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PRINCE ALEXANDER KROPOTKIN: THE SORRY LOT OF A FAILED TALENT

Abstract

The article introduces documents from the State Archive of the Tomsk Region (GATO) to study little-known facts from the biography of the man, whose fate was to find his last refuge in the city of Tomsk. Prince Alexander Kropotkin, brother of the famous scientist and revolutionary anarchist, was exiled to Siberia for “disloyalty” in 1874 and placed under strict police surveillance. In 1882 he, his wife and their two children were transferred to Tomsk, where the Prince worked in local newspapers: “Siberia”, “Eastern Review”, and “The Tomsk Provincial Times”. On June 25, 1886, just before the end of his exile, having sent his wife and children to Central Russia, the Prince committed suicide. The article focuses on the last years of A. A. Kropotkin’s life. Documents from the GATO presented in the article have not been published previously. Kropotkin led a secluded and quiet life, engaging in natural studies and from time to time visiting other persons under surveillance, but mostly keeping himself to himself. George Kennan, an American journalist and traveler, who stayed in Tomsk in 1882, mentions in his memoirs “most delightful evenings” in “cozy little parlor” of Konstantin Staniukovich, who at the time was also in exile, “where we sometimes sat until long after midnight listening to duets sung by Miss Staniukovich and Prince Kropotkin; discussing Russian methods of government an the exile system.” Kennan found Alexander “a man of impetuous temperament, high standard of

honour, and great frankness and directness of speech.” He once told the American journalist: “I was exiled simply because I dared to think and to say what I thought, about things that happened around me, and because I was the brother of a man whom the Russian Government hated.” News from Tomsk came as a sudden blow for the Kropotkins in summer 1886. Knowing that Alexander’s exile was coming to an end in September 1886, his brother Pyotr thought he would come to him, but Alexander did not believe he would have been allowed to go abroad. In the years of exile brothers got almost no news of one another, there’s no mention of letters from Pyotr in the archival documents. After her husband’s death, Vera Sebastianovna (nee Berinda-Tchaikovskaya) left Russia and settled down with her children in the Kropotkins house in Harrow, Great Britain. She brought the brothers’ letters from the time of their youth, and Pyotr sorted them out and reread with much emotion. He was struck anew by the depth of Alexander’s thinking evident in him since his youth. Perhaps, it was this deep and early development that caused his skepticism. He lost his faith in things very early. Alexander Kropotkin’s place of burial remains unknown.

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Keywords

State Archive of the Tomsk Region, Tomsk, Prince Alexander A. Kropotkin, overt surveillance, disloyalty

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