

THE "FREE COMMAND" AT THE MINES OF KARA.



THE most important of the objects that we had in view at the mines of Kara was the investigation of penal servitude in its relation to political offenders. Common, hard-labor felons, such as burglars, counterfeiters, and murderers, we had seen, or could see, in a dozen other places; but political convicts¹ were to be found only in the log prisons and penal settlements of Kara, and there, if anywhere, their life must be studied. In order to succeed in the task that we had set ourselves, it was necessary that we should personally visit and inspect one or both of the political prisons, and obtain unrestricted access, in some way, to the small body of state criminals who had finished their "term of probation" and were living under surveillance in the so-called "free command." We were well aware that these were not easy things to do; but we were no longer inexperienced and guileless tourists, dependent wholly upon letters of introduction and official consent. We had had six months' training in the school that sharpens the wits of the politicals themselves, we had learned how best to deal with suspicious police and gendarme officers, we were in possession of all the information and all the suggestions that political ex-convicts in other parts of Siberia could give us, and we saw no reason to despair of success.

It seemed to me that the best policy for us to pursue, at first, was to make as many friends as possible; get hold of the threads of social and official relationship in the penal settlement where we found ourselves; avoid manifestations of interest in the political convicts; make a careful study of our environment, and then wait—maintaining meanwhile, as Ladislav says in "Middlemarch," "an attitude of receptivity towards all sublime chances." Nothing was to be gained and everything might be risked by premature or over-hasty action. For three or four days, therefore, we did not attempt to do anything except to visit the common-criminal prisons and the mines, talk with the officials who called upon us, make ourselves agreeable to Major Potulof and his pretty wife, and study the situation. It soon became evident to me that there would be no use in asking

for permission to see the political convicts of the free command, and that if we made their acquaintance at all we should have to do it secretly. I knew most of them by name and reputation; I had a letter of introduction to one of them,— Miss Nathalie Armfeldt,— and I had been furnished by her friends with a map of the Lower Diggings, showing the situation of the little cabin in which she and her mother lived; but how to visit her, or open communications with her secretly, in a small village swarming with Cossacks and gendarmes, and, moreover, in a village where a foreigner was as closely and curiously watched and stared at as the Tsar of all the Russias would be in a New England hamlet, I did not know. But that was not the worst of it. I soon discovered that I could not even get away from Major Potulof. From the moment of our arrival he gave up all his other duties and devoted himself exclusively to us. If we staid at home all day, he remained all day at home. If we went out, he accompanied us. I could not make a motion towards my hat or my overcoat without his asking, "Where are you going?" If I replied that I was going out for exercise, or for a little walk, he would say, "Wait a minute and I will go with you." What could I do? He evidently did not intend that we should see some things in Kara, or have an opportunity to make any independent investigations. I understood and fully appreciated his situation as a high officer of the Crown, and I was sorry to cause him any uneasiness or annoyance; but I had undertaken to ascertain the real state of affairs, and I intended to do it by any means that seemed to be within the limits of honor and fairness. The most embarrassing feature of the situation, from a moral point of view, was that growing out of our presence in Major Potulof's house as his guests. It did not seem to be fair to mislead the man whose hospitality we were enjoying, or even to conceal from him our real purposes; and yet we had no alternative. Our only chance of success lay in secrecy. If we should intimate to Major Potulof that we desired to see the political convicts of the free command, and to hear what they might have to say concerning their life and the treatment to which they had been subjected, he would probably

¹ I use these words here in a somewhat restricted sense, to denote "katorzhniki" (kah'torz-nee-kee), or political criminals who are actually in penal servitude. There are political convicts, of course, in other parts

of Siberia; but all who are actually undergoing penal servitude—that is, the "katorzhniki"—live in the Kara prisons and villages.

express grave disapproval; and then we, as his guests, should be in honor bound to respect his authority. It would hardly be fair to eat a man's bread and then openly disregard his expressed wishes in a matter that might be of vital interest to him as well as to us. I revolved these and many other similar considerations in my mind for two or three days, and finally decided that if I could see the political convicts before Major Potulof had said anything to me on the subject I would do it—acting, of course, upon my own responsibility, at my own risk, and in such a way, if possible, as to relieve him from the least suspicion of complicity. I did not see why we should be tied hand and foot by accidental obligations of hospitality growing out of a situation into which we had virtually been forced. As soon as I had come to this decision I began to watch for opportunities; but I soon found myself involved in a network of circumstances and personal relations that rendered still more difficult and hazardous the course I intended to pursue. On the second day after our arrival we received a call from Captain Nikolín (Nee-ko'lin), the gendarme commandant of the political prisons. He had heard of our sudden appearance, and had come to see who we were and what we wanted in that dreaded penal settlement. He made upon me, from the first, a very unfavorable impression; but I was not prepared, nevertheless, for the contemptuous, almost insulting, coldness of the reception given to him by Major Potulof. It was apparent, at a glance, that the two men were upon terms of hostility; and for a moment I wondered why Nikolín should put himself in a position to be so discourteously treated. Most men would have regarded such a reception as equivalent to a slap in the face, and would have left the house at the first opportunity. Gendarme officers, however, are trained to submit to anything, if by submission they can attain their ends. Captain Nikolín wished to see the American travelers, and, notwithstanding the chilly nature of the reception given him, he was as bland as a May morning. It was obviously my policy to show him as much cordiality as I possibly could without irritating Major Potulof. I desired not only to remove any suspicions that he might entertain with regard to us, but, if possible, to win his confidence. "It must gratify even a gendarme officer," I thought, "to be treated with marked respect and cordiality by foreign travelers, when he has just been openly affronted by one of his own associates. We, as Major Potulof's guests, might naturally be expected to follow his lead. If we take the opposite course, Nikolín will give us credit not only for courtesy, but for independence of

judgment and clear perception of character, and we shall thus score a point." I never had any reason to doubt the soundness of this reasoning. Nikolín was evidently gratified by the unexpected evidences of interest and respect that appeared in our behavior towards him, and when he took his leave he shook my hand and expressed the hope that we might meet again. He did not dare, in Major Potulof's presence, to invite us to call upon him, nor did we venture to promise that we would do so; but we intended, nevertheless, to pay him a visit just as soon as we could escape from surveillance. Major Potulof had delicacy or prudence enough not to say a word in dispraise of Nikolín after the latter had gone; but in subsequent conversation with other officers I learned that the personal relations between the two men were greatly strained, and that Nikolín was generally hated and despised as a secret spy and informer by all the regular army officers at the post.

"He writes full reports to St. Petersburg of everything we do," said one officer to me; "but," he added, "let him write. I'm not afraid of him. We have had four or five gendarme officers in charge of the political prison here in the last three years, and he's the worst of the lot."

This information with regard to Nikolín and his relations to Potulof greatly complicated the situation. Suppose I should succeed in making the acquaintance of the political convicts of the free command; Nikolín would almost certainly hear of it, and would probably find out that I had brought the convicts letters. He would at once report the facts to St. Petersburg, and would make them the basis of an accusation against his enemy Potulof by saying: "These American travelers are Potulof's guests. They have visited the political convicts secretly at night, and have even committed a penal offense by carrying letters. They would hardly have dared to do this without Potulof's knowledge and consent; consequently Potulof has been accessory to a violation of law, and has interfered with the discharge of my duties. I cannot consent to be held responsible for the political convicts if Major Potulof is going to aid foreign travelers in getting interviews with them and carrying letters to and from them."

The result of this would be that I, while receiving Major Potulof's hospitality, should be betraying him to his enemies and getting him into trouble—a thing that went terribly against all my instincts of honor. But even this was not all. Captain Nikolín, as I subsequently learned, was strongly opposed to the ticket-of-leave organization known as the free command, and had repeatedly recommended its abolition. My

visit to the political convicts—should I make one—would furnish him with the strongest kind of argument in support of his assertion that the free command was a dangerous innovation. He would write or telegraph to the Minister of the Interior: "I understand that it is the intention of the Government to keep the more dangerous class of state criminals in complete isolation, allowing them no communication with their relatives except through the gendarmerie. It is manifestly impossible for me to give this intention effect if political convicts are allowed to live outside the prison where they can be seen and interviewed by strangers. Foreign travelers are coming more and more frequently to Siberia, and Kara is no longer an unknown or an inaccessible place. If army officers like Potulof are going to aid such foreign travelers in opening communication with the political convicts, the Government must either abolish the free command and recommit its members to prison, or else abandon the idea of keeping them in isolation."

It was not difficult to foresee the probable consequences of such a report. I might, by a single secret visit, bring disaster upon the whole free command, and cause the return of all its members to chains, leg-fetters, and prison cells. That I should be the means of adding to the miseries of these unfortunate people, instead of relieving them, was an almost insupportable thought; and I lay awake nearly all of one night balancing probabilities and trying to make up my mind whether it would be worth while to run such risks. I finally decided to adhere to my original intention and make the acquaintance of the political convicts of the free command at all hazards, provided I could escape the courteous, hospitable, but unceasing vigilance of Major Potulof.

I lived in Kara five days without having a single opportunity to get out-of-doors unaccompanied and unwatched. At last my chance came. On the sixth day Major Potulof was obliged to go to Ust Kara (Oost Kah-rah') to attend a meeting of an army board, or court

of inquiry, convened to investigate the recent destruction by fire of a large Government flour storehouse.¹ He had said nothing to me about the political convicts; he had apparently become convinced that we were "safe" enough to leave, and he went away commending us laughingly to the care of his wife. Before he had been gone an hour I tore out the pocket of my large, loose fur overcoat, dropped down between the outside cloth and the lining a few little presents that I had promised to give to the political convicts, transferred from my waist-belt to my pocket the letters that I had for them and the rough map of the village with which I was provided, and then set out on foot for the political prison. It was about 2 o'clock in the afternoon. Major Potulof expected to be absent until the following night, so that I could safely count upon twenty-four hours of freedom from surveillance. My plan was to pay a visit first to Captain Nikolín, get upon the most friendly possible terms with him, remove any lingering suspicions that he might still entertain with regard to us, and then, about dark, go directly from his house to the cabin of Miss Nathalie Armfeldt, the political convict from Kiev to whom I had a letter of introduction. My object in calling first upon Captain Nikolín was twofold. In the first place, I felt sure he would know that Major Potulof had just gone to Ust Kara, and I thought it would please and compliment the gendarme officer to see that I had availed myself of my very first moment of freedom to call upon him, notwithstanding Potulof's hostility to him. In the second place, I reasoned that if I should be seen going to the house of a political convict it would be safer and would excite less suspicion to be seen going there directly from the house of the commandant than from my own quarters. In the former case it would, very likely, be thought that I was acting with the commandant's knowledge or permission; and in any case open boldness would be safer than skulking timidity.

Captain Nikolín was an old and experienced gendarme officer of the most subtle and unscrupulous type, who had received

¹ The history of this storehouse furnishes an interesting illustration of the corruption and demoralization that are characteristic of the Russian bureaucratic system everywhere, and particularly in Siberia. The building should have contained, and was supposed to contain, at the time it was burned, 20,000 poods (360 tons) of Government flour, intended for the use of the convicts at the Kara mines. Upon making an examination of the ruins after the fire it was discovered that 20 or 30 poods of flour, which belonged to a private individual and had been stored in the building temporarily as an accommodation, was only slightly charred on the outside, and that three-fourths of it could still be used. Of the 20,000 poods of Government flour, however, not the slightest trace could be

found, and an investigation showed that it had all been stolen by somebody, and that the building had been burned to conceal the theft. A few months later, after our departure from Kara and while the investigation was still in progress, Major Potulof's house, which contained all the documents relating to the case, was destroyed by an incendiary fire in the same mysterious way. The censor has never allowed the results of the investigation to be published in the Siberian newspapers, and I do not know who, if anybody, was found to be guilty of the double crime. In most cases of this kind the relations of the criminals with the higher authorities are found to be such as to necessitate a suppression of the facts and a hushing up of the whole matter. I presume that it was so in this case.

his training under General Muraviof (Moorav'off), "the hangman," in Poland, and had been about thirty years in the service. Personally he was a short, heavily built man fifty or fifty-five years of age, with a bald head, a full gray beard, thin, tightly-closed, rather cruel lips, an impenetrable face, and cold gray eyes. He had the suavity and courteous manners of the accomplished gendarme officer, but the unfavorable impression that he made upon me at our first meeting was deepened, rather than effaced, by subsequent acquaintance. He was in undress uniform, and he greeted me with what he evidently intended for frank, open cordiality, softening, so far as possible, all the hard lines of his face; but he could not bring a spark of good fellowship into his cold, watchful gray eyes, and I felt conscious that all his real mental processes were carefully masked. So far as I could read his character, its one weak point was personal pride in the importance and responsibility of his position — pride in the fact that he, a mere captain of gendarmes, had been selected in St. Petersburg and sent to Siberia to command this important prison; had been freed from all local control; and had been given the unusual privilege of communicating directly with the Minister of the Interior, which was the next thing to communicating directly with the Tsar. It seemed to me that a man who felt such a pride, and who knew that in spite of his position he was despised by all the regular army officers of the post, would be gratified to find that an intelligent American, living in the very house of one of his (Nikolin's) enemies, had clearness of insight and independence of judgment enough to call upon him the moment Potulof's restraint was removed, and to treat him with marked deference and respect. To what extent this reasoning was well founded I do not know, but upon it I acted. I apologized for not calling upon him before, and explained that I had been prevented from doing this by circumstances beyond my control. He bowed gracefully, said that he understood the circumstances perfectly, and asked me to do him the honor of drinking tea with him. A steaming samovar (*sah'mo-vahr*) was soon brought in by a soldier, our cups were filled with the beverage that cheers but does not inebriate, cigarettes were lighted, and we settled ourselves in easy chairs for a comfortable chat. I narrated with as much spirit as possible our adventures in Siberia; brought out casually the fact that I was a member of the American Geographical Society; referred to my previous connection with the Russian-American Telegraph Company; described dog-sledge travel and tent life with the wandering Koraks; and gave an account of my

pleasant interview with Mr. Vlangalli (Vlangah'lee), the Associate Minister of Foreign Affairs in St. Petersburg, in order to show him that I had come to Siberia openly and boldly, with the consent and approbation of the highest Russian officials. He seemed to like to hear me talk; and, as I had not the slightest objection to talking, I rambled on until I had given him a detailed history of my whole life up to the year of our Lord 1885. If I omitted anything, I omitted it through forgetfulness or because he failed to draw it out. He inquired whether I intended to write an account of my Siberian trip, and I replied that I certainly did; that I was in the service of THE CENTURY MAGAZINE; that I had already written one series of articles on Siberia, and intended to write another as soon as I should get home. This seemed to interest him, and I therefore poured out information about American magazines in general and THE CENTURY in particular; invited him to come to our house and look over Mr. Frost's sketches; told him how much money THE CENTURY purposed to spend in illustrating our papers, and expressed regret that his ignorance of English would prevent him from reading them. He remarked hopefully that they might be translated. I replied that I trusted they would be, since my first book had been twice translated into Russian; and that, in any event, he would be interested in looking at the illustrations. What else I said in the course of our long conversation I cannot now remember, but I think I never gave any other man so much information about myself and my affairs as I gave that gendarme officer.

My frankness and my childlike confidence in him finally began to produce the desired results. His manner softened and became more cordial; he poured out for me a third or a fourth cup of tea, asked me if I would not like to have some rum in it; and then, finding that I could be a sympathetic listener as well as a frank and communicative talker, he began to give me information about himself. He described to me the organization of the gendarmerie and the way in which gendarme officers are educated; gave me his own personal history; told me how many times and under what circumstances he had been promoted; how much salary he received; what decorations he had; how much longer he would have to serve before he could retire on a pension; and said, with a little pride, that he was the only officer of his rank in all Siberia who had the right to communicate directly with the Minister of the Interior. The conversation finally drifted into a discussion of common-criminal exile, and to my great surprise he vigorously condemned

the étapes and the forwarding prisons; declared that the life of common convicts on the road was simply awful; and said that the banishment of criminals to Siberia was not only ruinous to the persons banished, but very detrimental to all the interests of the country. This was to me a wholly unexpected turn, and for a moment I hardly knew what course to take. He might be merely posing as a philanthropist,—a sort of Howard in a gendarme officer's uniform,—or he might be luring me on with a view to finding out how much I knew and what my opinions were. An instant of reflection convinced me that my safest course would be to follow his lead, without betraying too much knowledge of the subject, and to lay as much stress as possible on the few good prisons that I had seen. I therefore deplored the overcrowding of the forwarding prisons and the bad sanitary condition of the étapes, but referred to the new central prison at Verkhni Udinsk (Verkh'nee Oo'dinsk) as an evidence that the Government was trying to improve the condition of things by erecting better buildings. Without any suggestion or prompting from me, Captain Nikolin then diverted the current of our conversation to another branch of the subject and began to talk about the political convicts at the mines of Kara. Their condition, he said, was much better, and their life much easier, than people generally supposed. They lived together in large, well-lighted *kameras*; they were not required to do any work; they had a good library; they could receive money from their friends; and at the expiration of their "term of probation" they were set at liberty, and were allowed to live in houses and to cultivate little gardens of their own. I expressed great surprise at this presentation of the case, and said, "Do you mean to tell me that the political convicts don't work in the mines?"

"Work!" he exclaimed. "Certainly not. They have nothing to do but sit in large, comfortable, well-lighted rooms, and read or study."

"Do they ever have communication with their friends or relatives in European Russia?" I inquired.

"Certainly," he replied. "That was one of the things that I insisted on when I came

here, that they *should* be allowed to write to their friends and relatives. Of course I read their letters, or rather their postal cards, but they can write as much as they like."

"We have always had the impression in America," I said, "that state criminals in Siberia are compelled to work in underground mines, often chained to wheelbarrows, and that their life is a constant struggle with hardships and misery."

He smiled a calm, superior sort of smile, and said that he himself had had precisely similar ideas before coming to Siberia, and that he had been surprised just as I was. "Why," said he, "if you should take a look into one of the *kameras* of the political prison at this moment you would see the prisoners sitting around a big table, reading and writing, just as if they were in some library."

I remarked that that would be a very pleasant thing to see, as well as to write about, and asked him if there would be any objection to my taking a look into one of the *kameras*.

"Well—yes," he replied hesitatingly. "I have no authority to allow any one to inspect the prison. I can show you, however, some of the books from the library—even English books."

He thereupon called a soldier from the hall and sent him to the prison with orders to bring back any English books or periodicals that happened to be in. The soldier shortly returned with a copy of Shelley's poems and a recent number of "Punch." These Nikolin handed to me triumphantly, as proofs that the political convicts had a library, and were even furnished with English periodicals.

"Not long ago," he continued, "they had theatrical performances in one of the *kameras*; and at one time they actually published a little manuscript newspaper for their own amusement."

He then got out the prison books to show me how much money the political convicts had received from their relatives that year. The total amount was 6044 rubles, or about \$3022.¹

"Do the prisoners themselves have the spending of this money?" I inquired.

"Yes," he replied. "It is not given into their hands; but they can direct the expenditure of

¹ Upon my return to Irkutsk (Eer-kootsk') I was fortunate enough to make the acquaintance of an officer who was employed in the Comptroller's Department, and who had access to all the accounts of the Kara prisons. I asked him if he would be kind enough to ascertain for me how much money had been sent to the political convicts at Kara by their relatives in the first ten months of 1885. He made the investigation and reported that the prisoners had received, on an average, 37½ cents a month per capita, or about \$375 in all. Captain Nikolin apparently had shown me a "fixed-up" and deceptive statement, for the purpose

of making me believe that the political convicts were in receipt of \$3000 or \$4000 a year over and above their subsistence, and that, consequently, they were living in comparative luxury. I have no doubt that the computation made by the officer of the Comptroller's Department in Irkutsk was an accurate one, and that \$375 was really the amount that the prisoners had received. Why the sum was not larger I shall explain in another place. Three hundred and seventy-five dollars every ten months, if divided among a hundred convicts, would give each of them about a cent and a quarter a day.

it, and buy with it anything that the prison regulations allow."

I received all these revelations with pleased surprise, and became almost enthusiastic when the humane and philanthropic gendarme officer drew for me a charming picture of happy state criminals, living contentedly together in large, airy rooms, studying English literature in a well-appointed library, reading "Punch" after dinner for relaxation, publishing a newspaper once a week for self-improvement, and getting up a theatrical entertainment in a kamera now and then as a safety valve for their exuberant spirits! I was grieved and shocked, however, to learn, a moment later, that these well-treated convicts were not worthy of the gracious clemency shown to them by a benevolent paternal government, and repaid its kindness with the blackest treachery and ingratitude.

"You have no idea, Mr. Kennan," said Captain Nikolín, "how unscrupulous they are, and how much criminal skill they show in concealing forbidden things, and in smuggling letters into and out of prison. Suppose that you were going to search a political convict as thoroughly as possible, how would you do it?"

I replied that I should strip him naked and make a careful examination of his clothing.

"Is that all you would do?" he inquired, with a surprised air.

I said that no other course of procedure suggested itself to me just at that moment.

"Would you look in his ears?"

"No," I answered; "I should not think of looking in his ears."

"Would you search his mouth?"

Again I replied in the negative.

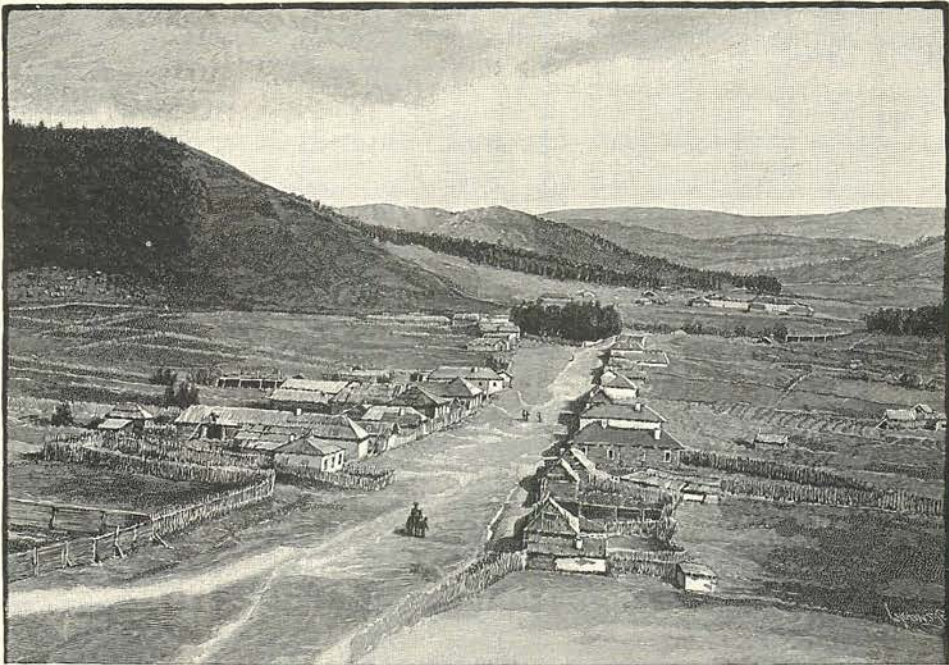
"Would you look in a hollow tooth?"

I solemnly declared that such a thing as looking in a hollow tooth for a letter would never, under any circumstances, have occurred to me.

"Well," he said triumphantly, "I have taken tissue paper with writing on it out of a prisoner's ear, out of a prisoner's mouth, and once I found a dose of deadly poison concealed under a capping of wax in a convict's hollow tooth. Ah-h-h!" he exclaimed, rubbing his hands, "they are very sly, but I know all their tricks."

A cold shiver ran down my back as I suddenly thought of the things that lay hidden in my overcoat. Between the cloth and the lining were two Chinese tea-cups, a hand mirror, and a small red feather duster, which had been intrusted to me by an exiled lady in a village near Irkutsk, and which I had promised to deliver to Miss Armfeldt with assurances of the donor's remembrance and love. I had left the overcoat hanging in the hall, and if this gendarme officer was so extremely suspicious

as to look in ears for letters and in hollow teeth for poison, perhaps he had already ordered one of his subordinates to make an examination of it. How I should explain the presence between the cloth and the lining of such unusual articles of equipment as two porcelain tea-cups, a hand mirror, and a red feather duster, I did not know. I might say that Americans are constitutionally sensitive with regard to their personal appearance, and that, when making calls, they always carry looking-glasses in the tail pockets of their overcoats, in order that they may properly adjust their neckties before entering the drawing-rooms of their acquaintances; but how should I account for the tea-cups and the long-handled feather duster? I might as well try to explain the presence of a mouse-trap and a fire-extinguisher in a diving-bell! For twenty minutes I sat there in an uncomfortable frame of mind, half expecting every time the door opened that a Cossack would enter with the red feather duster in his hand. The apprehended catastrophe, however, did not occur, and Nikolín continued to pour out information concerning the political convicts and their life at the mines. Much that he said was true; but the truth was so interwoven with misrepresentation that if I had been the ignorant and credulous tourist he supposed me to be I should have been completely deceived. To an on-looker who understood the situation and could see into both hands, the game that we were playing would have been full of interest. My acquaintance with the political prison was almost as accurate and thorough as that of Captain Nikolín himself. I had a carefully drawn plan of it in a belt around my body; I had a list containing the names of all the prisoners; I could have described to him the appearance and the situation of every object in every cell; I knew exactly what the convicts had to eat and wear and how they spent their time; I knew that four of them had been chained to wheelbarrows and that several were insane; and I could have given him a detailed history of the prison for the five preceding years. With all this information in my mind, with a letter of introduction to the political convicts in my pocket, and with presents for them concealed in my overcoat, I had to sit there and listen coolly to statements that I knew to be false; assume feelings that I did not have; and play, without the quiver of an eyelash, the part of a good-humored, credulous, easy-going tourist who had nothing to conceal, who was incapable of keeping to himself even the details of his own private life, and who was naturally surprised and delighted to find that the political convicts, instead of being chained to wheelbarrows in damp subterranean mines, were really treated with humanity, considera-



A PART OF THE LOWER DIGGINGS, WITH THE POLITICAL PRISON IN THE DISTANCE.

tion and benevolent kindness, by an intelligent and philanthropic commandant.

I do not know what impression I made upon Captain Nikolin in the course of our long interview; but I have some reason to believe that I succeeded in blinding and misleading one of the most adroit and unscrupulous gendarme officers in all Eastern Siberia. I may be greatly mistaken; but if he flatters himself that he deceived me he is at least as much mistaken as I am. I cannot, of course, defend my dealings with this official upon any high moral ground; but I was playing a hazardous game, with everything at stake and no means of self-protection except diplomacy. In my baggage, or on my person, I had revolutionary documents, plans of prisons, papers from Government archives, letters to and from political convicts, and ten or fifteen notebooks that would have incriminated not only scores of exiles in all parts of Siberia but many fearless and honest officials who had trusted me and given me information. If suspicion should be aroused and I should be searched, it would not only bring disaster upon all of these people, as well as upon me, but would probably result in the loss of all my material and in the punishment of everybody who had had anything to do with furnishing it. In view of

the critical nature of my situation, and the number of lives and fortunes that might depend upon my safety, I sincerely trust that the recording angel dropped a tear or two upon some of my statements to Captain Nikolin and blotted them out forever.

Late in the afternoon the commandant and I parted, with mutual assurances of distinguished consideration, and I directed my steps towards the little cabin of Miss Nathalie Armfeldt, which was situated about midway between the political prison and the house of Major Potulof on the outskirts of the Lower Diggings. My nerves were strung up to a high state of tension by my interview with Captain Nikolin. I was flushed with a consciousness of success, and I felt equal to anything.

Miss Armfeldt, whose history I already knew, was the daughter of a prominent Russian general now dead, and was the sister of Madam Fedchenko (Fed-chen'ko), wife of a well-known Russian scientist and explorer. The family was a wealthy and aristocratic one, and both Miss Armfeldt and her mother were friends, or at least acquaintances, of the eminent Russian novelist Count Tolstoi. Miss Armfeldt herself spoke French, German, and English, drew, painted, and was an educated and accomplished woman.¹ She was arrested

¹ I regret that I am unable to give more details of Miss Armfeldt's life. A Russian revolutionist to whom I applied for information wrote me as follows:

"I knew Miss Armfeldt personally and have some idea

of her as an individual; but as to biographical details—such matters interest us so little when we are 'in action' that we hardly ever ask one another about them. I only know that her father was a general,

in Kiev on the 11th of February, 1879, while attending one of the meetings of a secret revolutionary society. They were surprised by the police late in the evening, and the men of the party resisted arrest, drawing revolvers and firing at the police and the gendarmes. A sharp skirmish followed, in the course of which one gendarme and two of the revolutionists were shot dead and several on each side wounded. The whole party was finally captured and thrown into prison. For being present at the time of this armed resistance to the police, although she had not participated in it, and for belonging to the revolutionary party, Miss Armfeldt was sentenced to four-

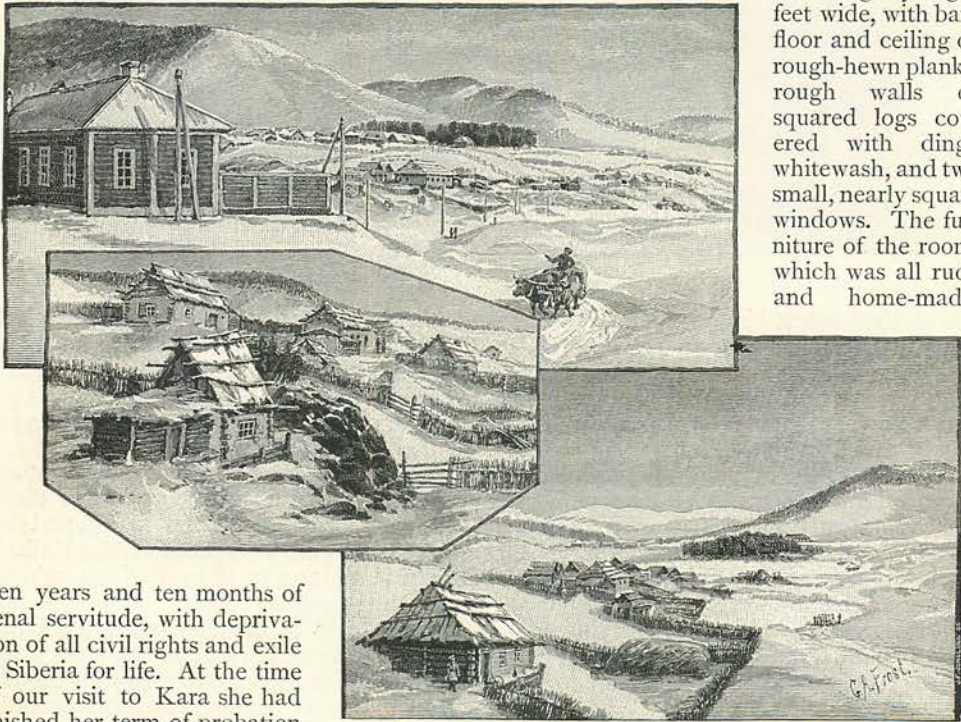
knocked at the heavy wooden door, and in a moment it was unbarred and opened by a young woman.

"Does Miss Armfeldt live here?" I inquired. "I am Miss Armfeldt," she replied.

"My name is George Kennan," I said. "I am an American traveler, and I have come to Siberia to investigate the exile system. I have met many of your friends, and I bring a letter of introduction to you from Madam N——."

She looked at me for almost a minute in silent and half-incredulous amazement. Finally she seemed to recover herself and said, "Pray come in." I followed her through a small, dark entry into a wretched little room about ten

feet long by eight feet wide, with bare floor and ceiling of rough-hewn planks, rough walls of squared logs covered with dingy whitewash, and two small, nearly square windows. The furniture of the room, which was all rude and home-made,



1. TELEGRAPH STATION AND PART OF LOWER DIGGINGS. 2. HOUSES OF THE POLITICAL FREE COMMAND. 3. ROAD TO THE POLITICAL PRISON.

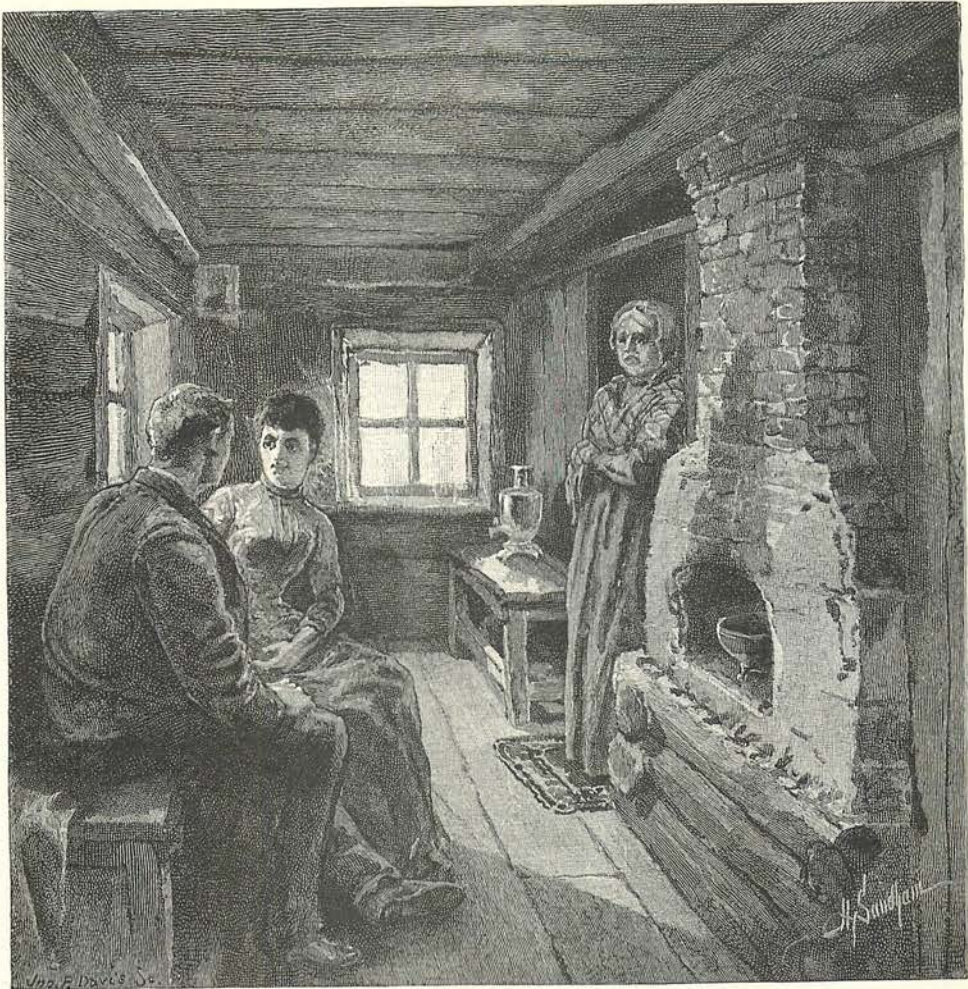
teen years and ten months of penal servitude, with deprivation of all civil rights and exile to Siberia for life. At the time of our visit to Kara she had finished her term of probation in prison, and was living outside in the free command with her mother, a lady sixty or sixty-five years of age, who had voluntarily come to Siberia to share her daughter's fate.

The sun had set and it was fast growing dark when I reached the little whitewashed cabin which, from the descriptions I had had of it, I thought must be the Armfeldts'. I

consisted of a square pine table without a cloth, three unpainted pine chairs, and a narrow single bedstead covered with a coarse gray blanket. On each side of the door were shelves, upon which were a few domestic vessels and utensils, such as plates, cups and saucers, knives and forks, and a tea-

and that her sister, who was a tolerably well-known writer on scientific subjects, was married to the Russian explorer Fedchenko, who perished recently on a mountain in Switzerland. Personally, Nathalie Armfeldt was not one of the striking personalities, such as Perofskaya (Per-off'ska-ya), Bardina (Bar-dee-na), and others. She belonged to that modest set of workers in whom the beautiful moral qualities

of the Russian revolutionist are shown at their best—absolute devotion and absolute selfishness. These simple virtues become great, both as qualities and as moving powers, when they are so elevated as to be almost perfectly pure. You have probably seen many of these types among the Siberian exiles. The touching sympathy that permeates what you write about them is a proof of this."



CABIN OF MISS ARMFELDT. (A SKETCH FROM MEMORY.)

pot. The room contained absolutely nothing else except a basket and a cheap Russian trunk under the bed. Everything was scrupulously neat and clean, but in other respects the house looked like the home of some wretchedly poor Irish laborer. I removed my heavy overcoat and was about to hand Miss Armfeldt the letter that I had for her, when she caught me suddenly by the arm and said, "Stop! Don't do that! Wait until I put up the window shutters and bar the door." She lighted a candle with trembling hands, and then ran out and closed the windows with tight board shutters, barred the door, and returning said, "You are not accustomed to the atmosphere of alarm and apprehension in which we live. You might have been seen through the window giving me a letter." She then took the letter; but without opening it fixed her eyes upon me with the expression of bewildered, half-incredulous amazement that

had not left her face since I introduced myself at the door. Finally she said, "How did you ever get here?"

I replied that I had come on horseback over the mountains from Stretinsk (Stray'tinsk).

"But how were you ever *allowed* to come here?"

"I was not allowed," I replied. "I came here without anybody's knowledge. I have been in Kara almost a week, and this is the first opportunity I have had to get out of doors unwatched."

I then told her that I had come to Siberia to investigate the life of the political convicts, and gave her a brief account of my previous Siberian experience. She looked at me like one half dazed by the shock of some great and sudden surprise. Finally she said, speaking for the first time in English: "Excuse me for staring at you so, and pardon me if I have not seemed to welcome you cordially; but I



MADAM SUKHOMLINA, A MEMBER OF THE FREE COMMAND.

can hardly believe that I am awake. I am so excited and astonished that I don't know what I am doing or saying. You are the first foreigner that I have seen since my exile, and your sudden appearance here, and in my house, is such an extraordinary event in my life that it has completely overwhelmed me. I feel as Livingstone must have felt when Stanley found him in Central Africa. How did the remarkable idea of coming to Siberia and investigating the life of the political convicts ever enter your head?"

I was answering her questions in English, when I heard a feeble and broken voice, which seemed to come from behind the oven, inquiring, in Russian, "Who is there, Nathalie? With whom are you talking?"

"It is an American traveler, mother, who has found us even here at the mines."

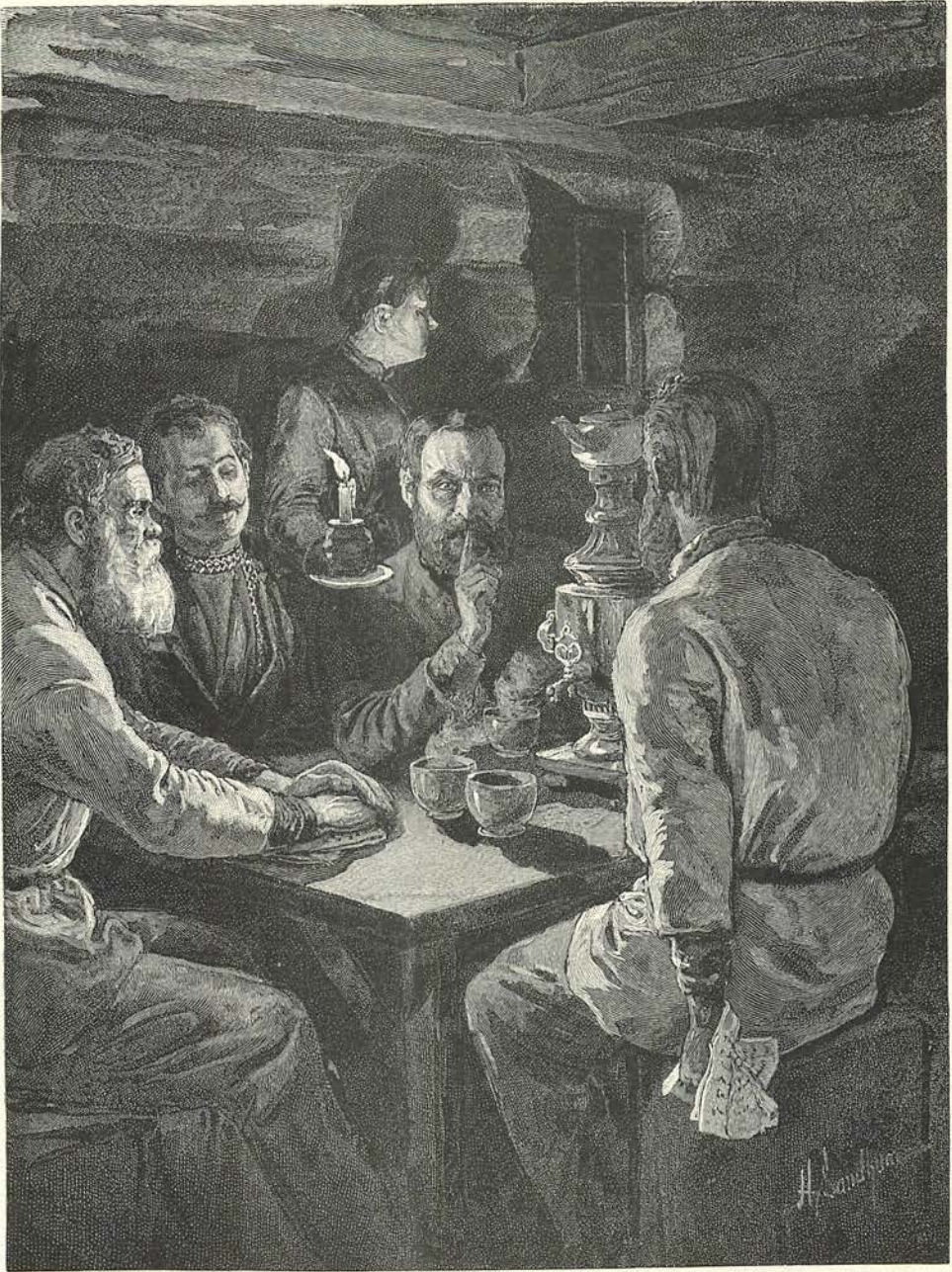
The feeble voice was that of Miss Armfeldt's mother, who had been asleep on a cot bed behind a low partition that partly screened the oven and who had been awakened by our conversation. In a moment she came out to greet me—a worn, broken woman, sixty or sixty-five years of age, with soft gray hair and a refined, gentle, intelligent face, but a face deeply lined by care and grief. Her eyes were swollen, with heavy, dark semicircles under them, as if she had spent many long, weary nights in weeping. It filled my heart with sym-

pathy and pity merely to look at her. I had never seen so sad, hopeless, grief-stricken a face.

I spent half an hour with the Armfeldts and then left them, promising to return at a later hour in the evening, when Miss Armfeldt said she would have the other members of the free command there to meet me. Flushed with nervous excitement, I hurried back to Major Potulof's house, where I found dinner waiting for me. Every now and then in the course of the meal Mrs. Potulof would look at me with a curious expression in her face, as if she wondered what I had been doing all the afternoon; but apparently she could not summon up resolution enough to ask me, and it did not become necessary, therefore, for the recording angel to drop any more tears upon my already blotted record.

At 7 o'clock I went back to the Armfeldts', where I found a political convict named Kurteyef (Koor-tay'eff) and a pale, delicate young woman, who was introduced to me as Madam Kolenkina (Ko-len'kinah). I recognized the latter by name as one of the revolutionists sent to the mines for alleged complicity in the plot to assassinate General Mezzentseff (Mez'zentseff), the St. Petersburg chief of police, but I was surprised to find her so young, delicate, and harmless-looking a woman. I had been surprised, however, in the same way many times before. The women who have taken an active part in some of the most terrible tragedies of the past fifteen years in St. Petersburg, Moscow, Kiev, and Odessa, who have shown a power of endurance and a stern inflexibility of character rarely found in men, are delicate girls from eighteen to twenty-five years of age, whom I should have taken for teachers in a Sunday-school or rather timid pupils in a female seminary.

One by one the political convicts of the free command began to assemble at Miss Armfeldt's house. Every few minutes a low signal-knock would be heard at one of the window-shutters and Miss Armfeldt would go cautiously to the door, inquire who was there, and when satisfied that it was one of her companions would take down the bar and give him admission. The small, dimly lighted cabin, the strained hush of anxiety and apprehension, the soft, mysterious knocking at the window-shutters, the low but eager conversation, and the group of pale-faced men and women who crowded about me with intense, wondering interest as if I were a man that had just risen from the dead, made me feel like one talking and acting in a strange, vivid dream. There was not, in the whole environment, a single



THE KNOCK AT THE WINDOW-SHUTTER.

suggestion of the real, commonplace, outside world; and when the convicts, with bated breath, began to tell me ghastly stories of cruelty, suffering, insanity, and suicide at the mines, I felt almost as if I had entered the gloomy gate over which Dante saw inscribed the dread warning, "Leave hope behind."

About 9 o'clock, just as I had taken out my note-book and begun to write, a loud, impera-

tive knock was heard at the side window-shutter. Madam Kolenkina exclaimed in a low, hoarse whisper, "It 's the gendarmes! Don't let them come in. Tell them who of us are here, and perhaps they 'll be satisfied." Everybody was silent, and it seemed to me that I could hear my heart beat while Miss Armfeldt went to the door and with cool self-possession said to the gendarmes, "We are

all here: my mother, I, Kurteyef, Madam Kolenkina, and" — the other names I could not catch. After a moment's parley the gendarmes seemed to go away, Miss Armfeldt shut and re-barred the door, and coming back into the room said with a smile, "They were satisfied; they did n't insist on coming in." Then, turning to me, she added in English: "The gendarmes visit us three times a day to see what we are doing and to make sure that we have not escaped. Their visits, however, have grown to be formal, and they do not always come in."

Conversation was then resumed, and for two hours or more I listened to stories of convict life in prison, on the road, or at the mines, and answered, as well as I could, the eager questions of the convicts with regard to the progress of the Russian revolutionary movement. In the course of the talk my attention was accidentally attracted to a person whom I had not particularly noticed before and to whom I had not been introduced. It was a man thirty or thirty-five years of age, with a colorless, strangely vacant face and large, protruding blue eyes. He had seated himself on a low wooden stool directly in front of me, had rested his elbows on his knees with his chin in his open hands, and was staring up at me with a steady and at the same time expressionless gaze in which there seemed to be something

unnatural and uncanny. At the first pause in the conversation he said to me abruptly, but in a strange, drawing, monotonous tone, "We — have — a — graveyard — of — our — own — here. — Would — you — like — to — see — it?"

I was so surprised and startled by his manner and by the nature of his question that I did not for a moment reply; but the conviction suddenly flashed upon me that it was a political convict who had lost his reason. As the knocking at the gate after the murder in Macbeth seemed to De Quincey to deepen the emotions excited by the tragedy and to reflect back a sort of added horror upon all that had preceded it, so this strange, unprompted question, with its suggestions of insanity and death, seemed to render more vivid and terrible the stories of human suffering that I had just heard, and to intensify all the emotions roused in my mind by the great tragedy of penal servitude.

I remained with the political convicts that night until after midnight, and then walked home with my blood in a fever that even the frosty atmosphere of a semi-arctic night could not cool. Everybody had gone to bed except Mr. Frost, who was watching anxiously for my return. I threw myself on the divan in my room and tried to get to sleep; but all that I had just seen and heard kept surging through my mind, and it was morning before I finally lost consciousness.

George Kennan.

ON THE INDIAN RESERVATIONS.



APACHE SOLDIER, OR SCOUT.

be already far away from there, even in our neighborhood. Conversation lapsed at last,

I WAS camping with a couple of prospectors one night some years ago on the south side of the Pinal Range in Arizona Territory. We were seated beside our little cooking fire about 9 o'clock in the evening engaged in smoking and drowsily discussing the celerity of movement displayed by Geronimo, who had at last been heard of down in Sonora, and might

and puffing our pipes and lying on our backs we looked up into the dark branches of the trees above. I think I was making a sluggish calculation of the time necessary for the passage of a far-off star behind the black trunk of an adjacent tree when I felt moved to sit up. My breath went with the look I gave, for, to my unbounded astonishment and consternation, there sat three Apaches on the opposite side of our fire with their rifles across their laps. My comrades also saw them, and, old, hardened frontiersmen as they were, they positively gasped in amazement.

"Heap hungry," ejaculated one of the savage apparitions, and again relapsed into silence.

As we were not familiar with Mr. Geronimo's countenance we thought we could see the old villain's features in our interlocutor's, and we began to get our artillery into shape.



APACHE.