THE COMING OF WINTER

*Stanzas from “Onegin” [Chapter Four]*

[xl]

Our Northern Winter’s fickle Summer,

Than Southern Winter scarce more bland⎯

Is undeniably withdrawing

On fleeting footsteps from the land.

Soon will the Autumn dim the heavens,

The light of sunbeams rarer grown⎯

Already every day is shorter,

While with a smitten hollow tone,

The forest droops its shadow leafage;

Upon the fields the mists lie white,

In lusty caravans the wild geese

Now to the milder South take flight;

Seasons of tedium draw near,

Before the door November drear!

[xli]

From shivering mist ascends the morning,

The bustle of the fields declines,

The wolf walks now upon the highway.

In wolfish hunger howls and whines;

The traveller’s pony scents him, snorting⎯

The heedful wanderer breathless takes

His way in haste beyond the mountains!

And though no longer when day breaks

Forth from their stalls the herd begins

To drive his kine,⎯his noon-day horn recalls.

The peasant maiden sings and spins,

Before her crackling, flaming bright

The pine chips,⎯friend of Winter night.

[xlii]

And see! The hoar frost colder sparkles

And spreads its silver o’er the fields,

Alas! The golden days are vanished!

Reluctant Nature mournful yields.

The stream with ice all frozen over

Gleams as some fashionable parquét,

And thronging hordes of boyish skaters

Sweep forward on its crystal way.

On her red claws despondent swimming,

The plump goose parts the winter cold,

Then on the ice with caution stalking

She slips and tumbles,⎯ah behold!

Now the first snowflake idling down

Stars the depressing landscape brown.

[xliii]

At such a season in the country,

What can a man’s amusements be?

Walk? And but more of empty highway

And of deserted village see?

Or let him through the far Steppes gallop,

His horse can scarcely stand at all⎯

His stamping hoofs in vain seek foothold,

The rider dreading lest he fall!

So then remain within thy paling,

Read thou in Pradt or Walter Scott,

Compare thy varying editions,

Drink, and thy scoffing mood spare not!

As the long evenings drag away

So doth the Winter too delay.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Pushkin.

[*Pradt was a French political writer, Minister to the Grand Duchy of Warsaw in 1812. Nine editions of his History of the Embassy at Warsaw were demanded*.]

FROM “ONEGIN” [CHAPTER FOUR, XXVI]

Sometimes he read aloud with Olga

A latter day romance discreet,

Whose author truly painted nature,

With cunning plot, insight complete;

Of the passed over a few pages,

Too bald or tasteless in their art⎯

And colouring, began on further,

Not to disturb the maiden heart.

Again, they sat for hours together

With but a chess board to divide;

She wish her arms propped on the table,

Deep pondering, puzzled to decide⎯

Till Lenski from his inward storm

Captured her castle with his pawn!

Pushkin.

FROM “ONEGIN” [CHAPTER EIGHT, XXIX]

Love condescends to every altar,

Ah when in hearts of youth it springs,

Its coming brings such glad refreshment

As May rain o’er the pasture flings!

Lifted from passion’s melancholy

The life breaks forth in fairer flower,

The soul receives a new enrichment⎯

Fruition sweet and full of power.

But when on later altars arid

It downward sweeps, about us flows⎯

Love leaves behind such deathly traces

As Autumn tempests where it blows

To strip the woods with ruthless hand,

And turn to soggy waste the land!

Pushkin.

FROM “ONEGIN” [CHAPTER SEVEN, II AND III]

How sad to me is thine appearing,

O Springtime, hour of love’s unrest!

Within the soul what nameless languors!

What passions hid within the breast!

With what a heavy, heavy spirit

From the earth’s rustic lap I feel

Again the joy of Springtide odours⎯

That once could make my spirit reel!

No more for me such pleasures thrilling,

All that rejoices, that has life,

All that exults,⎯brings but despondence

To one past passion as past strife,

All is but prose to such as he,

Wearied into satiety.

Perchance we fain would pass unnoticed

That which in Autumn drooped and pined,

Now radiant in verdure springing,

Since it must of our loss remind;

As with a tortured soul we realize

In Nature’s glad awakening,

That we shall never find renewal,

Who evermore are withering.

Perchance there haunts us in remembrance,

Our own most dear and lyric dream,

Another long forgotten Springtime⎯

And trembling neath this pang supreme,

The heart faints for a distant country

And for a night beside the sea!

Pushkin.

From *Russian Lyrics: Songs of Cossack, Lovers, Patriot and Peasant* by Martha Dickinson Bianchi [Dickinson], New York: Duffield and Company 1910 (2nd edn 1916).