## Michael Strogoff,

THE COURIER OF THE CZAR.

By Jules Verne.

CHAPTER XV .- CONTINUED.

In buying it at Omsk, he had been lucky and taking him to that postmaster, the gener ous mujik had rendered him a great service. Besides, if Michael Strogoff had already taken a fancy to his horse, the beast itself seemed to conform little by little to the futigues of such a journey, and by allowing it a few hours rest daily, its rider might hope that it would bear him beyond the invaded provinces.

Hence, during the evening and the night of 2d and 3d of August, Michael Strogoff remained in his hotel on the outskirts of the city; hotel little patronized, and thus sheltered from curious and importunate visitors.

Broken with fatigue, he went to bed, after having taken care that his horse was well provided for the night; but he could only obtain a broken and intermittent slumber. Too many remembrances, too many anxieties, assailed him. The image of his old mother, that of his young and intrepid companion left behind him, both without protection, passed alternately before his mind, and were intermixed in all his thoughts.

Then he thought of his mission, which he had sworn to fulfil: of what he had seen since his departure from Moscow, proving to him more and more how important it was. The movement was of the most serious character, and the complicity of Ogwess rendered it more dreadful still. And when his eyes fell on the letter bearing the imperial scal-that letter, which, no doubt, contained the remedy for so many sufferings, the salvation of all that country, torn to pieces by war-Michriel Strogoff felt in him an intense desire to rush over the steppe, to cross, as a crow would fly, the distance to Irkutsk; to be an engle so as to rise above all obstacles; to be a hurricane to pass through the air with the rapidity of one hundred versts to the hour, to arrive, in fine, be wre the grand duke, and cry to him: Altesse! from his Majesty the Czar!"

On the following morning, at six o'clock, Michael Strop off started with the intention of making the eighty versts (eighty-five kilo-meters) from Kamsk to the the hamlet of Oubinsk. Beyond a radius of twenty versts he found again the marshes of Baraba, which no drainage could there dry up, and upon the soil of which was often a foot of water. The road was then difficult to find; but with his extreme prudence, the crossing was effected without accident.

horse to rest all night, for he wanted, the following day, to devour the one hundred versts between Oubinsk and Ikoulskoe. He started at daybreak, but unfortunately, in that part of the country, the soil of the Baraba is more and more detestable.

In fact, between Oubinsk and Kamakora, rain having been very abundant a few weeks before, had filled that depression of the land like a water-tight tub. There was even no break in the continuity of that endless network of sloughs, ponds and lakes. One of those lakes-considerable enough to be ad-Tchang by the Chinese-must be followed on | rivulets, tributaries of the Obi. its borders for more than twenty versts, and with very great difficulty.

Delays therefore occurred which all the impatience of Michael Strogoil could not prevent. He had acted wisely when he refused to take a carriage at Kamsk, for his horse passed where no vehicle could have suc-

o'clock at Ikoulskoe, and stopped till the fol-lowing morning. There was absolutely no news of war in that lost village of the Baraba. By its nature even that portion of the province situated at the fork formed by the two Tartar columns, in dividing, one on Omsk, the other on Tomsk, had escaped the horrors of the in-

But the natural difficulties were to become less at last, for if he had no unexpected delay. Michael Strogoff was to leave the Baraba on the morrow. He would then have a practical route when he would have trave traversed the one hundred and twenty-five versts (133 kilometers) remaining between him and Klorvan.
When arrived at this town he would be at

equal distance from Tomss. He would then take advice from circumstances, and very probably he would decide how to pass by that city which Feefar-Khan occupied, if the news Was correct.

But if these towns, such as Ikoulskoe, or Karguinsk, which he passed the day after, were comparatively quiet, thanks to their situntion in the Baraba, where the Tartar columns would have manuavred with difficulty, was it not to be feared, on the richer shores of the Obi. Michael Strogoff, having no more physical obstacles to overcome, would have all to apprehend from man? It was not improbable. However, if it was necessary he would not hesitate to quit the route to Irkutsk. He would evidently not hesitate to travel through the trackless steppe, and dare its dangers of starvation and death. There, in fact, he would no longer find a path, no more cities or villages; hardly even a few isolated farms, or simple buts of poor people, no doubt hospitable, but where he could hardly find the necessaries of life. Nevertheless there was no alternative. Finally at about half-past three o'clock, when being beyond Kargatsk station, Michael Strogoff left the last depressions of the Baraba, and the hard and dry soil of the Siberian territory resonnded under the feet of his horse.

He had left Moscow on the 15th of July Therefore, that day, the 5th of August. including more than seventy hours lost on the borders of the Irtych, twenty-one days had passed since be started.

Fifteen hundred versts yet remained before reaching Irkutsk.

## CHAPTER XVI.

MICHAEL STROGOFF had good reason to fear an unpleasant meeting on those plains beyond the Baraba. The fields, trampled under the feet of horses, indicated that the Tarturs had passed over them, and it could be said of the barbarians what has been said of the Turks "Where the Turk passes, grass never grows again!"

Michael Strogoff was then forced to use the most precautionary measure in crossing that country. A few scrolls of smoke which twisted above the horizon showed that towns, and hamlets were still burning. Had those fires been set by the advance guard, or was the army of the Emir already to the last limits of the province? Was Feofar-Khan in person at the government of Yeinieisk? Michael Strogoff did not know, and could decide nothing without being positive about that. Was the country so much forsaken that he would be unable to find a single Siberian to suspicious signs?

Michael Strogoff went two miles on the completely deserted road. He sought on every | ready to plunge into it, if necessary. side right and left, some house which might

was nevertheless still smoking when he approached. He saw at a few paces from the house an old man surrounded by crying coll. tions that fortunately the squadron did not dren; a woman yet young, his daughter no think it necessary to visit the bushes, but doubt, and the mother of those little ones, were about to bivouse to rest their horses, kneeling on the ground, gazing haggardly upon that scene of desolution; she was nursing a child who would soon miss her wonted nourishment. All round that family was nothing but ruin and desolation!

Michael Strogoff went to the old man. "Can you answer me?" said he, gravely."

- "Speak," answered the old man. "Have the Tartars passed here?"
- "Yes, since my house is in flames." " Was it an army or a detachment?"
- "An army, since, as far as your eye can see our fields are devastated." "Commanded by the Emir?"
- "By the Emir, since the waters of the Obi have become red."
- "And Feofar-Khan has entered Tomsk?" " Tomsk."
- "Do you know if the Tartars have taken Kolyvan ?"
- "No, since Kolyvan does not burn yet." "Thanks, friend. Can I do something for
- you and yours ?" "Nothing."
- "Good-bye.' " Adieu."

Michael Strogoff placed tweuty-five roubles on the knees of the unfortunate woman, who had not even the strength to thank him, and spurred on his horse to continue his course, interrupted for a moment.

yet, was possible. He must first provide against the long journey. Next, throw himself out of the route of Irkutsk, to turn Tomsk, after having crossed the Obi. There was no other course to pursue.

That new route once determined, Michael Strogoff had no need to hesitate an instant. He did not hesitate. Giving to his horse a more rapid and regular speed, he followed the direct route leading to the left bank of the Obi, from which he was yet forty versts dis-Will he find a boat to cross it? or, the Tartars having destroyed the skiffs of the

river, shall he be forced to cross it by swimming? He would take counsel. As to his horse, now well nigh exhausted, Michael Strogoff, after having called for what strength it had left for this last heat, must try to exchange it for another at Kolyvan. He felt that the poor beast would fail under him before long. Kolyvan then was to become a new starting point, for from that city his journey would assume new phases. As long as he traveled over the devastated country, Michael Strogoff, reaching Oubinsk, left his great difficulties remained; but if, after avoiding Tomsk, he could take the route to Irkutsk through the province of Yeniesisk,

which was not yet invaded by the destroyers,

he must reach his destination in a few days. Night had come after a quite warm day. At midnight, the darkness covered the steppe. The wind, completely still since sunset, did not disturb the perfect calmness of the atmosphere. The only sound that reached the ear was the galloping of the horse on the deserted road, and the occasional words of encouragement from its master. Amid that darkness an extreme attention was necessary to keep mitted in the geographical cathogue-called the road, bordered with ponds and small

Should be lose the road, where might he not wander? Perhaps, in a vain effort to regain it, he might, without a single friendly star to guide him, continue to hasten in a wrong direction, so that even when the kindly sun again shone, he would be so far away that, despite its aid, he might be unable, in that unfamiliar and scantily populated country to reat night Michael Strogoff arrived at nine turn to the road for perhaps even two or

three days. In that case his horse would infallibly fail him, and, forced to proceed on foot, he, too, might perish amid the dreary solitudes. Then, with his death, his master's mission would fail of accomplishment, and the emperor would never even learn whether his courier was faithless or dead.

Hence Michael advanced as rapidly as possible, but with a certain prudence. He had confidence not only in the excellence of his eyes, which pierced the darkness like those of an owl, but also in the circumspection of his horse, whose sagacity he had proved.

At this moment, Michael Strogoff, having alighted, trying to discover exactly the direction of his course, fancied that he heard a contused murmur coming from the west. It was like the noise of a far-distant clattering of the feet of horses on dry land, no doubt one or two miles behind him-a certain cadence of steps striking the ground regularly.

Michael Strogoff listened more attentively, placing his ear at the intersection of two roads.

"It is a detachment of horsemen coming by the road of Omsk," said he to himself.
"They travel swiftly, for the noise increases. Are they Russians or Tartars?"

Michael Strogoff listened again, "Yes," said he, "those horsemen come at a great speed. Before ten minutes they will be here! My horse cannot outrun them. If they are Russians I will join them. If they are Tartars, I must avoid them. But how Where can I hide myselt in this barren steppe?"

Michael Strogoff looked around and his eye discovered a mass confusedly shaded, at about a hundred steps from him on the left.

"There are some bushes," said ho. "It I seek refuge there. I perhaps expose myself to be taken, should they search here; but I have no choice! They are here!"

In a few moments Michael Strogoff, dragging his borse after him, reached a small thicket of fir trees, which the road led to. Beyond, and on this side, completely stripped of trees, the road wound between quagmires and ponds, which were separated by dwarfy bushes of reeds and heath On both sides the ground was absolutely impassable, and the troop must, of course, therefore pass in front of that little thicket, since they followed the road to Irkutsk.

Michael Strogoff threw himself under cover of the fir trees, and advancing about forty paces, he was stopped by a river which inclosed the thicket in a half circular embrace

But the shade was so dense that Michael Strogoff ran no risk of discovery unless the small grove should be carefully searched. He led his horse to the river and tied it to a tree, and then stretched himself on the skirt of the thicket to ascertain with whom he had to deal.

Hardly had Michael Strogoff placed himself behind a tree, when a confused light appeared, which was reflected here and there from a few brilliant points moving in the darkness.

"Torches!" said he. And he quickly drew back, sliding like an Indian, in the thickest portion of the grove.

As the horsemen neared the thicket, they slackened their speed. Were they lighting the road with the intention of discovering any

Michael Strogoff had reason to fear it, and, as by instinct, he slunk back to the river, The detachment arrived at the grove and

and to give opportunity to the men to take In fact, the unbridled horses began to graze

about them.

the thick grass which carpeted the ground. As to the horsemen, they stretched their limbs on the border of the road and partook of the provisions in their haversacks. Michael Strogoff had retained all his coolness, and crawling between the high shrubs, he tried to see and to hear.

Michael Strogoff saw by certain prepara-

It was a detachment coming from Omak. It was composed of Usbeck horsemen, the predominating race in Tartary, whose type is nearly similar to the Mongolians. Those men, well built, of high stature and rude and savage traits, wore covered with the "talpak," a kind of black sheepskin bonnet, and with yellowish boots of which the tips were raised in a point, like the shoe of the middle centuries. Their mantles were made of calico wadded with crude cotton, bound at the waist with a belt spotted with red leather They were armed for defense with a shield, for offense with a curved sabre, a long knite and | noise. a gun hanging at their saddle-bow. Over their shoulders draped a burnous of felt of a brilliant color.

The horses grazing free on the skirt of the wood, were of Usbeck race, like their owners. He had learned one thing; by all means he must avoid passing by Tomsk. To go to but endowed with a remarkable strength, are Kolyvan, where the Tartars had not arrived those running beasts which know no other These animals, smaller than the Turco horse, speed than the gallop.

That detachment was led by a "pendjabaschi," i.e., a commander of fifty men, having under his orders a "deh-baschi," commanding only ten men.

Those two officers were a casque and a half coat of mail; small trumpets at their saddlebow formed the distinctive sign of their rank. The penja-baschi had ordered his men to rest after a long journey. In talking, the second officer and himself smoking the avoid discovery by jumping on his saddle only beng," a leaf of hemp which forms the base at the latest possible moment, and only after of "haschisch, of which the Asiatics use great having passed a turning point at two hundred quantities, went to and fro in the wood, so that Michael Strogost without himself being seen, could see and hear all of their movements and conversation, for they spoke in the Tartary tongue.

From the first words of that conversation the attention of Michael Strogoff was strongly interested. Indeed, it concerned him.

"That courier cannot have advanced so much ahead of us," said the pendja-baschi, and, on another hand, it is impossible for him to have taken any other route than the Baraba.'

"Who knows if he has left Omsk?" answered the deh-baschi. "Perhaps he is hidden still in some house of the city!"

"I wish it was so indeed! Colonel Ogareft would have no reason to fear that the dispatches carried by that courier would reach their destination!"

"They say he is a Siberian," replied the

deh-baschi. "As such he must know the country, and it is possible that he has left the route to Irkutsk to return to it after-

"But then we would now be shead of him," answered the pendja-baschi, " for we left two minutes after, he head the noise of seve-Omsk less than an hour after him, and we have followed the shortest route, with all the swiftness of our horses. Therefore, he is either at Omsk or we are before him at Tomsk, so as to prevent his retreat; and, in both cases he will not reach Irkutsk."

"A fierce woman, that Siberian who is evidently his mother!" said the deh-baschi. At those words the heart of Michael Strogoff leaped as if to break his breast.

"Yes," answered the pendja-baschi, "she acted well, but in denying that the supposed merchant was her son, it was too late. Colonel Ogareff could not be deceived, and as he said, be knew how to make the old witch speak, when the time came !"

As many words, as many poniard strokes for Michael Strogoff! He was recognized as a courier to the Czar! A detachment of horsemen thrown after him could not fail to intercept his way! And, supreme anguish! his mother was in the bands of the Tartars. and the cruel Ogareff thought himself able to make her speak when he desired it!

Michal Strogoff knew well that the old Siberian would not speak, and that it would cost

Michael Strogoff thought not to hate Ozareff more than he had done up to now, yet nevertheless, a wave of new hatred swelled in his heart. The infamous man who betrayed his country threatened now to torture his mother!

The conversation went on between the officers, and Michael Strogoff understood that in the neighborhood of Kolvvan, an engagement was imminent between the Muscovite troops, coming from the north, and the Tartars. A small body of two thousand Russians, announced on the lower part of the Obi, was coming by forced marches toward Tomsk. If such was the case, that body going to engage the large body of the troops of Feofar-Khan would be unavoidably annihilated; and the route to Irkutsk would then be completely in the power of the invaders.

As to himself, Micheal Strogoff learned, by a few words of the pendja-baschi, that a price was set on his head, and an order to take him dead or alive has been given.

Hence the necessity to distance the Usbecks on the route to Irkutsk, and to place the Obi between him and them. But for that, he had to fly before they would break their bivouac. Having formed that resolution, Michael Strogoff prepare to execute it.

In fact, the halt could not last long; and the pendja-baschi thought to give but an hour's rest to his men, although they had not exchanged their horses for fresh ones since leaving Omsk, and their beasts must have been as wearied as that of Michael Strogoff.

Not an instant to lose then. It was one in the morning. He must profit by the darkness which the dawn would soon; chase away, to leave the thicket and take the route; but though the night favored him, the success of such a flight appeared almost impossible

Michael Strogoff did not want to leave anything to chance. He took his time to reflect and weigh carefully the change for and against, so as to make the best in his game.

From his examination of the situation he arrived at this conclusion: He could not escape behind the grove, closed in by an arc of trees. The river lining that are was not only deep, but wide and muddy. Great reeds rendered its passage impossible. Under that slimy water one felt a miry bottom on which the foot could find no support. Besides, beyoud the water, the ground covered with bushes impeded a rapid flight, pursued without mercy and some encircled, would inevitably fall into the hand of the Tartars.

Only one practicable way remained—the great toute. To try and reach it by turning the kirt of the wood, without awaking their attention; to cross one fourth of a mile before being seen; to demand of his horse all its remaining energy aid strength, were it to fall

not be abandoned. He visited many. All halted. The riders alighted. They were empty!

A hut which he perceived among the trees to light the route for a considerable distance cross that important river—this is, what Mi-

chael Strogoff had to do.

His energy, his courage were tenfold stronger
in face of danger. His life was in jeopardy, his mission, the honor of his country, perhaps the safety of his mother, were in peril. could not hesitate, but set to work instantly. Indeed, there was no time to lose. Already a certain movement was seen among the men of the squadron. Several horsemen were going here and there on the slope of the road in front of the wood. The others were still at the foot of the trees, but their horses gathered little by little toward the center of the

grovo. Michael Strogoff at first thought to seize one of those horses, but he reflected, with reason, that they were as tired as his own. Better, then, confide in the one of which he was sure, and which had rendered him so many services. That courageous animal, hidden by a high bush of heaths, had escaped the notice of the Usbecks. These, besides, had not gone so far as the extreme limit of the wood.

Michael Strogoff, crawling on the grass, approached his horse, which was lying on the ground. He caressed it, he spoke softly in its ear, and succeeded in rousing it without At that moment-favorable circumstance-

the torches, completely consumed, sunk in

darkness, and the gloom of the night was yet intense under the cover of the trees. Michael Strogoff, having bridled and sad-That was easily seen in the light of the dled his horse, and tested the stirrups, began torches under the branches of the fir trees. to lead his beast slowly by the bridle. Besides, the intelligent animal, as if it understood what was wanted of it, followed its master without

the least noise. Yet a few Usbeck horses pricked their ears and went little by little toward the skirt of the thicket.

Michael Strogoff had his hand on his revolver, ready to crush the skull of the first Tartar cavalier who might approach him. But, fortunately, the alarm was not given and he might yet reach the angle of the wood border-

steps from the thicket. Unluckily, when about to cross the skirt of the grove, the horse of an Usbeck, scenting that of Michael Strogoff, neighed and ran after

His master went after to bring it back, but pecciving a form flying in the faint glimmer-ing of dawn, "Alerto!" roared he. Then all the men of the bivousc arose and

ran toward the road. Michael strogoff had nothing to do than to jump into the saddle and dart away.

The two officers of the detachment were in advance, encouraging their men. But Michael Strogoff was already in his saddle.

At that moment the report of a gun was heard and a ball pierced through his mantle. Without turning his head, without answer, he spurred his horse, and crossing the bushes with an enormous bound, he darted away in the direction of the Obi.

The horses of the Usbecks were unharnessed—hence he could gain a certain advance upon the pursuit of the squadron; but they would not be long in throwing themselves on his trail: and in fact, in less than ral pursuing horses which little gained on him.

The day began to dawn and objects grew visible a over large circuit. Michael Strogoff, looking back, saw a horse

man who approached him rapidly. He was the deh-baschi. That officer, with a superior horse, held the lead of the squadron and threatened to overtake the courier.

Without stopping, Michael Strogoff pointed his revolver, and with a steady hand, fired at the officer. The Usbeck fell, struck in th breast, and rolled on the ground.

But the other horsemen were close behind him, and without halting by the deh-baschi, exciting each other by their shouts of rage and revenge, spurring cruelly the flanks of their horses they surely diminished the distance between them and Michael St. ogoif.

For halfan hour, however, he k. pt veyond their clutches, but he well knew that his horse was falling, and at every instant he feared that striking against some obstacle, he would

fall forever. The light grew gradually brighter, though the sun was still under the horizon. Two miles ahead a pale line, bordered with a f.w trees, was developing itself.

It was the Obi, which runs from the southwest to the northeast, almost level with the soil, its valley being the vast steppe itself. Several times guns were fired at Michael

Strogoff, but without touching him; and several times also he unloaded his revolver at the horsemen who came too near. Each time an Usbeck rolled in the dust, greated with furious cries of his friends. But such pursuit could have but one ending

the capture of Michael Strogoff. His horse urging it to the edge of the river. The squadrou was at the time only fifty steps behind him! The Obi was absolutely

deserted-no skiff, no boat to help him over the river! "Courage, my brave horse!" cried Michael Strogoff. "Come on! A last effort!" And

he sprang into the river, which at that place measured half a mile across. The swift current was very difficult to stem The horse of Michael Strogoff had no foothold at all, hence no support. It was by swimming that he was to cut tuose waters running with the swiftness of a torrent. To

of courage. The horsemen were on the border of the river, and hesitated to throw themselves into its waters.

dare them, was, for Michael Strogoff, a miracle

But at that moment, the pendja-baschi seizing his gun, pointed it carefully at the fugitive, who already was in the middle of the river; a report, and the horse of Michael Strogoff, struck onthe flank, was engulfed with his muster.

Michael Stropoff extricated himself from his stirrups, when the animal disappeared under the waters of the river. Then suffering himself to sink below the surface just in time to avoid a hail of bullets, he succeeded in reaching the right shore of the river, and disappeared in the reeds which bristle on the shore of the Obi.

## CHAPTER XVII. MICHAEL STROGOFF was not in immediate

danger. However, his position was a terrible one. Now that the noble animal which had served him so well, had just found death in the waters of the river, how could he pursue his journey?

He was on foot, without provisions, in a de-

vastated country, chased by the pickets of the Emir, and still far distant from his destination.' "By heaven, I will accomplish my mis-

reasons! for discouragement his mind was debating. " God protect holy Russia !" ... -Michael Strogoff was onfe from the shots of

the Usbecks. These had not dared follow him into the the river, and, besides, they thought he was drowned, for after his disappearance under the current they could not see,

him reach the right bank of the Obi. But Michael Strogoff, gliding between the reeds of the slope, had reached a more elevated spot on the shore, with difficulty though, because a thick mud brought there when the river overflowed, made that place almost impassible. !!

Once on a firmer ground, Michael Strogoff decided what he was to do; avoid Tomsk, which was occupied by the Tartars.

Nevertheless he had to reach some town, and if need be, some post-relay, where he could get a horse. The horse being found, he would throw himself along unfrequented roads, and would take the Irkutsk route only when in the neighborhood of Krasnoiarsk. From that point, if he hastened, he hoped to Irtych. And now, after having witnessed still find an open road, and he could go the battle between the Russians and the Tartowards the southeast, in the provinces of the | tars in front of the city, leaving the city when Baikal Eake. At first Michael Strogoff negati | the struggle was still going on in the street to take in his real position.

"Two miles ahead, in following the Obi, was a small town picturesquely situated on a others priority in describing the stirring events. slight eminence. A few churches with their Byzantine cupolas painted in green and gold shadow, and without being seen he could see shaded the back-ground of this heaven.

That was Kolyvan, where the officers and employees of Kamsk and other cities take refuge during summer to avoid the unhealthiness of the Baraba. Kolyvan, from the news the courier of the Czar had heard, was his dispatch, while Alcide Jolivet, contrary to not yet in the hands of the enemy. The Tartar troops divided in two columns, one on the left to Omsk, the other on the right to taking the dispatch. Tomsk, neglecting the intermediate points.

The simple and logical project conceived by Michael Strogoff was to reach Kolyvan before the horsemen of the Emir, who went up the left shore of the Obi. There he was to procure a horse and clothes by all means, graph the following dispatch : and rejoin the Irkutash route through the southern plain.

It was three in the morning. The surroundings of Kolyvan, in perfect stillness, then seemed to be completely deserted. Evidently the country population, shunning the invasion which they could not resist, betook themselves to the north in the pro-

vinces of Yeniseisk. Michael Strogoff was traveling rapidly towards Kolyvan' when distant detonations

reached his ears. He stopped and distinctly heard the dull, heavy reports which shook the air, mingled with sharper and shriller sounds, the cause of which he well knew.

"That is cannon! and this is musketry!" said he. "Is the small Russian body engaged with the Tartar army? Ah, heaven grant that I arrive before them at Kolyvan.

Michael Strogoff was not mistaken. Soon the reports grew louder and more distinct, and behind, on the left of Kolyvan, smoke arose above the horizon-not in clouds, but in large spirals, produced by artillery discharges.

On the left of the Obi the Usbeck cavaliers stopped to await the result of the battle. Michael Strogoff had nothing more to fear from them. So he hastened towards the

Meanwhile, the detonations redoubled and neared very sensibly. It was no more a confused rolling but a succession of distinct cannon reports. At the same time, the smoke brought by the wind, raised in the air, and it was shown clearly that the combatants were moving rapidly towards the south. Kolyvan was to be attacked from the north. But were the Russians defending it against the Tartars, or striving to retake it from the soldiers of Feofar-Khan? He could only conjecture and the uncertainty caused great uneasiness

to Michael Strogoff. He was only half a mile from Kolyvan when long jet of flame flashed betwixt the houses of the city, and the spire of a church crumbled down in the middle of a torrent of embers and

Was the struggle already going on in Kolyso, and in that case, it was evident, liussians and Tarrars were fighting in the streets of the city. Was it the right moment to seek refuge there? Was not Michael Strogoff risking capture, and would be succeed in escaping from Kolyvan as he did from Omsk?

All those possibilities presented themselves to his mind. He hesitated for a moment Was it not better, even on foot to go to some village in the south or east, such as Diachinks for instance, and there buy a horse at

any price? This was the safer chance, and presently leaving the shores of the Obi, Michael Strogoff went straight on to the right of Kolyvan. At that moment the detonations were very violent. Soon the flames stretched forth on the left of the city. The fire had devoured a

whole quarter of Kolyvan. Michael Strogoff was running across the plain, trying to reach the cover of some trees scattered here and there, when a detachment of Tartar cavalry appeared on the right. Michael Strogoff could no louger go in

that direction. The horsemen advanced

rapidly towards the city, and it was difficult for him to escape. Suddenly, at the corner was spent, but nevertheless he succeeded in of the thicket, he saw a house which he might nerhans reach upperceived. To run, to hide himself, to ask and to take there, if need be, something to renew his strength, for he was exhausted with fatigue

and hunger, was Michael Strogoff's only resource. He fled, then, to this shelter, and diawing near he perceived that it was a telegraph station. Two wires were going east and west, and a third was stretched towards Koiyyan. One would suppose that, under the circumstances, that station would have been aban-

doned, but, as it was, Michael Strogoff could find there a refuge, wait for the night if need be, to travel again across the steppe which was searched by the Tartar pickets. Michael Strogoff hurried towards the door

of that house and opened it hastily. A single person was in the room where the dispatches were written. He was an employee, calm, cold, indifferent to all that was going on outside. Faithful to his post, he waited behind his window for the public to claim his ser-

Michael Strogeff went to him, and, with a voice broken by fatigue, he asked: "What do you know?"

"Nothing," answered the employee, smilng.
"Are the Russians and Tartars fighting?"

"People say so."

"But who are the victors?" "I don't know."

So much coolness in the midst of these terrible occurrences, so much indifference even, was hardly possible. "And is not the wire cut?" asked Michael

Strogoff. "It is cut between Kolyvan and Krasnoiarsk, but it works yet between Kolyvan and

the Russian frontier." "For the Government?" " For the Government, when they think it proper, for the public; when they pay. It is

ten kopecks a word—I wait your orders, sir." Michael Strogoff was going to answer that sion!" cried he, answering in an instant all strange operator that he had no disputch to water, when suddenly the door of the house door which Michael Strogoth had not before was abruptly opened a historic against town noticed and path are adjusted to

Michael Strogoff thought the office in ded by the Tartars, and was about to jump through the window, when he noticed that two men only entered the room, and that they

were far from being Tartar soldiers. One of them held a dispatch, written in pencir, and, outrunning the other, he was at the window of the stoical employee. In those two men Michael Strogoft was aston. ished to discover two persons he had thought never to see again. They were the correpondents Harry Blount and Alcide Jolivet, no more traveling companions, but rivals, enemies, now that they were operating on the

They had left Ichim a few hours only after the departure of Michael Strogoff, and if they arrived before him at Kolyvan in following the same route, it was because Michael Strogoff had lost three days on the borders of the they had run to the station to send away their dispatches to Europe, each seeking to rob the

Michael Strogoff kept at a distance in the and hear all. He was probably about to learn important news and know if he ought to enter Kolyvan or not.

Harry Blount, more alert than his colleague, had possession of the window and handed in his habits, stepped impatiently. "Ten kopecks a word," said the operator.

Harry Blount placed a pile of roubles on the counter, his confrere looking at him somewhat stupefied. "Well," said the employee, and, with un-

disturbed sang froid he commenced to tele-" Daily Telegraph, London. "From Kolyvan, Government of Omsk, Siberia, August 6.

"Engagement of Russian troops with Tar-That reading being made aloud, Michael Strogoff could hear all the English correspon-

dent addressed to his paper. "Russian troops repulsed with great lesses. Tartars entered Kolyvan this day."

These words ended the dispatch. "My turn new," said Alcide Jolivet, who tried to pass his dispatch addressed to his cousin of the Montmartre Faubourg.

But that did not suit the English reporter. who thought of remaining at the window as long as he should have news to transmit, as fast as fresh events might occur, so he did not give place to his confrere. "You are through!" cried Alcide Jolivet.

"I am not through," simply answered Harry Blount. And he went on writing words which he

passed to the operator, who read very quietly: "In the beginning God created heaven and earth." "They were verses from the Bible Harry Blount was telegraphing, to gain time and not give place to his rival! That would pro-

bably cast a few thousand roubles to his paper, but his paper would have the first information. France might wait! Think of the anger of Alcide Jolivet, who under other circumstances would have appreciated the joke. He even insisted that the

operator should take his dispatches in preference to those of his confrere. "That is the right of the gentleman," said the employee, cooly, in pointing to Harry Blount, smiling kindly to him.

And he continued to transmit to the Daily Telegraph the first book of the Holy Writ. While he was operating, Harry Blount went to the window, and with his glass he observed what was going on about Kolyvan, so as to

complete his information. A tew minutes later, he took his place again at the office window and added to his

elegram :

"Two churches in flames. The fire seems to gain on the right. The earth was without form and void; darkness covered the face of the earth." Alcide Jolivet had simply a ferocious desire

to strangle the honorable reporter of the Daily Telegraph. He once more called upon the employee,

who again cooly answered : "It is his right, sir, it is his right-ten kopecks a word." And he telegraphed the following news

"Russian refugees escape the city. And God said: Let there be light, and there was

handed him by Blount:

Alcide Jolivet was literally transported with rage. Meanwhile Harry Blount was again at the outside window, but this time, absent-minded probably on account of the spectacle he saw, he made his observations too long. So, when the operator had finished sending the third verse of the Bible, Alcide Jolivet quietly took his place at the wicket, and as his colleague had done, placed a respectable pile of roubles on the desk and handed his despatch, which

the employee read aloud: "Madeline Jolivet, 10 Faubourg Mont-martre, Paris Kolyvan, Government of Omsk, August 6th. Runaways fly from the city-Russians beaten. Furious pursuit by the Tar-

And when Harry Blount came back, he heard Alcide Jolivet completing his telegram. singing musingly with mockery: "There was a little man all dressed in gray, in Paris. Alcide Jolivet thought it better not to mix sacred things with profane as his colleague had done, and he answered by a joyful chorus of Beranger to the verses of the Bible.

At that moment a commotion shook the telegraph office. A shell had entered the wall, and a cloud of dust filled the waitingroom. Alcide Jolivet was just finishing his verse: As red as an apple, who, without a penny, but without stopping, threw himself on the shell, took it on his hands before it exploded,

threw it out of the window and came back to the wicket! It was all done in an instant. In five seconds the shell burst outside. Then continuing his telegram with perfect coolness, Alcide Jolivet wrote: "A shell of sixty pounds weight has burst

through the wall of the telegraph office. Expect some others of same calibre." For Michael Strogoff there was no room to doubt but that the Russians were repulsed from Kolyvan. His last resource was then to hasten over the southern plain. But then the great discharge of guns was

heard terribly near the telegraph station, and a hail-storm of bullets crashed through the window. Harry Blount, atruck on the shoulder fell. Alcide Jolivet was at that moment abo /0 transmit this supplement to his dispatch's

"Hurry Blount, reporter of the Daily Tele-

graph, fall at my side, struck with a bomb-When the operator told him with imperturable coolness: "Sir, the wire is broken."

And leaving his window, he quietly took his hat, which, he brushed with his sleeve, and send; that he wanted only a little bread and always smiling, went out through a small