

A

NARRATIVE

OF THE

Extraordinary Adventures

OF

Four Russian Sailors.

Who were cast away on the Desert  
Island of East-Spitzbergen.

To which is added,

A Droll Story of a Fisherman.

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STIRLING:

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Who were cast away on the Desert  
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**T**HE truth of these adventures is sufficiently authenticated. When these unfortunate sailors first arrived at Archangel, they were examined apart by Mr. Klinstadt, Chief Auditor of the Admiralty of that city, who minuted down all the particulars which exactly corresponded with each account. Mr. Le Roy, Professor of History in the Imperial Academy, some time after sent for two of the men, viz. Alexis Himkof, and Himkof, his godson, to Petersburgh, from whose mouths he took the following narrative, which also agreed with Mr. Klinstadt's minutes. The original was published in the German language, at Petersburgh, in the year 1769, and

transmitted from thence to the ingenious Mr. Banks, who, with several other Members of the Royal Society, were so well pleased with the account that they directed a translation of it to be made into English.

In the year 1743, one Jeremiah Okladnikoff, a merchant of Meseu, a town in the province of Jugovia, and in the government of Archangel, fitted out a vessel, carrying 14 men: She was destined for Spitzbergen, to be employed in the whale or seal fishery: For eight successive days after they had sailed, the wind was fair; but on the ninth it changed: so that, instead of getting to the west of Spitzbergen, the usual place of rendezvous for the Dutch ships, and those of other nations annually employed in the whale-fishery, they were driven eastward of those islands; and, after some days they found themselves at a small distance from one of them, called East-Spitzbergen; by the Russians, Maloy Broun; that is, Little Broun. Having approached this island within almost three wrights, or two English miles, their vessel was suddenly sur-

rounded by ice, and they found themselves in an extremely dangerous situation. In this alarming state a council was held; when the Mate, Alexis Himkof, informed them that he recollected to have heard that some of the people of Mefen, some time before, having formed a resolution of wintering upon this island, had accordingly carried from that city timber proper for building a hut, and had actually erected one at some distance from the shore.

This information induced the whole company to resolve on wintering there if the hut, as they hoped, still existed; for they clearly perceived the imminent danger they were in, and that they must inevitably perish, if they continued in the ship. They dispatched therefore four of the crew, in search of the hut, or any other succour they could meet with. These were Alexis Himkof the mate; Iwan Himkof, his godson; Stephen Scharapof, and Feodor Weregine. As the shore on which they were to land was uninhabited, it was necessary that they should make some provision for their

expedition. They had almost two miles to travel over loose bridges of ice, which being raised by the waves, and driven against each other by the wind, rendered the way equally difficult and dangerous: Prudence therefore forbade their loading themselves too much, lest being overburthened, they might sink in between the pieces of ice and perish.

Having thus maturely considered the nature of their undertaking, they provided themselves with a musket, a powder horn, containing 12 charges of powder, with as many balls, an axe, a small kettle, a bag with about 20 pounds of flour, a knife, a tinder-box and tinder, a bladder filled with tobacco, and every man his wooden pipe. Thus accoutred, these four sailors quickly arrived on the island, little suspecting the misfortunes that would betal them. They began with exploring the country; and soon discovered the hut they were in search of, about an English mile and half from the shore. It was 36 feet in length, 18 feet in height, and as many in breadth. It contained a small

anti-chamber, about 12 feet broad, which had two doors, the one to shut it up from the outer air, the other to form a communication with the inner room: This contributed greatly to keep the larger room warm, when once heated. In the large room was an earthen stove, constructed in the Russian manner; that is, a kind of oven, without a chimney, which serves occasionally either for baking, for heating the room, or, as is customary among the Russian peasants, in very cold weather, for a place to sleep upon.

They rejoiced greatly at having discovered the hut, which had however suffered much from the weather, it having now been built a considerable time: Our adventurers, however, contrived to pass the night in it. Early next morning they hastened to the shore, impatient to inform their comrades of their success; and also to procure from their vessel such provisions, ammunition, and other necessaries, as might better enable them to winter on the island.—I leave my readers to figure to themselves the astonishment and agency of mind these

poor people must have felt, when on reaching the place of their landing, they saw nothing but an open sea, free from the ice, which but a day before, had covered the ocean. A violent storm, which had arisen during the night, had certainly been the cause of this disastrous event.

But they could not tell whether the ice which had before hemmed in the vessel, agitated by the violence of the waves, had been driven against her, and shattered her to pieces; or whether she had been carried by the current into the main, a circumstance which frequently happens in those seas. Whatever accident had befallen the ship, they saw her no more; and as no tidings were ever afterwards received of her, it is most probable that she sunk, and that all on board of her perished.

This melancholy event depriving the unhappy wretches of all hope of ever being able to quit the island they returned to the hut from whence they had come, full of horror and despair. Their first attention was employed, as may easily be imagined, in

devising means of providing subsistence, and for repairing their hut. The twelve charges of powder, which they had brought with them, soon procured them as many rein-deer; the island fortunately for them, abounding in these animals.

I have before observed, that the hut which the sailors were so fortunate as to find, had sustained some damage, and it was this: there were cracks in many places between the boards of the building, which freely admitted the air. This inconvenience was however easily remedied, as they had an axe, and the beams were still sound, (for wood in those cold climates continues through a length of years, unimpaired by worms or decay) so it was easy for them to make the boards join again very tolerably; besides, moss growing in great abundance all over the island, there was more than sufficient to stop up the crevices, which wooden houses must always be liable to. Repairs of this kind cost the unhappy men the less trouble, as they were Russians; for all Russian peasants are known to be good carpen-



ters: they build their own houses, and are very expert in handling the axe. The intense cold, which makes those climates habitable to so few species of animals, renders them equally unfit for the production of vegetable. No species of tree, or even shrub, is found on any of the islands of Spitzbergen; a circumstance of the most alarming nature to our sailors. Without fire it was impossible to resist the rigour of the climate; and, without wood, how was that fire to be produced, or supported? Providence, however, has so ordered it, that, in this particular, the sea supplies the defects of the land. In wandering along the beach, they collected plenty of wood, which had been driven ashore by the waves; and which at first consisted of the wrecks of ships, and afterwards of whole trees with their roots, the produce of some more hospitable, but to them unknown climate, which the overflowing of rivers, or other accidents, had sent into the ocean.

Nothing proved of more essential service to these unfortunate men, dur-

ing the first year of their exile, than some beads they found upon the beach, having a long iron hook, some nails of about five or six inches long, and proportionably thick, and other bits of old iron fixed in them; the melancholy relics of some vessels cast away in some remote parts. These were thrown ashore by the waves at a time when the want of powder gave our men reason to apprehend that they must fall a prey to hunger, as they had nearly consumed those rein-deer they had killed. This lucky circumstance was attended with another equally fortunate; they found on the shore, the root of a fir-tree, which nearly approached the figure of a bow.

As necessity has ever been the mother of invention, so they soon fashioned this root to a good bow, by the help of a knife; but still they wanted a string and arrows. Not knowing how to procure these at present, they resolved upon making a couple of lances, to defend themselves against the white bears, by far the most ferocious of their kind, whose attacks they had

great reason to dread. Finding they could neither make the heads of their lances, nor of their arrows, without the help of a hammer, they contrived to form the large iron hook mentioned above into one, by heating it, and widening a hole it happened to have about its middle, with the help of one of their largest nails. This received the handle and a round button at one end of the hook served for the face of the hammer. A large pebble supplied the place of an anvil, and a couple of rein-deer's horns made the tongs. By the means of such tools, they made two heads of spears; and after polishing and sharpening them on stones, they tied them as fast as possible with thongs made of rein-deer skins, to sticks about the thickness of a man's arm, which they got from some branches of trees that had been cast on shore. Thus equipped with spears they resolved to attack a white bear; and, after a most dangerous encounter, they killed the formidable creature, and thereby made a new supply of provisions. The flesh of this animal they relished exceedingly,

as they thought it much resembled beef in taste and flavour. The tendons they saw with much pleasure could, with little or no trouble, be divided into filaments, of what fineness they thought fit. This perhaps was the most fortunate discovery these men could have made; for, besides other advantages, they were hereby furnished with strings for their bow.

The success of our unfortunate islanders in making the spears, and the use they proved of, encouraged them to proceed, and to forge some pieces of iron into heads of arrows of the same shape, though somewhat smaller in size than the spears above mentioned. Having ground and sharpened these like the former, they tied them, with the sinews of the white bears, to pieces of fir; to which, by the help of fine threads of the same, they fastened feathers of a sea fowl; and thus became possessed of a compleat bow and arrows. Their ingenuity in this respect, was crowned with success far beyond their expectation; for during the time of their continuance upon the island, they, with these arrows, kil-

led no less than two hundred and fifty rein-deer, besides a great number of blue and white foxes. The flesh of these animals served them also for food, and their skins for cloathing, and other necessary preservatives against the intense coldness of a climate so near the pole.

They killed, however, only ten white bears in all, and that not without the utmost danger; for these animals, being prodigiously strong, defending themselves with astonishing vigour and fury. The first our men attacked designedly; the other nine they slew in defending themselves from their assaults; for some of these creatures even ventured to enter the outer room of the hut, in order to devour them. It is true, that all the bears did not shew (if it may be allowed the expression) equal intrepidity; either owing to some being less pressed by hunger, or to their being by nature less carnivorous than the others; for some of them, which entered the hut, immediately betook themselves to flight on the first attempt of the hunters to drive them away. A repe-

tion, however, of these ferocious attacks, threw the poor men into great terror and anxiety, as they were in almost a perpetual danger of being devoured. The three different kinds of animals above-mentioned, viz. the rein-deer, the blue and white foxes, and the white bears, were the only food these wretched mariners tasted during their continuance in this dreary abode.

In their excursions through the island, they had met with stony loam, or a kind of clay, nearly in the middle of it. Out of this they found means to form an utensil which might serve for a lamp; and they proposed to keep it constantly burning, with the fat of the animals they should kill. This was certainly the most rational scheme they could have thought of, for to be without a light, in a climate where, during winter, darkness reigns for several months together, would have added much to their other calamities. Having therefore fashioned a kind of lamp, they filled it with rein-deer's fat, and stuck in it some twisted linen, shaped into a wick. Bit

they had the mortification to find, that as soon as the fat melted, it not only soaked into the clay, but fairly ran through it on all sides. The thing therefore was to devise some means for preventing this inconveniency, not arising from cracks, but from the substance of which the lamp was made being too porous. They made therefore a new one, dried it thoroughly in the air, then heated it red-hot, and afterwards quenched it in their kettle, wherein they had boiled a quantity of flour down to the consistence of thin starch. The lamp being thus dried and filled with melted fat, they now found, to their great joy, it did not leak. But for greater security, they dipped linen rags in their paste, and with them covered all its outside. Succeeding in this attempt, they immediately made another lamp, for fear of an accident, that in all events they might not be destitute of light; and when they had done so much, they thought proper to save the remainder of their flour for similar purposes. As they had carefully collected whatever happened to be cast on shore,

to supply them with fuel, they had found amongst the wrecks of vessels some cordage, and a small quantity of bakum, (a kind of hemp used for calking ships) which served them to make wicks for their lamp. When these stores began to fail, their shirts and their drawers (which are worn by almost all Russian peasants) were employed to make good the deficiency. By these means they kept their lamp burning without intermission, from the day they first made it (a work they set about soon after their arrival on the island) until that of their embarkation for their native country.

The necessity of converting the most essential parts of their clothing, such as their shirts and drawers to the use above specified, exposed them the more to the rigour of the climate. They also found themselves in want of shoes, boots, and other articles of dress; and, as winter was approaching, they were again obliged to have recourse to that ingenuity which necessity suggests, and which seldom fails in the trying hour of distress.

They had skins of reindeer and



foxes in plenty, that had hitherto served them for bedding, and which they now thought of employing in some more essential service; but the question was, how to tan them. After deliberating on this subject, they took to the following method: they soaked the skins for several days in fresh water, till they could pull off the hair pretty easily; they then rubbed the wet leather with their hands till it was nearly dry, when they spread some melted reindeer fat over it, and again rubbed it well. By this process the leather became soft, pliant and supple, proper for answering every purpose they wanted it for. Those skins which they designed for furs they only soaked for one day, to prepare them for being wrought, and then proceeded in the manner before mentioned, except only that they did not remove the hair. Thus they soon provided themselves with the necessary materials for all the parts of dress they wanted.

They made a curious needle out of a piece of wire; and the sinews of the bear and reindeer, which they split

into several threads, served them to sew with.

Excepting the uneasiness which generally accompanies an involuntary solitude, these people, having thus by their ingenuity so far overcome their wants, might have had reason to be contented with what Providence had done for them in their distressful situation. But that melancholy reflection, to which each of these forlorn persons could not help giving way, that perhaps he might survive his companions, and then perish for want of subsistence, or become a prey to the wild beasts, incessantly disturbed their minds. The mate, Alexis Himkof, more particularly suffered; who, having left a wife and three children behind, sorely repined at his being separated from them: they were as he told me, constantly in his mind, and the thought of never more seeing them made him very unhappy.

When our four mariners had passed nearly six years in this dismal place, Feodor Weregim, who all along had been in a languid condition, died, after having in the latter part of his life,

suffered most excruciating pains. Tho' they were thus freed from the trouble of attending him, and the grief of being witnesses to his misery, without being able to afford him any relief, yet his death affected them not a little; they saw their number lessened, and every one wished to be the first that should follow him. As he died in winter, they dug a grave in the snow as deep as they could, in which they laid the corpse, and then covered it to the best of their power, that the white bears might not get at it.

Now, at the time when the melancholy reflections occasioned by the death of their comrade were fresh in their minds, and when each expected to pay this last duty to the remaining companions of his misfortunes, or to receive it from them; they unexpectedly got sight of a Russian ship. This happened on the 15th of August 1749.

The vessel belonging to a trader, of the sect called by its adherents Stara Vieva, that is, the Old Faith, who had come with it to Archangel, proposing it should winter in Nova Zem-

bla : but, fortunately for our poor exiles, Mr. Vernezobre, Director of the whale-fishery, proposed to the merchant to let his vessel winter at West-Spitzbergen ; which he at last, after many objections agreed to.

The contrary winds they met with on their passage, made it impossible for them to reach the place of their destination. The vessel was driven towards East-Spitzbergen, directly opposite to the residence of our mariners ; who, as soon as they perceived her, hastened to light fires upon the hills nearest their habitations, and then ran to the beach, waving a flag, made of a rein-deer's hide, fastened to a pole. The people on board, seeing these signals, concluded that there were men on the island who implored their assistance, and therefore came to an anchor near the shore. It would be in vain to attempt describing the joy of these people, as seeing the moment of their deliverance so near. They soon agreed with the master of the ship to work for him on the voyage, and to pay him eighty rube's on their arrival, for taking them on board, with

all their riches ; which consisted in fifty pud or two thousand pound weight of rein-deer fat, in many hides of these animals, and skins of the blue and white foxes, together with those of the ten white bears they had killed. They took care not to forget their bow and arrows, their spears, their knife and axe, which were almost worn out; their awls, and their needles, which they kept carefully in a bone box, very ingeniously made with their knife only ; and in short, every thing they were possessed of.

Our adventurers arrived safe at Archangel on the 28th of September, 1749, having spent six years and three months in their rueful solitude.

The moment of their landing was nearly proving fatal to the loving and beloved wife of Alexis Himkof, who, being present when the vessel came into port, immediately knew her husband, and ran with so much eagerness to his embraces, that she slipped into the water, and very narrowly escaped being drowned.

All three, on their arrival, were strong and healthy ; but, having liv-

ed so long without bread, they could not reconcile themselves to the use of it, and complained that it filled them with wind. Nor could they bear any spirituous liquors, and therefore drank nothing but water.

### Droll Story of a Fisherman.

THE Marquis Della Scalas, in Italy, once invited the neighbouring gentry to a grand entertainment, and all the delicacies of the season were accordingly provided. Some of the company had already arrived, in order to pay their very early respects to his excellency; when the major-domo, all in a hurry, came into the dining-room: 'My Lord, said he, here is a most wonderful fisherman below, who has brought one of the finest fish I believe in all Italy; but then he demands such a price for it! Regard not the price, (cried the marquis.) pay it him down directly.' 'So I would please your highness, but he refuses to take money.' 'Why, what would the fellow have?' 'A hundred strokes of the strappado on the bare shoulders, of

my lord; he says he will not bate of a single blow.—Here they all ran down to have a view of this rarity of a fisherman. ‘A fine fish! cried the marquis: ‘What is your demand, my friend? You shall be paid on the instant.’ ‘Not a quattrini, my lord; I will not take money: if you would have my fish, you must order me a 100 lashes of the strapaddo upon my naked back; if not I shall go and apply elsewhere.’ ‘Rather than lose your fish,’ says his highness, ‘let the fellow have his humour.’—‘Here! (he cried to one of his grooms) discharge this honest man’s demand; but don’t lay on over hard; don’t hurt the poor Devil very much.’ The fisherman then stripped, and the groom prepared to put his lord’s orders in execution. ‘Now, my friend,’ cried the fishmonger, ‘keep good account, I beseech you, for I am not covetous of a single stroke beyond my due.’ They all stood suspending in amaze, while this operation was carrying on. At length, on the instant that the executioner had given the fiftieth lash, ‘Hold!’ cried the fisherman, ‘I have

already received my full share of the price." "Your share!" questioned the marquis: "What can you mean by that?" "Why, my lord, you must know I have a partner in this business, my honour is engaged to let him have the half of whatever I shall get: and I fancy that your highness will acknowledge by and by, that it would be a thousand pities to defraud him of a single stroke." "And pray, my friend, who is this same partner of yours?" "It is the porter, my lord, who guards the outer gate of your highness's palace: he refused to admit me but on the condition of promising him the half of what I should get for the fish." "Oh! Oh!" exclaimed the marquis, breaking out into a laugh. "By the blessing of heaven he shall have his demand doubled him in full tale."—Here the porter was sent for, and stripped to the skin; when two grooms laid upon him with might and main, till they rendered him fit to be sainted for a second Bartholomew.—The marquis then ordered his major domo to pay the fisherman 20 sequins, and desired him to call yearly for the like sum, in recompence for the friendly office he had rendered him.

F I N I S.