

Michael Strogoff,

OR, THE COURIER OF THE CZAR.

By Jules Verne.

CHAPTER IV.—CONTINUED.

This was especially remarked by a traveler in a carriage at the front part of the train. This person—evidently a stranger—made good use of his eyes and asked numberless questions, to which he received only evasive answers. Every minute leaning out of the window, which he would keep down to the great disgust of his fellow travelers, he lost nothing of the views to the right. He inquired the names of the most insignificant places, their position, what were their commerce, their manufactures, the number of their inhabitants, the average mortality, etc., and all this he wrote down in a note book, already full of memoranda.

This was the correspondent Alcide Jolivet, and the reason of his putting so many insignificant questions was that among the many answers he received, he hoped to find some interesting fact "for his cousin." But, naturally enough, he was taken for a spy, and not a word treating of the events of the day was uttered in his hearing.

Finding, therefore, that he could learn nothing in relation to the Tartar invasion, he wrote in his note book: "Travelers of great discretion. Very close as to political matters."

While Alcide Jolivet noted down his impressions thus minutely, his confidant, in the same train, travelling for the same object, was devoting himself to the same work of observation in another compartment. Neither of them had seen each other that day at the Moscow station, and they were each ignorant that the other had set out to visit the scene of the war. Harry Blount, speaking little, but listening much, had not inspired his companions with the suspicions which Alcide Jolivet had aroused. It was not taken for a spy, and therefore his neighbors, without constraint, gossiped in his presence, allowing themselves even to go farther than their natural caution would in most cases have allowed them. The correspondent of the Daily Telegraph had thus an opportunity of observing how much recent events preoccupied the party of merchants who were on their way to Nijni-Novgorod, and to what a degree the commerce with Central Asia was threatened in its transit. He therefore did not hesitate to note in his book this perfectly correct observation.

"My fellow travelers extremely anxious. Nothing is talked of but war, and they speak of it with a freedom which is astonishing, as having broken out between the Volga and the Vistula."

The readers of the Daily Telegraph would not fail to be as well informed as Alcide Jolivet's "cousin."

And moreover, as Harry Blount, seated at the left of the train, only saw one part of the country, which was hilly, without giving himself the trouble of looking at the right side, which was composed of wide plains, he added, with British assurance:

"Country mountainous between Moscow and Vladimir."

It was evident that the Russian government purposed taking severe measures to guard against any serious eventualities even in the interior of the empire. The rebellion had not crossed the Siberian frontier, but evil influences might be feared in the Volga provinces, so near to the country of the Kirghiz. The police had as yet found no traces of Ivan Ogareff. It was not known whether the traitor, calling the foreigner to avenge his personal honor, had rejoined Feofar-Khan, or whether he was endeavoring to foment a revolt in the government of Nijni-Novgorod, which at this time of year contained a population of such diverse elements. Perhaps among the Persians, Armenians, Cossacks, who flocked to the great market, he had agents, instructed to provoke a rising in the interior. All this was possible, especially in such a country as Russia. In fact this vast empire, of 4,740,000 square miles in extent, does not possess the homogeneity of the states of Western Europe. Among the many nations of which it is composed there exist necessarily many shades.

The Russian territory in Europe, Asia and America extends from the fifth degree east longitude to the hundred and thirty-third degree west longitude, or an extent of nearly two hundred degrees; and from the thirty-eighth north parallel to the eighty-first north parallel, or forty-three degrees. It contains more than seventy millions of inhabitants. In it thirty different languages are spoken. The Slavonian race predominates, no doubt, but there are besides Russians, Poles, Lithuanians, Cossacks, and others. Add to these Finns, Laplanders, Estonians, several other northern tribes with unpronounceable names, the Permians, the Germans, the Greeks, the Tartars, the Caucasian tribes, the Mongols, Kalmucks, Samoid, Kansakian, and Aleutian hordes, and one may understand that the unity of so vast a state must have been difficult to maintain, and that it could only have been the work of time, aided by the wisdom of many successive rulers.

Be that as it may, Ivan Ogareff had hitherto managed to escape all search, and very probably he might have joined the Tartar army. But at every station where the train stopped, inspectors came forward who scrutinized the travelers, and subjected them all to a minute examination, as, by order of the superintendent of police, these officials were seeking Ivan Ogareff. The government, in fact, believed it to be certain that the traitor had not yet been able to quit European Russia. If there appeared cause to suspect any traveler, he was carried off to explain himself at the police station, and in the meantime the train went on its way, no person troubling himself about the unfortunate one left behind.

With the Russian police, which is very arbitrary, it is absolutely useless to argue. Military rank is conferred on its employees, and they act in military fashion. How can any one, moreover, help obeying, unhesitatingly, orders which emanate from a monarch who has the right to employ this formula at the head of his wks: "We, by the grace of God, Emperor and Autocrat of all the Russias, of Moscow, Kiev, Vladimir and Novgorod, Czar of Kasan and Astrakhan, Czar of Poland, Czar of Siberia, Czar of the Tauric Chersonese, Signior of Pskov, Prince of Smolensk, Lithuania, Volynia, Podolia, and Finland, Prince of Esthonia, Livonia, Courland and of Semigallia, of Bialystok, Karelia, Sougria, Perm, Viatka, Bulgaria, and of many other countries; Lord and sovereign Prince of the territory of Nijni-Novgorod, Tchémigoff, Biazan, Polotsk, Borskoi, Jaroslavl, Biélozersk, Oudoria, Oudoria, Kondeinia, Vitepsk, and of Miasia, Governor of the Hyperborean Regions, Lord of the countries of Iveria, Kartalina, Grouzina, Kabardina, and Armenia, hereditary Lord and Suserain of the Scher-kass princes, of those of the mountains and of others; heir of Norway, Duke of Schleswig-Holstein, Stormarr, Dithmarsen, and Oldenburg." A powerful Lord, in truth, is he whose arms are an eagle

with two heads, holding a sceptre and a globe, surrounded by the escutcheons of Novgorod, Vladimir, Kiev, Kasan, Astrakhan, and of Siberia, and environed by the collar of the order of St. Andrew, surmounted by a royal crown!

As to Michael Strogoff, his papers were in order, and he was, consequently, free from all police supervision.

At the Station of Vladimir the train stopped for several minutes, which appeared sufficient to enable the correspondent of the Daily Telegraph to take a two-fold view physical and moral, and to form a complete estimate of this ancient capital of Russia.

At the Vladimir station fresh travelers entered the train. Among others, a young girl presented herself at the door of the carriage occupied by Michael Strogoff.

A vacant place was found opposite the courier of the Czar. The young girl took it, after placing by her side a modest travelling bag of red leather, which seemed to constitute her luggage. Then seating herself with downcast eyes, she prepared for a journey which was still to last several hours.

Michael Strogoff could not help looking attentively at his newly arrived fellow traveler. As she was so placed as to travel with her back to the engine, he even offered her his seat, which she might prefer to her own, but she thanked him with a slight bend of her graceful neck.

The young girl appeared to be about sixteen or seventeen years of age. Her head, truly charming, was of the purest Slavonic type—slightly severe, and which would, when a few summers had passed over her, unfold into beauty rather than mere prettiness. From beneath a sort of kerchief which she wore on her head escaped in profusion light golden hair. Her eyes were brown, soft, and expressive of much sweetness of temper. The nose was straight, and attached to her pale and somewhat thin cheeks by delicate mobile nostrils. The lips were finely cut, but it seemed as if they had long since forgotten how to smile.

The young traveler was tall and upright, as well as could be judged of her figure from the very simple and ample pelisse that covered her. Although she was still a very young girl in the literal sense of the term, the development of her high forehead and clearly cut features gave the idea that she was the possessor of a great moral energy—a point which did not escape Michael Strogoff. Evidently this young girl had already suffered in the past, and the future doubtless did not present itself to her in glowing colors; but it was none the less certain that she had known how to struggle, and that she had resolved to struggle still with the trials of life.

Her energy was evidently prompt and persistent, and her calmness unalterable, even under circumstances in which a man would be likely to give way, or lose his self-command.

Such was the impression which she produced at first sight. Michael Strogoff, being himself of an energetic temperament, was naturally struck by the character of her physiognomy, and while taking care not to cause her annoyance by a too persistent gaze, he observed his neighbor with no small interest. The costume of the young traveler was both extremely simple and appropriate. She was not rich—that could easily be seen; but not the slightest mark of negligence was to be discerned in her dress. All her luggage was contained in a leather bag under lock and key, and which, for want of room, she held on her lap.

She wore a long, dark pelisse, which was gracefully adjusted at the neck by a blue tie. Under this pelisse, a short skirt, also dark, fell over a robe which reached to her ankles, and of which the lower edge was ornamented with some simple embroidery. Half-boots of worked leather, and thickly-soled, as if chosen in the anticipation of a long journey, covered her small feet.

Michael Strogoff fancied that he recognized, by certain details, the fashion of the costume of Livonia, and he thought that his neighbor must be a native of the Baltic provinces.

But whether was this young girl going, alone, at an age when the tender care of a father, or the protection of a brother, are considered a matter of necessity? Had she now come, after an already long journey, from the provinces of Western Russia? Was she merely going to Nijni-Novgorod, or was the end of her travels beyond the eastern frontier of the empire? Would some relation, some friend, await her arrival by the train? Or was it not more probable, on the contrary, that she would find herself as much isolated in the town as she was in this compartment, where no one—she must think—appeared to care for her? It was probable.

Michael Strogoff observed her with interest, but himself reserved, he sought no opportunity of accosting her, although several hours must elapse before the arrival of the train at Nijni-Novgorod.

Once only, when her neighbor—the merchant—who had jumbled together so imprudently in his remarkable tall and shawls—being asleep, and she was swaying from his great head, the other, Michael Strogoff awoke him somewhat roughly, and made him understand that he must hold himself upright, and in a more convenient posture.

The merchant, rude enough by nature, grumbled some words against "people who interfere with what does not concern them," but Michael Strogoff cast on him a glance so stern that the sleeper leaned on the other side, and released the young traveler from his unpleasant vicinity.

The latter looked at the young man for an instant, and with a mute and modest thanks was in that look.

But a circumstance occurred which gave Michael Strogoff a just idea of the character of the maiden. Twelve versts before arriving at the station of Nijni-Novgorod, at a sharp curve of the iron way, the train experienced a very violent shock. Then, for a minute, it ran on to the slope of an embankment.

Travelers more or less shaken about, cries, confusion, general disorder in the carriages, such was the effect at first produced. It was to be feared that some serious accident had happened. Consequently, the panic-stricken passengers thought only of getting out of the carriages and taking refuge on the line.

Michael Strogoff thought instantly of the young girl; but while the passengers in her compartment were precipitating themselves outside, screaming and struggling, she had remained quietly in her place, her face scarcely color changed by a slight pallor.

She waited—Michael Strogoff waited also. She had not made any attempt to leave the carriage. Nor did he move either. Both remained quiet.

"A determined nature!" thought Michael Strogoff.

However, all danger had quickly disappeared. A breakage of the coupling of the luggage van had first caused the shock to and then the stoppage of the train, which in another instant would have been thrown from the top of the embankment into a bog. There was an hour's delay. At last the road being cleared, the train proceeded, and at half-past eight in the evening arrived at the station of Nijni-Novgorod.

Before any one could get out of the carriages, the inspectors of police presented themselves at the doors and examined the passengers.

Michael Strogoff showed his paporojna, made out in the name of Nicholas Korpadoff. He had consequently no difficulty.

As to the other travelers in the compartment, all bound for Nijni-Novgorod, their appearance, happily for them, was in no wise suspicious.

"The young girl in her turn, exhibited, not a passport, since passports are no longer required in Russia, but a permit indorsed with a private seal, and which seemed to be of a special character. The inspectors read the permit with attention. Then, having attentively examined the person whose description it contained:

"You are from Riga?" he said.

"Yes," replied the young girl.

"You are going to Irkutsk?"

"Yes."

"By what route?"

"By Perm."

"Good!" replied the inspector. "Take care to have your permit vised at the police station of Nijni-Novgorod." The young girl bent her head in token of assent.

Hearing the questions and replies, Michael Strogoff experienced a mingled sentiment both of surprise and pity. What! this young girl alone, journeying to that far off Siberia, and at a time when, to its ordinary dangers were added all the perils of an invaded country, and one in a state of insurrection? How would she reach it? What would become of her?

The inspection ended, the doors of the carriages were then opened, but before Michael Strogoff could move toward her, the young Livonian, who had been the first to descend, had disappeared in the crowd which thronged the platforms of the railway station.

CHAPTER V.

Nijni-Novgorod, Lower Novgorod, situate at the junction of the Volga and the Oka, is the chief town in the district of the same name. It was here that Michael Strogoff was obliged to leave the railway, which at the time did not go beyond this town. Thus, as he advanced, his traveling would become first less speedy and then less safe.

Nijni-Novgorod, the fixed population of which is only from thirty to thirty-five thousand inhabitants, contained, at that time, more than three hundred thousand; that is to say, the population was increased tenfold. This addition was in consequence of the celebrated fair, which was held within the walls for three weeks. Formerly Makariev had the benefit of this concourse of traders, but since 1817 the fair had been removed to Nijni-Novgorod.

The town, dreary enough at most times, then presented a truly animated scene. Six different races of merchants, European and Asiatic, were fraternizing under the congenial influence of trade.

Even at the late hour at which Michael Strogoff left the platform, there were still a large number of people in the two towns, separated by the stream of the Volga, which compose Nijni-Novgorod, and the highest of which is built on a steep rock, and is defended by one of those forts called in Russia, "kremlin."

Had Michael Strogoff been obliged to stay at Nijni-Novgorod, he would have had some trouble in finding a hotel, or even an inn, to suit him. In the meantime, as he had not to start immediately—he was compelled to look out for some lodging; but before doing so, he wished to know exactly the hour at which the steambot would start. He went to the office of the company whose boats plied between Nijni-Novgorod and Perm. There, to his great annoyance, he found that the Caucasus for that day was the boat's name—did not start for Perm till the following day at twelve o'clock. Seventeen hours to wait! It was very vexatious to a man so pressed for time. However, he resigned himself to circumstances for he never senselessly murmured. Besides, the fact was that no telegraph or telegraph line, or post-office, nor horse, could take him more quickly either to Perm or Kasan. It would be better, then, to wait for the rapid than any other, and which would enable him to regain lost time.

Here, then, was Michael Strogoff strolling through the town and quietly looking out for some inn in which to pass the night. However, he troubled himself little on that score, and but that hunger pressed him, he would probably have wandered on till morning in the streets of Nijni-Novgorod. He was looking for supper rather than a bed. But he found both at the sign of the "City of Constantinople." There the landlord offered him a fairly comfortable room with little furniture, it is true, but which was not without an image of the Virgin, and portraits of a few saints framed in yellow gauze.

A goose filled with sourstuffing, swimming in thick cream, barley bread, some curds, powdered sugar mixed with cinnamon, and a jug of kvass, the ordinary Russian beer, were placed before him, and sufficed to satisfy his hunger. He did justice to the meal, which was more than could be said of his neighbor at table, who, having in his character of "old believer" of the sect of Raskalniks, made the vow of abstinence, rejected the potatoes on the dish in front of him, and carefully refrained from putting sugar in his tea.

His supper finished, Michael Strogoff, instead of going up to his bedroom, again strolled out into the town. But although the long twilight yet lingered, the crowd was already dispersing, the streets were gradually becoming empty, and at length every one retired to his dwelling.

Why did not Michael Strogoff go quietly to bed as would have seemed more reasonable after a long railway journey? Was he thinking of the young Livonian girl who had for many hours been his traveling companion? Having nothing better to do, he was thinking of her. Did he fear that lost in this busy city, she might be exposed to insult? He feared so, and with good reason. Did he hope to meet her, and if not, would be to afford her protection? No, to meet would be difficult. As to protection, what right had he—alone in the midst of these wandering tribes! And yet the present dangers are nothing to those she must undergo. Siberia! Irkutsk! I am about to dare all risks for Russia—for the Czar, while she is about to do so—for whom? For what? She is authorized to cross the frontier? And the country beyond is in revolt! The steppes beyond are full of Tartar bands.

Michael Strogoff stopped for an instant and reflected.

Without doubt, thought he, "she must have determined on undertaking her journey before invasion. Perhaps she is even now ignorant of what is happening. But no; that cannot be, for the merchants discussed before her the disturbances in Siberia, and she did not seem even surprised. She did not even ask for an explanation. She must have known it then, and though knowing it, she is still resolute. Poor girl! Her motive for the journey must be urgent indeed! But, though she may be brave and she certainly is so—her strength must fail her; and, to say nothing of dangers and obstacles, she will be unable to endure the fatigue of such a journey. Never can she pass Irkutsk!"

Including in such reflections, Michael Strogoff wandered on as chance led him; but, being well acquainted with the town, he knew that he could without difficulty retrace his steps.

Having strolled on for about an hour, he seated himself on a bench against the wall of a large wooden cottage, which stood, with others on a vast open space.

He had scarcely been there five minutes when a hand was laid heavily on his shoulder.

"What are you doing here?" roughly demanded a large and powerful man, who had approached unperceived.

"I am resting," replied Michael Strogoff.

"Do you mean to stay all night on the bench?" asked the man.

"Yes, if I feel inclined to do so," answered Michael Strogoff, in a tone somewhat too sharp for the simple merchant he wished to persecute.

"Come forward, then, that I may see you," said the man.

"It is not necessary," he replied; and he calmly stopped back ten paces or so.

The man seemed, as Michael observed him well, to have the look of a Bohemian, such as are met at fairs, and with whom contact, either physical or moral, is unpleasant. Then, as he looked more attentively through the dusk which was coming on, he perceived near the cottage a large caravan, the usual traveling dwelling of the Zingaris, or gypsies, who swarm in Russia wherever a few coopecks can be obtained.

As the gypsy took two or three steps forward and was about to interrogate Michael Strogoff more closely, the door of the cottage was opened. He could just see a woman, who advanced quickly, and in a language which Michael Strogoff knew to be a mixture of the Mongol and Siberian:

"Another spy!" she said. "Let him alone and come to supper. The 'papluk' is waiting for you."

Michael Strogoff could not help smiling at the epithet bestowed on him, dreading spies as he did above all things.

But in the same dialect, although his accent was very different, the Bohemian replied in words which signified:

"You are right, Sangarre. Besides, we start to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" repeated the woman in surprise.

"Yes, Sangarre," replied the Bohemian; "to-morrow; and the Father himself sends us—where we are going!"

Thereupon the man and woman entered the cottage, and carefully closed the door.

"Good!" said Michael Strogoff to himself; "if these gypsies do not wish to be understood, when they speak before me, they had better use some other language."

From his Siberian origin, and because he had spent his childhood in the steppes, Michael Strogoff, it has been said, understood almost all the languages in usage from Tartary to the Sea of Ice. As to the exact signification of the words exchanged between the gypsy and his companion, he did not trouble his head. For why should it interest him?

An hour after, Michael Strogoff was sleeping soundly on one of those Russian beds which always seem so hard to strangers, and on the morning, the 17th of July, he awoke at break of day.

He had still five hours to pass at Nijni-Novgorod; it seemed to him an age. How was he to spend the morning, unless in wandering, as he had done the evening before, through the streets? By the time he had finished his breakfast, strapped up his bag, had his paporojna inspected at the police office, he would have nothing to do but start. But he was not a man to lie in bed after the sun had risen, so he rose, dressed himself, placed the letter with the imperial arms on it carefully at the bottom of its usual pocket, within the lining of his coat, over which he fastened his belt; he then closed his bag and threw it over his shoulder.

This done, he had no wish to return to the "City of Constantinople," and, intending to breakfast on the bank of the Volga, near the wharf, he settled his bill and left the inn. By way of precaution, Michael Strogoff went first to the office of the steam-boat company, and there made sure that the Caucasus would start at the appointed hour. As he did so, the thought for the first time struck him that since the young Livonian girl was going to Perm, it was very possible that her intention was also to embark on the Caucasian, in which case he should accompany her.

The town above, with its kremlin, whose circumference measures two versts, and which resembles that of Moscow, was altogether abandoned. Even the governor did not reside there. But if the town above was like a city of the dead, the town below, at all events, was alive.

Michael Strogoff, having crossed the Volga on a bridge of boats, guarded by mounted Cossacks, reached the square where, the evening before, he had fallen in with the gypsy camp. This was somewhat outside the town, where the fair of Nijni-Novgorod was held, with which that of Leipzig itself is not to be compared. In a vast plain beyond the Volga rose the temporary palace of the Governor-general, where, by imperial orders, that great functionary resided during the whole of the fair, which thanks to the people who composed it, required an ever-watchful surveillance.

This plain was now covered with boats, symmetrically arranged in such a manner as to leave avenues broad enough to allow the crowd to pass without a crush.

In the avenues and long alleys already a large assemblage of people, there were which had risen at four o'clock, the sun, above the horizon. Russian, Cossacks, Georgians, Greeks, Turks, Persians, and Asiatic, a mixture of Europeans and Asiatics, talking, wrangling, bargaining and bargaining. Every thing which can be bought or sold seemed to be heaped up in this square. For, horses, camels, asses, boats, caravans, every description of conveyance that would serve for the transport of merchandise, had been accumulated on the fair ground. Furs, precious stones, silks, Cashmere shawls, Turkey carpets, weapons from the Caucasus, gazes from Smyrna and Spanish, Tiflis armor, caravan tents, European bronzes, Swiss clocks, velvet and silks from Lyons, English cottons, harness, fruits, vegetables, minerals from the Ural, malachite, lapis lazuli, spices, perfumes, medicinal herbs, wood, tar, rope, horn, pumpkins, watermelons, etc. All the products of India, China, Persia, from the shores of the Caspian and the Black Sea, from America and Europe, were united at this corner of the globe.

It is scarcely possible truly to portray the moving mass of human beings surging here and there, the excitement, the confusion, the hubbub; demonstrative as were the natives and the inferior classes, they were completely outdone by their visitors. There were merchants from Central Asia, who had occupied a year in escorting their merchandise across its vast plains, and who would not again see their shops and counting-houses for another year to come. In short, of such importance is this fair of Nijni-Novgorod that the sum total of its transactions amounts yearly to not less than a hundred million roubles!

A kind of light took about £16,750,000 sterling.

On one of the open spaces between the quarters of this temporary city, were numbers of mountebanks of every description; harlequins and acrobats, deafening the visitors with the noise of their instruments and their vociferous cries; gypsies from the mountains telling fortunes to the credulous fools who are ever to be found in such assemblies; Zingaris or Tsiganes—a name which the Russians give to the gypsies who are the descendants of the ancient Copts—singing their wildest melodies and dancing their most original dances; comedians of foreign theaters acting Shakespeare, adapted to the taste of spectators who crowded to witness them. In the long avenues the bear showmen accompanied their four-footed dancers; menageries resounded with the hoarse cries of animals under the influence of the stinging whip or red-hot irons of the tamer; and, besides all these numerous performers, in the middle of the central square, surrounded by a circle four deep of enthusiastic amateurs, was a band of "mariners of the Volga," sitting on the ground as on the deck of their vessel, imitating the action of rowing, guided by the stick of the master of the orchestra, the veritable helmsman of this imaginary vessel!

A whimsical and pleasing custom! It should here be mentioned that England and France, at all events, were this year represented at the great fair of Nijni-Novgorod by two of the most distinguished products of modern civilization, Messrs. Harry Blount and Alcide Jolivet.

Alcide Jolivet, an optimist by nature, seemed to find everything agreeable, and as by chance both lodging and food were to his taste, he jotted down in his book some memoranda particularly favorable to the town of Nijni-Novgorod.

Harry Blount, on the contrary, having in vain hunted for a supper, had been obliged to find a resting-place in the open air. He therefore looked at it all from another point of view; and was preparing an article of the most withering character against a town in which the landlords of the inns refused to receive travelers who only begged leave to be flayed, "morally and physically."

Michael Strogoff, one hand in his pocket, the other holding his cherry-stemmed pipe, appeared the most indifferent and least impatient of men; yet, from a certain contraction of his eyebrows every now and then, a careful observer would have perceived that he was burning to be off.

For about two hours he had been walking about the streets, only to find himself invariably at the fair again. As he passed among the groups of buyers, and sellers, he discovered that those who came from countries on the confines of Asia manifested great uneasiness. Their trade was visibly suffering from it.

Another symptom also was to be remarked. In Russia military uniforms appear on every occasion. Soldiers are wont to mix freely with the crowd, the police agents being almost invariably aided by a number of Cossacks, who, lance on shoulder, keep order in the crowd of three hundred thousand strangers.

But on this occasion the soldiers, Cossacks and the rest, did not put in an appearance at the great market. Doubtless, a sudden order to move having been foreseen, they were restricted to their barracks.

Nevertheless, though no soldiers were to be seen, it was not so with officers. Since the evening before, aides-de-camp, leaving the governor's palace, galloped in every direction. An unusual movement was going forward which a serious state of affairs could alone account for. There were innumerable couriers on the roads both to Vladimir and to the Ural Mountains. The exchange of telegraphic dispatches between Moscow and St. Petersburg was incessant.

Michael Strogoff found himself in the central square when the report spread that the head of the police had been summoned by a courier to the palace of the governor-general. An important dispatch from Moscow, it was said, was the cause of it.

"The fair is to be closed," said one.

"The regiment of Nijni-Novgorod has received the route," declared another.

"They say that the Tartars menace Tomsk!"

"Here is the head of police!" was shouted on every side. A loud clapping of hands was suddenly raised, which subdued by degrees, and finally was succeeded by absolute silence.

The head of the police arrived in the middle of the central square, and it was seen by all that he held in his hand a dispatch.

Then, in a loud voice, he read the following announcement:

"By orders of the Governor of Nijni-Novgorod:

"1st. All Russian subjects are forbidden to quit the province upon any pretext whatever.

"2nd. All strangers of Asiatic origin are commanded to leave the province within twenty-four hours."

CHAPTER VI.

Howe'er disastrous those measures might prove to private interests, they were, under the circumstances, perfectly justifiable.

All Russian subjects are forbidden to leave the province; if Ivan Ogareff was still in the province, this would at any rate prevent him, unless with the greatest difficulty, from rejoining Feofar-Khan, and becoming a formidable lieutenant to the Tartar chief.

All foreigners of Asiatic origin are ordered to leave the province in four and twenty hours; this would send off in a body all the traders from Central Asia, as well as the bands of Bohemians, gypsies, etc., having more or less sympathy with the Tartar of Mongolian populations, and which had been collected together at the fair. So many heads, so many spies, and undoubtedly the state of affairs required their expulsion.

It is easy to understand the effect produced by these two thunder-claps bursting over a town like Nijni-Novgorod, so densely crowded with visitors, and that of all other places in Russia. The natives, therefore, whom business called beyond the Siberian frontier, could not leave the province, for a time at least. The tenor of the first article of the order was express; it admitted of no exception. All private interests must yield to the public weal. As to the second article of the proclamation, the order of expulsion which it contained admitted of no evasion either. It only concerned foreigners of Asiatic origin, but these could do nothing but pack up their merchandise and go back the way they came. As to the mountebanks, of which there was a considerable number, and who had nearly a thousand versts to do before they could reach the nearest frontier, for them it was simply misery.

At first there rose against this unusual measure a murmur of protestation a cry of despair, but this was quickly suppressed by the presence of the Cossacks and agent of police.

Immediately, what might be called the exodus from the immense plain began. The awnings in front of the stalls were folded up; the theaters were taken to pieces; the song and the dance ceased; the shows were silent; the files were put out; the acrobats' ropes were lowered; the old broken-winded horses of the traveling vans came back from their

sheds. Agents and soldiers with whip or stick stimulated the tardy ones, and made nothing of pulling down the tents even before the poor Bohemians had left them.

Under these energetic measures the square of Nijni-Novgorod would, it was evident, be entirely evacuated before the evening, and to the tumult of the great fair would succeed the silence of the desert.

It must again be repeated—for it was a necessary aggravation of these severe measures—that to all of these nomads chiefly concerned in the order of expulsion even the steppes of Siberia were forbidden, and they would be obliged to hasten to the south of the Caspian Sea, either to Persia, Turkey, or the plains of Turkestan. The posts of the Ural, and the mountains which form, as it were, a prolongation of the river along the Russian frontier, they were not allowed to pass. They were therefore under the necessity of traveling a thousand versts before they could tread a free soil.

Just as the reading of the proclamation by the head of the police came to an end, an idea darted instinctively into the mind of Michael Strogoff.

"What a singular coincidence," thought he, "between this proclamation expelling all foreigners of Asiatic origin and the words which I heard this evening between two gypsies of the Zingari race: 'The Father himself sends us where we wish to go; that old man said. But the Father is the Emperor. He is never called anything else among the people. How could these gypsies have foreseen the measure against them? How could they have known it beforehand, and where do they wish to go? Those are suspicious people, and it seems to me that to them the government proclamation must be more useful than injurious.'"

But these reflections, though certainly correct, were completely dispelled by another, which drove every other thought out of Michael's mind. He forgot the Zingaris, their suspicious words, the strange coincidence which resulted from the proclamation. The remembrance of the young Livonian girl suddenly rushed into his mind.

"Poor child!" he thought to himself. "She cannot now cross the frontier."

In truth the young girl was from Riga; she was Livonian, consequently Russian, and now could not leave Russian territory! The permit which had been given her before the new measures had