MUSCOVY

RUSSIA THROUGH FOREIGN EYES

1553 – 1900

FRANCESCA WILSON

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BOOKS THAT MATTER

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PREFACE

Is your journey really necessary, as they used to ask us in the Second World War? Not the journeys of the foreign visitors to Russia—they had their reasons for them—but our journey into the past to accompany them? I think it is. Many of the earlier travellers impart the excitement they felt in their discovery of an unknown country and their narratives can be read with the sort of pleasure that *Robinson Crusoe* and *Gulliver's Travels* still give. They saw Muscovy with the eyes of children to whom everything new and surprising is equally significant: black or white, repulsive or attractive. Every detail is concrete and sharp.

We have chosen to begin with, not the pioneer Herberstein, but the adventurous and lovable English sailor, Richard Chancellor who, thwarted in his search for Cathay stumbled, instead, into the court of Ivan the Terrible, all gold and jewels and barbaric pomp. (The Tudors, with English arrogance, claimed that Chancellor had discovered Muscovy as Columbus had discovered America.) Even a century later, the Dutch sailor Struys, penetrating to the Caspian, had no less a sense of wonder and discovery. His account of his imbroglios with Cossack brigands and fierce Tartars reads like a picaresque novel.

The visitors whose records are most valuable are those who lived longest in Russia, learned the language, made friends with the people: men like Captain John Perry, engineer to Peter the Great; Dr Cook, physician to Prince Galitzin; Martha Wilmot, the Irish girl who helped Princess Dashkov to write her memoirs; the Quaker Daniel Wheeler whom the Tsar Alexander I invited to drain the St Petersburg marshes; Herr Kohl who studied Russian life for six years. (Yet admittedly the French, whose visits were usually briefer, were amongst the most acute observers, as for instance Madame de Staël, whose whirlwind *tournée* lasted only two months.)

Here we must apologize for a gap; we have no Italians (except for Casanova). The Italians contributed more than any other nation to the arts and visual glories of Russia. It was Italians who from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries were building churches in Kiev and the walls, towers and churches of the Kremlin. In the eighteenth century it was to architects like Trezzini, Rastrelli and Quarenghi that St Petersburg owed its superb layout and many of its most splendid buildings. What did they think of the Muscovy to which they were giving so much? Unfortunately we have been unable to trace any personal account of their impressions and experiences. Yet it matters little, for their record in marble, stucco, in stone and gorgeous ornament are

more lasting than the records of foreigners who have left us only words. Again it was Italians who, in the 1730s, brought opera to St Petersburg; it was Italians who, along with the French, taught Russians the ballet. On Scythian soil they sowed seed which bore strange fruit —something different and magical which the West still enjoys.

Each of our many travellers tells something about Russia which can be discovered in no other way. With their foreign eyes they saw, in startling colours, things that to the natives were so familiar that they never noticed them. Unfortunately, as all these travellers, except Macarius, Patriarch of Antioch, were Westerners they were convinced that they belonged to a superior culture, an attitude which scarcely changed until the myth of the Slav soul was propagated towards the end of the nineteenth century. In consequence most of them failed to see the virtues of a primitive people or values in institutions that were not on the Western pattern. There is a tiresome note of condescension in their writings.

There is another reason why the earlier foreign impressions of Russia are especially valuable. For various geographical and historical reasons, education in Russia developed so late that few Russians wrote about their country. When Karamzin wrote his *History of Russia* at the end of the eighteenth century, he made considerable use of foreign accounts of his country. The present collection, however, is not concerned except incidentally with Russian history. The documents chosen describe the Russian scene and the Russian people: how they lived in their cities and their villages, what they ate and drank, how they built their houses, tilled their fields, worshipped at home and in their churches, bore the tyranny under which they lived, celebrated birth, marriage and death—day-to-day things, not high politics or international relationships. For this reason, few ambassadors' reports are included.

Only foreign impressions of European Russia are given. Fitzroy Maclean, in *A Person from England*, has told the exciting stories of travellers in Asiatic Russia. George Kennan's great human document *Siberia and the Exile System* is no exception to this rule. His book deals with European Russians, not with Kalmucks, Kirghiz or Yakuts. The abbé Chappe D'Auteroche's *Journey into Siberia* is also only incidentally about Siberia. His rendezvous in Tobolsk was with Venus; his story about the Russians he met on his journey.

The richest period for foreign accounts, the nineteenth century, is the hardest from which to select and, after 1860, the least necessary. We can read the Russians on themselves. For one of the strangest phenomena in European literary history had occurred. The

Muscovites, with a pentecostal suddenness, realized the potency of the written word. In the words of a Russian writer:

> 'Little more than a century was allotted to our literature to epitomize—in a violent foreshortening—the millenia of European tradition, and to add a new domain to the old spiritual universe of the West. . . . This was something strikingly different from the long, slow, organic formation of other literatures. Russian literature did not arise as a tree—slow to grow, hard to decay, organic. No, it exploded like a rocket, displaying a short, sharp, transient radiance on the darkening horizon of Western civilization.'[1]

For the first time, we in the West could read the Russian view of the monotonies and beauties of their landscape, the joys and sorrows of their people, their passions, aspirations, superstitions and beliefs, their oppressions, follies and sufferings, in Gogol, Turgenev, Herzen, Tolstoy, Dostoievsky and Chekhov; even if great poets like Pushkin and Tyutchev were sealed from us by a language we had not mastered.

Readers will come to the narratives in this book with their own prejudices. Some will be most impressed by the contrast between the Soviet Russia of today and the Tsarist Russia of yesterday; they will point to the staggering feats of the cosmonauts and scientists whose forebears were serfs; to the women effective in every walk of life, whose granddams were tied to the soil, old hags at thirty, or doomed to cards, cosmetics and idleness.

Others will find in these descriptions of Tsarist times certain perennial features. They will mutter, '*Plus ça change* . . .' They will talk of the unchanging effect of climate on Russian character, that inexorable climate: autumn with its bitter rains that turn roads into swamps; winter that, for months, buries the whole world under snow, and breeds inertia; spring which, however lyrical with sudden blossom and Easter's joys, isolates villages and farms for weeks by disastrous floods; summer with its intolerable heat, dust, flies and drought. The Soviet with all its technological skill cannot change the climate. They will point, also, to the constant effect of history and geography on the Russian character: the influence of the Orient ('Scratch a Russian and you find a Tartar'), of the steppes, vast and lonely as the ocean, breeding melancholy and a fatalistic capacity for endurance. There will be among them many who maintain that absolutism is inherent in Russia, that Siberia has a more ominous sound now, in the days of Solzhenitsyn's *Ivan Dennisovitch*

[1] N. Bachtin, *Lectures and Essays* (Birmingham 1963).

and *The First Circle,* than it had in the days of Dostoievsky's *From the House of the Dead.*

It is perhaps inevitable that many in the West see Russia in these sombre terms (Siberian prisons, Dostoievskian gloom) but this is to ignore the immense forward drive of the Russian people, the long hopes that characterize their attitude to the universe (Gogol's dashing troika, horses with the whirlwind on their manes). It is on the foundation of this long view that, again and again, Russia has, with superhuman effort, pulled itself out of swamps that would have engulfed another nation. In early encounters our travellers were amazed to see Russians working not for themselves but for their grandchildren. Were they guided by a star they saw in the East? The star might be, as in our day, a sputnik heralding the dawn of technological achievement, or the birth of a new hope for man. Have we in the West, in our present pessimistic mood, lost this long view?

Russia is a country of violent contrasts. This book will be useful if the reader, startled as our travellers were by the juxtaposition of these contrasts, sees Russia as a whole: on the one hand, Ivan the Terrible, on the other, Ivan the beggar saint; on the one hand, oppression and cruelty, Turgenev's despair, Dostoievsky's suffering; on the other, colour, life, triumph—the Cossack choir, the Easter ritual, Borodin's *Prince Igor,* Diaghilev's ballet. Side by side there is the darkness and—the sudden glory.

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INTRODUCTION

When Hakluyt attributed to the English seaman, Sir Richard Chancellor, 'the strange and wonderful discovery of Russia', he was characteristically insular and ignorant. Sigismund von Herberstein had visited Russia as Imperial ambassador in 1517 and 1526, had published a book on it in 1549, and become known on the Continent as the discoverer of Russia. He had given Westerners the first extensive description of Russian history, geography, government and customs, but it could not be fairly said of him, any more than of Chancellor, that he had discovered Russia. Kievan Russia had had close links, both dynastic and commercial, with the rest of Christendom. A daughter of King Harold had married the son of the Grand Prince of Kiev and there were English mercenaries there in the eleventh century.

This so-called Kievan period in Russian history started when Vladimir accepted Christianity (*c.* 988), not in the Latin but in the Greek Orthodox form. It witnessed the rise of a brilliant civilization, revealed not only in architecture, literature and the applied arts but also in the spirit of freedom, so alien to the Muscovite principle of the subject's complete subjection to the state.[1]

The Kievan period came to an end when, in 1224, the Tartars invaded Russia.

> 'Few catastrophes so great or so enduring in their effects have overwhelmed a young and struggling country. The Tatars were no undisciplined horde of feckless barbarians, but a force of some half a million trained light horsemen, representing an empire which in the lifetime of Jinghis Khan, its creator, had been extended from Manchuria to the Caucasus at a cost of more than eighteen million lives. . . . Every important Russian town, Novgorod excepted, was burned or put to the sack.'[2]

For nearly two hundred years Russian principalities and city republics survived only by utter and humiliating subservience to their Asiatic masters. All contacts with the West were severed. Russia virtually disappeared from the map of Europe. Only in the fifteenth century did she begin to re-emerge. By this time the power of the Golden Horde had been broken. The yoke of the Tartars had been shaken off but they had left a legacy; the Muscovite Grand Dukes had learned from the Great Khans the

[1] G. Vernadsky, *Kievan Russia* (London, 1948).
[2] H. A. L. Fisher, *History of Europe* (London, 1936), p. 379.

art of absolute rule, an art never forgotten in Russia and, in Tsarist times, reinforced by the Church, with its emphasis on submission and its doctrine of the divine right of the ruler.

Ivan III (1462–1505) received ambassadors from the Holy Roman Empire, but none came from England. So it came about that, when Herberstein's book was published in 1549, no one in England took note of it. In the forty years after it was published it went into eighteen editions in many different languages, but no English edition came out until 1576. For us it was Richard Chancellor who had discovered Muscovy (as unknown to us as America when Columbus accidentally bumped into it)—and not the German Herberstein.

For readers of English this is an advantage. We get a sense of discovery from our Tudor sailors and merchants, who noted down everything they saw with a freshness of vision and an excitement which we do not find in the sober and scholarly Herberstein. Moreover, we have it in their sonorous sixteenth-century prose.

Herberstein knew some Russian and went about his studies of Muscovy conscientiously, even consulting Russian archives. From him the Continent took its stock notions of Russia, which lasted for hundreds of years: the excessive cold in winter so that the spit from your mouth freezes before it reaches the ground and you lose your nose unless you rub it with snow; the intolerable heat in summer, which burns up whole corn-fields and forests; the black wolves and white bears; and, above all, the tyranny of the Grand Duke of Muscovy, who makes all his people, even the greatest of his princes, slaves—and these Russians, Herberstein adds, seem to prefer slavery to freedom. As for women, they are kept in Oriental seclusion and beg their husbands to beat them, else they think they do not love them. As a good Catholic, Herberstein was shocked by many things: that communion was in both kinds and given to small children, that priests married, and so on. A good part of his account concerns the indignities he suffered at the hands of the Grand Duke's messengers, who seemed to think that their lord was more important than the Holy Roman Emperor whom Herberstein represented. His outrage at these 'misunderstandings' is the most entertaining part of his book and make Herberstein seem quite human. He describes how he managed not to be the first to dismount from his horse, nor the first to uncover his head, even how he did not get up and bow to all the princes at each fresh dish presented to him at the Grand Duke's banquet,

and how displeased the barbarous Muscovites were at his show of spirit and conscious superiority. He even allows himself a little joke in discovering in the loaf of bread the Grand Duke handed to him 'an emblem of the hard yoke and perpetual servitude of those who eat it', since it was shaped like a horse's collar.

The Continent had other writers on Muscovy beside Herberstein, the Italian Paulus Jovius, for instance, but for the Tudor English it was their own men who discovered for them that strange, half-barbarous country.

Hakluyt introduces them. When he was in Paris, as chaplain to our ambassador there, he was outraged to hear that 'in voyaging, exploration and adventure' his countrymen were despised for their 'sluggish security'. To refute this he collected, with tremendous industry, *The Principal Navigations, Voiages and Discoveries of the English Nation, by sea or overland, to the most remote and distant quarters of the earth, at any time within the compass of these 1,500 years,* a work he published in 1589.

He wants, he says, to preserve certain English exploits from 'the greedy and devouring jaws of oblivion'. True, the Portuguese had found a new way to India, the Spaniards had discovered lands westward of the Pillars of Hercules, but their way was never barred by ice, mist and darkness. Our sailors

> 'exposed themselves unto the rigour of the stern and uncouth Northern seas, made trial of the swelling waves and boisterous winds, which there commonly do surge and blow, sailed by the ragged and perilous coast of Norway, the unhaunted [i.e. unfrequented] shores of Finmark, the dreadful and misty North Cape.'

Hakluyt cites a letter to Henry VIII from Robert Thorne, a London merchant living in Seville. Thorne was envious of the achievements of the Spaniards and Portuguese; the English compared to them, seemed to be 'without activity or courage'. There was a route to the fabulous East still undiscovered, a way 'shorter to us than to Spain or Portugal', namely by the north-east. By this passage 'ships may have the clearness of the day without any darkness of the night', and from thence proceed to Cathay and all the Indies. Thorne was not the only one to believe in this north-east passage. Among others there were the mathematician and astrologer, John Dee and, most important of all, the veteran explorer, Sebastian Cabot, governor of the Company of Merchant Adventurers. He knew the 'perils and travails' of the expedition from

his own experience. He had searched for a passage to Cathay, not by the north-east but by the north-west and, instead of the magical Cathay, had discovered only the barren Newfoundland.

It was on Cabot's advice that, in 1553, in the seventh year 'of our most dread sovereign lord Edward VI . . . certain grave citizens of London, men of great wisdom and careful for the good of their country', raised between them (each giving £25) the sum of £6,000, and fitted three ships for the exploration of the north-east passage 'for the discovery of Cathay and divers other regions'. The three ships were the *Bona Esperanza* of 120 tons, the *Edward Bonaventure* of 140 tons and the *Confidenza*. Sir Hugh Willoughby, 'a most valiant gentleman and well-born' was appointed captain of the *Bona Esperanza* and admiral of the little fleet, 'both by reason of his goodly personage (for he was of a tall stature) as also for his singular skill in the services of war' (he had fought under Henry VIII against the Scots). Richard Chancellor was appointed captain of the *Bonaventure*.[1]

The moment when Chancellor accidentally 'discovered' Muscovy was singularly auspicious for both countries. England was badly in need of new markets. Ivan the Terrible, surrounded by enemies both at home and abroad, was desperately anxious for new friends and allies—and also to import instruments of war. The Tudor adventurers did not know this, and the joy with which they were at first welcomed and the honours and favours heaped on them may have caused them some mild surprise, but they took them in their matter-of-fact way—and as the rightful due of their great nation and their great sovereigns—and were not deterred from writing critically of what they saw. It is time, now, for them to tell their own stories.

[1] Hakluyt gives us the tale of Chancellor's adventures partly in his own words but mostly in those of Clement Adams, Chancellor's friend. Adams was a learned man, who had studied at King's College, Cambridge, and then became tutor to the king's henchmen in Greenwich. Chancellor recounted his adventures to him. Adams wrote them in elegant Latin, afterwards translated. The two accounts corroborate each other, but as Adams tells us more about Chancellor than modesty allowed him to tell of himself, in the following account Adams' words are generally preferred.

ANTONY JENKINSON

First journey to Russia 1557; second journey 1562; third journey 1566; last journey as ambassador 1571

ANTONY JENKINSON was chosen to be captain of the *Primrose* (to which the precious Osip Napea was entrusted for safe conduct back to his own country) because he was a seasoned traveller, merchant and seaman. The Company also appointed him agent for three years. The list he gives us of his journeys includes Spain, Portugal, Greece, Turkey, Asia Minor, Syria and most of North Africa. In 1546, as a young man, he had been sent into the Levant as training for a mercantile career. In 1553 he was at Aleppo and wrote an account of the entry into that city of Solyman the Great, whose permission he received to trade in Turkish ports, free of customs' duties. He was always eager to explore new countries and carried with him dispatches from Queen Mary to Ivan IV, requesting the Tsar to help him on his way to Persia and even to Cathay. Sumptuous presents were sent to the Tsar, mainly of velvet and satin but also a lion and lioness, and Osip Napea was also given a number of valuables, for which one hopes he was grateful.

Three other ships sailed with the *Primrose*. The Muscovy Merchants gave instructions to the masters and mariners of the fleet similar to those given before, except that there was an added urgency in their admonition to keep within sight of each other; in dark or misty weather they should make a great noise with trumpets, drum, horn and gun. They sent an important letter to their agents in Russia giving a list of the cargoes in the four ships: mainly cloth (kersies and cotton) but also nine barrels of pewter. The most useful merchandise to be obtained in Russia, they said, was still wax, tallow, flax and train oil (from seals). As for hemp, it was best to make ropes of it in Russia. Of furs they desired no great plenty because they were dead wares; sables and rich furs

were not 'every man's money' though they could do well with mink. Search must be made for herbs and earth that made good dyes such as Turks and Tartars use. They were sending a young man with knowledge of wood to get samples of yew, near the Pechora River, and coopers to make casks, also ten young apprentices to be trained either to keep accounts or to buy and sell and 'some to be sent abroad to the notable cities of the country for understanding and knowledge'. They wanted samples of steel and copper from Tartary. They affirmed that they had been given by Philip and Mary the monopoly of trade with Russia.

In his first letter Jenkinson related how, on May 12, 1557, he embarked at Gravesend, and arrived safely in the bay of St Nicholas on July 13th. The Russian ambassador and his company, he tells us with obvious relief, 'with great joy got to shore'. They were welcomed home with splendid presents, 'not only rye bread and pancakes but also swans, geese and ducks and all manner of victuals both fish and flesh, in the best manner that the rude people could devise'.

Jenkinson himself went on to Colmagro, a hundred versts away, and sailed in a small boat up the swift River Dwina (noticing that the natives made 'tar' from the trees which grew by its sides) until he came to Vologda, a great city where the houses were all built of firwood, as also the churches, two for every parish—one for summer, the other to be heated in winter. All the way, he never entered into a house but lodged in the wilderness by the river's side. 'And he that would travel that way must carry with him a hatchet, a tinder box and a kettle to make fire and seethe him meat, when he hath it, for there is small succour in these parts.' On December 1st, he left Vologda in a sledge, as the manner is in winter, with post horses. He changed fourteen times before Moscow.

On Christmas Day the Tsar invited him to a banquet at his palace in the Kremlin. Six hundred were present, heathen as well as Christians. Two places from the Tsar sat a boy of twelve, the heir to the emperor of Kazan whose country Ivan had conquered eight years earlier. In another hall were feasting 2,000 Tartars who had recently surrendered to the Tsar. It was all immensely grand and festive. The Tsar kept handing Jenkinson dishes of meat and goblets of wine and mead. Every time the Tsar drank or tasted a dish of meat, he crossed himself and all the company stood up. (Where Herberstein had been irritated, Jenkinson only marvelled.)

1 Antony Jenkinson's Muscovy, 1562.

On Twelfth Night, Jenkinson witnessed the gorgeous ceremony of the blessing of the waters. First came the long procession from the church with lighted tapers, followed by men carrying the cross and ikons of Our Lady and St Nicholas; then a hundred priests and the Metropolitan himself. Last of all came the Tsar with a crown on his head and all his nobles richly apparelled with gold, jewels and furs. This immense crowd gathered bareheaded, in spite of the fearful cold, round a hole that had already been hacked out of the thick ice on the river. The priests sang, the Metropolitan blessed the water, then cast it on the Tsar, his son and his nobles.

> 'That done, the people with great thronging filled pots of the water to carry home and divers children were thrown in, and sick people, and plucked out quickly again and divers Tartars christened. All which the Emperor beheld. Also there were brought the Emperor's best horses to drink the hallowed water.'

Jenkinson was surprised by the prestige of the Metropolitan and greatly impressed by the authority of the Tsar ('No prince in Christendom is more feared of his own nor yet better beloved'). He did not admire the Russians in general.

> 'They are great talkers and liars, flatterers and dissemblers. The women be very obedient to their husbands and go not often abroad. I heard of men and women that drank away their children and all their goods at the Emperor's taverns.'

He noted, as innumerable visitors hereafter were to note, that in Russia it was accounted no shame to be drunk.

There follows a long account, given by one of Jenkinson's companions, of religion in Russia. This is, on the whole, objective, without the contempt shown by Chancellor and later foreign visitors. On Palm Sunday there is a very solemn procession, the Tsar leading the horse on which the Metropolitan sits, young men spreading garments in front of it. For, after Our Lady and St Nicholas, the Metropolitan is next to God and of higher dignity than the Tsar himself. In matters of religion he gives sentence as himself lists, 'whether it be to whip, hang or burn'. There are a great many rich monasteries. 'They keep great hsopitality and relieve much poor people day by day.' At Easter, after the fasting and mourning of Holy week, they have the resurrection

> 'whereof they rejoice. For when two friends meet during the Easter holy days, the one of them says, the Lord of Christ is risen, the other

answers, it is so of a truth and then they kiss and exchange their eggs, both men and women continuing in kissing four days together.'

At christenings the godfathers and mothers all spit to exorcize the devil. The godfather hangs a cross round the baby's neck. This he wears all his life 'else he is no Christian'.

The thing that rouses real indignation in honest English breasts is the way marriage is solemnized. This is in most points abominable. First the man sends the woman a small box in which there is a whip, needles, cotton, scissors, etc., and perhaps some raisins or figs, 'giving her to understand that if she offend she must be beaten with a whip; by the needles, etc., that she must apply herself diligently to sew; by the fruits, that if she do well, no good thing shall be withdrawn from her.' When the marriage day is appointed, the bride makes a great show of resistance, shutting herself up, sobbing and weeping, until she is dragged to the church by two women. The marriage ceremony is much as ours. Afterwards there is drinking, singing and dancing that lasts for three days. However poor they are the bridegroom is called a duke, the bride a duchess.

'One common rule is amongst them, if the woman be not beaten with the whip once a week she will not be good, and the women say if their husbands did not beat them they would not love them.'

When a man or woman dies, they stretch him out and put a new pair of shoes on his feet because he has a great journey to go, then they wind him in a sheet as we do and put a testimony in his right hand which the priest gives him to testify to St Nicholas that he dies a Christian man or woman. Their friends follow the corpse, always laid in an open wooden coffin, to the church carrying wax candles, weeping and howling. When a man is hanged he is given no testimony; 'how they are received into heaven, it is a wonder, without their passport.'

'There are a great number of poor people among them which die daily for lack of sustenance, which is a pitiful case to behold. . . . A great many are forced in the winter to dry straw and stamp it to make bread thereof. In the summer they make good shift with grass, herbs and roots; barks of trees are good meat with them at all times. There is no people in the world, as I suppose, that live so miserably and the most part of them that have sufficient for themselves are so unmerciful that they care not how many they see die of famine in the streets.'

They believe that in a country full of diseases the best thing is to go to their hot baths twice a week and sweat the evil out.

In 1558, Antony Jenkinson got permission from the Tsar to explore the Volga, down to Astrakhan on the Caspian Sea, which he had recently conquered. From him we get the first English account of the Tartars. Unlike Captain John Perry and many Englishmen after him, he does not admire them but considers them a wicked people. He is shocked that they have no towns or houses but move from place to place with their wives, children and cattle. (They say to their children who do not want to move, 'Will you smell your own dung, like the Russians?') They eat no bread, which they say is made from the top of a weed and makes the Christians weak, but only meat, especially horse. For drink they have blood from their horses and fermented mare's milk. They delight in no art or science except wars. When Jenkinson came to Astrakhan he found it a desert, for famine and pestilence had followed the long wars and 100,000 had died. The surviving Tartars were so miserable they might easily have been converted to the Christian faith 'if the Russians themselves had been good Christians, but how should they show compassion to other nations when they are not merciful unto their own?' Jenkinson could have bought many goodly Tartar children for the price of a loaf of bread but he 'had more need of victuals than of any such merchandise'.

Jenkinson crossed the Caspian Sea, penetrating to Bactria and Bokhara, where we cannot follow him except to note that even in these countries, outside his jurisdiction, the Tsar's fame was such that his letters saved Jenkinson on many occasions from being killed or made a slave. He could not get to Persia because it was too unsettled, but he did some trade with the Tartars and rescued six Tartar ambassadors and twenty-five Russians from the prospect of slavery to the king of Samar. On his return to Moscow he kissed the Tsar's hand, gave him the men he had salvaged, a white cow's [yak's] tail from Cathay (which he hadn't reached) and a Tartary drum. Having got the Tsar's leave to depart he arrived safely at Colmagro in May 1560, and from thence sailed to England.

Jenkinson's second journey to Russia, in 1561, is of little interest for the purpose of this enquiry as he was only crossing to Persia and his account tells mainly of his experiences there. His third journey, started in 1566, was of great importance because he gained

great privileges from the Tsar for English merchants. Calling upon God, the only strengthener of all things and the helper of all Christian believers, the Tsar promised his 'sister' Queen Elizabeth to grant certain valuable privileges to the Muscovy Company. Not only did he permit them to buy and sell in all part of his kingdom without paying any custom duties, but he gave them complete monopoly of trade in Russia. If any other merchants, out of what countries soever they might be, came in with their ships or waggons, their goods would be confiscated. Moreover the Company was permitted to buy houses in Vologda and Colmagro or whatever other places they liked and set up trading centres there. Jenkinson was triumphant. The Company had obtained all that their hearts desired. Moreover, the Tsar again sent an embassy to London. They presented Elizabeth with some fine sables and other rich furs, which in our climate, her courtiers felt, 'were wholesome, delicate, grave and comely, more dignified and comforting to age than the new silks, shags and rags' on which latterly we had been wasting our money.

Unfortunately the new friendship did not fulfil its promise. The first coolness came in 1567. Ivan, feeling menaced by enemies at home and abroad asked Elizabeth both for asylum in England, if he were forced to flee, and for alliance with him in his wars. Elizabeth readily promised him asylum (he would do the same by her, he said, if she needed it—she thanked him but said she did not) but she had no wish to get involved in his quarrels with his neighbours. Ivan was furious. He threatened the Muscovy Company to open trade with English merchants who did not belong to them. Elizabeth immediately sent another embassy, headed by Thomas Randolph but, though he succeeded in getting all the Company's privileges confirmed, the truce was only temporary. Ivan was still hoping for an alliance. In 1570 he wrote an angry letter to the Queen:

> 'We thought that you lord it over your domain and rule by yourself . . . but now we see that there are men who do rule beside you, and not men but trading boors, who do not think of the profit of our safety, honour and lands but seek their own merchant profit. And you remain in your maidenly estate like a common maid.'

It was to soothe the angry Tsar and patch up trade relation again that Jenkinson was sent on his fourth and last journey to Russia in 1571—this time as ambassador.

As soon as he arrived in Russia, he sent his interpreter to Moscow to tell the Tsar of his arrival. In the meantime the English agents gave him most alarming reports; they had heard it said that if ever Jenkinson came back to Russia he would lose his head. For a moment Jenkinson hesitated, wondering if he had better not return home again, but he was a brave man. Sure of his innocence, he was determined to face it out, to seek an interview with the Tsar, to hear of what he was accused and have a chance to justify himself.

For six painful months Jenkinson waited in Colmagro, with no bodyguard, no lodging appointed for him and no victuals supplied, 'according to the fashion for ambassadors, which argued his [the Tsar's] grievous displeasure towards our nation'. For four months he had no news of what had happened to his interpreter. Later he discovered that, because the whole country was 'sore visited by the hand of God with the plague', no one was allowed to travel and his interpreter, after he had gone half way, had been held in quarantine. Jenkinson sent another messenger, with a guide, by an unknown way through the wilderness, although he knew that it was strictly forbidden to travel by indirect ways. The two men were caught by a watchman who might lawfully have burned them, with their horses, but was persuaded (presumably by bribes) not to do so.

At last, on January 28, 1572, the plague having abated, a message came from the Tsar that Ambassador Jenkinson should be given post-horses and await his pleasure in Pereslav. Here he remained under house arrest for seven weeks, not allowed to see anyone, not even his own people. At last, on March 23rd, he was summoned to the court. The Tsar received him graciously, allowing him to kiss his hand. He then dismissed his courtiers all except his chief secretary and one other and told Jenkinson to come near him with his interpreter. He then, in somewhat obscure language, explained the reason for his displeasure. In 1567 he had sent Jenkinson back with a secret message to Elizabeth and had expected he would return with a favourable answer. Instead, the Queen had sent Randolph, 'but all his talk with us was about merchants' affairs and nothing touching ours'. (The secret message, as explained above, was the request for an alliance and, if necessary, asylum.)

Jenkinson replied that he had given the secret message to the Queen and that she had sent an answer back with Randolph. He could not come himself because he had been sent on another

mission. He reminded the Tsar that the merchants of the Company had now been trafficking in his dominions for nineteen years and had always been ready to serve him. It was grievous that His Majesty had withdrawn all privileges from the Company's merchants (he asked that these should be restored) and that he had allowed, to trade on their own in his kingdom, rebellious agents who had given England a bad name. They were traitors who should be handed over to Jenkinson to take back home. The Tsar said he could not read the Queen's letters yet nor give an answer, because it was the week before Easter which must be spent in fasting and prayer. He then dismissed Jenkinson to his lodging but sent him a dinner 'ready dressed with great store of drinks of divers sorts'.

Jenkinson received a reply from the Tsar only six weeks after he had presented him with a detailed list, in writing, of complaints. These were mainly that English merchants could not recover their debts, not even from the imperial treasury, and were not allowed to pass down the Volga to Astrakhan and over the Caspian Sea to fetch their fellow traders out of Persia with their goods, and that English artificers had been kept in Russia against their will.

The Tsar replied most reasonably, promising to redress nearly all of the grievances. One thing he refused and that was to compensate the English for what they had lost in a Moscow fire, 'for that it was God's doing' and not his. Jenkinson left his interpreter behind to collect the debts and receive the letters of privilege. The Tsar sent him a gentleman 'charged to conduct him and provide boats, men, post horses and victuals all the way to the seaside, an enormous distance for such a provision'. At Colmagro he waited for a month. The Tsar had promised to send back for punishment the agent who had traded on his own and sown dissension, but he never turned up. On July 23rd, Jenkinson sailed for home. He wrote;

> 'And thus, being weary and growing old, I am content to take my rest in mine own house, chiefly comforting myself, in that my service hath been honourably accepted and rewarded of Her Majesty and the rest by whom I have been employed.'

That Jenkinson felt old and weary after his last exhausting experience in Russia, where his very life was in danger (as it had been many times on his travels), is scarcely surprising, although he was destined to live another forty years. (In 1572, when he re-

tired from his travels, he was probably still under fifty.) One hopes that he enjoyed taking his rest in his own house. He had, in 1568 married Judith Mersh, a relative of Sir Thomas Gresham, by whom he had five daughters and a son, all of whom married.

Jenkinson was the first of our merchant seamen to cross the dangerous and unknown Caspian Sea and penetrate into central Asia, even to the legendary Bokhara, which in the nineteenth century was to become part of the Russian Empire. He was an acute and accurate observer and added considerably to geographical knowledge. England had already had, from Chancellor, a picture of manners and customs in Muscovy but he added many significant details. He wrote of his experiences in such a matter of fact style, avoiding all grandiloquence and exaggeration, that one is apt to forget how extraordinary they were, and what courage and tenacity were needed to face them.

His country made some acknowledgement of the debt they owed him. In 1568 Jenkinson received a grant of arms. The preamble described him as 'one who for the service of his prince, weal of his country and for knowledge sake, hath not feared to adventure his life and to wear his body with long and painful travel into divers and sundry countries'.

INTRODUCTION

In the first years of the seventeenth century, not many Westerners braved the dangers of travel in Muscovy. This was the Time of Troubles, following on the death of Boris Goudunov in 1605. Boris had been a strong ruler, but the belief that he had gained the throne through ordering the murder of the rightful heir to it, the Tsarevitch Dimitri, haunted his subjects (to whom, because of his title, he was sacred) and made them only too willing to believe that the conspiracy had miscarried and that Dimitri had turned up in Poland. When he entered Moscow at the head of an army of Poles, he was welcomed with wild enthusiasm but later suffered from his sponsors. The Poles were Catholics and the perennial enemies of the Orthodox Russians. They outraged the Muscovites. Because of them the hapless Dimitri, an engaging figure, was murdered. For years Russia was in chaos. In 1613 the pious Muscovites, who believed so profoundly in the divine right of emperors, had at last an accredited tsar. The boyars elected to the throne a lad of sixteen, Michael, the first of the Romanovs. This did not end the confusion. There was a second False Dimitri. The Poles fought on. The peasants and peaceable citizens were a prey to marauders.

It is a relief to know that, by 1618, enough law and order had been restored for James I to send an embassy to his 'brother', the new Romanov tsar. This embassy is chiefly notable for the ambassador's chaplain, Richard James, and his companion Tradescant. James, a Fellow of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, compiled a Russian–English vocabulary and transcribed specimens of Russian oral literature. (This early Cecil Sharp made his collection of songs a hundred years before the Russians did.) As for Tradescant, founder of the first Natural History Museum and the first Botanical Garden in England, he brought back with him Arctic berries and plants, a new kind of helebore, a purple geranium and several rose bushes (all single) whose scent was 'marvellous sweet'. One became known as the wild briar of Muscovy. It is encouraging and rather touching to think of these two mild, scholarly Englishmen collecting songs and plants in barbarous Muscovy, so soon after the tribulations of the Time of Trouble.[1]

[1] See J. Hamel, *England and Russia*, trans. J. S. Leigh (London, 1854); S. Konovalov, *Oxford and Russia*, an Inaugural Lecture (Oxford, 1947).

In 1636 the Duke of Holstein sent an embassy to Moscow. This enterprising duke hoped to steal a march on the rest of Western Europe and secure special trading privileges for his little country. In this he failed, but his embassy is important because with it went the learned young German Olearius, charged with the duty of gathering information about the peoples, manners and customs of Muscovy. Olearius is the first of the seventeenth-century Westerners worth considering at some length.

The Tsar Michael is a shadowy figure; not so his son Alexis, who succeeded to the throne on the death of his father in 1645. He earned the gratitude of the Royalists in this country by sending money to the exiled Charles II and asking in tender terms after 'the disconsolate widow of that glorious Martyr, King Charles the First'. When Charles II was safely on the throne, Alexis sent an embassy to congratulate him and (in 1662) London enjoyed the sight of the Tsar's three envoys driving in great pomp through their streets, their attendants with hawks on their wrists, 'in their habits and fox caps very handsome', according to Pepys, 'but Lord! to see the absurd nature of Englishmen, that cannot forbear laughing and jeering at everything that looks strange'. Charles, 'mindful of the Tsar's brotherly kindness to him in the time of his affliction', gave the Russians a reception unmatched in splendour (as the French ambassador noted rather ruefully) and received with pleasure gifts of gold cloth, furs, hawks, and horses. In 1664 he sent a return embassy to Moscow under the Earl of Carlisle, in the hopes of renewing the friendship broken in the time of Cromwell and regaining the lost trade privileges. Unfortunately, the Earl of Carlisle was a stupid, arrogant fellow who knew nothing of diplomacy but had accepted the post in the hopes of some good hunting in a wild country. He behaved so insolently that the Tsar was stung into throwing back the King of England's gifts, although he must have especially regretted the watches and pistols. Even Andrew Marvell's beautifully composed Latin epistles—the poet was in the earl's train—did nothing to smooth over the rift. The embassy served only to embitter Anglo-Russian relations. Its only good result was a lively account of Muscovy given by its secretary Guy Miège, a Swiss who had lived long in England. The Tsar's court was almost grander than in the days of Ivan the Terrible. The Tsar was like a sparkling sun, his throne silver-gilt, his crown and sceptre covered with precious stones; the four lords standing beside him were clothed in white ermine and

had great chains of gold; 200 boyars were clothed with vests of gold, silver or velvet set with jewels.[2]

But Alexis was less celebrated, in Russia, for his grandeur than for his extreme piety and his insistence on the rigorous keeping of fasts and attendance at divine service. Poor Macarius, Patriarch of Antioch and his son Paul of Aleppo experienced this in their bones and flesh. They had come to Holy Muscovy to beg for alms and they did not enjoy its holiness. Macarius and his suite nearly died of starvation during the frequent fasts of the Church, when a little pulse, or a dried herring, was put before them; they nearly dropped dead when forced to stand upright, for four hours in a cold dark church, listening to endless intoning. For them, used to the more relaxed, more festive holiness of their Syrian dioceses, Muscovite holiness seemed overdone. It is something of a shock to find the Russian Orthodox Church criticized, not by Protestant or Roman Catholic bigots but by those of its own hierarchy.

Alexis was extremely pious yet, by a well-meaning effort to purge the mistakes which, through ignorant copyists, had crept into the Bible and the Church ritual, he caused the first great schism of the Russian Church. The Patriarch Nikon, by making these corrections, alarmed the conservatives.

The result was that the Razkolniks, or Old Believers, formed their own church and, in spite of bitter persecution, became the first and largest group of Russian non-conformists.

Perhaps Alexis' great gift to his country was the encouragement he gave to foreigners. In this respect he was the precursor of his more famous son Peter. Not only did a number of Scotsmen fight in his wars (the most famous of them was General Patrick Gordon) but his own personal doctor was the Englishman, Samuel Collins. For us this is gain: Collins was uninhibited in his comments on life in Muscovy.

Uninhibited too, was the Dutch sailor Jan Struys, but more exciting as his adventures led him farther afield. From Struys we have a first-hand account of the Cossack brigand, Stenka Razin, folk-hero of Russian song and legend, forerunner of Mazeppa and Pugachev. Startled, we glimpse another Muscovy, wild, passionate, full of colour, as improbable as the most fantastic work of art; but now we are in Russia and this is real life.

[2] G. Miège, *A Relation of Three Embassies . . . in 1663–1664* (London, 1669).

JEAN STRUYS

Travels in Muscovy[1]

French Edition, Amsterdam 1718

GLANIUS published the French edition of this book in 1718, because—he writes in his introduction—although the author Jean Struys was distinguished neither by birth nor education, he was a 'natural genius', who had succeeded in all he had undertaken and had written of his experiences in an easy style that would please those who look for what is 'solid and authentic' in what they read. The descriptions of the places he visited are so exact and detailed that they would be useful to the reader while his adventures would amuse them.

Struys started on his travels in December 1647, but did not arrive in Muscovy until October 1668.

Struys tells us in his introduction that from his earliest years he was obsessed with the desire to travel, but that his father insisted on his learning an honest trade and would not hear of his going to sea. He bore this until he was seventeen. Then, finding his father inflexible, he ran away from home and, at Amsterdam, as a common sailor, boarded a ship bound for Genoa. For ten years he travelled far and wide, to Sierra Leone, Madagascar, Siam, Japan and Turkey. In Troy he was seized by the Turks and for six weeks was in the galleys.

It was here that Struys met his first Russian, an old man who had been a galley slave for twenty-four years and had lost his ears and nose as a punishment for trying to escape. With the help of a file which Struys had managed to conceal, they both got rid of their chains and shortly before dawn, 'slipped softly into the sea'. The Turkish sentinels shot their arrows after them, one of which

[1] *Voyage en Muscovie.* The extracts are translated by the Editor.

pierced the thigh of the old Russian, 'to the bone'. In spite of this he swam with his comrade for two hours, till they reached the Venetian ship, the *Sacrifice of Abraham,* which received them kindly. Here, by the goodness of Heaven, the Russian was soon healed of his dangerous wound, and both men took part in the ensuing battle with the Turks in which the Venetians won a glorious victory. From this experience Struys learned, among other things, the phenomenal physical strength, power of endurance, courage and trustworthiness of the Russian peasant, and one hopes that he remembered his old comrade later when he was in his most critical mood in barbaric Muscovy.

The battle against the Turks was fought in June 1656. The next year Struys returned to Holland, intending to stay there for a few days but, as he put it, 'fate decided' that he should marry and that for more than ten years he could not leave his family. After this, nothing could hold him and he left in another *Sacrifice of Abraham* en route for Muscovy and Persia. At Riga their ship was unloaded and its cargo put on thirty carts to be taken overland to the Caspian Sea, where they hoped to obtain silk from Persia. (Struys does not tell us what wares were on the carts to be given in exchange, only that they were grossly overloaded.) He was horrified by the extreme poverty and nakedness of the peasants round Riga, treated, he says, by their lords worse than the Turks treated their slaves. He was glad to get to Pitsiora, his first Russian village, where the inhabitants were well fed and had a flourishing market. At Pletscow, the next town they arrived at, they sent back their Riga carts, as they had received the Tsar's order that horses and waggons or sleighs should be provided for them for the rest of their journey to the Caspian. It was already the end of October. On November 12th the snow was so deep that they had to proceed in sleighs. Struys recounts many details of his journey to Moscow: the terrors of the forest where he met a bear, packs of wolves and bands of robbers; the miserable wooden huts the peasants lived in. He was not much impressed by Novgorod, in spite of its former glories and the Monastery of St Anthony. Here was preserved the millstone on which the saint had sailed from the Tiber, through the Baltic and down the Volga. This attracted thousands of worshippers, but not Struys although, as a Catholic, he should have believed in saints and their miracles.

Struys had a guide who spoke German; he himself began to learn Russian of which he says he soon knew as much as was suit-

able for a foreigner. He found his journey through gloomy forests and wretched villages extremely melancholy. The *izbas* (cottages) where they sometimes stopped had neither food for them nor beds, so that they spent the night smoking their pipes. They were glad when at last they got to Moscow. Struys gives a careful description of this city, noting the horrors of its winter, in which many people are frozen to death or, unless they rub themselves with snow, lose their ears or noses through frost-bite. The summer, he hears, is about as bad because of its extreme heat and the unwholesome bogs surrounding the city, which were a breeding place of fevers.

He writes a chapter or two on the manners and customs of the Muscovites for whom he conceived a great contempt, finding them ignorant, brutal and vicious. Since 1634, tobacco had been forbidden them because, through smoking, many families had been ruined and many houses burnt down. Struys was scandalized by their arranged marriages and maintained that they were often unhappy and led to divorce. If a woman was sterile or had only daughters, she could be forced by her husband to enter a convent and he was free to remarry after six weeks. If one of the partners was accused of adultery, he or she could be forced by a judge to become monk or nun. The Russians are lascivous but so superstitious that when they take a woman they remove the cross that, since their christening, has hung round their neck and hang a veil over the ikon. He notes that if a man takes a foreigner, it is a great sin, but not so bad in a woman, since if she has a child she will undoubtedly bring him up in the Orthodox faith. Struys even finds it superstitious in Russians that they wash before going to church, as though water would take away their sins. At the baths men and women mix without scruple 'as naked as one's hand'.

Struys left Moscow in May (He arrived in Astrakhan in September). He met the officers and crew of his ship in a boat on the River Oka, and it was by boat that most of the journey was made. He was impressed by the great apparent fertility of the land beside the Volga (which he said was like the Nile). 'Yet it is a desert, having never been inhabited since the army of Tamerlane put it to fire and sword to punish the insolence of the Muscovites who had plundered and burnt one of his frontier cities.'

Astrakhan, Struys writes, is for its size and beauty, one of the most famous towns in Muscovy. Ivan the Terrible had conquered it after he had taken Kazan, and since then it had grown enormously and brought great revenues to the Tsar in customs' duties.

Not only Kalmucks and Tartars, but Armenians, Persians and even Indians trade here with the Russians. There was fruit of all sorts and since the Persians had given vines to a German monk, grapes and wine.

Struys considers the Tartars, whom he found in the winter camp around Astrakhan, less hideous than the Kalmucks, their sworn enemies, but apart from that, has little good to say of them. In return for a promise to fight for the Tsar, they pay him no tribute. This suits them. War gives them the chance to loot.

In Astrakhan, Struys was received by Stenka Razin. The captain of his ship, hearing of his fame, decided to visit him and asked Struys to go with him. Struys tells the hero's story as he learnt it from the Muscovites. Stenka Razin was a Don Cossack, a proud race who fought for the Tsar on condition that they kept their freedom to rule themselves. No slave who fled to them could be recaptured. In this way they had attracted to their ranks many brave and desperate people. Stenka Razin had revolted against the Tsar to avenge his brother, who had been hanged by the Russian General Dolgoruki for withdrawing his regiment, against orders, after a successful campaign against the Poles. Stenka could make himself feared. He could also make himself loved. He gathered hordes of willing followers, seized ships laden with merchandise on the Volga, sacked towns and monasteries on its shores and terrorized the whole country-side. When the governor of Astrakhan sent a fleet against him, Stenka, although he had only twenty-two boats to the governor's thirty-six, had the best of it, and Tsar Alexis offered to forgive him the past if he would return to his service. Stenka, who was at the end of his resources, accepted with joy and camped near Astrakhan. From time to time his troops marched into the town all superbly dressed, wearing crowns covered with pearls and precious stones. Stenka was recognized by the respect shown him; people approaching him on their knees, calling him *Batushka* or father. He was tall, his carriage noble, his looks proud, his only flaw that his face was slightly pockmarked. At first the people of Astrakhan were delighted with the newcomers, as they sold at ridiculously low prices the things which, during four years, they had stolen from Persians, Russians and Tartars. Struys himself bought from them a massive gold chain for forty roubles and silk for a song.

Stenka received Struys and his captain kindly, and was delighted with a gift of two bottles of brandy, since his had run out. He

found by enquiry that they were Dutch sailors and merchants, under the protection of the Tsar. This was all right at the moment but later when Stenka, tired of inactivity, retired from Astrakhan and again turned rebel, it proved disastrous. Before that happened they visited him in his ship on the Volga where he was drinking and making merry with his officers.

> 'Near him was a Persian princess whom he had seized with her brother on one of his last raids. He made a present of the young man to the governor of Astrakhan but kept the princess, whom he loved. . . . At the end of the day, he became very drunk and leaning over the ship's side and looking with a dreamy air at the water of the Volga, he cried after a moment's silence, "No river can be compared with thee. What do I not owe thee who have given me so many triumphs and such treasures? I owe thee all that I possess and all that I am. Thou hast made my fortune and crowned me with benefits but I have shown ingratitude. . . . I seem to hear thy reproaches, that I have never given thee anything. Pardon me kind river; I confess that I have offended and if this confession is not enough to appease thy just anger, I offer thee with all my heart what is dearest to me in the world." At which he ran to the princess and threw her into the river, all dressed as she was in gold cloth and adorned with pearls and precious stones. The poor princess deserved a better fate and there was no one who did not pity her in his heart. And, although she was of such a high rank, and suffered at finding herself in the power of a cruel and brutal man, yet she had felt an infinite indulgence for him and had never shown resentment at her captivity. However brutal Razin was, one must believe that if drink had not maddened him he would not have done this cruel deed, for until then he had seemed rather just than inhuman.'

Struys, whose great merit as a travel writer was his inexhaustible curiosity, tells us that he sought out Razin's followers and got them to tell him how they had gained such power. It was from them presumably that he had heard the story of the Persian princess, or did he insert it later on when it had become the famous Russian folk-tale and song? Certainly it embellishes his memoirs.

When Stenka withdrew from Astrakhan to raise revolt again among his people, he took with him a large number of officers and men, whom he had won over to his side. The governor sent an emissary to him demanding their return. He replied that they would soon be returning—in a different manner. 'Tell your governor', he said, 'that I am a prince, born free and independent, and that perhaps his power is not so great as mine.' Soon the people

of Astrakhan were horrified to see a fleet of eighty sail, each boat armed and filled with soldiers 'all eager for loot' and, although the Tsar sent a larger fleet against the rebels, it did him no good, for the Muscovites who had joined Stenka penetrated his ships, inducing the sailors to mutiny and throw their officers into the river. Others penetrated the army; the common soldiers cut the throats of their officers and joined Stenka, who made them an impassioned speech:

> 'At last, my friends you are free; what you have just done liberates you from the yoke of your tyrants. This yoke is so heavy and cruel that it is amazing that you have borne it so long. Heaven, touched by your tears, has sent you a liberator who, after freeing you from the oppression under which you have been groaning, will love you as his own children and will have for you the heart of a father. In gratitude for this, he asks only sincere affection, inviolable fidelity and a steadfastness proof against the wiles of your enemies. It is to destroy them that Heaven has put you under my protection. Help me and we will finish what we have begun.'

After this speech, the Muscovites whom his gifts had already suborned, swore that they were ready to follow Stenka wherever he might lead, that their zeal was unquenchable, that he would soon see the sort of people he had won to his side. These words were followed by the applause of the whole army and a general cry of 'Long live the prince. Long live the father of his soldiers and may Heaven destroy all tyrants.'

Struys continues:

> 'Whilst Stenka was triumphing, there was sorrow in Astrakhan where the governor, surprised at the treachery of his fleet, thought vainly of winning it back. To crown his anger he discovered that the people despised him; they had praise only for Stenka; the soldiers said out loud that they were going to quit the service, that they did not receive their pay because it was put to other uses, that it was not fair that they should risk the lives of which so little care was taken.'

Stenka Razin's success alarmed our Dutch sailors exceedingly. It was clear that Astrakhan would soon fall into his hands and that they, being under the Tsar's protection, would all be massacred. They noted that the governor had so little confidence in his own people that he promoted the foreigners—Germans, Dutch, and an English captain, Robert Heut (sic). He put Germans in charge of the city's artillery. The captain of Struys' ship confided in him

his plan to cross the Caspian Sea, stealing away secretly in the dead of night. He was a harsh man and forbade him to warn the two sailors, Cornelius Brak and Jacop Trappen, because they had their wives and children with them, and they might be an encumbrance. 'However I thought that this command was contrary to Christian charity and that it was cruel to abandon our compatriots to the rage of a people who would give them no quarter, so I warned them and saw to it that Brak came on board with his wife and child.' Trappen, who hadn't enough money for the journey, was forced to stay. 'We recommended him to divine Providence.'

They set off through the arms of the Volga and, although in their small sloop they were in great danger from storms as well as of losing their way, Struys noted everything that they passed and was especially interested in how the fishermen at the mouth of the Volga, caught sturgeon. They planted stakes in triangles to trap the fish. They killed them with javelins and made caviar from their roe,

> 'which is the only part which they value; as to the fish, they care little for it and salt only some of it, as the lower orders in Moscow buy it. The sale of caviar here is as great as the sale of butter in Holland. The Muscovites do not eat butter during their fasts, using caviar instead for all their sauces, so that they consume vast quantities of it.'

They sailed into the Caspian Sea, whose water, Struys noted, was sweet and excellent to drink. They landed for a while at Terki, which had been well fortified by a Dutch engineer in 1636 and was now being strengthened by an English colonel.

They next landed in Circassia, where Struys was dazzled by the beauty of the women and their lack of false shame. The breasts which the lower orders expose are

> 'two globes, well placed, well shaped and of an incredible firmness, and I can say without exaggeration that nothing is so white or so clean. Their eyes are large, sweet and full of fire, their nose well-shaped, their lips vermilion, the mouth small and smiling; . . . their hair of the most beautiful black, sometimes floating and sometimes tied up, and frames their faces most agreeably. They have lovely figures, tall and easy and their whole being seems free and relaxed. In spite of these exquisite gifts they are not really cruel and are not afraid of the approach of men, no matter from what country.'

Their husbands are good-natured and not jealous but it is hard

to understand how such beautiful women can love men so ugly. Although they are easy-going, one must not go too far with them. Struys has seen some of his comrades, taken in at first, lose all confidence by their rebuffs. These people appeared to be Mohammedans, but had neither mosques nor mullahs. He saw them celebrate the feast of Elijah.

When Struys and his companions were near Derbent, they decided to abandon their sloop and go on to Persia by land. At first they walked through the bush by night, eating only dry bread without water, but on the fourth day it was decided, against the advice of Struys, to travel by day. Here again the poor Brak with his wife and child would have been abandoned, being asleep when the decision was taken. Struys told his comrades that they were worse than Tartars and woke up the little family. Soon they were all seized by Tartars and taken to their Sultan, Osmin, who after stripping them of most of their belongings (leaving Struys, however, his gold chain and bag of money) let them go on their way. They had not gone far when they fell into the hands of another band of Tartars, crueller than the first lot. One after the other they raped Brak's wife and stripped the party naked, except that they left Struys two pairs of drawers, which he wore one over the other. One pair he gave Brak's wife to help to hide her nakedness. (Later on Brak was sold as a slave and his wife taken into a prince's harem.)

A little farther on Struys and two of his companions were captured by another band, who believed that they were some of Stenka Razin's men, whom they detested. They were tortured and put into chains and eventually brought before Sultan Mahomet, the son of Osmin, who kept them as his slaves.

Once Struys is out of Muscovy his story can be briefly told. By this time we are accustomed to find him always behaving in an exemplary manner; not only is he charitable, willing to disobey orders when these are unkind, but we also notice that when his advice is not taken the consequences are always disastrous. While he was a slave to Osmin's son, he was even more heroic—remaining not only faithful to the wife he had not seen for years but also to his Christian faith. Osmin's son told him that if he would embrace the true faith and become a Mohommedan, he would not only free him but also give him two beautiful wives and make him head of his army. The two women, who were not bad looking, came twice to try to seduce him. He politely declined their kind

offers, pointing out that his faith, which he refused to abjure, allowed him only one wife and she awaited him in Holland. This they thought exaggerated and indeed ridiculous. Struys was finally sold in Derbent to a Persian, Hadji Biram. He was in luck, for Persians were kinder to their slaves than Turks. Moreover he was lucky enough to save his master from drowning in the sea. After this his master treated him very humanely and promised to take him to Isfahan, where he would find his fellow countrymen. In the meanwhile he had caught the eye of Aline, the principal wife of his master, a Dutch captain's daughter who had been abducted at the age of twelve. She had plenty of money and told Struys that they could escape and together make the journey to Holland where, if his wife happened to be dead, she would marry him. The plan tempted him extremely. Not only was Aline charming and a Christian, she had also a vast quantity of jewels and bags full of money which she showed him. He knew of a boat they could take and he knew the Caspian Sea. But he was not a Dutchman for nothing. He did not dare to go to Astrakhan as long as Stenka Razin was ruling it. His adventures continued as various as ever and, as always, he noted the manners and customs of the people with whom, though a slave, he came into contact. The religion of an Indian tribe struck him as most extraordinary. On one of their fêtes they went to a river, throwing into it rice and beans for the fishes and then did the same for the insects

> 'of whom they took a singular care. For they would rather die than kill a single animal. They stir up the water to save the fishes from the nets and cry with all their might to make the birds fly away. And this great pity they have not only for beasts, but also for their own kind, whom they refuse to fight. They will not even light candles, for fear that flies will get burned in them.

(If anything makes one believe in Struys' experiences and the accounts of the people he met, it is this description of a religion which, of all others must at the time have seemed the most incredible to the Western mind.)[2]

Struys, for his sins left his kind master for the Polish ambassador, who nearly starved him to death. In October 1673 he borrowed

[2] Today we are used to these beliefs though we are sometimes brought up against them in a way that touches us. When the Tibetan children came to England they were acutely distressed by our brutal ways with flies and would respectfully follow round the swatters, picking up their victims and trying to bring them back to life.

money, bought his master a horse and was liberated. Hadji Biram, remembering how he had saved his life, gave him presents and so did his sad wife Aline, lamenting as she handed him a well-filled purse that she was destined to spend the rest of her life among infidels. Although Struys had by this time heard that Stenka Razin had been captured and taken prisoner to Moscow, and that Astrakhan was liberated, he was no longer tempted by Aline's plot. As a free man he could return home in a less adventurous and dangerous manner and in the meantime could visit Isfahan. And it is here that we take our leave of Struys, still enquiring, still wondering, still trusting to a kind Providence which did, indeed, bring him back safely to his home in Holland.

POSTSCRIPT TO J. STRUYS' *Travels in Muscovy*

Volume III of J. Struys' *Voyage en Muscovie* takes us away from Russia. It starts with a description of Isfahan, tells us how Struys took ship and came to Batavia; how, at last, longing for his home, he embarks for Holland, is taken prisoner by the cruel English in St Helena and is eventually put ashore by them in Ireland. This, compared to Muscovy and Batavia, is next door to home. Struys, only interested in his picaresque adventures in all quarters of the world, wastes no time in describing his reunion with his wife and children, nor on what it felt like to settle down to a respectable, quiet life in one of those neat, bright, houses with their polished tile floors and the sun coming through the windows which we know so well from Vermeer's pictures. The wholesome loaves and cheeses depicted by Pieter Hooch and Ter Borch must have been especially acceptable to Struys whose most sensational chapter in this third volume describes his shipwreck on the Indian coast and the torments of hunger which he suffered there with his comrades. He spares us nothing; not even the digging up and devouring of corpses. Accustomed as we are to find Struys always siding with virtue and reinforcing it with reason, it is no surprise to find him dissuading a comrade from cannibalism, first on the grounds that God had given formal instruction against killing, secondly that the proposed victim, a woman, was only a skeleton covered with skin and would not make a juicy morsel and thirdly that, once human flesh was tasted, the appetite for it increased and none of the ship-wrecked party would feel safe. When the temptation came again to the famished men, it was scotched by the

reasonable suggestion that they should draw lots amongst themselves for their victim. No one felt willing to let Providence decide his fate in this haphazard manner. After innumerable adventures, including fighting for the Great Mogul, building ships for him and sailing down the Ganges, Struys managed to get out of India; he neglects to tell us how. It does not much matter. We know that he always escapes from his tight corners. What we should have liked to hear is what he does when he is at home and no longer in one. About this he is silent.

INTRODUCTION

In the eighteenth century, after Peter the Great's opening of his 'window', Western visitors to Russia increased enormously. They were very articulate and many of their memoirs, letters and books have come down to us. We are faced by the difficulty of choice. The secret dispatches of ambassadors are a valuable source of information for students of international relations and court intrigues. Often they seem no more than the gossip columns of history. These are discarded as in the main, irrelevant to the object of this book which, as pointed out in the Preface, is to show how the Russian people lived and how they faced the problems set them by their inexorable climate, the geography of their vast country and the arbitrary rule of their masters.

Many eighteenth-century ambassadors throw incidental light on these subjects. Sir George Macartney is an instance. He was a pleasure-loving, witty, handsome young man, who (if Casanova is to be believed[1]) was recalled by our Foreign Office at the request of Catherine the Great, because he had had the impertinence to fall in love with one of her maids of honour. Macartney has apt things to say, not only about the courtiers with whom he mixed but about the common people, whom he described as extremely docile when properly handled and as 'having a greater share of honesty than we have any right to expect'. He is said to have been £6,000 in debt when he left Russia.

Sir James Harris, ambassador at the difficult and humiliating time when we were losing our American colonies (1778–83) is mostly concerned with diplomatic relations, the rise and fall of court favourites, and whom (and how much) to bribe. In a letter to a friend he summarizes the miseries of an ambassador to Catherine II.

> Now for a word on this country; you know its extent, its high reputation—nothing but great deeds are done in it. The monarch is an arrant wonan—a vain spoilt woman. . . . the men in high life, monkeys grafted on bears . . . Religion, virtue and morality nowhere to be found; honour cannot be expressed in this language. There is no reward for good actions, no punishment for any crimes. The face

[1] Casanova was leading his adventures in St Petersburg while Macartney was English ambassador there (1765): *Mémoires de Casanova,* VII.

of the country in this neighbourhood is a desert, the climate never to be lived in. . . . You will naturally suppose living here not very comfortable.'

We can put aside the ambassadors to make room for people less exalted. Most interesting of these are Captain John Perry, the hydraulic engineer employed by Peter the Great to build a canal and scrape his warships, and John Cook, a Scottish doctor who came to Russia, he tells us, for a change of air. Both these men stayed for fourteen years and wrote graphic accounts of their experiences and the people they worked with.

Dr John Bell is another Scottish physician who worked for several years in Russia, accompanying Peter the Great's embassies to Peking, Persia and Istanbul. He wrote good descriptions of the regions through which he passed. But, with apologies to Dr Johnson who warmly recommended his *Travels* to Boswell, we have preferred Dr John Cook's experiences to Dr Bell's, as more personal, fuller of incident and odd characters.

Jonas Hanway is another visitor whose travels through Russia are omitted. Hanway is an endearing figure, best known as the inventor of the umbrella and for his courage in carrying it through hooting crowds in London (less remembered for his efforts to reclaim fallen women and improve the condition of chimney sweeps and foundlings). From this generous, eccentric Englishman one might expect a picturesque book on Russia, but the book we have is disappointing. He was sent, in 1743, by the Russia Company, to improve our trade relations with that country and with Persia. He was a good choice from their point of view, for he had an almost religious feeling about the value of commerce, and the supremacy of England as a mercantile nation as well as in all other ways. He travelled, he writes, 'about four thousand miles, through a variety of adventures and accidents', and the journal which he wrote should have been a thrilling story. But he wrote it to convince the public of the all-importance of Anglo-Russian trade relations, to remind English merchants of the happy employment they were in, for 'few callings are so free and independent', and to remind them, too, that the Almighty had chosen their island not only to be the granary of Europe and America but also 'to befriend mankind in clothing them in every quarter of the globe'.

Mrs Vigor's letters to a friend are included because they are entertaining and shrewd. Like her admired Lady Mary Wortley

Montagu, she lost none of her advantages as an intimate of court circles.

The distinguished astronomer and scientist, the abbé Chappe d'Auteroche, urging his *izvoztchiks* across muddy steppes, along frozen rivers and through gloomy forests in carriages and sledges that were always breaking down, takes us with him all the way. We share his panic lest he miss his rendezvous with Venus, on June 6, 1761, in Tobolsk. He carries the culture and gallantry of eighteenth-century France into the wilds of Muscovy and through him we see many Russian things with new eyes.

Another Frenchman, Masson—who with his brother served Catherine the Great in her armies for ten years, only to be expelled by her son the Tsar Paul—wrote amusing secret memoirs on his experiences and observations, but his portraits of Catherine's favourites and his court gossip are more relevant to historians than to the purpose of this book.

We end with the scholar, William Richardson, who spent four years in St Petersburg as tutor to the sons of Lord Cathcart, the English ambassador. He wrote a shocking account of the slavery of the serfs as well as some entertaining anecdotes. This yields better extracts than the weighty book of William Coxe, another tutor, accompanying his pupils on the grand tour. This was famous in its day and necessary reading for ambassadors and other visitors to Russia. But it is a pedestrian work and we leave it respectfully behind.

INTRODUCTION

For many people in Russia, the last years of the eighteenth century had been a nightmare. No one had known what the mad Tsar Paul might do next. Edmund Clarke, who travelled through the country in 1799, wrote that honesty was found only in the victims of tyranny, condemned for their love of truth to the mines of Siberia or some dungeon of the empire. Now Paul was dead, and liberals believed that Alexander, educated by his enlightened Swiss tutor La Harpe, would bring reforms into the country. Later, when he played a great part in the defeat of Napoleon, he was represented as the new St George who had freed Europe from its dragon and who, by his Holy Alliance, was going to free it from all future strife. Travellers came and went for some years before they realized how illusory these hopes had been.

Ker Porter's *Travelling Sketches* clearly show the new attitude to the Scythian Bear. Hired originally to paint vast, romantic pictures of the New Russia, he quickly came to believe in the myth and fell in love not only with the princess whom he later married, but with almost everything in her exotic country.

John Carr was another artist who travelled in Russia at this time. He is worth quoting because he noticed things that had escaped the observation of other Western visitors.

The most entertaining accounts of this time are in the journals of the two Irish girls, Martha and Catherine Wilmot, who lived in the family of Princess Dashkov. It is to Martha that we owe the *Memoirs* of the most remarkable Russian woman of her time. She made Princess Dashkov write them, smuggled them out of Russia and published them, Both girls wrote, often scathingly, about the 'higher orders' whom they met. Unique are Martha's stories of the serfs with whom she lived and of the day-to-day life in Princess Dashkov's household. Catherine, more brilliant and caustic than her sister, has amusing comments to make. Although there were thousands of foreigners living in Russian families as tutors, nurses or guests, throughout the nineteenth-century, none have recorded their impressions as simply and as vividly as these two girls have done.

Madame de Staël, although she spent only two months in Russia, wrote a perceptive analysis of Russian character. She showed more insight than other foreigners. True she was not altogether objec-

tive, for, as she saw Russians in their finest hour, when they were preparing to fight her arch-enemy, Napoleon, she was naturally prejudiced in their favour.

The memoirs of the romantic and flamboyant Brigadier-General Sir Robert Wilson, who fought side by side with Russians in 1812, 1813 and 1814, give vivid accounts of these terrible campaigns, but they are omitted as more particularly interesting to historians than the general reader. Xavier de Maistre is another foreigner who fought in the Tsar's army against Napoleon and writes, like Wilson, a harrowing account of the retreat of the Grande Armée. Xavier and his brother Joseph were the most brilliant writers among the numerous French émigrés who took refuge in Russia from the Revolution and from Napoleon. Xavier, who lived on and off in Russia from 1802 till his death in 1852, wrote many letters from St Petersburg to a friend in France, but they tell us little of day-to-day life there. In 1812, when he married one of the Tsarina's maids of honour, he adapted himself completely to Russian life, but he gives far more brilliant pictures of this in his fiction than in his letters. The most famous of these stories, *La Jeune Sibérienne,* used to be obligatory reading in French *pensionnats*. The *Histoire d'un Prisonnier Français* describes how an enlightened noblewoman ran her estate, and her attitude to her serfs, and it can be read with interest to this day. Xavier's brother Joseph will always be remembered, if only for his famous comment on Russia (in a letter of August 1811), 'Every nation has the Government it deserves'.

Dr Lyall, who practised medicine for some years in Russia after 1812, although an unattractive figure, made some unusual comments on customs and manners that are worth quoting, often for their unconscious humour.

The section ends with the letters and journals of two Quakers, Daniel Wheeler and Stephen Grellet. Wheeler, a Yorkshire farmer, spent many years draining the marshes near St Petersburg (Alexander I, who had visited a Friends' Meeting in London, had insisted on having a Quaker for this task). Grellet toured all over Russia, preaching 'as the Spirit moved him'. Although their writings are tainted with the repetitive pieties usual in their Society at that time, they are free from the scorn and condescension of other Protestants. The Quaker apologist Barclay had taught that even the Turk, the Jew and the pagan, by the holy light in their souls, might be united to God. They were eager to find spiritual

depth in the Russians whom they met, not only in the mystical Tsar himself and many of the nobles, but even in the paid clergy, so much disapproved of by the Society of Friends. Russia had to wait for the visit of Liddon, Canon of St Paul's, in 1867, for a judgment as sympathetic.[1] Apart from the pieties, which we gladly omit, Wheeler, a practical man, wrote graphic descriptions of farming problems, floods, epidemics and his talks with the Tsar.

[1] 'The sense of God's presence—of the supernatural—seems to me to penetrate Russian life more completely than that of any of the Western nations.' (H. P. Liddon, Canon of St Paul's, after a visit to Russia in 1867.)

ROBERT LYALL

The Character of the Russians and a Detailed History of Moscow

London 1823

DR LYALL spent several years in Russia after 1812. He married a Russian woman who bore him, he says, numerous offspring. He became a member of the Agricultural and Physico-Medical Societies of Moscow. He dedicated his book to the Tsar Alexander I, whom at first he much admired. This admiration was tempered with criticism by the time he had finished his book, which took him eight years to write, for he disliked the part Alexander was playing in the Holy Alliance, the chief instrument in suppressing liberty in Europe. He also thought it dangerous that Russia had gained so much territory by the Congress of Vienna. 'It is not by conquest, and extending dominions already too great, that the rapid civilization of Russia is to be accomplished' he had admonished the Tsar in his original dedication, afterwards suppressed.

Lyall declares that his object was truth: 'I have sought to unshackle myself from prejudice, and to keep clear of malevolence.' Even while living in Russia he recorded facts and expressed opinions with perfect freedom, he says. His book is agreeably illustrated by the coloured drawings of a Russian artist, Mr. Lavrov.

A great part of Lyall's section on the character of the Russians is taken up with quotations from the books of other travellers and his criticisms of them. Some, he says, have given an account of Russia which is too favourable. Noblemen and titled gentlemen arriving in Russia, introduced to the first families in Petersburg and Moscow,

'everywhere find open tables, cheerful and pleasant society, all kinds of amusements, evening parties, *conversaziones*, balls, masquerades. The same round of pleasures meets them wherever they sojourn.'

They have no idea of the general state of society in Russia.[1]

'Other travellers, without rank or introductions, find everything gloomy and are startled with difficulties and disagreeables at every step. At length they get introduced to the secondary circles of the nobility and are disgusted with their customs and manners.'

Many compare Russia with European countries which 'have been civilized and polished for centuries'. This is unfair. Russia should be compared with what it was before Peter the Great 'opened the flood-gates of civilization', and later in the century, when Catherine II encouraged arts and sciences and foreign commerce. 'The just discrimination of national character', writes Mr James in his *Journal of a Tour in Germany, etc.* (1816), 'is denied to the native from prejudice, to the resident from too great familiarity, to the visitor from too little means of observation.'

Lyall begins with an attempt to characterize the nobles. They are too often servile to superiors and haughty to inferiors but, in his experience, they were not generally cruel to their slaves; in fact there was a familiarity between lord and vassal which no other state of society would admit.

The Russians are insinuating and cunning . . . fond of novelty and improvident; when cash abounds they are generous, ostentatious and improvident . . . they are disposed to indolence, to a sedentary mode of life, and to much sleep . . . yet when urged by affairs or necessity they are excessively active and withstand extraordinary hardships and fatigues. What noble but a Russian could exchange his comfortable carriage for a *telega* and travel by night and by day thousands of versts in that dreadfully jolting, uncovered equipage and with a celerity which is astonishing.'

Lyall quotes James on the nobles' love of display.

'They are as yet a young nation and better pleased by show than by reality. Generally they are accused of too great fondness for osten-

[1] 'The foreigner and above all the Frenchman, after having passed through the inhospitable wastes of Prussia and the savage fields of Livonia, is amazed and enchanted to find, in the middle of a vast desert, a city [St Petersburg] immense and glorious and societies, amusements, arts and tastes which he thought only existed in Paris.' Masson, *Mémoires Secrets sur la Russie* (Amsterdam, 1800 and 1801).

tation, but we must confess that it is always the splendour of an hospitable and liberal mind which they exhibit. The pride of display is regulated in each branch with taste and elegance.'

About religion, Lyall makes the comments usual to Protestants. Although he admits that the ritual of their church captivates the imagination, it has little influence on moral conduct. Later in his book he describes with enthusiasm the work of the Bible Society in Russia and the Tsar's support of its activities. Lyall has nothing but praise for the religious tolerance of the Russians; the 'charity in religious belief prevalent among all ranks of society'. He quotes Clarke on the superstition of their Church.

> 'The wild, untutored savage of South America, who prostrates himself before the sun, exercises more natural devotion than the Russian who is all day crossing himself before his Hat, and sticking farthing candles before a picture of St Alexander Nevski.'[2]

Discussing morals, Lyall notes with disfavour marriages of convenience, arranged by the parents, the frequent separation of husbands and wives and the tolerance of each other's infidelities by married couples. He was titillated by the account by two Frenchmen of a highly select Physical Club, which was a nobleman's brothel, but as this was suppressed by Catherine II (who might have been expected to sympathize with it), the detailed account he gives of it seems irrelevant.

Noting the primitive habits of the aristocracy, Lyall remarks on the absence of bedrooms. He was present at a fête, given by one of the gentry in central Russia.

> 'Throughout Saturday, carriages filled with nobles continued to arrive, some of them with large bags filled with beds; others followed in *telegas* loaded with beds and pillows. Conversation and cards were the evening amusements and at 11 o'clock an elegant supper was served up and at its conclusion a scene of bustle and confusion followed. The dining-room, drawing-room, hall and the whole suite of apartments in which we had passed the evening were converted into bedrooms. Scores of servants were now running backwards and forwards, with beds and mattresses, *shubas* and baggage; beds were arranged on the floor, some upon chairs, others upon the stoves.'

Servants, he notes, lie about anywhere in their lord's house; he even stumbled against them on the stairs, when he rose early.

[2] E. D. Clarke, *Travels in Various Countries in Europe and Africa* (London, 1811), Vol. I.

This, he thinks, partly accounts for the vermin found in the best houses and on the most exalted people. But at least they get rid of a good deal by their weekly visits to the baths. He quotes unsavoury stories of Potemkin taking lice (which Lyall is too prudish to name) from his head and killing them on the bottom of his plate at dinner, and he laments the habit of spitting.

About the famous hospitality of the Russians, Lyall did not agree with the *Deux Français* (who, incidentally, belonged to the least hospitable country in Europe) that it was something they have in common with savages and was a relic of barbarism. Some foreigners thought it due to their love of display, but even the critical Clarke had to acknowledge that during the reign of Paul, when it was dangerous to be kind to Englishmen, the nobles entertained them 'notwithstanding the risk incurred'. Sir Robert Wilson noted the disinterested, generous help given by high and low to prisoners on their trek to Siberia. When in the Russian army, he experienced the liberal hospitality of the officers. 'Whatever one of them possesses is alike the property of friend or stranger; and the banquet or the solitary loaf is equally partaken by the invited or uninvited guest.'[3]

> 'The openness [he writes] with which even unmarried females speak of pregnancy, of confinement, of the diseases of child-birth, and even of those changes which are peculiar to the sex, in the presence of males, has often astonished and disgusted me. As a medical man, I soon found that delicacy of expression, and of allusion, used in Britain when examining patients, altogether unnecessary in Russia.... They talk of diseases and their symptoms with the greatest indifference. This practice is peculiarly disgusting during meals.'

Lyall was outraged that, in a lake famous for curing 'the curse of barrenness', only eight or nine miles from Moscow, you could, after attending church on Sunday, watch men and women bathing 'as in the days of primeval innocence'. (This had also shocked the more indulgent artist Ker Porter.[4]) He admits that Russians and other continentals often talk of 'the cautious, cold, prim and even repulsive manners of the English ladies' but he prefers

[3] R. T. Wilson, *Private Diary of Travels, etc., in the Campaigns of 1812, 1813, 1814* (London, 1860).

[4] The Austrian Korb, Secretary to the Imperial Envoy in 1698, was shocked by the sight of men and women bathing naked together, not only in Russia but also in Poland. Count MacDonnell, translating his book into English in 1863, leaves this passage in the decent obscurity of Latin.

See J. G. Korb, *Diary of an Austrian Secretary* (London, 1863).

'their charming modesty, the result of moral and religious principles, to licentious frankness'.

Lyall was also incensed by the curiosity of the Russians.

> 'With as much ease as they say, "How do you do?", the nobles ask the most impertinent questions, with respect to your connections and family, your property and revenues, and your secret affairs and private opinions. An evasive answer only prompts their curiosity. But they do not content themselves merely in making enquiries of yourself; they will apply to your servant-women or servant-men, to your lackey or your coachman. If you are living in their families, the master or mistress is generally acquainted with everything you do, through enquiries made of your servants.'

Lyall was hurt by the way his cures were laughed at when he was physician in Count Orlov's family. As treatment of intermittent fever, beside Peruvian bark, he used 'that renowned remedy the arsenical solution' and advised the shaving of the head, unaware that, because recruits' heads were shaved, it was considered degrading. Dinner-party guests were told that he used 'killing cures'.

Lyall was on firm ground when he refused to sign a certificate of illness for a steward whose mistress, a general's wife, wanted to keep him although his passport had run out and officials demanded his presence in St Petersburg. '*Vous ne risquez rien du tout,*' she said. 'Such things are done every day! It would be a Christian action.' When Lyall said that physicians in England did not do such things, the lady replied, 'In Russia, you should do as Russians do.' The lady, he adds, soon after became a nun.

Lyall joyfully records that, in 1818, Alexander gave to the Bible Society the building which formerly had housed the office of Secret Affairs, called by foreigners the Inquisition. This had been founded in 1658. He quotes Levesque on the Secret Chancery, a kind of State Inquisition by which the most respectable citizen could be arrested when accused by the most miserable wretch.

> 'What a contrast [writes Lyall] from being an Inquisition to become, in a mild reign, the depository of thousands of Bibles, New Testaments and Gospels, in about twenty languages; a central depot of Christianity, in which secret inquisition is unknown; a focus from which the divine doctrines of the way, the truth and the life, are scattered over the Russian Empire.'

Lyall does not tell us in what building the Tsar re-established his Secret Police. Probably, good man, he thought it was abolished. He was convinced (for he did not foresee the terrible fate of the Decembrists) that the Russian officers who had lived in the west after the defeat of Napoleon, would bring back to their country the gospel of liberty, which they had learned there, and introduce into their country gradual reforms, including the freeing of the serfs. On these notes of piety and hope, we may leave Dr Lyall and his pompous, long-winded but informative book.

POSTSCRIPT TO R. LYALL'S *Character of the Russians*

More than half of Lyall's book is dedicated to a detailed description of Moscow. He describes, often with drawings, many of its innumerable churches (Jonas Hanway says there were 1,800 when he visited it in 1736), its monasteries, foundling homes and many of its palaces and great houses. He recounts its history from the Middle Ages until 1820 when he last visited it. He quotes foreigners who had visited it before the fire of 1812 had destroyed it.

Coxe on Moscow in 1784

'I was all astonishment on the immensity and variety of Moscow. Wretched hovels are blended with large palaces; cottages of one storey stand next to the most superb and stately mansions. . . . Churches presented themselves, some with domes of copper, others of tin, gilt or painted green and many roofed with wood. Moscow may be considered a town built on the Asiatic model, but gradually becoming more and more European.'

E. D. Clarke on Moscow in 1800

'Moscow is in everything extraordinary. . . . when [entering the gate into the city] you ask "How far is it to Moscow?" they will tell you, "This is Moscow", and you behold nothing but a wide and scattered suburb: huts, gardens, walls, pig-sties, brick walls, churches, dung-hills, palaces, timber-yards, warehouses and a refuse of materials sufficient to stock an empire with miserable towns and miserable villages. One might expect that all the states of Europe and Asia had sent a building. . . . mosques from Constantinople; Tartar temples from Bucharia; pagodas, pavilions and verandas from China; cabarets from Spain; dungeons, prisons and public offices from France; architectural ruins from Rome; terraces and trellises from Naples and warehouses from Wapping. Having heard accounts of its im-

> mense population, you wander through deserted streets. Passing suddenly to the quarter where shops are situated [you find] Greeks, Turks, Cossacks, Chinese, Muscovites, English, French, Italians, Poles, Germans all parading in the habits of their respective countries.'

Mr James, who saw Moscow soon after the fire of 1812 which destroyed nearly three-quarters of the city, describes 'the universal scene of desolation', but Lyall describes its miraculously quick rebuilding.

> 'In the summer of 1815, in every suburb, in every street, in every lane, crowds of workmen were employed. In 1816 on the return of the spring, thousands of artisans and labourers were seen in every quarter of the city, and it being known that the Emperor would visit the ancient capital, the nobles and merchants vied with each other in building and repairing. The Emperor on his first visit after the destruction of Moscow was highly pleased to see her, like the phoenix, rapidly rising from her ashes. . . . By the burning of innumerable small sombre wooden houses and hovels, and by the superior and tasteful manner in which most of the city is rebuilt, Moscow has greatly changed its appearance. . . . She is daily losing her Asiatic appearance. From this observation the Kremlin must be exempted; its ancient singularity and grandeur are preserved completely. It ought to be held sacred to posterity. To the honour of the Emperor, of the government and of the Russians such sentiments have had due influence on their conduct. The renovation of the Kremlin is the most splendid monument of the present reign.'

INTRODUCTION

In this period a great many foreigners wrote their impressions of Russia. As early as 1839 Robert Bremner gave as an excuse for publishing his book, *Excursions in the Interior of Russia*, the 'overwhelming interest' which existed in regard to Russia. But, except for Mrs Smith, who wrote vividly, if naïvely, of day-to-day life in St Petersburg, English accounts written before the last quarter of the century have been excluded. They are too prejudiced. This is true not only of George Sala, whose cheap journalism had once a considerable vogue, but of the more serious Laurence Oliphant and Charles Henry Scott. These Englishmen, travelling on the eve of the Crimean War, wanted only to whip up hatred of Russia. They laid stress on her dangerous ambitions and gloried in her weaknesses. If these are discarded, why choose the equally prejudiced Marquis de Custine? He opens this section in an atmosphere of unrelieved gloom. But his book is in a different category from theirs; though repetitive and diffuse it is better written and of all the works on Russia this book had the greatest influence on Western opinion in the nineteenth century. It is still read. It has been recently republished. Although Custine was so prejudiced that even Russian hospitality seemed to him to have sinister motives, yet he saw, with startling clarity, the effects of a police state on a whole people.

It is a relief to turn from the gloomy Marquis to two Germans writing of Russia at the same period. The genial Kohl, who lived for six years in Russia and learned its language, responded to the warmth of its people. Haxthausen, a lover of the primitive, studied the life and social organization of the peasantry. He was the first to describe the *mir* to Western readers; the first evangelist of that mystique of the 'wisdom' of the illiterate Russian peasant, which was, in part, the origin of the later cult of the 'Slav soul'.

It is a relief, too, to turn to two of the Marquis' compatriots, who boasted that, in spite of the Crimean War, the French had always been friends of the Russians: the flamboyant Dumas, seeking colour and copy in the Caucasus: the poet Gautier, looking for beauty in landscapes and cities; the journalist Tissot, finding, in the Ukraine, song, dance, colour and a yearning for the freedom to express their own culture. Tissot stressed the growing hatred

and fear of the Germans who, for so long, had been the most numerous and—because they pervaded every walk of life—the most influential of all foreigners in Russia, and who were considered the embodiment of efficiency and culture.

That very superior person, George Nathaniel Curzon, noticed the same in 1888, *en route* for Samarkand. He commented on the 'overwhelming antithesis between the German and Russian character, the one vigilant, uncompromising, stiff, precise; the other sleepy, nonchalant, wasteful and lax'. He was pleased with Alexander III's anti-German policy; German language forbidden in the schools of the Baltic provinces, German fashions proscribed at court. He found much in common between the Russian and Briton, 'qualities that make for greatness; self-reliance, pride, a desperate resolve, adventurousness and a genius for discipline'. The Russians admired the English, he said, for 'their silent fury and aristocratic impassivity'. They despised France 'for its music-hall statemanship and epicene civilization'. Altogether fairly satisfactory; though Curzon was taking no chances and was going to see what Russia was up to in Asia and what designs she had on India.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the English writers redeemed their sorry performance of the 1850s. The intelligent, sensitive Scottish journalist E. D. Noble lived a long time in Russia and knew its language and literature. The great Russian novels were beginning to be known in the West; Turgenev's greatest work *Fathers and Sons*, was translated into English in 1867, Tolstoy's *Childhood* in 1862. The celebrated Danish critic, Georg Brandes, wrote at length and with enthusiasm about the new Russian literature in his *Impressions of Russia* (1888); but in England and America, Noble's writings were more influential. At a time when there was general horror at the assassination of the Tsar Liberator, Alexander II, Noble insisted that there were only a few hundred terrorists among the revolutionaries of Russia; the majority were peace-loving, dedicated young men and women, like the Narodniks who were trying to educate the peasants. He tried to dispel the myth that absolutism was inherent in Russia; on the contrary, revolt was a recurring theme in her history. Their old heroic lays sang of their love of freedom. The millions of dissenters showed their rebellion against authority. The great Razkolnik revolt in the seventeenth century had not been over a trifling question of how to make the sign of the cross; it was a

protest against authority, a refusal to obey the dictates of the all-powerful hierarchy.

In the 1880s, Mackenzie Wallace, a distinguished writer and *Times* correspondent, published his monumental study of Russia. This is too vast and serious a work to represent by brief extracts. But we do include his account of a meeting of a *mir*. His record of the discussions he overheard gives a better understanding of how this peasant commune managed its affairs than any abstract accounts of its constitution. His conversations with a member of the Molokani give an insight into the beliefs and way of life of this interesting Russian sect.

Noble, Brandes and Mackenzie Wallace certainly improved understanding of Russia in the West but, as soon as Constance Garnett and other translators had introduced Russia's own voice in her great writers, their importance diminished. Herzen makes us realize, in human terms, what the tyranny of Nicholas I meant to his people. Bazarov, in Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*, embodies all Nihilists; Marianna, in his *Virgin Soil*, all Narodniks; Yelena, in his *On the Eve*, all pan-Slavs. Dostoievsky's *Devils* leads us into the revolutionary cells of the seventies. Why read of these phenomena in Mackenzie Wallace? Tolstoy takes us to the Caucasus in his *Cossacks* and *Hadji Murad*, and shows us daily life, dramatic, complex and warm, in his great novels.

It might be objected, too, that because of Dostoievsky's personal account of penal servitude in Siberia, in his *From the House of the Dead* (translated in 1881) we need no account of it by a stranger. But this is not so. No native could have been given the chance of visiting the prisons, hospitals, transport columns and barges that George Kennan was given, nor of holding conversations with political prisoners, even with police and governors. Only Kennan could give the overall picture we have in his magnificent *Siberia and the Exile System*. Perhaps no-one at that time but an American would have combined such scrupulousness in fact-finding and such a passion for accurate figures with such humanity and understanding.

Kennan is the only American to appear in this book, although there were several in the nineteenth century who wrote of Russia. Of these perhaps the most important was Isabel Hapgood, who lived in Russia towards the close of the 1880s, translating the epic songs and Gogol and Turgenev. She told her countrymen that Russians were not as complicated as they thought, and that

'all classes from the peasant up possess a naturally simple, sympathetic disposition and manner. . . . for the rest, characters vary quite as much as they do elsewhere'.

Her articles in the *Atlantic Monthly,* for instance, 'Count Tolstoy at Home' and 'A Journey on the Volga', were eagerly read, and she induced literary conferences in America to discuss Russian history and literature. In 1867, Mark Twain and his 'Innocents' had visited Yalta, where they were charmingly entertained by Alexander II, 'a determined-looking man, though a very pleasant-looking one. . . . It is easy to see that he is kind and affectionate. There is something very noble in his expression when his cap is off. There is none of that cunning in his eye that we noticed in Louis Napoleon's.' (After the publication of Kennan's book on Siberia, Mark Twain's attitude to Russian tsars changed and he wondered loudly why nobody assassinated the monsters.)

Henry Adams, visiting Russia in 1897 and 1899, spoke of Russia and America as 'the two future centres of power; and, of the two, America must get there first! Some day, perhaps a century hence, Russia may swallow even her.' He suggested, too, that Siberia could, with advantage, be Americanized.

Finally we leave airy theories and prophecies and return to the direct experience of the Scotsman Hume, who introduced reaping-machines onto the steppes of the Ukraine. He shared the life of the peasants, often toiling and sleeping with them and he writes of them with understanding and sympathy. He ended with a hope which history has made pathetically comic, that the country would liberalize itself and become a United States of Russia, like America.

ALEXANDRE DUMAS

Adventures in the Caucasus[1]

Paris 1859

TO travel through the Caucasus in the middle of a fierce war suited Dumas' romantic, exuberant nature more than any other of his journeys. Everything came as grist to his mill: the fearful discomforts, the physical difficulties, above all the danger. 'At first one fears it; then faces it; then longs for it.' He had the same advantages that he had had in the rest of his travels in Russia. Everyone, especially women, wanted to meet the author of so many best-selling novels. He was advised to wear an order, before starting on the Caucasus, as this won great respect in Russia. He put on the order of Charles III of Spain, given him in 1846, and was, with these trappings and the loyal Kalino's affirmations, everywhere 'treated as a general'.[2] Above all he wanted not only to write adventure stories but to live them himself and prove himself as brave and as hardy as one of his own musketeers. Later on in Paris, at the Princesse Mathilde's weekly dinners, he often recounted his Russian adventures. This is how the Goncourts described him:

> 'A giant figure, with hair turned pepper and salt and the tiny, clear, sly eyes of a hippopotamus, ever observant even when lowered. . . . With Dumas there is an indefinable something of both a side-showman's hawking wonders, and a travelling salesman from the Arabian Nights.'

Dumas hoped to visit Shamyl: 'Shamyl the Titan, who struggles from his lair against the Tsar of all the Russias. Will he know our

[1] *Impressions de Voyage. Le Caucase.* The extracts are translated by the Editor.
[2] Kalino was a student of Moscow University and was Dumas' guide and interpreter.

name? Will he allow us to sleep a night in his tents?' But the Titan did not invite him.

Dumas knew something of Lermontov who, for attacking the Tsar's tyranny and writing of lost liberties in his poems, was exiled to the Army of the South and became the poet of the Caucasus. He lived, fought and died there, losing his life, like Pushkin before him, in an infamous duel in which, though he shot into the air, his opponent shot to kill. Dumas probably did not know that Count Leo Tolstoy, disgusted with the inanities of Moscow life, had gone there in 1851 and was changed for ever by the impact of the mountains, of the rugged mountain people, of life and death in the Caucasian campaigns. In the *Cossacks* he is writing of himself when he describes his hero Olyenin's first sight of the mountains: 'From that moment, all that he had seen or thought or felt assumed for him the new, sternly majestic character of the mountains. All his recollections of Moscow, his shame and repentance... all disappeared and never returned again.' (Turgenev considered Tolstoy's *Cossacks* the most perfect writing in the Russian language.)

To understand the impact of the Caucasian campaigns on the Russian gentry who took part in them, one must remember the emptiness and frivolity of their lives under the tyranny of Nicholas I—frivolity which rightly shocked the Marquis de Custine. The Caucasus was an escape from futility: gave them activity, danger, comradeship, contact with nature of an extraordinarily exhilarating kind. To some of these gentry the war was, as to so many of the more primitive Cossacks, a crusade, the Cross against the Crescent, a Holy War, as it was to Shamyl and his puritanic Muslim adherents. (It is illuminating to compare these campaigns with those of our men in India, fighting the Pathans on the North-West Frontier or conquering the Sikhs in Scinde: campaigns that inspired a few tales and songs by Kipling, but no great lyrical poetry. Far away from our bustling, self-absorbed island, the Indian saga had far less effect on our lives and minds than the Caucasian campaigns—fought on what they considered their own soil—had on the Russians.)

Although Dumas could not know all that the Caucasian drama meant to Russia, he sensed something of its romance and its savagery and he gives a racy account of his Caucasian experiences. His writing, indeed, is what one wants in a book of travel—full of exciting adventures, of exact detail of sights, sounds and tastes,

with vignettes of the people he meets and records of the conversations he had with them. It compares favourably with our other travellers' accounts. Gautier gives exquisite descriptions of cities and landscape but does not introduce us to a single Russian, nor record a single conversation. As for our Englishmen, they too often feel hostility and contempt. 'All Frenchmen', wrote Dumas, 'have an innate sympathy with the Russians.' A good way to begin contact with a new country.

To follow the whole of Dumas' adventurous journey would be to quote the whole book. A few extracts may give its flavour.

Nothing excited Dumas more than his first sight of the whole Caucasian range from the Shalbuz to the Elbruz, with the snow-covered peak of the Kasbek towering up in the midst of it.

> 'For a moment we stood silent before this splendid panorama. This was not the Alps nor the Pyrenees; this was nothing that we had ever seen nor even imagined. This was the Caucasus, the stage chosen by the first tragedian of the ancient world for his first drama,

11 'This was the Caucasus.'

a drama whose hero was a Titan and whose actors were gods! Alas! I had not brought my Aeschylus with me. Had I done so, I should have sat down and reread *Prometheus* from the first line to the last. It is easy to understand why the Greeks made these magnificent peaks into the cradle of the world.'

In Dumas' time, the Elbruz had not yet been climbed. 'To do that, the mountaineers say, one would need a special dispensation from God Himself. It was on the crest of this mountain, according to tradition, that Noah's dove rested when it flew out of the ark.'

Everywhere he went, Dumas found the imprint of the ancient world and, with his classical education, it enhanced his delight. Later, sailing home on the Black Sea, he thought of Jason seeking the Golden Fleece in the Argo, 'a ship such as no man in Colchis had ever seen'.

Dumas' journey involved much discomfort but he welcomed it.

'When a man spends the night on a plank with his cloak as his only mattress and blanket, getting up in the morning gives little trouble. I jumped up at dawn, washed my face and hands in the copper bowl which I had bought in Kazan (to make sure of having one, for it is one of the rarest objects in Russia) and awoke my companions.'

French gourmet that he was, he was prepared to cook his own dishes and, having discovered, in an Armenian family, the succulent quality of *shashlik*, he cooked bits of marinaded mutton on a metal skewer, which he held over the hot embers of the fires, always made for him wherever he dossed down; 'the nicest thing I had to eat during all my time in Russia'. Dumas was an excellent shot and supplemented his larder with game on all his travels.

Dumas started his journey at Kizlyara, a few miles west of the Caspian Sea, a thriving market town, where Armenians, Tartars, Kalmucks, Nogais and Jews, all in their own picturesque costumes, gathered to trade. His first descriptions are of these people.

'Commerce, apart from the Tartars' enterprising business of kidnapping men, women and children and selling them back to their families, consists mainly of Armenian wine and brandy, silks woven locally, and rice, sesame, saffron and madder grown on near-by farms. . . . As a rule the Armenian has no speciality. Every other race has; the Persian sells silks; the Lesghian, woven cloth; the Tartar, weapons. The Armenian sells everything that is saleable and even the unsaleable. There is a saying here: "If a Tartar gives you a nod, you

can count on him; if a Persian gives you his hand, count on him; but, if you are dealing with an Armenian, make him sign a paper in the presence of two witnesses." '

Dumas' admiration of the Tartars was equal to Captain John Perry's, for whom they worked in the time of Peter the Great.

'What a difference there is between these fierce Tartars and the humble serfs whom we met between Petersburg and Astrakhan! Their self-respect, their rugged, independent pride appealed to us.'

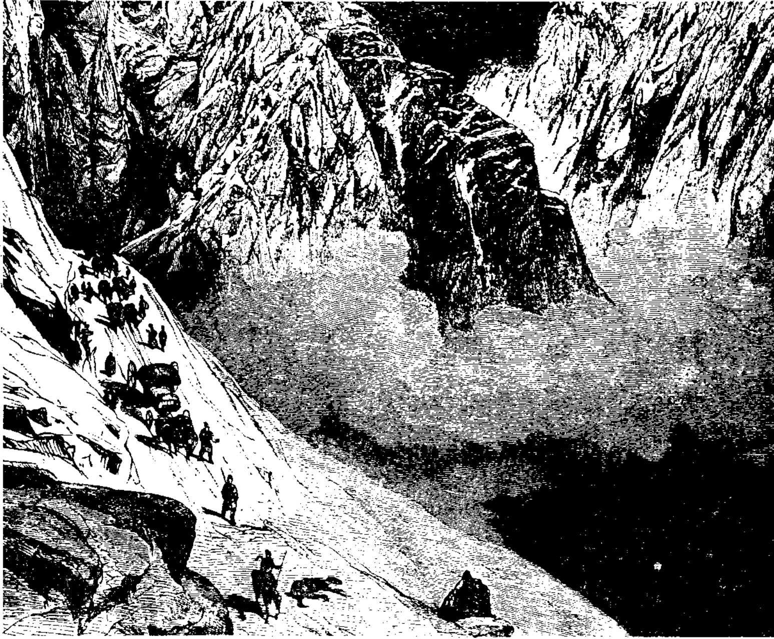
He had an equal admiration of the Cossacks of the Line who, because of his importance and the danger of his journey, were always assigned to him as escort.

'A Cossack of the Line, born within sight of the enemy he has to fight, familiar from infancy with danger, is a soldier from the age of twelve. He spends only three months of the year in his *stanitza* (village). All the rest of his life, until he is fifty, he spends on horseback and under arms. He is a splendid soldier. War to him is an art, danger is a joy. . . . The Cossacks of the Don, on the other hand, are of agricultural stock, spending their childhood on peaceful plains and unhappy when facing their enemy ambushed in the ravines and woods of the mountains.'

Dumas was entertained by the Nijni Novgorod dragoons, who had served for forty-six years in the Caucasus.

'It was here that I was struck by the difference between the Russian soldier in Russia and the same soldier in the Caucasus. In Russia, a soldier is deeply depressed and ashamed of his servitude, humiliated by the gulf between him and his officers. A Russian in the Caucasus is gay, lively, happy and high-spirited, proud of his uniform. He has hopes of promotion, of distinguishing himself, of danger. Danger ennobles him; it brings him near to his officers. Danger keeps him cheerful, for it makes him realize the value of life. The French would be amazed by what a Russian soldier has to endure in this mountain warfare, living on sodden black bread, sleeping in the snow, dragging himself and his equipment over trackless wastes of granite rocks, where no hunter has set foot, over which only the eagle has soared. And for what a war! A war without quarter or prisoners; where a wounded man is left for dead, where his mildest enemies collect their victims' hands, his fiercest, human heads.'

Dumas was often in danger himself. He was several times attacked by the mountaineers but he was always defended by his escort. He was treated by the governors of the various districts he



12 'A precipice of seven thousand feet.'

passed through and by the chiefs of police, as someone extremely precious and important. Lavish as was the hospitality he was everywhere shown, it was outdone by Prince Bagration, a Georgian and one of the finest officers in the Russian army. Five hundred men from his regiment accompanied Dumas and his companions to the crest of the Karanai from whence, looking over a precipice of seven thousand feet, they saw the birthplace of the legendary hero, the still unconquered Shamyl, and the convolutions, crests and chasms, the chaotic devastation of the Caucasian range.

> 'No place in the world has been more tortured by volcanic upheavals than Daghestan, where the mountains, like the people who live in them, seem racked and torn in a fierce, never-ending battle.'

When Dumas came down from the terrifying height he found that he had been made an honorary member of the Regiment of Native Mountaineers. 'After dinner the band played during the entire evening to celebrate my initiation.'

Thereafter, Dumas stayed with Bagration on the Caspian Sea, at Derbent.

13 Hawking on the steppes.

'For four days we had not been separated from Bagration for one hour. He had been our guide, interpreter, our host, our everything. He knew the value of everything and the name of everything. If he saw a dagger he could judge the temper of its steel; if we glanced at a falcon, he at once knew its breeding; if we expressed a desire, he said, "I'll see to it for you", so that we no longer dared to wish for anything in his presence. He was a typical Georgian prince; brave, hospitable, extravagant, romantic and handsome.'

Bagration's care for his guests did not end at Derbent. Dumas discovered that he had arranged for escort, horses and hospitality all the way from the Caspian to Tiflis, where he knew that the French consul would look after him.

After leaving Derbent, Dumas camped on the steppes with a party of Tartars, who were sitting round a bonfire making themselves griddle-cakes from the flour they were carrying from Baku to army headquarters in the Caucasus.

'There was something peculiarly romantic about eating supper on the steppes beside the Caspian Sea with the descendants of Genghis Khan and Tamerlane. On the one side lay the mountains of

Daghestan, whence at any moment a troop of brigands might sweep down upon us and force us to fight for our lives; on the other this great lake, almost as unknown today, in spite of Klaproth, as it was in Greece in spite of Herodotus. All around us we could hear the bells of fifty camels as they cropped the withered grass, or see them with their necks stretched out on the sand'.

Dumas' next host was Prince Tarkanov, or rather his son, a boy of twelve, who knew French and did the honours. He shocked Dumas, who liked hunting game but not human beings, by regretting that brigands were getting scarce, as so many had surrendered to the Tsar. At the same time, he was sure that he would kill at least three. They were expecting an attack that night and Dumas asked the boy if they would kill him.

'"Oh no," he laughed, "they wouldn't be such fools as to cut off my head. They'd prefer a high ransom and they know that, if they take me, my father would sell everything, even to the last button of his uniform, to get me back. He loves me so much."'

This kidnapping racket interested Dumas immensely. Women in one area, he discovered, were not often carried away, as so many had perished when dragged through the icy Terek. The brigands preferred tougher game who would survive.[3] (Later on, on his journey, Dumas was to hear the sensational story of the abduction of two Georgian princesses, their children and their French governess, Madame Drancy. They were kidnapped in 1854 and exchanged for Shamyl's son in 1856. Madame Drancy published their experiences when she returned to Paris and they have been brilliantly retold by Lesley Blanch in *The Sabres of Paradise*. Dumas met one of the princesses in Tiflis. He was struck by her look of profound sorrow which he understood when she told him that her two youngest children had been torn from

[3] Captain Richard Wilbraham, travelling in Transcaucasia in 1837 heard harrowing tales, wherever he went, of people carried off by brigands and held for ransom. Often large sums were demanded, which the relatives had great difficulty in raising. The government refused to contribute, for fear of encouraging the traffic. Wilbraham talked to a German who, with several others, had been carried off by Circassians and kept for months near the foot of Elburz. They had suffered from hunger but were not ill-treated, their duty being to tend the flocks.

See Capt. Richard Wilbraham, *Travels in the Caucasus, Georgia and Persia* (John Murray, London, 1839).

George Ditson, who claimed that he was the first American to travel in the Caucasus, also writes of the traffic. See G. L. Ditson, *Circassia or a Tour in the Caucasus* (New York, 1850).

her arms, when they were passing through the raging Alezan, then in flood.)

Dumas' most moving experience was at Tchervelone, a village famous for its gaiety and beautiful women, descendants of outlawed Muscovite aristocrats, but when they arrived at its gates they saw that it was anything but gay—it was now completely deserted, except for the sentinel on guard. He told them that all its inhabitants had gathered on the far side of the village to witness the execution of a traitor. Two years before, a Cossack of Tchervelone, a married man with two children, had been taken prisoner by the Chechens and held for ransom. While in the mountains, he had fallen in love with the brigand chief's daughter who had returned his affection. He threw in his lot with the Chechens, became a Muslim and married his lovely mistress, as he was now able to have two wives. Soon he was the most daring fighter in the tribe. The Chechens decided to take Tchervelone with his help. He crept in, intending to unbar the gate for them but, on passing his home, he saw through the window his wife and children on their knees, praying before the ikon. The sight so moved him that he went in and embraced them and then gave himself up to the *hetman* (chief) of the *stanitza* (village), warning him of the imminent attack of the enemy. This was beaten off but the renegade Cossack was, in spite of his repentance, condemned to death. The execution was to take place at noon.

'We came at last to the place of execution, a patch of level ground, near the cemetery. The condemned man, who was between thirty and forty years of age, was kneeling beside a newly dug grave, his eyes unbandaged and his hands unbound. A priest stood by him, hearing his confession. A platoon of nine men with loaded rifles was drawn up in line a few yards off. When the priest had given absolution, the *hetman* went up to the condemned man and said: "Gregor Gregorovitch, you have lived as a traitor and a brigand. Die like a Christian and a brave man and God will forgive your sins and your brothers your treachery." The renegade listened humbly, then, raising his head, he said: "My brothers, I have already asked God's forgiveness and He has forgiven me; now I ask yours. Do in your turn forgive me." Then those who had suffered at Gregor's hands came up to him, each in his turn. (He knelt before them as he had knelt before God.) First came an old man, saying: "Gregor Gregorovitch, you killed my only son, the support of my old age but God has forgiven you and now I forgive you. Die in peace." Saying this he kissed him. Next came a young woman. "Gregor Gregorovitch", she said, "you

killed my husband, made me a widow, my children orphans, but as God has forgiven you, I must also forgive you. Die in peace." She kissed him and gave place to others, who went up to him in turn with their reproaches. One said that he had killed his brother, another that he had killed his horse or had burned his house. All said: "You are forgiven. Die in peace." Last of all came his wife and children to bid their farewell. But the younger of the two, attracted by the pebbles mixed with the earth thrown up from the newly dug grave, went off to play with them. Finally the *hetman* came forward again. "Gregor Gregorovitch, your time has come." I confess that this was all I saw of the terrible scene. I wheeled my horse round and rode back into the *stanitza.* Ten minutes later I heard shots. Gregor Gregorovitch had ceased to exist. The crowd re-entered their village in silence.'

When Dumas got to Tiflis, the capital of Gecrgia, he found that his fame had preceded him. The ladies were in great excitement. They all knew his *The Three Musketeers* and his *Count of Monte Cristo.* (His barber who cut his hair so short that he looked like a seal, told him that he had sold his clippings for women to put in their pin-cushions.) They pestered Dumas to tell them of the latest Paris fasions—especially the address of the Paris shop that sold the corset which Princess G. had just brought back and which made waists smaller than wasps'. Beautiful as he found the ladies and gay as he found their city in contrast to Russia, he could not bear to leave Georgia without visiting Vladikavkaz and the Pass of Dariel. He took the route that, so tradition said, Pompey had followed in his campaign against Mithridates. The weather grew worse. In the valley of the Aragva, snow began to fall. Soon it was waist-deep. As they wound up the mountain, several times their *tarantas* stuck fast. They bartered it for a sleigh with five horses and later exchanged the horses for a dozen bullocks

'that ploughed breast-high through the soft snow and dragged us painfully upwards, a yard or two at a time. . . . The country round had a melancholy grandeur, a white, lifeless brilliance. Sky and earth were one, limitless and silent as death. . . . Far below we could see the Aragva, no longer a gleaming silver ribbon as in summer but an ashen-grey band almost black against the snow.'

Warned by the driver of the mail-coach from Russia, which they met on their way, that there was danger of avalanches, Dumas sadly turned back. He found Tiflis in blazing sunshine, although it was already winter.

At the end of January 1859, Dumas, with thirteen crates of the souvenirs he had collected, took ship at Poti on the Black Sea and caught a French ship at Trebizond. 'I cannot tell you what it meant to me to hear again the accents of Brittany and Marseilles. I felt as if I were at home again, the Caucasus a dream.'

He found, however, that he was not quite done with Caucasians. There were in the steerage, three hundred of them, mostly women and children, all destined to be sold as slaves in Istanbul.

GEORGE KENNAN

Siberia and the Exile System

London and New York 1891

THE publication of George Kennan's description of the life of exiles in Siberia did more than anything else to bring to an end the century-long love affair between the United States and Russia. It had been a strange friendship. That the Tsars of All the Russias, the most powerful and tyrannous autocrats of Europe, should have flirted with a republic founded on all the democratic principles which they so studiously flouted—Habeas Corpus, equality before the law, free speech, religious toleration, and all the other rights of man—is one of the curiosities of the modern world. Little is said about it in English history books. Perhaps we have chosen to ignore it because it was based so largely on hatred of our own country. Not even love unites people so strongly as an intense, well-directed hate.

A few words must be said about this Russo-American friendship, before the impact of Kennan's revelations can be properly assessed.

France, in American mythology, is her oldest friend. The nineteen-year old Lafayette, fighting (entirely on his own initiative) on the side of the oppressed American colonists, has never been forgotten.

> 'Our next oldest traditional friend [writes Thomas Bailey] is Russia. She was on our side, or appeared to be, not only during the war of Independence but also during the hardly less critical years of the War of 1812 [with England] and the great Civil War. Little wonder that the legend of the Tsarist affection for the new republic took such a deep hold.'

When Catherine the Great refused, politely but firmly, George III's request for 20,000 of her fierce Cossacks to subdue his rebel-

lious colonists, it was assumed that the Tsarina was sympathizing with a valiant people struggling for their freedom. Did she not correspond with Voltaire and dabble with liberal ideas? The reasons she gave—exhausting war with the Turks and so on—could not have been the real ones. The outcome, at any rate, was on the whole a happy one. Instead of Cossacks, highly skilled in rapid warfare as well as in rape, loot and murder, America received the somewhat less practised Germans and their gratitude to the Tsarina was undying. (As late as 1920, voices were raised in America protesting against the sending of her doughboys to fight the Bolsheviks in their civil war, on the grounds that Catherine had refused to intervene with her Cossacks in the War of Independence.)

An even more tangible bond between Russia and America was their fury at the British interference with the freedom of the seas and the rights of neutrals to trade with her enemies. Catherine's image was darkened when she seized a large slice of poor, little Poland, but there was nothing that besmirched Alexander I's reputation for Americans—not even Tilsit, for to many of them (although not to the New Englanders) it seemed right that he should side with their oldest friend, the French, against the hated English in the Napoleonic War. In 1809, the United States sent their first ambassador to St Petersburg, John Quincy Adams. He found a warm welcome. The Tsar hoped that the new republic over the ocean would become the commercial rival of Great Britain, which was so arrogantly seizing neutral ships and crippling trade.

Adams, a Puritan from New England who read the Bible from cover to cover every year and felt guilty at the time he had to waste attending banquets and balls in St Petersburg, salved his conscience by cementing the friendship between his country and Russia, so passionately at one about the freedom of the seas and the wickedness of the British intereference with it. America needed a friend, especially in 1812, when anger about the seizure of her ships had led her into war with England. As scant notice of this little war is taken in our school textbooks (because, perhaps of the ignominious part in it played by our glorious navy, and the valiant feats of the American 'fir-built frigates'), it is not generally known, over here, that Alexander offered to mediate between us and our rebellious ex-colonists and, although nothing came of the offer and peace was concluded without his intervention, America felt

grateful for his kind intentions and chalked up another good mark for Russia. They were pleased, too, that that great country had noticed their exploits. 'You are constantly beating at sea the English, who beat all the rest of the world,' the Russian Chancellor remarked to Quincy Adams.

Between this time and their Civil War, there were ups and downs in the friendship between Russia and the United States. During the Crimean War, American sympathy was with Russia, and a number of American doctors worked for their wounded. On the other hand, American sympathies were with the Poles in their savagely repressed risings of 1830 and 1863, and with the Hungarians in 1848, whose revolution Nicholas I helped his brother-Emperor of Austria to put down. This was not only because of the black accounts their ambassadors in St Petersburg gave of Tsarist tyranny and obscurantism, but also because of the flood of Polish and Hungarian refugees who sought freedom in their country. All these things were forgotten when, at the darkest moment for the North in their fight to preserve their Union against the South, a Russian fleet arrived in New York. At a time when the British and French were favouring the South and it seemed as though they might intervene in its favour, this friendly gesture was received with a tremendous burst of enthusiasm. Everywhere, from Boston to Washington, the Russian sailors were banqueted and fêted, and toasts were drunk to Lincoln the Emancipator (of slaves) and Alexander the Liberator (of serfs). That the Russians wanted to remove their fleet from the Baltic, in case the British and French intervened over Poland, was noted only by a few very astute Americans and had no impact on the public mind.

When, in 1867, Russia sold Alaska to the United States for the ridiculous sum of $7,200,000, it was hailed as another friendly gesture on the part of the Tsar Alexander II. It would have been ungracious to stress that, as the Russians were vastly extending their Empire across Asia, Alaska seemed not worth the expense and trouble of exploitation. Not even the Russian extension of its power in the Balkans in the late 1870s alarmed America, for were they not fighting to free their Christian brethren from the 'unspeakable Turk'? In 1881 Alexander II was assassinated by Nihilists. He had been America's one true friend in the Civil War and had sold them Alaska (which was proving very profitable). American grief at his death was widespread and sincere. After the disappearance of the Tsar Liberator, things were never the

same between the two countries. The long love-affair began to show signs of wear. Moreover, American engineers and technicians employed in the building of Russian railways and its expanding industry were maddened by the inefficiency and corruption that hampered their activities and their consuls were burdened by their complaints and claims. Alexander III had none of the liberal impulses of his father. He was cruel and despotic. Scapegoats were needed for the murder of Alexander and for the growth of Nihilism, and the Jews filled the bill. The shocking pogroms of the 1880s resulted in the flight of Russian and Polish Jews into the eastern states of America. Unlike the quarter of a million Jews, mostly of German origin, already in the States, these were not a prosperous, hardworking people but a ragged, terror-stricken horde. America saw her land becoming a dumping ground for the victims of Tsarist tyranny and it displeased her.[1] Then, in 1891, when pogroms were easing off, another bombshell exploded: the publication by George Kennan of his two-volumed book, *Siberia and the Exile System.* No book since *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had had such an impact on public opinion.

In 1885, George Kennan was commissioned by the *Century Magazine* to write a series of articles on the prisons of Siberia. He had already spent two years there. When only twenty years of age he had been part of an expedition organized by the Western Union Telegraph Company to survey a possible telegraph route across Siberia to Alaska. This came to an end when, in 1866, a cable was laid across the Atlantic, but it had given Kennan first-hand experience of a region almost unknown to the West.

[1] Isabel Hapgood, who spent two years in Russia at the close of the 1880s and learned the language, tried to combat the growing hostility to Russia of her countrymen. In her book *Russian Rambles* (1895) she writes, 'I am told that I must abuse Russia if I wish to be popular in America! . . . I am sure that the Russia of Ivan the Terrible's time would precisely meet its views. . . . In spite of all that has been written about Russia, the common incidents of everyday life are not known. . . . Russians of all classes, from the peasant up, possess a naturally simple, sympathetic disposition and manner, as a rule, tinged with a friendly warmth whose influence is felt as soon as one crosses the frontier. Shall I be believed if I say that I found it in custom-house offices and gendarmes? For the rest, characters vary quite as much as they do elsewhere.' She wrote many articles for the *Atlantic Monthly*. She gave an interesting account of a visit to Tolstoy in Yasnaya Polyana, in which she quoted the Countess's opinion of her husband's disciples: all 'small, blond, sickly and homely, as like to one another as a pair of old boots'. Isabel Hapgood helped in the knowledge of Russian literature in America by her *Survey of Russian Literature, with Selections* (1902).

He had become fluent in Russian and interested in the Russian people, but he had had no opportunity to visit prisons and was convinced that the reports on them by political exiles in England, notably Stepniak and Prince Kropotkin, were exaggerated. On the whole he sympathized with the Russian government in its efforts to get rid of its terrorists and revolutionaries. As his attitude was well known, he was given official help by the Russians to make his investigations. Actually the conditions in which he found the exiles were horrible beyond belief and he did not spare his readers in describing them. At the same time, he wrote in a factual way, giving (as far as was possible without bringing his informants into danger) chapter and verse for his findings so that their authenticity could not be doubted.

Kennan's first articles were dramatically illustrated by George A. Frost, who had accompanied him. These illustrations spoke even more forcibly than Kennan's narrative: endless lines of convicts with chains between their legs, trudging through the snow, guarded by soldiers armed with guns and whips; the forwarding prisons, filled to the roof with men and women; men shot as they broke from the line in a bid for freedom. In 1891 these articles and pictures were published in book form.

Kennan begins peaceably enough with a short description of his journey through Russia. He was amazed in Nijni Novgorod at what seemed to him a vast city, with 'churches, mosques, theatres, markets, banks, hotels' entirely empty of life, with grass growing in its streets. This was 'the caravanserai' for half a million traders and only occupied during the period of the fair for two or three months every year. He was surprised too that the great extension of the railways hadn't as yet killed the most famous fair of Russia. Kennan and Frost sailed up the Kama to Perm, 125 miles from Ekaterinburg to which they travelled by the new railway. This town had become prosperous because of the recently exploited minerals, fabulous in variety and value, of the Ural Mountains. The most important of these were iron, copper and coal but there were also gold and precious stones.

Ekaterinburg was similar to other Russian towns:

> 'The same wide, unpaved streets, the same square log houses with ornamented window casings and flatly pyramidal, tin roofs, the same high board fences between the scattered dwellings. the same white-walled churches with coloured or gilded domes, the same *gostinoi dvor* or city bazaar.'

where one could find everything that the Empire produced and many things it didn't. Kennan was especially delighted to find American peanuts and instructed the shop-keeper how to roast them and make them eatable. He was impressed that Ekaterinburg had some pretensions to 'self-culture' with a Ural Society of Friends of Natural Science, two newspapers (unfortunately heavily censored in Moscow) and an occasional opera season.

Kennan and Frost were entertained in the lavish Russian manner by the superintendent of the Berozeu gold-mines and immensely impressed by his tasteful home and exquisite garden, with its flowers, fountains, cherry-trees and conservatory filled with oranges, lemons and pineapples. After supper they played croquet on the lawn. It all seemed very civilized. They were less impressed, however, at seeing women in the gold-mines working eleven hours a day for a dollar two cents a week and felt that it was worse than penal servitude. As yet they little knew what this was like. They were soon to see.

From Ekaterinburg to the Siberian border, a distance of two hundred miles, Kennan and Frost went by 'horse express service' along the great Siberian road which stretched 3,000 miles from the Urals to the head-waters of the Amur River. They passed a caravan of freight waggons—the careful Kennan counted 1,450 of them on the first day—and commented on the riches of Siberia, which daily sent so many tons of its products to Russia. When they passed the post at the entrance to Siberia, Kennan thought of the heartrending scenes the pillar had witnessed in past centuries, for it was here that the convicts had said good-bye to their beloved country, many of them kissing the ground and taking a little Russian earth to accompany them in their exile.

Siberia was not the entire icy waste which the Americans had imagined.

> 'To the traveller who crosses the Urals for the first time in June, nothing is more suprising than the fervent heat of Siberian sunshine and the extraordinary beauty and profusion of Siberian flowers. There were long stretches of wheat and rye and great expanses of prairie. The roadside was bright with wild-roses, violets, honeysuckle, iris and the golden trollius and there were seas of forget-me-not.'

But Kennan was surprised that there were no scattered farmhouses. The peasants, nearly all on Crown land, did not own their property, and lived in villages which looked poor and neglected,

their wide streets often a sea of liquid mud where a few pigs wandered. There were no trees or gardens but the *izba* windows were brightened with fuchsias, oleanders, pinks, geraniums, tea-roses and cactus.

Tiumen was the first Siberian town they came to. They arrived exhausted after forty hours without sleep, jolted almost to pieces in their cramped *tarantas* (carriage). The next day they presented their letters of introduction to the chief police officer and at once got permission to visit the forwarding prison through which all exiles had to pass.

Transportation to Siberia, Kennan explains, had begun soon after its conquest in the seventeenth century, but at first it was disabled criminals, mutilated by the barbarous punishments then in vogue, who had been sent there. At the end of the century, mutilation as a punishment had been forbidden and banishment to Siberia substituted. As well as for crimes of violence, men were exiled for minor offences such as fortune-telling, prize-fighting, snuff-taking, driving with reins (considered a Western innovation: Russian peasants were supposed to ride the horse or run by its side), begging, and setting fire to property accidentally. In the eighteenth century, when the mineral and agricultural resources of Siberia were discovered, the government realized that convicts could be useful and many were condemned to hard labour in the silver mines of Daurski and the mines of Transbaikal. When in 1753, the Tsarina Elizabeth abolished capital punishment (and it should be remembered that Russia was the first country to do this), murderers were condemned to hard labour and perpetual exile in Siberia, but at least had their lives. In the reign of Catherine II, when the demand for labour increased because of the exploitation of the mines, the list of offences, punishable by exile trebled. Jews were exiled for non-payment of taxes, serfs for cutting down trees without leave, non-commissioned officers for various misdeeds, and the number of political offenders and nobles who had fallen from favour increased greatly. Up to the close of the eighteenth century it was an unorganized system. Exiles were driven like cattle, often begging their way, because there was no provision for feeding them, but in the early nineteenth century this was remedied. They were given identity cards showing who they were and where they were bound for and exile station-houses were erected along the most important routes. The first of these was at Tiumen.

It was at Tiumen that records were kept of all exiles to Siberia and the categories to which they belonged. The records started in 1823 and Kennan was allowed to copy them. Exiles, he found, were divided into four categories: hard-labour convicts, penal colonists, persons simply banished', and *dobrovolni*, women and children who voluntarily accompanied their relatives. The first two lots, supposed to be criminals, were deprived of all civil rights and condemned to spend their lives in Siberia. Their heads were half shaven and they wore leg-fetters. As those 'simply banished' were not necessarily criminals, they wore no fetters and might hope to return home when the term of their banishment had expired. Analysing the figures for 1885, Kennan found that the largest single class (5,536 out of 15,766) was composed of the women and children who went voluntarily, and that more than half of the supposed criminals and the 'simply banished' had had no trial but were sent by a mere order from the Minister of the Interior or of some official.

These cool facts showed Kennan's careful avoidance of sensationalism and made his description of the terrible conditions in the prison the more convincing to his readers. But it was the prison hospital that roused the greatest horror and compassion.

> 'The most common disorders seemed to be scurvy, typhus, typhoid fever, acute bronchitis, rheumatism and syphilis. . . . Never before in my life had I seen faces so white, haggard and ghastly as those that lay on the gray pillows in those hospital cells. As I breathed that heavy stifling atmosphere, poisoned with the breaths of syphilitic and fever-stricken patients, loaded and saturated with the odour of excrement, disease germs, exhalations from unclean human bodies and foulness inconceivable, it seemed to me that over the hospital doors should be written "All hope abandon, ye who enter here".'

(Florence Nightingale had thought the same when she entered the hospital at Scutari, but that was thirty years earlier.)

It was not surprising that the annual death rate in the Tiumen prison ranged from 23 per cent to 44 per cent—a death rate, Kennan thought, exceeding that of any pestilence in Europe in the Middle Ages. He noted that the prison wardens and the colonel-inspector of transportation were themselves incensed at conditions. The colonel had often reported them to Petersburg, but his complaints were unanswered.

The day after visiting the prison, Kennan witnessed the departure of one of the marching parties.

'There was a jingling of chains as some of the prisoners who had been lying on the ground sprang to their feet; the soldiers of the guard shouldered their rifles; the exiles crossed themselves devoutly, bowing in the direction of the prison chapel; and at the word "March." the whole column was instantly in motion. Three or four Cossacks in dark-green uniforms and with rifles over their shoulders, took the lead; a dense but disorderly throng of men and women followed, marching between thin, broken lines of soldiers; next came the *telegas* (waggons) with the old, the sick and the small children; then a rearguard of half a dozen Cossacks; and finally four or five wagons piled high with gray bags. The last sounds I heard were the jingling of chains, and the shouts of the Cossacks to the children to keep within the lines.'

The next day Kennan witnessed the embarkation of 700 exiles on convict barges taking them to Tomsk—a voyage that lasted at least seven days. Here the overcrowding was as shocking as in the Tiumen prison.[2] Kennan was struck by the diversity of types

[2] Robert Ker Porter visited a prison in Moscow, where conditions were as horrible as in Siberia. Here the prisoners 'dragged on a dying life, or rather a tortured one; miserable fare, miserable sleep, and an atmosphere fraught with every calamity which foulness can inflict'. But this was in 1806 and at that date prisons in England were not exactly convalescent homes, as we know from John Howard. The interesting discovery Ker Porter made on his visit was of seven men in a less gloomy room. They were officers guilty of forgery, and soon to be transported for life to the mines of Siberia.

Here Ker Porter draws a comparison between the Russian and English penal systems, much to our disadvantage. Here, he says, we hang a man not only for treason, murder and forgery but for stealing half-a-crown. A short while ago a woman, left destitute with two children because her husband had been pressed into the Navy, had stolen some coarse linen from a shop. She was hanged at Tyburn, to the joy of shopkeepers, though there was a baby still sucking at her breast. Being a practical fellow for an artist, Ker Porter considered death a wasteful punishment. These seven forgers working for the rest of their lives in the mines of Siberia would be doing something useful for the State, the government would benefit from their labour and at the same time their fate would be a salutary warning to other would-be-forgers. But, although he gave his cold approval to the condemnation of the seven poor Russians, Ker Porter did add what he called 'a few pleadings' for the miserable inmates of our own dungeons, stressing that the Mosaic law had not required death for theft but only restitution—this was all that God required. Although he approved Russia's abolition of capital punishment he did not fail to note that the condemnation of a man to two hundred lashes with the knout meant executing him in a particularly terrible way. Was it something sadistic in his nature that made him insist on witnessing this punishment and describing it in horrifying detail? (There are no statistics to show how often the Russians circumvented the Tsarina Elizabeth's humane law in this manner, but Tolstoy, in *Hadji Murad*, describes Nicholas I hypocritically praising the abolition of capital punishment in his enlightened country and condemning refractory students and heretics to what would be certain death after running the gauntlet of soldiers.)

See Robert Ker Porter, *Travelling Sketches in Russia and Sweden* (London, 1813).

among the prisoners, more than three-quarters of whom were wearing leg-fetters:

> 'There were fierce wild-looking mountaineers from Daghestan and Circassia, condemned to penal servitude for murders of blood revenge; there were Tartars from the lower Volga, Turks from the Crimea, whose scarlet fezzes contrasted strangely with their gray convict overcoats; crafty-looking Jews from Podolia, going into exile for smuggling; and finally common peasants in great numbers from all parts of Europe and Russia. The faces of the prisoners generally were not as hard, vicious and depraved as the faces of criminals in America. Many of them were pleasant and good-humoured.'

Frost made sketches of the different convict types. This caused them extreme amusement. They laughed and joked like schoolboys off for a picnic.

In Tiumen, Kennan bought a *tarantas* (a covered, four-wheeled carriage) and he and Frost started on their journey across Siberia to the mines of the Transbaikal. With their *podorozhnaya* (order for horses) they were able to hire, at a small price, either post-horses or 'free horses' all along the route. Whenever they stopped at an *étape* (halting station for convicts) or at an assembly place like Semipalatinsk, Omsk, or Tomsk, Kennan visited the chief officials and received permission to see all he wanted. Afterwards, when he lectured in America, he was always asked how this was possible and why he was never arrested. He admitted that he was fearing arrest the whole time. This had never happened, he supposed, because he had always presented himself to the highest authorities with his letter from the Minister of the Interior and received their permission.

We cannot accompany Kennan to all the stations of the cross which he visited on his self-imposed pilgrimage. At Omsk he found they had demolished the prison where Dostoievky had spent four years of penal servitude. (His *From the House of the Dead* had been translated into English in 1881 and to Kennan it was a bible.) The forwarding prison at Tomsk affected him even more actuely than the Tiumen prison, because the exiles, after so much more of their journey, were in a much worse condition. There were 3,000 in huts designed for 1,400. The sheds for family parties, packed to the ceiling with 'weary-eyed men, haggard women and wailing children' harrowed him most. Why should women and children guilty of nothing but devotion to husbands or fathers have to

undergo such intolerable suffering? Why should so many babies have to die? It was little wonder that typhus epidemics broke out, In the hospital Kennan found young nurses with strong, intelligent faces, obviously medical students, banished for 'untrustworthiness.'

It was not the statistics that Kennan collected so conscientiously that affected Americans so deeply; it was his human stories. Before his investigations they had thought that the political prisoners sent to Siberia were all Nihilists who cared for neither God nor man and went about throwing bombs and plotting the overthrow of the State. They had believed that these wretches had been condemned in a court of justice to a deserved punishment. Kennan revealed to them that from the beginning of the exile system, hundreds of thousands had been sent to Siberia by what was called 'administrative process', that is, without trial, and often without reason given. That the Minister of the Interior or one of twenty different classes of Russian officials could, by the scrawl of a pen, condemn innocent people to the intolerable sufferings of banishment, blackened the name of Russia, for so long hailed as America's friend and ally. In the reigns of Nicholas I and of the 'liberal' Alexander II, thousands of men and women were exiled to Siberia, not only by order of the Tsar but also by order of mere officials, even of the elders of the village communes and private landowners. Was not every human being entitled to a trial, to know of what he was accused, to call witnesses in his defence? Kennan mentioned the case of two brothers exiled because of mistaken identity and of a woman exiled because she dared to write to Alexander III, telling him of the case and asking for redress. A doctor was banished for coaching two medical students exiled from St Petersburg to central Russia because of 'untrustworthiness'. He was sent to the Arctic regions of Siberia. His young wife, after the birth of their baby, tried to follow him. She left the baby with friends and started the 6,000 mile journey, joining a band of convicts as she could then travel at government expense. When she reached Irkutsk, she was still nearly 3,000 miles away from her husband. She 'had endured without complaint the jolting, the suffocating dust, the scorching heat and cold autumnal rains on the road, the bad food, the plank sleeping-benches, the vermin and the pestilential air of the *étapes*', but at Irkutsk, her health gave way. She discovered that she would have to travel for weeks, on dog or reindeer sledges, through the Arctic solitudes of north-east Asia. She died insane in the Irkutsk prison hospital. Kennan heard

her story from exiles who had travelled with her, one of them a well-known member of a provincial *zemstvo*.

In the course of his travels Kennan met more than 500 political exiles, the first ones in Western Siberia, where they were living in comparative freedom. They were introduced to him by the official in charge, who told him that many of them were young men and women of high attainments. (One thinks of Lenin and Krupskaya translating the Webbs' *History of Trade Unionism* and doing a little quiet fishing in the rivers.) One of them was making anthropological researches among the Kirghiz. A woman impressed him because she told her experiences without bitterness or exaggeration. After a year's solitary confinement in Moscow, she had been banished to a dreary settlement in Siberia and only recently been brought to the comparative civilization of Semipalatinsk. They talked cheerfully of literature, art and American politics. In his country they would have been thought of as the mildest liberals.

In Tomsk, Kennan had long talks with Prince Alexander Kropotkin. He was not a revolutionary, like his famous brother Peter, but had been too outspoken in his criticisms of the corruption and spying in the government office where he worked. He was exiled, without trial, to a town on the Yenesei River in Eastern Siberia. (As a student he had been imprisoned for having a copy of Emerson's *Self Reliance* and refusing to say who had given it to him.) Here he had lived with his wife for four years, making botanical and geological collections and founding a museum. He was an accomplished astronomer but had not had the instruments necessary to carry on his researches. When he was transferred to Tomsk he had had more books, but was constantly harried by the police, who suspected him of communicating with his brother. (A year after this meeting with Kennan, Kropotkin, on the eve of his release and return to Russia, committed suicide.) The writer Felix Volkhovski was an exile with whom Kennan struck up a warm friendship. His health and been shattered by long imprisonment in the Fortress of Peter and Paul. He knew American history and literature and Kennan managed by secret means to correspond with him after he had left Russia, hearing in this way of the suicide of his wife and the death of his little daughter. The sequel to this friendship was sensational. In 1889 Volkhovski knocked at Kennan's door in Albany. Assuming the character of a retired army officer he had travelled 2,800 miles from Irkutsk to Vladivostok where he was hidden on a British coal steamer, and taken to Japan. From

there, on another British ship, he sailed to Vancouver, the passengers paying his fare, so that he should not have to go steerage. This adventure is worth recording for escapes were extremely rare from Siberia.[4]

Attempts were often made. Escapers were known as *brodyags*. Kennan talked to several *brodyags*, marching in fetters from Tomsk to Irkutsk. Some of them had escaped half a dozen times from the mines. They had always been captured or had given themselves up from hunger and despair. 'I know *brodyags*', the captain told Kennan, 'who have been over this road sixteen times in leg-fetters. God only knows how they live through it.' When they broke from the marching line, they were of course shot at by the guards but these were not always good marksmen.

About *brodyags*, such a feature of the Siberian landscape, Kennan heard many tales when he reached the gold mines of Kara. Here half the hard-labour convicts lived in 'free commands' outside the prison walls.

> 'Every year when the weather becomes warm, the free command begins to over-flow into the forests; and for two or three months a narrow but almost continuous stream of escaping convicts runs from the Kara penal settlements in the direction of Lake Baikal. The signal for this annual movement is given by the cuckoo. The cry of the bird is taken as evidence that an escaped convict can once more live in the forests, and to run away, in convict slang, it to go to General Kukushka for orders. In Siberia, as a whole, the number of runaway exiles and convicts who take the field in response to the summons of this popular officer exceeds 30,000. Most of the Kara convicts who "go to General Kukushka for orders" in the early summer come back to the mines under new names and in leg-fetters next winter; but they have had their outing, and have breathed for three whole months the fresh, free air of the woods, the mountains and the steppes. . . . They do not expect to escape altogether; they knew that they must live for months the lives of hunted fugitives, subsisting upon berries and roots, sleeping on the cold and often water-soaked ground and facing death at almost every step. But, in spite of all this, they cannot hear in early summer the first soft notes of the cuckoo without feeling a passionate longing for the adventures and excitements that attend the life of a *brodyag*.

A prison official told Kennan of a convict servant who begged

[4] Nabokov in a spirited defence of the old régime of Russia asserts that escapes were easy and cites 'St Leo Trotsky, pulled merrily through the snow by reindeers, bringing like a new Santa Klaus, his gifts to the West'. See his autobiography, *Speak Memory*.

him to lock him up in the summer for, he said: 'I am old and grey-headed now, I can't stand life in the woods as I could once, but if I hear General Kukushka (cuckoo) calling me, I must go.'

Many prison officials winked at escapes because they could continue to draw the rations and clothes of the runaways and sell them on the black market, but to the peaceable burghers of Siberia the *brodyags* were a great menace. In order to survive they had perforce to steal and in Siberia there were many times the number of crimes of violence recorded in European Russia. In fact, the strong protests against the whole exile system that came out of Siberia was less out of sympathy for the politicals than out of outrage that their country was a dumping ground for common criminals, half of whom were not tidily locked up in prisons but living in colonies in remote areas or in free commands from which it was not hard to escape, even though only temporarily.

Incidentally, the oddest exile Kennan met in Siberia, also the oldest, was not a *brodyag* nor a convict—it was the bell of Uglich, banished to Tobolsk, in 1593, by order of Boris Goudunov for having rung the signal for insurrection at the time of the murder of the Tsarevitch Dimitri. The bell had been consecrated and purged of its sins. Uglich was demanding it back, saying that it had been punished enough by three centuries of exile, but Tobolsk would not let it go.

Kennan discovered something profoundly illustrative of Russian psychology: the convicts organized themselves into secret unions called *artels*, and as in their village *mirs*, they chose their own head-man or *starosta*, made their own rules, had their own standards of honour and their own penal code. The *artel* bribed executioners to flog lightly, soldiers to smuggle vodka, tobacco and playing cards. They levied taxes, distributed privileges, and the punishment for disloyalty was always death.

To Kennan the most physically exhausting part of his journey was from Tomsk to the Transbaikal, through Eastern Siberia. The autumn had begun and continual rain had turned the roads into seas of mud.

> 'The jolting of our heavy *tarantas* through deep ruts gave us violent headaches and prevented sleep; . . . we suffered from cold and were tormented by predatory insects from the road-side prisons and *étapes*! To be forced to live for weeks at a time in clothing infested with fleas, lice or bedbugs gave me a humiliating sense of physical defilement.'

But even greater than the physical exhaustion was the nervous strain. Kennan was a warm-hearted, imaginative man. Day after day he witnessed suffering that he thought unparalleled in the civilized world and he could do nothing to alleviate it. In the second volume of his book Kennan gives a picturesque sketch of Catherine Breshkovsky, the 'Grandmother of the Russian Revolution'. An aristocrat who spoke French, German and English fluently and was a gifted musician, she had twice served out penal terms in the mines of Kara.

> 'The unshaken courage with which this unfortunate woman contemplated her dreary future and the faith that she manifested in the ultimate triumph of liberty in her native country, were as touching as they were heroic. Almost the last words which she said to me were: "Mr Kennan, we may die in exile, and our children may die in exile, and our children's children may die in exile, but something will come of it at last.". . . . I cannot recall her last words to me without feeling conscious that all my standards of courage, of fortitude, and of heroic self-sacrifice have been raised for all time, and raised by the hand of a woman. Interviews with such political exiles—and I met many in the Transbaikal—were to me a more bracing tonic than medicine.'

When Kennan reached Transbaikal, his health broke down and he made haste to return to his country. He was, in any case, anxious to tell his story. With the optimism characteristic of good Americans, he hoped that his revelations might induce the Tsar to reform the whole system. A petition was drawn up in Philadelphia, after one of Kennan's lectures, asking Alexander III to do something about his prisons. It cited the Civil War friendship when his father had sent his fleet to New York; it received thousands of signatures. Alexander turned a blind eye. Copies of the *Century Magazine* that reached Russia were severely censored, whole pages being blacked out. Yet many read it in secret and Kennan's admirers credited him with inflaming the Russian masses against their master and thus inciting them to revolt in 1917.

Kennan was no revolutionary, nor was he a prophet. He had some inkling of the hidden riches of Siberia, but nothing told him that a city of scientists dedicated to explore them would sprout up there sixty years after he had seen its exiles trudging through the mud nor that, in the 1960s, the Albert Hall in London would be listening to a choir of young men and maidens from Omsk,

Dostoievsky's 'House of the Dead', and watching their mild yet disciplined dancing, triumphant with health and high spirits.

Kennan had not done what he had set out to do. He had sympathized with the Russian government's treatment of what he thought of as Nihilists; he had gone to Siberia to vindicate it. An honest man, when he saw what the truth was he told it. Notwithstanding all Russian denials, America and England now knew for certain what Tsarist tyranny was and what Siberia stood for.

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