The Survivors of the Chancellor

By

Jules Verne

INTRODUCTION

THE SURVIVORS OF THE CHANCELLOR was issued in 1875. Shipwrecks occur in other of Verne's tales; but this is his only story devoted wholly to such a disaster. In it the author has gathered all the tragedy, the mystery, and the suffering possible to the sea. All the various forms of disaster, all the possibilities of horror, the depths of shame and agony, are heaped upon these unhappy voyagers. The accumulation is mathematically complete and emotionally unforgettable. The tale has well been called the "imperishable epic of shipwreck."

The idea of the book is said to have originated in the celebrated French painting by Gericault, "the Wreck of the Medusa," now in the Louvre gallery. The Medusa was a French frigate wrecked off the coast of Africa in 1816. Some of the survivors, escaping on a raft, were rescued by a passing ship after many days of torture. Verne, however, seems also to have drawn upon the terrifying experiences of the British ship Sarah Sands in 1857, her story being fresh in the public mind at the time he wrote. The Sarah Sands caught fire off the African coast while on a voyage to India carrying British troops. There was gunpowder aboard liable to blow up at any moment. Some of it did indeed ex-

plode, tearing a huge hole in the vessel's side. A storm added to the terror, and the waters entering the breach caused by the explosion, combated with the fire. After ten days of desperate struggle, the charred and sinking vessel reached a port.

The extreme length of life which Verne allows his people in their starving, thirsting condition is proven possible by medical science and recent "fasting"' experiments. The dramatic climax of the tale wherein the castaways find fresh water in the ocean is based upon a fact, one of those odd geographical facts of which the author made such frequent, skillful and instructive use.

"Michael Strogoff" which, through its use as a stage play, has become one of the best known books of all the world, was first published in 1876. Its vivid, powerful story has made it a favorite with every red-blooded reader. Its two well-drawn female characters, the courageous heroine, and the stern, endurant, yearning mother, show how well Verne could depict the tenderer sex when he so willed. Though usually the rapid movement and adventure of his stories leave women in subordinate parts.

As to the picture drawn in "Michael Strogoff" of Russia and Siberia, it is at once instructive and sympathetic.

The horrors are not blinked at, yet neither is Russian patriotism ignored. The loyalty of some of the Siberian exiles to their mother country is a side of life there which is too often ignored by writers who dwell only on the darker view.

The Czar, in our author's hands, becomes the hero figure to the erection of which French "hero worship" is ever prone. The sarcasms thrown occasionally at the British newspaper correspondent of the story, show the changing attitude of Verne toward England, and reflect the French spirit of his day.

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CHAPTER I
THE CHANCELLOR

CHARLESTON, September 27, 1898. -- It is high tide, and three o'clock in the afternoon when we leave the Battery quay; the ebb carries us off shore, and as Captain Huntly has hoisted both main and top sails, the northerly breeze drives the Chancellor briskly across the bay. Fort Sumter ere long is doubled, the sweeping batteries of the mainland on our left are soon passed, and by four o'clock the rapid current of the ebbing tide has carried us through the harbor mouth.

But as yet we have not reached the open sea we have still to thread our way through the narrow channels which the surge has hollowed out amongst the sand-banks. The captain takes a southwest course, rounding the lighthouse at the corner of the fort; the sails are closely trimmed; the last sandy point is safely coasted, and at length, at seven o'clock in the evening, we are out free upon the wide At-

lantic.

The Chancellor is a fine square-rigged three-master, of 900 tons burden, and belongs to the wealthy Liverpool firm of Laird Brothers. She is two years old, is sheathed and secured with copper, her decks being of teak, and the base of all her masts, except the mizzen, with all their fittings, being of iron. She is registered first class, A 1, and is now on her third voyage between Charleston and Liverpool. As she wended her way through the channels of Charleston harbor, it was the British flag that was lowered from her mast-head; but without colors at all, no sailor could have hesitated for a moment in telling her nationality, -- for English she was, and nothing but English from her water-line upward to the truck of her masts.

I must now relate how it happens that I have taken my passage on board the Chancellor on her return voyage to England.

At present there is no direct steamship service between South Carolina and Great Britain, and all who wish to cross must go either northward to New York or southward to New Orleans. It is quite true that if I had chosen a start from New York I might have found plenty of vessels belonging to English, French, or Hamburg lines, any of which

would have conveyed me by a rapid voyage to my destination; and it is equally true that if I had selected New Orleans for my embarkation I could readily have reached Europe by one of the vessels of the National Steam Navigation Company, which join the French transatlantic line of Colon and Aspinwall. But it was fated to be otherwise.

One day, as I was loitering about the Charleston quays, my eye lighted on this vessel. There was something about the Chancellor that pleased me, and a kind of involuntary impulse took me on board, where I found the internal arrangements perfectly comfortable. Yielding to the idea that a voyage in a sailing vessel had certain charms beyond the transit in a steamer, and reckoning that with wind and wave in my favor there would be little material difference in time; considering, moreover, that in these low latitudes the weather in early autumn is fine and unbroken, I came to my decision, and proceeded forthwith to secure my passage by this route to Europe.

Have I done right or wrong? Whether I shall have reason to regret my determination is a problem to be solved in the future. However, I will begin to record the incidents of our daily experience, dubious as I feel whether the lines of my chronicle will ever find a reader.