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## THE COURIER OF THE CZAR

By Jules Verne

task?"

The old sailor did not, therefore, expect any more fugitives at the port of Livenitchnaia, and yet at the moment the raft was leaving the shore two men, coming out of a deserted house, ran with great haste to the bank.

Nadia, sitting at the back part of the raft, looked at them in a listless man-

A cry was about to escape her. She seized the hand of Michael Strogoff, who at that moment raised his head. "What is the matter with you, Na-

dia?" he asked. "Our two fellow travelers, Michaelthat Frenchman and that Englishman whom we met in the defiles of the Ural mountains."

Michael Strogoff shuddered, for the strict incognito from which he did not wish to depart was in danger of being

unveiled. And in reality it was not any longer Nicholas Korpanoff whom Alcide Jolivet and Harry Blount were about to see in him now, but the true Michael Strogoff, the courier of the czar. The journalists had already met him twice since their separation at the posthouse of Ichim-the first time at the camp of Zabedeiro, when he cut with the blow of the knout the face of Ivan Ogareff, the second time at Tomsk, when he was condemned by the emir. They knew therefore what to think of him and his true position as courier of the czar. Michael Strogoff quickly took up his

"Nadia," said he, "when that Frenchman and Englishman shall come on board beg them to come up to me." They were indeed Harry Blount and

Alcide Jolivet, whom not chance, but the force of events, had conducted to the port of Livenitchnaia, just as they had led Michael Strogoff.

The reader knows that after having been present at the triumphal entry of the Tartars into Tomsk they had gone away before the savage execution which terminated the feast. They had no doubt but their old fellow traveler had been put to death, and they were quite unaware that he had been only made blind by order of the emir.

Then, having procured horses, they had abandoned Tomsk that very night, with the fixed intention of dating henceforth their articles from Russian camps of eastern Siberia.

Alcide Jolivet and Marry Blount set out for Irkutsk by forced marches. They had great hopes of outstripping Feofar-Khan, and most certainly they would have done so had not a third column unexpectedly made its appearance, having come from the southern provinces of the Yenisei. Like Michael Strogoff, they were cut off before having even reached the Dinka. Hence they were again compelled to go down as far as Lake Baikal.

When they arrived at Livenitchnaia, the port was already deserted. On any other side it was impossible for them to enter Irkutsk, which was invested by the Tartar armies. They had been there for three days,

and very much embarrassed, when the raft arrived.

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

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

"Here one does not pay anything." gravely answered the old mariner. 'One risks his life; that is all." The two journalists embarked, and

Nadia saw them take their place in the fore part of the raft. Harry Blount was always the cold Englishman who had scarcely addressed a word to her during the whole jour ney across the Ural mountains. Alcide

Jolivet seemed a little more grave than usual, and one would acknowledge that his gravity was justified by that of the circumstances. Alcide Jolivet was then installed on the fore part of the raft, when he felt a hand rest on his arm. He turned round and recognized Nadia, the sister

of him who was no longer Nicholas Korpanoff, but Michael Strogoff, courier of the czar. A cry of surprise was about to escape him when he saw the young girl place her finger on her lips.

"Come," said Nadia to him. And, assuming an air of indifference Alcide Jolivet; making a sign to Harry Blount to accompany him, followed ber. But if the surprise of the journalists was great at meeting Nadia on that

raft it was without limits when they perceived Michael Strogoff, whom they could not believe to be still alive. Michael Strogoff had not moved at their approach.

Alcide Jolivet had turned himself to-

ward the young girl. "Gentlemen, he does not see you," said the young girl. "The Tartars have burned out his eyes! My poor brother is blind!"

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

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

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

"On my faith as a gentleman," added Harry Blount.

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

"I prefer to act alone," said Michael Strogoff. "But those scoundrels have burned

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

already below zero.

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

He was certain that the Tartars were actually investing Irkutsk and that the three columns had already formed a ction. One could not therefore doubt that the emir and Ivan Ogareff were before the capital.

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

past up to the moment when Alcide Jolivet thought it his duty to say to Michael Strogoff: "We almost owe you some excuses for not having shaken hands with you before our separation at the posthouse

"No; you had a right to believe me a coward."

"Anyhow," added Alcide Jolivet, "you have splendidly whipped that villain, and he will carry the marks of it a long

"No, not a long time," simply answered Michael Strogoff.

In half an hour after the departure from Livenitchnaia Alcide Jolivet and Harry Blount had heard all the details of the cruel trials through which Michael Strogoff and his companion had successively passed. They could not but openly admire an energy which the devotedness of the young girl alone had been able to equal. And of Michael Strogoff they had formed the. very same opinion which had been so well expressed by the czar at Moscow-"In truth, he is a man!"

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

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

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

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

. To be Continuel. PANAMA SAFE.

Panama, Jan. 21.—The exchange of prisoners was responsible for yester-day's disaster to the Government. the former the Revolutionists heard of the plans of the Government. The Padilla, which had been painted white, advanced unrecognized to a spot about 300 meters from the Lautaro, at which she began firing. The position of the latter prevented her position of the latter prevented her from using her two big guns mounted forward, but she returned the Padil-la's fire with her small after guns. Her gunner, however, was the first man ikiled, and the foreign crew of the Lautaro refused to obey orders. Gen. Alban, a veteran officer, has been appointed military commander of the appointed military commander of the district. Senor Arjona is the civil governor. The capture of Panama by the Revolutionists is considered impossible, owing to the number of Government ironys here. ernment troops here.

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