

OPEN LETTERS.

A Siberian Tragedy.

IN the New York "Evening Post" of August 25th appeared the following telegram from London:

"LONDON, August 25.—Alexander Krapotkin, brother of Prince Krapotkin, the translator of Herbert Spencer's works into the Russian language, has committed suicide with a revolver at Tomsk."

As I was perhaps the last West-European or American to see Prince Alexander Krapotkin before his death, circumstances seem to lay upon me the duty of explaining the significance of the brief announcement above quoted, and of giving such facts as are in my possession with regard to a life which ended so tragically, and which seems to me to have been so needlessly and cruelly wrecked.

I made the acquaintance of Alexander Krapotkin in February of the present year at the Siberian city of Tomsk, where I spent two weeks on my way home from the Trans-Baikal. He had then been living in exile as a political offender nearly ten years. Although banished to Siberia upon the charge of disloyalty, Krapotkin was not a nihilist, nor a revolutionist, nor even an extreme radical. His views with regard to social and political questions would have been regarded in America, or even in Western Europe, as very moderate, and he had never taken any part in Russian revolutionary agitation. He was, however, a man of impetuous temperament, high standard of honor, and great frankness and directness in speech, and these characteristics were perhaps enough to attract to him the suspicious attention of the Russian police.

"I am not a nihilist, nor a revolutionist," he once said to me, indignantly, "and I never have been; I was exiled simply because I dared to think and to say what I thought about things which happened around me, and because I was the brother of a man whom the Russian Government hated."

Prince Krapotkin was arrested the first time in 1858, while a student in the St. Petersburg University, for having in his possession a copy in English of Emerson's "Self-Reliance" and refusing to say where he obtained it. The book had been lent to him by one of the faculty, Professor Tikhonravof, and Krapotkin might perhaps have justified himself and escaped unpleasant consequences by simply stating the fact, but this would not have been in accordance with his high standard of personal honor. He did not think it a crime to read Emerson, but he did regard it as cowardly and dishonorable to shelter himself from the consequences of any action behind the person of an instructor. He preferred to go to prison. When Professor Tikhonravof heard of Krapotkin's arrest, he went at once to the rector of the University and admitted that he was the owner of the incendiary volume, and the young student was thereupon released.

After his graduation from the University, Krapotkin went abroad, studied science, particularly astronomy, and upon his return to Russia made a number

of important translations of French and English scientific works into his native language. Finally, he entered the government service, and for a time previous to his exile held an important place in the Russian Telegraph Department. This place, however, he was forced to resign in consequence of a collision with the Minister of the Interior. The latter ordered Krapotkin one day to send to him all the telegrams of a certain private individual that were on file in his office. Krapotkin refused to obey this order upon the ground that such action would be personally dishonorable and degrading. Another less scrupulous officer of the department, however, forwarded the required telegrams, and Krapotkin resigned. After this time he lived constantly under the secret supervision of the police. His brother had already become prominent as a revolutionist and socialist; he himself was under suspicion, his record from the point of view of the government was not a good one, he probably injured himself still further by frank but injudicious comments upon public affairs, and in 1876 or 1877 he was arrested and exiled to Eastern Siberia upon the vague but fatal charge of disloyalty. There were no proofs against him upon which a conviction could be obtained in a formal trial, and he was therefore exiled by what is known in Russia as the "administrative process," that is, by a simple executive order, without even the pretense of indictment, presentment, or hearing.

His place of exile was a small town called Minusinsk, situated on the Yenisei River in Eastern Siberia, two or three hundred miles from the frontier of outer Mongolia. Here, with his young wife, who had voluntarily accompanied him into exile, he lived quietly four or five years, devoting himself chiefly to reading and scientific study. There were in Minusinsk at that time no other political exiles, but Krapotkin found there, nevertheless, one congenial companion in the person of a Russian naturalist named Martiánof, with whom he wandered about the country making botanical and geological collections and discussing scientific questions. To Martiánof's enthusiasm and energy and Krapotkin's sympathy and encouragement Minusinsk is wholly indebted for its really excellent public museum, an institution which is not only the pride of all intelligent Siberians, but is likely, through an illustrated catalogue now in course of publication, to become known to naturalists and archæologists in Europe and the United States.

During the long series of tragic events which culminated in the assassination of Alexander II., Siberia filled up rapidly with political exiles, and the little town of Minusinsk had to take its quota. With the arrival of these new-comers began a stricter system of police supervision. As long as Krapotkin was the only political exile in the place he was allowed a good deal of freedom, and was not harassed by humiliating police regulations; but when the number of "politicals" increased to twenty, the difficulty of watching them all became greater, and the authorities thought it neces-

sary, as a means of preventing escapes, to require every exile to report himself at stated intervals to the chief of police and sign his name in a book kept for the purpose. To this regulation Krapotkin refused to submit. "I have lived here," he said to the *Ispravnik*, "nearly five years and have not yet made the first attempt to escape. If you think that there is any danger of my running away now, you may send a soldier or a police officer to my house every day to watch me; but after being unjustly exiled to Siberia I don't propose to assist the government in its supervision of me. I will not report at the police office." The *Ispravnik* conferred with the Governor of the province, who lived in Krasnoyarsk, and by the latter's direction told Krapotkin that if he refused to obey the obnoxious regulation he would be banished to some place lying farther to the northward and eastward, where the climate would be more severe and the life less bearable. Krapotkin, however, adhered to his determination and appealed to General Shelashnikof, who was at that time the Acting Governor-General of Eastern Siberia and who had been on terms of personal friendship with Krapotkin before the latter's banishment. General Shelashnikof replied in a cool, formal note, insisting upon obedience to the regulation and warning Krapotkin that further contumacy would have for him disastrous consequences. While this appeal was pending, General Anutchin was appointed Governor-General of Eastern Siberia, and, as a last resort, Krapotkin wrote to his aged mother in St. Petersburg to see Anutchin previous to the latter's departure for his new post and present to him a petition in her son's behalf. When the aged and heart-broken mother appeared with her petition in General Anutchin's reception-room she was treated with insulting brutality. Without reading the petition Anutchin threw it violently on the floor, asked her how she dared come to him with such a petition from a traitor to his country, and declared that if her son "had his deserts he would be cleaning the streets in some Siberian city under guard, instead of walking about at liberty." For this brutal insult to his mother Krapotkin told me that he was afraid he should kill Anutchin if he ever happened to see him.

By this time all of the other political exiles in Minusinsk had submitted to the new regulation and were reporting at the police office, and Krapotkin was notified by the *Ispravnik* that if within a stated time he did not follow their example he would be banished to Turukhansk, a wretched settlement of twelve or fifteen houses, situated in the province of Yeniseisk, near the coast of the Arctic Ocean. Krapotkin, however, still adhered to his resolution, and after a terribly trying interview with his wife, to whom he was devotedly attached, he succeeded in extorting from her a promise to return to European Russia with their young child, and let him go to Turukhansk alone. What this promise cost them both in misery I could imagine from the tears which suffused their eyes when they talked to me about it. At the last moment, however, while Mrs. Krapotkin was making preparations to return to European Russia, she happened to see in the "*Siberian Gazette*" a letter from some correspondent—a political exile, I think—in Turukhansk, describing the loneliness, dreariness, and unhealthfulness of the settlement, the Arctic

severity of the climate, the absence of all medical aid for the sick, and the many miseries of life in such a place. This completely broke down the wife's fortitude. She went to her husband, convulsed with sobs, and told him that she would send her child to European Russia, or leave it with friends in Minusinsk, but go with him to Turukhansk she must and should—to let him go there alone was beyond her strength. "After this," said Prince Krapotkin, "there was nothing for me to do but put a pistol to my head or yield, and I yielded. I went to the police office, and continued to report there as long as I remained in Minusinsk."

I have related this incident in Prince Krapotkin's Siberian life partly because it seems to have first suggested suicide to him as a means of escape from an intolerable position, and partly because it is in many ways an index to his character. He was extremely sensitive, proud, and high-spirited, and often made a fight upon some point which a cooler, more philosophic man would have taken as one of the natural incidents of his situation.

About two years ago Prince Krapotkin was transferred from Minusinsk to Tomsk, a change which brought him a few hundred miles nearer to European Russia, but which in other respects was not perhaps a desirable one. When I saw him in February he was living simply but comfortably in a rather spacious log-house, ten minutes' drive from the European hotel, and was devoting himself to literary pursuits. He had a good working library of two or three hundred volumes, among which I noticed the astronomical works of Professors Newcomb and Holden, Stallo's "*Concepts of Science*," of which he expressed a very high opinion, several volumes of Smithsonian Reports, and forty or fifty other American books. His favorite study was astronomy, and in this branch of science he would probably have distinguished himself under more favorable circumstances. After his exile, however, he was not only deprived of instruments, but had great difficulty in obtaining books; his private correspondence was under control, and he was more or less constantly disquieted and harassed by police supervision and searches of his house; so that his completed scientific work was limited to a few articles upon astronomical subjects, written for French and German periodicals. He was a fine linguist, and wrote almost equally well in French, German, or Russian. English he read easily but could not speak.

On the last day before my departure from Tomsk he came to my room, bringing a letter which I had promised to carry for him to one of his intimate friends in Western Europe. With the keen sense of honor which was one of his distinguishing characteristics, he brought the letter to me open, so that I might assure myself by reading it that it contained nothing which would compromise me in case the Russian police should find it in my possession. I told him that I did not care to read it, that I would run the risk of carrying anything that he would run the risk of writing—his danger in any case would be greater than mine. He thereupon seated himself at my writing-table to address the envelope. We happened at the moment to be talking of his brother, Pierre Krapotkin, and his pen, taking its suggestion from his thoughts, wrote automatically upon the envelope his brother's name instead of the name

of the person for whom the letter was intended. He discovered the error almost instantly, and tearing up the envelope and throwing the fragments upon the floor, he addressed another. Late that evening, after I had gone to bed, there came a knock at my door. I opened it cautiously, and was confronted by Prince Krapotkin. He was embarrassed and confused, and apologized for calling at that late hour, but said that he could not sleep without finding and destroying every fragment of the envelope upon which he had inadvertently written the name of his brother. "This may seem to you," he said, "like absurd timidity, but it is necessary. If the police should discover, as they probably will, that I visited you to-day, they would not only examine the servants as to everything which took place here, but would collect and fit together every scrap of waste paper found in your room. They would then find out that I had addressed an envelope to my brother, and would jump at the conclusion that I had written him a letter, and had given it to you for delivery. How this would affect you I don't know, but it would be fatal to me. The least I could expect would be the addition of a year to my term of exile, or banishment to some more remote part of Siberia. I am strictly forbidden to communicate with my brother, and have not heard directly from him or been able to write to him in years." I was familiar enough with the conditions of exile life in Siberia to see the force of these statements, and we began at once a search for the fragments of the envelope. Every scrap of paper on the floor was carefully examined, but the pieces which bore the dangerous name, "Pierre A. Krapotkin," could not be found. At last my traveling companion, Mr. Frost, remembered picking up some torn scraps of paper and throwing them into the slop-basin. We then dabbled in the basin for twenty minutes until we found and burned every scrap of that envelope upon which there was the stroke of a pen, and only then could Prince Krapotkin go home and sleep. "Two years hence," he said to me as he bade me good-night, "you may publish this as an illustration of the atmosphere of suspicion and apprehension in which political exiles live. In two years I hope to be beyond the reach of the Russian police." Poor Krapotkin! Less than two years have elapsed, and his hope is already realized, but not in the way we then anticipated.

When I kissed him good-bye on the following day he was full of anticipations of freedom and a new career outside the limits of Russia. His term of exile would have expired in September of the present year, and it was his intention to go at once to Paris. His only fear was that at the last moment an addition of two or three more years would be arbitrarily made to his term of exile. That, he admitted, would be a terrible blow to him, because he had nearly exhausted the little money which remained from the wreck of his small private fortune, and he could not support his family upon the pittance of three dollars a month which is the allowance made by the government to political exiles in Western Siberia.

The evil which he dreaded probably came upon him. I have no information as to the circumstances which brought about his suicide, but there would seem to be little doubt that late in August he was informed that he would not be permitted to return in September to European Russia, and that, in a fit of despair, he

took his own life. It would be easy for such a man, in the bitterness of his disappointment, to reason himself into the belief that his wife and children would be better off without him than with him, and when once this morbid belief had taken possession of him, there would be little to restrain him from suicide. In Prince Alexander Krapotkin's death Russia loses an honest man, a cultivated scholar, a true patriot, and a gallant gentleman.

George Kennan.

Time-Reckoning for the Twentieth Century.

IS THERE not a necessity for reform in our system of time-reckoning? Scientific authorities and railway managers are pretty generally agreed that there is, but they are not sure that the public is prepared for what at first sight may appear too radical changes on use and wont. I am inclined to think that the public is more intelligent and more ready for useful changes than doubters suppose. There is certainly room for reform. According to the system of local time, there are in the world as many different days as there are meridians round the circumference of the globe.

"These days overlap each other, but they are as perfectly distinct as they are infinite in number. There are no simultaneous days on the earth's surface, except those on the same meridian, and as the different days are always in the various stages of advancement, difficulties must necessarily result in assigning the precise period when an event takes place. The telegraph may give the exact local time of an occurrence, but it will be in disagreement with the local time on every other meridian around the earth. An event occurring on any one day may on the instant be announced in a locality where the time is that of the previous day, and in another locality where the time is that of the following day. About the period when the month or year passes into another month or year, an occurrence may actually take place, according to our present system of local reckoning, in two different months or in two different years. Indeed, there can be no certainty whatever with regard to time, unless the precise geographical position be specified as an essential fact in connection with the event described. Under these circumstances it must be conceded that our present system of notation is most defective. Certainly it is unscientific, and possesses every element of confusion. It produces a degree of ambiguity which, as railways and telegraphs become greatly multiplied, will lead to complications in social and commercial affairs, to errors in chronology, and to litigation, and will act as a clog to the business of life, and prove an increasing hindrance to human intercourse."

Thus argues Mr. Sandford Fleming, who has done so much to press this subject on the attention of the world, in a memoir read by him before the Royal Society of Canada, in May last, and prepared for publication in the Smithsonian Institution Reports. To show how unscientific is the system of reckoning time by our position on the earth's surface, we have only to reflect that every meridian converges at the pole. If we ever get there, we can take our choice between the days of Berlin, Paris, London, New York, Winnipeg, San Francisco, Peking, Calcutta, and as many others as we like, and live at the same moment of time in the different hours, days, months, or years of different places. What a blissful place for the Irishman who pathetically complained that he wasn't a bird, and therefore could not be in two places at once!

The present system has human inertia on its side, and nothing else. It leads to loss of time and loss of