

## APPENDIX B

“EXCERPT FROM THE MARQUIS DE CUSTINES  
TRAVELS IN RUSSIA IN 1842”<sup>1</sup>

The figure of the Empress is very elegant & tho she is extremely thin I find an indefinable grace about her whole person. Her mein far from being haughty as I had been informed is expressive of an habitual resignation. On entering the Chapel she was much affected & I thought she was going to faint... Her soft blue eyes, rather sunken, told of deep sufferings supported with angelic calmness. Her look full of feeling has the more power, from its seeming unconsciousness of possessing any. Faded before her time & so weak that it is said she cannot live long, her appearance gives the idea of a passing shadow, of of [*sic*] something that belongs no more to earth. She has never recovered from the anguish she had to undergo on the day of her accession to the throne. and conjugal duty has consumed the rest of her life. She has given too many idols to Passion, too many grand dukes to the Emperor— Every one sees the state of the Empress but no one mentions it. The Emperor loves her. When ill in bed he attends her himself, watches by her bedside & prepares & administers her food & medicine. No sooner is she better than he destroys her health with the excitement of fêtes & journeys, but the moment danger to her health is again apprehended he renounces all his projects... The nearer any of us is placed to the imperial sun the more he is a Slave to the glory attached to his situation. The Empress is dying under the weight of this Slavery—

From my own observation this must be unjust, as ungenerous, for if the wife of any Sovereign is happy in her family it is the Empress of the Czar Nicolas. but I am told her constitution was undermined by her fondness for amusement. late hours at routs, excess in dancing, frequent attendance at Theatres &c. Now the Imperial family is an example to their court, benevolent & considerate the ladies are at the head of all charitie[s] & their early hours are quite established.

## NOTE

1. Appendix B is a single, abridged quotation from the Marquis de Custine's *La Russie en 1839*, in the 1842 English translation. It is his description of the exhausted and nervous appearance of Empress Aleksandra Fyodorovna, attributed by him to the stress of (1) the Decembrist rebellion in 1825, which threatened her husband's accession to the throne and the entire Imperial family with assassination and (2) her years of bearing children (de Custine, *Empire of the Czar*, pp. 137–138; see also pp. 159, 161). This passage, copied in Anna Whistler's hand, is followed by her response to what she deemed to be Custine's lack of generosity and of justness in attributing the empress's debility to a subservience to the emperor's whim and thereby suggesting an unhappy marriage. But although Custine was implying that the emperor had power, he was not saying the marriage was unhappy. Anna Whistler entitled the quotation "Excerpt from the Marquis de Custine's travels in Russia in 1842." A. Th. Von Grimm, in his biography of Aleksandra Fyodorovna, whom he knew personally, corroborates in detail Custine's statement and also does not suggest an unhappy marriage (von Grimm, *Alexandra Feodorovna*, vol. 1, pp. 157, 246).