THE COURIER OF THE CZAR.

By Jules Verne.

CHAPTER XI .- CONTINUED.

Walking along, Alcide Jolivet chattered away as usual, with his invariable good humor.

"Faith, Mr. Korpanoff," said he to Michael, "you have indeed got us out of a bad scrape." "I have only done, sir," replied Michael, what any one would have done in my place. If travelers did not help one another, there might as well be no roads at all."

"Well, sir, you have done us a good turn, and if you are going farther in these steppes we may possibly meet again, and---

Alcide Jolivet did not put any direct question to Michael as to where he was going, but the latter, not wishing it to be suspected that he had anything conceal, at once replied:

"I am bound for Omsk, gentlemen." "Mr. Blount and I," replied Alcide, "go where danger is certainly to be found, and without doubt news also."

"To the invaded provinces?" asked Michael with some earnestness. "Exactly so, Mr. Korpanoff; and we may

possibly meet there." "Indeed, sir," replied Michael, "I have little love for cannon-balls or lance-points, and am by nature too great a lover of peace to ven-

ture where fighting is going on.' shall separate so soon! But on leaving ness. Ekaterenburg it may be our fortunate fate to travel together if only for a few days."

"Do you go on to Omsk?" asked Michael, after a moment's reflection. "We know nothing as yet," replied Alcide; "But we shall certainly go as far as Ishim,

and once there, our movements must depend on circumstances." "Well then, gentlemen," said Michael, we will be fellow travelers as far as Ishim."

Michael would certainly have preferred to travel alone, but he could not, without appearing at least singular, seek to separate himself from the two reporters, who were taking the same road that he was. Besides, since Alcide and his companion intended to make some stay at Ishim. he thought it rather convenient than otherwise to make that part of the journey in their company. Then in a perfectly indifferent tone he remarked: "Do you know, with any degree of certainty

where this Tarter invasion is?"

"Indeed, sir," replied Alcide, "we only know what they said at Perm. Feofar-Khan's Tartars have invaded the whole province of Semipolatinsk, and for some days, by forced marches, they have been descending the course of the Irtish. You must hurry if you wish to get to Omsk before them."

"Indeed I must," replied Michael. "It is reported also that Colonel Ogareft has succeeded in passing the frontier in disguise, and that he will not be slow in joining the Tartar chief in the revolted country."

"But how do you know it?" asked Michael, whom this news, more or less true, so directly concerned. "Oh! as these things are always known,"

replied Alcide, it is in the air." "Then have you really reason to think that Colonel Ogareff is in Siberia?"

"I myself have heard it said that he was to take the road from Kasan to Ekaterenburg.

"Ah! you know that, Mr. Jolivet?" said

Harry Blount, roused from his silence. "I know it." replied Alcide. "And do you know that he was disguised

as a gypsy!" asked Blount. "As a gypsy!" exclaimed Michael, almost

involuntarily, and he suddenly remembered his disembarking at Kasan.

"Just well enough to make a few remarks on the subject in a letter to my cousin," replied Alcide, smiling.

"You lost no time at Kasan," dryly observed the Englishman. "No, my dear fellow! and while the Cau-

casus was laying in her supply of fuel, I was employed in obtaining a store of information."

Michael no longer listened to the repartee which Harry Blount and Alcide exchanged. He was thinking of the gppsy troupe, of the old Tsigane, whose face he had not been able to see, and of the strange woman who accompanied him, and then of the peculiar glance which she had cast at him. As he was trying to recollect all the details, close by he heard "Ah! forward, sirs!" cried he.

"Hullo!" said Alcide to himself, "this quiet merchant who always avoids bullets is | nursing of some poor little infant?" in a great harry to go where they are flying about just now !"

Quickly followed by Harry Blount, who was not a man to be behind in danger, he dashed after Michael. In another instant the three were opposite the projecting rock which protected the tarantass at the turning of the road.

"A bear!" cried Michael, who could not mistake the growling. "Nadia! Nadia!" And then, drawing his cutlass from his belt, Michael bounded round the buttress behind which the young girl had promised to wait.

threw a wild glare on the scene. "As Michael reached the tarantass, a huge

It was a monstrous bear. The tempest had driven it from the woods which bristle on the Ural slopes, and it had come to seek refuge in this cave, doubtless its habitual retreat, which

of the enormous creature, breaking their traces, had escaped, and the iemschik thinking only of his beasts, leaving Nadia face to face with the bear, had gone in pursuit of

them. But the brave girl had not lost her presence of mind. The animal, which had not at first seen her, was attacking the remaining Nadia, leaving the shelter in which she had beed crouching, had run to the car-riage, taken one of Michael's revolvers, and, advancing resolutely towards the bear, had

tection behind the tarantass, but then, seeing

heard. In an instant he was on the spot. Another bound and he was between the bear and the girl. His arm made one movement upwards, and the enormous beast, ripped up by that terrible knife, fell to the ground a lifeless mass. He had executed in splendid style the famous blow of the Siberian hunters, who endeavor not to damage the precious fur of the bear, which fetches a high price. "You are not wounded, sister?" said Michael, springing to the side of the young

"No, brother," replied Nadia. At that moment the two journalists came up. Alcide seized the horse's head, and in an instant his strong wrist mastered it. His companion and he had seen Michael's rapid

stroke. "Bravo!" cried Alcide: "for a simple merchant, Mr. Korpanoff, you handle the hunters knife in a most masterly fashion."

' Most masterly, indeed," added Harry. "In Siberia," replied Michael, "we are

obliged to do a little of everything." Aicide regarded him attentively. Seen in the bright glare, his knite dripping with blood, his tall figure, his deter-mined air, his foot placed firmly on the huge carcass, he was indeed worth looking at.

"A formidable fellow," said Alcide to himself. Then advancing respectfully, his hat in his

hand, he saluted the young girl.

Nadia bowed slightly.

Alcide turning towards his companion:
"A sister worthy of the brother!" said he. Now, were I a bear I should not meddle with a couple at the same time so brave and

so charming." Harry Blount, perfectly upright, stood hat in hand, at some distance. His companion's "I am sorry; we must only regret that we casy manners only increased his usual stiff-

> At that moment the iemschik, who had succeeded in recapturing his two horses, reappeared. He cast a regretful glance at the magnificent animal lying on the ground, loth to leave it to the birds of prey, and then proceeded once more to harness his team.

Michael acquainted him with the travelers' situation, and his intention of putting one of the horses at their disposal.

"As you please," replied the iemschik.
"Only, you know, two carriages instead of one. "All right, my friend," said Alcide, who

understood the insinuation, "we will pay "Then gee up, my turtle doves!" cried the iemschik.

Nadia again took her place in the tarantass. Michael and his companions followed on foot.

It was three o'clock. The storm, now decreasing no longer, swept with terrific violence across the defile. The remainder of the ascent was rapidly performed.

When the first streaks of daybreak appeared the tarantass had reached the telga, which was still conscientiously imbedded as far as the centre of the wheels.

Such being the case, it can be easily understood how a sudden jerk would separate the front from the hinder part. One of the side horses of the tarantass was harnessed by means of cords to the remains of the telga, the reporters took their place on the seat of this singular equipage, and the two carriages started off at the same moment. They had now only to descend the Ural slopes, in doing which there was not the slightest difficulty.

Six hours afterwards the two vehicles, the tarantass preceeding the telga, arrived at Ekaterenburg, nothing, worthy of note having happened in the descent.

The first person the reporters perceived at the door of the post-house was their iemschik, who appeared to be waiting for them. This worthy Russian had a fine open coun-

tenance, and, without the slightest hesitation, he smilingly approached the travelers, and holding out his hand, in a quiet tone he demanded the usual pour-boire. This very cool request roused Harry Blount's

gorod, his voyage on board the Caucasus, and schik prudently retreated, a straight-blow of lant protector, a friend so generous and wise. the fist, in true British boxing style, would have paid him all his claims of na vodkou. Alcide Jolivet, at this burst of anger,

laughed as he had never laughed before. "But the poor devil is quite right!" he cried. "He is perfectly right, my dear fellow. It is not his fault if we did not know how to

follow him !" Then drawing several copecks from his

pocket: "Here, my friend," said he, handing them

to the iemschik; "take them. If you have not carned them, that is not your fault!" This redoubled Mr. Blount's irritation. He

even began to speak of a lawsuit against the owner of the telga. "A lawsuit in Russia, my dear fellow!"

cried Alcide. "Thiugs must indeed change should it ever be brought to a conclusion! Did you never hear the story of the wet-nurse who claimed payment for twelve months "I never heard it," replied Harry Blount.

"Then you do not know what that suckling had become by the time judgment was given in favor of the nurse?" "What was he, pray?"

"Colonel of the Imperial Guard!"

At this reply all burst into a laugh. Alcide enchanted with his own joke, drew out his note-book, and in it wrote the follow-

"Telga, a Russian carriage with four wheels, that is, when it starts; with two wheels when it arrives at its destination."

CHAPTER XII.

EKATERENBURG, geographically, is an Asiatic city, for it is situated beyond the Ural Mountains, on the farthest eastern slopes of the chain. Nevertheless, it belongs to the government of Perm; and, consequently, is included in one of the great divisions of European Russia. It is as though a morsel of Siberia lay in Russian jaws.

Neither Michael nor his companions were likely to experience the slightest difficulty in obtaining means of continuing their journey in so large a town as Ekaterenburg. It was founded in 1723, and has since become a place of considerable size, for in it is the chief mint of the empire. There also are the headquarters of the officials employed in the management of the mines. Thus the town is the centre of an important district, abounding in manufactories principally for the working and refining of gold and plating.

Just now the population of Ekaterenburg. had greatly increased; numerous Russians and Siberians, menaced by the Tartar invasion, having collected there, driven from those provinces already overrun by the hordes of Feofar-Khan, and the Kirghiz counry, which extends to the south-west of the Irtych as far as the frontiers of Turkestan.

Thus, though it had been so troublesome matter to find horses and vehicles when gong to Ekaterenburg, there was no difficulty in leaving it; for under present circumstances few travelers cared to venture on the Siberian

So it happened that Blount and Alcide had as it raised its paws to strike her down, gave not the slightest trouble in replacing, by a it the contents of the second barrel. "No; his grandmother," replied Alcide, angry at his indifference. "What age should sound telga, the famous demi-carriage which

across the Urals; and he had only to harness, three good horses to it to take him swiftly

Zaimskoe, this road has slight inclines, which gentle undulations are the first signs of the Ural Mountains. But, after Novo-Zaimskoe, begins the immense steppe which extends almost as far as Krasnoiarsk, over a space of seventeen hundred versts (about 1,122 miles.)

as to their route across the invaded country, their news-bunting instinct set them on one

This road from Ekaterenburg to Ichimwhich passes through Irkutsk—was the only one which Michael could take. But, as he did not run after news, and wished on the

"I am very bappy to make part of my journey in your company," said he to his new companions, "but I must tell you that I am most anxious to reach Omsk; for my sister and I are going to rejoin our mother. Who can say whether we shall arrive before the Tartars reach the town! I must therefore stop at the post-houses only long enough to

night." "That is exactly what we intend doing," replied Blount.

"Good," replied Michael; "but do not lose an instant. Buy or hire a carriage whose

front wheels." Half an hour afterwards the energetic Frenchman had found a tarantass as nearly as possible like Michael's, and in which he

and his companion at once seated them. Michael and Nadia once more took their

places in their carriage, and at twelve o'clock the two vehicles left the town of Ekaterenburg together,

Nadia was at last in Siberia, on that long road which led to Irkutsk. What must then have been the thoughts of the young girl? Three strong, swift horses were taking her across that land of exile where her parent was condemned to live, for how long she knew not, and so far from his native land. But she scarcely noticed those long steppes over which the tarantass was rolling, and which at one time she had despaired of ever seeing, for her eyes were gazing at the horizon beyond which she knew was her banished father. She saw nothing of the country across which she was traveling at the rate of fifteen verst an hour; nothing of these regions of Western Siberia, so different from those of the east. Here, indeed, were few cultivated fields; the soil was poor, at least at the surface, but in its bowels lay hid quantities of iron, copper, platina, and gold. There were, too, plenty of busy factories, but very few farms. How can hands be found to cultivate the land, sow the seed, and reap the harvest, when it pays better to burrow beneath the earth? The pickaxe is everywhere at work; the spade nowhere.

However, Nadia's thoughts sometimes left the provinces of Lake Baikal, and returned to her present situation. Her father's image faded away, and was replaced by that of her generous companion as he first appeared on the Wladimir railroad. She recalled his attentions during that journey, his arrival at the police station, the hearty simplicity with which he had called her sister, his kindness to her in the descent of the Volga, and then all he did for Ler on that terrible night of the storm in the Urals, when he saved her life at

Thus Nadia thought of Michael. She thanked God for having given her such a gal-She knew that she was safe with him, under his protection. No brother could have done more than he. All obstacles seemed cleared away: the performance of her journey was but a matter of time.

also thanked God for having brought about his meeting with Nadia, which at the same time enabled him to do a good action, and afforded him additional means for concealing his true character. He delighted in the young girl's calm intrepidity. Was she not indeed his sister? His feelings towards his beautiful and brave companion was rather respect than affection. He felt that hers was one of those pure and rare hearts which are held by all in high esteem.

However, Michael's dangers were now beginning since he had reached Siberian ground. If the reporters were not mistaken, if Ivan Ogareff had really passed the frontier, all his actions must be made with extreme caution. Things were now altered; Tartar spies swarmed in the Siberian provinces. His incognito once discovered, his character as courier of the Czar knowu, there was an end of his journey, and probably of his life. Michael

While such were the thoughts of those occupying the first carriage, what was happening in the second? Nothing out of the way. of na vodkau. Alcide spoke in sentences: Blount replied by monosyllables. Each looked at everything in his own light, and made notes of such incidents as occurred on the journey—few and but slightly varied-while they crossed the provinces of Western Siberia.

At each relay the reporters descended from their carriage and found themselves with Michael. Except when meals were to be taken at the post-houses, Nadia did not leave the tarantass, When obliged to breakfast or dine, she sat at table; but was always very reserved, and seldom joined in conversation.

Alcide, without going beyond the limits of strict propriety, showed that he was greatly struck by the young girl. He admired the silent energy which she showed in bearing all the fatigues of so long and difficult a jour-

nev. The forced stoppages were anything but agreeable to Michael; so he hastened the departure at each relay, roused the innkeepers, urged on the iemschiks, and expedited the harnessing of the tarantass. Then the hurried meal over-always too much burried to agree with Blount, who was a methodical eater-they started, and were driven as eagles, for they paid like princes, and, as Alcide said,

trouble himself about the girl at table. That gentleman was not in the habit of doing two things at once. She was also one of the few subjects of conversation which he did not care to discuss with his companion. Alcide having asked him, on one occasion,

half shutting his eyes. "Why, Nicholas Korpanoff's sister."

The country they were then crossing was almost a desert. The weather was fine, the sky partly clouded, the temperature more supportable. Had the carriages only possessed springs, the travelers would have had nothing to complain of in the journey. They were traveling at the same rate as post-berlins, and that is saying something for their speed.

"But very few of the Siberian peasants were to be seen in the fields. These peasants At Ichim, as we have said, the reporters in- | are remarkable for their pale, grave faces, which a celebrated traveler has compared to those of the Castilians, without the haughtiness of the latter. Here and there some villages already deserted indicated the approach of the Tartar hordes. The inhabitants, having driven off their flocks of sheep, their camels, and their horses, were taking refuge in the plains of the north. Some tribes of the wandering Kirgis, who remained faithful, had transported their tents beyond the Irtych and the Obi, to escape the depredations of the invaders.

Happily, post traveling was as yet uninter-rupted; and telegraphic communication could still be effected between places connected with the wire. At each relay horses were to be had on the usual conditions. At each telegraphic station the clerks seated at their desks, transmitted messages delivered to them, delaying for State despatches alone.

Thus far, then, Michael's journey had been accomplished satisfactorily. The courier of the Czar had in no way been impeded; and, if he could only get on to Krasnoiarsk, which was the farthest point attained by Feofar-Khan's Tartars he knew that he could arrive at Irkutsk before them. The day after the two carriages had left Ekaterenburg they reached the small town of Toulougnisk at seven o'clock in the morning, having covered two hundred and twenty versts, no event worthy of mention having occurred.

Half an hour was then devoted to dinner. This over, the travelers once more started at a rate which the promise of a certain number of copecks could alone explain. The same evening, the 22nd of July, they arrived at Tiou-

men, sixty versts farther.

Tioumen, whose population is usually ten thousand inhabitants, then contained double that number. This, the first industrial town established by the Russians in Siberia, in which may be seen a fine metal-refining factory and a bell foundry, had never before presented such an animated appearance. The correspondents immediately went off after news. That brought by Siberian fugitives from the seat of war was far from reassuring. They said, amongst other things, that Feofar-Khan's army was rapidly approaching the valley of the Ichim, and they confirmed the report that the Tartar chief was soon to be joined by Colonel Ogareff, if he had not been so already. Hence the conclusion naturally arrived at was that operations would be pushed in Eastern Siberia with the greatest

On the other hand, it had been necessary to summon the Russian troops from the European provinces of Russia chiefly : but, being still at some distance they could not oppose the invasion. However, the Cossacks of the government of Tobolsk had been advancing by forced marches toward Tomsk, in the hope of cutting off the Tartar columns.

At eight o'clock in the evening, seventyfive versts more having been accomplished by the two carriages they arrived at Yaloutor-

Horses were rapidly changed, and, on leaving the town, the river Tobol was passed in a ferry-boat. Its peaceful waters rendered this operation easy; it would, however, have to be repeated more than once in the journey, and probably under less favorable conditions.

At midnight, fifty-five versts farther, the town of Novo-Saimsk was reached, and the travelers now left behind them the country broken by tree-covered hills, the last remains of the Ural Mountains.

Siberian Here began the regular which extends to the neighborhood of Krasnoiarsk. It is a boundless plain, a vast grassy desert; earth and sky here form a circle as distinct as that traced by a sweep of the compasses. The steppe presents nothing to attract notice but the long line of the telegraph posts, their wires vibrating in the breeze like the strings of a harp. The road could be distinguished from the rest of the plain only by the clouds of fine dust which rose under the wheels of the tarantass. Had it not been for this white riband, which stretched away as far as the eye could reach the travelers might have thought themselves in a desert.

Michael and his companions again pressed rapidly forward across the steppe. The horses urged on by the iamschik, seemed to fly over the ground, for there was not the more than would be suitable for a plain Irkslightest obstacle to impede them. The tarantass was going straight for Ichim, where the two correspondents intended to stop, if laid his hand heavily on his shoulder. nothing happened to make them alter their

plans. Nearly two hundred versts separated Novo Saimsk from the town of Ichim, and before eight o'clock the next evening the distance could and should be accomplished if no time was lost. In the opinion of the iemschiks should the travelers not be great lords or high functionaries, they were worthy of being so, if it was only for their generosity in the matter

On the afternoon of the next day, the 23rd of July, the two carriages were not more than thirty versts from Ichim. Suddenly Michael caught sight of a carriage—scarcely visible among the clouds of dust-preceding them along the road. As his horses were evidently less fatigued than those of the other traveler, he would not be long in overtaking it. This was neither a tarantass nor a telga, but a post-berlin, all over dust, and looking as if it had made a long journey. The postilion was thrashing his horses with all his might, and only kept them at a gallop by dint of abuse and blows. The berlin had certainly not passed torough Novo-Saimsk and could only have struck the Irkutsk road by some less frequented route across the steppe.

Our travelers first thought, on seeing this berlin, was to get in front of it, and arrive first at the relay, so as to make sure of fresh horses. They said a word to their iemschiks, who soon brought them up with the berlin. Michael Strogoff came up first.

As he passed a head was thrust out of the window of the berlin. He had no time to see what it was like, but as he dashed by he distinctly heard this word,

But they did notstop; on the contrary, the berlin was soon distanced by the two taran-

It now became a regular race; for the horses of the berlin-no doubt excited by the sight and pace of the others-recovered their strength and kept up for some minutes. The three carriages were hidden in a cloud of dust. From this cloud issued the cracking of whips, mingled with excited shouts and exclamations of anger.

Nevertheless, the advantage remained with

perhaps more than the postmaster could provide for, at least in a short space of time. Half an hour after the berlin was left for

of the steppe. It was eight o'clock in the evening when the two carriages arrived at the posthouse in

Ichim. The news was worse and worse with regard to the invasion.

The town itself was menaced by the Tartar vanguard; and two days before the authorities had been obliged to retreat to Tobolsk. There was not an officer nor a soldier left in Ichlm. On arriving at the relay, Michael . Strogoff immediately asked for horses.

He had been fortunate in distancing the

Only three horses were in a fit state to be immediately harnessed, The others had just come in worn out from a long stage. The postmaster gave the order to put to.

As the two correspondents intended to stop at Ichim, they had to trouble themselves to and means of transport, and therefore had their carriage put away. In ten minutes Michael was told that his

tarantass was ready to start. "Good!" said he.

Ichim?"

Then turning to the two reporters, chim, the time is come for us to separate," "What, Mr. Korpanoff," said Alcide Jolivet, shall you not stop even for an hour at

"No, sir; and I also wish to leave the posthouse before the the arrival of the berlin which we distanced."

"Are you afraid that the traveler will dis pute the horses with you?" "I particularly wish to avoid any diffi-

culty." "Then, Mr. Korpanoff," said Jolivet, "it only remains for us to thank you once more for the service you rendered us, and for the pleasure we have had in traveling in your company."

"Is it possible that we shall meet you again in a few days at Omsk," added Blount.

"It is possible," answered Michael, "since I am going straight there,"

"Well, I wish you a safe journey, Mr. Korpanoff," said Alcide, "and Heaven preserve you from telgas." The two reporters held out their hands to

ing his, when the sound of a carriage was heard outside. Almost immediately the door was flung

Michael with the intention of cordially shak-

open and a man appeared. It was the traveler of the berlin, a military. looking man, apparently about forty years of age, tall, robust in figure, broad-shouldered, with a strongly-set head, and thick moustaches meeting red whiskers. He wore a plain uniform. A cavalry sabre hung at his side, and in his hand he held a short-handled whip.

"Horses," he demanded, with the air of a man accustomed to command. "I have no more disposable horses," answered the postmaster, bowing.

" I must have some this moment.' "It is impossible." "What are those horses which have just

been harnessed to the tarantass I saw at the door ?" "They belong to this traveler," answered the postmaster, pointing to Michael Strogoff. "Take them out," said the traveler, in a

Michael then advanced. "These horses are engaged by me," he said. "What does that matter? I must have

tone which admitted of no reply.

them. Come, be quick; I have no time to "I have no time to lose either," replied

Michael, endeavoring to be calm, but restraining himself with difficulty. Nadia was near him, calm, also, but secretly uneasy at a scene which it would have been

better to avoid. "Enough!" said the traveler. Then going up to the postmas "Let the horses be taken out of the tarantass and put into my berlin," he exclaimed,

with a threatening gesture.

The postmaster, much embarassed, did not know whom to ovey, and looked at Michael, who evidently had the right to resist the unjust demands of the traveler. Michael hesitated an instant. He did not wish to make use of his podorojna, which would have drawn attention to him, and he was most unwilling either by giving up his

portant not to engage in a struggle which might compromise his mission. The two reporters looked at him ready to support him should he appeal to them.

horses to delay his journey, and yet it was im-

My horses will remain in my carriage, said Michael, but without raising his tone utsk merchant. The traveler advanced towards Michael and

"Is it so?" he said in a rough voice. "You will not give up your horses to me?' "No," answered Michael. "Very well; then they shall belong to whichever of us is able to start. Defend your-

self, for I shall not spare you.' So saying the traveler drew his sabre from ita sheath, and Nadia threw herself before Michael.

Blount and Alcide Jolivet advanced towards him.

"I shall not fight," said Michael quietly, folding his arms across his chest.

"You will not fight."
"No." "Not even after this?" exclaimed the traveler. And before any one could prevent him, he struck Michael's shoulder with the handle of the whip. At this insult Michael turned deadly pale. His hands moved convulsively as if he would have knocked the brute down. But by a tremendous effort he mastered himself. A duel! it was more hamlets, he should be unable to obtain the than a delay; it was perhaps the failure of his mission. It would be better to lose some tremely anxious to reach Omsk. Perhaps hours. Yes; but to swallow this affront!

"Will yeu fight now, coward?" repeated the traveler, adding coarseness to brutality. "No," answered Michael, without moving, but looking the other straight in the face. "The horses this moment," said the man

and left the rooom. The postmaster followed The effect produced on the reporters by this incident was, not to Michael's advantage. Their discomfiture was visible. How could this strong young man allow himself to be

struck like that and not demand satisfaction

for such an insult? They contented them-

selves with bowing to him and retired, Jolivet remarking to Harry Blount: "."
"I could not have believed that of a man who is so skilful in finishing up Ural Mountain bears. Is it the case that a man can be courageous at one time and a coward at another? It is quite incomprehensible."

A moment afterwards the noise of wheels and the cracking of a whip showed that the berlin drawn by the tarantass' horses, was driving rapidly away from the post-house. Nadia, unmoved, and Michael, still quivering, remained alone in the room.

have been the blush of shame, had replaced the paleness on his manly countenance. Nadia did not doubt that powerful reasons alone could have allowed him to suffer so great a humiliation from such a man.

"Your hand, brother," said she. And at the same time her hand, with an almost maternal gesture, wiped away a tear which sprang to her companion's eye.

CHAPTER XIII.

Napla, with the clear perception of a rightminded. woman, guessed that some secret motive directed all Michael Strogoff's actions: that he, for a reason unknown to her, did not belong to herself; that he had not the power of doing what he desired; and that in this instance especially he had heroically sacrificed to duty even his resentment at the gross injury he had received.

Nadia therefore asked no explanation from Michael. Had not the hand which she had extended to him a ready replied to all that he might have been able to tell her?

Michael remained silent all the evening.

The postmaster not being able to supply them with fresh horses until the uext morning, a whole night must be passed at the house. "Well, gentlemen, since you remain at Nadia, could profit by it to take some rest, and a room was therefore prepared for her. The young girl would no doubt have pre-

ferred not to leave her companion, but she felt that he would rather be alone, and she made ready to go to her room. Just as she was about to retire she could not refrain from going up to Michael to say

good-night. "Brother," she whispered.

But he checked her with a gesture. The girl sighed and left the room. Michael Strogoff did not lie down. He could not have slept even for an hour. The place on which he had been struck by the brutal traveler felt like a burn.

"For my country and the Father," he mut

tered as he ended his evening prayer. He especially felta great wish to know who was the man who had struck him, whence he came, and where he was going. As to his face. the features of it were so deeply engraven on his memory that had no fear of ever forget-

The latter, a Siberian of the old type, came directly, and, looking rather contemptuously at the young man, waited to be questioned. "You belong to the country?" asked Michael.

Michael at last asked for the postmaster.

"Do you know that man who took my horses?" " No. "Had you never seen him before?"

"Never."

"Who do you think he was?" "A man who knows how to make himself Michael fixed his piercing gaze upon the Siberian, but the other did not quait before

"Do you dare to judge me?" exclaimed Michael. "Yes," answered the Siberian, "for there are some things that even a plain merchant

cannot receive without returning." " Blows ?" "Blows, young man. I am of an age and strength to tell you so."

Michael went up to the postmaster and la' his two powerful hands on his shoulders. Then in a peculiarly calm tone: "Be off, my friend," said he; "be off! I

could kill vou." The postmaster understood this time. "I like him better for that," he muttered. as he retired, without adding another word. At eight o'clock the next morning the 24th of July, three strong horses were harnessed to the tarantass. Michael and Nadia took their places, and Ichim, with its disagreeable remembrances, was soon left far behind.

ned during the day, Strogott ascertained that the berlin still preceded them on the road to Irkutsk, and that the traveler, as hurried as they were, never lost a minute in pursuing his way across the steppe. At four o'clock in the evening they reached Abatskaia, seventy-five versts farther on,

At the different relays at which they stop-

where the Ichim, one of the principal affluents of the Irtich, had to be crossed. This passage was rather more difficult than that of the Tobol. Indeed, the current of the Ichim was very rapid just at that place. During the Siberian winter, the rivers being all frozen to a thickness of several feet, they are easily practicable, and the traveler even crosses them without being aware of the fact, for their beds have disappeared under the snowy shaet spread uniformly over the steppe;

but in summer the difficulties of crossing are sometimes great. In fact, two hours were taken up in making the passage of the Ichin, which much exasperated Michael especially as the boatmen gave

them alarming news of the Tartar invasion. This is what they said: Some of Feofar-Khan's scouts had already appeared on both banks of the lower Ichim, in the southern parts of the government or Tobolsk. Omsk was threatened. They spoke of an engagement which had taken place between the Siberian and Tartar troops on the frontier of the great Kirghese horde—an engagement which had not been to the advantage of the Russians, who were somewhat weak in numbers in that direction. The troops had retreated from thence, and in consequence there had been a general emigration of all the peasants of the province. The boatmen spoke of horrible atrocities committed by the invaders-pillage, theft, incendiarism, murder. Such was the system of Tartar warfare.

The people fled on all sides before Feofar-Khan. Michael Strogoff's great fear was lest, in the depopulation of the towns and means of support. He was therefore exon leaving this town they would get the start of the Tartar scouts, who were coming down the valley Irtych, and would find the road open to Irkutsk.

Just at the place where the tarantass crossed the river ended what is called, in military language, "Ichim chain "-a chain sa fowers, or little wooden forts, extending nom the southern frontier of Siberia for a distance of nearly four hundred versts. Formerly these forts were occupied by detachments of Cossacks, and they protected the country against the Kirghese, as well as against the Tartars. But since the Muscovite government had be-dieved these hordes reduced to absolute submission, they had been abandoned, and now could not be used, just at the time when they would have been most useful. Many of these forts had been reduced to ashes ; and the boatmen even pointed out the smoke to Michael, rising in the southern horizon, and showing the approach of the Tartar advance-guard.

As soon as the ferry boat landed the tarantass and its occupants on the right bank of the Ichim, the journey across the steppe was resumed with all possible speed.

ilt: was seven in the evening. The sky-was cloudy Every now and then a shower of rain over his chest, was seated motionless as a fell, which laid the dust and much improved ly provided with horses. Two carriages were statue. However, a color which could not the roads. Michael Strogoff had remained

The clump of pines struck by the lightning was still burning. There was no one to be ing memorandum, destined to figure in a forth-seen. However, Michael was not to be mis- coming French and Russian dictionary: taken, a report had certainly reached him. Suddenly a dreadful growling was heard, and then another report from close to the slope.

The pines, completely enveloped in flames, animal retreated towards him.

Nadia then occurried. Two of the horses, terrified at the presence

The animal, slightly wounded in the shoulder, turned on the girl, who rushed for prothat the horse was attempting to break its traces, and knowing that if it did so, and the others were not recovered, their journey could not be continued, with the most perfect roads. coolness she again approached the bear, and,

This was the report that Michael had just | had managed to take them to Ekaterenburg. | you consider her?"

As to Michael, he retained his tarantass, / "Had I been present at her birth I might which was not much the worse for its journey have known," replied Blount curtly

over the road to Irkutsk. As far as Tioumen, and even up to Novo-

tended to stop, that is at about six hundred and thirty versts from Ekaterenburg. There they intended to be guided by circumstances either together or separately, according as track or another.

contrary to avoid the country devastated by the invaders, he determined to stop nowhere.

change horses, and must travel day and

"Whose hind wheels," added Alcidc, "are warranted to arrive at the same time as its

the peril of his own.

Michael remained buried in thought. He

felt now more than ever the weight of his responsibility.

in "Russian engles."

It need scarcely be said that Blountdid not

how old he thought the girl, "What girl?" he replied, quite seriously, " Is she his sister?"

uttered in an imperious tone: tasses.

Michael and his companions, which might be The courier of the Czar, his arms crossed very important to them if the relay was poor- over his chest, was seated motionless as a

behind, looking only a speck on the horizon

Then, going up to him as he had come to her in the police station at Nijni-Novgorod :