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THE

2 Копеекъ Serpentine PERF. OF BALLYROTSK

(CONSIDERABLY) AFTER JULES VERNE.
(Continued from page 13.)

tobacco store, and licensed premises for the sale of *heiri* and *hooct* in the village. He was also the one person of liberal education to whom we alluded above, and had been decorated with the fiftieth class of the Order of the Holy Blue Bear.*

The resources of the printing house of this enterprising gentleman did not provide a sufficient variety of type and ornamental borderings for setting up a whole sheet of stamps at once. Had it been otherwise, numerous minor varieties of type would doubtless have brought joy to the philatelist and a plethora of *kopees* to the till. Reproduction by lithographic transfer was the method employed. But the Letajovski had invented sixteen different ways of spelling the name Ballyrotsk, and during the eight years that stamps had been in use in that district only one-half of those spellings had been exhausted! An infinite variety of colored papers of the cheapest description had done the rest, and the post-office was, as I have stated, a most flourishing institution.

This being the case, how was it that on this particular evening of October 27th 1890, the officer of the 15th Class of the Holy Blue Bear, &c., &c., was poring over his accounts in a state bordering on distraction? How was it that he was tearing his hair and thumping his breast in a frenzy of distress?

"Three roubles, two kopees and a half missing," exclaimed the wretched man, "and the Schloggowski's has promised to have me knouted if my accounts are wrong again. Every stamp in the drawer, every fragment of a stamp must be accounted for! although I told him that several sheets had been so devoured by the mice as to be quite unsearchable. He won't believe me; he declares that I am trying to defraud the revenue, both of the District and of the Empire. I, an officer of—"

His soliloquy was interrupted by the jangling of bells and the cracking of whips, as a *bacmonah*, drawn by three *yrkoads*† abreast, rattled up to the door, while a traveler called loudly for the Letajovski in an unmistakable foreign accent.

CHAPTER III.

Was it unique? That was the question—a question Mons. Chose, of the great firm of

† Two forms of a fiery spirit distilled from rye, which in these districts provides both food and drink.
‡ L. ordre du Sac r-ze Cachon Bleu.
* Travelling Inspector of the Imperial Post-office.—Author.
* Hackney carriage in the country.—Author.
* Small kind of rough pony, very hardy and surefooted.—Author.

Chose, Bonmarche et Cie. was not likely to leave long unanswered.

A discovery of this kind, made by such a firm as that, is not blurted out to the whole world immediately. Mons. Chose—as a man who knew when to speak and when to be silent, and on this occasion he had been silent—as far as the philatelic world was concerned at least—for some 24 hours after making this important discovery.

Twenty-four hours before the Stamp Bourse was electrified by the exhibition of this extraordinary variety the electric wires had been brought into play, and a telegram had been despatched as follows:—

"Postmaster, Ballyrotsk, Russia.—Reserve entire stock for Chose, Paris. Agent on the way."

The Electric Telegraph [we really have no room for a history of the Electric Telegraph.—Ed.]

To one person alone had the discovery been revealed.

Aleide Roulette was the most trusted and intelligent of the vast staff of employees of the great firm whose name we have already quoted so often.

Aleide Roulette might be said to have been and bred a philatelist. Originally discovered when an infant in the largest letter receptacle at the chief post-office in Paris, where he narrowly escaped obliteration, he had been brought up among stamps.

To say that he was an accomplished philatelist was not sufficient. He knew *all* about stamps! All!! All that anyone else knew, and a great deal that no one else knew. He knew why this was thus; he knew why that was not. He knew why the stamps of his native country, his beloved France, were perf. 14 in one direction and 13½ in the other.

But there was one thing that Aleide Roulette did not know, and that thing was—What was the machine that produced the Serpentine Perforation of Ballyrotsk.

This he was about to discover, for at the very same moment that Mons. Chose, with his own hand delivered his message at the telegraph office, his trusty lieutenant started up-n his journey to the interior of Russia.

Now to reach Ballyrotsk Aleide Roulette had three courses open to him. Taking the *chemin de fer de*— [We have again to omit several pages of most interesting matter, describing in detail all the places through which the intrepid traveler might have passed, but did not, as well as those through which he did pass without stopping to see them; also a thrilling narrative of an encounter with wolves—without which no journey through Russia is complete. It is sufficient therefore to say that Aleide Roulette reached his destination in due course, and that it was he, in a bacmonah drawn by three yrkoads abreast, who was left shouting for the Letajovski at the end of chapter II.—Ed.]

CHAPTER IV.

John Robinson Brownjonesmith was a typical Englishman; he might we'll have sat for the portrait of John Bull himself.

Rudly, and of a cheerful countenance, the brilliant hue of his complexion was only rivalled by that of his abundant *chevelure*.

His appearance was dazzling. He wore the full national costume upon all occasions; the bright scarlet *redingote*, the snow-white waistcoat, the creamy cords, the boots with tops of a delicate buff, matching the tint of the thin post cards.

These boots were polished until he could see to shave himself in them; indeed it was popularly supposed that he did shave himself in them, and it was credibly reported that on festive occasions he had even been known to retire to rest without removing them from his feet.

Such was the living representative of the illustrious families of Smith, Jones, Brown, and Robinson, in the direct line of the senior branch of each of those houses; such was the great English philatelist.

For John Robinson Brownjonesmith was indeed a philatelist, though it is hard to conceive how the intricate science of philately can exist in a country of dense fog, where the teeming population is only kept within bounds by the ravages of the spleen and the constant suicides from London Bridge.

Yes, he was a philatelist after the English fashion. He collected stamps, as he did everything else, violently, explosively. If he wanted a stamp, he rested neither day nor night, he spared neither time nor money, until he got it. And great was his wrath, fearful was his language, dreadfully did he stamp and rage, if the prize had been secured by someone before him.

Such is philately in that land of the dismal swamp, which its inhabitants, who know nothing of any other, fondly call Great Britain!

When the Stamp Bourse of Paris is excited, its throbs are felt throughout the stamp world. Within a few minutes of the announcement in Paris of the great discovery of Mons. Chose, that discovery was known in London, and John Robinson Brownjonesmith was aware that another unique variety had been unearthed, that another unattainable rarity had passed out of his reach.

An hour or two was spent in objugation, in stamping and raging, in the course of which his thickest pair of boots was worn through, and a brand new Kidderminster carpet reduced to rags. Then occurred to him the question which had presented itself to Mons. Chose some twenty-six hours earlier, was it unique? And this question John Robinson Brownjonesmith, with his usual impulsiveness, determined to decide for himself.

To put on a pair of new boots was the work of a few moments. A hansom cab conveyed first to the nearest post-office, whence telegrams were despatched in all directions. Among them was the following:—

"Postmaster, Ballyrotsk, Russia. Reserve entire stock for Brownjonesmith, London. Am on the way."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]