Lord and Peasant in Russia
FROM THE NINTH TO THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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to overcome more handicaps than did his counterpart in Western Europe. The difficulties of transport made the carriage of raw materials and finished products expensive, and there were periods during the year when goods often could not be moved at all. The effects of this handicap upon economic growth are obvious, particularly when the Russian conditions are compared with the relative ease with which goods could be moved all year around in the geographically more fortunate lands of the West. Similarly, Russia was less favored than were these lands in the location of her mineral resources. To get the iron they needed the Russians had to go to the thinly settled Urals and her lands, far distant from the centers of population, trade, and industry. Despite this Russia was able to become a leading iron producer until the ironmakers of other lands, and above all of England, began to smelt with coke instead of charcoal. When that happened Russia could no longer compete, for unlike England her deposits of coal suitable for coking lay far from the iron mines, and the costs of bringing fuel and ore together would have been prohibitive.

Cf Baykov, The Economic Development, pp. 137-143

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THE DVIORANS'TVO ASCENDANCY

During the eighteenth century an upsurge of the nobility, sometimes labelled by historians as a "feudal reaction," seems to have been nearly a pan-European phenomenon. In country after country a new class cohesiveness appeared among members of the ruling class. They revived old and well-nigh forgotten corporate privileges, they demanded new ones, and they made a bid for greater power for their caste in government.

The nobility of Russia shared in this movement. But the Russian experience was unique in at least two respects. First, in other lands the renascence of aristocratic pretensions came to an early end—victim of revolution, or centralization, or bureaucratization, or parliamentary reform. In Russia the story turned out differently. The Russian nobles won their freedom from the galling obligation of state service; they were granted a charter that guaranteed their rights as members of a privileged class; they gained a monopoly on the ownership of land and serfs; they were able to reduce their peasants to the condition of chattels; they made and unmade tsars; and they ruled in the provinces.

The second unique feature of the Russian experience was that until the reign of Peter I there had not even been a noble caste in the Western European sense of a distinct corps, all of whose members were equally endowed with special class privileges that raised them above other subjects. The honor and precedence that a Russian lord enjoyed came from his ancestry, and not from his membership in a special caste, nor from serving the tsar. The scions of old families scorned their fellow servitors who sprang from less distinguished lines, and saw no reason to identify themselves or their interests with them.

The consciousness of belonging to a single class only appeared during Peter's reign. As with so much else that was new in that

Romasovich-Slavatinski, Dviornostvo, pp 2-3
era, primary responsibility for this development lay with the tsar himself. Peter established and enforced the principle that social distinction rose from state service and not from ancestry. To his way of thinking the demands of the state outweighed all other considerations, including the claims of lineage. He needed officers and administrators for his mushrooming army and bureaucracy, and he decided that the rights of nobility would go only to those who filled these posts. He took decisive and sometimes severe measures to compel landowness to serve. He ordered the compilation of a register of all eligibles, kept records of their service, confiscated the property of those who evaded service, and ordered that evaders could be assaulted, robbed, and even murdered with impunity because their evasion had put them outside the law. All those eligible for service had to enter upon it at the age of fifteen and remain in it until disability, senility, or death ended their usefulness. They were expected to begin training for service in special schools when they were ten, but this requirement was nullified by a combination of evasions and of inadequate educational facilities. To ensure a steady flow of noble sprigs into the armed forces Peter charged the director of the government’s genealogical bureau with the task of seeing to it that not more than one-third of the members of a family were in civil service. The test had to be in the military. On entering active duty with the troops the young noble was required to serve in the ranks before he could be commissioned. Sons of wealthy and important families were posted to one of the three Guards regiments, while others went to a line outfit where they lived the lives of ordinary recruits.

The decree of 24 January 1722 by which Peter created a Table of Ranks in imperial service represented the culmination of his plans for the nobility. Service grades had of course existed for a long time, and by the end of the sixteenth century twenty-two separate ranks had been established. During the seventeenth century the elaborate system of genealogical precedence known as mestnichestvo which had regulated the distribution of these offices had deteriorated. By the time of its formal abolition

on 12 January 1682 the principle that promotions depended upon merit or the tsar’s favor, rather than upon ancestry, had become generally accepted. Now Peter gave precise formulation to what had become the established pattern. His Table of Ranks set up fourteen parallel grades in the military, civil, and imperial court bureaucracies. Every servant, no matter what his pedigree, had to begin his career in the lowest rank, or chin, and promotions were supposed to depend upon merit and length of service. The man of common birth who entered military service won hereditary nobility when he was commissioned a second lieutenant or ensign, lowest of the fourteen military ranks. If he chose a career in the civil bureaucracy he gained nobility only if he rose to the eighth chin, that of collegiate assessor. Peter’s law remained in force with only minor modifications made in it until 1917. In 1845 Nicholas I, in response to long-expressed desires of the high aristocracy, made it more difficult to become a member of the nobility by ordering that, henceforth, hereditary nobility came only with the eighth chin (staff officer rank) in the military, and fifth rank in the civil service.

By making the acquisition of noble status dependent upon government service Peter welded the servitor-nobles into a single class that was held together by common interests, and that shared common corporate privileges. In fact, Peter not only called this corps of the nobility into being but also gave it its first corporate name. Indulging his weakness for foreign words he chose the name the Poles used for their nobility, russifying it into dvorianstvo. In the second half of the century, however, Peter’s selection was replaced by an old Russian word, dvorianstvo. Centuries before that name had been used for the dvorianstvo, the lesser servitors of the prince who lived in his door, his court. Now it was applied to all nobles, great and small—a fitting name for a noblesse that owed its preeminence to service to the tsar.

Peter was responsible, too, for the adoption of both honorific and hereditary titles for the nobility. Prior to his reign the title

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of honor of blagorodnyi, well-born, was restricted to members of the tsar’s family. Everyone else was formally addressed as a “slave” of the tsar. In 1726 Peter changed the titles of the ruling family and substituted blagovestnyi, true believer, as the proper form of address for the tsar’s kinsmen Blagorodnyi, well-born, now began to be used for nobles. By the middle of the eighteenth century it had become the accepted form, so that both as individuals and as a class they were identified as “blagorodnyi.”

The only hereditary Russian title in the pre-Petrine era had been that of kniaz, prince. It was born by those who claimed descent from Svjatigor, from Gediminas, Prince of Lithuania (1316–1341), or from Tatar and Georgian princes. (In Russia, as in other continental lands, all the children of a titled father had the same title he had even while he was still alive.) In 1707 Peter honored his favorite, Alexander Menshikov, son of a stable man, with the title of kniaz. This was not Menshikov’s first princely title; two years before the Holy Roman Emperor had made him a prince of that empire. No more Russian princes were created until the reign of Paul, at the end of the century, though several Russians, among them Catherine II’s favorites, Potemkin, Orlov, and Zubov, were named princes of the Holy Roman Empire. Paul, and his sons Alexander I and Nicholas I, awarded the title to a number of people, so that by the second half of the nineteenth century sixteen families had been elevated to princely rank. Peter introduced the title of Count (Graf) in 1706 when he raised B.P. Sheremetev to that rank. By the reign of Alexander II 65 counts had been created by the tsars. There were also a number of counts whose titles came from the Holy Roman Emperor. Peter introduced the title of baron, too. In 1710 he gave it to Peter Shafirov, who had risen from a humble Jewish origin to high rank in the tsar’s service. The title in succeeding years was awarded to successful business men, and so came to be held in low regard by the old aristocracy.

Data on the size of the dvorianstvo are lacking until the mid-nineteenth century. But its numbers grew steadily, for the Table of Ranks offered a door through which men of the most hetero-

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The dvorianstvo ascendency generous backgrounds and origins could pass to become members of the ruling class. Its ranks were swollen by the nobles of the annexed Baltic and Polish provinces who were allowed to keep their privileged status and their titles. At the end of the seventeenth century, there had been an estimated 2,815 noble families. Estimates made during the eighteenth century are too much inflated to be of use, so that stages in the growth of the dvorianstvo cannot be marked out. But by the time of the Tenth Revision in 1858 there were 886,728 nobles in European Russia, and another 30,000 in Siberia and the Caucasus, or one noble for about every 40 inhabitants of the empire.

In theory, all these hundreds of thousands of people were equally noble and all had the same privileges. The daughter of a prince could marry an ordinary noble without blemishing her family’s honor. No noble had legal precedence over his fellows. But snobbery could not be legislated out of existence. There were bound to be social gradations in a class that extended, as a minister of Nicholas I put it, “all the way from the step of the throne almost to the peasants.” The strata were formalized in registers called Books of the Nobility that were kept by the central government until 1785, when they were turned over to the noble assemblies of each province. The dvorianstvo was divided into six classes: nobles by patent, nobles by military service, nobles by civil service, foreign nobles, titled nobles, and, finally, the old aristocratic families. The members of the last-named group, the noblesse de race, considered themselves superior to all the others. They reserved a special scorn for the first three classes, whom they regarded as an upstart nobility—descendants of burghers, priests, and peasants. They were more tolerant of the foreign nobles, and were willing to accept the holders of Russian titles (except barons) as equals. Men in the top brackets of the military and civil service were also acceptable in the highest social circles, even though they were entered in classes two and three of the dvorianstvo registers.”

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1 Kluchevski, History iv, 80.
2 Romanovich-Slatviniski, Dvorianstvo, pp. 598–909.
3 Prince K. A. Livu quoted in Florinsky, Russia, ii, 808.
4 Romanovich-Slatviniski, Dvorianstvo, pp. 43, 46, 60.
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The uppermost levels thought of themselves as the aristocracy. To distinguish themselves from the rest of the nobility they adopted Western manners and dress, and above all ape'd the French noblesse of the ancien régime. To assure the perpetuation of their distinctiveness they set up special schools that admitted only children of the "best" noble families. There the students, as one writer (who disapproved) put it, "were soaked in the finest Parisian French accent, in the angelic Parisian dialect, in the elegant manners of the aristocrats of the old régime . . . and emerged as genuine marquises of good old France." An Englishwoman in Russia in the first years of the nineteenth century commented—with feminine illogic, be it noted—that it seemed "childishly silly" for the Russians to oppose Napoleon "when they can't eat their dinners without a French cook to dress it, when they can't educate their children without unprincipled adventurers from Paris to act as tutors and governesses, when every house of consequence . . . has an outcast Frenchman to instruct the heir apparent—in a word when every association of fashion, luxury, elegance, and fascination is drawn from France . . ."

Yet, despite the internal stratification, a sense of unity and cohesiveness grew among all the levels of the nobility from the reign of Peter on. By the time of the convening of the Legislative Commission of 1767, nobles forthrightly identified themselves as belonging to a corporate body all of whose members shared the same interests and ambitions. The dvorianstvo of Moscow in its instructions to its delegates to the Commission spoke of the "corps of the nobility which includes within itself its own prerogatives and invulnerability," and called attention to the general needs of the entire noble class; the nobility of Volokolamsk demanded that rights and preeminence be accorded the corps of the nobility; the cahiers of the Kostroma dvorianstvo lamented the fate of impoverished nobles who could not afford to educate their children properly, so that these youths grew up in ignorance and stagnation and lacked the

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14 Catherine Wilmot quoted in Purman, Scan Bolovm p 190.

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... a cachet of nobility. Like sentiments were voiced in the cahiers of other groups of nobles and in the statements of their deputys. The series of concessions the dvorianstvo gained as a class from the throne provides the clearest evidence of the growth of this new corporate feeling. Peter I had kept the nobles subservient to the crown. After his death the absence of a stable principle of succession to the throne, and the character of the monarchs who reigned after him, gave the new noble class the opportunity to win great power and wide privileges for itself. The bizarre creatures who wore the crown after Peter—a lewd child, lascivious women, and a deranged German prince—depended upon the support of the dvorianstvo to get and keep the throne. The predominantly noble Guards regiments, above all, made and broke sovereigns. As the price of their support, the dvorianstvo demanded concessions from rulers and would-be rulers.

The abolition of the service requirement was their most spectacular gain. To most nobles compulsory service was an extremely distasteful duty. They used every possible pretext to dodge it, giving bribes, pleading illness, and even feigning insanity. They pressed constantly for its repeal. Already in Anna's reign concessions began to be made. In 1731 a military academy for noble youths of 13 to 18 opened in St. Petersburg. Its graduates received commissions and thereby avoided the detested obligation of beginning their military careers in the ranks. In 1736 Anna reduced the service period from life to 25 years, and excused one male member of each family with two or more men in it, on the condition that the exempted son manage the family property. Finally, Peter III, on 18 February 1762, abolished all compulsory service, allowed the individual to decide for himself whether he wanted to serve the tsar, and permitted nobles to travel abroad freely, and to enter the service of a foreign ruler. Catherine II, even more than her predecessors, acquiesced to the demands of the dvorianstvo. Her policy of concession has sometimes been interpreted as a clever maneuver on her part to

18 Remennovich-Slavatskii, Dvorianstvo, pp. 58-64.
19 Ibid., pp. 181-194; Florinsky, Rusia, 1 484-505.

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keep the nobility satisfied, so that it would not protest against
control by the government and "merchant capitalism" over
matters of national import.19 Be that as it may, Catherine identified
herself with the nobility—"je sui aristoocrate," said she,
"c'est mon métier"—and her long reign turned out to be the
Golden Age of the dvorianstvo.

The gains they made at the expense of the throne and of other
classes in society reached their apogee in the Charter of the
Nobility that Catherine granted on 21 April 1785,20 The first
section of the charter confirmed and codified the privileges that
had already been won. The noble's freedom from compulsory
service was restored. His right to enter the service of a foreign
ruler who was friendly to Russia was confirmed, although he had
always to come to the tsar's defense when needed. If he was the
first of a family to hold property he could dispose of it however
he wished, but the alienation of inherited land was limited. He
was declared the owner of the timber and the sub-soil wealth on
his property, and he could do as he pleased with these resources.
He could buy villages, establish factories and mills in them, and
could sell the agricultural and manufactured goods he produced
at wholesale to both foreign and domestic buyers. He could not
be deprived of his privileged status unless he committed deeds
unworthy of the honor of his caste, such as treason, banditry, or
breaking his oath. He could be imprisoned or exiled, but could
not be given corporal punishment. He was free of all personal
taxes, and soldiers could not be quartered on him.

The next section of the charter granted new and extensive
powers to the nobility in provincial administration. Catherine,
in the interests of more efficient administration, had increased
the number of guberniias to fifty by splitting the existing prov-
inces into new units, each of which was supposed to contain

19 Cf. Sacke, "Adel und Bergrecht, das linke Sacke on the basis of what seems
me to be an entirely incorrect analysis, arrived at the conclusion that Cath-

erine's policy, despite its external appearance, was actually anti-noble and pro-
bourgeois. Sacke was a German follower of M. N. Pokrovski, once the director
of official Communist historiography. Pokrovski claimed that the period between
the reigns of Peter I and Catherine II had been an era of reaction of the greedy
against the domination of merchant capitalism and that during Catherine's
reign the preeminence of the capitalists had been reestablished.

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300,000-400,000 inhabitants. The dvorianstvo had been clamor-
ing for a greater voice in local affairs, and Catherine, in the
charters, ordered that the nobility of each gubernia should
organize itself into a provincial estate. These bodies were given
control over nearly all the local governmental functions of the
province, either directly or through officers they chose from
among themselves. They named the majority of the administra-
tive and judicial officials in their gubernia, and directed recruit-
ing, tax collecting, police work, and the many other activities of
local government. The charter instructed that they were to meet
triennially. All nobles of the province had the right to
attend, but only those who were over 25, owned property, and
had reached the rank of company grade officer (subaltern
through captain), or its civilian equivalent in the imperial serv-
"ice could vote or hold elective office.21 Thus, even though the
obligation to do service had been abolished, active participation
in local affairs depended upon its performance. Moreover, the
central government maintained firm control over the assemblies,
and any independent expression or action by one of these pro-
vincial estates was viewed as dangerous resistance to the will of the
tsar.22 Despite these restrictions, the fact remains that on the
very eve of the revolutionary movement that was destined to
swEEP away or greatly reduce the authority of long-existing
noble provincial estates in Western lands, the Russian nobility
for the first time won the right to form privileged assemblies
entrusted with powers of local government.

In 1831 Nicholas I restricted the right to a direct vote in the
province assemblies to nobles who owned a minimum of
100 male serfs, or had at least 5,000 desiatins of arable land.
This new law produced a drastic reduction in the electorate,
since only about 16 percent of the serfdom had more than
100 males.23

In 1866 another decree lowered the property qualification for
those who had reached the grade of colonel in the army, or the

19 Provincial assemblies were not established in provinces of northern and
northeastern Russia nor in Siberia because of the small number of nobles in
those regions. (Forinsky, Russia, p 571.)

20 Engelsmann, Die Landesgeschichte, pp 289-304.
21 Frumkin, Krestovoe naselenie, p 67.
fifth rank in the civil hierarchy. These men needed only five serfs or 150 desiatins to vote. Even with this liberalization only a small proportion of the nobility were able to qualify. For example, in 1858 in Riazan just 655 of the 3,926 male hereditary nobles, in Chernigov 426 out of 6,268, and in Kaluga 465 out of 3,406 could cast individual votes. Nobles who owned at least five peasants or 100 desiatins of arable could pool their holdings to obtain the necessary amount of serfs or of land, and be represented by a delegate who voted for them.

The predominance of the nobility received a temporary setback during the brief reign of Catherine's son, Paul I (1796–1801). Obsessed apparently by a pathological hatred of his mother—who for her part had treated him shamefully—Paul seemed determined to wipe out her accomplishments (A curious story tries to explain the wretched relationship between mother and son by claiming that Paul was not Catherine's child. According to this tale he had been substituted in the cradle, against Catherine's wishes, for a girl born to Catherine. The then empress, Elizabeth, is said to have ordered this substitution because she wanted Catherine and her husband to have a male heir). On the day of his coronation Paul issued a series of decrees aimed at curtailing the power of the nobility, and for the rest of his tenure on the throne he continued in an anti-dvorianstvo policy. He recognized that the absence of a fundamental law of succession to the throne had enabled the dvorianstvo to augment its position through palace revolutions, and so he established a fixed order of succession through primogeniture; he amended the Charter of the Nobility to weaken the dvorianstvo control over local government; he restored corporal punishment for nobles; he imposed a tax on them; and so on.

The enormous gifts of land and serfs lavished by the tsars of the eighteenth century upon members of the dvorianstvo provides striking evidence of the great favor these people enjoyed. Land had always been plentiful in Russia, and princes had long followed the practice of giving it out in generous portions to their followers. In the seventeenth century the Romanov dynasty gave a new twist to the practice by making excessively large gifts to kinmen and favorites. The vast expansion in territory and population in the eighteenth century provided the tsars with resources in land and peasants that went beyond the wildest dreams of earlier rulers. At the same time, the eighteenth century was the age of the favorite in Russian history. Never before had favorites wielded so much power and influence, and never before had their sovereigns showered so much wealth upon them. Men of lowly origins and bearers of great names shared alike in the imperial bounty.

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27 Baranowski, Materialy p. 193; Demchenkov, Materialy p. 170; Poprotski Materialy i. 199.

28 Besides hereditary nobles i.e. those nobles who passed on their noble status to their children there were "personal" nobles. The rank of personal nobility went with the grade in the civil service just beneath the grade that carried hereditary nobility. With her personal nobility extended only to the officied and his wife, and was not hereditary. The personal nobles had most of the privileges of the hereditary noble, but was not allowed to participate in the corporate activities of the nobility (Schutz, Russische Rechtsgeschichte p. 180 and note.)

29 Millusew, Histoire, t. 7/60.

30 Kaniak, Geschichte, pp. 17-18.
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Menzhikov, the groom's son, Alexis and Cyril Razumovskii, sons of a Little Russian peasant, Alexis Dolgorukii, descendant of Riurik, and Boris Shetemtev, scion of an ancient boyar house, and others like them, had thousands of peasants and great stretches of land bestowed upon them.

Peter I, in comparison with those who ruled before him, was overwhelmingly generous in his gifts, but his successors determined to outdo him in prodigality. Between 1740 and 1801 they gave away over 1,503,000 adult male peasants with their wives and children. Catherine II alone turned over 800,000 peasants of both sexes to private proprietors. Remarkably enough, Paul nearly outdid his mother in his gifts to nobles despite his animus against their class. In his brief reign, and mainly in the first ten months of his rule, he managed to give away 600,000 peasants of both sexes. But Paul's motives were not quite the same as those of his predecessors. While heir to the throne he somehow conceived the strange notion that privately-owned serfs were better off than the peasants who lived on the estates that belonged to the tsar and his family—a theory that was certainly contradicted by the facts (v. pp. 485-491).

When he ascended the throne he was able to implement his conviction, and half of the 600,000 people he gave away came from imperial properties. The ensuing serious decline in his income compelled him to slow down on his program, and finally to abandon it.

Alexander I vowed that he would not indulge in this form of imperial extravagance. But both he and his successor Nicholas continued to give away land and people, though not on so grand a scale as their forbears. Between 1804 and 1896 they distributed over a million desiatins of state land to a total of 568 persons. Most of their grants lay in sparsely peopled regions of the south and east.

By far the greatest part of the largesse of the eighteenth century rulers went to the handful of men who enjoyed their

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Catherine II

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Paul

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Total

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A host of much smaller grants were frequently made. Special events such as a christening in the tsar's family, the cutting of the first tooth by an imperial infant, or a military victory, were marked by the distribution of land and peasants. Palace revolutions were accompanied by awards to the supporters of the new ruler. Elizabeth gave 29 to 45 male souls to each of the guardsmen who aided in her elevation to the throne, and similar bequests were made by other rulers. Lesser services were sometimes rewarded with breathtaking generosity. Alexander Vasilchikov, a Guards lieutenant, who was Catherine II's fancy man for twenty-two months, received from his pleased Empress 7,000 peasants, 100,000 rubles in cash, a furnished palace worth 100,000 rubles, jewelry valued at 50,000 rubles, porcelains worth another 50,000 rubles, and a pension of 20,000 rubles. Others of her passing loves were treated with equal consideration, while those who had more lasting holds on her affection, such as Gregory Orlov and Gregory Potemkin, had astronomical amounts heaped upon them. Potemkin, for instance, on his fortieth birthday received a gift of 900,000 rubles, partly in cash and partly in land. Tsar Paul was said to have given 2,000 souls to a man who dedicated a poem to him. At the request of Prince Bezborodko he gave a property with 850 souls to the Prince's mistress, who reputedly was by profession a trumpeter.

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At a review an officer gave Paul a witty retort that so pleased the tsar that he presented him with 1,000 souls. Such were the whims of the Emperors and Autocrats of All the Russians.

III

The success of the nobles in the eighteenth century in establishing their sole right to own land and serfs provides further evidence of the appearance among them of class cohesiveness, and of the willingness of the sovereigns to accede to their demands. Their monopoly on land and serfs had come into being in the preceding century but had not been complete, for men of various non-serving groups had been able to continue to own land and peasants. Then, in a series of decrees and instructions issued between 1730 and 1758 the throne deprived one after another of these groups of this privilege, and ordered that if they did not dispose of their property within a set period it was to be confiscated by the state.

The fact that the government had to repeat its injunctions against the ownership of land and serfs by non-nobles bears witness to evasions in the law, and to vacillations in the policy of the government. The want of a settled purpose was evidenced most clearly in the backing and filling that went on about the right of merchants to own serfs. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, Peter I had allowed merchants to buy serfs for their factories, and other laws of the 1720’s and 1730’s permitted industrialists in the Urals to keep skilled runaway peasants by paying indemnities to the owners of the fugitives. A decree of 7 January 1736 declared that factory owners could only purchase serfs without land, but as a result of complaints this limitation was removed. In 1752 the Senate fixed the maximum number of self workers a merchant factory owner could have, the quota being adjusted to the size and nature of his enterprise. Finally, on 29 March 1762 Peter III forbade merchant manufacturers to buy peasants, and a few months later Catherine, now on the throne, confirmed the prohibition. (In the following year an exception was made for foreigners who established factories in Russia.)

The conflict over the right to buy serfs has sometimes been viewed as important evidence of a class struggle between the factory-owning bourgeoisie and the serf-owning nobility, and the law of 29 March 1762 is seen as heralding the triumph of the “feudal reaction.” It was pointed out on an earlier page that merchants had made comparatively small use of their legal right to buy serfs, so that this interpretation seems over-drawn. But the dvorianstvo had indeed become alarmed at this encroachment upon its monopoly. The cahiers of the nobility of the Lukh district to its delegate at the Legislative Commission—where class antagonisms were openly expressed—complained that bourgeois factory owners had purchased villages (before the decree of 1762) and “like genuine nobility enjoyed privileges that did not belong to them.” Nobles of other districts voiced similar complaints, among them the dvorianstvo of Krapivina who with unconscious irony pointed out that “the factory owners of the merchant class, owning many serfs, live off the fat of the land in pleasurable luxury and idleness.” Some feared, too, that if merchants were permitted to buy peasants there would be fewer left for the nobles, and since serfs were the lords’ chief source of income their revenues would therefore decline. Merchants, for their part, instructed their delegates to demand that they not only be allowed to buy serfs once again for their factories, but also for use as domestics.

The merchants were not alone in wanting the right to buy serfs. Delegates from every one of the social groups that were represented at the Legislative Commission asked for it, and those who did not have their own representatives, such as priests and government clerks, were spoken for by representatives of other groups.

The dvorianstvo resolutely and successfully opposed these and later demands by commoners, and retained its monopoly on serf ownership until the emancipation. There were, however, a few groups outside the dvorianstvo who by special favor of

32 Silakhovskii, Die Feldgemeinschaft, p. 181; Kluchevskii, History, v. 12, p. 2
34 Tugan-Baranovskii, Russkaia fabrika, t. 26-27, p. 28.
35 Semovskii, Krepostnii vopros, t. 2, 96-97.
THE DVORIANSTVO ASCENDANCY

the throne shared this privilege. The small pomeshchiks known as the omodentsy who had been reduced to the status of state peasants in the eighteenth century, had been allowed to keep their right to own serfs. Only a small and diminishing minority of them, however, exercised this privilege, so that by the 1830's there were not more than a thousand serfs owned by these people. The law permitted the "military residents" and the "tax-free proprietors" of Olenets gubernia, and the Mizras who descended reputedly from Tatar nobles, to own serfs, too. The total number in their possession was extremely small, probably not being more than a couple of hundred.27

Citizens of certain towns in the western provinces, charitable foundations, peasants on personal estates of the imperial family, and the state peasantry, also were allowed to own serfs and land. The right of cities went back to the period when they had been under Polish rule. After their annexation by Russia they were permitted to keep the privilege until the 1830's. Charitable foundations had received their serfs as gifts.28 A decree of 31 October 1766 empowered the peasants on estates of the imperial family to buy land and serfs from neighboring landowners. They could not pay more than 30 rubles for each male soul, and had to pay the state an annual obrok of 1 tula 25 kopecks for each destain of land they purchased. In 1788 another decree extended this privilege to the state peasantry.29 These measures were undoubtedly inspired by the state's desire to give its peasants the same opportunity to evade personal military service that seigniorial peasants had. The seigniorial landlords could buy serfs in their master's name to serve as substitutes for themselves when recruit calls were made. Now the peasants of the imperial family, and the state peasants, could meet their recruit obligation in the same manner.

Actually, men of all classes continued to disregard the restrictions against their ownership of serfs. Some of them used uses, such as registering their people in the name of a cooperative nobleman, but others made no effort at concealment. During

27 Köppen, 'Über die Vertheidigung', p. 410 For the composition of these groups
28 P.P. 417-419, 424-426
29 Rosyukov, Krojetsnoe pravo, pp. 14-16
30 P.Z. XVII 76, p. 1272 r. 1851; XIX 106, 1860, 19 Jan 1788, p. 1005

THE DVORIANSTVO ASCENDANCY

Catherine's reign there were priests who owned sizable properties, merchants who bought villages for themselves, and government clerks and other roturiers, who owned serfs. Even serfs had their own serfs, though they always bought them in the name of their masters. In 1777, for instance, a serf who belonged to Count Sheremetev bought a property with 249 male souls on it for 29,560 rubles. In 1794 the wealthy serf manufacturers of Ivanovo owned a total of 528 male and 659 female serfs. In the 1830's some Sheremetev serfs were said to have owned as many as six to seven hundred bondmen.30

Tsar Paul gave further evidence of his spirit against the dvorianstvo when in 1798 he restored the right of merchants to buy serfs for their factories. The number they could purchase for each plant was to be fixed according to the Senate decree of 1758. But this revival was short-lived. Alexander I, on 5 July 1802, placed severe limitations on the privilege, and finally in a ukase of 6 November 1806 definitively abolished it.31 Decrees of 1804 and 1814 ordered that henceforth "personal" nobles could no longer own serfs. The personal noble who had serfs at the time of the issue of these laws could keep them until his death, after which his heirs had to dispose of them. In 1841, the government, as part of a program to reduce the number of landless peasants, commanded nobles who owned no landed property to divest themselves of their serfs.32

In contrast to its preservation of the exclusive right to own serfs, the dvorianstvo's monopoly on landownership crumbled in the nineteenth century. Despite Alexander's pro-noble orientation he felt he should "do something" about the agrarian problem. His efforts at genuine reform proved futile, chiefly because the failings of his own character made it impossible for him to face the difficulties and dangers of radical revisions. Still, some changes emerged from the long deliberations he held with his counselors on these matters. One of these was the ending of the sole right of the dvorianstvo to own land. The

30 Semekhov, Krojetsnoe pravo, I, 289-296; Shchepetov, Krojetsnoe pravo, pp. 109-114 Table 7, p. 355; Semekhov, Krejts'iane, I, 108
31 Tugus-Manushev, Russkoe isplavya, p. 88
32 ZZ, 1857, 15, sect 268, 269-273. For personal nobles v. note 22 above

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who welded the nobility into a caste and elevated it to the highest levels in the state, crushed the independence of the church, and ultimately took away its land and peasants.

When the century opened, the church, despite efforts to curb its wealth that dated back to the sixteenth century, remained in possession of vast holdings. In the Second Revision in 1747 over 900,000 male peasants in Great Russia and Siberia belonged to religious institutions, and the census made two decades later showed that the church now owned 991,751. As in the past, the monasteries were by far the greatest proprietors among the church seigniors. In 1747 they owned 728,776 males, prelates owned 116,376, the Holy Synod had 57,426, and cathedrals and parish churches owned 29,757. Trinity-St. Sergie Monastery continued as the single greatest private serfowner in the empire. It had about 166,000 male peasants on the properties it owned in five provinces of Great Russia. Trinity-St. Alexander Nevskii had 25,464, the Convent of the Assumption had close to 24,000, St. Cyril’s in Beloozersk had 21,590, and at least nine others had between ten and twenty thousand. These, of course, were the Grooses of cloistered society. Out of close to a thousand monasteries in the mid-eighteenth century, well over half owned no serfs. But of the 457 who did, 70 percent had over 100 males, and 57 percent had over 5,000. In comparison with lay seigniors these monasteries were great proprietors, for scarcely more than 16 percent of the lay seigniors of that time had more than 100 serfs. Prelates also owned many peasants. In 1747 the bishops in twenty-four dioceses had an average of 5,500 male serfs, and some had well over 10,000. Churches were much less wealthy. Only 566 of them—50 cathedrals and 516 parish churches, representing not much over 3 percent of the total number of churches—owned peasants, and most of them had fewer than twenty.

Tsars had long had their troubles with the wealth and power of the church, but it took a man of Peter’s will to settle matters. That monarch decided that it was high time to put an end to the church’s pretensions. In 1701 he announced that the newly-

IV

The ascendency of the dvoirans’tvo in the eighteenth century provided a sharp contrast to the fate of the great group of Russianproprietors—the churchmen. For the same monarchs

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revived Monastery Bureau, originally established by Tsar Alexis but abolished in 1667, would manage the properties of prelates and monasteries. The Bureau gave part of the revenues from these lands to their clerical owners, and the rest went to the treasury. In 1721 Peter abolished the office of Patriarch, the head of the Russian church, and replaced it with a government bureau called the Most Holy Synod. The church’s properties were transferred back to the direct control of the religious until 1726, when they were turned over to a new body made up of laymen, known as the Economic College. (Peter had introduced the foreign word kollegia for new administrative agencies that operated on the collegiate or council principle, rather than being directed by individual ministers.)

After Peter’s death the Economic College fell under the authority of the Synod, but in 1738 Empress Anna transferred it to the control of the Senate. Then, when Elizabeth, who had a reputation for piety, came to the throne she abolished the College and gave the Synod complete control over all ecclesiastical property. In 1757, not much more than a decade later, she reversed that decision and returned the administration of church lands to lay officials. She used the widespread unrest among church peasants as the excuse for her action. But the real reason was her need for more revenues. The Seven Years’ War had just begun, and Russia needed money to carry on its share of the battle against Frederick of Prussia.

It was an easy step from the arrangement set up in 1757 to secularization, especially for Elizabeth’s successor, Peter III, who was openly scornful of the Orthodox Church and its ritual. On 21 March 1762 he reestablished the Economic College and placed all church property under its administration. The church peasants were to be allotted the land they tilled, and the myriad of dues and services they paid their clerical masters was to be replaced by a single payment of one ruble per peasant per year to the Economic College. The College was to use part of this revenue to support the clergy, and the rest was to go into the state’s treasury for general purposes.

45 Semyonov, Krest’iane, II, x, 199-201; Millukov, Istoriia, II, 468-491

46 Robert Keith to George Grenville 1 July 1762 SRO, xi (1762) 9
47 Millukov, Istoriia, II, 548-550; Semyonov, Krest’iane, II, xi
48 Returns of the Tenth Revision in 1768 showed 2,847 male souls owned by churches and monasteries. These institutions, however, belonged to sects other than the Russian Orthodox and were in provinces annexed from Poland. Translitteral Krest’ianstvo nasledovia, p. 46.
THE DVIORANDSTVO ASCENDANCY

In her correspondence with Western men of letters the empress deemed herself on the secularization, as evidence of her sympathy with the ideals and philosophy of the Enlightenment. The truth, of course, was that she had carried out the program initiated by her predecessors, none of whom (as one historian tactily observed) has ever been considered a disciple of Voltaire and the Encyclopedists.\footnote{Millulov, Histoire, n. 590-591}

Naturally enough, the clergy bitterly opposed the secularization, and many private landowners also criticized it severely. They feared that it might well establish a precedent that would lead to limitations or even abolition of their own powers over their serfs. Some found flaws in the results of the reform, claiming that the secularized properties were going to ruin, that the condition of the peasants on them had worsened, and that these developments damaged the economy of the empire. Their charges found important supporters, and in the last years of her life Catherine seemed ready to yield. The proposal was made to rent out all secularized properties, and also all Court estates, to private landlords. The empress died before the scheme was implemented and it was not renewed in the following reigns. Paul, however, gave away 50,000 secularized peasant souls to commanders of Russian knightly orders, and Alexander I in 1816-1818 transferred some of them into the status of military colonists.\footnote{Semenovskii, Krest'iane, n. xliv-xlix 278-286} With these exceptions the former peasants of the church and their descendants remained state peasants.

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The Russian noble measured his wealth not by the amount of land he owned, as did his peers in other countries, but by the number of male serfs (or revision souls) that belonged to him. In the first half of the eighteenth century a proprietor who had over 1,000 revision souls was held to be of vast wealth, if he had 500 to 1,000 he was a great proprietor, if he had 100 to 500 he was well off, if he had 25 to 100 he was a petty noble, and if he had less than 25 he was poor. Then, starting in the second half of the century standards soared as a result of the increase in population, and the lavish gifts of peasants made by the tsars. The great magnates now counted their serfs in many thousands, while the lords who had 500 or so was considered to be just well-to-do.\footnote{Millulov, Histoire, n. 592, 693; Leroy-Beaulieu, L'Empire, t. 411-4120}

But the magnates and even the men of moderate wealth made up a very small minority of the nobility. The usual landlord owned less than 100 serfs, and a large number of them owned less than 10. Partial information collected in 1777 showed that 32 percent of the serfowners for whom data were available had fewer than 10 male serfs, 30 percent had 10 to 30, 13 percent had 30 to 60, 7 percent had 60 to 100, and only 2 percent owned over 100. The much fuller (though still incomplete) data collected in 1834 and 1858 for the eighth and tenth revisions, covering all the provinces of European Russia, reveal the continued predominance of the small serfowner, and the unevenness of the distribution of serfs among proprietors.\footnote{Semenovskii, Krest'iane, n. 390; Vostovskii, Ekonomika Rossii, p. 39}

In 1834, as the table shows, 84 percent of the serfowners owned less than 100 males, and 16 percent owned over 100 (the same proportions as those for 1777). The 84 percent who

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<th>1834</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NO OF SERF-</td>
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<td></td>
<td>OWNERS</td>
<td>ALL SERF-</td>
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<td>ALL SERF-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Serfowners</td>
<td></td>
<td>OWNERS</td>
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<tr>
<td>without land</td>
<td>17,753</td>
<td>13</td>
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<td>1 to 20 souls</td>
<td>58,457</td>
<td>46</td>
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<td>30,417</td>
<td>24</td>
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<td>16,740</td>
<td>13</td>
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<td>2,873</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1,598,891</td>
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<tr>
<td>over 1,000 souls</td>
<td>1,353</td>
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<td>3,560,059</td>
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<td></td>
<td>127,105</td>
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<td>10,766,661</td>
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had less than 101 souls owned altogether just 19 percent of the total male serf population. The 16 percent who owned over 100 had 81 percent of all male serfs. By 1858 the proportion of serfowners with less than 101 had decreased. Now only 78 percent of the serfowners were in this category, and 22 percent owned more than 100. The division of serfs between the two groups, however, remained unchanged. The men with less than 101 male serfs had 19 percent of all male serfs, and those with 100 or more owned 81 percent.

The inequality in the distribution of serf ownership becomes even more striking when only the smallest and the largest proprietors are compared. In 1834 60 percent of the serfowners owned fewer than 21 souls. Altogether they owned just 5 percent of all male serfs. One percent of the serfowners had more than 1,000 souls each. Their total serf ownership accounted for 33 percent of all male serfs. In 1858 44 percent of the serfowners had less than 21 males, and together owned 31 percent of all males. One percent owned 1,000 souls or more, and together owned 29 percent of the male serf population.6

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6 The Russian serfowner had on the average many more serfs than the contemporary American slavewright had slaves. In 1870 9.8 percent of the 547,995 American slavewright families had just 1 slave, 50.4 percent had 2 to 5, 32.5 percent had 5 to 9, 15.7 percent had 10 to 19, 8.6 percent had 20 to 49, and 1.8 percent had 50 to 99. Thus, 99.5 percent owned less than 100 Negro men, women, and children. (The Russian figures are for males only.) Of the 5 percent (27,733) who owned more than 100 slaves 1,479 owned 100 to 200, 187 owned 200 to 299, 56 owned 300 to 499, 2 owned 500 to 1,000 and 1 owned over 1,000. In 1870 there were 3,204,918 slaves in the United States. [368]

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### RICH NOBLE, POOR NOBLE

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<th>1858</th>
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<td></td>
<td>NO OF SERF-</td>
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<td>OWNERS</td>
<td>ALL SERF-</td>
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<td>Serfowners without land</td>
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<tr>
<td>Landlords with:</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 20 souls</td>
<td>41,016</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>347,539</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 to 100 souls</td>
<td>25,498</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1,566,373</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101 to 500 souls</td>
<td>19,030</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2,929,102</td>
<td>27</td>
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<tr>
<td>500 to 1,000 souls</td>
<td>2,471</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1,560,888</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>over 1,000 souls</td>
<td>1,382</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3,050,540</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>105,880</td>
<td></td>
<td>10,551,182</td>
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The revision returns showed a drop of 23,283 (over 18 percent) in the number of serfowners between 1834 and 1858. The sharp decrease in the number of serfowners who had no land accounted for over three-fifths (14,190) of the decline. The 1841 law that forbade landless nobles to own serfs brought about the decrease in the size of this category. Shifts occurred in other groups, too. The number of landlords with less than 21 male serfs fell by 30 percent (17,441), and the total number of souls they owned declined by 27 percent (122,508). The number of proprietors with over 1,000 males decreased by 5 percent (71), and they owned 14 percent (506,419) fewer serfs. The middle groups increased in size. In the 21 to 100 cubic the number of serfowners went up by 17 percent (5,081), and the number of their serfs rose 11 percent (105,716). In the 101-500 category, the number of serfowners increased by 19 percent (3,190), and the number of their serfs went up 8 percent (290,908).

Assuming equal accuracy for the data from the two revisions, percent had 50 to 99. Thus, 99.5 percent owned less than 100 Negro men, women, and children. (The Russian figures are for males only.) Of the 5 percent (27,733) who owned more than 100 slaves 1,479 owned 100 to 200, 187 owned 200 to 299, 56 owned 300 to 499, 2 owned 500 to 1,000 and 1 owned over 1,000. In 1870 there were 3,204,918 slaves in the United States. [369]
the decline in the number of proprietors with over 1,000 souls must have resulted from the partition through inheritance of the great holdings that favored nobles had received from the tsars and empresses of the eighteenth century. As for the decline in the numbers of the smallest serfowners, perhaps many of these men decided that their holdings were too small to support both themselves and their serfs, and so they sold their peasants to wealthier seigniors. The effects of these developments at the top and bottom would be to increase the proportion of serfowners in the middle categories.

Of the proprietors who owned over 1,000 males, a handful counted their serfs in the tens of thousands. The Sheremetevs headed the roster of these fabulously wealthy people. Count N. P. Sheremetev owned 185,610 male and female serfs and 990,793 desiatins of land in the last part of the eighteenth century. A half century later his son, Count D. N. Sheremetev, owned almost 300,000 serfs of both sexes, though his land holdings had decreased to 714,000 desiatins. The Vorontsovs, Jusupovs, Stroganoves, Orlov, and Golitsins were other great proprietors, though they owned far fewer people than the Sheremetevs. Count Vorontsov owned 54,703 serfs of both sexes and 271,395 desiatins of land at the end of the eighteenth century, and in 1851 his successor owned 57,702 male souls alone. In the 1840s Prince Jusupov had 33,000 male souls and 300,000 desiatins.

Every province had a large number of serfowners who had less than 21 male serfs. These petty proprietors were most common, however, in the Little Russian provinces of Chernigov and Poltava, where 65 percent of the seigniors were in this category. Other provinces with unusually high concentrations of these smallest serfowners were Kursk with 60 percent, Kharkov with 50 percent, and Smolensk, Novgorod, and Voronezh, all with 48 percent.

Since the wealth of seigniors was measured by the number of male peasants they owned, the cost of serfs provides an index to their gross worth. Only scattered price data are available, however, up to the middle of the nineteenth century. Then, in 1859, the Ministry of Interior collected data on 18,000 sales of populated and unpopulated land made between 1 January 1854 and 1 January 1859. This material provides a mass of information on the prices paid for serfs and land in the last decade of serfdom. In the following table the 57 provinces of European Russia for which this information is most complete are grouped according to geographical regions. The Ministry's data for each province included the number of sales of populated land, the number of male serfs and of desiatins of land involved in the sales, the total amount of money that changed hands in the transactions, the number of sales of unpopulated land, the amount of unpopulated land that was involved, and the total amount of money paid for the unpopulated land. The Ministry's figures do not include the cost of serfs without land. Since the higher prices paid for populated land was due to the presence of serfs on that land, the value of the individual male serf can be computed from the data given.

Using the computed average price of a male serf with land as a guide, it is possible to gain an idea of the average cash value of seignorial holdings in the 1850s. For example, the holding of a landowner in New Russia who had 21 male serfs on his property was worth on the average 7,935 rubles (577.9 rubles x 21). A property in the Southwest with 21 souls was worth 5,111 rubles (241.5 rubles x 21); in Lithuania such a

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10 The Ministry's data are condensed in tabular form in Rikšii, ‘Zabity,’ pp. 16–41.
11 This was done by multiplying the number of desiatins of populated land by the average price of a desiatin of unpopulated land, subtracting the product from the total sales in rubles of populated land, considering the remainder to be the value added to the land by the presence on it of serfs, then dividing this figure by the number of serfs on the populated land: the quotient is the computed average price of the male serf soul without land.

Maslov, ‘Agromat vyvshet,’ pp. 567–577, using the same data, computed the average value of populated and unpopulated land and of the individual male serf without land for two regions (Central Industrial and Central Agricultural). He arrived at incorrect results, however, because he made the arithmetical error of averaging the averages he found in his source.
The most remarkable finding, however, that emerges from the table is the relatively small difference in much of the empire between the prices of populated and unpopulated land. The presence or absence of serfs made startlingly little difference in many places in the amount of money people were willing to pay for a property. In six of the 37 provinces included in the table land with serfs on it cost only 1 to 9 percent more than unpopulated land; in eight it cost 11 to 20 percent more; in ten it cost 21 to 29 percent more; in five it cost 31 to 39 percent more; and in eight it cost between 43 and 74 percent more.

Nearly half the sales analyzed in the table took place in the Central Agricultural, Central Industrial, and Lake zones. Over 46 percent of the empire’s serfs lived in these three regions in the 1850s. As the table shows, land cost much more in the Central Agricultural than it did in the other two zones (and, in fact, more than it did in any other region). This higher price was undoubtedly attributable to the fertility of the soil in the Central Agricultural, and to its proximity to major markets in the Central Industrial provinces. But the average price of a serf without land in the Central Agricultural was less than it was in the Central Industrial and Lake regions. In other words, serfs were valued more highly in these latter two regions than they were in the Central Agricultural, and so added more to the value of the land.

The explanation of this regional difference in the price of serfs seems to me to lie in the use serfowners made of their peasants. By the last part of the eighteenth century a regional barshchina-obrok pattern had worked itself out. Labor services predominated in the obligations demanded by the serfs in the Central Agricultural provinces, while obrok predominated in the obligations demanded by the lords in the Central Industrial and Lake regions. The fact that these latter proprietors valued their serfs more highly than did their peers in the Central Agricultural indicates that serfowners received a higher net return.

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18 1 to 5% more: Grodno 1%, Chernigov 2%, Podolia 4%, Kurisk 5%, Vovodzhy 9%, Minsk 9%, 11 to 20% more: Tula 11%, Orlov 12%, Riazan 13%, Mogilev 13%, Novgorod 13%, Smolensk 13%, Pozna 13%, Tambor 20%, 21 to 29% more: Podila 21%, Kherson 22%, Kiev 23%, Vinca 24%, Saratov 42%, Kazan 24%, Viazma 20%, Moscow 25%, Tver 25%, Smolensk 25%, 31 to 50% more: Kaluga 45%, St. Petersburg 59%, Pukov 59%, 51 to 74% more: Vladimir 45%, Saratov 48%, Kostroma 52%, Nizhny Novgorod 54%, Kharkov 56%, Orenburg 63%, Volgina 71%, Samara 73%.

Makov, Agrarnye opredelenia, i. 452, made these calculations for each province but managed to make the astonishingly high score of 21 errors out of a possible 37 in computing the percentages.

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turn from serfs on obrok than they did from serfs on bashchina. Therefore, serf prices were higher in the regions where obrok predominated. This, in turn, points to the conclusion that a premium attached itself to seigniorial non-participation in market production, for the obrok was the form of serf exploitation used by those proprietors who eschewed commercial activity and drew their incomes from quitrents.

This explanation is at variance with the one advanced by the Russian Marxist economist, Peter Maslov, early in this century. Maslov’s interpretation has been one of the most influential expressions of the view that there was a close and direct link between developing capitalism and the abolition of serfdom in Russia. He argued that the development of the market economy, and seigniorial participation in this development, accounted for the small price differentials between populated and unpopulated land. The greater demand of the expanding market for farm goods made agricultural land more valuable. This stimulated proprietors to increase their arable, and thereby produced an increase in the demand for unoccupied land. For these reasons the difference in price between populated and unpopulated land was less in the Central Agricultural, a fertile farming area, than it was in the Central Industrial and Lake regions, where the soil was less fertile and farming was of much less importance.

Part of the landowner’s income, according to Maslov, consisted of the rent paid by the tenants, and Maslov assumed the nature of land rent. This was separate from the income he received from the labor of his serfs, which Maslov called profit. By the 1860s the price of populated land was determined by the capitalized value of the rent and profit it yielded. The price of unpopulated land was determined by the capitalized value of the rent alone. The price of the serf was determined by the capitalized value of the profit his owner could draw from his labor. Land in the Central Agricultural cost more than did in the Central Industrial and Lake provinces because the landowners there realized more rent from their land than did the landowners in the other two regions. Serfs cost less in the Central Agricultural because a larger proportion of the seignior’s income came from the rent yielded by his land.

Maslov’s attribution of a rationalistic attitude to the landlords of the Central Agricultural region, and his argument that they were losing their interest in serfdom as a result of this new attitude, has been repeated by others after him. Later pages will show that there is little evidence to support these views. It suffices here to observe that much of the production of the bashchina peasants in the central agricultural zone was consumed by the household of the proprietor, and did not go to market; the available data indicate that direct seigniorial production did not increase during the first half of the nineteenth century, and indeed, on larger estates seems to have decreased; and the serfowners of the Central Agricultural provinces, like their fellows in most other parts of the empire, were nearly unanimous in their disapprobation of the government’s decision to emancipate the serfs.

The unequal distribution of serfs among the proprietors, and the low cash value of land and serfs, meant that a large sector of the Russian seigniorial class was made up of men of very limited means. The thousands of serfowners who owned less than twenty-one males, and particularly those who had less than ten, were in especially straitened circumstances. Engaged in a constant struggle to make ends meet, they had neither the time nor the means to care about the amenities appropriate to their social status. They rarely had the opportunity to leave their petty rural world, and when the chance came they often could not afford it. A representative of a group of provincial
nOBLES TOLD THE SEnATE IN 1771 THAT OVER 600 YOUNG NOBLES AMONG THE PEOPLE HE REPRESENTED HAD INFORMED HIM THAT THEY WANTED TO ENTER IMPERIAL SERVICE, BUT DID NOT HAVE THE CLOTHES AND BOOTS THEY NEEDED TO REPORT FOR DUTY. MANY AMONG THEM LEAST OF THE SEIGNIORS ADOPTED PEASANT WAYS AND PEASANT MANNERS, TILLED THEIR LAND THEMSELVES, AND GRADUALLY SANK INTO THE MASS OF THE PEASANTY. A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE NOBILITY OF RIAZAN REPORTED IN 1827 THAT 1,700 NOBLE FAMILIES, OR ONE-FOURTH OF ALL THE NOBLE HOUSEHOLDS OF THAT PROVINCE, WERE SO POOR THAT "TOGETHER WITH THEIR PEASANTS THEY FORM ONE FAMILY, EAT AT ONE TABLE AND LIVE IN ONE HUT." "TSAR NICHOLAS' GOVERNMENT EMBARKED ON A PROGRAM OF DIRECT RELIEF THAT HELPED A FEW OF THESE PAUPERIZED NOBLES. THE STATE MOVED THEM FROM CROWDED REGIONS TO LESS POPULOUS PARTS OF THE EMPIRE, AND GAVE THEM LAND AND MONEY SUBSIDIES. IN THE FORTIES AND FIFTIES SEVERAL HUNDRED FAMILIES BENEFITED FROM THIS POLICY."

MUCH OF THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE EXISTENCE OF THIS LARGE NUMBER OF POVERTY-STRIKEN NOBLE FAMILIES LAY WITH THE NOBLES THEMSELVES. THEIR STUBBORN MAINTENANCE OF THE CENTURIES-OLD CUSTOM OF DIVIDING THEIR REAL AND PERSONAL POSSESSIONS AMONG THEIR HEIRS HAD THE INEVITABLE RESULT OF SPLINTERING PATRIMONIES WITH EACH SUCCESSIVE GENERATION. AS IN EARLIER CENTURIES, ONCE WEALTHY FAMILIES WERE REDUCED TO POVERTY IN AS FEW AS THREE GENERATIONS. SOMETIMES ONE BRANCH OF A FAMILY WAS ABLE TO HOLD ON TO ITS SHARE OF THE PATRIMONY, WHILE ANOTHER MORE PROLIFIC LINE BECAME IMPOVERISHED THROUGH THE OPERATIONS OF EQUAL INHERITANCE. WHEN A MEMBER, SAY, OF THE GOLITSIN CLAN WAS MENTIONED IN A CONVERSATION, IT WAS NOT UNCOMMON TO ASK, "WHO IS THIS GOLITSIN? A RICH ONE OR A POOR ONE?" MANY SMALL VILLAGES WERE DIVIDED UP AMONG TEN TO FIFTEEN PROPRIETORS, AND LARGER SETTLEMENTS WITH 400 TO 500 SOULS IN THEM WERE SPLIT UP AMONG AS MANY AS THIRTY TO FORTY SEPARATE OWNERS. BARON HÄXTHAUSEN HEARD ABOUT ONE VILLAGE THAT WAS PARCELLED AMONG 89 PROPRIETORS.

10 ROMANOVICH-SLAVATINSKI, DREVOSTRO; p. 64: FOOTE, FINE, p. 306: BARANOVICH, MATERIALY, p. 146.
12 ROMANOVICH-SLAVATINSKI, DREVOSTRO pp. 65, 66.

14 PSZ, V, NO. 278, 91-94.

RICH NOBLE, POOR NOBLE. ONLY THE RICH RESERVOIRS OF EMPTY LAND IN THE COLONIAL REGIONS KEPT ALL ESTATES FROM BEING REDUCED TO PETTY HOLDINGS IN A FEW GENERATIONS. SOMETIMES HEIRS, DISCONTENT WITH THEIR SMALL PORTION, SOLD OUT TO THEIR COHEIRS AND WITH THE PROCEEDS BOUGHT PROPERTY ON THE FRONTIERS WHERE LAND WAS CHEAP. IN THE FERTILE VOLGA PROVINCES, FOR EXAMPLE, A DESATIN OF UNPOPULATED LAND COST 60 PERCENT LESS IN THE 1850S THAN IT DID IN THE CENTRAL AGRICULTURAL ZONE (v. TABLE. P. 372). A MAN WHO INHERITED LAND AND SERFS IN THE LATTER REGION COULD SELL THE LAND, USE THE MONEY TO BUY MORE THAN TWICE AS MUCH LAND ACROSS THE VOLGA, AND SETTLE THERE WITH HIS SERFS.

AN EFFORT TO SUPPLANT THE SYSTEM OF EQUAL INHERITANCE WAS MADE BY PETER I AS PART OF HIS REFORM PROGRAM. IN A UKASE OF 23 MARCH 1714 HE ORDERED THAT HENCEFORTH THE OWNER OF REAL PROPERTY HAD TO PASS IT ON TO A SINGLE HEIR, WHOM THE OWNER HAD THE POWER TO DESIGNATE. THE HEIR DID NOT HAVE TO BE THE ELDEST SON UNLESS THE OWNER DIED INSTATE, IN WHICH CASE THE FIRST-BORN SON INHERITED, OR FALLING SONS THE ELDEST DAUGHTER. IF THE DECEDENT HAD NO SURVIVING DIRECT HEIRS HE COULD BEQUEATH HIS PROPERTY TO A KINSMAN, AND IF HE DIED INSTATE THE NEAREST KINSMAN INHERITED.

IN THE TEXT OF THE DECREE PETER EXPLAINED THAT EQUAL INHERITANCE LED TO THE IMPOVERISHMENT AND EVENTUAL DISAPPEARANCE OF POOR FAMILIES, AND THAT IT REDUCED THE GENERAL WELFARE AND TAX-PAYING ABILITY OF THE PEASANTY. THE HEIRS TRIED TO LIVE ON THE SAME SCALE AS THEIR PARENTS, BUT OWNING FEWER SERFS HAD TO EXPLOIT THEM MORE HARSHLY THAN THEIR PARENT. HE ALSO POINTED OUT THAT WHEN ALL SONS SHARED IN THE PATRIMONY EACH WAS LIKELY TO TRY TO LIVE ON THE INCOME HE DREW FROM HIS INHERITANCE, INSTEAD OF ENGAGING IN PRODUCIVE ENTERPRISE. FOR PETER, IN TRYING TO ENSURE THE SUCCESSION OF HIS STYLE, WAS NOT ONLY CONCERNED WITH PROTECTING THE LANDOWNING CLASS FROM IMPOVERISHMENT. HE ALSO WANTED TO ENCOURAGE NEWLY ENRICHED PEERS TO GO INTO TRADE, INDUSTRY, GOVERNMENT SERVICE, AND THE ARTS. HE REALIZED THAT ALLOWING ONLY ONE SON TO INHERIT THE REMAINING LANDS WOULD HAVE TO SEEK THEIR FORTUNES ELSEWHERE. HE HOPED THAT THESE LANDLESS CALVES WOULD BECOME—AS THEY HAD IN ENGLAND—
an adventurous and energetic breed of men whose poverty and ambition would goad them into the fields that Peter wanted them to enter.

But Peter’s effort at reform failed. It ran too strongly against old tradition. Landowners used dodges of one sort or other to get around the new legislation so that they could provide for all their children. Jealousies and feuds disturbed family relationships when the decree was obeyed. Finally, in 1731 Empress Anna repealed the unpopular law and the old order was restored. The method of distribution of real and personal property, as worked out over the centuries in custom and legislation, was later systematized in the Свод Законов, the codification made in the nineteenth century of the laws of the empire.

The chief heirs were the sons of the decedent. They received equal shares of the estate. Each daughter was supposed to receive one-fourteenth of the real property and one-eighth of the movable property of her parent. Failing male descendants, daughters inherited everything, and if there were no direct heirs the property went to collateral relatives. Wives received one seventh of their late spouse’s real property and one fourth of his personal property, regardless of whether there were any children. Although primogeniture was recognized neither in law nor custom, the eldest son generally took his father’s place as head of the family. It was not unknown, however, for the father to designate another of his sons to succeed him in this position.

Some of the wealthiest proprietors, however, awakened to the dangers of equal inheritance, and tried to protect their patrimonies by entailing them and passing them on by primogeniture. They had to get permission from the throne to do this. Until the reign of Nicholas I only two men, General-Field Marshal Count Chernyshev in 1774 and Count Stroganov in 1814, had succeeded in gaining the necessary imperial assent. Nicholas I allowed the creation of entails in fourteen individual instances, and in 1845 issued a decree that permitted any noble to entail his property if it met certain specified qualifications.

These qualifications, however, were so high that only the wealthiest could meet them. To be eligible for entail the property had to have at least 10,000 and not more than 100,000 desiatins of improved land, or have at least 400 and not more than 4,000 peasant homesteads on it, and produce an annual income of not less than 12,000 rubles and not more than 200,000 rubles. Apparently just a few proprietors among those rich enough to qualify took advantage of the law; between 1845 and 1861 only twelve entailments were created.

Because so many of the empire’s serfowners had such limited means it is not surprising to discover that most of them had to borrow constantly to make ends meet. But the greatest proprietors, too, lived out their lives under the ever-present shadow of debt. Some of these magnates owed fantastic sums of money. Count N. P. Sheremetev, who had more serfs and more land than anyone else in the empire, owed 2,018,839 rubles in 1800. He piled up this enormous debt by the simple procedure of spending more than his income. In 1798, for example, his revenues amounted to 692,200 rubles, but he spent 692,000 rubles. He used 29 percent of this expenditure to service his debts, nearly 55 percent went for personal expenses, and he spent the rest on the maintenance of his household and on charity. N. P. was overshadowed by his heir, D. N. Sheremetev. In 1822 D. N. spent 2,100,000 rubles, or 500,000 rubles more than his income for that year. In 1858 he spent 3,442,500 rubles. This exceeded his income for that year by 1,900,000 rubles. The result of this scale of living was that by 1859 he owed 6,000,000 rubles. Prince I. B. Tisupov, another of the greatest serfowners, owed 100,000 rubles in 1798 to government lending agencies. By 1818 his indebtedness to these agencies had gone up to 693,830 rubles, and at the time of his death in 1831 he owed three times as much as he had owed in 1818. B. A. Kurakin, who owned over 7,000 serfs and had an income of around

20 Hvid., v, no. 5717, 596-597; Клищевский, History, iv, 89-90, 351-352.
22 Haxthausen, Studien, 1, 152.
23 Romanovitch-Slavatinskii, Domains, pp. 243-253, 528-539.
The debts piled up by the grandees suited their eminence. Lesser men involved themselves in proportion. The consequence was that Russian serfowners became burdened with an unbelievable amount of debt that increased from decade to decade. They borrowed most of the money they craved by mortgaging their serfs with special governmental credit bureaus that had been established for their convenience. Records of these institutions showed the size and growth of their indebtedness in the last decades of serfdom. 37

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>NO. OF REVISION SOULS MORTGAGED (IN MILLIONS)</th>
<th>PERCENT OF ALL SERFS</th>
<th>AMOUNT OWED STATE CREDIT INSTITUTION (MILL. OF RUBLES)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1820</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>110 (assignat)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1833</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>950 (assignat)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1843</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>398 (credit rubles)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1855</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>485 (credit rubles)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1879</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>66</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data on the number of serfs mortgaged by the lords of each province and region in 1856 reveal marked regional differences in the extent to which the serfowners had borrowed. 38

With 71.3 percent of their revision souls mortgaged, the seigniors of the Central Agricultural region, chief granary of the empire, were the most heavily indebted landowners. They were followed closely by the lords of the Lower Volga, another fertile agricultural zone. In contrast, the proprietors in the gubernias of the Southwest, and especially in the provinces of New Russia, stood far below the national average in the degree of their indebtedness. The landowners in these provinces were taking the lead in new agricultural developments, and in finding new markets for their products.

37 Kogan, "Volhynia," p. 105
38 1850 and 1855 data from Volynskyi, Ekonomika Rossii, p. 185; 1843 data from Prokhorov, Studen, 18, 5: 1850 and 1859 data from Skrblenski, Kreditnikiu domu, 1849-1849
39 Bankovsky dolg," pp. 259-265

The dvorianstvo’s borrowings were not limited to the state’s lending institutions. These banks, despite their liberality, could not meet the apparently insatiable demand of the seigniors for cash. The serfowners borrowed from agencies set up by the provincial governments, and they borrowed from private moneylenders. The global amount of their private loans is unknown, but it must have been considerable: information collected in Voronezh in the late 1850s (nearly 70 percent of the serfs there were mortgaged with the state banks at this time) indicated that almost 17 percent of the total debt of the seigniors was owed to private individuals. 39

Until well into the eighteenth century private moneylenders had, in fact, been the only sources of credit in Russia. The monks, merchants, and nobles who engaged in this trade charged from 12 percent to 20 percent, and sometimes as much as 40 percent, for their loans. The government, evincing its new interest and solicitude for the nobility, decided that it must save the seigniors from the clutches of the usurers. In 1779 an imperial ukase authorized a government bureau, the Monetaia Kontora, to aid insolvent nobles in redeeming valuable pawned with the moneylenders. In 1793 another ukase declared that the high rates charged by the private lenders could not be
tolerated, and ordered the Monemvaiia Kontova to make loans at 8 percent to landowners against jewelry and gold and silver articles. The Kontova carried on these operations until 1756, but lent money only to a narrow circle of courtiers.

These and other disorganized efforts to provide credit fell far short of meeting the needs of the seigniors. The rise in their scale of living and the increase in prices involved them all the more deeply with moneylenders. Thoughtful members of the dvorianstvo began to discuss ways of establishing other sources of credit sources, for as one of them warned, "the luxurious tastes and the excessive prodigality of a large part of our nobility will lead soon to most of our villages winding up in the hands of manufacturers, merchants, clerks, secretaries, doctors and surgeons, and they, not we, will be the masters and the proprietors."

The ascendancy of the nobility made it almost inevitable that the state would come to its aid. In 1754 the government established the Noble Bank with branches in Moscow and St. Petersburg; in 1772 it ordered the Foundling Homes it operated in these two cities to make loans from their funds to nobles; in 1786 it set up a new bank called the Government Loan Bank, with which the Noble Bank was merged; and in 1797 it established the Auxiliary Bank of the Nobility which in 1802 was also merged with the Government Loan Bank. In addition, in 1775 the state authorized the charity boards of the provincial governments to make loans to local proprietors, and the Charter of the Nobility in 1783 gave permission to the noble assemblies of each guberniia to form provincial Noble Banks.

The Assignat Bank, established by the government in 1769 to issue the new paper money, was also allowed to make loans by special arrangements to important aristocrats.

The sovereigns candidly stated that their aim was to rescue the landlords from the private moneylenders. Empress Elizabeth in her ukase that created the Noble Bank in 1754 declared that "many of our subjects, mostly from the nobility, having need of

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*Borovoi, K. Poprou, pp 72-73; Alekseev, "Rasskaz o cheshechestvennosti," pp 530-537

*A Belosow quoted in Borovoi, K. Poprou," p 72

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money, have been compelled to borrow from others at a high rate of interest and with big collateral." Similar expressions were included in the later decrees that expanded the state's credit services to the seigniors. For example, in the manifesto of 1797 that established the Auxiliary Bank for the Nobility, Tsar Paul allowed that "with extreme grief we see that many noble families are groaning under the burden of debt... having fallen into the hands of greedy misers and usurers..."

When the government organized the Noble Bank in 1754 it provided it with a capital of 750,000 rubles. By the mid-eighties it had increased the bank's capital to 6 million rubles, most of this sum being supplied by the Assignat Bank. The new Government Loan Bank, established in 1786, had even greater resources than its predecessor—it by 1796 it had 11 million rubles available for loan. But this institution was dwarfed by the Auxiliary Bank of the Nobility which lent a total of 50 million assignat rubles between 1798 and 1802, when it merged with the Government Loan Bank. Lesser but still sizable sums were available for loan to seigniors from imperial and provincial charitable foundations and credit organizations. Most of these funds came from the government, but some came from depositors, and in the case of the charitable foundations, from gifts made by private persons for philanthropic purposes. By the turn of the century the amount of the government's loans to seigniors actually exceeded its expenditures for all other purposes. The throne was determined to have an abundance of credit available for the dvorianstvo, even though this meant cutting back on other governmental functions, and putting a great strain on the state's finances.

The government's credit agencies made their loans against the real property of the borrower. But since the value of the property was determined by the number of serf souls on it, the loans were actually made on the serfs. At first the government set a maximum loan of 10 rubles per soul, but in 1766 raised the limit to 20 rubles, in 1786 to 50 rubles, and in 1804 to 60 rubles. The loans were made at 6 percent. Initially they were for three years, but that limit was lengthened, too, so that by
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the beginning of the nineteenth century the borrower could have up to 57 years for repayment.33

The usual landlord, whether he borrowed from a government institution or from a moneylender, rarely employed his loan for capital improvements on his property. Instead he used it for consumption. The improvidence and profligacy of the Russian nobility is familiar to every reader of the great Russian novels of the nineteenth century. There is no question that in these faults lay much of the explanation for their ever-increasing indebtedness. Moreover, the lenient policy of the governmental lending agencies encouraged excessive borrowing and extravagant spending. These institutions granted extensions and postponements freely, and they rarely foreclosed, since their raison d'être was to save properties for the dovorianstvo, and not to take them away. Delinquents were allowed to remain in possession, so that loans often amounted to outright gifts from the state.34

Private moneylenders and creditors had to go through long and expensive legal proceedings to force payment, and had to overcome the venality and prejudices of the officials themselves. Nobles, with whom they had to deal. Some of them resorted to unusual tactics to get their money, if a story told by a Frenchman who lived in Russia in the early years of the nineteenth century can be believed. According to his tale a certain noble who never paid his debts made it a practice to distribute alms to beggars, who waited for his appearance on the steps of his home. One day, to his astonishment, he saw one of his most persistent creditors in the crowd who had gathered for his largesse. The man held out his palm and cried, "Give, for this is perhaps all I will get from you to relieve the misery to which you have reduced me."35

Already in the 1790's an English visitor had marvelled at the ability of bankrupt nobles to "live in a sort of affluence and at a greater expense than would be reasonably imagined."36 A few years later John Quincy Adams, then serving as American

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33 Ibid, pp. 214-217; Schmiritz, Les Institutions, II, 201-202
34 Borovoi, "K voprosu," p. 76
35 Fussman, La Russie, III, 109-112; cf. Iogobovskiy, Ethude, 1, 346
36 Thacker, First, II, 500-501

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Minister to St. Petersburg, wrote in a letter to his mother:37

"The tone of society among us is almost universally marked by an excess of expenses over income. The public officers all live far beyond their salaries, many of them are notorious for never paying their debts, and still more for preserving the balance by means which in our country would be deemed dishonorable, but which are here much less disreputable than economy."

But high living was not the only cause for the heavy indebtedness of nobles. There were other reasons, too. One was the low salaries paid government officials and army officers. The only way many of these men could live at a scale befitting their social position was to borrow or speculate, or both.38 Another and far more basic reason for their insolvency was the low return most of them received from their properties. Part of the responsibility for this lay in the inadequate transportation system that made it so difficult to send goods to market. But the landowners themselves were chiefly responsible for the failure of their lands to produce more revenues for them. As the next chapter shows, most of them had no interest in improving their agricultural operations, and thereby failed to take advantage of the opportunity that was available to them to better their own economic position. The attitude they did have toward their properties, the uses they made of them, and the ways they went about operating them, are the subjects of the next chapter.

37 8 Feb. 1810 in Ford, ed., Writings, III, 396
38 Fussman, La Russie, III, 109-112

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