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By Jules Verne

[CONTINUED.]

They had been there for three days, and very much embarrassed, when the raft arrived.

The design of the fugitives was communicated to them. There was certainly some chance of their being able to pass during the night and penetrate into Irkutsk. They therefore resolved to make the attempt.

Alcide Jolivet at once placed himself in communication with the old mariner and asked passage for his companion nterest allowed on Savings Bank de- and himself, offering to pay the fare he fixed, whatever it might be.

"Here one does not pay anything," gravely answered the old mariner. "One risks his life; that is all."

The two journalists embarked, and Nadia saw them take their place in the fore part of the raft.

Harry Blount was always the cold Englishman who had scarcely addressed a word to her during the whole journey across the Ural mountains. Alcide Jolivet seemed a little more grave than usual, and one would acknowledge that his gravity was justified by that of the

Alcide Jolivet was then installed on the fore part of the raft, when he felt a hand rest on his arm. He turned round and recognized Nadia, the sister of him who was no longer Nicholas Korpanoff, but Michael Strogoff, courier of the czar. A cry of surprise was about to escape him when he saw the young girl place her finger on her tips. "Come," said Nadia to him.

And, assuming an air of indifference, Alcide Jolivet, making a sign to Harry Blount to accompany him, followed her. But if the surprise of the journalists was great at meeting Nadia on that raft it was without limits when they perceived Michael Strogoff, whom they could not believe to be still alive. M chael Strogoff had not moved at their

Alcide Jolivet had turned himself toward the young girl. "Gentlemen, he does not see you,"

said the young girl. "The Tartars have burned out his eyes! My poor brother

A deep feeling of pity was pictured on the face of Alcide Jolivet and his companion.

An instant afterward both of them, seated near Michael Strogoff, warmly shook his hands and waited for him to

in a low voice, "you must not know who I am nor what I came to do in Siberia. I beg you to respect my secret. Do you promise me?" "On my honor," answered Alcide Joli-

"On my faith as a gentleman," added

Harry Blount.

"Very well, gentlemen." "Can we be of any use to you?" asked Harry Blount. "Would you wish

"I prefer to act alone," said Michael Strogoff.

"But those scoundrels have burned out your sight," said Alcide Jolivet.

"I have Nadia, and her eyes suffice." Half an hour later the raft, after having left the little port of Livenitchnaia, was fairly in the river. It was 5 o'clock in the evening. Night was fast coming on. It would be very dark and very cold also, for the temperature was

already below zero. Alcide Jolivet and Harry Blount, although they had promised Michael Strogoff to keep his secret, yet did not leave his side. They spoke in a low voice, and the blind man, putting what he already knew to what they now told him, was enabled to form an exact idea

of the state of affairs. He was certain that the Tartars were actually investing Irkutsk and that the three columns had already formed a junction. One could not therefore doubt that the emir and Ivan Ogareff were

before the capital. But why that haste to arrive there of the courier of the czar, now that the emperor's letter could no longer be remitted by him to the grand duke, and he did not even know its contents? cide Jolivet and Harry Blount could

no more understand than could Nadia. Besides, they had not spoken of the past up to the moment when Alcide Jolivet thought it his duty to say to

Michael Strogoff: for not having shaken hands with you

kers' Supplies, School Desks, Fan. before our separation at the posthouse but they would be obliged to abandon

"No; you had a right to believe me a ed by the ice blocks, would not be long

have splendidly whipped that villain, the fir trunks, violently separated, were and he will carry the marks of it a long | becoming entangled under the hard

ed Michael Strogoff. In half an hour after the departure come, they would be perceived by the from Livenitchnaia Alcide Jolivet and Tartars and massacred without pity. Harry Blount had heard all the details | Michael Strogoff returned to the back of the cruel trials through which Mi- part of the raft, where Nadia was waitchael Strogoff and his companion had ing for him. He approached the young successively passed. They could not girl, he took her hand and put to her but openly admire an energy which the that invariable question. "Nadia, are devotedness of the young girl alone you ready?" to which she answered as had been able to equal. And of Mi- usual: Foundryman, Durham, Ont chael Strogoff they had formed the "I am ready." very same opinion which had been so

well expressed by the czar at Moscow-

H INTHE

"In truth, he is a man!" At 8 o'clock at night, as the aspect of the sky had forewarned them, an excessive darkness enveloped all the country. The moon, being new, would not rise above the horizon. From the middle of the river the banks were visible. The cliffs at not a great height were blended with those heavy clouds which they displaced with difficulty. At intervals a breeze would come from the east and seem to expire in that narrow valley of the Angara.

The old mariner, lying down on the fore part of the raft near his men, occupied himself altogether in turning aside from the ice blocks, a maneuver which he executed without making any

This drifting of the ice, after all, was a favorable circumstance as long as it did not oppose an insurmountable obstacle in the passage of the raft; for indeed this apparatus alone on the free waters of the river would have run the risk of being perceived even through the thick shade, whereas it was now confounded with these moving masses of all sizes and all shapes, and the din produced by the grating of the blocks drowned all other suspicious noise.

There was a very keen frost. The fugitives suffered dreadfully from it, not having any other shelter but some branches of the birch tree. They pressed close to each other in order to better support the low temperature, which during that night had reached 10 degrees below zero.

Michael Strogoff and Nadia, lying down at the back part of the raft, endured without complaint this additional suffering. For a man who was reckoning soon to attain his end Michael Strogoff seemed singularly calm. Besides, in the most grave situations his energy had never abandoned him. Already he looked forward to the moment when at last it would be permitted him to think of his mother, of Nadia, of himself. He only feared one last and evil chance. It was lest the raft should be absolutely stopped by a barrier of thick ice before having reached Irkutsk. He did not think of anything but that, being, moreover, decided if it were necessary to attempt some su-

preme act of daring. Nadia, refreshed by some hours of repose, had recovered that physical energy which misery had sometimes been able to subdue without ever having shaken her moral energy. She was "Gentlemen," said Michael Strogoff | thinking also that in case Michael Strogoff should make a new effort to attain his end she must be there to guide him. But at the time that she was approaching Irkutsk the image of her father was pictured more vividly in her mind. She saw him in the invested town, far from those he cherished, but-for she did not doubt it-struggling against the invaders with all the dash of his patriotism. Before many hours, if heaven should at length favor them, she would us to help you to accomplish your be in his arms, reciting to him the last words of her mother, and nothing

should again separate them.

amid the mass of floating ice. Up to this time no Tartar detachment had been signaled on the high pants of the Angara, and this indicated that the raft had not as yet come on a live

The raft still moved on, unperceived.

with their outposts. Meanwhile it was necessary to maneuver with more care in the midst of the ice, which was fast closing.

The old mariner rose up, and the mu-All had as much as they could do, and the management of the raft became more and more difficult, for the bed of the river was becoming obstructed.

Michael Strogoff had moved softly to the fore part of the raft. Alcide Jolivet had followed him.

Both listened to what the old sailor and his men were saying.

"Guard there on the right!" ening on the left!"

boathook!"

"If God wills it!" replied the old sailor. "Against his will nothing can be

"You hear them?" said Alcide Jolivet. "Yes," replied Michael Strogoff, "but

God is with us." Meantime the situation became more and more serious. If the raft once "We almost owe you some excuses | ceased to make headway, the fugitives would not only never reach Irkutsk, their floating apparatus, which, crushin sinking under the waters. The wil-"Anyhow," added Alcide Jolivet, "you low bindings were already breaking, crust, and soon the unfortunate people "No, not a long time," simply answer- would have no other refuge than the ice itself. Then, when daylight should

For some versts more the raft con- ceed. tinued to make its way through the floating ice. If the Angara should be choked up with ice, it would form a barrier, and consequently it would be impossible to follow the current. Already the passage down the river was slower. At every instant there were collisions, or time was by having to make long turnings. they must escape landing on the ac; there they must take a narrow pass between itin fine, many anxious drawbacks.

And now only a few hours of the night remained. If the fugitives die not reach Irkutsk before 5 o'clock the morning, they must gir up all hope of ever entering there. At length, at half past 1, in spite of

all their united efforts, the raft struck against a thick barrier and stopped altogether. The ice which was floating down the river cast itself upon it and forced it against the obstacle and held it motionless as if it had been driven At this place the Angara becomes nar-

rowed to not more than half its normal breadth; hence the accumulation of ice blocks, which were by little and little piled one upon another under the action of the double pressure, which was considerable, and of the cold, whose in- by a high cathedral, and for its houses, tensity was redoubling. At 500 paces built in picturesque disorder along its down the river again became wide, and slopes. ice blocks, detaching themselves by lit- Seen from a certain distance, from tle and little from the lower edge of that the top of the mountain which runs field, continued to float down to Irkutsk; along the great Siberian route at a dis- had appeared on the Angara ramparts hence it is probable that without that tance of some twenty versts, with its of earth had been raised. A most narrowing of the banks the barrier would domes and belfries, its graceful spires, flooded with the waters of the Angara. not have been formed, and the raft could like those of minarets, its spiral domes, had been dug between the inner and fugitives had to give up all hope of from the eyes of the traveler from the reaching the end of their journey. If moment he enters the town. The town, they had had at their disposal the tools half Byzantine, half Chinese, becomes which the whalers usually employ to at once European by its macadamized open out canals across the icefields, if streets, bordered with sidewalks, with they had been able to cut this field as their rows of gigantic birch trees, by far as the place where the river be- its brick and wooden houses, some of came wider, perhaps the time would which have several stories, by its many not have been wanting, but not a single splendid equipages-in fine, by the saw, not a pickax, nothing with which whole body of its inhabitants being to cut the crust, which the extreme cold very advanced in the progress of civhad rendered as bard as granite.

What should they do? At that moment rifle shots were heard At that epoch Irkutsk, refuge for the Strogoff in the ear of the young girl.

Without making any observation, ready for everything. Nadia took the ernor general of eastern Siberia. Unhand of Michael Strogoff.

the raft."

here and there by the firing. Nadia crept on in front of Michael The garrison of Irkutsk was then Strogoff. The balls fell around them composed of a regiment of foot Cos-

rugged and with sharp edges, made wore the helmet and blue uniforms their hands bleed, but still they kept striped with silver. Ten minutes afterward the lower of particular circumstances the brother border of the barrier was reached. of the czar had been shut up in the There the waters of the Angara again town since the commencement of the became free. A few large blocks of invasion.

the field and floating with the current, tail. descended toward the town. Nadia understood what Michael Strogoff wished to attempt. She saw one

of those blocks of ice that was only held by a narrow tongue. "Come," said Nadia.

And both lay down on this morsel of ce, which a slight rocking loosened

wn the river. The river itself bewider, and the route was free.

Michael Strogoff and Nadia could hear the firing of guns, the cries of disjiks took up again their beathooks. | tress, the shouts of the Tartars that made themselves heard up the river. Then little by little those cries of deep anguish and of ferocious joy were lost in the distance.

"Oh, those poor companions!" whis pered Nadia.

For half an hour the current quickly carried along the block of ice which was bearing Michael Strogoff and Nadia. At every moment they feared that "Look! The blocks of ice are thick- they might sink under the water. Being caught in the stream, it followed "Keep it off! Keep it off with your the middle of the river, and it would not be necessary to give it an oblique "Before an hour we shall be stop- direction until there was question of making for the quays of Irkutsk.

Michael Strogoff, with his teeth set and his ears ready to catch the least sound, did not utter a single word. Never was he so near attaining his end. He felt that he was about to suc-



Toward 2 o'clock in the morning a double row of lights lit up the somber horizon on the two banks of the An-

On the right was the glare from the

lights of Irkutsk, on the left the fires of the Tartar camp. Michael Strogoff was not more than

half a verst from the city. "At last!" whispered he.

But suddenly Nadia gave a cry. At that cry Michael Strogoff rose up from the block, which became very unsteady. His hand stretched out toward the head of the Angara. His face, all lit up with the reflections of blue lights, became terrible to look at, and then, as though his eyes had been reopened to the light, be cried:

"Ah, God himself is against us!"

CHAPTER XVII.



RKUTSK, capital of eastern Siberia, has in ordipary times a population of 30,000 souls. A high hill of solid rock, skirting the right bank of the Angara, serves as a splen-

did position for its churches, crowned

have continued to descend the current. it has a somewhat oriental appearance. outer wall of the fortification. The But the evil was irreparable, and the But that oriental appearance vanishes city could no longer be taken by a sudilization, and to which the latest fashions of Paris are not at all strangers.

on the right bank of the Angara. A Siberians of the province, was crowded. shower of bullets was directed upon It abounded in resources of every kind. the raft. Had the unhappy men been Irkutsk is the emporium for all that perceived? Evidently, for other deto- countless merchandise which is exnations resounded on the left bank. changed between China, central Asia The fugitives, caught between two fires. and Europe. They did not fear to became a target for the Tartar marks- draw there, the peasants from the valmen. Some were wounded by these ley of the Angara, the Mongols-Khalballs, although in the midst of the kas, people from Toungouze and Bougreat darkness they only fell by chance. ret, and to allow the wilderness to "Come, Nadia," whispered Michael stretch out between the invaders and the town.

Irkutsk is the residence of the govder him is a civil governor, in whose "I am thinking of crossing the bar- hands is concentrated the administrarier," he said to her in a low voice, tion of the province, a head of the po-Guide me, but let no one see us leave lice, who has a great deal to do in a town where exiles around, and lastly Nadia obeyed. Michael Strogoff and a mayor, one of the leading merchants, she glided quickly over the surface of an important personage by his imthe icefield in a silence that was broken mense fortune and by the influence which he has over his fellow citizens.

like a shower of hailstones and crashed sacks, which numbered about 2,000 upon the ice. The surface of the field, men, a body of foot gendarmes, who Besides, it is known that on account

ice, becoming by degrees detached from That situation must be given in de-

It was a journey of political impor- siege.

tance that had led the grand duke into those distant provinces of eastern Asia. The grand duke, after having visited the principal cities of Siberia, traveling in military rather than princely style, without any retinue, escorted by a detachment of Cossacks, had gone even as far as the countries beyond the Balthe block began to make its way kan mountains. Nicholaevsk, the last Russian town which is situated on the shores of the sea of Okhotsk, had been

honored by his visit. Having reached the boundaries of the immense Muscovite empire, the grand duke was returning to Irkutsk, from whence he would soon return to Europe, when the news reached him of that invasion, which was as sudden as it was menacing. He hastened to reenter the capital, but when he arrived there communication with Russia had been cut off. He still received a few telgrams from St. Petersburg and Moscow. He could even answer them. Afterward the wire was cut under the circumstances already known to the

Irkutsk was isolated from the rest of

The grand duke could do nothing but organize resistance, a thing which he did with that firmness and coolness of which he had given under other eircumstances incontestable proofs.

News of the taking of lchim, of Omsk, of Tomsk, came successively to Irkutsk. They could not count on being soon relieved, but they must prevent at all price the occupation of the capital of Siberia. The few troops scat-

tered over the province of Amur and those in the government of Irkutsk could not arrive in sufficient numbers to arrest the Tartar columns. Besides, since Irkutsk could not possibly escape being invested, it was of the utmost importance to put the town in a position to sustain a siege of some length.

Those works were begun on the day on which Tomsk fell into the hands of the Tartars. At the same time as that It doesn't try to use it's food. last news the grand duke learned that the emir of Bokhara and the allied khans were directing the movement in person, but what he did not know was that the lieutenant of those barbarous chiefs was Ivan Ogareff, a Russian offi- way to get fat. cer whom he himself had cashiered.

From the first, as has been seen, the inhabitants of the province of Irkutsk

had been ordered to abandon the towns and villages. Those who did not seek refuge in the capital were compelled to retire beyond Lake Baikal, to where the invasion would not likely extend its ravages. The crops of corn and forage were requisitioned for the town, and that last rampart of Russian power in the extreme east was prepared to re-

sist for some time. Irkutsk, founded in 1611, is situated at the confluence of the Irkut and the Angara, on the right bank of the river. Two wooden bridges, built on piles and so arranged as to open the whole width of the river for the necessities of navigation, joined the town with its out. skirts which extended along the left bank. The outskirts were abandoned the bridges destroyed. The passage of the Angara, which was very wide at that place, would not have been possi. ble under the fire of the besieged. But the river could be crossed either above or below the town, and as a consequence Irkutsk was in danger of being attacked on the east side, which no rampart protected.

It was, then, in works of fortification that the hands were first employed. They worked day and night. The grand duke found a spirited population in supplying that need, and afterward he found them most brave in its defense. Soldiers, merchants, exiles, peasants, all devoted themselves to the common safety. Eight days before the Tartars den assault. It must be invested and

besieged. The third Tartar column-that which had ascended the valley of the Yenisei-appeared in sight of Irkutsk on the 24th of September. It immediately occupied the abandoned outskirts, of which the very houses had been destroyed in order not to impede the action of the archduke's artillery, which was unfortunately very insufficient.

The Tartars organized themselves while waiting the arrival of the two other columns which were commanded by the emir and his allies.

The junction of these divers corps

took place on the 25th of September at the camp of Angara, and all the army, except the garrisons left in the principal conquered towns, was concentrated under the orders of Feofar-Khan. The passage of the Angara having

been regarded by Ivan Ogareff as impracticable before Irkutsk, a strong body of troops crossed at some versts down the river on some bridges of boats which had been established for that purpose. The grand duke did not attempt to oppose that passage. He could only have harassed them without preventing it, not having any fieldpieces at his disposal, and this is the reason he remained cooped up in Ir-

Ivan Ogareff, a clever engineer, was certainly able to direct the operations of a regular siege, but he had not the material to carry forward his operations quickly. So he had hoped to surprise Irkutsk, the end of all his efforts. One can see that things had turned out otherwise than he had reckoned. On the one hand, the march of the Tartar army delayed by the battle of Tomsk; on the other, the rapidity with which the works of defense had been

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

carried on by the grand duke. For

these two reasons his projects had fail-

ed. He found himself therefore under

the necessity of carrying on a regular

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When the composition came to an end, Richter expressed his criticism in a very few words. "Well," he said, "I, too, haf written compositions to make a pile so high"-raising his hand three feet from the ground-"but I haf burned them!"

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