

**HISTORICAL MEMOIRS OF
THE EMPEROR
ALEXANDER I. AND
THE COURT OF RUSSIA**

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Historical Memoirs of the Emperor Alexander I. And the Court of Russia by Sophie de Choiseul-Gouffier & Mary Berenice Patterson

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SOPHIE DE CHOISEUL-GOUFFIER & MARY BERENICE PATTERSON

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OF THE
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ALEXANDRE I.

Historical Memoirs
OF THE
Emperor Alexander I.
AND
The Court of Russia

BY
MADAME LA COMTESSE DE CHOISEUL-GOUFFIER

Translated from the Original French

BY MARY BERENICE PATTERSON

With an Introduction and Notes



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Introductory Note

TO THE AMERICAN TRANSLATION

THE Comtesse de Choiseul-Gouffier, *née* Comtesse de Tisenhaus, was born at Vilna, in Russian Poland, in the closing decade of the eighteenth century. Her father was a wealthy landed proprietor of Polish descent. Of the family history of the Comtesse de Tisenhaus we know but little apart from what these pages reveal to us. Her family had been intimate in the court circles of Catherine II. and Paul I.; and Alexander I., upon his accession to the throne of Russia, continued to honor the Comte de Tisenhaus with his friendship. However, the comte shared the hope of a large number of his countrymen that Napoleon would recognize the rights of Poland and give it once more an independent, united national existence. To this end a delegation of Polish nobles waited on Napoleon at Vilna, on the twenty-eighth of June, 1812. He showed them but scant courtesy, and gave them no hope that he would aid in the realization of their wishes. Nevertheless, the Poles continued to look to Bonaparte as their only friend. It is stated on undoubted authority that besides the sixty thousand Poles in the French army a hundred thousand implored permission to raise the standard

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of independence and garrison Poland as the outpost of Europe against Russian aggression.¹ Among those who thus deserted the Russian emperor was the Comte de Tisenhaus. In this juncture it fell to the lot of the author of these Memoirs to preserve the family estates from sequestration. The comtesse, up to the time of her first meeting with Alexander, shared her father's distrust of the czar; but after meeting him, she, in common with many others, was impressed with Alexander's frankness, energy, and nobility of character. This impression, upon a more extended and more intimate acquaintance, deepened into a loyal and devoted friendship on the part of the subject, which was returned by the emperor. Refined and delicate sympathy, combined with a singularly engaging and open mind and a respectful admiration of the personal qualities of Alexander, gave to the friendship of Comtesse de Tisenhaus the qualities most valued by the czar.

The political intrigues between Napoleon and the Poles, and especially the requirement on the part of Bonaparte that Alexander should carry out the Continental blockade against England, from which Russia was suffering grievously, caused Alexander to terminate the peace which had existed between Russia and France since the signing of the treaty of Tilsit, July seventh, 1807.¹ To this end he massed his troops on the western border of Russian Poland in March, 1812, and made his headquarters at Towiany. Here, on April twenty-seventh, Mlle. de Tisenhaus

¹ Russia. Morfill.

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first met Alexander; and the volume before us tells us the story of the friendship that existed between them until his death at Taganrog, December first, 1825.

The comtesse married the French gentleman, M. de Choiseul-Gouffier, and resided thenceforth in Paris. This gentleman belonged to one of the first families of France. His youth had been passed in various European capitals, where his father, Comte Marie-Gabriel-Florens-Auguste-de-Choiseul-Gouffier, had held important positions; notably that of ambassador to Constantinople, where he had successfully established the influence of France. While there the comte declined the office of ambassador to the Court of St. James, preferring to remain at Constantinople. At the outbreak of the Revolution he adhered to the king, and was proscribed by the revolutionary government. He retired to Russia, where he was a favorite with Paul I., who nominated him as Privy Councillor and Director of the Académie des Beaux Arts, and of the Bibliothèque Impériale. The comte returned to France in 1802, and after the restoration Louis XVIII. appointed him Minister of State and Peer of the Realm. Notwithstanding the busy life he had lived, the comte found opportunities for exercising his literary tastes, and is remembered as the author of several important treatises; among others a magnificent work entitled "A Picturesque Journey in Greece," elegantly illustrated, which won him an election to the Academy of Inscriptions and the French Academy.

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A book, as well as a person, has a history, and it is only to be regretted that the first has no means of telling its story. We may imagine what obstacles it encountered before it became a book and entered its own world; what vicissitudes it passed through in that world; how by some it was valued, and by others laid on a dark shelf to be covered by dust till, perchance, a stranger greeted it and recognized its value, or picked it up only to cast it into some other corner. So this volume has had its history. Three years after the death of Alexander, Mme. de Choiseul-Gouffier published in Paris her "*Mémoires Historiques sur l'Empereur Alexandre et la Cour de Russie.*" From the date of its publication this work was recognized as an authority on the life of Alexander I., and as a source of reliable and valuable information on the conditions and customs prevailing in Russia at the time of Napoleon's invasion. It was also prized for its descriptions of St. Petersburg and Csarzko-Sélo.

It was not long until the edition was exhausted; but before that time arrived historical and biographical writers had made copious extracts from the book, and had even based their articles on the facts therein contained. Among others, M. de Lamartine drew from it liberally in his "*Histoire de Russie.*" M. Dumas owed his indebtedness to it in his "*Maitre d'Armes.*" Not only did students of Russia and her affairs turn to the pages of the Souvenir, but readers eager for every detail of information about Napoleon and his ill-fated campaign welcomed