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George Kennan
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Siberia and the Exile System

VOLUME 1

GEORGE KENNAN



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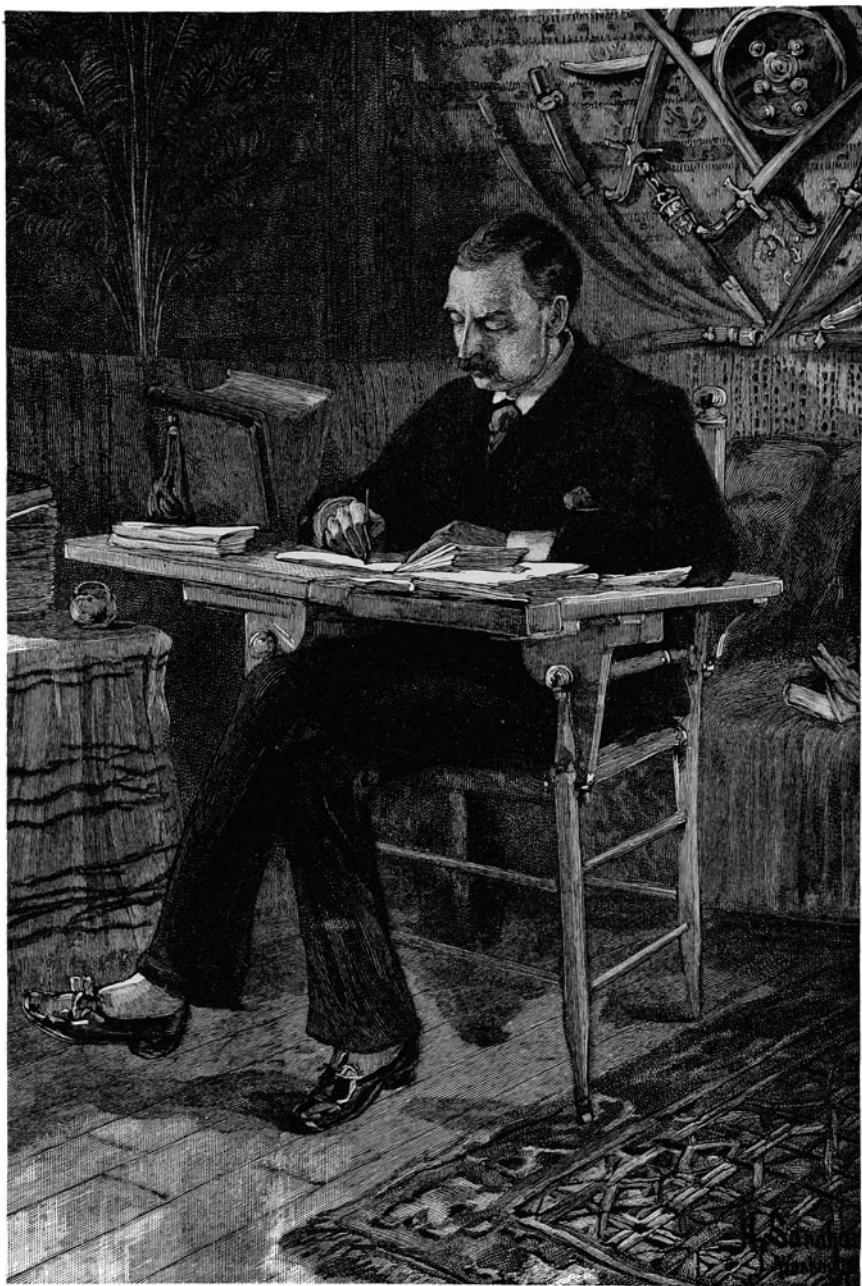
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GEORGE KENNAN.

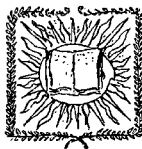
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SIBERIA AND THE EXILE SYSTEM



BY GEORGE KENNAN

VOLUME ONE



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PREFACE

THE idea of exploring some of the less known parts of Siberia, and of making, in connection with such exploration, a careful study of the exile system, first took definite form in my mind in the year 1879. From such observations as I had been able to make during a residence of two and a half years in the country, and a subsequent journey of five thousand miles overland to St. Petersburg, it seemed to me that Siberia offered to a competent investigator an extremely interesting and promising field of research. To the Russians, who had possessed it in whole or in part for nearly three centuries, it was, of course, comparatively familiar ground; but to the average American, at that time, it was almost as much a *terra incognita* as central Africa or Thibet. In 1881 the assassination of Alexander II., and the exile of a large number of Russian revolutionists to the mines of the Trans-Baikál, increased my interest in Siberia and intensified my desire not only to study the exile system on the ground, but to investigate the Russian revolutionary movement in the only part of the empire where I thought such an investigation could successfully be made,—namely, in the region to which the revolutionists themselves had been banished. It seemed to me a hopeless task to look for nihilists in the cities of St. Petersburg and Moscow, or to seek there an explanation of the political events and the social phenomena that interested me. Most of the leading actors in the revolutionary drama of 1878-79 were already in Siberia; and if the imperial police could not discover the few who still remained at large in European Russia, it was not at all likely that I could. In Siberia, however, communication with exiled nihilists might perhaps be practicable; and there, if anywhere, was to be obtained the information that I desired.

Circumstances, and the want of time and means for such an extended journey as I wished to make, prevented me from taking any definite steps in the matter until the summer of 1884, when the editor of *The Century Magazine* became interested in my plans, and proposed to me that I should go to Siberia for that periodical and give to it the results of my work. I thereupon made a preliminary excursion to St. Petersburg and Moscow for the purpose of collecting material and ascertaining whether or not obstacles were likely to be thrown in my way by the Russian Government. I returned in October, fully satisfied that my scheme was a practicable one; that there was really nothing in Siberia which needed concealment; and that my literary record—so far as I had made a record—was such as to predispose the Russian Government in my favor, and to secure for me all the facilities that a friendly investigator might reasonably expect.

The opinions which I held at that time with regard to the Siberian exile system and the treatment of political offenders by the Russian Government were set forth fully and frankly in an address that I delivered before the American Geographical Society of New York, in 1882, and in the newspaper controversy to which that address gave rise. I then believed that the Russian Government and the exile system had been greatly misrepresented by such writers as Stépniak and Prince Kropótkin; that Siberia was not so terrible a country as Americans had always supposed it to be; and that the descriptions of Siberian mines and prisons in the just-published book of the Rev. Henry Lansdell were probably truthful and accurate. I also believed, although I did not say, that the nihilists, terrorists, and political malcontents generally, who had so long kept Russia in a state of alarm and apprehension, were unreasonable and wrong-headed fanatics of the anarchistic type with which we in the United States had become so familiar. In short, all my prepossessions were favorable to the Russian Government and unfavorable to the Russian revolutionists. I lay stress upon this fact, not because my opinions at that time had intrinsically any particular weight or importance, but because a just estimate of the results of

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an investigation cannot be formed without some knowledge of the preconceptions and personal bias of the investigator. I also lay stress upon it for the further reason that it partly explains the friendly attitude towards me which was taken by the Russian Government, the permission which was given me to inspect prisons and mines, and the comparative immunity from arrest, detention, and imprisonment which I enjoyed, even when my movements and associations were such as justly to render me an object of suspicion to the local Siberian authorities. It is very doubtful whether a traveler who had not already committed himself to views that the Government approved would have been allowed to go to Siberia for the avowed purpose of investigating the exile system, or whether, if permitted to go there, he would have escaped serious trouble when it was discovered that he was associating on terms of friendly intimacy with political criminals of the most dangerous class. In my frequent skirmishes with the police, and with suspicious local officials in remote Siberian villages, nothing but the letter which I carried from the Russian Minister of the Interior saved me from summary arrest and imprisonment, or from a search of my person and baggage which probably would have resulted in my expulsion from the empire under guard and in the loss of all my notes and documentary material. That letter, which was my sheet-anchor in times of storm and stress, would never, I think, have been given to me, if I had not publicly defended the Russian Government against some of its numerous assailants, and if it had not been believed that personal pride and a desire to seem consistent probably would restrain me from confessing error, even should I find the prison and exile system worse than I anticipated, and worse than I had represented it to be. How far this belief was well founded, and to what extent my preconceived ideas were in harmony with the facts, I purpose, in the present work, to show.

I wish it to be clearly understood, however, that I do not aim to present a complete and comprehensive picture of Russian society as a whole, nor to survey every part of the vast field occupied by the Russian Government, nor to set forth, in due order and pro-

portion, all of the complex, heterogeneous and inter-related facts and phenomena that go to make up the composite national life of a hundred millions of people. A task of such magnitude would exceed my strength, and would carry me far beyond the limits that I have set for myself. All that I aim to do is to give the reader a clear and vivid impression of the scenery, the people, and the customs of Siberia, to record the results of a careful study of the exile system, and to consider the attitude of the Russian Government toward its subjects so far—and only so far—as may be necessary to throw light upon the facts, the characters, or the events by me observed.

Some of the criticisms that have been made upon the articles on Siberia and the exile system published in *The Century Magazine* have been based apparently upon the assumption that a survey of any one particular department of national life must necessarily be incomplete and misleading, and that the fair-minded investigator should supplement it by taking into the field of vision a quantity of unrelated facts and phenomena from a dozen other departments.

“Your articles,” certain critics have said, “give a false impression. Your statements with regard to Russian prisons, indiscriminate arrests, and the banishment of hundreds of people to Siberia without trial may all be true; but there are in Russia, nevertheless, thousands of peaceful, happy homes, where fathers and brothers are no more in danger of being arrested and exiled to Siberia than they would be if they lived in the United States. Russia is not a vast prison inhabited only by suspects, convicts, and jailors; it is full of cultivated, refined, kind-hearted people; and its Emperor, who is the embodiment of all the domestic virtues, has no higher aim in life than to promote the happiness and prosperity of his beloved subjects.”

The obvious reply to such criticism as this is that it wholly mistakes the aim and scope of the work criticised. I did not go to Russia to observe happy homes, nor to make the acquaintance of congenial, kind-hearted people, nor to admire the domestic virtues of the Tsar. I went to Russia to study the working of a penal sys-

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tem, to make the acquaintance of exiles, outcasts, and criminals, and to ascertain how the Government treats its enemies in the prisons and mines of Eastern Siberia. Granted, for the sake of argument, that there *are* thousands of happy homes in Russia; that the empire *does* abound in cultivated and kind-hearted people, and that the Tsar *is* devotedly attached to his wife and children; what have these facts to do with the sanitary condition of a tumble-down *étape* in the province of Yakútsk, or with the flogging to death of a young and educated woman at the mines of Kará? The balancing of a happy and kind-hearted family in St. Petersburg against an epidemic of typhus fever in the exile forwarding prison at Tomsk is not an evidence of fairness and impartiality, but rather an evidence of an illogical mind. All that fairness and impartiality require of the investigator in any particular field is that he shall set forth, conscientiously, in due relative proportion and without prejudice, all the significant facts that he has been able to gather in that selected field, and then that he shall draw from the collected facts such conclusions as they may seem to warrant. His work may not have the scope of an encyclopedia, but there is no reason, in the nature of things, why it should not be full, accurate and trustworthy as far as it goes. An investigation of the Indian question in the United States would necessarily deal with a very small part of the varied and complex life of the nation; but it might, nevertheless, be made as fair and complete, within its limits, as Bryce's "American Commonwealth." It would, perhaps, present a dark picture; but to attempt to lighten it by showing that the President of the Republic is a moral man and good to his children, or that there are thousands of happy families in New York that have not been driven from their homes by gold-seekers, or that the dwellers on Commonwealth Avenue in Boston are refined and cultivated people who have never made a practice of selling intoxicating liquor to minors, would be not only illogical, but absurd. If the gloominess of the picture is to be relieved, the proper way to relieve it is to show what has been done to remedy the evils that make it gloomy, and not, by any means, to prove that in some other part of the country, under

wholly different conditions, a picture might be drawn that would be cheerful and inspiring.

In the present work I have tried to deal fairly both with the Government and with the exiles. If the Government's contention is not always set forth as fully as may seem to be desirable, it is simply because most of the Government officials to whom I applied for information, both in Siberia and St. Petersburg, either manifested such a disinclination to talk that I could not pursue the subject, or else made such transparent and preposterous attempts to deceive me that their statements were merely grotesque. It will be seen, however, that a large part—perhaps more than one half—of my information with regard to Siberian prisons and the working of the exile system has been taken directly from official sources, and that a very small part of it—probably less than one-fifth—rests upon the statements of exiles or prisoners. I have appended, in the shape of classified groups of facts, a quantity of information relating to the exile system obtained by going through ten years' files of Siberian newspapers, as well as a mass of statistics from reports of the Russian prison and medical departments to show the sanitary condition of Siberian prisons and the rate of mortality in exile parties. I was assured by honest and intelligent officers of the exile administration in Siberia that these statistics are often "cooked" in such a manner as to show a much more favorable state of affairs than that which in reality exists, but they are the best official evidence obtainable. In other appendices will be found two reports of Governor-general Anúchin to the Tsar with the Tsar's marginal notes; a collection of facts bearing upon the treatment of Russian and Siberian authors by the Minister of the Interior, and of Russian and Siberian periodicals by the bureau of censorship; a small collection of revolutionary documents, and another of laws, rules, and orders of the Government relating to revolutionists, and finally a bibliography of the Russian literature relating to Siberia and the exile system so far as I am acquainted with it.

The system of spelling Russian names that I have adopted is

that sanctioned by the Royal Geographical Society of Great Britain in 1885, and since that time used by it in all of its publications. Its rules are as follows.

1. No change will be made in the spelling of words and names that have become, by long usage, familiar to English readers, such as *Cossack*, *droschky*, *Moscow*.

2. The true sound of the word as locally pronounced will be taken as the basis of the spelling, but only an approximation to the sound is aimed at.

3. Vowels are pronounced as in Italian and consonants as in English.

4. One accent only is used, the acute, to denote the syllable on which stress is laid.

5. Every letter is pronounced. When two vowels come together, each one is sounded, though the result, when spoken quickly, is sometimes scarcely to be distinguished from a single sound, as in *ai*, *au*, and *ei*.

6. The values of the vowels and of the principal consonants are as follows:

a—has the sound of <i>a</i> in <i>father</i> .	au—has the sound of <i>ow</i> in <i>how</i> .
e— “ “ “ <i>e</i> in <i>benefit</i> .	ei— “ “ “ <i>ey</i> in <i>they</i> .
i— “ “ “ <i>i</i> in <i>ravine</i> .	zh— “ “ “ <i>s</i> in <i>vision</i> .
o— “ “ “ <i>o</i> in <i>mote</i> .	ch—is soft as in <i>church</i> .
u— “ “ “ <i>oo</i> in <i>boot</i> .	g—is hard as in <i>gun</i> .
ai— “ “ “ <i>i</i> in <i>ice</i> .	kh—is guttural as in <i>khan</i> .

y—is a consonant as in *yard* and is never used as a vowel or a terminal.

An exception will be made to Rule 1 in the case of a few words, such as *Czar*, *mujik*, *Nijni*, which are misleading in their common English form, and which have been correctly transliterated by such authorities as Wallace, Ralston, and Morfill.

An exception will also be made to Rule 2 in the case of certain surnames, such as *Kropótkin* and *Tourguénef*, whose possessors have adopted for themselves a definite form of signature in roman letters. A guide, however, to the pronunciation of such surnames will be found in the vocabulary at the end of Volume II.

Before closing this preface I desire to tender my most sincere and hearty thanks to the many friends, acquaintances, and well-wishers throughout European Russia and Siberia who encouraged me in my work, coöperated in my researches, and furnished me with the most valuable part of my material. Some of them are political exiles, who imperiled even the wretched future that still remained to them by writing out for me histories of their lives; some of them are officers of the exile administration who, trusting to my honor and discretion, gave me without reserve the results of their long experience; and some of them are honest, humane prison officials who, after reporting again and again upon the evils and abuses of the prison system, finally pointed them out to me, as the last possible means of forcing them upon the attention of the Government and the world. Most of these people I dare not even mention by name. Although their characters and their services are such as to make their names worthy of remembrance and honor, it is their misfortune to live in a country where the Government regards a frankly expressed opinion as an evidence of "untrustworthiness," and treats an effort to improve the condition of things as an offense to be punished. To mention the names of such people, when they live under such a government, is simply to render them objects of suspicion and surveillance, and thus deprive them of the limited power they still exercise for good. All that I can do, therefore, to show my appreciation of their trust, their kindness, and their aid, is to use the information which they gave me as I believe they would wish it to be used,—in the interest of humanity, freedom, and good government. For Russia and the Russian people I have the warmest affection and sympathy; and if, by a temperate and well-considered statement of the results of my Siberian investigations, I can make the country and the nation better known to the world, and ameliorate, even little, the lot of the "unfortunates" to whom "God is high above and the Tsar is far away," I shall be more than repaid for the hardest journey and the most trying experience of my life.

GEORGE KENNAN.

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