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## THE COURIER OF THE CZAR

By Jules Verne

Ivan Ogareff, having every faculty of seeing, observing and acting, spent the next day in visiting the fortifications. Everywhere he was received with cordial congratulations by the officers, soldiers and citizens. This courier of the czar was like a tie which bound them to the empire. Ivan Ogareff therefore recounted to them all the details of his journey, and this with a vivacity that was never wanting. Then, without at first insisting on it too much, he spoke of the gravity of the situation, exaggerating, as he had done while addressing the grand duke, both the successes of the Tartars and the forces at their disposal. To listen to him, the savor would be insufficient should it even come, and it was to be feared that a battle fought under the walls of Irkutsk would be as disastrous as the battles of Kalyan, of Tomsk and of Krasnoyarsk.

Ivan Ogareff was not at first lavish in these sinister insinuations. He took care they should penetrate by degrees into the minds of the defenders of Irkutsk. He seemed to answer only when a great many questions were put to him and then as though with regret. In any case he added always that it must defend itself to the last man, and they must blow it up rather than surrender it!

If the defenders of Irkutsk could have been discouraged, Ivan Ogareff had chosen an efficient means. But the garrison and population of Irkutsk were too patriotic to allow themselves to be frightened. Of those soldiers, of those citizens, shut up in an isolated town at the farthest end of the Asiatic world, not one had dreamed of speaking of capitulation. The disdain of Russia for those barbarians was without any fear of exposing himself to the missiles of the besiegers, whose first posts were less than a verst from the ramparts. He knew well that he was recognized. He had had a glimpse of a shadow which had glided to the foot of the ramparts.

A circumstance altogether unnatural was the cause, from his arrival at Irkutsk, of there being frequent relations between Ivan Ogareff and one of its bravest defenders, Wassili Feodor. One knows with what anxiety this unhappy father was devoured. If his daughter, Nadia Feodor, had left Russia at the date assigned by the last letter he had received from Riga, what had become of her? Was she still trying to traverse the invaded provinces, or, rather, had she already been for a long time a prisoner? Wassili Feodor could not find any solace for his sorrow except when he had some opportunity of fighting against the Tartars, opportunities which were too seldom for his liking. Now, when Wassili Feodor was informed of the unexpected arrival of a courier from the czar he had a presentiment that this courier could give him some tidings of his daughter. It was only a very slight hope, but still he clung to it.

Wassili Feodor went to find Ivan Ogareff, who availed himself of this opportunity to have daily relations with the commandant. Did the renegade think he could turn that circumstance to his own profit? Did he judge all men by himself? Could he believe that a Russian, even a political exile, could be so mean as to betray his country? Whatever was the case, Ivan Ogareff met with skillfully feigned eagerness all the advances made to him by the father of Nadia. The latter, the very next morning after the arrival of the pretended courier, went to the palace of the governor general. There he informed Ivan Ogareff of the circumstances under which his daughter had to leave European Russia and told him now what was his anxiety in her regard.

Ivan Ogareff did not know Nadia, although he had met her at the posthouse of Ichin the day on which she was there with Michael Strogoff. But then he had paid no more attention to her than the two journalists, who were at the same time in the posthouse. He could not therefore give any news of his daughter to Wassili Feodor.

"But at what time," asked Ivan Ogareff, "had your daughter to leave Russian territory?"

"At nearly the same time as you," replied Wassili Feodor.

"I quitted Moscow on the 15th of July."

"And Nadia also had to leave Moscow on that date. Her letter told me so expressly."

"She was, at Moscow on the 15th of July?" asked Ivan Ogareff.

"Yes, certainly at that date."

"Very well," replied Ivan Ogareff. Then, recollecting himself, he added:

"But, no; I was forgetting. I was about to confound dates. It is unfortunately too probable that your daughter has had to cross the frontier, and only one hope remains—that she may have stopped on receiving news of the Tartar invasion!"

Wassili Feodor hung down his head. He knew Nadia, and he knew well that nothing would prevent her setting off. By this statement Ivan Ogareff had just committed gratuitously an act of real cruelty. With one word he could reassure Wassili Feodor.

Although Nadia had passed the frontier under the circumstances previously described, Wassili Feodor, by com-

paring the date at which his daughter was certainly at Nijni Novgorod and the date of the order forbidding any one to leave it, would without doubt draw this conclusion—that Nadia could not have been exposed to the dangers of an invasion and that she was still, in spite of herself, on the European territory of the empire.

Ivan Ogareff might have said that word. He did not say it. Wassili Feodor withdrew heartbroken. After that interview his last hope was destroyed. During the two following days the grand duke several times asked for the pretended Michael Strogoff and had him repeat all that he had heard in the imperial cabinet of the New palace. Ivan Ogareff, prepared for all those questions, answered without ever hesitating. He did not conceal designedly that the government of the czar had been altogether taken by surprise by the invasion; that the rising had been prepared with the greatest secrecy; that the Tartars were already masters of the line of the Obi when the news reached Moscow, and finally that nothing was ready in the Russian provinces to throw into Siberia troops sufficient to repel the invaders.

Afterward Ivan Ogareff, entirely free in his movements, began to study Irkutsk, the state of its fortifications, their weak points, in order eventually to make use of those observations if any circumstance should prevent the consummation of his treason. He devoted himself more particularly to the examination of the Bolchala gate, which he intended treacherously to surrender. Twice at night he came to inspect that gate and the fortifications around it. He walked about there without any fear of exposing himself to the missiles of the besiegers, whose first posts were less than a verst from the ramparts. He knew well that he was recognized. He had had a glimpse of a shadow which had glided to the foot of the ramparts.

Sangarre, risking her life, had just come to try to put herself in communication with Ivan Ogareff. Besides, the besieged for two days had enjoyed a tranquillity to which they had not been accustomed since the Tartars first invested Irkutsk. It was by order of Ivan Ogareff.

The lieutenant of Feofar-Khan had wished that all attempts to carry the town by sheer force should be suspended. Thus after his arrival at Irkutsk the artillery was absolutely silent. Perhaps at least he hoped so—the vigilance of the besieged would be somewhat relaxed. In any case, at the outpost several thousand Tartars were ready to hurl themselves against the gate when deprived of its defenders, when Ivan Ogareff should let them know the hour for action.

Meanwhile that could not be long delayed. They must make an end of it before the Russian corps should arrive in sight of Irkutsk. The resolution of Ivan Ogareff was taken, and that very night from the top of the rampart a note fell into the hands of Sangarre. It was the following night, the night from the 5th to the 6th of October, at 2 o'clock in the morning, that Ivan Ogareff had fixed for delivering up Irkutsk to the Tartars.

**CHAPTER XIX.**

HE plans of Ivan Ogareff had been laid with the greatest care, and, unless some unlikely circumstance should occur, they must succeed. It was necessary that the Bolchala gate should be without defenders at the moment when he should deliver it up to the Tartars. Thus at that moment it would be indispensable that the attention of the besieged should be drawn to another point of the city; hence a diversion agreed upon with the emir. That diversion had to take place along the suburbs of Irkutsk, up and down the right bank of the river.

The attack on those two points would be made very earnestly and at the same time a feigned attempt to cross the Angara on its left bank. The Bolchala gate would then be probably abandoned, especially as on that side the advance posts, which were said to be at some distance off, would seem to have been collected together.

The fifth day of October had come. Before twenty-four hours the capital of eastern Siberia ought to be in the hands of the emir and the grand duke in the power of Ivan Ogareff. During all that day an unusual movement was taking place in the camp of the Angara. From the windows of the palace and from the houses of the right bank one could see distinctly that important preparations were being made on the opposite heights.

Numerous Tartar detachments were seen moving toward the camp and thus hourly re-enforcing the troops of the emir. This was the preparation for the diversion which had been agreed upon, and it was being made in the most ostentatious manner. Moreover, Ivan Ogareff did not conceal from the grand duke that some attack was to be feared on that side. He knew, he said, that an assault would be made at the two extremities of the town along the river; and he counseled the grand duke

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to re-enforce those two points more directly menaced.

The preparations that had been noticed, coming to the support of Ivan Ogareff's recommendations, it was necessary to take some account of them. Thus after a council of war which was held at the palace orders were given to concentrate the defense on the right bank of the Angara and at the two extremities of the town, where the fortified terraces rested on the river.

This was precisely what Ivan Ogareff wished. He evidently did not reckon that the Bolchala gate would remain without defenders, but they would be there only in a small number. Besides, Ivan Ogareff was about to give to the diversion such importance that the grand duke would be obliged to oppose it with all his disposable forces.

And indeed an incident of an exceptional gravity, devised by Ivan Ogareff, was to powerfully aid in the accomplishment of his projects. For even if Irkutsk had not been attacked at points distant from the Bolchala gate and along the right bank of the river that incident would have sufficed to draw the chief body of the defenders to the place where Ivan Ogareff wished precisely to bring them. It would cause at the same time a most terrible catastrophe.

All the chances were then that the gate, being free at the hour fixed, would be given up to the thousands of Tartars who were waiting under the thick cover of the forest on the east. During that day the garrison and population of Irkutsk were constantly on the alert. All the measures which were required to repel an attack on points never before threatened were taken.

The grand duke and General Voronoff visited the various posts which had been strengthened by their orders. The picked corps of Wassili Feodor occupied the north of the town, but with the injunction to march at once to where the danger should be most pressing. The right bank of the Angara was protected by the artillery at their disposal.

With these measures taken in time, thanks to the opportune recommendations of Ivan Ogareff, there was every reason to hope that the prepared attack would not succeed. In that case the Tartars, discouraged for the time, without doubt would defer for a few days any new attack against the town. Besides, the troops expected by the grand duke might arrive any hour. The safety or the loss of Irkutsk hung on a thread.

**To be Continued.**

**JINGLES AND JESTS.**

**The Spirit of Christmas.**  
All hail the genial time of year  
When every heart is kind,  
When far and near there is good cheer  
And care is left behind.

Old feuds forgot, old hates aside,  
Now hearty clasps of hand  
While far and wide at Christmastide  
Love reigns throughout the land.

Forgive, forget, a truce to pride;  
Healed are all friendship's rifts.  
At gay Yuletide on every side  
We're "worked" for Christmas gifts.

**Queer.**  
"It's mighty hard to judge by appearances," said Uncle Eben. "When you see a man wif a new suit o' clothes, you nebber kin tell whether he's got a whole lot o' money or whether he's jes' done spent it."

**The Professor.**  
"And yet," said the professor, struggling with a burr and blackened steak of unusual toughness which the cook lady had just brought in, "they say woman's work is never done!"

**The Saddest Days.**  
These are the saddest days; once more, in spite of all advice,  
Dear little Willie lies away  
With little Reginald, and they,  
Of course, break through the ice.

**THE LADIES**

know a stylish carriage when they see one, and for that reason we like to have them call and look over the beauties we have set up on the floor. Our advice to men is to bring the ladies with them when they select a new vehicle. They will know what best suits the case.

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