

A SLEIGH RIDE IN RUSSIA.*

ONE of my most vivid recollections of Russian adventure relates to a journey during which I endured some of the most painful, I may say dangerous hours of my life, owing to my driver being drunk, of which fact I was utterly ignorant when we started from the post-house. The night was clear, and the moon shone brightly from a cloudless sky; but the weather was intensely cold, in fact the centre of the road was as hard as a sheet of ice, and consequently I travelled rapidly, while on each side of me the snow was soft and many feet deep. I was alone, and had very recently enjoyed a cup of hot tea, to which I added a dash of cognac; and having lighted my pipe, I jumped into my sledge, warm and comfortable—so warm and cozy, in fact, that I soon fell into a sound and undisturbed slumber, to which the smooth and rapid progress of my sledge greatly contributed, when all at once I was aroused from my home dreams by a tremendous crash—to find myself, sledge and horses firmly fixed, indeed half buried, in the snow. To rub my eyes, jump from the carriage, heavily fur clad as I was, and to plunge up to my thighs in the snow (for there had been a recent thaw, and the snow was soft on the roadsides), and at the same time to recollect that I was unarmed and alone in the centre of an unfathomable Russian pine forest, at two A.M., with my despatches in the sledge, and no help at hand, was the work of a moment. In the next instant I was startled by a human howl, of such intensity, that I verily believe no hungry pack of wolves in the forest could have rivalled it; and at the same time I discovered that my postillion was in fierce combat with one of the tallest and most powerful men I ever beheld, while a dozen other wretches of the same type were howling and screeching, and rushing to the scene of action. By the bright light of the moon I was also enabled to observe in the road track before me about a score of sledges heavily laden, each drawn by one small horse, and carrying merchandise; while two lay floundering in the snow on the opposite side of the road, against which we had driven and got the worst of it. All these untoward events occurred in far less time than I have told them. Before I proceed, however, it may be as well to remark that while every word I write is fact, an order did exist, and probably still exists, in Russia, which commands that everything and every person—man and beast—shall make way for those who travel with a 'Potragera,' or authority for courier horses, or, in other words, all official persons. But the wretched serf, my postillion, though he was not too drunk to keep his seat while his little horses kept the road at a gallop, was far too drunk to see the impossibility of passing anything but a flock of crows in the narrow lane between two high banks of snow. Therefore, as I subsequently discovered, although every human effort had been made on his blowing his horn to permit us to pass, it was all in vain. But he was in no state to reason; moreover, he probably saw double, which naturally widened the wayside. Thus driving furiously, he upset the hindermost sledge, at the same time, in Russian fashion, lashing the driver with his whip; but the second shock was too great even for my heavier sledge, and thus we became fixed, horses and carriage, fast in the deep snow. Happily, most happily, reason came to my aid, and a moment's thought sufficed to convince me of the dangerous position in which I found myself, and that discretion now was far better than valour. It was quite evident that my driver was in fault; and had I attempted to take his part, or made any effort to defend him, my own life, as well as the despatches, would have been perilled. Heavily therefore as I was clad—observing that blows had already passed between him and the athletic Russian I have named—I made a rush at the former, wrenched the uplifted whip from his hand, seized him firmly by the throat, and throwing him backwards on the snow, I broke the whip

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in two, and stood with outstretched arms calmly before him. Meanwhile the whole troop of sledge-drivers had gathered around us, evidently showering threats and imprecations on our heads, which unpleasant language I happily did not understand; at the same time uttering the most diabolical howls I ever heard before or since. Bitter cold as was the night, the perspiration poured down my forehead, and if I did not experience absolute fear—and it occurs to me that I certainly did—why, I most assuredly uttered an inward prayer for Heaven's protection, feeling that the odds were twenty to one that I should perish like a dog, or be murdered far away from all I loved on earth, in the dense pine solitude. It was by no means a pleasant position in which to find one's self, I do assure you, gentlemen who live at home at ease. Indeed, had I ventured, without the aid of a Tom Sayers or two, to strike a blow, or made the slightest effort to defend my drunken friend, then cooling himself in the snow, with the thermometer 28° below zero, the fate of both of us would have been vastly disagreeable, for I never beheld such brutal anger, nay, ferocity, as that which the moonlight permitted me to discover on the dirty faces of the leader and his followers, as by offers of money, attempted smiles, which must have looked like grins, and general affability of demeanour, I endeavoured to appease them. At this moment the postillion arose from his sprawling position on the snow; luckily, I had possessed myself of his whip, for making a rush at the leaders, he cut their slight cord traces, and vaulting on one of the animal's back, tried to make off, whether to escape for assistance or leave me to my fate I know not; but thought, rapid as lightning, soon told me that if left alone I must perish in the snow, even if I escaped a worse fate. Once more, then (recollect he was intoxicated, and a lighter man than myself), I threw him on the snow. At this moment how great was my happiness when a travelling Pole, who spoke German, rode up in the midst of the fray, coming from the direction towards which I was travelling! No glimpse of a distant sail to the wrecked sailor on a raft, no alms to the half-starved beggar, was ever more welcome than the appearance of that bearded Jew. I never look on the race without thinking of him, and could scarcely refuse to accept a bill, even though it were to be discounted at sixty per cent., were I again to meet him. He immediately came to my aid, and it is to his help as much as the calm demeanour which Providence permitted me to assume in the hour of danger, that in all probability I am indebted for the privilege of being alive to tell this tale. Suffice it to say that, after considerable parley, great humiliation and politeness on my part, some forbearance and inconceivable vociferation on that of my enemies, peace was made, and the leader seemed at length to be convinced that I had had no share in the upsetting of his sledges or their contents, which lay scattered on the snow; and I must do him the justice to admit that, when thus convinced, he contented himself with liberal indulgence in savage threats and oaths, which he launched at the head of my driver, but which were to be put into practical execution on some future day. He then called his men together, and after herculean efforts, they extracted my half-buried sledge and horses from the snow, dragged it past the caravan, and sent me on my way rejoicing.

THE EARL of Surrey, afterwards eleventh Duke of Norfolk, who was a notorious gourmand and hard drinker, and a leading member of the Beef-steak Club, was so far from cleanly in his person, that his servants used to avail themselves of his fits of drunkenness—which were pretty frequent, by the way—for the purpose of washing him. On these occasions they stripped him as they would a corpse, and performed the needful ablutions. He was equally notorious for his horror of clean linen. One day, on his complaining to Dudley North at his club that he had become a perfect martyr to rheumatism, and had tried every possible remedy without success, the latter wittily replied, "Pray, my lord, did you ever try a clean shirt?"

CURIOUS FACTS CONCERNING DAYS AND DATES.

TWO facts must be granted; first, that there are twenty-four hours in each day, and seven days in each week, each day having a distinguishing name; and secondly, that Monday begins, all over the world, one instant after Sunday ends; Tuesday after Monday, and so on.

Now, the fact that the names of our days change in every place on the face of the globe once in twenty-four hours, naturally gives rise to the question "Where does the change first take place?" or, more familiarly, "when does Sunday first begin?"

If a ship were to leave New Zealand for England, via the Cape of Good Hope, the day and date of her arrival would correspond with those of England; while, on the other hand, if the voyage were to be made via Cape Horn, day and date would differ.

Suppose, again, an American war vessel to leave San Francisco in search of the "Shenandoah" at say nine o'clock on Tuesday evening, and a British vessel to sail from Canton in China with the same object at the same time, which would be about five o'clock on Wednesday morning—should the vessels, after a three weeks' cruise, fall in with the "Shenandoah" at the same time, and together capture her, the American commander would in his report say she was captured at say five o'clock p.m. on Tuesday, while the British commander's report would say five o'clock on Wednesday afternoon. The time of day would be similar, but day and date would not.

The names of days were carried over the globe east and west from Europe and the western part of Asia.

Owing to the difference in time, Monday morning commences in Quebec before Montreal. It begins also in Father Point before Quebec, in St. John, N. B., before Father Point, in London before St. John, N. B., in India before London, in China before India, but not in San Francisco before China, for Monday commences in Montreal before it does in San Francisco.

Consequently, each day gets a new name after leaving San Francisco and before reaching China.

When the telegraph across Russian Territory will be in operation—if it be possible to send a telegram from Montreal to Canton—at certain hours of the day the telegram would leave Montreal on our day, pass through San Francisco on the day previous (by name), and arrive in Canton on the day of the same name as that on which it left Montreal.

To obtain accuracy in day and date, it will become necessary in the course of time to have some degree of longitude on the passage of which the name of the day will change first, and that line should be Long. 170° W. of Greenwich, because that degree separates the continents of Asia and America, and is East of New Zealand.

When it is 12 o'clock noon at Long 10° E. of Greenwich, say at Hamburg, the day is called by the same name, the world over, because it is then midnight at the degree of longitude above mentioned; and when noon at that degree of longitude it is midnight at Hamburg, and the names of two days equally divided over the world, say first day of January, 1866, from 170° W. of Greenwich to Hamburg, over Asia and Europe, and thirty-first day of December, 1865, from Hamburg to that degree of longitude over America.

The instant when it is midnight at 170° W. is the only one when there is universally the same day and date.

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LITTLE KINDNESSES.—The humble current of little kindnesses, which, though but a creeping streamlet, yet incessantly flows, although it glides in silent secrecy within the domestic walls and along the walks of private life, and makes neither appearance nor noise in the world, proves in the end a more copious tribute into the store of human comfort and bounty, however ample that may rush into it with a mighty sound.