

ALEXANDROVSKI,

27th November, 1903.

Dear-----

I completed a letter of 18 sheets to you last night at 12 o'clock, but I had to be up at six o'clock this morning, and as I could not trust anyone at the Hotel with money for stamps for postage, I have left the letter in my valise until Sunday and it will very likely travel in the same train with myself to Tomsk. You must excuse my writing just now, as I have a slight gathering on my right little finger and I have to hold it out straight when I write; it is so painful. I will have it poulticed to-night, as it interferes with my only amusement, which is writing. I have had a new experience to-day: wrapped in sheepskin, with woollen cabman's cap and a heavy fur cap over it, I have been driven 50 miles in a sleigh through the wilds of Siberia--Icicles were hanging to my cap and my eyebrows and moustache had a solid coating of ice. The sledge was long and I was in a half reclining position, lying on matting rugs and felt, and two great fur aprons over me to my nose. My Kutcher sat on one side in felt and skins, hair inwards and cloth cap lined with fur. We did the journey with one stoppage for "Chai" tea and eggs, which is all I have had to eat to-day, as the Hotel people could not breakfast me at half past six, and I had to be content with a glass of light beer, which served me until eleven, when we halted for "Zhafhuck" breakfast. We had that (the breakfast) at a Russian Farm, which was full of people, a family of two or three generations, and as hot within as the air was cold without. The tea and the four eggs I ate were good, also the black bread. They make good and delicious tea everywhere here, and I shall never like English tea again. There were two beds in the parlour and a big stove and in the outer room two or three beds

narrow, upon which men were lying side-ways, with their legs gathered up, like some people I know. A baby was being lifted up and down in a kind of covered scale, and I could not see it, and fortunately did not hear it. I gave the youngest boy visible, with a face rather like Harry's some sugared nuts in a canister, and his grandfather was satisfied with lld. for my breakfast. My ^{diver} diver, an honest fellow said 40 copecks quite enough and he had 2 glasses of tea out of the pot. I was tucked in again in the farmyard, and one of the sons, a handsome young fellow, held open the two leaved gate, to let the "Karata" and pair out--He was clad in a fur cape, yellow leather boots, and a tunic to his knees of soft magenta colour. The whole surrounding was like a medieval English farm, the costumes like English peasants of the time of Edward 1st, but rather more luxurious. The great grandfather was a patriarch with long hair and beard. The Russians are very fond of this type, which is Norse, straight eyebrows, long noses, pointed beard, and foreheads with two creases in them, like mine. I see the Norse type now comes out in myself.

We did the second half of our journey, 27 miles, or 38 versts, without stopping, the horses going well through the soft powdery snow, which they kicked up into my face. The country was lovely, like a great park wrapped in purest snow--long ridges lay on both sides, wooded to their summits with fir and birch, silver birch, with very delicate lace like twigs and branches--sometimes there were groves of small firs amongst them, the effect very pretty. Once we had a beautiful view of the valley of the Angara, which reminded me of that of the Seine from Montmorency. Often our way ran along the top of a middle ridge and then dropped into valleys between two long ridges. At last, when I was almost asleep, being charmed by the soft

gingling of the horse bells, we reached the village, which is a very long one with many large houses, probably inhabited by rich convicts who enjoy their liberty under inspection. I don't know where I am now, as I was driven to a building like a very pretty inn, but it has two striped sentry boxes, black and white, one on each side of the door. I have sent my letter to the chief and shall hear from him about seven. This may be a sort of Government Inn. It is beautifully kept, beautifully clean, and I have just had "Chai". I was told I should probably stay with the Chief, but I shall see; in any case I am very comfortable here. The decorations, as usual, include a painting of the Czar, but I don't see the Czarina. The other pictures are mostly Photos of the Convict Settlement and work rooms. There is evidently very much to be seen, and there are some large black looking enclosures. We passed on the roads several troupes, probably of convicts, with soldiers carrying guns with bayonets with fixed amongst them. My appearance caused quite a commotion and with my wool helmet and projecting frozen moustache, I have been taken for an old general, which I suppose I am. I shall not be able to post this here, as it would probably be opened at the Postoffice-- In this region they are rather suspicious, but my letter from Lessar their Pekin Ambassador, is a great passport, but there is evidently a mystery about the matter, which class three cannot understand. The Superiors are all most open, one walked in just now and came and shook hands.

IRKUTSK--GRAND HOTEL.

30th November, 1903.

Dear-----

I have just had my cup of "Chai", and left Alexandrovski at half past ten yesterday morning, having spent the previous evening with the Director and his family, who had the Doctor and his wife in. The Director, M. Lyantoscovitch and his daughter played Mozart's 12th Sanata, Raff's Cavatina, Chopin's Nocturne, Tchaskowky's Romana, all familar pieees. He played the violin and his daughter the piano. He is an able musician, and got through Raff's double notes better than anyone I have heard, excepting Leruda. He has a Band at the Prison of 11 men, and they gave a special concert for me in the afternoon in a handsome room provided for recreations. I have made ample notes of my visit, and will write all out in the train for the "Times". The Director spoke only Russian as well as his wife (a most gentle kindly old lady, who is in trouble, having only just lost a son) and the daughter. The Director knew a little French and his wife German. She went all over the prison with us and translated everything the Director said, a very hard piece of work for her. I am getting quite flush in German; one necessarily picks up many new words--I shope in that language to many of the prisoners, who do all the work of that vast establishment, for there are 1500 in the Central Prison, and the village of between 2,000 to 3,000 inhabitatns, is also a prison. None but prisoners and officials and the 200 soldiers in charge are allowed to live in Alexandrovski. I slept in the Gort Stolovoya or Hotel, were my lodgings were free, but I hired the cook for food. However, I lunched and suppered with the Director in an adjoining house. My bedroom was beautiful, and I was attended to entirely by two convicts, both of whom were most patient, watching every want, and the elder one was a splendid

valet who insisted on dressing me like a baby. The poor men here are from all parts of the Russian Empire, and commit murder and offences often through vodka spirit, and have to live in repentance ever after. Most of those I spoke to had committed murder, or manslaughter, one confessed to making false coins, and others to robberies. The Greek Church only allows to be put to death, and the knout or whip is not now used, unless by the military. They have a large Greek Church joining the Central Prison and I went there at 5, and saw a Greek service through; it lasted 2 hours. However, I must stop for I want to post this with the other very long letter, which I hope you will receive safely. The express for Tomsk is due to leave here to-day, and will probably be late, so I hope to get away by it, and should be in Tomsk Thursday morning. A day or so must do for me there, and the same at Omsk, and then to Moscow, whence I will wire. I want to see the great gold refinery before leaving.

IRKUTSK.

Nov. 30th, 1903.

Just a line of supplement to my last letter of this morning which I gave to the Bank to post.

I have been to the gold Refinery and was shewn round by the Director, who spoke French and German. I saw lots of gold ingots ready for despatch to St. Petersburg. It comes largely from the valley of the Lena. I heard from M. the Director that young Keighley had been here with the Earl of Ronaldshay a month ago, and had gone to Port Arthur. I suppose he is having a run round during the winter season; they say here he does not stick long to anything.

Afterwards I had a long walk and crossed the Angara to the

Station and found there was an express, to leave at 6.50 p.m., so that I shall leave by it for Taiga junction for Tomsk. I am paying from here to Peterbourg and the total fares from Newchwang to Peterbourg, will only have amounted to £21 a wonderfully cheap ride considering the accommodation. The ticket is available for 17 days, and I shall only just in time to spend Christmas with you. Jim had better inquire about the Holt Steamer, which is bringing my purchases and see they are brought from London in time for our Annual Christmas Show. I hope you have got the dresses by now, and that you will have the crepe made up for an X'mas present, being grey you can wear it for mourning. I think I shall return from Peterbourg by Stockholm, Copenhagen, and Hamburg. It will be cheaper than through Berlin by "train de luxe".

I must now conclude as I have calls to make. I like Irkutsk very much. It is very picturesque, and not at all outlandish. The Russian architecture is classic or Byzantine and has a stateliness or picturesque dignity about it. What an experience I am having. It is worth years of labour, and my knowledge of languages has been invaluable, and I am slowly picking up Russian. It is smooth and rather hard to catch.