

THE SNOW-STORM

A Story

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1856

I.

It was after six o'clock when I, having drunk tea, left the station, the name of which I do not remember, but which, I remember, was somewhere in the Land of the Don Army, near Novocherkask. It was already dark when I seated myself at Aléshka's side in the sleigh and wrapped myself in my fur coat and blanket. Near the post-house the air seemed to be warm and calm. Although there was no snow falling, not a single star could be seen overhead, and the sky seemed unusually low and black as compared with the pure snow plain, which lay stretched out in

front of us.

After passing the dark forms of windmills, one of which awkwardly flapped its large wings, and getting beyond the Cossack village, I noticed that the road became worse and deeper with snow. The wind began to blow more fiercely on my left, to blow aside the tails and manes of the horses, and stubbornly to raise and carry away the snow which was crumbled by the runners and hoofs. The bell began to tinkle less audibly. A spray of cold air ran up my back through some opening in my sleeve, and I thought of the post inspector's advice not to

travel in order to avoid going astray in the night and freezing on the road.

" I hope we shall not lose our way," I said to the driver. Not receiving any answer from him, I put the question more clearly : " Well, shall we reach the next station, driver ? Shall we not go astray ? "

"God knows," he answered, without turning his head around. " I declare there is a blizzard ! Not a bit of the road can be seen. 0 Lord ! "

" I wish you would tell me whether you

will bring me to the next station," I continued. " Shall we get there ? "

" We must get there," said the driver. He continued to speak, but I could not hear him through the wind.

I did not wish to turn back ; nor did it seem at all pleasant to wander about all night in the frost and snowstorm in an absolutely barren plain, such as this part of the Land of the Don Army was. Besides, although I could not get a good look at my driver in the dark, I for some reason did not like him, and he did not inspire me with confidence in him. He sat straight, with his feet before him, and not sidewise. He was of tall stature ; his voice was lazy ; his cap was somehow not a driver's cap, – it was large and it swayed from side to side. Nor did he urge his horses on as is proper, but held the reins in both his hands, like a lackey who has taken the coachman's box. Above everything else, I did not trust him because his ears were wrapped in a kerchief. In short, this solemn, stooping back, which towered in front of me, did not please me, and promised no good.

" In my opinion, it would be best to return," Aléshka said to me. " What pleasure is there in wandering about ? "

" 0 Lord ! dust see what a blast is blowing ! I can't see the road at all, - my eyes are all stuck together - 0 Lord ! " grumbled the driver.

We had not gone fifteen minutes when the driver stopped his horses, turned the reins over to Aleshka, awkwardly straightened out his legs from the seat, and, crunching the snow with his big boots, went away to look for the road.

" What is it ? Where are you going ? Lost the road, eh ? " I asked him ; but the driver did not make any reply. He turned his face away from the wind which cut his face and walked away from the sleigh.

" Well ? Found it ? " I repeated when he came back.

" No, nothing," he suddenly said, impatiently and angrily, as though I were to blame for his having lost the road. Leisurely placing his large feet on the foot-rest, he began with his frosted hands to separate the reins.

" What are we going to do ? " I asked him, when we started again.

" What shall we do ? We shall travel

whither God will take us."

We proceeded in the same amble, now obviously at random, in more than half a foot of loose snow, or over the brittle and bare crust.

Although it was cold, the snow on my collar melted very rapidly ; the blizzard kept growing stronger, and from above began to fall a light, crisp snow.

It was evident that we were travelling God knows where, because, after having journeyed another fifteen minutes, we no longer saw a single verst post.

" Well, what do you think ?" I again asked the driver, " shall we reach the station ? "

" Which station ? We can get back if we give the reins to the horses ; they will take us back ; but hardly to the next station – we shall only be lost."

" Well, let them go back," I said. " And really – "

" So you want to go back ? " said the driver.

" Yes, yes, turn back ! "

The driver gave the horses the reins. They began to run faster, and, although I did not notice that we were turning ; the wind soon changed, and soon the windmills could be seen through the snow. The driver became bolder and began to talk.

" The other day the return sleighs got caught in a storm," he said, " so they had to stay overnight in haystacks. They came back only in the morning. It was lucky they did find those haystacks, or else they would have frozen stiff, – it was so cold. As it is, one of them had his feet so frost-bitten that we thought for three weeks that he would die."

" It is not cold now and the wind has gone down," said I, " so maybe we could try it."

" That is so, it is warm, but it is blowing hard. It is now at our back, so it seems lighter, but it is blowing hard. I could go if it were on courier duty or something of the kind, but not of my own will. It is no joke to have your passenger frozen. They will make me responsible for you."

II.

Just then were heard the bells of several troykas which were rapidly catching up with us.

" A courier bell," said my driver. " There is only one such at the whole station."

In reality, the bell of the first sleigh, the sound of which was clearly borne to us through the air, was very fine: pure, melodious, deep, and slightly quivering. I later learned that it was the arrangement of a fancier, and consisted of three bells, of a large one in the middle, with what is popularly called a wagtail sound, and of two small ones, tuned at thirds with it. The sound of this third and of the quivering fifth, which reechoed in the air, was exceedingly striking and strangely agreeable in this desert steppe.

" The post is running," said my driver, as the first of the three sleighs came abreast ours. " How is the road ? Is it possible to travel upon it ? " he cried to the driver of the last sleigh ; but this one only shouted to his horses, and made no reply.

The sound of the bells quickly died away in the wind as soon as the post passed us.

Apparently my driver felt ashamed.

" I suppose we had better go now, sir ! " he said to me. " People have just passed over it, and so their tracks will be fresh."

I agreed with him, and we again turned against the wind, and moved forward over the deep snow. I looked sidewise on the road, so as not to lose sight of the track made by the sleighs. For about two versts the track was clearly visible ; then there could be seen only a small unevenness under the runners ; but before long I was absolutely unable to tell whether it was a track or simply a drifted layer of snow. The eyes got tired looking at the monotonously disappearing snow under the runners, and I began to look ahead of me. We still saw the third verst-post, but were entirely unable to find the fourth ; as before, we travelled against the wind and with the wind, to the right and to the left, and finally we reached a point when my driver said that we had strayed to the right, while I said it was to the left, and Aléshka proved that we were going directly back.

We again stopped several times, and the driver dragged out his large feet and went out to find the road, but all in vain. I myself went once to see whether that which so appeared to me was really the road; but no sooner had I with difficulty made six steps against the wind, and convinced myself that everywhere were the same monotonous, white layers of snow, and that the road existed only in my imagination, than I no longer saw the sleigh. I called out : " Driver! Aléshka ! " but I felt how the wind caught the voice out of my mouth and in a twinkling carried it away far from me, into the distance. I went where the sleigh was, but it was not there ; I went to the right, and it was not there, either. I am ashamed to recall in what loud, penetrating, yes, even a little despairing, voice I shouted once more, " Driver ! " when he was within no more than two feet of me. His black figure, with his small whip and enormous cap fallen to one side, suddenly loomed up before me. He took me to the sleigh.

" Luckily it is warm," he said, " or else, if it should freeze, it would be terrible ! - 0 Lord ! "

" Give the horses the reins : let them

take us back," I said, seating myself in the sleigh. " Will they take us back ? Eh, driver ? "

" They certainly will."

He dropped the reins, two or three times struck the harness pad of the centre horse with his whip, and we again went somewhere. We travelled about half an hour. Suddenly the fancier's bell and two others were heard in front of us : this time they were moving toward us. Those were the same troykas, which had deposited the mail and now were going back with return horses to the station. The courier trdyka of large horses with the fancier's bell was swiftly running in front. A driver was sitting on the box and briskly calling out to his horses. Back of him, in the body of each empty sleigh, sat two drivers, and one could hear their loud and merry conversation. One of them was smoking a pipe, and a spark, fanned by the wind, illuminated part of his face.

As I looked at them I felt ashamed of being afraid to travel, and my driver, evidently, was experiencing the same feeling, for we said in one voice : " Let us follow them ! "

III.

Before allowing the last troyka to pass by, my driver began awkwardly to turn back and drove the shafts into the horses tied behind. Three of the horses shied, tore off the halter, and started to run to one side.

" You cross-eyed devil, can't you see how to turn ? Straight upon people ! You devil ! " A short driver, an old man, so far as I could judge from his voice and stature, who was seated in the last sleigh, began to curse in a hoarse and quivering voice. He quickly jumped out of the sleigh and ran after the horses, continuing to curse profanely, and to call my driver all kinds of names.

The horses were not easily taken. The driver ran after them, and in a minute the horses and the driver were lost in the white mist of the snow-storm.

" Vasfl-i ! Let me have the dun horse ! I can't catch them this way," his voice was still heard.

One of the drivers, a very tall man,

climbed out of the sleigh, silently unhitched his troyka, over the side band climbed upon one of the horses, and, crunching over the snow at an ambling pace, was lost in the same direction.

But we, with the other two troykas, started across fields behind the courier sleigh, which, tinkling with its bell, raced at full gallop ahead of us.

" Of course he will not catch them ! " my driver said, in respect to the one who had started after the horses.

" Since the accursed centre horse has not gone back to the other horses, it will take them where there will be no way out."

From the time that my driver began travelling back of the others he became more cheerful and talkative, a fact of which I did not fail to take advantage, since I did not yet feel like sleeping. I began to ask him where he came from, what he was doing, and how he was getting on, and I soon learned that he was a countryman of mine, from the Government of Tula, village of Kirpfchnoe, and a manorial peasant ; that they had little land left, and that since the cholera they had had no good crop of grain; that

there were two brothers in the family, while a third was a soldier; that their grain would not last until Christmas, and so they lived by outside earnings ; that the younger brother was the manager of the household, because he was married, while he himself was a widower ; that peasants from his village came here every year in artéls to hire out as drivers ; that he had never driven before, but that he had taken a place on the post in order to support his brother; that he, thank God, earned 120 roubles in assignats a year, from which sum he sent one hundred home ; and that life would be passable here, if the couriers were not such beasts, and the people such a swearing lot.

"What reason did that driver have to swear so? O Lord ! Did I tear away the horses on purpose ? Do I mean anybody's harm? And what made him gallop away after them ? They would come back in time, anyway. As it is, he will only wear the horses out, and will be lost himself," repeated the God-fearing peasant.

" What is that black spot ?" I asked, noticing a few black objects in front of us.

" A caravan. How nice it is to travel

that way ! " he continued, when we came abreast with huge, mat-covered wheeled wagons, following each other. " You see, not a man is to be seen, – they are all asleep. Those are intelligent horses : they know the way and can't go astray. I have travelled with freight," he added, " so I know."

It was really strange to see those immense wagons covered with snow from the mat top to the wheels and moving all along. Only in the front corner a mat, covered two fingers deep with snow, was raised a little, and for a moment a cap stuck out from it just as our bells tinkled past the caravan.

A large, piebald horse, stretching its neck and straining its back, stepped evenly over the trackless road, monotonously shook its shaggy head under the whitened arch, and pricked one of its snow-covered ears, as we came abreast with it.

Having travelled another half-hour, the driver again turned to me :

" Well, sir, what do you think ? Are we travelling in the right direction ? "

" I do not know," I answered.

"At first there was a terrible wind, but now we are having good weather. No, we are not going right, – we are wandering again," he concluded, with the greatest calm.

It was evident that, notwithstanding the fact that he was inclined to be a coward, he – as the proverb says, In company death is agreeable – became entirely self-possessed when he saw that there were many of us, and he did not have to guide or be responsible. He in the most indifferent manner made observations on the blunders of the guiding driver, as though he were not in the least concerned in the matter. And, in fact, I noticed that the sleigh in the van at times showed its profile on my left and at others on my right ; it even seemed to me that we were circling in a very small space. However, that might have been an optical illusion, even as I was led to believe that the van sleigh was going up-hill or down-hill, or on an incline, whereas the steppe was absolutely flat.

Having travelled a little while longer, I noticed, as I thought, far away near the horizon, a long, black, moving line ; a minute later it became clear to me that it was the same caravan which we had

caught up with before. The snow just as before covered the squeaking wheels, several of which did not even turn ; the men were still sleeping under the mats, and the piebald horse of the van in the same way expanded its nostrils in order to scent the road, and pricked its ears.

" I declare, we have been circling and circling and have come back to the same caravan," my driver said, in a dissatisfied voice. " The courier horses are good, so it does not hurt them to run around recklessly, but ours will soon stop if we are going to travel all night."

He cleared his throat.

" Let us turn back, sir, to save ourselves."

" What for? We shall get somewhere soon."

« Where ? We shall pass the night on the steppe. How it is blowing – 0 Lord ! "

Although I was surprised to see the guiding driver, who obviously had lost both road and direction, not trying to find the road but racing at full gallop with merry shouts, I did not wish to fall behind them.

" Follow them," I said.

The driver started his horses and drove them more unwillingly than before. He no longer turned back to talk to me.

IV.

The storm grew stronger and stronger, and from above fell crisp, tiny flakes of snow. I thought it was beginning to freeze : my nose and cheeks felt more frosty than before, a spray of cold air more frequently found its way under my fur coat, and it became necessary to wrap myself well. Now and then the sleigh rattled over a bare, crusted spot from which the snow had drifted. I had now travelled nearly six hundred versts without staying anywhere overnight, and so, although I was interested in the outcome of our straying, I involuntarily closed my eyes and began to doze.

Once, as I opened my eyes, I was struck for a moment by what seemed to be a bright light that illumined the white plain : the horizon had widened considerably ; the low, black sky had

suddenly disappeared ; on all sides could be seen white, slanting lines of falling snow. The form of the sleigh in front was more distinct, and as I looked up I thought in the first moment that the clouds were dispersed and that the falling snow covered the sky. Just as I awoke, the moon had arisen and was casting its cold bright light through the loose clouds and the falling snow.

What I saw clearly was my sleigh, the horses, the driver, and the three sleighs in front of me : the first, the courier's, in which the driver was sitting alone on the box and driving at an easy trot ; the second, in which sat two men, who, having thrown down the reins and made a windbreak of a cloak, were all the time smoking a pipe, as could be seen by the sparks which flashed there ; and the third, where no one was to be seen, and where in all likelihood the driver was sleeping in the body of the sleigh. The guiding driver, as I awoke, occasionally stopped his horses in order to look for the road. Every time we stopped the howling of the wind became more audible, and I could see more clearly a surprisingly large quantity of snow which was borne through the air. In the snow-shrouded moonlight I saw the short figure of the driver, with his

whip-handle in his hand, testing the snow in front of him and moving up and down in the dim mist; then again he walked up to the sleigh, jumped sideways on the box, and again, above the monotonous whistling of the wind could be heard his brisk, sonorous calls and the tinkling of the bells. Whenever the driver of the first sleigh climbed out to find signs of the road or haystacks, there proceeded from the second sleigh the vivacious, selfconfident voice of one of the drivers calling out to the guide :

" Oh, there, Ignashka ! We have borne too much to the left : bear to the right, under the wind ; " or, " Don't circle about in vain ! Keep to the snow just as it lies and we shall come out all right ; " or, " How you are straying! Unhitch the piebald horse and let him lead: he will take you out to the road. That will be better ! "

The one who was counselling this not only did not unhitch the off-horse or go out on the snow to find the road, but did not even put his nose out from behind his cloak ; and when Ignashka, the guide, to one of his counsels shouted to him to take the lead himself if he knew so well where to drive, the counsellor replied that if he ran a courier sleigh that

would be exactly what he would do, and he would bring us out on the road. " But our horses will not take the lead in a blizzard ! " he called out. " They are not that kind of horses ! "

" Then don't bother me ! " Ignashka replied, merrily whistling to his horses.

The other driver who was sitting in the same sleigh with the counsellor said nothing to Ignashka, and in general took no part in the matter, although he was not yet asleep, as I concluded from his inextinguishable pipe, and because when we stopped I heard his measured, uninterrupted talk. Only once, when Ignashka stopped for the sixth or seventh time, he apparently became annoyed at the interruption of his pleasant ride and called out to him :

" What are you stopping for? I declare, he wants to find the road ! Don't you know it is a snow-storm ? Even an engineer could not find the road now. Keep on as long as the horses pull you ! Don't be afraid, we shall not freeze to death - Go, I say ! "

" Indeed ! A postilion was frozen to death last year ! " my driver interposed.

The driver of the third sleigh did not wake up all that time. Once, during a stop, the counsellor shouted :

" Filipp ! Oh, Filipp ! " and receiving no reply, he remarked : " I wonder whether he is frozen. Ignashka, you had better take a look."

Ignashka, who had time for everything, walked over to the sleigh and began to push the sleeper.

" Just see how half a bottle has knocked him down ! If you are frozen, say so !" he said, shaking him.

The sleeper muttered something and uttered a curse.

" lie is alive, friends ! " said Ignashka, and again he ran ahead. We started once more, this time so fast that the small bay off-horse of my sleigh, which continually received the whip on its tail, more than once jumped up in an awkward small gallop.

V.

I think it must have been about midnight when the old man and Vasili, who had gone after the stray horses, came up to us. They had found and caught the horses, and then fell in with us; but it will always remain a puzzle to me how they did that in the dark, blind snowstorm and on the barren steppe. The old man, swinging his elbows and legs, was riding at a trot on the centre horse, while the side horses were tied to the arch ; for in a snow-storm the horses may not be let loose. When he came abreast with us he again began to call my driver opprobrious names:

" I declare he is a cross-eyed devil !
Really - "

" Oh, Oncle Mitrich," the story-teller in the second sleigh shouted, " are you alive ? Come into our sleigh ! "

The old man made no reply to him, and continued to curse. When he thought he had said enough he rode up to the second sleigh.

"Did you get them all?" somebody in the second sleigh asked.

" I should say so ! "

His small figure threw itself with its breast on the back of the trotting horse, then leaped down on the snow, and without stopping ran to the sleigh and rolled itself in, its legs sticking out above the rounds of the body of the sleigh. Tall Vasili silently seated himself, just as before, in the first sleigh with Ignashka, and both together began to look for the road.

“ What a swearer – O Lord ! ” mumbled my driver.

We then travelled for a long time, without stopping, over the white desert, in the cold, transparent, and quivering light of the snow-storm. I would open my eyes, – and the same clumsy cap and back, covered with snow, towered before me ; the same low arch, under which the head of the centre horse, with its black mane evenly flaunting in the wind, was swaying the same length between the tightly stretched bridle-straps ; beyond the back could be seen the same right-side horse, with its tail tied short and its splinter-bar occasionally striking against the wicker body of the sleigh.

I would look down, – and there the same crisp snow was torn up by the runners and stubbornly raised by the wind and carried

to one side. In front, the guiding sleigh ran at the same constant distance ; on the right and left everything looked white and dim. The eye looked in vain for a new object : there was to be seen neither post, nor stack, nor fence. Everywhere everything was white, white, and in motion : now the horizon seemed to be immeasurably distant, now to be reduced on all sides to within two feet of me ; suddenly a white, tall wall grew out on the right of me and ran along the sleigh, and now it disappeared to grow out in front again, in order to run farther and farther away and to disappear once more.

I would look up, – and at first it seemed light, as though I could see the stars through the snow mist ; but the stars ran away from view higher and higher, and I saw only the snow which fell past my eyes upon my face and the collar of my fur coat. The sky was everywhere equally bright, equally white, colourless, monotonous, and constantly motionless. The wind seemed to change : now it blew into my face and stuck my eyes together with snow ; now it angrily on one side flapped the collar of my fur coat over my head or scornfully switched my face with it ; now it moaned behind me through some chink.

There was heard the feeble, uninterrupted crunching of the hoofs and runners on the snow, and the dull clanking of the bells, as we rode over the deep snow.

Occasionally, when we went against the wind, and over a bared frozen crust, there were borne to us through the air the energetic whistling of Ignashka, and the liquid sound of the bell with the echoing and tremulous fifth, and these sounds suddenly gave relief to the dreary character of the desert, and then again sounded monotonously, playing all the time with insufferable exactness the tune which I imagined I was hearing. One of my feet began to freeze, and when I turned around in order to wrap myself better, the snow, which covered my collar and cap, fell down behind my neck and made me shudder ; but I was, in general, still warm in my fur coat, and sleepiness overpowered me.

VI.

Recollections and pictures with increased velocity alternated in my imagination.

" The counsellor who is all the time calling out in the second sleigh, I wonder what kind of a peasant he may be ? No doubt he is red-haired, stout, with short legs/' I think, " just like Fédor Filippych, our old butler." And I see the staircase of our big house, and five manorial servants stepping heavily on towels, as they drag a piano out of the wing. I see Fédor Filippych, with the rolled up sleeves of his nankeen coat, carrying one pedal, running ahead, unfastening a bolt, pulling here at the towel, giving a push there, creeping between the people's legs, being in everybody's way, and never ceasing to cry in an anxious voice :

" Back, you people in front ! That's it ! Lift the tail end ! Up, up, and carry it through the door ! That's it ! "

"Just let us do it alone, Fédor Filippych," timidly remarks the gardener, jammed against the balustrade, red with straining, with the greatest exertion holding up a comer of the grand.

But Fédor Filippych does not cease worrying.

" What is this ?" I reflect. " Does he imagine that he is useful and necessary

for the common work, or is he simply glad because God has given him that self-confident, persuasive eloquence, and delighted because he is squandering it ? It must be so." And I, for some reason, see the pond, the tired servants, who, knee-deep in the water, are dragging a seine, and again Fédor Filippych with a watering-pot, shouting to everybody, running up and down the shore, and occasionally walking up to the pond in order, by holding back the golden carps with his hand, to let the turbid water flow out and to take up fresh water.

And now it is noon, in the month of July. I am going somewhere over the newly mown grass of the orchard, under the burning and direct rays of the sun ; I am still very young, and I am lacking something and wishing for something. I go to the pond, to my favourite place, between the brier-bushes and the birch avenue, and lie down to sleep. I remember the feeling with which I, lying down, look through the red, prickly stems of the brier upon the black globules of dry earth, and the glinting light blue mirror of the pond. It is the feeling of a certain naïve self-satisfaction and sadness. Everything around me is so beautiful and all that beauty so affects me, that it seems to me that I myself am good, and the one thing

that annoys me is that nobody admires me.

It is hot. I try to fall asleep in order to find consolation ; but the flies, the unendurable flies, give me no rest even here, begin to gather around me, and stubbornly and stiffly, like knuckle-bones, keep leaping from my forehead to my hands.

A bee buzzes not far from me in the hottest place ; yellow-winged butterflies fly exhausted from blade to blade. I look up: my eyes pain, – the sun burns too brightly through the light foliage of the curly birch-tree, which sways its boughs high above me and softly, and I feel hotter still.

I cover my face with my handkerchief: I feel suffocated, and the flies seem to stick to my hands on which exudes perspiration.

In the brier thicket the sparrows begin to fuss. One of them has leaped down on the ground, about two feet from me: he twice pretends to pick at the ground, and, rustling in the twigs, and giving a merry chirp, he flies

out of the thicket ; another, too, leaps down on the ground, raises his tail,

looks about him, and flies away after the first, like an arrow, with a twittering.

On the pond are heard the strokes of the beetles on the wet clothes, and these strokes reecho, and are, as it were, carried downward, over the surface of the pond. I hear the laughter and chatting and plashing of bathers.

A gust of wind makes the tops of the birches rustle at a distance from me ; now it comes nearer, and I hear it stir the grass, and now the leaves of the brier thicket get into commotion and flap on their branches ; and now, raising a corner of my handkerchief and tickling my perspiring face, a fresh spray has reached me.

A fly has found its way through the opening of the raised handkerchief, and in fright flutters about my moist mouth. A dry twig presses against my back. No, I can't lie any longer : I will go to take a swim. But just then I hear some hasty steps near that very brier thicket, and a woman's frightened voice :

" O Lord ! What shall we do ? And no men around ! "

" What is it ? What ? " I, running out

into the sun, ask the servant woman who runs, sobbing, past me. She only looks back on me, sways her hands, and runs ahead. And now here is seventy-year-old Matrëna, holding down the kerchief with her hand, as it slips from her head, tripping along, dragging one foot in a woollen stocking, and running to the pond. Two girls run, holding each other's hands, and a ten-year-old boy, in his father's coat, clutching the hempen skirt of one of them, follows.

" What has happened ?" I ask them.

" A peasant has drowned."

" Where ? "

" In the pond."

" Who? One of ours ? "

" No, a transient."

Coachman Ivän, scuffing his huge boots over the mown grass, and fat steward Yakov, drawing breath with difficulty, run to the pond, and I after them.

I remember the feeling which said to me :
" Jump in and pull out the peasant ! Save him, and everybody will admire you,"

which was precisely what I wanted.

" But where, where ?" I ask the crowd of manorial servants collected on the shore.

" Over yonder, right in the whirlpool, near the other shore, almost near the bath-house," says the laundress, putting the wet clothes on the yoke. " I saw him dive under; then he appeared again, and again went out of sight ; he showed up once more, and cried, ' People, I am drowning ! ' and again went down, — nothing but bubbles came up. Then I knew that a man was drowning, so I yelled, ' People, a man is drowning! ' "

The laundress swings the yoke on her shoulder, and, waddling sidewise, walks over a foot-path away from the pond.

" What a misfortune ! " says Yakov Ivanov, the steward, in a desperate voice. " What a lot of trouble there will now be with the rural court! There will be no getting rid of it ! "

A peasant with a scythe makes his way through the crowd of women, children, and old men, who are gathered at the farther shore, and, hanging his scythe on the branch of a willow, slowly takes off his boots.

" Where is it ? Where did he drown ?" I keep asking, wishing to jump in there and do something unusual.

I have pointed out to me the smooth surface of the pond, which the passing breeze ripples now and then. I cannot make out how he has drowned: the water continues to stand just as smoothly, beautifully, and indifferently above him, resplendent in the gold of the afternoon sun, and it seems to me that I am unable to do anything, and that I shall not surprise any one, especially since I am a poor swimmer; meanwhile the peasant is pulling the shirt over his head, ready to jump in. All look at him in hope and breathless expectancy ; but having gone into the water up to his shoulders, the peasant slowly returns and puts on his shirt, – he cannot swim.

More and more people run up, and the crowd grows bishier and bigger ; the women hold on to each other ; but nobody offers any aid. Those who have just arrived give all kinds of advice, and sigh, and fright and despair are depicted in their faces ; of those who have been there awhile, some, being tired of standing, sit down on the grass, while others go back. Old Matréna asks her daughter whether she has

closed the damper of the stove ; the boy in his father's coat with precision throws pebbles into the water.

But now, barking and looking back in doubt, Trezorka, Fédor Filippych's dog, comes running down-hill ; and now his own form, running down-hill and shouting something, appears from behind the brier thicket.

" What are you standing for ? " he calls out, taking off his coat on the run. " A man has drowned, and they stand there ! Let me have a rope ! "

Everybody looks in hope and fear at Fédor Filippych while he, holding with his hand the shoulder of an obliging servant, with the tip of his left boot pulls off the heel of his right.

" Over there, where the people are standing, over there, a little to the right of the willow, Fédor Filippych ! Over there," somebody says to him.

" I know," he answers, and, frowning, no doubt in reply to the signs of shame expressed in the crowd of women, pulls off his shirt and takes down his cross, which he hands to the gardener's boy, who is standing before him in an attitude of

admiration. Then, stepping energetically over the mown grass, he goes up to the pond.

Trezorka, perplexed as to the cause of the swift movements of his master, has stopped near the crowd and, having swallowed with a smacking noise several grassblades near the shore, looks questioningly at him, and with a merry yap throws himself into the water with his master.

At first nothing is seen but foam and spray, which reaches us on the shore ; then Fédor Filippych gracefully swings his arms and, evenly raising and lowering his back, with a hand over hand motion, briskly swims to the other shore. Trezorka gets his mouth full of water, hurriedly turns back, shakes himself off near the crowd, and on his back dries himself on the shore.

While Fédor Filippych is reaching the other shore, two coachmen run up to the willow with a seine rolled up on a stick. Fédor Filippych for some reason or other raises his arms, dives once, twice, a third time, every time letting a stream of water out of his mouth, handsomely tossing his hair, and not answering the questions which are hurled at him on all

sides. Finally he comes out on the shore, and, so far as I can see, is busy merely with giving orders about the spreading of the seine. The seine is dragged out, but there is nothing in the net but ooze, and a few small carps wiggling in it. While the seine is thrown out again I pass over to the other side.

All that is heard is the voice of Fédor Filippych giving orders, the plashing of the wet rope in the water, and sighs of terror. The wet rope, which is attached to the right wing, is ever more covered with grass, and comes ever farther out of the water.

"Now pull together, as one man, pull!" shouts Fédor Filippych. The water-soaked floats make their appearance.

"There is something coming ! It pulls hard, friends," somebody calls out.

Now the wings with two or three little carps wriggling in them are pulled out on the shore, where they wet and crush the grass. And now through the thin, quivering layer of troubled water there appears something white in the stretched net. A sigh of terror, not loud, but impressively audible amidst the dead silence, runs through the crowd.

" Pull, harder, out to the shore ! " is heard the determined voice of Fédor Filippych, and the drowned man is dragged out to the willow, over the mowed-down stubbles of burdock and agrimony.

And now I see my good old aunt in a silk dress ; I see her lilac parasol with a lace edge, which is somehow out of keeping with this picture of death, so terrible in its simplicity ; I see her face, which is ready to burst out into tears. • I remember the disappointment expressed in her face because she could not make any use of arnica in this case ; I also remember the painful, aggravating feeling which I experienced when she said to me, with a naïve egotism of love : " Come, my dear ! Oh, how terrible this is ! And you always go out swimming by yourself ! "

I remember how brightly and hotly the sun baked the powdery earth underfoot ; how it played on the mirror of the pond ; how the large carps plashed near the shore, while schools of small fish rippled the middle of the smooth pond ; how a hawk circled high in the air, hovering over the ducklings which, dousing and splashing, swam out from the reeds into the pond ; how the white, curly storm-

clouds gathered near the horizon ; how the mud which had been brought out on the shore by the seine slowly receded, and how, walking along the dam, I again heard the strokes of the beetle, as they reecho over the pond.

But this beetle sounds as though two beetles were tuned to thirds, and this sound torments and exhausts me, the more so since I know that this beetle is a bell, and Fédor Filippych will not make it stop. This beetle, like an instrument of torture, compresses my foot, which is freezing, – and I fall asleep.

I was awakened, as I thought, by our very rapid ride, and by two voices calling out right near me :

" Say, Ignashka ! Oh, Ignashka ! " said the voice of my driver. " Take my passenger ! You have to drive there anyway, but why should I wander about uselessly ? Take him ! "

Ignashka's voice called out over me : " What pleasure is there for me to be responsible for the passenger ? Will you put up a bottle ? "

" A bottle ! Half a bottle will do."

"Half a bottle, I declare !" shouts another voice. "To wear out the horses for half a bottle ! "

I opened my eyes. The same insufferable, quivering snow blinded my eyes ; there were the same drivers and horses, but I saw some other sleigh near me. My driver had caught up with Ignashka, and we for a long time drove side by side. Although a voice from the other sleigh advised him not to take less than a bottle, Ignashka suddenly stopped his sleigh.

" Load them over ! So be it ! It is your luck ! You will put up the half bottle to-morrow when we come back. Have you much luggage ? "

My driver jumped out into the snow, with unusual vivacity for him, bowed to me, and asked me to seat myself in Ignashka's sleigh. I had no objection ; it was evident that the God-fearing peasant was so happy over it that he wished to pour out his gratitude and joy on somebody : he bowed and thanked me, Aléshka, and Ignashka.

" Well, thank God ! What was it for anyway, O Lord ! We have been driving half the night, and we do not know whither we are going. He will get you

there safely, sir, while my horses are all worn out."

He transferred the things with increased alacrity.

While the things were being transferred, I went with the wind, which almost lifted me off my feet, to the second sleigh. This sleigh was one-fourth covered with snow, particularly on the side where the cloak had been put out as a protection against the wind over the heads of the two drivers ; but back of the cloak it was pleasant and comfortable. The old man was lying as before with his legs dangling over the side, and the storyteller continued his tale : " At the same time as the general comes, you see, in the name of the king, to Mary, in the prison, just at that time Mary says to him : ' General, I have no need of you, and cannot love you, and so, you see, you are not my lover ; but my lover is that same prince.'

" At the same time - " he went on, but, seeing me, he grew silent for a moment and began to fan the spark on his pipe.

"Well, sir, have you come to us to hear a tale?" said the other, whom I have called the counsellor.

" Yes, it is nice and jolly here with you ! " I said.

"It drives away dulness. At least, you have no time to think."

" Do you not know where we are now ? "

This question did not please the drivers, so I thought.

" Who can make out where ? Maybe we have driven into the Calmuck country," replied the counsellor.

" What are we going to do ?" I asked.

"What are we going to do? We will keep driving, and maybe we shall get somewhere," he said, in a dissatisfied voice.

" But if we do not, and the horses stick in the snow, what then ? "

" Why, nothing."

" But we shall freeze to death."

" Of course, that is possible, because we can't see any haystacks now : evidently we have got into the Calmuck country.

Above everything else we must watch the snow."

" Are you afraid, sir, you will freeze ? " asked the old man, in a trembling voice.

Although he seemed to be making fun of me, he apparently was chilled to his bones.

" Yes, it is getting very cold," said I.

" Ah, sir ! You ought to do the way I do : don't mind it, and take a run, and you will feel warmer."

" It's great to run behind the sleigh," said the counsellor.

VII.

" Please, all is ready ! " Aléshka cried to me, from the front sleigh.

The snow-storm was so severe that only by bending over and clutching the skirts of my overcoat with both my hands was I able with the greatest difficulty to make the few steps which separated me from the sleigh, over the drifting snow which was

carried away from under my feet. My former driver was already kneeling in the middle of the empty sleigh ; but, upon seeing me, he raised his large cap, whereat the wind furiously flaunted his hair, and asked me for a pourboire. No doubt, he did not expect anything, for my refusal did not in the least disappoint him. He thanked me anyway, shoved his cap back on his head, and said to me :
" Well, sir, God grant you – " and, jerking his reins and smacking his lips, he moved away from us. Soon after Ignashka, too, swayed with his whole back, and shouted to his horses. Again the sound of the crunching hoofs, of the shouting, and of the bells took the place of the howling wind, which became particularly audible whenever we stopped.

For about fifteen minutes after the transfer I did not sleep, finding diversion in watching the form of my new driver and of Ids horses. Ignashka sat on the box in a dashing fashion, kept leaping up, waved his hand, with the whip hanging down from it, at the horses, shouted, beat one foot against the other, and, bending over, adjusted the crupper of the centre horse, which kept sliding off to the right. He was not tall, but, as I thought, well formed. Above his short fur coat he wore a beltless cloak,

the collar of which was almost thrown back ; his neck was entirely bare ; he wore not felt, but leather boots and a small cap, which he kept taking off and fixing on his head. His ears were covered by his hair only. In all his movements there was to be seen not only energy, but something more, I thought, namely, a desire to rouse this energy in himself. Still, the farther we travelled, the more frequently he, to adjust himself, jumped up in his seat, clapped his feet together, and started conversations with Aléshka and me. I thought he was afraid of losing courage.

And there was good reason for it : although the horses were good, the road became more difficult with every step, and we could see the horses running less willingly. It became necessary to use the whip, and the good, large, shaggy centre horse stumbled two or three times, even though, taking fright, it jerked forward and swung its shaggy head almost as high as the bell. The right side horse, which I involuntarily watched, visibly dropped the traces and the long leather tassel of the crupper which kept dangling and bobbing on the off side, and begged for the whip, but, being a good, and even a mettled, horse, it seemed to be annoyed at its own weakness, and angrily lowered

and raised its head, begging for the reins.

It was really terrible to see the snow-storm and frost growing stronger, the horses weakening, the road getting worse, and ourselves not knowing where we were, or whither we were going, or whether we should reach the station at all, or even a shelter, – and it was ridiculous and strange to hear the bell tinkling with such freedom and cheerfulness, and Ignashka shouting so briskly and beautifully, as though it were a sunny day during the Epiphany frosts, and we were out for a holiday sleighride along a village street ; but, 'strangest of all, was the thought that we were travelling, and travelling fast, some–

where away from the spot in which we were. Ignashka started a song, in a horrible falsetto, it is true, but in such a loud voice and with such pauses, during which he whistled, that it would have been strange to be timid while listening to him.

" Ho, there ! Don't yell that way, Ignashka ! " was heard the counsellor's voice. " Stop a bit ! "

" 'What? "

" Sto-o-op ! ''

Ignashka stopped. Again everything was silent, and the wind began to moan and howl, and the snow, whirling, fell more heavily upon the sleigh. The counsellor walked over to us.

" Well, what ? "

" What ? Where are we going ? "

" Who knows ? "

" Are your feet frozen that you strike them so ? "

" I hardly feel them.''

"You had better get down: there is something glimmering there, – maybe it is a Calmuck camp. You might be able to warm your feet."

" All right. Hold the horses – here ! "

Ignashka ran in the direction pointed out to him.

" One must look at everything and watch it : something might be found. What sense is there in travelling at random ? " the

counsellor said to me. " Just see how he has made the horses sweat ! "

All the time that Ignashka was walking, – and that lasted so long that I was afraid he might have lost his way, – the counsellor told me in a self-confident, quiet tone of voice what was to be done during a snow-storm, – that it would be best to unhitch a horse and let it go, that, as God is holy, it would take them right, and how sometimes it is possible to go by the stars, and that, if he had the leading sleigh, we should long ago have been at the station.

"Well, did you find it?" he asked Ignashka, who was coming back, with difficulty trailing his legs knee-deep in the snow.

" I did find something, – some kind of a camp," Ignashka replied, breathing heavily, " but I do not know what it is. My friend, we must have strayed into the Prolgovskaya estate. We must bear more to the left."

" What nonsense ! That is our camp, which is back of the Cossack village," retorted the counsellor.

" But I tell you it is not ! "

" I have looked at it, and I know: that's what it is; and if not that, it is Tamyshevsko. We must keep more to the right : we shall come out near the long bridge, at the eighth verst."

" I tell you no ! I saw it ! " Ignashka replied, in anger.

" O friend, and you call yourself a driver ! "

" That's it, I am a driver ! Go do-wn yourself ! "

" What is the use of my going ? I know without going."

Ignashka grew apparently angry : he jumped on the box, without answering him, and drove on.

" I declare, my feet are numb : I can't warm them up," he said to Aléshka, continuing ever more frequently to strike his legs together and to scoop out and throw away the snow which had got into his boot-legs.

I was dreadfully sleepy.

VIII.

" Is it possible I am freezing to death ?
" I thought through my sleep. " They say death always begins with sleep. It would be better to drown than freeze stiff. Let them drag me out with a seine. Still, it does not make much difference whether I drown or freeze stiff, so long as that stick will not be pushing me in the back and I can forget myself."

I forgot myself for a second.

" What will all this end in ?" I suddenly say mentally, opening my eyes for a moment and staring at the white space. " What will it all end in ? If we do not find any stacks and the horses stop, which, it seems, will soon happen, we shall all of us freeze to death."

I must confess, although I was a little afraid, the desire that something unusual, something tragical, might happen with us, was stronger in me than my petty fear. It seemed to me that it would not be bad if the horses themselves brought us on the morning half-frozen to some distant, unknown village, and if a few of us were even completely frozen. Dreams of

this kind hovered before me with unusual distinctness, and followed each other with extraordinary rapidity.

The horses stop ; there is ever more snow falling, and nothing but the ears and the arch of the horses can be seen. Suddenly Ignashka appears above us with his trdyka and hurries past us. We implore him, we cry to him, to take us ; but the wind carries away the sound, and there is no voice. Igndshka laughs, shouts to his horses, whistles, and is hidden from us in a deep, snow-drifted ravine. The old man jumps on horseback, swings his elbows, and wants to gallop away, but cannot move from the spot. My old driver, with the large cap, throws himself upon him, drags him down to the ground, and tramples upon him in the snow. " You wizard ! " he cries, " you scold ! Let us wander together ! " But the old man knocks a hole through the drift with his head : he is not so much an old man as a rabbit, and he is leaping away from us.

The counsellor, who is Fédor Filippych, tells us all to sit down in a circle and not to mind being covered up by the snow, for we will be warmer that way. And really, we are warm and comfortable ; only, I want to drink.

I take out the lunch-basket, treat everybody to rum and sugar, and myself drink with great pleasure.

The story-teller is telling some tale about the rainbow, – and above us there is a ceiling of snow and a rainbow.

" Now let us each make a room out of the snow, and let us go to sleep ! " I say. The snow is soft and warm, like fur. I make a room for myself and want to enter it ; but Fédor Filippych, who sees the money in my lunchbasket, says to me :

" Hold on ! Give me the money ! We shall have to die anyway ! " and he grabs me by the leg. I give him the money and only ask him to leave me alone ; but they do not believe that this is all the money I have, and want to kill me.

I seize the old man's hand and –with unspeakable joy begin to kiss it : the old man's hand is tender and sweet. At first he tears it away from me, then he gives it to me of his own accord, and with his other hand pats me.

Still, Fédor Filippych comes to me and threatens me. I run into my room : it is not a room, but a long, white corridor, and somebody holds me by my legs. I tear

myself away.

My dress and part of my skin remain in the hands of him who is holding me ; but I am only cold and ashamed, – the more ashamed because my aunt with her parasol and homoeopathic medicine–chest, linking arms with the drowned man, are coming toward me. They are laughing, and do not understand the signs which I am making to them.

I throw myself into the sleigh, and my feet trail in the snow ; but the old man is in pursuit of me, swinging his arms. The old man is very close to me, but I listen and I hear two bells ringing in front of me, and I know that I am saved as soon as I reach them.

The bells sound louder and louder ; but the old man has caught up with me and falls upon my face with his belly, so that the bells can scarcely be heard. I again grasp his hand and begin to kiss it – The old man is not an old man, but the drowned person – and he cries :

" Igndshka, stop ! Those are Akhmét's stacks, I think ! Go and take a look at them ! "

" This is too terrible. No, I will wake

up – "

I opened my eyes. The wind had blown the flap of Aléshka's overcoat on my face, and my knee was uncovered ; we were travelling over the bare crust, and the thirds of the bells could be heard most distinctly with the quivering fifth.

I looked to see the stacks ; but instead of the stacks, I now see, with open eyes, a house with a balcony and the crenelated wall of a fortress. I am not much interested in scrutinizing this house and fortress ; what I want is to see the white corridor, over which I run, and to hear the sound of the church-bell, and to kiss the hand of the old man. I again close my eyes and fall asleep.

IX.

I slept soundly ; but the third of the bells was all the time audible and now appeared to me in the shape of a dog, barking and jumping at me, and now as an organ, of which I was one pipe, and now as French verses, which I was composing. Then again it appeared to me that this third was some instrument of torture,

with which they did not cease compressing my right heel. This sensation was so strong that I awoke and opened my eyes and rubbed my leg. It was beginning to be numb.

It was a light, turbid, white night. The same motion pushed me and the sleigh ; the same Ignashka was sitting sidewise and beating his feet together; the same side horse, stretching its neck and indolently lifting its feet, ran at a trot over the deep snow, while the tassel bobbed up and down on the crupper and switched the horse's belly. The head of the centre horse with the floating mane shook its head in even measure, straining and loosening the reins which were attached to the arch.

All that was covered with snow more than ever before. The snow whirled in front ; from the side it covered the runners and the feet of the horses up to their knees, and lodged from above on the collars and caps. The wind was now on the right, ' now on the left ; it played with the collar and skirt of Ignäshka's cloak and with the mane of the oft' horse, and moaned over the arch and between the shafts.

It became dreadfully cold, and the moment I put my face out of my collar, the

frosty, crisp snow, whirling, packed itself on my eyelashes, mouth, and nose, and lodged behind my neck. I looked around me, and everything was white, bright, and snowy, – not a thing anywhere but turbid light and snow. I began in earnest to feel terribly. Aléshka was sleeping at my feet and in the very bottom of the sleigh ; his whole back was covered with a dense layer – of snow. Ignashka did not lose courage : he kept jerking his reins, shouting, and clapping his feet. The bell sounded just as charmingly. The horses snorted a little, but continued to run, stumbling ever more frequently, and stepping more softly.

Ignashka again leaped up, waved his mitten, and started a song in his thin, strained voice. Before finishing it, he stopped the sleigh, threw the reins on the seat, and climbed down. The wind howled furiously ; the snow covered the skirts of Ins fur coat, as though shovelled upon it. I looked around : the third sleigh was not back of us, it had fallen behind somewhere. Near the second sleigh the old man could be discerned through the snow mist, jumping now on one foot, now on the other. Ignashka made about three steps from the sleigh, sat down in the snow, ungirded himself, and began to take off his boots.

" What are you doing there ?" I asked.

" I must change my boots, else I shall freeze off my feet," he replied, continuing at his work.

I was too cold to put my neck out of my collar, in order to see what he was doing. I sat upright, looking at the side horse, which, spreading its feet, in a sickly and tired manner wagged its tied-up and snow-covered tail. The jar which Ignashka caused to the sleigh, as he jumped upon his box, woke me up.

" Where are we now ?" I asked. " Shall we get there at least at daybreak ? "

" Don't worry : we shall get you there," he replied. " My feet are now quite warm since I have changed my boots."

He started ; the bell began to ring, the sleigh once more swayed from side to side, and the wind whistled under the runners. We again navigated the immeasurable sea of snow.

X.

I fell soundly asleep. When Aléshka, kicking me with his foot, woke me up, and I opened my eyes, it was day. It seemed even colder than at night. There was no snow from above ; but a stiff, dry wind kept drifting the powdery snow on the field and especially under the hoofs of the horses and under the runners. The sky in the east, to the right of us, was of a dark blue hue and looked leaden ; but the bright, orange, slanting rays were ever more clearly defined upon it. Overhead, the pale azure of the heaven could be seen back of white, fleeting, lightly tinged clouds ; on the left the clouds were bright, light, and movable. All about us, so far as the eye could see, the field was covered by white, deep snow, scattered in sharp layers.

Here and there could be seen a grayish mound, over which stubbornly swept crisp, powdery snow. Not one track, of sleigh, or man, or beast, was visible. The contour and colours of the driver's back and of the horses could be clearly discerned and were sharply defined on the white background. The visor of Ignashka's dark blue cap, his collar, his hair, and even his boots were white. The sleigh was completely covered with snow. The gray centre horse had the whole right side of

its head and of the top-lock packed with snow ; the off horse on my side had its legs covered with snow up to the knee, and on the right side the large sweat-drops were frozen into a rough surface. The tassel bobbed up in the same even manner, as though to keep time with any imaginable tune, and the horse was running as before ; but by its sunken, rising and falling belly and flabby ears one could see how tired it was.

There was but one new object to arrest attention : it was a verst-post, from which the snow dropped upon the ground, and near which the wind had drifted a whole mound to the right and was still furiously transferring the crisp snow from one side to another. I was very much astonished to see that we had travelled a whole night for twelve hours with the same horses, without knowing whither we were going or stopping, and yet had managed to come out all right. Our bell seemed to tinkle more cheerfully.

Ignashka wrapped himself in his coat and shouted. Behind us the horses snorted, and the bells tinkled on the sleigh of the old man and the counsellor ; but the one who had been asleep was positively lost somewhere in the steppe. Having travelled about half a verst, we came across a fresh, not yet covered-up track

of a sleigh and troyka, and occasionally rose-coloured spots of blood, apparently from a horse that had grazed its foot, were seen upon it.

" That is Filipp ! I declare, he has got ahead of us ! " said Ignashka.

Now a little house with a sign was seen standing all alone in the snow, which had drifted almost up to the roof and windows. Near the inn stood a trdyka of gray horses, with a curly nap from the frozen sweat, with outstretched legs and drooping heads. The space before the door was swept clean, and there stood a shovel; but the snow still drifted from the roof, and the moaning wind whirled it about.

In reply to the sound of our bells, a tall, red-cheeked, red-haired driver came out of the door, holding a glass of liquor in his hands, and shouted something. Ignashka turned around to me and asked my permission to stop. Then, for the first time, I saw his physiognomy.

XI.

His face was swarthy and lean, and he had a straight nose, just such as I had expected, judging from his hair and build. It was a round, merry, very snub-nosed physiognomy, with an immense mouth, and sparkling, light blue eyes. His cheeks and neck were red, as if rubbed with a piece of cloth ; the eyebrows, the long eyelashes, and the down which evenly covered the lower part of his face, were packed with snow and entirely white. There was but half a verst left to the station, and we stopped.

" Only hurry up ! " I said.

" Just one minute," replied Igndshka, jumping down from his box, and walking over to Filipp.

" Let me have it, friend," he said, taking oft" the mitten from his right hand and throwing it with the whip on the snow. He threw back his head, and in one gulp emptied the glass of brandy which had been given to him.

The innkeeper, no doubt an ex-Cossack, came out of the door with a bottle in his hand.

" Who wants some ? " he said.

Tall Vasili, a lank, light-haired man, with a goat-like beard, and the counsellor, a stout, white-haired man, with a thick white beard encasing his red face, went up to him and also drank a glass. The old man, too, walked over to the group of the drinking men, but he was not served ; he went back to his horses, which were tied from behind, and began to pat one of them on the back and crupper.

The old man was just as I had imagined him : small, haggard, with a wrinkled, livid face, scanty beard, sharp little nose, and ground-down yellow teeth. He wore a new driver's cap, but his short fur coat, worn off, smeared with tar, and torn at the shoulder and the skirts, did not cover his knees and his hempen nether garment, which was tucked into his huge felt boots. He was all bent and wrinkled, and, with trembling face and knees, was busy about the sleigh, apparently trying to get warm.

" Well, Mitrich, you had better take half a bottle ! It would warm you up," the counsellor said to him.

Mitrich was startled. He adjusted the harness of his horse, straightened out

the arch, and walked over to me.

" Well, sir," he said, taking his cap from off his gray hair, and making a low obeisance, " we have been wandering about with you the whole night, looking for the road : you might favour me with a half-bottle. Really, sir, your Serenity ! I have nothing to warm myself with," he added, with a servile smile.

I gave him twenty-five kopeks. The innkeeper brought out a half-bottle and gave it to the old man. He took off his mitten and the whip, and stretched out his small, black, pockmarked, and somewhat livid hand toward the glass; but the thumb refused to obey him, as though it did not belong to him : he could not hold the glass, and he spilled the brandy and dropped the glass on the snow.

All the drivers roared with laughter.

" I declare, Mitrich is so frozen that he cannot hold the brandy."

Mitrich was very much annoyed at having spilled the drink.

However, they filled another glass for him and poured it into his mouth. He immediately became more cheerful, ran

into the inn, lighted his pipe, began to grin, displaying his yellow, ground teeth, and to swear with every

word he spoke. Having finished the last glass, the drivers went back to their sleighs, and we started.

The snow grew whiter and brighter, so that one felt blinded looking at it. The orange strips rose higher and higher, and shone brighter and brighter above on the sky ; even the red disk of the sun became visible near the horizon through the steel gray clouds : the azure became more brilliant and darker.

On the road, near the village, the track was clear and distinct and of a yellowish consistency, and here and there we crossed over sink-holes ; in the frosty, compressed air one could feel a certain agreeable lightness and coolness.

My sleigh went very fast. The head of the centre horse and its neck, with its mane fluttering up to the arch, swayed with a rapid motion, almost in one spot, under the fancier's bell, the tongue of which no longer rang out, but rattled along the walls. The good side horses, tugging together at the frozen, crooked traces, leaped energetically, while the tassel

bobbed against the belly and the crupper. Occasionally a side horse wandered off the beaten road into a snowdrift, sending up a spray of snow into its eyes, in its attempt to get out again. Ignashka shouted in a merry tenor ; the dry frost made the runners shriek ; behind us two little bells were tinkling in a melodious and holiday fashion, and I could hear the drunken exclamations of the drivers. I looked back : the gray, curly side horses, stretching out their necks and breathing evenly, their bits awry, leaped over the snow. Filipp adjusted his cap, waving the whip ; the old man lay in the middle of the sleigh, his legs being raised as before.

Two minutes later the sleigh creaked over the planks of the swept driveway of the station, and Ignashka turned to me his snow-covered, frost-exhaling, merry face.

" We have brought you here after all, sir ! " he said.