

Personality and private life of S.P. Botkin (on the materials of “Letters of S.P. Botkin from Bulgaria of 1877”)

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“The letters of S.P. Botkin from Bulgaria of 1877” is the only epistolary document among the published works of the famous Russian physician. Traditionally, this work is an introduction of S.P. Botkin as a doctor, a scientist, and a public figure. Moreover, this book is a historical reference to the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878. Handwriting comparison of some manuscripts of the revealed significant parts of the work that were not included in the published version. Those fragments contain unknown biographical information regarding S.P. Botkin’s private life: his marriage, household activities etc. In those notes, S.P. Botkin appears to be an attentive father and the head of a big family. The relationship between husband and wife characterizes him in a surprising way. The author of the notes proves to be an emotional person and a passionately loving husband. It seems that those feelings, which he was inclined to view from a rational perspective as kind of an adjustment mechanism, helped him to overcome all the difficulties of the war time and his family tragedy with dignity. The original manuscript provides us an insight to this scientist, who was at the peak of his career as a doctor and the head of the scientific society. The family ambiance and the support from his beloved wife remained to be a source of energy crucial for his professional and public performance.

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Details of private and daily life generally of little interest by themselves, acquire a completely different light when used for characterizing a figure of great importance for the national culture. “...History goes through a person’s home, through his private life. Not titles, decorations or royal favor, but ‘human self-reliance’ turns him into a historical figure”, – this way, using Pushkin’s words¹, Y.M. Lotman determines the value of family circumstances [1, p. 177]. This fully applies to the well-known Russian doctor

S.P. Botkin. Private aspects of his personality have been the subject of studies [2–5], but we can not say that we have a complete psychological portrait: it is not clear what was the source of his tireless, amazing, multilateral action.

The purpose of this work is to draw a complete picture of the personality of the famous Russian doctor using his epistolary heritage. In addition to the unpublished original of the well-known Botkin’s *Bulgarian saga*, other family documents stored in archives in Moscow and Saint Petersburg served as sources. Among them, in particular, are letters to his brother Michael and his wife E.A. Botkina’s reply letters.

Botkin’s “Letters from Bulgaria 1877” [6, 7] remain the most valuable material for

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¹ “Man’s self-reliance [self-identity]” – from A.S. Pushkin’s poem “Two feelings, equally close” (1830).

his biography. The epistolary relates to the first six months of the Russo-Turkish war (June – November 1877), when S.P. Botkin accompanied the Emperor Alexander II [8] and witnessed the key events of the campaign – the crossing of the Danube, the defense of the Shipka Pass, assaults and siege of Plevna. The position of the emperor's physician in ordinary and generalship² allowed him to move freely in the frontal area, to assess the progress of the military campaign, to organize medical support for combat operations, to visit hospitals, consult doctors and even personally provide medical aid to the wounded. For S.P. Botkin, it was the second campaign: for the first time he took part in warfare during the Crimean War (after the fall of Sevastopol in 1855). Then, as noted by a contemporary and friend of the family, it was a twenty-three year old "gentle, caring, very young student" [10, p. 27], a physician assistant in the medical unit, one of those headed by the surgeon N.I. Pirogov. Nearly 25 years, a forty-five-year-old S.P. Botkin – was a famous Russian doctor, leader of the emerging national clinical school, professor of the leading therapeutic department in the nation. For 17 years he worked in the Imperial Medico-Surgical Academy (IMSA), and for the last five – at the court, as a personal physician of Russian Emperor's family. As the royal medic, Botkin monitored the health and treated the wife of Alexander II – Empress Maria Alexandrovna, who was suffering from pulmonary tuberculosis [11, 12].

At that time in the educated society it was customary to run correspondence in the form of journal entries. The wartime letters to their wives were written in such a manner by the future Emperor, Grand Duke Alexander Alexandrovich, Russian envoy in Turkey, General N.P. Ignatiev; adjutant-chief, Colonel M.A. Gazenkampf, military chaplain V. Gurjev et al. [13–16]. Twenty years earlier, N.I. Pirogov used to send letters of the same kind to his wife during the campaign of Sevastopol from Crimea [17]. The letters are valuable resource that provides information about the life and attitudes of their authors, their private

life. Field letters by S.P. Botkin, addressed to his second wife – Ekaterina Alexeevna Botkina – give important information enabling a better understanding of his personality.

These letters – almost everything that has been written by S.P. Botkin during the period under review: "...I beg all my friends and acquaintances' pardon, because I do not write <...> I remember and love all my friends, but I am definitely not in a state to be writing <...> I'm only inclined to write to you, I am in a very particular mood – so much so that I can be communicative with you only. It is to you that I pour my soul out to..." (letter number 37 dated September 5, 1877, village of Gorna Studena, Bulgaria) [7, p. 208]. The messages are of significant volume, full of events and details. They suggest that their author is a delicate, caring person, able to acutely perceive not only personal sorrow, but also events happening around. The book materials remain relevant both for Botkin's biographers, and for historians studying the Russo-Turkish war of 1877–1878. [4, 5, 18–21].

The letters were published by E.A. Botkina after her husband's death in 1892 in the "Bulletin of Europe" and in 1893 as a book [6, 7]. Comparing with the original previously unknown fragments were revealed, which were not included in the publication. Fifth part of the text was omitted from the manuscript. Reductions in the number of cases (either accidentally or intentionally) are not indicated in the publication. This material contains unique information that allows to understand better the inner world of S.P. Botkin – his mind, thinking, moral principles.

It is appropriate to discuss Botkin's attitude to war. In the Soviet period the issue was often silenced or barely touched upon, and discussed in a biased manner.

In the early 1870's a significant portion of Russian society was influenced by Slavophile ideas. Russia's absence of conqueror's agenda, its struggle for the Christian faith, the memory of the historic confrontation with the Ottoman Empire made this campaign just in the views of the Russian people. Perception of war performed a uniting function, raising it to the national idea. [18] "We must not yield anything to any Europe in this business for any reasons. <...> Constantinople must be ours!" – a typical example of the mood of the time was reflected in F.M. Dostoevsky's

² Since 1870, S.P. Botkin had the rank of a valid state councilor (4th civilian rank) with the title "Excellency" [9]. According to the "Table of Ranks" it corresponded to the military rank of Major-General, and Rear Admiral in the navy.

journalism [22, p. 87], which has not been foreign to Botkin as well. In one of his letters to his brother Michael, shortly before leaving for the front, he was excitedly saying: "...There <in the Balkans> is now the most interesting point of the entire Earth's surface, but, in addition, all of our valiant Russian interests are there now, serving which according to my abilities is the greatest happiness for me. I'd be ashamed to sit idly, while all that lives, all that's Russian are eager to be on the scene..."³. Even at the end of this letter, instead of traditional goodbyes, sounds a patriotic call: "When are you coming back, my dears?⁴ – How can you <...> be so calm, don't you feel the tug of going back to Russia?"⁵ Notice how this phrase resonates with the final phrase of the popular in those years novel: "So enough of this nonsense; it's time we faced the truth. <...> All this continental life, all this Europe of yours, and all the trash about 'going abroad' is simply foolery, and it is mere foolery on our part to come..."⁶

S.P. Botkin longed to be in the theater of war, without neither an outlook of a professional soldier nor sufficient physical training. One of the students of the early 1870s describes him as follows: A big large man of medium height with a sharp outline of the abdominal organs and somewhat heavy gait.⁷ His head, <...> being quite big, was fringed by strands of very thin light-auburn hair with some gray; in the front a wide, expressive forehead was prominent, on which the owner of the head has moved his glasses up often; broad temporal angles; under the forehead, from under the deep eye sockets were photophobic eyeballs, <...> excessive myopia and disorder in

both eyes' refraction, encouraged S.P. Botkin to wear sunglasses constantly, to which he also attached his pince-nez..." [23, p. 125]. Composer M.A. Balakirev, one of Botkin's patients, was surprised to note that "he is very clumsy, a perfect bear, his legs are thick like a centennial oak each", and emphasized his merchant's image – he found in his appearance something similar to "a senior clerk in a cotton shop at the Nizhny Novgorod fair" [24, p. 160]. At the IMHA, an educational institution under the War Department, S.P. Botkin "dressed in a merchant manner": "he did not wear a military dress, and always showed up at his classes in black long-tailed coat, tailored somewhat baggily..." [23, p. 125]. Like all members of the main headquarters of the Emperor, he had no doubts as to the time of presence of Alexander II at war. "Everyone was leaving for six weeks tops," – clearly indicates Botkin in one of his early letters [7, p. 88]. This confidence was created by faith in the transience of the campaign (Turkey was considered a weak opponent).

Fat, clumsy, shortsighted S.P. Botkin, accustomed to his baths given by a "special" attendant, thought he would not stay on the Balkan front long, hoping that the persons accompanying the emperor will lodge in the larger settlements of the occupied territories, in acceptable living conditions. However, the military campaign was delayed, and he spent half a year in the wild steppe areas where at first "African heat" and the dust, "finding its way to every crease," got in his nerves, and then – steppe storms, high humidity and constant thirst, which were replaced by dampness, cold and many days of autumn rains. Unbearable were hygienic and sanitation conditions of the campaign (no conventional sewerage and running water, no fresh underwear, dirty clothes, living in crude ground shelters, drafty leaking tents, low-ceilinged poor peasant huts with mold, fleas, bedbugs, flies and rodents. Discomfort was caused by the stench (the smell of "man and his interior accessories", "rotting human corpses"), being in epicenters of epidemic infections, an often repulsive, psychologically depressing group of people) [7, p. 34, 40, 45, 139, 150, 247]. The irritation was propelled by unusual, monotonous food, absence of sugar, as well as cupholders and dining napkins and so forth [7, p. 7, 32, 35].

³ Department of manuscripts at the Institute of Russian Literature (Pushkin House) – further on RO IRLI (PD). M.P. Botkin's fund. F. 365. Op. 1. Storage uni. 13/1. Page 28 reverse (letter from May 24, 1877).

⁴ S.P. Botkin means his brothers Michael and Sergey who traveled Europe at that time. Michael Petrovich Botkin (1839–1914) is a brother, Sergey Petrovich Postnikov (1838–1880) – first cousin from the mother's side. Both were pursuing art. At the moment of the letter both traveled Europe and stayed in Rome.

⁵ RO IRLI (PD). M.P. Botkin's fund. F. 365. Op. 1. Storage unit. 13/1. Page. 29 rev. (letter from May 24, 1877).

⁶ F.M. Dostoevsky's novel *The Idiot* (1868). The phrase is uttered by Yelizaveta Procophievna Yepanchina.

⁷ S.P. Botkin in his letters repeatedly indicates that some movements are not easy for him and in one place even indicates his weight – "six poods" (96 kg) [7, p. 45, 55, 142].

Alexander the Second's personal medic used to wear an officer's jacket during the war campaign; that was the limit of his adaptation to a military life. He never managed to get used to the "terrible" conditions of life in the camp. The conditions he was unaccustomed to, severe everyday life of the war, the Russian army failures have become a serious challenge for the already elderly civilian man accustomed to the urban way of life and comfort. However, S.P. Botkin was in a privileged position⁸ of the emperor's medic. His expenses (horses, forage, transportation, food) were paid out of the treasury (unlike the group of senior officials who were obliged to support themselves). He moved around with the royal convoy (light transport designed for Alexander II and his entourage) [14, p. 97]. Note that, despite the fact that S.P. Botkin impeccably served the royal family for almost twenty years, it was his participation in the Bulgarian campaign that Alexander III considered the basis for awarding him the Silver Medal "in the memory of the deceased Emperor Alexander II".⁹

By late summer of 1877 the military defeats changed the attitude of Russian society to the campaign. S.P. Botkin was sensitive to tactical miscalculations that led to the giant human losses for that time, to the facts of immorality of the senior military leadership (ruthless attitude toward the soldiers, theft in the supporting services, poor organization of medical care). The situation in his own household was not easy at the time as well.

It is well-known how much family and the close circle meant to Russian geniuses (S.M. Solovyov, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Sechenov, Mechnikov, Pavlov, Vernadsky). Love in the life of S.P. Botkin is only a partially touched upon subject of his biography [5, p. 135–140] that deserves more attention without a doubt. The cuts from the wartime letters reveal the figure we were not familiar with. While possessing details of a prominent public (scientific, clinical, teaching, social) life of S.P. Botkin, we nevertheless do not

have a clue as to what gave him the moral strength for vigorous activity.

"... They all envy my calm and imagine that I know something they don't, but what supports me in such a vivacity without cards, without crazy horseback riding. <...> They do not know what is the secret of this power ..." [7, p. 367]. On this the unpublished letter fragment is interrupted, but thanks to the manuscript, it becomes clear: "...They do not know that the person who loves and feels loved, is in a state of trance, and his strength greatly increases. <...> Just as a very religious person finds in his faith support in moments of his trials, thus I in my love for you find support and comfort. Yes, dear, sitting here in my kennel, separated from you by distance, I feel you, I live with you, I talk, I share my thoughts with in sheer enjoyment..."¹⁰

These words are addressed to Ekaterina Alexeevna Botkina (1850–1929), second wife of S.P. Botkin, nee Princess Obolenskaya, daughter of Governor of the Moscow, prince A.V. Obolensky, a general, a participant of the Crimean War, the hero of the battle of Balaklava on 13 (25) October 1854; who bore the name Mordvinov after her first marriage.

With his first wife Anastasia Alexandrovna (nee Krylova; 1835–1875) S.P. Botkin has lived for 16 years. It was an example of a traditional family with a patriarchal order. The psychotype of a fiery husband, passionate in his private and business life, who in the process of professional development has formed his own field of research, developed a talent for organizational activity and public stance, eventually became discordant with the "homely" perception of the world and the low level of social claims of his wife. Letter to brother Michael makes clear that the crisis of Botkin's relationship with his wife was aggravated due to her growing physical exhaustion and misanthropy because of the multiple births she gave [5, p. 135–136]. These changes are the reason for the extramarital affair that S.P. Botkin conducted during the last years of their life together.

Ekaterina was 18 years younger than S.P. Botkin, was of passionate temper, lively,

⁸ The headquarters of the emperor at the theater of the Russo-Turkish War consisted of 75 people of the suite and 30 servants.

⁹ Russian State Historical Archives, Saint-Petersburg (RGIA). F. 472. Op. 411/1931. D. 23 ("On the coining of a medal at the occasion of Death of the Emperor Alexander the II. March 9, 1881 – June 28, 1885."). L. 248.

¹⁰ Manuscript collection of the history department of the National Research Institute of Healthcare Management, named after N.A. Semashko (RF OI NNII-OZ). S.P. Botkin letters from Bulgaria (May – November 1877). Letter No. 55 of November 10, 1877.

with an ardent zest for life, as well as of a good physical health.¹¹ She belonged to a new generation, “a group of advanced, the so-called nihilists” [25, p. 152], was brought up “in the spirit of atheism and anarchism” [26, p. 26], had revolutionary notions fashionable among the youth of the time (“a protesting and liberalized nature”) [27, p. 294]. By a chance, at the whim of an extravagant mother, who left her husband for the sake of a political refugee [26, p. 26; 28], in her youth Catherine spent several years in Europe, surrounded by the dissidents: “All of the oddities of Ekaterina Alexeevna began there. An aristocrat, at a young age she found herself in an environment so different from the one in which she spent her childhood, <...> she had the time to accept, of course, only the outer side of the ideas that the people surrounding her stood for” [29, p. 62]. Before meeting with S.P. Botkin her whole appearance and behavior expressed protest: she wore “haircuts, glasses and men-like dresses” [26, p. 26], she smoked, which “was not in keeping with all of her aristocratic appearance as well as folksy sayings that she used to insert into her sophisticated speech, while interweaving those with sentences in French and Italian,” [29, p. 61–2]. Ekaterina Alexeevna’s first marriage was short: by the time of her acquaintance with S.P. Botkin she was already a widow (since 1868).

The emotional loneliness of both, their similarity of temperament, an active public stance contributed to the emergence of mutual interest. Their growing closer was supported by time itself, when the “family code” began to be interpreted freely: extramarital affairs and divorces were not condemned, and even fashionable. The unofficial precedent of “family reformation” at the highest level¹² was seen by many as a guide to action [30,

¹¹ S.P. Botkin immediately paid attention to the physical health of the future second wife. See: RO IRLI (PD). The Fund of M.P. Botkin. F. 365. Op. 1. Storage unit 13/1 (SP Botkin’s letters to M. Botkin for 1874–1889). L. 17 (letter of April 4, 1876).

¹² For the last 16 years of his reign, Emperor Alexander II had a second family, in addition to a lawful one. The same format of private life was practiced also by his august brothers, the great princes Constantine and Nicholas.



S.P. Botkin and his wife, E.A. Botkina. The end of the 1870s (presumably in the mansion on Galernaya street, 77).¹³

p. 66–68]. Chances are good that it is on this pair that one of the residents of Livadia estate hinted upon: “...Usually at the funeral of the first wife one looks for the second...” [31, p. 997].

Their relationship became a salvation for both: S.P. Botkin has gained for himself not just a significant other, but an emotionally close, active partner with a comparably passionate temperament, a taste for life and youthful vigor. For Ekaterina, these relations have become a kind of moral resurrection and, if we may say so, a physical salvation. It is easy to imagine what would that young impulsive woman have come to in the 1870s, during the spread of populist doctrine and revolutionary ideas, if she had not met a mature, rationally thinking man, immersed in cause admired by the public. Let us note that such was an estimate given in the society to their marriage. Thus, talking about her father – Prince A.V. Obolensky – his contemporary casually adds that “his eldest daughter got lost completely” and was saved only by the fact that “already at her sunset married the famous Botkin, who was able to appreciate his father-in-law and give him comfort during his last years” [25, p. 92]. Ekaterina, apparently, knew it, because she called

¹³ Department of Prints of the Russian National Library (St. Petersburg). E. Al. P-3-60 / 1 (Archive of the amateur artist I.V. Boldyrev, vol. 1). L. 63 (SP Botkin).

her husband “my strength, my power, the source of all my good qualities”.¹⁴

Bulgarian letters of S.P. Botkin are addressed to the woman he loves, with which he at that time had a relationship for almost five years, and for the second year was officially married. Those family circumstances were compelling grounds for concern at his forced departure: “If I was not so sorry to leave the family, I would set off on this journey with the greatest desire...”.¹⁵ The year before, having become the second wife of the forty-four years old Botkin, the twenty-seven years old spouse has committed herself to take care of six step-children aged from 6 to 17. A stepmother, apparently, has created some tension in the house. In addition, shortly before Botkin’s voyage, Ekaterina and Sergei will have another child – Maria, born January 9, 1875.¹⁶ The girl, born before the marriage of her parents, was in her third year, and all this time she was brought up in Menton, in Ekaterina Alexeevna’s mother’s care. She was only taken home a year after her parents got married, when it was clear that the older children got used to their stepmother. Of the fact that Ekaterina’s daughter is their half-sister, only the eldest son was informed: “...Our family is now grown with a daughter, a pretty and cute girl, she entered the family very simply, without explanations (only Bisha¹⁷ was told everything). <...> What a heavy stone, which stifled my heart, fell off with the arrival of this kid. Now, finally, I can breathe ...”.¹⁸ From the letters of this period, it is clear that not only children, but also for the Moscow Botkin brothers (Peter and Dmitry Petrovich), the relatives of the first wife, it was not easy to accept such an unusual woman, as

well as the existence of an illegitimate child.¹⁹ And there was another factor of concern – Ekaterina Alexeevna was pregnant with another child, and due by early autumn.

It was the echo of a difficult home situation, that could influence the following words in a letter to his pregnant wife, which convey a sense of guilt and embarrassment: “... In the present time, to live a family life, to enjoy all the benefits of family happiness – it would be a sin. <...> I’m still convinced that we’re off to a good, holy deed, to contribute in which will be a joy for a large part of life, <...> we are working on the idea of Christianity” [7, p. 42, 67, 98].

Fifty-five letters reached their destination.²⁰ Since S.P. Botkin was close to the theater of warfare during 170 days (from May 31 to November 17), we can calculate that the correspondence left twice a week, with each courier.²¹ At the same time from these dates it can be seen that almost not a day went by when S.P. Botkin did not put the pen to paper. He wrote to his young wife: “...Knowing for myself that I enjoyed reading all the small details of your life, I’m sure that you, same as I do, enjoy reading all sorts of nonsense that comes to my mind...” [7, p. 57]. Ekaterina Alexeevna was very attuned to the state of her husband’s mind: “I understand that our letters is the only consolation for you in your sad life...”.²²

The relationship between husband and wife became the prominent subject of correspondence. Mature, passionate about his calling, experienced, self-confident man with a keen sense of civic and professional duty turned out to be very attached to this obviously inexperienced, but an active, daring

¹⁴ Fundamental Library of the Military Medical Academy. CM. Kirov (FB WMA). SP Botkin estate. F. XV. Storage unit 9, No 5 (Botkina EA. Letters to SP Botkin, October 26 – November 9, 1877). L. 14 (letter of November 1, 1875).

¹⁵ RO IRLI (PD). MP Botkin estate. F. 365. Op. 1. Storage unit 13/1. L. 28 (letter from May 24, 1877).

¹⁶ RGIA. Fund of the Chancellery of His Imperial Majesty (HIM) for accepting petitions, filed to the “Highest” name. F. 1412. Op. 2. D. 1190 (The case of the legalization of the daughter of Leib-Medic, Privy Councilor Sergey Botkin). 10 p.

¹⁷ Bisha – family nickname of Sergey, the oldest son, (born 1859), who at the time was seventeen.

¹⁸ RO IRLI (PD). M.P. Botkin’s foundation. F. 365. Op. 1. Storage unit 13/1. L. 29 (letter from May 24, 1877).

¹⁹ RF OI NNNIIOZ. Botkin’s letters from Bulgaria (May – November 1877). Letter 28 from Aug 9 1877.

²⁰ Government couriers, employed by members of the royal suite, delivered letters to the capital in a week: we can draw such a conclusion, based on the fact that most of them are marked with the date of receipt made by Catherine Alexeyevna’s hand.

²¹ An indication of the postal connection with the Emperor’s Headquarters is found in the letters of the member of the suite Count N.P. Ignatiev: “The dispatch of couriers between the Headquarters and Saint Petersburg was arranged as follows: from here they send on Tuesday and Saturday in the evenings, and from Petersburg also with the evening train on Wednesday and Friday” [14, p. 30].

²² FB WMA. Archive of S.P. Botkin. F. XV. Storage unit 9, No 5 (Botkina E.A. Letters to S.P. Botkin, October 26 – November 9, 1877). L. 23 r. (letter of November 9, 1877).

young woman who liked him a lot. The lyricism of addresses (“baby mine”, “my dear Gulinka [little dove]”, “my dear, precious swallow,” “my dear swallow, a good friend of mine”, “my joy, my heart of gold”), expression of feelings, help us look at the rational Botkin in a new way: “...Today I especially want to talk to you, tell you how much I love you, how happy I am with your love. But can words express what you feel, human speech lacks those subtle shades of feeling that my whole soul is full of now, if I mastered a musical technique, I would express my feelings more precise with musical sounds...”²³ In another letter we read: “...I wrote to you already that I have never lived so closely to you, as it is now, I love you even more, no one will pull you away from me, you’re my baby, you’re inside me, we are connected by nature...”²⁴ Touching are the manifestations of his concern for the pregnant wife: “...Take care of yourself, my dear, beloved swallow, do not torture yourself with letters to me, write every time, but do not tire yourself, write two lines, tell me that you love me, that will make me happy”²⁵ Also, self-analysis of Botkin’s own mental state becomes important for a better understanding of his original thinking: “...Just practicing my craft in the form available to me now, does not satisfy me by far; of course it is also a great support, but still it is rather dry and does not give the food to a whole scope of brain functions, usually attributed to the life of the heart. Yes, dear, you managed to give me this food, your heart, your love have kept me warm in this dugout, in the moral and physical sense of the word...”²⁶ Rationalistic thinking allows him to consider the phenomenon of love from materialistic positions – as a kind of mechanism facilitating adaptation to extreme environmental conditions. The vision of his mental state as a product of “brain functions” is the perception of a physiologist, matching the understanding of the scope of neural activity in the works of

his contemporary and friend, I.M. Sechenov [32]. However, Botkin’s innate emotionality and high sensitivity is disclosed in the way he senses the moment when his wife is about to give birth: “Reading this letter, I was weeping like a child, but these tears are not bitter, these are the tears of happiness from knowing I’m loved by someone like you. <...> Going with you through all the current sufferings, of course my nerves are so tense that I could not read your letter without the relief of tears, as it is the only consolation that remains for me in my present condition. With whom shall I share my concerns, to whom I can tell how much I love you and how hard it is for me to be away from you at this moment? I think you will give birth now (after four). I used to greet all of my first children with tears, which I could never hold in these high moments of a woman’s life. My darling, if I was now standing next to you, I would have fallen to your hands and kiss them. What bliss would it be to see now your bright, clear, loving eyes...”²⁷

The letters indicate how helpful can cherished memories be in the psychologically difficult conditions. S.P. Botkin often refers to those, reliving the romantic moments: “...Sitting behind the desk in my prison before a small window with wooden beams, I experience happiness by being completely transported back to you, into our bedroom. <...> I try to spend on my own at least an hour so I can just sit and quietly think of you out there, then I recall you at the various encounters of our lives: in the Crimea at the <Korsakov> cottage, when you walked me out with a stick, and on your balcony, and under a large walnut tree in Borzhevitsa in a white dress <and> in a coquettish hat, and during my consultation in Livadia wearing a black dress and your tiny paw in a black glove,²⁸ and at Milyutina’s, for the first time we met and, finally, abroad in Italy, and in Karlsbad and Aegir, and grandpa’s on Sergievskaya street,²⁹ and Nice, and Cannes, and finally, our life in the

²³ RF OI NNIIIIOZ. Letters from S.P. Botkin from Bulgaria (May – November 1877). Letter No. 55 of November 10, 1877

²⁴ RF OI NNIIIIOZ. Letters from S.P. Botkin from Bulgaria (May – November 1877). Letter No. 42 of September 16, 1877

²⁵ RF OI NNIIIIOZ. S.P. Botkin’s letters from Bulgaria (May – November 1877). Letter No. 30 of August 9, 1877

²⁶ RF OI NNIIIIOZ. S.P. Botkin’s letters from Bulgaria (May – November 1877). Letter No. 55 of November 10, 1877

²⁷ RF OI NNIIIIOZ. S.P. Botkin’s letters from Bulgaria (May – November 1877). Letter No. 42 of September 16, 1877

²⁸ This shows that Yekaterina was in mourning, which could be because of her deceased little sister – Mary (1854 – March 1873) – or her first husband (died 1868).

²⁹ The Naryshkina mansion, inherited by Ekaterina Alekseevna from her grandfather, Adjutant General S.P. Sumarokov, preserved till this day – Tchaikovsky Street (until 1923 – Sergievskaya Street), 7.

Crimea and in our cozy house on Galernaya street. I live by these memories, reviewing them as the favorite album of my life...”.³⁰ Characteristically, this listing of places they met corresponds to the sequence of Botkin’s trips in the early 1870s as a court physician of Empress Maria Alexandrovna (March–October 1872 – Crimea, Livadia, April–June 1873 – Italy (Sorrento, Albano), July 1873 – Karlsbad and Aegir, March 1875 – France (Nice) August – September 1876 – Crimea, Livadia). It becomes clear the introduction to E.A. Mordvinova already took place in the spring of 1872 – three years before the death of Anastasia, the first wife of S.P. Botkin. This is confirmed by short diary entries of the court physician, which, for some obviously very meaningful moments, becomes a personal diary of S.P. Botkin.³¹ The existence of the relationship between S.P. Botkin and E.A. Mordvinova in spring 1873 is emphasized simultaneously by his letters to his brother Michael,³² and journal note.³³

Obviously, longing for his beloved made the adversities of the protracted military campaign less painful. “What remains is, for a thousand times, countless times to repeat to you that I love, love, love you, like I never ever loved anyone, how one loves for the last time...”.³⁴ Note that these words were written at the time when the scale of the tragedy of the third assault on Plevna became clear, and the king – his only patient during this

campaign – shaken “by enormous sacrifices made in vain <...>, cried like a baby” [13, p. 123] and came down with a severe fever, an exacerbation of chronic malarial infection [8].

Letters of his beloved and loving wife helped Botkin maintain a mental balance, without a doubt. They began with greetings: “My dear, my Swallow, Sergulya, Swallow precious, my sweet *baby* [in English]...”, “My little dove, my doggy...”, “Hello, my precious heart”, “Hello, my joy, how was your sleep? What did you dream of? I think I saw you in my dreams all night ...”, and the declarations went on: “My thoughts are never at home, they are always where you are, always with you. I get this from many people: “You are not here ...”; and really, I’m rarely “here”, mostly with you...” In letters of the young wife her state must have been shown: “... If you could see and feel, my beloved, how much tenderness and passion boils in my heart for you! I would have smothered you with hugs and kisses if you would have come in this moment. I would have sold my soul and be ruined if it allowed me to see you ...”.³⁵ Touching words of his two-year-old daughter were heard in those letters: “Is daddy sick in bed? Does daddy have a bed? Is daddy sick at the war? Does his tummy hurt? His throat? Why doesn’t he come back for so long? I will write to him, dear papa, come back”.³⁶ Botkin’s careless reference to the fact that some officers’ wives (of Gen. T. <uchkov>) came to the front (letter No 42 of 24 September) [7, p. 239] led to Ekaterina trying to use this opportunity, “...I’m only asking for one favor, for both of us, <...> invite me for a visit, that will refresh the both of us. Invite me with a despatch, I don’t need to pack a lot, it will only take me an hour to get ready”.³⁷ She would go on this trip if it was not for a difficult birth: “If it was possible to fly over all of the space dividing us, I would long since have been around you, wrap your dear neck around with one hand, the other holding your hair, always falling on your

³⁰ RF OI NNIIIOZ. S.P. Botkin’s letters from Bulgaria (May – November 1877). Letter No. 42 of September 16, 1877.

Note that such thoughts were for many men a way of psychological adaptation in the conditions of prolonged stress. Thus, the Emperor Alexander Nikolayevich touchingly recalls his first encounter, his “precious anniversary” of meeting with his beloved, Ekaterina Dolgorukova, and those memories “make <him> shudder with emotion” (quoted by [33, p. 141]).

³¹ FB VMA. S.P. Botkin’s estate. F. VIII. Storage unit 12 (Journal of the royal medic S.P. Botkin. 1872–1874). L. 6. (entry in early June 1872).

³² RO IRLI (PD). M.P. Botkin’s estate. F. 365. Op. 1. Storage unit 12 (Letters from S.P. Botkin to M.P. Botkin for 1866–1874). L. 91, 98 (letters of April 18 and 29, 1873).

³³ FB VMA. SP Botkin estate. F. VIII. Storage unit 12 (Journal of the royal medic S.P. Botkin. 1872–1874). L. 37 rev., 41, 41 rev., 43 rev., 73, 81 rev. (entries of May 4, 8, 9, 12, July 1, 23, 1873).

³⁴ RF OI NNIIIOZ. S.P. Botkin’s letters from Bulgaria (May – November 1877). Letter No 42 from Sept 15, 1877.

³⁵ FB VMA. S.P. Botkin estate. F. XV. Storage unit 9. №5 (Botkina E.A. Letters to S.P. Botkin, October 26 – November 9, 1877). L. 5 rev. (letter of October 27, 1877).

³⁶ FB VMA. S.P. Botkin estate. F. XV. Storage unit 9. No 5 (Botkina E.A. Letters to S.P. Botkin October 26 – November 9, 1877). L. 14, 23 rev. (letters of November 1 and 9, 1877).

³⁷ FB VMA. S.P. Botkin estate. F. XV. Storage unit 9. No 5 (Botkina E.A. Letters to S.P. Botkin, October 26 – November 9, 1877). L. 14 rev., 25, 25 rev. (letter of November 2, 1877).

face, and I would give long, gentle, hot kisses to you, my only friend, my source of light, my bright sunshine...”³⁸

Ekatherina Botkina’s resentment, caused by the prolonged absence of her husband, is a testament to her radical views and her passionate nature. The royal physician’s wife (!) allows herself under conditions of total censorship [7, p. 8; 14, p. 14] to write about the imperial court to the addressee, who was in the retinue of the monarch, the following: “All of this society, which they call high, is so rotten, ugly, vulgar, vile and dishonest that causes disgust. <...> I’m not fond of these people, and was never fond of them. Russia is suffering much because of them, in different circumstances, both in times of peace and war...”³⁹ An evidence of that was found in the diaries of the IMHA historian, a message from a year later: “...Two ladies, wives of men of high stature, were suspected and have been subjected to a police search for political propaganda. One of them <...> Ekaterina Alekseevna Botkina – wife of the chief court physician who enjoys the full confidence of the royal family. What they are accused of – I do not know; but I’ve heard from reliable people, <...> M-me Botkina spent very unhappy ‘fifteen minutes’ in the III department.⁴⁰ Then both were bailed out by their husbands”⁴¹

Of course, for a man whose duty kept him long in close proximity to the royal family, such conduct of his wife was unacceptable. More surprising is that Botkin himself is not confused by this: the spouses communicate freely in their letters in the same spirit. At the same time, E. Botkina realizes that her behavior may affect her husband’s career, and tries to restrain herself:

³⁸ FB VMA. S.P. Botkin estate. F. XV. Storage unit 9. No 5 (Botkina E.A. Letters to S.P. Botkin, October 26 – November 9, 1877). L. 13 (letter of November 1, 1877).

³⁹ FB VMA. S.P. Botkin estate. F. XV. Storage unit 9. No 5 (Botkina E.A. Letters to S.P. Botkin, October 26 – November 9, 1877). L. 13 rev. – 14

⁴⁰ The third branch of His Imperial Majesty’s Own Office was the highest organ of the political police in the Russian Empire during the reign of Nicholas I and Alexander II (from 1826 to 1880), which conducted surveillance of politically unreliable persons.

⁴¹ FB VMA. F. VIII. Storage unit. 18. (Chistovich Y.A. Diaries of 1855–1880, typewriting, part 3). L. 629 (entry of April 20, 1879).

“I’m learning from you, but my temper prevents me”⁴² However, it is clear that her efforts are not due to a need to show loyalty as a czar’s subject, but with her trying not to cause her husband any problems.

Passionate feelings in his second marriage has changed a lot in S.P. Botkin’s regard to his court service. In the beginning, being busy helped the royal physician hide from the discord in the family, but when Botkin found family happiness, he seeks to get rid of duties binding his will. So, if earlier (spring 1873), according to the diaries, he thought only about the possible resignation [12], then after meeting Ekaterina he repeatedly filed petitions about it (1875, 1877, 1879). In the letters, the topic was discussed during the autumn: “... If I did not have in my head a firm decision to change my way of life, then maybe I would <not> dare to ask <for resignation>; but I do not want any benefits precisely in order to have more rights to a full exemption <...>, I will not be able to go on at the same rate. <...> My family life is falling apart in the most ruthless way, and I understand how I need to get out, jump out of the wheel, in which I’ve been spinning in the past few years, <...> with a clear conscience I can ask to dismiss me from the obligation which exceeds my powers...”⁴³

The clinical and teaching work was Botkin’s calling, his lifetime cause [2, 5]. Considering this, the information found in the journal cuts, that for the sake of family happiness he is ready to even change his professional life, is a real discovery: “These six months, which exhausted me as much as it was possible, gave me, on the other hand, the power of *self-preservation*. I feel obliged to make every effort to escape and not so much for myself, but for you and for all of our children. Now I am not yet old enough to not be able to arrange my life in a new way; if I’ll still have my clinic, then I don’t need to do anything anew; if I will have to sacrifice even a clinic, I <...> consider myself as morally awake, to start or rather continue my work in a different way...”⁴⁴

⁴² FB VMA. S.P. Botkin’s estate. F. XV. Storage unit. 9. No 5 (E.A. Botkina. Letters to S.P. Botkin, October 26 – November 9, 1877). L. 5 rev. (letter from October 27, 1877).

⁴³ RF OI NNIIOZ. Botkin’s letters from Bulgaria (May–November 1877). Letter 55 from November 10, 1877.

⁴⁴ RF OI NNIIOZ. Botkin’s letters from Bulgaria (May–November 1877). Letter 55 from November 10, 1877.

Botkin's understanding of the moral meaning of the family for a man shows in that he, obviously referring to himself, writes about the impact of war on the psyche: "...People who have a family, <...> undergo this trial better, which our company is a subject to. Those who have it the hardest are those who don't have anyone to think of or to long for; these unclaimed for have completely lost it and have grown old in two months as if two years of this life have passed..." [7, p. 129]. Is it not why he was watching carefully ("with great interest I study the personality") his bachelor companions (52-year-old professor of surgery Moscow I.N. Nowacki, colonel of the royal entourage V.P. Sch<litter> who spent 18 years in the army, the royal-surgeon Yu.N. Kovalevsky) [7, p. 56, 89]?

A significant space in the correspondence is taken by issues of child rearing. Botkin's attitude indicates that he was a caring, philoprogenitive father. In the autumn letters he touches on the problems of education. The family had a tradition of inviting the best tutors. Thus, the eldest son, Sergei, was taught physics by P.P. Van der Fleet – assistant professor, later professor of Saint Petersburg University (his name is known in connection with his theoretical work), who was introduced to the Botkin family by their longtime friend I.M. Sechenov, his colleague at the time. These sessions were conducted using an original method: once a week for two hours, he gave a lecture at home with the analysis of the previously proposed articles from foreign magazines and books, the second session, practical, implied conducting experiments in the physics laboratory at the university department. Suzya (son Eugene's home name), who was lagging behind in Russian, was trained by A.V. Kurganovich, who served in the Second gymnasium of Emperor Alexander I, where all the Botkin sons studied. Botkin was unhappy with his son's academic results and wanted to replace the teacher, although E.A. Botkina brings up a reasonable argument that they should not lay off a tutor, with whom the boys will study for years to come.

From discussions in letters, we see how different the characters of Botkin children were. For example, 11-year-old Sasha (born in 1866), the fourth son, significantly lagged behind Eugene, who was older than he was only a year. Birthday gifts for each were chosen with a special meaning. For example, pocket watches were

considered as a recognition of growing up. Such a gift for Sasha, who, according to his stepmother, "did not deserve it with his conduct" was "to incite his feelings and make him act like a grownup, behave better..."⁴⁵ In her letters E.A. Botkina tells about the boys' academic failures, and shares the solutions: "...Tonight, I gave Petya⁴⁶ a ticket to the Italian opera,⁴⁷ so he can have some kind of a treat, as he was very sad because of his poor grade in Greek, some small incentive occasionally has a beneficial effect on him ..."⁴⁸ In his youth Petya was not always sure in his own abilities, which sometimes completely paralyzed his will.

A recurring theme of the correspondence is health matters of the family members. Here is one of the typical messages: "...Nastia got her menses after 20 days again and this time with severe pain. <...> Shurka [Alexander] is still down with indigestion. <...> Malia is still busy with the stomach, now she's constipated, now the stool is like white paste, then diarrhea, <...> sleep is not calm, she squeaks in her sleep, complaining that her stomach hurts"⁴⁹. In the absence of the head of a family, children were looked after by Dr. V.M. Borodulin, Botkin's clinical intern, close to his family. 10 years later (in 1887) he marries the only daughter of his teacher by his first wife, Anastasia. For the management of E.A. Botkina's labour and follow-up, Botkin invited the obstetrician A.Y. Krassovsky,⁵⁰ the

⁴⁵ FB VMA. S.P. Botkin's estate. F. XV. Storage unit 9, number 5 (E.A. Botkin's letters to S.P. Botkin. October 26–9 November 1877). L. 15 rev. (letter dated November 2, 1877).

⁴⁶ Peter Botkin (1861–1933) was in his sixteenth year.

⁴⁷ The letter is dated November 2, 1877. That evening in the capital in the Bolshoi (Stone) Theater G. Verdi's opera "Masquerade" played. [34] At the site of this theater is now the St. Petersburg Conservatory. From the Botkins mansion (Galernaya street, d. 77) to the Theater Square along the Moika river one could get within less than a quarter of an hour.

⁴⁸ FB VMA. S.P. Botkin's estate. F. XV. Storage unit 9, number 5 (E.A. Botkin's letters to S.P. Botkin. October 26–9 November 1877). L. 15 (letter dated November 2, 1877).

⁴⁹ FB VMA. S.P. Botkin's estate. F. XV. Storage unit 9, number 5 (E.A. Botkin's letters to S.P. Botkin. October 26–9 November 1877). L. 9 rev. (letter dated 31 October 1877).

⁵⁰ Anton Yakovlevich Krasovsky (1821–1898) – Honorary royal obstetrician (from 1866), royal obstetrician (since 1874), doctor of medicine, the actual state councilor, full professor in the department of obstetrics, women's and children's diseases at IMHA (1858–1876), director of obstetrical establishments of the Imperial Saint Petersburg Orphanage.

IMHA professor, the master of obstetrics in Saint Petersburg (he assisted the birth of all Princess Dolgorukova's children by Alexander II when she gave birth in secret in 1872, 1873, 1876 and 1878) [35, p. 55, 62, 63]. The health status of E.A. Botkina before and after childbirth was monitored by another colleague of S.P. Botkin — his former student, Dr. E.A. Golovin.

Special scrupulousness with which S.P. Botkin treated the matters of family and the upbringing of children, were apparently rooted in his painful childhood experiences. He clearly remembered his childhood in a large and wealthy family⁵¹ [2, 5, 21]. E.A. Botkina recorded fragmentary memories of her husband: "As long as mother was alive, there was some kind of care for young children, but the mother did not have time to mess with a huge family. The family was growing every eleven months..."⁵² His mother, the second wife of his father, died when he was six years old: "...the old father, not really going into the education and lives of young children, left <...> all of them to teachers. But teachers were cheap and therefore all sorts came across. One of them, for example, asking the seven year-old Sergei to copy the workbook and not happy with the result, used to throw him [p. 5] both his notebook and workbook, and words, and the workbook lay upside down before the little student. He diligently copying off from the upside down workbook, copied mechanically, not understanding anything, and no one saw the disgrace that was happening..."⁵³ So, living in the house, which was recognized "the most educated and intelligent merchant's house in Moscow" [10, p. 27], due to lack of parental attention and teacher's participation, S.P. Botkin has long remained a socially neglected child. In the age of 10, he has significantly lagged behind their peers, according to the family "stupid boy who they refused to teach to read and write, and about whom his father said:" What shall we do with this fool? One thing remains — to send him for a soldier..."⁵⁴

⁵¹ S.P. Botkin was the eleventh child in a family and sixth from the second marriage of his father. Altogether in the house there were 26 children, 14 of whom reached adulthood.

⁵² FB VMA. S.P. Botkin estate. F. XV. Storage unit 3. No 1 (E.A. Botkina. Biography of S.P. Botkin). L. 4.

⁵³ FB VMA. S.P. Botkin estate. F. XV. Storage unit 3. No 1 (E.A. Botkina. Biography of S.P. Botkin). L. 4 rev. — 5.

⁵⁴ FB VMA. S.P. Botkin estate. F. XV. Storage unit 3, No 1 (E.A. Botkina. The Biography of S.P. Botkin). L. 5 — 5 rev.

Botkin's parental affection is characterized by the fact that the tragic third assault on Plevna, and the subsequent serious disease of the emperor [8] did not distract him from dreaming about his eighth child (his first after his official marriage with E.A. Botkina): "...Do I need to tell you, honey, what I am going through; <...> one scene is drawn before me, I see you suffering, I see how you try to conceal it, how lovingly you're smiling at me, I'm taking your tiny hot hand, kissing your palm, you're facing me with your lips; now I see you as you finally calmed down, I hear a baby cry, I'm kissing you and I'm crying with happiness, knowing your torments are over now..."⁵⁵ From the omissions of the same correspondence we learn that E.A. Botkina suffered a difficult birth and soon lost her baby. The news of this has undermined Botkin's strength. This was the reason that he could not continue performing his duties and rushed to Saint Petersburg, come what may.

Sergei Botkin's childhood stereotype of a large family of many children probably contributed to the formation of his views on women's issues, contrary to the idea of emancipation common at that time in a liberal society. He considered childbearing the main mission of a woman. The belief was manifested in his professional activities. According to the memoirs of one of his patients, at his consultations Botkin often asked women the question: "When did you have your last child?". If it turned out that the woman did not have any for a few years, he replied: "It is very unfortunate, the best medicine for you would be having children" [36, p. 64].

A detailed discussion of domestic issues in the letters provides a complete picture of the Botkins' family life. Writer Yuri Nagibin rightly said: "The most detailed, thorough biographies, painstaking research may not create such an "effect of presence", as one short letter..." [37, p. 15]. Feeling the psychological exhaustion of her husband, E.A. Botkina was trying to distract him with the household stuff, which, apparently, meant little to her as well. She describes her hairstyle, the cut and color of her dress, etc. Her telling about economic matters was more

⁵⁵ RF OI NNIOZ. S.P. Botkin's letters from Bulgaria (May — November 1877). Letter number 41 of September 14, 1877.

substantial, for example, about her orders to insulate the wall in his study, of a successful purchase of an adult pony to carry laundry and let the children ride him in the summer, about a gift for her husband – rich traveling sleigh made of Karelian birch with American bearskin, on buying a pair of black horses. “Tomorrow, <if> everything goes well, I will lead the whole brood to the photographer, we’ll take a group shot, I and all seven kids – a gift for you...”⁵⁶ – she reports to her spouse. Whether this photoshoot took place and whether the images are preserved, is unknown.

The letters reveal S.P. Botkin’s habits: smoking strong cigars (up to 10 pieces a day), the preference of sweet wines (his favorite was the Madeira), which he had in his home cellar (400 bottles), his usual food (scrambled eggs – a traditional breakfast, and tea – “as the best of drinks”, lemons). Here is where we find descriptions of packages she used to send him: “Shall I send you something to eat, sweetie? I will send you some caviar, but please do not eat it too much, that’ll just give you a colic”.⁵⁷ These notes let us imagine how, and in what company the family spent their evenings, who could come to dinner without an invitation. Serious professional topics were discussed alongside. Thus, E.A. Botkina offered to organize in the family mansion, which she inherited from her grandfather,⁵⁸ a hospital for the wounded, she passed the news from IMHA in detail (about the illness of Professor Rudnev et al.), relayed information on the health situation in the court, about the circumstances in which an article was printed that distorted the role of units of the Red Cross at the front. In addition, there is documentary evidence that Ekaterina was helping S.P. Botkin for many years, setting his home appointments.⁵⁹ All this shows that she really was

his soulmate and could become a mainstay in its activities.

S.P. Botkin’s nephew in his memoirs says that Sergey Petrovich “enjoyed great love of Emperor Alexander II”, while his wife was not invited to the court [27, p. 294]. Alexander II was loyal to the fact that the wife of his courtier had radical views. Condescending attitude of the Emperor to the young princess, the same age as his mistress, Catherine Dolgorukova, could be explained by his awareness of the environment in which she was raised, and be a manifestation of male solidarity: as for himself, contrary to public opinion, the monarch left for his subjects the opportunity to defend their right to their private life.

At the same time, non-conformism of the court physician in family life (illicit relationship, the birth of an illegitimate child), the oppositional stance and provocative behavior of his wife, apparently complicated his relationship with the Empress and hindered the development of trust between doctor and patient, as Maria Alexandrovna in the period lived knowing about the unfaithfulness of her august spouse [12]. However, the passion and openness of Sergei Botkin gave an impression that one could not expect from the court physician any backroom games. Combined with high professionalism, this made him indispensable in the entourage of Alexander II. In turn, the long-term stay in the imperial family allowed S.P. Botkin implement its organizational initiatives.

S.P. Botkin was close to the Empress – his royal employer, who preached traditional family values, which ran counter to the situation in the physician’s personal life: first, the presence of an illegal relationship, then a marriage to a woman who was not accepted in the high society. S.P. Botkin explained his position as follows: “...People tend to forget that a man marries for himself, not for them, and therefore they feel entitled to look at the marriage of another from their own point of view...”⁶⁰ For the time when starting a family was seen as a form of implementation of the dynastic, economic, patrimonial and other interests, this understanding (a family as a product of an

⁵⁶ FB VMA. S.P. Botkin’s estate. F. XV. Storage unit 9, number 5 (E.A. Botkina. Letters to S.P. Botkin, October 26 – November 9, 1877). L. 19 rev. (letter dated November 5, 1877).

⁵⁷ FB VMA. S.P. Botkin’s estate. F. XV. Storage unit 9, number 5 (E.A. Botkina. Letters to S.P. Botkin, October 26 – November 9, 1877). L. 25 (letter dated November 2, 1877).

⁵⁸ Number 7 on Sergievskaya street in St. Petersburg (now the Tchaikovsky street).

⁵⁹ FB VMA. S.P. Botkin estate. F. XV. Storage unit I. No 3 (Journal of patients’ appointments <for Botkin home consultation>, 1883–1884). 45 p.

⁶⁰ IRLI (PD). MP Foundation Botkin. F. 365, Inv. 1. Ed. hr. 13/1 (Letters S.P. Botkin – M.P. Botkin, 1874–1889 gg.). L. 16 (letter dated March 1876).

emotional relationship) was light-minded, very bold and unconventional.

His memoirs preserved an evidence allowing to imagine how the Botkins were perceived by their contemporaries about the same period (a year before the events in September 1876): "...Botkin is unattractive, but a very nice person <...>, charming and polite. <...> She is a small, thin, homely woman with a huge nose, *obviously very clever*, but not pretty.⁶¹ Botkin's face *shines with happiness...*" [31, p. 995, 996, 998]. Next to this woman he was in perfect harmony: felt like the head of a large family nest – which he had once grown in. This feature was also indicated by N.A. Belogolovy, when he called his friend "a biblical patriarch," "surrounded by his twelve children from the age of thirty years to a one-year-old..." [2, p. 356]. It also drew the attention of an accidental witness: "How nicely all the children carry themselves... <...> The spirit of abiding to the elders rules in the family and with all the education, patriarchal mores are showing" (from the diary of Academician V.P. Bezobrazov, record of May 28, 1886) [38, p. 524].

Sergey Petrovich and Ekaterina Alexeevna Botkins have lived happily together for 13 years, became the parents of eight children (two boys died in childhood, six girls survived to adulthood). Over the years, S.P. Botkin arranged the mansion on Galernaya Street, organized the construction of a large country estate in Finland. E.A. Botkina used to breed bees, was engaged in agricultural work, was fond of daguerreotypy (photography) – an avant-garde art at the time [39, p. 25]. The writer M.E. Saltykov-Schedrin's son remembered her as "a lady is not particularly pleasant, but, apparently, a good hostess ..." [39, p. 24]. Her views and political stance allowed her not to try to please everyone. A large family, a financially secure life, common children – all this contributed to the fact that they both settled down – gradually developed into a trustworthy, politically correct family people, happy with their married life.

S.P. Botkin, who in his early youth adhered to nihilistic views, and was later a liberal, towards

the end of his life became more right-wing. His grandson – S.P. Chekhov (1918–2004), guided by the family legend, believed that his grandfather's political views were the closest thing to a "constitutional democracy" [40, p. 43]. E.A. Botkina lost the sharpness of the political radicalism beside her husband: from a young atheist and anarchist, surrounded by revolutionaries, she has evolved into a caring mother, totally devoting herself to the welfare of the family, for example, she was bustling about setting up a home church in the new Finnish estate.⁶² The Botkins home made a good impression: "...I can rarely remember a family, especially celebrities (unfortunately, celebrities rarely have well-appointed families), leaving such a good impression. No trace of the nihilism, and how much they slandered in this regard both Botkin and his wife (nee. princess Obolensky). She is an exemplary mother of a family" (May 1886) [38, p. 524]. After the events of 1917 in Russia E.A. Botkin found herself in exile, where she was engaged in charity work.

After the assassination of Alexander II and his death, S.P. Botkin retained his post under the new emperor, but was actually removed from the court. We allow ourselves to assume that the evolution towards conformity has helped save the Botkin family from emigration, which in the current political situation have chosen for themselves the well-known representatives of the liberal camp (M.T. Loris-Melikov, I.I. Mechnikov) and people from Botkin's close circle (N.A. Belogoloviy, A.F. Merchinsky et al.).

Note that in the detailed biographical sketch of S.P. Botkin, the subject of his second marriage is merely touched upon [2]. Perhaps N.A. Belogoloviy, who knew S.P. Botkin since childhood and who for more than forty years was associated with his family, there was a reason why he did not mention that these seemingly so different people were happy together. The explanation could be in his desire not to hurt the children from his first marriage, who remembered what preceded the emergence of a new family of their father.

⁶¹ Here, apparently, is the emphasized attention to the appearance of this woman, a note of how "unpretty" she was – which is, most likely, the result of dislike, which the author of these memories felt for the princess.

⁶² Central State Historical Archives of Saint Petersburg (CGIA). Foundation of the Saint Petersburg Consistory. F. 19. Op. 74. D. 8 («The case of the construction of a house church in the estate of the actual secret adviser, court physician, Prof. S.P. Botkin in the village of Kultila in Finland). 6 p. (April-September 1882).

Correspondence in the time of the forced separation from a loved one, staying in the harsh war reality and the difficult family circumstances allows us to see the previously unknown personality traits of S.P. Botkin. This already mature, professionally accomplished man, recognized by the society, was caught in a passionate feeling, comparable to what one feels at a very young age, towards the externally unattractive, daring and liberated young woman. Botkin was attracted by her business activity, her interest in everything new, and, because of the significant differences in age – her inexperience. The forty-five years old descendant from a merchant class and a twenty-seven years old representative of the upper classes, the princess with the revolutionary views, while both already had the experience of a previous marriage, were able to create a happy family. The letters show how much Sergei Botkin needed Ekaterina, how the sensuality and mutuality in relationships were important for him, and became to him a source of

human happiness, of energy for his creative and professional activity.

The unpublished passages of S.P. Botkin's Bulgarian letters to his wife contain information, which gives an idea about S.P. Botkin's personal life, allows the "unbuttoned" view of the Russian emperor's court physician, who stood at the origins of the national academic medicine, the founder of the national clinical school. History of S.P. Botkin's second marriage is typical of 1860–1870 years: it reflects the spirit of the times and the current social trends. Private correspondence allows us to see another Botkin – father and husband. Could it be that his private life ("own house") holds the key to his sense of civic and professional duty, patriotic ideas and activities? The discovered biographical details do "humanize" the portrait of the great clinician, social activist, reformer of national health care, largely explain his public stance, decisions, actions, and make the image of S.P. Botkin more approachable.

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