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Petersburg and assume the imperial title or to publish a statement of renunciation, while Nicholas, aware of his unpopularity among the troops, hesitated to order the oath taken to himself without Constantine's public renunciation.

The abnegation of Nicholas and Constantine provided an interregnum, recognized by the Northern Society as an opportunity not likely to be repeated for some time to come. The necessity for action was heightened by fresh knowledge that a member had betrayed the organization to the government. There was, then, the choice of awaiting probable arrest or staging a revolt, and the Society chose the latter.

When they learned that Nicholas had decided to have the new oath taken on the morning of December 14, they hastily set the revolt for that day. Word of the planned uprising was sent to the Southern Society, and Prince Sergei Trubetskoi was elected "dictator" with full powers to act as he chose in the coming events. Before the uprising the conspirators learned that several regiments upon which they had counted were lost to them as guards officers refused to vouch for or commit their troops. Moreover, the "dictator" was notably hesitant and ineffectual. Ryleev, Alexander Bestuzhev, Peter Kakhovsky and others, however, were swept along by the excitement and romanticism of the impending hour into a vortex of frenzied talk and motion. Time was too short for coherent planning; but, by circulating rumors that the new

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5Old Style.

the martyr, prophet, and toiler, whose duty it was to struggle with a crude and unsatisfactory reality and to inspire the people to participation in noble aspirations. It was given to the poet to suffer, both in the circumstances of his life and through his heightened sense of life and spirit. Kuchelbeker's existence was closely interwoven with his poetic art, and poetry was the primary, most consistent comfort and support through his last two decades of life. 58

Kuchelbeker devoted years to the composition of his longer works, the dramatic tragedies; but he did not mull over his works for "all that I have ever mulled over" he wrote, "has drowned and not a trace of it has remained." He waited always for the "creative spark." It was a sorrow finally to part with a creation, and having completed at last the labor of fifteen years he asked "what thoughts will take its place; with what shall I become so close?" 59

Although Kuchelbeker wrote novels, critiques, essays, and articles, poetry remained for him the highest and most perfect form of literary art. The years of suffering strengthened his talent but the impossibility of having this poetry published was a constant and great sorrow. Much of his poetical work has been printed, but only in recent times. 60 Never was this romantic poet far from a rather tragic, if dramatically expressed, sense of life. Like many of his contemporaries


59 Dekabristy v buriatii, 26.

60 Gudzii, Katorga i ssylka, XXI, 181. Dekabristy, poezija, 590.
and comrades Kuchelbeker had begun his writing career with hope and belief, only to see his life blighted, his career closed. 61

On an anniversary of the Southern (Chernigov) Uprising of 1825-26 Michael Bestuzhev was inspired to put a new verse to a popular Russian tune; this song became one of the most popular among the Decembrists at katorga. So far as is known Michael had not written verses before his exile stimulated the few, but successful, ventures at katorga. Depicting the Chernigov uprising and the tragic fate of Sergei Muravev-Apostol, Bestuzhev's poem is an expression of the despair into which the exiles now and then were plunged. 62

If the poetry of the Decembrists reflects despair and loss of faith in life, it contains also momentary flashes of conviction in the ultimate triumph of a better existence for Russia and its people. Odoevsky's work has generally an optimistic conviction that "after Holy Russia in bondage and suffering" there would come a Russia of "joy and glory. . . ." 63

Hovering over their literary endeavors was the "thought that all these papers . . . would come to the flame" or be lost in the archives of the Third Division. This awareness at times deadened the efforts and spirit of an author in exile. 64

62 This poem for many years was attributed to Alexander Bestuzhev. Nechkina, II, 440. Dekabristy; poeziia, 200. Poety-dekabristy, 293.
63 Poeziia dekabristov, 49.
64 Volk, 72.
The experience of Konstantin Torson with the Third Division is representative of difficulties encountered by men who sought to publish from political exile. Persistently, tirelessly, Torson worked to perfect and promote mechanized agriculture; in connection with this work he wrote an article on the subject, addressed to his sister with the request that she do what she could toward its publication. The article was held up by the Irkutsk authorities, then at Torson's urging finally forwarded to Russia where it fell into the vast files of the Third Division. Torson's attempts to publish brought from Count Benkendorf, head of the Division, an admonition that Decembrists must not seek publication but rather "concern themselves with the establishment and construction of their farms. . . ." Benkendorf wrote in response to similar requests of the exiles that it was "unsuitable for state criminals to send their works for publication . . . for this places them in a situation not compatible with their status." His words, however, had an imperceptible effect on the exiles.

Before his exile Vladimir Shteingel worked in the Siberian archives; as a native of the region he knew Siberia well. During exile he wrote numerous articles on the region as well as critiques of works devoted to Siberia and which he found to be generally inaccurate or misleading. With but few exceptions these essays were lost at the Third Division in transit to editors and publishers.66

65 Vospominaniia Bestuzhevykh, 769, 770.
66 Nikitin, Voprosy geografii, XLI, 259.
The Decembrist who made most persistent and pathetic attempts to publish was Wilhelm Kuchelbeker. He wrote numerous heart-rending appeals; he asked his family in Russia to submit petitions; he utilized his influential friends Pushkin, Zhukovskii, and Nicholas Grech—all with little effect. Kuchelbeker's desire to publish, second only to a burning desire to leave Siberia, was related both to his desperate financial plight and to his great love for literature. Almost immediately upon his arrival in Siberia Kuchelbeker sent Grech an ambitious plan for submitting articles to the latter's journal. In return for at least one article a month he would receive one hundred rubles monthly plus three hundred rubles yearly in such items as books, tobacco, and coffee. At length Kuchelbeker discussed the articles he had ready for print— one on Homer, others on Pushkin, Marlinsky, Shakespeare, Schiller, Goethe, More, Walter Scott, and some light essays—and then added reassuringly that these were not in the florid German style. He asked to be informed as soon as possible whether the proposal was acceptable. This letter never reached Grech.  

Michael Kuchelbeker at the same time forwarded to Grech a similar suggestion for publishing articles on Siberia and the Transbaikal where he had been collecting data for a decade. This letter too found its way into the official archives.

Alexander Pushkin helped Kuchelbeker publish some of his poetry, giving what assistance he thought prudently might be given. With the

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67 *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, LIX, 459-460.

death of Pushkin in 1837 the exile turned to Vasilii Zhukovskii, urging that he use his influence with the Tsar. One such intercession by Zhukovskii in Kuchelbeker's behalf brought an Imperial refusal. Most letters from the persistent exile, however, never reached Zhukovskii. Sensing in 1845 that death was approaching, Kuchelbeker's letters were more and more insistent and pleading. Referring to an earlier refusal to publish on grounds that "it was not yet time," Kuchelbeker wrote, "but six years have passed since [then]; from a vigorous hale man, I have become a feeble, emaciated, old and almost blind man. . . . When will the time arrive? My days are numbered."69 Two months later he was dead and his wife and children were dependent for support from the other exiles.70

In the first years of exile at Selenginsk Nicholas and Michael Bestuzhev asked relatives in Russia to solicit permission for publication of their works, suggesting they would be willing to publish anonymously. Repeated petitions on behalf of the exiles brought repeated refusals. Michael, well aware of Nicholas' talent and literary interests, reproached him once for devoting so much time to scientific and mechanical pursuits and so little to writing. Nicholas replied with the complaint of all the exiles: it was difficult to write when one knew it would never be seen or printed.71

70 I. D. Iakushkin, 303.
When they recognized these as such, editors shunned works submitted by state criminals unless they knew official permission to write and publish had been granted. Despite official restrictions and editorial policies, there were slips from time to time, articles and poems that escaped the ubiquitous agencies of surveillance and appeared pseudonymously or anonymously. And toward the end of Nicholas I's reign there even came rare permission to print an article by one of the exiles.

In 1831 Alexander Bestuzhev was transferred to the Caucasus and en route stopped to visit former comrades. At Olekimsk Nicholas Chizhov read Bestuzhev several of his poems including one based on an Iakut story, entitled "Nucha." The next year this rather lengthy poem appeared in Moskovskii telegraf under the author's own name. Publication of this work stirred up a storm; an investigation was launched; the editor was removed; rigorous quizzing and searching ensued among the poet's Siberian associates. Writing the governor, the distraught Chizhov protested his innocence, indeed, his complete surprise at the publication of his poem.\(^\text{72}\) The furor over this incident was the greater since the author's name was given—in this case a man to whom Nicholas I had consigned a life in exile. About this same time a few of Odoevsky's poems were printed but without the author's name and the resultant fanfare.\(^\text{73}\)

\(^\text{72}\) Nucha is the Iakut for "Russians." Probably Bestuzhev submitted to the editor this poem along with some verses of his own which appeared at the same time. Kubalov, Dekabristy v vostochnie Sibir, 64, 65.

\(^\text{73}\) Vospominaniia Bestuzhevykh, 770.
With the influence and intercession of Alexander Pushkin a portion of Kuchelbeker's drama "Izhorskii" and his "Russian Decameron 1831" were printed. One of Kuchelbeker's comedies appeared in 1839 and an article of 1845 on Russian grammar and language in Notes of the Fatherland (Otoechestvennyi zapiski) apparently came from his pen.\(^7^4\)

The Messenger of Natural Science (Vestnik estestvennykh nauk), a journal of small circulation, in 1854 published Nicholas Bestuzhev's "Guzinoe Ozero," (Goose Lake) and the year before the journal of the Economic Society printed two abridged essays, descriptions of Buriat farming and of his brother's new type of carriage.\(^7^5\)

The Journal of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 1843 printed Shteingel's study of Ishim okrug, and under the pseudonym Tridechnyi the naval journal Maiak carried a few of his articles in the 1840's.\(^7^6\)

Almost without exception the few works that passed or by-passed Third Division, censors, and cautious editors, to be printed anonymously or pseudonymously, were politically and socially as innocuous as the usual material appearing in journals at this time. Several works printed in the 1850's with the censor's permission were articles on

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\(^7^4\) Literaturnoe nasledstvo, LIX, 463, 547, 548.


maladministration in Siberia by Dmitri Zavalishin, articles which caused the officials considerable embarrassment.77

It was not only the content of Decembrist literature that worried officialdom; it was also authorship. For these political exiles to publish at all affronted the Tsar's sensibilities and strained his anxieties, whether the work be poetry, prose, or a translation of some ancient Greek historian.

The past was ever a favorite preoccupation of the Decembrists whose memories clung especially to the glorious—for some inglorious—days of revolt and trial. In any one of its differing aspects the past might fill various purposes—psychological, recreational, scholarly, political. The Decembrists' writing at times reflects the expediency of utilizing history in support of opinion or the necessity of directing

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77 Baranovskaia, Dal'niy vostok, XXVI, 165-166. A. M. Linden, "Zapiski," Russkaia starina, CXXII (April, 1905), 123. For many years Zavalishin advised and assisted various officials in Eastern Siberia (this was during the governorship of V. Ia. Rupert, 1837-1847—a not very distinguished administration). In 1847 the energetic and capable N. N. Muravev (later Muravev-Amurskii) was appointed governor and Zavalishin may have felt slighted since the governor developed his own policies and did not defer to the exile. Zavalishin became such a thorn that in 1855 Muravev asked to have him moved to Western Siberia. Although the request was granted, Zavalishin refused to budge from Chita where his wife's family lived, and only left that town when in 1863 he was forcibly returned to Russia. Zavalishin did what he could to take part in affairs. He assisted in organizing the incorporation of Chita (1852), and gave aid during the typhus epidemic of 1853. He attempted also to advise in the colonization of the Amur valley; when his advice was not accepted he exposed maladministration in the expeditions of 1853-1854. During the earlier administration of Rupert he had advised officials in Chita as well as official and unofficial visitors to Siberia. Zavalishin's memoirs contain details of all this activity and more, II, 291, 311-314, 315, 317, 319-320, 341, 344-345, 387. One traveler whom Zavalishin impressed was G. G. Ravenstein, The Russian on the Amur: Its Discovery, Conquest, and Colonization (London, 1861), 443.
criticisms of contemporary Russia toward less recent times and more distant regions.

Russia's antiquity was studied with the present in mind. In speaking of the "calling of Rurik," Lunin commented that the "Varangian-brigands" did not (as the Chronicle states) establish themselves in authority over Novgorod "with the concensus of the citizenry," but rather through force and subterfuge. Lunin was disgusted with the usual court historians—including the great Karamzin—for overlooking this fact in their histories. Explaining away the monk's version as given in the Chronicle Lunin presumed it was so written to "legitimize the authority" of the Rurik dynasty.78

Alexander Bestuzhev, however, valued the early Chronicles as literature, and for the information they provided on the early republic of Novgorod. His brother Nicholas emphasized Novgorod's role in colonizing the North and developing trade.79 But contemporary historians were censured for biased and disdainful attitudes toward Novgorodian freedoms, although the exiles recognized this attitude was necessary since the Tsarist regime would not—or could not—tolerate truth about the veche republic.80

The significant reign of Peter I in the eighteenth century evoked various evaluations. Nicholas Bestuzhev saw the administrative reforms of Peter, and especially the system of colleges, as the beginning of democracy, admitting, though, that later it was "somewhat ruined"; and in the system of ranks he recognized advancement through talent rather

78Volk, 318-319. 79Volk, 291, 341. 80Volk, 332.
than status. On the other hand, Alexander Podzhio had such a hatred of autocracy that he acknowledged nothing good in this reign. Michael Fonvizin wondered if Russia were any better for Peter's rule, since during this era the masses of people remained in the same miserable condition while the state and a privileged few moved far ahead of them, adopting forms of Westernism without their spirit and thus distorting the country's development. Actually it was not so much imitation of Europe that Fonvizin objected to as the possibility this imitative habit might produce in the nineteenth century serf reform on the basis of a landless proletariat.

Fonvizin was stirred by the appearance of Esneaux and Chennechot's *History of Russia* (Paris, 1835) to write a "short survey of the manifestations of political life in our country" from earliest times. The French historians had based their work upon approved Russian histories, de-emphasizing past freedoms and individuality. According to Fonvizin there had been small numbers of slaves (prisoners of war and bankrupts) but neither political nor civil slavery in ancient Russia; the restrictions of serfdom came about through successive applications of force and coercion, until by mid-seventeenth century the system was consolidated. In this study of the decay of Russian freedoms Fonvizin emphasized the

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81 Volk, 400, 413.

82 M. A. Fonvizin, *Politicheskaia zhizn' v Rossii i drugiya stat'i* (Moscow, 1907), 10, 104-106.
oath was contrary to the wishes of Constantine and relying upon hatred of Nicholas in the army, they hoped to disaffect enough troops to carry the revolt to a successful conclusion.

On the morning of the fourteenth Michael and Alexander Bestuzhev, having induced a battalion to rebel, marched them off to the Senate Square where the oath-taking and the revolt were to occur. More troops joined them, led by Nicholas Bestuzhev; Ryleev, Eugene Obolensky, and Wilhelm Kuchelbeker, among other conspirators, appeared on the Square. But some were conspicuously absent and the "dictator," after a brief appearance, went into hiding at the Austrian embassy. In all, about three thousand troops joined the insurgent officers and noblemen, where for much of the day they stood confronting a considerably larger contingent of government forces, the Emperor, and military advisers. Nicholas first undertook by peaceful means to end the revolt. Governor-General Miloradovich of St. Petersburg and then Army Commander Stärlor were dispatched across the Square to talk with the rebels; the firebrand Kakhovsky shot and killed both. The rebels could not be dispersed by the cavalry because of icy pavements. As dusk approached and it became obvious that civilians and troops were only awaiting dark before joining the revolt, there was nothing left but for Nicholas to order into action the artillery. One salvo dispersed the rebels while taking lives of troops and bystanders; several more salvos ended all resistance. The government did not reveal any statistics, and bodies of the dead and wounded (in some cases) were precipitously shoved under the ice of the

?Today this Square is known as Decembrist Square.
deleterious role of the Tsars, recognizing, however, increments of autocracy accruing from the Tatar yoke.  

For those political exiles who seized upon and emphasized past freedoms in Russia wherever they spotted them (or thought that they did), and who blamed autocratic rulers for the subversion of earlier freedoms, ancient Rome and Greece provided factual and fictive data on the evils of tyranny. In Greece the tyrants brought only ruin, piracy, plague, hunger, "and the axe." These "dishonorable monsters" justly deserved their "terrible fate."  

Wilhelm Kuchelbeker pointed out that in Greece, overthrow of the tyrants had led to a rise of patriotism, and the flowering of art, literature, and trade. Other Decembrists set aside ideology to acknowledge the importance of the Greco-Roman legacy in modern European civilization.

In their preference of the Middle Ages over the Enlightenment, some Decembrists reflected the romantic age. The Middle Ages were the "most dramatic . . . poetical," thought Alexander Bestuzhev, with their "piety and love, knights and pirates." The novels of Sir Walter Scott influenced the exiles for "the genius of Walter Scott" "threw open to us [the past] and transported us into it . . . ." Nicholas Bestuzhev appreciated the Middle Ages when the "rise of science, growth of trade, invention of printing and the compass advanced . . . man to the [point] . . . .

\[83\] Fonvizin, 1, 3, 9. Volk, 366.

\[84\] Volk, 184, 206.

\[85\] Volk, 184.

\[86\] Volk, 226, 207.
where he was enabled to break with prejudices and superstitions inherited from early barbarians.  

So important did Michael Lunin consider a study of the past for the later well-being of the individual that he urged history be taught at the beginning of an education. Nicholas Bestuzhev, in an article on trade and industry, set forth his ideas on the study and writing of history. His historiography is stimulated perhaps more by ideology than scholarship. Bestuzhev felt that until recent times history had been written only about tsars and heroes. . . . Scholars of the state have referred only to the administration of and increase in finances. About the people, their needs, their well-being or poverty, we have known nothing and therefore the exterior brilliance of the courts we have taken for the true happiness of states. . . . Only in the present century have we understood that the power of the state is composed of the people, that the people's prosperity is the state's wealth and that without their prosperity the wealth and magnificence of the other classes is but an ulcer.  

A more detailed study of states revealed that in all European countries governments were at odds with their peoples, including even those states with constitutional government. In the despotic states, where the head of state was all things—the law, the constitution, the executor, the legislator—the people were merely "the wheel of a vast machine, the movement and direction of which is provided by the spring—the despot." Yet even those states with constitutions were little
better, for if it be said about them that "their ministers are responsible before the law, then it is easy to object . . . [that] responsibility is doubtful where the courts, or the parliamentary members, are bribed or have an interest in promoting their own . . . gains." If under the guise of "equality of rights" the government punished only the obvious culprits, then the law represented a "weak protection for the citizen . . . ." An example of the inefficacy of law in nations where individuals and interests thought only of their own gains was the American states after the war for independence. In that country also, Bestuzhev believed, selfish concern with individual interests had more recently led to economic crises.

In their criticism of the middle class industrial system as it developed in the Western countries, Decembrists were close to the later narodniki (populists). The Decembrist Fonvizin was, like Bestuzhev, critical of Western institutions. He linked to a criticism of communism a condemnation of the social system in Western Europe. In these countries an impoverished "almost savage proletariat" hated the present order, and hoped through social upheaval to destroy existing institutions and thereby improve their lot. The difficulties in France (in 1848 and after) were common to all of Western Europe; a restless impoverished mass required a strong government and large army to preserve or establish order.

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90 Baranovskai a, 117.

91 Dekabristy, poezia, 74.
Acknowledging that communism and socialism had Biblical roots, Fonvizin nonetheless censured contemporary adherents of these doctrines for proposing to substitute ridiculous new institutions for old ones. Insofar as they frightened vested interests and challenged outmoded prejudices the communists and the socialists performed a valuable service; however, their methods forced him to condemn their ideology. The upheavals and the chaos fomented by these doctrinaires and their impoverished supporters were not what the peace and welfare of Europe required.\footnote{\textit{Pamiati dekabristov}, III, 291, 111, 112.}

As the Decembrists understood it, laissez-faire policies, operating in conjunction with earlier feudal reforms spawning a tenant peasantry, had given rise to an impoverished restless proletariat in the nineteenth century. They did not want this process to occur in Russia and believed the commune system, if made the basis of agrarian reform, would prevent it.

It was not long after the expatriate Decembrist N. I. Turgenev published his three volume \textit{Russia and the Russians} (Paris, 1847) that it reached Siberia where the exiles read it avidly and vexedly. In letters to Sergei Volkonskii, Nicholas Bestuzhev discussed at length the banalities, generalities, and verbiage in the work. What Turgenev had said of Russia could as well be said of England and France. The \textit{a priori} reforms and constitution proposed by Turgenev showed a disconcerting inability to understand and take into consideration the special
conditions of Russia. Bestuzhev was especially alarmed that Turgenev failed to base his projected reform of serfdom on the commune system. Russian conditions were not so like those of Western Europe that one could freely apply the example and experience of that region to Russia. "I am so vexed at Turgenev" wrote Bestuzhev "that I even thought of writing him. To a foreigner it is quite pardonable not to know Russia . . ." but more insight was expected of a Russian.93

Their outspoken criticism of Western institutions, along with fervid defense of Russia's unique conditions, was not conjoined to approval of Russia's social system based as it was upon serfdom. The country's well-being and prosperity demanded abolition of serfdom and the existing system. Serfdom was not only economically and politically harmful, it was, wrote Fonvizin, "contrary to religion and morality" and perverted rulers and ruled alike. Fonvizin was concerned with the manner of abolition and set forth a method which would protect both the noble class and the peasant class.94

Slavery (elsewhere) seemed to provide an opportunity to criticize what was disliked at home. Slavery was "incompatible with the times . . ." and the United States provided a "lamentable but useful example of this" wrote Lunin; there "they solemnly recognize the equality

93 Maksimov, Sobranie sochinenii, IV, 240, 238. The Decembrists considered Turgenev a deserter from their cause. Zetlin, 347.
of the people . . . as a fundamental principle of their constitution"
while demonstrating "to the contrary by the gallows and citing shades of
color in justification of . . . deeds offending humanity." Lunin died
before the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* but other Decembrists read
this work with considerable interest.

Ironically the "land of the exiled" offered more evidences of
freedom than the Decembrists would have noted in European parts of the
Empire, and they did not overlook this fact. "My body suffers cold and
deprivation in Siberia," admitted Lunin "but my spirit, free from
despicable bonds, wanders along the plains. . . ." 96

Noting those aspects most favorably to impress the exiles,
Nicholas Bestuzhev commented that in Siberia

> they do not know serfdom, which in European Russia hinders
> the development of industry and agriculture. Here in Siberia
> all is new: the land, the people, industry, trade. . . . 97

The Decembrists could not but recognize the wonderful potential-

ties of a country with vast undeveloped resources and a populace unen-
cumbered by serfage. While praising the freer atmosphere of Siberia
Basargin deplored the practice of populating the region with criminals
and offered a solution to end this practice. 98

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96 Kubalov, *Dekabristy v vostochnie Sibir*, 132.

97 Baranovskaia, 178.

98 Nikitin, *Voprosy geografii*, XLI, 263. Chukovskaia, 133.
Sokolov, 204. Basargin, 190-192.
Canada (as also the United States) afforded many comparisons and contrasts with Siberia. Zavalishin maintained that Canada by "reason of its geographic position, conditions of nature, population distributed sparsely over a large area, and simultaneous historical development," was strikingly similar to Siberia. He thought of both Canada and Siberia as colonies, but the latter, with strict controls from the autocratic center and with its underdevelopment, differed quite markedly from the former.\(^9\)

Michael Lunin valued highly the practice and principle of justice—as he once wrote, "I loved justice and hated injustice and therefore find myself in exile"—and took a keen interest in the laws and legal procedure both of Russia and other European countries. When in the 1830's Speranskii accomplished the important task of codifying Russian laws of the past two centuries, Lunin wrote that codification was hardly likely to improve the most glaring inadequacies in the administration of Russian justice. Dearth of qualified lawyers, absence of a jury system, complete secrecy surrounding cases, and inept personnel of the courts made certain that when finally a case was adjudicated according to existing law, it became the source of further litigation. Lunin might well have argued that it was not imperial policy at that time to reform the court system.\(^10\) Lunin's reaction to the so-called official nationalism disseminated during the 1830's and 1840's

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\(^9\) N. M. Iadrintsev, *Sibir kak koloniiia v geograficheskom etnograficheskom i istoricheskom otnoshenii* (St. Petersburg, 1892), 699, 715-716. (Referred to as Iadrintsev, *Sibir kak koloniiia*.)

was most critical. In a caustic commentary Lunin attempted more than mere criticism; his analysis of the doctrine concluded that its components—orthodoxy, autocracy, and Russian nationalism—were heterogeneous, unrelated, and contradictory in their results. Notably among the exiles Lunin painted with unflinching strokes the regime of Nicholas I as a stupid, cumbersome machine futilely devoted to unrealizable goals.

Whatever may have been the exiles' criticism of the social and political system of the Empire, when Russia was threatened all rallied to its support. The Crimean campaign evoked numerous and egregious outbursts of patriotic concern, nonetheless sincere for being no more than the verbal demonstrations of exiles. "I don't know about you," wrote one, "but my heart weeps when I read the news . . ." of the siege of Sevastopol. In an article on the Crimean War, Nicholas Bestuzhev described the patriotic reaction of the Siberian populace, the border guards, and the exiles. This article was prompted by Nicholas' own grave concern and anxiety. Lamenting defeat in the war Pushchin sought comfort in the hope that failure would avail more than the "most brilliant success if it finally opens our eyes" to the need for reform.

The literary heritage of the exiles testifies to their adjustment to the new milieu, for while these men aged and sobered they did not

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101 Lunin, 41-42.
103 E. E. Iakushkin, 38.
permit mind or spirit to atrophy. Their minds touched upon many different subjects and they utilized diverse literary forms. Yet as a reflection of or an inducement to political and social transformation, the literary work of the Decembrists in Siberia fails. With few exceptions the exiles expected their words to leave no traces or echoes. Most wrote under the hovering image of secret agents and police officials. These expectations and apprehensions influenced both the scope and the nature of this writing. But though this literature tends to reflect prudence and restraint, it does not indicate a craven abjuration of earlier ideals nor is it reactionary, as Soviet historians at times aver. And that this literature exists at all is something of an indication of the framework within which the Tsarist regime meted vengeance to those caught in its sensitive web. Soviet historians marked an important centennial in 1925 by locating and publishing considerable writings of the Siberian period of the Decembrists. These misfits of the Tsarist regime left a large literary legacy, which might prompt one to wonder if political criminals of a later regime would leave so much literature written in exile.

With its tragi-comic mosaic of adventure, idealism, courage, faint-heartedness, and chaotic organization the Decembrist movement and revolt inspired contemporary and future authors. Between some contemporary Russian literary figures and the Decembrists were ties of friendship and sympathy. Although such literary men as A. S. Griboedov, Peter Chaadaev, Alexander Pushkin and Vasilii Zhukovskii did not share the fate of the Decembrists, they tended earlier to sympathize with the
ideals of the Movement. Pushkin, a spiritual Decembrist before the uprising, came later to doubt the efficacy of revolution for Russia and to prefer other means of accomplishing reform. The methods and the dreams of the Decembrists were more romantic than realistic, and with a growing realism in his art, the poet evolved a more realistic political ideology (perhaps, though, for different reasons). Thus Pushkin's later references to the Decembrists are rather reserved. There is a fragmentary chapter ten of *Eugene Onegin* which is just short of moral condemnation of the Decembrist Movement. But Pushkin did not forget his friends during their exile. The "Message to Siberia," a poem sent to the exiles shortly after their banishment, expresses Pushkin's appreciation of their sacrifice and his conviction of ultimate victory for those ideals snuffed out in December 1825. Pushkin also dedicated a poem to his friend Ivan Pushchin in exile. Decembrists Lunin, Gorbachevskii, and Michael Bestuzhev were among those who criticized Pushkin's receipt of an imperial pension, feeling this acceptance a moral capitulation to the intolerable regime.

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Neva River. With the spring thaws they washed up on shore, a grisly reminder. The uprising in the North had failed for lack of audacious and able leadership.

Even before these fateful events at St. Petersburg, December 13, the authorities at Tulchin arrested Pestel. Arrest of its outstanding leader, who had been betrayed by a trusted associate, left the Southern Society considerably weakened. Sergei Muravev-Apostol also was arrested but escaped, and learning of the events in St. Petersburg he and several comrades decided immediately to revolt.

Troops of the Chernigovsky Regiment were assembled and induced to rebel with promises they were to liberate the country from serfdom and oppression. Hoping to persuade other regiments in the locality to desert, Muravev-Apostol and Bestuzhev-Riumin marched their forces into several villages around Tulchin, meanwhile awaiting word from messengers to Kiev. When the men sent to scout Kiev failed to return as expected they abandoned the plan to move on the city. After marching through the southern countryside for several days, apparently undecided on a course of action, the rebels on January 3, 1826, came upon government forces. Although wounded in the first skirmish, Muravev-Apostol valiantly attempted to rally his men, but they were no match for the artillery and hussars. The leaders of the revolt were rounded up, sent to St. Petersburg where they were imprisoned, and tried with the other conspirators.

Nicholas quickly appointed a Commission of Investigation to gather and evaluate testimony. The government's net was extensive; the arrested men included not only those in the revolt, but men who had broken with

Alexander Dumas (Père) and Leo Tolstoi attempted fictionalized works. Dumas' Fencing Master caused much consternation among the exiles who knew it was modeled on the Annenkov family. Iakushkin called it the "most outrageous stupidity . . . [the author] has endeavored to depict [Annenkova] in a favorable light; only his concept of excellence is rather lamentable. . . ."\footnote{I. D. Iakushkin, 282.}

Tolstoi made three attempts to write a novel about the Decembrists. His efforts in the 1850's were interrupted to work on War and Peace; he made his last attempt to complete this novel in 1878 when he wrote Decembrist Svistunov that the "work is almost as important to me as my life." Nonetheless, it remained unfinished. In gathering
information for the planned novel Tolstoi turned to the Decembrists themselves. Writing to a friend, Decembrist Matvei Muravev-Apostol expressed his doubts that Tolstoi would be able to depict the time or the people for

in order to understand our times, to understand our aspirations, it is necessary to penetrate the truth of Russia's situation then. . . . It is necessary accurately to paint all the . . . calamities which . . . overwhelmed the Russian people; our movement is impossible to understand . . . or to explain apart from its ties with these troubles. . . . To picture fully these afflictions will be impossible for Count L. N. Tolstoi. . . . I have told him so.108

Michael Znamenskii was a lesser talent than the great Russian writer, but a man closer to the Decembrists. Son of a Siberian priest, educated by the Decembrists, and their lifelong admirer and friend, Znamenskii in later life wrote a novel devoted to the Ialutorovsk exiles and their parochial schools.109 The work of these Decembrists, forming the basis of Znamenskii's novel, comprises a portion of the next chapter.


109 Sokolov, 87. S. I. Turbin and M. Znamenskii, Strana izgnaniia i ischeznuvshie liudi (St. Petersburg, 1872), 219-366.
CHAPTER V

EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Sometime after their arrival at Petrovsk zavod in 1830, Commandant Leparskii granted the Decembrists permission to train a boys choir for the local church. While the exiles welcomed the opportunity they were not content with this worthy, though innocuous, task, and began to complain that musical instruction was seriously hampered by the boys' illiteracy. Giving in to what seemed a just complaint Leparskii sanctioned instruction in reading and writing. The Decembrists then proceeded to add courses until the curriculum included crafts, arithmetic, natural sciences, French, and at the request of the local clergy, Latin and Greek. Thus began the katorga-school.

Since the new katorga-school at Petrovsk offered a preparation for seminary work the clergy looked upon it with favor, while those villagers, criminal katorzhniki, and officials ambitious for their children sympathized with the educational efforts of the Decembrists. In time students from the katorga-school performed remarkably well on examination for entry into higher schools, amazing examiners accustomed to poor performances from the Transbaikal students. Since the Petrovsk school operated contrary to established policy for political exiles,

\[1\] Chukovskaia, 62. Zavalishin, II, 97.
there were serious moments whenever examiners attempted to account for outstanding performances among a group heretofore distinguished by its mediocrity.²

When the exiles realized that children of criminal katorzhniki and natives came from very impoverished homes they undertook to clothe and feed the students. The nourishing food and warm clothing was a boon to the youngsters. A more valuable contribution was, of course, the opportunity to acquire appreciation of academic and manual pursuits, since many of these boys came from homes where such accomplishments were viewed with considerable scorn. Moreover, a number of youths acquired an incentive to improve the miserable conditions of their environment and in later years to impart advantages of an education to their own children.³

When the last Decembrist katorzhniki left prison in 1839 activities of the school did not completely cease. Ivan Gorbachevskii settled in Petrovsk, and he continued to teach and inspire the young people there until his death thirty years later.⁴

Proper education of their own children became one of the most disturbing problems to confront the Decembrists. These men tended to give important emphasis to the acquisition of knowledge, and to deplore any future for their children devoid of the pleasures and advantages secured by a liberal education. Circumstances of exile seemed to

³Maksimov, Sobranie sochinenii, III, 330-332.
⁴Kubalov, Katorga i ssylka, XXI, 151. Gorbachevskii, xvi.
foresaw fruition of their hopes, at the least to make their realization difficult. Those with children in Russia might do little more than bear the frustrations of supervising and rearing a family via correspondence laden with advice, exhortations, and, possibly, inspiration. In such cases the men keenly regretted their inability to assist their children. Ivan Iakushkin devoted considerable time during katorga to reading, thinking, preparing manuals of geography, botany, and zoology "in the hope that somehow unexpectedly" he might be of help to his sons. His letters contain contrived and lengthy attempts at counseling and motivating the two boys whom he had left in infancy. Still, these youngsters might gain an education in institutions in Russia and European countries.

While children born to Decembrists in Siberia were a great joy they were also a very grave responsibility. Opportunities were almost non-existent and furthermore the youngsters were deprived of social and political rights. The pleasures that Andrei Rozen found in his large family turned to anxiety in the contemplation of their future. The knowledge that his children were deprived of the rights of citizenship and of property goaded him into educating them well to make their way in a world largely closed to them. When Maria Volkonskaia's anxiety prompted her to petition for funds from her Russian estates to provide an education for the children, the Tsar pointedly reminded her that

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6Rozen, 163, 197.
"since . . . there are no teachers in Siberia . . . the education of children demands no funds. . . ."7

Rather infrequently the exiles sent their children to the few Siberian schools. Such permission was difficult to obtain, while tuitions burdened small incomes and the schools themselves were inferior. The exiles preferred to rely upon their own efforts, often pooling their special skills and knowledge in the cooperative education of the children.8 For example, the Volkonskii children received an education through cooperative efforts. Mukhanov taught them mathematics; Podzhio, geography and history; Lunin, English; and Volkonskii, literature. Michael Volkonskii's later fine record at the Irkutsk high school, whose doors grudgingly opened to him in 1846, confirmed the significance of these tutorial efforts.9

Vasilii Davydov asked his family to send materials from Russia on natural sciences, history, political economy, geography, philosophy, and languages so that he might educate his children at home. Davydov's anxiety for the future of these children in 1842 prompted him to make a fateful decision. In that year the government announced a new policy in regard to the Siberian-born children of Decembrist exiles. It would educate the youngsters in Russian schools at state expense and return

7Sergei Mikhailovich Volkonskii, O dekabristakh: po semeinym vospominaniam (Paris, 1921), 84-85.


to these boys and girls rights and privileges taken from their parents
and heretofore denied them. This was on condition, however, that the
children relinquish the family name and adopt the patronymic. The offer
disgusted and outraged the exiles and none but Davydov accepted.
Vadkovskii's reaction was representative when he wrote "there is
impossible evil in this; unfortunate is he who would give away his
children. . . ."\(^\text{10}\)

Zavalishin was one of those Decembrists who determined that his
Siberian wife and her family should acquire an education, and looked
upon the self-imposed task as his most sacred responsibility. He
devoted himself to preparation of textbooks and tutoring his wife and
sister-in-law in history, geography, mathematics, botany, drawing,
French, and Latin. Because musical knowledge formed a part of the well-
educated person's training, he also introduced his pupils to the intri-
cacies of the guitar—the only instrument at hand.\(^\text{11}\)

The exiles were able to exert influence beyond their own circles
since Siberia was then an educational desert that absorbed the contribu-
tions of educated minds. There was no university in the region until
1888. At mid-century Siberia had half a dozen high schools and about
twenty district elementary schools, inferior institutions receiving
little income or encouragement from state ministries and leading a

\(^\text{10}\) Piksanov, Istorik-marksist, I, 182-183. Literaturnoe nasled-
stvo, LX, 285-286. Basargin, 212-213. Streich, Katorga i ssylka, XXI,
138. E. E. Iakushkin, 82.

\(^\text{11}\) Zavalishin, II, 260.
Students were drawn chiefly from official and merchant classes, the other classes being debarred by law or impoverishment. In the year 1830, 117 and 150 students, respectively, attended Tobolsk and Irkutsk high schools. Tomsk province, with about half a million population in 1853, had ninety-five high school students. Girls schools were practically non-existent as the first such school was established at Irkutsk in 1838 and did not herald a rush of institutions devoted to the education of the female sex. Those who could afford the expenses imported governesses from Europe. Significantly the political exiles were successful in reaching the poorer and indigenous classes—people who otherwise would have remained illiterate. Moreover, the quality of this education was superior for the time and region.

The Decembrists were not the first political exiles to teach; nor were they the last. Prisoners of war during the reign of Peter I were sent to Siberia, where some established private schools. These prisoners were mostly Swedes and in later years Siberia was dotted with enclaves of Swedish-speaking inhabitants. In the eighteenth century political exiles from Ukrainian and Polish territory and, in the nineteenth century, Poles from the rebellions of 1830 and 1863 added to Siberian enlightenment, teaching music and languages. This is to say nothing of


13 Iadrintsev, Sibir kak koloniiia, 558, 559, 560, 564. R. M. Kabo, Goroda Zapadnoi Sibiri; ocherki istoriko-ekonomicheskoi geografii XVII-pervaia polovina XIX vv. (Moscow, 1949), 113. N. M. Druzhinin, "Dekabrist I. D. Lakushkin i ego lankasterskaia shkola," Uchenye zapiski, II (Moskovskii gorodskii pedagogicheskii institut, Moscow, 1941), 90.
the efforts of a rather considerable number of Russian political exiles, of which the Decembrists are an early important group.\footnote{Iadrintsev, Sibir kak koloniiia, 563-564. V. G. Bazanov, Vol'noe obshchestvo liubitelei rossiiskoi slovesnosti (Petrozavodsk, 1949), 76. (Referred to as Bazanov, Vol'noe obshchestvo.)}

The Decembrists' schools in Siberia utilized the monitorial or Lancaster system of instruction developed by two Englishmen—Andrew Bell in India and Joseph Lancaster in Britain. This method entered Russia from England, and also from France where army officers had encountered it during the occupation. In their pre-Siberian days the Decembrists knew of this method and some used it to educate their troops and their serfs.\footnote{Druzhinin, 64-65. Bazanov, Vol'noe obshchestvo, 65, 68.} Iakushkin's schools at Ialutorovsk and Raevskii's at Olonka made use of this method. There is little information on Raevskii's school, but a great fund of material exists in Soviet libraries on the educational work of Iakushkin.\footnote{Druzhinin, 34.} However, little has been done with this material except for an article by N. M. Druzhinin which is useful despite its ideological verbiage.

Ialutorovsk, two hundred \textit{versts} south of Tobolsk on the Tobol River, was a village of haphazardly assorted huts interspersed with a few unsightly stone houses and churches. The populace was largely illiterate \textit{meshchan} (lower middle class) with a small elite of wealthy merchants and the usual complement of inept or corrupt officials. After 1835 Ialutorovsk was the place of settlement for seven Decembrists and the wives of several. The newly formed parochial schools became the
focal point of their interest, efforts, and incomes; but Ivan Iakushkin, with indefatigable energy, restless mind, and a love of teaching, remained the nerve center of these schools. 17

When Father Stephen Znamenskii transferred to Ialutorovsk, Iakushkin quickly perceived that the enlightened priest might wish to establish a parochial school under his clerical authority. Approached by Iakushkin in 1839, Znamenskii eagerly accepted the idea and, most importantly, willingly entrusted its operation to the exile. 18

A Synod' ukaz of 1836-1837, encouraging the educational work of priests, served as the basis of Znamenskii's request to establish a parochial school, and of the consistory's readily granted permission. The ukaz, however, made no provision for funds and state authorities would not grant an appropriation. Therefore, the exiles at Ialutorovsk and Tobolsk contributed from their own funds and solicited aid of their wealthy merchant friends. Construction of the school was interrupted midway by the Ialutorovsk gorodnichii, outraged that such work was proceeding without his knowledge or permission. 19 Decembrists at Tobolsk finally persuaded provincial authorities to countermand the

17 Besides Iakushkin were Entaltsev, Basargin, Obolenskii, Muravev-Apostol, Pushchin, and Tizenhauzen. Chukovskaiia, 117. Druzhinin, 34-35, 47-75. Dekabristy, 236. I. D. Iakushkin, 314, 489.

18 Znamenskii was a good friend of the Decembrists in Tobolsk and soon became acquainted with their comrades at Ialutorovsk. Druzhinin, 35.

the societies earlier, had not been even indirectly involved, or were merely friends of the rebels. The Emperor personally questioned them as they were arrested, using a variety of ingenious approaches, each calculated to break down the particular man before him. Damp cells, chains, bread and water diets, and separation from families accomplished in some instances what Nicholas' inquisitions did not. Most of the men began to talk, implicating themselves and others whether guilty or innocent. This outpouring, during which they even exaggerated their own complicity, was prompted by a sense of guilt and contrition, hope of winning freedom, twisted idealism, cowardice, and the effects of their recent experiences.

The report of the Commission was presented May 30, indicting 579 alleged conspirators. Nicholas appointed a Supreme Court to try the accused; but the outcome was a foregone conclusion. One member of the Court was Michael Speransky, Russia's most distinguished statesman of the nineteenth century, at that time under a cloud of suspicion for possible connection with the Decembrists. The appointment was more than refined torture; it was a test of the man's loyalty. Speransky knew many of the accused or their families, and one of those indicted, Batenkov, had lived with him. Except for a half-hearted attempt to urge leniency in regard to the death sentence, Speransky seems not to have attempted to ameliorate their fate. Admiral Mordvinov was the sole member of the Court to withhold approval of the death sentence. Of those tried, 289 were found guilty. Lesser sentences were meted out to about half of these, while 121 were given severe sentences of death or exile. The
indignant gorodnichii's order, and in July 1842 the boys parochial school finally opened with a student body of six.\textsuperscript{20}

These first students had been gathered from among the young people to whom Iakushkin spoke on his customary walks through the town. By the end of 1842 there were over forty students, sons of Ialutorovsk peasants, officials, Tatars, and Cossacks. Within a few years they came from as far distant as Kurgan and Tobolsk.\textsuperscript{21} The poorer students were given warm clothing in winter, and a wealthy merchant provided needed transportation. Sessions lasted the year-round four days a week, four hours daily during the warmer months and two hours in the winter. All work was accomplished at the school and the students took no assignments or materials home.\textsuperscript{22}

The curriculum included reading, writing, catechism, and elementary mathematics, comprising the usual parochial program. This was considerably augmented with Russian grammar, Latin, Greek, geography, Russian history, geometry, algebra, mechanics, drawing, botany, and zoology. These latter two subjects did not figure in school reports to the consistory and officials. They were taught "unofficially" by Iakushkin. The four-year course provided a broader education than that available at the time in the provincial elementary schools.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{20}Druzhinin, 87. Orlov and Verzhbitskii, 115. At Tobolsk were Decembrists Semenov and Svistunov, both in civil service, Bobrishchev-Pushkin and M. A. Fonvizin, who knew the governor and the Bishop. Druzhinin, 87-89.

\textsuperscript{21}Orlov and Verzhbitskii, 112, 113.

\textsuperscript{22}Chukovskaia, 121. Orlov and Verzhbitskii, 113. Druzhinin, 76.

\textsuperscript{23}Vospominania i rasskazy, II, 351. I. D. Iakushkin, 510. Druzhinin, 77-78.
By the end of 1842 the new school was growing rapidly, seemingly firmly established, and charged by the church with preparing boys for the seminary and with offering an education to those not able to attend the district school. Prospects were very favorable when the school encountered a threat from the district inspector of schools. Piqued that the exile "deprived of all rights" was teaching, jealously aware the parochial school was taking students from the district school, and miffed that he had not been consulted in its operation, Inspector Lukin showered the provincial authorities with denunciatory reports. Further, he visited the school, denounced Iakushkin and abusively ordered him from the classroom. Before the Inspector's activities might culminate disastrously, Senator I. N. Tolstoi arrived at Ialutorovsk in the course of his Siberian inspection tour. Tolstoi was so impressed with the new school that he persuaded the authorities to drop their investigation. Lukin was reminded that his duties stopped short of the parochial school, and the exiles exulted that the Enemy had been vanquished.

Four years later Iakushkin established a girls school, one of the first in Siberia and apparently inspired by the death of his wife whom he had not seen for twenty years. The school sought to provide an education for girls from all classes who were twelve years of age or over. Opening with twenty-five students, the school at first charged a

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24 Golodnikov, Istоричeskii vestnik, XXXI, 757. Druzhinin, 74, 75.

modest tuition, until endowments and proceeds from the sale of the
girls' needlework made it self-sustaining. Instead of mechanics,
advanced mathematics, Latin and Greek, the girls were taught various
types of needlework, sewing, and French. But otherwise the operation
and curricula of the two schools were similar.26

Absence of corporal punishment and the warm relations Iakushkin
maintained with and between the students made both schools popular. In
fourteen years the boys school graduated 594 students while sixteen
hundred attended. The girls school in the decade before Iakushkin left
Siberia graduated 191 students. At the time of his departure in 1856
there were fifty girls studying at the school.27

The Lancaster method possessed several important advantages, as
well as some disadvantages. It required few qualified teachers,
necessitated no large expenditures for books and materials, and thus
seemed to be the most inexpensive yet efficient method of producing
literate citizens in a region of little wealth, few capable instructors,
and mass illiteracy. The older and more proficient students assisted
with the instruction, thereby reducing the need for experienced teachers.
Within the large classroom tablets and charts were arranged about the
walls according to subject and difficulty. In groups of ten the
students worked under the guidance of a monitor. Competent students

26 I. D. Iakushkin, 490, 659. Druzhinin, 89. Vospominaniia i
rasskazy, II, 265. Orlov and Verzhbitskii, 117.

27 Znamenskii, Sibirskii sbornik, III, 89. Druzhinin, 86.
Kubalov, Katorga i ssylka, XXI, 152. I. D. Iakushkin, 440.
moved toward the head of the group, and when the material was mastered in a particular section they were examined by the supervising teacher (in this case Iakushkin) for admission to the next level of difficulty. The monitor asked questions of the students in his group; answers were given first from the charts and then from memory, until the material was learned. The monitor did not correct answers; the students corrected one another. Nor was the monitor responsible for imparting material beyond that contained on the charts. In learning to write the students worked first in sand, then with slates, and finally with pen and ink.

In addition to instructing the monitors and testing the students, Iakushkin prepared most of the materials for the courses. His comrades assisted in transposing these materials to the large wall charts. The course in geography required about fifty such charts, while the presentation of Russian history from Rurik to the accession of Nicholas I required some sixty tablets. (This course, as all of them, was presented in a prudently non-political manner.) N. I. Grech's text in Russian grammar was used, but considerably re-worked and enlarged by Iakushkin for his students. All courses might utilize the Lancaster method, but to supplement its emphasis upon rote memorization and methods reminiscent of a "conveyor belt," Iakushkin devised various new

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29 Bazanov and Kazanskii, Sovetskii sever, I, 33.
methods and technics. For the course in mechanics he used models and
apparati to illustrate principles of physics; the geography course
utilized specially constructed maps and globes. Botany and zoology were
studied on excursions where the students learned to recognize, classify,
analyze, and sketch the animals and vegetation of Western Siberia.\textsuperscript{31}
Iakushkin's work in botany and geography was known by contemporary
educators and scholars, and some of his methods for these courses were
unusual for that time.\textsuperscript{32}

The success of the schools encouraged officials to visit
Ialutorovsk and prompted district directors to send teachers who
observed and then introduced these methods into other Siberian schools.
Girls' schools at Omsk and Tobolsk were modeled on that at Ialutorovsk.
Several provincial governors, the Bishop, the director of elementary
schools, and the inspector of Kurgan district schools were among the
officials visiting the parochial schools. Officials who had seen their
operation were reluctant to curtail the schools or the work of
Iakushkin.\textsuperscript{33}

These schools might have had a stormier existence had not the
provincial authorities recognized their value, the church hierarchy held
Father Znamenskii in great esteem, and the Decembrists at Tobolsk

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\textsuperscript{31}I. D. Iakushkin, 657. Chukovskaja, 118.
\textsuperscript{32}Dekabrjisty, 237-238, 302, 303.
\textsuperscript{33}Dekabrjisty, 293, 316. Bazanov and Kazanskii, Sovieteskii sever,
I, 33-34. Znamenskii, Sibirskii sbornik, III, 88. Orlov and
\end{flushright}
wielded some influence with the governor and the Bishop. For although Father Znamenskii was head of the schools, it was commonly realized in Siberia that Iakushkin actually supervised their operation and remained the inspiration for their existence. Over a period of years reports to Petersburg stated merely that Iakushkin kept his own apartment, read, and behaved in an "exemplary manner," and thus Siberian authorities concealed his connection with the schools. For some time the fiction was preserved that Iakushkin was a friend of Father Znamenskii who came often to the school to visit the priest and who may have looked around the place from time to time, but nothing more. This was the tenor of Znamenskii's reply when questioned by the Bishop; and it was the answer given those investigations stirred up periodically by a continual flow of denunciations from Ialutorovsk officials.  

When the girls school opened reports from Ialutorovsk intensified, mainly denouncing Iakushkin's role. However, the reports were ignored by provincial authorities or else explained away by the exiles when confronted with them. In fact the Decembrists at Ialutorovsk so successfully explained the situation and those at Tobolsk so ably influenced the authorities, that it was decided in 1848 to grant the boys school two hundred rubles a year from the Ialutorovsk land tax revenue—a fact which did not please local officials. The report accompanying this decision explained that since the parochial school

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35Druzhinin, 92.
educated not only children of the clergy but also those of the various classes and "fully occupied the place of a public school," it merited financial assistance. At this time then Iakushkin was able to pay a small salary to his two assistants.\textsuperscript{36}

Shortly thereafter the situation altered. During Father Znamenskii's absence Iakushkin clashed with the assistant priest who objected to an addition to the girls school in the church yard, and who revealed all the details of the exile's activity to the Bishop. Nevertheless, with the help of wealthy friends the school was enlarged and located elsewhere.\textsuperscript{37} At this same time the new inspector of schools, N. A. Abramov, attempted to place the boys school under his supervision and, if possible, close the girls school. The new threat took Iakushkin to Tobolsk where his efforts, with those of Znamenskii and the Tobolsk exiles, saved the schools and even effected Abramov's transfer. Iakushkin, however, was forced by circumstances to relinquish his active participation in the work of the schools rather than risk their closure. Indirectly, he continued to take an interest in them.\textsuperscript{38}

Thus the attempt to place the boys school under district authority was forestalled, but only for a while. In 1853 Znamenskii was transferred to another church, and his successor took little interest in

\textsuperscript{36}Druzhinin, 89-90. Orlov and Verzhbitskii, 116. Golodnikov, Istoricheskii vestnik, XXXIV, 93.

\textsuperscript{37}Druzhinin, 90. I. D. Iakushkin, 322, 354.

\textsuperscript{38}Druzhinin, 91, 93. I. D. Iakushkin, 322, 325, 358. Orlov and Verzhbitskii, 117, 118. N. A. Abramov (1812-1870) wrote on the history, geography, and archaeology of Siberia.
preserving the school's independence. Three years later, after
Iakushkin returned to Russia, the boys school became a one-year prepara-
tion for the district school, while the girls school soon closed.³⁹

A more stern official attitude toward Iakushkin from 1850 may
have reflected the reactionary policies adopted by Nicholas I in
response to events in Europe. The vigorous attempts to subordinate the
parochial school to district authority were no doubt spurred by the
school's receipt of a yearly appropriation after 1848.⁴⁰

At Olonka, a village near Irkutsk, Vladimir Raevskii opened a
school based on the Lancaster method and supported from his own funds.
The people at first were dubious of the new school, feeling the pursuit
of education "dulled the mind." As long as the populace considered
educated persons to be fools they were hesitant to seek knowledge for
themselves. But gradually the children, and then their elders, began
attending the school, and it eventually attracted young and old of both
sexes and all classes.⁴¹

The Tobolsk girls school, commissioned in 1852, was organized
and administered with the assistance of Decembrist Peter Svistunov. The
governor's appointment of Svistunov was not startling, as the exile had
been a civil servant for some years, was widely educated, and familiar
with the Ialutorovsk schools. About one hundred girls from the poorer

³⁹I. D. Iakushkin, 328, 672. Druzhinin, 93.
⁴⁰Druzhinin, 91. I. D. Iakushkin, 340.
⁴¹Sibir i dekabristy, 70. Chukovskaia, 125. Kudriavtsev, Irkutsk; ocherki po istorii goroda, 109. Kubalov, Dekabristy v
vostochnie Sibiri, 92.
classes studied reading, writing, and "froth"—Svistunov's expression for needlework and sewing. 42 The Bestuzhevs and Konstantin Torson opened a school at Selenginsk for Buriats and villagers aspiring to read and write. They operated also a craft shop where Buriats trained as blacksmiths, locksmiths, carpenters, and opticians. When the Buriats left for their native villages, often far distant from Selenginsk, they took with them not only new skills but tools and equipment necessary for their trade, and thus effected changes in their native milieus. Over a period of some fifteen years the Bestuzhevs trained hundreds of Transbaikal Buriats. The Bestuzhev sisters taught sewing to the girls and women of Selenginsk. 43 Mukhanov at Bratskii Ostrog and Ust-Ude, Zavalishin at Chita, Muravev-Apostol at Viliuisk, the Beliaev brothers at Mimusinsk, Peter Borisov and Iushnevskii at Malaia Razvodnaia, and Alexander Bestuzhev at Iakutsk, all more or less informally operated schools for varying periods of time. 44


The Siberian officials employed some of the exiles as tutors. Iushnevskii gave piano lessons to the governor-general's daughter; Wilhelm Kuchelbeker educated the children of the chief of Boarder Guards. Peter Beliaev, Bechasnov, Zavalishin, and Batenkov were among others who taught the children of local authorities. When they could, the exiles took orphans and other youngsters into their homes, rearing and educating them and sending some to Russia for training. Children of Cossacks, Tatars, Buriats, peasants, and the offspring of their Siberian friends and comrades partially filled the role of sons and daughters left in Russia. It may be added that in some cases this tutoring provided, or was expected to provide, much needed financial remuneration.

Siberian officials did not overtly encourage the efforts of Decembrists to spread literacy and learning, for policy governing political exiles was stringent, while fiscal and political policies discouraged a liberal stand on education. But Siberian officialdom obviously made no sincere effort over the years to comply with the letter of imperial decrees, though it did manage considerable meddling.

47 Sokolov, 129.
Court recommended that thirty-six be executed, including five whose crimes merited drawing and quartering; eighty-nine were sentenced to Siberian exile. Nicholas made a show of magnanimity, commuting death for thirty-one to permanent exile at katorga (hard labor), while the five most serious criminals had their sentences changed to hanging. On July 13, Pestel, Ryleev, Kakhovsky, Sergei Muravev-Apostol, and Bestuzhev-Riumin were hanged in a bungling ceremony which produced profound shock, for there had been no executions during the reign of Alexander I and Russia had in fact no de jure death penalty.

The sentences were cruel and in some cases arbitrary. Ivan Iakushkin had broken with the secret society in 1820; Bashmakov was not a member of a society, but had merely known Sergei Muravev-Apostol. A rather sizeable number of those exiled had not taken part in the revolt. Pestel was arrested before the revolt occurred and yet he was executed; while Trubetskoi, morally as responsible as the executed, received a sentence of exile. Some who had as much reason as the accused to tremble escaped trial and punishment, for instance, Michael Orlov who had been one of the leaders in the Union of Welfare.

To the end of his life Nicholas remained sensitive to the subject of the uprising. It was especially displeasing that men of the noble class and representatives of the foremost families in the Empire should

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8E. E. Iakushkin, Dekabristy na poselenii (Leningrad, 1926), 42.
and at times restricted or prohibited this educational work. In 1827 Shakovskii at Turukhansk was strictly forbidden to teach.\textsuperscript{48} When the governor general of Eastern Siberia learned in 1836 the Decembrists were teaching he ordered his officials to stop this activity or suffer the consequences of allowing such a "harmful influence on the minds" of the populace.\textsuperscript{49} Iakushkin encountered difficulties with officials in the 1850's, and all exiles who attempted to teach felt the ubiquity of officialdom. But attempts to thwart these educational activities lacked the will and the general support necessary to succeed.

There is considerable evidence that educational efforts of the Decembrists were remembered and appreciated by the Siberian populace well into this century. Descriptions and recollections of these teachers appear often in Russian journals and books in the decades after amnesty, as well as being noted in studies of Siberian life and political exile. Soviet historians disinterring the Tsarist exile system in the 1920's sought out former students of Decembrists and encouraged these ancients to write. While these recollections reveal the faded and fuzzy memories of advanced age they reflect also an awareness of what the exiles had done for them, for their brothers, sisters, or parents.\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{48} Bazanov, Sovetskii sever, I, 30.

\textsuperscript{49} Chukovskaiain, 108.

If it can be said that without the fact of political banishment the Decembrists would have been more active citizens, the question can be asked: how much more might they have done? What educational work might they have undertaken in European parts of the empire at that time that they did not in some degree manage to accomplish during exile? Perhaps the Siberian interlude was educationally as productive as had these individuals remained citizens in good standing free of the restraints of exile. For the territory in which they lived and worked was far from the capitals that exuded reaction, while exile itself acted as a catalyst to transform ideals and ambitions into reality and impatience into sober pursuit of the possible. Moreover, Siberia did not know serfdom; the impoverished peasant or native might acquire some knowledge if he so wished and if the opportunity were there, as it was at Ialutorovsk and elsewhere. Viewed within the framework of conditions and progress in the Empire during this period, the legacy of the Decembrists to Siberia comes into significant perspective. The exiles left to a culturally thirsting region a small but well trained and inspired group of educated men and women.

CHAPTER VI

AGRARIAN, MECHANICAL, AND SCIENTIFIC PURSUITS

In 1835 Emperor Nicholas I decided that each Decembrist settled in Siberia would be given fifteen desiatins, or some forty-one acres, of plow land near his village. When executing this decree in the following year, it was stipulated that the exile visit his land only with permission of local authorities, and in going to and fro remain within designated limits of travel. A grant of forty acres was expected to provide the exile with an income and to secure the future of children born in exile.¹

Prior to their Siberian sojourn the Decembrists had some acquaintance with agrarian pursuits; but knowledge acquired from the ownership of large estates and numerous serfs or through academic study, did not prepare a man to farm in Siberia where conditions were far different from those in Russia. Much Siberian land is unsuited to farming, the climate is severe and extreme, and at that time markets were small, local, and restricted. Unlike Russia, Siberia exported no produce.²

¹One desiatin is 2.70 acres. Streich, Katorga i ssylka, XXI, 127. Dmitriev-Mamonov, 20, 21.

²Dekabristy v buriatii, i. Chukovskaiia, 64-65. Sokolov, 112.
During their period at "katorga" several Decembrists took advantage of the opportunity to study farming with Konstantin Torson, an acknowledged authority, and gardens at both Chita and Petrovsk prisons provided practical experience. Yet this was poor preparation for the conditions that confronted the exiles in settlement: bad soil, adverse climate, poverty, official restrictions, limited markets. And this is to say nothing of the inadequate training and the uncongenial temperaments of the reluctant farmer-exiles.3

The Imperial injunction of 1835 was followed with varying degrees of application, success, and failure. Paul Vygodovskii refused to till his land, informing the authorities that its "location . . . and climate . . . made the land useless" for any agrarian purpose. Instead Vygodovskii spent his time in composing the essays and notes that culminated in 1854 in his rearrest.4 In philosophic jest Michael Lunin observed that "Plato and Herodotus do not abide well with the plow and harrow." Yet reluctant to depend upon his sister, Lunin made conscientious if not especially skillful attempts to farm. His first year brought him about one hundred forty rubles income.5

Eugene Obolenskii had no illusions concerning his ability to farm, remarking on one occasion that he could not distinguish good soil

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3Dekabristy v buriatii, 28, 81. Beliaev, 232. Sokolov, 111.
4Beliaev, 300-301. Rozen, 204. I. D. Iakushkin, 592.
5Gessen, Dekabrist Lunin i ego vremia, 111. Lunin, 37.
"They ask that I farm," commented another exile; "I spent ten years in cadet corps, ten years in military service, seven years in prison—I ask, where could I have learned farming." And each time this gentleman did wish to till the soil he must send over one hundred miles for permission.

Alexander Frolov was one of those Decembrists who took a genuine interest in agriculture. A man of little academic education but a skilled farmer, Frolov at katorga assiduously shunned the academic pursuits that appealed so to most of the political exiles and worked instead in their prison garden. In settlement Frolov operated a vegetable and wheat farm, a tobacco plantation, and a mill. Before their transfer to the Caucasus in 1839, Alexander and Peter Beliaev developed several relatively prosperous agrarian enterprises. They ran a mill, raised cattle, and operated a large farm of about five hundred acres. Mukhanov, who farmed more modestly, reported an income in 1843 of over two hundred rubles and anticipated twice that amount for the following year.

After seriously giving thought to the possibilities for farming in the Transbaikal, Nicholas and Michael Bestuzhev concluded that conditions suited the raising of merino sheep. When they took up

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6 Sokolov, 110. 7 Sibir i dekabristy, 142.
9 Beliaev, 329, 330, 331. 10 Pamiati dekabristov, I, 211.
settlement at Selenginsk they, along with Konstantin Torson, two local merchants, and a retired officer, organized a sheep-raising company which invested in five hundred head of sheep and thirteen hundred acres of meadow land. From the land they hoped to feed the sheep and sell a surplus of hay for profit.\textsuperscript{11}

During this period the letters of the Bestuzhevs are a valuable source for information on farming and the economy of the Transbaikal. The problems encountered were of considerable magnitude; there was the difficulty of securing suitable hay and fodder, a shortage of workers, crop failures, droughts, unsatisfactory conditions of trade, and depressed prices of skins and wool.\textsuperscript{12} Since merino sheep did not mix with the herds raised in the Transbaikal their offspring had no market. The fine wool from these sheep could not be woven in local mills and transportation to Russia raised the price to prohibitive levels, while meat of the merinos was tough. Apparently, a slim hope of selling wool to an American purchaser in the region failed to materialize. Thus a combination of adverse circumstances foredoomed the merino farm to financial failure and the Bestuzhevs turned to gardening and cattle raising.\textsuperscript{13}

While land in Siberia was cheap, the necessary farm buildings, livestock, and equipment, constituted a large investment. Attempting to

\textsuperscript{11} Baranovskaja, 162. \textit{Vospominaniia Bestuzhevykh}, 191.

\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Pis'ma iz Sibiri}, 72, 84-95 passim, 61-63.

expand their farm and thereby improve their profits the Bestuzhevs bought the buildings and cattle of a neighbor relocating in Russia. But gardening, wheat growing, and cattle raising did not provide the anticipated rewards. The region was too dry for consistently good harvest, the growing season of eight to ten weeks, too short for many garden crops. Even in good years, which averaged one out of three or four years, the price of grain was likely to be low. Without transportation facilities only very limited markets were available. Winter snows in some years, summer droughts in others, ruined fodder and made cattle raising hazardous. Hoping to augment their income, the Bestuzhevs and Konstantin Torson constructed a grain mill, adding thereby to their list of agrarian failures. These men had the necessary technical, mechanical, and academic skills, as well as determination and drive. But, while conditions in the Transbaikal permitted a man to farm for his own needs, they did not at that time enable him to do so on a large scale and to great profit. The Bestuzhevs did not at first fully appreciate this fact, and for a decade poured their money from Nicholas' painting and Michael's craft shop into these agrarian ventures. In general, this failure to recognize and adapt to the special conditions of Siberia characterized the efforts of other Decembrists who farmed.


15 Sokolov, 110. Dekabristy v buriati, 4. Baranovskaia, 159-160.

16 Sokolov, 105, 110.
Those Decembrists most benefited from an agrarian life who liked the outdoors, the hard work, or who might find restored health, contentment, or a feeling of usefulness in tilling the soil. The independently wealthy Decembrists, such as Volkonskii, Trubetskoi, and Nikita Muravev, might think of farming as an occupation for the spirit, not as a venture whose financial outcome was significant.  

Contrary to imperial hope and expectation, farming brought the exiles into contact with the populace. The Decembrist katorzhniki supplied the Chita garrison with food from their garden. Workers at the Minusinsk gold mines were provided with grain and beef by the Beliaevs. Most of the farmer-exiles helped the impoverished Siberian peasants with money, seeds, and advice on the better cultivation of crops. Shakhovskii's energetic assistance to the peasants at Turukhansk aroused the authorities to order his relocation. Sergei Volkonskii spent most of his time with the peasantry of Irkutsk, summers working in the fields, winters at the market-place gatherings. Michael and Nicholas Bestuzhev came to consider their peasant neighbors as "more or less our responsibility. . . ." The exiles frequently employed the Siberians as laborers on their farms and especially at harvest time, which was a season of conviviality, work, and feasting. Gathering early in the morning the peasants worked at harvesting until dusk signaled a hearty

17Sokolov, 110. Beliaev, 300. Rosen, 204.


19Belogolovyi, 36. Dekabristy v buriatii, 5.
dinner prepared by the exiles' wives. Dancing, songs, and music usually followed until dawn. 20

Partly through intent, partly in ignorance of local conditions, the exiles persisted in attempting to raise various fruits and vegetables absent from a Siberian diet; and these ventures in improved farming and better nourishment were known to succeed. At Chita the Decembrists raised cucumbers, watermelons, muskmelons, asparagus, and kohlrabi for the first time in the memory of local populace, whose diets had consisted largely of cabbage and onions. 21 Muravev-Apostol was the first person at Viliuisk to cultivate vegetables, while at Iakutsk Alexander Bestuzhev attempted to raise flowers and vegetables unknown to the populace, although the severe climate precluded complete success. 22 Raevskii at Olonka and Nicholas Bestuzhev at Selenginsk introduced methods for raising melons. 23

Dr. Belogolovyi described the success of Aleksei Iushnevskii in growing maize, which was totally unfamiliar to his Siberian friends. A Soviet writer on Siberian agriculture has concluded tentatively that the Decembrists introduced this crop into the region; at any rate it was apparently unknown before their arrival. 24

20 Rozen, 202.
22 Muravev-Apostol, 63. Safronov, 26.
Bechasnov taught the peasants of Smolenskoe and vicinity to extract a reputedly tasty oil from hemp seeds. Several of the Decembrists cultivated tobacco; and although not marketable elsewhere, tobacco has continued to the present to be grown for local consumption. Michael Kuchelbeker grew rye (khleb) for the first time at Barguzin. The scythe was brought to the Buriats of Selenginsk by the Bestuzhevs, and its use changed the living patterns of these natives who before had each winter moved to new pasturage for their cattle.

At Chita and Petrovsk, where there were no skilled craftsmen, the exiles at katorga perforce were their own tailors, carpenters, and mechanics. Some of them attained considerable skill in these arts, but Nicholas Bestuzhev was especially adept. Spoken of as the exile with the "golden hands," he devoted himself to many mechanical and scientific pursuits. Among his multifarious activities Bestuzhev constructed sun dials, clocks and watches, devised a sprinkling system for the garden, made cradles and toys for the children, turned discarded fetters into jewelry for wives and relatives, fixed Petrovsk's idle saw mill, with Torson's help repaired Iushnevskii's dilapidated piano, and taught these and other skills to his comrades.

26Zalkind, Tainye obshchestva, VIII, 173.
27Vospominaniia Bestuzhevykh, 175. Maksimov, Sibir i katorga, 406.
instigate and stage a revolt against him. In numerous instances he knew the conspirators; their relatives were among his advisers, officials, and associates. Nicholas ordered that the Decembrists never be mentioned in public or print, and adhered doggedly to that command, hoping to erase the memory of the events of "the fourteenth." This policy, which added considerably to the martyrdom of the Decembrists in death and exile, helped to create a legend as impelling as the revolt itself in furthering Russia's revolutionary elan. That the Decembrists during their investigation recanted, confessed freely, and implicated each other did not diminish the facts of their sacrifice and fate. Besides, this regrettable behavior was a temporary lapse from honor and dignity. They quickly recovered. The Decembrists inspired Herzen with their ideals, devotion, and self-sacrifice, and Herzen in turn inspired a generation of Russian intelligentsia.

9 Many illustrious names were among the Decembrists, including the Princes Volkonsky (whose mother was at the time of his exile a lady-in-waiting at the Court), Trubetskoi (descendant of Prince Gedymin), Odoevskii, Bariatinskii, Obolenskii, and Shchepin-Rostov (all descendants of the House of Kurik), and Muravev, Tolstoi, and Kakhovskii. Prince Paul Dolgoruky, A Handbook of the Principal Families in Russia, trans. F. Z. (London, 1858), 45-58 et passim. Some families had several Decembrists. Four Bestuzhev brothers were involved: three were exiled to Siberia and one to the family estate. Of the three Muravev-Apostol brothers, one was executed, one committed suicide at the fate of his brother, and one was sent to Siberia. In all, ten members of the Muravev family were implicated in the uprising: the aforementioned Muravev-Apostols, Alexander and Michael N. Muravev, Artamon Z. Muravev, Nikita and Alexander M. Muravev, the brother of Nikita's wife, Z. G. Chernyshev, and their cousin, Michael Lunin. Sergei Ia. Gessen, Dekabrist Lunin i ego vremia (Moscow, 1926), 13.

10 D. S. Mirsky, "The Decembrists," The Slavonic Review, IV (December, 1925), 403-404.

11 Martin Malia, Alexander Herzen and the Birth of Russian Socialism, 1812-1855 (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1961), 31-34, 50-52.
For many years Nicholas Bestuzhev had been fascinated by the idea of a simple chronometer for ocean vessels. At katorga he began to work on the perfection of such an instrument whose simplicity, and thus its cheapness, he believed, would save lives lost at sea through the misguided frugality of captains and ship owners who refused to purchase the expensive item. Despite numerous obstacles Bestuzhev pursued to the end of his life this interest in a simpler, more perfect chronometer. There was first the difficulty of obtaining adequate information on clock construction. Then came the task of procuring funds, material, and equipment. Bestuzhev waited ten years for a special type of bronze which could be obtained only from Russia, not in China or Siberia; the bronze finally arrived after his death. He experimented continually with substitute materials. The necessity of setting and proving the clocks by the stars prompted him to build a telescope and equip an observatory. To finance this work he spent hours at the easel painting, until his eyes began to fail. But with all these delays and obstacles, the work continued. Bestuzhev made numerous clocks, each embodying a different idea, principle, or a combination of these. The timepieces were remarkably accurate, in the words of their maker, "vastly more simple and cheap than the best English chronometers while yielding them nothing in accuracy." Testimony of others supported this conviction.


30 Quoted in G. E. Pavlova, Dekabrist Nikolai Bestuzhev; istorik russkogo flota (Moscow, 1953), 10.

31 Vospominaniia Bestuzhevykh, 251, 277. Rozen, 165.
Bestuzhev spoke of himself as "... a partisan of all that is new with the condition that it be good." He followed the developments in science in Russia and Europe, experiencing chagrin at the constant restrictions to his own scientific endeavors. Writing to Admiral Reineke, Nicholas complained that "... here, far from everything contemporary I suffer from inadequate nourishment for my scientific work. If only I had the means!!! Moreover, my voice cannot be heard from such a remote region and under such conditions."32

Among the inventions of Bestuzhev during exile was a stove of simple construction which required less fuel and maintained heat considerably longer than ordinary stoves. I. I. Sviiazev, inventor of the so-called sviiazevskii heating system, marvelled at the ease with which Bestuzhev grasped principles and ideas learned only after many years by those more active in the field.33 Another invention was a rifle lock developed to the "ne plus ultra of simplicity." Shortly before Bestuzhev's death in 1854 Governor-General Muravev (later Amurskii) asked him to prepare a model of this lock. Muravev sent this to the Grand Prince Constantine where it "dropped as into water."

"Probably a scholarly committee has been analyzing its cunning simplicity for a decade while the poor soldier ... has campaigned with his complicated instrument" remarked Nicholas' brother.34

32 Baranovskaia, 197, and quoted, 185.

33 Chukovskaia, 73. Baranovskaia, 165. Vospominaniiia Bestuzhevykh, 517-518.

34 Dekabristy, 249. Vospominaniiia Bestuzhevykh, 183.
Nicholas' interest in the rifle lock in turn inspired a keen enthusiasm for hunting. Bestuzhev refused to venture forth, however, until he was completely outfitted with equipment of his own construction, from rifle and fowling piece to cartridges and ammunition. Notable perseverance and ingenuity in preparing himself for the hunt brought Bestuzhev considerable first hand knowledge of the Transbaikal and the Buriat hunters. But apparently the intrepid hunter had an "artistic soul" that so freely wandered over the beauties of woods and mountains the game made off from under his feet; and chance sight of the animal brought him such agitation the shot went wild. 35

Bestuzhev's younger brother Michael was inventor and maker of the sideek or bestuzhevka (a carriage) which was used throughout eastern Siberia. Michael was one of those exiles who developed an interest in mechanics when, at katorga, he sought diversion from constant reading. In settlement he put his newly acquired interest and skill to use developing and producing the sideek. His shop supplied a radius of several hundred verst around Selenginsk, and elsewhere his carriage inspired some feeble imitations. 36 This carriage was sturdy, long-lasting, of simple design and construction, and easily drawn over the rugged terrain of the Transbaikal. In fact, the sideek could follow

35 Vospominaniia Bestuzhevykh, 183-184.
36 Baranovskaia, 163, 164. Chukovskaia, 72. Vospominaniia Bestuzhevykh, 323.
any path a horse might take while constituting a lighter burden for the animal than carrying the rider. 37

The Bestuzhevs and their close friend Torson, all former navy men, were interested in devising improvements for sailing and steam vessels which, they hoped, would "lighten the load of the . . . sailor." Michael Bestuzhev and Torson worked on improvements for hydraulic engines. A few of their inventions were similar to devices later used in German and American steam ships. 38 Nicholas Bestuzhev had plans for an improved steering mechanism. When he learned this same idea was later incorporated into American vessels—realizing he had been outstripped by someone else—Bestuzhev lamented he necessarily had grown accustomed in Siberia to seeing his ideas developed and utilized by others. 39

The efforts of Konstantin Torson to construct and promote agricultural machinery were as futile as they were extensive. Torson's interest in agricultural machinery was born in Siberia. During katorga he constructed models and made numerous drawings of farm equipment embodying improvements in design and construction. Some of these plans were turned over to comrades leaving for settlement, and in at least one

38 Literaturnoe nasledstvo. LX, 231-232, 243-244.
39 Vospominaniia Bestuzhevykh, 518.
instance the recipient of these plans had more success with the new invention than had the inventor himself.\(^{40}\)

While he developed all types of farm machinery, Torson's dream remained a machine that would winnow, thresh, and grind the grain in one operation. With profits anticipated from the operation of this machine Torson hoped to establish a factory and supply the Siberian peasant with mechanized equipment. Torson considered apparently that the Siberian was lazy enough to wish to lighten his work while sufficiently industrious to adopt mechanized farming.\(^{41}\)

In settlement Torson undertook and completed construction of his combination thresher, despite the ever-present problems of funds, labor, and materials. The few peasants who used it found this a wonderfully efficient and amazing machine. But other peasants, disturbed by the behemoth, wrecked it. Heartbroken, Torson found what comfort he might in the similarity of his own and Richard Arkwright's experiences with the ignorant mob.\(^{42}\)

Friends who pointed to the unsuitability of Transbaikal farming for large scale mechanization made no impression, and Torson's small fortune, lavished on these schemes, vanished as completely as his dreams. Still he would not give up attempts to promote mechanized


\(^{41}\)Kudriavtsev, Istoriia buriat-mongol'skogo naroda, 228. Dekabristy v buriatii, 83, 84, 85.

\(^{42}\)Kudriavtsev, Istoriia buriat-mongol'skogo naroda, 228. Dekabristy v buriatii, 35.
farming. In speaking of Torson’s love for his machines, Nicholas
Bestuzhev wrote in 1839 that his friend was "like a man who in old age
decides to fall in love. So [Torson] did not give any attention to
mechanics until ten years ago when he first noticed its beauty, and
since then . . . he loves it to unreason, even . . . foolishness. . . ."

The huge wreckage of Torson’s dream stood reproachfully before
his house for years. The inventor was heard to remark he would burn the
thing were he not afraid of burning down the house as well. Its
ultimate fate is briefly alluded to in the correspondence of comrades:
"Torson has sold his machine for the parts."

Count Nicholas Mordvinov, member of the court trying the insur­
gents, suggested in May of 1826 that the government use the Decembrist
exiles for agricultural development and scientific study of Siberia, as
the region had need of the skills in which these men were versed.
This enlightened suggestion was coolly received. Instead, official
policy attempted to safeguard against the very situation Mordvinov
envisaged. The government did not intend that the political exiles
develop or study Siberia.

The second quarter of the nineteenth century was a period of
increased interest in and study of Siberia. Scandinavian, German, and
Russian scientists visited the region to investigate its climate, flora

43 Vospominaniia Bestuzhevykh, 259, 260, 302. Pis’ma iz Sibiri,
97, 19.
44 Vospominaniia Bestuzhevykh, 302.
45 Quoted in Baranovskaia, 157.
46 Arkhiv Grafov N. S. Mordvinovykh, ed. V. A. Bil’basov (St.
Petersburg, 1903), VIII, 41-42.
and fauna, geology, and meteorology. Decembrist exiles assisted these scientific expeditions in one guise or another. In fact, one Soviet student of the Decembrists' exile has concluded there were few if any expeditions to Siberia in the late 1820's and 1830's that were not assisted by the exiles. Further, the Decembrists on their own initiative made scientific studies of the country. This activity, though contrary to imperially established policy, was in part carried on with the connivance or acquiescence of local authorities.

The Beliaev brothers at Minusinsk assisted the German scientist Lessing in his barometric measurements and helped also the Russian astronomer Vasilii Fedorov. The mathematical genius of Nicholas Zaikin considerably aided the Norwegian scientist and philosopher Christopher Hansteen. Christian Due's expedition along the shores of the Olekma River was accompanied by Andrei Andreev, and in the Iakutsk region Due received from Muravev-Apostol climatic, ethnographic, and archaeological data. Alexander Bestuzhev in 1828 helped the Norwegian scientist Georg Erman in studies of the earth's magnetism at Iakutsk.

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47 Chukovskaia, 99-100.

48 Sto let iakutskoi ssylki, 97. Kubalov, Dekabristy v vostochnie Sibiri, 61.

49 It has been impossible to identify Lessing positively. Possibly this is Christian Friederich Lessing (1809-1862), German doctor and botanist. Fedorov (1802-1855) from 1832 to 1837 coordinated a series of latitudinal and longitudinal points in Siberia. Beliaev, 308-309. Chukovskaia, 105.

L. F. L'vov had the assistance of Wilhelm Kuchelbeker in his investigation of conditions among the Tungus tribes of the Transbaikal.  

A. T. Middendorf's expedition of 1843 studied the vegetation, resources, and climate of northern Siberia. The northern regions, especially the Eniseisk-Turukhansk area, are of interest to scientists where they are equidistant from the warming effects of both Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. At Middendorf's request Decembrist Iakubovich was granted permission to assist in this expedition, on condition that none of his studies be published under either his own name or a pseudonym. Further, it was not to be explained from whom Middendorf received his information in the case of Iakubovich. Many years later the exile was given credit for meteorological observations, and for studies on the farming, flora, and gold-bearing streams of the Nazimov region. Iakubovich's participation was the subject of official reports and concern until his death a few years later made ridiculous the debate over his assistance of the Middendorf expedition.

Stephen Semenov took part in Alexander Humboldt's Siberian expedition. Semenov was an especially educated and learned man, much respected by head of the Omsk oblast, General Loran. Loran sought to please the great German scientist by offering Semenov's services while the expedition was in the region. At his audience with the Tsar in 1829

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51 "Iz vospominanii Leonida Fedorovicha L'vova," Russkii arkhiv, XXIII, 548.

52 Chukovskaia, 102-105. Middendorf's explorations (1843) finished the delineation of Russia's Arctic shore in addition to the other accomplishments.
Humboldt remarked that he "was astonished and delighted . . . to encounter . . . really educated people in the most distant corners of your vast Empire." Nicholas' glow of pleasure evaporated when Humboldt explained it was the Decembrist exile to whom he referred. Quickly an imperial courier reached Loran with angry reprimands and orders for Semenov's transfer to a more remote region. 53

The extent and scope of this aid to scientific groups is not completely known as the scientists necessarily hesitated to credit contributions of political exiles. It is probable that the Russian botanist Nicholas Turchaninov had the cooperation of several Decembrists in studying Siberian flora during the 1830's and 1840's, though the botanist does not mention such help. 54

Working individually in villages throughout Siberia, the Decembrists added to the accumulation of knowledge about this vast region. Much of this information was, however, lost or filed away and forgotten for many decades. For instance, a number of the exiles sought to share their knowledge and their collections of Siberian flora with the Botanical Gardens at Petersburg. Podzhio, Volkonskii, Shakovskii and the Borisov brothers all sent descriptions, drawings, or specimens to the Gardens. A portion of this information never got beyond the Third Division, whose files later disgorged these and other evidence of scientific work of the exiles. 55

53 Chukovskaia, 101, 102.

54 Chukovskaia, 106, 100. Nicholas Turchaninov (1796-1863) was a Russian botanist who worked in Irkutsk after 1828.

55 Chukovskaia, 82, 84, 85, 96.
CHAPTER II

KATORGA

Decembrists who had pictured Siberia as a nineteenth-century inferno, or thought of it as a region at the "edge of the inhabited world," began to feel their gloom lift a little as they traveled to exile. "The further we went into the depths of Siberia, the more it gained in my eyes" commented one exile in surprise.\(^1\) The people were more alert, more spontaneous than in Russia. Writing of the Cossacks another Decembrist was astounded "by the diversity of their knowledge and the development of their minds . . . not expected in a place about which abound . . . rumors of wildness and barbarity. . . ."\(^2\) These men especially appreciated the fact that Siberian inhabitants and officials did not receive them as criminals. In fact the townspeople greeted them in some instances as honored guests. At Tobolsk they received solicitous care in the police chief's home. At Tara they enjoyed the hospitality of the gorodnichii (governor of the town) and his wife. At Krasnoiarsk the governor obligingly relayed messages from anxious families, and the first Decembrists to reach Irkutsk were treated to a

\(^1\)B. G. Kubalov, "Sibirskoe obshchestvo i dekabristy," Katorga i ssylka, XXI (August, 1925), 139.

\(^2\)M. K. Azadovskii, "N. Bestuzhev—ethnograf," Sibirskaiia zhivaia starina; sbornik statei po obshchemu kraevedeniiu i ethnografii, III (Irkutsk, 1925), 140. (Referred to as Sibirskaiia zhivaia starina.)
The botanical collections of the Borisovs were begun at a time when Siberian flora were yet little studied. Peter and Andrei started collections at the Blagodatsk mines near Nerchinsk; they continued this work at Chita, Petrovsk, during the journey between these two prisons, and at settlement in Malaja Razvodnija (in Irkutsk province). Their extensive collections were valuably supplemented with Peter's drawings. The brothers were interested as well in insects, butterflies, and birds of Siberia. Peter made a large collection of birds and insects, while his brother devised an insect classification identical to that later adopted by the Paris Academy.

The Borisov collection of flora went in part to the St. Petersburg Gardens; the entomological collection in part to scientists at Moscow. Peter's study of the ants and scorpions of Siberia is in the Moscow Historical Museum; his drawings are scattered in various places. These extant botanical, ornithological, and entomological remnants represent a small proportion of their study and work.

Ivan Iakushkin collected the herbs and plants of western Siberia. His collection from the Ialutorovsk region numbered over three hundred species, making it one of the most important collections of western Siberian herbs.

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57 Zavalishin, II, 102.
58 Chukovskaia, 89, 95-96. Maksimov, Sibir i katorga, 418.
59 Dekabristy, 305. I. D. Iakushkin, 266.
Studies of Siberian climate and meteorology made by the exiles are among the early work performed in these fields. At katorga in Chita and Petrovsk the exiles compiled meteorological data, in the case of Petrovsk, extending over a period of more than a decade. These records were given later to the Berlin Academy of Science. Muravev-Apostol at Viliuisk, Bukhtarma, and Ialutorovsk; Iakushkin at Ialutorovsk; Mitkov at Krasnoiarsk; Nicholas Bestuzhev at Selenginsk; and the Borisovs at Malaia Razvodnaia, all collected atmospheric and meteorological data. The German scientist Heinrich von Wild utilized the records of the Borisovs and Mitkov in his study of Russian meteorology.

In connection with his atmospheric studies at Ialutorovsk, Ivan Iakushkin constructed a windgauge. The simple mechanism, exposed atop a high pole, operated a dial at ground level indicating the wind's velocity. The summer after Iakushkin set up this instrument Ialutorovsk experienced a severe drought; rain clouds with maddening consistency dispersed before dropping their moisture only to re-form elsewhere and dump excessive moisture on surrounding areas. The superstitious Ialutorovsk peasants decided that this "devil" must be using his mysterious instrument to disperse the clouds, and accordingly they wrecked it one dark night. Three days later it is reported to have rained.

From his observatory at Selenginsk Nicholas Bestuzhev collected data on the stars and the atmosphere. His seismograph meanwhile

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60 Sibir i dekabristy, 98. Chukovskai, 98.
61 Chukovskai, 96. Sibir i dekabristy, 99.
recorded interesting evidences of earth movements in a region noted for its earthquakes and many lesser seismic disturbances. Bestuzhev found a high degree of correlation between the rise and fall of the Selenga River (whose fluctuations he also measured) and the vacillation of the earth's surface in the vicinity of Selenginsk. Bestuzhev also analyzed meteors that had fallen in the region. Data from these and other studies were sent in correspondence to Admiral Reineke who requested Bestuzhev's permission to communicate this material to friends at the Academy of Science.

In 1837 the government undertook to measure the depths of Lake Baikal, an interesting lake because of its depth (one of the world's deepest) and its hazardous navigational conditions. Michael Kuchelbeker was commissioned to make depth soundings of Barguzin Bay on the eastern side of the Lake. Ferdinand Wolf made an extensive analysis of the numerous minerals and mineral springs of Siberia. Shteingel compiled geographic data on Ishim okrug and Muravev-Apostol, on Ialutorovsk and environs. Zavalishin collected topographical information at Chita and in the Chikoi and Amur basins. From this information he prepared a map of the Transbaikal which was reportedly utilized by the authorities until a later official survey.


64 Baranovskaia, 185.

65 Streich, Moriaki dekabristy, 256-257.

Nicholas Bestuzhev's study of Goose Lake (Guzinoe Ozero) merits some discussion as one of the more scholarly ethnographic works on the Transbaikal dating from the last century. Guzinoe Ozero was interesting to Bestuzhev both as a lake and as the habitat of Buriat tribes along its shores. South of Selenginsk on the route to Koakhta, the lake is about forty versts long by twenty wide, making it one of the largest in Buriat-Mongolia. It appeared in the eighteenth century at a spot where formerly there had been a plain and a small pond. For some reason the pond increased in size; rivers flowing southward emptied their waters into the lake and eventually it covered the entire valley. Bestuzhev concluded that rather extensive seismic disturbances produced the lake in a remarkably short time. An island in its center was the home of numerous species of birds. Along its northern shores were salt precipitations and around the lake, coal deposits. The lake itself contained many kinds of fish in plentiful supply.

The region had long been inhabited by Buriats. Bestuzhev discovered artifacts of a past culture along with an ancient irrigation system indicative of a high proficiency in hydraulic engineering.

Descriptions of Buriat culture are the most significant aspect of this study. Unlike previous writers, Bestuzhev found in the Buriat

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67 Baranovskaia, 173. The "scourge of God," Ghenghis Khan, was born in this region.
68 N. A. Bestuzhev, "Guzinoe ozero," Rasskazy i povesti starogo moriaka N. Bestuzheva (Moscow, 1860), 493-495, 497, 502-503.
69 Bestuzhev, 487, 495, 486.
70 Baranovskaia, 158, 174, 214.
some good qualities. They were honest, hospitable, resourceful, and quick; but much addicted to drink, evasive and prone to great dissembling. Bestuzhev traced the obvious decay of Buriat economy, attributing it to concentration of wealth in the hands of the taishas, arbitrary authority of these native leaders, prevalence of cattle diseases, the kalym (the practice of extortion and bribery), and the influence of Lamaism. Lamaism was in fact the "plague of the Buriat tribes." 71

Among other aspects of Buriat culture which Bestuzhev studied were their physical types and characteristics, manner of rearing their children, construction and arrangement of the huts, fishing, food and drink, marriage, methods of calculating time and distance, fortune telling, rituals, amusements, crafts, and social and religious customs. 72

The anonymous publication in 1854 of "Guzinoe Ozero" aroused considerable interest in the region and attracted visitors to the lake. The government for awhile considered building a railway to open up coal deposits and other minerals subsequently discovered around the lake. Bestuzhev's article was, however, so completely forgotten as to remain unknown to students of this region at the end of the century. In the early 1920's the historian M. K. Azadovskii re-discovered this work and since then it has been referred to by Soviet students of Buriat culture and the Transbaikal. 73

71Bestuzhev, 570, 571-572, 573.
72Bestuzhev, 508, 519, 520, 524, 525-526, 560-563, 566-569.
73Chukovskaia, 50. Baranovskaia, 176-177.
During most of the last century Siberia was a terra incognita, and it is unfortunate that Count Mordvinov's farsighted suggestion was not followed. Two Decembrists, Batenkov and Shteingel, had worked in Siberia and knew the country well; others, among them P. and A. Borisov, N. Bestuzhev, Semenov, Zaikin, were educated in the sciences; and practically all of these men were vitally interested in their new homeland. So interested, in fact, were they that lack of equipment and funds, and the presence of official discouragement, did not halt their studies, although it certainly impeded their pursuits. With some official permissiveness, knowledge of the region might have been considerably augmented during this period. As it was, in a haphazard largely unplanned fashion the exiles at Viliuisk, Iakutsk, Turukhansk, Selenginsk, Ishim, Ialutorovsk, Barguzin, Chita, Petrovsk, Malaia Razvodnaia, and elsewhere, added to the fund of knowledge on Siberia.

The period of Decembrist exile coincided with a time of growing interest in Siberia expressed in the visits of Russian and foreign scholars. It is regrettable that the exiles could take such a slight role in furthering this scientific study of the region.
EPILOGUE

THE AMNESTY

Alexander II ascended the Russian throne at the death of his father in February 1855. The new Tsar fully intended to amnesty the Decembrists exiled by Nicholas I, but the rush of affairs attendant upon his accession postponed the proclamation for eighteen months during which period the exiles impatiently awaited the decree. Finally, in August 1856, thirty-two men were amnestied and permitted to live anywhere within Russia with the exception of Moscow and St. Petersburg, while those few who previously had returned home were relieved of limitations to their activity. Of the amnestied, twenty-nine were implicated in the 1825 uprising; three were not. These three were men denounced for "subversive" activities by Ippolit Zavalishin (young brother of the Decembrist Dmitri) and sent in 1828 to katorga, which they subsequently shared with the Decembrists and with their accuser.1 Two Decembrists, Vygodovskii and Lutskii, were not mentioned in the amnesty. Vygodovskii was re-arrested and re-exiled in 1854 to northern Siberia and his fate is uncertain.2 Lutskii's fate is also

1 Gosudarstvennyia prestupleniia vRossii v XXXv., ed. B. Bazilevskii (St. Petersburg, 1906), I, 94.

2 G. Lur'e, "Iz rukopisei dekabrista Vygodovskogo," Katorga i ssylka, CXII (March, 1934), 86-88.
indefinite, although his numerous escapes and recaptures had made unlikely any amnesty.

Not all of the exiles utilized their freedom to return home. In the case of some Decembrists, money was not available for moving themselves or families to Russia. Others had lost contact with relatives and friends or else knew no one to whom they might return in 1856. Bystritskii arrived home after thirty years to find none of his family living. In the case of some, reluctance to exchange familiar surroundings for an uncertain existence was a factor in the decision to remain in Siberia.

Gorbachevskii remained at Petrovsk village. In 1864 he became an "arbitrator of the peace"—an official who supervised redistribution of lands following the peasant reform. Gorbachevskii possessed considerable influence and numerous friends at Petrovsk, where he had taught and inspired the young people for many years. An unofficial mediator in the squabbles and problems of his neighbors, he persuaded the villagers to abandon their idea of evicting the Jews from Petrovsk.

Early in the 1860's Gorbachevskii received an invitation from his nieces to live in St. Petersburg where they would provide him with an apartment. The old man refused, unwilling to leave friends or break ties with Siberia and assume dependence upon relatives in a city he had not seen for thirty-five years.

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3 B. Kubalov, "Dekabristy i amnistiiia," Sibirskie ogni, V (November, 1924), 158.

4 Gorbachevskii, xix, xiv.
Bechasnov and Vedeniapin were unable to return home for want of the necessary funds. Michael Kuchelbeker's income too was meagre. Unwilling to ask for government assistance and determined not to abandon his large Siberian family, Kuchelbeker remained at Barguzin. Michael Bestuzhev refused to leave his Siberian wife and remained at Selenginsk until her death. He returned to Russia only in 1867 and died four years later.

The interdiction against residing at Moscow or St. Petersburg seemed an unnecessary cruelty to men who were infirm in body and shorn of revolutionary fervor or influence. Many of these men had families or friends within but not outside of the two cities, and they felt keenly the separation from loved ones after amnesty. Both Ivan Iakushkin and Nicholas Basargin were quickly hustled out of Moscow without an opportunity to complete medical treatment. In the case of Iakushkin, death was at least indirectly hastened by governmental policy. Forced to leave Moscow, he went to live on the distant, inclement, and swampy estate of a friend, where in the next year he died of a fever. Eugene Iakushkin remarked that had he known the conditions to be imposed upon his father by the authorities he would have suggested remaining in Siberia. The officials applied to Iakushkin a ukaz of 1833 prohibiting

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5 Volkonskii, Zapiski, 498.
6 Streich, Moriaki dekabristy, 259.
7 Gorbachevskii, 250. Dekabristy v buriatii, 8.
8 Iakushkin, 451, 452, 648.
residence in Moscow province to amnestied exiles. At the same time, though, Volkonsky was living on the outskirts of Moscow itself. And Ivan Pushchin in 1856 received special permission to stay in St. Petersburg.

Compelled by a sense of duty to his late wife’s family and a lively interest in the developments of the Transbaikal region, Dmitri Zavalishin remained at Chita following the amnesty. Friends thought this to be a choice of financial necessity and proposed a special collection for him. But Zavalishin lived in Siberia through preference and he was most reluctant to leave when the local authorities, wishing to get rid of a nuisance, re-exiled him in 1863 to Russia. Returned to Russia, Zavalishin tutored the children of wealthy merchants and wrote voluminously for periodicals. He married a second time and reared innumerable children, the youngest being ten at the time of his death in 1892. Zavalishin was the last Decembrist. He, thus, had the final rebuttal to his comrades who had often and vigorously disagreed with him over their experiences. This chance to speak the last word no doubt gave the contentious old gentleman great pleasure.

The reforms of Alexander II and particularly the abolition of serfdom were of especial interest in the years after amnesty. The proposals concerning and the decree ending this hated institution evoked

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9Iakushkin, 523, 449. 10Iakushkin, 449.

11Pushchin, 35.

12Kubalov, Sibirskie ogni, V, 158. Zetlin, 348-349.
picnic in their honor. All were sought out by officials and merchants for some pleasantly animated conversation.  

Hastily snatched moments of parting in Russia had been overwhelmed with the realization that separation was probably permanent. For most of the exiles this was the last meeting with parents, wives, children, fiancées, or friends. The knowledge that they left saddened and grieving families added further to the burdens of banishment, and a few of these men—repudiated by relatives—were denied all moral support.

"I am not so guilty as circumstances have indicated" wrote an exile to his sternly unforgiving father; "but am more unfortunate than guilty.... I pray you do not consider me a villain." The deprivations and nature of this journey into exile broke the health of several. Couriers accompanied the Decembrists as far as Irkutsk, and since they were paid by the trip, a few drove the men in their charge beyond endurance in the haste to return for another group.

From Irkutsk the Decembrists were sent either to settlement or to katorga (hard labor); if to settlement, they were dispatched to the northern regions of Iakutiia and if to katorga, in all but a few instances they went to Chita. Before leaving Irkutsk last messages to

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3Kubalov, Katorga i ssylka, XXI, 140-141.

4N. I. Lorer, Zapiski dekabrista, ed. M. N. Pokrovskii (Moscow, 1931), 124. S. Ia. Streich, "Dekabristy na katorga i v ssylke," Katorga i ssylka; sbornik novykh materialov i statei (Moscow, 1925), 13. (Referred to as Katorga i ssylka: sbornik.)

lively comments in the correspondence and memoirs of Decembrists. Obolensky and Svistunov became "arbitrators of the peace" and worked eagerly to implement the reforms. Alexander Muravev and Vasilii Tolstoi, however, were critical of the decree of 1861, chiefly disillusioned by the restrictions and lengthy indebtedness placed upon the peasants.

Those Decembrists who outlived Nicholas I benefited very little by amnesty. Most of the exiles had died before their nemesis; but of those amnestied only Batenkov, mentally unbalanced through his experiences, seemed to have had no qualms at returning to Russia after so many years. The passage of time forged numerous ties and feelings of familiarity with Siberia. Even those who chafed most in exile realized it was improbable they would ever reconstruct a past life or build a new one in Russia. Some who had turned heavy-hearted toward exile returned from their experience with notable reluctance.

The Decembrists perforce passed their most active and valuable years far from comfortable indigenous milieus, burdened with vexing restrictions and the frustrating isolation imposed by Nicholas I. Yet, with few exceptions, these men expended worthy efforts in making acceptable the conditions of Siberian existence, with the result that they not only enriched their own lives far above expectation but added enormously to the culture of their vast prison.

14 Dekabristy, 19.
15 Dubrovskii, 45-46.
APPENDIX

Table 1. The Decembrists: Dates in Exile, Places of Settlement, and Death

Map of Russia and Siberia
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Birth</th>
<th>Siberian Dates To Settlement</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>To the Caucasus</th>
<th>Death in Siberia</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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<tr>
<td>Andrei N. Andreev</td>
<td>1826-31</td>
<td>1826-31</td>
<td>Zhigansk</td>
<td></td>
<td>1831</td>
<td>Burned in fire to hut along with Repin</td>
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<td>Iakov M. Andreevich</td>
<td>1800</td>
<td>1827-40</td>
<td>Verkhneudinsk</td>
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<td>1840</td>
<td>Became insane d. in hospital</td>
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<td>Ivan A. Annenkov</td>
<td>1802</td>
<td>1827-56</td>
<td>Belskoe; Turinsk</td>
<td></td>
<td>d. 1878</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Anton P. Arbuzov</td>
<td>1827-43</td>
<td>1839</td>
<td>Nazarovskoi; Achinsk</td>
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<td>1843</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Ivan B. Avramov</td>
<td>1801</td>
<td>1827-40</td>
<td>Turukhansk</td>
<td></td>
<td>1840</td>
<td>Murdered</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pavel V. Avramov</td>
<td>1791</td>
<td>1828-36</td>
<td>Aksha—Transbaikal</td>
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<td>1836</td>
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<td>A. P. Bariatsinskii</td>
<td>1798</td>
<td>1827-44</td>
<td>Tobolsk</td>
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<td>1844</td>
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<td>Nikolai V. Basargin</td>
<td>1799</td>
<td>1827-56</td>
<td>Turinsk; Kurgan; Omsk; Ialutorovsk</td>
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<td>d. 1861</td>
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<td>1775</td>
<td>1828-59</td>
<td>Tara; Kurgan; Tobolsk</td>
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<td>1859</td>
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<td>1793</td>
<td>1846-56</td>
<td>Tobolsk; Tomsk; Irkutsk</td>
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<td>d. 1863; kept 20 years in Alekseevsk prison</td>
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<td>Name</td>
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<td>Place</td>
<td>To the Caucasus</td>
<td>Death in Siberia</td>
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<td>V. A. Bechasnov</td>
<td>1802</td>
<td>1827-59</td>
<td>1839</td>
<td>Smolenskoe</td>
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<td>1859</td>
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<td>1803</td>
<td>1827-39</td>
<td>1832</td>
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<td>1807</td>
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<td>1797</td>
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<td>Iakutsk</td>
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<td>1800</td>
<td>1827-67</td>
<td>1839</td>
<td>Selenginsk</td>
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<td>1800</td>
<td>1826-56</td>
<td>1826</td>
<td>Sredni-Kolymsk; Turukhansk; Eniseisk; Krasnoiarsk; Tobolsk</td>
<td></td>
<td>Became insane d. 1871</td>
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<td>1802</td>
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<td>Andrei I. Borisov</td>
<td>1798</td>
<td>1826-54</td>
<td>1839</td>
<td>Malaia Razvodnaia</td>
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<td>1854</td>
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<td>1799</td>
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<td>1839</td>
<td>Khomutov</td>
<td></td>
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<td>1799</td>
<td>1827-37</td>
<td>1828</td>
<td>Berezov; Talutorovsk</td>
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<td>1827-29</td>
<td>1828</td>
<td>Iakutsk</td>
<td>1829</td>
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<td>1795</td>
<td>1826-48</td>
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<td>1848</td>
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<td>1855</td>
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<td>1788</td>
<td>1827-45</td>
<td>1828</td>
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<td>1791</td>
<td>1827-59</td>
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<td>1788</td>
<td>1828-53</td>
<td>1833</td>
<td>Eniseisk; Krasnoiarsk; Tobolsk</td>
<td>Amnestied 1853; d. 1854</td>
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<td>1804</td>
<td>1827-58</td>
<td>1836</td>
<td>Shushenskoe; Minusinsk</td>
<td>d. 1885</td>
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<td>1795</td>
<td>1826-35</td>
<td>1826</td>
<td>Kondinskoe</td>
<td>1835</td>
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<td>M. N. Glebov</td>
<td>1804</td>
<td>1827-51</td>
<td>1832</td>
<td>Kabanskoe</td>
<td>1851</td>
<td>Probably beaten, poisoned by convoy officer</td>
<td></td>
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<td>V. M. Golitsyn</td>
<td>1803</td>
<td>1826-29</td>
<td>1826</td>
<td>Kirensk</td>
<td>1829</td>
<td></td>
<td>d. 1859</td>
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<td>To Settlement</td>
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<td>Death in Siberia</td>
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<td>1790</td>
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<td>1826</td>
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<td>Became a paraplegic in exile</td>
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<td>Death in Siberia</td>
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<td>1827-51</td>
<td>1840</td>
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<td>1827-53</td>
<td>1835</td>
<td>Urik; Tobolsk</td>
<td>1853</td>
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<td>1832</td>
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<td>1827-50</td>
<td>1839</td>
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<td>1850</td>
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<td>1827-33</td>
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<td>1839</td>
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<td>1792</td>
<td>1828-48</td>
<td>1832</td>
<td>Ust-Kuda; Irkutsk</td>
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Russia were dispatched in the care of trusted and well-bribed couriers. 6

The Tsar took a characteristically attentive interest in the fate of his "friends of the fourteenth" during their Siberian sojourn. An informer was planted among them. This agent provocateur, Roman Medoks, had spent fourteen years in Schlüsselburg prison and there he became acquainted with some Decembrists prior to their exile. Released from Schlüsselburg and sent to Viatka, Medoks subsequently performed energetically in his role of informer. Three Senators inspecting the Siberian administration in 1826 were asked to write reports on Decembrists they encountered. Not satisfied with this information Nicholas I sent his own agent, Prince Boris Kurakin, who compiled notes on forty of the exiles passing through Irkutsk. Kurakin's classification of their mental and emotional attitudes ranged from "despondent" and "contrite" to "flippant cheerfulness," and among the latter he noted there were some who have stretched their intemperance to the most audacious degree... Iakushkin... has an unconstrained manner and flippant tone when speaking about his past exploits and at the same time, despite the chain on his legs, is very busy with his handsome black mustache... Here is a young man of twenty-five years, who has betrayed his sovereign... deprived of rank and nobility, sentenced to fifteen or twenty years katorga and then to eternal exile, who has the audacity despite all this to concern himself with his physical appearance... 7


7 Pushchin, 100. Lorer, 130. S. Ia. Streich, Roman Medoks: pokhoshdenia russkogo avanturista XIX veka (Moscow, 1930), 59, 113. Dekabristy: neizdanny materialy i stat'i, ed. B. L. Modzalevskii and Iu. G. Oksman (Moscow, 1925), 115-118, 124. (Referred to as Neizdanny materialy.)
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<td>I. S. Povalo-Shveikovskii</td>
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<td>1827-31</td>
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<td>1833</td>
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<td>1826-29</td>
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<td>S. G. Volkonskii</td>
<td>1788</td>
<td>1826-56</td>
<td>1836</td>
<td>Urik</td>
<td></td>
<td>d. 1865</td>
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<tr>
<td>A. Vonder Briggen</td>
<td>1792</td>
<td>1827-56</td>
<td>1828</td>
<td>Pelym; Kurgan; Turinsk</td>
<td></td>
<td>d. 1859</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>V. I. Vranitskii</td>
<td>1826-32</td>
<td>1826</td>
<td>1826</td>
<td>Pelym; Ialutorovsk</td>
<td>1832</td>
<td>Became insane</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>P. F. Vygodovskii</td>
<td>1802</td>
<td>1827-56</td>
<td>1828</td>
<td>Narym</td>
<td></td>
<td>Fate and death after 1856 unknown</td>
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### TABLE 1 (contd.)

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<th>Name</th>
<th>Birth</th>
<th>Siberian Dates</th>
<th>To Settlement</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>To the Caucasus</th>
<th>Death in Siberia</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ferdinand B. Wolf</td>
<td>1827-54</td>
<td>1835</td>
<td>Urik; Tobolsk</td>
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<td>1854</td>
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<tr>
<td>N. A. Zagoretskii</td>
<td>1796</td>
<td>1827-37</td>
<td>1828</td>
<td>Vitim; Buret</td>
<td>1837</td>
<td>d. 1885</td>
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<tr>
<td>N. F. Zaikin</td>
<td>1801</td>
<td>1826-33</td>
<td>1826</td>
<td>Vitim</td>
<td></td>
<td>1833</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Dmitrii I. Zavalishin</td>
<td>1804</td>
<td>1827-63</td>
<td>1839</td>
<td>Chita</td>
<td></td>
<td>d. 1892; last Decembrist</td>
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Kurakin was not alone in his apparent discomfiture in the presence of the exiled Decembrists whose urbane, sometimes haughty and uncontrite manner made even the venerable Senators uneasy.\(^8\)

Regulations placed the Decembrist katorzhniki at the complete disposal of the commandant of Nerchinsk mines. They were to wear chains constantly, remain locked in their cells at night, work under orders from the regional engineering corps, and have no written contact with any person. Wives who accompanied their husbands might send, and both exiles and wives might receive, letters, but only through the offices of the civil governor in Irkutsk and the commandant in Nerchinsk. Provision was made for care of the sick katorzhniki, and specific detailed instructions discussed the possibility of a bunt (uprising) among the prisoners. The commandant was admonished to follow orders strictly and make regular monthly reports on each prisoner.\(^9\) Nicholas I had a very great apprehension about these political exiles which necessitated a constant prolonged flow of orders and information.\(^10\)

The Nerchinsk region was chosen as the place of katorga for several reasons. Here the mines and factories of the state were far from political centers; the population was sparse; and machinery for guarding the katorzhniki was already established. In 1828, spurred by Sukhinov's plot to escape katorga at Zerentuisk mines, the Decembrists

\(^8\)Lorer, 130-131.

\(^9\)M. N. Gernet, Istoriia tsarskoi tiur'my (Moscow, 1946), II, 152-154.

\(^10\)Gernet, II, 160. Sokolov, 206.


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I, Jeanne Meakin Haskett, was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, July 5, 1928. I received my secondary-school education in the township schools of Hamilton County, Ohio and my undergraduate training at Ohio Wesleyan University, receiving a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1950. My Master of Arts degree was received from Ohio State University in 1956. While at Ohio State working for the Doctor of Philosophy degree I was a Graduate Assistant in the Department of History and a University Fellow. The last two years I have been teaching in the Department of History and Political Science at Central Michigan University, Mt. Pleasant, Michigan.
THE DECEMBRISTS IN SIBERIAN EXILE

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

Jeanne Meakin Haskett, B. A., A. M.

The Ohio State University
1962

Approved by

[Signature]
Adviser
Department of History
were gathered together and imprisoned at Chita in the Nerchinsk region. There in one location they could more easily be watched. Because of the political nature of their crime they were not allowed to work in the prison plant nor to live in proximity to other criminals at Chita. 11

Chita lies east of Lake Baikal in a picturesque valley. The weather is rigorous but the climate is healthful. Autumn begins in early August; yet during the brief summer vegetation of every type explodes into bloom: flowers, wheat, barley, vegetables and fruits.

In 1826 Chita was a small frontier settlement with a few dozen tumble-down houses and a dilapidated wooden church. Temporarily the exiles were housed in an abandoned cossack fort while a prison was hastily built. The women who had chosen to join their husbands in Siberia gradually arrived, about eleven in all. Since Chita was some five thousand miles from the capital, prison life largely depended upon the personality of the commandant. 12

"Fortunately for the Decembrists the commandant was the old general, Leparskii, a man of rare heart . . . " wrote the daughter of

11 Nerchinskaia katorga; sbornik nerchinskogo zemliachestva, ed. M. A. Braginskii (Moscow, 1933), 32, 34. (Referred to as Nerchinskaia katorga.) Streich, Katorga i ssylka, XXI, 133. M. Iu. Baranovskaiia, Dekabrist Nikolai Bestuzhev (Moscow, 1954), 110. Dekabristy v zabaikal’se; neizdannye materialy, ed. A. V. Kharchevnikii (Chita, 1925), 11. (Referred to as Dekabristy v zabaikal’se.)

Decembrist Annenkov. Roman Leparskii, a Pole who had served Russia during the reign of Catherine the Great, was a conscientious and kind-hearted man. He could display great cruelty when necessary as indicated by his treatment of the unsuccessful Sukhinov conspirators. For the most part, however, he energetically defended the rights of the Decembrists.\(^{13}\) That life in katorga passed as peaceably and easily as it did was due in great measure to Leparskii.\(^{14}\)

In carrying out his duties Leparskii was disturbed by two unpleasant possibilities—denunciation by a government spy and adverse public opinion in Europe. The two sides of his nature were attuned to both situations. He was the strict disciplinarian and army man, formal, aloof and stern, the rigid upholder of rules and regulations. But, he was also the cultured educated Pole, tactful, sensitive and understanding. Firmness tempered by humanity proved more beneficial than laxity and weakness.\(^{15}\) Leparskii remained commandant until his death in 1837 by which time most of the Decembrists had left katorga for settlement. Denunciations and adverse reports were eluded by Leparskii who once asked his prisoners,

*what will be written about me everywhere in Europe? People will call me a hard hearted jailor, executioner, and oppressor, while the truth is in reality that I*


\(^{14}\)A. V. Predtechenskii, 185.

only retain my present post in order to protect you from the persecutions and injustice of unscrupulous officials.¹⁶

In their memoirs and letters the Decembrists generally confirm Leparskii's statement and speak highly of his services, with the exception of Dmitri Zavalishin who wrote that "those with wealth, status, and important ties he [Leparskii] concerned himself about; with the mass of us he did not bother. . . ."¹⁷

In September 1828 the commandant was informed he might remove the chains from those who merited this favor, and Leparskii considered that all deserved it. After living in chains for almost three years the loss of these "constant companions" was felt. "I . . . almost regretted losing them" remarked Andrei Rozen; "they had so often accompanied my songs as I kept time with my feet." Moreover, there was some dislike of receiving favors in any form from the tsarist regime, and a few of the exiled Decembrists looked upon their chains as a badge of honor.¹⁸

It was perhaps the result of a report written by Decembrist Kornilovich that Nicholas I made one or two changes in their conditions. After several months in katorga at Chita, Kornilovich had been returned to St. Petersburg where he was confined to a cell, given paper, pen, access to books and informed he would write reports for the government.


¹⁷Dmitri I. Zavalishin, "Prebyvanie dekabristov v tiuremnom zakliuchenii v Chite i v petrovskom zavode," Russkaia starina, XXXII (October, 1881), 432.

His first assignment, describing the life of Decembrists at Chita, came from the Tsar. This report posed problems for Kornilovich: would it benefit or harm his comrades? Actually the report aided his companions at Chita. Where he discussed the chains they were forced to wear constantly, Nicholas wrote "notify Leparskii to take the chains off those who merit it." And where Kornilovich mentioned the impossibility of attending church or reading the Bible, the Tsar noted: "Order Prince Meshcherskii (£head of the Holy Synod) to select an excellent priest to be sent to the prisoners." 19

During the first years in katorga at least two escapes were planned. Decembrist Sukhinov planned to escape from the Zerentuisk Mines. He became acquainted at the mines with an old prison-wise exile and with the son of a merchant who helped him procure weapons. Others joined the conspiracy. They planned to free all the prisoners in Zerentuisk, then move westward freeing prisoners on the way, and finally join the bulk of the Decembrists at Chita where further plans would be made. The plot was disclosed by a participant and twenty-two were sentenced to increased terms of katorga, flogging or execution. Sukhinov, 19

19 Various reasons for Kornilovich's recall have been given: that Nicholas wanted to question him about possible connections with secret societies abroad; that he was to be queried concerning documents in the state archives relating to the revolt. Probably the Tsar considered Kornilovich the best qualified to describe katorga and the Decembrists' life in Chita and also to write informative reports for the government. Kornilovich was well educated and had worked in the archives. He spent four years in prison before being sent to the Caucasus and an early death. P. E. Shchegolev, Dekabristy (Moscow, 1926), 295-319 passim.
to avoid execution, committed suicide. Decembrist Gorbachevskii, close to Sukhinov but not involved in the plot, wrote that

to harm the government in any way became a necessity for him; to free himself and everyone else was his favorite thought. He lived only that he might, to the last moment of his life, be an enemy of the state. Love for his country, comprising always the distinguishing feature of his character, was never extinguished. But . . . it was as though it were converted into hatred of the triumphant state.20

At Chita another escape was planned during the years 1827-1828. Dmitri Zavalishin in his memoirs related he sent scouts along the Amur River and received from them a report on the territory and route of travel in March 1828. They planned to escape in June of that year, down the Ingoda, Shilka and Amur Rivers into China and thence to the West.21

At first the prisoners were enthusiastic and confident. "I was convinced this plan could succeed. There were seventy of us—young, healthy, determined. To disarm the guards and leave the prison did not present difficulty . . . since the majority of the soldiers would have taken our side."22

Most of the exiles at Chita had hopes of escaping an onerous prison and exile existence. But at least two among the conspirators hoped to reach the West where they could reveal the "truth" about the


21. Zavalishin's memoirs, as all his writing, contain much hyperbole and must be taken cum grano salis. But he is no doubt correct this time in emphasizing his personal importance. He was one of but two Decembrists in Chita who knew the region. Dekabristy i ikh vremia, ed. M. K. Azadovskii (Moscow, 1928), I, 217-226 passim. (Referred to as Dekabristy i ikh vremia.)

22. Sokolov, 69.
revolt and conditions inside Russia. These were Dmitri Zavalishin and Michael Lunin. Lunin made all sorts of personal preparations in anticipation of the escape, procuring a compass, storing up funds for the long journey west, and adapting himself to very little food.\(^{23}\)

No escape took place. For one reason or another the plot at Chita was abandoned. Wives put obstacles in the way and pointed out the dangers. Those able to finance flight for the group were the ones with wives at Chita. Further, "... the beginning of privileges and advantages to certain persons ... produced a difference of interests and broke the common bond and intentions; this deprived the plan of its primary conditions for success." The news of Sukhinov's fate evoked doubts, and an important factor was the possibility of amnesty which was only recognized as unlikely when in 1830 the Decembrists reached the so-called permanent prison in Petrovsk.\(^{24}\)

Sentence to katorga or forced labor meant work in the mines and foundries of Eastern Siberia. The Decembrists were not an exception to this regulation, but their labor was generally nominal. Initially they had very much dreaded the unknown. They thought they would be treated as the criminal exiles, and the sight of these weary, ill-fed, chained, dirt-encrusted creatures tormented their early period of katorga.

"Compared to what I had expected we were so unburdened with work that I thought the situation must change for the worse..." Eight of the Decembrists (including the most wealthy and privileged) actually labored

\(^{23}\)Dekabristy i ikh vremia, I, 222, 226. Sokolov, 69.

\(^{24}\)Dekabristy i ikh vremia, I, 222. Sokolov, 69.
for a short period in the mines. Work below ground was in some ways preferable to that above ground. "... Underground it was ... rather warm; when ... chilly I could pick up a hammer and soon become warm. ..." When brought out of the mines to sort slag they grumbled. "Underground we had worked as we pleased and then rested. The work ended at eleven ... and the rest of the day was our own. Above ground the work was almost twice as long and moreover was task work. ..." 

At Chita the work was not overburdening. The Decembrists dug the foundation of their prison, worked on the streets, leveled ravines and periodically filled "devils ditch"—a gully washed out with each rain. This busy-work, along with care of their gardens, occupied summer months. From September to May their tasks consisted chiefly of grinding flour in the mill and cleaning out the barns and stables. They worked four to six hours each day except Sundays and holidays. Work that became too difficult might be relieved by hiring the guards or employing several husky criminal exiles placed at their disposal by the commandant.

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26 Bogucharskii *et al.* (ed.), I, 276.

27 Rozen, 113, 128. Baranovskaia, 94.

Each work day the prisoners were greeted by the guard shouting "Gentlemen, to work!" If not enough volunteered to work that day he coaxed: "Come on, gentlemen, someone else . . . or the commandant will note there are very few." Well supplied with reading matter and chess sets the "volunteers" formed ranks while their guards took up rifles and work tools; all then marched off to strains of their favorite revolutionary song "Our Fatherland Suffers Under Your Yoke." 29

The ease of labor they owed to Leparskii who steadfastly insisted on using his own judgment when ordered to utilize the prisoners unsparingly for work. "Only for appearances' sake did we spend time at the mill grinding flour which was never edible" commented Basargin. 30

The government provided four kopeks per day for each katorzhnik, a sum insufficient for the Decembrists and until families could arrange to send money the early months were rather spartan. At Chita they organized an informal artel to assist those who did not have help from families and thus were dependent on state aid. Voluntary contributions went to support the needy. They lived in four large rooms and took their meals together. A cook was hired and at first the meals were prepared outside the prison, an unsanitary arrangement that lasted only until they might place this chore under their own fastidious supervision. 31


30Beliaev, 241. Sokolov, 62.

31Vospominaniia Bestuzhevykh, ed. M. K. Azadovskii (Moscow, 1951), 160. (Referred to as Vospominaniia Bestuzhevykh.) Sokolov, 65. Lorer, 135, 137, 144.
The situation altered at Petrovsk where the prisoners did not live together, but in cells. Some of the wives lived in the prison as well and then later married men moved into homes in the village. Thus, not directly observing the plight of the less fortunate at Petrovsk, the wealthy sometimes had to be reminded. Reluctance to ask assistance prompted a group of the needy to seek state aid. However, among the Decembrists as a group there was much opposition to receiving favors or assistance from the government and as an alternative to state aid the exiles worked out and ratified articles for an artel, to handle both individual and group purchases. This was their so-called Large Artel.  

Accounts of the artel were kept on a yearly basis; subscription was five hundred rubles per year. Those with incomes below this amount gave the entire sum received; those with incomes in excess contributed anything over the subscription rate they wished. The offices of manager, buyer, treasurer, and gardener were established with annual elections. Manager and buyer, both free to leave the prison in connection with their duties, supervised the prison housekeeping and meals, and made all purchases. Monetary surpluses at the end of the year went into the fund to aid Decembrists leaving katorga for settlement.  

Not all elected to join the Large Artel. Michael Lunin observed the Roman Catholic fast days and prepared his own meals. A few remained

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33 N. V. Basargin, Zapiski, ed. P. E. Shchegolev (Petrograd, 1917), 138-156.

34 Vospominania Bestuzhevykh, 159-160.
aloof for personal reasons, involving antagonisms, indifference, or exclusiveness.  

Although the establishment of the Large Artel improved culinary matters, there was continued grumbling about the food. Occasionally unpopular or inept managers resigned under pressure. Most dissatisfaction came from the younger Decembrists.

Besides providing for themselves, their wives and children, the Decembrists fed a host of maids, governesses, servants, several non-Decembrists who shared their prison, their guards, and the children who attended their prison school. Within the prison itself they employed numerous servants, a cook, a baker, several kvashiki (brewers of kvas, a fermented drink), gardeners, swineherd, and bathhouse attendants.

In 1832 the so-called Small Artel was organized. It provided loans and grants to Decembrists leaving for settlement. Voluntary donations were its chief source of income. This artel, before and after the amnesty, gave aid to needy Decembrists, their wives, widows, and children.

The villages and people of Chita and Petrovsk benefited from the presence of the Decembrists. Large purchases enriched merchants, peasants

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38 Maksimov, Sobranie sochinennii, III, 299, 300. I. D. Iakushkin, 121, 599.
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I am most desirous of expressing my appreciation to Professor Charles Morley, my adviser, who has known exactly how to encourage, inspire, and slightly prod along this Ph.D. aspirant. I have had a most cooperative and capable typist in making the final copy; Mrs. Dale Davy's work has been invaluably helpful. My parents have not at any point failed to give encouragement and also help in the preparation of this paper--for which my thanks seem inadequate.

For any mistakes that remain or have entered this paper, I am responsible.
and craftsmen who sold at a "dear price their modest produce and . . . meagre services." Wives of the Decembrists gave occupation to some inhabitants, either as servants or maids. In addition, the exiles provided educational opportunities for local children. Chita's indifferent and poor farmers learned from the example and instruction of the Decembrists and in 1830 fell heir to their large garden and tools at the time of transfer to Petrovsk prison. Both Petrovsk and Chita were left fine homes built by the wives. 39

Petrovsk zavod, which became the new home of the Decembrist katorzhniki, was an iron foundry and state prison, with an adjoining village. Total population was something over two thousand inhabitants, about one-fourth officials and free villagers; the rest, katorzhniki. Here the Decembrists exerted an ameliorating influence on the cruelty and the arbitrary treatment of prison officials toward criminal katorzhniki. Cruelties formerly concealed from the commandant were exposed by the Decembrists, whose servants from among the prisoners came to talk freely to their employers. The prisoners who served the Decembrists in katorga were considered faithful and honest workers and the Decembrists endeavored to aid the most destitute of them. 40

After the first months in katorga the exiles developed a rich and varied intellectual life which helped them elude melancholy and

39 Lorer, 144. Vospominaniia Bestuzhevykh, 164. I. D. Iakushkin, 120. Rozen, 139-141.

At Chita a group formed to read original poems, essays, and translations, and also to perform musical compositions. Nicholas Bestuzhev read his work on the Russian fleet; his brother Michael wrote several short stories. Odoevskii recited his poems and Bobrishchev-Pushkin his fables. Both Ivashev and Vadkovskii occasionally composed music for their weekly concerts, but these works are lost except for Ivashev's music to his poem "Rybak." At Petrovsk the wives had pianos and accompanied the men's chorus. The exiles also formed chamber music groups, with piano, violincello, violin, flute and guitar combinations.

Katorga offered unique educational opportunities. "You were correct" wrote Obolenskii, "when you said Chita and Petrovsk were . . . a marvelous school for us. . . ." Specialists in various fields arranged courses for their comrades wishing to study systematically and thus established the Decembrists' "Academy," where they heard lectures on ancient and medieval history, Russian history, military strategy and

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41 L. K. Chukovskaya, Dekabristy issledovateli Sibiri (Moscow, 1951), 23. Baranovskaya, 106.


43 Baranovskaya, 106.
tactics, physics, chemistry, anatomy, mathematics, Russian literature, philosophy, astronomy, geography, and natural science. Michael Kuchelbeker told of his round-the-world trip in the "Apollon"; Torson described his journey to Antarctica; and Kornilovich lectured on historical research in the state archives until his departure for St. Petersburg.

They took great interest in foreign languages. Rozen, a German from Estonia, studied Russian. Those who did not know French, and these were a minority, learned that language. Zavalishin studied Greek, Hebrew, Spanish, and English. English was especially troublesome. One who spoke the language urged his comrades to "read and write English all you want . . . only . . . please don't try to speak it!" To pass the time or improve language skills they made translations and in this way Gibbons' *Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*, works of James Fenimore Cooper and Benjamin Franklin were translated into Russian.

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46 Rozen, 131.

There was no dearth of books to study. The medical library of one exile comprised over 4,000 books, and those who could had their entire libraries of twenty or thirty thousand volumes sent to them. In general, "Petrovsk afforded each the opportunity to study whatever subject he wanted."\(^{48}\)

The wives who shared exile subscribed to journals and newspapers and ordered books. Among the journals received at katorga were *Revue Britannique*, *Revue de Paris*, *Revue des deux mondes*, *Revue industrielle*, *Revue technologique*, *Revue de mécanicien*, *Mécanicien Anglais*, *l'Illustration Française*, *Journal pour rire*, *Journal des débats*, *Indépendence Belge*, *The Times*, *Quarterly Review*, *Edinburgh Review*, *Post*, *Punch*, *English Illustration*, *Journal de Francfort*, *Journal de Hambourg*, *Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Preussische Zeitung*, and periodicals from Poland and Italy.\(^{49}\)

To the honor of the government, wrote Beliaev, it was big enough to permit even English journals of the most liberal sort to reach us. Many books were sent, from the most serious political and philosophical to the lightest novels. At that time our literature in Russia was very boring, therefore the books were English, French, German; very few ... were from Russia.\(^{50}\)

The commandant was obliged to survey all of this literature which the exiles and their wives received. At first in each book he wrote

\(^{48}\) I. D. Iakushkin, 131. One exile estimated their combined libraries at almost half a million volumes. Zavalishin, II, 94-95.

\(^{49}\) *Vospominaniia Bestuzhevykh*, 176.

\(^{50}\) Beliaev, 213-214.
"read by Leparskii," but as the volume of printed materials became great he began to write "seen by Leparskii." 51

As a link with the outside world, the periodicals were in greatest demand. A system for the efficient equitable distribution of journals and newspapers was established. The prisoners formed a Journal Artel with members paying a monthly sum entitling them to read all periodicals subscribed to by the artel. Apparently the katorzhniki with few exceptions joined this artel. 52 Reading was ever a favorite pastime: as one of the Decembrists wrote to his family, "my first and only request is books, books. . . ." 53

During katorga the Decembrists waged a determined struggle to acquire writing materials. Regulations prohibited writing, but soon after reaching Chita the prisoners illicitly secured paper and pencils. As writing at night by candle was a strain on eyes and nerves, they sought official relaxation of restrictions. First, the prisoners pointed out their newly created office of buyer required access to pencil and paper. Then, the injustice of allowing men who visited their wives' homes in the village to have access to writing materials was pointedly stressed. The seeming uselessness of the ban plus its

51 Beliaev, 214.

52 Maksimov, Sobranie sochinenii, III, 281, 300. Basargin, 158.

injustice was enough to encourage Leparskii's lifting the restrictions, which the exiles considered a great victory.\(^{54}\)

Among the Decembrists there were those who professed diverse philosophic and religious views. There were materialists, atheists, deists, Russian Orthodox, Roman Catholics, and Protestants (Lutherans). Prison debates reveal that the Decembrists tended generally to divide into two groups. One group consisted of those who believed in the validity of the Christian religion, convinced of its historical and philosophical merits. Another group of exiles considered that for one reason or another the existence of a god could be denied; and some in this group especially thought Christianity a weak religion. Gibbons' *Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire* was quoted in support of each faction.\(^{55}\) Further to enhance its arguments each group sponsored an article devoted to a consideration of the origin of human speech. In his article Decembrist Bobrishchev-Pushkin maintained that man, as a creature of God was given speech, a requisite of the human condition, at the moment of creation. On the other hand, Decembrist Bariatinskii, a professed atheist, countered with an essay which held that man, as all animals, communicated first in the form of interjections and subsequently developed these into the more complex language patterns. In their

\(^{54}\) Dekabristy v buriatii (Verkhneudinsk, 1927), 81. Zavalishin, II, 88.

\(^{55}\) Beliaev, 227-230.
memoirs the Decembrists seem to have rated Pushkin's article over Bariatinskii's in organization and logical presentation.56

For some, arrest and exile increased tendencies to rely upon religious faith; others held fast to atheistic or materialistic views. During katorga the more religious organized themselves into a group, rather derisively dubbed the "congregation," for the purpose of reading the Bible and hearing sermons on Sunday. Members of the "congregation" were mostly mild-mannered, unquarrelsome individuals.57 Not so the "slavian" group (so-called because most had been members of the Society of United Slavs). These militant Decembrists expressed their generally atheistic views with great vigor and confidence. Rivalries and irritations between the groups were at times bitter.58

Michael Lunin was a most devout man. Converted to the Roman Catholic faith during an early visit to France, his devotion intensified in exile. He lived apart and aloof from the others, observed all the fast days, and spent hours in daily prayer and meditation. At one time disapproving of a work by Victor Hugo he patiently burned it--page by page in a candle flame. A man of the most brilliant intellect and the staunchest political and religious convictions, he was spoken of with

56 Beliaev, 227-228, 229. I. N. Rozanov, "Dekabristy poety; ateist A. P. Bariatinskii," Krasnaiia nov, III (March, 1926), 255.


58 I. D. Iakushkin, 111, 598.
respect and awe; or, by a few, with bitter scorn; seldom, with indifference. 59

In Siberia, where there was at that time one doctor of questionable competence for about forty thousand inhabitants, preservation of robust health was important. During katorga the Decembrists were fortunate, since Chita's climate was healthful and that of Petrovsk was not insupportable, and moreover they had the competent medical services of the Decembrist Ferdinand Wolfe. Wolfe at first was permitted to treat only his comrades but as his fame spread prisoners, villagers, and then peasants from outlying areas came to him. Following his successful treatment of the aged and critically ill Leparskii, Wolfe was allowed to doctor without restriction and to leave the prison at any time in the course of his ministrations. In Chita one of the wives equipped a hospital used by the villagers as well as the exiles. In Petrovsk they set aside a special cell as dispensary which was equipped through the efforts of the wives. 60 This attention to physical health was rewarding.

Of the fifty-one deaths among the Decembrists in Siberia from 1826 to 1856, only one occurred during katorga. In commenting on their good health and the absence of deaths among them in katorga, one Decembrist concluded the "monotonous life and simple moderate food without doubt suited" them. 61


When sentenced the Decembrists as a group were quite young: 40 per cent were twenty-five or under; 50 per cent, between twenty-six and thirty-five; 10 per cent, over thirty-five. Time, however, took a rapid toll of life and of youth, especially in settlement, and 65 per cent of the Decembrists died in Siberia prior to 1856. Seeing some of his comrades for the first time after fifteen years of settlement, Mukhanov was shocked to find them "very old" and "all white and ailing." Mukhanov himself, not yet forty-two, was described as "much changed, grey . . . timid. . . ." Despite the high toll among the exiles, both in Siberia and in the Caucasus, a handful of them lived to a ripe age. The eight Decembrists alive in 1878 were all over seventy-five years of age, the eldest, eighty-five. The last Decembrist died in 1892, at the age of 88.62

About ten of the exiles, or just under 10 per cent, developed serious mental disturbances, with the majority of these cases occurring among those who went directly to settlement--usually in the far north--and who did not spend a prior period at forced labor.63

There were twenty-five children born to Decembrists during the years at katorga, fourteen of whom lived beyond childhood. For those who survived the severe early years, life was not unpleasant. From the beginning they lived in the company of highly educated people and were


63Zapiski dekabristov (London, 1863), II, 120. I. D. Iakushkin, 137. Dekabristy i ikh vremia, ed. M. P. Alekseev and B. S. Meilakh (Moscow, 1951), 261. (Referred to as Alekseev (ed.), Dekabristy.)
the center of much attention. "I had no nurse. I was rocked, nursed, taught, and brought up by Decembrists" wrote the daughter of one. "I was brought into the world by Wolfe ..." she continues; and "despite the tenderness, care and devotion ... we were not spoiled ..." In winter the exiles built the traditional snow mountains in the prison yard where the children played and skated. "My first remembrances are of prison and fetters. But despite the grimness of these memories they are the best and the most happy of my life." 64

Recalling katorga in later years Beliaev wrote that the Decembrist exiles were deprived of ... freedom; but except for freedom we were not constrained in anything and had all that educated, mature men could wish ... to this, one must add that in the prison were people of the highest mentality, goodness and self-denial and that here there was much food for the mind and heart; so it is possible to say that imprisonment was not only comforting but served as a real school for wisdom and goodness. . . . Few of us stayed out of this true brotherhood. 65

This was the somewhat roseate view of recollection. Actually there were both good and bad aspects in the daily life at katorga. Writing his family "by occasion" (in a letter bypassing official channels), Iakushkin commented that

life at Petrovsk is very tolerable; I live alone in a warm, rather light and ... very clean room. . . . Do not think I say this solely to comfort you. . . . Days in Petrovsk pass with unusual rapidity one after the other ... with nothing noteworthy except for the bath on Saturday and the mail on Sunday. . . . 66

64I. D. Iakushkin, 137. Annenkova, 188, 183.
65Beliaev, 272.
66I. D. Iakushkin, 249.
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Iakushkin then described the prison routine. He was up at seven; he dusted, swept, set up the samovar, washed, dressed. At nine, if it were his day, he went to work in the mill; at twelve he returned for lunch, puttered around the room and at two returned to work until four-thirty. Work was followed by a walk about the courtyard, tea, reading, then dinner. Lights were out and the cell was locked at nine. If he did not work he read or studied; two nights a week he dined in the cell of a comrade and his wife. Post day was the most important event in the week.67

To break the monotony of routine most of the men spent some time working at crafts—carpentry, bookbinding, tailoring, shoe making, drawing, watch or jewelry repair, musical pursuits. This was but a temporary escape. Writing in his prison notebook Nicholas Bestuzhev complained:

I want life and I lie in my grave. . . . To live means to be active and to be inactive is worse than . . . purgatory; therefore, I hammer, I saw, I plane, I dig and all the time the blows fall as cold drops on the head of a . . . mad man, dealing the final knell to a . . . sick heart.69

In their cramped quarters at Chita the jangle of chains, mixed with incessant conversation, singing and restless movement, made a cacophony at times unendurable. Unchanging, strident, tedious days brought a few to contemplate or even attempt suicide. Petrovsk with its separate cells was a blessing.70

67 I. D. Iakushkin, 251. 68 Rozen, 126. 69 Chukovskaia, 76-77.

There were jealousies, invidious comparisons, and some severe condemnation among the Decembrist katorzhniki. Included in their number were the wealthy and the poor, the privileged and the unprivileged. There were six princes, four barons and counts, thirteen generals and colonels, others with vast family estates who even in katorga wanted for little. Some were addicted to pleasures and able to bribe guards; and a few selfishly hoarded their material wealth. There were those who willingly or apathetically yielded to laziness, indolence, pointless argument, frivolous pastimes. Zavalishin commented bitterly on the orgies and the example of Svistunov and complained of his selfishness. Michael Bestuzhev disapproved of the "aristocrats" and especially of his brother's persistent association with them. The "true brotherhood" of Belaev's recollections certainly existed but in less unsullied form than perceived from the memories of old age.

The permanent prison for the Decembrists in Petrovsk, 200 miles west of Chita, was completed in the summer of 1830. The six-week trip from Chita to Petrovsk proved to be a welcome diversion. On the journey the Decembrists encountered the Buriats and the Russian Old-Believers. The Old-Believers had been sent or had migrated to Siberia during the eighteenth century and lived then in prosperous villages throughout the Transbaikal region. Their homes were well constructed and comfortable, and they were praised by the Decembrists as

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71 Sokolov, 68. Zavalishin, II, 238-246 passim. Pis'ma iz Sibiri dekabristov M. i N. Bestuzhevykh, ed. M. K. Azadovskii and I. M. Trotskyi (Irkutsk, 1929), I, x. (Referred to as Pis'ma iz Sibiri.)
fine farmers and good citizens. "The riches and prosperity of these peasants made me feel as if I were looking at Russians at work in America rather than in Siberia.... They have a large and very fruitful territory" and "are an industrious people...." These schismatics adhered firmly to their beliefs but without the fanaticism and ignorance of the schismatics in Russia. "Many of the wealthy.... subscribed to and read journals and papers, were interested in contemporary events and freely entered into religious conversations with.... us...."[72]

On this trip the Buriats acted as servants, porters, and guides. To forestall friendship with the political exiles the officials warned the Buriats these were evil spirits and dragons. The Decembrists took a great interest in the Buriats and once the fear and hesitancy of the latter wore off a mutual friendship developed. ".... On rest days [they] constantly came to us and intently watched our chess games," commented Lorer. "Once when one of us vacated his place a Buriat took it up and played.... excellently." As the authorities had made no provision for feeding the Buriats, food from the Decembrists' kitchen was a welcome treat.[73]

The trip to Petrovsk was not difficult. The weather was generally fine and those who desired could ride, as did Michael Lunin who spent his days and nights in a specially constructed closed off and padded

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wagon—an elaborate contrivance. His mysterious aloofness aroused the curiosity of the Buriats who at each stop grouped about the impressive wagon. After a few days of this awed attention Lunin emerged from his carriage to learn why the Buriats stood about his carriage. They wished to see this "chief criminal" and find out why he was exiled:

"Do you know your taisha?" Lunin asked them. "Yes, we know him."
"And do you know the taisha over him who can put him in a carriage and take him away to destruction?" "Yes, we have heard of him." "Well, I wished to put an end to his power and thus am banished." Laughing, the bowing audience withdrew.⁷⁴

Most of the exiles preferred to walk so they might study the luxuriant flowers and enjoy the wild scenery. All reveled in freedom, in the vast expanses of rivers and skies unimpeded to view by palisades and grills. Evenings the Decembrists sat about their fires as the Buriats sang and narrated native legends. Some attempts were made to interest the Buriats in the benefits of reading and writing.⁷⁵ Days of rest— one in three— were spent reading, conversing, pouring over the papers from Europe, writing diaries, or compiling notes and dictionaries on Buriat language and legends. Excerpts from Shteingel's diary reveal how one of the exiles spent his free time:

August 12, 1830 . . . read the papers. August 14 . . . read. . . .
August 18 . . . received the papers; news about the death of the English king and the uprising in Sevastopol. . . . August 22 . . . read Philips Ambrose, English poet, 1671-1742. . . .
August 25 . . . French have taken Algeria. . . . August 30 . . .

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⁷⁴ Gessen, Dekabrist Lunin i ego vremia, 105. Rozen, 142-143.


The journey ended on a rather ambivalent note of joy and dejection. Before arriving at Petrovsk they heard the prison had been built without windows and the news, if true, meant an end to intellectual pursuits. Then, the day before their arrival the exiles were cheered by word of the July Revolution (1830) in France and so "merry with the hope of a better future in Europe . . ." they entered the new prison singing the Marseillaise.77

Gradually over the next decade Petrovsk emptied of Decembrists as terms of katorga expired, were shortened by Imperial decree or, very rarely, by a family's successful petition. After 1839 only one prisoner remained—Ippolit Zavalishin, brother of Dmitri—who, although not actually a participant in the uprising, was involved in the fate of the Decembrists. Two of the exiles settled in Petrovsk village; the rest transferred to the villages of eastern and western Siberia.78

The approach of freedom from katorga evoked various reactions. It posed financial problems for some with families in Siberia or those dependent upon outside aid. All these men, whose education had been mostly abstract and academic, had the task of becoming financially

77 Lorer, 153, 154. Vospominaniia Bestuzhevykh, 166, 335, 779.
established in a wild agrarian region, a difficult problem at any time and doubly disheartening after years of confinement. However, regardless of financial or family situation, settlement was deliverance from the routine, monotony, and restraint of prison.\textsuperscript{79}

While still at Petrovsk they made plans and preparations for the future, decided where they would prefer to settle, with whom (if possible) they would like to begin agricultural enterprises or share settlement. This necessitated much correspondence and petitioning with St. Petersburg. There were also more mundane preliminaries to settlement. It was difficult to purchase items in Siberia, but tools and furniture might be made in Petrovsk before leaving or ordered from the foundry there. The Bestuzhev brothers made the carts, telegas, harnesses, furniture and prepared the iron work necessary for their house and farm.\textsuperscript{80}

The severance of friendships formed or strengthened at katorga was painful while pangs of lost companionship and prison security were not mitigated by sight of the places of settlement. "Nature here is extremely monotonous; all is flat, which I find very gloomy after the diverse scenery of Eastern Siberia . . ." wrote Pushchin, who for a year after leaving katorga suffered from unexplained melancholia. The Decembrist Tolstoi admitted he left prison reluctantly: "I very much


\textsuperscript{80} Basargin, 207. \textit{Pisma iz Sibiri}, 35.
disliked going," he recalled in his memoirs. Life in the isolated tiny villages posed numerous inconveniences, not the least of which was medical care. "In the event of illness" wrote one whose health was precarious, "I can write the governor; my letter will go to the volost administration, then to the okrug authority, from there to the governor and the answer will come back the same route. . . . If medical treatment is received it will arrive either after my illness or after my death. . . ." 81

Society was far from pleasant or satisfactory in the small villages where most of the katorzhniki were sent at first. "... Sometimes the future frightens me; without people it is difficult, unbearable. I do not say I have no contacts with people here. . . . They are constant, but not the sort I . . . want." Another settler found he could do without people, preferring "to be acquainted with no one than with just anyone." Pushchin felt painfully the loss of his comrades' society and asked repeatedly in letters for information about everyone. 82

The Decembrists did not in later years feel their period of katorga had been wasted. "I sense myself better and improved . . ." wrote Obolenskii. The years in prison had instilled in the exiles regular habits of work and study, discretion and inner discipline--

81 Pushchin, 130, 132, 138. Pamiati dekabristov; sbornik materialov (Leningrad, Akademiia Nauk, 1926), II, 6-20 passim; I, 188. (Referred to as Pamiati dekabristov.)

qualities not always present in them before their Revolt. Although settlement required new habits and skills, katorga with its rich educational opportunity had been a valuable preparatory experience to settlement in Siberia. Ideals and principles, changed or unchanged in the prison caldron, were certainly more thoughtfully and intelligently adhered to after katorga. With the establishment of artels and a cooperative regime, prison society became for the Decembrists a microcosm of society in general. In prison they learned the significance of social rules and laws as the framework within which society operates and became more realistic concerning what could be accomplished within that framework. In the expression of one Decembrist "prison gave us a political existence beyond the boundary of political life." These "first revolutionaries" continued to require always a political and social existence. Having attained patience and realism to a greater degree, the considerable skills and knowledge of the Decembrists were to contribute to Siberian culture as their earlier impetuosity had augmented Russian political and revolutionary tradition.

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CHAPTER III

LIFE IN SETTLEMENT

The Tsar intended that the Decembrists living in Siberian settlement become farmers, or at the least engage in occupations and pastimes not requiring contact with the Siberian populace. The comportment of the settled exiles was of interest not alone to the Tsar and Russian officialdom; in their own circles the Decembrists debated their proper activities in exile. Were the opportunity offered, ought they to engage in business and entrepreneurial enterprises? Was it appropriate to accept aid from the state when necessary? Was it proper for them to live comfortably, even plentifully, in settlement? Ivan Iakushkin considered both state aid and the pursuit of business occupations inappropriate for state criminals whose crimes were political and thus based upon adherence to high principles. Especially improper was any work involving speculation and profit. The duty of the political exile was to "ask for as little as possible" and "not contemplate financial gain. . . ." When his close friend Ivan Pushchin thought of prospecting for gold in Siberia, Iakushkin was affronted that his comrade could undertake such an unworthy venture. Not all the Decembrists could adhere so firmly as Iakushkin to idealistic views.

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1 A. P. Golubkov, "Pervye zemliaki," Eniseiskaia ssvlka; sbornik eniseiskogo zemliachestva, ed. V. N. Sokolov, III (Moscow, 1933), 17. (Referred to as Eniseiskaia ssvlka.) E. E. Iakushkin, 94, 97, 100. I. D. Iakushkin, 296.
The Tsar indicated that single Decembrists in settlement might be permitted to receive up to one thousand rubles yearly and those with a wife and children in Siberia, up to two thousand—which sums might come from occupational activities or from families. This worked hardship on those Decembrists accustomed to luxury or comfort in their living arrangements. And therefore, to augment incomes when possible the exiles received funds illicitly in excess of this amount. Since the Decembrists who undertook to farm proved generally inept, farming did not provide a source of adequate income, and only those with independent incomes could afford to indulge in agrarian pursuits. Most of the Decembrists without families able to smuggle or send them money turned perforce to non-agrarian activities. In so doing they met with vexing regulations and refusals. For instance, Wilhelm Kuchelbeker was not given permission to publish his poems and essays, nor were other Decembrists given such permission. The translations of foreign works made by some exiles with such high hopes of publication and remuneration failed to reach print. Konstantin Torson was hampered in attempts to promote the use and manufacture of farm machinery. On the pretext it would take him beyond the limits of travel permitted the exiles, Vedeniapin was refused permission to engage in fishing and lumbering enterprises, to mine mica, or to work for a local merchant; moreover, his plot of plough land might be worked only upon permission of the proper authorities.

2Streich, Katorga i ssylka, XXI, 126. Sokolov, 105-106, 139. Sibir i dekabristy: stat'yi, materialy, neizdannye pis'ma, bibliografiia, ed. M. K. Azakovskii (Irkutsk, 1925), 52. (Referred to as Sibir i dekabristy.)
CHAPTER I

THE DECEMBRIST UPRISING

Russia's "first revolution" with a political program occurred during December 1825. It lacked organization, mass support, well-defined objectives, and particularly leadership. The men who led the uprising were chiefly guards officers and noblemen who feared or misunderstood the masses; they hoped to succeed without arousing the people and plunging the Empire into holocaust. But their fear of the people made them timorous, inept leaders, and their failure to lead proved their undoing. Those most seriously implicated in the unsuccessful revolt were sent to Siberia or, in the case of five, were hanged. The exiled Decembrists were amnestied only in 1856, and for some thirty years prior to that time they lived and worked collectively, a total of 2070 exile-years in the most distant and undeveloped region of the Empire. The hand that closed the careers of these young noblemen inaugurated, thereby, a new day for Siberia. As exiles, the Decembrists left a rich legacy of educational and cultural works. As Siberia's first

1 Most of the information about the uprising and its origins is taken from the fine work of Anatole G. Mazour, The First Russian Revolution, 1825 (reprint, Stanford, California, 1961).

2 This figure is compiled from information in Sibirskaja Sovetskaia Entsiklopedija, Vol. I (2 vols.; Novosibirsk, 1929), 799-802, and V. N. Sokolov, Dekabristy v Sibiri (Novosibirsk, 1946), 228-239.
The Beliaev brothers were offered positions managing the Kusmatsov gold mines but forced by officials to forego these opportunities.  

On the other hand, the Bestuzhev brothers met with little official restriction; yet they found earning a livelihood difficult nonetheless. First, they attempted sheep raising, tanning, and farming. Then Michael turned to the production of carriages and opened a machine and craft shop. In addition, the brothers did optical work, made jewelry and performed watch repairs. Using Buriat labor, several of these enterprises, as the machine shop and manufacture of carriages, prospered. Their chief source of income, however, was Nicholas' painting and sketching. With official approval he journeyed to Kiakhta, near the China border, and to Irkutsk and surrounding villages, where for one hundred to one hundred and fifty rubles each, he made portraits of the society and the officialdom of Siberia. For some time the unusual occupation—unusual because Nicholas had permission both to paint and to travel—echoed in the exiles' correspondence, and apparently was not unprofitable. Peter Borisov eked out a pitiable existence drawing the

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4 Baranovskaia, 160-163. Vospominaniia Bestuzhevykh, 192, 742. Most of the existing portraits of Decembrists are Bestuzhev's work. In addition to portraiture he made landscapes, sketches of Buriat villages and artifacts, and iconographs—working chiefly with water color and oil. Baranovskaia lists and dates his work, 236-273; 121-136, 140, 177, for discussion and mention of other Decembrist-artists. Many of Bestuzhev's portraits of the exiles can be found in Dekabristy; 86 portretov, vid petrovskogo zavoda i 2 bykovkh risunka togo vremeni, ed. and comp. I. S. Zilbershtein (Moscow, 1906). Other Decembrist-artists include Alexander and Michael Bestuzhev, Volkonskii, Lunin, A. Z. Muravev, A. V. Podzhio,
animals, birds, and insects of Siberia; but these beautifully executed
works had little market value. Running errands and binding books,
Peter's brother added a few kopeks to their meagre income.5

The officious, fluttery Bechasnov was remembered by Siberian
neighbors for his dedicated management of a small factory near Irkutsk,
the first of its kind there. A young acquaintance wrote that his father
had given Bechasnov the money to build

a small factory for the manufacture of hemp oil. This was a
very cheap product and therefore my father was little inter­
ested in it, but Bechasnov, understandably (for his material
means were nil) was wrapped up in it. . . . Constantly when
he came to the city he ran to see us, always puffing and
panting, always anxious, and reported various triflings to
my father. . . .6

The Decembrist Vadkovskii ran a grain mill for the peasants who
lived near the village of Oek.7

The cost of living in Siberia was relatively high. A simple
peasant hut might rent for as much as three hundred and fifty rubles a
year. Grain was expensive. The Siberians took advantage of the circum­
scribed freedom of the exiles to exact a good price for their produce
and their services. Those who worked for Decembrists pressed for high
wages under the sometimes mistaken impression these people were wealthy.8

Repin, Iakubovich, Kireev, Falenberg, Odoevskii, Iushneviiskii, Ivashev,
and A. M. Muravev. Alekseev (ed.), Dekabristy, 285-370 lists the paint­
ings, photographs, and sketches either about or attributed to the Decem­
brists.

5N. A. Belogolovy, Vospominaniia i drugie stat'i (St. Petersburg,
1897), 4.

6Belogolovy, 89-90.

7Chukovskaia, 112. Neizdannye materialy, 228.

One possible solution to both the high cost of living and the limited occupational opportunities was to enter government service. At one time or another during their exile the Decembrists Semenov, Briggen, A. N. Muravev, Shteingel, Annenkov, Basargin, Svisunov, and Venediapin entered government service. Others were called upon by Siberian authorities for advice or information. None of these men, with the possible exception of A. N. Muravev who became a governor of Tobolsk province, ever was to achieve rank or responsibility in Siberia commensurate with his education and ability. And Muravev despite his position was not trusted by the government which continued a secret surveillance of his activities. These exiles in government service worked mainly as clerks and were often harassed by ignorant officials and obscurantist policies. One of the Decembrists was even brought before the Siberian courts in two cases—one involving counterfeiting and the other concerning the death of a peasant.

The popularity and influence of certain Decembrists was cause of anxiety to the authorities who nonetheless sought to utilize those exiles with special knowledge of the region or with prestige among the peasants. During the 1842 Potato Rebellion in Permskoi gubernia the officials of neighboring Tobolskoi gubernia urged Shteingel to write a soothing proclamation to the threatening populace. Once the crisis was over Shteingel was transferred to a more remote region under the threat

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of "strictest measures" if he again permitted himself "to mix in matters not concerning him..."\(^{10}\) Michael Kuchelbeker was asked by governors Tseidler and Nikita N. Muravev to investigate farming and peasant conditions.\(^{11}\) In one report Kuchelbeker noted that "up to now no one here has made any studies of sowing and harvesting..." so that "accounts of the people often contradict one another." Kuchelbeker felt his studies were too limited and information for one year would prove of little value. The condition of the peasants was depressed as Kuchelbeker had been made well aware through his studies, and so he recommended that officials supply the peasants with potatoes. The authorities, however, were far too apprehensive about the possible subversive influence of Kuchelbeker on the peasants to give much attention either to his report or his suggestions.\(^{12}\)

In these exiles Siberian authorities encountered outspoken critics of official maltreatment and gross indifference to the people's welfare. Living in the Buriat region of Eastern Siberia, the Bestuzhevs became distressingly aware of the cruelties and neglect of the officials toward these indigenous people. Zavalishin at Chita was concerned with the conditions of colonists along the Amur River. And while yet at katorga Shteingel wrote of the abuses in the contemporary Siberian administration in his *Sibirskie satrapy* which ostensibly described unjust officials of an earlier period.\(^{13}\)

\(^{10}\) Bogucharskii et al. (ed.), I, 313-315. Chukovskaia, 127.

\(^{11}\) Streich, *Moriaki dekabristy*, 256.


Various factors besides the financial prompted the Decembrists to seek service jobs, though not all who applied were successful in obtaining such positions. The work provided an escape from inactivity. It was a hoped for opportunity to be of genuine service, or perhaps to benefit their children and family, or hasten return to Russia. Men not suited by education and temperament to agrarian pursuits also sought state service. From Iakushkin and Zavalishin there were bitter denunciations of those who for whatever reason became "tools of the administration which had exiled them."  

The wealthier exiles assisted their more impoverished comrades when they could. Ivan Pushchin in particular was active in this work, and his letters reveal a multitude of charitable undertakings.  

From 1835 the government followed a policy of rendering some financial assistance to the needy Decembrists, giving them up to two hundred rubles yearly and freeing their children born in Siberia of taxes and duties. From 1835 to 1856 an average of six Decembrists a year received state aid.  

This low figure reflects not only the relative financial well-being of many of the exiles, but also their reluctance to accept aid from the regime unless absolutely necessary.

For those Decembrists who might tap wealth in Russia, life in exile was comfortable. These exiles had access to the most enlightened


15 Sokolov, 140. Pushchin, 159, 165, 191-192, 224.

society and the most pleasant living conditions this region offered. The two-story plantation-style home of Pushchin in Ialutorovsk, for example, was not unlike plantation homes in the American South. Rozen's house at Kurgan was a spacious, sturdy building, surrounded by a beautifully cared for yard. The Volkonskii dacha (summer home)--Kamchatnik--on the shores of the Angara apparently nestled delightfully among the woods, mountains and flowers of the Baikal region for an acquaintance marvelled that they lived so gaily in their "lovely though distant corner. . . ." So splendid was their winter home that Volkonskii preferred to live in a nearby village.\textsuperscript{17} The homes of both the Volkonskii and the Trubetskoiis at Urik and then Irkutsk became intellectual and social centers. In fact the numerous parties, theatricals, musicals, and dinners of the Decembrists considerably enlivened Irkutsk, Tobolsk, Kurgan and other towns.\textsuperscript{18}

These exiles and their European wives added a noticeable cultural tone to Siberia. Dr. Belegolovyi returning to Irkutsk after an absence of several years in Russia was amazed to realize it had so changed. He

\textsuperscript{17} Pamiati dekabristov, III, 128. Rozen, 196, 204. E. E. Iakushkin, 44. M. Muravev, "Dekabrist Artamon Zakharovich Muravev," Tainye obshchestva v Rossii v nachale XIX stoletiia; sbornik materialov, statei, i vospominanii (Moscow, 1926), VIII, 121. (Referred to as Tainye obshchestva.) Pis'ma iz Sibiri, 103-104. Belogolovyi, 55. F. A. Kudriavtsev, Istoricheskie pamyatniki irkutskoi oblasti XVII-XX vv. (Irkutsk, 1949), 29.

attributed this transformation to the "simultaneous appearance" in the region of fifteen to twenty highly educated people who could not but have a deep influence; such men as N. Bestuzhev, Nikita Muravev, Iushnevskii, and Lunin rendered an irresistible influence with their outstanding intellects. . . . They brought real enlightenment . . . and did not swagger their origins, their superior education. . . . They were such animated, educated, cultured people that it was natural they acquired significance and merit . . . especially . . . to those who had a hazy consciousness of something in life other than the animal, vegetable, and vulgar, which then distinguished provincial life.19

Although the Siberian populace warmly welcomed and accepted the exiles, too often officials provided the only educated society, especially in the smaller villages. The Decembrists tended to dislike and mistrust the authorities and thus for want of congenial educated company came to prefer either solitude or, where possible, the association of their comrades. The Ialutorovsk exiles were quite clannish and in describing their life Pushchin wrote "... we live harmoniously and speak candidly when we get together . . . Thursdays at our place and Sundays with Muravev-Apostol. We dine . . . simply . . . and then either go home or remain for cards to give diversion to our comrade Tizenhauzen who is old and deaf. . . ."20 The Decembrists developed a fairly close association with Polish exiles of the 1830 rebellion. In

19Belogolovyi, 47.

his memoirs Decembrist Lorer spoke of a not untypical evening when
Madame Naryshkina entertained them after dinner at the piano, playing
first "Polish folk songs. . . . The Poles were touched to tears . . .
and Naryshkina moved on to gayer tunes, mazurkas, dances . . . gradu­
ally the grief of these patriots gave way to joy. . . ."21

Apparently ties with the Polish exiles were closer than those
formed with the Petrashevtsy exiled from Petersburg in 1849. This
latter group was ideologically oriented toward European utopian socialism
which had relatively little appeal for earlier political exiles.
Dostoevsky, exiled with other members of the Petrashevtsy circle, did not
refer to the Decembrists in his writings, although he mentioned meeting
a few of their wives.22 Felix Tol is almost the only member of this
group of political exiles to leave written notes and descriptions of
Decembrists he met. Though they did not share with these young men a
common devotion to utopian socialism the Decembrists did feel that they
"the old inhabitants of Siberia must be guardians of the new con­
scripts . . ." and when chance brought them together attempted to aid
the Petrashevtsy.23

Hunting, fishing, and hiking were favorite pastimes of the active
exiles. Although not hunters before exile both Michael Lunin and
Nicholas Bestuzhev developed an avid interest in the sport. Iakushkin

21 Lorer, 172.

22 Literaturnoe nasledstvo, LIX, 489-491. E. E. Iakushkin, 33.
Neizdannye materialy, 318, 320.

23 E. E. Iakushkin, 121, 123-145 passim. I. D. Iakushkin, 379,
579. Dekabristy, 32.
spent the summers wandering about Ialutorovsk's fields and woods collecting plants and herbs. Others hiked for sheer joy in being free to roam. The Transbaikal is especially beautiful and on long walks into the mountainous region Nicholas Bestuzhev explored the shores of Goose Lake and the Buriat settlements nearby, gathering information for his ethnographic articles.24

Attempting to limit the range and activities of the Decembrists in settlement, Nicholas I wrote his officials to prevail upon [them] to conduct themselves peaceably and discreetly. They must have no equivocal speech or conversation; also no ties are to be formed with them. They are to mingle in no crowds or gatherings, either at their own homes or others. They are not to leave the place where they are staying and without fail must spend the night in their apartments. In the event of absence they are to be penalized. . . ."25

As will be apparent already, these instructions were quite obviously interpreted differently by the officials, according to distances from Petersburg, predisposition of the individual authority, or the passage of years. In establishing policy to govern the political exiles in settlement the tsarist government faced a two-fold problem. It wished certainly to avoid making martyrs of the Decembrists; but on the other hand it sought to restrict and control their activity as

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25 Sto let iakutskoi seylki, 90.
much as possible. Basargin felt that the government did not wish to seem especially cruel toward us and... yet it did not want us to attain any sort of importance... In a word, the government wished that those who had rebelled serve as a constant reminder and example to those who thought of rebellion against the regime.26

The net effect was an ambiguously executed policy and inconsistencies on the part of the Tsar and his officials. Flagrant infractions of regulations might occur with the Siberian officials "looking through their fingers" while innocent acts brought severe repercussions. Nicholas Bestuzhev was allowed to make numerous portraits of his comrades but such an act as sending daguerreotypes to their families brought the Ialutorovsk Decembrists vigorous censure.27 Numerous infractions of rules occurred without official knowledge or concern, however; thus despite rules limiting or restricting their activities and freedom the Decembrists lived more comfortably than later political exiles and much better than they had dared hope.

But there were numerous examples of tragedy and hardship among the exiles. Not long after their exile Andreev and Repin died in the fire of Repin's hut at Verkholensk and rumors persisted among the Decembrists that this was the work of brigands who constantly roamed Siberia. When Peter Borisov died suddenly his psychotic brother was deprived of the only human association he could tolerate and immediately took his life. Sukhinov committed suicide to avoid execution for an attempted

27Basargin, 211, 212. Pamiati dekabristov, III, 82. Kubalov, Dekabristy v vostochnie Sibir, 45.
intellectual group they taught a generation of youths who became a small
intelligentsia. In the words of a nineteenth-century historian, the
political exiles, despite the most unfortunate conditions of life,
did as much good for Siberia as might have been accomplished
in a hundred years or more. . . . They explored Siberia in
the fields of anthropology, natural science, economics, and
social and ethnographical conditions; in a word, they did
imcomparably more than had been done in the other Russian
provinces. These people were the true benefactors of Siberia
in a moral, a social, and a material sense.3

Succeeding chapters will survey the Decembrists' life in exile as
well as their contributions to potential knowledge and Siberia. But
first, it is appropriate briefly to discuss their abortive revolt and
its background.

The reign of Catherine II in the eighteenth century was a period
during which lip service was rendered to enlightened ideas, and the
process of turning the higher nobility into replicas of polished French-
men was completed. And thus a generation who spoke French better than
Russian, who had access to liberal concepts, and who observed its
Empress parading before European opinion as one of the philosophes
became in time father to a generation of noblemen no longer awed by the
novelty of liberal ideas, well educated, and burning with zeal to reform
the deplorable conditions of Russia which were so sharply high­lighted
by their travels.

The joy and optimism which in 1801 greeted the accession of
Alexander I soon shriveled into nothing for want of nourishment, as the

3I. G. Prizhov (1827-1885), quoted in Literaturnoe nasledstvo,
ed. A. M. Egolin (Moscow, 1954, LIIX-LX), 635.
escape from katorga. Glebov died in settlement from the effects of a beating and poisoning by a Siberian official, and Shakhirov died under mysterious circumstances apparently at the hands of another official. Krasnokutskii, until his death in exile, suffered severe paralysis induced by the conditions of Siberian existence. Bobrishchev-Pushkin developed a psychosis during exile and at times was subjected to care as cruel as the illness. Vygodskii was in 1854 re-imprisoned and sent to a remote region where he was forgotten; since the amnesty neglected him he never returned to Russia. Vronitskii became seriously ill in the northern tundra and before his death was dependent upon the few natives there. Prince Bariatinskii came from one of the oldest and wealthiest Russian families (a descendant of the Ruriks) but nonetheless during exile he lived in squalor and poverty; forgotten by his family he died in a Siberian charity hospital a destitute alcoholic with an estate of a few kopeks, an extra shirt and some books. Following twenty years of solitary confinement in Russia, Batenkov was sent to settle in Siberia where his moods of childlike bewilderment and uncontrollable chatter aroused the pity of his comrades. Until his death in Siberia, for almost thirty years, Spiridov had no communications from his family. Shteingel was separated from his wife and numerous children for thirty years. The Fonvizins, husband and wife, left sons in Russia who died not long before a special amnesty would have reunited them after many years. Following her husband's death Madame Entaltsev was forced to remain in Siberia until the amnesty a decade later. A most promising participant in the secret societies was Povalo-Shveikovskii who in
exile sank into complete torpor and apathy. Both Gorbachevskii and Mozalevskii were refused much needed financial aid by the government and harassed by the church for possessing "atheistic" views. The most desolate, unhealthy spot in Siberia became Lunin's place of incarceration in 1841 and here he spent four lonely years, seeing none but his guard or an occasional official; perhaps, though, his greatest sorrow was in leaving behind his beloved hunting dogs. The Decembrist Lutskii managed to change places with a criminal exile during the journey to Siberia and his later exploits, captures, and escapes made him a legend among the fringes of Siberian society; not amnestied in 1856 and entirely forgotten by family and comrades Lutskii's ultimate fate is unknown.28

If the Decembrists complained relatively little it was perhaps that those with most cause to complain had the least opportunity to be heard, or it may have been that "a man can . . . become accustomed even to hell." However, far from accepting their lot fatalistically, those who could do so never ceased to petition for some improvement in their situation. Both the exiles and their families made repeated attempts to sway officialdom and tsar to leniency. Most such requests were for permission to move elsewhere in Siberia--either for financial or health reasons--or to travel to a larger town for proper medical attention. The government met these petitions with no definite or fixed policy: some were granted while others were not. But patience and persistence often were rewarded, for by the end of the 1840's most of the Decembrists had succeeded in settling in small groups clustered near the centers of Tobolsk and Irkutsk.

In two instances relatives other than wives were permitted to share exile. The three sisters of Michael and Nicholas Bestuzhev and the sister and mother of Torson were allowed to join their exiles. Iakushkin's sons chose to serve in Siberia, where they visited their father upon several occasions, and Volkonskaia visited her brother in

29 Dekabristy v buriatii, 22.

Irkutsk. These reunions with relatives were very rare and occurred only during the later period of exile.\textsuperscript{31}

In very few instances were the exiles permitted to return to Russia during the lifetime of Nicholas I. Mukhanov, Fonvizin, and the Bobrishchev-Pushkins were granted such permission in the 1850's.\textsuperscript{32}

During the 1830's some twenty-five Decembrists were allowed to enter the army and serve in the Caucasus, from whence one or two of the more fortunate returned home.\textsuperscript{33}

Utilizing one pretext or another the settlers in Siberia traveled rather considerably. Relocation from one village to another offered an opportunity to visit comrades along or near the route of travel. Transfer to the Caucasus, so long as the journey continued generally westward, also afforded reunions with old friends and comrades. These trips were not hurried, taking perhaps months or a year to complete, and were the supreme joy of a rather tedious existence. They traveled with Cossack or courier escorts who were generally willing to prolong the journey while the comrades indulged in night- and day-long debates, shared forbidden books such as \textit{Uncle Tom's Cabin}, collected money for needy


\textsuperscript{33}Streich, Moriaki dekabristy, 251-252. Nechkina, I, 448.
comrades at home, and placed petitions before provincial authorities in
behalf of non-perambulatory friends. 34

With their air of legitimacy, and the more so as the exiles aged,
medical trips were a favorite excuse. Pushchin's medical trip in 1849
was a grand and leisurely tour through Tiumen, Tobolsk, Tara, Krasnoiarisk,
Irkutsk (his destination), Kiakhta, Selenginsk, and way points. The
revolutionary activity in Europe had something to do with Pushchin's
need for medical attention that year. Months before the trip his com-
rades speculated upon the fate of the petition. At last permission came.
But the anticipated joys of travel were not complete, for Pushchin moved
eastward away from the source of all the latest news of Europe and
Russia. Writing home to comrades he had recently left he pleaded for
news: "You know as much as we do here." 35

"My favorite occupation ..." wrote the Decembrist Mukhanov "is
to read a few lines written in the hand of a relative." 36 While at
katorga the exiles presumably wrote no letters, which was, however, more
a sacrifice for their families since at least the exiles might receive
letters. When after ten or fifteen years relatives held a letter in the
handwriting of their exile it was a noteworthy occasion. "How many tears

34 Dekabristy v zabaikal' e, 33. S. G. Volkonskii, 477.
Zavalishin, Russkaia starina, XXXII, 388. Dekabristy; letopisi, III,
Lorer, 178, 180, 181. Pushchin, 34, 241, 260. I. D. Iakushkin, 390,

35 Pushchin, 33, 34, 227, 418, 230.

36 Popov, Katorga i ssylka; sbornik, 221.
we shed reading your letters, the first from you personally in eleven
... years" wrote the father of one exile.37

Decembrists' correspondence provides a record of marriages,
ilnesses, births, deaths, trips, promotions in civil service, reunions,
and contains, as well, descriptions of books, articles, essays of
particular interest, and instructions to children in Russia. If one
exile kept something of note to himself another would surely report it.
As one wrote, "despite our dispersal ... we, as it were, constituted
one family; corresponded with one another, knew where and in what condi-
tion each was and as much as possible helped one another."38 On the
whole, these letters were charitable and relations, warm; but the exiles
were not entirely uncritical of one another. For instance, Iakushkin's
letters referred to the much-respected Lunin as the "Kopev" of their
generation, a "state criminal of fifty" who permitted himself the
"escapades of youth."39 Much criticism was directed toward the Davydovs
who sent the children born in Siberia to a state school in Russia. The
squabbles and jealousies between the Volkonskiis and the Trubetskois

37I. D. Iakushkin, 115, 247, 249-257 (the latter a long letter
"by occasion" from katorga.) Dekabristy, 302. Bulanova, 73, 257.

38Dekabristy, 314. Orlov and Verzhbitskii, 119. I. D. Iakushkin,
letopisi, III, 103. Sokolov, 139.

39A. D. Kop'ev was a writer at the end of the eighteenth century
noted for his escapades. I. D. Iakushkin, 285, 288.
were common knowledge and elicited a great deal of petty gossip among the comrades.  

In addition to a plethora of letters, the exiles dispatched to one another books, translations, journals, newspapers, even their diaries in at least one case. The great volume of this varied correspondence testified to their continued interest in life and in the world outside the small orbit of political exile. In reference to the 1848 revolutions in Europe one Decembrist remarked that "we read, talk, debate, argue, dream--this is the sole part which we can take in the common movement." Letters, occasional travelers, and newspapers were the chief sources of contact with Europe. Nicholas Bestuzhev's friendship and correspondence with Admiral Mikhail Frantsevich Reineke was especially valuable during the Crimean War when the Admiral sent details of the Battle of Sinope and descriptions of the siege of Sevastopol along with maps of the roadstead, information valued above that in the foreign or Russian newspapers they received. During the 1850's Herzen's Kolokol was popular; the exiles passed the illegal papers from village to village until threadbare.

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42 Vospominaniiia Bestuzhevykh, 802. Baranovskaya, 218-222. Dekabristy v buriatii, 14. Literaturnoe nasledstvo, LX, 234. Vice-Admiral Reineke was an authority on hydrography and from 1856 a member of the Academy of Science.

The correspondence of Michael Lunin was a series of pamphlets upon current problems of national import; these letters excoriated serfdom, officialdom, censorship, autocracy, and the court system. Such outspoken letters as Lunin wrote and sent through the prescribed official channels brought consequences which none but the intrepid Lunin cared to incur. Regulations governing correspondence of the exiles or their wives were designed to provide strict control. During the first years in Siberia all their letters were routed through Petersburg regardless of final destination, so that a letter might travel thousands of versts out of its way. Rozen poignantly experienced the effect of this regulation when "some months after hearing of Repin's death [I] received a letter from him" which had made a circuit of twelve thousand versts in reaching Rozen. It was the more tragic as Decembrist Repin enthusiastically discussed all of his plans for a new life in settlement.

The regulations were later changed to enable letters to pass through censorship in Siberia. This had its disadvantages too, for civil servants procrastinated and letters accumulated while the outraged exiles waited impatiently for mail. Another constraint on correspondence was the knowledge that government officials read everything. "Tell me . . . what can I write to you when our letters are always read. It drives me to rage and despair" complained one of the exiles. The most innocent remarks might elicit searches and questioning. Pushchin's

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45 Rozen, 164.
facetious reference to "the fish" stirred up rigorous investigation until officials satisfied themselves it had no hidden revolutionary meaning, referring merely to a map drawn by Lakushkin and Pushchin at Petrovsk. 46

It is not surprising, given these circumstances, that the Decembrists and their wives utilized each opportunity to send messages "by occasion" around the Third Division; most letters within Siberia and many to Russia went "by occasion." Despite the chance of exposure (and the provocateur Medoks did report some illegal letters) and the necessity of referring in official letters to nothing mentioned unofficially, this was the preferred method of maintaining contact with friends and families. The exiles were resourceful in devising "occasions." 47 Relatives in Europe, for instance, sent serfs to the exiles as servants, giving them messages or money to convey. These servants were then returned home as "unfit" or "homesick" and others sent. Trubetskaia wrote from Petrovsk that she "would be much calmer if she might have her childhood nurse . . ." sent to her. Some of the people sent to serve did not realize they were carrying letters which might have been sewed into an article of clothing. The Turinsk exiles had an invaluable means of sending messages; they were able to rely upon the local nuns to transmit letters. The more trusted Cossacks and even officials carried


47 E. E. Lakushkin, 64. Streich, Roman Medoks, 130.
letters. Sympathetic travelers to Siberia seldom left an exile without a message for someone along the way. Merchants in Tobolsk, Irkutsk, Ialutorovsk, and other towns made business trips to Russia and took letters from the exiles.48 Dr. Belogolovyi, both friend and pupil of the Decembrists, wrote that his father each summer had gone to Russia on trade matters and on these trips he aided the Decembrists he knew, taking letters and parcels to their families and frequently acting as intermediary in all sorts of matters between them and people in the capitals.49

While serving in Siberia, Iakushkin's son carried messages and Volkonskii's son, as courier with the Irkutsk governor's office, brought first word in 1856 of the long-awaited amnesty.50 Another strategem was to send letters addressed to the servants of the recipient and sign them fictitiously.51 Even in isolated Akatui, Lunin found "occasion" to send out letters, and they remain the only accurate information on his last four years in this horrible prison.52


49 Belogolovyi, 2.

50 I. D. Iakushkin, 434, 682. E. E. Iakushkin, 50. Ivan P. Barsukov (ed.), Graf Nikolai Nikolaevich Muravev-Amirskii; po ego pis'mam, ofitsial'nym dokumentam, razskazam sovremennikov i pechatnym istochnikam (Moscow, 1891), 470. (Referred to as N. N. Muravev.)

51 Dekabristy; letopisi, III, 93 infra.

52 Gessen, Dekabrist Lunin i ego vremia, 130.
lofty schemes of the Tsar for both constitutional and peasant reform remained on paper. Napoleonic wars, Continental Blockade, the invasion and campaign of 1812-1814, followed by Metternichian reaction in Europe—all turned Alexander's mind and proclivities from liberal channels. In the last decade of his reign increasing responsibility and influence were given to the hated and cruel Count Arakcheev, while the obscurantist Prince A. Golitsyn was entrusted first with the administration of the Holy Synod and later with the education ministry.

Alexander's descent into mysticism and reaction bore the fruit of disillusionment and opposition, particularly among young noblemen. Many guards officers had served in Western Europe and returned home in 1815 wiser and sadder. Contrasts between life in the West and conditions in the Empire were so intensely disturbing and frustrating that some of the returning officers formed a secret society, advocating constitutional and peasant reforms and acknowledging the possibility of resort to violence and assassination to achieve these reforms.

In 1816 the Union of Salvation was formed at St. Petersburg by a group of young noblemen who were guards officers. An early recruit to the Society, Pavel Pestel, became the outstanding individual in the Decembrist movement. Members of the Union of Salvation soon realized that their hopes and programs were perhaps too ambitious for the time, and the Society was reorganized as the Union of Welfare with a somewhat altered membership and more modest goals. But a cleavage noticeable in the parent organization appeared in the Union, a cleavage rooted in conflicting degrees of liberalism and devotion to democracy. When
The Russian poet and translator Vasilii Zhukovskii was close to some of the Decembrists before the exile. In 1837 while on tour of Siberia with his royal pupil, the Tsarevich, Zhukovskii enjoyed a reunion with old friends in Kurgan. Tsarevich Alexander had been expressly forbidden by his father to have contact with the political criminals, but nonetheless went to some trouble to learn of their life. He relied for first-hand information upon Zhukovskii's reports and at Kurgan he arranged for a special mass so that he might catch a glimpse of the exiles as they attended church. Both Zhukovskii and the Tsarevich wrote letters to Nicholas I on behalf of these exiles. "I dare . . . petition you about these unfortunates" wrote Alexander, "who fully repent their crime and are ready to spill the last drop of blood for their Tsar, and I ask that you lighten their fate, about which they do not . . . complain. . . ." The Tsar lightened their burdens to the extent of granting the "less guilty" permission to transfer to the Caucasus where they might serve in the ranks of the army, and thus some did perforce prove their willingness to shed their blood for the Tsar. 53

For their part the Decembrists were as curious about the young Tsarevich as he about them. The Kurgan exiles awaited the imperial visit with great hopes and expectations. Some even hoped it might signal amnesty for them. The Tsarevich rather impressed the exiles and one wrote of him as both their hope and the hope of Russia as it was realized

little could be expected from Nicholas I. "We truly wished him fortune, contentment, and the grace of God" wrote Lorer.54

For the diversion they provided or the news they conveyed all visitors were welcome. Often these people brought messages from Russia. Officials from Petersburg on imperial errands or Senators on Siberian inspection often halted to converse with the Decembrists or to obtain advice and information from these men who had spent a decade or more in the region.55 Michael Lunin was one of the few Decembrists to resent the officials from Russia.56

The Decembrists provided an added attraction for the occasional foreign visitor to Siberia. Contemporary travelers went to considerable effort to meet the exiles; but as late as the end of the century Englishmen and Americans in Siberia commented (often quite inaccurately) upon what they had learned. All seemed surprised to realize the Decembrists had lived rather well in Siberian exile; but they pounced on instances of tragedy and tended to overemphasize both the good and the bad aspects of exile.57

54 Dubrovin, Russkaia starina, CX, 97. Lorer, 174.
56 Vospominaniiia Bestuzhevykh, 744. Gessen, Dekabrist Lunin i ego vremia, 277, 133.
When the Tsarevich wrote his father from Kurgan that the Decem-
brists were willing to die for their Tsar, he might better have said for
their country. The "first revolutionaries" never lost their concern for
Russia's well-being. "Although confined in prison for ten years" wrote
Michael Lunin, "I have not ceased to ponder the welfare of my
country..." And Alexander Herzen in his memoirs wrote that "our
Decembrists loved Russia passionately," while the Decembrist Muravev-
Apostol once told a former pupil of his that the "Decembrists were
spiritually attached to Russia." "I love Russia" remarked Nicholas
Bestuzhev; "my misfortune has not cured me of wishing her well." And
in speaking of her Decembrist father, Sophia Nikitchina Muraveva recailed
an occasion during exile when

an officer from Russia... talked about the current abuses
of the government; then going up to my father in an under-
tone he added: "I must admit to you that I do not love
Russia!" to which my father recoiled in powerful indignation
and thundered: "Why do you tell me this? If I did not love
Russia, I would not be here!"

The Tsarist government harassed the wives of the exiles almost as
much as it did the exiles themselves. All sorts of obstacles were placed
in the path of the eleven women who determined to follow husbands to
Siberia. These women, including two who went as fiancées to marry exiled
Decembrists, overcame all opposition from families and government
officials, and willingly signed away their titles, estates and civil

58 Gessen, Dekabrist Lunin i ego vremia, 120.
59 Baranovskaia, 226.
60 Quoted in Baranovskaia, 226.
rights. They agreed that children born in Siberia be registered as Crown peasants, that they keep in their possession no valuables and renounce all right of ownership over serfs who accompanied them, and that they leave behind their children. This latter stipulation prevented those women from leaving Russia whose husbands insisted they not leave the children. Others made the sacrifice, as did Madame Davydov, who had six children in Russia. 61

Through persistent efforts from Siberia, with the aid of important family connections, and assisted by their undoubted feminine charm, these women succeeded in lightening the burdens of the exiled Decembrists during katorga and settlement. They sent for medical supplies and cared for the sick; they cooked and wrote letters for the katorzhniki (Madame Trubetskaia wrote about ten letters daily); they provided moral support by their presence and devotion and interceded with officials against unfair or unbearable conditions (they were, for instance, responsible for windows finally being added to Petrovsk prison); and not least, their letters to families and friends kept before Russian society the fate and the memory of these men, to the great chagrin of tsar and government. There was a limit to how completely the authorities could or would silence the feminine voices in Siberia. Alexander

Pushkin, as well as all Moscow society, praised the sacrifices of the young and beautiful Maria Volkonskaia. Later the poet Nekrasov immortalized Maria and the other wives in a lengthy poem. In a few instances the decision to follow husbands was based on duty and protest as much as love. Volkonskaia's decision was one of rebellion and political protest. She had hardly known her husband before exile; he was twice her age and the marriage had been arranged by her father, hero and General in the Great War of 1812 and close friend of Volkonskii. But Maria determined to leave her child and her bitterly opposed family to follow Volkonskii.62

In exile, all these women were loyal companions and they gave the courtly Leparskii no peace in their zealous attention to the exiles' welfare, until the beleaguered Commandant once vowed he would rather "deal with three hundred state criminals than ten of their women."63

In Chita the wives were at first permitted to see their husbands only a few times a week. They spent most of their days, however, seated just outside the prison walls in sight of the exiles. Later, at Petrovsk, the women lived in the prison. Since no children were permitted in the prison the women's hardships were increased by constant moving from prison to village as they cared for husbands and children. Not long before her premature death Muraveva wrote she spent the day

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63 Lorer, 149.
"going from prison to house and house to prison ..." This had greatly undermined her health and after her death the authorities permitted the husbands to move into homes in the village.  

Since the Decembrists were sentenced to legal death and lost all civil, social, and political rights, their wives were considered widows; this freed them to remarry with no religious or legal censure. Three of the wives took advantage of their freedom to remarry but the vast majority remained loyal. 

Less is known about the Siberian wives of the Decembrists. Marriages with Siberian women were considered by some of the comrades to be "unequal" and "unstable," in a word, "misalliances." Actually, they were with a few exceptions rather satisfactory and long lasting. After the amnesty the Decembrists did not forsake their Siberian wives but remained in Siberia or else took the women with them to Russia. These wives were Buriats, Cossacks, in one case a criminal exile, and in a few instances, European governesses. Generally the Siberian wives were uneducated women and their husbands attempted to correct this deficiency by giving them the rudiments of an education. But these efforts did not make the ladies any more or less than the "simple good women" they mostly were. While in Siberia their status and illiteracy were not a great

handicap; in an entirely different milieu among the Russian families of their husbands their Siberian manners and characteristics were quite obvious. 66

About twenty of the Decembrists married while in exile. 67 One of the less happy marriages was that of Wilhelm Kuchelbeker. With a highly nervous poetic temperament, he found little joy in marriage to a Siberian woman who was semi-literate. In the diary intended for his son, Kuchelbeker urged, "learn from my example; do not marry a girl who is not in a position to understand you." Apparently Kuchelbeker's wife scribbled on the back of his poetry and then threw the pages away; she complained constantly of his inability to provide a living for the family; and perhaps most significantly, she was not one to inspire or soothe a poetic temperament. 68


Pamiati dekabristov, III, 76, 132. Sokolov, 170, 171. Kubalov,
Bulanova, 374. A. E. Rozen, "P. I. Falenberg; rasskaz iz epokhi 1826g.,” Russkaia starina, XXXVIII (June, 1883), 592. Pushchin, 32, 235, 240.

CHAPTER IV

LITERARY ACTIVITIES OF THE DECEMBRISTS
IN EXILE

Siberian exile cut short several promising literary careers among the Decembrists. Alexander Kornikovich, Nicholas Bestuzhev, Wilhelm Kuchelbeker, Michael Lunin, and Alexander Odoeskii may have been denied the fame, recognition, and opportunity their talents bespoke. Not one of the Decembrists developed a literary career in Siberia. Yet despite the restrictions and obscurity imposed by official policies and the conditions of exile, literary pursuits were important in the Siberian life of the Decembrists. Indeed, writing was one of the few favorite activities in which the political exile might engage if he were either very prudent and cautious, or rather reckless. Writing prose and poetry served as an escape from boredom, a means of expression, an anvil upon which to forge contact with more tolerable realities. It reflected those interests, needs, and aspirations which were not lost merely because a man found his former associations, opportunities, and career wrenched from his grasp. The new scene—blending imprisonment, autocratic surveillance, poverty, loneliness, idleness, and despair—prompted some of these exiles to take up fresh studies, contemplate life in different terms, and explore hidden talents. Men who had never
seriously put pen to paper found themselves writing poetry, stories, and essays depicting in multiform their earlier freedom and experiences as well as more recent trials and frustrations.

The early literary legacy of the Decembrists has been an interesting aspect of this important revolutionary group, while the heritage of the Siberian period is almost unmentioned. Yet the extent and merit of this later writing are not embarrassingly modest, so much as they are obscured by circumstances. It is the purpose of this chapter to survey the Decembrists' works of prose, poetry, and translation, the activities surrounding these works, and briefly to set forth a few viewpoints culled from this literature of exile.

The Decembrists' literary legacy from exile was voluminous, and, despite the accidents of time, still is. Untold manuscripts were destroyed by the repressing agencies of Tsardom or through the prudence of the exiles themselves, their families and heirs; while many other manuscripts have been lost over the years. When Michael Lunin was arrested at Urik in 1841, many of his papers and those of his comrades perished. Lunin's own manuscripts were impounded to disappear into official limbo at St. Petersburg, and those of some close associates were destroyed in the uncertainty at that time. For example, when Gorbachevskii heard of the arrest at Urik he destroyed his memoirs and also some papers of Mukhanov in his keeping. Nikita Muravev burned his work on transportation in Russia; others burned various articles and correspondence.¹

¹M. K. Azadovskii's study of the lost, destroyed, and misplaced works of the Decembrists in Literaturnoe nasledstvo, LIX is referred to as Azadovskii, LN, LIX. Azadovskii, LN, LIX, 605, 732.
Some years later, encountering difficulty with the authorities in Siberia, Michael Bestuzhev decided to destroy a portion of his papers. In 1854 Vygodovskii was re-arrested and the officials disposed of seven thousand pages of his manuscripts—all that they found, except for brief excerpts transmitted to the Third Division in illustration of the exile's "audacious writings." From these extant excerpts it is possible to obtain some idea of the scope of Vygodovskii's writing in exile, touching upon the history of ancient peoples, amusements and the dance (in its political aspect), the privileged nobility, economics, and theology.  

A few years before the amnesty enabled him to return to Russia Iakushkin's papers of pre-revolutionary days, long hidden by his mother-in-law, were destroyed by her in expectation of death. The heirs of Matvei Muravev-Apostol's sister found papers of this Decembrist in her estate which they destroyed. Papers left in Siberia by Gorbachevskii, Mozalevskii, Mitkov, and Kireev were all or in part lost. Iakubovich's memoirs for many years were kept by a Siberian family and at last destroyed during the upheavals of 1917-1919.

In the first years at katorga the Decembrists planned and wrote a journal, Zarnitsa, which they confidently expected to have published for the benefit of their impoverished comrades. Zarnitsa's chief instigator and inspiration was Mukhanov, who took the manuscripts for

2 Azadovskii, LN, LIX, 605, 720.
3 Azadovskii, LN, LIX, 605.
4 Azadovskii, LN, LIX, 605.
transferred to the Second Army Headquarters at Tulchin in the Ukraine, Pestel soon became the leader of a more liberal branch of the Society. In 1821 the Union of Welfare decided to hold a general conference in Moscow where representatives from the two branches and from Moscow would discuss differences of opinion and program. The conference agreed to carry out a fictitious dissolution of the Society in order to rid it of unwanted members and lull the active suspicions of the government. From the disbanded Union of Welfare two societies emerged—the Northern Society at St. Petersburg and the Southern Society centered at Tulchin and with several offshoots in the area.

Although members of the secret organizations disagreed heatedly on many issues they were in accord on the necessity of abolishing both autocracy and serfdom. Generally, members of the Southern Society were more radical; this was especially so after August 1825 when they were joined by members of another secret society, the United Slavs. Most members of the Society of United Slavs were democrats, men of the lower nobility who possessed few if any serfs and had little to lose by radical changes. The Southern Society and the United Slavs wished to assassinate the imperial family, set up a republican regime and a government with broad popular participation. The United Slavs also wished to form a federated union of all the Slavic peoples. The Northern Society, whose leaders were Nikita Muravev and Kondraty Ryleev, favored in general a constitutional monarchy with property qualifications to participation in governmental offices and processes. Pestel was unsuccessful in his efforts to induce a more radical tendency among the members of the
the journal into settlement when he left katorga. Before he might
arrange publication through the intercession of influential friends at
the capital, he was forced to burn the manuscripts to keep them from
police officials. It is, therefore, uncertain who had written for
Zarnitsa; certainly Odoevskii, and probably Nicholas and Michael
Bestuzhev, P. Bobrishchev-Pushkin, Bariatinskii, Davydov, Vadkovskii,
and Ivashev were represented as all these men were at katorga at the
time and all are known to have written in exile.5

The papers which Lunin accumulated during four years at Akatui
silver mines vanished at his death there in 1845. It is known that
another Decembrist, Konstantin Torson, made a study of Russia's financial
and economic structure, though the fate of this and other manuscripts by
this man is unknown. A series of economic studies by Nicholas Bestuzhev
is missing. Bariatinskii's article on the origin of human speech, so
widely quoted by the Decembrists, is lost, as are most of Ivan Iakushkin's
philosophical essays. For the "Academy" at katorga Obolenskii gave a
series of lectures on the history of the church and Christianity, but
none of his philosophical writing remains.6 Lost, too, is a philosoph-
ical article of the nature of the universe penned by Nicholas Bestuzhev.7

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5 Maksimov, Sibir i katorga, 418. Literaturnoe nasledstvo, LX,
176, 178. Zarnitsa means summer lightning.

6 Azadovskii, LN, LIX, 738, 740-742.

7 Baranovskaia, 231.
It is understandable that works of a philosophic or political nature were considered dangerous by their authors and brought to a contrived end, but other works seemingly innocuous, certainly valuable, are also missing, in considerable degree. These are the ethnographic works. Life in Siberian settlement was rich with opportunities to study native tribes, customs, dialects, some of these never before investigated. Many of the Decembrists made use of their situation to investigate various ethnographic aspects of Siberia. Unfortunately, such studies by Mukhanov, Michael and Wilhelm Kuchelbeker, Shteingel, and the three Bestuzhev brothers have been destroyed or lost. Michael Bestuzhev’s essays on Buddhism and Lamaism, and Gorbachevskii’s work on Shamanism also are missing. There is no trace of Chizhov’s ethnographic studies except that conveyed in several of his extant poems. Of the exiles’ rather extensive ethnographic literature it seems that only a small proportion remains.8

Among other works to disappear, and for which there is some record of existence, are "Stenka Bazin," a poem by Ivashev; poems of Vakovskii and also some of his musical compositions; the satirical poems of Davydov; poems of Alexander Bestuzhev from Iakutsk; the verses of Batenkov (of which a few quite interesting remnants remain); a series of humorous vaudeville sketches on which Chizhov and the Siberian poet

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Ershov collaborated; a study of the Altai region by Shteingel; an essay by Ivan Pushchin on the 1825 uprising; and other items.  

Soviet historians have found materials in the Third Division files, at the Winter Palace (some of Vadkovskii's poems turned up there), and in various archives in Siberia. Thus some of the information here will follow from the work of Russians who have collected and published new sources. Surveyed first is the extant prose of the exiles, consisting of literary critiques, political, economic, ethnographic, and historical essays and treatises, short stories, novels, memoirs, correspondence, and translations of foreign works.

In a critique devoted to "Poetry and Prose," and lost in Third Division files en route to Pushkin, Wilhelm Kuchelbeker bitterly protested against the so-called "commercial tendencies" in Russian literature which he observed especially in the journal, Biblioteka dlia chtenia edited by C. I. Semkovskii. Kuchelbeker disliked commercialization of literature and the prevailing emphasis upon utilitarianism; but writing as a political exile he did not give direct expression to his feelings, cloaking the ideological or political significance of his protest in a criticism of one article that seemed best to exemplify the reactionary views of the editor. Semkovskii thought literature should give pleasant and light reading to the educated man. To Kuchelbeker this

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9 Poemia dekabristov, ed. B. S. Meilakh (Leningrad, 1950), 691. Azadovskii, LN, LIX, 708, 708-710, 744. P. P. Ershov (1815-1869) had parts of a lengthy folk epic published in 1854; this work, "Konek Gorbunok," received high praise from Pushkin and enjoyed wide popularity.
approach betrayed literature and the literary art; it was a vulgar sort of esthetics; it deprived literature of its significance, and limited it to petty subjects. In this attack Kuchelbeker gave vent to his outrage at the direction of Russian literature of the 1830's. Kuchelbeker wrote numerous articles and critiques, completed a short novel in 1843, and kept a lengthy diary. But his most inspired effort was devoted to poetry.

The contemporary fame of Alexander Bestuzhev-Marlinsky (the sole Decembrist-exile successfully to publish) came from the novels which for a time were read in Russia almost as often and eagerly as those of Pushkin. Marlinsky also wrote poetry which his brothers thought rather mediocre on the whole. All of Bestuzhev's prose—short stories, ethnographical studies, historical essays, and novels—is more or less imbued with a romantic style in the manner of Victor Hugo whom he greatly admired, and of Sir Walter Scott. Bestuzhev's novels are full of wild adventures, obvious dramatics, heroes who are by turns pathetic and passionate. This is especially so of the early novels. The later works, probably under the influence of his older brother Nicholas, have more realism; and the Siberian essays and ballads, born of sober contemplation, are a haven of realism among the works of this author. Nicholas Bestuzhev sternly lectured his brother for a florid style and

11. Literaturnoe nasledstvo, LIX, 467.
insisted that literature demanded above all else reflection and clarity—not glitter. Alexander argued, protested, but withal strove to improve; his older brother was his unquestioned highest authority in all things. Among Marlinsky's writing from Iakutsk exile are a series of poems, some ballads taken from Iakutsk stories, an essay on romanticism, and letters of considerable ethnographic content.

Although Marlinsky achieved great fame during and just after his short lifetime, Nicholas Bestuzhev was considered by some contemporaries to be the superior writer. Alexander Turgenev (brother of the Decembrist Nicholas) and the poet and critic Peter Viasemskii both thought the older Bestuzhev a more capable writer, while the historian N. M. Karamzin also appreciated Nicholas's literary ability. Before exile the articles and ethnographic studies of Nicholas Bestuzhev were well received, especially descriptions of voyages to Holland and Spain and the introductory chapter to his projected history of the Russian fleet. Almost thirty years elapsed before Nicholas's works again appeared in print, although he continued to write in Siberia. Among his


15. Literaturnoe nasledstvo, LX, 179-181. Dekabristy: poezia, 576. Vospominaniia Bestuzhevykh, 618. Nicholas Bestuzhev was appointed historian of the Russian fleet with access to the state archives. His naval training and experience, education and literary ability made him a natural choice; the work was halted by exile. Only the introductory chapter appeared in print before Bestuzhev's exile. In 1952 three hundred pages of his manuscript were discovered, tracing the history of the Russian fleet up to the reign of Peter I. Literaturnoe nasledstvo, LX, 171.
manuscripts from exile are "A Russian in Paris in 1814," "An Essay on Free Trade and Industry," and "The Burial," this latter an interesting short story commenting on an aspect of worldly society. 16

At Petrovsk wives of the exiles noticed that Nicholas was fond of children; when they rather naturally wished to know why he had never married he humored the ladies by promising to write it all down some time. Periodically and charmingly reminded of his promise he finally wrote a delightful and only partially autobiographical story, "Why I Never Married" (Otchego ia ne zhenat). 17 Also at Petrovsk and at the request of comrades and friends, Nicholas wrote "Reminiscences of Ryleev," the executed patriot and revolutionary for whom he had deep affection. Bestuzhev wished to write a complete biography of Ryleev, but put it off during katorga for fear of a search and reprisals, as well as from lack of time. Nicholas and his brother Michael hoped eventually to compose biographies of all participants in the revolt of 1825, and append to them Nicholas' portrait of each. In settlement where there was more time and less danger in literary pursuit Nicholas several times undertook the project. By then, however, memory had dimmed sufficiently to necessitate much verification with comrades whose death or distance made the scheme impracticable. With the exception of a small fragment supplementing the essay on Ryleev, "The Fourteenth of

16 Volk, 280. Baranovskaia, 118. Literaturnoe nasledstvo, IX, 179, 186-190.

17 Dekabristy; poezia, 641, 414-426.
December, 1825," this biographical plan was not realized. Most of Nicholas' writings were ethnographical and his most important work "Guzinoe Ozero" (Goose Lake) is considered in another chapter.

Michael Bestuzhev, the third brother exiled in the aftermath of revolt, became a writer only after imprisonment and exile. Before that time Michael had not published, apparently had written little if anything; his testimony before the Investigating Committee, however, indicates he had begun to write in the weeks after arrest. In exile Michael composed a series of naval stories which had great popularity with the exiles and wrote as well some ethnographical studies.

In his youth Gavriil Batenkov served on the staff of Michael Speranskii during and after the latter's Siberian sojourn. He had been close to Speranskii until the revolution; indeed, he was one of those contacts which brought upon Speranskii suspicion of complicity in the revolt. Evidence of the esteem and the affection Batenkov had for the great statesman is most clearly expressed in the "Comments on Speranskii." These notes, written in answer to questions posed by a young biographer of Speranskii, add no new facts and are rather superficial, owing in part to elementary questions posed by the biographer. They are interesting mainly as a work of the Decembrist, written after twenty years of solitary confinement in prison and eight years of exile.

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Michael Lunin's literary work includes the essay on the "Social Movement During the Present Reign," an ironic commemoration of the fifteenth year of Nicholas' rule; "A Glance at the Russian Secret Organization 1816-1826," which the author unsuccessfully sought to publish abroad in 1839; and a study of the "Religious Beliefs of the Greeks in Homer," written at the Akatui silver mines. His "Review of the Report Presented to the Emperor of Russia by the Investigation Commission in 1826," was compiled from information related by the exiles at katorga. This is the Decembrists' answer to official distortions and inaccuracies, and circulated widely if illicitly among the exiles.21

Lunin's letters to his sister, which circulated throughout Siberia, were a form of propaganda against the state. As Lunin wrote, "the publicity which my letters enjoy through many copies turns them into a political weapon which I . . . use in defense of freedom." A year's proscription from writing convinced Lunin of the significance of his views; further, he thought that "such interdictions . . . generally act disadvantageously to the authority from which they emanate."22

In his memoirs Zavalishin gave an accepted and interesting, although incorrect, version of Lunin's re-arrest in 1841 and re-exile to the distant Akatui silver mines:

He printed articles unpleasant to the government in an English journal. . . . The English journal was so dishonorable as to . . . betray . . . that the articles were sent from eastern


Siberia and this ... put the government on the track. First, it was clear that such articles could come only from one of us. The authorities began to sort out all whom they knew to be familiar with the English language; they questioned me. ... But only Lunin had been so imprudent as to write his sister to send him this very journal. This was a ... clue. ...23

Other Decembrist exiles attributed the search and arrest to letters Lunin had sent his sister. Actually he was arrested when a copy of the manuscript on the "Secret Organization 1816-1826" came to the Third Division not in published form but through an agent.24 Orders from the Third Division called for a "sudden and strict" search of Lunin's apartment and for the officials to collect carefully and without exception all the letters and various papers belonging to Lunin, seal them and send them to the Third Division; and Lunin to be sent immediately ... to Nerchinsk and a most deliberate inquiry made of the distribution of his criminal works.25

Although later the Third Division informed Lunin's sister it was unaware of his new location in Siberia, its files at that very time contained a secret order for Lunin "to be sent to the Akatui mines, not permitted to work, subjected to the most rigorous incarceration apart from the other criminals ... and kept there until [arrival] of a

23Zavalishin, II, 277-278.

24Gessen, Dekabrist Lunin i ego vremia, 139. These two accepted versions are refuted by Gessen in his article "Sud'be literaturnogo naslediia Lunin," Katorga i ssylka, LXII (November, 1930), 86-97. Gessen claims those exiles at Urik circulated the theory that Lunin's letters provoked the authorities to arrest him, hoping thus to conceal their knowledge of any familiarity with Lunin's essays. This version then reached Zavalishin at Chita where it was elaborated and developed further. Zavalishin's version gained wide acceptance.

25Streich quotes this in a comment, I. D. Iakushkin, 562.
special order" which, however, never came. Under such conditions of inescapable inactivity until his sudden death in 1845, Lunin apparently preserved both mental and physical health, writing that his health was "amazing and if they don't take a notion to hang me or shoot me I shall live a hundred years"; he was, moreover, "content with the situation," convinced that "it is possible to be happy in all circumstances of life. . . ." Lunin probably felt that his personal war with autocracy demanded an appropriate adjustment to autocracy's attempts to break him and to halt his literary activities.

In 1854 at the request of Alexandra Muraveva's sister Ivan Iakushkin wrote his "Memoirs" of this young woman who had followed her husband to exile and died at Petrovsk. Shortly after arriving in settlement from katorga in the 1830's Iakushkin penned an interesting essay on the origin of life "Chto takoe zhizn'," a pre-Darwinian work differentiating man from animals on a social and not spiritual basis, and expressing philosophic-biological support for a materialist origin of life. Another of Iakushkin's articles, the "Fourteenth of December," was for some time wrongly attributed to Ivan Pushchin, under whose name Alexander Herzen published it in the Free Russian Press (London, 1863).

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26 Streich's comments, I. D. Iakushkin, 563.
27 Gessen, Dekabrist Lunin i ego vremia, 279, 132. Akatui, located in Eastern Siberia, was one of the worst prisons for political criminals during the Tsarist regime; climate and prisons conditions were terrible.
29 I. D. Iakushkin, 167-171, 143-159.
Northern Society, though he sent emissaries and journeyed north himself in an attempt to adjust differences. The two groups did agree tentatively that in 1826 they would undertake a revolt and the assassination of the Tsar.

But fate decreed that the uprising should not come in 1826. Emperor Alexander I died in November 1825, while at Taganrog on the Sea of Azov. He left no heir to the throne and ordinarily would have been succeeded by his brother Grand Duke Constantine. In 1823, however, Constantine renounced his right to the throne. The formal renunciation, along with announcement of Grand Duke Nicholas' succession, was sealed and entrusted by Alexander to the Senate with instructions to open it immediately after his death and not before. Since Alexander was reluctant to speak of the altered succession, few persons knew that Nicholas was the heir apparent. There is some question, in view of his later behavior, whether Nicholas himself realized this although Alexander is known to have suggested to his brother of the probability he would one day ascend the throne.

When on November 27, word of Alexander's death reached the capital, Nicholas immediately took the oath of allegiance to his elder brother Constantine and had government officials and guards regiments do likewise. There then followed two weeks of protracted correspondence between Constantine at Warsaw and Nicholas at St. Petersburg. Grand Duke Constantine firmly refused entreaties either to come to St.

\footnote{This date is Old Style, based on the Julian Calendar.}
While at Petrovsk Nikita Muravev conceived the idea of writing a detailed history of the Secret Society; in order to escape detection he wrote it in the form of notes along the margins of books, which limited its scope and clarity. When later his library came into the possession of his brother, these notes were collected, edited, augmented, and published by Alexander Muravev as *Mon Journal*. The *Journal* is not entirely accurate but it is an interesting indication of Nikita Muravev's ideas at the outset of exile and his brother's ideas following twenty-seven years of exile.

Works of military strategy and tactics, others on early Kievan and Russian history, and a large study of transportation are among Nikita Muravev's manuscripts. Existing now only in a rough draft, the study of transportation (written in the 1830's) is the most noteworthy, and represents extensive research. From foreign sources Muravev collected information on the operation of canals in America, England, France, Belgium, Holland, Italy, and Denmark. The treatise includes some discussion of Russia's river systems, economy of a riverine population, river freight, and the role of canals in Russia. Muravev projected a network of canals to coordinate existing trade and industry, connect the seas around European Russia, and ultimately influence Russia's trade, industrial, and agricultural development. The author as well discussed

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the possibilities for developing a railway system in Russia. This large work reflects Muravev's interests, not unique among the political exiles, in economic, historical, and national Russian problems.

One of the more prolific writers was Michael Fonvizin whose literary work includes essays on serfdom and agriculture, communism, socialism, reminiscences of his youth and various miscellaneous essays such as one "Concerning the Imitation of Europe by Russians." There is also a lengthy "Historical Survey of Philosophy"; beginning with the ancient Greek school and ending with Hegel, this essay conveys Fonvizin's belief in a science of philosophy which might be used to "strengthen faith in God." Fonvizin's "Survey of the Manifestations of Political Life in Russia" traces the beginnings and development of serfdom.

Decembrist Shteingel collected materials for a history of Siberia, to be written initially in the form of articles. Extant manuscripts include a "History of Russian Settlement on the Shores of the Eastern Ocean," "Sibirskie satrapy," and a statistical description of Ishim okrug (Tobolsk gubernia). Feodor Vakovskii compiled materials on the Chernigov regimental uprising, while Briggen wrote of the forced stay in Pelyn of Burkhard von Munnich, exiled during the

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32 Bogucharskii et al. (ed.), I, 71-72.

33 Dekabristy, 315. Bogucharskii et al. (ed.), I, 97.

reign of Elizabeth Petrovna (1741-1762). Peter Borisov's writing is largely devoted to natural science, but includes also history, philosophy, archaeology, and a study of crime and punishment.35

Convinced of the importance of their secret societies, revolutionary movement and uprising, and of their exile, many Decembrists turned to writing memoirs and histories. Already alluded to are the notes of Nikita Muravev and Lunin's refutation of the report of the investigating committee. The exiles left descriptions of the prelude to uprising, the revolt itself, and the trial, sentence, and exile. These memorialists include Michael Bestuzhev, Andrei Shteingel, Eugene Obolenskii, Ivan Gorbachevskii, Matvei Muravev-Apostol, Nicholas Lorer, Alexander Beliaev, Ivan Iakushkin, Nicholas Basargin, and Dmitri Zavalishin.36

The Decembrists who wrote voluminously, without urging, contrast with those who reluctantly and with considerable prompting wrote of their experiences. To a series of questions from the historian of his brothers, Michael wrote of his family, the uprising, and exile, and then at the prodding of M. I. Semevskii, began but did not complete his own memoirs.37 The encouragement of his sons, visiting him for the first time in the 1850's, spurred Iakushkin to compose his memoirs at

35Dekabristy; poeziia, 579. Volk, 190, 211. Rozen, 119. Vospominania Bestuzhevykh, 775.

36Bogucharskii et al. (ed.), I, 318.

Ialutorovsk. There is no doubt he had earlier thought of writing, as
did most of the exiles, but never decided the time was right. The first
part of the memoirs was dictated to the older son, the second part to
his younger son, and the final section was written in Iakushkin's hand.
The younger son, Eugene, was influential also in encouraging other
Decembrist exiles to write. He strongly urged that Ivan Pushchin pen
recollections of Alexander Pushkin; and after protests and hesitations
Pushchin finally wrote a rather full description of the poet's years at
the Tsarskoe Selo Lyceum and St. Petersburg. Eugene Iakushkin as well
persuaded Obolenskii to write of Ryleev, with whom Obolenskii had been
close and to whom the poet sent last verses before his execution in
July 1826.38

Running through two volumes of substantiation, justification,
elaboration, and clarification of his activities prior to, during, and
after the uprising, the memoirs of Dmitri Zavalishin are among the
lengthiest and most facilely composed of all the autobiographical
accounts of Decembrists. These memoirs had their own history, not
unrelated to turbulent events of the author's life. The first edition
was made during Zavalishin's exile in Chita only to be destroyed as a
precaution on the eve of his deportation to Russia in 1863. In the
early 1880's he re-composed the memoirs which were then serialized in
Russkaia starina until a torrent of outraged comment and the censor's
heavy pencil persuaded the editor to discontinue this lively series.

Pushkin v vospominaniakh i rasskazakh sovremennikov (Leningrad, 1936),
569. I. E. Iakushkin, 33-34, 37.
The complete memoirs appeared only in 1904—apparently a third edition by the author, for they differ from the earlier serialized text.\(^\text{39}\) In addition to the memoirs, Zavalishin left numerous reports and articles written in Chita for the edification of officialdom and all and sundry, on the organization of Eastern Siberia, its development, trade with China and industrial growth, Siberia's significance, the necessity of settling the Amur and how this should be accomplished, conditions for selecting and appointing officials, social structure in Siberia, schemes for helping the lower classes, engineering problems, military organization and on and on. How voluminously Zavalishin wrote in exile on all subjects is partially reflected by the mass of articles published during the thirty-five years he lived after amnesty.\(^\text{40}\)

Several of the exiles kept diaries and journals which are interesting evidences of the day-by-day circumstances, conditions, and moods of exile. Lunin's journal is a record of pungent thoughts on the regime and the social structure of Russia. These comments reveal the

\(^\text{39}\)Dekabristy i ikh vremia, I, 219. Zavalishin, I, preface, passim. Zavalishin died at 88 (1892) and to the end he wrote about the uprising and exile. His memoirs are outspoken and contain information some of the Decembrists wanted forgotten. Also the memoirs emphasize to the point of distortion Zavalishin's own importance in everything with which he was ever remotely connected, while disparaging those persons whom he disliked (and these were many). The Decembrists still alive and able, took exception to much of this material and wrote lively letters of explanation and defense of themselves and deceased comrades.

\(^\text{40}\)"Melkie rasskazy M. M. Popova," Russkaia starina, CV (March, 1901), 641. Titles and sources of thirty-seven articles (from 1856 to 1884) are given in Pamiati dekabristov, III, 130-132.
indignation which Lunin felt at both his own and Russia's degraded condition. Wilhelm Kuchelbeker maintained a diary during prison and exile in order, in his words, to "... distinguish ... the little noteworthy events and thoughts ..." of a circumscribed existence. The diary contains Kuchelbeker's poems, lengthy descriptions of dreams, notations of family births and deaths, thoughts on his dead or departed friends and on the course of his ill-fated love for a young pupil, along with mention of the few joys that came in prison and exile. Whatever satisfaction the diary afforded its author, he was not unaware of its historical interest. "I shall be happy" Kuchelbeker wrote, "if ... when I am no more" those who find it remark "he was a man ... not without talent ... and spirit."  

With the hope of publication, financial remuneration, or for personal edification and amusement, the Decembrists undertook to translate novels, poems, histories, autobiographies, and articles. These endeavors produced translations of Washington Irving's Conquest of Granada, poems of Byron and Thomas More, Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography, Pascal's Thoughts (which Bobrishchev-Pushkin and Ivan Pushchin received permission to publish), Nouvelles Heloise of Rousseau, and Sismondi's History of the Italian Republic of the Middle Ages (or rather, excerpts from this massive work). 

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41. Wilhelm Kuchelbeker, "Dnevnik," Russkaia starina, XIII, XIV (August, September, 1875), 490-531, 75-91; and LXXII (October, 1891), 61-112 contain excerpts from the diary. Kuchelbeker, Russkaia starina, XIII, 490. Dekabristy v buriatii, 25.

Michael Ponvizin translated numerous articles from the journals of the German publisher-publicist Joseph Meyer, as well as poems by the German poet and physician Andreas Kerner. Wilhelm Kuchelbeker translated from John Gottfried von Herder, and Dmitri Zavalishin made translations from the early Greek and Roman historians Thucydides and Tacitus. Alexander von der Briggen translated Caesar's Commentaries, to which he appended copious notations and comments of his own, and excerpts from the work of Gaius Sallustius, the Roman historian.

The Decembrist-poets in exile number about twenty: men for whom there are extant poems or remnants of poems. But of this number only Wilhelm Kuchelbeker, Alexander Odoevsky, and Alexander Bestuzhev might be referred to as professional poets.

Alexander Odoevsky was the poet laureate of the Decembrists in Siberia. In fact as a poet he lived chiefly in exile. Odoevsky once wrote that "I have never put my verses on paper," and except for those poems sent to friends or written in their journals this remark is largely true. Comrades in exile were responsible for collecting his

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45 Others who wrote verse include Bechasnov, Raevskii, Bariatinskii, Nicholas and Michael Bestuzhev, Paul and Nicholas Bobrishchev-Pushkin, M. Muravev-Apostol, Chizhov, Davydov, Vakovskyi, D. Zavalishin, Batenkov, and Zaikin.

46 Poety-dekabristy; stikhotvoreniia, comp., B. Meilakh (Leningrad, 1949), 197. (Referred to as Poety-dekabristy.) Dekabristy; poeziia, 596. Odoevsky (1802-1839) spent five years at katorga and five years in settlement before being sent to the Caucasus to serve in the army, until his death of malaria.
work. Artamon Muravev for one made a painstaking record during katorga; unfortunately this collection of poems was lost. Others jotted down poems as they came "extemporaneously in excellent verse . . . " from Odoevsky's lips. But the poet himself did not consider his verses worthy of written recognition and preservation. Such a facile tongue and reluctant pen meant the loss of many poems without a trace despite efforts of comrades. In settlement there was no one to take down his verses and poems for this period are therefore rare.

In an article discussing the supposed poems of A. I. Odoevsky, a Soviet writer concludes certain poems attributed to Odoevsky are not his, so that there is an element of risk in the assumption of his authorship. This is understandable for others wrote down Odoevsky's poems and then often gave them to individuals who would not always remember the correct authorship. Later publications of Odoevsky's poetry were not thoroughly authenticated, while unsigned poems were attributed to him by compilers and scholars who knew he composed voluminously and haphazardly. Some of these poems are probably the work of Decembrists other than Odoevsky.

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47 Azadovskii, LN, LIX, 700-701. M. Muravev, Tainye obshchestva, VIII, 120.
48 Gudzii, Katorga i ssyvka, XXI, 178. Azadovskii, LN, LIX, 700, 701.
50 Azadovskii, LN, LIX, 700, 702.
His exiled comrades considered Odoevsky an important poet. With perhaps as much enthusiasm as considered judgment Beliaev felt that were his "many thousands of verses collected and published, the future would place him next to Pushkin, Lermontov and other first rate poets." Odoevsky, certainly, is the best poetic expression of the Decembrist mood in exile. His poetry is representative of the romantic era, reflecting a love of nature, abstract idealism, and optimism. Toward the end of his life optimism faded. In his own words Odoevsky was a "singer of the people" and patriot who sympathized with those who sought freedom. The theme of much of his poetry is freedom: its loss and the struggle to regain it. A poem describing the efforts of Slavic peoples to gain freedom was set to music by the Decembrist Vadkovskii and became the exile's favorite revolutionary song. On Maria Volkonskaia's birthday, Odoevsky inscribed in her notebook a sad verse, depicting a land "dedicated to sorrow and tears," a land whose lovely vistas vainly besought freedom. The best known of this poet's works is the "Answer to an Epistle of Pushkin," which contains the line later made famous on the masthead of Lenin's Iskra--"from the spark shall come the flame."

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51 Gudzii, Katorga i ssylka, XXI, 177.
52 Gudzii, Katorga i ssylka, XXI, 179. Dekabristy; poeziia, 624-625.
53 Poety-dekabristy, 198.
With a colorful poetic temperament, full of caprices and eccentricities, moody and exuberant by turns, Wilhelm Kuchelbeker has been dubbed the Don Quixote of Russian literature. Kuchelbeker was an ardent poet, very much devoted to the Muse. Languishing in prison for a decade he wrote, "I hope to remain a poet to my dying moment, and . . . if I were denied poetry in return for freedom, fame, riches . . . I would not waver: I prefer sorrow, bondage, poverty, illness of spirit and body with poetry to good fortune without it."  

The poetry of Kuchelbeker is wild, heartfelt, amorphous, and verbose. Infused with a spirit of mysticism, it contains much that is autobiographical in its moodiness and idealistic aspirations. One of the poet's favorite works, "Izhorski," describes a young man's struggle to liberate himself from the dark and passionate forces of life. "Vechnyi zhid," considered by the poet his best work, pessimistically portrays life as a blend of the ridiculous and the tragic, thereby reflecting the sorrow and loss of faith that came to Kuchelbeker during exile.  

As a poet Kuchelbeker was interested in the ideas and the ideals toward which life must strive; the task of the poet, therefore, was not to portray the real and actual, but the ideal. The poet himself was

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55 Gudzii, Katorga i ssylka, XXI, 181.
56 Literalurnoe nasledstvo, LIX, 498.