

## Life and People of Times Past

Dedicated to Anna Valerianovna Nazarieva  
(Translated by Nina Bogdan)

In summoning a number of especially distinguished characters from the mists of times past, I did not want to take up the reader's time with my own persona, as my own past could not be of any interest to the public, but this turned out to be impossible to avoid, and I therefore, like it or not, was forced to surrender to necessity.

It was a different matter when it came to people who were above and beyond the norm or who were especially typical and characteristic of their time—here every tiny detail may have meaning or value, the more so when one knows such people or even meets them casually. All of this certainly obligates one to share one's recollections with society.

### I.

A.M. Butlerov<sup>1</sup>

I had just turned nine years of age when my Aunt Varvara Alekseyevna Nefedieva, in accordance with my father's wishes, took me to A.S. Topornin's Kazan Boarding School for Noble Youths.

My dear auntie was one of those elderly spinsters who was wonderfully well-educated according to the standards of those times, and who existed on God's green earth for the sole

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander Mikhaylovich Butlerov—a professor at a Sib[erian] University and a scholar; born in Chistopol, Kazan *Guberniya* [Province] on 25 August 1828; passed away on 5 August 1886 at his estate in the village of Butlerovka, Spassky *Uyezd* [District] in that same *Guberniya*. After completing a course of study at Kazan University in 1849, he defended a dissertation for his Master's Degree in Chemistry in 1851; in 1854, he was recognized as a Doctor of Chemistry and Physics by Moscow University. Butlerov's scholarly work, "Introduction to the Complete Study of Organic Chemistry" is considered a classic. Many of his articles are published in various Russian and foreign special publications. In addition to chemistry, Butlerov had a great interest in beekeeping. His essay "The bee, its life, and basics of proper beekeeping," had a printing of more than 30,000 copies and his brochure, "How to raise bees," 20,000 copies. A few months prior to his death, the first Russian beekeeping agency, which he founded, began publication of "The Russian Beekeeping Sheet." Butlerov was also known as a sincere and passionate follower of the study of phenomena involving spiritualism and mediums. He included many articles about this subject in the journal, which, after his death, were published in a separate book.

purpose of being ever ready, at any time of year, notwithstanding winter blizzards or spring storms, to bustle about and gallop off on behalf of her many relations at first summons; to remain, without sleep, at an ill or dying relative's bedside throughout the night; to create a trousseau for one of her numerous nieces; to take her blind sister to a leading Kazan eye specialist; to prepare her nephew, perennially running wild, for the gymnasium, after long years of drilling him in Russian and French grammar and hammering home such facts as, for example, that an island is land surrounded by water; to rush to Samara, Penza and even Moscow on business for her brother, who, all of sudden, would decide to mortgage his estate with the Board of Trustees. Nothing for herself, everything for her dear ones—that is, her relations—this was the only goal of my auntie's rather lengthy life. People would gravitate to her every year during the holidays; she served as the only completely reliable and strong link for a whole multitude of relatives; she drew people together and would bring to an end, time and again, discord and arguments that would arise; she was highly valued and she well deserved to be.

My father, at this time an elderly widower, decided that it was necessary to send me to get some instruction (as people expressed themselves in those days). The earlier, the better, and my spinster auntie was already in her indestructible home-constructed traveling carriage sitting next to her spinster maid Grusha, devoted to her in life and in death, and, ringing the little postal bell, whisking me away from the rural quiet.

In the 1840s, Kazan was the only center of enlightenment and civilization in the entire expansive Volga area; landowners and important officials sent their children there and hundreds of servant boys were brought to Kazan to learn all kinds of trades. Kazan professors, doctors and educational institutions enjoyed a high-browed influence and Kazan cartwrights, blacksmiths, and cabinetmakers were equally well thought of; no one knew or wanted to know anything

greater than Kazan or better than Kazan, nor would anyone have dreamt in that patriarchal time that someday a resident of Simbirsk or Samara would, while standing on the deck of a ship passing by, glance indifferently at the former capital of the entire Volga region in the distance, only to leave it behind in an effort to get to Moscow, St. Petersburg, or the abroad as quickly as possible.

I barely had time to collect myself before I was already in Kazan, on Fedorovskaya St., in a gloomy barracks-like building, with a huge sign that said: "Alexander Semeonovich Topornin Boarding School for Noble Youths."

I still see a row of identical rooms with classroom furniture, huge blackboards, and a half-length portrait of the forbidding trustee of the Kazan school district, Musin-Pushkin, vividly resembling an eagle in academic uniform; dormitory rooms with small beds crowded close together; a long dinner table with the inevitable schoolboy on his knees, as punishment, near the stove. I remember the inspectors, polar opposites: the soft and round German, like a bread roll, and the bony, hawk-nosed, and nimble Grand Army<sup>2</sup> drummer, Roland, nicknamed "Furious"; and my boarding school comrades, viewed as wolf cubs, wrested by force out of their dens on the banks of the Volga, Kama, Sura and even the Don Rivers. I remember the rare visits, which caused indescribable horror, of the district trustee, who was positively unable to speak like a normal person, but could only boom with such crashing thunder that all the boarding school residents, from its director, Topornin, to the yard-keeper, instantaneously lost their capability of speech and trembled like leaves.

Nevertheless, I must say in all fairness that against the gloomy background of this scene, several pleasant people stood out brightly—Topornin, for some unknown reason saddling

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<sup>2</sup> The army of Napoleon I.

himself with the difficult duty of boarding school director, and a number of teachers who treated the students well.

One holiday, when we had returned from the church service two by two, with "Furious" Roland in charge, a respected handsome gentleman, the Kazan landowner Butlerov, entered the reception area accompanied by a boy who looked very much like him and who was dressed in a gray collarless jacket and a big turndown shirt collar. The boy, clearly sensing trouble, was pressed close to his father and was timidly examining his future schoolmates. After the usual discussions, the respectable gentleman departed and the nice-looking boy remained behind at the boarding school, moving in to my room.

The newcomer was forced to first suffer the difficult period of probation—that is, the inescapable quibbling, ridicule and bickering on the part of the unruly sons of the Volga, Kama, and the Don. Butlerov endured all this with rare patience, never complaining, and his large gray eyes continued to gaze trustingly at the tormentors. As all of this torment continued, the new schoolmate's good nature, his tidiness and decency, were intolerable for his tormentors. Butlerov's most rabid antagonists were two brothers, Don Cossacks, who wore, with a certain affected pride, multicolored *arkhaluks*<sup>3</sup> and extremely wide pantaloons. One day, the boisterous boys from the Don, upon setting up an ambush on the black staircase, attacked Butlerov, having decided to rip or ruin his new suit, but, happily, his faithful tutor arrived and the boys from the Don got the punishment they deserved. I remember well that, even after this incident, Butlerov did not change his attitude towards his schoolmates, remaining just as good-natured as he was on the first day of his arrival at the boarding school.

Soon, an early desire for activity made itself known in Butlerov's nature. He wasn't satisfied with the basic preparations for lessons, he couldn't bear idleness, and in his free time or

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<sup>3</sup> Tunics with a high standup collar.

on holidays, when the other students stood all day at the windows watching the street scene, or listened to stories about Volga and Kama bandits (which were in great demand), he would always find some kind of activity, and was fascinated by the most varied subjects.

Butlerov's first enthusiasm was a passion for painting—no one was more diligent about copying noses and eyes. Then he moved on to oil paints and, completely unexpectedly for his schoolmates, painted an image of one of the apostles, covered it with lacquer and hung it over his bed. On my part, I was decidedly bemused by Butlerov's creation and took every convenient opportunity to go to the bedroom and look at the picture. He went even further: Butlerov acquired an icon lamp (*lampada*) which burned in front of the image every night. When he first put it up, I would awaken time and again to admire my roommate's creation.

After a while, Butlerov acquired a new passion—he zealously worked with some kinds of vials, jars, and bowls, secretly pouring something from one vial to another; restless Roland interfered with him in every way, frequently taking away the vials and glass containers, putting the unwanted chemist in the corner, or leaving him without dinner, but the latter didn't back down as he had the support of the physics teacher. Finally, a tiny, always locked cabinet, filled with some kind of substances and various types of glassware, appeared in the corner next to Butlerov's bed.

On one fine spring evening, when the students were noisily and joyfully playing a ball game in the sprawling yard and Furious Roland was dozing in a sun-warmed spot, there was a deafening explosion in the kitchen... Everyone was shouting, and Roland, leaping like a tiger, found himself in the basement level where the kitchen was located. Then the tiger again appeared before us, mercilessly dragging out Butlerov, hair and eyebrows scorched, and, following him

was an older tutor, hanging his head, drawn in as an accomplice and stealthily supplying materials necessary to carry out experiments.

To the credit of Topornin's boarding school, it should be noted that whippings were never used at this institution but since Butlerov's crime was extreme, our teachers, in a general council, thought of a new unheard-of punishment. The criminal was taken from his dark punishment cell two or three times into the common dining hall, with a black board hanging on his chest on which "great chemist" was written in large white letters.

A terrible fire, which destroyed half the city, put an end to Topornin's pedagogical work. The boarding school was closed, the students were sent home, and I lost track of Butlerov for a long period of time. We met again, if I am not mistaken, in the fall of 1847. I had just donned a dark blue collar,<sup>4</sup> and, beside myself with joy, was walking along the university corridor when I suddenly bumped into a thickset student with a terribly sunburned face—this was Butlerov, who had just returned from the shores of the Caspian Sea, where he had traveled for some kind of scholarly research with one of the Kazan University professors. There before me was the kind, always even-tempered and pleased-with-himself-and-the-entire-world Butlerov.

A long period of time passed... at the end of the 1860s, on Nevsky [*Prospekt*]<sup>5</sup>, someone's strong hands grabbed me from behind and I turned around and saw those same familiar, bright, kind, gray eyes from childhood... This was Butlerov, the same Butlerov that I knew in Topornin's boarding school and Kazan University. Taking shelter in the nearest restaurant, we happily reminisced about the past: Kazan, Topornin's boarding school, Roland, the explosion that caused so much noise, and we again parted but this time never to meet again in this life.

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<sup>4</sup> This means Nazariiev had just enrolled in the university and was wearing the standard blue collar of a student.

<sup>5</sup> St. Petersburg's main avenue.

Consequently, my fleeting associations with Butlerov were limited to our childhood and adolescence but, despite that, they strengthened my conviction that later and even throughout the course of the rest of my life, I never met a man who was so little affected by the passage of time; Butlerov the professor vividly reminded me of that selfsame Kazan University student that Butlerov had been—serenely kindhearted, a self-taught artist and chemist, my comrade from Topornin's boarding school.

## II.

### A.I. Artemiev<sup>6</sup>

The most pleasant time of year for the boarding school pupils was the arrival of summer and vacation. No one even thought about studies... Each boy would obtain a piece of chalk and would write "Hurrah! Hurrah! Vacation's here!" in huge letters wherever he had a notion to do so. Even Roland—even he, it seemed, would relax and would, for a time, lose his fury.

Dying from impatience, I was waiting for my father's servant who usually came for me on the postal transport in an old traveling carriage that had seen its day... Finally the carriage with its raised shaft was in the yard and for me there was no greater pleasure than to get underneath the leather flap, even for a minute, and sit on the soft pillows. The day of departure was already set but then Topornin, to my great chagrin, explained to me that, in accordance with

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<sup>6</sup> Alexander Ivanovich Artemiev was born in 1820 in Khvalynsk, where his father was a well-respected alcoholic beverage inspector. A.I. first attended a local *Uyezd* school, then a Saratov gymnasium, and finally, Kazan University, from which he graduated in 1841. Four years later, he defended a dissertation for a Master's Degree "On the influence of the Vikings on the Slavs." He was first an assistant editor and then, from 1844, the editor of the *Kazan Guberniya News*, for which he wrote many varied articles on history, geography, statistics and archaeology. In 1850, he was elected as a member of the Archaeological and Geographic Society and in 1851 he was transferred to work in St. Petersburg, in the statistical committee of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, where he held the post of senior editor. He died in 1874. Of Artemiev's many scholarly works, the following deserve special mention: "On the composition and movement of populations in the Nizhegorodsk and Yaroslavl *Guberniyas*," "The Medal Commission during the time of Catherine II," "Historical manuscripts of Kazan University," "The Kazan gymnasium of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century," "On people's correspondence," and "A survey of the works of Imperial Russia's Geographical Society on historical geography." In addition, Artemiev was the editor of the publications, "Urban Communities of the Russian Empire," and "List of Populated Areas."

my father's wishes, another student would be going along with me in order that I have instruction during the vacation period.

The mail *troika* was brought in; I sat in the traveling carriage, dressed for travel and burning with impatience as a driver arrived with the odious (to me) student and his tiny suitcase. This was Alexander Ivanovich Artemiev.

We set out on the journey, safely crossed the Volga, and sped along the wide postal road at such a speed that people today couldn't even conceive of it.

My fellow traveler's intelligent open face and his kind thoughtful expression all spoke in his favor; I took heart and, getting acquainted with him, once and for all set my mind at rest about the future.

This was in the early 1840s, and the time when serfdom was in full swing; when the joy and sorrow of a noble family, one way or another, falsely or sincerely, was shared by their servants and peasants. To a certain degree, a lack of personal interests consequently filled the bleak life of a serf with the interests of the noble family and this could explain the existence of the "ideal servant," devoted to the point of complete self-disregard.

As soon as the traveling carriage stopped at the porch of our old house, which very much resembled a huge chest covered with planks, all the servants and a large number of the village elders filled the entryway. I spent an entire hour hugging one person after another—they kissed me, examined me intently, each one remarked on whether I had grown or gained weight or not, and everyone, interrupting one another, rushed to congratulate my father with my arrival. Then, at the end of the celebrations, an old-fashioned tightly closed carriage raced up, with a *troika* harness of horses that had at one time been gray but were now white with age, and driven by a heavyset driver, who was also once young but was now an elder, with a full white beard, visible



from afar. Two seated footmen, indescribably respectful, rushed to help out my three aunts, all elderly spinsters (with one of whom I have already acquainted the reader), rushing to this joyful meeting from their own estate, which was located seven *versts*<sup>7</sup> from ours.

Forgotten amidst the general fuss, the student pressed himself into a corner and quietly observed the scene taking place. Finally, someone remembered his presence, he was located, and, as a guest, was greeted with boundless and expansive enthusiasm. My father, aunts, the housemaid, the servant Porfiriy (a modest, intelligent, extremely intellectually curious person who was in charge of my father's library and office), who was assigned to the guest, all of them burned with the desire to somehow please the new arrival. Initially, conversation in the house basically concerned such topics as how Alexander Ivanovich slept, whether he would drink tea or coffee, at what time he would have breakfast, would he go swimming, and so on.

Then the neighbors came forward; they swooped up Alexander Ivanovich, time and again sent their horses for him, stuffed him with food, and insistently demanded that he take a real part in all the celebrations and family holidays.

Alexander Ivanovich, extremely conscientious as he was, spoke in vain about his duties as a teacher—no one, from my father on down, wanted to even hear about such trivialities; the only thought on everyone's mind was to how better to entertain their dear guest. To make matters worse, at one of the birthday dinners, Alexander Ivanovich, after drinking one too many glasses of champagne, recited Pushkin's "Poltava"<sup>8</sup> with such grandiloquence that the sensitive lords and ladies gasped in ecstasy, gushed tender words, and, throughout the entire summer, decisively seized the charming guest from the rather careless landowners, who were dragging him to hunts and other such revelry.

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<sup>7</sup> A *verst* equaled approximately .6 of a mile or 3,500 feet.

<sup>8</sup> A poem about the Battle of Poltava, (June 27, 1709), when Peter the Great's troops defeated Swedish forces.

Willingly or not, the guest unquestioningly surrendered himself to the stupefying drift of free-wheeling country life of that time, sincerely believing that he was in a group of simple and very kind people, and did not distract himself with analysis, or maybe he didn't suspect that the kind-heartedness and welcome of those who surrounded him arose principally from boredom and the need to fill a huge amount of idle time.

On rare days, free from parties and visits to neighbors, Alexander Ivanovich sought solitude and would retire, with a book in his hands, to a shady garden area adjacent to the house.

"What are you reading?" I asked curiously as I was walking by.

"I'm re-reading Pushkin..."

This was the first time in my life that I heard this name.

"Perhaps you'd like to listen—then sit down beside me," Alexander Ivanovich offered.

I really wanted to go to the orchard, a dark green cloud visible across the street that separated it from the house. I must have known that at exactly that time the gardener, Agap Ivanovich, of advance aged, as bad-tempered as a man could be, guarding every berry, and a menace to the servant and peasant boys, had snuck over to his gatehouse and was sleeping the sleep of the righteous. But curiosity won out and I sat down next to my tutor.

He began to read *The Captain's Daughter*<sup>9</sup>... I forgot the raspberries and cherries and sat next to Artemiev until late evening, begging him to continue. From that day on—a day that was so memorable to me—I would impatiently wait for that blessed minute when, after lunch, there would be a quiet period in the house and my tutor would retire to his favorite corner under the shade of a dense lilac bush with Pushkin in his hands. I was always right behind him and for a long time was influenced only by him—it was simply not possible to be indifferent to him.

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<sup>9</sup> A novel by Alexander Pushkin.

The summer turned out to be wonderful; there were warm, clear nights with a full moon in a starlit sky. I well remember one such night. It was as bright as day; I was lying in bed, awake, listening alertly to the faint rustle of paper and the scrape of a pen coming from the neighboring room. I knew that my neighbor wrote in his diary every night... And, all the while, the full moon rose higher and higher in the dark blue sky. It was impossible to sleep on such a night... I had the urge to get up and peek in on my neighbor. Throwing on some clothes and not able to resist, I timidly pushed open the door. My neighbor's small room was filled with the blinding light of the moon; the sleeping village, the silver stripe that was the river, and the white bell tower on the hill were framed in the open window...

I stood unmoving at the threshold, brimming over with apologies, but Artemiev tossed down his pen and, extending his hand, proposed that we go for a walk in the orchard. We went out and wandered till dawn in the lush, positively enchanted garden. Usually shy, Alexander Ivanovich spoke on and on, recited poetry and tightly gripped my hand. Perplexed, not understanding my tutor's exalted mood, I nevertheless greedily listened to his voice, caught the expression in his large black eyes, turned up to the sky, and it seemed as though I felt the closeness of a pure wonderful soul.

At that time, it never entered my head that my tutor was the first, and possibly the last and only romantic of his kind, whom I would meet in my life.

Our secret night strolls were repeated on a number of occasions and, from that time on, I developed a definitive and long-time bond with him.

The summer flew by quickly and the day of departure arrived... The priest came and, in the usual presence of my aunts, the crowds of servants, and peasants, the farewell service began.

Under a driving rain of tears, accompanied by the lamentations of the old women of the village, and by good wishes and advice, I got into the traveling carriage next to my dear tutor and we disappeared in a cloud of dust.

Once we were en route, Alexander Ivanovich gave free reign to his recollections of the past summer. Needless to say, my relations and neighbors were sentimentalized to the extreme. Quiet by nature, and inherently romantic, Artemiev was more capable of abstract ideas and contemplation than in resolving practical, purely true life problems. There was such a strong need in him to respect and love that he was capable of inventing good people, often ascribing qualities to them they did not have.

Upon returning to the usual colorless and austere circumstances of school life of that time with "Furious Roland"; the pupils who had run wild during the summer; and the dispiriting expectation of the sudden visits and pogroms on the part of the district trustee, Musin-Pushkin, my affection for the romantic developed into a real fervor, and I came alive only on those days when he visited Topornin's boarding school. At the same time, our closeness caused an unprecedented, yet badly directed, love for reading to lodge within me. I read everything I could get my hands on, whether it was Vyzhigin,<sup>10</sup> *Macrobiotics*, or *Dumont d'Urville's Travels Around the World* and paid for this dearly on more than one occasion both at the boarding school as well as at the university, when I would take with me the most recent *Otechestvenniye Zapisky*<sup>11</sup> issue to an incredibly dull lecture on Roman or natural law, which would literally put students to sleep, and immerse myself in reading until the professor would castigate me in front of everyone in the auditorium.

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<sup>10</sup> Probably the novel *Ivan Vyzhigin* by Faddey Bulgarin.

<sup>11</sup> *Notes on the Homeland*, a journal that published essays and stories.

Upon completing a university course in the Eastern Department with a Candidate Degree, Alexander Ivanovich proceeded to take the Master's exam and, like it or not, had to pass a mandatory scholarly determination to receive that ranking.

Finally, the by then long-awaited determination day arrived, anticipated with apprehension both by Artemiev as well as myself and which was held, for some reason, not in the lecture hall as this was usually done but in the sixth auditorium, where I was practically the first member of the audience to arrive, as I was now a first-year student in the Department of Law.

By 12 o'clock, the auditorium was overflowing with the curious, and the platform was surrounded by rows of chairs, where high-ranking individuals and opponents were seated, among whom I immediately noticed the long grim figure of the history professor, Ivanov, at that time acting the role of a Kazan University celebrity on the basis that every university, in one form or another, had to have its very own celebrity. In actuality, Professor Ivanov stood out only for his righteousness, extreme peevishness, and a passion to do someone a bad turn or destroy them. But everyone shuddered and took on respectful positions awaiting the formidable trustee, Musin-Pushkin, whose voice, reminiscent of a far-off roll of thunder, could be heard in the corridor. And there he was, as always majestic and more resembling a commander surveying his troops rather than a guardian of a temple of knowledge. Looking to the right and left with flashing eyes, he lowered himself heavily into a chair, armed himself with a lorgnette, and prepared to listen while Artemiev, pale as a sheet, timidly and indecisively climbed up on the platform as if he were ascending a scaffold.

Alexander Ivanovich made a somewhat stilted opening statement in a weak rather trembling voice, read his theses, and stopped abruptly in anticipation of his opponents' onslaught.

Professors Fogel and Kovalevsky demurred in a pro forma manner and for the sake of decorum but they had just begun to exchange pleasantries with the young scholar when the infamous history professor, already gasping with impatience and an excess of bile, began to growl rather than speak. I, in a feverish state, heard first the professor's abrupt and occasionally shrill voice from afar, and then the soft, barely audible speech of my beloved Alexander Ivanovich, and, feeling a strong uncontrollable flood of compassion, closed my eyes, in order not to see the self-conscious pained figure of my friend, dressed in a new suit and white tie. Everything concluded well in the end, however; the formidable trustee became bored with listening to the too lengthy scholarly joust, and he turned impatiently in his chair and gazed thunderously at the bilious professor who immediately quieted down and, in his conclusion, even noted some undeniable merits to the dissertation. After this, the trustee rose grandly from his place and solemnly congratulated Artemiev, after which congratulations came from the professors and the public. Finally, I was also able to snatch a happy moment and caught up with Alexander Ivanovich in the dark hallway, kissing him wholeheartedly.

Upon receiving his Master's diploma, Alexander Ivanovich remained at the university as a librarian's aid and was also appointed editor of the *Kazan Guberniya Journal*.

I later often visited Artemiev in his shabby government-issued apartment, very much resembling a monk's cell, near the library, and in this dark cell, which had none of the conveniences of our time, the solitary toiler lived for a long while, immersed in his research, and tirelessly digging through old tomes and archives. Just as a real ascetic knows only the road from his cell to the church, so did Artemiev's entire life center on his tiny nook and the wonderful university library. From that time on, historical research concerning Kazan, the Bulgars and the entire Volga region in general periodically appeared on the pages of the just recently

uninformative *Guberniya* journal, but, at the same time, throughout the course of many years, a tedious obligation befell the scholar and romantic to excel at describing all types of official celebrations, such as visitations of a miracle-working icon or of high-ranking officials who occasionally came to Kazan.

So many times I found Artemiev working on articles with the inevitable tears in his eyes as the sun appeared from behind the thickening clouds to light up the scene of festivities. People of that time had to have enduring staying power in order to put up with, for so many years, the difficult situation in which Artemiev found himself, and, despite it all, he was able to preserve the holy fire of his love for knowledge and for people.

After introducing me to Pushkin, Artemiev was the first person to tell me about Byron, explaining his significance. In the recluse's gloomy cell, we often read *Don Juan* (in French), miraculously saved from burning, at which, according to Artemiev, Byron's essays were aimed, along with multitudes of other books which Magnitsky, the former Kazan University trustee, had considered to be evil.

The push that Alexander Ivanovich gave me quickly revealed itself, as soon as literary conversations in which students read their own works began at the university. I passionately devoted myself to composing a theatrical tale from the times of Ivan the Terrible and shamelessly harried my former tutor, reading every page I wrote to him. Only super-human kindness could abide such obtrusiveness.

Many years passed... I lost track of Artemiev and, only in the early 1860s, when I was in St. Petersburg at an evening at Stepan Semeonovich Dudishkin's did I find out by chance from Maykov that the modest reserved unknown toiler lived in St. Petersburg, worked for the

academic community, was appreciated for his services, and had been appointed as a permanent member of the Central Statistical Committee.

At that moment, I felt the involuntary joy that seizes a person who has learned that justice still exists in this world.

### III.

#### Count Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy

In his notes "On public education," provided by the poet Pushkin in 1826 to Czar Nikolay Pavlovich, he states, in passing, that, as everything is for sale in Russia, the examination will soon become a new branch of industry for professors." An examination, in Pushkin's opinion, resembles a badly constructed customs gate, through which old invalids allow (for money) those who were not smart enough to go around."

In all fairness, it must be said that Kazan University of that time teemed with such obliging invalids. One of them dealt exclusively with passing wealthy people; others offered him apartments with all expenses paid and, in this way, continued further and further from one course to the next, until they received a diploma.

With things being this way, unimaginable dunces completed the university courses with no problem, even receiving Candidates' Degrees. It got to the point that a Candidate in the mathematics department did not pass the arithmetic examination for military school pupils of one of the Guards regiments and, as far as I can remember, no one was especially upset by this fact. To my surprise, the same situation occurred in a much later time as well, and, as late as the 1860s and 1870s, I encountered actual university students and candidates who were completely unconcerned with academics, but the reasons that fostered such incidents no longer had anything to do with the former complaisance of the invalids.



The professor of esthetics, who was also secretary of the testing committee, was among the most available of the invalids who kept the gate in my time. This was a very kind, very fat fellow who wore a blue suit with scholarly buttons, who possessed the rare art of directing, via devious paths, noblemen's sons who had been prepared in a slap-happy or homespun way, and who themselves burned with a desire to put on the dark blue collar. Such people either had to get placed with the esthetics professor or take lessons with him, and, in this way, secure his sponsorship.

It never entered my mind that it was possible for me to enroll in the university but the esthetics professor on his part, after some superficial testing, immediately decided that I should enroll, without regard to the fact that I was only fifteen years old, as this obstacle could be eliminated if an acquaintance put in a good word to the university rector.

And so, unexpected and unlikely as it was, I began to prepare for the examination in the attic of the professor's little house, next to his office, in no way resembling the comfortable offices of the scholars of our time. A dim light, coming in through two small curtainless windows, was reflected on the walls, painted an ocher color; three rows of boards, bending under the weight of books covered with a thick layer of dust were attached to one wall; a hard divan stood against the other wall, under which a vodka bottle was hidden from curious eyes; and a small table was placed between the windows, piled with paper and drafts of lectures.

Upon returning from the university, the weary professor would quickly dress in some kind of loose open blouse which looked very much like a women's garment and which had been most likely handmade by his beautiful but very stern wife; would quickly and greedily make a greasy dinner; and immediately retire to his modest office. There, settling on the couch, he would begin to snore horribly, which, in the beginning, frightened me. Later, he would wake, drink tea,

again retire upstairs behind locked doors and until late at night would now enjoy himself in his own fashion—in other words, he put a vodka bottle on the table, and, pouring shot after shot, becoming more and more inspired, prepared lectures or continued his scholarly work, started when he was still a professor at the Kazan Ecclesiastical Academy. Long after midnight, the frantic scratching of his moving pen would trail off and, soon after, the attic would resound with the heroic snoring of the professor.

One day, at dinner time, a chestnut harness horse briskly rolled into the professor's tiny yard and a young man in a military-style greatcoat with a beaver collar then appeared in the entryway. The esthetics professor took off his blouse in a flash and, appearing in his academic uniform, took the guest upstairs. After speaking with him and coming back down, he said that this person was Count Leo Nikolayevich Tolstoy, who wished to enroll in Kazan University and was requesting that he be prepared in Russian philology.

The lessons soon began. At the appointed hour, the Count and the professor would go up to the attic and enter his office. Occasionally, I would also attend these lessons, avoiding the Count, who, from the first meeting repulsed me with his studied coldness, shaggy hair, and the contemptuous expression in his narrowed eyes. This was the first time that I had met a youth who was replete with such a strange and incomprehensible (to me) importance and exaggerated self-satisfaction. The professor, still in that same unchanged women's outfit, not at all embarrassed by the presence of the stiff-necked Count, strode about the room with heavy steps and, in a booming voice, exactly as if he were in an auditorium overflowing with listeners, talked about some interesting item in the history of Russian literature. He explained the meaning of "The Lay of Igor's Campaign" as a monument of the *druzhina* epic,<sup>12</sup> spoke about Prince (*Knyaz*)

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<sup>12</sup> A twelfth century epic poem about the raid of Prince Igor Svyatoslavovich and his troop (*druzhina*) against the Polovtsians, a nomadic warrior tribe.

Kurbsky,<sup>13</sup> Theophan Prokopovich,<sup>14</sup> or bursting into laughter, related Tretyakovsky's biographical details; but he spoke with the most eagerness and greatest animation about Mikhail Vasilyevich Lomonosov, the first Russian scholar to come from the peasant *muzhiks*. At that point, he would pace ever more quickly from corner to corner, wave his arms, make some kind of strange gestures, and become inspired to the point that the mighty figure of Lomonosov for some time overshadowed, in my imagination, all other leading figures in Russian literature.

The Count would leave immediately after the lesson without saying a word of farewell.

The Count appeared in a suit for the examination, accompanied either by a relative or a family tutor. As could have been expected, everything proceeded as usual: the kind invalid wasn't napping and did his job. Fulfilling his duty as secretary of the examination committee, he, at the same time, vigilantly watched over his pupils and, at the critical moment, with his usual smile, showed up to lend a hand and engage the examiner in conversation. The stern unforgiving face of the latter immediately softened, his wrinkles smoothed out and a cheerful conversation ensued between the colleagues, after which the nonplussed pupil was released with a loving smile.

In a fog from the unexpected and very undeserved honor of wearing a dark blue collar, I, in the beginning, would go to the university as if to a party, and, armed with paper and pen to take notes at lectures, which I didn't understand, would be the first to appear in the corridors.

Occasionally and only at history lectures, which were mandatory for all departments of the first two courses (except medical students), I would encounter the Count, who joined, despite his awkwardness and shyness, a small circle of so-called aristocrats. He barely acknowledged my

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<sup>13</sup> Knyaz Andrey Mikhaylovich Kurbsky served under Ivan the Terrible but left his service for fear of persecution and later served the Polish King Sigismund II Augustus.

<sup>14</sup> Archbishop Theophan Prokopovich was a reformer of the Russian Orthodox Church under Peter the Great and one of the founders of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

greetings, clearly wanting to show that here we were also far from equal, as he had arrived on trotting horses and I on foot.

After an unsuccessful examination, the Count transferred to the Law Department and, due to this eventuality, we now met in the corridors daily. I continued to observe the haughty figure of the Count, who now had an irritable expression as a result of the unsuccessful examination, with the same bewilderment and curiosity. If I am not mistaken, the Duke of Lichtenberg came to Kazan at this time and his arrival was a reason for a number of celebrations and balls.

On its part, the university administration drew up a list of students who were obliged to dance at the ball given by the head of the *guberniya*. Count Tolstoy was included in this list also but after the Duke departed, when reminiscences about the ball were the subject of lively conversation of the so-called aristocratic circle, the Count held himself aloof and took no part in them while his comrades, in a perceptible manner, treated him as a great eccentric and philosopher. Observing all of this, I was at my wit's end as to how to define the Count's character.

After the Christmas holidays, when lectures again began, I was, one day, late to a lecture of the bilious history professor, always ready to flunk a student, especially one of those so-called aristocrats and artful cavaliers for whom he bore a noticeable and undisguised loathing.

I was standing in the empty corridor at the auditorium door with a sinking heart, listening to the flowing speech of the professor and wondering what kind of dressing down I would get in front of the mass of students. At that moment, the Count, out of breath from agitation, red, with drops of sweat on his brow, and more disheveled than usual, approached that same door. In the meantime, sub-inspector Zommer was already descending on us from the depths of the corridor with quick silent footsteps and a grim threatening expression. There was nothing to do but open

the fateful door; it squeaked excruciatingly and Tolstoy and I were in a huge auditorium, trying to slip up to the upper desks without being noticed. The professor threw us a forbidding glance and, with even more affected emotion, continued to tell the story of Ivan the Terrible's campaign against Kazan.

The next day, at 8 o'clock in the morning, I had already received an order to appear before the student inspector.

Anticipating something unpleasant, I went to the university office and, after listening to a stern reprimand for being late to the lecture, I set off to the sixth auditorium under arrest accompanied by a sergeant-major with a whole row of medals on his chest.

The door slammed shut... and I was alone in the huge empty room, in an undisturbed silence, while the lively festive traffic on Voskresenskaya St. increased the burden of imprisonment even more. Dying of boredom and idleness, I knocked on the door and convinced the guard to take a note to my room which was not far from the university. Soon, my man appeared with a pillow and books.

Feeling a bit better and settling on a bench, I had just started to read Lermontov when I heard someone's footsteps in the corridor, the door opened and Count Tolstoy, in a gray military style overcoat came into view. He was accompanied by that same sergeant-major but the latter was much more polite and obsequious, immediately allowing the Count to have his servant in the corridor for dispatching.

Taking off his overcoat but not taking off his cap, not paying any attention to me at all, the Count started pacing back and forth quickly, glancing at the window, unbuttoning and buttoning his frock coat and, in general, showed impatience and displeasure with his silly situation. I was outraged to the depths of my soul by his behavior and continued to lie there with

my head in the book, trying to show that I didn't notice the Count's presence. He opened the door and loudly, exactly as if he was in his own apartment, called his servant.

"Tell the coachman (apparently waiting in the drive), to drive by the windows," the Count ordered.

"Yes sir," the servant who entered replied and the displeased Count settled himself at one of the windows with the intention of somehow killing time.

I continued reading but finally couldn't stand it, and also walked up to the window. On the street, the driver sped by us either at a walk or at a trot, with arms out-stretched.

We exchanged a word or two regarding the trotter and, an hour later, were already involved in a passionate endless argument where the main point wasn't the subject about which we were arguing, but rather a strange antagonism that immediately rose to the surface.

Dozens of years already separate me from the days spent face to face with Count Tolstoy and I, surrendering in spite of myself to the influence of his brilliant talent more and more every year, I would like to recall, God only knows how much, every word he said during our involuntary imprisonment, but I have retained only a general impression and a general sense of our conversation. I remember that, upon noticing Lermontov's "Demon," Tolstoy spoke ironically about poetry in general, and then, turning to Karamzin's history, which I had next to me, tore into history as the most boring and practically useless of all subjects.

"History," he said bluntly, "is nothing more than a collection of fables and useless trivia sprinkled with a bunch of useless numbers and proper names. The death of Igor,<sup>15</sup> the snake that bit Oleg<sup>16</sup>—there are nothing more than fairytales. And who needs to know that Ivan's<sup>17</sup> second

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<sup>15</sup> Prince Igor, son of Rurik, died at the hands of the Drevlians, a tribe from whom he was collecting tribute.

<sup>16</sup> Prince Oleg, possibly Rurik's brother-in-law, ruled Rus' after Rurik's death. A prophesy foretold that his death would be caused by his stallion so he sent the horse away. After it died, Oleg went to see its remains and a snake slithered out of the skull and bit him.

marriage to Temryuk's<sup>18</sup> daughter took place in August of 1562 and the fourth to Anna Alekseyevna Koltonskaya in 1572, but it is required that I memorize all of this and, if I don't know it, I get a failing grade. And how is history written? Everything is made to fit a well-known measure thought up by a historian. The Terrible Czar, about whom Professor Ivanov is now lecturing, suddenly, beginning in 1560, from being virtuous and wise, turns into a mindless savage tyrant. How and why? Don't even ask about that..." my fellow prisoner held forth in approximately this manner.

Such harshness of judgment took me aback quite a bit, the more so that I considered history to be my favorite subject.

Evening arrived without us noticing and the Count's lackey brought candles; darkness ruled in the auditorium's corners and a kind of oppressive silence in the entire immense university building.

Huddling into a corner and wrapping myself in my overcoat, I wished my companion good night but he decisively resisted my intention, amazed at how anyone could sleep on bare boards.

There was nothing to be done, and we again began to argue and all of the compelling (for me) force of Tolstoy's doubts descended on the university and university studies in general. He now repeatedly used the expression "Temple of Knowledge." Remaining as serious as before, he described our professors in such a funny manner that despite all my efforts to remain indifferent I laughed like a madman.

"Meanwhile," Tolstoy concluded, "you and I are right to expect that we will leave this temple as useful knowledgeable people. But what will we get out of the university? Think about

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<sup>17</sup> Ivan the Terrible.

<sup>18</sup> Prince of Kabarda in the Northern Caucasus.

it and answer honestly. What will we bring out of this sanctum, returning home, to the village, what will we be good for, who will need us?" Tolstoy insistently questioned me.

Suffering from lack of sleep, I just listened and stubbornly kept quiet.

Morning had barely broken when the door opened and the sergeant-major entered, bowing, and told us that we were free to go home.

Tolstoy slapped his cap on by feel, wrapped himself in his beaver-trimmed overcoat, nodded his head to me in passing, cursed the temple once more, and departed, accompanied by his servant and the sergeant-major. I also left quickly, heaved a deep sigh, and, free of my companion, walked out into the freezing cold, to the empty just-awakening street. My head, heavy exactly as if after a night of drinking to intoxication, was bursting with doubts and questions that had never entered it before, called up by my strange, positively unfathomable (to me) fellow prisoner.

As Tolstoy and I were Department of Law students, he in his first year and I in my second, the very next day, we, like it or not, bumped into each other in the hallway. I felt the urge to resume yesterday's discussion, but I had only to glance at the unapproachable, stone-faced figure of the Count to abandon this intention and walk on by as quickly as possible.

We met for the last time at the final examinations, which were usually held in the university's lecture theater. Second-year law students, out of their wits with terror, were waiting for the bloodthirsty history professor's examination.

Count Tolstoy was called up, he approached the table and took a ticket; I approached as close as possible and waited with impatience for what would happen. I was curious to hear how my former companion, whom in the depths of my soul I had already acknowledged to be quite out of the ordinary, would distinguish himself.



It's possible that I have forgotten something or mixed it up in my recollections but the vague awareness of something transcendent, exceptional, and, at the same time, incomprehensible in Count Tolstoy—this awareness I clearly remember and am certain that I am not mistaken about it.

A moment passed, two, then several minutes. I waited with a sinking heart while Tolstoy looked at the ticket, his face getting red, and was silent. The offer was made to switch tickets but the same thing happened with the new one. The professor was also silent, fixing his mocking poisonous gaze on the student. The difficult scene that played out before me ended with the Count putting down his ticket, turning around and, not paying any mind to anyone, without hurrying, moving towards the exit doors.

Zero, zero, he got a zero... was whispered all around me.

I lost my head from agitation and, in the nearest group of aristocrats, dressed exactly as if they were going to a ball, and awaiting the same fate, the rumor went around that some upper circle ladies had approached the history professor with the request that he take mercy on the Count and the former solemnly promised not to give him a "one."

"But he got out of it craftily—he gave him a zero and he is right... he wriggled out of it deftly..." the students commented.

I listened to the sneers and jests that were raining down on Tolstoy from all sides but in the depths of my soul I was ready to swear that he knew the subject no worse than others and could have answered—he just didn't want to... Why he did this rather than answering, what caused his stubborn silence—excessive shyness or pride—this I could not understand nor explain to myself at all.

I never saw Tolstoy again in Kazan after the examinations and it was 14-15 years later that I unexpectedly bumped into him on the steps of Krayevsky's St. Petersburg home on Liteynaya [Street], where Panayev and Nekrasov lived at that time. I bumped into a man wearing a fur coat and an artillery cap, right at Ivan Ivanovich Panayev's apartment door. Our eyes met and I immediately recognized Count Tolstoy, at that time already a famous writer. I stopped transfixed and watched as he walked out into the street. In Panayev's elegant office, I found Nekrasov in his robe (on account of being ill), Gerbel in a lancer's uniform with red lapels, Yazykov, and, sitting apart, as always detached, Dobrolyubov. They were having a lively conversation, the topic of which was the just departed Count Tolstoy.

"What a shame that you missed it... if only you had come earlier," Panayev said to me, always equally welcoming and hospitable to everyone, "You would have heard all kinds of wonderful things... you would have learned that Shakespeare is a mediocre person and that our wonder in and admiration of Shakespeare is nothing more than our desire not to lag behind others and a habit of repeating other's opinions. Yes indeed, this is a curious... the man doesn't want to know any traditions, either theoretical or historical." And they again became involved in a lively discussion about that same enigmatic man, who, for me, had been inscrutable for a long time.

The more Tolstoy's huge gifts manifested themselves, the more interested I became in everything about him. I collected the tiniest details and when I was in Moscow that year I listened with indescribable interest to Sergey Andreyevich Yuriev, the most sincere and passionate admirer of the Count as a person and a great writer. Yuriev and I planned to visit Tolstoy at *Yasnaya Polyana* and only Sergey Andreyevich's illness interfered with our fulfilling these intentions. Incidentally, as far as I can remember, Yuriev, with his usual enthusiasm, spoke

about the incredible ease with which Tolstoy took to studying every subject that interested him, of his powers of observation, his extremely simple way of life, and of his importance as a teacher.

I also was very much interested in the lengthy discussion about Tolstoy that I had with a very likeable artillery colonel with whom I spent the summer on the Baltic Sea near Riga. Tolstoy's former comrade in Sevastopol reminisced with obvious pleasure about the Count and the time spend with him in the same battery. He even recognized himself in one of the heroes in the Count's Sevastopol stories.

"I'll say this," the old fellow narrated with a blissful smile, "Tolstoy inspired anyone and everyone in the difficult moments of combat life with his stories and his hastily composed songs. He was, all in all, the soul of the battery. When Tolstoy was with us, time flew and there was no end to the merriment. When Tolstoy left—he went off to Simferopol—everyone was crestfallen. A day went by, a second one, a third... Finally he returned—just like a prodigal son—gloomy, gaunt, and unhappy with himself... He would take me aside, further away, and would begin confessing. He would tell me about everything: how he would carouse, gamble, where he spent his days and nights, and, at the same time, would you believe, he castigated and tormented himself as if he were a real criminal; it was even sad to look at him, how he ate his heart out. This was the kind of person he was. In a word, strange, and, to tell the truth, I didn't really understand him, but, on the other hand, this was a rare person, an extremely honest soul, and it is definitely impossible to forget him.

Now, when I have re-read each line written by Count Tolstoy's hand twenty times, in order to re-read them yet again and always find in his creations something new that I hadn't noticed previously, that I had missed, or the worth of which I had not valued properly; and

when, in the difficult moments of life, during days of complete solitude and in blizzards when I am in the steppe, I reach for Tolstoy's book like a tested true resource that uplifts my heavy spirit, it always seems to me that I became familiar with some of the thoughts and convictions of the great writer a long time ago, and had heard something similar in the weak and barely audible hints from my fellow prisoner in the sixth auditorium of Kazan University.

V. Nazariev.