

THE COURIER OF THE CZAR

By Jules Verne

CHAPTER XX.

MICHAEL STROGOFF was not, had never been, blind. A purely human phenomenon, at once moral and physical, had neutralized the action of the red-hot blade which the executioner of Feofar had passed over his eyes. One remembers that at the moment of that terrible punishment Marfa Strogoff was there, stretching out her hands toward her son.

Michael Strogoff looked at her, as a son can look at his mother when it is for the last time. Streams of tears welled up from his heart to his eyes, which his high spirit tried in vain to restrain and, filling the sockets of his eyes, had thus saved his sight. The action of the heat had been destroyed just in the same manner as when a smelter, after having plunged his hand into water, thrusts it with impunity into molten iron.

Michael Strogoff had at once understood the danger he would have run in making known his secret to any one. He realized the advantages which he might gain from this situation for the accomplishment of his projects. It is because they would believe him to be blind that they would leave him his liberty.

It was necessary, then, that he should be blind, that he should be so for all, even for Nadia. In short, that he should be so everywhere and that not a gesture at any moment could cause any doubt of the sincerity of his role. His resolution was taken. Even his very life must be risked in order to give all the proof of his blindness, and one knows how he risked it.

His mother alone knew the truth, and it was on the square of Tomsk that he had whispered it in her ear when, bending over her in the shade, he had covered her with his kisses.

We can now understand how when Ivan Ogareff had placed the emperor's letter before his eyes, which he believed to be blind, Michael Strogoff had been able to read, had read that letter which disclosed the hateful designs of the traitor; hence that energy which he displayed during the second part of the journey; hence that unchanging will to reach Irkutsk and on the way there to fulfill with his own voice his mission. He knew that the town was to be given up by the traitor. He knew that the life of the grand duke was threatened. The safety of the brother of the czar and of Siberia was still in his hands.

In a few words all this history was recounted to the grand duke, and Michael Strogoff told also, and with what emotion, the part which Nadia had taken in these events.

"Who is this young girl?" asked the grand duke.

"The daughter of the exiled Wassili Feodor," answered Michael Strogoff.

"The daughter of Commander Feodor," said the grand duke, "has ceased to be the daughter of an exile. There are no more exiles at Irkutsk."

Nadia, less strong in joy than she had been in sorrow, fell at the feet of the grand duke, who raised her with one hand, while he held out the other to Michael Strogoff. An hour afterward Nadia was in the arms of her father.

Michael Strogoff, Nadia, Wassili Feodor, were reunited. It was on all sides complete happiness.

The Tartars had been repulsed in their double attack upon the town. Wassili Feodor, with his little troop, had crushed the first assaults which had presented themselves at the Bolshaya gate with the expectation of finding it open.

At the same time that the Tartars were driven back the besieged had rendered themselves masters of the fire. Before daybreak the troops of Feofar-Khan had returned to their encampments, leaving a good number of dead under the ramparts.

Among the dead was the gypsy Sangarre, who had tried in vain to rejoin Ivan Ogareff.

For two days the besiegers attempted no new assault. They were discouraged by the death of Ivan Ogareff. That man was the soul of the invasion, and he alone, by his long continued plots, had sufficient influence over the khans and their hordes to be able to lead them to the conquest of Asiatic Russia.

Meanwhile the defenders of Irkutsk had held themselves on their guard, and the investment continued, but on the 7th of October from the first streaks of day the boom of cannon resounded on the heights around Irkutsk. It was the relieving army which had arrived under the orders of General Kisely, who thus signalled his presence to the grand duke.

The Tartars did not stay any longer, they did not wish to risk a battle under the walls of Irkutsk. The camp of the Angara was immediately raised, Irkutsk was at last delivered.

With the first Russian soldiers two bands of Michael Strogoff had entered the town. They were the inseparable Blount and Jolivet. By gaining the camp of the Angara along the heights of the city and the other heights, they had been able to reach Irkutsk.

the raft. This had been put down by Alcide Jolivet in his notebook and in this manner, "Was near ending like a lemon in a bowl of punch."

Their joy was great to once more find Nadia and Michael Strogoff safe and sound, especially when they learned that their brave companion was not blind, a statement which led Harry Blount to jot down this observation: "A red-hot iron is perhaps insufficient to destroy the sensibility of the optic nerve. To be modified."

Afterward the two correspondents, well installed in Irkutsk, occupied themselves in putting in order the impressions of their journey. From thence two interesting chronicles of the Tartar invasion were sent to London and Paris, which, strange to say, only contained each other on points of less moment.

For the rest the campaign was bad for the czar and his allies. That invasion, useless as are all those that attack colossal Russia, was most fatal to them. They soon found themselves cut off by the troops of the czar, who retook successively all the conquered towns. Besides, the winter was terrible, and of those hordes, decimated by the cold, only a small number returned to the steppes of Tartary. The route from Irkutsk to the Ural mountains was free.

The grand duke was in haste to return to Moscow, but he delayed his journey in order to assist at a touching ceremony which took place some days after the entry of the Russian troops.

Michael Strogoff had sought out Nadia and in the presence of her father had said to her, "Nadia, my sister still, when you left Irkutsk to come to Irkutsk had you no other regret but that of leaving behind you your mother?"

"No," replied Nadia, "now what ever."

"So that no part of your heart has remained down there?"

"None, brother."

"Then, Nadia," said Michael Strogoff, "I do not believe but that God in bringing us together, in allowing us to pass through these great trials together, has wished us to be united forever."

"Ah!" said Nadia as she fell into the arms of Michael Strogoff, and turning toward Wassili Feodor, "My father," she said, blushing deeply.

"Nadia," said Wassili Feodor, "my joy will be to call you both my children."

The marriage ceremony took place in the cathedral of Irkutsk. It was very simple in its preparations, but very beautiful in the concourse of the military and civil population, which thus wished to show its gratitude to the young couple, whose strange journey had now become legendary.

Alcide Jolivet and Harry Blount of course assisted at the marriage, of which they wished to give an account to their readers.

"And does it not make you envious to imitate them?" asked Alcide Jolivet to his companion.

"Fshaw!" exclaimed Harry Blount. "If like you, I had a cousin!"

"My cousin is not any longer marriageable," laughingly answered Alcide Jolivet.

"All the better," added Harry Blount, "for they speak of difficulties which are about to arise between London and Peking."

"Would you not like to see what is passing there?"

"Why, my dear Blount," cried Alcide Jolivet, "I was about to propose it to you!"

This is how the two inseparables set out for China.

Some days after the ceremony Michael and Nadia Strogoff, accompanied by Wassili Feodor, started on their journey to Europe. That road of sorrows was only one of happiness on their return. They traveled very rapidly with one of those trains which glide like an express over the frozen steppes of Siberia.

Meanwhile, arrived at the banks of the Dniha, just opposite Briskoe, they stopped there one day. Michael Strogoff sought out the place where he had interred poor Nicholas. A cross was planted there, and Nadia prayed for the last time on the tomb of the humble and heroic soul which neither the one nor the other would ever forget.

At Omsk old Marfa was awaiting them in the little house of the Strogoffs. She pressed in her arms that noble girl whom in her heart she had already a hundred times called her daughter. The brave Siberian on that day had the right to own her son and to say that she was proud of him.

After some days passed at Omsk, Michael and Nadia Strogoff returned to Europe, and Wassili Feodor being well fixed in St. Petersburg, neither his son nor his daughter had any occasion ever to leave him, only when they went to see their old mother.

The young courier had been received by the czar, who attached him specially to his person and decorated him with the cross of St. George.

Michael Strogoff afterward attained to a high post in the empire. But it is not the history of his success, but the history of his trials, which has deserved to be chronicled.

MANON

An Incident of the French Revolution.

On the outskirts of the little village in which we lived stood an old house, tenanted by such an old, old man.

The house was old, but its tenant, much older. No one in the place could remember him even as middle aged. He had been old Niles to everybody for years.

My brother and I, the youngest of a very large family, were thrown very much on our own resources, and we admired and cultivated Niles, for he had won our childish hearts one Christmas by telling us a gruesome story at supper, where he occupied the post of honor at the table—a story so dreadful that we were afraid to go to bed alone for the next three nights.

In that gentle and friendly community Niles, by means of his old age and infirmities, was a privileged character.

People living in the great houses around used to send him tidbits from their own tables. Truth compels me to relate that Niles did not always receive these offerings with gratitude. If the dish was not to his taste, he would reject it with contumely, and the mistress of the house advised by him to get a new cook. But Steena, our cook, beloved of us children, had found favor in Niles' eyes. Her offerings were never rejected by him; especially an eel soup and an eel pie of hers were welcome to his taste.

How well I remember the day on which he told us the following tale, the last, as it happened, we were ever to hear from Niles' lips.

A day in June, I remember it was, full of sunshine and perfume and the song of birds. Niles sat out before his door on a bench, so old and shrunken, shivering in the hot sun and muttering, "The sun does not warm one as it used to do, but I am an old, old man."

He accepted, however, Steena's offering of a basin of soup, and when he had swallowed it, to our great delight, offered of his own accord to tell us a story. "Not," he added, "one of those foolish tales of ghosts or fairies you children are so fond of, but a true tale, one I lived through myself."

"It was long, long ago. You have heard and read, have you not, of the French revolution, when blood flowed like water in the streets of Paris and Frenchmen chopped off the heads of both king and queen? At that time I was a boy in the service of a young Danish nobleman."

"How tired we grew of it all, the guillotine, the shrieking Paris crowds, who sang and danced and jeered around while the tumblers full of their victims were being dragged away to their death. But we were in Paris and could not get out, you know. We were there no longer known as master and servant; citizen was the name dinged in our ears."

"My master—I call him master now—was an aristocrat of a high and noble family in our own northern land; but we kept that to ourselves. I could speak not a word of French. My master could speak it like a Frenchman, of course."

"Opposite our lodgings was a wineshop, kept by one of the red capped Frenchmen. He offered one day to sell me some very fine French wine, 'Wine fit for the king himself,' he added, with a wink, which told me that the king, dead now and his bones moldering in a ditch, had once upon a time had this wine in his own royal cellar."

"I went to the wineshop directly after to buy some of this wine, as my master was in sore need of something to cheer his heart. My tongue, however, could never twist and turn itself to utter a word of French, and when Manon, the shopkeeper's daughter, heard me she fell into shrieks of laughter. I thought the ceiling would come down then and there on our heads. The saucy minx! I marched out, red in the face and with my head up. I vowed, I would never put myself in the way of being laughed at by her, a girl who could not speak a word of my tongue."

"When the wine was drunk, I refused to go again to fetch it. He could go himself, I told my master. He was in no great hurry to go, but did so at last. There was no laughing at his French, if you please, and my master got into the way of going there every day or two to pass the time with Manon. They sat in a room back of the shop, Manon with her needlework and my master with his books. In the midst of the alarms they spent a pleasant time enough, for they were young and in love with each other."

"So day after day passed until at last Manon broke in on me to tell me my master was in prison, denounced by a cousin of her own,

who was jealous of him, and in great danger of having his head cut off.

"But we are Danes, both of us. What can the French government do with us?" She shrugged her shoulders. "Who knows? But let us try what we can do with the English and Danish consuls." In all Paris not a Danish consul could we find, and the Englishman was not sanguine. "Paris might as well be a kingdom in Ashanti," he told us sadly. "There are a lot of savages gone mad. Do you know Sanson has complained of being overworked? In fact, bloodshed and cruelty are rampant."

"However, he promised to do what he could for us, which was nothing, as it turned out."

"When Manon found that there was no help, as we walked away weeping from the grim prison, to my astonishment she began to beg me to lend her my black confirmation suit, made by my mother a few months before and never yet worn by me. Lend her my confirmation suit? Not! What could she want with a boy's suit, she, a girl? I scoffed at her, but she flung her arms round my neck, and with her pretty brown eyes full of tears she entreated me to let her have it. She only wanted it a day; I should have it back then. What could a boy like me do with Manon's eyes full of tears and Manon's arms around his neck? I yielded very reluctantly, but I did yield. She eagerly seized upon the bundle and ran off with it."

"I could not help but notice how pale her face was, how dark her eyes were as she vanished out of my sight."

"That very night my master came back. He seemed very anxious about Manon and sent me to her father's to inquire about her. There, however, no one knew anything about her. Her father was very angry with her for neglecting the shop and promised her a beating when she did return. There was no news, however, the next day and the next."

"On the morning of the third day we, my master and I, heard the rumbling of the tumbrel behind us, and there, standing erect, dressed in my confirmation suit, was Manon. How young and innocent she looked! Only a city peopled by human wolves and hyenas could have struck the little curly brown head from the long, white, slender throat. Her eyes, full of love, were resting on my master, for whom she was to die, and she made him a little gesture of farewell, a quick little gesture, so slight as to be unobserved almost. But he saw it and would have fallen senseless had I not held him up by main force and turned off quickly into the street leading to our lodgings. Before we got to our destination the tumbrels were coming back empty, and she had given her life for him, the aristocrat—she who was no aristocrat; only a poor, plain, common body like myself."

This was the last tale we ever heard from Niles. The next morning he was found dead in his bed. His face, wonderfully rejuvenated by death, lay on the pillow, his hands gently clasped as though in prayer. All the place was present to do honor to his obsequies, we children wearing a band of crape on our left arms, tied there by Steena.

After the funeral it was found that Niles had left all he owned to Steena—the old house, the waste garden and a goodly sum of money. And Steena, good, ugly Steena, was an heiress in a small way. She who was wearied of single blessedness and had commissioned the blacksmith and the shoemaker to get her a husband in vain while she was poor and ugly had lovers galore.

Her choice fell on a handsome young Englishman, a dozen years her junior. In spite of the advice of her disinterested friends and relatives, she married him presently. The only notice she deigned to take of it was that she was married in the English church and by the English clergyman, and when, in the course of a year, Steena became the mother of twins, two blond haired, blue eyed miniatures of their father, what mother so happy and so proud as Steena, our Steena?

By that time, too, there was a neat gravestone to Niles' memory on his grave, and the house, newly painted, and the garden, blooming like the rose, gave evidence that the old man's money had been put to excellent use by the thrifty Steena.—Penny Pictorial Magazine.

Where Woman Is Lord.

In a tiny island called Minikoi, off the southern coast of India, a most peculiar state of society exists, for woman is lord of all she surveys. The wife is the recognized head of the house. She owns it and everything in it, while anything that her husband, who works very hard, can earn goes to increase her wealth. Her husband belongs to her, too, and when she marries him she gives him her name instead of taking his.

THE BOY GIANT AND HIS WONDERFUL TOP

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When Ah Grim, the baby giant, got to be a strapping boy, He was teasing Jack each minute for some pretty little toy, And at last, to bring the giant's awful teasing to a stop, Jack employed a dozen workmen to construct the baby's top. They procured a dozen axes and picked out a mammoth tree, Which Ah Grim at once uprooted—'twas a wondrous sight to see— Then they sawed a piece and hacked it with their axes half a day, Till Ah Grim, the baby giant, had a top with which to play.



When he set the top to spinning, it set up an awful roar; Dug a cellar in the roadway and began to bore and bore. Hooves trembled all around it, and the walls began to crack, And it must have gone to China, for Ah never got it back. Sad! Grim went home that evening, for no matter what he'd play All his toys would somehow trick him or would break or get away, And they were so very costly that poor Jack, in wrath, declared That to purchase toys for Ah Grim nevermore could cash be spared.

An Amusing Game. Card castles is the name of an amusing game. The players sit at either end of a long table and build a two tier card castle. This is protected with one hand, while the players aim their remaining cards at their adversary's castles. The side which knocks down the other side's castles first wins the game.

Morning on the Farm. When the white dove coos to his drowsy mate, And the birds in the trees rejoice, Old Brahma stands on the barnyard gate And shouts in a lusty voice, "I feel better this morning!" And the bantam thinks 'tis true, For he answers back in a tenor tone, "Without-a doubt—you do-o."

The house dog lies with his head on his paw and blinks at the morning call; The cat with a field mouse in her jaws Comes running home on the wall, While the Brahms heralds the moon again, And the bantam takes the cue: "I feel better this morning!" "Without-a doubt—you do-o."

The birds with a glorious burst of song Make glad the orchard's boughs, And the farmer, swinging his pail along, Goes out to milk the cows; The work of the day begins again, And the roosters call anew: "I feel better this morning!" "Without-a doubt—you do-o." —Youth's Companion.

A Good Reputation Saved This Boy. John Watt, a Canadian boy, was arrested in Detroit the other day. He was convicted of using money that belonged to another, having in his necessity yielded to temptation. In suspending sentence Judge Murphy said to this boy:

"The highest treasure in this world is a good name, and I am going to show you the value of it. I have written to various people in Toronto, and I find that your character has been above reproach up to this time. I think you see the error of wrongdoing, and I trust the lesson will be sufficient. In allowing you to go on suspended sentence I know you will go back to Canada out of my jurisdiction. I am trusting to your honor. I do not know whether an American boy in like circumstances would receive the same consideration if in Canada, but I trust so." Tears were kept back with difficulty by the young Canadian, and he promised the judge that he would write to him every month and let him know what he was doing. "Many days well lived may some time count for one day mispent,"—American Boy.