

"Kara grew worse after I left. To hint at what happened, I tell briefly the story of my dear friend Maria, a woman of education and deep refinement. Shortly after my going Maria saw Madame Sigida strike an official who had repeatedly insulted the women. Two days later she watched Sigida die, bleeding from the lash; that night she saw three women commit suicide as a protest to the world; she knew that twenty men attempted suicide on the night following, and she determined to double the protest by assassinating the Governor of Trans-Baikal, who had ordered Sigida's flogging. At this time Maria was pregnant. Her prison term over, she left her husband and walked hundreds of miles to the Governor's house and shot him. She spent three months in a cold, dirty 'secret cell,' not long enough to lie down in or high enough to stand up in, wearing the cast-off suit of a convict, sleeping on the bare floor and tormented by vermin: she was then sentenced to be hanged. She hesitated now whether to save the life of her unborn child. She knew that if she revealed her condition her sentence would be changed to imprisonment. She decided to keep silent and sacrifice her child, that when the execution was over and her condition was discovered the effect on Russia might be still greater. Her condition, however, became apparent, and she was started off to the Irkutsk prison. It was midwinter, forty degrees below zero. She walked. She was given no overcoat and no boots, until some common criminals in the column gave her theirs. Her child was born dead in prison, and soon after she too died.

"Meanwhile I had been taken to Selenzensk, a little Buriat hamlet on the frontier of China, where Mr. Kennan met me."

Kennan speaks of her in these words:

"Her face bore traces of much suffering, and her thick, dark, wavy hair, cut short in prison at the mines, was streaked here and there with gray. But not hardship nor exile nor penal servitude had been able to break her brave, finely-tempered spirit, or to shake her convictions of honor and duty. . . . There was not another educated woman within a hundred miles; she was separated for life from family and friends, and she had, it seemed to me, nothing to look forward to except a few years more or less of hardship and privation, and at last burial in a lonely graveyard beside the Selenga River. . . . The unshaken courage with which this unfortunate woman contemplated her dreary future, and the faith she manifested in the ultimate triumph of liberty in her native country, were as touching as they are heroic. Almost the last words she said to me were: 'Mr. Kennan, we may die in exile, and our children's children may die in exile, but something must come of it at last!'"

"The seven years that followed," she continued, "were the hardest of the twenty-three, for I spoke to but three Russian politicals, who stopped three weeks. In winter—from twenty to fifty below zero—I used to put my chair upon the brick stove and sit with my head close to the thatch." Hence the severe rheumatism that now affects her. "The Government had allowed me six dollars a month. My hut rent was fifty cents, wood a dollar and a half, food four dollars. My friends at home? Yes, they sent money, too, but of course I sent this to my Kara friends. At long intervals one of their many letters reached me—sometimes sewed in the lining of a Buriat cap. I grew almost frantic with loneliness, and to keep my sanity I would run out on the snow shouting passionate orations, or even playing the prima donna and singing grand opera arias to the bleak landscape, which never applauded.

"The seven years over, I was allowed to travel all through Siberia. I lived three years in Irkutsk, the main Siberian city, and many years besides in Tobolsk, Tiumen, and other smaller towns. Here, as my hard-