propose to go?"

"I have not settled yet. It seems to me that anyone with pluck and energy ought to be able to make his way out of this country somehow; besides, from what I hear great numbers do get away, and take to the woods."

"Yes, but they have to give themselves up again."

"That may be; but I hear also that if they give themselves up a long way from the prison they escape from, and refuse to give any account whatever of themselves, they are simply sent to prison again as vagabonds. In that case they are treated as ordinary convicts. Now from what I hear, an ordinary convict is infinitely better off than a political one. Of course you have to associate with a bad lot; still that is better than almost solitary confinement. The work they have to do is not hard, and if they are well conducted they are let out after a time, whereas there is no hope for a political prisoner. At any rate, even if I knew that if I was retaken I should be hung at once, I should try it."

"But the distance to the frontier is enormous, and even when you get there you would be arrested at the first place you come to if you have no papers; besides, how could you get through the winter?"

"I should get through the winter somehow," Godfrey said stoutly. "There are hundreds and thousands of people in scattered villages who live through the winter. Why shouldn't I? I would make friends with the natives in the north, and live in their huts, and hunt with them. But I am not thinking of that. The distance is, as you say, enormous, and the cold terrible. My idea is to escape by the south."

"It is a desert, Godfrey."

"Oh they call it a desert to frighten people from trying to escape that way. But I know there is a caravan route by which the teas come from China; besides, there are tribesmen who wander about there and pick up a living somehow. I don't say that I am going to succeed; I only say I am going to try. I may lose my life or I may be sent back again. Very well, then, I will try again some other way. We are not far from the Chinese frontier here, are we?"

"No; the frontier is at Kiakhta, not more than three or four hundred miles away."

"What are the people like?"

"They are called Buriats, and are a sort of Mongol tribe, living generally in tents and wandering with their flocks and herds through the country like the patriarchs of old."

"If they have large flocks and herds," Godfrey said, "the reward the Russians offer for escaped convicts can't tempt them much. Most likely they are hospitable; almost all these wandering tribes are. If one had luck one might get befriended and stick for a time to one of these tribes in their wanderings south, and then get hold of some other people, and so get passed on. There can't be anything impossible in it, Alexis. We know that travellers have made their way through Africa alone. Mungo Park did, and lots of other people have done so, and some of the negro tribes are, according to all

accounts, a deal more savage than the Asiatic tribes. Once among them it doesn't much matter which way one goes, whether it is east to China or west to Persia."

Alexis sat and looked with some wonder at his companion. "By the saints, Godfrey Bullen, I begin to understand now how it is that your people, living in a bit of an island which could be pinched out of Russia and never missed, are colonising half the world; how they go in ships to explore the polar seas, have penetrated Africa in all directions as travellers, go among the wildest people as missionaries. We are brought up to have everything done for us: to think as we are told to think, to have officials keep their eyes over us at every turn, to be punished if we dare to think independently, till we have come to be a nation of grown-up children. You are only a boy, if you will forgive my calling you so, and yet you talk about facing the most horrible dangers as coolly as if you were proposing going for a promenade on the Nevski. We won't talk any more about it now, for you have made me feel quite restless. There, you have been here two hours, and I have forgotten all my duties as host, and have not even offered you a cup of tea; it is shameful." And Alexis brought out a samovar and soon had water boiling and tea made.

After they had drunk it they went out of the hut, and Godfrey was introduced to the other exiles. Two of them who lived together were quite old men; they had been professors at the University of Kieff, and were exiled for having in their lectures taught what were considered pernicious doctrines. There were three military and two naval officers, a noble, another doctor, and two sons of merchants. All received him cordially, and Godfrey saw that in any other place the society would be a pleasant one; but there was an air of settled melancholy in the majority of the faces, the sentry fifty yards away, and the high prison wall behind, seemed ever in their minds.

By common consent, as it seemed, no allusion was ever made to politics. They had all strong opinions, and had

sacrificed everything for them, but of what use to discuss matters the course of which they were powerless to influence in the smallest degree. Free, there was probably not one of them but would again have striven in one way or another to bring about reforms, either by instructing the ignorant, rousing the intelligent, or frightening the powerful. But here, with no hope of returning, the whole thing was best forgotten. The past was dead to them, and they were without a future. The news that Godfrey brought of the blow that had been struck against the Czar roused them for a few days. The war then was still being carried on. Others were wielding the weapons they had forged, but of what had happened afterwards Godfrey was ignorant. Four men had been arrested or killed; but whether they had played an important part in the matter he knew not, nor whether others had shared their fate. All he could say was, that so far as he heard, numerous arrests had taken place.

But the excitement caused by the news very speedily died away, and they again became listless and indifferent. All worked for a little time in their gardens, but beyond that only those who had made some sort of occupation for themselves had anything to interest themselves actively in. Sometimes they played chess, draughts, or cards, but they did so, as Godfrey observed, in a half-hearted manner, with the exception, indeed, of one of the professors, who was by far the strongest chess-player of the party, and who passed all his time in inventing problems which, when complete, he carefully noted down in a book, with their solutions.

"When I am dead," he said one day to Godfrey, who was watching him, "they will send this book to a nephew of mine; you see I have written his name and address outside. He is a great chess-player, and will send it to England or France to be published; and it is pleasant for me to think that my work, even here in prison, may serve as an amusement to people out in the world."

Except in the dulness and monotony of the life there was

little to complain of, and Godfrey was surprised to find how far it differed from his own preconceived notions of the life of a political prisoner in Siberia. It was only when, by an effort, he looked ahead for years and tried to fancy the possibility of being so cut off from the world for life, that he could appreciate the terrible nature of the punishment. Better a thousand times to be one of the murderers in the prison behind the wall. They had work to occupy their time, and constantly changing associates, with the knowledge that by good conduct they would sooner or later be released and be allowed to live outside the prison.

When at eight o'clock in the evening the prisoners were locked up in their huts, he endeavoured to learn everything that Alexis Stumpoff knew of Siberia.

He found that his knowledge was much more extensive than he had expected. "As I came out nominally, Godfrey, as a free man, I brought with me every book I could buy on the country, and I almost got them by heart. It seemed to me that I was likely to be kept here for years, if not for life. I might be sent from one government prison to another, from Tobolsk to the eastern sea; therefore every place possessed an interest for me. Besides this, although I was not actually a political prisoner myself I was virtually so, and my sympathies were wholly with the prisoners, and I thought that I might possibly be able to advise and counsel men who came under my charge: to describe to them the places where they might have relations or friends shut up, and to dissuade those who, like yourself, meditated escape, for my studies had not gone far before I became convinced that this was well-nigh hopeless. I learned how strict were the regulations on the frontier, how impossible, even if this were reached, to journey on without being arrested at the very first village that a fugitive entered, and that so strict were they that although numbers of the convict establishments were within comparatively short distances of the frontier, escapes were no more frequent from them than from those three thousand miles to the east. When I say

escapes I mean escapes from Siberia. Escapes from the prisons are of constant occurrence, since most of the work is done outside the walls. There are thousands, I might almost say tens of thousands, get away every spring, but they all have to come back again in winter. The authorities trouble themselves little about them, for they know that they must give themselves up in a few months."

"Yes, my guard told me about that. He said they were not punished much when they came in."

"Sometimes they are flogged; but the Russian peasant is accustomed to flogging and thinks but little of it. More often they are not flogged. They have, perhaps, a heavier chain, for the convicts all wear chains—we have an advantage over them there—and they are put on poorer diet for a time. They lose the remission of sentence they would obtain by good behaviour, that is all, even when they are recognised, but as a rule they take care not to give themselves up at the prison they left, but at one many hundred miles from it. In the course of the summer their hair has grown again. They assert stoutly that they are free labourers who have lost their papers, and who cannot earn their living through the winter. The authorities know, of course, that they are escaped convicts, but they have no means of identifying them. They cannot send them the rounds of a hundred convict establishments; so instead of a man being entered as Alexis Stumpoff, murderer, for instance, he is put down by the name he gives, and the word vagabond is added. The next year they may break out again; but in time the hardships they suffer in the woods become distasteful and they settle down to their prison life, and then, after perhaps six, perhaps ten years of good conduct, they are released and allowed to settle where they will. So you see, Godfrey Bullen, how hopeless is the chance of escape."

"Not at all," Godfrey said. "These men are most of them peasants—men without education and without enterprise, incapable of forming any plan, and wholly without resources

in themselves. I feel as certain of escaping as I am of being here at present. I don't say that I shall succeed the first time, but, as you say yourself, there is no difficulty in getting away, and if I fail in one direction I will try in another."

CHAPTER VI

AN ESCAPE

THE evenings were spent principally in conversations about Siberia, Godfrey being eager to learn everything that he could about its geography and peoples.

Alexis told him all he knew as to the mountains and rivers, the various native tribes, the districts where the villages were comparatively numerous, and the mighty forests that, stretching away to the Arctic Sea, could hardly be said to be explored. Books and paper were forbidden to the political prisoners, and so strict were the regulations that the warders would not under any considerations bring them in. But Godfrey wrote all the particulars that he judged might in any way be useful with a burnt piece of stick upon the table as Alexis gave them, and then learned them by heart, washing them off after he had done so.

But few of the details Alexis could give him would be of any use in the attempt he first intended to make. The southern frontier was so temptingly close that it seemed absurd to turn from that and to attempt a tremendous journey north, involving the certainty of having to struggle through an Arctic winter, and to face the difficulties of the passage west, either by land or sea. Beyond the fact that from Irkutsk he would have to make for the southern point of Lake Baikal, some sixty miles away, and then strike about south-east for another two hundred through a country inhabited almost entirely by Buriats, the doctor could tell him little.

"Kiakhta," he said, "or rather, as far as the Russians are concerned, Troitzkosavsk, which is a sort of suburb of Kiakhta, is the frontier town. Kiakhta is a sort of neutral town inhabited only by merchants, and by a treaty between Russia and China no officer or stranger is allowed to sleep there. Across the frontier, a few miles away, is the Chinese, or I suppose I should say the Mongol, town of Maimatchin. Beyond the fact that the people about there are Mongols rather than Chinese, and that such religion as they have is that of Thibet rather than China, for their priests are called lamas, I know nothing except that the caravan route from Kiakhta to Peking is somewhere about a thousand miles, and that the camels do it in about thirty-five days."

"Then they make about thirty miles a day," Godfrey said. "I suppose there must be wells at their halting-places."

"Ah, that is another matter, Godfrey. You see a camel can go three days without water easily enough, and of course they would carry skins of water for the travellers."

"Oh, that is no odds," Godfrey said. "One could walk the ninety miles easily enough in three days, and there would be no difficulty in carrying water enough for that time. Besides, one would of course join a caravan if one could. Luckily enough I had two hundred roubles in notes when I was captured, and they restored them as well as my watch and other things when I started. I suppose the Mongols are just as fond of money as other people. The Chinese are, certainly, and I might get some Chinese tea-merchant to let me go in his train for a consideration."

The Russian laughed. "'Pon my word, Godfrey, I begin to think you will do it."

"There can't be anything impossible in doing it," Godfrey said. "Why, did not Burton disguise himself and go with a caravan to Mecca and visit the holy places, and that was twenty times as difficult and dangerous. Going along the caravan route of course the difficulty is the language and the Buriats. If one could talk Mongol, or whatever the fellows

call their language, it would be easy sailing; but I own that it is a difficult thing to get along and explain what you want with people who cannot understand a word you say. I suppose the Buriats speak Russian."

"I should say that a great many of them do, Godfrey. I know there are missionaries and schools among them, and some of them live in settled villages, though they are so wedded to their own wandering life that they build their houses on the exact model of their tents, with a hole in the roof to let the smoke out. Still, as they deal with the towns and come in to sell their cattle and sheep and herds and so on, no doubt the greater part of them, at any rate on this side of the frontier, speak a certain amount of Russian. The difficulty will be to persuade them not to give you up."

"But I can pay them more not to give me up than they can get for doing so," Godfrey said.

"They would kill you for what you have, Godfrey. They are permitted to kill runaways, in fact encouraged to do so, and the reward is the same whether they are brought in dead or alive."

"I should think, Alexis, it is easier to bring in a live man than a dead one."

"I don't know," the Russian laughed. "I don't think a Buriat would find it very easy to take you any distance alive, but there would be no trouble in chucking you into a cart and bringing you here after the preliminary operation of knocking you on the head."

Godfrey smiled. "You forget there would be some preliminary trouble in knocking me on the head, Alexis; but seriously, I don't think any natives who have been in contact at all with civilisation are disposed to take life without some strong motive. Of course robbery would be a motive, but I should certainly have nothing about me that a Tartar or a Buriat—I suppose they are all something of the same thing—would covet. You were telling me yourself that many of these people have very large flocks and herds. Is it likely

such people as these would cut a stranger's throat on the chance of finding a few roubles in his pocket?"

"Well, one would think not, Godfrey; but of course they are not all rich."

"No; they may not be rich, but you say they are always nomads. Well, people who are nomads must always have some sort of animals to carry their tents, and a certain amount, anyhow, of cattle, horses, or sheep. No, I don't at all believe in cutting throats without a motive."

"But let us understand a little more about your intentions, Godfrey. Do you mean to climb over that fence and then to stroll away to the south with your hands in your pockets and your hat on one side of your head, and to ask the first man you come upon to direct you to the shortest road to Pekin?"

Godfrey laughed. "No, not quite that, Alexis. These clothes did very well in St. Petersburg, and though they are all the worse for the journey here I daresay they would pass well enough in the streets of Irkutsk. The first thing to do will be to get some clothes, for as far as I could see coming along the natives all dress a good deal like the Russians. I suppose in winter they wrap up more in furs, or they may wear their furs differently, but any sort of peasant dress would do, as it would not excite attention, while this tweed suit would be singular even in the streets here."

"That fur-lined great-coat would be all right, Godfrey."

"Yes. I bought that at St. Petersburg. I don't know that it would go very well with a peasant's dress, and it is certainly not suitable for the time of year, though I shall take it with me if I can. If I could roll it up and carry it as a knapsack it would be first rate for sleeping in, besides it might do as something to exchange when one gets to places where money is of little use. If I can get hold of a pistol anyhow I shall be glad. A pistol will always produce civility if one meets only one or two men. The other things I should want are a box of matches for making fires, a good knife, or better still, a small axe for chopping wood, and a bottle or skin for holding water."

"You will be seized and sent back in a week, Godfrey."

"Very well, then, there will be no harm done. I regard this as a sort of preliminary investigation. I shall ascertain the difficulties of travel in Siberia, and shall learn lessons for next time. I believe myself the true way is to strike one of the great rivers, to build or steal a boat, to go down in it to the Arctic Sea, and then to coast along until one gets to Norway; but that is a big affair, and besides it is a great deal too late in the year for it. When I attempt that I shall make off as early in the spring as possible."

"Remember you may be flogged when you are caught, Godfrey."

"Well, I shouldn't like to be flogged, but as you say the convicts don't think much of it, I suppose I could bear it. They used to flog in our army and navy till quite lately."

"It is a dishonour," Alexis exclaimed passionately.

Godfrey shrugged his shoulders.

"The dishonour lies in the crime and not in the punishment," he said. "At our great public schools in England fellows are flogged. Well, there is no disgrace in it if it's only for breaking the rules or anything of that sort, but it would be a horrible dishonour if it were for thieving. All that sort of thing is absurd. I believe flogging is the best punishment there is. It is a lot better to give a man a couple of dozen and send him about his business, than it is to keep him for a year in prison at the public expense, and to have to maintain his wife and children also at the public expense while he is there. Besides, I thought you said the other day that they did not flog political prisoners."

"Well, they don't, at least not at any of the large prisons; but in some of the small establishments, with perhaps a brutal drunken captain or major as governor, no doubt it may be done sometimes."

"Well, I will take my chance of it."

"And when do you think of starting?" Alexis asked after a pause.

"Directly. I have only to decide how I am to get out after the door is locked, and to make a rope of some sort to climb the fence with. The blankets tied together will do for that. As to the getting out there is no difficulty. One only has to throw a blanket over that cross beam, get up on that, and get off one of the lining boards, displace a few tiles, crawl through."

"I have half a mind to go with you, Godfrey."

"Have you, Alexis? I should be awfully glad, but at the same time I would not say a word to persuade you to do it. You know I make light of it, but I know very well that there will be some danger and a tremendous lot of hardship to be gone through."

"I don't think I am afraid of that, Godfrey," Alexis said seriously. "It is not that I have been thinking of ever since you began to talk to me of getting away. I consider it is a hundred to one against success; but, as you say, if we fail and get brought back no great harm is done. If we get killed or die of hunger and thirst, again no harm is done, for certainly life is not a thing to cling to when one is a prisoner in Siberia; but it is not that. You see I am differently situated to you. If you do succeed in getting away you go home, and you are all right; if I succeed in getting away what is to become of me? I speak Russian and German, but there would be no return for me to Russia unless some day when a new Czar ascends the throne, or on some such occasion, when a general amnesty is granted; but even that would hardly extend to political prisoners. What am I to do? So far as I can see I might starve, and after all one might almost as well remain here as starve in Peking or in some Chinese port. Granted that I could work my way back to Europe on board ship, what should I do if I landed at Marseilles or Liverpool? I could not go through the streets shouting in German 'I am a doctor, who wants to be cured?'"

"No, Alexis," Godfrey agreed, "you could not well do that; but I will tell you what you could do. Of course at the

first place I get to, where there is a telegraph to England, I will send a message to my father to cable to some firm there to let me have what money I require. Very well. Then, of course, you would go home with me to England, and there is one thing I could promise you, and that is a post in my father's office. You know we trade with Russia, and though our correspondence is generally carried on in German, I am quite sure that my father would, after you had been my companion on such a journey as that we propose, make a berth for you in the office to undertake correspondence in Russian and German, and that he would pay a salary quite sufficient for you to live in comfort; or if you would rather, I am sure that he would find you means for going out and settling, say in the United States, in the part where German is the general language."

"Then in that case, Godfrey," the Russian said, shaking his hand warmly, "I am your man. I think I should have gone with you anyhow; but what you have said quite decides me. Now, then, what is our first proceeding?"

Godfrey laughed.

"I should say to take an inventory of our belongings, Alexis, or rather of your belongings, for mine are very briefly described. Two hundred roubles in notes, a watch, a pocket-knife, the suit of clothes I stand up in, half a dozen pairs of socks, and three flannel shirts I bought on the way, one great-coat lined with fur; I think that is about all. It is a very small share. Yours are much more numerous."

"More numerous, but not much more useful," Alexis said. "They let me bring one large portmanteau of clothes, but as I can't carry that away on my shoulders it is of very little use. All I can take in that way is a suit of clothes and a spare flannel shirt or two, and some socks. I have got two cases of surgical instruments. I will take a few of the most useful and some other things, a pair of forceps for instance. We may come across a Tartar with a raging tooth, and make him our friend for ever by extracting it, and I will put a bandage or

two and some plaster in my pocket. They are things one ought always to carry, for one is always liable to get a hurt or a sprain. As to money, I have a hundred and twenty roubles; they are all in silver. I changed my paper at Tobolsk, thinking that silver would be more handy here. Unfortunately they took away my pistol, but a couple of amputating knives will make good weapons. I have got a leather waistcoat, which I will cut up and make from it a couple of sheaths. Of course I have got fur cloaks, one of them a very handsome one. I will take that and another. There ought to be no difficulty whatever in getting someone to give us two peasants' dresses in exchange for that coat, for all these people know something of the value of furs."

"Yes, and if you can get a gun and some ammunition thrown into the bargain, Alexis, it will be most useful, for we may have to depend upon what we shoot sometimes."

"Yes, that would be a great addition, Godfrey. Well, we will set about making the sheaths at once. I have got a store of needles and stout thread."

"They will be useful to take with us," Godfrey said, "not only for mending our clothes, if we want it, but for exchange. Women have to sew all over the world, and even the most savage people can appreciate the advantage of a good needle."

"That is so, Godfrey. I have got a packet of capital surgical needles, and some silk. I will put them in with the others; they won't take up much room. Well, shall we start to-morrow night?"

"I think we had better wait for two or three days," Godfrey said. "We must save up some of our food."

"Yes, we shall want some bread," Alexis agreed. "We can't well get that in through the warders, it would look suspicious, but I will get in some meat through them. We have got some of the last lot left, so we can do with very little bread."

For the next two days they found plenty to occupy them, while their stock of bread was accumulating. One of the

Russian's coats was cut up and made into two bags like haversacks, with a band to pass over the shoulder for carrying their belongings. Straps were made of the cloth for fastening the great-coats knapsack fashion. They agreed that however long they might have to wait they must choose a stormy night for their flight, as otherwise they could hardly break through the roof and scale the fence without being heard by the sentries who kept watch night and day. They were eager to be off, for it was already the end of July, and the winter would be severe in the country over which they had to travel. On the fourth day a heavy rain set in, and in the evening it began to blow hard.

"Now is our time," Godfrey said; "nothing could have been better."

They had already loosened two of the lining boards of the roof, and as soon as they had been locked up for the night they removed these altogether. They packed their haversacks with the articles they had agreed to take, with six pounds of bread each and some meat, rolled four blankets up and knotted them tightly together, strapped up the three fur-lined cloaks, and placed the knives in their belts. Then without much difficulty they prised up one of the thick planks with which the hut was roofed. Godfrey got through the opening, and Alexis passed out to him the haversacks and coats, and then joined him, and they slid down the roof and dropped to the ground.

The paling was but twenty yards behind the huts. As soon as they reached it Godfrey climbed upon his companion's shoulders, threw the loop of a doubled rope over one of the palisades and climbed on to the top. Then with the rope he pulled up the coats and haversacks and dropped them outside. Alexis pulled himself up by the rope; this was then dropped on the outside and he slid down by it. Godfrey shifted the rope on to the point of one of the palings, so that it could be easily shaken off from below, and then slipped down it. The rope shaken off and two of the blankets opened, the haversacks

hung over their shoulders, and the great-coats strapped on, each put one of the twisted blankets over his shoulder, scarf fashion, wrapped the other round as a cloak, and then set out on their way. Fortunately the prison lay on the south side of the town and at a distance of half a mile from it; and as their course to the extremity of Lake Baikal lay almost due south, they were able to strike right across the country.

The wind was from the north, and they had therefore only to keep their backs to it to follow the right direction. It was half-past ten when they started, for the nights were short, and had it not been that the sky was covered with clouds and the air thick with rain, it would not have been dark enough for them to make the attempt until an hour later. By three o'clock it was light again, but they knew there was little chance of their escape being discovered until the warders came to unlock the hut at six in the morning, as the planks they had removed from the roof were at the back of the hut, and therefore invisible to the sentries.

"No doubt they will send a few mounted Cossacks out to search for us, as we are political prisoners," Alexis said; "but we may calculate it will be seven o'clock before they set out, and as this is the very last direction they will imagine we have taken we need not trouble ourselves about them; besides, we shall soon be getting into wooded country. I believe it is all wood round the lower end of the lake, and we shall be quite out of the way of traffic, for everything going east from Irkutsk is taken across the lake by steamer."

After twelve hours' walking, with only one halt of half an hour for refreshment, they reached the edge of the forest, and after again making a hearty meal of their bread and cold meat, and taking each a sip from a bottle containing cold tea, they lay down and slept until late in the afternoon.

"Well, we have accomplished so much satisfactorily," Alexis said. "Now we have to keep on to Kaltuk, at the extreme south-western point of the lake. It is a very small place, I believe, and that is where we must get what we want."

We shall be there by the evening. We shall be just right, as it wouldn't do for us to go in until it is pretty nearly dark. A place of that sort is sure to have a store where they sell clothes and other things, and trade with the people round."

They struck the lake a mile or two from its extremity, and following it until they could see the roofs of the houses lay down for an hour until it should be dark enough to enter.

"We had better put on our fur coats," Alexis said. "The people all wear long coats of some fashion or other, and in the dusk we shall pass well enough."

It was a village containing some fifty or sixty houses, for the most part the tent-like structures of the Buriats. They met no one in the street, and kept on until they saw a light in a window of a house larger than any others, and looking in saw that it was the place for which they were in search. Opening the door they went in and closed it behind them. A man came out from the room behind the shop. He stopped for a moment at seeing two strangers, then advanced with a suspicious look on his face.

"Do you want a bargain?" Alexis asked him abruptly.

"I have little money to buy with," he said sullenly.

"That matters little, for we will take it out in goods."

The man hesitated. Alexis drew out the long keen amputating knife. "Look here," he said. "We are not to be fooled with. You may guess what we are or not; it is nothing to us and nothing to you. We want some of your goods, and are ready to give you good exchange for them; we are not robbers. Here is this coat; look at it; it is almost unworn. I have used it only one winter. You can see it is lined with real sable, and it cost me three hundred roubles. At any rate, it is worth a hundred to you, even if you take out the lining, sell the skins separately, and burn the coat. Examine it for yourself."

The shopkeeper did so. "They are good skins," he said, and Alexis could see that he quite appreciated their value.

"Now," Alexis said, "I want two peasant dresses complete,

coat, trousers, high boots, and caps. What do you charge for them?"

"Twenty roubles each suit."

"Very well. Pick two suits the right size for us, and lay them down on the counter. Now we want two pounds of brick-tea and two pounds of tobacco. We want two skins that will each hold a gallon or a gallon and a half of water, and a tin pot that will hold a quart, and two tin drinking mugs. We want a gun and ammunition; it need not be a new one. I see you have got half a dozen standing over there in the corner. What do you charge your customers for those? I see they are all old single barrels and flint-locks."

"I charge fifteen roubles apiece."

"Well, we will take two of them, and we want two pounds of powder and six pounds of shot, and a couple of dozen bullets. Now add that up and see how much it comes to."

"Ninety-two roubles," the man said.

"Well, I tell you what. I will give you this cloak and twelve paper roubles for them. I don't suppose the goods cost you fifty at the outside, and you will get at least a hundred for the skins alone."

"I will take it," the man said. "I take it because I cannot help it."

"You take it because you are making an excellent bargain," Alexis said fiercely. "Now, mind, if you give the alarm when we have gone it will be worse for you. They won't catch us; but you will see your house on fire over your head before the week is past."

Godfrey placed a ten-rouble note and two one-rouble notes on the table; they gathered up their goods and made them into a bundle, carefully loaded their guns, and put the powder and shot into their haversacks. Then Alexis lifted the bundle, and shouldering the guns they left the shop.

"Will he give the alarm, do you think?" Godfrey asked.

"Not he. He is thoroughly well satisfied. I daresay he will get a hundred and fifty roubles for the coat; besides, he

knows that escaped convicts are desperate men, and that we should be likely to execute my threat. Besides, I don't suppose he would venture to stir out. For aught he knows we may be waiting just outside the shop to see what he does, and he will fear that he might get that hungry-looking knife into him if he came out to raise the alarm."

All was quiet, and they were soon beyond the limits of the village, and struck out for the country.

They held on for two or three miles, filled their water-skins at a little stream running towards the lake, and then entering a wood pushed on for some little distance, lighted a fire, and made themselves some tea.

"We are fairly off now, Godfrey. We have become what they call wanderers, and should be safe enough among the Russian peasants, most of whom have been convicts in their time, in the villages north, for they are always willing enough to help men who have taken to the woods. Well, except in the villages, of which there are few enough about here, we are not likely to come upon them. From here to the frontier are Buriats, and indeed beyond the frontier. However as we have both got guns, we need not be afraid of any small party. Of course some of them have guns too; but I don't suppose they will be fools enough to risk throwing their lives away for nothing. At any rate there is one comfort. There is nothing to show that we are political prisoners now. We might be honest peasants if it were not for these confounded heads of hair."

"I should think," Godfrey said, "we had better get rid of our hair altogether. It will be some time before it grows, but anything will be better than it is now."

"We have got no scissors, Godfrey, and we have no soap. If we had, those knives of ours are sharp enough to shave with."

"We can singe it off," Godfrey said. "Not now, but in the morning when we can see. I will do it for you, and you can do it for me. I would rather be bald-headed altogether than be such a figure as I am now."

Accordingly in the morning they singed off their hair with red-hot brands, then they changed their clothes for those they had obtained the night before, folded up their great-coats, divided the tea, tobacco, and the greater part of the powder and shot between them, put a portion in their haversacks, and rolled the rest up in the coats, then strapped these to their shoulders and started on their way.

"Now I feel ready for anything," Alexis said as they tramped along. "We have no weight to speak of to carry, and we have means of getting a meal occasionally. Now if we keep a little west of south we shall strike the Selenga river, which runs through Maimatchin, and then we shall be in China. We shall have to avoid the town, because I know there is a treaty between Russia and China about sending back exiles who cross the frontier. Still, when we get there we are at the starting-place of the caravans."

"Is it a desert the whole distance?"

"No. The first part is a mountainous country with two or three rivers to cross. I don't think the real desert is more than eight or ten days' march across. We shall certainly have no difficulty about water for some time to come. There are plenty of squirrels in these woods; at least I expect so, for they abound in all the forests. We must knock some of them over if we can. I believe they are not bad eating, though I never tried one. Then by the streams we ought to be able to pick up some wild duck, though of course at this time of year the greater portion of them are far north. Still I have great hopes we shall be able to keep ourselves in food with the assistance of what we may be able to buy occasionally. I think the only thing we have got to fear at this part of our journey is the Buriats. The thing I am really afraid of is the getting into China. I don't mean the frontier here; this is Mongolia, and it is only nominally Chinese; but when we get across the desert and enter China itself, I tell you frankly I don't see our way. We neither of us can speak a word of the language. We have no papers, and we may be arrested

and shut up as suspicious vagabonds. There is one thing; at Kalgan, which is close to the Great Wall, there are Russian traders, and I should go boldly to them and ask their help. Russians out of Russia are sure to be liberal, though they may not dare to be so when they are at home, and I feel sure they would help us when we tell them our story, if we can only get at them. However we need not trouble ourselves much about that at present."

Once beyond the forest they were in an undulating country, the hills sometimes rising to a considerable height. Occasionally they saw in the distance encampments of natives, with sheep, cattle, and horses in considerable numbers. They kept clear of these, although occasionally they had to make wide detours to do so. Time was no object to them, and they made but short journeys, for the Russian, who had never been accustomed to walk long distances, had blistered both his feet badly on the first night's journey, and the subsequent travelling had added to the inflammation. On the fourth evening they halted for the night on a little rivulet, after making only five or six miles.

"It is no use, Alexis," Godfrey said; "we must stop here until your feet are quite well. We shall gain by it rather than lose, for when you are quite right again we could do our five-and-twenty or thirty miles a day easily, and might do forty at a push; but your feet will never get well if you go on walking, and it makes your journey a perfect penance; so I vote we establish ourselves here for three or four days. There is water and wood, and I daresay I shall be able to shoot something—at any rate you can't go on as you are now."

"It is horribly annoying," Alexis said, "to be knocked up like this just at the start."

"But it makes no difference," Godfrey urged. "We are not due at Peking on any given day. It is very pleasant out here, where one can enjoy one's freedom and exult that there is no policeman or Cossack watching every movement. It would make no difference to me if we stopped here for a

month. Now let me pull those boots off for you, then you can sit with your feet in this little pool."

"Warm water would be better, Godfrey. If you will get the kettle to boil I will dip my two flannel shirts in and wrap them round and keep on at that. That will be better than cold water."

"All right! I will soon get a fire alight. By Jove, they are bad!" he exclaimed, as Alexis pulled off his stocking. "They must have been hurting you desperately. Why did you not say how bad they were two days ago? We might as well have stopped then as now."

"I hoped they would have got better when I put on these big boots instead of those I started with. But I did not think they were as bad as they are. I am afraid this is going to be a troublesome business, Godfrey."

"Well, it can't be helped," Godfrey said cheerfully. "At any rate, don't worry on my account."

The Russian's feet were indeed greatly swollen and inflamed. The skin had been rubbed off in several places, and the wounds had an angry look, their edges being a fiery red, which extended for some distance round them.

"Well, you have plenty of pluck, Alexis, or you never could have gone on walking with such feet as those. I am sure I could not have done so."

"We thought over most difficulties, Godfrey, that we might possibly have to encounter, but not of this."

"No, we did not think of it, though we might really have calculated upon it. After being three or four months without walking twenty yards it is only natural one's feet should go at first. We ought to have brought some soap with us—I do not mean for washing, though we ought to have brought it for that—but for soaping the inside of our stockings. That is a first-rate dodge to prevent feet from blistering. Well, I must see about the fire. I will go up to those trees on the hillside. I daresay I shall be able to find some sticks there for lighting it. These bushes round here will do well enough when it is once

fairly burning, but we shall have a great trouble to get them to light to begin with."

In half an hour he was back with a large faggot.

"It is lucky," he said, "there is a fallen tree. So we shall have no difficulty about firewood. We ought to have brought a hatchet when we got the other things. These knives are first-rate for cutting meat and that sort of thing, but they are of no use for rough work. My old knife is better."

While he was talking he was engaged in cutting some shavings off the sticks. Then he split up another into somewhat larger pieces, and laying them over the shavings, struck a match, and applied it. The flame shot up brightly, and in five minutes there was an excellent fire, on which the kettle was placed.

"We had better have our dinner first, Godfrey. Then I can go on steadily with these fomentations while you take your gun and look round."

"Perhaps that will be the best way," Godfrey said. "We have nothing left but six squirrels. We finished the last piece of bread this morning and the meat last night. How had we better do these squirrels?"

"I will skin them, Godfrey, while you are seeing to the fire. Then we will spit them on a ramrod, and I will hold them in the flame."

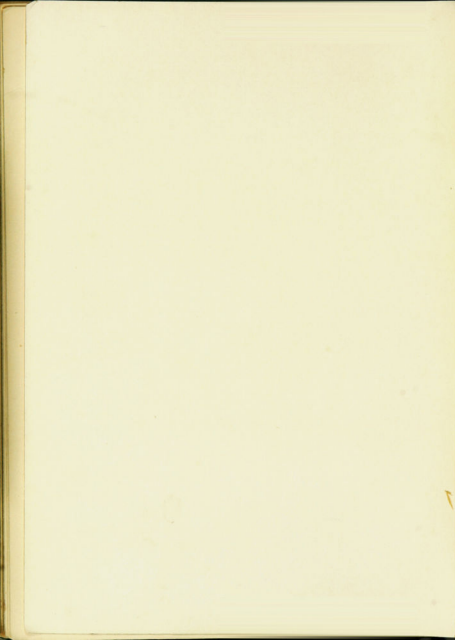
"I think we can manage better than that," Godfrey said, and he went to the bushes and cut two sticks of a foot long with a fork at one end. He stuck these in the ground, on the opposite sides of the fire. "There," he said, "you can lay the ramrod on these forks, and all you have got to do is to give it a turn occasionally."

"How long do you suppose these things want cooking?"

"Not above five minutes, I should think. I know that a steak only takes about eight minutes before a good fire, and these little beggars are not half the thickness of a steak. They are beginning to frizzle already, and the water is just on the boil."



A SUPPER OF ROASTED SQUIRRELS



The squirrels were pronounced very good eating. When the meal was over Godfrey filled the kettle again and gave it to Alexis, and then, taking his gun, started down the valley. He was away three hours, and brought back twenty birds of various sorts, but for the most part small.

"No very great sport," he said as he emptied his haversack. "However, they will do for breakfast, and I may have better luck to-morrow. There are some fish in the pools, but I do not see how we are to get them. I saw one spring out of the water; it must have weighed a couple of pounds."

"You might shoot them, Godfrey, if you could find a place where the bank is pretty high so as to look down on the water."

"So I could; I did not think of that. I must try to-morrow."

"If it hadn't been for my feet," Alexis said, "we should have been down on the Selinga to-morrow, and we had calculated on being able to buy food at one of the villages there."

"We shall be able to hold on here," Godfrey said, "for a few days, and I expect that one day's good tramp, when your feet are better, will take us there. After that we ought to have no great difficulty till we get down near the desert."

CHAPTER VII

THE BURIAT'S CHILD

AFTER three days' rest the Russian's feet were so much better that he said he should be able to make a start the next morning. Godfrey, however, would not listen to the proposal.

"We are getting on all right," he said. "I am not much of a shot, but at any rate I am able to bag enough birds to

keep us going, and though I have only succeeded in shooting one fish as yet, it was a good big one and was a real help to us. It is no use going on till your feet get really hard, for you would only be laming yourself again. It will be quite time enough to talk about making a start in three days' time."

The next morning Godfrey was roughly awakened by a violent kick. Starting up he saw a group of six Buriats standing round them. Three of them had guns, which were pointed at the prisoners, the others were armed with spears. Resistance was evidently useless; their guns had been removed to a distance and the knives taken from their belts before they were roused. Godfrey held out his hands to show that he surrendered, and addressed the usual Russian salutation to them. The men were short, square-built figures, with large skulls, low foreheads, flat noses, and long eyes like those of the Chinese. Their cheek-bones were high and wide apart, the complexion a yellow-brown, and the hair jet black and worn in a platted tail down the back. They made signs to their prisoners to accompany them. Alexis pulled on his boots. Two of the men with guns stood guard over them while the others examined the stores, and were evidently highly pleased with the two brightly polished knives.

"Rather an abrupt termination to our journey, Godfrey."

"Painfully so. I was almost afraid everything was going on too well with us, Alexis. It began to look so easy that one could not understand why there should not be hundreds of prisoners every year make their way across."

"I should not have minded so much," Alexis said, "if we had not got such a satisfactory kit together. We had everything we really wanted for a journey across Asia."

"Except food and water, Alexis."

"Well, yes, those are important items, certainly, and if we had difficulty about it here in a decent sort of country, what might be expected on farther? Well, we have had our outing; I only hope they won't give us up at Irkutsk. I suppose it depends where their grazing-grounds are. There are

another two months of summer; I wish we could have had our fling till then."

Half a mile along the valley they came upon a tent, evidently belonging to the men who had taken them. They talked a good deal among themselves as they approached it, but went straight on without making a stop.

"I expect they are taking us down to some chief or other, if they call them chiefs," Alexis said. "I expect they came out to hunt for horses or cattle that have strayed."

Seven or eight miles farther the valley opened on to a plain, and a short distance in front of them, on the stream, stood ten tents, one of which was considerably larger than the others. Great flocks of sheep grazed on the plain, and at a distance they could see numbers of cattle, while some horses with their saddles on were hobbled near the tents.

"I think we are lucky, Godfrey. The owner of all this must be a rich man, and can hardly covet the roubles he would get for giving us up. Besides, he is sure to talk Russian."

As they came up to the huts they saw that their occupants were all gathered, talking excitedly in front of a large tent. One of the men ran on and then returned; the news he gave was evidently bad. He talked excitedly, pointing to his own leg about half-way between the knee and the ankle. The men broke into exclamations of regret.

"I wonder what is the matter, Alexis; something has happened. I should think that someone must have met with an accident."

"Without wishing ill to anyone, Godfrey, I sincerely wish it may be so, then I might be able to win their good-will."

Little attention was paid to the party when they joined the group, all were too busy in discussing some event or other. Three or four minutes later a man came to the door of the tent and waved his hand, and gave some order. His dress was a handsome one. The little crowd fell back, but one of the men who had brought the captives in went up and spoke

to him. He again waved his hand impatiently, and was turning to enter the tent when Alexis cried loudly: "I am a doctor, if anyone has been hurt I may be of service to him."

The man stepped hastily forward. "Do you say you are a doctor?"

"I am."

"Come in then," he said abruptly, and entered the tent.

"I will call you if you can be of any use," Alexis said to Godfrey as he followed him.

The tent was a large one. Some handsome Koord carpets covered the ground. Facing the door was another opening leading into a small tent serving as the women's apartment.

There were several piles of sheep-skins round the tent, and by one of these three women were standing. Two of these were richly dressed in gowns of handsome striped materials. They wore head-dresses of silver work with beads of malachite and mother-of-pearl, and had heavy silver ornaments hanging on their breasts. Their hair fell down their backs in two thick braids. The other woman was evidently of inferior rank. All were leaning over a pile of skins covered with costly furs, on which a boy of seven or eight years old was lying. His father, for such the man evidently was, said something in his own language, and the women turned eagerly to Alexis.

"You are a Russian doctor!" one of the women exclaimed joyfully.

"I am, lady," he said. "I graduated at St. Petersburg."

"Can you do anything for my son?" she asked. "Half an hour ago he went up incautiously behind a young horse that had been driven in from the herd only yesterday and it kicked him. See, it is terrible," and she burst into tears.

Alexis went forward and lifted a wet cloth that had been placed on the leg. A slight exclamation broke from his lips as he did so. The bone was evidently completely smashed, and one of the splintered ends projected through the skin.

"He must die," the mother sobbed, "nothing can save him."

The father did not speak, but looked inquiringly at Alexis. The latter made a sign to him to move to the other side of the tent.

"Well," the Buriat asked, "must he die?"

"There is no reason for his dying," Alexis said, "but there is no possibility of saving his leg, it must be amputated."

"What would be the use of living without a leg?" the Buriat exclaimed.

"A great deal of use," Alexis said quietly. "There are hundreds, aye thousands, of men in Russia who have lost a leg, some from an accident like this, or from a waggon going over them, some from a wound in battle. In some cases the leg is taken off much above the knee, but even then they are able to get about and enjoy their lives; but when it is below the knee, like this, they are able to do everything just the same as if they had both feet. They can walk and ride, and, in fact, do everything like others; besides, for such men there are people at St. Petersburg who make feet of cork, and when these are on, with a boot and trousers, or with a high boot, no one could tell that the wearer had not two feet. I have met men who had lost a leg, and they walked so well that I did not know till I was told that they had not two legs."

"I will speak to his mother," the Buriat said, and returning to the women he spoke to them in their own language. At first they appeared shocked and even terrified at the idea, but as he went on, evidently repeating what Alexis had told him, the expression of their faces changed. The Buriat called Alexis across.

"You cannot hesitate, lady," he said, "when your child's life is at stake. No Russian mother would do so for a moment. It may seem to you dreadful that he should have but one foot, but in a little time, even with so rough a limb as I could make for him, he would be running about and playing again, and, as I have been telling his father, he can obtain from St. Petersburg a foot so perfect that when wearing a high boot no one would suspect the misfortune that has happened to him."

"Can he not be cured without that?"

"No, lady. If it had been a simple fracture his leg might be bandaged up so that it would heal in time, but, as you can see for yourself, the bone is all splintered and broken, and unless something is done mortification will set in, and in a few days he will cease to live."

"But are you sure that he will live if you do it?"

"I am sure, lady, that the operation will not kill him. I believe that he will live, but that is in the hands of God. You see him now, the shock has prostrated him. He has but little life in him, and if he dies he will die from that and not from the taking off of his foot. But I do not think he will die, he is young and hardy, and on my faith as a Russian gentleman I believe that he will live."

"It shall be tried," the Buriat said abruptly. "God has doubtless sent you here at this moment. Why otherwise should a doctor be brought to my door when this has happened? Do as you will."

Alexis felt the boy's pulse. "I must wait," he said, "until he has recovered somewhat from the shock. Give him some warm milk with a spoonful, not more, of vodka in it. Your men have taken the knives that I and my friend carried; they were specially made for this, and we shall need them. Do not fear as to the operation, it is the most simple in surgery. Let him have the milk at once. Let him remain quiet upon his back, and do not let him attempt to move his leg. Do not tell him about this, it would frighten and agitate him. If I had medicines that we use in our hospitals I could send him to sleep so that he would know nothing about it, and when he woke up would be ignorant that his foot had been removed; but as there is none of it within a hundred miles of us we must manage it as we best can. Please tell your men to release my friend, I shall need his assistance."

After bidding the woman heat some milk at once the Buriat went out and ordered Godfrey's guards to release him at once, and to restore to them their knives and all their other posses-

sions. Alexis informed Godfrey of what had taken place, and what he proposed to do.

"The operation would be a very easy one if we had chloroform and proper implements. Unfortunately there is no chance of their having such a thing as a fine saw, and how in the world I am to make a clean cut through the bone I do not know. The knife that you carry is just the right thing for the job; but how about a saw? If we could have chloroformed him, we could, after making the cuts through the flesh, have put the leg on a log of wood and have cut clean through the bone with a chopper. It would not be a good plan, for it would probably splinter the bone, but it might have been tried, but without chloroform it is not to be thought of."

Godfrey thought for a moment. "The knives are of a very good steel, Alexis?"

"Oh yes, of the very best steel!"

"Is it hard steel like that of a razor?"

"Yes, very much the same."

"Then I should think it could be managed. I know the least thing will notch a razor. Now I should think if we took the large knife, and with my pocket-knife or with the edge of a hard stone notch the edge carefully all the way down, it would make a very good saw."

"I should think it might do anyhow, Godfrey, and the idea is a very good one. Well, let us set about it at once. I can get a piece of fresh bone to try on; no doubt they kill a sheep here every day."

They set to work and in ten minutes had notched the blade of the knife all the way down. Alexis had, as he expected, no trouble in obtaining a freshly-picked bone, and they found that the knife sawed through it very cleanly. Then Alexis went in to see the boy again. Before, he had been lying with his eyes half-closed, without a vestige of colour in his cheeks; the warm milk had done its work almost instantaneously, and he was perfectly conscious and there was a slight colour in

his cheeks. His pulse had recovered strength wonderfully. Alexis nodded approvingly to the Buriat. He drew him outside the tent.

"If I were you," he said, "I would send away all the people from the other huts. If the poor child screams they may get excited and rush in, and it is better that everything should be perfectly quiet. I should send away also the ladies, unless of course his mother particularly wishes to be with him; but it will be trying for her, and I own that I would rather not have anyone in the tent but you and my friend."

The Buriat went inside; he returned in two or three minutes. "My wife will stay; my sister and the attendant will go." Then he called to the men who were standing at the doors of their huts:

"The doctor says there must be silence for some time; he is going to do something and he wishes that all shall retire to a distance until I wave my hand for them to return. Will there be anything you want?" he asked Alexis.

"A large jug of warm water," he said, "a bowl, and some soft rag—that is all. By the time that is ready I shall be. You will have to hold his leg, Godfrey," he went on as the Buriat returned to his tent. "You must hold it just under the knee as firmly as possible, so as to prevent the slightest movement. But I am going to try to mesmerise him. I have seen it done with perfect success, and at any rate it is worth trying. In the weak state he is in I ought to be able to succeed without difficulty. Now I want a couple of small flat stones with rounded edges, a strip of soft skin, and a bit of stick three or four inches long and as thick as your finger, to make a tourniquet with."

By the time that these were ready a perfect stillness reigned in the camp. The whole of the natives had gone away to a distance of over a quarter of a mile, and were sitting in a group watching the tents, and, Godfrey had no doubt, debating hotly as to the folly of allowing a stranger to have anything to do with the son of their employer. He now followed

Alexis into the tent, where all was in readiness. The child's head was slightly raised by a skin folded and placed under it. His mother knelt beside him.

"What do you wish me to do?" the Buriat asked.

"I wish you to stand beside him and aid his mother to hold him should he struggle, and I may need you to dip the rag into the warm water, squeeze it out, and give it me."

"Of course he will struggle," the Buriat said; "we men can bear pain, but a child cannot."

"I am going to try to put him to sleep," Alexis replied; "a sleep so sound that he will not wake with the pain. I do not say that I shall be able to, but I will try."

The Buriat looked at Alexis as if he doubted his sanity. That a Russian doctor should be able to take off the child's leg was within his comprehension. He had once seen a man in the street of Irkutsk with only one arm, but that anyone could make a child sleep so soundly that he would not wake under such an operation seemed to him beyond the bounds of possibility.

"Tell the child that I am going to do him good," Alexis said to the mother, "and that he is to look at my eyes steadily." He placed himself at the side of the couch and gazed down steadily at the child; then he began to make passes slowly down his face. For three or four minutes the black eyes looked into his unwinkingly, then the lids closed a little. Alexis continued his efforts, the lids drooped more and more until they closed completely. He continued the motions of his hand for another minute or two, then stooping he lifted an eyelid; the eye was turned upwards, so that the iris was no longer visible.

"Thank God, he has gone off!" he said. "Now for the tourniquet. That is right; twist gradually now, Godfrey, and place the stone on the main artery. Now," he said to the Buriat, "hold this stick firm with one hand and place the other on his chest to prevent his moving. Do you lay your arm across him," this to the mother; "that is right. Kneel

with your face against his. Now, Godfrey, grasp the leg just below the knee and hold it firmly."

Godfrey did so, and then shut his eyes as he saw the doctor about to use the knife, expecting to hear a piercing scream from the child. There was no sound, however, and in a very few seconds he heard Alexis utter a low exclamation of satisfaction. He looked now; the flesh was already cut through and no cry had escaped the child. Another moment the foot and the lower portion of the leg came away at the point where the bone was crushed; then Alexis pushed the flesh upwards so as to expose another inch of the shin-bone, and then took the saw and cut through it. Some strands of silk lay close to his hand; with a long needle he took up the ends of the arteries and tied them with the silk; then he took hold of the stick of the tourniquet and loosened it a little. The result was satisfactory; the arteries were securely tied. Then he tightened it again and gave it to the Buriat to hold, wiped the wound with the damp rag, drew down the flesh over the end of the bone, brought up the flap of flesh from behind, and with a few stitches sewed it in its place.

"It is all done," he said, rising to his feet. Then he passed his hand several times across the child's forehead. "Tell him softly, when he opens his eyes," he said to the mother, "that he will soon be well now and that he must go to sleep." He continued the passes for some time, occasionally lifting the eyelid. "He is coming round now," he said at last. A few more passes and the child drowsily opened its eyes. Its mother spoke to it softly, and with a faint smile it closed them again. Alexis stood quietly for another minute or two. "He is asleep now," he said to the Buriat; "you need hold him no longer."

The tears were running down the man's cheeks; he seized one of the hands of Alexis and pressed it to his lips, while the mother, sobbing with joy, did the same to the other. To them it seemed almost a miracle.

"Have some milk kept warm," Alexis said, "and give it to

him when he awakes. Do not tell him anything about his foot having been taken off. Keep a blanket lying over him so that he will not see it. It is well that he should not be agitated, but tell him that he must lie perfectly quiet and not move his leg, as it would hurt him if he did so. Now, chief, it would be as well if you called the others back and told your servant to get some breakfast, for my friend and I have had nothing to eat since your men woke us this morning."

The Buriat went outside the tent and waved a blanket, and the others came running in at the signal.

"Tell them not to make a noise," Alexis said; "the longer the child sleeps quietly the better."

The Buriats uttered exclamations of the most profound astonishment when the chief told them that the Russian doctor had taken off the leg of the child without his feeling the slightest pain, and that there was every hope of his speedily recovering, whereupon they looked at Alexis with a feeling of respect amounting to awe. A sheep was at once killed, skinned, cut up, and placed in a great cooking pot over a fire; but long before this was done two great bowls of hot milk were brought out by the Buriat to Alexis and Godfrey, to enable them to hold on until the meal was prepared. At his order the men at once set about erecting a tent for them close to his own, and as soon as this was up, piles of soft skins were brought in.

"That has been a lucky stroke indeed, Godfrey," Alexis said as they took possession of their new abode.

"It is indeed, Alexis. Nothing could have been more providential. We are in clover as long as we choose to stop here. Do you think the child will recover?"

"I think there is every hope of his doing so. These natives are as hard as nails. I don't suppose the child has ever had a day's illness in his life, and in this pure dry air there is little fear of the wound doing badly. The next thing to do is to make him a pair of crutches to get about with till he can bear to have a wooden stump on. The only nuisance is

that we shall be delayed. As a doctor, I cannot very well leave my patient till he is fairly on the road towards recovery."

"Certainly not," Godfrey agreed. "Well, I daresay we shall put away the time pleasantly enough here."

Half an hour later two horses were brought up, and these with their saddles and bridles were presented by the Buriat to his guests, and were picketed by their tent. The next three weeks passed pleasantly; they rode, hunted, and shot. The little patient made rapid progress towards recovery, and at the end of that time was able to get about on two crutches Godfrey had made for him.

"It is better that you should make them, Godfrey, and also the wooden leg when he is ready for it," Alexis had said. "It is just as well that their gratitude should be divided a little, so I will hand that part of the work over to you."

The Buriats were delighted indeed when they saw the child hopping about the camp with his crutches, and their gratitude knew no bounds to their guests. Alexis had made no secret to the Buriat of their intention of trying to make their way to Peking. He endeavoured in every way to dissuade them from it.

"You will never find your way across the desert," he said, "and will die for want of water. The people are wild and savage. They are ruled by their lamas, and if they do not put you to death, which they would be likely to do for what you have, they will certainly send you back to Kiakhta and hand you over to the Russians there; and even if you got through the desert the Chinese would seize you and send you back. It would be madness to try. It would be better than that to go south and make for Thibet, although even that would be a desperate expedition. The tribes are wild and savage, the desert is terrible for those who do not know it. You would never find the wells, and would perish miserably of thirst even if you escaped being killed by the tribesmen. Still your chances would be greater than they would be of reaching Peking. But you had far better make up your minds

to live here. I will give you flocks and herds. You should be as of my family, and you, Alexis, should marry my sister, who is rich as well as pretty, for she owns a third of all the flocks and herds you see."

Alexis warmly thanked the Buriat for the offer, but said they must take time to consider it. "One might do worse," he said, laughing, to Godfrey when they were alone. "The women are certainly a great deal better-looking than the men, and the girl would be considered fair-looking even in Russia. At any rate it would be vastly better being a Buriat here than being inside that prison at Irkutsk."

"I agree with you there, Alexis; but it would be horrible being cut off here from the world for life."

"But one is cut off in prison, Godfrey; and though I agreed to share your attempt I have never been very hopeful about its success, and I am still less hopeful now from what I hear of the difficulties ahead of us. As I said when you first talked of it, there must be some frightful difficulties here, or this would be the way by which convicts would always try to escape, and yet we have never heard of one doing so."

"Yes, I begin to think myself I have made a mistake, Alexis, in choosing this route instead of a northern one. Besides, we shall have winter upon us in a very few weeks now, which would of course add tremendously to our difficulties. But you are not seriously thinking of stopping here, are you?"

"I don't know, Godfrey. You see you have got a home and friends waiting for you if you do get away, I have nothing but exile. I do believe we shall never succeed in getting out through China, and I think we couldn't do better than stop here for a year or two. By the end of that time we may succeed in establishing relations by means of this Buriat with some of the tea merchants at Kiakhta, and getting one of them to smuggle us through with a caravan; but, at any rate, if you still hold to going I shall go too. I have no intention of deserting you, I can assure you."

In another fortnight Godfrey had made a stump for the child. The hollow was lined with sheepskin to take off the jar, and it strapped firmly on to the limb. The wound was not quite sufficiently healed yet for the child to use it regularly, but when on first trying it he walked across the tent the joy of his father and mother knew no bounds.

They had only been waiting for this to make a move, for the pasture had for some time been getting short, and on the following day the tents were pulled down, and for three days they journeyed east, and then finding a suitable spot again pitched their tents. They were now, as the Buriat told them, only some thirty miles from Kiakhta. Godfrey and Alexis had talked matters over during the journey. They agreed that the season was now too late for them to think of attempting the journey until the following spring, and had almost concluded that the attempt to get through China should be altogether abandoned. Going north there were the rigour of the climate and the enormous distances as obstacles, but the passage would be chiefly by water. There was no danger from the tribes they would have to pass through, no difficulties such as they might meet with from the opposition of the Chinese, and they had pretty well resolved to pass the winter with the Buriats and to make a start in the spring.

Their host was greatly pleased when they informed him of their intention at any rate to spend the winter with them, for he hoped that before the spring Alexis would have made up his mind to accept his offer, and to settle down as a member of the tribe.

The day after the Buriats pitched their fresh camp one of the men reported that he had seen a large bear at the edge of a forest two miles from the huts. Alexis and Godfrey at once took their guns, borrowed a couple of long spears and two hunting knives, and started for the wood, the native going with them to show them the exact spot where he had seen the bear. There was a good deal of undergrowth about, and they thought it probable that the animal was not far off. The

Buriat had brought a dog with him, and the animal at once began sniffing the ground. His master encouraged it, and presently it started, sniffing the ground as it went. It had gone but a few hundred yards when it stopped before a thick clump of bushes and began growling furiously. They had a short consultation, and then the two friends took up their post one at each corner of the bushes, while the Buriat went round to the rear of the clump with his dog and began beating the bushes with his stick, while the dog barked and yelped. A minute later a bear broke out of the bushes within four yards of Alexis.

The Russian levelled his gun. Godfrey heard a report far louder than usual, and something flew close to his head. A moment later he saw Alexis struck to the ground by the bear. Godfrey rushed up, and fired when within two paces of the animal, which with a fierce growl turned upon him. He sprang aside and plunged his spear deep into its side. The bear struck at the handle and broke it in two, and then rose on its hind-legs. Godfrey drew his knife and awaited its rush, but it stood stationary for half a minute, swayed to and fro, and then fell on its side. Godfrey leaned over it and plunged his knife in deep behind its shoulders, pressing it until the blade disappeared. Then feeling certain it was dead he ran to Alexis, who lay motionless on the ground. By the side of him lay the stock of the gun and a portion of the barrel; it had exploded, completely shattering the Russian's left hand. But this was not his only or even his most serious injury. The bear had struck him on the side of the head, almost tearing off a portion of the scalp and ear.

The Buriat had by this time come round, and Godfrey bade him run to the camp at the top of his speed to fetch assistance. Feeling in his friend's pocket he drew out the bandage which Alexis always carried, and wrapped up as well as he could his shattered hand, of which the thumb and two first fingers were altogether missing; the wound on the head was, he felt, altogether beyond him. In less than half an hour

the chief Buriat and four of his men dashed up on horse-back. They had brought with them two poles and a hide to form a litter. The chief was deeply concerned when he saw how serious were the Russian's injuries. No time was lost in lashing the hide to the poles. Alexis was lifted and laid upon the litter, and two of the Buriats took the poles while the others led back the horses. As soon as he arrived in camp Godfrey bathed the wounds with warm water, and poured some spirits between the lips of the wounded man, but he gave no signs of consciousness.

"I am afraid," he said to the Buriat, who was looking on anxiously, "that his skull is injured or there is concussion of the brain. The only thing that I can see will be for him to be carried at once to Kiakhta. There is sure to be a hospital there and doctors."

"That would be best," the Buriat said; "but I will take a house there, and my wife and sister shall nurse him."

"That will be better than going into the hospital," Godfrey agreed, "for two reasons. In the first, because Alexis would certainly get more careful nursing among his friends than in a hospital, and he might then avoid, if he survives his injuries, being again imprisoned."

No time was lost. Four Buriats took the poles, Godfrey walked beside the litter, and the Buriat, his wife and sister, mounted and rode off to have everything ready for them when they arrived at Troitzkosavsk, the suburb of Kiakhta. It was late before they reached it. The Buriat met them half a mile outside the town, and at once conducted them to a house that he had hired from a friend established there. As soon as Alexis was laid upon a couch Godfrey and the Buriat went out and ascertained where one of the surgeons of the military hospital lived. On reaching the house they were shown by the Cossack who acted as the doctor's servant to his room.

"A friend of mine has been badly injured by a bear," the Buriat said; "I wish you to come and see him at once. He is in a house I have taken near this. I will be responsible for all charges."

The doctor looked keenly at Godfrey and then said, "I will come. You are not a Buriat?" he said to Godfrey as they started.

"I am not, doctor; though I have been living with them for some time."

"And the man who is ill, is he a Buriat?"

"No, sir; he is a Russian, and a member of your own profession."

"He is clever," the Buriat said. "He saved the life of my child by taking off his leg, and he is running about again now. He is as a brother to me, and I would gladly give a thousand cattle rather than that he should die."

No other words were spoken until they arrived at the house. The surgeon stooped over Alexis, lifted one of his eyelids, and felt his pulse.

"Concussion of the brain," he said; "a serious case. Bring me rags and hot water." He bathed the wound for some time and then carefully examined it. "There is a fracture of the skull," he said to Godfrey, "and I fancy there is a piece of bone pressing on the brain. Put wet cloths round his head for the present; I will go and fetch my colleague, and I will send down some ice from the hospital. His hand is bandaged up, what is the matter with that?"

"His gun burst, doctor, and has mangled his hand dreadfully. That was how it was the bear got at him and struck him."

The surgeon removed the bandages and examined it. "Keep it bathed with warm water until I return," he said.

Half an hour later he came back with the other surgeon, a man older than himself, both carrying cases of instruments. The wound on the head was again examined. They then proceeded to operate, and in a few minutes removed a portion of splintered bone. Then the flap of skin was carefully replaced in its position, and a few stitches put in to hold it. The hand was then attended to.

"Nó, I don't think it need come off," the senior surgeon

said, "we may save the third and little fingers. At any rate we will try; if it does not do we can take the whole off afterwards."

The operation was performed, then ordering the ice that had just been brought to be applied to the head, the surgeons left.

"We will look in again early in the morning," one of them said to Godfrey, "and then we will have a chat with you."

The women took it by turns to watch, and Godfrey, worn out by the excitement of the day, slept until morning. Alexis was restless, moving uneasily and muttering to himself. His eyes were open, but he took no notice of what was going on around him. The surgeon they had first seen came alone.

"He is better," he said to the Buriat, "but he is very far from being out of danger yet. It will be a long illness, but I hope that we may be able to bring him round. I will send him some medicine presently. Keep cloths with cold water and ice to his head." He beckoned to Godfrey to follow him out of the room.

"I don't want to ask any questions," he said, "about my patient. I have been called in by this Buriat to see a friend of his, and it does not concern me who or what he may be; but it is different with you. As a Russian officer I cannot be seeing you daily without reporting that I have met a person who scarcely appears to be what he seems. It is painful to me to be obliged to say so. I do not give advice any way. I only say that if you do not wish to be asked questions, it would be best for you to leave here after nightfall; until then, I shall not consider it necessary to make any report. I shall be back again once or twice to-day; you had better think the matter over."

Godfrey had been thinking the matter over as he walked beside the litter, and had already arrived at a decision. It was evident that many weeks, if not months, must elapse before Alexis would be fit to sustain the hardships that would attend an attempt to escape, and he thought it probable that more than ever he would be inclined to throw in his lot with the

wandering Buriats; he had therefore only himself to think about. He had foreseen that he would not be able to stop at Kiakhta without being exposed to being questioned, and that there remained therefore only the option of living with the Buriats during the winter or of giving himself up. The former plan would be the most advantageous in the event of his trying to reach Peking; but the difficulties in that direction appeared to him so great that he shrank from the thought of facing them, especially as he should now be alone, and he preferred the idea of trying to escape by the north.

In this case a further sojourn among the Buriats would be useless; in a Russian prison he would be able to pick up many valuable hints from the men with whom he would work, and might find someone ready to make the attempt with him. The difficulties of escape from prison did not seem very great, and would, he thought, be even less at one of the penal settlements than if confined in an ordinary jail. When, however, the doctor spoke to him, Godfrey only thanked him, and said he would speak with him again when he next called. The Buriat saw that he was looking serious when he returned to the room.

"What did he say to you?" he asked. "Did he threaten to report you?"

"He spoke very kindly," Godfrey replied. "But he said that it would be his duty to do so if I remained here."

The Buriat shook his head. "I was thinking of that yesterday, and was afraid for you. Out on the plains there would have been none to question you; but here in the town a stranger is noticed at once, for every resident is known. You must make off at once. You can take my horse, we will watch over your friend. Once in my tents you will be safe."

Godfrey thanked him warmly, but told him that he had not quite decided as to what he should do, but would let him know later on. Then, as he could do nothing for Alexis, he threw himself down on a pile of skins, and thought the matter over in every light.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MINES OF KARA

GODFREY found it a difficult matter to decide what was best to be done; but after two hours' thinking his mind was quite made up. He did not stand in the same position as Alexis with the Buriats. It was Alexis who had laid them under such an obligation by saving their child's life. He himself was simply liked as the doctor's companion, and without Alexis the long months of winter would be dreary indeed. He thought that imprisonment would be preferable to living alone in a Buriat hut. Accordingly he rose at last, and told the Buriat that his course was decided.

"I shall give myself up," he said. "I know that you would make me welcome in your tents; but from what you have told me, I see that there is no prospect whatever of an escape through China, and that if I go out to the plains I shall be there for life, while if I go to a prison I may in time be released, or at any rate I can again escape."

"Whenever you come to us you will be welcome," the Buriat said. "For yourself, you know best; but we shall be all sorry to lose you. Is there anything I can do for you? I know the governor here, for I have had large dealings with him for sheep and cattle for the troops."

"I shall be very glad if you will go with me to him," Godfrey said. "A word from you may be of great advantage to me. There are no prisons here, and I am most anxious to be sent to Nertchinsk and not to Irkutsk, because it was from there we escaped."

The Buriat's wife and sister were sorry when they heard Godfrey's determination, but they were too much occupied with Alexis to try and dispute it.

"When will you go?" the Buriat said.

"At once, if you will take me. I have no preparations

to make; I only cause extra trouble here, and can be of no assistance. But first, if you will procure paper, pen, and ink, I will write a letter for you to give to Alexis when he recovers, telling him why I leave him."

The Buriat sent out one of his men, who presently returned with writing materials, and Godfrey then wrote a long letter to Alexis, explaining at length the reasons that actuated him in deciding to give himself up.

"You are in good hands," he said, "and I could do nothing for you; and in any case I should have to leave you now, for did I not give myself up I must leave this evening, therefore I could do no good to you in any case. I know that you were half inclined to stay with the Buriats, and you will now have even greater reasons for doing so than before. If, however, you should at any future time change your mind and try to make your escape, I need not tell you how delighted I should be to see you in England. I inclose the address of my father's office, where you will be sure either to find me or to hear of me. But even if I have not got home you will receive the heartiest welcome when you tell him of our having been together and show him this letter, and you may rely upon it that my father will be able to procure a situation for you in London, even if he cannot find a berth for you in his own house of business."

When he had finished he handed the letter to the Buriat to give to Alexis.

"Here is money," the Buriat said, "which my wife found upon Alexis. You had better take it with you."

"I cannot do that," Godfrey said, "it is his; I have some of my own. I know he would gladly give it to me if he were conscious; but I cannot take it now."

"Very well," the Buriat said, "you are doubtless right; but at any rate you can take some from me. I am rich. I have many thousands of sheep and cattle. If you do not take it I shall be offended, and shall think that in some way we have displeased you. A thousand roubles are nothing to me;

I have given as much for one suit of furs for my wife. You must take this; if you ever attempt to escape again, you will need money."

After much debate Godfrey accepted five hundred roubles in notes, seeing that the Buriat would be really pained by his refusal, and knowing that the money would indeed be useful to him when he next tried to make his escape. Being anxious to hear the surgeon's next report about Alexis, Godfrey delayed his start until after his visit.

"There is no change," the doctor said, after examining his patient, "nor did I expect there would be after such serious injuries as he has received. It would be strange, indeed, if he did not suffer from the shock. It may be some days before any change takes place. It is vastly better that he should be restless, or even wildly delirious than lying unconscious as he was when I first saw him. Well, and what are you going to do, young fellow?"

"I am going to give myself up," he said.

"You have had enough of the plains, eh?"

"Yes, sir, for the present."

"Mind, don't be foolish enough to say that you have escaped; there is not the least occasion for that; that would make the case a great deal worse."

"My friend here was going with me to the governor, doctor, to tell him that I have been living with him for some time."

"Yes, that is all well enough; but if you give yourself up it is a confession that you have escaped; that won't do at all. I tell you what will be the best thing: I will go with you to Colonel Prescoff, the governor. I shall tell him the truth, that I was attending one of the Buriat's men, who had been badly injured by a bear, when I saw you there. I found that you could not give a good account of yourself, and had no papers, and that, therefore, as was my duty, I brought you to him. Then you must say that you have been working here and there, and that you come from, say, Tomsk. I suppose you have been there?"

Godfrey smiled.

"That is near enough," the doctor went on. "As for your papers, you lost them, or they were burnt or stolen from you. He won't ask you many questions. Then the Buriat will speak up for you—he is rather an important man, being one of the richest of his tribe—and say what he can for you. Is there anything you want done particularly?"

"I want to be sent to Nertchinsk instead of to Irkutsk. I would rather work in the mines or anywhere else than be shut up in prison."

"And besides, you would not be known?" the doctor laughed.

"That is the principal thing, sir."

"Whatever you do, my lad," the doctor said, "if you have been a political prisoner—mind, I don't ask the question, and don't want to know—but if you have been, don't let it out. It is better to have been a murderer than a Nihilist out here. I daresay the colonel would send you to Nertchinsk if your friend here asks him, but it is a good deal further and a more expensive journey."

"I will gladly pay for the vehicle, sir."

"Ah, well; if you will do that, I should think it could be managed. I will go in first with your friend and have a talk with the colonel, and we will see if we can put the matter straight for you before you are called in."

Godfrey took his fur-lined coat, said good-bye to the two ladies, gently put his hand on his comrade's shoulder, and followed the doctor and his host. When they arrived at the governor's house the doctor left him in the room where two military clerks were writing, and went in with the Buriat to the governor. In five minutes the bell rang. An orderly answered it, and returning, bade Godfrey follow him. The governor was seated at a table, the doctor and the Buriat standing near.

"So I hear," the colonel said, looking sharply at Godfrey, "that you are unable to give an account of yourself, and have nothing but a cock-and-bull story of having wandered about

through the country. We understand what that means. However, our friend here," and he motioned to the Buriat, "speaks well of you, and says that you have done him some service. However that cannot be taken into consideration. It is clear that having no papers and no domicile, you are a vagabond, and as such must be committed to prison. You will be taken to Nertchinsk." Godfrey bowed. The colonel touched the bell again, and the orderly entered. "Take this man to the cells."

The Buriat stepped forward and shook hands with Godfrey.

"Come again," he said in a low voice, "you will always be welcome."

The doctor nodded. "I shall see you before you start," he said. Godfrey saluted the colonel and followed the orderly out of the room. He was taken across a court-yard to a cell.

"A good style of young fellow," the colonel said when he left. "He has either been an officer and got into some scrape with his colonel, or he is a political."

"One or the other, colonel, no doubt," the doctor agreed.

"Well, it is no business of mine," the colonel said. "I suppose he has had four or five months in the woods and wants to get into snug quarters again before winter. Well, good morning, gentlemen!" and his visitors took their leave.

Late in the evening the doctor came into Godfrey's cell. "By the bye," he said, "I put your name down as Ivan Holstoff. It was as good as any other, and you had to be entered by some name. I feared that you might blurt out your own whatever it may be, and that might be fatal, for if you are a political prisoner your name will have been sent to every station where there are troops."

"I am very much obliged to you, doctor, for your kindness," Godfrey said. "I will take care to remain Ivan Holstoff. How much am I to pay for the carriage?"

"Your friend the Buriat has seen to that, and handed the governor money for a vehicle there and back, as the soldier in charge of you will have to return."

"It is very good of him," Godfrey said gratefully. "Please tell him when you see him how much obliged I am to him for his kindness to me."

"I think my patient will do," the doctor said. "He is quieter and less feverish this evening. I think he will pull round; and now good-bye! I think you have done right in giving yourself up. You are but a lad yet, and with good conduct, now that you are entered only as a vagabond, you will get leave to work outside the prison in two or three years, and get a permit to settle anywhere in Siberia a couple of years later."

The next morning at daybreak Godfrey was placed in a vehicle. A soldier mounted by the side of the driver, the latter shouted to his horses, and started at full gallop. Soon after leaving the town they passed a caravan of forty carts carrying tea. The soldier, who appeared a chatty fellow, told him they would be three months on their way to Moscow. At a town named Verchne Udinsk they regained the main road and turned east and continued their journey through Chita, a town of three thousand inhabitants, to Nertchinsk, a distance of six hundred miles. The country was hilly, and for the most part wooded, but varied at times by rolling prairies on which large herds of cattle were grazing. The journey was far more pleasant than that Godfrey had before made, for being no longer regarded as a political prisoner his guard chatted with him freely; and at night, instead of having to sleep in the vehicle in the open air, he was lodged in the convict stations, which, as the season was late, were for the most part unoccupied. He was glad, however, when he arrived at Nertchinsk, for the jolting of the springless vehicle was very trying. He did not see the governor of the prison, but was at once assigned to a cell there on the guard handing to the authorities the official report of the governor at Kiakhta.

"You are to go on again to-morrow," the warden said to him that evening. "We are full here, and there is a party going on to Kara. You will go with them. The barber will

be here to shave you directly. You have not been out very long, judging by the length of your hair. Here is your prison dress. You must put that on to-morrow instead of the one you have on, but you may carry yours with you if you like, it will be useful to you when your term in the prison is done."

Accordingly the next morning Godfrey was taken into the court-yard, where some fifty other prisoners were assembled, and ten minutes later marched off under a guard of eight mounted Cossacks. He carried his peasant's clothes and fur coat rolled up into a bundle on his shoulder, and had, after he changed his dress, sewn up his money in the collar of his jacket with a needle and thread he had brought with him, keeping out some twenty roubles for present purposes. The journey occupied five days, the marches averaging twenty-five miles apiece. The prisoners talked and sung by the way, picked the blackberries and raspberries that grew thickly on the bushes by the wayside, and at night slept in the stations, their food consisting of very fair broth, with cabbage in it, meat, and black bread. Godfrey was asked no questions. He did not know whether this was because the convicts thought only of themselves, and had no curiosity about their companions, or whether it was a sort of etiquette observed among them. Godfrey was surprised to find how much the country differed from the ideas he had formed of Siberia.

The forests were beautiful with a great variety of foliage. Late lilies bloomed by the roadside with flowers of other kinds, of whose names he was ignorant. To the north was a chain of hills of considerable height. The forest was alive with birds, and he frequently caught sight of squirrels running about among the branches. No objection was offered by the guards to their making purchases at the villages through which they passed, except that they would not allow them to buy spirits. At the first opportunity Godfrey laid out four or five roubles in tea and tobacco, some of which he presented to the guards, and divided the rest among his fellow-prisoners, who forthwith dubbed him "the count." At length Kara was

reached. It was not a town, but purely a convict settlement, the prisoners being divided among four or five prisons situated two or three miles from each other. They were first marched to the most central of these. Here they were inspected by the governor, who had the details of each case reported by the authorities of the prisons they had left. They were at once divided into parties in accordance with the vacancies in the various prisons.

Only four were left behind. These were taken to a guard-room until allotted to the various wards. One by one they were taken out, Godfrey being the last to be summoned. He was conducted to a room in which several convicts were seated writing; through this a long passage led to the governor's room.

"You are known as Ivan Holstoff," the governor said when the warder had retired.

"Yes, sir."

"Age?"

"Seventeen."

"Charged with being a vagabond, found without papers or documents, and unable to give a satisfactory account of yourself."

Godfrey bowed. The colonel glanced through the paper by his side signed by the governor at Kiakhtha, and saying that the prisoner had been most favourably reported upon by a wealthy Buriat, a government contractor with whom he had been living out on the plains.

"You persist in giving no further account of yourself?" the governor asked.

"I would rather say nothing further, sir," Godfrey replied.

"You are not a Russian," the governor said sharply.

"I am a Russian born," the lad replied.

"You speak with a slight accent."

"I was away for some years from my country," Godfrey replied.

"I suppose you would call yourself a student?"

"Yes, sir, I was a student until lately."

"You are a young lad to have got yourself into trouble. How was it? Do not tell me what crime you are charged with, but you can tell me anything else. It will go no farther, and there will be no record of what you say."

Godfrey liked the officer's face. It was stern, but sternness is a necessity when a man is in charge of some three thousand prisoners, the greater proportion of whom are desperate men; but there was a kindness in the half-smile with which he spoke.

"I am here, sir, from pure misfortune. I have no doubt most people you question declare they are innocent, and I do not expect you to believe me. The facts against me were very strong, so strong that I believe any jury would have convicted me upon them, but in spite of that I was innocent. I behaved like a fool, and was made the dupe of others, but beyond that I have nothing whatever to blame myself for or to regret."

"It may be as you say," Colonel Konovovitch said. "I am not here to revise sentences, but to see them carried out. Conduct yourself well, lad, and in two years you will get a permit to reside outside the prison. Three years later you will be practically free, and can go where you like in Siberia and earn your living in any way you choose. Many of the richest men in the country have been convicts. I shall keep an eye on you, and shall make matters as easy for you as I can."

He touched the bell, and the warder re-entered and led Godfrey away. The colonel sat for some little time in thought. He liked the lad's face and his manner, which, although perfectly respectful, had none of the servility with which Russians generally address their superiors. "He did not say that he was a Russian," he said to himself, "only that he was born in Russia. I should say from his appearance and manner that he was English. What was he sent out here for, I wonder? He may have been a clerk and been condemned for forgery

or embezzlement. He may have been a political prisoner, most likely that I should say. He may have got mixed up in some of these Nihilist plots; if so, he has done well to become a vagabond. I can't help thinking he was speaking the truth when he declared he was innocent. Well, perhaps in the long run it will be the best for him. A clerk's lot is not a very bright one, and I should say he is likely to make his way anywhere. He has a hard two years' time before him among those scoundrels, but I should think he is likely to hold his own."

Then he dismissed the subject from his thoughts and turned to a pile of papers before him.

Godfrey, on leaving the presence of the governor, was taken by the warden to one of the prison blocks, and was handed over to the prison official in charge of it. He was taken to a small room and there furnished with a bag in which to keep his underclothing and other effects.

"You will use this bag for a pillow at night," the official said. "What money you have you can either give to me to take charge of for you, or can hand it over to the head man of the room to lay out for you as you require it, or you can keep it yourself. If you choose to hold it yourself you had better keep a very sharp look-out; not that there are any professional thieves here, it is only for very serious offences that men are sent east of Irkutsk."

Godfrey thanked the official, but said that what little he had he might as well keep with him. His money in paper was safely hidden in the lining of his convict jacket, and as he knew that that would be worn by night as well as by day, it was perfectly safe there. He was provided with some flannel shirts and other underclothing.

"I see you have underclothing of your own," the official said; "but of course you have the regular allowance given you; if you run short of money you can sell them. Now come along with me."

Godfrey was led into a large room, where the scene some-

what widely differed from what he had pictured to himself would be the interior of a prison at the dreaded mines of Kara. The room was large and fairly lofty; the walls were clean and whitewashed; down both sides ran benches, six feet wide, similar to one he had seen in an English guard-house. There were some sixty men in the room; some of these were lying upon the bed-places smoking pipes, others were sitting on them talking together or mending their clothes, and several parties were engaged in card-playing. Save for the ugly gray uniforms with the coloured patches in the centre of the back, significant of the term of imprisonment to which their wearers had been sentenced, and the strangely shaved heads of those present, he might have been in a singularly free-and-easy barrack-room. Most of the men looked up as the official entered.

"A new comrade," he said. "Mikail Stomoff, do you take him in your charge"; and having said this he at once left the room.

Mikail Stomoff, a big powerful man, came across to Godfrey. He was the starosta or head man of the ward, elected to the position by the votes of his fellow-prisoners. It was his duty to keep order and prevent quarrelling, and to see that the ward was swept out and kept tidy. He transacted all business for the prisoners, made their purchases outside, and was generally the intermediary between them and the authorities. In return for all this he was free from labour at the mines.

"Well, my lad," he said, "you began early. How long are you in for, and what have you done?"

"I am in here for being a vagabond," Godfrey said, "and I believe the punishment for that is five years."

"A vagabond, eh? we have not many of them here. The wanderers generally work their way west. However, I dare say you had your reasons, and I don't know that you are not right, for most of us prefer hard work here to the dulness of the prisons in the west. Now, lad," he went on, dropping

his voice, "if you have got any money do not say a word about it. You will be robbed to a certainty if you keep it yourself. The best thing you can do is to hand it over to me, and I will take care of it for you." Godfrey nodded, and putting his hand in his pocket pulled out the ten-rouble note he had set aside, and two or three smaller notes, and slipped them into the man's hand.

"You can have it out as you want it," the man said; "and anything you want outside I can get for you out of it. The only thing prohibited is vodka."

Some of the other men came round, and Godfrey thought he had never seen more villainous faces. Some of them were heavy, stolid, and stupid; others were fierce and passionate.

"He is a vagabond," Mikail said to them. "I don't know what he has been before that, and if he is wise," and he gave a significant glance at Godfrey, "he will keep that to himself."

"I should say he had been a political," one of the men said in a tone of contempt, for there was a certain jealousy of the politicals among the convict class; because, although their lot was really much harder than that of ordinary convicts, they were allowed to retain their own clothes, were lodged separately, and were almost all men of education, and in many cases of noble family. The feeling was evidenced by the indifference with which the rest of the men strolled away again when they heard the suggestion.

"How do they all get tobacco?" Godfrey asked the starosta. "Is it part of the rations? Surely the money they may have when they come in here must soon be spent."

"We may buy the tobacco," Mikail said. "Every man has something for his work. They pretend it is half the value of the work we do, but of course we know better than that. Still we all get something each day, and can spend it as we like. I don't think they allow smoking in the western prisons, but they do in all those east of Irkutsk. The authorities encourage it, indeed, for it is considered healthy and keeps away fever. There are no fevers in summer, but in

winter, from so many men being shut up together, the air gets bad and sometimes we have outbreaks of fever."

"But where do you buy your tobacco?"

"People come to the prison gates and sell it as we come back from work. You can buy anything except vodka, and you can buy that, though not openly; it gets smuggled in."

"How many hours do you work a day?"

"Thirteen; but of course it is only for five months in the year. In winter the ground is too hard."

"Too hard!" Godfrey repeated. "Why, it never gets cold in mines."

"You don't think you are going to work underground, do you?" the man said; "there are very few underground mines here. It is all on the surface. There are some underground, because I have worked in them. I would rather work there than here. They can't look after you so sharp, and you can take it as easily as you like."

Godfrey looked astonished. His ideas of the Siberian mines had been taken from stories written by men who had never been within thousands of miles of them, and who drew terrible pictures of the sufferings of exiles simply for the purpose of exciting feeling throughout Europe against the Russian government.

"But it is very unhealthy in the mines underground, is it not?"

"No; why should it be? It is much cooler and pleasanter working underground than it is in the dust and heat, I can tell you."

"But I thought all quicksilver mines were unhealthy."

"Quicksilver!" the man repeated; "there is not a quicksilver mine in all Siberia. There is gold and silver, but I don't believe there is a place where quicksilver is found. Anyhow there is not one that is worked. They have been gammoning you, young fellow."

"Well, they have gammoned a good many other people too," Godfrey said. "I know I have read frightful accounts of the sufferings of prisoners in quicksilver mines."

"Who wrote them?" Mikail asked. "There are a few convicts who may years afterwards be proved innocent, and allowed to return to Russia, but they are not the sort that would write lies about this place, for if they did they would soon find themselves on the road again. There are not a dozen men who have ever made their escape. Some of them may have invented lies for the sake of getting pity, and make themselves out to be hard used. Have you ever read any books by them?"

"Only one," Godfrey said. "It was written by Baron Rosen; he was a political prisoner who was pardoned after being here a great many years. He described the life of political prisoners, of course, and even that was not very bad. Many of them had their wives with them, and they seem to have lived together pretty comfortably."

"Ah! well, I don't think a political prisoner who came here now would say as much. They are sent to lonely settlements, many of them up at Yakutsk; though, of course, there are some down here. It is a horribly dull life. Some of them do work in the mines, but they are better off than those who have no work to do at all. I would rather be in for murder a hundred times than be a political; and what name do you go by, young fellow?"

"I am entered as Ivan Holstoff."

"That will do well enough. Don't you be fool enough to tell anyone what your real name is. There are sneaks here as well as elsewhere who are glad enough to curry favour so as to get easy jobs, or to be let out sooner than they otherwise would be, by acting as spies; so you keep your real name to yourself. If it got to the ears of the governor he might find out what prison you escaped from and what you were in for, and if you were a political you would either be sent back there, or put with the politicals here, so keep it to yourself."

"Shall I give you my watch?"

"Yes, I think you had better. It would be of no good to anyone who took it as long as he was in here, but he would be

able to sell it when he went to live outside. I will take care of it for you. I have got a safe where I keep the money and things locked.

"We have got to work, and pretty hard, but I tell you we are a good bit better off than they are in the prisons of Russia. We have got plenty to eat, though I cannot say much for its niceness; anyhow we are a long way better fed than the soldiers who look after us; but here comes the food."

A warder brought in a huge tray upon which were placed bowls of a sort of soup, while two others brought baskets piled up with huge chunks of black bread. Mikail took from a cupboard a spoon, and gave it to Godfrey. "You keep this for yourself," he said; "we don't have knives and forks, and do not want them."

"Is this a day's allowance of bread?" Godfrey asked, as he took hold of one of the lumps.

"No. You get as much as that in the morning. Our allowance is four pounds a day, two in the morning and two in the evening. The evening bread generally lasts for evening and morning soup, and we take the morning bread away with us to eat in the middle of the day."

Godfrey sat down on the edge of the bed bench and ate his supper. As he looked at the men more carefully he saw that there were greater differences between them than he had at first noticed. Some of them he judged to have been gentlemen, and he afterwards found that there were three or four who had been officers in the army, but sentenced for grave military crimes. There were half a dozen in for forgery or embezzlement, and over thirty for murder. Some among the prisoners were Tartars. These were all in for murder or robbery with violence.

"Where am I to sleep?" he presently asked Mikail.

"I sleep in that corner next to the wall. Put your bag next to mine. They are not so likely to play tricks with you then."

Godfrey was not sorry to lay himself down on the boards. There was no attempt at undressing on the part of any of the

convicts. He would have thought the bed a very hard one a few months since; but he was now well contented with it, though he would have preferred rather more room on each side.

"I suppose I ought to feel very miserable," he said to himself. "I can't make out why I don't. Here am I shut up with about a hundred as villainous-looking fellows as one could want to see—something like half of them murderers, all desperate criminals. I ought to be down in the dumps. It seems unnatural that I shouldn't be. I suppose I have a sort of Mark Tapley disposition, and get jolly under difficulties. Of course I should feel it more if I hadn't made up my mind to escape somehow. The colonel seems a good sort of fellow, and even the prisoners speak well of him. Then it is a comfort to hear that all that talk about the quicksilver mines was a lie, and the work is going to be no worse than a gold-digger would have in California or a navy at home. There is no great hardship about that, at any rate for a time. If it was not for the thought of how horribly anxious they must be at home about me, I should not mind. It will be something to talk about all one's life. The first thing for me to do is to learn from the others as much as possible about the country. I have learned a lot about the geography of Siberia from Alexis, and have got a good idea about all the rivers. I dare say I shall learn a good deal more from some of these men. Another thing is to pick up as much of their language as I can from these Tartar fellows. They seem to be scattered pretty well all over the country. At least I have seen some of them all the way I have gone. I know there are other tribes. Those fishing chaps they call Ostjaks are the ones I should have most to do with. I expect one could get on with them if one happened to get them in the right vein. I suppose they speak some sort of dialect like that of these Tartars. At any rate I should think it would be sure to be near enough for the natives to understand each other. I believe Russian helps with all these languages, for the Russians are themselves

only civilised Tartars. At any rate one of the first things to be done is to learn to speak the language, and I should be able to learn a lot about the country from them too. I have got eight or nine months before one can think of making a start, for of course it must be done in the spring. It is the end of September now, though I have lost all account of the days of the month."

So he lay thinking for a long time, always confidently and hopefully. Soon after daylight the convicts were astir.

"Is there any place where we can get water to wash?" he asked Mikail.

"There is a tap and a trough out there in the yard," the man said, looking somewhat surprised at the request.

Godfrey hurried out, threw off his jacket and shirt, turned the tap on to his head, and enjoyed a thorough sluice. Feeling vastly better for the wash, he slipped on his things again and went into the room. He was not surprised now that he had woken with something like a headache, for the air of the room was close and unwholesome. Breakfast similar to the supper the night before was soon served. Godfrey had plenty of bread left from the evening before, and put the piece now served out to him under his jacket. Half an hour later the convicts, ranged two and two, started for the mines. The distance was five miles. The heavy tools were taken in carts drawn by horses, and a guard of soldiers with loaded muskets marched beside the line.

The mine was a large open cutting, and the prisoners were employed in digging the sand and carrying it on hand-barrows to the place where it was to be washed. The work was not entirely performed by prisoners, as there were many free labourers also employed. Godfrey was given a shovel, and his work consisted in loading the sand and gravel, as the pickmen got it down, on to the barrows. Being unaccustomed to work, his back ached and his hands were blistered by the end of the day; but he knew, from his experience in rowing, that this would pass off before long. At any rate the labour was far

easier than he had anticipated. He had expected to see overseers with whips, but there was nothing of the sort. A few men directed the labour, and spoke sharply enough if they saw any of the prisoners shirking, but there was nothing to distinguish it from any other work of the kind, save the Cossack guards here and there leaning upon their muskets, and certainly the men worked no harder than ordinary labourers would do. Indeed, when the time was up and the prisoners started on their return towards the prison, the free labourers continued their work, and would do so, he afterwards learned, for some hours, as it would take a considerable time for all the sand obtained during the day to be thoroughly washed up and the gold extracted. Godfrey had at first looked narrowly at the sand as he shovelled it, for specks of gold, but had seen none; and indeed the proportion of gold at the mines of Kara was so small that they would not have paid if worked by free labour; but the produce served to lessen the expenses of the prisons, and the mines afforded work to the convicts. The prisoners were not forbidden to talk, and Godfrey, who had happened to be placed next to a young fellow of the better class, learned a good many particulars as to the mines. He had seen no women at them, and asked if they were not employed at that labour.

"I never heard of such a thing," the other said. "They have to work; they wash and mend our clothes, and scrub the floors, and help the cooks, but that is all. After working for a certain time, according to the length of their sentence, they are allowed to live out of prison, and after a still further time are at liberty to settle down anywhere in Siberia they choose."

"Have you been here long?" Godfrey asked.

"I have been here three years," he said, "and I should be out by this time if I had not run away last year."

"How did you get on?"

"I got on well enough till the cold weather came. There are plenty of berries in the woods, and besides we occasionally came down and stole things from the carts waiting at

night at the post-houses. We got a chest of tea once, and that lasted us all through the summer. There were ten of us together. Besides that, the people all along the road are very good to escaped prisoners. They dare not give them anything, because, if it were known they did so, they would be severely punished; but on the window-sill of almost every house is placed at night a plate with food on it, in case any wanderer should come along. Of course when winter came I had to give myself up."

"Do you think escape altogether is possible?"

"I don't say that it is not possible, for some have done it; but I suppose for every one who has tried it, hundreds have died. There is no living in the mountains in winter. Men do get free. There are a great many private mines, and in some of these they ask no questions, but are glad enough to engage anyone who comes along. After working there as a free labourer for a couple of years it is comparatively easy to move somewhere else, and in time one may even settle down as a free labourer in a town; but there is no getting right away then, for no one can leave Siberia without a passport giving particulars of all his life.

"You are not thinking of trying, are you? because, if you will take my advice, you won't. It is all very well to go out for a summer holiday, but that is a very different thing from attempting an escape. I was a fool to try it, but I had such a longing to be in the woods that I could not help it. So now I shall be obliged to work here for a couple of years longer before I can live outside the prison. I am here for knocking down my colonel. We were both in love with the same girl. She liked me best, and her father liked him best. He was a tyrannical brute. One day he insulted me before her, and I knocked him down. I was tried for that, and he trumped up a lot of other charges against me; and there was no difficulty in getting plenty of hounds to swear to them. So you see here I am with a ten years' sentence. I don't know that I am not lucky."

"How is that?" Godfrey asked.

"There were half a dozen fellows in the regiment—I was one of them—who ventured to think for themselves. We had secret meetings, and were in communication with men of other regiments. Well, I was sent off before anything came of it. But they got hold of the names of the others when they arrested some Nihilists at Kieff, and they were all sent out here for life. I met one of them a few months back, and he told me so. So you see it was rather lucky that I knocked down the colonel when I did. Besides, it is ever so much better to be a convict than a political. I don't know how it was you had the luck to get turned in with us. I can tell you there is no comparison between their lot and ours. Still it is hateful, of course, living among such a gang as these fellows."

"They look pretty bad," Godfrey said.

"Bad is not the word for it," the other said. "A man I know who works as a clerk in the office told me that there are about two thousand two hundred prisoners in the six prisons of Kara, but of these only about a hundred and fifty are women. They are even worse than the men, for of the hundred and fifty there are a hundred and twenty-five murderesses, and of the others twelve are classed as vagabonds, and I suppose most of these are murderesses too. Out of the two thousand men there are about six hundred and seventy murderers. That is not such a big proportion as among the women, though, as there are nearly seven hundred classed as vagabonds, you would not be far wrong if you put down every other man as a murderer."

"It is horrible," Godfrey said.

"Well, it is not pleasant; but you must remember that a great many of these murderers may be otherwise pretty honest fellows. A great many of them have killed a man or woman when mad with vodka; some of the others have done it in a fit of jealousy; a few perhaps out of vengeance for some great wrong. The rest, I grant, are thoroughly bad.

"By the way, my name is Osip Ivanoff. There are two or

three decent fellows in our ward. I will introduce you to them this evening. It makes it pleasanter keeping together. We have got some cards, and that helps pass away the summer evenings. In winter it is too dark to play. There is only one candle in the ward; so there is nothing for it but to lay up and go to sleep as soon as it gets dark. There is the prison. I daresay you won't be sorry when you are back. The first three or four days' work is always trying."

CHAPTER IX

PRISON LIFE

GODFREY found that there was no Sunday break in the work at Kara, but that once a fortnight the whole of the occupants of the ward had baths, and upon these days no work was done. Upon a good many saints' days they also rested; so that, practically, they had a holiday about once in every ten days. For his own part he would have been glad had the work gone on without these breaks. When the men started for work at five in the morning, and returned to the prison at seven at night, the great majority, after smoking a pipe or two, turned in at once, while upon the days when there was no work quarrels were frequent; and, what was to him still more objectionable, men told stories of their early lives, and seemed proud rather than otherwise of the horrible crimes they had committed. His own time did not hang at all heavy upon his hands.

One of the Tartar prisoners who spoke Russian was glad enough to agree, in exchange for a sufficient amount of tobacco to enable him to smoke steadily while so employed, to teach him his own dialect. Godfrey found, as he had expected, a sufficient similarity between the two languages to

assist him very greatly, and with two hours' work every evening, and a long bout on each holiday, he made rapid progress with it, especially as he got into the habit of going over and over again through the vocabulary of all the words he had learned, while he was at work in the mine. When not employed with the Tartar he spent his time in conversation with Osip Ivanoff and the little group of men of the same type. They spent much of their time in playing cards, whist being a very popular game in Russia. They often invited Godfrey to join them, but his mind was so much occupied with his own plans that he felt quite unable to give the requisite attention to the game.

He soon learnt the methods by which order and discipline were maintained in the prisons. For small offences the punishment was a decrease in the rations, the prohibition of smoking—the prisoners' one enjoyment—and confinement to the room. The last part of the sentence was that which the prisoners most disliked. So far from work being hardship, the break which it afforded to the monotony of their life rendered the privation of it the severest of punishments, and Godfrey learned that there was the greatest difficulty in getting men to accept the position of starosta, in spite of the privileges and power the position gave, because he did not go out to work. For more serious offences men were punished by a flogging, more or less severe, with birch rods. For this, however, they seemed to care very little, although sometimes incapacitated for doing work for some days, from the effects of the beating.

Lastly, for altogether exceptional crimes, or for open outbreaks of insubordination, there was the *plete*—flogging with a whip of twisted hide, fastened to a handle ten inches long and an inch thick. The lash is at first the same thickness as the handle, tapering for twelve inches, and then divided into three smaller lashes, each twenty-five inches long and about the thickness of the little finger. This terrible weapon is in use only at three of the Siberian prisons, of which Kara is

one. From twenty to twenty-five lashes are given, and the punishment is considered equivalent to a sentence to death, as in many cases the culprit survives the punishment but a short time. The prisoners were agreed that at Kara the punishment of the *plete* was extremely rare, only being given for the murder of a convict or official by one of the convicts. The quarrels among the prisoners, although frequent, and attended by great shouting and gesticulation, very rarely came to blows, the Russians having no idea of using their fists, and the contests, when it came to that, being little more than a tussle, with hair pulling and random blows. Had the prisoners had knives or other weapons ready to hand, the results would have been very different.

Godfrey had not smoked until he arrived at Kara; but he found that in the dense atmosphere of the prison room it was almost necessary, and therefore took to it. Besides smoking being allowed as useful to ward off fevers and improve the health of the prisoners, it also had the effect of adding to their contentment, rendering them more easy of management, as the fear of the smoking being cut off did more to ensure ready obedience than even the fear of the stick. Tea was not among the articles of prison diet; but a samovar was always kept going by Mikail, and the tea sold to the prisoners at its cost price, and the small sum paid to the convicts sufficed to provide them with this and with tobacco.

Vodka was but seldom smuggled in, the difficulty of bringing it in being great, and the punishment of those detected in doing so being severe. At times, however, a supply was brought in, being carried, as Godfrey found, in skins similar to those used for sausages, filled with the spirit and wound round and round the body. These were generally brought in when one or other of the prisoners had received a remittance, as most of them were allowed to receive a letter once every three months; and these letters, in the case of men who had once been in a good position, generally contained money. This privilege was only allowed to men after two years' unbroken good conduct.

Godfrey's teacher in the Tartar language had been recommended to him by Osip as being the most companionable of the Tartar prisoners. He was a young fellow of three or four and twenty, short and sturdy, like most of his race, and with a good-natured expression in his flat face. He was in for life, having in a fit of passion killed a Russian officer who had struck him with a whip. He came from the neighbourhood of Kasan in the far west. Godfrey took a strong liking to him, and it was not long before he conceived the idea that when he made his escape he would, if possible, take Luka with him. Such companionship would be of immense advantage, and would greatly diminish the difficulties of the journey. As for Luka, he became greatly attached to his pupil. The Tartars were looked down upon by their fellow-prisoners, and the terms of equality with which Godfrey chatted with them, and his knowledge of the world, which seemed to the Tartar to be prodigious, made him look up to him with unbounded respect.

The friendship was finally cemented by an occurrence that took place three months after Godfrey arrived at the prison. Among the convicts was a man named Kobylin, a man of great strength. He boasted that he had committed ten murders, and was always bullying and tyrannising the quieter and weaker prisoners. One day he passed where Luka and Godfrey were sitting on the edge of the plank bed talking together. Luka happened to get up just as he came along, and Kobylin gave him a violent push, saying, "Get out of the way, you miserable little Tartar dog."

Luka fell with his head against the edge of the bench, and lay for a time half stunned. Godfrey leapt to his feet, and springing forward struck the bully a right-handed blow straight from the shoulder. The man staggered back several paces, and fell over the opposite bench. Then, with a shout of fury, he recovered his feet and rushed at Godfrey, with his arms extended to grasp him; but the lad, who had been one of the best boxers at Shrewsbury, awaited his onset calmly, and, mak-

ing a spring forward just as Kobylin reached him, landed a blow, given with all his strength and the impetus of his spring, under the Russian's chin, and the man went backwards as if he had been shot.

A roar of applause broke from the convicts. Mikail rushed forward, but Godfrey said to him:

"Let us alone, Mikail. This fellow has been a nuisance in the ward ever since I came. It is just as well that he should have a lesson. I sha'n't do him any harm. Just leave us alone for a minute or two; he won't want much more."

The Russian rose slowly to his feet, bewildered and half stupefied by the blow and fall. He would probably have done nothing more; but, maddened by the taunts and jeers of the others, he gathered himself together and renewed the attack, but he in vain attempted to seize his active opponent. Godfrey eluded his furious rushes, and before he could recover himself, always succeeded in getting in two or three straight blows, and at last met him, as in his first rush, and knocked him off his feet.

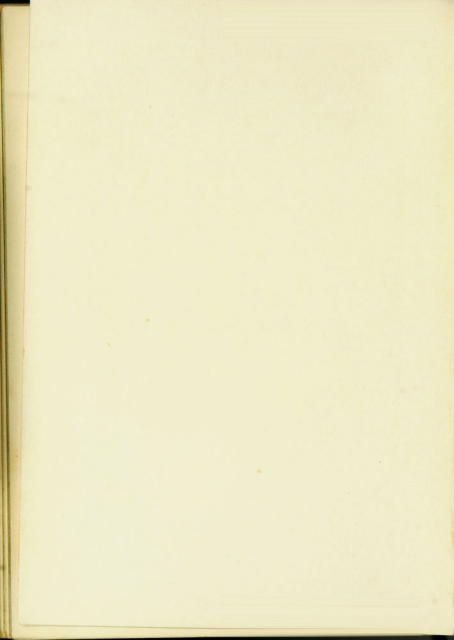
By this time Kobylin had had enough of it, and sat on the floor bewildered and crestfallen. Everything that a Russian peasant does not understand savours to him of magic; and that he, Kobylin, should have been thus vanquished by a mere lad seemed altogether beyond nature. He could not understand how it was that he had been unable to grasp his foe, or how that, like a stroke of lightning, these blows had shot into his face. Even the jeering and laughter of his companions failed to stir him. The Russian peasant is accustomed to be beaten, and is humble to those who are his masters. Kobylin rose slowly to his feet.

"You have beaten me," he said humbly. "I do not know how; forgive me; I was wrong. I am ignorant, and did not know."

"Say no more about it," Godfrey replied. "We have had a quarrel, and there is an end of it. There need be no malice. We are all prisoners here together, and it is not right that one



GODFREY PUNISHES KOBYLIN IN THE CONVICT PRISON



should bully others because he happens to be a little stronger. There are other things besides strength. You behaved badly, and you have been punished. Let us smoke our pipes, and think no more about it."

The sensation caused in the ward by the contest was prodigious, and the victory of this lad was as incomprehensible to the others as to Kobylin himself. The rapidity with which the blows were delivered, and the ease with which Godfrey had evaded the rushes of his opponent, seemed to them, as to him, almost magical, and from that moment they regarded Godfrey as being possessed of some strange power, which placed him altogether apart from themselves. Osip and the other men of the same stamp warmly congratulated Godfrey.

"What magic is this?" Osip said, taking him by the shoulders and looking with wonder at him. "I have been thinking you but a lad, and yet that strong brute is as a child in your hands. It is the miracle of David and Goliath over again."

"It is simply skill against brute force, Osip. I may tell you, what I have not told anyone before since I came here, that my mother was English. I did not say so, because, as you may guess, I feared that were it known and reported it might be traced who I was, and then, instead of being merely classed as a vagabond, I should be sent back to the prison I escaped from, and be put among another class of prisoners."

"I understand, Ivan. Of course I have all along felt sure you were a political prisoner; and I thought, perhaps, you might have been a student in Switzerland, which would account for you having ideas different to other people."

"No, I was sent for a time to a school in England, and there I learned to box."

"So, that is your English boxing," Osip said. "I have heard of it, but I never thought it was anything like that. Why, he never once touched you."

"If he had, I should have got the worst of it," Godfrey laughed; "but there was nothing in it. Size and weight go for very little in boxing; and a man knowing nothing about it

has not the smallest chance against a fair boxer who is active on his legs."

"But you did not seem to be exerting yourself," Osip said. "You were as cool and as quiet as if you had been shovelling sand. You even laughed when he rushed at you."

"That is the great point of boxing, Osip. One learns to keep cool, and to have one's wits about one; for anyone who loses his temper has but a poor chance indeed against another who keeps cool. Moreover a man who can box well will always keep his head in all times of danger and difficulty. It gives him nerve and self-confidence, and enables him at all times to protect the weak against the strong."

"Just as you did now," Osip said. "Well, I would not have believed it if I had not seen it. I am sure we all feel obliged to you for having taken down that fellow Kobylin. He and a few others have been a nuisance for some time. You may be sure there will be no more trouble with them after the lesson you have given."

Luka's gratitude to Godfrey was unbounded, and from that time he would have done anything on his behalf, while the respect with which he had before regarded him was redoubled. Therefore when one day Godfrey said to him, "When the spring comes, Luka, I mean to try to escape, and I shall take you with me," the Tartar considered it to be a settled thing, and was filled with a deep sense of gratitude that his companion should deem him worthy of sharing in his perils.

Winter set in in three weeks after Godfrey reached Kara, and the work at the mine had to be abandoned. As much employment as possible was made for the convicts. Some were sent out to aid in bringing in the trees that had been felled during the previous winter for firewood, others sawed the wood up and split it into billets for the stoves, other parties went out into the forest to fell trees for the next winter's fires. Some were set to whitewash the houses, a process that was done five times a year; but in spite of all this there was not work for half the number. The time hung very heavily on

the hands of those who were unemployed. Godfrey was not of this number, for as soon as the work at the mine terminated he received an order to work in the office as a clerk.

He warmly appreciated this act of kindness on the part of the commandant. It removed him from the constant companionship of the convicts, which was now more unpleasant than before, as during the long hours of idleness quarrels were frequent and the men became surly and discontented. Besides this he received regular pay for his work, and this was of importance, as it was necessary to start upon such an undertaking as he meditated with as large a store of money as possible. He had, since his arrival, refused to join in any of the proposals for obtaining luxuries from outside. The supply of food was ample, for in addition to the bread and soup there was, three or four times a week, an allowance of meat, and his daily earnings in the mines were sufficient to pay for tobacco and tea. Even the ten roubles he had handed over to Mikail remained untouched.

One reason why he was particularly glad at being promoted to the office was that he had observed, upon the day when he first arrived, a large map of Siberia hanging upon the wall; and although he had obtained from Alexis and others a fair idea of the position of the towns and various convict settlements, he knew nothing of the wild parts of the country through which he would have to pass, and the inhabited portion formed but a small part indeed of the whole. During the winter months he seized every opportunity, when for a few minutes he happened to be alone in the office, to study the map and to obtain as accurate an idea as possible of the ranges of mountains. One day, when the colonel was out, and the other two clerks were engaged in taking an inventory of stores, and he knew, therefore, that he had little chance of being interrupted, he pushed a table against the wall, and with a sheet of tracing paper took the outline of the northern coast from the mouth of the Lena to Norway, specially marking the entrances to all rivers however small. He also took a tracing,

giving the positions of the towns and rivers across the nearest line between the head of Lake Baikal and the nearest point of the Angara river, one of the great affluents of the Yenesei.

The winter passed slowly and uneventfully. The cold was severe, but he did not feel it, the office being well warmed, and the heat in the crowded prison far greater than was agreeable to him. At Christmas there were three days of festivity. The people of Kara, and the peasants round, all sent in gifts for the prisoners. Everyone laid by a little money to buy special food for the occasion, and vodka had been smuggled in. The convicts of the different prisons were allowed to visit each other freely, and although there was much drunkenness on Christmas day there were no serious quarrels. All were on their best behaviour, but Godfrey was glad when all was over and they returned to their ordinary occupations again, for the thought of the last Christmas he had spent in England brought the change in his circumstances home to him more strongly than ever, and for once his buoyant spirits left him, and he was profoundly depressed, while all around him were cheerful and gay.

Nothing surprised Godfrey more than the brutal indifference with which most of the prisoners talked of the crimes they had committed, except perhaps the indifference with which these stories were listened to. It seemed to him indeed that some of the convicts had almost a pride in their crimes, and that they even went so far as to invent atrocities for the purpose of giving themselves a supremacy in ferocity over their fellows. He noticed that those who were in for minor offences, such as robbery with violence, forgery, embezzlement, and military insubordination, were comparatively reticent as to their offences, and that it was those condemned for murder who were the most given to boasting about their exploits.

"One could almost wish," he said one day to his friend Osip, "that one had the strength of Samson, to bring the building down and destroy the whole of them."

"I am very glad you have not, if you have really a fancy of

that sort. I have not the least desire to be finished off in that sudden way."

"But it is dreadful to listen to them," Godfrey said. "I cannot understand what the motive of government can be in sending thousands of such wretches out here instead of hanging them. I can understand transporting people who have been convicted of minor offences, as, when their term is up, they may do well and help to colonise the country. But what can be hoped from such horrible ruffians as these? They have the trouble of keeping them for years, and even when they are let out no one can hope that they will turn out useful members of the community. They probably take to their old trade and turn brigands."

"I don't think they do that. Some of those who escape soon after coming out might do so, but not when they have been released. They would not care then to run the risk of either being flogged to death by the *plete* or kept in prison for the rest of their lives. Running away is nothing. I have heard of a man, who had run away repeatedly, being chained to a barrow which he had to take with him wherever he went, indoors and out. That is the worst I ever heard of, for as for flogging with rods these fellows think very little of it. They will often walk back in the autumn to the same prison they went from, take their flogging, and go to work as if nothing had happened. They are never flogged with the *plete* for that sort of thing, that is kept for murder or heading a mutiny in which some of the officials have been killed. No; the brigands are chiefly composed of long-sentence men who have got away early, and who perhaps have killed a Cossack or a policeman who tried to arrest them, or some peasant who will not supply them with food. After that they dare not return, and so join some band of brigands in order to be able to keep to the woods through the winter. I think that very few of the men who have once served their time and been released ever come back again."

During the winter the food, although still ample, was less

than the allowance they had received while working. The allowance of bread was reduced by a pound a day, and upon Wednesdays and Fridays, which were fast days, no meat was issued except to those engaged in chopping up firewood or bringing in timber from the forest. Leather gloves were served out to all men working in the open air, but in spite of this their hands were frequently frost-bitten. The evenings would have been long indeed to Godfrey had it not been for his Tartar instructor; the two would sit on the bench in the angle of the room and would talk together in Tartar eked out by Russian. The young fellow's face was much more intelligent than those of the majority of his countrymen, and there was a merry and good-tempered expression in his eyes. They chatted about his home and his life there. His mother had been an Ostjak, and he had spent some years among her tribe on the banks both of the Obi and Yenesei, but had never been far north on either river. He took his captivity easily. His father and mother both died when he had been a child, and when he was not with the Ostjaks he had lived with his father's brother, who had, he said, "droves of cattle and horses."

"If they would put me to work on a river," he said, "I should not mind. Here one has plenty to eat, and the work is not hard, and there is a warm room to sleep in, but I should like to be employed in cutting timber and taking it in rafts down the river to the sea. I love the river, and I can shoot. All the Ostjaks can shoot, though shooting has brought me bad luck. If I had not had my bow in my hand when that Russian struck me I should not be here now. It was all done in a moment. You see I was on the road when his sledge came along. The snow was fresh and soft, and I did not hear it coming. The horses swerved, nearly upsetting the sledge, and knocking me down in the snow. Then I got up and swore at the driver, and then the Russian, who was angry because the sledge had nearly been upset, jumped out, caught the whip from the driver and struck me across the face. It hurt me

badly, for my face was cold. I had been in the wood shooting squirrels, and I hardly know how it was, but I fitted an arrow to the string and shot. It was all over in a moment, and there he lay on the snow with the arrow through his throat. I was so frightened that I did not even try to run away, and was stupid enough to let the driver hold me till some people came up and carried me off to prison; so you see my shooting did me harm. But it was hard to be sent here for life for a thing like that. He was a bad man that Russian. He was an officer in one of the regiments there, and a soldier who was in prison with me afterwards told me that there was great joy among the soldiers when he was killed."

"But it was very wrong, Luka, to kill a man like that."

"Yes; but then you see I hadn't time to think. I was almost mad with pain, and it was all done in a minute. I think it is very hard that I should be punished as much as I am when there are many here who have killed five or six people, or more, and some of them women, and they have no worse punishment than I have. Look at Kobylin; he was a bandit first of all, as I have heard him say over and over again. He beat his wife to death, because she scolded him for being drunk, then he took to the woods. The first he killed was a Jew pedlar, then he burnt down the house of the head-man of a village because he had put the police on his track. He killed him as he rushed out from the door, and his wife and children were burnt alive. He killed four or five others on the road, and when he was betrayed, as he was asleep in the hut, he cut down with an axe two of the policemen who came to arrest him. He is in for life, but he is a great deal worse than I am, is he not?"

"Then there is that little Koshkin, the man who is always walking about smiling to himself. He was a clerk to a notary, and he murdered his master and mistress and two servant women, and got away with the money and lived on it for a year; then he went into another family and did the same, but this time the police got on his track and caught him. Nine

lives he took altogether, not in a passion or because they were cruel to him. I heard him say that he was quite a favourite, and how he used to sing to them and was trusted in every way. No, I say it isn't fair that I, who did nothing but just pay a man for a blow, should get as much as those two."

"It does seem rather hard on you, but you see there cannot be a great variety of punishments. You killed a man, and so you had sentence for life. They can't give more than that, and if they were to give less there would be more murders than there are, for everyone would think that they could kill at least one person without being punished very heavily for it."

"I don't call mine murder at all," Luka said. "I would not kill a man for his money; but this was just a fight. Whiz went his whip across my face, and then whiz went my arrow."

"Oh, it is not so bad, Luka, I grant. If you had killed a man in cold blood I would have had nothing to do with you. I could not be friends with a man who was a cold-blooded murderer. I could never give him my hand, or travel with him, or sleep by his side. I don't feel that with you. In the eye of the law you committed a murder, and the law does not ask why it was done, or care in what way it was done. The law only says you killed the man, and the punishment for that is imprisonment for life. But I, as a man, can see that there is a great difference in the moral guilt, and that, acting as you did in a fit of passion, suddenly and without premeditation, and smarting under an assault, it was what we should in England call manslaughter. Before I asked you to teach me, when Osip first said that he should recommend me to try you, I saw by the badge on your coat that you were in for murder, and if it had not been that he knew how it came about, I would not have had anything to do with you, even if I had been obliged to give up altogether my idea of learning your language."

The starosta continued a steady friend to Godfrey. The

lad acted as a sort of deputy to him, and helped him to keep the accounts of the money he spent for the convicts, and the balance due to them, and once did him real service. As Mikail's office was due to the vote of the prisoners, his authority over them was but slight, and although he was supported by a considerable majority of them there were some who constantly opposed him, and at times openly defied his authority. Had Mikail reported their conduct they would have been severely punished; but they knew he was very averse to getting anyone into trouble, and that he preferred to settle things for himself. He was undoubtedly the most powerful man in the ward, and even the roughest characters feared to provoke him singly.

On one occasion, however, after he had knocked down a man who had refused to obey his orders, six or seven of his fellow convicts sprung on him. Godfrey, Osip, and three or four of the better class of convicts rushed to his assistance, and for a few minutes there was a fierce fight, the rest of the prisoners looking on at the struggle but taking no active part one way or the other. The assailants were eventually overpowered, and nothing might have been said about the matter had it not been that one of Mikail's party was seriously injured, having an arm broken and being severely kicked. Mikail was therefore obliged to report the matter, and the whole of the men concerned in the attack upon him received a severe flogging.

"I should look out for those fellows, Mikail," Godfrey said, "or they may injure you if they have a chance."

Mikail, however, scoffed at the idea of danger.

"They have got it pretty severely now," he said, "and the colonel told them that if there was any more insubordination he would give them the *plete*; and they have a good deal too much regard for their lives to risk that. You won't hear any more of it. They know well enough that I would not have reported them if I had not been obliged to do so, owing to Boulkin's arm being broken; therefore it isn't fair having any grudge against me. They have been flogged before most of

them, and by the time the soreness has passed off they will have forgotten it."

Godfrey did not feel so sure of that, and determined to keep his eye upon the men. He did not think they would openly assault the starosta, but at night one of them might do him an injury, relying upon the difficulty of proving under such circumstances who had been the assailant.

The solitary candle that burned in the ward at night was placed well out of reach and protected by a wire frame. It could not, therefore, be extinguished, but the light it gave was so faint that, except when passing just under the beam from which it hung, it would be impossible to identify anyone even at arm's-length. Two of those concerned in the attack on Mikail were the men of whom Luka had been speaking. Kobylin the bandit muttered and scowled whenever the starosta came near him, and there could be little doubt that had he met him outside the prison walls he would have shown him no mercy. Koshkin on the other hand appeared to cherish no enmity.

"I have done wrong, Mikail," he said half an hour after he had had his flogging, "and I have been punished for it. It was not your fault; it was mine. These things will happen, you know, and there is no need for malice"; and he went about the ward smiling and rubbing his hands as usual and occasionally singing softly to himself. As Godfrey knew how submissive the Russians are under punishment he would have thought this perfectly natural had he not heard from Luka the man's history. That was how, he thought to himself, the scoundrel smiled upon the master and mistress he had resolved to murder. "Of the two I think there is more to be feared from him than from that villain Kobylin, who has certainly been civil enough to me since I gave him that thrashing. I will keep my eye on the little fellow."

Of necessity the ward became quiet very soon after night set in. The men talked and smoked for a short time, but in an hour after the candle was lit the ward was generally per-

fectly quiet. Godfrey, working as he did indoors, was far less inclined for sleep than either the men who had been working in the forest or those who had been listlessly passing the day in enforced idleness, and he generally lay awake for a long time, either thinking of home and school-days, or in meditating over his plans for escape as soon as spring arrived, and he now determined to keep awake still longer. "They are almost all asleep by seven o'clock," he said to himself. "If any of those fellows intend to do any harm to Mikail they will probably do it by ten or eleven, there will be no motive in putting it off longer; and indeed the ward is quieter then than it is later, for some of them when they wake light a pipe and have a smoke, and many do so early in the morning so as to have their smoke before going to work."

Five evenings passed without anything happening and Godfrey began to think that he had been needlessly anxious, and that Mikail must understand the ways of his own people better than he did. The sixth evening had also passed off quietly, and when Godfrey thought that it must be nearly twelve o'clock he was about to pull his blanket up over his ear and settle himself for sleep when he suddenly caught sight of a stooping figure coming along. It was passing under the candle when he caught sight of it. He did not feel quite sure that his eyes had not deceived him, for it was but a momentary glance he caught of a dark object an inch or two above the level of the feet of the sleepers.

Godfrey noiselessly pushed down his blanket, gathered his feet up in readiness for a spring, and grasped one of his shoes, which as usual he had placed behind the clothes-bag that served as his pillow. Several of the sleepers were snoring loudly, and intently as he listened he heard no footfall. In a few seconds, however, a dark figure arose against the wall at the foot of the bench; it stood there immovable for half a minute and then leaned over Mikail, placing one hand on the wall as if to enable him to stretch as far over as possible without touching the sleeper. Godfrey waited no longer but brought

the shoe down with all his force on the man's head, and then threw himself upon him pinning him down for a moment upon the top of Mikail. The latter woke with a shout of surprise followed by a sharp cry of pain. Godfrey clung to the man, who, as with a great effort he rose, dragged him from the bed, and the two rolled on the ground together. Mikail's shout had awakened the whole ward and a sudden din arose. Mikail leaped from the bench and as he did so fell over the struggling figures on the ground.

"Get hold of his hands, Mikail," Godfrey shouted, "he has got a knife and I can't hold him."

But in the dark it was some time before the starosta could make out the figures on the floor. Suddenly Godfrey felt Mikail's hand on his throat.

"That's me," he gasped. The hand was removed and a moment later he felt the struggles of his adversary cease, and there was a choking sound.

"That is right, Mikail, but don't kill him," he said.

At this moment the door at the end of the ward opened and two of the guard ran in with lanterns. They shouted orders to the convicts to keep their places on the benches.

"This way," Mikail called, "there has been attempted murder, I believe."

The guards came up with the lanterns.

"What has happened to him?" one of them said, bending over the man who was lying insensible on the ground.

"He is short of wind," Mikail said, "that is all that ails him; I had to choke him off."

"But what is it all about?"

"I don't know myself," Mikail said. "I was asleep when I felt a thump as if a cow had fallen on me, then I felt a sharp stab on the hip, two of them one after the other, then the weight was lifted suddenly off and I jumped up. As I put my feet on the ground I tumbled over Ivan here and—who is it? Hold the lantern close to his face—ah, Koshkin. What is it, Ivan, are you hurt?"

"He ran his knife pretty deep into my leg once or twice," Godfrey said. "I got his arms pinned down, but I could not keep him from moving his hands. If we had lain quiet he would have hurt me seriously, I expect; but we were both struggling, so he only got a chance to give me a dig now and then."

"But what is it all about, Ivan, for I don't quite understand yet?" Mikail asked.

"I told you, Mikail, that fellow would do you a mischief. You laughed at me, but I was quite sure that that smiling manner of his was all put on. I have lain awake for the last five nights to watch, and to-night I just caught sight of something crawling along at the edge of the bench. He stood up at your feet and leant over, as I thought then, and I know now, to stab you, but I flung myself on him, and you know the rest of it."

"Well, you have saved my life, there is no mistake about that," and Mikail lifted and laid him on the bench. "Now," he said to the guards, "you had better take that fellow out and put him in the guard cell, the cold air will bring him round as soon as you get him out of this room. You had better hold him tight when he does, for he is a slippery customer. When you have locked him up will one of you go round to the doctor's? This young fellow is bleeding fast, and I fancy I have lost a good deal of blood myself."

As soon as the soldiers had left the ward carrying Koshkin between them Mikail called Osip and Luka. "Here," he said, "get the lad's things down from under his iron belt and try and stop the bleeding till the doctor comes. I feel a bit faint myself or I would ask no one else to do it."

In ten minutes the doctor arrived. Godfrey had three cuts about half-way between the hip and the knee.

"They are of no consequence except for the bleeding," the doctor said. "Has anyone got a piece of cord?"

"There is a piece in my bag," Mikail replied. The doctor took it and made a rough tourniquet above the wounds, then

drew the edges together, put in two stitches in each, and then strapped them up. Then he attended to Mikail. "You have had a narrow escape," he said; "the knife has struck on your hip-bone and made a nasty gash, and there is another just below it. If the first wound had been two inches higher there would have been nothing to do but to bury you."

"Well, this is a nice business," Mikail said, when the doctor had left. "To think of that little villain being so treacherous! You were right and I was wrong, Ivan, though how you guessed he was up to mischief is more than I can imagine."

"Well, you know the fellow's history, Mikail, and that he had murdered nine people he had lived among and who trusted him. What could one expect from a villain like that?"

"Oh, I know he is a bad one," Mikail said, "but I did not think he dare take the risk."

"I don't suppose he thought there was much risk, Mikail. If I had been asleep he would have stabbed you to the heart, and when we found you dead in the morning who was to know what prisoner had done it?"

"Well, it was a lucky thought my putting you next to me, young fellow; I meant it for your good, not for my own, and now you see it has saved my life."

"A kind action always gets its reward, Mikail—always, sooner or later; in your case it has been sooner, you see. Now I shall go off to sleep, for I feel as drowsy as if I had been up for the last three nights."

CHAPTER X

PREPARATIONS FOR FLIGHT

THE next morning Godfrey and Mikail were by the doctor's orders carried to the hospital and placed in a comfortable and well-arranged ward. "You won't have to be here many days," the doctor said when he came round the ward. "I only had you brought here because the air is sweeter and better than it is in that room you were in." An hour later the governor with a clerk came in. Mikail was first called upon for his statement, which was written down by the clerk.

"Had you any reason for supposing that the man had any special enmity against you?" the governor asked.

"Only because of that flogging he had for the row in the ward last week, sir."

"Ah, yes, he was one of those who attacked you then and was flogged; that accounts for it."

Then Godfrey gave his account of what had happened.

"Did you observe anything that made you specially watchful?" the governor asked.

"I thought perhaps one of them might try to take revenge on Mikail, sir. One or two of them were very sullen and surly, and would, I thought, do him harm if they had the chance; but I suspected this man more than the others because he seemed so unnaturally pleasant, and as I had heard him boasting about the things for which he is here, I thought he was more dangerous than those who grumbled and threatened."

The governor nodded. "Yes, he is a thorough-paced villain; you have done very well, young man, and I shall not forget it."

Five days later there was a stir in front of the hospital, and Mikail, whose bed was by the side of the window, raised himself on his elbow and looked out.

"It is a punishment parade," he said; "I expect they are

going to flog Koshkin with the *plete*. No governor of a prison is allowed to do that until the circumstances of the case have been sent to the governor of the province, and the sentence receives his approval; that is no doubt what has caused the delay. All the prisoners are mustering."

Godfrey, who was in the next bed, managed to draw himself on to Mikail's, and then to sit up so as to look out. The whole of the convicts of that prison, some eight hundred in number, were drawn up forming three sides of a square; in front of them, four paces apart, were a line of soldiers with fixed bayonets, while behind was another line. Then Koshkin, stripped to the waist, was brought forward and bound to a thick board having an iron leg, so that when laid down the board inclined to an angle of about thirty degrees. On this he was so strapped as to be perfectly immovable. Then a man approached with the dreaded whip and took his place on one side of the criminal. The governor then entered the square. He was attended by all the prison officials. His face was very grave and stern, and he walked along the lines, scrutinising closely each man as he passed him. Then he took his place in the centre of the square and held up his hand.

"This man," he said, "has attempted to murder the starosta of his ward, and is for this sentenced to fifty lashes. Let this be a lesson to all here."

Then he signalled to the executioner, who brought down his lash with great force upon the bare back of the prisoner. A terrible cry broke from Koshkin. Two more blows were given, and then the executioner moved to the other side and delivered other three blows. In this way the lashes crossed each other at an angle. Godfrey could look no more, but crawled back on to his own bed. Mikail continued looking out until the punishment was over.

"He has not bled," he said; "he will die."

"How do you mean, Mikail?"

"Well, that is how it is, Ivan. It is as the executioner likes,

or as he is ordered. He can, according to the way he strikes, cut the flesh or not each stroke. If it bleeds the man seldom dies, if it doesn't there is little chance for him. There are several ways of flogging the prisoner, and his friends generally bribe the executioner; then he strikes with all his strength the first blow—that is terrible, but it seems to numb the flesh somehow, and afterwards he does not strike so hard, and the prisoner hardly feels the blows. The worst is when he hits softly at first and then harder and harder, then the man feels every blow to the end; but they are obliged to hit hard, if not they get flogged themselves. I saw a case where the executioner had been well bribed and, therefore, hit gently, and the prisoner was taken down and he was tied up in his place and got twenty lashes. Years ago they used the *plete* at all the prisons, now they only use it at three prisons, where the worst criminals are sent, and this is one of them."

A week later they were both discharged from the hospital and returned to the ward. The first thing they heard on entering it was that Koshkin had died the night before. Godfrey went back to his work in the office. He was doubtful how he should be received in the ward, but he found that, except by Kobylin and four or five others, he was welcomed quite cordially.

"You have done us all a service," Osip said. "There was sure to have been trouble sooner or later, and that flogging will cow these fellows for some time. This is only the second there has been since I came here—I mean, of course, at this prison. Besides, Mikail is a good fellow, and we all like him, and everyone would have been sorry if he had been killed."

"What is he in for? I never asked before. Of course, I see that he has the murderer's badge on his back. Do you know how it happened? I never heard him speak of it."

"Yes, he told us about it one evening, that was before he became starosta. Some vodka had been smuggled in and he had more than was good for him, and that opened his lips.

He had been a charcoal-burner and having had the good fortune to escape the conscription he married. She was a pretty girl, and it seems that the son of a rich proprietor had taken a fancy to her, and when the next year's conscription came he managed by some unfair means to get Mikail's name put down again on the list. Such things can be done, you know, by a man with influence. Mikail ran away and took to the woods. He was hunted for two or three months in vain. Then someone betrayed him, and one morning he woke up in a hut he had built for himself and saw the place was surrounded by soldiers.

"With the officers was the man who had injured him. Mikail was mad with fury, and rushing out with a big club he had cut he stretched the fellow dead on the ground—and served him right. However, of course Mikail was taken, tried, and condemned. He had killed a noble's son, and three weeks later was on his way to Siberia. His wife has followed him, and is living now in a village two miles away. Another six months and Mikail will have served his ten years, which is the least time a murderer can serve before he gets leave to live outside the prison. He is sure to get it then, his conduct has been always good, and no doubt this affair will count in his favour. His wife came out two years after he was sent here. She keeps herself by spinning and helping at a farm. It has been a good thing for Mikail, for it has kept him straight. If it had not been for that he would have taken to the woods long ago."

"I don't call that a murder," Godfrey said indignantly. "If I had been on the jury I would never have convicted him. He was treated illegally and had the right to resist."

"I don't blame him very much myself," Osip said. "Of course it would have been wiser to have submitted, and then to have tried to get off serving, but I don't suppose anyone would have listened to him. If it hadn't been a noble he killed I have no doubt he would have got off."

"But you are noble yourself, Osip."

"Yes, but that does not give me any marked advantage at present. Of course it will make a difference when I get out. My friends will send me money, and I shall live at Tobolsk and marry some wealthy gold-miner's daughter, and be in the best society. Oh, yes, it is an advantage being noble born, even in Siberia."

Godfrey was quite touched with the joy that Luka manifested when, on his return from work, he found him in the ward. "Ah, my master," he exclaimed, with tears in his eyes, "why did you not tell me that you were watching? I would have kept awake all night and would have thrown myself on that dog; it would have made no matter if he had killed me. It would not have hurt me so much as it did to see you bleeding."

"You must not call me master," Godfrey said, holding out his hand, which the Tartar seized and pressed to his forehead. "You and I are friends, there are no masters here."

Godfrey learnt that every effort had been made by the authorities to discover how Koshkin had obtained the knife, but without success. He must have bribed one of the guards to fetch it in for him, but there was no tracing which had been concerned in the matter. All the prisoners had been searched and their bags examined, but no other weapons had been discovered. Godfrey did not hear a single word of pity for Koshkin, or of regret at his death. Indifference for others was one of the leading characteristics of the prisoners. Although living so long together they seldom appeared to form a friendship of any kind; each man lived for and thought only of his own lot. Godfrey observed that it was very seldom that a prisoner shared any dainty he had purchased with another, and it was only when three or four had clubbed together to get in a ham, a young sucking pig, or some vodka that they were seen to partake of it together.

Some of the prisoners, indeed, scarcely ever exchanged a word with the rest, but moved about in moody silence paying no attention to what was going on around them. Some again

were always quarrelling, and seemed to take a delight in stirring up others by giving them unpleasant nicknames, or by turning them into ridicule.

"I am glad indeed, Mikail," Godfrey said, as he lay down beside the starosta that night, "that you were not seriously hurt. I only heard to-day that you had a wife waiting for you outside."

"Yes, it is true," Mikail replied. "I never talk of her. I dare not even let myself think of her, it seems too great a happiness to be true; and something may occur, one never knows. Ah, Ivan, if it had not been for you what news would have been taken to her! Think of it, after her long journey out here; after waiting ten years for me, to hear that it was useless. I tremble like a leaf when I think of it. That night I lay awake all night and cried like a young child, not for myself, you know, but for her. She has taken a cottage already, and is furnishing it with her savings. She is allowed to write to me, you know, once every month. At first it was every three months. What happiness it was to me when my first five years was up and she could write once a month! Do you think I shall know her? She will have changed much. I tell myself that always; and I—I have changed much too, but she will know me, I am sure she will know me. I tremble now at the thought of our meeting, Ivan; but I ought not to talk so, I ought not to speak to you of my happiness—you, who have no friend waiting to see you."

"I like to hear you talk of your wife, Mikail. My friends are a long way off indeed; but I hope that I shall see them before very long."

"You think that you may be pardoned?" Mikail asked.

"No, I mean to escape."

"Ah, lad," Mikail said kindly, "I don't suppose there is ever a prisoner comes here who does not say to himself, I will escape. Every spring there are thousands who take to the woods, and scarce one of these but hopes never to see the inside of a prison again, and yet they come back, every one of them."

"But there have been escapes, Mikail, therefore there is nothing impossible in it."

"There are twenty thousand convicts cross the frontier every year, lad. There is not one man makes his escape in five years."

"Well, I mean to be the man this five years, Mikail."

"I would not try if I were you. Were you in on a life sentence for murder, or still worse, as a political prisoner, I would say try if you like, for you would have nothing to lose; but you have a good prospect now. I am sure you must have been a political, but now that you have been a wanderer you are so no longer. You have won the governor's good-will, and as soon as your time is up, perhaps before, you will be allowed to live outside the prison. If you go away in the spring you will, when you return as winter comes on, forfeit all this, and have to begin again. When you come out there will be my little hut ready for you, and such a welcome from my wife and me that you will forget how small and rough it is, and there you will live with us till your five years are up, and you can go anywhere you like in Siberia."

"I thank you sincerely, Mikail, and I should, I am sure, be as happy as an exile could be with you and your faithful wife; but if I have to try afresh every year for twenty years I will break out and strive to escape. You know that I am English by my mother's side. I can tell you now that I am altogether English, and I will gain England or die. At any rate, if it is to be done I will do it. I have health and strength and determination. I have learnt all that there is to be learnt as to the difficulties of the journey. I have more to gain, more to strive for than other prisoners. Even if they escape they cannot return home. They must still be exiled from Russia; must earn their bread among strangers as they are earning it here. I have a home awaiting me—a father, mother, and sisters—to whom I shall come back as one from the grave. Why, man, the difficulties are nothing in comparison to the reward. A journey across Asia is as nothing to the journeys

many of my countrymen have made across Africa. Here there is no fear of fever, of savage tribes, or savage beasts. It is in comparison a mere pleasure excursion. I may not succeed next time, just as I did not succeed last year, but succeed in the end I will."

"I believe you," Mikail said earnestly, infected by Godfrey's enthusiasm. "Did you not overthrow, as if he were a babe, Kobylin, whom everyone else feared? Yes, if anyone can do it you can."

At last the long winter was over, the thaw came, and the work at the mine was renewed. Godfrey was afraid that he might be still kept in the office, and he spoke to Mikail on the subject; the latter spoke to one of the officials, and told him that the prisoner Ivan Holstoff petitioned that he might be again put to work on the mine instead of being kept in the office, as he felt his health suffering from the confinement. Two days later Godfrey was called into the governor's room.

"I hear that you have asked to go to the mine again, lad."

"Yes, sir; I like active work better than sitting indoors all day."

The colonel looked at him keenly. "You are doing well here, lad; it will be a pity to have to begin over again. I can guess what is in your thoughts. Think it over, lad, don't do anything rash; but if—," and he hesitated, "if you are headstrong and foolish, remember you will be better off here than elsewhere, and that I am never very hard on runaways. That will do; you will go out again with the gang to-morrow."

"Thank you, sir," Godfrey said earnestly, and with a bow returned to his work at the desk in the next room.

On the following day work at the mine was resumed. Godfrey at once began his preparations for his flight, and as a first step managed to conceal under a lump of rock a heavy hammer and a pick used in the work; he had already laid in a stock of a dozen boxes of matches. The next evening he said to Mikail when they had lain down for the night,—

"Now, Mikail, I want you to help me."

"So you really mean to go?"

"Yes, my mind is quite made up. I want you to get me in some things from outside."

"I will get you anything if you will tell me what you want."

"I want most of all two long knives."

"Yes, knives are useful," Mikail said; "but they are awkward things to get. I dare not ask any of the people who trade here to get such a thing. Ah! I know what I will do; I am losing my head. I will steal you two from the kitchen; but that must be done the last thing, for if knives were missed there would be a great search for them. What is the next thing?"

"I should like a coil of thirty or forty yards of fine rope, and some string. They are always useful things to have."

"That is so," the convict assented.

"Then I shall want some thread and needles."

"There is no difficulty about that; I can buy them for you at the gate. I don't know what excuse to make to get you the rope, but I will think of something."

"I don't think there is anything else, except that I should like these twenty roubles changed into kopecks."

The man nodded. "When will you try?"

"To-morrow. It is dark now by the time we leave off work; it will be easy to slip away then. Luka is going with me."

"That is good," Mikail said, "he will be very useful; he is a good little fellow, and will be faithful to you. You had best keep steadily west, and give yourself up at Irkutsk. It is a rough road working round by the north of Lake Baikal; but you had better take that way, it is safer than by the south. But no doubt if you are careful you might go that way too. Then the summer after, if you can get away again, there is no give up at Tomsk. Once fairly away from here there is no fear of your being overtaken; they never take the trouble to hunt the woods far, they know it is of no use. Remember, as long as you don't go too far from the road, you will light upon cottages and little farmhouses where you can get something to

eat; but if you go too far into the woods you may starve. There will be no berries except strawberries yet, and strawberries are not much use to keep life together when you are travelling."

"Oh, by the by, there is one more thing I want you to get for me if possible, and that is fish-hooks and line."

"That is difficult," Mikail said; "however, a rouble or two will go a long way. But you must put off your start for another two or three days. The rope and the hooks will need time to get."

It was, indeed, the fourth evening before Mikail told Godfrey that he had got everything except the knives. "I will manage to get these in the morning," he said, "when I go into the kitchen and see about breakfast. If I were you, I would put on those two spare shirts over the one you wear, and take your three spare pairs of stockings. Of course you will wind the rope round your waist. I suppose you will buy bread from the others, there are always plenty ready to sell; you had better take enough for two or three days. Cut it in slices, put them inside your upper shirt with the other things you take, your belt will keep them safe. Don't try to slip away unless you see a really good opportunity; it is no use being shot at. Besides, with those irons on your legs, they would soon overtake you. Better put it off for another time than to run any risk."

Godfrey at once informed Luka that they were to try to escape on the following evening, told him to put on his spare shirts at night, gave him the matches, and told him to stow away in the morning as much bread as he could carry. The young Tartar made no reply beyond a pleasant nod; his confidence in his companion was unbounded. The next morning, while eating their breakfasts by the dim light of a candle, Mikail passed close to Godfrey and slipped two long knives into his hand; these he hid instantly inside his shirt.

"I have got the bread," Mikail said; "it was better for me to buy it than you. I have put it under your bag."

As it was quite dark in the corner of the room Godfrey had no difficulty in cutting up the hunks of bread, and concealing them without observation. Mikail strolled up while he was so engaged. Godfrey had already given him money for the various purchases, and he now pressed a hundred-rouble note into his hand, and said:

"Now, Mikail, you must take this from me; it is not a present to you, but to your brave wife. When you get out you will want to do your share towards making the house she has got for you comfortable. Till you get your free ticket you will still be working in the mines like the others; and though you will get the same pay as free labourers then, it will be some time before you can lay much by. When your term is over you will want to take up a piece of land and farm, and you must have money for this until your crops grow."

"I will not take it," the man said huskily; "it is a hundred roubles. I would not rob you; you will want every kopeck you have. The money would be a curse to me."

"I have five hundred still left, Mikail, which will be ample for me. You will grieve me if you refuse to take it. It will be pleasant to me, whether I am taken again or whether I escape, to think that I have made one home happier for my stay here, and that you and your brave wife, in your comfortable home, think sometimes of the young fellow you were kind to."

"If you wish it I will take it," Mikail said. "Feodora and I will pray before the *ikon* to the saints morning and night to protect you wherever you may be."

"Pray for me as Godfrey Bullen, Mikail; that is my real name. I am English, and it is to England I shall make my way."

"Godfrey Bullen," the man repeated four or five times over. "I shall not forget it. Feodora and I will teach it to our children if the good God should send us any."

"I should like to let you know if I get safely home," Godfrey said; "how can I write to you?"

"I can receive letters when I am out of prison," Mikail said. "You know my name, Mikail Stomoff; put Karoff, that is the name of the village my wife lives at—Karoff, near Kara. If the letter does not come until my term is over, and I have left, I will leave word there where it can be forwarded to me."

"I hope that you will get it long before that, Mikail. The journey is too long to do in one summer. I shall winter somewhere in the north, and I hope to be in England by the following autumn; therefore, if I have got safely away, you may look for a letter before the Christmas after next. If it does not come by that time, you will know that I have failed in my first attempt, and then you will, I hope, get one a year later. I shall, of course, be careful what I say; in case it should be opened and read, there will be nothing in it about your knowing that I intended to escape."

"We shall look for it, Godfrey Bullen, we shall look for it always, and pray the good God to send it to us."

The next morning when Godfrey rose he wrung Mikail's hand warmly.

"God bless you," the starosta said with tears in his eyes. "I shall not come near you again; they would see that something was strange with me, and when you were missing, would guess that I knew you were going. May all the saints preserve you."

Before they formed up to march to their work, Godfrey shook hands with his friend Osip. "I am going to try on our way back to-night," he said.

"Good-bye, and good luck to you," Osip replied. "I would go with you if I was in for life; but I have lost two years already by running away, and I dare not try again."

During the day Godfrey observed very carefully the spot where he had hidden the tools, so that he might be able to find it in the dark, piling three small stones one on the top of the other by the roadside at the point nearest to it. When work was over, he managed to fall in with Luka at the rear of the line. A Cossack marched alongside of him.

"Five roubles," Godfrey whispered, "if you will let us drop behind."

Five roubles was a large sum to the soldier. The life of the guards was really harder than that of the prisoners, except that they did no work, for they had to mount guard at night when the convicts slept, and their rations were much more scanty than those given to the working convicts, and they were accustomed to eke out their scanty pay by taking small bribes for winking at various infractions of the prison rules. The Cossack at once held out his hand. Godfrey slipped five rouble notes into it. They kept on till they reached a wood, where beneath the shadow of the trees it was already perfectly dark.

The Cossack had stepped forward two or three paces and was walking by the next couple.

"Now, Luka," Godfrey said, and the two sprang off the path among the trees. They waited two or three minutes, then returned to the road and hurried back to the mine. They had been the last party to start for the prison, and the place was quite deserted. It took them fully half an hour to find the tools. The rings round their ankles were sufficiently loose to enable the pick to be inserted between them and the leg; thrusting it in as far as it would go under the rivet, it was comparatively easy work to break off the head with the hammer. In ten minutes both were free. Leaving the chains and tools behind them, they made their way out of the cutting and struck across the country, and in an hour entered the forest. It was too dark here to permit them to proceed farther; they lay down and slept until day began to break, and then continued their way up the rising ground until, after four hours' walking, they were well among the mountains. They found an open space by the side of a rivulet where the wild strawberries grew thickly, and here they sat down and enjoyed a hearty meal of bread and strawberries.

"Now we have got to keep along on this side of that range of mountains in front of us till we get to Lake Baikal," God-

frey said. "We will push on for a day or two, and then we must find some cottages, and get rid of these clothes. What we want above all things, Luka, are guns."

"Yes, or bows and arrows," Luka said.

"It would be as difficult to get them as guns. They don't use them in these parts, Luka."

"I can make them," Luka said; "not as good as the Ostjaks' bows, but good enough to kill with."

"That is satisfactory, Luka. If I can get hold of a gun and you can make a bow and arrows we shall do very well."

For four days they continued their journey through the forest, gathering much fruit, chiefly strawberries and raspberries, and eating sparingly of their bread. At night they lit fires, for the evenings were still cold, and slept soundly beside them. On the fifth morning Godfrey said, "We must turn south now, Luka, our bread won't last more than two days at the outside, and we must lay in a fresh supply. We have kept as near west as we could, and we know by the mountains that we cannot be far wrong, still it may take us some time to find a village." To Godfrey's satisfaction they arrived at the edge of the forest early in the afternoon.

"We cannot be very far from Nertchinsk," he said. "We must be careful here, for there are lots of mines in the neighbourhood."

After walking for another three or four hours several large buildings were seen among the trees in the valley, and these it was certain belonged to one or other of the mines. When it became dark they descended still farther, and kept down until they came upon a road. This they followed until about midnight they came upon a small village. They found, as they had hoped, bread and other provisions upon several of the window-sills, and thankfully stowing these away again struck off to the hills.

"This is capital," Godfrey said, as after getting well into the forest, they lighted a fire, threw themselves down beside it, and made a hearty meal. "If we could rely upon doing

as well as this always I should not mind how long our journey lasted. It is glorious to be out in these woods after that close prison."

The Tartar nodded. The closeness of the air in the prison never troubled him, but he was quite ready to agree to anything that Godfrey might say. "Good in summer," he said, "but not very good in winter."

"No, I expect not; but we shall have to make the best of it, Luka, for it is quite certain that we shall have to spend the winter out somewhere."

"We will make skin coats and keep ourselves warm," Luka said confidently. "Make a good hut."

"Yes, that part of the thing seems simple enough," Godfrey agreed; "the difficulty will be in feeding ourselves. But we need not bother about that now. Well, we had better go off to sleep, Luka; we have been tramping fully eighteen hours, and I feel as tired as a dog."

In a few minutes they were fast asleep, but they were on their feet again at daybreak and journeyed steadily for the next three days, always keeping near the edge of the forest. On the fourth day they saw a small farmhouse lying not far from the edge of the wood.

"Here is the place that we have been looking for for the last week," Godfrey said. "This is where we must manage to get clothes. The question is, how many men are there there? Not above two or three, I should say. But anyhow we must risk it."

They waited until they saw lights in the cottage, and guessed that the family had all returned from their work.

"Now then, Luka, come along. You must look fierce, you know, and try to frighten them a bit. But mind, if they refuse and show fight we must go away without hurting them."

Luka looked up in surprise. "Why that?" he asked. "You could beat that pig Kobylin as if he were a child, why not beat them and make them give?"

"Because I am not going to turn robber, Luka. I know

some of the runaways do turn robbers, and murder peasants and travellers. You know some of the men in the prison boasted of what they had done, but that is not our way. We are honest men though we have been shut up in prison. I am willing to pay for what I want as long as I have money, after that we shall see about it. If these people won't sell we shall find others that will."

They went quietly up to the house, lifted the latch and walked in, holding their long knives in their hands. Two men were seated at table, three women and several children were near the fire. There was a general exclamation of alarm as the two convicts entered.

"Do not fear," Godfrey said loudly; "we do not wish to rob anyone. We are not bandits, we are ready to pay for what we require, but that we must have."

The men were both convicts who had long since served out their time. "What do you want?" one of them asked.

"We want clothes. You need not be afraid of selling them to us. If we were captured to-morrow, which we don't mean to be, we will swear to you that we will not say where we obtained them. We are ready to pay the full value. Why should you not make an honest deal instead of forcing us to take life?"

"We will sell them to you," one of the men said after speaking a few words in a low tone to the other, and then rising to his feet.

"Sit down," Godfrey said sternly. "We want no tricks. Tell the women to fetch in the clothes."

The man, seeing that Godfrey was determined, abandoned his intention of seizing a club and making a fight for it, and told one of the women to fetch some clothes down. She returned in a minute or two with a large bundle.

"Pick out two suits, Luka, one for you and one for me." Luka was making a careful choice when Godfrey said, "Don't pick out the best, Luka, I don't want Sunday clothes, but just strong serviceable suits; they will be none the worse for a

patch or two. Now," he said to the men, "name a fair price for those clothes and I will pay you."

The peasants had not in the slightest degree believed that the convicts were going to pay them, and their faces lighted up. They hesitated as to the price.

"Come, I will give you ten roubles. I am sure that is more than they are worth to you now."

"Very well," the man said, "I am contented."

Godfrey placed a ten-rouble note upon the table. "Now," he said, "we want a couple of hats." Two fairly good ones were brought down.

"Is there nothing else?" the man asked, ready enough to sell now that he saw that he was to be paid fair prices.

"We want some meat and bread, ten pounds of each if you have got it."

"We have a pig we salted down the other day," the man said. "We have no bread—we are going to bake to-morrow morning—but you can have ten pounds of flour."

"That will do. We want a small frying-pan, a kettle, and two tin mugs. Have you got any tea in the house?"

"I have got about a pound."

"We will take it all. We can't bother ourselves about sugar, Luka, we must do without that; every pound tells. We have brought plenty of tobacco with us to last some time. Have you got a gun?" he asked the man suddenly.

"Yes," he said, "we have got two. The wolves are troublesome sometimes in winter. Fetch the guns, Elizabeth."

The guns were brought down. One was a double-barrel of German make, the other a long single-barrel. "How much do you want for this?" he asked, taking up the former.

"I don't use it much," the man said, "one will be enough for me, I will take fifty roubles."

"No, no," Godfrey said. "You value your goods too high; money is not as plentiful with me as all that. I can't go higher than twenty roubles," and he laid the gun down again.

"I will take thirty," the man said.

After a good deal of bargaining Godfrey obtained the gun, a flask of powder, and a bag of bullets and shot for twenty-five roubles. Then he paid for the other goods he had purchased. Luka made them into a bundle and lifted them all on to his shoulder. Then saying good-bye to the peasants they again started for the forest.

"We are set up now, Luka."

"Yes indeed," the Tartar replied. "We could journey anywhere now; we want but two or three blankets and some furs and we could travel to Moscow."

"Yes, if we had one more thing, Luka."

"What is that?"

"Passports."

"Yes, we should want those; but I daresay we could do without them."

They enjoyed their suppers greatly that night, frying some pork and then some dough-cakes in the fat, and washing it down with numerous cups of tea.

"The next thing will be for you to make a bow and arrows, Luka. I did not buy the other gun for two reasons: in the first place because we could not afford it, and in the second because you said you liked a bow best."

Luka nodded. "I never shot with a gun," he said. "A bow is just as good, and makes no noise."

"That is true enough, Luka. Well, I shall be a good deal more comfortable when we leave those convict clothes behind us. Of course we shall be just as liable to be seized and shut up as vagabonds when we cannot produce papers as if we were in our convict suits, but there is something disgusting in being dressed up in clothing that tells everyone you are a murderer or a robber, and to know there is that patch between one's shoulders."

Luka was quite indifferent to any sentimental considerations. Still he admitted that it was an advantage to get rid of the convict garb. In the morning they put on the peasants' clothes. As Godfrey was about the same size as the man

whose garments he had got, the things fitted him fairly. Luka's were a good deal too large for him, but as the Russian peasants' clothes always fit them loosely, this mattered little. The other things were divided into two bundles of equal weight.

Luka would willingly have carried the whole, pointing out that Godfrey had the gun and ammunition, but the latter said:

"If you take the frying-pan and kettle and the two tin mugs that will make matters even, Luka."

The two convict suits were left at the foot of the tree where they had slept. Godfrey first thought of throwing them on to the fire, but changed his mind, saying:

"Some poor beggar whose clothes are worn out may come upon them, and be glad of them, some time during the summer; we may just as well let them lie here. Now, Luka, we must walk in good earnest. We ought to be able to make five-and-thirty miles a day over a tolerably level country, and at that rate we shall be a long way off before winter."

The forests abounded with squirrels. Although Luka assured him that they were excellent eating, Godfrey could not bring himself to shoot at the pretty creatures. "It would be a waste of powder and shot, Luka," he said. "We have plenty of meat to go on with at present, when it is gone it will be time enough to begin to think of shooting game; besides, there are numbers of mines about this country, and the sound of a gun might bring out the Cossacks."

CHAPTER XI

AFLOAT

IT was a pleasant journey through the forest, with its thick and varied foliage, that afforded a shade from the sun's rays, with patches of open ground here and there bright with flowers. Godfrey had enjoyed it at first, but he enjoyed it still more after he had got rid of the convict badge. He had now no fear of meeting anyone in the woods except charcoal-burners or woodmen, or escaped convicts like themselves. By such they would not be suspected of being aught but what they seemed—two peasants; unless, indeed, a hat should fall off. The first night after leaving the prison Godfrey had done his best to obliterate the convict brand, by singeing it off as he had done before.

Each day the air grew warmer, and they could pick as they walked any quantity of raspberries and whortleberries. Luka always filled the kettle at each streamlet they came to, as they could never tell how long they would be before they arrived at another, and the supply rendered them independent, and enabled them to camp whenever they took a fancy to a spot. They walked steadily from sunrise to sunset, and as they went at a good pace Godfrey was sure that they were doing fully the thirty-five miles a day he had calculated on. Although Sundays had not been observed at the prison, and the work went on those days as on others, Godfrey had not lost count, and knew that it was on a Monday evening that they had broken out, and each Sunday was used as a day of rest.

"We are travelling at a good pace, Luka," he said, "and thirty-five miles a day six days a week is quite enough, so on Sundays we will always choose a good camping ground by a stream, wash our clothes, and rest."

They had little trouble about provisions. At lonely houses they could always obtain them, and there they were received

very hospitably, the peasants often refusing absolutely to accept money, or at any rate giving freely of all the articles they themselves raised, and taking pay only for tea and sugar, which they themselves had to purchase. When no such places could be met with they went down to villages at night, and never failed to find bread and cakes on the window-sills, though it was not often that meat was there, for the peasants themselves obtained it but seldom. Godfrey had no fear of his money running short for a long time. The six hundred roubles with which he arrived at Kara had been increased by his earnings during the nine months he had been there. He had spent but a few kopecks a week for tea and tobacco, and his pay while he had been a clerk was a good deal larger than while he had been working in the mine. Luka, too, had saved every kopeck he had received from the day when Godfrey told him that he would take him with him when he ran away. He had even given up smoking, and was with difficulty persuaded by Godfrey to take some tobacco occasionally from him. Between them in the nine months they had laid by nearly a hundred roubles, and had, therefore, after deducting the money given by Godfrey to Mikail and that paid for the gun and clothes, over five hundred roubles for their journey.

They were glad, indeed, when at last they saw the broad sheet of Lake Baikal. They had for some time been bearing to the north of west, and struck the lake some twenty miles from its head. There were a good many small settlements round the lake, a good deal of fishing being carried on upon it, although the work was dangerous, for terrible storms frequently swept down from the northern mountains and sent the boats flying into port. The lake is one of the deepest in the world, soundings in many places being over five thousand feet. Many rivers run into the lake, the only outflow being by the Angara. Baikal is peculiar as being the only fresh-water lake in the world where seals are found, about two thousand being killed annually. The shores are in most places extremely steep, precipices rising a thousand feet sheer up from the edge

of the water, with soundings of a hundred and fifty fathoms a few yards from their feet. Fish abound in the lake, and sturgeon of large size are captured there.

Godfrey knew that there were guard-houses with Cossacks on the road between the northern point of water and the steep mountains that rise almost directly from it. He had specially studied the geography of this region, and knew that after passing round the head of the lake there was a track across the hills by which they would, after travelling a hundred and fifty miles, strike the main road from Irkutsk to Yakutsk, near the town of Kirensk, on the river Lena. From Kirensk it would be but little more than a hundred miles to the nearest point on the Angara, which is one of the principal branches of the Yenesei.

To gain this river would be a great point. The Lena, which was even nearer to the head of Lake Baikal, also flowed into the Arctic Sea; but its course was almost due north, and it would be absolutely hopeless to endeavour to traverse the whole of the north coast of Siberia. The Angara and the Yenesei, on the other hand, flowed northwest, and fell into the Arctic Sea near the western boundary of Siberia, and when they reached that point they would be but a short distance from Russia. It seemed to him that the only chance was by keeping by a river. In the great ranges of mountains in the north of Siberia there would be no means of obtaining food, and to cross such a district would be certain death. By the rivers, on the other hand, there would at least be no fear of losing their way. The journey could be shortened by using a canoe if they could obtain one, and if not, a raft. They would often find little native villages or huts by the banks, and would be able to obtain fish from them. Besides, they could themselves catch fish, and might possibly even winter in some native village. For all these reasons he had determined on making for the Angara.

Buying a stock of dried fish at a little fishing village on the lake they walked to within a mile of its head, there they slept

for the night, and started an hour before daybreak, passed the Cossack guard-house unseen just as the daylight was stealing over the sky, and then went along merrily.

The road was not much used, the great stream of traffic passing across Lake Baikal, but was in fair condition, and they made good progress along it. Long before that, Luka had, after several attempts, made a bow to his satisfaction. It was formed of three or four strips of tough wood firmly bound together with waxed twine, they having procured the string and the wax at a farmhouse on the way. There was one advantage in taking this unfrequented route. The road between Irkutsk and Tomsk was, as Godfrey had learned on his outward journey, frequented by bands of brigands who had no hesitation in killing as well as plundering wayfarers. Here they were only likely to fall in with convicts who had escaped from Irkutsk or from convoys along the road, and were for the most part perfectly harmless, seeking only to spend a summer holiday in freedom, and knowing that when winter came on they would have to surrender themselves.

Of such men Godfrey had no fear, his gun and his companion's bow and arrows rendered them too formidable to be meddled with, and until they came down upon the main road there was no chance of their meeting police officers or Cossacks. No villages were passed on the journey, and Godfrey, therefore, had no longer any hesitation in shooting the squirrels that frisked about among the trees. He found them, as Luka had said, excellent eating, although it required three or four of them to furnish anything like a meal. He soon, however, gave over shooting, for he found that Luka was at least as certain with his bow as he was with the gun, with the advantage that the blunt arrow did not spoil the skins. These, as Luka told him, were valuable, and they would be able to exchange them for food, the Siberian squirrel furnishing a highly-prized fur.

Each day Luka brought down at least a dozen of these little creatures, and these, with their dried fish and cakes made of

flour, afforded them excellent food on their way. After four days' walking across a lofty plateau they descended into a cultivated valley, and before them rose the cupolas of Kirensk, while along the valley flowed the Lena, as yet but a small river, although it would become a mighty flood before it reached the sea, nearly four thousand miles away. It would have to be crossed at Kirensk, and they sat down and held a long council as to how they had best get through the town. They agreed that it must be done at night, for in the daytime they certainly would have to produce passports.

"There will not be much chance of meeting a Cossack or a policeman at one or two o'clock in the morning, Luka, and if there were any about we ought to be able to get past them in the dark."

"If one stops us I can settle him," Luka said, tapping his knife.

"No, no, Luka, we won't have any bloodshed if we can help it, though I do not mean to be taken. If a fellow should stop us and ask any questions, and try to arrest us, I will knock him down, and then we will make a bolt for it. There is no moon now, and it will be dark as pitch, so that if we kick out his lantern he would be unable to follow us. If he does, you let fly one of your blunted arrows at him. That will hit him quite hard enough, though it won't do him any serious damage. Of course, if there are several of them we must fight in earnest, but it is very unlikely we shall meet with even two men together at that time of night."

Accordingly they went in among some trees and lay down, and did not move until they heard the church bells of the distant town strike twelve. Then they resumed their journey, keeping with difficulty along the road. Once in the valley it became broader and better kept. At last they approached the bridge. Godfrey had had some fear that there might be a sentry posted here, and was pleased to find it entirely deserted.

"We will take off our shoes here, Luka, tie them with a

piece of string, and hang them round our necks. We shall go noiselessly through the town then, while if we go clattering along in those heavy shoes, every policeman there may be in the streets will be on the look-out to see who we are."

They passed, however, through the town without meeting either policeman or soldier. The streets were absolutely deserted, and the whole population seemed to be asleep. Once through the town they put on their shoes again, followed the road for a short distance, and then lay down under some trees to wait for daylight. Now that they were in the country they had no fear of being asked for passports, and it was not until the sun was well up that they continued their journey. Four miles farther they came upon a village, and went boldly into a small shop and purchased flour, tea, and such articles as they required. Just as they came out the village policeman came along.

"Where do you come from?" he asked.

"I don't ask you where you come from," Godfrey replied. "We are quiet men and hunters. We pay for what we get and harm no one who does not interfere with us. See, we have skins for sale if there is anyone in the village who will buy them."

"The man at the spirit-shop at the end of the village will buy them," the policeman said; "he gives a rouble a dozen for them."

"Thank you," and with a Russian salutation they walked on.

"Of course he suspects what we are," Godfrey said to his companion; "but there was no fear of his being too inquisitive. The authorities do not really care to arrest the wanderers during the summer months, as they know they will get them all when winter comes on; besides, in these villages all the people sympathise with us, and as we are armed, and not likely to be taken without a fight, it is not probable that one man would care to venture his life in such a matter."

On arrival at the spirit-shop they went in.

"The policeman tells us you buy skins at a rouble for a dozen. We have ten dozen."

"Are they good and uninjured?" the man asked.

"They are. There is not a hole in any of them."

The man looked them through carefully.

"I will buy them," he said. "Do you want money, or will you take some of it in vodka?"

"We want money. We do not drink in summer when we are hunting."

The man handed over ten rouble notes, and they passed out. A minute later the policeman strolled in.

"Wanderers?" he said with a wink. The vodka seller shrugged his shoulders.

"I did not ask them," he said. "They came to me with a good recommendation, for they told me that you had sent them here. So after that it was not for me to question them."

"I told them you bought skins," the policeman said. "They seemed well-spoken fellows. The one with the bow was a Tartar or an Ostjak, I should say; he may have been a Yakute, but I don't think so. However, it matters little to me. If there was anything wrong they ought to have questioned them at Kirensk; they have got soldiers there. Why should I interfere with civil people, especially when one has a gun and the other arrows?"

"That was just my opinion," the other said. "Well, here is a glass of vodka, and I will take one with you. They are good skins, all shot with a blunt arrow."

Godfrey and his companion now took matters easily. There was no motive for hurrying, and they devoted themselves seriously to the chase.

"We must have skins for the winter," Luka said. "I can dress and sew them. The squirrels are plentiful here, and if we set snares we may catch some foxes. We shall want some to make a complete suit with caps for each of us, and skins to form bags for sleeping in; but these last we can buy on the way. The hunters in summer bring vast quantities of skins down to the rivers to be taken up to Krasnoiarsk by steamer, and you can get elk skins for a rouble or two, which will do

for sleeping bags, but they are too thick for clothing unless they are very well prepared. At any rate we will get as many squirrel skins as we can, both for clothes, and to exchange for commoner skins and high boots."

It was three weeks after they had left Kirensk before they struck the Angara, near Karanchinskoe. They had traversed a distance, as the crow flies, of some eight hundred miles since leaving Kara, but by the route they had travelled it was at least half as far again, and they had been little over ten weeks on the journey. Luka had assured Godfrey that they would have no difficulty in obtaining a boat.

"Everywhere there are fishing people on the rivers," he said. "There are Tunguses—they are all over Siberia. There are the Ostjaks on all the rivers. There are my own people, but they are more to the south, near Minusinsk, and from there to Kasan, and seldom come far north. In summer everyone fishes or hunts. I could make you a boat with two or three skins of bullocks or horses or elk, it only needs these and a framework of wood; but we can buy one for three or four roubles—a good one. We want one strong and large and light, for the river is terribly swift. There are places where it runs nearly as fast as a horse can gallop."

"Certainly we will get a good-sized one, Luka. If the river runs so swiftly we shall have no paddling to do, and therefore it will not matter at all about her being fast; besides, we shall want to carry a good load. We will not land oftener than we can help, and can sleep on board, and it will be much more comfortable to have a boat that one can move about in without being afraid of capsizing her. Whatever it costs, let us get a good boat."

"We will get one," Luka said confidently. "We shall find Ostjaks' huts all along the banks, and at any of these, if they have not a boat that will suit us, they will make us one in two or three days."

Avoiding the town, and passing through the villages at night, they kept along down the river bank for four days. The

river was as wide as the Thames at Greenwich, with a very rapid current. They saw in some of the quiet reaches fishing-boats at work, some with nets, others with lines, and at night saw them spearing salmon and sturgeon by torchlight. Across the river they made out several of the yourts or summer tents of the Ostjaks, but it was not until the fourth day that they came upon a group of seven or eight of these tents on the river bank. The men were all away fishing, but the women came out to look at the strangers. As Luka spoke their dialect he had no difficulty in opening the conversation with them. He told them that he and his companion wanted to go down the river to Yeneseisk, and wished to buy a boat, a good one.

The women said that some of the men would be in that evening, and that the matter could be arranged.

"They will be glad to sell us a boat," Luka said to Godfrey. "They are very poor the Ostjaks; they have nothing but their tents, their boats, and their clothes. They live on the fish they catch, but fish are so plentiful they can scarce get anything for them, so they are very glad when they can sell anything for money."

The Ostjak men arrived just before it became dark. They wore high flat-topped fur caps, a dress something like a long loose blouse, and trousers of fine leather tucked into boots that came up to the knee. Most of them had bows and arrows in addition to their fishing gear. Godfrey felt no uneasiness among these men as he would have done among the Buriats in the east, for they were now at a distance from any convict settlements, and these people would know nothing about the rewards offered to the natives in the neighbourhood of the mines for the arrest of prisoners. A present of some tobacco, of which Godfrey had laid in a large stock, put the Ostjaks into an excellent temper. Fish were broiling over the fire when they returned, and the two travellers joined them at their meal. After this was over and pipes lighted the subject of the boat was discussed. The Ostjaks were perfectly ready to

trade. They said they would sell any of their six boats for three roubles, and that if they did not think any of these large enough they would build them a larger one in three days for six roubles.

Godfrey had exchanged twenty roubles for kopecks at the first village they had passed after reaching the river, as he knew that notes would be of no use among the native tribes, and without bargaining he accepted the offer they made. After passing the night stretched by the fire they went down with the men in the morning to inspect the boats. They were larger than he had expected to find them, as the fishing population often shift their quarters by the river and travel in boats, taking their family, tent, and implements with them.

"What do you think, Luka?"

"They are large enough," Luka said, "but they are not in very good condition. I should say that farthest one would do very well; but let us have a look at the state of the skins."

The boat was hauled ashore and carefully examined. Three or four of the skins were found to be old and rotten; the rest had evidently been renewed from time to time.

"We will take this if you will put in four good skins," Luka said to the owner.

"It will be six roubles if we put in fresh skins," the Ostjak said. "We will put in good skins and grease all the boat, and then it will be the same as new. The other skins were all new last year."

"No," Luka said. "You said you would build a whole boat larger than this for six roubles."

The men talked together. "We will do it for five roubles," they said at last, and Luka at once agreed to the terms.

There was no time lost. The Ostjaks ordered the women to set about it at once, and leaving the matter in their hands went off to their fishing. Godfrey asked them to take him with them, leaving Luka to see to the repairs of the boat. The fishing implements were of the roughest kind. The hooks were formed of fish bones, bound together by fine gut;

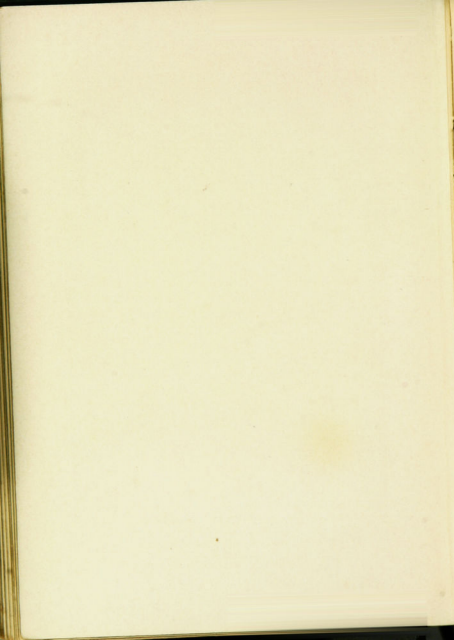
the lines were twisted strips of skin, strong gut attaching the hook to these lines; the bait was small pieces of fat, varied by strips of fish with the skin on them. Clumsy as the appliances were, jack, tench, and other fish were caught in considerable numbers, and among them two or three good-sized salmon. The nets were of coarse mesh, made of hemp, which grows wild in many parts of Siberia. They were some ten feet in depth and some twenty yards long.

The upper ends were supported by floats made of bladders, and the whole anchored across the stream by ropes at the extremities, fastened to heavy stones. In these nets a considerable quantity of fish were taken. The fishing was over early, for there had been a good supply taken on the previous day, and as at this time of year they would not keep, it was useless obtaining more.

When they reached shore the common sorts of fish were thrown to the dogs; a dozen of the best picked out, and with these two of the men started at once for the nearest village, where they would be sold for a few kopecks; the rest were handed over to the women, while the men proceeded to throw themselves down by the fire and smoke. Godfrey went to see how the women were getting on with the boat. They had already made a great deal of progress. The skins, which had been chosen by Luka from a pile in the hut, were already prepared by having fat rubbed into them. The hair was left on them, as that would come inside. The bad skins had been taken off, the others cut to fit, and now only required sewing into their places. As a matter of course Godfrey and Luka took their meals with the Ostjaks and greatly enjoyed the change of diet. They gladdened the hearts of their hosts by producing a packet of tea, of which a handful was poured into a pot of water boiling over the fire. The liquor was drunk with delight by the Ostjak men and women, but Godfrey could not touch it, for some of the fish had already been boiled in the water, which the Ostjaks had not thought it necessary to change.



SPEARING FISH BY TORCHLIGHT



At night he went out again with them in the boats for a short time to see them spear salmon. A man holding a large torch made of strips of resinous wood stood in the bow of the boat, and on either side of him stood an Ostjak holding a long barbed spear. In a short time there were swirls on the surface of the river. These increased till the water round the boat seemed to boil. The Ostjaks were soon at work, and in half an hour twenty fine salmon were lying in the bottom of the boat, and then having caught as much as there was any chance of selling the natives they returned to their yourts. The next morning the work on the boat was resumed, and as all the women assisted it was finished in a very short time. Then melted fat was poured into the seams, and the whole boat vigorously rubbed with the same. By twelve o'clock it was finished. Then there was a little fresh bargaining for two salmon spears, a supply of torches, half a dozen common fox skins, and three large hides for stretching over the boat at night. Some of the lines and fish-hooks were also bought, and a few fish for present consumption, then Godfrey and Luka took their places in the boat, and bidding farewell to the Ostjaks paddled out into stream.

The boat was some twenty feet long and six feet wide in the centre. It was almost flat-bottomed, and drew but two or three inches of water. A flat stone had been placed on a layer of clay in the bottom, and they had taken with them a bundle of firewood. Godfrey was in the highest spirits. It was true that the real dangers of the journey had not yet begun, but so far everything had gone very much better than he had anticipated. He had not thought there would be any chance of recapture, for he knew that unless they came into the towns the Russians took no trouble about the escaped convicts. All the convicts with whom he had spoken had agreed that there was little trouble in sustaining life in the forests during summer, for that even if they could not obtain food from the peasants they had only to carry off a sheep at night from the folds.

"That is why the peasants are so ready to give," one said.

"I don't say that they are not sorry for us, but the real reason is they know that if they did not give we should take, and instead of being harmless wanderers, as they call us, we should be driven to become bandits."

Still Godfrey had anticipated much greater difficulties than they had met with; in fact up to the present time it had been simply a delightful tramp through the woods. The next part of the journey would, he expected, be no less pleasant. They had a large and comfortable boat, well adapted for the navigation of the river. There would be no difficulty as to food, for fish could be obtained in any quantities, and grain was, he had heard from some of the Tartar prisoners who knew that portion of the Yenesei, abundant and extraordinarily cheap.

He seated himself in the stern of the boat with a paddle. There was no occasion to steer, for it mattered in no way whether the boat drove down the river bow or stern first; but at present it was an amusement to keep her straight with an occasional stroke with the paddle. Luka sat on the floorboards at the bottom of the boat, and set himself to work to manufacture from the squirrels' skins two fur caps of the same pattern as those worn by the Ostjaks. Godfrey had asked him to do so in order that they might be taken for members of that tribe by anyone looking at them from the villages on the banks. As to the dress it did not signify, as many of the more settled Ostjaks had adopted the Russian costume. Godfrey intended to fish as they drifted along, but they had at present at least as much fish on board as they could consume while it was good. Luka, as he worked, sang a lugubrious native ditty, while with his knife he trimmed the skins into shape. Having done this he proceeded to sew them together with great skill.

"Why, you are quite a tailor, Luka," Godfrey remarked.

"Everyone sews with us," Luka replied. "The women do most, but in winter the boys help, and sometimes the men, to make rugs and robes of the skins of the beasts we have taken in the summer. What do you say, shall I leave these tails

hanging down all round, except just in front? They often wear them so in winter."

"But it is not winter now, Luka."

"No, it is not winter; but you see the Ostjaks and most of the Russians wear their hair long, quite down to the neck. Our hair is growing, but at present it will only just lie down flat. If I leave on these black tails round the caps, at a little distance it will look like hair. Then, if you like, I can make two summer caps to put on when we land to buy anything."

"Very well, Luka, I think the idea is a good one. The people do wear their hair long, and our close crops might excite attention. This is better than gold-digging at Kara, isn't it?"

Luka nodded. "No good for man always to work," he said. "Good to lie quiet sometimes."

"I don't know that I care about lying quiet generally, Luka, but it is pleasant to do so in a boat. I am keeping a look-out for wild-fowl, it would make a pleasant change to fish diet."

"Not so far south as this. The Yenesei swarms with them in winter, but in summer they go north. Just before the frost begins you can shoot as many as you like."

"That will be something to look forward to. When does the weather begin to get cold and dry?"

"Where I lived the nights began to get cold at the end of September, but we shall be far down the Yenesei by that time, and it will begin early in the month."

"We shall be a long way down," Godfrey said, "if we keep on at this pace. We must be going past the banks eight or nine versts an hour."

"That is nothing; it will be more than twice that sometimes. The Angara between the lake and Irkutsk runs fifteen versts. When I was taken east we saw barges, each towed up-stream by twenty horses, and it took them sometimes four days, sometimes six, to make forty-five versts."

As they went along they passed several fishing-boats, but

as they were keeping in the middle of the stream, while the boats lay in the slacker water near the shore, there was no conversation. Twice the Ostjaks shouted to know where they were going, but Luka only replied by pointing down the stream. The journey was singularly uneventful. At night they lit a torch for a short time, and generally speared sufficient fish for the next day, but if not, they cut a strip or two from the back of one they had caught, baited three or four hooks and dropped them overboard, and never failed in a short time to fill up their larder. Sometimes they grilled the fish over the fire, sometimes fried them, sometimes cut them up in pieces that would go into the kettle, and boiled them. Occasionally, when evening approached, they paddled to the shore near a village, and Luka, whose Tartar face was in keeping with his dress, went boldly in and purchased tobacco, tea, and flour, and a large block of salt, occasionally bringing off a joint of meat, for which the price was only four kopecks, or about a penny a pound; five kopecks being worth about three halfpence according to the rate of exchange. A hundred kopecks go to the rouble; the silver rouble being worth from two and tenpence to three shillings and twopence, the paper rouble about two shillings.

At first Godfrey had steered half the night and Luka the other half, but after the second night they gave this up as a waste of labour, as the boat generally drifted along near the middle of the river, and even had it floated in-shore no harm would have been done. The fox skins made them a soft bed, and they spread a couple of the large skins over the boat and were perfectly warm and comfortable. Godfrey thought that on an average they did a hundred and twenty miles a day. On the eighth day the river, which had been widening gradually, flowed into another and greater stream, the Yenesei. Hitherto they had been travelling almost due west, but the Yenesei ran north. As they floated down they had had much conversation as to their plans. It was now nearly the end of August, and it would not be long before winter was upon them. Another

month and the Yenesei would be frozen, and they would be obliged to winter. The question was where should they do so?

Now they were on the Yenesei Luka was on his native river, though his home was fully a thousand miles higher up. Godfrey had at first proposed that he should disembark here and make his way up the banks home, but the offer filled Luka with indignation.

"What are you going to do without me?" he asked. "You can talk a little Tartar, quite enough to get on among my people, but how could you get on with the Ostjaks? Besides, even if I were to leave you, and I would rather die than do that, I could not go to my home, for in my native village I should be at once arrested and sent back to the mines. I might live among other Tartars, but what good would that be? They would be strangers to me. Why should I leave you, who have been more than a brother to me, to go among strangers? No, wherever you go I shall go with you, and when you get to your own land I shall be your servant. You can beat me if you like, but I will not leave you. Did you not, for my sake, strike down the man in the prison? Did you not take me with you, and have you not brought me hither? What could I have done alone? If you are tired of me shoot me, but as long as I live I will not leave you."

Godfrey hastened to assure Luka that he had only spoken for his good, that he was well aware that without him he should have little chance of getting through the winter, and that nothing therefore was farther from his thoughts than to separate himself from him if he was willing to remain. It was some time before Luka was pacified, but when he at last saw that Godfrey had no intention whatever of leaving him behind if he were willing to go with him, he recovered his spirits and entered into the discussion as to where they had better winter. He had never been below the town of Yeneseisk, but he knew that the Ostjaks were to be found fully a thousand miles below that town, especially on the left bank of the river,

but below that, and all along the right bank, the Tunguses and Yuraks were the principal tribes. It was finally agreed that they should keep on for at least eight hundred miles beyond Yeneseisk, and then haul up their boat and camp at some Ostjak village, and there remain through the winter.

"We will get at Yeneseisk whatever you think the Ostjak will prize most—knives and beads for the women, and some cheap trinkets and looking-glasses. Some small hatchets, too, would probably be valued."

"Yes," Luka said, "Ostjaks have told me that their kindred far down the river were more like the people to the extreme north by the sea. They are pagans there, and not like us to the south. They have reindeer which draw their sledges. They are very poor and know nothing. From them we can get furs, but we can buy goat-skins and sheep-skins at Yeneseisk."

"We shall have to depend upon them for food," Godfrey said.

"Why, we can get food for ourselves," Luka said somewhat indignantly. "When the cold begins, before the river freezes, we shall get great quantities of fish. They will freeze hard, and last till spring. Then, too, the river will be covered with birds. We shall shoot as many as we can of these, and freeze them too. Flour we must take with us, but flour is very cheap at Yeneseisk. Corn will not grow there, but they bring it down in great boats from the upper river."

"But how do they get the boats back, Luka?"

"They do not get them back; they break them up for firewood. Firewood is dear at Yeneseisk, and they get much more for the barges for fires than it cost to build them in the forests higher up."

"Then how do they do for fires among the Ostjaks?"

"I have heard they do not have wood fires; they kill seals. There are numbers of them farther down the river, and from their fat they make oil for lamps and burn these. We shall be in no hurry as we go down. We will float near the banks, and

may kill some seals. What are you thinking of?" for Godfrey was looking rather serious.

"I was thinking, Luka, that these things we are thinking of buying, the things to trade with the Ostjaks, you know, and the flour, and tea, and goat-skins, and so on, will take a good deal of money. We don't spend much now, but when we get into Russia we shall want money. We can't beg our way right across the country."

"No," Luka said, "but we shall not be idle all the winter."

"How do you mean we shall not be idle, Luka?"

"We must hunt; that is what the Ostjaks and Tunguses do. We must get skins of beaver, sable, ermine, and black foxes, and we must sell them at Turukhansk. There are Russian traders there. They do not live there in the winter, but come down in the spring to buy the skins that have been taken in the winter."

"That sounds more cheerful," Godfrey said. "You had better get another flask of powder, and some more bullets and shot for me, Luka, and some better arrow-heads for yourself."

"Yes, we shall want them more than anything. We can do without flour, but we cannot do without weapons."

"Well, you must do the buying, Luka. They will take you for an Ostjak, from some village up the river, who has come in to lay in his stock of provisions for the winter. It is of no use my trying to pass here as a native, though in Russia I might be taken as a Russian."

CHAPTER XII

WINTER

A FEW hours after entering the Yenesei they saw on the right bank of the river, which was now of great width, the domes of the town. They ran in to the shore a mile above it.

"I shall not land, Luka," Godfrey said. "I don't want to be questioned. I shall put off, and drop our anchor a quarter of a mile out and fish. You must make two or three journeys if necessary."

"The things will not be heavy, Godfrey, the flour is the only thing that will weigh much. I will get someone to help me down with that."

They had already gone over and over again the list of purchases to be made.

"I shall drop down a little nearer the town, Luka, when I think it is about time for you to be coming back, so you won't have so far to carry the things. Don't be more than three hours whether you have got anything or not, or I shall begin to feel anxious about you."

Luka nodded, and went off. Godfrey paddled the boat out a short distance, let down the stone, and began to fish. He was under no real uneasiness as to the young Tartar, there was nothing about him to distinguish him from other natives, and as these would be about this time arriving in considerable numbers at Yeneseisk to sell the skins of the animals they had taken in the chase during the summer, and to lay in stores for the winter, it was unlikely in the extreme that anyone would even question him. Such indeed was the case. There were numbers of natives in the stores of the Russian traders, and he made his purchases without any question whatever being asked. He bought rather more hatchets, knives, and trinkets than they had agreed upon, and two sacks of flour, although

he deemed the latter to be a luxury that they could very well dispense with altogether. Godfrey was just thinking of taking up his anchor and going down towards the town when he saw him returning, accompanied by two natives carrying the sacks. He pulled up his anchor and paddled to shore. "Have you got everything, Luka?" he asked.

"Everything—powder, shot, and balls; tea, salt; ten knives, and eight axes; beads, four goat-skins, looking-glasses, tobacco, and flour"; and one by one he handed the articles as he named them into the boat.

"How much flour is there, Luka?"

"Two hundred pounds. I have got more trinkets than we said. They were very cheap. They look like gold and silver, and only cost ten kopecks apiece. I have also brought two bottles of vodka."

"That is bad, Luka."

"The two only cost a rouble," Luka said calmly; "they may be very useful to us; and I bought more tea and tobacco than we said."

The men who had carried the flour had received a few kopecks for their trouble, and had gone off as soon as they had laid down their burdens. Directly the things were handed into the boat, Luka stepped in and they pushed off into the stream.

"I have bought plenty of arrow-heads, and two steel spear heads and shafts."

"I wondered what those short poles were."

"They are of tough wood and the right length, ten feet long. They are good for seal-hunting and for bears."

"Well, I think you have done capitally, Luka. You have made the money go a long way. I suppose you have spent the hundred roubles you took with you?"

"I have four left. I think I have done very well. We have everything we shall want through the winter."

"Well, we are fairly off for the north now," Godfrey said, in high spirits that everything was settled, and that for eight

months at least there would not be the slightest risk of meeting with a Russian policeman or soldier. "Hurrah for the north, Luka, and for shooting and adventures!"

Luka smiled. It was rarely he laughed, but he was always ready to smile when Godfrey addressed him.

"The air feels brisk and cold to-day. We shall soon have winter upon us."

"Yes; look there!" Luka said, pointing into the air ahead of them.

"What is it? It looks like a long black streak."

"Geese," Luka said. "It is a flight of wild geese from the north."

As it approached Godfrey saw that the Tartar was right. A solitary bird led the way, two followed him closely, then came rank after rank widening out till it was a broad band of fully fifty abreast. Line after line they followed in almost military array, and extending in length fully a quarter of a mile.

"Why, there must be thirty or forty thousand of them there," he exclaimed in amazement.

"You will see bigger flocks than that," Luka said. "Why, all the river, from Minusinsk down to Turukhansk, more than 2000 miles, is well-nigh covered with birds. We shall have no lack of meat presently."

During the day many flights similar to those first seen passed overhead, some larger, some containing only a score or two birds. The next day the numbers were still larger, whole battalions coming along almost incessantly. These were by no means confined to geese. There were gulls and swans, flocks of small birds of many kinds, flights of wild ducks—the latter, for the most part, flying much lower than the geese, which kept far overhead.

"We had better land to-night," Luka said. "They fly close after dark, and the flocks will settle on the banks. We will shoot them as they come overhead. You may not see them well, but they are so thick that you can hardly miss them."

Accordingly, when evening came on they landed, fastened

the boat, took a couple of sheep-skins each to throw over their shoulders (for even in these two days the cold had sensibly increased), and lay down to await the coming of the birds. All day long the air had been full of their cries, but it had grown quieter now, though occasionally they heard a sharp cry of the leader of a flock, followed by a responsive note from the birds following him. From time to time Godfrey could hear the whirring sound of a multitude of wings as the flocks passed overhead. These became louder as the time went on, and he knew that they were flying lower. He had loaded his gun with heavy shot, and once or twice was disposed to fire, but Luka each time stopped him. "They are much too high yet. They will come close down presently." The stars were shining brightly, and Godfrey could make out the outlines of the geese as they passed overhead. Presently there was a sharp call a few hundred yards higher up the bank.

"This lot are coming low," Luka whispered. "They are probably going to settle to feed. Get ready now."

Godfrey lay with his gun pointed upwards; a minute later he heard the rustling of wings, which rose to a sound like a mighty wind, and then some forty yards overhead a dark cloud of birds swept along across the sky. Godfrey fired one barrel, waited a moment and then fired again. With a loud cry of surprise and alarm the flock divided in two, and almost instantly there were several heavy thuds on the ground close by.

"Hurrah! we have got some of them," Godfrey said, and leaping up they ran to collect the fallen birds. There were five of them. "That is grand," he exclaimed in delight.

"Will you shoot some more?" Luka asked.

"No, we have as many as we can eat, Luka, for the next three days at least. It would be a waste of powder and shot to kill more, and worse still, it would be a waste of life. It is right to kill what we require as food, but to my mind there is nothing more wicked than taking life merely for amusement. I consider that we should well deserve any misfortune that

might happen to us if we were to kill any one of God's creatures wantonly. One of our best poets has written:

“ ‘He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.’

“It makes me furious sometimes, Luka, when I read books of what is called sport, and find men boasting of killing numerous creatures merely for the pleasure of killing them. I feel that nothing would give me greater pleasure than to flog such brutes.”

Luka did not much understand this outburst of indignation, but as usual he grunted an assent, and carrying the birds they returned to the boat.

“It is freezing to-night,” the Tartar said as they stepped in. “I will lay the geese in the bow beyond the cover. They will be frozen by the morning.”

Godfrey was glad of the wrapping of warm furs that night, and even when he shook them off and looked out at sunrise, it was still so chilly that, after he had leaned over the side of the boat as usual, and sluiced his head with water, he was glad to take a paddle and work hard for a bit to keep himself warm.

“Get the fire alight, Luka, and the kettle on,” he said, “and cut up one of those geese. How are you going to get the feathers off? I suppose you will have to pluck them and singe them.”

“It would take much too long that. We can spare the feathers this time.”

So saying, with his knife he made a slight incision down the breast-bone, and then proceeded to tear off the skin, bit by bit, feathers and all.

“That is a quick way,” Godfrey said, “though it doesn't improve the bird's appearance; but that is a trifle. Never mind the bread, we shall have to do without that before long, and I feel as hungry as a hunter.”

In a very few minutes the fire was blazing, and portions of the goose frizzling over it, and in twenty minutes the meal was ready. Godfrey thought he had never eaten anything nicer; and the meat being much less rich than that of tame geese, he did very well without bread. For the next three days they made no pause, floating down night and day, the stream varying in speed from five to ten miles an hour. At points where the stream was most rapid, they paddled in towards the bank to avoid the waves raised by the river in its course. The light boat always floated easily over these, but she needed to be kept with her head to them; and Godfrey was afraid that a moment's carelessness might bring her broad-side on to them, and therefore preferred to glide along at a somewhat slower rate near the shore.

The river was now a mile and a half wide. To the left the country was flat, but on the right they could see hills rising far above each other. One or two small trading stations were seen on the right bank, but upon the left they passed only a few clusters of Ostjak yourts. On the right great pine forests came down in places to within a short distance of the river, but these were rarely seen on the left. On the fifth day after leaving Yeneseisk they saw a small trading station on the right bank. This Godfrey, who had got the geography of the river by heart, judged to be Peslovska, because it was one of the few trading stations which was not situated at a point where a tributary stream ran into the Yenesei.

"We are far enough down now, Luka," he said. "We are not more than two hundred miles from Turukhansk. We will land at the next Ostjak huts we come to, and see if they are disposed to be friendly with us."

"They will be friendly," Luka said confidently. "Why not? They are peaceable people, and they know that did they touch strangers they would be punished. There are Russian soldiers at Turukhansk. The Ostjaks are very poor. You have things to give them, and you want nothing of them."

Twenty miles further they saw a group of seven huts on the

left bank ahead of them, and paddling in landed close to them. Three or four canoes much smaller than their own lay there, and as they climbed the lofty bank some of the Ostjaks came out from their huts.

"What do you want?" one of them asked abruptly.

"I am travelling with this gentleman, who has come from a far distant country to hunt and to shoot game here in winter. We would like to live beside your village and to hunt with you. You see he has a gun. He has many things as presents, and it will be well for the village where he settles. Here is some tobacco for all," and Luka handed a small roll of tobacco to each of the men. "We have also some presents for the women," and he produced two or three looking-glasses, and some rows of large blue and red beads. The women, who were listening in the huts, at once came out.

"It is good," an old man, who seemed to be the leader of the Ostjaks, said. "Why should not the stranger live here with us and hunt with us if he chooses? He will be welcome. Let us help the strangers."

The whole of the Ostjaks at once set to work. Godfrey chose a piece of level ground twenty or thirty yards lower down than the huts. He and Luka, aided by some of the men, carried the various articles out of the boat. While they were doing this, the women stuck some poles in the ground round the circle Godfrey had traced, and lashed them together in the middle with some strips of hide. The three large skins were placed against this on the northern side. Then the women paused.

"You had better buy some more large skins if they have got them, Luka. Say that you will give a knife for hides enough to finish the huts with."

The knives were large ones with rough handles and strong blades, and when Luka took one out from a bundle and said to the chief, "We will give this knife for enough skins to finish the hut," he gave an order to his wife, and she and two of the other women at once brought some elk hides from a pile lying

by the side of his tent. A few stitches here and there with the needle made of a sharp fish-bone, with a thread of twisted gut, fastened the corners of the hides together, and in half an hour the tent was complete. The goat-skins were spread on the ground. The fox and other skins were made into two piles, one on each side of the tent, and all the goods stored inside.

"This is splendid," Godfrey said; "here we are as snug as if we were born Ostjaks. I had no idea they would have made us so comfortable. We will give them a cup of tea all round, Luka, as a reward for their labours. We don't care for sugar, but the two pounds you bought at Yeneseisk will come in useful now. They will think a lot more of it if it is sweet. See if they have got a big kettle. That little thing of ours will only hold a couple of quarts."

Upon inquiry the chief produced a cauldron, which he exhibited with great pride. It had evidently been used for melting down blubber. Luka carried it down to the water's edge, and then scrubbed it with sand until it was tolerably clean; then he rubbed it with wisps of coarse grass, filled it with water, and stood it on a fire that the Ostjaks had made from drift-wood picked up from the shore. In half an hour the water boiled. He put in two or three handfuls of tea and half a pound of sugar, let it boil for another minute or two, and then took the pot off the fire. Then he invited the Ostjaks to dip in their cups. In each of the huts they had a few tin mugs, for the expense and risk of carriage of crockery rendered the prices prohibitive, and even the tin mugs were prized as among their most precious possessions. Luka and Godfrey also dipped in their cups as an act of civility, but the latter made a wry face when it approached his lips, for the odour of the blubber was very strong, and he took an opportunity, when none of the Ostjaks were looking, to pour the contents of the tin upon the ground beside him; but to the Ostjaks the smell and flavour of blubber was no drawback, and men and women sat round the fire drinking the sweet

liquor with great enjoyment, and evidently highly contented at the coming of this stranger among them.

While they were partaking of it Godfrey heard a sound behind, and looking round saw a boy driving in several reindeer. He was delighted at the sight, not only because it promised hunting expeditions, but because they might aid to carry them across the frozen steppes, to the Obi, before the frost broke up. Talking with the Ostjaks Luka found that, as the temperature had been below freezing-point all day, they intended to commence fishing in earnest the next morning. The position of the huts had been specially selected for that purpose. The river made a sharp bend just above them, and the point threw the current across to the opposite bank, forming almost a back-water at the spot where the huts stood. It seemed strange to Godfrey, as he lay down that night, to be without the gentle motion of the boat to which he had been so long accustomed, and he lay awake for some time, not forgetting before he went to sleep to thank God for the wonderful success that had so far attended him, and to pray for a continuance of His protection.

As soon as it was light the boats all put off, and anchoring a short distance out were soon engaged in fishing. Godfrey put down four lines, each with six of the hooks Mikail had purchased for him before starting from Kara. These were baited with strips of fish, and he and Luka were soon busy at work hauling in the fish. They were mostly jack or tench, and by the evening they had caught nearly a hundred. When they rowed to shore they found that they had been far more successful than any of the Ostjaks, this being due to the superiority of their hooks over the fish-bone contrivances of the natives. Following the example of the Ostjaks they laid the fish in lines in front of their tent to freeze during the night.

After boiling their kettle, frying a couple of fish, and taking supper, they lighted two torches and again went out, returning before midnight with twenty-five salmon averaging fifteen

pounds each. By the morning the fish were all frozen as hard as pieces of wood, and were then laid in a pile. For four days this work continued with equal success, and by the end of that time they had a pile of fish six feet square and three feet high, making, Godfrey calculated, nearly a ton of fish. They had observed that some of the Ostjaks had each morning brought in several wild geese and swans, and Luka learnt from them that there was a large marsh a mile away in which large flights of geese settled every night. Accompanied by two of the Ostjaks they started late in the evening for the spot. When they came near the marsh they could hear a low chattering noise as the birds fed on the aquatic grasses. Sometimes they heard cries in the air, answered by calls from the feeding birds, and followed speedily by a great rustling of wings as fresh flocks alighted.

Godfrey and Luka had brought with them some fox-skins and sat wrapped up in them, but in spite of that they felt the cold as they waited hour after hour. Godfrey dozed off several times, and at last slept for three or four hours. He was awakened by a touch from Luka, and a low warning to keep silence. The morning was breaking. He found that the Ostjaks had built a sort of shelter of bushes, which had the effect of breaking the force of the north wind and of hiding them from the water-fowl. Raising his head cautiously he saw before him a sheet of shallow water; this was absolutely covered with geese, a few swans being seen here and there. Luka had warned him not to fire until the Ostjaks had shot all their arrows, as the sound of his gun would at once scare the whole flock. The edge of the water was about forty yards away. The Ostjaks and Luka had both made holes through the bushes in front of them so as to be able to shoot without exposing their heads. Moving gently Godfrey found a spot where he could see through the boughs. The natives were just ready to shoot. There were three swans close to the edge of the water, and the bows twanged almost together.

Although he knew how marvellous was the shooting of the

Ostjaks, he was nevertheless surprised at seeing that each of the birds was struck in the head, and was thus killed instantly without the slightest noise being made.

Again and again they shot, and each arrow brought down its bird. Luka's third arrow was less successful; it wounded a bird on the neck, and with loud cries of pain and alarm it flew flapping across the pool. In an instant the whole mass of birds rose on the wing, circling round and round with loud cries. The natives, lying on their backs, shot arrow after arrow into the air, in each case transfixing a goose. Each had twelve arrows, and when they were exhausted Luka said, "Now, Godfrey, you can fire."

Godfrey waited until a number of birds flew in a mass over him, and then discharged both barrels. Five geese fell, and then the whole vast flock flew away to the north, leaving the lagoon entirely deserted save by the floating bodies of their dead companions.

"Arrow better than gun," Luka said as he rose. "Gun kill, but frighten all away. Arrow keep on killing."

"That is true enough, Luka; there is no doubt the bow is the best for this sort of work; but I shall manage better another time."

The birds were picked up. Twelve had fallen to each of the Ostjaks. Luka had eleven, and Godfrey five. It was a heavy burden to carry back to the huts. Godfrey and Luka's shares of the birds were laid by the pile of fish, with the exception of one which Luka proceeded to skin and hang up, while Godfrey saw to the fire and put on the kettle.

When they had finished breakfast Godfrey said, "We will take three or four hours' sleep now, Luka, and then I am going down to have a look at that marsh." They accordingly started at mid-day. Godfrey made a detour round the lagoon, and a hundred yards beyond it, on the opposite side, found a clump of bushes that he thought would suit his purpose. With Luka's assistance he cleared a spot in the middle large enough for them to lie down on, and then returned to camp. They

took their next meal early, and then, taking some furs to make themselves comfortable, again started round the lagoon. It was just sunset when they got there, and spreading two or three fox-skins on the ground, and throwing two over their shoulders, they waited.

It was scarcely dusk when the first flock of geese passed close over their heads, on their way to the lagoon. Luka discharged two arrows, and then Godfrey fired his two barrels into them. Several fell, but the flock scattered with wild screams; but, after circling round and round for some time, settled in the lagoon. A quarter of an hour passed, and then another flock came along. All night the flocks continued to arrive at short intervals, and from each Godfrey brought down several. Luka's arrows were soon exhausted, but Godfrey continued firing until morning began to break. Then they got up to see the result of the night's shooting. Luka, although seldom excited, gave a shout of pleasure. The ground around them was thickly strewn with geese. Many were only wounded; but Luka, with a short, heavy stick, soon put them out of their pain, although not without several sharp chases. Then they collected and counted the birds. There were eighty-four in all.

"Another night's shooting, Luka, and our larder will be full."

Each taking up six geese, which was as much as they could carry, they returned to the tents, and then set out again, accompanied by all the boys and girls of the village; and this time the whole of the geese were carried to the hut.

"It is an awful pity," Godfrey said, as he looked at the great pile, "that we haven't got anything we could use for holding the feathers. Well, we will have them picked anyhow. We can make a thick layer of them under the skins for the present. When it gets downright cold we can nestle in among them somehow."

Accordingly the children were set to work to pluck the birds, which were then left out to freeze in the same way as the fish.

That night and the next day they rested, and then had another night's shooting. The amount of success was as great as that which had attended the first.

"We have plenty now to last us well on into the spring," Godfrey said as he looked at the great pile. "What is to be done next, Luka?"

"Pour water over them and the fish and let them freeze."

"Do they keep better that way, Luka?"

"Yes; not get so dry."

The Ostjaks had been astounded at the success of their visitors, both in fishing and shooting. Godfrey now had a conversation with their chief, and offered to shoot a supply of geese for the natives, if they would furnish him and his companion with a complete outfit of furs for the winter. This the chief at once agreed to, as they had a large supply of foxes' skins in camp, and these, with the exception of the rarer sorts, were practically worthless for the purpose of exchange.

Godfrey made the chief another offer: to give him a hatchet, two knives, and six fish-hooks, if he would supply them with as much seal's flesh as they might require during the winter, and with blubber for lamps. The Ostjaks had already killed a good many seals; but the pursuit of them required time and patience, and Godfrey wanted to ensure a supply for the winter, although Luka told him they would have plenty of opportunities of getting seals then. Accordingly, for the next ten days the shooting was continued at night, Godfrey and Luka sleeping during the day, and leaving it to the young Ostjaks to collect and bring in the birds.

The cold daily increased, and Godfrey began to feel much the want of warmer clothing. However, on the eighth day the Ostjaks brought in two suits. They were the joint work of the women of the village. As the Ostjaks were greatly pleased at the quantity of food coming in daily, which ensured them a sufficiency of meat throughout the winter, in addition to their own stock of fish, the work was well done. For each a closely-fitting shirt had been made of the squirrel skins they

had brought down with them, with the fur inside. The trousers were of red fox-skin, with the hair outside. The upper garment was a long capote of the same fur, reaching down to the ankles, and furnished with a hood covering the head and face, with the exception of an opening from the eyes down to the mouth. In addition to these, was given to each as a present a pair of Ostjak boots. These were large and loose. They were made of goat-skins, rendered perfectly supple by grease and rubbing, and with the hair inside. They came up to the thighs, and had a thick sole made of layers of elk-hide. There was also for each a pair of socks of squirrel's skin, with the hair inside, and a pair of fingerless gloves of double skin, the fur being both inside and out, except in the palm, which was of single skin, with the fur inside.

"Well, if it is cold enough to require all that," Godfrey said, "it will be cold indeed; but it will be awful walking about with it. Surely one can never want all those furs!"

But in time Godfrey found that they were none too many, for at Turukhansk the thermometer in winter sometimes sinks to 60 degrees below zero. For a time, however, he found no occasion to use the capote, the fur shirt, trousers, and boots being amply sufficient, while the fur cap with the hanging tails kept his neck and ears perfectly warm. Already the ice was thick on the still reach of the river beside which the huts stood, although, beyond the shelter of the point, the Yenesei still swept along. The lagoon had been frozen over for some days, in spite of the water being kept almost perpetually in motion by the flocks of water-fowl, and the ground was as hard as iron. The Ostjaks were now for some days employed in patching up their huts and preparing them to withstand the cold of winter.

An immense pile of firewood had been collected on the shore, for boughs of trees and drift-wood, brought down by the river, often came into the back-water, and these were always drawn ashore, however busied the men might be at the time in fishing. All through the summer every scrap of wood that came

within reach had been landed, and the result was a great pile that would, they calculated, with the blubber they had stored, be sufficient to last them through the winter.

"What will they do if fuel should run short?" Godfrey asked Luka. "They will cross the frozen river with their sledges to the forests. They would either take their huts down and establish themselves there, or would cut wood, fill their sledges, and bring it over. I have been talking to them. On the other side there are many Russian villages, for the post-road is on that side. In summer the carriages are drawn by horses; in winter they have reindeer. These people are very poor; the skins that they make their clothes with are all poor, the animals were torn by the dogs or injured—that is why they could not sell them. Those red fox-skins would have been worth two roubles each if they had been good; but the merchants will give nothing for those that are injured. They say it does not pay for the carriage. So they were glad to make them up for us."

"What do they do with the reindeer?"

"They milk them in summer, and in winter they let them to the owners of the post-stations. Of course, when they move they use them themselves."

"What we want, Luka," Godfrey said, after sitting quiet for some time, "is more money. If we had that, we might hire sledges and reindeer as soon as the snow gets on the ground, and travel west; but of course there is no tempting these poor people to make such a journey without money to pay them well."

"They will go hunting presently," Luka said. "You might get some good furs and sell them."

"Yes; but I don't see why I should. No doubt many of the Russian peasants in the villages have guns; and if they don't get skins, why should I?"

"A great many skins come down every year," the Tartar said. "Black fox is worth money, fifteen, twenty roubles; ermine is worth money; lots of them in the woods."

"Well, we must hope for the best. If we can but get enough

for them to take us across to the Obi, we ought to be able to coast round in a canoe to Archangel. But I don't think we could do it from this river in one season. The ice does not break up till June, and begins to form again in October. We can only rely upon three open months. I doubt whether we could get in that time from the Yenesei. However, it is of no use our bothering ourselves about that now."

Another fortnight and the frost was so severe that the ice extended almost across the river, and a heavy fall of snow covered everything. As soon as it was deep enough Godfrey and Luka followed the example of the Ostjaks and raised a high wall of it encircling the tent to keep off the bitter north wind. Then the weather changed again. The wind set in from the south, and drenching rains fell. At the end of two or three days the ice on the river had disappeared, but it was not long before winter set in more bitterly than before. The ground became covered with the snow to a depth of upwards of three feet, and the river froze right across. The wall round the tent was rebuilt, Godfrey fashioning wooden shovels from some planks he found among the drift-wood. The Ostjaks took to their snow-shoes, and Godfrey fashioned for himself and Luka two pairs of runners, such as he had seen in use near St. Petersburg.

These were about five feet long, by as many inches wide, and slightly turned up at each end. A strap was nailed across, under which the foot went. The ends were turned up by damping the wood and holding it over the fire, a string being fastened tightly from end to end, so as to keep the wood bent. When they were completed they practised with them steadily, and found that as soon as the surface of the snow hardened they could get along upon them at a good pace on level ground, completely distancing the Ostjaks on their broader snow-shoes. The Ostjaks evidently admired them greatly, but were too much wedded to their own customs to adopt them.

Godfrey was so warmly clad that he felt the cold but little. His eyes, however, suffered from the glare of the snow, and he

at once adopted spectacles, which were made for him by the Ostjaks. They were the shape of goggles, and made of skin with the hair on, narrow slits being cut in them, these slits being partly covered with the hair, and so shielding the eyes from the glare of the snow. They were fastened on by leathern straps, tied at the back of the head. The Ostjaks themselves seldom wore them, but they were used by Samoyedes, a kindred tribe, dwelling generally farther north, though many of them at times came down even as far as Yeneseisk.

Early in November the Ostjaks prepared for a hunting expedition. The men, since they were confined to their huts by the snow, had been busy in manufacturing traps of various kinds and getting the sledges into order. On a large sledge, which was to be drawn by three reindeer, was placed the skins necessary for forming a tent. On these were piled a store of provisions, which were chopped out from the frozen masses by hatchets. On the smaller sledges were placed the traps and a quantity of the coarser kinds of frozen fish as food for the dogs. It had been settled that Godfrey and Luka should accompany them. They had contributed liberally from their store of geese and fish, and added to the load on the reindeer sledge their kettle, frying-pan, and a parcel of tea and tobacco. When all was ready the three reindeer were harnessed to the large sledge, one to each of the three small sledges, and soon after daybreak on the 5th of November they started, the Ostjaks being anxious to be off, for the weather again showed signs of breaking, and it might be another month before the river was permanently frozen for the winter. Six Ostjaks, including the chief, formed with Godfrey and Luka the hunting party; the others remained behind to look after the rest of the reindeer, as it was necessary to keep a space clear from snow, to enable them to get at the grass. They would, too, continue the fishing, keeping holes broken in the ice and catching fish by torchlight. The men walked with the sledges, which only went at a walking pace.

Across the river the route was easy, the surface of the snow

being crisp and hard, but it was hard work mounting the opposite bank, which was exceedingly steep. The reindeer pulled well, and at difficult points the men aided them. A short distance from the bank they crossed the post-road, and in another half-hour were in the forest.

Godfrey had already been told that they would travel for several days before they began to hunt, as the villagers with their guns scared the wild animals from the forests in their neighbourhoods. There was no difficulty in travelling through the forest, for the pine-trees stood generally at some distance apart, and there was but little growth of underwood. All day they kept steadily on. When evening came they cut some young poles, erected their tent, and lit a fire in the centre. By this time Godfrey had become accustomed to the smoke, which escaped from the top of the tent by a hole.

A couple of geese were cut up and broiled over the flame, and some cakes baked in the frying-pan, their pipes were lighted, and they lay down in a circle with their feet to the fire. For three more days the journey was continued. Then, as several tracks had been seen in the snow, they halted and prepared for the hunt. The method was simple. The men scattered in several directions, and when they struck upon a recent track followed it up. Each man took with him a dog, a certain amount of provisions, a box of matches from Godfrey's store, and a large skin to wrap himself in at night. Sometimes, as Godfrey found, the track had to be followed a long distance before they came up to the animal, which always travelled in zigzag courses hunting about for white mice and other prey. Sometimes it was found to have taken to a hole, and then a trap was set to catch it when it came out. The animals were principally ermine; but one or two sable, which are considerably larger, with much more valuable skins, and some martens were taken. All belong to the weasel family; the upper part of the ermine being brown in summer, but, like most animals in or near the arctic zone, changing into a pure white in winter, with the exception of the tail, which

remains black as in summer. The ermine is but little larger than the English ferret, while the sable and marten are the size of large polecats. When the Ostjaks came up with them they either knocked them on the head with a club or shot them through the head. They were then carefully skinned, the bodies being thrown to the dogs for food.

It had been agreed that the animals caught should be divided; but Godfrey felt that he was doing but little, for he was unable to shoot them, as this would have damaged their skins. However, he aided in tracking them down, and in setting traps when he traced them to a hole; and once or twice he came up with and killed one with a club. Occasionally he shot a squirrel—the little animals coming out from their nests in holes in the trees at the sound of footsteps, their curiosity costing them dear. After remaining four days at this spot the tent was pulled down and packed up, and they advanced another two days' journey into the forest.

CHAPTER XIII

HUNTING

AT the end of a fortnight one of the Ostjaks started with the large sledge for the huts, taking with him all the skins that had been collected. These had mounted up to a considerable number, the Ostjaks considering their luck to have been extraordinary, and putting it down in a great degree to their white companion, for whom they began to have an almost superstitious respect, since the way he had supplied their village with food for the winter seemed to them almost miraculous. The reindeer with the light sledge would accomplish the return journey in two days with ease, although the distance had taken them five days on their way out. It was

to return with a fresh supply of provisions, especially for the dogs. The night after the sledge had left, the dogs barked fiercely for some time. They slept in the tent. Some of the Ostjaks made pillows of them, others allowed them to lie upon them, and they helped to keep the tent warm; the din when they began barking was prodigious.

"What is it all about?" Godfrey shouted in Luka's ear.

"I think it must be a bear," Luka shouted back.

"Why don't they let the dogs out?"

"They would drive the bears away, and it is too dark to see to shoot them. In the morning they will follow their track."

The dogs presently ceased barking and with low growls lay down again. As soon as it was light the Ostjaks turned out and found great footmarks round the tent. Before starting from the huts Godfrey had exchanged the heads of their fishing-spears for the iron spear-heads they had purchased. Loading his gun with ball, Godfrey with Luka and four of the Ostjaks started in pursuit, taking six of the dogs, and a sledge, with them. On his long runners he would soon have left the Ostjaks behind; but Luka translated their warning that they must all keep together, for as there were two bears it would be dangerous to attack them in lesser numbers.

In about an hour they arrived at a dense thicket, and it was evident that this was the lair of the bears until they took up their permanent winter quarters in a hollow tree. The dogs were urged to attack them, but could not be persuaded to enter far, confining themselves to barking fiercely. "How are we going to get at them?" Godfrey asked.

The Ostjaks consulted together, and then they collected some dry pine needles and twigs, and two of them went to the windward side of the thicket and made a fire, upon which, as soon as it was fairly alight, they threw some dead leaves mixed with snow.

"If they were to light the bushes themselves, it would drive them out quicker than that smoke," Godfrey said.

"Not good, not good," Luka said earnestly. "Once catch fire, big flame run through forest, burn miles and miles."

"I did not think of that," Godfrey said. "That would be a foolish trick."

However, the smoke had the desired effect, and in a minute or two, two bears burst out on the other side, growling angrily. The dogs rushed at them, barking loudly but taking care to keep at a safe distance from their paws. The bears both raised themselves on their haunches. The Ostjak bows twanged and Godfrey fired. One of the bears rolled over, the other charged at his assailants. Godfrey fired his second barrel, then dropping his gun and grasping his spear, stood ready to meet the charge. But the bear did not reach him, for as it rose on its hind-legs the Ostjaks and Luka again shot their arrows, and the bear rolled over dead. The two animals were placed on the sledge, the reindeer harnessed, and, the Ostjaks taking ropes to aid it with its heavy burden, they returned to the tent.

They had scarcely reached it when one of the other hunters returned with news that they had come upon the track of an elk. The bears were at once dragged into the tent, the entrance securely fastened to prevent a passing wolf or ounce from tearing them; then, taking with them this time all the dogs and the three sledges, they started, and in half an hour came to where the chief and his remaining followers were awaiting them.

"They came along here yesterday afternoon," the chief said to Luka. "There is one big stag, and one young one, and three females."

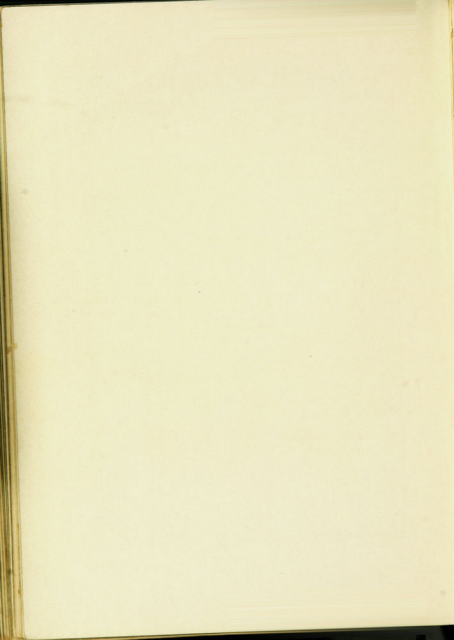
After three hours' walking they came to a spot where the snow was much trampled, and there were marks of animals having lain down.

"That is where they slept," the chief said. "They are travelling south, but they will probably stop to feed before they have gone far; we may catch them then." He ordered one of the men to stop with the sledges, and the rest proceeded onwards.

Not a word was spoken now, and as they went they took the greatest pains not to brush against any branch or twig.



GODFREY BRINGS DOWN AN ELK



The Ostjaks were now walking their fastest, and Godfrey had to exert himself to keep up with them. Their footfall was so light as to be scarce audible. After two hours' travelling they saw an opening among the trees, and here some young pines were growing thickly. The chief pointed significantly towards them, and Godfrey understood that the animals would probably be feeding there. They now went slowly, and the chief whispered orders that they were to make a circle round the opening and close round on the other side as noiselessly as possible. He himself would enter the thicket from the side on which he now was. The crackling of the pine twigs would drive them out on the other side. Very quietly they worked round and took up their stations, each standing behind a fir-tree, and then waited.

They could hear the stamping of heavy hoofs and the occasional breaking of twigs. Presently there was a louder and more continuous sound of breaking bushes, and then with a sudden rush a great elk, followed by four others, burst out of the thicket. As they came along the Ostjaks stepped out from their hiding-places and let fly their deadly arrows. The leading elk came close to the tree behind which Godfrey was standing, and as it passed he fired both barrels, hitting it just behind the shoulder. The elk ran a few paces and then fell. Three out of the other four had been brought down by the Ostjak arrows; the young male escaped. The satisfaction of the Ostjaks was great; for here, in addition to the value of the skins, was food for themselves and the dogs for some time to come.

A man was at once sent back for the sledges. While waiting for these the rest set out on various tracks of ermine they had passed on the way, and three of these and a marten were killed before the sledges came up. The big elk was placed on one sledge, one of the females on each of the others. The fourth was skinned, cut up, and divided among the three sledges. Lightly as the sledges ran over the snow the men were all obliged to harness themselves to ropes to assist the

deer, and it was late in the evening before they arrived at the hut. The fire was lighted at once. Godfrey undertook the cooking, while the rest skinned the bears and elk, cut them up, and hung up the carcasses on boughs beyond the reach of the dogs. These had a grand feast off the offal while the men were regaling themselves with fresh elk steaks.

For two months the hunting was continued with much success, then the Ostjaks said they would return home. Godfrey, however, was anxious to continue hunting; he had a small tent that had been made for him and Luka, and the Ostjak leader offered to leave one of the sledges with six dogs that had been trained to draught work. As soon as the Ostjaks had started on their return journey the tent, a store of provisions and furs, were packed in the sledge, and a fresh start made, as they had been in their present position for over a week. As they went along two of the poles were arranged so that they made a deep groove in the snow, by which they could find their way back to the starting-point. Two days' journey took them into a hilly country. They established themselves in a sheltered valley, and made that the centre from which they hunted.

They were now twelve days' journey from the Yenesei and well beyond the range of ordinary hunting parties. They had soon reason to congratulate themselves on entering the more mountainous country, for here the game was much more abundant than it had been before. The dogs had by this time become attached to them, for Godfrey was fond of animals, and had petted them in a manner to which they were quite unaccustomed from their Ostjak masters. One of them especially, a young dog, had taken regularly to accompany Godfrey when hunting, and he found the animal of the greatest utility, as it was able to follow the back track with undeviating certainty. This was of importance, for there was but a short twilight each twenty-four hours, the sun being below the horizon except for an hour or two at noon, and they were obliged to carry torches while following the tracks of the smaller animals.

Ermines were found in considerable numbers, and in the first week four fine sables were killed, as well as two martens and a bear; the latter was specially prized. They had brought a fortnight's provisions for themselves and the dogs, but they were anxious to eke these stores out as long as possible, as they could no longer depend upon getting fresh supplies from home. The bodies of the ermines were but a mouthful for one of the dogs, while the sables and martens gave them a mouthful all round. The bear, however, contained a large quantity of excellent food, and setting aside the hams for their own consumption they hung up the rest of the meat on a tree to serve out gradually among the dogs. They soon found, however, that they need be under no anxiety as to food, as foxes abounded, principally red, though two of the valuable black foxes fell to Godfrey's gun. They found many paths in the woods completely trodden down by animals. Here they used the Ostjak method of catching them: putting up a screen of branches across the track. Looking at these objects with suspicion, the animals invariably refused to try either to jump over or crawl through them, but went round at one end or the other. Here accordingly traps were fixed and many animals were taken.

Intense as the cold was Godfrey felt it even less than he had anticipated. The wide-spreading woods broke the force of the winds, and while they could sometimes see the tops of the trees swaying beneath its force they scarcely felt a breath below. Luka knew nothing of the Esquimaux fashion of making snow-huts, and said he had never heard of it among the Ostjaks or Samoyedes. At each of the halts, however, Godfrey piled the snow high over the low tent of reindeer-skin which he had got the women to make for him according to his own plan. It resembled a tent *d'abri*, or shelter tent, seven feet long and as much wide, was permanently closed at one end, and had flaps crossing each other at the entrance. Instead of depending entirely upon the two uprights and the ridge-pole between them, Godfrey when erecting it put eight

or ten poles on each side, stretching from the ridge out to the side of the tent, so as to support the skin under the snow they piled over it.

The bottom was covered with a thick mat of furs, the sides were lined with them, and others were hung across the entrance, so that the cold was effectually kept out. A large fire was kept burning in front of the tent, and from this, from time to time, red embers were taken out and placed in a cooking-pot inside. At night two or three lamps, fed by oil melted down from the fat of the animals they killed, were kept alight, and in this way lying snugly in their sleeping-bags they felt perfectly warm and comfortable, although the temperature outside was from forty to fifty degrees below zero. The dogs slept outside, with the exception of the one of which Godfrey had made a special pet, it being allowed to share the tent with them. A high bank of snow was erected on each side of the entrance to the tent. This served further to break the force of the wind and to retain and reflect back the heat of the fire. The dogs therefore, being provided with a good supply of meat from the proceeds of the chase, did very well.

One afternoon the sky was very thick and overcast, and Luka said he thought that they were going to have snow.

"In that case, Luka," Godfrey said, "we will set to work to make things comfortable. If there is a heavy fall we might be almost buried here. Ordinarily it is sheltered, but if there is a wind, and I can see that it is blowing now, it might drift very deep in this hollow, and we might find ourselves completely snowed up. I think the tent is strong enough to stand any pressure, but it does not contain much air. We will cut down some strong poles and lay them side by side across the snow walls in front of the tent. The smoke will find its way out through them, and if a deep snow comes on it will save the dogs from being snowed up; besides, it will give us a lot of additional air, which we may want. Two or three hours will do it. The time won't be thrown away anyhow, for the branches we cut off and the poles themselves will do for fire-wood."

The snow-flakes began to fall just as they finished the work—the result being a sort of flat-roofed shelter with snow walls ten feet long and six feet high, in front of the tent. A large quantity of firewood was piled up at the entrance to the shelter.

"That is a capital idea, Luka," Godfrey said as they retired into the tent. "We can sit with the entrance of the tent open now if we like and get the benefit of the fire outside, for the air having to pass close by it on its way to us gets comparatively warm."

When they went out to build up the fire for the last time before lying down, snow was falling steadily, and was already deep in front of the entrance to the shelter. The dogs had been well fed and lay thickly clustered round the fire, evidently greatly contented with the unusual luxury of a roof over them. Godfrey crawled into the tent again, closed the flaps, hung up a skin before them, and getting into his sleeping-bag lay there comfortably smoking his pipe and talking to Luka.

"We are as snug here as if we were in a palace, Luka; but I should not like to be caught out in the woods to-night. Have you ever heard of any of the Ostjaks or Samoyedes being frozen to death?"

"Couldn't be frozen if they had a hatchet and matches with them," he replied. "Can always chop down branches and make a hut and a fire in the middle to keep it warm. Then snow comes and covers it up and keeps out the wind. Out on the plains a man might get frozen if stupid, but he ought never to be if he knew what to do. He should look for a hollow where the snow had drifted deep, then make a hole in the side of the drift and crawl in. He ought to be quite warm there if furs are good. But they do not often get lost; they never go very far from huts when snow in the sky. Directly it comes on they would make for home. Can always get along in snow-shoes."

"The *isvostchiks* are often frozen in St. Petersburg in their sledges at night," Godfrey said.

"They can't build huts in a town," Luka remarked; "they

can't find snow deep enough to get into; town not good in winter."

"Are there many wolves here, Luka? Do they often attack people?"

"No, there is plenty of game in the woods. In Russia the game now, so I hear, is scarce, so the wolves must take to eating men; but here there is plenty of game, and so they do not often attack people. I have heard of hunters going out and never coming back again. Then people say wolves eat them, but not often so. May be killed by elk, or hurt by a falling tree, or climb hills and fall down. I do not think it is often the wolves. Wolves great cowards."

"I am glad to hear it, Luka; I have heard them howl sometimes at night and wondered whether they would come this way."

"Not come here," Luka said decidedly, "we keep plenty of big fire. All beasts afraid of fire. Then we have got dogs and guns. Much easier for wolves to attack elk; but even that they seldom do unless it is wounded or has injured itself."

"Well, I think I will go off to sleep; my pipe is out and the hot tea has made me sleepy."

After sleeping for some hours, Godfrey awoke with a strange feeling of oppression. Outside he could hear the dogs whimpering.

"Wake up, Luka," he said, "it is very close in here. I fancy the snow must have drifted very deep and covered us up completely. Let us get up and see about it."

It was quite dark outside, except that the embers of the fire threw a dull red light on the snow. The shelter seemed but half its former dimensions. The snow had drifted in at its entrance and lay in a bank piled up to the roof.

"Bring your spear, Luka, and mine, and shove them up between these poles. We must make a few holes up through the snow if we can to let a little air in."

The spears were pushed up and then worked a little to and fro to try to enlarge the hole. They were eight feet long, but

Godfrey did not feel at all sure that they penetrated through the cover of snow. However, when they had made a dozen of these holes there was a distinct change in the air.

"They have gone nearly through, if not quite, and anyhow they are near enough to the surface for the air to find its way out. Now we had better set to work at once to dig a passage out. That is one advantage of this shelter, there is a place to throw the snow back into."

Going down on their hands and knees they soon scraped the snow away until they reached the entrance to the shelter. Here the snow weighted by the pressure above was much denser and harder, and they could cut out blocks with their hatchets.

"Now," Godfrey said, "we must make a tunnel sloping upwards. It must be as steep as it can so that we are able to climb up, making steps to give us foothold. I will begin, for we only just want it wide enough for one. I will hand the blocks down to you as I cut them, and you pile them regularly along the sides here. As we fill the shelter up you must drive the dogs back into the tent. We shall want every inch of room for the snow before we get out."

For hours they worked steadily, taking it by turns to cut and to pile. The last four feet were much more difficult than the first, the snow, being lighter and less packed, falling in upon them as they dug. Once Luka was completely buried, and Godfrey had to haul him back by the legs. The atmosphere inside, however, improved as they got upwards, being able to penetrate between the particles of the light snow. It was six hours before they both struggled out, followed by the dogs in an impetuous rush. It took them another couple of hours to clear away and beat down the snow sufficiently to make an easy entrance to the shelter. A fire was lighted outside and a meal cooked, for the lamps were quite sufficient to keep the tent sufficiently warm, and they would have been well-nigh stifled with smoke had they attempted to light the fire in the shelter. The snow was still falling and drifting, and the sky showed no signs of change.

"The entrance will fill up again by to-morrow," Luka said, "and we shall have more trouble than ever to get out."

"We must provide against that, Luka; we must build a sort of roof over the entrance here, and then we shall only have to start from this point again. Let us set to work and chop down some poles at once."

After three hours' more work a cover was built over the entrance, and roofed with pine branches so as to prevent the snow from drifting in.

"Now, Luka, there is one more job, and unfortunately a long one, but we must do that. We must get the snow that we have packed in the shelter below out of the way, for if by any chance this passage fell through, we should have nowhere to pile the snow; besides, we may have another passage as deep as the present one to dig to-morrow, for the snow is drifting down in clouds. It has deepened a couple of feet since we began to make the roof over the entrance."

Luka, who was always ready to work, set to cheerfully, but the short twilight had faded into deep darkness before the work was completed.

"If we had had a couple of good shovels with us, Luka, we should have made short work of this," Godfrey said as they retired below into their tent. "We could do as much work in an hour as one can in five with these tools. It is heart-breaking to shovel out snow with a hatchet. I am as tired as a dog. This is harder work than the gold-mines at Kara by a long way."

"Yes," Luka said, "but there is no man with a gun."

"No, that makes a difference, Luka, this is free work and the other isn't; not that one can call it exactly free when we have no choice but to do it."

For another four days the snow continued to fall; but as the wind had dropped, and the snow no longer drifted, their work each morning was comparatively easy.

"I wish it would stop," Godfrey said, "for we begin to want food for the dogs; our stock of dried fish has been exhausted

since we were shut up. There is half a deer hanging to a branch of that tree close to the tent, but it is eight or ten feet below the snow, and as we can't calculate the exact position now it would be a big job to try to get at it." There was, however, no change in the aspect of the weather on the following morning, and Luka announced that beyond the tea and a handful or two of flour there was nothing whatever for breakfast, while the dogs had fasted on the previous day.

"Well, Luka, there is nothing to do but to try and get at that venison. I have been thinking that it will be easiest to try from below; it is much quicker work chopping out the solid snow than it is trying to make a hole in that loose stuff at the surface. The tree was just about in a line with the front of the tent, wasn't it? and we hung the deer on a branch that stretched out nearly as far as the tent. I should say we hung it about half-way along that branch and not above twelve feet from the tent."

Luka agreed as to the position.

"Very well, then, as we know exactly the direction, and as the distance is but twelve feet, it ought not to take us very long to chop out a passage just big enough and high enough for one to crawl through. When we get near the place where we think it is, we must make the tunnel a good bit higher, for the bottom of the meat was quite five feet from the ground so that it should be well out of reach of the dogs. Now, will you go first or shall I?"

"I will begin," Luka said. "We must make the passage wide enough to push the snow past us as we get it down."

"Certainly we must, Luka. Make it pretty wide at the bottom, and make the top arched so as to stand the pressure from above."

It was easy enough work at first, but became more difficult every foot they advanced, as the one behind had to crawl backward each time with the snow that the one at work passed back to him. At last the tunnel was driven twelve feet long, and the last four feet it had been given an upward direction,

by which means less snow had to be removed than would have been the case had the bottom remained level with the ground and the height been increased.

"We are a good twelve feet in now, Luka, and certainly high enough. Which way do you think we had better try?"

Luka replied by calling one of the dogs and taking it with him to the end of the tunnel. The animal at once began to snuff about eagerly, and then to scratch violently to the right.

"That will do," Luka said, pushing it back past him and taking its place. He had driven but a foot in the direction in which the dog was scratching when the hatchet struck something hard. It required some care to dig round the meat and make a hole large enough for Luka to stand up beside it and cut the cord by which it hung. The dogs yelped with joy when he dragged it back to the other end of the passage. The fire was made now in the passage under the roof they had made at the end of the first day's work, for outside the snow fell so fast that it damped the fire greatly, and as the smoke made its way out through the entrance it was no inconvenience to them below. A good-sized piece of raw meat was chopped off and given to each of the dogs. The ramrod was thrust through another large piece and held by Luka over the fire, and then Godfrey carried the rest of the joint outside and placed it in the fork of a tree.

"It smells good, Luka," he said as he returned to the fire; "I wish it would attract a bear."

Luka shook his head. "Bears are asleep, Godfrey; they are hunted in summer, and sometimes they may be found in the early part of the winter, but never when the snow is deep; they would die of hunger. There might be wolves, but we don't want them. Wolf skins fetch very little, and their flesh is only good for the dogs; we don't want wolves, but we must be on our guard. In such weather as this food is very scarce. They might come and attack us. Yesterday I heard howls once or twice. I think when we have done breakfast it will be better to take that meat down below."

"Why, they wouldn't smell it as much as this cooked meat, Luka."

"No, I was not thinking of that, but if they come we may want it."

"You mean they might besiege us, Luka?"

"Yes, shut us up here. Wolves very patient; wait a long time when they scent food."

"Well, we will have the dogs sleep up here for the future. They will act as sentries, and there is none too much air down there. That reminds me, I will cut a long pole or two, fasten them together, and try and drive them down through the snow to the roof of the shelter below."

Luka shook his head. "You might drive it down five or six feet, but you would never get it down to the roof, and if you did you could never pull it up again."

"I don't know, Luka. I once saw them driving down some bars in tough clay when they were making a railway cutting at home. I think we might do it in the same way."

Godfrey after breakfast cut a pole, chopping it off just below where two or three small branches had shot from it, leaving a bulge. This bulge he shaped and smoothed very carefully with his knife, so that it was in the form of a peg-top.

"There," he said. "You see it is thicker here than it is anywhere else, so that the hole it makes will be a little larger than the pole itself, and instead of the snow holding the pole all the way down it will touch it only on this shoulder."

This succeeded admirably. It was six feet long. They had cleared away the loose snow to a depth of eighteen inches, and both holding it were able to force the pole down as much more; then they hammered it with a billet of wood until only a foot showed; then they spliced another to it, and working it up and down jumped it in until they could again use the mallet, and at last struck on something solid, which could only be one of the beams forming the roof of the hut. Godfrey went below, and soon discovered the spot where the pole

came down, and with his knife managed to clear away the snow round it. Then he went up and assisted Luka to withdraw the pole, which left a hole of about three inches in diameter.

"That is a capital chimney," he said. "Now we will throw a few fir branches over it, to prevent the dogs treading here and shutting it up. I think the air looks rather lighter, Luka, and that the storm is nearly over. There is a howl again. I am afraid that we are going to have trouble with the wolves. Is there anything we can do?"

Luka shook his head. "We might get up into trees," he said. "We should be safe there, but then we should lose the dogs."

"That would never do, Luka; we should have to haul the sledge back a hundred and fifty miles. No, I'll tell you what we will do: we will cut down some young trees and block up our tunnel with beams, leaving three or four inches between each to fire through or use our spears."

"That is a very good plan," Luka said. "We should be quite safe then."

It took them some hours' work to carry out the idea. The middle of the tunnel was closed by a row of pointed stakes, some four inches in diameter, driven deep into the snow and reaching up to the roof of the shelter. An opening of a foot wide was left in the middle, another stake being placed beside it in readiness to fill it up if required. The operation was completed by the light of the fire, as it was pitch dark by the time it was done. Then another meal was cooked and eaten, and the brands carried below where, at the bottom of the descent, the fire was now kindled. The dogs had for some time been growling angrily in the upper passage, and the fire was no sooner alight below than they broke into a chorus of fierce barking.

"We had better bring them down here, Luka, and fill up the opening. I think the wolves must be gathering in numbers."

Going up again they sent the dogs down, firmly lashed two cross-bars to the others, and to these lashed the pole they had left in readiness, thus completing the grating across the tunnel. As they worked the smoke from the fire below curled up round them. A few months before Godfrey would have found it almost insupportable, but by this time he had, like the natives, become so accustomed to it that it affected him very little. Still he said to Luka: "You had better break off the hot ends of the sticks so as to have a red fire only for the present, the smoke makes my eyes water so that I can scarcely see. Now the sooner those fellows come to get their first lesson the better."

Kneeling by the grating, with his gun in his hand and his spear beside him, Godfrey gazed out, and could presently distinguish the outline of a number of moving figures.

"I can see their eyes at the entrance," he said. "Shall I give them a shot, or will you send an arrow into them?"

"You fire," Luka replied. "Bow makes no noise, gun will frighten them; besides, I have only twenty arrows and they would get broken. Better keep them till there is need."

Godfrey levelled his gun, which was charged with buckshot, and fired both barrels. Terrific yells and howls followed, and the opening was clear in a moment, though Godfrey could see two or three dark figures on the snow. There was a sound of whimpering and snarling, and then of a fierce fight outside.

"They are killing and eating the wounded," Luka said; "when they have done that they will come again. Let them get close up next time."

In a few minutes the entrance to the tunnel was darkened again, and then cleared. The dead wolves had been pulled away. Another quarter of an hour and the animals reappeared. As all was silent they gradually approached. Godfrey could hear their panting, and presently heard a noise against the bars. A moment later there was a rush and an outburst of snarling growls, then he and Luka drove their spears again and again between the bars, yells of pain follow-

ing each stroke. The animals in front were unable to retreat, and the others behind crowded in upon them, maddened with the smell of blood, and all trying to get first at their prey. They quarrelled and fought among themselves, while their cries and growls were answered by the furious barking of the dogs in the shelter below.

In two or three minutes Godfrey, who had reloaded his gun, fired both barrels into the mass, and at the flash and sound the wolves again fled. This time they did not venture to re-enter the passage. Occasionally one showed itself, and was instantly shot by Godfrey or Luka, who took turns on watch throughout the night. As soon as the dim light broke they removed the bar and issued out with the dogs. A dozen wolves lay dead outside the bars, seven were scattered round the entrance. Godfrey shot two more who were lurking under the trees, while Luka sent an arrow through another.

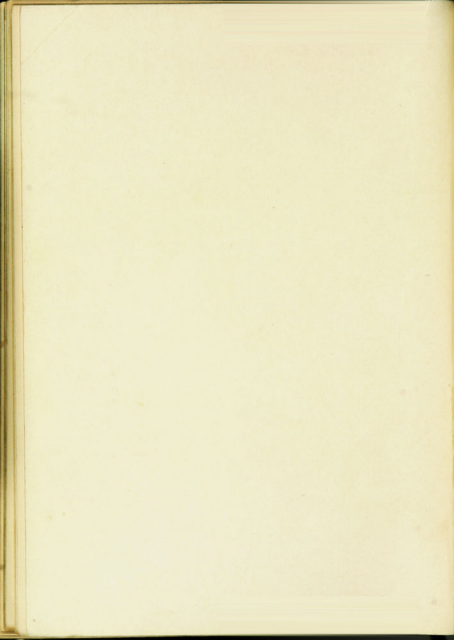
"There are plenty of them about still," Godfrey said. "Let us get three or four of the dead ones upon a branch out of their reach as food for the dogs, drag the rest away from the entrance to the tunnel, and bring the others up from below. That will give them, with the three we have shot now, enough for a big meal. Then I should think they would move off."

This was accordingly done, and they went below and cooked breakfast, while the dogs feasted on a dead wolf. Then they lay down for three hours' sleep. When they went up again the dead wolves had disappeared, only a few bones and the blood-marked snow showing where they had lain. Godfrey fired a couple of shots to scare away any that might be lingering in the neighbourhood, and then replacing the bars they went out hunting, and from that time heard no farther of the wolves.

They continued their hunting, shifting their camp occasionally until it was time to rejoin the Ostjaks, and then travelled east. They struck the river some thirty miles below the camp, crossed at once and travelled up the other side until



THE SLAUGHTERED WOLVES



they arrived at the huts. They were heartily welcomed by the natives, and remained there for three days to rest the dogs. They were very glad of getting a supply of fish again. These the Ostjaks had in abundance, as they kept their frozen piles for food when the keenness of the wind rendered the cold so bitter that they were forced to remain in their huts. At other times they fished by torchlight at holes that they kept broken in the ice, spearing the fish, which were attracted by the light. The Ostjaks were surprised at the large number of skins, some of them of the most valuable kind, that Godfrey had brought back, and were impatient for a fresh start. They were this time absent for only six weeks, returning at the beginning of May. The hunt was marked by no adventure. They did fairly well, but were not fortunate in securing any skins of the black fox and but few of the sable.

Upon their return the furs that had been taken during the two hunts with the Ostjaks were fairly divided, and Godfrey added his and Luka's shares to those they had themselves obtained. There were over fifty in all, including three black foxes, six sables, and ten martens, the rest being of inferior value. Then a list was made of the necessaries that Luka was to purchase at Turukhansk. These included ten pounds of brick tea, some copper nails if he could obtain them, a store of ammunition, some more fish-hooks, the largest kettle he could buy, a frying-pan, a few pounds of sugar, ten pounds of salt, some stout sheeting, thirty yards of duck canvas, three blocks, a coil or two of rope, needles and twine, a saw, a couple of chisels, and some other tools.

"You must make the best bargain you can for the skins, Luka; I have no idea how much they are worth."

The Ostjaks were, however, able to tell them the prices the traders pay for the skins of each animal, provided that they were fine specimens and in good condition. The black foxes were worth from fifty to a hundred roubles, the sables from thirty to fifty, the martens some ten roubles less; the other skins were worth from fifteen to thirty roubles.

Luka took the sledge and a reindeer and started alone, having gone over the list of things required again and again until Godfrey was convinced that he was perfect. He took his sleeping-bag but no tent. He calculated that he should be away five days, as it would take him two to drive to Turukhansk, and a day there to make his purchases.

On the fifth evening he returned, with everything he had been ordered to get, and a few other things that he thought would be useful. He had obtained in all six hundred and fifty roubles as the result of their six months' hunting, and of these had expended a hundred and seventy roubles.

"We are well set up for money now, Luka," Godfrey said, as he added the notes to those he before possessed. "I have still four hundred roubles out of what I received from the Buriat, so we have now nearly nine hundred, which will be enough to pay our way to England from any point we may land at."

CHAPTER XIV

THE BREAK-UP OF WINTER

SPRING was rapidly approaching now. Occasionally for a day or two southerly winds set in and rain fell in torrents, then again the Arctic currents prevailed, and everything was frozen as hard as before. Flocks of geese passed over, flying north, but returned again when the cold set in afresh. Small birds, too, in great numbers made their appearance, crowding on patches of ground that the sun and rain had cleared of snow, fluttering round the tents in flocks, picking up scraps of food that had been thrown out, and keeping the dogs in a state of perpetual excitement. The Ostjaks said that the break-up of the ice might come any day, or it might be delayed for another month; it depended less upon the weather here

than on that higher up. It is not the sun or the rain that breaks up the ice, but the rise of the river from the snow melting a thousand miles higher up, and all over the country drained by the rivers running into the Yenesei.

The women were now making a canoe under Godfrey's instructions. He had often gone out in canoes on the Severn and on the sea when staying at watering-places there. The craft that had done them such good service before would not do for their present undertaking. They required a boat which should be fairly fast, sea-worthy, and yet light, for it might be necessary to carry it considerable distances. It was necessary that its dimensions should exceed those of an English canoe, for it must carry a considerable amount of food, although of course he meant to depend chiefly on the fishing-lines and gun. It was made five-and-twenty feet long, and three feet wide. The central compartment was thirteen feet long. This was covered in at the sides and ends, leaving an opening for them to sit and paddle, fifteen inches wide, and five feet long. Underneath the covered parts provisions, furs, cooking utensils, etc., could be stowed away on both sides, leaving room for them to lie down at full length in the centre.

The two end compartments were entirely covered in, but had openings over which a cover was lashed, and could, if necessary, be used for holding stores; but Godfrey did not intend to put anything here except temporarily, as it was important that the canoe should be as buoyant and light as possible. The frame of the boat was built of the tough and elastic wood of which the Ostjaks made their bows. It was very light, the ribs being bound to the longitudinal pieces by fine gut. It was built, as nearly as Godfrey could lay them out, on the lines of an English cruising canoe. The deck strips were similarly lashed, and when the framework was completed Godfrey tested its strength by dropping it three feet to the ground, rolling it over and over, and trying it in a variety of ways.

When fully satisfied with it the work of putting on the cover

commenced. This was made of very soft and well-tanned reindeer hide, stretched as tightly as possible, and then rubbed with seal oil. The keel of the boat had been made very strong, as the rigidity of the whole craft depended upon this. It had been made flat, and the skins had been taken over it. When it was finished a false keel six inches in depth in the centre, tapering away to nothing at the ends, was fixed underneath. This keel was also made of tough wood, a little more than a quarter of an inch thick, but widening suddenly to over an inch where it touched the boat, in order that it might be securely fixed with screws to the keel inside.

The boat was provided with a light mast, which could be stepped or unstepped at pleasure, and there were two stays of twisted leather, one fastening to each side of the boat. An iron ring with a cord travelled up and down the mast, the halliard running through a small block, as Luka had been able to obtain a sheave at Turukhansk. The sail was a lug made of sheeting, oiled, and the boat carried beside a triangular sail of very much smaller dimensions and stouter cloth for heavy weather. She also carried a small mizzen mast and sail. In rough weather the cockpit could be completely covered with a light apron with openings where the rowers sat, with a sort of collar, which could be lashed tightly round their waists. The edges of this apron could be lashed down over the gunwale round the cockpit. When completed the canoe itself, with its masts and sails, weighed but sixty pounds, and could be carried with ease by one person on his shoulder.

The Ostjaks greatly admired the craft, which was entirely different from anything they had ever seen. The false keel puzzled them greatly, and Gódfrey's explanations, even when aided by Luka, failed altogether in making them understand that it would have the effect of enabling the craft to sail near the wind without drifting to leeward. The additional draught of water was no inconvenience whatever in a craft designed for the sea, and it added materially to the strength of the canoe. On the 15th of May it was freezing hard. The natives

going down to the water's edge in the morning reported a sudden rise of three feet in the river. It continued to rise all day, and by nightfall was fifteen feet above its former level.

In the evening the north wind dropped suddenly, and an hour later it sprang up from the south, and by midnight a torrent of rain was falling. Godfrey could hear sounds like the reports of cannon above the pattering of the rain on the skins, and knew that it must be the ice breaking. In the morning when he looked out the whole mass of ice seemed to be moving. Black cracks showed everywhere across the white surface. The river had during the night risen another twenty feet. By mid-day the scene was a wild one indeed. No longer was the surface smooth. Hurrying along at the rate of fifteen miles an hour the great masses of ice were dashed against each other by the force of the current.

Two miles lower down the river narrowed suddenly, and here a block was formed. Some of the pieces of ice were thrust down, others climbed over them, thrusting themselves one on the top of the other till a ridge thirty or forty feet high was formed from bank to bank. At times this gave way, and then the whole was whirled down the stream, while another ridge at once commenced to form. Godfrey walked down to the point and stood for hours looking at the scene. The great blocks of ice, six or eight feet thick, seemed almost to be endowed with vitality as they climbed one above the other, until thrust off the crest of the ridge by the pressure of those behind them. The din was prodigious, a crackling, rustling, roaring sound, with sharp explosions and deep muffled booming. The whole air seemed to quiver with sound, and the loudest shout would have been inaudible a yard or two away. Below the ridge the river, so long as the barrier stood, was comparatively clear, but from time to time great masses of ice that had been sunk by the pressure and swept along under the ridge came to the surface with a surge that lifted one end high out of the water, reminding Godfrey of the spring of some enormous fish; then the ice would come

down with a mighty splash, and hasten away reeling and rocking on the rapid current. Entranced by this mighty conflict of the forces of nature, Godfrey stood there until seven or eight o'clock in the evening.

It would be light for three hours yet, for the sun now only sank for a short time below the horizon. The rain was still falling heavily when he returned to his hut. The river had risen another thirty feet since the evening before, and the height of the bank had decreased from a hundred feet to about thirty. For two more days it rained incessantly. The river had now risen to its high-water mark, ten feet below the bank. Godfrey asked the Ostjaks if there was no fear of its overflowing, but they told him that there was no cause for uneasiness, for that at its present point it overflowed at many places both above and below them, and extended over a vast tract of country, and that at every additional foot it would spread so widely that it would speedily begin to fall again. The ridge had now ceased to form, although the river was still packed with floating masses.

"In another two days," the Ostjaks' chief said, "the ice will be all gone except a few blocks. Much of the ice above is carried out by the floods and left to melt on the land as the water lowers, but even without that the river at its present rate would soon carry it all down."

This Godfrey could well imagine, for at the rate of fifteen miles an hour over three hundred and sixty miles of the river would have been emptying daily. At the end of another three days but few blocks of ice were visible, and Godfrey now began to make preparations for his start. First the canoe was to be tried. She was taken down and placed in the water, and the sides under the half-decks were filled in with frozen geese and fish from the pile, which was still but little affected by the thaw.

When she was thus brought down to nearly the weight she would have to carry, Godfrey and Luka took their places in her, dipped their paddles in the stream, shot out, and pad-

dled about for some time in the still water behind the shelter of the point. Godfrey found to his satisfaction that she paddled easily, quite answering to his expectations. Then Luka, who had already practised the manoeuvre on shore, stepped the masts, fastened the stays, and hoisted the sails. There was a light breeze from the south, and the boat ran rapidly along before it till it was again abreast of the village, then she was put about and made short tacks in the dead-water. Godfrey found that she stood stiffly up to the canvas, and, as far as he could see, made little or no leeway. Then he returned to the village. The Ostjaks, who seldom made use of sails, and then only when dead before the wind, were perfectly astounded alike at the rapidity with which the boat glided through the water and at the ease with which she came about, and were astonished beyond measure at seeing her make a zigzag progress in the teeth of the wind.

Early the next morning the rest of the preparations were completed. The tea, tobacco, cooking utensils, and other necessaries were stowed away under the deck astern of Godfrey, together with twenty pounds of fat. This had been carefully set aside for the purpose when animals were killed and cut up. It had been melted down in the chief's large pot and poured into a tin drinking-mug, in which four strands of unravelled cord had been placed to act as wicks. The tin was dipped in ice water, and in a few minutes the fat solidified, then the tin was dipped again, this time in hot water, and the short fat candle with its four wicks then came easily out, and the process was repeated. These candles weighed just about a pound each. Godfrey collected fat enough to make fifty, but being afraid of overburdening the canoe he decided that twenty must suffice, believing that he would be able to pick up drift-wood as they coasted along.

A store of pine-wood torches was lashed on the deck on each side of the mast forward of Luka, the fishing spears, hatchets, and other articles for trade stowed away, the furs and their winter garments laid thickly at the bottom of the

boat. They took with them Jack, Godfrey's favourite dog, and then, bestowing all the rest of their possessions on the Ostjaks, they took a hearty farewell of them, stepped on board, and started. They had at the last moment decided to take their old boat also with them. This was fastened by a tow-rope behind the canoe. It was filled with frozen provisions, having been first lined with rough furs, others were laid closely over them. In this way Godfrey calculated that they would remain frozen for a long time. The rest of the store of flour and a stock of firewood were added.

As to the extra weight of towing the canoe it was immaterial, as until they reached the mouth of the river there would be no occasion for paddling, and beyond that the stock of provisions could be transferred to their own canoe to take the place of those used up on the way, and the craft could then be cast adrift. As there was a light breeze, however, the sail was hoisted, rather because it gave them steerage way than for any increase to their speed. As soon as the canoe shot out into the rougher water in the full force of the stream, Godfrey was still more delighted with the boat, the empty compartments fore and aft rendering her exceedingly buoyant. She had been built with somewhat higher sides than the canoes Godfrey had seen at home, and rose a good deal towards the ends; and she floated as lightly as a cork on the surface of the water. That afternoon they passed Turukhansk. Below this the river widened out. In the evening they lowered the sail, as they did not wish to run the risk of striking either the shore or a piece of ice that might have got delayed on its journey. All night they hurried on, lying snugly in the bottom of the boat with the apron closed overhead.

In the morning they found they were not far from the left bank, and that the river now was more than four miles wide. The sail was again hoisted and breakfast made, after which they got out their lines and hooks, baited, and dropped them into the water. During the course of the day they caught several fish, and picked up a considerable quantity of floating wood, which they stowed in the large canoe.

"I think, Luka," Godfrey said, "that instead of letting our old boat go we may as well keep it for a time. As long as there is wind, it makes no great difference to our speed, though, of course, it would be heavy if we were paddling. If we had bad weather we could land and turn it bottom upwards, and there would be a hut ready made for us. This canoe is all right for sleeping in when the water is smooth, but with its deep keel we could not sleep in it ashore."

Luka was, as usual, quite of Godfrey's opinion. After this they made the old boat their kitchen, for there was but little room in the canoe for cooking purposes; and it was, moreover, a relief to get into the roomy craft where they could move about as they pleased. As drift-wood was abundant they made their fires entirely of this, keeping their candles for the time when they might have to leave their store-boat behind them. On the third day the river widened out greatly. They could no longer see the right bank, and Godfrey concluded that they were now in the Gulf of Yenesei.

"The weather is going to change," Luka said the next morning; "the wind will soon be coming from the north; going to blow hard."

"In that case, Luka, the sooner we are ashore the better. The current now is nothing like so swift as it was. I don't think we are going past the land at more than three miles an hour, but that would be quite enough if the wind comes from the north to knock up a nasty sea in no time. Let us get our paddles out; there is not a breath of wind."

In half an hour they reached the shore, but had to coast along for some time before they found a place free of rocks.

"This will do, Luka, we are not a minute too soon; those puffs just now were so strong that we made no way against them. Now, then, jump out and get the canoe high and dry."

They had retained their long boots, and stepped out into water up to their knees. Then they lifted the canoe and carried it ashore.

"It is heavier than it was when we put it in," Luka said.

"I should think so. What with the furs and provisions, candles, and one thing and another, there must be a hundred and fifty pounds weight in her. There, put her down here, Luka, and let us get the other up. We must take the things out first. Quick, man, the wind is getting up fast. Isn't it cold? we shall want our fur jackets on directly." The firewood and provisions were carried up some distance above the water's edge, and then the boat was lifted and placed beside them. A thick sleet had now set in, and the wind was blowing with tremendous gusts.

"Now, then, look about, Luka, and see if you can find a sheltered nook. I will pile stones into the well of the canoe so as to anchor her safely. If she were to be rolled over and over her skin would soon be cut to pieces."

Before he had finished this Luka returned. "Good place here," he said. "Good shelter."

"We'll finish this job first, Luka. This is much more important than our getting wet."

As soon as it was done they went to the large canoe, and lifting it carried it away to the place Luka had found—a ridge of rock running back at a right angle from the shore, with a perpendicular face some twelve feet high. At one point there was a deep cleft in it, some eight feet wide at the mouth and narrowing gradually in.

"Capital, Luka; we shall be as snug as possible here. Now, turn her over and take her in."

The cleft was so deep that the stern of the boat was, when she was laid down bow foremost, fully fifteen feet inside the entrance.

"Now it may blow as much as it likes," Godfrey said, "it won't hurt us here. Now do you go and get some of the firewood. I will fetch some skins from the canoe, and the sails."

After getting out some provisions, the cooking utensils, and a couple of the candles, Godfrey returned to the boat. Then he made another journey for some more skins and the two sails. By this time the wind was blowing so fiercely that he

could scarcely stagger along with his load. The sea was covered with white heads, and the waves were breaking noisily against the rocks. Luka had already brought up plenty of firewood, and had thrown a large skin over the furs containing the frozen fish, and piled stones on it to prevent its being blown away.

"Now, where will you put the fire?" he asked. "If you put it inside it would burn the boat, if you put it outside it would be no use to us."

"I quite see that, Luka. We must make ourselves comfortable, for this storm may last for days for anything I know. We must prop this end of the boat up so that we can sit upright under it with something to spare. We must pile up some stones a couple of feet high under each gunwale." In a quarter of an hour this was done. The sail was then laid over the boat, the ends being kept down by stones.

"That is snug," Godfrey said. "Now we will put the mizzen over forward so as to keep the wind out right along." There were four feet of head room at the entrance to the boat tent, and in front of this the fire was soon lit, one of the pine torches being cut up to start it with. The skins were laid upon the ground, and taking off their wet coats they put on fur jackets. "Now we can see about breakfast, Luka."

Luka had run down and filled the kettle, while Godfrey was fastening down the sail. This was placed on the fire, and as soon as it began to burn clear some of the fish they had caught the day before were laid on the glowing embers, together with two legs of a goose.

"The thing we are going to have most trouble about, Luka, is fresh water," Godfrey said as they ate their breakfast. Luka looked surprised. "When we once get beyond the stream of the Yenesei," he went on, "the water will be salt."

"Salt!" Luka repeated.

"Yes, too salt to make tea with. We shall be all right for a time, no doubt. What with the melting snow and the rains we have had, there are sure to be lots of little streams running

into the sea; but when the land dries we shall be in a bad way."

Luka looked serious; this was altogether beyond his experience.

"Of course if we can get plenty of fresh fish we shall get on fairly, as we sha'n't require much to drink. We will look about the rivers when I can get at the map. I know there is a small one called the Gida running in just between the mouths of the Yenesei and Obi; and there is the Kara on farther, and then the Petchora. As far as I can remember that is all that were marked, but of course there may be lots of little streams that were not put down. There is one thing, if we find that we generally get wind, and can keep the big boat with us, we could make her carry water as well as fuel. She would hold any quantity, for half a dozen barrels would not sink her above an inch. We should certainly get out of the difficulty that way. It gave me quite a fright at first. I felt so sure that I had thought of everything, and there, I never for a moment thought about the sea being salt. How it is blowing outside! It is lucky indeed you have found such a snug corner, Luka, for if we had been out in the open we could only have piled stones in the boat to prevent it blowing away, and lain at full length underneath her, which would be all well enough for one night, but would be a frightful nuisance if it had to go on for three or four days."

So sheltered were they, indeed, that they scarce felt the wind that was howling above them, and were as comfortable beneath their boat as they had been in their hut by the river side.

"When it is as rough as this in the gulf, Luka, it will be tremendous out at sea."

Luka had never seen the waves higher than those in some of the rapids of the upper river, and he was astonished at the white-headed waves and at the showers of spray they sent up as they struck the rocks.

"Are the waves ever much bigger than this?" he asked.

"Bigger! I should think so. Out in the open sea one of the waves would make a hundred of these."

"Then they must break the vessels to pieces, Godfrey?"

"No, they are built very stout and strong, and very big. They get broken to pieces if the sea drives them against rocks, and sometimes in very great storms get so beaten by the waves that the planks open and the water runs in and they sink."

"I should not like to go to sea if the waves were like that," Luka said thoughtfully. "This is terrible. Why, if we had not come ashore in time the boat would have sunk."

"She would have made a good fight for it, Luka. With the apron tied in round us we could stand a very heavy sea. So long as we keep her head to the waves the water might wash over us, but it could not get in; and even if it did fill the space where we sleep, the compartments at the ends are quite buoyant enough to keep her up."

"What would you do if you were out in what you call a great sea, Godfrey?"

"I should lash the mast and the sail and our paddles and the firewood together, fasten our mooring rope to them and throw them overboard, that would keep us head to sea—because these things would all float in the water, and the wind would not get hold of them. They call a contrivance like that a floating anchor. Then we would both lie down in the bottom, button the flaps over the holes in the cover, and lie there as snugly as possible. You see our weight would be down quite low in the boat then, and that would keep her steady. Oh, we should get on capitally if there were plenty of room for us to drift."

"How far have we to go now?"

"I can't exactly tell you. I wish I knew. From the long jagged cape, which is the northern point of land on the western side of the Gulf of Yenesei and forms the separation between it and the mouth of the Gulf of Obi, to Waigatz Straits, between the mainland and Waigatz Island, which lies

south of the island called Nova Zembla, is about two hundred and fifty miles in a straight line, but I should think it is quite three times that if we have to follow all the ins and outs of the shore. From there to Archangel, if we go in to Archangel, is about three hundred and fifty miles more, cutting across everything. If we had a current with us, like the stream of the Yenesei, we should make very short work of it; but unfortunately there is nothing of that sort. Paddling steadily we might go three miles an hour—say a hundred miles in three days. If we had wind that would help us, of course we should go a great deal faster, because we should paddle and sail too."

"But if we don't go to the place you call Archangel, where should we go?"

"We should keep far north of it, Luka, and sailing in a straight line nearly due west, should strike the northern coast of Norway somewhere or other. I should say, from what I saw of it on the map, it would be five hundred miles from Waigatz. But that would be madness for us to attempt. We might get caught in terrible storms; we might get into fogs, and as we have no compass there we should lie, not knowing which way to go. No, we must stick to the land till we get to the mouth of the White Sea. With a favourable wind we should get across that in a day, and then go on coasting again till we get beyond the Russian frontier; then at the first village we come to we land, find out all about the distances, and arrange to get taken in reindeer sledges to some regular settlement."

"What sort of people are they there?" Luka asked.

"They are the same sort of people as the Samoyedes. I don't know that they are just the same. Anyhow, they speak the same sort of language. Well, you know the Northern Ostjaks we stayed with speak nearly the same as the Samoyedes. You could hardly get on with them at first, because their talk was so different to that of the Southern Ostjaks; but you got to speak it quite easily at last. So I have no doubt you will be able to make any natives you may meet, whether

they are Samoyedes or anything else, understand you without difficulty.

"What is it, Jack? What are you whining about?" he asked the dog, who, having made a hearty meal, had been lying down between them while they were talking, but who now sat up, snuffing and whining uneasily.

"It may be either a fox or a bear," Luka said, making his way farther back into the hut, and returning with his bow and arrows, Godfrey's gun, and the two spears.

"I hope it is a bear," Godfrey said as he removed the charges of shot, and rammed down bullets in their place. "We don't want any more skins, unless it happens to be a black fox, which would be worth having, but a supply of bear meat would come in very handy."

The dog's whine presently changed into an angry growl.

"Bear sure enough. I expect he knows of this place, and has come here for shelter. He had much better have left it alone. It is lucky for us that the fire has burnt low; it would have scared him if it had been blazing. Lie down, Jack."

Lying perfectly still they presently heard a sharp snuffing noise, and a minute or two later a bear came round a corner of the rock. Astonished at the sight of the white object, the animal sat up on its haunches.

"Now!" Luka exclaimed, and discharged his arrow at the same moment that Godfrey had pulled his trigger. The arrow struck the bear in the throat, and such was the force with which it was sent that the head showed at the back of the neck. Godfrey's bullet struck it in the chest, and the bear at once rolled over. Thinking it was killed, he crawled from under the boat and ran forward, but the animal suddenly rose to its feet; running up alongside, he placed the muzzle close to its ear and pulled the other trigger.

"It is dead now, Luka," he shouted as he bent over it. At the same moment he heard a cry of warning, and was simultaneously struck a heavy blow which stretched him on the ground beside the bear. It flashed through his mind that his assail-

ant was the female bear. He had heard from the Ostjaks that the best plan, if attacked by an enraged bear, was to sham death, and he therefore lay without moving a muscle as he was struck down. He heard the twang of Luka's bow, and Jack's sharp barking close to his ear. Then with a deep angry growl the bear left him and rushed towards the tent. Godfrey at once sprang to his feet. He had not brought his spear with him as he crawled out, but he sprang to the fire and dragged out a brand. Luka had discharged another arrow, and Jack was harassing the bear by snapping at its hind-legs. In terror for the safety of the canoe rather than that of Luka, who could, he knew, well defend himself, Godfrey leapt forward and struck the bear across the nose with the brand. With a roar of fury it turned upon him, but as it did so it exposed its side to Luka, who discharged another arrow behind its shoulder. It rolled over and over, but again gained its feet. The pause, however, had given Luka time to emerge from under the boat with his spear in his hand, and running up he thrust it right through the body, and the bear fell over dead. Then he ran to Godfrey.

"Are you hurt?" he asked.

"I am hurt a bit, Luka, for I felt a sharp pain as the beast knocked me over, but I do not think it can be much. It was very lucky that we put our fur jackets on again; if it hadn't been for that, I expect he would have regularly laid open my shoulder."

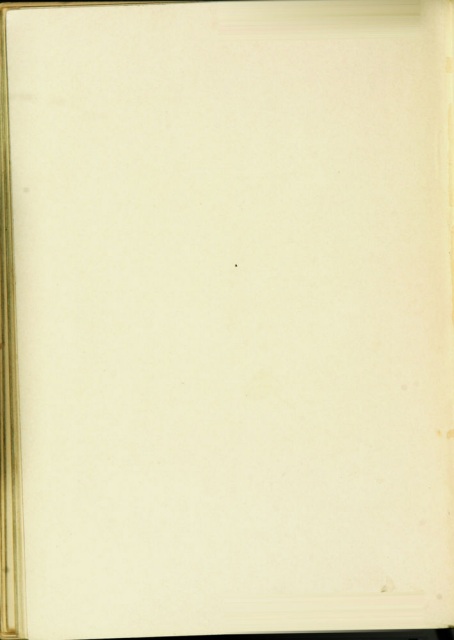
He took off his coat. The bear's claws had penetrated through the skin, and had scored three gashes on his shoulder. But these, Luka said, were of no great depth, and beyond making his arm stiff for paddling for a day or two would matter little.

They at once set about skinning the two bears, put the four hams carefully aside, cut off most of the meat, gave Jack another hearty meal, and then retired again to their shelter.

"My heart was in my mouth when I saw him rushing at the tent; if he had struck the boat, or thrown his weight upon it, it would have been a terrible business."



LUKA FACES THE BEAR



"I was afraid too," Luka said. "I was just going to shoot again when you struck him on the nose, and so gave me a chance of hitting him in a vital spot. If it hadn't been for your blow I should hardly have stopped him; he was so close that even if I wounded him mortally he would have come down on the boat."

"Well, it is fortunate it has ended so, Luka; it will be a lesson to me when I shoot a bear next to look out for its mate, and also not to leave my spear behind me, or to advance towards a bear I think dead until I have loaded my gun again."

For two days longer they had to remain in their shelter; but the third morning when they awoke the wind had died away, and the sun was shining brightly. As there was still some sea on, Godfrey determined to stay another day and explore the coast a little. Leaving Luka to look after the boats and goods in case any more bears might be in the neighbourhood, he started with Jack. He was amazed at the quantity of birds that he met with—thrushes, wagtails, warblers, chifchaffs, fieldfares, and red-poles rose at every step. The air quivered with the song of innumerable larks, which mingled with those of the willow-warblers; snipe in considerable numbers sprang up and darted off with a sharp cry from almost under his feet; plovers circled round and round; ducks of various kinds passed between the shore, and, as Godfrey supposed, inland swamps or lakes; martins in great numbers darted hither and thither hawking for insects. Occasionally birds, which he supposed to be grouse, rose with a loud whirr.

Short as was the time since the snow had cleared off the ground, spring had come in with marvellous rapidity. The grass was already well-nigh knee-deep, and flowers of various kinds were in full bloom. Where the ground was comparatively bare of grass, it was studded with the yellow blossoms of wild heart's-ease, and amongst some stunted alder-trees Godfrey found a dwarf rose already in bud, and wild onions and

wild rhubarb in flower. Then he came upon a broad expanse of a shrub that looked to him like a rhododendron, with a flower with a strong aromatic scent. Several times he heard the call of a cuckoo. On a patch of sand there were some wild anemones in blossom. Godfrey pulled a bulb of wild onion, cut off a slice and tasted it. It was similar in flavour to the cultivated plant, but very sharp and acrid. However he set to work, and pulled up several dozen bulbs. They were small, not exceeding the size of a radish, but they would be very valuable, as one of them chopped fine would be sufficient to give a savour to a whole goose.

Turning to the right and coming down upon the shore he saw that the edge of the water was fringed with sea-gulls of various kinds picking up tiny fish as the waves broke in sandy coves, or scuttling into the water and making sudden dips and dives into it. Farther out flocks of black ducks were feeding, while two or three pairs of swans passed overhead going north. Presently he saw three or four native huts ahead; some reindeer were grazing near them, and three boats were hauled upon the shore. These were doubtless Samoyedes. As soon as he caught sight of them he turned. He had heard that the Samoyedes, although more friendly than the Tunguses with strangers, were much less to be depended upon than the Ostjaks, and as he had no faith in being able to explain what he was doing there with his comparatively limited command of the Ostjak language, he thought it better to return at once to Luka. He found when he reached the tent that the Tartar was beginning to feel anxious, for he had been four hours absent. As they had abundance of food, and had no occasion to trade with the natives at present, they decided not to pay a visit to them.

As soon as dinner had been cooked, they set to work to get everything in readiness for a start. The stores were taken out of the canoe, and she was carried down to within a few feet of the water. The tent was dismantled, and the boat also carried down. Then they devoted themselves for the rest of the

afternoon to collecting more drift-wood, for the water was again falling, and the highest level it had reached was strewn with debris. As there was now no practical distinction between night and day they lay down and slept for four or five hours, then put the large canoe into the water, and placed the firewood in her, with the stock of flour, frozen meat, and the bears' flesh; then with the kettle and frying-pan they baled eight or ten buckets of water into her, for Godfrey did not know how soon the river would become brackish. They spread the bear-skin over all, then having carefully repacked the canoe, they put her also into the water, stepped the mast, took their places in her, hoisted the sail, and with the boat in tow started north again. The wind was from the south, and with the assistance of the current they went along rapidly; but, nevertheless, the paddles were got to work, as, now that they were fairly on their way again, every mile gained was of importance. They kept about a mile from shore so as to take advantage of the current. In twenty minutes the native encampment was passed. They saw no one moving about there, and supposed that they must all be asleep, for the sun was low down on the horizon. Godfrey's watch was still going, but as he had had no opportunity of comparing it with any other timepiece for just a year, he could only consider it to be an approximate guide. Once a month or so he had made a point of setting it. This he did by sticking up a pole and measuring the shadow it cast, knowing that this would be at its shortest at twelve o'clock. By this means he calculated that he was never more than half an hour wrong.

The shore continued very flat, and once or twice they saw sand-banks stretching out a considerable distance. Sometimes both paddled, sometimes Godfrey steered only and Luka laid in his paddle. Three times in the course of the day the big canoe was pulled up, and Luka went on board and cooked a meal, the flat slab on which they lit their fire having been raised three or four inches above the bottom to keep it out of the water. Hitherto Godfrey had done all the steering when

the boat was under sail, but he now instructed Luka. Little teaching was, indeed, needed, as the steering was done with the paddle, and Luka was accustomed to keeping the boat straight when paddling. He was, however, nervous with the sail, which was boomed straight out with a light spar Godfrey had cut for the purpose. However as the wind was dead aft there was no fear of this jibing so long as the boat's course was kept true; this was rendered all the more easy by the steady drag of the boat astern.

Twelve hours after starting Godfrey told Luka to lie down and sleep, as he intended that so long as they had favourable winds they should continue their voyage without stopping. There was no occasion for going ashore. The bears' flesh would last them as long as it kept good, and they had plenty of water on board for at least a fortnight. In a few minutes Luka was sound asleep. Jack lay on the deck in front of him, sometimes sleeping, sometimes waking up, and giving a sharp bark in reply to the cry of a sea-gull passing overhead, or a flock of black ducks skimming along close to the surface of the water within fifty yards of the boat.

CHAPTER XV

COASTING

THE current was now losing its power, and Godfrey, dipping his hand into the water and then putting it to his lips, found that it was distinctly brackish, and congratulated himself upon having laid in a stock of water when he did. After Luka had slept for six hours, Godfrey roused him.

"Now, Luka, you must take my place and steer; move very carefully else we shall capsize her. That is it. Now, if there is any change you lean forward and touch me; I shall wake in

a moment. If the sail should shift over to the other side all you have got to do is to shift this sheet to its fastening on that side. With this light wind jibing does not matter at all, but if the wind freshens wake me at once."

For a quarter of an hour Godfrey watched to see that Luka steered steadily, then he worked himself down in the cockpit and closed his eyes. It did not seem to him that he had been asleep long when Luka touched him.

"I would not have woke you," Luka said; "but the land seems going right away from us."

Godfrey sat up. "So it is, Luka! I should not be surprised if that is the extreme northern point. Of course it may be only a deep bay, but at any rate we must see." He looked at his watch. "Why, I have been asleep nearly seven hours. Now, Luka, you had better haul the boat alongside, and see about cooking. We forgot to try those onions yesterday. Cut one up small and put it in the pan with the meat. By the by, you had better tie a piece of cord to those four bears' hams, and let them tow overboard for two or three hours. The water must be quite salt now, and when you take them out we will rub a little fresh salt into them. They ought to keep well then."

As soon as Luka had got into the boat—Jack jumping in with him, as he always made a point of superintending the cooking operations—Godfrey took his place in the stern, jibed the sail, which had before been on the port quarter, over to starboard, brought her head somewhat to the north of west, and hauled in the sheet. Lying over till the water nearly touched her gunwale, the light little craft would have gone speedily along had it not been for the drag of the boat astern. This, however, towed lightly, for she was loaded with but a very small proportion of the weight she would carry. Godfrey judged, by the objects on the shore, that they could not be going along less than three miles an hour. In six hours the land trended away due south, and he knew that they had now reached the first of the two deep bays they would have to pass

before reaching the northern extremity of the Cape. He kept on his course, and an hour later, with the exception of the low coast nearly astern, no land was to be seen. Luka, who was paddling steadily, looked round. He had such implicit confidence in his companion that he was quite sure the boat was keeping the right course, but he had a vague sense of uneasiness at seeing nothing but sea around him.

"How do you know which way to go?" he asked.

"I know that by keeping on the same way we were going past the last land, we shall strike the coast again on the other side of this bay. I think it is twenty or thirty miles across. I can tell the way by the wind in the first place, and in the second place by the position of the sun. You see it is over my right shoulder at present; there is the mark of my shadow on the side. I have got to keep it about there, making some allowance for the change in the position of the sun."

Luka understood this. "But suppose the wind was to change," he said.

"I should know it by the position of the sun. You see at present it comes nearly due south, and is blowing almost straight towards the sun; but if it were very cloudy, or at night when I could not see the sun, I should not be able to tell. Then after holding on till I felt sure that we were well past the mouth of this bay, I should put her about on the other tack, and should be sure to come upon the land sooner or later. Anyhow, even in the darkest night we should know if the wind had gone round to the north, as it would be so much colder, besides there is never a great shift of wind like that without knowing it. The one wind is sure to drop, and there would be something like a dead calm before the other set in. Anyhow, with a bright sun and a steady wind like this we cannot go wrong, and you will see land ahead in seven or eight hours."

It was less than six hours when Godfrey saw the low land ahead, and they were presently coasting along it again with the wind free, for they were now running but little to the west

of north. Thirty miles farther there was another break in the coast.

"That was a first-rate map I made the tracing from," Godfrey said; "the coast-line is most accurately marked. Now we have another run of about the same distance as the last, then there is about fifty miles almost due north, then we shall be round this other Cape."

They made the passage safely across, although it took them longer than the first, for the wind dropped lighter, and they had both to use their paddles.

"We have just done it in time, Luka, and that is all. If we had been half an hour later there would be nothing for it but to anchor. Look at that white cloud on the water; that is a fog; we are only just in time. I am heading for that cove. Paddle hard, Luka, or it will be on us now before we get there."

They had just entered the cove, which was forty or fifty feet wide, and ran as many yards into the land, when the fog rolled over them.

"It is like a wet blanket," Godfrey said; "it is thirty or forty degrees colder than it was a minute back. Paddle very slowly and carefully now, Luka, and dip your paddle deeply in. I want to go as far up this creek as I can; but I don't want to run ashore."

Very gently they paddled on until Godfrey felt the ground at a depth of about three feet. "That will do nicely," he said. "Now I will drop the anchor over."

The anchor was one of Ostjak manufacture. It consisted of a long, flat, narrow stone weighing about six pounds; to each of the flat sides were lashed two pieces of fir, about an inch and a half in diameter. They projected a few inches below the stone, and were cut off just below a branch of about an inch in diameter and eight or ten inches long. These branches, when growing, bent downwards and slanted at an angle closely resembling that of the fluke of an anchor with the upright. The whole, therefore, was an excellent imitation of an anchor

with four flukes, two on each side, the stone serving as a weight. This was thrown out of the bow of the canoe, and a couple of fathoms of line let out. Then Godfrey hauled up the larger boat and fastened it alongside. They could just make out the outline of the shore about fifteen feet on either side of them.

"We must take to our fur jackets again, Luka; my teeth are chattering, and after working as hard as we have been doing for the last three or four hours it won't do to get a chill. I am as hungry as a hunter; we had breakfast at five o'clock by my watch, and it is three now."

Luka soon lit the fire in the boat. The provisions in the canoe had been finished two days before, as they had been obliged to throw overboard what they had not eaten owing to its having become unfit for use. The food, however, wrapped up in furs in the boat was still solidly frozen. They cut a couple of fish out of the mass and placed them in the frying-pan; stuck a wooden skewer through some pieces of bears' meat and held them in the flame, and hung the bears' hams, as they did each time they cooked, in the smoke of the fire.

"We must try to get some more fish next time we set sail, Luka. I am sure we passed through several shoals of fish by the swirling of the water."

It was thirty-six hours before the fog cleared off, swept away by a south-westerly wind. As they had nothing to do but to eat and sleep during this time, they got up their anchor and hoisted their sail the moment the fog cleared off, and in eighteen hours reached the sharp point of the Cape. Rounding this, Godfrey said:

"Now, Luka, we are at the mouth of the Gulf of Obi. It is nearly two hundred miles, according to this map, to the opposite side, and we daren't try to make that; besides, the wind has been getting more to the west and would be right in our teeth, for you see by this tracing the opposite point of land is a good bit to the south of west. There is nothing for it but for us to keep along this shore for something like a hundred

and fifty miles. We can lay our course well with this wind. The gulf won't be more than eighty miles wide there, and we can strike across and coast down the opposite bank. It seems a long way round, but we shall do it as quickly as we should beating right across in the teeth of this wind. I doubt if we could do that at all with this craft behind us."

Fortunately the wind was not high, or they could not have ventured out, as a heavy swell would have set in from the other side of the gulf. They kept their course within half a mile of the shore.

"What are those black things on that low point?" Godfrey asked. "I can hear them barking. They must be tremendously big dogs, if they are dogs."

"They are seals," Luka said; "they go right up the rivers in summer, and the Samoyedes and Yuruks kill great numbers on the coast. They eat the flesh and sell the teeth for ivory."

"Well, we don't want them at present," Godfrey said; "but if we fall short of food we will see whether we can kill some. At present the great thing is to get on."

Night and day the canoe kept on her way. Except when Godfrey was asleep Luka did not steer, for he did not like the management of the sail, especially now that the boat at times heeled over a great deal with the beam wind. He himself took his sleep by fits and starts two or three hours at a time, and except when cooking, paddled away assiduously. Twice Godfrey was lucky enough to bring down some ducks when a flock swept past the boat within shot. They had, too, a supply of fresh fish, for Godfrey now always had two lines out towing astern, with some white geese feathers fastened to the hooks as bait. Ordinarily they caught nothing, but they passed through several large shoals of fish, and at these times they pulled them out as fast as they could haul in and let go the lines, sometimes bringing in three or four at a time, as there were six hooks on each line. These fish were herrings, and they formed a welcome change. Luka had never seen one before, for although they penetrate for some distance up the

great rivers, they never ascend to the upper waters. Jack, too, benefited greatly, for of late he had been kept on somewhat short rations, as they had now been reduced to the four half-cured bears' hams and a comparatively small stock of frozen food.

On the fifth day after rounding the cape the wind, which had been gradually getting lighter, dropped altogether, and for the next two days both of them worked steadily with their paddles.

"We must have made a good two hundred miles," Godfrey said; "and we could safely venture to strike across in such quiet weather as this, but there is a river marked on the chart as coming in somewhere here, and I want to find it if I can. There is water enough for another week, but it begins to taste horribly of skin, and besides that it has a considerable mixture of ashes. I am sure we must be very close to it; indeed, according to my calculation of two hundred miles, we ought to have passed it already. Anyhow, we will keep on until we get there."

Godfrey was not far out, for late in the day they saw an opening of some fifty yards wide in the bank. They at once made for it, and entering it, paddled along as near the bank as they could go to avoid the current. Godfrey tasted the water from time to time, and after paddling for two hours pronounced it perfectly sweet.

"We will land here, Luka. I am sure we both want to stretch our limbs a bit and have a rest. Look about for a good place to land; the banks are too steep to be able to get the big canoe up, but we can carry the other—it is light enough now."

They presently found a place where a portion of the bank had fallen in and left a gap. Here they landed, moored the large canoe to the shore and carried the other up the bank. An exclamation of pleasure broke from Godfrey at the wide expanse of bright green dotted with flowers. Jack was exuberant in his delight, circling round and round like a wild

thing, barking loudly and occasionally throwing himself down to roll. The two paddles were driven firmly into the ground, the sail unlaced from the yard, which was lashed to the paddles as a ridge-pole, over which the sail was thrown. The furs were taken out of the boat and spread in the tent.

"We will have a cup of tea, Luka, and then turn in for twelve hours' sleep. I am sure we deserve it."

After a long rest they woke thoroughly refreshed; then, while Luka was lighting a fire, Godfrey went down to the river, stripped, and had a short swim, the water being too cold to permit his stopping more than two or three minutes in it. When they had had breakfast he said:

"Now, Luka, do you go down to the boat, take the fire-wood out, and then sluice the boat thoroughly with water and get it perfectly clean. By the time you have done that I shall be back, and we will then lift her out of the water and turn her bottom upwards to dry thoroughly. Then we will melt down some of that bear fat we saved and give her a thorough rubbing with it. But we will leave that job until to-morrow; it will take four-and-twenty hours for her to dry. I am going out with my gun to see what I can shoot. The whole place seems full of birds, though they are mostly small ones; still I might come across something better. You had better keep Jack with you."

Godfrey's expedition was not a very successful one. He brought back four grouse and a dozen small birds, which he had killed with a single shot, firing into the thick of a flock that flew by overhead. The grouse were roasted for dinner, and Godfrey found to his satisfaction that Luka had baked a pile of cakes, this being the first time they had tasted bread for a fortnight, as it demanded more time and attention than they could spare to it in the boat. Luka told him that several flights of black duck had passed up the river while he had been at work at the boat, and volunteered to grease the boat next day if Godfrey would try to get a shot at them.

"It will be of no use my trying to shoot them on the river,"

Godfrey said, "as I should have no means of picking them up; and I can tell you I found the water too cold this morning to care about stripping and swimming out for them. I will have another try on the plain. I saw four or five deer to-day, but only the first passed within shot, and as I had not a bullet in the gun he got off without my firing at him. I will try to-morrow if I can't stalk one."

Accordingly the next day Godfrey set out. After an hour's walking he saw three deer. He worked round very cautiously so as to get a clump of bushes between him and them, and then crawled up to it and looked through. They were a hundred and fifty yards away, and he had no confidence in his gun at that distance. He stood for some time thinking, and then remembered he had read that on the American plains the deer were often decoyed into coming close up to the hunter by working upon their curiosity. He drew his ramrod out from his gun, put the cap he wore—which was the fur one with tails—on to the end of it, pushed this through the bushes, and began to wave it to and fro. The deer caught sight of it immediately, and stood staring at it for a minute or two, ready to bound away should the strange object seem to threaten danger. As nothing came of it, they began to move towards it slowly and with hesitation, until they gathered in a group at a distance of not more than fifty yards.

Godfrey, while waving the cap with one hand, was holding his gun in readiness with the other. Feeling sure that he could not miss the mark now, he gently lowered the cap and raised his gun to his shoulder. Slight as was the movement it startled the deer; but as they turned to fly he fired both barrels at the shoulder of the one nearest to him, and had the satisfaction of seeing it fall, while its companions dashed away over the plain. He ran up to the fallen animal and found that it was already dead, both bullets having struck it in the region of the heart. He proceeded to cut off the head and the lower part of the legs, opened and cleaned it, and was then able to lift it on to his shoulder. As he neared the tent Jack came tearing along to meet him with loud barks of welcome.

"Yes, I have got food for you for some time, Jack, though it does not seem to me that you do much to earn it."

Luka was at work greasing the boat. Godfrey called him up on to the bank.

"We must try and do something to preserve the meat, Luka."

"Shall we rub it with salt, Godfrey?"

"We can spare some salt, but not much. It would never do to be left without that. We can do well enough without bread, but we can't do without salt."

"Smoke it well," Luka said.

"We might try that, but I am afraid those hams are beginning to go."

"Not smoke enough, Godfrey."

"No, I suppose not."

"They must have plenty, lots of smoke."

"Well, there is plenty of wood to make smoke with."

"We must keep it close," Luka said. "We ought to smoke it for two days."

"We can keep it close enough by cutting some poles and making a circular tent with the sail. It will spoil its whiteness, but that is of no great consequence. You had better leave the boat for the present, Luka, and come with me and cut poles and boughs for the fire."

Taking hatchets they started out and presently cut eight poles ten feet long.

"Now which is the best wood for smoking it with?"

"Pine makes the best smoke next to oak."

"There are plenty of stunted pines about, and I should think some of this aromatic shrub with it would be good. I will make up two big bundles of that, and we will take them and the poles back first; then we will cut some pine boughs."

As all these were obtained within a few hundred yards of the camp, they had soon materials for their fire. The poles were then stuck in a circle and lashed together at the top, the sail taken down and wrapped round it. It was not large enough,

but by adding the storm-sail and the hide of the deer the covering was made complete. Then a number of sticks were tied from pole to pole across it. The deer-flesh was then cut up into strips of about a foot long, three or four inches wide, and half an inch thick; and these were hung over the sticks until the whole of the deer was so disposed of. The three remaining bears' hams were also hung up, and a fire of the pine-wood was then with some difficulty lighted and some of the sweet-smelling shrub laid on it. Godfrey, who had undertaken this part of the business while Luka went back to the boat, crawled out from the tent almost blinded.

"By Jove!" he said as he closed the aperture, "if it is as bad as that now that it is only just lighted, the meat ought to be smoked as dry as a chip by to-morrow."

Godfrey had nothing to do now but to watch the smoke rising from the opening at the top of the tent, opening the entrance a little whenever it slackened, drawing the sticks together with the iron ramrod, and throwing on a fresh armful of the fuel. Having finished greasing the boat, Luka did the same to the canoe. They spent the next twenty-four hours in alternately sleeping, collecting drift-wood on the river-bank, and attending to the fire, which had to be watched carefully, and some dry splinters added from time to time to get the green wood to keep alight. Every hour or two a piece of meat was taken out and examined, and in thirty hours from the time of lighting the fire Luka pronounced that it was done. The strips had shrivelled to half their former thickness and were almost black in colour.

"They will give us plenty of work for our teeth, Luka," Godfrey said. "They look almost like shoe-leather, but perhaps they will be better than they look. I once tasted some smoked reindeer tongues—at least they called them reindeer tongues, but I do not suppose they were—and they were first-rate. Now there is nothing more to do; let us get ready for another start."

The sail was taken off and the poles chopped into five-foot lengths.

"We will lay them in the bottom of the boat, Luka, four longways and four crossways. As there are sixteen of them, that will make the top line five or six inches above the floor. Then we will lay our firewood on them. In that way it won't get wet with the water, and, what is quite as important, it won't dirty the water."

This was done. The flour and deer's flesh were stowed on similar platforms fore and aft of the firewood and covered with skins. Some twelve buckets of water were then baled in. What remained of the frozen provisions was inspected; but it was agreed that as it had already melted a good deal, it would not be eatable much longer, and as they had food enough to last for some time, it was of no use keeping it. It was therefore broken up, Jack was allowed to eat as much as he wanted, and the rest was left. When everything was packed the canoe was carried down and placed in the water, and they took their places; Jack jumped on board, and a fresh start was made.

As soon as they emerged from the small river, they struck out straight from the land. The wind was light and from the north, and both took their paddles. Their four days' rest had done them good, and the canoe, under the influence of sail and oar, went fast through the water.

"Twenty-four hours ought to take us across," Godfrey said. "The gulf looks from eighty to ninety miles across at the point where the river runs into it. We must head rather to the south, for there is sure to be a current out in the middle, as the Obi is a big river."

It was, however, thirty hours before they reached the opposite shore—Godfrey accounting for the difference on the supposition that the stream must have been a good deal stronger than they expected, and must have drifted them down a long way. They found, indeed, that even inshore they were passing the land at a rate of nearly two miles an hour.

"That is all the better, Luka, for with this north wind our sail will be no good to us. We may as well get it down at once and stow it. The shores are muddy, I see; so we shall

not hurt the canoe if we should drift up against it. That is a comfort, for we can both go to sleep. I am sure, after thirty hours' paddling with only two or three long easies, we deserve a rest. First of all we must have a meal. One does not know whether to call it dinner or supper when there is no night and we sleep just when we are tired."

They had caught eight or ten fish as they came across, passing through a great shoal of herrings. In half an hour the kettle was boiling over the fire, the fish were hissing and crackling in the frying-pan over it, and a strip of deer's flesh, with the ramrod run through it, was frizzling. It was pronounced excellent. There was a slight aromatic bitterness that gave a zest and flavour to it, and the flesh inside was by no means so tough as Godfrey had expected to find it. When all three of the voyagers had satisfied their hunger, the brands were as usual extinguished, the embers thrown overboard; then returning to the canoe, they lay down, and were in a very few minutes fast asleep. They slept for six hours, and when they woke the land was no longer in sight.

"It is lucky there is no fog," Godfrey said, "and that we have the sun to act as a compass. We can't be many miles out. We won't make straight for shore, Luka; we will head about north-west, so as to edge in gradually. There must be a good deal of current here, and it will be helping us along."

In an hour the low line of coast was visible, and they then headed still more to the north.

"There must be a good three-mile-an-hour current here," Godfrey observed presently. "We are going along first-rate past the shore. It took us over five days to come up. At this rate we shall go down in two."

They paddled steadily for twelve hours, stopping once only to cook a meal. Then they went close inshore again, had supper, and slept. When they woke they found they were still within a mile of the shore, and the current was now taking them along no more than a mile an hour.

"The gulf must be wide here, Luka. I don't think we

should gain anything by going out four or five miles farther, so we will keep about as we are. We ought to be at the point by the end of to-day's work. We were two hundred miles up. I expect we drifted down five-and-twenty miles in crossing, and we must have passed the land at a good five miles an hour yesterday; so that we ought not to be more than thirty or forty miles from the point, for this peninsula does not go as far north as the other by twenty or thirty miles."

After eight hours' paddling they found themselves at the mouth of a deep bay.

"That is all right," Godfrey said, examining his tracing. "That land on the farther side of the bay is the northern point of the gulf. We will paddle across there and anchor by the shore for to-night. To-morrow we shall have a long paddle, for it is seventy or eighty miles nearly due west to a sheltered bay that lies just this side of Cape Golovina. Once round that, we have nearly four hundred miles to go nearly due south into Kara Bay. This long tongue of land we are working round is called the Yamal Peninsula. Once fairly down into Kara Bay, we shall leave Siberia behind us, and the land will be Russia."

They struck across the bay, and landed under shelter of the cape. The land was higher here than any they had before met; and after their sleep Godfrey took his gun, accompanied by Jack, and ascended the hill.

"It is rum," he said to himself, as he gazed over the wide expanse of sea to the north, "that this should be one sheet of ice in the winter. I do not like the look of those clouds away to the north. I think we are going to have either a fog or a gale. We won't make a move till we see. This coast seems rocky, and it won't do to make along it unless we have settled weather."

He returned and told Luka, and then wandered away again, as he had seen that birds were very plentiful, and he returned in three hours to the boat with a dozen grouse, six ptarmigan, and a capercaillie. Godfrey was now a good shot, and the birds, never having been disturbed by the approach of man,

were so tame that he had no difficulty whatever in making a bag. As he went down to the boat he congratulated himself that they had not made a start, for the sky was now overcast, and the wind was already blowing strongly.

"We will have some bread to-day, Luka. These birds deserve something to eat with them, and our flour is holding out well. We have not eaten above twenty pounds since we started. I wish we had some yeast or something to make it rise. By the by I have an idea. Don't mix that till I come back, Luka."

Here, as when he landed on the Yenesei, he had seen numbers of rough nests on the ground, the birds being so tame that they often did not fly off even when he passed quite close to them. He returned to a spot where he had seen these nests quite thick, and had no difficulty in collecting a large number of little eggs of a great variety of colour.

"I expect about two out of every three are bad," he said. "We shall have to break them singly to find out the good ones. Fancy making a cake of sparrows' eggs!"

Upon breaking them he found that not more than one in five was good. Still there were quite enough for the purpose. The frying-pan was used as a basin, and in this he made a sort of batter of eggs and flour. By the time he had done this four of the grouse were nearly roasted. He poured the batter into the empty kettle, melted some deer's fat in the pan, and then poured in the batter again. Then he washed out and filled the kettle, and placed it upon the fire.

"Now, by the time the water is boiling, Luka, the batter and the grouse will be cooked. That is what we call a Yorkshire pudding at home; it will go splendidly with the birds."

The pudding turned out really good, and they enjoyed the meal immensely, Jack having the bones of the four birds for his share, together with the solitary fish they had caught the day before. By the time they had finished they were glad to get up their tent, which they pitched with the entrance close to the fire, for even in the sheltered spot where they were

fierce gusts of cold wind swept down upon them. The canvas of the tent was fastened down by heavy stones placed upon it, the furs brought in, and everything made snug. For three days the storm raged.

"It is a nuisance losing so much time," Godfrey said. "It was somewhere about the middle of June when we started, and there are only three months of open weather here. Every day is of importance. I sha'n't so much mind when we get to the mouth of the Petchora, for I heard from one of the Russians in the prison that canoes often go as far as that from Archangel to trade, so I shall feel when I get there that we are getting into civilised regions. It is about four hundred miles from Kara Bay, so that we have a good eight hundred miles to travel before we get there. We can certainly paddle forty miles a day by sticking to it steadily; but allowing for another stoppage of four days, and we can't allow less than that, that will be a fortnight. How long have we been now, Luka? There is nothing to count time from."

Luka shook his head.

"Well, it is somewhere above three weeks," Godfrey went on; "so that by the time we get to the mouth of the Petchora, it will be the last week in July. That will give us a couple of months; but I fancy we can't count much on the weather in September. Still, if the canoes go from Archangel to Petchora and back, we ought to be able to do it from Petchora, for the distance from there to Archangel is a good deal less than from the mouth of the Yenesei to the Petchora. There is one thing, if the weather gets very bad on the way, or we get laid up by bad weather for a long time on the way to Petchora, we can go up the river, I hear, to a place called Ust Zlyma, and from there go overland to Archangel. It is about two hundred or two hundred and fifty miles across, and we could walk that in ten days. I am quite sure that we should not be suspected of being anything but what we look; and at Archangel there is sure to be a British consul, and he would put us up to the best plan of getting out of the country. However, there will be plenty of time to see about that as we get on."

The wind fell on the morning of the fourth day, but it would be some hours before the sea would have gone down sufficiently for them to make a start. Godfrey again went out shooting, this time accompanied by Luka.

Godfrey was as fortunate as he had been before, shooting three capercaillie and nineteen grouse; while Luka brought down with his arrows four capercaillie, which he found sitting on stunted trees. On their way back to the boat they collected a great quantity of eggs, and came upon a rabbit warren.

"Do not shoot," Luka said, as Godfrey cocked his gun, "it will frighten them all into their holes. If you will go on with the dog, I will lie down here and will bring you as many rabbits as I can carry."

Two hours later he came down to the tent with two dozen rabbits he had shot. After cooking two of them, and giving one to Jack as his share, they packed up all their belongings and again took to the canoe. They used their paddles until round the cape, and then heading westward hoisted their sail, for what wind there was was still from the north, and the help it afforded was sufficient greatly to reduce the labour of paddling. They kept steadily on, one or other taking occasional snatches of sleep. But with this exception, and that of the time spent by Luka in cooking, they continued to paddle until, forty hours after starting, they reached Cape Golovina, passing between it and Beloc Island. They did not make the halt they had intended under shelter of the cape, for the weather was fine, and Godfrey wanted to take advantage of the north wind as long as it lasted. Once round the cape they headed nearly due south, and the wind freshening a little, drove them along merrily, and they were able to cease paddling, and to take a fair proportion of sleep alternately.

Luka was now getting more accustomed to the management of the sail, and no longer feared an occasional jibe, and night and day—if it could be called night when the sun never set—they continued their voyage along the coast of the Yamal

Peninsula. At the end of the fourth day the wind freshened so much that the large sail was taken down and the leg-of-mutton sail substituted for it; but as the wind continued to rise, and the sea to get up fast, Godfrey began to look out for some spot into which to run for shelter. The coast was very indented and broken, and in two hours they passed the mouth of a deep bay into which the boat was at once directed, and was presently moored under the shelter of its northern bank.

"She is a splendid sea-boat," Godfrey said. "If it wasn't for the boat in tow I should not mind what weather I was out in her."

Their stay was of short duration, for in a few hours the wind sank again. "I don't think it is done yet," Godfrey said when they were beyond the shelter of the bay. "I fancy it will blow up again presently; still we may as well push on. I think it is rather more from the east than it was."

For the next twenty-four hours, however, there was no very marked change in the force of the wind, but it had now veered round to the north-east.

"We are getting well down now," Godfrey said. "We have been sailing for five days, and we have certainly been running a good three miles an hour from the time we rounded the cape. So we are three hundred and fifty miles down. I should say we must be entering Kara Bay."

"Very bad weather coming," Luka said, looking back.

Godfrey turned round. A heavy black cloud was sweeping up with a misty line below it.

"By Jove! you are right; that is a big squall and no mistake. There is no bay to run to here, Luka, and we could not get there in time if there was. We must do as I talked about. Quick, lower the sail down, there is not a moment to lose. No; wait until I bring her up head to the wind. Now, then, down with it. Now unstep the mast, lash that and the boom, the other sail, and its spar together; that is the way." And with their joint efforts the work was accomplished in a couple of minutes. "Now, then, fasten this rope to your end, Luka;

I will tie the other end to mine. That is right. It is long enough to make a good big angle. Now fasten the head-rope to the middle; be sure it is put in the middle, Luka. That is right. Now, launch it overboard."

The work was done as quickly as it is described, and in three minutes from the time the mast was lowered the canoe was riding to the floating anchor.

"Now then, Luka, on with the apron."

"Shall we sit up?"

"No; we will lie down, cover up the holes, and lash them carefully when we are in. It is going to be a drencher, and it is of no use our getting wet through to begin with. We could not do anything with the paddles."

They had scarcely made themselves snug when, with a roar, a deluge of rain fell on the deck and cover, and a moment later even this sound was partly deadened by the howl of the wind. Although their heads were close together, Godfrey felt that it would be utterly useless to make any remark. He felt under no uneasiness, for, with their weight well down and anchored head to sea, he felt sure that the light canoe would ride over anything like a cork bottle. The motion of the boat rapidly increased, but she herself rode lightly over the waves. As these increased the jerking of the boat behind at her rope became more and more violent, and the canoe quivered from end to end with the shocks.

"This will never do," Godfrey said to himself. "The boat will pull the stern out of her. It will be an awful loss to cut her adrift, but it can't be helped."

He unlashed the fastenings of the cover of the circular hole above him, reached his hand forward and got hold of Luka's paddle, and passed it with his own out through the hole. Then he sat up himself. Confident as he felt in the canoe, he was almost frightened at the wild aspect of the sea. The wind was literally howling, driving the rain before it with a force that stung Godfrey's neck as it struck it. He got out a strip of deer-skin lashing, of which there was a supply always

close at hand under the deck, lashed the paddles together, and then, leaning aft, lashed them at the centre firmly to the tow-rope. Then with some difficulty he got out his knife and cut the rope close to its fastening; the paddles flew overboard, and the boat drifted rapidly astern, the drag of the paddles being, as Godfrey observed with satisfaction, sufficient to keep her head to wind. Then he wriggled himself down underneath the apron again and lashed down the cover of the hole.

CHAPTER XVI

A SAMOYEDE ENCAMPMENT

THE action of the canoe was altogether changed as soon as it was released from the strain of the boat behind. There was no more tugging and jarring, but she rose and fell on the waves almost imperceptibly.

"Well, Jack, old fellow, what do you think of it?" Godfrey said to the dog as it nestled up close to him. "Here we are now, out in a regular storm. It is lucky we have plenty of sea-room, Jack. I reckon it is seventy or eighty miles across to the other side of the gulf, and I don't suppose she can drag those spars through the water much more than a mile an hour. So we have plenty of time before us. We must both put away as much time in sleep as we can. We have lost almost all our provisions, old boy, and our water, which was of still more consequence. It is very lucky I always made a rule of having the kettle filled and put on board here after each meal and of keeping a dozen pounds of meat here. I thought we might be obliged to cast the boat adrift suddenly. Well, if we have luck, we may find it again. We shall both drift in the same line, and there is no reason why she shouldn't live through it. The stock of firewood has gone down, and

she has not got above a couple of hundred pounds' weight in her altogether. I am afraid she will take enough salt water on board to spoil our supply of fresh, but I think we are drifting pretty straight for the Kara River. I calculated that it lay dead to leeward of us when the wind went to the north-west."

It was a considerable time before Godfrey went off to sleep owing to the rapid changes of the angle at which he was lying. Sometimes his head was two or three feet higher than his feet, and directly afterwards the position was exactly reversed. The rolling was but slight, and this he scarcely felt, being too tightly packed in along with the furs and the dog to move much. But at last the noise of the water and the roar of the wind lulled him to sleep. He woke once, and then went off again, and his watch told him that he had been altogether asleep twelve hours. When he next woke, he felt at once that the motion was slighter than it had been and that the wind had greatly abated.

"Are you asleep, Luka?" he shouted.

"I am not asleep now," Luka replied drowsily.

"The storm is pretty nearly over; I will get the cover off and look round, and then we will see if we can't boil some water and have some tea. We have never used any of those candles yet; this will be a good opportunity to try them."

Unlashing and removing the cover, Godfrey sat up and looked round. The gale had broken. Black clouds were hurrying past overhead, but there were patches of blue sky. The sea was still very heavy, but it was rarely that the canoe dipped her nose under a wave, so lightly did she rise and fall over them.

"In a few hours we shall have our sail up again, Luka," he said as the Tartar thrust his head up through his opening. It was but for a moment. He instantly dived under again and replaced the cover, appalled at the sea, which was infinitely rougher than anything he had ever before witnessed.

"It looks pretty bad, doesn't it?" Godfrey said, laughing, as he, too, resumed his position of shelter.

"It is terrible," Luka said.

"I expect it has been worse. At any rate, as you can see, we have got through it without taking a drop of water on board, thanks to the floating anchor. Now I will pass the kettle forward to you. Be very careful with it, for it is all the water we have."

"All the water! Why, what has become of the boat?" Luka exclaimed.

"I had to cut her adrift half an hour after the squall struck us. Did not you hear me look out when I took your paddle?"

"I felt you take the paddle, but there was too much noise to hear anything, and I was too frightened to listen. I thought that surely we should go to the bottom. Why did you cut her loose?"

"Because she was tugging so hard. She would have pulled us to pieces, and it was better to let her go than to risk that. She will have drifted the same way we have done, only she will have gone three times as fast, for she was a good deal higher out of water, and the paddles which I fastened on to her head-rope won't have anything like the hold on the water that our spars have. We will keep in the same direction when we get our sails up, and if she has lived through it we shall very likely find her ashore somewhere along the coast. Now be sure you lash that kettle securely to the deck-beam, Luka. Put it as near one side as you can get it, then there will be room for you to lie alongside and watch it. But stop! Before you fasten it pour out half a mugful of water for Jack. He doesn't like tea, and there will be nothing but tea for him after we have once made it."

The candle was lighted and fixed under the kettle, but the four wicks gave out such an odour that Godfrey was glad to sit up again and remain outside, until a nudge from Luka told him that the tea was ready. They ate with it some slices of raw bear's ham. Luka offered to cook it, but Godfrey had had the candle put out the moment he got under the cover and would not hear of its being lighted again.

"It is not at all bad raw," he said. "They eat raw ham in Germany, and that last smoking it got was almost as good as cooking it. I expect the sea will have gone down in a few hours, and then we can have a regular meal; but if you were to light that smelly thing again now it would make me ill. Now, Jack, I will light my pipe and look out again, and you shall come out too for a breath of fresh air. I will hold you tight and see that you don't go over."

In twelve hours the sea had almost gone down. The floating anchor was hauled up and unlashed, the masts were stepped, the large sail hoisted, and, free from the dead weight that had hitherto checked her speed, the little craft sped along gaily before the gentle wind, Godfrey keeping her as near as possible dead before it, on the chance that they might catch sight of the boat.

"If we drifted a mile an hour and she drifted three," he said, "she would have gained four-and-twenty miles while we were asleep, and perhaps since then she has been gaining a mile an hour; so she is from thirty-five to forty miles ahead of us, and must be quite half-way across the gulf. Anyhow, we need not begin to look out yet; we are going about four knots an hour, I should think, and I don't suppose she is going more than one. In about ten hours we must begin to look about for her."

Before the end of that time the sea had gone quite down, and the wind had fallen so light that Godfrey thought they were scarce making three knots an hour. "I hope it won't fall altogether," he said, "for as we have no paddles it would be awkward for us."

"Two of the bottom boards will do for paddles."

"Yes, I know that, Luka, I am steering with one of them; but they would do very little good, for they are so thin that they would break off directly we put any strength on to them."

Godfrey occasionally stood up and looked round, but could see no signs of the boat, and indeed could hardly have done so unless he had passed within a couple of miles at most of her.

"The wind may have changed a little," he said, "though I don't think it has done so. Anyhow, I will head a little more to the south, so as to be sure that we shall strike the shore to the east both of the Kara River and the point she is likely to drift to."

Four hours later they made out land ahead of them, some six miles away as they guessed, and holding on reached it in two hours and a half's time. They stepped out as soon as they got into shallow water, carried the canoe ashore, drank a mug of cold tea and ate some raw meat, and then lay down for a long sleep. When they woke they collected some drift-wood and lighting a fire, cooked some meat.

"What are you going to do, Godfrey?" Luka asked. "Are you going to set out at once to look for the boat?"

"No, we had better wait for a few hours. She may not have drifted to the shore yet, though I do not think she can be far off; still it is as well to give her plenty of time. At any rate we can shoot some birds, so the time won't be lost."

Having made a fair bag and been absent from the canoe for five hours they returned, and after cutting up a capercaillie and grilling it over the fire, they got the boat into the water and started.

They had sailed about eight miles to the west when Luka exclaimed, "There is something there by the shore close to that point. It may be the boat; it may be a rock."

It was another quarter of an hour before Godfrey was able to assure himself that it was really the boat. "Thank God for that, Luka!" he exclaimed. "We have reason to thank Him for a great many things. I do so every hour, and I hope you do so too. But finding the boat again safe seems to me the greatest blessing we have had yet; I don't know what we should have done without it."

Another quarter of an hour brought them to the point. The boat lay just afloat, bumping on the sand as each little wave lifted and left her. They sprang out of the canoe into shallow water and threw out the anchor, and then waded to the boat.

She had about four inches of water in her, but was entirely uninjured.

"Hurrah!" Godfrey shouted, "she is as good as ever. Now, Luka, get everything out of her as soon as you can, then we can turn her over and empty her, put the things in again, and be off at once. We have got no time to lose, for you must remember there is not much more than a quart of cold tea left in the kettle. I am sure the Kara River can't be very far off, but I can't say whether it is three miles or thirty."

In half an hour they were again afloat and working their paddles to assist the sail. Two hours later Luka said, "Huts on that point ahead of us."

"So there are," Godfrey said. "Six or eight of them and a lot of cattle."

"Reindeer!" Luka corrected. "Samoyede village."

"Why, there must be hundreds of them," Godfrey said in surprise.

"Yes, the Ostjaks told me in our old camp that many of the Samoyedes had five hundred, and some of them a thousand reindeer. They keep them just as we do cattle. Their wealth is counted by their reindeer. They make their clothes of its skin; its milk and flesh are their chief food. It draws their sledges, and when they want money they can sell some of them."

"Did you ask how much they can be sold for?"

"Yes, the Ostjaks said that they were worth here two or three roubles each."

"Then if there are many of these encampments along the shore, Luka, we need not trouble about food; and if anything happens to our boat we can make a couple of sledges, buy four reindeer, and start by land."

"Then we should have to wait until winter," Luka said.

"Yes, that would be a nuisance; but it would not be so very long to wait. I had no idea reindeer were so cheap. If I had I think instead of spending the winter hunting I would have bought some reindeer and started to drive. Still it would

have been a terrible journey, and perhaps we have done better as it is. Well, shall we land? What do you think?"

"We don't want anything," Luka said. "The Samoyedes are generally friendly. They are not like the Tunguses and Yuraks. But you see there are but two of us, and we have hatchets and knives and other things they value. If we wanted anything I should say let us land, but as we don't it would be better to go on."

"You are right, Luka. I don't suppose there would be any risk of being robbed; still it is just as well not to run even the smallest chance of trouble when everything is going on so well."

On passing the point on which the encampment was situated they saw a wide opening. "The Kara!" Godfrey exclaimed joyously. "We will cross to the other side, and coast up on that shore till the water becomes fresh."

It required four hours' sailing and paddling before they got beyond the influence of the sea, then they landed, shot and hunted for a couple of days, took in a fresh supply of water, and started again.

"We have passed the line of the Ural Mountains now," Godfrey said. "The Kara rises in that range. We may almost consider ourselves in Russia."

One morning Luka woke Godfrey soon after he had lain down for his turn of sleep.

"Fog coming," he said.

Godfrey sat up and looked round. "That it is, Luka. We must head for shore directly." He seized his paddle, but the fog cloud had drifted rapidly down upon them, and before they were half-way to shore drifts of white cloud floated past them on the water, and five minutes later they were surrounded by a dense white wall, so thick that even the canoe towing behind was invisible. They ceased paddling.

"There is nothing to do but to wait," Godfrey said. "Get your fur coat on; it is bitterly cold. There is one comfort, what wind there is is towards the shore, and we shall drift that way."

"I can't feel any wind at all," Luka said.

"No, it is very slight; but there must have been some to bring this fog down from the north. We were not more than half a mile from the shore when it closed in upon us. If we only drift fifty yards an hour we shall be there in time. Let us have a cup of tea and then we will rig up the cover and turn in. We have a lot of sleep to make up for. There is one comfort, there is no chance of our being run down."

Godfrey saw by his watch when he woke that he had been asleep for four hours, and he sat up and looked round. The fog was as thick as before. The movement woke Luka, and he too sat up.

"Listen, Luka!" Godfrey exclaimed as he was about to speak. "I heard a bird chirp." The sound was repeated. "It is over there," Godfrey said. "Hurrah! we shall soon be ashore," and they seized their paddles.

After rowing for a minute or two they stopped and again listened. "There it is again," Godfrey said; "right ahead. Paddle gently, Luka; we sha'n't see the shore until we are on it, and we must not risk running head on to a rock." Presently something dark appeared just in front of the canoe.

"Hold water!" Godfrey exclaimed, and as they stopped her way the boat drifted quietly against a rock. They brought her broadside to it and stepped out.

"That is a comfort. The fog can last for a week now. Let us get the canoe ashore. We can moor the boat; the water is as smooth as glass, and there is no risk whatever of her damaging herself. Bring an armful of firewood ashore," he went on as they laid the canoe down gently on a flat rock. "I will look about for a place for the tent."

"Do not go far or you will lose yourself."

"I will take care of that. I won't go beyond speaking distance."

Godfrey soon found a patch of sand large enough for the tent, and this was soon erected and a fire lit. Jack as usual indulged in a wild scamper, but returned to Godfrey's whistle. "Don't go too far, Jack, or you will be losing your way too."

The fog did not clear off for another forty-eight hours, but when at the end of that time they looked out of their tent the sky was clear and the birds were singing gaily. The ground rose almost perpendicularly behind them to a height of from twenty to thirty feet. It was rocky, with some deep indentations.

"We will do some shooting, Luka; but as there may be some natives near we will hide the canoe. It is no use running any risks. We will stow the tent and get everything packed before we start, and then we shall be able to set out when we return."

The canoe was packed and carried some fifty yards along the shore, and then laid behind a great boulder that had fallen at the mouth of a cleft in the rock.

"Shall we pull up the boat?" Luka asked.

"No, I don't think that is worth while. There is nothing there worth stealing. The natives have got plenty of fish of their own, no doubt, and drift-wood too. Now let us be off."

The birds were scarcer than usual, and they wandered a long distance before they had made up anything like their usual bag.

"We have been eight hours out," Godfrey said, looking at his watch. "We may as well have a meal before we start back. It will take us two or three hours to get to the boat again. There will be no loss of time. It takes no longer cooking here than it would there, and we may as well carry the birds inside as out."

They were engaged in eating their meal when Jack suddenly gave an angry growl, and looking up they saw a party of a dozen Samoyedes with bows and arrows at a distance of fifty yards behind them. They sprang to their feet.

"Shall I shoot?" Luka asked.

"No, no, Luka, their intentions may be friendly. Besides, though we might kill three or four of them they would riddle us with arrows. We had best meet them as friends."

When the Samoyedes came up Luka gave them the ordinary salutation of friendship.

"Where come from?" the man who seemed to be the leader of the natives asked suspiciously.

"A long way from the east," Luka said, pointing in that direction.

"Who are you?"

"Ostjak," Luka said, knowing that the Samoyedes would have heard of that tribe, but would know nothing of his own.

"Who this?" the native asked, pointing to Godfrey.

"A friend of Ostjaks," Luka said, "come to hunt and shoot. I come with him."

"This Samoyede country," the native said; "not want Ostjaks here."

"We do no harm," Luka said. "We go west, far along, not want Samoyede country. Buy milk of Samoyedes. Good friends."

The Samoyedes talked together, and then the leader said "Come!" Without any appearance of hesitation Godfrey and Luka set off with the natives. Their language, though differing from that of the northern Ostjaks, was sufficiently alike for them to be able to understand each other.

"Do you think they mean to be friendly?" Godfrey asked in Russian.

"I don't know," Luka replied. "Perhaps not made up their minds yet."

"They are going down to the coast, that is a comfort, Luka; they are going to the west of our boats. I suppose they have an encampment there. I expect they heard my gun and have been following us at a distance until they saw us sit down."

"Must have seen them," Luka said.

"Only one may have been following us, and may have sent the others back to fetch up the rest from their tents. Well, it does not matter now they have got us. If they ask where we came from, as I expect they will, you had better tell them, Luka, we came in a boat. They will guess it without our telling, and will very likely look for it. It is better to make no concealment."

Two hours' walking brought them to a little valley, in the middle of which ran a small stream. They followed it down for half a mile, and then at a sudden turn they saw the sea in front of them, a cluster of ten Samoyede yourts and a herd of reindeer feeding on the slope behind them. A number of women and children and five or six old men came out to look at them as they approached.

"Sit down and let us talk," the leader said as they reached the village, and set the example by seating himself by a large fire. Godfrey and Luka at once did the same.

"The Ostjak and his friend have come very far," he said.

"A long distance," Luka replied. "We have travelled many days and are going to the Petchora."

"Have you reindeer? Did you walk all the way?"

"No, we have no reindeer; we came in a boat. You will find it along the shore."

"How far?"

"About an hour's walk I should say."

The Samoyede gave an order, and two of the men at once left the circle, got into a canoe, and paddled away.

"The strangers will stay here for a day or two. We have plenty of milk and fish."

Luka nodded. "We are in no hurry to go on. We have plenty of time to reach the Petchora before the winter sets in."

The Samoyede spoke to one of the women, and she set to work to clear out one of the tents. The chief got up and walked away, and the conference was evidently over. Three hours later they saw the canoe reappear at the mouth of the river with the boat towing behind it. The Samoyedes gathered on the shore to examine it, evidently surprised at its form and size, which differed entirely from their own, which were little craft capable of holding two at most. They tasted the water at the bottom of the boat and found it to be fresh. The stove for cooking spoke for itself, and as there was firewood, meat, flour, and some rough furs, there seemed all that was necessary for a journey. When they returned the chief asked Luka:

"Is that Ostjak canoe?"

"Yes; but it is built much larger than our canoes generally are, as it was for long journey."

Presently the women brought a large bowl of reindeer milk and some fried fish. As they were eating, four of the men who were standing behind suddenly threw themselves upon Godfrey and Luka, while the others closed in, and in a minute they were securely bound hand and foot. Godfrey made no struggle, for he felt that it would be useless and might result in his being shot or stabbed. The hatchets and knives were taken from their belts, and they were then carried to the tent and thrown down. Jack had fought fiercely, biting several of the natives, until he was struck with a spear in the shoulder by the chief, when he limped off uttering piercing yells.

"What do you think they mean to do with us, Luka?" Godfrey asked. "Will they hand us over to the Russians do you think? Cowardly blackguards. I wish now we had fought at first."

"No, won't hand us to Russians; too far off. They don't think of that; they have taken us for the sake of our hatchets and knives and of your gun. Perhaps they will keep us to work for them. Perhaps they will cut our throats."

"It is not a pleasant look-out either way. Still, if they keep us, we are safe to get away before long; we must hope for the best. I wonder they haven't taken my ammunition and the other things."

"Not know about pockets," Luka said. "They would have taken them if they had."

Two or three hours later the Samoyedes came in and carefully examined the captives' lashings. Their hands were tied behind them with reindeer thongs, which were so tightly bound that they almost cut into the skin, and their feet were equally firmly lashed. In a few minutes the sound of talk ceased and the camp became quiet.

"I suppose it is their bedtime," Godfrey said. "If the fools do not set a guard over us we shall soon be free."

"How is that?" Luka asked.

"We will gnaw through one of the thongs, of course, there can be no difficulty about that; we will give them an hour to get to sleep and then we will set to work. What is that? Ah, Jack, is it you?" as the dog crept in between them with low whines. "Poor old chap, you did your best. I can't pat you now. Roll yourself to the door and look out, Luka."

"There are three of them sitting by a fire, but it will be darker presently and they will not see us"—for although it could scarcely be called night the sun now dipped for an hour or two below the horizon at midnight.

"Well, see or not see, we will go, Luka. If we are to be killed it shall be making a fight for it, and not having our throats cut like sheep. Now, I think you are more accustomed to chewing tough food than I am, so I will roll over on my face, and do you set to work and bite through the thong."

Luka's sharp teeth cut through the twisted hide in five minutes. It was a quarter of an hour more before Godfrey's hands recovered their usual feeling. As soon as they were efficient he unfastened the thongs round his companion's wrists and those round their feet.

"Now then, Luka, put your head out and see if you can see my gun."

"Gun sure to be in chief's tent," Luka said. He looked out. "Can't see gun. My bow and arrows are lying on ground by chief's tent."

"Very well, then, you had better crawl round and fetch them first, that will be something to begin a fight with anyhow. Here, I will slit open the tent behind with my knife, then you can crawl along past the others till you get to the chief's tent without those fellows at the fires seeing you. I am more afraid of those beastly dogs giving the alarm than of the men."

Godfrey cut a slit with his pocket-knife in the reindeer-skin covering, and then Luka crawled out. He lay flat on his stomach and dragged himself along, looking, as Godfrey thought, in the twilight, just like the seals he had seen crawl-

ing over the rocks. He passed three of the yourts and then turned off. In four or five minutes he reappeared with his bow and quiver of arrows and two native spears. He crawled back as carefully as he had gone.

"Give me the knife, Godfrey."

Godfrey handed it to him. "You are not going to kill anyone, Luka? If they attack us, of course we shall shoot them down in self-defence, but I would not have anyone killed in cold blood on any account."

The Tartar shook his head. "I am not going to kill anyone. I looked into the tent; the gun is leaning by the side of the chief. Women and children are lying all round. Couldn't get in. I will cut a slit in skin and take gun."

"It will be first-rate if you can manage that, Luka. We can make a good fight of it if you can manage to get the gun."

Godfrey was able to watch Luka's proceedings now. He stopped behind the fourth tent, placed his ear against the skin and listened intently. Then he inserted the blade in the skin two feet above the ground and very quietly, with a sawing motion, cut downwards. Then he began at the top again and made a horizontal cut four or five inches long, and then cut again down to the ground, removing the flap of skin. He peered into the tent, then he inserted his arm, a moment later he withdrew it with the gun, and then returned to Godfrey. The latter's first step was to charge the gun, for he had fired two shots while Luka was cooking the meal before they were surprised.

"Now, Luka, which do you think we had better do, make for the canoes or go off on foot?"

"We want big canoe," Luka said. "Can't well do without it. We had better go to that."

"I think so too," Godfrey said. "If we can once get on board we can beat them off. Of course there is more risk of being discovered that way, but I think we had better chance it."

They kept along for some distance on the side of the hill,

and then, when about a hundred yards from the huts, crawled down to the river, crept back along the bank until they reached the boat, which was hauled up with the native canoes on shore.

"How are we to get it down, Luka?" Godfrey whispered. "If we stand up to carry it down those fellows by the fire, who are not twenty yards away, must see us. If we try to push it down we are safe to make a noise."

"Wait a moment, give me knife again," Luka said; and having obtained it he went along the line of canoes, cutting and slicing the skins from end to end. Then he returned to Godfrey.

"They can't follow now," he said. "Once on board we are safe."

"I have been thinking, Luka, our best plan will be to lie down one on each side, and to hoist her up as well as we can, and move her forward inch by inch."

Luka nodded, and they separated to carry out their plan, when Jack decided the matter by leaping on board, and sending the paddles with a rattle to the bottom of the boat.

"Jump up, Luka, and in with her."

As they sprang up there was a shout from the three natives by the fire, which was answered by the fierce barking of two or three score of dogs. After a moment's hesitation two of the natives rushed back to their yurts for their bows, while the third, who happened to have his close at hand, fitted an arrow and discharged it hastily. As they were running the boat down it missed its mark, and before he could shoot again the boat was in the water, and they had sprang on board. The native ran down to the edge with his bow bent, but Luka's bow twanged and the man fell back with an arrow through his body. They seized the paddles and drove the boat twenty yards into the stream, when the whole of the Samoyedes rushed down to the bank and began to discharge their arrows.

"Lie flat down, Luka," Godfrey said, setting the example, "the stream will take us."

There was a great jabber of voices on the bank.

"The chief is telling them to take to their canoes," Luka said laughing. "You will hear some shouts directly. The water won't begin to come in through the slits till they put their weight in the canoes."

Godfrey lifted his head for a moment and saw five or six of the natives on the bank abreast of him, standing in readiness to shoot. Quickly as he withdrew it again two arrows struck the boat within a few inches of the point where he had looked over.

"Luka," he said, "we must get a little further out; I am afraid the stream might set us in towards the bank. I will put my cap upon a piece of firewood and hoist it up. They will shoot at it, and the moment they do we must both spring up and give two or three strong strokes to take her further out."

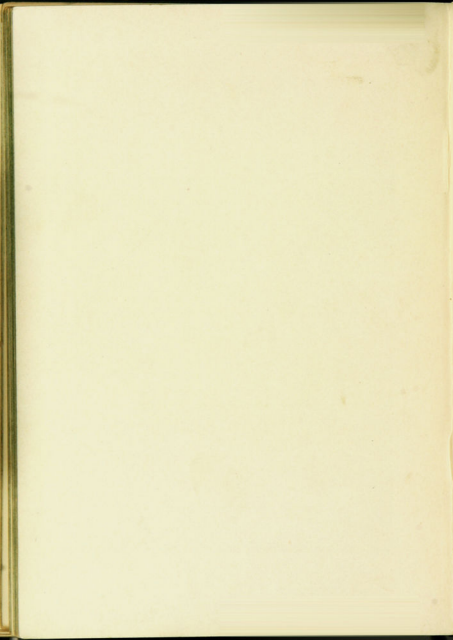
Lying flat on his back at the bottom of the boat, Godfrey raised his cap; almost instantaneously there were three or four sharp taps on the side of the boat, and one arrow passed through it but an inch above his chest. In a moment he sat upright with a paddle in his hand, and a couple of sharp strokes sent the boat out into the centre of the current. At this moment they heard a series of yells and splashes. "Lucky for them," Luka laughed, "I made the slits so big. If they had got out farther they would all have been drowned: these people are not able to swim."

"No, I should think not," Godfrey said. "They don't look as if water had ever touched them from the day they were born. We are safe now, in ten minutes we shall be clear of the river, and have only got to paddle back and fetch our canoe."

"We may have to fight yet," Luka said. "Sure to follow us. The meat and flour is all gone. I expect they gave it to their dogs. That is what made them sleep so sound. They will know that we shall have to land somewhere to get food, and think they will have us then. They will mend canoes very quick, and some of them will come after us."



GODFREY AND LUKA ESCAPING FROM THE SAMOYEDS



"It will be worse for them if they do," Godfrey said. "With my gun and your bow we could keep a score of canoes at a distance. Still, as you say, we may have trouble in getting our canoe. However, we must have that if we have to fight the whole tribe for it."

Godfrey looked up from time to time. He could do so safely now, for they were fifty yards from the bank, and there was time for him to withdraw his head before an arrow could reach him. The natives, however, had ceased to follow the boat, having doubtless run back when they heard their companions' cries. Godfrey thought it as well not to take to the paddles until they were well out of the river, lest one might have run on and hidden himself in a clump of bushes. As soon as they were out of the river they took up the paddles, and rowed straight out for a distance of a couple of miles. "How long will they be in patching up their canoes, Luka?"

"They will do it in an hour," Luka said. "The women will sew the slits together, and the men melt fat and smear over."

"Very well. Then we had better turn now and make for the place where the canoe is hid. They won't expect us to land so soon, and most of the men will be waiting to follow with the canoes. If only four or five follow us along the bank we can manage them easily enough. Fortunately, the canoe is light enough for one of us to carry it down to the water. While you are doing that I can keep them off. This boat paddles a lot heavier than the other, Luka."

Luka grunted in assent.

"Do you think you will know the place where you hid the canoe?" Godfrey asked presently.

"Let us go close in to see," Luka said. "We went ashore in fog. I don't know how it looks from the sea. The coast is all alike here. We must keep very close."

"How far along do you think it is, Luka?"

"It can't be much more than an hour to paddle," Luka replied. "The Samoyedes were away three hours to fetch the

boat, and they were in no hurry and had to tow her back with their canoe."

For half an hour they kept the boat parallel with the land, and then inclined towards the shore. Presently Luka said, "There are six men walking along on bank."

"Well, there won't be six left to walk back," Godfrey replied grimly, "if they interfere with us. Now, Luka, it is nearly an hour since we turned; we will go in within a hundred yards of the shore. Those bows of theirs are not like yours, they won't carry more than forty or fifty yards. Now, I will just give those gentlemen a hint that they had better keep away from the edge of the cliff"; and so saying he laid down his paddle, and took up his gun and fired. He aimed high, as he wished to frighten and not hurt. The natives instantly disappeared from the edge. "Now, Luka, do you keep on paddling; I will watch the top of the bank, and if one of them shows his head I will fire. They won't suspect we have any idea of landing, and will probably keep a bit back. All we want is time to land and climb the bank. Keep inshore now, so that next time I fire I may be able to send the bullet pretty close. This gun is not much use at more than fifty yards' distance."

Only once did Godfrey see a head above the bank, and the instant he did so he fired.

"That will show them we are keeping a sharp look-out; I don't think they will come near for some little time now. I daresay they are puzzling themselves, first, why we are coming this way, and secondly, why we are keeping so close."

"There is the place where we had tent," Luka exclaimed suddenly. "Do you see the ashes of the fire?"

"That is it, sure enough. Now, run ashore and dash up the bank."

As soon as the canoe touched the shore they leapt out and ran up the bank. Not twenty yards away were the Samoyedes. Godfrey uttered a shout and raised his gun to his shoulder, and the natives with a yell ran off at full speed.

"Now, Luka, do you go and get the canoe in the water. Be careful; if you find it heavy for you with the stores on board, take them out; there is no occasion for hurry. Those fellows won't venture within range of my gun again; they will keep at a distance, and send up word to the tents that we have landed. So take your time over it; if you were to make a slip and damage the canoe it would be fatal to us."

The natives stopped at a distance of a quarter of a mile, and then, as Godfrey expected, one of them started at a run back towards the village. In ten minutes Godfrey heard a shout from below, and looking round saw the canoe safely by the side of the boat. He ran down and took his place in her, and they paddled out towing the boat behind them.

CHAPTER XVII

A SEA FIGHT

AS soon as they had reached a distance of two or three hundred yards from the shore Godfrey ceased paddling. "Now we can talk matters over, Luka. There is no occasion for hurry now. If these fellows in the canoes are disposed to fight we can't prevent them. They will certainly be out of the river before we could get back there; and even if we did pass first they could easily overtake us, for those light craft of theirs would go two feet to our one unless we had wind for our sail. So we may as well take things easy, and decidedly the first thing to do is to wash and dress Jack's wound, and then to get some tea and something to eat. We have had nothing since we were caught yesterday between twelve and one o'clock.

"What a lucky thing it was we hid the canoe, Luka!" he went on, as the Tartar pulled the boat up alongside the canoe

and began to prepare to light a fire. "The chances are we should not have been able to get her off as well as the boat, and even if we had they would have taken out all our stores. The meat we might replace, but the loss of the tea and tobacco, and above all of the matches, would have been terrible; besides, they would have got our spare hatchets and knives, the fish-hooks and lines, and all our furs. We don't want the furs for warmth now, but it would make a deal of difference to our comfort if we had to sleep on hard boards. I do not know how to feel thankful enough that we hid the canoe away."

"We could not have gone without our things," Luka said. "We would have fought them all and killed them rather than lose our tea and tobacco."

Godfrey laughed at his companion's earnestness.

"I think that would have been paying too dearly for them, Luka. Still we should have missed them badly."

Just as they had finished their meal they saw some black spots ahead of them close inshore. "I should not be surprised if they have been picking up those fellows who followed us, Luka. No doubt the man who ran back would tell them they could do nothing against our arms. But I don't think they will dare attack us in our boat even if they have got all the men there. There were only twelve at first, not counting the old men who were in their camp when we were brought there. You shot one of them, so there are only eleven, even if they have got on board those who followed us. I have always heard that they are plucky little fellows, but I do not think they would be fools enough to attack us on the water. I feel sure they can't have any intention of doing so. I expect their original idea was to hover about us night and day, and then, when we went ashore to get food, to steal the boat and hunt us down. Now they find we have got a second boat they will see that it is a longer job than they expected, for they will guess that our real valuables are on board the boat we hid, and that we may have enough provisions here to last for some time."

The canoes, as they approached them, sheered off to a distance of a quarter of a mile, and then gathered together evidently in consultation. Then they turned and paddled rapidly back again, soon leaving the canoe and boat far behind.

"I wonder what they are up to now?" Godfrey said; "some mischief I have no doubt."

"Perhaps more yours on farther? They might send on a man with fast reindeer a long way ahead, so that they might attack us with forty or fifty canoes."

"So they might, Luka. That would be very awkward, and we should be afraid of landing anywhere. They may pass the news on from camp to camp for any number of miles. Yes, that is a very serious business. The only thing I see for it is to make right out beyond sight of land, and then push on as fast as we can. Fortunately they don't know anything about our sail, and as they left us so fast just now they will reckon that we cannot make much more than two miles an hour; while, when we get the wind, we can go six if we help with the paddles. We may as well keep on as we are at present, as if determined to keep near the land till, at any rate, we are some distance past the mouth of the river. There is not likely to be another of their camps for some distance along, for, of course, they would always be near a river, as they must have water for themselves and their reindeer."

Paddling quietly, they continued on their course until they had passed the mouth of the river. When they had gone half a mile they saw nine canoes, each containing one man, come out from the river and follow them.

"They mean to stick to us," Godfrey said uneasily. "I'm afraid we are going to have a lot of trouble with them, Luka."

After paddling for another two hours they turned their heads seaward. The canoes did the same. In four hours more the land had almost disappeared, but the clump of canoes still maintained their position behind them.

"It is of no use going out any further, Luka. We are a long way out of sight of anyone on shore now. Now let us head

west again." An hour later one of the canoes left the group and paddled rapidly towards the land.

"That is what their game is," Godfrey said. "They have sent off to tell their friends ashore the course we are taking, and do what we will they will keep them informed of it. We may have a fleet of canoes out at any moment after us. Do you think we could leave them behind if we were to cast off the boat?"

Luka shook his head decidedly. "No; their canoes are very small; paddle quick, much quicker than we could."

"She is very fast, Luka."

"Yes; but too many things on board. If we threw over everything—food, and kettles, and dog, and furs—we might go as fast as they could; but even then I think they would beat us."

"Well, we won't try that anyhow, Luka; I would rather risk a fight than that. I don't see anything to do but to wait for the wind. It is not often calm like this long, and we have had it three or four days already. If we do get a wind we can certainly beat them by cutting loose the boat."

"Beat them anyhow," Luka said. "With wind and paddles they might keep up with us rowing very hard for a bit; but men tire, wind never tires. We sure to beat them at last. I think we shall have wind before very long."

"I hope so, Luka; and not too much of it. Well, as we can't get away from them by paddling, Luka, we may as well lower our lines. We have only got two or three days' provisions on board, and we may just as well lay in a stock while we can."

The hooks were baited with pieces of meat and lowered, and the paddles laid in. Scarcely were the lines out when Godfrey felt a fierce tug. "Hulloa!" he exclaimed, "I have got something bigger than usual." He hauled up, and gave a shout of satisfaction as he pulled a cod of fully ten pounds weight from the water. Five minutes later Luka caught one of equal size.

"That will do, Luka. I will throw mine into the boat, and we will keep yours on board. Now we have got among cod there is no fear of our not getting plenty of food. I know they catch enormous quantities off the northern coast of Norway, and it is evident that they come as far as these waters. It is some time since we tried this deep-sea fishing, which accounts for our not having caught any before."

"Are they good fish?" Luka asked. "I have never seen any like them."

"First-rate, Luka, especially if we had some oyster sauce to eat with them; as we haven't we must do without. They are capital, and they are not full of bones like the herrings. Now we will paddle on again. You leave that fish alone, Jack; you shall have some of it for supper."

"There is a dark line on the water over there," Luka said presently, "wind coming."

"That is a comfort, Luka."

Half an hour later the breeze came up to them. "Shall I get up the sail, Godfrey?"

Godfrey did not reply for a minute or two. "Yes, I think we may as well, Luka. Whether we go fast or slow these fellows will be able to send word on shore, and we may as well tire them a bit."

The sails were hoisted, Godfrey took the sheet and laid in his paddle. "The wind may freshen," he said, "and it would not do to fasten the sheet."

Luka, who seemed tireless, continued paddling, and the boats went through the water at a considerably faster pace than before. The effect on their pursuers was at once visible. Instead of paddling in a leisurely manner in a close group, the paddles could be seen to flash faster and faster.

"They have to row pretty hard to keep up with us now," Luka said, looking over his shoulder at them. "Up to now they felt comfortable, think everything right, and quite sure to catch us presently. Now they begin to see it is not so easy after all." They maintained their relative positions till the sun was near the horizon.

"It is ten o'clock, Luka, the sun will set in half an hour. You lay your paddle in, and get us a cup of tea and a bit of that dry meat. You had better boil the kettle over one of the candles. Then you lie down to sleep for four hours, after that I will take a turn. We are a deal better off than those fellows behind; they must keep on paddling all night, and as they only have one man in each boat there is no relief for them."

Luka did as he was ordered. After drinking his tea Godfrey lighted his pipe, and Luka lay down. Godfrey did not feel very sleepy, although he had not closed his eyes the night before; but they had had a long bout of sleep when compelled to keep their tent by the fog, and the excitement of the chase kept him up now. As it grew dusk he could see that the canoes drew closer, but he had no hope, in any case, of giving them the slip, for it was never perfectly dark. When, four hours later, he woke Luka the sky was brightening again.

"More wind come presently," the Tartar said, looking at the sky.

"I won't lie down just yet, Luka. It will be quite light in half an hour, and I want to have a good look towards the shore before I go to sleep."

Luka at once took the paddle. The wind was perceptibly freshening and the canoe was slipping fast through the water.

"Now, Luka," Godfrey said presently, "stand up and have a look round. Be careful how you do it; it would not do to capsize her now."

Two minutes later Luka exclaimed, "I see them; a whole lot of canoes, twenty or thirty, over there," and he pointed towards the shore but somewhat ahead of them.

"Sit down, Luka, and I will stand up and have a look. Yes, it is as much as they will do to cut us off. They did not calculate on our coming along so fast. I will luff up a little more, and we shall pass ahead of them however hard they paddle."

So saying he sat down, hauled in the sheet and headed

nearer to the wind. "The fellows behind won't see them for some time," he said. "The canoes must be four miles away at least, and I don't suppose they could see each other more than half that distance, being so low in the water. If we had just a little more wind we should do it nicely."

Half an hour later the sheet was eased again, and the boat resumed her former course, as Godfrey saw that he should pass well ahead of the canoes coming out from the shore, and she moved faster with the wind abeam than she did close-hauled. Even while sitting down the canoes could be seen now. The natives were paddling their hardest, and the light craft danced over the surface of the water, which was now beginning to be ruffled by the breeze.

Half an hour later they joined the pursuers astern, and their yells could be heard although they were half a mile away. Godfrey counted them as he passed ahead of the fleet, and there were thirty-three canoes, each with two paddlers.

"The yourts must be thick along the coasts here, Luka; they must have gathered up all those canoes from at least half a dozen camps. Now I will lend you a hand."

He eased the sheet still further, so that the boat should heel over less, and fastened it in a loose knot, which could be slipped in an instant. Then he betook himself to his paddle. "Those fellows behind have had a long row out against the wind, and have no doubt been working their hardest ever since they caught sight of our sail. A stern-chase is a long chase. I fancy the wind has freshened a little, but it is very little."

Occasionally he looked back over his shoulder.

"They are gaining slowly, Luka, but they are a good half mile behind us still, and it will take them two or three hours to pick that up. I am quite sure now that if we cut the boat adrift we can forge ahead, hand over hand, but that must be a last resource; it is almost a matter of life and death to be able to keep it with us. Still it is a satisfaction to know that if the worse comes to the worst we can get away from them."

Jack fully entered into the excitement of the chase, taking his seat on the covering near the stern, and barking defiance at their pursuers. Another hour's paddling and the space between the canoe and the natives was lessened by half.

"Now, Luka, I will send them a couple of bullets as a reminder that we have got weapons."

Laying in his paddle he took his gun, turned round and knelt looking astern, and fired both barrels at the fleet of canoes. He had not taken any particular aim, for the gun was of little use at a distance exceeding a hundred yards, and the motion of the canoe would have prevented anything like accuracy of shooting even with a rifle. He intended to frighten rather than to hurt, and gave the gun a considerable elevation. He saw, however, the men in one of the canoes cease paddling and drop behind the rest, and could make out that one of its occupants was doing something.

"I hit one of the canoes, Luka; I fancy they are trying to patch up the hole." He loaded the gun again, this time with his largest-sized shot, laid it down and resumed his paddle.

"I have put in buck-shot this time, Luka; I don't want to kill any of the poor beggars, and the shot will spread. I have put in double charges so as to give them a good dose as they come up. Small shot would be of no use, it would not get through those thick leather coats of theirs. Now then, let us send her along."

The wind was certainly freshening, for it was not until another four or five miles had been traversed that the canoes had crept up to within a hundred yards' distance. At last Godfrey felt it was time to fire again, and waiting till the canoes were within about seventy yards' distance he fired both barrels, slightly shifting his aim between each shot. A series of yells arose from the canoes, four or five of them at once dropped behind.

"Paddle your hardest, Luka, while I load again, the beggars are coming up fast now."

The natives with yells of fury were sending their canoes

through the foaming water, and were but fifty yards away when he again fired. This time five or six of the natives dropped their paddles, and two of the canoes were upset. A volley of arrows fell thickly round the boat, and one or two spears skimmed along the water close to it. Godfrey seized his paddle again.

"Head towards the shore, Luka," he said; and as the boat headed round he slackened the sheet and so brought the wind nearly dead aft. The boat was on an even keel now, and they could feel by the lessened strain on the paddles that her speed was considerably increased. In two or three minutes Godfrey looked round; the canoes were a hundred yards behind.

"We are gaining on them, Luka."

Another ten minutes and the interval was more than doubled.

"They are beginning to get tired," Godfrey said. "We are going a good deal faster, of course, now we have got the wind astern, but I do not think they are going as fast as they did, and I expect that last dose of buck-shot took the heart out of them a good deal. They had reckoned that we should be only able to fire once or twice before they came up, and that I should use bullets; but that handful of buck-shot evidently peppered a good many of them, and they know if they come up they will have four more barrels at least among them. I think the fighting is all over now."

Another hour and the canoes were a mile astern, and the land was now but four or five miles away. Godfrey thought that he could safely resume his course west, especially as the wind had distinctly freshened.

"I will lay in my paddle now, Luka. I must give all my attention to the sail. I expect they will give it up. They will think when they see me cease paddling that we know we can get away from them whenever we like."

Godfrey's surmise turned out correct; the natives did not attempt to follow, but held on their course straight for the land, paddling slowly now. They were in two divisions, five

or six of the canoes being a good deal astern of the others, those with single rowers that had followed them so long having dropped behind to pick up the occupants of the canoes that had capsized. In several of the canoes in this division Godfrey could make out that only one man was paddling, and guessed that the other was more or less disabled by the shot.

"I don't think we shall be troubled any more by them," he said; "they will be a couple of hours before they reach land, by which time we shall be out of sight, and even reindeer will hardly take the news along the shore with all its deep indentations as quickly as we shall sail; besides, I fancy, they will come to the conclusion that the game is not worth the candle. Now lay in your paddle and let us have breakfast comfortably. It is just twelve o'clock."

Day after day they coasted along, passed through Waigatz Straits, between the island of that name and the mainland, then touched at four islands lying across the mouth of a large and deep bay, and then held on until they reached the mouth of the Petchora. The distance to this point from the Kara River was, Godfrey calculated, about three hundred and fifty miles. It took them fifteen days to cover that distance, as they stopped and spent a day shooting several times, for they were not fortunate along here in catching many fish as they went. On passing one of the islands Godfrey shot a seal, the flesh of which they found was by no means bad.

The weather continued very fine, but there was so little wind that during the whole distance they did not once put up their sail, but depended entirely upon their paddles. Upon one of their shooting expeditions Godfrey had the good luck to shoot a very fine black fox. They had had their meal and were stretched at full length by the fire. Luka had gone off to sleep. Godfrey was almost dozing when he heard a slight rustle in the grass, and opening his eyes saw a black fox standing at a distance of ten paces. It had evidently been attracted by the smell of some fish they had been frying, and stood with its nose in the air sniffing. Godfrey's gun was lying beside

him, the left-hand barrel he always kept loaded with ball. His hands stole quietly to it, and as he grasped it he sat up and fired a snap shot at the fox as it turned and darted away. To his surprise as well as delight it rolled over.

"There is a piece of luck, Luka," he said, as the latter sprang to his feet bow in hand at the report. "That is a pure fluke, for I fired without raising the gun or taking the least aim."

Luka examined the fox. "It is one of the largest I ever saw," he said, "and the fur is in splendid condition."

"Its skin will come in handy, Luka. We must put in and replenish our stores at Droinik, at the mouth of the Petchora. We are running very short of tea and tobacco, we have been very extravagant lately, and we have had no flour since those scamps robbed us. It is very lucky Jack was so sound asleep. I often scold you, Jack, for being such a sleepy little beggar, but for once it is lucky, for if you had heard the fox coming he would have been off without my getting a shot at him."

Accordingly when they reached the mouth of the Petchora they landed three miles from Droinik, and Luka, taking the fox-skin and those of other smaller animals they had shot during their excursions, went into the town, and returned with four pounds of tea, as much tobacco, forty pounds of flour, two large tin kettles, each capable of holding a gallon of water, to carry an extra supply, and sixty silver roubles.

"I am heartily glad you are back, Luka, for I have been nearly eaten alive; the mosquitoes are awful—worse, I think, than at any place we have landed."

They had indeed entirely given up sleeping ashore since their forced stay on the Gulf of Obi, always pushing off two or three hundred yards from the shore and anchoring, for the mosquitoes were terrible; and upon their hunting expeditions they always smeared their faces, necks, and hands thickly over with bears' fat, but even with this they suffered severely. Nowhere, indeed, are mosquitoes so great a scourge as along the shores of the Arctic Sea.

They had already determined that they would at any rate make for the Kanin Peninsula, and would then be guided by the weather. If it still remained calm and quiet, they would sail across the entrance to the White Sea, and coast along until they reached the frontier of Norway, which would be about four hundred miles from the point of the Kanin Peninsula; if the weather showed signs of changing they would go up the White Sea to Archangel, which would be about the same distance.

Two days' paddling took them to the western mouth of the bay, the course from here lay due west to Kolgueff Island, nearly two hundred miles away. Godfrey did not hesitate to strike for it, as it was seventy or eighty miles saved, and there was no risk of missing it. Four long days' paddling took them there, and an equal time brought them to the western point of the Kanin Peninsula. The weather continued still and clear, the sea was as smooth as glass, and there were no signs of change; but September had begun, and every hour was of importance. They therefore determined now to abandon the boat, which made a considerable difference in their speed.

"Our candles will do for cooking. We have still forty pounds of dried flesh, and twenty of flour, and we may expect to get a few fish anyhow. Our three kettles will hold two gallons and a half of water, enough to last us seven or eight days. In three days at most we ought to strike the coast again, and we are sure to find some streams running down to the sea in a very short time, so we will risk it. We know that the two of us can send her along a good five miles an hour."

Accordingly the dried meat and flour were transferred to the canoe, the kettles were filled up with fresh water, and, after taking a long drink and letting Jack lap as much as he could take, they took their seats in the canoe again, threw off the tow-rope and started due west.

Accustomed as they now were to the work, and their muscles hardened by exercise, they sent the boat rapidly through the water.

"We mustn't exert ourselves too much, Luka," Godfrey said after the first quarter of an hour. "A long slow stroke is the one to send her along, and we can keep that up for any time. We must do our very best till we sight the coast again. After the way she behaved in that storm I am not afraid of wind, but I am horribly afraid of fog. If we had but a compass it would not matter to us one way or other; but if a fog came down when we are a good way off the land, there would be nothing to do but to lay in our paddles and wait, even if it lasted for a fortnight. Still, as long as there is no change of weather, there does not seem any reason why a fog should set in; but I shall not feel happy till we have got the land alongside of us."

For three days the paddles were kept going, each taking alternately six hours' sleep, and working together for twelve. Jack having nothing to do was the most uneasy of the party, sometimes lying down with his nose between his paws, sometimes getting up and giving a series of short impatient barks. Early on the second day they were fortunate in passing through a large shoal of herrings. Godfrey laid in his paddles and attended to the lines, and in half an hour had forty-five fish. After that they paid no further attention to fishing, being now amply supplied with food. The herrings, too, required less water than the dried meat. They fried them over the candles, and whenever their mouths were parched they chewed a piece of raw herring and found great relief from it. Jack was allowed two raw herrings a day; with that and a very small allowance of water he did very well. On the third day a light southerly wind sprang up, and they at once hoisted their sail and found that it eased their labour materially.

"I should think we ought to see the land to-night, Luka; three days at eighty miles a day is two hundred and forty miles. If we don't see it by evening, we must head a little more to the south. Of course we cannot depend very accurately on our steering, and we may have been going a trifle north of west all this time. But it is all right, for the coast

we are making for keeps on trending north, and we are certain to hit it sooner or later."

At six o'clock they had a meal which Luka had been cooking, and then Godfrey said, "Now I will have my six hours' sleep." He stood up to change places and let Luka come astern to steer, when he exclaimed, "Look, is that a cloud ahead of us, or is it land?"

"Land!" Luka said after gazing at it attentively. "It is high land."

All idea of sleep was given up. Godfrey seized his paddle again, and in four hours they were within a mile of the land. It differed widely from the low coast they had so long been passing. Steep hills rose from the very edge of the shore, clad in many places with pine forests. They were not long before they found a suitable place to land, and soon had the canoe ashore and the tent erected, for the nights were already becoming unpleasantly cold. Luka went into the woods, and soon returned with some dried branches and a quantity of pine cones. Godfrey cut three sticks and made a tripod, from which the small kettle was suspended, and fish and meat were soon grilling over the fire. As soon as the kettle boiled a handful of tea was dropped into it, and it was taken off the fire. The three companions made an excellent meal, then Luka and Godfrey lighted their pipes and sat smoking by the fire for half an hour, and then lay down in the tent for a sound sleep.

When Godfrey woke he found that Luka was already up. He had stirred up the embers, put on fresh wood, filled the kettle and hung it over the fire, and had then evidently sauntered off into the wood. Godfrey, after the luxury of a rapid bathe, began to prepare breakfast, and by the time it was ready Luka came down with a dozen squirrels he had shot.

"Lots of them in the wood," he said; "if stop here three or four days, get lots of skins."

"I don't think they would be much good to us, Luka, though those you shot will be useful for food; but I have been

obliged to stand with my head over the smoke of the fire to keep off these rascally mosquitoes, and my face was so swelled with their bites when I woke that I could hardly see out of my eyes till I bathed my face with cold water. The sooner we are off the better, if we don't want to be eaten alive."

Accordingly, as soon as the meal was finished they packed up and continued their voyage. After eight hours' paddling they came upon the mouth of a river.

"This must be the Seriberka," Godfrey said. "That is the only river marked in the map anywhere about here. We will paddle a mile or two up and fill our kettles. If it is that river, we shall come upon an island a few miles off the coast, in another twenty or thirty miles. See, Luka, how near we are getting to the end of the map. We are not very much more than a hundred miles from this line; that is the division between Russia and Norway. Once we land on the other side of that line we are free."

In seven or eight hours after leaving the river, Godfrey said, "There is Kildina Island, Luka. We will land over there instead of upon this shore. There may be some Laplanders about, and there is a Russian place called Kola about twenty miles up a river a little way past the island, and the natives might take us there if they came upon us, for they would not understand either Ostjak or the Samoyede dialect, and I don't suppose they would talk Russian. Anyhow, we may as well be on the safe side. After coming seven or eight thousand miles we won't run any risk of a failure in the last hundred. I don't much like the look of the sky away to the north. I fancy we are going to have a storm. Thank God it did not come two days earlier."

They landed on the island, hauled up the boat, then Godfrey took some time in finding a hollow where they could light a fire without risk of its being seen on the mainland, as if there were Lapps there, they might cross in their canoes to see who had made it. They had no trouble in collecting plenty of drift-wood along the shore, and carefully choosing the

driest, so as to avoid making a great smoke, they lit a fire and erected the tent to leeward of it, so that the smoke might blow through it, and so keep out their enemies the mosquitoes. Godfrey's prediction about the weather was speedily verified. The wind got up very rapidly, and in two hours was blowing a gale from the north.

"No fear of canoes coming across," Luka said.

"No fear at all. I don't suppose there was any real risk of it in any case, but I feel more nervous now than I have done all the time. At any rate the storm has made it perfectly safe. There will soon be a sea on that no canoe could face."

For three days the storm raged, and they were glad to resume their fur jackets. Jack lay coiled up in the furs in the tent, and nothing could persuade him to move except for breakfast and dinner. They waited twelve hours after the gale ceased to allow the sea to go down and then started again, hoisting their sail as there was enough wind to help them.

CHAPTER XVIII

HOME AGAIN

GODFREY felt in wild spirits as they hoisted their sail, for the end of the journey was close at hand, and, unless some altogether unforeseen misfortune were to befall them, they would have accomplished an undertaking that had been deemed almost impossible. They kept well out from land, increasing the distance as they sailed west until they were some ten miles out, for the map showed that some five-and-twenty miles from the point where they had camped a rocky peninsula jutted out. In three hours they could make out its outline, for the land was bold and high, and it took them another four hours before they were abreast of its eastern point, Cape

Navalok. Then they coasted along the peninsula until they arrived at Cape Kekour, its western point. They had now been paddling nearly twelve hours, for Godfrey was too impatient to be content with the sail only. Just before they arrived at the cape, Luka, seeing a good place for landing, suggested a halt.

"No, no," Godfrey said, "we will not risk another landing. We have been marvellously fortunate up to now, and it would be folly to run even the slightest risk when we are so near the end of our journey. We will keep on. There are only thirty or forty more miles to go, and then we shall enter the Voranger Fiord. Then we shall be in Norway. Think of that, Luka! We can snap our fingers at the Russians, and tell everyone we meet that we have escaped from their prisons."

"Who shall we meet?" Luka asked.

"Ah, that is more than I can tell you. The sooner we meet someone the better. Norway is not like this country we have been passing along; it is all covered with great mountains and forests. I don't know anything about the coast, but I fancy it is tremendously rocky, and we should have a poor chance there if caught in another storm from the north. There are Laplanders, who are people just like the Samoyedes, and who have got reindeer; if we find any of them, as I hope we shall, we ought to be all right. We have got a hundred silver roubles, and if you show a man money and make signs you want to go somewhere, and don't much care where, he is pretty safe to take you. Now you take a sleep, Luka. I will steer. There is no occasion to paddle, the wind is taking us along nearly three miles an hour, and time is no particular object to us now. You get three hours, then I will take three, and then we will set to with the paddles again."

Eight hours later they could make out high land on the starboard bow, and knew that they were approaching the entrance to the fiord. They had not taken to their paddles again, for the wind had freshened, and they were going fast through the water. Luka cooked a meal, and as it was growing dark the land closed in on both sides to a distance of about eight miles.

An hour later they saw lights on their right hand. "Hurrah!" Godfrey exclaimed, "there is a village there. We won't land to-night. We might find it difficult to get a place to sleep in. One night longer on board won't do us any harm. Thank God we are fairly out of Russia at last, and shall land as free men in the morning."

They drew in towards the shore a mile or so above the lights, and paddled cautiously on until close to the land. There they dropped their anchor overboard, and, wearied out by their long row, were speedily sound asleep.

It was broad daylight when they woke. Godfrey, when he sat up, gave a loud cheer, which set Jack off barking wildly. "Look!" Godfrey shouted, "it is a town, and there are two steamboats lying there. Thank God, our troubles are all over. You had better get breakfast, Luka. It is of no use going ashore till people are awake."

Breakfast over the anchor was at once pulled up, and in a quarter of an hour they were alongside a quay. Their appearance was so similar to that of the Lapps that they themselves would have attracted but little notice, but the canoe was so different in its appearance to those used by these people that several persons stood on the little quay watching them as they came alongside. Their surprise at the boat was increased when Godfrey came up on to the quay. No Laplander or Finn of his height had ever been seen, and moreover, his face and hands were clean. They addressed him in a language that he did not understand. He replied first in English, then in Russian. Apparently they recognised the latter language, and one of them motioned to Godfrey to follow him.

"You wait here till I come back, Luka. I daresay the people are honest enough, but I don't want any of our furs or things stolen now that we have got to the end of our journey."

He then followed his conductor to a large house in the principal street, where he went into a sort of office and spoke to a man sitting there. Then he went out, and in a minute returned with a gentleman.

"Do you speak English, sir?" Godfrey said.

"I speak it a little," the gentleman replied in surprise at hearing the language from one who looked like a Laplander.

"Do you speak Russian better?" Godfrey next asked.

"Yes," he replied in that language. "I know Russian well. And who are you?"

"I am an Englishman. I was resident in St. Petersburg when I was seized and condemned to exile in Siberia as a Nihilist, although I was perfectly innocent of the charge. I was taken to the mines of Kara in the east of Siberia, but made my escape, descended the Yenesei, and have coasted from there in a canoe."

The man looked at him incredulously.

"I am not surprised that you doubt my story," Godfrey said.

"If you will come down with me to the wharf you will see the canoe in which I made the journey. I built it on the Yenesei. I have with me a Tartar who escaped with me and shared my fortunes."

The merchant put on his hat and walked down to the wharf.

"It is a strange craft," he said, "though I have seen some at Christiania similar in form but smaller, built of wood, that Englishmen have brought over. And is it possible that you have sailed from the mouth of the Yenesei in her?"

"There has been no great difficulty about it," Godfrey said.

"We have kept near the coast, and have generally landed when bad weather came on. I have a gun, and with that and fishing there has been no difficulty about food. The journey has been a long one. It is seventeen months since I left Kara. I am provided with Russian money, sir, and shall be glad if you can tell me what is my best way of getting back to England."

"It is fortunate indeed that you did not arrive here two days later, for the last steamer will sail for Hamburg to-morrow. She touches at many ports on her way, but I don't know that you can do better than go to Hamburg, whence there is a steamer nearly every day to England. If you had been two days later

you would have lost her, for the season is just over, and you would then have had to travel by land and river down to Tornea on the Gulf of Bothnia. But come up with me to my house; I am the agent here for the steamer. What are you going to do with your canoe?"

"I shall take her home with me just as she stands," Godfrey said.

"And the Tartar?"

"Yes, the Tartar and the dog."

"Very well. Stay here for ten minutes," he said to Luka, "I will send a man down to help you up with the canoe. We may as well put it in my yard," he went on as he started back with Godfrey. "The people are as honest as the day, but they might be pulling it about and examining it, and it is just as well to stow it away safe. Well, this is a wonderful escape of yours! During the twenty years I have been here, it has never happened before."

"I wonder it has not been done many times," Godfrey said. "Canoes go from Archangel to the Petchora, which is quite half-way to the mouth of the Obi, and there is no more difficulty between the Petchora and the Yenesei than there is on this side. The first thing to do now is to get some clothes."

"The first thing to do, I think, is to get some breakfast," the trader said.

"I have already had some breakfast on board," Godfrey said; "but I daresay I can eat another."

"I will warrant you can. Your breakfast was probably of the roughest."

"It was," Godfrey admitted. "I have not eaten a piece of real bread for more than a year. We haven't had much of anything made of flour since we started in the canoe in June; but one gets to do without bread very well."

"I have not asked you your name yet," the trader said.

"It is Godfrey Bullen. My father is head of a firm in London that does a good deal of trade with Russia. He was living in St. Petersburg a good many years. That is how it is that I speak the language."

"I was wondering how it was that you spoke it so well. Now, then, let me introduce you to my wife and family. This is an English gentleman, wife," he said in his own language to a pleasant-looking lady. "He does not look like it, but when I tell you that he has made his escape from Siberia in a canoe it will account for it."

Godfrey found that his early meal had in no way abated his appetite. The breakfast was an excellent one, but he confined himself to bread and butter, and thought he had never tasted anything so good in his life. He learned that his host was an importer of goods of all kinds, and did the principal trade at Vadsö, besides supplying all the villages on the fiord.

"If you had been here a few days earlier," he said, "you would have found a countryman of yours, a Mr. Clarke, who almost monopolises the whaling trade here. He owns three steamers, and has a great melting-down establishment. I myself send great quantities of cod to Hamburg by steamer. Most of the boats here work for me."

After breakfast Godfrey gave his host a sketch of his adventures.

"It has been a wonderful journey," his host said when he concluded. "I have heard of one or two cases where men have made their way to Archangel, and thence by land to our frontier, but I never heard of anyone attempting it by sea before. It was a perilous journey indeed, and required a knowledge of canoeing, which no Russian prisoner would be likely to have. Then you were certainly fortunate in having a companion with you who was at home with those Ostjaks. Still, as you brought him with you for that purpose, that was forethought rather than luck."

"Which is the first port at which the steamer will stop that I can send a telegram from?"

The merchant laughed. "If you go down-stairs into the office, and go through the door to your left hand, you will find yourself in a telegraph office."

"Really?"

"Yes, really. We have had the telegraph here for some little time."

Godfrey rushed down-stairs, and sent off a telegram as follows:—

"Have just arrived here. Made my escape from prison at Kara, in Siberia. Seventeen months on the way. Am in first-rate health. Start to-morrow by steamer to Hamburg. Hope all are well. Have plenty of money."

He directed it to his father's office, so that the news might be broken gradually to his mother. In the afternoon the answer came:—

"Thank God for His mercies. All well. I shall cross to Hamburg to meet you."

While Godfrey was being made much of by the merchant and his family, and, indeed, by many of their acquaintances, who, upon hearing the news, came in to see him and inquire into the wonderful voyage, Luka was no less a centre of attraction to the fishermen, and was so generously treated that long before it became dark he was obliged to be assisted, in a state of inebriation, to a pallet that had been prepared for him. Godfrey was annoyed when he heard it; "but," as his host said, "after being eighteen months, and, for aught I know, eighteen months before that, without touching liquor, very little would be likely to produce an effect upon him. I dare say it is his talking as much as the spirit that has turned his head; besides, you know, the lower class of Russians and Tartars are all fond of spirits."

"I shall not be angry with him in the morning," Godfrey said, "because I do think that it is pardonable; but I shall talk seriously to him about it, and tell him that if he is coming home to England with me he must give up spirits. He has done without them so long that it can't be any hardship."

"What are you going to do with him?"

"I have not the most remote idea," Godfrey laughed. "If he likes to return to his people I daresay my father would be able, through the Russian embassy, to get a pardon for him and permission to go back; but I don't think he has any notion of that. He lost his parents when he was a child, and I never heard him express the slightest desire to go back again. He has attached himself to me heart and soul, and I think looks upon it as a settled thing that he will be always with me. I don't know in what capacity, still, I suppose, something will be found for him."

The steamer was to start at nine o'clock on the following morning, and by that hour Godfrey, Luka, and Jack were on board and the canoe carefully stowed on deck. Both had obtained a complete fit-out from the merchant's stores, and although Godfrey's garments would scarcely have passed muster in London, they did very well for the voyage. Luka was greatly amused at his own appearance in European garb, though Godfrey thought he looked much better in his Ostjak costume.

"We will rig him out fresh when I get him home," he said to the merchant. "I don't know what he looks like now in that greatcoat and billycock hat."

The merchant stayed on board until the last moment. As soon as he got into his boat the paddles began to revolve and the steamer started on her way. She was ten days on her voyage, ascending many of the fiords, landing or taking on board cargo or passengers.

Godfrey enjoyed the voyage greatly. The scenery was magnificent, and eagerly as he desired to be at home, he was almost sorry when the end approached. It had been so strange to have nothing to do but to sit and watch the shore, to eat and to sleep. Luka had been very penitent over his little excess at Vadsö, and had solemnly promised Godfrey to abstain from spirits in future; and he, too, enjoyed the voyage in his way, eating enormously, and drinking vast quantities of tea and coffee. Godfrey had sent off one or two telegrams from the

ports at which he touched, so that his father might be able to judge when the ship was likely to arrive; and when one morning early the vessel steamed up to the wharf at Hamburg Godfrey saw him waiting there. It was a joyful meeting indeed, and it was not until they were alone together at an hotel, Luka being left down-stairs in charge of the canoe, that they were enabled to begin to talk.

"Did you know what had become of me, father?"

"Yes, my boy. Petrovytch telegraphed to me that you had been missing three days, and I at once went over to St. Petersburg. He thought that you had fallen into bad hands, and had been murdered and thrown into the Neva; but remembering that you had got into that silly scrape before with the police, I thought it possible that, coming, as your absence did, directly after the affair at the Winter Palace, suspicion had fallen on you again. I went to the head of the police; he declined to give me any information. Then I set the embassy at work, and they found out that you had been arrested with some desperate Nihilists. At last they obtained a sight of the records of the court-martial before which you had been tried, and told me that the case was so strong against you that nothing could be done; indeed, had it not been for your youth, and the fact that you were a British subject, you would certainly have been executed. I tried everything, but I found it absolutely useless. The embassy recommended me to let the matter drop for the present, and in time, perhaps, when the Nihilist scare passed off, it might be possible to interest some minister or other in your favour and obtain a reversion of your sentence. Then a few months later came the assassination of the Czar, and, of course, that rendered it more hopeless than ever, and all we could hope for was, that in the course of years we might again move in the matter. Of course it has been a terrible business for us all. But we won't talk about that now. Thank God it is over, and that you have returned to us. But what madness, Godfrey, to mix yourself up with these people!"

"Indeed, father, I was perfectly innocent, though I cannot

blame the court-martial for finding me guilty." And he then gave his father the details of his connection with the two Nihilists Akim Soushiloff and Petroff Stepanoff, and of the circumstances of his arrest in their room.

"I am very glad to hear that, Godfrey. Not that it makes any actual matter now, but because, after the warning I had given you to avoid the society of any people holding extreme opinions, it seemed to me you must have showed an incredible amount of wilfulness and folly in getting yourself mixed up with these desperate conspirators. I am heartily glad to find that I was mistaken, and that, except as regards that foolish business at the theatre, you have really not been to blame in the matter, and have been altogether a victim of circumstances. Now, tell me how you got away. And first, who is that queer-looking little fellow with your canoe?"

"He is my comrade and friend, father. He escaped from prison with me, and is devoted to me; but for him I should have had no chance whatever of making my way through all the difficulties of the journey." And he then gave his father an outline of their adventures from the time of their leaving Kara.

When he had finished, Mr. Bullen went down-stairs and saw Luka, and shook hands with him heartily, telling him in Russian that he had heard from Godfrey how much he owed to him, and assuring him that he need have no fear for the future.

Two days later the party arrived at home. There is no occasion to say anything as to the joy of that meeting. The three years of hardship and roughing it had converted the careless school-boy into a powerful young fellow. His spirits were as high and he was as full of fun as of old; but the experience he had gone through had strengthened his character, had given him self-reliance and confidence, and had, as his father and mother soon saw, had a very beneficial effect in forming his character.

Two or three days after his arrival Godfrey wrote to Mikail.

It was a very guarded letter, because he knew that it would be opened by the prison authorities, but it thanked him for the kindness he had shown to him while in prison, and expressed a hope that, now that he would have obtained partial freedom, and would be united to his wife, he would succeed and prosper. He inclosed a five-hundred-rouble note from his father as a present in return for the kindness he had shown him, and he also inclosed a directed envelope, so that he could acknowledge the receipt of the letter.

An answer written by the priest of the village—for Mikail was unable to write—came at the end of five months. It was expressed in the most grateful terms. He had been released four months after Godfrey left, and the governor had, as a reward for his good conduct, allowed him to work for a farmer instead of in the mines. He said that he was perfectly happy, and that, as he should now be able to purchase a small farm for himself, he should be sure to do well. "I have a boy," he said, "who was born three months ago; we have christened him Godfrey, in memory of the night when you saved my life at the risk of your own."

Luka was for some time a difficulty. He absolutely refused to return to Russia, and was for a time established as door-keeper at the office, but in the spring after Godfrey's return the latter took him down with him to a house Mr. Bullen had just purchased near Richmond. Luka was so delighted with the country that he was established there, and became a sort of general factotum, assisting in the garden, stables, or house, wherever he could make himself useful, and being in special charge of a sailing boat that Godfrey keeps on the river. He had picked up a good deal of English from Godfrey on their travels, and soon came to speak it fairly, and being regarded as a friend by all the family, he is in every way perfectly contented with his lot. Four years after Godfrey's return, a clerk one day came into the office with the news that a gentleman wished to speak to him, and Godfrey was astounded at the entry of Alexis.

"I have come," the Russian said. "You told me to come, and I have done so."

"I am delighted to see you, Alexis. I had thought of you as married and settled among the Buriats."

"I did marry," Alexis said; "but three years afterwards I lost my wife. What was I to do? I could not remain all my life a wandering shepherd, afraid ever to enter a town or to speak with a civilised being; so I sold my flocks and herds. You know my wife owned a third of those of the Buriat. He was a rich man and bought most of them, and for the rest I found other purchasers. Then he negotiated for me with one of the tea merchants, and I managed to go as a driver with one of his caravans to Peking."

"And what do you mean to do, Alexis? I can still keep my promise, and make a berth for you here in the office."

"I thank you, my friend," Alexis said; "but I shall return to my profession. I am a doctor, you know, and have my Russian diplomas. I shall learn your language, and study in your hospitals for a time; then I shall set up here. I believe you have many Russians in your poorer districts; and as, besides, I speak German, I should be able to obtain a sufficient practice. Moreover, I have brought with me orders on a bank here for five thousand pounds, which I paid into their branch at Hong-Kong. I will get you to invest that for me, and you will see that it will give me an income sufficient for all my wants."

Alexis carried out his plans, and has now a large although not very remunerative practice among the Russian and German colony in the East End of London. He married the daughter of a clergyman there, and remains fast friends with Godfrey, who has now set up an establishment of his own, of which Luka is major-domo, and special guardian and playmate to Godfrey's little boys.

Godfrey has not returned to Russia, but is his father's right hand in the London business; at the same time he is free to visit St. Petersburg did he wish to do so, as Mr. Bullen drew

up a full statement of his case, and this having been forwarded by the Russian ambassador, with a strong recommendation on his part, a reversal of the sentence of the court-martial was obtained, and a full pardon granted to him. It is not probable, however, that he will again set foot on Russian soil, his experiences as a prisoner in Siberia having been, as he says, ample for a lifetime.

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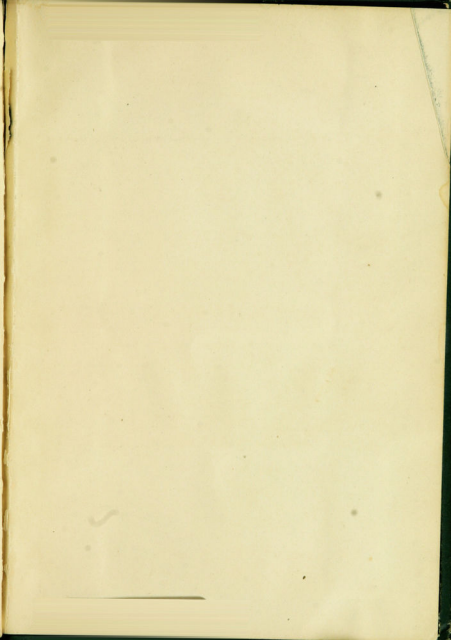
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