

## AN ADVENTURE IN SIBERIA.



TURCHANOFF was a citizen of St. Petersburg. He was an honest man; but honesty in Russia is no road to royal favour, and by some means or other he incurred the Czar's displeasure. Suddenly he disappeared from his home. This would have been the object of wonder, did not the people well know that a rash word spoken, or a sinister meaning implied, frequently carried a man from his family to labour for the rest of his life in a Siberian iron-mine. At any rate, Turchanoff vanished; and the best that could be hoped for was, that he might not be forced to walk the long road to his exile, with a hint given to his guards, that "he was not expected to outlive the journey." Wife and children he had none; but parents, brothers and sisters, he had; although their sorrow for this mysterious bereavement was of no import, when balanced against the offended majesty of the mighty Czar.

Far beyond the waste borders of Russian civilization is the town of Polana. Here there is a group of large houses with yellow walls and red roofs, surrounded with palisades; and from these issue regular trains of exiles, to commence their journeys towards the remote and snowy solitudes which are the prisons of the Czar's empire.

Yet, although many such trains depart, none ever enter, for it is the policy of Petersburg to convey the captives thither, one by one, by different routes—silently, hurriedly, and by stealth. They come from all provinces of the empire; are passed in by night, dressed in a uniform that none may know their condition, whilst their names are concealed, and their offences only written in the judgment-book of the Emperor. When a

sufficient number has arrived, several huge unwieldy wagons are rapidly drawn up at the entrance: the women, the old men, and the infirm, are placed in them; whilst the others, with a few weak wretches not intended to outlive the march, follow in pairs—a long dismal train, which is swiftly arranged and hastily put in motion along that great Siberian road—a well-trodden way, hopeless as Charon's ferry! Seldom, indeed, does the exile tread that path with his face towards home. Turchanoff, early in the month of August, 1826, found himself an unwilling pilgrim, condemned to perpetual captivity among the barren solitudes of remote Siberia.

Most of his companions marched merrily along, with songs and laughter, whilst some women in the wagon chanted the loved hymns of home; but a few men there were, with bended necks and downcast eyes, who mourned deeply over their miserable lot. "They are not thankful for the mercy of his imperial majesty," said the officer in command; "they are sullen, and meditate evil. Put them in chains." And so they walked in fetters.

We cannot follow Turchanoff through the weariness of that dismal journey. It was a monotonous circle of toil, indignity, and want. Many times the youthful captive longed to break from his guards, and dig himself a grave amid the snow; but at every station a militia of peasants relieved the convoy, and being answerable for their prisoners, girded them as with a wall of adamant.

At length the melancholy train reached the banks of the river Iset, near the Ural Mountains; and there, in the pillared quarries, Turchanoff found the field of his future labours, amid a population of exiles, men and women.



RUSSIAN PEASANT'S HOME.

There was one girl who had been condemned to a long banishment here, for cursing the emperor when he knouted her brother to death. She had escaped once; but a priest aided her recapture and consignment to the full severities of her sentence. She frequently saw Turchanoff, and often conversed with him by stealth. Their crimes were of equal magnitude. When at St. Petersburg, he had received news of the death of a

relative, who had been worked to death in an iron-mine, and was heard to express hope that the end of such things drew nigh, adding a compliment to the Czar on his humility. This sin was sufficient for his condemnation to perpetual exile, and endless, hopeless, thankless toil. Such, at least, was the imperial opinion; but Turchanoff differed, and, sympathising with the young captive, revolved the idea of escape.

Fifteen months after the merchant was put to labour in the quarry, he disappeared; and five months afterwards we discern him walking, in company with a woman, through a pine wood, near the river Obi, which flows into the Polar sea. Turchanoff was approaching the frozen belt which girds the northern pole, and proposed reaching Obdorsk, where, mingling with the crowds at the great fair, he might escape with his young companion by some caravan, traverse the dreary wastes of ice and snow, and once more enter the circles of comparative civilization.

Russia is a nation of barbarians, who mimic the arts of refinement, which sit on them as well as the feathers of the pheasant on the awkward jay. Turchanoff thought, however, that St. Petersburg was the centre of happiness, even though a tyrant ruled—for there was his home, and there were his associations; there his cradle was, and there he prayed to be buried. There, too, he longed to bind himself for life to Jesika, the young exile, who was his predecessor in misfortune, and his companion in flight.

How he had escaped from the quarries, how he had wandered amid wild, bleak regions, and over rivers and lakes, and among strange, uncouth tribes, we cannot pause to tell; but the adventures of the next few days and nights were so remarkable that this history would be worthy of great notice, even if we pass by its other features, and the qualities of its modest author.

Turchanoff was a clever man. He had not wandered among the tribes so long without learning to express himself in their dialects. When, therefore, he arrived at the winter yurts, or huts of Taginsk, in the middle of the wood, he described to the wondering barbarians who welcomed him the cause and object of his visit. Nor had he failed to furnish himself, though by equivocal means, with a supply of coined silver—a faithful

attendant when mercy lags on the way, when gratitude is faint, when charity sleeps, and even love looks back at the fair scenes left behind, trembling at the desert that spreads away before. His dress was that of an Ostyak hunter; and now, entering the yurts, he told his tale, and bargained for a sledge to carry him and his companion to Obdorsk.

Around the village, which is inhabited only in winter, the snowy ground spread away in one vast level. The dwellings were frail, but neat; and warm, being draped and carpeted with reindeer skins. A bright fire sparkled in the centre, and around it the men reposed, whilst their wives prepared a humble but abundant meal. They welcomed the stranger, and bade him be in peace with them for that night. But Turchanoff knew that pursuit was on his track, and desired his kind host quickly to prepare the sledge; and the Ostyaks went forth to catch the reindeer, which had that day strayed far off to the borders of the wood, where the snow was thin, and the moss easily found.

In about an hour the distant cry of the drivers was heard through the wood—a halloo hoo! hoo! uttered by many mingled voices, and growing louder as it came nearer. Presently the dull clatter of hoofs announced the approach of the scattered herd, and Turchanoff, starting from his reindeer couch, went to the door and saw a singular sight. The moon fell brightly through the open glades and avenues, and the smooth snow glared with ghostly whiteness as far as the eye could reach. From every quarter of the forest numbers of the reindeer were galloping in wild confusion towards the huts, and their drivers, with flaming brands, darted after them among the trees, shouting and leaping like so many demons from below. At length the great herd was collected; the men uncoiled a long strap of leather, held it from hand to hand, and thus enclosed the animals in a circle. The patient creatures remained quietly turning up the snow in

search of the moss, whilst four were selected to draw the sledge. The rest had logs attached to their necks that they might not stray.

A low, tilted, chariot-shaped sledge was next brought out. Each deer had a girth put round his body, with a single trace attached to it, and passing between his legs through a board in front of the vehicle. Four were harnessed in a line; and the traces, running through bone rings, were fastened to a cord which braces together the smooth runners of the sledge. A contrivance made of bone, something like a head-stall, was then placed in front of the high-branching antlers of the foremost deer, and secured beneath by a leather strap. A single rein ran along the left side, passing through a ring in the animal's girth. None of the others are bridled, but steadily follow the direction of the first.

Just then, some men came running in, and reported that on the further borders of the wood, two Russian sledges were swiftly gliding along the ice-bound waters of the Obi, and evidently proceeding to Taginsk, to change their reindeer. On this hint the good Ostyaks drove away all the remaining animals, that Turchanoff, should these be his pursuers, might enjoy the advantage of a fair start. The driver took his place, bearing in his hand a slender, iron-shod staff, twelve feet in length, to urge and assist in guiding the deer, as well as to defend them from the wolves.

All was ready, and the merchant began his flight, blessing the sharp wit of his rude host, whom he well rewarded; and, uncharitably wishing the Russians a long detention at this village, the sledge was soon speeding rapidly on its way through the forest. The train of deer carried it merrily forward along the moonlit path, while the driver flourished his wand, and took snuff out of a case shaped like a powder-horn, amusing his companions with an account of the Ostyak mode of life. He was especially

eloquent in the praise of his wife, who was, he said, "a clean woman," always carrying about in her girdle a wisp of soft larch-wood shavings, to wipe any cooking vessel or eating-trough which might offend his eyes. The making of these wisps, he said, was a principal amusement of the men during the social evenings spent in their snug winter yurts. When Turchanoff spoke of the emperor, the Ostyak started, and bade him not speak of the dark powers of evil, for they devoured men. Such are the manners, and such the ideas of these wild tribes.

After a journey of many leagues, they arrived, towards the evening of the next day, at a village of portable huts, composed of a wooden frame covered with reindeer skin, without any entrance except by lifting up the heavy drapery and creeping beneath. The Ostyak readily gained admittance into one, and introduced his companions, who were glad to exchange the frigid exterior air for this snug lodging. In the middle of the hut or tent was a blazing fire. Around it sat, on soft couches of skins, several men, naked to the waist, with some women, veiled from head to foot, who, even whilst preparing food in the pot that was suspended over the flames, allowed no glimpses of their features to appear. A little child lay by the hearth in a canoe-shaped cradle of thick reindeer hide. The reception of the wanderers was warm and hospitable. They were supplied with provisions and promised a fresh team of deer; and the proffered reward was taken, without asking more.

The tribe is primitive in its manners and simple in its wants. The men employ themselves, during winter, in the chase of fur animals. They go out armed with bows and arrows, and with a strong bent plate of horn, worn under the clothing, which covers the inside of the wrist for two or three inches, to protect it from the blow of the powerful

bow-string. They possess a good store of furs for barter, and a stock of dried fish and black bread. They live amid dreary regions; but all is not desolate, for many an island of green fertility smiles upon those wastes of snow; and spots there are of rich luxuriance, where the Siberian rose blooms even in the early spring.

Next morning, with a fresh team of deer, and an ample provision of dried fish and hard cakes, Turchanoff and his young companion, accompanied by the good Ostyak, proceeded on their way, exchanging a friendly blessing with their hosts. They started before dawn, and when the sun rose gazed upon a spectacle seen only in these northern regions. The great luminary appeared on a violet horizon. On either hand seemed to rise other suns, vast and luminous, and below them a magnificent inverted arch of prismatic light shone from quarter to quarter of the heavens; whilst glittering peaks were displayed at intervals along a glorious crimson rim which ran along the whole sky. These appearances changed into others, all glowing with enchanting hues, until the whole east blazed as with a flood of molten gold, and the sun rose steadily in his course towards the meridian.

All that day, and long after evening had dimmed the heavens, the sledge sped over the snow, having paused once for a fresh team, and was now rapidly nearing Obdorsk, on the shores of the Polar sea. At length, when the night was deepening, they emerged from an immense wood, and traversed an open track beyond which another shady wilderness spread itself. The moon was up, and shone brightly on the white plain, over which the sledge moved as a spectral shadow, straight onwards, without noise or interruption. Suddenly the loud hoo! hoo! of several voices in the distance behind caught the merchant's ear, and turning, he beheld two lights rapidly borne along the edge of the

forest. One was far in advance of the other. These were the Russian sledges in chase; for their track had been discovered, and their recapture resolved on at any cost, because they possessed the secrets of the prison-house. Away they fled, while away after them the nearest vehicle, now emerging into the light, glided over the snow in swift pursuit. The race continued until midnight, when Turchanoff, now on the verge of the forest, found himself overtaken. A Russian officer and two drivers were in the pursuing sledge.

In a moment the white snow was stained with blood. Turchanoff felt a sudden wound—a quick flash gleamed—a hand seized young Jesika; the Russian was prostrate—one of the drivers lay across him, and the other, a dull serf, sat motionless in his place. Quickly cutting the traces, the Ostyak bade the merchant mount again, for another sledge was in pursuit. The rude driver placed the rein in Turchanoff's hand, and bade him jerk it gently, whilst he drew from the bottom of the vehicle a bow, deliberately placed an arrow on the string, and laid the foremost deer of the pursuing sledge lifeless on the snow. To kill one of these animals was a sore task to the savage, and the man wept when he had done so; for animals employed in draught are regarded with affection. Again the fugitives were whirling on in their perilous flight. At that moment a sudden fall of snow took place; the wind rose, and the white drifts whirled in giddy fantastic dances on the plains; and the fugitives thus favoured, entered the wood and eluded their pursuers, fled through deep solitudes and dark forests, until Obdorsk, with its smoking tenements, came in view. They then mingled among the crowd of free-traders from the snowy plain to the eastward, and passed unnoticed into the town. Here a benevolent priest married the merchant to his exile bride, at the wooden church that repre-

sents Christianity on the borders of that icy sea.

By-and-bye the Ostyak found his way back to the yurts of Taginsk, with an ample store of white bread (a rich luxury to that frugal tribe), which Turchanoff sent in gratitude for their services. The

adventures of the merchant and his companion, during their journey so St. Petersburg, were perilous and strange. The contractor, from whom Turchanoff borrowed, without leave, a bag of silver, received its equivalent in a mysterious manner several years after.



## LEOPARDS AND PANTHERS.

LEOPARDS and panthers are among the most beautiful of animals, and, like our domestic cat, when young, are exceedingly playful. They are all expert climbers, and concealed in some branch they watch the approach of their prey and spring down upon it. They also hunt the monkeys and other animals that live upon trees, and the mark of their claws is often seen upon the bark near the top of the tallest trees. The term leopard is generally applied to the species having small black spots, arranged in a circular form upon a yellow ground, and panther to those with larger spots; but whether they are distinct species, or only varieties of the same, has not been determined by naturalists. There is also a black variety in which the ground is dusky black with spots of a jet or glossy black, and both yellow and black have been observed sucking the same mother. It is therefore probable that there is a great diversity of markings upon them, and that specific differences cannot be determined by colour.

The following interesting account of a panther is given in "Loudon's Magazine of Natural History," by Mrs. Bowdich; and, though of considerable length, it is so interesting that we cannot omit it. It is beautifully told, and the traits in the disposition of the animal show that at least some of the race, by gentle treatment, are capable of manifesting great attachment and gentleness:—

"I am induced to send you some account of a panther which was in my possession for several months. He and another were found, when very young, in the forest, apparently deserted by their mother. They were taken to the king of Ashantee, in whose palace they lived several weeks; when my hero, being much larger than his companion, suffocated him in a fit of romping, and was then sent to Mr. Hutchison, the resident left by Mr. Bowdich at Coomassie.

This gentleman, observing that the animal was very docile, took pains to tame him, and, in a great measure, succeeded. When he was about a year old, Mr. Hutchison returned to Cape Coast Castle, and had him led through the country by a chain, occasionally letting him loose when eating was going forward, when he would sit by his master's side, and receive his share with comparative gentleness. Once or twice he purloined a fowl, but easily gave it up to Mr. Hutchison, on being allowed a portion of something else. On the least encouragement, he laid his paws upon our shoulders, rubbed his head upon us, and his teeth and claws having been filed, there was no danger of tearing our clothes. He one morning broke his cord, and the cry being given, the castle gates were shut, and a chase commenced. After leading his pursuers two or three times round the ramparts, and knocking over a few children by bouncing against them, he suffered himself to be caught, and led quietly back to his quarters, under one of the guns of the fortress.