

CHAPTER XII

1747-1818

BARANOF, THE LITTLE CZAR OF THE PACIFIC

Baranof lays the Foundations of Russian Empire on the Pacific Coast of America — Shipwrecked on his Way to Alaska, he yet holds his Men in Hand and turns the Ill-hap to Advantage — How he bluffs the Rival Fur Companies in Line — First Russian Ship built in America — Adventures leading the Sea-otter Hunters — Ambushed by the Indians — The Founding of Sitka — Baranof, cast off in his Old Age, dies of Broken Heart

No wilder lord of the wild northland ever existed than that old madcap Viking of the Pacific, Alexander Baranof, governor of the Russian fur traders. For thirty years he ruled over the west coast of America from Alaska to southern California despotic as a czar. And he played the game single-handed, no retinue but convicts from Siberia, no subjects but hostile Indians.

Whether leading the hunting brigades of a thousand men over the sea in skin canoes light as cork, or rallying his followers ambushed by hostiles repelling invasion of their hunting-ground, or drowning hardships with seas of fiery Russian brandy in midnight carousals, Baranof was supreme autocrat. Drunk or