A SOURCE BOOK FOR RUSSIAN HISTORY
FROM EARLY TIMES TO 1917

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Peter the Great to Nicholas I

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He sits in stern judgment of His slaves—
And thou, alas! art burdened
By multitudes of dreadful sins!

Thy courts are black with black
injustice,
The yoke of slavery thy brand;
With Godless flattery and lies corrupted,
Inert with dead and shameful sloth,
With vile abominations overrun!

Oh, though unworthy of His choice,
Thou art His chosen! Purify
Thyself in the cool stream of penitence,
Lest the thunder of double punishment
Come down on thy head!

XIV: 44. HERZEN ON RUSSIA AND EUROPE IN THE 1830s AND 1840s

Alexander Ivanovich Herzen (Gertsen) (1812-70), an émigré from 1847 on, wrote freely on many topics and was widely read in Russia, especially through his journal Kolokol (The Bell, 1857-67). The following excerpts from Herzen’s memoirs concern various aspects of Russia and Europe in the 1830s and 1840s and help to illustrate why Herzen was regarded as neither Slavophile nor Westernizer. (For the views of Herzen on the 1850s and 1860s, see Item XV: 44.)


[On Moscow University in the 1830s:] The youthful strength of Russia streamed into it from all sides, from all classes of society, as into a common reservoir; in its halls they were purified from the prejudices they had picked up at the domestic hearth, attained a common level, became like brothers, and dispersed again to all parts of Russia and among all classes of its people.

Until 1848 the organization of our universities was entirely democratic. Their doors were open to everyone who could pass the [entrance]-examination, unless he were . . . a serf.

. . .

[In the 1830s:] A new world was pushing at the door, and our hearts and souls opened wide to meet it. Saint-Simonism became the foundation of our convictions and remained unalterably so in its essentials.

. . .

[On the influence of German philosophy:] Our young philosophers corrupted not only their language but their understanding; their attitude toward life, toward reality, became scholastic, bookish; it was that learned con-

ception of simple things which Goethe mocks with such genius in the conversation of Mephistopheles with the students. Everything that in reality was immediate, every simple feeling, was raised into some abstract category and emerged without a drop of living blood, a pale, algebraic shadow. In all of this there was a naiveté of a sort, because it was all perfectly sincere. The man who went for a walk in Sokolniki [a park in Moscow] went in order to give himself up to the pantheistic feeling of his unity with the cosmos; and if on the way he happened to meet a drunken soldier or a peasant woman who got into conversation with him, the philosopher did not simply talk to them, but tried to define the essential substance of the common people in its immediate and phenomenal manifestation.

[On the Moscow professors of the 1830s and 1840s:] Granovskii was not alone; he was one of a group of young professors who came back from Germany while we were in exile. They did a great deal for the advancement of the University of Moscow. History will not forget them . . .
Our professors brought with them these cherished dreams [that the dialectical approach could solve contemporary historical problems], and an ardent faith in learning and in men; they preserved all the fervor of youth, and the professorial chair was for them a sacred pulpit from which they had been called to preach the truth. They came to the lecture room, not as mere professional savants, but as missionaries of the religion of humanity.

The mistake of the Slavophiles lies in their imagining that Russia once had a culture peculiar to itself, which was eclipsed by various events and finally by the Petersburg period. Russia never had, and could never have had, such a culture. That which is now reaching our consciousness, that which begins to glimmer in our thoughts as a presentiment, that which existed unconsciously in the peasant hut and in the open field, is only now beginning to sprout in the pastures of history, fertilized by the blood, tears, and sweat of twenty generations.

These are the foundations of our life, not memories; these are living elements, existing not in chronicles but in the actual present; but they have merely survived under the hard historical process of building up a unified state; and under the yoke of the state they have only been preserved but not developed. I doubt, indeed, whether the inner strength for their development would have been found without the Petrine period, without a period of European education.

The primitive foundations of our life are insufficient. In India there has existed for ages and exists to this day a village commune very similar to our own and based upon the division of fields; yet the people of India have not gone very far with it.

Only the mighty thought of the West, with which all its long history is permeated, is able to fertilize the seeds slumbering in the patriarchal mode of life of the Slavs. The artel' [workers' cooperative] and the village commune, the sharing of profits and the division of fields, the communal assembly and the union of villages into self-governing volosti—all these are the cornerstones on which the temple of our future free, communal existence will be built. But still, these cornerstones are only stones—and without Western thought our future cathedral will not rise above its foundations.

After spending a year or two in Europe, we see with surprise that in general the men of the West do not correspond to our conception of them, that they are greatly inferior to it.

Elements of truth enter into the ideals we have formed, but either these elements no longer exist or they have completely changed their character. Knightly valor, the elegance of aristocratic manners, the strict decorum of the Protestants, the proud independence of the English, the luxurious life of the Italian artists, the sparkling wit of the Encyclopedists, and the saturnine energy of the terrorists—all this has been melted down and transmuted into a whole conjunction of universally predominant petty bourgeois manners. They make up a complete whole—that is, a finished, self-contained outlook upon life, with its traditions and rules, with its own good and evil, with its own ways and its own morality of a lower order.

As the knight was the prototype of the feudal world, so has the merchant become the prototype of the new world; lords are replaced by employers.

Under the influence of the petty bourgeois, everything in Europe has changed. Knightly honor is replaced by a bookkeeper's honesty, elegant manners by propriety, courtesy by affection, pride by touchiness, parks by kitchen gardens, palaces by hotels open to all (that is, to all who have money).

All morality has been reduced to this: in every way possible the indigent must acquire property, while the rich must preserve and increase what they have; the flag which is run up in the marketplace when trading begins has become the banner of a new society. Man has de facto become the appendent of property; life has been reduced to a perpetual struggle for money.

... Life has been reduced to speculating on the stock exchange; everything—editorial offices of magazines, electoral colleges, legislative chambers—all have turned into money changers' shops and markets. The English are so used to putting everything into shop language that they call their old Anglican church the Old Shop.