

it was! Mine beats audibly while I write about him.

At present I am doing nothing. Last month I ordered some "Leaves for the Study" to be printed for the benefit of a day-labourer who has written some good and manly poetry, now published by subscription. If you read "Fraser's Magazine," you will see

in April two imaginary conversations of mine. My scenes are on Antony and Octavius—characters of which it appears to me that Shakespeare has made sad work—and worse in Cleopatra. God bless you, my pleasant Mariuccia. Pray for me, and Pomerio. Some people are so wicked as to believe we shall never meet again!

W. S. L.

A RUSSIAN POLITICAL PRISON.

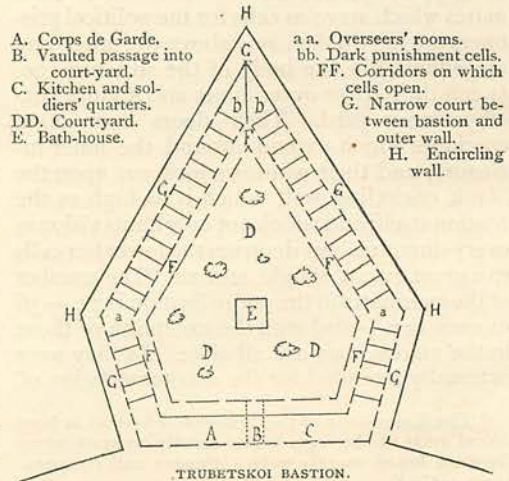
THE FORTRESS OF PETROPAVLOVSK.

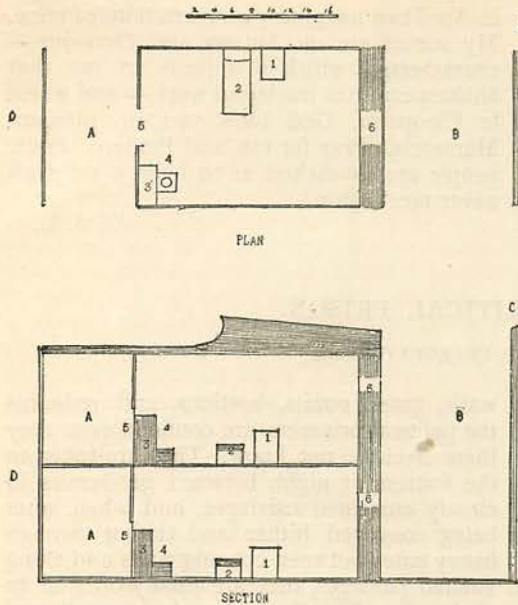


HE great state prison of Russia—the prison in which all important and dangerous political offenders sooner or later find themselves—is the fortress of Petropavlovsk. Every traveler who has visited

St. Petersburg must remember the slender gilded spire which rises to a height of nearly four hundred feet from the low bank of the Neva opposite the Winter Palace, and which shines afar like an uplifted lance of gold across the marshy delta of the river and the shallow waters of the Finnish Gulf. It is the spire of the fortress cathedral under which lie buried the bones of Russia's Tsars and around which lie buried almost as effectually the enemies of the Tsars' government. All that can be seen of the fortress from the river, upon which it fronts, is a long, low wall of gray stone broken sharply into salient and reëntering angles with a few cannon *en barbette*, a flag fluttering from the parapet, and over all the white belfry and burnished spire of the cathedral and the smoking chimneys of the Imperial mint. The main entrance to the fortress is a long vaulted passage leading through the wall near the end of the Troitski bridge and opening into a rather spacious grassy and well-shaded park or boulevard to which the public are admitted at all hours of the day and through which the residents of "the Petersburg side," as that part of the city is called, go to and from their homes. It is impossible, however, to obtain by merely walking along this thoroughfare any definite idea of the extent or character of Russia's great political prison. The fortress as a whole is an immense aggregation of bastions, ravelins, curtains, barracks, and store-houses which must cover at least three-quarters of a square mile and which is intersected by the boulevard above referred to, and by a canal or moat which separates the citadel or fortress proper from the "crown-work" in the rear. In what part of this vast labyrinth of

walls, gates, courts, bastions, and redoubts the political prisoners are confined even they themselves do not know. They are taken to the fortress at night, between gendarmes in closely curtained carriages, and when, after being conveyed hither and thither through heavy gates between echoing walls and along vaulted passages, they are finally ordered to alight, they find themselves in a small and completely inclosed court-yard from which nothing whatever can be seen except the sky overhead. Where this court-yard is situated they can only conjecture. There is some reason to believe that the part of the fortress where the political prisoners are confined while awaiting trial is a bastion which projects on the river side in the direction of the Bourse; but even this is not certain. All that I could learn from the political exiles whose acquaintance I made in Siberia was that they had been shut up in what they believed to be the Trubetskoï bastion. Of this particular part of the fortress, however, they could give me a full description, and a plan of it, drawn by an exile who is now in Eastern Siberia, will be found below.





PLAN OF CASEMATE AND SECTION OF RIGHT FACE OF BASTION FROM INNER COURT-YARD TO OUTER WALL.

A. Corridor; B. Outer court; C. Encircling wall; D. Inner court.

1. Table; 2. Bed; 3. Oven; 4. Commode; 5. Door; 6. Window.

#### THE TRUBETSKOI BASTION.

THE Trubetskoi bastion is a massive, pentagonal, two-story structure of stone and brick, about 300 feet in length from the flanked angle to the base and 250 feet in width on a line drawn between the two shoulder angles.\* It stands in a court which is 25 or 30 feet longer and wider than the bastion itself, and which is formed by a high wall corresponding in outline with the bastion faces and separated from them all around by a space of 12 or 15 feet. The effect of this encircling wall is to completely shut the bastion in. The casemates which serve as cells for the political prisoners are in two tiers, one above the other, and are situated in the body of the structure, between the narrow outer court and a more spacious inner yard. Their doors open upon corridors which extend around the inner inclosure, and their windows look out upon the blank encircling wall which is as high as the bastion itself, and which not only limits vision in every direction, but deprives the lower tier cells to a great extent of light and air. The number of the casemates in the entire bastion is 72,—36 in each tier,—and with the exception of those in the angles, they are all alike. As they were originally intended for the accommodation of

\* The dimensions of the Trubetskoi bastion as here stated must not be regarded as strictly accurate, since they are based merely upon estimates and computations.—G. K.

heavy cannon, they are much larger than ordinary prison cells. Their dimensions are approximately 24 feet in length from door to window, 16 feet in width between partition walls, and 12 feet in height to a slightly vaulted ceiling. The walls and ceilings are of brick, and the floors are concrete. The massive outer face of the bastion is pierced in each casemate by one arched window at a height of eight or nine feet from the floor, the tunnel-like aperture is guarded by double gratings, and the lower right-hand pane of the iron sash is hung on hinges so that it can be opened for the admission of air. Owing to the height of the window from the floor the prisoner cannot reach it without support, and can see nothing out of it except the upper part of the outer wall and a narrow strip of sky. The heavy doors of the casemates are of wood, and in the middle of each is a square port-hole which can be closed by a hinged panel. The panel swings up and down like a miniature drawbridge, and when lowered to a horizontal position forms a shelf upon which food for the prisoner can be placed by the guard. Immediately over it is a narrow horizontal slit about as large as the opening for letters in a street letter-box, covered by a pivoted strip of wood which can be raised and lowered like the blade of a jack-knife so as to open or close the aperture. This contrivance, which is known to the political prisoners as the "Judas," enables the guard to look into the cell at any time without attracting the attention of the occupant. The furniture of the casemate consists of a common Russian oven with its door in the corridor; an iron bedstead, bolted into the masonry at one end so that it cannot be moved; a shelf-like slab of iron, also bolted into the wall near the head of the bed and intended for use as a table; a stationary iron wash-basin; a wooden box, containing an excrement bucket; a small cheap image of the Madonna before which the prisoner can say his prayers, and a tin cup suspended against the wall under the window to catch the moisture which drips from the slopes of the deep embrasure. The general aspect of the casemate is somber, gloomy, and forbidding; and the first idea suggested to the mind by the massive walls, the vaulted ceiling, the iron window, the damp, lifeless air, and the profound stillness is the idea of a burial vault or crypt.

#### THE FIRST NIGHT IN THE FORTRESS.

WHEN a political prisoner is brought at night to one of these casemates he is first of all stripped naked. A careful examination is made of his person to ascertain whether he

has anything concealed in his hair, mouth, ears, or nostrils, and when the guard are satisfied that he has not, they give him in the place of his own clothing a prison costume consisting of a coarse gray linen shirt, drawers of the same material, a long blue linen dressing-gown, woolen stockings, and a pair of soft felt slippers. As soon as he has put on these garments the soldiers of the guard retire, the heavy wooden door closes behind them, the key grinds in the rusty padlock, and the prisoner is left alone in the dimly lighted casemate. The stillness is that of the grave. There is not a footstep, nor a voice, nor a sound of any kind to indicate the presence of another human being in the bastion. Every fifteen minutes the bells of the fortress cathedral chime out slowly the air with which the words, "Have mercy, O Lord!" are associated in the Russian liturgy, and every hour they ring the melody of the ecclesiastical chant, "How glorious is our Lord in Zion!" The damp, heavy atmosphere, the dripping walls, the oppressive silence, and the faint muffled tones of the cathedral bells chiming mournful airs from the church liturgy, all seem to say to the lonely and dejected prisoner, "Although not dead, you are buried." Crushed by the thought that this is the end of all his hopes and aspirations and struggles for the welfare of his country, tortured by anxiety concerning the fate of those nearest and dearest to him, he rises from the narrow iron bed upon which he has thrown himself in the first paroxysm of despair and begins to pace his cell. "How long," he asks himself, "will this continue?" He reviews mentally the events which preceded and followed his arrest, recalls the questions that were asked him at the preliminary examination, and tries to form from the facts of his case a calm judgment as to the probable duration of his imprisonment. The offense with which he is charged is not, he thinks, a serious one; there are no complicating circumstances to retard the investigation; perhaps he will be tried and released in a few weeks. But as this ray of hope enters his heart he stoops to replace the loose felt

slipper which has fallen from one foot, and in so doing notices for the first time what seems to be a faint path leading from one corner of the cell to another on the same diagonal which he has been pacing. Startled by a vague apprehension, he seizes the small lamp and examines it more closely. It is unquestionably a path—a shallow but perceptible groove worn into the solid concrete by human footsteps. The mournful significance of this discovery comes to him almost with the shock of a new misfortune. He then is not the first prisoner who has been buried in this lonely casemate, nor the first who has sought in physical exercise relief from mental strain. Somebody who perhaps was also accused of a political offense—somebody who perhaps was also hopeful of a speedy trial—made that significant groove. Somebody heart-sick with hope long deferred trod that path from corner to corner not merely a hundred times nor a thousand times, but hundreds of thousands of times, until the solid floor of the casemate had been worn away by his weary feet, and a long shallow depression marked the line of his monotonous march. This melancholy record of an unknown predecessor's loneliness and isolation disheartens the prisoner more than all that has happened to him since his arrest. He recalls the history of the Decembrists, and remembers that in this same fortress many of that gallant band of revolutionists spent all the years of their early manhood and finally died, committed suicide, or went insane. One of them, Lieutenant-Colonel Battenkoff, languished here in solitary confinement for almost a quarter of a century;\* another, Midshipman Diboff, was held a prisoner here until death came to his relief; a third, Lieutenant Zaikin, unable to endure the mind-destroying torture of complete isolation, killed himself by dashing his head against the wall; while a fourth, preferring even a death of agony to a life clouded by mental disorder, swallowed glass broken from his cell window.† In this same fortress still another officer lay in solitary confinement until the guards re-

\* The history of the attempt made by a number of army and navy officers at the accession to the throne of the Emperor Nicholas to bring about a revolution and establish a constitutional form of government is well known. Lieutenant-Colonel Battenkoff, one of the participators in this movement, was punished by solitary confinement in the fortress from December, 1825, to February, 1846, a period of more than twenty years. During this time he was never outside of the Alexei ravelin, and never saw a human being except his guards. He was permitted to have a Hebrew Bible and a lexicon, and he spent a large part of his time in making a new translation of the Old Testament into Russian. This mental occupation probably saved him from insanity, which is the fate most dreaded by political prisoners and which is the almost invariable result of long

solitary confinement. With the exception of the lexicon and a few religious books, Lieutenant-Colonel Battenkoff had access to no literature, and in the whole twenty years did not see a newspaper nor hear a word of intelligence from the outside world. He was, in fact, buried alive in the strictest sense of the words. In February, 1846, he was finally released and exiled to western Siberia. Some interesting facts with regard to his life and character will be found in a letter from his friend Mr. A. Luchtef to the Irkutsk newspaper, "Sibir," for January 30, 1883, and in Maximoff's "Siberia and Penal Servitude," Vol. II., p. 166.

† "Recollections of a Decembrist," p. 185, by A. Belaieff. St. Petersburg, 1882. Much was crossed out in the manuscript of Mr. Belaieff's book by the censor, but the above statements were allowed to stand.

ported that he had ceased to answer questions, and an official examination showed that he had become a complete imbecile. He could still eat, drink, and perform the actions that years of unbroken routine had rendered habitual; but from his heavy, glazed eyes the last spark of human intelligence had vanished, and he sat motionless on his bed for days at a time in the profound stupor of intellectual death.\*

Oppressed by these gloomy recollections of fortress history, the prisoner can pace his cell no longer. He imagines that he can feel with his lightly clad feet the shallow trough made by the feet of his unknown predecessor, and every step in it suggests possibilities of suffering which he dares not contemplate. Seating himself again on the narrow bed, he listens long and intently for some sound of life from the outside world — some faint, audible evidence of human activity to break up this oppressive nightmare of burial in a subterranean crypt haunted by phantasms of tortured suicides and imbeciles. The bells of the fortress cathedral chime out slowly again, "Have mercy, O Lord!" but the faint tones of the mournful supplication die away into a stillness more profound, if possible, than that which went before. Suddenly the prisoner becomes conscious of two human eyes staring at him with fixed, unwinking gaze from the middle of the casemate door. Startled, nervous, excited, it seems to him for a moment as if the phantasms of his disordered imagination were taking definite objective form — as if the ghost of some political suicide, at that dead hour of the night, were peering into the gloomy casemate where on a tragic day long past it left its emaciated mortal tenement lying on the floor with a fractured skull or a throat full of broken glass. But as he gazes in spell-bound fascination at the mysterious, expressionless eyes they suddenly vanish, and a faint click, made by the cover of the "Judas" as it falls into place over the slit where the eyes have been, shows him that the fancied apparition was only the guard looking into the cell from the corridor. A momentary feeling of relief is followed by still deeper depression, as he realizes for the first time that although absolutely alone he is the object of constant suspicion and vigilance. The eyes of a supernatural visitant would at least have been compassionate and sympathetic; but the

impersonal, unrecognizable, expressionless eyes of an unknown spy appearing noiselessly now and then at the aperture of the "Judas" only render his situation the more intolerable. The very solitude seems now to be pervaded and dominated by a watchful, hostile, pitiless presence which he can neither see nor escape from.

As the prisoner's emotional excitement gradually subsides he begins to feel conscious of the damp chilliness of the casemate, and in a shiver, due partly to cold and partly to nervous reaction, he creeps into his narrow bed and draws the thin blanket up over his shoulders for the night. The last sound which he hears as he sinks into a troubled, fitful sleep is that of the cathedral chime ringing at midnight, "God save the Tsar."

#### ROUTINE OF LIFE IN A CASEMATE.

THE daily routine of a prisoner's life in the Trubetskoi bastion begins with the serving of hot water for tea about 8 o'clock in the morning. Nothing except the hot water is furnished at the expense of the Government; but if the prisoner has money of his own in the hands of the "smatritel," or warden, the latter will purchase for him tea, sugar, white bread, tobacco, and other simple luxuries not forbidden by prison rules. About 2 o'clock the guard appears at the port-hole in the door with the prisoner's dinner, which consists of soup with a few fragments of meat floating in it, "kasha," made of unground barley or oats boiled in enough water to saturate the grains, and a pound and a half of black rye-bread. What remains of the soup from dinner is warmed up for supper, and at a later hour in the evening hot water is brought again for tea. All food is served in block-tin or pewter dishes, and is eaten with wooden spoons. Knives and forks are regarded as dangerous implements and are not allowed to go into a prisoner's hands under any circumstances. Previous to 1879 the food provided for political prisoners in the Trubetskoi bastion was abundant and good. Thirty-five or forty out of fifty or more exiles whom I questioned on the subject in Siberia told me that during the time that they were imprisoned in the fortress — between 1873 and 1878 — complaint with regard to food could not fairly be made. It was better in

\* Neither the name nor the offense of this officer is known. The fact of his existence was disclosed by certain gendarmes who served as guards in the Alexei ravelin in 1882, and who in August of that year were exiled to Siberia for permitting political prisoners to communicate with their friends. According to the story of these gendarmes, the imbecile officer, who was known only by the number of his casemate, had been thrown into the fortress many years before they first saw him for offering a grievous insult to the Emperor

Alexander II. The cause for the insult was said to be the ruin by the Tsar of the officer's sister. Whether this story had a foundation in fact, or was merely a prison rumor which obtained currency as an explanation of the officer's long confinement and strict seclusion, I do not know; but the exiled gendarmes were in perfect agreement as to the facts of the unknown prisoner's life which had come under their own immediate observation, and described with many pathetic details the gradual decay of his mental powers.

quality and more plentiful in quantity than that furnished to prisoners of the same class in other prisons of the empire. About the time, however, that the Terrorists began their activity in 1879, the treatment of political prisoners everywhere underwent a change for the worse, and in the fortress that change was marked by a decrease in the quantity and a deterioration in the quality of the food. Finally, after the assassination of Alexander II., the imprisoned revolutionists were deprived of nearly all the privileges that they had previously enjoyed, were treated with greater severity and rigor than ever, and were put virtually upon the same footing with common criminals. In 1882, when a young law student of my acquaintance named Stasoff was brought to the Trubetskoi bastion, the food furnished there was so bad that at first he could not force himself to eat it, although he had already been four months in prison in another part of the empire. The guard, noticing that he left his dinner and supper untouched, said to him, "Do you intend to starve yourself to death?"

"Suppose I do," replied the prisoner; "why not?"

"We won't let you," said the guard; "we will feed you by force."

"How by force?"

"Simply enough; we will put a rubber pipe down your throat and pour milk into it."

"But," said Mr. Stasoff, "if you'll only give me milk, I'll take that now without any rubber pipe." The guard, a good-humored young soldier, smiled and turned away, advising the prisoner to eat what was set before him. Hunger finally compelled Mr. Stasoff to swallow the prison ration, but that the food thus forced upon him was insufficient and bad is shown by the fact that in less than three months he was prostrated by scurvy, and at the expiration of four months it was found necessary to remove him to the House of Preliminary Detention in order to save his life. He was so weak that he could not leave his bed, his face was pale and haggard, his eyes were sunken, and blood flowed from his swollen gums at every attempt to eat. He had then been eight months in solitary confinement without trial, and had been reduced from robust health to a condition so low that the fortress surgeon who was called to examine him said, "We must get you out of this grave or it will soon be too late."

The dreary monotony of life in the Trubetskoi bastion is relieved to some extent by a daily walk of ten or fifteen minutes in the small inner court-yard. Every morning or afternoon, at a certain appointed hour, a soldier enters the casemate with the clothing which

the prisoner had on when he was arrested and, throwing it upon the bed, says, "Pazholuyte na progulku"—"You will please take your walk." It is one of the rules of the fortress that a prisoner shall put on his own dress every time he leaves his cell, in order that the prison garments which he has been wearing may be thoroughly searched during his temporary absence. He is required therefore to change his apparel throughout, even to underclothing and stockings, and is closely watched meanwhile to see that he does not transfer anything from one suit of clothes to the other. When he has made this complete change of dress he is taken out into the little court-yard where, between two gendarmes, he promenades slowly back and forth for ten minutes. He can see little more from his exercise ground than he could from his cell; but in summer and in fair weather even a walled court-yard is a pleasant change from the gloom, dampness, and death-like stillness of a bomb-proof casemate. It is at least open to the universe overhead, and as the prisoner walks back and forth in it the sun shines warmly and brightly in his face; the green foliage of a few shrubs and stunted trees gratifies the craving of his eyes for color; he can hear occasionally the whistle of a passing steamer on the unseen Neva, or the faint music of a band in the neighboring zoölogical garden; and now and then, when the wind is fair, it brings to his nostrils the cool, moist fragrance of the woods. If this walk could be prolonged for two or three hours, it would have a most beneficial influence upon the prisoner's health and spirits; but as there are sometimes sixty or seventy political offenders in the bastion, and as the Government does not intend that they shall ever see one another, much less have an opportunity to exchange signals, only one of them is allowed to walk in the court-yard at a time. This limits the daily outing of each to about ten minutes. While the prisoner is taking his walk, the cell which he has left and the prison dress which he has temporarily laid aside are both carefully searched, in order to make sure that he has not accidentally come into possession of an old rusty nail; that he is not saving up bits of cigarette paper with a view to surreptitious correspondence; that he is not hoarding matches with the hope of getting enough together to poison himself—that, in short, he is not hiding anything which can be used either as a means of making his life more endurable or as an instrument for putting it to an end. When the prisoner returns to his cell at the end of his walk he puts on again the coarse linen prison garb which has just been searched, and the citizen's dress which he has worn for ten minutes in the court-

yard is taken away by the gendarmes to be searched in its turn. This ends the day's "recreation."

It is the concurrent testimony of fifty or more exiles whom I met in Siberia, that the worst privations of life in the Trubetskoi bastion are the loneliness, the stillness, and the lack of occupation. Physical hardships, such as bad food, foul air, dampness and cold, can be endured; but the mental and moral torture of complete isolation, perfect stillness, and the absence of all employment for hands and brain soon becomes literally insupportable.

#### HOW PRISONERS ARE WATCHED AND GUARDED.

THE system of discipline enforced in the fortress is of the strictest possible character. In 1881 there were constantly on guard in each of the several corridors of the Trubetskoi bastion two sworn "nadziratels," or overseers, five soldiers armed with rifles and revolvers, and four gendarmes. Their duties were to carry food and water to the prisoners in their cells, to keep up fires in the ovens in winter, to remove the excrement buckets when necessary, to see that no noise was made in any part of the bastion, and to watch the prisoners constantly night and day through the "Judas" slits in the doors of the casemates. They all wore soft felt slippers, so that they could steal along the corridors and peep into the cells without making the slightest noise; they were forbidden to talk to one another or to the prisoners in a tone above a whisper, or to speak to the latter at all, except in case of absolute necessity; and they had orders to report instantly any unusual or suspicious action or behavior on the part of the occupant of any cell on their corridor. Finally, the three classes of guards—overseers, soldiers, and gendarmes—were required to watch not only the prisoners, but one another; so that if a soldier, for example, came to feel affection and sympathy for a prisoner, and wished to help or shield him, he would be restrained from doing so by the consciousness that he himself was watched by the gendarmes, and that the least relaxation of severity or manifestation of sympathy on his part would be noticed and reported. There is always danger in a Russian prison that the political prisoners, who are generally men of education and character, will establish friendly relations with their guards—especially with the soldiers—and will secure the aid of the latter in carrying on secret correspondence with their friends, both inside and outside the prison walls. This has happened again and again in all parts of the empire, and more than once in the fortress itself. In order

to prevent it the Government has not only made it the duty of the soldiers and the gendarmes to watch one another, but has adopted the plan of changing them so frequently that a prisoner has not time even to lay the foundation of an acquaintance with one of them before another takes his place. In 1881 the soldiers on duty in the corridors of the Trubetskoi bastion were changed every hour; and as the prison authorities could draw soldiers from an army of fifty or sixty thousand men massed in and about St. Petersburg, they could put a different battalion on guard duty every day for six months. The gendarmes were also shifted frequently; and the overseers, who were twenty-four in number, changed stations every day, going from one story or corridor of the bastion to another at irregular and uncertain intervals, so that a prisoner sometimes did not see the same overseer twice in a fortnight, and could never count on the presence of a particular one in his corridor at a particular time. Once a month the prisoners are taken separately to a little bath-house in the middle of the courtyard, where they bathe under guard of two gendarmes, and as often as may be necessary the prison barber visits them in their cells for the purpose of cutting their finger-nails, toenails, and hair. Edged tools are not allowed to go into their hands for an instant, and a female prisoner who obtains permission to sew in her casemate must call the guard every time she wishes to use scissors, and give him the material to be cut.

#### INTERVIEWS WITH RELATIVES.

THE loneliness and monotony of life in the Trubetskoi bastion are relieved, in the cases of many of the prisoners, by occasional interviews with relatives. Once a month the father, mother, sister, brother, wife, or child of a political prisoner may obtain from the Minister of the Interior or the Chief of Gendarmes permission to visit the fortress in a closed carriage under guard and talk with the prisoner for ten minutes. In the room where the interview takes place there are two net-work partitions or gratings of iron wire, five or six feet apart, with a square aperture in each like a bank teller's window, at about the height of a man's head from the floor. The visitor stands on the outside of one of these gratings, and the prisoner on the outside of the other, with their faces at the square port-holes, while at a small table in the inclosure between them sits an officer whose duty it is to listen to the conversation. Both visitor and prisoner are warned in advance that their talk must be limited to strictly personal and domestic matters; that it must be perfectly intelligible to the listening

officer; and that it must contain neither names of persons nor references to public affairs. In order to guard against a possible interchange of secret signals, a gendarme stationed directly behind the prisoner watches every motion and expression of the visitor, while another, stationed behind the visitor, watches every motion and expression of the prisoner. At the slightest indication of an attempt on the part of either to convey forbidden intelligence to the other, an end is put to the interview and the privilege is not again granted. Many prisoners regarded the so-called privilege as a mere mockery, and refused to see their relatives altogether. Doctor Melnikoff, a bright, cultivated young surgeon whom I found living in exile in a village of eastern Siberia near the frontier of Mongolia, said to me in a conversation on this subject: "Interviews with my wife were a source of pain and distress to me rather than of pleasure. I could not say anything to her that I wanted to say; I could not take her in my arms; I could not even touch her hand; and it seemed like a desecration of love to speak of it in the presence of hired eavesdroppers, jailers, and spies to whom it might afterward be nothing more than a subject for coarse jest and laughter. All I could do, therefore, was to ask and answer a few formal questions; look with aching heart at my wife's pale, convulsed face streaming with tears; and then bid her good-bye and go back to my casemate. For days afterward her agonized face haunted me and I was more miserable than ever. I finally refused to see her."

PRIVILEGES AND DIVERSIONS.—AN ARTIFICIAL HICCOUGH.

THE only privilege of a prisoner's life in the Trubetskoi bastion which is really prized is the use of books and writing materials. There is in the bastion a very good library of about a thousand volumes, made up chiefly of books which have been sent to or purchased by the prisoners in the course of the last twenty years, but which the owners were not permitted to take away with them at the expiration of their terms of imprisonment. From this library many—perhaps most—of the politicals awaiting trial are allowed to draw books. Writing materials, in the shape of a pen and ink and a small copy-book made of half a dozen sheets of coarse paper stitched together, are also loaned to them for a few hours at a time upon condition that they shall be returned without injury or mutilation. These privileges, however, are not granted at all times nor to all of the prisoners. Nikolai Charushin, one of the early propagandists, who spent two years and a half in the Trubetskoi bastion, was

not allowed for the first five months to see a single printed line. Solomon Chudnofski, a well-known publicist and a member of the western Siberian branch of the Imperial Geographical Society, was put into a strait-jacket in the same bastion in the spring of 1878 for insisting upon his legal right to have pen and paper for the purpose of writing a letter of complaint to the Procureur. Many other prisoners were deprived of these and all other privileges for months at a time, without the assignment of any reason whatever by the prison authorities. There would seem to be sometimes a deliberate intention on the part of the Government to break down the resolution and disorder the mental faculties of obstinate political offenders by depriving them of all means of mental employment. Doctor Melnikoff, for example, the young surgeon of whom I have spoken, was not allowed for a long time to have either books or writing materials, and finding that the loneliness and lack of occupation were becoming insupportable, he saved a part of his daily ration of black rye-bread, and after moistening it enough to render it plastic he began to mold it into small figures. This diversion was a perfectly harmless one, even from the point of view of the strictest disciplinarian, and if it had been permitted it would have enabled the young surgeon to while away many long, weary hours, and might have made for him all the difference between mental health and insanity. No sooner, however, did the gendarmes on duty in the corridor notice what he was doing than they took away both the figures and the bread and warned him that if he attempted anything of the kind again he would be punished.

The death-like stillness of the casemate where Doctor Melnikoff was confined became in time as intolerable as the absence of employment. His feet, clad in soft felt slippers, made not the slightest noise when he walked; he dared not knock or drum with his fingers; and it was so long since he had heard the sound of his own voice that he sometimes doubted whether he still had a voice. He finally went into the remotest part of the casemate, crouched down in a corner, with his back to the door, and began to talk softly aloud to himself. The next time the guard peeped through the "Judas" and discovered what the prisoner was doing he opened the door and said to him that talking aloud even to one's self was "neilza,"—"impossible,"—and that if he repeated the offense he would be put into a dark cell. Baffled again, the young surgeon was for a long time silent, but he finally conceived the idea of making a noise, and at the same time reassuring himself as to the

unimpaired efficiency of his vocal cords, by counterfeiting a hiccough. This stratagem succeeded. The guard of course insisted that the prisoner should stop it; but the prisoner declared that hiccough is a spasmodic affection of the diaphragm and glottis which cannot be controlled by the will, and that if the guard wanted it stopped the best thing he could do was to get him some medicine for it from the fortress surgeon. The soldier, acting on this suggestion, went to consult the "feldsher" or assistant medical officer of the bastion, while the prisoner, with a sense of perfect security, hiccoughed so vociferously and joyously that he could be heard out in the corridor. All efforts of the prison authorities to cure Doctor Melnikoff's hiccough proved unavailing. It was a chronic infirmity, and when it assumed an acute and paroxysmal form, as it did every day or two throughout the remainder of his term of imprisonment, it set all remedies at defiance. I said to the young surgeon when he related to me in Siberia this incident of his prison life, that I presumed the distressing malady disappeared with his liberation from the fortress. "Oh, no," interposed his wife laughingly. "Whenever he feels lonesome or 'ennued' he hiccoughs to himself artificially for a quarter of an hour at a time; but he does it now unconsciously, so that it really is a disease."

#### PRISONERS' METHODS OF INTERCOMMUNICATION.

THE principal object of the rigorous system of prison discipline enforced in the Trubetskoi bastion is the prevention of communication between the prisoners. As the politicals in this part of the fortress are all persons who have not yet been tried, the Government regards it as extremely important that they shall not have an opportunity to secretly consult one another and agree upon a scheme of defense; that they shall not be allowed to give one another points and suggestions after preliminary examination; and that those who have been a long time in prison shall not be able to learn from those just arrested what has happened in the outside world since their removal from it. The Government intends, in short, to isolate every political offender, if possible, so completely that he will suppose himself to be the only human being shut up in that part of the fortress and will not think, therefore, of knocking on the wall or trying in any other way to attract sympathetic attention. If the prisoners were permitted to talk aloud, either to the guards or to themselves, such isolation as this would be impracticable. They would occasionally hear one

another's voices and would thus be apprised of their nearness to one another; and then if they were allowed to make the least noise they would contrive a method of transmitting intelligence by means of that noise from cell to cell. Even footsteps on a hard floor, if the feet were not muffled in soft felt slippers, might be so timed and spaced as to indicate numbers and letters in the cipher-square. In view of these considerations the Government believes it to be absolutely necessary to watch the prisoners constantly and to maintain throughout the bastion the stillness of a sepulcher. The results of this strict system of surveillance and repression are not, however, as satisfactory in practice as they presumably are in theory. The political prisoners communicate with one another in three or four different ways in spite of all the measures of prevention and precaution that official ingenuity can devise. In the first place they communicate by means of the knock alphabet. The prison authorities made an attempt in 1876 to put a stop to surreptitious telegraphy by masking the walls of all the casemates with screens of wire net-work covered with soft thick felt. This scheme however created a new evil without remedying the old one. The space between the screens and the wall served the prisoners as a convenient hiding-place for scraps of cigarette paper, old nails, pins, bits of string, ends of burnt matches, and other useful articles of that sort which they had previously had great difficulty in concealing from the gendarmes. The screens, moreover, did not prevent the knocking. The prisoners soon discovered that the little shelf-like iron table bolted into the wall of each casemate near the head of the bed would convey sound as well as the wall itself, and that if an instructed listener put his ear to one of these tables he could hear distinctly the faintest tap made upon the corresponding table in the cell above or below. This discovery rendered communication between the cells of the upper and the lower tier comparatively safe and easy. All that the prisoner had to do was to seat himself on the bed, bury his head in his arms on the table as if he were tired or despondent, and tap softly with the ball of one finger on the iron slab under cover of his shoulder. The attitude was a perfectly natural one and excited no mistrust in the mind of the guard, and by a slight change of position the ear could be laid against the table when it became necessary to listen. Gentle tapping upon a non-resonant substance like iron did not make noise enough to be heard across the casemate, and yet every stroke set up a slight vibration in the table which was communicated through the wall to the corresponding table in the cell



above or below, where it became audible as a faint, soft throb. This method of knocking was much safer than the one in ordinary use, because when the prison authorities set a trap for the knockers, as they frequently did, by secretly removing three or four prisoners from alternate cells and putting gendarmes in their places, no harm ever came of it. The knocking of course continued, but as the official eavesdroppers never thought of putting their ears to the tables, they were unable to detect the slightest sound.

#### CIPHER-MEDICATED BREAD PILLS.

ONLY two successful methods of preventing intercommunication by means of the knock alphabet were ever devised by the fortress authorities. One of them necessitated the disuse of all the cells immediately adjoining those occupied by political offenders, and the other required the stationing of a gendarme and a soldier in every casemate. Even these measures, however, did not entirely stop intercommunication unless the prisoners were deprived at the same time of their daily walk and of the privilege of drawing books from the library. If all the cells around a prisoner were left empty and he found that he could not get a response to his knocks, he saved bits of cigarette paper, pierced holes in them with a sharp splinter or dotted them with the burnt end of a match in such a manner that the groups of holes or dots when counted would indicate numbers answering to certain letters in the cipher-square, and then inclosing the papers in a small ball of moistened bread, he laid them aside until he should be taken out for his daily walk. As soon as he heard the gendarmes coming for him he concealed the cipher-medicated bread pill in his mouth, and when after the usual change of dress he was conducted into the court-yard, he contrived to drop it unnoticed in a place where he thought it would be discovered by the next prisoner who came there to walk. The little brownish ball of rye-bread was so nearly of the color of the ground that it was not likely to attract the attention of the guard, and yet it was almost certain to be noticed by men who were looking with intense passionate eagerness for secret tidings from a brother, wife, or dearest friend who, if alive, was somewhere in that gloomy bastion. Occasionally, when a prisoner was unable to procure cigarette paper, he unraveled a little yarn from his stocking or drew out a thread from his cotton sheet, and having tied knots in it in such a way that the groups of knots would make numbers in the cipher-square, he dropped that in the court-yard. The first prisoner who dis-

covered the bread pill or the tangled thread generally managed to secure it either by pretending to tie his shoe or by some other similar ruse; and having obtained possession of it, he concealed it in his mouth, carried it back to his cell, and at the first opportunity read the cipher message which it contained or embodied. Such communications were necessarily brief, but they were sometimes full of significance and pathos. In November, 1880, there was in the fortress a well-known revolutionist named Goldenberg, whose mental faculties had become partially disordered as the result of solitary confinement. In a fit of morbid depression he reasoned himself into the belief that the revolutionary movement was hopeless; that a continuance of the struggle could lead to nothing but further misery and disaster; and that the best way to stop it and to prevent the sacrifice of more lives was to make a full and frank confession to the Chief of Gendarmes of all that he knew, and thus enable the Government to crush the revolutionary organization by a single decisive blow. The reasoning was that of an unbalanced brain, but Goldenberg acted upon it and gave to the Government all the information in his possession with regard to the plans and *personnel* of the organization to which he belonged. This betrayal almost destroyed the revolutionary party by leading to the immediate arrest of a large number of its ablest and bravest representatives. After taking this fatal step Goldenberg was tormented by the thought that his comrades in prison would misunderstand his motives and perhaps attribute his action to the basest treachery or cowardice. He was still in solitary confinement in the fortress and had no opportunity to explain or defend his course, but the secret communications in cipher which he began to drop in the court-yard showed his comrades that he had some explanation to make. A prominent revolutionist who was then in the Trubetskoi bastion, but who is now in eastern Siberia, said to me, "Hardly a day passed that some of us did not find in the court-yard a bread pill or a leaf or a scrap of cigarette paper bearing in cipher the words, 'I can explain—Goldenberg'; or 'Don't condemn me—Goldenberg'; or 'Hear before you judge—Goldenberg.' It was pathetic to see how the poor fellow longed to unbosom himself to some of us, and how he was tortured by the thought that we might regard him as a traitor or a coward." Goldenberg died mysteriously in the fortress before the end of that same year, and is believed to have committed suicide. The Government used his confession against Zheliaboff in the trial of the regicides in 1881, but refused to give any information

with regard to the time or circumstances of his death.\*

Another method of intercommunication, which was resorted to when knocking became for any reason impracticable, was that by means of library books. When a volume was returned by a prisoner after perusal, every page of it was scrutinized by a gendarme before it was replaced in the library, in order to guard against the possibility of communication by means of writing on the margins or fly-leaves. Notwithstanding this precaution, the prisoners managed to mark the books in such a way that the marks were not perceptible to the examining gendarme, but could be found by other prisoners into whose hands the volumes might subsequently come. This they accomplished by making shallow indentations with a splinter or a pin over selected letters of the print. The indentations were so faint that they were not noticeable when the leaf of the book made a right angle with the line of vision, but they clearly appeared when the page was held up to the light at an acute angle, with the eye of the reader near the lower margin. An indentation over the second letter from the beginning of a line indicated the figure 2, and another over the third letter from the end of the same line the figure 3, and the number 23 stood in the cipher square for the letter "h." In this way a message might be spelled out in cipher even in the presence of a gendarme, and there was hardly one chance in a hundred that the faint indentations would be discovered by an official examiner who had to look over three or four hundred pages in a few moments, and who often performed his duty in a formal and perfunctory manner.

#### A WINGED MESSENGER.

IT would be thought that human ingenuity could go no further in the contrivance of schemes to relieve the monotony of solitary confinement by a secret interchange of ideas and emotions with other prisoners, but in the fortress there were occasionally practiced methods of intercommunication even more extraordinary than any of these.

"One afternoon in the summer of 1881," said Doctor Melnikoff to me in the course of a conversation about his fortress life, "I was lying on the bed in my casemate, wondering how I should get through the rest of the day,

\*Official Stenographic Report of the Trial of the Regicides, p. 7. St. Petersburg, 1881.

when there flew into the cell through the open port-hole in the door a large blue-bottle fly. In the stillness and loneliness of one of those casemates any trifle is enough to attract a man's attention, and the occasional visit of a fly is an important event in one's life. I listened with pleasure to the buzz of his wings, and followed him with my eyes as he flew back and forth across the cell until I suddenly noticed that there was something unnatural in the appearance of his body. He seemed to have something attached to him. I arose from the bed in order to get nearer to him, and soon satisfied myself that there was a bit of paper fastened to his body. How to catch him and secure that paper without attracting the attention of the guard in the corridor I hardly knew, as he was flying most of the time in the upper part of the cell beyond my reach. For ten or fifteen minutes I watched him without being able to think of any way to capture him; but at last he came down nearer to the floor, and as he passed me I succeeded in catching him in the hollow of my hands without injuring him. Attached to his body by a fine human hair I found a small folded scrap of thin cigarette paper, upon which a man's name had been written with the burnt end of a match. It was not the name of any one whom I knew; but as it was evident that some strictly guarded prisoner hoped by this means to let his friends in the bastion know either that he had been arrested or that he was still alive, I fastened the paper again to the fly as well as I could and put him out into the corridor through the port-hole, saying 'S'Bogom' ["With God," or "Go with God" — a Russian expression commonly used in bidding a friend good-bye].

"Did you ever hear anything more of the fly," I inquired, "or find out who the prisoner was?"

"Never," he replied. "The fly disappeared in the corridor, but whether the paper ever reached anybody who was acquainted with the prisoner, or not, I don't know — probably not, for the chances were a thousand to one against it."

If these pages should ever be seen by the political prisoner who wrote his name on that scrap of cigarette paper, and who, if alive, is now in Siberia, he will know that his little winged messenger did not wholly fail, but carried his name to another prisoner, who, although a stranger, thought of him often with sympathy and pity and remembers him still, even in Siberian exile.

*George Kennan.*