

**ELIZABETH; OR THE  
EXILES OF  
SIBERA: A TALE**

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Elizabeth; Or The Exiles of Sibera: A Tale by Madame Cottin

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**MADAME COTTIN**

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THE EXILES OF SIBERIA.

ELIZABETH;  
OR,  
THE EXILES OF SIBERIA.

A Tale.

FROM THE FRENCH OF MADAME GOTTEN.

WILLIAM P. NIMMO  
CALCUTTA

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ELIZABETH;  
OR,  
THE EXILES OF SIBERIA.

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PART I.

On the banks of the Irtysh, which rises in Calmuck Tartary and falls into the Oby, is situated Tobolsk, the capital of Siberia; bounded on the north by forests of eleven hundred versts in length, extending to the borders of the Frozen Ocean, and interspersed with rocky mountains covered with perpetual snows, around it are sterile plains, whose frozen sands have seldom received an impression from the human foot, and numerous frigid lakes, or rather stagnant marshes, whose icy streams never watered a meadow, nor opened to the sunbeam the beauties of a flower. On approaching nearer to the pole, these stately productions of nature, whose sheltering foliage are so grateful to the weary traveller, totally disappear: brambles, dwarf birches, and shrubs alone ornament this desolate spot; but even these, further on, vanish, leaving nothing but swamps covered with a useless moss, and present, as

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it were the last efforts of expiring nature. But still, amidst the horror and gloom of an eternal winter, Nature displays some of her grandest spectacles—the aurora borealis, inclosing the horizon like a resplendent arch, emits columns of quivering light, and frequently offers to view sights which are unknown in a more southern hemisphere. South of Tobolsk is the province called Ischim,—plains strewed with the repositories of the dead, and divided by lakes of stagnant and unwholesome water, separate it from the Kerquis, an idolatrous and wandering people. It is bounded on the left by the river Irtysh, and on the right by the Tobol, the naked and barren banks of which present to the eye fragments of rocks promiscuously heaped together, with here and there a solitary fir-tree rearing its head; beneath them, in a space formed by an angle of the river, is the small village of Saimka, about six hundred versts from Tobolsk; situated in the furthest extremity of the circle, in the midst of a desert, its environs are as gloomy as the sombre light which illuminates their hemisphere, and as dreary as the climate.

The province of Ischim is nevertheless entitled the Italy of Siberia, since it enjoys nearly four months of summer, though the winter is rigorous to an excess. The north winds which blow during that period are so incessant, and render the cold so piercing, that even in September the Tobol is paved with ice; a heavy snow falls upon the earth, and disappears not before the end of May; but from the time that it begins to dissolve, the celerity with which the trees shoot forth their leaves and the fields display

their verdure, is almost incredible; three days is the short period that nature requires to bring her plants to maturity. The blossoms of the birch-tree exhale an odoriferous scent, and the wild flowers of the field decorate the ground; flocks of various kinds of fowl play upon the surface of the lakes; the white crane plunges among the rushes of the solitary marsh to build her nest, which she plaita with reeds, whilst the flying squirrels in the woods, cutting the air with their bushy tails, hop from tree to tree, and nibble the buds of the pines, and the tender leaves of the birch. Thus the natives of these dreary regions experience a season of pleasure; but the unhappy exiles who inhabit it—alas! none.

Of these miserable beings the greater part reside in the villages situated on the borders of the river, between Tobolsk and the extremest boundary of Ischim; others are dispersed in cottages about the country. The government provides for some, but many are abandoned to the scanty subsistence they can procure from the chase during the winter season, and all are objects of general commiseration. Indeed, the name they give the exiles seems to have been dictated by the tenderest sympathy, as well as a strong conviction of their innocence,—they call them “Unfortunates.”

A few versts from Saimka, in the centre of a marshy forest, upon the border of a deep circular lake, surrounded with black poplars, resided one of these banished families, consisting of three persons—a man about five-and-forty, his wife, and a beautiful daughter in the bloom of youth.

Secluded in the desert, this little family were strangers to the intercourse with society; the father went alone to the chase; but neither had he, his wife, or daughter been ever seen at Saimka, and except one poor Tartar peasant, who waited on them, no human being entered their dwelling. The governor of Tobolek only was informed of their birth, their country, and the cause of their banishment; the secret he had not even confided to the lieutenant of his jurisdiction, who was established in Saimka. In committing these exiles to his care, he had merely given orders that they might be provided with a comfortable lodging, a garden, food, and raiment, accompanied with a positive charge to restrict them from all communication with any one, and particularly to intercept any letter they might attempt to convey to the court of Russia.

So much consideration, such mystery and strict precaution, excited a suspicion that, under the simple name of Peter Springer, the father of this family concealed one more illustrious, and misfortunes of no common nature; the effect, perhaps, of some great crime, or possibly a victim to the hatred and injustice of the Russian ministers.

But every endeavour to discover the truth of these conjectures having proved ineffectual, curiosity was soon extinguished, and all interest in the fate of the new exiles died with it; indeed, they were so seldom seen that they were soon forgotten; and if, in pursuit of the chase, some straggling sportsman rambled towards the lake of the forest, and inquired the name of the inhabitants of the hut upon its border, the only answer to be obtained was, that "they