

GLEB STRUVE

## Alexander Turgenev, Ambassador of Russian Culture in *Partibus Infidelium*

To the memory of Waclaw Lednicki (1891–1967)

“Homme de toute sorte de savoir,” was how Alexander Turgenev was once described by Chateaubriand,<sup>1</sup> while Francis Jeffrey, the editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, in a letter to Sydney Smith, called him “a Russian gentleman accomplished in all liberal and *orthodox* sciences.” The word “orthodox” was underlined by Jeffrey, and Turgenev said that he did not understand the meaning of that underlining. It is possible, of course, that all Jeffrey had in mind was that Turgenev was of the Russian Orthodox faith and knew all about its tenets.

Turgenev’s Russian friends had some apt and colorful nicknames for him. One of them called him “little Grimm,” or “Grimmikin” (*Grimushka*), alluding to Catherine the Great’s indefatigable correspondent and go-between in Europe, through whom she maintained relations with the French *philosophes* and who kept her informed of what was going on in European political and intellectual life. This nickname was later changed into “pilgrim.” Another referred to him as “an encyclopedic steam engine,” and still another as “a live newspaper.” One of his closest and lifelong friends, as well as most assiduous correspondent, Prince Peter Viazemsky, the poet, wrote of him:

We believe that there has never been anywhere a *speedwriter* [*borzopisets*] to match him. He could have said, echoing a poet: “What a lot of paper have I covered with writing in the course of my life.” But neither his friends nor posterity . . . have reproached or are going to reproach him for this. His epistolary activity was amazing. It got the better of his somewhat lazy nature, of his distractedness and his absent-mindedness. . . . He corresponded with his petitioners, with his brothers,

1. This statement of Chateaubriand’s is quoted as follows by Prince Peter Viazemsky in his “Staraja zapisnaia knizhka”: “M-r le comte Tourguéneff, ci-devant ministre de l’instruction publique en Russie, homme de toute sorte de savior.” Viazemsky adds that Turgenev’s former friend, Count Bludov, noted that Chateaubriand had managed to commit “three mistakes and three absurdities” in his brief statement: “Turgenev was not a count, had never been minister of education, and was not omniscient.” *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 12 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1878–96), 8: 274 (hereafter cited as *PSS*).

---

This article is based on a public lecture, originally delivered as the 1968 Waclaw Lednicki Memorial Lecture at the University of California in Berkeley and later given, each time in a somewhat revised and enlarged form, at Oberlin College, Ohio, the Universities of Wisconsin, British Columbia, and Washington, San Francisco State College, and the University of California at Los Angeles and Riverside.

with his friends, with people he knew and, often, with those he did not know, with scholars, with clergymen of all possible denominations, with ladies of all ages, of different generations. He was in correspondence with all of Russia, with France, Germany, England, and other countries. And his letters are, for the most part, models of style, of living speech. They are entertaining for their contents and for their artistic polish, about which he did not bother, but which burst out spontaneously under his tireless and carefree pen. . . . This was not enough: alongside this vast and diversified correspondence, he also kept, for his own benefit, a detailed diary. In the huge folios of his correspondence and of his journals the future historian of our time, from the first years of the reign of Alexander I to the year 1845, will no doubt find material and colors for depicting the political, literary, and social scene of the period we have lived through.<sup>2</sup>

Turgenev knew several languages. French and German he spoke and wrote fluently. His knowledge of English was slight to begin with, but must have improved greatly over the years to enable him to converse with so many Englishmen, even though in those days it was undoubtedly possible, quite often, to converse in French. The same is true of his knowledge of Italian, and from his letters and diaries we know that during his prolonged sojourns in Italy in 1832 and 1833 he took regular lessons, at one time every morning, reading Dante and Tasso with his teacher. He also knew Latin well, and his letters abound in quotations from classical authors. But unlike many of his contemporaries—Pushkin, for instance—he corresponded with his Russian friends mostly in Russian and not in French. It is curious, however, that his friend Peter Chaadaev, the author of the famous *Philosophical Letters*, urged him to use the French language in his correspondence and even insisted that he liked his French letters better. Chaadaev wrote to him:

Ne vous en déplaît, j'aime mieux vos lettres françaises que vos lettres russes. Il y a dans vos lettres françaises plus de laisser aller, vous y êtes plus vous-mêmes. Or, c'est lorsque vous êtes tout vous-mêmes, que vous êtes bon. Vos circulaires en langue nationale, articles de journaux, mon ami, articles de journaux! et je vous en fais bien mon compliment: mais c'est pour cela que je ne les aime pas. Au lieu que vos lettres fran-

2. *PSS*, 8: 282. In an entry in his "Notebook" for 1838, when he was living in Brighton, Viazemsky wrote that Turgenev had given up the idea of going to Ireland for fear of seasickness and did not go to Scotland because there was no one he could write to from there: his brother Nikolai had lived in Scotland and knew all about it, while he, Viazemsky, was then not in Moscow. Two days later Viazemsky noted that Turgenev had gone to London "to pick up letters that no one writes to him," adding, "C'est un sujet de comédie." See *Zapisnye knizhki (1813-1848)* (Moscow, 1963), pp. 244, 247. This partial reissue of the notebooks, in the Literary Monuments series, edited by V. S. Nechaeva, contains only those notebooks that were published during Viazemsky's lifetime. Otherwise this edition is a great improvement on the earlier publications, including the one in *PSS*, which was full of misprints and errors, was poorly edited, and lacked all commentary. It is to be regretted that the rest of the notebooks have not been similarly published.

gaises n'ont l'air de rien, et c'est pour cela que je les trouve excellentes. Si j'écrivais à une femme, je dirais qu'elles vous ressemblent. D'ailleurs, vous êtes essentiellement homme de l'Europe. Vous savez que je m'y connais. Le français est vraiment votre costume obligé. Vous avez éparpillé toutes les pièces de votre toilette nationale sur les grandes routes du monde civilisé. Donc, écrivez le français, et ne vous gênez pas je vous en prie, attendu que, grâce à la nouvelle école, de si bonne composition, il est permis désormais de ne pas plus se déranger en français qu'en javanais, dans la quelle langue, dit-on, l'on écrit indifféremment de haut en bas et de bas en haut, de droite à gauche et de gauche à droite, sans qu'il en advienne aucun inconvénient.<sup>3</sup>

Later Chaadaev wrote to Turgenev, apropos of Viazemsky, that "in order to write well in Russian one had to be an exceptional man, a Pushkin or a Karamzin," adding: "I am speaking of prose: a poet is always an exceptional man." It is interesting that Turgenev always wrote to Viazemsky's wife in French: a Russian letter to a lady of society would have been a violation of etiquette.

It was Viazemsky also who said of Turgenev that he was endowed with a roaming instinct, a *Wanderlust*, that he was always "on the move." Indeed, this indefatigable "speedwriter" or "pen-pusher" was an equally tireless traveler. Even in the days when the Russians of the upper class often traveled far afield, the range of his peregrinations was quite amazing. Not only was he at home in Germany, France, Italy, Switzerland, and England, which he crossed and recrossed many times, but his travels also took him to the Scottish Highlands, to Holland and Belgium, to Scandinavia, to Austria and Hungary, and to Serbia. The only countries in Western Europe he seems never to have visited were Spain and Portugal, though his friend Prosper Mérimée urged him to come to Spain.

Turgenev never went outside Europe, but in one of his letters he quoted Andrew Jackson's presidential address of 1833 and suggested that the future of Western civilization might rest with the United States of America.

Turgenev's travels were not a result of any necessity, as was quite often the case with his compatriots who were taken far afield either by diplomatic duties or by military exigencies. He was impelled mainly by his insatiable restless curiosity and by his roaming instinct. "Il n'est pas le grand agitateur, mais le grand agité," one of his friends said of him. ("The great agitator" was the name applied to the well-known Irish political leader of those days, Daniel O'Connell.) Viazemsky described Turgenev as "a many-sided *dilettante*,"<sup>4</sup> "a composite, eclectic nature," and "an intellectual cosmopolite," and

3. *Sochineniia i pis'ma P. Ia. Chaadaeva*, ed. M. O. Gershenzon, 2 vols. (Moscow, 1913-14), 1: 170-71.

4. On Turgenev's "dilettantism" see *PSS*, 8: 276-80. In speaking of Turgenev's

said that “while in no field of knowledge was he what is called at home, in none was he a complete stranger.” He took in fact every opportunity to widen the range of his knowledge, to add new areas to it, for instance, modern science and technology, and even during his short visits to this or that center of European learning he found time to attend university lectures and public meetings on a great variety of subjects.

This aspect of Alexander Turgenev’s activities is amusingly pictured by the French writer and society lady, Mme Virginie Ancelot. In her book about her own Parisian salon she describes Alexander Turgenev as a man of society extremely curious about all things intellectual, and particularly fond of public lectures. This is what she says:

Il avait été ministre en Russie et donna sa démission quand son frère se trouva compromis dans une affaire politique. Puis il se mit à courir l’Europe dont il savait toutes les langues, pour écouter tous les professeurs en renom. Ce qu’il faisait afin de ne rien perdre en ce genre, quand les orateurs devaient parler presque à la même heure ou dans des villes différentes, est inimaginable; il lui est arrivé, en Allemagne, avant les chemins de fer, d’avoir une chaise de poste attelée à la porte de l’université où il écoutait un professeur, pour sauter dedans dès que la leçon finissait, afin d’aller à dix lieues de là en écouter un autre.<sup>5</sup>

Mme Ancelot may have been exaggerating, but we know from Turgenev’s own correspondence and diaries that he often tried to squeeze in a lecture or a public meeting of some sort between two social visits. In 1827, when he was living in Leipzig, he regularly attended lectures at the university. The fact that one course he wanted to attend was given at six o’clock in the morning did not deter him. And we must not indeed forget that this was in the days when railways were still in their infancy (and there were none in Russia) and when most traveling had to be done in mail coaches or in private carriages.

Born in 1784, Alexander Ivanovich Turgenev was the second of the four Turgenev brothers, all of whom have left some trace in the history of Russian culture. Their father was a noted Moscow Freemason in the late eighteenth century. He played an important part in the spiritual formation of such writers as Karamzin and Zhukovsky. After the disbandment of the Masonic lodges by Catherine the Great and the arrest of Novikov, he was banished to his Simbirsk estate, where he remained until the accession of Paul I in 1796. Upon his return to Moscow he was appointed director of the Moscow University.

Alexander’s elder brother, Andrei, was a schoolmate and a close friend of

---

“political dilettantism” and in characterizing his “liberalism,” Viazemsky does not seem to me to do full justice to his friend.

5. Mme Ancelot, *Un Salon de Paris: 1824 à 1864* (Paris, 1866), pp. 96–97.

the poet Zhukovsky, and himself a poet of considerable promise. Had he not died at the age of twenty-two he might have played a significant part in Russian literature on the threshold of the Golden Age. The Friendly Literary Society to which the brothers Turgenev belonged was one of the principal channels through which German literary influences found their way into Russia, crowding out the earlier French ones. Schiller, Goethe, Wieland, and other Germans of the Sturm und Drang period were the great favorites of these young Russians.

Of Alexander Turgenev's two younger brothers, Nikolai is remembered as one of the leading Decembrists, one of the most active and vocal members of the secret societies in the 1820s, a dedicated champion of the abolition of serfdom. The actual Decembrist uprising, on December 14, 1825, found him abroad and he took no part in it, but was nevertheless sentenced to death in absentia. The sentence was later commuted to lifelong exile. He remained an expatriate for the rest of his life, living first in England and later in France. After the amnesty of the Decembrist conspirators at the beginning of the new reign (that of Alexander II) he was able to revisit his native country, but he did not go back there to live. The involvement of Nikolai Turgenev in the Decembrist affair made Alexander resign his high position in the imperial civil service and devote much of his time and energy during the remainder of his life to the efforts to obtain a pardon for his brother. Those efforts were unavailing, and Alexander did not live to see his brother and the other Decembrists amnestied. He died in 1845, eleven years before the amnesty.

The youngest of the four Turgenev brothers, Sergei, served in the Russian diplomatic service, was at one time closely associated (as was Nikolai) with the Prussian statesman Baron Stein, took part in introducing the Lancaster system of mutual education into the Russian occupation army in France after the defeat of Napoleon, and died soon after the Decembrist uprising, after a short spell of mental illness, in which no doubt the catastrophe that had befallen his brother Nikolai played a not unimportant part.

Alexander Turgenev received his early education on the parental estate of Turgenevo. One of his tutors was Georg-Christoph Tobler, a Genevan, a relative of the celebrated phrenologist Lavater. In the early 1780s Tobler had known Goethe in Weimar. He was undoubtedly the first to arouse in his pupils, the two elder Turgenev brothers, an interest in the great German poet and his work.

Later, Alexander Turgenev was enrolled in the Boarding School of the Moscow University where literary interests and pursuits were very much encouraged by its director and other teachers. It became in fact the nursery of early German romantic influences in Russia and gave Vasilii Zhukovsky to Russian literature.

Between 1802 and 1804, after a short time in the civil service in the archives of the Foreign Office (one of Pushkin's "archival youths," like his hero, Eugene Onegin), Alexander Turgenev studied at the University of Göttingen. It was here that his interest in, and taste for, historical studies received a powerful stimulus. Recalling, much later, his student years, he said that he had really gone to Göttingen to study botany: "Why didn't I stay with the flowers for the sake of which I went to Göttingen? But Hoffmann was lazy and Schlözer came to like me, and so I gave up flowers and took up Nestor and the Varangians. Yet with flowers I would not have faded myself so soon: someone observed recently that naturalists live longer and are kinder people."<sup>6</sup>

But although botany may have been Turgenev's first love (and he did retain a liking for flowers and for nature in general), his interest in history was quite genuine and lasting. To the end of his days he nurtured a feeling of warm gratitude to his Göttingen teachers, to August Ludwig Schlözer in particular. It gave him real pleasure to revisit his alma mater and to attend some lectures there. His first published piece was an article in Karamzin's *Vestnik Evropy* for 1803 about Göttingen and its students. In another article for the same journal, also about Göttingen, he made the following prophetic statement: "There is no doubt that the time is approaching when the literature of my country will spread all over Europe and when our language will be one of the essential perquisites of good education" (*Vestnik Evropy*, 1803, no. 12, p. 190). While at Göttingen, Turgenev took part in an outing to the Harz Mountains and the ascension of the Brocken, and later described it to his Russian readers. At the end of his stay in Göttingen he made, with his friend Andrei Kaisarov, a trip to Bohemia, Hungary, and Serbia, visiting also, on the way back, Trieste and Venice.

The stay at Göttingen marked the end of Alexander Turgenev's formal *Lehrjahre*—informally, one might say, he continued studying and learning all his life. The period that followed, from 1805 to 1825, can be described as his *Dienstjahre*. And this was followed by the *Wanderjahre* which occupied the last twenty years of his life. Between the *Lehrjahre* and the *Wanderjahre* he made a rapid career in the Russian civil service, attaining the rank of titular state councilor (*deistvitel'nyi statskii sovetnik*), and also had conferred on him in 1819 the court rank of *kamenger*—that is, *Kammerherr*—or chamberlain.

His civil service began in the Commission for the Codification of Laws, under Speransky, but by 1810 he had been appointed director of the Administration of Foreign Religious Denominations. Pushkin referred to him facetiously as "the faithful protector of Roman Catholic priests, Jews, and Sectarians" (Pushkin actually used the word *skoptsy*). For many years, until

6. *Arkhiv brat'ev Turgenevykh*, in 6 parts (St. Petersburg-Petrograd, 1911–21), 6: 283–84 (see note 11).

in fact it was closed down, he was also secretary of the Russian Bible Society which was patronized by his ministerial chief, Prince Alexander Golitsyn. In this connection both he and his brother Nikolai established close relations with some leading British Quakers and Abolitionists, among others with Wilberforce, to whom there are many references in their correspondence.<sup>7</sup> Alexander Turgenev was also an active member of numerous charity and public welfare organizations. Interceding on behalf of all sorts of people who were in need of help or protection, including prisoners and deportees to Siberia, took up a large amount of his time both during the period of his work for the Russian government and after his resignation. The organization and operation of prisons became one of his lifelong interests, and he never failed to visit the prison in any city that was new to him. To quote again Viazemsky in his memoir of Alexander Turgenev:

He would get up early and go to bed late. All day long he was on the move, both mentally and physically speaking. In the morning he was busy with all kinds of official work. The rest of the day he roamed all over the city, often as an intercessor on behalf of his friends and acquaintances, and sometimes on behalf of people who were complete strangers to him, but who had appealed for his intercession. . . . The list of people who were helped by Turgenev would exceed the long list of amorous conquests claimed by Don Juan according to Leporello in Mozart's opera. Russian literature, Russian men of letters who needed protection and support, as well as young newcomers who had not yet had time to blaze their trail, always found in him an intercessor and an intelligent guide. For a long time he was, as it were, the intermediary, the agent, the spontaneously authorized and accredited chargé d'affaires of Russian literature with the authorities and educated society. This service alone, little known and now forgotten, gives him a place of honor in our literature.<sup>8</sup>

Thus Viazemsky. The role which Alexander Turgenev played in interceding for Pushkin on various occasions when the latter got into some scrape is well known. It was Turgenev also who was charged by Nicholas I with accompanying Pushkin's body to its last resting place after the fatal duel.

Though not himself a poet, Alexander Turgenev took an active part in the literary life and heated literary controversies of his time. He was a faithful

7. In one of his published letters from abroad Turgenev mentioned meeting in Paris Wilberforce's friend and collaborator Zachary Macaulay, who told him about Wilberforce's last days. Turgenev added: "Wilberforce had always been my heart's hero and I always rejoiced seeing his portrait in Prince G[olitsyn]'s office. I still had a chance to hear him when he was perorating, bent already by old age but eloquently, in various Bible, missionary, and philanthropic societies in London." A. I. Turgenev, *Khronika russkogo: Dnevnik (1825-1826 gg.)*, ed. M. I. Gillelson (Moscow and Leningrad, 1964), p. 56.

8. PSS, 8: 280-82. In characterizing Alexander Turgenev as "a dilettante" Viazemsky made one exception: there was one area, he said, in which Turgenev was "a virtuoso," and that was the area of "good deeds."

member of the Arzamas literary society (or club) which represented the Karamzinists at the height of their battles with the literary conservatives. In this society he was known under the nickname "Aeolian Harp." Although taken, as those of most of the other members, from Zhukovsky's poetry, this nickname also had a facetious connotation related to Turgenev's habit of burping, and was thus a hint at his proverbial gluttony: Viazemsky said of him once that he was "a glutton rather than a gourmet." The Russian initials of that nickname (in Russian, "Èolova Arfa") served later as Turgenev's literary pseudonym.

Alexander Turgenev's official career was cut short by the Decembrist catastrophe in which his brother and many of his closest friends were implicated. It is true that he had given up his official post, ostensibly for reasons of health, somewhat earlier, and spent most of the year 1825 in travels abroad. His resignation may have been, in part, due to the closing down of the Bible Society and other repressive measures in the last year of Alexander I's reign and the retirement of his chief, Prince Alexander Golitsyn. But had it not been for the Decembrist uprising and its aftermath, he probably would have resumed his work for the Russian government. Although he shared some of his brother's views and was just as ardent and dedicated an abolitionist, never wavering in his opposition to serfdom, his political views were more moderate than those of many a Decembrist. On the other hand, he was, I think, a more consistent and genuine liberal constitutionalist than his brother Nikolai. The latter said more than once that his primary, if not his sole, concern was the abolition of serfdom, that he was much less interested in this or that form of government, that serfdom, or slavery (Russian abolitionists often used that term in speaking of the plight of Russian peasants), was not necessarily a sign of autocracy and was not incompatible with a representative government. This was no doubt an allusion to the state of things in the United States of America: Russian opponents of serfdom very often voiced their solidarity with the British and American abolitionists with whom the brothers Turgenev maintained a close contact. The subject was often touched upon by Alexander Turgenev in his letters.

In the final analysis, Turgenev's liberalism turned out to be much more steadfast than that of some of his once more radical friends—Viazemsky, for example. Unlike Viazemsky, he could never forgive those of their former friends, like Count Bludov, who had had a share in deciding the fate of the Decembrists. Nor could he yield to the urgings of those of his friends who suggested that he should return to the service of the Russian State. He wrote once to Viazemsky: "Thank Dmitriev for his suggestion that I should return to the service of Russia. What can I offer to that service? An encyclopedic stock of knowledge, of impressions, perhaps even of ideas, but all the same, all said and done, *in toto—nihil*. On the other hand, I shall deprive myself of my



right to the only consolation, that of knowing that I serve without being in the service... .”<sup>9</sup>

Like several of his friends, like Viazemsky, Kozlovsky, and Chaadaev, Turgenev sympathized with the Poles during the 1830–31 insurrection and disapproved of Pushkin’s well-known “anti-Polish” poems. But, unlike Viazemsky, he never changed his attitude toward Poland, while at the same time remaining a staunch opponent of all forms of extreme nationalism. He often met Mickiewicz in Paris in the 1840s, attended his famous lectures at the Collège de France, and urged Viazemsky to have them translated into Russian. In one of his letters, written in 1844, we find the following significant passage about Mickiewicz: “I should like to describe Mickiewicz to you as he is now: not at all what he is taken for, not an enemy of the Russians, not a Pole, but an apostolic Christian, with an admixture of Catholicism which is difficult to shed.”<sup>10</sup>

Alexander Turgenev was not an original thinker and has no place of his own in the history of Russian thought. Nor has he a place in the history of Russian imaginative literature, except as a friend, and at times a stimulator, of many writers among his contemporaries. He was nevertheless not only “un homme de toute sorte de savoir,” as Chateaubriand said of him, but he was also *un homme de lettres*, and as such he occupies an important place in the history of Russian letters (as distinct from literature in the stricter sense of the word). And while I do not intend this as a pun, I would say that he owes this place, in the main, to his countless letters. His epistolary legacy is enormous. His long (sometimes up to sixty pages), informative, and witty (though not as witty and caustic as his friend Viazemsky’s) letters to his many Russian friends and to his brothers, especially those written during his travels, give a vivid, thoughtful, and amusing picture of the European political, social, and intellectual scene of those days—the period between 1825 and 1845. If only as a source of information about a number of well-known European personalities—writers, artists, scholars, politicians, ladies of society, and so on—these letters deserve to be better and more widely known.

Only a small part of this epistolary legacy has been published so far. The principal publication is in the volumes known as the *Ostaf'evskii Arkhiv* and the *Arkhiv of the Brothers Turgenev*, which contain the bulk of his correspondence with Viazemsky and some others.<sup>11</sup> To this may be added the

9. *Arkhiv brat'ev Turgenevykh*, 6: 221.

10. *Ostaf'evskii arkhiv kniazai Viazemskikh* (St. Petersburg, 1899), 4: 290.

11. Four volumes of *Ostaf'evskii arkhiv* were published in 1899 under the editorship of V. I. Saitov. Another volume was added later. *Arkhiv brat'ev Turgenevykh* appeared in six installments between 1911 and 1921. Each installment ran to several hundred pages. Alexander Turgenev’s letters to his brother Nikolai were published in 1872 in Leipzig. Unlike the others, this is not a scholarly edition, and there is no commentary. It is surprising that it was never reissued. A great deal of previously unpublished material about

volume of his letters to his brother Nikolai and various publications of his letters to the brothers Bulgakov, to Zhukovsky, and others. But there is still much that remains unpublished.

When one considers that in those days of slow communications much of Turgenev's life had to be spent in mail coaches and *dormeuses* (there is an amusing contemporary cartoon portraying Alexander Turgenev the traveler and the letter-fiend in a carriage drawn by a pigeon), the volume of his correspondence will appear to be truly staggering. It is not for nothing that Viazemsky spoke of him as "a speedwriter." The contents of many of his private letters, irrespective of whether they were addressed to Viazemsky or to some of his relatives, were usually circulated (often at his own request) among his friends and relatives. So often did they present a general interest that Viazemsky and others decided to make journalistic use of them and had them printed in *Moskovskii Telegraf*, *Sovremennik*, and other journals of the time. "You can make an omelette out of my letters for whomever you wish," Turgenev once wrote to Viazemsky. Twenty-one of those epistles of his, some of them quite long, appeared in print under different titles, such as "Letters from Paris," "Letters from Dresden," "Chronicle of a Russian in Paris," and so forth, over a period of nearly twenty years (between 1827 and 1845). Turgenev reported in them on such things as the trial of Fieschi; a visit to the workshop of Daguerre, the pioneer of photography; the reception of the new Immortals in the French Academy; the sermons of outstanding French preachers; his meetings with various writers; and so on. In a way, these letters continued the tradition of Karamzin's *Letters of a Russian Traveler*, though they never attracted the same attention, were not translated into other languages, and were not meant as works of literature. And though not meant as journalism either, they are in fact an early example of Russian *reportages*. Those letters of Turgenev's that were printed during his lifetime in various journals were recently collected and issued under the title *The Chronicle of a Russian*.<sup>12</sup> Added to them were Turgenev's diaries for 1825 and 1826. But the greater

---

Alexander Turgenev is to be found in A. N. Shebunin, *Dekabrist N. I. Turgenev: Pis'ma k bratu S. I. Turgenevu* (Moscow and Leningrad, 1936).

12. *Khronika russkogo* (cited in note 7). This fine edition, published by the Soviet Academy of Sciences in its Literary Monuments series, reproduces twenty-one pieces of Turgenev's, his "letters from abroad," published during his lifetime in various periodicals, to which are added his diaries for the years 1825 and 1826, never previously published in full. The title, *The Chronicle of a Russian*, was suggested by Pushkin, who had a very high opinion of the literary and journalistic worth of Turgenev's epistolary contributions to his *Sovremennik*. In the new edition the texts, which were often censored, have been checked with the originals and, where necessary, emended in footnotes. An appendix contains an interesting article by the editor on Alexander Turgenev and his literary legacy (pp. 441-504), as well as a detailed and very informative commentary (pp. 506-72) that makes use of rich, still unpublished material. There is also a concise chronology of Turgenev's "wanderings." A welcome feature of this volume, not always found in similar scholarly Soviet publications, is an index of names.

part of the diaries still remains unpublished, and there are also many still unpublished private letters.

As regards Turgenev's relations with his numerous friends and acquaintances among writers, artists, scholars, and politicians of almost every European nation, most of what we know on this subject is based on his own letters, reports, and diaries, while in various European archives, in the unpublished letters of those foreign friends of his or his letters to them, there may still lie buried some valuable and interesting material. It is particularly likely that letters to some of the lesser figures in the world of arts and letters are still undiscovered.

The range of Turgenev's acquaintanceship among European men of letters, scholars, and public figures was enormous. He visited Goethe in Weimar and later talked about him with Chancellor Müller. He met Jean Paul, Schlegel, and Tieck. He also met Heine in Paris. He knew Thomas Moore and paid a visit to Robert Southey in Keswick. He stayed at Abbotsford as Sir Walter Scott's guest and discussed both literature and recent history with him. In Italy, Stendhal acted as his cicerone in Rome and its environs. The list of French celebrities he knew is a very long one. It includes such writers as Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Benjamin Constant, Mérimée, Alfred de Musset, Victor Hugo, Sainte-Beuve, Charles Nodier, Eugène Sue. Several of them he met in the salon of Mme Récamier, the famous Abbaye-aux-Bois, of which he was an habitué for many years. Writing about her and mentioning that he had read Benjamin Constant's letters to her in her own study and while looking at her, he said: "Friendship with her introduces to each other and makes into friends people of different stamp and different caliber." (He himself introduced some of his Russian literary friends to her.) His interest in religious and ecclesiastical problems and controversies of the day made him attend the sermons and lectures of such men as Lamennais and Lacordaire, Ravignan and Montalembert (he also knew at least three of them personally), and in his letters and diaries those particular interests of his are reflected very prominently. He shared some of Peter Chaadaev's ideas, without however sharing his Roman Catholic propensities, and although what Soviet scholars say today about his hostility to the official Russian Church is a gross exaggeration (and he remained a practicing Russian Orthodox), there is no doubt that he felt very much attracted toward Protestantism. Had he been living in our days one could easily imagine him not only taking an interest in the Christian ecumenical movement, but actively participating in it.<sup>13</sup>

13. Turgenev was in close contact with the French Protestant journal *Le Semeur* and its editor, Henri Lutteroth (1802-?). This journal devoted a great deal of space and attention to Russian religious and ecclesiastical problems (Lutteroth himself was the author of a book about the Jesuits in Russia), and it is likely that much of its information on this subject was supplied by Turgenev. After Turgenev's death *Le Semeur* published an

His historical interests made him anxious to meet the leading historians of the day, and the names of such men as Villemain, Michelet, Mignet, Augustin Thierry, Niebuhr, Savigny, Barante, and others, are scattered throughout his letters. All of them he knew personally. But he also knew such makers of history as Canning, Lord Rosebery, Talleyrand, several of Napoleon's brothers and their wives, as well as men who were both historians and makers of history, such as Thiers, Guizot, and Lamartine. Among the philosophers he was on friendly terms with Schelling and also knew Baron d'Eckstein, Ballanche, Victor Cousin, and Degérando. Although he was much less at home in natural and physical sciences, he tried to keep abreast of the developments in this area too, and counted among his personal friends Cuvier, Arago, Alexander von Humboldt, Augustin de Candolle, and others. He knew the famous Italian polyglot, Cardinal Mezzofanti. To the long list of European celebrities whom he knew personally we may add such composers as Rossini, Chopin, Liszt, and Berlioz, as well as several famous sopranos; and such artists as Horace Vernet, Ingres, Isabey, David, Thorvaldsen; and the famous French actor Talma. In one of his letters Turgenev mentions a concert to be conducted in Paris by Berlioz, who was then only twenty-four years old, at which, the newspapers said, Alexandrine Verteil from St. Petersburg was to sing a song by the "Muscovite" composer Glinka. According to the papers, said Turgenev, "This will undoubtedly be the first occasion on which Russian poetry and Russian music will be heard in a Parisian concert."<sup>14</sup>

Alexander Turgenev also made an important contribution to Russian historiography. Busy as he was writing letters, attending lectures, sermons, operatic and theatrical performances, concerts, and evening parties, visiting prisons and simply seeing people—and this while crisscrossing Europe from one end to another—he still found time to ransack various libraries and archives, including, for instance, the Vatican secret depositories, in search of historical documents bearing on Russia's relations with Poland and the West. He copied some of those documents himself and had others transcribed for him by hired copyists. The result was the publication by the Russian Archeographic Commission of two volumes of such historical documents.<sup>15</sup> More was

---

obituary of him (1846, no. 2, pp. 13–15). At the end of it we read: ". . . bien peu d'hommes éminents ont vécu en même temps que lui dans une région quelconque de l'Europe sans lui appartenir par les liens d'une estime solide, et souvent encore par ceux d'une fidèle affection. M. de Tourguéneff laisse dans le cœur de ses proches des regrets dont aucun effort ne sera tenté pour écarter la salutaire amertume. Il laisse dans son pays une place vide, grande et bien difficile à remplir. . . ." This unsigned obituary was probably written by Lutteroth. That Turgenev also counted among his friends the publisher of the ultra-Catholic *Le Correspondant*, M. Wilks, is a testimony to his broadmindedness.

14. Quoted in *Khronika russkogo*, pp. 267–77.

15. The two volumes of documents collected by Turgenev were published in 1841–42 under the title *Akty istoricheskie, otnosiashchiesia do Rossii, izvlechennnye iz inostrannykh arkhivov i bibliotek A. I. Turgenevym*. This Russian title was followed by one in Latin:

published later. It has been suggested that this activity of Turgenev's implied that he was continuing de facto to be a civil servant and may even have been a secret agent of the Russian government abroad. Such a suggestion or suspicion is, I think, quite gratuitous. This was a work of love on Turgenev's part, done apparently at his own expense (he was a man of independent means), at great cost in time and energy, in a spirit of selfless devotion. There is absolutely nothing sinister in the fact that materials collected and copied by Turgenev were transmitted for publication through the Ministry of Education: the Archeographic Commission, which was to publish those materials, was subordinate to the ministry. This does not mean that Turgenev had become its employee or agent.<sup>16</sup>

In Turgenev's diary for 1836—he was at the time living in Paris—there is the following interesting entry with which he began a new volume of the diary:

Once again a new volume! Shall I manage to finish it here, and if so when? The one before this I began in Turgenevo twenty-one months ago. Will this one also be my trans-Volga companion? I hope to breathe again the native air. . . . Fate tosses me from country to country, without any benefit either for me or for the others. My mind and my heart wish to stay put, to calm down; but something carries me irresistibly from Kholmogory to Naples, from the banks of the Seine and the Danube to those of the river Moscow, from the Thames to the Volga. I can hardly account to myself for the stimuli for my wanderings: it used to be my brother and my business cares; now it is again my brother, but more for my own sake than for his, and the arranging of the affairs of my estate. But in addition, in my last pilgrimage there was also this matter of Russian history. I am returning to Russia with rich acquisitions, with old Russian treasures

---

*Historica Russiae monumenta*, etc. A later publication, based on documents gathered by Turgenev, appeared abroad in 1858 under the title *La Cour de Russie il y a cent ans: 1725-1783*.

16. The suggestion about Turgenev being unofficially in the service of the Russian government even after 1825 was made by George Kennan in his 1968 Oxford lectures (so far unpublished) on Marquis de Custine, the author of the notorious book about Russia under Nicholas I. Mr. Kennan later kindly allowed me to read the manuscript version of the lectures which he had prepared for the press. This is not the place to discuss in detail Turgenev's attitude toward Custine. It was certainly not one of unreserved hostility. In a letter to Viazemsky from Marienbad, dated August 12, 1843, Turgenev asked about his friend's reaction to the book, which he said was being read by all of Europe, and wrote: "Give me your opinion, please, not about the facts *qu'il faut mépriser comme tels*, but about the principles, about the frankly conveyed impressions" (*Ostaf'evskii arkhiv*, 3:256). Not long before that, Turgenev was summoned from Moscow to St. Petersburg by Count Benckendorff, the head of the Third Department of His Majesty's Own Chancery. He was expected "to present some explanations." He mentioned this summons in a letter to Viazemsky, but seems never to have given an account of his interview with Benckendorff or some subordinate of his, unless it is still to be found in his unpublished diaries. In his "Notebook" Viazemsky also mentioned a much earlier case of police watch on Turgenev, and even quoted an amusing police report on his movements (*PSS*, 8:280).

which concern her life in ancient and not so ancient times. Here and in Italy I have gathered materials about Russia's history, I can enrich with them our literature, I can fill in the gaps in our recent history. I labored not for myself, not out of sheer whim, not just to satisfy my own curiosity. I spent here the whole of the summer and part of the winter in archives; I negotiated with librarians in the Vatican, in London, and in Florence. There are now some tangible fruits of my labors; I can point them out, I can become the editor of important state papers; I can throw the light of history on diplomatic secrets, expose the intrigues of ministers, of statesmen and courtiers; prove the treachery and the greed of the nobles and even of the fair sex. In the turmoil of the Parisian winter and amid the zephyrs of the Roman spring I lived for Russia. The diplomats here did not help me. My countrymen often shunned me. And it is on the cards that all of them have hindered my work by their gossip. But I found in my labor its own reward. In foreign archives I discovered Russian antiquity; in foreign reports, Russia's good and profit. I discriminated between truth and slander. I often felt ashamed of the Russians, but, comparing my countrymen with foreigners, Talleyrand with Osterman, one epoch in the life of nations with another, I saw in the laws which govern the rise, the decline, and the disintegration of nations, and with them of individuals, nothing but repetition, one and the same thing.<sup>17</sup>

This is what Turgenev meant when he told Viazemsky that he could serve Russia without being in the service. Had he been able to devote more time to his historical studies, for which he certainly had a taste, his contribution to Russian historiography would have been even greater. As it is, we must give him credit in a double capacity: as a tireless collector of historical records and as an intelligent, knowledgeable, and perceptive observer and witness—eavesdropper (to use his own word)—of European history in the making and of so many of its makers.

As regards Russian literature, he performed equally tirelessly the functions of an informant and an intermediary. Several of his Russian literary friends were introduced by him to Mme Récamier, in whose salon they were to meet their prominent French confreres. Turgenev never missed an opportunity to tell his foreign literary friends what was going on in Russian literature. He spoke to Southey of Zhukovsky and his translations. He informed Walter Scott of the reception of his work in Russia. He got Lamartine interested in Pushkin. He acted as an intermediary between Chaadaev and Schelling (it was through him that Chaadaev, in 1832, sent his first letter to Schelling). He also brought together Chaadaev and Baron d'Eckstein. He urged Viazemsky to contribute articles on Russian literature to the Genevan *Bibliothèque Universelle*. At the same time, his letters to Viazemsky and other Russian friends,

17. Quoted in *Khronika russkogo*, pp. 478–79, from an unpublished diary.

which were read aloud, circulated, and then often printed, contained a wealth of information about what was going on in literature in France, England, Germany, and Italy.

He reported on the lectures he attended, on the sermons he heard, on the meetings of the French Academy and of the French Parliament. His own reading was vast and varied; though, unless he was an exceptionally fast reader, it must have been cursory and inevitably superficial.<sup>18</sup> In every new place that he visited the first things he looked for were the *cabinet de lecture* and the lending library (and then the local jail). He immediately proceeded to fill his voluminous letters to his Russian friends with the fruits of his reading. He often summarized newly published literary works and gave a brief appraisal. Many of those books he would thereupon buy and dispatch to his friends, often through various travelers. When Viazemsky became deputy director of the Russian Department of Foreign Trade, Turgenev filled page after page of his letters to him with information about the most worthwhile recent publications—French, German, English, and Italian—in the field of economics. Here, too, he was not content to give just the titles of those publications, but also summarized, characterized, and appraised them (he was himself very interested in economic problems). Some of Turgenev's letters to Viazemsky read like a *bibliographie raisonnée* of contemporary European literature on political economy.<sup>19</sup>

It also often occurred to Turgenev to act as an intermediary between European men of letters of different nationalities, bringing people together, introducing them to each other. Thus he gave a young Swiss lady and student of astronomy a letter of introduction to Schelling, and she afterward wrote him an enthusiastic letter about the warm reception Schelling and his wife had accorded her. He discussed Schelling and his philosophy with Lamennais in Venice. He may have been the first to bring Schelling to the attention of Victor Cousin; later the two met and became engaged in a lively correspondence. Such examples could easily be multiplied.

“Vous êtes essentiellement homme de l'Europe,” Chaadaev wrote to

18. In his memoir of Turgenev, Viazemsky illustrated the superficiality of his reading with the following story: On the way to Abbotsford, whither he had been invited by Sir Walter Scott, Turgenev suddenly remembered that he had not read a single line of Scott's. In the very next town he hastened to buy the first Scott novel that caught his eye and rapidly perused it in order to be able to refer to it or quote it in conversation with his host. Although Viazemsky said that he had heard this story from Turgenev himself, it is difficult to believe that the latter had not read any Scott before 1828. In any case, a “speedwriter,” Turgenev must also have been an exceptionally fast reader. And what he read he seemed to assimilate well. On Turgenev's visit to Scott see my article, “A Russian Traveller in Scotland in 1828: Alexander Turgenev,” *Blackwood's Magazine*, November 1945, pp. 1–8.

19. Gillelson, in *Khronika russkogo*, mentions that it was Turgenev who initiated a bibliography of foreign publications in the magazine *Moskovskii Telegraf* (see p. 462).

Alexander Turgenev in 1832. Turgenev was, indeed, and remained all his life, a *zapadnik*, a convinced Westernizer. At the same time he was, in some ways, a profoundly Russian man, certainly much more so than Chaadaev, and in this respect very much like two other Westernizing friends of his, Prince Viazemsky and Prince Peter Kozlovsky, the latter of whom was once described by Mme de Staël as “un Russe engraisé par la civilisation.” All three could, with justice, be characterized as “Russian Europeans.”<sup>20</sup> Turgenev was equally at home in Moscow, on his Simbirsk estate of Turgenevo, on Lord Lansdowne’s estate at Bowood, in the Parisian salons of Mme Récamier and Mme Ancelet, discussing classical antiquity with Stendhal in Tivoli, or philosophy with Schelling in Munich or Venice. Incidentally, Viazemsky thought that Turgenev had much in common with Stendhal, while Schelling wrote Turgenev about their own common insights and experiences. Turgenev was, however, fully aware of the distance that separated him from Schelling, whom he once described as “the greatest mind in Germany.”

When on one occasion in Mme Récamier’s salon Turgenev admired the knowledge of Russia displayed by Barante (who had been French ambassador in St. Petersburg), his hostess remarked: “But you, too, Monsieur Turgenev, you know France better than we do.” No one among his contemporaries was better suited and equipped to act as ambassador-at-large of Russian culture in the Western world and to serve as a link between Western culture and Russia. It is permissible to think that when, a quarter of a century later, his famous namesake and distant relative, the novelist Ivan Turgenev, came to play an important part in French literary life, to many a French writer the name must have had a familiar ring. This was certainly true of Prosper Mérimée: a friend of Alexander Turgenev, he also made friends with the more famous Ivan.

20. Viazemsky, who, as I have said, tended to play down Turgenev’s liberalism, described his stance in the controversy between the Westernizers and the Slavophiles as more or less “neutral” (*PSS*, 8: 280–84). It is, of course, true that Turgenev had many close friends in both camps and was, in a way, “accepted” by both factions, but so was Viazemsky himself in later years. In a letter to Viazemsky from Moscow, dated March 29, 1840, Turgenev wrote: “Willy-nilly, I belong to Russia, to her history, to her inner life, to her gossip [Turgenev used here one of his frequent Gallicisms: *kommerazhi*, that is, *commérages*—G.S.], to her vices and calamities, to her glory and valor. I am as Russian as they make them, but. . . .” This last sentence remained unfinished, Turgenev adding, “I cannot go on with the letter” (see *Ostaf’evskii arkhiv*, 4: 105). This is how Turgenev himself gave expression to his essential Russianness. This does not, however, invalidate Chaadaev’s verdict: “Vous êtes essentiellement homme de l’Europe.”