



THE GOVERNMENT SUBSIDISED STEAMSHIP "LOMONOSOF," IN WHICH HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR OF ARCHANGEL VISITS THE NOVA ZEMBLA SAMOYAD RUSSIAN SETTLEMENTS EVERY SUMMER.

A SUMMER VISIT TO NOVA ZEMBLA.

BY J. RUSSELL-JEAFFRESON, F.R.G.S.

NOVA ZEMBLA—that long island divided by the three narrow straits, the Yongoiski, the Kara Gates, and the Matostchin Shar (or straits), from Waigatz Island and the mainland of Russia, stretching from 70° to 77° N. latitude off the coast of Siberia in Europe, and lying right between those two vast, dreary, dangerous, ice-choked seas, the Barents and the Kara (this latter well called by Dr. Nansen the ice-cellar of the world)—this land, to most persons, conjures up visions of men in fur, Arctic expeditions, sledges, ships crushed, and a thousand horrors, not, as my trip was, a summer picnic in a fine mail-boat of 2,500 tons, with a French cook and a well stocked cellar, and a band to play at dinner. But this was the experience of the author, when, in 1896, he visited the island on board the Russian mail-steamer *Lomonosof*, chartered by the Governor of Archangel—"the Father of Nova Zembla," as he is called by the Samoyads, "Alexander Platonovitch Englehardt" (the beloved), as he is called by all. Up to 1872 Nova Zembla was No Man's Land, or was only the land of the bear, reindeer, and walrus, and an occasional band of extra bold Waigatz or Harberona Samoyads, who visited its shores to hunt, or, rarer still, a scientific expedition. But in 1873 it was taken by Russia and placed under the Humane Society, who built three huts at a cost of £400, and put six months' food there, in case of requirement by the Russian or Norwegian walrus hunters, who annually visited its shores, and who might be, as they often are, shipwrecked and bound to winter in this desolate land, where it is perpetual darkness from November 13th to February 1st, and perpetual day from May 26th to July 18th, when the sun never sinks. Its climate is one long winter,

and some of the bays and inlets never thaw, and on the land lies (in spite of its southerly degree) eternal snow; its summer temperature is 1° to 3° R., and its winter temperature 60° R., and in autumn rain deluges every valley, and floods are the order of the day.

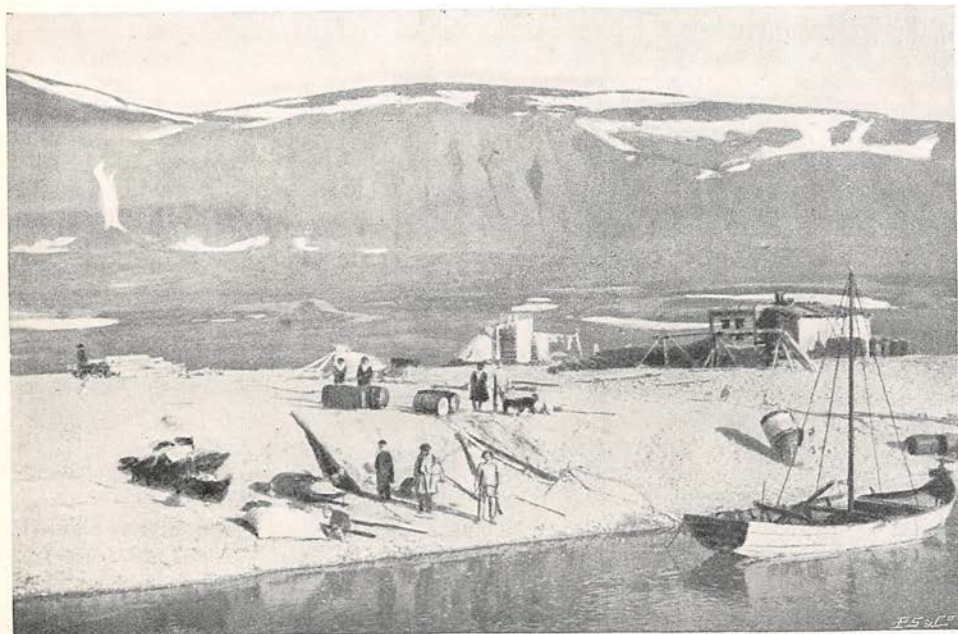
But in November, 1892, Nova Zembla was put under official Russian rule—*i.e.*, under the protectorate of the Government of Archangel, and at first all expenses were paid by the State. Now it pays itself well, for on that date the Government shipped three families of Samoyads from the Petchora to Nova Zembla, numbering 88 souls; in 1898 there were 120, one Russian priest, and an unqualified peasant doctor (called a *felcher*). There are now two settlements, the largest, Karmenkula, consisting of three big wooden houses, a church, a wooden parsonage, a store, a bath, and six to twelve chooms, or native skin wigwam-like huts. The other settlement, purely a native one, consists of chooms only, eight in number. It is a few miles from the entrance of the Matostchin Shar, that curious natural canal or strait dividing the island into two great halves. This canal is deep and navigable (when not blocked with ice) and two miles wide at parts.

Now a vessel visits this island twice a year—in July and September—and stays a day or two at each settlement. Barring that, and between those times, there is no communication whatever with the mainland, for no one is allowed to land without a special permit. This is to discourage what used to happen in the old days when a foreign fishing-boat would land, and after dosing the Samoyads with brandy, would induce them to part with all their year's catch for a few more bottles of "vodka" to continue

their "bust" on; so now the Governor, when he cannot go himself, sends his Secretary every year to negotiate with them. The product of each man's hunting is taken to Archangel and an account in his name is kept at the Bank. If he is poor or unlucky the Governor helps him, if not he gets his money and can, through the Secretary, order what he wants up to his balance, the goods being brought to him next voyage. To show their income, for example, one—the champion hunter—on my visit had 700 roubles (£70) as the result of his year's work, and the least prosperous—a lazy man—had 50 kopecks (1s.). Each, after the sale of his skins, was told his balance and allowed to buy. It was most interesting to sit next to the Secretary, good-natured and patient, and hear him explain and minister to the wants of these children of Nature. Gunpowder, lead, tea, sugar, flour, china cups (a great delicacy), knives, salt, cloth, needles, dogs, snuff, tobacco, were the chief of the orders given. I heard one added a wife, and his order, which was serious, was booked by the Secretary, and next voyage the Governor sent him one, a girl from the Samoyad settlement on the Petitioya. He was very pleased, but next time the boat called (the Governor told me this story at the English Club at Archangel, when we were dining, and we roared over it)

the Samoyad sent the girl back to the Secretary with a message to the Governor that he must change this wife (as if she were a gun or a bale of merchandise) for another, as she was no good, too lazy, and a poor cook, and he refused to keep her; so the Secretary had to take the poor girl home and another wife was sent him. This time, I heard, it was a success, perhaps backed by the Governor's message that he would not change any wives sent again. This couple he sent on a honeymoon to Solivetski Monastery, as a sort of example and pilgrimage.

These Samoyads struck me as finer and more intelligent than the mainland tribes. This is due to the healthy life they lead, with no chance of getting drunk for weeks when they have money, as the mainland natives do on every available opportunity. As one said to me, running his greasy fingers through his matted hair, "Samoyad's head thick and dirty, but not empty, oh, not empty." He emphasised this by slapping his hands together between each word, a characteristic Samoyad trick. Sometimes one comes up to the Secretary and asks him to write a letter; the good-natured man at once pulls out his note-book, takes down his name, etc., and begins. When the Samoyad says it is to God he wants to write it, the Secretary drops his pen and explains. The Samoyad



KARMENKULA, CAPITAL OF NOVA ZEMBLA, IN THE NORTH OF THE SOUTHERN ISLAND, NEAR THE MATOSTCHIN SHAR.



A SAMOYAD CHOOM (HUT), DOGS, AND BABY BEARS, AT THE MATOSTCHIN SHAR SETTLEMENT, NOVA ZEMBLA.

answers, "I thought the Governor" (who is the "great one") "could give it Him." Poor, poor Samoyad! Another complained of heart pains, and we could not convince him it was not heart pain as he kept pointing to his right side. They were like children and had to be humoured and treated as such. Sitting on an upturned saucepan in a choom chatting to one, I said, "You have here a nice home, a wife and children, and yet you say you are not satisfied. What more do you want?" "Dogs," was the laconic reply. "One dog better than ten wives; wives can't drag sledge and catch deer; want dogs." And so I sat and drank tea without sugar or milk, very hot and weak, with him, and talked about the dogs, the winter hunting of the bear—the mighty Oshka of their old legends—the walrus and the deer. Religion was his great subject next to dogs, which I may say are sent them from Archangel once a year, where all the stray dogs caught in the province by the police are kept, and a hundred or so are thus sent out and divided among them to train for use in their sledges, and form their most valued possession. Last year the Governor tried to introduce tame reindeer, but when landed safely the first night, not being properly watched, these dogs (trained to hunt the wild deer) got into the enclosure and killed them all but one, and that ran away into the mountains and joined a wild herd. It is curious to see how

very regularly and devoutly the Samoyads attend church now, when two years back they were all heathens and worshipped wooden idols called Bolvans, supposed to be inhabited by a spirit named Noom. But it is, in a way, only a thin veneer of Christianity, for I heard that often after church they returned home and worshipped Noom again as a sort of compromise, for they still fear that this spirit may be angry and work them ill if he is quite neglected.

Needless to say that this Noom worship is done in secret, so that the priests may not get wind of it. But it is done still, and many families yet have these idols hidden away in their chooms for secret worship. The figures are dreadfully difficult to see, let alone to get. I think of late years two Mr. Trevor Battye brought from Kolguey Island, and two I got (one on Waigatz Island and one in the Yalmal), are all that have come to England. Mr. Jackson saw one, on his winter tundra journey, and I got another large one this winter in the Kamiskia Zembla country after a week's haggling with a Samoyad, who at last parted with it for some vodka and a box of pills, a quarter-pound tin of gunpowder and a cake of tobacco. This one, for which I paid this exorbitant price, was two feet six inches high and carved like a Dutch doll out of one block, and was, the Samoyad assured me, two hundred years old, with a double necklace

of bear-claws and a dress of skin. He said it was a great Bolvan and originally came from the great Frozen Islands in the East (the new Siberia Islands) one hundred years ago, and used to have a choom to itself on Waigatz Island before the Russians made them Christians. He only sold it to me because he feared if the Russians saw it they would punish him. My other two, both old ones, are only pieces of stick with heads carved on them. Mr. Montefiore Brice, F.G.S., F.R.G.S., late secretary to the Jackson-Harmsworth Polar Expedition, editor of Mr. Jackson's book on his winter journey among the Samoyads, and a great student of Samoyad lore, has seen them and says they

fifty; he looked sixty; the life is a killing one. I heard him perform a service there and I was impressed beyond description to hear his soft, fine voice intoning those grand old Russian prayers in that tiny barn of a church to those reindeer-skin-clad, fierce-looking natives, each armed with a great brass-mounted sealing knife. The sight was grand and impressive, and one calculated to bring serious thoughts to the most worldly and flippant. After service, he having left the church, we walked and talked on the beach.

I said, "To amuse yourself in winter, do you shoot, father?"

"No, I am not allowed to take life, by the



TWO OF THE CHIEF SAMOYAD HUNTERS AND THEIR DOG SLEDGE AT KARMENKULA.

agree with the usual description written by the few who have visited this land and seen these idols.

Apropos of their religion, much has been written abusing the Russian peasant priest, but my experience is the reverse. The Karmenkula priest, an old man, a picture of an ideal frontier pastor, has been there twelve years, winter and summer, with a single exception, and now in recognition of his services the Holy Synod has sent him a £500 house and fittings. Before, he used a Samoyad hut and made his own tables and chairs out of driftwood. I talked to him, and in spite of his surroundings found him refined and very quiet. He told me he was

rules of my order, and I have no inclination. I love to watch life, birds especially—they are God's creatures.

"Do you like living here?"

"I am accustomed to it," he said; "it is my path to God. We do not come into this world only to do as we like."

"Have you no relatives?"

"No, except in heaven, I trust."

Each reply seemed to rebuke the question.

"You must enjoy your eight weeks every year in Archangel?"

"No, I take it for my health only. I certainly like to see the Cathedral services, but I prefer Nova Zembla. I have no duty in Archangel."

Then he told me the total revenue of Nova Zembla—he kept the accounts—was 10,000 r., or £1,200 a year. He said the Samoyads were morally greatly improving, and now none miss a service, and never neglect the numerous religious festivals, and, without being able to read, they remember them all without a mistake (and prayers are legion in Russia) by some mysterious calculation on their fingers. His name was "Father Ton," and, whatever his beliefs and sect may be, and however they differ from our own, no one could but admire that figure as I saw it when I left him standing alone on the beach, his long, white hair streaming in the wind, waving us farewell as a man among men, who would take up his Master's work in such a place and stick to it; for this life of winter after winter spells certain death, and death in all the horrors of that terrible Arctic disease, scurvy, for him accelerated by his rigorous

fasts and abstinence from fresh animal food, which alone can battle the disease for a year or two more.

When the Governor was leaving the Matostchin Shar another rather impressive scene was enacted. About seventy Samoyads,—the whole colony, in fact—voluntarily (for they love the Governor, who is a father to them in every sense) all knelt to kiss his feet, much to his annoyance, he telling them only to kneel to God and not to him, as the English Chancellor did near the same shores 300 years ago; and then, as he left, the spokesman of the party rose and said: "I, poor, dirty Samoyad, to you, great father, can nothing give; but there (pointing to the sky) is our God, yours, great father, and mine, poor Samoyad. He will give you all happiness, a happy voyage and a good, happy, lawful wife. God with you, God with you, a Samoyad's good-bye. Good-bye, great white father, good-bye."

