

POLITICAL EXILES AND COMMON CONVICTS AT TOMSK.



AMONG the questions most frequently asked me since my return from Russia are, "How did you manage to gain admittance to Siberian prisons and étapes, to make the acquaintance everywhere of banished political offenders, and to get access to so many official documents and reports? Did not the local authorities know what you were doing, and, if so, why did they not put a stop to your investigations, or at least throw more obstacles in your way?"

I cannot give perfectly satisfactory answers to these questions, because I do not know what instructions were given to the local authorities concerning us, nor what view was taken of our movements by the Siberian police. I can, however, indicate the policy that we pursued and the measures that we adopted to avert suspicion when it became necessary to do so, and can suggest some of the reasons for the generally non-aggressive attitude taken towards us by the Siberian officials.

In the first place, it seems to me probable that when I called upon the higher authorities in St. Petersburg and asked permission to go to Siberia to inspect prisons and study the exile system, the officials reasoned somewhat in this way: "It is neither practicable nor politic to exclude foreigners from Siberia altogether. Americans and West Europeans will not be satisfied until they have investigated this exile question; and if we deny them opportunities for such investigation, they will say that we are afraid to have the condition of our prisons known. Mr. Kennan is a friendly observer; he has defended us and the exile system in an address before the American Geographical Society; he has publicly taken our side as against the nihilists; and his main object in going to Siberia seems to be to get facts with which to fortify his position as our champion. Under such circumstances he is not likely to take a very pessimistic view of things, and if somebody must go to Siberia and look through our prisons, he is the very man to do it.¹ Mr. Lansdell gave, on the whole, a favorable account of the working of our penal institutions,

¹ Mr. Vlangalli, the Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs, had already seen a copy of my address before the American Geographical Society upon "Siberia and the Exile System"; and the conclusions which I here attribute to him might have been drawn, fairly enough, from the frank and honest statements that I made to him. I did not promise that I would defend the Russian Government, but I did assure him that I had no

and there is every reason to suppose that Mr. Kennan, who is already friendly to us, will follow his example. The reports of these two gentlemen will satisfy the curiosity of the western world, and thus prevent further research; while, at the same time, they will furnish us with a means of silencing foreign critics and accusers. If an English clergyman and an American journalist declare, after personal investigation on the ground, that there is nothing particularly terrible about the exile system, the world will probably accept the judgment. We will, therefore, allow Messrs. Kennan and Frost to go to Siberia, and will give them letters of recommendation; but we will make them apply to the local authorities, in all cases, for permission to inspect prisons, and then, if necessary or expedient, we can direct secretly that such permission be denied. There is, of course, some danger that they will meet political exiles, but they seem already to be strongly prejudiced against such offenders, and we will prejudice them still further by giving them a letter of introduction to Mr. Katkoff, and by instructing the latter to see that they are furnished in advance with proper information. If their relations with political criminals in Siberia become, nevertheless, too close and intimate, we can at any time direct that they be warned, or, if necessary, that they be put under surveillance."

My belief that this was the reasoning of the high officials in St. Petersburg is based mainly, of course, upon conjecture; but it is supported collaterally by the whole of our Siberian experience. It was everywhere apparent that the question of admitting us to prisons or excluding us therefrom had been left to the discretion of the Siberian authorities; and that the latter, in their dealings with us, were guided mainly by circumstances and by personal views and impressions. It was in the highest degree important, therefore, that we should so conduct ourselves as to gain the confidence and goodwill of these officers, and that we should prosecute our researches in the field of political exile in such a manner as not to excite comment or give occasion for report. Nine-tenths of the

intention of writing a sensational narrative; that in my opinion the exile system had been painted in too dark colors; and that a fair statement of the real facts would, I thought, interest the whole civilized world, and, at the same time, be of service to the Government. In this, as I have before said, there was not the least insincerity or diplomacy. My statements were strictly and exactly in accordance with my opinions.

towns and villages through which we passed were in communication with St. Petersburg by telegraph. If the police should discover that we were systematically visiting the political exiles and taking letters of introduction from one colony to another, they might send a telegram any day to the Minister of the Interior, saying, "Kennan and Frost are establishing intimate relations everywhere with administrative exiles and state criminals. Was it the intention of the Government that this should be permitted?" I did not know what answer would be made to such a telegram; but there certainly was a strong probability that it would at least result in an official "warning," or in a stricter supervision of our movements, and thus render the accomplishment of our purposes extremely difficult. Our letters of recommendation might protect us from unauthorized interference at the hands of the local authorities; but they could not save us from an arrest or a search ordered by telegraph from St. Petersburg. That telegraph line, therefore, for nearly a year hung over our heads like an electric sword of Damocles, threatening every moment to fall and cut short our career of investigation.

Up to the time of our arrival at Ust Kamenogorsk we had had no trouble with the police, and our intercourse with the political exiles had been virtually unrestricted. As we began, however, to accumulate letters and documents that would be compromising to the writers and givers if discovered, we deemed it prudent to mask our political investigations, as far as practicable, under a semblance of interest in other things, and, at the same time, to cultivate the most friendly possible relations with the local authorities. It seemed to me that to avoid the police, as if we were afraid of them or had something to conceal from them, would be a fatal error. Safety lay rather in a policy of extreme boldness, and I determined to call at the earliest moment upon the *ispravnik*, or chief of police, in every village, and overwhelm him with information concerning our plans, purposes, and previous history before he had time to form any conjectures or suspicions with regard to us, and, if possible, before he had even heard of our arrival. After we began to make the acquaintance of the political exiles, we had no difficulty in getting from them all necessary information with regard to the history, temperament, and personal characteristics of an official upon whom we purposed to call, and we therefore had every possible advantage of the latter in any contest of wits. He knew nothing about us, and had to feel his way to an acquaintance with us experimentally; while we knew all about him, and could, by virtue of our knowl-

edge, adapt ourselves to his idiosyncrasies, humor his tastes, avoid dangerous topics, lead up to subjects upon which we were sure to be in enthusiastic agreement, and thus convince him that we were not only good fellows, but men of rare sagacity and judgment—as of course we were! We made it a rule to call in evening dress upon every official, as a means of showing him our respectful appreciation of his rank and position; we drank vodka and bitter cordial with him—if necessary, up to the limit of double vision; we made ourselves agreeable to his wife, and Mr. Frost drew portraits of his children; and, in nine cases out of ten, we thus succeeded in making ourselves "solid with the administration" before we had been in a town or village forty-eight hours.

The next steps in our plan of campaign were, first, to forestall suspicion in the minds of the subordinate police, by showing ourselves publicly as often as possible in the company of their superiors; and, secondly, to supply the people of the village with a plausible explanation of our presence there by making visits to schools, by ostentatiously taking notes in sight of the scholars, and by getting the teachers to prepare for us statistics of popular education. This part of the work generally fell to me, while Mr. Frost attracted public attention by sketching in the streets, by collecting flowers and butterflies, or by lecturing to station-masters and peasants upon geography, cosmography, and the phenomena of the heavens. This last-mentioned occupation afforded him great amusement, and proved at the same time to be extremely useful as a means of giving a safe direction to popular speculations concerning us. Jointly I think we produced upon the public mind the impression that we had come to Siberia with what is known in Russia as an "*uchonni tsel*" (a "scientific aim"), and that we were chiefly interested in popular education, art, botany, geography, and archæology. After we had thus forestalled suspicion by calling promptly upon the police, and by furnishing the common people with a ready-made theory to explain our presence and our movements, we could go where we liked without exciting much remark, and we devoted four or five hours every night to the political exiles. Now and then some peasant would perhaps see us going to an exile's house; but as many of the politicals were known to be scientific men, and as we were traveling with a "scientific aim," no particular significance was attached to the circumstance. Everybody knew that we spent a large part of our time in visiting schools, collecting flowers, sketching, taking photographs, and hobnobbing with the local authorities; and the idea that we were particularly interested in the

political exiles rarely occurred, I think, to any one. As we went eastward into a part of Siberia where the politicals are more closely watched, we varied our policy somewhat to accord with circumstances; but the rules that we everywhere observed were, to act with confidence and boldness, to make ourselves socially agreeable to the local authorities, to attract as much attention as possible to the side of our life that would bear close inspection, and to keep the other side in the shade. We could not, of course, conceal wholly from the police our relations with the political exiles; but the extent and real significance of such relations were never, I think, suspected. At any rate, the telegraphic sword of Damocles did not fall upon us, and until we reached the Trans-Baikal, we did not even receive a "warning."

Our work in all parts of Siberia was greatly facilitated by the attitude of honest and intelligent officials towards the system that we were investigating. Almost without exception they were either hostile to it altogether, or opposed to it in its present form; and they often seemed glad of an opportunity to point out to a foreign observer the evils of exile as a method of punishment, and the frauds, abuses, and cruelties to which, in practice, it gives rise. This was something that I had neither foreseen nor counted upon; and more than once I was surprised and startled by the boldness and frankness of such officials, after they had become satisfied that they could safely talk to me without reserve.

"I get my living by the exile system," said a high officer of the prison department to me one day, "and I have no fault to find with my position or my pay; but I would gladly resign both to-morrow if I could see the system abolished. It is disastrous to Siberia, it is ruinous to the criminal, and it causes an immense amount of misery; but what can be done? If we say anything to our superiors in St. Petersburg, they strike us in the face; and they strike hard—it hurts! I have learned to do the best I can and to hold my tongue."

"I have reported upon the abuses and miseries in my department," said another officer, "until I am tired; and I have accomplished little or nothing. Perhaps if you describe them, something will be done. The prison here is unfit for human habitation,—it is n't fit for a dog,—and I have been trying for years to get a new one; but my efforts have resulted in nothing but an interminable correspondence."

Statements similar to these were made to me by at least a score of officers who held positions of trust in the civil or military service of the state, and many of them furnished me with abundant proof of their assertions in the shape of statistics and documentary evidence.

In the field of political exile we received invaluable aid from persons who were more or less in sympathy with the politicals, or with the liberal movement. How widespread in Siberia this feeling of sympathy is the Government probably does not know. One night, in a Siberian town, I attended a social meeting in a private house, where were assembled several members of the town council, six or eight army officers, and all the political exiles in the place. The army officers and the exiles seemed to be upon terms of the most friendly intimacy: the conversation was often extremely bold and liberal in tone, and songs that are generally recognized as revolutionary were sung by the officers and the politicals in unison. I met with similar evidences of "untrustworthiness" ("neblagonadezhnost") among officials in many parts of Siberia; and even in St. Petersburg, after my return from Asiatic Russia, I found *chinovniks* who manifestly sympathized with political offenders, and who aided me in procuring copies of valuable papers and documents. It will readily be seen, I think, that when one has the coöperation of honest officials who desire to have the truth known, of private citizens who are secretly in sympathy with the struggle for freer institutions, and of political exiles who are themselves collecting information with regard to the exile system, the investigation of that system becomes a less difficult task than at first sight it would seem to be.

I met in Tomsk, for the first time, political exiles who had taken part in the so-called "propaganda" of 1872-75; who had been banished by sentence of a court, and who might fairly be called revolutionists. They did not differ essentially from the administrative exiles in Semipalatinsk, Ulbinsk, and Ust Kamenogorsk, except that they had been longer in exile, and had had a much wider range of experience. One of them, a bright and talented publicist about thirty-five years of age, named Chudnofski, told me that he was arrested the first time at the age of nineteen, while in the university; and that he had been under police surveillance, in prison, or in exile nearly all his life. He was held four years and three months in solitary confinement before trial, and spent twenty months of that time in a casemate of the Petropavlovsk fortress. For protesting against illegal treatment in that great state-prison, and for insisting pertinaciously upon his right to have pen, ink, and paper, in order that he might address a complaint to the Minister of the Interior, he was tied hand and foot, and was finally put into a strait-jacket. He thereupon refused to take food, and starved himself until the prison surgeon reported that his condition was becoming crit-

ical. The warden, Colonel Bogarodski, then yielded, and furnished him with writing materials, but no reply was ever made to the complaint that he drew up. He was finally tried with "the 193," in 1878, upon the charge of importing pernicious books, was found guilty, and was sentenced to five years of penal servitude, with deprivation of all civil rights. In view, however, of the length of time that he had already been held in solitary confinement while awaiting trial,—four years and three months,—the court recommended to the Tsar that his sentence be commuted to exile in Western Siberia for life.¹

Most men would have been completely broken down by nearly five years of solitary confinement and seven years of exile; but Mr. Chudnofski's energy and courage were invincible. In spite of the most disheartening obstacles, he completed his education, and made a name and a career for himself even in Siberia. He is the author of the excellent and carefully prepared history of the development of educational institutions in Siberia, published in the "Official Year Book" of the province of Tomsk for 1885; he has made two scientific expeditions to the Altai under the auspices of the West Siberian Branch of the Imperial Geographical Society; he has been an indefatigable contributor to the Russian periodical press; and his book upon the Siberian province of Yeniseisk took the prize offered by the Krasnoyarsk city council for the best work upon that subject.² Mr. Chudnofski impressed me as a man who, if he had been born in America, might have had a career of usefulness and distinction, and might have been an honor to the state. He happened to be born in Russia, and was therefore predestined to imprisonment and exile.

Among the most interesting of the newly arrived political exiles in Tomsk was Mr. Constantine Staniukovitch, the editor and proprietor of the Russian magazine "Diello," whose history I gave briefly in an article upon "Exile by Administrative Process," in *THE CENTURY MAGAZINE* for September. He was a close and accurate observer of Russian social life, a talented novelist, a writer of successful dramas, and a man of great force, energy, and ability. His wife, who had accompanied him to Siberia, spoke English fluently with the least perceptible accent, and seemed to me to be a woman of more than ordinary culture and refinement. They had one grown daughter, a pretty, intelligent girl seventeen or eighteen years of age,

¹ Sentence in the trial of "the 193," pp. 5, 11, and 16. An official copy of the document is in my possession.

² "The Province of Yeniseisk, a Statistical and Politico-Economical Study," by S. Chudnofski. 195 pages. Press of the "Siberian Gazette," Tomsk, 1885.

as well as two or three younger children, and the whole family made upon us an extremely pleasant impression. Some of the most delightful evenings that we had in Tomsk were spent in their cozy little parlor, where we sometimes sat until long after midnight listening to duets sung by Miss Staniukovitch and Prince Krapotkin; discussing Russian methods of government and the exile system; or comparing our impressions of London, Paris, Berlin, New York, and San Francisco. Both Mr. and Mrs. Staniukovitch had traveled in the United States, and it seemed not a little strange to find in their house in Siberia visiting-cards of such well-known American officers as Captain James B. Eads and Captain John Rodgers, a photograph of President Lincoln, and Indian bead and birch-bark work in the shape of slippers and toy canoes brought as souvenirs from Niagara Falls. We had not expected to find ourselves linked to political exiles in Siberia by such a multitude of common experiences and memories, nor to be shown in their houses such familiar things as bead-embroidered moccasins and birch-bark watch-pockets made by the Tonawanda Indians. Mr. Staniukovitch was struggling hard, by means of literary work, to support his family in exile; and his wife, who was an accomplished musician, aided him as far as possible by giving music lessons. Their term of exile was three years, and if the Government has not arbitrarily added a year or two, they will be free before the appearance of this article.

To me perhaps the most attractive and sympathetic of the Tomsk exiles was the Russian author Felix Volkhoiski, who was banished to Siberia for life in 1878, upon the charge of "belonging to a society that intends, at a more or less remote time in the future, to overthrow the existing form of government." He was about thirty-eight years of age at the time I made his acquaintance, and was a man of cultivated mind, warm heart, and high aspirations. He knew English well, was familiar with American history and literature, and had, I believe, translated into Russian many of the poems of Longfellow. He spoke to me with great admiration, I remember, of Longfellow's "Arsenal at Springfield," and recited it to me aloud. He was one of the most winning and lovable men that it has ever been my good fortune to know; but his life had been a terrible tragedy. His health had been shattered by long imprisonment in the fortress of Petropavlovsk; his hair was prematurely white;

The value of Mr. Chudnofski's book was greatly impaired by censorial mutilation, and the last two chapters could not be printed at all; but even in its expurgated form it is acknowledged to be one of the most important works of the kind that Siberia has yet produced.

and when his face was in repose there seemed to be an expression of profound melancholy in his dark brown eyes. I became intimately acquainted with him and very warmly attached to him; and when I bade him good-bye for the last time on my return from Eastern Siberia in 1886, he put his arms around me and kissed me, and said, "George Ivanovitch, please don't forget us! In bidding you good-bye, I feel as if something were going out of my life that would never again come into it."

Since my return to America I have heard from Mr. Volkhofski only once. He wrote me last winter a profoundly sad and touching letter, in which he informed me of the death of his wife by suicide. He himself had been thrown out of employment by the suppression of the liberal Tomsk newspaper, the "Siberian Gazette"; and his wife, whom I remember as a pale, delicate, sad-faced woman, twenty-five or thirty years of age, had tried to help him support their family of young children by giving private lessons and by taking in sewing. Anxiety and overwork had finally broken down her health; she had become an invalid, and in a morbid state of mind, brought on by unhappiness and disease, she reasoned herself into the belief that she was an incumbrance, rather than a help, to her husband and her children, and that they would ultimately be better off if she were dead. A little more than a year ago she put an end to her unhappy life by shooting herself through the head with a pistol. Her husband was devotedly attached to her; and her death, under such circumstances and in such a way, was a terrible blow to him. In his letter to me he referred to a copy of James Russell Lowell's poems that I had caused to be sent to him, and said that in reading "After the Burial" he vividly realized for the first time that grief is of no nationality: the lines, although written by a bereaved American, expressed the deepest thoughts and feelings of a bereaved Russian. He sent me with his letter a small, worn, leather match-box, which had been given by Prince Pierre Krapotkin to his exiled brother Alexander; which the latter had left to Volkhofski; and which Volkhofski had in turn presented to his wife a short time before her death. He hoped, he said, that it would have some value to me, on account of its association with the lives of four political offenders, all of whom I had known. One of them was a refugee in London, another was an exile in Tomsk, and two had escaped the jurisdiction of the Russian Government by taking their own lives.

I tried to read Volkhofski's letter aloud to my wife; but as I recalled the high character and lovable personality of the writer, and imagined what this last blow of fate must have

been to such a man,—in exile, in broken health, and with a family of helpless children dependent upon him,—the written lines vanished in a mist of tears, and with a choking in my throat I put the letter and the little match-box away.

The Tsar may whiten the hair of such men as Felix Volkhofski in the silent bomb-proof casemates of the fortress, and he may send them in gray convict overcoats to Siberia; but a time will come, in the providence of God, when their names will stand higher than his on the roll of history, and when the record of their lives and sufferings will be a source of heroic inspiration to all Russians who love liberty and their country.

In the city of Tomsk we began to feel for the first time the nervous strain caused by the sight of remediless human misery. Our journey through South-western Siberia and the Altai had been off the great exile route; the politicals whose acquaintance we had made in Semipalatinsk, Ulbinsk, and Ust Kamenogorsk were fairly well treated and did not seem to be suffering; and it was not until we reached Tomsk that we were brought face to face with the tragedies of exile life. From that time, however, until we recrossed the Siberian frontier on our way back to St. Petersburg, we were subjected to a nervous and emotional strain that was sometimes harder to bear than cold, hunger, or fatigue. One cannot witness unmoved such suffering as we saw in the "bologans" and the hospital of the Tomsk forwarding prison, nor can one listen without the deepest emotion to such stories as we heard from political exiles in Tomsk, Krasnoyarsk, Irkutsk, and the Trans-Baikal. One pale, sad, delicate woman, who had been banished to Eastern Siberia and who had there gone down into the valley of the shadow of death, undertook one night, I remember, to relate to me her experience. I could see that it was agony for her to live over in narration the sufferings and bereavements of her tragic past, and I would gladly have spared her the self-imposed torture; but she was so determined that the world should know through me what Russians endure before they become terrorists, that she nerved herself to bear it, and between fits of half-controlled sobbing, during which I could only pace the floor, she told me the story of her life. It was the saddest story I had ever heard. After such an interview as this with a heart-broken woman—and I had many such—I could neither sleep nor sit still; and to the nervous strain of such experiences, quite as much as to hardship and privation, was attributable the final breaking down of my health and strength in the Trans-Baikal.

Before I left the city of Tomsk for Eastern Siberia, most of my long-cherished opinions

with regard to nihilists and the working of the exile system had been completely overthrown. I could not, by any process of readjustment or modification, make my preconceived ideas fit the facts as I found them. In a letter written from Tomsk to the President of The Century Company on the 26th of August, 1885, I indicated the change that had taken place in my views as follows:

The exile system is much worse than I supposed. Mr. —'s examination of prisons and study of the exile system were extremely superficial. I cannot understand how, if he really went through the Tiumen and Tomsk forwarding prisons, he could have failed to see that their condition and the condition of their wretched inmates were in many respects shocking. Nobody here has tried to conceal it from me. The acting governor of this province said to me very frankly yesterday that the condition of the Tomsk prison is "oozhasnoi" (awful), but that he cannot help it. . . . What I have previously written and said about the treatment of the political exiles seems to be substantially true and accurate,—at least so far as Western Siberia is concerned,—but my preconceived ideas as to their character have been rudely shaken. The Russian liberals and revolutionists whom I have met here are by no means half-educated enthusiasts, crazy fanatics, or men whose mental processes it is difficult to understand. On the contrary, they are simple, natural, perfectly comprehensible, and often singularly interesting and attractive. One sees at once that they are educated, reasonable, self-controlled gentlemen, not different in any essential respect from one's self. When I write up this country for THE CENTURY, I shall have to take back some of the things that I have said. The exile system is worse than I believed it to be, and worse than I have described it. It is n't pleasant, of course, to have to admit that one has written upon a subject without fully understanding it; but even that is better than trying, for the sake of consistency, to maintain a position after one sees that it is utterly untenable.

In Tomsk, and during our journey from that city to Irkutsk, we had for the first time a satisfactory opportunity to study the life of Siberian exiles on the road. Marching parties of convicts three or four hundred strong leave Tomsk for Irkutsk weekly throughout the whole year, and make the journey of 1040 miles in about three months. Étapes, or exile station-houses, stand along the road at intervals of from 25 to 40 miles; and at every étape there is a "convoy command" consisting of a commissioned officer known as the "nachalnik of the convoy," two or three under-officers, and about forty soldiers. As the distance from one étape to another is too great to be walked in a single day by prisoners in leg-fetters, buildings known as "poloo-étapes," or "half-étapes," have been constructed midway between the true étapes for the shelter of the

convicts at night. These half-way houses are generally smaller than the regular étapes, as well as somewhat different from the latter in architectural plan, and they have no "convoy commands." Marching parties are expected to make about 500 versts, or 330 miles, a month, with 24 hours of rest every third day. If a party leaves Tomsk Monday morning, it reaches a poloo-étape Monday night, arrives at the first regular étape Tuesday night, and rests in the latter all day Wednesday. Thursday morning it resumes its journey with another convoy, Thursday night it spends in the second poloo-étape, Friday night it reaches the second regular étape, and Saturday it again rests and changes convoy. In this way the party proceeds slowly for months, resting one day out of every three, and changing convoys at every other station. Each prisoner receives five cents a day in money for his subsistence, and buys food for himself from peasants along the road who make a business of furnishing it. The dress of the exiles in summer consists of a shirt, and a pair of trousers of coarse gray linen; square foot-wrappers of the same material in lieu of stockings; low shoes or slippers called "kottee"; leather ankle-guards to prevent the leg-fetters from chafing; a visorless Glengarry cap; and a long gray overcoat. The dress of female convicts is the same, except that a petticoat takes the place of the trousers. Women and children who voluntarily accompany relatives to Siberia are permitted to wear their own clothing, and to carry severally as much baggage as can be put into a two-bushel bag. No distinction is made between common convicts and political convicts, except that the latter, if they are nobles or belong to one of the privileged classes, receive seven and a half cents a day for their subsistence instead of five, and are carried in telegas instead of being forced to walk.¹

Up to the year 1883 there was no separation of the sexes in marching parties; but since that time an attempt has been made to forward unmarried male prisoners apart from "family parties," and to include in the latter all children and unmarried women. This reform has lessened somewhat the demoralization resulting from the promiscuous association of men, women, and children for months in overcrowded étapes; but the state of affairs is still very bad, since even "family parties" contain large numbers of depraved men and boys.

On Monday, August 24, Mr. Frost and I, by invitation of Captain Gudeem, the nachalnik

¹ At one time politicals were sent to Siberia separately in post vehicles under guard of gendarmes, and were carried to their destinations almost as quickly as if they had been private travelers. That practice, however, has been abandoned on account of its inconven-

ience and expense, and all politicals are now forwarded with common criminal parties. The result of the change is to prolong by many months the miseries of étape life, and to increase enormously the chances of sickness and death.

of the Tomsk convoy command, drove to the forwarding prison at 7 A. M. to see the departure of a marching party. The morning was cool, but a clear sky gave promise of a warm, sunshiny day. As we drew up before the prison we saw that the party had not yet made its appearance; and presuming that Captain Gudeem was busy, we did not send for him, but sat in our droshky watching the scenes at the gate. On each side of the lead-colored portal was a long wooden bench, on which half a dozen soldiers, in dark green uniforms, were sitting in lazy attitudes, waiting for the party to come out, and amusing themselves meanwhile by exchanging coarse witticisms with three or four female provision venders, squatted near them on the ground. An occasional high-pitched jingle of chains could be heard from within the inclosure, and now and then half of the double gate was thrown open to admit a couple of fettered convicts carrying water in a large wooden bucket slung between them on a shoulder-pole. Every person who entered the prison yard was hastily searched from head to foot by one of the two sentries at the gate, in order to prevent the smuggling in of prohibited articles, and especially of vodka.

About 8 o'clock telegas for the transportation of the weak and infirm began to gather in the street in front of the prison; a shabby under-officer who had been lounging with the soldiers on one of the benches rose, yawned, and went discontentedly into the prison court-yard; the soldiers put on their blanket-rolls and picked up their Berdan rifles; and a louder and more continuous jingling of chains from the other side of the palisade announced that the convict party was assembling. At last the prison blacksmith came out, bringing a small portable forge, a lap anvil, a hammer or two, and an armful of chains and leg-fetters, which he threw carelessly on the ground beside him; the soldiers shouldered their guns and took positions in a semicircle so as to form a cordon; an under-officer with the muster-roll of the party in his hand, and another with a leather bag of copper coins slung over his shoulder, stationed themselves near the gate; and at the word "Gatova!" ("Ready!") the convicts, in single file, began to make their appearance. The officer with the muster-roll checked off the prisoners as they answered to their names; the blacksmith, with the aid of a soldier, examined their leg-fetters to see that the rivets were fast and that the bands could not be slipped over the heel; and finally, the second under-officer gave to every man ten cents in copper coin for two days' subsistence between étapes. When all of the "katorzhniki," or hard-labor convicts, had come out of the prison yard, they arranged themselves in two parallel lines so that they

could be conveniently counted, and removed their caps so that the under-officer could see that their heads had been half shaved as required by law. They were then dismissed, and the "poselentse," or penal colonists, went through the same routine — the soldiers of the convoy stepping backward and extending the limits of their cordon as the number of prisoners outside the palisade gradually increased.

At length the whole party, numbering 350 or 400 men, was assembled in the street. Every prisoner had a gray linen bag in which were stored his scanty personal effects; many of them were provided with copper kettles which dangled from the leather belts that supported their leg-fetter chains; and one convict was carrying to the mines in his arms a small brown dog.

When the whole party had again been counted, and while the gray bags were being put into telegas, I availed myself of what seemed to be a favorable opportunity to talk with the prisoners. In a moment, to my great surprise, I was addressed by one of them in good English.

"Who are you?" I inquired in astonishment.

"I am a vagabond," he said quietly and seriously.

"What is your name?"

"Ivan Dontremember," he replied; and then glancing around and seeing that none of the convoy officers were near, he added in a low tone, "My real name is John Anderson, and I am from Riga."

"How do you happen to know English?" I asked.

"I am of English descent; and, besides that, I was once a sailor, and I have been in English ports."

At this point the approach of Captain Gudeem put a stop to our colloquy. The number of "brodyags," or vagabonds, in this party was very large, and nearly all of them were runaway convicts of the "Dontremember" family, who had been recaptured in Western Siberia, or had surrendered themselves during the previous winter in order to escape starvation.

"I have no doubt," said Captain Gudeem to me, "that there are brodyags in this very party who have escaped and been sent back to the mines half a dozen times."

"Boys!" he shouted suddenly, "how many of you are now going to the mines for the sixth time?"

"Mnogo yest" ["There are lots of them"], replied several voices; and finally one gray-bearded convict in leg-fetters came forward and admitted that he had made four escapes from the mines, and that he was going into

penal servitude for the fifth time. In other words, this man had traversed eight times on foot the distance of nearly 2000 miles between Tomsk and the mines of Kara.

"I know brodyags," said Captain Gudeem, "who have been over this road sixteen times in leg-fetters, and who have come back sixteen times across the steppes and through the woods. God only knows how they live through it!"

When one considers that crossing Eastern Siberia thirty-two times on foot is about equivalent to walking twice the circumference of the globe at the equator, one can appreciate the indomitable resolution of these men, and the strength of the influence that draws them towards home and freedom. In the year 1884, 1360 such brodyags were recaptured in Western Siberia and sent back to the mines of the Trans-Baikal, and hundreds more perished from cold and starvation in the forests. M. I. Orfanof, a Russian officer who served many years in Eastern Siberia, says that he once found 200 "Ivan Dontremembers" in a single prison—the prison of Kaidalova, between Chita and Nerchinsk.¹

Some of the brodyags with whom I talked were men of intelligence and education. One of them, who was greatly interested in our photographic apparatus, and who seemed to know all about "dry plates," "drop shutters," and "Dallmeyer lenses," asked me how convicts were treated in the United States, and whether they could, by extra work, earn a little money, so as not to leave prison penniless. I replied that in most American penitentiaries they could.

"It is not so," he said, "with us. Naked we go to the mines, and naked we come out of them; and we are flogged, while there, at the whim of every nariadchik."²

"Oh, no!" said Captain Gudeem good-naturedly, "they don't flog at the mines now."

"Yes, they do, your Nobility," replied the brodyag firmly but respectfully. "If you are sick or weak, and can't finish your stent, you are given twenty blows with the cat."

I should have been glad to get further information from the brodyag with regard to his life at the mines, but just at this moment Captain Gudeem asked me if I would not like to see the loading of the sick and infirm, and the conversation was interrupted.

The telegas intended for prisoners physically

¹ "Afar" (V' Dalee), by M. I. Orfanof, p. 226. St. Petersburg, 1883.

² A petty officer who directs the work of the convicts in the "razreiz," or cutting, and who sets their tasks.

³ Some convicts are extremely skillful in counterfeiting the symptoms of disease, and will now and then succeed in deceiving even an experienced prison

unable to walk were small one-horse carts, without springs of any kind, and with only one seat, in front, for the driver and the guard. They looked to me like the halves of longitudinally bisected hogsheads mounted upon four low wheels, with their concave sides uppermost. More wretchedly uncomfortable vehicles to ride in were never devised. A small quantity of green grass had been put into each one, to break the jolting a little, and upon this grass, in every cart, were to sit four sick or disabled convicts.

"All prisoners who have certificates from the doctor, step out!" shouted Captain Gudeem, and twenty-five or thirty "incapables"—some old and infirm, some pale and emaciated from sickness—separated themselves from the main body of convicts in the road. An under-officer collected and examined their certificates, and as fast as their cases were approved they climbed into the telegas. One man, although apparently sick, was evidently a malingerer, since, as he took his place in a partly filled telega, he was greeted with a storm of groans and hoots from the whole convict party.³

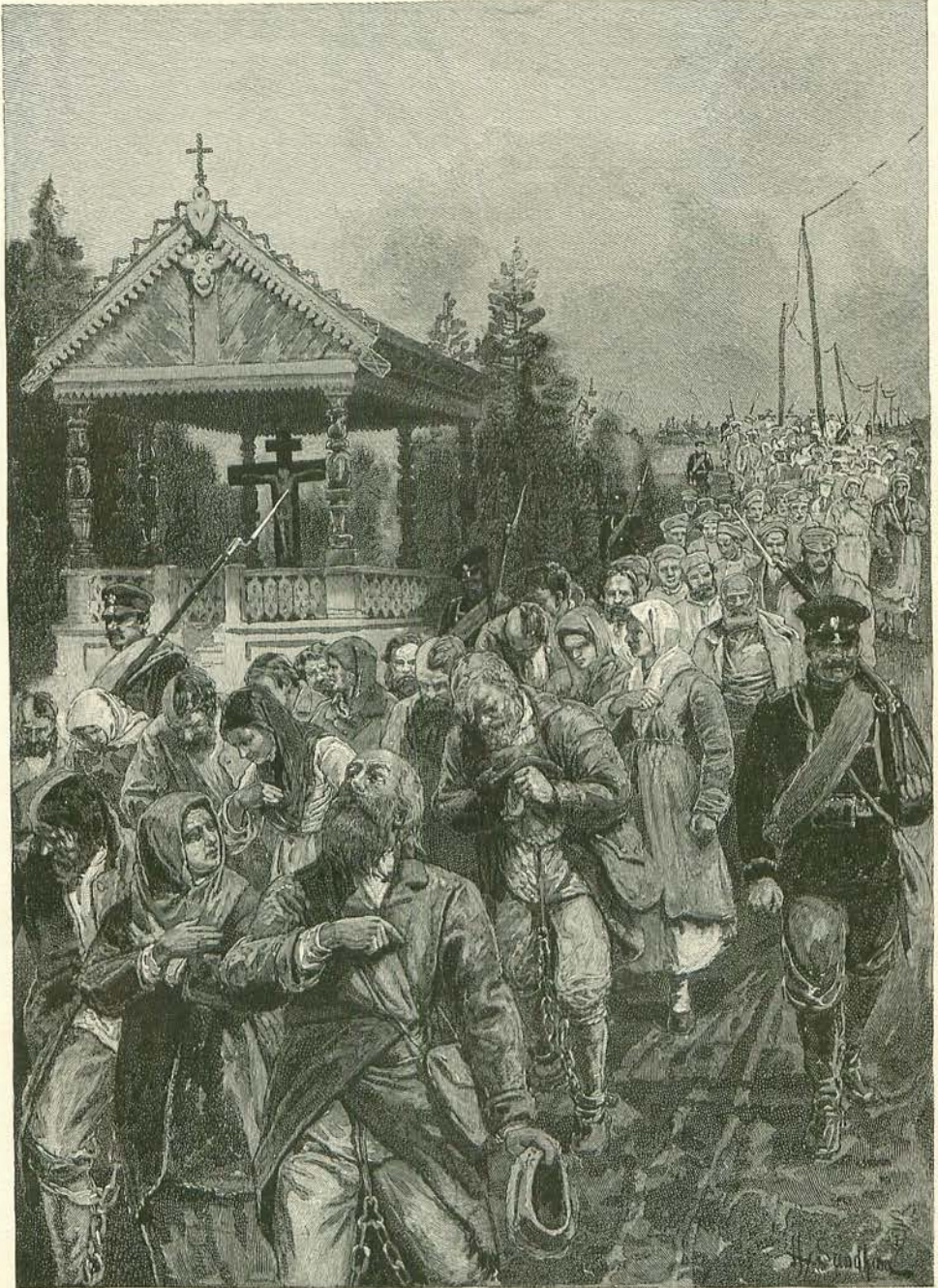
The number of prisoners who, when they leave Tomsk, are unable to walk is sometimes very large. In the year 1884, 658 telegas were loaded there with exiles of this class, and if every telega held four persons, the aggregate number of "incapables" must have exceeded 2500.⁴ Such a state of things is, of course, the natural result of the overcrowding of the Tomsk forwarding prison.

When the sick and infirm had all taken the places assigned them in the invalid carts, Captain Gudeem took off his cap, crossed himself, and bowed in the direction of the prison church, and then, turning to the convicts, cried, "Well, boys! Go ahead! A safe journey to you!"

"Party—to the right! Party—march!" shouted one of the under-officers, and with a clinking of chains which sounded like the jingling of innumerable bunches of keys the gray throng, hemmed in by a cordon of soldiers, began its long journey of 1800 miles to the mines of the Trans-Baikal. The marching convicts, who took the lead, were closely followed by the telegas with the sick and the infirm; next came three or four carts loaded with gray linen bags; and finally, in a tarantas behind the rear-guard of soldiers, rode Cap-

surgeon. If necessary for the accomplishment of their purpose, they do not hesitate to create artificial swellings by applying irritating decoctions to a slight self-inflicted wound, and they even poison themselves with tobacco and other noxious herbs.

⁴ Report of the Inspector of Exile Transportation for 1884, p. 31 of the MS.



A CONVICT PARTY PASSING A SHRINE NEAR TOMSK.

tain Gudeem, the nachalnik of the convoy. The column moved at the rate of about two miles an hour; and long before noon it was enveloped in a suffocating cloud of dust raised by the shuffling, fetter-incumbered feet of the prisoners. In warm, dry weather, when there is no wind, dust is a source of great misery to marching parties—particularly to the sick, the women, and the children. There is no possible way of escaping it, and when a prisoner is suffering from one of the diseases of the respiratory organs that are so common in *étape* life it is simply torture to sit in a cramped position for six or eight hours in an open telega, breathing the dust raised by the feet of 350 men marching in close column just ahead. I have traced the progress of an invisible exile party more than a mile away by the cloud of dust that hung over it in the air.

Five or six miles from Tomsk the party passed a "chasovnaya," or roadside shrine, consisting of an open pavilion, in which hung a ghastly wooden effigy of the crucified Christ. Here, as upon our departure from Tomsk, I noticed that two-thirds of the convicts removed their caps, crossed themselves devoutly, and muttered brief supplications. A Russian peasant may be a highway robber or a murderer, but he continues, nevertheless, to cross himself and say his prayers.

The first halt of the party for rest was made about ten miles from Tomsk, at the entrance to a small village. Here, on a patch of green-sward by the roadside, had assembled ten or twelve girls and old women with baskets of provisions, bottles of milk, and jugs of "kvass," or small beer, for sale to the prisoners. At first sight of these preparations for their refreshment, the experienced brodyags, who marched at the head of the column, raised a joyous shout of "Preeval! Preeval!"—the exile's name for the noonday halt. The welcome cry was passed along the line until it reached the last wagon of "incapables," and the whole party perceptibly quickened its pace. A walk of ten miles does not much tire a healthy and unincumbered man; but to convicts who have been in prison without exercise for months, and who are hampered by five-pound leg-fetters united by chains that clash constantly between the legs, it is a trying experience. In less than a minute after the command to halt was given, almost every man in the party was either sitting on the ground or lying upon it at full length. After a short rest, the prisoners began buying food from the provision venders, in the shape of black rye-bread, fish pies, hard-boiled eggs, milk, and kvass, and in half an hour they were all sitting on the ground, singly or in groups, eating their lunch. With the permission of Captain Gudeem, Mr. Frost took a photograph

of them, which is here reproduced, and about 2 o'clock the party resumed its journey.

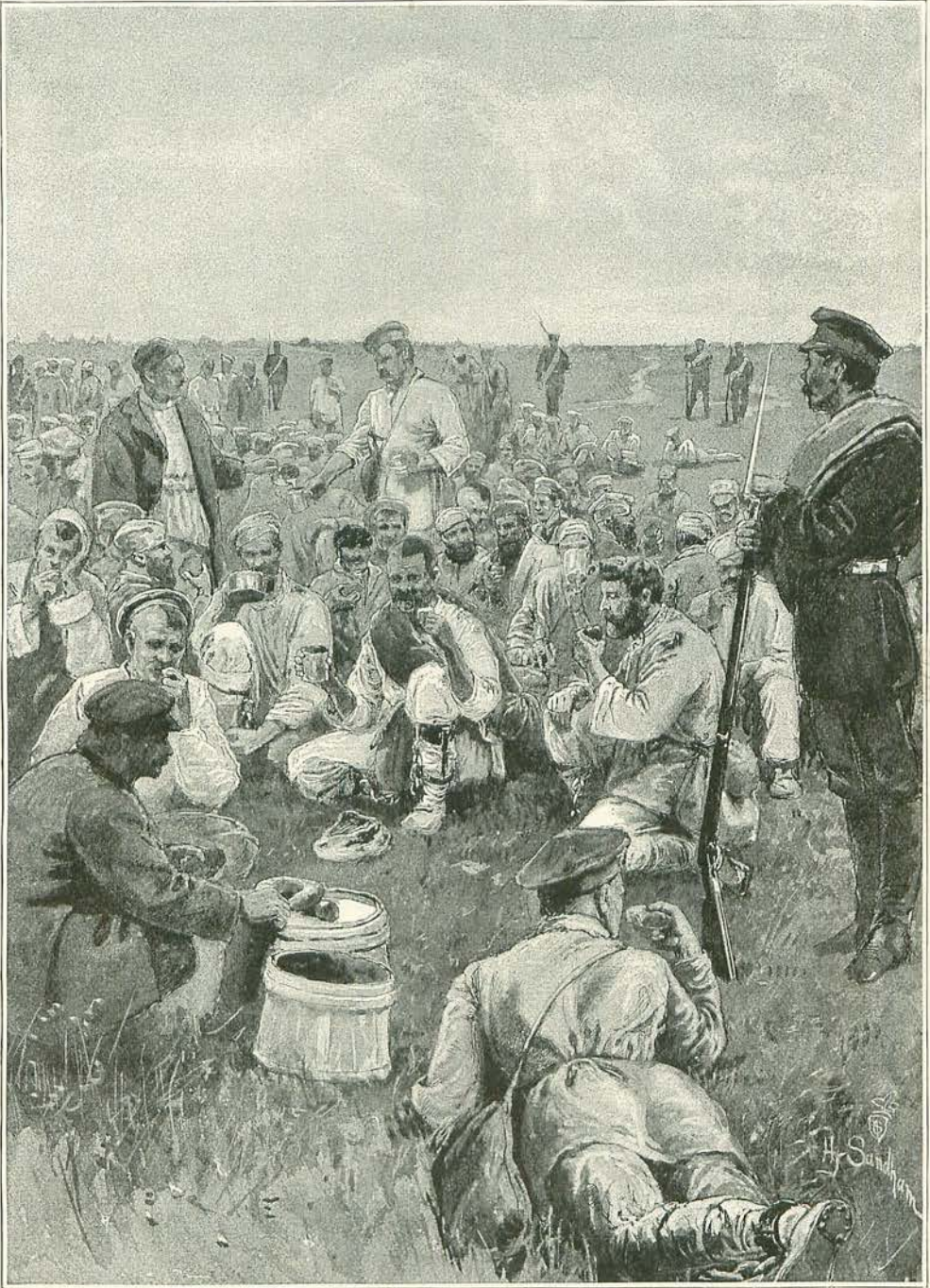
The afternoon march was without noteworthy incident. The brodyags talked constantly as they walked, raising their voices so as to make themselves heard above the jingling of the chains, while the novices generally listened or asked questions. There is the same difference between a brodyag who has been to the mines half a dozen times, and a novice who is going for the first time, that there is between an experienced cowboy and a "tenderfoot." The brodyag knows the road as the tongue knows the mouth; he has an experimental acquaintance with the temper and character of every convoy officer from Tomsk to Kara; and his perilous adventures in the "taiga"—the primeval Siberian forest—have given to him a self-confidence and a decision of character that make him the natural leader in every convict party. It is the boast of the true brodyag that the ostrog (the prison) is his father and the taiga (the wilderness) his mother; and he often spends his whole life in going from one parent to the other. He rarely escapes from Siberia altogether, although he may reach half a dozen times the valley of the Ob. Sooner or later he is almost always recaptured, or is forced by cold and starvation to give himself up. As an *étape* officer once said to a brodyag rearrested in Western Siberia, "The Tsar's cow-pasture is large, but you can't get out of it; we find you at last if you are not dead."

The conversation of the brodyags in the party that we accompanied related chiefly to their own exploits and adventures at the mines and in the taiga, and it did not seem to be restrained in the least by the presence of the soldiers of the convoy.

The distance from Tomsk to the first *poloo-étape* is twenty-nine versts (nearly twenty miles), and it was almost dark before the tired prisoners caught sight of the serrated palisade within which they were to spend their first night on the road.

A Siberian *poloo-étape*, or half-way station, is a stockaded inclosure about 100 feet long by 50 or 75 feet wide, containing two or three low, one-story log buildings. One of these buildings is occupied by the convoy officer, another by the soldiers, and the third and largest by the convicts. The prisoners' *kazarm*, which is generally painted a dirty yellow,¹ is long and low and contains three or four large *kameras*, each of which is provided with a brick oven and a double row of plank nares, or sleeping-platforms. According to the last official report of the Inspector of Exile Transportation, which is confirmed by my own observation, "All of the *étapes* and *poloo-étapes* on the road between

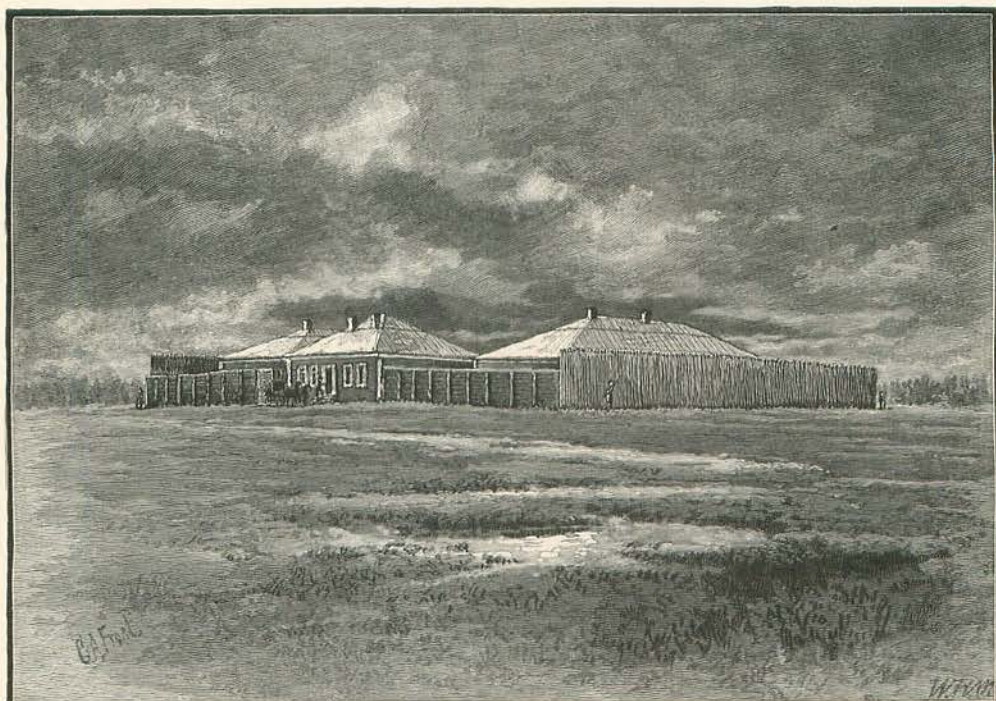
¹ Yellow is the *étape* color throughout Siberia.



HALT OF A CONVICT PARTY FOR LUNCH.

Tomsk and Achinsk — with a very few exceptions — are not only too small, but are old and decayed, and demand capital repairs." Their principal defect is that which is characteristic of Siberian prisons generally; namely, lack of adequate room. They were built from 30 to 50

years ago, when exile parties did not number more than 150 men, and they now have to accommodate from 350 to 450. The result, as stated by the Inspector of Exile Transportation, is that "in pleasant weather half the prisoners sleep on the ground in the court-yard, while in



"POLOO-ÉTAPE" ON THE TOMSK-ACHINSK ROAD.

bad weather they fill all the *kameras*, lie on the floors in the corridors, and even pack the garrets." The cells are not even as habitable as they might be made with a little care and attention. They are almost always dirty; their windows are so made that they cannot be opened; and notwithstanding the fact that the overcrowding, at certain seasons of the year, is almost beyond belief,¹ no provision whatever has been made in them for ventilation.

When our convicts, after their toilsome march of twenty-nine versts from Tomsk, reached at last the red-roofed *poloo-étape* of *Semiluzhnaya*, they were marshaled in rows in front of the palisade and again carefully counted by the under-officers in order to make sure that none had escaped, and then the wooden gate of the court-yard was thrown wide open. With a wild, mad rush and a furious clashing of chains, more than three hundred men made a sudden break for the narrow gateway, struggled, fought, and crowded through it, and then burst into the *kameras*, in order to secure, by preoccupation, places on the sleeping-platforms. Every man knew

that if he did not succeed in preëmpting a section of a *nare* he would have to lie on the dirty floor, in one of the cold corridors, or out-of-doors; and many prisoners who did not care particularly where they slept sought to secure good places in order to sell them afterward for a few *kopecks* to less fortunate but more fastidious comrades.

At last the tumult subsided, and the convicts began their preparations for supper. Hot water was furnished by the soldiers of the convoy at an average price of about a cent a teakettleful; "brick" tea was made by the prisoners who were wealthy enough to afford such a luxury;² soup was obtained by a few from the soldiers' kitchen; and the tired exiles, sitting on the sleeping-platforms or on the floor, ate the black bread, the fish pies, or the cold boiled meat that they had purchased from the provision venders. The evening meal is sometimes an exceedingly scanty one, on account of the failure of the peasant women to bring to the *étape* for sale an adequate supply of food. They are not obliged to furnish subsistence to convicts on the road, and the exile

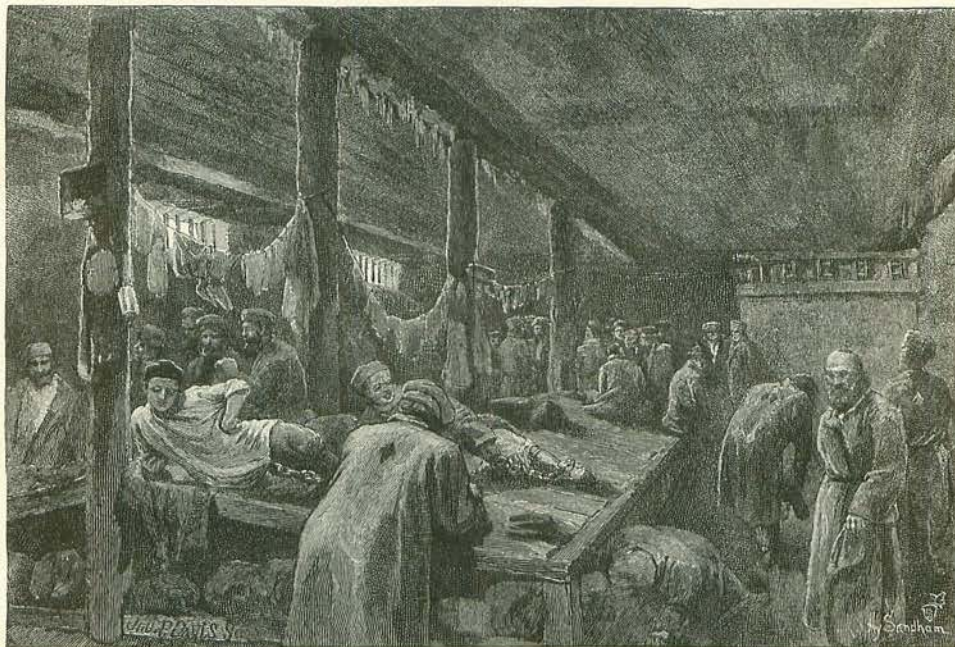
¹ The well-known Russian author Maximof cites a case in which 512 human beings were packed into one of these *étapes* in Western Siberia ("Siberia and Penal Servitude," by S. Maximof, Vol. I., p. 81. St. Petersburg, 1871); and Mr. M. I. Orfanof, a Russian officer who served ten years in Siberia, reports that an East Siberian *étape* (at Verkhni Udinsk), which was intended for 140 prisoners, never contained, when he visited

it, less than 500, and sometimes held more than 800 ("Afar," by M. I. Orfanof, p. 220. St. Petersburg, 1883).

² Brick tea is made of a cheap grade of tea leaves, mixed with stems and a little adhesive gum, and pressed into hard dry cakes about eight inches in length, five inches in width, and an inch and a half in thickness. It resembles in appearance and consistency the blackest kind of "plug" tobacco.

administration attempts no regulation of the commissariat beyond furnishing the prisoners with money for rations, and allowing the peasants or the soldiers of the convoy to act as purveyors. In times of scarcity it is impossible to buy, with the money given to each exile for his subsistence, enough food to satisfy hunger. In one district of Eastern Siberia, where there had been a partial failure of the crops, the exiles could scarcely buy, with five

than half the party lay on the dirty floors without blankets or pillows, and the atmosphere of the rooms in the course of the night became foul and polluted to an extent that can be imagined only by one who has been present at the opening of the doors in the morning. How human beings, under such conditions, live to reach the mines of Kara, I do not know. It was my intention to ask a friendly *étape* officer to allow me to spend one night



A KAMERA, OR CELL, IN A "POLOO-ÉTAPE."

cents a day, a pound and a half of black rye-bread. The *étape* officers complained bitterly to me of the indifference of the Government to the sufferings of the prisoners, and declared that it was unjust and cruel to give men only a pound and a half of black bread, and at the same time force them to march twenty miles a day in leg-fetters, and in bitterly cold weather.¹

After supper the roll of the party was called in the court-yard; a sentry was stationed at each corner of the quadrangular stockade, and another at the gate; a cheap tallow-candle was lighted in each *kamera*; "parashas," or large uncovered wooden tubs for excrement, were placed in the cells and corridors; and the prisoners were locked up for the night. More

with the convicts in an *étape kamera*; but after breathing the air of one of those cells when the doors were reopened in the morning, I decided not to make the experiment.

The second day's march of the convict party that left Tomsk on the 24th of August differed little from the first. A hasty and rather scanty breakfast in the *kameras* was followed by the assembling of the convicts, the morning roll-call, and the departure; the day's journey was again broken by the preeval, or halt for lunch; and early in the afternoon the party reached the first regular *étape*, where it was to change convoys and stop one day for rest.

The *étape* differs from the *poloo-étape* only in size and in the arrangement of its buildings.

¹ This was in the Verkhni Udinsk district of the Trans-Baikal. According to the statements made to me by the *étape* officers, black bread of the poorest quality cost from six to seven kopecks a pound, and the prisoners received only eleven kopecks a day. This state of affairs existed throughout the entire fall of 1885, growing worse and worse as winter came on. No attention whatever was paid, so far as I know, to

the complaints and suggestions of the *étape* officers, notwithstanding the fact that a circular had been issued by the Prison and Exile Department providing for such an exigency, and requesting the Siberian governors to increase, in times of scarcity, the daily allowance of prisoners on the road. (Circular Letter of the Prison and Exile Department, No. 10,887, December 15, 1880.)

The court-yard is more spacious, and the *kameras* are a little larger, than in the *poloo-étape*; but the buildings are old and in bad repair, and there is not room enough in them for

say that most of them are in a lamentable condition. The *étapes* are particularly bad. With a very few exceptions they are tumble-down buildings, in bad sanitary condition, cold in winter, saturated with miasm, and offering very little security against escapes.



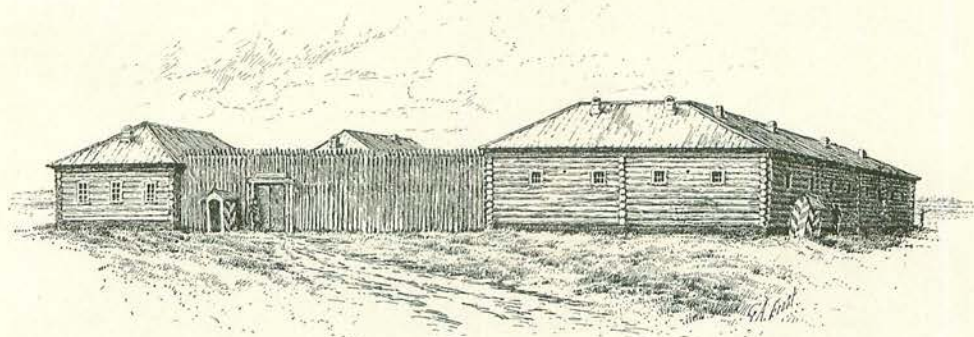
"BRODVAGS," OR RUNAWAY CONVICTS.

half the number of prisoners now forwarded in every party. I will describe the regular *étapes* briefly in the words of General Anutchin, the Governor-General of Eastern Siberia, who saw them at their best. This high officer, in a private report to the Tsar marked "Secret," of which I was fortunate enough to obtain a copy,¹ says:

During my journey to Irkutsk I inspected a great number of penal institutions, including city prisons, forwarding prisons, and *étapes*; and I regret to have to

I have not myself said anything worse of *étapes* than this. If these buildings, after they had been put in the best possible condition for the Governor-General's inspection, made upon him such an impression as this, the reader can imagine what impression they made upon me, when I saw them in their every-

¹ This report was delivered to the Tsar in December, 1880, by Adjutant Kozello, one of General Anutchin's aides.



SKETCH OF AN ÉTAPE ON THE TOMSK-IRKUTSK ROAD.

day aspect. I am quite content, however, to let Governor-General Anutchin's description stand as my own, with a few qualifications and exceptions. All of the étapés on the Tomsk-Irkutsk road are not of this character. I examined one at the village of Itatskaya, near Marinsk, which was clean, well cared for, and in perfect order, and I have little doubt that if I had had time to visit every exile station-house on the road, I should have found many to which the Governor-General's description would not fairly apply. In the main, however, it is truthful and accurate.

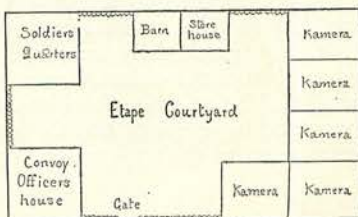
The "lamentable condition" of the Siberian étapes seems to me to be mainly attributable to corrupt and incapable administration, and to the inherent defects of a bureaucratic system of government. For these very étapes, bad as they are, an immense amount of money has been appropriated; but the greater part of it has been divided between fraudulent contractors and corrupt government officials. An inspector of exile transportation, who had excellent opportunities to know the facts, told me that it was hardly an exaggeration to say that if all the money that had been appropriated for the construction and maintenance of these "tumble-down buildings" could now be gathered together it would be enough to pay for the erection of a line of solid silver étapes along the whole route from Tomsk to the city of Irkutsk. Governor-General Anutchin himself says, in the same report to the Tsar from which I have already quoted:

Large sums of money have been spent in repairs upon these buildings, and 250,000 rubles have recently been appropriated for the construction of new étapes in the province of the Trans-Baikal. I doubt, however, whether, in the existing state of things [or "under existing conditions"], any substantial results can be expected. There is even danger that the new étapes in the province of the Trans-Baikal will share the fate of the étapes in the provinces of Yeniseisk and Irkutsk.

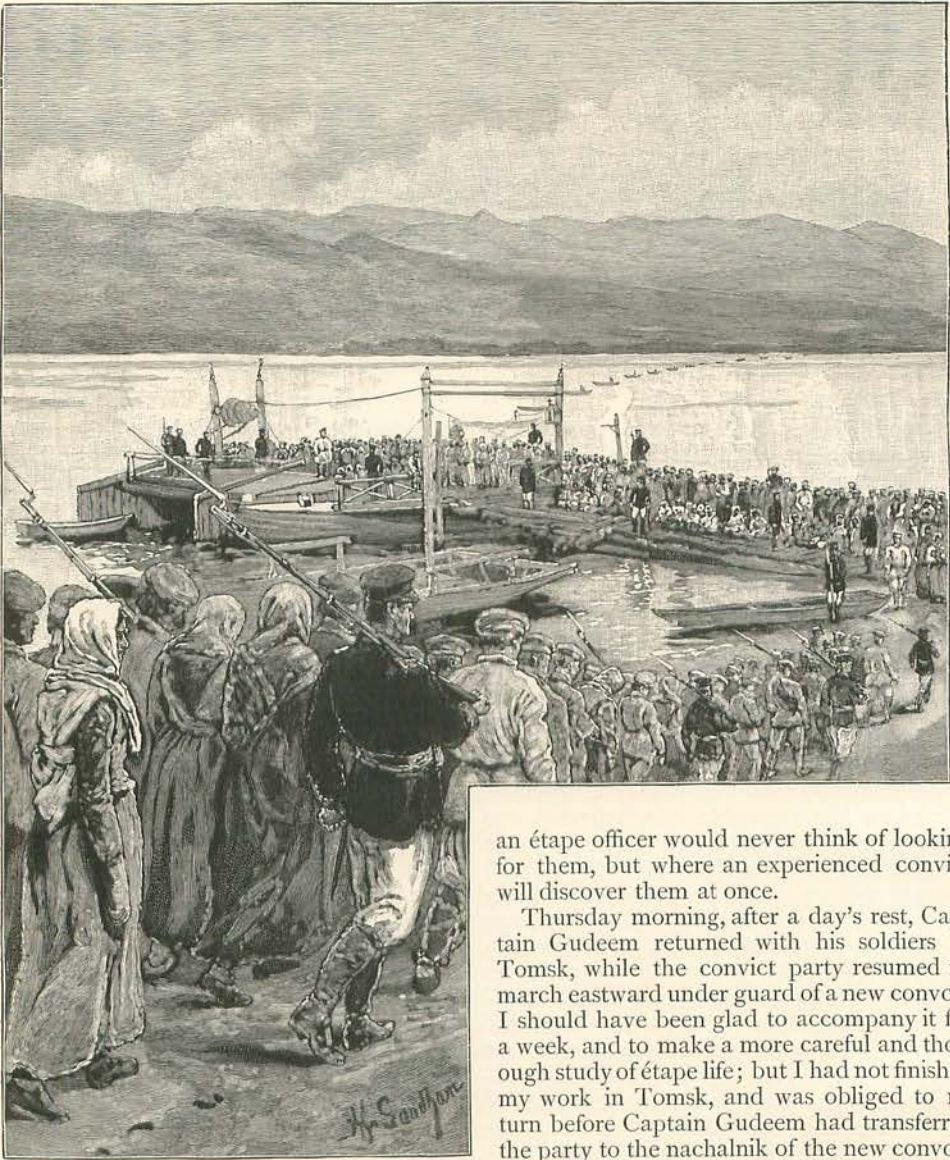
General Anutchin's foreboding has been fully justified. Both the Inspector of Exile Trans-

portation for Eastern Siberia, and the assistant chief of the prison department in St. Petersburg, admitted to me that the new étapes in the Trans-Baikal were "very unsatisfactory."

Our convict party spent Tuesday night in the first regular étape at Khaldeyeva, under almost precisely the same conditions that prevailed the previous night in the poloo-étape of Semiluzhnaya. Half the prisoners slept on the floor, under the nares, and in the corridors, breathing all night an atmosphere poisoned by carbonic acid and exhalations from uncovered parashas. Wednesday was a day of rest; and the exiles lounged about all day in the prison court-yard, or studied the "record of current events" on the walls of the étapes. The sleeping-platforms and the walls of every Siberian étape bear countless inscriptions, left there by the exiles of one party for the information or instruction of their comrades in the next. Among such inscriptions are messages and greetings to friends; hints and suggestions for brodyags who meditate escape; names of exiles who have died, broken jail, or been recaptured; and items of news, of all sorts, from the mines and the forwarding prisons. Therefore for the convicts the étape walls are equivalent to so many pages of a daily newspaper, containing an exile directory, open letters, obituary notices, a puzzle department of brodyag ciphers, and a personal intelligence column of the highest interest to all "travelers on government account." One of the first things that an experienced convict does, after his arrival at an étape, is to search the walls for news; and his fortunes not infrequently turn upon the direction, or the warning, contained in a mes-



PLAN OF ABOVE.



CROSSING THE RIVER ON A PENDULUM FERRY-BOAT.

sage that he finds there from a comrade who has preceded him. Mr. Galkin-Vrasskoi, Chief of the Prison and Exile Department, at last has come to appreciate the significance and importance of these mural inscriptions, and has recently ordered *étape* officers to see that they are carefully erased. I doubt, however, whether the order will secure the desired results. The prison authorities are constantly outwitted by convicts, and the latter will soon learn to write their messages in places where

an *étape* officer would never think of looking for them, but where an experienced convict will discover them at once.

Thursday morning, after a day's rest, Captain Gudeem returned with his soldiers to Tomsk, while the convict party resumed its march eastward under guard of a new convoy. I should have been glad to accompany it for a week, and to make a more careful and thorough study of *étape* life; but I had not finished my work in Tomsk, and was obliged to return before Captain Gudeem had transferred the party to the *nachalnik* of the new convoy.

The life of exiles on the road, three days of which I have roughly sketched, continues, with little to break its monotony, for many months. In sunshine and in storm, through dust and through mud, the convicts march slowly but steadily eastward, crossing the great Siberian rivers on pendulum ferry-boats; toiling up the sides of forest-clad mountains in drenching rains; wading through mire in swampy valleys; sleeping every night in the heavy mephitic atmosphere of overcrowded *étapes*, and drawing nearer, day by day, to the dreaded mines of the Trans-Baikal.

George Kennan.