

***Michael Yurievich Lermontov,
a brilliant Russian poet.***
("Lermontov- Encyclopaedia Britannica")



Lermontov was born in Oct. 15 [Oct. 3, Old Style], 1814, Moscow, Russia—died in July 27 [July 15], 1841, Pyatigorsk, the leading Russian Romantic poet and author of the novel *Geroy nashego vremeni* (1840; *A Hero of Our Time*), which was to have a profound influence on later Russian writers.

Life

Lermontov was the son of Yury Petrovich Lermontov, a retired army captain, and Mariya Mikhaylovna, née Arsenyeva. At the age of three he lost his mother and was brought up by his grandmother, Yelizaveta Alekseyevna Arsenyeva, on her estate in Penzenskaya province. Russia's abundant natural beauty, its folk songs and tales, its customs and ceremonies, the hard forced labour of the serfs, and stories and legends of peasant mutinies all had a great influence in developing the future poet's character. Because the child was often ill, he was taken to spas in the Caucasus on three occasions, where the exotic landscapes created lasting impressions on him.

In 1827 he moved with his grandmother to Moscow, and, while attending a boarding school for children of the nobility (at Moscow University), he began to write poetry and also studied painting. In 1828 he wrote the poems *Cherkesy* ("Circassians") and *Kavkazsky plennik* ("Prisoner of the Caucasus") in the vein of the English Romantic poet Lord Byron, whose influence then predominated over young Russian writers. Two years later his first verse, *Vesna* ("Spring"), was published. The same year he entered Moscow University, then one of the liveliest centres of culture and ideology, where such democratically minded representatives of nobility as Aleksandr Herzen, Nikolay Platonovich Ogaryov, and others studied. Students ardently discussed political and philosophical problems, the hard fate of serf peasantry, and the recent Decembrist uprising. In this atmosphere he wrote many lyrical verses, longer, narrative poems, and dramas. His drama *Stranny chelovek* (1831; "A Strange Man") reflected the attitudes current among members of student societies: hatred of the despotic tsarist regime and of serfdom. In 1832, after clashing with a reactionary professor, Lermontov left the university and went to St. Petersburg, where he entered the cadet school. Upon his graduation in 1834 with the rank of subensign (or cornet), Lermontov was appointed to the Life-Guard Hussar Regiment stationed at Tsarskoye Selo (now Pushkin), close to St. Petersburg. As a young officer, he spent a considerable portion of his time in the capital, and his critical observations of aristocratic life there formed the basis of his play *Maskarad* ("Masquerade"). During this period his deep-but unreciprocated--attachment to Varvara Lopukhina, a sentiment that never left him, was reflected in *Knyaginya Ligovskaya* ("Duchess Ligovskaya") and other works.

Lermontov was greatly shaken in January 1837 by the death of the great poet Pushkin in a duel. He wrote an elegy that expressed the nation's love for the dead poet, denouncing not only his killer but also the court aristocracy, whom he saw as executioners of freedom and the true culprits of the tragedy. As soon as the verses became known to the court of Nicholas I, Lermontov was arrested and exiled to a regiment stationed in the Caucasus. Travel to new places, meetings with Decembrists (in exile in the Caucasus), and introduction to the Georgian intelligentsia--to the outstanding poet Ilia Chavchavadze, whose daughter had married a well-known Russian dramatist, poet, and diplomatist, Aleksandr Sergeyevich Griboyedov as well as to other prominent Georgian poets in Tiflis (now Tbilisi) broadened his horizon. Attracted to the nature and poetry of the Caucasus and excited by its folklore, he studied the local languages and translated and polished the Azerbaijani story "Ashik Kerib." Caucasian themes and images occupy a strong place in his poetry and in the novel *Geroy nashego vremeni*, as well as in his sketches and paintings.

As a result of zealous intercession by his grandmother and by the influential poet V.A. Zhukovsky, Lermontov was allowed to return to the capital in 1838. His verses began to appear in the press: the romantic poem *Pesnya pro tsarya Ivana Vasilyevicha, molodogo oprichnika i udalogo kuptsa Kalashnikova* (1837; "A Song About Tsar Ivan Vasilyevich, His Young Bodyguard, and the Valiant Merchant Kalashnikov"), the realistic satirical poems *Tambovskaya kaznacheysya* (1838; "The Tambov Paymaster's Wife") and *Sashka* (written 1839, published 1862), and the romantic poem *Demon*. Soon Lermontov became popular; he was called Pushkin's successor and was lauded for having suffered and been exiled because of his libertarian verses. Writers and journalists took an interest in him, and fashionable ladies were attracted to him. He made friends among the editorial staff of *Otechestvennye zapiski*, the leading magazine of the Western-oriented intellectuals, and in 1840 he met the prominent progressive critic Belinsky, who envisioned him as the great hope of Russian literature. Lermontov had arrived among the circle of St. Petersburg writers.

At the end of the 1830s, the principal directions of his creative work had been established. His freedom-loving sentiments and his bitterly skeptical evaluation of the times in which he lived are embodied in his philosophical lyric poetry ("*Duma*" ["Thought"], "*Ne ver sebye . . .*" ["Do Not Trust Yourself . . ."]) and are interpreted in an original fashion in the romantic and fantastic images of his Caucasian poems, *Mtsyri* (1840) and *Demon*, on which the poet worked for the remainder of his life. Finally, Lermontov's mature prose showed a critical picture of contemporary life in his novel *Geroy nashego vremeni*, containing the sum total of his reflections on contemporary society and the fortunes of his generation. The hero, Pechorin, is a cynical person of superior accomplishments who, having experienced everything else, devotes himself to experimenting with human situations. This realistic novel, full of social and psychological content and written in prose of superb quality, played an important role in the development of Russian prose.

In February 1840 Lermontov was brought to trial before a military tribunal for his duel with the son of the French ambassador at St. Petersburg--a duel used as a pretext for punishing the recalcitrant poet. On the instructions of Nicholas I, Lermontov was sentenced to a new exile in the Caucasus, this time to an infantry regiment that was preparing for dangerous military operations. Soon compelled to take part in cavalry sorties and hand-to-hand battles, he distinguished himself in the heavy fighting at Valerik River, which he describes in "*Valerik*" and in the verse "*Ya k vam pishu . . .*" ("I Am Writing to You . . ."). The military command

made due note of the great courage and presence of mind displayed by the officer-poet.

As a result of persistent requests by his grandmother, Lermontov was given a short leave in February 1841. He spent several weeks in the capital, continuing work on compositions he had already begun and writing several poems noted for their maturity of thought and talent ("Rodina" ["Motherland"], "Lyubil i ya v bylye gody" ["And I Was in Love"]). Lermontov devised a plan for publishing his own magazine, planned new novels, and sought Belinsky's criticism. But he soon received an order to return to his regiment and left, full of gloomy forebodings. During this long journey he experienced a flood of creative energy: his last notebook contains such masterpieces of Russian lyric poetry as "Utes" ("The Cliff"), "Spor" ("Argument"), "Svidanye" ("Meeting"), "Listok" ("A Leaf"), "Net, ne tebya tak pylko ya lyublyu" ("No, It Was Not You I Loved So Fervently"), "Vykhozhu odin ya na dorogu . . ." ("I go to the Road Alone.."), and "Prorok" ("Prophet"), his last work.

On the way to his regiment, Lermontov lingered on in the health resort city of Pyatigorsk for treatment. There he met many fashionable young people from St. Petersburg, among whom were secret ill-wishers who knew his reputation in court circles. Some of the young people feared his tongue, while others envied his fame. An atmosphere of intrigue, scandal, and hatred grew up around him. Finally, a quarrel was provoked between Lermontov and another officer, N.S. Martynov; the two fought a duel that ended in the poet's death. He was buried two days later in the municipal cemetery, and the entire population of the city gathered at his funeral. Later, Lermontov's coffin was moved to the Tarkhana estate, and on April 23, 1842, he was buried in the Arsenyev family vault.

Assessment

Only 26 years old when he died, Lermontov had proved his worth as a brilliant and gifted poet-thinker, prose writer, and playwright, the successor of Pushkin, and an exponent of the best traditions of Russian literature. His youthful lyric poetry is filled with a passionate craving for freedom and contains calls to battle, agonizing reflections on how to apply his strengths to his life's work, and dreams of heroic deeds. He was deeply troubled by political events, and the peasant mutinies of 1830 had suggested to him a time "when the crown of the tsars will fall." Revolutionary ferment in Western Europe met with an enthusiastic response from him (verses on the July 1830 revolution in France, on the fall of Charles X), and the theme of the French Revolution is found in his later works (the poem Sashka).

Civic and philosophical themes as well as subjective, deeply personal motifs were closely interwoven in Lermontov's poetry. He introduced into Russian poetry the intonations of "iron verse," noted for its heroic sound and its energy of intellectual expression. His enthusiasm for the future responded to the spiritual needs of Russian society. Lermontov's legacy has found varied interpretations in the works of Russian artists, composers, and theatrical and cinematic figures. His dramatic compositions have played a considerable role in the development of theatrical art, and his life has served as material for many novels, poems, plays, and films.

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The official biography of the Russian poet Mikhail Yurievich Lermontov would not be complete without mentioning that Lermontov is considered as one of the mysterious Russian poet. The discussion of his life and his literary works is still continued as more documents are discovered.

Mikhail lost his mother Mariya Mikhaylovna, née Arsenyeva, when he was 2.5 years old. His grandmother Yelizaveta Alekseyevna Arsenyeva, nee Stolypina, was a strong, egoistic and wealthy person. She was sure that she is the only person who can take care of her grandson Misha Lermontov. Misha's father Yuri Petrovich Lermontov and all Lermontov's relatives were considered as miserable because of their relative poverty. Yelizaveta Alekseyevna Arsenyeva had to accept that Yuri Petrovich Lermontov was a nobleman so she could not ignore this fact. She promised to keep the honour of Lermontov surname but as a matter of fact she separated Misha from his father. Misha Lermontov was growing up in surrounding of the Stolypin's relatives mostly bearing just his own surname – Lermontov.

Mikhail Yurievich believed that his ancestry is coming from Scotland. So when he was at least at the age of fifteen in 1830 he wrote two poems “The Grave of Ossian” and “Desire” dedicated to his homeland Scotland.

The Grave of Ossian

In my beloved Scottish highlands,
Under a curtain of cold mists,
Between the sky of storms and dry sands,
The grave of Ossian exists.
My dreaming heart flies to its stone
To breathe in native air puffs
And take from it the priceless loan -
The treasure of the second life.

Mikhail Lermontov, 1830.

(Translated by Yevgeny Bonver, October, 2000
Edited by Dmitry Karshedt, May, 2001)

Desire

Why not am I the steppe raven,
Just passed me by across the haven?
Why can't I glide alone on sky?
Being a spirit, being free and fly?

I'd fly to west, tear west along
To ancestral lea, to ancestral home,
To deserted castle on the foggy hill,
To forgotten ashes where ancestors live.

Their ancient shield on the castles' wall,
Their rusty sword - It says it all.
I'd fly to brush my sword and shield,
To recall the pride of flourished field

I have dream to touch Scottish harp a string
Hearty tone fulfill every castle wing
Waking up a dream, flying up the vault,
Breaking time and space, crashing poet's soul.

But pray is hopeless, and dreams are vain

Against the destiny, against the fate.
I am far away from foggy hills.
The Northern Sea as laying sill

The last offspring of Scottish knights,
Buried by snow, faded by night.
In snow country being born,
The foreign soul I did not learn.

Oh, why not am I the steppe raven?

Michael Lermontov, 1830

(Interpreted by Tatiana Molchanova, 2005).

Dear poet did not know how many prominent and wealthy Lermontov relatives he had and who were the direct descendents, as poet was, from the Scottish George Leirmont and who lived in Sankt Petersburg at the same time as Mikhail Yurievich lived there: Admiral Mikhail Nikolaevich Lermontov (1792-1866), General Major Vladimir Nikolaevich Lermontov (1796-1876), General Major Dmitri Nikolaevich Lermontov (1802-1854), General Major Vsevolod Nikolaevich Lermontov (1812-1877), General Major Rostislav Matveevich Lermontov (1810-1877), and many others. Most of them belong to the heroes of the Russian wars of their times.

The lack of knowledge about Lermontov relatives was among the reasons of the poet's tragic fate. This particular theme is broadly discussing in the Russian literature and would be the special topic of new literary work.

The name of the Russian Poet Mikhail Yurievich Lermontov was known in the Great Britain as early as 1843 when Thomas Shaw interpreted Lermontov's poem "Terek" ("Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine vol. 54, Dec 1843):

THE GIFTS OF TÉREK.

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN OF LERMONTOFF. BY T. B. SHAW.

Terek* bellows, wildly sweeping
 Past the cliffs, so swift and strong;
 Like a tempest is his weeping,
 Flies his spray like tears along.
 O'er the steppe now slowly veering—
 Calm but faithless looketh he—
 With a voice of love endearing
 Murmurs to the Caspian sea:

“ Give me way, old sea! I greet thee;
 Give me refuge in thy breast;
 Far and fast I've rush'd to meet thee—
 It is time for me to rest.
 Cradled in Kazbék, and cherish'd
 From the bosom of the cloud,
 Strong am I, and all have perish'd
 Who would stop my current proud.
 For thy sons' delight, O Ocean!
 I've crush'd the crags of Dariál,
 Onward my resistless motion,
 Like a flock, hath swept them all.”

Still on his smooth shore reclining,
 Lay the Caspian as in sleep;
 While the Terek, softly shining,
 To the old sea murmur'd deep:—

“ Lo! a gift upon my water—
 Lo! no common offering—
 Floating from the field of slaughter,
 A Kabárdinetz † I bring.
 All in shining mail he's shrouded—
 Plates of steel his arms enfold;
 Blood the Koran verse hath clouded,
 That thereon is writ in gold:
 His pale brow is sternly bended—
 Gory stains his wreathed lip dye—
 Valiant blood, and far-descended—
 'Tis the hue of victory!
 Wild his eyes, yet nought he noteth;
 With an ancient hate they glare:
 Backward on the billow floateth,
 All disorderly, his hair.”

Still the Caspian, calm reclining,
 Seems to slumber on his shore;
 And impetuous Terek, shining,
 Murmurs in his ear once more:—

“ Father, hark! a priceless treasure—
 Other gifts are poor to this—

* A river which, rising on the eastern side of the ridge of the Caucasus, falls, after a rapid and impetuous course, into the Caspian, near Anápa.

† A mountaineer of the tribe of Kabárda.

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I have hid, to do thee pleasure—
 I have hid in my abyss!
 Lo! a corse my wave doth pillow—
 A Kazá'chka* young and fair.
 Darkly pale upon the billow
 Gleams her breast and golden hair;
 Very sad her pale brow gleameth,
 And her eyes are closed in sleep;
 From her bosom ever seemeth
 A thin purple stream to creep.
 By my water, calm and lonely,
 For the maid that comes not back,
 Of the whole Staníza,† only
 Mourns a Grébenskoï Kazák.

" Swift on his black steed he hieth;
 To the mountains he is sped.
 'Neath Tchetchén's kinjál‡ now lieth,
 Low in dust, that youthful head."

Silent then was that wild river;
 And afar, as white as snow,
 A fair head was seen to quiver
 In the ripple, to and fro.

In his might the ancient ocean,
 Like a tempest, 'gan arise;
 And the light of soft emotion
 Glimmer'd in his dark-blue eyes;

And he play'd, with rapture flushing,
 And in his embraces bright,
 Clasp'd the stream, to meet him rushing
 With a murmur of delight.

* A Kazák girl.

† Village of Kazáks.

‡ Kinjál, a large dagger, the favourite weapon of the mountain tribes of the Caucasus, among which the Tchetchénetszes are distinguished for bravery.

We think that in 1843 Scottish famous writer T. Shaw did not connect Lermontov's name with the Scottish family of Learmonth as the article "Memories of Kirkaldy of Grange" that appeared in this Magazine in January 1849 did not mention about possible connection Sir James Learmonth of Dairsie with the Russian Poet Mikhail Lermontov. However the Scottish Newspapers reacted pretty quickly in response to the Vladimir Vasilievich Nikolski's publication in the Russian Magazinr "Russkaya Starina" in 1873. We present below the original article from a Scottish Magazine (Collected by Henry George Farmer, GB 0247 MS Farmer 252, and Accession Number: 4638, Glasgow University Library):

Mr W. R. S. Ralston writes in Saturday's *Athenæum*:—A recent number of an excellent Russian periodical, the *Russkaya Starina*, contains some interesting information about the ancestors of one of Russia's greatest poets, Michael Lermontof—the greatest poet, indeed, with the single exception of Alexander Pushkin. It has long been known that Lermontof was of Scotch extraction, but his pedigree was not given with perfect accuracy in the *Gerbovník*, a book of Russian genealogies, armorial bearings, &c. The documents, however, which are now printed in the *Russkaya Starina* give precise information about the first of the Lermontofs who settled in Russia, as well as about his descendants. By its aid, some Scotch genealogist may be able to trace the Russian poet back to his family's Caledonian home. Early in the seventeenth century a Scotchman named Yury (i.e., George) Lermant (or, more probably, Lermont), seems to have emigrated from Scotland to Poland, where we hear of his residing at Bělava, a town in the present Russian Government of Smolensk. Thence he passed into Russia, entering the service of Michael Feodorovich, the first Czar of the Romanof dynasty, by whom he is mentioned under the name of Yury Lermant, in a *gramota*, or rescript, dated March 9, 1621. His descendants Russified their name by means of the affix *of*; and his great grandson's great-grandson was the famous poet, Michael Andréévich Lermontof. The family arms are described in the Russian *Gerbovník* as follows:—"On a golden shield is a black chevron with three golden squares on it, and below it a black flower. The shield is crowned by the usual noble helm with a noble crown. The mantling of the shield is golden, lined with red. Underneath the shield is the device, *Sors mea Jesus*." This description tallies to a considerable degree with that given by Sir Bernard Burke of the arms of the earldoms of Dean and Murrison—"Or, on a chevron sable, three mascles, of the first." It remains for some Scotch antiquarian, hopes the Russian editor, to identify the George Andréévich (Andrew's son) Lermont, the founder of the present Russian family of the Lermontofs, and, if possible, to prove the existence of a blood relationship between the Russian poet and the famous Thomas the Rhymer, to whom the same surname has been attributed. Michael Lermontof often refers in his poems to the Scottish name of his forefathers. In one of these, printed for the first time in the *Russkaya Starina*, he says:—

Beneath the curtain of mist,
Beneath a heaven of storms,
Among the hills of my Scotland,
Lies the grave of Ossian.
Thither flies my weary soul
To breathe its native gale.
And from that forgotten grave
A second time to draw its life.

And in another poem, called "The Wish," he longs to have the wings of a bird, that he might fly "to the West, to the West, where shine the fields of my ancestors," and where, "in the deserted tower, among the misty hills, rests their forgotten dust." Above the sword and shield hanging on the ancient walls he would fly, he cries, and with his wing flick off the gathered dust of ages:—

And the chords of the harp of Scotland would I touch,
And its sounds would fly along the vaults;
By me alone awakened, by me alone listened to,
No sooner resounding than dying away.

It vain are his fancies, he adds, his fruitless prayers be delivered from the harsh laws of fate:—

Between me and the hills of my fatherland
Spread the waves of seas;
The last scion of a race of hardy warriors
Withers away amid alien snows.

This article probably raised for the first time the question of the kin relations between Scottish Learmonth and Russian Lermontovs before the Scottish historians and public. Unfortunately since those times there were no any systematic studies in this direction in Scotland. There was probably just belief. That is why the series publications appeared in 1925 and then in 1941, 1944 in the Scotland about the Scottish-Russian poet Mikhail Yurievich Lermontov and we appreciate them all. These publications were based on the Russian archives documentary work and Dr. Crocket's request to the Russian Imperial Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, 1913. We illustrate below all of them in the chronological order (Glasgow University Library, Farmer Special Collection, author's private request).

Michael Lermontoff. 1925

The Manse, Tweedsmuir. October 28, 1925.

SIR,—The Russian poet, Michael Lermontoff (properly Mihail Yurjevich L'ermontov), claimed descent from George Learmont or Learmonth, a Scot who emigrated to Poland about the beginning of the 17th century. In 1613 Learmont was one of a garrison of a small Polish town which was besieged by the Russians. Along with other Scottish or Irish soldiers he espoused the cause of the Russians, and putting an "ov" to his name settled down and became the ancestor of a new family in Russia.

George Learmont is said to have belonged to the parish which gave us the famous Thomas of Ercildouen (Earlston), or Thomas the Rhymer. There is no proof, however, that Thomas bore the name of Learmont, though that has been stated with persistency by many writers from Hector Boece's day, Boece being the first to call him Learmont. Persons of that name living in Earlston in my early days there did claim kinship with the Rhymer, but the whole story of Thomas is so tangled and difficult that little authentic can be made out of it. Anyhow it is a picturesque tradition which connects the great Russian bard with the Border Rhymer, the "Day-star of Scottish poetry."—I am, &c. W. S. CROCKETT.

1925, by W. S. Crockett

1925
Michael Lermontoff.

14 Saxe-Coburg Place, Edinburgh,

October 26, 1925.

SIR,—In reference to the Miscellany in to-day's *Scotsman* dealing with Michael Lermontoff, the Russian poet, it may be of interest to remember that the Learmonth's of Balcomie were a well-known Fifeshire family. The arms and initials of John Learmonth appear on the fine arched gateway of Balcomie, and are illustrated in the "Castellated and Domestic Architecture of Scotland," vol. 2.—
I am, &c.

THOMAS ROSS.

1925, by Thomas Ross.

The Miscellany.

LERMONTOFF.

SCOTTISH-RUSSIAN POET.

THERE are some very interesting points to be noticed in the life and works of the young Scottish-Russian poet on whom an article appeared in a recent issue of *The Scotsman*. As the writer of the article pointed out, the love of liberty is a leading characteristic. Indeed, the offending passage in his poem on Pushkin's death denounced the corrupt courtiers as "Slaughterers of Liberty." Lermontoff could think of no greater criminals than these.

There are two characteristics, however, which it might be interesting to note. The first is his melancholy and the second his mysticism.

(i.) The strain of melancholy in Russian writers may be the result of environment; in the case of Lermontoff it was partly environment against which his free spirit rebelled, and partly, no doubt, the influence of Byron. The character of the "Demon" strongly suggests Byron's Cain; Petchorin, "the Hero of our Time," bears some resemblance to Don Juan. There is a certain pessimism in some of the shorter poems from which the following extracts may be selected:—

I long for nothing of this gay world's giving,
Nor mourn the past—its memories grieve me
not.

I seek but freedom and a rest from living,
And long to sleep, forgetting and forgot.

And again—

Life is a cup: blindfold we drink
The wine, and as we drain it
The goblet glistens at the brink,
With our own tears that stain it.

And lastly, one of the most popular short poems concludes with the following sentiment:—

Azure the sky that o'er him reaches,
Bright flash the sunbeams on the seas—
But ho, perverse, the storm beseeches,
And in the storm alone were peace.

One involuntarily thinks of the Corsair looking over the waters or of Childe Harold leaving his native land. But Lermontoff was without the selfishness of Byron, and he was deeply patriotic. We come, therefore, to the conclusion that his melancholy was due less to the Byronic influence than to the power of environment. There is often the poet's disappointment and the vague yearning—of which we are so conscious in reading Shelley. Lermontoff longed to feel himself in a free atmosphere:—

Where homing eagle paused awhile to hover,
And freer winds their courses onward sped,
There on the dizzy peak my dreamland fancies
Whirled on with these through ether's broad
expanses.

(ii.) The mysticism is well illustrated by two poems on the theme that a prophet's utterances are seldom believed. In one of them the prophet is described as silent in the midst of a noisy gathering

Whilst in futurity which no man's eye could
measure.

He looked with spiritual eye.
Nay, what is it to you? Be joyful ye
Who see not what I see! the frail world ending
In dissolution, o'er your heads impending
The axe! Ye see it not! Alone I see! I see!

In the other he describes the world's scorn

for the prophet—

Beware of him—he was, forsooth,
Too proud to dwell with us securely.
He said he brought the word of truth
From God to men. A madman, surely!

His biographer writes that this was Lermontoff's last poem.

Was it his Scottish ancestry that implanted within him that love of freedom and that love of the mountains? Was it not amidst the magnificent scenery of the Caucasus that Lermontoff found the truest expression of his genius? The last words of the "Novice" who has escaped the slavery of a monastery only to die—contain a request that he may be buried in some spot whence Kazbek may be visible. Is not Lermontoff revealing the passion in his own soul for a free life in the mountains, when the dying hero of this most characteristic poem gasps with his last breath:—

For some free moments' space
Among the mountains steep and grey,
Where as a child I used to play,
I tell thee, monk, I would despise
Eternity and Paradise.

ROBERT BURNES.

[A translation by Mr Burnes of a complete poem by Lermontoff will be found in a neighbouring column.]

A RUSSIAN POET

HIS SCOTTISH YEARNINGS.

MICHAEL LERMONTOFF, one of the greatest Russian poets in the XIXth century, came of an entirely Russian parentage, but his family descended from a Scottish nobleman by name of Lermont, who had migrated into Russia some time in the XVIIth century. This ancestry, for all its remoteness, was not quite imperceptible in the life of their famous descendant.

The poet's days were cruelly short. Born in 1814, he was killed in a senseless duel in 1841; but his dramatic and poetical works left lasting traces in the history of Russian literature. Outwardly, his life stands as a pitiful failure. An imprudently frank poem on Poushkin's death (in 1837) resulted in his disgrace and bitter exile. Away from his family, and almost deserted by his friends, Lermontoff died, leaving behind him a mass of literary wealth, amongst other things some lyrics than which no more beautiful exist in the Russian language.

It is in one of these that he gives expression to his otherwise unrevealed longings for his ancestors' country. He begins with a passionate appeal for liberty:—

"Oh would I were a bird of the steppes
Which has just flown above me;
Would I could soar in the skies,
And love but freedom alone!"

Freedom! The very word was then forbidden in Russia. Be it remembered here that the young poet lived in the reign of Nicholas I. (of Crimean memories), when Russian subjects were not allowed to travel abroad except for strictly official purposes.

If that enchanting freedom were his, the poet's wanderings would take him daringly far.

"For then Westward would I fling my flight,
Where my ancestors' fields are a-blossoming,
Where—in an empty castle—on misty mountains—
Rests their forgotten dust!"

And here another picture suggests itself, most probably gliding into the poet's memory from a bygone scanning of the family history:—

"On an ancient wall their hereditary shield,
And their rusty sword hang together;
Then would I fly over the shield and the sword,
And dust them with my wing!"

Comes the climax of the poet's longing:—

"And I would touch the chords of a Scottish harp,
Its sound would wander beneath the vaults—
But, awakened and heard only by myself,
Soon would it be hushed into silence!"

But now the poet is back in the dreary, sunless life of an exile. His dream, just the lure of an empty shadow:—

"Al! these yearnings are vain,
Impotent against the stern decrees of fate—
Between me and the hills of my country (?)
Are stretching the waves of the sea!"

But "his country's" freedom is never to be his, and thus something like despair creeps into the closing lines:—

"I—the last scion of fearless warriors—
Am fading away amidst alien snows;
Here was I born, but my soul does not belong
here."

One wonders if, after all, his ancestors' country would have done more to recognise his genius. Distrusted, imprisoned, and finally exiled, throughout his young life Lermontoff had sung songs of undaunted freedom, sometimes of splendid despair. Such moods were not encouraged in Russia a hundred years ago. She treated him as a curiously indifferent mother, almost afraid of the fierce outbursts of his genius. Was he not, in all sad reality, alone "amidst alien snows"?

Afterwards she knew his greatness, and wept for his early passing; but in life he could well yearn for the Scottish spirit of liberty. And to Scotland he poured out his innermost soul in one of his finest lyrics.

EDITH M. ALMEIDINGEN

Two previous publications were in 1925.

The most impressive memories of the 100 anniversary of Mikhail Yurievich Lermontov's death were published in July 1941 in Scotland when the Second World War stormed through Europe and Russia.

Russian Poet's Scottish Descent 10/7/41

It is a far cry from Earlston, in Berwickshire, to Moscow, but the celebration, even in the midst of war, of the centenary of the death of the "poet of the Caucasus," Mikhail Lermontov, recalls his traditional link with Thomas Learmont, the Rhymer, of Ercildoune.

The George Learmont who in 1613 settled in Russia, after a spell in the service of the Polish army, claimed descent from the famous thirteenth century poet whose Tristrem story, belonging to the Arthurian cycle of romance, fired the imagination of Sir Walter Scott and many another. In his adopted country, George Learmont added an "ov" to his name, and formed the first Russian cavalry regiment.

Mikhail Yurevitch Lermontov was also a soldier, but fell foul of the Tsar when he wrote an impassioned poem on the death of Pushkin. He was exiled to the Caucasus, returned after a year, and died in a duel. One of the greatest romantic poets of Europe, he prided himself on his descent from Thomas of Ercildoune, and was an eager student of the old ballads.

**10.55 MICHAEL YURIEVICH
LERMONTOV**

1941

(1814-1841)

A programme of settings of his poems to commemorate the centenary of his death, June 27, 1841

We parted ; How sad I am

Dargomizhsky

Farewell ; Was that your voice ? ; At the sacred gate.....*Blumenfeld*

The rock.....*Rimsky-Korsakov*

The prophet.....*Cui*

Lullaby ; Lo, in the spreading fields

Grechaninov

sung by Tatiana Mahushina (soprano)

Descended from a Scottish family named Lermont, Lermontov was one of the outstanding figures of the romantic period in Russian literature. Like his friend, Pushkin, he was deeply influenced in thought and technique by Byron ; like Pushkin he has been an endless source of inspiration to Russian musicians. In addition to innumerable settings of his lyrics, such as those in the present programme, his major poems inspired such works as Balakirev's 'Tamara' and Rubinstein's opera, *The Demon*. Lermontov's only important prose work, 'A Hero of our Time', is one of the masterpieces of Russian fiction.

11.15 JACK PAYNE
with his Orchestra

12.0 midnight-12.20 a.m. app.

Time, Greenwich : **NEWS**

Farmer 252

THE RUSSIAN ARMY

Scotland's Share in Its Creation

Mr GLEB STRUVE, Reader in Russian Literature in the University of London, delivered the first of two lectures on "A Russian Grand Tour of Scotland in 1828" in the Latin Classroom, Edinburgh University, yesterday evening. Mr Struve said that Alexander Turgenev's visit to Scotland in 1828 was one of the many interesting links between Scotland and Russia, whose relations went back to the seventeenth century. The part played by some Scottish generals, such as Patrick Gordon or Bruce, in the creation of the modern Russian Army under Peter the Great was well known. It could even be said that, inasmuch as the Red Army was carrying on the traditions of the old Russian Army—and that element of tradition was now very much stressed—Scotland had some share in producing the splendid fighting qualities of the Russian soldier which the whole world was now admiring. Great also was the part played by Scottish physicians in Russia in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Lesser known were Russian contacts with Scotland. In the eighteenth century several Russians received their education in the Universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow, and one of them, Professor Desnitsky, a pupil of Adam Smith, could be regarded as the founder of Russian jurisprudence.

Turgenev, said Mr Struve, could best be described as an ambassador-at-large of Russian culture in foreign parts. The extent of his travels was enormous even for those days, and the range of his acquaintances extremely wide. His grand tour of Scotland lasted over six weeks. It began with Abbotsford, where he stayed two days with Sir Walter Scott. He then went on to Edinburgh, where he spent three weeks. His Scottish friends included Francis Jeffrey, Macvey Napier, Professor McCulloch, the well-known economist, and Professor Pillans, one time rector of Edinburgh Royal High School. He twice visited Lord Rosebery at Dalmeny. He felt overcome by Scottish hospitality, and complained that he had no time left for solitary rambles, book in hand. After his stay in the capital Turgenev left for Lanark and Glasgow and for a tour of the Highlands.

YOUTH SERVICE

SOVIET LITERATURE. Mr GLEB STRUVE, author of the recently published "Twenty-Five Years of Soviet Russian Literature," lectured on "Soviet Literature" in Scottish-Czechoslovak House, Edinburgh, last night. Mr Struve said that the Revolution of 1917 did not mean a revolutionary break-up with the past. Except for a very short period of general dislocation of life, when its effects were felt also in literature, the traditions were upheld and continued. But whereas during the first period of the Revolution it was the tradition of Russian Modernism that was continued, later—and especially since 1932—there appeared a tendency to learn from the classics of literature, both Russian and non-Russian. Pushkin and Tolstoy, Balzac and Stendhal were the authors that were held up before the Soviet writers as the masters from whom they were to learn how to write and even what to write about. The slogan of Socialist Realism, which was now regarded as a more or less compulsory artistic method in the Soviet Union, was sufficiently wide to allow of considerable latitude of treatment when applied to literature. Present day literature—and art in general—in Russia had become rather conservative and opposed to drastic innovations and experiments. It has also become more humanistic. Another notable recent development was connected with the now widespread cult of the past, and had produced a number of historical novels dealing with those moments of Russian history when national existence of Russia was at stake. Since the war literature had been placed in its service and the war theme had practically ousted every other subject.

Among the signs of the times and fruits of the war are an increased interest in and taste for the national literature of our Ally, Russia. Messrs Hodder & Stoughton, London, are evidently prepared to cater for those who desire to make acquaintance with the masterpieces of Russian fiction in English dress; and they publish (at 2s. 6d. net per volume), under a cover bearing a bold design of the Imperial arms, two volumes which are typical in many ways of the national genius and character. One of these, Maxim Gorky's *Comrades*, which has already appeared in English under the title of "Mother," seems to make tangible the oppressive weight of gloom and pain that has hitherto hung over the spirit of the Russian worker. *The Heart of a Russian*, from the hands of Lermontov, one of the brightest stars in the firmament of Russian letters, takes us back three-quarters of a century into the past, to a Russia presenting strange contrasts to that of today. Under the original name of "A Hero of Our Time" it has already been translated into nine European languages, and is now for the first time rendered into English by J. H. Wisdom and Marr Murray. It is a piece of what may be called Byronic realism, placed against the romantic background of the Caucasus chain, with which the author was familiar from birth and service, and flavoured with the ironic spirit of revolution and discontent. Although the writer scornfully disavows having had any particular person in view when he drew the picture of Pechovin, the novel is believed to have been the pretext of the duel in which he prematurely lost his life.

HEIRLOOMS FOR RUSSIAN DEFENCE FUND

Gift from Grandchildren of Russian Poet Lermontov

THE grandchildren of the famous Russian poet, Lermontov (whose ancestors came from Scotland) have donated their family heirlooms, consisting of antique earrings set with diamonds, valued at 20,000 roubles, to the National Defence Fund, said Soviet War News last night.

Lermontov (the name is a corruption of Learmonth) was born in Moscow in 1814. In the course of his brief career, he was expelled from the University of Moscow for insubordination and from the Imperial Guards, for a poem in anger at the death of Pushkin (who was killed in a duel.) In 1841, he quarreled with with an old school fellow over a lady, and was killed in the duel which resulted.

His fame, outside Russia, as a great poet is (ironically enough) largely due to a German collection of his works.

The gift that is described in the Scottish Magazine above is well-known in Russia. The descendents of Vladimir Nikolaevic Lermontov, whose portrait is presented above, made the extremely valuable donation to the Russian National Defense Fund in 1941.

Thomas Rhymer of Ercildoune Erceldoune (also spelled Ercildoune - presently Earlston) or Thomas Learmonth (1220-1297).



Illustration 9.

Upper image: the romantic image of Thomas Rhymer.
<[Http://www.firstfoot.com/scotchmyth/thomasterhymer.htm](http://www.firstfoot.com/scotchmyth/thomasterhymer.htm)>
Lower image: a map of Birckshire, 1654
(Atlas of Scotland by Joan Blue).

There are many books and written records which refer to Thomas and for that reason we can be certain that he did exist. Erceldoune Thomas also called the Rhymer and Learmonth, seer and poet, occupies much the same position in Scottish popular folklore as does Merlin in that of England, but with some historical foundation. His actual existence and approximate date can be fixed by contemporary documents.

The name of Thomas Rimor de Ercildun, with four others, is appended as witness to a deed whereby Petrus de Haga de Bemersvde agreed to pay half a stone of wax annually to the Abbot of Melrose for the chapel of St. Cuthbert at Old Melrose (Liber de Melros, Bannatyne Club, 1298). The document is undated, but the Petrus de Hags, cannot be he who witnessed the signature of Richard de Mooresville, constable of Scotland, about 1170 (Liber S. Marie de Dryburgh, Bannatyne, Club, 1847, p. 269), and must be identified with the person of that name who lived about 1220) (ib.pp.94-6), as proof the four witnesses mentioned above were Oliver, Abbot of Dryburgh (c. 1250-68), and Hugh de Peresbv, Viscount of Roxburgh, alive in 1281. In the cartulary of the Trinity House of Soltra, preserved in the 'Advocates Library', Edinburgh, is a deed conveying to that house all the lands held by inheritance in Erceldoune by Thomas de Ercildoun filius et heres Thome Rymour de Ercildoun. The date has been usually quoted 1294-1299 (The Dictionary of National Biography, Founded in 1882 by George Smith, edited by Lesley Stephen and Sir Sidney Lee From the Earliest Times to 1900, volume VI, published since 1917 the Oxford University Press and sold by The Waverley Book Co. Ltd., 96-97 Farrington St., London, E.C.4, page 803).

We present a short account of his life and the myth that gave him his name and reputation.

Thomas lived in the village of Ercildoune now called Earlston, a village on the right bank of the river Leader which is eight miles from the village of Learmouth (see above illustration). The ruins of the keep of an ancient tower (illustrated below) which are still there were originally known as The Rymers Castle and, later, Learmonth Tower.



Illustration 10.
Rex Learmonth at the ruins of the Tower,
Earlston, 2005.

In the early days of the 13th century in Scotland, the ballad or poem told stories and recorded history. Thomas was said to be able to hold his audience spellbound. Lord and Lady, Knight and knave, young and old, would hang on to every word, because Thomas could only tell the truth, and many of his rhymes were prophetic. He was born around 1220 and died about 1297; prophecies only appeared in literary form in the 1400s when he became a celebrated poet and prophet after his death. But while he lived, he was famous too, because of the strange and fascinating events that caused him to receive his amazing gifts. The story goes that Thomas was walking in Huntly Burn near the Eildon Hills, close to his home in Ercildoune one fine May morning, when he heard a horse in the distance. As it came closer, he saw that the rider was a very beautiful lady with golden hair and jewels

sparkling over her spring green cloak. She stopped and introduced herself as the Queen of the Underworld. He begged her for a kiss and it was that which changed his life forever. She took the willing Thomas with her back to the Underworld. It was there that he was to learn that life consists of three paths. The first is desert flat, wide and straight, as far as the eye can see. This path has an unhappy and fruitless ending. The second path is narrow, winding and treacherous with thorny hedges; this is the path of righteousness with a good ending. The third path is very green and lush with foliage and vegetation meandering into a forest or glade. This is the path to the Underworld. Do not utter a word whilst passing down this way or you will stay forever. The Queen gave Thomas an apple from a perfectly laden tree which meant he would be graced with the gift of truth, foresight and poetry. He was transformed into a nobleman, as with the gift of truth a man is indeed noble. He was given an enchanted harp to be used as the link between this world and the Underworld showing its timeless mystical qualities. With this and all his other gifts, he became a wise Laird. When he returned to Ercildoune, he found that he had been away for seven years, although it had seemed to him to have been only an hour or so.

Thomas became Laird of the Castle of Ercildoune and quickly established himself as a prophet. He predicted the death of King Alexander III in a fall from his horse in 1286. This prediction was made to The Earl of March in Dumbar Castle on the day before the accident happened. He also predicted the union of the Scottish and English Crowns, the Battle of Bannockburn and the Jacobite uprisings. He wrote poetry and his advice and wisdom were sort by all. The story goes that he disappeared in about 1297 when he was called back to the Underworld by two white deer or forest children who came to take their brother back home and he was never seen again.

This story is of course the kind of myth that the people of those days believed. Nevertheless, Thomas was regarded even in

his own time as important, remarkable and special as he has been called the Scottish Merlin and illustrations show him with a long white beard, a tall hat and a long cloak. Some accounts record that Thomas had a son. However there is no record of his larger family but they most certainly did exist and, as already stated, had been in this part of Scotland for several hundred years before he was born. Many modern contemporary historians are considering the direct connection of Thomas Rhymer with the Learmonth Clan through paternal or maternal lines, and/or through some other relatives.

It has only been possible to relate the basic information on Thomas Rhymer. More romantic stories that connect Thomas Learmonth's prophecy with the Scottish national hero William Wallace, with the dramatic events in the Fyvie Castle, with the Gight Castle and the fate of the great British Poet Lord Byron and much more details can be found in the following publications: "Learmonth-Lermontovs : origin & history of the surname and families, 1057-2007" : Russia & Great Britain by Tatiana Molchanova & Rex Learmonth." (National Library of Scotland: HB6.209.1.40); "Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border by Sir Walter Scott (1803); "The romance and prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune", printed from five MSS with illustrations from the prophetic literature of the 15th and 16th centuries" by Thomas, James Augustus Henry Murray, published by N. Trübner for the Early English Text Society, 1875.

During our investigations, we came across the following interesting information in Old Rolls, which gives details relating to early family members. Following are translations from Latin / Norman French ("Rotuli de libertate ac de misis et Praestitis, Regnante Johanne". Cura T. Duffus Hardy, London, 1844, pages: 52, 72, 95) Translation from page 52, date 1203 AD: The land given: The King etc. to G. son of Peter etc. We command that you give without delay, to the inheritor Gerard de Leheramont, 25 pounds for land from the land of Simon de Haverech, with all its wheat and farm stock and whatever will come forth from it: and if the aforesaid land is not worth 25 pounds, that you make this

known to us by default. Given by myself at Montefort, 25th July. Translation of the page 72, date 1203 AD. The fief being granted anew it is commanded that G. son of Peter assign to Gerard de Leiramund 25 pounds sterling per annum in the matter of the fief to the Exchequer, and these things shall be done before the secretary (notary?), and by the time of their middle age, [the matter of] his fief shall be done by the heir from the Exchequer of the former St. Michaels.

Translation of the page 95, date 1204 AD: “ The King etc. for your support (prayers?) etc. We [at first told you that] without delay you make over to the heir Ger. De Leermut in full holding of the whole land which belonged to Gaufrey son of Hamois and Netestedel, who is in Britain (Brittany?) with our enemies, with all their farm stock, land and chattels, and make known to us what stock may be on that land, and what chattels, and how much the land itself may be worth with and without the stock, and how much it can be valued [in future]. Given etc.”

According to this information King John gave the order to his Justiciar' Geoffrey Fitz Peter who was 1st Earl of Essex, (Piers de Lutegareshale, b. ca. 1162, d. 1213) to give the lands to Gerald Leiramont in full holding. These lands belonged originally to Gaufrey (Geoffrey) son of Hamois (Havoise?) and Gerald Leiramont was the heir. They were vast lands with farm, chattels, and stocks, so Leiramont became a wealthy laird.

In 1330 AD Adam Lethermouth was groom to King Edward III (Calendar of memoranda rolls (Exchequer) preserved in the Public Record Office: Michaelmas 1326-Michaelmas 1327. London, H.M.S.O., 1968, pages 382-385, 2271: xxiv) (The King's groom was an honorary title and did not mean that he looked after the King's horses). This information indicates that these people held high positions and were close to the English Court.

Acknowledgement.

Our work would not have been completed without constant support from the Russian association “Lermontov’s Hereditary” and its Chairman and our kin Mikhail Yurievich Lermontov who is now a Vice – Chairman of the Federal Scientific-Methodical Council, Ministry of Culture and Mass-Communications, Russian Federation. Mikhail and his wife Elena gave us both moral and financial support, which enabled us to write and to publish this book.

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The Benedictine Monks of the Pluscarden Abbey, near Elgin, Moray, Scotland, particularly for preserving the ancient Learmonth Coat of Arms and their interest and understanding of Russian literature.

The University of St. Andrews, Fife, Scotland, and in particular Prof. Steve Murdoch and A. Grosjean who created the databases “Scotland, Scandinavia and Northern Europe Database, 1580-1707» that allows us to identify many Learmonths served abroad during the period 1580-1630.

The Wishart Genealogy Society, St. Andrews, Fife, Scotland. The Chairman Dr. David Wishart kindly sent us not well-known portrait of the Scottish Martyr George Wishart-Learmonth.

The representative of the Magistrate of St. Andrews Julie Poole who kindly sent us photographs of the relict Learmonth monuments exhibited in the Magistrate Hall, St. Andrews, Fife, Scotland.

The Scottish Music Centre, Glasgow, and Glasgow University Library for their huge collection of the archive documents about Scottish composer George Learmonth Drysdale.

The Court of the Lord Lyon - the official heraldry office for Scotland and in particular Mr Bruce Gorie who is secretary to the Lyon Clerk. Mr Gorie kindly sent us the list of the registered Learmonth Coat of Arms since 1672.

Mr Chris Ruffle who now resides in Taiwan. He purchased Dairsie Castle from Andrew Logan, sight unseen, as part of the sale of Dairsie Farm. It was an unpromising start, for Dairsie was referred to as "an unsuitable candidate for restoration" by Historic Scotland. Undaunted Ruffle achieved planning permission to rebuild the castle within a year of the purchase. Chris then wrote the story of Dairsie Castle and kindly sent us a copy of his achievements.

Professor of Music and Chair of the Department of Music at Southwestern University Kenny Sheppard who had chosen the story of the Scottish composer George Learmonth Drysdale as a theme of his dissertation.

The Director of the Scottish Tartans Authority Brian Wilton, Edinburgh, Scotland, for the professional skills and enthusiasm that were expressed during the creation and presentation in Russia of the Russia Lermontov Tartan in August 2007.

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We express the special gratitude to all Learmonth families who sent us their stories.

The technical support from Olga Bakushkina was also greatly appreciated. The comments of the reviewers of the book: Dmitri Fedosov and Adrei Tsuguliev were most valuable.

To collect the historical facts and illustrations we travelled few times over Scotland and England. All members of our families and particularly Yuri Postnikov and Anya Lyakhovskaya (Tatiana's husband and granddaughter) were extremely helpful and enthusiastic. We all became admirers of British history.

We express our cordial gratitude to Her Majesty the Queen of the United Kingdom for her high assessment of our research of the families of the Learmonth and Lermontovs and their connections throughout the years.



BALMORAL CASTLE

To: Mr M Lermontov, Mrs T Melchanova and Mr R Learmonth
The Association 'Lermontov Heritage'

The Queen wishes me to write and thank you all for the letter and the books which you have kindly sent to Her Majesty.

The Queen was pleased to hear from you and thought it was kind of you to send the volumes which you have so extensively researched and recently had published, on the subject of the families of the Learmonth and Lermontovs and their connection throughout the years.

I am to thank you all once again for this thoughtful gift and for writing as you did which, together with your good wishes, Her Majesty greatly appreciates.

Lady-in-Waiting

12th September 2008

The Russian version of our book, published in Moscow in 2008, recognised as the best book of year 2008. Mikhail Yurievich Lermontov and our book were awarded with the National Prize in the field of “Genealogical Studies. Memory”.



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Tatiana Molchanova

Graduated from the Lomonosov Institute of Fine Chemical Technologies; PhD in the Biological Sciences, Moscow, Russia; holder of the position of the Senior Scientist in the Haematological Scientific Centre (1974-1991) working in the collaboration with the Engelhard Institute Molecular Biology Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow. Participated in pioneering molecular diagnosis of the hemoglobinopathies in Russia; studied the conformational mobility of protein molecules. Since 1991 has been working in the USA: Biochemistry Department & Sickle Cell Centre headed by Emeritus Professor T. Huisman; Pharmaceutical Companies; National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, Maryland. Authors of more than hundred professional publications. The last years has been researching Genealogy & Family history. Author of books and articles. Tatiana Molchanova is a cousin of George (Yuri) Lermontov (1910-2005).

Rex Learmonth

Graduated from College. Served in the British Army. Became a trainee in the textile industry. In 1970 became the owner of the textile manufacturing business. Retired in 2000 and became an amateur historian and writer. Rex Learmonth is a direct descendant from the Scottish Borders Learmonth's.