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Memoirs of a Revolutionist by P. A. Kropotkin; Nicolas Walter

Review by: A. V. Knowles

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He accompanied the Emir of Bukhara on his state visit to St Petersburg in 1906. During the first Balkan war Kalmykow was Russian consul general in Uskub. When the Turks abandoned the city he took over the administration, and was instrumental in preventing a massacre of the Christian population by the aroused Muslims. For his courage in handling a dangerous situation he was decorated by both the Russian and the French governments, and on his return to Moscow enjoyed a brief hour of fame.

Kalmykow, a liberal of the increasingly rare non-doctrinaire variety, recounts these events with modesty, a quiet humour, and an absence of rancour. The many prominent figures he met are described with deft touches. We see Stolypin at a state dinner sitting 'calm and haughty among the members of his cabinet' with 'a kind of cold, disdainful challenge in his eyes'. We see the mild-mannered Tsar Nicholas II assuming 'an expression of strained dignity' when he walked in official processions, 'like a living symbol of Russian autocracy'; the impressive and resourceful Abdul Ahad, Emir of Bukhara, unexpectedly taken aback by a polite enquiry from the empress as to the number of his daughters; I. D. Delyanov, minister of education, 'a small, sly Armenian with a bald, oval head, a banana-like nose, and a protruding abdomen'. Many other prominent figures appear briefly in these pages, from statesmen such as Izvolsky and Sazonov to Tolstoy and Gor'ky.

Although useful to students of Russian diplomatic history, Kalmykow's memoirs will not lead to a revision of views on historical events and figures. Their chief value lies rather in their power to add a sense of reality and immediacy to cold facts and names, to bring to vivid life a vanished age.

London

D. S. M. WILLIAMS

Kropotkin, P. A. *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*. Edited with introduction and notes by Nicolas Walter, Dover Publications Inc., New York, 1971. xxxiv + 557 pp. Plates. Index.

INTEREST in anarchy and in Kropotkin, the leading anarchist theoretician of his day, is reviving. A reliable biography of Kropotkin is still lacking, although *The Anarchist Prince* by Woodcock and Avakumović has recently been reprinted in the USA (Schocken, 1971). However, Kropotkin's own works are better served and most of them are readily (if not cheaply) available; many of them are being reprinted, for example, *The Great French Revolution* (Orbach and Chambers), *Mutual Aid* and *The Conquest of Bread* (both Allen Lane). Perhaps soon a new edition will be made of his imaginative *Ideals and Realities in Russian Literature*. However, Nicolas Walter's edition of his most famous work, an unabridged re-publication of the edition by Houghton Mifflin and Co., New York, 1899, supersedes that by Doubleday (1962) with an introduction and notes by J. A. Rogers, and, like it, contains any new information or opinion in the notes.

A new edition of the *Memoirs* always poses a problem because of the manner in which it was composed. Parts, written in English, were first

published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1898 and 1899, and then a longer edition appeared as a book both here and in the USA in 1899 with an introduction by Georg Brandes (which is reproduced here, but not in the Rogers edition). The various Russian editions from 1906 to 1929 are a translation of the English version of 1902, including varying amounts of Kropotkin's own alterations and additions written in Russian. The *Academia* edition of 1933 was taken from Kropotkin's manuscript written in Russian, and subsequent Soviet editions follow this. The idea of both Rogers and Walter to fill out and correct the book through the notes seems to me the best approach, and although generally it is no disadvantage if notes are assembled at the end of a book, it would have been better in this instance if at least the changes (and variants) made by Kropotkin himself could have appeared as footnotes.

However, Walter has provided an interesting and competent introduction, paying more attention to the period of Kropotkin's life (1886–1921) which is not covered by the *Memoirs*, which are left to speak more or less for themselves. Walter rightly points out that Kropotkin is remarkably reticent in some respects—not only about his personal life (and surely there are aspects of it other than sexual matters to which Walter might have referred; and being reticent on this subject is not necessarily 'typical nineteenth-century puritanism') but also about some of the people and events that fill the pages. This warning is particularly valuable in connection with Kropotkin's involvement with the activities of the Chaykovsky Circle in St Petersburg in 1872–4, where Kropotkin, if not actually playing down his own rôle, certainly understates the arguments that went on during the Circle's meetings, most of which were occasioned by Kropotkin's own rather more activist views. Perhaps, as Walter implies, Kropotkin was too much of a gentleman to wish to open up old wounds, or to create new ones. One does wonder though whether Walter's dubious statements in the last few lines of the introduction might well have been omitted.

The notes are extensive and informative, and there is an adequate index. The *Memoirs* themselves, covering Kropotkin's childhood, his time in the Corps de Cadets, his geographical expeditions, his growing political awareness, his first visits abroad, his revolutionary activities with the Chaykovsky Circle, his arrest, imprisonment and escape to Western Europe, the development of his anarchist philosophy and his activities in the socialist movement in England, are as readable and as interesting as ever. It is a pity that Kropotkin's own charming drawings of people and places, reproduced for instance in the 1933 Soviet edition, are not included.

Liverpool

A. V. KNOWLES

*Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik 1918–1945, Serie B: 1925–1933.* Vol. V: 17 March to 30 June 1927. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1972. 1+670 pp. Maps. Index of persons.

THIS substantial volume of documents from the files of *Auswärtiges Amt*