THE IMAGE OF THE QUAKER AND CRITIQUE OF ENTHUSIASM IN EARLY MODERN RUSSIA

What role does he intend to fill?
Childe Harold? Melmoth for a while?
Cosmopolite? A Slavophile?
A Quaker? Bigot?—might one ask?

Pushkin, *Eugene Onegin*, VIII, 8, 71

In June 1814, while the Russian Emperor Alexander I stayed in London, some prominent members of the Society of Friends eagerly sought an audience with the victorious tsar. The meeting was easily arranged, and the tsar even attended a silent prayer in a Quaker meeting house. A week later, at Portsmouth, ready to sail to Russia, Alexander suddenly expressed the wish to visit any family of the Quaker persuasion in the neighborhood. Alexander I was very impressed with the religious practice, charitable works and industriousness of the Friends. Several years later he invited some prominent Quakers to come to Russia to work on a project of reclamation of lands around St. Petersburg and on plans for elementary education and prison reform. In the early 1820s, Quakers were in vogue, as reflected in Pushkin's verse above; it is very telling that a Quaker is mentioned as the opposite of a bigot, as a cosmopolite is opposed to a Slavophile.

Until this episode, however spectacular, the contacts between Russians and English Quakers had been rather sporadic. In January 1697, during his stay in London, Peter the Great met with a group of Quakers headed by William Penn who spoke German. In the 1760s a Quaker doctor, Thomas Dimsdale, was administering inoculations for smallpox in St. Petersburg. Though well-known, Dr. Dimsdale was perceived in St. Petersburg as a skillful physician rather than a Quaker. In July 1790, Nicholas Karamzin visited a Quaker meeting house in London; he was not much impressed by Quakers, having found them "boring." Even in the 1890s private relations with Quakers were per-

ceived as exotic. Nikolai Leskov's novel *The Vale of Tears* (1892), featuring Russian followers of the Friends, evoked some skeptical responses; the reviewers doubted whether a Quaker was a realistic detail for a story set in a provincial Russian town. Leskov responded with a special article, "The Quakeresses," describing Russian Quaker women exiled in Siberia.4

Despite the lack of personal contacts with English Friends, Russians were familiar with Quakers. At the end of the seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth centuries, Russian ecclesiastical authorities prosecuted several people called "Quakers": in 1689, a Silesian preacher Quirinus Kuhlman; in 1717, the sect known as "Spiritual Christians" which was believed to have been founded by a "Prussian Quaker," and in the 1730s through the 1750s, yet another Russian spiritualist sect known as *Khristovshchina*.

In the 1780s, publications about English and American Quakers appeared in certain Russian magazines. Some of these publications, inspired by Enlightenment discourse, suggested the image of an exemplary citizen of the model republic in Pennsylvania, a champion of toleration and human rights. Another variation of the image of a "good Quaker," influenced by the Pietist tradition, emphasized his genuine and "natural" Christian virtues.

The image of the Quaker as humanitarian did not simply replace that of the Quaker as heretic. In the eighteenth century, the image of the Quaker, as perceived in Russia, included several conflicting pictures: a dangerous heretic, associated with seventeenth-century English Quakers and certain Russian sectarians; a model citizen and a Christian, associated with William Penn and American, especially Pennsylvanian, Quakers. This multiple image was a result of the different strands within Western intellectual influence—seventeenth-century controversial theology, Enlightenment discourse, and Pietism.

This complex influence is especially evident in the works of Petr Alekseevich Alekseev (1727–1801), the archpriest of the cathedral of Archangel Michael in the Moscow Kremlin and a renowned scholar. His writings on Quakers show the role of the image of Quakers in important debates at the end of the eighteenth century, which were centered on the problems of "enthusiasm" and "fanaticism."

**Quakers and the Critique of Enthusiasm in Western Discourse**

The treatment of Quakers in Western discourse of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was indeed focused on their "enthusiasm," i.e., the con-