

as "Dora," and "Enoch Arden." Their beauty is not in themselves alone, but in the air that breathes around them, in the light that falls upon them from the faith of centuries. Christianity is something more than a system of doctrines; it is a life, a tone, a spirit, a great current of memories, beliefs, and hopes flowing through millions of hearts. And he who launches his words upon this current finds that they are carried with a strength beyond his own, and freighted oftentimes with a meaning which he himself has not fully understood as it flashed through him.

But, on the other hand, we cannot help seeing that the Bible gains a wider influence and a new power over men as it flows through the poet's mind upon the world. Its narratives and its teachings clothe themselves in modern forms of speech and find entrance into many places which otherwise were closed against them. I do not mean by this that poetry is better than the Bible, but only that poetry lends wings to Christian truth. People who would not read a sermon will read a poem. And though its moral and religious teachings may be indirect, though they may proceed by silent assumption rather than by formal assertion, they

exercise an influence which is perhaps the more powerful because it is unconscious. The Bible is in continual danger of being desiccated by an exhaustive—and exhausting—scientific treatment. When it comes to be regarded chiefly as a compendium of exact statements of metaphysical doctrine, the day of its life will be over, and it will be ready for a place in the museum of antiquities. It must be a power in literature if it is to be a force in society. For literature, as a wise critic has defined it, is just "the best that has been thought and said in the world." And if this is true, literature is certain, not only to direct culture, but also to mold conduct.

Is it possible then for wise and earnest men to look with indifference upon the course of what is often called, with a slighting accent, mere *belles lettres*? We might as well be careless about the air we breathe or the water we drink. Malaria is no less fatal than pestilence. The chief peril which threatens the permanence of Christian faith and morals is none other than the malaria of modern letters—an atmosphere of dull, heavy, faithless materialism. Into this narcotic air the poetry of Tennyson blows like a pure wind from a loftier and serener height.

Henry van Dyke.

STATE CRIMINALS AT THE KARA MINES.



IN the morning after my first visit to the political convicts of the free command I called again at the little cabin of the Armfeldts, taking Mr. Frost with me. Major Potulof (Po'-too-loff) was expected back from Ust Kara (Oost Kah-rah') that night, and I knew his return would put a stop to my operations. It was important, therefore, that I should make the best possible use of the twelve or fourteen hours of freedom that still remained to me. I did not expect to be able to conceal from the authorities, for any great length of time, my intercourse with the political convicts. I was well aware that it must, sooner or later, be discovered, and all that I hoped to do was to get as much information as possible before the inevitable interference should come. There was some risk, of course, in visiting the houses of the free command openly by daylight; but we could not afford to waste any time in inaction, and I had promised Miss Armfeldt that I would return early that forenoon if not prevented by some unforeseen complication or embarrassment.

A brisk walk of fifteen or twenty minutes

brought us to our destination, and we were admitted to the house by Miss Armfeldt herself. In the searching light of a clear, cold, winter morning, the little cabin, with its white-washed log walls, plank floor, and curtainless windows, looked even more bare and cheerless than it had seemed to me when I first saw it. Its poverty-stricken appearance, moreover, was emphasized, rather than relieved, by the presence, in the middle of the room, of a large, rudely fashioned easel, upon which stood an unframed oil painting. There seemed to me something strangely incongruous in this association of art with penal servitude, this blending of luxury with extreme destitution, and as I returned Miss Armfeldt's greeting I could not help looking inquiringly at the picture and then at her, as if to ask, "How did you ever happen to bring an oil painting to the mines of Kara?" She understood my unspoken query, and, turning the easel half around so that I could see the picture, said: "I have been trying to make a portrait of my mother. She thinks that she must go back to Russia this year on account of her other children. Of course I shall never see her again,—she is too old and feeble to make another journey to

Eastern Siberia,—and I want something to recall her face to me when she has gone out of my life. I know that it is a bad portrait, and I am almost ashamed to show it to you; but I wish to ask your help. I have only a few colors, I cannot get any more, and perhaps Mr. Frost may be able to suggest some way of using my scanty materials to better advantage."

I looked at the wretched, almost ghastly, portrait in silence, but with a heart full of the deepest sympathy and pity. It bore a recognizable resemblance to the original, and showed some signs of artistic talent and training; but the canvas was of the coarsest and most unsuitable quality; the colors were raw and crude; and it was apparent, at a glance, that the artist had vainly struggled with insuperable difficulties growing out of a scanty and defective equipment. With the few tubes of raw color at her command she had found it impossible to imitate the delicate tints of living flesh, and the result of her loving labor was a portrait that Mr. Frost evidently regarded with despair, and that seemed to me to be little more than a ghastly caricature. It was pitiful to see how hard the daughter had tried, with wholly inadequate means of execution, to make for herself a likeness of the mother whom she was so soon to lose, and it was even more pitiful to think that before the close of another year the daughter would be left alone at the mines with this coarse, staring, deathlike portrait as her only consolation. I looked at the picture for a moment in silence, unable to think of any comment that would not seem cold or unsympathetic. Its defects were glaring, but I could not bring myself to criticize a work of love executed under such circumstances and in the face of such disheartening difficulties. Leaving Mr. Frost to examine Miss Armfeldt's scanty stock of brushes and colors, I turned to Mrs. Armfeldt and asked her how she had summoned up resolution enough, at her age, to undertake such a tremendous journey as that from St. Petersburg to the mines of Kara.

"I could not help coming," she said simply. "God knows what they were doing to people here. Nathalie was beaten by soldiers with the butt-ends of guns. Others were starving themselves to death. I could get only vague and alarming reports in St. Petersburg, and so

I came here to see for myself. I could not bear to think of Nathalie living alone in the midst of such horrors."

"When did these things happen?" I inquired.

"In 1882 and 1883," she replied. "In May, 1882, eight prisoners made their escape, and after that the life of all the political convicts was made so hard that they finally declared a hunger strike and starved themselves thirteen days."

While Mrs. Armfeldt and I were talking Victor Castiurin (*Kass-tyoo'rin*), Madame Kolenkina (*Ko-len'kin-ah*), and two or three other political convicts entered the room, Miss Armfeldt brought out the samovar and gave us all tea, and the conversation became general. I should be glad, if I had the requisite space, to give the readers of *THE CENTURY* the same vivid and detailed account of life in the Kara prisons that was given me at Miss Armfeldt's house that day; but six or eight hours' conversation cannot be put into a single magazine article, and I must content myself, for the present, with a brief narrative of my personal experience, and a short outline sketch of the life of political convicts at the mines of Kara between the years 1880 and 1885.

I made my last call at the house of the Armfeldts on the afternoon of November 7, just twenty-four hours after I first entered it. I was well aware that the return of Major Potulof that night would put a stop to my visits, and that, in all probability, I should never see these unfortunate people again; while they, knowing that this was their last opportunity to talk with one who was going back to the civilized world and would meet their relatives and friends, clung to me with an eagerness that was almost pathetic. I promised the Armfeldts that I would call upon Count Leo Tolstoi and describe to him their life and circumstances,¹ left my address with them so that they might communicate with me should they ever have an opportunity to write, and took letters from them to their relatives in European Russia. It may perhaps seem to the reader that in carrying letters to and from political convicts in Siberia I ran an unnecessary and unjustifiable risk, inasmuch as the act was a penal offense, and if discovered would probably have led to our arrest, to the confiscation of all our papers,

¹ I kept this promise, and told Count Tolstoi all that he seemed to care to hear with regard to the Armfeldts' situation. He manifested, however, a disinclination to listen to accounts of suffering among the political convicts in Eastern Siberia; would not read manuscripts that I brought expressly to show him; and said distinctly that while he felt sorry for many of the politicals, he could not help them, and was not at all in sympathy with their methods. They had resorted, he said, to violence, and they must expect to

suffer from violence. I was told in Moscow that when Madame Uspenskaya (*Oo-spen'ska-ya*), wife of one of the political convicts at Kara, went to Count Tolstoi to solicit a contribution of money to be used in ameliorating, as far as possible, the condition of politicals at the mines, she met with a decided refusal. The Count was not willing, apparently, to show even a benevolent and charitable sympathy with men and women whose actions he wholly disapproved.

and, at the very least, to our immediate expulsion from the Empire under guard. I fully appreciated the danger, but, nevertheless, I could not refuse to take such letters. If you were a political convict at the mines, and had a wife or a mother in European Russia to whom you had not been allowed to write for years, and if I, an American traveler, should come to you and ask you to put yourself in my power and run the risk of recommittal to prison and leg-fetters by telling me all that I wanted to know, and if I should then refuse to carry a letter to your mother or your wife, you would think that I must be either very cowardly or very hard-hearted. I could not refuse to do it. If they were willing to run the risk of writing such letters, I was willing to run the risk of carrying them. I always consented, and sometimes volunteered to take them, although I was perfectly well aware that they would cause me many anxious hours.

Just before dark I bade the Armfeldts and the other members of the free command goodbye, telling them that I should try to see them once more, but that I feared it would be impossible. Major Potulof did not return until midnight, and I did not see him until the next morning. We met for the first time at breakfast. He greeted me courteously, but formally, omitting the customary handshake, and I felt at once a change in the social atmosphere. After bidding me good-morning, he sat for ten or fifteen minutes looking moodily into his tea-cup without speaking a word. I had anticipated this situation and had decided upon a course of action. I felt sincere regard for Major Potulof, he had treated us very kindly, I understood perfectly that I had placed him in an awkward and unpleasant position, and I intended to deal with him frankly and honestly. I therefore broke the silence by saying that, during his absence, I had made the acquaintance of the political convicts of the free command.

"Yes," he said, without raising his eyes from his tea-cup, "I heard so; and," he continued, after a moment's pause, "it is my duty to say to you that you have acted very rashly."

"Why?" I inquired.

"Because," he replied, "the Government looks with great suspicion upon foreigners who secretly make the acquaintance of the political convicts. It is not allowed, and you will get yourself into serious trouble."

"But," I said, "no one has ever told me that it was not allowed. I can hardly be supposed, as a foreigner, to know that I have no right to speak to people who are practically at liberty, and whom I am liable to meet any day in the village street. The members of the

free command are not in prison; they are walking about the settlement in freedom. Everybody else can talk to them; why cannot I?"

"I received a telegram," he said gravely, "from Governor Barabásh" (the governor of the territory of the Trans-Baikal in which the mines of Kara are situated), "saying that you were not to be allowed to see the political prison, and, of course, it was the governor's intention that you should not see the political convicts."

"You did not tell me so," I replied. "If you had told me that you had received such a telegram from the governor, it would have had great weight with me. I cannot remember that you ever intimated to me that I could not visit the members of the free command."

"I did not know that you were thinking of such a thing," he rejoined. "You said nothing about it. However," he continued, after a moment's pause, "it is Captain Nikolin's affair; he has the political in charge. All that I have to do is to warn you that you are acting imprudently and running a great risk."

I then explained to Major Potulof frankly why I had said nothing to him about my intentions, and why I had taken advantage of his absence to carry them into effect. If I had said to him beforehand that I wished or intended to see the political convicts, he would have been obliged either to approve or to disapprove. If he had disapproved, I, as his guest, should have been in honor bound to respect his wishes and authority; while, if he had approved, he would have incurred a responsibility for my illegal action that I did not wish to throw upon him. I admitted knowledge of the fact that my intercourse with the political convicts would not have been permitted if it had been foreseen, and told him that my only reasons for making their acquaintance secretly in the way I had were first, to avoid interference, and secondly, to relieve him as far as possible from any suspicion of complicity. "Nobody now," I said, "can accuse you of having had anything to do with it. You were not here, and it is perfectly evident that I waited for the opportunity that your absence gave me." My explanation seemed to mollify him a little, and his old cordial manner gradually returned; but he warned me again that secret intercourse with political convicts, if I continued it, would almost certainly get me into trouble.

An hour or two after breakfast I was surprised and a little startled by the sudden re-appearance of Captain Nikolin, the gendarme commandant of the political prison. He desired to see Major Potulof on business, and they were closeted together for half or three-

quarters of an hour in the major's writing-room. I was, at the time, in another part of the house trying to write up my notes; but Mr. Frost was at work upon a crayon portrait of the major's children in the drawing-room, off which the writing-room opened. At the first opportunity after Captain Nikolin's departure Mr. Frost came to me in some anxiety and whispered to me that he had accidentally overheard a part of the conversation between Captain Nikolin and Major Potulof in the writing-room and that it indicated trouble. It related to my intercourse with the political convicts, and turned upon the question of searching our baggage and examining my papers and note-books. As Mr. Frost understood it, Captain Nikolin insisted that such an investigation was proper and necessary, while Major Potulof defended us, deprecated the proposed search, and tried to convince the gendarme officer that it would be injudicious to create such a scandal as an examination of our baggage would cause. The discussion closed with the significant remark from Nikolin that if the search were not made in Kara it certainly would be made somewhere else. Mr. Frost seemed to be much alarmed, and I was not a little troubled myself. I did not so much fear a search,—at least while we remained in Major Potulof's house,—but what I did fear was being put upon my word of honor by Major Potulof himself as to the question whether I had any letters from the political convicts. I thought it extremely probable that he would come to me at the first opportunity and say to me good-humoredly, "George Ivanovich, Captain Nikolin has discovered your relations with the political convicts; he knows that you spent with them the greater part of one night, and he thinks that you may have letters from them. He came here this morning with a proposition to search your baggage. Of course, as you are my guests, I defended you and succeeded in putting him off; but I think under the circumstances it is only fair you should assure me, on your word of honor, that you have no such letters."

In such an exigency as that I should have to do one of two things — either lie outright, upon my word of honor, to the man in whose house I was a guest, or else betray people who had trusted me, and for whom I had already come to feel sincere sympathy and affection. Either alternative was intolerable — unthinkable — and yet I must decide upon some course of action at once. The danger was imminent, and I could not bring myself to face either of the alternatives upon which I should be forced if put upon my word of honor. I might perhaps have had courage enough to run the risk, so far as my own papers were concerned, but I

knew that the letters in my possession, if discovered, would send Miss Armfeldt and all the other writers back into prison; would leave poor, feeble Mrs. Armfeldt alone in a penal settlement with a new sorrow; and would lead to a careful examination of all my papers, and thus bring misfortune upon scores of exiles and officers in other parts of Siberia who had furnished me with documentary materials. All the rest of that day I was in a fever of anxiety and irresolution. I kept, so far as possible, out of Major Potulof's way; gave him no opportunity to speak to me alone; went to bed early on plea of a headache; and spent a wretched and sleepless night trying to decide upon a course of action. I thought of about a dozen different methods of concealing the letters, but concealment would not meet the emergency. If put upon my word of honor I should have to admit that I had them, or else lie in the most cowardly and treacherous way. I did not dare to mail them, since all the mail matter from the house passed through Major Potulof's hands, and by giving them to him I might precipitate the very inquiries I wished to avoid. At last, just before daybreak, I decided to destroy them. I had no opportunity, of course, to consult the writers, but I felt sure that they would approve my action if they could know all the circumstances. It was very hard to destroy letters upon which those unfortunate people had hung so many hopes,—letters that I knew would have such priceless value to fathers, mothers, sisters, and brothers in Russia,—but there was nothing else to be done. The risk of keeping them had become too great to be justifiable.

As soon as I had come to a decision, I was confronted by the question, "How are the letters to be destroyed?" Since the discovery of my secret relations with the political convicts I had been more closely watched than ever. My room had no door that could be closed, but was separated from the hall, and from Major Potulof's sitting-room, merely by a light portière. Its large curtainless window was almost on a level with the ground, and an armed sentry, who stood night and day at the front entrance of the house, could see through it. If I tore the letters into small bits, they might be found and pieced together. If I burned them, the odor of the burning paper would be at once diffused through the house; and, besides that, I was likely to be caught in the act, either by the sentry, or by Major Potulof himself, who, on one pretext or another, was constantly coming into my room without knock or announcement. There happened to be in the room a large brick oven, and about half an hour after I got up that morning a soldier came in to make a fire in it. The thought at once

occurred to me that by watching for a favorable opportunity, when Major Potulof was talking with Mr. Frost in the sitting-room and the sentry was out of sight, I could throw the letters unobserved into this fire. As I walked out into the hall to see that the coast was clear there, I noiselessly unlatched the iron door of the oven and threw it ajar. Then returning and assuring myself that the sentry was not in a position to look through the window, I tossed the letters quickly into the oven upon a mass of glowing coals. Five minutes later there was not a trace of them left. I then erased or put into cipher many of the names of persons in my note-books and prepared myself, as well as I could, for a search.

There were two things in my personal experience at the mines of Kara that I now particularly regret, and one of them is the burning of these letters. I did not see the political convicts again, I had no opportunity to explain to them the circumstances under which I acted, and explanations, even if I could make them, are now, in many cases, too late. Miss Nathalie Armfeldt died of prison consumption at the mines in less than a year after I bade her good-bye, and the letters from her that I destroyed were perhaps the last that she had an opportunity to write. I was not put upon my word of honor, I was not searched, and I might have carried those letters safely to their destination, as I afterward carried many others.

The other unfortunate thing in my Kara experience was my failure to see Dr. Edward Veimar, one of the most distinguished political convicts in the free command, who at the time of our visit was dying of prison consumption. He was a surgeon, about thirty-five years of age, and resided, before his exile, in a large house on the Nevski Prospekt near the Admiralty Place in St. Petersburg. He was a man of wealth and high social position, and was at one time a personal friend of Her Majesty, the present Tsaritsa. He was in charge of her field hospital throughout the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-78; was made a cavalier of the order of St. Anne for distinguished services in that campaign; received three or four crosses of honor for gallantry on the field of battle; and was greatly beloved by General Gourko, with whom he made the passage of the Balkans. He was condemned as a revolutionist upon the flimsiest possible circumstantial evidence, and, after a year's imprisonment in one of the casemates of the Petropavlovski¹ fortress, was sent to the mines of Kara. At the time of

his trial, the London "Times," in a column editorial upon his case, said:

Our correspondent at St. Petersburg, in a dispatch we publish this morning, telegraphs the sentences passed yesterday on the prisoners charged with participation in the Nihilist conspiracy. Western observers can see in these state trials at St. Petersburg nothing but a shameful travesty of justice. The whole of these proceedings are an example of the way in which any one can govern by the aid of a state of siege. Military justice has had, as a rule, the merit of being sharp and sudden, but the military justice of the Russian courts has been as cruel in its dilatoriness as grossly illogical in its method and terribly severe in its sentences. . . . Among the accused who were condemned yesterday, Dr. Weimar was in every way a man of whom his country seemed to have reason to be proud. He is in personal bearing a gallant gentleman. As a physician he has devoted his time and skill to the service of his suffering countrymen. He is (or was till yesterday, for to-day he is a drudge in the deadly mines) decorated with Russian and Roumanian orders, and with the medal for the Turkish war. He was with the troops who crossed the Balkans under Gourko—a splendid feat of arms. The charges against this gentleman, the way in which the case was got up and pressed, would seem exaggerated in the wildest burlesque. The humors of injustice were never carried so far, if we may trust the reports of the trial, by Bunyan's *Mr. Justice Hate-good* or Rabelais's *Grippeminaud*. . . . Witnesses were brought forward to speak to the character of Dr. Weimar. Their testimony was a shower of praises, both as to his moral character and his bravery in war. This was inconvenient for the prosecution. Supposing the charges against Dr. Weimar true, it would appear that an exemplary citizen so despaired of the condition of his country that he conspired with miscreants like Solovioff and aided other dastardly assassins. It might have been surmised that the prosecution would bring evidence to damage the character of the accused, or at least to show that the praise heaped on him was undeserved. Nothing of the sort. The prosecutor said, "Gentlemen, I could have produced a series of witnesses whose testimony would have been quite the reverse. Unfortunately, all of them are absent." A military court could hardly avoid taking the word of the presiding general, but the whole proceeding, the whole conception of testimony and justice, are only to be paralleled in the burlesque trial witnessed by Alice in Mr. Carroll's fairy tale. . . . No case could bear more direct evidence to the terrible condition of Russian society and Russian justice. Either a man who seems to have been an exemplary citizen in other respects was driven by despotism into secret and dastardly treason, or Dr. Weimar is falsely condemned and unjustly punished. In either alternative, if the reports of his trial are correct, that trial was a scandal even to military law.

The Crown Princess Dagmar (now the Empress), whose hospital Dr. Veimar had managed during the Russo-Turkish war, took a deep personal interest in him, and was a firm believer in his innocence; but even she could

¹ Used as an adjective, the word has the *i*. The Russians use the word thus, "Petropavlovski fortress," "fortress of Petropavlovsk"—in one case with the *i*, and in the other without.

not save him. When she came to the throne, however, as Empress, in 1881, she sent Colonel Nord to the mines of Kara to see Dr. Veimar and offer him his freedom upon condition that he give his word of honor not to engage in any activity hostile to the Government. Dr. Veimar replied that he would not so bind himself while he was in ignorance of the state of affairs under the new Tsar (Alexander III.). If the Government would allow him to return to St. Petersburg, on parole or under guard, and see what the condition of Russia then was, he would give them a definite answer to their proposition; that is, he would accept freedom upon the terms offered, or he would go back to the mines. He would not, however, bind himself to anything until he had had an opportunity to ascertain how Russia was then being governed. Colonel Nord had a number of interviews with him, and tried in every way to shake his resolution, but without avail.

When Mr. Frost and I reached the mines of Kara, Dr. Veimar had been released from prison on a ticket of leave, but was dying of consumption brought on by the intolerable conditions of Siberian prison life. The political convicts wished and proposed to take me to see him the night that I was at Miss Armfeldt's house, but they represented him as very weak, hardly able to speak aloud, and likely at any moment to die; and after I saw the effect that my sudden appearance produced upon Miss Armfeldt and the other politicals who were comparatively well, I shrunk from inflicting upon a dying man, at midnight, such a shock of surprise and excitement. I had occasion afterward bitterly to regret my lack of resolution. Dr. Veimar died before I had another opportunity to see him, and six months afterward, when I returned to St. Petersburg on my way home from Siberia, I received a call from a cultivated and attractive young woman to whom, at the time of his banishment, he was engaged. She had heard that I was in Kara when her betrothed died, and she had come to me hoping that I had brought her a letter, or at least some farewell message from him. She was making preparations, in November of the previous year, to undertake a journey of four thousand miles alone, in order to join him at the mines and marry him, when she

received a telegram from Captain Nikolin briefly announcing his death. Although more than six months had elapsed since that time, she had heard nothing else. Neither Dr. Veimar before his death, nor his convict friends after his death, had been permitted to write to her, and upon me she had hung her last hopes. How hard it was for me to tell her that I *might* have seen him—that I *might* have brought her, from his death-bed, one last assurance of love and remembrance, but that I had not done so, the reader can perhaps imagine. I have had some sad things to do in my life, but I think this was the saddest duty that ever was laid upon me.

I afterward spent a whole evening with her at her house. She related to me the story of Dr. Veimar's heroic and self-sacrificing life, read me letters that he had written to her from battlefields in Bulgaria, and finally, with a face streaming with tears, brought out and showed to me the most sacred and precious relic of him that she had—a piece of needlework that he had made in his cell at the mines, and had succeeded in smuggling through to her as a present and token of remembrance and love. It was a strip of coarse cloth, such as that used for convict shirts, about three inches wide and nearly fifty feet in length, embroidered from end to end in tasteful geometrical patterns with the coarsest and cheapest kind of colored linen thread.

"Mr. Kennan," she said to me, trying in vain to choke down her sobs, "imagine the thoughts that have been sewn into that piece of embroidery!"

We remained at the mines of Kara four or five days after our last visit to the house of the Armfeldts, but as we were constantly under close surveillance, we could accomplish nothing. All that there is left for me to do, therefore, is to throw into systematic form the information that I obtained there, and to give, in this and the following paper, a few chapters from the long and terrible history of the Kara penal establishment.¹

The Russian Government began sending state criminals to the mines of Kara in small numbers as early as 1873, but it did not make a regular practice of so doing until 1879. Most of the politicals condemned to penal ser-

¹ Nearly all the statements made in the following pages have been carefully verified, and most of them rest upon unimpeachable official testimony. There may be trifling errors in some of the details, but, in the main, the story of which this is one chapter can be proved, even in a Russian court of justice. The facts with regard to Colonel Kononovich (Kon-on-o'vitch) and his connection with the Kara prisons and mines were obtained partly from political convicts and partly from officials in Kara, Chita (Chee'tah), Irkutsk, and St. Petersburg. The letter in which Kononovitch resigned

his position as governor of the Kara penal establishment is still on file in the Ministry of the Interior, and all the circumstances of his retirement are known, not only to the political convicts, but to many of the officials with whom I have talked. I regret that I am restrained by prudential and other considerations from citing my authorities. I could greatly strengthen my case by showing—as I might show—that I obtained my information from persons fully competent to furnish it, and persons whose positions were a sufficient guarantee of impartiality.

itude before the latter date were held either in the "convict section" of the Petropavlovski fortress at St. Petersburg, or in the solitary-confinement cells of the Central Convict Prison at Kharkoff. As the revolutionary movement, however, grew more and more serious and widespread, and the prisons of European Russia became more and more crowded with political offenders, the Minister of the Interior began to transfer the worst class of hard-labor state criminals to the mines of Kara, where they were imprisoned in buildings intended originally for common felons.¹ In December, 1880, there were about fifty political convicts in the Kara prisons, while nine men who had finished their term of probation were living outside the prison walls in little huts and cabins of their own. Most of the male prisoners were forced to go with the common felons to the gold placers; but as the hours of labor were not unreasonably long, they regarded it as a pleasure and a privilege, rather than a hardship, to get out of the foul atmosphere of their prison cells and work six or eight hours a day in the sunshine and the open air.

The officer in command of the Kara penal establishment at that time was Colonel Kononovich, a highly educated, humane, and sympathetic man, who is still remembered by many a state criminal in Eastern Siberia with gratitude and respect. He was not a revolutionist, nor was he in sympathy with revolution; but he recognized the fact that many of the political convicts were refined and cultivated men and women, who had been exasperated and frenzied by injustice and oppression, and that although their methods might be ill-judged and mistaken, their motives, at least, were disinterested and patriotic. He treated them, therefore, with kindness and consideration, and lightened so far as possible for every one of them the heavy burden of life. There were

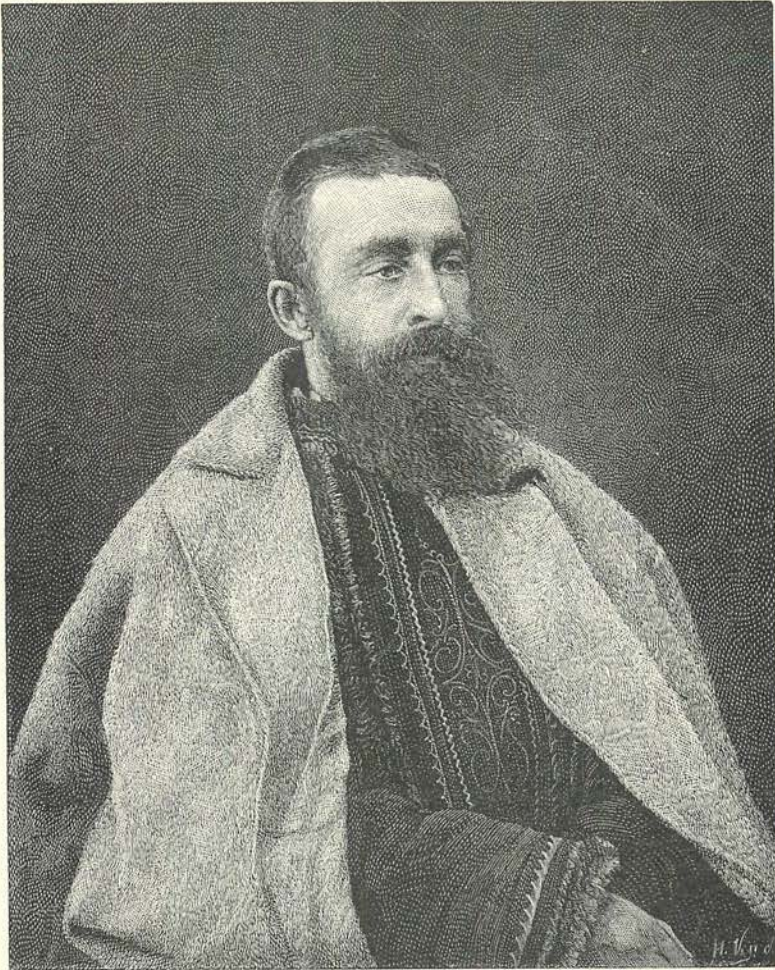
¹ The political prison was not in existence at that time, and the state criminals were distributed among the common-criminal prisons, where they occupied what were called the "secret" or solitary-confinement cells. At a somewhat later period an old detached building in Middle Kara was set apart for their accommodation, and most of them lived together there in a single large kamera. They were treated in general like common convicts, were required to work every day in the gold placers, and at the expiration of their term of probation were released from confinement and enrolled in the free command.

² This is a punishment still authorized by law, and one still inflicted upon convicts who are serving out life sentences. The prisoner is fastened to a small miner's wheelbarrow by a chain, attached generally to the middle link of his leg-fetter. This chain is long enough to give him some freedom of movement, but he cannot walk for exercise, nor cross his cell, without trundling his wheelbarrow before him. Even when he lies down to sleep, the wheelbarrow remains attached to his feet. Four politicals have been chained to wheelbarrows at Kara, namely: Popeko, Berezniuk, Fomi-

in the Kara prisons at that time several state criminals who, by order of the gendarmerie and as a disciplinary punishment, had been chained to wheelbarrows.² Colonel Kononovich could not bear to see men of high character and education subjected to so degrading and humiliating a punishment; and although he could not free them from it without authority from St. Petersburg, he gave directions that they should be released from their wheelbarrows whenever he made a visit of inspection to the prison, so that at least he should not be compelled to see them in that situation. The humane disposition and sensitiveness to human suffering of which this is an illustration characterized all the dealings of Colonel Kononovich with the political convicts; and so long as he was permitted to treat them with reasonable kindness and consideration he did so treat them, because he recognized the fact that their life was hard enough at best. Late in the year 1880, however, the Minister of the Interior began to issue a series of orders intended, apparently, to restrict the privileges of the state criminals and render their punishment more severe. They were forbidden, in the first place, to have any written communication whatever with their relatives. To such of them as had wives, children, fathers, or mothers in European Russia this of itself was a terrible as well as an unjustifiable privation. Then they were forbidden to work in the gold placers, and were thus deprived of the only opportunity they had to see the outside world, to breathe pure, fresh air, and to strengthen and invigorate their bodies with exercise. Finally, about the middle of December, 1880, the governor received an order to abolish the free command, send all its members back into prison, half shave their heads, and put them again into chains and leg-fetters.³ Colonel Kononovich regarded this order as unnes-

chef, and Shchedrin. The last of them was not released until 1884. Whether or not any have been thus punished since that time I do not know.

³ All of these orders were issued while the liberal Loris Melikof was Minister of the Interior, and I have never been able to get any explanation of the inconsistency between his general policy towards the Liberal party and his treatment of condemned state criminals. Some of the officials whom I questioned in Siberia said without hesitation it was the minister's intention to make the life of the political convicts harder; while others thought that he acted without full information and upon the assumption that modern politicals were no more deserving of sympathy than were the Decembrists of 1825. The Decembrist conspirators — although high nobles — were harshly treated, therefore Nihilists should be harshly treated. Many of the political exiles whom I met in Siberia regarded Melikof's professions of sympathy with the liberal and reforming party as insincere and hypocritical; but my own impression is that he acted in this case upon somebody's advice, without giving the matter much thought or consideration.



DR. VEIMAR.

sarily and even brutally severe, and tried in every way to have it rescinded or modified. His efforts, however, were unavailing, and on the 28th of December he called the members of the free command together, read the order to them, told them that he had failed to obtain any modification of it, and said that he would, on his own personal responsibility, allow them three days more of freedom in which to settle up their domestic affairs. On the morning of January 1, 1881, they must report at the prison. To all the members of the free command this order was a terrible blow. For two years they had been living in comparative freedom in their own little cabins, many of them with their wives and children, who had made a journey of five thousand miles across Siberia in order to join them. At three days' warning they were to be separated from their families, sent back into prison, and put again into chains and leg-fetters. Some of them were

leaving their wives and children alone and unprotected in a penal settlement, some of them were broken in health and could not expect to live long in the close confinement of a prison kamera, and all of them looked forward with dread to the chains, leg-fetters, foul air, vermin, and miseries innumerable of prison life.

In the free command was living at this time a young lawyer, thirty-three years of age, named Eugene Semyonofski (Sem-yon'of-skee). He was the son of a well-known surgeon in Kiev, and had been condemned to penal servitude for having been connected in some way with the "underground" revolutionary journal "Onward." He was a man of high character and unusual ability, had had a university training, and at the time of his arrest was practicing law in St. Petersburg. After four or five years of penal servitude at the mines his health gave way, and in 1879 he was

released from prison and enrolled in the free command. At the last meeting of the political convicts and their wives, on New Year's Eve, it was noticed that Semyonofski seemed to be greatly depressed, and that when they parted he bade his comrades good-bye with unusual manifestations of emotion and affection. About 2 o'clock that morning Mr. Charushin (Charoo'shin), a political convict in whose little cabin Semyonofski was living, was awakened by the report of a pistol, and rushing into the room of Semyonofski found that the latter had shot himself through the head. He was still living, but he did not recover consciousness, and died in about an hour. On the table lay a letter addressed to his father, with a note to Charushin asking him to forward it, if possible, to its destination. The letter was as follows:

MINES OF KARA,

Night of December 31, January 1, 1880-1.

MY DEAR FATHER: I write you just after my return from watching the old year out and the new year in with all my comrades. We met, this new year, under melancholy and disheartening circumstances. You have probably received a letter from the wife of one of my comrades, whom I requested to inform you that we had been forbidden thenceforth to write letters to any one—even our parents. Senseless and inhuman as that prohibition was, there awaited us something much worse—something that I knew nothing about when that letter was written. Ten days or so after we received notice of the order forbidding us to write letters, we were informed that we were all to be returned to prison and confined in chains and leg-fetters. There are nine men of us, namely: Shishko, Charushin, Kviatkovski, Uspenski, Soyuzof, Bogdanof, Terentief, Tevtul, and I; and we have all been living about two years in comparative freedom outside the prison. We expected something of this kind from the very day that we heard of the order of Loris Melikof prohibiting our correspondence; because there was in that order a paragraph which led us to fear that we should not be left in peace. Tomorrow we are to go back to prison. But for the faith that Colonel Kononovich has in us we should have been arrested and imprisoned as soon as the order was received; but he trusted us and gave us a few days in which to settle up our affairs. We have availed ourselves of this respite to meet together, for the last time in freedom, to watch the old year out and the new year in. I shall avail myself of it for yet another purpose. I do not know whether the carrying out of that purpose will, or will not, be a betrayal of the confidence that Colonel Kononovich has reposed in us; but even if I knew that it would be such a betrayal I should still carry out my purpose.

It may be that some one who reads the words "they are going back to prison" will compare us to sheep, submissively presenting their throats to the knife of the butcher; but such a comparison would be a grievously mistaken one. The only means of escape from such a situation as ours is in flight—and how and whither could we fly, in a temperature of thirty-five degrees below zero, and without any

previous preparation for such an undertaking? The reason why no preparations have been made you know, if you received the letter that I wrote you last August.

My own personal determination was to attempt an escape if the order for our return to prison should come in the spring, when it would be possible to escape, and to do it, not on the spur of the moment, but after serious preparation. It has not, however, happened so. In the mean time I feel that my physical strength is failing day by day. I know that my weakness must soon have its effect upon my mental powers, and that I am threatened with the danger of becoming a complete imbecile—and all this while I am living outside the prison. The question arises, what would become of me *in* prison? My whole life rests on the hope of returning some time to Russia and serving, with all my soul, the cause of right and justice to which I long ago devoted myself; but how can that cause be served by a man who is mentally and physically wrecked? When the hope of rendering such service is taken away from me, what is there left? Personal self-justification? But before the moment comes for anything like complete satisfaction of that desire, they can put me ten times to the torture. I have, therefore, come to the conclusion that there is no longer anything to live for—that I have earned the right, at last, to put an end to sufferings that have become aimless and useless. I have long been tired—deathly tired—of life; and only the thought of home has restrained me, hitherto, from self-destruction. I know that I am about to cause terrible grief, Sasha,¹ to you, and to all who love me; but is not your love great enough to forgive the suicide of a man tortured to the last extremity? Understand that, for God's sake! I have been literally tortured to death during these last years. For the sake of all that you hold dear, I beseech you to forgive me! You must know that my last thoughts are of you—that if I had a little more strength I would live out my life, if only to save you from further suffering; but my strength is exhausted. There is nothing left for me to do but to go insane or die; and the latter alternative is, after all, better than the former.

Good-bye forever, my dear, kind, well-remembered father and friend! Good-bye, Sasha, and you my younger brother, whom I know so little. Remember that it is better to die, even as I die, than to live without being able to feel one's self a man of principle and honor.

Once more, good-bye! Do not think ill of your unhappy son and brother, who, even in his unhappiness, finds consolation.

EUGENE.

All that was mortal of Eugene Semyonofski now lies in the political convicts' burying-ground on a lonely hill known as "The Convict's Head" in Eastern Siberia. The unpainted wooden cross that marks his grave will soon decay, and then nothing will remain to show where lie the ashes of a man whose brilliant talents, high standards of duty, and intense moral earnestness might have made him an

¹ "Sasha" was Semyonofski's brother Alexander.



MME. KAVALÉFSKAYA.

honor to his country and an invaluable worker in the cause of freedom and humanity.

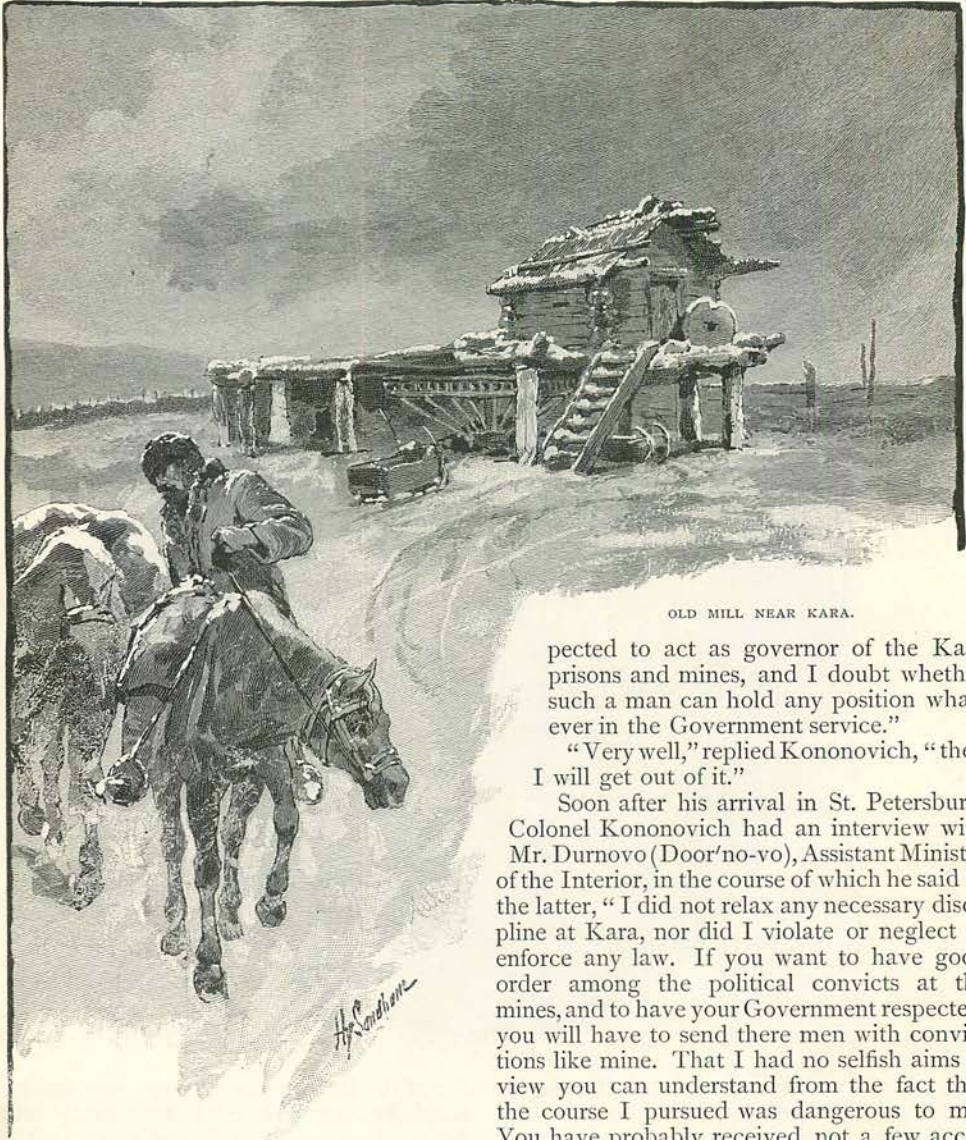
Of course Colonel Kononovich was greatly shocked by Semyonofski's suicide, but this was only the beginning of the series of tragedies that resulted from an enforcement of the Government's orders concerning the treatment of the political convicts.

Very soon after Semyonofski's suicide, Mr. Rodin, another political convict, poisoned himself to death by drinking water in which he had soaked the heads of matches; Mr. Uspenski (Oo-spen'skee) hanged himself in the bath-house; and Madame Kavaléfskaya, sister of

one of the best known political economists in Russia,¹ went insane, shrieked constantly, broke the windows of her cell, and was so violent that it became necessary to confine her in a strait-jacket.

Colonel Kononovich was too warm-hearted and sympathetic a man not to be profoundly moved by such terrible evidences of human misery. He determined to resign his position as governor of the Kara penal establishment, whatever might be the consequences; and in pursuance of this determination he wrote to the Governor-General of Eastern Siberia and to the Minister of the Interior a very frank and bold letter, in which he said that he regarded the late instructions of the Government concerning the treatment of the political convicts as not only impolitic but cruel. If they wanted an officer who would treat the politicals in

¹ Mr. V. Vorontsof (Vor-on-tsof), author of "The Destiny of Capital in Russia" and of a large number of articles upon political economy in the Russian magazines "European Messenger," "Annals of the Fatherland," and "Russian Thought."



OLD MILL NEAR KARA.

pected to act as governor of the Kara prisons and mines, and I doubt whether such a man can hold any position whatever in the Government service."

"Very well," replied Kononovich, "then I will get out of it."

Soon after his arrival in St. Petersburg, Colonel Kononovich had an interview with Mr. Durnovo (Door'no-vo), Assistant Minister of the Interior, in the course of which he said to the latter, "I did not relax any necessary discipline at Kara, nor did I violate or neglect to enforce any law. If you want to have good order among the political convicts at the mines, and to have your Government respected, you will have to send there men with convictions like mine. That I had no selfish aims in view you can understand from the fact that the course I pursued was dangerous to me. You have probably received not a few accusations made against me by other officers. I am not afraid of accusations, nor of opposition, but I do fear my own conscience, and I am not willing to do anything that would lose me its approval. The Government, by its orders, made it impossible for me to serve as governor of the Kara prisons and at the same time keep an approving conscience, and I therefore asked to be relieved. If I should be ordered there again I would act in precisely the same way."

The subsequent history of the Kara penal establishment, which I shall give in a later article, must have made Mr. Durnovo think many times of these brave, frank words.

I have not been able to speak favorably of

accordance with the spirit of such instructions, they had best send a hangman there. He, himself, was not a hangman; he could not enforce such orders without doing violence to all his feelings, and he must therefore ask to be relieved of his command. The resignation was accepted, and in the summer of 1881 Colonel Kononovich left the mines of Kara, and some time afterwards returned to St. Petersburg. As he passed through Irkutsk he had an interview with Governor-General Anuchin (An-noo'chin), in the course of which the latter said to him, rather coldly and contemptuously, "Of course, Colonel Kononovich, a man holding such views as you do could not be ex-

many Siberian prisons, nor to praise many Siberian officials; but it affords me pleasure to say that of Colonel Kononovich I heard little that was not good. Political convicts, honest officers, and good citizens everywhere united in declaring that he was a humane, sympathetic, and warm-hearted man, as well as a fearless, intelligent, and absolutely incorruptible official. Nearly all the improvement that has been made in the Kara penal establishment within the past quarter of a century was made during Colonel Kononovich's term of service as governor. In view of these facts

continued suffering and ill-treatment on the road, this young man was as wild, suspicious, and savage as a trapped wolf. He seemed to regard all the world as his enemies, and glared at every officer as if he expected a blow, was half afraid of it, but was prepared to die fighting. Colonel Kononovich received him courteously and kindly; sent the wife of one of the political exiles to him with clean fresh underclothing; attended generally to his physical needs, and finally said to him, "Remember that nobody here will insult you or ill-treat you." The young convict was greatly surprised



THE POLITICAL PRISON AND CAPTAIN NIKOLIN'S HOUSE. (A SKETCH FROM MEMORY.)

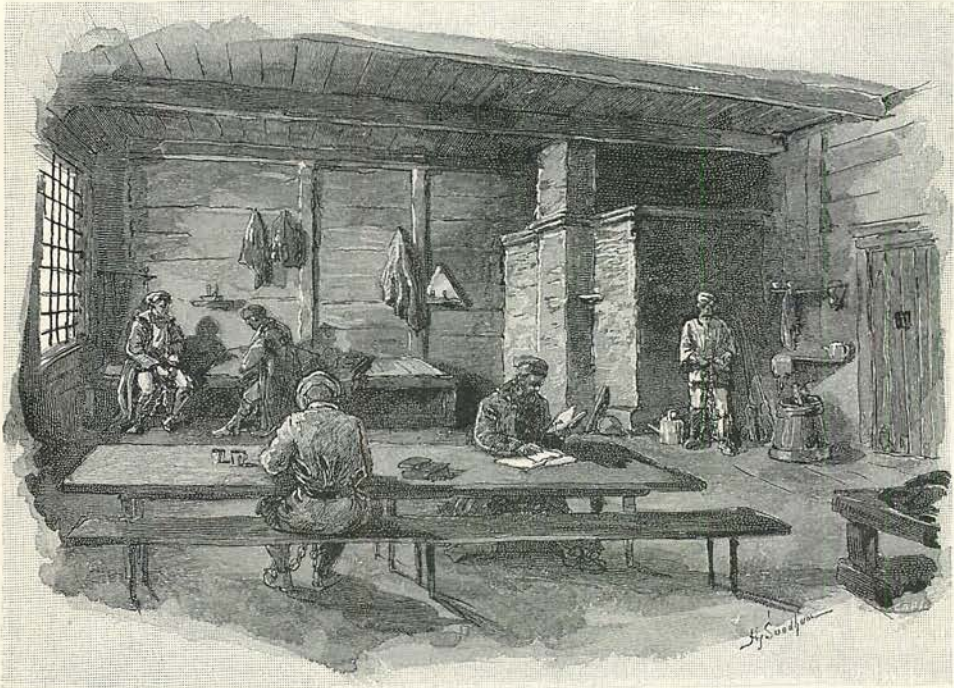
I regret to have to say that he was virtually driven out of Siberia by the worst and most corrupt class of Russian bureaucratic officials. He was called "weak" and "sentimental"; he was accused of being a "socialist"; he was said to be in sympathy with the views of the political convicts; and the *ispravnik* of Nerchinsk openly boasted, in the official club of that city, that he would yet "send Colonel Kononovich to the province of Yakutsk with a yellow diamond on his back." How ready even high officers of the Siberian administration were to entertain the most trivial charges against him may be inferred from the following anecdote. During the last year of his service at Kara there came to the mines a political convict, hardly out of his teens, named Bibikof (Bee'bee-koff). As a consequence of long-

by such a reception, and in a letter that he subsequently wrote to a friend in European Russia he said, "I am glad to know, from the little acquaintance I have had with Kononovich, that a Russian colonel is not necessarily a beast." This letter fell into the hands of the police in European Russia, was forwarded through the Ministry of the Interior to General Ilyashevich (Ill-yah-shay'vitch), the governor of the Trans-Baikal, and was sent by that officer to Colonel Kononovich with a request for an "explanation." It seemed to be regarded as documentary evidence that the governor of the Kara prisons was on suspiciously friendly terms with the political convicts. Kononovich paid no attention to the communication. Some months later he happened to visit Chita on business, and Gov-

ernor Ilyashevich, in the course of a conversation about other matters, said to him, "By the way, Colonel Kononovich, you have never answered a letter that I wrote you asking for an explanation of something said about you in a letter from one of the political convicts in your command. Did you receive it?"

"Yes," replied Kononovich, "I received it; but what kind of answer did you look for? What explanation could I give? Did you expect me to excuse myself because somebody regarded me as a human being and not a beast?"

— or, in other words, releasing, for two or three hundred rubles *per capita*, young men who had been legally drawn as conscripts and who should render military service. He undertook to bring the corrupt officials to justice; but they had strong and highly placed friends in Irkutsk, they trumped up a set of counter charges, packed the investigating commission with their own associates, and came very near sending Colonel Kononovich to the province of Yakutsk "with a yellow diamond on his back," in fulfillment of the *ispravnik's* boast. Fortu-



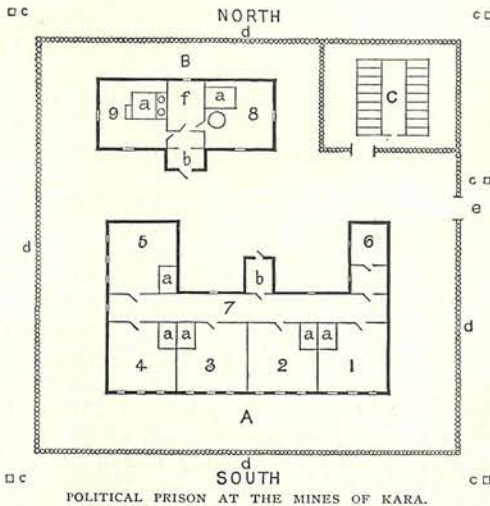
INTERIOR OF A KAMERA IN THE POLITICAL PRISON.

Was I to say that the writer of the letter was mistaken in supposing me to be a human being — that in reality I was a beast, and that I had never given him or anybody else reason to suppose that a Russian colonel could be a human being?"

This presentation of the case rather confused the governor, who said that the demand for an explanation had been written by his assistant, that it had been stupidly expressed, and that after all the matter was not of much consequence. He then dropped the subject.

After resigning his position at the mines of Kara, Colonel Kononovich, who was a Cossack officer, went to Nerchinsk, where he took command of the Cossack forces of the Trans-Baikal. He soon discovered that a small knot of officers, including the *ispravnik*, were engaged in selling immunity from conscription

nately Kononovich had influential friends in St. Petersburg. He telegraphed to them and to the Minister of the Interior, and finally succeeded in securing the appointment of another commission, in having the *ispravnik* and some of his confederates thrown into prison, and in obtaining documentary evidence of their guilt. The conspirators then caused his house to be set on fire in the middle of a cold winter night, and nearly burned him alive with all his family. He escaped in his night-clothing, and, as soon as he had gotten his wife and children out, rushed back to try to save the papers in the pending case against the *ispravnik*, but it was too late. He was driven out by smoke and flames, and most of the proofs were destroyed. Colonel Kononovich then "shook his hand" against Siberia — to use a Russian expression — and went to St. Petersburg. He did not



POLITICAL PRISON AT THE MINES OF KARA.

A. Main Prison Building; B. Kitchen and Bath-house; C. Small Solitary-confinement cells, not now used; 1, 2, 3, 4. Large Kamera or cells designated respectively by the prisoners as "Academia," "Dvorianka," "Yakutka," and "Kharchofka"; 5. Kamera used as a prison hospital, or lazaret; 6. Water-closet; 7. Main Corridor; 8. Bath-room; 9. Kitchen; a. Ovens; b. Entry-ways; c. Sentry-boxes; d. Stockade around prison buildings; e. Gate to prison yard; f. Bath-house dressing-room.

want to live any longer, he said, in a country where an honest man could not do his duty without running the risk of being burned alive. In St. Petersburg he was given another position, as representative on the general staff of the Cossack forces of the Trans-Baikal, and he lived there quietly until the summer of 1888, when he was promoted to the rank of general and appointed to command the largest and most important penal establishment in Siberia; namely, that on the island of Saghalien (Saghalien'). This appointment is in the highest degree creditable to the Russian Government, and, taken in connection with the erection of the new prison in Verkhni Udinsk, it furnishes a gratifying proof that the Tsar is not wholly indifferent to the sufferings of Siberian exiles and convicts. As long as General Kononovich remains in command of the Saghalien prisons and mines there is every reason to believe that they will be intelligently, honestly, and humanely managed.

Almost the last work that Kononovich accomplished at the mines of Kara was the erection of the new political prison near the Lower Diggings. Captain Nikolin would not allow me to inspect this building, nor would he allow Mr. Frost to photograph it; but from convicts who had been confined in it I obtained the plan on this page and the picture on page 534, and from memory Mr. Frost drew the sketch on

page 533. In general type it differs little from the common-criminal prisons, but it is larger, better lighted, and more spacious than the latter, and is, in all respects, a more comfortable place of abode. It contains four kameras, exclusive of the hospital, or lazaret, and in each of them there are three windows, a large table, a brick oven, and sleeping-platform accommodations for about twenty-five men. There are no beds, except in the lazaret, and all the bed-clothing that the prisoners have was purchased with their own money. Originally the palisade did not entirely inclose the building, and the prisoners could look out of their front windows across the Kara valley; but Governor-General Anuchin, on the occasion of one of his rare visits to the mines, disapproved of this arrangement, remarked cynically that "A prison is not a palace," and ordered that the stockade of high, closely set logs be so extended as to cut off the view from the windows, and completely shut in the building. It is hard to see in this order anything but a deliberate intention on the part of a cruel official to make the life of the political convicts as miserable and intolerable as possible. Every common-criminal prison in Kara, without exception, has windows that overlook the settlement or the valley; and every burglar and murderer in the whole penal establishment can see from his cell something of the outside world. The political convicts, however, in the opinion of the Governor-General, had no right to live in a "palace" from which they could see the green trees, the glimmer of the sunshine on the water, and the tender purple of the distant hills at sunset or at dawn. They must be shut up in a tight box; the fresh invigorating breeze from the mountains must be prevented from entering their grated windows; and the sight of a human being not clothed in a turnkey's uniform must never gladden their weary, homesick eyes. I have wished many times that his Excellency Governor-General Anuchin might be shut up for one year in the political prison at the mines of Kara; that he might look out for 365 days upon the weather-beaten logs of a high stockade; that he might lie for 365 nights on a bare sleeping-platform infested with vermin; and that he might breathe, night and day, for 52 consecutive weeks, the air of a closekamera, saturated with the poisonous stench of an uncovered excrement-bucket. Then he might say to himself, with a more vivid realization of its meaning, "A prison is not a palace."

George Kennan.