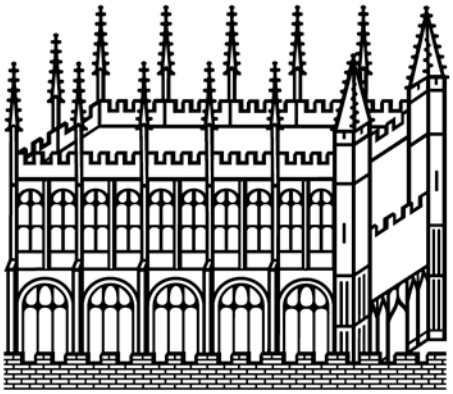

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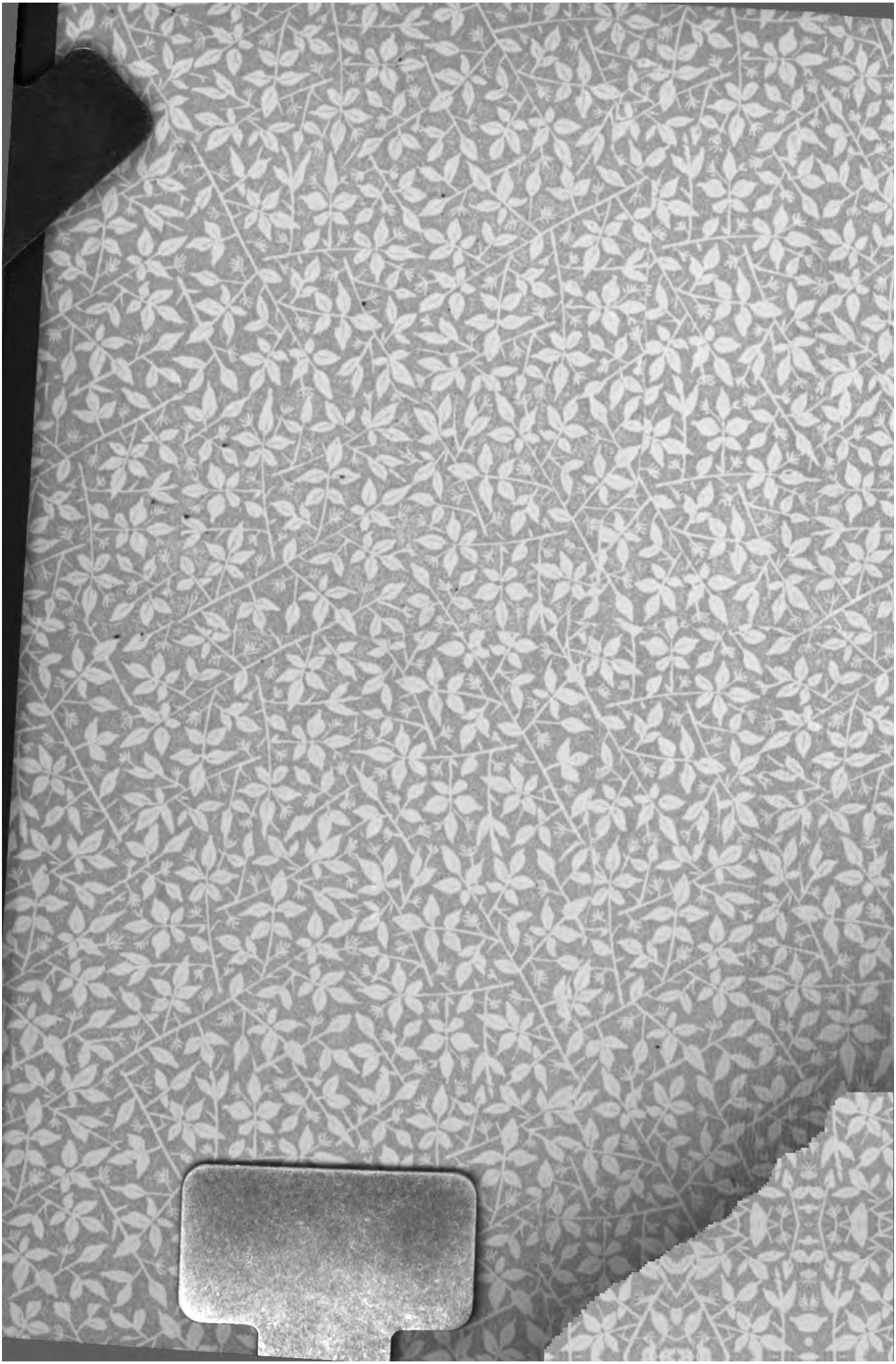
RALPH'S YEAR IN RUSSIA

A STORY OF TRAVEL & ADVENTURE



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RALPH'S YEAR IN RUSSIA.

BY THE CAMP FIRE.

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RALPH'S YEAR IN RUSSIA.

A STORY OF TRAVEL AND ADVENTURE
IN EASTERN EUROPE.

BY

ROBERT RICHARDSON,

AUTHOR OF "ALMOST A HERO," "THE YOUNG CRAGSMAN,"
"THE BOYS OF WILLOUGHBY SCHOOL,"
ETC. ETC.

WITH NINE ENGRAVINGS.

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1882.

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TO

MY FATHER AND MOTHER.

DEDICATED

In Love.

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RALPH'S YEAR IN RUSSIA.

CHAPTER I.

LEAVING ENGLAND.

R. DRISCOLL and his wife were seated alone at dinner. The meal was nearly over, and Ralph their son had already risen from the table and left the room, having been informed by his parents that they wished to be alone for a little.

"I suppose, then, that that letter which you received this morning finally places the appointment in St. Petersburg in your choice, either to accept or refuse," said Mrs. Driscoll.

"Yes; I have but to say the word and it is mine," answered Dr. Driscoll. "And now, Helen, shall I say that word?"

"Yes, I think so, George; and I know you think the same."

"I do, Helen; and I am really glad that you have at length become reconciled to the thought of leaving

England. It is a great sacrifice that I am asking you to make, to leave friends and native land, and to see our pleasant home here broken up; but it will be best. I never cease to blame myself for the foolish speculations which have well-nigh ruined me; but they did not seem foolish when I first entered upon them, and I took the advice of others whose shrewdness and experience I thought were to be trusted."

"Say no more about that now, George. You did all for the best, and you could not be expected to know much about mines."

"I am afraid that is just my condemnation, my dear. Because I knew so little about the matter, I should have refrained from meddling in such ventures."

"Think no more about it, George. It has caused us enough anxiety already. Let us try to banish it from our thoughts from this day."

"Willingly. That shall be my earnest endeavour; and indeed I should be very thankful for this way out of my difficulties that has been opened up to me so opportunely. If we had had to stay on in London, we should have been obliged very much to reduce our present style of living. Now, you know what that would incur for a medical man in my position. People would immediately begin to talk and gossip, and we may be sure that in many quarters not the most charitable construction would be put upon my sudden decline in fortunes. My professional reputation would be certain to suffer, and the struggle to

maintain the position I have gained would be a difficult and uphill one. It would, indeed, be in a measure like beginning things over again; for we would require to remove to some other less expensive neighbourhood than this. Now, I confess that I have not the inclination, and, perhaps, not the courage, to face all this; nor do I see the advantage, where there is an honourable way of escape such as has offered itself. In St. Petersburg I shall enjoy a professional position as good as that which I hold in London, and my income will be certainly not less."

"When I first expressed doubts about the advisability of our leaving England, even under our circumstances, I was thinking more of the children than of myself. I should never have hesitated a moment about going with you had there been only myself to consider," said Mrs. Driscoll.

"I know that, my dear. But in regard to Ralph and Meta, it is quite possible that a little travel and a sojourn in a foreign land may do them both good in several ways. Ralph is quite of an age to profit by it. For a boy of fifteen, he is fairly advanced in his school-work, and his studies will only be interrupted for a short time by this change in our life. His education may be completed as well in St. Petersburg as here—better in one respect, for he will have an excellent opportunity of acquiring two foreign languages, French and Russian. The same applies to Meta."

"It is she I was chiefly concerned about," said Mrs. Driscoll. "I was not sure if Miss Ordley would go

with us to Russia, and I should certainly have been sorry if I had had to seek another governess for Meta now. They get on so well together. Miss Ordley is such a thorough teacher, and understands Meta as well as I do myself. But I am glad to say that Miss Ordley is quite willing to remain with us.

"Is that so? Well, I am very glad to hear it too for Meta's sake as well as our own."

"Yes; I explained our whole position to Miss Ordley to-day, and she said that, since her father and mother died, she has no such binding ties in England as to prevent her accompanying us. I consider it extremely fortunate to have her with me; for not only will she be an agreeable companion to myself and Meta, but she is so helpful, ready-witted, and quick-handed, has so much method and forethought, that she will be of the greatest assistance to me both in getting away and in our new life in Russia."

"No doubt. About the children again: another way in which I think they will benefit by our change in life will be that it will quicken and develop in them their faculty of observation. You know that I always lay great stress on that part of a boy's or girl's education, and it is only lately that it has begun to be at all attended to in our schools. The observing faculties have been too much sacrificed to those of absorption and retention. I have tried to remedy this in Ralph's case, and I think with fair success. Life in a foreign country will be a good field of exercise for him. He is already a pretty quick and

accurate observer for a boy; but I cannot say the same for Meta. Now, a complete change of life and surroundings may do a good deal to supply what I cannot but think is a want in her character. She is apt to be a little dreamy, absent, and self-absorbed. To give you a simple instance of what I mean. The other day, when they went together to that concert at the Albert Hall, I asked Meta on their return what sort of a looking man was the conductor, Caramdini. She answered that she didn't think there was anything particular about his appearance, and could give me nothing more definite in the way of description than that. I then asked Ralph. 'A short, spare, dark, sallow man, with glittering eyes and a black, rather untidy beard,' he said at once. There was a terse, suggestive description in a sentence."

"You must recollect in this instance that Meta was probably a good deal more taken up with the music itself than Ralph; that should be allowed for," said Mrs. Driscoll. "But hear another side of the question. I admit that Meta is much less quick in observation than Ralph, and I hope she will gradually correct this defect. But, on the other hand, she has much more reflection and forethought, though a year and a half younger. Ralph is often far too quick and hasty in action. With him, to think is generally to do; and you know that it is only much older and more experienced people than he who can afford to let action follow immediately upon thought. Ralph has frequently to undo and begin over again what a

little reflection at first would have enabled him to do easily and well. It is different with Meta. Not only does her head save her hands, to use the common phrase, but her head saves her head, as I may say, more often than with Ralph. Less quick in almost every way than Ralph, she often gets through a piece of work, whether head or hand work, more speedily than he, from having thought about it a little before beginning. Now, in judging the characters of the two, I think one thing should be regarded as in some measure a set-off to the other."

"Without a doubt. I believe you see all sides of a question generally more clearly than I do, my dear, and hold the balance more justly."

"I see more of the children than you, especially, of course, of Meta, and so I ought to be rather more familiar with their characters."

"Suppose we have them both in now, and inform them of our plans," said Dr. Driscoll.

"Very well; it is as good a time as any," answered Mrs. Driscoll.

She rose and rung the bell, and a servant appeared.

"Tell Master Ralph and Miss Meta that we wish to see them, Barbara, please."

Mrs. Driscoll was a rather small woman, with a quiet, intelligent face and dark eyes. Dr. Driscoll was a man still in the prime of life. He had steady, bright, quietly-observant eyes, and a firm but pleasant mouth. Notice for a moment his hands, as he holds his evening paper: they are firmly moulded, rather long, but well shaped; clever, dexterous, unerring

hands, as strong and certain as they are light and quick. You might guess from them that their possessor is either what he is—a surgeon—or a man accustomed to some kind of work demanding at once manipulative delicacy, strength, and certitude. Dr. Driscoll was indeed a not less clever surgeon than physician, and in both departments of his profession was rising to a good position in London.

Ralph and Meta Driscoll entered the room together. Ralph was a dark-haired, dark-eyed, good-looking boy, with a frank, open, English type of good-looks, and a fine red-brown glow of health in his cheeks. He was actively built, though, like most growing boys, not so compactly and trimly set as he would become. I should be violating truth if I called his figure that of a young Apollo, as I have failed to notice many young Apollos among boys midway in their teens. Ralph looked like what he was,—a healthy, hardy, active, and rather handsome schoolboy, such as you will see scores of every year at Lord's, at the Eton and Harrow match, or on a hundred other cricket-grounds throughout the kingdom.

Meta Driscoll was fairer than her brother, with fine gray eyes, brown hair, and a pretty, rather plump, face.

"Have you quite finished your private and confidential talk, *mater mea?*" Ralph began as soon as he had entered the room. "What state or family secrets have you been discussing? If they are only family ones, by-the-by, I think Meta and I should share in

them. I shall be sixteen in ten months, and Meta is already as old as I am."

"Sixteen in ten months!—that is one way of reckoning one's age, and taking time by the forelock, certainly," said Dr. Driscoll, laughing. "But we want you to be serious now, my boy. We *are* going to take you into our councils, which are no longer secret ones. You know both of you that I have lost much money recently."

"Yes; in those abominable Welsh mines. Mamma explained it a little to Meta and me the other day," exclaimed Ralph. "What a shame that people should be allowed to get up these swindling bubble-companies to tempt simple people!"

"Simple indeed," said Dr. Driscoll with a slight sigh.

"I didn't mean that, papa; I didn't mean that you were simple," said Ralph rather confusedly.

"I was though, Ralph; I am certainly to be included in the description."

"Why doesn't Parliament put down such things?" continued Ralph. "What else is the good of a parliament?"

"We won't speak any more about that now, my boy. What your mother and myself want to tell you and Meta is this: I have received the offer of a medical appointment in St. Petersburg, which I have resolved to accept, so that we must all shortly prepare ourselves for a considerable change in our life. In about six weeks from this we shall leave England for Russia."

"For Russia, papa!" exclaimed Ralph and Meta in a breath.

"For Russia. St. Petersburg is in Russia, you know," replied their father, smiling.

"But how sudden, papa! What a change it will be for us all!" said Meta.

"No doubt of that, my dear; but not an altogether unpleasant change, I hope. We may feel a difference in many things at first, perhaps; but I trust we shall become accustomed and reconciled to whatever contrast there is between Russian and English life, after a little."

"It isn't so much that, papa; we shall be leaving so many friends here."

"That will be the hardest wrench of all, my dear," said Mrs. Driscoll; "but your papa and I have decided that it is best that we should go, and the matter has given us much thought. Perhaps our absence from England may not be for so very long, though we cannot speak certainly as to that."

"It will be hard leaving some of our friends," said Meta rather sadly—"Uncle Harry, and grandmamma, and the Cuthberts."

"We must be willing to make some sacrifices, Meta," said Ralph with a rather important air. "Papa is making a sacrifice in leaving London, I know. I just looked at a number of the *Lancet* that was lying on the study table the other day, and I saw a notice of a paper that he read before the Royal Medical Society. It was most complimentary. 'A very original and valuable contribution to our know-

ledge on this subject.' That was what the writer said in concluding."

"Or words to that effect—eh, Ralph? I don't think it was quite so strongly worded, was it?" said Dr. Driscoll.

"These were the words, as nearly as possible. So, you see, Meta, that papa is becoming famous, and will have to give up all hopes of some day being made an honorary physician to the Queen, or whatever it is called, by going to Russia. We must be ready to share in his sacrifice. I shall have to give up a good deal more than you. I haven't yet told you all the honours that would probably have fallen to me at Oakhurst next half. I would most likely have been captain of the second eleven, and would have pulled bow-oar in the fourth form crew. Now, I can tell you, it's a bit of a sacrifice for a fellow to give up all this,—only, being a girl, you won't understand it fully. But I don't mind, if it's for the family good."

"O my heroic brother! How magnanimous you are! But, being only a girl, you can't expect me to have such a great spirit," said Meta, who could not help laughing, as her father and mother were also doing, at Ralph's tone and air, though she had really been made rather serious by her parents' announcement.

"But there will be good fun in going to Russia, too —or ought to be," said Ralph, going off into another train of thought. "It will be a regular change, and no mistake; and we shall see lots of strange new

things that one has read about. There are wolves and bears no end in Russia still."

"Not in St. Petersburg, I hope," said Meta slyly.

"No, silly. St. Petersburg is as civilized as London, or nearly so. Where's your geographical knowledge? That's one thing I can beat you in, Meta, anyway. I can give you odds in geography."

"Don't you boast about that, sir, or I'll say something about spelling."

"I don't mind;—or I'll save you the trouble and the satisfaction at the same time.—She says that in my last letter to her from school I spelt *until* with two *l's*, but I don't believe it."

"And he was my *truely* affectionate brother," said Meta.

"You ought really to get a stronger grip of your spelling once and for all, my boy, or you may find it a difficult matter by-and-by. It is a most important matter for any one in your position of life. Many a situation and post have been endangered or missed for a wrongly-spelt word."

"O papa, I was only joking," said Meta. "Ralph is really a very fair speller now. There are very few words that he trips at."

"Only the double letters sometimes, you know," added Ralph.

"I am glad to hear it, for I know spelling has been a rather uphill matter with you, as it is with many. Dogberry, in *Much Ado about Nothing*—do you remember?—says that reading and writing come by nature; but Shakespeare was much too shrewd an

observer to write *spelling*, for in that case Dogberry would not have been so far from the truth, nor his remark so ludicrous."

"Well, we have wandered a little from our subject," said Mrs. Driscoll. "Miss Ordley will go with us to Russia, Meta. You will be glad to hear that."

"Very, mamma. It will be so nice having some one we know beside us, for it will be a little while before we make friends in St. Petersburg."

"We shall have to set to work at once preparing for our journey, for the time is not too long for all that has to be done. We must be very busy, Meta, and lessons will have to take a secondary place, I suspect, for a time."

"I daresay Meta won't violently oppose that, model pupil as she is," said Ralph.

"I never said I was a model pupil, Ralph, or thought so either," said Meta.

"Papa, have you told Mark your plans?"

"Not yet."

"May I tell him—now?"

"Yes, if you like. Of course I never doubted but that he would go with us."

"Oh, of course not; but I'll just go and talk it over with him, and hear his views."

"I'll go with you, Ralph, if you like," said Meta.

"Very well. Come along then."

"Are you coming into the drawing-room, George?" said Mrs. Driscoll, rising from her seat.

"For a few minutes, I think," answered her husband, looking at his watch. "I shall have to see that fever case in Park Road to-night, but it will do if I start in a quarter of an hour.—Ralph, tell Martin to be ready at eight, please."

Ralph and Meta left the room together, and their mother and father followed.

CHAPTER II.

MARK.

"He'd sailed the planet round and round,
And chased the setting sun
To Amazonia's utmost bound,
Where mighty rivers run:
Circled the spheres,—yet evermore
Came back to merry England's shore."

RALPH and his sister found old Mark Weatherby in the stables busy cleaning some of the silver-plated work of the harness. It was a rare thing to catch Mark altogether idle during the working-hours of the day. Let me first briefly describe him to you, and then say something about his relations to the Driscoll family.

Mark Weatherby was rather short in stature and squarely built. He had a gray, grizzled beard, a tanned, weather-beaten, and seamy face, in colour and texture more like a deep-coloured walnut than anything else I can compare it with. He was sixty years of age, and still an active and hardy man, his bright blue eye undimmed, and plenty of vigour and elasticity both of body and mind yet remaining to him.

Mark had been a servant to Dr. Driscoll ever since

Ralph and Meta could remember, and long before that. He had, in fact, served his present master's father. Dr. Driscoll's father had been a sea captain, and Mark had been first cabin-boy in his ship, and afterwards a sort of private servant to him, varying his duties in this capacity with those of an ordinary seaman. He had proved so good and faithful a servant that Captain Driscoll acquired both a sincere liking and respect for him, while Mark on his part became deeply attached to his master. The two never separated, but sailed the world round and round again together, until at last Captain Driscoll retired from a seafaring life, and spent the remainder of his days with his wife and boy in a quiet English village.

Mark Weatherby meanwhile continued to roam about the world, not, however, always on sea, but often spending long periods on land in different countries and in various occupations. He had acquired a love of change and variety that was not easily satisfied. But shortly before Captain Driscoll died he returned to England, and was at his old master's side during his last hours. Then he offered his services to the "young master," as he called George Driscoll then. George had just finished his medical studies in London, but, to further equip himself for his profession, was about to visit some of the great Continental schools of medicine. So Mark accompanied his young master to Paris, Berlin, and Heidelberg. Captain Driscoll had saved money, and left his widow and son well provided for, so that the

latter could afford to travel before finally settling down to work as a doctor in London.

Mark had been with Dr. Driscoll ever since, having given up all thought of returning to his old seafaring and wandering life. His exact position in the Driscoll household, in regard to the duties he fulfilled, it would have been rather difficult to define, and it would take too long to enumerate the different ways in which the old man made himself useful. It is sufficient to say that he could turn his hand to almost anything, and his services extended from Mrs. Driscoll, his mistress, to Martin the coachman, while they included the care of the small garden and conservatory. When the family repaired in summer to the sea-side or the country, Mark invariably accompanied them, and was still of as much use as ever; for it was he who had taught Ralph to swim, to shoot, and to ride, services of which Dr. Driscoll appreciated the value, and which he would have had little time to teach his son himself. It may be thought that an old sailor would not make the very best professor of riding; but Mark had been a number of things in his life besides a sailor. To sum up, Mark was as much attached to his present master and to the whole family as he had been to Captain Driscoll, and a very strong bond of mutual affection existed between him and Ralph and Meta. What were Mark's other characteristics, I hope the reader will discover as our story proceeds.

"Mark," exclaimed Ralph, as Meta and he approached the old man, "in all your wanderings you

were never in Russia, were you? At least I have never heard you speak of it."

"No, Master Ralph, I never was,—not fairly in, though I've been very nigh. I made a voyage to Constantinople once in one of they Mediterranean steamers as takes folk pleasure-cruising in the summer."

"Well, would you be surprised to hear that we are all off to Russia in a month from this?" said Ralph.

Mark's face at any rate showed no sign of surprise, but he paused a moment before answering.

"A man as has come to my time o' life, and knocked about the world as much, ain't easy surprised, Master Ralph; but, for all that, I'm free to confess as you do surprise me a bit. Will you explain a little, sir, and go middling slow? I ain't so quick at the uptake as I once was."

"You know you don't believe that now, Mark; that's just mock-humility."

A grim smile flickered on Mark's face.

"What is this Russian business, Miss Meta?" he said. "A holiday trip?"

"Something much more than that, Mark. Papa is going to practise in St. Petersburg, in some way, instead of in London, and we are all going with him, of course. We may be away from England for a long time."

"And you'll go with us, Mark, won't you?" said Ralph.

"Of course, sir; where else should I go? Where the master is I hope to be till the end, and it don't

make much difference whether it's Russia or England. I certainly had hoped to lay my bones in the old country, but if the great Captain wills it otherwise, why—"

"So you will yet, Mark," interrupted Ralph. "What are you talking of? You're not an old man yet; you're just what's called elderly. But don't you think it will be interesting going to Russia, Mark? There'll be ever such a lot of new things to see different from England."

"Surely, surely; and it's nat'ral as you should wish to see the world, Master Ralph. I had the fit strong upon me myself once, few more so. Russia's a kind o' barbarous place, in some ways, I take it; but there's no doubt fine parts in it, being so big. Most countries has good bits, like people: it's a sorry stick as is all knots."

"You don't know so much about Russia as about some places, do you, Mark? because you haven't been there," said Meta.

"No, miss. It's mostly through being to places as I know anything about them, for I haven't done so much book study somehow as I maybe should, 'cepting the Book itself. I've overhauled that log pretty frequent, I ain't ashamed to say. My old mother taught me to, and I've tried to keep the promise I gave her. Only indifferently well I've sometimes done it, I'm afeard; but still, what the Book says mostly holds good—'Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he grows up he'll stick by the old ship.'"

"That's not quite the way it goes, is it, Mark?" said Meta, smiling.

"Maybe not, miss. It don't much matter, I take it, as long as you get the sense. I believe I seldom do fetch the words exactly as they stand."

"Have you ever met any Russian people anywhere, Mark?" said Meta.

"Yes, now I think on it, I have,—and Poles too; leastways one."

"Tell us about them, Mark, please," said Meta. "Those poor Poles, — I don't think the Russians treated them well."

"That's a mild way of putting it. They treated them abominably," said Ralph.

"I'm afeard so, accordin' to all accounts," said Mark. "This Pole I was speaking about had suffered for his country. His story was a sad one, poor lad. It comes back to me again when I begin to think on it. We were a very mixed crew in the old *Dolphin*, to be sure."

"What was the *Dolphin*, Mark—what sort of a ship, I mean?" said Ralph. "Tell us the whole story."

"The *Dolphin* was a whaler, Master Ralph, sailing from Hull. We were a very scratch crew, as I say, and among us were a Russian and a Pole. The Pole, —I never came within miles of pronouncing his name, and just called him Thaddy mostly,—was little more than a lad, and him and I became chums. He told me his whole story one night over a pipe. He had got mixed up with one of the insurrections that used

to be so common in Poland years ago,—him and his father. His father headed a band of village folk and other country people in a night attack upon a Russian camp. The Russians were a deal the stronger in numbers, and Thaddy's father and his followers were completely routed. Thaddy himself fell wounded early in the fight. The father fought over the body of his wounded boy until overpowered and cut down. When Thaddy awoke from the faint into which he had fallen, he found his father lying lifeless and cold beside him. He himself escaped; for the Russians, thinking he was dead, had taken no further notice of him, and he was able to drag himself to a farm-house near by, where his wounds were dressed, and he recovered. He left his native land soon after, and became a wanderer about the world like myself."

"And about the Russian who was with you too," said Ralph; "there could have been no love lost between the Pole and him."

"I believe Thaddy fairly hated him in his heart—that is, at first. The Russian was second mate, you see, and Thaddy couldn't openly show the enmity and scorn as burned in his breast; but I believe the mate more than suspected the feelings Thaddy had towards him. Well, on our return voyage Thaddy fell ill—caught a chill somehow and fevered. We had no doctor on board. Every whaling-ship is bound to carry a doctor o' some sort; but we had left port in rather a hurry, and the skipper had not been able to get one somehow, and had just run the risk of breaking the law and starting without. But it

turned out as our Russian second mate knew something about medicine,—had been 'prenticed like to a doctor afore he took to a sea-life. Well, he took Thaddy in hand, and not only physicked and doctored him, but nursed him day and night, as watchful and gentle, I do assure ye, as any woman. Thaddy pulled through all right; but it's my belief as he never would but for the mate. Of course the lad heard all about it when he was up and about again, and of course all his former feelings towards the Russian, which had entirely arisen from his looking on him as the nat'ral enemy of his country, passed away and gave place to very different sentiments. He would have been a poor-spirited fellow otherwise, and that he warn't. He and the mate became fast friends. Arter that voyage the two emigrated together to Canada, started as backwoods farmers together, prospered, and, for all I know, may be partners to this day."

"He was a fine fellow the mate, Mark," said Meta.

"He was, miss; and I think as that story goes far to show as there must be Samaritans among the Russians like most other peoples, for I take it that was summat not much different from the story of the man as went down to Babylon."

"Jericho, Mark; wasn't it?" said Meta.

"I believe it were Jericho. I've got the main facts o' the Book pretty well, ye see, saying it as shouldn't, but I'm apt to mix up names and places a bit, which, arter all, don't so much signify, not to me leastways. Well, that Russian mate o' the *Dolphin*

gave me a good opinion o' Russians, which I didn't ezactly have before, because there was a deal o' prejudice in England against them in those days. First, when I was a lad, it were the French as we were all bound to call hard names; and then it were the Russians; but the more you knock about the world and mix wi' all sorts, the more you come to see as it makes much less difference what nation a man belongs to as some people seem to think—that is, when you come to have to do wi' people individually, as I may say. It's what a man is himself is the main thing, and folks are pretty mixed whatever country they hail from. You can't allays judge a cake by the oven it was baken in."

"It'll be very cold in Russia, I'm afraid," said Meta.

"They'll have ways o' keeping it out, I don't doubt," said Mark; "and Heaven tempers the wind to—to the—young ravens."

"The shorn lambs, you mean, Mark," said Ralph.

"Maybe it is lambs. There's some word about the young ravens in the Proverbs or somewhere, howsoever."

"But that other—about the lambs, I mean—isn't in the Proverbs, Mark," said Meta. "Somebody told me it was once, and I was a whole night looking for it; but it isn't in the Bible at all."

"It has that sort o' sound, you'll allow, miss; but there's been good proverbs made since Solomon's time, though I believe he's got the gist o' them.—Now, I

think that bit and snaffle are about as bright as they can be made," said Mark, proceeding to lay aside his work. "It'll not be many times more I'll have to help Martin in this way if we're to start so soon. Your father's been losing money lately, he told me. I take it that's mainly at the bottom of his going to Russia. Well, he needn't be down-hearted about it, as I told him. He'll soon get to windward o' his money matters again. He's main clever, the master, —everybody knows that; and when a man's main clever and main honest, he'll weather most storms."

"It will be sad leaving the old house and everything," said Meta.

"It will, miss. We've been fine and happy here. But changes come some time to most everybody; and the house, and garden, and everything that knew you once, know you no more for a bit, perhaps for ever."

"I daresay it will be jolly enough in St. Petersburg," said Ralph, who thought the conversation had taken rather a doleful turn.

"In course," said Mark cheerfully. "It's only nat'ral and right to be sorry for leaving a place where you've been content and happy; but we'll get along cheerful enough in foreign parts all the same. I've to go a bit of a message for the mistress now, children; so I think I'll just start and get it done."

Mark put on his coat and left the stables, and Ralph and Meta turned away towards the house again.

CHAPTER III.

ST. PETERSBURG.

"It may be
That you shall one day come to like our ways,
That now seem strange and unfamiliar to you."

IT was a calm and bright evening in early September when the *Emperor*, the steamer in which the Driscoll family had taken their passage, stopped at Cronstadt, the port of St. Petersburg. There the passengers were transhipped into a smaller boat, the *Emperor* being too deep in draught to allow of its passing the bar at the mouth of the Neva.

As our travellers drew near the great capital of Eastern Europe, its spires and gilded domes, gleaming in the western sunlight, were distinctly visible from a considerable distance, but the city itself could not be seen until the boat was close to the quay. A furnished house had been secured for the Driscolls through an agent, and thither they at once drove, leaving the bulk of their luggage to follow.

A drive of less than half an hour brought them to the house, which was a flat in a large block or quad-

rangle of buildings, in the centre of which was a spacious courtyard.

"What queer houses!" said Ralph. "Why, the ground-floors are shops. Fancy living over a shop!"

"That's the way in some of the houses in Edinburgh," said Meta, who had once visited a friend in that city; "but I don't think it's the best houses."

"Well, you needn't despise living above a shop here, at any rate, for the custom seems to be a very common one among all classes," said Dr. Driscoll. "But let us examine the rest of the house. The rooms are fine large ones at any rate."

"Almost too much so, don't you think? It will take such large fires to heat them," said Mrs. Driscoll.

"You forget, my dear, the different method of heating adopted here. See!" Dr. Driscoll pointed to a handsome stove in the room.

"Of course, I should have remembered that Continental fashion."

"We shall find that make the rooms hot enough in winter, if I mistake not," said Dr. Driscoll.

The rooms were well furnished, though with more regard to show, as it seemed to the English tastes of the strangers, than to solid comfort. The largest apartment in the house, and that which had, at the same time, the least amount of furniture, was the "saloon." It contained chairs, two or three card-tables, a sofa, a round table, a grand-piano, two long narrow looking-glasses, candelabra depending from

the roof, some French engravings, and a picture of a saint in a corner.

"We shall not keep that in the room, shall we?" said Meta.

"I hardly think it is worth while removing it, Meta," said her father. "I think our Protestantism is strong enough to stand the presence of that rather ugly picture, don't you?"

"Meta's Sunday-school orthodoxy is shocked," said Ralph.

"Don't be flippant, my boy."

"I didn't mean to, papa; but really the picture is so ugly that I think it may safely remain where it is as far as we are concerned."

The saloon led to the drawing-room, a small but more showily furnished room, with a good deal of gilding about the ceiling and cornices; mirrors, sofas, and lustres in profusion, and more French engravings on the walls. From the drawing-room the party passed immediately into the bedrooms, without any intervening passage.

"What small beds!" said Mrs. Driscoll.

"No bigger nor a ship's bunk, ma'am," said Mark Weatherby, who was accompanying the family in their round of inspection, following close in their wake, and noting all things with shrewd eyes.

"Where are the washstands?" said Miss Ordley.

"There ain't any," said Ralph, bursting into a laugh. "Look here. This is the substitute for them —the apology, I call it."

Ralph pointed to a very small basin, and a ewer

that might possibly hold a pint of water, standing on a side-table.

"Did you expect a plunge-bath in every room?" said Dr. Driscoll. "I can tell you, Master Ralph, in such winter weather as they have here, you may not feel inclined to take a dip into a cold bath every morning; if you do, you will have to keep a small hatchet in your room to make a hole in the ice."

"One would like something a little bigger than a slop-basin at any rate," said Ralph. "You don't mean to say you're going to content yourself with that, papa!"

"I notice that the gentlemen's bedrooms are much more plainly furnished than the ladies'. My room—for I suppose this is intended for my boudoir—is really a pretty room," said Mrs. Driscoll.

"It is, indeed," said Miss Ordley. "What a pretty table in marquetry this is! Do you see that this is the only room that has window-curtains?"

"Yes; but I notice that there are a number of little things wanting in a Russian house which we have come to consider essential—little knick-knacks and conveniences, which add so much to the comfort and homelike look of a room. We must just supply them by degrees ourselves."

"I say, ain't any of you getting hungry?" said Ralph. "It's six o'clock. I hope they've got something ready for us."

It was found that the servants had dinner prepared for the family, and were only waiting the order to serve it. In a short space the party were seated in

the dining-room, and having had a long fast, did full justice to their dinner, notwithstanding that several of the viands were novel and strange both in appearance and taste. Meanwhile Mark Weatherby had betaken himself to that part of the house appertaining to the domestics, where he also was plentifully provided for.

"I shall never get to like that caviare, if I live in Russia for the next twenty years," said Ralph.

"Don't be too sure of that," said his father. "The taste is not more peculiar than that of olives."

"That isn't saying much for it."

"You may get to like both in time; and, if you don't, there is not much harm done."

"It is like black-currant jelly to look at," said Meta.

"But 'oh the difference to me,' as some poet says," said Ralph.

"It's in *Lucy Gray*,—Wordsworth," said Meta.

"Is it? I suppose I picked it up from some of your poetry collections then.—But please don't make such comparisons, Meta, or you'll put me out of conceit of some good things I like, which would be cruel, to say the least."

"What *is* caviare, Miss Ordley?" said Meta, who was so accustomed to appeal to her governess for information, that she did so instinctively, even when her father and mother were present.

"It is the roe of the sturgeon, is it not, Dr. Driscoll?"

"Yes. The captain of the steamer told me a good deal about caviare one evening. Enormous quantities

of it appear to be consumed in Russia. Something like thirty thousand barrels are sent from Astrakhan in the course of a year. The Volga and the Don are the chief rivers in which the sturgeon is found; and the fishing as well as the preparation of the caviare constitute, of course, a great industry."

"Does any one feel inclined to take a look round St. Petersburg to-night?" asked Ralph, when dinner was finished.

"Not I, for one," said Meta. "I mean to go to bed very soon. I am very sleepy, for I didn't sleep at all well on the steamer."

"I slept like a top—as well as ever I did. It was quite smooth the whole way."

"I shall be glad to go to bed soon too," said Miss Ordley, "for I am in much the same case as Meta."

"I don't think you will get a companion in your walk, Ralph," said his father; "and on the whole, I would advise you to put off beginning your tour of inspection until to-morrow. I know the restless feeling of curiosity that besets one so strongly in a new place and among novel scenes, but we have all plenty of time before us."

"Very well, to-morrow be it. 'To-morrow for fresh woods and pastures new.'—Shakespeare."

"It isn't Shakespeare, Ralph," said Miss Ordley, laughing.

"All right. I'm open to conviction. It's generally safe to say him. Good-night, all who are going to bed; I'm going to see how Mark's getting on in his quarter of our new world."

CHAPTER IV.

RECONNOITRING.

"With many a stately square;
Squadrons might wheel and armies gather there."

ALL the travellers slept soundly, despite their comparatively small beds; and next morning the plans for the day were discussed.

"Notwithstanding a good night's rest, I don't feel inclined for a great deal of walking to-day," said Mrs. Driscoll. "I still feel the motion of the steamer, and want more rest; so if you go with us, Ralph, you must restrain your energies, and not knock Miss Ordley and Meta and me up the first day."

"We had better have a carriage, and just do one or two of the principal sights to-day," said Dr. Driscoll.

"One of these droshkies, papa? They don't look very comfortable, and one won't nearly hold us all," said Meta.

"No; we can get a comfortable carriage for four from any of the hotels, I understand."

"But there are five of us," said Mrs. Driscoll.

"I don't care about going in a carriage," said Ralph; "I would far rather walk. One sees twice as much. See, this is what we'll do! Papa will take you three about the town in a carriage, and Mark and I will have a cruise round together; and when we meet again at dinner we can compare notes."

"Very well; let it be that way," said Dr. Driscoll.

"Take care and not lose yourselves, Ralph," said Meta.

"If we do, I dare say we shall find ourselves again. Lots of the people, the cabbies and shopkeepers, seem to patter English—'Pigeon-English,'—and Mark's a capital fellow for remembering his bearings on land or sea."

Ralph and Mark were presently sallying forth together. Having no definite plan to proceed upon, they simply turned their faces towards what seemed the most important quarter of the city, and, to use the vulgar but expressive phrase, "followed their noses," a process which shortly brought them to the principal street of St. Petersburg—the Nevski Perspective. A splendid street it struck them as being, broad and straight, lined with lofty, handsome houses, for the space of nearly three miles.

The thoroughfare was full of life, colour, and movement, and presented a varied and ever-shifting panorama, full of novelty and interest to strangers. Mark Weatherby had by no means yet lost his faculty of curiosity and wonder, notwithstanding that he had already seen so much of the world, and he fully

entered into and sympathized with his young master's interest in all that was passing around them.

"See, Mark, those must be Cossacks! I know them by the pictures," said Ralph.

A group of horsemen were approaching. They were dressed in blue frock-coats, girdled about the waist with a narrow belt, and wore black sheep-skin caps, some high, and some round, shaped like turbans. Long red spears were suspended by straps from their saddle-bows. The men were short in stature, but of shapely and active figures.

Ralph and Mark were chiefly struck by the sense of vastness and space which the city they were traversing conveyed. Everything seemed planned on so large a scale, as though to provide ample breathing and moving room for an indefinite increase of population through centuries to come. The great breadth of the streets, the huge blocks of buildings, the immense area of the squares, united to produce an imposing *ensemble*, that somewhat wearied the unaccustomed eye by its magnitude. The soft September sunshine glinting on the green house-roofs, on the bright domes of the churches, and on the broad bosom of the river, gave colour and cheerfulness to the scene, and relieved it of the feeling of monotony which the unbroken uniformity and vastness of the city would otherwise have produced upon our two strangers.

When Ralph and Mark had traversed the length of the Nevski Perspective, they turned into one of the side streets which cross it at right angles, and presently

came to a house with a curious sign-board over the door—a roughly-executed design of a tea-kettle in the midst of a small flock of cups, painted white on a bright green ground.

"This is the first time I've seen a sign o' that kind," said Mark. "It's a sort o' tea public-house, I reckon. The pictur' looks like an ironclad sailing through a green ocean wi' a convoy of gunboats. Well, it ain't such a bad notion. Better a deal put up at the sign o' the *Teapot and Cups* than at the *Foaming Tankard*, or the *Bottle and Glass*, or some such."

"Let's stop a moment and look in, Mark," said Ralph.

The windows of the tea-tavern were open, and all that was passing within was visible to the two on-lookers. Men of the shopkeeping class in blue caftans or cloaks, and with great beards; droshky-drivers, closely buttoned to the throat in long coats; homely country-people in shirts or sheep-skins, with oddly-cut hair, were seated about the room, round small tables. Boys were running from table to table, many of them barefooted, waiting on the customers, bringing this one rolls of bread, and that one a sort of biscuits or rusks, and to all tea. A few of the people used cups, but the majority drank their tea from glasses. Some were using cream, but in most of the glasses thin slices of lemon floated. Saucers of lump sugar stood on the tables. The drinker took a piece between his finger and thumb, and instead of putting it into his tea, placed it between his teeth, and then sipped his tea through it.

"Well, that's a queer fashion o' sugaring one's tea, any way," said Mark. "And the lemon, too! I've allays thought up till this as the proper place for lemons were rum-punch. I've allays been a temperate man, Master Ralph, as you know; but, nevertheless, I'm free to own as a slice of lemon improves a glass of punch, and I believe as that's the nat'ral use for lemons. Seems to me it's kind o' running straight agen natur' to use them for tea. Lemons are allays lemons, whatever the country, and they can't have one meaning in England and another in Russia—that stands to reason. However, I don't grudge them the custom. They seem happy and contented enough; and, arter all, better for them their tea and lemon than rum and lemon, though it do seem to an Englishman like turning natur' upside down, all the same."

The next place of public entertainment which Ralph and Mark passed did not present to them so pleasant and harmless an aspect. The sign of the house plainly told its character—a large bunch of grapes gaudily painted on a red ground. "*Vodka sold here,*" was written in Russian over the door. Sounds of rough laughter issued from within; and now and then a reeling *moujik* (peasant) came stumbling into the street, sometimes a mere boy in years.

"Ah, here is old England again, only a little more so, seemingly," said Mark, in a tone of sorrowful disgust. "I thought as we should come across summat like this by-and-by. The Russians ain't easily matched at this sort o' thing, by all accounts, though it ain't for us in England to boast.—Come along,

Master Ralph; there's neither pleasure nor edification to be got hereabouts. We'd best tack straight across the street."

"There's a pleasanter sight," said Ralph. "What is it he has? It looks like some kind of lemonade."

A boy, in the centre of a little knot of people, was pouring out some liquid from a large glass jug into a tumbler, which he handed to a customer, refilling it again as soon as emptied, and passing it to another patron.

"I've half a mind to try it; I'm jolly thirsty," said Ralph. "I don't much like the notion of his having only one tumbler for everybody, but I think I'll chance that for once."

Ralph advanced to the vender and made a sign that he wished to try his ware.

"Malinevoi kvas," said the boy, naming his liquor.

"No doubt," said Ralph, not in the least understanding what was meant. "Pour away."

Ralph tasted the beverage rather sparingly at first, but finding it pleasant enough drank it off.

"Have some, Mark? It's not half bad. It's a sort of raspberry syrup."

Mark took a glass, and pronounced the drink cool and refreshing.

"What shall we give him? We'll just have to leave it to him," said Ralph.

He took out a handful of copper coins from his pocket, and the boy chose four.

"Chetiri copeck," said he.

"Four copecks; I suppose it's all right," said Ralph.

"It don't seem much, anyhow. A copeck is not much more than a farthing, I believe.—I say, look there, Mark; what splendid fellows those are!"

Three horsemen, splendidly mounted, rode up the street. They sat their horses with a stately grace and ease, as though they had been born in the saddle. Their dress was of great richness: burnished helmets with little scarlet crests adorned their heads, a sort of steel veils fell over their necks and shoulders, their tunics were of linked mail, while their legs were encased in plate-armour, the general effect of their appearance being one of exceeding picturesqueness. The horsemen were themselves conspicuously handsome, with dark flashing eyes, and regular features.

"What are they, I wonder?" said Ralph. "I must try and find out."

The first person Ralph asked did not understand what he said; but the next, a shopkeeper, who was standing at his door, understood and spoke a little English.

"Ah, Circassian!" he answered.

"They are Circassians, Mark. Circassians are famed for their good looks, you know, and these fellows certainly don't discredit their nation. But what swells they are! They look for all the world as if they had just stepped out of one of Scott's novels—'Ivanhoe,' or perhaps the 'Talisman;'—but you've never read either, I suppose, Mark."

"No, Master Ralph, I don't mind as I ever did; but I think I take your meaning in a manner. You're

thinking o' the time as knights and tournyments were in fashion."

"Exactly. These Circassian fellows take one back to the days of King Richard, and chivalry, and Robin Hood, and the Crusades," said Ralph, mixing up his imagery somewhat.

"Like the Lord Mayor's Show," suggested Mark.

"Nonsense, Mark; better than that. That's nothing more than a stage show, and a pretty poor one at that. What a lot of street-venders there seem to be here! more even than in London, I think. There's a fellow with rolls; let us have some. We won't be home in time for lunch."

They approached a man who was carrying on his head a tray, on which were arranged round flat rolls of bread in rows. The man set down his tray on a portable frame-work like a camp-stool, such as is used in English households for placing dinner-trays on, and displayed his wares for Ralph's inspection. Ralph purchased a couple of the little loaves a-piece for himself and Mark, paying for them in the same fashion as he had done for the raspberry syrup; and the old man and the boy continued on their way, munching their rolls with great contentment, while still gazing about them on all sides.

They passed by many stately churches and handsome public buildings, but did not enter any, having agreed to confine their operations to-day to the outside aspect of the city. They wandered along the quays by the river, and along the canals with which the city is intersected, and took note of the shipping

and the various craft which enlivened the water. from the long flat barges to the gay little ferry-steamers gliding hither and thither between the wharves and the various islands in the river. They passed by the Isaac Cathedral, and the Kazane Cathedral, and admired their vast and stately proportions. They paused for some time before the famous statue of Peter the Great, raised aloft on its huge basement of granite—the figure of a fiery horseman urging his steed up a steep incline, full of life and vigour; the horse seeming to strain every nerve as he labours up the hill.

Ralph and Mark encountered more strange and novel groups of people, in unfamiliar dresses and with unfamiliar faces, more itinerant tradesmen, fruit-merchants, flower-girls with prettily arranged bouquets, sweetmeat venders, fish-sellers, broom-pedlers, tea venders;—every imaginable kind of ware seemed to be purchasable in the streets. Many monks and nuns were met, some standing about the church steps, others apparently begging, for some of the monks had boards placed before them on which were covers of cloth embroidered with crosses, and on these Ralph now and then saw a passer-by place a coin, as one does into the box of a blind man. At last both Ralph and Mark judged that they had had enough both of walking and gazing for one day.

"We'll turn homewards now, I think, Mark."

"Home'ards it is, Master Ralph, if we can call anywheres hereabouts home as yet. My old legs are beginning to remonstrate, as I may say."

"You walk as well as I do yet, Mark, every bit. But, I say, do you know whereabouts we are? In which direction does our house lie?"

Mark paused a few moments before answering, directing his glance this way and that, up the street and down.

"I'm bothered if I know where we are," he said with a puzzled look. "The place is so square and level and reg'lar, and one street's so like its neighbour, it's not easy remembering one's bearings. There's no landmarks like, anywhere."

"We'll walk on a bit, and see if we come to any place we remember," said Ralph. "Did we pass this church before?"

"I couldn't just say, there's such a many churches all built on the same lines. But a dull skipper blames his compass, and that's my case now, I'm afeard. It's stupid o' me being so much adrift."

"We must ask the way of somebody," said Ralph.

They entered a shop and questioned the shopkeeper.

"We have lost our way. We should be glad if you would put us right," began Ralph, speaking slowly and distinctly.

"Loss your way!—mojnoli? (is it possible?) What street you live, barrin?" said the man politely.

For the life of him Ralph could not recall the name of the street, and Mark was equally at a loss.

"I cannot remember at this moment. We have just come to St. Petersburg," said Ralph. "If you would name a few of the streets, I think I would know which it was."

"Horosho!" (Good) answered the shopman. "Nevski-Prospekt, Gorokhoraia-Ulitza, Voshesenski-Prospekt, Milionaya-Ulitza, Morskaia-Ulitza—"

"That is it," said Ralph; "Morskaia Street.—Isn't it, Mark?"

"I believe it is, sir," answered Mark, a little doubtfully.

"Morskaia-Ulitza! Horosho! The Great or the Little, barrin?"

"The Little — Little Morskaia Street. — Yes, I am sure now that is the name, Mark," said Ralph.

"I go with you to the street, monsieur," said the shopman, who was accustomed to mix up English, French, and German indifferently in addressing foreigners, interlarding the whole with his national ejaculations. He led the way into the street and began to point with his hand. This was the immediate signal for several passers-by to stop and draw near, and very soon a little group of people had collected with that mysterious celerity with which all dwellers in cities are familiar.

"Two streets to the right, you come with the Nevski-Prospekt; straight along till third street, Na lèvo, *à gauche*—what you call it in English?—to the left. Yes, that is so. Then monsieur will go one turn *à droit*, to the right; then—"

"This will never do, Mark; we shall never recollect all this," said Ralph; and then he addressed the shopman,—

"I'm afraid we won't remember the directions.

Could we not get some one to go with us a part of the way?"

The group gathered round were meanwhile chattering and gesticulating with much energy and apparent interest; and, as Ralph spoke, a youth started forward and exclaimed,—

"Da, da! sdess! (Yes, yes; here, sir.) Ivan speak the English much. Show the way quick to mister."

"Da, da! Germans, Germans," was passed from one to another among the onlookers.

"Not a bit of it," said Mark; "no more than you are, good people. English as the Queen o' Britain herself."

"Da, da! English, French, American, German—all the same with stupid people," said the shopman.—"Messieurs, go with this young man. Show you the way straight home. Give him two, three, four copeck; na vodka, drinkgelt. You understand, barrin?"

"Yes; all right. Thank you for your trouble," said Ralph.—"Come along, Mark; let us get away from this as quick as possible, or there'll soon be a regular crowd."

The youth led the way up the street, and Ralph and Mark followed close in his wake.

"Germans, Germans," muttered the crowd as a parting salute.

"Do we look like Germans, Master Ralph?" exclaimed Mark in a tone of no small disgust. "It's the first time as ever I were taken for a foreigner o' any kind. A man likes to look like his country whatever it is, and especially if that country's

England. It's enough to make a man out o' conceit of his face altogether. Seems to me as these Russians have no discrimination whatsoever."

"Not a bit, Mark," said Ralph, bursting into a laugh.

"I've nothing to say agen the Germans, *as* Germans, you understand; I've met more'n one o' them, downright good fellows; but all the same it stands to reason as there must be as much difference betwixt an Englishman and a German from stem to stern as betwixt the captain's pinnace and a Dundee whaleboat."

"No doubt, Mark; that stands to reason, as you say," said Ralph, still laughing.

Their guide led the way at a quick pace, and they were not long in reaching the house. Ralph gave the lad some copecks, with which he seemed amply satisfied, grinning and taking off his cap many times as he turned away.

"Well, I think we've done a pretty good day's work," said Ralph, as Mark and he entered the house.

"We've had a fine day, Master Ralph," assented Mark, "except for being taken for Germans. But they're main ignorant, these Russians, I doubt. Howsoever, by all accounts the country's a deal o' leeway to make yet in many directions; and the Book has a word about the beam in our own eye, as it is well for a man allays to bear in mind."

CHAPTER V.

A FAMILY SYMPOSIUM.

"The web of his life was of a mingled yarn, good and ill together."

AT dinner there was of course a great deal of talk. Ralph himself talked for three, and the rest had a difficulty sometimes in getting in a word. But Dr. Driscoll was accustomed to allow his children a good deal of freedom in this respect, provided always that their talk had no approach to forwardness or pertness in it. On this occasion, moreover, he deemed that some extra license was permissible.

"What sort of a day have you had, Meta?" asked Ralph, when he had taken the edge off his appetite with a couple of plates of soup.

"Very nice."

"The soup?"

"No."

"Then I can't agree with you; I think it's first-rate."

"I mean we've had a pleasant day."

"Give me your idea of a 'nice' day. What did you do?"

"First we drove to the hospital where papa is to be one of the doctors you know—the Obukhoff hospital it is called."

"Where I reported myself," said Dr. Driscoll.

"What did you think of it as a hospital, papa?" said Ralph.

"The building is a fine large one, with spacious grounds round about. It seems to be a well-managed institution, but of course I merely got a glance at it to-day. There are some fifteen medical men attached to it, from which I should fancy that, large as the place is, my duties there will hardly occupy all my time."

"Then you will have a capital chance of finishing your book, father," said Ralph.

"Book! who told you I was doing anything with book-writing?"

"No one. You can't have wished to keep the matter secret, or you wouldn't leave your manuscript lying about on your table as you did at home—I mean at St. John's Wood. I saw bits of it more than once, and of course I put two and two together."

"And did your curiosity lead you to a closer inspection?"

"No; I'm bad at hieroglyphics. But seriously, father, I wouldn't have been so mean as to pry into your work, even if I could have read the manuscript; for I wasn't sure whether you would care for any one seeing it at present."

"I have no great wish to keep the fact that I

have been putting together from time to time material for a small book, a secret; though it may never see the light, except it is the fire, after all."

"Oh, but it will. That is only your modesty, father. Now that you will have more time than in London, you will get it done.—Well, where did you go after you left the hospital?"

"Oh, we just drove round and about the city," said Meta, "and got a general view of St. Petersburg, and stopped and had some lunch at a *traktir*."

"Where?"

"A traktir—a restaurant, you know."

"Lucky you. Mark and I had only some rolls and a drink of raspberry syrup by way of a lunch. But we've had a good time, and seen a deal."

"And what do you think of St. Petersburg, Ralph?" said his mother.

"Middling. It's very large, and square, and regular, and there are some fine buildings."

"You see them all at once better than you do in London, don't you?" said Meta.

"Yes, that's where they beat us."

"It's a terribly wearying place for sight-seeing, it has struck me. The spaces are enormous. But we can take it at our own time; and for my part I shall do it leisurely," said Mrs. Driscoll.

"And I too. Even the mere sight of such vast masses and lines of buildings is fatiguing," said Miss Ordley.

"As a whole, however, it cannot be denied that there is an air of imposing grandeur about the city,"

said Dr. Driscoll. "The trite guide-book phrase does not greatly exaggerate—'a city of palaces.'"

"Of course you saw the Great Peter's statue?" said Meta.

"Yes, we stopped a good while at that. It is really splendid. We have nothing like it in London."

"It conveys the idea one has of the mighty Czar admirably, I thought," said Dr. Driscoll; "it is so full of force, and fire, and energy. But, indeed, the whole city is a monument of Peter's unconquerable energy. Hardly another man then living, probably, would have conceived of building a city on such a site as that of St. Petersburg—a mere marsh as it was when the work began."

"But the amount of human life that was sacrificed in the doing of it was fearful," said Mrs. Driscoll. "It is said that a hundred thousand men died from hunger alone."

"If you touch on the morality of the thing, my dear, I am afraid it will be difficult to defend Peter. And yet to the work he accomplished, after all has been said against it that can be said, Russia chiefly owes the prosperity and power she enjoys to-day."

"Why did he choose this site for his city if it had so many disadvantages?" said Ralph.

"He thought it would provide him with 'a window to look out upon Europe,' as he said; and so no doubt it did, better than any other spot in Russia could have done."

"We saw the little wooden cottage he lived in, Ralph, while the city was being built," said Miss

Ordley. "It will greatly interest you. They show you the boat the Czar built himself, and the sails he used, all in good preservation."

"Yes, I want to see that especially. I was telling Mark about Peter's cottage, but we didn't know whereabouts it was, and we couldn't be bothered with a guide; they are such a nuisance, and there is no stopping them until they are run down like a clock. Some one must show me where it is, soon."

"Anybody will direct you to it. Everybody seems to know a good deal about the great Emperor in Petersburg."

"You have caught up the right way to call the city pretty quickly, Miss Ordley. No one puts the 'Saint' to it here," said Ralph.

"Perhaps they feel that there would be a little irony in so calling the founder of the city, notwithstanding that they worship his memory so," said Mrs. Driscoll.

"He had, perhaps, not a great deal of the saint about him; but you'll allow he had something of the hero—morally, I mean, not physically only. About the last, of course, there can be no two opinions," said Dr. Driscoll. "That was a fine incident in his early life, for example, when he humbled himself to become cabin boy to the rough old Dutch skipper Museh. He worked on board the vessel like a drudge, kindled the galley fires, washed down the decks, waited at table, filled the skipper's pipe, brewed his grog, and from those duties passed through all the stages of a common seaman's

apprenticeship. And he did it all patiently and cheerfully, so that Museh could avow he had never had a better apprentice."

"It must have been at that time that another incident, which is told of Peter, occurred," said Miss Ordley. "A fierce storm struck the vessel. All were in great dread, except Peter. He remained calm and collected, and told the helmsman how to steer. The man resented his interference, and Peter caught the helm from his hands, and began to guide the ship himself. But the pilot seized the helm from Peter again, and kept his post. When the gale was over and the danger past, the helmsman recollected who it really was whom he had so rudely opposed, and falling down before Peter, asked his pardon. The Czar raised the man from his feet, kissed him on the forehead, and said kindly, 'I have nothing to forgive you; I thank you for saving my life, and for the proper rebuke you gave me too.'"

"One of the best points about Peter the Great was that, however hard he made his men work, he always shared in the hardest of it himself," said Ralph. "No wonder they were encouraged and cheered when they found their emperor working side by side with them in the dock-yards."

"And living exactly on the same rough fare—coarse bread and spirits,—singing at his work to keep up the hearts of his comrades, and joining in their rude mirth when the day's work was over," said Dr. Driscoll.

"He was quite fit to do that," said Mrs. Driscoll;

"for he drank as much as the roughest of his men, and at such times his spirit was as wild and boisterous as theirs."

"But he did even more than I have said," continued Dr. Driscoll. "When any of his men fell ill during their work, he nursed them. His was the first hand to pass the spirit-flask to a chilled or a fainting comrade. Among the many things he knew something about was surgery, which he studied at the hospitals; and with his own hands he bound up and set many a poor fellow's leg, broken or hurt in battle."

"He was just a little too fond of trying his surgical skill in the case of his friends, was he not?" said Miss Ordley, smiling.

"Isn't there a story about his having pulled out the wrong tooth for some poor woman?" said Mrs. Driscoll slyly.

"I daresay the emperor's friends found ways of avoiding his experiments before they became at all serious; and about the tooth-drawing story, if it was true, it isn't the first time such little accidents have happened with humbler dentists. There must always be a certain amount of vicarious sacrifice in the progress of science, you know."

"Pleasant thought for the sacrificed. How lightly you doctors talk of these things! About Peter again: will you try to excuse the way he treated his prisoners after the rebellion among the Strelitzes? What butchery did not the Czar commit with his own hand! It is too horrible to read. I don't think

there can be anything in history so fearful,—in comparatively modern history, that is."

"I will not try to justify, in any way, that terrible episode in the emperor's career. The mad fury of a semi-savage then burst forth uncontrolled."

"But perhaps the meanest thing Peter ever did," said Ralph, "was when he was besieging some place—I forget the name—which was held by the Swedes. He dressed his own soldiers in the Swedish uniform, you remember, and then got up a sham fight between them and the rest of his troops. The mock Swedes pretended to be beaten, and the commandant of the town, looking out from the ramparts, and seeing what he thought to be a regiment of his own people retreating, opened the gates to let them in. Peter's soldiers crowded in, and a terrible massacre began. It was a most false deed, for, of course, it was against all the rules of warfare, except those of savages."

"Narva was the name of the town, if I remember rightly," said Dr. Driscoll. "Peter's action in that affair was no doubt unpardonable; but even there the nobler side of his character came out, and showed in a curious way what a strange mixture he was. Do you remember the sequel of the story, Ralph? I ran through a short biography of the Czar, which I found among the books in the saloon of the steamer, to refresh my memory with the facts of his life, so that is how I am rather better posted in his history than you would have found me a fortnight ago, I suspect. Peter, when he saw that his soldiers were bent upon

massacre and robbery, exerted himself to the utmost, and in a great measure successfully, to restrain them, even killing those who persisted in their murderous work. Then he entered the town-hall, where the terrified inhabitants were gathered together in great numbers, laid down his blood-stained sword before the governor, and cried, 'Fear not; I have been shedding, not Swedish, but Russian blood to save you.' That act, at least, was to his credit; and yet on the same occasion his baser nature was once more to reveal itself. When the gallant officer who had so long and bravely defended the town was brought before the Czar, the latter, in an outburst of fury, struck his prisoner in the face,—an act utterly beneath his dignity and station. But in speaking of the fierce outbreaks of passion to which Peter so frequently gave way, it should be remembered that they were probably in part due to physical causes; and looking at the matter from a physician's point of view, I am inclined to regard this as in some degree an excuse for him. He was subject all his life to a kind of fit, at which times he was not wholly responsible for his actions. Altogether, I think that all history has no more remarkable figure than the great Russian Czar—no king or leader among men who was such an extraordinary compound of the barbarian and the hero, of the iron-willed despot, whose word brooked no check, and the self-sacrificing saviour of his country. He had an exceptional work to do of enormous difficulty; and when all the results of his work are considered, I think we need not wonder at

the affection and reverence in which his name is held by the Russian people."

"I think we're getting a little deep," said Ralph. "You've been piling up the agony like a second Macaulay, father. I expect wonders from your book, only, being a medical instead of a historical subject, it won't give you such opportunities. What are we going to do to-morrow?"

"In the morning I think I shall deliver my letter of introduction to Gospodin Pavel Carlovitch Volkoff."

"What is he, papa? You were always going to tell us," asked Meta.

"I can tell you little about him as yet, Meta, but I hope to learn more to-morrow. I know that he is a merchant, and very rich, and the address on the letter tells me that he lives in the Sadovaya Street. Mr. Archer, who gave me the letter, and who was some time in Russia, you are aware, assured me that he was an agreeable man, whom it would be pleasant to know."

"It will be nice if we get to know some pleasant people," said Meta.

The party now rose from the table and adjourned to the drawing-room, except Ralph, who descended to the courtyard to talk with Mark about an early visit to Peter the Great's cottage. He found the old man in conversation with the *dvornik* or house-watchman. The dvornik's duty was to keep a nightly watch over all the tenements in the particular block of buildings to which he was attached. But he had other duties besides this, which rendered his post by no means a

sinecure. As Ralph came up he found Mark putting the dvornik through a pretty minute examination, which Gabriel replied to with good humour, in very tolerable English.

"Who is it pays you?" asked Mark.

"Government chiefly,—we are all servants of the State, we dvorniks. And sometimes we get a na vodka from the people of the house, and something at the New Year. Some of us get a good deal in this way, according to the people."

"And you have plenty o' work besides watching the house, seemingly."

"Ah, by St. Nicholas! yes. We have to look after the yard and keep it tidy, and to clear the roof of snow in winter, and carry wood, and bring water, and we are at the bidding of everybody. At night we must sit at the gate, and keep guard till morning."

"It must be awfully cold sometimes," said Ralph.

"Always in winter, barrin. But chto delat?" (What's to be done?) said Gabriel with a shrug.

"And do ye like the life?" said Mark.

"Da, net (Yes, no). It is as good as another. It varies with the people of the house. Some people are pigs," said Gabriel emphatically.

"It is a hard life, to be sure," he resumed; "but in summer we have our pleasures. I have my little *balaika*, and in the long, warm nights I sing the songs of my native village far away. Then Gabriel is gay. And in the winter—why, we have vodka (corn-brandy) and tea. They keep away the cold. What can one wish?"

"What is a balaika?" asked Ralph.

"What you call in English—net! I know not. There are strings, and we thrum, thrum—so; it is very sweet music;" and Gabriel made a motion with his hands as though playing on a guitar.

"Banjo!" suggested Ralph.

"Panjo! da! perhaps, barrin," said Gabriel.

Here Gabriel recollected some duty which it was time he should attend to.

"I must go," he said, moving away.

Ralph placed a piece of money in his hand.

"Blagodarin (Thanks), sir," said Gabriel, lifting his cap, a grin of satisfaction irradiating his stolid countenance at the unexpected douceur.

"It's but fair to tip him, after we've questioned him so much," said Ralph.

"It's a marvel how people get accustomed wi' things," said Mark. "A galley boy's life's a paradise compared wi' what these dvorniks seem to lead. They've not a minute as they can call their own; and to think o' them sitting out all night in the snow for months together fairly freezes one's blood; and yet ye see they seem content enough, and can sing wi' the best in the summer time. Surely, as King Solomon himself says, 'Contentment is better than fine gold, and a merry heart is far above rubies.'"

That night, as Ralph was going to bed, he heard the tinkle of Gabriel's balaika in the courtyard beneath, and his voice accompanying the music to a wild, monotonous air that fell strangely on Ralph's ear in the stillness of the night.

CHAPTER VI.

NEW FRIENDS.

"All around
Gave proof of opulence, and large estate."

"WELL, papa, about the Volkoffs. Tell us all about them," said Meta at dinner next day.

"One doesn't learn a great deal on a first call upon strangers usually," answered her father.

"It depends something on the strangers," said Meta.

"Well, you shall hear all I have to tell. I did learn more than one generally expects to in such cases; for Gospodin Pavel Carlovitch Volkoff is a frank and genial man, and was, perhaps, all the more so to me, as I was a stranger in the country. The Russians yield to no people in hospitality, they say. Well, the Volkoffs live in a splendid house splendidly furnished. There are only three of a family,—Gospodin Volkoff himself, his wife, and son, a boy of about your age, Ralph. I was shown over a large part of the house, but I am not going to describe it

to you, as you will see it for yourself very soon. We are all invited to dinner there to-morrow,—a family dinner merely; no other guests but ourselves. The Volkoffs thought we might like that best at first, which I assured them we should."

"That will be capital," said Meta; "but I am sorry there is no daughter too."

"It is rather a pity for you, my dear; but I think you will find everything else in the Volkoffs' house except a daughter. If money could have bought one, I daresay that would have been there too."

"At what hour are we invited for?" said Mrs. Driscoll.

"Five; that is the usual dinner-hour here, I find. And, by the way, it is almost certain that we shall be invited to take a siesta for an hour or so after dinner; that is another common Russian custom. So it is not necessary to show any surprise, Master Ralph, if you are expected to take a nap when you have finished your dinner."

"They shall never guess but that I have been accustomed to it from my cradle," answered Ralph.

"Shall we require a carriage? is the house far?" said Mrs. Driscoll.

"It is not far; but they are going to send their carriage for us."

"It is very kind of them," said Mrs. Driscoll.

Pavel Carlovitch Volkoff was a wealthy merchant, of good birth, with extensive country estates. His house in St. Petersburg was similar to many others of his class and social station. It was very large,

and furnished in a fashion that was almost Eastern in its luxuriousness, with a somewhat superabundance of ornament and decoration for English tastes. The principal rooms all opened into one another, and the long vista thus presented had a very rich effect. Few of the things which art has devised for the comfort and gratification of man were absent from these splendidly appointed apartments.

On every side the eye fell upon articles of beauty and value, gathered from all quarters of the globe,—on Persian carpets, and Indian and Chinese silks draping the walls; on fine pictures and marble statues, gilded mirrors and glittering chandeliers; on innumerable choice and costly trifles of vertu and bric-a-brac, and elegant gems of art in every shape. Many of the rooms, instead of being carpeted, were inlaid with oak; and each being of a different pattern, the general effect was exceedingly bright and pleasing.

Before the party sat down to the regular dinner, they partook of the *zakuska,* or little dinner, a sort of appetizer which the Russians, no doubt, deem a beneficial dietetic custom. It consisted of various relishes, such as fresh caviare, smoked salmon, radishes, and cheese. The Driscoll party tasted very sparingly of this refection, not having yet taken kindly to the custom, while Dr. Driscoll was somewhat doubtful of its hygienic soundness.

The dinner was such as Ralph and Meta had never seen before, and hardly even conceived of as being served to so few persons, so varied and elaborate was it.

"Just like the 'Arabian Nights,' for all the world, —like that famous invisible must have seemed to the barber's brother, you know," as Ralph said afterwards.

Of many of the curious and unfamiliar dishes Meta was very chary, and confined herself chiefly to what looked most like English viands; but she was, nevertheless, interested in watching everything, and noticing in what points Russian table customs differed from English. Already her somewhat dormant powers of observation were being quickened by the novelty of her new surroundings. As for Ralph, he displayed a fine courage in facing most of the dishes that were presented to him by the grand-looking waiters; and although he more than once got hold of something that was little more grateful to his unaccustomed palate than was his old friend caviare, he showed a heroic stoicism worthy of an American Indian in concealing the wry face which it would have been a relief to him to make.

The host and hostess performed their duties with easy gracefulness and the most watchful attention to their guests' wants. Gospodin Pavel Carlovitch himself was a tall, slight man in middle life, with fair hair and beard and light eyes, and a pleasant and bright but not very forcible face. His wife was an elegant-looking woman, with refined features, and the same want of definite and forcible expression of any kind which characterized her husband's features. Her manner was bright and winning, and indicative of great good-nature.

Carl, the son, was a slimly-built boy, with fair hair and complexion like his father's, small features, and cheeks with scarce an atom of colour in them. Beside Ralph, he looked like an aspen sapling beside a young oak. He was dressed with a richness and elaborate precision, from his finely worked collar down to his shining, lacquered boots, that fairly astonished Ralph and Meta. He looked, in truth, a complete little dandy, but, nevertheless, looked a good deal of a little gentleman too. On the whole, had there been more of the ordinary schoolboy about his appearance, and less of the embryo man of the world, the impression made on a stranger would have been healthier and pleasanter.

Meta was very silent during dinner, but Ralph was by no means so much awed by the novelty of the situation. Moreover, finding that Carl was so much at his ease, and joined with such quiet self-possession in the general conversation, he deemed it incumbent upon him to support the dignity of British boyhood by endeavouring to appear equally assured and at his ease. On the whole, he succeeded pretty well in this laudable ambition, though the boyish unconventionality of his speech contrasted oddly with Carl's set and precise phrases. The conversation during dinner was, of course, carried on in English, which the Russian family spoke almost as fluently as their guests.

After dinner came an hour's retirement for siesta, as Dr. Driscoll had predicted, but the time was not devoted by Ralph and Meta at least to sleep. When

the party again met in the drawing-room, the host proposed a game of cards for those who were so inclined. "You gentlemen had better make up a whist-table, my dear. There are just the right number; and we ladies will continue our chat," said his wife.

The host and his son, Dr. Driscoll and Ralph, accordingly sat down to a rubber. It never seemed to occur to any of the Volkoffs that Ralph might not play whist. He could play, however, a rough-and-ready, dashing sort of game, that sometimes carried him pretty successfully through a rubber, if luck favoured him. But he was quite overmatched by Carl, who played with the skill and cool judgment of a veteran.

Dr. Driscoll and Carl were partners against Carl's father and Ralph. Carl's face, as he played, was a complete study, and impressed Ralph so deeply that I suspect it interfered with his own game. He looked like a small sphinx for impassiveness, and not the oldest veteran in the game could have been more successful in concealing his inward thoughts. Dr. Driscoll and Carl rose from the table winners, notwithstanding Gospodin Pavel's fine play.

"You play with a fine courage, young sir," said the host, smiling. "But you scorn finesse, I see. It is useful, however, sometimes, when it is not too *fine*. Then it may outwit itself." They now rejoined the ladies, and presently Carl's mother proposed that he should show Ralph and Meta his library and study-room. Carl was very willing to do so, and led his two guests from the room.

Carl's study was quite a little gem in its way. There was a handsome inlaid table in the centre of the room, on which stood a fine nut-wood desk, an inkstand of quaint and fanciful design, flowered *papier-maché* paper-holders, pretty paper-cutters, penholders, and half a dozen other such appointments of a writing-table. Round the walls of the room were rows of book-cases filled with volumes shining in morocco and calf, or gleaming in crimson and gold. Here and there about the room stood little busts and statues in marble and bronze; among the rest, one of Molière and another of Charles Dickens. There were pictures, too, hung between the different book-cases—bright water-colours, and some fine French engravings.

Ralph and Meta regarded everything with interest and no small astonishment. Never had they before seen anything to compare with it in the way of a boy's studying room. They thought that the Queen's sons themselves could not have had a better appointed one.

But when Ralph had sufficiently examined the various objects of interest in the room, he began silently to look around for some of the articles which he was accustomed to connect with every boy's sanctum. He glanced into the corners to discover if there was such a thing as a cricket bat hiding about anywhere, or a fishing-rod, or a foot-ball. He looked round the walls with the vague hope of catching sight of a gun or even a riding-whip. But no traces of any such things could he see anywhere.

"Are you much in this room?" he asked of Carl.

"A good deal. Miss Leslie and myself spent several hours a day at least here."

"Who was Miss Leslie?" asked Meta.

"My governess. She is not with us now. She has been some time gone. Before her I had a French governess."

"Have you always had governesses to teach you, then?" asked Ralph in unconcealed surprise.

"Yes; since I could speak," answered Carl gravely, and apparently not noticing Ralph's astonishment. "But I am not to have any more; I am too old now."

"I should rather think so," Ralph was on the point of ejaculating, but he checked himself.

"What sort of lessons do you do chiefly?" he said; "Latin, and Greek, and Euclid, and the rest?"

"Not much Latin and Greek. German, French, and English authors are those I am most familiar with. Do you admire Molière?"

"No," replied Ralph bluntly; "that is, I don't know much about him. We read 'Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme' with Monsieur Lenoir one half; but the fellows at Oakhurst didn't go in for French much somehow. We had enough to do to manage our Homer and Virgil generally."

"It is different here, you will find," said Carl. "Everybody, that is anybody, knows French and German, and many English. Do you like my bust of Charles Dickens? It is thought good. I wish very much to have one of Scott, and am to get one sent from London. They are my favourite English writers."

"They are capital reading, both of them," said Ralph, feeling that here at least was a point upon which he could be in full sympathy with his host. "But have you no games in Russia? Or perhaps you keep your fishing-rods and things in your bedroom—lots of fellows do in England."

"I don't fish," answered Carl.

"Oh! Then is cricket played in Russia?"

"I don't know; I think not. I never heard of cricket at least, except Charles Dickens's 'Cricket on the Hearth;' but that was not a game."

Ralph laughed, and Meta could not conceal a smile.

"Do you ever shoot, then?" said Ralph. "There should be plenty of shooting in Russia."

"I have not learned to shoot yet, but papa thinks I must soon. Mamma is rather afraid of guns, but no doubt I shall have to learn soon."

"Lots of fellows can shoot in England at our age," said Ralph, "especially country fellows. I learned pretty early myself, because Mark, our man, taught me, and we had friends in the country who had first-rate partridge shooting. But don't fellows play any games at all here?"

"We have 'ball.'"

"Ball! why only girls play that with us. Yours surely can't be the same game."

"I do not know if it is the same. And in the winter we have the 'ice-hills.'"

"What are they?"

"It would take too long to explain now so as to

make you quite understand, but you will see when the winter comes. It is capital fun, and everybody likes it," said Carl, warming up at last into a little gleam of enthusiasm.

"And of course you'll have skating. St. Petersburg should be a famous place for that with the river so close and all these canals."

"Yes, we skate; but we are not so fond of it as of the ice-hills. I think we might go back to the others now."

They returned to the drawing-room, where they found a servant bringing in tea and cake, lemonade, fruits, and confectionary. After partaking of these, the Driscoll party rose to take leave of their host and hostess.

"Have you visited any of the islands yet, Dr. Driscoll?" said Pavel Carlovitch.

"No," answered the doctor.

"They are our chief places of holiday resort within easy range at this season of the year, you know. I have a little place on Yelagin Island, where we often go in summer. Indeed we are only in the city for a few days at present. I think you would like to visit Yelagin; and if so, I propose that we should all go there to-morrow evening, if the day is fine. The good weather is rapidly passing away now, and winter will soon have laid its iron grasp upon our Russian world."

"We shall be very glad to do as you propose," said Dr. Driscoll. "We have no other plans in view for to-morrow."

"Then will you be ready if we call for you in the afternoon? We can dine on the island, and return in the evening. I think you would like to go by water. It will be a little novelty to you, perhaps, and the sail is agreeable."

"Let it be that way then," said Dr. Driscoll; "and thank you for your thoughtfulness. We shall be in readiness for you."

At this moment Carl advanced to the three ladies, and with a grave and somewhat formal little bow, presented each with an ornamented box of choice French sweetmeats; an act of courtesy which was entirely self-suggested.

The night was calm and still as the party drove home. The moon was high in the heavens, and a soft clearness, peculiar to Russian nights at this season of the year, bathed the city in a mystical tender light, which showed it to great advantage. The clear but subdued moonlight glinted on the gilded cupolas of the churches glimmering softly beneath, streamed whitely on the broad marble steps of the Winter Palace, and fell with a golden-white shimmer on the calm expanse of the river. The long lines of stately buildings faded into the distance in a darkling vista. In the hushed stillness that reigned over everything, the great city seemed dreaming, as though a fairy spell held it bound in an eternal sleep. The scene produced a strong impression on the strangers by its dream-like beauty, and all thought they had not yet seen St. Petersburg to such advantage.

CHAPTER VII.

RALPH.

"With him the jest and quip
Tread on the lagging heels of gravity,
And trip him up."

AT breakfast next day the visit to the Russian family was freely discussed.

"They are very nice, are they not, mamma? so hospitable and kind," said Meta.

"Very much so. Mrs. Carlovitch Volkoff seems good-nature itself. I cannot honestly say I think there is much in her. She has charming manners, speaks several languages wonderfully well, and I have no doubt dances beautifully. Beyond that she seems to know next to nothing; and, indeed, admits as much with delightful frankness."

"The accomplishments you have mentioned, my dear, are all that are necessary for a Russian lady, I suspect. The higher education of women has scarcely begun here yet," said Dr. Driscoll.

"A woman may fall a good deal short of the 'higher education,' and yet know a little of what is going on

in the world outside her own town, without being either a politician or a blue."

"St. Petersburg *is* a Russian lady's world; there can be little doubt of that," said Dr. Driscoll.

"They think the gossip of St. Petersburg the murmur of the world, perhaps, to take a slight liberty with the poet's words," said Ralph.

"Well done, Ralph! that isn't so badly remembered for you."

"We got Tennyson pretty well drilled into us at Oakhurst. The doctor knows him personally, I believe, and admires him no end. But perhaps I'm not so prosaic a person as Meta thinks, after all. Perhaps, as Artemus Ward says, I can jerk a poem on occasion as well as another."

"Mr. Volkoff must be very rich," said Miss Ordley. "The house is as handsomely furnished as most noblemen's in England."

"It is as fine as Chatsworth," said Meta.

"As richly furnished, perhaps, but hardly in so good taste," said Mrs. Driscoll.

"Pavel Carlovitch has no doubt great wealth," said Dr. Driscoll. "Though he is of good birth, his family have long been engaged in commerce, if he can be said to be engaged in what he does not give two hours of thought a day to. He leaves almost all the commercial part of his affairs to his partners; but I believe he pays a good deal of attention to the management of his estates.—What do you think of Carl, Ralph?"

"A wonderful specimen of a boy, father. I never

met exactly his equal. But I suppose he's indigenous to the soil, as the geographers say. Question—What are the native products of Russia? Answer—Caviare, Russia leather, droshkies, diamonds, *samovars*, and boys like Carl Pavlovitch."

"I think he is very nice, and ever so much more polite than lots of English boys I have seen," said Meta.

"Oh, of course; he is just the sort of fellow some girls would like, I daresay. I don't deny he's gentlemanly enough, after a sort; but he isn't very manly —you can't say that. In fact he's neither a man nor a boy, nor yet a hobbledehoy. I don't know what he is, except a strong spice of the milksop."

"You mustn't be too hard on him, my boy. Remember that Russian lads have not the same sort of bringing up as English," said Dr. Driscoll.

"Can you believe that up till quite lately he has been taught only by governesses?" said Ralph.—"I beg your pardon, Miss Ordley, but you know yourself it's an odd thing for a fellow of his age to be having a governess," he added hastily.

"I don't feel offended," said Miss Ordley. "I assure you I would not wish to teach boys of his age in England."

"Miss Ordley would sooner be the keeper of the monkey-house in the Zoological," said Meta mischievously.

"Thank you, Meta. I'll recollect I owe you one."

"You should have seen Carl's library and study, papa. It was such a pretty room," said Meta.

"Can you fancy a fellow's diggings without so much as a cricket-bat in it? That is my lord Carl's case. Not a sign of a boy's belongings in any corner of the room. But, after all, what would have been the use of such things to him? He has a hand like a lady's. Mine looked like a bear's paw beside it;—didn't it, Meta? I fancy him playing 'forward' in a football match, or facing old Mason's 'bailers' at Oakhurst, or keeping wicket, or rowing stroke, or— Oh, it is too rich!" And Ralph leaned back in his chair and laughed aloud at the picture floating in imagination before him, until he seemed in imminent danger of being choked by the piece of toast he was swallowing.

"It's very easy laughing at Carl because he can't play all your games, but cricket and rowing are not everything. Carl must be clever. See how well he speaks French and English, and I daresay German too."

"Because he's done nothing else since he could speak at all. He's gone through a course of governesses,—if you'll excuse the expression, Miss Ordley. But he knows nothing of Latin or Greek; and I'd sooner be able to construe a few lines of Homer, or puzzle out an ode of Horace, than know Molière off by heart, any day. One can pick up French or German by going and living a year among the people, but it's a different matter with Greek and Latin."

"The best way is to know them all, Ralph," said his father.

"Oh yes—of course; but every one can't be a

learned blacksmith, father. Talking of German reminds me of a funny thing that happened to Mark and me on Tuesday when we were walking about the city. We sort of lost our way; at least when we wanted to return we weren't quite sure in which direction our house was. A shopman whom I spoke to began to explain to us our whereabouts, and soon a small crowd of gaping people were gathered round us, staring and chattering among themselves. They kept repeating the word 'Germans,' which evidently meant us; and Mark's disgust at being taken for anything but a true-blue Briton would have made you laugh. He was quite at a loss to understand how any one could make such a mistake, and regards it as a striking proof of the ignorance of the Russian common people."

The matter is very easily explained, Ralph," said Miss Ordley. "The people certainly did not intend to insult you; the Russian peasantry call all foreigners, no matter who, Germans."

"Then I shall make a point of informing Mark of that, and I daresay it will soothe his mind considerably, and perhaps modify his opinion about the obtuseness of the people. It is only fair to them to tell him."

"Don't you think Mrs. Volkoff is nice-looking, mamma?" said Meta.

"Yes; she has a pretty, good-natured face."

"A little like the pictures outside sugar-plum boxes," said Ralph. "I haven't seen a great number of good-looking girls in St. Petersburg as yet. They

are clumsy, and have bad complexions. But then it isn't the season, so we must wait a little, I suppose."

"You don't seem likely to leave your heart in Russia, Master Ralph," said Miss Ordley, laughing.

"Not in any case.

Where'er I roam, the wide world through,
To distant Ind, or far Peru
My constant heart shall still be true
To the girl I left behind me"—

sang Ralph.

"May I ask who is the loadstone in England to which your faithful heart ever turns?" said Miss Ordley.

"Don't you know? I have no secret about it. You are all acquainted with the young person.

My fond heart has but one niche
Where you'll reign alone;
If you'll wait till I grow rich,
Sweet Bell Mahone."

"Really, Ralph, you are developing quite a vein of parody," said Dr. Driscoll, as all were laughing at Ralph's impromptu.

"That comes of their having a school magazine at Oakhurst," said Meta. "They put the most dreadful nonsense into it. Ralph will be writing burlesques some day."

"No, I thank you. I'd sooner be a gamekeeper. It's more fun and better pay. Good-bye all till lunch. Mark and I are off for another cruise this morning. We're going to overhaul the Hermitage, and bring up at Peter's Cottage."

"Ralph *is* such a goose sometimes," said Meta, when her brother had left the room.

"It's sheer spirits," said Miss Ordley.

"And there's few better things to start in life with than a good stock of that," said Dr. Driscoll thoughtfully. "Most men find they need all they have. People sober down fast enough now-a-days."

"And Ralph's nonsense is always so harmless," said Miss Ordley, who was great friends with Ralph. "There isn't a better-hearted boy in England—or in Russia either, I venture to say."

"I didn't mean anything against Ralph," said Meta quickly. "I wouldn't wish a better brother, though he does tease sometimes; but I suppose all brothers do that."

"Girls must expect their small crosses like other people. Fathers have little girls, and yet how patient they are!" said Dr. Driscoll.

CHAPTER VIII.

YELAGIN ISLAND.

"Or on a blithesome afternoon in May
To watch the people making holiday."

THE Volkoffs called punctually for the Driscolls at the hour appointed. They had two handsome carriages which easily held the whole party. A short drive brought them to one of the wharves, in front of the summer gardens, whence the little ferry-boats start for the various places of holiday resort on the Neva. The boat in which the party embarked was a slightly-built little craft with a gaily-painted stern, representing a very florid and rather impossible landscape, with figures much too big for the surrounding nature. After a pleasant sail over the calm, bright bosom of the river, Yelagin Island was reached.

The scene that suddenly opened before the eyes of the English strangers was one that not a little surprised them, for they were not prepared to find anything so charming and picturesque in such close proximity to the city. What little they had as yet seen of the rural surroundings of St. Petersburg—

flat, marshy wastes—had impressed them anything but favourably.

But here the landscape was of a very different character. Of natural effects there were indeed none, but art had done its utmost to supply what nature had denied. Shady alleys and groves of birch and fir spread on all sides, interspersed with broad lawns of bright green verdure, which sloped gently down to the banks of the river. Country and suburb were blended in a marvellous manner; for at one moment the Driscolls could almost fancy themselves in the recesses of a natural pine-forest, until the next, when they emerged on a garden brilliant with flower-beds and trim with English-looking gravel-walks, in the midst of which stood a pretty chalet or a model *isba*, or peasant's cottage, built of wood fancifully painted and quaintly ornamented.

The prospect from the Imperial Palace, which is one of the attractions of Yelagin Island for the good people of St. Petersburg, could not fail to charm the English visitors. Their gaze rested on a glowing space of flower-gardens, and passed from thence to the broad, shining bosom of the Neva, its green banks sprinkled with pretty houses peeping forth from a background of darkling pine-woods, while beyond that a glimpse was caught of the city spires gleaming in the afternoon sunlight against a clear blue sky.

Here and there amid the foliage, raised on artificial heights, stood a little Athenian temple, or a Chinese pagoda, or an Oriental kiosk, adding variety and colour to the scene. Everything, to be sure, bore

some trace of artificiality; but so skilfully and successfully had art concealed art, that the general impression left upon the spectator was a bright and pleasing one. Nothing striking or romantic met the view, but much that was lively and charming.

The Volkoffs conducted their friends round all the places of chief attraction, and the party rambled slowly among the glades and flowery lawns, the strangers noting all that was new around them with interested eyes. The numbers of holiday-makers that were taking advantage of what would probably be one of the last fine and warm afternoons in the year, gave great animation and gaiety to the scene. All were in their holiday bravery, and as all ranks were represented in the passing crowd, from the nobleman to the peasant, the variety of costume was considerable.

The Driscolls were struck with the richness and beauty of many of the ladies' toilets, while the novel, quaint, and rather pretty dresses of the peasant women had an interest of a different kind. Many of the men were of handsome appearance, with fine silky beards, fair hair, bright colour, light blue eyes, and regular features. The women of the peasant class wore loose tunics with full sleeves, over which was their national dress, the sarafane, made of bright red or blue cotton, fastened at the shoulders with a band. The matrons wore, for the most part, gaily-coloured handkerchiefs twisted about their heads, while the head-dress of others consisted of a sort of pasteboard coronet, gilded, and ornamented with embroidery

work. The girls wore their hair hanging in long plaits behind.

The costume of the men of the same class was not unpicturesque, consisting of a long, loose-fitting tunic, not unlike the ancient *toga*, fastened round the waist with a bright-coloured girdle, or the short pelisse of the country, lined with sheep-skin, which at this season of the year was turned outside.

An excellent band was playing in its stand amid the trees, and groups of the humbler holiday-makers were standing around, with looks expressive of great gratification.

"You seem a people fond of music," said Dr. Driscoll.

"Distinctly so," answered Pavel Carlovitch. "In the summer, I am glad to say, the people have their tastes in this respect well provided for. There are many open-air concerts free like this."

"How much you have made out of these islands!"

"You may well say that. We are a little proud of them. They were simply pestilential marshes not so long since, and we have literally snatched them from the waters, and converted them, as you see, into pleasant pleasure-grounds for the people."

Gospodin Pavel spoke in a tone of some elation. With a Russian boasting is a national weakness, but it is only fair to admit that Pavel Carlovitch had a right to some feeling of pride in this instance.

"It is pleasing to see how quiet and orderly the people are. I do not remember ever having seen better behaved holiday folk," said Dr. Driscoll.

"When you have seen more of Russia, you will find that it is the same everywhere, sir. Our peasantry are not only orderly and law-loving, but civil and polite, as well to each other as to their superiors. It is inherent in their nature."

Dr. Driscoll did not say how much the orderly conduct, at any rate, of the Russian people might be due to their past history, to the iron despotism under which they had for ages lived, and from which they were only now slowly emerging.

Gospodin Volkoff's own villa on Yelagin Island was a pretty little house, built on the model of a Swiss chalet, and happily placed in respect of its windows commanding a wide view of the surrounding land. Hither the party retired towards the hour of dinner, when the Driscolls found an elegant little repast awaiting them. The chalet was quite retired in the midst of its own grounds; but from the windows of the room in which the party sat the gay and animated scene outside could be easily viewed.

When the dinner was concluded the party sat and watched the passing stream of people. Presently a number of young men and women gathered together, as though about to engage in a dance of some sort.

"They are going to dance the *kapalooshka*, one of our national dances," said Mr. Volkoff.

The dancers formed in two lines, the men on one side, the women on the other, partners facing each other, as in Sir Roger de Coverley with us. Then a youth advanced, and by a series of pantomimic invitations, challenged his partner to dance. The

girl, after some prelude of a like character, accepted the invitation, and the dance began between the two, the rest meanwhile looking on. The pair circled and whirled in turn, taking very small steps, so as scarcely to lift their feet from the ground, constantly swinging their bodies and arms to and fro the while, in an undulating motion not a little graceful and picturesque. The figure concluded by the man advancing and kissing the glowing cheek of his partner, and the two retired to give place to another pair. At any especially adroit or graceful motion of the dancers, the onlookers clapped their hands in approval and applause.

"It is for but a very short space in the year that we can enjoy these out-door pleasures," said Pavel Carlovitch,—"barely three months. A stern climate holds us in its cold grasp for the rest of the year. This very day may perhaps be the last that one can sit out thus, in the open, with enjoyment. These fair islands in two months' time will be half hidden by water and snow; wolves will prowl around these bright gardens, and owls hoot in the eaves of my chalet."

"It is hard to believe it," said Mrs. Driscoll; "still you appear to make the most of what fine weather you have."

"We need to, madam, or life in Russia would be *triste* indeed."

"Fancy wolves ranging at large about these pretty gardens!" said Ralph.

"Then I was not so far wrong after all, Ralph,"

said Meta. "Do you remember my once asking you —it was half in fun, though you took me seriously— whether there were ever any wolves in St. Petersburg? You see they are not so very far off."

"You will never be troubled with any visits from them in Little Morskaia Street, Miss Meta," said Pavel Carlovitch, smiling.

"We should take our friends to visit Peterhoff, mamma," said Carl. "I daresay we may have one or two other fine days yet. Peterhoff is finer than Yelagin. There are cascades, and fountains, and grottoes, and dolphins, nymphs, and Neptunes, and Tritons— "

"And minnows?" said Dr. Driscoll slyly.

"No, sir," answered Carl, slowly and gravely, and not in the least perceiving Dr. Driscoll's fun; while Ralph, Meta, and Miss Ordley were hiding their smiles. "I don't think there are any minnows; but the fountains are thought by the best judges to be hardly inferior to those at Versailles."

"Why, Carl, you are as good as a guide-book," said Dr. Driscoll.

"I never saw the fountains at Versailles," said Ralph, "but I can tell you we have some at the Crystal Palace that can't be easily beaten."

"Do you remember Richie Moniplies, in the 'Fortunes of Nigel,' Ralph, who, when Geordie Heriot mentioned the Thames, indicated that he would think little of the Thames if he had once seen the Nor' Loch and the Water of Leith, the latter a stream one can jump across. Remember the wise re-

buke of Geordie Heriot, how that it was such boasters as Richie that brought reproach on Scotland, and be slow to boast when you are doubtful of your facts. The Crystal Palace fountains are pretty enough, but comparing them with those at Versailles can only bring ridicule upon the speaker."

Ralph was of a robust constitution in regard to bearing little strokes of this sort. This his father understood; and whereas he would have been more careful about administering such rebukes in public in the case of a more sensitive nature, he knew that Ralph would take no harm from it in any way.

The party returned to the city in the gray of the twilight, when a soft, vapoury dampness, peculiar to Russian evenings at this season, had begun to impregnate the air. The Driscolls separated from their entertainers at the gateway of their house.

"We have to thank you for a most pleasant day," said Mrs. Driscoll. "Whether our stay in Russia is to be a prolonged or a short one, we shall not soon forget our first visit to Yelagin Island."

CHAPTER IX.

WORK.

"A stern look, but a gentle heart."—SHAKESPEARE.

IT was a week later that Dr. Driscoll said,—

"Now, Ralph, don't you think it is about time you were settling down to something in the nature of work? Your holidays have this year been of unusual length, and we have now seen all the principal sights in and about Petersburg — the Cathedral, the Hermitage, Peterhoff, the Michael Palace, and the rest of them. Aren't you wearying to get back to some kind of settled occupation?"

"In strict regard to fact I can't say I am," answered Ralph. "But nevertheless I am ready to begin work again whenever any plan is fixed on."

"Then that will be very soon. I have all but finally arranged a plan. I have been talking over the matter with Pavel Carlovitch,* but I did not wish

* In speaking of or to acquaintances, it is the custom in Russia to use, not the Christian and the surname, but the Christian name and the father's, with the inflection *ovitch* in the case of a man, and *ovna* in that of a woman. Thus Ivan Ivanovitch is John the son of John; Maria Ivanovna, Maria the daughter of John.

to say anything to you about it until our sight-seeing was fairly over. He thinks it about time now that Carl was having some other kind of instructor than a governess. I advised him to let his son begin Latin, and he has taken my advice. We have found out a young German who, I think, will suit our purposes very well; and Carl and you are both to be his pupils."

"And are we to go to him?" asked Ralph.

"No; he is to come here, and Carl too. Pavel Carlovitch at once proposed that plan, as he said there would be days in the winter when the weather would be inclement and severe, and it would be easier for him, with his several vehicles and many servants, to send Carl here, than for you to go to his house,—which was thoughtful of him; but Gospodin Volkoff seems only typical of his class in these matters."

"The arrangement will be a very convenient one," said Mrs. Driscoll. "When does the young German begin his duties?"

"That is the only point not yet quite settled. Mr. Rosendorf—that is his name—does not exactly know when he will be free from his present duties. It will be in a few days, however; and he is to let me know."

"What sort is he, father—round-headed, with long yellow hair, and spectacles, and a huge pipe, like all the pictures of German students?"

"He has fair hair, but it isn't long; he also wears spectacles; but when he called on Pavel Carlovitch, at whose house I saw him, he must have left his pipe

behind—at least it wasn't between his lips. His head may be round, but it is certain that it is not empty. If you ever get yours to hold half as much, Master Ralph, I shall be well satisfied. Mr. Rosendorf seems to be one of those marvellous Germans who know everything—in the way of book-knowledge at any rate—for his diplomas and testimonials prove that he is a proficient in Latin, Greek, French, the natural sciences, and mathematics, and a few other things besides. Plenty for you to draw upon, you see."

"I hope he is strict, among his other good qualities," said Meta. "I am sure they can't be at Oakhurst."

"Are you, indeed, *matushka?*" said Ralph, undisturbed.

"What does 'matushka' mean?" asked Meta.

"See how much quicker I am naturally at picking up foreign languages than you. You haven't learned the simplest words yet. Matushka means 'little mother,' 'little old woman.' I mean it for the latter in your case."

"I have picked up some words, though," retorted his sister. "Perhaps you know the Russian for brother? It's *brat;* so take care."

"Meta has the whip-hand of you there," said Dr. Driscoll, laughing.

"I don't think it is a word Meta would often use even as a weapon," said Miss Ordley.

"You don't think she would so far discredit her upbringing, eh, Miss Ordley? But you don't know

how desperate she can be when she's fairly roused. Wild cats aren't a circumstance to her, as the Americans say," said Ralph. "My! she can be snappish, just. I call her *short metre* then."

"Mamma, why *did* you give me a name that people can pun so much on?" said Meta.

"It is your grandmother's, my dear. You couldn't escape," said Ralph. "It is certainly a delicious name for the purposes you mention; but I won't worry your pretty name any more to-day, *barishna*, or you'll blow me up like a gas-meter. I beg pardon; I really didn't mean it.—I suppose I had better overhaul my books and things before Mr. Rosendorf comes."

"It will be as well; and get up some pages of Horace and Virgil too, if you can," said Dr. Driscoll. "Pavel Carlovitch and myself thought that Carl and you should be a mutual assistance to each other, you helping him in his Latin, and he you in modern languages."

"I'm quite willing for that arrangement. Carl is in many things—well, not to put too fine a point on it, as Mr. Micawber says—a muff, an out-and-out muff. But for all that, he is a good deal of a little gentleman—the two things can go together, you know; and I daresay we shall get along well enough."

A few days later the German tutor made his first appearance. Franz Rosendorf was a short, squarely-built, broad-shouldered young man, with pale-blue eyes, and a rather irregular but bright and intelligent face. A small room in the house had been set apart as a study for Ralph and Carl, and furnished accord-

ingly, not in the complete and dainty style of Carl's own study-room, but sufficiently for the purpose. Here the two boys met their tutor daily, and work began for them in earnest.

Franz Rosendorf soon learned the measure of his pupils' capabilities, in the case of each, and proportioned their several studies with a judicious regard to the same. He had no desire to make their work a burden to them, and he had a suspicion that in regard to Carl the process of cramming had already been carried rather too far in certain directions, while in others his education had been, in Franz Rosendorf's opinion, much neglected.

Ralph and Carl, after a little, found that they got on very well with their tutor. He was firm enough with them in requiring that they should at least do their best at whatever piece of work they undertook; but Franz Rosendorf had the gift of inspiring interest in his pupils for their studies, whether it were languages, history, or natural science he was handling, which is the chief secret of all successful teaching. Ralph and Carl perceived so clearly what sympathy their tutor had in their progress, and the real gratification it was to Mr. Rosendorf himself when they did some piece of work especially well, that they would have been much duller-hearted and poorer-spirited boys than they were, had they not, as a rule, done the best they knew to satisfy him. When their tasks were fairly over, Franz Rosendorf at once ceased to be any longer the teacher, and became the companion and friend—good-natured, genial, and hearty.

CHAPTER X.

WINTER DAYS.

"These are the healthful joys, the long delights,
That come with shortening days and lengthening nights."

ANON.

WINTER sets in rapidly in Northern Russia. Of autumn there is little. A few days suffice to strip the trees and shrubs in the gardens of St. Petersburg, and leave them leafless and chill. In a few days the villas and cottages on the islands are deserted; and their owners, the nobles, merchants, and business people—for everybody above the position of tradesman has his country box somewhere in the environs of St. Petersburg—take refuge again in the city, flying before the cold winds that sweep up the broad estuary of the Neva.

The Driscolls began to make the necessary preparations against the winter, like all around them; with an even greater degree of precaution, perhaps, from a slightly exaggerated idea of the climatic rigours that lay before them. Double sashes were fixed in the windows; the stoves were examined to see that they were in good working order; the wood-pile in the

courtyard was built high and broad; and in a word, everything was done which the Driscolls were told was the right thing to do to "garrison the fortress," as Ralph expressively termed it.

The snows began, and soon St. Petersburg was wrapped in a cold mantle of white, which it was not to doff again until the spring. Wheeled carriages of every description were now useless, and gave place to sledges of various degrees of comfort and elegance. In many cases these were formed simply by taking the bodies of the summer vehicles—the droshkies, tarantasses, and the rest—off their wheels, and placing them on slides.

It is not only the interior of their private houses that the Russians must fortify against the severity of the winter. On the first really cold day that the Driscolls were abroad in the streets, they were struck and somewhat amused at beholding all the statues in the squares and public places encased in matting to insure them from being cracked or chipped by the frost. In like manner, the less hardy of the trees in the gardens wore an armour of straw, to enable them to survive until the milder weather should return.

I need hardly say, after this, that Ralph and Meta Driscoll were clad in a considerably more formidable fashion than they had ever been in England. Ralph wore a raccoon cloak, thickly wadded throughout, with a rolling fur collar. His boots reached above the ankle, and were warmly lined with fur.

Meta's walking-jacket had an inner coat of fox-

skin, deliciously soft and warm, with a collar of sable, her muff being also of sable. The same material composed her hat, which was so made that it could be drawn down over her ears at pleasure, so that when its lapels were brought down, and the collar of her jacket drawn up, you could perceive little of her face save the tip of her nose—which, truth compels me to say, was, in very frosty weather, rather red—and her eyes. She wore high, wadded boots similar to her brother's; and altogether both Ralph and she, in their Russian winter costume, presented a comfortable and handsome appearance.

Not less so, you may be sure, was Carl Pavlovitch's winter toilet; for every article of his dress was of the richest material, while there were several small details in his costume which were absent from Ralph's, being more of the nature of ornament than actually necessary to the wearer. In fact, Carl looked, in Ralph's familiar but expressive phrase, "a tremendous little swell;" but it was not entirely his own doing that he was so richly and elaborately dressed. His mother, who, it must be admitted, had not a great deal to engage her energies either mental or bodily, found a pleasure in expending her thought upon her only son; and Carl, who loved his mother dearly, never thought of opposing her wish that he should be dressed thus, knowing that it gratified her.

Severe as the winter in Russia no doubt is, it must not be supposed that it is so severe as to prevent persons in ordinary health from taking frequent exercise in the open air. In St. Petersburg the cold is less

felt than in many places much further south, by reason of the comparative stillness and calmness of the atmosphere. The Driscolls found that they had considerably magnified the rigours of climate which they would have to endure. Though the Neva was coated with ice to the depth of three feet, there were long tracts of calm, when the air was perfectly windless and still; and during such times the English family found that outdoor exercise, provided it was brisk, was not only perfectly possible, but highly exhilarating and enjoyable.

On every favourable day, when there was no snowstorm in progress, and the wind was not too keen, the Driscolls took exercise in the open air, either walking or driving. St. Petersburg now presented a very different aspect from that which it had worn when the English strangers first arrived in the city. Its appearance was in many respects livelier; for everybody who had country houses had come to town for the winter, and the streets, squares, and promenades were more crowded. The scene, too, had even more features of novelty for a stranger than in the summer. The Nevski Perspective was a sight which caused the Driscolls both wonder and admiration. The crowds of sledges, of varied shape and size, many of them extremely handsome in their appointments, with bright-coloured nets fastened to the harness of the horses, and silver bells hanging from the high horse-shoe-shaped collars, tinkling in the frosty air; the richly-dressed ladies occupying the sledges, buried amid piles of rugs and costly furs; the men in their

fashionably-cut, sable-trimmed cloaks, many of them possessing all the handsomeness and grace characteristic of the Russian men in all ranks; the innumerable officers and soldiers in their picturesque uniforms; the varied dresses of the lower ranks and orders, conspicuous among which were the costumes of the nurses—gold, quaintly embroidered head-dresses, brilliant sarafane, and huge necklaces of amber beads; the coachmen, notable by their four-cornered caps of crimson velvet, edged with fur, and their flowing caftans fastened with a red scarf;—all these features, with a score of others, combined to make a scene which the Driscolls thought they had never seen surpassed in the way of street sights.

The first time the emperor and empress were seen driving in their sledge caused, of course, a small excitement among the ladies, but the sight soon became a common one. On every fine day the imperial sledge might be seen gliding along the fashionable promenades, the Nevski Perspective, and the quays of the river, drawn by two or four splendid horses, and eclipsing all other equipages. But much more interesting to Ralph than even the imperial sledge and its august occupants was the sight one day of a real Lapland sledge drawn by two reindeers, which passed rapidly down the Nevski close in the wake of the Czar's sledge itself. But by-and-by this too became a not uncommon sight.

A favourite resort with the ladies, and one to which even Ralph did not disdain sometimes to accompany them, was the Gostinoi Dwor, or chief

bazaar of St. Petersburg, where all the best Russian shops were situated. Every town of considerable size in Russia has its Gostinoi Dwor; and that in the capital is a large square building, surrounded by a colonnade, and containing innumerable shops and emporiums for the sale of every conceivable article, but more especially such as are characteristically Russian. Mrs. Driscoll, Miss Ordley, and Meta found frequent entertainment in traversing the Gostinoi Dwor, and examining the various shops; but, nevertheless, their enjoyment was not unalloyed or without drawbacks, for, whether they were bent on purchase or not, no sooner did they enter the bazaar than they were assailed with such a volley and din of entreaties to buy as at first fairly bewildered them. They were at once, by some means or other, discovered to be English, and—

"What does sudarina wish?" "What may you require, barishna?" assailed them whenever they paused before a shop.

"Here are most lovely laces, ribbons, handkerchiefs, shawls, hats, shoes, slippers, scarves, rings, brooches, bracelets, madam, lady. All fresh from London and Paris, sudarina."

These and a dozen like cries, uttered with inconceivable rapidity, were poured into the ears of the English party, until they became a little accustomed to the ordeal, and learned how to rebut their tormentors.

"It is for all the world like the opening scene in the 'Fortunes of Nigel;' don't you remember, mamma?"

said Ralph, on the first occasion of their visiting the bazaar, when he couldn't help laughing at the perplexed and half-startled looks of his mother, Meta, and Miss Ordley. "The apprentices in old Cheapside just bothered the people exactly in this way: 'What d'ye lack? what d'ye lack?' It beats everything. The Lowther Arcade on a Christmas eve isn't worth mentioning."

The Driscolls very quickly learned that they needed to keep all their wits about them not to be cheated left and right. A Russian dealer deems bargaining an inseparable part of his trade. It seems to give him genuine satisfaction apart from the possible pecuniary gain from the process.

The shops in the bazaar which at first struck the Driscolls most, as being so entirely unlike anything to be seen in the streets of an English city, were those for the sale of *ikons*, pictures of the saints, which were to be purchased at every price, and of all degrees of decoration, some loaded with gold and gems, others ornamented with the flimsiest tinsel, ranging in value from sixty guineas to sixty pence. Mrs. Driscoll was desirous of purchasing one of these saints' pictures as a characteristic souvenir of the place.

"This one—how much?" she asked the shopman.

"Three roubles, madam. St. Nicholas, favourite Russian saint, lady. Very cheap," answered the man.

Mrs. Driscoll had ascertained beforehand what she should give for a picture of the description she held

in her hand, and knew that the price demanded by the dealer was much too high.

"No, I cannot give you three roubles. I will pay you one and a half roubles," she said.

"One and half, one and fifty copecks!" exclaimed the shopman in feigned astonishment. "It is not possible, sudarina; I should lose money by it."

"That is a fair price; I can give no more," said Mrs. Driscoll firmly.

"Horosho (Well), we will say two roubles, madam. St. Nicholas, lady, favourite saint—two roubles."

"No, I cannot give you one copeck more than one and a half roubles. If you cannot let me have the picture at that price, I must go somewhere else."

"Det, det!" (No, no!) exclaimed the shopman excitedly; "one and seventy-five copecks, lady, and you shall have this pretty little St. Nicholas. I am making you a present of it, sudarina; one and seventy-five copecks."

"One and fifty," repeated Mrs. Driscoll quietly, but as firmly as before.

"Horosho! I shall be ruined, madam. But madam is stranger; she shall have it for one rouble and a half."

Mrs. Driscoll laid down the money; and the shopkeeper now took it up with so unexcited and composed a manner that it was perfectly clear that his feelings were not greatly outraged at the price for which he had parted with the article.

"Well done, mamma," said Ralph, as they left the bazaar; "you fairly routed the Philistines this

time. You showed a front like a British line of battle."

"I have no doubt the man has been paid full value for the picture," answered Mrs. Driscoll. "But these Russian dealers must not be judged quite like English salesmen, I suspect. It is greatly a matter of custom with them to haggle and bargain over the most trifling article they sell. I don't think they would feel easy in their consciences unless they went through this preliminary."

The Neva now presented a scene of great variety and animation, and was a continual source of interest to the English family. Streams of sledges and foot-passengers traversed it in all directions, while large courses were set apart for the trotting matches in harness, a favourite sport with the Russians. Skating, too, was now at its height; and Ralph and Meta, who skated themselves averagely well, had an opportunity of witnessing to what perfection the art could be brought. Ralph accorded his unqualified admiration to the skill of the Russian youths on the ice, and none the less so when he found that here at least was an exercise in which Carl Pavlovitch was more than his match. Carl skated with an ease and grace which Ralph's fewer opportunities for practice had not enabled him to reach. But though the three young people were frequently on the ice together, Carl never made the slightest allusion to his manifest superiority over Ralph; a circumstance which was not entirely lost upon the latter, though all he said about it was, one day, to Meta,—

"He *is* a little gentleman at bottom. But I never denied that, did I, Meta?"

Excellent as the skating on the river and canals was, Ralph and Meta found that the Petersburgians did not pursue the amusement for more than a few weeks, when it gave place to "ice-hills," which the Russians deem a much more enthralling pastime. As this sport differs so greatly from any of our winter diversions in England, and is so peculiarly Russian, I must describe it to you in some detail.

Two strong timber platforms, raised some fifty feet from the ground, and having ornamental roofs, are erected opposite each other, a space of several hundred feet separating them. The summit of these stages is reached by a flight of steps; and an inclined plane, composed of large blocks of ice whose surface has been rendered perfectly smooth by water being poured over them, leads at a rapid angle to the level ground. You mount to the stage, enter your little sledge, and glide rapidly down the sloping ice-hill; get out when you have reached the bottom, ascend the opposite platform, and repeat the process. The sledges used for the sport are constructed of steel, slightly made, about three feet in length and one foot in height, and furnished with a cushioned seat. The sledger seats himself with his legs stretched out in front of him, and guides and regulates the motion of his sledge by touching the ice on each side with his hands, which are, of course, guarded with thick gloves.

A novice in the sport of the "ice-hills" is certain

to suffer a few tumbles, and these are sometimes sufficiently rough ones. But to Ralph, inured to such things by the experience of many a hard-fought football match, a rude fall or two was of little moment; and the management of the sledge is really so quickly learned that he was soon in a position to enjoy the "ice-hills" with the best.

The pastime is one in whose delights the ladies have their share, for a gentleman may place a lady on his sledge before him and thus launch forward down the hill; while some ladies become so fearless and so expert that they will kneel or stand erect behind their male companions, and in this attitude perform the whole of the steep descent.

The English family learned to enjoy the ice-hills vastly. Day after day, when Ralph, Carl, and Meta's studies were finished, they repaired, accompanied by Mrs. Driscoll, Miss Ordley, and Franz Rosendorf, to engage in the pastime. Then Franz Rosendorf would take Mrs. Driscoll in his sledge; Ralph, Miss Ordley; and Carl, Meta; and for one or two hours they devoted themselves to the exhilarating sport. Sometimes Dr. Driscoll, escaping from his professional duties at an earlier hour than usual, would make one of the party and share in the fun. The cold of a Russian winter renders active exercise of some description essential, and the "ice-hills" provide one most agreeable means of obtaining this. The exceedingly rapid motion through the still, keen frosty air sends the blood leaping and tingling through every vein, and a warm glow into the cheeks,

which is spread through the whole frame. The English family never failed to return from the ice-hills, each and all, with a sensation of pleasurable exhilaration and wholesome tiredness, and, as Ralph said, "hungry for a square meal."

CHAPTER XI.

WINTER NIGHTS.

"And story, jest, and laughter mingle,
As we sit cosy i' the ingle."

THERE were days when even Ralph did not choose voluntarily to be out of doors—days when the snow fell thick and fast, driving along the streets of the city in whirling, blinding blasts; when no one, in fact, ventured forth from their stove-heated, cold-proof houses save those whose avocations compelled them.

Weather even of this severe description seldom prevented Carl Pavlovitch from coming to the Driscolls; for he had simply to put himself into his covered sledge, which was constructed to shut out all cold, and be driven to the house; while for the coachmen, Russian domestics of this class are almost if not entirely indifferent to the elements. A dvornik will sleep out all night in the snow seated at the gate of the house which it is his duty to watch; the washerwomen stand round holes in the ice and pursue their calling amid singing and

laughter for hours together; and a Russian peasant, after having taken his customary weekly bath of boiling water, will roll himself in the snow outside his cottage; while to the brief season of excessive heat which visits the country in summer, the people are equally impervious.

Finding that there were sure to be days when there was neither fun nor comfort in being out of doors, Ralph Driscoll set himself to devise some means of indoor diversion. The saloon or reception room of the house was much larger than the family required for purposes of hospitality, the Driscolls' circle of acquaintances being as yet, of course, small. At Ralph's suggestion, therefore, and after a little discussion in family conclave, the saloon was emptied of its furniture—which was not a difficult matter, for the apartment was but scantily appointed, as has been already indicated—and converted into a playing room.

Then Ralph, with Mark's assistance, constructed a ball of cork, cloth, and twine, the whole being covered with chamois leather, and stitched like a tennis ball. When finished, it was something between a tennis and a cricket ball; not nearly so hard as either, but about as heavy as the former. Ralph and Mark contemplated the result of their handiwork with considerable satisfaction, and decided that it would very well answer the purpose intended, which was to be nothing else than indoor cricket. Ralph had conceived the idea that it would be a laudable act on his part to teach Carl Pavlo-

vitch cricket, or at least as close an imitation of that game as circumstances would permit.

So the days on which there was no temptation to leave the house were given up to cricket in the saloon. There was little risk of breaking the windows, for Ralph had made his ball of sufficient softness to preclude this. Franz Rosendorf looked on at the first game between his pupils; in which old Mark also took a part, it not being the first time he had batted and bowled to his young master; and on the second occasion expressed the wish to be also included in the sport.

Ralph's scheme turned out quite a success, and far exceeded his expectations. Capital fun it was, I assure you; though the reader who cannot conceive of cricket as separable from wickets, and guards, and a "tented field," may have a difficulty in believing so. Carl learned to like the game wonderfully; and it must be recorded to Ralph's credit that he took great pains and showed much patience in teaching him. He was, of course, awkward enough at first; but still he showed more aptitude for the game, especially for batting, than Ralph had expected. As for Franz Rosendorf, he threw himself into the to him novel sport with great gusto, and got along famously, though more by good luck than management, and in a rough and ready fashion which often violated every strict rule of science.

This sort of pastime was the very best thing in the world for Carl—the element that had been wanting in his education all his life, and which it

had been his misfortune and not his fault to have missed. He had never known the healthy rivalry of school sports. His companionship with Ralph and Meta Driscoll was already rubbing off the precocious gravity and formal precision of his manner, and making him a little more like an average English boy of his age. He had soon learned to like the Driscolls, being naturally of an affectionate disposition. The kindly, unaffected, home-like ways of the English family, and the natural unconstraint of their domestic life, had a great attraction for him, and he soon fell into their social habits.

The saloon was a very spacious room, like all such apartments in Russian houses, and the cricket players got a good long bowling distance. Ralph chalked out a wicket on the wall, and, after a while, he got Carl to stand well up to his chalk stumps, and to play with a tolerably straight bat. Ralph congratulated himself on having brought his bat from England with him, which he had done partly because he did not like to part with an old friend that had served him well in many a long innings, and partly with the idea that some cricket might be got in Russia in the summer season. He never got Franz Rosendorf to bat according to any recognized principles of the game. Franz played entirely after a style of his own, but he was so good-humoured, and joined so heartily in the laugh at his own blunders and awkwardnesses, that his presence added much to the general fun.

"This is not real cricket, you understand," Ralph explained more than once; "that is something very different. It's more what we would call 'little cricket;' but it's not bad fun considering. If we had you at Oakhurst, Carl, I believe you might make not such a bad bat in time. I don't think you would ever be up to much in bowling or fielding; you've begun too late. Look out now! I'm going to give you a ripper this ball. Steady now; play well forward, and don't wink."

Such scraps of comment and advice Ralph interjected amid the play.

"The lad's really main clever wi' his bat, Master Ralph, considering all things," said Mark. "It's a pity he's had an eddication little different from a girl's. His parents couldn't do better, in my humble opinion, than send Master Carl over to England for a year or two. Knowing French and German and English, besides his native tongue—which I take it Russian must be arter all, though the gentlefolks here talk it so little—and being able to talk like a book, so to speak, is all right and proper in their place, and it isn't for an unlearned man like Mark Weatherby to pretend to belittle sech things; but, at the same time, a boy's a boy, and if he misses learning the things as every boy ought to learn—the use o' his hands as well as head, in other words—why, he misses an important part o' his eddication. A lad should be supple and limber if he's to be green and hearty in his age. A leisome sapling makes a hale oak."

The Driscolls did not find the long winter evenings at all dull in their new home, notwithstanding that their visitors were few. Carl, instead of returning home after his studies were over, sometimes stayed over the night with his friends—an arrangement which his parents had no objections to, for they seldom opposed Carl in any of his wishes; and in this case, moreover, they felt sure that he could gain nothing but benefit from his increasing intercourse with the Driscolls. Franz Rosendorf also frequently spent the evening with the family, and then there was always a good deal of music. Being a German, of course Franz played the piano like a *maestro;* and Miss Ordley being also a skilful and refined performer, with a strong love of music, the little circle enjoyed some delightful musical evenings.

To listen to Franz Rosendorf play or sing was no small treat; the ease, vigour, and yet delicate brilliancy of his style, and the range and variety of his *repertoire,* from the masters of his native country to the national and popular airs of all countries—he was able to please every taste, and could delight Mrs. Driscoll and Miss Ordley with Beethoven and Mozart, Bach and Corelli, as easily as he roused Ralph to unbounded admiration, notwithstanding his droll German accent, by the way in which he sang "Tom Bowling," "The Vicar of Bray," and the "Good Rhine Wine." When he played some stirring march or national anthem, the keys leaped beneath his strong touch, but always

with a perfectly harmonious beat and rhythm, while the melody flowed from under his hands in an unbroken stream, filling the room with its rich, deep harmony.

Dr. Driscoll had almost every night free, and the early part of the evening he gave up to his family, retiring later on to his study to occupy himself for a little while with that literary work to which reference has been made. Besides music, there was plenty of talk in the circle, in which Ralph was usually foremost, and cards, and other round games. Carl taught the rest to play *preference*, which, with loto and short whist, is the favourite Russian card game.

When tired of cards, they gathered in a circle, and, while the ladies worked, there was more miscellaneous conversation, and frequently story-telling. It was soon discovered that both Franz Rosendorf and Carl were expert story-tellers. Franz was widely read in the legendary lore in which his country is so rich; while Carl had for his years a quite marvellous acquaintance with the Russian *shaztas* or folk-tales, and had Krilof's fables at his finger-ends. He had as good a memory as Ralph, whose memory was perhaps the strongest of his mental possessions; and, in addition, not a few of the qualities of a good *raconteur*—fluency, self-possession, and a bright and abundant imagination. So interesting were these story-telling evenings, that Dr. Driscoll himself would sometimes be tempted to put off his work in his study to listen to a wild

legend of the Hartz Mountains from Franz Rosendorf; or to Carl, while he told the history of the "Water King and Vasilissa the Wise," or the thrilling story of "The Soldier's Midnight Watch." *

On the occasions when Carl stayed the night with the Driscolls, there was more story-telling between Ralph and him in bed. The two slept in the same bed; for the Driscolls had had new beds set up in all the sleeping apartments, constructed on the liberal English principles in respect to size to which they had been accustomed. Warm and snug beneath their great pile of blankets and quilts, the two boys told each other stories until, overcome at length by the drowsy god, they dropped off to sleep—to pursue, it may be, the course of the interrupted legend in dreamland. In this way the number of stories of Russian mythology, fairy lore, witchcraft, magic, and ghost stories, with which Carl regaled Ralph would have filled a volume; while Ralph occasionally repaid his companion with a description of some phase of English school life or tale of school-boy adventure.

The ripening friendship between the two boys pleased the parents of both.

"They will each get good from one another's companionship, I haven't a doubt," Dr. Driscoll said to his wife. "The fault in Carl's upbringing has clearly been that his father and mother have not been careful 'to keep the boy above his work,' as the elder

* For excellent translations of these stories the reader is referred to Mr. Ralston's "Russian Folk Lore."

Pascal used to say in regard to the education of boys. He is now, for the first time, getting some idea of what an English boy's life is like, and is already benefiting by it. On the other hand, we need not be ashamed to admit that there are points in which Ralph may learn something from the Russian boy."

"I am glad to see as you and Master Carl are taking so kindly to one another, Master Ralph," said Mark Weatherby one day. "I was afraid at first as ye wouldn't, seeing there were so many points o' difference between your bringing up. But you're getting along fine, I can see; and Master Carl, he's picking up things wonderful—wholesome English notions I mean, as'll do him no harm to learn, but contrariwise. And maybe you're learning a few things from him yourself, Master Ralph; besides just bits of French and Russian you understand. As iron sharpeneth iron, you know, so does mixing wi' foreign nations do both sides no harm. Master Carl is a main honest and right-hearted little chap at bottom, I do believe. And then Mr. Rosendorf's one o' the right sort of masters, as even an unlearned man can see. He knows how to give out what's in him, besides being a perfect emporium o' knowledge, as one may say."

"Encyclopædia I think you mean, Mark."

"Maybe it is sicleopædia, sir; though emporium seems to me to convey my meaning pretty well too. And what a musical gift Mr. Rosendorf has too, to be sure! I never heard his equal out o' the Crystal

Palace, and I'm a sort of a judge o' music, in a rough way, as you know, though I say it as shouldn't."

"You can pipe like a thrush, Mark—no flattery. You must sing Mr. Rosendorf a regular sailor's song some day. He'd be delighted, I'm sure."

CHAPTER XII.

THE LAPLAND CAMP.

"Leaving a bitter, grudging clime
That stunts the growth and dwarfs the natural man."

NOVEMBER was past, and Christmas was approaching, when one day at dinner Dr. Driscoll reported a piece of news.

"I suppose none of you can have heard that a party of Laplanders have encamped a little way out of the city? They only arrived yesterday. They were talking of it at the hospital. They have come down from their desolate northern home, partly, I take it, for a spell of our milder weather—for Petersburg appears to a Lapp very much as Nice or Mentone does to us in England—and partly for trade and barter."

"It would be great fun if we could pay them a visit, don't you think?" said Ralph. "I should like to see some real Laplanders in their natural state."

"Well, I thought of that, and I called on the Volkoffs, coming from the hospital, and asked Pavel Carlovitch if a visit to the Lapp camp could be arranged. He at once fell in with the idea in his usual

obliging way, and promises to do more than I myself had in my mind. He is to try and arrange that we go to the Laplanders' camp the day after to-morrow in real Lapland sledges. If he is successful in arranging the matter, which I have little doubt about, the sledges are to be in waiting at his house at noon on Friday."

"That will be capital," said Ralph.

"Do you mean that we are all to go, papa, or only you gentlemen?" said Meta.

"All, of course; there is nothing to prevent ladies going. Some might consider Laplanders savages; but if so, they are of a very mild type."

A note received by Dr. Driscoll next day announced that Gospodin Pavel Carlovitch had arranged everything in regard to the proposed excursion. Friday proved a favourable day. At noon, a clear though feeble sun cast a faint glow over the snow-covered earth, and the sky was blue and clear. A number of sledges, each drawn by two reindeer, were waiting in the yard of the Volkoffs' house. The sledges were most like the half of a small canoe, and were just large enough to hold one person besides the driver.

Each of the party having got into his or her allotted sledge, the little cavalcade set off, creating some stir and excitement among the populace as it passed along the streets and out into the open country. The driver of each sledge held in his hand a pole with which to guide his team, or keep his sledge on its balance, for the frail and slightly-built vehicles jolted a good deal, swinging this way and

that, as they made their way over the snow. They advanced at a quick rate, however, notwithstanding that the drivers, what with steering their teams and keeping the sledges in an upright position, had their hands full. When the party were fairly beyond the bounds of the city, nothing but a vast white plain of snow stretched on all sides around them, a dark clump of pine trees here and there being the only objects that broke the horizon line.

The Lapland encampment was reached in about an hour. It consisted of some half a dozen tents, made of reindeer skins stretched over a frame-work of fir poles fastened together at the top. Each tent contained a numerous family, huddled together in a very miscellaneous fashion—men, women, children, and dogs being so mixed and mingled that it was very difficult to distinguish which were which, the more so by reason of the thick cloud of smoke that filled the hut and enveloped its occupants.

When the eyes of the visitors became a little accustomed to the reek and smoke, they were able to note the distinguishing features of the scene around them. The Laplanders were all dressed alike, and the costume of the women differed hardly at all from that of the men; and as none of the latter had any beards or whiskers, it was a matter of the greatest difficulty to distinguish the males from the females. The dress consisted of a short coat of reindeer skin, fastened round the waist, tanned reindeer trousers, boots of the same material, and peaked caps of blue cloth.

Ralph and Meta were most struck with the diminutive size of the Laplanders, although from their reading they were prepared to see a very small race of people. None of the men exceeded five feet in height. They were small, brown-faced, wiry, weather-beaten looking fellows, with round heads, prominent cheek bones, small bright eyes, and flat noses, by no means handsome, but some of them good-natured and jolly-looking enough.

The women were remarkably like the men, and of an equally homely style of beauty. But there was one object of real loveliness in one of the tents, which proved that even among the poor, little, plain-faced Laplanders something of a higher type of beauty, of fairy-like grace and charm, may occasionally emerge. This was a little girl about five years old, whom the strangers could not sufficiently admire. She had a round cherub-like face, as pretty as a picture by Greuze, with a soft, pink glow in her cheeks, lively, bright, dark-blue eyes, and rich flaxen hair. Her little blue cap, which was trimmed with silver, was set coquettishly on her head in the most piquant manner.

"Did you ever see anything more pretty?" said Mrs. Driscoll.

"Wouldn't she look beautiful among the branches of a Christmas tree?" said Meta.

"Hanging by a gold cord like the other presents?" said Ralph, laughing.

"No, of course not. But doesn't she make you think of Hans Andersen somehow, Miss Ordley? She's just like that—like his stories I mean."

"Or like the skipper's little daughter in Longfellow's poem," said Miss Ordley:—

> 'Blue were her eyes as the fairy flax,
> Her cheeks like the dawn of day,
> And her bosom white as the hawthorn buds
> That ope in the month of May.'"

The Volkoffs had provided a number of little presents for the Laplanders, as well as an ample supply of refreshments, and these were now distributed among them, and received with the liveliest demonstrations of delight. The women put on the trinkets and ribbons at once, their eyes sparkling with pleasure as they arrayed themselves in their new-gotten finery. Cakes and apples and sweetmeats had been brought for the children, who were soon holding a small carnival among themselves—the babies laughing and crowing, which presently set up the dogs, until there was such a babel of sounds in the tents that it became slightly overpowering, and the visitors were driven again into the open air.

Dr. Driscoll and Ralph having a desire to taste reindeer flesh, and the Laplanders' larder having run low, one of the men very willingly consented to catch and kill a reindeer. Taking in his hand a lasso, he skilfully caught by the horns a deer that was standing at some distance off, and then began hauling in the lasso, as a sailor hauls in a rope, until the animal was close by his side. Then with one blow he laid it dead at his feet. A steak was cut from the haunches of the dead animal and boiled, and each of the party tasted a morsel of the flesh

By all it was confessed to be rather tough; a good deal to Ralph's disappointment, who had conceived a high idea of how deer-flesh should taste.

"It isn't so good as kangaroo, by a deal," said Mark Weatherby—who was one of the party—aside to Ralph. "It's not like some o' the same species as you find in North America, Master Ralph. You must go there to learn what a good deer-steak is like—kill it yourself, and eat it over a camp-fire, as I ha' done, and as you'll maybe do some day. There's no knowing, and ye might have worse luck. But there! I'm a good-for-naught old gossip, I doubt, to be putting such notions into your head. Always recollect, Master Ralph, as it's the rolling stones o' this world as never gather moss. It's as true a word as any King Solomon himself wrote, and old Mark Weatherby's a living example o' the same."

The Laplanders have a language of their own; but some of these spoke Russian, and with them Pavel Carlovitch held a conversation, which he interpreted to the Driscolls. Among other things, the Lapps said they had recently been attending the funeral of a very rich man among their people.

"Hundreds and hundreds of deer," said the speaker, making a sweeping circular motion with both arms; "and tobacco! casks full—and brandy! ah! we had as much as ever we could drink. He was the richest man we ever knew."

The last circumstance seemed to be the most convincing proof of all to the Laplanders of their dead friend's great riches.

"They are extremely fond of tobacco and strong drink," said Pavel Carlovitch; "and a tumblerful of brandy has no more effect upon them than a cup of tea would have on any of us."

The Laplanders, being questioned, told various particulars of their mode of life in their far Northern home with much good-nature.

"For weeks together, in the winter, we cannot see to kill a bird with a gun at a hundred yards," one said.

"Our reindeer are our chief care," said an old man, who seemed to be the patriarch of the tribe. "They are our companions, our best friends, as well as our wealth. We reckon a man rich according as he has deer. We follow our deer, and wander as they guide us, for they know best where to find the pasture, and where the snow is least deep. They supply us with all our needs. But still we must kill them in the autumn, for their skins bring much money, and we must have tobacco. We can get four or five shillings for a good skin, and the horns we boil down to make glue."

The Laplanders produced some reindeer cheese, and this the visitors found much more palatable than the flesh of the animal. It had the appearance of cream-cheese, and a similar flavour. "It sells at a high price," said Pavel Carlovitch; "you will pay a rouble or more for a couple of pounds. The Laplanders do not greatly care for selling it, for it forms a chief part of their diet. They take it with their coffee, of which they are as fond as they are of brandy and tobacco."

It was now time that the party should think of returning, so the reindeer were re-harnessed to the sledges. Before taking final leave of the Lapps, Pavel Carlovitch made each family a present of a packet of tobacco, at the sight of which the beady, deep-set eyes literally sparkled fire. The little camp set up a shout and hurrah as the sledges drove away.

"Poor people! what a small thing makes them merry and happy!" said Mrs. Driscoll.

As the reindeer drew the sledges swiftly over the snow, it was curious to hear the sharp clapping sound made by their hoofs, which, being split in the middle, open and close again each time they strike the ground. The noise was like the musical click-clack of the castanets in a Spanish *bolero*, and made an accompaniment to the voices of the party as they spoke to each other from the sledges. The short winter day was rapidly darkening when the Driscolls reached their house; and as it had grown very cold during the last hour, all were glad to gather until dinner around the stove. Nevertheless, the opinion was unanimous that the visit to the Lapp encampment had been well worth the making.

"We stayed just about long enough though," said Ralph. "The—the—odours of a Lapp camp are not just those of Araby the blest. On the whole, I think Lapps may be described as more picturesque than cleanly. Really by far the cleanest thing about them are the reindeer."

"Except the little girl, Ralph. What a dear little thing she was!" said Meta.

"I don't think I ever saw a prettier child anywhere," said Mrs. Driscoll.

"Perhaps she was a changeling—not a Lapp child at all," suggested Ralph maliciously. "I don't believe such a little golden pippin could have grown on such a crab-tree."

"What a shame! I believe she was a real Lapp little girl, or her mother would never have been so proud and fond of her as she seemed to be," said Meta.

"These Lapps are said to be a gentle and even reverent people," said Dr. Driscoll, "notwithstanding that their ideas of personal cleanliness are peculiar if judged by English standards, and despite their love of strong waters, both of which characteristics are greatly due to circumstances. They have pastors and missionaries settled among them, and many of them are baptized and receive the sacrament. They are capable of great kindness. Pavel Carlovitch told me a story of a friend of his who was once travelling in Lapland for scientific objects. He fell ill during his tour, when he was nursed and tended by a party of Laplanders with a care and gentleness which, he declared, could not have been surpassed by the most civilized people in Europe. His illness lasted a long time; but the attention which he received never remitted for a day, until he was finally restored to health and strength. Of course, he rewarded his preservers suitably, but such acts, he felt, were beyond material reward; while the Laplanders could not have acted as they did simply from the ex-

pectation of recompense, for there was nothing about the traveller to suggest that he was able to make them an equivalent return for their services."

"Well done, little Lapp! After all, you're not half so small as you look. Your hearts are bigger than your legs, anyhow," said Ralph.

CHAPTER XIII.

A RUSSIAN NEW YEAR.

"They loved to greet the coming year,
Like a new king, with large and liberal cheer."

CHRISTMAS day was spent by Carl Pavlovitch with the Driscolls, who did their best to observe the season as they would have done had they been in England, though such merry-making as they held was necessarily of a more limited and quieter character. In most parts of Russia Christmas is not observed to the same extent as the New Year and Easter, which are the two great festivals in the Russian calendar. The Driscolls were invited to spend New Year's night with the Volkoffs, who kept the season in the customary hospitable and profuse manner with which wealthy Russian families celebrate the birth of the New Year.

On the morning of New Year's day the Driscolls attended high mass in the Kazane Cathedral. The scene was one which could not fail to impress a stranger by its gorgeous, almost barbaric magnificence. The spaciousness of the church itself, the

fine pillars of marble with their richly gilt capitals, the tesselated pavements, the picture-hidden walls, the glittering suspended lamps with their hundreds of lighted tapers, the venerable figure of the metropolitan, or high priest of St. Petersburg, officiating at the altar, the rich dresses of the clergy, the sweet voices of the choristers as they sang the responses, and filled the echoing aisles with a softly-swelling flood of harmony, all tended to produce, for the moment, a solemnizing effect upon the minds of the onlookers, even in the case of those whose creed differed from that of the Church whose ornate and elaborate ritual they were witnessing. The Driscolls made their way out of the cathedral through a crowd of begging monks and nuns, who thronged the steps of the church, and whose appearance was a striking contrast to the wealth and magnificence within. It was a relief to escape from the close atmosphere of the church, thick with smoke and heavy with incense, into the fresh cold air.

"What a wonderful sight!" said Meta, who had never beheld anything like it before. "What a splendid show it is! But how can people like to go to a church like that every Sunday? It quite dazzles one's eyes, and has made my head ache. I can't understand how any one can like it, for all the beautiful singing, which really was beautiful."

"It is certainly a little overpowering; but I suppose they are used to that part of it," said Miss Ordley.

"How earnest and devout some of the worshippers

seemed! you must have all noticed that," said Dr. Driscoll. "It must always be said for the Roman Catholic Church, and the same applies to the Greek Church, that its true adherents are as earnest in their devotions as those of any other creed in the world. There was a poor little peasant girl kneeling before one of the icons in there, down whose cheeks the tears were rolling so heavy and fast that she must hardly have been able to see the picture for weeping. No one could doubt the depth and sincerity of her worship at any rate."

"But some of these people must be terribly ignorant, father," said Ralph. "The way the moujiks bow down and prostrate themselves before their favourite icons really comes to little more than idol-worship—like a North American Indian when he worships an image of the Great Spirit."

"Something higher than that probably, Ralph, if you knew the whole matter more thoroughly. Many of those worshippers who are now crowding the cathedral are no doubt sadly ignorant, and it is because they are so that many things in their worship have such an attraction for and power over them. Much of their creed and ritual which does not commend itself to us may be merely preparatory to a simpler and higher religion, which they may possibly only arrive at slowly and by degrees. Men do not become educated in any direction all at once. That has never been God's way of raising the world, as all history proves."

"That is the gist o' the matter in a nutshell, sir,"

said Mark Weatherby, who, the reader will by this time have gathered, was privileged, from his long services in the family and his strong attachment to all its members, to speak his thoughts in their presence with considerable freedom, which privilege he had never been known to abuse by any approach to undue familiarity. "Many o' these poor people act up to their lights, I do believe, and the wisest can do no more. Maybe they'll come by-and-by to a clearer knowledge o' things. They're little more'n groping yet a many of them, I doubt; but they'll walk in the clear daylight when the time comes. Things won't hasten themselves in this world for our bidding, as you say, sir; and afore we had the compass, men had to steer by the stars, and the Russians, I take it, are about at that stage o' religion now, so to say. We need to be a deal patienter with other people's religion than we often are. You can't look to make an archbishop o' Cantybury out of a Russian moujik in a day."

The rest laughed, and the characteristic dry twinkle of a smile crossed the old man's seamy face at his last allusion.

There was a large family party at dinner at the Volkoffs', and after dinner more guests arrived. The after-dinner siesta which the household frequently indulged in was foregone on this occasion; for the programme of festivities to be got through during the evening was a lengthy one; besides which there were many young people among the party, who were in an exceptionally wakeful and expectant condition which could not have been easily subdued.

The fun of the evening began with dancing, in which all the young people and a number of the elders joined. Many of the former wore fancy dresses, Carl Pavlovitch himself being arrayed in an English costume of the reign of the Georges,—powdered hair, velvet coat with large lapelled pockets, deep waistcoat, lace cuffs and frills, silver-buckled shoes, and sword. Very handsome he looked,—his slight, graceful figure showing off the rich dress, which was of the finest material and complete in every detail, to full advantage.

Meta Driscoll wore a very simple but pretty dress, almost all of white, representing "Morning;" while Ralph was costumed as Robin Hood, in doublet of "forest green," low-crowned cap and feather, broad buff-coloured leathern belt, from which hung hunting-knife and quiver, and at his back his long bow. There were many other very pretty and picturesque dresses,—knights and courtiers, burghers and peasants, princesses and shepherdesses of every country and period; and these, as they mingled in the dance, made a wonderfully bright and effective tableau.

Carl Pavlovitch chose Meta as his partner for the opening dance, a French quadrille; and after that the dancing, being now fairly set a-going, was kept up with unflagging vigour. A small stringed-band occupied a little gallery embowered in evergreens at one end of the long saloon, and played the newest and most popular dances with as much precision as spirit, winning the complete approval of even so thorough a judge as Franz Rosendorf.

Before the programme of dances was at an end, Carl and four of his friends performed a minuet, while the rest of the company sat and looked on; and a very pleasing and pretty sight it was to see the young performers pacing through the slow but graceful old-fashioned dance, in which Carl especially acquitted himself to perfection. Nothing could have surpassed the grave courtliness of the boy's bearing as he figured, paced, and bowed; and although to the eyes of the English family the whole scene was a somewhat odd one, recalling to their minds visions of a long-past time in England, it could not but attract and please them. Carl Pavlovitch indeed felt himself for the time not so much a boy merely as the heir of his father's house, on whom it devolved to support his father in the hospitalities of the evening.

The dancing over, the guests were led to an apartment at the back of the house and overlooking the courtyard. Here a surprise awaited them in the shape of an unexpected and beautiful sight. On looking out of the broad windows into the court beneath, the guests beheld a little palace of ice, in every window of which sparkled lights of varied colours, whose radiance the ice mirrored and reflected in a thousand rainbow-tinted hues, glittering, sparkling, and shooting out innumerable stars into the frosty night. The sight was a complete surprise to the assembled company, as no word had got abroad that this was among the entertainments which Pavel Carlovitch had provided for his guests. Only Ralph of all those present had had a hint from Carl of

the building of the ice-palace, which had proved a grand success, and seemed to the younger part of the company the perfect realization of fairy-land.

"Here is your Hans Andersen now, if you like," said Ralph aside to Meta. "All you want is the little Lapp girl to pop into her palace, and you have your ice-maiden and everything complete. I am beginning to forget Andersen, I must admit, but I know he has something about an ice-palace and an ice-maiden too."

"It is lovely," said Meta, lost in admiration of the glittering ice-palace. "What an immense trouble it must have been building it!"

"The Russians understand all about these things, you know," answered Ralph with a slightly superior air.

After the company had sufficiently satisfied themselves with gazing on the ice-palace, they were ushered into another large and brilliantly-lighted room, at one end of which stood a magnificent Christmas-tree, the item of all others in the evening's programme which had the chiefest interest for at least the younger portion of the guests.

The tree was a splendid example of what a Christmas-tree should be,—a handsome fir, loaded until its boughs drooped with ornaments and decorations of every description—red, blue, and green lights, wreaths and festoons of gold and silver paper, glittering globes suspended amid the dark-green branches flashing back the lights from the tapers. The whole seemed one blaze of light and colour crowned by a figure in

wax of a golden-haired lady waving a star-tipped wand, at whose magic touch the beautiful tree seemed to have suddenly sprung into being.

A universal exclamation of delight and admiration broke from the company, old and young, at the sight of the tree; and then the distribution of the gifts began. This was done chiefly by Carl, who performed his part with much grace and ease, and as though the duty came naturally to him. Everybody got a handsome and appropriate present, the individual tastes of each being suited so happily as almost to create the impression that the fairy guardian of the tree had really exercised her supernatural power in the arrangements.

Ralph's present was a handsome walnut-wood writing-desk, and Meta's a pretty brooch set in turquoise. Besides the principal gifts, there were a large number of smaller ones taken from the tree itself and distributed among the guests, several falling to the share of each. The apples and oranges which had served to decorate the tree turned out to be imitations of those fruits, which, when you touched a spring, opened and revealed hidden in the heart some little trinket or knick-knack—a silver thimble for a lady, or an ivory scarf-ring for a gentleman. In the same way real walnuts and little fir-cones split in half as you pressed them, and were discovered to be filled with chocolate or some other variety of sweetmeat.

After the distribution of the gifts from the Christmas-tree, supper was announced. Such a supper

Ralph and Meta had never before beheld, although they had been at some large Christmas gatherings in England. The elder people sat at one table and the younger at another, and each table was furnished in an exactly similar manner to the other.

It would take too long to describe the many beautiful and ingenious devices by which the tables were decorated. There were little castles, French châteaux, and Chinese temples of frosted sugar; little islands of chocolate, set with tiny palm and cocoa-nut trees, and girdled with a coral reef of white almond rock; miniature palaces in sponge-cake, hollow, and actually illuminated with twinkling tapers;—these and a score of other devices as quaint and clever as they were pretty interested and delighted the guests as they sat at supper, which concluded with a little speech from Pavel Carlovitch, in which he wished all his friends assembled every happiness and prosperity during the coming year.

CHAPTER XIV.

BELOW STAIRS.

"The mirth and fun grew fast and furious."—BURNS.

THE company began to separate soon after supper. Although so much had been gone through during the evening, owing to the early hour at which the guests had met, the night was still comparatively young.

"We should be happy if your party could remain a little longer with us, Dr. Driscoll," the host said. "It is early yet; and as you are strangers to many of our Russian customs, perhaps it would interest you to see the finish of our New Year's festival, or at least a little of it. The duties of my wife and myself, and, I may add, of Carl, are not quite over yet. We have now to visit the servants' hall, where I think we shall find some fine merry-making already begun."

"We try to make our domestics as happy and light-hearted as we can on these occasions," said Mrs. Volkoff. "We give them a tree nearly as good as the one you have seen, though of course the gifts are of a somewhat different kind."

"And at our country house at this moment the

same observance of the season is, I trust, being kept up," said Pavel Carlovitch, with a slight air of satisfaction and pride. "Our peasantry have not too much mirth and ease in their lives. A hard and rigorous climate presses on them for a long part of the year. There are few opportunities for pastime and social amusements. We have not the gifts of nature which Southern peoples enjoy, you will understand. Therefore our people cannot have the same light-hearted gaiety that comes with the sunshine. And so I think it is the duty of landed proprietors like myself to do all in their power to make their people happy when they can; and you shall see that we *can* be innocently mirthful when we get the chance. Vodka is not the Russian peasant's only source of happiness, as our detractors maliciously affirm."

The Driscolls were very willing to stay a little longer and witness the proceedings in the servants' hall. Pavel Carlovitch accordingly led the way to that part of the house reserved for the domestics. The Driscolls found a large, oaken-floored room filled with men and women; for the servants of the family had invited their friends to share with them in the evening's festivities. At one end of the room stood a glittering Christmas-tree, very little less grand than that which has already been described, and at the other a long narrow table loaded with good things.

At the entrance of the master and mistress of the house, a slight silence fell upon the room, which had up to this been echoing with talk and laughter; the

servants ranged themselves in a line, and advanced towards Pavel Carlovitch and his wife and son. Each man and woman, as he or she passed, made a low bow to the master and mistress and to Carl; but there were several old people among the domestics, and these, in place of bowing, raised the hand of their master, his wife, and son, and kissed it.

"You see it is a relic of the old times," said Pavel Carlovitch to his guests. "These good people would one and all kiss our hands, if we so wished; yes, and some of them even the skirts of our dresses. But I have long done away with that old custom; it is a little too feudal for my tastes altogether. If my people bow to me, it is enough; and I do the same when I meet them in the streets. But these old people, you understand, they cannot be got to abandon the old fashion entirely. They were too old when the emancipation of the serfs took place to be able to give up all the ancient ways. They would very willingly kiss our dresses, but we make a compromise with them and give them our hands, and it pleases them. Now, I have made you a rather long explanation; but I thought you might be surprised, especially you young people, at our hands being kissed, as only your Queen's would be in England."

After that, champagne was served round to everybody, and the health of the family was drunk.

"It is not extravagance that I give my servants champagne to drink our healths in," said Pavel Carlovitch, smiling. "We use it on all high days and holidays, and the wedding is a poor one indeed, even

among the peasantry, where the toasts are not drunk in champagne."

The distribution of the Christmas gifts now followed. As in the case of the Volkoffs' own guests and friends, the servants' presents were all valuable and appropriate, consisting chiefly of warm and handsome clothing, or articles of household use for the married people; though some of the younger women received also knick-knacks of personal adornment and finery.

Old Mark Weatherby was among the invited guests, and he was not forgotten in the general distribution of gifts. It had cost the hospitable and thoughtful host and hostess some little mental exercise to determine what would be a suitable souvenir for the old sailor; but at length, on Carl's suggestion, who was by this time on terms of familiar intercourse with Mark, they had chosen a handsome illustrated Bible, with which Mark was vastly pleased.

The master and mistress and their guests remained to see the dancing well begun.

"I daresay you have seen as much as you care to now," said Pavel Carlovitch to his friends. "The merry-making here will be kept up till a late hour, long after my wife and I shall have retired."

"Papa," said Carl, "I think Ralph and I will stay a little longer. Mark Weatherby and Ralph can easily go home together afterwards, so that Dr. and Mrs. Driscoll need not wait. Ralph would like to see a little more of the fun, I am sure."

Ralph said that he certainly would; and so it was

agreed that the rest of the Driscoll party should return home, and that he and Mark should follow a little later. Pavel Carlovitch and Mrs. Volkoff withdrew with their guests, who presently took their leave.

"We have had such a delightful party, dear Mrs. Volkoff," said Meta earnestly, as she kissed her hostess.

"I am so glad to hear you say so, dear," replied Mrs. Volkoff, returning Meta's kiss. "It cannot be a greater pleasure for our friends to accept our endeavours to entertain them than it is for us to make them. It will be a great gladness to my husband and myself if you will carry back with you to England, when you return to your dear native land, a pleasant memory of Russian hospitality."

"I believe Mrs. Volkoff is as kind-hearted a woman as any in England," said Meta, when they were all home again.

"In Russia, don't you mean?" said her father, laughing.

"No; I meant England, papa."

"And why should she not be?"

"You know what I mean, papa. People always think their own country-people best, you know, in everything."

"The Russians are certainly our equals in hospitality," said Dr. Driscoll.

"And in politeness," said Mrs. Driscoll. "I cannot imagine Mrs. Volkoff saying an impolite or ill-natured thing, and it is a point in which the Russian ladies

generally are undoubtedly strong. I do not say that they always mean all their words express, but they must not be understood literally, and the wish to please their friends, which is at the bottom of their compliments, is at least an amiable one."

Meanwhile the fun in the servants' hall of the Volkoffs' mansion was reaching a height, and Ralph was much entertained by the novelty of many of the proceedings. Some of the dances were quite new to him, and admirably executed he thought most of them were. There were general dances, like English country dances, in which all joined, and solo dances by the more expert and graceful of the performers; and now and then a *pas-de-deux*, in which two dancers, a male and female, executed a species of ballet, descriptive of rural life—usually a rustic courtship, all the stages of which were portrayed in suggestive pantomime with great skill and dramatic expression.

Games intervened between the dances. One of these reminded Ralph of blind-man's-buff, while another resembled the homely country game of drop-the-handkerchief, or kiss-in-the-ring; by which harmless diversion Ralph had too often witnessed English village sports to feel at all scandalized. But there were others of the games with which he was quite unfamiliar; chief among which was one whereby the players sought to peep into futurity, and learn the future that awaited them in the coming years. Two large bowls filled with water were placed on a table, one for the men and the other for the women.

Slips of paper were fixed all round the rim of the bowls, each bearing the name of one of the fortune-triers. A lighted taper was then floated on the water; and as it swam slowly round and round the bowl, it at last set fire to one of the slips of paper. The youth or maid whose name was thus first burned was destined to be married before the year ended.

There was singing as well as dancing, and Ralph was enabled to form a good idea of what the Russian national melodies, the popular songs of the people, were like. Many of them were pleasing and melodious, though, being mostly set in a minor key, there was a prevailing note of sadness in the greater number of the airs. Others were quaint and wild, rising and falling in an irregular and varying rhythm, as though the singers were improvising the music, as they actually did sometimes as regards the words.

"I think it's about time as we were thinking of making homewards now, Master Ralph," said Mark after a time.

"Very well, I'm ready; we've seen as much as is to be seen, I daresay," answered Ralph. "But before we go, do you know what I think you might do, Mark? You might dance a sailor's hornpipe, and show them what we can do in that line. I'm sure they would be delighted."

"I'm a'most getting too stiff for dancing, Master Ralph. I can't do a hornpipe proper justice, as I once might ha' done," said Mark modestly.

"You manage it first-rate still, Mark."

"There's no music. None o' them can play a hornpipe on these balaikas o' theirs, I doubt."

"We'll manage that; I'll whistle you a hornpipe. I'll just tell Carl."

Carl thought Ralph's idea a capital one; and presently a space was cleared for Mark in the middle of the room. A pause in the hum of talk followed, as Mark took up his position on the floor, squared his shoulders, placed his hands on his hips, and, as Ralph started the tune, began his dance.

Mark had been the most expert of hornpipe dancers in his day, and still retained much of his youthful skill and agility. Now that he had undertaken the task, he was resolved to do his best, to show his audience what an English hornpipe was really like; and he threw an astonishing amount of spirit and vigour into his performance, footing and shuffling, reeling and twirling, as though he had renewed for the moment all the energy and fire of his prime. Ralph quickened the time, and Mark responded gallantly; and at last wound up his dance with a grand double cut and shuffle in the highest style of art.

The audience were fairly astonished, and to an equal degree delighted. They had never probably witnessed anything of an exactly similar kind before, and the applause was loud and hearty. The Russians as a nation are remarkably susceptible to all kinds of rhythmic sounds and motions, delighting greatly in both dance and song. So demonstrative was the approbation which followed Mark's performance, that Ralph said,—

"I expect it comes to an *encore*, Mark; and I must say I never saw you do a hornpipe better."

"I can't give it to 'em again, sir. I put my best foot foremost, I am free to admit; but the time's gone by when I can just foot it for a whole night and know no difference."

"They would like to have another taste of your powers though, Mark, I feel sure. Couldn't you sing something? It is too much to ask you to do another hornpipe; but you might perhaps give them a verse or two of 'Twas in the Good Ship *Rover*,' or 'All in the Downs,' or something."

"I'm quite willing to bear a hand in the fun, Master Ralph; for I've allays held as harmless mirth doeth good like a medicine, as the Book says; and if you think they'd care to hear my hoarse old pipe, I'm ready to do my best. I think I'll try them with a nigger song. They're simple sort o' airs, mostly, as are easily understood at first hearing."

"Yes, that will do capitally."

Mark asked one of the men to lend him his balaika, or triangular guitar, and, seating himself, began to strum a prelude. Mark had cruised for some years among the various ports of the Southern States of America, and during that time had picked up many of the songs common among the negroes. He had also learned to strum upon the banjo, having a quick and correct ear. He found that the Russian balaika sufficiently resembled a banjo as that an acquaintance with the one instrument enabled him to play on the other with enough facility to accompany his singing.

After playing a few bars of the music, Mark began the following song:—

" On de banks ob de broad Mississippi,
'Mid de fields ob de cotton and de corn,
On old Massa Holt's plantation,
At an early age dis darky lad was born.
You couldn't find 'long all Mississippi
A happier lot o' niggers dan we,
For massa he was kind to ebery soul—
We was jes' like one big family.
'Way Souf, 'way Souf,
Where de Mississippi flows to de sea.

" Oh, de land flowed wid milk and wid honey,
Dere was punkin-squash for man and for chile;
For all dat de darky got to do, sar,
Was to tickle de earf and it smile,
And missis was a lady like a queen,
So beautiful you neber did see;
And she sing to de darkies dat sweet
De bobolink stop whistling on de tree.
'Way Souf, 'way Souf,
Where de Mississippi flows to de sea.

" Oh, round about de old log cabins
Dere was melody and mirf ebery night;
And you heard ebery banjo tinkling,
Making music in de soft starlight.
Ebery darky serenading to his love,
All underneaf de broad banana tree;
And de blessed little chillun tearing round,
A-dancing all so happy and so free.
'Way Souf, 'way Souf,
Where de Mississippi flows to de sea.

" But gone are de massa and de missis,
Dey hab crossed de broad bright riber
Dat is broader dan de wide Mississippi,
And de old place am gone for eber.
And de niggers are scattered up and down
Fru de land from sea to sea;

For de great war is ober and past,
And de black folk dey all is free.
'Way Souf, 'way Souf,
Where de Mississippi flows to de sea.

"Oh, it's good dat de nigger should hab freedom,
For his soul's jes' as white as another;
And you can't sell him now like cotton,
And you can't steal de chile from his mother.
But massa was de real old sort,
And he treated all his people kind and free;
So dis darky can't help drop a tear
Where he sleeps 'neaf de broad banana tree.
'Way Souf, 'way Souf,
Where de Mississippi flows to de sea."

Mark knew how to render a negro song in the appropriate manner. During long sea-voyages he had often taken part in the minstrel performances got up among the passengers and sailors for the general entertainment of the ship. Among his forecastle mates he had, in his younger days, been thought to excel as an amateur darky, and even yet his hand and voice had not quite forgotten their old cunning. His voice, to be sure, was not what it once was in strength and freshness, but it was still harmonious; and he still remembered how to give the proper accent to the dialect of the song, and to add to its dramatic effect by the little tricks of speech and gesture usual in this class of minstrelsy.

The audience received Mark's song with every manifestation of pleasure, notwithstanding their surprise and wonder at the nature of the performance, which was to them a complete novelty. Even such of them as understood a little English—which one or

two of the upper servants did—were entirely baffled by the dialect of the song; but the inability of the audience to comprehend the exact meaning of Mark's performance did not prevent them from appreciating the simple music, which was not unlike in character their own native melodies. Much clapping of hands greeted the conclusion of the song; and then the butler of the Volkoff household, advancing to Mark, offered him a brimming glass of champagne, which the old man, with a sidelong comprehensive nod to the room in general, drank.

"And now, Master Ralph, we'll be off," he said.

Carl, Ralph, and Mark now left the room, all the servants bowing to the two boys as they retired. One of Mr. Volkoff's own tarentasses was soon ready to convey Ralph and Mark home. When they reached the house they found everybody gone to bed, except Gabriel the dvornik, and the servant who admitted them. Looking at his watch Ralph found that it was well on to two o'clock.

No one was very early up next morning, and Ralph was the last of all to appear at breakfast.

"What a tremendously jolly evening it was!" said Ralph.

"Please tell us what went on after we left, Ralph," said Meta; and then Ralph went pretty minutely into particulars.

"You should have seen Mark," he said in conclusion; "he fairly astonished the natives, I assure you. I don't know which they were most astonished at or admired most, the hornpipe or the song—perhaps

they were most pleased with the last. You all know Mark's no mean hand at a negro song, and I think you've all heard him sing 'Way Souf.' But last night he introduced a novelty. Wishing, I suppose, to give the Russians as good an impression of negro minstrelsy as possible in the space of one song, he sang each verse to a different air, so that beginning with 'Way down upon the Swanee River,' he ranged through 'Nelly Gray,' and one or two others, and finally brought up with 'Dandy Jim,' or the 'Prairie Flower,' I forget which. How he managed to make the different tunes all fit into the same metre is more than I can say, but he did manage it most ingeniously, though it was a little laughable all the same. But the audience didn't laugh. They listened most attentively; and though, of course, they missed all the fun of the thing, they seemed to like the music wonderfully, and I don't suppose Mark ever had a more appreciative audience."

"I shouldn't think Carl would be here to-day," said Meta.

"Sure not to," said Ralph.—"And, father, I think I might cut work to-day too."

"Very well. I daresay Franz Rosendorf will have no objections."

CHAPTER XV.

MASLINITZ.

"Life's a fair,
A raree-show, wherein a little day
Men air their bravery and take their gauds—
And then the lights go out."—*Old Play.*

IT was the first day of the carnival week, a season which is kept in Russia with every festive observance which the imagination of the people can suggest and the time of the year will allow.

"I suppose you ladies will drive round the fair," said Ralph that morning. "I shouldn't advise you to attempt to walk about in the crowd. Mark and I mean to do the sight pretty thoroughly, however.—I hope you've got some blinnies for dinner, mother."

"I really hadn't thought of it, Ralph; but I can see about having some."

"What are blinnies?" said Miss Ordley

"Why, don't you know? haven't you heard? I *am* astonished, Miss Ordley," said Ralph. "I always thought you knew everything. I have always regarded you, in fact, as quite an 'emporium' of knowledge, as Mark called Franz Rosendorf. Blinnies are

the right and proper thing to have at carnival time in Russia. It wouldn't be a carnival, in fact, without blinnies, any more than Christmas would be Christmas with us without plum-pudding, or Good Friday without cross-buns. They have already begun their blinny-eating, for I saw Gabriel hard at work just now. They are a sort of pancakes, and they eat them with caviare, or cream, or butter; but I shall have mine with brown sugar, the same as one would at home. I daresay we'll find them not at all bad."

"I declare he's becoming a perfect epicure," said Meta.

"By no means, matushka; only when I'm in Russia, I like to do as the rushes, I mean the Russes, do. But pancakes were always a weakness of mine, I'm not above confessing. But it's about time that Mark and I were setting out if we're not to miss any of the fun. I'll look out for you, though there'll most likely be such a crowd that there won't be much chance of seeing you."

The fair was held opposite the Admiralty, and thither at an early hour in the day the humbler portion of the inhabitants of St. Petersburg flocked in crowds. Later on the richer classes of the community would drive slowly round and round on the outskirts of the fair in their sledges, which would be filled with ladies and children dressed in their gayest holiday attire.

Ralph and Mark were resolved to do the fair systematically, so as to obtain as thorough an impression as possible of what a Russian popular holiday

was like. The day was clear and bright, and though the air was sharp it was dry and still, and not too cold as long as one kept moving about. Booths and tents of all sizes met Ralph and Mark's gaze on every hand, in front of many of which were flaming coloured pictures illustrative of the entertainment provided within. Out-door performances were also going on before many of the tents, in which the actors endeavoured, by giving the public a taste of their quality, to tempt them to pay the entrance money for the whole performance.

Here a juggler was busy swallowing snakes, fire, and swords; there a showman, eloquently discoursing on the feats performed by his troop of trained animals, all of which were to be witnessed for the sum of six copecks; and there a clown, dressed in a white woolly costume, with a tall sugar-loaf hat, and a coat with long dangling sleeves "a world too wide," was keeping the crowd agape with wonder and laughter by his jokes, impromptu songs, and waggish criticisms of his audience, most of which were of the plainest and most personal kind, but all taken with perfect good humour by the onlookers, who seemed rather pleased than otherwise when the jester distinguished them by a remark, flinging their copecks to him in remuneration.

There were all sorts of swings, merry-go-rounds, and puppet-shows, such as are common at fairs in all countries, and one description of boat-swing which Ralph had never seen before, in which four large wooden boats went round and round in a perpen-

dicular circle with what seemed a particularly giddy and unpleasant motion; but that the diversion suited a Russian crowd was manifest from the way in which it was patronized.

Little booths and stalls for the sale of refreshments abounded, the refreshments consisting for the most part of nuts, a kind of gingerbread, and blinnies. Everybody, men, women, and children, appeared to be eating nuts, and Ralph and Mark walked about through the crowd amid a never-ceasing cracking and crunching sound in their ears.

After they had about exhausted the outside aspect of the fair, they resolved to enter one of the booths and witness the performance within. They paused before one for a moment to listen to the description of the entertainment given by the proprietor, who was standing on the platform outside and shouting a speech at the top of his voice. By this time both Ralph and Mark had picked up enough of the language to be able to understand the drift of what was said to them in Russian; and as the showman repeated his speech in exactly the same words over and over again, they presently came to know the nature of the entertainment he was vaunting. The man always concluded the summary of his show with the following exciting piece of description:—

"Lastly, ladies and gentlemen, you will here behold the three wonderful and world-famous Persian brothers, Ali, Hassan, and Selim. Ali with a lighted candle will jump down Hassan's throat; and Hassan with a lighted candle will jump down Selim's throat;

and Selim, with the combined impetus of his two brothers, will jump down his own throat and leave the audience in total darkness. Walk in, ladies and gentlemen, walk in."

"We'll not try his show, Mark, I reckon," said Ralph. "There's just a little too much high-falutin about this chap, even for a fair. Let us see what the next booth has to offer. Yes, here is something more tempting, I think. Look here, this is rather rich, or rather *Rich*-ardson, one might say."

The booth before which they now paused had an immense placard covering almost the entire frontage, on which a highly coloured, but, to Ralph and Mark, wholly unintelligible picture blazed in red, green, and yellow. Over the picture, in letters a foot long, was the following announcement:—

SIRKUS AND DRAMA FROM LONON.

THE PLAY OF HAMLET THE DANE BY MR. SHAKESPEARE.

DIRECT FROM THE LONON THEATRE.

"Here is something striking at last, Mark, and no mistake," said Ralph, laughing. "'The play of Hamlet the Dane by Mr. Shakespeare.' No doubt the people think it's the name of the actor who is going to perform the part, and certainly there's not much harm done to anybody if they do. And from '*the* Lonon theatre!' Come along, Mark; we mustn't miss this. Let us see Hamlet in ten minutes."

They paid their money and entered the booth, which they found pretty full of people. The "sir-

kus" was just over, but they were in time to see the opening of the drama. It was a truly wonderful performance, and did immense credit to the ingenuity of the playwright; for not only did the audience get "Hamlet in ten minutes," but Macbeth and Othello to boot. The piece was, in fact, an extraordinary medley of the three tragedies, in which Hamlet appeared with red hair and a black face, in a species of kilts, with a long "Hamlet" cloak and a Scotch cap, thus exhibiting in one person the distinguishing outward characteristics of three separate heroes in a manner which at least said much for the liberality of the management.

The gentleman who supported this motley character was fully equal to the difficulties of the situation, for he displayed enough energy for three. Whether he came from the Lon'on theatre or not, he spoke Russian with remarkable fluency and vigour, as did all the other performers in the piece. He pronounced the prince's name "Gamlet," there being no aspirate in the Russian language, and produced a most ludicrous impression on the minds of Ralph and Mark, by constantly striking a heroic attitude and exclaiming, "'Tis I—I, Gamlet the Dane!"

"He might as well call him Gimlet at once," said Mark.

The way in which the adapter of the piece had dovetailed one Shakespearian drama with another was, considering the limited space allowed him, to say the least, ingenious; for the audience were treated to all the most tragical and thrilling scenes from

Hamlet, Othello, and Macbeth, getting the ghost, the fencing and poisoning scene from the first tragedy, the "pillow business" from the second, and all the fighting and witch bits from the third.

"Gamlet" was made the hero, or rather the villain, of everything, for the exigencies of the plot required that he should perpetrate all the deeds of villany included in the above scenes. As nothing was left undone on the part of the portrayer of Gamlet to reveal him in all his natural blackness, the audience were no doubt convinced that he was one of the most thorough-paced vagabonds that ever flourished on or off the stage. But poetical justice was duly observed by the author of the piece, and "Gamlet" came to an end which, though sufficiently violent to satisfy the most ardent lover of justice, was certainly no more than he deserved. The drama concluded with a blood-curdling scene between "Gamlet" and the witches, in which those weird and awful ladies hurled upon the head of the Danish prince a storm of upbraiding, mockery, and wild, exulting abuse, and finally seized hold of the wretched "Gamlet," and tipped him over into a huge boiling caldron; and the curtain fell amid the triumphant eldritch shrieks of the witches and the expiring groans of their miserable but guilty victim. Ralph and Mark issued from the booth in a condition of mingled amusement, amazement, and confusion of ideas.

"Well, we got enough for our copecks, anyhow," said Ralph, laughing heartily. "What a muddle it was, to be sure!"

"I'm not deep versed in Shakespeare, but I ha' seen all the three plays on which this queer mixtur' o' a drama has been built," said Mark; "and if Master Shakespeare can see what's going on on our earth below here, and he's the good-natered man I take him to ha' been, I reckon as he's a-holding his sides wi' laughter at this minute, and I don't think there's anything irreverent in the notion."

It was now about mid-day, and the fun of the fair had reached its height. The crowd was great, and the noise was in proportion. What with the cries of the refreshment venders, the shouting of the booth proprietors, as each vaunted the especial attractions of his show; the din kept up by the various musical instruments tooting, strumming, and drumming on all sides; the never-ceasing hum of voices from the crowd itself,—such a motley and confused hubbub filled the ears of Ralph and Mark as the former at least had never experienced before, while the latter likened it, in his own mind, to the uproar of a black fellow's corrobboree which he had once heard in Australia. And like a sort of undercurrent of accompaniment to all the din of sounds human and instrumental, the cracking, crunching, and munching of nuts never paused for a moment.

In and out among the crowd went small bands of maskers, and representatives of various wandering professions,—an itinerant story-teller, a gipsy fortune-teller, a Greek dealer in amulets and relics of the saints, a begging monk, while one man, fantastically dressed, led about a tame dancing-bear

A vast amount of eating and drinking was of course going on on all sides. The Russian peasant, and even those higher up in the social scale, knowing that a long fast lies before them, fortify themselves against the austerities of the Lenten season by laying in a liberal supply of solids and liquids during the carnival week. Besides such trifles as blinnies, gingerbread, apples, and nuts, the people were regaling themselves largely with a very substantial kind of cake called *koolilak*, composed of meat or fish, bread, and rice or carrots, which was washed down with draughts of *kvass*, a fermentation made by black bread and water, *burga*, a kind of beer, vodka, or tea.

Ralph and Mark, beginning to feel hungry as well as their neighbours, lunched on apples, gingerbread, and tea. The tea they purchased from one of the many itinerant tea-venders, who were to be found in every part of the fair hard at work supplying the necessities of the crowd. They kept their huge *samovars*, or tea-urns, wrapped up in woollen cloths to keep in the heat, while in front of them were suspended leathern racks for the glasses, slung from the neck by straps. The tea-venders did as brisk a commerce as the traktirs, where liquids of a more potent kind were dispensed.

In the afternoon the crowd of sledges and carriages which kept driving round and round in the vicinity of the fair increased, until the long line of vehicles could only move at a walking pace. The richly-caparisoned horses in some of the sledges, with the gaily-coloured nets thrown over the harness, and the

handsome dresses of the ladies and children gave variety and brightness to the scene; while even the homely *kabitka* of the humbler class of charioteers, when set off by a Siberian rug hung over the back, added a bit of colour, if not of actual beauty, to the scene.

Ralph and Mark entered one or two other show-booths during the afternoon, but stayed a very short time in each, being in no ways attracted by the performances. But in every case the audience seemed perfectly satisfied and pleased, anything in the nature of a show diverting the simple-minded Russian peasant. In one of the tents they witnessed a terrific battle-piece—the combatants, of course, being Russians and Turks—in which a handful of Russians performed miracles of valour against a horde of the Mohammedans, and in which a private soldier especially distinguished himself by taking prisoner, single-handed, a gigantic turbaned pasha, the general of the Turkish army. This exhibition was naturally in great favour with the crowd, as a similar show would probably have been with the patriotic populace of any country.

Great as the crowd was, a stranger could not fail to be struck with its orderliness and even politeness. There were plenty of policemen about, but their services seemed never to be required; and they themselves were a good deal more taken up with watching the sights of the fair than the movements of the people, doubtless aware from experience that any such action on their part would be uncalled for and superfluous.

"They're the best behaved crowd I've ever seen—I'll allays say that for them," said Mark; "and polite too, polite to a marvel. Just look at that old moujik now, Master Ralph; and that's what's been going on all day, as of course you ha' noticed."

They were passing a small apple and gingerbread stall kept by a grizzled old fellow, who at that moment lifted his hat in the most courteous manner to an approaching acquaintance.

"A good day to you, Michael Nicolaivitch. How does your good wife, and how are the little ones?" said the old man.

"Well, I thank you, Alexander," answered the other, a young man, returning the salute as politely. "I hope trade is busy with you this fine fair time."

"Couldn't ha' been more courteous-like, ye see, sir, if they'd ha' been peers o' the realm both," said Mark. "Now with us it would ha' been, 'Well, Tom, how's the old woman?'"

"With the probable addition of 'How's the kids?'" said Ralph, laughing.

"They can teach us a thing or two in these matters, uneddicated as most o' them are," continued Mark. "Politeness costs little, and it sweetens life's journey a deal, none the less for peasants than for peers, but maybe rather more. In the nature o' things, there's no reason why an appleman shouldn't be as polite as a lord, and the Russians prove as it's possible. The common people are as courteous to each other in their daily intercourse as they are to their superiors, and I take it as that's the finest garnish possible to plain fare

and a homely board. Better a dinner o' salt junk and ship's biscuit and politeness therewith than a stall-fed ox with boorishness, and rude speech, and all uncharitableness, as the wise king says, or words to that effect."

At last Ralph and Mark agreed that they had had enough of the carnival, and betook themselves home. As they entered the courtyard, they encountered Gabriel, whom they found busy upon a dish of blinnies.

"Why, I left him eating blinnies this morning, and here he is at it still," said Ralph to Mark. "I should just like to know how many he has disposed of during the day.—Gabriel, how many blinnies may you have had to-day?"

"Thirty-six, barin; and with St. Nicholas's blessing, I hope to eat a dozen more before the day's over," answered Gabriel composedly, and resumed the discussion of his pancakes.

"Well, Ralph, what do you think of the carnival?" asked Dr. Driscoll during the evening.

"An odd sight, and worth the seeing. What a din there was! What with the drums and the whistles, and the shouting, and the creaking of the swings, and the banging of cymbals, and the cries of the hawkers, and the tooting of the marionette man, and the continual nut-crunching, I never heard such a babel, and don't wish to for some time to come, though I shouldn't like to have missed it all the same. I looked out for you in the crowd of sledges, but couldn't see you. Did you get a pretty good sight of the fair?"

"We saw a good deal—as much as your mother and Miss Ordley cared for, I think," said his father. "But it was a most curious sight, and it struck me as being, in some measure, indicative of the stage of civilization which the peasantry of Russia have reached as compared with more western peoples. One would have to go back a hundred years or more in England to witness just such a scene as that of to-day. I don't exactly mean to say that the Russian people are in everything a hundred years behind ourselves, for I am far from thinking that, but in some respects the peasantry are all that behind the same classes in Great Britain. The simple, almost childish sights that will amuse a Russian moujik show the low state of education in which he still is. One almost forgot to-day, in looking on at the fair, that we were in the nineteenth century at all. It was like a stage representation of the eighteenth or even the seventeenth."

"That's all true, father; but, ignorant as the common people are, they beat us in some things. You should have heard Mark enlarge to-day upon the politeness of the Russian common people, and you would have been convinced of that. He wound up his speech, in his frequent fashion, with a wonderful adaptation of the verse in the Proverbs about a dinner of herbs and a stalled ox. He has the most ingenious way of bringing in the Bible to cap his own illustrations; and he always honestly believes he gives you, as he says, 'the gist o' the matter.'"

"And so he does," said Meta.

"Yes; but sometimes in a shape that I don't think

Solomon or David themselves would recognize," said Ralph.

"It doesn't matter as long as you get the sense, and as long as Mark himself knows the sense," answered Meta. "He always admits that he doesn't use exactly the same words."

"About the politeness of the Russian common people, I am ready at once to admit that," said Dr. Driscoll. "I see plenty of examples of it in the hospital, and of their gratitude for small favours too.

"What is the meaning of *maslinitz*, the Russian word for carnival, do you know, Miss Ordley?" said Meta.

"It means 'butter week,' I believe; at least I saw it translated *semaine beurré* in a French book lately."

"A very appropriate name too," said Ralph. "Butter or fat week, because so much butter is used with the blinnies, no doubt; and secondly, because everybody tries as hard as he can to make himself as fat as possible against Lent. It's just on the principle of the bears, you know, who lay in as much internal fat as they can to carry them through their hibernation."

"Don't be so vulgar, Ralph," said his mother.

"It's literal truth, though, mother; and small blame to the Russians for doing so under the circumstances, for I understand that some of them keep the fast most strictly.

"It is a most foolish system altogether," said Miss

Ordley with a little severity; "for the excesses after Lent is over are in proportion to the austerity with which it is observed."

"Majestic Miss Ordley! you should write a letter to one of the Petersburg papers—you really should," said Ralph; "and sign it, 'How it strikes a Stranger.' There, I give you that tip as my contribution to the good work."

"Thank you, Master Ralph; but you will have to aid me far more than that if I am to begin a crusade against the creed of the country," said Miss Ordley, laughing, as Ralph left the room.

Miss Ordley was a small person, with a remarkably neat and well-rounded figure, and an expressive though not actually pretty face. The epithet "majestic" was about as applicable to her as it is to a pigeon or a partridge.

"Ralph *is* such a goose," said Meta for the thousandth time in her life; "he makes a joke about everything."

"He is at that age, my dear; he has not reached your maturity yet," said her father, smiling.

CHAPTER XVI.

ON THE ROAD.

"For he was one of the olden time."—*Song.*

THE Driscolls were seated in their drawing-room after dinner. Dr. Driscoll was with his family. He had not yet retired to his study—where, as has been already indicated, he usually spent a part of every evening—for he had something to speak about which would take some little time in the telling.

"What would you think of taking a trip into the country, Ralph?" he began.

"All of us do you mean, father? not surely at this season," said Ralph.

"How you jump to conclusions, my boy! No; I did not mean the whole of us, but you and I and Mark. It is too early yet for ladies to think of travelling for pleasure. Listen while I tell you of a plan I have. Your mother and I have already discussed it.—Miss Ordley and Meta, you may give me your attention too, for my plans include all you ladies.—I have been requested by the authorities to go to Moscow for the purpose of inspecting the great

Foundling Hospital there. When I received this order, or intimation, whichever it may be termed, it at once occurred to me that it might be a good opportunity for my seeing a little more of Russia by continuing my journey beyond Moscow. I stated my desire to do this to the hospital authorities, and they at once very courteously granted me a long furlough, which will last most of the summer. I had the less hesitation in making my request, both because I have really worked very hard at the hospital through the winter, and because this piece of business which is taking me to Moscow lies out of my proper work—is outside the special duties which I am engaged to perform. My superiors know this, of course, and no doubt considered it in granting me so liberal a furlough. I next consulted with Pavel Carlovitch, who, with his usual readiness to oblige, soon had a plan cut and dry for my consideration. In two or three days he himself starts for his country estate; and he proposes that, after I have finished my work in Moscow, I should go on and visit him at Karlhoff, which is the name of his estate. His idea is that myself and Ralph and Mark should go first, and that you three ladies should follow with Mrs. Volkoff and Carl as soon as the spring has fairly begun and the ice is broken up."

"Splendid!" exclaimed Ralph with enthusiasm; "the very thing I have been hoping for this long while—I mean that we should all spend the summer in the country somewhere. Petersburg is all very well in its way, but a town is always a town wher-

ever it is, and town life must be a good deal the same everywhere. I want to see a little of Russian country life. It's always in the country where you best see what foreign people are really like, they say."

"Yes, there's a good deal of truth in that. Cities are like great mills—they grind people smooth and round, and take off all the corners," said Miss Ordley.

"I want to see some animals besides—four-legged animals I mean, not merely two-footed ones," said Ralph. "We are in a country that abounds in all sorts of game too, and we've not seen a feather of it yet. I want to see some bears and wolves also."

"Don't talk in that cool and bloodthirsty way about bears and wolves, Ralph, please," said his mother.

"Where is Karlhoff, Mr. Volkoff's place, papa?" asked Meta.

"It is in one of the south-eastern provinces. The railway takes you as far as Voronej, and the rest of the journey is by post."

"But, papa, are we to be left alone in the house while you and Ralph are away?" said Meta.

"If you were, I don't think any great harm could come to you, Meta," said her father, smiling. "You have Gabriel, and you know a dvornik is as much a policeman as a house-porter. But your mother and I have arranged for that too. As I thought you might just like to have some 'man-body,' as the Scotch would say, in the house at night, I have asked Franz Rosendorf to sleep here, who will be

also useful as a cavalier to any little entertainments you may care to see. He will be pleased to act in that capacity I am sure."

"What a long holiday you will have, Ralph!" said Meta.

"I mean to exact a promise from Ralph that he is to do a certain amount of work in the country," said Dr. Driscoll.

"I shall give that promise, and try my best to keep it; but, of course, in the summer I shall expect a proper holiday, free from any sort of work, just as I should have had at home," said Ralph.

"Will it be a comfortable journey for you, papa, at this time of the year? It is still as cold as ever."

"The railway journey will be quite comfortable. After that, it may be pretty cold in the carriage; but we shall have one of Pavel Carlovitch's own sledges from Voronej, and it is sure to be a comfortable and well-appointed one. We are to be met at Moscow by his messenger. He is a Scotchman, a Mr. Hugh Ralston by name. He acts as the steward and general superintendent of the Karlhoff estates, besides managing Pavel Carlovitch's print-mills."

"Has Mr. Volkoff mills?" said Meta.

"Yes; there is a print-factory on the estate. Mr. Volkoff tells me that Mr. Ralston is a capital manager both of the mills and the estate generally, and so the print-works pay. The Russians, you may be aware, excel in the manufacture of printed cloths."

"Many of their patterns are exceedingly pretty,

I think—as good as anything we get in England," said Mrs. Driscoll.

"When shall you start, papa?" said Meta.

"In about a week from this. Though colder, it will be pleasanter travelling now than in the spring, when the ice begins to break. In fact, I suppose it is next to impossible to travel then in some parts of the country. Mr. Volkoff wishes to be a little while in advance of us, he says, so that he may have the house ready for our reception. It is shut up, of course, during the winter."

"Why isn't Carl going with his father; doesn't he care to go?" asked Ralph.

"He will wait and come with his mother," said Dr. Driscoll. "The fact is, I don't think she would like the idea of his making so long a journey at this season. He hasn't your robustness, you know, Ralph."

"He is improving though," said Ralph. "It's wonderful what a lot of good that 'little cricket' we have has done him. He's getting a muscle on his arms like an egg."

"I think myself that it would be perfectly safe for Carl to accompany us, and I've no doubt his father thinks the same, and the boy himself would probably be glad enough to go; but if he believes his mother would be anxious, he is right to consider her wishes. It must always be remembered that he is an only child."

Mark Weatherby received the announcement of the proposed journey, in which he was to accompany

his master, with his usual composure and philosophy, which a life of much changeful experience had bred in him. Ralph and he brought out their guns from their cases, and set to work to give them a thorough cleaning.

"It's a long holiday my father is to get, Mark, so we may have a lot of shooting before we're back here again," said Ralph, his pulses quickening at the very thought of the pleasant excitement in store.

"No doubt the master has earned his holiday," replied Mark. "No doubt he's put the doctors at the hospital up to a thing or two. England, of course, stands at the head of all sorts o' science, and Russia can't be expected to be level wi' us in these matters. It stands to reason as the master, being one o' the smartest doctors in London, must ha' shown the Russian doctors all the newest notions, and taught them a deal o' science; and no doubt as they're grateful, being nat'rally a grateful people; at least I can say as the common people are.—But in regard to sport, now, Master Ralph, what'll we do if we're going to have any dealings wi' bears and wolves and the like? These fowling-pieces, of course, will never do for them."

"Of course not; but that will be all managed. Mr. Volkoff has guns for everybody at Karlhoff—rifles and all kinds. We shall use our fowling-pieces for the smaller game. I wanted to have my own gun for use whenever possible, you know; because one never shoots as well as with one's own piece."

"That's all right then; and if it's our fortun' to

fall in wi' bears, why, we'll be able to give a good account of ourselves, I hope," said Mark. "I do believe as my old blood begins to warm up a bit once more at the thought o' some real sport. I've seen some bear-hunting in my day, as ye know, Master Ralph, in the Canadian backwoods, and again on whaling cruises; but it's beginning to be like a dream to me."

"Well, I hope we'll have some experiences that will refresh your memory, Mark—that's what I hope," said Ralph.

The day of the departure of Dr. Driscoll, Ralph, and Mark arrived. Mrs. Driscoll, Miss Ordley, Meta, and Carl accompanied them to the railway station and saw them off. The travellers were at once struck with the excellence of the accommodation in the first-class carriages. They found themselves in a compartment arranged as a saloon, somewhat after the style of American railway cars, with well-cushioned sofas running round all sides, tables in the centre, a bright stove, a handsome clock, brackets for candles; the whole on a scale of completeness, and wearing an air of comfort, that caused Ralph to exclaim, "What a jolly carriage! it's like a little drawing-room."

It required all the interior comfort and convenience which the car possessed to compensate for the monotonous and unlovely aspect of the outside world. Never had Ralph journeyed through so absolutely uninteresting a country. On every side he beheld nothing but a vast plain of snow, flat as a chess-board, broken by no elevation as high as an English hay-

stack, and only varied by tracts of forests of pine and larch. Had the travellers been journeying in the summer the scene would have been no more lively or striking; for in place of the snow plains, there would only have been wastes of morass and marsh land.

The difference between the scenery—if the word can be applied where scenery there was none—through which the train was passing, and that of an English prospect, even in winter, was very striking. No cozy villages snuggled in clefts between the hills; a little spire etched sharply against the blue-gray sky, the smoke from the village forge rising straight into the still, frosty air; no hedgerows, bare but trim; no white farmhouses dotting the landscape; no neat fields and gardens; no stately country mansions surrounded by swelling park-lands; no old-fashioned, time-mellowed, many-gabled manors, their mullioned windows twinkling in the mid-day sun—nothing to relieve the vast and gaunt monotony.

When Ralph had fully satisfied himself that nothing whatever was to be gained either of amusement or instruction from gazing out of the windows, after some talk with his father on various subjects, he settled himself into a snug corner of the carriage, and turned his attention upon the book with which he had provided himself.

Our three travellers had left St. Petersburg in the afternoon. They were the only occupants of the carriage as far as Luban, but when they reached that station they were joined by two other travellers.

The strangers were men, one old, the other still in

the prime of life. As they entered the carriage both saluted Dr. Driscoll, Ralph, and Mark, who returned the courtesy. The strangers presented at once a likeness and a strong contrast. They were sufficiently like each other in features as to be without difficulty recognized for father and son. Each had the same light blue eyes, the same shaped forehead, and nose. But the contrast in the outward appearance of the two men was also marked. The older man wore his hair long, and an ample, grizzled beard covered the lower part of his face. The younger man was clean shaven, save for a small mustache, and his hair was cut short like an Englishman's.

The difference in the dress of the two was more marked still. The old man was clad in a long, loosely-fitting coat, a round black cap, and high leather boots reaching nearly to the knees. His companion wore a fashionably cut overcoat, trousers of the latest style, shining patent leather boots, and a handsome Scotch travelling cap ornamented with a silver thistle. His appearance was that of a handsomely though rather overdressed man; and was such, moreover, that a hasty observer might have mistaken him for an Englishman, a Frenchman, or a Scotchman. Had he worn kilts he would have perhaps looked most like a Cockney taking his autumn holiday in the Highlands.

The son had a shrewd, flat-featured, but good-natured face; the father, despite his plainer and more homely attire, had the more imposing appearance of the two. His silvery hair and beard gave an air of grave dignity to a finely-shaped head, while

about his whole bearing were a repose and a simple ease which became him better than a certain artificial fineness of speech and manner did the son.

The younger man began to talk almost as soon as the train was in motion again; he was voluble and communicative, and certainly polite.

"Ah! I have travelled in England," he hastened to inform his fellow-passengers, at an early stage in the conversation. "I enjoyed my stay there greatly. I admire everything English much, and everything French. We are learning from you here, you will have noticed—the better classes, that is. As for the peasantry, they do not easily change; they are dense, stupid *bêtes*—I am afraid they are pigs. You find them so, *n'est-ce pas?*"

"Do not call the peasants hard names, my son," said the old man, who had scarcely yet spoken, and who had seemed to the English party to be of a silent not to say taciturn disposition, in marked contradistinction to his son. "The peasants are not to blame if they appear ignorant to strangers; it is the result of circumstances which they could not alter or help; and since the emancipation they have improved. They are less ignorant, less servile. But improvement in these things comes only slowly."

"My father always champions the peasants, you must understand. He is of the old school, you know," the younger man explained in a low tone to Dr. Driscoll.

"I do not think they need championing so very much," said Dr. Driscoll, in his ordinary voice. "In

many points they will compare favourably with the peasantry of other countries. I have found them gentle, and courteous, and wonderfully grateful for even small favours."

"And open and frank like a sailor, if they're treated wi' common fair-play, as betwixt man and man," said Mark quietly. "They're not o' the close, secretive sort, as'll hardly let their left hand know what their right hand does."

The younger of the Russians gave a slight stare at the plainly-dressed old man—whom he could not mistake for anything but an attendant of some kind—who thus quietly put in his word. The amusement of Dr. Driscoll and Ralph was equally excited by the Russian gentleman and Mark—by the look of wondering surprise on the face of the former, and by Mark's novel reading of the scriptural quotation. The expression of the elder Russian's face had resumed its usual gravity, while Mark's composure was in no wise disturbed by the silent and astonished gaze directed upon him.

"We will change the subject," said the younger Russian presently. "Do you propose getting out at the next station, sir? It is nearly six o'clock, and good refreshments are to be obtained at our next stoppage; I should advise you to alight."

"Very well; we shall be glad to do so," answered Dr. Driscoll. "Shall we have plenty of time to procure something to eat and drink?"

"Abundance. There is always that at our stations. It is too much the case for my taste."

The train shortly after stopped, and the travellers alighted. The station was a handsome and well-appointed one, and Dr. Driscoll and Ralph found the refreshment department capitally supplied. A little crowd of people were loitering about the platforms, most of them carrying some article of luggage, but there was almost none of the stir and bustle apparent which characterize an English railway station.

"You do everything in a somewhat leisurely style on your railways," said Dr. Driscoll, when the travellers were once more seated in their places.

"Leisurely is a soft word for it, *mon cher ami;* you are too polite. It is tortoise-like—that is the word. You saw that lot of people waiting at the station we have just left: how long do you think some of them will have to wait for the next train? Four hours, *ma parole d'honeur.*"

"Is that really so?"

"To a minute. I know one man personally. His destination is Novgorod, and his train is not due for four hours. Many Russians are content to wait that time, and the common people will sometimes arrive at a station as much as six hours before the departure of the train they want. We Russians like to make sure of things, you see; we are a long-sighted people."

The speaker gave a little laugh at his own pleasantry.

"My son is a mocker sometimes," said the old man gravely. "We are right to be cautious. Where is

the gain in so much haste? We did business slowly and surely in my day; but we were just as happy, and were just as good at a bargain, I daresay. Now everybody is so fine and French."

"Aha! Well done, patrushka! That is a shaft at me," exclaimed the son good-humouredly; and then he again repeated in a lower tone to Dr. Driscoll—"My father is of the old school, you see; that goes without telling." The speaker turned next towards Ralph, and taking from his pocket a box for holding sweetmeats, said,—

"Will you be pleased to try these chocolates, young gentleman?"

Ralph took one or two, but the Russian gentleman tipped up the box and poured out Ralph a handful of the sweetmeats.

"What an odd mixture he is!" thought Dr. Driscoll; "with all his man-of-the-world air and cosmopolitan shrewdness he carries about a *bonbonnière* like a schoolmiss."

Something similar was passing through Ralph's mind. He appreciated the good-nature and friendliness of his fellow-traveller, but he could not help a slight feeling of contempt for a grown-up man who kept a bonbon box always in his pocket.

It had grown dark some time since, and the guard had lit the candles.

"What shall we do to pass the time?" said the Russian gentleman. "We can have cards, or chess, or dominoes from the guard. Or shall we converse? But perhaps you do not care for any of these games.

I will tell you what we shall do. My father, I know, never makes this journey from Petersburg to Moscow without thinking of a time long ago, before we had railways, when he travelled the same road under very much less pleasant circumstances than we are doing at present. Now, if you gentlemen would like to hear that story, I am sure my father will be delighted to tell it to you.—Come, father, our friends are listening."

"No, no, Vasili; you will weary the gentlemen," said the old man. "There is nothing wonderful in my story; and you know it yourself by heart."

"We shall be very pleased if you will tell us the story," said Dr. Driscoll.

"Yes, do, sir, please," said Ralph.

The old Russian looked at Ralph, and a grave smile crossed his face.

"You would like to hear it, eh?" he said kindly.

"Yes, sir, I would, very much," Ralph answered.

"Then you shall have it; but, I repeat, it is nothing; it will disappoint you."

CHAPTER XVII.

A HAND-TO-HAND FIGHT.

"The old man told a stirring tale,
Might make the boldest cheek turn pale."

THE old man began in his quiet, deep voice. But he had not proceeded far in his narrative when his tone became quicker and intenser, his manner absorbed and animated; he raised his hand from time to time with a rapid, expressive gesture, while his clear blue eyes brightened and kindled.

"I was born a peasant—a serf," he commenced. A sudden look of surprise crossed the faces of his fellow-travellers, but the speaker did not appear to notice it. "But while I was yet a young man I obtained my freedom. I saved my master from death by drowning. He was a large-hearted and grateful man, and he made me a freeman. I was thought to be quick in business matters for a peasant, and I had some ambition. I entered into trade in Petersburg, beginning in a very small way, started by my former master. Meanwhile I educated myself—at least what we regarded as such then, and

which served our purposes; and in trade I prospered. By-and-by I married, and found a good helpmate in my wife.

"I was a general retail dealer in all descriptions of soft goods. One winter I set out on a journey to Moscow for purposes of trade. I had heard privately of a good bargain in connection with certain bankrupt stock that was shortly to be obtained in that city, and I was determined to lose no time in profiting by my information.

"My wife was to accompany me. I kept no domestic of any kind at this time; my wife and I managed everything, both in my shop and in our household, between us. I had a kabitka of my own; my business required it. It was in the depth of winter when we started, being duly provided with a *podorojna*—our order for horses from the different post-houses, you understand. This was long before any railway was even thought of between Petersburg and Moscow.

"Our journey began prosperously. It had been an unusually severe winter up till then, but we had just fallen into a tract of still calm weather. We made rapid progress from post-house to post-house. The short afternoon of the first day was drawing to a close. We were still a considerable distance from the next post-house, where we purposed passing the night. We were entering a tract of forest, when my wife, whose hearing was quicker even than mine—which was quick enough in those days—caught a faint but ominous sound.

"'Nicolai!' she exclaimed, 'do you hear? What sound is that?'

"I bent my head and strained to hear. The air was perfectly windless and still, and presently a short yelp, far away, fell on my ear. A faint rustling sound among the trees followed.

"'Nicolai, it is the wolves!' whispered my wife, involuntarily lowering her voice in her fear.

"I did not at once answer. Again a yelping bark came through the forest, and the rustling sound drew nearer and nearer. My horses sprang suddenly forward, almost jerking the reins from my hands. Their speed had been flagging somewhat, but now it redoubled. They, too, knew instinctively that danger was approaching.

"'Speak, Nicolai, husband! It is the wolves, is it not?' repeated my wife.

"'It is, Anna,' I answered. 'But they will not probably attack us. You know they seldom voluntarily attack people except when in the extremity of hunger.'

"'They must be that now, Nicolai. Remember the season has been a very bitter one. They must be desperate with hunger. Listen how near the sound is coming. And look! look! I can see them now.'

"At that moment a pack of wolves came into sight, emerging from the shadow of the trees, and sweeping after us in full cry. The forest was now ringing with their horrid howls, that made the blood creep to hear.

"'Take the reins, Anna, and keep the horses at

their topmost speed, though they will not need much urging on our part. Do not fear. I have my two revolvers. I shall kill with every barrel, and may terrify the rest,' I said.

"My wife caught the reins from my hands; and I, standing in the back of the sledge, drew my revolvers, and prepared to give our pursuers a hot reception. On they came; and now I could see their wide, gaping jaws, their hanging, froth-flecked lips, and their starting eyeballs gleaming in the dark like red fires. Their gaunt forms looked twice the size of life as their shadows fell athwart the white snow.

"The horses were now galloping with the speed of mad terror, their hard panting mingling with the fierce barking of the wolves. Now the pack was near enough for me to hear their quick breathing. I waited till the foremost of them were within a few yards, and then fired. The leader of the pack rolled over dead upon the snow. Again I discharged my weapon, and another wolf fell. Immediately the rest of the pack fell upon their slaughtered comrades, and in a few moments had torn them to shreds. On they came again, and once more I fired and killed. In this way I discharged all my barrels; and each time I fired no lead was wasted, for I made sure of my victims by allowing them to come so near that I almost fancied I could feel their breath upon my face. As I discharged my last barrel my wife cried—

"'I see the lights of the village, Nicolai. We shall soon be there. Throw out the packages.'

"The sledge was laden with samples which I was

taking to Moscow in the way of trade; for I thought to combine two objects in my journey—to make my desired bargain, and to press my own wares. Reluctantly, I must confess, I now threw out my small bales and parcels to the wolves. They were at once seized and fought for, and for a moment served to check our pursuers. But the next they were upon us again. At last the sledge was emptied of its whole freight.

"'Five minutes more, Nicolai, and we are saved,' cried my wife, whose gaze was fixed upon the village we were nearing, and who did not fully realize that I had exhausted my last resource. No, not quite! I had still my knife. I drew it from its leathern sheath at my belt. A wolf sprang at me like an arrow from a bow, and I buried it to the hilt in his breast. The warm blood spurted out upon my cheek as I drew my weapon from the quivering brute, who fell back lifeless; and I had just time to recover position when another leapt at me, and was received like his fellow on the point of my long hunting-knife.

"But I felt that this could not last long. I was already beginning to feel weary and exhausted by exertions such as I had long been unused to since my life had been confined to the city. A third wolf sprang upon me; I struck out fiercely at him; but my head was growing confused, and my aim was less true than before. My blow fell short, and only wounded my fierce foe. He fell forward upon me over the back of the sledge, and we grappled each other like two wrestlers. A mist overspread my

eyes; I felt my grasp of the wolf's throat relaxing; my brain grew dizzy and more dizzy; I was rapidly losing consciousness. I just heard my wife's words faintly, as in a dream,—

"'We are saved, Nicolai, husband! we are saved!'

"I saw figures move rapidly and confusedly before me, and then I was lifted from the sledge and carried into a house. Presently I came to myself. My wife was standing beside me with a spirit flask in her hand.

"'Look up, Nicolai,' she said; 'all peril is past.'

"'We just reached the village in time, Anna; was it not so?' I said.

"'Yes; I called aloud, and the people here rushed out with guns, and the wolves fled. We were only just in time. In a minute more the last wolf would have had its fangs in your throat, my husband, and then—'

"My wife shuddered convulsively, and did not finish. She has been a good and faithful wife, Anna Ivanovna, always. My story is finished, gentlemen. The remainder of our journey was completed without further adventure. I was successful in my business, and returned to Petersburg a richer man than I left it, though at that time that was not saying a great deal. We made our money slowly in the old times, copeck by copeck."

The old man ceased, his animation of manner at once disappeared, and his face returned to its customary gravity.

"Thank you very much for your narrative, sir,"

A TERRIBLE ENCOUNTER. *Page 183.*

Dr. Driscoll said. "Yours was indeed a narrow escape."

"I wonder the wolves did not attack your horses," said Ralph.

"In a few moments more, no doubt, they would have done so; but up to the minute of our reaching the village we managed to keep just ahead of the pack. The horses flew with the speed of madness," said the old man.

"Ah, you did well that time, patrushka. Your presence of mind and stout heart saved you, no doubt," said the son. Notwithstanding that he looked upon him as one of "the old school," antiquated in his ideas and manners, the son was evidently not a little proud of his father.

The old man did not reply to his son, who continued,—

"And now, if you will excuse me, gentlemen, I am going to retire. I was up late last night and am beginning to feel sleepy. *Bon soir à tout le monde.*"

The English travellers having no motive for remaining up longer, also betook themselves to rest. They were provided with couches by the guard, on which it was possible to sleep almost as comfortably as at home, and soon no sounds were heard in the compartment save the regular breathing of the sleepers.

Next morning the travellers breakfasted together at the first station at which the train stopped. The younger of the Russians was still in excellent spirits,

and his *vive* French manner was more marked than ever. The night's rest had redoubled his energies. When the train was in motion again, he said, addressing Dr. Driscoll, "Might I ask, sir, what is your destination?"

The doctor told him.

"Karlhoff! ah, indeed! the estate of Gospodin Volkoff. I know it, though I have not the honour of the proprietor's acquaintance. Why, on your way thither you must pass close to my own little place. I should be delighted, sir, if you would stop and do me the pleasure of a visit. Will you not promise me that pleasure? It will take you hardly at all out of your way, and you may find it a break and rest on your journey. You must pass through the village of Kovka in reaching Karlhoff, and my house is but a few versts from Kovka. Any one in the village will direct you to it. Say that you will come, my dear sir, and we shall all be delighted to welcome your party."

"It is very kind of you, but I fear I cannot promise certainly to accept your invitation," answered Dr. Driscoll. "It must depend on circumstances, for I shall have to consider others in the matter."

"But if circumstances do permit of it you will try and visit me?"

"I think I can promise so much."

"Then may fortune be favourable. Allow me to offer you my card. My father does not carry a card-case; such things were not in vogue in his day, and

he is of a conservative temperament, you will have noticed."

Dr. Driscoll took the Russian's card, and in turn handed him his own. The name which he read on the card was *Vasili Nicolaivitch Nordcheff.*

CHAPTER XVIII.

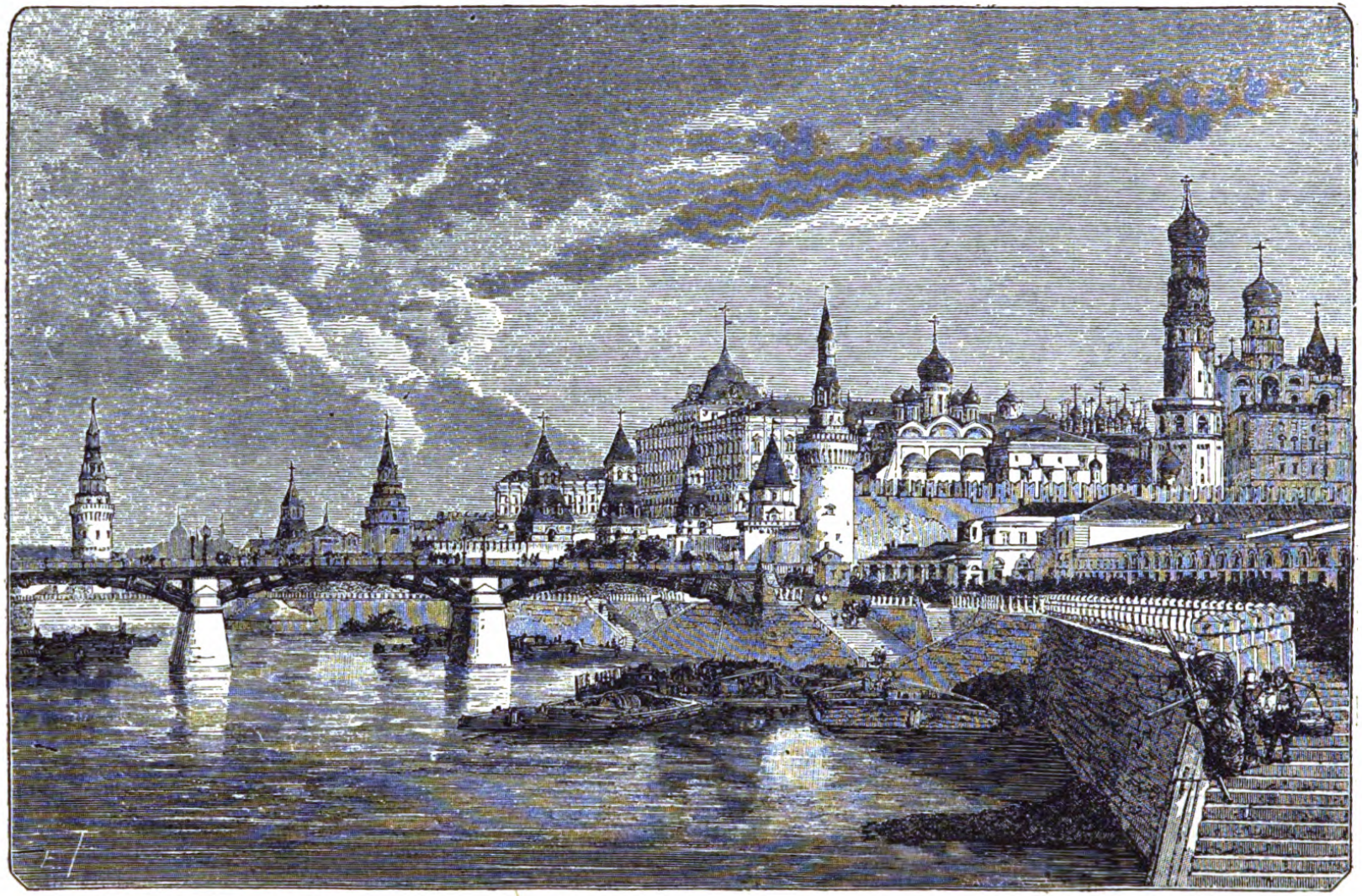
MOSCOW.

"Fantastic, strange the whole did seem
Most like a city in a dream."

THE train reached Moscow at noon. As it approached the city the English travellers saw that the character of the country was materially changed, and for the better, appearing much more hilly, varied, and picturesque even in its present covering of snow. The English party found Mr. Hugh Ralston awaiting them at the station. Mr. Vasili Nordcheff parted from Dr. Driscoll and Ralph with demonstrative politeness, shaking them warmly by the hand, and repeating his hopes that they might meet again. The old man, Nicolai Nordcheff, shook Ralph's hand kindly also, and bowed to Dr. Driscoll.

"I have engaged rooms in a private hotel for you," said Mr. Ralston. "It is kept by an English person, and I think you will find it comfortable."

Mr. Hugh Ralston was a man with a Scotch face of a frequent type—clear blue eyes, a fair and ruddy complexion, marked cheek bones, which his fresh



MOSCOW.

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colour served to accentuate the more, a firmly moulded jaw, a long upper lip and a yellow-red beard; an alert, purposeful, and on the whole comely face.

After they had had lunch at their hotel the party sallied forth to view the city. Dr. Driscoll and Mark's curiosity had been excited no less than Ralph's by what they had seen in driving from the station; and as their stay in Moscow was to be a short one, the fine afternoon was not to be lost. It was a day in early March, cold still, but with a bright sun.

"You know Moscow pretty well, I suppose, Mr. Ralston?" Dr. Driscoll said.

"Yes, I think I may say I do. I am here pretty often on business, and I have become interested in the place, and poked about in it a good deal. We shall not need a guide at any rate."

"Good, so much the better. We place ourselves entirely in your hands then."

Mr. Ralston soon made it evident that he was well capable of fulfilling the office of a cicerone. He led his companions to all the points whence the best views of the city were to be obtained; while in regard to information he was, if not quite so full as a guide-book, as full as there was any need for, and less stereotyped, having his own individual opinions and thoughts upon the sights of the city.

In Mr. Ralston's judgment one of the finest general views of Moscow was that presented from the terrace of the Kremlin, and thither the party repaired.

Conspicuous amid the vast undulating sea of roofs

upon which the travellers looked down, more by reason of its architectural form than by its size, rose the Church of Vasili Blagennoi (the Cathedral of St. Basil)—fantastical, extraordinary, unique. Utterly devoid of architectural symmetry—for no two of its sixteen cupolas exactly resembled each other—the cathedral yet riveted the gaze of the strangers by its very fancifulness—the imaginative vagaries displayed in its design, if design it could be said to possess where all was so motley and diverse. The turrets presented as great a variety in their roofing as contrast in their colouring,—fluted and twisted like a wine-decanter, marked and honey-combed like a pine apple, scaled like the back of a gold-fish,—all clustered, like exotic fruit on a bough, round a tall centre steeple terminating in a crescent, which was again crowned by a cross; the whole dazzling the eye by its diversity and brilliancy, and holding the imagination as by a spell.

"You know the story connected with the Church of St. Basil, I suppose," said Mr. Ralston. "The tyrant Ivan Vassilivitch, by whom it was erected in commemoration of the capture of Kasan, caused the eyes of the architect to be put out, that he might never build such another structure."

"It is like the work of an architect of extraordinary but unregulated genius, conceived in a moment when his imagination was most active and most abnormal," said Dr. Driscoll. "It recalls to me some of Wiertz's pictures. I don't know whether you have seen the Wiertz gallery in Brussels, Mr. Ralston; but

I mean in the wealth of imagination displayed by both architect and painter. Each seems to have allowed his fancy fairly to run riot; but the originator of the cathedral is far less grim than the artist —indeed he is not grim at all, though somewhat grotesque perhaps."

"Fantastic at any rate," said Mr. Ralston. "But you will notice that, though there is great diversity of colour in the building, there is no want of harmony. The variety and brilliancy of the whole does not irritate or offend the eye, though it no doubt surprises and for a little dazzles it."

"It is a marvel, sir, fairly a marvel," said Mark; "I can't remember as I ever saw anything jest to liken it to myself, in all my faring."

They saw as much of the Kremlin as they could overtake at one time, wondered at its vast proportions, —containing as it does within the circuit of its walls a palace, a senate-house, an arsenal, a treasury, and numbers of churches,—and admired its beauty; its white walls rising terrace upon terrace, rampart on rampart, battlement above battlement—pierced, buttressed, turreted; its airy, graceful pavilions, like Moorish castles or Eastern pagodas; its light, overarching roofs, supported by their tapering pillars,—the summit of the whole vast structure thus presenting, in its light elegance, so striking a contrast to the massive giant strength of its basement, which seemed built to last for aye. They call the Kremlin a palace —the ancient palace of the Czars—and a fortress— the ancient Tartar fortress; but it is rather a whole

citadel in itself, or even a city, so great are its proportions, so many the separate buildings embraced within its walls.

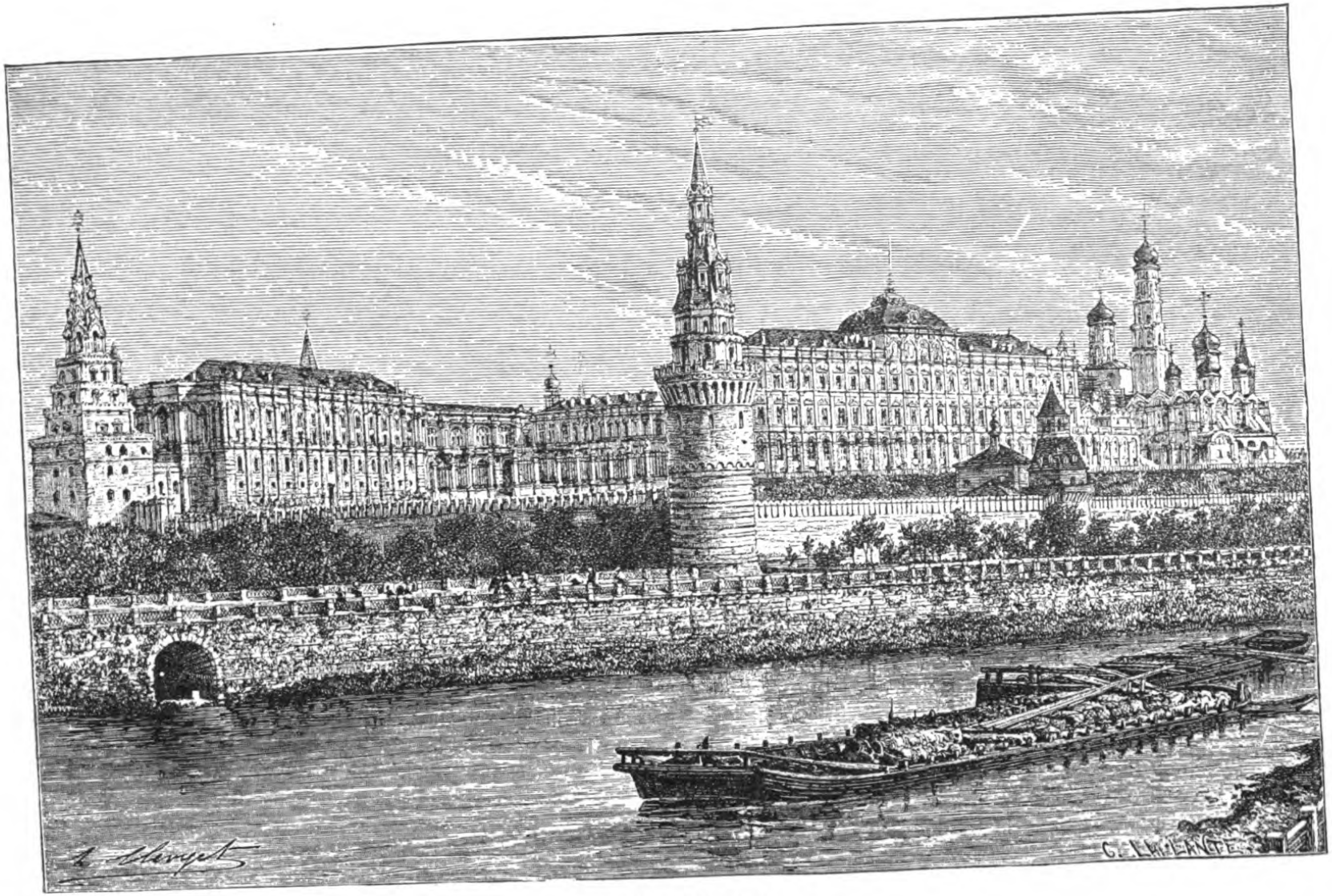
The English party of course saw the mighty bell, of which everybody has read or heard, where it stands in front of the tall tower of Ivan Veliki, the loftiest tower in Moscow.

"Surely this vast fortress was built by Titans for gods, if ever place was," said Dr. Driscoll. "Keats's Hyperion, the 'last of that whole mammoth brood,' might have found here a safe refuge in his despair, even against the thunderbolts of Jupiter."

"And the old Scandinavian giants might here have laughed defiance to the last at the rising powers of Thor and Odin had they had such a retreat as this," said Mr. Ralston. "These walls have passed unscathed through fiercer and more fiery ordeals, I suppose, than any ever reared by man. They mocked at the efforts of Napoleon's engineers, while all the city around them was vanishing in flame and collapsing in ruin. These walls gave the first check to the surging tide of Napoleonic conquest, which was rolled back in ever-weakening waves until it spent its last feeble ripples on the beach of St. Helena."

"It must have been somewhere hereabouts that Napoleon is said to have stood and looked down on the burning city," said Dr. Driscoll.

"Yes; from one of the windows overlooking this terrace, probably. Napoleon made the Kremlin his head-quarters on the 15th of September, and on that very day the fire broke out among the shops in the



THE KREMLIN.

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bazaar, and in a short space had spread throughout the city with extraordinary rapidity, the houses being built chiefly of wood. There are one or two old people in Moscow still living who can remember the terrible and unparalleled scene: they must then have been lads in their teens. The year was 1812, you remember. The number of private houses alone which were destroyed by the fire was calculated to be thirteen thousand, and besides these there were the many churches, palaces, and other state buildings. The loss of property amounted to something like twenty million. Such in extent was this wonderful deed of self-sacrifice and patriotism. Now, if you have had enough of the Kremlin for one visit, we may take a turn through some other parts of the city."

The party left the Kremlin through the Holy Gate, and presently entered the Kitai Gorod, or Chinese Town of Moscow—the great trade centre of the city, a bazaar or market of such extent as to constitute a small town in itself. Here, amid a maze of arcades and passages, each covered gallery reserved for a particular traffic, a crowd of sellers and buyers was collected, so great that their negotiations had the appearance of a confused scramble.

There were many features in the bazaar of novelty and interest, and the whole had an Oriental and bizarre look which was quite wanting in the Gostinoi Dvor, the corresponding quarter of St. Petersburg. Now the strangers passed a Tartar shop devoted wholly to the sale of soap made at Kasan, a compo-

sition in which eggs form an important ingredient, and which is highly esteemed by Russian ladies for its softness and purity. The owner of this "emporium" was in full Tartar costume, which was simple enough—a long blue caftan, and a light-coloured hat of felt covering his shaven head.

Further on, on the other side of the arcade, was a shop kept by a Persian in a tall, black, cone-shaped sheep-skin cap, the long, loose sleeves of his coat gathered up in knots behind. The type of his face at once marks him for an Asiatic, and his slender and graceful figure makes him conspicuous among the sturdy, broad-shouldered, sheepskin-clad Russian peasants. His boots of lacquered leather, ingeniously embroidered with gold and silver thread, correspond to the general elegance of his costume, and altogether he is undoubtedly a swell of the first water.

It was curious to note the method by which the various shopmen managed their calculations. Each had at his side a little frame of wires on which beads of different colours were strung, and with these beads he did such arithmetic as his business transactions required

"A rather primitive mode of ciphering," said Dr. Driscoll. "These little machines are for all the world like the small frames of ivory beads which I recollect in my childhood as being in use in infant schools for teaching the first principles of counting. I don't know whether they are still in fashion, or whether our school boards have vetoed them in favour of some more modern system."

"These shopmen are quite at sea without their *tchots*," said Mr. Ralston. "They are baffled by the shortest sum in mental calculation; but with their aid they can really do marvels, adding up sums to almost any amount. I have heard or read somewhere that the Chinese have the same practice. But see! there is an even more curious fashion to English eyes. Observe the way in which a Russian trader wiles his time when custom is slack."

Mr. Ralston called the attention of his companions to two shopmen, neighbours, who were engrossed in a game of draughts, only raising their eyes every now and then to glance at some possible customer, or pausing in their play for a moment to sip the cup of tea which stood at the elbow of each. Almost every shop-keeper, whether busy or at leisure, kept a cup, or rather a glass, of tea near to his hand, the universal slice of lemon floating on the surface.

From the Kitai Gorod Mr. Ralston led his companions through various other quarters of the city, choosing those which best displayed the characteristic features of the old Muscovite capital. Dr. Driscoll, Ralph, and Mark were struck on every hand by the contrast presented between the eastern metropolis and the great western one which they had left behind them. If St. Petersburg had the advantage in regard to convenience and comfort from the size and regularity of its streets and buildings, Moscow undoubtedly surpassed its western rival in picturesqueness.

Such a strange medley of the imposing and the

insignificant Ralph had never before seen in any single city. Now and then the party entered a street which seemed built on some fixed and definite plan; but the next moment they were forced to abandon that idea by a sudden turn or twist which the street took, and then terminated in some narrow lane or blind alley. The houses were as irregular in size and style as the streets: a palace overshadowed a hovel, and a row of little one-storied wooden cottages lifted an unblushing front beside a gilded and stately church.

But that which struck the strangers more, perhaps, than anything else, was the curious union of town and country which the city presented. Out of a crowded thoroughfare or a wide square they suddenly emerged into a quiet street with detached cottages, each with its yard and garden, so that it was difficult to realize that they were in the centre of a large city and not in a suburban village, until the next turning brought them again into the midst of closely-packed houses and thronged pavements.

This irregularity of construction and odd juxtaposition of urban and rural life gave the city a picturesqueness and an air of negligence which were not displeasing when mentally contrasted with the stiff and monotonous uniformity characteristic of most large cities. The Moscow pavements, to be sure, were anything but models of what pavements should be; many of the streets were as tortuous as the wrigglings of a freshly caught eel, and the general aspect of the city suggested an extraordinary

medley of the grand and the mean, apt to be confusing to a Western mind.

"What a completely Oriental look the place has!" said Dr. Driscoll. "It is difficult to believe that one is walking through a European city."

"It is much more interesting than Petersburg, I think, though everything is so mixed up, and the streets, I must say, hardly so clean," said Ralph.

"How well Moscow 'shows itself,' as one may say," said Dr. Driscoll. "Every quarter of a mile you see it from some new point and in some fresh aspect. It almost equals Edinburgh in that way, the single respect, I should think, in which the two cities can be compared."

"Both have the same want, however—the one thing that would make them perfect in regard to situation," said Mr. Ralston: "each wants water. Set Edinburgh on the Bay of Naples or on Cork Harbour, and the imagination could not conceive a grander city. Place Moscow in some similar situation, and it would rival Constantinople in picturesqueness. Madame de Stael called it the Rome of the north; but as regards appearance, the Constantinople of the north would be, to my fancy, as apt a comparison."

"I never saw Constantinople, of course, or Rome either," said Ralph; "but Moscow has been all the time reminding me of some city in the 'Arabian Nights.' It just looks like that, I think. Bagdad must be or have been something like this."

"That's just another way of saying that it's

Oriental looking, isn't it?" said his father. "I quite understand your feeling."

"The comparison is a true one probably," said Mr. Ralston. "One can easily fancy the good Haroun Alraschid—that famous caliph who was always just, and merciful, and brave, notwithstanding a somewhat impetuous temper—wandering by night, incognito, about these streets, accompanied by his wise and faithful vizier. There is just such a house as the three ladies might have lived in—I forget their several names—who entertained in so strange a fashion the caliph himself, and his vizier, and Mesrou the chief of his household, all disguised as foreign merchants, together with the porter, and the three one-eyed calendars, sons of sultans."

"And down this narrow winding street might have lived the Damascus pastry-cook, Bedreddin Hassan, true son of a vizier, who made those famous and incomparable cheese-cakes—incomparable, albeit baked without pepper," said Dr. Driscoll.

"Cream-tarts it stands in the text, father," said Ralph, laughing.

"Cheese-cakes, I am ready to wager," answered Dr. Driscoll. "Cheese-cakes it was in my book. It is a long day since I read the tales of that foremost wit among women, Scheherezade, but I would go to the stake about its being cheese-cakes in my youth; for I well remember how my mouth watered over the description, and how I got your grandmother to try and rival the accomplishments of the pastry-cook Bedreddin, which she did very successfully, I thought."

"Well, I never saw Bagdad, gentlemen, and I've but a misty notion as to the drift o' what you've been just saying, but the place as Moscow reminds me of mostly is Babylon," said Mark gravely. "Not, of course, as I've ever seen Babylon either; it was a deal afore my day. But that's what the place summons up in my mind somehow. All these glittering towers and palaces, and then again the bits of gardens, and the country mixed up like wi' the city, minds one summat o' the hanging gardens as we read of. I don't express myself rightly, gentlemen, but that's the sort o' feeling I have."

"Quite right, Mark. In fact the city might suggest half-a-dozen of those old and famous capitals, which float in one's imagination in a dreamlike and half-glorified way—Babylon, or Nineveh, or even Tadmor in the wilderness. New as most of Moscow really is, it has much of the antique picturesqueness, the artless confusion, coupled with the almost barbaric gorgeousness, of some ancient Biblical city; while the mighty Kremlin, standing there as if it had stood there since time began, heightens the illusion. And now, I think, you must have had enough walking for one day. It is past six o'clock."

"I confess to being not a little tired," said Dr. Driscoll.

"My old legs are beginning to think as their master's head is crazed, I believe," said Mark, smiling grimly; "but the marvel o' the place leads one on, to be sure. I've never seen anything to equal that Kremlin, save once when I was wandering wi' a

party o' my shipmates in the forests o' Mexico: it was a matter o' a wreck, sir—but that's too long a story to tell now—and we came suddenly upon the ruins o' a vast building, right in the heart o' the untrodden forest; a temple it had once been, the mate said, and must ha' been built ages and ages ago. It was fairly a marvel, I assure ye, for the size it must ha' been, and had just such a look as yonder Kremlin might have in ruin."

"Likely enough," said Mr. Ralston.

The party now returned to their hotel, where dinner was soon ready for them, and which they were quite ready for. Mr. Ralston had taken care that the several culinary specialties for which Moscow enjoys a fame formed part of the *menu*, and had not forgotten to order a dish of sterlet soup. They had proposed visiting one of the large tea-traktirs (restaurants) with which Moscow abounds, after dinner; but all felt too tired for this, so they had their tea in their hotel instead.

"The good people of Moscow are even greater tea-drinkers than the Peterburgians," said Mr. Ralston. "They fairly drown themselves in tea, but it is usually of the weakest description. This that we are having I ordered to be made in our English fashion. The tea itself is of an excellent quality."

"It is indeed. This possesses a fragrance that tea seldom has with us," said Dr. Driscoll. "From tea to Napoleon is a sufficient leap; but one cannot traverse the streets of Moscow without having vividly recalled to one's mind the event which must always

render it most memorable in history. I remember in some work on Russia, published many years ago, a comparison which struck me at the time as a fine one, in which the writer likened Napoleon to Belshazzar, reading in the red glare of the blazing city, as Belshazzar did of old upon the wall, that his empire had passed away."

CHAPTER XIX.

POSTING.

"He who travels
Our rude and uncouth highways needs, i' faith,
Lay his account with some plain entertainment."

DURING the whole of the following day Dr. Driscoll was engaged at the great Foundling Hospital, to inspect which was his chief business in Moscow. Mr. Ralston and Ralph walked about the city during the morning, and examined such parts as had not been overtaken on the previous day.

"You have seen Moscow under favourable conditions, considering the time of the year," said Mr. Ralston, "for yesterday and to-day have luckily been bright; but, as you can fancy, the city looks much prettier when all its gardens and planted spaces are in full summer foliage."

Dr. Driscoll rejoined Mr. Ralston and Ralph at dinner in the evening.

"Well, I have got through all my duties, and a busy day I have had, I can assure you," he said, "What an astonishing place the great hospital is, to be sure! It has even exceeded my expectations. I

begin to suspect the authorities at Petersburg sent me chiefly that I might add my small word of praise to the general approval which the institution has won from all quarters, rather than with the expectation that I should find anything to alter or suggest in regard to its management. My more especial work, however, was in connection with one particular department of the hospital—a department in regard to which we in England are supposed to possess the latest scientific knowledge; and here I ventured to make one or two suggestions to the management which were favourably received, and which will probably be adopted. And now I am a free man, with a long holiday before me, to do with it what I like."

"Then, if you have no objections, we shall start for Voronej to-morrow morning," said Mr. Ralston. "I am a little anxious to get back to Karlhoff as quickly as possible. My overseer at the factory is an intelligent and honest fellow, but young at his post, and he was a little anxious at having the whole responsibility of affairs on his shoulders during my absence."

The party left Moscow by an early train next morning, and on the following day reached Voronej. There they passed the night, and in the morning prepared to continue their journey. Mr. Ralston had brought a large sledge with him from home, which he had left at a posting-inn in the town, and which was now got ready for the travellers. Dr. Driscoll was a little surprised at the extent of Mr. Ralston's preparations for the journey in regard to provisions.

"Ah, you have yet to travel in Russia, my dear sir," said Mr. Ralston. "With the exception of those in Petersburg and Moscow, there is still hardly a decent hotel in Russia. The best I ever put up at out of the two capitals was in a quarter where you might least have expected it—at Ekaterinberg, on the borders of Siberia. You will find that my preparations are none too complete. Some of our Russian wayside inns, were you to patronize them, would rather astonish you."

The horses were now put to. They were three in number, harnessed abreast; the middle one in shafts, and with a high yoke over its neck, in shape something like a horse-shoe, from which small bells were suspended; the two side horses lightly harnessed, so as to run almost free. The sledge itself was more substantially than elegantly built, having no springs, but in their place a framework of poles, which the inequalities of most Russian country roads render more serviceable than springs, and a large hood, which could be so drawn down as to convert the sledge into a covered carriage.

The horses were small, ragged, weedy looking animals, but their performance soon proved them to be better than their looks. They got over the ground at a capital pace, and answered bravely to the calls of their driver, who always kept them at the top of their speed. The yemstchick, or post-boy, was a source of much wonder to Dr. Driscoll, Ralph, and Mark. That such an atom of a coachman should display such coolness, skill, and address, was a new ex-

perience in travelling. The boy could not have been more than ten years old, and yet he managed his team with a dexterity and knowingness that were nothing short of marvellous.

He held his reins thrust out before him at arm's-length, and leaning forward in his place, so drove his team as to avoid all the greater inequalities in the road, shaving past obstacles as though he were trying how close he could go without concussion. Sometimes he played circus-like feats with his steeds, such as one sees performed at equestrian exhibitions, where the rider now spreads his horses over half the breadth of the arena, and now gathers them so closely together that they jostle heads and shoulders. Almost exactly thus did the youthful yemstchick seem to delight in displaying his command over his horses, all the while urging them to their fullest speed.

Ralph was delighted with the little yemstchick. "It beats anything I ever saw at Hengler's cirque, or anywhere else, when you think of his size," he said.

"It is fair amazing, to be sure," said Mark "I ha' seen some smart driving in Californy, and some smarter still over the Blue Mountains in Australia, where the stage-coachmen drive ye sheer up a mountain, and then down a precipice, or next to it; but this bit o' a lad matches 'em both. He must be a straight descendant of Jehu, the son of Nimshi, for he driveth furiously, but a'most as cleverly as fast."

The day was again bright, and the atmosphere

still, so that, warmly wrapped up in their cloaks and furs, the travellers did not feel the cold unpleasantly keen, and were able to keep the hood of their sledge raised. Dr. Driscoll took the present opportunity of mentioning to Mr. Ralston the invitation of Mr. Vasili Nicolaivitch Nordcheff, at the same time briefly describing that gentleman and his father.

"However, as you wish to get home as quickly as possible, that is a very good reason for our not turning aside from our direct route," he concluded.

"No, no; I am not in such haste as that comes to," answered Mr. Ralston. "I really think you should pay Mr. Nordcheff a visit; and we need only stay at his house a day. It will give you a glimpse into Russian provincial life. From your description, I can see that your travelling companions were typical specimens of two distinct classes in the country, the Old and the New, or what is generally called French merchants. I might give you some description of what manner of men they both are, for I am frequently brought into contact with both types; but as we purpose visiting the Nordcheffs, it will be more interesting for you to discover these things for yourselves, and then you shall see what you shall see."

At each post-house the travellers changed horses and yemstchicks. Sometimes their post-boys were quite lads, little if any older than their first; sometimes youths; sometimes elderly men. All showed themselves equally skilful drivers, and all possessed the secret of getting out of their horses the utmost limit of speed of which they were capable.

They stopped an hour at one post-house at mid-day to lunch, when the wisdom of Mr. Ralston's forethought in the matter of provisions became manifest; the people at the post-house could contribute nothing towards a decent meal, except a samovar and hot water. So Mark busied himself with the tinned meats, biscuits, tea, etc., which Mr. Ralston had laid in, and soon had a capital hot kettle of tea ready, and a comfortable meal for the hungry travellers. They paid a trifle for the use of the samovar and the hot water; the fresh horses were put to; and the travellers were again rushing at headlong speed over the hard, crisp snow, which flew this way and that beneath the flying feet of the horses, the sledge-bells tinkling shrilly in the frosty air, the yemstchick gesticulating and shouting as he urged his team to increased speed, hardly ever making use of his short whip, but doing all by hand and voice.

An intense stillness reigned over the wilderness through which they were passing. Not a sound broke the silence save the voice of the yemstchick, which, when its possessor was not calling upon his horses, was occasionally raised in a verse of some wild chant, which echoed strangely among the pines, and died away in far-off echoes with a plaintive, lingering cadence.

Now and then a wolf or fox was seen skulking on the outskirts of the forest, to disappear as the sledge approached; crosses were passed, rude wooden structures erected here and there on the roadside; *telégas* were met or passed—clumsy little country carts laden

with tallow, hides, or wood. The villages which occurred on the journey were all of the same description, consisting of two rows of cottages, set back at some distance from the road, and built of roughly hewn logs, each cottage being surrounded by a high wooden palisade. From all these villages there was quite wanting the cheerful neatness and air of comfort characteristic of most English hamlets; but the travellers could easily imagine that in summer they might possess a certain rustic picturesqueness; for the cottages, with their gabled ends, which were always turned towards the street, had something of the look of Swiss chalets, and while the most of them were of the plainest description of architecture, others, belonging to the richer class of peasants, had their eaves decorated with a wooden fringe, brightly painted and carved in a quaint and pretty design.

At nightfall the travellers reached one of these villages, and it was decided to pass the night there. The post-house at which they put up made pretensions to being an inn also. "I daresay it will do as well as another," Mr. Ralston said. "I have already forewarned you not to expect luxurious accommodation at any country inn in Russia."

The room into which they were shown was furnished in the barest and most comfortless manner,—a coverless table, a cushionless sofa, and a few chairs being the only furniture it possessed.

"It will be a mere waste of words asking the people here what they could let us have for supper," said Mr. Ralston. "They would answer that they

could serve us anything we chose to order, and for every article we named would be ready with some glib explanation of its absence from the larder. Their actual bill of fare at this moment consists probably of black bread, cabbage or mushroom soup, a few eggs, and kvass, vodka, and tea; so we shall just have to content ourselves with a repetition of our lunch."

A slovenly waiter came and spread the bare table with a very peculiar looking cloth, which, on closer examination by the travellers, whose curiosity was piqued by its appearance, turned out to be nothing more or less than a creased and soiled counterpane. Ralph laughed outright as Mr. Ralston unceremoniously swept the unsavoury-looking bit of napery off the table, and flung it on the sofa.

"I shouldn't wonder if the waiter's napkin is also his dish-cloth; it looks black enough," said Mr. Ralston.

The man, on his return to the room with a samovar of tea, showed not the slightest sign either of surprise or discomposure at Mr. Ralston's action in regard to the counterpane table-cloth.

"We can trust the tea, at any rate; I don't suppose any one would care to try their cabbage soup. I would not recommend it," said Mr. Ralston.

The travellers sat up but a short while after supper. Ralph and his father shared a bedroom between them, and Mr. Ralston and Mark were each provided with a separate room. The bedrooms were furnished in a like scanty and cheerless fashion with the apart-

ment in which the travellers had supped. All the party had brought their own bedding with them from St. Petersburg, Dr. Driscoll having been informed that this precaution was highly advisable in travelling in Russia,—a fact to which Mr. Ralston had also added his emphatic testimony.

All the travellers were early astir next morning. The people of the inn had tea ready for them, and Mark, who was the first up, had taken the waiter's duties into his own hands, and spread the coverless table with the remainder of the contents of the hampers.

"Well, how did you all sleep?" asked Mr. Ralston, and as he spoke there was perceptible in his eyes and about the corners of his mouth a lurking smile.

"Precious badly," burst out Ralph. "When Mr. Volkoff told us to take blankets, he surely forgot to mention that we ought not to trust even the beds themselves. Why, I believe mine fairly swarms with—with—fleas, and something a degree or two more abominable. Look here, and here!"

Ralph turned the back of his neck towards Mr. Ralston, and then bared his arm. Both were sprinkled plentifully with red spots that told their own tale.

"Whatever have you been doing with yourself?" said Mr. Ralston with feigned gravity.

"Of course you don't know, Mr. Ralston," said Ralph. "Father is just the same as that, and Mark too, I know. You must be made of proof iron; or is it that you have got accustomed to the thing that you take matters so coolly? Why, my bed was

simply a hive, and nothing less.—What is your experience, Mark?"

"I'm a'most speechless wi' indignation, Master Ralph, to think as such a state o' things should exist in a country calling itself Christian. I've been waging a sort o' hand-to-hand fight all the night, and I doubt but I've come off second best after all. I feel summat like as if I'd been rolled over a mile o' barnacles. But I would just like to say a word or two to that young man. I suspected something like this last night."

The waiter entered the room at this moment with a fresh supply of hot water. Mark had by this time learned to speak in Russian with tolerable fluency.

"Young man," he began, with severity, "a strict regard for the truth must ha' been an item as was neglected in the school where you got your education. Didn't you assure me last night as there wasn't a single—ahem!—flea in the house?"

A broad grin overspread the waiter's normally stolid features. "Yes, sir, quite right; I said there wasn't a *single* one in the house, and neither there is. I didn't say there were not more, did I, sir?"

The cool assurance and imperturbable good-humour with which the man said this, as if the whole matter were an exquisite joke, roused Mark's ire mightily, though it amused rather than otherwise the rest.

"*Single!*" exclaimed Mark with indignant emphasis; "no, I'm pretty sure as there isn't a *single* one. They're every man jack o' them married, and got large and healthy families."

Ralph gave a shout of laughter, in which he was joined by his father and Mr. Ralston.

"What would happen to your house if it was a ship, young man, is jest this," continued Mark: "there'd be a-piping of all hands to the pumps first thing every morning; then there'd be a general holy-stoning o' the decks, and after that a general fumigation of the ship's hammocks, and every man as kept his hammock in such a condition as mine was last night would stand a fine chance o' being swabbed and holy-stoned himself."

"Did you not suffer at all, Mr. Ralston? or are you case-hardened?" said Dr. Driscoll.

"No, not quite," answered Mr. Ralston. "The fact is, I didn't sleep on my bed; I slept on the floor."

"I thought so. I thought you must know better than to do as we did," said Ralph. "What a shame of you not to give us that tip, Mr. Ralston!"

"I had said a good deal against Russian inns, you see," said Mr. Ralston, laughing, "and I felt as if something ought to happen to justify my accusations, or you would think me prejudiced."

"And so you sacrificed your friends to prove to them the correctness of your opinions."

"I ask everybody's pardon, if my manner of proof has been of a slightly practical character. Before you return to Petersburg, I hope you will find out some of the more agreeable sides of Russian character in the humbler ranks than that which you have just had experience of. Cleanliness in these matters is certainly not a strong point with the Russian

peasantry. The absolute contentment in which they rest in regard to the whole matter approaches to a sort of fatalism. I once tried to get some Western notions into the heads of our work-people in regard to the treatment of certain species of insectivora. They heard me patiently to the end, as a Russian peasant always does, and then answered calmly, 'Why should we do thus towards the creatures, barin? Did not God make us both?'"

"There's no manner of use arguing wi' people like that, sir," said Mark conclusively. "There's a deal that's good about the Russian peasant, as I can already bear witness, but he's not quite abreast o' the times in some things. They've many virtues, but a strict attention to the details o' cleanliness, as ye may say, is not among them. 'Cleanliness is next to godliness,' isn't their eleventh commandment, anyhow."

CHAPTER XX.

THE RESULTS OF HAVING A MUSICAL YEMSTCHICK.

"It is always the unexpected that happens."—DISRAELI.

WITH a fresh team and a new yemstchick the travellers were presently again on the road. The new post-boy was an exceptionally lively and merry fellow for a Russian; gifted with a fine musical voice, and possessing a large repertory of songs. A very little persuasion induced him to give the travellers a specimen of his powers; and when once set going he trolled out song after song with hardly a pause or interruption, while the solemn pines echoed back his deep-toned tenor. The music served to while away the time pleasantly enough —for the yemstchick had really a natural aptitude for music, and sang his half-wild, half-plaintive ballads with expression and feeling—but the sequel to his performance was not so agreeable.

The sledge was approaching a belt of forest, and the road had narrowed so considerably from the snow having got banked up on each side, that one of the horses had to be harnessed in front of the others.

The vehicle was ascending a slight hill, and the yemstchick was urging his horses to their utmost speed that he might take the steep with a rush; at the same time he was singing at the top of his voice something about—

"Such a pretty maid
Was the young Katrina,
Any man had died
Willingly to win her.

"Half a country town
Loved her to their cost,
From the barin down
To the village post."

Either the yemstchick's attention was partly diverted by his singing from his driving, or the horses took fright at something; but the sledge made a sudden swerve, struck the side of the road, and the next moment the occupants found themselves overturned upon the snow-drift. The vehicle rolled right over on the top of them; so that, what with the carriage itself, and the pile of superincumbent rugs, furs, and luggage, the travellers were well-nigh smothered in the snow-bank.

Ralph was the first to extricate himself and scramble to his feet, and next Mr. Ralston and Dr. Driscoll.

"Wherever have Mark and the yemstchick got to?" said Ralph.

Where indeed? They were nowhere to be seen; and it was not until after some minutes of vigorous digging in the drift that both were at last unearthed, or rather unsnowed. The old man reappeared look-

ing a little shaken; but the yemstchick seemed no more put about than if he had just come out of a bath which he had taken voluntarily and for pleasure: he merely shook himself like a big dog, and said quietly, "How could that have happened now? But, *salvo Bogen!* it might have been worse."

It was bad enough, however; for, on examination, the shafts and part of the harness of the sledge proved to be so badly broken that it was impossible to proceed further.

"What is to be done?" said Dr. Driscoll.

The yemstchick was interrogated.

"We must just go on with our feet," he answered. "The forest is just there, you see. Perhaps we shall come upon some *isba* soon, where we can sleep to-night. To-morrow is a new day, and the morning is wiser than the night."

"The fellow is clearly a bit of a philosopher in his way," said Dr. Driscoll.

"They are all that way. The composure with which the Russian peasant accepts every misfortune as something over which he has absolutely no control is a little awkward sometimes. But there is nothing for it in the present instance but to follow the man's advice."

The yemstchick cut away the horses from the broken and tangled traces and led them on in front, while the rest of the party followed a few paces in the rear. In this order they entered the forest, and had not proceeded more than a mile when, much to the travellers' relief and satisfaction—for it seemed to

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them not at all improbable that they might have to pass the night without a roof to cover them—they came upon a rude little log-wood cabin, at the door of which were two men.

On Mr. Ralston stating the plight in which his companions and himself were placed, and that they desired to make the hut their hostelry for the night, the men at once consented to supply them with such accommodation as was in their power to afford.

On entering the isba, the travellers found it occupied by two women and some half-dozen children.

"My comrade is Michael Chegaivitch," said one of the men; "I am Zacharia Strogonoff. We are wood-cutters. If the gentlemen would like some tea now, my wife Louba will have hot water in two minutes. Perhaps the gentlemen have their own tea?"

"Yes," said Mr. Ralston, who had taken care to bring one of the packets of tea with him before leaving the sledge.

"Whom do you cut wood for? For some barin? or do you supply some village merely?" asked the yemstchick, who wished to arrive, if possible, at an idea of their whereabouts.

"We work for Gospodin Vasili Nicolaivitch mostly," answered the man.

"Vasili Nicolaivitch!" said Dr. Driscoll in surprise. "Are we near where he lives, then?"

"A few versts off only, barin," answered the man.

"Then we are not far from the village of Kovka?"

"It lies just on the other side of the wood, barin."

"This is extremely fortunate," said Mr. Ralston

aside to Dr. Driscoll. "Our plan is now clear. To-morrow morning we will pay your travelling companions a visit. Vasili Nicolaivitch will soon set the sledge to rights for us again, and we will then proceed on our journey."

"Be it so. Things have turned out more luckily than could have been expected, certainly; but it is odd that we should have been again thrown in the way of our friends in this manner."

"We call such chances odd, but they are the things that are continually happening in travel. Dickens used to say that every year he found the world growing smaller."

The two women busied themselves in preparing the tea for the strangers, and then retired with their children into a corner of the cabin, leaving the space immediately around the stove to the men. After they had partaken of their tea, the travellers, with the exception, of course, of Ralph, who was not so precocious as to smoke yet, lit their pipes and had some talk with the two woodmen. It was arranged that the two men should, in the morning, conduct the party to the house of Vasili Nicolaivitch.

The travellers prepared to retire early. The women and the children had already gone to rest. Their toilet preparations ere retiring were simplicity itself—in fact they made none. The children were put to bed as they stood in their clothes; their bed consisting of a long wooden shelf or bench running along the wall, about a foot and a half from the ceiling. Into this crib, which was not unlike the

berths on board a ship, the children climbed like chickens going to roost. The two men and their wives lay down on the top of the stove itself.

The English travellers were somewhat uncertain as to where they themselves were to make their couches. A low bench ran round three sides of the cabin, where they might have lain down, but it did not look particularly clean. In fact the interior of the hut generally looked the reverse of clean. The travellers were suspicious of the wooden bench, lest it might prove a harbour of "animated nature."

"We had better just lie down on the floor," said Mr. Ralston. "Bare earth as it is, it is probably the cleanest thing in the place. We have plenty of rugs."

"I think I could give a certain well-known newspaper advertiser in England a hint that would be worth his while to adopt," said Ralph. "You know the way the patent advertisers are fond of putting it—'What no householder should be without,' and 'What no lady should be without,' etc. Well, the gentleman I refer to should have one of his advertisements run thus: 'What no traveller in Russia should be without—Keating's insect destroyer.'"

"Write to Mr. Keating or some of his agents, and give him your hint. He might allow you a small royalty on the sale of his specific, if it increased greatly from your suggestion," said Mr. Ralston, laughing.

"I'll think about it when I get back to England," said Ralph.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE NORDCHEFFS AT HOME.

"Let's hold their boundless hospitality
As covering a host of lesser virtues
Which they possess not."

THE travellers slept soundly, notwithstanding their somewhat hard couch, and were up early in the morning.

"I hope you're quite recovered now from your snow-bath yesterday, Mark," said Dr. Driscoll.

"Quite, sir, thank'ee. I was a bit took aback, I must confess, not being just quite so strong in the nerves as I was twenty year agone, though nothing to complain of for my years neither. It's not the first time I've had a snow-bath, as you call it, sir, by a long score; but what only sets a young man's blood tingling chills an old one's marrow. An old tree may look tough and lusty enough to the outward eye—as I am thankful to say I still feel—but it ain't to be supposed as its sap can run as warm and strong as a sapling's. Howsoever, I feel spry enough this morning again, and ready for the day's chances."

The travellers left the cabin, conducted by the two wood-cutters, shortly after they had finished their breakfast. Immediately on emerging from the forest, they reached the village of Kovka; and a walk of half an hour longer brought them to the gates of a substantial-looking square house, surrounded by grounds of some extent. This the wood-cutters announced was the residence of Vasili Nicolaivitch and his father Nicolai Nordcheff. Dr. Driscoll placed some money in the hands of the woodmen, who were profuse in their expressions of thanks, having evidently received a much larger sum for their services than they expected.

The travellers knocked at the door of the house before which they stood, and presently it was opened by a little old woman. Dr. Driscoll presented his card, and the party were led into a handsomely furnished room. In a few minutes after, Vasili Nicolaivitch entered the room quickly, and greeted Dr. Driscoll and Ralph with outstretched hands.

"Ah, my dear sir, I am transported to see you. It is very good of you thus to visit us," he exclaimed; and then turning slightly towards Mr. Ralston and bowing, he continued, "A friend of yours;—delighted to make your acquaintance, sir."

Dr. Driscoll narrated as briefly as possible the circumstances of the accident to the sledge on the previous day.

"Ah, that is a trifle!" answered the host lightly. "That will happen to any traveller in Russia any day. We will soon set all to rights. I will send

two of my men back for the sledge, and we will have it all in proper order for you by to-morrow. Where is your yemstchick?"

"He is with us. We sent him round to the back of the house with my man Mark, who you may remember travelling with us."

"To be sure, I recollect—an elderly man; a sort of half *valet de chambre,* and half what you call body-servant, henchman, in England,—what you mean when you say old and trusted family servant, *n'est-ce pas?*"

"Something of that sort," said Dr. Driscoll. "Our yemstchick cannot leave us and his horses till the next stage, which is still some miles distant, I believe."

"That is all right. Come now, all of you, and relieve yourselves of your greatcoats, and then I will introduce you to the ladies."

Vasili Nicolaivitch led his guests into a bedroom, where they changed their outer garments, and washed. Then they descended to the drawing-room of the house. As they entered, a lady rose hastily from a sofa.

"Agafia, my love, here are guests. You remember my telling you of my English travelling companions from Petersburg? Behold them then."

"O Vasili! why did you not announce me of them?" exclaimed the lady in some confusion.—"You are very welcome, sirs," she continued, bowing to the strangers.

"Our friends will excuse your being somewhat *en déshabillé,* Agafia," said her husband. "They are

aware that they come to us at an early hour, and that ladies' toilets are elaborate things now-a-days, requiring time and thought. They understand these matters in England, my dear."

The term *déshabillé* was certainly not too strong a one to apply to Mrs. Vasili Nicolaivitch Nordcheff's morning costume. She wore a long, loosely-fitting wrapper, of gaudily-coloured print, untidily put on, and not very clean. Her hair was carelessly fastened up behind, loose knots and tangles straggling out here and there. On her feet were slippers, very much down at the heel; and it could not escape the eye of the most careless observer that the lady's stockings were many degrees removed from white, their ostensible colour. In a word, Mrs. Vasili Nicolaivitch Nordcheff presented an *ensemble* which few ladies in England, of the same position in life, are found exhibiting at any hour of the day, and it is not to be wondered at that the strangers were not at once prepossessed by her appearance. She was not bad looking either, having bright dark eyes and a good-natured face, with a rather pasty complexion.

The lady quickly recovered from her temporary embarrassment at the unexpected presentation of the strangers, and was soon talking unconstrainedly to them, the remarkably free-and-easy style of her toilet apparently giving her little concern after the first few moments.

After a little general conversation, Vasili Nicolaivitch announced that he would go and summon his father and mother, and left the room for that pur-

pose. He returned in company with Nicolai Nordcheff and a little old woman, whom, to their surprise, the English guests recognized as the person who had opened the door to them, and whom Vasili now introduced as his mother.

The old lady presented as great a contrast to her daughter-in-law as did Nicolai Nordcheff to his son. She was dressed in the plainest and most simple manner possible, to be sure, but her dress looked appropriate and suited to her years and condition, and being at least neat and simple, caused her to be a pleasanter sight to contemplate than the younger Mrs. Nordcheff.

Vasili was anxious to show his guests over the house. "He will expect us to examine and admire everything," said Mr. Ralston aside to Dr. Driscoll as they followed their hosts from the room. "A Russian of the class to which your friend belongs regards his house very much as we would a private museum, as something to be shown off to every stranger. Every chance of doing so is one of the greatest gratifications he can enjoy."

Vasili led his guests from room to room, and displayed all his possessions with undisguised pride and satisfaction. The house was a large one, and was literally stuffed with furniture and ornaments of every description,—all the apartments, that is, except the dining-room, which, according to usual Russian custom, was meagre and bare in its appointments; but almost everywhere else in the house the display was profuse It seemed as if every quarter of the

globe had been laid under tribute to furnish its peculiar product. Silks and satins from China, carpets and tapestries from Persia, buhl, ormolu, and ivory ornaments from India, pictures from Italy, elaborate and wonderful clocks from Paris, were collected together until each room seemed quite incapable of holding another article and still allow of any space to move about in.

The general aspect of the rooms was heterogeneous and confused in the extreme; for where there was such an abundance of everything, anything like plan or arrangement was next to impossible. Everywhere there were wealth and profusion, and everywhere mistaken or doubtful taste. Vasili displayed all his possessions exactly as Mr. Ralston had said, like a man exhibiting a museum which had become to him of the nature of a hobby. He demanded of his guests that they should look at everything, while he himself ran off, with the rapidity of a professional cicerone, a short history of every article, always concluding with its money value. This garrulity on the part of their host was only saved from becoming a bore to the strangers by his gaiety and imperturbable good humour, which made it amusing.

The last room into which the English travellers were led was the bed-chamber of old Nicolai Nordcheff and his wife, a handsome apartment like all the others, though not quite so over-furnished as some.

"This is somewhat plainer, you remark," said Vasili. "My dear father and mother are simple in their tastes, you see, and we study them, of course.

Voilà! they are of the old school. My father would have things here more old-fashioned still, but I tell him it is the duty of every one to conform to the changing times. This bedstead, you observe, is as good and handsome as anything in the house; why not? Should not my mother have the best of everything?"

Vasili touched the heavy damask hangings of the bed as he spoke.

"Ah, yes! it is very beautiful—to look at," said the old lady simply; "but Nicolai and I—we do not sleep in that bed,—no." And before her son or daughter-in-law could interrupt her, the old lady had drawn out from under the bed a low, wooden trestle-bed of the simplest description. "We like to be nearer the stove, Nicolai and I," she continued, "and we can draw this little bed as close as we like."

The sudden crestfallen and discomfited look which crossed the son's face very nearly set the strangers off laughing, and it was only by a strong effort that they restrained their amusement; but Vasili quickly recovered himself.

"Yes, yes," he said with a shrug, "you and father are getting old people, matushka; you need warmth of course, and it is difficult breaking old habits besides.—Well, you have seen all the house now. We will have some lunch, then a smoke; after which you might like to take a walk round the grounds before dinner."

This programme was duly carried out. When the gentlemen returned to the house after their walk,

there was still nearly an hour until dinner. During this time the guests were left to themselves in the rooms which had been appointed for their use.

At dinner the English party found the company supplemented by another guest, a tall man of middle age, with a long, dark beard and long hair, dressed in a loose flowing gown, and with a cross hung from his neck. From his dress and general appearance Dr. Driscoll and Ralph at once knew him to be a priest. He was in fact the priest or "pope" of the neighbouring village. Vasili Nicolaivitch introduced him as Feodor Ottonovitch.

"I sent down to the village to invite him to make one at our table," Vasili whispered aside to Dr. Driscoll. "You will find him a man considerably superior in intelligence to the ordinary run of our village popes. They are pigs, many of them, I assure you, *bêtes grossiers*—drunkards. I am sorry to say it, but it is truth. But our Feodor Ottonovitch is of a different sort—you shall see."

The dinner was an excellent one, abundant and varied to luxuriousness. Mr. and Mrs. Vasili were assiduous in their attentions to their guests; but what struck Dr. Driscoll and Ralph most was that old Nicolai Nordcheff and his wife from time to time rose from their seats and themselves waited upon and helped their guests, assisting the servants quietly and unostentatiously, and with a dexterity as though they were accustomed to the work. This caused no surprise to Mr. Ralston, who had witnessed the same thing before.

"Our father and mother are pleased to do this," Vasili explained in a half-apologetic tone. "It is a relic of the old days, when such things were thought a mark of hospitality, you will understand. Father and mother are of the old school, *cela va sans dire*, and old people do not easily catch the tone of the times."

After dinner the company sat in the drawing-room, when all, with the exception of Ralph, the two ladies included, lighted papirosses, or cigarettes, and smoked. Vasili Nicolaivitch, Dr. Driscoll, Mr. Ralston, and the priest sat down at a table to cards; and Ralph, desirous of making himself agreeable, if possible, endeavoured to engage the younger lady in conversation.

Mrs. Vasili Nordcheff now presented a very different appearance from what she had done in the earlier part of the day, so different that Dr. Driscoll and Ralph had had some difficulty in recognizing her as the same person. To Mr. Ralston the metamorphosis which the lady had undergone caused no wonder.

Her dress was very rich and handsome, sweeping behind her in heavy folds; her hair was elaborately dressed; her cheeks were no longer yellow-white in colour, but bloomed with roses that had budded and blown with a magical swiftness since morning; the diamonds upon her fingers and neck would have made a jeweller's mouth water; and what was perhaps the most marked change of all, her hands were quite clean. Mrs. Vasili in "full dress" was indeed an object of magnificence, but the taste displayed in her costume was very doubtful.

Ralph did not find that he made rapid progress in conversation with Mrs. Vasili, although he was a boy with a good deal to say for himself usually, as the reader has by this time probably gathered.

"Is there much going on hereabouts, Mrs. Vasili—any fun, you know?" he asked in his direct schoolboy manner, after a few preliminary remarks.

"Fun! *divertissement,* that is what you mean. No, not much of that. Country life in Russia is *triste* for ladies, especially in the winter; and there are few people around here with whom my husband and I can associate. They are peasants for the most part, and they, you know, are pigs."

Ralph was accustomed by this time to hear this expression of criticism employed by all sorts and grades of Russians, and so he was not now surprised at hearing it from the lips of a lady.

"Do you play the piano?" he began again.

"A very little—never in company," answered the lady, without removing her papiross from her mouth, but puffing out her words like a man.

"I suppose you read a good many novels, then, in the winter?"

"No; I am not greatly a reader. Sometimes I read a French novel. I once read a book of Alexandre Dumas—'The Count of Monte Christo,' I think he called it. Did you ever hear of that book? It was rather interesting, but so long. It is a good book for a winter, however—it took me six months. I once tried an English novel: some English gentlemen with whom my husband became

acquainted recommended it to me. I am forgetting its name—something about Adam, I think. The time must have been long ago, surely; but I did not get far with that story,—I thought it was so slow, and yet I understood it was by one of your best writers. No; I am afraid I have not what you call a taste for reading. Your English ladies seem to find it good *pour passer le temps.* It is a droll taste, which we Russian ladies do not understand."

"Do you visit much, then?"

"No, not much—not in the country. There is no one to visit, and the roads in winter are so bad."

"What do you do, then, mostly?" pursued Ralph, beginning to be very much at a loss to imagine how Mrs. Vasili did contrive to get through the time.

"Ah, well, it is hard just to tell; but I do much as other Russian ladies do in the country," replied the lady slowly. "We go to church regularly, and we fast regularly; these are our duties, you will understand. Then for our amusements, our chief ones are the *bals masques.* I go to those in Moscow, being the nearest. Ah, that is what you call fun indeed. Then we enjoy ourselves. At Moscow and Petersburg we see life and the world. At home there is not much else to do than to eat, drink, sleep, and play cards."

Altogether Ralph was not greatly impressed with the delights, intellectual or physical, or with the general desirableness, of a Russian lady's life in the country.

When the gentlemen had finished their game of cards, Vasili proposed that the men should now with-

draw to his private study and smoking-room, and continue their smoking there. The room into which the host conducted his guests he called a study, but the articles usually associated with study were the least part of its furnishing. Facilities for smoking of every description abounded, and the apartment was otherwise a snug and comfortable one. While the company had been occupying the drawing-room tea had been from time to time handed round by a servant, by whom also the guests had been continually plied with sweetmeats and other confections. Now the tea and sweetmeats gave place to wines, liqueurs, and spirits; and if the English guests had on each occasion complied with their host's invitations to drink, their heads and nerves would have been in a very curious and undesirable condition before the evening was over.

Father Feodor, on the other hand, never refused his host's bidding to help himself, but replenished his glass from the vodka flask with a steady persistency that considerably astonished Dr. Driscoll and Ralph, notwithstanding what they knew of the Russian capacity in this direction. Ralph could not help wondering what would be thought of a clergyman in England who might have rivalled Friar Tuck in a department in which that jovial cleric especially excelled. But, notwithstanding the regularity and depth of Feodor's potations, they did not apparently incommode him in the least degree. He preserved the same self-possessed and unruffled demeanour throughout the evening.

"Now we shall be snug," said Vasili, as he lit another fine Havana cigar which he took from a box on the table. "What do you say to some one telling a story, while the rest smoke and listen. You English people should be good hands at story-telling, if your books are to be believed. At Christmas, according to your magazines, you are always gathering round the fire and telling famous stories to each other. Are not Dickens's people and many others in your Christmas tales always doing that? But perhaps it is more in books than in real life, *n'est-ce pas?* Now the Russians, many of them, are really good raconteurs. I do not wish to boast, look you, but it is an acknowledged fact. You will find much dramatic faculty and narrative power among all classes of our people. You must have noticed that, Mr. Ralston."

"Yes; and now I propose, Mr. Nicolaivitch, that you put the question beyond dispute in your own person, as I have no doubt you can."

"No, no; I was not speaking of myself, truly. I am an exception. I have no gift in this way. My father is much better; and Father Feodor here is a notable story-teller."

"Mark Weatherby is a capital hand at spinning a yarn; many old sailors are. I think you would like to hear some of his sea experiences," said Ralph, speaking out straightly the thought uppermost in his mind at the moment.

"Is that so? then we shall have him up, by all means," said the host. "I am very fond of hearing

stories, I have to confess. I have a strong dash of the famous caliph in me. It is a childish taste, perhaps, but I believe it has been fostered by your English literature, your Dickens and Thackeray, and your other Christmas story-tellers. But we shall have up old Mark—how do you call him?—Fair-weather, Goodweather, Badweather—no—"

"Weatherby," said Ralph.

"Weatherby?" repeated Mr. Nicolaivitch; and he touched a bell on the wall. A servant appeared presently, who was bidden to summon Mark.

Mark entered the room, and quietly took a seat placed for him by the servant. Vasili Nicolaivitch invited him to fill his glass, and Mark mixed himself a tumbler of mild grog; for the old man was temperate in all his habits. He was not at all discomposed at being thus unexpectedly ushered into the company of the gentlemen. In the presence of his superiors he always bore himself with a respectful deference, mingled with a quiet self-possession, and this demeanour seldom or never deserted him.

Dr. Driscoll explained to Mark the turn which the conversation had taken, and how their friends and entertainers would be pleased to hear him narrate some one of his experiences by land or sea. After a few moments' thought, while he silently puffed the pipe he had lighted, Mark began and told a striking story of how a vessel, in which he once served as boatswain, had been saved from wreck on an iceberg by the presence of mind, nerve, and skill of the third officer, who had actually steered the ship straight

through a cleft or arch in the berg, and so snatched her from certain and immediate destruction.

Vasili Nicolaivitch, old Nicolai Nordcheff, and Father Feodor were all greatly interested and pleased by Mark's narrative, and the former praised it with his usual effusiveness.

"And now it is your turn, patrushka," he said, addressing the pope. "You will oblige our friends, will you not?"

"With pleasure, if you think any of my gossips will amuse them in the least."

Father Feodor placed his cigar on the table beside him, drank what remained of liquor in his glass, and began the following story.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE POPE'S TALE.

"The senses of the sick,
'Tis known, are ofttimes strangely quick."

HEN I was a young man, before I was married and obtained a cure, I was one of the brothers in the monastery of Tvek. I may mention that no priest in the Greek Church can hold a cure until he is married, and that he can only marry once. If his wife die, he must no longer have the charge of a parish, and generally returns to a monastery.

The monastery of Tvek resembled most other monasteries of our holy Church. It was a large square building, surrounded by high walls. Within the walls, besides the main building, there were the chapel and several offices, the cemetery, and the garden. Over the gateway were suspended pictures of the blessed Virgin and Child, together with several others of different saints, in front of which, of course, lamps were always kept burning.

The interior arrangements of the building were simple, but it is necessary to bear them in mind in

order to understand my story. A long passage or gallery divided the building in the centre, on either side of which were the monks' cells, the superior's apartments, the refectory, and other rooms. This passage led to a small room at the back of the house, sunk somewhat below the level of the rest of the building, and used as a sort of storehouse for firewood and different odds and ends.

Though all the inmates of a monastery are supposed to be brothers, having common interests and sympathies, particular friendships are formed between individuals as in the outside world. My closest friend among the brothers at our monastery was Vladimir Bariatinsky. I believe we were as truly attached to each other as though we had been brothers by blood.

Vladimir was a man such as you find but few of, alas! in our Church. He had views far in advance of his time, and was, besides, a man of great erudition. He spoke several foreign languages with ease and elegance. It is to him that I owe my acquaintance with English, as also what knowledge I possess of the histories, religious and political, of other countries besides my own. But in addition to his large attainments, my friend was of the deepest and most earnest piety, gentle, and pure and good in every thought as well as act. He was decidedly of an ascetic temperament—too much so, I used to tell him; for I myself was of that robust physical constitution that must find an outlet in vigorous action, and goes not easily with asceticism. But it was Vladimir's nature

to be self-denying, self-sacrificing, watchful to anxiousness lest the flesh should overcome the spirit in him, of which, poor dear fellow, there was very little chance in any case.

For Vladimir was a frail and delicate man, with a body like a woman's—sensitive, sympathetic, vibrating to every touch, whether of happiness or pain. He was like a fine instrument, that gives out the sweetest music when all its strings and notes are in perfect order and harmony, but which the lightest mishap sets ajar.

Among Vladimir's accomplishments was that of music. He played upon the harp with a wonderful skill and feeling. The amusements in which the inmates of a monastery may lawfully indulge are, you may imagine, neither many nor varied. But music is among them, and it is a great boon when some brother is possessed of such musical gifts as was Vladimir.

Many a long winter night was beguiled and shortened by his sweet and tuneful music. Anything that could be done with a harp I believe he could accomplish; and whatever of the compositions of the great masters of all countries lent themselves to the somewhat limited capacity of the harp, he could perform.

But there were times when Vladimir was too ill and weak to touch his harp. He was subject to attacks of physical prostration, for which no remedy had been found. At such times he could do nothing but move in the feeblest manner about the house, unable to perform the lightest of his ordinary duties.

At such times it was noticeable that his always sensitive body became doubly sensitive, as was only natural. His nervous system became strung to a pitch that must have been a positive pain to its possessor. On these occasions of illness I noticed that his sense of hearing was always strangely acute. The slightest noise seemed to jar upon him; and to the credit of the brothers generally, I must tell that everything was done that was possible to spare him in this way. In truth, all liked and respected Vladimir, and the wonderful purity of his nature was not the sort of thing to raise envy in most hearts. It was something above that.

It was during one of Vladimir's attacks of debility that the circumstances I am now to narrate happened. One windy winter night all the brothers were gathered in the refectory to partake of our frugal supper before retiring to our several cells. Brother Osep had just come in from performing a duty which fell to each brother in turn to perform at this hour, which was to place a small portion of our supper—a bowl of buckwheat, black bread, and kvass, or whatever it might be—at the gate of the monastery. I must explain briefly what this was for.

You may have heard that not a few prisoners make their escape from Siberia, and find their way through the deserts and forests to some large town, and thence, it may be, out of the country, though as often as not they are recaptured and taken back to the scene of their punishment. These fugitives conceal themselves in the woods during the day, but at night enter

the nearest village in search of food, which they are pretty certain of finding. For the Russian has usually a soft heart, and it is a custom in very many villages for people to leave meat and drink outside their doors or windows for the support of any Siberian runaways that may be lurking in the neighbourhood.

Not only so, but the monasteries sometimes do the same thing. Strictly speaking, it is wrong, no doubt, and a direct breach of the laws of the country; and doubly wrong, it may be, for the inmates of a monastery to countenance such practices. Some of these fugitives are criminals, with blood upon their hands. And yet, as I say, the Russian's sympathy with any kind of misfortune is great, and it gets the better of his sense of justice even in the case of a monk; and, in truth, when one sees the gangs of the condemned clanking along the road, chained, and guarded by soldiers, and thinks of the long exile to which they are doomed, it would be a hard heart that felt no stir of pity, even though one knows that in almost every case, notwithstanding all that has been said by foreigners to the contrary, the culprits richly deserve their sentences.

But to return to my story. Brother Osep had re-entered the refectory, and taken his place at the table beside the rest of us, when Brother Vladimir, who, though in a very weak condition, was able to sit at meals with us, uttered a sudden exclamation—"Ah! what is that?—the harp! the harp!" he cried, in a low, tremulous voice.

We all looked at Vladimir, puzzled to know what he meant. His harp was not in the room. He had not felt in the mood to play upon it for some days, and the instrument, we all knew, was standing at that moment at the head of the passage, in a small niche in the wall, its usual place.

"Do you not hear it? There again—listen!" repeated Vladimir, his voice becoming more tremulous and excited. "Some one is playing on the harp."

All bent their heads to listen, but for a little no one heard anything. Most of the brothers thought it must be fancy on the part of Vladimir; but I, who knew better than any of the others how keenly acute all his senses became during the attacks of his nervous affection, knew that it was quite possible that he might hear what we could not.

"There, once more!—do none of you hear? The harp is being played upon by some one. Listen! It is Mozart's Twelfth Mass."

There was a strange excitement now visible in Vladimir's face, which was increasing every moment.

"There, now! it swells higher. Surely you must hear it now!" cried he again, in what was for him almost an impatient tone.

Again we strained our ears to hear, and this time we did, one and all, catch a faint sound, as of a harp touched by the lightest fingers.

"Yes; I hear it now. It is the harp. What can it mean? Who can it be?" exclaimed the superior, in a low voice, from his place at the head of the table.

As he spoke, he rose from his seat, and moved towards the door, followed by all the brothers, in somewhat confused order. We walked up the passage to where the harp stood. There it stood still in its accustomed place, resting undisturbed against the wall. No slightest sound issued from it now. We stopped to listen, but even Vladimir heard no sound.

We looked up the long passage and down, but saw nothing. The gallery preserved the unbroken silence which always reigned in it at this hour. Our footsteps fell with a hollow echo on the oaken flooring. No other human being was in the corridor but ourselves, we were convinced; no sound broke the stillness but our footsteps and the wind outside moaning and wailing round the eaves of the house.

We returned to the refectory, and our supper concluded. No one spoke much during its progress, and when one did address his neighbour it was in a hushed whisper. All could see that the superior, a venerable old man revered by us all, was preoccupied and perplexed in thought. The brothers rose from the table and retired to their cells, conversing in whispers, the same topic, of course, occupying all,—Who could have been playing on the harp?

On the following evening, at the same hour, the same thing occurred in almost identically the same order and manner, with one difference and addition. Vladimir declared that almost simultaneously with the sound given out by the harp, he heard the noise of light footsteps and the sweep of a dress of some kind along the passage. Again we all hurried out

into the gallery, with the same result as on the previous night. We saw nothing, we heard nothing. The sound of the harp had ceased.

On the third evening the same thing occurred; and this time, all of us, being more keenly than ever on the alert, heard, as well as Vladimir, a light, swift footstep along the passage, and a soft trail, only caught by intense straining of the hearing, of a garment. We looked in each other's faces, and the same expression was manifest in each,—perplexity mingled with an amount of awe. There was something strange, inexplicable, and mysterious in the whole thing,—the playing of the harp as by unseen spirit fingers, simultaneous with the swift, light fall of feet and the rustling of raiment along the corridor.

But there was something more than perplexity and awe in Vladimir's face. Each night his manner had grown more excited, until at last, to-night, he seemed no longer able to contain himself. His frail frame trembled with the excitement which he was utterly unable to control.

"For God's sake, let us get to the bottom of this mystery," he exclaimed, and, rising from his place, hurried to the door. We all crowded after him. He led the way at a pace which only his excitement enabled him to maintain, in his present debilitated state of health, up the passage. We paused a moment before the harp. It was standing quiet and undisturbed. Then Vladimir led the way on to the very top of the passage. Here was the door which gave upon the little store-room already referred to.

Vladimir opened the door, which was never kept locked. There was no light in the room, but on the door being opened a faint radiance streamed in from the gallery. The whole area of the little chamber could be taken in at a glance, and as we entered in a confused group the eyes of all at once fell upon a figure crouching in a corner of the room. The figure tried to crouch still closer against the wall, and to hide itself from our sight behind a little pile of logs, but in vain.

The superior approached the huddled-up figure, touched it lightly, raised it from the ground, and led it forward. Then all saw that it was a woman—a woman quite young, in the dress of a prisoner, with bright, lustrous eyes, and a terrified, eager, famished look in a face that must, in happier days, have been fair to look upon.

The superior led the woman, unresisting, along the passage, back to the refectory, all the rest following, conversing in low tones. First the superior pressed the poor woman to eat with gentle solicitude. His tender manner inspired her with confidence, and she drank a little of the wine which, at the superior's bidding, one of the brothers brought to her. Then the superior asked her story, and she told it. The wretched girl—for she was little more than a girl—spoke with trembling accents, and her narrative was frequently interrupted by sobs.

I need not weary you with her story in detail; nor is it necessary. She had been accused, tried, and found guilty of child murder in Petersburg six

months previously. A strange chain of circumstantial evidence, against which her advocate had striven in vain, condemned the girl. But she reiterated, with many protestations, that she was innocent of the crime imputed to her; and we believed her. She told her story so simply and, when she had somewhat recovered from her first agitation, so connectedly, that we could not but believe her when she strove to prove to us how she was guiltless. She acknowledged that the evidence against her was strong, and did not blame her judges for thinking her guilty; but at the same time she believed herself to be perfectly justified in endeavouring to escape from her punishment—which, of course, granting her innocence, she was.

The girl had been sentenced to exile, with hard labour, in the Siberian mines. She had, from the moment she arrived in Siberia, plotted how to make her escape. An opportunity at length arrived, and she began her long and perilous flight. When she had reached our monastery, she was almost spent with fatigue, anxiety, insufficient food, and exposure. She found the food that was nightly placed at the gate of the monastery. On the first night, refreshed and inspirited by the first full meal she had had for many days, the idea possessed her that she would try and find shelter for the night somewhere about the monastery. She was half dead with cold, and felt that she could not live through much longer exposure.

With difficulty, but with the strength that is often

bred of despair, she climbed the high iron gate, crossed the court, and approached the door of the main building. It was unlocked: the locking of the outer door was the last thing attended to by us before retiring for the night. She softly opened the door, and seeing the long passage but dimly lighted, and hearing all silent and still, ventured to pass into the house and through the corridor. She passed along with swift but quiet steps, bare-footed as she was, and at the head of the passage found the other door which led into the little chamber. It seemed to the poor woman a very harbour of refuge suddenly opened up to receive her.

She slept that night in the little room, rose before any one in the house was astir, and let herself out as she had entered. During the day she hid herself in the neighbouring wood, and at night repeated her exploit. If she could only escape discovery for a few days, she thought, she would by that time recover sufficient strength to continue her journey, with increased hope of finally escaping all chance of recapture. On the third night she was discovered, as I have narrated.

Everything was now explained. The footfalls which we had heard in the passage were of course the girl's footsteps; the rustle of a garment was the brushing of her torn and trailing gown. The sound of the harp was not more difficult to explain. On each night the wind had been high; when the door was opened, it had swept up the narrow passage and stirred the strings of the harp. Vladimir's quick ear

had been the first to catch the sound of his own harp; but the idea that he heard bars from Mozart's Twelfth Mass was a pure fancy, bred of Vladimir's at the time abnormally active imagination. In Vladimir's seasons of physical depression his mental and imaginative faculties were preternaturally keen.

"I had been playing the mass the last time I touched the harp, and I suppose it was lingering in my thoughts," he said, quite ready now to admit that his fancy was fancy and nothing more.

My story is all but done. All that was weird and ghostly in the matter was now simply and naturally explained; and I am not ashamed to say that a feeling of relief was experienced by one and all of us at this natural solution of the mystery. We Russians are credited with being superstitious beyond our neighbours. Perhaps we are. We are farther remote from the great centres of Western civilization, and we have so many millions to teach. It is no wonder we are behind the times in many things, but with God's help we will make up by degrees.

The fugitive was fed and clothed and nursed. So convinced were we by her story that she was innocent of the crime brought against her, that we had no scruples about furthering her escape by every means in our power; and we were successful. The girl got safe away from Russia, and when I last heard of her, which is a good many years ago now, she was fulfilling the duties of a domestic in an English family resident in Italy with credit to herself and satisfaction to her employers.

"That is an interesting story; we have to thank you for it, sir," said Dr. Driscoll when Father Feodor had concluded.

"You tell it well, sir," said Mark Weatherby; "as well as though you were English born. It's sometimes been a marvel to me as a man as is a foreigner will talk English like a bishop, so to say; while another, as is an Englishman by birth, stumbles and trips in his talk like a hobbled horse. There's where the power o' eddication comes in. I've allays held wi' the wise king there—as in most other things, barrin' one or two o' his frailties, of course—Give me knowledge afore riches. Naught can rob a man o' that; while riches may any moment take to themselves wings like eagles and fly to the uttermost parts of the earth."

All smiled at Mark's vein of philosophy.

"He is a bit of a character, look you, this henchman of yours, *mon cher ami*," said Vasili Nicolaivitch, in a side whisper to Dr. Driscoll.

"It is, for the most part, good character that he possesses, however," answered Dr. Driscoll, smiling,—"honest stuff all through.—Speaking of the prisoners sent to Siberia, I imagine a good deal of exaggeration exists in the minds of people in other countries," continued Dr. Driscoll, addressing Father Feodor more especially.

"A great deal. Foreign writers on Russia have, for the most part, given very misleading accounts of this part of our government arrangements; but I lately read a short work on Russia by an Englishman, who

had been long a resident in the country, which really gave a just and impartial report. The prisoners sent to Siberia may be broadly classed under two heads—criminals, and political offenders. Now of the first class, the criminals, it is only those who have been guilty of the worst crimes who are compelled to work in the mines. Now the life of these men, in the mines, is not especially hard or prejudicial to the health; while the prisoners themselves are such as would probably have been executed in most other civilized countries. The worst culprits do not now live in the mines, but always above ground. Then for the political exiles. Their whole punishment consists in their being compelled to live within a certain radius. As long as they keep within this area, they are essentially free. I do not think that you could find any instance at the present time of a political offender working in the mines, or in fact required to do any description of compulsory government labour. A common mistake—wilfully made or not I do not take it upon me to say—of foreign writers upon Russia, is to confuse the criminals sent to Siberia with the political exiles. The lot of the latter is sufficiently hard in having to endure separation from friends and home—sometimes for what may seem a small political offence to a Western mind—and does not need to be exaggerated by sensational and false descriptions. What I have told you is a simple statement of the facts, which you may rely upon. Of course, things were in a much worse condition formerly than they are now; and what would

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have been true of a dozen years back, would be quite untrue if written or spoken now. The chief improvement that has taken place in regard to prisoners sent to Siberia is in the means of transport. Once they were obliged to walk the whole way. All that is done away with now. The exiles are taken by steamboat as far as Perm, and thence conveyed in vehicles. In this way, of course, they are spared an immense amount of fatigue and exposure. In short, our government now take a great deal of care of their prisoners."

"I imagine the Czar has to be greatly thanked for these measures of improvement," said Dr. Driscoll.

"I should not wonder if he were, though I cannot speak certainly on this particular point. The Emperor is a humane and a gentle-hearted man."

"The love and respect which the masses of the people evidently have for him is something really wonderful."

"He is deserving of it, sir. Consider, if he had never done anything else in his life for the people except the emancipation, that act alone merited their everlasting gratitude."

"Some have tried to belittle that act; but I have always regarded it as one of the greatest and noblest deeds ever attempted by any monarch in any age," said Dr. Driscoll.

"I agree with you," said Mr. Ralston. "When the attendant difficulties and risks are considered, it was a bold and brave as well as a philanthropic act."

"You will hear it said that the Emperor grows

less liberal as he grows older," said Father Feodor. "Perhaps he does; men naturally get more conservative as they get older—or it would be more correct to say, that as they get on in years they do not change so fast as the times, and so appear to stand still or even to retrograde. And then it must always be remembered that the Czar is surrounded by many people whose interests and sympathies are antagonistic to those of the people, and it is difficult in his position not to be somewhat influenced by these. But in his heart Alexander II. cherishes and loves his people."

"You should know the peasantry well yourself, father," said Dr. Driscoll.

"Yes; my life has lain long among them. They are not the most intelligent peasantry in the world, nor the nicest in all their ways; but they have good and likable traits. Education, enlightenment, that is what they want; and not only the peasants, but their teachers as well, or those who should be their teachers, guides, and examples, but who too often are not—I mean the village popes, my brethren."

"As far as I have been able to judge, the Russian people are naturally religious and reverent," said Dr. Driscoll.

"After a fashion they are religious. You will find many people in all classes who are strict in the observance of every duty and ceremony imposed by our holy Church. Too often it does not go much beyond this; but sometimes I think that this must perhaps come first in the religious history of every

nation—that it is an early stage in our religion that may slowly give place to something higher and better. God usually works his purposes slowly in this world. It is only in exceptional cases that he requires a convulsion and an earthquake. You would be astonished at the extent in which mere outward form and observance pass for religion with us. One or two examples I could give you of this would be almost amusing, if they were not rather sad and grim; but to mention just one instance. I have known a highway thief, on the eve of committing a robbery, enter a church and spend some minutes in prayer before the image of some favourite saint, and pray for success in his rascally work."

"Have the peasants, for the most part, a somewhat material conception of the future state?" said Dr. Driscoll.

"In my opinion they don't trouble themselves to think much about it at all," said Vasili Nicolaivitch; "they think all that is the business of the priests, look you. Have not the popes *the cure of their souls*, and must they not take the chief responsibility? that is the way a Russian moujik reasons, when he reasons at all."

"You are too sweeping, Vasili Nicolaivitch," said Father Feodor. "Yes, a Russian moujik's ideas of heaven are somewhat material, I am afraid, when they are not altogether confused. But ours is not the only country where confusion and difference of opinion exist on this matter."

"True enough, sir; leastways, I can speak of

England," said Mark. "The fact is, most of us make a kind o' heaven for ourselves, I imagine; and the heaven one man pictures differs from his neighbour's, according as his earthly circumstances differ. I don't know whether I make myself plain, gentlemen, but an example o' what I mean occurs to me. Jest afore we left England, one o' the bishops, in a grand speech, made a remark or two about heaven. The bishop is an admirable specimen o' a manly, active, earnest Christian man, allays ready to bear a hand in all good works; a strong man, overflowing with energy, so to speak. Well, he said as he could never conceive of a heaven as was not a sphere of enlarged activities —a fine phrase as stuck in my memory. The kind o' paradise as was most attractive to the bishop was one in which he should be privileged to do even more good work than on earth. Well, right and good for the bishop, say I; but, if I may take the liberty to criticise a bishop, I think as he forgot that such an idea o' the happy land has no charms whatsoever for the poor little seamstress as maybe lives in the same street wi' his lordship, and whose day's work takes out o' her every bit of strength as she possesses. She doesn't look forward to a heaven of increased activity, poor soul! How should she? Her heaven is a heaven of *rest*. And so, ye see, gentlemen all, people's notions o' the next world will allays be a good deal coloured by their experiences o' this; and perhaps each as has been faithful here below'll get something like what he most longs for, or at any rate what is best for him. The bishop'll get his more perfect sphere of work,

maybe, and the weary little seamstress'll get her rest. I beg your pardon, gentlemen all, for putting in my oar at such length."

"No apologies are needed, my good friend," said Vasili cheerfully. "There seems to me much of philosophy in what you have said, though I must confess it is not a subject I have given much attention to. You put the matter, my friend, in a nutshell, as you English say.—And now, is any one tired? or shall we light more cigars?—Are you wanting to get to your bed, young gentleman?"

Ralph of course disclaimed all idea of wishing to get to bed, and would, in truth, have sat up listening to the talk as long as the others chose to talk. But Dr. Driscoll, remembering that a long journey awaited them on the morrow, decided that the conclave should be broken up. So Father Feodor took leave of his host and the Englishmen, and shortly afterwards Vasili Nicolaivitch conducted his guests to their bed-rooms, which, being apartments furnished with every comfort and even luxury, were doubly welcome after the very indifferent sleeping accommodation which the travellers had had to put up with since leaving St. Petersburg.

CHAPTER XXIII.

KARLHOFF.

"Sport by thicket or by stream."

SHORTLY after breakfast on the following day, Dr. Driscoll and Mr. Ralston expressed to their host their desire to continue their journey as soon as the sledge was ready. Vasili Nicolaivitch did his utmost to detain his guests for another day, pressing them with an amount of demonstration, the genuineness of which there was no mistaking. Dr. Driscoll was, in fact, somewhat embarrassed by his host's reiterated entreaties that they should delay their departure till the next day; but Mr. Ralston, who was proof against this sort of thing from previous experience, remained firm.

"I quite anticipated all that," he said to Dr. Driscoll afterwards. "The only wonder I had was that the sledge was ready for us. Our host might so easily have delayed its repairing, and given us some plausible excuses. But it is all meant in the way of hospitality. If Vasili Nicolaivitch could have had a snowstorm on hand to order, I have no doubt it

would have been forthcoming to keep us another day under his roof."

The rest of the journey to Karlhoff was accomplished without further incident deserving of record. The travellers reached the estate late in the afternoon, and Dr. Driscoll and Ralph received a warm welcome from Pavel Carlovitch. Everything was in readiness to receive them, the house having undergone a thorough overturning after being shut up during the winter.

Pavel Carlovitch's country house was a handsome building, of light and elegant construction, built in the Swiss style, and furnished with every convenience and comfort very much as an English country house might be. Immediately adjoining the main building was a winter-garden, filled with orange trees and oleanders.

The grounds in the midst of which the house stood were exceedingly extensive, and laid out with great taste and skill. From the front windows you looked out first upon a garden, planted not with pine and plane trees only, but with birch, willow, and oak—with trees and shrubs of every variety, between which led winding walks and alleys. Everything now, of course, still wore a white raiment of snow, but the strangers could easily imagine how beautiful the place would look in its summer garb. Placed here and there amid the trees were pretty statues and little fountains of quaint and curious design.

Beyond the garden you beheld a park sloping away into the distance in gentle undulations, and if you

walked beyond the confines of the park you came upon a little hamlet where lived Pavel Carlovitch's tenants, most of whom were employed in the print-works immediately adjoining. Mr. Ralston occupied a comfortable little cottage close to the factory.

"Of course you are expecting some sport while you are here, and I think I may promise that you will not be disappointed," said Pavel Carlovitch at dinner on the day of his guests' arrival. "To-morrow I will introduce to you my head huntsman and forester, and we can have a little talk with him. I propose that we have a wolf hunt on the first fine moonlight night. In regard to bears, I think we should wait a little. To go in search of Master Bruin at present we should require snow-shoes. Now snow-shoes, to a novice, are difficult things to manage. Going up or down a hill, for instance, a tyro is very apt to tumble; and when he does tumble with a pair of snow-shoes on, it is sometimes by no means an easy matter digging him out of the snow again, and meanwhile he stands a chance of being suffocated. So I think we shall not have our bear hunt till a little later on, when the snow has begun to disappear."

The next day Dr. Driscoll and Ralph made the acquaintance of Casimir Petrovitch the huntsman. A noticeable man was Casimir, a man you looked at twice. He was rather above the middle height and of splendid proportions, broad and deep-chested, with a head and shoulders that reminded Ralph most of the figures of Roman gods and gladiators

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he had seen in museums. Casimir Petrovitch stood on the ground just as though he had been rooted to it, as firm and steady as a rock and as straight as a pine. His face wore an expression of resolute firmness, and had an honest, straightforward look besides which prevented it from being stern. His hair and beard were black and shaggy, and his eyes dark blue. He wore a coat of untanned sheepskin, fastened at the waist with a belt, from which hung a powder-flask and hunting-knife. His trousers were of the same material, and a round, close-fitting cap covered his head. As he stood, resting his gun upon the ground, he seemed, Ralph thought, the very picture of a sturdy hunter, a dweller in the woods and wilderness—he looked so calm, self-reliant, and fearless.

"I wish to show my friends what wolf-hunting with us is like, Casimir," said Mr. Carlovitch in Russian.

"Barin, there should be a fine moon to-morrow night," answered Casimir in the same language.

"Very good. You can have all in readiness by then, I suppose."

"Certainly, barin."

On the next night there was a clear and moonlight sky, as Casimir Petrovitch had prophesied there would be. The hunters set out in two sledges, a large one containing Pavel Carlovitch, Dr. Driscoll, Mr. Ralston, Ralph, Casimir Petrovitch, and Mark Weatherby, and a smaller one containing two men —under-huntsmen—and a live pig fastened up in a bag.

Away started the sledges at a fine pace, and after about an hour's drive reached the open plain. As soon as the party were fairly in the open, the men in the smaller sledge, which was in advance, began to pinch the pig, which forthwith gave vent to a series of squeaks and squeals that startled the astonished echoes, and sounded with double shrillness in the still, frosty air. At the same moment Casimir Petrovitch threw out from behind his sledge a rope, to the end of which was attached a small bundle of hay, which danced about over the ruts in the snow as the sledge sped on.

In no long time the hunters caught sight of a pack of wolves advancing, like dark shadows, over the snow. Ralph felt his pulses quicken with excitement and his blood begin to course more rapidly through his veins. It was the first time he had ever seen a pack of wolves in full cry. On they came, a troop of bounding shadows; but, as they drew nearer and nearer, no longer shadowy and phantom-like, but taking more distinct body and shape, their lean, gaunt figures becoming solidly outlined against the snow. Meanwhile a long howling rent the air, which, as the pack drew nearer, was changed to a shorter and more yelping cry,—a quick, sharp bark,—which, mingling with the shrieks of the pig, made up an indescribable medley of sound.

Nearer and nearer came the wolves, lured on by the hope of pork, which the squealing of the pig told them must be somewhere near at hand. At last the foremost of the pack caught sight of the bundle of

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acquainted recommended it to me. I am forgetting its name—something about Adam, I think. The time must have been long ago, surely; but I did not get far with that story,—I thought it was so slow, and yet I understood it was by one of your best writers. No; I am afraid I have not what you call a taste for reading. Your English ladies seem to find it good *pour passer le temps.* It is a droll taste, which we Russian ladies do not understand."

"Do you visit much, then?"

"No, not much—not in the country. There is no one to visit, and the roads in winter are so bad."

"What do you do, then, mostly?" pursued Ralph, beginning to be very much at a loss to imagine how Mrs. Vasili did contrive to get through the time.

"Ah, well, it is hard just to tell; but I do much as other Russian ladies do in the country," replied the lady slowly. "We go to church regularly, and we fast regularly; these are our duties, you will understand. Then for our amusements, our chief ones are the *bals masques.* I go to those in Moscow, being the nearest. Ah, that is what you call fun indeed. Then we enjoy ourselves. At Moscow and Petersburg we see life and the world. At home there is not much else to do than to eat, drink, sleep, and play cards."

Altogether Ralph was not greatly impressed with the delights, intellectual or physical, or with the general desirableness, of a Russian lady's life in the country.

When the gentlemen had finished their game of cards, Vasili proposed that the men should now with-

draw to his private study and smoking-room, and continue their smoking there. The room into which the host conducted his guests he called a study, but the articles usually associated with study were the least part of its furnishing. Facilities for smoking of every description abounded, and the apartment was otherwise a snug and comfortable one. While the company had been occupying the drawing-room tea had been from time to time handed round by a servant, by whom also the guests had been continually plied with sweetmeats and other confections. Now the tea and sweetmeats gave place to wines, liqueurs, and spirits; and if the English guests had on each occasion complied with their host's invitations to drink, their heads and nerves would have been in a very curious and undesirable condition before the evening was over.

Father Feodor, on the other hand, never refused his host's bidding to help himself, but replenished his glass from the vodka flask with a steady persistency that considerably astonished Dr. Driscoll and Ralph, notwithstanding what they knew of the Russian capacity in this direction. Ralph could not help wondering what would be thought of a clergyman in England who might have rivalled Friar Tuck in a department in which that jovial cleric especially excelled. But, notwithstanding the regularity and depth of Feodor's potations, they did not apparently incommode him in the least degree. He preserved the same self-possessed and unruffled demeanour throughout the evening.

hay, and, imagining that the pig must be concealed in it, made a dash at it.

The moment for action on the part of the hunters had now arrived. All were now sharing in Ralph's excitement, except perhaps Casimir Petrovitch, whose long-inured nerve was proof against any excitement that could be produced by the chase. It had been arranged that he should take the first shot. He raised his rifle, took quiet and steady aim, fired, and the foremost wolf, a huge hungry-looking fellow, rolled over in the snow.

The rest of the pack, who were close at his heels, were in too full speed to be able immediately to check themselves at the fall of their leader, but came on at a rush. All in the sledge now discharged their guns in a volley; three wolves fell, and the whole of the rest of the pack scattered like magic. In a few minutes there was not a sign of them to be seen on the wide white plain.

Ralph could not be sure whether he had killed or not. Clearly some one must have missed; but there was no desire on the part of any one to argue about the matter. All were satisfied with the net result—four dead wolves. Ralph had found considerable difficulty in taking steady aim, owing to the swaying of the sledge and its rapid motion, so that he thought it quite likely that he had missed his wolf. But whether he had or not, he was abundantly pleased with the whole night's work. It was his first experience of anything that could be called a hunt, and the excitement of it had been of the keenest and

most pleasurable description. On the following day men were sent back to secure the skins of the dead wolves, which are prized in Russia for lining cloaks with.

It was not long before Ralph and Mark became very good friends with Casimir Petrovitch, and acquainted with his family. The huntsman lived with his household in an isba just outside the village. This cottage was a very favourable specimen of a peasant's dwelling. Casimir Petrovitch was a Siberian, and the peasantry of Siberia are as high a type of their class as is to be found in Russia. Their personal appearance, education, address, and general bearing convince the stranger of this, as well as the condition of their cottages, and the training of their households.

Casimir's eldest son was named Basil, and between Basil and Ralph there presently sprang up a very close intimacy, with advantages to both, but with the balance distinctly on Ralph's side. Basil was an active, good-looking boy, with a figure as straight and a frame as lithe and hardy as a young ash sapling. He was his father's own son, for he seemed to take naturally to woodcraft, learning all the secrets of forest and hunting lore as readily and rapidly as if he had inherited the aptitude with his mother's milk, as he probably did.

Basil's life had been passed in the open air, by forest and stream, ever since he could walk almost. His father had begun to teach him woodcraft as soon as he could learn anything. Now, when Ralph first

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made his acquaintance, he knew all about the habits and ways of every bird and beast that was to be found on Pavel Carlovitch's estate, and their number and variety were great.

With the frankness and directness general with boys, and decidedly characteristic of Ralph Driscoll, he soon made Basil understand that he would be delighted if he would impart a little of his knowledge and skill to him. This Basil was quite willing and glad to do, for Ralph had inspired confidence and liking in the peasant boy by his frank and pleasant manner.

Shortly after the wolf hunt Casimir Petrovitch started off one morning to a distant part of the estate, where he thought it likely that he might find the winter-quarters of a bear. He went in his little Siberian dog-sledge, drawn by five dogs, and expected to be absent a day or two. It happened that Mrs. Petrovitch's larder was somewhat low at this time, and Casimir left instructions with Basil that he had better see to the replenishing of it—a task which the father could intrust with perfect confidence to his son.

On the morning on which Casimir Petrovitch left his cottage, Basil set about his task, and proposed that Ralph should assist him, to which the latter very readily agreed. On the first day Basil determined that he would try for rabchick, a kind of partridge. As soon as the two boys were fairly into the wood, they stationed themselves, at Basil's bidding, beneath a tree. Then Basil drew from his pocket a small

quill, put it to his lips, and imitated the cry of a rabchick with such startling fidelity that Ralph could have easily believed it was the bird itself, and in fact glanced for a moment up at the tree above him. There was no bird there, but presently Ralph heard a rush of wings, and the next minute saw a number of rabchicks settle upon a tree within easy range.

"Now, then! quick!" said Basil.

The boys raised their guns, fired, and two birds dropped. Immediately Basil's dog, Pero, a steady old dog, who understood his work thoroughly, darted forward, seized the dead birds, and deposited them at his young master's feet. Basil placed them in the game-bag slung at his back.

"Good!" said he. "They answered the call finely; they are hungry to-day."

"It is first-rate," said Ralph. "How wonderfully you manage the whistle! Is it difficult?"

"It requires a little practice," answered Basil quietly; "let us try again."

The boys moved forward, and, after a little, paused under a second tree, and Basil repeated his ruse. Again the rabchicks came to the call, and again the boys' shots were successful, and a couple more birds were placed in the bag. They continued their sport till noon, by which time they had bagged ten brace, and returned home — Basil well satisfied from a business point of view, Ralph in high spirits with the sport and the good shooting he had made.

Next day they went hare-shooting. After a mile's walk through the forest they came upon hare-tracks

in the snow. Presently the tracks formed a circle, by which Basil knew that the form was not far off; and a little after, they came upon a fine large hare. Basil gave Ralph the first shot: the hare gave a short leap into the air as Ralph's gun cracked, and measured its length on the snow. It was of a blue colour, and the largest hare Ralph had ever seen,—the Russian hare being of a large species.

"We don't care much for hares in Russia, but they do well enough for soup," said Basil.

"I should rather think they did," said Ralph, thinking that Russians must be daintier in some things than he gave them credit for being.

The boys shot four hares during the morning.

"It isn't so bad; but you should see the numbers we get in the spring sometimes. The rivers are in flood then, and overflow the country for miles. We station ourselves on a high bank somewhere. The hares gather together in corners as the water rises, and we follow them and knock them over with sticks by dozens. It is not real sport, to be sure, but it is good for filling the house-larder. I think mother will tell us when she gets these four hares that hers is full enough now, and father is sure to bring something home with him. But when the snows melt, which will be soon now, and when the summer comes, you shall see we will have some much finer sport than we can get now."

"Shall we? That will be jolly, then: but I consider we have done first-rate already," said Ralph.

Casimir Petrovitch returned home, bringing the

intelligence that he had discovered the whereabouts of a bear; and a few days after unmistakable signs appeared that spring had begun and that the snow was about to disappear. When it had melted sufficiently to enable the hunters to approach the bear's winter-quarters without the aid of snow-shoes, arrangements were made for the hunt.

The expedition consisted of several sledges, for a somewhat large number of peasants was necessary to "ring" the bear. The hunters left the sledges when they were about a mile from the place of the bear's hibernation. Ralph and his father found walking through the half-melted snow, plunging ankle-deep at every step, neither a pleasant nor an easy matter, and were glad enough when the bear's hole was reached.

By no means all of the party carried guns, — in fact none but the gentlemen, Mark Weatherby, Casimir, Basil, and the under-huntsmen did so. The rest of the men were armed with long spears, and each shooter was supported by one or more spearmen.

The hunters made a ring round the hole in which Casimir knew the bear to be. A number of the peasants at once began to talk with and call to the bear. This has frequently the desired effect of rousing Master Bruin; but on this occasion he was unusually drowsy and lymphatic, and recourse had to be had to "stirring him up." This was done by two peasants advancing to the entrance of the hole, and, inserting a long pole, literally poking the bear.

The critical moment had arrived. Ralph was

experiencing a curious feeling of suppressed excitement. He knew that this last measure must bring out the bear, and as it was quite impossible to tell in which direction he would rush, there was a certain amount of danger to each and all. Presently Ralph, watching the mouth of the hole with all his eyes, beheld a head appear, and the next moment the whole entrance was filled up by a black object. There was a low growl, and the black object made a rush forward, straight at Ralph. Ralph gathered himself together, closed his lips tight, raised his rifle, and fired. A louder roar came from the bear, who made a sudden swerve in his course, and made in another direction, this time rushing at Mr. Carlovitch. Ralph's bullet had evidently struck the bear somewhere, but only with the effect of rousing him from his drowsy condition, and enraging him up to full fighting pitch.

As the bear approached Mr. Carlovitch, the latter fired, and the next moment every one saw that he had missed. Before the spearman behind could receive the bear on the point of his lance, the creature had rushed forward and struck Mr. Carlovitch a heavy blow with his front paw. He fell with the bear on the top of him, but the next moment the spearman passed his weapon through the creature's shoulder.

The bear now turned savagely upon his new assailant, and, striking the spear with his huge paw, splintered it in pieces. The bear's attention being thus drawn from Mr. Carlovitch, the latter was able to rise on one knee and draw his hunting-knife, which he buried in his enemy's breast. Fainting fast from

loss of blood, the bear had, nevertheless, still sufficient strength left to fall heavily right on the top of Mr. Carlovitch, and in a little more might, with the remnant of his power, have either killed him outright or badly torn and mangled him, had not Mark Weatherby at that instant hurried forward and poured the contents of his rifle into the bear's head. The great creature rolled over and fell with a heavy thud upon the snow; and Mr. Carlovitch rose from the ground somewhat shaken, but with no hurt, save a rather bad scratch upon the wrist, where the bear had first struck him.

"Many thanks, my good fellow. You came up just in time, for I think I had a very narrow shave for my life," he said to Mark; and he took the old sailor by the hand and wrung it warmly.

All the rest were now crowding around Mr. Carlovitch to inquire to what extent he had been hurt, and the satisfaction was, of course, great when it was learned that he was comparatively uninjured.

"You see a bear hunt with us may sometimes prove sufficiently dangerous to be exciting," said Mr. Carlovitch to Dr. Driscoll, smiling.

"Indeed it may. I assure you my heart was not far from my mouth when I saw the creature knock you down."

"The fact is, I did not expect him to rush in my direction, and my aim was a hurried one," said Pavel Carlovitch. — "But allow me to congratulate you, Master Ralph, on the steady front you presented to Bruin. You did hit him, though evidently not in a

fatal spot. But a bear takes a deal of killing generally; and you did remarkably well, on your first bear hunt, to hit at all."

Ralph felt a glow of pleasure and pride at Mr. Carlovitch's praise.

"I felt rather queer, however, when I saw the great brute rushing at me," said Ralph. "It took all the 'grit' I could summon up, as the Americans say, to keep cool and fire steady."

The bear was now lifted by several of the peasants and placed in one of the sledges, and the party made their way homewards. Champagne was served out to everybody in front of the house, and at Mr. Carlovitch's request, Mark's health was drunk in a bumper. Pavel Carlovitch had done much to win the affection of the peasants on his estate, and there was not one who had taken part in the hunt but rejoiced at the barin's escape that day.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A LETTER FROM META.

"For a good letter,
That reads like the kind gossip of a friend—
Familiar, natural, and warm with life—
Commend me to a woman or a child."

WHILE Mr. Carlovitch, Dr. Driscoll, and Ralph were seated at lunch next day, they beheld through the windows of the room, which looked to the front of the house, a small sledge drive up the broad avenue. It was drawn by three horses, and two men were seated in it, dressed alike in a sort of official costume.

"The post," said Mr. Carlovitch; "the first since your arrival. It arrives twice a week at this season, but we shall have it oftener in a little while. This is about the last journey it will need to make by sledge until next winter."

"I should not care much for being a country postman in Russia—during the winter, I mean," said Ralph.

"Nor I either," said Mr. Carlovitch. "It is indeed a hard and rough life. You see they are obliged to

travel in a teléga, our roughest kind of vehicle; nothing less strong would be able to stand some of our country roads. The teléga has no hood or covering of any sort, as you perceive, so that the men are exposed to all changes of weather; and thus some of them travel for thousands of versts, often with scanty rest, for the greatest watchfulness is required against the various dangers of the road. The same remarks apply to the feldjägers, a subordinate class of government couriers, whose occupation is even harder, for they usually travel alone; but perhaps they get accustomed to the life. One is always apt to exaggerate the seeming hardships of a life of which we have no experience, just as we over-estimate pleasures which are not ours. But here are our letters."

A servant brought in the letters. There were several for Mr. Carlovitch, three for Dr. Driscoll, and one for Ralph. Ralph's letter was from his sister Meta. The three were silent as they read their correspondence.

"I find that one of these communications must be answered at once," said the host. "You will excuse me for a little while I go to my study."

When the father and son were alone, Ralph said,—

"My letter is from Meta, father—such a fine long letter. Meta is becoming a tip-top correspondent—writes with quite a style really. I almost think Miss Ordley must have touched it up for her, as I know she does her drawings."

"I don't think that is at all likely in the case of

her letters. Meta is quite old enough to write a decent letter."

"Would you like to hear some of her news?"

"Certainly."

"I'll pick out some bits, then:—

"'The ice has fairly begun to break up here, and I suppose it has with you too. Everybody is, of course, glad; for whatever the pleasures of a Russian winter may be, one has had quite enough of them before the end. You can't think how excited the people here get about the day on which the ice on the river will really first break. People lined the river banks and wharves, anxiously gazing on the ice, reminding each other of the date on which it began to break last year, and arguing earnestly in groups as to whether it would disappear on this day or the next. Miss Ordley and I walked out to see what was going on; and we actually heard gentlemen betting as to the hour at which the ice would break, while ladies gossiped about it, and servant people wrangled over it. It was quite an amusing sight to watch the different people, how interested everybody seemed to be; and when at last the ice on the river did break, the liveliest pleasure beamed on every face.

"'And such a strange sight the river was! First, there was a sharp splitting noise; then a crashing and a rushing sound, as the great masses of ice dashed and ground together. Then the immense blocks of ice began whirling down the stream, sometimes in separate bergs, as it were, sometimes heaped together, of all shapes and sizes, like houses and animals and

birds, some curious and fantastic looking, and others really beautiful. There was a clear, pale blue, unclouded sky, as though the spring had at last begun; and flocks of wild swans, together with sea-gulls, were flying over our heads or skimming the once more free waters. Altogether, the scene was a beautiful as well as a novel one, and Miss Ordley and I were both glad that we had not missed it."

"Quite graphic, not to say poetical, isn't it?" Ralph paused to remark. "Here's another bit:—

"'How did you pass Easter day?—the same as we did here? Did everybody give you a coloured egg and kiss you on the cheek? Isn't it a droll custom? All the servants here kissed mamma and Miss Ordley and me; and as they presented the eggs, said, "*Christos vos chris*" (Christ is risen), and we of course answered, "He is risen indeed." And oh, you should have heard the bells! You have escaped that, for there cannot be many in the country. With every bell in Petersburg going on Easter day, you can imagine the fearful din. I think every peasant man and boy in Petersburg must have had a pull at the bells that day, for they seem to think it the greatest fun. I cannot describe the uproar. It was simply terrific, and we all had headaches.'

"Speaking of the kissing on Easter day," said Ralph, "you should have seen the ordeal that Mr Ralston had to go through, father. He had to be kissed by every man, woman, and child employed in the factory. You can fancy the scene. Some of the children and women were clean and nice enough

looking, and Mr. Ralston's task wasn't much of a hardship in regard to them. But others were not so; and what with the slobbery youngsters, and the withered old dames, and the men with dusty and grimy faces, from working among the machinery, you can fancy Mr. Ralston required some nerve and boldness. But he carried the business through like a hero, and actually smiled so graciously that you would have thought he enjoyed it. It was the perfection of gallantry; but I stood by in a corner where I could not be seen, and laughed till my sides ached, it was really such a droll sight. But I want to read you just one more sentence from Meta's letter:—

"'Do you know, I think that Franz Rosendorf likes Miss Ordley *a good deal.* Now, this is a secret, mind, and I may be mistaken; Miss Ordley is so quiet when she likes, you know, and can hide her feelings so well; but still I think that she likes *him* too. I can't explain to you exactly how I know this, and I don't think you would understand if I tried to. I hope what I suspect is true, for I like Mr. Rosendorf very much. He is so nice, and has been so attentive and helpful to us all while you and papa have been away. He has taken us twice to lovely concerts.'

"There! what do you think of that for Miss Meta?"

"I think that she is developing a faculty of observation, which I trusted that foreign travel would bring out, though I hadn't exactly this direction of her powers in view," said Dr. Driscoll, also smiling.

"Oh, trust a girl for finding out these sort of things, whatever else may escape her. But I like Meta's way of putting it. She 'thinks I wouldn't understand' if she were to explain her reasons. That's because I'm a boy, you see. I shall owe Miss Meta one for that. But I really do think that she is getting much quicker in observing things since we left England. On holidays at home she used to get away into a corner and bury herself in a book for a whole morning, or dream over the pages without reading at all sometimes—building castles in the air, I suppose. She doesn't do that nearly so much now; she takes more interest in outside things, which is all the better for her, I reckon. Books for rainy days and winter nights, but out-of-doors for sunshine. That's my rule; and not a bad one, I think. You have a letter from mamma, I see,—when are they all coming here?"

"Your mother writes that she had just seen Mrs. Volkoff, and everything has been arranged for their journey. We may expect them here in a week."

Pavel Carlovitch re-entered the room at that moment.

"You will have heard from your wife that they are about to start in a few days from Petersburg," he said to Dr. Driscoll. "As soon as the roads are fairly clear of snow and passable for vehicles they will set out."

The spring brought more sport for Ralph and his father, who frequently accompanied his son and Basil in their shooting expeditions. Sometimes Mr.

Carlovitch and Casimir Petrovitch were of the party, sometimes not. Basil knew all the best shooting-grounds on the estate, and was quite capable of acting as guide to the sportsmen—of fulfilling, in a word, the duties of a "keeper" in England.

Mr. Carlovitch's estate, like most gentlemen's estates in Russia, abounded in game of every description,—partridges, ptarmigan, willow-grouse, black-cock, woodcock, ducks, geese, and swans, and every other species of wild fowl. The capercailzie at this season afforded Ralph and his father some excellent sport. They stalked the birds in the following manner:—

The Russian capercailzie is a timid and cautious bird, easily frightened by the least noise. The sportsmen were obliged to exercise the greatest caution in approaching the birds as they perched among the pine-tops. Every now and then the capercailzies would utter their curious cry, at the same time closing their eyes. This was the sportsmen's opportunity. While the birds' eyes were shut, they approached a little nearer, and so on till they got within range, always taking the greatest heed lest the rustling of a branch or a careless footfall should betray their approach and scare the birds. After some practice, both Dr. Driscoll and Ralph became fairly expert in the art of stalking capercailzie, and enjoyed the sport greatly.

Still better, perhaps, was the sport afforded by the blackcock. One grand day was enjoyed by all our party, including Mr. Ralston and Mark. The party

started in a tarantasse before daybreak. Arrived at the scene of action, they found three small tent-like huts built on the ground among the trees, constructed of young pine branches, so cleverly that they looked very like clumps of natural wood. Several stuffed birds, to serve as decoys, were placed among the branches of the neighbouring trees.

The sportsmen arranged themselves in three parties, and each took possession of one of the huts. Small loopholes had been left in the leafy walls, through which the sportsmen could both mark the approach of the birds and shoot as well. Having duly arranged themselves, and looked to their guns, they waited for the daybreak.

With the first dawn of light, Ralph, all whose senses were keenly alert, heard a noise of wings, and presently beheld a curious sight. A whole regiment of blackcocks rapidly appeared in the little open space in which the ambushes were built, and separating into pairs, began to fight with the most astonishing vigour and fury, while the hen-birds, perched on the surrounding trees, looked on at their warlike lords, cheering them in the fray, it may be, by bird language and signs.

The light in the forest was still dim, for the sun was not yet risen. But the sportsmen being so near the light was sufficient for their purpose. They got to work at once, and rare was the sport obtained. As the birds came within range, the marksmen brought them down from their coverts, or picked off the hens from their perches in the trees. So absorbed

were the cocks in their fighting that they took scarce any notice of the firing, and, while their companions were dropping fast and thick around them, continued their fierce battle.

As soon as the sun had fairly risen above the horizon and shed its light through the forest, such of the blackcock as were left surviving flew off and disappeared among the brushwood, and the sportsmen emerged from their ambush and gathered up the spoil. All had shot well, and Ralph felt certain that at least six brace had fallen to his own gun. That was something like sport, he thought, and really it was not bad for a boy. This was not the only morning's sport with blackcock that Ralph had, for Basil and he returned several times again to the ambush,—blackcock shooting, in this fashion, lasting during the whole time the birds are pairing.

The two boys and Mark got some capital wild-fowl shooting on the lake, which was about half a mile from Mr. Carlovitch's house. A framework of hides was erected in the prow of the boat, which was moored near the shore or close to some clump of water-reeds. Concealed behind this screen, the sportsmen waited for the birds as they came to feed in the evening, and sometimes bagged as many as thirty or forty ducks. One day when Ralph and Basil were out alone they shot a fox, which greatly pleased the latter; for the fur of the fox is much prized in Russia for lining cloaks with, and Basil knew that he should obtain a good price for the fox's

"The money will buy my sister a marriage-gift," he said.

"Is one of your sisters to be married, then?" asked Ralph.

"Yes, shortly. She is going to marry Alexander Youchanzoff in the next village. We shall all have to give her some little present, and what I get for this fox's skin will buy mine. I must think what it shall be. There will be a bazaar at Moktoff next Sunday. I will go and see what there is that Agafia would like. You can buy anything at our bazaars."

CHAPTER XXV.

HOUSE-BUILDING.

"And soon a merry din uprose
Of axe, and saw, and hammer-blows;
And as they wrought the workmen sang
Till all the forest echoes rang:
'Mid song, and jest, and blithesome laughter,
The building grew from base to rafter."

THERE were signs of unusual stir in the *Gospotsky Dom*—the name by which the proprietor's house on a Russian estate is called. It was the day on which Mrs. Volkoff and her party were expected, and the servants of the household were busy preparing for their reception.

Ralph was on the look-out for the party, and in the afternoon beheld two tarantasses, or travelling carriages, each with a large hood, and drawn by three horses, approaching from a distance. He walked rapidly along the road to meet them. The first tarantasse carried the travellers' luggage, the second the travellers themselves. The horses were proceeding at a foot-pace up an incline in the road, and Ralph, mounting the step of the carriage, climbed into it.

"Take care, Ralph; it isn't the best of manners to

climb into a carriage that is not your own in this unceremonious fashion," said his mother.

"I beg Mrs. Volkoff's pardon, but I am sure she will make allowance for a schoolboy's impatience and impetuosity," said Ralph as he kissed his mother and sister, and shook hands with Mrs. Volkoff and Carl.

"To be sure," answered Mrs. Volkoff good-humouredly.

"And how are you all?" asked Ralph.

"Very well, I think," said Mrs. Volkoff. "And you, Master Ralph, what do you think of Russian country life, as far as you have seen? I hope everything has been made comfortable in the house for your father and yourself."

"Everything, Mrs. Volkoff. We are enjoying ourselves immensely—at least I know I am, and I think I can say the same for the pater. I never expected to have such good shooting anywhere as I have had here; and never shall again, I expect, unless I go to America or Africa or some such place."

"Ah, well, I am delighted that you have enjoyed yourself; but you will do so still more now, when we are going to have fine weather. For myself, I must say I find the country in Russia during the winter very *triste;* but it is different with gentlemen, of course."

The carriages presently drove up to the house. Carl's father and Dr. Driscoll were standing on the steps before the house, waiting to receive the new arrivals. After dinner, the three young people had

much to say to each other, especially, of course, Ralph and Meta.

"Did you get what I asked in my last letter, Meta?" Ralph said, after they had been talking together for some time.

"Yes; I have it in my pocket now. I knew you would soon ask about it, so I did not pack it away anywhere."

"Thanks for being so considerate for my impatience, matushka," answered Ralph, as he received from Meta a small package, which he immediately proceeded to open.

The parcel contained a knife; one of those comprehensive and ingenious pieces of machinery dear to the hearts of school-boys, comprising a large and a small blade, a cork-screw, a saw, a pair of tweezers, an implement for removing stones from a horse's hoof, a toothpick—the latter quite a superfluous article for a boy at any rate—a lancet, a file, and possibly several other instruments, agricultural, surgical, domestic, and otherwise, which failure of memory has caused the writer to omit.

"It's a beauty!" said Ralph, after a few moments' critical examination of the knife. "You have done splendidly, Meta; you couldn't have shown more judgment if you had been a boy. This is the very thing I wanted; it is real English make, not a doubt about that."

"I am so glad it is the right thing; I was a little anxious about it," said Meta.

"Basil will be awfully pleased with it," said Ralph.

"I don't think I could have chosen a more suitable present."

In his last letter Ralph had commissioned Meta to purchase the best knife she could get in St. Petersburg, describing to her the sort he wished. It was intended as a gift to Basil; and Meta, not being limited as to price, had expended ten shillings in the purchase—a sum which Ralph was very willing to disburse.

"How is Franz Rosendorf, Meta?" Ralph next asked.

"Very well; but I think he was a little sorry at our leaving."

"Oh yes, of course, I understand," said Ralph.

"Ralph, you didn't—tell anybody what I mentioned in my letter?" asked Meta gravely, and a little anxiously. "You know, I told you it was a secret, and that I might be mistaken."

"Oh no, the secret's all right with me. I'll be as close as the telegraph office. Of course I mentioned it to the pater, though; I never thought you meant to include him."

"Well, perhaps not," said Meta slowly; "but I hope papa won't mention it to any one else."

"I can answer for it that he won't, for this very good reason, that he has probably forgotten entirely that I ever mentioned the matter to him.—Have you and Franz Rosendorf been keeping up your cricket, Carl?"

"Very little. It isn't so good, I think, when there are only two," replied Carl.

"No doubt of that. Well, we might have some real cricket now, occasionally; only meanwhile there are such lots of other things to do here. You'll see we'll have the finest fun in the woods now. Basil is a regular trump; he can do anything. No books for the next couple of months, Carl; we must make the most of your short Russian summer. — But what have you got there?"

Carl held in his hand a box of some size.

"Bonbons," he said. "I knew you couldn't get any good ones here—not like those in Petersburg—and I thought you would like some after all this time."

"That's very kind and jolly of you, Carl, I'm sure," said Ralph, as Carl placed the box in his hand.

Ralph would once have been inclined to laugh a little at the notion of a boy of Carl's age bringing such a gift as a parcel of sweetmeats to another of the same age all the way from St. Petersburg; but now he had got to regard such an act as among the customs of the country, and it neither caused him surprise nor struck him as ludicrous. As to the bonbons themselves, he was by no means beyond appreciating them yet.

"These are splendid ones, Carl," he said, dipping into the box; "and all the more welcome after my long fast from all such childish vanities, eh? I hope I may keep my sweet-tooth till I'm eighty, that's all. To alter slightly the words of one of our popular and much-quoted poets, whom you probably never heard

of, Carl, and of whose writings I myself am acquainted with these two lines only:—

> 'These bonbons they come as a blessing to men,
> Like the Pickwick, the Owl, and the Waverley Pen.'"

"Just as great a goose as ever; isn't he, Carl?" said Meta, who was nevertheless, at that moment, admiring her brother, and thinking that if he liked he could almost write a pantomime. Carl laughed, admiring Ralph too, as he did at most times.

The Russian summer comes in with a rush—"leaps like a tiger on the land." The spring season is short, and in a marvellously brief space after the snow has disappeared from the ground and the ice from the lakes and rivers, the land has clothed itself in its summer raiment; a luxuriant verdure covers the fields, a thick foliage the forest, innumerable wild-flowers star the meadows, and the whole aspect of nature suddenly changes, as by the touch of a magician's wand.

Many of our fairest wild-flowers are not found in Russia. There are no violets, cowslips, or blue-bells, neither are there hawthorn-hedges, or eglantine; but lilies-of-the-valley and buttercups abound. Wild-roses are found; and there are several flowering trees and bushes of great beauty, native to the country—the mountain ash, which bears a pretty white blossom, the linden flowers, and the flax; while the gradations in the forest tints, from the darkling pines to the light green birch, add variety and beauty to the landscape.

Wild fruits are very plentiful in Russia in the summer. Not only are cranberries, bilberries, and black and red currants found in profusion, but also large quantities of strawberries and raspberries, and a fruit called maroshea, yellow in colour, and like a mulberry in shape, which is very good for making preserves.

A country gentleman's estate in England would convey to the reader very little idea of the same thing in Russia. Pavel Carlovitch's lands, for instance, bore very slight resemblance to those of an English landed proprietor. The gardens and grounds in the immediate vicinity of the house, to be sure, had much the same appearance as an English garden has; but the rest of the estate had by no means the same trim, cultivated, and park-like look which an English property presents. In the first place, it was far too vast in extent to be kept in the same perfect order which we connect with an English estate; and secondly, the art of cultivation is undoubtedly not in the same advanced condition in Russia as it is with us.

Nevertheless, there is much that is pleasant to the eye, as has already been indicated, in the aspect of a Russian estate in the summer season, especially in the southern and south-eastern provinces. There was a sense of space and freedom about Pavel Carlovitch's property which some might have preferred to the more trim and well-ordered but more meagre and artificial look of an English domain. The plains stretched for mile upon mile around the house, no hedge or fence marking the boundaries of the fields;

while large tracts of forest were interspersed among the corn land and the flax fields. Deep in the forest lay a lake—not a pretty little artificial pond, such as adorns an English estate, but a broad sheet of water, with islands and beds of rushes, and alive with fish. Through the bright blue sky great eagles might be frequently seen sailing on broad pinions, and large flocks of migratory birds sometimes darkened the air with their close-crowded wings.

Ralph, Carl, and Meta threw themselves into the delights of country life with heart and soul. Never had Carl so much enjoyed the country before; for never before had he had a companion like Ralph, so fertile to suggest and devise fresh pastimes. The three companions were out-of-doors all day long, whenever it was not actually raining; and Meta shared in almost all the sports of the boys, except, of course, the shooting. Carl himself did very little shooting, having never hitherto used a gun, as has already been stated; but he now began, under the instruction of Ralph and Basil, to learn the use of that weapon, and though it must be admitted that he was a little doubtful and timid about the matter at first, he gradually gained confidence and, in the same ratio, skill.

With the advent of the warm weather, Ralph and Basil set about carrying out a plan they had conceived in concert a short time previously. This was to build a little hut in the woods, for the general accommodation—a shelter from the occasional thunder or sun showers, which are almost all in the way of

rain that varies the brightness of a Russian summer, or a retreat from the heat of mid-day, when the vertical rays of the sun drive idle people in Russia indoors, and field-labourers to a siesta behind a hay-stack.

Mark Weatherby lent an active hand in the building of the hut, and all bore a share in the work, something being found in which even Meta could be of material service. The chief part of the labour, however, fell on Mark and Basil, for they quickly proved themselves the most expert both in contrivance and execution.

Mark entered into the plans of the young people with great zest, and did his best that the little cottage should turn out a success, and be a neat and workmanlike piece of building. It was not the first time by many that he had assisted in building the house that was to cover him.

"It's like going back to the old days a'most," he said. "The last time as I helped to raise the roof that was to shelter me, was far enough from where we're standing now, away in Saskatchewan country in North America, when I made one o' a party as accompanied an English gentleman on a sporting expedition. I reckon as he got enough 'roughing it' that time to last him a good spell, though he was a brave and gallant gentleman, and as good a sportsman as ever drew trigger, and a kind and generous leader to boot. Heigho! the changes o' this life are a continual marvel to me. I thought when I took service wi' your father, Master Ralph and Miss Meta, as I had

done wi' changes; but here I am again, in this outlandish Russia—begging your pardon, Master Carl, for the word, and meaning no offence—helping to build a bit o' a shanty in my old age, as though I were once more a backwoodsman. Not but that I enjoy it too, and the work does my old blood good, and freshens me up, as a whiff o' the sea allays does; and if the matter gives you all a bit o' pleasure, I'm sure as I'll be delighted. It makes me feel a'most a lad again myself to be able to join even so far in your pastimes."

Basil, as has been indicated, was Mark's right-hand man—his first mate, as Mark called him—in the building. Basil was wonderfully expert in the use of his hands. Give a Russian peasant an axe, and he will perform wonders with it. His axe is his tool-chest; and it is a common expression in the country to say that a Russian peasant is born with an axe in his hand, which some few persons may regard as quite as fortunate a condition of birth as that indicated by our phrase, "Born with a silver spoon in his mouth." Basil had been early trained by his father to handle an axe, and now he was almost as quick and clever in its use as Casimir Petrovitch himself.

The spot selected for building the hut was a grassy slope on the border of the lake, in an angle made by a stream which flowed into the lake. The plan of the cottage closely resembled that of an isba, and, like an isba, was constructed of the stems of trees, roughly hewn, the interstices being filled up with clay

and moss. The eaves of the roof overhung the walls, and the roof was gabled, like a Swiss chalet; indeed the hut, when completed, looked not unlike a Swiss cottage, with the appearance of which nearly every one is familiar.

Each of the workmen had his particular work appointed him, as in this way, Mark knew from experience, the general progress made would be steadier and quicker. Ralph did most of the tree and sapling felling, assisted by Mark and Basil when the tree to be brought down was of extra size. Mark and Basil cut and shaped the logs, and most of the actual building of the hut—the placing of the slabs, and the interior work which demanded greater power of construction and defter hand-work—devolved upon them, though Ralph also was able occasionally to lend a hand in this department.

To Carl fell the duty of calking the spaces and chinks in the walls with clay and moss, and also of preparing strips of bark for the roof. In this last task Carl was assisted not a little by Meta, who was very anxious to do what she could to insure the general success of the work.

And so the matter went merrily on, enlivened but not interrupted by frequent talk and laughter. At the end of a week, by dint of constant work daily, the hut was completed, the finishing touches being put to the building amid the cheers of the craftsmen, who contemplated the finished result of their labours with no small satisfaction. The little hut would probably have struck most people as a sufficiently rough-

and-ready affair, with very few pretensions to architectural grace and scientific proportion. But the builders—especially, of course, the young people—regarded the work of their own hands with all the pride of authorship, and, like most authors of whatever description, saw no faults in their offspring. Even old Mark seemed unconscious of any little deficiencies existing in the work; or at least, if he was aware of any such, he did not give expression to them in the presence of the rest. He may have reasoned that there was no use in damping the ardour and enthusiasm of the young people by calling their attention to any small inequalities and weaknesses in the work which his more experienced eye had detected, nor, so far as I can see, would there have been.

"It ain't so much amiss, not by no means," he said, as he contemplated the hut with the half-closed eye of criticism, "especially considering the means at our command, which were limited, as you may say, at best. Well, I wish ye all manner o' pleasure in the little place, young people; and if it gives ye all as much amusement in the occupation as it has certainly done in the making, I think as you'll do pretty well. When you all grow up, if you just hold as fast and firmly by whatever you each take in hand—allays so as it's a fair and honourable matter—as you ha' done in this business of the little house building, you'll surely do well. What does the Book say on this point? The man as is diligent in his business, and, having once put his hand to the plough, does not look

back, he shall stand afore the king himself—meaning, of course, that he'll come to honour. That's what the Book says, or words to that effect. I disremember the exact order o' the words sometimes, but I mostly gets at the pith o' the meaning.

"But, Mark, you must visit us in our cottage pretty often, you know," said Meta.

"I'll be pleased and honoured, miss," replied Mark.

They held a little *fête* to commemorate the completion of the cottage, to which all the elders were invited. The *fête* was of an *al fresco* character, a sort of picnic, the entire arrangements being undertaken by the young people. Meta was the mistress of the ceremonies, and very creditably she played her part, displaying a tact and business-like management that rather astonished Ralph. She had all her provisions for the lunch conveyed to the cottage at an early hour on the morning of *fête* day. Ralph, Carl, and Basil were her waiters, and she kept them busily employed, so that Ralph declared that he had worked harder that morning than during the building of the hut itself.

The guests were invited for one o'clock, and when they arrived in a body, including Mr. Ralston, they found a very tempting and tasteful lunch arranged in front of the cottage. The interior of the hut itself was prettily decorated with wreaths and festoons of flowers and ferns, while over the roof floated gaily in the breeze a bright-coloured flag. This banner was the joint-work of Ralph, Carl, Meta, and Miss Ordley, and had occupied their evenings for

a week back. As a work of art, it displayed no small degree of fancy and invention, by reason of the original and complex character of the device which it bore. This was an ingenious union of the national cognizances of Great Britain and Russia, in which the lion and the unicorn were depicted amicably fraternizing with the Russian eagles in a fashion that must have delighted the hearts of all philanthropic and peace-loving people in both countries.

Ralph and Carl had composed this device in concert, and Carl, who was clever with his pencil, had sketched it out on the canvas. Miss Ordley and Meta had then followed the outline of the sketch in various coloured wools; and the flag being additionally ornamented with a deep fringe of silk, the effect was very bright, while the emblazonment on the banner was certainly original and striking, though it might have impressed the curiously critical with a slight sense of the incongruous, not to say the comical.

But none of the invited guests were disposed to be hypercritical. The lunch was really very nicely and prettily arranged, and deserved all the compliments which the guests bestowed upon it. Meta acted the part of hostess with great success, and Ralph, Carl, and Basil made the most active and indefatigable of waiters. The day was a delightful one, warm and sunshiny, and everybody was pleased and in the best of spirits,—the young people with the success of their little *fête*, the guests both to see the pleasure of the young people,

and by the real enjoyment they themselves had received.

Every one praised the cottage, and congratulated the builders on the success they had achieved.

"Only one thing remains to be done now," said Ralph at the conclusion of the lunch: "the cottage wants a name."

"Have you thought of one yourself, Ralph?" asked his mother.

"Not yet; I wanted to wait till you were all here. We shall be glad to hear suggestions," said Ralph, uttering the last words with the air of a chairman addressing a meeting.

"Suggest some name yourself, Ralph," said Carl.

"Let's see, then. Lakeside?—no, that's too hackneyed. Waterview?—that's as bad."

"Pine Cottage. It's built chiefly of pine-wood, and there are pines all about," said Meta.

"Pine Cottage isn't very fresh either, and I don't much like the name. It rhymes with 'whine,' and has a general suggestion of something die-away and droopy. Supposing we call it *Quintette Cottage*. There were five of us at the building of it; and the name's original, I fancy, at any rate. Quintette Cottage — it's quaint if not imposing, don't you think?"

"As it's a Russian cottage—an isba—don't you think it should have a Russian name?" said Dr. Driscoll.

"*Piat* is the Russian for five, but *piat* has no sort of sound in it; it's a very vague, unimpressive sort

of word," said Ralph doubtfully. "Quintette has at least some 'click' about it, something for the tongue to catch hold of, you know."

"Oh yes! it's much the better name of the two. I don't think we can do better than choose it," said Basil. And so it was settled that the hut should be called Quintette Cottage.

"And now, will you christen it, Mrs. Volkoff, please?" said Ralph.

Mrs. Volkoff raised a wine-glass, with a little champagne in it, and splashed the contents against the wall of the cottage, at the same time pronouncing its name. Then the company gave three cheers, and the ceremony was completed.

After that, Quintette Cottage was a constant resort of the young people. They took shelter beneath its roof from the heat of mid-day; they sometimes took their lunch there. Meta, together with Miss Ordley, read and worked there; and in these occupations they were sometimes joined by Mrs. Driscoll and Mrs. Volkoff. Sometimes, also, Dr. Driscoll and Pavel Carlovitch walked down from the house in the cool of the evening, and smoked their cigars seated in front of the little hut.

These long warm summer days were very enjoyable, and the free, open-air life which everybody around them led was very agreeable to the English party. The Russian family's hospitality was as natural and free from constraint as it was unbounded. Their guests did what they pleased, went where they pleased, and were bound by no over-strict laws

of etiquette and conventionality, the one generally understood rule being that all were expected to meet together at the dinner-hour, and a small pretext was sufficient to excuse any one of the party, if he or she wished to be excused, from this also.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE "OLGA."

"Build me straight, O worthy master!
Stanch and strong a goodly vessel,
That shall laugh at all disaster,
And with wave and whirlwind wrestle."

LONGFELLOW.

META and Carl never ceased to derive enjoyment and satisfaction from Quintette Cottage; but after a little, it must be admitted that its pleasures began to pall on Ralph. It will be seen how, for a boy of Ralph's age and character, the little hut became presently rather a tame amusement. He found that the building of it was by far the most interesting and exciting part of the business; and though he enjoyed it in occupation for a little, the novelty by-and-by wore off, and he began to wish for something fresh, and, if possible, more stirring. One morning he broached a matter to Basil which had been simmering in his mind all the previous day. "See here, Basil, I want to consult you about something in which I require your help," he said. "What do you say to our building a boat, and going up the river as far as we can go?"

The river referred to by Ralph was the stream which flowed into the lake, and in the angle made by which with the lake the cottage was situated.

"Why build another boat, when there are several already, one of which Gospodin Volkoff would at once let you take if you wished it?" was Basil's answer.

"There are two reasons for my not wishing to do that: first, I propose being a night away—camping out, in a word—and we might dirty, and even, by some accident, damage one of those gay and rather gimcrack skiffs in the boat-house down there, which I should be very sorry to do; and, secondly, I expect that a good deal of the fun will be in building the boat. Our cottage having turned out a success, I want to see what we can do in the shipbuilding way. Will you help me?"

"Yes, certainly I will," answered Basil, who would have done a great deal more than this to please Ralph. The handsome and unexpected present of the knife, with which Basil had been delighted past expression, had completely won over to Ralph whatever part of the Russian boy's warm and simple heart was not already his, and bound him to him with links of steel.

"I have not yet spoken either to Carl or Mark about the matter," continued Ralph; "but I mean that they should both join us in our expedition, and of course Mark must help us a great deal in the building of the boat. I shall have a talk with him at once, and we will set to work upon our craft the first thing to-morrow."

Ralph and Mark accordingly had a long consultation that afternoon, to which Carl was a listener, without taking much part in the talk, which dealt with matters outside his experience, and in which, therefore, he could give no practical suggestions. He was, however, very content to listen to his two companions.

Mark was willing to fall in with Ralph's proposal if it should turn out to be at all practicable.

"Camping out has a fascinating sort o' sound for a boy, I allow, and it's only nat'ral as you should be attracted by the notion," he said; "but as to your idea of building a boat, Master Ralph, seems to me as it requires a few moments' reflection. What sort o' a craft, now, might you have in your mind's eye, so to speak?"

"Well, I don't quite know; that's the truth," said Ralph in a doubtful tone. "I had not quite settled that yet myself. I thought you might have something to propose on that point."

Mark chuckled slightly, and then resumed gravely, "Ye see, we must consider the natur' o' the waters we're going to navigate. That's the very first thing to be looked at."

"Of course," said Ralph.

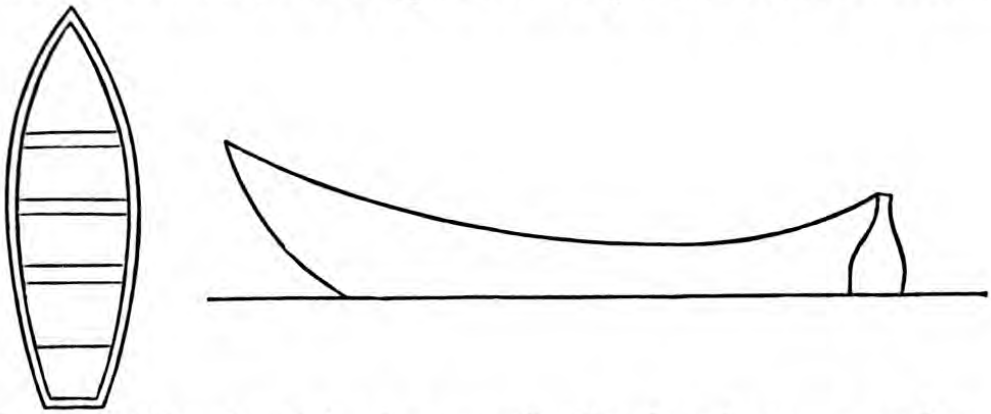
"Well, then, let us jest look at it for a moment. You see, the river Maloi, as they call it, is a decidedly shallow stream, and will, of course, get shallower the further we ascend it. It is also a slow-flowing stream, wi' a weak current. Now, if it had been a quicker and a deeper stream, wi' perhaps a rapid or two, I

should have advised a canoe, which we could ha' built here wi'out much difficulty, and which would ha' been good enough fun for you young gentlemen. But looking at everything, I think as a flat-bottomed craft will be the best for our purposes—a sort o' punt, and yet not quite a punt. But I have an idea o' the kind o' thing in my mind, which I'll show you when we begin our work."

"Which had better be at once, Mark," said Ralph.

"To-morrow mornin', then, sir. I should like to think my notion out a bit yet, but I'll have it all fairly fixed in my mind by to-morrow."

In the morning Mark and the three boys began their work. The sort of boat which Mark proposed to construct was of a very simple description. He had made a rough sketch on paper of its plan, which served to show the boys at once what was intended and to guide them in their work. Here is a copy of Mark's sketch, showing the deck plan and lines of the



boat. The boat had a perfectly flat bottom and no keel. There were three seats for the rowers, and one in the stern for the steersman, so that it just held four persons comfortably. In the front thwart there

was a mast-hole, for it was intended to set a sail when the wind and other circumstances allowed it. The navigators, however, were to depend for progress mainly, of course, on rowing. The oars were short, and when finished, rather rough and unshapely looking—something between oars and paddles—and were worked in thole-pins, as indicated in the sketch.

The boat was built of well-seasoned pine planks, the shaping and fashioning of which fell to be done mainly by Mark and Basil. Basil simply astonished Ralph by the cleverness and neatness with which he handled his tools, and all the nicer and more exact work was left to him. When the boat was finished, the bottom was tightly covered with tarred canvas, to render it the more waterproof. A small rudder was fitted into the stern, and tiller ropes attached.

An impartial and unbiassed judge must have pronounced the boat a decidedly primitive specimen of naval architecture. It was little more than a punt, while the sail with which it was proposed sometimes to navigate it was an Oriental and somewhat bizarre-looking affair that suggested ideas of a Chinese junk or a Fiji canoe. Nevertheless, considering the age of three of the craftsmen, and that Mark himself, the architect and master-builder, was nothing more than an amateur in boat-building, the little vessel was a creditable achievement. The three boys were quite satisfied with its appearance, Ralph's satisfaction being expressed, as usual, with most emphasis.

"It beats the cottage hollow. You're simply a genius with tools, Basil. If you were to come to

England, and study the cabinet-maker's business, you'd make your fortune in time, for I'm sure you'd turn out the most famous and original designs for furniture and house decorations."

"Oh no," answered Basil modestly; "I can only copy when I have some model before me. That's the way with all our Russian workmen, my father says. They can imitate anything, but they can't invent."

"You would learn to invent if you were in England," said Ralph.

"Well, now, the proof o' a craft is in the launch, I reckon," said Mark. "She looks not so much amiss, though it would puzzle me to say what order o' naval architecture she belongs to; but she has yet to be tested. There may be some weak point in her somewhere, which the water alone will show us."

"We must get a name for her first, though," said Ralph. "What shall we call her?"

"*Nancy* is a good old-fashioned name for a boat, and one as sounds sweet and familiar in my ear. There was allays a *Nancy* or two among the craft in my native place. There were an old rhyme, too, that comes back to me now, though I hain't thought on it for years. I dunno' rightly where it comes from:—

'Straight through the tall green billows
The good ship cuts her way;
It had been my fancy to call her *Nancy*
Upon my wedding-day.'"

"*Nancy* is pretty threadbare for the name of a boat though, Mark. We must try and get something a little fresher."

"There's another rhyme as I minds of—one brings back another, same as texts:—

'Twere in the good ship *Rover*
I sailed the world around;
For forty years and over
I ne'er touched British ground.'

What do you say to *Rover*, Master Ralph?"

"It isn't bad, but it sounds better when you put *Red* before it; and *Red Rover* would suggest pirates, and we're rather explorers, you know. *Rover* alone makes one think of a dog more than of a ship."

Mark began to think that Ralph was rather difficult to please in the matter of names.

"All the good names are about used up, that's the fact," said Ralph. "There's *Discovery*, and *Enterprise*, *Endeavour*, and *Argonaut* for high-sounding names, and *Nautilus*, and *Water-Lily*, and *Fire-Fly*, and *Fairy* for fancy names, not to speak of the *Rob Roy*."

"I don't think as *Fairy* would suit the craft, Master Ralph. She don't exactly realize one's ideas o' a fairy, judging her in the most favourable light."

"Let us be modest, Ralph. Let us call her the *Tub*," said Carl mischievously.

"You evidently don't appreciate the dignity of the occasion," answered Ralph. "No, no; we must get some more euphonious name than that, at any rate. Supposing we call her the *Olga*, after your mother, Carl. It's a pretty name."

"Very well, let it be that," said Carl. "I'm sure mamma will feel complimented."

"Then you must paint the name on her, Carl. We'll put it on her bows, not at the stern. It will look better that way, I fancy; more easily seen, at any rate, and there's authority for it too,—

'And round about the prow she wrote
The Lady of Shalott.'"

"Why, that wasn't meant as the name of the boat, was it, but of the crew," said Carl laughing, as he began to paint the name in white upon the bows of the boat.

"It might stand for both."

On the following morning the *Olga* was launched in the presence of Mr. and Mrs. Volkoff, Dr. and Mrs. Driscoll, Miss Ordley, and Meta. The trial trip of the boat was a success. She answered to her helm fairly well, considering her shape and construction, and did not take in much water—did not leak more than a little occasional bailing out would remedy.

That day was occupied in thoroughly testing the capabilities of the *Olga* on the lake, and in getting ready the stores, etc., for the start next morning. When Mrs. Volkoff was informed of the intention of the boys to spend a night away from home, she was at first inclined to be alarmed at the proposal. The idea was quite a new one to her.

"But you surely do not mean to sleep out of doors, Ralph?" she said. "Have you not noticed that, however warm the day may have been, there is always

a dampness in our Russian nights, so great that there is much risk in being long in the open air to persons unaccustomed ?"

" Yes ; but we shall be provided against that, Mrs. Volkoff. We shall not sleep in the open air at all. We are taking a tent."

This reassured Mrs. Volkoff considerably.

" You will promise not to be away longer than one night then. You know Carl has not been brought up quite like English boys, so much accustomed to outdoor sports and exposure."

" We shall only be absent one night, Mrs. Volkoff, I promise," Ralph replied.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE CRUISE OF THE "OLGA."

"We thought there was no more behind,
But such a day to-morrow as to-day,
And to be boy eternal."—*Winter's Tale.*

THE party started early. The morning was a beautiful one, a little misty in the low grounds still, but giving promise of warmth. The provision baskets having been snugly stowed in the stern of the *Olga*, Ralph, Basil, and Carl took their seats at the oars, and Mark at the tiller. Each had his gun loaded, ready to his hand.

The rowing was exceedingly easy, the water being so smooth, and the oars light from their smallness. Mark's task was considerably more difficult than that of the boys, for the stream was both narrow—its breadth was about twice that of the Regent Park Canal, or perhaps rather more—and full of shallows, so that steering was a business of some skill. But Mark was equal to it, though with all his watchfulness and dexterity the boat now and then went aground on a sand-bank. But this was a variety in the voyage which was diverting to the boys rather

than otherwise, suggesting the vicissitudes and crises of river-life. At these junctures Basil and Ralph were always promptly at the bows of the boat to shove her off from the sand-bank again, while Carl worked her back into deeper water, the whole process being accompanied with many "yeo-ho-ings" and "steadys," which no doubt greatly facilitated matters.

The scenery along the banks of the river was pleasing though not striking. After about an hour's rowing the hills on each side became higher and much more thickly wooded, and now signs of birds and water-fowl became more abundant. The voyagers began to turn their attention to sport, and the oars were every little while laid aside for the guns. The forest echoed more and more often to the crack of the guns, and the sport was brisk. Ducks, with one or two snipes, were the birds most frequently seen and shot, and by mid-day a good bag had been obtained.

At mid-day the party landed for lunch; and then continued their voyage. In the afternoon a light breeze sprang up, and the mast was stepped and the sail set. The management of the boat now devolved almost entirely on Mark, and the three boys turned their attention wholly to their guns. The sport, however, was hardly so good as in the morning, the birds having by this time probably got more shy. But the boys were quite satisfied with the success already attained, and by-and-by were content to do nothing but sit in their places and watch the river banks, and the water, and the boat's progress, and

enjoy the sail. It was enjoyment in itself being out on the bright rippling river in the warm sunshine. The *Olga*, under Mark's management, obeyed her helm and sail pretty well; and though her sailing powers were decidedly below par, as was to be expected, a high rate of speed was not wished for by her crew, with whom time was no object.

At six o'clock the party again landed, and having unstepped the mast and made all snug and shipshape in the boat—a point upon which Mark was very particular—drew her up on the bank. Preparations were now made for the encampment. A tent was pitched by placing a pole between the forks of two trees which grew opposite each other, separated by a space of about eight feet, and stretching across this a canvas sheet which had been brought for the purpose. The sheet was then made fast on each side by means of ropes attached to pegs driven into the ground, and one end closed up. A very satisfactory shelter against the moist, damp atmosphere of a Russian summer night and against possible rain was thus quickly provided, and the tent had much the appearance of the familiar V-shaped digger's or military tent.

"Now for our fire," said Mark, when the tent was fixed to his satisfaction.

The building and kindling of the fire was the work of a few minutes only, there being abundance of light dry wood ready to hand. Two forked sticks were then driven into the ground—one on each side of the fire—a third laid crosswise upon them, and

from this the kettle was suspended. Then Mark set about the cooking of a duck and a couple of the snipes. The boys plucked them; Mark split the birds up the middle, cleaned them, and then dexterously spitted them on thin pine splints; and each of the party proceeded to roast a bird, turning it before the fire till the proper degree of brownness was reached. Had not Mark been present to superintend this part of the culinary arrangements, it is probable that the boys, or at any rate Ralph and Carl, partly through want of patience, and partly through want of judgment, would have spoiled the cooking of the birds. But Mark knew from old experience how long the process should take, and saw that the boys took time and the requisite pains, with the happy result that the birds were done to a turn, presenting to the eye a crisp, toast-like brownness, and to the nostril a fragrance most stimulating to the appetite and grateful to the senses.

But the bivouackers needed no stimulant to their appetites, and they did not linger long enjoying the fragrance of their supper, pleasant as that was. They had soon a fine kettle of tea ready with which to moisten the solids, and, with the addition of biscuits and butter, and dried and fresh fruit as a second course, what could the heart of man or boy desire further wherewith to satisfy the promptings of a keen appetite?

The campers lingered over their meal, for they were pretty tired as well as hungry, and they felt that they had that day earned the right of loitering

and dallying now. Besides, the day's work was over, and there was nothing else to do except prepare for the night, which could be quickly done. And so they sat on and talked and laughed and trifled, and drank cup after cup of tea long after they had left off eating, until not a drop remained in the kettle.

It was exceedingly pleasant, to be sure! Nobody who has not sat beside a camp-fire, drinking tea out of a tin mug, and basking himself in the cheery blaze, can understand how pleasant. The fire was built in front of the tent, between it and the river, and Mark and the three boys sat at the entrance of the tent, half inside, half out. They had placed a great pine log on the fire, which spread for yards around an atmosphere of genial warmth which effectually nullified and dispersed whatever natural moisture there was in the night air.

The fire leaped and crackled, and cast long fantastic shadows over the grass and trees, and a wavering radiance over the water. The resinous pine log kept up a cheerful snapping noise that mingled with the wash and lap of the river among its reeds. The faces of the four *voyageurs* grew ruddy in the red blaze, and the group looked like a picture by Rembrandt—strong contrasts of light and shadow—the red blaze in front, the darkling shadowy pines behind.

"This *is* the real thing now," exclaimed Ralph with enthusiasm. "Nothing could surpass this,—nothing on earth or;—well, I don't want to be irreverent."

"No, Master Ralph; no need for that," said Mark.

"I mean it's just the acme of things, you know, the *ne plus ultra*, the *summum bonum* of jolliness, the—in short, it's just a case of 'the force of fancy can no further go,' as some one says. Imagination and words fail me."

"You've done pretty well," said Carl, laughing.

"Not so well as I feel; but the American word hits the gold best,—it's *bully*, that's what it is. I've no notion of the origin of that word, but it's the most graphic one I know. What couldn't one imagine themselves now? We might be trappers on the banks of a North American river, or Canadian voyageurs encamped on the St. Lawrence. Nothing is wanting to complete the scene,—the river, the pine woods at our back, our canoe yonder. Did you ever read Captain Mayne Reid, or Ballantyne, or Kingston, Carl? If you have, you will have no difficulty in supposing that we are now just acting out a chapter from one of their books. Look at those old pine woods; ain't they the virgin forest—as virgin as if they were on the banks of the Amazon itself?—

"This is the forest primeval. The murmuring pines and the hemlocks,
Bearded with moss and in garments green, indistinct in the twilight."
That's about all I remember, but let me fill up from my fancy.
See how we sit round our fire—Mark with his pipe o' tobaccy—
Having disposed of a jolly good supper of roast duck and snipeling:
Roast snipe and duckling, perhaps, would have been the correcter expression,
More euphonious, too, but more conventional also;
So what we lose in precision we gain in variety, may be.
But this I fear 's a digression, as authors say when they grow prosy.
Done were those ducks to a turn, too, thanks to the artful old sailor;
Memory fondly lingers, recalling their exquisite brownness.

And when the whole was washed down with a kettle of tea quite superb, sirs,
Was not our supper—speak truth now—a banquet a monarch might envy?
Thus might one string on hexameters such as these, rough-fashioned, homely,
Straight on till midnight, if only one's breath and your patience could stand it;
But having piped a rude stave in praise of our supper, I pause here.

"That's capital, Ralph; however do you manage it straight off like that?" said Carl.

"It comes very nigh poetry, to be sure," said Mark. "It has a sort o' lilt and ring in it same as the psalms; but I must say as I like poetry to have a kind o' rhyme in it, myself. It don't somehow sound just like poetry unless the lines clink and jingle, so to speak. Not as I set up for a judge o' such things, but I take it as a plain man may have a taste in poetry just as he may have in tobacco. I like a plain brand myself, where the flavour's decided, and you can distinguish what you're smoking, and there's a slight nip at the end o' every whiff; but some prefer a blend, where the smoking's mixed and confused like, and you never rightly know what taste's uppermost. And it's something the same with poetry. Some like their poetry plain and straight, wi' a rhyme at the end to give it a taste, and make it stick to the tongue, like *John Gilpin;* others seem to like theirs cut fine and mixed, where there's no flavour to speak of, and you end just as you begin. I'm not now referring to your poetry, Master Ralph; I've just been led off into a general consideration o' the matter."

"You've got a perfect theory of poetry, Mark;

you're a critic spoiled," said Ralph, laughing.—"But if you had ever done Latin verse at school, Carl, and been five or six years worrying at Virgil besides, you would find that stringing together impromptu English hexameters isn't a task that requires superior poetical powers. And writing nonsense verses, even in Latin, becomes little more than a trick with practice. Our 'head' at Oakhurst didn't go in for Latin verse much, but still there were several of our fellows who could reel off Latin 'hex-and-pents,' as we called them, by the score. Here goes for one; let's take the first line of *Evangeline* for a basis. I daresay there'll be a slip in quantity somewhere though, or no *cæsura*, or something. I haven't tried a hexameter since I left school, but here goes: *Ecce sylvam antiquam! hic arbores teres et altæ.* There you are! It's probably agee somewhere, but it'll serve to show you, Carl, that making a set of school verses, *of a sort*, isn't so stiff a business as it may seem to an outsider; and when you can make them in Latin, of course you can make them still easier—of the same rough-and-ready sort—in English. But we're getting altogether too bookish and schooly for the occasion, and must be boring Mark and Basil awfully. We'll have a little melody, Mark, for there was precious little in my 'hexams.' Sing something, like a good old fellow."

"Certainly, sir; what shall it be?"

"'The Golden Vanitee,' Mark. I fancy neither Carl nor Basil has ever heard that."

Mark knocked the ashes out of his pipe, placed it

on the ground beside him, cleared his throat, and began the quaint old ballad, "The Golden Vanitee":—

There was a ship,
And a gallant ship was she;
Ech, diddle dee! and the Lowlands low!
And she was called the *Goulden Vanitee*,
As she sailed for the Lowlands low.

"She had not sailed a league,
A league but only three,—
Ech, diddle dee! for the Lowlands low!—
When she came up with a French gallee,
As she sailed for the Lowlands low."

Mark sang to the end of the somewhat lengthy ditty, which he rendered with good spirit and the requisite touch of humour, so that his audience greeted its conclusion with hearty applause.

"Isn't it a curious, jolly old stave? I think it sounds ever so much better here among the silent woods, too," said Ralph, who was determined to find everything appropriate and ideal in the surroundings. "Now, some one must spin a yarn.—You begin, Carl, and I'll promise to follow."

And so they all told a story each—Carl, the tale of the *Soldier's Watch;* Ralph, a story of school life, which he entitled *Thompson Tertius;* Basil, one about a supposed ghost that haunted an old barn in the village, and kept the people perplexed and awed for a week, until his father unravelled the mystery by a thorough exploration of the deserted barn, when the spectre turned out to be a great white owl whose eyes shone in the dark like two coals of fire; and Mark Weatherby closed the circle of stories by

an adventure of his own boyhood, about his being belated on Dartmoor, a story which Ralph had heard the old man tell before, but which he was very ready to hear again. Then there were more songs and talk, until every one confessed to at last feeling tired, and a motion made by Ralph, that "the house should now adjourn for bed," was carried unanimously. The bivouackers wrapped themselves in their rugs, lay down under the cover of the tent, and having wished each other a cheery "good-night," were soon sound asleep.

Mark was the first up in the morning, and before the others were awake had the fire lighted and the kettle on. He was content to let his young companions "take their fill of sleep," as he said.

"You're entitled to at least an hour longer than me, lads, according to age," said he, when the boys apologized for not being up in time to help him with the fire. "Growing lads can take more sleep, just as they can take more food, than grown-up folks. Besides, I'm an uncommon industrious sleeper when I'm about it. One learns to be that at sea, and I've never forgotten the habit. I'm a concentrated sleeper, as ye may say," concluded the old man humorously.

After making a hearty breakfast, Mark and the three boys took down their tent, got all their things together again, stowed them in the boat, and were soon once more afloat. They now began their homeward journey. The weather was again beautifully fine, and the home voyage was as enjoyable as that

of the previous day had been. It proceeded at a leisurely rate, the boat's progress being frequently checked altogether for purposes of sport. By the afternoon as many birds had been shot as room could be conveniently made for in the boat. Then Mark and the boys desisted from their shooting, for none of them had any desire for sport that was merely wanton.

The sun was low in the west when the voyagers at length reached home, and moored the *Olga* in front of the cottage. Meta and Miss Ordley were on the look-out for them; and dinner at the house had been put forward on Ralph and Carl's account. At dinner the two boys were the heroes of the hour, in a small way, and held the conversation pretty much between them. They certainly got through a great deal of talk, one taking up the narrative as soon as the other dropped it; so that the others got a tolerably full and explicit relation of the expedition, and perhaps caught a tinge of the boys' enthusiasm.

"I don't remember having ever seen you so pleased and enthusiastic about anything, Carl," said his father, pleased himself to note the glow of healthy excitement in his son's face, for he felt sure it was a healthy excitement.

"I never was, papa," answered Carl.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

META'S ADVENTURE.

"They liked the things that pleased them best,
(They had such little wit,)
And let the wind blow east, blow west,
They took no heed of it:
They roamed unfettered as the air,
Nowhere their home, and everywhere."

Old Ballad.

A DAY or two after the boys' excursion, Meta expressed to Ralph and Carl a desire to have a sail in the *Olga* a little way up the river also. The boys were quite willing to gratify her, and in the afternoon the three started, Meta steering, Ralph and Carl rowing. Meta had learned to steer not amiss on the lake, but she now found that guiding the light, well-trimmed skiffs on the broad open lake was a different matter from steering the *Olga* up the narrow, winding river, beset with sandbanks and shallows. But she gave her whole attention to the task, and for a time all went pretty well.

"I think we have gone about far enough now," said Ralph, when they had reached a certain point in the river. "There's rather a ticklish bend just ahead,

and I'm afraid your steering powers won't reach to it, Meta; it took Mark all he knew. You've done bravely so far. We'd better let well alone, and turn now."

So the boat was put about, and her head set for home again. Whether it was that Meta's arms had grown a little tired from the unusually long strain upon them, or that, trusting that she knew the course better from having already traversed it, she of her own accord relaxed her care and attention, it is certain that her steering was less steady, so that Ralph had to caution her more than once. Each time he did so Meta's steering became for a while less straggling and uncertain, but presently again deteriorated. At last a crisis came. In turning a sharp bend in the stream, a quick little swirl in the current swept the boat's head round and drove her out of her course. Meta was unprepared, and before the boys could back-water in time, the boat had drifted on to a sand-bank, and the next moment was fast aground.

Ralph and Carl strove their utmost with the boat-pole and their oars to get the boat off again. But all their efforts were in vain. The *Olga* had buried her nose deep into the sand, and clung there like a barnacle to a rock. After a quarter of an hour's pushing and tugging, Ralph and Carl saw that the task of freeing the boat was beyond them.

"It's no use. We might as well try to lift the *Great Eastern* with a three-foot lever. She's rooted as fast as though she grew there. We haven't moved her an inch," said Ralph.

"What *is* to be done, Ralph? Oh, dear! it was all my fault," exclaimed Meta, a good deal frightened, and feeling rather inclined to cry, though she was striving hard to keep back her tears.

"It can't be helped, Meta. It was a bit of steering beyond you, that's about it, and I think you were getting a little tired in any case," said Ralph.

"But what are we to do, Ralph?" said Carl.

"There's only one thing to be done. We must go ashore and make the best of our way home on foot. It can't be more than four miles."

"It won't be difficult getting on shore at any rate," said Carl.

"Not in the least. The sand-bank runs right in. The water won't take us much over our knees. See, Meta, get on my back, and I'll land you in a few moments. You'll carry my boots and your own, please, Carl."

The boys took off their boots and socks, which Carl fastened together and slung over his shoulder. Then Ralph took Meta in his arms—a method of carriage which she preferred to being transported on his back—and in a few moments had set her safe and dry on the bank, Carl following close behind. Ralph and Carl put on their socks and boots again.

"Now, then! *tramp's* the word, and put your best foot foremost, Meta. We've got a pretty good march before us, but you never shirked walking, as far as I remember," said Ralph.

The three walked steadily on side by side.

"What will become of the *Olga*, Ralph?" said Meta.

"Nothing can happen to her meanwhile—she's too fast jammed—and we'll find some means of getting her free to-morrow, I daresay."

The path which Ralph, Carl, and Meta were pursuing was not a difficult one, though a little rough. They took care to keep close alongside the river, so as to run no risk of losing their way, which might have happened had they wandered into the forest. It would be a little difficult for the son of an English landowner to lose his way on his father's property, but Carl might easily have done so among the vast pine woods which covered large tracts of the Karlhoff estates.

After walking about half-an-hour the three companions came to a small stream which crossed their path at right angles and flowed into the main stream. It was a very insignificant and innocent-looking little brook, which no one could conceive of as being the cause of disaster. But that big events hinge on small chances is a truth familiar enough to form a copy-book motto, if it has not already been turned to that account. A word misunderstood turns the fortune of a battle-field, and the tiniest leak sinks an ironclad.

There were a few stepping-stones in the stream, placed there probably by some peasant on the estate whom business sometimes led in this direction. Meta was the first to cross the brook. She had placed her foot on the second stone, and had just leaned all her weight on it, when it turned suddenly beneath her. She lost her footing, and fell sidelong into the water.

In a moment Ralph was standing in the stream beside his sister, and in another had lifted her and placed her on her feet on the other side.

But directly Meta tried to stand upright she fell to the ground. A spasm of pain crossed her face.

"I think I must have hurt my foot," she said. "It is so painful I cannot stand."

Ralph and Carl both bent down and examined Meta's foot. It was beginning perceptibly to swell about the ankle.

"You have twisted it in your fall, that is it," said Carl.

"Yes, I think so," answered Meta. "How dreadfully unfortunate I am to-day! What am I to do?"

There was a short pause before either of the boys replied.

"You don't think you could manage to get home, even by leaning on Carl and me?" said Ralph.

"Oh no, dear, it is impossible. We have more than half the distance to go yet, and I am sure I could not walk a hundred yards. I am afraid the pain is increasing."

"I don't suppose we could carry you all the way home," continued Ralph reflectively. "We might if we had some kind of litter, but not without, I am afraid. Do you know, Carl, if we are near any cottage or habitation of any sort?"

"I couldn't say, Ralph. I don't know this part of the estate very well—it is nearly all forest, you see—but I think it's not unlikely that there may be

some woodman's cottage not far off. If Basil had only been with us he could have told us."

"He is far enough off though. He went this morning to the fair at Moktoff to buy a marriage present for his sister," said Ralph. "Well, the only plan I can think of is that we should search about and try if we can find some cottage where Meta can remain while we go home for assistance. See, Carl, you'll remain here with Meta, and I'll take a cruise round the neighbourhood. I'll take care to note landmarks, so that I can find you again."

"Very well. We'll not stir from here, and I do hope you'll be successful," said Carl, who was somewhat nervously alive to the gravity of the situation.

"Be sure not to lose us, Ralph," said Meta anxiously as Ralph started.

A few minutes' walk brought Ralph deep into the forest. He could see nothing but pine trees on every side, with here and there a narrow, sandy foot-track winding among them. He followed one of these, and, taking out his knife, notched a tree here and there as he proceeded. He had gone perhaps a mile, getting, as it seemed to him, deeper and deeper into the heart of the forest at every few paces, when he saw directly in front of him a faint smoke rising from the ground and twisting like a spiral cloud in and out among the trees. He quickened his pace, and in a few minutes more beheld, not the isba of some peasant, as he had expected, but a man and a woman seated beneath a tree. A second glance informed Ralph that these were not the only human

beings close at hand. A few yards further on were a couple of tents, in front of which were other men and women, together with children.

Ralph hesitated for a moment before advancing further. He at once guessed what the strangers were. They were evidently gipsies. The appearance of the people themselves, dark, with long curling coal-black hair, somewhat aquiline noses, and thick lips; the tents, the fire, with the pot suspended from its rude tripod,—the whole aspect of the scene at once told Ralph that he was looking upon a gipsy encampment.

He hesitated a moment, I say, before advancing, but his natural courage and spirit presently overcame his doubts, and he walked up to the man and the woman, who were now fixedly and somewhat curiously scanning the intruder.

Ralph addressed them in Russian, and after some interchange of questions and answers, succeeded in making the gipsies understand the state of matters. Before this result was reached, all the rest of the camp had gathered round, and most of the elder men and women were taking part in the discussion.

Ralph was careful to make plain his relations to Pavel Carlovitch Volkoff, and he noticed that the name was well received by the gipsies. The end of the matter was that the gipsies expressed themselves willing to render Ralph all the help in their power, and two men were appointed to accompany Ralph back to where he had left Carl and Meta.

When Meta saw who were Ralph's companions, a

strong shadow of doubt crossed her face; but a few words of explanation from Ralph reassured her, and she allowed herself to be lifted upon the shoulders of the two gipsy men. Ralph and Carl followed close behind, and in this order they returned to the encampment.

The manner of the gipsies towards the three young people, and especially towards Carl, was markedly respectful and courteous, and their words presently gave a sufficient indication of the reason.

"You are welcome to all we can do, barin," said one old man, who seemed the chief. "Gospodin Pavel Carlovitch has always been considerate and generous to the gipsies. We are glad to be able to serve his son. The barishna shall have all the attention we can give her, but our means are but rough and poor at best."

The old man spoke with a courteous and even graceful air that corresponded well with his tall and stately carriage, for though his beard was white with many winters, his figure was still erect and straight.

Meta was led to one of the tents, and seated on the ground. Then a woman brought a vessel containing warm milk mixed with water. Taking a handful of green leaves from a small basket, she crushed them between her palms, bruising and rubbing them until they were of almost the consistency of paste, which she then mixed with the warm milk and water. With this she fomented Meta's foot with a very deft and soft hand. The process was wonderfully soothing, and when it was finished Meta already

felt the pain of her ankle much alleviated. The woman finally swathed Meta's foot in soft linen cloth.

"What is to be done now, Ralph?" said Carl to Ralph in English. "We can hardly leave Meta among these people alone while we go home, though they seem very well disposed."

"We might do this—you might stay here with Meta while I go home and report what has happened."

"Very well."

Carl informed the chief of this arrangement, but he proposed another.

"No need for either of you to go all the way home alone," said the old man. "We will send a messenger to your father, who will inform him of everything and set his mind at ease. Meanwhile you will stay with us until you are all rested and refreshed with food. Our young men in the meantime will construct a litter, and by-and-by we will carry the barishna home on it."

"What do you say, Ralph?" said Carl aside to Ralph.

"I don't mind staying. These people evidently wish to be hospitable towards you, Carl, and I think we ought to gratify them. Your father no doubt stands high in their favour."

"Yes; I know he has always been easy with the gipsies. Some proprietors are very strict towards them; but my father has allowed them a good deal of freedom, and he has not been a loser by it. They

have troubled us very little by stealing and pilfering, and whenever there was any case of that sort my father usually took no notice, finding that was the best plan. The Russian gipsies are not all equally idle and worthless. Some of them work at regular trades. But they are rather revengeful when they are disturbed and too closely watched. They are altogether a peculiar people, as you know, in Russia and everywhere."

"I was never in such close quarters with them before, and I am not sorry to have the chance of seeing something of their ways and life. See! they are going to invite us to share their supper. We're having quite an adventure. It's like what you read about, you know. It'll be something to tell of that we have taken pot-luck with gipsies."

The old man again came forward and said, "You will share our simple fare, gentlemen, will you not?"

"To be sure, and thank you. We're as hungry as hunters," said Ralph heartily.

The old man motioned to the boys to take their places beside him. The rest of the gipsies made a circle round the fire. Then two men lifted the great pot from the fire, and each person was supplied with a wooden bowl and a horn spoon. The contents of the pot were apportioned, every man, woman, and child receiving an ample allowance. As the lid was lifted from the pot a savoury steam had risen and filled the circumambient air, which struck Ralph as particularly appetizing, for he was hungry after a long fast. The taste of the stew did not belie its

savour. It was a sort of thick soup or stew — a hotch-potch of a large variety of ingredients, flesh and vegetable, but so skilfully blended as to produce a highly artistic and agreeable result. Ralph and Carl thought that the gipsy *chef* thoroughly understood his business; for though they could just recognize a number of familiar elements in the stew, rabchick and wild duck, sterlet, bacon, and mushrooms, yet no single flavour unduly predominated over another, and the boys thought they had never eaten a better dish in their lives. No doubt they both brought to the discussion of their supper the most infallible of sauces, a lively appetite; but, making all allowances for that fact, I am disposed to think that Ralph came close to the truth when he said,—

"This gipsy *chef* is a genius, Carl. Nothing in the way of a stew could possibly surpass this." And then he continued, addressing the old man, "I'll trouble you for another helping, if you please."

The old chief refilled Ralph's bowl with a pleased smile on his face.

Meta had meanwhile been quietly enjoying her supper also, seated in the entrance of the tent. The pain arising from her foot was greatly less now, and by no means sufficient to prevent her relishing her bowl of stew. Now that the excitement caused by her accident, and by the whole course of the afternoon's events, had very much subsided, she became aware of a hunger only less keen than that of Ralph and Carl—a natural result of the fatigue and strain of body and mind she had passed through.

Busily engaged as Ralph was with the consideration of his supper, he had at the same time been attentively observing what was passing around him, and noting the characteristics of the scene.

Some of the gipsies struck him as being fine looking people, tall and supple, with a type of countenance partly Jewish, partly Egyptian, reminding him of the figures on Egyptian mural decorations, with wonderfully black and bright eyes and flashing white teeth. It was only the younger of the women, however, who were thus handsome and striking. The elder women were either stout and ungraceful or withered and somewhat witch-like. The men appeared, like the old chief, to preserve their grace of figure and face into later life.

The gipsies were dressed in long cloaks of a dark colour, and all the women, young and old, had brooches fastening their cloaks. The women wore handkerchiefs on their heads, with the corners hanging down over the shoulders. They also wore curious necklaces of copper coins—copecks strung together—while some of the younger ones were decorated with other ornaments more or less gaudy. The gipsies spoke a curious dialect, which Ralph found difficult to follow, and which sometimes puzzled Carl, who informed Ralph that it was simply incorrect Russian.

Shortly after supper, the old chief, addressing Ralph and Carl, said, "A messenger has been sent to the big house; he will be there by this time. Meanwhile we shall try and amuse you a little, young gentlemen."

At a sign from the old man, several of the younger men and women rose from their places and arranged themselves in order. A man took a guitar and began to play, and presently one of the women commenced to sing. She was one of the handsomest of the gipsies, with great dark eyes that glanced this way and that as she sang. Her song began in a low, melancholy key, but presently rose and swelled, and filled all the surrounding space with sound.

By-and-by the rest joined in the music, and as they did so began to dance. The music now became much faster and louder, and the motions of the dancers correspondingly vehement. They leaped and wheeled, snapped their fingers, and from time to time uttered a peculiar shrill cry. At length, to such a point of excitement did they work themselves that it seemed as if every inch and every nerve and fibre in their bodies were in motion, vibrating and quivering. All the while the man with the guitar kept spinning round on his heels, no less excited than the dancers themselves, and every moment increasing the speed of the music. Ralph, Carl, and Meta, as may be supposed, watched the performance with curiosity and not a little astonishment.

When the dancing and singing were over, two men began to perform a number of feats of conjuring and sleight of hand, several of which were so clever that Ralph and Meta thought they had never seen them surpassed at the best London entertainments.

"The gipsies have a great fame for this sort of thing; they go about to the fairs and festivals and

set up their booths for dancing and conjuring," said Carl.

When the feats of legerdemain were concluded, a gipsy came up to the old chief and spoke a few words aside to him.

"The litter is all ready now for the barishna," said the old man.

"Then I think we had better be starting," said Ralph.

The litter was brought forward. It was constructed of pine boughs, and had a pair of handles at each end like a palanquin or a sedan-chair. A rug was thrown over this, and Meta was seated upon it. Two young men then lifted the litter by the shafts or handles and bore it between them.

"Thank you very much for your hospitality and kindness," Carl said to the old man.

"We shan't soon forget the evening we have spent with you," said Ralph, and he took the old chief by the hand and shook it.

The old man seemed pleased, and returned Ralph's grasp. Then Carl held out his hand too, and Meta nodded from her elevated seat on her litter. The rest of the gipsies bowed, or waved their hands with a graceful, courteous motion, by way of saying "Good-bye," and the little procession started, Meta and her bearers in front, Ralph and Carl side by side close behind. This order was maintained till they arrived at the house, which was reached as the long twilight of the Russian summer evening was merging into night. Mr. and Mrs. Carlovitch, Dr. and Mrs. Dris-

coll, together with Miss Ordley, were all waiting up for the wanderers—the three ladies in some anxiety to learn more definite particulars in regard to Meta.

"I am all right, mamma; there is really nothing much wrong," Meta declared. "My foot did pain me a good deal at first, but it is ever so much better now. The stuff that the gipsy woman rubbed it with acted almost like magic. You ought really to get the receipt for the gipsy ointment, papa, and introduce it into England."

"Well, well, we must talk about that and all the rest of your adventure to-morrow. You must really get to bed now, all of you; and I hope you will sleep, Meta, after all the day's excitement," said her father.

"I must see these gipsy men and reward them for their good offices; they seem to have done everything in their power in the way of care and attention," said Pavel Carlovitch, leaving the room.

CHAPTER XXIX.

GOOD-BYE TO KARLHOFF.

'Tis with no small regret
I quit these scenes, for they have come to wear
A kind familiar look."

NOTWITHSTANDING Meta's declaration that there was little the matter with her hurt foot, it kept her to the sofa for a full week. By the end of that time she was able to walk about again with almost her usual ease and freedom; all pain had left her, and only a slight stiffness in the ankle remained.

She was promising herself many another long ramble about the woods of Karlhoff, but the days that the Driscolls were to spend on Pavel Carlovitch's estate were fewer than Meta was calculating on.

"Do you know that we return to Petersburg on this day week, Meta?" Miss Ordley said on the morning on which Meta first quitted her sofa.

"This day week! so soon! Who said so, Miss Ordley?"

"Your papa and mamma were talking about it last night after you had gone to bed. They will no

doubt tell you all about their arrangements to-day. Your papa says he has had quite a long enough holiday now, and must return to his duties. The hospital authorities in Petersburg have already extended his leave of absence, you know."

"Yes, they have been very generous. But, oh! I am so sorry to leave Karlhoff; it has been so pleasant here. I somehow thought he might have remained a week or two yet. We have been just like a family party."

"We shall not be quite separated from our friends; they go with us to Petersburg."

"I am glad of that, at any rate. But why are they leaving this beautiful place when it is at its best? I should have thought they would stay in the country as long as the summer lasted."

"You forget, surely, Meta, Mr. Carlovitch's pretty little place on Yelagin Island, which we visited when we first arrived in Petersburg. Don't you remember how charming it is? Well, the family naturally like to spend part of the summer there, and that is what they propose doing now."

"The little chalet on Yelagin Island is pretty and gay, but I much prefer Karlhoff, there is so much more space and variety. But no doubt there would not be much use in having a house on the island if one never used it," said Meta.

Ralph, it may be supposed, was not less sorry than his sister at having to return to St. Petersburg; but seeing that it was inevitable, he was old enough and wise enough to cherish no feeling of discontent or

vain regret. It would have been ungrateful and unmanly if he had, considering the large amount of pleasure he had enjoyed during his stay at Karlhoff, and this he fully recognized.

On the day preceding that of their departure, Ralph, Carl, and Meta went the round of all their favourite haunts, and bade each a lingering and regretful farewell. They held a little parting banquet in Quintette Cottage, at which Mark was present. They took a last sail in the *Olga*, which had been brought back safe and uninjured from its enforced moorings on the sand-bank; and I believe it was with a real feeling of regret that Ralph looked for the last time on the primitive little craft which had been his idea, and in the building of which he had taken so keen an interest.

"I declare I feel quite sentimental," he said; but the next moment the humorous sense, which was so strong in the boy, asserted itself, and the conclusion of his speech belied its beginning:—

> "Farewell, a long farewell, my trim-built wherry!
> For nevermore with thee I'll cross the ferry.
> Sing honerie! asthore Machree, and Derry down down Derry!"

With Ralph, at this stage of his life, sentiment and fun always lay side by side, and from the sublime, or at any rate the serious, to the ridiculous was usually but one step.

The parting between Ralph and Basil was one of sincere regret on both sides. Basil had done so much to add to Ralph's pleasure, putting himself about in a score of ways to gratify him, and had really taught

him so much that was useful and worth knowing in regard to sport and forest craft, that Ralph felt genuinely grateful to him; while Basil on his part had found Ralph so frank and genial a companion, so ready to meet him on equal terms and to merge all considerations of superior birth and education in a hearty and equal comradeship, that he had formed a strong and loyal regard for the English boy dashed with a considerable admiration,—in fact, the liking and regard of each of the boys for the other was mingled with admiration. Since neither by any means lacked shrewdness or penetration, each esteemed and valued in the other what he did not possess in so high a degree himself.

"What a jolly time we've had, Basil, to be sure! I hope we'll see each other again some day, perhaps this time next year."

"If we're in Russia then, Ralph," said Meta. "We don't mean to stay in Russia always, you know, Basil; England is our real home."

"It's likely we'll be settled here for a bit yet, however, so far as we can see at present. But if we do return to England, you might come yourself some day, Basil. More unlikely things have happened than that. You should think over that notion of mine of setting up as a cabinet-maker in London, and talk over it with your father,—you really should."

"We could get you plenty of custom in London, I am sure we could; we have many friends there," said Meta, projecting herself swiftly into the future,

and imagining herself assisting her mother in choosing the furniture for a new English house, in the appointing of which Basil was to bear the chief share.

"Ah! England is far away," was all Basil answered in a rather sad tone.

"Not at all; the journey is nothing."

"I should like to see your country—yes, but it is far away; it is beyond the seas."

Basil extended his arm with an expressive gesture as he spoke. He had never even seen the sea. It was an unknown quantity with him, vague and vast, not yielding itself to measurement in his imagination, so that all lands that lay beyond it seemed equally remote and inaccessible, and England appeared as distant as America.

Ralph and Meta each gave Basil a little gift at parting, and the two boys shook hands, with the hope that they might meet again, though in the breast of each the expectation was really a faint and vague one.

On their way back to St. Petersburg, the party turned aside from their direct course a little in order to visit the great annual fair at Nijni-Novgorod. Their journey led them so close to the town that Pavel Carlovitch thought it a pity that his English friends should miss seeing it, and Dr. Driscoll was himself of the same opinion.

The great fair was at its height when the travellers arrived in the town, and the sight was a truly astonishing one. Craft of every description crowded the

river—barges that had come from the Siberian rivers, bringing copper and iron; others from the Caucasus, freighted with oil; others again, curious, Asiatic-looking crafts, carved and painted, laden with tea from far-away China. Steamers shot in and out among the ships,—this from the vast pine-forests and everlasting snow regions of Northern Siberia; that from the arid tracks that border the southern Volga. All the vessels were gay with flags, and decorated with quaint devices in silver and gold—figures and pictures of saints and gods who guard the welfare of seamen.

The travellers first obtained a general impression of the fair, by ascending the hills behind the town, on the other side of the river Oka, and then they descended, and wandered among the long rows of shops and booths, thus obtaining a closer and more detailed view of the great bazaar.

The shops were ranged in long narrow lines or alleys, and quantities of goods were piled up at the entrance of each, so that what with the narrowness of the passages and the vast crowd of people, progress was slow and somewhat hot work. But there was so much that was strange and novel in the scene that the English strangers at least did not greatly object to the slowness of the progress made.

Each line or row of shops was devoted to some special goods: there was an "iron-line," a "wool-line," a "carpet-line;" a row of shops devoted to the sale of nothing but Russian wares,—the large trunks of many colours, and strongly bound in metal, so in-

dispensable to the household of a Russian moujik, one of which every peasant must secure if he wishes a treasury, a strong box for the safe keeping of his worldly wealth and his dearest household goods; brightly-burnished copper samovars, another possession equally dear to the heart of a Russian housewife; and *voilok*, a rough-looking, hairy material, manufactured from cow-hide, which composes the bed of a Russian peasant, and supplies him in cold weather with boots.

It seemed to the strangers as if every nationality in the world was represented in the crowd about them, and that every country known to them by name had its "line." There were Tartars, eager-eyed, hawk-faced men, vending all descriptions of leather ware, slippers and boots of every variety of shape and ornamentation; natives of Bokhara, copper-coloured men, with coal-black hair and gleaming black eyes, seated amid their cotton bales, cross-legged, in a semicircle; Circassians in their graceful national costume, which admirably set off their slender figures and finely-moulded features, selling various articles of silver filigree work. Then there were French glove merchants; Swiss toy merchants, with carved ornaments in wood and horn from Brienz and Geneva; spectacle-sellers from Frankfort and Berlin; and Siberians from the Oural Hills, with great store of valuable stones.

The English party made some small purchases as mementoes of the fair, and to send as presents to friends in England. Mrs. Driscoll bought a silver

belt of quaint device in the Circassian "line," and in the Chinese line a package of "brick tea" of peculiar fragrance and flavour, and which she knew could not be obtained in England. The tea was made up in Chinese boxes, and was so exceedingly expensive that Mrs. Driscoll did not feel disposed to purchase more than a single pound. For all the other articles purchased, the buyers never paid more than one-half the price demanded.

"And even then you may rest assured that you have been overcharged," said Pavel Carlovitch.

"Well, we can say, at any rate, that we bought the things at first hand from the original sellers themselves," said Mrs. Driscoll. "It is something to have purchased a turquoise ring from a Tartar himself."

"I am extremely sorry to have to rob you of even that consolation and illusion," said Pavel Carlovitch, smiling. "You must not take everything that you behold in the fair *au pied de la lettre*—not believe much more than half you see. That same semi-barbarous-looking Tartar from whom you purchased your ring was never out of Russia in his life, and is probably a quiet-living Moscow shopkeeper. When you have been at the Nijni-Novgorod fair once or twice you come to understand these things, and can distinguish the genuine from the sham. The Chinese tea-merchants are Russian born and bred also, who have got up a little Chinese gibberish which deceives strangers. Their ware is genuine, however; on that you may rely. We have seen the ships on the river

that transported it. But some of these dealers are really what they seem. Those grave, aristocratic-looking Persians, now, are genuine—more genuine than all their carpets, half of which are of Russian manufacture. Those Bokharans, too, there is no mistaking them; nor yet those gigantic Siberian stone-merchants. The trade morality of the fair is, I am afraid, very low. They pretend to sell every produce of the known world here; and that is actually pretty nearly the truth, only a purchaser requires all his wits if he is to get what he thinks he gets, and not a mere counterfeit."

"You may get anything hereabout except ordinary honesty; that's what it about comes to," said Mark aside to Ralph. "It 'ud be difficult to follow the Book's injunction here, I reckon, and 'buy the truth,' because they sell it not."

It was a great relief to the party to emerge at last from the thronged and heated bazaar, where the air was getting more and more stifling, and the dust was anything but agreeable, into a broad avenue, shady and cool with trees, at the back of the governor's house, which was situated in the middle of the fair. All had now had enough of the sights, sounds, and odours of the fair—some of which latter were, it must be confessed, more decided than fragrant—and were glad to seek rest and retirement in a hotel. The hotel was but an indifferent one, and inconveniently crowded, but the travellers had but to pass one night beneath its roof. On the following day they continued their journey, the English party not regretting

—setting the novelty and strangeness of the scene against the several slight disagreeables they had no doubt undergone in witnessing it — that they had delayed their journey a day or two to visit the world-famous fair at Nijni-Novgorod.

CHAPTER XXX.

HOMEWARDS.

"No longer wander,
Turning again where
England lies, yonder."

"WE don't mean to stay in Russia always, you know, Basil," Meta had said, when Ralph and she were bidding Basil good-bye; but she was far from thinking when she thus spoke how short a time longer she was to be in Russia.

When the Driscolls reached St. Petersburg, Dr. Driscoll found a batch of letters awaiting him. He had, of course, received none during the journey from Karlhoff. By far the most important of these was one from a medical friend in London, an old physician, whose name stood among the highest in his profession in England. When Dr. Driscoll was a young man, Dr. Armitage had been a professor at the hospital at which he studied. Subsequently he had given up his post at the hospital, and devoted himself entirely to the work of a consulting physician. Dr. Driscoll had been a favourite pupil of Dr. Armitage's, and the acquaintance thus formed between the older

and the younger man had ripened into a firm friendship. The elder physician had frequently shown his good-will towards his younger brother practitioner, and his interest in his advancement, by recommending all cases which he could not overtake himself to Dr. Driscoll.

Dr. Armitage was now a man well up in years, and he was finding the professional calls upon him more and more a tax on his physical powers. He was desirous of easing himself somewhat of his labours, and he also wished that such part of his practice as he surrendered might be taken up by one who should be able and willing to follow out his principles and system of treatment. He knew of no one who was so capable of carrying on the methods which it had been his life-work to develop and perfect as his old pupil and friend; and he now wrote to Dr. Driscoll, proposing that he should return to London and become his assistant, and ultimately his successor.

The proposal was a gratifying one to Dr. Driscoll, and too advantageous to be refused. He at once made up his mind to accept it, a resolve in which he was wholly supported by his wife.

No other reason was needed to determine Dr. Driscoll in his action than the direct one in question; but had an additional argument been required in favour of his quitting Russia, it might have been found in the aspect of political affairs at that moment in St. Petersburg. The Driscolls arrived in the capital to find the whole political horizon troubled and threatening. Rumours of this state of things

had reached them on the journey, but in St. Petersburg the facts of the case were more clearly and rapidly realized. An outbreak of hostilities between Russia and Turkey seemed imminent, and the air was full of rumours of war. What attitude England would assume in the crisis was as yet not perfectly apparent, but the relations between it and Russia were, as Dr. Driscoll's home papers again and again expressed it, "strained," so that one could not help fearing the worst.

"If England should determine upon war, the position of an English resident in Petersburg, holding a post under the Russian Government as I do, might not be a pleasant one," Dr. Driscoll said to his wife. "Possibly, I have nothing to fear, and our personal safety and freedom might be quite secure; but there is no knowing for certain. If the worst comes, in a time of such uncertainty and unsettlement as will ensue the position of English people here may prove to be, at the least, anxious and uncomfortable; so that really this offer of Dr. Armitage's is very well timed."

"It is indeed most fortunate; for if it had not come you might have been tempted to hold on your situation at the hospital, and I really do not think I could have had a day's ease of mind in Petersburg if war broke out between Russia and England. It would be dreadful," said Mrs. Driscoll.

The year which the English family had spent in Russia had been a pleasant and happy one. They were quite glad to return to England; but, at the

same time, it was not without some feeling of regret that they quitted Russia. Especially did they regret being obliged to part from Pavel Carlovitch's family, whose hospitality and kindness to them had been unremitting from their first arrival in St. Petersburg. The Russian family, on their part, were equally sorry that their English friends were so soon to leave them. Poor Carl's face was for many days quite a picture of sadness, but the arrangement that was come to a day or two before the Driscolls sailed in a great measure cheered and raised his spirits, giving him something to look forward to. It was agreed between the two families that the Volkoffs should visit the Driscolls in London, and that even if circumstances should prevent his father and mother leaving Russia, Carl was in any case to visit England and spend some time with the Driscolls.

"Whether war should break out between our countries need make no difference in this arrangement," said Dr. Driscoll. "War should have no power to sever private friendships. You will be as safe and as much at ease in London as you are here, I assure you, even though our armies were in the heat of conflict."

"I believe that; England is always happy in that respect," answered Pavel Carlovitch. "But we must trust that it will not come to war between the two nations. I have good hope that it will not. War we shall have, and a serious enough one; but I pray not with England."

Dr. Driscoll had still another inducement for

desiring to return to England—namely, the publication of his book, which was now completed. He could, of course, have had it published in London without himself going there, but it would be more convenient that he should be on the spot while the work was passing through the press, and more advantageous in every way. He had forwarded portions of the manuscript to Dr. Armitage, who had not only read them with lively interest, but had suggested some minor points wherein he thought the work might be with advantage supplemented—hints which Dr. Driscoll was very ready to adopt.

Dr. Driscoll's book was but a small one, but it was the result of much thought and experience. It treated of some common physical infirmities which afflict mankind, and its design was to equip the reader with a few simple but efficacious weapons whereby he might resist the attacks of such bodily ills as he was most prone to, as far as they could be resisted by human means.

The theme of the book was in truth an old and oft-treated one, but Dr. Driscoll had handled it with a degree of freshness that distinguished his book from a score of works of a like kind, discovering new hints and suggestions that were entirely the result of his own research and experiment; while the whole was lightened, and lifted above the category of merely medical handbooks, by the grace of a style which, at once easy, bright, and varied, revealed a distinct literary faculty in the author.

These points did not escape the critics, and the

comments of the various reviewers almost invariably closed with an expression of surprise as well as praise that a book of such a description could be thus preserved from being purely technical and dull to the unprofessional reader by the bright, familiar, essay-like character of its style. Favourably noticed with scarcely an exception, Dr. Driscoll's little book rapidly won its way into popular favour, and brought its author both increased reputation and some pecuniary profit. In this reference I have necessarily had to anticipate somewhat, the opportunity being a convenient one to allude to the work which had occupied Dr. Driscoll's leisure moments during his sojourn in Russia, and of which brief mention has once or twice been made in these pages.

It was the second day previous to that on which the Driscolls were to embark for England. Ralph was busy packing up some books in a trunk in a small room that adjoined the drawing-room, from which it was separated by a thin and slight partition, little more than a screen, as is the fashion in many Russian houses.

Ralph thought that all the others of the family were out of the house. He knew that his mother and Meta had gone to the Gostinoi Dvor, to make some final purchases for presents to friends in England, and he had thought that Miss Ordley had accompanied them. But presently, when he had nearly finished with his book-packing, he heard Miss Ordley's voice in the adjoining room, and a moment after, another voice. Both speakers talked in low tones,

but through the thin screen Ralph could easily recognize the voices. The second was that of Franz Rosendorf. Ralph could not possibly avoid hearing the words of the speakers, and before he could decide upon what to do in order to reveal his presence, he had caught several sentences.

"It is little that I have to offer you, Anna. Can you be content with it?" Franz Rosendorf was saying, in a voice trembling with earnestness.

"Quite, Franz. You yourself give up much in going to England with me, and not asking me to settle with you in Germany. But I have no fear of you not succeeding in England. With your learning and talents you will readily find a good situation in some of our large English schools; and I am sure that Dr. Driscoll will do what he can to forward your interests."

"With work to do, I shall be as happy in England as in Germany, Anna. Wherever you are will be henceforth my home. My own personal wants are few; I have been trained to that. All I desire is to be able to make enough to give you all you have been accustomed to, and all you deserve; and I am not afraid of hard work, as I think you know. I have been trained to that too, my love."

At this point, Ralph made a great din—much greater than the circumstances required—by letting fall a pile of books; and when the noise ceased, the voices in the drawing-room had ceased also, and Ralph heard instead a sound of retreating footsteps. He had succeeded in his object, that of discovering to

the lovers his proximity. The above brief dialogue sufficiently explains itself, and the reader may be safely left to fill in details. Franz Rosendorf and Anna Ordley had, in a word, become engaged, and Franz accompanied the English family back to England.

Dr. Driscoll decided on taking a round-about route home. The political relations between England and Russia were not so critical, and events were not being hurried on so rapidly as that it made any difference whether the Driscolls were a few days, more or less, in quitting Russia. Dr. Driscoll thought that, as the opportunity might not soon occur again, they might as well return to England by way of the Mediterranean, and Pavel Carlovitch suggested that this should be done by making the Volga trip.

"I cannot promise you anything very great in the way of scenery," he said; "but you will see some things that will be strange and novel to you, and the journey is not an arduous one,—the boats are fairly good."

The Driscolls, accompanied by Franz Rosendorf, journeyed by train to Nijni-Novgorod, and there embarked on one of the steamers of the Volga Steam Company.

Shortly after the boat had left the wharf, the scenery on the banks of the river, which was here about two-thirds of a mile broad, was pretty, and occasionally picturesque; but there was nothing which any traveller who had beheld really fine scenery, such as that of Switzerland or Scotland,

would deem striking. The banks in many places presented the red, loamy colouring which is to be frequently seen in the south of England; and as the level rays of the setting sun fell on this with a rich mellow light, and on the trees and grasses which lined the water's marge, the effect was very pleasing.

Now and then a town was passed, now and then a village. The towns occasionally attracted the eye by some aspect of antiquity which lent them quaintness, or by some showy church which they possessed, whose gilded or star-spangled dome flashed in the sunlight. The villages were almost invariably monotonous in the extreme in general aspect,—patches of sombre colour in the landscape, which broke but did not enliven it.

The chief incidents which varied the journey were undoubtedly the frequent grounding of the steamer. The summer had been a more than usually dry one, and the river was proportionately shallow. These *contretemps* at first caused Mrs. Driscoll, Miss Ordley, and Meta some alarm; but they were so frequent, and were attended with such small results in the way of discomfort, that the ladies got to regard them with comparative composure. To the gentlemen they served as a small excitement.

The mate stood at the bow of the steamer, and whenever he caught up a pole which lay always near to his hand, Ralph knew what might be looked for, and was at the mate's side to watch his proceedings. The pole had a rough scale of feet marked upon it; and whenever the mate thought the water was

becoming somewhat shallow, he dipped his sounding-pole into the river, drew it out, and from the height of the water-mark knew, of course, how much the boat was drawing.

"Three!—two and a half!—two!—one and a half!" he would call. When he got to "One and a half!" he roared it out in a louder tone, for it meant grounding—the steamer drawing eighteen inches.

A grating, scraping sound of the boat's keel upon the sand, and she was fast. Then all the crew, armed with long poles, rushed to the prow, and began to push the steamer off. The engines were put back, the boat throbbed and vibrated from stem to stern, the steam roared in the escape pipe, the sand was stirred up from the bottom of the river until the water grew thick and yellow, and then the boat was in deep water again.

The steamer stopped frequently to take in wood, and at night lay alongside some wharf. Whenever a stoppage took place, the passengers were besieged by a crowd of pedlers and venders of various provisions — bread, fruit, tea, and cooked flesh and fish.

Many quaint and curious barges were met or passed, —Eastern-looking craft, bedecked with many flags, some with high poops, with bulwarks of painted trellis, and a wooden erection in the centre of the deck like a large shed, which the Driscolls supposed was the sleeping apartments of the crew.

The passengers were of various nationalities,— Tartars and Circassians and Bokharans, many of

whom had been attending the Nijni-Novgorod fair, and were now returning doubtless with fatter and weightier purses. Some of the Circassians and Bokharans were dressed in a fashion little short of magnificence. These merchants and dealers were evidently returning from the great fair in fine spirits, and a great deal of eating and drinking went on among them, champagne flowing as freely as water among the Russian portion of the passengers. Each day, at the sunset hour, every Tartar on board, desisting from his talk or from eating and drinking, spread a small square of carpet on the deck, knelt down on it, and facing towards the setting sun, prayed to the Prophet with an air of much devoutness. It was curious to watch the ways of these various races with which the English family found themselves surrounded; and indeed, but for the odd study of manners and character thus afforded, the voyage would have become, towards its close, a somewhat tedious one.

The river journey ended at Astrakhan, on the Caspian Lake, the "Star of the Sea," as the town is poetically called among Oriental peoples. Thence the English party took steamer to Bakù, and journeying thence by the Caucasus and Constantinople, reached the Mediterranean. Fine calm weather accompanied them, and the journey home, putting aside the little inevitable disagreeables inseparable from travel, was a delightful one; the voyage up the Mediterranean, in the large and splendidly equipped steamer in which the Driscolls had taken their

passage, being like a yachting trip, so undisturbed was the sea, so slight the vessel's motion.

But, nevertheless, the feeling of satisfaction and gladness was universal when the white cliffs of England were at length sighted, shining soft and still in the evening light.

"Glad to have seen foreign lands—glad to be back again in England; that is about our feeling, I think," said Dr. Driscoll, as the party stood in a group on the steamer's deck watching the nearing shores.

"There isn't any place like England, after all," said Ralph. "But, for all that, I hope this isn't the last taste we shall have of travel."

"No; but I don't think we'll mix ourselves up with mines again for the sake of an enforced exile abroad. We'll hit upon some other scheme, I hope," said Dr. Driscoll with a smile.

THE END.