

The Anti-Tocqueville, or, an Introduction to the Work of Aleksei Evstaf'ev

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When the United States was founded, it started a debate over democracy that continues today. While many people today argue that democracy is the best system of government and hope for its spread around the world, not everyone has been convinced. This work discusses a previously unpublished manuscript by a nineteenth-century Russian diplomat to the United States that argues against American democracy and Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*. Consisting of a comparison between the autocracy of Russia, the constitutional monarchy of Great Britain, and the democracy of America, the book advocates for the middle term as the ideal system, combining the best of both worlds.

The author, Aleksei Evstaf'ev, has been forgotten by posterity, and only a few specialist publications in English and Russian have explored his writing, particularly around the War of 1812.¹ Born in Ukraine, then part of the Rus-

¹ N. N. Bolkhovitinov, *Stanovlenie russko-amerikanskikh otnoshenii, 1775–1815* (Moscow: Nauka, 1966); F. A. Golder, "The Russian Offer of Mediation in the War of 1812," *Political Science Quarterly* 31 (September 1916): 360–91; I. I. Kurilla, "'Velikaia respublika proveriaemaia prikosnoveniem istiny': Aleksei Evstaf'ev i pervyi opyt Rossiiskoi kontrpropagandy v SShA," *Americana* 14 (2014): 313–25; Kurilla, "'Russian Celebrations' and American Debates about Russia in 1813," *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* 44 (2016): 114–23; Kurilla, *Zakliatye druz'ia: Istoriiia mnenii, fantazii, kontaktov, vzaimo(ne)ponimaniia Rossi i SShA* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2018); Kurilla, "Debates about Russia, America, and New World Order: Four Books from the 1850s," *Vestnik Volgogradskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta. Seriiia 4* 26, 5 (2021): 225–31; V. N. Ponomarev, "Polveka za okeanom: Rossiiskii diplomat i literator Aleksei Evstaf'ev," *Amerikanskii ezhegodnik 1990* (Moscow, 1991): 191–205; Norman E. Saul, *Distant Friends: The United States and Russia, 1763–1867* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991); Daniel L. Schlafly, "The First Russian Diplomat in America: Andrei Dashkov on the New Republic," *Historian* 60, 1 (1997): 39–57; N. Suchugova, *Diplomaticheskaia missiia Dzhona Kuinsi Adamsa v Rossii v 1809–1814 godakh: Russko-amerikanske politicheskie i kul'turnye sviazi nachala XIX veka* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2007); Il'ya Vinitsky, "'Chelovek rasseiannyi': Alexis Eustaphie (1799–1857) kak natsional'nyi proekt,"

sian Empire, in 1783, Evstaf'ev studied at the Kharkiv Ecclesiastical Seminary, and in 1798 he was sent to London as a churchman (*tserkovnik*) for services in the church for the Russian ambassador. There he fell in love with England and an Englishwoman, Sarah, who he married in 1805. History has not recorded her maiden name. He became the first Russian or native of Ukraine to write in English, and published extensively on subjects related to Russia. This was during the Napoleonic Wars, in which Britain was engaged in a titanic struggle with Napoleonic France over who would control Europe. Russia played a crucial role in the wars and was allied at various times with France and Britain. This meant that Evstaf'ev had a ready audience for his works, which defended the Russian emperor, Alexander I, and his policies. In 1808, likely due to his proficiency in English, Evstaf'ev was named the Russian consul to Boston. There, he was a fixture of the literary scene, writing many plays that were staged there, and was closely connected to the Federalist Party, who believed that Britain was a model for the United States and that elites had an important role in leading society. However, with the loss of the national power of the Federalist Party in 1815 and his move to New York City in the late 1820s, Evstaf'ev lost his audience and sank into obscurity. He died in 1857 and is buried in Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn.²

The history of his manuscript, which he titled "The Great Republic Tested by the Touch of Truth," is not widely known. The copy found at the Manuscripts and Archives Division of the New York Public Library (NYPL) is dated 1852 and seems to be a draft. It takes the form of a small bound notebook and is 120 pages long and in relatively good condition. There was an effort by the NYPL in the 1920s to collect Russian-related sources, and it was likely donated by his American descendants at that time. It is possible that Evstaf'ev had earlier attempted to publish it, but found no takers. Its harsh criticism of democracy would have made it a difficult book to publish in America, while

Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie 130, 6 (2014), https://www.nlobooks.ru/magazines/novoe_literaturnoe_obozrenie/130_nlo_6_2014/article/11209/; William Benton Whisenhunt, "The Beginnings of Russian-American Diplomatic Relations," in *A Russian Paints America: The Travels of Pavel P. Svin'in, 1811–1813* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008), 12–23; Leo Wiener, "The First Russian Consul at Boston," *The Russian Review* 1 (April 1916): 131–40.

² I would like to thank my student Avery Jude Holbert from my History 401 seminar class at the College of Staten Island/CUNY that has worked on Evstaf'ev for several years now. Holbert discovered that Evstaf'ev's grave was in Green-Wood Cemetery. For the Federalists, see Mark Peterson, *The City-State of Boston: The Rise and Fall of an Atlantic Power, 1630–1865* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), chap. 8; on later Boston Federalists and their impact on American culture, see Marshall Foletta, *Coming to Terms with Democracy: Federalist Intellectuals and the Shaping of an American Culture* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001).

its focus on America would have made it of less interest to British publishers. It consists of a comparison of autocracy, constitutional monarchy, and democracy. It is clear from the start that Evstaf'ev sees constitutional monarchy as the ideal system of government, combining both tradition and innovation. He has but faint praise for autocracy and much criticism for democracy, unlike another author with a similar first name.

Tocqueville and *Democracy in America*

Alexis de Tocqueville was a French aristocrat whose family had suffered in the French Revolution and who had personally observed the instability of France, where revolutions and democracy regularly alternated with restorations of monarchy. How was it, he wondered, that the Americans were able to have one revolution and then stop? Why did American democracy also provide the stability of British constitutional monarchy? In 1830, after the most recent revolution in France led to the establishment of a new monarchy, Tocqueville found it would be useful if he could leave the country for a while. The excuse was to study the American prison system, which seemed to reform criminals more than the French one, where terrible conditions led to a revolving door on prisons for criminals.

In reality, though, Tocqueville sought to find the sources of social stability even under conditions of democracy. As an aristocrat, Tocqueville was not personally attracted to all aspects of democracy. However, he believed that it was the future of humanity and that France would need to adapt to democracy sooner rather than later. From May 1831 to February 1832, he and his friend Gustave de Beaumont undertook an extensive journey through the United States, spending time in New York and Philadelphia, but also in frontier towns like Green Bay, Wisconsin and in the South.³

Tocqueville found that American society was stable and would remain democratic for the foreseeable future due to its isolated geographic position, which protected it from invasion, the integrative function of the judicial branch, particularly the jury system, and the democratic mores or habits of the heart that had developed over time. He was impressed by the reality of popular sovereignty and the activity of numerous voluntary associations, which were the means by which individuals banded together in groups brought about changes in government and society. He noted that Americans believed in the idea of self-interest well understood, or that it was in an individual's personal and financial interest to help improve society as a whole. He also felt

³ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Letters from America*, ed. and trans. Frederick Brown (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

that religious freedom and pluralism were key aspects of American society and argued that separation between church and state strengthened both.

However, he and especially Beaumont were appalled by slavery and noted the gap between the ideals of democracy and the reality of American society. He developed the idea of the tyranny of the majority, which pointed out that because the majority determined the winners of elections, they could, if they so wished, exercise a nearly unlimited power over the minority. In addition, he worried that Americans would fall prey to individualism, a word he coined in French and that was introduced in English through the translation of this work. For him, individualism was a danger to democracy because it encouraged individuals to only care about themselves and to ignore and perhaps even attack the general good.

Tocqueville's work has been acclaimed for more than a century as an incisive introduction to American democracy. Generations of undergraduates have read it in college and have discussed the themes of the work. It made Tocqueville, only in his twenties when it was published, a major intellectual figure in France. Evstaf'ev's work did not share the same fate. Written by a forgotten figure, it has never been published before.

The Life of Evstaf'ev

Born in 1783, Evstaf'ev's ancestors were Don Cossacks, but he was a member of the clerical estate.⁴ After graduating from seminary, he was sent to London as a churchman, which included various clerical positions, usually filled by seminary students.⁵ While in London, he sang in the choir and began a life-long love of England and the English language.

While in England, Evstaf'ev began to make a name for himself as a man of letters. He was part of a wider group within the Russian consulate in London that particularly admired the works of some of the first major Russian poets, Mikhail Lomonosov and Alexander Sumarokov, and in 1807 Evstaf'ev published in *The Literary Panorama* an English translation of an article about Lomonosov that excised a section on the dislike between those two authors.⁶ In addition, he translated Karamzin's essay on books and reading in Russia, also for the same journal.⁷ Evstaf'ev's writing never lost the aspiration toward

⁴ Ponomarev, "Polveka za okeanom," 191.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Anthony Cross, "Russkoe posol'stvo v Londone i znakomstvo anglichan s Russkoi literaturoi v nachale XIX v.," in *Sravnitel'noe izuchenie literatur: Sbornik statei k 80-letiiu akademika M. P. Alekseeva* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1976), 99–107.

⁷ Ibid.

the sublime, modeled on Sumarokov's work, which strikes the modern reader as somewhat forced. Also in 1807, he published his first separate work, a pamphlet titled *Advantages of Russia in the Present Contest with France*, but it was his *A Key to the Recent Conduct of the Emperor of Russia*, published in 1808, which explained Alexander's treaty with Napoleon at Tilsit in the most favorable light, that provided him entry into a diplomatic career. As Anthony Cross has noted, "Instances of 'Russo-French' authors are not uncommon in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but Evstaf'ev is probably the first example of a 'Russo-English' author."⁸

In 1805, Evstaf'ev married his wife Sarah, who we know to be an Englishwoman due to a letter Evstaf'ev wrote her from Paris, dated 29 February 1808.⁹ We learn from the letter that he had unexpectedly been called to the Russian ambassador's residence in Paris and was not sure where he would be posted next. He felt that it was possible that she would have to join him in Russia. He wrote: "A messenger is going now to St. Petersburg, and the Embassadeur writes once more concerning my destiny and my translation of Playfair, which, it seems, has also been buried in oblivion; and I shall remain at Paris no longer than the return of post from Russia, which will be in a month at furthest. This short month will decide my fate; and you shall see me in London in less than six weeks, or hear that I am gone to Russia."¹⁰ He expected that Sarah would soon join him, writing "I shall embrace you with transport, for I can not live without you, indeed I can not. I have not felt, till now, how much your presence is connected with my happiness; and I have experienced, at length, that to fully appreciate our felicity we must part with it."¹¹ He referred to their common acquaintances in England and hoped that they would all be together again.

Instead, the rest of Evstaf'ev's life was to be connected to the United States of America. Still a new country, America was not yet a major player on the world scene, and Russian-American relations in the nineteenth century have been well characterized by Norman Saul as those of distant friends.¹² Key to the acceptance of the first American consul to Russia in 1803 was the personal relationship between Alexander I and Thomas Jefferson, sparked by the

⁸ A. G. Cross, *"By the Banks of the Thames": Russians in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Newtonville, MA: Oriental Research Partners, 1980), 56.

⁹ Ponomarev, "Polveka za okeanom," 195 n. 25; letter from Aleksei Evstaf'ev to his wife Sarah, 29 February 1808, A. G. Yevstafiev Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Saul, *Distant Friends*.

tsar's interest in constitutions early in his reign.¹³ In 1808, Andrei Dashkov and Evstaf'ev received instructions to set off for America.¹⁴ Evstaf'ev was the bearer of a letter, dated 3 October 1808, from the American ambassador to Russia at St. Petersburg, Levett Harris, to the American consul at London, suggesting he had indeed gone to Russia and then to London to prepare for his transfer to America.¹⁵ Once installed in Boston, Evstaf'ev became an active member of that town's vibrant social life. Although he complained repeatedly that his salary was not enough to allow him to support his family, he was able to stage his five-act tragedy, *Mazepa, Hetman of the Ukraine*, in March 1811, which only played for a few nights.¹⁶ In 1812, he published *Reflections, Notes, and Original Anecdotes, illustrating the Character of Peter the Great, to which is added a tragedy in five acts entitled "Alexis, the Czarewitz."* The history and play presented Peter as an ideal monarch, similar to his earlier portrait of Alexander I, and showed Peter as having to rise above his selfish love of his son in order to serve the greater good by having him killed.¹⁷

In 1812, Evstaf'ev became especially active in Boston society. In particular, he was closely associated with the Federalist Party, whose power base was in New England and whose conservative views coincided with many of Evstaf'ev's.¹⁸ The Federalists were unsupportive of the War of 1812, which pitted America against New England's main trading partner, Great Britain. Thus, the Federalists were very pleased to receive reports of Russian victories over Napoleon, Britain's enemy. In contrast, the Republican Party felt that Russia was aiding America's enemy, Britain, and also denied that the Russians were indeed capable of defeating Napoleon. In 1812, Evstaf'ev published *Resources of Russia in the Event of a War with France*, in which he argued that Russia's population (47 million) and resources, such as mines and weapon manufactories, were sufficient to defeat Napoleon.¹⁹

¹³ Whisenhunt, "Beginnings," 18.

¹⁴ Nina Bashkina et al., eds., *The United States and Russia: The Beginnings of Relations, 1765–1815* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1980), 523–26.

¹⁵ Bashkina, *The United States and Russia*, 542.

¹⁶ Ponomarev, "Polveka za okeanom," 194; Wiener, "First Russian Consul," 134.

¹⁷ Wiener, "First Russian Consul," 134–35.

¹⁸ Susan Smith-Peter, "The Russian Federalist Papers: Aleksei Evstaf'ev, the War of 1812, and Russian-American Relations," in *New Perspectives on Russian-American Relations*, ed. William Benton Whisenhunt and Norman Saul (New York: Routledge, 2016), 20–35.

¹⁹ Alexis Eustaphieve, *Resources of Russia in the Event of a War with France, with a Short Description of the Cozaks* (Boston, 1812). There was also a second edition published in Boston in 1813 to which was appended a sketch of the campaign in Russia. A third

The Federalists were extremely welcoming of the new Russian diplomats, conducting what amounted to a charm campaign.²⁰ The Federalists emerged as a party soon after the creation of the American government in 1789. Although George Washington technically was not a member, he did sympathize with it. The main leader and driving force behind the Federalists, however, was Alexander Hamilton, who pushed through an ambitious plan to have the federal government pay off the states' Revolutionary War debts and create a national bank. Under Hamilton, the Federalists stood for a strong central government and leader and a willingness to keep order internally, by force if necessary, as was the case during the 1794 Whiskey Rebellion. In addition, they were for good relations with Britain and suspicious at best of France.²¹

With Napoleon's rise to power in France, Europe was torn by a series of wars involving French expansion and Napoleon's attempt to conquer most of Europe. His main opponent throughout was Great Britain. The British entered into a series of alliances with various powers in order to combat Napoleon, whose ambitions threatened British dominance and the British Empire. The British also impressed American sailors into the British navy and took other acts that the Republicans in particular felt were hostile to American interests. As a result, on 18 June 1812, the United States declared war on Britain. The Federalists were dead set against the war from the start, given their pro-British orientation and distrust of France. This brought them even closer to the Russian diplomats, who felt that the Republicans were hostile to Russia, since that country was now allied with Britain.²²

One of the most striking examples of the rapport between the Federalists and Evstaf'ev took place on 25 March 1813, when nearly all the prominent Federalists of Massachusetts gathered together to celebrate the Russian victories, rejoice in the fall of Napoleon, and criticize the policies of the Republican administration.²³ While the administration had been blinded or seduced by France into "virtually co-operating in her schemes of Universal Domination," Russia "was the only remaining nation on the continent of Europe, on

edition was published in London in 1813. See Nikolai Bolkhovitinov, *The Beginnings of Russian-American Relations, 1775-1815* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 461 n. 28.

²⁰ Bashkina, *The United States and Russia*.

²¹ James M. Banner, Jr., *To the Hartford Convention: The Federalists and the Origins of Party Politics in Massachusetts, 1789-1815* (New York, 1970).

²² William Nagengast, "Moscow, the Stalingrad of 1812: American Reaction toward Napoleon's Retreat from Russia," *Russian Review* 8, 4 (1949): 302-12.

²³ Nagengast, "Moscow, the Stalingrad," 304-06; Bolkhovitinov, *Beginnings*, 343.

whom the hopes of the friends of civil liberty could repose."²⁴ Thus, France appeared as the false ally and Russia as the true friend of freedom and liberty. A speech by prominent Federalist Harrison Gray Otis was followed by a series of illuminated transparencies, beginning with an image of Alexander I in full uniform, with the inscription beneath: "Well, I will arm me, being thus forewarn'd / They shall have wars, and pay for their presumption." This line from Shakespeare's *Henry VI, Part III* follows directly after the quote, also from Henry VI, "Ha! Durst the traitor breathe out so proud words?" This suggests that the administration, or, at the very least, Napoleon, was a traitor to the lawful monarch.

Evstaf'ev's own speech emphasized similar themes of the legitimacy of Russian power and the illegitimacy of France's. According to Evstaf'ev, Alexander I "dwells on the memory of your Washington" and like him, and like Peter the Great, "aspires only to be the father of his country." While "conquests were made from time to time," they were always "dictated by necessity" rather than self-aggrandizement. Thus, Alexander I was not a danger to other countries, unlike France, which Evstaf'ev compared to a dangerous torrent destroying all in its path. Russia, in contrast, was "an extensive plain" whose wide river was only dangerous during storms but otherwise "spreads happiness and abundance through the regions its passes."²⁵ Overall, his message to the Federalists was simple: Russia defeated France but posed no danger to other states because it was not revolutionary and did not seek to overturn the order of things.

Evstaf'ev also gave a toast after his speech: "The Capital of Massachusetts—the first to resist aggression, and the last to remember an injury. May it ever in politics and morals be the leading star of America."²⁶ This was a not-too-hidden suggestion that the Federalist-dominated city of Boston should become the leading political light in America. While his speech as a whole had avoided criticism of the Madison administration, others certainly had not. The toast aligned Evstaf'ev with the Federalists in a way that President Madison found offensive. In a letter dated (14) 26 April 1813 to John Quincy Adams, then American ambassador to Russia, Madison's secretary of state, James Monroe, complained of Evstaf'ev's conduct, particularly as it came at a moment when Alexander I had offered to mediate between the United States and Great Britain. Monroe decried "the very improper conduct of the Russian Consul there, who placed himself in connection with the avowed opponents of the government in the attitude of direct variance with it. By his

²⁴ *The Weekly Messenger*, 2 April 1813, 1.

²⁵ *The Weekly Register* (Baltimore), 10 April 1813, 91.

²⁶ Bashkina, *The United States and Russia*, 954.

toast, in which he applauded in strong terms the conduct of those persons, he censured in terms equally strong the conduct of this government. I need not suggest to you the glaring impropriety of such conduct in the agent of a foreign power, whose duty it is to show respect to the government receiving and protecting him."²⁷

Evstaf'ev, in an earlier letter to Russian ambassador Andrei Dashkov, which was then sent to Monroe, had stated that he meant the toast as a compliment to his hosts and that "No offense, therefore, and no disrespect were or could have been intended towards the general government by my allusion to the politics and morals of Boston, when such politics and morals are only mentioned in connection with their past character, and qualified with a wish *that they may always be correct*, in other words, that they *may be such as they formerly were*."²⁸ Evstaf'ev thus restated his position rather than recanted. He refused to apologize, and indeed asserted that Boston, and thus the Federalist Party, was and had been correct.

This could have been the end of his political career, but Nikolai Kozlov, the Russian consul in Philadelphia, in a letter to Minister of Foreign Affairs Nikolai Rumiantsev, dated (19 April) 1 May 1813, argued that the Republicans seized upon the pretext of the toast as an excuse because they had already been irritated by articles written by Evstaf'ev that tore apart the "ridiculous and insulting" claims made by Republican newspapers. Because the articles were unsigned, "many others have been attributed to him without the least evidence." These articles, Kozlov said, were the real reason for the party's exasperation with Evstaf'ev, although they used the toast, in which "he indiscreetly wished for the success of the Federalist Party" as a pretext. Kozlov himself was clearly irritated with the Republicans and sympathized with the Federalist views of Evstaf'ev, writing that "Mr. Evstaf'ev is considered a Federalist here; but just as it is impossible to show that he has taken part in American affairs, they are not subject to the inquiry of the American Government, which does not have the least right to force either a foreign consul or one of its own citizens to change his mind. On the contrary, we have many reasons to complain about the insolence of the editors of American newspapers, which frequently are full of calumnies concerning Russia and her government."²⁹ Similarly, Russian ambassador to the United States Andrei Dashkov wrote to Rumiantsev from Washington, DC on 19 June/1 July 1813, stating that while Evstaf'ev's toast was "a little pretentious to be true," the real reason the Re-

²⁷ Ibid., 958.

²⁸ Ibid., 953.

²⁹ Ibid., 962.

publicans complained was that “they decided to revenge themselves upon our Consul for want of the means to revenge themselves upon the Federalists.”³⁰

Dashkov prevailed upon Monroe to not officially complain about Evstaf’ev by withdrawing a possible complaint of his own against Republican journalist William Duane. “I learned of it by chance,” Dashkov wrote of the threatened complaint, “and it was to appease me with regard to an indecent publication against Russia made by an adjutant-general of the United States who is also the editor of a gazette (Duane), that they desisted from this step.”³¹ Duane’s Republican newspaper, the Philadelphia *Aurora*, had published many intensely anti-Russian articles, including one that argued Russia would soon be defeated “and will undergo *partition*.”³² The newspaper that carried the news of the celebration of Russian victories, *The Weekly Messenger*, had publicly battled with Duane many times, arguing that the Russian army was indeed capable of defeating Napoleon.³³ Thus, the toast was part of a larger partisan struggle that Evstaf’ev took part in by publishing unsigned articles against Republican criticisms of Russia.

Evstaf’ev was never happier than in the midst of a stiff fight. However, it was his fate to outlive by decades the party that he had so identified with. In 1815, the Federalists gathered at the Hartford Convention. Although they did not actually vote to have New England secede from the Union, the slander stuck and the party ceased to be a force in national politics, although they remained important in New England politics in the 1820s.³⁴ Having lost his audience, Evstaf’ev still continued to attempt to publish widely in Boston periodicals, but was so mocked that he fell silent.³⁵ In 1827, he became Russian consul in New York.³⁶

Evstaf’ev was thus in New York City during the time that Tocqueville visited in 1831. Given that Tocqueville’s visit was noted in the newspapers and was the topic of much discussion, it is possible that Evstaf’ev was aware of it and then read the volumes that appeared in 1835 and 1840.³⁷ It is even possi-

³⁰ Ibid., 980.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Bolkhovitinov, *Beginnings*, 340.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Banner, *To the Hartford Convention*.

³⁵ Wiener, “First Russian Consul,” 138–39.

³⁶ Vinitsky, “Chelovek rasseiannyi,” https://www.nlobooks.ru/magazines/novoe_literaturnoe_obozrenie/130_nlo_6_2014/article/11209/.

³⁷ Tocqueville, *Letters from America*.

ble that Evstaf'ev met Tocqueville at some official function, as the former was still consul at the time. So far, no proof of a meeting has been found, however. Unlike Tocqueville, Evstaf'ev was unable to publish his work at all.

Despite the harsh criticism Evstaf'ev meted out to America, his son became an American citizen and later was a prominent citizen of Buffalo, New York. Evstaf'ev published a booklet on homeopathy in 1837 and 1846.³⁸ An account from the Homeopathic Medical Society of the County of New York suggests that after 1835 Evstaf'ev may have primarily occupied himself with homeopathy: "His official position, which was honorable, did not fully occupy his time, so he was a frequent attendant at the dispensary and took much interest in the cases treated."³⁹ He died in 1857 and was buried in Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn.

Evstaf'ev and "The Great Republic Tested by the Touch of Truth"

Consisting of nine chapters, Evstaf'ev's main work, "The Great Republic Tested by the Touch of Truth," provides a comparison of Russia, America, and Great Britain. Russia and America are shown as the extremes of autocracy and democracy, while Britain holds what for Evstaf'ev is the happy medium of constitutional monarchy.⁴⁰ A great believer in monarchy and aristocracy, Evstaf'ev felt that Britain's government greatly benefited from the union of these forces of legitimacy, tradition, and innovation when needed. Implied within the work is a critique of Russian aristocracy for its lack of leadership in politics and the economy. Much of the work consists of a critique of the politics and society of the United States, focusing on such topics as the rule of the majority as a legalized mob, the fallibility of juries, and the political party system as a source of social tension. At first glance it seems a wholesale rejection of the entire American project; however, a closer look suggests that it takes part in the long American tradition of political critique as an argument that present conditions fall short of the vision of the Founding Fathers.

Evstaf'ev had a great deal of love and admiration for Great Britain. He argued that Britain was the source of America's greatness and that the rest of the world would do better to go directly to the source rather than to what he saw as a less-successful imitation. At the outset of "The Great Republic," he writes: "It has been long with me a maxim, that the three familiar elements

³⁸ Wiener, "First Russian Consul," 140.

³⁹ B. F. Joslin, "Inaugural Address," *The North American Journal of Homeopathy* 23 (May 1875): 431.

⁴⁰ "The Great Republic Tested by the Touch of Truth," A. G. Yevstafiev Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

of the glorious British Constitution, said to have been first revealed in the Lycurgus-Spartan Code present the integer of Governmental Power the *Despotic, limited* and *popular*, as imaged forth in *Russia, England*, and the transatlantic new *Republic* of the United States. England, the happy medium between the two, is indisputably superior to both.⁴¹ Similarly, he states that America “is decked out in a most attractive guise by the Utopian Tocquevilles of the day, whom the least semblance of their *beau ideal* cheats into false estimates, and sends to the Far West for pearls and gems, which, genuine withal, are at their elbow in old England. No wonder, they on their return, themselves deceived, pass on their countrymen the half-fledged rooster for a bird of paradise, or the sorry Jackdaw tricked in borrowed plumes, for a majestic Eagle!”⁴²

However, like Tocqueville, Evstaf’ev criticized American government for the power of the majority, which Tocqueville warned could manifest as a tyranny of the majority. Evstaf’ev rejected “the prevailing notion that the federal American, like that of England, is a government of checks and balances; whereas it simply is Government of majority, making laws, passing by them, or unmaking them, just as it suits its interest or pleasure.”⁴³ Thus, without the cool and reflective voices of an aristocracy, America had fallen into the grasp of the hotheads that the Federalists themselves had warned against.

Evstaf’ev stated that

[t]he constitution of the United States is confessedly on the English model, the *President* replacing the *King*, the *Senate* the *House of Lords* and the *house of representatives* the *house of commons*. At the first glance the one, with a mere change of names, appears a faithful copy of the other; yet upon a nearer view it will be found that “the rose” does not always “smell as sweet under another name,” and that the change of names in the present instance is a substantial change from *obsolete fixtures* to constantly *advancing improvements*, according to the ever-boasting Americans, and from *positive good* to *positive evil*, according to my own deduction. Both superstructures are apparently supported by the same number of columns and there again rest on the same foundation; but all identity is limited to the popular branch of *representatives* and *commons*. All else is a deliberate, and, I must say, presumptuous deviation.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Ibid., 2.

⁴² Ibid., 10.

⁴³ Ibid., 15.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 40.

Evstaf'ev particularly rejected the extension of democracy in the first half of the nineteenth century to white men without property, something the British would not accept fully until 1918. For Evstaf'ev, the United States was dangerously overstretched, both geographically and politically, and on the verge of collapse.

He also emphasized the need for a strong central authority. Evstaf'ev noted: "By the simple but happy fiction that 'the King can do no wrong' he is kept at an immeasurable distance from all party conflicts, and can only be *the Ruler*, never *Partisan* if even so inclined. Hence social order, peace and harmony are never marred by those discordant elements which are ever at work in all elective governments His person is sacred, inviolate. He is the splendid abstract of his nation, the Unit wherein her prosperity, refinement, grandeur, dignity, and ornamental parts of character are all concentrated, and all faithfully reflected."⁴⁵

At first, Evstaf'ev argued that republics could not be long lasting because they went against nature. He asked, "Now, who has ever heard of Nature building up Republics? Echo says Who?—and there the question rests. Who, on the contrary, has ever heard of one of her communities without a chief assigned to it and armed by her with corresponding powers?... Her animated kingdom of birds, insects, quadrupeds, and all gregarious creatures, man apart, is spread over the Earth; yet nowhere do we see a bevy of self-constituted sovereigns, each individual pretending to be one, endowed with the ability to rule themselves at their own will and pleasure, independent of some special chief-presiding Power."⁴⁶ This radical Republicanism was a danger to the continuation of the United States, although in other places he seems to suggest that a republic with a properly constituted elite might be able to survive. He wrote, "a Republic, so expanded must needs *fail*, as it has always failed, because it dreams that *man* is made for *government*, not *government* for *man*, and rests itself on his *perfectibility*, not as he *is*, but as he *ought to be*, a fatal error!"⁴⁷ The key phrase here is "so expanded," as it suggests that the danger came from sharing too much power with too many people. It also draws upon a longstanding debate over whether a republic could only exist in a small country, such as Switzerland. The western expansion of the United States, for Evstaf'ev, meant that the country was becoming too large to succeed.

He drew upon Russian history, specifically Nikolai Karamzin's conservative history that saw the monarchs as the necessary centralizers of the Russian nation, to claim that republics were doomed to failure. Evstaf'ev wrote,

⁴⁵ Ibid., 41.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 69.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 77.

"It is no fault of mine that they remember to forget that Russians, the supposed bayonet-driven slaves, had a republic of their own, and were familiar with its gifts much earlier than any other people in the East and North of Europe. Their truly celebrated 'great Novgorod' whose *motto* was '*Against God and great Novgorod Who?*' was a giant republic, voluntarily and by unanimous consent, relinquished and exchanged for monarchy, in consequence of its unwieldiness."⁴⁸

In "The Great Republic," Evstaf'ev wrote of the United States: "Theirs is indeed a genuine republic, the true popular Self-Government, such as was always aimed at, but never before accomplished. It is the *first* deserving of the name, and for this very cause, the *last* that, should it fail, will have been tried. Such, it appears, to have been the impression of General Washington himself, according to the testimony of two *aids* who were his favorites and intimates of his family. Both these distinguished officers (generals) had assured me that the 'Father of his Country' had no faith in the stability of a republic, and rather thought that he would serve his country better by accepting than refusing the supreme Authority; but as, on one hand, his motives would be misunderstood, and placed to the account of personal ambition; and, on the other, the characteristics of Americans offered the best materials to build upon, he owed it to the world at large to aid in the experiment decisive of the merits and whole question with respect to governments republican in form and practice."⁴⁹ This statement has no basis in fact and is likely the wishful thinking of Evstaf'ev.

It is telling that Evstaf'ev makes George Washington his source of authority, as it suggests some of Evstaf'ev's own conflicted feelings about the matter. Washington, although technically nonpartisan, was known as a Federalist. This section is the most hopeful in the manuscript about the chances of success for the United States, and can be read as an expression of Evstaf'ev's continuing sense of loyalty to the Federalists. Similarly, he wrote, "In the early days of this famed Republic, the auspicious days of all republics, talent, honesty and education were, no doubt, essential requisites in the election of her Presidents, but of these days there soon will be left nothing but the memory."⁵⁰

However, Evstaf'ev did admit that the Constitution had created a confederated republic that had shown itself to be more stable than he had expected: "The framers of the Constitution of the States were certainly no ordinary men. Fully aware of its want of the intermediate support, they did their utmost to supply it. Aristocracy, in any shape and guise, which, aided by slave-ownership might have been molded into something of the kind, being forbidden *a*

⁴⁸ Ibid., 113.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 17.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 43.

priori, they bethought themselves of a continuous massive colonnade, which, as a pledge of lateral security, is certainly a novel feature in the various forms, devised as yet of social many-headed structure. Under the imposing name of *confederation* it forms a chain of States, and thus imparts to the Republic what has never yet been realized—the power and capacity of long duration and unlimited extension. Nevertheless, it is inadequate, in serious cases, to fill up the void left by the absence of the heart.”⁵¹ By this he meant that America lacked a central authority figure beloved by all, as he believed the monarch to be. The lack of a universally accepted leader would mean that the states would find it difficult to settle their differences at the national level. Given that he was writing a few years before the outbreak of the Civil War, he was not completely wrong.

Evstaf'ev attacked the idea of equality head on, writing, “There never was a graver falsehood, more solemnly uttered, than what is contained in the words ‘Men are created equal!’ Equal in what? Health, strength and beauty? Every face and form we meet proclaim the contrary.... The constant outcry of the poor against the rich is a sufficient negative. It will not do for Fourierism to argue that all this is owing to the bad and vitiated state of the existing Social System; for, if a colony of penniless adventurers be planted on a desert island, the land divided equally between them, and each furnished with the same facility of cultivation, in less than a year after, some of them will be found poor, some rich, and some one Master of the rest!”⁵²

For Evstaf'ev, hierarchy was part of nature and therefore could not be avoided:

Nature and Nature's God never intended to create “men equal” and by so serious a mistake, remove all necessity for mutual assistance and supply of wants, break the mysterious tie that binds and holds society together. Equality here contemplated, is at war with *Socialism* itself, which is at once its type and Phantom. There certainly is an equality quite practicable and most beneficial, but it has no connection with the birth of man. It is that law—equality in the administration of both criminal and civil justice, which is found in England, and *there only*, the United States having no more of it than any other nation they are in the habit of reproaching on that score.⁵³

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 58.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 58–59.

Evstaf'ev feared that a lack of hierarchy would have an atomizing effect, resulting in the lack of ties between individuals and potentially leading to the destruction of society itself.

The comparison of *Democracy in America* and *The Great Republic Tested by the Touch of Truth* is fruitful because while the texts begin at different starting places, they come to some similar conclusions. They both note the danger of the tyranny of the majority. They both feel that the elites of society should have a great deal of influence.

The contrast is also quite useful, as Tocqueville is willing to grant that people are capable of self-improvement, while Evstaf'ev considers people to be naturally bad and therefore in need of control from above. Tocqueville believes in equality, while Evstaf'ev sees the concept as against morality and religion. Tocqueville, however, had noted that equality supported morality, especially in relations between men and women. The wide and complementary range of themes available in the two works makes reading them both exceptionally fruitful.