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A Georgian Anarchist

David Marshall Lang

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One of the first Georgian professional revolutionaries was the anarchist Varlam Cherkesov or Cherkezishvili¹ (1846–1925), a native of Kakheti. As a student at St. Petersburg, he associated with Karakozov, who made an abortive attempt on the life of Tsar Alexander II in 1866. Later he joined the Nechaev group, who planned a nation-wide plot against the government. Tried with eighty-six others, Cherkesov was sentenced to forced labour in Siberia. Escaping in 1876, he made his way to Switzerland and joined in the literary and conspiratorial work of the Russian emigres there. However, he parted company with his Russian associates over the issue of Georgian independence. He became a great friend and disciple of Prince Kropotkin the anarchist. Cherkesov favoured the anarchist creed because it promised greater freedom to small nations than did Marxist dictatorship and centralist rule. From 1903, he and Kropotkin assisted another Georgian revolutionary, Kamando or Giorgi Gogelia, alias ‘K. Orgeiani’, to edit one of the first Russian anarchist papers, *Khleb*

¹ It was fashionable in the nineteenth century to replace the Georgian name endings in -shvili and -dze (both meaning ‘son of’) with the Russian termination in -ov, e.g. Baratashvili into Baratov, Tsitsishvili into Tsitsianov, and many others.

i Volya or *Bread and Liberty*. Smuggled into Russia, this paper had an influential following. Its open advocacy of terrorism later alarmed Kropotkin, who had relapsed in his old age into a more abstract and contemplative approach to the revolutionary question. In 1907, Cherkesov helped to organize a mass petition of the Georgian people against Tsarist oppression, which was presented, though with scant result, to the International Peace Conference at The Hague. Cherkesov and his Dutch wife, Freda, had many friends in English society and in European political circles. An uncompromising critic of the doctrines of Marx and Engels, he is excluded today from the Russian revolutionary pantheon. He died in London at an advanced age.