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WILLIAM
HEPWORTH

FREE RUSSIA

William Dixon

Free Russia

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William Hepworth Dixon
Free Russia

PREFACE

Svobodnaya Rossia —*Free* Russia – is a word on every lip in that great country; at once the Name and Hope of the new empire born of the Crimean war. In past times Russia was free, even as Germany and France were free. She fell before Asiatic hordes; and the Tartar system lasted, in spirit, if not in form, until the war; but since that conflict ended, the old Russia has been born again. This new country – hoping to be pacific, meaning to be Free – is what I have tried to paint.

My journeys, just completed, carried me from the Polar Sea to the Ural Mountains, from the mouth of the Vistula to the Straits of Yeni Kale, including visits to the four holy shrines of Solovetsk, Pechersk, St. George, and Troitsa. My object being to paint the Living People, I have much to say about pilgrims, monks, and parish priests; about village justice, and patriarchal life; about beggars, tramps, and sectaries; about Kozaks, Kalmuks, and Kirghiz; about workmen's artels, burgher rights, and the division of land; about students' revolts and soldiers' grievances; in short, about the Human Forces which underlie and shape the external politics of our time.

Two journeys made in previous years have helped me to judge the reforms which are opening out the Japan-like empire of Nicolas into the Free Russia of the reigning prince.

February, 1870.

6 *St. James's Terrace.*

CHAPTER I.
UP NORTH

"White Sea!" laughs the Danish skipper, curling his thin red lip; "it is the color of English stout. The bed may be white, being bleached with the bones of wrecked and sunken men; but the waves are never white, except when they are ribbed into ice and furred with snow. A better name is that which the sailors and seal-fishers give it – the Frozen Sea!"

Rounding the North Cape, a weird and hoary mass of rock, projecting far into the Arctic foam, we drive in a south-east course, lashed by the wind and beaten by hail and rain, for two long days, during which the sun never sets and never rises, and in which, if there is dawn at the hour of midnight, there is also dusk at the time of noon.

Leaving the picturesque lines of fiord and alp behind, we run along a dim, unbroken coast, not often to be seen through the pall of mist, until, at the end of some fifty hours, we feel, as it were, the land in our front; a stretch of low-lying shore in the vague and far-off distance, trending away towards the south, like the trail of an evening cloud. We bend in a southern course, between Holy Point (Sviatoi Noss, called on our charts, in rough salt slang, Sweet Nose) and Kanin Cape, towards the Corridor; a strait some thirty miles wide, leading down from the Polar Ocean into that vast irregular dent in the northern shore of Great Russia known as the Frozen Sea.

The land now lying on our right, as we run through the Corridor, is that of the Lapps; a country of barren downs and deep black lakes; over which a few trappers and fishermen roam; subjects of the Tsar and followers of the Orthodox rite; but speaking a language of their own, not understood in the Winter Palace, and following a custom of their fathers, not yet recognized in St. Isaac's Church. Lapland is a tangle of rocks and pools; the rocks very big and broken, the pools very deep and black; with here and there a valley winding through them, on the slopes of which grows a little reindeer moss. Now and then you come upon a patch of birch and pine. No grain will grow in these Arctic zones, and the food of the natives is game and fish. Rye-bread, their only luxury, must be fetched in boats from the towns of Onega and Archangel, standing on the shores of the Frozen Sea, and fed from the warmer provinces in the south. These Lapps are still nomadic; cowering through the winter months in shanties; sprawling through the summer months in tents. Their shanty is a log pyramid thatched with moss to keep out wind and sleet; their tent is of the Comanche type; a roll of reindeer skins drawn slackly round a pole, and opened at the top to let out smoke.

A Lapp removes his dwelling from place to place, as the seasons come and go; now herding game on the hill-sides, now whipping the rivers and creeks for fish; in the warm months, roving inland in search of moss and grass; in the frozen months, drawing nearer to the shore in search of seal and cod. The men are equally expert with the bow, their ancient weapon of defense, and with the birding-piece, the arm of settlers in their midst. The women, looking any thing but lovely in their seal-skin tights and reindeer smocks, are infamous for magic and second sight. In every district of the North, a female Lapp is feared as a witch – an enchantress – who keeps a devil at her side, bound by the powers of darkness to obey her will. She can see into the coming day. She can bring a man ill-luck. She can throw herself out into space, and work upon ships that are sailing past her on the sea. Far out in the Polar brine, in waters where her countrymen fish for cod, stands a lump of rock, which the crews regard as a Woman and her Child. Such fantasies are common in these Arctic seas, where the waves wash in and out through the cliffs, and rend and carve them into wondrous shapes. A rock on the North Cape is called the Friar; a group of islets near that cape is known as the Mother and her Daughters. Seen through the veil of Polar mist, a block of stone may take a mysterious form; and that lump of rock in the Polar waste, which the cod-fishers say is like a woman with her child, has long been known to them as the Golden Hag. She is rarely seen; for the clouds in summer, and the snows in winter, hide her charms from the fishermen's eyes; but when she deigns to show her face in the clear bright sun, her children hail her with a song of joy, for on seeing her face they know that their voyage will be blessed by a plentiful harvest of skins and fish.

Woe to the mariner tossed upon their coast!

The land on our left is the Kanin peninsula; part of that region of heath and sand over which the Samoyed roams; a desert of ice and snow, still wilder than the countries hunted by the Lapp. A land without a village, without a road, without a field, without a name; for the Russians who own it have no name for it save that of the Samoyeds' Land; this province of the great empire trends away north and east from the walls of Archangel and the waters of Kanin Cape to the summits of the Ural chain and the Iron Gates of the Kara Sea. In her clefts and ridges snow never melts; and her shore-lines, stretching towards the sunrise upwards of two thousand miles, are bound in icy chains for eight months in the twelve. In June, when the winter goes away, suddenly the slopes of a few favored valleys grow green with reindeer moss; slight specks of verdure in a landscape which is even then dark with rock and gray with rime. On this green moss the reindeer feed, and on these camels of the Polar zone the wild men of the country live.

Samoyed means cannibal – man-eater; but whether the men who roam over these sands and bogs deserve their evil fame is one of the questions open to new lights. They use no fire in cooking food; and perhaps it is because they eat the reindeer raw that they have come to be accused of fondness for human flesh. In chasing the game on which they feed, the Samoyeds crept over the Ural Mountains from their far-off home in the north of Asia, running it down in a tract too cold and bare for any other race of men to dwell on. Here the Zarayny found them, thrashed them, set them to work.

These Zarayny, a clever and hardy people, seem connected in type and speech with the Finns; and they are thought to be the remnant of an ancient colony of trappers. Fairer than the Samoyeds, they live in log huts like other Russians, and are rich in herds of reindeer, which they compel the Samoyeds to tend like slaves. This service to the higher race is slowly changing the savage Samoyed into a civilized man; since it gives him a sense of property and a respect for life. A red man kills the beast he hunts; kills it beyond his need, in the animal wantonness of strength. A Samoyed would do the same; but the Zarayny have taught him to rear and tend, as well as to hunt and snare, his food. A savage, only one degree above the Pawnee and the Ute, a Samoyed builds no shed; plants no field; and owns no property in the soil. He dwells, like the Lapp, in a tent – a roll of skins, sewn on to each other with gut, and twisted round a shaft, left open at the top, and furnished with skins to lie on like an Indian lodge. No art is lavished on this roll of skin; not so much as the totem which a Cheyenne daubs on his prairie tent. Yet the Samoyed has notions of village life, and even of government. A collection of tents he calls a Choom; his choom is ruled by a medicine-man; the official name of whom in Russian society is a pope.

The reigning Emperor has sent some priests to live among these tribes, just as in olden times Marfa of Novgorod sent her popes and monks into Lapland and Karelia; hoping to divert the natives from their Pagan habits and bring them over to the church of Christ. Some good, it may be hoped, is done by these Christian priests; but a Russ who knows the country and the people smiles when you ask him about their doings in the Gulf of Obi and around the Kara Sea. One of these missionaries whom I chanced to meet had pretty well ceased to be a civilized man. In name, he was a pope; but he lived and dressed like a medicine-man; and he was growing into the likeness of a Mongol in look and gait. Folk said he had taken to his bosom a native witch.

Through the gateway held by these tribes we enter into Russia – Great Russia; that country of the old Russians, whose plains and forests the Tartar horsemen never swept.

Why enter Russia by these northern gates? If the Great Mogul had conquered England in the seventeenth century; if Asiatic manners had been paramount in London for two hundred years; if Britain had recovered her ancient freedom and civil life, where would a foreign observer, anxious to see the English as they are, begin his studies? Would he not begin them in Massachusetts rather than in Middlesex, even though he should have to complete his observations on the Mersey and the Thames?

A student of the Free Russia born of the Crimean War, must open his work of observation in the northern zones; since it is only within this region of lake and forest that he can find a Slavonic race which has never been tainted by foreign influence, never been broken by foreign yoke. The zone from Onega to Perm – a country seven times larger than France – was colonized from Novgorod the Great, while Novgorod was yet a free city, rich in trade, in piety, in art; a rival of Frankfort and Florence; and, like London and Bruges, a station of the Hanseatic League. Her colonies kept the charter of their freedom safe. They never bent to the Tartar yoke, nor learned to walk in the German ways. They knew no masters, and they held no serfs. "We never had amongst us," said to me an Archangel farmer, "either a noble or a slave." They clung, for good and evil, to their ancient life; and when the Patriarch Nikon reformed the Church in a Byzantine sense (1667), as the Tsar Godunof had transformed the village in a Tartar sense (1601), they disowned their patriarch just as they had denied their Tsar. In spite of every force that could be brought against them by a line of autocrats, these free colonists have not been driven into accepting the reformed official liturgies in preference to their ancient rites. They kept their native speech, when it was ceasing to be spoken in the capital; and when the time was ripe, they sent out into the world a boy of genius, peasant-born and reared (the poet, Michael Lomonosof), to impose that popular language on the college, on the senate, on the court.

CHAPTER II.
THE FROZEN SEA

At Cape Intsi we pass from the narrow straits dividing the Lapp country from the Samoyed country into this northern gulf.

About twice the size of Lake Superior in the United States, this Frozen Sea has something of the shape of Como; one narrow northern bay, extending to the town of Kandalax, in Russian Lapland; and two southern bays, divided from each other by a broad sandy peninsula, the home of a few villagers employed in snaring cod and hunting seal. These southern bays are known, from the rivers which fall into them, as Onega Bay and Dvina Bay. At the mouths of these rivers stand the two trading ports of Onega and Archangel.

The open part of this inland gulf is deep – from sixty to eighty fathoms; and in one place, off the entrance into Kandalax Bay, the line goes down no less than a hundred and sixty fathoms. Yet the shore is neither steep nor high. The gulf of Onega is rich in rocks and islets; many of them only banks of sand and mud, washed out into the sea from the uplands of Kargopol; but in the wide entrance of Onega Bay, between Orlof Point and the town of Kem, stands out a notable group of islets – Solovetsk, Anzersk, Moksalma, Zaet and others; islets which play a singular part in the history of Russia, and connect themselves with curious legends of the Imperial court.

In Solovetsk, the largest of this group of islets, stands the famous convent of that name; the house of Saints Savatie and Zosima; the refuge of St. Philip; the shrine to which emperors and peasants go on pilgrimage; the haunt of that Convent Spectre which one hears described in the cod-fisher's boat and in the Kozak's tent; the scene of many great events, and of one event which Russians have agreed to sing and paint as the most splendid miracle of these latter days.

Off the Dvina bar stands the new tower and lighthouse, where the pilots live; a shaft some eighty feet high, not often to be seen above the hanging drapery of fog. A pilot comes on board; a man of soft and patient face, with gray-blue eyes, and flow of brownish hair, who tells us in a bated tone – as though he feared we might be vexed with him and beat him – that the tide is ebbing on the bar, and we shall have to wait for the flow. "Wait for the tide!" snaps our Danish jarl; "stand by, we'll make our course." The sun has just peeped out from behind his veil; but the clouds droop low and dark, and every one feels that a gale is coming on. Two barks near the bar – the "Thera" and the "Olga" – bob and reel like tipsy men; yet our pale Russ pilot, urged by the stronger will, gives way with a smile; and our speed being lowered by half, we push on slowly towards the line of red and black signals floating in our front.

The "Thera" and the "Olga" are soon behind us, shivering in all their sheets, like men in the clutch of ague – left in our wake to a swift and terrible doom. In half an hour we pass the line of buoys, and gain the outer port.

Like all great rivers, the Dvina has thrown up a delta of isles and islets near her mouth, through which she pours her flood into the sea by a dozen arms. None of these dozen arms can now be laid down as her main entrance; for the river is more capricious than the sea; so that a skipper who leaves her by one outlet in August, may have to enter by another when he comes back to her in June. The main passage in the old charts flowed past the Convent of St. Nicolas; then came the turn of Rose Island; afterwards the course ran past the guns of Fort Dvina: but the storms which swept the Polar seas two summers since, destroyed that passage as an outlet for the larger kinds of craft. The port police looked on in silence. What were they to do? Archangel was cut off from the sea, until a Danish blacksmith, who had set up forge and hammer in the new port, proposed that the foreign traders should hire a steamer and find a deliverance for their ships. "If the water goes down," he said, "it must have made a way for itself. Let us try to find it out." A hundred pounds were lodged in the bank, a steamer was hired, and a channel, called the Maimax arm, was found to be deep enough for ships to pass. The work was done, the city opened to the sea; but then came the question of port authorities and their rules. No bark had ever left the city by this Maimax arm; no rules had been made for such a course of trade; and the port police could not permit a ship to sail unless her papers were drawn up in the usual forms. In vain the merchants told them the case was new, and must be governed by a rule to match. They might as well have reasoned with a Turkish bey. Here rode a fleet of vessels, laden with oats and deals for the Elbe, the Maas, and the Thames; there ran the abundant Maimax waters to the sea; but the printed rules of the port, unconscious of the freaks of nature and of the needs of man, forbade this fleet to sail.

Appeal was made to Prince Gagarine, governor of Archangel: but Gagarine, though he laughed at these port rules and their forms, had no deals and grain of his own on board the ships. Gospodin Sredine, a keen-witted master of the customs, tried to open the ports and free the ships by offering to put officers on the new channel; but the police were – the police. In vain they heard that the goods might spoil, that the money they cost was idle, and that every ruble wasted would be so much loss to their town.

To my question, "How was it arranged at last?" a skipper, who was one of the prisoners in the port, replies, "I will tell you in a word. We sent to Petersburg; the minister spoke to the Emperor; and here is what we have heard they said. 'What's all this row in Archangel about?' asks the Emperor. 'It is all about a new mouth being found in the Dvina, sir, and ships that want to sail down it, sir, because the old channel is now shoaled up, sir.' 'In God's name,' replied the Emperor, 'let the ships go out by any channel they can find.'"

Whether the thing was done in this sailor-like way, or by the more likely method of official report and order, the Maimax mouth was opened to the world in spite of the port police and their printed rules.

A Hebrew of the olden time would have called this sea a whited sepulchre. Even men of science, to whom wintry storms may be summed up in a line of figures – so many ships in the pack, so many corpses on the beach – can find in the records of this frozen deep some show of an excuse for that old Lapland superstition of the Golden Hag. The year before last was a tragic time, and the memory of one dark day of wrack and death has not yet had time to fade away.

At the end of June, a message, flashed from the English consul at Archangel – a man to represent his country on these shores – alarmed our board of trade by such a cry for help as rarely reaches a public board. A hundred ships were perishing in the ice. These ships were Swedes, Danes, Dutch, and English; luggers, sloops, corvettes, and smacks; all built of wood, and many of them English manned. Could any thing be done to help them? "Help is coming," flashed the wires from Charing Cross; and on the first day of July, two steamers left the Thames to assist in rescuing those ships and men from the Polar ice. On the fifteenth night from home these English boats were off Cape Gorodetsk on the Lapland coast, and when morning dawned they were striving to cross the shallow Archangel bar. They could not pass; yet the work of humanity was swiftly and safely done by the English crews.

That fleet of all nations, English, Swedish, Dutch, and Danish, left the Dvina ports on news coming up the delta that the pack was breaking up in the gulf; but on reaching that Corridor through which we have just now come, they met the ice swaying to and fro, and crashing from point to point, as the changing wind veered round from north to south. By careful steering they went on, until they reached the straits between Kanin Cape and Holy Point. The ice in their front was now thick and high; no passage through it could be forced; and their vessels reeled and groaned under the blows which they suffered from the floating drifts. A brisk north wind arose, and blowing three days on without a pause, drove blocks and bergs of ice from the Polar Ocean down into the gut, forcing the squadrons to fall back, and closing up every means of escape into the open sea. The ships rolled to and fro, the helmsmen trying to steer them in mid-channel, but the currents were now too strong to stem, and the helpless craft were driven upon the Lapland reefs, where the crews soon saw themselves folded and imprisoned in the pack of ice.

Like shots from a fort, the crews on board the stronger ships could hear in the grim waste around them hull after hull crashing up, in that fierce embrace, like fine glass trinkets in a strong man's hand. When a ship broke up and sank, the crew leaped out upon the ice and made for the nearest craft, from which in a few hours more they might have to fly in turn. One man was wrecked five times in a single day; each of the boats to which he clung for safety parting beneath his feet and gurgling down into the frozen deep.

When the tale of loss was made up by the relieving steamers, this account was sent home to the Board of Trade:

The number of ships abandoned by their crews was sixty-four; of this great fleet of ships, fourteen were saved and fifty lost. Of the fifty ships lost in those midsummer days, eighteen were English built and manned; and the master mentions with a noble pride, that only one ship flying the English flag was in a state to be recovered from the ice after being abandoned by her crew.

It would be well for our fame if the natives had no other tales to tell of an English squadron in the Frozen Sea.

CHAPTER III.
THE DVINA

By the Maimax arm we steam through the delta for some twenty miles; past low, green banks and isles like those in the Missouri bed; though the loam in the Dvina is not so rich and black as that on the American stream. Yet these small isles are bright with grass and scrub. Beyond them, on the main-land, lies a fringe of pines, going back into space as far as the eye can pierce.

The low island lying on your right as you scrape the bar is called St. Nicolas, after that sturdy priest, who is said to have smitten the heretic Arius on his cheek. No one knows where this Nicolas lived and died; for it is clear from the Acta, that he had no part in the Council of Nice. The Book of Saints describes him as born in Liki and living in Mira; whence they call him the Saint of Mirliki; but not a line of his writing is extant, and the virtues assigned to him are of opposing kinds. He is a patron of nobles and of children, of sailors, of cadgers, and of pilgrims. Yet, in spite of his doubtful birth and genius, Nicolas is a popular saint. Poor people like him as one who is good to the poor; a friend of beggars, fishermen and tramps. A Russian turns to him as the hope of starving and drowning men; so that his name is often heard, his image often seen, in these northern wilds; more than all else, on the banks of rivers and on the margins of the Frozen Sea. A peasant learns with delight from his Book of Saints (his Bible, Epos, Drama, Code, and History all in one) that Nicolas is the most potent saint in heaven; sitting on the right hand of God; and having a cohort of three hundred angels, armed and ready to obey his nod. A mujik asked a foreign friend to tell him who will be God when God dies? "My good fellow," said he, smiling, "God will never die." At first the peasant seemed perplexed. "Never die!" and then a light fell on him. "Yes," he retorted, slowly; "I see it now. You are an unbeliever; you have no religion. Look you; I have been better taught. God will one day die; for He is very old; and then St. Nicolas will get his place."

Though he is common to all Russians – adored on the Dnieper, on the Volkhof, on the Moskva, no less than on the Dvina – he is worshipped with peculiar zeal in these northern zones. Here he is the sailor's saint, the adventurer's help; and all the paintings of him show that his watchful eyes are bent in eager tenderness upon the swirl and passion of the Frozen Sea. This delta might be called his province; for not only was the island on your right called after him, but also the ancient channel, and the bay itself. The oldest cloister in the district bears his name.

On passing into the Maimax arm, your eyes – long dimmed by the sight of sombre rock, dark cloud, and sullen surf – are charmed by soft, green grass and scrub; but the sight goes vainly out, through reeds and copse, in search of some cheery note of house and farm. One log hut you pass, and only one. Two men are standing near a bank, in a little clearing of the wood; a lad is idling in a frail canoe, which the wash of your steamer lifts and laves; but no one lodges in the shed; the men and boy have come from a village some miles away. Dropping down the river in their boat to cut down grass for their cows, and gather up fuel for their winter fires, they will jump into their canoe at vespers, and hie them home.

On the banks of older channels the villages are thick; slight groups of sheds and churches, with a cloister here and there, and a scatter of windmills whirling against the sky; each village and mill in its appointed place, without the freak and medley of original thought. Here nothing is done by individual force; a pope, an elder, an imperial officer, must have his say in every case; and not a mouse can stir in a Russian town, except by leave of some article in a printed code. Fort Dvina was erected on a certain neck of land in the ancient river-bed, and nature was expected to conform herself forever to the order fixed by imperial rule.

On all these banks you note a forest of memorial crosses. When a sailor meets with bad weather, he goes on shore and sets up a cross. At the foot of this symbol he kneels in prayer, and when a fair wind rises, he leaves his offering on the lonely coast. When the peril is sharp, the whole ship's crew will land, cut down and carve tall trees, and set up a memorial with names and dates. All round the margins of the Frozen Sea these pious witnesses abound; and they are most of all numerous on the rocks and banks of the Holy Isles. Each cross erected is the record of a storm.

Some of these memorial crosses are historic marks. One tree, set up by Peter the Great when he escaped from the wreck of his ship in the frozen deep, has been taken from the spot where he planted it, and placed in the cathedral at Archangel. "This cross was made by Captain Peter," says a tablet cut in the log by the Emperor's own knife; and Peter being a carver in wood and stone, the work is not without touches of art and grace. Might not a word be urged in favor of this custom of the sea, which leaves a picture and a blessing on every shore? An English mariner is apt to quit a coast on which he has been kept a prisoner by adverse winds with a curse in his heart and a bad name on his tongue. Jack is a very grand fellow in his way; but surely there is a beauty, not less winning than the piety, in this habit of the Russian tar.

Climbing up the river, you come upon fleets of rafts and praams, on which you may observe some part of the native life. The rafts are floats of timber – pine logs, lashed together with twigs of willow, capped with a tent of planks, in which the owner sleeps, while his woodmen lie about in the open air when they are not paddling the raft and guiding it down the stream. These rafts come down the Dvina and its feeders for a thousand miles. Cut in the great forests of Vologda and Nijni Konets, the pines are dragged to the waterside, and knitted by rude hands into these broad, floating masses. At the towns some sturdy helpers may be hired for nothing; many of the poor peasants being anxious to get down the river on their way to the shrines of Solovetsk. For a passage on the raft these pilgrims take a turn at the oar, and help the owners to guide her through the shoals.

In the praams the life is a little less bleak and rough than it is on board the rafts. In form the praam is like the toy called a Noah's ark; a huge hull of coarse pine logs, riveted and clamped with iron, covered by a peaked plank roof. A big one will cost from six to seven hundred rubles (the ruble may be reckoned for the moment as half a crown), and will carry from six to eight hundred tons of oats and rye. A small section of the praam is boarded off to be used as a room. Some bits of pine are shaped into a stool, a table, and a shelf. From the roof-beam swings an iron pot, in which the boatmen cook their food while they are out in the open stream; at other times – that is to say, when they are lying in port – no fire is allowed on board, not even a pipe is lighted, and the watermen's victuals must be cooked on shore. Four or five logs lashed together serve them for a launch, by means of which they can easily paddle to the bank.

Like the rafts, these praams take on board a great many pilgrims from the upper country; giving them a free passage down, with a supply of tea and black bread as rations, in return for their labor at the paddle and the oar. Not much labor is required, for the praam floats down with the stream. Arrived at Archangel, she empties her cargo of oats into the foreign ships (most of them bound for the Forth, the Tyne, and the Thames), and then she is moored to the bank, cut up, and sold. Some of her logs may be used again for building sheds, the rest is of little use, except for the kitchen and the stove.

The new port of Archangel, called Solambola, is a scattered handful of log houses, that would remind you of a Swiss hamlet were it not for the cluster of green cupolas and spires, reminding you still more strongly of a Bulgarian town. Each belfry bears a crescent, crowned by a cross. Along the brink of the river runs a strand, some six or eight feet above the level plain; beyond this strand the fields fall off, so that the country might be laid under water, while the actual strand stood high and dry. The new port is a water-village; for in the spring-time, when the ice is melting up stream, the flood goes over all, and people have to pass from house to magazine in boats.

Not a grain of this strand in front of the sheds is Russ; the whole line of road being built of ballast brought into the Dvina by foreign ships, and chiefly from English ports. This ridge of pebble, marl, and shells comes nearly all from London, Liverpool, and Leith; the Russian trade with England having this peculiarity, that it is wholly an export trade. A Russian sends us every thing he has for sale; his oats, his flax, his deals, his mats, his furs, his tar; he buys either nothing, or next to nothing, in return. A little salt and wine, a few saw-mills – chiefly for foreign account – are what come back from England by way of barter with the North. The payment is gold, the cargo ballast; and the balance of account between the two countries is – a strand of English marl and shells.

CHAPTER IV.
ARCHANGEL

On passing up the Dvina from the Polar Sea, your first experience shows that you are sailing from the West into the East.

When scraping the bar, you notice that the pilot refuses to drop his lead. "Never mind," he says, "it is deep enough; we shall take no harm; unless it be the will of God." A pilot rarely throws out his line. The regulation height of water on the bar is so and so; and dropping a rope into the sea will not, he urges, increase the depth.

When climbing through the delta, you observe that every peasant on the shore, both man and woman, wears a sheepskin wrap – the garment of nomadic tribes; not worn as a rule by any of the settled races on the earth.

In catching a first glimpse of the city, you are struck by the forest of domes and spires; the domes all color and the spires all gold; a cluster of sacred buildings, you are apt to fancy, out of all proportion to the number of people dwelling in the town.

On feeling for the river-side, a captain finds no quay, no dock, no landing-pier, no stair. He brings-to as he can; and drags his boat into position with a pole, as he would have to do in the Turkish ports of Vidin and Rustchuk. No help is given him from the shore. Except in some ports of Palestine, you will nowhere find a wealthy trade conducted by such simple means.

When driving up that strand of English marl, towards the city of which you see the golden lights, you hear that in Archangel, as in Aleppo, there is no hotel; not even, as in Aleppo, a public khan.

Full of these signs, you turn to your maps, and notice that Archangel lies a little to the east of Mecca and Trebizond.

Yet these highways of the Dvina are not those of the genuine East. Baksheesh is hardly known. Your pilot may sidle up, and give your hand a squeeze (all Russians of the lower ranks are fond of squeezing!) on your safe arrival in the port; and if you fail to take his hint, as probably you will, he whispers meekly in your ear, as though he were telling you an important secret, that very few strangers come into the Dvina, but those few never fail to reward with na-chai (tea-money) the man who has brought them in from the sea of storms. But from the port officials nothing can be got by giving vails in the bad old way. Among the many wise things which have been done in the present reign, is that of reducing the number of men employed in the customs, and of largely increasing the salaries paid to them by the crown. No man is now underpaid for the service he has to do, and no one in the Customs is allowed to accept a bribe. Prince Obolenski, chief of this great department, is a man of high courage as well as high principles, and under his eye the service has been purged of those old abuses which caused it to be branded with black and red in so many books. One case came under my notice, in which a foreign skipper had given to an officer in the port a dozen oranges; not as a bribe, but as a treat; oranges being rarely seen in this northern clime. Yet, when the fact was found out by his local superior, the man was reduced from a high post in the service to a low one. "If he will take an orange, he will take a ruble," said his chief; and a year elapsed before the offender was restored to his former grade.

The new method is not so Asiatic as the old; but in time it will lead the humblest officer in Russia to feel that he is a man.

Archangel is not a port and city in the sense in which Hamburg and Hull are ports and cities; clusters of docks and sheds, with shops, and wagons, and a busy private trade. Archangel is a camp of shanties, heaped around groups of belfries, cupolas and domes. Imagine a vast green marsh along the bank of a broad brown river, with mounds of clay cropping here and there out of the peat and bog; put buildings on these mounds of clay; adorn the buildings with frescoes, crown them with cupolas and crosses; fill in the space between church and convent, convent and church, with piles and planks, so as to make ground for gardens, streets, and yards; cut two wide lanes, from the church called Smith's Wife to the monastery of St. Michael, three or four miles in length; connect these lanes and the stream by a dozen clearings; paint the walls of church and convent white, the domes green and blue; surround the log houses with open gardens; stick a geranium, a fuschia, an oleander into every window; leave the grass growing everywhere in street and clearing – and you have Archangel.

Half-way from Smith's Wife's quarter to the Monastery, stand, in picturesque groups, the sites determined by the mounds of clay, the public buildings; fire-tower, cathedral, town-hall, court of justice, governor's house, museum; new and rough, with a glow of bright new paint upon them all. The collection in the museum is poor; the gilt on the cathedral rich. When seen from a distance, the domes and turrets of Archangel give it the appearance of some sacred Eastern city rather than a place of trade.

This sea-port on the Dvina is the only port in Russia proper. Astrachan is a Tartar port; Odessa an Italian port; Riga a Livonian port; Helsingfors a Finnish port. None of these outlets to the sea are in Russia proper, nor is the language spoken in any of them Russ. Won by the sword, they may be lost by the sword. As foreign conquests, they must follow the fate of war; and in Russia proper their loss might not be deeply felt; Great Russia being vast enough for independence and rich enough for happiness, even if she had to live without that belt of lesser Russias in which for her pride and punishment she has lately been clasped and strained. Archangel, on the other side, is her one highway to the sea; the outlet of her northern waters; her old and free communication with the world; an outlet given to her by God, and not to be taken away from her by man.

Such as they are, the port and city of Archangel owe their birth to English adventure, their prosperity to English trade.

In the last year of King Edward the Sixth, an English ship, in pressing her prow against the sand-banks of the Frozen Sea, hoping to light on a passage to Cathay, met with a broad sheet of water, flowing steadily and swiftly from the south. That ship was the "Bonaventure;" her master was Richard Challoner; who had parted from his chief, Sir Hugh Willoughby, in a storm. The water coming down from the south was fresh. A low green isle lay on his port, which he laid down in his chart as Rose Island; afterwards to be famous as the cradle of our northern trade. Pushing up the stream in search of a town, he came upon a small cloister, from the monks of which he learned that he was not in Cathay, but in Great Russia.

Great was a name given by old Russians, not only to the capital of their country, but to the country itself. Their capital was Great Novgorod; their country was Great Russia.

Sir Hugh Willoughby was driven by storms into "the harbor of death," in which he and his crews all perished in the ice; while his luckier lieutenant pushed up the Dvina to Vologda, whence he forced his way to Moscow, and saw the Grand Duke, Ivan the Fourth. In that age Russia was known to Europe as Moscovia, from the city of Moscow; a city which had ravaged her old pre-eminence from Novgorod, and made herself mistress of Great Russia.

Challoner was wrecked and drowned on his second voyage; but those who followed him built an English factory for trade on Rose Island, near the cloister; while the Russians, on their side, built a fort and town on the Dvina, some thirty miles from its mouth; in which position they could watch the strangers in their country, and exchange with them their wax and skins for cotton shirts and pewter pans. The builder of this fort and town was Ivan Vassilivitch, known to us as Ivan the Terrible – Ivan the Fourth.

Ivan called his town the New Castle of St. Michael the Archangel; an unwieldy name, which his raftmen and sailors soon cut down – as raftmen and sailors will – into the final word. On English lips the name would have been St. Michael; but a Russian shrinks from using the name of that prince of heaven. To him Michael is not a saint, as Nicolas and George are saints; but a power, a virtue, and a sanctity, before whose lance the mightiest of rebel angels fell. No Russian speaks of this celestial warrior as a saint. He is the archangel; greatest of the host; selected champion of the living God. Convents and churches are inscribed to him by his celestial rank; but never by his personal name. The great cathedral of Moscow is only known as the Archangel's church. Michael is understood; for who but Michael could be meant? Ivan Vassilivitch had such a liking for this fighting power, that on his death-bed he gave orders for his body to be laid, not in that splendid pile of St. Vassili, which he had spent so much time and money in building near the Holy Gate, but in a chapel of the Archangel's church; and there the grim old tyrant lies, in a plain stone coffin, covered with a velvet pall.

Peter the Great rebuilt Archangel on a larger scale with more enduring brick. Peter was fond of the Frozen Sea, and twice, at least, he sailed over it to pray in the Convent of Solovetsk; a place which he valued, not only as a holy shrine, but as a frontier fortress, held by his brave old Russ against the Lapps and Swedes. Archangel was made by Peter his peculiar care; and masons were fetched from Holland to erect his lines of bastions, magazines, and quays. A castle rose from the ground on the river bank; an island was reclaimed from the river and trimmed with trees; a summer palace was designed and built for the Tsar. A fleet of ships was sent to command the Dvina mouth. In fact, Archangel was one of the three sites – St. Petersburg and Taganrog being the other two – on which the Emperor designed to build cities that, unlike Novgorod and Moscow, should be at once fortresses and ports.

The city of Ivan and the city of Peter have each in turn gone by. Not a stone of Ivan's town remains; for his new castle and monastery, being built of logs, were duly rotted by rain and consumed by fire. A fort and a monastery still protect and adorn the place; but these have both been raised in more recent years. Of Peter's city, though it seemed to be solid as the earth itself, hardly a house is standing to show the style. A heap of arches, riven by frost and blackened by smoke, is seen on the Dvina bank; a pretty kiosk peeps out from between the birches on Moses Isle; and these are all!

In our western eyes Archangel may seem to be over-rich in domes, as the delta may appear to be over-rich in crosses; but then, in our western eyes, the city is a magazine of oats and tar, of planks and skins; while in native eyes it is the archangel's house, the port of Solovetsk, and the gate of God.

CHAPTER V.
RELIGIOUS LIFE

A friend is one day driving me from house to house in Archangel, making calls, when we observe from time to time a smart officer going into courtyards.

"This man appears to be dogging our steps."

"Ha!" laughs my friend; "that fellow is an officer of police."

"Why is he following us?"

"He is not following us; he is going his rounds; he is warning the owners of all good houses that four candles must be lighted in each front window to-night at eight o'clock."

"Four candles! For what?"

"The Emperor. You know it is his angel's day; you will see the streets all lighted – by police suggestion – at the proper time."

"Surely the police have no need to interfere. The Emperor is popular; and who can forget that this is St. Alexander's Day?"

"There you are wrong; our people hardly know the court at all. You see these shops are open, yon stalls are crowded, that mill is working, as they would be on the commonest day in all the year. A mujik cares but little for kings and queens; he only knows his own angel – his peculiar saint. If you would test his reverence, ask him to make a coat, repair a tarantass, or fetch in wood, on his angel's day. He would rather die at your feet than sully such a day with work. In fact, a mujik is not a courtier – he is only a religious man."

My friend is right in the main, though his illustration takes me as a stranger by surprise.

The first impulse in a Russian heart is duty to God. It is an impulse of observance and respect; at once moral and ceremonial; an impulse with an inner force and an outer form; present in all ranks of society, and in all situations of life; in an army on the march, in a crowd at a country fair, in a lecture-room full of students; showing itself in a princess dancing at a ball, in a huckster writing at his desk, in a peasant tugging at his cart, in a burglar rioting on his spoil.

This duty adorns the land with fane and altar, even as it touches the individual man with penitential grace. Every village must have its shrine, as every child must have his guardian angel and baptismal cross. The towns are rich in churches and convents, just as the citizens are rich in spiritual gifts. I counted twenty spires in Kargopol, a city of two thousand souls. Moscow is said to have four hundred and thirty churches and chapels; Kief, in proportion to her people, is no less rich. All public events are celebrated by the building of a church. In Kief, St. Andrew's Church commemorates the visit of an apostle; St. Mary's, the introduction of Christianity In Moscow, St. Vassili's commemorates the conquest of Kazan; the Donskoi Convent, Fedor's victory over the Crim Tartars; St. Saviour's, the expulsion of Napoleon. In Petersburg, St. Alexander's commemorates the first victory won by Russians over Swedes; St. Isaac's, the birth of Peter the Great; Our Lady of Kazan's, the triumphs of Russian arms against the Persian, Turk, and Frank. Where we should build a bridge, the Russians raise a house of God: so that their political and social history is brightly written in their sacred piles.

By night and day, from his cradle to his grave, a Russian lives, as it were, with God; giving up to His service an amount of time and money which no one ever dreams of giving in the West. Like his Arabian brother, the Slavonian is a religious being; and the gulf which separates such men from the Saxon and the Gaul is broader than a reader who has never seen an Eastern town will readily picture to his mind.

An Oriental is a man of prayer. He seems to live for heaven and not for earth; and even in his commonest acts, he pays respect to what he holds to be a celestial law. One hand is clean, the other unclean. One cup is lawful, another cup is unlawful. If he rises from his couch a prayer is on his lips;

if he sits down to rest a blessing is in his heart. When he buys and when he sells, when he eats and when he drinks, he remembers that the Holy One is nigh. If poor in purse, he may be rich in grace; his cabin a sanctuary, his craft a service, his daily life an act of prayer.

Enter into a Russian shed – you find a chapel. Every room in that shed is sanctified; for in every room there is a sacred image, a domestic altar, and a household god. The inmate steps into that room with reverence; standing for a moment at the threshold, baring his head, crossing himself, and uttering a saintly verse. Once in the house, he feels himself in the Presence, and every act of his life is dedicated to Him in whom we live and move. "Slava Bogu" – Glory to God – is a phrase forever on his lips; not as a phrase only, to be uttered in a light vein, as a formal act, but with an inward bending and confession of the soul. He fasts very much, and pays a respect beyond our measure to sacred places and to sacred things. He thinks day and night of his angel; and payments are made by him at church for prayers to be addressed in his name to that guardian spirit. He finds a divine enjoyment in the sound of cloister-bells, a foretaste of heaven in kneeling near the bones of saints. The charm of his life is a profound conviction of his own unworthiness in the sight of God, and no mere pride of rank ever robs him of the hope that some one higher in virtue than himself will prove his advocate at the throne of grace. He feels a rapture, strange to a Frank, in the cadence of a psalm, and the taste of consecrated bread is to him a fearful joy. Such things are to him not only things of life and death, but of the everlasting life and the ever-present death.

The church is with a Russian early and late. A child is hardly considered as born into the world, until he has been blessed by the pope and made by him a "servant of God."

As the child begins, so he goes on. The cross which he receives in baptism – which he receives in his cradle, and carries to his grave – is but a sign. Religion goes with him to his school, his play-ground, and his workshop. Every act of his life must begin with supplication and end with thanks. A school has a set of prayers for daily use; with forms to be used on commencing a term, on parting for holidays, on engaging a new teacher, on opening a fresh course. It is the same with boys who work in the mill and on the farm. Every one has his office to recite and his fast to keep. The fasting is severe; and more than half the days in a Russian year are days of fasting and humiliation. During the seven weeks before Easter, no flesh, no fish, no milk, no eggs, no butter, can be touched. For five or six weeks before St. Peter's Day, and for six weeks before Christmas Day, no flesh, no milk, no eggs, no butter, can be used. For fifteen days in August, a fast of great severity is held in honor of the Virgin's death. A man must fast on every Wednesday and Friday throughout the year, eating nothing save fish. Besides keeping these public fasts, a man should fast the whole week before making his confession and receiving his sacrament; abstaining from every dainty, from sugar, cigarettes, and every thing cooked with fire.

On the eve of Epiphany – the day for blessing the water – no one is suffered to eat or drink until the blessing has been given, about four o'clock, when the consecrated water may be sipped and dinner must be eaten with a joyful heart. To fetch away the water, people carry into church their pots and pans, their jacks and urns; each peasant with a taper in his hand, which he lights at the holy fire, and afterwards burns before his angel until it dies.

Every new house in which a man lives, every new shop which he opens for trade, must be blessed. A man who moves from one lodging to another must have his second lodging purified by religious rites. Ten or twelve times a year, the parish priest, attended by his reader and his deacon, enters into every house in his district, sprinkles the rooms with holy water, cleanses them with prayer, and signs them with the cross.

In his marriage, on his dying bed, the Church is with a Russ even more than at his birth and baptism. Marriage, held to be a sacrament, and poetically called a man's coronation, is a long and intricate affair, consisting of many offices, most of them perfect in symbolism as they are lovely in art. Prayers are recited, rings exchanged, and blessings invoked; after which the ceremony is performed; an actual circling of the brows with a golden rim. "Ivan, servant of God," cries the pope, as he puts the circlet on his brows, "is crowned with Nadia, handmaid of God." The bride is crowned with Ivan, servant of God.

Some people wear their bridal crowns for a week, then put them back into the sacristy, and obtain a blessing in exchange. Religion touches the lowliest life with a passing ornament. The bride is always a queen, the groom is always a king, on their wedding-day.

A man's angel is with him early and late; a spirit with whom he dares not trifle; one whom he can never deceive. He puts a picture of this angel in his bedroom, over the pillow on which he sleeps. A light should burn before that picture day and night. The angel has to be propitiated by prayers, recited by a consecrated priest. His day must be strictly kept, and no work done, except works of charity, from dawn to dusk. A feast must be spread, the family and kindred called under one roof, presents made to domestics, and alms dispensed to the poor. On his angel's day a man must not only go to church, but buy from the priests some consecrated loaves, which he must give to servants, visitors, and guests. On that day he should send for his parish priest, who will bring his gospel and cross, and say a prayer to the angel, for which he must be paid a fee according to your means. A child receives his angel's name in baptism, and this angelic name he can never change. A peasant who was tried in the district court of Moscow on a charge of having forged a passport and changed his name, in order to pass for another man, replied that such a thing could not be done. "How," he asked in wonder, "could I change my name? I should lose my angel. I only forged my place of birth."

So closely have religious passions passed into social life, that civil rights are made to depend in no slight degree on the performance of religious duties. Every man is supposed to attend a weekly mass, and to confess his sins, and take a sacrament once a year. A man who neglects these offices forfeits his civil rights; unless, as sometimes happens in the best of cities, he can persuade his pope to give him a certificate of his exemplary attendance in the parish church!

CHAPTER VI.
PILGRIMS

Next to his religious energy, the mastering passion of a Russ is the untamable craving of his heart for a wandering life.

All Slavonic tribes are more or less fond of roving to and fro; of peddling, and tramping, and seeing the world; of living, as it were, in tents, as the patriarchs lived; but the propensity to ramble from place to place is keener in the Russ than it is in the Bohemian and the Serb.

A while ago the whole of these Slavonic tribes were still nomadic; a people of herdsmen, driving their flocks from plain to plain, in search of grass and water; camping either in tents of skin, or in frames of wood not much more solid than tents of skin; carrying with them their wives and children, their weapons of war, and their household gods. They chased the wild game of their country, and when the wild game failed them, they ate their flocks. Some few among them tilled the soil, but only in a crude and fitful way – as an Adonan tends his patch of desert, as a Pawnee trifles with his stretch of plain; for the Slavonic husbandman was nearly as wild a wanderer as the driver of kine and goats. His fields were so vast, his kin so scattered, that the soil which he cropped was of no more value to him than the water he crossed, the air he breathed. He never dreamt of occupying his piece of ground after it had ceased to yield him, in the unbought bounty of nature, his easy harvest of oats and rye.

Some trace of these wandering habits may still be found, especially in the pilgrim bands.

These pilgrim bands are not a rabble of children and women, gay and empty folk, like those you meet when the vintage is gathered in Sicily and the south of France; mummers who take to the pilgrim's staff in wantonness of heart, and end a week of devotion by a feast in the auberge and a dance under the plaintain leaves. At best that French or Sicilian rabble is but a spent tradition and a decaying force. But these Northern pilgrims are grave and sad in their doings, even as the North is grave and sad. You never hear them laugh; you rarely see them smile; their movements are sedate; the only radiance on their life is the light of prayer and praise. Seeing these worshippers in many places and at many times – before the tomb of Sergie near Moscow, and before the manger at Bethlehem, I have everywhere found them the same, in reverence, in humility, in steadfastness of soul. One of these lowly Russ surprised me on the Jordan at Bethabara; and only yesterday I helped his brother to cross the Dvina on his march from Solovetsk. The first pilgrim had visited the tombs of Palestine, from Nazareth to Marsaba; the second, after toiling through a thousand miles of road and river to Solovetsk, is now on his way to the shrines at Kief. As my horses rattled down the Dvina bluffs I saw this humble pilgrim on his knees, his little pack laid by, and his forehead bent upon the ground in prayer. He was waiting at the ford for some one to come by – some one who could pay the boatman, and would give him a passage on the raft. The day had not yet dawned; the wind came up the river in gusts and chills; yet the face of that lowly man was good to see; a soft and tender countenance, shining with an inward light, and glad with unearthly peace. The world was not much with him, if one might judge from his sackcloth garb, his broken jar, his crust of black bread; but one could not help thinking, as he bowed in thanks, that it might be well for some of us who wear fine linen and dine off dainty food to be even as that poor pilgrim was.

This pilgrimage to the tombs and shrines of Russian saints, so far from being a holiday adventure, made when the year is spent and the season of labor past, is to the pilgrim a thing of life and death. He has degrees. A pilgrim perfect in his calling will go from shrine to shrine for several years. If God is good to him, he will strive, after making the round of his native shrines, to reach the valley of Nazareth, and the heights of Bethlehem and Zion. Some hundreds of these Russian pilgrims annually achieve this highest effort of the Christian life on earth; making their peace with heaven by kissing the stones in front of the Redeemer's tomb. Of course the poorer and weaker man can never expect to reach this point of grace; but his native soil is holy. Russia is a land of saints; and his map is dotted with sacred tombs, to which it is better for him to toil than rest at home in his sloth and sin.

These pilgrims go on foot, in bands of fifty or sixty persons, men, women, children, each with a staff in his hand, a water-bottle hanging from his belt; edifying the country as they march along, kneeling at the wayside chapel, and singing their canticles by day and night. The children whine a plaintive little song, of which the burden runs:

"Fatherkins and motherkins,
Give us bread to eat;"

and this appeal of the children is always heard, since all poor people fancy that the knock of a pilgrim at their window may be that of an angel, and will bring them luck.

A part – a very large part – of these rovers are simple tramps, who make a trade of piety; carrying about with them relics and rags which they vend at high rates to servant-girls and superstitious crones.

A man who in other days would have followed his sheep and kine, now seeks a wild sort of freedom as a pilgrim, hugging himself on his immunity from tax and rent, from wife and brat; migrating from province to province; a beggar, an impostor, and a tramp; tickled by the greeting of young and old as he passes their door, "Whither, oh friend, is the Lord leading thee?" Sooner or later such a man falls in with a band of pilgrims, which he finds it his good to join. The Russian Autolycus slings a water-bottle at his belt, and his female companion limps along the forest road on her wooden staff. You meet them on every track; you find them in the yard of every house. They creep in at back-doors, and have an assortment of articles for sale, which are often as precious in the eyes of a mistress as in those of her maid; a bit of rock from Nazareth, a drop of water from Jordan, a thread from the seamless coat, a chip of the genuine cross. These are the bolder spirits: but thousands of such vagrants roam about the country, telling crowds of gapers what they have seen in some holy place, where miracles are daily performed by the bones of saints. They show you a cross from Troitsa; they give you a morsel of consecrated bread from St. George. They can describe to you the defense of Solovetsk, and tell you of the incorruptible corpses of Pechersk.

These are the impostors – rank and racy impostors – yet some of these men and women who pass you on the roads are pious and devoted souls, wandering about the earth in search of what they fancy is a higher good. A few may be rich; but riches are dust in the eyes of God; and in seeking after His glory they dare not trust to an arm of flesh. Equally with his meekest brother, the rich pilgrim must take his staff, and march on foot, joining his brethren in their devotions and confessions, in their matins and their evening song.

Most of these pilgrim bands have to beg their crust of black bread, their sup of sour quass, from people as poor as themselves in money and almost as rich in the gifts of faith. Like the hadji going to Mecca, a pilgrim coming to Archangel, on his way to the shrines, is a holy man, with something of the character of a pope. The peasant, who thinks the crossing of his door-step by the stranger brings him blessings, not only lodges him by night, but helps him on the road by day. A pilgrim is a sacred being in rustic eyes. If his elder would let him go, he would join the band; but if he may not wend in person, he will go in spirit, to the shrine. A prayer shall be said in his name by the monks, and he will send his last kopeck in payment for that prayer by the hand of this ragged pilgrim, confident that the fellow would rather die than abuse his trust.

The men who escape from Siberian mines put on the pilgrim frock and seize the pilgrim staff. Thus robed and armed, a man may get from Perm to Archangel with little risk, even though his flesh may be burnt and his papers forged. Pietrowski has told the story of his flight, and many such tales may be heard on the Dvina praams.

A peasant living in a village near Archangel killed his father in a quarrel, but in such a way that he was not suspected of the crime; and he would never have been brought to justice had not Vanka, a friend and neighbor, been a witness of the deed. Now Vanka was weak and superstitious, and every day as he passed the image of his angel in the street, he felt an inner yearning to tell what he had seen. The murderer, watching him day and night, observed that he prayed very much, and crossed himself very often, as though he were deeply troubled in his mind. On asking what ailed him, he heard to his alarm that Vanka could neither eat nor sleep while that terrible secret lay upon his soul. But what could he do? Nothing; absolutely nothing? Yes; he could threaten to do for him what he had done by accident for a better man. "Listen to me, Vanka," he said, in a resolute tone; "you are a fool; but you would not like to have a knife in your throat, would you?" "God take care of me!" cried Vanka. "Mind me, then," said the murderer: "if you prate, I will have your blood." Vanka was so much frightened that he went to the police that very night and told them all he knew; on which his friend was arrested, brought to trial in Archangel, and condemned to labor on the public works for life. Vanka was the main witness, and on his evidence the judge pronounced his sentence. Then a scene arose in court which those who saw it say they shall not forget. The man in the dock was bold and calm, while Vanka, his accuser, trembled from crown to sole; and when the sentence of perpetual exile to the mines was read, the murderer turned to his friend and said, in a clear, firm voice, "Vanka! remember my words. To-day is yours: I am going to Siberia; but I shall come to your house again, and then I shall take your life. You know!" Years went by, and the threat, forgotten by every one else, was only remembered by Vanka, who, knowing his old friend too well, expected each passing night would be his last on earth. At length the tragedy came in a ghastly form. Vanka was found dead in his bed; his throat was cut from ear to ear; and in a drinking-den close by lay his murderer, snoring in his cups. He had made his escape from the mines; he had traversed the whole length of Asiatic Russia; he had climbed the Ural chain, and walked through the snow and ice of Perm, travelling in a pilgrim's garb, and singing the pilgrim's song, until he came to the suburbs of Archangel, where he slipped away from his raft, hid himself in the wood until nightfall, crept to the familiar shed and drew his knife across Vanka's throat.

No one suspects a pilgrim. With a staff in his hand, a sheepskin on his back, a water-bottle at his belt, and a clot of bass tied loosely round his feet, a peasant of the Ural Mountains quits his home, and makes no merit of trudging his two or three thousand miles. On the river he takes an oar, on the wayside he endures with incredible fortitude the burning sun by day, the biting frost at night. In Moscow I heard the history of three sisters, born in that city, who have taken up the pilgrim's staff for life. They are clever women, milliners by trade, and much employed by ladies of high rank. If they could only rest in their shop, they might live in comfort, and end their days in peace. But the religious and nomadic passions of their race are strong upon them. Every year they go to Kief, Solovetsk, and Jerusalem; and the journey occupies them forty-nine weeks. Every year they spend three weeks at home, and then set out again – alone, on foot – to seek, in winter snow and summer heat, salvation for their souls. No force on earth, save that which drives an Arab across the desert, and a Mormon across the prairie, is like this force.

In the hope of seeing these pilgrim bands, of going with them to Solovetsk, and studying them on the spot, as also of inquiring about the convent spectre, and solving the mystery which for many years past connected that spectre with the Romanof family, I rounded the North Cape, and my regret is deep, when landing at Archangel, to hear that the last pilgrim band has sailed, and that no more boats will cross the Frozen Sea until the ice breaks up in May next year.

CHAPTER VII.
FATHER JOHN

Stung by this news of the pilgrim-boat having sailed, and haunting, unquietly, the Pilgrim's Court in the upper town, I notice a good many sheepskin garbs, with wearers of the burnt and hungry sort you meet in all seasons on the Syrian roads. They are exceedingly devout, and even in their rags and filth they have a certain grace of aspect and of mien. A pious purpose seems to inform their gestures and their speech. Yon poor old man going home with his morsel of dried fish has the air of an Arab sheikh. These pilgrims, like myself, have been detained by storms; and a hope shoots up into my heart that as the monks must either send away all these thirsty souls unslaked, or lodge and feed them for several months, they may yet contrive to send a boat.

A very small monk, not five feet high, with girl-like hair and rippling beard, which parts and flows out wildly in the wind, is standing in the gateway of the Pilgrim's Court; and hardly knowing how it might be best to put the matter in my feeble Russ, I ask him in that tongue where a man should look for the Solovetsk boat.

"English?" inquires the girl-like monk.

"Yes, English," I reply, in some surprise; having never before seen a monk in Russia who could speak in any other tongue than Russ. "The boat," he adds, "has ceased to run, and is now at Solovetsk laid up in dock."

In dock! This dwarf must be a wag; for such a conjunction as monks and docks in a country where you find a quay like that of Solambola is, of course, a joke. "In dock!"

"Oh yes, in dock."

"Then have you a dock in the Holy Isle?"

"A dock – why not? The merchants of Archangel have no docks, you say? Well, that is true; but merchants are not monks. You see, the monks of Solovetsk labor while the merchants of Archangel trade. Slava Bogu! A good monk does his work; no shuffling, and no waste. In London you have docks?"

"Yes, many: but they were not built by monks."

"In England you have no monks; once you had them; and then they built things – eh?"

This dwarf is certainly a wag. What, monks who work, and docks in the Frozen Sea! After telling me where he learned his English (which is of nautical and naughty pattern), the manikin comforts me with news that although the pilgrim-boat has gone back to Solovetsk (where her engines are to be taken out, and put by in warm boxes near a stove for the winter months), a provision-boat may sail for the monastery in about a week.

"Can you tell me where to find the captain of that boat?"

"Hum!" says the dwarf, slowly, crossing himself the while, and lipping his silent prayer, "*I* am the skipper!"

My surprise is great. This dwarf, in a monk's gown and cap, with a woman's auburn curls, the captain of a sea-going ship! On a second glance at his slight figure, I notice that his eyes are bright, that his cheek is bronze, that his teeth, though small, are bony and well set. In spite of his serge gown and his girl-like face, there *is* about the tiny monk that look of mastery which becomes the captain of a ship.

"And can you give me a passage in your boat?"

"You! English, and you wish to see the holy tombs? Well, that is something new. No men of your nation ever sail to Solovetsk. They come over here to buy, and not to pray. Sometimes they come to fight."

The last five words, spoken in a low key, come out from between his teeth with a snap which is highly comic in a man so lowly and so small. A lady living at Onega told me some days ago that once, when she was staying for a week at Solovetsk with a Russian party, she was compelled to hide her English birth, from fear lest the monks should kill her. A woman's fancy, doubtless; but her words came back upon my mind with a very odd sort of start as the manikin knits his brow and hisses at the English fleet.

"Where is your boat, and what is she called?"

"She lies in the lower port, by the Pilgrim's Wharf; her name is the 'Vera;' as you would say, the 'Faith.'"

"How do you call your captain?" I inquire of a second monk, who is evidently a sailor also; in fact, he is the first mate, serving on board the "Faith."

"Ivan," says the monk; a huge fellow, with hasty eyes and audacious front; "but we mostly call him Vanoushka, because he is little, and because we like him." Vanoushka is one of the affectionate forms of Ivan: Little Ivan, Little John. The skipper, then, is properly Father John.

As for the next ten days and nights we are to keep company, it may be best for me to say at once what I came to know of the queer little skipper in the long gown and with the woman's curls.

Father John is an infant of the soil. Born in a Lapland village, he had before him from his cradle the hard and hopeless life of a woodman and cod-fisher – the two trades carried on by all poor people in these countries, where the modes of life are fixed by the climate and the soil. In the summer he would cut logs and grass; in the winter he would hunt the sea in search of seal and cod. But the lad was smart and lively. He wished to see the world, and hoped in some future time to sail a boat of his own. In order to rise, he must learn; in order to become a skipper, he must study the art of guiding ships at sea. Some thirty miles from the hamlet where he lived stood Kem, an ancient town established on the Lapland coast by colonists from Novgorod the Great, in which town there was a school of navigation; rude and simple as became so poor a place, but better than none at all; and to this provincial school Father John contrived to go. That movement was his first great step in life.

From Kem you can see a group of high and wooded islands towards the rising sun, the shores of which shine with a peculiar light in the early dawn. They seem to call you, as it were, by a spell, into some paradise of the north. Every view is green, and every height is crowned by a church with a golden cross. These islands are the Solovetsk group; and once, at least, the lad went over from Kem in a boat to pray in that holy place. The lights, the music, and the ample cheer appealed to his fancy and his stomach; leaving on his mind an impression of peace and fullness never to be effaced.

He got his pass as a seaman, came over to Archangel, fell into loose ways, and meeting with some German sailors from the Baltic, listened to their lusty songs and merry tales, until he felt a desire to leave his own country and go with them on a voyage. Now sailors are scarce in the Russian ports; the Emperor Nicolas was in those days drafting his seamen into the Black Sea fleets; and for a man to quit Russia without a pass from the police was a great offense. Such a pass the lad felt sure he could never get; and when the German vessel was about to sail he crept on board her in the night, and got away to sea without being found out by the port police.

The vessel in which he escaped from his country was the "Hero," of Passenburg, in Hanover, plying as a rule between German and Danish ports, but sometimes running over to the Tyne and the Thames. Entered on the ship's books in a foreign name, Father John adopted the tastes of his new comrades; learned to eat English beef, to drink German beer, and to carry himself like a man of the world. But the teaching of his father and his pope was not lost upon him, even in the slums of Wapping and on the quays of Rotterdam. He began to pine for religion, as a Switzer pines for his Alp and an Egyptian for his Nile. What could he do? The thought of going home to Kem was a fearful dream. The lash, the jail, the mine awaited him – he thought – in his native land.

Cut off from access to a priest of his own religion, he talked to his fellows before the mast about their faith. Some laughed at him; some cursed him; but one old sailor took him to the house of a

Catholic priest. For four or five weeks Father John received a lesson every day in the creed of Rome; but his mind misgave him as to what he heard; and when his vessel left the port he was still without a church. In the Levant, he met with creeds of all nations – Greek, Italian, Lutheran, Armenian – but he could not choose between them, and his mind was troubled with continual longings for a better life.

Then he was wrecked in the Gulf of Venice, and having nearly lost his life, he grew more and more uneasy about his soul. A few months later he was wrecked on the coast of Norway; and for the second time in one year he found himself at the gates of death. He could not live without religion; and the only religion to whisper peace to his soul was that of his early and better days. But then the service of his country is one of strict observance, and a man who can not go to church can not exercise his faith. How was he to seek for God in a foreign port?

A chance of coming back to Russia threw itself in his path. The ship in which he served – a German ship – was chartered by an English firm for Archangel; and as Father John was the only Russ on board, the skipper saw that his man would be useful in such a voyage. But the news was to John a fearful joy. He longed to see his country once more, to kneel at his native shrines, to give his mother some money he had saved; but he had now been twelve years absent without leave, and he knew that for such an offense he could be sent to Siberia, as he phrased it, "like a slave." His fear overcame his love, and he answered the skipper that he would not go, and must quit the ship.

But the skipper understood his trade. Owing John some sixteen pounds for pay, he told him that he had no money where he lay, and could not settle accounts until they arrived in Archangel, where he would receive his freight. "Money," says the Russ proverb, "likes to be counted," and when Father John thrust his hands into empty pockets, he began to think, after all, it might be better to go home, to get his wages, and see what would be done.

With a shaven chin and foreign name, he might have kept his secret and got away from Archangel undiscovered by the port police, had he not yielded the night before he should have sailed, and gone with some Germans of the crew to a drinking-den. Twelve years of abstinence from vodka had caused him to forget the power of that evil spirit; he drank too much, he lost his senses; and when he woke next day he found that his mates had left him, that his ship had sailed. What could he do? If he spoke to the German consul, he would be treated as a deserter from his post. If he went to the Russian police, he fancied they would knout him to death. Not knowing what to say or how to act, he was mooning in the port, when he met an old schoolfellow from Kem, one Jacob Kollownoff (whom I afterwards came to know). Like most of the hardy men of Kem, Jacob was prospering in the world; he was a skipper, with a boat of his own, in which he made distant and daring voyages. At the moment when he met Father John he was preparing for a run to Spitzbergen in search of cod, to be salted at sea, and carried to the markets of Cronstadt. Jacob saw no harm in a sailor drinking a glass too much, and knowing that John was a good hand, he gave him a place in his boat and took him out on his voyage. The cod was caught, and Cronstadt reached; but the return was luckless; and John was cast away for a third time in his life. A wrecked and broken man, he now made up his mind to quit the sea, and even to take his chance of what his people might do with him at home.

Returning to Kem with the skipper, he was seized by the police on the ground of his papers being out of order, and cast into the common jail of the town, where he lay for twelve months untried. The life in jail was not harder than his life on deck; for the Government paid him, as a prisoner, six kopecks a day; enough to supply his wants. He was never brought before a court. Once, if not more than once, the elder hinted that a little money would make things straight, and he might go his way. The sum suggested as enough for the purpose was seventy-five rubles – nearly ten pounds in English coin. "Tell him," said John to his brother, who brought this message to the jail, "he shall not get from me so much as one kopeck."

A week later he was sent in a boat from Kem to Archangel, under sentence, he was told, of two years' hard labor in the fort; but either the elder talked too big, or his message was misread; for on going up to the police-office in that city, the prisoner was examined and discharged.

A dream of the summer isles and golden pinnacles came back to him; he had lived his worldly life, and longed for rest. Who can wonder that he wished to become a monk of Solovetsk!

To the convent his skill in seamanship was of instant use. A steamer had just been bought in Glasgow for the carriage of pilgrims to and fro; and on her arrival in Archangel, Feofan, Archimandrite of Solovetsk, discharged her Scottish crew and manned her with his monks. At first these holy men felt strange on deck; they crossed themselves; they sang a hymn; and as the pistons would not move, they begged the Scottish engineer to return; since the machine – being made by heretics – had not grace enough to obey the voice of a holy man. They made two or three midsummer trips across the gulf, getting hints from the native skippers, and gradually warming to their work. A priest was appointed captain, and monks were sent into the kitchen and the engine-room. All went well for a time; Savatie and Zosima – the local saints of Solovetsk – taking care of their followers in the fashion of St. Nicolas and St. George.

Yet Father John was a real God's gift to the convent, for the voyage is not often to be described as a summer trip; and even so good a person as an Archimandrite likes to know, when he goes down into the Frozen Sea, that his saints are acting through a man who has sailed in the roughest waters of the world.

CHAPTER VIII.
THE VLADIKA

"You have a letter of introduction to the Archimandrite of Solovetsk?" asks Father John, as we are shaking hands under the pilgrim's lamp. "No! Then you must get one."

"Why? Are you so formal when a pilgrim comes to the holy shrine?"

"You are not quite a pilgrim. You will need a room in the guest-house for yourself. You may wish to have horses, boats, and people to go about. You will want to see the sacristy, the jewels, and the books. You may like to eat at the Archimandrite's board."

"But how are these things to be done?"

"You know the Most Sacred Vladika of Archangel, perhaps?"

"Well, yes, a little. One of the Vladika's closest friends has been talking to me of that sacred personage, and has promised to present me this very day."

"Get from him a line to the Archimandrite. That will make all things smooth," says Father John.

"Are they great friends?"

"Ha! who can tell? You see, the Most Sacred Vladika used to be master of every one in the Holy Isles; and now … but then the Vladika of Archangel and the Archimandrite of Solovetsk are holy men, not likely to fall out. You'll get a line?"

"Yes, if he will give me one; good-bye."

"Count on a week for the voyage, and bring white bread," adds the dwarf. "Prosteté – Pardon me."

Of course, the Vladika (bishop or archbishop) is a monk; for every high-priest in the Orthodox Church, whether his rank be that of vicar, archimandrite, bishop, or metropolite, must wear the hood, and must have taken vows. The rule that a bishop must be "the husband of one wife," is set aside so far as regards the clergy of higher grades. A parish priest is a married man; must, in fact, be a married man; and no young deacon can obtain a church until he has first obtained a bride. The social offices of the Church are done by these family men; baptism, purifying, marriage, confession, burial; yet the higher seats in the hierarchy are all reserved (as yet) for celibates who are under vows.

The Holy Governing Synod – highest court of the Orthodox Church – consists of monks, with one lay member to assist them by his knowledge of the world. No married priest has ever had a seat on that governing board. The metropolites are monks; and not only monks, but actual rulers of monastic houses, Isidore, metropolite of Novgorod, is archimandrite of the great Convent of St. George. Arseny, metropolite of Kief, is archimandrite of the great Convent of Pechersk. Innocent, metropolite of Moscow, is archimandrite of the great Convent of Troitsa. All the vicars of these high-priests are monks. The case of Archangel and Solovetsk is, therefore, the exception to a general rule. St. George, Pechersk, and Troitsa, are governed by the nearest prince of the Church; and in former times this was also the case with Solovetsk; but Peter the Great, in one of his fits of reverence, broke this old connection of the convent and the see of Archangel; endowing the Archimandrite of Solovetsk with a separate standing and an independent power. Some people think the Archbishop of Archangel nurses a grudge against the civil power for this infringement of his ancient rights; and this idea was probably present in the mind of Father John.

Acting on Father John's advice, I put on my clothes of state – a plain dress suit; the only attire in which you can wait on a man of rank – and drive to my friend's abode, and finding him ready to go with me, gallop through a gust of freezing rain to the palace-door.

The archbishop is at home, though it is not yet twelve o'clock. It is said of him that he seldom goes abroad; affecting the airs of an exile and a martyr; but doing – in a sad, submissive way, as if the weapon were unworthy of its work – a great deal of good; watching over his church, admonishing his clergy, both white and black, and thinking, like a father, for the poor.

Leaving our wraps in an outer hall (the proper etiquette of guests), we send in our cards by an usher, and are received at once.

The Most Sacred Vladika, pale as a ghost, dressed in a black gown, on which hangs a sapphire cross, and wearing his hood of serge, rises to greet us; and coming forward with a sweet and vanishing smile, first blesses his penitent, and then shakes hands with his English guest.

This Most Sacred Father Nathaniel is now an aged, shadowy man, with long white beard, and a failing light in his meek blue eyes. But in his prime he is said to have been handsome in person, eager in gait, caressing in style. In his youth he was a village pastor – one of the White Clergy – married, and a family man; but his wife died early; and as a pastor in his church can not marry a second time, he followed a fashion long ago set by his aspiring brethren – he took the vows of chastity, became a monk, and began to rise. His fine face, his courtly wit, his graceful bearing, brought him hosts of fair penitents, and these fair penitents made for him high friends at court. He was appointed Vicar of St. Petersburg – a post not higher in actual rank than that of a Dean of St. Paul's, but one which a popular and ambitious man prefers to most of the Russian sees. Father Nathaniel was an idol of the city. Fine ladies sought his advice, and women of all classes came to confess to him their sins. Princes fell beneath his sway; princesses adored him; and no rank in the Church, however high, appeared to stand beyond his reach. But these court triumphs were his ruin. He was such a favorite with ladies that his brethren began to smile with malicious leer when his back was turned, and drop their poisonous hints about the ways in which he walked. They said he was too fond of power; they said he spent more time with his female penitents than became a monk. It is the misery of these vicars and bishops that they can not be married men, with wives of their own to turn the edges of such shafts. Men's tongues kept wagging against Nathaniel's fame; and even those who knew him to be earnest in his faith began to think it might be well for the Church if this fascinating father could be honorably sent to some distant see.

Whither was he to go?

While a place was being sought for him, he happened to give deep offense in high quarters; and as Father Alexander, Vladika of Archangel (hero of Solovetsk), was eager to go south and be near the court, Father Nathaniel was promoted to that hero's place.

He left St. Petersburg amidst the tears of fair women, who could not protect their idol against the malice of envious monks. Taking his promotion meekly as became his robe, he sighed to think that his day was come, and in the future he would count in his church as a fallen man. Arriving in Archangel, he shut himself up in his palace near the monastery of St. Michael; a house which he found too big for his simple wants. Soon after his coming he abandoned this palace for a smaller house; giving up his more princely pile to the monks of St. Michael for a public school.

A spirit of sacrifice is the pre-eminent virtue of the Russian Church.

The shadowy old man compels me to sit on the sofa by his side; talks of my voyage round the North Cape; shows me a copy in Russian of my book on the Holy Land; inquires whether I know the Pastor Xatli in London. Fancying that he means the Russian pope in Welbeck Street, I answer yes; on which we get into much confusion of tongues; until it flashes upon me that he is talking of Mr. Hatherley of Wolverhampton, the gentleman who has gone over from the English to the Russian rite, and is said to have carried some twenty souls of the Black Country with him. What little there is to tell of this Oriental Church in our Black Country is told; and in return for my scanty supply of facts, the Vladika is good enough to show me the pictures hanging on his wall. These pictures are of two classes, holy and loyal; first the sacred images – those heads of our Saviour and of the Virgin Mother which hang in the corners of every Russian room, the tutelary presence, to be adored with reverence at the dawn of day and the hour of rest; then the loyal and local pictures – portraits of the reigning house, and of former archbishops – which you would expect to find in such a house; a first

Alexander, with flat and dreamy face; a Nicolas, with stiff and haughty figure; a second Alexander, hung in the place of honor, and wearing a pensive and benignant smile. More to my mind, as less familiar than these great ones of the hour, is the fading image of a lady, thoroughly Russ in garb and aspect – Marfa, boyarine of Novgorod and colonizer of the North.

Nathaniel marks with kindling eyes my interest in this grand old creature – builder alike of convents and of towns – who sent out from Novgorod two of her sons, and hundreds of her people, to the bleak north country, then inhabited by pagan Lapps and Karels, worshippers of the thunder-cloud, and children of the Golden Hag. Her story is the epic of these northern shores.

While Red and White Rose were wasting our English counties with sword and fire, this energetic princess sent her sons and her people down the Volkhoff, into Lake Ladoga, whence they crept up the Swir into Lake Onega; from the banks of which lake they marched upward, through the forests of birch and pine, into the frozen north. She sent them to explore the woods, to lay down rivers and lakes, to tell the natives of a living God. They came to Holmogory, on the Dvina, then a poor fishing-village occupied by Karels, a tribe not higher in type than the Samoyeds of the present day. They founded Suma, Soroka, and Kem. They took possession of the Frozen Sea and its clustering isles. In dropping down a main arm of the river, Marfa's two sons were pitched from their boat and drowned. Their bodies being washed on shore and buried in the sand, she caused a cloister to be raised on the spot, which she called the Monastery of St. Nicolas, after the patron of drowning men.

That cloister of St. Nicolas was the point first made by Challoner when he entered the Dvina from the Frozen Sea.

"You are going over to Solovetsk?" says the Vladika, coming back to his sofa. "We have no authority in the isles, although they lie within our See. It pleased the Emperor Peter, on his return from a stormy voyage, to raise the Convent of Savatie to independent rank, to give it the title of Lavra – making it the equal, in our ecclesiastical system, with Troitsa, Pechersk, and St. George. From that day Solovetsk became a separate province of the Church, dependent on the Holy Governing Synod and the Tsar. Still I can give you a line to Feofan, the Archimandrite."

Slipping into an inner room for five minutes, he composes a mandate in my favor, in the highest Oriental style.

CHAPTER IX.
A PILGRIM-BOAT

A lady, who knows the country, puts up in a crate such things as a pilgrim may chance to need in a monastic cell – good tea, calf's tongue, fresh butter, cheese, roast beef, and indispensable white bread. These dainties being piled on a drojki, propped on pillows and covered with quilts – my bedding in the convent and the boat – we rattle away to the Pilgrim's Wharf.

Yes, there it is, an actual wharf – the only wharf in Archangel along which boats can lie, and land their passengers by a common sea-side plank!

Moored to the capstan by a rope, lies the pretty craft; a gilt cross on her foremast, a saintly pennant on her main. Four large gold letters tell her name:

ВѢРА

(pronounced Verra), and meaning Faith. Father John is standing on his bridge, giving orders in a low voice to his officers and crew, many of whom are monks – mate, steward, cook, and engineer – each and all arrayed in the cowl and frock.

On the Pilgrim's Wharf, which lies in a yard cut off by gates from the street, and paved with chips and shavings to form a dry approach, stands a new pile of monastic buildings; chapels, cells, store-rooms, offices, stalls, dormitories; in fact, a new Pilgrim's Court. A steamer can not reach the port in the upper town, where the original Pilgrim's Court was built; and the fathers, keeping pace with the times, have let their ancient lodgings in the town, and built a new house lower down the stream.

Crowds of men and women – pilgrims, tramps, and soldiers – strew the wharf with a litter of baskets, tea-pots, beds, dried-fish, felt boots, old rugs and furs, salt-girkins, black bread; through which the monks step softly and sadly; helping a child to trot on board, getting a free pass for a beggar, buying rye-loaves for a lame wretch, and otherwise aiding the poorest of these poor creatures in their need. For, even though the season is now far spent, nearly two hundred pilgrims are in waiting on the Pilgrim's Wharf; all hoping to get over to the Holy Isles. Most of these men have money to pay their fare; and some among the groups are said to be rich. A dozen of the better sort, natives of Archangel, too busy to pass over the sea in June, when their river was full of ships, are taking advantage of the lull in trade, and of the extra boat. Each man brings with him a basket of bread and fish, a box of tea, a thick quilt, and a pair of felt leggings, to be worn over his boots at night. These local pilgrims carry a staff; but in place of the leathern belt and water-bottle, they carry a teapot and a cup. One man wears a cowl and gown, who is not of the crew; a jolly, riotous monk, going back to his convent as a prisoner. "What has he been doing?" "Women and drink," says Father John. The fares are low: first-class, six rubles (fifteen shillings); second-class, four rubles. Third-class, three rubles. This tariff covers the cost of going out and coming back – a voyage of four hundred miles – with lodgings in the guest-house, and rations at the common tables, during a stay of five or six days. A dozen of these poor pilgrims have no rubles in their purse, and the question rises on the wharf, whether these paupers shall be left behind. Father John and his fellow-skipper have a general rule; they must refuse no man, however poor, who asks them for a passage to Solovetsk in the name of God.

A bell tolls, a plank is drawn, and we are off. As we back from the wharf, getting clear, a hundred heads bow down, a hundred hands sign the cross, and every soul commends itself to God. Every time that, in dropping down the river, we pass a church, the work of bowing and crossing begins afresh. Each head uncovers; each back is bent; each lip is moved by prayer. Some kneel on deck; some kiss the planks. The men look contrite, and the women are sedate. The crews on fishing-craft salute us, oftentimes kneeling and bowing as we glide past, and always crossing themselves with uncovered heads. Some beg that we will pray for them; and the most worldly sailors pause in their work and hope that the Lord will give us a prosperous wind.

A gale is blowing from west and north. In the river it is not much felt, excepting for the chill, which bites into your bone. Father John, with a monk's contempt for caution, gives the Maimax Channel a free berth, and having a boat in hand of very light draught, drops down the ancient arm as a shorter passage into the gulf.

Before we quit the river, our provident worshippers have begun to brew their tea and eat their supper of girkin and black bread.

The distribution on board is simple. Only one passenger has paid the first-class fare. He has the whole state cabin to himself; a room some nine feet square, with bench and mat to sleep on; a cabin in which he might live very well, had it not pleased the monks to stow their winter supply of tallow in the boxes beneath his couch. Two persons have paid the second-class fare – a skipper and his wife, who have been sailing about the world for years, have made their fortunes, and are now going home to Kem. "Ah!" says the fair, fat woman, "you English have a nice country to live in, and you get very good tea; but…" The man is like his wife. "Prefer to live in Kem? Why not? In London you have beef and stout; but you have no summer and no winter; all your seasons are the same; never hot, never cold. If you want to enjoy life, you should drive in a reindeer sledge over a Lapland plain, in thirty degrees of frost."

The rest of our fellow-pilgrims are on deck and in the hold; rich and poor, lame and blind, merchant and beggar, charlatan and saint; a motley group, in which a painter might find models for a Cantwell, a Torquemada, a St. John. You see by their garb, and hear in their speech, that they have come from every province of the Empire; from the Ukraine and from Georgia, from the Crimea and from the Ural heights, from the Gulf of Finland and from the shores of the Yellow Sea. Some of these men have been on foot, trudging through summer sands and winter snows, for more than a year.

The lives of many of my fellow-passengers are like an old wife's tales.

One poor fellow, having no feet, has to be lifted on board the boat. He is clothed in rags; yet this poor pilgrim's face has such a patient look that one can hardly help feeling he has made his peace. He tells me that he lives beyond Viatka, in the province of Perm; that he lost his feet by frost-bite years ago; that he lay sick a long time; that while he was lying in his pain he called on Savatie to help him, promising that saint, on his recovery, to make a pilgrimage to his shrine in the Frozen Sea. By losing his legs he saved his life; and then, in his poverty and rags, he set forth on his journey, crawling on his stumps, around which he has twisted a coarse leather splinth, over fifteen hundred miles of broken road.

Another pilgrim, wearing a felt boot on one leg, a bass shoe on the other, has a most abject look. He is a drunkard, sailing to Solovetsk to redeem a vow. Lying tipsy on the canal bank at Vietegra, he rolled into the water, and narrowly escaped being drowned. As he lay on his face, the foam oozing slowly from his mouth, he called on his saints to save him, promising them to do a good work in return for such help. To keep that vow he is going to the holy shrines.

A woman is carrying her child, a fine little lad of six or seven years, to be offered to the monks and educated for the cowl. She has passed through trouble, having lost her husband, and her fortune, and she is bent on sacrificing the only gift now left to her on earth. To put her son in the monastery of Solovetsk is to secure him, she believes, against all temporal and all spiritual harm. Poor creature! It is sad to think of her lot when the sacrifice is made; and the lonely woman, turning back from the incense and glory of Solovetsk, has to go once more into the world, and without her child.

An aged man, with flowing beard and priestly mien, though he is wrapped in rags, is noticeable in the groups among which he moves. He is a vowed pilgrim; that is to say, a pilgrim for life, as another man would be a monk for life; his whole time being spent in walking from shrine to shrine. He has the highest rank of a pilgrim; for he has been to Nazareth and Bethlehem, as well as to Novgorod and Kief. This is the third time he has come to Solovetsk; and it is his hope, if God should spare him for the work, to make yet another round of the four most potent shrines, and then lay up his dust in these holy isles.

Some of these pilgrims, even those in rags, are bringing gifts of no small value to the convent fund. Each pilgrim drops his offering into the box: some more, some less, according to his means. Many bear gifts from neighbors and friends who can not afford the time for so long and perilous a voyage, but who wish to walk with God, and lay up their portion with His saints.

On reaching the river mouth we find a fleet of fishing-boats in dire distress; and the two ships that we passed a week since, bobbing and reeling on the bar like tipsy men, are completely gone. The "Thera" is a Norwegian clipper, carrying deals; the "Olga" a Prussian bark, carrying oats; they are now aground, and raked by the wash from stem to stern. We pass these hulls in prayer; for the gale blows dead in our teeth; and we are only too well aware that before daylight comes again we shall need to be helped by all the spirits that wait on mortal men.

With hood and gown wrapped up in a storm-cape, made for such nights, Father John is standing on his bridge, directing the course of his boat like an English tar. His monks meet the wind with a psalm, in the singing of which the pilgrims and soldiers join. The passenger comes for a moment from his cabin into the sleet and rain; for the voices of these enthusiasts, pealing to the heavens through rack and roar, are like no sounds he has ever yet heard at sea. Many of the singers lie below in the hold; penned up between sacks of rye and casks of grease; some of them deadly sick, some groaning as though their hearts would break; yet more than half these sufferers follow with lifted eyes and strenuous lungs the swelling of that beautiful monkish chant. It is their even-song, and they could not let the sun go down into the surge until that duty to their Maker was said and sung.

Next day there comes no dawn. A man on the bridge declares that the sun is up; but no one else can see it; for a veil of mist droops everywhere about us, out of which comes nothing but a roar of wind and a flood of rain.

The "Faith" is bound to arrive in the Bay of Solovetsk by twelve o'clock; but early in the day Father John comes to tell me (apart) that he shall not be able to reach his port until five o'clock; and when five is long since past, he returns to tell me, with a patient shrug, that we want more room, and must change our course. The entrance to Solovetsk is through a reef of rocks.

"Must we lie out all night?"

"We must." Two hours are spent in feeling for the shore; Father John having no objection to use his lead. When anchorage is found, we let the chain go, and swinging round, under a lee shore, in eight fathoms of water, find ourselves lying out no more than a mile from land.

Then we drink tea; the pilgrims sing their even-song; and, with a thousand crossings and bendings, we commit our souls to heaven. Lying close in shore, under cover of a ridge of pines, we swing and lurch at our ease; but the storm howls angrily in our wake; and we know that many a poor crew, on their frail northern barks, are struggling all night with the powers of life and death. A Dutch clipper, called the "Ena," runs aground; her crew is saved, and her cargo lost. Two Russian sloops are shattered and riven in our track; one of them parting amidships and going down in a trough of sea with every soul on board.

In the early watch the wind goes down; sunlight streaks the north-eastern sky; and, in the pink dawn, we catch, in our front, a little to the west, a glimpse of the green cupolas and golden crosses of Solovetsk – a joy and wonder to all eyes; not more to pilgrims, who have walked a thousand miles to greet them, than they are to their English guest.

Saluting the holy place with prayer, and steaming by a coast-line broken by rocks and beautified by verdure, we pass, in a flood of soft warm sunshine, up a short inland reach, in which seals are plashing, over which doves are darting, each in their happy sport, and, by eight o'clock of a lovely August morning, swing ourselves round in a secluded bay under the convent walls.

CHAPTER X.
THE HOLY ISLES

Chief in a group of rocks and banks lying off the Karel coast – a group not yet surveyed, and badly laid down in charts – Solovetsk is a small, green island, ten or twelve miles long, by eight or nine miles wide. The waters raging round her in this stormy sea have torn a way into the mass of stones and peat; forming many little coves and creeks; and near the middle, where the convent stands, these waters have almost met. Hardly a mile of land divides the eastern bay from the western bay.

Solovetsk stands a little farther north than Vatna Jökull; the sixty-fifth degree of latitude passing close to the monastic pile. The rocks and islets lying round her are numerous and lovely, for the sea runs in and out among them, crisp with motion and light with foam; and their shores are everywhere green with mosses and fringed with forests of birch and pine. The lines are not tame, as on the Karel and Lapland coasts, for the ground swells upward into bluffs and downs, and one at least of these ridges may be called a hill. Each height is crowned by a white church, a green cupola, and a golden cross. On the down which may be called a hill stands a larger church, the belfry of which contains a light. Land, sea, and sky are all in keeping; each a wonder and a beauty in the eyes of pilgrims of the stormy night.

Running alongside the wharf, on to which we step as easily as on to Dover Pier, we notice that beyond this beauty of nature, which man has done so much to point and gild, there is a bright and even a busy look about the commonest things. Groups of strange men dot the quays; Lopars, Karels, what not; but we soon perceive that Solovetsk is a civilized no less than an enchanted isle. The quay is spacious, the port is sweet and fresh. On our right lies that dock of which Father John was speaking with such pride. The "Hope," a more commodious pilgrim-boat than the "Faith," is lying on her stays. On our left stands a guest-house, looking so airy, light, and clean, that no hostelry on Italian lake could wear a more cheerful and inviting face. We notice a lift and crane, as things not seen in the trading ports; and one has hardly time to mark these signs of science ere noticing an iron tramway, running from the wharf to a great magazine of stores and goods.

A line of wall, with gates and towers, extends along the upper quay; and high above this line of wall, spring convent, palace, dome, and cross. A stair leads up from the water to the Sacred Gates; and near the pathway from this stair we see two votive chapels; marking the spots on which the Imperial pilgrims, Peter the Great and Alexander the Beneficent, landed from their boats.

Every thing looks solid, many things look old. Not to speak of the fortress walls and turrets, built of vast boulders torn up from the sea-bed in the days of our own Queen Bess, the groups of palace, church, and belfry rising within those walls are of older date than any other work of man in this far-away corner of the globe. One cathedral – that of the Transfiguration – is older than the fortress walls. A second cathedral – that of the Ascension – dates from the time when St. Philip was prior of Solovetsk. Besides having this air of antiquity, the place is alive with color, and instinct with a sense of art. The votive chapels which peep out here and there from among the trees are so many pictures; and these red crosses by the water-margin have been so arranged as to add a motive and a moral to the scene. Some broad but not unsightly frescoes brighten the main front of the old cathedral, and similar pictures light the spandrel of the Sacred Gates; while turrets and cupolas of church and chapel are everywhere gay with green and gold.

One dome, much noticed, and of rarest value in a pilgrim's eye, is painted azure, fretted with golden stars. That dome is the crown of a new cathedral built in commemoration of 1854 – that year of wonders – when an English fleet was vanquished by the Mother of God. Within, the convent looks more durable and splendid than without. Wall, rampart, guest-house, prison, tower, and church, are all of brick and stone. Every lobby is painted; often in a rude and early style; but these rough passages from Holy Writ have a sense and keeping higher than the morals conveyed by a coat of lime. The screens and columns in the churches glow with a nobler art; though here, again, an eye accustomed to admire no other than the highest of Italian work will be only too ready to slight and scorn. The drawing is often weak, the pigment raw, the metal tawdry; yet these great breadths of gold and color impress both eye and brain, especially when the lamps are lit, the psalm is raised, the incense burning, and the monks, attired in their long black hoods and robes, are ranged in front of the royal gates.

This pretty white house under the convent wall, near the Sacred Gates, was built in witness of a miracle, and is known as the Miracle Church. A pilgrim, eating a bit of white bread, which a pope had given him, let a crumb of it fall to the ground, when a strange dog tried to snatch it up. The crumb seemed to rise into the dog's mouth and then slip away from him, as though it were alive. That dog was the devil. Many persons saw this victory of the holy bread, and the monks of Solovetsk built a shrine on the spot to keep the memory of that miracle alive; and here it stands on the bay, between the chapels erected on the spots where Peter the Great and Alexander the Second landed from their ships.

When we come to drive, and sail, and walk into the recesses of this group of isles, we find them not less lovely than the first sweet promise of the bay in which we land. Forests surround, and lakelets pursue us, at every step. The wood is birch and pine; birch of the sort called silver, pine of the alpine stock. The trees are big enough for beauty, and the undergrowths are red with berries and bright with Arctic flowers. Here and there we come upon a clearing, with a dip into some green valley, in the bed of which slumbers a lovely lake. A scent of hay is in the air, and a perfume new to my nostrils, which my companions tell me breathes from the cotton-grass growing on the margin of every pool. At every turn of the road we find a cross, well shaped and carved, and stained dark red; while the end of every forest lane is closed by a painted chapel, a lonely father's cell. A deep, soft silence reigns through earth and sky.

But the beauty of beauties lies in the lakes. More than a hundred of these lovely sheets of water nestle in the depths of pine-wood and birch-wood. Most famous of all these sheets is the Holy Lake, lying close behind the convent wall; most beautiful of all, to my poor taste, is the White Lake, on the road to St. Savatie's Cell and Striking Hill.

Holy Lake, a sheet of black water, deep and fresh, though it is not a hundred yards from the sea, has a function in the pilgrim's course. Arriving at Solovetsk, the bands of pilgrims march to this lake and strip to bathe. The waters are holy, and refresh the spirit while they purify the flesh. Without a word, the pilgrims enter a shed, throw off their rags, and leap into the flood; except some six or seven city-folk, who shiver in their shoes at the thought of that wholesome plunge. Their bath being finished, the pilgrims go to dinner and to prayers.

White Lake lies seven or eight miles from the convent, sunk in a green hollow, with wooded banks, and a number of islets, stopping the lovely view with a yet more lovely pause. If St. Savatie had been an artist, one need not have wondered at his wandering into such a spot.

Yet the chief islet in this paradise of the Frozen Sea has one defect. When looking down from the belfry of Striking Hill on the intricate maze of sea and land, of lake and ridge, of copse and brake, of lawn and dell; each tender breadth of bright green grass, each sombre belt of dark-green pine, being marked by a white memorial church; you gaze and wonder, conscious of some hunger of the sense; it may be of the eye, it may be of the ear; your heart declaring all the while that, wealthy as the landscape seems, it lacks some last poetic charm. It is the want of animal life. No flock is in the meadow, and no herd is on the slope. No bark of dog comes on the air; no low of kine is on the lake. Neither cow nor calf, neither sheep nor lamb, neither goat nor kid, is seen in all the length of country from Striking Hill to the convent gate. Man is here alone, and feels that he is alone.

This defect in the landscape is radical; not to be denied, and never to be cured. Not that cattle would not graze on these slopes and thrive in these woods. Three miles in front of Solovetsk stands the isle called Zaet, on which sheep and cattle browse; and five or six miles in the rear lies Moksalma, a large grassy isle, on which the poultry cackle, the horses feed, and the cows give milk. These animals would thrive on the holy isle, if they were not driven away by monastic rule; but Solovetsk has been sworn of the celibate order; and love is banished from the saintly soil. No mother is here permitted to fondle and protect her young; a great defect in landscapes otherwise lovely to eye and heart – a denial of nature in her tenderest forms.

The law is uniform, and kept with a rigor to which the imperial power itself must bend. No creature of the female sex may dwell on the isle. The peasants from the Karel coast are said to be so strongly impressed with the sin of breaking this rule, that they would rather leap into the sea than bring over a female cat. A woman may come in the pilgrim season to say her prayers, but that duty done she must go her way. Summer is a time of license – a sort of carnival season, during which the letter of a golden rule is suspended for the good of souls. A woman may lodge in the guest-house, feed in the refectory; but she must quit the wards before nine at night. Some of the more holy chapels she may not enter: and her day of privilege is always short. A male pilgrim can reside at Solovetsk for a year; a female must be gone with the boats that bring her to the shrine. By an act of imperial grace, the commander of his majesty's forces in the island – an army some sixty strong – is allowed to have his wife and children with him during the pilgrim's year; that is to say, from June to August; but when the last boat returns to Archangel with the men of prayer, the lady and her little folk must leave their home in this holy place. A reign of piety and order is supposed to come with the early snows, and it is a question whether the empress herself would be allowed to set her foot on the island in that better time.

The rule is easily enforced in the bay of Solovetsk, under the convent walls; not so easily enforced at Zaet, Moksalma, and the still more distant isles, where tiny little convents have been built on spots inhabited by famous saints. In these more distant settlements it is hard to protect the holy men from female intrusion; for the Karel girls are fond of mischief, and they paddle about these isles in their light summer craft by day and night. The aged fathers only are allowed to live in such perilous spots.

CHAPTER XI.
THE LOCAL SAINTS

This exclusion of women from the Holy Isle was the doing of Savatie, first of the Local Saints.

Savatie, the original anchoret of Solovetsk, was one day praying near a lake, when he heard a cry, as of a woman in pain. His comrade said it must have been a dream: for no woman was living nearer to their "desert" than the Karel coast. The saint went forth again to pray; but once again his devotions were disturbed by cries and sobs. Going round by the banks of the lake to see, he found a young woman lying on the ground, with her flesh all bruised, her back all bleeding from recent blows. She was a fisherman's wife. On being asked who had done her this harm, she said that two young men, with bright faces and dressed in white raiment, came to her hut while her husband was away, and telling her she must go after him, as the land belonged to God, and no woman must sleep on it a single night, they threw her on the ground, struck her with rods, and made her cry with pain.

When she could walk, the poor creature got into her boat, and St. Savatie saw her no more. The fisherman came to fish, but his wife remained at home; and in this way woman was driven by angels from the Holy Isle. No monk, no layman, ever doubts this story. How can he? Here, to this day, stands the log house in which Savatie dwelt, and twenty paces from it lies the mossy bank on which he knelt. Across the water there, beside yon clump of pines, rose the fisherman's shed. The sharp ascent on which the church and lighthouse glisten, is still called Striking Hill.

This St. Savatie was a monk from Novgorod living at the old convent of Belozersk, in which he served the office of tonsurer – shaver of heads; but longing for a life of greater solitude than his convent gave him, he persuaded one of his brethren, named Valaam, to go up with him into the deserts near the Polar Sea. Boyars from his country-side were then going up into the north; and why should holy men not bear as much for Christ as boyars and traders bore for pelf? On praying all night in their chapels, these boyars and traders ran to their archbishop with the cry: "Oh, give us leave, Vladika, to go forth, man and horse, and win new lands for St. Sophia." Settling in Kem, in Suma, in Soroka, and at other points, these men were adding a region larger than the mother-country to the territories ruled by Novgorod the Great. The story of these boyars stirred up Savatie to follow in their wake, and labor in the desolate land which they were opening up.

Toiling through the virgin woods and sandy plains, Savatie and his companion Valaam arrived on the Vieg (in 1429), and found a pious monk, named German, who had also come from the south country. Looking towards the east, these monks perceived, in the watery waste, a group of isles; and trimming a light skiff, Savatie and German crossed the sea. Landing on the largest isle, they made a "desert" on the shore of a lakelet, lying at the foot of a hill on which birch and pine trees grew to the top. Their lake was sheltered, the knoll was high; and from the summit they could see the sprinkle of isles and their embracing waves, as far as Orloff Cape to the south, the downs of Kem on the west.

Savatie brought with him a picture of the Virgin, not then known to possess miraculous virtues, which he hung up in a chapel built of logs. Near to this chapel he made for himself and his companion a hut of reeds and sticks, in which they lived in peace and prayer until the rigor of the climate wore them out. After six years spent in solitude, German sailed back to the Vieg; and Savatie, finding himself alone on the rock, in that desert from which he had banished woman and love, became afraid of dying without a priest being at hand to shrive and put him beneath the grass. Getting into his skiff, he also crossed to Soroka, where he obtained from Father Nathaniel, a prior who chanced to visit that town, the bread and cup; and then, his work on earth being done, he passed away to his eternal rest.

Laying him in the sands at Soroka, Nathaniel raised a chapel of pine logs, dedicated to the Holy Trinity, above his grave; and there Savatie would have lain forever, his name unknown, his saintly rank unrecognized on earth, had he not fallen in the path of a man of stronger and more enduring spirit.

One of the bold adventurers from Novgorod, named Gabriel, settling with his wife Barbara in the new village of Tolvui, on the banks of Lake Onega, had a son, whom he called Zosima, and devoted to God. Zosima, a monk while he was yet a child, took his vows in the monastery of Palaostrofsk, near his father's home; and on reaching the age when he could act for himself, he divided his inheritance among his kin, and taking up his pilgrim's staff departed for the north. At Suma he fell in with German, who told him of the life he had lived six years in his desert on the lonely rock. Zosima, taken by this tale, persuaded German to show him the spot where he and Savatie had dwelt so long. They crossed the sea. A lucky breeze bore them past Zaet, into a small and quiet bay; and when they leaped on shore – then strewn with boulders, and green with forest trees – they found themselves not only on the salt sea, but close to a deep and lustrous lake, the waters of which were sweet to the taste, and swarming with fish, the necessary food of monks.

Kneeling on the sand in prayer, Zosima was nerved by a miraculous vision to found a religious colony in that lonely island, even as Marfa's people were founding secular colonies at Suma, Soroka, and Kem. He saw, as in a dream, a bright and comely monastic pile, with swelling domes and lofty turrets, standing on the brink of that lovely sheet of water – henceforth to be known as the Holy Lake. Starting from his knees, he told his companion, German, of the vision he had seen; described the walls, the Sacred Gates, the clusters of spires and domes; in a word, the convent in the splendor of its present form. They cut down a pine, and framed it into a cross, which they planted in the ground; in token that this island in the frozen deep belonged to God and to His saints. This act of consecrating the isle took place (in 1436) a year after St. Savatie died.

The monks erected cabins near this cross; in which cabins they dwelt, about a mile apart, so as not to crowd upon each other in their desert home. The sites are marked by chapels erected to perpetuate their fame.

The tale of these young hermits living in their desert on the Frozen Sea being noised abroad in cloisters, monks from all sides of the north country came to join them; bringing strong thews and eager souls to aid in their task of raising up in that wild region, and among those savage tribes, a temple of the living God. In time a church grew round and above the original cross; and as none of the hermits were in holy orders, they sent a messenger to Yon, then archbishop of Novgorod, asking him for a blessing on their work, and praying him to send them a prior who could celebrate mass. Yon gave them his benediction and his servant Pavel. Pavel travelled into the north, and consecrated their humble church; but the climate was too hard for him to bear. A second prior came out in Feodosie; a third prior in Yon; both of whom staid some time in the Frozen Sea, and only went back to Novgorod when they were broken in health and advanced in years.

When Yon, the third prior, left them, the fathers held a meeting to consider their future course. Sixteen years had now passed by since Zosima and German crossed the sea from Suma; ten or twelve years since Pavel consecrated their humble church. In less than a dozen years three priors had come and gone; and every one saw that monks who had grown old in the Volkhoff district could not live in the Frozen Sea. The brethren asked their archbishop to give them a prior from their own more hardy ranks; and all these brethren joined in the prayer that Zosima, leader of the colony from first to last, would take this office of prior upon himself. His poor opinion of himself gave place to a sense of the public good.

Marching on foot to Novgorod, a journey of more than a thousand miles, through a country without a road, Zosima went up to the great city, where he was received by the Vladika, and was ordained a priest. From the mayor and chief boyars he obtained a more definite cession of the isles than Prior Yon had been able to secure; and thus he came back to his convent as pope and prior, with the fame of a holy man, to whom nothing might be denied. Getting leave to remove the bones of Savatie from Soroka to Solovetsk, he took up his body from the earth, and finding it pure and fresh, he laid the incorruptible relics in the crypt of his infant church.

More and more monks arrived in the lonely isles; and pilgrims from far and near began to cross the sea; for the tomb of Savatie was said to work miraculous cures. But as the monastery grew in fame and wealth, the troubles of the world came down upon the prior and his monks. The men of Kem began to see that this bank in the Frozen Sea was a valuable prize; and the lords of Anzersk and Moksalma quarrelled with the monks; disputing their right over the foreshores, and pressing them with claims about the waifs and strays. At length, in his green old age, Zosima girded up his loins, and taking his pastoral staff in hand, set out for Novgorod, in the hope of seeing Marfa in person, and of settling, once and forever, the question of his claim to these rocks by asking for the lordship of Kem itself to be vested in the prior of Solovetsk!

On a column of the great cathedral of St. Sophia, in the Kremlin of Novgorod, a series of frescoes tells the story of this visit of St. Zosima to the parent state. One picture takes the eye with a singular and abiding force – a banquet in a noble hall, in which the table is surrounded by headless guests.

Passing through the city from house to house, Zosima was received in nearly all with honor, as became his years and fame; but not in all. The boyars of Kem had friends in the city; and the Marfa's ear had been filled with tales against his monkish guile and monkish greed. From her door he was driven with scorn; and her house was that in which he was most desirous of being received in peace. Knowing that he could do nothing without her aid, Zosima set himself, by patient waiting on events, to overcome her fury against the cause which he was there to plead. At length, her feeling being subdued, she granted him a new charter (dated 1470, and still preserved at Solovetsk), confirming his right over all the lands, lakes, forests and fore-shores of the Holy Isles, together with the lordship of Kem, made over, then and for all coming time, to the service of God.

Before Zosima left the great city, Marfa invited him to her table, where he was to take his leave, not only of herself, but of the chief boyars. As the prior sat at meat, the company noticed that his face was sad, that his eyes were fixed on space, that his soul seemed moved by some unseen cause. "What is the matter?" cried the guests. He would not speak; and when they pressed around him closely, they perceived that burning drops were rolling down his cheeks. More eagerly than ever, they demanded to know what he saw in his fixed and terrible stare. "I see," said the monk, "six boyars at a feast, all seated at a table without their heads!"

That dinner-party is the subject painted on the column in St. Sophia; and the legend says that every man who sat with him that day at Marfa's table had his head sliced off by Ivan the Third, when the proud and ancient republic fell before the destroyer of the Golden Horde.

Strengthened by his new titles, Zosima came back to Solovetsk a prince; and the pile which he governed took the style, which it has ever since borne, of

The Convent that Endureth Forever

Zosima ruled his convent as prior for twenty-six years; and after a hermitage of forty-two years on his lowly rock he passed away into his rest.

On his dying couch he told his disciples that he was about to quit them in the flesh, but only in the flesh. He promised to be with them in the spirit; watching in the same cells, and kneeling at the same graves. He bade them thank God daily for the promise that their convent should endure forever; safe as a rock, and sacred as a shrine – even though it stood in the centre of a raging sea – in the reach of pitiless foes. And then he passed away – the second of these local saints – leaving, as his legacy to mankind, the temporal and spiritual germs of this great sanctuary in the Frozen Sea.

About that time the third monk also died – German, the companion of Savatie, in his cabin near Striking Hill; afterwards of Zosima, in his hut by the Holy Lake. He died at Novgorod, to which city he had again returned from the north. His bones were begged from the monks in whose grounds they lay, and being carried to Solovetsk, were laid in a shrine near the graves of his ancient and more famous friends.

Such was the origin of the convent over which the Archimandrite Feofan now rules and reigns.

CHAPTER XII.
A MONASTIC HOUSEHOLD

My letter from his Sanctity of Archangel having been sent in to Feofan, Archimandrite of Solovetsk, an invitation to the palace arrives in due form by the mouth of Father Hilarion; who may be described to the lay world as the Archimandrite's minister for secular affairs. Father Hilarion is attended by Father John, who seems to have taken upon himself the office of my companion-in-chief. Attiring myself in befitting robes, we pass through the Sacred Gates, and after pausing for a moment to glance at the models of Peter's yacht and frigate, there laid up, and to notice some ancient frescoes which line the passage, we mount a flight of steps, and find ourselves standing at the Archimandrite's door.

The chief of this monastery is a great man; one of the greatest men in the Russian Church; higher, as some folks say, than many a man who calls himself bishop, and even metropolite. Since the days of Peter the Great, the monastery of Solovetsk has been an independent spiritual power; owning no master in the Church, and answering to no authority save that of the Holy Governing Synod.

Like an archbishop, the Archimandrite of Solovetsk has the right to bless his congregation by waving three tapers in his right hand over two tapers in his left. He lives in a palace; he receives four thousand rubles a year in money; and the cost of his house, his table, his vestments, and his boats, comes out of the monastic fund. He has a garden, a vineyard, and a country-house; and his choice of a cell in the sunniest nooks of these sacred isles. His personal rank is that of a prince, with a dignity which no secular rank can give; since he reigns alike over the bodies and the souls of men.

Dressed in his cowl and frock, on which hangs a splendid sapphire cross, Feofan, a small, slight man – with the ascetic face, the womanlike curls, and vanishing figure, which you note in nearly all these celibate priests – advances to meet us near the door, and after blessing Father John, and shaking me by the hand, he leads us to an inner room, hung with choice prints, and warmed by carpets and rugs, where he places me on the sofa by his side, while the two fathers stand apart, in respectful attitude, as though they were in church.

"You are not English?" he inquires, in a tender tone, just marked by a touch – a very light touch – of humor.

"Yes, English, certainly."

A turn of his eye, made slowly, and by design, directs my attention to his finger, which reclines on an object hardly to have been expected on an Archimandrite's table; an iron shell! The Tower-mark proves that it must have been fired from an English gun. A faint smile flits across the Archimandrite's face. There it stands; an English shell, unburst; the stopper drawn; and two plugs near it on a tray. That missile, it is clear, must have fallen into some soft bed of sand or peat.

"You are the first pilgrim who ever came from your country to Solovetsk," says Feofan, smiling. "One man came before you in a steamship; he was an engineer – one Anderson; you know him, maybe? No! He was a good man – he minded his engines well; but he could not live on fish and quass – he asked for beef and beer; and when we told him we had none to give him, he went away. No other English ever came."

He passes on to talk of the Holy Sepulchre and the Russian convent near the Jaffa Gate.

"You are welcome to Solovetsk," he says at parting; "see what you wish to see, go where you wish to go, and come to me when you like." Nothing could be sweeter than his voice, nothing softer than his smile, as he spake these words; and seeing the twinkle in his eye, as we stand near the English shell, I also smile and add: "On the mantel-piece of my writing-room in London there lies just such another shell, a trifle thinner in the girth."

"Yes?" he asks, a little curious – for a monk.

"My shell has the Russian mark; it was fired from Sebastopol, and picked up by a friend of my own in his trench before the Russian lines."

Feofan laughs, so far as an Archimandrite ever laughs – in the eyes and about the mouth. From this hour his house and household are at my disposal – his boat, his carriage, and his driver; every thing is done to make my residence in the convent pleasant; and every night my host is good enough to receive from his officers a full report of what I have seen and what I have said during the day!

Three hundred monks of all classes reside on the Holy Isle. The chief is, of course, the Archimandrite; next to him come forty monks, who are also popes; then come seventy or eighty monks who wear the hood and have taken the final vows; after these orders come the postulants, acolytes, singers, servants. Lodgers, scholars, and hired laymen fall into a second class.

These brethren are of all ages and conditions, from the pretty child who serves at table to the decrepit father who can not leave his cell; from the monk of noble birth and ample fortune to the brother who landed on these islands as a tramp. They wear the same habit, eat at the same board, listen to the same chants, and live the same life. Each brother has his separate cell, in which he sleeps and works; but every one, unless infirm with years and sickness, must appear in chapel at the hour of prayer, in refectory at the hour of meals. Hood and gown, made of the same serge, and cut in the same style, must be worn by all, excepting only by the priest who reads the service for the day. They suffer their beards and locks to grow, and spend much time in combing and smoothing these abundant growths. A flowing beard is the pride of monks and men; but while the beard is coming, a young fellow combs and parts his hair with all the coquetry of a girl. When looking at a bevy of boys in a church, their heads uncovered, their locks, shed down the centre, hanging about their shoulders, you might easily mistake them for singers of the sweeter sex.

Not many of these fathers could be truly described as ordinary men. A few are pure fanatics, who fear to lose their souls; still more are men with a natural calling for religious life. A goodly list are prisoners of the church, sent up from convents in the south and west. These last are the salt and wine of Solovetsk; the men who keep it sweet and make it strong. The offense for which they suffer is too much zeal: a learned and critical spirit, a disposition to find fault, a craving for reform, a wish to fall back on the purity of ancient times. For such disorders of the mind an ordinary monk has no compassion; and a journey to the desert of Solovetsk is thought to be for such diseases the only cure.

An Archimandrite, appointed to his office by the Holy Governing Synod, must be a man of learning and ability, able to instruct his brethren and to rule his house. He is expected to burn like a shining light, to fast very often, to pray very much, to rise very early, and to live like a saint. The brethren keep an eye upon their chief. If he is hard with himself he may be hard with them; but woe to him if he is weak in the flesh – if he wears fine linen about his throat, if savory dishes steam upon his board, if the riumka – that tiny glass out of which whisky is drunk – goes often to his lips. In every monk about his chamber he finds a critic; in nearly every one he fears a spy. It is not easy to satisfy them all. One father wishes for a sterner life, another thinks the discipline too strict. By every post some letters of complaint go out, and every member of the Holy Governing Synod may be told in secret of the Archimandrite's sins. If he fails to win his critics, the appeals against his rule increase in number and in boldness, till at length inquiry is begun, bad feeling is provoked on every side, and the offending chieftain is promoted – for the sake of peace – to some other place.

The Archimandrite of Solovetsk has the assistance of three great officers, who may be called his manager, his treasurer, and his custodian; officers who must be not only monks but popes.

Father Hilarion is the manager, with the duty of conducting the more worldly business of his convent. It is he who lodges the guests when they arrive, who looks after the ships and docks, who employs the laborers and conducts the farms, who sends out smacks to fish, who deals with skippers, who buys and sells stores, who keeps the workshops in order, and who regulates the coming and going of the pilgrim's boat. It is he who keeps church and tomb in repair, who sees that the fathers are warmly clad, who takes charge of the buildings and furniture, who superintends the kitchen, who keeps an eye on corridor and yard, who orders books and prints, who manages the painting-room and the photographer's office, who inspects the cells, and provides that every one has a bench, a press, a looking-glass, and a comb.

Father Michael is the treasurer, with the duty of receiving all gifts and paying all accounts. The income of the monastery is derived from two sources: from the sale of what is made in the monkish workshops, and from the gifts of pilgrims and of those who send offerings by pilgrims. No one can learn how much they receive from either source; for the receiving-boxes are placed in corners, and the contributor is encouraged to conceal from his left hand what his right hand drops in. Forty thousand rubles a year has been mentioned to me as the sum received in gifts; but five thousand pounds must be far below the amount of money passing in a year under Father Michael's eye. It is probably eight or ten. The charities of these monks are bounded only by the power of the people to come near them; and in the harder class of winters the peasants and fishermen push through the floes of ice from beyond Orloff Cape and Kandalax Bay in search of a basket of convent bread. These folks are always fed when they arrive, are always supplied with loaves when they depart. The schools, too, cost no little; for the monks receive all boys who come to them – sent as they hold, by the Father whom they serve.

Father Alexander is the custodian, with the duty of keeping the monastic wardrobe, together with the ritual books, the charters and papers, the jewels and the altar plate. His office is in the sacristy, with the treasures of which he is perfectly familiar, from the letter, in Cyrilian character and Slavonic phrase, by which Marfa of Novgorod gave this islet to the monks, down to that pious reliquary in which are kept some fragments of English shells; kept with as much veneration as bones of saints and chips from the genuine cross!

CHAPTER XIII.
A PILGRIM'S DAY

A pilgrim's day begins in the early morning, and lengthens late into the night.

At two o'clock, when it has hardly yet grown dark in our cells, a monk comes down the passage, tinkling his bell and droning out, "Rise and come to prayer." Starting at his cry, we huddle on our clothes, and rush from our hot rooms, heated by stoves, into the open air; men and women, boys and girls, boatmen and woodmen, hurrying through the night towards the Sacred Gates.

At half-past two the first matins commence in the new church – the Miracle Church – dedicated to the Victress, Mother of God; in which lie the bones of St. Savatie and St. Zosima, in the corner, as the highest place. A hundred lamps are lit, and the wall-screen of pictured saints glows richly in our sleepy eyes. Men and women, soldiers and peasants, turn into that sacred corner where the saints repose, cross themselves seven times, bow their foreheads to the ground, and kiss the pavement before the shrine.

Falling into our places near the altar-screen; arranging ourselves in files, rank behind rank, in open order, so that each can kneel and kiss the ground without pushing against his neighbor; we stand erect, uncovered, while the pope recites his office, and the monks respond their chant. These matins are not over until four o'clock.

A second service opens in the old cathedral at half-past three, and lasts until half-past five; and when the first pope has given his blessing, some of the more ardent pilgrims rush from the Virgin's church to the cathedral, where they stand in prayer, and kneel to kiss the stones for ninety minutes more; at the end of which time they receive a second benediction from a second pope.

An hour is now spent by the pilgrims in either praying at the tombs of saints, or pacing a long gallery, so contrived as to connect the several churches and other monastic buildings by a covered way. Along the walls of this gallery rude and early Russian artists have painted the joys of heaven, the pains of purgatory, and the pangs of hell. These pictures seize the eyes of my fellow-pilgrims, though in quaint and dramatic terror they sink below the level of such old work in the Gothic cloisters of the Rhine. A Russian painter has no variety of invention; a devil is to him a monkey with a spiked tail and a tongue of flame; and hell itself is only a hot place in which sinners are either fried by a fiend, or chawed up, flesh and bone, by a monstrous bear. Yet, children sometimes swoon, and women go mad from fright, on seeing these threats of a future state. My own poor time is given to scanning a miraculous picture of Jerusalem, said to have been painted on the staircase by a monk of Solovetsk, as a vision of the Holy City, seen by him in a dream. After studying the details for a while, I recognize in this vision of the holy man a plan of Olivet and Zion copied from an old Greek print!

All this time the pilgrims are bound to fast.

At seven o'clock the bells announce early mass, and we repair to the Miracle Church, where, after due crossings and prostration before the tomb, we fall into rank as before, and listen for an hour and a half to the sacred ritual, chanted with increasing fire.

When this first mass is over, the time being nearly nine o'clock, the weaker brethren may indulge themselves with a cup of tea; but the better pilgrim denies himself this solace, as a temptation of the Evil Spirit; and even his weaker brother has not much time to dally with the fumes of his darling herb. The great bell in the convent yard, a gift of the reigning Emperor, and one more witness to the year of wonders, warns us that the highest service of the day is close at hand.

Precisely at nine o'clock the monks assemble in the cathedral to celebrate high mass; and the congregation being already met, the tapers are lit, the deacon begins to read, the clergy take up the responses, and the officiating priest, arrayed in his shining cope and cap, recites the old and mystical forms of Slavonic prayer and praise. Two hours by the clock we stand in front of that golden shrine;

stand on the granite pavement – all uncovered, many unshod – listening with ravished ears to what is certainly the noblest ceremonial music of the Russian Church.

High mass being sung and said, we ebb back slowly from the cathedral into the long gallery, where we have a few minutes more of purgatorial fire, and then a monk announces dinner, and the devoutest pilgrim in the band accepts his signal with a thankful look.

The dining-hall to which we adjourn with some irregular haste is a vaulted chamber below the cathedral, and in any other country than Russia would be called a crypt. But men must build according to their clime. The same church would not serve for winter and summer, on account of the cold and heat; and hence a sacred edifice is nearly always divided into an upper and a lower church; the upper tier being used in summer, the lower tier in winter. Our dining-hall at Solovetsk is the winter church.

Long tables run down the room, and curl round the circular shaft which sustains the cathedral floor. On these tables the first course is already laid; a tin plate for each guest, in which lies a wooden spoon, a knife and fork; and by the side of this tin platter a pound of rye bread. The pilgrims are expected to dine in messes of four, like monks. A small tin dish is laid between each mess, containing one salted sprat, divided into four bits by a knife, and four small slices of raw onion. To each mess is given a copper tureen of sour quass, and a dish of salt codfish, broken into small lumps, boiled down, and left to cool.

A bell rings briskly; up we start, cross ourselves seven times, bow towards the floor, sit down again. The captain of each mess throws pepper and salt into the dish, and stirs up our pottage with the ladle out of which he drinks his quass. A second bell rings; we dip our wooden ladles into the dish of cod. A reader climbs into the desk, and drawls the story of some saint, while a youth carries round a basket of white bread, already blessed by the priest and broken into bits. Each pilgrim takes his piece and eats it, crossing himself, time after time, until the morsel gets completely down his throat.

A third bell rings. Hush of silence; sound of prayer. Serving-men appear; our platters are swept away; a second course is served. The boys who wait on us, with rosy cheeks, smooth chins, and hanging locks, look very much like girls. This second course, consisting of a tureen of cabbage-soup, takes no long time to eat. A new reader mounts the desk, and gives us a little more life of saint. A fourth bell jangles; much more crossing takes place; the serving-men rush in; our tables are again swept clean.

Another course is served; a soup of fresh herrings, caught in the convent bay; the fish very good and sweet. Another reader; still more life of saint; and then a fifth bell rings.

A fourth and last course now comes in; a dainty of barley paste, boiled rather soft, and eaten with sour milk. Another reader; still more life of saint; and then sixth bell. The pilgrims rise; the reader stops, not caring to finish his story; and our meal is done.

Our meal, but not the ritual of that meal. Rising from our bench, we fall once more into rank and file; the women, who have dined in a room apart, crowd back into the crypt; and we join our voices in a sacred song. Then we stand for a little while in silence, each with his head bent down, as humbling ourselves before the screen, during which a pope distributes to each pilgrim a second morsel of consecrated bread. Brisk bell rings again; the monks raise a psalm of thanksgiving; a pope pronounces the benediction; and then the diners go their way refreshed with the bread and fish.

It is now near twelve o'clock. The next church service will not be held until a quarter to four in the afternoon. In the interval we have the long cloister to walk in; the holy lake to see; the shrine of St. Philip to inspect; the tombs of good monks to visit; the priestly robes and monastic jewels to admire; with other distractions to devour the time. We go off, each his own way; some into the country, which is full of tombs and shrines of the lesser saints; others to lave their limbs in the holy lake; not a few to the cells of monks who vend crosses, amulets, and charms. A Russian is a believer in stones, in rings, in rosaries, in rods; for he bears about him a hundred relics of his ancient pagan creeds. His favorite amulet is a cross, which he can buy in brass for a kopeck; one form for a man, a second form for a woman; the masculine form being Nikon's cross, with a true Greek cross in relief; the feminine form being a mixture of the two. Once tied round the neck, this amulet is never to be taken off, on peril of sickness and sudden death. To drop it is a fault, to lose it is a sin. A second talisman is a bone ball, big as a pea, hollow, drilled and fitted with a screw. A drop of mercury is coaxed into the hole, and the screw being turned, the charm is perfect, and the ball is fastened to the cross. This talisman protects the wearer from contagion in the public baths.

Some pilgrims go in boats to the farther isles; to Zaet, where two aged monks reside, and a flock of sheep browses on the herbage; to Moksalma, a yet more secular spot, where the cattle feed, and the poultry cluck and crow, in spite of St. Savatie's rule. These islets supply the convent with milk and eggs – in which holy men rejoice, as a relief from fish – in nature's own old-fashioned ways.

Not a few of the pilgrims, finding that a special pope has been appointed to show things to their English guest, perceive that the way to see sights is to follow that pope. They have to be told – in a kindly voice – that they are not to follow him into the Archimandrite's room. To-day they march in his train into the wardrobe of the convent, where the copes, crowns, staffs and crosses employed in these church services are kept; a rich and costly collection of robes, embroidered with flowers and gold, and sparkling with rubies, diamonds and pearls. Many of these robes are gifts of emperors and tsars. One of the costliest is the gift of Ivan the Terrible; but even this splendid garment pales before a gift of Alexander, the reigning prince, who sent the Archimandrite – in remembrance of the Virgin's victory – a full set of canonicals, from crown and staff to robe and shoe.

Exactly at a quarter before four o'clock, a bell commands us to return; for vespers are commencing in the Miracle Church. Again we kneel at the tombs and kiss the stones, the hangings, and the iron rails; after which we fall in as before, and listen while the vespers are intoned by monks and boys. This service concludes at half-past four. Adjourning to the long gallery, we have another look at the fires of purgatory and the abodes of bliss. Five minutes before six we file into the cathedral for second vespers, and remain there standing and uncovered – some of us unshod – until half-past seven.

At eight the supper-bell rings. Our company gathers at the welcome sound; the monks form a procession; the pilgrims trail on; all moving with a hungry solemnity to the crypt, where we find the long tables groaning, as at dinner, with the pound of black bread, the salt sprat, the onion parted into four small pieces with a knife, and the copper tureen of quass. Our supper is the dinner served up afresh, with the same prayers, the same bowing and crossing, the same bell-ringing, and the same life of saint. The only difference is, that in the evening we have no barley-paste and no stale milk.

When every one is filled and the fragments are picked up, we rise to our feet, recite a thanksgiving, and join the fathers in their evening song. A pope pronounces a blessing, and then we are free to go into our cells.

A pilgrim who can read, and may happen to have good books about him, is expected, on retiring to his cell, to read through a Psalm of David, and to ponder a little on the Lives of Saints. The convent gates are closed at nine o'clock; when it is thought well for the pilgrim to be in bed.

At two in the morning a monk will come into his lobby, tinkle the bell, and call him to the duties of another day.

CHAPTER XIV.
PRAYER AND LABOR

But if the hours given up to prayer at Solovetsk are many, the hours given up to toil are more. This convent is a hive of industry, not less remarkable for what it does in the way of work than for what it is in the way of art and prayer.

"Pray and work" was the maxim of monastic houses, when monastic houses had a mission in the West. "Pray and work," said Peter the Great to his council. But such a maxim is not in harmony with the existing system; not in harmony with the Byzantine Church; and what you find at Solovetsk is traceable to an older and a better source. No monk in this sanctuary leads an idle life. Not only the fathers who are not yet popes, but many of those who hold the staff and give the benediction, devote their talents to the production of things which may be useful in the church, in the refectory, and in the cell. A few make articles for sale in the outer world; such articles as bread, clothes, rosaries and spoons. All round these ramparts, within the walls, you find a row of workshops, in which there is a hum of labor from early dawn until long after dark; forges, dairies, salting-rooms, studies, ship-yards, bake-houses, weaving-sheds, rope-walks, sewing-rooms, fruit-stores, breweries, boot-stalls, and the like, through all the forms which industry takes in a civilized age. These monks appear to be masters of every craft. They make nearly every thing you can name, from beads to frigates; and they turn out every thing they touch in admirable style. No whiter bread is baked, no sweeter quass is brewed, than you can buy in Solovetsk. To go with Father Hilarion on his round of inspection is to meet a dozen surprises face to face. At first the whole exhibition is like a dream; and you can hardly fancy that such things are being done by a body of monks, in a lonely islet, locked up from the world for eight months in the twelve by storms of sleet and deserts of ice.

These monks make seal-skin caps and belts; they paint in oil and carve in wood; they cure and tan leather; they knit woollen hose; they cast shafts of iron; they wind and spin thread; they polish stones; they cut out shoes and felts; they mould pewter plates; they dry fruit; they fell and trim forest trees; they clip paper flowers; they build carts and sledges; they embroider capes and bands; they bake bricks; they weave baskets and panniers of silver bark; they quarry and hew blocks of stone; they paint soup-ladles; they design altar-pieces, chapels, and convents; they refine bees'-wax; they twist cord and rope; they forge anchors and marling-spikes; they knit and sew, and ply their needles in every branch of useful and decorative art. In all these departments of industry, the thing which they turn out is an example of honest work.

Many of the fathers find a field for their talents on the farm: in breeding cattle, in growing potatoes, in cutting grass, in shearing sheep, in rearing poultry, in churning butter, and making cheese. A few prefer the more poetic labor of the garden: pruning grapes, bedding strawberries, hiving bees, and preserving fruit. The honey made at Mount Alexander is pure and good, the wax is also white and fine.

The convent bakehouse is a thing to see. Boats run over from every village on the coast to buy convent bread; often to beg it; and every pilgrim who comes to pray takes with him one loaf as a parting gift. This convent bread is of two sorts – black and white – leavened and unleavened – domestic and consecrated. The first is cheap, and eaten at every meal; the second is dear, and eaten as an act of grace. Both kinds are good. A consecrated loaf is small, weighing six or eight ounces, and is stamped with a sacred sign and blessed by a pope. The stamp is a cross, with a legend running round the border in old Slavonic type. These small white loaves of unleavened bread are highly prized by pious people; and a man who visits such a monastery as either Solovetsk, St. George, or Troitsa, can not bring back to his servants a gift more precious in their eyes than a small white loaf.

The brewery is no less perfect in its line than the bakehouse. Quass is the Russian ale and beer in one; the national drink; consumed by all classes, mixed with nearly every dish. Solovetsk has a name and fame for this Russian brew.

Connected with these good things of the table are the workshops for carving platters and painting spoons. The arts of life are simple in these northern wilds; forks are seldom seen; and knives are not much used. The instrument by which a man mostly helps himself to his dinner is a spoon. Nearly all his food is boiled; his cabbage-soup, his barley mess, his hash of salt-cod, his dish of sour milk. A deep platter lies in the centre of his table, and his homely guests sit round it, armed with their capacious spoons. Platter and spoon are carved of wood, and sometimes they are painted, with skill and taste; though the better sorts are kept by pilgrims rather as keepsakes than for actual use.

A branch of industry allied to carving spoons and platters is that of twisting baskets and panniers into shape. Crockery in the forest is rude and dear, and in a long land-journey the weight of three or four pots and cups would be a serious strain. From bark of trees they weave a set of baskets for personal and domestic use, which are lighter than cork and handier than tin. You close them by a lid, and carry them by a loop. They are perfectly dry and sweet; with just a flavor, but no more, of the delicious resin of the tree. They hold milk. You buy them of all sizes, from that of a pepper-box to that of a water-jar; obtaining a dozen for a few kopecks.

The panniers are bigger and less delicate, made for rough passage over stony roads and through bogs of mire. These panniers are fitted with compartments, like a vintner's crate, in which you can stow away bottles of wine and insinuate knives and forks. In the open part of your pannier it is well (if you are packing for a long drive) to have an assortment of bark baskets, in which to carry such trifles as mustard, cream, and salt.

Among the odds and ends of workshops into which you drop, is that of the weaving-shed, in one of the turrets on the convent wall; a turret which is noticeable not only for the good work done in the looms, but for the part which it had to play in the defense of Solovetsk against the English fleet. The shot which is said to have driven off the "Brisk" was fired from this Weaver's Tower.

Peering above a sunny corner of the rampart stands the photographic chamber, and near to this chamber, in a new range of buildings, are the cells in which the painters and enamellers toil. The sun makes pictures of any thing in his range; boats, islets, pilgrims, monks; but the artists toiling in these cells are all employed in devotional art. Some are only copiers; and the most expert are artists only in a conventional sense. This country is not yet rich in art, except in that hard Byzantine style which Nikon the Patriarch allowed in private houses, and enforced in convent, shrine, and church.

But these fathers pride themselves, not without cause, on being greater in their works by sea than even in their works by land. Many of them live on board, and take to the water as to their mother's milk. They are rich in boats, in rigging, and in nets. They wind excellent rope and cord. They know how to light and buoy dangerous points and armlets. They keep their own lighthouses. They build lorchas and sloops; and they have found by trial that a steamship can be turned off the stocks at Solovetsk, of which every part, from the smallest brass nail to the mainmast (with the sole exception of her engines), is the produce of their toil.

That vessel is called the "Hope." Her crew is mainly a crew of monks; and her captain is not only a monk – like Father John – but an actual pope. My first sight of this priestly skipper is in front of the royal gates where he is celebrating mass.

This reverend father takes me after service to see his vessel and the dock in which she lies. Home-built and rigged, the "Hope" has charms in my eyes possessed by very few ships. A steamer made by monks in the Frozen Sea, is, in her way, as high a feat of mind as the spire of Notre Dame in Antwerp, as the cathedral front at Wells. The thought of building that steamer was conceived in a monkish brain; the lines were fashioned by a monkish pen; monks felled the trees, and forged the bolts, and wove the canvas, and curled the ropes. Monks put her together; monks painted her cabin;

monks stuffed her seats and pillows. Monks launched her on the sea, and, since they have launched her, they have sailed in her from port to port.

"How did you learn your trade of skipper?"

The father smiles. He is a young fellow – younger than Father John; a fellow of thirty or thirty-two, with swarthy cheek, black eye, and tawny mane; a man to play the pirate in some drama of virtuous love. "I was a seaman in my youth," he says, "and when we wanted a skipper in the convent, I went over to Kem, where we have a school of navigation, and got the certificate of a master; that entitled me to command my ship."

"The council of that school are not very strict?"

"No; not with monks. We have our own ways; we labor in the Lord; and He protects us in what we do for Him."

"Through human means?"

"No; by His own right hand, put forth under all men's eyes. You see, the first time that we left the convent for Archangel, we were weak in hands and strange to our work. A storm came on; the 'Hope' was driven on shore. Another crew would have taken to their boats and lost their ship, if not their lives. We prayed to the Most Pure Mother of God: at first she would not hear us on account of our sins; but we would not be denied, and sang our psalms until the wind went down."

"You were still ashore?"

"Yes; grooved in a bed of sand; but when the wind veered round, the ship began to heave and stir. We tackled her with ropes and got her afloat once more. Slava Bogu! It was her act!"

The dock of which Father John spoke with pride turns out to be not a dock only, but a dry dock! Now, a dock, even where it is a common dock, is one of those signs by which one may gauge – as by the strength of a city wall, the splendor of a court of justice and the beauty of a public garden – the height to which a people have attained. In Russia docks are extremely rare. Not a dozen ports in the empire can boast a dock. Archangel has no dock; Astrachan has no dock; Rostoff has no dock. It is only in such cities as Riga and Odessa, built and occupied by foreigners, that you find such things. The dry dock at Solovetsk is the only sample of its kind in the whole of Russia Proper! Cronstadt has a dry dock; but Cronstadt is in the Finnish waters – a German port, with a German name. The only work of this kind existing on Russian ground is the product of monkish enterprise and skill.

Priests take their share in all these labors. When a monk enters into orders he is free to devote himself, if he chooses, to the Church service only, since the Holy Governing Synod recognizes the right of a pope to a maintenance in his office; but in the Convent of Solovetsk, a priest rarely confines his activity to his sacred duties. Work is the sign of a religious life. If any man shows a talent for either art or business, he is excited by the praise of his fellows and superiors to pursue the call of his genius, devoting the produce of his labor to the glory of God. One pope is a farmer, a second a painter, a third a fisherman; this man is a collector of simples, that a copier of manuscripts, and this, again, a binder of books.

Of these vocations that of the schoolmaster is not the least coveted. All children who come to Solovetsk are kept for a year, if not for a longer time. The lodging is homely and the teaching rough; for the schools are adapted to the state of the country; and the food and sleeping-rooms are raised only a little above the comforts of a peasant's home. No one is sent away untaught; but only a few are kept beyond a year. If a man likes to remain and work in the convent he can hire himself out as a laborer, either in the fishing-boats or on the farms. He dines in summer, like the monks, on bread, fish and quass; in winter he is provided with salt mutton, cured on the farm – a luxury his masters may not touch. Many of these boys remain for life, living in a celibate state, like the monks; but sure of a dinner and a bed, safe from the conscription, and free from family cares. Some of them take vows. If they go back into the world they are likely to find places on account of their past; in any case they can shift for themselves, since a lad who has lived a few years in this convent is pretty sure to be able to fish and farm, to cook his own dinner, and to mend his own boots.

CHAPTER XV.
BLACK CLERGY

All men of the higher classes in Russia talk of their Black Clergy as a body of worthless fellows; idle, ignorant, profligate; set apart by their vows as unsocial; to whom no terms should be offered, with whom no capitulations need be kept. "Away with them, root and branch!" is a general cry, delivered by young and liberal Russians in the undertone of a fixed resolve.

The men who raise this cry are not simply scoffers and scorners, making war on religious ideas and ecclesiastical institutions. Only too often they are men who love their church, who support their parish priests, and who wish to plant their country in the foremost line of Christian states. Russia, they say, possesses ten thousand monks; and these ten thousand monks they would hand over to a drill sergeant and convert into regiments of the line.

This rancor of the educated classes towards the monks – a rancor roused and fed by their undying hatred of reforms in Church and State – compels one to mark the extent and study the sources of monastic power. This study will take us far and wide: though it will also bring us in the end to Solovetsk once more.

"A desert dotted with cloisters," would be no untrue description of the country spreading southward from the Polar Sea to the Tartar Steppe. In New Russia, in the khanates of Kazan and Crimea, in the steppes of the Lower Volga, and in the wastes of Siberia, it would not be true. But Great Russia is a paradise of monks. In the vast regions stretching from Kem to Belgorod – an eagle's flight from north to south of a thousand miles – from Pskoff on Lake Peipus, to Vasil on the Middle Volga – a similar flight from west to east of seven hundred miles – the land is everywhere bright with cloisters, musical with monastic bells.

Nothing on this earth's surface can be drearier than a Russian forest, unless it be a Russian plain. The forest is a growth of stunted birch and pine; the trees of one height and girth; the fringe of black shoots unvaried save by some break of bog, some length of colorless lake. The plain is a stretch of moor, without a swell, without a tree, without a town, for perhaps a hundred leagues; on which the grass, if grass such herbage can be called, is brown; while the village, if such a scatter of cabins can be called by a name so tender and picturesque, is nothing but log and mud. A traveller's eye would weary, and his heart would sicken, at the long succession of such lines, were it not that here and there, in the opening of some forest glade, on the ridge of some formless plain, the radiant cross and sparkling towers of a convent spring towards heaven; a convent with its fringe of verdure, its white front, its clustering domes and chains. The woods round Kargopol, the marshes near Lake Ilmen, and the plains of Moscow, are alive with light and color; while the smaller convents on river bank and in misty wood, being railed and painted, look like works of art. One of my sweetest recollections in a long, dull journey, is that of our descent into the valley of Siya, when we sighted the great monastery, lying in a watery dell amidst groves of trees, with the rays of a setting sun on her golden cross and her shining domes – a happy valley and a consecrated home; not to speak of such trifles as the clean cell and the wholesome bread which a pilgrim finds within her walls!

The old cities of Great Russia – Novgorod, Moscow, Pskoff, Vladimir – are much richer in monastic institutions than their rivals of a later time. For leagues above and leagues below the ancient capital of Russia, the river Volkhoff, on the banks of which it stands, is bright with these old mansions of the Church. Novgorod enriched her suburbs with the splendid Convents of St. George, St. Cyril, and of St. Anton of Rome. Moscow lies swathed in a belt and mantle of monastic houses – Simonoff, Donskoi, Danieloff, Alexiefski, Ivanofski, and many more; the belfries and domes of which lighten the wonderful panorama seen from the Sparrow Hills. Pskoff has her glorious Convent of the Catacombs, all but rivalling that of Kief.

Within the walls, these cloisters are no less splendid than the promise from without. Their altars and chapels are always fine, the refectories neat and roomy, the sacristies rich in crosses and priestly robes. Many fine pictures – fine of their school – adorn the screens and the royal gates. Nearly all possess portraits of the Mother and Child encased in gold, and some have lamps and croziers worth their weight in sterling coin. The greater part of what is visible of Russian wealth appears to hang around these shrines.

These old monastic houses sprang out of the social life around them. They were centres of learning, industry, and art. A convent was a school, and in these schools a special excellence was sought and won. This stamp has never been effaced; and many of the convents still aspire to excellence in some special craft. The Convent of St. Sergie, near Strelna, is famed for music; the New Monastery, near Kherson, for melons; the Troitsa, near Moscow, for carving; the Catacombs, near Kief, for service-books.

In the belfry of the old Cathedral of St. Sophia at Novgorod you are shown a chamber which was formerly used as a treasure-room by the citizens – in fact, as their place of safety and their tower of strength. You enter it through a series of dark and difficult passages, barred by no less than twelve iron doors; each door to be unfastened by bolt and bar, secured in the catches under separate lock and key. In this strong place the burghers kept, in times of peril, their silver plate, their costly icons, and their ropes of pearl. A robber would not – and a boyar dared not – force the sanctuary of God. Each convent was, in this respect, a smaller St. Sophia; and every man who laid up gold and jewels in such a bank could sleep in peace.

"You must understand," said the antiquary of Novgorod, as we paddled in our boat down the Volkhoff, "that in ancient times a convent was a home – a family house. A man who made money by trade was minded in his old age to retire from the city and end his days in peace. In England such a man would buy him a country-house in the neighborhood of his native town, in which he would live with his wife and children until he died. In a country like Old Russia, with brigands always at his gates, the man who saved money had to put his wealth under the protection of his church. Selecting a pleasant site, he would build his house in the name of his patron saint, adorn it with an altar, furnish it with a kitchen, dormitory, and cellar, and taking with him his wife, his children, and his pope, would set up his tent in that secure and comfortable place for the remainder of his days on earth."

"Could such a man have his wife and children near him?"

"Near him! With him; not only in his chapel but in his cell. The convent was his home – his country-house; and at his death descended to his son, who had probably become a monk. In some such fashion, many of the prettiest of these smaller convents on the Volkhoff came to be."

Half the convents in Great Russia were established as country-houses; the other half as deserts – like Solovetsk; and many a poor fellow toiled like Zosima who has not been blessed with Zosima's fame.

But such a thing is possible, even now; for Russia has not yet passed beyond the legendary and heroic periods of her growth. The latest case is that of the new desert founded at Gethsemane, on the plateau of the Troitsa, near Moscow; one of the most singular notes of the present time.

In the year 1803 was born in a log cabin, in a small village called Prechistoe (Very Clean), near the city of Vladimir, a male serf, so obscure that his family name has perished. For many years he lived on his lord's estate, like any other serf, marrying in his own class (twice), and rearing three strapping sons. At thirty-seven he was freed by his owner; when he moved from his village to Troitsa, took the name of Philip, put on cowl and gown, and dug for himself a vault in the earth. In this catacomb he spent five years of his life, until he found a more congenial home among the convent graves, where he lived for twenty years. Too fond of freedom to take monastic vows, he never placed himself under convent rule. Yet seeing, in spite of the proverb, that the hood makes the monk in Russia, if not elsewhere, he robed his limbs in coarse serge, girdled his waist with a heavy chain, and walked to the palace of Philaret, Metropolite of Moscow, begged that dignitary's blessing, and craved permission to adopt his name. Philaret took a fancy to the mendicant; and from that time forth the whilom serf from Very Clean was known in every street as Philaret-oushka – Philaret the Less.

Those grave-yards of the Troitsa lay in a pretty and silent spot on the edge of a lake, inclosed in dark green woods. Among those mounds the mendicant made his desert. Buying a few images and crosses in Troitsa and Gethsemane at two kopecks apiece, he carried them into the streets and houses of Moscow, where he gave them to people, with his blessing; taking, in exchange, such gifts as his penitents pleased; a ruble, ten rubles, a hundred rubles each. He very soon had money in the bank. His images brought more rubles than his crosses; for his followers found that his images gave them luck, while his crosses sent them trouble. Hence a woman to whom he gave a cross went home with a heavy heart. Unlike the practice in western countries, no peasant woman adorns herself with this memorial of her faith; nor is the cross a familiar ornament even in mansions of the rich. A priest wears a cross; a spire is crowned by a cross; but this symbol of our salvation is rarely seen among the painted and plated icons in a private house. To "bear the cross" is to suffer pain, and no one wishes to suffer pain. One cross a man is bound to bear – that hung about his neck at the baptismal font; but few men care to carry a second weight.

An oddity in dress and speech, Philaret-oushka wore no shoes and socks, and his greeting in the market was, "I wish you a merry angel's day," instead of "I wish you well." In his desert, and in his rambles, he was attended by as strange an oddity as himself; one Ivanoushka, John the Less. This man was never known to speak; he only sang. He sang in his cell; he sang on the road; he sang by the Holy Gate. The tone in which he sang reflected his master's mood; and the voice of John the Less told many a poor creature whether Philaret the Less would give her that day an image or a cross.

This mendicant had much success in merchants' shops. The more delicate ladies shrank from him with loathing, not because he begged their money, but because he defiled their rooms. Though born in Very Clean, this serf was dirtier than a monk; but his followers saw in his rusty chains, his grimy skin, his unkempt hair, so many signs of grace. The women of the trading classes courted him. A lady told me, that on calling to see a female friend, the wife of a merchant of the first guild, she found her kneeling on the floor, and washing this beggar's feet. Her act was not a form; for the mendicant wore no shoes, and the streets of Moscow are foul with mire and hard with flints. One old maid, Miss Seribrikof, used to boast, as the glory of her life, that she had once been allowed to wash the good man's sores. Young brides would beg him to attend their nuptial feasts; at which he would "prophesy" as they call it; hinting darkly at their future of weal or woe. Sometimes he made a lucky hit. One day, at the wedding-feast of Gospodin Sorokine, one of the richest men in Moscow, he turned to the bride and said, "When your feastings are over, you will have to smear your husband with honey." No one knew what he meant, until three days later, when Sorokine died; on which event every one remembered that honey is tasted at all Russian funerals; and the words of Philaret the Less were likened to that Vision of Zosima, which has since been painted on the pillar in Novgorod the Great.

Madame Loguinof, one of his rich disciples, gave this mendicant money enough to build a church and convent, and when these edifices were raised in the grave-yard of Troitsa his "desert" was complete.

At the age of sixty-five, this idol of the people passed away. When his high patron died, Philaret the Less was not so happy in his desert as of yore; for Innocent, the new Metropolite, was a real missionary of his faith, and not a man to look with favor on monks in masquerade. Deserting his desert, the holy man went his way from Troitsa into the province of Tula, where, in the village of Tcheglovo, he built a second convent, in which he died about a year ago. The two convents built by his rusty chains and dirty feet are now occupied by bodies of regular monks.

In these morbid growths of the religious sentiment, the Black Clergy seek support against the scorn and malice of a reforming world.

These monks have great advantages on their side. If liberal thought and science are against them, usage and repute are in their favor. All the high places are in their gift; all the chief forces are in their hands. The women are with them; and the ignorant rustics are mostly with them. Monks have always attracted the sex from which they fly; and every city in the empire has some story of a favorite father followed, like Philaret the Less, by a female crowd. Vicar Nathaniel was not worshipped in the Nevski Prospect with a softer flattery than is Bishop Leonidas in the Kremlin gardens. Comedy but rarely touches these holy men; yet one may see in Moscow albums an amusing sketch of this gifted and fascinating man being lifted into higher place upon ladies' skirts.

The monks have not only got possession of the spiritual power; but they hold in their hands nearly all the sources of that spiritual power. They have the convents, catacombs, and shrines. They guard the bones of saints, and are themselves the stuff of which saints are made. In the golden book of the Russian Church there is not one instance of a canonized parish priest.

These celibate fathers affect to keep the two great keys of influence in a land like Russia – the gift of sacrifice, and the gift of miracles.

CHAPTER XVI.
SACRIFICE

Sacrifice is a cardinal virtue of the Church. To the Russian mind it is the highest form of good; the surest sign of a perfect faith. Sacrifice is the evidence of a soul given up to God.

A child can only be received into the church through sacrifice; and one of the forms in which a man gives himself up to heaven is that of becoming insane "for the sake of Christ."

Last year (1868), a poor creature called Ivan Jacovlevitch died in the Lunatic Asylum in Moscow, after winning for himself a curious kind of fame. One-half the world pronounced him mad; a second half respected him as a holy man. The first half, being the stronger, locked him up, and kept him under medical watch and ward until he died.

This Ivan, a burgher in the small town of Cherkesovo, made a "sacrifice" of his health and comfort to the Lord. By sacred vows, he bound himself never to wash his face and comb his hair, never to change his rags, never to sit on chair and stool, never to eat at table, never to handle knife and fork. In virtue of this sacrifice, he lived like a dog; crouching on the floor, and licking up his food with lips and tongue. When brought into the madhouse, he was washed with soap and dressed in calico; but he began to mess himself on purpose; and his keepers soon gave up the task of trying to keep him clean.

No saint in the calendar draws such crowds to his shrine as Ivan Jacovlevitch drew to his chamber in this lunatic's house. Not only servant girls and farmers' wives, but women of the trading classes, came to him daily; bringing him dainties to eat, making him presents in money, and telling him all the secrets of their hearts. Sitting on the ground, and gobbling up his food, he stared at these visitors, mumbling some words between his teeth, which his listeners racked their brains to twist and frame into sense. He rolled the crumbs of his patties into pills, and when sick persons came to him to be cured, he put these dirty little balls into their mouths. This man was said to have become "insane for the Lord."

The authorities of the asylum lent him a spacious room in which to receive his guests. They knew that he was mad; they knew that a crowded room was bad for him; but the public rush was so strong, that they could neither stand upon their science, nor enforce their rules. The lunatic died amidst the tears and groans of half the city. When the news of his death was noised abroad, a stranger would have thought the city was also mad. Men stopped in the street to kneel and pray; women threw themselves on the ground in grief; and a crowd of the lower classes ran about the bazars and markets, crying, "Ivan is dead! Ivan is dead! Ah! who will tell us what to do for ourselves, now Ivan is dead?"

On my table, as I write these words, lies a copy of the *Moscow Gazette*– the journal which Katkoff edits, in which Samarin writes – containing a proposal, made by the clergy, for a public monument to Ivan Jacovlevitch, in the village where this poor lunatic was born!

All monks prefer to live a life of sacrifice; the highest forms of sacrifice being that of the recluse and the anchorite.

Every branch of the Oriental Church – Armenian, Coptic, Greek – encourages this form; but no Church on earth has given the world so many hermits as the Russ. Her calendar is full of anchorites, and the stories told of these self-denying men and women are often past belief. One Sister Maria was nailed up in a niche at Hotkoff, fed through a hole in the rock, and lingered in her living tomb twelve years.

On the great plateau of the Troitsa, forty miles from Moscow, stands a monastic village, called Gethsemane. This monastic village is divided into two parts; the convent and the catacombs; separated by a black and silent lake.

A type of poverty and misery, the convent is built of rough logs, colored with coarse paint. Not a trace of gold or silver is allowed, and the only ornaments are of cypress. Gowns of the poorest serge, and food of the simplest kind, are given to the monks. No female is allowed to enter this holy place, excepting once a year, on the feast of the Virgin's ascent into heaven. Three women were standing humbly at the gate as we drove in; perhaps wondering why their sex should be shut out of Gethsemane, since their Lord was not betrayed in the garden by a female kiss!

Across the black lake lie the catacombs, cut off from the convent by a gate and fence; for into these living graves it is lawful for a female to descend. Deep down from the light of day, below the level of that sombre lake, these catacombs extend. We light each man his taper, as we stand above the narrow opening into the vaults. A monk, first crossing his breast and muttering his pass-words in an unknown tongue, goes down the winding stairs. We follow slowly, one by one in silence; shading the light and holding to the wall. A faint smell fills our nostrils; a dull sound greets our ears; heavily comes our breath in the damp and fetid air. The tapers faint and flicker in the gloom. Gaining a passage, we observe some grated windows, narrow holes, and iron-bound doors. These openings lead into cells. The roof above is wet with slime, the floor is foul with crawling, nameless things.

"Hush!" drones the monk, as he creeps past some grated window and some iron-clad door, as though he were afraid that we should wake the dead.

"What is this hole in the stone?" The monk stops short and waves his lurid light: "A cell; a good man lies here; hush! his soul is now with God!"

"Dead?"

"Yea – dead to the world."

"How long has he been here?"

"How long? Eleven years and more."

Passing this living tomb with a shiver, we catch the boom of a bell, and soon emerge from the narrow passage into a tiny church. A lamp is burning before the shrine; two monks are kneeling with their temples on the floor; a priest is singing in a low, dull tone. The fittings of this church are all of brass; for pine and birch would rot into paste in a single year. Beyond the chapel we come to the holy well, the water of which is said to be good for body and soul. It is certainly earthy to the taste.

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