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J.Y. Simpson

Excerpt

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## INTRODUCTION

## I

## BIOGRAPHICAL

PETER ALEXANDROVITCH SABUROV, the author of these Memoirs, was born on 22 March/3 April, 1835, on the estate of Veryaevo, in the district of Elatma in the Government of Tamboff. He was a member of a distinguished family. His brother Andrew held for several years the portfolio of the Minister of Public Instruction, while family marriage ties linked him with Prince Anatole Gagarine, one of the more considerable landed proprietors in Russia: a sister was the well-known head of a school for girls at Voronezh. As a youth he attended the Imperial Alexander Lyceum, St Petersburg, where he completed his studies in December, 1854, gaining the first gold medal. His outgoing dissertation on *The Commercial Routes of the Ancient Greeks in the Black Sea* was published shortly after in St Petersburg. Thus early had his mind been directed to the regions around South Russia, and their many related political and economic problems.

After a brief interval he entered the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as an Assistant Secretary in the Chancery. From 1857 to 1859 he served as Secretary in the Russian Legation at Munich. Thence he was sent to England, where he remained for nearly eleven years, first as Second Secretary, then as First Secretary, and finally as Counsellor of the Russian Em-

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bassy in London, under Baron Brunnow.<sup>1</sup> Here he had the opportunity of making the acquaintance of the leading British statesmen—Disraeli, Gladstone, Salisbury and others. Having great social gifts and being a keen sportsman, he found himself very frequently invited to country-house parties. Here also in 1867 he may have published anonymously his first financial work, a small volume, entitled *La Banque d'État et le Papier-monnaie*.<sup>2</sup> It is however the case that Baron Brunnow sometimes added to his despatches critical reviews on British Budget and other financial matters supplied by M. Saburov, to whose able secretarial work his Ambassador continually directed the attention of the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

As things fell out, it was in London also that he made his first acquaintance with Prince Bismarck in

<sup>1</sup> Brunnow, Baron Philip (1797–1875), of Baltic origin, passed the best part of his diplomatic career in London as representative of the Imperial Russian Government. Strongly Anglophil, he worked for the promotion and maintenance of a good understanding between Russia and Great Britain, both previous to and after the Crimean War. He was accredited to the Court of St James from 1840 to 1854. At the close of the Crimean War he returned to London as Ambassador, acting there from 1860 to 1874. He signed on behalf of Russia the Treaty of 15 July, 1840 (Quadruple Alliance), as also the Treaty of London of 18 May, 1852, and took an active part in defending the interests of Denmark against Prussia at an abortive Conference of the Powers convoked at London in April, 1864. In 1871 he secured the acceptance by the British Government of the Gortchakov declaration that Russia no longer considered herself bound by the clause in the Treaty of Paris (1856) under which her naval rights in the Black Sea had been limited. Baron Brunnow was made a Count on 18 March, 1871.

<sup>2</sup> This statement is made on the authority of his son, M. P. P. Saburov, but I have been unable to verify it.

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1862. Bismarck, who had been Ambassador in Paris, was expecting to be appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs. Previous to returning to Berlin in his new capacity, he came over to London in 1862 to get to know the prominent British statesmen personally. Baron Brunnow, the Russian Ambassador, gave a dinner in his honour to which Gladstone was invited, as also Disraeli, leader of the Opposition. After dinner there was general conversation, but Bismarck set himself alongside of Disraeli and talked with him for the matter of half an hour. Later in the evening Disraeli came up to Saburov, and said, "What an extraordinary man Bismarck is! He meets me for the first time and he tells me all he is going to do. He will attack Denmark in order to get possession of Schlesvig-Holstein; he will put Austria out of the German Confederation; and then he will attack France—an extraordinary man".<sup>1</sup> "Evidently", continued M. Saburov, in narrating this incident to the writer, "Bismarck had the whole plan already in his head. We Russians were all on the best of terms with him at this time. He was a sincere friend of Russia. He had been Ambassador in St Petersburg. But things began to be different after his quarrel with Prince Gortchakov<sup>2</sup> in 1875."

<sup>1</sup> For a fuller account of this evening cf. W. F. Monypenny and G. E. Buckle's *Life of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield*, iv, 341–348.

<sup>2</sup> Gortchakov, Prince Alexander Mikhailovitch (1798–1883), who served as Foreign Minister and was later called to the high office of Chancellor in the Russian Empire, was undoubtedly the most powerful Minister in Europe around 1863. In the conflict between Austria and Prussia in 1866, Russia remained neutral, and permitted Prussia to reap the fruits of victory and establish

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The following letter<sup>1</sup> under date of 5/17 July, 1862, gives Brunnow's impressions of the visit at the time:

Monsieur de Bismarck has just made an appearance in London on the pretext of visiting the Exhibition, but, in reality, with the purpose of securing an interview with Lord Palmerston and Lord Russell.

The friendliness of our relations as old colleagues at Frankfort, has induced him to open up to me on the object of his journey and its result.

If I had to sum up my mind on the one thing and on the other, I would say that the idea behind his journey was unsound, and the purpose a failure. The reason for this is very simple. Four days are not enough in which to get to know the statesmen who are at the helm of affairs in England. On principle they discuss only those questions which they are under the necessity of settling; they are neither accustomed nor have they the liking for aimless and unnecessary conversation.

The reserve which M. de Bismarck has met with in London has astonished him all the more since he believes himself designated to replace Count Bernstorff shortly at Berlin. He thought that the English Ministers, aware of this eventual succession, would attach more importance to entering into her supremacy in Germany. Again, when the Franco-German war of 1870–1871 broke out, Russia answered for the neutrality of Austria. An attempt was made to form an anti-Prussian coalition, but it failed in consequence of the cordial understanding between the German and Russian Emperors. Personally, Prince Gortchakov viewed the unification of Germany with apprehension, and may be said to have saved France with the help of Great Britain against the provocation of Bismarck, 1875. The subject of the later estrangement of Bismarck and Gortchakov comes up more than once in the Memoirs. Prince Gortchakov resigned in 1882, and was succeeded by de Giers (*vide infra*).

<sup>1</sup> Access to this and the immediately following letters, preserved in the archives of the Russian Embassy in London, I owe to the kind co-operation of Baron Alexander Felixovitch Meyendorff and M. Sablin.

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direct relations with him. Disappointed in this expectation, he felt a touch of annoyance at it, which he in no way tried to conceal from me. This dissatisfaction has prevented him from bringing to the appreciation of men and things in this country the degree of concentration and determination which I have noted in him everywhere else.

He is above all mistaken in attributing to Lord Russell an acquaintance with German affairs which he is far from possessing! He is equally deceived in placing this Minister much above Lord Palmerston! He formed this opinion on the basis of a single conversation which he had with the Premier on the day when the latter, after receiving the degree of Doctor of Laws at Oxford University, came back to town exceedingly tired, and certainly very little inclined to take the interests of Prussia to heart!

On both sides, the impression was unfavourable. M. de Bismarck and Lord Palmerston did not have time to do justice to each other.

Both have related to me the most outstanding points in their conversation.

M. de Bismarck tried to show that he was strong enough to direct parliamentary affairs in Prussia with the aid of a minority! Lord Palmerston replied that he very much doubted it.

In the second place, M. de Bismarck gave the hint that in a more or less distant future, the Prussian Government, in order to give a measure of satisfaction to the advanced opinion of the country, might find itself engaged in a conflict with Austria. Lord Palmerston replied, "I consider you have too much good sense to come to that".

Both of them retained a rather disagreeable memory of this interview.

Wishing to respond to the confidential attitude in which my old Frankfort colleague made me acquainted with these details, I told him that he would require to come back to England, and make a longer stay in order to correct the inaccurate impressions that he was taking away with him after

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too short a visit. He did not seem to appreciate the justice of that remark.

A second Memorandum of the same date as the preceding one, gives an account of the visit of the Saxon Minister of Foreign Affairs.

The visit of Baron Beust<sup>1</sup> followed closely that of M. de Bismarck. The Saxon Minister, more fortunate than the Prussian Minister, produced a good impression here. As he knew the ground already, he confined himself to those commonplace expressions of courtesy that commit you to nothing.

He tried nevertheless to discover the attitude of the English Ministers towards the scheme of reform which he proposed to introduce in the federal organisation of Germany.

He found Lord Russell indifferent to, and completely ignorant of, the matter. The British Cabinet attaches importance only to the maintenance of a good understanding between Prussia and Austria. The Union of these two Powers constitutes, in the eyes of Her Britannic Majesty's Government, the basis of the defensive system of the German Confederation. But the English Ministers do not in any way believe themselves called to take part in the settlement of the federal interests of Germany.

Lord Russell declared himself in this sense in telling me of his interview with Baron Beust.

"I am indebted to this Minister for some rather instructive information about the questions of domestic politics which are being discussed at this moment in the heart of the Confederation. In this debate, the struggle for influence engaged in between Prussia and Austria always takes the first place.

"I learn lastly that the Cabinet at Vienna has decided to

<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Ferdinand, Count von Beust (1809–1886), was Minister of Foreign Affairs in Saxony from 1849 to 1866, when he resigned office after the defeat of Austria. He subsequently had a brilliant career in Austria, and later as Ambassador in London and Paris. See his *Memoirs*.

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make the attempt to get all the States comprising the Austrian Monarchy into the German Customs Union (*Zollverein*).

“This plan is the result of a double combination,— industrial and political.

“On the one hand the Viennese Cabinet is trying to give fresh scope to the natural prosperity of its States by opening to their products a larger market, free from all obstacles, in the whole extent of Germany.

“On the other hand also, in attempting to make Venice come into the Customs Union, the Viennese Cabinet is trying, without any doubt, to link her Italian possessions to the commercial interests of the Confederation, so as to consolidate further the military position which it occupies in face of Italy.

“Baron Beust does not admit that supposition at all. He asserts that the entry of Austria into the *Zollverein* would have a purely commercial interest, and that it would impose no political sacrifice on Germany.

“I am not convinced of the truth of this statement. I rather think that the Saxon Minister is disposed to favour the Austrian combination in that it would serve to increase the influence of the Viennese Cabinet over North Germany, and diminish in like measure the preponderance of Prussia.

“The latter inspires a fear in her neighbours, as to the cause of which Baron Beust did not leave me in ignorance. He thinks that Prussia aims at self-aggrandisement, sooner or later, to the prejudice of the sovereignty and independence of the bordering States. It is in order to resist this tendency that he leans towards Austria.

“He feels himself but feebly supported by the States of the second and third rank. He complains bitterly of their mistrust and jealousy. ‘I would like to keep them from drowning, but they bite my hand.’”

On leaving London, the Saxon Minister goes to Paris, where his business is to terminate some arrangements connected with the conclusion of the Treaty of Commerce with France.

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In 1870 M. Saburov was appointed Chargé d’Affaires at Carlsruhe, where he wrote his still unpublished *Mémoire sur l’Angleterre*, which helped to gain for him, in the summer of the same year, the post of Russian Minister in Athens, where he remained till 1879. His records of these years lie in the manuscript of his work *Ma mission en Grèce*.

A pleasant impression of his relations with his former chief and of his interest in his new work, may be gathered from the following letter to Baron Brunnow from Corfu, under date of 25 August/6 September, 1870.

Monsieur le Baron,

I have just received your kind and affectionate letter of 13/25 August, for which I beg you to accept all my thanks. It has for me the twofold value of being the voice of my old chief, who is good enough to take an interest in the début of his pupil, and it gives me, at the same time, the means of appreciating exactly the present intentions of England with regard to Greece.

With the help of your advice it will be easy for me not to fall into error on this point, through the often contradictory local opinions which I hear expressed around me, and through the behaviour and language of Erskine<sup>1</sup> himself, who, whilst

<sup>1</sup> Erskine, the Hon. Edward Morris, C.B. (1817–1883), son of Lord David Montague Erskine, British diplomat, who, after serving as Secretary at the British Embassies in St Petersburg and Constantinople, was appointed Minister Plenipotentiary at Athens, 7 May, 1864. Here, in 1870, he had to deal with a tragic event—the murder of some English tourists by a party of brigands. He was held responsible in some quarters for having failed to save the lives of those members of the party who had been taken prisoner (vide infra), and his conduct was severely blamed in Parliament and in some English newspapers, on the ground that he had not displayed sufficient energy and decision in the crisis. It is interesting to note that his Russian colleague took a more



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doing his best to serve his Government with all the zeal of which he is capable, has his mind too much filled by the misfortune of not having saved his compatriots,<sup>1</sup> to be able to maintain the calmness necessary in his so difficult situation. That will not prevent me from giving a cordial character to my relations with him on every opportunity, in accordance with the nature of our present relations with England.

I expect to make great use of the argument with which you have just enriched my repertory, and which is summed up in these words: "Greece owes it to her own dignity to efface the memory of Marathon by a *spontaneous* action of reparation".

I will exert my efforts to get all the politicians with whom I shall be in relation at Athens to come to this point of view.

sympathetic view of Erskine's conduct. This was also the attitude of the Foreign Office, which found that he had done everything that was possible. Subsequently Mr Erskine was transferred to Stockholm (1872), and retired from the Service in 1881.

<sup>1</sup> Conditions in Greece were not very settled, and brigands had sometimes considerable political, military and social power. Likewise they had sympathisers, agents and accomplices in the Greek Parliament and the administrative bodies in Athens. A party of tourists, mostly English, escorted by four mounted gendarmes, was captured by brigands on 11 April, 1870, when returning from a visit to the Plain of Marathon. The party included two Secretaries of Legations (British and Italian), three other Englishmen, two ladies and a child. In the struggle two of the gendarmes were killed, and the ladies (Lady Muncaster and Mrs Lloyd) and child were sent back in charge of the other two gendarmes. The brigands then released another prisoner (Lord Muncaster), and through him commenced what turned out to be protracted negotiations with the British Minister and the Greek Government for a heavy ransom and full amnesty for themselves. While the negotiations were proceeding, they removed the prisoners to the village of Oropos. This territory was invested by Greek military detachments. The brigands, under the pressure of an attack which they considered to be a violation of a promise given to them, and in which some of them fell, murdered all their prisoners. The remaining criminals were eventually caught and executed. (Cf. Parliamentary Papers, May, 1870.)

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For the true dignity of Greece is certainly enshrined in these two lines.

Unfortunately, Sir, the fatality which seems to weigh on this miserable matter since the first day, has created two circumstances here, which will make the execution of that programme difficult.

The first one is that the indefinite prolongation of the inquiry and the various incidents which accompany it have already warped public opinion in Greece. Wrongly or rightly, the Greeks are beginning to be bitter against England. Moreover, a wrong idea has crept into their minds which gains ground every day; they think that England wishes to make use of the Marathon catastrophe to strengthen her influence, to impose Ministries on them, in short to govern Greece.

I am far from ignoring the rôle that party rivalries can have had in this disposition of men's minds. Without any doubt there are people who call out that Greece is humiliated, simply in order to discredit the men in power. But the fact is none the less true: a certain irritation exists, and contributes greatly towards paralysing the generous impulse which during the first days drew from the whole of Greece—led by the King—a cry of indignation at the Marathon crime. Under these conditions, *spontaneity* in reparation becomes difficult for the Greek Government. In order not to lose its popularity, it is fatally brought to *bargaining* with England inch by inch, in place of fully and willingly offering her the necessary satisfactions.

So as to make it easy for Greece to follow this plan, it would be desirable for the English Government to leave her greater freedom to determine the conditions under which, for example, the pecuniary satisfaction will have to be effected. There is a rumour—and I have not been able yet to verify it—that Mr Erskine has already, in an official letter, demanded a pecuniary indemnity for Mrs Lloyd.<sup>1</sup> If this be true, I should much regret it. It would be infinitely preferable that this

<sup>1</sup> Widow of one of the murdered Englishmen to whom the Greek Government subsequently paid £10,000.