Concluding Remarks

With the major exception of the Marxist scholars, most historians of the reign of Nicholas I—whether they concentrated, like Schilder, on court and government, like Schiemann on foreign policy, like Polievktov on internal developments, or like Lemke on political police and censorship—have noted the importance of the emperor and his firm beliefs for the course of Russian history. Nicholas I, to be sure, gave no new direction to the development of his country. Rather he clung with a desperate determination to the old system and the old ways. The creator of the doctrine of Official Nationality, Count Uvarov, once remarked that he would die with a sense of duty fulfilled if he could succeed in "pushing Russia back some fifty years from what is being prepared for her by the theorists." In a sense, Nicholas I and his associates accomplished just that: they froze Russia as best they could for thirty—although not fifty—years, while the rest of Europe was changing. The catastrophe of the Crimean War underlined the pressing need for fundamental reforms in Russia as well as the fact that the hour was late.

However, before we turn to Alexander II and the "great reforms" we shall consider the development of Russian economy, society, and culture in the first half of the nineteenth century. In those fields, as we shall see, by contrast with Nicholas’s politics, movement prevailed over stagnation.

THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF RUSSIA IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The development of an exchange or money economy, much more rapid and widespread than formerly, must certainly be recognized as the main feature of the economic history of Russia in the first half of the nineteenth century or—more precisely—until the abolition of serfdom. A money economy began perceptibly to develop in Russia as early as the middle of the sixteenth century, but at first this process went on very slowly and encompassed relatively small groups of the population. Only in the nineteenth century did the money economy begin to evolve into its second stage of development, when a majority of the people becomes engulfed in the trade cycle, works for the market, and to satisfy its own needs buys produce of someone else’s labor, also brought to the market as merchandise.

The second half of the eighteenth century marked the zenith of manorial economy and serf agriculture in Russia, but the first decades of the nineteenth witnessed significant changes in the economic picture. Russian estates sent more and more produce to the market, at home and even abroad, as southern Russia began to export grain via the Black Sea. New opportunities for marketing, together with a continuing growth of population, led to a strong and steady rise in land prices. Yet while possibilities beckoned, Russian agriculture could evolve in the capitalistic direction only to a limited extent and at great human and economic cost, for it was restricted by the social structure and the institutions of the country.

Most landlords, entirely unprepared for the task by their education and outlook, failed to adjust effectively to competition and to establish efficient production on their estates. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the proportion of non-gentry landownership grew, despite the fact that only members of the gentry could own serfs. In addition, the indebtedness of the gentry to the state increased rapidly, acquiring tremendous proportions by the middle of the century. It has been estimated that on the eve of the emancipation of the serfs in 1861 the state held in mortgage two-thirds of all the serfs. Small estates were especially hard hit. While substantial landlords on the whole adjusted more or less effectively to the new conditions, their poorer brethren, lacking capital or other sufficient assets, lost out in the competition. The first half of the century thus saw a concentration of
gentry landholding, and a decline, often pauperization, of small gentry landowners.

Seredom, of course, lay at the heart of pre-reform Russian agriculture. Considerable evidence indicates that the landlords first responded to the new market opportunities and the generally rising tempo of economic life by trying to obtain a greater yield from their own fields. Barshchchina, therefore, increased in scope and became more intensive, a process culminating in the 1840’s. But serf labor offered no solution to the problem of achieving efficient, improved production: illiterate, unskilled, and uninterested, the serfs were plainly poor producers. Above all, they lacked incentive and initiative. As a result, in the 1840’s and especially in the 1850’s obrok increased at the expense of barshchchina. Its monetary value rose very markedly; an individual peasant had to pay his master perhaps ten times as much in 1860 as in 1800, while he was encouraged to work hard by the fact that he could retain what remained after the payment. Serfs received additional land in return for obrok, and more of them earned their — and, indeed, their masters’ — keep in factories, in transportation, and in other occupations, including agricultural work away from their home. Significantly, more and more free labor came to be hired in agriculture, especially in the Volga region and the Black Sea provinces. Agricultural wages generally rose, although both the amount of rise and the wages themselves remain very difficult to calculate. The increase of free labor in agriculture — even though, of course, that labor frequently represented the work of someone else’s serfs hired temporarily — acquires added importance when considered in conjunction with the growth of free labor in industry and, indeed, in virtually all aspects of Russian economy.

While Russian agriculture in the first half of the nineteenth century reacted in a strained and pauperized manner to new conditions and demands, a certain advance and modernization were achieved. With the use of machinery and fertilizers and improved organization and technique, some estates became successful “capitalistic” producers. In general, too, productivity increased somewhat as Russian agriculture became more intensive. Also, the produce gradually became more diversified. Old staple crops, notably rye and wheat, continued to be grown on a large scale and in fact for the first time attained prominence among Russian exports. But certain new items rose to positions of some importance in the agriculture of the country. These included potatoes and sugar beets, and, in the south, wine, the successful production of which required considerable knowledge and skill. The production of potatoes quintupled in the 1840’s, the production of wine tripled between the early 1830’s and 1850, and the spread of sugar beets in Russia can be gauged by the number of sugar beet factories: 7 in 1825, 57 in 1836, 206 in 1844, 380 in the early 1850’s. The culture of silk and certain vegetable dyes developed in Transcaucasia. Fine wool began to be produced with the introduction into Russia of a new and superior breed of sheep in 1803. With government aid, the number of these sheep increased from 150,000 in 1812 to some 9 million in 1833.

Industry

Industry, no less than agriculture, was affected by the growth of a market economy. Russian manufacturing establishments, counting only those that employed more than fifteen workers, increased in number from some 1,200 at the beginning of the century to 2,818 by 1860. The labor force expanded even faster: from between one and two hundred thousand in 1800 to between five and nine hundred thousand on the eve of the “great reforms.” The striking discrepancy in the statistics compiled by various specialists results from both inadequate material and the problem of definition, including definition of the key concepts, “factory” and “worker.” Soviet scholars, especially after Stalinization, on the whole emphasized and exaggerated the industrial development of Russia, but they also provided some valuable documentation to support certain of their claims.

The relatively new cotton industry grew most rapidly. Its output increased sixteen times over in the course of the half-century, and at the end of the period Russia possessed about one million cotton spindles. The cotton industry required capital, and, in contrast to older woollen and linen manufactures, it was run by free, not serf, labor. On the whole, free labor gained steadily over bonded labor, and “capitalist” factories over both possessional and manorial ones. According to one count, by 1825 “capitalist” factories constituted 34 per cent of all industrial establishments. Wages, although very low to be sure, kept going up.

At the same time, especially after the first quarter of the century, the use of machinery and steam power steadily increased in Russian manufacturing. The Russians imported machinery to the value of 42,500 silver rubles in 1825, 1,164,000 silver rubles in 1845, and 3,103,000 in 1860. Moreover, they began to build their own machines: the country possessed 19 machine-building factories with their annual output valued at 500,000 rubles in 1851, and 99 with an output worth 8,000,000 rubles in 1860. Russian industry, however, remained largely restricted to the Urals, the Moscow area, the rapidly growing St. Petersburg-Baltic region, and several other already well-established centers. In particular, none had as yet arisen in the vast Russian south.

Trade and Transportation

Trade also reflected the quickening tempo of economic life in Russia in the first half of the nineteenth century. Internal trade experienced
marked growth. The differentiation of the country into the grain-producing south and the grain-consuming center and north became more pronounced, providing an even stronger basis for fundamental, large-scale exchange. Thus the north and the center sent the products of their industries and crafts south in return for grain, meat, and butter. Certain areas developed their own specialties. For example, the Northwestern region produced flax for virtually all of Russia. A district in the distant Archangel province raised a special breed of northern cows. Several Ukrainian provinces became famous for their horses, while the best sheep were bred in southern Russia, between the Volga and the Don. Even such items as woolen stockings became objects of regional specialization. A number of scholars have noted how, in the first half of the nineteenth century, purchased clothing began gradually to displace the homespun variety among the peasants.

Merchant capital grew and fairs expanded. The famous fair near the Monastery of St. Simeon in the Nizhni Novgorod province was transferred in 1817 to the town of Nizhni Novgorod itself and there attained new heights. In 1825 goods worth 12,700,000 rubles were sold at that fair; in 1852 the sum rose to 57,500,000. A number of other fairs also did a very impressive business. The total turnover in Russian internal trade for 1825 has been estimated at the considerable sum of 900,000,000 rubles.

Transportation also developed, if rather slowly. Rivers and lakes continued to play an extremely important role in trade and travel. A number of canals, especially those constructed between 1804 and 1810, added to the usefulness of the water network, by linking, for instance, the Western Dvina to the Dnieper and St. Petersburg to the Volga, thus making it possible to send goods from the upper Volga to the Baltic Sea. The first steamship appeared in Russia in 1815, on the Neva. In 1820 regular steam navigation commenced on the Volga to be extended later to other important rivers and lakes. Following by several years the construction of a small private railroad to serve the needs of a factory, the first public Russian railroad, joining St. Petersburg and the suburban imperial residence of Tsarskoie Selo — present-day Pushkin — was opened to traffic in 1837. In 1851 the first major Russian railroad went into operation, linking St. Petersburg and Moscow on a remarkably straight line as desired by Nicholas I. The Russians even proceeded to establish a railroad industry and build their own locomotives and cars, a development in which Americans, including George Whistler, the father of the painter James McNeill Whistler, played a prominent part. But, considering the size of the country, the systems of transportation remained thoroughly inadequate. In particular, in 1850 Russia possessed only a little over three thousand miles of first-class roads. The Russian army in the Crimea proved to be more isolated from its home bases than the allied forces, which were supplied by sea, from theirs.

Foreign trade — about which we have more precise data than we have concerning domestic commerce — grew swiftly in the first half of the nineteenth century. The annual value of Russian exports on the eve of the “great reforms” has been estimated at 230 million rubles, and of imports at 200 million, compared to only 75 and 52 million respectively at the beginning of the century. Russia continued to export raw materials, such as timber and timber products, hemp, flax, tallow, and increasing quantities of grain. The grain trade resulted from the development of agriculture, notably the raising of wheat, in southern Russia; from the organization of grain export, largely in Greek ships, via the Black Sea; and from the pressing demand for grain in industrializing western Europe. From bare beginnings at the turn of the century, the grain trade rose to 55 per cent of the total value of Russian exports in 1855. It led to the rapid rise of such ports as Odessa and Taganrog and made the Black Sea rival the Baltic as an avenue for commerce with Russia. Russian manufactures, by contrast, found no demand in the West, but — a foretaste of the future — they attracted some customers in Turkey, Central Asia, Mongolia, and China. The Russian imports consisted of tropical produce, such as fruits and coffee, and factory goods, including machinery, as has already been noted.

Social Composition

The population in Russia continued to increase rapidly throughout the period: from 36,000,000 in 1796 to 45,000,000 in 1815 and 67,000,000 in 1851. At the same time its social composition underwent certain changes. While the serfs multiplied in the eighteenth century to constitute, according to Blum, 49 per cent of the total population of Russia in 1796 and as much as 58 per cent in 1815, they failed to keep pace with other social groups after that date. In 1858 they composed 44.5 per cent of the total. Indeed, some scholars have argued that the serfs did not increase in number at all during the decades preceding the emancipation. Serovskv and other students of serfdom have shown what a tremendous and progressively heavier burden of obligations the serfs had to carry, and how hard their life frequently was. These crushing conditions of existence limited the expansion of serfdom and somewhat diminished its relative social weight in Russia in the first half of the nineteenth century.

By contrast, Russian urban population grew both absolutely and as a proportion of the total between 1800 and the “great reforms” — in this case continuing and accelerating an eighteenth-century trend, Townspeople
constituted about 4.1 per cent of the inhabitants of the empire at the turn of the century and 7.8 per cent in 1851.

To be sure, the upper class, the gentry, retained its dominant social and economic position and its leadership in most phases of Russian life. Yet, as our brief account of the economic evolution of the country indicated, its problems and difficulties increased. Most landlords failed to adjust effectively to the changing economic conditions, sank gradually deeper into debt, and often slid further toward poverty. The differentiation of the gentry, from successful landed magnates at one extreme to the numerous poor and even destitute gentry at the other, became increasingly prominent. If the reign of Catherine the Great represented the golden age of the Russian gentry, the reigns of Alexander I and Nicholas I witnessed the development of processes leading unmistakably to its decline.

Evaluations of the Russian Economy and Society

There are several ways of looking at Russian economy and society in the first half of the nineteenth century. To many foreign observers, some older Marxist historians, and certain other critics the main characteristics of Russian life in the period preceding the "great reforms" consisted of backwardness, stagnation, and oppression. As a reaction to this extreme view, many historians — ranging from Soviet specialists to such émigré scholars as Karpovich — have stressed the achievements of the Russians during those difficult decades. They have pointed to a wide variety of phenomena in support of their emphasis: the brilliant Russian literature and culture of the period — which we shall discuss in the next chapter — and Kiselev's reform of the condition of the state peasants; the early penetration of capitalism into the country and certain technological improvements made by the Russians; railroads and the cotton industry; the growing middle class and the expanding trade.

Yet this approach, in its turn, must be kept within its proper frame of reference. For, while Russian economy and society certainly did develop in the first half of the nineteenth century, the empire of the tsars failed to keep pace with other European countries. Whereas capitalism began to affect Russia, it was revolutionizing Great Britain, Belgium, and France. Russian industry was less important in the total European and world picture in 1860 than in 1800, and it had to be protected by very high tariffs. Although the Russian urban classes rose rather rapidly during the first half of the nineteenth century, they remained extremely weak compared to the bourgeoisie in different countries of western Europe. Whereas the country obtained some steamships and railroads, its transportation system failed to serve adequately either the peacetime needs or the needs of the Crimean War. The Russians’ weapons and military equip-
RUSSIAN CULTURE IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Pushkin represents an extraordinary and, perhaps, a unique manifestation of the Russian spirit, said Gogol. I shall add on my own: also prophetic... His appearance helps greatly to illuminate our dark road with a guiding light.

DOSTOEVSKY

Every age, every nation contains in itself the possibility of original art, provided it believes in something, provided it loves something, provided it has some religion, some ideal.

KHOMSIKOV

It has often been noted that the farther one is in Europe one goes the more abstract and general political ideas become. The English agitated for the particular and historic rights of Englishmen; the French for the universal and limitless rights of man; the Germans sought freedom in the realm of the "pure" or "absolute" idea... It is also roughly true that the farther east one goes, the more absolute, centralized, and bureaucratic governments become, while the middle groups between an ignorant peasantry and a military state grow smaller and weaker. Moreover, the greater the pressure of the state on the individual, the more formidable the obstacles to his independence, and the greater his social loneliness are, the more sweeping, general, and abstract are ideologies of protest or compensation.

MAIA

In culture, the eighteenth century in Russia had represented a period of learning from the West. The learning, to be sure, continued in the nineteenth century and, in fact, became all the time both broader and deeper. But, beginning with the reign of Alexander I, Russia developed a glorious literary culture of its own, which in time became the accepted standard of excellence in its homeland and a model to be imitated by many writers in other countries. The "golden age of Russian literature" has been dated roughly from 1820 to 1880 — from Pushkin's first major poems to Dostoevsky's last novel — most of it thus falling in the period preceding the "great reforms." While the arts in Russia did not keep up with Russian literature, they too advanced in the first half of the nineteenth century. Music, for example, developed along creative and original lines, leaving far behind the imitative efforts of the time of Catherine the Great. Russian science and scholarship also showed noteworthy progress. If the eighteenth century had its Michael Lomonosov, the reign of Nicholas I witnessed the epoch-making work of Nicholas Lobachevsky. Moreover, whereas Lomonosov had remained something of a paradox in his age, unique, isolated, and misunderstood, learning in Russia in the first half of the nineteenth century gradually acquired a broader and more consecutive character, with its own schools of thought, traditions, and contributions to the total intellectual effort of Western civilization. Even philosophical, political, social, and economic doctrines grew and developed in a remarkable manner in spite of autocracy and strict censorship.

Although people from the lower classes began to acquire prominence on the eve of the "great reforms," Russian culture of the reigns of Alexander I and Nicholas I was essentially gentry culture. Its tone and charm have been best preserved in magnificent works by its representatives, such as Tolstoy's War and Peace, Turgeniev's A Gentry Nest, and Serge Akhakov's family chronicle. Supported by the labor of serfs and confined in a narrow social group — not unlike the culture of the antebellum South in the United States — Russian culture of the first half of the nineteenth century marked, just the same, a great step forward for the country and left many creations of lasting value. The educated gentry, whose numbers grew, continued to enjoy a cosmopolitan, literary upbringing at home, with emphasis on the French language and with the aid of a battery of foreign and Russian tutors. For illustration one can turn to Tolstoy's autobiographical trilogy as well as to a host of other reminiscences of the period. Next, the sons of the gentry often attended select military schools before entering the army as officers, where again the French language and proper social manners were emphasized. Also, members of the gentry often collected valuable libraries on their estates, followed with interest developments in the West, and even frequently traveled abroad to learn about western Europe and its culture first hand. More and more of them attended universities, both at home and in foreign countries.

Education

University education, as well as secondary education in state schools, became more readily available after Alexander I's reforms. With the creation of the Ministry of Education in 1802, the empire was divided into six educational regions, each headed by a curator. The plan called for a university in every region, a secondary school in every provincial center, and an improved primary school in every district. By the end of the reign the projected expansion had been largely completed: Russia then possessed 6 universities, 48 secondary state schools, and 337 improved primary state schools. Alexander I founded universities in Kazan, Kharkov, and St. Petersburg — the latter first being established as a pedagogical institute —
transformed the "main school," or academy, in Vilna into a university, and revived the German university in Dorpat, which with the University of Moscow made a total of six. In addition, a university existed in the Grand Duchy of Finland: originally in Abo — called Turku in Finnish — and from 1827 in Helsinki, or Helsinki. Following a traditional European pattern, Russian universities enjoyed a broad measure of autonomy. While university enrollments numbered usually a few hundred or less each, and the total of secondary school students rose only to about 5,500 by 1825, these figures represented undeniable progress for Russia. Moreover, private initiative emerged to supplement the government efforts. It played an important part in the creation of the University of Kharkov, and it established two private institutions of higher education which were eventually to become the Demidov Law School in Iaroslavl and the Historico-Philological Institute of Prince Bezborodko in Nezhin. Finally, it may be noted that the celebrated Imperial Lyceum in Tsarskoe Selo, which Pushkin attended, was also founded during the reign of Alexander I.

The obscurantist purges of the last years of Alexander's rule hurt Russian universities, especially the one in Kazan. But Magnitsky and his associates held power only briefly. The many educational policies under Nicholas I that proved to be anxious rather than beneficial to Russian schools and learning were of greater importance. During the thirty years of Official Nationality, with Uvarov himself serving as minister of education from 1833 to 1849, the government tried to centralize and standardize education; to limit the individual's schooling according to his social background, so that each person would remain in his assigned place in life; to foster the official ideology exclusively; and, above all, to eliminate every trace or possibility of intellectual opposition or subversion.

As to centralization and standardization, Nicholas I and his associates did everything in their power to introduce absolute order and regularity into the educational system of Russia. The state even extended its minute control to private schools and indeed to education in the home. By a series of laws and rules issued in 1833–35, private institutions, which were not to increase in number in the future except where public schooling was not available, received regulations and instructions from central authorities, while inspectors were appointed to assure their compliance. "They had to submit to the law of unity which formed the foundation of the reign." Home education came under state influence through rigid government control of teachers: Russian private tutors began to be considered state employees, subject to appropriate examinations and enjoying the same pensions and awards as other comparable officials; at the same time the government strictly prohibited the hiring of foreign instructors who did not possess the requisite certificates testifying to academic competence and exemplary moral character. Nicholas I himself led the way in supervising and inspecting schools in Russia, and the emperor's assistants followed his example.

The restrictive policies of the Ministry of Education resulted logically from its social views and aims. In order to assure that each class of Russians obtained only "that part which it needs from the general treasury of enlightenment," the government resorted to increased tuition rates and to such requirements as special certificates of leave that pupils belonging to the lower layers of society had to obtain from their village or town before they could attend secondary school. Members of the upper class, by contrast, received inducements to continue their education, many boarding schools for the gentry being created for that purpose. Ideally, in the government's scheme of things — and reality failed to live up to the ideal — children of peasants and of lower classes in general were to attend only parish schools or other schools of similar educational level, students of middle-class origin were to study in the district schools, while secondary schools and universities catered primarily, although not exclusively, to the gentry. Special efforts were made throughout the reign to restrict the education of the serfs to elementary and "useful" subjects. Schools for girls, which were under the patronage of the empress dowager and the jurisdiction of the Fourth Department of His Majesty's Own Chancery, served the same aims as those for boys.

The incultation of the true doctrine, that of Official Nationality, and a relentless struggle against all pernicious ideas constituted, as we know, essential activities of the Ministry of Education. Only officially approved views received endorsement, and they had to be accepted without question rather than discussed. Teachers and students, lectures and books were generally suspect and required a watchful eye. In 1834 full-time inspectors were introduced into universities to keep vigil over the behavior of students outside the classroom. Education and knowledge, in the estimate of the emperor and his associates, could easily become subversion! As already mentioned, with the revolutionary year of 1848 unrelied repression set in.

Still, the government of Nicholas I made some significant contributions to the development of education in Russia. Thus, it should be noted that the Ministry of Education spent large sums to provide new buildings, laboratories, and libraries, and other aids to scholarship such as the excellent Pulkovo observatory; that teachers' salaries were substantially increased — extraordinarily increased in the case of professors, according to the University Statute of 1835; that, in general, the government of Nicholas I showed a commendable interest in the physical plant necessary for education and in the material well-being of those engaged in instruction. Nor was quality neglected. Uvarov in particular did much to raise educational and scholarly standards in Russia in the sixteen years during
which he headed the ministry. Especially important proved to be the establishment of many new chairs, the corresponding opening up of numerous new fields of learning in the universities of the empire, and the practice of sending promising young Russian scholars abroad for extended training. The Russian educational system, with all its fundamental flaws, came to emphasize academic thoroughness and high standards. Indeed, the government utilized the standards to make education more exclusive at all levels of schooling. Following the Polish rebellion, the Polish University of Vilna was closed; in 1833 a Russian university was opened in Kiev instead. The government of Nicholas I created no other new universities, but it did establish a number of technical and "practical" institutions of higher learning, such as a technological institute, a school of jurisprudence, and a school of architecture, as well as schools of arts and crafts, agriculture, and veterinary medicine.

Science and Scholarship

With the expansion of higher education, science and scholarship grew in Russia. Mathematics led the way. Nicholas Lobachevsky, who lived from 1793 to 1856 and taught at the University of Kazan, was the greatest Russian mathematician of that, or indeed any, period. The "Copernicus of geometry" left his mark in the history of thought by formulating a non-Euclidean geometry. Starting from an attempt to prove the old Euclidian axiom that on a given plane it is possible to draw through a point not on a given line one and only one line parallel to the given line, and proceeding by trying to refute other alternatives, Lobachevsky found his task impossible. He then faced the consequences of his discovery and went on to postulate and develop a non-Euclidian geometry, within which the Euclidian scheme represented but a single instance. While Lobachevsky's revolutionary views received scant recognition from his contemporaries either in Russia or in other countries — although, to be exact, he was not quite alone, for a few Western scholars were approaching similar conclusions at about the same time — they nevertheless represented a major breakthrough in the direction of the modern development of mathematics and the physical sciences. Several other gifted Russian mathematicians of the first half of the nineteenth century also contributed to the growth of their subject.

Astronomy too fared exceptionally well in Russia in the first half of the nineteenth century. In 1839 the celebrated Pulkovo observatory was constructed near St. Petersburg. Directed by one of the leading astronomers of the age who was formerly professor at the University of Dorpat, Frederick William Jacob Struve, and possessing the largest telescope in the world at that time and in general the most up-to-date equipment, Pulkovo quickly became not only a great center of astronomy in Russia, but also a valuable training ground for astronomers from other European countries and the United States. Struve investigated over three thousand double stars, developed methods to calculate the weight of stars and to apply statistics to a study of them, and dealt with such problems as the distribution of stars, the shape of our galaxy, and the absorption of light in interstellar space, a phenomenon which he was the first to establish. Struve's associates and students — in fact, several other members of the Struve family — further expanded the study of astronomy in Russia.

Physics and chemistry also developed in the reigns of Alexander I and Nicholas I. Russian contributors to these branches of knowledge included an early experimental physicist in electricity and other fields, Professor Basil Petrov, who was on the staff of the Medical-Surgical Academy and taught himself physics, and a distinguished chemist, Professor Nicholas Zinin. Zinin worked and taught in Kazan and St. Petersburg and established the first prominent school of Russian chemists. He is perhaps best remembered as a pioneer in the production of nitric dyes.

The natural sciences in Russia grew with the physical, their practitioners including such luminaries as the great Baltic German embryologist Academician Charles Ernest Baer. As in the eighteenth century, the natural sciences were enriched by some remarkable expeditions and discoveries. Russians continued to explore Siberia and traveled repeatedly from the Baltic "around the world" to Alaska. They discovered numerous islands in the Pacific Ocean, which, however, the Russian government did not choose to claim. And in 1821 an expedition led by Thaddeus Bellingshausen discovered the antarctic continent.

The humanities and the social sciences progressed similarly in Russia in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Oriental studies, for example, profited both from Russia's proximity to much of Asia and from Uvarov's special patronage. They became established in several universities and made important contributions to knowledge, ranging from pioneer descriptions of some Central Asiatic peoples to Father Jakob Bichurin's fundamental work on China. Indeed the Russian Orthodox mission in Peking served from the time of Peter the Great to the revolutions of 1917 as an institute of sinology.

The making of history was developed and gained a new public, Nicholas Karamzin, who must be mentioned more than once in connection with the evolution of the Russian language and literature, also became the first widely popular historian. His richly documented twelve-volume History of the Russian State, which began to appear in 1816 and which was left unfinished in the account of the Time of Troubles when the author died in 1826, won the enthusiastic acclaim of the educated public, who enjoyed Karamzin's extremely readable reconstruction of the colorful Russian past. The historian, to be sure, tried to edify as well as entertain: he argued
Throughout his work that autocracy and a strong state made Russia great and must remain inviolable. In 1811 Karamzin had expressed similar views more succinctly in his secret *Memoir on Ancient and Modern Russia* given to Alexander I to counteract Spontanovsky’s reformist influence. In Russian universities new chairs were founded in history. The hard-working Michael Pogodin, a proponent of Official Nationality, became in 1835 the first professor of Russian history proper at the University of Moscow, to be succeeded in 1845 by a much greater scholar, Sergei Soloviev, the bulk of whose work, however, belongs to Alexander II’s reign.

**Language and Literature**

The Russian language evolved further, and so did linguistic and literary studies. If the writings of Karamzin marked the victory of the new style over the old, those of Pushkin already represented the apogee of modern Russian language and literature and became their classic model. The simplicity, precision, grace, and flow of Pushkin’s language testify to the enormous development of the Russian literary language since the time of Peter the Great. Such opponents of this process as the reactionary Admiral Alexander Shishkov, who served from 1824 to 1828 as minister of education, fought a losing battle. While writers developed the Russian language, scholars studied it. The first decades of the nineteenth century witnessed the work of the remarkable philologist Alexander Vostokov and the early studies of several other outstanding linguistic scholars. Literary criticism rose to a new prominence. The critics ranged from conservative university professors, typified by Stephen Shevryev of the University of Moscow, who adhered to the doctrine of Official Nationality, to the radical firebrand Vissarion Belinsky. Indeed, we shall see that with Belinsky literary criticism in Russia acquired sweeping social, political, and generally ideological significance.

Literature constituted the chief glory of Russian culture in the first half of the nineteenth century, owing to the genius of several writers. It remains the most highly prized legacy from the time of Alexander I and Nicholas I, whether in Russia, with a virtual cult of Pushkin, or in other countries where such works as *Eugene Onegin* and *Dead Souls* are read.

Karamzin’s sentimentialism, mentioned in an earlier chapter, which was popular at the end of the eighteenth and in the first years of the nineteenth century, gradually lost its appeal, while Karamzin himself turned, as we know, to history. New literary trends included what both pre-revolutionary and Soviet scholars described as romanticism and realism in their various aspects. Romanticism produced no supreme literary figure in Russia except the poet Theodore Tiutchev, 1803–73, who spent much of his life in Germany and had little influence in his native land. It did, however, attract a number of gifted poets and writers and also contributed to the artistic growth of such giants as Lermontov, Pushkin, and Gogol. Of the Russian romanticists proper, Basil Zhukovsky deserves mention. Zhukovsky, who lived from 1783 to 1852, faithfully reflected in his poetry certain widespread romantic moods and traits: sensitivity and concern with subjective feelings, an interest in and idealization of the past, a penchant for the mysterious and the weird. On the whole the poet represented the humane, elegiac, and contemplative, rather than the “demonic” and active, aspects of romanticism. Zhukovsky’s value for Russian literature lies in the novel lightness and music of his verse, in the variety of literary forms that he utilized successfully for his poetry, and in his numerous and generally splendid translations. In addition to translating superbly into Russian some works of such contemporary or near-contemporary Western writers as Schiller, Zhukovsky gave his readers an enduring Russian text of Homer’s *Odyssey*, translated, characteristically enough, from the German. Incidentally, in 1829 Russians obtained Nicholas Gnedich’s excellent translation of the *Iliad* from the Greek.

Realism fared better in Russia than romanticism, a fact which many nineteenth-century and especially Soviet critics never ceased to point out. They felt, furthermore, that with realism Russian literature finally achieved true independence and originality and established a firm foundation for lasting greatness. A difficult concept to use, the term *realism* has been applied to a variety of literary developments in Russia in the first half of the nineteenth century. In a sense, the writer of fables, Ivan Krylov, was its best practitioner. Krylov, who lived from 1768 to 1844, but began to write fables only in his late thirties after concentrating unsuccessfully on comedy, tragedy, and satire, achieved something like perfection in his new genre, rivaling such world masters of the fable as Aesop and La Fontaine. Krylov’s approximately two hundred fables, which became best sellers as they appeared during the author’s lifetime and have remained best sellers ever since, win the reader by the richness and raciness of their popular language, the vividness, precision, and impeccable wording of their succinct narrative, and their author’s power of human observation and comment. While animals often act as protagonists, their foibles and predicaments serve as apt illustrations both of Krylov’s Russia and of the human condition in general.

Alexander Griboedov’s allegiance to realism seems less convincing than Krylov’s. That brilliant writer, whose life began in 1795 and ended violently in 1829 when a Persian mob killed him in the Russian legation in Teheran, achieved immortality through one work only: the comedy *Gore ot uma*, translated into English as *Woe from Wit* or as *The Misfortune of Being Clever*. This masterpiece was finished in 1824, but.
because of its strong criticism of Russian high society, was put on the stage only in 1833 and then with numerous cuts. Gore ot uma is neo-
classical in form and contains very little action, but it overflows with wit.
It consists almost entirely of sparkling, grotesque, or caustic statements and
observations by its many characters, from a saucy maid to the em-
bittered hero Chatsky — all set in the milieu of Muscovite high society.
Its spark is such that Griboedov's play possesses an eternal freshness and
effervescence, while many of its characters' observations — like many
lines from Krylov's fables — have become part of the everyday Russian
language. Nor, of course, does a comic form exclude serious content.
Gore ot uma has been praised as the outstanding critique of the leading
circles of Russian society in the reign of Alexander I, as a perspicacious
early treatment of the subject of the conflict of generations — a theme
developed later by Turgenev and other Russian writers — and as providing
in its main character, Chatsky, a prototype of the typical "superfluous"
hero of Russian literature, at odds with his environment.

Like Griboedov, Alexander Pushkin, the greatest Russian writer of the
age, was born near the end of the eighteenth century and became famous
in the last years of Alexander I's reign. Again like Griboedov, Pushkin had
but a short life to live before meeting violent death. He was born in 1799
and was killed in a duel in 1837. Between 1820, which marked the com-
pletion of his first major poem, the whimsical and gently ironic Rastan and
Liudmilka, and his death, Pushkin established himself permanently as,
everything considered, the greatest Russian poet and one of the greatest
Russian prose writers, as a master of the lyric, the epic, and the dramatic
forms, and even as a literary critic, publicist, and something of a historian
and ethnographer. Pushkin's early works, such as The Fountain of
Bakhchisarai and The Prisoner of the Caucasus, magnificent in form,
reflected a certain interest in the unusual and the exotic that was character-
estic of the age. However, as early as Eugene Onegin, written in 1822-31,
Pushkin turned to a penetrating and remarkably realistic treatment of
Russian educated society and its problems. Onegin became one of the most
effective and compelling figures in modern Russian literature, while both
he and the heroine of the poem, Tatiana Larina, as well as their simple
story, were to appear and reappear in different variations and guises in
the works of Lermontov, Turgenev, Goncharov, and many other writers.
While Eugene Onegin was written in most elegant verse, Pushkin also
contributed greatly to the development of Russian prose, especially by
such tales as the celebrated A Captain's Daughter. In his prose even more
than in his poetry Pushkin has been considered a founder of realism in
Russia and thus an originator of the main current of modern Russian lit-
erature. Pushkin's deeply sensitive and versatile genius ranged from un-
surpassed personal lyrics to historical themes — for example, in the tragedy

Pushkin's genius has often been described as "classical." Its outstanding
characteristic consisted in an astounding sense of form, harmony, and
measure, which resulted in perfect works of art. The writer's fundamental
outlook reflected something of the same classical balance: it was humane,
sane, and essentially affirmative and optimistic. Not that it excluded
tragedy. A long poem, The Bronze Horseman, perhaps best expressed
Pushkin's recognition of tragedy in the world. It depicted a disastrous
conflict between an average little man, Eugene, and the bronze statue of
the great founder of St. Petersburg, who built his new capital on virtually
impassable terrain, where one of the recurrent floods killed Eugene's
beloved: a conflict between an individual and the state, human desire and
necessity, man and his fate. Yet — although a minority of specialists,
including such important critics as Brusov and Lednicki, reject this read-
ing of the poem — The Bronze Horseman, too, affirms Peter the Great's
work, modern Russia, and life itself.

Pushkin's genius appeared in Russia at the right time. A century of
labor since Peter the Great's reforms had fashioned a supple modern
language, developed literary forms, and established Russia as a full
participant in the intellectual life of Europe. Pushkin, who knew French
almost as well as Russian, profited greatly by the riches of Western litera-
ture — from Shakespeare to Pushkin's contemporaries — as well as by
Russian popular speech and folklore. Yet, while the stage had been set
for Pushkin, it was not cluttered. The great writer could thus be the first
to realize the potential of modern Russian verse as well as modern
Russian prose, of lyric poetry as well as factual narrative, and set the
standard. His sweeping influence extended beyond language and literature
to the other arts in Russia, and especially to music — where composers,
ranging in time from Glinka and Dargomyzhsky through Musorgsky,
Rimsky-Korsakov, and Tchaikovsky to Rachmaninov and Stravinsky,
created more than twenty operas on the basis of his works. Indeed, he
appeared to incarnate the entire glorious spring of Russian literature and
culture. Another very great lyric poet, Theodore Tiutchev, expressed this
best when he concluded a poem devoted to the tragedy of Pushkin's death:
"You, like first love, the heart of Russia will not forget."

If Pushkin is generally regarded as the greatest Russian poet, Michael
Lermontov, who also lived and wrote in the first half of the nineteenth
century, has often been considered the second greatest. Born in 1814
and killed in a duel in 1841, Lermontov began writing at a very early age
proved utterly irresistible. Occasionally, for instance in the stories Notes of a Madman and A Nose, weird content paralleled these magical literary powers. More frequently, as in the celebrated play, The Inspector General, and in Gogol’s masterpiece, the novel Dead Souls, the subject matter contained nothing out of the ordinary and the plot showed little development.

Dead Souls, published in 1842, demonstrates the scope and might of Gogol’s genius and serves as the touchstone for different interpretations of Gogol. That simple story of a scoundrel, Chichikov, who proceeded to visit provincial landlords and buy up their dead serfs — serfs were called “souls” in Russia—to use them in business deals as if they were alive, has been hailed, and not at all unjustly, by critics all the way from Belinsky to Soviet and post-Soviet scholars as a devastating, realistic, satirical picture of rural Russia under Nicholas I. But there seems to be much more to Gogol’s novel. The landlords of different psychological types whom Chichikov meets, as well as Chichikov himself, appear to grow in vitality with the years, regardless of the passing of that society which they are supposed to mirror faithfully, for, indeed, they are “much more real than life.” Russian formalist critics and such writers as Merezhkovsky and Nabokov deserve credit for emphasizing these other “non-realistic” aspects and powers of Gogol. The great novelist himself, it might be added, did not know what he was doing. His withering satire, applauded by the opponents of the existing system in Russia, stemmed directly from his weird genius, not from any ideology of the Left. In fact, in the second volume of Dead Souls Gogol tried to reform his characters and save Russia. That project, of course, failed. Still trying to resurrect Russian society, Gogol published in 1847 his unbelievably naïve and reactionary Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends, which suggested, for example, that serfs should remain illiterate and shocked educated Russia. Gogol attempted also to find salvation for himself — and, by extension, for Russia — in religious experience, but to no avail. He died in 1852 after a shattering nervous breakdown when he burned much of the sequel to the first volume of Dead Souls.

Karamzin, Zhukovsky, Krylov, Gribėndov, Pushkin, Lermontov, and Gogol were by no means the only Russian authors in the reigns of Alexander I and Nicholas I. While no extended discussion of the subject can be offered in a textbook, it should be realized, for instance, that Pushkin did not stand alone, but was the outstanding member of a brilliant generation of poets. Again, the prose writers included, in addition to those already mentioned, the magnificent narrator of provincial gentry life, Serge Aksakov, and other gifted authors. Moreover, pre-reform Russia saw much of the work of another supreme lyric poet who has already been
mentioned, Theodore Turgenev, as well as the first publications of such
giants of Russian and world literature as Turgenev, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy. It
was a golden age.

Ideologies

In spite of the reaction of the last part of Alexander's reign and the
steady repression under Nicholas, the first half of the nineteenth century
proved to be creative not only in literature but also in Russian political
and social thought and in the building of ideologies in general. Herzen
could well refer to it as an amazing period of outward political slavery
and inward intellectual emancipation. Again Russia profited from its as-
association with the West and from the work performed throughout the
eighteenth century in developing education and culture in the country. As
we saw earlier, educated Russians shared in the Enlightenment, and indeed,
after the outbreak of the French Revolution, produced the first Russian
martyrs of the radical ideas of the Age of Reason, such as Novikov and
especially Radishchev. Eighteenth-century liberalism or radicalism per-
mitted in the nineteenth century in groups as different as Alexander I's
Unofficial Committee and the Decembrists. But on the whole the intel-
lectual scene began to change drastically. Romanticism and German
idealistic philosophers replaced the Enlightenment and French philosophes
as guides for much of European thought. The new intellectual Zeitgeist
affirmed deep, comprehensive knowledge — often with mystical or reli-
gious elements — in opposition to mere rationalism, an organic view of
the world as against a mechanistic view, and the historical approach to
society in contrast to a utilitarian attitude with its vision limited to the
present. It also emphasized such diverse doctrines as struggle and the
essential separateness of the component parts of the universe in place of
the Enlightenment ideals of harmony, unity, and cosmopolitanism. And
it stressed the supreme value of art and culture. In the new world of
romanticism such strange problems as the true nature of nations and the
character of their missions in history came to the fore.

Romanticism and idealistic philosophy penetrated Russia in a variety
of ways. For example, a number of professors, typified by Michael Pavlov,
who taught physics, mineralogy, and agronomy at the University of Mos-
cow, presented novel German ideas in their lectures in the first decades
of the nineteenth century. Educated Russians continued to read voraciously
and were strongly influenced by Schiller and other brilliant Western
romanticists. Of course, the subjects of the tsar were also Europeans and
thus could not help but be part of European intellectual movements.
While some Russians showed originality in developing different currents
of Western thought, and while in general the Russian response to romantic
*Ivan the Terrible and His Son* by Repin.


Petrodvorets (Peterhof), summer palace built by Peter the Great, 1722–50, near Leningrad.

*The Commissars of the Zaporozhie Writing a Letter to the Turkish Sultan* by Repin.
Cathedral of St. Dmitri, 1194-7, in Vladimir.

A church in ancient Suzdal.
ideas can be considered creative rather than merely imitative, there is no convincing reason for dissociating Russian intellectual history of the first half of the nineteenth century from that of the rest of Europe, whether in the name of the alleged uniquely religious nature of the ideological development in Russia or in order to satisfy the peculiar Soviet nationalism.

In particular, two German philosophers, Schelling first and then Hegel, exercised strong influence on the Russians. Schelling affected certain professors and a number of poets—the best Russian expression of some Schellingian views can be found in Tютчев's unsurpassed poetry of nature—and also groups of intellectuals and even schools of thought, such as the Slavophile. It was largely an interest in Schelling that led to the establishment of the first philosophic "circle" and the first philosophic review in Russia. In 1823 several young men who had been discussing Schelling in a literary group formed a separate society with the study of German idealistic philosophy as its main object. The circle chose the name of "The Lovers of Wisdom" and came to contain a dozen members and associates, many of whom were to achieve prominence in Russian intellectual life. It published four issues of a journal, Mnemosyne. The leading Lovers of Wisdom included a gifted poet, Дмитрий Веневитинов, who died in 1827 at the age of twenty-two, and Prince Владимир Одоевский, 1803–49, who developed interesting views concerning the decline of the West and the great future of Russia to issue from the combination and fruition of both the pre-Petrine and the Petrine heritages. The Lovers of Wisdom reflected the romantic temper of their generation in a certain kind of poetic spiritualism that pervaded their entire outlook, in their worship of art, in their pantheistic adoration of nature, and in their disregard for the "crude" aspects of life, including politics. The group disbanded after the Decembrist rebellion in order not to attract police attention.

A decade later, the question of the nature and destiny of Russia was powerfully and shockingly presented by Петр Чаадаев. In his Philosophical Letter, published in the Telescope in 1836, Чаадаев argued, in effect, that Russia had no past, no present, and no future. It had never really belonged to either the West or the East, and it had contributed nothing to culture. In particular, Russia lacked the dynamic social principle of Catholicism, which constituted the basis of the entire Western civilization. Indeed, Russia remained "a gap in the intellectual order of things." Чаадаев, who was officially proclaimed deranged by the incensed authorities after the publication of the Letter, later modified his thesis in his Apology of a Madman. Russia, he came to believe, did enter history through the work of Peter the Great and could obtain a glorious future by throwing all of its fresh strength into the construction of the common culture of Christendom.

Russian intellectual life grew apace in the 1840's and 1850's. Spurred
by Schelling, by an increasing Hegelian influence, and by German romantic thought in general, as well as by the new importance of Russia in Europe ever since the cataclysm of 1812 and by the blossoming of Russian culture, several ideologies emerged to compete for the favor of the educated public. Official Nationality, which we considered in an earlier chapter, represented the point of view of the government and the Right. While it cannot be included in what Herzen called “intellectual emancipation,” it did possess influential spokesmen among professors and writers, not to mention censors and other officials, and played a prominent role on the Russian scene. On the one hand, Official Nationality may be regarded as a culmination of reactionary currents in Russia, which found earlier proponents in such figures as Rostopchin, Shestakov, Magnitsky, and in part Karamzin. On the other hand, it too, in particular its more nationalistic wing that was typified by the Moscow University professors Michael Pogodin and Stephen Shevelev, testified to the impact of German romanticism on Russia. The Slavophiles and the Westernizers developed the two most important independent, as opposed to government-sponsored, schools of thought. The Petrashevsky, by contrast, had a briefer and more obscure history. But they did represent yet another intellectual approach to certain key problems of the age.

The Slavophiles were a group of romantic intellectuals who formulated a comprehensive and remarkable ideology centered on their belief in the superior nature and supreme historical mission of Orthodoxy and of Russia. The leading members of the group, all of them landowners and gentlemen-scholars of broad culture and many intellectual interests, included Alexei Khomiakov who applied himself to everything from theology and world history to medicine and technical inventions, Ivan Kireyevsky who has been called the philosopher of the movement, his brother Peter who collected folk songs and left very little behind him in writing, Constantine Aksakov, a specialist in Russian history and language, Constantine’s brother Ivan, later prominent as a publicist and a Pan-Slav, and George Samarin who was to have a significant part in the emancipation of the serfs and who wrote especially on certain religious and philosophical topics, on the problem of the borders of the empire, and on the issue of reform in Russia. This informal group, gathering in the salons and homes of Moscow, flourished in the 1840’s and 1850’s until the death of the Kireyevsky brothers in 1856 and of Khomiakov and Constantine Aksakov in 1860.

Slavophilism expressed a fundamental vision of integration, peace, and harmony among men. On the religious plane it produced Khomiakov’s concept of sobornost, an association in love, freedom, and truth of believers, which Khomiakov considered the essence of Orthodoxy. Historically, so the Slavophiles asserted, a similar harmonious integration of individuals could be found in the social life of the Slavs, notably in the peasant commune — described as “a moral choir” by Constantine Aksakov — and in such other ancient Russian institutions as the zemskii sobor. Again, the family represented the principle of integration in love, and the same spirit could pervade other associations of human beings. As against love, freedom, and co-operation stood the world of rationalism, necessity, and compulsion. It too existed on many planes, from the religious and metaphysical to that of everyday life. Thus it manifested itself in the Roman Catholic Church — which had chosen rationalism and authority in preference to love and harmony and had seceded from Orthodox Christendom — and, through the Catholic Church, in Protestantism and in the entire civilization of the West. Moreover, Peter the Great introduced the principles of rationalism, legalism, and compulsion into Russia, where they proceeded to destroy or stunt the harmonious native development and to seduce the educated public. The Russian future lay in a return to native principles, in overcoming the Western disease. After being cured, Russia would take its message of harmony and salvation to the discordant and dying West. It is important to realize that the all-embracing Slavophile dichotomy represented — as pointed out by Stepan and others — the basic romantic contrast between the romantic ideal and the Age of Reason. In particular, as well as in general, Slavophilism fits into the framework of European romanticism, although the Slavophiles showed considerable originality in adapting romantic doctrines to their own situation and needs and although they also experienced the influence of Orthodox religious thought and tradition.

In its application to the Russia of Nicholas I the Slavophile teaching often produced paradoxical results, antagonized the government, and baffled Slavophile friends and foes alike. In a sense, the Slavophiles were religious anarchists, for they condemned all legalism and compulsion in the name of their religious ideal. Yet, given the sinful condition of man, they granted the necessity of government and even expressed a preference for autocracy: in addition to its historical roots in ancient Russia, autocracy possessed the virtue of placing the entire weight of authority and compulsion on a single individual, thus liberating society from that heavy burden; besides, the Slavophiles remained unalterably opposed to Western constitutional and other legalistic and formalistic devices. Yet this justification of autocracy remained historical and functional, therefore relative, never religious and absolute. Furthermore, the Slavophiles desired the emancipation of the serfs and other reforms, and, above all, insisted on the “freedom of the life of the spirit,” that is, freedom of conscience, speech, and publication. As Constantine Aksakov tried to explain to the government: “Man was created by God as an intelligent and a talking being.” Also, Khomiakov and his friends opposed such aspects of the established
order as the death penalty, government intrusion into private life, and bureaucracy in general. “Thus the first relationship of the government and the people is the relationship of mutual non-interference...” No wonder Slavophiles’ publications never escaped censorship and prohibition for long.

The Westernizers were much more diverse than the Slavophiles, and their views did not form a single, integrated whole. Besides, they shifted their positions rather rapidly. Even socially the Westernizers consisted of different elements, ranging from Michael Bakunin who came from a gentry home like those of the Slavophiles, to Vissarion Belinsky whose father was an impoverished doctor and grandfather a priest, and Bauli Boltin who belonged to a family of merchants. Yet certain generally held opinions and doctrines gave a measure of unity to the movement. The Slavophiles and the Westernizers started from similar assumptions of German idealistic philosophy, and indeed engaged in constant debate with each other, but came to different conclusions. While Khomskov and his friends affirmed the uniqueness of Russia and the superiority of true Russian principles over those of the West, the other party argued that the Western historical path was the model that Russia had to follow. Russia could accomplish its mission only in the context of Western civilization, not in opposition to it. Naturally, therefore, the Westernizers took a positive view of Western political development and criticized the Russian system. Contrary to the Slavophiles, they praised the work of Peter the Great, but they wanted further Westernization. Also, whereas the Slavophiles anchored their entire ideology in their interpretation and appraisal of Orthodoxy, the Westernizers assigned relatively little importance to religion, while some of them gradually turned to agnosticism and, in the case of Bakunin, even to violent atheism. To be more exact, the moderate Westernizers retained religious faith and an essentially idealistic cast of mind, while their political and social program did not go beyond mild liberalism, with emphasis on gradualism and popular enlightenment. These moderates were typified by Nicholas Stankevich, who brought together a famous early Westernizer circle but died in 1840 at the age of twenty-seven before the movement really developed, and by Professor Timothy Granovsky, who lived from 1813 to 1855 and taught European history very successfully at the University of Moscow. The radical Westernizers, however, largely through Hegelianism and Left Hegelianism, came to challenge religion, society, and the entire Russian and European system, and to call for a revolution. Although few in number, they included such major figures as Vissarion Belinsky, 1811–48, Alexander Herzen, 1812–70, and Michael Bakunin, 1814–76.

Belinsky, the most famous Russian literary critic, exercised a major influence on Russian intellectual life in general. He had the rare good fortune to welcome the works of Pushkin, Lermontov, and Gogol and the debuts of Dostoevsky, Turgenev, and Nekrasov. Belinsky’s commentary on the Russian writers became famous for its passion, invective, and eloquence, as well as for its determination to treat works of literature in the broader contexts of society, history, and thought, and to instruct and guide the authors and the reading public. Belinsky’s own views underwent important changes and had not achieved cohesiveness and stability at the time of his death. His impact on Russian literature, however, proved remarkably durable and stable: it consisted above all in the establishment of political and social criteria as gauges for evaluating artistic works. As Nekrasov put it later, one did not have to be a poet, but one was under obligation to be a citizen. Following Belinsky’s powerful example, political and social ideologies, banned from direct expression in Russia, came to be commonly expounded in literary criticism.

Both Herzen and Bakunin became prominent in the 1830s and 1840s, but lived well beyond the reign of Nicholas I. Moreover, much of their activity, such as Herzen’s radical journalistic work abroad and Bakunin’s anarchist theorizing and plotting, belonged to the time of Alexander II and will have to be mentioned in a subsequent chapter. Yet their intellectual evolution in the decades preceding the “great reforms” formed a significant part of that seminal period of Russian thought. Herzen, whose autobiographical account My Past and Thoughts is one of the most remarkable works of Russian literature, came from a well-established gentry family, like the Slavophiles and Bakunin, but was an illegitimate child. He became a leading opponent of Khomiakov in the Muscovite salons and a progressive Westernizer. Gradually Herzen abandoned the doctrines of idealistic philosophy and became increasingly radical and critical in his position, stressing the dignity and freedom of the individual. In 1847 he left Russia, never to return. Bakunin has been described as “founder of nihilism and apostle of liberty” — Herzen said he was born not under a star but under a comet — but he began peacefully enough as an enthusiast of German thought, especially Hegel’s. Several years earlier than Herzen, Bakunin too left Russia. Before long he turned to Left Hegelianism and moved beyond it to anarchism and a sweeping condemnation of state, society, economy, and culture in Russia and in the world. Bakunin emphasized destruction, proclaiming in a signal early article that the passion for destruction was itself a creative passion. While Herzen bitterly witnessed the defeat of the revolution of 1848 in Paris, Bakunin attended the Pan-Slav Congress in Prague and participated in the revolution in Saxony. After being handed over by the Austrian government to the Russian, he was to spend over a decade in fortresses and in Siberian exile. Both Herzen, disappointed in the
West, and Bakunin, ever in search of new opportunities for revolution and anarchism, came to consider the peasant commune in Russia as a superior institution and as a promise of the future social transformation of Russia—a point made earlier by the Slavophiles, although, of course, from different religious and philosophical positions—thus laying the foundation for subsequent native Russian radicalism.

The Petrashevsky were another kind of radicals. That informal group of two score or more men, who from late 1845 until their arrest in the spring of 1849 gathered on Fridays at the home of Michael Butashevich-Petrashevsky in St. Petersburg, espoused especially the teaching of the strange French utopian socialist Fourier. Fourier preached the peaceful transformation of society into small, well-integrated, and self-supporting communes, which would also provide for the release and harmony of human passions according to a fantastic scheme of his own invention. Many Petrashevsky, however, added to Fourierism political protest, demand for reform, and general opposition to the Russia of Nicholas I. The government took such a serious view of the situation that it condemned twenty-one men to death, although it changed their sentence at the place of execution in favor of less drastic punishments. It was as a member of the Petrashevsky that Dostoevsky faced imminent execution and later went to Siberia. The Petrashevsky, it might be added, came generally from lower social strata than did the Lovers of Wisdom, the Slavophiles, and the Westernizers, and included mostly minor officials, junior officers, and students.

Several trends in the intellectual history of Russia in the first half of the nineteenth century deserve attention. If we exclude the Decembrists as belonging ideologically to an earlier period, Russian thought moved from the abstract philosophizing and the emphasis on esthetics characteristic of the Lovers of Wisdom, through the system-building of the Slavophiles and, to a lesser extent, the Westernizers to an increasing concern with the pressing issues of the day, as exemplified by the radical Westernizers and, in a different sense, by the Petrashevsky. At the same time radicalism grew among the educated Russians, especially as German idealistic philosophy and romanticism in general disintegrated. Moreover, socialism entered Russian history, both through such individuals as Herzen and his lifelong friend Nicholas Ogarev and through an entire group of neophytes, the Petrashevsky. Also, the intellectual stratum increased in number and changed somewhat in social composition, from being solidly gentry, as the Slavophiles still were, to a more mixed membership characteristic of the Westernizers and the Petrashevsky. All in all, Russian thought in the reigns of Alexander I and Nicholas I, and especially the "intellectual emanipation" of the celebrated forties, was to have a great impact on the intellectual evolution of Russia and indeed on Russian history all the way to 1917 and even beyond.

While contemporaries and later many scholars showed special interest in the Russian literature and thought of the first half of the nineteenth century, the fine arts, too, continued to develop in the reigns of Alexander I and Nicholas I. Both emperors were enthusiastic builders in the tradition of Peter and Catherine. At the time of Alexander the neo-classical style, often skillfully adapted to native traditions, reached its height in Russia. It affected not only the appearance of St. Petersurg, Moscow, and other towns, but also the architecture of countless manor houses all over the empire throughout the nineteenth century. The leading architects of Alexander's reign included Hadrian Zakharov, who created the remarkable Admiralty building in St. Petersurg, and Andrew Vorontzikh, of serf origin, who constructed the Kazan Cathedral in the capital and certain imperial palaces outside it. Under Nicholas neo-classicism gave way to an eclectic mixture of styles.

Largely guided by the Academy of Arts, painting evolved gradually from neo-classicism to romanticism as exemplified by Karl Brullov's enormous canvas "The Last Day of Pompeii." A few more realistic genre painters also began to appear. Music grew in quantity, quality, and appeal. In particular, Russian opera developed, and it obtained a lasting position in Russia and elsewhere through the genius of Michael Glinka, 1804–57, and the talents of other able composers such as Alexander Dargomyzhsky, 1813–69. As elsewhere in Europe, Russian opera and the Russian musical school generally stressed folk songs, melodies, and motifs. The theater, the ballet, and the opera attracted increasing state support and public interest. The theater profited from the new Russian dramatic literature, which included such masterpieces as "Woe from Wit" and "The Inspector General," and the emergence of brilliant actors and even traditions of acting. Public theaters existed in many towns, while some landords continued to establish private theaters on their estates, with serfs as actors. In the ballet too, under the guidance of French and Italian masters, standards improved and a tradition of excellence developed.

On the whole, Chaudet's claim that Russia had contributed nothing to culture, outrageous in 1836, would have found even less justification in 1855 or 1860. Yet, as the Slavophiles, Herzen, and other thinking Russians realized, not all was well: there remained an enormous gulf between the educated society and the people, between the fortunate few on top and the broad masses. Something had to be done. The future of Russia depended on the "great reforms."