

A PRISONER IN THE CAUCASUS

a narrative poem by Alexander Pushkin

DEDICATION TO N. N. RAYEVSKY¹

Accept it with a smile, my friend –
this offering of an imagination set free:
to you I've dedicated this exiled poet's song,
this work my empty time has moved me to create.

Blameless but comfortless, I faced destruction;
I heard my false accusers whispering on every side.
The cold dagger of betrayal was tearing me,
the burden of love's disillusion was crushing me.
But close to you I still found peace;
my heart had rest in our fond friendship;
the storms that raged above me lost their fury;
and in that quiet anchorage I praised the gods.

I was sad when we parted;
and as my thoughts turned to poetry
I recalled the Caucasus,
where grim Mount Beshtáu,² like an awesome hermit,
dominates with its five peaks
the villages³ and fields of the Circassians.
It became for me a new Parnassus, mount of inspiration.
I'll never forget its flinty summits,
its gushing springs, its parched heathlands,
its sultry wastes, that landscape
that made such a deep impression on the two of us –

where warlike raiders roam the hills
and a wild imagination
lies in ambush in the empty silence.

Yes, in this story you'll find, I hope,
memories of the days we so enjoyed,
you'll find clashing emotions,
familiar dreams, familiar sorrows,
and the private voice of my inner self.

We've taken different paths in life.
No sooner had your flower opened
in the gentle climate of your home
than, treasured child as you were,
you followed in the footsteps of your war-hero father
and proudly dashed away to fields of blood,
to hail of enemy fire.
The fatherland has taken you to its heart,
moved by your self-sacrifice,
and seeing in you the true beacon of its hopes.

I, early on, have come to know distress, faced persecution,
victim of slanderers and vindictive fools;
but, fortifying my heart
with independence and with patience,
I have been imperturbably awaiting better days,
looking to the successes of my friends
for my delight and consolation.

PART ONE

Circassia, a village: the menfolk were sitting at ease in their doorways. Born and bred in the Caucasus, they talked about the unrest and destruction of war, about the fineness of their horses, about the pleasures of their wild, free lives; and they exchanged memories of the past – the raids when they carried off before them, the tricks their clever chieftains used to play, the vicious thrusts their swords delivered, their deadly aim as marksmen, the villages they burned to ashes, and the gentle touch of the dark-eyed girls they took captive.

They chatted on in the stillness, while the moon floated aloft in the evening mist. Suddenly a mounted Circassian galloped up in front of them, dragging a young prisoner on a rope. 'A Russian – look!' cried the raider. The villagers quickly gathered round in an angry throng. But the prisoner lay cold and silent, with bloodied head, motionless like a corpse. He did not see the faces of his enemies; he did not hear their shouts and curses. A deathly coma cast its shadow on him, enveloping him with a baleful chill.

For hours the young prisoner lay in heavy stupor. Not till the midday sun shone cheerfully overhead did the life-force stir within him, and he gave a muffled groan. Warned by the sun's rays the poor fellow slowly raised himself up and looked feebly around . . . He saw the mountain massif towering inaccessibly above, eyrie of marauding tribes and rampart of free Circassia. The young man remembered: he was a prisoner – or was it just a horrifying nightmare? Then he heard the sudden clank of the chain round his legs. The dreadful sound told all. The scenery around grew dim. Goodbye to freedom, precious freedom! He was a slave.

He was lying behind some huts by a thorny hedge. The

Circassians were in the fields; there was no one on guard; in the empty village all was quiet. He could see the valley floor, deserted, stretched out before him like a green coverlet. Beyond, the hillsides rose in stages to a regular line of mountain peaks; and among them a lonely track lost itself in a forbidding remoteness. The young prisoner's heart was troubled by a heavy thought. . . . That distant road must lead to Russia – the land where his youthful fire had first blazed with self-confidence and unconcern; the land where he had experienced life's first thrills, where he had loved so much, where he had courted such dreadful anguish. Yes, it was there that he had let his turbulent life-style ruin his hopes, his pleasures, his desires, locking within his blighted heart the memory of better days.

[. . .]

He had put other folk, and society itself, to the test, and he had learned how much it cost to buy their fickleness. In hearts of friends he had found betrayal; in dreams of love he had found a mindless nightmare. He was sick of being the regular butt of idiots he had long despised, of foes who spoke with forked tongues, of dupes who would pass on any slander. So he had renounced society and befriended nature; he had left his home and rushed away to distant parts, in the cheerful company of freedom – or freedom's ghost.

Freedom! – the one thing he had cherished in an empty world. He had worn out his sensibility in fevered emotion; he had let himself grow cold to poetry and imagination; but his heart still stirred when he heard a freedom song. Freedom he had worshipped as an aloof deity, with the fervent prayer of a devotee.

Now all was over . . . Nowhere could he see anything on which to fix his hopes. His latest dreams – even they had deserted him. He was a slave. Resting his head on a stone he waited for the flame of his sorry life to go out with the last glow of sunset; he longed for the refuge of the grave.

The sun was already out of sight behind the mountains.

A loud hubbub started up in the distance. The folk were returning from their fields to the village, their gleaming harvest knives catching the fading light. As they arrived fires were lit in their houses, and gradually the raucous clamour died away. With nightfall a comfortable tranquillity enveloped the place. In the distance a mountain torrent showed white as it tumbled from a rocky precipice. The sleeping peaks of the Caucasus were wrapped in a blanket of cloud. . . .

But someone was coming in the moonlight, treading stealthily in the deep silence. Who was it? The Russian looked up. Before him stood a Circassian girl, a gentle greeting on her wordless lips. He stared at her without speaking; it was a delusion, he thought, a trick played by his exhausted senses. Just visible in the moonlight she smiled with compassion and reassurance. She crouched, and with a steady hand she held some cool kumis⁴ to his lips. But he ignored the healthgiving cup: his hungry soul caught the look in the young girl's eyes and the magic sound of her pleasant voice. He could not understand the foreign words, but her tender expression, her burning cheeks, her gentle voice – these all said 'Live on!', and the prisoner lived again. In response to her kindly prompting, he gathered his remaining strength, pulled himself up and slaked his aching thirst on the refreshing drink; then he lay back to rest the weight of his head once more upon the stones. But still he kept his clouded eyes on the Circassian girl, and for a long, long time she sat by him pensively. It was as though she wanted to comfort the prisoner with her silent presence. Every so often her mouth opened involuntarily as she tried to speak; then she would sigh, and more than once her eyes filled with tears.

Day followed day in blurred succession. The prisoner, still in chains, spent the whole time with the cattle in the mountains. In summer heat he took shelter in the moist coolness of a cave. When a crescent moon's silver light shone out beyond the dark mountains, the Circassian girl came by a shadowed

path and brought the prisoner wine, kumis, sweet-smelling honeycomb fresh from the hive, and millet-meal white like snow. She shared this secret supper with him; and resting her gentle eyes on him she talked away, blending her incomprehensible words with the language of eyes and hands. She sang him songs of the mountains too, and songs of happy Georgia; and she eagerly tried to memorise the foreign words he taught her.

It was the first time that the innocent young girl had known the joy of being in love. But the Russian had long ago lost the ecstasy of his younger days; he was unable to respond to a love that was childlike and openhearted – perhaps he was afraid to recall the image of a love he had forgotten.

It is but gradually that our youth fades and that we lose our capacity for love; we still from time to time surprise ourselves with an encounter that thrills us. But the vibrant sensation of our first love, the heavenly fire of its rapture – that is something that will never visit us again.

It seemed that the prisoner, bereft of hope, was getting used to his wretched existence. He tried to suppress deep within him both the anguish of captivity and the fire of defiance. As he picked his way among the gloomy crags in the chill of early morning he would fix his searching gaze on the distant massifs that showed grey and pink and deepest blue. What scenes of splendour! Mountain peaks, thrones of eternal snows, seemed to the eye like a motionless bank of clouds; and in their midst Mount Elbrus,⁵ huge and majestic, twin-headed colossus glistening with crown of ice, gleamed white in the azure sky.

Sometimes with dull persistent rumbling a peal of thunder would herald a storm; then the prisoner would love to sit motionless on the mountainside above the village, the storm clouds smouldering at his feet and the dust swirling up in spirals across the steppe. Deer sought shelter in terror among the rocks; eagles rose from their ledges and screeched high

aloft; the whinnying of Circassian horses and the lowing of cattle were drowned in the roar of the tempest . . . Then suddenly, amid lightning flashes, a cloudburst of rain and hail would unleash itself on the valleys. Torrents of rainwater streamed downhill, scouring the slopes and shifting primeval rocks. But the prisoner, alone on his mountain height, beyond thunder clouds and out of storm's reach, would await the return of sunlight and listen with strange enjoyment to the cataclysm's muffled reverberation.

It was the outlandish people of those parts that the European found most fascinating. The prisoner noted the religious beliefs of the mountain folk, their customs, and their upbringing; he liked the simplicity of their lives, their hospitality, their love of fighting, the speed and deftness of their movements, their lightness of foot, their strength of hand. For hours on end he would watch a lithe Circassian in shaggy cap and black felt cloak galloping on the wide steppe or through the hills – leaning forward in the saddle, his agile legs pressing down on the stirrups, at one with his steed, practising early for war.

He admired the elegance of the dress they wore for battle and for everyday. A Circassian is festooned with weaponry; he takes pride and comfort in it. He carries a harness, a handgun, a quiver, a Kubán-style⁶ bow, a lasso, a dagger, and a sabre – which he constantly keeps by him at work and at leisure. He carries everything lightly, never fumbles. On foot or on horseback, he is always the same, with the same indomitable, intrepid bearing. His prized possession is his mettlesome horse, reared among mountain herds, a terror to easy-going cossacks, but to him a loyal, longsuffering companion. With his horse the wily brigand lies in wait in cave or thick undergrowth; then, spying a traveller, he's off at once like an arrow from the blue; and in an instant a powerful throw decides the contest. Fair game! The trailing rope is already dragging the stranger into the mountain fastness. The

horse gallops on with all speed, full of fire and daring; he can make his way anywhere – through fen and forest, thicket, rock and gully. He leaves behind a trail of blood; his hoofbeats sound through the empty hills; ahead a foam-flecked torrent roars – he plunges into the seething flood; the traveller, thrown to the bottom, gulps in the turbid water, and fainting prays for death, sees death before him. . . . But the sturdy horse rushes straight through and hauls the man out on the spray-drenched bank.

Here's another of the Circassian's tricks. When the darkness of a moonless night shrouds the hills, he grasps a branched tree-trunk thrown down into the river by a storm; he fastens all his fighting gear – shield, cloak, cuirass, helmet, quiver and bow – to the boughs and age-old roots. Then, silent and untiring, he jumps down into the swift torrent behind it. The night is murky; the river roars; the powerful current bears him past lonely banks where cossacks stand guard on raised mounds leaning on their lances and peering at the dark-flowing stream – while the scoundrel's armoury, black against blackness, floats past them. What is he thinking about, that cossack? Is he remembering past battles, nights spent in the open on a field of death, regiments parading for a thanksgiving service, or the folks back home? Dangerous reminiscences! It's time to say goodbye to the free life of camp, to the family homestead, to the soft flowing Don, to wars and pretty girls. The hidden enemy has made fast to the bank; out comes an arrow from his quiver and – whoosh! – the cossack falls, the guardpost runs with blood.

Now picture our Circassian in the home where his ancestors have lived. Imagine him sitting there peacefully with his family, when weather is bad and embers are glowing in the hearth. A weary stranger rides up late from a trek across lonely mountains; he dismounts, comes in and seats himself nervously by the fire. Then the Circassian is the kindly host, rising courteously to greet the newcomer, and handing him a

fragrant cupful of best Georgian wine⁷ to cheer him. Later, beneath felt cloak still damp with rain, the traveller will enjoy a night's untroubled sleep in the smoky hut before moving on from the hospitable shelter of his lodging next morning.

Customarily, at the high feast of Bairam,⁸ a crowd of young Circassians will gather for a series of sporting contests. They'll undo their quivers-full of feathered arrows and shoot at the birds of prey up in the clouds. Then they'll form an impatient line at the top of a steep hillside and, at a given signal, bound down like deer, filling the valley with dust and the sound of running as their feet strike the earth in a friendly race.

But men that are born for war get tired of the monotony of peacetime, and often they mar the sporting activities of their freedom and leisure with crueller sports. Sometimes in the wild exuberance of Circassian festivities there'll be a menacing flash of swords, and the heads of slaves will tumble to the dust to the youngsters' rapturous applause.

The Russian witnessed these bloody entertainments with indifference. In earlier life he had himself been fond of daredevilry and had burned with thirst for bloodshed. Bound by a code of honour from which mercy was absent, he had been used to seeing death near at hand when, engaged in a duel, he had walked, cold and unmoved, to meet a challenger's bullet. Perhaps, as he stood deep in thought, he was remembering the time when he had himself taken part in rowdy festivities with a crowd of his friends . . . Was he regretting those bygone days and the disillusionment they had led to? Or was he fascinated to watch these fierce and uncomplicated pastimes and see his own past mirrored faithfully in the savage nation's lifestyle?

The drift of his innermost thoughts he hid in deep silence. He held his head high, and his looks betrayed nothing. The tough Circassians marvelled at his nonchalance and pluck; they spared him for his youth, and in whispered exchanges congratulated themselves on their prize.

PART TWO

The mountain girl had now come to experience an inner rapture, life's sweetest delight. Her eyes, ardent and innocent, expressed love and happiness. When in the darkness of night her companion, burning with passionate desire, kissed her with a silent kiss, she would forget the everyday world; she would say: 'Dear prisoner, brighten that sad look of yours; rest your head on my breast; forget about freedom and your homeland. I'm happy to hide here with you, away from everyone: my heart is yours to command. Make love to me. No one yet has kissed my eyelids. No young, dark-eyed Circassian has crept at dead of night to the bed where I sleep alone. They call me a heartless girl, beautiful but stubborn. I know what the future has in store for me: my father and fierce brother want to sell me for a sum of gold to someone I don't love in another village; but they'll give in to my entreaties; if not, I'll find a dagger or some poison. It's to you, to you only, that I'm drawn, by a wonderful force I can't understand. I love you, dear captive; you've overpowered my inmost being . . .'

He would look at the lovesick girl with silent pity, his mind full of heavy thoughts as he listened to her words of love. His self-control would falter, and the memories of past days would well up within him. Once large tears even rolled down from his eyes. The pain of love without hope lay in his heart like lead. At last he poured out his sorrows to the young girl:

'Forget me: I'm not worth your love, your devotion. You mustn't waste your precious days on me: encourage another young man. Let his love take the place of my cold and sorry feelings. He'll be faithful; he'll value your loveliness, the affectionate look in your eyes, the warmth of your youthful kisses, and the tenderness of your impassioned words. I have

no more rapture, no more desire; I shall fade away, victim of destructive passion. You see here the debris of unhappy love, the terrible wreckage of an inner tempest. Leave me alone; just pity this wretched fate of mine. My poor friend, why didn't you come into my life earlier – in the days when I still believed in my hopes and in the dreams that thrilled me? But it's too late: I'm dead to happiness; the spectre of those hopes has flown away. This friend of yours has lost the capacity for making love; to feelings of tenderness he reacts like stone.

'How terrible to respond to lively kisses with lips that are dead; and to meet eyes full of tears with a chilly smile! How terrible, when dozing numbly in the arms of a passionate lover, to be tormented by useless jealousy as one thinks of another woman! While you return my kisses so lingeringly, so tenderly, and find the hours of love passing so quickly and serenely, at the same time I am gulping back tears in the silence, distracted, miserable, seeing before me, as in a dream, the vision of someone I shall always love. I call to it, I struggle towards it – and meanwhile I say nothing, see nothing, hear nothing. I give myself to you in oblivion; it's the mysterious phantom that I embrace: that's what I shed tears for in the emptiness; it haunts me everywhere, bringing a sombre pain to my bereft soul.

'Just leave me my iron fetters, my lonely dreams, my memories, my sorrow and my tears: you cannot share them. You've heard my heart's confession. Forgive me . . . put your hand in mine – to say goodbye. The chill of separation won't trouble a woman's affections for long. Love will pass; she'll get restless; a pretty lass will fall in love again.'

The young girl sat with open mouth, sobbing without tears. Her downcast, motionless eyes expressed a silent protest. She trembled, pale as a ghost. Her cold hand still lay in the hand of her lover. At length the agony of love poured itself out in anguished words:

'Ah, Russian, Russian, why did I give myself up to you for

ever before I knew what you felt! It's not long I've been resting my dreaming head on your chest. It's not many nights of happiness fate has granted me. Will they ever come back again? Surely joy hasn't vanished for ever? I'm young, I'm inexperienced: if only from pity, prisoner, you could have kept the truth from me by staying silent, by pretending to be kind. I would have eased your predicament by whatever gentle attentions you needed. I would have protected you in your moments of sleep, while you rested, poor suffering friend. You didn't wish it . . .

'But who is she, this gorgeous creature you're so attached to? Do you love her, Russian? Does she love you? . . .

'I understand your pain . . . Please in your turn forgive my weeping. Don't laugh at my distress.'

She stopped talking. Sobs and groans convulsed the poor girl's breast. Her lips muttered wordless reproaches. Insensible, she clutched his knees, hardly able to breathe. The prisoner gently raised her up, distressed as she was, and said:

'Don't cry. Like you, I've been persecuted by fate and tormented by passion. No, I received no love in return; I loved alone, suffered alone. And like a smouldering ember I shall die away in oblivion, somewhere in these desolate valleys. I shall end my life far from the river banks I long for. This steppeland will be my grave; and here in exile this heavy chain will gather rust, still fastened to my bones . . .'

The stars of night grew dim; great mountain ranges, bright with snow, stood out in the distant radiance. The two of them, with bowed heads and downcast eyes, parted in silence.

From that time on the prisoner wandered near the village, alone and disconsolate. Dawn brought one new day after another to the sultry horizon; and night slipped away after night. He thirsted for freedom, to no avail. If a mountain goat darted momentarily between the bushes, or if a gazelle leapt through the shadows, he gave a start, making his chains clank. Then he would wait intently: perhaps it was a cossack

creeping up to raid the Circassian villages by night and bravely rescue any captives. He called out . . . but all around was silent; only the river splashed and roared; and the wild creature, scenting a human, bounded off into the empty darkness.

One day the Russian prisoner heard a warlike shout echoing through the mountains: 'To the horses! To the horses!' There was running and commotion, the jingle of copper bits, the black of felt cloaks, the gleam of weaponry. The saddled horses seethed; all the men of the village were ready to go raiding; and the fierce horde of born fighters streamed down from the hills like a river and galloped along the banks of the Kubán to exact the rewards of violence.

The village fell quiet. Guard dogs lay asleep by the huts in the sunshine. Naked, dark-skinned children played around, noisy and uncontrolled. Their great-grandfathers sat in a circle, blue smoke spiralling from their pipes. They were listening in silence as the young girls sang a refrain they knew well; and as they listened their old hearts grew young again.

The Circassian song

I

The mountain river's waters roar;
no human sound the nightwatch rouses.
A cossack sentry, tired of war,
leans on his steel-tipped lance and drowns.
'Cossack! The night is dark; don't dream –
a Chechen lurks across the stream.'

2

A cossack drifts in his canoe,
a fishnet through the water towing.
'Cossack! A watery death for you –
as children, in hot weather going

to paddle, fall and, drowning, scream.
A Chechen lurks across the stream.'

3

Along the hallowed river's strand
the cossack hamlets rich are growing;
light-hearted dancers kick the sand
and sing – 'But, cossack girls, get going;
yes, hurry homeward, pretty team:
a Chechen lurks across the stream.'

While the girls sang, the Russian sat on the river bank and dreamt of escape; but his prisoner's chain was heavy, and the river deep and fast-flowing . . .

Meanwhile, the steppe grew dark and slumbrous. Shadows enveloped the tops of the crags. The moon's wan light glimmered among the white huts of the village. Deer stood trancelike above the waters. The last late eagle's cry died away. The distant gallop of horses still echoed dully through the mountains.

Then he heard a noise: someone was coming. A girl's veil glimmered for a moment, and there, sad and pale, was *she*, quite near him. The lovely creature's lips were searching for words; her eyes were full of pain; and her hair fell in a black wave down onto her shoulders and breast. In one hand glistened a file, in the other an inlaid knife. It was as if she was on her way to some secret combat or martial exploit.

The mountain girl looked up at the prisoner. 'Escape,' she said. 'You won't meet a Circassian man anywhere. Hurry; you mustn't waste the hours of night. Take the knife: no one will track you in the dark.'

Holding the file in her trembling hand, she knelt at his feet. The iron screeched beneath the file; she shed a tear, she could not help it – and the chain fell apart with a clatter. 'You're free', she said. 'Make your escape!'

But her wild look expressed an upsurge of love. She was in anguish. A whistling gust of wind twisted aside her veil. 'My dear friend', he cried out, 'I belong to you for ever, I am yours till death. Let us leave this terrible country together; escape with me . . .'

'No, Russian, no! My enjoyment of life – it's finished. I've known all there is to know; I've known happiness. It's all passed now; there's nothing left, not a trace. It's no good: you have given your love to someone else . . . Find her, love her. Why should I now feel pain or grief? . . . Goodbye! The blessings of love will be with you each hour. Goodbye – forget my anguish. Give me your hand . . . for the last time.'

He held out his arms to the Circassian girl; life returned to his heart, and he rushed to her. With a long kiss of parting they set the seal on their mutual love. Then hand in hand, full of sadness, they quietly walked together to the river bank.

The Russian was already swimming through the deep currents that roared around him, turning the waves to foam as he went; he had already reached the rocks on the other side, was already clutching them . . . when suddenly he heard a dull splash in the water, and a distant cry. He climbed out onto the tangled bank and looked back. The farther shore was clear to see, white with spray; but there was no young Circassian girl, neither by the shore nor on the mountain slope. Everything was still as death . . . on the river's slumbering banks there was only the faint sound of a breeze, and on the splashing waters just a vanishing circle of ripples in the moonlight.

He understood it all. With a farewell glance he took in for the last time the empty village with its palisade; the fields where as prisoner he had looked after the cattle; the crags up which he had dragged his chains; and the stream where he had rested at noonday and heard the rough Circassians singing their songs of freedom in the hills.

The deep darkness was dispersing high above; daylight was

returning to the shadowed valley; the dawn had risen. The freed prisoner was striding along the distant path; in front of him Russian bayonets already glistened in the haze, and cossack sentries were calling to each other from their guardposts.

EPILOGUE

So the goddess who inspires me,
light-winged companion of my dreams,
has flown to the frontiers of Asia;
she has picked herself a garland
of wild Caucasian flowers.
Fascinated by the austere dress of the tribes there,
who live their lives at war,
she has often come to me, in her enchanting way,
in this new costume;
she has roamed the crags
around empty Circassian villages,
and eavesdropped on the songs
of the girls left behind there.
She has taken a liking too
to the war camps of the fearless cossacks,
their calls to arms, their watchposts,
their quiet graveyards,
and the restless neighing of their horses.

Patroness of poetry and storytelling,
with so much to remember –
perhaps next she will recount
grim legends of the Caucasus;
perhaps she will tell a tale of distant lands,
of the ancient duel of Mstislav,⁹
of how the Russians were betrayed and slaughtered
as they lay with vengeful Georgian girls.

And then I shall celebrate the glorious time
when our two-headed eagle,¹⁰ scenting bloody combat,
rose up high against the disaffected Caucasus,
when the roar of battle and the thunder of Russian drums
first broke out along the foam-flecked River Terek,
and our daring general Tsitsiánov,¹¹ head held high,
himself took part in the carnage;
I shall celebrate our hero Kotlyarévsky,¹²
scourge of the Caucasus:
wherever his thunderous presence loomed,
his coming, like the black death,
brought havoc and destruction to the mountain tribes . . .
Now he has put down his avenging sword,
he no longer takes pleasure in war;
tired of the world, overloaded with honours,
he is enjoying a peaceful leisure
in the quiet of the valleys of his home.
But after him – a deafening uproar in the East! . . .
at last it was time for the Caucasus
to bend its snowy head in self-abasement:
Yermólov¹³ was on the march!

Hushed now are the furious shouts of war:
all is in subjection to Russian arms.
The proud sons of the Caucasus fought on,
they suffered dreadful losses;
but nothing could save them –
not the carnage they inflicted on us,
not their fabled weaponry,
not their mountains, nor their spirited horses,
nor their devotion to an untamed freedom.
Like the Mongol hordes,
the mountain folk of the Caucasus
will not stay true to their ancestral ways:
they'll forget the call of hungry conflict
and put aside the arrows of war.

The traveller will ride without fear
 up to the mountain fastnesses where they used to lurk;
 and sombre tales will be told
 of how their murderous raids were punished.

TRAVELS IN THE CAUCASUS AND THE CRIMEA

I EXTRACT FROM A PRIVATE LETTER FROM
 ALEXANDER PUSHKIN TO HIS BROTHER LEV
 PUSHKIN OF 24TH SEPTEMBER 1820

....
 On my arrival in Yekaterinosláv, I had nothing to do, so I went boating on the Dnieper, took a bathe, and caught a fever – in my usual way. General Rayévsky,¹ who was travelling to the Caucasus with his son and two daughters, found me lodged in a poor Jewish home, delirious, without a doctor, behind a jug of iced lemonade. The General's son . . . suggested to me a journey to the Caucasian waters; the doctor who was travelling with them promised not to do me in on the way; Inzov² gave me his blessing and wished me a good trip. I lay in the carriage, I was so ill. After a week I recovered.

I stayed for two months in the Caucasus; the waters were very necessary for me, and helped me exceedingly, especially the hot sulphurous ones. As well, I bathed in the warm acid-sulphurous waters, and in the cold iron and cold acidic waters. All these medicinal springs are to be found at no great distance from each other, in the outermost foothills of the Caucasian mountains. I am sorry, my friend, that you were not with me to see that splendid range of mountains – their frozen peaks, which in the clear light of dawn look from a distance like strange clouds, varicoloured and stationary. I am sorry that you could not go up with me onto the