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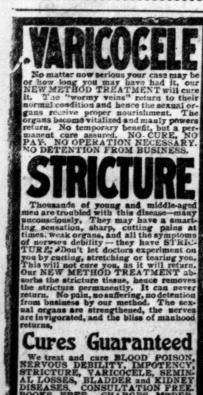
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## THE COURIER OF THE CZAR By Jules Verne

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 supreme 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 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 ctured 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 patriot ism. Before many hours, if heaven should at length favor them, she would be in his arms, reciting to him the last words of her mother, and nothing

should again separate them. The raft still moved on, unperceived amid the mass of floating ice. Up to this time no Tartar detachment had been signaled on the high banks of the Angara, and this indicated that the raft had not as yet come on a line

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-

The Knife | jiks took up again their boathooks, 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!" "Look! The blocks of ice are thickening on the left!"

boathook!" "Before an hour we shall be stop-

"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 ceased to make headway, the fugitives would not only never reach Irkutsk, but they would be obliged to abandon

their floating apparatus, which, crushed by the ice blocks, would not be long in sinking under the waters. The willow bindings were already breaking, the fir trunks, violently separated, were becoming entangled under the hard crust, and soon the unfortunate people would have no other refuge than the ice itself. Then, when daylight should come, they would be perceived by the Tartars and massacred without pity.

Michael Strogoff returned to the back part of the raft, where Nadia was waiting for him. He approached the young girl, he took her hand and put to her that invariable question. "Nadia, are you ready?" to which she answered as

"I am ready." For some versts more the raft continued 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 lost by having to make long turnings. Here they must escape landing on the ice; there they must take a narrow pass between it-

in fine, many anxious drawbacks. And now only a few hours of the night remained. If the fugitives did not reach Irkutsk before 5 o'clock in the morning, they must give 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 alogether. 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 narrowed to not more than half its normal breadth; hence the accumulation of ice blocks, which were by little and little 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 intensity was redoubling. At 500 paces down the river again became wide, and ice blocks, detaching themselves by little and little from the lower edge of that field, continued to float down to Irkutsk; hence it is probable that without that parcowing of the banks the barrier would narrowing of the banks the barrier would not have been formed, and the raft could have continued to descend the current. But the eyil was irreparable, and the

reaching the end of their journey. If they had had at their disposal the tools which the whalers usually employ to open out canals across the icefields, if they had been able to cut this field as far as the place where the river became wider, perhaps the time would not have been wanting, but not a single saw, not a pickax, nothing with which to cut the crust, which the extreme cold had rendered as hard as granite. What should they do?

At that moment rifle shots were heard on the right bank of the Angara. A shower of bullets was directed upon the raft. Had the unhappy men been perceived? Evidently, for other detonations resounded on the left bank. The fugitives, caught between two fires, became a target for the Tartar marksmen. Some were wounded by these balls, although in the midst of the great darkness they only fell by chance, "Come, Nadia," whispered Michael Strogoff in the ear of the young girl. Without making any observation,

ready for everything, Nadia took the hand of Michael Strogoff. "I am thinking of crossing the bar-rier," he said to her in a low voice. "Guide me, but let no see us leave

Nadia obeyed. Michael Strogoff and she glided quickly over the surface of the icefield in a silence that was broken

here and there by the firing.

Nadia crept on in front of Michael
Strogoff. The balls fell around them like a shower of hailstones and crashed upon the ice. The surface of the field, rugged and with sharp edges, made their hands bleed, but still they kept advancing.

Ten minutes afterward the lower border of the barrier was reached. There the waters of the Angara again became free. A few large blocks of ice, becoming by degrees detached from the field and floating with the current, 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 tengue. "Come," said Nadia.

And both lay down on this morsel of ice, which a slight rocking loosened from the barrier. The block began to make its way down the river. The river itself be

came wider, and the route was free. hear the firing of guns, the cries of distress, 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!" 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 they might sink under the water. Being caught in the stream, it followed the middle of the river, and it would not be necessary to give it an oblique 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, he cried:

"Ah, God himself is against us!"

CHAPTER XVII.



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

did position for its churches, crowned by a high cathedral, and for its houses, built in picturesque disorder along its

. To be Continuel.

The London Daily Mail publishes an alarmist dispatch from Madrid giving opinions of various prominent politicians concerning the gloomy outlook in Spain and their fears that the coronation of King Alfonso next May may be the signal for a revolution.

The old maid may work the census man, but she can't deceive the old man with the scythe. Father Time is the daddy of them all.

The littleness of a service has nothing whatever to do with its value in God's eyes. God appraises all service by the spirit in which it is performed.



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Frame house, 10 rooms and summer kitchen, lot 60 ft. by 104 ft., \$800.00. Frame house, 8 rooms and summer kitchen, lot 60 ft. by 208 feet, good

stable, \$1,100.00. Two vacant lots, each 60 feet front, by 104 feet. se, 8 rooms, lot 60 feet by 208

feet. \$1,000. Farm in Howard, 32 1-2 acres, house, stable and orchard, \$1,000.

Farm in Chatham Township, 110 acres. All cleared. Good house, barn, stables and sheds, \$5,700.00. Will trade for 25 or 50 acre farm, part

payment. Farm in Township of Raleigh, 50 acres. All cleared. Good houses and

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