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THE 2 Kopecks Serpentine PERF. OF BALLYROTSK.

(CONSIDERABLY) AFTER JELES VERNE.

(Continued from page 17.)

After a violent altercation with the clerk as to whether his name was to be charged as on word or regard, he repaired in haste to the offices of Messrs. Thos. Cook and Son, where he engaged, regardless of expense, a personally-conducted tour to Ballyrotsk for himself alone. Twenty-seven hours, fifteen minutes and a half had elapsed since Alcide Roulette unknown to the Englishmen, had started from Paris. Was it possible that by means of a special train to Dover, a special fast steamer across the Channel, and specially-engaged conveyances—provided by the agents of the ubiquitous Cook—that delay twenty-seven hours, &c., unwittingly incurred, could be made up?

Time alone would show; and time, as usual, was rapidly hurrying onward.
The usual pace of an express train—[We have to omit some very interesting statistics as to rates of traveling by various conveyances, from the earliest time, &c., &c. But the usual considerations, &c.,—Ed.]

CHAPTER V.

We left Alcide Roulette, in a *bacmosnah* drawn by three yekods abreast [a means of conveyance which we confess we never heard of before; you may depend upon me.—AUTHOR.], shouting for the Letajoski.

No sooner did the latter make his appearance than he was assailed with a torrent of eager questions.

"Your stock, your stock of stamps, where is it?"

"My stock, Monsieur!"

"Yes, your stock. Did you not get my telegram?"

"No, indeed, Monsieur. When was it sent, and from where?"

"Yesterday week, at 11.29 a. m., from Paris."

"But, Monsieur, telegrams reach us only by the ordinary mails, arriving at Ballyrotsk but once a month. We had a mail just one week hence; the next will arrive twenty-one days hence."

"Confusion! And your stock?"

"It is gone, all; the drawer is absolutely empty! There will be no more stamps until I have time to print them, and this is our busiest season."

"But stamps like this, the perforated stamps," and Alcide Roulette produced an accurate tracing of the marvelous variety, "what are they, where are they?"

"Alas! Monsieur, all the stamps like that are eaten."

"Eaten! Merciful heavens! to what straits

have these wretched villagers been reduced! But the machine, the machine!"

"The machine, Monsieur?"

"Yes, the machine, the machine that produces this perforation?"

A light dawned upon the Letajoski, a brilliant idea flashed across his mind.

"Monsieur, if you will stay here but one night, only till to-morrow morning, you shall have—for the ridiculously small sum of three roubles, two kopecks and a half, silver, paid in advance—you shall have the machine. I swear it, upon the honor of an officer of the 15th Class of the Order of the Holy Blue Bear."

Mystery upon mystery! Why was not the machine forthcoming at once?

But the wily Letajoski would give no explanations, and the sum being but a small one, Alcide Roulette paid it, and the skin of the officer of the Order of the Holy Blue Bear was saved from the knou!

Alcide Roulette retired to such rest as he could obtain in the miserable quarters that were alone available. It was plainly useless to order supper, when the inhabitants had been reduced to devouring their postage stamps. He swallowed the few fragments which he had fortunately saved from his dinner, and retired to the humble apology for a bed that had been provided for him in the licensed drinking shop.

To bed, but not to sleep! No! All the most influential inhabitants of the district united to render sleep impossible. To use his own expression, he was *Perce en flex pignou a la pousse*, and rattleed in all the colored lines of the so'ar spectrum!

Besides all this, the thoughts of the extraordinary perforation, and of the mysterious machine which produced those curious dentulations, were enough of themselves to keep his brain in a sleepless whirl. Poor Alcide Roulette! Small wonder that at daybreak he was again clamoring at the door of the village post-office, half distracted.

The Letajoski slept soundly, and when he at last awoke it was only to indignantly assure his untimely visitor that the post office did not open till 10 a. m., and that it was contrary to all the regulations to admit anyone, no matter who, before that hour.

Alcide Roulette returned to his comfortless couch.

After feverishly tossing about for an hour or two he fell into a fitful slumber, disturbed by nightmares, in which gigantic perforating machines penetrated his chest, pinning him to the ground with their needles, while a kind of Juggernaut Car with rattleing wheels 3 threatened to divide him into narrow longitudinal strips. On the top of all was seated the grinning Letajoski, with a sheet of serpentine perforated stamps in one hand and the machine in the other.

What was the machine? Pinned down as he was he could not get at it; he could not even see what it was like.

He awoke with a start—it was broad daylight—he had slept, if sleeping it could be called, till long past midday.

Now for the machine.

He hurried to the post office. The Letajoski received him with a pleasant smile, quite unlike the fiendish grin of that horrible dream, and asked—without the slightest tinge of irony—whether he had slept well. With his natural politeness, Alcide Roulette assured him that he had passed a most agreeable night, and then proceeded to ask for the promised machine.

"Here it is, Monsieur; I have captured it at last!"

And the Letajoski produced to the astonished gaze of his questioner—what? What could it be? A small apparatus of wires and wood with something inside which rattled and—and squeaked!

"Could it want oiling, this machine?"

"What was it? Could it be? It was—"

A moustrap! An ordinary, domestic, penny moustrap!

And inside it—was it possible?

A mouse! *Mus domesticus! Mus ridiculosus! Mus DENTICULATOR!!!* [Even at this most exciting moment, the author could not resist the opportunity of introducing a few pages dealing with the natural history of the RODENTIA, which we have no scruple about omitting.—ED.]

"What does this mean?" exclaimed the indignant Frenchman. "I am in no humor for jesting, Monsieur."

"But, Monsieur, this is the machine for which you asked. I told you that the stamps were eaten—"

Eaten! Nibbled! Horror!

"Then the serpentine perforation, this extraordinary variety on account of which I have traveled all the way from Paris—is it possible?"

"But certainly, Monsieur—"

"Ha! But it will not happen again. I have caught here the largest and fattest of these rascals, and have the pleasure to hand him over to Monsieur for safe custody. Besides, I have obtained a tin box in which to keep the stamps in future!"

Alcide Roulette was furious.

"These stamps! These miserable labels—"

"Stay, Monsieur, do not abuse my stamps, as the Englishman—"

"The Englishman! What Englishman?"

"The Englishman Mister Brownjonesmith, who arrived yesterday, some six hours before you did and purchased the whole of my stock."

It was the last straw. Alcide Roulette, with 27 hours, 12 minutes, and 30 seconds start, had yet been beaten in the race by some six hours!

"I explained to him, Monsieur, what had happened, as I would have to you—but you were too hasty, you would not listen. And when I had finished he said, 'These stamps—these wonderful varieties of yours—are all blooming rubbish!' I replied to him—I said it with all the dignity of an officer of the 15th Class of the Order of Holy Blue Bear—No, Monsieur, they are not Blooming rubbish, they are—Ballyrotsk!"

THE END.