

Becoming a Romanov

Grand Duchess Elena of Russia
and her World (1807–1873)

MARINA SOROKA and CHARLES A. RUUD



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Preface

Elena Pavlovna Romanova began her life as a royal princess of Württemberg in 1807; she died a Russian grand duchess in 1873. She is the only female Romanov whose name merits mention in any narrative of Russian history after the Crimean War because of her contributions to social welfare, medicine, science, music, and the emancipation of serfs in 1861.

However, she has remained an elusive figure, often mentioned but never explained. A publicist in 1882 provided a reason for the reluctance of biographers in imperial Russia. They were ‘fearful of hurting the self-esteem of the living by rendering justice to the deceased’,¹ as none of the Romanovs of the late empire could match Elena Pavlovna’s accomplishments or her achievements. In the early 1900s Anatoly Fedorovich Koni, a celebrated legal expert and publicist, collected some materials for her biography, but all he did was publish an essay.

After the revolution of 1917, in the Soviet times, writing about the Romanovs – above all writing favourably – was discouraged. Nevertheless, Elena Pavlovna’s role in the abolition of serfdom and the founding of the first Russian community of nurses was sometimes mentioned. Her name also appeared in the albums featuring the masterpieces from the Russian State Museum housed in her palace. A prominent Soviet novelist Sergei Sergeev-Tsensky slipped her name into his fictionalized narrative of the Crimean War, *Sevastopol Toils*. It was exceptional for the Soviet period and proved the lasting quality of her contribution.

In today’s Russia this benign semi-neglect continues: anniversaries of the causes which she supported – the Red Cross, the Petersburg conservatory, hospitals and the emancipation of serfs, among them – are occasions to remember her. Several essays dedicated to Elena Pavlovna that have appeared are re-worked conference presentations and their scope is necessarily limited.

In 1991 she was featured in a short German monograph about August von Haxthausen, Elena Pavlovna’s Prussian friend and protégé,² but the author focused on one issue, emancipation, and Haxthausen’s intellectual contribution to it.

¹ ‘V.K. Elena Pavlovna. Zametki k ee zhizneopisaniiu’, *RS* (1882), 33: 781–802.

² Martina Stoyanoff-Odoy, *Die Grossfürstin Helene von Russland und August Freiherr von Haxthausen: Zwei konservative Reformer im Zeitalter der russische Bauernbefreiung* (Wiesbaden, 1991).

And yet Elena Pavlovna took it for granted that someone would write a record of her life and as early as 1843 instructed the executors of her will to burn all her personal documents except those which her official biographer would need. As a result, her archive largely contains numerous official reports, newspaper articles, business proposals and memoranda, as well as documents relating to household and court administration. Just as she wished, the breadth of her civic and cultural interests is amply shown; her private world and her views are obliterated as much as possible.

Her diaries were apparently destroyed, save for a dozen pages; so was most of her correspondence with her parents and her friends. She often asked her correspondents to burn her letters, and, unfortunately for historians, they usually complied. We know of her close intellectual friendship with several remarkable personalities of the nineteenth-century Russia but few letters survived. As early as 1847 a German diplomat and biographer Karl-August Varnhagen von Ense was burning to ask the grand duchess to let him read her correspondence with a deceased Russian political thinker, Prince Petr Kozlovsky, which he knew existed; in the 1860s a Swiss theologian Ernest Naville wrote an important memorandum for Elena Pavlovna, but there are no traces of any of these documents in her vast archive. The same applies to her letters to the Evangelical proselytizer Count Alexandre de Saint George.

Still, there are scattered records from her contemporaries and we have found them helpful in trying to see the person behind the public figure. Her voice is best heard in her surviving letters to General Pavel Kiselev, a close friend for forty years. She wrote like she spoke: impetuously, unhesitatingly, never at a loss for words or for ideas. She could go on for five-six pages in a large sprawling hand, without making corrections.

Another friend, Count Sergei Uvarov, kept Elena Pavlovna's expansive, emotional letters tidily bound in a volume of letters he received from the Romanovs now at the Historical Museum in Moscow.³ Field Marshal Fedor Berg preserved her letters written at the time of the Polish insurrection of 1863. Two ladies of her court also saved her letters. These previously unused documents were essential in understanding the person who played an important role in Russia's history despite her insistence that she had led a life of contemplation.

Her marriage in 1824 to the youngest brother of Emperor Alexander I, Mikhail Pavlovich, was ill-fated. In an epoch when happiness was synonymous with love, Elena Pavlovna and her husband evoked pity from their relatives and acquaintances for their loveless marriage.

Her strong personality ensured that she achieved an unprecedented degree of independence in the Romanov family. She used it to demonstrate what a determined and competent Romanov could accomplish. Like other royal

³ A Moscow colleague, Dr Pavel A. Tribunsky directed us to Count Uvarov's archive.

philanthropists she endowed hospitals, schools, scientific projects and soup kitchens for the poor. The Russian Academy of Sciences holds her weighty collection of scholarly books. Russia owes to her its first lay community of nurses (the precursor of the Russian Red Cross), as well as the first conservatory of music. Her greatest service to Russia was her help to Alexander II in the daunting enterprise of ending serfdom.

‘All that is exquisite is slow in maturing,’ Schopenhauer said. It took thirty years for an angry, unhappy, self-absorbed girl to grow into a generous and noble woman. In 1830 a diarist mentioned Elena Pavlovna’s haughty and fretful temper and concluded: ‘there is something missing in her life, an element which makes her an unfinished piece of work.’⁴ She found an outlet for her energy and intelligence when she was in her late forties. In 1869, when her best work had been done, she told a friend that ‘as long as she sought only to satisfy her vanity, she had not found relief, but when she thirsted for the happiness which one finds in Jesus, her thirst was quenched.’⁵ It seems that she found a cause – Russia – which answered to her religious searching.

Her portraits well illustrate the evolution. Karl Briullov’s 1829 portrait of young Elena Pavlovna displays none of her inner qualities that were yet to come: at 23 the young woman had a weak receding chin of a pouting child and a blank face with insignificant features.

No one would call the majestic, mature woman on her later portraits ‘an unfinished piece of work’. Elena Pavlovna’s expression has become confident and thoughtful. Whether costumed as a Romantic variation on Walter Scott’s captive Queen Mary Stuart, or a redhead Renaissance beauty, she never again appears limp or insipid. In her last portraits she looks straight into an onlooker’s eyes with a little ironic smile on the strong, handsome intelligent face. She found her role in the world and is at peace with herself.

How she achieved a unique position within the imperial family and how she used it is a story told for the first time.

The grand duchess was able to participate in Russian social, cultural and political life because aristocratic women in Russia exercised significant control over family and society. They were also highly literate and actively engaged in patronage networks⁶ which provided Elena Pavlovna with access to politics through her friends.

She favoured masculine company because in her time men were the thinkers and the doers. They helped her grasp the needs of Russia and the possibilities open

⁴ N. Kauchtschischwili (ed.), *Il diario di Darja Fedorovna Ficquelmont*, 26 June 1830, 135.

⁵ L. André, *Madame André-Walther (1807–1886)* (Paris, 1889), 53.

⁶ Barbara Evans Clements, *A History of Women in Russia from Earliest to the Present* (Bloomington, 2012), XVII.

to a Romanov grand duchess; by forging alliances with them she accomplished her goals. Foremost among them was the charmer of ladies Gen. Pavel Kiselev, who was also the most competent statesman of Nicholas I's reign. Another was Sergei Uvarov, an Orientalist, diplomat and minister of education. The Russian foreign minister Prince Alexander Gorchakov, Yuri Samarin, a statesman and publicist, as well as the Prussian scholar August von Haxthausen, were her friends. Together with Anton Rubinstein she brought the Russian national school of music to life. She enabled the brilliant surgeon and pedagogue Nikolai Pirogov to transform Russian medicine and rescue untold numbers of wounded soldiers during the Crimean war.

In the epoch of reforms the grand duchess supported her younger friends from the informal 'Petersburg Party of Progress'. She shared their conviction that reforms could pre-empt revolutions and the autocracy should take the leading role in promoting them.⁷ Nicholas Riasanovsky, looking back from the mid-twentieth century, concluded that the moment when autocracy and Russian society parted ways was after the suppression of the 1825 insurrection.⁸ But the grand duchess and her circle in the 1860s were convinced that it was possible to implement major reforms in Russia without violence or revolution. They were confident that consistent reform activity would consolidate the empire and stabilize the Romanovs' throne. It was not too late, had it not been for the diminished state-building energy of the Romanov dynasty.

All archival documents and a large part of published primary and secondary sources were in French, followed by Russian, English and German. Whenever the translator is not indicated, it was Marina Soroka and Charles Ruud from Russian and Marina Soroka from French and German.

Until the revolution of 1917 Russians had dated their domestic correspondence according to the 'old style' used in the empire, which in the nineteenth century was 12 days behind the Western 'new style' calendar. In writing abroad they used both styles.

We gladly acknowledge our debt to friends and colleagues:

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⁷ A.A. Alafaev, S.S. Sekirinskii, 'K.D. Kavelin', in *Rossiiskie liberaly*. (B.S. Itenberg and V.V. Shelokhaev, eds) (Moscow, 2011), 65.

⁸ Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *A Parting of Ways. Government and the Educated Public in Russia, 1801–1855* (Oxford, 1976).

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Marina Soroka, Charles Ruud

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Abbreviations

ACV	Archives Cantonales Vaudoises
<i>AKV</i>	<i>Arkhiv kniazia Vorontsova</i> [Prince Vorontzov's Archive]
BL	British Library
GARF	Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii
GIM	Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskii Muzei
IRLI RAN	Institut Russkoi Literatury Rossiiskoi Akademii Nauk
<i>LPN</i>	<i>Lettres et papiers du chancelier Comte de Nesselrode, 1760–1850.</i>
OR RGB	Otdel rukopisei Rossiiskoi Gosudarstvennoi Biblioteki
<i>RA</i>	<i>Russkii Arkhiv</i>
RGADA	Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Drevnikh Aktov
<i>RS</i>	<i>Russkaia Starina</i>

Citations for Russian archival sources are to be read as follows:

GARF and RGADA materials: fond-opis-delo, list.

GIM materials: fond-opis-edinitsa khraneniia, list.

OR RGB: fond-karton-edinitsa khraneniia, list.

IRLI RAN: fond-edinitsa khraneniia, list.

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Chapter 1

The Education of a German Princess: 1807–1823

Like a true German woman I enjoy daydreaming ... It is a pretty flower that bloomed on the day I was born and I believe it would push from my tomb, if we were not fated to lie under marble slabs.

Elena Pavlovna to Pavel Kiselev

Marquis Astolphe de Custine, the author of the Russophobe bestseller *La Russie en 1839* briefly met Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna (1807–73) when she was 32 and declared categorically that the former Princess Charlotte of Württemberg would have been much happier if she had been less intelligent, had remained in Germany and married a humdrum ruler of a petty German principality. Boredom and petty interests seemed to him the best formula for feminine happiness. He failed to see in Elena Pavlovna the qualities which would enable her to accomplish things of historic importance – and even less did the marquis understand that Russia was the only place where a woman would have an opportunity to accomplish them (Figure 1.1).

Prince Eugen of Württemberg, Elena Pavlovna's relative, knew her better, but he did not believe any royal woman could have a fulfilling life: 'I often thought to myself: "I am afraid God has been too generous to her, considering her rank; she will not need at all many of the qualities he endowed her with."' ¹ She proved them both wrong.

Württemberg Rulers

Princess Charlotte of Württemberg's motherland was a small duchy in the southwest corner of the Holy Roman Empire, tucked between Austria and Baden. Württemberg suffered from French and Austrian invasions as their armies marched through its territory to fight every one of their wars. Like all German states, the duchy suffered in the sixteenth century from the Thirty Years' War and because the duke lost all tax revenue from his devastated lands he became dependent on taxation and eventually on the Assembly of the Estates which budgeted funds for the government. In the seventeenth century,

¹ 'Iz vospominanii printsa Evgeniia Viurtembergskogo', *RA*, (1878), 3: 353.



Figure 1.1 Karl Briullov, Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna, 1828–1829, oil on canvas

the duchy's government became a stable bureaucracy,² and the dukes relied on administrative experts rather than courtiers.³

As a member of the Holy Roman Empire beholden to the emperor in Vienna, Württemberg did not conduct an independent foreign policy. The duchy nevertheless achieved a high standing among other German states because of the luxury of its court and the level of its culture. A fortunate combination of intelligent rulers and efficient administrators promoted the little state to become one of the wealthiest in Germany.

Under a succession of worldly Francophile dukes some of whom converted from the Lutheran faith to Catholicism, in the eighteenth century Württemberg became one of the major European centres of culture. The dukes looked to Paris as the beacon of civilization and kept abreast of Parisian news. One of the dukes

² James Allen Vann, *The Making of a State* (Ithaca and London, 1984), 86–9.

³ Vann, 263.

kept a permanent agent in Paris who made regular reports on the French court and on society and sent to Stuttgart information about the latest fashions and trends in arts and science.

The ruling family's intelligent patronage of education fostered an environment in which a number of Württemberg scholars and men of letters achieved a European fame: Luther's assistant Philip Melancthon, the philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel; the political thinker Justus Möser; the poets Christoph Martin Wieland and Johann Friedrich Christoph Hölderlin.

Living in splendid Baroque palaces surrounded by parks with carefully laid flowerbeds, the dukes of Württemberg led a cultivated and self-indulgent existence. The court balls and entertainments imitated Versailles on a smaller scale; French fashion was the norm, and at the first salon in Württemberg the guests discussed in French the news from Versailles.⁴

The duke of Württemberg, Karl Eugen, who ruled from 1744 to 1793, built two palaces in the best French classicist style, *Solitude* and *Mon Repos*. He had his own court opera and a ballet company – a luxury out of the reach of most German princes – and endowed the Academy of Arts. The duke also established a military academy which eventually became one of the best humanistic schools in Europe. Stuttgart Academy of Sciences flourished.

This lavish spending eventually drained the duchy's resources and the duke had to look for ways to supplement his revenues. In 1752 he signed a secret treaty with France to receive an annual subsidy for recruiting and training 6,000 infantrymen to fight on France's side in any future war. With ample resources again available to him, Karl Eugen went on with decorating his capital and buying French art, while his officials wondered where he got the money.⁵

When the Seven Years' war began in 1756 Karl Eugen faced his day of reckoning. Prussia entered the war on Britain's side and Austria, on that of France. Austria summoned its vassal German princes to fight Prussia and the French monarch Louis XV asked Württemberg for the agreed-upon 6,000 troops. There were none to be had, for the French money had been spent. Karl Eugen had to raise two armies simultaneously, one for Austria and another for France. He achieved it by squeezing his nation dry. His army suffered defeat and Karl Eugen became a failed ruler of a ruined country. He died having witnessed the collapse of the French monarchy in the Revolution and left his heirs to deal with mountainous debts, domestic turmoil and external threats. The most immediate threat came from France.

Karl Eugen was childless and after his death two of his elderly brothers briefly ruled and then, in 1797, his nephew Frederick (1754–1816), an obese young giant with heavy jowls and blond hair, usually covered by a powdered

⁴ Vann, 263.

⁵ Vann, 263.

wig, became the duke. Frederick was born in Montbéliard (or Mömpelgard, in German), the flourishing French-speaking exclave. Frederick's father governed Montbéliard on behalf of his older brother and maintained the tradition of artistic and academic patronage. Typically, educated Montbéliard natives – Frederick and his siblings included – were bilingual in German and French. Many had French names and Württemberg loyalties or vice versa.

The First King

Frederick's younger sister Sophia Dorothea married the Russian heir Paul in 1776, and became Grand Duchess Maria Fedorovna. When she left for Russia her unemployed brothers, nephews, as well as childhood friends and servants followed her. Montbéliard henceforth became a supplier of tutors and professors to Russia.

Frederick also sought his fortune abroad. He spent several years in Prussian service, found the prospects disappointing and moved to Russia with his wife and son William. His daughter Catherine and his son Paul named after the Russian empress and the heir, Grand Duke Paul, were born in Russia. Catherine II expelled Frederick from Russia in 1786, when his wife asked the empress for protection against his cruelty and abuse. He left, taking his children with him. Within two years the princess died and he was free to marry again, but he waited ten years for an advantageous political marriage to the British Princess Charlotte, the youngest daughter of King George III. He succeeded his father as Duke of Württemberg in 1797.

Napoleon's army occupied the duchy in 1800 and Frederick fled with all his family. But he could not remain in exile forever, so he faced a choice: to join either Napoleon or his enemies. All his family ties – Russian, Prussian and British – prompted him to join the anti-Napoleonic coalition; instead, geography and military power dictated his policies. Frederick briefly joined the anti-Napoleonic coalition, abandoned it on the verge of defeat and allowed the French army to march through Württemberg territory to make war on its neighbours. He also ceded Montbéliard to France, receiving territorial compensation, and provided an army for Napoleon. Frederick's daughter Catherine reluctantly married Napoleon's equally reluctant brother, King Jerome of Westphalia (an artificial kingdom created by Napoleon). The connection buttressed Württemberg's position in the German Confederation.

Two subsequent developments benefited Württemberg. The French government implemented an efficient bureaucratic revolution in the French-controlled German states of the Rhine Confederation which set them on the road of administrative and legislative modernization. Napoleon rewarded the duke for his support by anointing him king on 1 January 1806. Württemberg

became a kingdom with a territory twice the size of the old duchy, the population of nearly one and a half million and a strong absolutist monarchy.⁶ King Frederick I, now a corpulent giant bursting out of his resplendent military uniform, was eager to consolidate his new status, which raised him above most of the German princes. He had the reputation of the most intelligent German ruler and the only one who kept a semblance of dignity under the French rule. His subjects ‘complained about the burden of taxation and the severity of laws but nowhere else in Germany was there such efficient administration and such a magnificent court.’ Even in 1815, after a devastating war, a visitor admired the splendid palace and theatre and the brilliant uniforms of the courtiers.⁷

The Royal Family

Using every opportunity to display his family’s new royal dignity, the king celebrated the birth of his first granddaughter Frederica Charlotte Marie, on 7 January 1807. The first legitimate daughter of Prince Paul of Württemberg, she was also the first royal princess born in the family. The princess’s later attempt at an autobiography offers a dreary picture of her first years. Like all royalty, she was used to discretion and she took up her pen reluctantly because of the urging of an unnamed spiritual teacher:

It has always seemed difficult to me to speak about myself, and rather depressing to address questions to the past about the sorrows and joys that quickly flow by in the river of time. I would be reluctant to turn to this subject now, if it were not that your will, my dear master, is absolute for me.⁸

Because she intended to write a psychological self-portrait rather than a personal story she did not mention any names and crossed out the name of her younger sister Pauline which occurred in the beginning of her letter. Everyone in the family is characterized strictly through their relationship to herself: ‘my mother’, ‘my father’, ‘my brothers and sister’. The only person whom she thought worthy of describing in some detail was her grandfather, the king: ‘I still see him sitting in his splendid uniform, in front of a writing table, with his eyes wandering towards the palace garden, [to observe?] our games.’ She mentions his face, ‘lighted by a remarkable intelligence’, and the violence of his temper. The proud memory of Frederick’s ambitions lived on among his descendants and decades

⁶ Th. Nipperdey, *Germany from Napoleon to Bismarck 1800–1866* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1996[1983]), 1.

⁷ A. Mihailovsky-Danilevsky, *Zapiski 1814 i 1815 godov* (St Petersburg, 1841), 84–6.

⁸ Elena Pavlovna’s memoir, [n.d.], GARF, 647-1-27, l.3.

later Elena Pavlovna explained that ‘Napoleon had made him king and only by chance he missed the opportunity of ruling over a larger state.’⁹

The grand duchess Elena of Russia, a resident of an enormous empire, could not help adding wryly: ‘A sovereign of a small country he was ... fond of pomp, and ... did not miss any occasion to assert the grandeur of his court or that of his kingdom.’¹⁰

She does not explain why at the age of six or seven her grandfather had his four grandchildren transferred into the care of his consort, because then she would have to explain that her parents lived apart most of their marriage and separated soon after the end of the wars.

Her mother is mentioned once, as ‘a very kind person’ from whose care Charlotte and her siblings were taken when she was six and the others even younger. Her father, Prince Paul, merited from his daughter two dry references. He was a tall, ginger-haired, bad-tempered young man who married young and not too well by the standards of the time: his pretty wife, Charlotte, was a daughter of a politically insignificant duke of Saxe-Hildburghausen.¹¹

In Charlotte’s early years her father was either absent from their home or altogether exiled from Württemberg.¹² Prince Paul, ignoring his father’s prohibition, joined the Prussian army to fight against Napoleon in 1806. Soon after, he was captured by the French and forcibly returned to Stuttgart where his father had him under house arrest until his next departure. He visited home enough times for his wife to have five children, of whom four survived. After Charlotte they had a son Frederick Karl August in 1808, another daughter, Frederica Pauline Marie, in 1810, and a second son, Frederick August Eberhard, in 1813. Despite showing deference in giving every child of his the name of ‘Frederick’ or ‘Frederica’, Prince Paul systematically disobeyed his father. In 1812 Frederick I raised troops for Napoleon’s Russian campaign, but Prince Paul refused to join them, so, much to his anger, the king had to risk his heir’s life: the Crown Prince William led the Württemberg troops instead. After losing most of his soldiers, he barely escaped death in Russia himself. In the winter of 1813, soon after the coalition had struck a resounding defeat to Napoleon at Leipzig, Prince Paul went off to join the Russian army. It would seem that even during the domestic interludes he did not take much notice of his children, as his daughter writes, ‘My father always left an impression on me, of being a stranger to all of us ...’¹³

⁹ Elena Pavlovna’s memoir, 4.

¹⁰ Elena Pavlovna’s memoir, 5.

¹¹ A.O. Smirnova-Rosset, *Dnevnik. Vospominani’ia* (Moscow, 1989), 474.

¹² Elena Pavlovna’s memoir, 6.

¹³ Elena Pavlovna’s memoir, 9.

Because the crown prince's marriage was childless Prince Paul stood next in the line of succession. His sons guaranteed the future of the dynasty, so, when the prince left Stuttgart once again, the king had all the children moved to his palace. Their mother also lived in the royal palace, but she had no say in her children's upbringing. Charlotte says several times about her life at the court that the change was not favourable to her. She judged without any sentimentality the adults who surrounded her at the time. After the age of six Charlotte's mother and father were kept at an arm's length, if not shut out of her life. Charlotte, as a married woman, periodically visited her mother on her voyages abroad, but the princess-mother, who died in 1847, mostly knew about her daughter through the latter's lady-in-waiting. Prince Paul usually spent some time with his daughter in Switzerland, Italy or France, but her mother did not, as after a marital separation a woman became a social outcast. The young woman had to think of her public image and her parents never visited her in Russia, although her siblings did. In her will of 1843 Charlotte made bequests to her siblings and to her governess, but to her parents, unlike the Romanov family she did not leave even a token souvenir.

Queen Charlotte did not earn any warm words from her ward as she looked back on her childhood:

My grandmother (the second wife of my grandfather and a princess of England) ... was of limited intelligence and so despotic that she only tolerated those who thought like her ... She was oppressed by her husband, and she, in turn, liked to crush opposition, and her influence, then or later, did not do any good to us.¹⁴

Charlotte's childhood friend, whom she met in Paris, could only have heard from Charlotte herself that the queen was also an alcoholic.¹⁵ All in all, the Stuttgart court had the fame of being 'perhaps one of the surliest in Germany'.¹⁶

Charlotte's aunt, reflecting on her own childhood, pointed out that royal children were usually treated with extreme severity and much importance was attached to trifling misdemeanours: 'The steps, the actions of a poor child ... are considered matters of state importance ... Hence little denunciations, minute observations by the governors. They consider that a royal child has stolen a portion of happiness destined to the whole humanity.'¹⁷ Charlotte, too, criticized her grandmother's 'choice of the persons who had full authority over me' because they hurt her pride. It led to clandestine warfare between the six-

¹⁴ Elena Pavlovna's memoir, 9.

¹⁵ K. Buch, 'Velikaia kniaginia Elena Pavlovna', *RS* (1888), 3: 810.

¹⁶ 'Correspondance de l'Impératrice Marie-Louise et la Reine Catherine de Westphalie', *Revue de Deux Mondes* (1928), 105–6: 390.

¹⁷ *Correspondance inédite de la reine Cathérine de Westphalie* (ed. A. Du Casse) (Paris, 1893), 14.

year old princess and her governess. She seems to have taken it as a valuable experience: ‘submission to stupidity ever since has seemed unbearable to me.’¹⁸ In another version she says that all her life she had fought against persons but submitted herself to God – a statement that in any case speaks to her confidence in knowing God’s will and her readiness to make enemies.

As an adult Charlotte still could not forgive her grandmother for subjecting her to ‘a baroness who was very foolish and very proud of her position and her authority’. Angelic-looking little Charlotte with her whipped reddish-blond locks, as we see her on an early portrait, in her own words soon ‘discovered [the baroness’s] weaknesses’ and became her enemy.

Here is a little girl who despises her governess, who is increasingly distant from her mother and whose father is a stranger to her. Her grandmother produces mixed emotions of contempt and fear: the queen is foolish but moody and short-tempered. Her grandfather around whom everything revolves in her world is violent and dangerous. Her governess who watches over her and reports on her to the queen is her enemy. For about a year there is no adult on whom the girl can rely, no adult whom she respects and loves. She can only rely on herself and live by her wits in order to get what she wants from adults.

Charlotte’s Education

But luckily for her a new person appeared in her entourage. The baroness who was in charge of little Charlotte, needed an assistant to give the girl lessons and to take care of her needs so that the baroness would only give the general guidance. The king hired a Swiss spinster who had owned a girls’ school in her native canton of Glarus, but during the turbulent years of Napoleonic wars came to Württemberg.

Once again, the memoirist lets us see what she admired most in people: ‘Hers was a character with firm principles and all the courage which strong convictions impart to a person.’ The junior governess gradually earned the girl’s respect and obedience.

Paying no attention to my rank of princess ... she treated me sternly and without indulgence, always explaining to me the true value of things. It is to her that I owe [the ability] from my earliest years of accepting the responsibilities of my position and seeking only their true value in men and in things.¹⁹

¹⁸ Elena Pavlovna’s memoir, 2.

¹⁹ Elena Pavlovna’s memoir, 3.

The arrival of this new governess, Mademoiselle Bourdais, opened a new era in Charlotte's life. She says,

a little princess [who had been] rather spoiled and praised by my grandmother and her intimate circle, for the actions that should have been punished, and punished for the things that should have been encouraged, I found myself suddenly face to face with a woman born in a republic, who, for the firmness of her principles could be compared to a member of a religious sect.

Charlotte tried to do justice to her wise Swiss governess without presenting herself in too bad a light. 'I had an innate urge to distinguish myself – this disposition, if mismanaged, could have been dangerous for my personality... and was beginning to affect my natural temper.' But this did not describe the scale of the problem which the governess faced, and Elena Pavlovna, after some hesitation and crossing and overwriting words, confessed:

At that age I had a great desire to be noticed – either for my cleverness or my fine manners ... and I wanted to hear frequent praise. I behaved unnaturally. My governess ... without saying anything to me ... soon made me realize that there was another way of distinguishing myself, and I am indebted to her for she gave a beneficial direction to an innate trait which the mediocrity of those around me would have allowed to become a drawback.²⁰

Instead of alienating the spoiled little girl by chastising and reprimands and without making an apparent effort to dominate her, the new governess set 'a noble ideal' for Princess Charlotte – perhaps, the imitation of a heroic figure or a saint. The governess, never showing any doubt in her pupil's ability to rise to the ideal, led her through increasingly difficult intellectual and ethical challenges and in this way helped develop her moral qualities.²¹ Or this is what the memoirist thought in retrospect: 'She gave me the necessary lessons that accustomed me to work and to obedience without making them offensive to me.'²² Her sister Pauline's recollection of the Swiss governess balanced the description: 'Father [Prince Paul] recommended Mlle. Bourdais to be strict and she was excessively so with my poor sister Charlotte ... she was fond of us, but as a rule severity was her main method. My sister studied assiduously but she could never please Mlle. Bourdais. As a punishment Mlle. Bourdais left her without a meal ... My

²⁰ Elena Pavlovna's memoir, 9.

²¹ Elena Pavlovna's memoir, 3.

²² Elena Pavlovna's memoir, 4.

sister, who had a very quick temper, was often angry because of this and thus was constantly in a state of agitation ...²³

Charlotte's wish to shine and to stand out remained one of her notable traits, which her friends accepted with a smile and her enemies derided. But striving after a lofty and impossible ideal she learned to recognize her own limitations and appreciate others' qualities. She wrote that only after leaving Württemberg she understood what the governess had taught her: first of all, to value human intelligence; secondly, to believe that the most important and highest function of intelligence is to make one a better person.²⁴

Württemberg after the Napoleonic Wars

Charlotte did not explain the circumstances which led to her leaving Stuttgart. In 1813, around the time when Charlotte and her siblings moved into the royal household, on the eve of the battle of Leipzig, judging that Napoleon's defeat was imminent, King Frederick I re-joined the anti-Napoleonic coalition and made peace with his nephew Alexander I of Russia and his brother-in-law Prince Regent of Britain. By crossing over to the victors the king saved everything he had amassed. He appeared at the Vienna Congress and dazzled the delegates by his magnificent gifts to the Austrian court officials who were hosting the nine-month long assembly. Having obtained from the coalition governments a confirmation of his rights to all that Napoleon had granted he returned to Stuttgart.²⁵ The King now had to employ all his political talent to hold together in a single state a collection of his neighbours' former lands which had no shared past. He at once set out to write a unifying constitution for his kingdom (the first one promised by any German prince to his people).²⁶

The reforms, driven by Frederick I with a great single-mindedness, aimed at increasing the state's effectiveness and power. His disciplined civil servants supported him well; they felt that under the new order they were serving the law, reason and the common good.²⁷ The king's reforms freed the peasants from the remaining vestiges of serfdom and cleared the way for a major social change. There were few landed nobility in the south and in the early 1820s Württemberg developed a much stronger bourgeois society than Prussia.²⁸ Württemberg's

²³ O.K. Bazhenova, 'Elena Pavlovna. Formirovanie kharaktera', in *Velikaia kniaginia Elena Pavlovna* (St Petersburg, 2011), 35–6.

²⁴ Elena Pavlovna's memoir, 3.

²⁵ Mikhailovsky-Danilevsky, 80.

²⁶ A.W. Ward, 'Review', *The English Historical Review*, vol. 5, no. 17 (January 1890), 185.

²⁷ Nipperdey, 20.

²⁸ Nipperdey, 58–64.

civil servants were recruited from among the nobility, as had been the case in the eighteenth century, but the king preferred efficient and knowledgeable bureaucrats and it is only natural that university-educated ruling class valued education as the essential tool of professionalism. The country's intellectuals saw education as the way to intellectual freedom. They held as axiomatic that academic study was essential for pursuing the highest knowledge and new truths. So, little Charlotte's governess brought her up in harmony with the prevailing ideals of the time, and even after Mlle. Bourdais left, there were other people in Charlotte's world who shared similar ideas.

Frederick I's daughter Catherine, the former queen of Westphalia, followed her husband Jerome Bonaparte, ousted from Germany, into exile with her two children. While Queen Catherine, a pawn that had outlived its usefulness both to her father and to her husband, pleaded for help from her cousin Alexander I, Prince William, Frederick's heir, fell in love with the favourite sister of Alexander I, the widowed Ekaterina. The Romanovs were mortified, for William was married and a known womanizer. Even worse, Orthodox canon law banned marriages between first cousins. Maria Fedorovna insisted that William had to get a proper annulment of his first marriage, which he did and in January 1816 brought his new wife to Stuttgart. Soon after, William succeeded his father on the throne.

At this point his brother Paul reappeared in Stuttgart. He was at a loose end and with no means, except his part of the king's inheritance. Until King William had a son, Prince Paul was the heir, but he quarrelled with his brother and wanted to re-enter Russian service. His Russian sister-in-law tried to get Alexander I give Paul a commission in the Russian army. Alexander, who was usually willing to oblige his sister, replied:

I am very sorry, dear friend that I cannot do what you ask for Prince Paul. The honour of the army does not allow me to do it. He simply deserted our army. After this it would be an insult to the former to let him join again. Besides, when you think it over, you will realize that this step would not achieve its purpose, for as soon as Prince Paul gets a post, as you suggest in your letter – under a strict commander, far from all large cities and carrying out the onerous duties that our service lays on all the officers, – he will not last two weeks. Either he will desert again or he will send me his resignation, because such a life cannot be to his liking. And then, what will happen? He will at once leave Russia and find himself once again in the position in which he already is. I think it is better to leave him to it. Believe me, only serious reasons, such as my reluctance to corrupt the army, prevent me from doing what you ask. He is completely discredited in Russia.²⁹

²⁹ Alexander I to Grand Duchess Catherine, 16/28 January 1817, *Perepiska imperatora Aleksandra I s sestroi velikoi kniaginei Ekaterinoi Pavlovnoi* (ed. Grand Duke Nikolai

Barred from employment in the east, he went west and opened a new chapter in his daughter Charlotte's life.

Two Years in France

People who met the Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna in later years, struck by her serious interests and lucid mind, concluded that the time spent with her father in Paris had been a unique formative experience, when he introduced her to the refined society at the best Parisian salons. The name of the famous French scholar and pedagogue, the 'Great Cuvier', inevitably crops up with the implication that the future Grand Duchess Elena of Russia had been practically brought up at the knee of the man who was a paragon of enlightened thinking and that she was a disciple of sorts. This is what Elena Pavlovna's great friend, Pavel Kiselev assumed.³⁰

Madame Campan – a celebrated owner of a fashionable school for girls – regularly appears in relation to Elena Pavlovna's life in Paris. The resulting impression is the one which Elena Pavlovna must have liked and surely encouraged: she had an unorthodox but brilliant childhood and that is why she became an unorthodox and brilliant woman. She might not be a king's daughter, but she sprang from the royalty of intellect and spirit. Charlotte's Paris years were indeed unorthodox, but not in the way she cared to explain to her Petersburg friends.

Prince Paul left Stuttgart at the end of 1816 taking his wife and children, seemingly as hostages, because as long as the children were with him, he could be certain of receiving a subsidy from his brother with whom he was carrying on a much-publicized feud. One of the reasons Prince Paul quarrelled with his brother was his insistence on divorcing his wife, whom he accused of adultery, but first his father and then his brother denied him their authorization to do so. In late 1817 Prince Paul arrived in Paris with his family. In March 1818 he and his wife agreed on a separation and she left for her father's house. One evening she kissed her children good night, the next morning Mlle. Bourdais told them that their mother was gone.³¹ Considering that Prince Paul sent his children back to Stuttgart in early 1820, Charlotte spent about two years in France.

Madame Campan was out of business at the same time as her patron Napoleon I, and Prince Paul could not have placed his daughters in her school after 1815. Hers was a well-known name and people made assumptions which the grand duchess did not dispute. Jean-Jacques Coulmann, a native of

Mikhailovich) (St Petersburg, 1910), 181–2.

³⁰ Kiselev's diary [excerpts], GARF, 647-1-1108, 2.

³¹ Pauline of Nassau, cit. in Bazhenova, 37.

Montbéliard who knew Prince Paul's family in Paris offered a more plausible version of the princess's Parisian years. He says that in the early years of the Restoration, his sister, a widow of Napoleon's General Walther, lived in her modest house in Santeny, near Paris. Her two daughters took classes from the same teacher, M. Lobstein, as did two little princesses from Württemberg. The girls made friends with the classmates of their own age who were also Lutheran and spoke German. Their father allowed Charlotte and Pauline to visit Madame Walther's modest bourgeois house and – on occasion – that of their relative, Baron Georges Cuvier. The celebrated palaeontologist was the director of the Parisian *Jardin de Plantes*, the best botanical garden in Europe (which meant, in the world). Every week he received friends at his salon, but obviously Charlotte was not of an age to be one of them.

Cuvier's visits to Santeny were infrequent because he was extremely busy. His less known brother Frédéric, a director of the *Musée Naturel*, an assistant to his brother, came to Santeny much more often and he could have been confused with his brother in some recollections. Frédéric Cuvier brought his sons with him; sometimes the Great Cuvier came with his daughter and so the Cuviers met Prince Paul's daughters.

One of Madame Walther's daughters, writing soon after the former Princess Charlotte passed away in 1873, was more explicit. According to her, the Württemberg minister in Paris, a native of Montbéliard, told his countrywoman Madame Walther that Prince Paul had repudiated his wife and was living a scandalous life in Paris, unrestrained by the presence of his four children. The prince found the children a burden, but was reluctant to send them back home as a large part of his remittance money was actually assigned by the king for the children's education. Madame Walther felt sorry for the girls, recommended the school that one of her daughters was attending, and invited the princesses to come to her house on Sundays.

Easy to please, the princesses loved fried potatoes, and Madame Walther had them served whenever they visited. Their brothers came too, as well as Frederic Cuvier's son, and all the children played merrily. Charlotte maintained authority over her brothers, August and Frederick: one stern look from her stopped them in their tracks. Games ceased as soon as Prince Paul entered the room. This gentleman used to appear exactly when the table was set for dinner, Madame Walther's daughter added wryly.³² Charlotte's childhood friend remembered her father as 'brutal' and years later told the story of how Prince Paul attempted to cure his oldest daughter of her fear of mice. He had a servant gather a sack of live mice and bringing it into the girl's room, without warning emptied the sack in front of her. She fainted.³³

³² Henriette André to K. Buch, 7 August 1876, GARF, 647-1-1108, l.12a.

³³ Buch, 3: 805.

To comply with the terms on which he was receiving the money, the prince had to provide schooling for his children, but he found the cheapest possible solution. He placed his two sons with a Calvinist minister, Monod and his two daughters went to a boarding school kept by a Madame Gueroult, in Rue St Jacques, near Val de Grâce. Princess Pauline, Charlotte's sister, later recalled as one of the shocking features of the school that the pupils there were girls from all classes of society: 'from daughters of ministers to daughters of bakers and butchers. We were the only princesses.' Not only was the school cheap, but Prince Paul saved more money by arranging with the headmistress that his daughters would share the bedroom with other girls and would not require maids. The girls made their own beds and shined their own shoes³⁴ at a time when even bourgeois girls had maids to do that. The two Württemberg princesses were regarded with pity and contempt: with no money and no power to wield, their titles seemed a mockery. Pauline found an excuse for her father's parsimony: 'My father either had stipulated or had assumed that we would have a bedroom to ourselves, but we were placed in the same room with three other pupils and their maid ... Doubtless, he would never have left us in this boarding-school, had he known the details of the arrangements in this place.'³⁵

Further humiliation took place one Sunday morning. Madame Gueroult had a friend who was a chambermaid to the Duchess of Angoulême, the French Royalist icon as the only surviving child of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette. With Madame Gueroult's permission, the chambermaid took Charlotte and Pauline to St Cloud to introduce them to her mistress. Charlotte was furious but submitted to the authority of Madame Gueroult. The girls waited outside the church until the service was over. As the duchess, her husband and their suite left the church the chambermaid brought the two sisters forward for the duchess to see them. No one revered the sacred nature of monarchy more than Madame d'Angoulême. She could no more take seriously the royal princesses introduced by a servant than Charlotte could forget the humiliation which they experienced. Her friend Henriette recalled that the more Charlotte's pride suffered the more she thought of her royal rank and the respect due to it.³⁶ When Madame Walther had family dinners one of the Cuvier brothers present had to take Princess Charlotte in as the highest ranking lady present. Once she was satisfied with the deference shown to her rank, she relaxed and her merry disposition came to surface. Mme. Walther's brother remembered: '... [Charlotte's] innate pride made her say that she wanted to marry, but she would like to be a queen in her own right, not a king's wife.'³⁷ Her easy-going

³⁴ André, l.12a.

³⁵ Bazhenova, 39.

³⁶ André, l.12a.

³⁷ Jean-Jacques Coulmann, *Reminiscences* (Paris, 1862), 1: 238.

sister Pauline, when she had too much of Charlotte's bossing, would say: 'When you are queen, I will try not to be one of your subjects.'³⁸ Coulmann described Charlotte as an adolescent with a fresh white face and a haughty manner. He noticed her intelligence and common sense, which, he thought, the girl learned at the 'school of misfortune', and her 'nearly maternal' attention to her siblings.³⁹

As soon as Prince Paul negotiated with the dowager Queen Charlotte the terms under which he would part with his children, they went back to Stuttgart.⁴⁰ Coulmann and Mme. André describe a Charlotte that is recognizable from her contemporaries' later descriptions: conscious of her rank and '*altière*' or haughty. Both French accounts belie the splendid stories about her early education in Cuvier's salon – let alone 'Paris salons' which are also present in the myths – and replace them with realistic accounts about evenings in an enlightened middle-class family that treated the children with kindness and tact. Her acquaintance with Cuvier must have been memorable, for he was an outstanding person. But if some of Cuvier's views seem to resemble those of the Grand Duchess Elena, it may be because love of learning and pursuit of truth, were not exclusive to Cuvier or to France.

Charlotte and Pauline of Württemberg did not forget the friendship and attentions shown to them. The Walthers were invited to visit the princesses in Stuttgart in 1821 and much later, when one of Mme. Walther's daughters married and gave birth to a daughter, Charlotte (by then Elena Pavlovna of Russia) wished to be the baby's godmother in absence, stipulating that the Great Cuvier would be the godfather. Elena Pavlovna sent generous baptismal gifts to the Walther family, one of them being her own portrait in a frame of precious stones. The stones were arranged so that the first letters of their French names made up the word 'Santeny' – the address of Madame Walther's house.

Marriage Negotiations

Back in Stuttgart, the girls were placed under the care of Countess Üxkhull, a noblewoman with whom Charlotte got along well. She could not have been happy in her grandmother's care, having no respect for her, but now that she was older, she was treated with more consideration. Besides, Charlotte knew that the moment was nearing when she would be married and leave the royal palace for her husband's home. Her family did not think it would present a major problem: Charlotte was fresh, intelligent and well-mannered. The only handicap was her parents' notoriety. Her father tried to sue her uncle the king;

³⁸ Coulmann, 1: 239.

³⁹ Coulmann, 1: 238.

⁴⁰ Coulmann, 1: 240.

he also made it known that he left his wife because she had had an affair. The rumour did not help the couple's prestige in the times when her family's good name was an essential part of any girl's dowry. Prince Paul's reputation among Parisian salon radicals as 'a unique prince, imbued with the modern ideas, friend of social progress and a judicious freedom'⁴¹ made him look even worse in the eyes of European royalty.

Governesses had trained the girl to conform to the era's expectations: Charlotte was taught that men were educated for professional and political life, while women were destined to live for the family, not reaching out into the world. She must be warm, yielding, gentle and peaceable.⁴² Middle-aged people preached to the young what they had learned the hard way: romantic love was fleeting, while a marriage had to be founded on empathy and compatible sensibilities. These were to be found in people who were educated and brought up in a similar way – in Charlotte's case it could only be a prince. In the middle classes this notion was being replaced by the idea of romantic love, but aristocracy, and even more, royalty, saw marriage as a way to forge alliances that would add to their families' power and prestige. Marriage was a way of fulfilling one's duty to the family. Happiness was in the knowledge that one had done one's duty.

Aristocratic women's behaviour was increasingly restricted at the time. After the Napoleonic era ladies did not travel alone, could not carry burdens, did not walk quickly, did not work, but did handicrafts. Over-refinement set in – women were tender, delicate, nervous, prone to migraines and fainting fits. *Überweiblichkeit* [hyper-femininity] was the German word for it.⁴³ It did not describe Princess Charlotte, but she knew that she had to conform to this ideal in order to find a husband.

Unknown to her, in 1821 diplomats compiled her life story for her great-aunt, the Russian dowager empress, who wanted to find a bride for her youngest son, Mikhail Pavlovich. In the reports which the Russian minister sent from Stuttgart the girl's misfortunes were presented as an asset: 'the difficult circumstances she has been through have given her a depth of soul and made her very well-possessed'. Maria Fedorovna also found it encouraging that the girl still had not been out in society,⁴⁴ for that meant her heart was free. Such a girl was better-suited for Mikhail whose experience with women was limited. Countess Üxkhull received a request to write a description of her charge for the Romanovs. Her reference was glowing, but it omitted all mention of the girl's shortcomings,

⁴¹ Charles-Roland Néel de Lavigne, *Souvenirs de Néel de Lavigne, ancien sous-préfet et officier de la Légion d'Honneur* (Dinan, 1850), 113.

⁴² Nipperdey, 102.

⁴³ Nipperdey, 103.

⁴⁴ Empress Maria to Anna Pavlovna, 8 February 1822, *Chère Annette. Letters from Russia 1820–1828. The Correspondence of the Empress Maria Feodorovna of Russia to her Daughter the Grand Duchess* (ed. S.W. Jackman) (Dover, N.H., 1994), 59.

such as arrogance, short temper and a sharp tongue. All her qualities were listed fairly: she had a developed sense of responsibility and duty proper of her rank; if she heard a criticism, she bravely tried to overcome the criticized trait. She was considerate and devoted to those who had gained her affection. She was an assiduous learner and preferred sciences to arts. In the era when people relied on their own talents for entertainment and pleasure, Charlotte's tepid interest in arts might augur that she would be dull company, so the governess hastened to correct the impression: 'She is not at all a musician and will never be one, but she likes to draw...'⁴⁵

In July 1821 Grand Duke Nicholas of Russia wrote to his brother Mikhail that he had visited Stuttgart on purpose, in order to give him a first-hand opinion of the prospective brides, Charlotte and Pauline:

The eldest will soon be 15, she is short ... and not at all developed ... but she has an angelic face, is blond, graceful and speaks French like a native, dresses elegantly, has [small] feet ..., quite intelligent, but modest, sensitive and extremely kind. As far as I know you, you are certain to like her, but you cannot even think of marrying her before she fully develops, that is, no sooner than in two years ... The younger one looks quite like her sister, but she is eleven and looks like eight ... If you are still interested, you should try to meet them now, for the king is just waiting to have them ... confirmed, and it cannot be postponed for long, unless there is a good reason.⁴⁶

Talk about a Russian marriage for Charlotte prompted her uncle to postpone her confirmation, which usually takes place at the age of 13–14 and is the final and conscious act of adherence to the Lutheran church. Without confirmation the girl would not need to renounce the Lutheran Church when she converted to Orthodoxy.

Charlotte was not Maria Fedorovna's first choice, but the dowager empress had thought the matter through and concluded that she was the best one. Grand Duke Mikhail visited Stuttgart in late 1821, and apparently he did not impress Countess Üxkhull, for she reported to Charlotte's uncle unenthusiastically that the young man 'gained on further acquaintance', but the main thing was that he and Charlotte seemed to like each other.⁴⁷ In December 1821 the Württemberg family received a formal proposal. They accepted at once: it was a brilliant alliance both dynastically and politically. King William, Charlotte's uncle, had incurred the displeasure of the Holy Alliance powers by his reluctance to heed

⁴⁵ Countess Üxkhull to Empress Maria, 24 January 1821, cit. in Bazhenova, 42–3.

⁴⁶ Grand Duke Nicholas to Grand Duke Mikhail Pavlovich, [July 1821], cit. in Bazhenova, 45–6.

⁴⁷ Bazhenova, 46.

their policies and by a leak of his ambitious expansionist plans. He was eager to get back into the Russian emperor's good graces.

The usual exchange of formulas on both sides accompanied the negotiations. Diplomats and relatives in their letters skilfully injected warmth into the non-existent relationship of the fiancés. Under similar circumstances, 20 years before the Russian ambassador reported to Catherine II about the princess who had been chosen sight unseen as wife for the Russian heir: 'Indeed, nothing, Madame, can compare to the happiness of Princess Louise. She is becoming your child and the Grand Duke whom she will marry is a Prince whom she loves passionately ...'⁴⁸ 'Passionate love' was a requisite cliché and it covered a variety of sentiments, from infatuation to lukewarm acceptance which Alexander himself displayed. He told one of his attendants that he was puzzled because he felt 'tender friendship and a great pleasure' in the company of his fiancée, quite unlike the times when he had been in love before. The attendant hastened to reassure him that

... a true love based on laws, ... is tender because it focuses more on spiritual gifts than the corporal ones ... this love is usually eternal and ... the slower it is in blossoming, the stronger it will become in the future.⁴⁹

When the parties reached an agreement in principle, the young people were instructed to begin a correspondence. Empress Maria wanted the princess to come to Russia in the summer 1822, even though the marriage would not take part until 1824. But the girl's uncle did not agree to send her to Russia before 1823. Meanwhile, a Russian Orthodox priest, Fr Nikolai Musovsky arrived in Stuttgart to teach Charlotte the basic principles of the Orthodox doctrine and the Russian language. The girl found Russian difficult, but a year later she was bravely trying to read Russian books which were sent to her from Petersburg.⁵⁰

Mikhail returned to Stuttgart in the autumn of 1822, once again, to propose to Charlotte in person. The members of his suite reported to Petersburg that they heard the fiancé say that Charlotte was pretty and mature, and even that she was charming. But this time he was more tongue-tied and cold. His mother was determined to be optimistic: 'They say she has an angelical character',⁵¹ she wrote to her daughter about Charlotte, and hoped that even if her son was not in

⁴⁸ Count N.P. Rumiantsev to Catherine II, 18 January 1793, *Imperatritsa Elizaveta Alekseevna supruga Imperatora Aleksandra I* (ed. Grand Duke Nikolai Mikhailovich) (St Petersburg, 1909), 1: 12–13.

⁴⁹ A. Ya. Protasov's diary, cit. in *Imperatritsa Elizaveta Alekseevna*, 1: 25.

⁵⁰ Bazhenova, 47.

⁵¹ Empress Maria to Anna Pavlovna, 10 August 1822, *Chère Annette*, 65.

love – which seemed quite obvious by the end of 1822 – ‘at least he is cognizant of her virtues.’⁵² But after the last visit he almost ceased to write to his fiancée.

Throughout 1822 in Stuttgart Russian and Württemberg diplomats worked on the marriage contract. It was ready by the autumn of 1823. Invoking the blessing of the Most Holy and Indivisible Trinity, the document opened with a declaration that William I and Alexander I consented to the marriage,

for independently of the happiness and mutual understanding which will result from this union for the two spouses, these new ties will once again help to consolidate those which already exist between the said Majesties. Her Imperial Majesty Empress Mother of His Imperial Majesty the Grand Duke, as well as His Royal Highness Prince Paul, the father of Madame Princess Charlotte having given their consent to this union, it has been agreed after a friendly hearing, mature deliberation and perfect agreement of all the interested parties ... to name the plenipotentiaries to proceed without delay to prepare the marriage contract.

King William stated that his niece was marrying of her full and free will and with her father’s consent. The marriage would be celebrated in Petersburg after her seventeenth birthday and she would go to Russia in September 1823, accompanied by a suite chosen by her uncle the king. Her former teacher from the Paris years, M. Lobstein, was appointed her private secretary. The Romanovs would meet her on the border and treat her in conformance with her rank and her family standing. King William would give her a dowry and a trousseau. Her capital would remain in Württemberg and in her lifetime she would have the use of the interest. Charlotte’s future children were provided for by the Russian side, as well as the portion that she would get as a widow. The Russian emperor also committed himself to assume all her expenses if she lost her husband. Grand Duke Mikhail promised to receive her in marriage, honour her as his wife and provide for her expenses. According to the German tradition he was required to give Charlotte a hefty sum of money as ‘the morning-after present’ and he promised to do that. He also waived all rights to her dowry, leaving it entirely to her to do as she pleased with it and to will it to her siblings if they survived her.⁵³

The conversion of Princess Charlotte to Russian Orthodoxy and her marriage lay ahead. Now court officials were planning the wedding ceremony and the celebrations to follow it. She left in August 1823, accompanied by a small retinue. On the way to Russia she stopped in Weimar, where her fiancé’s older sister, the Grand Duchess Maria, an enlightened and noble woman, who upheld and enhanced the fame of Weimar as ‘the Athens of Germany’, gave her advice on how to go through the fatiguing court ceremonies. She predicted that

⁵² Empress Maria to Anna Pavlovna, 11 November 1822, *Chère Annette*, 69.

⁵³ Marriage contract, GARF, 647-1-2, ll.9–14.