

4338 AD

by

Vladimir Fedorovich Odoevsky

1835

Prose story

V. F. Odoevsky

4338

The Petersburg Letters

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{* According to the calculations of some astronomers, Biela's comet should, in 2,500 years' time, that is to say in the year 4339, collide with the Earth. The events of the novel which these letters are taken from take place in the year before this catastrophe. (note by V. F. Odoevsky.)}

FOREWORD

Note. These letters are produced by a person who is, in some senses, quite extraordinary. He has signed them but does not wish his name to be made public. Having been engaged in Mesmeric experiments for some years, he has achieved such a level of mastery of this art that he can, whenever he so wishes, enter into a somnambulist state. What is even more notable, is that he can choose in advance any object which he would like to examine by means of this magnetic form of vision.

In this way he can transport himself to any country, no matter how distant, into any period and into the situation of any person – almost without effort. His natural gift for this activity, which he has refined by long hours of practice, allows him to report or note down everything which presents itself to his magnetic perception. On waking from this state, he immediately forgets everything – and can proceed to read what he has written with no little curiosity. The calculations of astronomers, demonstrating that in the year 4339 that is to say 2500 years hence, Biela's comet ought to meet directly with the Earth made a particularly strong impression on our somnambulist. He was anxious to discover what the human race would be like in the year before that terrible moment – what would people say about it? what impression would it make on people? Indeed, what kind of morality and way of life might then be the norm? How would the strongest human feelings ambition,

curiosity, love find expression in those far-off times? Intending to find all of this out, he went into a somnambulant trance which continued for quite some time and on returning to consciousness he saw, spread out before him the sheets of writing which informed him that during his out-of-body experience he had been a Chinese citizen of the 44th century, who was travelling through Russia and enthusiastically corresponding with his friend, whom he had left behind in Peking.

When the somnambulist passed the letters on to his colleagues he received a variety of objections. Some of his discoveries seemed too everyday and ordinary while others appeared simply impossible. He replied "I would not dispute any of this – it is conceivable that somnambulist vision can play tricks on the viewer, as whatever we see is always influenced to a greater or lesser extent by our present-day understanding, and that may sometimes distort our perceptions of the truth according to scientific laws which are as yet unexplained." However if we consider the tale of my Chinaman in the light of what we presently know it cannot be said that it is wrong about a lot of things. Firstly, people remain people, with the same passions and convictions that they have always had. But on the other hand it's perfectly reasonable to suppose that the forms that their ideas and feelings take, and especially their everyday patterns of living, will be significantly different from ours. You may be struck by their conception of our time. You might indeed get the impression that we know more about things that happened 2500 years before us. But you need to take into account that younger generations always have things to do in the present, and they typically forget about the past. Humanity, as someone once said, is like a stone which has been dropped from a height and is in a state of constant acceleration. Future generations will be so busy with their own concerns that they will know much less than we do about the past. This process will be supported by the inevitable disappearance of our paper records. It's already well known that in some countries, such as America there are insects which see to it that books don't last more than a century. But there are other factors which can easily destroy the highest quality cotton paper over the course of a few hundred years. What do you think we would know about the Pharaoh Necho, or even Darius the Great, Psammetichus or Solon the Athenian if the ancients had not written on papyrus, pergament or best of all on stone tablets? Even after one millennium, to say nothing of two and half, will anything be left of our books? Well of course some of them will be re-printed, but once the originals are gone mistakes and misunderstandings will start to appear and there'll be nothing to check them against. So guesswork will add another quantity of errors while the earlier copies will in turn also disappear so that in 2.5 millennia people will have a much hazier picture of our times than we have even of the period of 700 BC that is to say, 2500 years before today.

The disappearance of breeds of horses is an evident matter, and there are thousands of examples of the same process in our times. That's to say nothing of the antediluvian animals, the giant lizards which Cuvier has proved once inhabited the Earth. Remember too that Herodotus reported that there were lions in Macedonia, in Asia Minor and in Syria and now they are hardly seen outside of Persia and India, the Steppes of Arabia and Africa. The shrinking of different breeds of dogs has happened practically before our eyes and can be achieved artificially in just the same way that gardeners turn large deciduous and coniferous trees into small pot plants.

Present day breakthroughs in chemistry already allow us to predict the invention of elastic glass, which is demanded by manufacturing industry and which was once demonstrated to Nero, a fact which is not questioned by any historian. Our contemporary medical use of gases should also some day become a daily habit, much as we now use pepper, vanilla, spirit, coffee, tobacco – all of which were once only used as medicine. The case of flying machines is self-evident. If, in our times, steam engines have been derived from teapots

which were accidentally covered by a weight and become ubiquitous, then who can doubt that even before the end of the 19th century flying machines ought to be in general use and they will change society a thousand times more than steamers and railway engines. In short, my informant continued, I do not find anything in the tale of my Chinaman which could not be extrapolated in a natural way from the general laws of human development as recognised by science and art. Consequently my findings should not be accused of exaggeration.

We considered it appropriate to include these lines as a foreword to the following letters.

Prince V. Odoevsky

From Hippolytus Tsungiev, a student of the Main Peking School, to Lingin a student of the same school.

Constantinople 27th December 4337.

First letter

My dear friend, I am writing you a few words, from the border of the Northern Kingdom. My journey so far has been successful. We flew through the Himalayan tunnel at lightning speed but at the Caspian tunnel we were held up by an unexpected obstacle: you doubtless will have heard about the enormous meteorite which recently fell through the southern hemisphere: well, it fell in the region of the Caspian tunnel and scattered over the road. We were obliged to get out of the electric carriage and humbly walk through the scattered heaps of meteoric iron. There was a storm out at sea and the grey Caspian roared above our heads, threatening to come down on us at any moment. In fact, if the meteor had fallen just a few yards further on then the tunnel would surely have caved in and the angry waters taken their revenge on mankind for daring to oppose them. Luckily this time human skill withstood the onslaught of nature. A few paces further on we were met by a new electro-carriage, magnificently equipped with galvanic headlights, and in the blink of an eye we were racing past the towers of Erzurum.

Now, pay attention and be shocked! I've been in a Russian flying machine! When I saw these aircraft, I must confess, I forgot about grandfather Orly's exhortations and my own safety – and all of our preconceptions about these things.

Say what you like, but flying in the air feels perfectly natural to me. Of course, our government was wise to forbid air travel, our nation's level of enlightenment makes it still too early to think about it. Accidents, which have cost the lives of tens of thousands of people demonstrate the need for the very decisive measures which the government so correctly took. But in Russia it's altogether different. If you could only see how the Russians smiled at my nerves, and my anxious questions. They didn't understand me at all! They are so confident of the capabilities of science and their own hearty spirits, that they can fly in the air with the same nonchalance that we take a train. Actually the Russians have a right to laugh at us. Each galvanic flying machine is managed by a professor, and a complex array of delicate instruments display changes in the various layers of the atmosphere and give warnings about the direction of the wind. Very few of the Russians suffer from air sickness. They have such strong constitutions that even in the upper layers of the atmosphere, they hardly feel any ill effects in the chest or lack of pressure in the blood – perhaps they have just become accustomed to it.

Although I cannot conceal from you that there is also a serious concern spreading in the local society. At the flight station I met the Russian minister of aeronautics together with the minister of astronomy; both of them surrounded by a crowd of scientists. They were inspecting some postal electro-carriages and flying machines and running different instruments and equipment – but with such an expression of alarm on their faces!

The thing is, my dear friend, that Halley's Comet is expected to fall to Earth, or if you prefer, collide with it – and that now seems certain. The estimate is that this should occur during the present year, although for various reasons the exact time and place cannot be determined.

SPb 4th Jan. 4338

Second letter

At last I am in the centre of the Russian hemisphere and the centre of world civilization. I am writing to you from a beautiful building, the roof of which is adorned with the name "Hotel for Air Arrivals" in giant crystal letters. Here such things are already commonplace. The more elegant homes either have roofs entirely of crystal or of white tiles covered in crystal with the name of the owner picked out in colour. At night, since the houses are well-lit inside, the shining rows of roofs make a magical sight. But it's very convenient too. Not like at home in Peking, where you can't make out your friends' houses without going down to ground level. The flight was very quiet. Although the post office flying machines are excellent we were constantly delayed by headwinds. Imagine, from Peking we only made it here on the eighth day! What a city, my kindly comrade! It's so magnificent.... And so enormous! Flying though it, I could believe what the ancient myth says, that once there were two cities here – one of which was named Moscow and the other Petersburg itself. According to legend the space between them was practically empty Steppe. It's true that in the part of the city that is known as Moscow and where the majestic remnants of the ancient Kremlin are, the architecture does have something special about it. Anyway don't expect any great news from me. I have hardly had time to look at anything because uncle was in a terrible hurry. I only managed to notice one thing: the aerial roads are kept in excellent repair here. Oh yes, I almost forgot....we did fly to the equator, but just for a short trip to see the start of the heat storage system which runs from here practically all over the northern hemisphere – it's really amazing. A work of many ages and of superb engineering! Picture it: here there are huge machines collecting warm air into pipes which take it to the main reservoirs. All the heat stores in every city of this great state are connected to the main reservoirs. Then from each heat store part of the warm air is passed to each building and enclosed garden and part of it, to the air travel routes. In this way, in spite of the harsh climate, we barely experienced any cold at all. So the Russians have even been victorious over their hostile weather conditions. They told me that the local society of manufacturers would like to offer our government deliveries of cold air directly to Peking, to freshen the streets. But there isn't time for that now...everybody's got their work cut out with the comet – which should destroy the Earth in a year's time. You know, uncle was sent by our emperor to Petersburg for negotiations about exactly that. There have already been a number of diplomatic meetings: our task is firstly to make inspections of all the measures being taken on the ground to counteract the threat, and secondly to bring China into the alliance of states which are joining together to share the costs of dealing with it. As a matter of fact, scientists here are very calmly and confidently asserting that so long as staff retain their presence of mind when the apparatus goes into action – it should be perfectly possible to prevent the comet from falling to Earth: they just need to know far

enough in advance the exact point the comet is heading towards. They assure us that this can be calculated accurately as soon as the comet becomes visible in their telescopes. In one of my future letters I will describe to you the preventative anti-comet measures being taken by the government here. So much knowledge! Such deep thinking! People here are amazingly knowledgeable and even more inventive.

You can see it everywhere you look. Just the daring idea of coping with the falling comet speaks volumes...but everything here is on a similar grand scale. I must confess that it makes me feel a little embarrassed about the level of development achieved by our own country. Although it is true that we are a young country, and here in Russia civilization goes back thousands of years: that's some consolation I suppose. Looking around I often ask myself, dear comrade, what would have become of us if our great Khun-Gin had not been born 500 years ago to wake China from its age-long slumbers, or rather its deathly stagnation? Where would we be if he had not wiped away the remains of our ancient and childish sciences and replaced our fetishes with true faith – thus bringing us into the family of educated peoples? Seriously though, we would be no better than the wild Americans who, for want of anything else to speculate on sell off their cities to the highest bidder and then try to come and rob us. We need to maintain an army especially to fend them off. It is terrible to think that we Chinese have only had air travel for less than two hundred years, and that it was only the victory of the Russians that got us to learn the art. And all because of this Chinese stiffness, which our poets still seem to think is somehow fittingly poetic. Of course we Chinese have now gone to the other extreme – to unreasoning imitation of foreigners. Now everything has to be done the way it is in Russia – clothes, habits and literature. The only thing we don't have yet it is the Russian quick thinking ...but that will come with time. Yes my friend. We are backward, very backward compared with our celebrated neighbours; so let's make efforts to learn, while we are young and there is still time. Goodbye. Write to me in the next telegraph emission.

P. S. Tell your Dad that, as he asked me, I have commissioned one of the best chemists to make camera images of some of the most historic buildings here, just the way they are with outlines and colours; you'll be amazed how different they are from what we call a "Russian style house" back home.

Third letter

Yesterday, one of the scientists here took me to the Cabinet of Curiosities. It's in a huge building right in the middle of the Neva and which looks like a whole city on its own. There are arches joining it to the river banks, and from the windows you can see an enormous fountain which protects the coastal part of Petersburg from flooding. A nearby island, which in ancient times was called Vasilevskiy Island is also part of the Cabinet. It has an indoor garden with trees and bushes, and there are animals walking around freely there – although they're behind bars they have plenty of space to roam. It's an absolute work of art! It is entirely built on arches which are constantly heated by warm air – so only a few steps separate the tropical and temperate climate zones. The garden is like a miniature version of the entire planet, so walking round it is like a journey round the world. The creatures of each country are exhibited in the corresponding places, and the whole thing is laid out just like a globe. Above the garden, in the centre of the Cabinet building on the Neva itself, is a gigantic heated pool. There you can see rare species of fish and amphibians. On both sides are halls with the natural kingdoms of dry land – flora and fauna all displayed in chronological order starting with the creatures from before the flood up to the present day. Even a quick look round it all made me realise how Russian

scientists manage to become so extraordinarily knowledgeable. It's sufficient to make a thorough tour of the Cabinet, and without reading any books, you can receive the training of a well-informed naturalist. The collection of animals is truly wonderful. So many species have disappeared or changed completely! I was especially taken with the very rare exhibit of a giant horse, which still had its wool. It is very similar to those little horses which ladies like to keep with their bedroom dogs – but the ancient horse was an incredible size. I could hardly reach up to its head.

– is it really possible, I asked the curator, — that people once rode on those monsters?

– Although there is no clear evidence for it, he replied — there are ancient monuments which show people sitting on top of horses.

– But isn't that some kind of allegorical representation? Maybe the ancients wanted simply to indicate the victory of humanity over nature, or over their own passions?

That's what many people think, and it's a reasonable point of view — said Khartin. But it seems as though those allegorical images were taken from the real world. Otherwise, how could we explain those words like "horseman" or "horserider" that are often found in ancient manuscripts? Also look —he said, showing me a raised foot of the horse with a curved bit of rusty iron nailed to the hoof — this is one of the Cabinet's most valuable exhibits. You see this iron is held on with nails, well, there are traces of nails on the other hoofs as well. This was obviously done by people.

– But how would they use that iron?

– Probably to limit the strength of that terrifying beast, said the curator.

– Or perhaps during wars they let them loose on the enemy, and the iron would help them to cause more damage?

– Your comments are rather witty, replied the courteous scientist. But where is the evidence?

I was silent.

– Not long ago a very ancient picture was found here, said Khartin. It shows some gear which was probably used to tame horses, and the horse in the picture has its legs tied to a strut and a man with a hammer is hitting its hooves. Nearby there is another horse which is harnessed to some kind of strange container on wheels.

That's very intriguing. But how do you explain the decrease in size of these animals?

– There are various hypotheses. The most likely explanation is that in the second millennium after the birth of Christ the spread of flying craft made horses unnecessary. The horses were just abandoned and they went off into the forest. They just ran wild and nobody was bothered about conserving them. Most probably died. Then later people started to take an interest in them and decided to finish off what nature had begun. There was a fashion for small plants and animals for several centuries and horses were part of that. So the horse eventually became the amusing decorative pet that we have today.

– So I suppose, — I said, looking at the skeleton, — that the people who rode on horses in ancient times were all heroes, or else, maybe people then were a lot braver than we are now. How could anyone risk sitting on a thing like that!

– Indeed, people in ancient times did tend to put themselves in danger more readily than today. For example, now it is firmly established that steam, which we presently only use for tunnelling and mining, is a terrible and dangerous force. But there was a period of several

centuries when it was used for transport.

That's just baffling.

– ?! I am sure that if the ancient books had been preserved we might understand a lot of things that don't seem to make sense now.

–" In that respect you are more fortunate than us. At least your climate helped to preserve a few fragments of ancient writing and you had time to transfer them onto glass; but in China, everything that didn't rot on its own was eaten by insects – so we have no written records dating from early times.

"And very little was preserved here," noted Khartin. — There are huge bundles of material were only the odd word or letter can be made out, and those serve as the basis for all of our ancient history.

– A lot must depend on the work of your curators of antiquities. I heard that the new dictionary which they have prepared will include two thousand recently discovered words.

– Indeed! — The curator responded. "but what good will that do?" They'll write two thousand dissertations about each of those words without ever discovering what they actually meant. Take the word "Germans" as an example. Our scientists have dedicated so much work to it, but they still can't unearth what its true meaning was. The Physicist had hit one of my sore points. As a student of history it's easy to wind me up with that sort of criticism. I decided to show off my learning.

– The Germans were a people who lived to the south of ancient Russia," I said. This is already beyond dispute. The Germans were subjugated by the Allemanns, then in the place of the Allemanns the Teutons appeared. The Teutons were then conquered by the Nemtsi, or more correctly, by the Germaines, and then the Germaines by the Deutsche. This last was a well studied ethnicity with a language that has been partially preserved in some fragments of writing by their poet Geothe...

Yes! That's what we used to think – said Khartin. But now antiquaries are practically all of the opinion that the Deutsche were something quite different and the Germans were some sort of caste or class, which people from different tribes were able to join.

"well I must admit, that's a completely new idea for me, I can see that our research is not quite up to speed on your latest discoveries.

We had conversations like that everywhere we went in the Cabinet. I asked permission to visit it more often and the curator told me that the Cabinet is open round the clock every day of the year. You can imagine how pleased I am to have met such a brilliant scientist.

Various Academies are also housed in the same building. They are called the "The Permanent Learned Congress." In a few days' time the Academy will be open to visitors and Khartin has promised to take me to the first session.

Fourth Letter

I forget to tell you that we arrived in Petersburg at the most amazing time for a foreigner, the month of repose. The Russians have two such months: one at the start of the year and another in the middle. Everything stops during these and government institutions are closed. People don't even visit each other. I like this custom a lot. It gives people time to

work on improving their inner lives and domestic arrangements and they just leave all external matters on hold. At first it was feared that this idea would lead to a slowdown in business, but in fact it turned out the opposite. Because people know they will have time to work on their own private projects, they concentrate much better on serving society the rest of the time. And since there are fewer distractions, everything gets done twice as fast. The regulation on this had an especially beneficial effect in reducing the amount of litigation in the courts. People have time to think things over, and the fact that all the offices are closed prevents them from acting in the heat of passion. Only an extreme emergency, like the threat of the comet, can disrupt this excellent tradition – but even so, there haven't been any meetings or soirees yet. Today we finally received the personal newspaper of one of the ministers here, which among other things, invited us to a soiree. You ought to know that in many homes people publish their news in this way, especially if they have a wide circle of acquaintances; it replaces ordinary correspondence. In each home there is a majordomo who is responsible for publishing the journal once a week or even daily. It's very easy to do. When the masters of the house instruct him, he simply makes a note of everything they say and then takes a picture of it and prints enough copies to send out to everyone. The newspaper has the usual details of the health or illness of the masters and other domestic news, then various ideas and commentaries, small inventions and also invitations. If there is an invitation to dinner, it will include a section called "Le Menu". {That's French}. There is a magnetic telegraph system connecting the houses of people who know each other which allows for unplanned communications. People who live miles apart can use it to speak to each other.

So I should, at long last, see the members of high society here. In a future letter I will write and tell you what impression they made on me. It's worth noting for us Chinese, who like to turn night into day, that here a soiree begins at five o'clock in the afternoon, they have dinner at eight and go to bed at nine. But then they do get up at four and lunch at twelve. Visiting someone in the morning is regarded as extremely inconsiderate – everyone, they suppose is busy in the morning. They have told me that even people who aren't busy in the mornings close their doors to maintain appearances.

Fifth letter

The house of the First Minister is in the best part of the city, near Pulkovo Heights. That's where the famous ancient observatory is which, they say, was built 2300 years ago. When we got near the house there were already quite a few aircraft on the roof; others were still airborne, and others were fixed to columns especially made for the purpose. We came out onto the platform which descended quickly and we found ourselves in a magnificent covered garden, which the minister used as a reception area.

The whole garden was full of rare plants and lit by a beautiful electrical device similar to the sun. They told me that it not only lights the garden, but also encourages the growth of the trees and plants in some chemical way. In fact it was the most luxuriant vegetation I've ever seen.

I think it would be a good thing, if our fellow Chinese, who are so keen on old-fashioned customs and manners, could see some society events and receptions here. They don't bother with our Chinese formality, which it seems we still haven't managed to shake off. The simple way people behave here can seem a little cold at first. But then you get used to it and it starts to seem completely natural, and you are convinced that this apparent coldness is mixed with genuine kindness. When we went into the reception it was already

full of guests. In some places you could catch a glimpse of groups of people walking among the trees; some talking enthusiastically and others listening in silence. I should say that here nobody is obliged to speak. You can go into a room without saying a word and not even answer any questions. — It won't strike anybody as strange. The in-crowd and the trend-setters often spend a whole evening in silence — they consider it rather fetching. Asking someone about their health, their business, or the weather or some other kind of small talk is not well looked upon. However, once a conversation begins it will continue passionately and energetically. There were lots of ladies there, all gorgeous and especially fresh-looking. Being too skinny or pale is a sign of ignorance here. Being knowledgeable about health and medical matters is part of a good upbringing — so they look down on people who don't look after their health, especially if they are women.

The women dressed wonderfully well. Most of them were in dresses made of elastic crystal in different shades; some of them seemed to flicker with all the colours of the rainbow and in others, had metallic crystals or rare plants, butterflies and shiny beetles fused into them. One of the fashionable ladies had live fireflies festooned around her skirts which produced a dazzling flash as she moved around the dark avenues of trees. A dress like that costs a lot of money, people said, and can only be worn once because the insects quickly die. Not without amazement, I noticed that high society was paying a lot less attention to our fateful comet than one might have expected. There was an unexpected mixture of responses. Some talked expertly about the differing degrees of success which the preventative measures had achieved, they calculated the weight of the comet, the speed of its approach and the extent to which the devices built for slowing it down might work. Others produced a litany of victories which mankind had already scored over nature. They had such confidence in the powers of human ingenuity that they could joke about the impending disaster. Others were calm for other reasons — they hinted that life had gone on for a fair old while, and that everything eventually must come to an end. Most people however, were just discussing their affairs and their plans for the future as if nothing was going to change. Some of the women were wearing bonnets "a la comete" {that's French for comet style}. They consisted of a small electrical gizmo that constantly scattered sparks around. I noticed that these ladies flirtatiously went out into the shade as often as they could to show off the fantastic electric tail, representing the trail of the comet, which decorated their hair with a shining plume and gave a special glow to their faces.

At times, in different parts of the garden, hidden music played, but very quietly so as not to disturb the conversations. Some keen people were sitting on the resonating screens which covered the hidden orchestra. They invited me to come and sit with them. But my nerves could not stand this pleasant but unaccustomed and powerful sensation and I fell off after less than two minutes. The women laughed at me. Generally everybody paid a lot of attention to me and uncle, and they tried to show their kind hospitality according to Russian traditions. That goes especially for the women, who liked me a lot as you will see later on. Walking along a path covered in a velvet carpet we stopped by a small pool which quietly burbled and splashed perfumed water. A very beautiful and elegantly dressed lady who had been a bit more friendly than the others came towards the pool and the burbling of the water changed into wonderful soft music. I'd never heard such strange sounds before. As I came closer to the lady I was astonished to see that she was playing a keyboard which was connected to the pool. The keys operated openings which sometimes let water fall onto crystal bells and created marvellous harmonies. Sometimes the water came out in a fast but intermittent stream, which produced a sound like the roar of angry waves brought into a wild but perfect harmony. Sometimes the flow was calm and then it was as if full chords were flying in from far away. Sometimes the stream dissolved into little splashes against the crystal glass from which we could hear a quiet melodic babbling. The instrument was called a hydrophone, recently invented here and still not widely used. My

wonderful lady had never seemed so gorgeous. Violet electrical sparks fell from her bonnet like a fiery rain her round white shoulders and were reflected in fleeting streams and sparkles which lit up her pretty and expressive face and luxuriant curls of hair. Shiny jets appeared through the rainbow stripes of her dress and sometimes it seemed to become translucent and reveal her splendid figure. Soon her pure and expressive voice was added to the sounds of the hydrophone and seemed to bury itself in the harmonic tides of the instrument. The action of the music, which seemed to have come from some watery hidden depths, the wonderful magical sparkles, the air full of fragrances, and the beautiful woman who seemed to float in that miraculous mixture of sounds and waves and light – all of this sent me into such an intoxicated state that when she stopped playing I couldn't come back to reality for a long time...which I suspect she noticed.

She had more or less the same effect on other people but there was no applause for her or complimentary speeches, which are not the custom here. Everybody knows how to evaluate their own art. A poor musician doesn't torture the ears of listeners, and a good one doesn't wait for the audience to beg him to play. Actually music is part of general upbringing here. It's as important as reading and writing and just as essential. They sometimes play other people's music, but usually, and especially women like the beauty I described, they improvise without being asked and whenever they feel inspired to play.

In different parts of the garden were trees with fruit on them for the guests. Some of them were real masterpieces of the gardener's art, which has been so perfected here. Looking at them I couldn't help thinking of the great efforts of thought and patience which had gone into grafting together such a variety of completely different fruits and creating altogether new varieties. For example I noticed fruits which were something in between a pineapple and a peach: there is nothing to compare with the taste of them. There are also dates growing on cherry trees and bananas combined with pears. There are countless other new varieties which have been invented, so to speak, by the local horticulturalists.

Some small carafes stood around the trees with golden taps. Guests would take the carafes and serve themselves by opening the taps. I supposed that it was a drink of some sort. I followed their example. But the carafes in fact contained an aromatic mixture of stimulating gases with the smell (or rather "bouquet") of wine. They seem to breathe an amazing liveliness into your organism, which makes it hard to keep from smiling constantly. These gases are completely harmless and doctors approve of their use. They have completely replaced wine in high society here. Wine is drunk by simple workers here who can't seem to leave behind its rude and wet embrace.

After a while the host invited us into a separate area where the magnetic bathhouse was. I should say that animal magnetism is the favourite drawing room entertainment here, it has totally overtaken ancient card-games, dice, dancing and other games. This is how it's done: one person stands at the bath, usually it's someone with more experience of magnetic manipulation. All the others take in their hands a lead which is attached to the bath and then the magnetization begins. This puts some people into a kind of magnetic sleep, which is good for the health; others it seems to have no effect on at all. But some people go into a trance, and that's the fun of it. As I was completely unaccustomed to it, the magnetism had no effect on me. But this meant that I was able to observe everything that happened.

A very interesting conversation quickly began: in the interval, those people who had been in a trance described their secret thoughts and feelings. "I must admit" said one, "that although I try to create the impression that I am not afraid of the comet, I am terrified by its approach to Earth" — "Today I deliberately made my husband angry" – said another

attractive woman, "because when he is angry he looks so much handsomer". — "Your rainbow dress", — she said ostentatiously to her neighbour "is so nice that I'd like to borrow it from you and make a copy, but I'm embarrassed to ask."

I came to a circle of women where my beauty was sitting. As soon as I entered the circle the beautiful one said to me "you can't imagine how much I like you, when I saw you I immediately wanted to kiss you!" "And me too, —and me too!" exclaimed several other ladies. The others laughed and congratulated me on my splendid success with the ladies of Peterburg.

This entertainment lasted for about an hour. When people come out of the trance they forget everything they have said, and the secrets they have let out give rise to thousands of intrigues. All this helps to keep social life bubbling, and it gives rise to weddings, romances and probably friendships too. Often people who are hardly acquainted find out about each others' feelings this way and old friendships are reinforced by the expression of genuine feelings. Sometimes just the men magnetise themselves and the women watch, and sometimes the women sit at the magnetic bath and tell their secrets to men. More than anything else, the spread of magnetism has completely cleaned society of any hypocrisy and pretence. It's clear that such things are impossible. However, diplomats, because of their official duties, refrain from this amusement. This means that they don't have much of a role when people entertain guests. In general, people here take a dim view of those who don't take part in magnetic sessions. They assume that such individuals either have hostile intentions or a tendency towards depravity.

Tired out after all the varied events of the day, I didn't wait for dinner. I went instead to look for my flying apparatus. In the yard there was a blizzard blowing and in spite of the enormous size of the ventilators which constantly poured a huge amount of heat into the air, I had to wrap myself up warmly in my glass cloak. But the thought of the beautiful lady warmed my heart, as they used to say. I found out that she is the only daughter of the minister of medicine. But regardless of her feelings towards me, I hope to be truly worthy of her favours. For the moment I don't have any scientific discoveries to my name, so I don't think I've quite earned them yet!

Sixth letter

In my last letter to you, which was so long, I still didn't tell you about some of the notable people I saw in the soiree at the Chairman's house. As I already told you, all of high society was there. The minister of philosophy, the minister of fine arts, the minister of the air force, poets and philosophers, and first and second class historians. Luckily I met Mr. Khartin there who I had previously met at uncle's. He gave me some curious details about the people at the party, but I'll leave that for another time. But I tell you, the way top state officials are trained and educated here is rather remarkable. They all attend a special college which is called the "College of State People". The best students from all other institutions are collected here and their development and their capabilities are monitored from an early age. On passing a strict examination they then spend several years at sessions of the State Committee until they have acquired sufficient experience. From there they go on to high positions in the state. This means that some of the senior mandarins are still quite young people. Actually this seems necessary. Only fresh and active young men can withstand the pressures and the duties placed on them. They grow old before their time, and it isn't their fault that their health suffers. It seems to be the price that has to be paid for the well-being of society as a whole.

The Minister of Reconciliation is the very highest official in the empire and the Chairman of the State Committee. His office is the toughest and the most slippery. He is responsible for all of the magistrates in the state, chosen from among the most honoured and richest people. The Justices of the Peace have to be in close contact with all of the houses in their area and prevent family disagreements, quarrels, and above all lawsuits. Meanwhile those that have already started they try to settle amicably. In the most difficult cases they have a fund from the government which is called the "Reconciliatory Fund" which they can use as they see fit to persuade people to drop their claims and complaints. Due to the general improvement in morals this fund is now half the size of what used to be spent on the Ministry of Justice and the Police. It's worth noting that the magistrates, as well as their own inner wish to do good (which is assessed strictly on selection) are also obliged by their post to be assiduous in their duties. For every lawsuit which they fail to prevent they are required to pay a fine, which is added to the general Reconciliation Fund. The Minister of Reconciliation is, in turn, responsible for the selection of magistrates and their performance in the post. He is himself the Head Magistrate and thus is charged with seeking agreement between all the sections and officers of the government. He also entrusted with the supervision of all scientific and literary arguments. The aim here is to let the arguments continue as long as is helpful for the improvement of science, and to keep them from becoming too personal. So you can imagine how deep a knowledge this official requires and what a dedication to the public good they must have. In general we should note, the lives of these public servants are short. The demands of the job kill them and little wonder...they don't only have to concern themselves with the tranquillity of the entire state, but also the constant effort to refine their own capabilities. It's hard for anyone to have the strength.

The present Minister of Reconciliation is truly worthy of his post. Although still young, his hair is already grey from the constant labours. In his face you can see kindness, rather than piercing intelligence and deep thought.

His office is full of books and papers. By the way I saw a very rare item them: a collection of Russian laws from the 19th century A. D. A lot of the pages had rotten away completely, but some were still whole. It was kept like a holy relic in a precious chest with a glass top. It had the name of the statesman who originally had it published.

"This piece of heritage is one of the oldest we have" –he told me. "Russian legislation is now impossible to explain because of changes in the language over such a long period of time. But from what we have been able to decipher it can be seen that our enlightened age has ancient origins! These remains should be preserved by a grateful posterity"

Seventh letter

Today Khartin came to me in the morning and invited me to come and look round the chamber of the General Session of the Academy. "I don't know" he said, "whether they will let us stay for the session today, but before it starts you'll have time to meet some of our scientists."

The Chamber of the Scientific Congress, as I have already written, is in the building of the Cabinet of Curiosities. Scientists come here everyday, not just for the weekly session. Most of them live here as well, which makes it easier from them to use the enormous library and the Cabinet's physics laboratories. As well as physicists, historians, poets, musicians and painters come to the chamber to share their ideas, experiments and even their failures and the very first fruits of their discoveries. They don't hold anything back, or

boast or try to give themselves too much credit. They discuss ways to agree about their work and to give it a unified direction. This is all reinforced by the special form of organisation which the community has developed and which I will describe to you in a future letter.

We entered a huge hall decorated with statues and portraits of great people. Some tables were covered in books, and others with various kinds of apparatus ready for running experiments. One table had the ends of leads which ran from the worlds largest galvanomagnetic chain – itself housed in a separate building several floors high.

It was still early and only a few people had arrived. A small circle was having a lively discussion of a recently published pamphlet. It had been presented in Congress by a young archeologist and dealt with the controversial and curious question of the ancient name of Peterburg. Perhaps you are aware of the fact that there are different and opposing opinions on this subject. The historical evidence is that the city was founded by a great statesman whose name was also given to the city. Nobody disagrees with this. But the discovery of some ancient texts suggests that, for some reason, the famous city changed its name several times over the millennia. These discoveries caused a commotion among the local archaeologists: one of them shows that the original name of Peterburg was Petropol, as can be seen in the lines of an ancient poet:

Petropol stands sleepily with its towers...

They objected, and not without reason, that there could have been a misprint in the poem. Another asserts that an older name of Peterburg was Petrograd. I won't go into the details of all the other suggestions on this matter: the young archeologist rejects them all out of hand. Digging through a half rotten layer of ancient books, he found a file of manuscripts some of the pages of which had been more mercifully treated by time than others. A few lines which had survived gave him the basis for writing a whole book of commentary in which he shows that the ancient name of Peterburg was Piter. To support this view, he presented Congress with the original manuscript. I saw this priceless relic. It is written on the kind of cloth which in those times was called "paper". The art of producing this material has been completely lost, which is not really a problem – since the flimsy and unstable nature of this paper is the main reason why so many of the ancient texts have been lost. I copied a few of the lines out for you which have caused such a flurry of scientific excitement, here they are:

"My old dear, I'm writing to you from Piter. Any day now I should be setting off for Kronstadt where they have offered me a position as head clerk.... with a salary of five hundred roubles a year." The rest of the message had been erased by time. You can easily imagine, what an investigator can do with a few precious lines. These are clearly from a letter, who was it written by and to whom? That is a question which the scientific world should be considering. Luckily whoever wrote the letter gives an idea of approximately what his profession was. He writes that he has been offered the position of assistant to the head clerk. But this is an important misunderstanding: what is meant by the words "head clerk"? It appears here for the first time in the historical record. Most historians are of the opinion that the head clerk was an important figure, similar to the "commanding officer" or the "head of the city authorities". I am in full agreement with this position – the analogy is obvious. They suggest, and not without basis that the "commanding officer" in antiquity would have been in charge of a military district, and the "head of the city authorities" would have been in charge of a city district. So the "Head Clerk" probably would have been their superior, coordinating the actions of the more specialised public servants. As for the words "my old dear", the grammarians state that this was a term of special respect suggesting that the recipient of the letter was also a senior figure of considerable authority. All of this is

so clear that it doesn't leave much room for doubt. There is just one difficulty – why the salary of 500 roubles? It doesn't make sense that such an important person as an assistant to the Head Clerk would have such an insignificant amount of compensation. This could be easily explained if we just assume that in antiquity the word "rouble" was a general expression for a large sum, like for example myriad. But I think there's something more important going on here. Doesn't the low level of the salary imply that the salaries paid to top officials in antiquity were a good deal lower than those paid to people with lower status? It may be that a man who was appointed to high office had a greater love for the common good, greater altruism and poetry in his soul, such a deep idea would be in line with the wisdom of our ancestors. So all of this shows, my friend, how little we really know about our history, in spite of all the work of our contemporary prospectors!

It was the first time I had ever seen a genuine piece of ancient text. You can't imagine what a feeling it gave me when I looked at that magnificent relic. The writings of this dignitary, perhaps a great man, who lived four thousand centuries ago. The fate of millions might have depended on him. Even his handwriting had something especially elegant and majestic about it. But the ancients had to write out so many letters to denote a word – which we can show with a single character. How did they find the time for writing? And they seem to have written a lot. Recently someone pointed out in passing a huge building which contains materials conserved from ancient times. It is completely filled with rotting files of paper with writing on it. All attempts to make sense of them have been futile. They turn to dust at the slightest touch. It has only been possible to record a few words which appear more often than others such as "rapport" or more correctly "report" and also "instructions" "release of provisions" and others but the meanings of these terms have been lost altogether. There must be such treasures of history, poetry, and science in those files...and all destroyed by the implacable passage of the years. We may have achieved much less than our ancestors, but at least our writing will survive. Here I've seen books written a thousand years ago on our glass papyrus – and they look like they were written yesterday! Surely the comet won't them?!

While we were inspecting the ancient text, the members of the Academy began to assemble, and since it wasn't an open session we had to leave. Today the Congress is due to consider different plans relating to the means for counteracting the falling comet. For this reason a closed assembly was called. On ordinary days the hall is practically filled to capacity – people here are so keen on scientific activity.

Going up to our aircraft we saw a crowd of people on a nearby platform who were calling our loudly and shouting and waving their arms about and apparently arguing.

"What's all that about?" — I asked Khartin.

"Oh it's better not to ask", — answered Khartin — "that crowd is one of the strangest phenomena of our age". In our hemisphere education has spread even to the lowest ranks of society, so there are lots of people are not intellectually capable of being simple craftsmen but who wish to proclaim themselves as scientists or men of letters. These people collect here nearly every day in front of the Academy. But, of course, the doors are closed to them so they try to draw attention by shouting. They still can't comprehend why our scientists abhor their company. So in disappointment, they have started to mimic them and they've started engaging in something like science and literature. Unfortunately they are not motivated by the common good like true scientists and they have turned both science and literature into a kind of manufacturing. One churns out rubbish, another one praises it and then a third sells it. The person who sells the most is regarded as a great man. They have these constant financial deals and constant arguments – they call the two sides parties – and each party tries to trick the other. Those are two parties, almost coming

to blows. Each wants to achieve a monopoly and even more, to take over real scientists or literary figures. That's the only time when they can forget about the arguments between parties and act in unison. They call anybody who tries to avoid them an "aristocrat" and they try to make friends with their flunkies. That way they can find out some household secret and then spin different sorts of cock and bull stories against their enemies. Anyway these manufacturers don't succeed in their enterprise, and it only makes the general suspicion towards them grow with every passing day.

"But" I asked "how can such people appear in the blessed kingdom of Russia?"

"Most of them have come here from other parts of the world; and they aren't familiar with the Russian spirit, and neither do they have a love for Russian civilization. They just want to make their fortunes – and Russia is rich. In antiquity people like this did not exist. At least they aren't recorded in history. Someone I know, who works in the field of comparative anthropology suggests that they might be direct descendants of the boxers, a kind of warrior that once existed in Europe. What can be done... These people are, unfortunately, the dark side of our age. We can only hope that with the further spread of education that this blight on our society will disappear."

Then we were approaching the house.

Fragments

I

In the beginning of the year 4837, when Peterburg had already constructed and completed repair of the pavements a galvanic flying machine {an air balloon driven by galvanism, note by V. F. Odoevsky} descended quickly to the platform of the high tower of the Hotel for Air Arrivals. A postal worker threw out a few hooks into the rings on the platform, and pulled out a moving staircase. A man in loose clothes made of elastic glass jumped out and ran nimbly onto the platform. He pulled a cord and the platform quietly went down to the main hall.

– What are you serving for dinner? — asked the traveller, throwing off his glass cloak and smoothing out a half kaftan made of a thin webby cloth.

– And whom do I have the honour of addressing?? — the barman asked politely.

– The Ordinary Historian in the court of the American poet Orly.

The barman went to the wall where various price-lists were hanging with different titles: poets, historians, musicians, painters, and so on and so forth.

He brought one of these to show the traveller.

What does this mean? — the traveller asked on reading the heading – "pricelist for Historians" Yes! I forgot that in your hemisphere, there is a suitable dinner for each profession. I have heard of that, but you must admit though, your way of doing things is a bit odd.

– the fate of our patria, — the barman replied — seems to be that it will never be understood by foreigners. I know that a lot of Americans have made fun of our establishment, but only because they don't want to try it for themselves. If you think about

it you'll see that it's actually based on mathematically sound ethical principles: the price list for each profession is related to the amount of good that it can bring to humanity.

The American smiled with amusement:

– ?! What a country of poets! You have poetry everywhere, even in the menu... I, as a southern prose-writer ask you, what should I do if I feel like eating a dish that is not included in the historian's price list?

– You can order it, but only for money.

– So you mean to say that everything on this menu is....

– Free, yes... In our lands we only ask from you that you live your life and do your work, the government already pays me for each traveller at the established rate.

– Well, that's not so bad. — noted the thrifty American, — I didn't realise that it worked like that. That's what happens if you never leave your own hemisphere. I haven't been any further than New Holland.

– And where did you board the aircraft? –if I may ask...

At the Strait of Magellan But let's talk about dinner... Can I get a good portion of starch extract on essence of asparagus; one condensed nitrogen a fleur d'orange, pineapple essences and a good bottle of carbonic acid gas with hydrogen? — And after dinner I'd like to have a magnetic bath if that's possible, I am very tired from the journey.

– How deep? Would you like a total trance or a partial one?

– No, just a light magnetic bath to strengthen my reserves...

– I'll prepare it immediately.

A neat little table of carved ruby came down from the ceiling and moved towards the elastic divan on golden stilts. It was covered with a tablecloth of elastic glass. The nutritious essences were served under cosies of ruby and the carbonic gas came in ruby bottles with gold taps that finished in long tubes.

The traveller ate heartily and asked for another portion of nitrogen. When he had finished the bottle of carbonic gas he started to liven up.

– Excellent nitrogen! — he said to the barman. I've only eaten the like of it once, in Madagascar.

II

While uncle was occupied by his diplomatic intrigues, I had time to meet a lot of interesting people. I met Mr. Khartin at Uncle's house, the ordinary historian of the First Poet Orly. (This is an honorary title in the empire; it is the historian's role to collect suitable materials for the Poet to work with, or to carry out new investigations under his instructions. The title itself was only recently created, but it has already rendered significant benefits to the state. Historical research has become more coherent, and this has shed new light on many of the neglected aspects of history.)

I immediately asked Khartin to explain to me exactly what his position involved, as I realised that it was held in the highest esteem by Russians – although we only have a

vague idea about it in China. This is what he answered "you, as a student, will be aware of how much effort the greats have put into uniting all the sciences into one. In this respect the works of the 3rd millennium are especially notable. Christ. In deep antiquity there were complaints that the sciences were too split up, but as the centuries passed all attempts to bring them together failed. Nothing seemed to work, neither simplification of methods, nor classifications of knowledge. Mankind was unable to overcome the terrible dilemma: either knowledge could be partial, or it could be shallow. What the scientists themselves didn't do, emerged naturally from the structure of society. This was because society had already been divided into classes of Historians, Geographers, Physicists, and Poets, each class acting independently. But this gave rise to the fortunate idea that occurred to our present ruler, who is himself a member of the class of First Poets. He noted that, in a scientific assembly, one class naturally becomes subservient to another. He decided to follow this natural tendency and to collect the various specialisations not only in epistemological terms but also socially...an idea which is of course rather simple, but which like all great simple ideas, can only occur to a truly great mind. It is possible that this first attempt has led to some fields being incorrectly classified – but that can easily be put right with time. Now when the title of poet or philosopher is conferred on someone, a few ordinary historians, physicists, linguists and other scientists are identified who will be obliged to work under the direction of their superior or to prepare materials for him. Each historian, in turn, can call upon the services of several chronologists, philologist-antiquarians, geographers...and a physicist – a few chemists, mineralogists and other o-gists. Mineralogists and the like have under their management a few metallurgists and so on down to the simple copiers, laboratory assistants ...who carry out the simple rough experiments.

Everyone wins from this arrangement. Where one person does not have sufficient knowledge he can be supported by another and any given piece of research is carried out simultaneously from all the angles. Material work does not distract the poet from his inspiration, or the philosopher from his thinking. This unified direction of scientific activity has brought incredible fruits to society as a whole. Unexpected discoveries have been made and there has been an almost supernatural increase in effectiveness. The extraordinary successes of our patria in recent years have all been thanks to unification of the enterprise of science."

I thanked Mr. Khartin for his gracious help and sighed to myself, wondering when China might advance sufficiently for a similar system of scientific work to operate in our country.

Comments

The author of *The Last Man* {Mary Shelley pub. 1826 (John Kuti's note)} tried to describe the last epoch of the Earth but only in fact describes things which appeared not long after. This means that he (sic -JK) could already sense within himself the beginnings of things which would then be developed by people who came later. Few people can express what is going to be in the far future, but I am sure that anybody who can free himself from his present-day prejudices and preconceived opinions, and cut out all the thoughts and feelings which arise out of habit, upbringing and the obligations of daily life, his own and other people's passions and instead give his spirit its full instinctive freedom – then in his own train of thought he will find those thoughts and feelings which will be most influential in the coming age.

The story of nature is a catalogue of things which have been and those which will be in the

future. The story of mankind is a catalogue of things which have been and which will never return.

The first of these we need to know in order to create the science of futurology. And the second we need to know, so as not to take for living, things which are already dead.

Flying machines and their effects on society.

It is quite noticeable that everything that we call "conditions of living" relates to a defined space – and only to the surface. All the conditions of trade, manufacturing, accommodation and so on will be quite different in three dimensions. It can be argued that the continuation of our present way of life depends on some kind of wheel – which some unknown mechanic is now working on – a wheel which makes it possible to steer flying balloons. It would be fascinating to find out, when mankind starts to travel in the air, how trade, marriages, borders, home life, the law, the policing of crime and so on will be organised – in other words, how will society be structured? Note that flying machines, locomotives and all types of machine have an effect on the education of people just by their very existence – quite apart from the direct benefits that they bring to society. Firstly the manufacturers and craftspeople who make them need knowledge, and secondly, people who use them have to make an effort to understand them, in a way that is not necessary for a shovel or a crowbar.

Green people land a flying machine in London. Letters from the Moon.

A means has been found to travel to the moon. It is uninhabited and serves only as a source of raw materials for the Earth. This saves the Earth from perishing due to the weight of population and its demands. These expeditions are extraordinarily dangerous – even more dangerous than earlier expeditions around the Earth – and they are only attempted by the military. Travellers take various gases with them in order to create air – which is lacking on the Moon.

The period 4000 years from now.

Orly, the son of the Poet Orly cannot marry his sweetheart until he has made his name with some kind of discovery in some field of research. He chooses history – and his archeologist brings him a manuscript from 4000 years earlier, which nobody can decipher. His commentaries on the letter.

The Petersburg Letters

19th Century. 2000 years later The son of the Poet has to make a scientific discovery in order to be worthy of marriage. Just as in earlier times he would have been required to succeed in tournaments or in battle. In some ruins he finds a manuscript dating from some unknown period in the past. The Ordinary Philosopher working for the Poet father sends him to the Ordinary Archeologist of the Poet son. He travels to the other hemisphere in a tunnel which passes through the centre of the Earth. Then he can interpret the manuscript and recreate this unknown period from the past..

The son discovers that the manuscript shows that Russia was then only a part of the world, and did not cover the whole planet. People used writing to communicate in those times. They had to learn how to play music, and weren't able simply to read it at sight from birth.

The judges consider that the poet has not found the true meaning of the document and

simply imagined his interpretation of it. He may have read some names but that these are meaningless. The young poet despairs. He complains about the difficult times he has to live in, and writes to his sweetheart that people don't understand him. He asks whether she might agree to love him just as he is, rather than as a poet.

In the Petersburg letters (2000 years later). Humanity comes to understand that the natural human organism is not capable of doing everything that our intellectual development requires. That is to say, that it is not a suitable vehicle for mankind to achieve the goals which our intellectual activity can define. This impossibility of achieving our intellectual goals – the incompatibility of human means and human ambitions drives the whole human race into hopeless despondency. Mankind in general seems to be on its deathbed.

Also: nomadic life is organised as follows: youths and men live in the north, and the elderly and children are moved to the south.

There is no doubt that people will have found a way to change the climate of different areas, or at least improve them. Perhaps volcanoes on Kamchatka (on the south of the peninsula) could be used as constant boilers to heat the whole country.

Using different chemical elements in the soil, a means is found to heat and cool the atmosphere and to use the wind for air conditioning.

Petersburg at different times of day.

Clocks producing fragrances: cactus hour, violets, mignonette, jasmine, rose, heliotrope, carnation, musk, angelica, vinegar, ether; and rich people actually have flowering plants appear by the hour.

The refinement of phrenology allows hypocrisy and pretence to be eradicated. Everyone's character is visible in the shape of their heads and "les hommes le savent naturellement" {people know instinctively (French)}.

The increasing feeling of love towards mankind reaches the point that people cannot bear to witness tragedies. They are amazed at the idea that we can calmly look on another's misfortune just as we cannot comprehend the enjoyment of the ancients at watching gladiators.

The fashionable gymnastics of the time is done with flying machines and animal magnetism. It is a common amusement for people to magnetise each other. Magnetic sympathy and antipathy give rise to a new kinds of trend-setting. As nation states combine into one, so groups of individuals identify themselves in more emphatic ways. This is a result of their internal feelings of sympathy or antipathy which become evident under the effects of magnetism.

They are amazed that people dared to travel in steam engines and carriages – they think that only heroes would have ridden in them, and they conclude that people have become more cowardly than they were.

Books are invented that, using a machine, change the letters in several other books simultaneously.

There are machines for producing novels and drama.

...The time will come when books are written by telegraphic dispatch. It should be possible to write anything except perhaps tables, maps and some theses on loose leaf papers. Type setting will only be used for newspapers and business cards. Correspondence will be replaced by electrical conversations. Novels will survive, but not for long. They will be

replaced by theatre, and textbooks will be replaced by public lectures. There will be plenty of work for new scientific researchers. In the mornings to fly (there will be aircraft instead of horse-drawn carriages) to a dozen lectures, read twenty newspapers and as many pamphlets, quickly write a dozen pages and then hurry to the theatre. But the main task will be to train the intellect not to get tired. It will have to move instantaneously from one subject to another. They will need to sharpen their minds so that the most complex operations quickly become easy. A mathematical formula will be found that allows the reader to find exactly the page he needs in an enormous book and quickly calculate how many pages he can safely skip over.

You may say that this is just a dream. None of this is possible. But with the exception of aircraft, all of this is happening before our eyes. Each of us is already like that scientific researcher, and the method for speed reading as already been found – ask anyone you like. If I may make so bold. Non raultum sed multa {In a few there's a lot (Latin).} — otherwise life would be impossible.

Comparative statistics for Russia in 1900. Silk textiles have been replaced by silk from shells.

All our books have been eaten by insects or destroyed by chlorine (the composition of which has been lost) – in the northern climate books might be better preserved.

The English sell off their islands by public auction, and they are bought by Russia.

Notes

This utopia was not published during Odoevsky's life. Exerts from the second part were first published in the journal "Moskovskiy Hablyudnatel" 1835, part. 1, pages. 55-69 under the pseudonym "V. Bezglasniy" with the title "The Petersburg Letters"

Another segment was first published in the almanac of V. Vladislavlev "Utrennyaya Zarya" SPb 1840 pages. 307-352 under the name Prince V. Odoevsky, with the title "The Year 4338 The Petersburg Letters" We should note that V. Vladislavlev – the writer and officer of the gendarmes published his almanac with the powerful support of the head of the 3rd division Beckendorff.

In the Odoevsky archive we found two letters from Beckendorff to the writer with a clear statement that he would work to support Vladislavlev's publication. (?? ???, ????? ??., ?? N.1 per 14). It is significant that the writer, who always hid his identity under a pseudonym was obliged to sign with his full name in this almanac.

Other sections from the utopia come from the Odoevsky collection(OR GPB, no. 1, 13, 20, 23, 26, 31, 54, 55, 80, 92 and others.). The fullest version of the Utopia was published in 1926 in the publication "Ogonyok" under the title "Year 4338 a fantastic novel" edited and introduced by ?. V. Tsekhovitsker. Later it was published again in the single volume V. F. Odoevsky "Romantic Stories" publisher Priboy, 1929, with the same editor. There are few utopian works in Russian literature, thus the utopia of the writer and social activist V. F. Odoevsky is of particular interest. 1912 it rightly caught the attention of P. Sakulin ("Russkaya Ikariya", Sovremennik, 1912, vol. 12; "From the History of Russian Idealism", ?. 1913 vol. 1, part 2, pages 178-202).

Soviet researcher O. V. Tsekhovitsker did a lot of work on the Odoevsky archives in 1925–1926, to try to produce the fullest version of the utopia. For this purpose the many files of

the Odoevsky collection were examined, and he compared different versions of the letters, fragments of separate chapters, and the most interesting notes on the content of the utopia which were scattered among the papers without dates or being allocated to chapters.

Most of the notes were printed in the original manuscript except some parts which had been published in "Utrennyaya Zarya" in 1840 where the original handwritten version had not been preserved.

The author never finished the utopia, although Odoevsky returned to it throughout his life.

"The year 4338" is the third part of a planned trilogy: in the first part Odoevsky wanted to portray the period of Peter the Great, in the second his own times – the 1830s, and the third the 40th century.

The first part of the trilogy was probably not written at all, as there are no traces of it in the archives. The second and third have the common heading of "Petersburg Letters". With time, Odoevsky gave up on writing the entire trilogy and worked on the utopia as a stand-alone piece. He even prepared a foreword to it which was attached to the "Petersburg letters".

We can find in the utopia a particular kind of "Communism of Dining" which is a characteristic of the unusually wide-ranging interests of Odoevsky. He also wrote "Doctor Puff's lectures on cookery and home economics" which were placed in supplements to the "literary gazette" and the "Commentaries for housekeepers".

The historical perspective of Odoevsky, as can be seen from the notes in his archive, were based on the proposition that future history would be divided into the following periods: "antiquity – from the start of the world to the birth of Christ, middle – from the birth of Christ to the division of the Earth into China and Russia; and then from the division until the present" (?R GPB, Odoevsky collection, op N.1 per 26, L. 95).

Mesmeric experiments – Freidrich Anton Mesmer (1734–1815) — Austrian doctor, became famous for his experiments in curing diseases with the help of so-called "animal magnetism". This method contained rudiments of hypnotic suggestion, although the treatments suggested were largely ineffective tricks.

Darius I (the Great) 521 – 486 BC. ancient Persian ruler from the dynasty of the Achaemenids. He carried out reforms which strengthened the Persian state. Darius mounted an unsuccessful attack on the Scythians of the Black Sea and began a war with Greece.

????? (??. Solon the Athenian approx. 559 BC. an outstanding political figure and social reformer of ancient Athens.

Georges Cuvier (1769–1832) — a well known French naturalist and paleontologist who abandoned the metaphysical assumption that biological species were unchanging. In an attempt to explain the changes in fauna on Earth, he proposed a theory of geological catastrophes which, according to Engels, "was a revolution in words, and a reactionary act in practice". (F. Engels, *Dialectic of Nature*, 1952, page 9).

Herodotus, (approx. 484 – 428 BC.) ancient Greek scientist, called the "father of History". Author the "the History of the Greek Persian Wars" an especially significant work with a broad conception, masterful writing and an objective attitude towards non-Greek peoples. Some of the historical facts asserted by Herodotus have later been confirmed by archeological finds. With regard to the expedition of Darius against the Scythians, he describes the lives of the peoples of the southern Russian steppes, which has particular

value for the study of the ancient populations of southern Russia.

Caesar Claudius Nero (37–68 A. D. Roman emperor, who was known for his cruelty.

Galvanic lights – electric light (Galvanic current is an early name for electric current produced by chemical reactions).

Halley's Comet – named after the English astronomer and geophysicist Edmund Halley. (1656–1742). In 1718 the scientist discovered the phenomenon of the movement of stars, which until that time had been considered as fixed. Halley calculated the elements of the orbits of more than 20 comets – including the large comet of 1682 which is named after him, and demonstrated that it periodically returned to the sun. We note that Odoevsky was familiar with the story "Halley's Comet" by M. P. Pogodin, published in the "White Comet" almanac in 1833 Saint Petersburg.

Negotiations – these are diplomatic discussions.

Camera-Obscura – refers to a photographic camera.

"Petropol stands sleepily with its towers..." is from "the Vision of Murza" a poem by Derzhavin.