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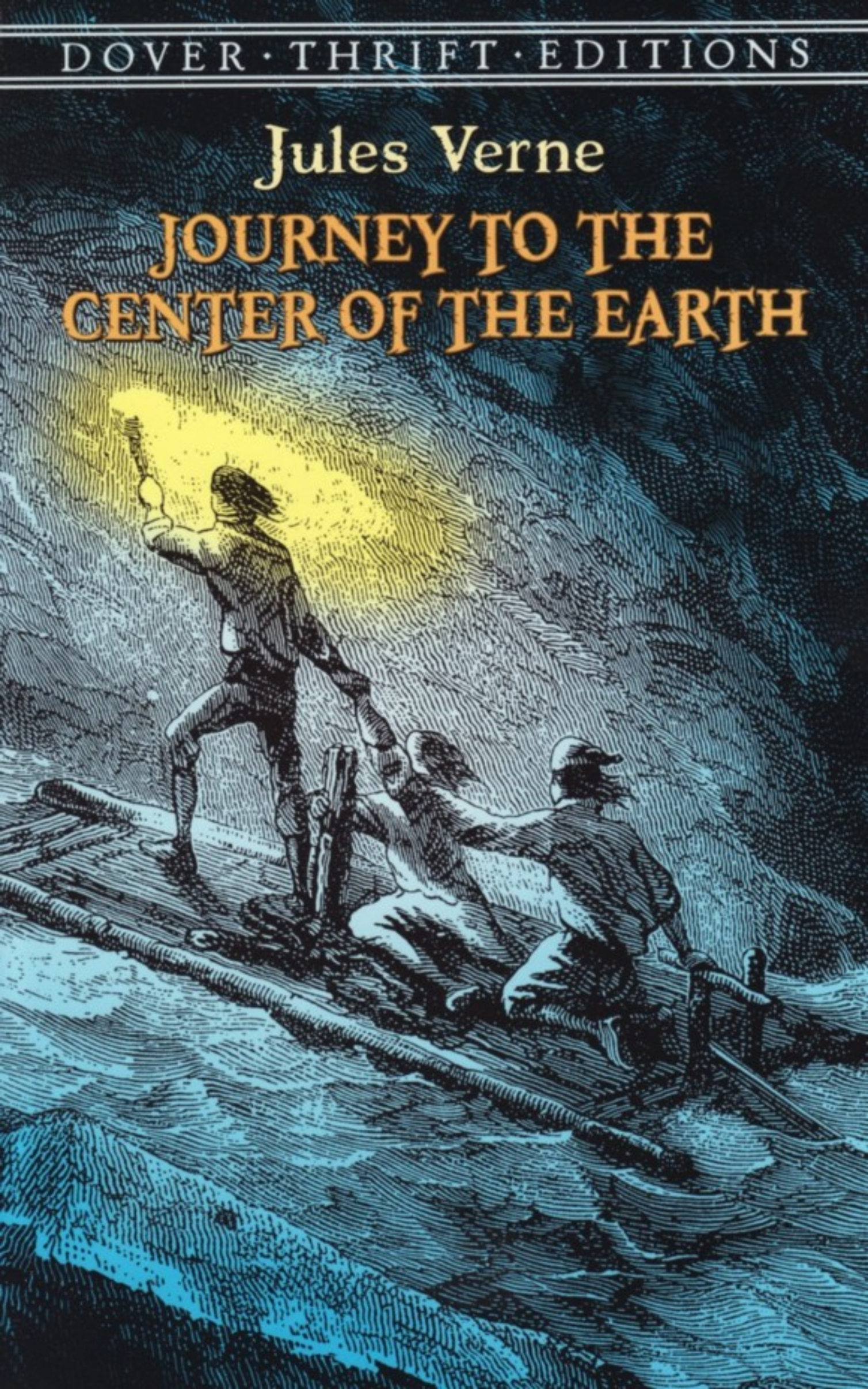
Jules Verne

JOURNEY TO THE CENTER OF THE EARTH



I

IT WAS on Sunday, the 24th of May, 1863, that my uncle, Professor Lidenbrock, came rushing suddenly back to his little house in the old part of Hamburg, No. 19, Königstrasse.

Our good Martha could not but think she was very much behind-hand with the dinner, for the pot was scarcely beginning to simmer, and I said to myself:

"Now, then, we'll have a fine outcry if my uncle is hungry, for he is the most impatient of mortals."

"Mr. Lidenbrock, already!" cried the poor woman, in dismay, half opening the dining-room door.

"Yes, Martha; but of course dinner can't be ready yet, for it is not two o'clock. It has only just struck the half-hour by St. Michael's."

"What brings Mr. Lidenbrock home, then?"

"He'll probably tell us that himself."

"Here he comes. I'll be off, Mr. Axel; you must make him listen to reason."

And forthwith she effected a safe retreat to her culinary laboratory.

I was left alone, but not feeling equal to the task of making the most irascible of professors listen to reason, was about to escape to my own little room upstairs, when the street-door creaked on its hinges, and the wooden stairs cracked beneath a hurried tread, and the master of the house came in and bolted across the dining-room, straight into his study. But, rapid as his flight was, he managed to fling his nutcracker-headed stick into a corner, and his wide-brimmed rough hat on the table, and to shout out to his nephew:

"Axel, follow me."

Before I had time to stir he called out again, in the most impatient tone imaginable:

"What! Not here yet?"

In an instant I was on my feet and in the study of my dreadful master.

Otto Lidenbrock was not a bad man. I grant that, willingly. But, unless he mightily changes, he will live and die a terrible original.

He was a professor in the Johannæum, and gave the course of lectures on mineralogy, during which he regularly put himself into a passion once

or twice. Not that he troubled himself much about the assiduity of his pupils, or the amount of attention they paid to his lessons, or their corresponding success. These points gave him no concern. He taught *subjectively,* to use a German philosophical expression, for himself, and not for others. He was a selfish *savant*—a well of science, and nothing could be drawn up from it without the grinding noise of the pulleys: in a word, he was a miser.

There are professors of this stamp in Germany.

My uncle, unfortunately, did not enjoy great facility of pronunciation, unless he was with intimate friends; at least, not when he spoke in public, and this is a deplorable defect in an orator. In his demonstrations at the Johannæum the professor would often stop short, struggling with some obstinate word that refused to slip over his lips—one of those words which resist, swell out, and finally come forth in the anything but scientific shape of an oath. This put him in a great rage.

Now, in mineralogy, there are many names difficult to pronounce—half Greek, half Latin, barbarous appellations which would blister the lips of a poet. I have no wish to speak ill of the science. Far from it. But when one has to do with rhomboidal crystallisations, retinasphaltic resins, galena favosite, molybdates of lead, tungstates of manganese, and titanites of zircon, the most nimble tongue may be allowed to stumble.

The townsfolk were aware of this pardonable infirmity of my uncle's, and they took advantage of it, and were on the watch for the dangerous passages; and when he put himself in a fury laughed at him, which was not in good taste, even for Germans. His lectures were always very numerously attended, but how many of those who were most regular auditors came for anything else but to make game of the professor's grand fits of passion I shouldn't like to say. Whatever my uncle might be, and I can hardly say too much, he was a true *savant.*

Though he sometimes broke his specimens by his rough handling, he had both the genius of a geologist and the eye of a mineralogist. With his hammer and steel pointer and magnetic needle, his blow-pipe and his flask of nitric acid, he was a master indeed. By the fracture, the hardness, the fusibility, the ring, the smell, of any mineral whatever, he classed it without hesitation among the six hundred species science numbers to-day.

The name of Lidenbrock was consequently mentioned with honour in gymnasiums and national associations. Humphry Davy, Humboldt, and Captains Franklin and Sabine, paid him a visit when they passed through Hamburg. Becqueul, Ebolmann, Brewster, Dumas, Milne-Edwards, Sainte Clarice Deville, took pleasure in consulting him on the most stirring questions of chemistry, a science which was indebted to him for discoveries of considerable importance; and in 1853 a treatise on Transcendent

Crystallography, by Professor Otto Lidenbrock, was published at Leipsic, a large folio, with plates, which did not pay its cost, however.

Moreover, my uncle was curator of the Museum of Mineralogy, belonging to M. Struve, the Russian ambassador, a valuable collection, of European celebrity.

Such, then, was the personage who summoned me so impatiently.

Fancy to yourself a tall, spare man, with an iron constitution, and a juvenile fairness of complexion, which took off a full ten years of his fifty. His large eyes rolled about incessantly behind his great goggles; his long thin nose resembled a knife-blade; malicious people declared it was magnetised, and attracted steel filings—a pure calumny; it attracted nothing but snuff, but, to speak truth, a superabundance of that. When I have added that my uncle made mathematical strides of three feet at every step, and marched along with his fists firmly clenched—a sign of an impetuous temperament—you will know enough of him not to be overanxious for his company.

He lived in his little house in Königstrasse, a dwelling built partly of brick and partly of stone, with a crenated gable-end, which looked on to one of those winding canals which intersect each other in the center of the oldest part of Hamburg, which happily escaped the great fire in 1842.

The old house leaned forward slightly, and bulged out towards the passers-by. The roof inclined to one side, in the position a German student belonging to the *Tugendbund* wears his cap. The perpendicular of the house was not quite exact, but, on the whole, the house stood well enough, thanks to an old elm, firmly embedded in the façade, which pushed its flower buds across the window-panes in spring.

My uncle was pretty rich for a German professor. The house was his own, and all its belongings. These belongings were his godchild Gräuben, a Virland girl, seventeen years old, his servant Martha, and myself. In my double quality of nephew and orphan, I became his assistant in his experiments.

I must confess I have a great appetite for geological science. The blood of a mineralogist flows in my veins, and I never grow weary in the society of my beloved stones.

On the whole, it was possible to live happily in this little house in Königstrasse, notwithstanding the impatience of the owner; for though he had a rough fashion of showing it, he loved me for all that. But, the fact was, he was a man who could not wait, and was in a greater hurry than nature.

When he used to plant mignonette and convolvuluses in his terra-cotta pots in the spring, every morning he went regularly and pulled their leaves, to hasten their growth.

With such an original, there was no alternative but to obey, so I darted into the study immediately.

FICTION/CLASSICS

Jules Verne

JOURNEY TO THE CENTER OF THE EARTH

"The reason Verne is still read by millions today is simply that he was one of the best storytellers who ever lived."—*Arthur C. Clarke*

An adventurous geology professor chances upon a manuscript in which a sixteenth-century explorer claims to have found a route to the earth's core. Professor Lidenbrock can't resist the opportunity to investigate, and with his nephew Axel, he sets off across Iceland in the company of Hans Bjelke, a native guide. The expedition descends into an extinct volcano toward a sunless sea, where they encounter a subterranean world of luminous rocks, antediluvian forests, and fantastic marine life—a living past that holds the secrets to the origins of human existence.

Originally published in 1864, Jules Verne's classic remains critically acclaimed for its style and imaginative visions. Verne wrote many fantasy stories that later proved remarkably prescient, and his distinctive combination of realism and romanticism exercised a lasting influence on writers as diverse as Mark Twain, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Jean-Paul Sartre. In addition to the excitement of an action novel, *Journey to the Center of the Earth* has the added appeal of a psychological quest, in which the sojourn itself is as significant as the ultimate destination.

Dover (2005) unabridged republication of the edition published by George Routledge and Sons, New York, 1876. iv+156pp. 5⅜ x 8½. Paperbound.

$3.00 USA **£3.00 UK**

PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

ISBN-13: 978-0-486-44088-0
ISBN-10: 0-486-44088-5

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