

Verbundkatalog Kalliope

4. A Russian Brig.

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"On board The Rurik, October 1, 1816.

....I have the honour of informing your Excellency that we are approaching the coast of California. Favoured by a strong wind from N. and N.W. with occasional gales, we made the voyage from Unalashka to California in a very short time. At midnight we saw by moonlight the Cap de los Reyes..."

Captain Otto von Kotzebue was very tired. It was late at night, and he had laboured for hours, in his narrow cabin, on a detailed report for his powerful protector, Count Romanzoff, former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Chancellor of the Russian Empire. The great man had retired from state service in 1815, but still had great influence behind the scenes. Now and then the captain interrupted his writing and glanced respectfully at Romanzoff's huge portrait on the wall. The martial and imposing looking gentleman was painted in dark colors, almost black. Kotzebue remembered with a contemptuous smile that once, somewhere in Chile, an ignorant fellow had asked him if the sinister man in the picture was a Negro. His Excellency Count Romanzoff - a nigger!

He was the sponsor and secret leader of this expedition. With the help of his expert adviser on nautical affairs, Admiral Krusenstern, he had worked out the plan for an extensive voyage with the double purpose of exploring certain parts of the South Sea and of investigating the possibility of a North-East passage through the Bering Straits into the Arctic Sea, and thence into the Atlantic. The Rurik, a brig of only 180 tons, was fitted out at the expense of the Imperial Chancellor, and sailed from Cronstadt on August 1, 1815, equipped with a crew of twenty seven men and a scientific

staff. The three naturalists and the artist on board were supposed to examine and describe plants and trees, rock structures, the courses of the rivers, and the habits of the natives in various regions of the American continent and the South Sea Islands. They were zealous scholars who had done a similar job in Brazil and Chile, and later, under the Arctic Circle, in Kamtschatka, that peninsular portion of Eastern Siberia, in varied parts of Alaska, and at Berin Straits where Siberia and Alaska almost meet.

Captain von Kotzebue, however, knew perfectly well that it was not merely, and not mainly, scientific curiosity that impelled the former leader of Russian imperialism to finance so costly an undertaking. The purely scientific angle was, indeed, of secondary importance compared with the political aspects involved. The Kurik, sailing under the Russian war flag, was supposed to impress the world with the prestige of the Imperial Navy and to promote Russian imperialism. The visit to the shores of California was of especial significance as a bold move toward the permanent establishment of Russian rule over territory now under Spanish dominion. Herr von Kotzebue, an ambitious and astute servant of his mighty masters, realized that his Highness, the ex-chancellor, expected him to send exact information concerning the power of resistance still left in the weakened organism of the Spanish colonial empire. He was also quite aware of the strategic importance of the harbor of San Francisco, where the southward expansion of Russian imperialism was bound to collide with Spain.

There were malignant people who said that Otto von Kotzebue, son of the famous playwright August Friedrich von Kotzebue, was a

poor- or, in any case, not a first-rate - navigator. Nobody could deny, however, that he was a shrewd and experienced politician. His knowledge of current international affairs was clear and comprehensive. Political dilettantes were still impressed by the power of Spain on the American continent. For Spanish possessions stretched in an unbroken line from Cape Horn to a point three hundred miles north from San Francisco. They comprised not only all of South-America - except Brazil and Guiana - but also the enormous region West of the Mississippi Valley. The Spanish Crown also owned East Florida, and furthermore claimed a strip of land, called West Florida, extending along the shore of the Gulf of Mexico, from Florida to the mouth of the Mississippi. But the Russian captain knew that the United States disputed the Spanish claim to West Florida. The State Department in Washington was of the opinion that this territory formed part of the original tract of Louisiana, and consequently was included in the transfer from Spain to Napoleon in 1800, and in Napoleon's sale of Louisiana to the United States, three years later. It hardly mattered that the Spanish authorities quite naturally disagreed with this point of view. 'What counts is power', thought the son of the German-Russian poet, Kotzebue, with a sort of melancholy cynicism. The United States attempted the seizure of the disputed region, and would have kept it, despite all Spanish protests, had not Great Britain, interfered. President Madison prudently withdrew the American troops, in 1813...

In the long run, however, Spain would be too weak to maintain her authority: Captain Kotzebue knew it, and he saw no sound reason

why Russia should not profit from Spain's predicament. 'Why should we leave the robbery to Great Britain or the United States?'

The United States - as the intelligent agent of Count Romanzoff told himself and his chief - had a very healthy appetite: the sound greed bharacteristic of growing youth. And it was rapidly becoming clear that they also had the strength and determination to satisfy their natural aspirations. The tempo and skill of their Westward expansion was remarkable. Kotzebue considered Jefferson's purchase of Louisiana a diplomatic and commercial masterpiece. Fifteen million dollars -, over 3,500,000 of which was to be paid back to American citizens in the West for damage to their trade - this was certainly not too high a price for one of the most valuable pieces of land in the world, doubling the territory of the United States. 'Jefferson's emissaries in Paris, Mr. Livingston and Mr. Monroe, were certainly not to be sniffed at ' decided Kotzebue with the knowing appreciation of an expert. 'Even Monsieur Tayllerand had not managed to get the better of them.' However, it seemed likely that Mr. Madison's government should have its eyes already on the treasures of California. The youthful republic had plenty of other troubles and of other tasks to perform. The war with Great Britain was barely over and had been rather an exhausting adventure, even for so strong and courageous a people. Besides, Great Britain still claimed the Oregon country, that huge region lying between the Rocky Mountains and the Pacific Ocean. Neither the King in London nor the President in Washington were to be considered as serious rivals for His Majesty the Czar in the matter

of California. 'And Spain?' The Captain chuckled with contempt. 'We'll see...', he decided. 'I have my eyes open. Old Romanzoff will be satisfied...'

He thought of his high protector in such informal terms because he was very tired. The chatter of the officers on deck irritated him. 'What's the matter tonight?' He was rather angry. 'Sometimes they hardly speak a word for days - They sit like deaf-mutes - and all of a sudden they are as garrulous as old women. What is all this excitement about our arrival in California? The silly enthusiasm of that poetic fool, Chamisso, seems contagious...'

Adelbert von Chamisso, one of the naturalists on board, had declared at the dinner table, that he was looking forward more eagerly to San Francisco than to any other stop of the entire journey - whereupon Kotzebue had remarked somewhat sourly: "It's not the first time I've heard that, Adelbert Loginovitch. You expect miracles from every island and port..." Herr von Kotzebue was in the habit of teasing and heckling his First Naturalist, and Chamisso, reciprocated with criticism of the captain. He was keeping a diary, and Kotzebue was sure that it was bristling with malicious attacks against him, the Captain. He disliked Chamisso because he was a poet, had no awe of authority, and was whimsical, too intelligent and somehow inscrutable.

It annoyed Kotzebue to imagine them all together out there, enjoying the mild night - young Choris, the artist, Martin Petrovitch Wormskiold, the second or "volunteer" naturalist, Dr. Eschscholz, the physician, the two lieutenants, and Chamisso with his endless talk. What was he talking about? It really looked like a conspiracy...

Chamisso was talking about America. He had told his comrades how happy he was to be nearing this continent, even though California were still under Spanish rule. "I still maintain," explained Chamisso, that one day, sooner or later, the United States will embrace the entire American continent." The Second Lieutenant asked somewhat dryly: "Including Alaska, Adelbert Loginovitch? Do you think that part of the Russian empire should belong to the United States as well?" Chamisso gave an evasive answer, and went on to praise Thomas Jefferson, the real nobleman and genuine man of the people: "There you have a really plausible conception of democracy, one that is not incompatible with aristocratic ideals..." And he added, with a knowing, sensual smile, the tip of his tongue touching his lip as though he were tasting something sweet: "Besides, he is one of the greatest writers of our time. What prose! Concise but eloquent too, clear, convincing..."

He spoke of the splendor, the constant growth, the new national consciousness of America, and praised the recent Treaty of Ghent as the completion of American Independence which until then had been acknowledged but not really respected in fact. "The year 1815 marks an epoch in American history," he declared. All of them nodded, but the Second Lieutenant seemed slightly bored. "Well, we won't see much of those free Americans in San Francisco," he said. Nothing but a few Spanish soldiers. It's not much of a place, I'm told. "

Young Choris, the painter - known on board as "the kid" had heard on the contrary that the little settlement of San Francisco was all charm and color. "You will find fine specimens of flowers

there", he promised the naturalists. "And the Spanish girls..." Choris was always and everywhere looking for attractive models for his Voyage Pittoresque, a series of sketches he was preparing for a publishing house in Paris.

The Second Officer yawned - "There aren't any pretty girls there, I tell you," - and the First Lieutenant, Gleb Simonovitch Shismareff, suggested: "Let's talk about something else." He was a tall good-natured fellow with a face like a full moon.

There was a silence. The sea had calmed. There was only the soft sound of the waves against the brow. Finally Choris announced: "I want to tell a story." It was rather surprising. "A fairy tale," said Choris. He sometimes had sudden ideas like that. He was young and fanciful. They liked him. He was a delicate lad with a pleasant voice and a smooth, handsome face. They laughed: "The kid wants to tell a story!"

And Choris, the artist, began:

"A very long time ago, in a country unknown, there lived a man by the name of Peter Schlemihl. He was both the richest and the most wretched human being on earth. For he had sold his shadow to a gentleman whom he met at a party. The gentleman had good manners and was nicely dressed, in an elegant grey frock coat. The only trouble was that he was the Devil. He wanted Mr. Schlemihl's shadow and his signature in blood. In return he gave what looked like an ordinary leather purse but that turned out to be always full of gold, no matter how much had been taken out of it. Peter Schlemihl thought this an excellent bargain, but he was wrong. For a man without a shadow soon finds himself in an embarrassing,

even a tragic position. He becomes conspicuous and finally a public scandal through the very absence of that colorless companion whom we generally neglect as long as he continues to follow us, faithful and mute. Peter could not enjoy the inexhaustible, magic purse. He was very lonely. People avoided him, boycotted him, considered him a monster. He frightened the girls and provoked the men. He had to shun the friendly light of the sun, and even the gentle gleam of the moon became dangerous to him..."

His listeners glanced anxiously at Chamisso and were relieved to see his shadow, distinct though faint on the wooden floor of the deck, in the waning light of the moon. Adelbert had a nervous manner of caressing Valet, the little dog - an appealing animal: he was fond of it. He seemed to address the dog, not his friends, when he said at last: "Can you see it, Valet? I still have my shadow - and a very nice and solid one, too..."

The others laughed, but it did not sound very gay.

Chamisso said, still caressing the dog and avoiding the eyes of his young friend Choris: " Why don't you finish your story?"

Choris replied - and even in the moonlight one could see him blushing - : " It is your story, Adelbert. Everyone knows that Peter Schlemihl is your work, and a very successful one, too."

Chamisso nodded gravely. " Yes, it is my story. And I knew what I was talking about when I described poor Schlemihl in all his misery and humiliation. I know what he went through. Any crook had the right to sneer at him, who had lost what even a beggar possesses. He was an outcast, a paria, condemned to dishonor and isolation. A man without a shadow is like a man without a father-

land. And a homeless man is like a shadowless man..."

The others listened with apprehension. For they all knew that Chamisso had no fatherland himself - or rather had two, which came to the same. His real name was Louis Charles Adélaïde de Chamisso. He was born at the ancient castle of Boncourt, in Champagne. During the French Revolution, when he was nine years old, his family was forced to leave France. A few years later, Charles-Adelbert was accepted as a page at the court of Frederick Wilhelm II of Prussia. His family went back to France when Napoleon became First Consul, but Adelbert remained in Germany. He had joined the army although he loathed Prussian militarism. He loved the German language, tried to write German poetry, and made friends with German poets of the romanticist circle. When he paid a visit to his family, in France, he felt himself entirely estranged from his homeland. Returning to Germany, however, he realized that there too he was a stranger.

"Life without a fatherland must be very sad," remarked the First Lieutenant, Gleb Simonovitch. "I cannot imagine what I would feel like, without great Little Mother Russia." He understood no language but Russian, and believed faithfully, stubbornly, childishly, in the infallibility of the Holy Little Father, the Czar of all Russians.

Young Choris, the artist, said, rather hastily: "We are a motley crowd on this boat, anyhow. Our Captain is a Russian subject all right; but his famous father writes German comedies and spends his life between Berlin, St. Petersburg, Vienna, Weimar and Reval in Esthonia. Dr. Eschscholz too seems somehow suspended be-

tween nations: half-German, half Russian. You were born somewhere in the Baltic Provinces, weren't you, Doctor? - Besides, I am a kind of mongrel myself: a German by origin, a Russian by education, and a Frenchman by love. For I believe that France is the finest country in the world. Don't you agree, Adelbert?"

"France is beautiful," Chamisso said.

And Choris, with a rather hectic intensity: " I am homesick for Paris! Don't forget to write me that recommendation to Madame de Staël, Adelbert!"

Chamisso smiled. "We still have plenty of time ..."

"She must be a wonderful woman!" Choris was very excited. "How I envy you, Adelbert, your friendship with her!"

"I owe a great deal to her friendship", said Chamisso. " By the way," - he suddenly addressed Dr. Eschscholz - , " did I ever tell you that I started the study of botany under her auspices? Yes, in Switzerland: I spent the summer with her... of course, in Berlin, I got a more thorough training."

The Second Lieutenant chuckled. " Did you pick flowers, Adelbert Loginovitch, in 1813, during the War of Liberation, when the Prussians defeated your great Emperor?"

"Exactly", admitted Chamisso, very seriously. " I couldn't stand the idea of bearing arms against the French - although I heartily approved of Prussia's heroic striving for liberty. So I left Berlin, and found refuge in the country home of friends. There I went on with my botanical studies while the storm raged - and I wrote the story of Peter Schlemihl..."

Choris reminded him: " You must tell us the end of your fairy

tale, Adelbert! You haven't come to the wonderful boots."

Now it was Chamisso who chuckled. "Yes, those boots certainly were wonderful. For they went seven miles in a single step. Poor Peter Schlemihl - homeless, shadowless, friendless - found a certain consolation in crossing all the continents and the oceans, from the North Pole to the Sahara, from the Sandwich Islands to the Bavarian Alps; everywhere admiring and examining the miracles of Nature - the flowers, the stones, the soil, and sometimes the people. He came a wandering naturalist, you see - just as I am myself, and as you are, collega Martin Petrovitch, and you, Esch-scholz."

"Why did you join our expedition, Adelbert Loginovitch?" the First Lieutenant inquired. "I often wondered..."

"It was an amusing story", Chamisso said. "Once, in Berlin, I had a chat with a friend - dear old Hitzig: Julius Edward Hitzig-, and while we were talking and smoking our pipes, I happened to notice a dispatch in the Tageblatt, telling rather vaguely about a Russian expedition that was being prepared. I was feeling rather discouraged at the time, and I made a half joking remark about wishing that I could go along and see the Eskimos. But friend Hitzig took it in utter seriousness, and said, "'Do you mean it, Adelbert?" 'Of course I do,' I said - laughing, you see, because I still thought of the whole matter as a joke. But Hitzig knew that Otto von Kotzebue was to be the leader of the expedition, and he had met his famous father, the Russian Councillor of State and German poet laureate, at Königsberg some time before. So Hitzig recommended me to old Kotzebue, and the father recommended me to the son - and here we are! The night is magnificent, and tomorrow

we'll be in San Francisco.'

Dr. Eschscholz remarked: " So August Friedrich von Kotzebue, after all, has done at least one good thing in his life."

Chamisso grinned. " He's a great poet, Eschscholz."

"Nonsense!" The doctor seemed rather angry. " He never wrote a line that could compare with your Peter Schlemihl or some of your recent poems."

"Thank you, Ivan Ivanovitch, thank you." Chamisso's smile was somewhat pallid, distracted. " Your opinion flatters me, and is original besides. Most people would think you were crazy. Who am I, compared with Kotzebue? He is the glory of our times! He is admired all over the world, in the South Sea Islands and in Tokyo, and even by American merchants ...He is wonderful!"

"He is sickening," insisted Eschscholz. "Have you forgotten that play of his, The Stranger, that we saw in Plymouth before we sailed?"

"How could I forget it!" laughed Chamisso. " It's a masterpiece - in its way. It's an amazing concoction - it's grand! People simply adored it - both the stage and the auditorium were literally dripping with tears. I can still hear Miss O'Neill wailing as Eulalia. She had the most ridiculous walk- like a nervous duck -, and her voice ..."

He imitated the shrill, piping voice. He danced and jumped on the deck like a madman, copying Miss O'Neill's exaggerated gestures. It was exceedingly funny and a trifle horrifying. He looked like a ghost as he fluttered and croaked on the deck, in the pale light of the ending night. 'Like a crazy bird,' thought Dr. Esch-

scholz, amused and uneasy.

It was Captain von Kotzebue who broke up the queer performance. He looked rather funny himself rushing along the deck, a heavy overcoat barely covering his long, white nightgown. His voice, however, was not comic at all, but very intimidating as he roared: "Are you insane, Adelbert Loginovitch? Go to bed and be ashamed of yourself! It's three o'clock in the morning."

On October 2, 1816, at 4 P.M., the Rurik dropped anchor in the Port of San Francisco, opposite the Presidio.

There was considerable agitation at the Spanish Port when the Russian vessel sailed into the harbor. The Spaniards hoisted their flag which was promptly saluted by Captain Kotzebue with seven guns. The Presidio responded with only five shots - which made Herr von Kotzebue very angry. His indignation increased as he noticed that no boat was sent from the shore to welcome the distinguished visitors. Later the Rurik people found out it was neither ill-will nor disorder that prevented their hosts from dispatching reception boats, but the simple fact that they did not possess any. This sounded incredible, considering the strategic significance and the almost ideal geographic situation of the harbor, which is about 90 miles long and from 5 to 15 miles wide, sheltered from dangerous winds on all sides, and contains excellent anchorage ground and plenty of deep water.

The story of the Russian visit to San Francisco, in October 1816, has elements of a comic opera. Both background and plot

seem somehow unserious, even unreal, and the scene of action is almost too colorful to be true: the brig anchored in the harbor; the improvised tents on shore where the Russians entertained the Spanish officers - Even the settlement of San Francisco itself had a stagey and improvised character; a picturesque group of barracks, forts and huts, dominated by the Presidio that represented a somewhat sloppy military authority. At the Mission, center of religious activities, situated several miles away in splendid isolation, the monks busied themselves with savoury dishes and exquisite wines, while the natives slaved for them.

There is material in fact for two or three humorous librettos. For no theatre could possibly afford all the extras and settings needed for this gaudy show. There is the chorus of sailors, another of Spanish officers and soldiers, besides the Indians and the monks. And what an opportunity for a costume designer! - : the becoming uniforms of sailors, officers, soldiers, and high officials, the fantastic draperies on the bronzed bodies of the savages. The leading characters, too, satisfy all the requirements: Kotzebue, the ambitious intriguer, arrogant and morose; Adelbert, an errant poet and scholar, a younger brother of the Flying Dutchman, though less violent; the Spanish Governor of the beautiful name of Paolo Vicente de Sola, arriving in haste from his castle in Monterey; and, finally, a dubious fellow named Kuskoff, villain and political agent, business man and crook. But this sinister character already takes us into the middle of the actual plot - that typical musical comedy intrigue, with two mighty monarchs, the Russian Czar and the King of Spain, invisible in the background.

The quarrel about the inadequate salute to the Russian flag was only a minor incident, prelude to more exciting events. It was promptly settled, with Chamisso acting as a mediator between the Presidio and the touchy Captain. Lieutenant Don Louis de Arguello, temporary commander of the Fort, sent his apologies and several baskets of fruit and vegetables, Kotzebue, however, stubbornly insisted on what he considered his legal right, and finally, after lengthy negotiations, obtained it: the Spaniards honored the Russian colors with two supplementary guns. They also had to hoist their flag again on this occasion, which caused a great deal of trouble. For the flag-staff was broken, and none of the Spanish soldiers had enough skill or pluck to climb the mast. The commander had to borrow a sailor from the Rurik to get his flag-staff repaired. At the same time, Lieutenant de Arguello sent a messenger to the Governor of New-California, Don Paolo Vicente de Sola, informing him of the arrival of the Russian brig. Captain Kotzebue meanwhile came in contact with Mr. Kuskoff, and here the dramatic intrigue begins.

For Mr. Kuskoff's activities, indeed, his mere existence in these regions were a permanent disturbance and provocation to the local Spanish authorities. He was an agent of the Russian American Company, and had settled at Bodega, about 30 miles from San Francisco. There he had erected a veritable fort - Fort Ross - on Spanish territory, with the avowed purpose of carrying on and protecting trade, prohibited by the Spanish law, on the California coast. This was by special order of Mr. Baranoff, much-feared

and much-hated head of all Russian settlements in America. The Spaniards had very good reasons to consider Baranoff's machinations an open scandal and an alarming threat to their own vital interests. For he had agents everywhere, including the South Sea Islands. The most notorious incident caused by one of Baranoff's secret representatives had occurred on Oahu, one of the Hawaiian Islands, then under the rule of an independent native king, Tameiameia. An adventurer by the name of Dr. Scheffer - formerly a Russian surgeon, subsequently one of Baranoff's agents - conspired with a local chieftain called Tamari, against his liege-lord, Tameiameia. Two captains of the Russian American Company went so far as to take possession of that island by hoisting the Russian flag over the harbor of Hana-ruru (Honolulu). The population rose in fury and the Russians were soon obliged to evacuate the island, threatening dreadful revenge upon their immediate return.

As for Kuskoff, he had carefully prepared the ground for a settlement near the little Bay of Bodega, as far back as 1808, when Romanzoff had just become Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs. The well-informed gentlemen in St. Petersburg knew perfectly well, of course, that in view of domestic conditions in Madrid, there was no risk involved in annoying the Spaniards in America. The claims of Spain to the territories on the California coast were no more highly respected by the Americans and English than by the Russians.

Officers and soldiers stationed in San Francisco were doomed to the most embarrassing impotence, living in actual misery, forgotten and deserted for six or seven years by Mexico, their motherland. The general discontent still further increased when the

new Governor of Monterey, Don Paolo Vicente de Sola, issued strict orders against smuggling, which so far had provided the soldiers with at least the bare necessities of life. The Governor's anger at Kuskoff's sordid activities becomes still more intelligible in view of his outspoken opposition to any illegal trade.

He was eager to get rid of that disturbing, obstinate fellow, and therefore rushed from Monterey to San Francisco, with the idea of persuading Captain von Kotzebue to stop Kuskoff's outrages. That the Russian Captain would be willing or able to interfere with his compatriot's machinations, was certainly a naive assumption for an experienced politician. Mr. Kuskoff constantly defied the justified complaints of the Spaniards, and he was hardly exaggerating, when he declared bluntly: " This is none of my business. I am only Baranoff's agent and I will leave Bodega when I receive my orders from him."- The mere name of Baranoff frightened the Spanish officials. Did they not realize that Herr von Kotzebue was just another tool in the hands of the same powers who directed that poor wretch Kuskoff?

The first shock and surprise for Governor de Sola was Kotzebue's rude refusal to visit him at the Presidio. The arrogant Captain expected the elderly officer on board the Rurik. Neither of the two wanted to make the first move and the situation began to be alarming. It was Adelbert von Chamisso whom the captain used, once more, as a go-between; for he knew a little Spanish and had pleasant manners. Yet he heartily disliked the idea of calling again at the Presidio, as proxy for his commander. The scene between the embarrassed poet and the insulted Governor makes a fine climax for our hypothetical libretto.

Don Paolao Vicente de Sola was a chubby little man - a fact which irked and depressed him considerably. He received the visitor in his gala uniform, covered with decorations, which contrasted nicely with the nightcap that he had forgotten to remove. Until the last moment he had supposed - or at any rate had tried to believe - that the young man was coming in the function of a mere outrider or herald, to announce the arrival of his master. When poor Adelbert had to tell him that he was charged only with the transmission of the captain's cool apologies and his desire to receive the Governor on board the Rurik -: when Don Paolo, in all his worn-out splendor, finally understood that the Russian navigator was deliberately insulting him, he nearly burst into tears; then pulled himself together; bit his lips, made a desperate attempt at dignity, and finally replied that, in that case, he would have to renounce the pleasure of meeting Herr von Kotzebue, since, unfortunately, he could not endure the sea before eating.

As for Chamisso, he was not far from crying himself. The idea of this proud, and helpless little gentleman riding back to his dreary residence at Monterey, without having seen the Captain, was almost more than his sensitive heart could bear: it was agonizing. There was nothing he could do, however, except to murmur, " I'm terribly sorry," - which was quite true - , make a polite bow, and leave.

A definite rupture between the Governor and the Russian Captain was avoided, thanks only to a fortunate misunderstanding. For when Herr von Kotzebue went on shore, around noon, he had no intention of visiting the Presidio, but wanted only to inspect the

Russian bath and the observatory that his men had improvised near the tents. The eager spies at the Presidio, however, sighted the Captain's boat; they informed the Governor, who supposed that Kotzebue had suddenly changed his mind and was coming to show his reverence to the representative of the Spanish crown. The good-natured man - touched, even overwhelmed by his visitor's unexpected courtesy - rushed down to welcome the long-awaited guest; Spain and Russia met on the sunny beach, and the Pacific Ocean witnessed the moving scene of their reconciliation.

A few hours later, the Spanish and Russian officers dined gaily together in a decorated tent. Don Paolo and his hungry lieutenants were overjoyed by the rich and tasty food which the visitors had bought from the Mission.

The only element our story lacks, is a veritable romance. Had old Kotzebue, the captain's celebrated father, written the play, he would certainly have introduced a lovely girl, either Spanish or Indian. She is perhaps the Governor's daughter, both the Captain and the poet are smitten by her charms and express themselves in vehement arias and tender duets; there might even be a humorous trio of jealousy. What a pity that the over-discreet chroniclers of the Rurik concealed this sentimental interlude, which may well have taken place.

The crude fact is, however, that the tensions and undercurrents as described or hinted at in Chamisso's memoirs, were far from tender. There was little love lost between any of the groups and individuals involved. The Russians and the Spaniards were mutually scornful, the Presidio was on bad terms with the Mission, and the

Indians hated the whites altogether. The soldiers were discontented: They had received no pay for seven years and the wealthy priests actually allowed them to starve since they had not the wherewithal to buy provisions. Chamisso had ill feelings toward Captain Kotzebue, while the latter was contemptuous toward everything and everybody. He considered the Spaniards poor soldiers and still poorer organizers; but he was also thoroughly disgusted by the Indians. They performed a war dance for him, by order of the missionaries - and Herr von Kotzebue did not enjoy it at all. He found " nothing remarkable" in the pantomime, and the faces of the Indians were " ugly and stupid." He noticed a resemblance between the California natives and the Negroes: " except that a Negro head may be called handsome in comparison with theirs." -

The negotiations concerning the Bodega settlement, dragging on through the whole stay of the Rurik at San Francisco, were a pure mockery. There were endless conferences, quarrels, stalemates, apologies, promises, lies, appeasements, new arguments, and new reconciliations. Mr. Kuskoff arrived from Bodega and reiterated his contention that he could do nothing without orders from Mr. Baranoff. Mr. Kotzebue was sometimes feline and diplomatic, sometimes conceited and rude, and always ^{as} evasive as possible. He promised to report the complicated case at once to His Majesty the Czar. His Majesty would send immediate instructions to Mr. Baranoff, who would then promptly communicate with Mr. Kuskoff. Meanwhile, the gentleman at San Francisco composed a solemn and detailed Protocol intended for both the sovereigns in St. Petersburg and Madrid. Chamisso acted as an interpreter and witness. He was

among those to seal the document - which (as Chamisso ironically stated in his memoirs) " reached its proper destination in St. Petersburg, and, without being presented to the Emperor, has been filed away with the proper ministerial department." As for Mr. Kuskoff, he used the time in a much more practical way: While the Protocol was being signed at the Presidio, he was busy, with several of his men, catching otters in the rear part of the Bay. Captain Kotzebue, while he shook hands with Don Paolo Vicente de Sola, knew perfectly well, of course, what his sly compatriot was doing at that very moment; he was also quite aware that catching otters was a punishable offence under Spanish law. The Spaniards knew that they were being disgracefully doublecrossed by their Russian visitors, but there was very little that they could do about it.

Young Choris, not being interested in high politics, found plenty of attractive material for his Le Voyage Pittoresque. He portrayed the Indians, the costumes they wore in their dances, their weapons; he made sketches of minerals and butterflies and flowers, and everything, in his artistic interpretation, somehow mirrors the youthful delicacy and sensual charm of his own personality: even the " grizzly bear of North America" shows a certain melancholy grace.

The naturalists were also industrious, and Doctor Eschscholz had the good fortune to discover a new flower, which was to be called "Eschscholtzia californica" and is now known as the California Poppy. Chamisso grew slightly jealous, but was consoled by the Governor, Don Paolo Vicente de Sola, who had taken a fancy to him. One day he presented su amigo Don Adelberto with a flower he

had picked up on his way from the Presidio to the Russian tents; It was an ordinary daisy, but Don Adelberto was pleased nonetheless.

The last scenes of the show are, appropriately, the most spectacular. There is an exciting fight on the beach between a bear and a bull, arranged by the Spaniards to give their visitors a thrill. The sailors of the Rurik had a fine time, but Chamisso found the spectacle rather dreary, "unwilling and bound as the animals were." There is the festival of Saint Francis - an excellent opportunity to present the activities of the missionaries among the more or less tamed Indians. The cautious priests, however, considered it wiser not to trust their recently acquired flock. The military power in California served mainly to protect the holy Mission against the uprisings of the savages; it also assisted the clergy in its conversions among the tribes, and in preventing those already in the faith from getting out again.

When the officers of the Rurik paid a visit to the missionaries, they were impressed by the size and beauty of their residence, though slightly shocked by the uncleanness of the large room where they were received "with much respect." The church, situated next to the Mission, was spacious, solidly built of stone, and handsomely fitted out. When the guests arrived they found a gathering of several hundred half-naked kneeling Indians. They were not permitted to absent themselves from a single Mass, although they understood neither Spanish nor Latin. The missionaries had not bothered to learn Indian languages. Captain Kotzebue grew very angry about this deplorable state of things. "How can you

ever succeed that way in bringing light to the heads and hearts of these poor creatures?" he asked the perplexed monks, who murmured that the Holy Mass possessed beneficent and comforting power in itself, even without being literally understood. The Russian navigator, however, was apparently opposed on principle and indiscriminately to the work of missionaries. He spoke of "that rage of converting savage nations, now spreading over the whole South Sea, and causing much mischief, because the priests do not take the trouble to make them men before they make them Christians."

Herr von Kotzebue seemed very urgently concerned, all of a sudden, with the plight of "those poor creatures", the Indians. He inspected their living quarters, several streets of long houses made of bricks. The dirt in these barracks was abominable: "It defies description!" exclaimed the humanitarian captain, and then asked severely whether these lamentable hygienic conditions might not be the cause of the high mortality rate among California Indians. "Isn't it true," he insisted, "that three hundred out of a thousand Indians in San Francisco die every year?" The missionaries could not deny the accuracy of this figure. Herr von Kotzebue had a good memory; he also knew that even the 400 Indian girls, living apart from the men in their own dirty barracks, were obliged to perform hard labor for the benefit of the holy fathers. The harvest of the fields had to be delivered to the missionaries who stored it in magazines, the Indians receiving only the absolute minimum necessary for their support.

All this was indeed pretty bad -: Chamisso had to admit it, although he was in the habit of contradicting the captain whenever possible. On the other hand, some of the holy fathers were kindly and generous. They regarded the Indians as children and treated them accordingly; watched and applauded their wild dances, and even allowed them on Sundays their beloved pastime of gambling. The Indians were passionate gamblers and would often lose everything but the slim rags in which they were clothed. Chamisso remembered that the friendly fathers had lent their own boat to the Indians, who were eager to have a close look at the Rurik when she arrived in the Bay. Such sympathetic understanding for the childish curiosity of the ignorant was certainly more human than any trait Chamisso had ever been able to discover in Kotzebue. Moreover, he wondered why the Captain, who had not been in the least concerned about the victims of Russian imperialism, should have developed this sudden sensitivity in social and humanitarian matters. Were the native sons of Alaska so idyllic as subjects of His Majesty the Czar? And what about the rule of the Russian American Company which controlled and exploited those northern colonies? And Mr. Baranoff - was he a humanitarian? The pretended function and task of the Company was to settle the country, develop its resources, propagate the faith, and extend Russian influence in North America. But the chief director of the company, Baranoff, - while operating under the nominal control of the Imperial Department of Commerce - actually exercised a despotic, often cruel sway in his remote realm of America.

Chamisso and his friends from the Rurik had a good opportunity to study the character and fate of a number of Aleutians and Kodiakers during their stay in San Francisco. Don Paolo Vicente de Sola offered the release of several Russian prisoners, as a cordial gesture toward the visitors from St. Petersburg, who had scarcely deserved such generosity. Among these prisoners incidentally were some Alaskan natives, who had been used by an American captain seven years ago, to catch otters in Spanish harbors. For the Russians not only cruelly exploited these northern people themselves but were also in the habit of selling them to others. Chamisso felt very much like confronting the Captain with these abuses. Herr von Kotzebue, however, was scarcely interested in the victims of Baranoff's policy. He even refused to accept them on board the Rurik, and curtly declared that his boat was crowded. Yet he admitted three Russians, elderly servants of the Russian American Company, who had worked in the settlement of Bodega and claimed to be dying of homesickness. "We cannot live any longer away from Little Mother Russia". Their maudlin chorus was a prelude to the clamorous finale. One of the nostalgic old fellows, Ivan Strogonoff, seemed especially delighted to return to his rotten little village in Russia. Since he was obviously not fit to serve as a sailor, Kotzebue had decided he should work in the cabins, as a special valet of the officers and there was general disappointment when he had an accident while hunting near San Francisco. He died on board the Rurik; - almost "on Russian soil," which was something to be grateful for. The last words he heard were Russian- if only the

angry curses of Lieutenant Gleb Simonovitch who realized that, with Strogonoff's death, vanished his last hope of having his boots blacked on this voyage.

After this sad though insignificant incident there remained nothing but the farewell celebration, a hilarious affair, with quantities of food, songs, dances, speeches, and general drunkenness on the part of the Russians, the Spanish soldiers, the priests, and even the converted or not-converted Indians. Chamisso seemed to be beside himself, entirely intoxicated with strong liquor and the overwhelming feeling of farewell, of music, the perfumed night and the sweet enigma of life. He finally went so far as to embrace the little Governor who was very pleased and embarrassed. "What a wild young man!" smiled the Governor. Chamisso made grand gestures and phrases that were even grander. "This country is wild too!" he cried. " It is a young country - do you understand? But you Spaniards are old ... you are so age-old, you can hardly move your feet..." He said it with a sort of tender contempt, and he added kindly: " That's why you are going to lose this country." - " Possible", said the Governor, and suddenly looked worn-out and exceedingly sad, though more lofty than ever - almost royal with his bleak, mournful smile: like a king who has decided to abdicate. The drunken poet, however, whispered in his ear: " America is strong... terribly strong, a young lion ...They are coming! They are coming!" he cried as though they were literally approaching over the white beach. "And they have beautiful songs, too - can't you hear? They are singing ..." The Governor said politely that he failed to hear

anything. "It's a new song," whispered the poet, very close to the old little man as though confiding a precious secret.- " It's their song ...An American sailor sang it for me, somewhere... It's very beautiful, very inspiring...Somebody made it - they made it when they were defending Baltimore against the British just a little while ago -, there was a Fort, they weren't going to yield no matter what happened, and the flag was waving - : it was a horrible night, full of the screams of the dying, a bloody night, but the flag kept waving - and they made their song."

And in the midst of the dancing Russians and the shouting Spaniards Adelbert von Chamisso sang the Star-Spangled Banner.

The Rurik heaved anchor, on November 1, 1816, after a stay of four weeks. Mr. Kuskoff remained at Bodega, the Spanish soldiers were still hungry, the Indians prayed and slaved, and Governor Don Paolo Vicente de Sola tried very hard to look dignified. Sometimes he thought, with a sort of fatherly tenderness, of that strange young chap, Adelbert von Chamisso, who was half-French, half-German, travelled under the Russian flag, understood even Spanish, knew the names of so many flowers, and wrote poetry.

'What sort of poetry might he write?' thought Governor Don Paolo.

But Chamisso, at that moment, was not writing verses, but working on his diary which he intended to publish under the title:

"Reise um die Welt." "The water of the harbor of San Francisco," - he noted -, " was phosphorescent, all through, with luminous points of light. The waves rolled up on the beach beyond the boat, perceptibly shimmering with fire. I examined the water of the harbor under a microscope, and found nothing abundant therein, except certain infusoria, to which I can describe no particular connection with the phosphorescence. - Day by day we watched the play of the fog, which, blown eastward by the strong sea-breeze over the bright, sunshiny land, dissolved and scattered itself everywhere. Singularly beautiful was the spectacle displayed for us at our departure, when the mist would sometimes hide and sometimes unveil the different peaks and valleys of the coast."

The gaudy interlude of San Francisco was finished. The boredom and adventure, the hardships and excitements of the endless journey started again. Again - the too-long nights in their dark narrow cabins; the freezing mornings on deck; the hours of silence and the hours of empty chat. They knew too much - and nothing - about each other. Each of them was deadly bored with the other's too-familiar face. Yet they remained mysteries to one another, as though they had lived on different planets. The First Lieutenant made his harmless, silly jokes. The Second Lieutenant was malicious. Captain Kotzebue harassed all of them with his whims, his arrogance, his suspicion. Choris, the " kid", made delicate drawings of flowers, birds, girls, and young Indian warriors who looked like ecstatic dancers. Adelbert von

Chamisso worked on his Remarks and Opinions, summing up his wealth of observations. He also wrote an essay on the Hawaiian languages. They cruised about the Pacific for some time, and discovered various islands and groups which they called the Krusenstern group, or the Kutusoff and Suwaroff Islands. They headed for Kamchatka, once more, and proceeded northwards, coasting along the Northwest coast of America, discovering and naming Kotzebue Gulf. Chamisso and his learned colleagues studied the habits of the natives, the courses of rivers, and the activities of volcanoes. The nights were freezing cold in Alaska, and the days unbearably hot on the South Sea Islands. For again they sailed to the South, returning by the coast of Asia, and they sojourned three weeks at the Sandwich Islands. They wandered like Peter Schlemihl with his seven-league boots. On January 1, 1818, they discovered a new island, and called it New Year Island. Many of the sailors infected themselves with syphilis. Chamisso was enchanted by the natives of the Easter Islands, the Hawaiian Islands, They had meals with King Tamameia at Hana-rur, or rather they watched the solemn ceremony of his Majesty's eating. They proceeded North again, but Herr von Kotzebue fell sick, so they had to return. They did not succeed in discovering the North-East passage through Berin Strait into the Arctic Sea. As ostensibly this was the chief purpose of their journey, one might call the whole expedition a failure. Kotzebue's mighty portectors at St. Petersburg, however, were well satisfied. Admiral Krusenstern declared the aim of the expedition to be " the means of extending the sphere of human knowledge". And he added graciously: " The accounts published of

the results of the expedition, give the most satisfactory proof that this object has been accomplished, though the Northern passage was not found." Captain Kotzebue was sent on a second expedition, only a few years later.

When they finally reached St. Petersburg, on August 3, 1818, they suddenly liked each other. They had lived together for so many years, in that "floating microcosm", as Chamisso called the brig. They were used to one another. Even Kotzebue and Chamisso shook hands. They felt strangely depressed - because this endless journey had reached its end, and they had gloomy forebodings for their future. The world was wicked - even more so than Captain Kotzebue, who, was probably, after all, a nice enough fellow under the skin. "Goodbye, friends!" said Captain Kotzebue, and his eyes were moist. "Goodbye, Captain!" said Adelbert von Chamisso. "Give my humble regards to your venerable father."

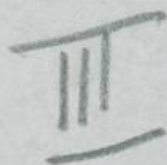
But the Captain was not to see his venerable father again. For August von Kotzebue was murdered, a few months later, by a nationalistic German student, at Mannheim. The name of the murderer was Karl Ludwig Sand. He called at the poet's house, stabbed Kotzebue to the heart, and exclaimed: "Here, you betrayer of the Fatherland!" The young Germany considered the Russian Councillor of State and popular German playwright a shameless reactionary. They believed ardently in gymnastics, the Fatherland, and murder.

The world was wicked. Choris, the painter, too, was murdered by bandits some years later, on another journey to America. Was there a curse on the crew of the Rurik?

As for Chamisso, he knew and accepted the merciless laws and

signs that dominated his life. On his way back from Russia to Germany, he wrote to a friend: " Here I am again, unchanged- completely -, rather exhausted but not satisfied by the voyage- still ready to travel, to face new adventure..."

Oh, those strange pilgrims, those poets, those homeless ones - : doomed and blessed they are; errant from pole to pole; rather exhausted but unsatisfied. What does he seek, in St. Petersburg, in Berlin, in Alaska, on the California coast? A lost kingdom? A lost home? A lost shadow?



A Russian Brig

(Adelbert von Chamisso.)

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A Russian Brig

(Adelbert von Chamisso.)

"On board The Rurik, October 1, 1816.

....I have the honour to inform your Excellency that we are approaching the coast of California. Favoured by a strong wind from N. and N.W. ,which sometimes blew a storm,we made the voyage from Oonalashka to California in a very short time. At midnight we saw by moonlight the Cap de los Reyes..."

Captain Otto von Kotzebue was very tired. It was late at night, and he had laboured for hours, in his narrow cabin, on a detailed report for his powerful protector, Count Romanzoff, former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Chancellor of the Russian Empire. The great man had retired from state service in 1815, but still remained an influential figure, pulling the wires in the background. Time and again, the captain interrupted his writing and glanced respectfully at Romanzoff's huge portrait decorating the wall. The martial and imposing looking gentleman was painted in dark colours, almost black. Kotzebue remembered with a contemptuous smile that once, somewhere in Chile, an ignorant fellow had asked him if the sinister man on the picture was a negro. His Excellency Count Romanzoff - a nigger! It was too ridiculous: it was shocking...

He was the donor and the secret leader of this expedition. With the help of his expert adviser for nautical affairs, Admiral Krusenstern, he had worked out the plan for an extensive voyage with the double purpose of exploring certain parts of the South Sea and of investigating the possibility of a north-east passage through Bering Strait into the Arctic Sea, and thence into the Atlantic. The Rurik, a brig of only 180 tons, was fitted out at the expense of the Imperial Chancellor, and sailed from Cronstadt on August 1, 1815, equipped with a crew of twenty seven men and a scientific staff. The three naturalists and the artist on board were supposed to examine and describe plants and trees, the structure of the stones, the course of the rivers, and the habits of the natives in various regions of the American continent and the South Sea Islands.

Those zealous scholars had done a fine job in Brazil and Chile, and later, under the Arctic Circle, in Kamtschatka, that peninsular portion of Eastern Siberia, in varied parts of ~~Admiral~~ Alaska, and at Bering Straits where Siberia and Alaska almost touch.

Captain von Kotzebue, however, knew perfectly well that it was not merely, and not mainly, scientific curiosity which made the former leader of Russian imperialism finance so costly an undertaking. The purely scientific angle was, indeed, of secondary importance compared with the political aspects involved. The Rurik, sailing under the Russian war flag, was supposed to impress the world with the prestige of the Imperial Navy and to promote Russian imperialism. The visit to the shores of California had a special significance as a bold move toward a permanent establishment of Russian rule on Spanish territory. Herr von Kotzebue, an ambitious and astute servant of his mighty masters, realized that his Highness, the ex-chancellor, expected him to send ~~exact~~ ^{or} informations concerning the actual power of resistance which was left in the weakened organism of the Spanish colonial empire. He also grasped the major importance of the harbour of San Francisco, being the strategic point where the southward expansion of Russian ~~imperialism~~ imperialism collided with the forces of Spanish colonization.

There were malignant people who said that Otto von Kotzebue, son of the famous playwright August Friedrich von Kotzebue, was a poor -or, in any case, not a first-rate - navigator. Nobody could deny, however, that he was a shrewd and experienced politician. His knowledge of current international affairs was clear and comprehensive. ^{were still impressed by} For political dilettants the Spanish power on the American continent, ~~was perhaps was still impressive~~ For the possessions of Spain reached in an unbroken line from Cape Horn to a point three hundred miles north from San Francisco. They comprised not only all of South America - except Brazil and Guiana - but also the enormous region west of the Mississippi Valley. The Spanish Crown also owned East Florida, and furthermore claimed a strip of land, called West-Florida, extending

~~Spain the Gulf~~ along the shore of the Gulf of Mexico, from Florida to the mouth of the Mississippi. But the Russian captain was ~~also~~ informed that the United States disputed the Spanish claim to West Florida. The State Department ^{in Washington} was of the opinion that this territory formed part of the original tract of Louisiana, and consequently was included in the transfer from Spain to Napoleon in 1800, and in Napoleon's sale of Louisiana to the United States, three years later. It hardly helped the Spanish authorities very much to refute the American point of view. 'What counts is only power,' thought the son of the German-Russian poet, Kotzebue, with a sort of melancholy cynicism. The United States attempted ~~to~~ the seizure of the disputed region, and would have kept it, despite of all Spanish protests, had not Great Britain interfered. President Madison prudently withdrew the American troops, in 1813...

In the long run, however, Spain would be too weak to maintain her authority: Captain Kotzebue knew it, and he saw no sound reason why Russia should not profit by Spain's deplorable position: 'Why should we leave the robbery to Great Britain or the United States?'

The United States - the intelligent agent of the Count Romanzoff ^{told himself and his chief} ~~did not doubt it~~ - had a very healthy appetite: the sound greed characteristic for growing youth. And, beyond any doubt, they also had the strength and determination to satisfy their natural aspirations. Tempo and skill of their westward expansion were remarkable. Kotzebue admired Jefferson's purchase of Louisiana as a diplomatic and commercial masterpiece. Fifteen million dollars, ^{over} 3,500,000 of which was to be paid back to American citizens in the West for damage to their trade - this was certainly not too high a price for one of the most valuable pieces of land in the world, doubling the territory of the United States. 'Jefferson's emissaries at Paris, Mr. Livingston and Mr. Monroe, must certainly pretty smart fellows,' decided Kotzebue with the knowing appreciation of an expert. However, it seemed not ~~less~~ likely that Mr. Madison's government

(Even Monsieur Talleyrand did not succeed in cheating them.)

was grasping, already now, at the treasures of California. The youthful republic had plenty of other troubles and of other tasks to perform. The recent war with Great Britain was just over and had meant a rather exhausting adventure, even for so strong and courageous a people. Beside, Great Britain still claimed the Oregon country, that huge region lying between the Rocky Mountains and the Pacific Ocean. Neither the King in London nor the President in Washington ~~represented~~ were to consider serious rivals for his Majesty the Czar, as far as California was concerned.

'And Spain?' The Captain chuckled with contempt. 'We'll see...', he decided. 'I have sharp, open eyes. Old Romanzoff will be satisfied...'

He thought of his high protector in such informal terms because he was very tired. It irritated him that the officers, on the deck, kept on talking and chatting. 'What's the matter tonight?' He was rather angry. 'Sometimes they hardly speak a word for days - one could think them mute -, and all of a sudden ^{they} turn garrulous like old women. What means all this excitement about our arrival in California? ~~It seems~~ The silly enthusiasm of ~~that~~ poetical fool, Chamisso, seems contagious...'

The Captain remembered that Adelbert von Chamisso, one of the naturalists on board, had declared ^{on the dinner table,} that he was looking forward to seeing San Francisco with more curiosity than to any other stop of the entire journey - whereupon Kotzebue had remarked with a sour smile: "I heard you telling this before, Adelbert Loginovitch, and rather frequently too. You expect miracles from every island and port..." Herr von Kotzebue was in the habit of teasing and heckling his First Naturalist, while Chamisso, on his part, was always disposed to criticize the Captain. He was keeping a diary, and Kotzebue believed that it was bristling with malicious attacks against him, the Captain. He disliked Chamisso because he was a poet, had no awe of authority ~~was~~, and was whimsical, too intelligent and somehow inscrutable.

Kotzebue angrily imagined how they were sitting together, out there on

the deck, enjoying the mild night - young Choris, the artist, Martin Petrovitch Wormskiold, the second or "volunteer" naturalist, Dr. Eschscholz, the physician, the two lieutenants, and Chamisso who kept on talking and talking. What was he talking about? ~~He~~ ^{It} really looked like a conspiracy...

Chamisso was talking about America. He had told his comrades how exceedingly happy he was to set foot on this continent although California was still ruled by the Spaniards. "I say still," explained Chamisso, "as I am firmly convinced that one day, sooner or later, the United States will embrace the whole of the American continent." And the Second Lieutenant, somewhat maliciously, asked: "Including Alaska, Adelbert Loginovitch? Do you think that part of the Russian empire should belong to the United States as well?" Chamisso ~~we~~ gave an evasive answer, and then went on praising ^{Thomas} Jefferson, the real nobleman and the genuine man of the people: "His broad and realistic notion of Democracy is compatible with aristocratic ideals." And he added, with a knowing ^{sensual} smile, while ~~the~~ ^{the} tip of his tongue touched his lip as though he was tasting something sweet: "Besides, he happens to be one of the greatest writers of our times. His prose is ^{concise} ~~eloquent~~ and yet winged, eloquent, clear, convincing..."

He praised the splendor, the constant growth, the new national consciousness of America. He glorified the recent Treaty of Ghent as the Completion of American Independence which was, up to now, only acknowledged but never really respected. "The year of 1815 marks an epoch in American history," he declared. All of them nodded, but the Second Lieutenant seemed slightly bored. "Well, we won't see very much of those free Americans in San Francisco," he said. "We won't see nothing but some Spanish soldiers. It's a poor place, I'm told."

Young Choris, the painter - whom they called "our kid" - ~~on~~ ^{on} the contrary, was informed that San Francisco was a gorgeous little settlement, fascinating and colourful. "You will find fine specimens of flowers there," he promised the naturalists. "And I can ~~✓~~ assure you the Spanish girls

are lovely..." Choris was always and everywhere looking for attractive models he could use for his Voyage Pittoresque, a series of sketches he was prepared for a publisher house in Paris.

The Second Officer yawned. "We won't see no pretty girls, I tell you," while the First Lieutenant, Gleb Simonovitch Shismareff, suggested: "Let's talk about something else." He was a good-natured, tall, big fellow, with a face serenely beaming like a full moon.

There was a silence. The sea had calmed down. One heard nothing but the soft sound of the little waves. Finally Choris announced: "I want to tell a story." It was rather surprising. "A fairy tale," said Choris. He sometimes had sudden ideas like that. He was young and fanciful. They liked him. He was a delicate lad with a pleasant voice and a smooth, handsome face. They laughed: ~~"See see"~~ "The kid wants to tell a story!"

And Choris, the artist, began:

"A very long time ago, in a country unknown, lived a man by the name of Peter Schlemihl. He was both the richest and the most wretched human being on earth. For he had sold his shadow to a gentleman whom he met at a party. The gentleman had polite manners and was nicely dressed, in an elegant grey frack coat. Yet he happened to be the Devil. He wanted Mr. Schlemihl's shadow and his signature written with blood. What he offered him seemed to an ordinary purse of solid leather. It turned out, however, to be a quite remarkable and most precious purse as it always remained full of gold, no matter how many ducats its owner may have spent. Peter Schlemihl thought, 'This is an excellent bargain'; but it really was a miserable one. For a man who lost his shadow finds himself in an embarrassing, even tragic position. He becomes conspicuous and finally a public scandal through the very absence of that colourless, mute companion whom we generally neglect so long as he faithfully keeps on following us. Peter could not enjoy his inexhaustible, magic purse. He was very lonely. People avoided him, boycotted him, considered him a monster. He frightened the girls and provoked the men.

He had to shun the friendly light of the sun, and even the ^{gentle} ~~gentle~~ gleam of the moon became dangerous for him...⁴

All of them anxiously glanced at Chamisso and had a relieved smile as they noticed his shadow, distinct though faint on the wooden floor of the deck, in the waning light of the noon. Adelbert had a somewhat nervous manner of carressing Valet, the little dog - a very cute animal: he was fond of it. He seemed to address the dog, not his friends, when he finally said: "Can you see it, Valet? I still have my shadow - and a very nice and solid one, too..."

The others laughed, but it did not sound very gay.

Chamisso said, while he went on caressing the pet dog and avoided to look at his young friend Choris: "Why don't you finish your story?"

Choris replied - and even in the moon light one could see him blushing - : "It is your story, Adelbert. Everyone knows that Peter Schlemihl is your work, and a very successful one, too."

Chamisso nodded gravely. "Yes, it is my story. And I knew what I was talking about when I described poor Schlemihl in all his misery and humiliation. I realize what he went through. Any crook had the right to sneer at him, who had lost what even the beggar possesses. He was an out-cast, a paria, condemned to dishonouring isolation. A man without his shadow is like a man without ~~his~~ a fatherland. And a homeless man is like a shadowless man..."

The others listened with apprehension. The silence that followed was funeral. For all of them knew that Chamisso had no fatherland himself - or rather, had two of them, which actually means that he had none. His real name was Louis Charles Adélaïde de Chamisso. He was born ~~at~~ the ancient castle of Boncourt, in Champagne. During the French Revolution, when he was nine years old, his family was forced to leave France. A few years later, Charles-Adelbert was accepted as a page at the court of Frederick Wilhelm II of Prussia. His family went back to France when

Napoleon became First Consul. But Adelbert remained in Germany. He had joined the army although he loathed Prussian militarism. He loved the German language, tried to write German poetry, and made friends with German poets of the romanticist circle. When he paid a visit to his family, in France, he felt himself entirely estranged in his homeland. Once returned to Germany, however, he realized that he was a stranger, there too.

"Life without a fatherland must be very sad," remarked the First Lieutenant, Gleb Simonovitch. "I cannot figure what I would feel like, without great Little Mother Russia." He understood no language but Russian, and believed faithfully, stubbornly, childishly, in the infallibility of that Holy Little Father, the Czar of all Russians.

~~The Second Lieutenant asked: "What did you do, Adelbert Loginovitch, when the Prussians were fighting Napoleon? Did you kill many of your compatriots?"~~

~~Chamisso calmly replied: "I was taken prisoner by the French."~~

Young Choris, the artist, said, rather hastily: "We are a motley crowd on this boat, anyhow. Our Captain is a Russian subject all right; but his famous father writes German comedies and spends his life between Berlin, St. Petersburg, Vienne, Weimar and Reval in Esthonia. As to Dr. Eschscholz, he, too, seems to be somehow 'between the nations': half-German, half-Russian. You were born somewhere in the Baltic Provinces, weren't you, Doctor? - Besides, I am a kind of mongrel myself: a German by origin, a Russian by education, and a Frenchman by love. For I believe France is the finest country in the world. Don't you agree, Adelbert?"

"France is beautiful," Chamisso said.

And Choris, with a rather hectic intensity: "I am homesick for Paris! Don't forget to write me the recommendation to Madame Staël, Adelbert!"

Chamisso smiled. "We have still plenty of time..."

"She must be a wonderful woman!" Choris was very excited. "How I envy you, Adelbert, for your friendship with her!"

"I owe very much to her friendship," said Chamisso. "By the way," - he suddenly addressed Dr. Eschscholz - , "did I ever tell you that I started the study of botany under her auspices? Yes, it was in Switzerland: I spent the summer with her... And then, of course, in Berlin, I got a more thorough training."

The Second Lieutenant chuckled. "Did you pick flowers, Adelbert Loginovitch, in 1813, during the War of Liberation, when the Prussians defeated your great Emperor?"

"That's exactly what I did," admitted Chamisso, very seriously. "I couldn't stand the idea of bearing arms against the French - although I heartily approved of Prussia's heroic striving for liberty. So I left Berlin, and found refuge in the country home of friends. There I continued my botanic studies while the thunderstorm raved - and, besides, I wrote the story of Peter Schlemihl..."

Choris reminded him: "You must tell us the end of your fairy tale, Adelbert! You didn't yet mention the pair of wondrous boots."

Now it was Chamisso who chuckled. "Yes, those boots were pretty wondrous, all right. For they enabled the person who bore them, to make seven miles with one single step. Poor Peter Schlemihl - homeless, shadowless, friendless - found a certain consolation in crossing the continents and oceans, from the North Pole to the Sahara, from the Sandwich Islands to the Bavarian Alps; everywhere admiring and examining the miracles of Nature - the flowers, the stones, the soil, and sometimes the human beings. He became a wandering naturalist, you see - exactly as I am myself, and as you are, college Martin Petrovitch, and you, Eschscholz."

"Why did you join our expedition, Adelbert Loginovitch?" the First Lieutenant inquired. "I often wonder how it may have happened..."

"It was really funny, the story of my joining the expedition," Chamisso said. "Once, in Berlin, I had a chat with a friend - dear old Hitzig: Julius Edward Hitzig - , and while we talked and smoked our pipes, I noticed

(an incidentally)

a dispatch in the Tageblatt, telling in somewhat confused and vague terms about an expedition the Russians were ^{preparing.} ~~planning to make~~. Since I happened to be, at that time, rather sad and discouraged, I exclaimed, without meaning it seriously - or, in any case, I didn't realize that I meant it seriously when I said: "I wish I could go with those Russians to the Eskimos!" Friend Hitzig, however, made a solemn face, and said, "Do you mean it, Adelbert?" And, "Of course I do," I replied - laughingly, you see; for I still considered the whole matter a joke. But Hitzig was informed that Otto von Kotzebue was to be the leader of that expedition, and that he is the son of great old Kotzebue, the Russian ⁱⁿ Councillor of State and German poeta laureatus, whom Hitzig had met at Königsberg, years before. So Hitzig recommended me to old Kotzebue, and the father recommended me to the son, - and there we are, fellows! The night is magnificent, and tomorrow we'll be at San Francisco."

Dr. Eschscholz remarked: "So August Friedrich von Kotzebue, ^{after all} ~~that old~~ ~~man~~ has done at least one good thing in his life."

Chamisso grinned. "He's a great poet, Eschscholz."

"Don't try to be funny!" The doctor seemed rather angry. "No single line he has ever written can stand the comparison with your Peter Schlemihl or some of your recent poems."

"Thank you, Ivan Ivanovitch, thank you." Chamisso's smile was somewhat pallid, distracted. "Your opinion flatters me, and besides has the charm of originality. Most people would think you crazy if they heard your talk. Who am I, compared with Kotzebue? He is the glory of our times! He is known and admired ^(all over the world) in the South Sea Islands and in Tokyo, and even among the American merchantmen... He is wonderful!"

"He is sickening," insisted Eschscholz. "Don't you remember that play of his, The Stranger, which we saw in Plymouth, before we sailed?"

"And how I remember it!" laughed Chamisso. "It's a masterpiece - in its special kind. It's a matchless concoction - it's grand! People simply

adored it - both the stage and the auditorium were literally overflowing with tears. Oh, I still can hear the lamenting voice of Miss O'Neill who played Eulalia. She had the most ridiculous kind of walking - like a nervous duck - ,and her voice sounded - like that..."

He imitated the shrill, piping voice Miss O'Neill had had when she played Eulalia in Plymouth. He danced and jumped on the deck like a madman, copying Miss O'Neill's exaggerated gestures. It was exceedingly funny and a trifle horrifying. He looked ghost-like as he fluttered and croaked on the deck, in the pale light of the ending night. "Like a crazy bird," thought Dr. Eschscholz, amused and terrified.

It was Captain von Kotzebue who disturbed the queer performance. He looked rather funny himself as he rushed ~~across the~~ across the deck, with ^a ~~map~~ heavy over-coat hardly covering his long, white night-gown. His voice, however, did not sound humorous at all, but very intimidating when he shouted: "Are you insane, Adelbert Loginovitch? Go to bed and be ashamed of yourself! It's three o'clock in the morning."

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operatic aspect. The given scenes of action are colourful enough: The anchored brig in the harbour; the improvised tents on shore where the Russians used to entertain the Spanish officers - and the settlement of San Francisco itself which looked rather improvised as well: a picturesque group of barracks, forts and huts, dominated by the Presidio that represented a somewhat sloppy military authority. As to the Mission, centre of the religious activities, it was situated several miles away in a splendid isolation. The monks were busy cooking savoury dishes and quaffing exquisite wine, while the natives had to slave for them.

There is ^{plenty} ~~an abundance~~ of material, indeed, for two or three humorous librettos. For no theatre ^{necessary} (possibly) could afford so many extras and sceneries as would be needed to perform this gaudy show. There is the chorus of the sailors, the chorus of the Spanish officers and soldiers, of the savage Indians and of the monks. What an abundance of opportunities to show colourful and attractive costumes! - the becoming uniforms of sailors, officers, soldiers, and high officials, not to mention the fantastic draperies on the bronzed bodies of the savages. The leading characters, too, guarantee a funny and exciting spectacle: Kotzebue, the ambitious intriguer, arrogant and morose; Adelbert, an errant poet and scholar, a minor brother of the Flying Dutchman, though less violent; the Spanish Governor by the beautiful name of Paolo Vicente de Sola, approaching in haste from his castle in Monterey; and, finally, a dubious fellow named Kuskoff, villain and political agent, business man and crook. But this sinister character already takes us into the middle of the actual plot - that typical musical comedy intrigue, with two mighty monarchs, the Russian Czar and the King of Spain, invisible in the background.

The quarrel about the insufficient salute to the Russian flag was merely a minor incident, ~~or~~ rather a prelude to the more exciting events to follow. It was promptly settled, with Chamisso acting as a mediator between the Presidio and the touchy Captain. Lieutenant Don Louis de Arguello, temporary commander of the Fort, sent his apologies and several baskets with fruits and vegetables.