THE NATIVES OF SIBERIA

Leaving the city of Omsk on his journey to the eastward, the Siberian traveler sees for the first time the genuine steppe in the full sense of the term—a country level as the sea, with not a hillock or even gentle undulation to break the straight line of the horizon, and not a patch of cultivation, a tree, a bush or even a stone to diversify the monotonous expanse. Traversing such a region is, I need scarcely say, very weary work—all the more as there are no mile-stones or other landmarks to show you the progress you are making. Still, it is not so overwhelmingly wearisome as might be supposed. In the morning you may watch the vast lakes, with their rugged promonotories and well wooded banks, which the mirage creates for your amusement. Then during the day there are always one or two trifling incidents which arouse you a little from your somnolence. Now you descry a couple of horsemen on the horizon or encounter a long train of camels marching along with solemn, stately step, and speculate as to the contents of the big packages with which they are laden. Now you observe the carcass of a horse that has fallen by the wayside, and watch the dogs and the steppe eagles fighting over their prey. Now you perceive—most pleasant sight of all—a group of haystack-shaped tents in the distance, and you hurry on to enjoy the grateful shade of a Kirghiz kibitka and a drink of the refreshing koumiss.

One of these aouls, or tent villages, in which we put up for the night, consisted of about twenty tents, all constructed on the same model and scattered in sporadic fashion without the least regard to symmetry. Close by was a watercourse, which appeared on some maps as a river, but which was at that time merely a succession of pools containing a dark-colored liquid. As we more than suspected that these pools supplied the inhabitants with water for culinary purposes, the sight was not calculated to whet our appetites. For want of something better to do we watched the preparations for dinner.

The dinner itself was not less primitive than the method of preparing it. The table consisted of a large napkin spread in the middle of the tent, and the chairs were represented by cushions, on which we sat cross-legged. There were no plates, knives, forks, spoons or chop-sticks. Guests were expected all to eat out of a common wooden bowl, and to use the instruments with which nature had provided them. The fare was copious, but not varied, consisting entirely of boiled mutton without bread or other substitute, and a little salted horse flesh thrown in as an entree.

To eat out of the same dish with half a dozen Mohammedans who accept their Prophet's injunction about ablutions in a highly figuratively sense is not an agreeable occupation; but with these Kirghiz something worse than this has to be encountered, for their favorite method of expressing their esteem and affection for one with whom they are eating consists in putting bits of mutton and sometimes even handfuls of hashed meat into the mouth of the guest with their dirty fingers. On such occasions as these it required no little effort to subject our feeling of nausea to a sense of Kirghiz politeness.

As a drink tea is not greatly used in the steppe, the Kirghiz buying the cheapest kind of what is called "brick tea"—tea which is hard pressed into molds so that it resembles bricks—otherwise they always have koumiss, a liquor made of fermented mare's milk.

The Kirghiz kibitka is a circular tent made of felt spread over a light wooden frame. This frame is easily taken apart and put together, and is so light as to form a load for a single camel. The broad pieces of felt are easily stretched over it, so that the whole can be put up in about ten minutes. On one side is a door covered with a flap of felt, and the fire is built in the middle, the smoke escaping through an opening in the roof. The interior of the tent is decorated with pieces of ribbons of various kinds, used to fasten down the felt, and around the sides the Kirghiz place and hang all their valuable goods, consisting of carpets, silk mattresses and cloths, and sometimes, in cases of richer men, of even silver articles, with the trappings of horses and household utensils. The kibitka combines the advantages of being cool in summer and warm in winter.

A Type of the Kirghiz Tribe.

These nomads who inhabit the steppe regions of Turkestan and Western Siberia are not the same people as the true Kirghiz or Buruts who live about the Lake Issykkul and in the mountains of Khokand, and are called by the Russians Karu-Kirghiz (black Kirghiz) and also Dikokomenny or wild mountain Kirghiz. They do not speak of themselves as Kirghiz, which is a name given them by the Russians, but are known only as Kazuk, the same as the Russian Coossack, which, as used in Central Asia, means simply a vagabond or wanderer, and its application is evident.

The Kirghiz speak a language which is one of the purest dialects of Tartar, although the kernel of their race is evidently Turkish. It was in the beginning of the eighteenth century, when the Kirghiz, through internecine disputes, found themselves attacked on the southwest by the Kalmucks, on the north by the Siberian Cossacks and on the east by the ruler of Jungaria, that they began to bid for Russian protection, and to afford that series of raison d'etre for Russian conquest in Central Asia. It was not, however, until 1781, on the death of the bold Sultan Ablai, who, by skillful coquetry with both Russia and China, had managed to retain independence, that Russian sway became fixed.

It is a curious fact that the Kirghiz were converted to Mohammedanism by the mistaken efforts of the Russian government. At first but few of the sultans had any idea of the doctrines of Islam, and there was not a mosque or a mullah in the steppe; but the Russians (just as they insisted on using the Tartar language in their intercourse with them) insisted on treating them as though they were Mohammedans, built mosques and sent mullahs until the whole people became outwardly Mussulman. When asked what religion they have (unaccustomed to such a form of the question) they will say that they do not know; but at the same time they will repel with vigor any insinuation that they are not good Mussulmans.

The Kirghiz are in general breeders of cattle and sheep, and the search for fresh pastures is the main cause for their migrations over the steppe. They do not, however, wander indiscriminately over the vast expanse, but have their settled winter and summer quarters, each volost—as they are now divided by the Russians for convenience in collecting taxes—keeping its own limits.

Besides horse-racing, the usual pastimes are wrestling, swinging, and especially the national sport, balga, where one man holds a kid thrown over his saddle and every one else tries to tear it from him. There is one race, called the "love chase," which may be considered a part of the form of marriage among the Kirghiz. In this the bride, armed with a formidable whip, mounts a fleet horse and is pursued by all the young men who make any pretensions to her hand. She will be given as a prize to the one who catches her, but she has the right, besides urging on her horse to the utmost, to use her whip to keep off all except the one already chosen in on the steppe, a religious ceremony of her heart. As mullahs are very rare any kind at a marriage is unusual; but one thing must be strictly perfomed. After the women have sung the virtues of the bride, and the men have chanted those of the groom, telling of his great exploits, how many cattle he has stolen and in how many marauding expeditions he has engaged, the young man must enter the kibitka, where the bride is eated and take her out, although both entrance and exit are feebly opposed by all her female friends. This is probably a remnant of the old primitive custom when marriage was an act of capture.

An Al Fresco School.

The present development of Russian railway enterprises is one of the most significant features of the day, and is the direct outcome of the French reapprochement. French loans are now providing the sinews of war for a recrudescence of Russian activity in Asia, aimed, of course, at England's commercial prospects in the far East. The progress of the trans-Siberian railway, however, is the point that excites chief interest, especially as the marked attention paid to Li Hung Chang during his recent visit to St. Petersburg clearly demonstrates that the route will lie via the open country and easy gradients which Manchuria can boast ,thus affording increased facilities for the opening up of the shortest possible main route between Europe and the Pacific, between St. Petersburg and Pekin.

The Trans-Siberian railway, at the time of my recent visit, was open to general traffic as far as the Obi river, a distance of 882 miles Cheliabinsk, the eastern terminus o fthe European railway system, and 386 miles beyond the Siberian city of Omsk but with the favor of Prince Hillkoff the Russian minister of ways and communications, I was able to continue my rail journey beyond the Obi river, over the partially-completed division to Krasnoyarsk. The formal opening of the last division, which, as Prince Hillkoff informs me, is to take place at the end of the year, will at last establish a continual rail communication between St. Petersburg and the greatest of the Siberian waterways—the Yenesei river. Of the three large bridges which are to be constructed along the line up to this point, the one across the Irtish has already been built and in use for over a year, while those across the Obi itself and its eastern branches are expected to be completed by the end of 1897. The building of the bridge over the Yenesei, the largest along the line, was formally commenced Sept. 1 of the present year.

Over the steppe and undulating country which lies between the Urals and the Yenesei river, the construction of the Trans-Siberian railway has been comparatively easy and inexpensive (I am informed about £3,500 per mile), but the mountainous regions from Krasnoyarsk to Irkutsk and from Lake Baikal to the Amoor river, where separate sections of the line are now building, are requiring much more engineering skill and pecuniary outlay. It is expected that the section between Krasnoyarsk and Irkutsk, the Eastern Siberitan capital, will be completed by the end of 1897.

Like the Tran-Caspian line to Sarmacand, the Trans-Siberian railway was decided upon with very little preliminary discussion or investigation. Alexander III. simply wrote, "Let there be a line," and a line there is, every day more rapidly approaching completion. Like the Trans-Caspian line, also, which has now handed over to Russia the Persian and Afghanistan markets, the Trans-Siberian railway is expected to yield a stimulating trading tendency in the Eastern empire. There is hardly a doubt that the impulse to construct the Trans-Siberian railway line was largely derived from the successful completion of the Canadian Pacific railway and its subsequent development of the British North American possessions; for, in many respects, Siberia is to Russia what Canada is to England—a great landed heritage, full of magnificent resources, only waiting to be developed.—London Graphic.

A Kirghiz Nation.

Dust and Pulmonary Diseases.

Workmen exposed to metallic and mineral dust are likely to be the greatest sufferers from this potent agency of mischief. It has long been known that dust coming from the polishing of steel and the filing of cast iron has a particularly destructive action upon the respiratory organs. Of the mineral dusts, that of granite is the most cutting and dangerous to the lungs. Vegetable dust coming from articles used in weaving, especially flax, hemp, jute and cotton, is also to be carefully avoided, as it often causes fatal chest troubles and consumption. Chest disorders are also frequent among those who handle dry skins, rabbit fur, horse hair, felt and bristles. But the dust lurking in sleeping apartments is often a medium of deadly infection.

M. Miquel, the French bacteriologist, who has been experimenting to find the best means for disinfecting dust in apartments, finds that chlorine gas, hydrochloric acid gas, formic aldehyde, hypochloride of soda and chloride of benzyl are (in the order named) the most efficacious and quickest in their operation. His discovery makes a decided advance in the art of disinfection, and should be given preference over the old method of using carbolic or sublimate sprays. A towel or sheet dipped in the commercial solution of formic aldehyde and hung up in a room will disinfect it without injuring pictures, bronzes or other objects of art.—Paris Letter.

The Prince of Guides.

Grindewald has just celebrated the seventieth birthday of Almer, the doyen of Swiss guides. Almer has been the pioneer of all modern mountain-stormers, to use the picturesque German word. In the Bernese Oberland alone he has made the ascent of the Jungfrau, Moench, Eiger, Wetterhorn and Schreckhorn no less than 100 times, and, with the exception of the Jungfrau, he has been the first to set foot on their snowy crests. He is also the only living mountaineer who has made the descent from the Moench on to the Wengenalp, and it is said there is not a mountain peak in the Valais, Grisons, Savoy and Dauphine on which he has not bivouacked. He has five sons, all of them trained from childhood to be guides, and some have carried on their father's work with English mountaineers in the Caucasus and the Himalayas. Almer affirms that none of his climbers has ever had an accident, but he himself has his scars of battle. On the Grindelwald glacier a falling block of ice broke several of his ribs, and in a winter ascent of the Jungfrau in 1885 his toes were all frozen and had to be amputated. Since then he has retired from work, and now enjoys a green old age in his chalet at Grindelwald.—Journal des Debate.

Too Expressive a Name.

Smiley—Guess that new coal-dealer down the street will have to change his name if he expects people to patronize him.

Bangs—Why? What's his name?

Smiley — Lyttleton. Some people might not notice it, but I'm afraid most people would shy at a name like that on a coal dealer's sign.

OUR YOUNG FOLKS

A Short Bear Story.

It was my fortune to spend the first twenty years of my life in a region where black bears were quite numerous. Our little community was often thrown into excitement by the discovery that bruin had been engaged in some before-unheard-of mischief, and not infrequently were all the men and boys in the neighborhood mustered to surround a piece of woods and capture a bear that was known to be there hidden away. Some of these occasions were full of excitement and danger, and maybe I shall some time tell about them; but just now I want to relate an experience with a bear that happened when I was thirteen years old.

It was part of my business in summer time to drive the cows to pasture every morning and home every night. Like most boys, however, I liked to play a little too well, and sometimes it would be very late before the cattle would be safely shut up for the night.

One day I had played a little longer than usual after school, and when I reached home it was almost sunset. I persuaded a playmate of my own age to accompany me, and started for the pasture. It was something more than half a mile away, and in getting to it we passed down an old road which was now partially unused. But barefoot boys are nimble fellows, and before it was dark we were at the bars of the pasture. There stood the cows, as usual, waiting patiently for some one to come for them, and a little way out from there were the young cattle in a group. Down went the bars, and the cows started out, when all at once there was a great confusion among the young cattle. They ran in every direction, and appeared terribly frightened at something.

We Did Not Look Back a Second Time.

In a moment we saw what it was. A large black bear was coming across the pasture near them. I don't suppose he meant to trouble the cattle, but that was his nearest way to pass from the woods to a corn field which he had in view, and he happened to come along there just as we did.

It required no long council of war for us to decide to retreat as fast as possible, and, taking the road, we made the best time we could until we came to the top of a little hill. Here, we mustered up courage to stop and look behind us. But there was the bear, coming right up the road after us. We did not look back a second time, you may be sure, but in a very few moments we burst into my father's kitchen, and, when we could get breath, exclaimed: "A b—a bear- A great, big, black bear chased us, and he's coming right up here!"

All that night we dreamed of bears. The cows did not come home, nor did the bear come after us, as we expected he would; but when father went down the next morning he found the bear's tracks in the road, and, following them up, he found where the old fellow had entered the corn field and taken his supper. Shortly afterward he was shot near the same place.

Marvels of the Ocean.

The makers of ancient maps were accustomed to introduce pictures freely. In deserts there would be drawings of lions, and along rivers they made "river-horses," which is the meaning of the Greek words that were put together to make up "hippopotamus." As for the oceans, they were filled up with any queer monsters that came to hand. Of course, these pictures helped to hide great spaces that would otherwise have been left staring blanks.

Besides, men understood very little about the strange happenings in the world around them, and invented fairy tales to explain these mysteries. It is not remarkable, then, that so late as Columbus' time his sailors did not at all like to think of sailing westward into the unknown ocean, full of fabulous creatures and magic happenings. even with all that wise and studious men have learned since, there is still enough to be met with in a long ocean voyage to excite wonder and alarm.

Sailors may see auroras, the strange "Northern Lights," the cause of which is even now little more than guessed at; they may be surrounded with water spouts, which are not entirely explained as yet; they may meet "tidal" (that is, earthquake waves) that rise from thirty to sixty feet, or even more, above the surface; they may be amazed by "St. Elmo's fire," the sparkling flames that play about masts and rigging; they may behold lightning in globe form, sheet flashes or forked bolts; they are sure to sail through the phosphorescence that has but lately been traced to animal life. Then, too, storms and calms, fogs and moonlight, bring strange sights. Altogether, the ocean is o wonderland that has new marvels every day; the very color of the sea is hardly twice the same.—"Mirrors of Air," bp Tudor Jenks, in St. Nicholas.

Grant's Game of Mumble-the-Peg.

A favorite game of the boys of John D. White's subscription school, at Georgetown, was mumble-the-peg. Grant couldn't play the game very skillfully, and the peg always got a few clandestine licks every time he was to pull it," says McClure's Magazine. "On one occasion it was driven in so deep that the boys thought Lys would never get it out. He set to work with his forehead down in the dirt, the sun beating hot upon him, and the crowd of boys and girls shutting out every breath of fresh air. The peg would not move. The red-faced, shock-headed, thick-set boy, with his face now all over mud, had forgotten his comrades, and saw only one thing in the world—that was the stubborn peg. The bell rang, but the boy did not hear it. A minute later, after a final effort, he staggered to his feet with the peg in his mouth. The old schoolmaster was in the door of the school house with his long beech switch—the only person to be seen. There was glee inside at this new development—here was fun the boys had not counted on. Imagine their surprise when, as the boy came closer, and the stern old schoolmaster saw his face, he set down the switch inside the door and came outside. One boy slipped to the window and reported to the rest. The old master was pouring water on Lys Grant's hands and having him wash his face. He gave him his red bandanna to wipe it dry. What the school saw a minute later was the schoolmaster coming in, patting the very red and embarrassed boy on the head."

Catsup—A Mistake.

One day, a good many years ago, a cook in a big preserving factory made a bad mistake. And that mistake was catsup—the odd-sounding name being applied on the spot by the angry manager.

The cook, so the story goes, had been up all the night before at a party. He was dull and cross and sleepy the next morning, and when he came to mix one of the big kettles of Adam's apples—for that was the name given in those days to tomatoes—he accidentally put the wrong box of spices and other ingredients into the boiling mass. Not long afterward the manager came sniffing down the room and discovered the error. Ordinary tomato preserves never smelled like that. When he tasted the mixture he smacked his lips, puckered his mouth and made a wry face over the bitter-sweet and now familiar pungent flavor. The kettle was immediately swung off the fire by the frightened cook, who expected to be discharged on the spot.

"Well," he said, with a rueful expression on his face, 'the cat's up.," meaning, by the slang term, that the tomatoes had been spoiled.

But the taste of the mixture still lingered in the manager's palate.

"I wonder how that would taste on a slice of roast beef," he said to himself, and that very day he tried it.

The result was such that the manager ordered the kettleful of the mixture bottled up and placed on the market, where it became popular at once.

And thus catsup and its name was discovered at the same time—and a mistake did it.

How Uncle Spoke in School.

When quite a small boy my uncle was asked to speak in school, it being the custom in those days for some of the scholars to electrify the school and visitors each week with grand declamations, usually from Shakespeare, or with compositions from their own imaginative minds nearly always about "Spring" or "The Beautiful Snow."

My uncle decided that it should be a 'big piece," and, furthermore, that no one should help him either in the selection or rehearsal. So after many days of study in the privacy of his own chamber, it was with pride and satisfaction that he stepped to the platform, and, bowing in the direction of his loving relatives and the assembled school, he waved one hand majestically. Then he put out the right leg and shouted at the top of his little lungs:

"Half a 'leg,' half a 'leg.' "

Here he was interrupted with shouts of laughter. Looking around in bewilderment for a moment, he again put out his foot with:

"Half a 'leg, half a 'leg,' onward into the valley of death rode the six hundred." He was once more silenced by the gale of mirth around him. And it was amid the laughter of the school and much confusion on his part that he made a painful bow and retreated before the gathering tears had a chance to fall. And all the persuasion in the world could never again induce him to speak "The Charge of the Light Brigade."—Agnes Marie Mather in the Chicago Record.

A Boy at Dancing School.

Another serious trial to The Boy was dancing school. In the first place, he could not turn around without becoming dizzy, and in the second place he could not learn the steps to turn round with; and in the third place, when he did dance, he had to dance with a girl! There was not a boy in all Charraud's, or in all Dodworth's, who could escort a girl back to her seat after the dance was over, in better time, or make his "thank-you" bow with less delay. His own voluntary terpischorean effort at a party was the march to supper; and the only steps he took with anything like success was during the promenade in the Lancers.

In "hands-all-round" he invariably started with the wrong hand; and if in the set there were girls big enough to wear long dresses, he never failed to tear such out at the gathers. If any body fell down, it was always The Boy; and if anybody bumped into anybody else, The Boy was always the bumper, unless his partner could hold him up and steer him straight.—"A Boy I Knew," by Laurence Barton, in St. Nicholas.

Shoes With Stoves in Them.

An effective means of warming the feet has been patented in Germany. The inventor calls it "heatable shoes." Within the heel of the shoe, which is hollowed out, there is a receptacle for a glowing substance, similar to that used in the Japanese hand-warmers, says the Popular Science News. Between the soles, imbedded in asbestos covers, is a rubber bag, which is filled with water. The water is heated and as it circulates while the wearer of the shoe is walking it keeps the surface of the foot warm. A small safety valve is provided so that the bag cannot burst. The warmth given by this sole never rises above 70 degrees Fahrenheit, and will last about eight hours. The sole is slightly thicker than that of a wet-weather boot.

The Life of a Clam.

The clam's body is completely enshrouded in the mantle, except for two openings, through one of which the foot can be pushed out. The other is for the siphon, or what is commonly known as the neck of the clam. In some respects the clam may be a little better off than we are, for he has a little brain in his foot, and also a gland for secreting strong fibers. With this he spins a byssus, by which he can attach himself to whatever he likes. He does not even have to search for his food, but waits for it to come to him. He makes a furrow in the mud or sand, attaching himself to the bottom by the byssus. Then he pokes his siphon up through the mud and water until it reaches the surface. The siphon is made up of two tubes, the water flowing in through one and out the other.

When the inflowing current, laden with minute plants and animals, reaches the gill chamber, some of these are sifted out and retained for food, and the water and waste matter flow out through the other tube.

The clam's eggs are carried by he mother on her gills. When there are fish in the water with them, the mother discharges the eggs, which soon hatch, but if there are no fish, they carry the eggs until they decay. The reason of this strange behavior is this: When the eggs are set free in the water they soon hatch, and the little ones swim about until they find some fish to which to attach themselves. They live for a time upon the mucous of the fish and then drop off, sink to the bottom and form burrows for themselves. This curious semi-parisitic life is no doubt a reversion to the habit of some ancient ancestor.—Appleton's Monthly.

America Still Ahead.

Russia is a very large country, and, with Siberia's immense area included, the size of the United States suffers in comparison with her. One of her newspapers has vaunted the transporting of a whole town some forty odd miles along a frozen river (a hertofore unknown feat, as it claims) the object of the removal being to place the town among some hills that lend themselves admirably to the purpose of fortification, thus securing a valuable military station. It will undoubtedly be quite a feat to accomplish such a task, and if the Russian engineers find any hitch in their plans, they can surmount the difficulties by reference to a similar undertaking successfully accomplished in the State of Illinois, namely, the moving of the town of Nauvoo over a frozen river. In the course of three winters this was done, and seven hundred houses were transported, and a new town, now a prosperous place, was established. The Russian newspapers can boast of the great work of moving one of their towns; but it is a pleasure to know that the United States long ago anticipated them in such matters.—Harper's Round Table.

Family of Kittens and Squirrels.

On the farm of Amos M. Collins, near Bainbridge, Ohio, dwells a most curiously-assorted family, presided over by a demure house cat. Several weeks ago Tabby gave birth to a pair of healthy kittens. When old enough to get about they went on a foraging expedition in a wood near by, accompanied by their mother. In their journey they discovered a gray squirrel's nest in which two young squirrels lay sleeping. The curiosity of the kittens was aroused, and they soon made friends with the squirrels, and, while the mother sat contentedly on a log, kittens and squirrels enjoyed a frolic. When it finally became dusk the cat quickly took one of the squirrels in her mouth and carried it to the farm, returning for the other one in a few minutes. The squirrels are now safely housed with the kittens, and the cat watches over the children of her adoption as carefully as over her own offspring.

Russian Schoolboy Gardeners.

Over in Russia many of the schools have connected with them small gardens, orchards or grape arbors, in which the boys and girls are taught to work. Each day the schoolmaster, who has charge of the garden, takes his pupils out and teaches them how to plant, hoe, rake and reap. In the south of Russia, where the country is almost treeless, the children learn how to set out trees and what the best kinds are, and in some provinces there is a complete silkworm colony in each school, and the pupils watch the wonderful little silk makers eat the mulberry leaves and spin their cocoons, and help all they can in the work of caring for the colony. At other schools bees are kept, and the boys and girls learn to handle them and guard them while they are honeymaking.

In this way the boys and girls of Russia, by the time they have finished their school work, know a good deal about some pursuits which will help them to make a living.

How would you enjoy some of these things in connection with your school?

A Boy With a Queer Wit.

George Pomeroy was a very mischievous boy in school, but quick to think of some means to escape punishment when caught in a scrape.

When in the sixth grade his cousin from New York State was visiting him and one day they went to school together. They sat in a double seat behind the high stove and were having a good time, but becoming rather noisy the attention of the teacher was attracted and she stole down unnoticed by either until she was just in front of them. Before she could reprimand them, however, George arose perfectly composed and said:

"Pardon me, teacher—Miss Payne, this is my cousin Frank White from Buffalo, who, with his parents- is visiting us. Mother would be pleased to have you call."

The introduction and invitation were so naturally and cordially given the teacher could not repress a smile, and, it is needless to say, no punishment was given.—Charlie Monroe in Chicago Record.

A Victim of Circumstances.

"How was it that Mrs. Westend was run down by a bicycle in broad daylight?"

"O, the man who rode the machine didn't belong to her set, and Mrs. Westend positively couldn't see him, you know."—Answers.

DEFECTIVE PAGE