THE GREAT MIGRATION

was himself only a sergeant of cossacks, and his dwelling a mere hut was not so pleasant as that they should wish to  
prolong it. They had now been a great while journeying through countries covered with frost and snow; and they were  
longing to reach those tropical isles famed for their spices and their loveliness which were to be the next stage in their  
grand tour round the globe. Influenced by these thoughts, then, they resolved to run all hazard, and try a shot at the  
bears. The kurilski seeing them determined, gave in; and, joining his gun to theirs, a volley of shots was simultaneously  
discharged through the bushes. Bears were seen to drop over and lie kicking upon the snow; but whether they continued  
their kicking for any considerable length of time, was a question about which our hunters could give no definite  
information. They did not stay to see; for the moment the smoke had cleared off, they saw the whole gang of bears in  
motion, and rushing towards them from all sides of the lake. The shrill fierce screaming of the animals, and the hurried  
pace in which they were making towards the ridge, declared their intentions. They were charging forward to the attack.  
The hunters saw this at a glance; and thought only of retreating. But whither could they fly there were no trees; and if  
there had been, the bears could have climbed them even better than themselves. There were steep rocky cliffs on both  
sides of the ravine: but these would afford them no security even had their ice coated slope permitted of their being  
scaled. But it did not, and if it had, the bears could have scaled the rocks too our russian hunters were in a complete state  
of perplexity, and perhaps would not have known how to save themselves, had it not been for their kurilski comrade. He,  
however, had conceived an idea or, rather, had drawn it from old experiences; and just at this moment he rushed down  
the slope, as he did so calling to the others to take to their sledges, and warning them that it was their only chance of  
escape. Of course none of them thought of disputing his advice, or even calling it in question; but one and all of them  
yielded obedience on the instant. Without saying a word, each rushed to his sledge, leaped upon the runners, seated  
himself in double quick time upon the little crescent like cradle, seized the ribbons, and straightened his team to the road.  
Had the dogs not been well trained, and their drivers equally well used to the management of a sledge, their peril would  
have been extreme. As it was though all came into their places in good style, and without confusion they had not a  
second to spare. The bears were already galloping down the slopes; and as the last sledge which was pouchskin’s moved off  
from the bottom of the ridge, the foremost of the roaring pursuers had got within less than yards of it it was now a trial  
of speed between bears and sledge dogs for the latter knew that they were in as much danger as their masters; and  
needed neither the exclamation ah nor the oschtol to urge them forward. On swept they over the frozen crust, as fast as  
they could go handling their limbs and claws with the nimbleness peculiar to their race. The bears followed in a sort of  
lumbering gallop; yet notwithstanding their uncouth movements, they kept for a long time close in the rear of the  
fugitives. Fortunately they did not possess the speed of the canine race; and at length seeing that they were being  
distanced one after another gave up the chase, and commenced returning towards the lake, slowly, and with apparent  
reluctance. Just at this crisis an accident occurred to pouchskin or rather pouchskin committed a mistake which had it  
been made minutes sooner, would most assuredly have cost him his life. The mistake which pouchskin made, was to drop  
the iron end of his oschtol on the snowy crust between his sledge and the dogs nearest to it the wheelers as we may call  
them. The effect of this, with kamschatkan sledge dogs, is to cause the whole team to halt; and so acted the dogs that  
pouchskin was driving all suddenly coming to a dead stop pouchskin endeavoured to urge them forward crying out the  
usual signal ha; but, in his anxious eagerness, pouchskin placed the accent after the vowel, instead of before it; and  
instead of ha his exclamation sounded ah the latter being the command for the dogs to halt, of course only kept them  
steady in their places; and they stood without offering to move a leg. By good fortune, the bears had already given up the  
pursuit and were not witnesses of this interruption; otherwise it would have gone ill with the ex grenadier. In due time  
the dogs were once more started; and pouchskin putting them to their highest rate of speed soon overtook the sledge  
train; which did not come to a halt until a good mile of snow covered country was between it and the bears. the hunters  
only paused then, for a short while, to breathe their panting dogs; and this done, they resumed their seats on the sledges,  
and continued on to the ostrog without a thought of going back after the bears. They had no intention, however, of  
giving them up entirely. They only drove home to the village in order to get assistance; and, as soon as their report was  
delivered, all the men of the settlement Cossacks, kurilskis, and half breeds turned out armed to the teeth for a grand  
battue, and proceeded towards the lake with the governor himself at their head. The bears were still upon the ground

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