

THE EXILES. A RUSSIAN STORY.

The Cossack thought, perhaps, that he had made a fine capture. He had no compunction or false sensibility about the matter, for the contempt for exiles is so great that the natives repeat this popular saying: "By killing a squirrel one gets only one skin, but by killing a Yermak one gets three—the man's coat, shirt and hide!"

Yermak was about to speak, but the Parisian was too quick for him.

"We do not refuse," said he, to the Cossack; "and, if you will lead the way, we will follow you willingly. For my part, I should greatly relish something warm to eat. Do they cook well at the ostrog? I do not believe that my companions would have anything to say against some good pemmican (extract of meat) broth and a venison pate."

M. Lafleur said this in a pleasant tone, at the same time endeavoring to make Yermak comprehend by signs that it was impossible to get clear of the plain invitation of the Cossack.

Yermak then resumed his place, first questioning, with a look the countenance of the chief of police. The latter seemed absorbed in a deep meditation, the subject of which the exile divined. Had Yermak not been present, Yegor certainly would have given the Cossack some trouble. But an attempt of that kind, with the chief of police against him, could not have been made without running the greatest risks.

Nadege was most alarmed at the intervention of this soldier and Ladislav already had tears in his eyes. Yegor reassured them both, and directed Tekel to regulate the speed of his sledge by that of the vehicle of the fatal Cossack who had thrown himself across their road.

The three nartas started abreast. The Cossack took a notion to have a race between his dogs and the reindeer. Tekel and his friend Chort were not averse to the proposal and accepted the challenge, driving off at a furious rate. In less than a quarter of an hour the ostrog was in sight. Yegor had scarcely had time to think over how he should face the terrible trial that was coming.

His heart beat violently. The ostrog was a small, ruined fortress, with walls formed of beams confusedly heaped together. A little square tower still stood at each angle, despite the age of the structure, the whole being surrounded by a palisade of huge logs of wood. It was what remained of one of those ancient fortifications built, in the seventeenth century, to protect the first Russian pioneers against the incursions of the natives.

Beside the ostrog stood a small village—one of the most remote stations in this northern region. In the fortress, ten Cossacks composed a post placed under the orders of an Esaulou. Thanks to this armed band, the officer of the Car was enabled to collect by force the tax payable in furs—the yasak—owed by the nomads of the district.

Yegor and his companions were brought before the Esaulou, who occupied the largest house in the village. He was an aged Russian—an old fox whitened in his burrow—perhaps, a former under-officer of the army who had been promoted, perhaps, a disgraced functionary who had been punished by banishment.

With such a man, firmness was necessary; Yegor summoned up all he possessed. He complained of the invitation made with armed hand by one of the soldiers of the ostrog, protesting that he was accustomed to more respect.

M. Lafleur, thinking that his friend was assuming too lofty a tone, interposed.

"Look here, my dear fellow," said he; "my guttural did as much towards deciding you to come to pay your respects to our Esaulou as all that abominable Cossack said. I am hungry and want something warm to eat," added he, addressing the Esaulou.

"It was not your intention to stop here, then?" said the latter. "You wished neither to renew your stock of provisions nor to procure fresh animals?"

"This officer, all-powerful in the district, could alone grant permission to obtain reindeer and purchase food."

"We came from Yakoutsik," answered Yegor, "but our reindeer, which were brought to us from Zakhivsk, are not yet fatigued and our provisions are still abundant."

"And you are going?"

"To Nijni-Kolimsk. This young girl and her brother are the children of your colleague, the Esaulou of that town; their father is very ill—and I am taking them to him."

While speaking, M. Lafleur had, nevertheless, handed his ticket to the officer. "I ask your pardon, Monsieur," said the latter, respectfully taking the paper; "but the chief of police of Yakoutsik," (the fugitives could not repress a start of great surprise) "notified me through my Cossacks of the escape of several exiles and sent me descriptions answering exactly to you, this young lady, her brother, and the young man accompanying them."

Yermak drew himself up, radiant at having succeeded so well.

Yegor thought he was about to speak—to denounce them.

He made a desperate attempt to assure his silence.

"You have not asked me," said he, to the Esaulou, "who is my other traveling companion. I have the honor to present to you in him one of the four or five Polish priests," (Yermak seemed overcome with supreme amazement)—"one of the Polish priests whom the Russian government allows to travel through Siberia, to visit once a year the settlements in which are the political convicts of their race and faith. He passes bravely through the Siberian cold from Tobolsk to the colonies of the Amoor, and from the mines of Nerchinsk to the shipyards of Okhotsk."

"He ought to have a regular passport," murmured the Esaulou.

The chief of police had about him only papers establishing his identity. To show them, would be equivalent to a denunciation.

"Permit me to finish," resumed Yegor, to whom the danger lent activity of mind. "The devil n of our new friend does not always receive its recompense; among the Verkho-Yansk Mountains, we drew him, so to speak, from the jaws of a bear—"

"Which had already cruelly torn his arm," said M. Lafleur, coming to Yegor's aid. "But the passport?"

"Eaten by the bear," said M. Lafleur. "Lost with a valuable wallet, in the agony of the terrible strife," said Yegor, drawing the voice of the distinguished naturalist.

The Esaulou, astonished at the silence of the pretended Polish priest, looked at him as if to obtain from him a word agreeing with the declarations of his companions.

The chief of police replied to this look.

"I have nothing to add," said he, "to what has been told you—the Verkho-Yansk Mountains, the bear, the wound—all this is the exact truth."

This was an immense relief to Yegor and Nadege, but all the trouble was not yet over.

"All this," said the Esaulou, scratching his head, "is far from being regular."

"What further can I do?" asked Yegor.

"You—nothing. But I must do what the circumstances render necessary. I arrest you, and shall ask instructions of the governor of Yakoutsik and his chief of police, at the same time sending a Cossack to Nijni-Kolimsk to announce to the Esaulou, my colleague, your speedy arrival—provided that what you have told me be true."

CHAPTER XV.—THE JEW AND HIS GOLD DUST.

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Then I saw them: "Twinkle, twinkle; How I won't see what you are!"
—Smith, Gray & Co.'s Monthly.

Treatment for scalds: Pour sweet oil over the burned part and sprinkle with soda or starch; lay on soft oil linen and keep the cloths constantly wet with lime water. Frosted fingers and toes may be successfully treated the same as scalds or burns.

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