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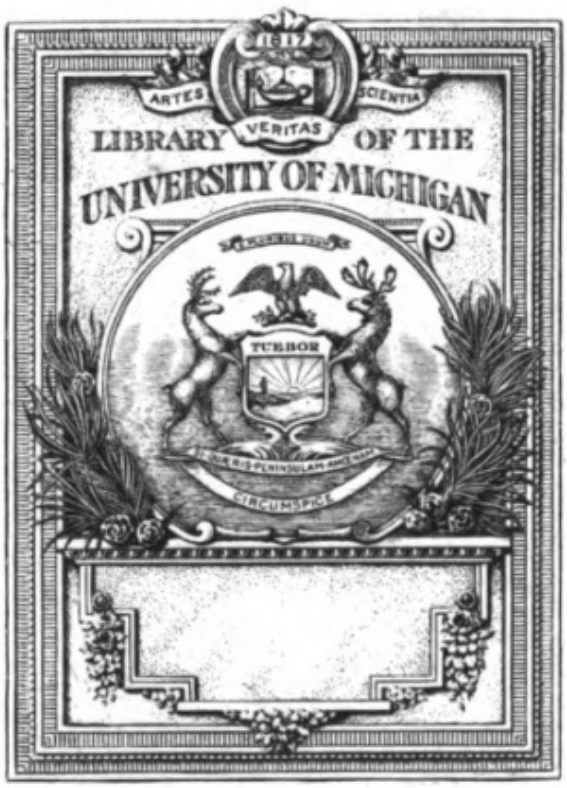

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FROM THE ARCTIC OCEAN

TO THE YELLOW SEA.

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NOTE.

I am indebted to the proprietors of the *Illustrated London News* for their kind permission to reproduce in this work the sketches and drawings I made for them whilst on my journey, a great many of which have already appeared in that paper; and also for the use of the text accompanying them, which has formed the basis of this work.

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Yours faithfully
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FROM THE ARCTIC OCEAN TO THE YELLOW SEA.

THE NARRATIVE OF A JOURNEY, IN 1890 AND 1891, ACROSS SIBERIA, MONGOLIA, THE GOBI DESERT, AND NORTH CHINA.

BY

JULIUS M. PRICE, F.R.G.S.,

Special Artist of the "Illustrated London News."

WITH ONE HUNDRED AND FORTY-TWO ILLUSTRATIONS FROM SKETCHES BY THE AUTHOR.

LONDON:

SAMPSON LOW, MARSTON & COMPANY

LIMITED,

St. Dunstan's House,

FETTER LANE, FLEET STREET, E.C.

1892.

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Before leaving Siberia, probably for ever, I am desirous of recording my gratitude for the assistance afforded me and the many kindnesses I received during the winter I spent there. From the highest officials to the humblest *employé*, the courtesy I was shown on all occasions was so great, that in all my varied experiences of travel I remember nothing to equal it; and if it is the same all over this mighty empire, I trust that my wanderings will lead me some day into Greater Russia itself. Amongst the many gentlemen to whom I owe a special debt of gratitude, I may mention Mr. E. Wostrotine, in Yeniseisk; General Telakoffsky, Dr. Peacock, and Messrs. Cheripanoff, Matwieff, and Kusnitsoff, in Krasnoiarsk; General Grimiken, M. Soukatchoff, and Mr. Charles Lee, in Irkutsk; and M. Feodroff and M. Shollingen, in Ourga.

J. M. P.

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PREFACE.

A FEW introductory remarks are, I feel, necessary, if only to give the *raison d'être* of my journey, and as a sort of apology for adding to the already formidable array of books of Asiatic travel.

The celebrated voyage of Captain Wiggins in 1887, when he successfully accomplished the feat of navigating a steamer (the *Phœnix*) across the Kara Sea and up the river Yenisei to the city of Yeniseisk, is too well remembered for it to be necessary for me to recapitulate an exploit which is destined to become historic, solving as it did the much-vexed question of the practicability of establishing commercial relations between England and Siberia *vid* the Arctic Ocean and the Kara Sea.

This successful expedition, opening up such immense possibilities, naturally encouraged its financial promoters to follow it up by another and much more important one. Towards the end of July in the following year, therefore, the *Labrador*, a powerful

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wooden steamer specially built for Arctic work, was despatched to the mouth of the Yenisei with a cargo of "all sorts," with which to try the Siberian market; the *Phœnix*, which had been laid up for the winter at Yeniseisk, being commissioned to proceed down the river and fetch back the cargo brought out by the *Labrador*, the latter vessel being too large to be able to get such a distance from the estuary. For all this, special permission had naturally to be got from the Russian Government; but so far from making any objections or putting any obstacles in the way of the scheme, the officials, advised of course from head-quarters, lent every assistance in their power and showed a most friendly spirit. Through a diversity of causes, into which it is not necessary to enter here, the expedition failed to accomplish its purpose, and the *Labrador* returned to England without having crossed the Kara Sea at all. An ordinary man would have been discouraged, at any rate for a time, by such a failure; but Wiggins is not of that stuff. Nothing daunted, he at once began trying to raise "the sinews of war" for a fresh expedition, and was so successful (such confidence had his friends in him), that the following year the *Labrador* once again started for the far North-East—but only to meet with another failure, though this

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time the failure, it was proved afterwards, could have been easily averted. In fact, so conclusively was this proved, that, emboldened with the knowledge of how near it had been to being a success, a syndicate of rich and influential London men was without difficulty got together, and it was at once decided that two ships should be sent out the following year, and that everything possible should be done to ensure success. This time there were no half-hearted measures; money was forthcoming, and with it a renewed enthusiasm in the scheme, which, I may add parenthetically, helped not a little to bring about its eventually satisfactory result; this notwithstanding the fact that the expedition started handicapped by the untoward absence (owing to his having met with shipwreck on his way to join us) of Captain Wiggins, the leading spirit of the project.

Talking about Russia one morning with Mr. Ingram at the office of the *Illustrated London News*, he suddenly suggested my going out as their "special artist" with this expedition. The love of travel and the spirit of adventure are so strong in me, that without the slightest hesitation I eagerly caught at the idea; in fact, had he suggested my riding across the Sahara on a bicycle I should probably have jumped at it with just as much alacrity.

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Well, to cut a long story short, after a lot of correspondence had passed between us, the "Anglo-Siberian Trading Syndicate" agreed to take me, subject to certain restrictions as to publication of sketches and matter relating to the expedition, and to land me eventually, if all went well, at the city of Yeniseisk, in the heart of Siberia. On my taking a map of the route down to the office, and asking Mr. Ingram where I was to go if I ever found myself there, "You can go wherever you like, so long as you send us plenty of interesting sketches for the paper," was his generous reply. With liberty, therefore, to roam all over the world, so to speak, and with unlimited time and plenty of means at my disposal, I started on a journey, the narrative of which I now venture to put in print, in the hope that at any rate some parts of it may give a few fresh facts about the vast continent I traversed from north to south.

In conclusion, I must candidly confess I arrived in Siberia with foregone conclusions derived from the unreliable information and exaggerated stories so current in England about this part of the world. How far my subsequent experiences dispelled the prejudices with which I started, the reader of my narrative may judge for himself. I have touched but *en passant* on the exile and prison system, for nothing

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was further from my thoughts, when I undertook the journey, than to make a profound study of this question. Efforts in this direction have been made both by prejudiced and unprejudiced writers, all of whom, however, are agreed on the main point, that the system is an anachronism and unsuitable to the present age. What I felt was that in Siberia, that vast country with such immense natural resources, there must be much which would be novel and interesting to study in its social aspect, apart from the actual prison life and hardships with which the name of Siberia has always been associated ; so I determined to devote my chief attention to phases of life which are still, in general, so little known that to many readers, probably, much that I have attempted to describe in these pages will come, as it did to me, in the light of a revelation.

JULIUS M. PRICE.

SAVAGE CLUB, LONDON,
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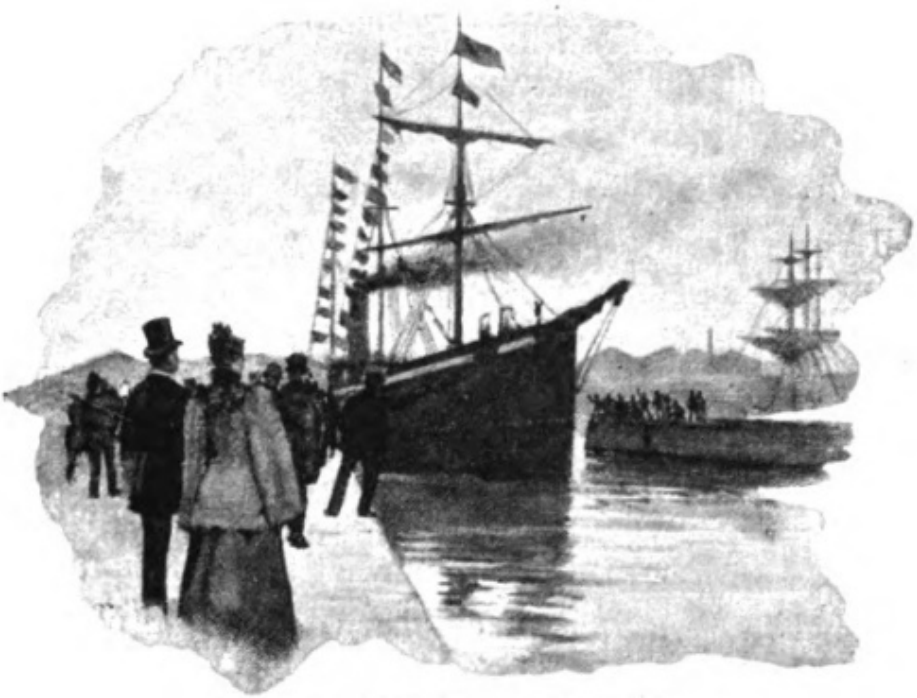

THE "BISCAYA" LEAVING BLACKWALL.

FROM THE ARCTIC OCEAN TO THE YELLOW SEA.

CHAPTER I.

FROM BLACKWALL TO SIBERIA.

The object of the expedition—The steamer *Biscaya* and its passengers and cargo—Across the North Sea—Uncomfortable experiences—First glimpse of Norway—Aalesund—The Lofoden Islands—The midnight sun—A foretaste of the Arctic regions—"Cape Flyaway"—Our ice-master, Captain Crowther—We sight the coast of Siberia—The village of Kharbarova—The entrance to the Kara Sea.

In these prosaic days of the nineteenth century one hardly expects a revival of the adventurous expe-

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ditions which made the fame of England in the days of Frobisher and Drake. As a matter of fact, the world is almost too well known now for such adventures to be possible, even were the leaders forthcoming, and the "good old buccaneering days" are long past. Still, I could not help thinking, on the day we left Gravesend for the far North-East, bound for a region but little known, and with the uncertainty of ever reaching our destination, that it must have been under somewhat similar conditions that the adventurers of old started on their perilous journeys; with, however, this very great difference —ours was not a filibustering expedition, but a commonplace commercial enterprise, backed up by several well-to-do Englishmen, with absolutely nothing of the romantic about it beyond the fact of its having to traverse these wild and comparatively unknown regions before it could be successfully achieved.

We started from the Thames on Friday, July 18, 1890, in the chartered Norwegian steamer *Biscaya*, eight hundred tons gross, bound for the Yenisei River with a nondescript tentative sort of cargo, consisting of a mixture of all sorts, from a steam saw-mill down to the latest toy for children, our ultimate destination being the town of Yeniseisk, which is situated some fifteen hundred miles from the mouth of this mighty river. The object of the expedition was to endeavour to open a trade route between

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England and Siberia by means of the Kara Sea passage, which was discovered by Nordenskiold in 1875.

Nothing of particular interest occurred during the first few days after we left the Thames. We were so closely packed that it required some careful arrangement to get us all comfortably stowed, so to speak. Imagine seven men jammed into a cabin just about large enough to accommodate four, and each man with the usual amount of superfluous luggage without which Englishmen could not possibly travel, this baggage also stowed in the cabin, and you will guess that we were packed like sardines. As, however, no doubt even sardines get used to being packed, after a time so did we; and, although the passage across the North Sea was about as uncomfortable a one as I ever experienced, we somehow managed to settle into our respective grooves long before we sighted the coast of Norway. Our party consisted of two representatives of the London Syndicate, two engineers, a master stevedore (to unload the ship on arrival), an experienced ice-master, who knew the Kara Sea thoroughly, the captain of the *Biscaya*, and your humble servant. I don't think I ever was on board a more crowded ship. Even the decks were packed with all sorts of paraphernalia, including a large steam-launch and several pens of live stock; and, so as to obviate any fear of running short of coal in the outlandish parts we were

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