History has often been shaped by heightened expectations that fail to gain fulfillment. An important case in point occurred in Russia at the end of the Napoleonic campaigns. Then many young Russian nobles, entranced by a firsthand glimpse of European life, were hoping to contribute to a liberalization of their society without abandoning the tradition of state service which had become the principle source of their identity as a class. Motivated by unrestrained idealism, they felt themselves "awakened to live a new life, to be inspired by everything that was noble and pure in the moral and political atmosphere." Unfortunately, their expectations were to be short-lived. I. D. Iakushkin would later recall that "it was unbearable to . . . listen to the jabbering of old men who praised everything ancient and prevented any forward movement. We left them behind by a hundred years." These remarks and many similar thereto can be found, both in the memoir literature of the period, and in the records of the official commission established to investigate the causes of the Decembrist revolt. They suggest that between 1814 and 1820 the Russian government managed to alienate a large segment of the nation's nobility. The alienated were youthful idealists who, it seems reasonable to suppose, would have given fervent support to leaders who did not fear social change. It is a principal thesis of this essay that one of these alienated idealists, Petr Iakovlevich Chaadaev, strongly desired to remain in the state service and resisted longer than many of his friends the conclusion that he could not find therein a viable meaning for his life. This thesis will be tested by an analysis of the events of the years 1820 to 1823, a period when this conclusion struck Chaadaev and forced him to cast aside the social and personal identity which he had created during nearly ten years of military service. This essay will show that these were the years which began the transformation of a social dilettante into a powerful critic of Russian culture.

In addition to the importance of this period in Chaadaev's life, there are three other reasons why a reassessment of these events will be beneficial.

2. N. I. Turgenev, La Russie et les Russes, 3 vols. (Brussels: Impimeurs Unis, 1847), I. 64.
First Erik Erikson's model of the identity crisis and the moratorium that often precedes its resolution can be employed, not in an attempt at full-scale psycho-history, but to provide some insights that are useful in comprehending the events of these years. Second, there is the problem presented by Quénéet's *Tchaadaev*. This book bearing the ponderous title, *Tchaadaev et les Lettres Philosophiques: contribution à l'étude du mouvement des idées en Russie*, was published in Paris by the Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion in 1931. Now forty-six years later it remains the most detailed study of Chaadaev's life and thought. However, new evidence, which makes it possible to correct errors and fill in gaps in Quénéet’s work, has been found. In short, both the discovery of new source material, and the publication of articles by Soviet and American historians have made Quénéet’s book obsolete.

The third reason is to be found in copies of unpublished manuscripts that I have obtained from Russian archives. These documents yield fresh insights into the development of Chaadaev's personality and intellect during the time of his transition from state service to retirement. Nevertheless, because the sources which serve as the basis for an analysis of this part of Chaadaev's life are still not plentiful, some of the arguments that follow will be speculative. However, greater certainty seems, in this instance, to be beyond the historian's immediate grasp. On the one hand, it might be gained by the discovery of more of Chaadaev's correspondence. But, in view of the arduous labor already performed by Dmitrii Ivanovich Shakhovskoi, the grandson of Chaadaev's cousin-in-law F. P. Shakhovskoi, such discovery is not likely. On the other hand, some of the conclusions to follow could be tested by the detailed investigation of the lives of many other members of Chaadaev's generation. If such work showed the existence of similar patterns in their lives, we would have gained fresh and valuable insights into the origins of the Russian intelligentsia.

I

In order to place the events that began in 1820 in their proper context, it is necessary to offer a very brief summary of the five years that followed the end of the Napoleonic campaigns.

By the end of 1814 Chaadaev had found what could have developed into an acceptable identity as a career officer in the military service. He had traveled with the Russian armies from Borodino to Paris and back to St. Petersburg. Three years later he became aide-de-camp to General Ilarion Vasil'evich Vasil'chikov, Commander of the Guards Corps, and by 1820 he was under consideration for promotion to aide-de-camp to the emperor. During this time he was renowned for his foppish dress and extravagant lifestyle. His sharp wit, brilliant intellect, and dashing manners had won him the attention of his fellow officers. He was, as Erikson would say, forging "for