THE DECEMBRISTS IN SIBERIA 1826—1856

Kupava E. Birkett

M.Litt.

Department of Slavonic Languages and Literatures
University of Glasgow

May 1988

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my sincere thanks to the following:

University of Glasgow —

My supervisors Professor Peter Henry of the Department of Slavonic Languages and Literatures, and Dr James White of the Institute of Soviet and East European Studies for their constructive criticism and encouragement;

Mr Martin Dewhirst of the Department of Slavonic Languages and Literatures for his meticulous editing of my script, and for suggesting that I should make the Decembrists' life in Siberia the main theme of my research;

Mr René Beermann of the I.S.E.E.S. for advice and encouragement generally;

Mrs Dyakonova of the State Lenin Library, Moscow, and her assistants in Reading Room I for their help during the time of my research in the Library in February-March 1986;

Professor S.F. Koval' of the Faculty of History, University of Irkutsk, for his interest in my research and the kind gift of his "Sibir' i dekabristy", No.4:

Professor John Erickson, Department of Defence Studies, Edinburgh, for the loan of books;

Miss Jean Fyfe of Rothesay, Bute, for undertaking the task of typing this dissertation.

C O N T E N T S

SUMMARY

The attempted rising in St Petersburg on 14.12.1825, and the almost simultaneous mutiny of the Chernigov regiment in the Ukraine, were led by young officers who had recognised that the continued existence of the serf system was the main cause of Russia's backwardness. Their aim was to abolish the system, but they had differing ideas on how the country was to be governed afterwards. After the failure of the risings, and the execution of five of the leaders, 121 of the rebels were sentenced to varying periods of forced labour in Siberia, followed by life exile there. The dissertation describes their journey to exile and their life in prison and in exile. Reference is made to contemporary knowledge of Siberia and to the realities of life there, with some mention of the plans the Decembrist exiles made for its future.

During their imprisonment the Decembrists organised their communal life and established a mutual aid fund based on democratic cooperative principles. They realised that to enable future generations to continue the struggle in which they themselves had failed education was essential, and began by educating one another in the so-called "prison academy".

The hardships of their imprisonment included the prohibition of correspondence with even their closest relatives. The prisoners were able to evade this ruling with the help of the wives of some of them, whose courage in overcoming the obstacles set in their way enabled them to join their husbands and share their exile. Not being prisoners, these women could not be restricted in the same way as the men. They were able to write letters on their behalf, and to obtain for them books and periodicals which helped to extend their knowledge and keep them abreast of current events. The women sustained the morale of the prisoners, and also ensured that the Decembrists were not forgotten in Russia.

On ending their terms of imprisonment, the Decembrists were settled in various parts of Siberia, some very remote. While life in these outlying places was often lonely and hard, those living in the Irkutsk area and near Lake Baykal were able to overcome some of their hardships. Their activities included research into local topography, meteorology and ethnography, painting, writing and, most importantly, education. In most of these Nikolay Aleksandrovich Bestuzhev excelled. Although most of the product of the Decembrists' research could not be published, they influenced those with whom they came into contact. They left behind them a legacy of education for girls as well as boys, for the indigenous peoples of the places where they lived, and an appreciation of the potential of these peoples; a higher level of cultural awareness; and a tradition of courage and steadfastness which remains a lasting memorial.

Note:

1) All translations from Russian texts are by me.

2) Russian names are given in full, i.e. name, patronymic and surname, the first time an individual is mentioned. After this initials or the surname alone are used, unless clarity requires a distinction between individuals with the same surname.

INTRODUCTION

The attempted rising of 14th December 1825, and the almost simultaneous mutiny of the Chernigov regiment in the Ukraine, have attracted a great deal of attention in the Soviet Union, and some in other European countries; but it seems as though the further into Western Europe one travels, the less the importance of these events is appreciated. In recent years Soviet publishing houses have produced a large and increasing number of reprints of memoirs and earlier studies of the rising and its aftermath, and scholarly research of a high quality continues at an ever increasing rate. Hitherto unpublished works are appearing. All this material, of course, is in Russian. In contrast, the amount appearing in English is small. There is a tendency to dismiss the December 1825 rising as yet another "palace revolution" which failed, an unimportant incident which can be crammed into a single paragraph. With few exceptions, what happened afterwards is ignored — principally because of the lack of information in English. The role of the wives of Decembrists who had the moral and physical courage to join their husbands is certainly a romantic story, but their true heroism is revealed only by closer study.

An important point to be remembered in any study of the Decembrists is that in most respects they were not a homogeneous group, nor were those who wrote poetry or prose a literary "school" in any sense of the word. They were characterised by a diversity of political views, ranging from those who wanted to kill the Tsar, or even the whole royal family, or put them on a ship and send them

away from Russia, to those who wanted Russia to become a constitutional monarchy or a republic. While most came from the ranks of the aristocracy — Russia's most prominent families were represented — as well as some quite obscure ones, there was even one man who was of peasant origin but cheated his way into the aristocracy for the sake of getting a post (P.F. Vygodovskiy, real name Duntsov); the majority were Russian or Ukrainian, but there was also a sprinkling of men of non-Russian background — Baltic (A.E. Rozen), Swedish (K.P. Torson), German (Vol'f, Kyukhel'beker), Italian (Poggio), some of whom were just first-generation Russians. Religious beliefs included some Lutherans, Roman Catholics (Lunin) as well as the great majority of Orthodox believers, and were balanced by several freethinkers (like the Borisovs). Their approach to solving Russia's problems varied too — from the sober and detailed plans of Pestel' and Nikita Murav'ev to the romantic enthusiasm of A.I. Odoevskiy. Many had in common experiences as officers during the wars against Napoleon, the realisation that Russia needed an infusion of new ideas, the disappointment of their hopes for reform on returning after the victory over Napoleonic France, when they found reaction setting in more firmly than before. Other common factors were an education better than that of most of their peers among the Russian aristocracy, and a failure to realise that revolution from the top downwards was unlikely to succeed. What united them most firmly was their recognition of serfdom as the underlying cause of Russia's social and economic condition, and the need to abolish it.

The enormous amount of material now available in the Soviet Union, and the large number of individuals of great diversity and outstanding

interest involved in the rising, have made selection essential. To describe all those who found themselves in Siberian exile would be impossible not only because of the limitations of this dissertation, but simply because not all are equally well documented. Some left no memoirs, others were extremely voluble. Little information is available about some who lived out their exile in poverty and obscurity. A choice has therefore been made of the most articulate, and an attempt has been made to present some idea of their lives and the contribution they made to the study and development of their Siberian environment.

The writings and actions of the Decembrists are not only fascinating in themselves, but they throw some light on certain aspects of Soviet thought and political development in such matters as education, the role of the poet in society (grazhdanstvennost'), and attitudes to non-Russian peoples; while the crucial failure to enlist popular support at the beginning, and the example of the wives, provided lessons which were not lost on the Russian revolutionary movements of the nineteenth century onwards.

CHAPTER I: THE JOURNEY TO SIBERIA

1 The Sentences

Of the men arrested after the attempted rising in St Petersburg and the almost simultaneous mutiny of the Chernigov regiment in the Ukraine, 579 were detained for further interrogation. 290 of these were released without punishment. The specially-appointed Committee of Investigation presented its findings to Nicholas I on 30th June 1826. The sentences were as follows:

For the five leaders — death by quartering. They were Pavel Ivanovich Pestel', Kondratiy Fedorovich Ryleev, Mikhail Pavlovich Bestuzhev-Ryumin, Sergey Ivanovich Murav'ev-Apostol and Sergey Grigor'evich Kakhovskiy. The rest were divided into 11 categories and received the following sentences:[1]

Category	No. of men	Sentence
1	31	Death by beheading
2	17	political death, forced labour (katorga) for life
3	2	forced labour for life
4,5,6,7	38	forced labour for 15, 10, 6 or 4 years respectively, exile (poselenie)
8	15	exile
9	3	exile to Siberia
10	1	military service (do vyslugi) [= 25 years]
11	8	military service (s vyslugoy) [= up to 25 years]

Note: 1) all those in categories 8—11 were to be deprived of their military and noble ranks; 2) "political death": the prisoner was required to lay his head briefly on the execution block in token of execution. In some cases the prisoner's medals and insignia were

first torn off his uniform; he then exchanged his uniform for prison clothing, and the uniform was burned on a bonfire in his presence. 3) although the 9th category is the only one where Siberia is mentioned as the place of exile, this is implicit in the rest.

One member of the Committee, Senator Lavrov, demanded death by quartering for 63 of the rebels. One member only, Admiral N.S. Mordvinov, voted against the death sentences and refused to sign them.

In order "to avoid bloodshed" Nicholas I used his prerogative of mercy to commute the sentence on the first five to death by hanging, and on the rest thus:

Category	No. of men	Sentence
1	25	forced labour for life
	6	20 years forced labour, exile
2	16	20 years forced labour, exile
	1	15 years forced labour, exile
3	2	20 years forced labour, exile
4	16	12 years forced labour, exile
5	2	8 years forced labour, exile
	1	serf labour
	1	10 years forced labour, exile
6	2	A.N. Murav'ev: "in recognition of his complete and sincere repentance" to be exiled to Siberia Lyublinskiy — 5 years forced labour, exile
7	13	2 years forced labour, exile
	2	serf labour for 2 years
8	14	sentence to be determined by the Supreme Criminal Court
	2	to serve in the navy as a sailor
9	3	to serve as soldiers in "distant regiments"
10	1	sentence to be determined by the Supreme Criminal Court
11	7	sentence to be determined by the Supreme Criminal Court (to be sent to "distant regiments")
	1	military service as a soldier (bez vyslugi)[2]

Note: all in these categories were to be deprived of military ranks and nobility.

Further reductions were made on the occasion of Nicholas I's coronation (22nd August 1826), the death of his mother, Empress Mariya Fedorovna and in November 1832.

Officers of the Chernigov regiment were tried in Mogilev; their sentences were pronounced by the Supreme Criminal Court and confirmed by Nicholas I on 12th July 1826:

All the officers were to be deprived of military and noble ranks and undergo "political death". Three who were killed during the fighting were not to have any grave-stone or memorial and their names were to be displayed on a gallows specially set up (it is not quite accurate to describe them all as having been killed, as the official document has it: Ippolit Murav'ev-Apostol shot himself when he realised that the mutiny was a failure, in the presence of his brother Sergey and the rest of his fellow-officers). Four were sentenced to death (one of them was Sergey Murav'ev-Apostol); one was to do forced labour in Siberia, four to serve in "distant regiments", five to be detained in the Peter-Paul Fortress for six months and then serve in the army. One was found innocent and released. Eight of the above were to share in a fine of 1170r 8 3/4k, this being a sum found to be missing from the regimental funds after the mutiny.

Lastly, soldiers of the Chernigov regiment were sentenced to undergo an appalling sentence of lashing: running the gauntlet between two rows of 500 men each from twice to twelve times; after this they were to be stripped of any awards for valour etc. and sent to military service in the Caucasus — if they survived.[3]

The bases on which the sentences were arrived at in the first instance are obscure and there were some inconsistencies: for example by a special manifesto of the Tsar, Aleksandr Nikolaevich Murav'ev was not only exempted from doing forced labour, but after a request from Murav'ev's mother-in-law he was allowed to have his wife, daughter Sof'ya and two sisters-in-law, Ekaterina and Varvara, accompany him and live in his place of exile.[4]

The savagery of even the commuted sentences was all the more startling in view of the fact that capital punishment, abolished by Empress Elizabeth and re-introduced by Empress Catherine II for regicide (committed or attempted) had not been carried out for many years.

During their imprisonment the young men had been frequently interrogated in the Winter Palace by Nicholas I himself. They had also been questioned by the Committee of Investigation, encouraged to make written statements about themselves, unexpectedly confronted with one another with the object of forcing them to betray themselves or others. But as there had been no counsel for the defence, it was no trial in the legal sense; nor were they given any hint of the sentences that might be expected.

On 12th July 1826 those being held in the Peter-Paul Fortress were assembled in the office of General Aleksandr Yakovlevich Sukin, the commandant of the Fortress, to hear their sentences. Baron Vladimir Ivanovich Shteyngeyl', one of the prisoners, described the scene in his memoirs:

> When the meeting began, the prisoners were led out of all the casemates ... to the commandant's house.
>
> This meeting of prisoners, most of whom had been kept separate from one another, had an extremely strong and joyful effect. We embraced and kissed

> one another like men resurrected, asking one another "What does this mean?" Those who knew answered that our sentences were to be announced. "What, have we been tried?" — "Yes, we have been tried" was the answer.[5]

The five leaders were executed on 13th July 1826.

2 Arrangements for Conveying the Decembrists to Siberia

Precise and detailed instructions for conveying the Decembrists to Siberia had already been prepared by the Chief of the General Staff, and were announced on 17th July 1826, i.e. four days after the executions. The instructions laid down the composition of the groups to be sent and the arrangements for accommodation and security on the way.

Those who were only to be demoted were to be dispatched immediately to their new regiments. Most of those who had been sentenced to forced labour and exile were to be sent away in pairs at intervals of two days. They were to be escorted by one military guard (fel'deger') and four gendarmes to each group. The civil governors of the areas to which they were going were to be informed of the arrival of the prisoners and instructed to keep them under the strictest possible observation. Reports on their behaviour were to be sent back to Nicholas I at regular intervals.[6]

3 Means of Travel

Most of the Decembrists travelled to Siberia in separate covered carriages (kibitki) or sledges drawn by three horses. These were

post-horses. Mikhail Aleksandrovich Fonvizin was lucky enough to have enough money with him to buy himself a light carriage, so that only the horses needed to be changed, and his luggage did not have to be lifted out at every change. From comments by Nikolay Vasil'evich Basargin it appears that the instruction to make the prisoners travel only one to a carriage was not always kept strictly by the fel'deger' in charge, for the one accompanying these two allowed them to travel in one carriage because of the extreme cold.[7] The regulations referred to above also stipulate that A.N. Murav'ev was to travel "on a cart, and not in his own carriage" — curious in view of the privileges he had already been allowed.

Those whose destination lay beyond Chita found the conditions of travel much more primitive: in most cases it was not possible to use wheeled vehicles, for there were no proper roads. Travel was on horseback, or, in winter, on sledges drawn by horses or even dogs. Much of the route lay through primeval forests (tayga) or along rivers; in the latter case small river boats were used.[8] On this kind of terrain the guards' precautions against the escape of the prisoners were relaxed, and the mood was more friendly. Leg-irons were removed for the section on horseback, but replaced when sledges were used.[9]

4 Leg-irons

When the prisoners were assembled to hear their sentences, they learned that a serious obstacle to dignity and comfort was to be endured: to each group in turn Sukin announced that "according to

instructions from the highest authority" leg-irons were to be worn throughout the journey; and a great sackful was brought in so that they could be put on then and there, for the first groups were to set out immediately.

This was contrary to the law of 18th July 1802, which forbade the use of leg-irons for the "well-born" (blagorodnyye) even after they had been deprived of their noble status. (Another article of the same law included leg-irons under the heading of "corporal punishment".)[10] The leg-irons of the Decembrists were supposed to be removed only when the wearers went to the bath-house or to church, but some civil governors in places where the Decembrists stayed took the risk of disobeying this rule and allowing the irons to be removed. Aleksandr Mikhaylovich Murav'ev wryly commented in his memoirs that

> One needs a special knack for wearing chains without wounding oneself. After a while we were wearing them elegantly.[11]

Mikhail Aleksandrovich Bestuzhev's leg-irons had been put on hurriedly and were not properly adjusted, causing him acute discomfort and severe abrasions. The accompanying fel'deger' had no authority to remove them. As a result, by the time they reached Tobol'sk, Bestuzhev was in great pain. Senator Prince A.V. Kurakin, with a fellow-senator, happened to be in Tobol'sk at the time on an official tour of inspection of Siberia. He might perhaps have been expected to help; however, even he lacked the necessary authority, although he was humane enough to provide another of the prisoners, Yakov Mikhaylovich Andreevich, with a pair of warm boots. In his report to the Tsar, Kurakin wrote:

> I wanted to help him [i.e. Bestuzhev], but since the irons had been rivetted on, I would have had to send for a blacksmith. I did not dare to take this liberty; moreover, three quarters of the journey had already been covered.[12]

5 Timing of Departures from St Petersburg

The first group of Decembrists left St Petersburg for Siberia on 21st July 1826. It consisted of Evgeniy Petrovich Obolenskiy, Artamon Zakharovich Murav'ev, Vasiliy L'vovich Davydov and Aleksandr Ivanovich Yakubovich. In the second, which left two days later, were Nikolay Vasil'evich Basargin, Ferdinand Bogdanovich Vol'f, Aleksandr Filipovich Frolov and Sergey Grigor'evich Volkonskiy. More groups were sent away every two days until the beginning of August, when there was a gap in the departures until January 1827. No official reason for this was given, but it may have happened because the authorities realised that the prison accommodation was not yet ready; or, as suggested by Andrey Evgen'evich Rozen, to avoid having too many of these prisoners, regarded as exceptionally dangerous (even though in chains), concentrated at the point of arrival at the same time. In view of the fear that the rising had inspired in Nicholas I, and the severity with which the Decembrists were treated, this is at least plausible.[13]

6 The Route to Exile

Convicts and exiles were usually taken to Siberia along the road through Vladimir, but the Decembrists were sent by a less commonly

used route through Yaroslavl'. This avoided Moscow, and ensured as little contact as possible with the ordinary convict convoys.

The distance along the usual route from St Petersburg to Chita was approximately 7200 km (6800 versts).[14] In winter the distance was slightly shortened by crossing Lake Baykal on the ice. This route was sometimes taken by Siberian residents used to conditions even when the weather made the ice treacherous (see Chapter VII, p.169).

7 Accommodation During the Journey

During the journey these prisoners were usually accommodated overnight in post-houses. The cost of transporting one prisoner of this category from St Petersburg to Irkutsk in this manner is given by A.M. Murav'ev as over 2000r, although he gives no source for this figure. This included twelve changes of horses, but he does not mention accommodation etc. or the time allowed at all. The money for the journey was issued to the fel'deger' before departure from St Petersburg, and they frankly regarded the assignment as a splendid opportunity for supplementing their pay. The result was that they urged on both drivers and horses unmercifully, skimping on the accommodation and pocketing what cash was left over on arrival. A.M. Murav'ev mentions that his group covered the whole distance in 24 days with only two rests of a few hours each.[15]

Not all the Decembrist prisoners were fortunate enough to travel to exile even on a cart: some had to make the journey on foot, and, apart from the exhausting nature of the journey, they fared far

worse in the matter of accommodation. Venyamin Yakovlevich Solov'ev, Ivan Ivanovich Sukhinov and Aleksandr Evtikh'evich Mozalevskiy, arrested after the Chernigov regiment mutiny, first had to walk to Moscow from Kiev, and then walk from there to their place of exile — a journey which took them well over a year. They wore leg-irons all the time. Classified as ordinary criminals, they had to endure filthy, crowded and verminous transit prisons (poluetapy).

8 Contacts with Relatives

Some of the Decembrists had been allowed brief visits from relatives while they were in the Peter-Paul Fortress. All such visits had to take place in the presence of Sukin and in his office.

In spite of official silence on the executions, the news of them and of the sentences leaked out. Desperate attempts were made by some of the relatives of the prisoners to visit them. The sister of Mikhail Sergeevich Lunin, Elena Sergeevna Uvarova, even travelled to Yaroslavl' to try to see him as he passed through the town. She pretended that she was there for religious observances of some kind, but the ruse was unsuccessful. Her presence was noticed and reported to the governor of the town. She then tried to bribe the fel'deger' convoying the group in which Lunin was travelling but this too was unsuccessful. The fel'deger' was court-martialled, and Uvarova severely admonished and sent home.[16] The mother of A.M. Murav'ev, too, tried bribing the fel'deger', offering 500 rubles merely to be allowed to embrace her son, but this was refused

for fear of punishment.[17]

The wife of Ivan Dmitrievich Yakushkin, who was only eighteen, took her baby son with her and, accompanied by her mother-in-law, also got as far as Yaroslavl'. (No mention is made of the channels by which the families found out the places through which the convoys were to pass.) Yakushkina was luckier than some of the other relatives, for she managed not only to see her husband but also followed him to a point between Yaroslavl' and Kostroma, where she was allowed to see him again.[18]

9 Clothing

On the night of their departure all the Decembrist exiles were provided with "standard issue" prisoners' clothing: a jacket and trousers of the coarse gray cloth used for soldiers' uniforms. They were not compelled to wear it, and those who could tried to supplement it with their own clothes. Obolenskiy's brother had given him some clothes. He decided to accept both, but to wear the issued outfit as it was looser and more comfortable. Artamon Zakharovich Murav'ev contrived to look, as Obolenskiy described him, "elegantly dressed" in clothing supplied by his wife; but Ivan Aleksandrovich Annenkov had no coat (many of the Decembrists were at this stage still wearing the clothes in which they had been arrested), and in Omsk the other members of the group in which he was travelling clubbed together to buy him one made of reindeer-skin. The temperature here was $-40^{\circ}C$.[19]

10 Money

Although some of the Decembrists came from very wealthy families, shortage of cash was sometimes a problem on this journey. N.V. Basargin, for example, happened to have 1700r on him when he was arrested. In the Peter-Paul Fortress this money was confiscated, which was normal procedure on arrest. He received an allowance from it of five rubles a week, enough, as he said, to buy white bread, tobacco and other small comforts. As he was leaving for exile, a small packet was pressed into his hand. He opened it, expecting to find the rest of his own money; but instead there were only ten silver coins worth 10k each.[20] At Schlüsselburg Basargin was suddenly embraced by three ladies, complete strangers, who offered him clothing, money and help. He courteously declined the offer. But he mentions another incident which obviously moved him deeply, and is typical of the attitude of very many Russians to exiles going to Siberia: an old beggar-woman offered him a few copper coins with the words "Here is all I have; you need it more than I do." He tactfully chose to please her by a token acceptance, picking out the oldest coin, which he treasured all his life.[21]

11 Health and Morale

Both the health and the morale of many of the Decembrists had been undermined by their imprisonment in the Peter-Paul Fortress as one of the causes. The fortress stands on the bank of the River Neva and had not yet properly dried out after the great flood of 1824:

> The cramped cells, the dim light which could scarcely penetrate the narrow embrasures covered with white paint, the damp: when the stoves were lit, water poured down the walls in torrents. Sometimes twenty or more basins of water were carried out of one cell in a day. The damp caused severe headaches, rheumatic disorders and coughing of blood. The cells swarmed with woodlice, cockroaches and fleas .... The air in the cells was stifling.[22]

Badly fed by the prison authorities, some of the prisoners were able to supplement their diet privately through their families. However, many were either not allowed to have visits from relatives, or had relatives who would not visit them or lived too far away. A few were even kept on a diet of bread and water by order of Nicholas I in the hope of starving them into confessing their involvement. He often interrogated them personally, frequently having them roused in the middle of the night and brought to the Winter Palace, hooded, for questioning. When they were returned to the fortress, the Tsar sent a note with them to the commandant, telling him how the prisoner was to be treated. Here, too, as in the sentences, there were inconsistencies: while most of the prisoners were denied access to reading matter or writing materials, Basargin managed with his warder's connivance to join a lending library in the city and during his imprisonment read all the available works of Sir Walter Scott, Fenimore Cooper and other writers in vogue at the time.[23]

Morale was further weakened by the failure of the rising, the shock of arrest and imprisonment, and the uncertainty in which the prisoners remained for almost a year. For many there was also the total or almost total lack of contact with family or friends. Finally there was the traumatic effect of the execution of the five

leaders and the pronouncement of their own sentences.

Some of the Decembrists had already been in indifferent health when arrested. Sergey Petrovich Trubetskoy was suffering from tuberculosis and had already been coughing blood in prison. Indeed, his departure to exile had to be delayed for a few days so that he could have medical treatment.[24] Basargin too was ill: he was so weak that when the prisoners were assembled to hear their sentences the warder had to help him to dress himself and support him as he tottered down the stairs.[25]

In spite of this, the mood of these young men improved as they travelled east, helped by the fresh air, and no doubt by the feeling that whatever hardships awaited them in Siberia, things could hardly be worse than they had been in the Fortress:

> In spite of the rapid motion and the shaking of the carriage, I arrived in Irkutsk perfectly well

Trubetskoy wrote in his memoirs.[26]

12 Hazards of Travel

So anxious were the escorts of the Decembrist exiles to complete their assignment and pocket the remaining cash, that they frequently took considerable risks, quite apart from the speed at which they made their charges travel. Several of the Decembrist memoirists commented on this, as well as on the brutality with which the fel'degeri treated both drivers and horses. There are numerous references to sledges overturning, a common enough occurrence in Russian country life in winter, but one made more dangerous by the leg-irons. A serious accident is described by Mikhail Aleksandrovich

Bestuzhev: approaching Tobol'sk, their fel'deger' had been hitting the driver of the carriage with his sword-hilt to force him to hurry, until the man could stand it no longer and handed the reins over to the guard. As they drove down a steep hill, the horses got out of control. Several vehicles carrying exiles collided. M.A. Bestuzhev nearly lost his life, for he was thrown out and dragged along as his leg-irons tangled with the spoke of a wheel. One of the fel'degeri was killed outright. The surviving one knelt before his passengers begging for forgiveness. In spite of this disaster, when the Governor of Tobol'sk asked whether the exiles had any complaints, they replied that they had none.[27]

Not all the fel'degeri and gendarmes were such disagreeable individuals: two of the Decembrists are on record as appreciating the kindness of their escorts. In a letter to his friend N.A. Samoylov, V.L. Davydov asked him to give gendarme Razumovskiy 100r on his behalf, and 50r to gendarme Guper. He also asked his wife to send 1500r to fel'deger' Sedov who had accompanied him. E.P. Obolenskiy, writing as he approached Irkutsk, had this to say to his father:

> Please send 500r to that kindest and most honest fel'deger' Aleksey Kuzmich Sedov, who escorted me to Irkutsk. His care, kindness and consideration enabled me to preserve my health and my life .... There was also a gendarme with us, Razumovskiy, who looked after me in particular. Please reward him ... for his five weeks of work and concern with 50r.[28]

Reckless driving was not the only risk. The gendarme accompanying Basargin's group was a kind enough fellow, but he had one weakness. He insisted on carrying with him a "little barrel" of vodka, from which he "drank immoderately" and tried to persuade his charges to do likewise.[29]

13 Attitudes of Local Residents to the Prisoners

As the prisoners passed through towns and villages, it became evident that in spite of official efforts to preserve the greatest secrecy about their identity, rumours about the rising and the arrival of the prisoners had reached many places through which they were to travel. Great interest was aroused in some. Reactions varied from curious stares to anger on behalf of the prisoners, combined with the traditional Russian compassion for all convicts being conveyed to Siberia — the "unfortunate ones" (neschastnye).

The fel'deger' was supposed to ensure that no contacts occurred between the prisoners and the public, but they were not always successful. Indeed, some of the people whom the prisoners encountered seem to have gone out of their way to be kind to them, often taking serious risks in doing so. We hear from A.M. Murav'ev, for instance, of an incident at Kostroma. While the horses were being changed, the prisoners were shut up in a room in the post-house. A young man pushed his way past the guard and managed to say "Gentlemen be of good courage, you are suffering in a most splendid and noble cause. Even in Siberia you will find sympathy" before the guard hustled him out.[30]

The further the Decembrists travelled into Siberia, the more boldly the people they met responded to their predicament. Even chiefs of police offered generous hospitality: the one in Kainsk met Basargin and his fellow-travellers accompanied by two servants lugging great baskets of food which he urged them to eat. He also offered them money "acquired not quite honestly" as he said (he had obtained it from bribes). The prisoners ate the food, but

declined the money.[31] Many people behaved in a manner which suggests either extreme political recklessness or faith in the safety lent by distance from the capital. There are far too many instances of such kindness inspired by the plight of the prisoners for more than a sample to be mentioned.

Notes to Chapter I

1 Izbrannye sotsial'no-politicheskie i filosofskie proizvedeniya dekabristov. S.Y. Shtraykh ed. M. 1951, T II, pp.464-481.

2 ibid. pp.481-485.

3 ibid. pp.493-497.

4 Bakhaev, V.B., Obshchestvenno-prosvetitel'skaya i kraevedcheskaya deyatel'nost' dekabristov v Buryatii. Novosibirsk 1980, p.37.

5 Memuary dekabristov: Severnoe obshchestvo. V.A. Fedorov comp. M. 1981, pp.232-233. (Hereafter Severn. obshch.)

6 Dvoryanov, V.V., V sibirskoy dal'ney storone. Minsk 1971, pp.31-32.

7 Memuary dekabristov: Yuzhnoe obshchestvo. I.V. Porokh comp. M. 1982, p.62. (Hereafter Yuzhn. obshch.)

8 Konkin, S.S., Dekabristy brat'ya Vedenyapiny. Saransk 1968, p.182.

9 Yakushkin, I.D., Zapiski, stat'i, pis'ma. M. 1951, p.100.

10. Severn. obshch. pp.136-137 (footnote).

11 ibid. p.138.

12 Dekabristy: neizdannye materialy i stat'i. B.L. Modzalevskiy, Yu.G. Oksman eds. M.1925, p.121.

13 Rozen, A.E., Zapiski dekabrista. Irkutsk 1984, p.205.

14 Dekabristy i Sibir'. A.N. Kopylov ed. Novosibirsk 1977, p.164.

15 Severn. obshch. pp.137, 138.

16 Lunin, M.S., Sochineniya i pis'ma. Petrograd 1923, p.98.

17 Severn. obshch. p.137.

18 Yakushkin, I.D., pp.94-95.

19 Severn. obshch. p.138.

20 Yuzhn. obshch. pp.58, 62.

21 ibid. p.64.

22 Konkin, S.S., p.135.

23 Yuzhn. obshch. p.58.

24 Severn. obshch. p.65.

25 Yuzhn. obshch. p.61.

26 Severn. obshch. p.66.

27 Vospominaniya Bestuzhevykh. M.K. Azadovskiy ed. M. 1951, p.139.

28 Dekabristy na katorge i v ssylke. Sbornik novykh materialov i statey. M.K. Azadovskiy, M.E. Zolotarev, B.G. Kubalov eds. M. 1925, pp.17-20.

29 Yuzhn. obshch. pp.69-70.

30 Severn. obshch. p.138.

31 Yuzhn. obshch. p.64.

CHAPTER II: SIBERIA

1 Siberia in the Context of This Dissertation

The word "Siberia" is frequently used in a general sense for all the land east of the Urals when it would be more accurate to use a name with a more localised meaning. While some of the Decembrists spent their years of exile after katorga in places as far apart as Yalutorovsk in the west of Siberia and Yakutsk in the north-east, the largest number lived in the areas round Irkutsk, at the southern end of Lake Baykal and on its eastern shore. Smaller groups eventually gathered in or near Tobol'sk and in Yalutorovsk. There was considerable fluidity in the Decembrist residents in most of these areas, as the exiles were allowed to apply for permission to join friends or relatives or seek better conditions (although their efforts to do so were not always successful). To trace these movements as a separate exercise would add little to the general picture.

Those who lived in the areas mentioned included some of the most active and articulate of the Decembrist exiles. Many left memoirs, and the letters of some have survived. With the exception of M.S. Lunin, exiled alone to Akatuy, those who lived in the more isolated places either for various reasons made less impact on their environment and its inhabitants, left no memoirs or did not get as involved with the local population as did for example the Bestuzhevs.

2 Russian Exploration and Conquest

When Russian exploration and conquest of what is now called

Siberia became intensified in the reign of Ivan IV (1547—1584), Sibir' was the name of the capital of the Tatar kingdom of Kuchum. The leading figures in the Russian conquest were members of the Stroganov family, owners of extensive lands in the Perm' area, whose wealth was derived mainly from salt extraction and trade. It was they who invited Ermak Timofeevich (?—1584), leader of the Cossacks, to help them. Together they captured the town of Sibir' and then pressed on, although with varying success.

Furs were the principal attraction for the Russians in Siberia: they wanted them not only for their own use but also as a source of income for the treasury through trade in markets as far apart as Byzantium and western Europe. As greed and consequent over-hunting led to a decline in the animal population, Russian hunters pushed their way further east in search of more productive hunting-grounds, travelling along river courses. With the support of armed expeditions, these areas were gradually incorporated into Russia, a process which was accelerated during the eighteenth century.

Old legends and modern archaeological finds indicate that the presence of iron, gold and silver deposits in Siberia was known to its prehistoric inhabitants.[1] As the Russians also became aware of them, smelting was developed on a large scale, especially iron-smelting in Eastern Siberia in the eighteenth century. Several smelting works were built round Nerchinsk, technically advanced for their time, but some were eventually forced to close through shortage of labour.[2] Gold was being obtained as a by-product of silver-smelting from mixed ores in Nerchinsk amongst other places (where some of the Decembrists spent the first years of their forced-labour

sentences). The Nerchinsk mines were the property of the "Kabinet", the department responsible for the personal property of the royal family, who owned considerable lands in the Altay and Transbaykal areas. Private gold-prospecting, first permitted in 1812 in the Urals, was not allowed in the Nerchinsk area.[3] In their heyday the total work-force in the Nerchinsk mines was about 70,000, including convicts and hired labourers.[4] By the beginning of the nineteenth century the Nerchinsk mines had declined in efficiency in the face of competition from private enterprise.

3 Administration

From the mid-sixteenth century Siberia was administered from Moscow by the Posadskiy prikaz, a government department whose functions referred generally to foreign relations. As Russian conquests in Siberia extended, a special government department was set up in Moscow in 1637 — Sibirskiy prikaz. This had wide terms of reference, including all judicial, financial and military matters but not the police or mines; transport was also excepted, being dealt with by the independent Yamskaya gon'ba.

Siberia was declared a guberniya in 1708 and after this was administered by a governor residing in Tobol'sk who took over the functions of the prikaz. When in 1819 Mikhail Mikhaylovich Speranskiy was commissioned to carry out an inspection of the Siberian administration, he uncovered many serious abuses and widespread corruption. He made proposals for reforms covering all aspects of administrative life in Siberia, and on returning to St Petersburg in 1822 he was appointed chairman of a special committee which was to prepare the

reforms. Both in his investigations and in the work of the committee his closest collaborator was Gavriil Semenovich Baten'kov (a future Decembrist exile), who was secretary of the committee. Soon after its formation, however, Speranskiy fell into disfavour and was replaced by Aleksey Andreevich Arakcheev. Although Baten'kov was only indirectly involved in the 1825 rising, he was arrested and imprisoned. The whole project for reform collapsed.

Since most of the land in Siberia was the property of the state and there was virtually no private landownership, there was no serfdom as there was in European Russia. Peasants on state lands were state peasants. Only those who lived on church lands were in effect serfs, but after the church lands were secularised in 1814, they also became state peasants.

In very general terms this was the situation in Siberia when the Decembrists arrived there.

4 Siberia as a Place of Exile

Siberia was already being used as a place of exile for captured runaway peasants in the sixteenth century. Bandits and other criminals, as well as participants in any kind of revolt, were also punished in this way, most being sentenced to forced labour (katorga). In 1581 a special department, Sysknoy prikaz, was set up in Tobol'sk to deal with this.[5]

By a decree issued by Catherine II in 1765 serf-owners were enabled to exile serfs to Siberia without even a trial, and also to have them returned from Siberia at any time. The decree recommended sending fit men under the age of 45, accompanied by their wives; but

this was interpreted by some owners as a convenient way of getting rid of serfs who were unfit for work through age or illness. By buying sick or old serfs cheaply and sending them to Siberia, the owners contrived to make a profit and keep the able-bodied serfs for themselves (they were paid 20 rubles by the government for each individual they sent). As a result, many of the serfs sent to Siberia — if they survived the rigours of the journey — were useless as a work-force.[6]

In another effort to populate Siberia's vastness, the death penalty was abolished for serfs and replaced by the cutting off of the index-finger of the left hand and sending the men to Siberia. Such mutilation, however, reduced their efficiency, and it was replaced by tearing out nostrils or cutting off ears.

From the middle of the eighteenth century participants in political plots and palace intrigues and other opponents of the establishment were more and more frequently being exiled to Siberia (for example M.O. Golovin, A.D. Menshikov, A.N. Radishchev). This use of Siberia as a place of exile for political offenders increased in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. According to V.N. Dvoryanov, the total number of convicts and exiles sent there in the years 1807—28 was 101,693, including families. (1807 was the first year for which accurate statistics can be given.[7]) Until then the political exiles had been individuals; the Decembrists were the first large group to be exiled to Siberia.

Convicts had been used as a work-force in Siberia from the early eighteenth century. Regarded by the Russian government as a source of cheap labour in salt-extraction and on other large-scale projects,

however, they proved inefficient and wasteful. Apart from the waste of lives — many did not survive the journey, or managed to escape on the way, or died during their sentence — unwilling labour could not be productive.

5 Decembrists' Knowledge of Siberia

a) Pre-1825

Information on Siberia was already being sent back to Moscow in the sixteenth century. Much of it came from the military governors (voevody) and concerned military matters of immediate interest to the government. Most of this material was deposited in the state archives, where it remained undisturbed for centuries. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw an upsurge in the amount of information being obtained, and a greater emphasis on geographical data. A number of expeditions went to areas of Siberia which lie outside the scope of this dissertation, but some participants of these published their findings in books which might have been of use to the Decembrists (see the Appendix to this chapter for the names of some of the most relevant works). It is doubtful, however, whether most of the participants of the rising of 1825 could have had much knowledge of Siberia. Apart from the inaccessibility of the archive material, the youthfulness of the rebels, and the fact that most of them had spent their time in military action before becoming involved in the secret societies, and also their ignorance of their eventual destination to Siberia, make this unlikely.

There were exceptions: Andrey Evgen'evich Rozen mentions P.S. Pallas's description of Siberia published in 1773—88.[8] It is also

known that in 1823 when Kondratiy Fedorovich Ryleev was working on his narrative poem Voynarovskiy he had read G.F. Miller's Opisanie sibirskogo tsarstva (published in St Petersburg in 1750). But the picture conveyed by him, and the comments of some of the Decembrists on hearing that they were to be exiled to Siberia, suggest that they had a very one-sided picture of it. In Voynarovskiy and another of Ryleev's poems, Smert' Ermaka (1821), it is described as a land of blizzards and snow, a "joyless land", "kingdom of cold and snow", "forgotten and deserted":

The Death of Ermak

The gale roared, the rain was noisy,
Lightning flew about in the gloom,
The thunder pounded unceasingly,
And the wind raged in the wild forest.
The Irtysh seethed within its steep banks,
Its grey waves mounting high,
They scattered howling into dust,
Dashing the Cossacks' boat against the banks.
(Lines 37-44)

Voynarovskiy

Once, in crackling frost,
Hunting the deer with his Siberian dog,
He ran on his skis into primeval forest —
Darkness and silence were all around!
Everywhere age-old pines
Or cedars white with hoar-frost;
Their branches densely intertwined
In an impenetrable canopy. (Lines 136-144)

Such notions, and the knowledge that this grim and savage land was used as a place of exile from which few returned, led the Decembrists to view their destination with apprehension. It was not only Ryleev who thought it was a grim place: Sergey Ivanovich Krivtsov wrote that it must have appeared

> something like the last circle of Dante's Inferno, the abode of inhuman suffering, humiliation and grief... a fate... which in its own way was worse than death.[9]

And on being told that he was to be exiled to Siberia, N.V. Basargin was convinced

> that all my dealings and accounts with this world were finished, and that the rest of my life was to be spent in a distant gloomy region (at that time Siberia was not as well known in our country as it is now [1856-57], and people spoke of it with horror), in perpetual suffering and all kinds of deprivation. I considered myself to be no longer an inhabitant of this world.[10]

b) Decembrists with Personal Knowledge of Siberia

i Vladimir Ivanovich Shteyngeyl' (1783—1863)

Born in the small town of Obva (Perm' guberniya, European Russia), V.I. Shteyngeyl' spent his early childhood in Siberia, where his father held various administrative posts. He was then enrolled in the Naval Corps of Cadets, and after graduating from it in 1799, he went back to Siberia and spent several years in Okhotsk and Irkutsk in the service of the admiralty. In 1810 he was appointed to a post under the Governor-General of Siberia, but left in 1812 to take part in the Napoleonic Wars. He returned east of the Urals only in 1826 as an exile.

K.F. Ryleev had heard of V.I. Shteyngeyl', but was not acquainted with him until the two met by chance in 1823 in Slenin's bookshop in St Petersburg. They struck up a friendship, one result of which was that Ryleev was able to obtain some descriptive information which he needed for his poem.[11] Possibly Shteyngeyl' also told Ryleev some of the words peculiar to Siberia which the poet used to enhance the "local colour" of his descriptions — such as yurta (the Buryats' tent made of hides or felt) and yasak (tribute paid in kind, mostly in furs, exacted by the Russians from the indigenous

peoples). (Lines 4 and 86 of Voynarovskiy.)

ii) Dmitriy Irinarkhevich Zavalishin. Zavalishin's knowledge of Siberia was acquired incidentally: when he was a naval officer, he passed through it on his way back to Russia after a world voyage under Admiral M.P. Lazarev. On returning to St Petersburg Zavalishin joined the staff of the Russian-American Company, a trading company which had links with Siberia as well as with Alaska, and since Ryleev was manager of the Company, he may well have obtained some information from Zavalishin too.

iii) Gavriil Semenovich Baten'kov was by far the best informed about Siberia of all the men connected in any way with the rising. Born and educated in Tobol'sk, after returning from the Napoleonic campaigns he graduated as a civil engineer in St Petersburg in 1816, returned to Siberia, and was appointed head of Siberian road communications. When M.M. Speranskiy was appointed Inspector-General (revizor) of Siberia in 1819 he made use of Baten'kov's wide experience and knowledge of the area and its inhabitants in the preparation of his plans, and made Baten'kov his chief assistant. On Speranskiy's return to St Petersburg Baten'kov, who had been granted leave of absence on health grounds, accompanied him. Baten'kov continued working on plans for Siberian reform. It was at this time that he came into contact with the secret societies, and might have passed on information about Siberia if asked.

c) Post-1825: Siberia as Described by Some Decembrists

Amongst those involved in the rising of 1825 were several sets of brothers and cousins. The Bestuzhevs and the Kyukhel'bekers

made valuable contributions to the knowledge of Siberia:

i) The Bestuzhevs

Four of the five Bestuzhev brothers were members of the Northern Society. The three eldest (Nikolay, 1791-1855, Aleksandr, 1797-1837 and Mikhail, 1800-1871) were exiled to Siberia; Nikolay and Mikhail also had sentences of forced labour and were imprisoned in Chita and Petrovskiy zavod. (The two youngest, Petr, 1803-1840 and Pavel, 1808-1846, were not active in the rising, but were nevertheless arrested and after a brief period of imprisonment sent to serve in the Russian army in the Caucasus.) Three sisters (Elena, 1792-1874, and Mariya and Ol'ga, born between 1793 and 1796, both died in 1889) fully shared their brothers' political views.

The father of this remarkable family, Aleksandr Fedoseevich (1761-1810), was a former naval officer who towards the end of his life was appointed head of the bronze casting studio of the Academy of Art in St Petersburg. A man of wide interests and well educated for his time, A.F. Bestuzhev had been co-editor with I.P. Pnin of the short-lived radical journal Sankt-Peterburgskiy zhurnal (1798). He passed on to his children his own radical views and critical attitude to serfdom. He also ensured that they got the best possible education available and a rich cultural background:

> ... one can say without exaggeration that our house was a well-stocked museum in miniature .... Surrounded all the time by such a variety of objects, with unopposed access to our father at all times, although he was constantly busy with serious matters ... listening to his discussions with learned men, actors or craftsmen, we ... unconsciously imbibed through all our pores the beneficial elements of our environment. Add to this a circle of friends, not extensive, but of select people; friendly and uninhibited conversations ... disputes without acrimony ... the tender

> love of our parents, without spoiling us or condoning our naughtiness, complete freedom of action within permitted limits, and you can perhaps form an idea of the resulting cast of mind of both the younger and older members of our family.[12]

Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Bestuzhev-Marlinskiy (a pen-name he coined from the name of the small town of Marli where his regiment was stationed) had already acquired a considerable reputation as a literary critic and writer of stories before 1825. With K.F. Ryleev he was co-editor and publisher of the literary journal Polyarnaya zvezda (1823-25). His exile to Yakutsk was shortened in 1829, when he was allowed to join the Russian army in the Caucasus. Most of his stories deal with the Baltic lands and the Caucasus, but in "From Tales of Siberia" (Iz rasskazov o Sibiri), "Siberian Customs" (Sibirskie nravy) and "Letter to Dr. Ehrmann" (printed anonymously in Moskovskiy telegraf (1831/7)) there is much realistic description of Siberia, Yakutiya and the Yakut people. His work was literary rather than scientific, with a very individual style.

Educated at home to the age of 12, Nikolay Bestuzhev was then enrolled in the Naval Corps of Cadets (Morskoy kadetskiy korpus) in St Petersburg, continuing the naval tradition of his father's family. (Among his fellow-pupils and lifelong friends was another future Decembrist — Konstantin Petrovich Torson, 1790?—1851.) His father arranged for him to have private tuition in subjects not included in the curriculum of the Corps, including lessons in painting at the Academy of Art. After graduating he was invited to join the teaching staff of the Corps. When his father died in 1810, he found himself at 19 the head and chief supporter of his family.

Between 1814 and 1817 N.A. Bestuzhev made two voyages to Western Europe with troop transports. Comparison of life in the West and in

Russia strengthened his radical views. The logical step for him, as for many of his fellow-officers, was the conclusion that Russia's economic difficulties could be solved only if serfdom was abolished and drastic changes made in the country's political structure. In 1824 he was enrolled in the Northern Society by K.F. Ryleev, and soon found himself a member of its governing body — the Duma. Meanwhile his professional career had prospered: in 1825 he was appointed director of the naval museum in St Petersburg. He had already been engaged for some time in re-organising its extremely disordered collections and archives and making a study of the history of the Baltic fleet, as well as being in charge of the Baltic (Russian) lighthouses. The versatility and sheer energy he was to show during his exile were already evident: organising amateur theatre performances in Kronstadt, and painting miniature portraits on bone and ivory were some of his other interests.

After the rising N.A. Bestuzhev made an attempt to escape but was arrested on 15th December. Sentenced in Category 11, he underwent "civil execution" together with 14 other naval officers at Kronstadt, but was sent to Siberia only in 1827. He died in Selenginsk.

With the same background as N.A. Bestuzhev, Mikhail was also enrolled in the Naval Corps of Cadets in 1812, and served in the navy until 1822. He was then promoted to lieutenant and transferred to the army. He was enrolled in the Northern Society in 1825 by K.P. Torson. His active participation in the rising earned him the same sentence as his brother Nikolay, and the two brothers served their terms of katorga and exile together. Mikhail survived to return to European Russia after the amnesty, although not until 1867, and died in Moscow. While he lacked the versatility of Nikolay, he was a

talented writer, and his memoirs are both well written and informative.

ii) Nikolay Aleksandrovich Bestuzhev on Buryatiya

N.A. Bestuzhev made a significant contribution to the knowledge of Siberia in three articles:

> Buryatskoe khozyaystvo: published in Trudy Vol'no-ekonomicheskago obshchestva in 1853, signed "Sibirskiy zhitel'"
>
> Gusinoe ozero: published anonymously in instalments in Vestnik estestvennoy nauki, January-June 1854
>
> Ocherki zabaykalskogo khozyaystva: published in Zemledel'cheskaya gazeta, 1857, Nos.31-33.

Gusinoe ozero

This is the most important and informative of the three articles and is therefore being considered first.

Goose Lake (Gusinoe ozero) got its name because it was a breeding-ground for wild geese. In Bestuzhev's time the Buryats called it "The Great Lake" (Kulun Nur in Buryat). It is separated from the southern shore of Lake Baykal by the Khamar-Daban Ridge. At the eastern end of the ridge the highest point is Borisan (1564m a.s.l.). Bestuzhev's description is based on observations made during a walking tour which he made accompanied by a young Russian-speaking Buryat, Damba Vambuev (not named in Gusinoe ozero). Damba Vambuev had also learned Latin and Greek from an English missionary, who had given him an education and converted him to Christianity (Robert Wall, or Well).[13] His linguistic and other skills helped Bestuzhev to confirm his high opinion of the Buryats' potential, a view he shared with other Decembrists living in the area. A keen hunter, Bestuzhev had got to know the Selenginsk area and its inhabitants well. He describes the Buryats fairly and sympathetically, but does not idealise

them. He also took the trouble to learn the Buryat names for local places and some general Buryat vocabulary.

The article is packed with information. Particular features which N.A. Bestuzhev noticed were the shallow and stony character of the soil and its high salt content, which appeared in the form of white patches of mixed salts — mostly Glauber salt — scattered about the surface. The salts, called gudzhir in Buryat, were used by the Buryats to flavour their tea, and they also fed it to their cattle.[14] The salt had also made the water of a small shallow lake near Goose Lake quite white, and since it got pleasantly warm[15] in the sun, N.A. Bestuzhev suggests that it could make a useful spa. Salt extraction, which had been carried out for a long time already, was done by cutting holes in the ice in winter and allowing the half-frozen salty solution to come out.[16]

Severe wind erosion and consequent droughts had left only a shallow soil layer. Droughts are described as "the normal state of affairs", but the ingenious Buryats irrigated their crops by digging channels and drawing water from streams.[17] Geological information: Cliffs of lava and quartz (sic) are mentioned, with other minerals embedded in them. Quartz crystals were also to be seen embedded in the granite, which is thus made very friable. The mention of lava of course suggests volcanic origins. Earth tremors were sometimes very strong — one mentioned as having occurred on 6.8.1839 was also felt in Irkutsk. N.A. Bestuzhev attributes these and other, minor, shifts in the earth's crust to a "subterranean fire":

> ... everything proves that not only here, but in many places the subterranean fire, like an ocean, shakes and rocks the surface on which we live, and beneath the surface there is a liquid flaming sea.[18]

He also quotes an explanation of the formation of Goose Lake which was current at the time: apparently 80 or 90 years previously two small lakes, separated by a ridge of land with a well on it, had suddenly begun to fill up. Eventually the ridge was almost completely flooded, leaving only a small island in the centre of the lake, which was what Bestuzhev saw. As the lake filled up, the lamas, who had built a shrine on the ridge, had to keep moving it out of the way of the water.[19] Bestuzhev noted that the rise and occasional fall in the level of the water of Goose Lake always coincided with similar variations in the level of Lake Baykal, and wonders whether there could possibly be an underground connection between the two.

In N.A. Bestuzhev's other two articles which have survived — Ocherki zabaykal'skogo khozyaystva and Buryatskoe khozyaystvo — the descriptions (mainly of the Selenginsk area) generally coincide with the descriptions of the terrain in the above article). The rapidly-flowing Selenga River however merits a special note, for in its rush towards Baykal it had eroded its own banks. Wind erosion is again mentioned — so much sand and dust has been carried onto the left bank that the houses of Selenginsk were becoming covered up, and the inhabitants were forced to move across the river.[20] The isolated situation of Selenginsk made purchase of supplies difficult, and the scarcity of winter feed forced farmers to slaughter most of their live-stock — except milch cows — and freeze the carcases in the ice. N. Bestuzhev mentions that about 70,000 hides and 200,000 sheepskins were traded for tea and textiles with the Chinese (at Kyakhta) every year.[21]

Letters of M. and N. Bestuzhev: During their imprisonment there was little opportunity for the Decembrists to get to know either the

locality or its inhabitants, and even smaller chances of commenting on them, since they had to rely on the help of the wives to conduct their correspondence for them. Some of the letters of the Bestuzhevs contain objective information on such things as climate. A very few letters have survived which escaped being sent through official channels. One of these, a long letter (26.11.1837)[22] written by N. Bestuzhev to all his relatives in European Russia, is thought to have been taken to St Petersburg by A.I. Arsen'ev, the manager of the Petrovsk works, whose sympathies lay with the prisoners, and who went home on leave in 1837 carrying a large number of letters from the Decembrists. In this letter N. Bestuzhev compares Siberia to North America. Because people thought of Siberia as a place of perpetual cold, inhabited only by bears and brigands, they were afraid of going there. But Bestuzhev argues that Siberia would change as America had, and in time more people would go there.

In another letter (29.11.1837)[22] and sent by official channels (it was written for him by Mariya Kazimirovna Yushnevskaya) N. Bestuzhev comments to his brother Pavel on climatic conditions in Petrovskiy zavod:

> ... one cannot touch anything in winter without causing sparks to leap out: fur coats sparkle when they are taken off, hair scatters sparks and stands on end when it is combed ... and this highly charged atmosphere has a bad effect on people with weak nerves. Not only our ladies suffer from it, but even many people born here complain of nervous disorders.[23]

(N. Bestuzhev had already been interested in electricity and meteorology before 1825: in 1818 an article by him on "Electricity in Relation to Certain Atmospheric Phenomena" (O elektrichestve v otnoshenii k nekotorym vozdushnym yavleniyam) had been published in the journal Syn otechestva.[24])

iii) Mikhail Aleksandrovich Bestuzhev on Buryatiya

Like his brother Nikolay, Mikhail Bestuzhev is also enthusiastic about Siberia:

> The towns and villages of Siberia now bear comparison with places in European Russia. The mere fact that in the whole of Siberia [sic] you will not find one peasant cottage without a chimney (kurnaya izba) will give you an idea of the external appearance and the internal domestic life of Siberia. (Letter of 26.11.1837) [25]

Elsewhere he assures his correspondent that "the whole of Siberia"

> is extraordinarily fertile ... the Nerchinsk district and after it the Verkhneudinsk district are so fertile that the harvest would not be believed at home .... There are large villages, good roads. The soil is sandy but fertile. We blame our climate, but here, at the end of September we are going about without overcoats ... and still eating melons ... grown outside.[26]

After this euphoria, however, a more realistic view emerges: closer acquaintance had shown that the potential of the country was either being wasted, or not fully exploited. Forests were being indiscriminately cleared for fuel and building material, causing climatic changes — marshes were drying up, and a chain reaction followed: water levels in rivers were falling, there was a loss of soil fertility, poor grass growth led to difficulties in feeding livestock. Droughts, frequent forest fires (caused partly by the Buryats' carelessness and partly by stubble burning) and water shortages due to scanty winter snowfall all added to the farmers' difficulties. (Letters of 20.5.1840 and 9.8.1841.[27]) Other troubles were caused by the Buryats' habit of letting their livestock, including camels, roam about freely. When the Bestuzhevs fenced in their own plots, the camels simply broke the fence down. A vivid description of an electric storm followed by a flash flood carrying debris down the valley is given in a letter of 14.10.1841.[28]

iv) Contributions by Other Decembrists

Mikhail Karlovich Kyukhel'beker (1791-1859)

M. Kyukhel'beker was a naval lieutenant and a member of the Northern Society. He was actively involved in the rising, and was imprisoned in Chita and Petrovskiy zavod. When his term of katorga had ended, he was sent to settle in Barguzin, where his brother Vil'gel'm joined him in 1836. M. Kyukhel'beker made meteorological and other observations and also collected data on agricultural practices and on the geology of the Barguzin area. Not all his work has survived, and the article entitled Kratkiy ocherk zabaykal'skogo kraya was published only in 1963 in an anthology entitled Zabytym byt' ne mozhet (M).

The geographical information in this article is virtually the same as that in the articles described above, and the main interest is in the notes on the Buryats, which will be mentioned in the appropriate section of this dissertation. There is, however, an interesting suggestion for the improvement of the transport system of Siberia, which, in its state at the time of writing, M. Kyukhel'-beker considers to be a serious obstacle to the development of trade: he suggests that the rivers of Siberia should be linked into a grand network of waterways, with portages where canals cannot be built, to cover the whole country.[29]

M. Kyukhel'beker also mentions the poor state of horticulture and vegetable growing: extreme conservatism added to pessimism about the results prevented the Russian Siberians from experimenting with new types of vegetables. Nevertheless the Decembrists persevered, as they had done in the face of similar attitudes in Chita and Petrovskiy zavod, and managed to grow potatoes and other vegetables not

previously cultivated in that area. A curious fact which he notes is that in spite of the large number of cattle, the use of animal manure as a fertiliser seemed to be almost unknown. The agricultural implements used were very primitive, especially the ploughs, and the ploughing was very shallow.

v) Peoples of Siberia as Described by Decembrists

N.A. Bestuzhev on the Buryats

N.A. Bestuzhev is as thorough when writing about the Buryats as he is in describing their environment. His comments are also notable for the balanced picture he gives of this people, with whom the Decembrists had first come into close contact during the journey from Chita to Petrovskiy zavod in 1830. While he is critical of some of the negative aspects of the Buryat way of life, he is objective in writing of their religious observances. He is never patronising or scornful and, quick to see the positive sides of their character and their potential, he sums up his views in the words

> As far as the Buryats' intellectual capabilities are concerned, they are on a level with all the best tribes of the human race.[30]

In his contacts with the Buryats, N.A. Bestuzhev was impressed particularly with their powers of observation — not surprising in a people who lived mainly by forest hunting — and by their courtesy and dignified social rituals. For example, when visitors entered a yurt, they made an obeisance before a small altar with a light burning on it, placed just inside the entrance. Conversations between host and guest invariably began with the latter politely enquiring "What news have you heard?" and then asking after the host's cattle and sheep.[31] When exchanging pinches of tobacco, the sleeves had to

be rolled down over the hands, since to give or take anything with bared hands was impolite.[32]

Two negative aspects of Buryat life are commented on by other Decembrists: their aversion to washing their bodies and the prevalence of drunkenness. On the former N.A. Bestuzhev wrote:

> They have even turned uncleanliness into a religious duty, saying that washing one's person or, even worse, going to the bathhouse, and keeping utensils clean, is a mortal sin.

However, those who worked for Russians did eventually take to washing themselves and gave up eating carrion, to which some were not averse.[33] Drunkenness (caused by drinking araka, made from fermented sour milk) was so common among the men that N.A. Bestuzhev frequently met Buryats on horseback, drunk in the saddle, being taken home by their horses.

Buryat Diet

The Buryat diet consisted mostly of fish or meat, supplemented by wild plants, a favourite one being the various kinds of wild onion which grew plentifully. All the Decembrist memoirists seem to have been impressed by the Buryats' tea, thickened with flour and butter, sometimes well boiled, for they nearly all mention it and Bestuzhev described it in considerable detail. Baked bread was a novelty to the Buryats: some used to gorge themselves on it until their stomachs ached, a complaint which Bestuzhev used to cure with ordinary pepper. He also mentions the Buryats' passion for eating fat (salo, suet), sometimes rancid. They even sometimes gave babies a lump of it to chew. Bestuzhev tells of one Buryat who sliced a good cutlet (sic) from the carcase of a wolf killed nearby. He fried it and ate it with evident enjoyment. Even cormorants were eaten on

another occasion, in spite of the notoriously tough and smelly flesh of these birds.[34] As Bestuzhev remarked, there is no disputing about tastes.

Poverty Among the Buryats

It is in the description of the Buryats' poverty, and also of the hold which the lamas had over them (for the two, according to the Decembrists, were related) that their humane and sympathetic attitude to them is most evident.

Several successive years of drought had left many Buryats impoverished, but poverty could not put an end to the practice of "bride-money" (kalym). This sum of money required of a prospective bridegroom sometimes even forced the Buryats to borrow from the Russians or mortgage their agricultural work for a whole year in advance. This and the heavy taxes exacted by the Buryat leaders — taisha — had helped to reduce them to abject poverty. Bestuzhev describes the yurt of a Buryat who was so poor that he did not even have a bed or the customary altar by the entrance. His daughter was doing what was usually a man's job — harnessed into a contraption for working leather hides — while his wife, dressed in rags, was sealing a tub for making araka with the mixture of cow-dung and mud used for this purpose. Bestuzhev was particularly struck by an old Buryat in the yurt who was so emaciated that he "could have served as a model for a lesson in osteology".[35]

Religion

Both the Bestuzhev brothers and M.K. Kyukhel'beker were interested in the religious observances and beliefs of the Buryats and recorded some interesting information about them.

N.A. Bestuzhev (Gusinoe ozero)

Three types of shrines are described. Their names in Buryat according to the author were bunkhan, obo and dasuk, amended by an editorial note in Dekabristy o Buryatii and translated: bumkan (Tibetan = chapel), obon (Mongolian = heap) and darkuti (Tibetan = prayer flag). The first type, according to Bestuzhev, were small wooden shrines containing an idol, always set on a hilltop, and used for performing the rites; obo were heaps of twigs and sticks used for the same purpose; and dasuk were a series of sticks standing upright in the ground with prayer flags festooned on them.[36] The prayers were inscribed by the lamas, who were rewarded for doing this by the gift of a lamb. Near the shrines were boxes filled with clay idols, and a stone cairn in front served as an altar.

Bestuzhev had a meeting with the Khama-lama, the chief lama of the area, who was so obese that two chairs had to be placed for him to sit on. He invited Bestuzhev to the annual festival, which consisted of horse-racing and wrestling, in which one of the lamas took part. The prize for the winner in wrestling was 20-30 kopeks.

In a letter (14.10.1841) Bestuzhev describes two ceremonies performed by Buryat lamas, who did not seem to mind his presence. The first was an extremely successful rain-making ceremony. The lamas sat before a small table on which were brass bowls containing a mixture of grain, water, milk, araka, cheese and curds. Drums, cymbals and a small bell were sounded by the elder lama. Prayers for rain were intoned by the Buryat onlookers, and some herbs laid on the altar. After more prayers, the contents of the bowls were thrown into the river. At this point, providentially for the lamas no doubt, drops of rain began to fall, and as the lamas chanted and

played more loudly, there was thunder and lightning, at which everyone ran for shelter.[37]

An annual ceremony is described later in the same letter. This took place on a hilltop. To the sound of the lamas' singing and playing, scraps of cloth inscribed with prayers were hung on strings. Men and women in festive clothes stood in a circle; then the women took a step sideways towards the sun. With hands folded they touched the ground, bending down in all four directions, and moved in a circle several times. All the men who had guns with them fired into the air and shouted words intended to frighten away evil spirits.

The lamas had a firm financial grip on the Buryats as well as a religious influence. An example of this were the three-day funeral rites for which the lamas had to be paid, so that, if a Buryat's parents died while he was away working for a Russian, and he could not summon the lamas to conduct the funeral, the lama lost the fee.[38] The lamas also exacted payment for prayers recited for the sick. Pressure was put on any family with sons to have at least one of them become a lama — leading to the family's loss of this member's earnings. N. Bestuzhev describes the lamas as "an ulcer (yazva) in the Buryats' life" and comments

> It is a pity that the bride-money and the celibacy of the lamas prevent this sensible tribe from multiplying.[39]

Mikhail Bestuzhev

M.A. Bestuzhev also contributes some descriptions of Buryat lamas' shrines and religious observances. He duplicates some of the information given by his brother in Gusinoe ozero in a letter written to

his sisters from Selenginsk (24.1.1842), but also gives some new facts. The contents of the four shrines round the main one are described in detail: In the first is a written record of the rites (Ganzhur) (he mentions 12 books in folio). In the second is a summary of the faith (Danzhur — 106 books in folio). The third is the burial-place of chief lamas; while in the fourth is a chariot with "four green horses" (sic) in which "their [the Buryats'] minor god rides round the temple in great state". Inside the temple is the prayer-drum, with the help of which the prayers which were formerly so devoutly recited have been reduced to a mere formula — a turn of the drum. There are also scraps of cloth with prayers inscribed on them, bells, votive cups with offerings of seeds beside the altar in front of which the chief lama sits. His assistants sit in the temple in strict order of precedence. M. Bestuzhev mentions 300-400 lamas being present at big festivals. He was present at a ceremony and describes a dish of wheat grains being offered among the lamas, followed by a distribution of holy water. The holy water was also sprinkled about the temple occasionally. The reading of the holy book was accompanied by a kind of growling by the assembled lamas. The ceremony ended with eerie music rising to a loud climax accompanied by the clashing of cymbals and a sound like "howling jackals or hyenas", followed by a most undignified rush of lamas to get out of the temple.[40]

The account of these ceremonies makes it all the more regrettable that M.A. Bestuzhev's essay on the lamas, mentioned in a letter to I.P. Kornilov (31.12.1852) was lost.[41]

Poverty had led to a deterioration in the Buryats' moral standards: theft had appeared, and the people themselves were becoming evasive

and cunning. Bestuzhev lays the blame for this not on the Russians, but on the greedy and work-shy lamas and on the taishas. The latter were appointed for life. Complaints about injustices were extremely difficult to put right, so most went unpunished. Some of this was due, according to Bestuzhev, to the Buryats' aversion to quarrelling and fighting.

Poverty was also leading to incipient class-distinctions not only between richer and poorer Buryats but within the divisions of the poorer ones. Some, he noted, were able to afford to build themselves permanent houses with ovens, while it was the poorer Buryats who continued their nomadic way of life.

Vil'gel'm Karlovich Kyukhel'beker (1797-1846)

V.K. Kyukhel'beker, the brother of M.K. Kyukhel'beker, was a fellow-pupil of Pushkin at the Lycée in Tsarskoe selo and one of his closest friends. His father, of German (Saxon) origin, had entered the service of Grand Prince Paul, later Paul I. After his retirement the family lived on their estate at Avinorm in what is now Estonia, a gift from the Tsar. In spite of their German background, both the Kyukhel'bekers always regarded themselves as thoroughly Russian. Vil'gel'm wrote all his enormous output of poetry and prose in Russian.

V. Kyukhel'beker first attracted public attention in 1820 when he recited his poem "Liberty" (Vol'nost') at a meeting of the Free Society of Lovers of Russian Literature (Vol'noe obshchestvo lyubiteley rossiyskoy slovesnosti). The poem was an attack on the persecution of poets, and was generally interpreted as being a veiled attack on the exiling of Pushkin to his country home. Kyukhel'beker then went to Paris as secretary to A.L. Naryshkin during the latter's

tour of Europe. Here Kyukhel'beker got into serious trouble when he delivered a public lecture on Russian literature in the course of which he made a strong attack on the Russian establishment. Sent back to St Petersburg at the request of the French authorities, with the stigma of political unreliability, he found it difficult to get employment. A position as secretary to General A.P. Ermolov, commander of the Russian army in the Caucasus, was also short-lived (1821-22), for he challenged N.N. Tatishchev, a relative of the general, to a duel. His next venture was the publication jointly with Vladimir Fedorovich Odoevskiy, a cousin of the poet Aleksandr Ivanovich Odoevskiy, of a literary journal, Mnemosina. Initially very successful, it was forced to close after only four issues (three in 1824 and one in 1825) for political reasons.

V.K. Kyukhel'beker had been a member of the Northern Society for only one month when the rising took place. He played an extremely active part in it, attempting to shoot Grand Duke Mikhail Pavlovich. Although sentenced to 20 years forced labour followed by life exile to Siberia, he was sent there only in 1835. During the intervening period of solitary confinement in Dunaborg and Sveaborg fortresses, he kept a diary and also wrote a great deal of poetry. He was sent straight to Barguzin (on the eastern shore of Lake Baykal), moving later to Aksha, Kurgan and finally to Tobol'sk, where he died.

Like the Bestuzhevs, both the Kyukhel'bekers took an interest in Buryat traditional literature. V. Kyukhel'beker's "Barguzin Fairy-Tale" (Barguzinskaya skazka) takes the form of a letter to A.I. Orlov, a doctor already established in Eastern Siberia when the Decembrists arrived there, and the friend of several of them. The story was

written for a journal, The Butterfly (Metlyak), of which Orlov was the editor.

V.K. Kyukhel'beker says that he heard the story from a Barguzin man who worked for him. It is a curious mixture of the Oedipus myth and Christian elements. The child about whom an Oedipus-type prophecy was made was brought up in a nunnery, until he began to grow up and take too great an interest in the pretty young novices. He had to leave, and, like the Prodigal Son, spent the money given to him by the Mother Superior on "riotous living". Like Oedipus, he unknowingly killed his own father. After he had committed a second murder, a hermit, to whom he had confessed his sins, sent him to live in a ruined and deserted church. During his years of penance he managed not to succumb to various temptations held out to him by the Devil. He died, however, and the hermit, who had come to see how he was progressing with his atonement, found his body. The hermit declared that the church was now re-consecrated, and it was immediately transformed into a place of beauty.[43]

N.A. Bestuzhev quotes at length from three Buryat songs (in his own translation), and also re-tells a legend which is interesting for containing several elements familiar from European fairy-tales: a precious ring lost and found, a superhumanly strong hero, a man-eating dragon, talking animals (with the fox depicted as cunning and resourceful), and a "happy ending" after the finding of the ring (Gusinoe ozero).

M.K. Kyukhel'beker on the Buryats

Organisation: Each tribe of Buryats had a governing body called stepnaya duma. This body, which had its own scribe and interpreter, settled local tribal affairs, collected taxes, pronounced judgment in

first instance cases etc. The tribal head was called zaisan and was appointed by the Russian authorities. The head of all the Buryats in the area was called taisha. Some of the officials held officer's rank and were rewarded with swords, medals and other insignia. The Buryats treated their leaders with great respect.

Religion: According to M. Kyukhel'beker (living in Barguzin) most Buryats at the time were of shaman religion. Some had become Buddhists, but the lamas, although outwardly treated with respect, were unpopular because of their mercenariness and the way in which they exacted respect by threats of disaster. Their efforts at curing the sick with medicines obtained from China are damned with faint praise by M. Kyukhel'beker as "sometimes successful". As for conversion to Christianity -

> Let us note once again that the Buryats are polygamous and can support more than one family; for this reason they prefer to accept lamaism rather than become Christians. It is, by the way, easier to convert a shamanist to Christianity than a lamaist.[42]

Other Siberian Peoples

The Tungus Tribe (by M.K. Kyukhel'beker)

This tribe had gradually been pushed out of its habitat by the advancing Buryats and then by the Russians. The Tungus were reindeer herders and breeders, but at the time when the Decembrists first came into contact with them they were beginning to change to cattle breeding. Although they were also starting to imitate the clothing and ways of the newcomers, they had retained their own language, and in fact had little contact with either the Buryats or the Russians. A very few had been converted to Christianity. According to M.K. Kyukhel'beker a Tungus tribe under a leader called Kantimur had arrived in the Barguzin area at the time of Peter I, from whom the

leader had received the title of "prince". The Tungus paid yasak but because of their mobility no-one really knew how many there were in the tribe. M. Kyukhel'beker guessed that there might be about 12,000. The numbers had declined sharply owing to the introduction by the newcomers of smallpox and venereal disease.[44]

The Russian Siberians

M.K. Kyukhel'beker distinguished between 1) Siberians descended from the first settlers (starozhily) and other incomers and 2) convicts or exiles and the descendants of earlier ones. He divides the starozhily into state and factory peasants (as far as he was concerned, these were the ones working in the Nerchinsk factories). Semeyskie — descendants of the schismatics (Old Believers) expelled from Russia in the seventeenth century with their families — are described by all the Decembrists as being very hard-working and prosperous, but unfortunately the moral standards of the younger generation were less strict than those of their elders, especially where drink and sexual behaviour were concerned.

In the Nerchinsk area there were also a few settlers (pereselentsy) of Ukrainian origin — mostly hard-working and respectable folk. A small number of Cossacks also lived there.

This mixture of races and nationalities had not, according to M. Kyukhel'beker, acquired a distinctive character of its own. He comments that unfortunately all these people had brought with them their bad qualities as well as their good ones — drunkenness, sexual immorality, an incapacity for prolonged and consistent effort, a certain dishonesty — but the redeeming feature of them all was their hospitality, which far outshone that of the Russians (in European

Russia) — even if in Siberia "it is not without an element of calculation".[45]

The Yakut People

Like the Buryats, the Yakuts were a nomadic people who lived mainly by hunting, fishing and stock-breeding (the latter included reindeer). They had also developed a high degree of skill in forging iron.[46] While in some respects they had benefited through contact with the Russians (who first reached Yakutiya in the early seventeenth century) in that they were introduced to agriculture, a gradual distinction between the increasingly prosperous heads of the tribes (toyon) and the growing number of poorer Yakuts was discernible.[47]

The Yakuts' religion was shamanism. The shaman acted as an intermediary between human beings and the various good and evil spirits (aiyy and abasy respectively). The most respected of the gods were the god of destiny — D'ylga-khaan and the god of war — Ilbis.

The Yakuts had a rich tradition of songs, epics in both prose and verse, ritual poetry and riddles. Some of their heroic lays (olonkho) referred to actual historical events.[48] A spring festival held in honour of the gods consisted of competitions and games accompanied by songs and dancing. Conversion to Christianity officially took place in the early eighteenth century,[49] but as far as the average Yakut was concerned it was merely lip-service, and the old rituals and beliefs persisted.

The Yakuts were largely illiterate, as were most indigenous peoples in Siberia at the time,[50] but like the Buryats they had a well-developed system of tribal signs and sign language used in hunting. In common with other Siberian peoples, they had to pay yasak. During

the eighteenth century in particular the burden of this tax became so heavy that some Tungus tribes and Yakuts refused to pay it, and later in the century the Yakuts were on the brink of rebellion against the Russians over this issue.

Notes to Chapter II

1 Mongayt, David, Archaeology in the USSR. M. 1955, English translation: Pelican 1966, pp.148, 167-169.

2 Kennan, George, Siberia and the Exile System. Osgood and McIlvain, London 1891, Vol.II, p.279.

3 Istoriya Sibiri, A.P. Okladnikov, V.I. Shunkov, eds. L. 1968-69, Vol.II, pp.393-394.

4 Sovetskaya istoricheskaya entsiklopediya. 1965, Vol.6, pp.751-752.

5 Dvoryanov, V.D., V sibirskoy dal'ney storone. Minsk 1971, pp.15-16.

6 ibid. pp.14-15.

7 ibid. p.50.

8 Rozen, A.E., Zapiski dekabrista. Irkutsk 1984, p.251.

9 Gershenzon, M., Dekabrist Krivtsov. Berlin 1923, pp.144-145.

10 Memuary dekabristov. Yuzhnoe obshchestvo. M. 1982, p.54.

11 Memuary dekabristov. Severnoe obshchestvo. M. 1981, p.205.

12 Vospominaniya Bestuzhevykh. M. 1951, p.207.

13 Golubov, V., in Baykal, 1975/6, p.125.

14 Dekabristy o Buryatii, V.B. Bakhaev comp. Ulan-Ude 1975, pp.63-65. (Hereafter Bakhaev.)

15 ibid. p.69.

16 ibid. p.66.

17 ibid. pp.87-88.

18 ibid. pp.76-77.

19 ibid. p.70.

20 ibid. p.137.

21 ibid. pp.58-59.

22 Bestuzhev, N.A. Stat'i i pis'ma. M. 1933, p.261. (Hereafter Stat'i.)

23 ibid. p.256.

24 Pasetskiy, V.M. Geograficheskie issledovaniya dekabristov. M. 1977, p.156.

25 Stat'i, p.276.

26 Bestuzhev, N.A. and M.A. Pis'ma iz Sibiri. Irkutsk 1929, p.13. (Hereafter Pis'ma.)

27 ibid. pp.38-43, 87.

28 ibid. pp.106-107.
29 Bakhaev, p.29.
30 ibid. p.132.
31 ibid. p.81.
32 ibid. p.85.
33 ibid. p.131.
34 ibid. pp.140-141.
35 ibid. p.89.
36 ibid. p.85.
37 Pis'ma, p.105.
38 Bakhaev, p.131.
39 ibid. p.132.
40 ibid. pp.211-214.
41 ibid. p.220.
42 ibid. p.48.
43 ibid. pp.53-57.
44 ibid. pp.46-47.
45 ibid. p.50.
46 Istoriya Sibiri. M. 1968, Vol.II, p.99.
47 ibid. p.294.
48 ibid. p.102.
49 ibid. p.295.
50 ibid. p.483.
51 ibid. p.143.

Appendix to Chapter II

Possible Sources of Information on Siberia

1 Nikolay Gavrilovich Spafariy (1635-1709). N.G. Spafariy was Russian ambassador to China. In 1675 he was commissioned to write a description of his journey from Tobol'sk to the Chinese frontier. He included descriptions of the main Siberian rivers, and gave a large amount of information on the economy and agriculture of the area.

Puteshestvie cherez Sibir' ot Tobol'ska do Nerchinska i granits Kitaya russkogo poslannika Nikolaya Spafariya v 1675 godu. Published with commentary by Yu.A. Arsen'ev in Zapiski russkogo geograficheskogo obshchestva po otd. etnografii, 1882, T X, vyp.1. Prilozh. str. 152. (Istoriya Sibiri T II. M. 1968, pp.75 and 158.)

2 Semen Ul'yanovich Remezov (2nd half of seventeenth century). Primarily a cartographer, Remezov travelled widely in Siberia and compiled an atlas of Siberian rivers. Although his maps repeat the errors of previous cartographers, he gave much useful information. He was also an architect, and made plans of many Siberian towns.

Khograficheskaya chertezhnaya kniga (1697-1711); Chertezhnaya kniga Sibiri sost. synom boyarskim Semenom Remezovym 1701g. Publ. only in 1882 in SPb. (Ist. Sibi. II p.160.)

3 Vasiliy Nikitych Tatishchev (1686-1750). During his term of service as manager of mines in the Urals, he issued questionnaires to the voevodas of Siberian towns requesting information on the geography, history and ethnography of their areas. On the basis of this he began compiling a massive encyclopaedia, but did not complete it. Most of this information is still unpublished, except for a volume of extracts published in 1950. Tatishchev was also a collector of Siberian chronicles.

4 Gerhard-Friedrich Miller (1705-1783). Miller was a historian and editor of Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti. He was associated with Tatishchev in the issuing of questionnaires referred to above. Miller also began the enormous task of deciphering and classifying the accumulation of Siberian chronicles. This work was commissioned by the Academy of Sciences, and most of it was done during the 1730s. Miller's main interests were in ethnography and archaeology, and he was one of the first researchers to take an interest in Siberian folk lore and literature. Not all his numerous works were published.

Istoriya sibirskogo tsarstva. SPb. 1750; republ. Vol.I M. 1937, Vol.II L. 1941; Opisanie torgov proiskhodyashchikh v Sibiri. SPb. 1756; Izbrannye trudy po geografii Rossii. M. 1950. etc.

5 Dr. Daniel Gottlieb Messerschmidt (1685-1736). In 1719 Messerschmidt was commissioned by Peter I to gather data on Siberia, paying attention not only to geographical and historical information, but also to its cultural history and the traditions, languages and medical lore of its indigenous peoples. After travelling about the country for seven years, he brought back to Russia a vast amount of information, and also maps and collections of specimens. Although his works remained largely unpublished, they provided useful sources for later scholars.

Forschungsreise durch Sibirien. Berlin 1720-27. Republished Teil 1, 1962, Teil 2, 1964, by the GDR Academy of Sciences and the AN SSSR in collaboration.

Other investigators of this period include:

6 Ph.I. Strahlenberg, a Swedish prisoner-of-war who whiled away his period of imprisonment in Siberia by producing a map (published in Stockholm in 1730) and an account of his observations of the country.

7 Urban Filipovich German (1755-1815). Kratkoe opisanie tobol'skogo namestnichestva, 1786.

8 Petr Simon Pallas (1741-1811). Academician and author of many works, of which the most important material is contained in: Puteshestvie po raznym provintsiyam Rossiyskoy imperii. SPb. 1773-88 (includes descriptions of Siberia); Sammlungen historischer Nachrichten über die Mongolische Völkerschaften. SPb. 1776-1806; Icones insectorum Rossiae 1781-98; Zoographica rosso-asiatica 1811; Sravnitel'nye slovari vsekh yazykov i narechiy. SPb. 1787-89, T 1-2.

9 Ivan Ivanovich Lepekhin (1740-1802). Dnevnye zapiski puteshestviya po raznym provintsiyam Rossiyskogo gosudarstva. SPb. 1771-1801.

10 I.P. Falk (?) Bemerkungen einer Reise im Russischen Reich in den Jahren 1772-74. SPb. 1775.

11 Johann Gottlieb Georgi (? -1802). Opisanie vsekh v Rossiyskom gosudarstve obitayushchikh narodov. SPb. 1776-78.

(Both 10 and 11 contain much Siberian material.)

12 Aleksandr Nikolaevich Radishchev (1749-1802). Sokrashchennoe povestvovanie o priobretenii Sibiri; Opisanie tobol'skogo namestnichestva; Zapiski puteshestviya v Sibiri.

Finally, a monthly journal devoted to Siberia: Sibirskiy vestnik; this was one of the first Russian scientific periodicals. It was first published in 1818 in St Petersburg by G.I. Spasskiy (d. 1864), who was an official in Krasnoyarsk. He had acquired a thorough knowledge of Siberia, having lived there in his youth and by travel. The journal provided varied information on Siberia including the life of the indigenous peoples. However, increasingly severe censorship eventually made it impossible to continue publication, and it closed in 1824.

CHAPTER III: NERCHINSK-BLAGODATSK

1 Irkutsk: Arrival

Irkutsk, where the first eight Decembrist prisoners arrived on 27th and 29th August 1826, was used at this stage only as a collecting-point from which they were sent on to their destinations for forced labour or settlement.

The Governor-General of Eastern Siberia at this time was Aleksandr Stepanovich Lavinskiy (1776-1844). He was a privy counsellor (tainyy sovetnik) and also a member of the special commission set up to make arrangements for guarding the Decembrists in Siberia.[1] When they arrived in Nerchinsk, he was temporarily absent, and they were received by N.P. Gorlov, his deputy. Both these men had previous connections with the Decembrists: Lavinskiy was a friend of the mother-in-law of Ivan Dmitrievich Yakushkin, Nadezhda Nikolaevna Sheremeteva, while Gorlov had become acquainted with Gavriil Stepanovich Baten'kov in the Masonic lodge Izbrannyy Mikhail in St Petersburg, of which both were members.[2]

The Decembrists found Gorlov kind and sympathetic. He not only had their leg-irons removed (although he had no authority to do so) but allowed them to receive visitors freely. The house where they were quartered attracted many — local officials, merchants, the school-teacher all came to pay their respects and to express sympathy with the exiles. Gorlov's kindness, however, earned him dismissal from his post.

On 30th August instructions were received from St Petersburg to send the eight prisoners to their places of forced labour: Obolenskiy

and Yakubovich were to go to the salt-refinery at Usol'sk, about 67km from Irkutsk on the Angara; Murav'ev, Davydov, and the two Borisovs were sent to the distillery in Aleksandrovsk; while Volkonskiy and Trubetskoy were sent to the distillery at Nikolaevsk.

In his memoirs Obolenskiy records that here, too, they were received kindly. He was afraid at first that they would have to work in the refinery: however, when he and Yakubovich arrived, the manager, Colonel Kryukov, was absent, and no-one gave the prisoners any instructions on their conduct. They were allowed to wander about the prison precincts freely, although still under discreet supervision. When Kryukov returned, he and his daughter entertained them to coffee, first taking the precaution of sending all the servants out of the house in case they spied on him.[3]

On the following day, the prisoners were told (aloud) that they were to chop wood, and given axes; but in a whisper, the policeman issuing these instructions added that the work would be done for them.[4] Obolenskiy thought it better to try to chop a few logs at least but, as on other occasions and in other places of forced labour, the ordinary convicts working alongside the Decembrists took pity on their inexperience and either finished their assignment for them or did the whole job.

The period spent in these places was merely an intermediate stage in their forced labour. Sent off to Siberia hurriedly, they arrived before the arrangements for their imprisonment had been completed. On 10th October all eight were sent to Blagodatsk and their katorga in the Nerchinsk mines began in earnest.

2 Nerchinsk-Blagodatsk

a) The Mines

Although the presence of silver ore in this area was already known in prehistoric times, the advancing Russians had only begun to mine here in the late seventeenth century. The first mine actually went into exploitation in 1704. More mines, widely scattered, and few of them close to the town of Nerchinsk, were gradually opened, until in the 1820s there were ten mines and seven smelting-works. The Nerchinsk area also included the iron-works of Petrovskiy zavod, about 107km (100 versts) away, which produced the iron machinery used in the mines, and the Onon lead mines. The silver ore found here contained a proportion of gold.

At first the work in the mines was carried out by exiled and migrant peasants, with a proportion of forced labour from 1722 onwards. In 1820 there were 1580 individuals doing forced labour in the mines and factories in the area. There were also 1314 children working in conjunction with the mines: boys from the age of 12 were employed in sorting the ore when it was brought out to the surface. The isolated situation of the mines, the wild and desolate nature of the whole area, and the consequent difficulties of transport and supply, combined with the outdated methods of working used in the mines owned by the Kabinet, of which these were part, led to a great variability in their fortunes and to consequent financial losses.[5]

b) Nerchinsk

The town of Nerchinsk had begun its existence in 1656 as one of the series of wooden forts built by the Russians for protection against attack by Mongolian and other enemies. It had been a centre

of the fur trade (Nerchinsk sables were considered to be the best in Siberia) until that declined; it had also been the centre for trade with China until that gradually moved to Kyakhta. Although it was a small place, by 1750 it already had a school (albeit with only 35 pupils). In 1765 the school was amalgamated with the one in Irkutsk, where pupils, besides acquiring the basic skills of literacy, were also taught technical drawing, surveying and naval architecture.

3 Arrival at Blagodatsk

When the first of the Decembrist prisoners arrived at Blagodatsk descriptions of each man were recorded in great detail, even including wound scars. All sharp objects, books and writing materials which they had managed to conceal or obtain surreptitiously were confiscated, as was money. This was returned in small instalments.

The manner in which they were received was in sharp contrast to the politeness and kindness with which they had been treated hitherto in Siberia. Some of the rudeness of the guards may have been due to the need to examine large amounts of personal luggage which one or two of the prisoners had brought with them (See Appendix to this Chapter for a list of Trubetskoy's). Timofey Vasil'evich Burnashev, the manager of the mines, had been instructed by Lavinskiy to treat these prisoners in exactly the same way as any other convicts were treated, but at the same time to ensure that they were kept in good health. He regarded both the instructions and the prisoners frankly as a nuisance:

> Devil take it, what double-faced instructions they give us. On the one hand I'm supposed to use them for work, and on the other I've to look after their health. If it were not for these stupid instructions, I could get rid of them [i.e. let them die from neglect] in a couple of months

he is reported as saying.[6] Several of the Decembrist memoirists comment on his rude and bullying manner.

4 Accommodation

Four of the prisoners were quartered in the houses of "reliable" villagers. The other four lived in a barrack in the village. Obolenskiy described it in his memoirs: the whole complex was about 15m by 3½m (7 sazhen's by 5 arshins) and comprised two log houses, one for the prisoners and one for the guards. In the former was a large Russian stove. The building was divided into small rooms with doors. Obolenskiy's room was just over 2m by 1½m (3 arshins by 2 arshins), the others a little larger.

The four who were living in the villagers' houses were soon going about freely and making friends; but this was reported to Burnashev, and he ordered them to be put into the barrack with the other four Decembrists. From November 1826 these eight men were crammed into filthy and verminous accommodation with scarcely room to turn. In a part of the world where darkness falls at three in the afternoon in winter, they were not allowed candles. They had no idea of what the future had in store for them, and nothing to do in their leisure time but talk, or play chess while there was still enough light.

A guard consisting of an N.C.O. and three soldiers was constantly watching them. But this was not the only duty of the guard: since the prisoners were not allowed matches, the guards had to light the samovar, make tea and cook meals and, as Obolenskiy observed

> in time they became fond of us and were extremely helpful.[7]

5 Working in the Mines

In the Blagodatsk mines the Decembrist prisoners gained their first experience of intense physical labour and were introduced to the hardships of industrial and mining life.

After their journey from Irkutsk they were allowed three days rest. After this they were roused every morning at 5.00 and led to the mine under escort. The shaft where they worked was about 150m deep and badly ventilated. They had to work in a kneeling position after manoeuvring the body into a narrow alcove in the shaft wall so that they could knock the ore out of the face. This was done with a mallet weighing 15 pounds.[8]

Each prisoner was accompanied by a convict fellow-worker. As in Aleksandrovsk and Usol'sk, the convicts often helped the Decembrists to complete their assignments.[9]

At this time the Decembrists were still without their leg-irons, while the convicts working in the same mines had been chosen from those who had committed a second crime and had to wear them. However, when the newly-appointed commander Stanislav Romanovich Leparskiy arrived, he ordered the Decembrists' irons to be replaced. Security arrangements were also tightened up: the Decembrists were now guarded by 12 Cossacks and an N.C.O. In his memoirs E.P. Obolenskiy attributes this change to Leparskiy's fear of a reprimand from higher authorities if the leniency he had shown earlier were to be reported.[10]

The prisoners worked from 5.30—11.00 a.m. During this time each man was expected to produce about 80kg of ore and carry it in baskets to the sorting depot, a distance of about 200m. At the end of the morning's work the prisoners were escorted back to their barrack for dinner.

6 Meals: Formation of the Common Fund

Inside the barrack the prisoners were allowed to take their meals together and to visit one another freely in their spare time. The diet provided by the prison authorities was described by Obolenskiy as "good, but not luxurious". They were given permission to supplement it out of the money which they had brought with them, now in the keeping of the commandant. Here a difficulty arose: while some of the prisoners had no money at all, others were well off. According to the record of prisoners' personal accounts kept by the commandant, Trubetskoy had with him on arrival 300 rubles, while A. and P. Borisov had only 20 rubles between them (but were sent 300 rubles on 23.3.27). Obolenskiy, whose family was very wealthy and owned several estates, arrived with 60 rubles, and received neither money nor letters from his relatives for two years.[11] The Decembrists were paid for their work in the mine at a basic rate of 80 kopeks per month, with deductions of 40k per month for provisions and 1/3k for days off owing to illness etc. The following amounts, for example, were paid during August and 1–19th September 1827: Obolenskiy — 83½k; but Volkonskiy, who suffered from chronic bronchitis, only got 26k.[12] The wives of Decembrist prisoners were officially allowed to have up to 1000r a year sent from home, but ways of circumventing this restriction were easily found. Ekaterina Ivanovna Trubetskaya mentions in a letter to her mother from Krasnoyarsk (9.9.1826) — i.e. before she had even reached Blagodatsk — that she had found out that she could have money sent to her in Irkutsk in spite of the restrictions, and suggests the sum of 12,000r. as an example.[13]

By a unanimous decision of the Decembrist prisoners the money belonging to them was pooled and used for the benefit of all. A.I.

Yakubovich was chosen to take charge of the accounts — and thus the "common fund" (artel') came into being.[14] It was further developed in both Chita and Petrovskiy zavod, and is described fully in Chapter VI.

7 Health

The air of Blagodatsk, polluted by the fumes of lead present in the ground, and the bad ventilation of the mine shafts, were well-known to be harmful. Living and working in these conditions, with the additional hardships of uncertainty about their future, home-sickness and separation from their families, it is not surprising that the health of the Decembrists deteriorated. A contributory factor was the poor diet. Vladimirskiy, head of the medical section at the Nerchinsk complex, examined them soon after their arrival and found that only Andrey Borisov could be given a clear bill of health. His brother Petr was already showing symptoms of the mental instability (pomeshatel'stvo v ume) which was to overwhelm him later; Trubetskoy was still coughing blood, Volkonskiy, A.Z. Murav'ev and Yakubovich all had bronchial trouble, Obolenskiy had scurvy and the attendant toothache, Davydov suffered from an "itch" (chasotka),[15] probably either an allergy or, more likely, caused by the verminous condition of the prison. The list could no doubt be extended. Wounds which had apparently healed began to give trouble again. During September Trubetskoy had 12 days off work, Davydov 17. Murav'ev began to suffer from depression.[16]

During the spring of 1827, as the weather improved, the prisoners were taken for walks — still within the prison precincts, and under Cossack guard. In spite of this their health still continued to deteriorate, and Leparskiy became alarmed. He instructed Burnashev

to transfer the prisoners to work on the surface. Working in pairs, they now had to carry baskets of ore from the exit of the mine to the sorting depot. Each pair had to deliver 30 baskets per shift, a total weight of 2400kg approximately (5 poods per basket). This was lighter work, and it was certainly much pleasanter to be doing it in the open air, but they had to compensate for this improvement by working an additional afternoon shift.[17]

8 Discipline and a Hunger Strike

In February 1827 an incident occurred which threatened to deprive the prisoners of their chief solace — the pleasure and support of one another's company.

The new commandant of the prison was Stanislav Romanovich Leparskiy, a Pole who had been a major-general in the Konnoegerskiy regiment. His appointment to this post dated from 24.7.1826, and he became commandant of the Nerchinsk mines in addition on 29.9.1826. He was allowed to choose his own suite for this, and included his nephew Osip Adamovich Leparskiy.[18] Leparskiy was also a member of the special commission for custody of the Decembrists referred to above. He was of course obliged to comply with official instructions, but there are numerous testimonies in the memoirs and letters of the Decembrists to his kind nature and his respectful treatment of the prisoners — always knocking before he entered the room of a prisoner, for instance. He was even willing to turn a blind eye to minor infringements of regulations: for instance, on seeing on the table such forbidden articles as ink-bottles, he would say "I don't see that".[19] Where more important matters were concerned, such as the wearing of leg-irons, however, he was not

prepared to risk being reported to St Petersburg and perhaps losing his job.

A new supervisor for the prisoners was appointed — M.P. Rik. With the enthusiasm of the proverbial "new broom", this young officer ordered the Decembrists to be locked up in their rooms instead of being allowed to visit one another in their leisure time. He also decided that instead of taking their meals together and being allowed to buy extra provisions, they were in future to eat separately in their rooms and accept whatever prison fare was offered.

The eight unanimously retaliated with a hunger-strike and, in spite of threats of being beaten as well as locked up, they kept it up for two days. At the end of the two days they got back their right to communal meals and leisure. This was the first hunger-strike recorded in the history of forced labour in Siberia.[20]

9 Arrival of Two Wives

February 1827 saw the arrival of Ekaterina Ivanovna Trubetskaya and Mariya Nikolaevna Volkonskaya. They were horrified when they saw the conditions in which their husbands were living. Having no idea that the prisoners were wearing leg-irons, Volkonskaya was so shocked when she saw her husband with them on that she involuntarily sank down on her knees and kissed the irons.[21] On the next day she found the entrance to the mine and, defying a guard who tried to stop her, made her way along the shaft to the face where four of the Decembrists were working. Before the guard caught up with her she managed to pass on some news from home and some letters which she had smuggled past the authorities.[22]

The two women had to live in a small wooden house outside the

prison precincts sleeping on mattresses on the floor. Two visits a week to their husbands, of one hour each, were all that they were allowed. On non-visiting days they used to sit outside the stockade and converse with their husbands and the other Decembrists through gaps between the logs. They did this even when the temperature dropped well below freezing-point.

Perturbed by the poor health and diet of the prisoners, they began, amateurishly and with cookery book in hand, to cook meals for them and take them to the prison. They were doing this at their own expense, a fact of which the prisoners were unaware at the time. Volkonskiy's wife had 700r in assignats[23] with her in addition to the money she had deposited with the prison commandant. (The assignat (assignatsiya) was paper currency introduced by Catherine II in 1769. 1r in silver was equivalent to 3½r in assignats. The assignat was not backed by gold.) When the money finally ran out, Volkonskaya and Trubetskaya began to stint themselves: like peasants they dined on soup and buckwheat porridge and did without supper. This went on until one of the guards found out and told S.G. Volkonskiy. The prisoners immediately decided to stop accepting the extra food.

These two women, brought up in luxury and wealth, learned not only to cook but to mend and sew for their menfolk. At first they had the help of their maids (serfs whom they had brought with them), but these girls began to flirt with the Cossacks, who, according to Obolenskiy, were "fine young men". The prison commandant decided that the girls would have to go home to Russia, and the two ladies did their own housework.

They were not prisoners, and therefore could not be put under any

restrictions such as those which were applied to the Decembrists. They could correspond with relatives and friends in Russia, although their letters were censored by the commandant and by the Third Department in St Petersburg. They were thus able to write on behalf of the men, and also to receive letters and parcels addressed to them but intended for the prisoners. They could also buy provisions, for they had greater freedom of movement than the prisoners. But their importance went far beyond their role of mere amanuensis or cook. There can be no doubt that their presence was crucial in keeping up the morale of the Decembrists. The wives who endured the period of imprisonment and exile with their husbands won the lasting respect and affection of all the Decembrists. And, although this was not a conscious aim, they ensured that the Decembrists were not forgotten in European Russia in spite of official efforts to ring down the curtains on 14th December.

The wives of other Decembrists arrived after the prisoners had been assembled in Chita and accompanied them to Petrovskiy zavod. More is said about them in Chapter VII.

10 An Attempted Escape

Looked at soberly, the idea of trying to escape from a prison such as Nerchinsk, set in the middle of wild mountainous country, seems quite unrealistic. But escapes were sometimes attempted by ordinary convicts, although they did not usually last long. The custom of leaving food and drink on the windowsills of houses was intended to help such fugitives. However hopeless, an escape was plotted by a Decembrist prisoner who arrived in Siberia after the main party. This happened at a time overlapping with their arrival and the depar-

ture of the larger group to Chita.

Four participants of the Chernigov regiment mutiny, Ivan Ivanovich Sukhinov, Venyamin Nikolaevich Solov'ev, Aleksandr Evtikh'evich Mozalevskiy and Andrey Andreevich Bystritskiy, were sentenced after the court-martial at Vasil'kov (Ukraine) to "civil execution" followed by forced labour in Siberia for life. The first lap of their journey to Siberia took them to Moscow. This and the rest of the journey was done on foot. Without proper clothing for such a journey — Sukhinov was still wearing the dressing-gown (khalat) in which he was arrested — and encumbered with irons on their hands as well as their feet, they were treated as ordinary convicts and had to endure the overcrowded and filthy transit prisons (etapy) in which the latter spent the nights. Bystritskiy and Sukhinov became ill on the way to Moscow; after a spell in hospital Sukhinov was well enough to go on, but Bystritskiy had to be left behind.

Leaving Moscow on 1.1.1827, they reached Chita on 12.2.1828, and received a warm welcome from the Decembrists already there. But for the three Chita was only a temporary stop, and on 14.2.1828 they had to go on to Nerchinsk, where they were to work out their life sentences. This part of the journey, also on foot, took a whole month.

From the moment of hearing his sentence, Sukhinov had been quite unable to reconcile himself to it. Hot-tempered and impatient, he had become obsessed with hatred for the authorities and with the idea of vengeance. He arrived in Chita in an embittered frame of mind, and not even the kindness and sympathy of M.N. Volkonskaya and the other wives could do anything to change it. Soon after reaching Nerchinsk he began to plot his escape.

In Nerchinsk at this time the prisoners had rather more freedom of movement than had been allowed to the first eight Decembrists brought there earlier. It was easier for Sukhinov to make contact with some of the ordinary convicts also because he and his two fellow-Decembrists had been classed as such on the journey. The idea of escape appealed to two of the convicts to whom Sukhinov suggested it.

Sukhinov was not thinking only of his own freedom. His complex plan was to raise the Nerchinsk convicts to mutiny, seize arms and ammunition from the prison store, and then go on to Chita to liberate the Decembrist prisoners there, after which they would all escape across the nearby Chinese frontier. Concealing his intentions from Solov'ev and Mozalevskiy who, he felt, would not be in favour of his plan, he persuaded two of the convicts — whom he plied with drink in the process — to join him. Their names were Pavel Golikov and Vasiliy Bocharov. They in turn involved other convicts in the plot.

Solov'ev and Mozalevskiy tried to find out what was going on, as their suspicions were aroused by Sukhinov's frequent meetings with convicts. They also noticed that he was spending money freely, although where he got it is still not clear: the three had pooled what little money they had, but were mystified that his share seemed so large. Sukhinov was becoming more and more evasive and secretive.

On 24th May 1828 one of the convict-conspirators, Kozakov, got very drunk and told the mine manager about the conspiracy. When Golikov and Bocharov found out about this, they lured him into the woods, killed him, cut up his body and buried it. Bocharov ran away, and since Kozakov had disappeared, the mine authorities came to the conclusion that he had also escaped. However, on 13th July a dog belonging to one of the mine officials brought home a human arm and

the murder was discovered. The incident was reported to Nicholas I. He was angered at the lax discipline at Nerchinsk prison, and chose the sentences himself: Sukhinov was to receive 300 strokes of the lash, be branded on the face and be imprisoned for life. However, the Tsar gave Leparskiy discretion to alter the sentences if he thought fit: and in contrast to his usual leniency Leparskiy evidently felt that he now had to inflict harsh sentences in case disciplinary action was taken against himself. He therefore sentenced Sukhinov and the five chief conspirators to execution by shooting. Sukhinov, who was being held in a cell alone, learned about the sentence by accident. Unable to face the humiliation of such an execution, he managed to obtain some arsenic (though how he did this is not known) and tried to poison himself. After two unsuccessful attempts, he hanged himself with the strap that supported his leg-irons. He was 33.

The sentences decided on by Leparskiy were duly carried out. The manner in which this was done is fully in keeping with the gruesome nature of this whole episode: Leparskiy reported to the Tsar that the soldiers carrying out the execution had been unable to shoot to kill because their firearms had first been issued in 1775, and the moving parts were no longer functioning. An officer stabbed Bocharov to death when the shots failed to kill him. The execution took place to the sounds of the screaming of men being lashed in another part of the prison precincts. Solov'ev and Mozalevskiy were transferred to Chita, as it was acknowledged that they had not been involved in the plot.

In his memoirs I.I. Gorbachevskiy quoted a remark which Sukhinov was said to have made several times and which seems peculiarly apt here:

> Our government is not punishing us, but taking revenge on us; the aim of all its persecutions is not to reform us, not [to make us] an example to others, but the personal vengeance of a timid soul.[24]

In September 1827 Leparskiy again visited the Blagodatsk prisoners. It was to tell them that they were to be transferred to the prison in Chita, which was now ready for them. It was the beginning of a most important period of their Siberian imprisonment and exile.

Notes to Chapter III

1 Sibir' i dekabristy. Vyp.I, Irkutsk 1978, p.213.

2 Istoriya Sibiri. M. 1968, Vol.II, p.465.

3 Memuary dekabristov. Severnoe obshchestvo. M. 1981, p.99. (Hereafter Severn. obshch.)

4 ibid. p.100.

5 Istoriya Sibiri. Vol.II, p.392. Kabinet: see Chapter II above.

6 Vospominaniya Bestuzhevykh. M. 1951, p.47.

7 Severn. obshch. pp.105-106.

8 Balabanov, V.F., Dekabristy v Blagodatske in Baykal 1975/6, p.118.

9 Severn. obshch. p.110.

10 ibid. p.111.

11 Chernov, S., Dekabristy v Blagodatske in Dekabristy na katorge i v ssylke. M. 1925, pp.95-96.

12 ibid. p.96.

13 ibid. p.30.

14 Memuary dekabristov. Yuzhnoe obshchestvo. M. 1982, p.88. (Hereafter Yuzhn. obshch.)

15 Chernov, pp.114-115.

16 ibid. p.116.

17 Severn. obshch. p.110.

18 Balabanov, V.F., Dekabristy v chitinskom ostroge in Dal'niy vostok 1972/1, p.139.

19 Yuzhn. obshch. p.107.

20 Severn. obshch. pp.107-108.

21 Zapiski M.N. Volkonskoy in Svoey sud'boy gordimsya my, Mark Sergeev comp. Irkutsk 1977, p.325.

22 ibid. p.326.

23 ibid. p.327.

24 Gorbachevskiy, I.I., Zapiski, pis'ma. M. 1963, p.102. See also Nechkina, M.V., O nas v istorii stranitsy napishut. Irkutsk 1982 (Zagovor v zerentuyskom rudnike (written in 1925)).

Appendix to Chapter III

List of Articles Brought by S.P. Trubetskoy to Blagodatsk 1827

2 gold watches, valued at 800r and 1500r respectively.
various medicines and books (not specified)
1 gold cross, 2 wooden crosses
portrait of his wife
1 gold ring
7 articles of toilet, 2 articles for smoking
folding travel samovar [sic]
3 Russia leather suitcases, 1 canvas suitcase [sukonnyy]
1 sheepskin coat [tulup], 1 fur coat, 1 goatskin (kid) coat
summer and winter greatcoats
suede gloves
overcoat and waistcoat [kamzol']
4 p woollen trousers, 2 summer pairs, 1 p sharovary skutskie ?
2 dressing gowns (summer and winter)
1 jersey
1 elk-skin chest-protector
8 waistcoats, 1 leather belt, 1 cotton cummerbund
1 sable cap
2 p gloves
5 pairs boots of various weights
39 linen shirts, 2 warm ones
9 p underpants, 19 p stockings
11 towels
12 silk handkerchiefs, 18 cotton ones, 4 lawn ones
6 neckerchiefs, 4 cravats [kosynki]
2 table cloths, 14 table napkins
22 items of bedlinen (6 categories)
2 heads sugar
up to 2 lbs. [sic] tea and tobacco

1 Morocco leather case with shaving set (1 Tsaregrad stone hone, 2 English razors, 1 glass soapdish, 1 shaving brush)
2 mahogany cases with writing implements, cutlery and toilet articles. (Glass inkbottle, with silver rim, 1 similar sandbox, 2 pencils in silver tubes, 1 pen with bone penholder, 1 penknife, 1 table knife, 1 table fork, 1 silver teaspoon, 1 bone comb, 2 horn combs, 1 soapdish for shaving, 1 p scissors (small), 1 p scissors (medium), 1 mirror, 1 folding knife with corkscrew)
1 seal with the letters EP
1 gun [Shurka]
1 cartridge case with cartridges
1 iron screwdriver for gun
up to 2 lb. gunpowder
up to 5 lbs small shot
1 Bible

Works of Innokentiy
"Spiritual Healing"
Cookery book
memo book
Collection of medicaments (1 pkt English mint, 5 pkts and 1 bottle of medicine for treating coughing of blood, 1 bottle Hoffmann's Drops, 1 pkt "laxative mixture", 1 pkt sago, 1 pkt arrowroot.
Money: 300 rubles (200 x 50 rubles, and 100 x 25 rubles)

From: Chernov, S., Dekabristy v Blagodatske, p.84 (see note 11 above).

CHAPTER IV: THE DECEMBRISTS IN CHITA

Deeply shaken by the rising of December 1825, Nicholas I wanted the participants to be sent as far away as possible from the capital. Remoteness and dispersal in small groups would, he hoped, ensure that they were forgotten and bring about the end of their influence. His fear of the rebels became obsessive and was to last all his life It led him to reverse the arrangements for their imprisonment almost as soon as they had been decided. To prevent the Decembrists from influencing, for instance, the convicts with whom they came into contact in the mines in Blagodatsk, it now seemed to him better to concentrate the former in one large isolated group. This decision was reinforced during a conversation between the Tsar and A.S. Lavinskiy, the Governor-General of Eastern Siberia, in June 1826, when the latter pointed out that it would be difficult to keep so many prisoners under close supervision in widely scattered and remote places.[1]

A special prison was therefore to be built. The first site considered, at Akatuy, was rejected because its air, polluted like that of Blagodatsk by lead fumes from the mines, made it a notoriously unhealthy place. The final choice was Petrovskiy zavod, but the existing accommodation there was insufficient for such a large group of prisoners. While a new prison was being built, temporary accommodation for the prisoners was found at Chita.

1 Chita

At the time of the Decembrists' arrival (from January 1827 on) Chita, a small village at the confluence of the Chita and Ingoda rivers, was known as Chitinskiy ostrog (because of the old prison

there). It had 49 dwelling-houses, a wooden church, a post-house, several shops and storage buildings, and barracks for the 40 Cossacks stationed there. Unlike Akatuy and Blagodatsk, Chita had no mines and was a healthy place:

> The location and climate of Chita were incomparable... the health of all of us improved greatly there,

Nikolay Vasil'evich Basargin wrote in his memoirs.[2]

Most of the 344 inhabitants were poor. The men were nearly all charcoal-burners who supplied charcoal to the Nerchinsk smelting-works. There was also some grain-growing and fishing.[3]

2 Chita Prison

The prison in Chita was built at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. By 1827 it had fallen into disuse and become dilapidated through neglect, but the structure was still sound, and it was considered quite suitable as temporary accommodation for the Decembrists.

The buildings comprised two log houses rented from local residents (the small prison, malyy kazemat, and "Dyachkov's prison", so called from the name of its owner).[4] Another smaller building was used as a local jail and as a transit prison (poluetap) for convicts on their way to Nerchinsk. An additional larger prison (bol'shoy kazemat) was built during the summer of 1827.[5] One of the Decembrists' first work-assignments was to dig out the foundations for this, but the actual building was done by peasants from the area. The prison complex was surrounded by a high wooden stockade.

3 Guarding the Prisoners

In Chita the prisoners were guarded by the same "Brigade of Veterans" who had guarded them in Blagodatsk. Owing to the shortage

of accommodation, some of the guards had to be quartered in outlying villages.[6] The total number of men guarding the 86 prisoners was 186, including officers. One sentry was posted outside each wall of the prison complex, with two at the gate.

After 1828, when the prisoners were taken outside the prison precincts to work, they were always escorted by a guard, as was the "housekeeper" (khozyain) when he went out to make purchases for his fellow-prisoners (see below No.6). Dr F.B. Vol'f, the only Decembrist with medical qualifications, was also escorted by a guard when he attended patients outside the prison (see below No.16).

4 Arrival of the Prisoners in Chita

The first eight Decembrist prisoners to arrive in Siberia, who had been working in the Blagodatsk mines, were also the first to be transferred to Chita (January 1827). Most of the rest were held meanwhile in various prisons near St Petersburg, and were taken to Chita in groups of three or four. 67 of them arrived in 1827, 8 in 1828 and 7 in 1829.[7]

When the prisoners arrived in Chita, their belongings were closely inspected and, as had been done in Nerchinsk, money, valuables and sharp objects were confiscated. Books — even Bibles initially — were also taken away. The Bibles were returned soon afterwards. Basargin is one of the memoirists who commented that the inspection and inventarising was done "rather rudely".[8]

5 Conditions in the Prison

Even after the completion of the new building (the "large prison") in September 1827 conditions in the rooms were crowded and uncomfortable. The haste and carelessness with which the new accommodation

had been built resulted in a number of defects: for instance the stoves smoked and were not properly insulated from the wooden walls, so that there was a constant fire-risk. The interior of the rooms was very gloomy because the windows were boarded up, except for a narrow strip of glass at the top, which was white-washed. In winter this strip was further obscured by layers of thick ice. The windows could not be opened, and the only way to ventilate the rooms was by opening the outside door into the yard. Thus in winter the prisoners had either to endure the stifling air or freeze.[9] The rooms measured approximately 6m by 3½m (8 arshins by 3½ arshins), and 15 to 20 prisoners were crowded into each one.[10]

At first the only furniture in each room was a large table at which the prisoners ate. As was usual in Siberian prisons (even in Dostoevskiy's day) they sat and slept on narrow shelves (nary) attached to the walls at three levels. Personal belongings were crammed under the lowest one. In January 1828, however, Leparskiy allowed the prisoners to buy themselves beds (at their own expense) and the prison authorities provided smaller tables. There was a little more space available after the departure to their places of settlement of prisoners with short sentences of forced labour, but even then the rooms were still cramped and uncomfortable. In 1828 also those who could afford to do so were allowed to build themselves small houses within the prison area. Seven availed themselves of this opportunity. In summer sleeping outside in tents was allowed, but still within the stockade.[11]

6 Daily Life in the Prison

The prisoners quickly established a daily routine. They took it in turns to prepare the tables for meals and clean up afterwards.

There was no kitchen in the prison, and the cooking had to be done in the kitchen of the nearby house of the manager of the Nerchinsk mines, Semen Ivanovich Smolyaninov. According to the prison regulations, the prisoners were supposed to do this themselves, but the Decembrists found ordinary convicts willing to cook for them in return for a small payment. The prisoners were allowed to take their meals together, and the food was brought to their rooms in large wooden tubs.[12] Because they were only allowed to use spoons, the meat and bread were brought already cut up.

The lack of space was one of the main disadvantages of the prison. Yakushkin mentions that when he and the other men in his room lay on the nary, each had less than 1 metre of space (1 arshin). Falling asleep was difficult, and made more so by the body vermin inescapable in such conditions. Even when the prisoners were moved to the larger new prison building, the table and nary occupied so much space that there was hardly any room to walk between them.[13] This was especially trying when exercise outside was impossible owing to bad weather, and in fact they must have spent a great deal of time sitting down. In good weather they got exercise in the form of traditional Russian games such as babki. The rooms were given names by the prisoners which reflected their admiration for the city-states of mediaeval Rus' — such as Pskov and Novgorod. One was named "Moskva" because most of those living in it came from that city.

7 Food in Chita Prison

All convicts in Siberian prisons, including the Decembrists, received an official allowance of 3 kopeks per day per person, plus about 33kg (2 poods) of flour each per month. This was a mere subsistence amount for a diet of bread, meat, soup and the traditional

Russian buckwheat. Rozen described the prison food as "plain and healthy", and commented

> I was often surprised at the moderation and contentment of those of our comrades who had been accustomed all their lives to having the best cooks and never dined without champagne, but now had no regrets about the past, and were content with soup and porridge (*shchi i kasha* [buckwheat]), washing them down with *kvas* or water...[14]

The Decembrists were fortunate in being able to supplement this diet in two ways:

a) When the wives of some of them had arrived, although they had to live outside the prison, they used to cook food for the prisoners and take it to them, as Volkonskaya and Trubetskaya had done in Blagodatsk. They did this at their own expense, and also provided small luxuries such as chocolate and coffee. (Tea and sugar were not included in the prison diet, and had to be paid for by the prisoners.[15]) Other supplements were also purchased by them: Balabanov quotes from an exclusive contract with Stepan Losev, a local merchant, for supplying provisions to the prisoners in 1827 (he does not say how long they were supposed to last):

> Dairy butter of good quality, unspoiled, at 16 rubles per pood,
> Dried fish, at 3 rubles 50 kopeks,
> Salted *omul'* of good quality, in barrels ... at 118 rubles per thousand,
> Mutton and fat.[16]

(*Omul'* = Arctic-sea whitefish (*Corregonus autumnalis*)

b) Further improvements in the diet became possible when in the spring of 1827 the prisoners were allowed to grow vegetables in the prison precincts. This would have been impossible without the help of the wives. Through them seeds were obtained from Russia, and soon, in spite of the short growing season and the prisoners' inexperience, the garden was producing not only enough vegetables to feed the

prisoners, but also enabled them to give away seeds and produce to needy villagers.

Unsuspected gardening skills and enthusiasm were awakened in some of the prisoners. Volkonskiy proved to be one of the keenest, and in spite of the misgivings of the villagers he managed to grow cauliflowers and other rather delicate vegetables then unknown in Eastern Siberia. Aleksandr Viktorovich Poggio was another keen gardener: in cold frames against the prison wall he even grew asparagus and cucumbers. Everything, according to Basargin, grew to enormous proportions in the fine climate. The villagers' pessimism was probably due to their ignorance of the crops the prisoners set out to cultivate.

8 Evasion of the Censorship

Evasion of the censorship of letters was developed more widely after the Decembrists were moved to Petrovskiy zavod, and later after the end of forced labour, but it had already begun in Blagodatsk. From the moment when M.N. Volkonskaya and E.P. Trubetskaya arrived there and began writing letters on behalf of the Decembrist prisoners, Nicholas I's plan for the complete isolation of the prisoners may be said to have collapsed. The fact that not all the numerous letters written by the wives could possibly have been only on their own behalf cannot have gone unnoticed by Leparskiy, especially because on some days the volume of correspondence was large — one of the wives would write perhaps ten or more letters a day. Leparskiy's discipline, however, was not very severe in some respects and in any case he was in a weak position, for the wives, not being prisoners, were not subject to the same restrictions as the men.

Other ways of evading the censorship were developed: for instance

there was a fairly high turnover rate of serfs. They were sent back to Russia by their owners and employers, the wives, on various pretexts, some rather thin: homesickness, unsuitability for the conditions, or flirting with the guards. They took with them letters and messages and new arrivals brought others back. Again, formal action would have stumbled against the fact that the owners of the serfs were the wives and not the prisoners.[17]

There were other individuals who were prepared to undertake this hazardous letter-carrying. For some the offer led to disaster: a fel'deger' called Zheldybin was arrested when a bag containing a letter from one of the Decembrists and suspected of being Zheldybin's property was found. He was in fact reported for this by another fel'deger', probably out of revenge, for this man himself had been caught with a letter from I.I. Pushchin in his possession; but it was Zheldybin who was sent to prison for a year.[18] Perhaps the most notable incident of this kind during the Chita imprisonment was the case of Filitata Osipovna Smolyaninova, the wife of the manager of the mines. She was distantly related to a Decembrist, I.A. Annenkov, and felt under an obligation to him because of a favour his grandfather had done an ancestor of hers. Whatever the reason may have been, she showed great sympathy for the prisoners, and especially for Annenkov. She not only cooked special delicacies for them, but offered to pass on a letter from Annenkov to his mother, to be taken to St Petersburg by the officer in charge of the silver convoy about to depart. This officer, however, passed the letter on to the Third Department instead of its addressee. Surprisingly, Smolyaninova was put under arrest for only one week for her part in this incident.[19]

9 Work in Chita

In the spring of 1828, as soon as the weather permitted, the prisoners remaining in Chita were able to start working. Since there were no mines there, the work was not strenuous compared to what the first eight prisoners had had to do in Blagodatsk. Indeed, it was so light as to be almost nominal. Nevertheless, for a few of the prisoners it proved difficult, either because of poor health or because they were completely unused to physical labour.

The prisoners had to sweep the streets of Chita, or clean out stables. They also had to shovel up earth and convey it in wheelbarrows to a large ditch which had to be filled in. Rain kept washing the earth away, which earned the ditch the nickname of the "Devil's Grave". This frustrating business continued until the stream which had been causing damage by overflowing was diverted by a dam.[20] If the weather was quite unsuitable for this kind of work, there was grain to be milled on a hand-mill to provide flour for the prisoners' own use. This was done under cover. As before, those who found this work too strenuous were helped by other prisoners, or could pay a guard to do it for them.

The prisoners were taken to work every morning in groups of 16. A guard came to the prison and called out "Gentlemen! To work, please!" As they marched to work they sang loudly. Indeed, a light-hearted atmosphere prevailed at these work-stints. The squads were divided into smaller groups, as there was not enough space for all to work at the same time, and those not working sat on the grass chatting, playing chess or reading. Friends quartered in different parts of the prison could meet here, and wives were allowed to come too.

Work was supposed to be from 8-12 and 2-5 daily, but the prisoners were allowed to work at their own rate. No work was done on Sundays or church holidays.

10 The "Prison Academy"

Even if the Decembrists had been allowed to keep the books which they had brought with them, they would not have been able to make much use of them. The darkness and overcrowding in the prison have already been mentioned. Concentration was made even more difficult by the continual talking and arguing that went on between the prisoners, and not least by the noise made at the slightest movement by the leg-irons, which had to be worn night and day, except for the weekly visit to the bath-house and when the prisoners went to Communion.

For some time the Bibles were the only available reading matter. Writing materials were strictly forbidden. Leparskiy, who had some sympathy for the plight of his charges, if not for their political views, used surreptitiously to lend them copies of the literary and scientific journal Moskovskiy telegraf (published 1825-34) and Russkiy invalid (a military periodical with a literary supplement published 1822-38). He stopped doing this, however, when he heard the prisoners singing their own parody of Zhukovskiy's "Ode on the Death of the Empress Marie Fedorovna".[21]

The prisoners could have obtained cards secretly from the guards, but deliberately chose not to play cards for fear of causing discord amongst themselves.[22]

This left them with only two possible spare-time occupations: playing chess and talking. The combination of circumstances led indirectly to perhaps the most important feature of the Chita period —

the so-called "prison academy". It arose out of the discussions which were themselves a way of satisfying their intellectual and philosophical searchings, the need to re-evaluate the events of the rising and their own attitudes to them, and to analyse the causes of their defeat.

All were in agreement on the main issue — that serfdom was the principal cause of Russia's deplorable condition and had to be abolished. There was agreement, too, on the need to ensure that the struggle in which the Decembrists had failed to achieve their aims was continued by future generations, who would need to be equipped with the necessary education. But the heterogeneous composition of this large group of men as regards age, experience, maturity and personality inevitably led to a disparity of views on the methods of achieving those aims. These differences had already been apparent in the days before the rising. A good many of the prisoners, for instance the members of the Northern and Southern Societies, had either not met before they found themselves imprisoned in Chita together, or had not seen one another since the rising, and some were unaware of the sequence of events. All this had to be put into perspective. Heated arguments arose, especially during the initial period of imprisonment, when many for the first time faced the story of the rising and accusations of subsequent recantation by some of the participants. Recriminations and quarrels were inevitable. M.A. Bestuzhev was quite frank about this: describing this period as a "senseless dream" and a "nightmare", he wrote that in addition to the noise made by the leg-irons there were

> arguments, quarrels, discussions, stories about imprisonment, about the interrogations, accusations

> and explanations, in a word, a seething whirlpool, incessantly gurgling and throwing out splashes of life.[23]

Some of the criticism was inevitably levelled at K.F. Ryleev, who had been the leading figure in the rising. The jaundiced D.I. Zavalishin was especially active, but there were others ready to join in the mud-slinging. This was what led N.A. Bestuzhev to write his memoir of Ryleev later, after the move to Petrovskiy zavod. But this is to anticipate.

Other memoirists, while admitting that there were disagreements, took the view that in order to present a united front these cracks had to be concealed. The fact that for many years after the rising it was forbidden in Russia to mention in public anything or anyone connected with it, or to publish any material on it, and the fact that even after the amnesty in 1856 the few surviving Decembrists were not allowed to reside in either Moscow or St Petersburg, meant that little reliable information emerged. Thus D.I. Yakushkin wrote (in the late 1850s—early 1860s):

> Minor disagreements among our younger folk were eventually smoothed over by the intervention of older comrades, and in general dirty linen was never washed in public.[24]

And Basargin:

> ...The best thing was that among us there were no reproaches.... No-one allowed himself even to mention the conduct [of another Decembrist] during the investigation, although many of us owed our fate to some careless testimony or to a lack of firmness on the part of some comrade. It was as though our undesirable thoughts had all been left behind in the prison [the Peter-Paul Fortress] and only mutual good will was retained.[25]

M.S. Lunin summed it up with his usual directness:

> Political exiles form a milieu outside society. Consequently, they must be either beneath it or above it. In order to be above it, they must be engaged in a common cause, and there must be the most complete agreement between them — at least externally.

(My emphasis, K.E.B.)

At the opposite extreme was Dmitriy Irinarkhevich Zavalishin. His statements, however, must be read with caution. In his memoirs, written in the 1870s, when he was one of the few Decembrists left alive, he reveals himself as a man of colossal self-esteem and vanity, extremely prone to take offence at real or imaginary snubs by other exiles; his frequent insistence that without his efforts as peace-maker, organiser and initiator the prison community would have degenerated into a sordid backbiting assembly strikes the reader as exaggerated. While his accounts of actual events can be corroborated by reference to the accounts of contemporaries, his assessment of personalities is questionable. This mistrust is reinforced by remarks made by M.A. Bestuzhev about Zavalishin having informed Alexander I about the existence of the secret societies while at the same time continuing contacts with their members (although not himself a member of any).[26]

There was a noticeable polarisation between devout Christians and the quite sizeable group of materialist thinkers. This is mentioned by Aleksandr Petrovich Belyaev: such conflicts, according to him, were inevitable owing to the numerous religious and philosophical ideas represented. There were among the prisoners in Chita

> many atheists, some sceptics and some systematic materialists. ...these arguments arose from some of them making fun of the beliefs, the observances of religious festivals, the mysteries, fasts, church rituals...[27]

Religious meetings were sometimes held on Sundays, arranged by the prisoners themselves. They were not prayer meetings or services as such: those attending them used to read aloud from French and other west European religious writers, usually in their own translation, or they read the sermons of prominent Russian church figures. They were nicknamed the "Congregation" (Kongregatsiya). The most prominent member was Pavel Sergeevich Bobrishchev-Pushkin, who until his imprisonment in the Peter-Paul Fortress had been a convinced materialist, but had a change of heart during his first months there.

Others who attended the meetings of this deeply religious (Orthodox) group were Nikolay Aleksandrovich Kryukov, Mikhail Mikhaylovich Naryshkin, Evgeniy Petrovich Obolenskiy, Sergey Petrovich Trubetskoy and D.I. Zavalishin. Although being of Baltic origin, A.E. Rozen was a Lutheran; he also gave readings at the meetings. M.S. Lunin, however, was a devout Roman Catholic and in religious matters kept to himself.

Former members of the Society of United Slavs, many of whom were materialists, also kept themselves to themselves and did not hold gatherings. After the merging of the Society with the Southern Society, which took place only after much misgiving on the part of some of the members, the adherents of the United Slavs did not attain great prominence in the larger movement. Many were poor and some were not as well-educated as their fellow-prisoners. They were distinguished by their loyalty to their convictions and to one another. The founder of the Society of United Slavs, P.I. Borisov, was one of the most respected members of the prison community. In general, it should not be thought that at this stage there was anything like a permanent rift between the religious groupings and the materialists.

Many of the Decembrists had had a far better education than their contemporaries among the Russian aristocracy, but some had simply been too young to have had the same opportunities for study. The "prison academy" arose both out of the need to ensure an educated generation to take over the struggle for political progress, and from the natural curiosity and need for intellectual stimulation felt by the prisoners. It brought to light the extraordinary variety of intellectual interests and practical ability represented among them. Lectures, discussions, demonstrations of technical skills now became the main spare-time occupation.

The versatile and gifted N.A. Bestuzhev, a former naval officer, lectured on naval history. K.P. Torson and M.K. Kyukhel'beker described their travels in various parts of the world, and also spoke on the Russian financial system. Aleksandr Osipovich Kornilovich and Mikhail Matveevich Spiridov both had a detailed knowledge of Russian mediaeval history. Ferdinand Bogdanovich Vol'f taught chemistry, physics and anatomy. Nikita Mikhaylovich Murav'ev discussed military strategy, illustrating his talks with his large collection of maps. (I have seen no explanation of how he obtained them or how he managed to avoid their being confiscated, K.E.B.) Higher and applied mathematics were the subjects taught by Fedor Fedorovich Vadkovskiy and Bobrishchev-Pushkin. Aleksandr Ivanovich Odoevskiy not only lectured on Russian literature, but was an outstanding poet, always ready to extemporise a poem to fit the occasion ("His lyre was always tuned" as A.E. Rozen remarked). Rozen himself composed and recited metric versions of the Psalms and spoke on the Epistles of St Paul, and he and Bobrishchev-Pushkin made up fables in verse. Some of the younger men who had not yet acquired the knowledge of

foreign languages which was commonplace in Russian aristocratic society of the time welcomed the chance to make up for this now — the languages which were taught by various members of the prison community included Dutch and the classical languages as well as the more usual French and German.

In 1828 permission was given to the wives to order books and subscribe to journals, and they were kept busy passing on requests for the most varied items: French and German dictionaries, books on Russian history, entomology, vegetable-growing and many other subjects. All the books had to be inspected by Leparskiy, who then inscribed them "Read by S.R. Leparskiy". Eventually he merely wrote "Seen by..." apparently because he could not keep up with the number of books received.

A sizeable library was built up, and all the prisoners had access to it. Nikita Mikhaylovich Murav'ev made an important contribution to it by having his father's extensive library sent from St Petersburg, and Volkonskaya and Trubetskaya contributed their own books. Some writers, including Pushkin, sent their works. A sketch of the interior of a room in Chita prison made in 1828 by Nikolay Petrovich Repin shows bookshelves with rows of books.

From Volkonskaya's letters we know that she requested books on mechanics, geometry, Russian history, the history of medicine and also the novel "Yuriy Miloslavskiy" (1829) by Mikhail Nikolaevich Zagoskin, popular at the time.[28] A large parcel of books ordered before the departure to Chita was sent on to her and included the works of Racine, Corneille, Voltaire, some dictionaries, and also "Gil Blas" and "Don Quixote", 80 volumes in all.[29]

11 Practical Skills and Activities

Some of the practical activities arose out of immediate needs: it was extremely difficult to buy or have made in Chita such things as clothing, household items or footwear.

> There were no craftsmen in Chita at all, or if there were, they were so bad, so lazy and so drunk that when we left our scanty stocks of materials with them we were still without clothing. We set up workshops for various trades ourselves.[30]

In any case, many of the prisoners had to be economical with their money. Also, when items requested by the wives were delivered from Russia, they were frequently found to be damaged, and indeed sometimes they were destroyed or stolen on the way. Replacements were then put into the box, and it was labelled "Found damaged and repacked". The replacements were not always to the liking of the recipient.

In the circumstances, skills had to be developed quickly, and the prisoners showed the greatest ingenuity in doing so. Pavel Dmitrievich Mozgan, Anton Petrovich Arbuzov and Evgeniy Petrovich Obolenskiy learned how to cut and tailor clothes. M.A. Bestuzhev and Petr Ivanovich Falenberg made and repaired footwear and caps. Petr Fedorovich Gromnitskiy did carpentry. Konstantin Petrovich Torson was a skilled mechanic. A.I. Borisov and D.I. Zavalishin did bookbinding. Ivan Ivanovich Gorbachevskiy cut his fellow-prisoners' hair. N.A. Bestuzhev made several clocks and presented one of them to A.G. Murav'eva in gratitude for her help in obtaining the necessary parts for it from Russia. He and P.I. Falenberg constructed a sundial in the prison yard. So much practical activity required space; a small workshop was built in the prison yard and as activities increased and Leparskiy allowed a gradual relaxation of discipline, access was extended to all prisoners.

12 Other Occupations

Further relaxations of discipline allowed by Leparskiy on his own initiative improved the quality of the prisoners' lives:

a) Music

Among the Decembrist prisoners were several excellent (amateur) musicians. Fedor Fedorovich Vadkovskiy, Aleksey Petrovich Yushnevskiy, Petr Nikolaevich Svistunov and Nikolay Aleksandrovich Kryukov formed a string quartet and gave recitals, notably on the occasion of a dinner on 30th August 1828 (St Alexander's Day). It was to celebrate the name-day of the 15 Aleksandrs, 3 Aleksandras, and ten others, men and women, who had patronymics from this name. Yushnevskiy not only played the violin, but was a brilliant pianist (he had been a pupil of John Field in Moscow), and had his piano sent from St Petersburg. Svistunov played the cello well and also organised a choir. Some of the other prisoners played the guitar and the flute. The necessary instruments and two more pianos were all sent by relatives of the prisoners from Russia. M.N. Volkonskaya, who was passionately fond of music and had a beautiful singing voice, had been overjoyed on arriving in Blagodatsk to find that, unknown to her, her clavichord had been packed up and strapped to the back of her carriage on the instructions of her sister-in-law, Zinaida Volkonskaya, from whose house she had left for Siberia. It was a source of great pleasure and consolation to her all the time of her exile. The two pianos were housed in another small building put up for the purpose in the prison precincts; it was used for music practice according to a rota to avoid disturbing prisoners in the main buildings. The informal music-making was also enjoyed by the people of Chita, who used to stand outside the stockade listening to it.

b) Art

The chief exponent of art was N.A. Bestuzhev. It was in Chita that he began painting the portraits (in water-colour) of his fellow-prisoners in order to have a record of their likenesses. As officially no portraits of any Decembrists could be made or circulated, he was obliged at this time to work clandestinely. The materials were obtained, like everything else, by the wives. The result was that an almost complete record of the prisoners, at least of those in Chita, came to exist. N.A. Bestuzhev also painted a number of water-colour views of the prison and local landscapes. (The greater part of this collection, after many vicissitudes, is now in the possession of N.S. Zil'bershtein, the historian and authority on the Decembrists, author of Nikolay Bestuzhev — khudozhnik, M. 1977, in which most of the water-colours are reproduced.)

13 "Housekeeping" Arrangements

In order to organise their "domestic" affairs, the Decembrists were allowed in 1828 to elect one of their number as " housekeeper" (khozyain). This was normal practice in Siberian convict prisons. The "housekeeper" had the privilege of being allowed to go out of the prison in daytime (but under guard) to buy provisions and other items required by the prisoners. The money was obtained from the prisoners' common fund on application to the commandant, but the "housekeeper" was allowed to use his own discretion in deciding what to spend it on. Leparskiy did not enquire too closely into this, although the prisoners were supposed to render an account to him.

Two prisoners were elected to be responsible for the kitchen garden, and two more for each room in the prison. The latter's duties were to see that the rooms were kept clean, to prepare the

tables for meals and clean up afterwards — not a pleasant task, since there was usually no hot water. They also had to see that the samovars were lit before meals. In all this they were assisted by boys from the village, who did the cleaning, fetched the cooked meals from the kitchen, ran messages and did other errands. These boys, called kamorniki, were paid a small wage from the common fund.[31]

Ivan Semenovich Povalo-Shveykovskiy, the first to be elected as "housekeeper", proved disappointingly inefficient. There were so many complaints about his management and his meanness with food supplements that he was replaced, after a unanimous vote, by A.E. Rozen, who kept his job until the prisoners were moved to Petrovskiy zavod.

14 Medical Care and Health

a) The Prisoners

There was only one fully-qualified doctor among the Decembrist prisoners in Siberia — Ferdinand Bogdanovich Vol'f, formerly staff-surgeon to the General Staff of the Second Army. By all accounts he was an extremely skilful and devoted doctor. A doctor had been sent from Irkutsk to look after the health of the Decembrists, but he proved to be incompetent. It was Leparskiy, whose own health was indifferent, who first sought Vol'f's professional services when he became very ill. Vol'f was reluctant to treat him in case anything went wrong and he was blamed, in which case his position as a katorzhnik practising his profession unlawfully might have become extremely difficult. His proposed compromise — that the official doctor should administer the treatment under his (Vol'f's) instructions — was accepted by Leparskiy who, fortunately for Vol'f, made a good recovery. After this Leparskiy wrote to Benkendorf strongly commend-

ing Vol'f. Benkendorf was so impressed that he sent instructions to Leparskiy that all Vol'f's prescriptions were to be accepted and that he was to be allowed to practise.[32] Vol'f was still a little reluctant to do so, and used to ask Murav'ev to go in his stead (according to Yakushkin, Murav'ev, who had a little medical knowledge, "loved doctoring people"). Eventually Vol'f relented, and in the prevailing shortage of doctors, good or bad, in Eastern Siberia, his skill made him widely known, and he was asked to attend the sick outside as well as inside the prison; in spite of the official approval of his work, however, he still had to be escorted by an armed guard when he attended patients.

Vol'f was assisted by several other prisoners with some medical skill in addition to A.Z. Murav'ev: Konstantin Gustavovich Igelstrom, Zavalishin, Kryukov and also E.I. Trubetskaya all helped. Frolov dispensed medicines.[33] Neither Vol'f nor any of his helpers accepted any payment for their services.

A.G. Murav'eva was able to obtain medicines through her mother-in-law, Ekaterina Fedorovna Murav'eva, who used to send for them to London and Paris as well as obtaining them in Russia. She also sent items of surgical equipment, and A.G. Murav'eva set up a small sick-bay in the prison.

b) Children Born in Chita and Petrovskiy zavod Prisons

Although the climate of Chita suited the adult prisoners, it was too harsh for some of the children born to Decembrist prisoners' wives, and there was also a lack of suitable maternity facilities even for that time. Taking the period of the Chita and Petrovskiy zavod imprisonment together, a total of 25 pregnancies occurred, of

which 7 ended in miscarriages or still-births. Of the children born alive, 4 died in infancy.[34]

15 The Common Fund (artel')

The daily subsistence allowance paid to the prisoners by the government was the same as that paid to any other convicts in Siberian prisons — 3 kopeks each in assignats, plus the monthly allowance of 33kg (2 poods) of flour each. To pay for the supplements mentioned in No.7 of this chapter, the common fund already started in Blagodatsk was continued in Chita.

Some of the prisoners whose families were wealthy were able to have considerable sums of money sent by their relatives. This was done through the wives or sometimes through secret channels, in which case it was done without the knowledge of the prison authorities. Amongst the wealthiest were N.M. Murav'ev and his brother Aleksandr, who between them were said to receive up to 40,000 rubles in assignats a year.[35] About half of the prisoners, including former members of the Society of United Slavs, came from impoverished aristocratic families who were able to send them very little money, or in some cases nothing. Others were neglected by their families for various reasons, or simply had no relatives.

The artel' was not only of practical use, it also helped to avoid any embarrassment which might have been felt by the poorer prisoners who could not afford the extra comforts enjoyed by the wealthy, and the existence of a "caring" organisation undoubtedly sustained their morale. It also helped to preserve the unity of the community.

Each contributed what he could afford. The amounts obviously varied greatly. Since the prisoners were not allowed to handle or

possess cash, the fund, like all moneys belonging to the prisoners or their wives, was held on their behalf by the prison authorities. The son of S.I. Smolyaninov, Evgeniy, was put in charge of the prisoners' accounts,[36] each kept separately. When money was required, the wives, who alone were allowed to have cash, applied to Evgeniy Smolyaninov for the sum required.

The fund was further developed in Petrovskiy zavod, where an elaborate set of rules was compiled, and these rules are to be found in the Appendix to Chapter VI.

16 Some Negative Aspects of Life in Chita Prison

The atmosphere of comradeship and mutual support which, in spite of the disagreements referred to above, prevailed in Chita prison, the light-hearted way in which the concept of "forced labour" was interpreted, and the gradual relaxation of discipline permitted by Leparskiy, make it easy to see the Chita period and indeed the whole period of katorga (except for Blagodatsk) in a falsely euphoric light. There was a sense of purpose in the activities of the "prison academy" — and there were dark shadows as well.

First and foremost among the latter were of course the stresses attendant on the reality of imprisonment, the physical discomfort and hardship, the sense of defeat, and the separation from families and friends, which affected all the Decembrists to some degree. But there were other factors: even after the easing of discipline in 1828 the prisoners were still not allowed to communicate directly with anyone outside the prison. The letters written by the wives were not always delivered to the addressees, if the Third Department in St Petersburg decided they were unsuitable. In fact this censorship of letters continued even after the prisoners had been allowed to settle

in exile and were officially permitted to conduct their own correspondence. In a letter to I.I. Pushchin and E.P. Obolenskiy, I.I. Gorbachevskiy wrote:

> It disgusts me to be writing to you through the hands of the government when I would like to talk to you with all the frankness of a soul in torment... Please tell me what I can write to you when our letters are read everywhere? It simply makes me rage and despair; and what a lot of news I could give you, what a lot of consolation I could get from you... if I could talk to you as frankly as I would like.[37]

The prisoners were forbidden to have any literary works published in Russia or elsewhere. Nevertheless, several of them made plans to publish an almanac of poems written in Chita prison. The contents were to be anonymous because of the restrictions imposed. It was to be called "Summer Lightning" (Zarnitsa). However, the project fell through because permission could not be obtained.[38]

17 End of Forced Labour for Some Prisoners

In 1828 twelve of the prisoners whose sentences of forced labour were only two years, commuted to one year, departed to their places of settlement. They were:

Ivan Borisovich Avramov
Aleksandr Fedorovich von Briggen
Aleksey Ivanovich Cherkasov
Grigoriy Ivanovich Chernyshev
Sergey Ivanovich Krivtsov
Vladimir Nikolaevich Likharev
Nikolay Fedorovich Lisovskiy
Vasiliy Karlovich Tizengauzen
Vladimir Sergeevich Tolstoy
Pavel Fomich Vygodovskiy
Andrey Vasil'evich Ental'tsev
Nikolay Aleksandrovich Zagoretskiy.

18 Removal of Leg-irons

In 1828 also, at long last, the leg-irons which had been such a trial to the prisoners were removed. Leparskiy was told to remove

them from those "whom he considered to be deserving" and decided that this applied to all the prisoners. The irons were handed over to Smolyaninov to keep, but some of the prisoners asked permission to retain a few links. These they forged into rings, covering them with gold or silver for which some of the women sacrificed their own rings. These rings made from the leg-irons were much cherished by those to whom they were given, and indeed there was quite a fashion for them in the area where the Decembrists lived.

Notes to Chapter IV

1 Vospominaniya Bestuzhevykh. M.K. Azadovskiy ed. M. 1951, p.145. (Hereafter Vosp. Best.)

2 Memuary dekabristov: Yuzhnoe obshchestvo. M. 1982, p.73. (Hereafter Yuzhn. obshch.)

3 Sheshin, A.B., Dekabrist K.P. Torson. Ulan-Ude 1980, p.109. Rozen, A.E., Zapiski dekabrista. Irkutsk 1985, p.224. (Hereafter Rozen.)

4 Balabanov, V.F., Dekabristy v chitinskom ostroge in Dal'niy Vostok, 1972/11, p.146. (Hereafter Balabanov.)

5 Rozen, p.228.

6 Balabanov, p.141.

7 ibid. p.142.

8 Yuzhn. obshch. p.70.

9 Yakushkin, I.D., Zapiski, stat'i, pis'ma. M. 1951, p.108. (Hereafter Yakushkin.)

10 Yuzhn. obshch. p.70.

11 Balabanov, p.148; Rozen, p.231.

12 Balabanov, pp.144-145.

13 Yuzhn. obshch. p.71.

14 Rozen, p.232.

15 Balabanov, p.144.

16 ibid. p.145.

17 Dekabristy na katorge i v ssylke. M.K. Azadovskiy et al. eds. M. 1925, p.43.

18 ibid. pp.58-60.

19. Yuzhn. obshch. p.84.

20 Yakushkin, p.120.

21 Vosp. Best. p.151.

22 Rozen, p.225.

23 Vosp. Best. pp.150-151.

24 Yakushkin, p.112.

25 Yuzhn. obshch. p.74.

26 Vosp. Best. p.473 (letter to M.I. Semevskiy, one of the earliest chroniclers of the Decembrist rising).

27 Belyaev, A.P., Zapiski dekabrista o perezhitom i perechuvstvovannom. SPb. 1882, p.227.

28 Pamyati dekabristov. F.A. Kudryavtsev, S.F. Koval' eds. Irkutsk 1975, pp.69-71.

29 ibid. p.66.

30 Vosp. Best. p.175.

31 Balabanov, p.175; Yuzhn. obshch. p.80.

32 Lorer, I.I., Zapiski dekabrista. Irkutsk 1984, p.145.

33 Rozen, p.262.

34 Yakushkin, p.137.

35 ibid. p.232.

36 Balabanov, p.145.

37 Gorbachevskiy, I.I., Zapiski i pis'ma. M. 1963, p.144.

38 Balabanov, p.144.

CHAPTER V: FROM CHITA TO PETROVSKIY ZAVOD

During the summer of 1830 rumours were circulating among the Decembrists in Chita prison that an amnesty was about to be announced. They proved to be wrong, and instead Leparskiy was instructed to organise the removal of the prisoners to the new prison in Petrovskiy zavod, about 430 miles west of Chita. The building, started in 1828, was not quite completed.[1] Nevertheless, the move took place in August-September.

The overcrowding in Chita prison had not been greatly relieved by the departure of those prisoners with a short sentence of katorga (see No.17 Chapter IV, above). Those who remained had become accustomed to this and the other discomforts of prison life, and felt considerable regret at leaving, especially as some disturbing rumours about the conditions in the prison at Petrovskiy zavod had reached them.[2]

The people of Chita, too, regretted the move: this was obvious from the tears they shed on the day of the prisoners' departure.[3] They had not only become attached to the Decembrists for their personal qualities, but had also incidentally benefited from their presence. Before 1827 Chita had been a poor place, but the wives of the Decembrists had spent money freely on food and other items, and now this source of income was aboutto dry up. On the other hand, there would be gains: the people of Chita would be allowed to occupy the houses built for the prison commandant and his staff, as well as those put up by some of the prisoners' wives.[4] On the whole, though, the inhabitants of Chita feared a return to their former poverty. Indeed, M.A. Bestuzhev mentions that this is exactly what happened.[5]

1 Organisation of the Journey

Organised with military thoroughness by Leparskiy and his staff, the move was accomplished smoothly, although it was necessarily slow, taking in all 46 days. Because the post stations along the route usually consisted only of the post-house and one or two dwelling houses, the prisoners were divided into two groups. They left Chita on 7th and 9th August respectively, each escorted by armed foot-soldiers and mounted Cossacks. Mounted Buryats, armed with bows and arrows, hovered round the periphery of the groups and acted as guides. The first group was commanded by Leparskiy's nephew, Osip Adamovich, the second one by Leparskiy himself.

These two travelled in their own carriages, but most of the prisoners walked. Their belongings were transported by horse and cart, one to each two men, and any of the prisoners who felt unfit to walk could take a ride on one of these. There was only one exception: M.S. Lunin, still suffering more than the others from the effects of wartime wounds, was allowed to make the whole journey in his own carriage. He travelled all the time with the hood up, invisible and hardly ever looking out, even sleeping in the carriage at night.

The wives of Decembrists without children were allowed to accompany their husbands in their own carriages and at their own expense. Those who had children went by post-chaise, but of course they too had to make some overnight stops. Most travelled all the way without incident, but Pauline Annenkova, who had two children, aged eighteen months and six weeks, with her, was shocked to learn on the next day that the family in whose house they had spent an untroubled night were in fact notorious brigands and murderers.[6]

2 Halts

During the day, short halts were made once or twice. Overnight halts began at varying times, sometimes early in the afternoon, and depended on the distance covered in each lap and its relative degree of difficulty. Every few days there were day-long halts, allowing the prisoners two consecutive nights in one place. Fifteen such day-long halts were made in all.

The location of both daytime and overnight halts was chosen by the Leparskiys and had not been planned in advance. The problem of accommodation was solved by ordering the Buryats in the area to supply yurts for the prisoners. These traditional homes of the Buryats and other Asiatic tribes consisted of a dome of thick felt supported by a central pole, the whole structure set up on a wooden platform. They could be dismantled for transport. The felt was proof against the sometimes strong winds prevalent in Transbaykalia, but not against the persistent heavy rain which the Decembrists sometimes had to endure. In cold weather a bonfire could be lit inside the yurt. The smoke escaped through a gap at the top, but in windless weather it hung around at a low level and added to the discomfort of those inside.[7]

In order to make a start as soon as the instructions were received, Leparskiy had requisitioned the yurts a whole month in advance. Some of the Buryats who supplied them had come a long distance. They were not allowed to go away, and had to wait until the word came to start.[8]

Four or five men slept in each yurt, with a guard posted outside each one. A separate yurt was provided for the officers, and also for the commandants, placed at a distance from the rest. Most of the

men slept on the floor, but those resourceful ex-navy officers, N.A. Bestuzhev and K.P. Torson, rigged up hammocks for themselves and their companions, and had even brought along folding tables and chairs.[9]

3 Feeding the Prisoners During the Journey

Each group was allowed to elect a *starosta*, whose main duty was to attend to the feeding of his fellow-prisoners. The first group elected Aleksandr Nikolaevich Sutgov, while the second chose Rozen. The *starosta* and an assistant chosen from the soldiers and referred to as *kashevar* left two hours ahead of the rest of the group, and by the time the latter caught up with them, they had a meal ready. The *starosta* and his assistant travelled on a cart, on which they also transported a field-kitchen and other equipment. Sometimes they had to rig up a shelter of branches when there was a strong wind. They were accompanied by an armed escort.[10]

Most of the supplies for these meals were brought from Chita, but some were bought on the way (Shteyngeyl' mentions meat being bought[11]).

During the short daytime halts, a kind of picnic atmosphere prevailed, with refreshments handed round by the ladies — at their own expense. Such delicacies as cold roast veal or chicken are mentioned, prepared by the wives in advance. Some of the men had even managed to get a supply of vodka — strictly forbidden in prison — enough for "a measure each". Since each of the groups numbered about thirty men, this seems to have been a considerable feat of undercover organisation.[12]

4 Discipline and Morale

Although the journey was a military-style operation, planned by

military men and carried out with an escort of soldiers, the participants were not expected to march along like soldiers. Leparskiy showed his trust in, and understanding of, his charges by making considerable relaxations in the discipline. That he did so unofficially is suggested by the instructions that were sent round the second of the two groups on one occasion when a fel'deger' arrived unexpectedly. No visits to other yurts were to be made. However, far from being on a visit of inspection, the fel'deger' had brought a letter from St Petersburg giving S.G. Volkonskiy official permission (obtained by M.N. Volkonskaya's parents) to return to Chita to be with his wife because she was in the last stage of her pregnancy.[13]

The men were allowed to walk along at their own speed. Occasionally some of the more energetic ones found that they had outstripped the rest. All that happened then was that an officer rode after them and politely asked them to wait for the others.[14] During overnight stops, for which the Leparskiys took care to choose agreeable places, preferably with a stream near by and a pleasant view, the prisoners were allowed to visit one another freely, and husbands and wives could be together all the time.[15] (Even on these occasions, however, Lunin stayed in his carriage by choice.)

For these men, most of them still young, this opportunity to be out in the open air after being confined for so long in their prison in Chita, and to be able to see far into the distance across what was for the most part attractive scenery, was like a holiday. Although there were inevitable complaints of tiredness, wet clothes after rain and other minor discomforts, they seem to have enjoyed each day. Roused at dawn by a drum-roll, they set off cheerfully, although conscious that their "freedom" was temporary and illusory.

Spirits were high from the start: N.V. Basargin and P. Annenkova both describe the "fantastic" clothes sported by the men in the second group — more reminiscent of a carnival procession than a group of "state criminals" sentenced for life:

> We killed ourselves laughing at the costumes and the comical procession. It was usually led by Zavalishin wearing a round hat with a huge brim and a kind of black robe of his own invention, rather like a Quaker coat... Behind him came Yakushkin in a short jacket à l'enfant, Volkonskiy in a lady's fur-trimmed jacket... Some wore Spanish mantillas...[16]

5 How Time Was Spent During the Halts

In addition to the usual tea-drinking and conversation, the prisoners also played chess and draughts, and there were books and newspapers in the luggage. German and French newspapers also reached them during the journey. These were included in the subscriptions taken out in Chita by the wives, and were sent after them by the authorities remaining there.

N.A. Kireev and N.A. Bestuzhev took the opportunity to make some sketches of the landscape, while A.I. and P.I. Borisov, Ferdinand Bogdanovich Vol'f and I D. Yakushkin continued the botanising and insect-collecting which they had already begun in Chita. During one of these halts A.I. Odoevskiy composed the poem

> What are these nomads' encampments, whose dark shapes
> we can see among the flames of the campfires?
>
> These are young men going into imprisonment
> For Holy Rus'.
>
> For Holy Rus' [they will endure] imprisonment and execution,
> [and achieve] joy and glory,
>
> Cheerfully we will lay down our lives,
> For Holy Rus'.

(Chto za kochev'ya cherneyutsya...)

6 Weather and Scenery

Throughout this journey the weather was extremely variable, heavy rain and sleet sometimes making the road muddy and the going difficult. At times it was pleasantly sunny, but a reminder of the early onset of winter in Siberia came when the temperature dropped below freezing point at night; and when the journey was almost over, at Mugor-Tebir, near Verkhneudinsk, an extra day's halt had to be made because the road was blocked by heavy snow.[17]

The pleasure of being able to see beyond the prison stockade heightened the Decembrists' sensitivity to the landscapes they passed. The diarists especially noted the changes from the fairly arduous crossing of the tip of the Yablonovyy Ridge near Chita, past lakes, across marshes and rivers, over hills covered with birch and pine woods. They noted the many and various wild flowers. The wild mountain scenery gradually changed to flatter, lower-lying terrain with well-tended farmland, leaving behind the Buryats and their nomadic life.

7 The Decembrists and the Buryats

One of the most important features of this journey was that during it the Decembrists had their first real contacts with the Buryats. One Buryat was attached to each yurt to act as a servant for the occupants during the stops.[18] Mounted Buryats escorted the two groups, and were accompanied by their families in light carriages. They had been warned to have nothing to do with these prisoners, who, they were told, were "dangerous criminals" and "wizards".[19] They certainly kept their distance at first, but eventually their curiosity proved too strong and they began to come closer. Gradually they gained enough confidence to talk to the prisoners, especially after making the discovery

that these supposed "wizards" were in reality cheerful and friendly young men. In addition to the services performed by the "servants", they began to offer help in other small ways, such as carrying the Decembrists' coats or pipes etc. (Pipes in those days were sometimes a yard long.) Most of them knew no Russian — or pretended to know none — but a few were able to act as interpreters.

The Buryats' curiosity centred on the mysterious Lunin, whom they took to be the "chief criminal" of them all. On looking out of his closed carriage on one occasion Lunin found it surrounded by silent Buryats respectfully waiting for him to emerge. When he asked what they wanted, their interpreter asked why Lunin had been exiled.

> "Do you know your Taisha [= commander]?" asked Lunin.
> "Yes, we do."
> "And do you know the Taisha who is higher than your Taisha and can put him into my carriage and finish him off?"
> "We do."
> "Well, then, know that I wanted to put an end to his power, and that's why I was exiled."

The Buryats were satisfied with this answer and went away.[20]

Other contacts with the Buryats and the Decembrists' reactions to them are described by some of the memoirists and the two diarists:

a) M.A. Bestuzhev had many conversations with Buryats either through an interpreter or with the help of a dictionary he had begun to compile while still in Chita (where there were few opportunities for meeting them). He encouraged them to tell him their traditional stories and sing songs.[21]

b) On 27th August the mother of the taisha and her grandson visited the Decembrists' encampment briefly. She was presented by them with a pair of slippers, while the boy was given a fishing-rod. Shteyngeyl' mentions that the previous taisha had held the rank of 8th class in the

Russian civil service (according to this visitor), but he says nothing about how this was acquired or whether the taisha had held any kind of post. Shteyngeyl' also mentions that the "chief taisha" of the Buryats had the right to mete out corporal punishment to other taishas.[22]

c) Shteyngeyl', always an enthusiastic teacher, spent some time trying to persuade the Buryat assigned to him of the benefits of being literate, at which the Buryat, named as Dunduk, "grinned with pleasure at hearing truths which were new to him".[23]

d) Some of the Buryats showed a keen interest in the Decembrists' chess-playing. One of them, Zaisan, a member of the taisha's suite, was invited to play against one of the prisoners. Zaisan not only won, but showed an appreciation of the finer points of the game, and was critical of some of his opponent's moves.[24] He explained that the Buryats had learned the game from the Chinese long ago.

e) On another occasion the Decembrists had a meeting with the heir to the khan (sic). He was a young boy, heir to a kingdom of 60,000, and was riding along in a carriage drawn by six horses. He was dressed in a green silk coat and a cap trimmed with beaver fur and pale blue bugles. Round his neck he wore a medal on the ribbon of the Order of St Anne, and by his side hung a silver-handled sabre. He stopped to talk to the Decembrists, and during a halt gave them an exhibition of his hunting skill, shooting down a running stag [reindeer] (released from the Buryats' herd?) with his bow and arrow. He presented the Decembrists with the dead animal, and went off, well pleased with their gift of tobacco.[25]

f) The Decembrists were taken to see a shaman (witch-doctor). On this occasion the taisha was also present. The time and place of the

meeting are not mentioned by any of those who describe it. The presence of the taisha possibly had an inhibiting effect on the shaman, for, as Shteyngeyl' wrote in his diary of the journey

> he hopped about a little, sang his mendu, mendu [the Buryats' name for themselves], his assistant shook his bells ... and the silly farce was over. We noticed that the taisha was laughing, so that we could see that he did not believe in the shaman, and in general the lamas are driving the shamans away, although they themselves do not do any more to enlighten the people, but merely take advantage of their ignorance.[26]

During this journey the Decembrists had a chance meeting with a Scottish missionary (unnamed), a member of the Bible Society, who was trying to convert the Buryats to Christianity, but apparently with very little success.[27] According to Rozen, the small number of Buryats who had been converted to Christianity were the ones who had settled down to a life based on agriculture. The rest he dismisses as "idolaters".

8 The Decembrists' Attitudes to the Buryats
(See also Ch. II and Ch. VII)

The Decembrists' reactions to the Buryats varied a good deal. The memoirists who mention the Buryats' helpfulness during the journey do so with a certain admiration for their agility and common sense. For instance, when rivers or marshy ground had to be crossed, the Buryats were always on hand with planks (mostki) or horses to prevent the Decembrists from getting their feet wet. Rozen admiringly mentions the inventiveness of those Buryats who had settled and taken up agriculture: he describes an ingenious arrangement of channels by which water was brought down from mountain streams to irrigate their crops. Another piece of ingenuity he describes was a way of making "bridges" of ice to enable them to cross rivers before they were completely

frozen over, by joining the tips of ice-lumps and letting them freeze together, while leaving a channel underneath for the water to flow.[28]

When M.A. Bestuzhev mentions the Buryats for the first time he exclaims with enthusiasm

What good people the Buryats are!

Yet a little further down on the same page of his diary of the journey he is rather impatient with their songs, calling them "terribly silly", and in the same breath and very patronisingly he refers to the Buryats as "these monkeys in human form" (eti martyshki v chelovecheskom obraze). He comments that the tales they told him show a strong Chinese influence, and have little that is Mongolian about them. He had, however, taken the trouble to learn something of their language and compile the dictionary already mentioned above.[29] On closer acquaintance he formed a more favourable opinion: the Buryat attached to his yurt is described as "a fine, sensible fellow, speaks Russian well and understands things even better...", and later: "Good humour and meekness are the distinguishing characteristics of these people..."[30]

It is also M.A. Bestuzhev who takes the trouble to explain something that Rozen merely notes: that the Buryats escorting the two groups of prisoners seemed to have no food with them, and kept darting into the woods during halts to pick cowberries (brusnika, vaccinum viti-idaea) — a smaller relation of the cranberry.[31] The reason was that when the Buryats were ordered to bring yurts for the prisoners, they had not been given time to collect supplies of provisions, and once in Chita they were not allowed to go away until the prearranged time for the departure of the prisoners. If it was true that they lived on berries all this time, they must have had

great powers of endurance. Bestuzhev showed great sympathy with them. The prisoners gave them food, tea and tobacco, all of which they gladly accepted.

From these accounts a fairly detailed picture of the Buryats' way of life emerges. Most of the following information comes from Rozen's memoirs:[32]

The Buryats' passion for tobacco and tea has already been mentioned. They drank their tea from small lacquered cups which were never washed. The tea was brewed from rotted tea-leaves mixed with cherry gum (sap?) and flattened into a long block about the size of a brick [a tea-brick]. Pieces of this were crumbled into a pot and butter or other fat added, also salt and sometimes flour. Tobacco, which was expensive, was smoked in copper pipes with small bowls for this reason.

The Buryats shaved their heads all over, except for a pigtail in the centre of the crown. They never washed their bodies, only occasionally rubbing their faces with snow. Under their sheepskin garments they wore nothing at all. The sheepskins were worked as the Buryats sat in their yurts in the evenings; using hands and teeth, they softened the leather, while others sharpened arrow-heads or moulded bullets.

9 The Old Believers

The farmlands which the Decembrists reached near the end of their journey owed their prosperity to the efforts of their owners — the Old Believers. These were the descendants of Russians exiled to Siberia in the time of Catherine II or earlier because they refused to accept reforms in the ritual of the Orthodox Church. They were allowed to bring their families with them, and because of this were

often referred to as semeyskie. These people and their descendants were extremely hard-working and prosperous, mostly farmers, although some had amassed quite large fortunes through trade (largely with China) and transporting goods. They were non-smokers and abstained from alcohol and even tea. Their houses were built in traditional Russian style.

The semeyskie came out to greet the Decembrists, whom they took to be religious dissidents like themselves, wearing their best clothes: the men in dark blue suits, the women in silk sarafans and gold-embroidered headdresses (kokoshniki). The latter seem to have caught Yakushkin's eye especially.[33] Rozen points out the sharp contrast between these prosperous and respectable-looking people and the descendants of the early Russian settlers (starozhily), whose poverty and lack of home comforts he attributes to their laziness and fondness for drink.

In this area there was no longer any need for the Decembrists to sleep in yurts, for the Old Believers eagerly offered them hospitality in their homes. The comfortably furnished houses, with fine traditional Russian painted furniture, and the abundant food they were offered, the handsome people and their strong horses aroused Rozen's enthusiasm even in retrospect:

> ... the people, the people! One handsome fellow after another, beautiful girls, no worse than the ones on the Don — tall, white-complexioned and rosy-cheeked![34]

10 Arrival of Anna Vasil'evna Rozen and Mariya Kazimirovna Yushnevskaya

Rozen was aware that his wife had at last received permission to join him, but was not sure when she would arrive. He was taken by surprise by her actual arrival on 27th August, when the prisoners

were settling down for a halt at Tarbagatay. She had been delayed by river floods. The commandant of the group allowed the couple to spend some time alone (but still under guard) in the house of a peasant in the village.

M.K. Yushnevskaya arrived a few days earlier, before the floods. Both these women brought letters and parcels with them, evading the censorship. They were allowed to join the other wives accompanying the group, and rode or walked the rest of the way to Petrovskiy zavod.

11 Celebration of the July Revolution (Paris 1830)

The news of the July Revolution in Paris reached the Decembrists on the 19th of September through newspapers. It aroused great excitement and enthusiasm. Basargin described the scene:

> We got a bottle or two of fizz [shipuchee] from somewhere, drank a glass each to the July Revolution, and sang the Marseillaise in chorus. Cheerfully, with hopes for a better future for Europe, we entered Petrovsk.[35]

Romantic enthusiasts still, even though two or three bottles of champagne between thirty or so men would not give each one more than a sip — they arrived at Petrovskiy zavod in optimistic mood, only to have their hopes for a better future for themselves cruelly dashed by what they found there.

Notes to Chapter V

1 Shteyngeyl', V.I., in: Dekabristy: neizdannye proizvedeniya, B.L. Modzalevskiy, Yu.G. Oksman eds. M. 1925, p.128. (Hereafter Shteyngeyl'.)

2 Memuary dekabristov. Yuzhnoe obshchestvo. M. 1982, p.80. (Hereafter Yuzhn. obshch.)

3 Shteyngeyl', p.134.

4 Vospominaniya Bestuzhevykh. M. 1951, p.164. (Hereafter Vosp. Best.)

5 ibid. p.165.

6 Vospominaniya Poliny Annenkovoy, 2nd edn. M. 1932, pp.188-189.

7 Yakushkin, I.D., Zapiski, stat'i, pis'ma. M. 1951, p.123.

8 Vosp. Best. pp.328-329.

9 Baranovskaya, M.Yu., Dekabrist Nikolay Bestuzhev. M. 1954, p.103; Zilbershtein, N.A., Khudozhnik Nikolay Bestuzhev. M. 1977, p.233; Dekabristy: neizdannye materialy. M. 1925, pp.136, 138 (sketches of one of the camps by an unnamed artist).

10 Rozen, A.E., Zapiski dekabrista. Irkutsk 1985, p.243.

11 Shteyngeyl', p.141.

12 ibid. p.132.

13 Lorer, N.I., Zapiski dekabrista. Irkutsk 1985, p.153.

14 Yakushkin, p.123.

15 ibid. p.122.

16 Yuzhn. obshch. p.84.

17 Shteyngeyl', p.145.

18 Yakushkin, p.123.

19 ibid. p.124.

20 Rozen, p.244.

21 Vosp. Best. p.328.

22 Shteyngeyl', p.140.

23 ibid. p.145.

24 Lorer, p.152.

25 ibid. p.152.

26 Shteyngeyl', p.141.

27 Vosp. Best. p.331.

28 Rozen, p.282.

29 Vosp. Best. p.328.

30 ibid. p.334.

31 Rozen, pp.243-244.

32 ibid. pp.244-245.

33 Yakushkin, pp.124-125.

34 Rozen, p.252.

35 Yuzhn. obshch. pp.86-87.

CHAPTER VI: PETROVSKIY ZAVOD 1830-39

1 The Prison

The prison, specially built to house the Decembrists, consisted of 64 rooms built round three sides of a quadrangle with a stockade across the fourth. The entrance to the prison complex was through a gateway in the stockade. The rooms were separated into twelve sections by massive doors, each with four locks. A corridor along the inner sides of the building was similarly divided. Guard-rooms at each corner of the quadrangle faced outwards, so that anyone attempting to escape or attack could be covered by cross-fire. The inner space of the quadrangle was divided into a series of yards, the gates between which were kept closed. The rooms were narrow and high — about 15m by 3.50m by 3m (high) (7½ arshins by 5 arshins by 4½ arshins) — a shape which suggested to M.A. Bestuzhev a comparison with "stalls for horses".[1]

Like the prison in Chita, this one had been hurriedly built, and the workmanship and finish were poor as a result. When the prisoners arrived, the plastering of the walls had not been completed. Work on this and other unfinished jobs continued for most of the first year of their occupancy, with the accompanying inconvenience of noise and disturbance. The building, which stood on marshy ground, had not dried out completely. Gaps between the logs of the walls resulted in draughts. The 32 stoves installed for heating had not been properly insulated from the walls, and since the infill of the party walls, instead of being earth, consisted of wood shavings and other extremely inflammable builders' rubbish, there was a high degree of fire risk. Indeed, D.I. Zavalishin mentions that Leparskiy ordered

special fire-fighting equipment from St Petersburg and organised a fire brigade with watchers on duty day and night in the summer, when the risks from grass-fires in the neighbourhood were particularly high. He also had barrels of water placed on the roof of the prison.[2]

The main defect of the building, however, was one of design rather than structural work. The Decembrists, arriving at Petrovskiy zavod in a state of euphoria induced by the news of the revolution in Paris, and invigorated by the brief respite from prison conditions during the journey from Chita, were dismayed to find that all the windows of their new prison, except those of the guard-rooms, faced onto the inner corridor and not outwards. As a result, the rooms were so dark that candles had to be used even in the daytime. This not only made reading difficult, but together with the lack of outward view was extremely depressing. This feature of the building could not be blamed on inefficiency: the original design had included windows facing outwards, but Nicholas I ordered them to be altered.[3]

The wives of the prisoners lost no time in expressing their indignation over this, both directly to Leparskiy and in letters home: Mariya Kazimirovna Yushnevskaya, Ekaterina Ivanovna Trubetskaya and Elizaveta Petrovna Naryshkina all wrote about the conditions under which their husbands were expected to live.[4] The protests were immediately passed on to Benkendorf and by him to Nicholas I. While the former was at first inclined to think that the complaints were exaggerated, the Tsar relented, and permission was given to make windows in the outside walls — but it reached Leparskiy only in July 1831.

2 Security Precautions

The brigade of veterans and the Cossacks who had guarded the Decembrists in Chita continued to do so in Petrovskiy zavod. Leparskiy was in overall command as before, assisted by a platsmayor and two platsadyutanty. The attempted mutiny at Zerentuysk led by Sukhinov had given the authorities a bad fright, and the guards mounted a day-and-night vigil in the corner guard-rooms.[5] A priest and a doctor were permanently attached to the prison. According to Zavalishin, Leparskiy's salary for this office was 30,000r p.a. (i.e. more than that of the Governor of Siberia), while his assistants and the doctor and priest were paid four times the usual salary for service in European Russia.[6]

The commandant was required to send monthly reports on the prisoners to St Petersburg. In addition, Nicholas I sent a commission to inspect the arrangements for the prisoners and report on them individually. The officer in command of this commission, Colonel of Gendarmes Kil'chevskiy, obviously had no idea of the secret channels of communication already developed by the prisoners: describing them as "very meek and conscious of their guilt", he reported that

> Correspondence with their relatives and friends is conducted through the established procedure, strictly and most carefully scrutinised by the civil governor in Irkutsk and again by the commandant.[7]

3 Contacts Between Decembrists and Convicts

Besides the Decembrists there were ordinary (non-political) convicts in the main prison. (Among them were serfs exiled for suspected complicity in the murder of Nastasya Minkina, the mistress of A.A. Arakcheev.)[8] Although the Decembrists were officially forbidden to have any contacts with either convicts or the local

population, in practice this rule was not always adhered to:

a) Work on the building was still in progress during the first year;

b) The Decembrists were allowed to have work done by convicts, among whom were men skilled in furniture-making and other crafts;

c) They were allowed to employ convicts as servants.

In return for their services the convicts were paid a small sum from the common fund, and the Decembrists tried through their contacts in European Russia to obtain some improvement in the conditions of the convicts:

> Our presence in Petrovskiy zavod had a good effect in taming the violent and arbitrary treatment of the convicts by those in charge of them... News of abuses reached us directly through our servants who were all convicts...[9]

While the success of the Decembrists in this direction was small, their efforts earned them the gratitude of the convicts, expressed in small ways — for instance they never stole from the Decembrists.

N.V. Basargin had a good deal to say in his memoirs about the question of guilt and innocence and the harsh punishment meted out so indiscriminately for even minor crimes whose root cause lay in social conditions, or even where mere accusations of crime were made and not investigated. He mentions the compassionate attitude of the Russian residents of that part of Siberia towards the "unfortunate ones" (the convicts). Not all the convicts sank into oblivion: he retells a story he heard from one who made good. Briefly, the man had been plied with drink by some criminals, and while drunk had lost his master's carriage and horses at cards. In spite of his honesty in making a confession to his master, he was sent without trial to settle in Siberia, but, encouraged by a police chief with some psychological insight, had become a successful farmer, and in fact

was building a church in gratitude for the change in his fortunes. Basargin's comments on this are relevant to the sentences pronounced, also without proper trial, to him and his fellow-prisoners:

> You writers and those who carry out the criminal laws should take a look at the criminal... You will say that this is an exceptional case. Yes, so it is; but who gave you the right to take away all the future of a being like yourself? This is a matter for God alone. You can only be moral physicians. Cure, or try to cure, as skilfully as you can, without harming the healthy organs, and when the cure is complete, return to society the member who can still be more useful to it than many another, particularly through his example, and do not brand him with eternal disgrace.

Elsewhere the reference to the Decembrists is direct:

> I am now sure that if the government, instead of condemning us so harshly had used a more moderate form of punishment, it would have achieved its aim better, and we would have felt the punishment more keenly, and would perhaps even have regretted the loss of our place in society... in a word, from being the most ordinary... people it turned us into political martyrs for our opinions, thus arousing general sympathy towards us while it [the government] took on the role of a bitter and implacable persecutor.[9]

4 Relations with Prison Authorities

Relations with Leparskiy continued to be remarkably good. N.V. Basargin was one of the memoirists who stressed the commandant's courtesy and willingness to listen to prisoners' complaints. The daily visits of his deputy, who conveyed the complaints to him, were also made courteously. However, in 1837 Leparskiy died, and was replaced by Grigoriy Maksimovich Rebinder, who was a strict disciplinarian and tried to introduce a more rigid regime in the prison. There were some protests from the prisoners. Rebinder's attitude softened, and the more relaxed regime of Leparskiy's day was resumed.

Relations with the manager of the Petrovskiy zavod foundry,

Aleksandr Il'ich Arsen'ev, were also excellent. He was a good friend to the Decembrists and frequently took immense risks in forwarding or even carrying unofficial correspondence for them to European Russia.

5 Life in the Prison

Married couples were allowed to live together in the prison, one room being allocated to each couple. Children, however, could not live there, so the wives who had children had to find alternative accommodation in the village. A.G. Murav'eva and M.N. Volkonskaya had already arranged for houses to be built for them before leaving Chita. Now several of the other wives had houses built. Others rented accommodation for themselves and their children. The ruling on children meant that the wives' time, and sometimes their loyalties as well, were divided between children and husbands. All the married men were eventually given permission to live with their wives outside the prison building.

Unmarried prisoners sometimes had to live two to a room, as there was not enough space to give each one separate accommodation. While this was certainly an improvement on the cramped conditions in Chita (and there was further improvement in the amount of space available as prisoners reached the end of their katorga and left for their place of settlement), there were some complaints.

The prisoners were allowed to arrange their rooms as they pleased. Those who could afford it sent for furniture from Russia, or had it made by convicts. A water-colour by N.A. Bestuzhev shows the Volkonskiys in their room, Mariya at her beloved clavichord and her husband standing beside her in a listening attitude, as though she

were singing. On the wall behind is a portrait, perhaps of her father, and there is a tall glass-fronted bookcase full of books. Another of Bestuzhev's sketches is of his brother Mikhail relaxing in his room with his feet on a chair, reading a book and smoking his long pipe. There is a rug on the floor and a bookcase at the back of the room.[10]

In a letter to his wife (13.3.32) I.D. Yakushkin is at pains to assure her that his room is warm and dry, that the plastering is finished, and that he is reasonably content — except for missing her and his sons. This letter was not sent through official channels, so that he did not need to conceal uncomfortable truths, but it nevertheless gives the impression that he is making the best of things in order to reassure his wife.[11]

6 Changes in Relationships Between Prisoners

While the separate rooms were better than the crowded ones of Chita, especially for those who wanted to study, several of the Decembrist memoirists mention the partial breakdown of the strong community spirit which had been such a marked feature of life in the Chita prison. The strongest criticisms come, as so often from D.I. Zavalishin: whereas, according to him, in Chita everything was shared — news, extra delicacies from home, reading material — and there were no secrets, once the prisoners were living in separate rooms and took their meals in them, cliques began to form and a marked division arose between the wealthier prisoners and the less well-off. Once privacy was possible, bad habits could be indulged in unseen — Zavalishin specifically mentions card-playing and drinking. Open disagreements and even quarrels occurred. Zavalishin cannot resist naming some culprits — P.N. Svistunov is criticised

for his excessive meanness and for using his considerable wealth for "orgies and seducing innocent village girls".[12] A.E. Mozalevskiy cultivates "disreputable acquaintances".[13]

While some of this may well have been true, it has to be said that Zavalishin's remarks about his fellow-prisoners, in which accusations are frequently made without names being mentioned or corroboration, are interspersed with even more frequent favourable references to himself: for example

> We had lived in Chita for only a short time when my personal importance became evident...[14]

and

> He [the prison commandant] never did anything without consulting me...[15]

His criticisms are often merely petty, as when he accuses the wives of competing with one another in sending more and better food to the prison — a reference to their efforts to supplement the prisoners' diet (not merely that of their husbands, and often to the detriment of their own). Some of his criticisms are untrue — for instance, he complains that the wealthier prisoners have lost interest in their poorer comrades.[16] The mere fact of the formation of the common fund and its offshoot, the "smaller" fund (malaya artel') (See Section 10 of this Chapter) directly contradicts this, as do the frequent references in memoirs and letters to help given to fellow-exiles of 1825 long after the end of their katorga. Some of Zavalishin's remarks are apparently linked to his disapproval of his fellow-prisoners' views — for instance both Svistunov and Mozalevskiy were materialists while Zavalishin was staunchly Orthodox. He accused these two men of using their materialism to justify their conduct.[17]

However, Zavalishin's remarks, subjective as they are, cannot be entirely discounted: in a letter written by N.V. Basargin to I.I. Pushchin (30.4.1842) (i.e. after the end of katorga for all the Decembrists) we read:

> Everything :that I have heard about him [Svistunov] here from any of us or from outside sources is very unpleasant.

This is followed by a description that Basargin has heard of Svistunov's unkind, indeed cruel, treatment of his servants; however, a little later, in another letter, again to Pushchin, Basargin wrote:

> I was very glad that the rumours about Svistunov were exaggerated.[18]

As far as the departure from the high standards of morals and conduct which the Decembrists showed at the beginning of their imprisonment is concerned, a realistic view of human nature suggests that something of the kind of behaviour referred to was bound to occur. An extreme example is mentioned in an editorial note in Polina Annenkova's memoirs, according to which she is supposed to have smuggled a girl from the village into the prison in Chita in a water-barrel.[19] If this really happened, it may have become known to the commandant, in which case he seems to have shut his eyes to it. (I have seen no other reference to this or any similar incident.) This is an aspect of life over which most of the memoirists draw a veil of discretion. On the other hand, Zavalishin mentions the rumours about Pushchin's illegitimate children, rumours which are referred to by other Decembrists.

These are extreme views. A more balanced picture emerges from the memoirs of Rozen and the Bestuzhevs, and also, much later, from an account by Evgeniy Dmitrievich Yakushkin, the son of the Decembrist, of a visit he paid to his father in his Siberian exile in 1855,

during which he met a number of the surviving exiles.[20]

M. Bestuzhev admitted that when the wives came to live inside the prison, groups formed around them, but he regarded their influence as wholly beneficial.[21] Rozen wrote:

> Although in Petrovskiy zavod each of us had his separate cell and more space and peace than in Chita, although the common fund here too was available to all and tried as before to satisfy the needs of us all, nevertheless the separation of our accommodation which allowed each of us to cut himself off or to choose an intimate and congenial circle ... that ideal quality which had heartened us in the cramped prison of Chita disappeared... We no longer went out to work singing in chorus, we did not meet together as often as before, dozens of circles formed according to relationships and inclinations. Some became reflective in their isolation, which could not have happened in Chita.[22]

In spite of these changes, however, many of the Decembrists expressed regret when their turn came to leave the prison and face the problems of settlement. In gaining a measure of freedom, they sometimes lost the support of immediate contact with their fellow-prisoners. For some, indeed, the real hardships began with the end of their katorga.

7 Daily Routine

The work which the Decembrists had to do in Petrovskiy zavod was, as in Chita, purely nominal. It consisted chiefly of milling grain in a hand-mill, which they did not do very expertly. The work does not even seem to have been compulsory:

> Those who wanted to, went out to work, anyone who did not, stayed quietly at home,

Basargin wrote. Excuses such as the weather being too hot or too cold, or "epidemic illness [sic]", sufficed.[23]

On Sundays and special feast days the prisoners were taken to

church. Sunday was also the day when they took it in turns to go to the bathhouse. In their leisure time they could walk up and down the corridors or round the yards. Domestic pets were kept: Yakushkin mentions goats, cranes and pigeons.[24]

In winter the prisoners built a snow hill in the prison yard for tobogganing, and flooded part of the yard for skating. In summer they grew flowers and vegetables. Inside the prison they were allowed to visit each other's rooms, but at first they were locked into their own sections at 10.00 p.m. At this time the yards were also locked. Because of the fire risk, the prison commandant decided that locking the room doors was too dangerous, and they were merely closed.

D.I. Yakushkin, in the long letter to his wife already mentioned above, describes his very regular routine of early rising and early retiring to bed, cleaning his room, much reading, dinner with the Trubetskoys twice a week and with Lorer or Pushchin on other days. Meals were no longer taken by all the prisoners together, except for celebrations or anniversaries. The cooked food was brought into the prison by the guards, who cleared away after meals, which they shared with the prisoners. The guards also lit the stoves and the samovars, and were paid a small monthly wage from the common fund for these services.[25]

8 Health

In general the physical health of the Decembrist prisoners in Petrovskiy zavod was good. Even Trubetskoy, who left St Petersburg in 1826 coughing blood, seems to have recovered — he actually lived until 1860. There were two deaths during this period: the much-loved A.G. Murav'eva died in 1832 after contracting a chill when returning to her own house after visiting her husband in the prison. Torn

between him and her sick child, she ran out of the house too lightly dressed. Aleksandr Semenovich Pestov died suddenly in 1833 after developing a carbuncle on his spinal cord.

A.E. Rozen attributed the good health to "a monotonous life, moderate and plain food".[26] The official prison diet, according to Yakushkin, was shchi and roasted meat for dinner, and the same for supper, but less of it; in addition each prisoner got two small white loaves [sic] per day, and from the prisoners' fund 1/3 pound of tea and 2 pounds of sugar per month.[27]

The harsh climate and generally hard conditions were bad for the children: facilities for care in childbirth were also poor — worse than these women would have found in their own homes in European Russia. Rozen tells how, when his son Kondratiy was born, he himself was not allowed to stay with his wife to help her but had to return to the prison. These women, accustomed in their earlier years to servants and comfort, nevertheless learned to feed and tend their babies themselves as well as looking after their other children: Rozen's wife

> fulfilled three roles [i.e. those of mother, wife and nurse] as is usual among the people, but they have grandmothers, aunts and sisters [to help them], whereas she was left alone as soon as she had regained her strength.[28]

The doctor attached to the prison was young and inexperienced, and in difficult cases used to consult F.B. Vol'f. As in Chita, the latter was assisted by A.Z. Murav'ev, who pulled teeth and bled his patients, as was usual at the time (he had attended some lectures on surgery while travelling abroad before the rising, but had no systematic medical training).[29]

There were some cases of nervous and mental illness in Petrovskiy

zavod: Nataliya Dmitrievna Fonvizina suffered acute attacks of anxiety and delusions; Ya.M. Andreevich and A.I. Borisov both began to show signs of mental disturbance during this time.

9 Resumption of Intellectual Life

The Decembrists were given permission to subscribe to newspapers and periodicals, and this they did with great enthusiasm through the wives' letters. N.A. Bestuzhev quotes an (incomplete) list of subscriptions:

Revue britannique	The Times
Revue de Paris	Quarterly Review
Revue des deux mondes	Edinburgh Review
Revue industrielle	Morning Post
Revue du mécanicien	Punch
Mécanicien anglais	English Illustration [sic]
Cabinet de lecture	Frankfurter Zeitung
L'illustration française	Hamburger Zeitung
Journal pour rire	Allgemeine Zeitung
Journal des débats	Preussische Zeitung
Indépendence belge	
	Several Polish and Italian newspapers [not named][30]

To prevent readers from retaining items for too long, a committee was elected (to be re-elected every year) to organise the circulation. The first consisted of Zavalishin, Volkonskiy and Mikhail Fotievich Mit'kov. Each prisoner paid 10r a year for the subscriptions. The committee then organised them, and made out a borrowers' rota and a few rules: newspapers could be borrowed for two hours, periodicals for two weeks; fines were imposed for overdue items, but any one could be borrowed again after everybody had finished reading it. In 1832 a total of 559r was spent on subscriptions. (There were then about 50 prisoners left.) This sum rose to 634r in 1833, but dropped as prisoners gradually went away.[31]

The most frequent requests for books passed on by the wives were for technical and scientific textbooks, but the prisoners kept abreast

of all the latest literature as well, both Russian and western European. M.K. Yushnevskaya mentions in a letter (July 1833) that she has been reading I.I. Ladyshnikov's Posledniy novik, first published in 1831.[32] Pushkin's Boris Godunov reached the Decembrists early in 1831, i.e. almost immediately after its first (incomplete) publication.[33]

> Everything that was being written and published in Russia at the time ... all the outstanding works published abroad ... both books and periodicals — we received without exception,

wrote M.A. Bestuzhev.[34]

Some of the prisoners were building up sizeable libraries. Especially notable were those of the Volkonskiys, the Trubetskoys, Zavalishin and Lunin. The latter's consisted largely of religious works, including some extremely rare books sent to him by his sister, E.S. Uvarova.[35]

10 The Common Fund (artel')

The Common Fund (artel'), which had already been started in Blagodatsk and continued in Chita, was developed much more extensively in Petrovskiy zavod. Started on 2.3.1831, it lasted until the end of the forced labour period in 1839. As before, it was prompted by the desire to share the comforts and amenities available to the wealthier prisoners with the less fortunate ones in a manner which would not embarrass anyone, or give grounds for accusations of patronage. It was also an exercise in cooperation before the days of the Rochdale pioneers,[36] and in democracy, as a study of the rules will show.

Basargin describes the chaotic first days in Petrovskiy zavod, when all the Decembrists were preoccupied with settling in and arranging their rooms; and this seems to have been when the idea arose of

continuing the fund in the form it retained until 1839. Basargin wrote that the fund

> was so well organised that none of us wanted for anything during the whole of this period, and no-one was dependent on anyone else.[37]

Zavalishin played a prominent role in the organisation and administration (he claimed that it was actually his idea, and that there was much discussion of, and disagreement about, the rules at the time).[38] The final version of the rules was drawn up by I.I. Pushchin and A.I. Odoevskiy.[39] (See Appendix to this chapter.) Since the prisoners were not allowed to handle cash, a clerk came to the prison every week and noted down contributions and withdrawals against each name.

The Small Fund (Malaya artel') (Obshchestvo vzaimnogo vspomoshchestvovaniya)

This fund, managed by Pushchin, Yakushkin and Zavalishin,[40] was an offshoot of the main fund. It was composed of percentage deductions from money received by prisoners from home and by voluntary contributions in addition. Its purpose was to provide a modest grant of money or clothing etc. to each Decembrist when leaving the prison on the termination of his forced labour and going to settle in some part of Siberia. In this way the men could provide themselves with basic household or farming equipment.

11 Other Activities at Petrovskiy zavod

a) Painting

The Petrovskiy zavod period was a prolific one for N.A. Bestuzhev's other interests — painting and writing. He had planned to paint a portrait of every Decembrist imprisoned in both Chita and Petrovskiy zavod in order to leave to posterity a complete record of their like-

nesses. It had to be done with some caution, since officially no portraits of those involved in the rising were allowed. (This was, of course, an additional reason for making them.) Bestuzhev succeeded in carrying out his self-imposed task. The portraits, painted in water-colour and each signed by the sitter for authenticity, have nearly all survived to the present day, in spite of many vicissitudes, and are a remarkable artistic achievement. Bestuzhev also painted portraits of some of the wives, landscapes and interior views of the prison.[41]

There were other Decembrist prisoners who showed artistic ability, if not of the same high standard as Bestuzhev: Yu.M. Andreevich (most of whose water-colours were lost when the house of the Borisov brothers, to whom he had bequeathed them, was accidentally burned down); I.A. Annenkov, V.P. Ivashev and N.P. Repin all made water-colour or pencil sketches of the prison and its interior.

b) Literature

Several important prose works were written by Decembrists in Petrovskiy zavod, and once again N.A. Bestuzhev's are outstanding:

i) Stationed at Schlüsselburg (Shlyussel'burgskaya stantsiya)[42]

This short story, a thinly-disguised autobiography, was written between 1830 and 1832 in response to frequently-expressed surprise on the part of other Decembrists, and especially their wives, as to why Bestuzhev had not married. It refers obliquely to his love for L.I. Stepovaya, the wife of the director of the pilots' training school in Kronstadt, where Bestuzhev had been stationed as a young naval officer. Besides the autobiographical element, the story raises a question of special importance to some other Decembrists as well as Bestuzhev — whether a dedicated revolutionary has the right to

involve the woman he loves in his uncertain and dangerous life. Bestuzhev concluded that marriage and revolutionary activity were incompatible and gave this as his reason for remaining single.

Other Decembrists had answered this question in different ways: for instance, when S.G. Volkonskiy asked for the hand of Mariya Raevskaya he was told by her father that if he wanted to marry her, he would have to give up his membership of the secret society in which he was involved (The Southern Society). He refused the condition, married her, but told her nothing about his political activities (she learned about them only some time after his arrest), but Mikhail Fedorovich Orlov, faced with the same choice when he wanted to marry Mariya Volkonskaya's sister, gave up politics. Rozen and several other members of the secret societies told their prospective brides the truth about their political involvement — a revelation which did not for the most part deter the women from marrying them.

ii) Reminiscences of K.F. Ryleev (Vospominaniya o K.F. Ryleeve)

(Written in 1832.) During the controversies about the events of 1825 which arose among the prisoners, some criticisms were made of the actions and leadership of the initiators of the movement, and especially of K.F. Ryleev. Among the sharpest were accusations levelled against him by Zavalishin (who had not been a member of any of the secret societies). Many of these critics had not been witnesses of the events, or known Ryleev personally, and could base their remarks only on hearsay. In 1832 Bestuzhev wrote his memoir of Ryleev at the request of other prisoners anxious to rehabilitate their leader. It established for later memoirists an interpretation of Ryleev's personality while those who had known him were still

able to make corrections and contributions to it.

iii) A Russian in Paris (Russkiy v Parizhe)[44]

(Begun in the early period of the Petrovskiy zavod sojourn and worked on until 1840.)

This short novel (povest') is a romantic love-story: a young Russian officer is billeted in the house of an aristocratic French family during the occupation of Paris by the Allied armies after the defeat of Napoleon. He falls in love with a young war-widow of the family, and after a troubled courtship persuades her to marry him. Describing incidents during the occupation, Bestuzhev stresses the humaneness of the Russian army of occupation, both officers and soldiers. His modest hero is instrumental in helping destitute French families, and reveals to his aristocratic and sophisticated hosts that Russians are not the barbarians they are sometimes thought to be. It is a well-told story with the expected happy ending, and some psychological truth, especially in the breaking down of the young woman's fear of being disloyal to her dead husband and "running away from herself", her ultimate acknowledgement of her love being hastened by news of the imminent departure of the Russian army from Paris.

iv) On the Freedom of Trade and Industry Generally (O svobode torgovli i promyshlennosti voobshche)

(Probably written during 1830-31.)

After a closely reasoned argument in favour of free trade, with many references to contemporary events and sources, Bestuzhev concludes that free trade is essential to Russia and to other countries as well; monopolies and taxes must be abolished, enabling every country to concentrate on the industries most profitable to it

and easing the burden of taxation on the population.

v) V.I. Shteyngeyl': Notes on Siberia (Zapiski o Sibiri)

(Written in 1834, published in 1859.) This is an article exposing the corruption rife in the Siberian administration of the day, and would certainly not have been published in Russia even if it had not been written by a political prisoner.

c) Technical and Scientific

i) N.A. Bestuzhev

Throughout the period of imprisonment and exile N.A. Bestuzhev emerges as the most versatile and gifted of the Decembrist exiles. In Petrovskiy zavod he continued to put his technical skill to good use as well as his other gifts.

Soon after the arrival of the prisoners in Petrovskiy zavod, the manager of the foundry, A.I. Arsen'ev, obtained the commandant's permission for N.A. Bestuzhev to examine a water-driven sawmill which for the past ten years had been regarded as beyond repair. With the help of K.P. Torson, Bestuzhev had it in working order within a day. He also repaired other machinery at the foundry, and taught other prisoners to do this. His wide range of skills and knowledge enabled him to tackle anything from making toys for prisoners' children to mending Yushnevskiy's piano. When Rozen and his family were leaving Petrovskiy zavod for settlement, Bestuzhev devised a cradle slung from the roof of the carriage in such a way that the baby, recently born, was not shaken about on the rough roads. For his own use Bestuzhev made a platform on a pulley on which he could raise his easel and himself to the level of the window to get more light (the windows were at the top of the wall).

ii) K.P. Torson was interested in agricultural machinery. The peasants in Siberia (i.e. those of Russian origin, for the Buryats were not yet cultivating crops at the time) were still using the most primitive implements like hand-flails. Torson wanted to make their work easier and more productive. He devised a simplified version of a threshing-machine supposed to have been invented by a Scot named Meikle, and sent the sketches to his mother in St Petersburg, who passed them on to Nicholas I. The Tsar was impressed and sent Torson's mother 500r out of state funds to get the project developed — a rare example of generosity on the part of the Tsar towards anyone connected with the hated rebels.[47]

d) Music

Mariya Volkonskaya's fears that she would never again be able to listen to music, expressed during the farewell evening arranged for her by her sister-in-law Zinaida Volkonskaya, proved groundless. If the concert-hall and the opera-house were no longer available, there was plenty of amateur music-making already in Chita, and it was continued in Petrovskiy zavod. Volkonskaya and Naryshkina continued the duet-singing which had given so much pleasure earlier, Volkonskaya accompanying on the clavichord. The prison rang to the sound of J.S. Bach's fugues, Chopin's mazurkas, piano arrangements of Beethoven's symphonies and Weber's "Der Freischütz", the most frequent performer being Yushnevskiy. There was even a small orchestra — perhaps what would now be called a "chamber ensemble", although there is no information on its make-up; the quartet of Chita days continued to entertain. Vadkovskiy set to music A.I. Odoevskiy's poem "Slavonic Maidens" (Slavyanskie devy) and composed both words and music of a work entitled "Desires" (Zhelaniya) which

was virtually a statement in a musical setting of the Decembrists' political programme and aspirations.[48] Thus music was not only a solace and entertainment, but was also made to bear a political message; but it was also intended to touch the emotions (hence the popularity of Beethoven's music).

e) Education

The importance of education had been acknowledged by the Decembrists long before the rising: several had already tried out the Lancasterian system of mutual education in their regiments during the occupation of France. Now, of course, they were not allowed to teach in case they exerted a political influence on the children they taught, but they found an ingenious way round this problem: in 1833 Leparskiy allowed the formation of a small choir to sing in church. It was open to both officials of the foundry and their families, and even to people outside. Svistunov and Kryukov were choir-masters. They argued that in order to train the choir properly they would have to teach the singers to read music; and to do this they really needed to be able to read the printed word as well. Leparskiy was once again either turning a blind eye or being obtuse, for he readily allowed tuition to begin. Most of it was done by Mikhail and Nikolay Bestuzhev. From teaching reading they gradually progressed to other subjects. I.I. Yakushkin taught mathematics, for instance. A small school gradually formed, and produced excellent results. Since many of the children attending lessons came from poor families, the Bestuzhevs even provided them with meals and clothing.[49]

12 The End of Katorga

As prisoners reached the end of their sentences of katorga, they were sent to settle in various parts of Siberia and the prison gradually emptied. The last inmates left in 1839. The building they had occupied remained empty for years. I.I. Gorbachevskiy remained as a resident in the village of Petrovskiy zavod even after the amnestying of the surviving Decembrists in 1856 — partly because he could not afford to return to Russia, and partly because he did not with to be dependent on his nephew, who had obtained permission for him to live with him in St Petersburg. He was also afraid of finding himself a social misfit after such a long absence from European Russia. He sometimes (rather reluctantly) conducted "guided tours" round the prison, as it became an object of curiosity, and perhaps pilgrimage. Some of the visitors had an appetite for souvenirs which led them to carry off not only scraps of paper or pens found on the floor: one uprooted a garden table at which Ivashev's wife used to drink tea, and carted it off with him. The building which had housed the Decembrists was accidentally burned down in 1864.[50]

Notes to Chapter VI

1 Vospominaniya Bestuzhevykh. M.K. Azadovskiy ed. M.1951, p.248. (Hereafter Vosp. Best.)

2 Zavalishin, D.I., Zapiski dekabrista. SPb. 1906, p.301.

3 Kodan, S.V., K istorii petrovskogo kazemata dlya dekabristov, in: Sibir' i dekabristy. Vyp.2. B.S. Meylakh editor-in-chief. Irkutsk 1981, p.80.

4 Dekabristy na katorge i v ssylke. M.K. Azadovskiy, M.E. Zolotarev, B.G. Kubalov eds. M. 1925. Yuzhnevskaya to S.P. Yushnevskiy, 7.9.1830; Trubetskaya to A.G. Laval', 28.9.1830, p.42; Murav'eva to G.I. Chernyshev, 1.10.1830, p.45; Naryshkina to V.N. Naryshkin, 27.9.1830, p.36.

5 Kodan, p.88.

6 Zavalishin, pp.285-286.

7 Kodan, S.V., Dekabristy v Petrovskom zavode: donesenie zhandarma F. Kil'chevskogo, in: Sibir' i dekabristy. Vyp.4. S.F. Koval' comp. Irkutsk 1985, pp.247, 249.

8 Baranovskaya, M.Yu., Dekabrist Nikolay Bestuzhev. M. 1954, p.110.

9 Vosp. Best. p.168; Memuary dekabristov: yuzhnoe obshchestvo. M. 1982, pp.53, 66-67. (Hereafter Yuzhn. obshch.)

10 Baranovskaya, pp.109, 115.

11 Yakushkin, I.D., Zapiski, stat'i, pis'ma. M. 1951, pp.250-251.

12 Zavalishin, p.347.

13 ibid. p.314.

14 ibid. p.372.

15 ibid. p.316.

16 ibid. pp.332-333.

17 ibid. p.347.

18 Zhitomirskaya, S.V., Mironenko, S.V., Iz arkhiva I.I. Pushchina. Pis'ma Basargina, in: Sibir' i dekabristy. Vyp.3. Irkutsk 1983, pp.201-202.

19 Vospominaniya Poliny Annenkovoy. M. 1932, p.320. (This note quotes an unpublished article by M.M. Popov, Konets i posledstvie bunta 14 dek. 1825. Rukopisnyy otdel biblioteki A.N. arkhiv Dubrovina.)

20 Dekabristy na poselenii: iz arkhiva Yakushkinykh. I. Yakushkin ed. Izd. M. and S. Sabashnikovykh. L. 1926, pp.16-61.

21 Vosp. Best. pp.86-87.

22 Rozen, A.E., Zapiski dekabrista. Irkutsk 1985, p.261.

23 Yuzhn. obshch. p.107.

24 Yakushkin, p.128.

25 Yuzhn. obshch. p.99.

26 Rozen, p.263.

27 Yakushkin, pp.128, 130.

28 Rozen, p.261.

29 ibid. p.263.

30 Vosp. Best. p.176.

31 Pamyati dekabristov. F.A. Kudryavtsev, S.F. Koval' eds. Irkutsk 1975, pp.75-76.

32 Yushnevskaya M.K., Pis'ma Alekseya Petrovicha Yushnevskogo i ego zheny Marii Kazimirovny iz Sibiri. Kiev 1908, pp.75-76.

33 Pamyati dekabristov, p.78.

34 Vosp. Best. p.176.

35 Pamyati dekabristov, pp.79-80.

36 The first cooperative trading shop was opened in Toad Lane, Rochdale, England, in 1844.

37 Yuzhn. obshch. p.88.

38 Zavalishin, p.338.

39 Yuzhn. obshch. pp.88-89; see Appendix to this Chapter.

40 Zavalishin, p.323.

41 For a full list of N.A. Bestuzhev's paintings, see: Baranovskaya, pp.236-272; Zilbershtein, N.S., Khudozhnik N.A. Bestuzhev. M. 1977, contains many reproductions of Bestuzhev's paintings in colour (N.S. Zilbershtein is the present owner of a great part of this collection).

42 Bestuzhev, N.A., Izbrannaya proza. M. 1983, pp.130-157.

43 Vosp. Best. pp.7-40.

44 Bestuzhev, N.A., pp.158-318.

45 Bestuzhev, N.A., Stat'i i pis'ma. M. 1933, pp.93-173.

46 Dum vysokoe stremlenie. S.F. Koval' ed. Irkutsk 1973, pp.19-22. First published in Istoricheskiy sbornik Vol'noy russkoy tipografii. Vyp.1. London 1859, under the title Sibirskie satrapy.

47 Sheshin, N.B. Dekabrist K.P. Torson. Ulan-Ude 1980, pp.134-136.

48 Zhelaniya — See Izbrannye sotsial'no-politicheskie i filosofskie proizvedeniya dekabristov. A.Ya. Shchipanov ed. M. 1951, p.111.

49 Kopylov, A.N., Malysheva, M.P., Dekabristy i prosveshchenie Sibiri v pervoy polovine 19go veka, in: Dekabristy i Sibir'. A.N. Kopylov ed. Novosibirsk 1977, pp.108-115.

50 Gorbachevskiy, I.I., Zapiski i pis'ma. M. 1963. Letter to E.P. Obolenskiy, 17.7.1861, pp.184-189.

Appendix to Chapter VI

RULES OF THE COMMON FUND

I

Aims of the Fund

1 Several years experience has shown us that it is essential to have a definite sum of money always at hand to be used both for general expenses and for individual needs. The allocation of a definite sum for the coming year, for instance, enables the housekeeper firstly to ensure that the maximum benefit is obtained from the fund, and secondly to buy in stocks for the year and for immediate use; it can also to some extent avoid the embarrassing situation in which the whole fund and individual participants have sometimes found themselves owing to delays in sending money.

II

Establishment of the Fund

2 In order to achieve this an annual general sum is formed.

3 This fund is composed as follows:
- a) Contributions by subscription.
- b) Receipts from the treasury.
- c) Payment received for flour.

4 The final date for subscriptions is to be the 1st February.

5 The sum of five hundred rubles in assignats is taken as the sum required for the subsistence of each individual for a full year, and on this basis the fund is composed as follows:
- a) All participants in the fund who receive 500r contribute the whole of this amount.
- b) Those who receive less than 500r contribute all they receive.
- c) Those receiving more than 500r must contribute 500r, and contribute more if they wish.

6 The most probable period covered by the subscriptions will be indicated at the time when they are made.

7 The subscribed money is realised as follows:
- a) Those who subscribe 500r or less pay it immediately on receipt.
- b) Those who subscribe more than 500r pay at the times indicated for them if possible.

III

Purpose of the Fund

8 The total amount of the common fund is divided into three parts: for housekeeping, private and reserve use.
- a) Housekeeping: this is intended for provisions for all contributors to the fund.

b) Private: this is to satisfy the private needs of each individual.
c) Reserve: this is intended partly for use as a loan for the housekeeping fund to provide a turnover of cash, and partly to provide grants to those leaving the prison.

9 The amount of the housekeeping section of the fund is determined by the maximum sum fixed for purchasing provisions for one person for a year multiplied by the number of users of the fund.

10 The private part of the fund consists of the amount remaining in the total fund after deducting the total housekeeping fund.

11 The reserve section of the fund consists of
a) 5% of the general sum deducted immediately on transfer of the money from the subscriber to the general fund.
b) the amount by which the actual sum exceeds the sum determined for the subsistence of the members for one year.
c) savings from the housekeeping fund.

12 The reserve fund is divided into a sum for purchasers and an emergency fund.
a) The purchasing fund is composed as follows: 1) 5% of the sum subscribed, 2) half the amount by which the actual fund exceeds the amount determined for the subsistence of the members for one year and 3) half the savings from the housekeeping fund.
b) The emergency sum is composed of 1) the second half of the sum by which the actual fund exceeds the amount determined for subsistence for one year and 2) the second half of the savings from the housekeeping fund. The emergency fund is intended for paying out to those leaving the prison and must always be at hand in cash.

IV

Ownership of Cash

13 Any money subscribed in cash becomes common property and is not returnable.

V

Division of Cash

14 The division of the total sum into housekeeping and private sections can be correct or incorrect.
a) Correct division of the money must be in accordance with the annual share determined in the estimate, i.e. for this year 1832 (except for the 5% of the reserve section) 237r for each contributor for housekeeping and 248r 80k for private use.
b) An incorrect division is one which does not correspond to the annual sharing out.

15 If the sum deducted by correct division is sufficient for housekeeping needs, then it will be correct: but if it is not sufficient, it is incorrect, and the calculation is carried out according to the following table compiled for the coming year:

Months	Household fund		Private Participants' fund	
	Amount which should be paid	available amount	Amount which should be paid	available amount
March	19.75	40	20.73	0
April	19.75	24	20.73	16
May	19.75	16	20.73	24
June	19.75	16	20.73	24
July	19.75	18	20.73	22
August	19.75	20	20.73	22
September	19.75	21	20.73	20
October	19.75	20	20.73	20
November	19.75	20	20.73	20
December	19.75	16	20.73	24
January	19.75	14	20.73	26
February	19.75	12	20.73	30.80
Total	237	237	248.80	248.80

VI

Transfer of Money

16 The housekeeping fund is to be used exclusively for the purchase of provisions.

17 The private fund is divided into equal portions according to the number of subscribers, and on transfer becomes the permanent and untouchable property of the subscriber.

VII

Management of the Funds

18 The annual management of the common funds and the use of it are carried out by two committees:

a) The temporary committee, which decides the use to which the fund is to be put for the year, i.e. it confirms the estimate made by the housekeeper for the next housekeeping year from 1st March to the 1st of the same month the following year.

b) The permanent committee, named the housekeeping committee supervises the allocation and transfer of money according to the estimate confirmed by the temporary committee.

19 The temporary committee, consisting of five members, usually meets before the election of the housekeeper and treasurer, and in addition to confirming the estimate, its purpose is

a) to audit the accounts of the common fund.
b) Examine the rules and propose any necessary changes in them for general decision.
c) Arrangements for elections of office-bearers.
d) Handing over the housekeeping to newly-elected persons.

20 The temporary committee dissolves immediately after carrying out the above duties.

21 The housekeeping committee consists of three members elected annually: the housekeeper, the buyer and the treasurer. They will also have a vote in the temporary committee during the compilation of the estimate and its confirmation.

22 In the housekeeping commission the housekeeper is responsible for general housekeeping matters, and the buyer for private needs, while the treasurer acts as intermediary between them.

23 The housekeeping committee divides the total fund into housekeeping and private sections; uses part of the housekeeping fund for bulk buying, and authorises payments made from the emergency fund; makes a preliminary examination of conditions and contracts made between the housekeeper and the treasurer, audits private and common account books monthly, and after the end of the audit two members of this committee, the housekeeper and the buyer, sign the accounts they have audited. The committee is also responsible for changing coins sent to participants in the fund. Finally before the end of the housekeeping year the committee carries out a stock-taking of whatever is left over from the year's supplies of provisions and adds their value to the reserve sum.

VIII

Duties of the Housekeeper

24 The housekeeper is elected for one year and takes over from his predecessor an inventory of everything owned by the common household.

25 The housekeeper compiles an estimate of requirements for the coming year and presents it to the temporary committee for confirmation.

26 If owing to an unforeseen rise in prices of stocks the prices exceed the estimate, the deficit arising from the increase in prices is compensated by a corresponding reduction in the amount of tea and sugar issued. However the housekeeper must never exceed the amount stated in the estimate.

27 Before making bulk purchases of sugar and tea the housekeeper must ask whether any member wishes to purchase these from his private funds in addition.

28 At the same time he must enquire whether any member wishes to receive the value of his ration of tea and sugar in cash.

29 The issue of tea and sugar is made by the housekeeper in the common room on a day which he must announce beforehand.

30 The housekeeper chooses a convenient time for the sale of flour and informs the treasurer in writing of the amount received for it.

31 The housekeeper keeps an account of gross income and expenditure and passes this information on to the treasurer two hours before an order is made.

32 The housekeeper must draw up a roster of duties for keeping the kitchen clean and give each member a week's notice of his turn of duty.

33 All servants working in the kitchen and the bathhouse are at the full disposal of the housekeeper: when hiring them, he must inform them that they are to carry out immediately any private instructions to help any member of the fund (artel') who may become ill during the night.

34 It is every housekeeper's duty to present to the temporary committee at the first meeting after its election a detailed account of all previous purchases: indicating

a) the time, quantity and type of goods purchased, their prices, the source of the money used, whether it was obtained by loan or other means, and whether large purchases were made,
b) whether the purchases were satisfactory or not, with reasons for this.

35 If the housekeeper is ill for a short period, his duties are to be carried out by the treasurer; if the illness of either housekeeper or treasurer is prolonged, new members are to be elected according to the established procedures.

IX

Duties of the Buyer

36 The buyer goes to the shop twice a week and in addition sends the guard there once a week.

37 No-one can require the buyer to buy goods on credit.

38 The buyer keeps one account book for all purchases he makes.

39 The buyer exhibits and distributes goods in the common room on a fixed day and time which he fixes himself once a year on taking up his office. The customers on receiving goods from the buyer must give him a payment note on his request.

40 The buyer arranges the roster for everyone doing official work. If the officer on duty informs the buyer that not everyone has come out to work, he [the officer] gives the buyer a list of the work roster. If for any reason more men are required for work, he deducts the number of persons from the next roster and informs them of this. On the next day the list of workers begins with the first name remaining on the current roster.

41 The buyer must have his own table in the office (see paragraph 81) for conducting his business and keeping his account books, also a large cupboard for keeping goods and a lockable box for records of purchases.

42 If the buyer is ill for a short time, his duties are carried out by the housekeeper; if his illness is prolonged new elections are held.

X

Duties of the Treasurer

43 The treasurer begins his duties by collecting subscriptions for the forthcoming year and presents the list to the temporary committee for scrutiny and for confirmation of the estimate of expenditure.

44 He transfers the money subscribed from individual accounts to the common fund immediately they have been sent; when the sum subscribed is over 500r he asks for the subscriber's agreement before doing so, but not if the sum is 500r or less. However, he informs the subscriber of his action in every case.

45 When dividing the cash of the private fund among participants the treasurer informs each person on the 25th day of the month of the sum paid to his account. This information is written on a blackboard in the common room.

46 No-one except the treasurer has the right to make deductions from the common funds, and he alone contacts the mine management regarding this fund.

47 The treasurer makes records of all the sums included in the common fund, as well as other sums, i.e. the housekeeping, garden plot, reserve and personal funds.

48 The treasurer makes withdrawals three times a week.

49 The treasurer bases withdrawals on the housekeeper's notes from the housekeeping fund, and those from the cash of the garden plot fund on notes from the buyer and private individuals, who must hand in their notes to him at least two hours before the withdrawal is to be made.

50 If anyone does not wish to draw his share and leaves it in the general private fund for the time being, the treasurer must require him to indicate when he wishes to receive it and the treasurer cannot pay it to him before the time indicated.

51 To avoid money being held up in one fund and delay in paying from another, the treasurer can transfer money from the credit of one fund to debit it to the other, but the sum being debited must be completely covered by subscriptions.

52 The treasurer may not transfer money from one account to another without the signature of the holder of that account.

53 The treasurer does not have to be involved in personal agreements or make a note of who owes what to whom.

54 He obtains hard-back account books from the housekeeper.

55 The treasurer must keep the accounts by double entry according to the accepted practice for this as follows:

No.1: general subscription
No.2: general income and expenditure
No.3: housekeeping
No.4: private, consisting of numbered subscribers' books with an alphabetical list of their names
No.5: cash record

Note: If an emergency sum or a purchasing sum accumulates, the treasurer must have an additional 6th and 7th book.

56 Every Saturday, from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m., the account books, with the exception of the alphabetical list (No.4 above) must be placed in the common room for those who wish to refer to them.

57 The treasurer must show the account books forming the alphabetical list to anyone who wishes to consult them, twice a week, in a place and at a time to be fixed by him once only for the whole year when he enters upon his duties; however he only shows members wishing to consult the books the statement of their own income and expenditure.

58 The treasurer must have his own table in the office (see paragraph 81) for conducting his business and keeping the account books, and a lockable box for keeping payment notes.

XI

Duties of the Gardener

59 In addition to the principal persons above, a gardener is elected.

60 When the time comes to elect a gardener, the housekeeping committee does this according to the established electoral procedure.

61 The gardener's duties are to make an estimate of the amount of money needed for the vegetable garden; when the housekeeping committee has confirmed the estimate, the gardener receives the allotted sum. The gardener consults the housekeeper about the kind and quantity of vegetables which will be required for feeding the community. While the vegetables are in the ground, he is in charge of them independently of the housekeeper, but informs the latter a few days before gathering them about the quantity and kind of vegetables which can be gathered for feeding the community.

XII

General Rules

62 The fund is administered according to rules compiled by the temporary committee and confirmed by a majority of votes in favour; but if a motion was not proposed through the temporary committee it does not apply to those who disagree with it even if it is passed by a majority vote.

63 All participants in the common fund have equal rights to the common fund.

64 All branches of the common fund association are founded and supported by the common sums. The housekeeper is forbidden to subscribe to any general expenditure.

65 Each member is obliged to accept public duties except those who do not make use of the benefits to the association resulting from the carrying out of these duties.

66 Anyone who has held office once as result of election has the right to refuse such duties for a period of three years.

67 Each member has the right to make contributions to any branch of the fund at any time. The use of such contributions is to be subject to the rules established for each branch separately.

68 For each person the sum for subsistence is set at 500r if sufficient money has been subscribed, otherwise it is to be arrived at by dividing the total by the number of participants.

69 The association guarantees to every member leaving it the remainder of his full annual contribution less the sum spent on his behalf.

70 When the reserve fund is realised, payment from it to those leaving is to be decided by unanimous decision of the housekeeping committee.
Note: In case of the sudden departure of any member, the housekeeping committee may pay him up to 300r from the reserve fund.

71 Payment for laundry is to be met not from the housekeeping fund but by each member from his own money owing to the variability in the amount of linen which the members send.

72 Each member has the right to make comments on the rules of the association and the carrying out of public duties. These comments are to be addressed to the housekeeping committee, which is to retain them for passing on to the temporary committee. If comments on the same subject are made by up to one third of the members, the housekeeping committee must immediately summon a meeting of the temporary committee which will examine the comments and submit them for general decision.

73 No member may require the housekeeping committee to submit for general discussion comments made by one person only and not relating to the organisation of the association; but if such comments are submitted with the signatures of more than one seventh (1/7) of all members of the association the committee must submit them for general decision.

74 All proposals made by the housekeeping committee are to be expressed in such a fashion that each member can answer them with the words "yes" or "no".

75 Comments or objections made by any member on proposals by the temporary committee or the housekeeping committee can only be accepted on a separate sheet [of paper] and must relate directly to the matter raised.

76 If the matter raised consists of several points, these must be submitted separately so that each can be answered with the words "yes" or "no".

77 Office-bearers do not vote on matters relating to the carrying out of their duties.

78 Any member requiring access to up to three office-bearers must contact them only on the day and at the time and in the place which they [the office-bearers] specify.

79 Any member withdrawing money must indicate on the payment note the fund from which he is making the withdrawal, i.e. the section fund or his private fund.

80 The common room is under the supervision of the housekeeper.

81 The common room is divided into two parts: the office of the housekeeping committee is to be set up in the smaller one, while the larger part is left for general purposes, e.g. religious services, elections, classes etc.

82 The original copy of the rules is to be kept by the housekeeper, and two copies are to be available for members' use.

XIII

Elections

Election of the Temporary Committee

83 The housekeeping committee informs all members of the association of forthcoming elections to the temporary committee, and requests each member to indicate whether he is going to vote: the number of voters is then divided into five groups in numerical order, and if the number does not divide equally the remaining names are added to the last group.

84 Members of the housekeeping committee are to go round the sections with a special packet for each one and the correct number of voting papers for the number of voters. The latter are to write on the voting paper under their own names the names of those for whom they are voting, and place the voting paper in the packet for their section.

85 The housekeeper, the buyer and the treasurer scrutinise the voting papers. The name which receives the greatest number of votes (if there is an even number of voters this must be half the votes plus one) is declared to be a member of the temporary committee.

86 After three inconclusive elections in any section of electors its members elect a member of the temporary committee from amongst the candidates of the other sections. If none of these receives a decisive majority vote in that division, they may elect the two candidates who receive the most votes. If in this event too the votes are evenly divided, the decision is made by casting lots.

87 On the day after the election all the newly-elected members of the temporary committee meet in the hall and examine one another's authorisation.

On Election and Voting for Responsible Positions

88 During the election and voting for the housekeeper and treasurer the temporary committee is in charge of the proceedings.

89 During the election and voting for the buyer and the gardener the housekeeping committee is in charge of the proceedings, unless they too elect the same persons as those chosen by the housekeeper and the treasurer.

90 When all office-bearers are being elected at the same time, the following order is observed: the housekeeper is elected first, then the treasurer, then the buyer and finally the gardener.

Electoral Procedure

91 Two days before the election the committee responsible for organising it informs everyone of the office to which election is being held.

92 The committee through its members collects the votes according to the procedure described above.

93 Failure to register a vote is regarded as agreement with the clear majority of the votes cast.

94 The member who receives the clear majority of votes is elected.

95 If no candidate receives a clear majority of votes, the two candidates who together receive the greatest number of votes in comparison with the rest become candidates and are voted on.

96 If the votes are equally divided between two candidates, the decision is made by casting lots.

Voting Procedure

97 On the day before the ballot the committee announces the names of the two candidates and informs them of the procedure which is to be observed for carrying out the ballot.

98 All those who voted in the selection also take part in the balloting; anyone who does not attend conveys his vote in writing through one of the committee members.

99 Only those who took part in the selection have the right to vote.

100 On the day of the ballot one of the members of the committee hands out the voting balls in the hall, giving each elector separately one white ball and one black one for each candidate.

101 On receiving the balls the elector goes up to the two voting boxes placed ready: another member of the committee standing beside them indicates which box is for which candidate.

102 The names of those who have deposited the balls are marked on an alphabetical list.

103 When all the balls have been deposited, the committee in the presence of all the voters counts the white and black balls for each candidate. The candidate who receives a clear majority of votes compared to the number of voters and compared to the other candidate is declared elected.

104 If both have a clear majority but have the same number of votes, the ballot is repeated. If three indecisive ballots occur, the election is decided by lot.

105 If neither candidate receives a clear majority of white balls, the voters hold another election.

Addendum

106 The public account books for 11 months, i.e. up to the 1st February, must be presented separately by the 10th of that month, so that after the 1st March only one month's accounts need to be verified.

Basargin, N.V. in: Memuary dekabristov. Yuzhnoe obshchestvo. M. 1982, pp.88-99.

CHAPTER VII: WIVES OF THE DECEMBRISTS IN CHITA AND PETROVSKIY ZAVOD

Mariya Nikolaevna Volkonskaya and Ekaterina Ivanovna Trubetskaya, to whose arrival in Blagodatsk reference has already been made (Chapter III, 9) followed their husbands to Chita and Petrovskiy zavod. During the two years following their arrival they were joined by

Aleksandra Grigor'evna Murav'eva (February 1827)
Aleksandra Vasil'evna Ental'tseva (May 1827)
Elizaveta Petrovna Naryshkina (May 1827)
Aleksandra Ivanovna Davydova (March 1828)
Nataliya Dmitrievna Fonvizina (March 1828)

Pauline Guèble (known in Russia as Praskov'ya Egorovna) arrived in March 1828 and was married to Ivan Aleksandrovich Annenkov immediately on arrival.

Many of these women had been brought up in wealthy families with plenty of servants (serfs) and social life, especially Trubetskaya and Volkonskaya. Now they had to learn to cook and sew, although some had serfs with them. Sometimes, too, they were obliged to fight for the welfare of their husbands. All this was done in conditions imposed by a harsh climate, physical discomfort and primitive accommodation, with poor medical facilities and an uncertain outlook for the future.

In Chita all the wives lived outside the prison in rented accommodation, and were allowed to visit their husbands twice a week for one hour, later extended to two. On these occasions other prisoners living in the room were taken out to another part of the prison. Between these visits the wives used to come to the outside of the stockade, whatever the weather, and try to catch a glimpse of their husbands through the gaps between the logs, or even to converse with

them. The sentries had been instructed not to allow this, and used to drive them off, sometimes even pushing them away with their rifle-butts. The visits are referred to in A.I. Odoevskiy's beautiful poem "To Princess M.N. Volkonskaya" (December 1829). From 1828 on husbands were allowed to visit their wives daily and stay with them overnight if the latter were unwell. From 1828 married couples were able to live together in the houses built by some of the prisoners in the prison precincts.

1 The Price Paid by the Wives to Join Their Husbands

The price which these women had to pay to be able to join their husbands was in some cases very high. It was not merely a question of the physical risks involved in such a long and arduous journey for young women accompanied only by a manservant and a personal maid. These risks did not in fact materialise. In any case, they would not have deterred the wives, although it could be argued that some, apart from the hazy notions of Siberia as a land of eternal ice and snow current at the time, did not fully realise what conditions they were going to find when they reached their destinations. This could particularly be said of Volkonskaya, who was only just 21 when she decided to follow her husband into exile. It is confirmed in a letter she wrote to her mother-in-law from Nerchinsk on 28.5.1827:

> Now I can understand what His Majesty the Emperor meant when he said "Now think what awaits you once you are past Irkutsk", and I thank God a thousand times that I did not understand it earlier.[1]

She was referring here (discreetly, because the letter was being sent through official channels and would be censored) to the difficulties which had been placed in her way, and in the way of other

wives of Decembrists who were also trying to join their husbands.

The decision to reunite with the "state criminals" caused consternation not only to the Tsar — whose main fear was that they would arouse sympathy for the prisoners by sharing their fate — but also to the families of some of them. The pressures exerted on Volkonskaya at this stage were particularly severe: she was caught up in the cross-fire of her own family's disapproval and attempts to stop her, and accusations from her husband's family that she lacked affection for him and was in no hurry to go. One of the Volkonskiy family's tactics was to keep her short of cash — which she answered by pawning her diamonds without telling them. Some wives who applied for permission to go to Siberia were refused outright by the Tsar: these were the wives of Aleksandr Fedorovich Briggen, A.Z. Murav'ev and Fedor Petrovich Shakhovskoy, and also the sister of Aleksandr Petrovich Belyaev and his brother Petr. Yakushkin's wife, Elizaveta Petrovna, was told she could go, but at the last moment one of her sons became ill, and she stayed to look after him. The permit lapsed, and she was then told that since she had not taken it up, it could not be renewed. In her case her husband was against her taking the risk of bringing children on such a journey; the other wives had to leave their children behind. Particularly cruel was the cat-and-mouse game played with the mother and sisters of M. and N. Bestuzhev: believing the Tsar's assurance that they were to be allowed to go to Siberia, they sold all their property and their estate, sent their luggage away to Selenginsk, and set off, only to be told on reaching Moscow that the permission had been withdrawn. They had no friends in Moscow and were stranded. The mother did not survive the shock and died a few days later, while the sisters had

to wait some years before they were at last able to join their brothers.[2]

More humiliations were in store for these intrepid women when they did reach Siberia: the governor of Siberia had been instructed to try to persuade Trubetskaya to turn back by telling her about the harsh conditions she would find east of Irkutsk. When reasoning and threats failed, she, and others who followed, were made to sign the following document, agreeing to give up their titles and other privileges:

> i. A wife following her husband and continuing conjugal relations with him naturally shares his fate and loses her former title, that is, she is known only as the wife of an exiled forced labourer, and therefore undertakes to endure everything that this status involves that is disagreeable in such a situation, for even the authorities will be unable to protect her from being humiliated perhaps every hour by persons of the most depraved and contemptible class, who may see in this a certain right to consider the wife of a state criminal sharing his fate to be like themselves. Such humiliations may well be physical. Hardened villains are unafraid of punishment.
> ii. Children born to them in Siberia will become state (factory) peasants [possessyonnye krest'yane].
> iii. No money or valuables may be taken with them; this is forbidden by the existing regulations, and is necessary for safety, because these places are inhabited by people prepared to commit any crime.
> iv. On departure to Nerchinsk they lose the right to be accompanied by serfs.[3]

When Volkonskaya's manservant read this document (which she signed without reading it) he exclaimed in horror, "Princess, what have you done? What have they made you do?"[4] Nevertheless, she wrote to her mother-in-law on 28.5.1827:

> I assure you, dear Mama, that there are no sacrifices I would not make to obtain the only consolation I can have in this world, that of sharing the fate of my husband; and certainly the loss of titles and possessions is no loss for me.[5]

The hardest condition imposed on these wives by Nicholas I was

undoubtedly the fact that children had to be left behind. M.N. Volkonskaya had a son born in January 1826 whom she left in the care of her husband's family. This child died soon after her arrival in Chita. The wives of Rozen, Trubetskoy, Fonvizin and Yushnevskiy each had two children. The largest family was that of Lev Vasil'evich Davydov, whose wife left behind six children in the care of various relatives. The agonising choice between children and husband can be imagined. There was also the question of the children's status: those born in Siberia were to lose their titles and become children of "state criminals" thereby losing the right to (amongst other things) education, which would affect their future.

2 The Role of the Wives

The role of these women in keeping up the morale of their husbands can hardly be exaggerated. A.I. Odoevskiy's poem mentioned above calls them "angels from an azure sky", and A.E. Rozen called them "our guardian angels". Their own attitude to what others regarded as their heroism was summed up (after the amnesty in 1856) in a remark made by A.I. Davydova: "It was the poets who made us into heroines, all we did was follow our husbands."

Volkonskaya and Trubetskaya had already begun writing letters on behalf of their husbands in Blagodatsk. Now, although the writing was shared by a greater number of women, the volume of correspondence was also greatly increased, and the letters were not only personal. The wives formed a link between the prisoners and the outside world, fulfilling a valuable function and preventing that isolation of the prisoners which Nicholas I had tried to achieve. Technically the wives were not prisoners, and could not therefore be prevented from

corresponding. All their letters — that is, all those which they sent through official channels — had first to be presented, unsealed, to the prison commandant, who read them and then sent them on to St Petersburg, where they were censored in the Third Department; nevertheless the wives were not afraid to pass on complaints about the treatment and conditions of the prisoners, sometimes in the frankest terms, or indeed to do so personally to the commandant.[6] The letters, written, as stipulated by the Third Department, legibly and in black ink, conveyed not only family news, but also requests for books, periodicals, seeds, tobacco, wine and other items which made life in prison a little more tolerable, and they conveyed the unspoken message that the prisoners were not forgotten.

3 Wives of the Decembrists (in order of arrival)

a) Ekaterina Ivanovna Trubetskaya (known as "Katasha"), 1800-1854.

Ekaterina Ivanovna Trubetskaya's father was Count I.S. Laval, a French émigré who had left France in 1791 and joined the Russian army.[7] The Lavals were very wealthy, and their large house in St Petersburg was visited by most of the literary and other celebrities of the time. S.P. Trubetskoy and his wife also lived there after their marriage, and it was in their apartment that many meetings of the Northern Society took place.[8]

Ekaterina Ivanovna showed no hesitation in giving all this up in order to join her husband in exile. On the day after he was sent away to Siberia she, too, left St Petersburg, accompanied by her father's secretary, Monsieur Vauché (as far as Irkutsk only).[9] Nothing stopped her, neither the breakdown of her carriage in Krasnoyarsk (she continued her journey in a hired one), nor the attempts of

the civil governor of Eastern Siberia, I.B. Tsaidler, acting on instructions from St Petersburg, to frighten her into turning back. Her devotion to her husband, her uncomplaining stoicism during the difficult period of her husband's imprisonment and in the isolation of Oyek, where they lived 1839-42, and her generous and kind nature made her much loved by all with whom she came into contact.

Although at first the Trubetskoys had considerable financial difficulties in Oyek, F.F. Vadkovskiy, a Decembrist exile also living there, described their household in a letter to I.I. Pushchin as

> ... a large household crowded with peasant women and girls, men and boys, eating and drinking their masters [khozyaeva] out of house and home... On a sofa ... Ekaterina Ivanovna with a pinch of snuff, meditating.... [Ekaterina Ivanovna] gets up at 5 or 6 in the morning and prays and reads religious books, which is reflected in all her opinions....[10]

and somewhat inhibits the conversation of younger men like Vadkovskiy.

The children of the Trubetskoys were:

Aleksandra 1830-1860, Elizaveta 1834-1918, Nikita 1835-1840, Vladimir 1838-1839, Zinaida 1837-1924, Ivan 1843-1874, Sofiya 1844-?.

The Trubetskoy family was allowed to move to Irkutsk in 1842. Ekaterina Ivanovna's health was failing, and it was thought that she could obtain better medical attention there. She died of cancer.

b) Mariya Nikolaevna Volkonskaya, 1805-1863

M.N. Volkonskaya was a daughter of N.N. Raevskiy, a hero of the war against Napoleon. She married Sergey Grigor'evich Volkonskiy, also a distinguished general, and 17 years her senior, in January 1825. He was a member of the Southern Society, which was based in Tul'chin (Ukraine). (This and the Northern Society, based in St Petersburg, were the successors of the secret societies of the

period prior to December 1825 in which the surge of criticism of the Russian establishment, impossible to voice openly, found expression.) It was to the Northern Society that chance — the sudden death of Alexander I — gave the opportunity for action.

The birth of the Volkonskiys' son in January 1826 was followed by a long and serious illness for Mariya Nikolaevna. Until she was at last told of her husband's arrest, she had known nothing about his involvement in politics, for he had thought it better for her not to be told. Like Trubetskaya, she immediately decided to join her husband in exile, although it was hard for her to leave her son. He died in 1828.

From her memoirs[11] it is clear that at the time of her marriage she did not really know S.G. Volkonskiy well: immediately after it she was in Odessa recuperating from an illness, while he was frequently absent on regimental duties. They had, in fact, only spent three months together.

The Raevskiy family were friends of Pushkin. He wanted Mariya Nikolaevna to take with her to Siberia the poem he had written addressed to the Decembrist exiles — "Deep in the Siberian mines" (Vo glubine sibirskikh rud). When he arrived at the house of Volkonskiy's sister-in-law, Zinaida, where Mariya Nikolaevna had been staying overnight to bid farewell to her Moscow friends, she had already left. It was A.G. Murav'eva who delivered it.

S.G. Volkonskiy was not well off in Siberia. Some members of his family were far from sympathetic to the exiles, took over the management of his estates and were unwilling to send him money. The circumstances of the exiled Volkonskiys improved when Mariya

Nikolaevna began to receive money from her own considerable funds in Russia.

After S.G. Volkonskiy's term of katorga ended in 1835, he and his family were allowed to live in Urik. This was their own choice: the Decembrist Dr Vol'f had been sent there to settle, and the Volkonskiys wanted to have the best possible medical attention for their children, Mikhail (1832-1909) and Elena (known as Nelly (1835-1910). Vol'f was moved to Tobol'sk in 1845. By this time the health of both the Volkonskiys was beginning to deteriorate, and they asked for permission to move to Irkutsk for the sake of better living conditions. Mariya Nikolaevna was allowed to return to Russia in 1855, but her husband could only follow her after the amnesty a year later.

In Irkutsk the Volkonskiys built a large house and furnished it luxuriously. It and the house of their friends the Trubetskoys became social and cultural centres for Irkutsk society. (Both houses are now museums.) In the case of the Volkonskiys, the social life was largely due to Mariya Nikolaevna's initiative, for her husband preferred to spend his time, dressed in shabby old clothes, chatting to peasants in the market, and used to disconcert his wife and her elegant guests by appearing thus dressed in the drawing-room.[12]

M.N. Volkonskaya was one of the most active wives of Decembrists in organising financial help for those leaving prison to settle in exile, and she was also generous in using her private income for this purpose. Volkonskiy mentions one instance of such help in a letter to I.I. Pushchin:

> My wife has helped to ensure the means of subsistence for them [the Borisov brothers] by an annual payment of 500 rubles.[13]

Doubts have been cast on the marriage of the Volkonskiys, particularly in view of the disparity in their ages and the fact that M.N. Volkonskaya did not have much opportunity to become properly acquainted with him before his arrest. It has been suggested that her feelings for him were not as strong as she led other people to believe, that she married him at her father's behest, and that her two surviving children were not fathered by him. Fedor Fedorovich Vadkovskiy (son of the Decembrist F.F. Vadkovskiy), who visited his father and other Decembrist exiles in Siberia in 1855-56, wrote in a letter to his wife:

> There are many rumours circulating about Mariya Nikolaevna's life in Siberia; it is said that even her son and daughter are not the children of Volkonskiy. Whoever their father may be, however, the love of the old man [S.G. Volkonskiy] is full of self-abnegation, and gives him a full right to them — something which apparently no-one in the family was willing to admit.[14]

While this throws a favourable light on the character of S.G. Volkonskiy, the next sentence makes a sad impression:

> All the affection of the children is centred on their mother, which has, of course, influenced their attitude to him as well.

M.N. Volkonskaya was also criticised for her view of the marriage of her daughter to Dmitriy Vasil'evich Molchanov, an official working in the local administration, who was accused of accepting bribes and tried and sentenced for this in Moscow. It was rumoured that M.N. Volkonskaya wanted this marriage to take place with a view to financial or social advantage for her daughter. Yakushkin wrote:

> Mariya Nikolaevna would listen to no-one, and told Volkonskiy's friends that if he [S.G. Volkonskiy] did not agree to the marriage, she would tell him that he had no right to do so, because he was not the father of her daughter.[15]

After the lapse of time these must be regarded as rumours, but their mention by the source quoted, not given to wild accusations or malice, suggest that they cannot be entirely discounted.

M.N. Volkonskaya was the author of memoirs, written ostensibly for her children, in which she described life in the two prisons. Her son developed a very critical attitude to the Decembrists and the rising, and for a long time withheld the memoirs from publication. They first appeared in print in 1904.

c) Aleksandra Grigor'evna Murav'eva, 1804-1832.

A.G. Murav'eva was one of the six daughters of Count Grigoriy Ivanovich Chernyshev, a wealthy landowner. She was related to several other participants in the rising: her brother Zakhar, her brother-in-law Aleksandr, her cousin F.F. Vadkovskiy, and her husband's cousin Mikhail Sergeevich Lunin, who were all sentenced to katorga and exile.

A.G. Murav'eva's family gave her their full support in her determination to join her husband in exile. This determination was evident from the very first announcement of his arrest (letter sent to him in the Peter-Paul Fortress, 2.1.1826[16]). Like M.N. Volkonskaya and E.I. Trubetskaya, A.G. Murav'eva was detained in Irkutsk while efforts were made to persuade her to turn back. Fortunately Pushkin's poem which she was carrying was not found, for it would probably have provided an excellent excuse to deny her permission to go on. This poem elicited from A.I. Odoevskiy a reply that is probably his most famous poem — The ardent sounds of the prophetic strings (Strun veshchikh plamennye zvuki...

Aleksandra Grigor'evna had to leave her two daughters and her son

in Russia to be looked after by her mother-in-law. The son died a year later. A daughter, Sofiya (known as Nonushka) was born in 1830.

d) Elizaveta Petrovna Naryshkina, 1801-1867.

E.P. Naryshkina was the daughter of Count P.F. Konovnitsyn, who had served with distinction in the campaigns against Napoleon. Two of her brothers were also involved in the rising, but were not sentenced to forced labour (I.P. and P.P. Konovnitsyn).

When her husband's term of forced labour ended in 1833 the Naryshkins were allowed to live in Kurgan. All this time Naryshkina was in poor health. They had no children, a daughter having died before Naryshkina left for Siberia. They adopted a daughter, Ul'yana, in Chita.

The Naryshkins were kept well supplied with money by their relatives and were able to help their fellow-exiles in need. Their own exile lasted only until 1837, when M.M. Naryshkin was allowed to join the Russian army in the Caucasus.[17]

e) Aleksandra Vasil'evna Ental'tseva, 1790-1858.

A.V. Ental'tseva's father was Lieutenant-Colonel Lisovskiy. Both her parents died when she was a child. The marriage to Andrey Vasil'evich Ental'tsev was her second one; she had a daughter from her first marriage, but no more children.

A.V. Ental'tsev's term of katorga was short, and after it ended in 1828 he was allowed to settle in Berezov. Here the climate and conditions were very harsh, and in 1830 they were allowed to move to Yalutorovsk, where a number of their fellow-exiles were already established. Unlike some of them, the Ental'tsevs were pursued by misfortunes. Hardship was caused when Ental'tsev's relatives

stopped sending them money. The inhabitants of Yalutorovsk did not really understand the Decembrists' situation and the Ental'tsevs in particular were subjected to petty harassment: for example, when Grand Duke Aleksandr, the heir to the throne, was visiting Yalutorovsk during a tour of Siberia, rumours began to circulate that Ental'tsev was plotting to shoot him. His house was thoroughly searched. The rumours arose because he had bought some large wooden balls to decorate his garden fence, and also a couple of ancient gun-carriages (no guns) which had been left behind in 1805 by a regiment temporarily stationed in the area.[18]

A.V. Ental'tsev became mentally ill, and his wife took him to Tobol'sk in the hope of finding a cure. When this proved impossible, they returned to Yalutorovsk, where she looked after him with great devotion until his death in 1845. Aleksandra Vasil'evna Ental'tseva was granted a small pension by the government, but it was barely sufficient for her basic needs. She returned to Russia after the amnesty in 1856.

f) Praskov'ya Egorovna Annenkova (Pauline Guèble), 1800-1876.

The romantic story of the love of Pauline Guèble for Annenkov, and her marriage to him in Siberia, is one of the best-documented biographies of wives of the Decembrists, thanks to her memoirs (written in 1861) and those of her daughter.

Pauline's parents were French. Her father was a Royalist aristocrat, an officer who was killed during Napoleon's Spanish campaign. Pauline's adventurous spirit and her poverty led her to accept the offer of a job in St Petersburg in a French fashion shop. She and Annenkov met six months before the rising. In spite of her origins,

the social gulf which now existed between them was too deep to be easily bridged. Annenkov's father had died, and the family estate was being managed by his mother, who had also inherited a large fortune from her own father. She was a capricious and despotic woman, and there was a serious threat that Annenkov would be disinherited if he married Pauline. There was also opposition from other members of the Annenkov family, some of whom were interested in gaining possession of the estate and accused Pauline of wanting to marry Annenkov for mercenary reasons. He himself was prepared to risk losing his estate, and on one occasion had even arranged for a priest and witnesses to be in attendance in a church on one of his estates; Pauline, however, refused to marry him without his mother's consent. However, a daughter was born to them in 1826. (She had, of course, to be left in Russia in 1828.[19])

At the time of the rising, Annenkov was a lieutenant in the guards. His mother, angered by his participation in the rising, was apparently quite indifferent to his fate when the sentences were announced, but, surprisingly, she now became very kind to Pauline.[20]

Faced with difficulty in obtaining permission to join Annenkov in Siberia and marry him, Pauline accosted Nicholas I personally during military manoeuvres to Belaya Tserkov',[21] when the often-quoted conversation between them took place: in reply to the Tsar's question "Are you his wife?" Pauline answered "No, but I am a mother". This is reputed to have led Nicholas I to give her the necessary permission.

Pauline Guèble had no money, but in spite of their antagonism — or perhaps her departure promised an opportunity for eventual enrichment — some of Annenkov's relatives contributed to her travel

expenses.[22] According to M.D. Frantseva, whose father was a civil servant in Siberia from 1836 to 1854, and who knew many of the Decembrists well, Nicholas I sent her a personal gift of 3000 rubles.[23]

I.A. Annenkov's mother provided Pauline with an escort of two serfs for the journey. Delayed at Irkutsk like the other wives of the Decembrist exiles, she left there on 29th February 1828 and crossed Lake Baykal on the ice. The driver took boards with him to lay across possible cracks in the ice, as was the practice at the time.[24] The marriage took place a month after Pauline's arrival in Chita.

Pauline was a practical and cheerful young woman. She quickly settled into the routine of life in Chita. She helped the less experienced Decembrist wives in their cooking experiments, commenting with slight amusement on their distaste for handling raw meat, which she did for them — after all, it was not their fault that they were unaccustomed to such practical matters:

> Their upbringing had not prepared them for such a life as became their lot, whereas I had been inured to everything through necessity.[25]

Five children were born to the Annenkovs during their exile.

In 1836 Annenkov's term of katorga ended, and they were able to move to Bel'skoe, a village about 130km from Irkutsk. They were now receiving large sums of money unofficially from Annenkov's mother, and news of this must have leaked to the local criminals. After two unsuccessful attempts, their house was burgled and money stolen. Now they had to admit to the authorities that they had been supplied with money contrary to the regulations. Two men were arrested, one of them the serf Andrey who had accompanied Pauline on her journey

to Siberia. Insufficient evidence against them was produced, and they were released, whereupon part of the money was mysteriously found in the garden. Andrey, however, was indiscreet enough to get drunk and boast about having spent the rest of it.

g) Nataliya Dmitrievna Fonvizina, 1805-1869.

N.D. Fonvizina's family were not well off, her father being the owner of a small estate called Otrada in Kostroma guberniya. At the age of 16 she married General Mikhail Aleksandrovich Fonvizin, nephew of the writer, and 17 years her senior. Like Pushkin's heroine Tatyana, N.D. Fonvizina had fallen in love with a sophisticated young man on a neighbouring estate, who had disdained her. Also like Tatyana, she married a distinguished general much older than herself, and became a member of St Petersburg society. These similarities lend plausibility to the suggestion that she was the prototype of Tatyana.

N.D. Fonvizina was intelligent and well-read, ans also devoutly religious. Highly strung and emotional, she suffered from several nervous illnesses during her years in Siberia.

Before their exile the Fonvizins had two sons, left in the care of M.A. Fonvizin's brother.[26] They both died in their mid-twenties in 1850.[27] Two children born in Siberia also died.[28]

After the end of M.A. Fonvizin's katorga he and his wife settled in Eniseysk where, according to M.D. Frantseva,

> ... there was hardly any society; the officials were very uneducated and boorish, their main pleasures only drinking and cards ... a decent man who found himself in this circle would find it unbearable.[29]

The Fonvizins found more congenial company when they moved to

Krasnoyarsk, where several of their fellow-exiles were already living. M.A. Fonvizin's relatives requested permission for them to move again, to Tobol'sk, the civil governor of which, Prince Petr Dmitrievich Gorchakov, was a relative of M.A. Fonvizin.[30] Here they were able to have a pleasanter social life. In 1853 M.A. Fonvizin's brother Ivan visited them, and obtained permission for M.A. Fonvizin to return to Russia for health reasons. His wife was allowed to return only in 1854.

h) Aleksandra Ivanovna Davydova, 1801-1893.

A.I. Davydova already had six children when her husband was sentenced after the rising. She left them in St Petersburg in the care of a relative, Countess Chernova-Kruglikova.[31] The Davydovs had seven more children in Siberia. Comparatively little mention is made of A.I. Davydova by the memoirists, but as a person she was notable for her gentle and happy disposition and even temper, and for her devotion to her husband and children.[32]

After the end of V.L. Davydov's katorga in 1839, he and his family lived in Krasnoyarsk, and remained there until his death in 1855, only a few months before the amnesty. His widow and children were allowed to return to the family estate of Kamenka (Ukraine).

i) Anna Vasil'evna Rozen, 1797-1883.

A.V. Rozen was a daughter of V.F. Malinovskiy, the first head of the lycée in Tsarskoe selo. The Rozens were married in April 1825. A.V. Rozen had been told of her husband's political activities and fully sympathised with them. A son was born in January 1826,[33] and when the question of joining her husband in Siberia arose, A.E. Rozen advised his wife to wait until the child was a little older

and better able to stand the journey. However, she decided to go to Siberia, and left the baby to be looked after by one of her sisters.[34] A.E. Rozen had seen the child only once, when his mother had brought him with her when she visited her husband in the Peter-Paul Fortress a few weeks after the baby's birth. Father and son were reunited in 1838, after A.E. Rozen was transferred to the army in the Caucasus. This parting and subsequent reunion are referred to in A.I. Odoevskiy's poem "In my cradle I was parted from my father and mother" (Ya razluchilsya v kolybeli S ottsom i mater'yu moey (Pyatigorsk 1838).[35]

Three more sons and two daughters were born in Siberia: Kondratiy, 1831 (named after A.E. Rozen's friend K.F. Ryleev, poet and leader of the Northern Society and the rising, executed in 1826[36]), Vasiliy, 1832, Vladimir, 1834, Anna, 1836, Sof'ya, 1839. The last-named lived only one week, the dates of the deaths of the rest are not known, thought to be not later than 1899.

A.I. Odoevskiy dedicated to Kondratiy Rozen a poem, "Cradle Song" (Kolybel'naya pesnya) in the last 18 lines of which he expresses faith in the continuation of the Decembrist cause by succeeding generations, and the ultimate achievement of its aims. The poem was published without this last section in 1883; it was deleted by the censor. The full version of the poem was printed only in 1923.

A.E. Rozen's term of katorga ended in 1837 and the family went to live in Kurgan. In 1837 he was allowed to join the army in the Caucasus, and the whole family left Siberia.

j) Mariya Kazimirovna Yushnevskaya, 1790-1863.

M.K. Yushnevskaya was Polish and a Roman Catholic. Her marriage

to Aleksey Petrovich Yushnevskiy was her second one. From her first marriage she had a young daughter, whom she had to leave behind in Russia.[37]

After her arrival in Petrovskiy zavod she and her husband were financially very insecure owing to a complicated legal tangle over the administration of Yushnevskiy's estate by his relatives. Even his mother was not empowered to send him money. This situation continued for eight years. There are frequent references in the letters of both the Yushnevskiys to their financial predicament.[38]

After the end of A.P. Yushnevskiy's katorga in 1839 they were sent to Oyek, where their friend and fellow-exile F.F. Vadkovskiy was already living. They had difficulties here too: the soil of the plot allocated to Yushnevskiy for cultivation was extremely poor, and rising prices added to their hardships.[39]

Both the Yushnevskiys continued to take an interest in contemporary music and literature, although towards the end of her residence in Siberia M.K. Yushnevskaya became almost blind.

In 1844 Vadkovskiy died. During the funeral service Yushnevskiy, who had helped to carry his friend's coffin, had a stroke and died almost immediately. M.K. Yushnevskaya was allowed to return to Russia only in 1855, although she insisted that she had not signed the document signed by other wives of Decembrists.[40] In 1851 she moved to the village of Malaya Razvodnaya. In her room she set up an altar, and a local Roman Catholic priest used to come every morning to celebrate Mass. In spite of all the hardships she had endured, M.K. Yushnevskaya found it possible to write in a letter (4.4.1855)

> I thank the Lord zealously for His mercies and for my being able to live thus and have the consolations of religion.[41]

k) Kamilla Petrovna Ivasheva (Camille le Dantu), 1808-1839.

The last of the wives of Decembrists to arrive in Siberia was, like Pauline Guèble, French. Camille le Dantu's father was an émigré escaping not from revolutionary France but from the Emperor Napoleon, for he himself had republican sympathies. After their arrival in Russia, his wife became governess to the two daughters of General Petr Nikiforovich Ivashev, a wealthy landowner living in the Simbirsk guberniya. His son, a lieutenant in the army, and the still very young Camille fell in love. After V.P. Ivashev was sent away to exile, Camille pined in secret and became so ill that at last she had to confess her love for him. Ivashev's parents asked Benkendorf to allow her to join their son in Siberia and marry him.[42]

V.P. Ivashev meanwhile was plotting a desperate and quite hopeless escape from prison with the dubious help of some of the ordinary convicts, causing his fellow-prisoners much concern when they discovered what was going on. He was suddenly summoned to the commandant's office, but instead of learning that the plot had been discovered, as he feared, he was asked whether he was willing to marry Camille. The news of her arrival came just in time to prevent an attempted escape that was doomed to failure.[43] The marriage of V.P. Ivashev and Camille le Dantu took place a few days after her arrival.

Three daughters and a son were born to the Ivashevs. The first, Aleksandra, born in 1833, died in 1835. In 1836 they went to settle in Turinsk, where in 1839 their fourth child, a daughter, was born.

She died at birth and Camille herself died almost immediately after. Shattered by this, V.P. Ivashev survived for a while, but he, too, died, almost exactly on the first anniversary of his wife's death.[44]

Camille was a young woman of great charm and was much loved by all her fellow-exiles, both men and women. Like M.N. Volkonskaya, she did not know her husband very well when she married him, but by all accounts the marriage was a very happy one. She adapted well to her new environment, even to living inside the prison. When they left Petrovskiy zavod V.P. Ivashev's father sent them 10,000 rubles to build a house, and was also generous in sending them clothes, books, carpets, wines and other luxuries.[45]

A.I. Odoevskiy's poem "Along the Highway... (A Distant Journey)" (Po doroge stolbovoy... (Dalekiy put'), written in Petrovskiy zavod in 1832, was dedicated to Camille and describes her dashing across snowy wastes in a sledge to join her imprisoned husband — a somewhat inaccurate picture, since she actually arrived in the autumn, but romantically beautiful.

4 An Offer of Education for Children of Exiled Decembrists

In 1842 a manifesto was issued by the Russian government offering free education for the children born to the Decembrist exiles in Siberia. Boys would go to a military academy, and girls to special schools for the daughters of the aristocracy (Institut blagorodnykh devits). However, the offer was accompanied by a condition: the children were to forfeit their surnames, and be known by new surnames formed from the first names of their fathers: thus, the son of Sergey Grigor'evich Volkonskiy was to be known not as Mikhail Sergeevich Volkonskiy, but as Mikhail Sergeev. This condition

aroused great indignation among the exiles, and they all refused to allow their children to be educated on such terms, except V.L. Davydov, who had a large family. F.F. Vadkovskiy commented:

> Poor fellow — for the sake of an extra kopek or an extra dish of food he sells his children and torments his wife [to death — ubivaet].[46]

The children of the other Decembrists were either educated by their parents and other exiles, or, like Mikhail Volkonskiy, at local schools where they were available (Irkutsk in his case).

Notes to Chapter VII

1 Pis'ma M.N. Volkonskoy. Russkie propileyi I. M. 1915, pp.18-19. (Hereafter Pis'ma M.N.V.)

2 Vospominaniya Bestuzhevykh. M.K. Azadovskiy ed. M. 1951, pp.192-193, 319.

3 Zapiski knyagini M.N. Volkonskoy, in: Svoey sud'boy gordimsya my. Mark Sergeev comp. Irkutsk 1977, pp.322-323. (Hereafter Zapiski M.N.V.)

4 ibid. p.322.

5 Pis'ma M.N.V., p.18.

6 Memuary dekabristov: Yuzhnoe obshchestvo. M. 1982, pp.72-73.

7 Mazour, A., Women in Exile: Wives of the Decembrists. Diplomatic Press, Tallahassee, Florida, 1975, p.

8 Davydoff, Alexander, Russian Sketches. Memoirs. Hermitage 1984, pp.48-54. Printseva, G.A., Bastareva, P.I., Dekabristy v Peterburge. L. 1975, p.25.

9 Rozen, A.E., Zapiski dekabrista. Irkutsk 1984, pp.228, 437 (note 236).

10 Dekabristy na poselenii: iz arkhiva Yakushkinykh. E. Yakushkin ed. M. 1926. Letter of 30.10.1840, pp.85-86. (Hereafter Dek. na pos.)

11 Zapiski M.N.V., p.312.

12 Belogolovyy, N.A., Iz vospominaniy sibiryaka o dekabristakh, in: V potomkakh vashe imya ozhyvet. Irkutsk 1986, p.34. (Hereafter V potomkakh.)

13 Dek. na pos. p.73 (letter of 3.1.1842.)

14 ibid. pp.51-52.

15 ibid. p.52.

16 Pavlyuchenko, E.A., V dobrovol'nom izgnanii. M. 1976, p.16; Druzhinin, N.M., Dekabrist Nikita Murav'ev; Druzhinin, N.M., Semeystvo Chernyshevykh. Last two titles in Druzhinin, N.M., Izbrannye trudy: Revolyutsionnoe dvizhenie v Rossii v XIXv. M. 1985, pp.205-207, 348.

17 Rishchevskiy, P.I., Dekabristy v tobol'skom izgnanii. Sverdlovsk 1975, p.58.

18 V potomkakh, p.261.

19 Vospominaniya Poliny Annenkovoy. M. 1929, pp.68-69. (Hereafter Annenkova.)

20 ibid. p.131.

21 Rozen, p.239.

22 Annenkova, pp.139-140.

23 Frantseva, M.D., Vospominaniya, in: V potomkakh, p.296.

24 Annenkova, pp.153-154.

25 ibid. p.173.

26 Frantseva, p.294.

27 ibid. p.302.

28 ibid. p.294.

29 ibid. p.287.

30 ibid. p.289.

31 Davydoff, p.239.

32 Rozen, p.239.

33 ibid. p.40.

34 ibid. pp.30, 31.

35 ibid. p.343.

36 ibid. p.234.

37 ibid. p.266.

38 Yushnevskiy, A.P., Pis'ma dekabrista A.P. Yushnevskogo i ego zheny Marii Kazimirovny iz Sibiri. Kiev 1908.

39 ibid. pp.75-80.

40 ibid. p.143.

41 ibid. p.170.

42 Bulanova, O.K., Roman dekabrista. Dekabrist V.P. Ivashev i ego sem'ya. M. 1925, pp.81-86. (O.K. Bulanova was the granddaughter of V.P. Ivashev and had access to family archives.)

43 Memuary dekabristov: Yuzhnoe obshchstvo, pp.81-83.

44 Bulanova, pp.239, 243.

45 ibid. p.146.

46 Dek. na pos., p.82.

CHAPTER VIII: THE DECEMBRISTS' PLANS FOR SIBERIA

1 Pre-1825

Projects and suggestions for changes in the administration of Siberia, included in general proposals for administrative reforms in Russia, go back to the time of Catherine II (Uchrezhdenie o guberniyakh, 1775). Other proposals continued to appear, the nearest in time to the rising of 1825 being M.M. Speranskiy's draft proposal of 1818 and one compiled by Matvey Aleksandrovich Dmitriev-Mamonov and M.F. Orlov, founder-members of the Order of Russian Knights (Orden russkikh rytsarey, 1814-17). With hindsight, the overtly political aims of this association seem very moderate, governed by the fear prevalent among many members that revolutionary changes would release the pent-up forces which had already led to peasant revolts in Russia and to the Terror in France in 1793. Nevertheless the project included placing restrictions on the power of the monarchy and the division of Russia into (quite arbitrary) regions from which representatives would be sent to a central government. Siberia was to be one of these regions, with 10 representatives out of a total of 221. The project included the founding of trading companies to further the development of the Siberian economy.[1]

Also in 1818 Nikolay Nikolaevich Novosil'tsev prepared another draft of reform (Gosudarstvennaya ustavnaya gramota). He proposed making Siberia into one of the 12 regions into which Russia was to be divided.[2]

Members of both the Northern and Southern Societies also produced plans for the political and economic re-structuring of the country —

Nikita Mikhaylovich Murav'ev (Northern Society) and Pavel Ivanovich Pestel' (Southern Society). Neither plan has survived entire, and neither of the authors completed their drafts. They are:

a) Draft Constitution of Nikita Murav'ev

The original text of this draft constitution was probably destroyed by Murav'ev's wife at her parents' estate immediately after the arrest of her brother, Zakhar Grigor'evich Chernyshev. He was involved in the rising and was sentenced to forced labour and exile in Siberia at the same time as N.M. Murav'ev. Two partial copies survived however: one was found among the papers left by A.P. Trubetskoy after his death (a), and the other in those of I.I. Pushchin, also posthumously (b). There is also in existence a manuscript version of the text written by N.M. Murav'ev himself (c). It was set down from memory during his imprisonment in the Peter-Paul Fortress before he was sentenced, and is a summary without any numerical data. Only the paragraphs of these versions which are relevant to the present dissertation will be compared, and they will be referred to as a), b) and c) as above.[3]

All three provide for the division of the territory of Russia into 14 derzhavy and two oblasti (the latter are Moscow and the Don). Siberia was to comprise two derzhavy named after the rivers Ob' (Obiyskaya) and Lena (Lenskaya), with their capitals at Tobol'sk and Irkutsk respectively. The divisions seem to have been decided arbitrarily. N.M. Murav'ev gives the population of the whole empire as 22,630,000; the Ob' derzhava was to number 490,000 and the Lena 250,000. (The sources for the figures are not given.[4]) The whole state was to be administered by a centralised government, to which,

according to a) the Ob' would send 10 representatives. The number to be sent by the Lena is not mentioned in a). In b) the Ob' would have 10 representatives and the Lena 5.[5]

The rights of Russians living in the Russian state are identical in a) and b):

All Russians are equal before the law.[6]

In c) this paragraph includes wording which in the other versions appears under another number, but is essentially the same:

> All Russians are subject to the law irrespective of their status (sostoyanie), are obliged to participate in elections if the conditions stipulated by the law apply to them, and not to refuse the position to which they are elected.[7]

Non-Russian peoples are provided for in a separate paragraph:

In a) nomadic tribes

> do not have the right to citizenship (grazhdanstvo) (para.34). The right to vote for certain posts, for example volostnoy, starshina [copyist's emphasis] is available to every Russian non-citizen (negrazhdanin) (para.35).[8]

In b) nomadic tribes

> do not have the right to citizenship. The right to participate in the elections of the volostnoy starshina [copyist's emphasis] is, however, also available to them (para.31).[9]

In c) All inhabitants, whatever their status (if they are not guilty before the law, are in their right minds, are completely honest and are not in anyone's service) who own movable or immovable property of 500 silver rubles, compose the class of electors (izbirateley) or jurors (prisyazhnykh) [N.M.Murav'ev's emphasis].[10]

b) Russian Law (Russkaya Pravda)

During 1821-22, when the Northern and Southern Societies were taking shape, P.I. Pestel' was already working on his draft constistution — Russian Law (Russkaya Pravda). At a meeting of the

Southern Society this was adopted as the basic law of the future Russian State. Rejecting the notion of a federal state (in this he was in agreement with the Northern Society), he opted for a united republic with a strong constitutional government:

> Russia is a united and indivisible state (edinoe i nerazdelimoe gosudarstvo).[11]

This expressed the intention of the Decembrists to retain Siberia as an integral part of Russia. The document also states explicitly that the laws of Russia would apply equally over the whole territory:

> The laws must be the same over the whole territory of the state.[12]

This is identical with the terms of N.M. Murav'ev's draft.

Of the original 10 chapters of Russkaya Pravda only 1, 2 and 3 have reached us in finished form. Chapters 4 and 5 are partly complete. The remaining ones were only sketched out. For the present study, the relevant sections are those dealing with non-Russian peoples living in Russia, and especially those referring to the indigenous peoples of Siberia.[13]

Paragraph 2 Part I lists all the non-Russian peoples of Russia, including the Finns, the Baltic peoples and "all the peoples of Siberia", but not the Poles, who are to be granted independence and are referred to in a separate paragraph. The argument is that the non-Russian peoples have never enjoyed independence, and because of their inherent weakness will never do so; they therefore have the right to the protection of Russia, but will have to give up the right to a separate existence "for ages to come" (na veki). The intention is to raise their standards of living. The "great nation" (i.e. Russia) is reminded of its responsibilities towards the weaker peoples, but at the same time these peoples are to be assimilated

into the larger, stronger one, forming one nation and "ceasing to dream vainly of what is impossible and unattainable..."[14] This clause was one of the main stumbling blocks in the way of the merging of the Southern Society and the Society of United Slavs, who objected to the idea of "assimilation".

The terms suggested for the nomadic peoples are of particular interest with reference to the opinion of the Buryats' potential expressed by M. and N. Bestuzhev, although Russkaya Pravda does not mention the Buryats by name. It does, however, single out the gypsies: they are to be given the stark choice of adopting the Orthodox faith and settling down or leaving the country.[15]

The nomadic peoples are referred to as "half-savage", ignorant and "not knowing what is good for them"; in pursuance of Christian duty they must be cared for by the Russian government. They must be encouraged to take up agriculture and convert to Christianity, and are to be given plots of land to settle on.[16]

The nomadic peoples of Eastern Siberia are given a paragraph to themselves.[17] Those still living by fishing and hunting are also to be encouraged to settle and take up agriculture and vegetable-growing. They are to have their "savage natures" softened by conversion to Christianity. Those tribes which are "governed" (upravlyayutsya) by the American Company are described as being "oppressed and robbed". They are to be rescued from the clutches of the company immediately.[18]

These plans will strike the modern reader as heavily paternalistic and patronising; however, they sprang from a genuine desire to help the tribes to a better life, and for their time they are reasonably progressive. The same concern for the "underdog" motivated the whole movement in its aim to liberate the serfs.

c) Other Plans for Reform

When M.M. Speranskiy was appointed Governor-General of Siberia in 1818 one of his main tasks was to compile a project for the reform of the corrupt Siberian administration. Most of the preliminary fact-finding for this was done by his assistant, G.S. Baten'kov, who was born and brought up in Tobol'sk. After taking part in the campaigns against Napoleon he trained as a civil engineer in St Petersburg. He then returned to Siberia to a post as chief road engineer. While the projected reform of Speranskiy cannot of course be regarded as "Decembrist", it has some points in common with the plans of the rebels. One such point is the belief that Siberia must remain an integral part of Russia, and the implications of this for the Siberian indigenous peoples. It is possible that Speranskiy knew of the plans of the secret societies, since Baten'kov was in St Petersburg in 1821-23 and joined the Northern Society during this period. He had also published several articles on Siberia in Syn otechestva and Severnyy Arkhiv in 1822 and 1823.[19]

In one of these articles, Baten'kov criticised the contemporary policy of populating the vast expanses of Siberia by forced settlement of people of Russian origin. Baten'kov recommended leaving this process to natural population growth. He also suggested linking the upper reaches of Siberia's rivers into a network of waterways. This is suggested by several of the Decembrists, notably by N. and M. Bestuzhev (see above).

The policy of the Russian government towards the Siberian indigenous peoples was also criticised by Baten'kov on the grounds that it ignored both their history and the climatic and environmental factors which governed their lives, and also regarded these peoples with

disdain.[20] Baten'kov himself considered, however, that they would be unable to reach equality with the Russians until their economic levels were the same, and that to achieve this, the tribes would have to give up their nomadic way of life.[21]

2) Post-1825

Suggestions for the advancement of the Siberian economy made by the Decembrists after 1825 were not for the most part set down in formal documents. They were, after all, not allowed to publish their work even after the end of their forced labour, and even then their correspondence was subject to censorship unless they managed to evade this. However, this did not prevent them from writing about the subject, and some even wrote articles. Most of these remained unpublished until after 1917. While the letters contain much news and personal comment, especially about difficulties caused by the writers' inexperience in agriculture, illness or other distress, the personal element is usually secondary to the interests of Siberia and its peoples. There are some remarkable organised notes and studies, and it is tragic that most of them remained unknown, were ignored or rejected by those to whom they were addressed, and represent a mass of wasted devotion and effort.

a) G.S. Baten'kov

Because of his contacts with members of the secret societies, Baten'kov was arrested, but his sentence of 20 years forced labour was not carried out. Instead, for reasons still unknown, he was kept in solitary confinement in the Peter-Paul Fortress for 19 years before being exiled to Tobol'sk. There followed a period of

recovery (according to M.N. Volkonskaya he was unable to speak properly when he arrived), and then he wrote a number of articles on Siberia which are a remarkable testimony both to his powers of recuperation and to his love for Siberia. Not all Baten'kov's numerous writings were devoted to plans for Siberia, but during the 1840s and 1850s he drafted several proposals for the reform of land administration and ownership (Ob upravlenii Sibiri). Regarding the State's monopoly of land ownership in Siberia as the main cause of her backwardness, he advocated the sale of State lands to private individuals, or making grants of land as rewards for service to Siberia, or even settling non-aristocrats (raznochintsy) on plots of land. Like several other Decembrists he saw the need for the creation of a network of communications and in "On the Roads of Siberia" (O dorogakh Sibiri, 1857) he returned to this subject with a plan for the construction of a network of roads linking Siberia with European Russia. This was to include sectors of horse-drawn railway between Perm' and Tobol'sk, and north-south road links across Siberia itself.[22]

Amongst other Decembrists who believed in the need to improve communications in Siberia were

b) N.V. Basargin

In "On the Development of Industry and Trade in Siberia" (O razvitii promyshlennosti i torgovli v Sibiri) Basargin stressed the need to attract both capital investment and trained specialists to Siberia. He was also in favour of developing the waterways, clearing fishing-grounds at sea to make fishing possible all the year round, and providing education for indigenous peoples as well as those of

Russian origin. In "On the Construction of a Railway from Tyumen' to the River Kama at Perm'" (Ob ustroystve zheleznoy dorogi ot g Tyumeni do reki Kamy v g Permi) (1836) he suggested that this railway should be built following the river courses.

c) M.K. Kyukhel'beker, also concerned at the lack of communications in Siberia, suggested linking the major rivers by a system of canals and portages.

d) Aleksandr Osipovich Kornilovich, 1800-1834

A.O. Kornilovich was a member of Vol'noe obshchestvo lyubiteley rossiiskoy slovesnosti from the early 1820s, and also of the Southern Society. He was assistant to the military historian D.P. Buturlin, who sent him to do research on Russian history in the state archives in St Petersburg. Kornilovich became fascinated with 17th and 18th century Russia, and especially with the life and personality of Peter I. By the time of the rising Kornilovich was already a well-known historian, and in 1825 was the editor of Russkaya starina. Of the work published at this time the most important was O zhizni Tsarevicha Alekseya Petrovicha (1821). This and the material Kornilovich had collected on Peter I was used by Pushkin in his research preparatory to writing Arap Petra Velikogo. Kornilovich's unconventional views on Russian history and its famous men led to some of his articles being refused publication by the censor, but several were printed in Polyarnaya zvezda.[24]

Kornilovich was present at the meeting at Ryleev's apartment on 13.12.1825 when plans for the rising were discussed, and he was also involved in the rising itself. He was sentenced to 8 years forced labour, but recalled to St Petersburg in 1827 for further inter-

rogation. Detained in the Peter-Paul Fortress until 1832, he wrote a novel, Andrey Bezymennyy, but his main occupation during this imprisonment was to write on the Russian state system. This was done by direct instructions from the Tsar. In 1832 he was sent to the Russian army in the Caucasus.

Kornilovich's observations on Siberia were set out in his note addressed to Nicholas I "On Improving the Condition of the Peasants in Siberia" (Ob uluchshenii polozheniya krest'yan v Sibiri, 19.6.1828). In this he advocated reducing the poll tax on Siberian peasants by a half or a third, the shortfall in state income to be made up by a property tax. By this means the burden of taxation would be more evenly spread and the change would relieve the poor peasants of the often hopeless indebtedness to the richer ones. Kornilovich also suggested making grants of money to new settlers (from the ranks of exiles) so that they would not get into debt at the outset of their residence, when they had to set up households. The extension of foreign trade which Kornilovich favours would require further exploration of the Amur basin, the establishment of a merchant fleet in the Pacific Ocean, facilitating trade access to North America. In other notes he suggested setting up agricultural schools and distilleries in Siberian towns. Like other Decembrists he was in favour of developing a road network across Siberia.[25]

e) Petr Aleksandrovich Mukhanov, 1798 (?99)—1854

P.A. Mukhanov lived in Moscow, and some of the meetings of the Moscow members of the Northern Society were held at his apartment. It was at one of these meetings that he suggested killing the Tsar, and this formed the main case against him. He was sentenced to eight years forced labour and life exile. After the end of his

forced labour, he spent his exile in Bratskiy ostrog (now Bratsk) and Ust'-Kudinsk, moving to Irkutsk.

A teacher of geography and history in military schools, Mukhanov was well-educated. By 1825 he was also established as a writer. His translations and articles (mostly on military history) were being printed in Syn otechestva and other journals. Like all the Decembrists he regarded the role of education as paramount not only for equipping future generations to continue the struggle begun in 1825, but also for the development of Siberia. His proposals, set out in O prosveshchenii i obrazovanii, included the provision of primary education in all Siberian parishes, to be paid for by contributions from the local population. Boarding facilities were to be provided if required. Noting with concern that Siberia had no university, he suggested converting the gimnaziya in Irkutsk into an institute of higher education until the Russian government could establish a university.

Meanwhile the Irkutsk gimnaziya was to fulfil two other important functions: ignorance of Siberian life and conditions on the part of European Russians generally, and of the Russian-born civil servants who administered it in particular, called for the establishment of a museum and information-collecting centre at the Irkutsk gimnaziya; and a ninth class there (again with boarding facilities) would train aspiring civil servants from all parts of Siberia. They would then be sent to St Petersburg or Moscow for another two years of professional training, on condition that they returned to serve in Siberia afterwards.[26]

Notes to Chapter VIII

1 Druzhinin, N.M., Dekabrist N.M. Murav'ev, in: Druzhinin, N.M., Izbrannye trudy. Revolyutsionnoe dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke. M. 1985, p.68. (Hereafter Druzhinin.)

2 Bazilevich, V., Oblastnoe delenie Sibiri v proektakh dekabristov, in: Sibir' i dekabristy. Irkutsk 1925, p.43.

3 Druzhinin, a) p.253, b) p.268, c) p.295.

4 ibid. a) p.257, b) p.271.

5 ibid. a) p.266, b) p.275.

6 ibid. a) p.255, b) p.269.

7 ibid. p.296.

8 ibid. p.257.

9 ibid. p.270.

10 ibid. p.296.

11 Vosstanie dekabristov. M. 1958, Vol.VII, p.126.

12 ibid. p.137.

13 ibid. pp.122, 145-146.

14 ibid. p.122.

15 ibid. p.143.

16 ibid. p.142.

17 ibid. pp.145-146.

18 ibid. p.146.

19 Kartsov, V.G., Dekabrist G.S. Baten'kov. M. 1977, p.59.

20 ibid. pp.32-38.

21 ibid. pp.94-95.

22 Bakhaev, V.B., Obshchestvenno-prosvetitel'skaya i kraevedcheskaya deyatel'nost' dekabristov v Buryatii. Novosibirsk 1980, p.154; Kartsov, V.G., Dekabrist G.S. Baten'kov. Novosibirsk 1965, p.194.

23 Shatrova, G.P., K voprosu o vzglyadakh dekabristov na Sibir' i programme ee proizvoditel'nykh sil i kul'turnogo urovnya. Uch. zapiski Tomskogo gos. universiteta. Kuybyshev 1938/34, pp.63-64.

24 Polyarnaya zvezda. Izd. A. Bestuzhevym i K. Ryleevym. Repr. M. 1960, pp.199, 288, 532.

25 Bakhaev, pp.149-150; Shatrova, p.65; Kornilovich, A.O., Stat'i i pis'ma. M.-L. 1957, pp.216, 455; Oganyan, L.N., Dekabrist A.O. Kornilovich i ego proekty razvitiya Sibiri i Bessarabii, in: Sibir' i dekabristy. Vyp.4. Meylakh, B.S. ed. Irkutsk 1985, pp.64-69.

26 Shatrova, pp.65-66.

CHAPTER IX: AFTER THE END OF KATORGA

1 Restrictions

Whatever frictions arose during the Chita and Petrovskiy zavod imprisonment, they were a relatively minor feature of the Decembrists' life there. The important effects were summarised by M.A. Bestuzhev:

> The prison united us, gave us mutual support... and provided moral nourishment for our spiritual life. The prison gave us political life after political death.[1]

The greater freedom outside the prison was, for the Decembrists, limited: still referred to as "state criminals" (gosudarstvennye prestupniki) even after the amnesty, they were restricted in their movements around the area where they were settled, still had their correspondence censored, were forbidden to take civil service or professional appointments or work for any private individuals and were reported on regularly by the police to St Petersburg. Those who were sent alone to remote places were often worse off than they had been in prisons. Losing the support provided by other prisoners was probably the worst disadvantage. The long distances between places of settlement, and poor or non-existent roads, made communication and travel (for which they had to obtain permission from the regional authorities) laborious and slow, and in winter often virtually impossible. Many of the Decembrists who were sent to settlement alone were poor, some quite penniless, yet they were unable to earn a living owing to the restrictions mentioned above and had to rely on the payment of 4r 35k in silver per month made by the governor. Some were in poor health, partly aggravated by

climatic conditions or poor housing (rheumatic and bronchial complaints were common).

For a group of men with such a high average standard of education and intelligence, teaching might seem the obvious solution to the problem of earning a living; but this was one of the occupations they were most strictly forbidden to follow lest they exercised a political influence on their pupils, although, as described in Chapter VI (11e), they found ways of evading this restriction. Teaching, like agriculture, was not to everyone's taste, but some of the exiles made a great success of it, as will be shown later in this chapter.

There were a few Decembrists who were not subjected to these restrictions and some even got permission to take up civil service posts. Among them were:

a) Aleksandr Mikhaylovich Murav'ev

A.M. Murav'ev was one of the founders of the Union of Salvation and the Union of Prosperity, the two ostensibly literary societies which were the precursors of the Northern and Southern Societies. He had not, however, been active in any of the societies since 1819. Because of this supposed "repentance" he was sentenced to exile without forced labour and without losing his rank or noble status, and his wife and sisters-in-law were allowed to join him in his exile in Yakutsk, where he was sent without having to do forced labour. Not being well off, he had to find employment. He was allowed to become a civil servant, and indeed became civil governor of Tobol'sk, 1832-34. In spite of this, his correspondence was still being censored and he was under secret police supervision.

b) A.F. von Briggen: sent to Pelym in 1828, he was transferred to Kurgan in 1836. Here he found himself in financial straits. An appeal for pardon made on his behalf by his wife and daughter in St Petersburg was refused. He applied for permission to join the civil service, however, and in 1848 was appointed magistrate in the local court of Kurgan. Here he came into conflict with his superiors in the local administration through his strict regard for truth and justice. He exposed the true facts about the death of a peasant named Mikhail Vlasov, who had protested against a case of corruption in the administration, and was murdered. Alarmed by von Briggen's revelations, the local authorities tried to get him to retract them, but he refused. The affair was reported to the Tsar, and von Briggen was transferred to Turinsk in 1850. He missed his friends, especially his fellow-exile N.I. Lorer, and in 1855 managed to get permission to return to Kurgan.[2]

c) Aleksandr Evtikh'evich Mozalevskiy was hampered by both poverty and ill health. He was sent to the Petrovskiy zavod area to settle, but his poor health did not even allow him to teach, let alone do any farming work. He was, however, offered a tutoring job in a local family which would at least have allowed him to earn his keep, but the local authorities stopped this plan. He wrote to Benkendorf pointing out the hardship caused by such restrictions not only to him but to other exiles — typical of the concern for one another so often shown by the Decembrists — but his letter was not even acknowledged — if it was indeed delivered.[3]

d) Ivan Fedorovich Shimkov, sent to Baturino, near Verkhneudinsk, found the terrain there too difficult to cultivate. On asking the

governor-general of Eastern Siberia to transfer him to Minusinsk, where the land was of better quality, he was offered a plot in an even more difficult place than the original one — but he died before the correspondence was concluded.[4]

It was almost as though the Third Department and the Siberian administration spent their entire time devising ways of snubbbing the Decembrists: in 1836 a new ruling made it compulsory for them to obtain a new permit whenever they wished to visit their plots, indicating each time how long they were allowed to be absent from their place of residence (in some cases the two were quite far apart). On occasion the time allowed was insufficient for both journey and work on the plot, and the permit turned out to be merely an exercise in futility.[5]

Even the official allocation of land was hedged around with restrictions: some exiles were given plots outside the boundary of the town where they lived, and then refused permission to leave the town at all. Not allowed powder and firearms, they could not supplement their diet by hunting (although at Akatuy M.S. Lunin was not thus restricted). They were allowed a maximum lump sum of 2000r sent by relatives to enable them to acquire the basic household necessities on settlement, and a further 1000r per annum either in one payment or in instalments. After 1828 this was increased to 2000r per annum. This emphasised the unequal circumstances of the exiles: for some these were trifling sums, and they were allowed to have goods sent from European Russia in addition. Some had huge loads delivered. For others, however, such sums were unavailable, and furthermore prices were rising in Siberia at this time, so that

the restrictions on earning faced the exiles with serious problems.[6]

Constantly frustrated in their efforts to be independent, they were also often frustrated in their desires to help their fellow-exiles for reasons that were, at best, obscure, and at worst seem purely malicious or motivated by fear.

2 Most Important Activities of the Decembrist Exiles after katorga

a) Education

The importance attached by the Decembrists to education was matched by a great thirst among Siberians for even the basic skills of literacy. N.A. Bestuzhev summed up the views of his fellow-exiles thus:

> The chief support of government by the people must be education. Autocracy is ignorance. Every step of education in a monarchy is a step towards freedom.[7]

The few schools in Siberia at that time were concentrated mainly in the major urban centres and catered exclusively for boys. The authorities in rural areas did not encourage teaching peasants' children to read and write, nor did it occur to them that the indigenous peoples had any right to be literate; while girls everywhere were lucky if they were taught even in private. In spite of being forbidden to teach, the Decembrists were ingenious in finding ways of evading these restrictions. Many gave lessons secretly to both children and adults — among them P.I. Borisov, A.I. Yakubovich, M.K. Kyukhel'beker. Some proved to be born teachers, for instance V.F. Raevskiy, V.K. Kyukhel'beker, N.A. Bestuzhev and I.D. Yakushkin. Several of the exiles made notable contributions to Siberian education, described below. Owing to the secrecy in which these activities had to be conducted, however, information about most of them is scarce and is scattered in numerous documents and letters.[8]

The method used in the most successful and best-documented schools run by Decembrists was the so-called Lancasterian method, and a brief account of its development in Russia is called for at this point:

i Lancasterian Education in European Russia and Siberia

Joseph Lancaster (1778-1838) was the son of an English soldier and was a Quaker. He enjoyed teaching and opened a school at his London home. Inscribed above the door were the words "All who will may send their children and have them educated freely, and those who do not wish to have education for nothing may pay for it if they are pleased". The method he devised was based on "mutual tuition" — older and more advanced pupils taught the younger ones — the reason being that Lancaster could not afford to pay teachers' wages. The method involved much learning by rote and chorusing of answers. There was no corporal punishment, and Lancaster invented some unusual punishments and rewards for his pupils, such as wicker cages in which troublesome or lazy pupils were hoisted up to the ceiling and left there for a while, while those whose progress was satisfactory were given badges. Lancaster's system attracted much attention and even aroused the interest of George III.[9]

A translation of Lancaster's book on his system was published in France in 1815 and led to the system being widely used in that country. In the same year N.I. Krivtsov (brother of the future Decembrist Sergey Ivanovich Krivtsov) who was stationed with the occupation forces in Paris, heard about the system, and on returning to St Petersburg wrote a note on it for presentation to Alexander I.[10] Two other members of the Russian army of occupation in France,

Nikolay Ivanovich Grech (writer and teacher, editor of the journal Syn otechestva) and Sergey Ivanovich Turgenev, started a school on Lancasterian lines for the soldiers in their regiment, stationed near Maubeuge. It was attended by 260 men. Grech, at that time still a liberal, introduced the system in St Petersburg, with the collaboration of the writer and poet Fedor Nikolaevich Glinka. Their initiative attracted much interest and discussion, and enjoyed the approval not only of liberals like Grech and Turgenev, but of the Tsar himself. Lancasterian schools began to appear in the provincial towns of Russia. In 1819 a society for the encouragement of these schools was founded in St Petersburg (Obshchestvo uchrezhdeniya uchilishch po metodu vzaimnogo obucheniya).[11] By 1820 there were schools of this type in 15 Russian towns including Irkutsk, where there were 219 pupils. The wave of enthusiasm reached Kishinev in the Ukraine, where Captain Vladimir Fedoseevich Raevskiy, with the encouragement of his commanding officer Mikhail Fedorovich Orlov, began teaching soldiers in his regiment by this method (1821—22).

By this time, however, Alexander I was in full retreat from his initial liberal views, and reaction was setting in. The Lancasterian schools came under suspicion of political unreliability. (Apart from the matter of teaching soldiers to read, Raevskiy deliberately chose as his material such challenging words as "slave", "despot", "tyrant", "fatherland" and "liberty", words much used also by the poets associated with pre-Decembrist secret societies to stimulate political thinking.) Raevskiy and Orlov were arrested in 1822. Orlov, whose brother Aleksey interceded on his behalf, escaped punishment, but Raevskiy, with no "connections", was imprisoned in

Tiraspol and Petrozavodsk for several years while investigations into his conduct were being made. In 1827 he was exiled to Siberia for life, without katorga.

ii) Yakushkin's School in Yalutorovsk

This is the best-documented of the schools organised by Decembrists in Siberia, and is also interesting because, while keeping closely to the original methods of his model, Yakushkin also extended the range of subjects taught. He was not inexperienced in teaching: he had started a small school in 1819 on his estate (Zhukovo, Smolensk guberniya). His motives were misunderstood by his neighbours, one of whom commented:

> That's good! You teach them singing and music, and you'll get a good price for them when you sell them.

(Yakushkin's uncle had recently sold twenty musicians for a total of 40,000r.)[12]

In Yalutorovsk Yakushkin did not get permission to open his school immediately. He worked secretly as far as possible at first, but there was a period of conflict with the authorities, who confiscated books and questioned the right of a "state criminal" to teach. This made Yakushkin's legal position very shaky. M.A. Fonvizin and I.I. Pushchin, at that time settled in Tobol'sk, used what influence they had with the authorities, and managed to get permission for the school to open, but Yakushkin's relations with the local authorities were strained for a long time. He persuaded the local priest, S.Y. Znamenskiy, to allow his name to be used as a cover-up, and the school was at last officially opened in 1842.[13] At first only boys were taught. In 1846 when Yakushkin's wife, who had not been allowed to join him, died, he opened a school for girls in memory of her.

Both schools existed until the amnesty of the Decembrists. A total of 594 boys passed through their school, 531 of whom completed the whole course. 192 girls out of a total of 240 completed their course. Both schools were extremely successful,[14] and some of the pupils went on to higher education in European Russia.

The basic method of teaching was the Lancasterian. Lessons took place four times a week, for four hours a day, with an interval for dinner. Yakushkin rented the accommodation at his own expense, and arranged it as far as possible in the same way as the original classrooms: beginners sat in the front row, with boxes of sand in which they drew the letters. More advanced pupils sat in the row behind and taught the beginners, and so on to the most advanced ones in the back row. Corporal punishment was not allowed, a system of badges and rewards being used (idle pupils wore a badge inscribed "Lazybones" (lent'ay).

Yakushkin gradually extended the range of subjects far beyond the original syllabus of J. Lancaster: French, German, mathematics, geography, history, mechanics, botany and zoology were taught, most of them by him. No textbooks were available, so the indefatigable Yakushkin wrote them himself, and even laboriously pasted paper globes for the geography lessons. The school was financed by contributions from local people. There was, as in the original Lancasterian schools, a good deal of learning by rote and chorusing of answers, but Yakushkin introduced another innovation — practical demonstrations and field excursions.[15]

Because Yakushkin was still under police supervision, he had to tread cautiously; but the school acquired such an excellent reputation that it was allowed to continue until the Decembrists were

amnestied. A critical situation arose when a local school inspector, Lukin, called at the school and questioned the right of a "state criminal" to teach, but Yakushkin with his usual forthrightness told him not to meddle and hustled him out.[16]

Yakushkin did not consider it was essential for a teacher to be fully versed in the subjects he taught, and cited the case of a teacher, a church deacon, whom he knew, who had only completed five school classes, and knew nothing of geography, history or mathematics, but "learned all these subjects in the course of teaching them".[17]

iii) Other Decembrists Involved in Education:

V.F. Raevskiy

Although Raevskiy was not a "Decembrist" in the literal sense of having taken part in the rising, he was a member of the Union of Prosperity and shared the views of the rebels, and he is usually referred to by modern Soviet writers on the subject as the "first Decembrist". After his arrest in 1822 he was detained in prison in Tiraspol' and Petrozavodsk while the investigations into his activities (including the educational ones mentioned above in i)) dragged on until 1827. Raevskiy was sentenced to life exile in Siberia without katorga, and lived in the village of Olonki, in the Irkutsk guberniya, from 1828 until his death in 1872.

Soon after his arrival he started a school in a house he rented at his own expense. It was the first one in the area; before this, an itinerant teacher had paid occasional visits. In spite of initial suspicion on the part of the villagers, the school was such a success that adults as well as children came to learn, and soon Raevskiy had to hire another teacher. Adult pupils included Raevskiy's young wife, whom he married in 1828.[18]

K.P. Torson and N.A. Bestuzhev

The school started by these two exiles in Selenginsk, in Torson's house, was open to both boys and girls, Buryat and Russian. Education for Buryats, and for girls of any nationality, was new in Siberia. Torson's sister, who had come from St Petersburg to share his exile, taught the girls sewing. Some technical training was provided for the boys. Some of the pupils had to defy opposition from the local authorities to attend. Torson and Bestuzhev were enthusiastic and efficient teachers, and some of their pupils continued their education in the gimnaziya of Irkutsk and in Kazan', and even at the Academy of Art in St Petersburg. One wonders, however, what their Buryat pupils made of the translation into Russian of Scott's "Ivanhoe" which they were given to read.[19]

Aleksandr and Petr Belyaev

Aleksandr Petrovich Belyaev and his brother opened a school in Minusinsk at the request of the local people. They took turns to teach in it and work on their farm.[20]

D.I. Zavalishin remained in Chita after his forced labour and opened a school there for the children of the indigenous peoples. Other Decembrists who taught children were M.I. Murav'ev-Apostol in Vilyuysk, A.V. Poggio in Ust'-Kuda, I.I. Gorbachevskiy in Petrovskiy zavod and I.I. Pushchin in Turinsk. They were helped by wives of Decembrists who taught girls sewing. Money for these schools was raised by local people.[20A]

iv) Education for Girls

In education for girls in Siberia the pioneer was I.D. Yakushkin, whose school has been described. Another school for girls in

Tobol'sk was also started by Decembrists. It was opened on 30th March 1852, a notable date for women in Siberia. Girls of all social classes could attend this school. It was organised by P.N. Svistunov and M.A. Fonvizin, and A.M. Murav'ev was the treasurer. Like other Decembrist teachers, they charged no fees, financing the school by contributions from local people, some of whom, at least at first, were strongly opposed to education for girls. Svistunov organised lotteries and other fund-raising efforts, and made considerable contributions himself. Although by twentieth-century standards it was a modest start, for its time the organisation of this school was a triumph, and the Decembrists can fairly be said to have pioneered education for girls in Siberia.[21]

v) Impact of Decembrists' Educational Work on Siberian Education

The significance of the Decembrists' schools went far beyond the confines of the classroom walls. They taught not only reading and writing, but extended the scope of education to the natural sciences and trades. In the process they stimulated latent interest in cultural and scientific matters, aroused interest and pride in the history and resources of Siberia, and incidentally produced some outstanding pupils: two students of Torson and Bestuzhev, the Startsev brothers, graduated from the Technical Institute of St Petersburg and the University respectively; another of their pupils was M.M. Lushnikov, the painter; one of Gorbachevskiy's pupils, I.S. Elin, studied medicine at Moscow University, was for a while an assistant in Botkin's hospital there, and then returned to practise as a doctor in Siberia.[22] Poggio's school also produced a well-known doctor — N.A. Belogolovyy, who became senior physician in the hospital in Irkutsk.[23]

Some elements in the Decembrists' ideas on teaching children can be traced in Soviet educational practice; although to assume direct genealogical descent would be dangerous, the encouragement of a responsible interest in the government of the country (grazhdanstvennost'), the deliberate teaching of patriotism and pride in the country's past and future, the replacement of corporal punishment by "moral influence" (nravstvennoe vozdeystvie), the teaching of respect for manual work and the introduction of "work experience" for school pupils, and not least the extension of education to girls and non-Russian peoples, are all common features of the two systems.

b) Agriculture

Officially farming was the only gainful occupation allowed to the exiles. Grants of land to them were first permitted by Nicholas I in 1835 (approx. 28 acres, 15 desyatins per man), but this seeming generosity had a negative aspect. Many of the Decembrists' farming ventures were unsuccessful for a variety of reasons: lack of finance in some cases; the natural disadvantages of climate and terrain, and the frequent failure to diagnose these correctly and to adapt familiar methods to new conditions; poor communications, causing difficulties in finding market outlets, also made difficult by the sparseness of the population; poor health and inability to do agricultural work; ignorance and inexperience; and in some cases (A.I. Odoevskiy was one) frank lack of interest. To the credit of the Decembrists it must be said that many of them undertook farming not only with a view to earning a living, but were also interested in improving the standards prevailing at the time in Eastern Siberia. This was especially true of Torson.

It is not possible to describe the numerous farming enterprises of the exiles, and only some outstanding examples are dealt with here.

i) K.P. Torson

Apart from his proposals for reforming the Russian fleet, Torson was interested in the design and construction of agricultural machinery. In this his main aim was to make the agricultural worker's task easier. His most notable work was on the development of a threshing implement to replace the cumbersome hand-flail still in use. He could not complete his new version until 1836 owing to the difficulty of getting the necessary parts. Torson also designed a mill worked by horse-power which was introduced on some of the bigger farms in the area, and also, with some modifications, by the Belyaevs on their farm.[24] Torson was hampered by petty restrictions and bad luck when he began working on this. He was living in Aksha at the time. He needed timber for the framework of the mill, but was not allowed to travel more than 17km (15 versts) from the village, and the forest was further away. He therefore had to rely on peasants to cut the wood for him, and, on getting it, often found that his specifications had not been observed. Other delays were caused by malicious rumours that the mill was going to cost an enormous sum of money, so that charges for work done on it were going to be prohibitive for the local people. The terminal illness of his friend and fellow-exile Pavel Vasil'evich Avramov, for whom Torson had to care, and the (accidental) burning of his stock of timber caused further delays.[25] Indeed, he only managed to complete the machine after moving to Selenginsk, where he asked to be allowed to join his friends the Bestuzhevs. His invention, however, was only a partial success.

ii) N.A. Bestuzhev

N.A. Bestuzhev tried to improve the local breed of sheep in Selenginsk. Previous attempts to do this had been made by the civil governor of Irkutsk, I.B. Tsaidler, who had tried unsuccessfully to interbreed English fine-haired sheep with the local coarse-haired ones in order to obtain a better quality of wool. Inexperience in stock-breeding and a lack of markets for wool — there were no cloth mills in Eastern Siberia at the time — forced the closure of the company formed by Tsaidler; in addition he had failed to attract sufficient shareholders. This was when Bestuzhev tried to revive the company, but was also unsuccessful. Hie comments give an idea of the difficulties which faced the Decembrists' farming efforts:

> There was not the same demand for wool from these sheep as for that from the local ones. Offspring were not bought in case they spoiled the local breed, the meat was not bought because it was not of very good quality, and there was not enough hay to keep the flock alive [in winter], because these merino sheep were such dainty ladies (baryni) that they had to be kept on the same kind of fodder all the year round...[26]

Whereas they realised that the enormous resources of Siberia were simply waiting to be exploited, the Decembrists were quite unable to do this. Their efforts, however, stimulated interest in improving land use and equipment, and were not entirely wasted. Given different conditions and better land, many would have been able to make a better job of their farms.

c) Medical Care

The medical care given by some of the Decembrists in Chita and Petrovskiy zavod has already been mentioned. As far as the period of settlement is concerned, there is little to add to this, since those already involved went on treating the sick wherever they were,

without charging any fees. They gave particularly valuable help during the epidemics of cholera and smallpox which periodically swept Siberia, as they did other parts of the world at that time. The chief exponent of medical care, Dr F.B. Vol'f, a graduate of the Medical-Surgical Academy of Moscow (in 1814), continued the same services which he had provided to both fellow-exiles and others, and which prompted N.A. Bestuzhev to describe him as being able "to raise the dead back to life".[27] Although Vol'f had no private means, and for some time received financial assistance from E.F. Murav'eva (the mother of the exiled Murav'ev brothers),[28] he continued to treat his patients free of charge. In 1845 he was appointed to a post at the military hospital in Tobol'sk. Here he also gave lectures on hygiene, and at the time of his death in 1854 was engaged in research into kidney disease.[29]

d) Scientific Research and Observation

Some interesting and potentially valuable observations on meteorology and natural conditions were made by exiled Decembrists, especially remarkable being the already mentioned descriptions of Buryatiya written by N.A. Bestuzhev (Chapter II, 6). Other exiles involved in such observations were:

i) I.D. Yakushkin in Yalutorovsk and Mikhail Fot'evich Mit'kov, who lived near Krasnoyarsk, also made observations, the latter paying particular attention to cloud formation, rain and snow types, and ice formation on the Enisey. His findings were sent to meteorological observation stations in other parts of Siberia and in European Russia.[30]

ii) M.I. Murav'ev-Apostol (Yalutorovsk), V.I. Shteyngeyl' in Ishim,

D.I. Zavalishin in the Amur area and Petr Ivanovich Falenberg in Shushenskoe allcontributed to the general study of Siberian topography, statistics and regional characteristics. Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Bestuzhev, short though his stay in exile was, wrote descriptions of Siberian scenery and people which, although more literary than scientific, nevertheless contributed to the general knowledge of the country. The fact that most of the Decembrists' findings could not be published does not detract from the value of the effort made.

iii) In the small village of Malaya Razvodnaya P.I. Borisov and his brother continued their botanical and entomological observations. They made contact with the Society of Investigators of Nature (Obshchestvo ispytateley prirody) in Moscow and sent specimens of plants and insects, and also corresponded with the Botanical Gardens of St Petersburg. Unfortunately, as happened to so much of the Decembrists' writings, A. Borisov failed to get wide acceptance: his papers on a new system of entomological classification which he had devised lay in the St Petersburg archives unpublished, and some illustrations of Siberian flora which a member of Senator Tolstoy's suite commissioned him to make were neither published nor paid for, but were taken away by the man who ordered them.[31]

The Borisovs were principally interested in botany and entomology, but they too made meteorological observations. These were used, with due acknowledgement, by the director of the main physical observatory of St Petersburg.[32]

e) Journalism

When the Decembrists ended their terms of katorga there was still no question of their writings being published either in book form

or in the public press. In Siberia the question of the latter did not arise, since there was as yet virtually no printed press: the first newspaper in Irkutsk began to appear in 1857 — the "Irkutsk Guberniya News" (Irkutskie gubernskie vedomosti). Before this there were a few manuscript journals and newssheets. One of the first Decembrists to offer work for publication was V.F. Raevskiy, but since in his articles he described the ill-treatment of Siberian peasants by officials, not surprisingly they were not accepted. Only the foreword appeared in print (1859).

When printed newspapers and journals began to appear in Siberia a few articles by the exiles did get printed, but they had to be published anonymously. M.A. Bestuzhev wrote several articles which appeared in the "Kyakhta Leaflet" (Kyakhtinskiy listok). This had a short life — a few months of 1826. It displeased the Transbaykal authorities by publishing Bestuzhev's criticisms of the local administration. No doubt they guessed who the author was, but no action was taken against Bestuzhev.

Much later D.I. Zavalishin, one of the few surviving Decembrist exiles who chose to stay in Siberia after the amnesty in 1856, had several articles published in the "Eastern Review (Vostochnoe obozrenie, first published April 1882): in "Nature and Man in Colonisation" (Priroda i chelovek v kolonizatsii, 1882/7) he expressed his disquiet at the still insufficient exploitation of Siberia's natural resources. In "The Migration of Peoples: Illusion and Reality" (Pereselenie narodov: Illyuziya i deystvitel'nost', 1882/23) he compares the flow of emigration from Europe to other continents in progress in his own time to the prehistoric migrations to Europe; and in "Siberia and Canada" (Sibir' i Kanada, 1883/34)

he draws a comparison between the development of the two countries from the beginning of European colonisation.

V.L. Davydov, N.A. Bestuzhev and V.K. Kyukhal'beker had articles published in two manuscript periodicals, the "Domestic Companion" (Domashniy sobesednik) and "The Butterfly" (Metlyak) in Verkhneudinsk, both very short-lived.[33]

f) Literature

The restrictions to which the Decembrists were subject in publishing their works resulted in a serious loss to Russian literature, for amongst them were several highly gifted and original writers and poets. The volume of material now available is extensive, and only a few outstanding works can be mentioned.

i) V.F. Raevskiy

Much of Raevskiy's poetry was written before 1820, i.e. before his arrest. His earliest "civic" poems belong to this period: "The singer in Prison" (Pevets v temnitse), "To my Friends in Kishinev" (K druz'yam v Kishineve). Only a few were published during his lifetime, and many remained unknown until the 1920s. In 1822 Raevskiy and Pushkin were both in Kishinev. Pushkin accidentally overheard a conversation which enabled him to warn Raevskiy of his imminent arrest. Raevskiy hurriedly burned or gave to trustworthy friends many of his papers, while what he did not succeed in getting rid of was confiscated. During his exile he wrote little, but three poems of this period are "She alone seemed..." (Ona odna kazalas' mne), dedicated to his wife, "When you were a baby..." (Kogda ty byl mladentsem...), to his son Konstantin who died in infancy, and a retrospective poem about his own life, "I had no

reward for my patience..." (Ne videl ya nagrady za terpen'e). A line from this could stand as an epitaph for the poet: "This stone in my heart I bear with a smile..." (S ulybkoy ya nesu na serdtse kamen').

ii) Aleksandr Ivanovich Odoevskiy

Odoevskiy was potentially one of the great poets of 19th century Russia, but comparatively little of his work has survived owing to his own indifference to its fate. Posterity owes the survival of what must be a mere handful of his output to his friends. Only one poem written by him before 1825 is still extant — "The Moon" (Luna). His most famous poem is probably his reply to Pushkin's message to the Decembrist exiles in Siberia, and the best-known line in Odoevskiy's poem is certainly the much-quoted "From the spark a flame will rise" (Iz iskry vozgoritsya plamya). It was from this line that Lenin took the name for his newspaper "The spark" (Iskra). (This poem is inscribed on the beautiful mosaic monument to the Decembrists on the railway station of Petrovsk-Zabaykal'skiy.) Two themes predominate in Odoevskiy's Siberian poems: the role of the poet in Society, a theme often used in "Decembrist" poetry and hinted at in Odoevskiy's earlier poem "The Ball" (Bal); and an unshakable faith in the ultimate victory of the cause which the poet and his fellow-exiles had failed to carry in 1825.

iii) Vil'gel'm Karlovich Kyukhel'beker

Much of the output in prose and poetry of this remarkable and original writer dates from his imprisonment before exile and is therefore irrelevant to this dissertation. None of these works were published during Kyukhel'beker's lifetime. Amongst the most interesting ones spanning both the imprisonment and the exile are

his diaries (philosophical and literary reflection rather than a record of day-to-day events), which he began in 1831 and continued until 1845, when he became blind, and some poems written in exile: reflections on his unfulfilled hopes — "They will not understand my sufferings" (Oni moyikh stradaniy ne poymut, 1839): "Fate takes me from the walls of my prison, And thrusts me out into the world (for I regretted it), But my world has disappeared like a flash of summer lightning And now my destiny is nothing."

The moods of depression expressed in "Weariness" (Ustalost'), 1845 — "I have come to know banishment and the impenetrable darkness of blindness, and the reproaches of a stern conscience, and I pity the prison of my beloved country" (Uznal ya izgnan'ya, uznal ya tyur'mu...) — gave way to a more reconciled attitude shortly before his death: "Now, thank God, I am at peace again!" (Vot, slava Bogu, ya opyat' spokoen!) (1846).

Kyukhel'beker's verse drama "Ivan the Merchant's Son" (Ivan kupetskiy syn) begun in 1839 and continued in exile, the prose novels "Ahasuerus" (Agasver) (1832-46) and "The Last of the House of Kolonna" (Posledniy Kolonna) (1832-42) are full of complex plots, unexpected adventures and startling events, combined with incidental reflections on contemporary events. Posledniy Kolonna closely parallels Goethe's Die Leiden des jungen Werther, transposed to an Italian setting, but it includes a wandering harp-player reminiscent of the father of another of Goethe's heroes, Wilhelm Meister.

iv) Mikhail Sergeevich Lunin

During the Siberian exile some of the Decembrists became steadily more conservative in their views — for instance, the Belyaev brothers, Obolenskiy, Shteyngeyl', Pushchin. Others like the

Borisovs, the Bestuzhevs, Baten'kov, Yakushkin, Gorbachevskiy and S.G. Volkonskiy, were among those who retained their original radicalism, or even moved further "Left". Volkonskiy developed a hatred of the aristocracy which, according to I.D. Yakushkin, the younger son of D.I. Yakushkin, "... if not in actions, then at least in words (a rarety at his age) would be a credit to any republican of '93 [1793]".[34] His patriotism took on a fiery character even in advanced years: at the age of 67, and in indifferent health, he had to be dissuaded by his wife and friends from volunteering to fight in the Crimean War.

Outstanding among those who retained their radical views was M.S. Lunin. From exile he wrote to his sister, Ekaterina Uvarova, who lived in St Petersburg, a series of letters which he asked her to circulate among her friends. Defying the censors, Lunin first of all set down a record of the events of 1825 with the intention of counteracting distorted versions in official accounts in which the rising was presented as another trivial "palace revolution" or aiming merely at regicide without any constructive ideas of reform. Lunin continued in subsequent letters with courageous and frank criticism of the autocracy. The letters were intercepted and for a year, 1839-40, Lunin was forbidden to correspond with anyone. When he was allowed to resume, he wrote in the same vein. A circle of friends used to copy his letters and circulate them in Irkutsk. In an undated letter quoted by A.Ya. Shtraykh he wrote:

> I am glad that you find my letters to my sister interesting. They express the convictions which led me to the place of execution, to prison and to exile... The publicity (glasnost') which my letters enjoy through the numerous copies makes them political weapons which I am in duty bound (dolzhen) to use in defence of freedom.[35]

(The letter is to an unknown correspondent.)

Unfortunately there is some doubt as to whether Uvarova actually carried out her brother's request to circulate the letters.

The most important letters are:

1 A review of the Russian Secret Society from 1816-26 (Vzglyad na russkoe taynoe obshchestvo s 1816g do 1826g.)

2 An analysis of the report presented to the Russian Emperor by the Secret Commission in 1826 (Razbor doneseniya, predstavlennogo rossiyskomu imperatoru Taynoy komissiey v 1826 godu.)

3 The Social-Political Movement in Russia during the Present Reign (Obshchestvennoe dvizhenie v Rossii v nyneshnem tsarstvovanii.)[36]

Among the circle of copyists was a police agent who reported to Nicholas I on the letters and the copying. In 1841 Lunin was arrested and sent to live alone in Akatuy. This was a notoriously unhealthy place where he lived cut off from his friends until his death in 1845. Officially he died from a stroke. Some accounts suggest that his death was due to carbon monoxide poisoning caused by a blocked chimney; but strong suspicions of political murder still hang over his death.

The realisation of the reasons for the failure of the rising of 1825 were acknowledged by the more radical of the exiles, but they were summed up by M.N. Volkonskaya in her memoirs thus:

> If I were to venture to express my opinion on the events of 14th December and the mutiny of the regiment of Sergey Murav'ev [the Chernigov regiment] I would say that it was all premature: one must not raise the standard of freedom without the support either of the armed forces or the people, who as yet do not understand anything about it.[37]

20A. Zavalishin, D.I., Zapiski dekabrista. SPb., 1906. pp.363-365.

Notes to Chapter IX

1 Vospominaniya Bestuzhevykh. M. 1951, p.146.

2 Ocherki istorii Kurganskoy oblasti. Chelyabinsk 1968, pp.82-86.

3 Pamyati dekabristov. Kudryavtsev, F.A., Koval', S.F. eds. Irkutsk 1975, p.53.

4 ibid. p.51.

5 Roshchevskiy, P.N., Dekabristy v tobol'skom izgnanii. Sverdlovsk 1975, pp.17-18.

6 Pamyati dekabristov, p.53.

7 Baranovskaya, M.Yu., Dekabrist N. Bestuzhev. M. 1977, p.178.

8 Kopylov, A.N., Malysheva, M.P., Dekabristy i prosveshchenie v Sibiri v pervoy polovine XIX veka, in: Dekabristy i Sibir'. Novosibirsk 1977, pp.89-108.

9 Dictionary of National Biography. London 1973.

10 Gershenzon, M., Dekabrist Krivtsov. Gelikon, Moscow/Berlin 1923, p.49.

11 Druzhinin, N.M., Dekabrist I.D. Yakushkin i ego lankasterskaya shkola, in: Druzhinin, N.M., Izbrannye trudy. Revolyutsionnoe dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veka. M. 1985, p.399.

12 Yakushkin, I.D., Zapiski, stat'i, pis'ma. M. 1951, p.28; Orlov, V.S., Verzhbitskiy, B.G., Dekabristy-smolyane. Smolensk 1951, pp.91-93.

13 Druzhinin, pp.416, 425.

14 ibid. pp.427-428.

15 ibid. pp.384-433.

16 ibid. p.426.

17 Yakushkin, p.325.

18 Kudryavtsev, F., Pervyy dekabrist V.F. Raevskiy v Olonkakh, in: Sibir' i dekabristy. M. 1925, pp.65-74; Burlachuk, Foma, Vladimir Raevskiy. M. 1987, pp.136-137.

19 Sheshin, A.B., Dekabrist K.P. Torson. Ulan-Ude 1980, p.176; Panchukov, A.P., Kul'turno-prosvetitel'skaya deyatel'nost' dekabristov v vostochnoy Sibiri. Ulan-Ude 1947, p.59.

20 Bogdanova, M.M., Dekabristy v minusinskoy ssylke, in: Dekabristy i Sibir'. Novosibirsk 1952, p.102.

← 20A.

21 Retunskaya, V.F., Pervaya zhenskaya shkola dekabristov v Tobol'ske, in: Sibir' i dekabristy. Vyp.II. Irkutsk 1981, pp.95-96.

22 Shatrova, G.P., Dekabrist I.I. Gorbachevskiy. Krasnoyarsk 1973, pp.171-172.

23 Matkanov, N.P., A.V. Poggio i ego vospitanniki brat'ya Belogolovye, in: Sibir' i dekabristy. Vyp.I. Irkutsk 1975, p.96.

24 Belousov, A.A., Dekabristy v Buryatii, in: Baykal 1975/6, pp.104-105.

25 Sheshin, pp.146-147.

26 Vosp. Best. p.196.

27 ibid. p.388.

28 Lushnikov, A.G., Dekabrist F.B. Vol'f, in: Dekabristy v Sibiri. Novosibirsk 1952, p.172.

29 Retunskiy, V.F., Vrachebnaya deyatel'nost' dekabristov v Sibiri, in: Sibir' i dekabristy. Vyp.I. Irkutsk 1978, p.104.

30 Pasetskiy, V.M., Geograficheskie issledovaniya dekabristov. M. 1977, pp.127-128.

31 Ryndzyunskiy, P.G., Dekabristy brat'ya Borisovy v gody zhizni na poselenii. Trudy Gos. Istoricheskogo muzeya. Vyp.XV. M. 1941, pp.9-10.

32 Pasetskiy, p.123.

33 Kudryavtsev, F.A., Dekabristy — sotrudniki sibirskikh gazet, in: Pamyati dekabristov, pp.146-147, 149-151.

34 Yakushkin, E.D., Dekabristy na poselenii. Iz arkhiva Yakushkinykh. M. 1926, p.51. (Letter from the younger son of the Decembrist, written to his wife during a visit to his father in Siberia in 1855.)

35 Lunin, M.S., Sochineniya i pis'ma. Shtraykh, S.Ya. ed. Peterburg 1923, p.60.

36 Lunin, M.S., Pis'ma iz Sibiri. M. 1987 contains the original French texts of these and translations into Russian and English.

37 Volkonskaya, M.N., Zapiski, in: Svoey sud'boy gordimsya my. Mark Sergeev ed. Irkutsk 1977, p.346.

CONCLUSION

It is tempting to criticise the Decembrists for their political ineptitude, but to do so from the standpoint of over a hundred years of political upheaval and revolution would be unfair and quite futile. One cannot help wondering, however, what might have happened if Nicholas I had been less frightened by the rising, and less obstinate and vindictive. Looking at the whole episode, from the "trials" to the amnesty in 1856, we see the following points in stark relief:

1 The utter failure of Nicholas' attempts to wipe out all memories and traces of the rising. In spite of the prohibitions on correspondence and contacts, a stream of messages, news in letters sent both officially and by secret means, parcels, newspapers, and books flowed back and forth between Siberia and Russia, keeping alive the memory of the exiles in numerous families. Many archives were preserved and a surprising amount of material has survived, including the memoirs of the most notable participants in the rising. A martyrology, unintentionally created, persisted in spite of the stunned silence which overwhelmed a large part of Russian society after the executions in 1826:

> They [the government] have got rid of the people, but they cannot get rid of their ideas. The wishes of the younger generation reach out to the Siberian wastes where the famous exiles shine in the darkness in which attempts are made to hide them. Their lives in exile are a constant witness to the truth of their principles. Their words are still so powerful that they are forbidden to express them even in private letters to their relatives. They have been deprived of everything: rank, property, health, fatherland and freedom;

> but they could not be deprived of the love of the people[1]

M.S. Lunin wrote in 1838.

2 The futile attempts to break the spirit of the Decembrists, or for that matter other revolutionaries who succeeded them in Russia, by imprisonment and exile, also raise the question of the effectiveness or otherwise of similar attempts in other times and other places to suppress movements devoted to throwing off oppression, and indeed of the effectiveness of imprisonment as a deterrent or punishment for petty crime. N.V. Basargin has something to say on this: commenting on convicts sentenced for serious crimes as compared to those exiled for theft etc., he wrote:

> I was convinced then, and still am, that those exiled for serious crimes such as murder or sacrilege are far more moral than those who are exiled for theft or other less serious offences. The former may have been led to commit their crimes by strong passions, inflexible character or revenge, but have not lost all their moral principles ... and I am sure that most of them could become decent and useful citizens; whereas the latter, led to crime by continuous moral deterioration, cannot be as easily reformed...

The government, Basargin argued, should take these latter criminals in hand and instead of

> barring their way to self-rehabilitation, act like a skilful physician, and not like an inexorable and unrelenting avenger.[2]

In the case of the Decembrists the government (i.e. Nicholas I) was acting as avenger — a vengeance stemming from blind and irrational fear.

3 By crowding the Decembrists into the prisons in Chita and Petrovskiy Zavod, the Tsar wanted to ensure security of imprisonment

and minimise the chances of their influence spreading. In the first he was successful, but in the second he once again failed, for in the crowded prisons the Decembrists were not only enabled to give one another moral and material support, but to discuss plans for the future.

Had Nicholas been a different character, he might have listened to the sensible advice of Admiral Nikolay Semenovich Mordvinov, the only member of the Investigating Commission who refused to vote for the death penalty for the rebels. This advice might have had far-reaching results:

> ... the participants in the recent conspiracy have died as far as European Russia is concerned, and must never again enjoy the rights of citizens of it... but with a few exceptions they all have the necessary qualities to be useful to the state again...

Mordvinov suggested setting up a Siberian academy for teaching physics, mechanics, mineralogy and other sciences which could be of use to Siberia. The Decembrists, he suggested, could be employed to teach there, and incidentally be rehabilitated for the general good of the country. He also suggested the creation of a Siberian aristocracy to which the Decembrists and their descendants could be admitted (thus compensating them for their loss of rank).[3]

The Decembrists' faith in the future of Siberia was justified, and some of their suggestions can be seen as the influence behind such projects as the building of the Baykal-Amur Railway, the exploitation of natural reserves (oil, minerals), the development of an educational network for girls as well as boys up to and including university level and not least in the emergence of the Buryats and

other indigenous peoples into the social and intellectual fabric of Siberia.

Notes

1 Lunin, M.S., Pis'ma iz Sibiri. M. 1987, p.62.

2 Memuary Dekabristov. Yuzhnoe obshchestvo. M. 1982, pp.102-103.

3 Baranovskaya, M.Yu., Dekabrist N. Bestuzhev. M. 1964, p.91.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

(Books referred to in the Dissertation)

Annenkova, P.: Vospominaniya Poliny Annenkovy. M. 1923.

Azadovskiy, M.K., Zolotarev, M.E., Kubalov, B.G. eds.: Sibir' i dekabristy. Irkutsk 1925.

——— Dekabristy na katorge i v ssylke. M. 1925.

Bakhaev, V.B. comp.: Dekabristy o Buryatii. Ulan-Ude 1975.

——— Obshchestvenno-prosvetitel'skaya i kraevedcheskaya deyatel'nost' dekabristov v Buryatii. Novosibirsk 1980.

Balabanov, V.F.: Dekabristy v Blagodatske. Baykal 1975/6, pp.115-124.

——— Dekabristy v chitinskom ostroge. Dal'niy Vostok 1972/11, pp.139-148.

Baranovskaya, M.Yu.: Dekabrist Nikolay Bestuzhev. M. 1964.

Barrat, Glynn: M.S. Lunin — Catholic Decembrist. The Hague-Paris 1976.

——— Rebel on the Bridge: a biography of A. Rozen. Paul Elam Land 1975.

Baten'kov, G.S., Pushchin, I.I., Tol', E.G.: Pis'ma. M. 1936. (Pis'ma G.S. Baten'kova...)

Bazanov, V.G.: V.F. Raevskiy: novye materialy. L.-M. 1949.

Belousov, A.A.: Dekabristy v Buryatii. Baykal 1975/6.

Belyaev, A.P.: Zapiski dekabrista o perezhitom i perechuvstvovannom. SPb. 1882.

Bestuzhev, N.A.: Izbrannaya proza. M. 1983.

——— Stat'i i pis'ma. M. 1933.

Bestuzhevy, M.A. i N.A.: Pis'ma iz Sibiri. Irkutsk 1929.

Bestuzhevy: Vospominaniya Bestuzhevykh. M. 1951. (Azadovskiy, M.K. ed.)

Bestuzhev-Marlinskiy, A.A.: Sochineniya v dvukh tomakh. M. 1981.

Bulanova, O.K.: Roman dekabrista. Dekabrist V.P. Ivashev i ego sem'ya. M. 1925.

Burlachuk, Foka: Vladimir Raevskiy. M. 1987.

Davydoff, Alexander: Russian Sketches. Memoirs. Hermitage 1984.

Dekabristy i Sibir'. Novosibirsk 1977.

Dekabristy rasskazyvayut. M. 1975.

Dekabristy v Sibiri. Novosibirsk 1952.

Dictionary of National Biography, Vol.30.

Druzhinin, N.M.: Izbrannye trudy. Revolyutsionnoe dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke. M. 1985.

Dvoryanov, V.N.: V sibirskoy dal'ney storone. Minsk 1971.

Ekonomika, upravlenie i kul'tura Sibiri XVI-XIX vv. Novosibirsk 1965.

Fedorov, V.A. comp.: Memuary dekabristov. Severnoe obshchestvo. M. 1981.

Fedorov, V.A., Porokh, I.V. comp.: Memuary dekabristov. Yuzhnoe obshchestvo. M. 1982.

Gershenzon, M.: Dekabrist Krivtsov. Berlin 1923.

Godiner, F. ed.: Izbrannye sotsial'no-politicheskie i filosofskie proizvedeniya dekabristov. Tom II. L. 1951.

Golubov, V.: Uchenik "Ulan-Narana". Baykal 1975/6.

Goorbachevskiy, I.I.: Zapiski i pis'ma. M. 1963.

Istoriya Sibiri. Tom II. M. 1968.

Kartsov, V.G.: Dekabrist G.S. Baten'kov. Novosibirsk 1965.

Kennan, George: Siberia and the Exile System. Vol. II. Osgood and McIlvain, London 1891.

Konkin, S.: Dekabristy brat'ya Vedenyapiny. Saransk 1968.

Kopylov, A.N. ed.: Dekabristy i Sibir'. Novosibirsk 1977.

Koval', S.F.: Dekabrist G.S. Baten'kov. Novosibirsk 1965.

—— comp.: Dum vysokoe stremlenie. Irkutsk 1973.

—— comp.: V potomkakh vashe imya ozhyvet. Irkutsk 1986.

Kudryavtsev, F.A., Koval', S.F. eds.: Pamyati dekabristov. Irkutsk 1975.

Lorer, I.I.: Zapiski dekabrista. Irkutsk 1984.

Lunin, M.S.: Pis'ma iz Sibiri. SPb. 1923; also reprint M. 1987.

Mazour, A.: The First Russian Revolution 1825. Stanford, California 1937.

—— Women in Exile: wives of the Decembrists. Diplomatic Press, Tallahassee, Florida 1975.

Modzalevskiy, B.L., Oksman, Yu.G. eds.: Dekabristy. Neizdannye materialy i stat'i. M. 1925.

Mongayt, David: Archaeology in the USSR. Engl. translation Penguin 1966.

Nazimov, M.A.: Pis'ma, stat'i. Irkutsk 1985.

Nechkina, M.V.: O nas v istorii stranitsy napishut. Irkutsk 1982.

—— Zagovor v zerentuyskom rudnike. M. 1925.

Ocherki istorii kurganskoy oblasti. Chelyabinsk 1968.

Okun', S.B.: Dekabrist M.S. Lunin. L. 1962.

Orlov, V.S., Verzhbitskiy, V.G.: Dekabristy-smolyane. Smolensk 1951.

Panchukov, A.P.: Kul'turno-prosvetitel'skaya deyatel'nost' dekabristov v vostochnoy Sibiri. Uch. zapiski Buryat-Mongol'skogo gos. universiteta, Vyp. 1. Ulan-Ude 1947, pp.57-68.

Pasetskiy, V.M.: Geograficheskie issledovaniya dekabristov. M. 1977.

Pavlyuchenko, E.A.: V dobrovol'nom izgnanii. M. 1976.

Printseva, G.A., Bastareva, P.I.: Dekabristy v Peterburge. L. 1975.

Raevskiy, V.F.: Materialy o zhizni i revolyutsionnoy deyatel'nosti. Tom II. Irkutsk 1983.

Roshchevskiy, P.I.: Dekabristy v tobol'skom izgnanii. Sverdlovsk 1975.

Rozen, A.E.: Zapiski dekabrista. Irkutsk 1984.

Ryndzyunskiy, P.G.: Dekabristy brat'ya Borisovy v gody zhizni na poselenii. Trudy Gos. Ist. muzeya, Vyp. XV. M. 1941, pp.5-26.

Sergeev, Mark comp.: Svoey sud'boy gordimsya my. Irkutsk 1977.

Shatrova, G.P.: Dekabrist I.I. Gorbachevskiy. Krasnoyarsk 1973.

——— Dekabristy i Sibir'. Tomsk 1962.

——— K voprosu o vzglyadakh dekabristov na Sibir' i programme pod"ema ee proizvoditel'nykh sil i kul'turnogo urovnya. Uchenye zapiski Tomskogo Gos. universiteta. Kuybyshev 1958.

Sheshin, A.B.: Dekabrist K.P. Torson. Ulan-Ude 1980.

Shteyngeyl', V.I.: Sochineniya i pis'ma. Irkutsk 1985.

Volkonskaya, M.N.: Pis'ma M.N. Volkonskoy. M. 1915.

——— Zapiski knyagini M.N. Volkonskoy. See Sergeev, Mark comp.: Svoey sud'boy gordimsya my.

Volkonskiy, G.S.: Pis'ma dekabrista. Zapiski otdela rukopisey GBIL. Vyp. 24. M. 1981.

Vosstanie dekabristov. Tom XVII. M. 1958.

Yakushkin, E.I.: Dekabristy na poselenii: iz arkhiva Yakushkinykh. Izd. M.S. Sabashnikovykh. L. 1926.

Yakushkin, I.D.: Zapiski, stat'i, pis'ma dekabrista. M. 1951.

Pis'ma dekabrista Alekseya Petrovicha Yushnevskogo i ego zheny iz Sibiri. Kiev 1908.

Zavalishin, D.I.: Zapiski dekabrista. SPb. 1906.

Zilbershtein, N.S.: Khudozhnik-dekabrist N.A. Bestuzhev. M. 1977.