In his lifetime Prince Dmitrii Aleksandrovich Khilkov (1857–1914) became known in a number of seemingly contradictory roles and contexts: courageous officer, Tolstoyan, defender of the oppressed, leader of the Dukhobor exodus, revolutionary terrorist and returning Orthodox prodigal. Born into one of Russia’s ancient aristocratic families, with close links to the court, he chose an unexpected path that led him deep into the Russian countryside and brought him to the very edge of the Empire. Renouncing a brilliant military career, he gave up almost all his land to the peasants and settled on a small farm at Pavlovki, Kharkov province. There, his support for peasants at variance with local landowners and the Church brought him into conflict with authority, both civil and ecclesiastical, and led to his exile, firstly among religious dissidents in Transcaucasia and later among political émigrés in Switzerland.

Using a wide range of often obscure published sources, this book explores Khilkov’s extraordinary life through his autobiographical notes and the accounts of many who knew him, among them Lev Tolstoi and his disciples, the Marxist Vladimir Bonch-Bruevich, fellow members of the Socialist Revolutionary Party and the Orthodox clergy who guided him back to the Church.

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Among Russian Sects and Revolutionists
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The Extraordinary Life of Prince D. A. Khilkov

Graham Camfield
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My first acknowledgement must be to the rich collections of the Library of the London School of Economics and Political Science, where it has been my privilege to work over many years. It was there, while researching materials on Russian sectarianism, that I encountered so many references to the name of Dmitrii Khilkov, whose curious history captivated my interest. Without access to the Library’s holdings of Russian and other material, especially the Russian revolutionary pamphlets, this book would not have been written.

I must record also my gratitude to Ol’ga Nikolaevna Nedogarko, researcher and local historian of Sumy district. The publication, in 1990, of her article on Khilkov and his collaboration with Lenin’s newspaper Iskra in Voprosy istorii KPSS, at much the same time as my own article on the Pavlovtsy appeared, prompted me to contact her. Ol’ga is the great-granddaughter of Semen Prokopenko, one of Dmitrii Khilkov’s closest companions, both in Pavlovki and in his subsequent exile. She knows the village and descendants of the Pavlovtsy, as well as members of the Khilkov family. She has kindly shared with me some of her own unpublished work on Dmitrii Khilkov, which is acknowledged in the text. Thanks to Ol’ga also, I had the privilege to meet Aleksei Aleksandrovich Khilkov, grandson of Dmitrii Aleksandrovich, living in Moscow district. Like me she believes that his memory should be preserved and honoured in his homeland and to this end her research over many years has done much to raise local awareness and knowledge of his life.


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The Khilkov Story: An Introduction

The name of Prince Dmitrii Khilkov is all but forgotten today in his native Russia and the wider world. His life spanned the years between the end of the Crimean War and the beginning of the First World War, a period of huge social and political change, and intense intellectual and spiritual ferment in Russia. A friend of Tolstoi and an acquaintance of Lenin, Dmitrii Khilkov could also boast among his near relations, an uncle, Mikhail Ivanovich Khilkov, Minister for Communications and Railways, and a cousin, Vladimir Fedorovich Dzhunkovskii, Chief of the Corps of Gendarmes. His life was a curious circular journey: from Orthodox warrior to pacifist Tolstoyan, from pacifist to revolutionary terrorist, from terrorist to Orthodox warrior. His story serves to illustrate and reveal aspects of movements which contributed to and shaped, in differing degrees, that turbulent period of religious and political life in Russia. The potential alliance of Russian sectarians with Tolstoyism was regarded by Church leaders of the day as a genuine threat to the stability of the Empire, on a par with, if not greater than, the threat of social and political revolution, whose leaders were in exile or emigration. Yet for the Church it was also a period that saw a rich expression of Orthodox thought from thinkers such as Nikolai Berdiaev and Sergei Bulgakov, who both returned to faith from Marxism. Dmitrii Khilkov was active in and through all these trends and movements and his role in them deserves to be better known. According to journalist Mikhail Menshikov, writing on his death, his was ‘an extremely remarkable life, deserving to remain in the literature’.

1 There are two notable exceptions thanks to Dmitrii Khilkov’s great-grandson, Prince Boris Mikhailovich: his work with genealogist O. N. Naumov, Istoriia roda Kniazei Khilkovykh (2008) and an article by V. A. Mazur, Khozhdeniia po mukam Kniazia Dmitriia Aleksandrovicha Khilkova (2000), which draws on the family archive held by Boris Mikhailovich Khilkov.
Throughout his extraordinary life the remarkable character of Dmitrii Aleksandrovich Khilkov made a lasting impression on many people and their recollections are to be found scattered through a range of varied sources. Indeed, it was the encounter with his name in so many situations and contexts that stirred the author to search out every mention and gather them into one narrative. This book is thus the fruit of research chiefly through printed and published primary and secondary literature. Numerous and sometimes lengthy extracts are given from often hard to find materials; translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

In his own day episodes of Khilkov’s life were known far beyond his homeland. In this introduction we will examine how that came to be and consider the varied sources which contributed to the story. In May 1892 a short paragraph in the Russian émigré journal, *Free Russia*, announced the first victims of a campaign against friends and disciples of Count Lev Tolstoi: Prince Khilkov, a ‘well known Khar’kov landowner’, had been exiled for five years to Transcaucasia. Almost two years later, in February 1894, the same journal brought news that the children of Prince Khilkov, ‘one of the most rigid adherents of practical Christianity as preached by Count Leo Tolstoi’, had been forcibly removed from their parents.

Within Russia, the name of Dmitrii Khilkov was already known to many: within the close aristocratic circles of the Russian Court and the military establishment, where generations of Khilkovs had loyally served the Tsar at the highest level; among the provincial nobility of Khar’kov and Poltava provinces, where the family held extensive estates; among the provincial clergy, who were deeply troubled by his anti-clericalism and support for sectarians; within the circle of friends and followers of the heretic Count Tolstoi; and among disaffected peasants in Khar’kov and beyond. The abduction of the Khilkov children by their grandmother on the authority of the Tsar became a *cause célèbre* in Russia. High family connections, together with the equally influential contacts of Tolstoi and his closest aide, Vladimir Chertkov, ensured that the affair was gossiped and discussed at the highest levels of society. Indeed the association with Tolstoi and the publicity machine developed by Chertkov to promote his teaching was to be the key factor in bringing the Khilkov story to the attention of the wider world.
In the early 1890s Russia was ravaged by a devastating famine. Tolstoi was instrumental in revealing the extent of the disaster in letters to the foreign press and in bringing relief to the hungry. Visitors came to observe and support the relief work, among them Jonas Stadling, a Swedish Baptist preacher, who had learned of the famine from contacts among dissenting sects in the South of Russia, and had been encouraged by Countess Tolstaia to see for himself. It was Stadling who, through his contact with Tolstoyan circles in Russia, brought the first detailed account of Prince Dmitrii Khilkov and his trials to a wider English audience in the pages of the popular religious magazine, *Sunday at Home*. His article, entitled *A Disciple of Count Tolstoi: the story of Prince Khilkov*, appeared in May 1895.

Two years later Stadling, included a chapter on Khilkov in his book, *In the land of Tolstoi: experiences of famine and misrule in Russia*.

The official campaign against Tolstoi and his followers came to a head in 1897, following their involvement in exposing the severe persecution of the Doukhobor sect in the Caucasus. It was Dmitrii Khilkov who had first reported the repression and who was, as a result, exiled once more, away from the Caucasus, to the Baltic, and finally abroad. The expulsion of Chertkov from Russia in the same year was to be of great significance both for the Tolstoyan movement in general and Khilkov’s story in particular. Chertkov’s support for the mass migration of Doukhobors to Canada in 1898 provided an opportunity to promote Tolstoi’s teaching, while drawing the attention of the world to this contemporary exodus. In the same year appeared the first issue of Chertkov’s new journal, *Svobodnoe slovo* [Free Word] and with it a collection of materials entitled *Pokhishchenie detei Khilkovykh* [Abduction of the Khilkov Children]. Dmitrii Khilkov’s autobiographical notes (*Zapiski D. A. Khilkova*) formed a large part of this text. Long after the event in 1908 some extracts were published for English readers in Jaakoff Prelooker’s *Heroes and Heroines of Russia: Builders of a New Commonwealth*.

Khilkov’s *Zapiski* were packed with ‘Tolstoyan’ themes: the evils of war and landownership; the virtues of working the land; the failings of the Church; and the injustice of state power. It is not hard to see there Chertkov’s hand as editor in the portrayal of Khilkov as an exemplary follower of Tolstoi’s teaching, and it was as such that he was generally
portrayed. What emerges, however, is a portrait not of a mere disciple, but one who followed his own truth. This was recognised by Countess Tolstaia, who sought to distance her husband from Khilkov’s ideas and wrote to her sister, Tatiana Kuzminskaia: ‘He has nothing in common with Lev Nikolaevich. Khilkov is the preacher of his own thoughts.’

In spite of Tolstaia’s claim, they had shared much in common: a disdain for the privileges of birth, grave misgivings about military service, self-reproach over landownership, sympathetic regard for the peasant and a spiritual outlook on life. For a season their outlook appeared to mesh closely, but Dmitrii Khilkov was the more radical, for which he suffered exile and the enforced removal of his children. Their relationship of mutual respect and admiration lasted for some fourteen years until 1901, when he finally broke with Tolstoi, rejecting his doctrine of non-violence and non-action. In the end Tolstoyan non-action did not sit well with a character that was essentially pragmatic and unable to let injustice pass unchallenged. In this narrative we shall explore not only his relations with Tolstoi, but also with fellow Tolstoyans, the ‘dark ones’ who so offended Sofia Tolstaia with their extreme views and behaviour, and who misrepresented her husband, she believed, in their efforts to lead a simpler life on the basis of his teaching. Khilkov was in contact with members of Tolstoyan communities throughout Russia. Some were visitors and companions at his farm in Pavlovki, some shared his exile in the Caucasus, interacting with dissenters there, and some, like him, were later to renounce Tolstoyism for Orthodox Christianity. The relationship with Tolstoi is, in part at least, revealed by the published correspondence through many volumes of the Jubilee edition of his collected works [Polnoe sobranie sochinenii] (PSS in text and notes hereafter).

The literature of Tolstoi studies is vast and well known. His followers have left numerous memoirs, for example those of Abrikosov and Groman, collected and published by Tolstoi’s secretary N. N. Gusev (1948). Biographies abound, from Biriukov’s early work (1921) to more recent works by A. N. Wilson (1988) and Rosamund Bartlett (2010). New scholarship on the Tolstoyans is appearing, notably Charlotte Alston’s study of the international Tolstoyan movement (2014) and Alexandra Popoff’s recent biography of Vladimir Chertkov (2015). Tolstoyan involvement with the wider
communitarian movement are revealed in S. I. Skorokhodov’s memoir, *Iz vospominanii starogo obshchinika* (1915–1916) and extensively covered in recent research by I. A. Gordeeva (2003).

The literature on Russian sects and sectarianism ranges through the Orthodox polemics of the nineteenth century, including the works of missionaries Timofei Butkevich and Vasilii Skvortsov and his influential journal *Vera i razum* [Faith and Reason], the studies and document collections published by Vladimir Bonch-Bruevich in the series *Materialy po istorii i izuchenii russkago sektantstva i staroobriadchestva* [Materials for the History and Study of Russian Sectarianism and the Old Belief] (1908–16), and, in the Soviet period, notably the work of Alexander Klibanov (1965). More recently Nicholas Breyfogle has written on the history of sectarians in the Caucasus (2005), where Dmitrii Khilkov’s interest and sympathy for these dissenters were first awakened in the 1880s. Molokans, Shalaputs, Stundists and Baptists were all represented there and their presence extended through much of Southern Russia and Ukraine, contributing to what Sergei Zhuk has called ‘Russia’s lost reformation’ (2004). Returning to Pavlovki in the mid-1880s Khilkov encountered Stundists and others under persecution which increased during the following decade.

In exile during the 1890s Khilkov engaged with Russian Baptist leader I. S. Prokhanov in the pages of *Beseda*, published at that time in Sweden for the evangelical Christian community, but providing a forum for a wide range of views. Here Khilkov debated with Prokhanov on the political position of the dissenting sects and their relations with the State. That theme continued with discussions of religious liberty in the pages of Biriukov’s *Svobodnaia mysl’* [Free Thought]. In 1901 theoretical discussion was overshadowed by real and disastrous events in Khilkov’s home village of Pavlovki. That story has been told in the author’s ‘*The Pavlovtsy of Khar’kov Province*’ (1990) and also by Sergei Zhuk (2004).

Of all Russian sectarians the Doukhobors are perhaps best known through their dramatic history and exodus, and living heritage in Canada. Their story is well documented by Woodcock and Avakumovic in *The Doukhobors* (1968). Since then further research on the Doukhobors has appeared in the work of fellow Canadian scholars, John Woodsworth (1999) and Andrew Donskov (2006). The Doukhobor Centenary Conference in
1999 was the occasion for some re-assessment of the Doukhobor protest of 1895 by Nicholas Breyfogle and Josh Sanborn (2000). The role of Dmitrii Khilkov in the Canadian settlement is documented in the above and also in numerous contemporary sources: the memoirs of fellow participants, Leopold Sulerzhitskii (1905), James Mavor (1923) and Quakers, Joseph Elkinton (1913) and James Neave (1911) and in the pages of Tolstoyan and Quaker publications.

Settling in Switzerland from 1899 Khilkov found his name and his talents sought after among the Russian émigré community, where his story was well known. In 1902 it received yet wider circulation with the publication of his memoirs (essentially material from the Zapiski) as Souvenirs inédits [Unedited Memories], in the French journal La Revue. In Switzerland he met revolutionary activists of all persuasions from anarchism to every shade of socialism. Social Democrat Vladimir Bonch-Bruevich was particularly close, sharing with Khilkov an interest in Russia’s sectarians. They participated together for a time in the Social Democrat journal Zhizn’ [Life], which frequently published material on the persecuted sects, and in Khilkov’s own Narodnye listki [People’s Leaflets], a series of radical pamphlets designed for smuggling into Russia. These and the revolutionary pamphlets published by the Socialist Revolutionary Party reveal his progress towards the idea of instigating a popular insurrection. His publications of the period, the memoirs of those who knew him and, not least, the records of the agents of the Okhrana who followed his activities, all add to the picture of this turbulent phase of his life. That story is the subject of the author’s From Tolstoyan to Terrorist: the Revolutionary Career of Prince D. A. Khilkov, 1900–1905 (1999).

Under the amnesty of 1905 Khilkov was permitted to return home to Pavlovki, where he turned his back on political activity, and took up the life of a farmer once more. For the next nine years he devoted himself to agriculture and spiritual reflection. Even in retirement in the deep countryside his name drew visitors, including journalist A. S. Pankratov, who interviewed Khilkov in 1910 for his book Ishchushchie Boga [Seekers of God] (1911). These latter years saw his spiritual journey come full circle. He investigated Buddhism, eastern religions, theosophy and the Christian Church. He discussed them in correspondence with former Tolstoyan friends and in
person with the local parish priests. Fathers Nikolai Chepurin and Iakov Prikhodin were of a new generation of Orthodox missionary priest, highly educated and articulate. Largely through their influence Dmitrii Khilkov was won back to the Orthodox faith. A volume of selected correspondence was published by Mikhail Novoselov in 1915 and more appeared in 1916 in the pages of Bogoslavskii vestnik [Theological Herald], essentially covering the last years of his life. The letters are most numerous for the period 1907 to 1914, right up to the outbreak of war and his journey to the front. Edited from an Orthodox viewpoint they reveal above all his spiritual investigation and final acceptance of the Church’s teaching. Finally, his untimely death at the very beginning of the war occasioned numerous eulogies from those who knew him well: Vladimir Bonch-Bruevich, Il’ia Tolstoi, Mikhail Menshikov, Mikhail Novoselov, Nicholai Chepurin and Iakov Prikhodin.

As stated, this work has drawn almost exclusively on the published sources. Beyond these there are, of course, important archive resources in Russia relating to the life and work of Dmitrii Khilkov, which may be briefly mentioned here. His letters to Tolstoi are held by the Tolstoi Museum (Gosudarstvennyi muzei L. N. Tolstogo, GMT) in Moscow. The Manuscript Division of the Russian State Library (Rossiiskaia gosudarstvennoi biblioteki, RGB) holds significant autobiographical and memoir material of contemporaries such as P. I. Biriukov and V. D. Bonch-Bruevich, including his Pamiati D. A. Khilkova (1899–1914). There also are the memoirs of his son Boris Dimitrievich Khilkov. Other material is held by the Institute of Russian Literature (Institut russkoi literatury (Puskinskii Dom), IRLI) and the Museum of the History of Religion (Gosudarstvennyi muzei istorii religii, GMIR). Details may be found in the following guides: ‘Lichnye arkhivnye fondy v gosudarstvennoy khranilishchakh SSSR: ukazatel’ (Moscow: [Glavnoe arkhivnoe upravlenie pri Sovete Ministrov SSSR], 1963) and ‘Vospominaniia i dnevniky XVIII–XX vv.: ukazatel’ rukopisi’, S. V. Zhitomirskaiia, ed. (Moscow: Kniga, 1976).

Russian dates before 1918 are given according to the Julian calendar, which was twelve days behind the Gregorian calendar in the nineteenth century, and thirteen days behind in the twentieth century.
CHAPTER 1

The Khilkovs in Peace and War

On 19 March 1856 an imperial manifesto proclaimed to the Russian people the end of the Crimean War and recognised the pressing need to address the problem of serfdom. Tsar Alexander II had been on the throne for just a year and the prospect of peace and hopes of much needed reform gave cause for optimism among his subjects. It appeared to herald a relaxation of the former oppressive regime of Nicholas I, and hold promise of greater freedom for the people. It was at this significant moment in Russian history that Prince Dmitrii Aleksandrovich Khilkov was born in November 1857 to a life of wealth and privilege as a member of Russia’s ruling elite. His formative years were to witness the consequences of emancipating the serfs on his own family estate, the return of war in 1877, and the assassination of Alexander II by a terrorist bomb in 1881.

The Khilkovs were numbered among the most ancient Russian noble families, who traced their line back to Rurik, founder of the Russian State, through the sixteenth century Prince, Ivan Khilok (Riapolovskii), from whom they derived their name. Generations of Khilkov princes gave distinguished service to the Tsars, while their wives and daughters served as ladies in waiting at Court. A strong military tradition ran through the family. In the nineteenth century Stepan Aleksandrovich Khilkov (1786–1854) had distinguished himself in the war against Napoleon and held the highest rank of Lieutenant General in the Emperor’s Own Life Guard Hussar Regiment. It was natural, therefore, that from an early age Dmitrii Aleksandrovich was marked out for a military career.

Of his parents and his early years we know little. His father Aleksandr Dmitrievich (1834–88) was a Colonel of Hussars, who served with honour.
in the Crimean War, then went into retirement in 1861. His mother Iuliia Petrovna (née Dzhunkovskaia, 1837–1916) appears as a single minded Russian matron, who above all prized the honour and position attached to the ancient name of Khilkov. Her own family, the Dzhunkovskiis, were of more recent noble origin. In the eighteenth century they were priests and a strong thread of piety appears to run through the family. Iulia Petrovna’s uncle, Stepan Stepanovich (1821–70), had converted to Catholicism abroad, entered the Jesuit order and conducted missionary work among the Eskimos and in Skandinavia. In the 1860’s he left the order, renounced Catholicism and was accepted back into the Orthodox Church in 1866. Looking forward to the path taken by Dmitrii Aleksandrovich, there is, perhaps, a foreshadowing here of his own unusual spiritual journey.

Dmitrii Aleksandrovich, born on 13 November 1857, was their first child. A second son, Alexander, was born two years later, but sadly did not live beyond his late teens. There is a suggestion, albeit from a critical source, that he committed suicide and that the Khilkov home was far from happy.

The conditions of family life in which he (Dmitrii) grew up in childhood were not at all favourable for the correct development of his moral-religious understanding (in the Prince’s own words, throughout the whole of his childhood he saw only one decent person close to him – the coach driver Emelian), – and (it was) these very circumstances which marked the beginning of that path by which Prince D. A. Khilkov also came to blind enthusiasm for the views of Count L. N. Tolstoi, and his brother – to suicide in his youth.

The author of these remarks, Archpriest T. I. Butkevich was a dedicated opponent of Tolstoyism, and his article, based on a visit to Khilkov in 1890, was published at the height of the Orthodox campaign against Tolstoi and his teaching in 1897. He wrote of course to undermine Khilkov’s reputation, but there was some truth in his description of the family. Much

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2 From Stepan Kondratievich Dzhunkovskii (beginning of the eighteenth century). The family held property in Poltava and Khar’kov. The estate at Pavlovki was Dzhunkovskii property.

later, in 1914, the priest Iakov Prikhodin, who had befriended Dmitrii Aleksandrovich in his latter years, also wrote of his 'disorderly upbringing'. His father, Aleksandr Dmitrieievich, had been a distinguished and exemplary officer, but it appears that in retirement he fell in with a circle 'who had a harmful influence on him, as a consequence of which there was disorder in his family life'. Here was a family scandal that was barely mentioned, suggesting marital breakdown, separation, and another, illegitimate, family. Some further evidence comes from a letter of Countess Tolstaia to her husband in April 1887. From a conversation with Khilkov’s aunt she had learnt that he had taken in his ‘dissolute and drunken father’ with his ‘awful brood’, who had all moved into his farm, which was close to where his mother lived. His health must have been failing at this stage as he died at the beginning of January 1888.

Dmitrii, or ‘Dima’, was his mother’s favourite. Many years later she would recall with pride how, during a visit to Italy, the Queen of Greece (formerly Grand Princess Ol’ga Nikolaevna of Russia) had been so charmed by the small boy with golden curls that she took him into her own carriage. At the beginning of 1866 her ambition for Dima took a first step forward when, shortly after his eighth birthday, his name was entered for a place in the Imperial Corps of Pages, an elite school, whose pupils were drawn exclusively from families of the highest rank.

At the age of twelve, in June 1870, Dmitrii took his place among the 150 pupils of the Corps. Organised into four junior (general) classes and two senior (special) classes, the emphasis was on military training and preparation for high command or state service. Nevertheless, following reforms in the late 1860’s the Corps at this time could also boast a broad even liberal education, probably the finest in the Empire. M. M. Osorgin, a pupil during the late seventies recalled that the teaching ‘was simply brilliant.

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5 S. A. Tolstaia, *Pi’sma k L. N. Tolstomu* (Moscow: Academiia, 1936), 393.
The majority of the professors were outstanding. In the final year the first sixteen pupils were nominated Pages of the Chamber and were attached to the personal service of members of the Imperial family, requiring frequent attendance at Court functions. This honour fell to Dmitrii Aleksandrovich in 1874 (aged sixteen), an indication of his high ability. Indeed in the final examination of the Corps he took sixth place and on graduation received a commission as cornet in the Hussar regiment of the Imperial Life Guards, his father’s old regiment, stationed at Tsarskoe Selo. On entering the regiment in August 1875, promotion followed swiftly. Within three months he was promoted from cornet to lieutenant and the following year, in September, was appointed commander of the fourth squadron and given other responsibilities. He became head of a school for soldiers’ children and clerk to the regimental court. The latter he soon gave up and spent six months as quartermaster, while continuing with the school.

From the few accounts we have of this period of his life it is clear that the young Dmitrii was a devout Orthodox Christian. According to Pankratov, ‘he came to love divine service, served as a sacristan in the Corps Church, he frequented the churches of St Petersburg and sought after splendour and dignity’. In later life he looked back with great pleasure to his time as sacristan, looking after the holy objects of the church and preparing them for divine service, never missing a service. He was an exemplary young officer, writes Novoselov, ‘distinguished by his refinement, piety, talent, and marvellous elegance of manners, and a fine gift of speaking. It was widely said of him that ‘he has the remarkable ability to be liked by all’.

At that time, at the beginning of 1877, attention in Russia was becoming focused on events in the Balkans, where fellow Slavs had risen against their Turkish rulers and were suffering terrible reprisals. The Tsar’s declaration of war on Turkey in April was followed by a wave of popular support for a holy crusade to liberate their Orthodox brethren. Along with countless

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others the Khilkov family were caught up in the general enthusiasm. Both Alexandr Dmitrievich and Iuliia Petrovna (as a Sister of Mercy) volunteered and departed for the Balkan front. As a conscientious and dedicated young officer Dmitrii wanted to practice what he had been trained for. To his dismay his regiment was not among those called to active service. Disillusioned with the off duty life of an officer and determined to go to war, he sought with some difficulty a transfer to the Caucasian front. Finally on 30 May 1877 Imperial permission was granted for him to join the Kuban Cossack regiment under the command of the Commander in Chief of the Caucasian Army, Grand Prince Mikhail Nikolaevich, brother of the Tsar.

There is a more colourful account, related by Vladimir Bonch-Bruevich, of Khilkov’s decision to enter the war. Bonch-Bruevich wrote a lengthy obituary for Dmitrii Aleksandrovich in 1914 in the left-wing newspaper Kievskaia mysl', which drew on conversations during the period of their friendship in Switzerland in the early 1900s. The picture he paints is of a young man, who, for all his excellent qualities, enjoyed the sometimes boisterous life of an officer in St Petersburg. In a story that could be straight from the pages of a romantic novel he tells how Dmitrii, who was after all only nineteen years old, had become smitten with a gypsy girl and was intent on marrying her. His plan, however, was frustrated by lack of means for a dowry and the girl’s reluctance to leave her people. Utterly dejected he saw the war as an opportunity to drown his sorrow and even to die for his lost love. Before he left made a final visit to the gypsy encampment to say farewell. As he did so he was stopped by an old woman, who ‘prophesied’ that to be safe in battle he should always be mounted on a white horse; if he should dismount, he would perish. With details that are absent from Khilkov’s autobiographical Zapiski, Bonch-Bruevich makes much of the influence of this gypsy encounter on Dmitrii Aleksandrovich’s attitude and subsequent behaviour in battle. As we shall see, he attributes this to a mystical vein in Khilkov’s character, which was observed also by Pankratov, but which was totally at odds with the rational portrayal in the Zapiski, edited by the no-nonsense Tolstoyan Vladimir Chertkov.

The Russian forces had crossed the frontier with Turkey on 12 April under the Supreme Command of Grand Prince Mikhail Nikolaevich and Major General M. T. Loris-Melikov. By early May the Russians had seized the key strongholds of Baiazet and Ardahan, and occupied a significant area of Turkish Armenia. Instead of following up their victory over the demoralised Turkish forces efforts were concentrated on besieging the fortress of Kars. Given this respite the Turkish commander, Mukhtar Pasha, withdrew to Zevin, between Kars and Erzerum, to regroup and await reinforcements. At was at this point that Dmitrii Khilkov entered the war. At first, he writes, ‘I saw only the ostentatious, beautiful side’ of the war. Soon, however, his initial idealism began to turn to disillusionment. Being on the staff of the detachment commander, Prince Chavchavadze, he was able to observe the campaign as a whole and became acquainted with the chief commanders.

In this situation, he writes, I was struck by something I had not in any way expected. The majority of these commanders thought only of themselves and gave no thought to ruining the whole operation or thousands of men, if by this they had some hope of harming another commander or receiving a decoration. I soon saw that in practice what was happening was the complete opposite of my expectations. I was disillusioned and began to pity the poor deceived soldiers, whom, indeed, they treated as cannon fodder.

The appalling waste of life and neglect of the men made him determined to protect the Cossacks under his command.

On 13 June Loris-Melikov mounted an attack on the Turkish position at Zevin, only to be repulsed with heavy losses. The Turks now took the advantage, forcing the Russians to lift the siege of Kars and retreat to the frontier. Only Ardahan and Baiazet remained in their possession. Meanwhile the Turks took and fortified the Avliar-Aladzha heights, a strong position commanding the approach to Kars. At the beginning of August the main body of the Russian forces, including Khilkov’s detachment, were encamped at Kuriuk-Dere, with an advance section at Bashkadykliar. Khilkov at this time was in command of a special operations unit (окхотничья команда),

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10 Zapiski, 79.
11 Zapiski, 80.
involved in specific and usually dangerous missions, chiefly in the field of reconnaissance and spying. To form his unit Khilkov especially requested Cossacks who were under military discipline and otherwise destined for a correctional battalion. From them he forged a successful unit, devoted to their commander. On one occasion he led them in a daring attempt to scale a dangerous cliff-face to take a Turkish fortress by surprise. ‘Why should we not attack the fortress from this side?’ he asked the men. ‘Why indeed, your honour, where you go, we go also’, they replied. As it happened the ascent had to be abandoned when the unit came under fire from the Russian artillery, mistaking them for Turks.

Among the men under Khilkov’s command at this time was a Tatar named Zamat, who had a curious and colourful history. For many years, as an abrek, he had led resistance to the Russians in the Caucasus mountains. Following a voluntary surrender, he was exiled to Sakhalin, from whence he later escaped. On return to Russia he volunteered for the Turkish War and served with distinction, particularly at the siege of Kars. His true identity, however, was discovered, and Zamat was forced to flee and return to his former life in the mountains, where he was later murdered as he slept. His life reads like a Caucasian romance, but Khilkov would recall the Tatar’s significant influence on his life at that time. For Zamat, it appears, was untypical of his race in that he had a horror of taking life.

On the evening of 8 August Khilkov was ordered by Prince Chavchavadze to lead a night attack on the Turkish cavalry camp in front of the main enemy position on the Avliar-Aladzha heights. To Khilkov this was a foolhardy enterprise, which could not possibly influence the course of the war and would only endanger his men, who were likely to run into enemy troops on the way back. Chavchavadze, however, was not swayed by

12 ‘Okhotnichii komandy’, Entsiklopedicheskii slovar’, (St Petersburg: Brokgauz i Efron, 1897), 22a, 502.
13 Pankratov, Ishchushchie Boga, 92.
14 Prince Zakharii Gul’batovich Chavchavadze (1825–1905), from 1878 Commander of the 2nd Combined Caucasian Division.
these arguments. With a troop of fifty men, among them Zamat, serving as an under officer, Dmitrii Aleksandrovich reached the camp to find the Turks asleep. The Tatar was reluctant to attack and kill sleeping men; Khilkov concurred and aimed to take them alive. The startled Turks, however, naturally retaliated and in the confusion of the moment an event occurred which was to prove a turning point in the young officer’s life. He writes:

We set off, reached the camp and found the Turks asleep. Here things began which are unpleasant for me to recall now, but at the time I gave them no thought. Having become separated from the Cossacks, I ran into two Turks. One of them thrust at me with a rifle. I thought he wanted to shoot me and I fired the revolver, which was in my hand, point blank at his head. He fell. As he fell he let go the bay horse, which he held by the reins. The other Turk fled. I rode after him shouting, ‘The bay is mine’. The fleeing Turk was holding the reins of the bay. I wanted to take it [...].

On return with a prize of eleven horses and two Turkish officers, Khilkov and his men were congratulated by all. Something, however, troubled him. He felt at first that it was his failure to retrieve the bay horse, but that night the real source of his disquiet became clear.

I woke in the night and for the first time began to think of the Turk I had killed and realised clearly that it was all because of him. I could sleep no longer, the Turk stood before me. Fortunately, I did not see his face, but his figure, – he was wearing a hood, and the hood stood up like a cone, – I remember to this day.

The following day the conviction grew that he could no longer stay in the detachment and that he must purge himself of the sin of murder. He therefore began to consider how best to approach his commanding officer, Grand Prince Mikhail, with a request to quit the detachment. For a professional soldier this was an odd reaction, but he had seen no purpose in the raid and he had killed a man for the sake of a few horses. He shared his dilemma with fellow officer, Prince Georgii Il’ich Orbeliani, with whom he shared a tent. Orbeliani at first took it for a joke, but seeing the seriousness of his intent,

16 *Zapiski*, 81.
17 Ibid.
and to protect his comrade from shame informed Colonel P. P. Valuev, whom they both respected. Summoned to explain himself, the Colonel made it clear to Khilkov that he did not approve of such foolishness. For his part Dmitrii Aleksandrovich insisted that his sense of guilt was so great that he had to fast and make confession. The Colonel was not impressed, suggesting that perhaps fear was the real motive for wanting to quit. When Khilkov denied this, Valuev gave the following remarkable advice:

Stay in the detachment, go where you are sent, only don’t kill; you see no one has ordered you to kill. Forget that you have a weapon, and the next time a Turk aims straight at you, keep still and do not defend yourself. If you are killed, you will in this way also atone for your sin of murder; but most important, you will no doubt discover to what extent you cannot kill.\(^\text{18}\)

To the young Khilkov this advice, cynical as it may have been, seemed quite fair. Subsequently, on more than one occasion he was able to put it to the test. About this time, however, he went down with dysentery, which became progressively worse until he collapsed and was taken into the hospital at Aleksandropol around 10 September.

During the second half of August the Turks, in a surprise attack, had overrun the Russian advance position at Bashkadykliar and occupied the strategically important heights of Kizil Tepe. The Russians counter attacked, but failed to retake the heights. From the end of August through September there was a lull in the fighting while both sides maintained defensive tactics. On 20 September the Russians, now reinforced, began an assault on the Turkish positions. The fighting continued for several days. In the hospital at Aleksandropol Khilkov could hear the sound of cannon fire. Quietly discharging himself he rejoined his detachment, though still far from well.

Weakened by the Russian offensive the Turks took up new positions on the Avliar Aladzha heights. The Russians maintained the offensive and on 3 October joined battle with the forces of Mukhtar Pasha for possession of the heights. That day Khilkov’s detachment was in reserve. Unable to observe the battle because the Turks had set fire to the plain, Khilkov and

\(^\text{18}\) Ibid., 82–3.
the others rode forward until they came in sight of Malye Iagny. On the summit of this mountain, at a height of around 2,000 metres, there was a Turkish position. All at once they noticed that the Turks were evacuating the stronghold. On reaching the summit Khilkov and his men found it deserted. It was beginning to get dark, but the Cossacks were keen to pursue the retreating Turks. Against his better judgement he consented and, catching up with the enemy, found himself in a dangerous situation in which his small band was outnumbered. As he urged the Turks to surrender he was shot at. The bullet passed under his left hand. His first thought was to kill the Turk, but as he drew his sabre he recalled Valuev’s words and the dead Turk. He was struck by the thought that it was pointless to take another sin upon himself, when he stood in imminent danger of death. Shortly afterwards he was almost killed when a bullet just missed his ear. In that case the assailant did not escape, but was struck down by Khilkov’s comrade Orbeliani.

The Russian victory at Avliar-Aladzha proved a turning point in the Caucasian campaign. Mukhtar Pasha’s forces retreated in disarray to Erzerum. A Russian force under General Geiman marched on the city and began what proved to be a protracted and fruitless siege, while another force concentrated on Kars. Towards the end of October (beginning of November) Khilkov’s unit volunteered to join a Cossack detachment under the command of Prince Ferdinand Witgenshtein, which was to join Geiman at Erzerum. Khilkov was still feeling weak from recurring bouts of dysentery. En route the detachment of about 800 men was attacked by a much larger Turkish force. Khilkov and his men were driven into the mountains, their ammunition all but spent. Pursued by the Turks they came upon a young Russian infantryman, completely dazed and bewildered. Hesitating for a moment Khilkov stopped to rescue the lad, at great personal risk under the constant enemy fire. Once again his actions were guided by Valuev’s advice and the memory of the dead Turk. Although in mortal danger, he experienced an extraordinary inner peace.¹⁹

¹⁹ Ibid., 87.
On 10 October the Russian forces commenced the siege of Kars. Within the fortress the Turks were well prepared for a long siege. Nearly a month later Russian troops successfully stormed the citadel in a surprise attack by night. During the time of the siege Khilkov was involved in a number of operations around Kars. One night he was ordered to take a force of around one hundred men across the river into a village below the fortress. It was suspected that the villagers were supplying the Turks with information about Russian positions. Khilkov and his men cleared the village, discovering at the same time several Turkish soldiers concealed there, one of whom was disguised as a Turkish beauty.

By now the notion of nonviolence, initiated by Valuev’s advice was becoming a guiding principle of Khilkov’s life. An incident around Kars further influenced him in this direction:

He was leading his men in a charge of Cossack against Turkish cavalry. As the two forces approached one another, Khilkov saw, coming directly towards him, a Turkish officer with his sword raised. The moment of impact came; but the officers looked into each other’s eyes and they passed without either bringing down his sword. On the side of the Turkish officer there may have been merely hesitation at the critical moment; but Khilkov said that the friendly look in the eyes of the Turk disarmed him, and he felt he could not kill him.

From his own account as given in the Zapiski and also recounted to Bonch-Bruevich he survived many astonishing close encounters with death. His daring, some would say reckless, missions were invariably successful and sustained very few casualties among his men, who came to believe that he had a ‘charmed’ life. His undoubted courage was recognised by the award of several honours: the Order of St Vladimir 4th degree with swords and ribbon, St Anna 4th degree with inscription ‘For valour’, and St Anna, 3rd degree with swords and ribbon. By the end of the war he had risen with distinction to the rank of Colonel at the mere age of twenty two. All

21 Ibid.
this, according to Bonch-Bruevich’s narrative, he firmly attributed to the gypsy prophecy.

Being of a somewhat mystical inclination, D. A. Khilkov, like many soldiers and sailors, who have been in great dangers, believed in and always gave heed to various omens, predictions, premonitions, fortune telling, and so on. He always attributed his successes in the Turkish war to the gypsy’s fortune telling more than anything. When I was on the point of trying to raise an objection with him, pointing to the undoubtedly careful planning of all his military ventures, to the solidarity and unity of the detachment, to his application of new methods of manoeuvring and, finally, and to the outstanding courage of both himself, and of all those subordinate to him, he suddenly began to get angry, irritated, avert his eyes, he did not look me in the face, as though I could ‘give him the evil eye’ and fired off rapidly:

No, and no again, that is all nonsense! You would speak to me about ‘courage’. No courage at all! It is all rubbish! Terror, so awful, bullets are whistling, you grasp your head involuntarily, you even shut your eyes, but you ride, you have no idea why ... You think: Lord, if only I could get away quicker! – and here bang! Bang! Shrapnel! – it blows up, whirls around. Fear drains all strength from you! I’m done for, you think! Well, but then somehow you are even coming out of it! ... And it is all, of course, the gypsy woman: she foretold it.\(^{22}\)

At the time of the final assault on Kars, Khilkov was on the staff of the General Officer Commanding and was able to observe the courage and determination of the Russian troops in their effort to take the citadel. The fall of Kars to the Russians on 6 November 1877 signalled the end of the Caucasian campaign, although Erzerum continued to hold out. Early in 1878 the campaign in the Balkans also came to an end and peace with Turkey was concluded initially by the Treaty of San Stefano, later modified, under pressure from Britain and Austria, by the Treaty of Berlin in July 1878.

Two days after the fall of Kars a grand military parade was arranged on the occasion of the name-day of Grand Prince Mikhail. Amid an atmosphere of general jubilation, the Grand Prince congratulated Loris-Melikov on his success. The victory celebration was marred, however, by an unforeseen incident, which made a strong impression on Khilkov. He writes:

\(^{22}\) Bonch-Bruevich, ‘Pamiati D. A. Khilkova’.