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MIKHAIL MURAV'EV, A POET AND TUTOR OF VIRTUE

Mikhail Nikitich Murav'ev was a poet of moderate importance for the eighteenth century Russian literature, known then primarily for his youthful verse. At the age of 15, he published a volume of fables, at the age of 17, a volume of odes, and in between small volumes of verse and two volumes of translations. He was a polyglot and had a good knowledge of the classical and contemporary literature and a good grasp of contemporary science, which were some reasons why Catherine II appointed him as a tutor of her grandsons, Alexander and Constantine. He was apparently fondly remembered by his pupils, since after Alexander became the tsar Alexander I, Murav'ev became a senator (1801), a member of the Ministry of Education (1801), and a curator of the Moscow University to which development he contributed significantly.

As a tutor of grand princes, Murav'ev was responsible for teaching Russian literature, history, and ethics. To Murav'ev, this was not just a cut-and-dry job. He believed that as a teacher, he not only had to know well the subject but also had to be a good moral example to his students. He had to influence his pupils by the heart that is “always noble [and by] generous, adorned reason ... to captivate [them] by the strength and beauty of his soul.”¹ He prepared for his students numerous handouts presenting Russian history, politics, science, but also ethics in form of moral teachings and edifying historical examples. Murav'ev's moral teachings were designed for every person, but, in his position as a tutor, he cared

¹ Quoted in Н.[Л.] Жинкин, М.Н. Муравьев (по поводу истекшего столетия со времени его смерти), *Известия Отделения русского языка и словесности Императорской Академии наук* 18 (1913), bk. 1, p. 290.

particularly about forming the mind of a future monarch. Because of the power of monarchical autocracy in Russia, these teachings would potentially have far reaching consequences.

Many of Murav'ev's notes and handouts are still unpublished; some of them have already been published, although they were not originally meant for a wide distribution, but as a teaching tool; they include *Emil's letters* (1789), with the title alluding to Rousseau's *Emile*; *Conversations of the dead* modeled on *Dialogues of the dead* written by Fontenelle (1683) and by Fénelon (1700–1718); *Essays on history, literature, and ethics* (1796); *Epochs of the Russian history*; and *Historical report on Russia in the seventeenth century*.

Virtue

Virtue is the pinnacle of perfection in human life (*Satisfaction and sorrow*, S 2.156).² This is not just an onerous task that leads to moral perfection but has a very personal dimension since happiness can be found precisely in virtue and in fulfillment of one's duties (*An inhabitant of a suburb*, S 1.73), and virtue is the only way to happiness (1.80). Therefore, "he escapes happiness who escapes work that duty puts on us" (*Good children*, S 1.201). More importantly, a virtuous life is eternally rewarded with entering "the lands of permanent happiness" (1.75).

Virtue lies in the realization that it is impossible to live by oneself, without friends, and without being useful to anyone. "Man is created for society: I receive from it so many benefits! It cared about my education; it is my patron, it defends me with weapons from an enemy and with laws from malice of my co-citizens. It honors me with its trust, decorates me with honors and with general respect which is even more precious than honor ... I want to love my friend, my relative, my benefactor more than myself and more than them, if possible – my fatherland" (S 1.73). The life of service to others is the life of a virtuous person who thereby can find the sense of fulfillment. "What happiness [it is] to wipe tears of an innocent sufferer, to be of service to the weak, to lighten burden of a subordinate!" (1.94).

Murav'ev also stated that the greatest happiness comes through justified self-respect (*Emil's letters* 1.110) and that self-love is natural, but love of virtue

² References are made to the following collections of Murav'ev's works:

P – Письма отцу и сестре 1777–1778 годов, in: Г.П. Макогоненко (ed.), *Письма русских писателей XVIII века*, Ленинград: Наука 1980, 259–377.

S – *Сочинения*, Санктпетербург: А. Смирдин, 1856 [1847], vols. 1–2.

St – *Стихотворения*, Ленинград: Советский писатель 1967.

should be greater since it leads to greatest happiness since it makes us worthy of love in our own eyes (*Self-love*, S 2.158). This idea means that a virtuous life leads to self-respect, to feeling good about oneself to the extent that a person deserves the love of others. Another personal benefit of a virtuous life is the sense of freedom. “Not that man, my friend, is free / Who, devoted to himself, leads carefree life, / Without [being of] any use to others, without a plan and without a deed, / As a thought suddenly took possession of his mind,” i.e., on the spur of the moment. He is a slave of his passions and yet the world never can satisfy his needs. However, “Who can have control over himself / Is the only one who is free. / ... Grand without pride, important without titles / Always ready [to be] useful to all; / He reveres sacred bonds of kinship / And, to be free, he'll accept light ties” – or rather he will take upon himself burden necessary to be of service to others and this burden will not be heavy to him – “An attentive husband and loving father” (*Epistle to Turgenev*, St 114),³ a person who treats with all seriousness his familial obligations. “Rich is who, knowing how to live according to his means, / Can put boundaries on his desires. / In a word, this and only this one [person] is free / Who in extremes of happiness is always like unto himself; / In glory, he isn't proud, nor despaired while falling, / [Who] hid in himself his dignity” (115), i.e., a modest person, not bragging about his accomplishments, not forgetting others in the best of times and in the worst of times.

Self-control appears to be an indispensable element of a virtuous life. The life of virtue is not necessarily simple and easy, but surely it is preferable. In Murav'ev's short story, Hercules had to choose his path of life between a rosy and safe path proposed by Delight and a path advocated by Virtue: the path on which dangers will not be fearsome and will be overcome by courage; the path of life for others, of fulfilling his duties and thus of being just. “Hercules did not doubt any longer and followed Virtue” (*Hercules' choice*, S 1.168).⁴

Following virtue requires self-improvement through self-control, i.e., through getting the upper hand over one's passions. Proper upbringing is needed to accomplish it. Proper education should include forming good taste in art and in literature since they soften bad passions. “Who is delighted by the beauty of a poem or by the composition of a painting is unable to see his happiness in unhappiness of others, in noisy gatherings of the lustful, or in seeking base profit.

³ It is stated that this *Epistle* is “a beautiful outline of virtuous and active sage” and “each thought in it can serve an honest citizen as a principle,” Константин Н. Батюшков, Письмо к И.М. Муравьеву-Апостолу о сочинениях Г. Муравьева [1814], in his *Сочинения*, Санктпетербург: Котомин 1885, vol. 2, p. 88; however, if a citizen is honest, he presumably has had some principles that have made him honest.

⁴ Murav'ev greatly abbreviated here a story given by a Sophist Prodicus, Education of Hercules by Virtue (Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 2.1.21–34).

Gentle heart and educated reason take delight in elevated feeling of friendship, magnanimity, and charity” (*Amusements of imagination*, S 2.216). It is doubtful whether passions can be completely silenced (*Epistle to N.R.R.*, St 148), but they surely can be to a large extent pacified. Also, new, positive passions can be developed. For instance, a philosopher is someone for whom truth is a passion (*Thoughts, remarks, and fragments*, S 2.307).

Development of a good aesthetic taste is not the only element of proper education leading to the burgeoning of virtue. Murav’ev apparently embraced the Enlightenment view that the increase of knowledge leads to better morals. “A philosopher – the noblest name and honor of any thinking man,” since a philosopher loves knowledge, thereby “elevating human nature.” So, “by educating ourselves, we become more virtuous. Learning animates in our heart seeds of good qualities” (*Thoughts, remarks, and fragments*, S 2.308). The greatest pleasure for an educated soul is to apply reason and heart to expand knowledge and art, to be useful, to establish societies, to fulfil civic duties (*Satisfaction and sorrow*, S 2.157), whereby there is a positive feedback between virtue and expansion of one’s knowledge: the latter finds pleasure in expanding virtue and a virtuous life results in the pleasure of increasing one’s knowledge.

Similarly, working on oneself and living for others are two sides of the same ethical coin. People can perfect themselves by fulfilling their higher duties, and by self-denial they can surpass all feats of courage (*Proposition*, S 1.197). Self-perfection leads to a virtuous life that prominently included working and living for others; on the other hand, living for others leads to self-perfection.

Being of service to others does not mean being constantly in the public eye. As Murav’ev phrased it, “happy is whose upbringing prepares him to the service to the fatherland, citizens, [all] people; who does not waste time in futile search of merriment; [who] can present himself with gentle shining/excellence in grand society and can take delight from himself in solitude” (*Amusements of imagination*, S 2.211). A withdrawal from the public can be beneficial to oneself and to the public since self-examination is performed best in solitude, far from the madding crowd. Self-perfection also can benefit from the moments of separation: “to earn its [the world’s] attention, it is sometimes necessary to deliberately hide oneself from people and acquire in silence gifts which will prove later to be useful,” like Demosthenes who fought in solitude with his impediment (2.211).

The call to a virtuous life can be a noncontroversial goal in life, but it may not be so when it comes to specifying what exactly it should be. Happiness comes from simplicity, goodness, pleasant feeling of life, unobstructed delight of natural goods, few needs, few passions, gentle feelings, sacred family, friendship, and humanity bonds. A happy person is an inhabitant of a quiet place on a secluded meadow close to a stream under a tree. Day and night he learns from the book of

nature, and his soul is elevated by the immensity of creations of the Lord. He has a sweet conviction that his soul will never die and hopes for resurrection in lands incomparably more beautiful (*Happiness*, S 2.169–170). Because only a virtuous person can be truly happy, a virtuous life comes from simplicity, goodness, etc. but how realistic is it to practice this virtue on one's piece of land, in seclusion, meditating on the wonders of nature? The message could be addressed only to the higher strata of the society who could afford it, but even for them it may be something of a daydream, particularly for the two Murav'ev's pupils. Would it amount to virtue if an emperor was spending his time ambulating about a meadow to savor the sight of a stream?

As to the lower and the largest stratum of the society, peasants, Murav'ev almost envied their lot. In his view, work and simplicity of life of peasants protect them from vices and illness (*On prosperity of the farmer*, 2.272; *An inhabitant of a suburb*, S 1.90,92–93). Landlords should care for peasants and experience shows that Russian landlords do care. They are their saviors in case of fire, illness, and the like (2.273). No mention of the peasants' life in dejected servitude and poverty, in constant mistreatment by masters. Murav'ev image of a happy peasant comes more from Vergil's *Georgics* rather than from the observation of the life of Russian peasants. In a rare case when he did fleetingly mention an abuse of peasants by their masters (1.91), the criticism was not designed to emancipate peasants from serfdom (1.91) but to make landlords more sensitive to their subjects. The concept of serfdom was never questioned.⁵

Although the moral precepts Murav'ev proposed are rather noncontroversial, how can their validity be justified if such a justification would be needed? – and a tutor should expect a question to that effect from his pupils. “Virtue is the attribute of the heart that no one can take away” (*Good children*, S 1.203). Ethics does not use proofs like geometry, but it “takes inner and delicate feeling that the omnipotent hand of the Creator placed in the chest of everyone. To see the excellence of a noble undertaking, a magnanimous deed, it is enough to ask one's own heart” (*Ethics*, S 2.137). The voice of the heart thus should be a guide in moral matters. However, can this voice be always trusted? The heart has to be kept pure, that is, it can become impure, and a character in one of Murav'ev's stories looked in the evening into his heart and when he found something that shouldn't be there, he blushed and took a firm resolve to improve himself (*An inhabitant*

⁵ This is in stark contrast with Radishchev's *Journey from Petersburg to Moscow* where the only happy state is depicted in a dream. In 1790, he was arrested and *Journey* was destroyed. A month later, Murav'ev started writing his *Inhabitant*. It is quite possible that the idyllic relations between landlords and peasants are not only so described since they were meant as a tutoring tool, but it may also have been an unspoken criticism of Radishchev as suggested by Irwin Radezky, *M.N. Murav'ev*, PhD diss., Columbia University 1980, p. 190–191 note 16.

of a suburb, S 1.74). The heart can thus become contaminated, whereby its voice can be muted. However, when “a bad example pours a plague into the heart, / A habit to be good is not far from us” (*Prudence*, St 193). Habits are formed through upbringing, which points to a crucial importance of proper education of the child. However, on what basis should parent’s principles concerning virtue stand? Also, although learning animates the seeds of good qualities in the heart, learning can also corrupt them when it is not grounded in the truth (*Thoughts, remarks, and fragments*, S 2.309). What truth? How is it that the voice of the heart is reliable – most of the time, if not always? As just mentioned, it is God who placed the delicate feeling in the chest of everyone. This statement points in the direction of theology, and a few scattered theological statements can be found in Murav’ev’s writings.

God

Murav’ev did not doubt the existence of God. His God is the source of truth, omnipotent, all-good, who rules over the universe by the power of His will (*Misfortune*, St 244; *Domestic happiness*, S 1.180), God existing by himself, filling with himself the entire universe (*Thoughts, remarks, and fragments*, S 2.336). At one point Murav’ev praised Locke for his correct outline of the concept of human reason, which included the rejection of innate ideas (*Destiny of philosophy*, S 2.262). Presumably, this was also Murav’ev’s view. Thus, if the concept of God is not inscribed in the human mind from birth, whence does it come? Apparently, from experience.

Murav’ev made occasional references to the physico-theological argument that was widely used by Russian authors: orderliness and harmony are indicators of God’s existence, although most of the time, he used this argument to appreciate more God’s majesty rather than merely to prove His existence. For instance, he exclaimed to the sun: “Glory to the hand that has drawn on the sky your path!” (*Sunrise*, S 2.293).⁶ The more one knows about nature, the more God’s craft can be appreciated. “A simple man passes by the spectacle of nature without paying attention to it. [A man] who knows nature better encounters everywhere a reason to be astonished, an omnipresent and unbroken chain of

⁶ In view of Alpatova, for Murav’ev the sun becomes “the incarnation of the absolute, higher truth of the Creator,” Татьяна А. Алпатова, *Космическоечувствовпозиии М.Н. Муравьева*, ин: Пашкуров А.Н., А.Ф. Галимуллина (eds.), *Михаил Муравьев и его время*, Казань: Татарский госсударственный гуманитарно-педагогический унстиверситет 2010, p. 9.

things and ineffable wisdom that created it ... Educated reason guided by experience encounters everywhere stable order, multiplicity and uniformity, an incessant consonance of causes and effects, and nature being always the same, always beautiful and magnificent, inexhaustible in power, a living imprint of goodness of the Supreme Being!" (*Spectacle of nature*, S 2.289). According to Murav'ev, the world is spread into infinity, filled with many worlds (2.289), with other suns, other earths (*An inhabitant of a suburb*, S 1.117), in which he followed Fontenelle rather than cosmology and cosmography that was then recognized by the Orthodox church.⁷ What about some unpleasant natural phenomena? All irregularities are part of a grand design that we cannot perfectly see. Realization of this fact removes fear of such phenomena as thunder, erosion of sea shores, comets, eclipses of the sun, earthquakes, and the like (2.290).

It is interesting that Murav'ev never once mentioned in his writings Christ directly or indirectly. On the other hand, he apparently sided with a somewhat generic understanding of God. In one of his short stories, an old Muslim hermit helps prince Tancred⁸ during the first crusader and says, "Love of man is the best service to God. I can be mistaken as to my understanding of the Supreme Being, but I cannot torment someone like me because he thinks differently. After you enlighten yourself, you'll regret the futility of your fury. God is a common Father of [all] people. He doesn't need vengeance of weak mortals. Loving one another – this is His most sacred commandment" (*Common goodwill to humankind*, S 1.178). The sentiment expressed in the last statement also appears in a letter to his sister: "the love of neighbor is the best image of the love of God."⁹ It is interesting that it was a Muslim who apparently was Murav'ev's spokesman, a Muslim admonishing a Christian knight, a representative of a religion that recognizes Christ as a prophet, but not as God. This fact along with no references made to Christ nor to the Holy Spirit strongly suggest Murav'ev's unitarian leanings.

The Providence

Arguably, for Murav'ev, the most important attribute of God is His providence. God is a providence on personal and national levels caring for each individual and for entire societies. The Providence chose prince Vladimir to bring

⁷ "What can be more pleasant than Fontenelle's *On the plurality of worlds?*", he rhetorically asked at one point (*Algarotti*, S 2.285).

⁸ Prince Tancred was one of the principal characters in Tasso's *Jerusalem delivered*.

⁹ P 330; cf.: "True honor of God is inseparable from love of men" (*Igor and Olga*, S 1.233).

Christianity to Russia (*A short outline of Russian history*, S 2.8), spared Dmitrii Donskii from death (2.30), and led Russians through hardships to greatness (2.35). Moreover, Catherine II was a gift of heavens (*Ode*, St 110), that is, of Providence.

God cares for His creation, particularly for humans, His highest creation (*Attributes of ethics*, S 2.140; *A view on the history of writing*, 2.245), since “He loves people more than people love themselves” (P 331). Every person should count on God’s helping hand in all situation of life. As Murav’ev already expressed it in his youthful years, “Who will be a leader of inexperience youth? / Aren’t we walking with an invisible friend from heaven, / Who carefully leads us away from an abyss, / While our favorite dreams drag us [to it]? / Sighings and prayers of father and mother / Are not rejected by higher destiny” (*Prudence*, St 193). While in danger, “In vain is a cry, heard by no one: / Everything is far away – [yet] God is with me. / God is with me, thunders are not dangerous; carried by His hand / They pronounce His rule: / His goods are showered on the earth / And shaking of violent water / Won’t go beyond its limits.¹⁰ / Mortals, be not afraid of earthly storm. / Nothing can move the vault of azure / Above rough clouds. / The eye of the Providence is open / Onto all nations, all creations. / Earth! isn’t in heaven your cover/protection?” (*Storm*, St 244). Just like natural disasters serve a greater cosmic purpose that is not always clear to humans, so do misfortunes in personal lives. True, “sometimes a misfortune befalls on the good / And brings profit with its evil malice. / Who knows, maybe in Your hands, Creator! / Misfortune is a way to elevate virtue?” (*Misfortune*, St 244).¹¹ God works His goodness even through unpleasantness of life.

Life on earth is not all that is. There is also life after life: “Fixedly chasing fleeting joys, / We walk on the rim of an open chasm / ... O mortal! By putting [your] hope in the Most High / And heeding the shortness of [our] days, stay away from pride. / You’ll pass through the earth, there you’ll live eternally” (*Uncertainty of life*, St 128). Therefore, the death of a loved one should not be a reason for despair, but, in a way, a reason for joy because the deceased has found eternal peace. So, Murav’ev said to a husband whose wife died: “Look at the perishing side of things: the mind, youth, beauty; / Oh! [They are] vanity [as compared with] the majesty of God. / ... When born, man is sentenced to death. ... Don’t complain, as the Keeper of all wished it / The soul of your wife is living in heaven now / And like a sailor who sailed through the sea / She’s found peace in the embrace of the Creator ... / Love her forever, just like you’ve loved

¹⁰ Cf. Kheraskov’s stanza quoted in *An inhabitant of a suburb*, S 1.79.

¹¹ As expressed in nontheological terms, through satisfaction and sorrow nature brings us to useful things and turns away from harmful things (*Satisfaction and sorrow*, S 2.155).

her / And remember that man is born for woes" (*Letter to A.M. Brianchaninov*, St 130–131).

Whereas in traditional Christianity, in particular, in Orthodoxy, the road to heaven is open by the salvific work of Christ and made possible by faith in Him manifesting itself through good works, Murav'ev apparently believed in the power of good works alone. Since he never mentioned Christ, he never mentioned the meaning of His death and resurrection. Apparently a virtuous life should suffice: "Good deeds don't die / Nor a good thought, nor a sigh of the heart. / Reward is ready in heaven / And close to us is a witness, God. / The life of the universe – [it is] the presence of God; / My soul will never die / The cold path of the grave / Leads to the house of life. / Eyes can't be opened here / Without seeing miracles of existence. / And there, freed from crude dust, / I'll see the glory of the Divine" (*Presence of God*, St 245). However, the need of some help of God is acknowledged: "My God! Favor me with [Your] look at my contrite heart and make me love those, whom I loved and do not turn away from me their love! Make me submissive to Your will and give me an opportunity to honor Your Supreme Being with the love of my deeds!" (*Thoughts, remarks, and fragments*, S 2. 316–317).

The church

As to Murav'ev's denominational commitments, we learn very little from Murav'ev's own pronouncements. He occasionally referred to Orthodoxy with respect, but mainly indirectly; for instance, he said that Vladimir brought from the Greeks holy Faith (*A short outline of Russian history*, S 2.8), that is the divine Faith (*Establishing the rule of one ruler*, 1.334), or Orthodox Faith (*A view on the history of writing*, 2.249) and built temples to the true God (*Vladimir and Charlemagne*, 1.236); he also mentioned wise Olga who was enlightened by Orthodoxy (*Captives*, S 1.175). However, he did not quite proclaim himself to be an Orthodox or Christian believer.

Interestingly, in his constant praises of Peter I that often went far beyond the boundaries of credibility and good taste,¹² he was not troubled by the fact that the Orthodox church lost its independence under his rule. In fact, he considered

¹² Peter I presumably waged wars not "to fill the universe with empty noise ... War serves Him as a means to bring happiness, power, and education to His nation. He brings arts, sciences and civility to the end of the World" (*Charles XII and Sviatoslav I*, S 1.240); Peter lived all his life for his fatherland; an enemy of pomp, he needed neither quietness not entertainment (*Adoption of European morals*, S 2.117).

this to have been a positive development for the country. As he stated, like Nikon, Prokopovich – who was instrumental in suppressing the independence of the church – held the steer of the Church and only the title of patriarch was lacking him (*Patriarch Nikon and Prokopovich*, S 1.269), but this title “belongs more to splendor than to the holiness of the service to God and it is discarded forever in Russia” (270). “Creative spirit of Peter the great opened in Russia free presence to all nations and confessions ... He was not carried away by competition of priests and did not sacrifice prosperity of government to fanaticism” (271). Apparently, fanaticism is pacified when the church becomes a servant of the state, as it happened under Peter I. Priests should appreciate it and take advantage of the fact that, instead of fanatically trying to be independent from the influence of the government, they are under its protection: “the servants of the Supreme Being ... should in peace take delight in protecting laws and not being concerned with civic government, they should elevate their souls by learning and should improve their hearts with gentleness” (269). Murav’ev also saw the role of the clergy not to be limited to the spiritual domain alone. In his view, priests should educate themselves in medicine; by their influence quarrels should disappear and family ties should be strengthened; they should also provide moral instructions and teach children how to read on Sundays and in winter (*On prosperity of the peasant*, S 2.275–276).

Like most Russian intellectuals and ecclesiastics, Murav’ev referred to Catholicism mainly in disparaging terms. He said that in times of Charlemagne, “Rome became the capital of terrible spiritual rule which ... threatened secular rule with submission” (*Captives*, S 1.173). Also, in Catholic regions of Germany people are superstitious and crude; on the other hand, in Protestant regions, “where rules rational freedom in discussion of opinions,” people are enlightened (*Preference of natural language*, S 2.242). Spaniards, who were Catholics, ravaged America with greed and false piety (*Domestic happiness*, S 1.179).¹³ “Heads of the Western Church dissatisfied with proclaiming gentle Faith, snatched secular advantaged of ruling and riches and added to suppression” of people and to ignorance. In particular, popes gave themselves the right to give thrones (*Successes of human reason*, S 2.255). At one point, however, he did commend the popes who “basing their rule on the power of thinking” cared for the art (*Arts in Italy*, S 2.250), and he was not averse to go to a Catholic church if only because a renown opera singer was singing there during the Lent season (P 352).

¹³ In this description and sentiment he apparently followed Marmontel’s *Les Incas* (1777), in which Marmontel “wanted to present an image so dear to humanity of all woes which follow holy bedevilment/obsession (святобесие) as Tred’iakovskii translates ‘fanaticism,’” (P 340); Murav’ev planned to make excerpts from this work, p. 282; see also И. Ю. Фоменко, *Исторические взгляды М. Н. Муравьева, XVIII век* 13 (1989), p. 176.

In a passing remark, Murav'ev was characterized as “profoundly believing and religious”¹⁴ without specifying the nature of his religiosity. His profound belief in a providential God is unquestionable. However, his observance of existing religious rites appears to be rather superficial. When deciding where to go for a church service, which was “an important question,” he decided not to go to one church since its architecture was not to his liking and to another since it was too far (P 303). It appears that his religiosity, when measured by his attitude to the official church of his times, was at best tepid. His religious zeal was apparently all located in the ethical dimension of life, in virtue, in a life of moral obligation as dictated by the voice of the heart which was the voice of the Most High. Being virtuous is not limited to a particular time or place; everyone can – and should – be virtuous. This universalism of virtue could have led Murav'ev to a universalist representation of God. He understood God in a monotheistic – even unitarian – fashion, but unlike many intellectuals of the Enlightenment, particularly in the West, his God is providential, caring for His creation. Deism thus is ruled out.

Although considered to be omnipresent, God is treated rather marginally by Murav'ev. He concentrated on the voice of the heart, presumably a gift of God, as the way of striving for moral perfection. Personal efforts of self-control, overcoming one's passions, pulling oneself away from negatives of life, with, possibly, occasional call for God's help,¹⁵ are the primary way of making virtue a reality. In his insistence on the importance of virtue and self-improvement, Murav'ev reflected some masonic ideas. He probably was not a mason himself,¹⁶ but he was a close friend of Maikov, who was a mason and who stressed the importance of virtue in his work. Murav'ev also published his work in *The Morning Light*, a masonic journal edited by Novikov on recommendation of Kheraskov, another mason. Murav'ev's theology can be considered a radicalization of Maikov's theology who mentioned Christ only twice, and of Kheraskov with only a few references to Christ in his voluminous works.

¹⁴ Жинкин, *op. cit.*, p. 315.

¹⁵ A recognition of divine help in actualizing virtue, feeble as it may have been, is altogether missing in an article devoted to the problem of virtue in Murav'ev's plays, А[лексей].Н. Пашкуров, Драматургия М.Н. Муравьева ‘пятилогия’ о Добродетели, *Проблемы изучения русской литературы XVIII века* 15 (2011), pp. 193–206.

¹⁶ Bakunina gives a rather weak proof of his masonic membership, masonic insignia on the volume that contained letters to his wife, Tatiana Bakounine, *Répertoire biographique des franc-maçons russe*, Paris: Institut d'Etudes slaves de l'Université de Paris 1967, p. 349; the volume is described by Михаил А. Осоргин, Московский журнал, *Временник общества друзей русской книги* 4 (1938), 105–128.

Summary

Murav'ev was a poet of moderate importance for the eighteenth century Russian literature. He was also a tutor of Catherine II's grandsons, Alexander and Constantine. In this capacity, he prepared numerous handouts to teach Russian history, politics, science, and ethics.

Murav'ev stressed the preeminence of virtue in everyone's life. The voice of the heart should be the guide in resolving moral problems. This voice is the gift of God and as such it can be usually trusted. Thus, morality is based on theology. Murav'ev's theology presents a grand vision of providential God who appears to be viewed from the unitarian perspective.

Key words: Russian literature, ethics, science, religion

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