

Chapter 7

A Foreigner on Russian Prisons

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People :

Author : Peter Kropotkin

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In Russian and French Prisons

by P. Kropotkin

CHAPTER VII

A FOREIGNER ON RUSSIAN PRISONS.

The foreigners who have visited Russia, and have been sufficiently keen observers, have often noticed a characteristic feature of the Russian Administration. People who belong to it know well its deficiencies, its worst features; very well indeed, because they themselves are not the last in contributing to its bad repute. They not only know it: they frankly acknowledge it when in company with their Russian friends. Even in official reports to the heads of the ministries, they do not conceal the bad organization of their respective departments.

But let a foreigner enter a drawing-room where, a few minutes before, the Administration was sharply criticized, and the critics will be unanimous in repeating to the foreigner that surely there are some minor deficiencies in the Administration; but the sun itself has its black spots, and His Excellency So and So is just now taking the most energetic measures for removing the very last remains of the disorder which unhappily crept into the Administration under his predecessor, General SO and SO. And if the foreigner is a man who writes for some newspaper in his own country, and shows an inclination to trumpet through the world what he

hears, those very same people who thought everything worse than ever a few minutes before, will be happy to show the foreigner everything in its best light, and thus to confound all vindictive writers who divulge to foreigners the reports written for home-use by those very same officials. I have remarked the same feature in the Mantchurian Administration, and I often noticed it both at Irkutsk and St. Petersburg. Surely I never saw a more disheartening picture of wholesale robbery in the higher Administration of Russia than that drawn in the reports of the Comptroller-General to Alexander II. As the Comptrol was first introduced in Russia, and nothing more characteristic than the open recognizance of the truth of these Comptroller-Generals' views, which was written by the Czar on one of the reports. Everybody in the upper circles of the Russian society knew the contents of the reports and the answer of the Czar. But what a chorus of maledictions would greet the Russian who should translate these reports, and circulate them in the foreign press! *Soru iz izby ne vynosi!* Do not take the dirt out of the house! would be the unanimous outcry.

One can easily understand how difficult it is for a foreigner to ascertain the truth under such circumstances, especially if he moves only in the Administrative circles, if he does not know Russian, and does not take the trouble to look through the Russian literature bearing on the subject. Even if he were inspired with the most sincere desire to know the truth, and not to be a puppet in the hands of Administrators, who are only too glad to find docile instruments in the foreign press, his way would be beset with difficulties.

This simple truth has not been understood by an Englishman, Mr. Lansdell, who has crossed Siberia a few years ago, and, after having hastily cast a glance on a few Siberian prisons, published a book, in which he tried to represent Russian and Siberian prisons under a smiling aspect. No wonder that his description did not agree with mine. It was quite natural also that he should try to explain the contradiction, and so he did, in an article contributed to the English press in February, 1883. The following from my rejoinder will complete the above picture of Russian prisons:1

Mr. Lansdell does not contradict my statements. He even seems not to notice the facts which I have divulged, and which represent the Russian prisons in quite another light than his own account of them. When I say, for instance, that the St.

Petersburg House of Detention which is quoted by Mr. Lansdell as a sample of what Russia can do was recognized by the Commission under State-Secretary Groth as a building that must be built anew to be rendered inhabitable, notwithstanding the fabulous sums of money it has cost (see the summary of the official report given in the *Golos* for the 24th of January, 1881); when I mention the wholesale stealing which was discovered in the same prison in 1881; when I call to mind the disgraceful treatment of political prisoners in this model-prison by General Trepoff, which treatment was condemned, so to say, even by a Russian Court, during the trial of Vera Zassoulitch; Mr. Lansdell turns a deaf ear to all this, and does not say if, in spite of all this, the St. Petersburg House of Detention still may be supposed to represent the very beau-ideal of what a House of Detention ought to be. When I produce, further, the narratives of an inmate of a central prison, published in Russia (under the responsibility of a Conservative editor, M. Eug. Markoff), and the reliability of which was recognized at once by all St. Petersburg newspapers; when I describe how the jailer of this central prison flogs his inmates, and how his successor gives free play to his own fists, Mr. Lansdell does not say if he still believes that in Russian prisons justice and mercy go hand-in-hand he likes better not to touch these subjects, but he asks me several questions about other things.

Mr. Lansdell asks me first, what I meant when I wrote: In the space of fourteen hours, indeed, he breakfasted, he dined, he traveled over forty miles, and he visited the three chief jails of Siberia: at Tobolsk, at Alexandrovsky Zavod, and at Kara. I simply meant to say that, whilst crossing the continent at the speed of a Siberian courier who outstrips the post, Mr. Lansdell has devoted less than fourteen hours to the study of the three chief penal establishments of Siberia. In fact, it appears from his own book (chapters v. ix. xxi. xxxvi. and xxxvii.), that he has spent a couple of hours in visiting the Tobolsk prison, two hours at Alexandrovsky Zavod, and less than ten hours in visiting the prisons of Kara, as in the space of one day he had not only to visit the jails, but also to travel between the different prisons scattered over a space of nearly twenty miles, and to experience the well-known Siberian hospitality in the shape of breakfasts and dinners (fully described in his book). As to the second day of his stay at Kara, during which day he had to visit the prisons of Lower Kara, it proved to be the name-day of the Superintendent of the works, Colonel Kononovitch, and in the evening Mr. Lansdell was bound to take the

steamer at Ust-Kara, so that when we came to the first prison, he writes, "where the officer was standing ready to receive us, I was afraid we should not have time, and that our staying might involve the missing of our steamer. I therefore begged that we might push on, which we did, to Ust-Kara.

In fact, I even would not have mentioned this less than fourteen hours knowledge of the chief centers of penal servitude in Siberia, if it were not necessary to reduce to its true value the following affirmation of Mr. Lansdell (vol. ii. page 5): I think it only right to say that I have visited Russian Houses of Detention from the White Sea in the north to the Black Sea and Persian frontier in the south, and from Warsaw in the west to the Pacific in the east. The truth is that Mr. Lansdell has cast a hasty glance on what the authorities were willing to show him; that he has not seen a single central prison; and that had he visited every prison in Russia in the way he visited some of them, he still would remain as ignorant as he is now about the real conditions of prison-life of Russia.

Still if Mr. Lansdell were able to appreciate the relative value of the information he obtained in the course of his official scamper through the Siberian prisons, and especially if he had taken notice of existing Russian literature on the subject, his book might have been a valuable one. This he did not, and so he is absolutely ignorant of what has been written in Russia on the subject. Himself does not partake of this opinion, and he writes:

Yet there is a fair sprinkling on my list of 120 works consulted or referred to, of Russian authors, and of those whom I have called the vindictive class of writers (some of them escaped or released convicts), who, trading upon the credulity and ignorance of the public, have retailed and garnished accounts of horrible severities, which they never profess to have witnessed, nor attempt to support by adequate testimony. One of these was Alexander Herzen, who wrote *My Exile to Siberia*, though he never went there, but only as far as Perm, where one of the prisons is situated of which Prince Kropotkin complains so bitterly.

It is true that at the end of Mr. Lansdell's book there is a list of 120 works consulted *or referred to* (that is, quoted by the authors whose works he has consulted). I find even in this list Daniel Defoe's *Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*. But the fair sprinkling of Russian names (if we exclude the authors who deal with Church matters, or merely with geography, as MM. Venukoff and

Prjevalsky) must be reduced to the following:(1) M. Andreoli's paper on Polish Exiles in 1863-1867, appeared in *Revue Moderne*, and which Mr. Lansdell contradicts without knowing anything about the sad story of Polish exile but what he has learned from occasional conversations during his hasty travel. (2) Dostoevskys *Buried Alive*, dealing with seclusion in the Omsk fortress *thirty-five years ago*; (3) Piotrovsky's romantic *Escape from Siberia, thirty-eight years ago*; (4) Baron Rozens *Memoirs*, dealing with the Decembrists, *fifty-five years ago*; and (5) Herzen's *My Exile to Siberia* telling his sojourn in exile at Perm, nearly *forty years ago*. But, of course, I do not find in this list either M. Maximoff's *Siberia and Hard Labor*, which is the result of serious studies made in Siberia, with the authorization of Government; nor the results of M. Nikitin's many years official inquiry into the state of our prisons; nor the Siberian *Stryapchiy* (or Procureur) M. Mishlo's papers on the Prisons submitted to his own control in Siberia; nor M. Yadrintseff's *Siberia as a Colony*; nor any of the official reports; not even M. Mouravioff's papers on prisons, published by M. Katkoff in his arch-conservative review. Shortly, *none* of the works which contain any information about the present state of Russian prisons. This ignorance of works which contain reliable information about our prisons is the more remarkable, as none of the just-mentioned authors belong to the vindictive class of writers who villify the land of their punishment, but they all were, and several are, officials in the service of the Government.

Let us see now if these authors are not more in accordance with the vindictive writers than with Mr. Lansdell's testimony. The chief lock-up for prisoners waiting for trial at St. Petersburg, the so-called Litovskiy Zamok, appears as follows under the pen of M. Nikitin:

It contains 103 rooms for 801 inmates. . . . The rooms are dreadfully dirty; even on the staircase you feel the smell which suffocates you. The black holes produce a dreadful impression (*potryasayushcheie vpechatlenie*); they are almost absolutely deprived of light; the way to them leads through dark labyrinths, and in the holes themselves all is wet: there is nothing but the rotten floor and the wet walls. A man coming from the open air rushes away, asphyxiated. . . . Specialists say that the *most healthy man* will surely die, if he be kept there for three or four weeks. The prisoners who were kept there for some time went out quite exhausted; several could hardly stand on their feet. Only a few prisoners of the less important

categories are allowed to work. The others remain with crossed hands for months and years. When M. Nikitin asked for accounts of the money brought to prisoners by their kinsfolk, or earned by themselves, he met with an absolute refusal from the authorities high and low. *Nikitin, on the St. Petersburg Prisons.*

The same author writes about the prisons at the police-stations of the capital :

In the rooms for common people the dirt is dreadful; they sleep on bare wooden platforms, and half of them sleep *beneath the platforms on the floor*. Each prison has its black holes; they are very small holes, where rain and snow enter freely. There is nothing but the floor to sleep upon; the walls and the floor are quite wet. The privileged prisoners who are kept in cells fall soon into melancholy; several are very near to insanity. . . No books are given in the common rooms, excepting religious ones, which are taken for making cigarettes. "*Police Prisons at St. Petersburg.*

The Official Report of the St. Petersburg Committee of the Society for Prisons, published at St. Petersburg in 1880, described the prisons of the Russian capital as follows :

The prison (Litovskiy Zamok) is built for 700 inmates, and the depot-prison for 200 men; but they often contain, the former from 900 to 1000 persons, and the depot-prison from 350 to 400, and even more. Besides, long since, these buildings correspond no more, neither to the hygienic conditions, nor to those of a prison altogether.

M. Katkoff's review, the *Russkiy Vyestnik*, does not give a better idea of Russian prisons. After having given a description of the police stations, the author, M. Mouravioff, says that the *ostrog* is not better; it is usually an old, dirty building, or a collection of such buildings enclosed by a wall. It is not better inside: moisture, dirt, overcrowding, and stench, such is the type of all *ostrogs* in the capitals and in provincial towns.

The dress is of two different kinds; the old and insufficient dress which is usually worn by the prisoners, and another which is distributed when the prison is to be shown to some visitor; but usually it is kept in the store-house. . . . No schools, no libraries. . . . The depots for convicts are still worse. . . . Let us stop before one of the rooms. It is a spacious room with platforms along the walls and narrow passages between. Hundreds of women and children are collected here. It is the

so-called family-room, for the families of the convicts. In this dreadful atmosphere you see children of all ages in the greatest misery. No Crown dress is allowed them, and therefore their bodies are covered with rags with dirty strips of cloth torn to pieces, which can shelter neither from cold nor from wet; and with these rags they will be sent on their journey to Siberia. *Russskiy Vyestnik*, 1878.

M. Yadrintseff the same whom Mr. Lansdell condescends now to quote writes as follows about the Siberian prisons which Mr. Lansdell imagines he knows after the hasty visits he has paid to them. I condense the description :

Almost in every ostrog there is a nearly underground corridor, moist and fetid, a grave; in this corridor are the cells for the more important prisoners *waiting for their trial*. These cells are half underground. The floor is always wet and rotten. Mold and fungoid growths cover the walls. Water is continually oozing from beneath the floor. A small painted window makes the cell always completely dark. The men are kept there in irons. There is no bedstead, no bed; the prisoners are lying on the floor which is covered with worms and myriads of fleas; and for bed they have rotten straw, for covering their poor cloak, torn to pieces. The moist and cold air makes you shiver even in the summer. The sentry runs away to breathe fresh air. And in such cells the prisoners spend several years, waiting for their trial! These prisoners, even the most healthy of them, become insane. I remember to have heard once in the night horrible cries, says one of the prisoners in his memoirs; it was a giant who was becoming insane.

And so on, and so on. I could fill pages with like descriptions. Was Mr. Lansdell shown all this? If not, was I not right to say that he ought to notice the existing Russian literature on the subject? And will Mr. Lansdell still maintain that he has noticed it?

As to Herzen's work, Mr. Lansdell's reply deserves a few words more. I have quoted, in my paper on Russian Prisons, a description of the Perm prison, which was written two years ago, that is, in 1881, by an inmate of the prison. It was published by Professor Stasulevitch in so scrupulously managed a paper as was the *Poryadok*; it was reproduced by all the newspapers, and was contradicted by nobody; even the usual official denial did not appear. What does Mr. Lansdell oppose to this recent testimony? He writes that he has consulted the memoirs of Alexander Herzen, who was at Perm, where one of the prisons is situated of which

Prince Kropotkin complains so bitterly. But Herzen was settled at Perm *forty years ago*; he never was there in a prison, and, as far as I remember, he does not even speak about the prisons at Perm. Shall I suppose that Mr. Lansdell knows of Herzen's work but its title?

As to the title, Mr. Lansdell accuses Herzen again and again of having published a book on his exile to Siberia without having been there. In the preface to his book, *Through Siberia*, he writes:

My specialty in Siberia was the visitation of its prisons and penal institutions, considered, however, not so much from an economic or administrative, as from a philanthropic and religious point of view. *Much has been written about them that is unsatisfactory, and some things that are absolutely false. One author has published My Exile to Siberia who never went there.*

The truth is that Herzen has never written about the prisons and penal institutions of Siberia, in fact, nothing about Siberia at all. He has written his memoirs under the title *Past and Thoughts* (Byloye i Dumy), one chapter of which, dealing with his incarceration at St. Petersburg and exile to Perm, was entitled *Prison and Exile* (Tyurma i Ssylka.) It is probably this chapter which was translated into English; and if the English publisher has thought it necessary to give it the title of *My Exile to Siberia*, I suppose that Herzen had nothing to do with that. The French, German, and Italian translations of the same work are simply entitled *Prison and Exile*.² In any case, Herzen's Memoirs, forty years old, have nothing to do with Siberia, and still less with the Perm prisons of our time; and that is precisely the subject which interests us.

I wrote further that the chief prison of St. Petersburg, the Litovskiy Zamok (of which I just have given an idea by quoting a few lines from M. Nikitin's description), is an old-fashioned, damp, and dark building, which should be simply leveled to the ground. To this proceeding, Mr. Lansdell says, "I would not utter a word of protest." He admits, too, that I, perhaps justly, find a good deal of fault with this prison. Well, I am glad to hear that Mr. Lansdell finds a good deal of fault with one Russian prison; but I regret that, though having visited the Litovskiy Zamok, he did not describe in his book the *chief prison of the Russian capital*; his readers would know what they have to expect from provincial prisons.

As to the overcrowding of Russian prisons, Mr. Lansdell doubts they were so

overcrowded as I said. I cannot answer better than by producing a few quotations from the materials I have at hand:

"The Tomsk Depot" (writes the correspondent of the *Siberian Gazette*) is overcrowded. To the 1520 people we had, 700 new ones are added, and so the prison which was built for 900 people contains 2220 inmates. There are 207 on the sick-list. (*Siberian Gazette* and *Moscow Telegraph*, August 28, 1881.)

At Samara: The *average* number of inmates in our prisons, on the first of each month for this year, was 1147; the aggregate cubic capacity of all our prisons being for 552 inmates. (*Golos*, May 13, 1882.)

At Nijniy-Novgorod: The prison, built for 300 men, contains, while the rivers are open for navigation, as many as 700, sometimes 800 prisoners. (Official report mentioned by the *Golos*, March, 1882.)

In Poland: Each place in the prisons of Poland is occupied by four prisoners instead of one. It is proposed to build a number of new prisons (they are not yet built). (*Moscow Telegraph*, November, 1881.)

Shall I fill one page or more with like quotations, or, rather, see what is said by official persons entrusted with the supervision of prisons:

M. Mouravioff, a contributor to M. Katoffs review, in an elaborate paper on Russian prisons (written precisely in the spirit that the admirers of the Russian Government like), says: *Almost all our prisons* contain one and a half to twice the number of prisoners for which they were built. (Prisons and the Prison Question, *Ruskiy Vvestnik*, 1878.)

The Siberian *stryapchiy*, M. Mishlo, writes about *Siberian* prisons which were under his own control: The jailer brought me to the rooms. Everywhere dirt, overcrowding, wet, want of air and light. After having visited the rooms, I entered the hospital. As soon as I entered the first room I involuntarily shrank back before the unutterable stench. . . . The cabinets were luxurious apartments in comparison with the hospital. . . . *Everywhere the number of prisoners is thrice the number admitted by the law.* At V. (Verkhneudinsk), for instance, the *ostrog* is built for 240 inmates, and usually contains 800. (*Otechestvennyia Zapiski*, 1881.)

It was precisely to such overcrowding, together with a phenomenal amount of dirt, that the famous typhus epidemic at the Kieff prison was due. It may have been

imported by Turkish prisoners; as the authorities said, but its dreadful ravages were owing to overcrowding and filth. Buildings erected for 550 inmates contained twice this number, says the *Golos* correspondent, in a letter dated the 30th of October, 1880; and he adds: The professors of the University who have visited the prison, arrived, as known, at the conclusion that overcrowding was the chief cause of the epidemic. The circular of the Chief Director of Prisons (mentioned in chapter II.) confirms, in its first paragraphs, the exactitude of this conclusion. No wonder that, after a partial evacuation of the prison, there were still 200 laid up with typhus out of 750 inmates. No wonder also that the mortality at Kharkoff has assumed the proportion (200 out of 500) described by the priest of the prison, in a sermon which was reproduced by the local *Eparchial Gazette* a paper appearing under the supervision of the Archbishop.

I come now to the fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul, where Mr. Lansdell was admitted to look through inspecting holes into the cells of the Troubetskoi bastion and to enter an empty cell, and where I was kept for nearly two years in the same building.

The system of Mr. Lansdell in dealing with this subject is really very strange. He mentions first what a friend of his (a person of high intelligence and probity, who moves in high circles at St. Petersburg) said about prisoners in the fortress. They were fed, he said, with salt herrings and given no water to drink, so that they became half mad with thirst; this business was only stopped by Count Schouvaloff; but his friend still thinks that drugs are sometimes given to prisoners to make them frantic, in the hope that during their excitement they may be led to confess. Then he describes his own visit to the fortress, and how he peeped breathlessly, after having duly prepared his nerves to see how this arch-offender is treated. And as he is shown nothing but a man lying at this moment on his bed, or a lady reading at her table, he discharges his bad temper against the exaggerated and vindictive expressions of released prisoners who vilify the land of their punishment, &c. I really do not see how the vindictive writers could be held responsible for the opinions of Mr. Lansdell's friends, who probably gather their information from the high circles where they move, and have sufficient intelligence to discriminate between mere fables and reality.

As to vindictive writers who are accused of exaggerations, there is only one

who has written about the Troubetskoi bastion, and this one seems to be quite unknown to Mr. Lansdell I mean Pavlovsky, who has published in the Paris *Temps* (in 1878, I think) a description of his imprisonment in the fortress; with a preface by Tourgueneff, whose name is a sufficient guarantee of the *absolute* trustworthiness of Pavlovsky's description, Mr. Lansdell's diatribes against exaggerated and vindictive expressions of released prisoners, are, therefore, mere flowers of polemics.

If Mr. Lansdell had limited himself to the description of what he saw, and had added that those prisoners whom he saw in the bastion were waiting for trial, or for exile without trial, for two, three years, or more, he would have merely done what he ought to do. But he goes on to deny the descriptions of such parts of the fortress which he has not seen, and of which he has not the slightest idea.

I had brought to the knowledge of public opinion in England, in order to show the hypocrisy of our Government, the treatment to which were submitted, the *condemned* revolutionists, who, instead of being sent to Siberia, according to law, were kept in the fortress, in dark cells, without any occupation, and were brought to madness, or on the edge of the grave, in the proportion of five to ten in less than one year. This I had written, according to a description published in the *Will of the People* and in the pamphlet *Na Rodinye*, as I knew that each word of this description is absolutely exact.

This part of the fortress (where Shiryaeff, Okladsky, Tikhonoff, Martynovsky, Tsukerman, &c., were kept in 1881, that is, the Trubetskoi ravelin, *not* the bastion) was not shown to Mr. Lansdell, and he knows absolutely nothing about it; so that the only account which, in my opinion, he was entitled to give was the following:

Although Count Tolstoy had promised me that I *should see everything* (he might say), but I was shown only that building where prisoners are kept when waiting for trial, and the Courtine; where I found no political prisoners. I was not shown any building where condemned Terrorists were kept, and I do not remember any of the names mentioned in the *Times* being named to me in the Trubetskoi bastion. So I can say nothing about the fate of Shiryaeff, Okladsky, and their comrades. In fact, I have visited only one bastion out of six, and have no idea about what the ravelins and the remainder of the fortress may contain.

That would have been, I think, the only correct way to give an account of his

visit to the fortress, and this the more as, out of two informants of Mr. Lansdell both belonging to the State secret police one (who belonged to the third section), said that he has visited once a building with cells underground which were lighted from the corridor above, hardly enough, he said, to read, which cells are probably the same that I have mentioned, where lamps are lighted for twenty-two hours out of twenty-four; and the other informant (a chief of the gendarmerie) mentioned a more comfortable building, three stories high, in the Alexis Ravelin, where prisoners were kept too. There are thus at least two prisons, or two suites of cells, which were not shown to Mr. Lansdell. But notwithstanding that, Mr. Lansdell tries to cast a doubt upon the just-mentioned description of the shameful treatment to which Shiryaeff, Okladsky, and their comrades were submitted, and, in order to show its inaccuracy, tells us a long story about a Russian, Mr. Robinson, who was kept, some twenty years ago, for three years (without being brought before a court) in the Alexis Ravelin, and was treated there as in a good hotel. Everybody will understand, however, that Mr. Robinson's case has absolutely nothing to do with that of Shiryaeff and Okladsky, and that the well-lighted room where he was kept (like hundreds of students and young men arrested at the same epoch) has nothing to do with the suite of dark cells mentioned not only by vindictive writers, but even by a third section informant of Mr. Lansdell. The fortress covers several hundred acres, and contains all kinds of buildings, from the palace of the Commandant to the cells where people are brought to death, or madness, in the course of a few months.

There is, however, one point upon which Mr. Lansdell's doubts are justifiable. It is when he doubts that physical torture has been applied to Ryssakoff. We doubted also. But who will be convinced of the contrary by such arguments of Mr. Lansdell as these:--Nobody was tortured in his presence, and Mr. Jones, a British subject, who was arrested once, and set at liberty after an examination which lasted for a quarter of an hour, was not put to torture!³ Everybody understands that torture would not be applied in the fortress under the eyes of Mr. Lansdell, and still less to Mr. Jones.

But Mr. Lansdell has made up his mind that after having seen a corner of the fortress, one would know everything about it; and he goes still further he victoriously exclaims:--"What, then, have become of the *cachots, oubliettes*, and dismal chambers which have been connected with the Peter and Paul by so many

" Well, I also know the Troubetskoi bastion; I know also the rooms of the Courtine; still I should never permit myself, on the ground of this limited knowledge, either to affirm or to deny the existence of *oubliettes* in the fortress. I should not affirm their existence, as I know that *oubliettes* are usually discovered only after a 14th of July; and I should not deny it, as I know that the Troubetskoi bastion does not embody even a tenth part of the fortifications of the fortress. The facts given in a foregoing chapter amply prove that there are *oubliettes*, with men therein, and that Mr. Lansdell, in denying their existence, has pushed too far his zeal in whitewashing the Russian Government.

And now let me add a few words about the difficulties which beset the way of those who earnestly wish to know the real state of Russian prisons. I shall not follow Mr. Lansdell's example, and accuse him of a want of good faith for his holding different views on Russian prisons from our Russian explorers and myself. I am fully aware of the difficulties one meets with in this way. I know them from my own experience, and still more from the written experience of those who attempted to make on a larger scale an inquiry into the state of our prisons. Even officials, to whom their official position opened the doors of the prisons at any time, and who had plenty of time before them to pursue their inquiry, openly acknowledge these difficulties. All serious explorers of our penal institutions are unanimous in saying that one learns nothing from a mere inspection of a prison. Each prison undergoes a magical change when a visitor is expected, says one of them. I did not recognize the lock-up which I had visited *incognito*, when I went afterwards to the same lock-up in my official quality, says another. The prisoners never unveil to an inspector the horrors committed in the prison, as they know that the inspector goes away and the jailer remains, says a third explorer. One must know the prisons, beforehand to discover the horrible blackholes, like those described by MM. Nikitin and Yadrintseff, as they obviously will never be shown to a visitor who knows nothing about them; and so on.

Such being the difficulties for Russian officials, they are still greater for a foreigner. He is in the worst imaginable position, on account of the continuous fear of Russian administrators of being treated by the foreign press as barbarians. He has before him this dilemma. Either he will thoroughly inquire into the state of the prisons, he will go to the bottom, and he will discover the bestialities of the

Makaroffs, the Trepoffs, and their acolytes; and then he will not receive permission to visit prisons. Or, he will make only an official scamper through a few prisons; he will know nothing but what the Government is willing to let him know; and, being unable to test for himself what is reported to him by officials, he will become he vehicle for bringing to public knowledge what his official acquaintances desire to be published. Such is the case of Mr. Lansdell.

But the greater the difficulties, the greater must be the efforts of those who really are desirous to know the truth; and we have seen foreigners who have vanquished these difficulties. One may differ with Mr. Mackenzie Wallace on many points, perhaps himself would change now his opinion on several subjects; but still his book, though not received with congratulations by MM. Katkoff and Tolstoy, was recognized unanimously by the independent Russian press as a serious and conscious work. And as to our prisons, several Russian officials, by displaying much patience and by spending much time, have come to learn the true state of our penal institutions. The English prisons are not Russian *ostrogs*. But if a foreigner went to England, without knowing a word of English, without taking the pains to study what was written in England about her penal institutions, and, after having paid a hasty visit to some prisons, should write that all those who hold different views on prisons from himself are merely inspired with a feeling of vindictiveness, surely he would be accused of great levity and presumption. But Russia is not, England, and to know the truth in Russia is far more difficult.

Levity is always regrettable, but it is the more regrettable in questions like this, and in a country like Russia. For twenty years all honest men in our country have been loudly crying against our prisons, and loudly asking for an immediate reform. For twenty years public opinion vainly asks for a thorough renovation of the prison administration, for more light for more supervision in the whole system. And the Government, which refuses that, will be only too glad if it can answer them: "You see, there is a foreigner who knows everything about prisons throughout the world, and who thinks that all you say is mere exaggeration; that our prisons are not at all bad in comparison with those of other countries."

□□When thousands, nay, a hundred thousand, of men women, and children are groaning under the abominable régime of prisons which we see in Russia, one ought to proceed with the greatest cautiousness and I earnestly invite the

foreigners who may be tempted to study this question, never to forget that each attempt to extenuate the dark features of our prisons will be a stone brought to consolidate the abominable régime we have now.

1 The following pages are reprinted, by permission, from the *Nineteenth Century*, June, 1883.

2 Mr. Lansdell repeats this accusation against Herzen with such a persistence, in different parts of his book, and in the *Contemporary Review*, that, in order to be certain about this subject I wrote to the son of Herzen, the distinguished Professor of Physiology, A. A. Herzen. Here is a translation of his reply, dated Lausanne, February 26, 1881 :

SIR, You are quite right; it is merely the part of the memoirs of my father which deals with his arrest and exile; there is not a word about Siberia. It is the English publisher who has added to the title the words to Siberia, *without the knowledge of my father, and my father has publicly protested at once against this hubbug (a l'insu de mon pere, et mon pere a des alors proteste publiquement contre ce humbug.) . . .*

"Believe me, &c., (Signed) A Herzen.

3 *Contemporary Review*, p. 285.

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