

THE KNOCK ALPHABET.

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Even in these miracle-coining times of telegraphic signs written and spoken, the following, from George Kennair's article in the January *Century*, reads like an extract from Jules Verne. The old abbé in the Château d'If was wise enough, but he could not penetrate the thick wall between him and Edmund Dantes with other language than irregularly communicated signs of encouragement to his fellow-labourer. The means of intercommunication resorted to by some Russian prisoners was unknown to him. These are described as follows:—"The talented Russian novelist X—, who has been twice exiled to Siberia and half a dozen times imprisoned, told me last summer that when he was arrested for the first time he had never heard of the "knock alphabet"; and that when, during the second day of his imprisonment, he noticed a faint tapping on the other side of the wall, he regarded it merely as an indication that the adjoining cell was occupied, and gave it no particular attention. As the knocking continued, however, and as the faint taps seemed to be definitely segregated into groups by brief intervals of silence, he became convinced that his unknown neighbor was endeavoring to communicate with him. Upon what principle or plan the knocks were grouped he did not know, but he conjectured that the number of taps between two 'rests' might correspond with the serial number of a letter in the alphabet,—one knock standing for 'a,' two for 'b,' three for 'c,' and so on up to twenty-six for 'z.' Upon putting conjecture to the test he was delighted to find that the knocks resolved themselves into the letters 'D-o-y-o-u-u-n-d-o-r-s-t-a-n-d?' He replied with forty nine knocks, so grouped and spaced as to make 'Y-e-s'; but long before he had finished this short word he became mournfully conscious that, at the rate of forty-nine knocks for every three letters, he and his unknown correspondent would not be able to exchange more than half a dozen ideas a week. The invisible prisoner on the other side of the wall did not seem, however, to be at all discouraged, and began at once another long series of knocks, which extended to two hundred and ninety-six, and which, when translated, made the words 'Teach you better way—listen!' Mr. X—then heard a loud tap near the corner of the cell, followed by the sound of