

## Death of the Emperor Alexander<sup>1</sup>

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**M**Y dear friend Thomas Shillitoe  
Thou would's't, I have no doubt, duly receive a letter which I enclosed to thy son John Heppenstall, by a messenger in one of the Autumn ships, homeward bound, which was committed to my care by Prince Alex<sup>r</sup> Golitzin to forward by a private conveyance. In a letter which I sent privately to Cousin John Hipsley more than six weeks since, I requested him to hand thee such extracts therefrom, as he might judge most interesting to thy feelings : which I hope he has complied with.

I often feel comforted when I think of thee, from a belief, that thou must rejoice, on looking back at thy visit to Petersburg, particularly in having performed it last year—1824—the delay of another season would have been too late—the beloved object of our tender solicitude is gone, I humbly trust to a better country, beyond the reach of every vile assassin, and where the Accuser can never come. The world perhaps may still continue to behold him as a hypocrite that has perished, but there is every reason to believe that he is numbered amongst those who have hope in their death.

Several persons, with whom I am personally acquainted, are now returned to this city, who were present, and well acquainted with every circumstance of his illness and last moments : all of whom perfectly agree, a truly consoling statement, that his days have ended in peace. As the fever with which he was attacked approached the height, he became delirious for three or four days : but afterwards, his faculties were quite restored again, and he was favored with great composure and serenity of mind. He was extremely averse to taking medicine at all times, and on the late occasion firmly persisted, for some time, in refusing to comply with what was recommended. On his medical attendants urging him very closely, he said : “ I never felt such peace before. I am very tranquil : and why should you disturb me ? If it is the Will of God, I shall be restored to health, and

<sup>1</sup> For previous references to the Emperor see vols. xv. xvii. xviii. xxiv. xxv.

if not, all your attempts are in vain." A priest was employed to administer the sacrament to him, according to the forms of the Greek Church : and this man was instructed to exhort him, in the most pressing manner, to make use of every means for his recovery—that it was his duty for the sake of his people, for his familys sake &c &c—at last he consented by saying : " I feel so peaceful that you may do what you please with my body." After this he submitted to every thing proposed with perfect resignation and patience and without complaint altho he suffered much.

On his being informed that there was no hopes of his recovery, he requested every person to leave the room—he remained alone, four hours : and then sent for the Empress, and Prince Volchonsky—his composure and calmness continued to the last. The morning he died, the sun broke out and shone into the room, which he remarked, and admired the beauty of the weather—" How beautiful the weather is." He was perfectly sensible as the awful moment approached, and feeling it draw near he took the hand of the Empress, pressed it first to his lips, then to his bosom, and committed her to the care of Prince Volchonsky (although deprived of speech) with a look far more expressive than the most eloquent words. In less than half an hour after this, he quietly breathed his last. He was very much reduced, and his countenance quite shrunk when he died—but the next day it resumed quite its old appearance as when in usual health, and even had colour in the lips. It was this placid appearance which gave rise to the expressions of the Empress in her letter to the Dowager Emp<sup>ss</sup> where she says : " Dead, he smiles upon me as he was wont to do when living."

I do not wish to harrow up thy feelings by a recital of the dreadful events which have lately taken place in this neighbourhood—The calamitous inundation which thou witnessed in the autumn of 1824<sup>2</sup>, one can reflect upon with a degree of comfort, when brought into comparison with the late horrid massacre, which took place in the Isaac's Place, in the front of the Senate House, and the alarming situation of the neighbourhood all around us, for some time after. Through all we

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Gurney wrote to Jonathan Hutchinson, 25 xii. 1824 : " The ravages of the flood in Petersburgh have been dreadful. In the midst our friend, Thomas Shillitoe, sat in his lodgings unconscious of the extremity of the case, whilst three women was drown'd in the very house next to him."

have been greatly supported and comforted, and particularly in being permitted so eminently to distinguish the interposition of that Almighty Power which has confounded the evil designs of barbarous and wicked men, and disclosed to view their deep laid plans of intended murder and rebellion. . Many of the Prisoners taken, in hopes of faring the better for it, have confessed the whole of the plot, which appears to have been organized with great ability—and was to have burst upon us like a volcano. The signal for its general explosion was to have been the assassination of Alexander, on his return to the capital from his late journey, but they had not taken into their final calculations that this dear man was to be taken away from the evil to come. This unlooked for event has brought about the overthrow of all their diabolical schemes in a marvellous manner.

In a short time the sentence of the law will be executed upon a large number of these deluded people. The fort is crowded with prisoners and many are still arriving from the interior of the country.

The remains of our late greatly lamented Alexander are now at Tsarsko Selo, and will pass our house in a few days for interment—great preparations are making on this occasion.

My wife unites with me, and the children, in dear love to thee and thine, and all our dear friends. We are all in good health, which is a great favor, and I hope we shall long retain a grateful humble sense of the merciful preservation we have witnessed, and render the Glory, the Praise, and the Thanksgiving unto Him Who is ever worthy, and unto whom only it belongs.

Thy affectionate friend

DANL. WHEELER.

2 Mo 28. 1826. o.s.

If thou shouldst see William Allen and household, please to give my dear Love to him and also, I wish to be affectionately remembered to Alexander Djunkovsky. I expect his father will enclose this letter in one to him. Sarah Kilham is well—Do write me. D.W. Love to Tho<sup>s</sup> Christy and family, & all enquirers.

*From the original, presented to D "in the name of Mary Ann Warner, of Brighton, and the other great grandchildren of Thomas Shillitoe," 1928.*