

Edouard Arturovich Rabeneck

Born 13.05.1858

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This memoir combines two accounts of family and factory life, written by Edouard in Paris in 1929-30, that came to Andrew Rabeneck as typescripts in English from his grandfather Charles, Edouard's eldest son. The English has been tidied up but remains as he wrote it.

Unfortunately, not much remains written down about the family life of my grandfather and his ancestors. Any documents my father had in his big library were burned in 1878, when fire broke out at our factory and at our house. As a child I remember being very interested in his library. What remained of it our Uncle Louis handed down to us, but when we left Russia we lost that too. We had an 18th century New Testament, which probably belonged to my great grandfather Heinrich Rabeneck, who lived in Engers (Westphalia). Of his children we only knew about three sons, the eldest Franz (1781-1858), the second Christian (1787-1856), and the youngest Ludwig (1791-1861), my grandfather. Franz was 10 years older than Ludwig. In Elberfeld the brothers ran a Turkish-red printing shop for yarn, without much success. A letter from Christian

while on a business trip to Chemnitz, complained about trouble he had selling goods. He added that ‘it is easier to dye yarn badly, than to sell badly dyed yarn’.

Franz probably left Germany in 1826, since his factory in Bolshevo was founded in 1827. The two brothers didn’t really get on. Franz dissuaded his brother from going to Russia, pretending that the factory didn’t run well. But it wasn’t true, the fabric print shop at Bolshevo worked very well from the outset. Nevertheless, Ludwig finally came to Moscow in 1831, leaving many debts in Elberfeld, which he later paid back to the last “Pfennig”. He even returned his membership of the limited partnership, his investment, which he wasn’t obliged to do. That made a great impression on the salesmen, and they always mentioned it whenever I went to Elberfeld. He was very esteemed in his native town. My bother-in-law – Otto Hilger – heard about him too.¹ He lived in Remscheid, the next town to Elberfeld.



1855 portrait (detail) of Ludwig Rabeneck by Karl Sohn (Düsseldorf).

When my grandfather Ludwig came to Moscow he met up with a friend, Edward Könemann, who had successful cloth factory in Sobolewo. His advice was to settle nearby, at the farm of Durnowo. Könemann had bought the estate with the house and the stables from the farmer and my

¹ See Memoir of Otto Hilger at www.livesretold.co.uk

grandfather bought the estate on the other side of the pond together with various farm-buildings. It was rumoured that my grandparents' house was a rebuilt cow-house, but I don't know if that is true, in any case the walls of the ground floor were very old and the upper wooden floors were built later. It was an easy decision for my grandfather to settle in Sobolewo, because it was situated on the river Klajnsma, like Bolshevo, and the water of the river was ideal for the Turkish-red dye works because of a lack of ferrous deposits. Our friendship with the Könemann family and the Pelzers began around that time. For three generations they were our friends and close neighbours. My brothers and sisters grew up with Armand Pelzer's numerous children. He had married Könemann's daughter and when Könemann died he rented the factory from his brother, Albert. Edward had led a life of luxury, spending lots of money, and when he died he left many debts and therefore his brother, who lived abroad, got the factory.

I don't know when my grandmother Elizabeth (Betty) followed her husband to Russia. Her two eldest children, Luise, born 1829 and my uncle Louis born 1831 were both born in Elberfeld. My father Arthur was born in Moscow the 29 of February 1836, so she must have moved to Moscow in 1835. My father's younger brothers and sisters were all born in Moscow. Emilie died young from TB and was buried in Moscow. Young Betty married Mr. Pollack and when he died Mr. de Myttenare. The youngest was Edmund. My grandmother did not like Russia, her antipathy to all things Russian was so striking that she didn't even teach her sons Russian, a problem when they later had to manage the factory. She travelled a lot; she took her son Louis to Italy several times to strengthen his weak lungs in the mild climate. They travelled in a special coach, which they used in districts where the railway had not yet been constructed. They went to St Petersburg and by ship to Stettin and by railway to Berlin; the coach always followed them. My father Arthur, who was the stronger one, sat on the front seat with his tutor Buddenkamp, with everyone else in the back. Buddenkamp had an important situation at my grandfather's; he was the *major domo*. My grandfather asked him for his advice concerning the business. Uncle Edmund often quarrelled with him and even later didn't speak well of him. My brother and I visited him with our uncle Louis when we lived in Cologne. He lived at that time in Wesseling on the Rhine, where he had a villa. My mother and my grandmother had the same the maiden names, Betty Quack. My grandmother was the sister of my grandfather Quack. They were Dutch and grew up in Holland. My grandmother's house was pretty uncomfortable. Uncle Louis' wife, Auguste, told me that when she

visited as a young woman, she didn't feel at home, mostly because there were no curtains. But she later bought some.

Two good portraits of the grandparents, painted by Karl Sohn (Düsseldorf) in 1855 made it safely from Moscow to Berlin after the Revolution to Karl Hilger (they are now in the house of Otto Hilger in Remscheid-Lennep).



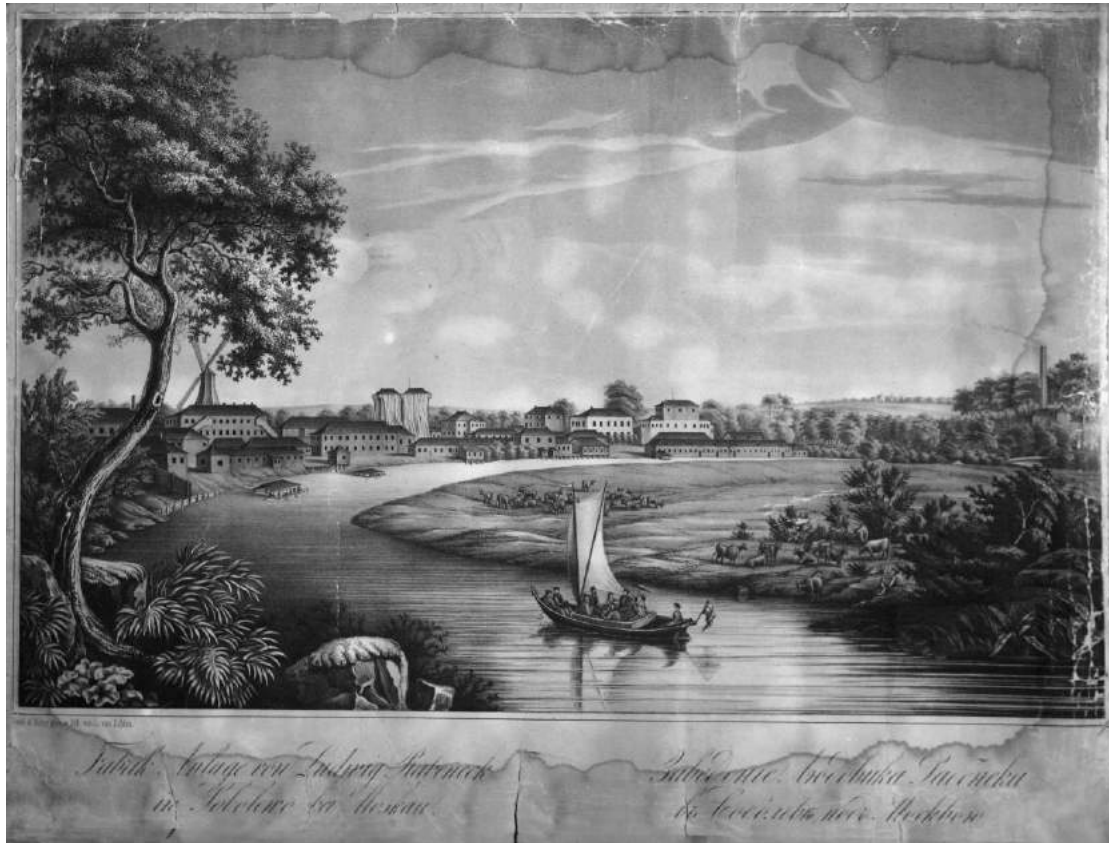
1855 portrait (detail) of Elizabeth (Betty Quack) Rabeneck by Karl Sohn (Düsseldorf).

Then there are two half-length portraits at my sister in Kassel (now Olga Rabeneck has them in London)². My grandmother was a beautiful lady; we can see it especially in the big picture, but at that time the painters used to paint like this. We had another small photo (Daguerreotype) of her as an elderly lady, which doesn't much resemble the portrait.

She must have been a restless, vivid lady. She was already ill when she went from Düsseldorf to Cologne, and she died of TB in 1858 in an hotel in Cologne. My brother and I often visited her grave when we were schoolboys in Cologne. The churchyard was at Melaten, outside the fortifications at that time. My grandfather is very similar in the portrait; he had a wig, as did most bald men in former times. His head is bent to the side and his pose is natural. We had a small photo of Uncle Christian, who came to Russia with grandfather, but as an old man; he was a bachelor and I suppose that he did not work in the business. He liked to sit on a bench at the gate of the factory and to watch the people going in

² Present location unknown.

and out. From my grandfather Ludwig I inherited the ledger where he himself registered business transactions and his private expenses from the beginning of his work in Russia until the 1850s. He signed off each year with these words: “with the help of God” or “with the assistance of God” . . . I was able close the year with gains of . . . Roubles. I kept the book in the house in a fireproof cabinet, but now it, too, is lost.



An early view of the Rabeneck factory at Sobolevo

It must have been a very patriarchal situation in my grandfather’s day. On his birthday, for example, flags were hoisted and people had the day off. In the last years of his life his health deteriorated and his sons began to manage the business. He died in 1861 and is buried in Moscow in our family grave.

My father Arthur was very advanced. He was only 17 years old when he finished his studies in Zürich. To complete his education he worked in a Turkish-red dye works in Holland near Haarlem. His uncle, the lawyer E. Quack, lived in the neighbourhood in Apkaden with his wife Luise, née Trost. These were my mother’s parents and she was born on December 22 1831. She was about four years older than my father, but nevertheless they fell in love very quickly and were soon engaged. When my father finished his articles he came on his own back to the factory. My mother followed him later and they got married in 1855, in Moscow. I remember

my father very well; for example how he would walk deep in thought across the factory court. Another time we were all sitting around the table in the dining room and my father came home completely soaked. He'd tried to start his new sailing boat on the river Kljasma. At a curve in the river a blast of wind came and the boat keeled over. He was a good swimmer and was able to right the boat and sail home. But he didn't sail any more, because it upset my mother too much. I never forget him lying on his deathbed. I was only six years old and that impressed me very much. Doctors had different opinions about his illness – the main cause was that he married too young, having such a demanding profession. What I heard about the last years of his life was that his nervous system was ill, and there's no doubt that he overworked himself; but at that time one did not pay attention to it. He died on the 21 of November 1864.³



Arthur Rabeneck (1836-1864) and Betty Rabeneck (1831-1911)

My mother was inconsolable. She was left with five children after nine years of happy marriage. The children were: Ludwig born on the 3 June, 1856; me born on the May 13, 1858; Lilly – Luise born on the 28 August, 1860; Jenny born on the 5 February, 1862, and Emma who was not yet one year old. It was hard for my mother to give us children the necessary education, especially because we didn't have much money. But she was an excellent lady; feminine and modest but also strong natured and she knew what she had to do. She was a good housewife and she taught us to lead a frugal life, despite which she liked good meals. She had many admirers being a young widow, but she didn't want to marry again, partly out of respect for her beloved husband and partly to take better care of us children. Thus, we remained extremely close and tender towards her. Her

³ Arthur committed suicide at the age of 28, depressed at the performance of the factory, although Eduard does not say as much in his memoir.

greatest pleasure was to have all her children around even after we married. She didn't like big parties, but when she moved to Dresden, we had plenty of parties with music. She had a good singing voice and accompanied herself on the piano. She particularly liked Schubert and Schumann 'lieder'. She enjoyed the theatre in Dresden and continued to develop her mind into old age. She was always open to novelty. She died of cancer in 1911, without suffering much.

When my father died the business was in bad shape and our shares were worth only 71,000 Roubles with interest at 7%. My father had some savings, so my mother had an income of 6,000 Roubles yearly, but she had to economise especially after my grandmother and aunt Luise came to live with us a year after Arthur's death. We called Aunt Luise Katuschka (bobbin) and later Koschka (cat). They came to us because after my grandfather's death they had no money. I remember them arriving from Holland. They were like foreigners for me. We didn't really like our grandmother; she was very strict and had no tolerance for loud young people. Even later, when we were studying in Dresden, she'd often reprimand us for unsuitable expressions. She died in Dresden, I think in 1881, and was buried there.

But, we were very close to Aunt Luise (Koschka). We shared our stories with her, when we were boys. Our mother wouldn't have approved of our behaviour. Most of them were stories about horses. We'd go to the stables immediately after having finished our lessons. We liked to drive horses by standing on the front axle of the carriage and in winter to drive the snowplough, named 'triangle', around the garden and park.

Our first lessons were with an elderly teacher named Danziger, who was a snuff taker. Then came a home tutor, Garemann, an unpleasant young man who punished my brother for trivialities. We didn't care for him and were glad when Altmannsberger replaced him a year later. He was an excellent man and a good teacher; we children liked him very much. When he had his breakfast in his room on the first floor on Sunday morning, we gathered round him. The younger sisters were sat on his lap and the others were standing around listening to what he had to say. He wasn't young, maybe in his fifties. When we asked him how old he was, he answered "I am the same age as my little finger". He composed poems for family birthdays, which we had to recite. The grown-ups liked him too, but he had one fault; sometimes he drank too much and became quarrelsome and unpleasant. My brother and I once caused him much trouble. Lessons normally began 8 o' clock and were interrupted by breakfast at 9 o' clock. One day, when we had guests, we played with our

kite in the morning, and we came to the lesson an hour late. We thought the teacher wouldn't be up, because he went to bed late on account of the guests. But he'd waited for us a whole hour and was in a temper. We were very scared. We got a week's detention, but it turned out to be a bit less. I found this punishment too severe, but I managed to laugh it off.

Around that time there were lots of young people at our house and at Pelzer's and we joked and flirted. It wasn't mentioned to us, but the path along the big pond was known as the "Seufzerallee" (walk of sighs), and we drew our own conclusions. I imagine that the engagement of our uncle Jan with Aunt Mary, née Ferrein, had taken place on this walk. Aunt Mary was the nanny at Pelzer's. The wedding was in 1870 in the house of Charles Ivanovich Ferrein. I remember the day because I had painful patent leather shoes.

Luise Dietze, spent the summer at the factory. She was a vivid and lively lady, tall and slim. I got on well with her, better than with her sister-in-law, our aunt Auguste, married to Louis Rabeneck, and upset not to have children of her own. She tended to adopt baby girls. The first one, Alice, died at the age of three. In 1868 she adopted another girl and named her Alice, too. She eventually married Franz Büttner in 1887, a professor at Halle (Germany) where he had the title 'Pfänner zu Tal' (downstream salt-maker). Aunt Luise adopted another girl in 1878, Ada, who later married Mr von Plotho.

Aunt Dietze had three daughters: Betty who married professor Kosmann in Heidelberg; Selma who married professor Raehlmann in Dorpat. He went to Germany when the Russians came to Dorpat. The youngest was Olga who married a second lieutenant Hecht, who retired early from the army. He studied law and later worked in an insurance company. The two older daughters were the same ages as my brother and I, and the youngest was the same age as my sister Jenny.

We often went to Bolshevo where we had friends. Hermann Rabeneck lived there with his wife and six children. The oldest, Franz, was 2 years older than my brother; the other children were girls.

When our father Arthur died, Uncle Louis became our guardian. As a young man he'd been to Cologne, to business school. He lodged there with the Oettingers, former teachers at the Friedrich-Wilhelm grammar school who had two daughters, Berta and Auguste. The latter became our aunt, when she married Uncle Louis. Berta married a Mr Lützel and had two children, Max and Adele who married Mr Genthe. After the

death of her husband she (Adele) came also to Moscow and married Mr Amsler, who died soon and was buried in Moscow. My brother and I went to school in Cologne because we knew the Oettingers. When our mother sent us to Germany uncle Edmund accompanied us as far as the German border, but he didn't dare enter Germany because he hadn't done his military service.

Uncle Edmund ended up marrying a factory girl from Amerevo; she did not have a good reputation and we didn't receive her in our family. He took her to England in 1866 and came back like an Englishman with many hunting trophies. But Eudoxia Mikhailovna was a good wife for him; she often went hunting with him and she was a good influence on him. Although they had no children they adopted a girl Jenny, who married Mr Ditmarch. Since Edmund didn't want to work in his father's business he cashed in 200,000 Roubles of capital and moved to Pushkino. He'd been spoiled by his mother because he was the youngest and a pretty boy. He never studied seriously, but he was very sociable and got on well with everyone. He was a good hunter and knew about nature and animals. He told vivid tales about his bear hunting without exaggeration or pretence about how hunters used to hunt. Children enjoyed watching him imitate the gestures and grimaces of animals. My brother went hunting with him before we got married, and we used to visit him in his dacha where we usually drank too much.



Edmund Rabeneck's house in Pushkino, now a local history museum. Photo:A.Alpatov

He saw the commercial business from the point of view of a hunter. He couldn't imagine that it could be positive for both sides. But in the end he

lost out. He'd soon spent his capital and finally had only his dacha in Pushkino. When he accompanied us in 1870, he was supposed to collect animals at the border destined for the Moscow zoo, and for his shop. In his shop he had parrots, armchairs, music and other curiosities. He owned the shop with Herman Rabeneck's former tutor, Stader. Unfortunately, he got nothing out of it; on the contrary, he had to keep sinking money into it. He founded a Turkish-red dye works with Watremez and two other persons and lent his name to the firm, which infuriated Uncle Louis. Soon after he quit, they changed the name to Watremez. When Edmund got too old and heavy to go hunting he started painting landscapes, and he was very skilled for an old amateur. He died in Pushkino in 1908 and was buried alongside his wife, who had died some years before. His only stipulation at his burial was that his mustache be waxed.

When we travelled abroad with our mother we went via St Petersburg, where we stayed with Aunt Betty. Her second husband was de Myttenare. Her first husband, Pollack, had died in 1866. He fell off a horse when they were out riding and died a few days later. He was a good businessman and the capital of his wife increased. De Myttenare was glad to have a rich wife; he was selfish and did nothing. She was under his spell and didn't stand up to him; in the next few years he spent all her money, as well as the money of her two children Adolf and Betty, from her first marriage. Eventually, they moved from St Petersburg to Heidelberg, where they led a good life. My brother and I often spent our holidays with them which we enjoyed very much. We had good memories of Heidelberg. Once we went with our uncle to a Hamburg student union beer hall; the members were very polite young men, but I was only 13 years old.

Uncle Edmund and I wanted to go to an exhibition in St Petersburg, but when we set out in the narrow coach, in which my uncle occupied most of the space, I fell out straight into a large pool. I was extremely wet and had to go home and put on one of my slim aunt's dresses while my clothes dried. My brother was luckier; he got to visit the exhibition with Uncle de Myttenare. I had quite a bit of bad luck on my first trip. I lost my hat near Königsberg when I leaned out of the window, and I fell out of bed in Berlin. Afterwards we went straight to Frankfurt am Main, where Uncle Louis was living at the time, and when school started again we went back to Cologne and stayed with our teacher Mr Feld. I don't remember mother saying goodbye; perhaps all my new impressions made me forget.

It was very cramped in Cologne. The garden was so small that we climbed the wall to look around and that caused a sensation – they were talking about escaped Russian bears! The teacher was a small hunchbacked man with a face like a nutcracker, but he was good-natured. His wife was the opposite; she was an ‘Xanthippe’⁴ and he was certainly henpecked. We got on well with their children; the daughter was 17 and the son was my age. They had a second son who was not normal; he had epilepsy, and his frequent attacks made an unpleasant impression on us. Our first autumn holidays seemed to be very long because we stayed with our teacher. So we were lucky to go to Uncle Louis for Christmas. Aunt Auguste went on at us about not being homesick considering how far from home we were, with the result that when I got back to Cologne I really did get homesick, nearly bursting into tears. At my uncle’s we met our former teacher Altmannsberger, who had obtained a position in Strasbourg. He went back after new years but died of a stroke in his hotel. Previously he’d taught my sisters, but he was soon replaced by Miss Besen. I met her in Sobolevo, when we were on vacation in Russia, and I didn’t care for her. Someone said that I had put a cat on her back, an animal she disliked, but I can’t say I remember that.

Initially at school we had trouble with the way we pronounced the German language. It was therefore a lucky thing I was in the same class as my brother. Although the youngest, I had no difficulties at school. We took only one year for the ‘tertia’, which usually took two. We left the school in 1875 having got the ‘Abitur’ (qualifying for university entrance). I remember how glad we were to sell all our belongings, for example our beds which we did not take to Dresden. Our school time in Cologne wasn’t that great. Mrs Feld was a disagreeable woman. For example she wouldn’t take care of our underwear; we had to take it to the laundry and mend it ourselves. We didn’t like the food; a pease-pudding was particularly disgusting. Because we lived with a teacher, we had few friends. For a short time we had Arthur Spies as a friend, but he soon moved to Dresden where his parents had settled. Mrs Feld did not like this friendship especially when we once came back tipsy with him and two other young men. We lacked experience of alcoholic drinks. My brother had had one too many fruit punches and was drunk.

Our mother moved to Dresden in 1873 because she wanted her daughters to go to school there. Our beloved younger sister Emma died in 1874 at the age of 10, from meningitis. She was a lively, charming child, who

⁴ Xanthippe the wife of Socrates, known for her sarcastic humour

was very close to her mother. For mother it was very hard to overcome this loss.

My brother and I remained in Cologne to finish school, but now we could spend our holidays with our mother in Dresden. She was upset that we arrived in Dresden for Christmas without coats. We hadn't worn coats throughout our schooling, to appear tough. But later, as students in Dresden, we got used to wearing winter coats. Our uncle wanted to reward us for graduating from school. He made two suggestions; a trip to Switzerland or to visit Uncle Louis at the factory. Since we were by then already much interested in the factory, we chose the second proposal.

My mother moved from her first apartment to the Schweitzerstrasse. There we lived on the first floor of a villa, with a balcony. From the balcony we could descend to a little garden by a staircase. We began our studies at the technical university in the autumn of 1875, just as the university was moving into a new building in our neighbourhood. The opening had been celebrated with a torch-lit procession, and we were glad to have taken part in it. In the winter we took dance lessons and that changed our student life. We met Mr Frick, who was not a good dancer, but he was a smart 'korpsstudent' in a band of students who went in for duelling. We became members of the Marcomannia union. Our mother allowed us to become members of this union, but we had to promise her not to fight. Although we were members, we didn't enjoy all the rights of membership. Nevertheless, I was wounded in the last year of my studies, only two small scratches, but when I got home my mother and my sisters got very excited. Anyhow, it was great mistake to have joined the union. We had to go to a lot of official meetings, and we could have used the time more profitably.

At the dance lessons we met an American family, Würdemann, who also lived in Schweitzerstrasse. The father was an elderly unsightly man, a widower, who was fond of my mother. He had three daughters; the two younger ones were our partners at the final ball. I fell in love with the youngest, Tilly, and she remained my girlfriend the whole time I was in Dresden. She also soon made friends with my sister Lilly, who was 16 years old at the time. She was always with us because it was considered indecent to leave lovers alone in those days. My sister Jenny played with her friend Minna Freisleben in the street. Jenny was very small, but at 16 she started to grow, and so did I. I kept on growing while I was a student. My mother was very close with Mrs Stephany from Moscow, our neighbour. We also had Dr Balos and his wife and some Dutch friends.

We youngsters could dance at the Kasino and at private balls. My mother sometimes had parties and we enjoyed a good social life in Dresden.

Once we'd finished our military service, my brother in 1878 and I a year later, we returned to the factory. From then on, our lives were joined to the factory.

Paris March 1930

Edouard Rabeneck

Edouard Rabeneck's family at Sobolevo in 1889

In the Rabeneck family archive is a photograph of Edouard Rabeneck's large family taken at Sobolevo in 1889, in the garden next to their house.



The Left hand group: Edouard Rabeneck, 31; Nellie Rabeneck, 27; with son Charles, 1, on her knee; Arthur Rabeneck, 5, sitting cross-legged;

Sitting at the table: Alexandrine Rabeneck née Weber, 34; Leo Lvovich Rabeneck, 6; Ludwig Rabeneck, 33; in the oval photograph frame Arthur Rabeneck 1836-64; Arthur's widow Elizabeth Rabeneck née Quack, 58, at her feet Andrew Rabeneck, 3;

The Right hand group: Eugenie Rabeneck, 27; at her feet Gustav Hilger, 3; Otto Hilger, 32; Lilly Hilger née Rabeneck, 29; on her knee Arthur Hilger, 1.

The development of the Ludwig Rabeneck firm

The first buildings for yarn dyeing were situated along the river, near our ice-cellar. When my grandfather was still alive, we used to go hunting where the dye works for yarn now stands, and the ground was swampy.



Plan of the Rabeneck estate and factories at Sobolevo, across the river from Shchelkovo. The director's houses are on the bend of the Klyazma River. Factory buildings in red at bottom centre. Source Trojza.blogspot.com

Also, nearby there were living quarters for the employees which often flooded in springtime when the river was high and once one of the employees, 'Wolf', lost his library; that made a big impression on us as children.

Until 1861 the factory workers were supplied by local landowners. They were serfs and came to the factory under supervision of a "desjatnik". They were often working off debts and their wages were paid to the estate owner. We housed them in wooden barracks on the factory grounds. Even after serfdom ended, we continued to house and feed the workers. Cooks prepared meals in big cauldrons and a bakery produced fresh bread. The garbage was used for feeding the pigs. From 1878 the workers became independent and prepared their own meals. They could buy all they needed in a food store on credit, and for wholesale prices. Costs were deducted from their wages monthly. A butcher's shop provided fresh meat. It wasn't easy to always provide good cheap food for the workers. In autumn, for example 1000 pud⁵ of cabbage were bought, which was salted in big wooden tubs to make 'Sauerkraut'. Beef and pork were

⁵ 1 pud = 16.38 kg

salted in the winter for the workers at the peatbog and it had to last until late summer. The bakery, which was mechanised in later years, produced 250 loaves of bread daily, half a pud each. For fresh meat an ox was slaughtered every day. Food sales were half a million roubles in the later years of the Ludwig Rabeneck factory, and about the same at Reutowo.

I grew up with my elder brother Ludwig. Until I was 12 I lived in Sobolevo, near the factory. In 1870, after Easter, my brother and I went to school in Cologne. However, we returned to visit Russia three times before we came back for good. Our first journey was considered an audacious adventure. Travelling wasn't so easy at that time. We went via Smolensk and it took five days. The railway from Smolensk to Moscow had just opened. There were considerable challenges, and it would have been harder on us had my brother not been so energetic and resourceful in his actions.

My first memories are from the 1860s. I don't remember my grandfather who died in 1861 (Ludwig August, b1794), but I do remember my father Arthur who died on the 9th of November 1864. He left behind my mother and five children; my brother and I, and the sisters Lilly, Jenny and Emma. The youngest sister died in Dresden at the age of only ten. My mother had moved to Dresden in 1873. My father married his cousin Betty Quack from Holland at the age of nineteen. The early marriage and the hard work at the factory from 4 o' clock 'til late in the evening had undermined his health. He was very developed intellectually and was the most gifted of the three brothers. He had good character, too, and often mediated between his brothers and sisters, being a good influence for his brothers.



Ludwig Rabeneck's house, later to become the Commercial school for the factory

My parents lived in their grandparents' house, which later became the school for the factories. Towards the factory, on the other side of the road and along our garden fence, there was a long, two storey, wooden house. In the middle of the first floor was a warehouse and the packing room, where old Mr Beckmann lived, our Moscow tutor's father. At each end were the staircases and kitchens of the two apartments located on the upper floor. In one of them my father's sister, Luise Dietze, lived during the summer, with Uncle Edmund in the other. To the left was situated the office, also a wooden building, presided over by N. L. Gruskovs – whom my grandfather trusted very much. He'd been a director of the factory for many years and was pensioned off in 1877, but he kept his flat on the factory grounds. My brother and I visited him every week He complained about an operation to his eye, but he saw us always from far away. He died about 1884.

Next to the office was a 'fitzerei', where the hanks of yarn were wound up, and a two-storey annex housed the apartment of the dye-master. At that time, all the supervisors and colour experts of our dye-works were Swiss. The dye-works consisted of low wooden buildings in a row with separate stone drying rooms and a high wooden structure used for air drying. Between the last two buildings there was a large meadow, where the dyed pieces were spread out. All the work was done by hand. The pieces were washed in the river, rinsed through using long sticks to agitate the cloth. There was a footbridge over the river made from of empty barrels leading to the meadows of the peasants from Turabjevo, where printed pieces of cloth were bleached to obtain a pure white. Only three 'perotinin'⁶ were driven via linkage to a horse driven treadmill. They preferred blind horses like one that grandfather had used as coach horse in earlier times. Horses with eyesight had their eyes bandaged. Except for the turkey-red, all prints were made by hand, in a long two-storey building, opposite our house in the direction of the river. To power the marina-mills we had a beam-engine⁷. Later, my brother bought another engine with valve control from the Gorlitz-Machine Factory⁸ to drive all the machines at the dye-works.

As children we sometimes saw workers come out of the Madder-mills, a building of several storeys, covered with red dust of the madder-root dye, their mouths bandaged with a sponge; they were coming out to get fresh

⁶ Perotinen – type of machine used, probably relating to the bleaching process using hydrogen peroxide.

⁷ Beam-engine was a steam engine with a large horizontal cross arm connecting the steam piston to a crankshaft and flywheel. The marina-mills required this source of power in order to mill dye-powder, in the same way that flour is milled.

⁸ German factory specialising in the manufacture of machines for the textile industry.

air. We didn't dare enter this building. A passage separated these dyeworks from the dyeworks for yarn. It was a long low wooden building with ladders between it and the stone drying rooms, to hand up the dyed yarn. The washing of the yarn took place on several rafts, which were equipped with a roofs and light walls. They were moored on the river, on the other side of the stone building. In the winter my uncle gave wide and warm pants to the washerwomen, but they did not like them; they'd rather be cold than teased by the other workers.

Among the managers around that time, I remember Sulzer the best. He worked in the dyeworks – an elderly gentleman with an unlit cigar in his mouth; in the evening, when the cigar was half chewed, he lit it. I also remember the colour expert Thalmann who later, I was told, had a print shop of his own in Moscow. Birkenkamp, from the dyeworks for yarn, would cry when the colours did not come out as he wanted; the workers called him, “Sleskin” from “tear” in Russian.

Uncle Louis, who had taken over the management of the factory after my father's death in 1864, often went abroad on account of his health. By the late 1860s he was living permanently in Frankfurt-am-Main. In Moscow his brother-in-law, Walter Dietze from Hamburg, took his place in the office; after my father died he started coming to the factory every week. He was married to Uncle Louis' sister Luise Rabeneck, but the workers didn't like him. They called him 'Zitzkapot', because he used that expression when he reprimanded them. Around that time there was a strike of the hand printers and soldiers came to the factory to subdue them. Dietze was not a natural manufacturer, he wanted to take as much as possible out of the factory and he blocked all improvements. He was also certain that the enterprise would eventually fail.

His negative mood led him to suicide during a visit to the factory, at my grandparents' house, where my mother was also living at that time. After Walter's death Uncle Louis moved to Moscow and became a director of the company. He lived in his grandparent's house in Moscow on “Bolshoi Charitonjewski Pereulok”, opposite the Mashkow Pereulok⁹. It was where I and all my brothers and sisters were born. Aunt Luise lived nearby in a one-storey wooden house on the corner of Bolshoi and Mali Xaritonjewski Pereulok. Despite having no technical training, Louis was open to innovation and the factory was improved several times, by new processes and buildings, to keep it up to date. Construction started soon after he returned. He had a lively temperament and the Moscow

⁹ Pereulok = side street

merchants liked him very much because he had a pleasant character. Sometimes he acted too hastily, for example at the end of 1860 he bought the Nicolskoe estate, situated 15 versts¹⁰ away, with the idea of using wood from the estate for the factory. But it was too far away and the transportation too difficult and expensive, especially in wintertime. He was able to sell it without loss after a few years, but he had lost out on buying Franz Rabeneck's factory, our biggest competitor for yarn. Franz's sons, Ewald and Hermann, wanted to return to Germany, and they gave Louis the first refusal on their factory. But he couldn't buy it because all his money was still tied up in the estate. Stucken and Spies bought it instead.

In the dyeworks we had stiff competition from the firm of a Mr. Baranov, not helped when we lost our Swiss manager. We tried a Russian manager without success, and then Louis decided to try Mr. Nabholz, founder of the photo-shop Scheerer & Nabholz, who had once managed dyeworks for my grandfather. Nabholz was no longer young, and he began work only on condition that we give him an assistant. That turned out to be my uncle, Jan Quack, who was then the boss of the 'small' dyeworks for thread, while Mr. Abrath was the boss of the so-called 'big one'. Later, Mr. Abrath ran both sections. He was from Elberfeld and had arrived around 1868. He was typical dyer from Elberfeld; the boys were impressed by his tall stature and loud voice, especially when he stood straddle-legged and gave orders to the workers. Later on, when he had saved up some money, he became very haughty, and his acquaintances named him "the great mogul". It was hard for Louis to deal with him. Uncle Jan, my mother's brother, arrived from Holland in 1866. His mother (my grandmother) and Aunt Louise Quack had come one or two years earlier, after the death of grandfather Quack. Uncle Jan had some commercial training, but he spoke with great satisfaction about his work as a supervisor of the dyeworks.

In 1869 Uncle Louis took my brother and I, together with our tutor Altmannsberger to the fair at Nizhny Novgorod, where we stayed for a week. This journey always remained vivid in our memories. We could watch the activities of the fair close up, and mix with the different people, because the quarters of the Turks and the Chinese were next to our warehouses. We were near the mosque, and the large warehouse for Chinese tea where the big bales of tea, sewn in animal skins were piled up. Along the 'Marina', huge bales from the Caucasus and the Volga, were stacked high, from where the carriages on the street below seemed

¹⁰ Verst = approximately 1 kilometer

to be toys. On our way back there was an incident, which I mention to illustrate how my brother had developed at an early age and had already the potential of acting cleverly and energetically.

Our tarantass¹¹ with two horses was sent to meet us at a small station of the Nishnier train, Wassiljewka, 30 versts away from the factory. The train got in at 6pm, and we drank tea in a pub until it was time to leave. Then we noticed that the coachman couldn't stand up and that our tutor was drunk too. My brother, unfazed, immediately asked for someone who knew the way. After along search a retired soldier was found who would show us. Then my brother ordered the coachman to take off his master's coat and said to him that he could walk home, having slept long enough. The tutor was loaded into the back of the coach where he sat on a multi-coloured balloon – and I was very sorry about that because it was intended as a present for my sisters. My brother took the reins and, with the man who knew the way, we got home safely.

We liked our tutor very much. He was excellent, and a pleasant companion. His only weakness was that he drank too much, and then became aggressive and unpleasant. He prepared us in all subjects for the school in Cologne, where we went at Easter 1870, but he could hardly make himself understood in Russian. There were great difficulties with Russian lessons. We started with a Russian Orthodox preacher from Shegalovo, until my mother discovered that instead of teaching us he played checkers with us. We got the best Russian lessons, but only for a short time, from Aunt Marie Quack, née Ferrein. She was governess at the Pelzers and she ended up marrying uncle Jan in 1869. At that time the Russian language wasn't considered important, and that was a mistake. Uncle Louis, our guardian, spoke Russian very badly and he did not like Russian schools. It would have been better and easier for us later had we gone to school in Moscow. After our studies in Cologne, we came back as strangers, unfamiliar with the circumstances and out of touch. My brother adjusted quickly to the situation, but I had nearly forgotten my Russian and all my life I regretted my insufficient knowledge of the language.

Fairs were of great importance in former times. My father went to Rostov in the district of Jaroslaw every year, where the fair began in 'butter-week'. That is, the week preceding Lent. Later we sent our goods to local buyers and closed our deals with them before the fair opened. My uncle went to the fair at Nizhny Novgorod every year for 25 years up to five

¹¹ Tarantass = open carriage

years before the railway was constructed. There were no branch banks at that time. Therefore, the merchants had to carry the cash from sales home with them. It wasn't a pleasant thing to do, because the roads were unsafe. Therefore, several merchants travelled together. How successful the fair in Nizhni was depended a great deal on the crop, and that was important for the sales of our merchandise. Nearly a third of our production was sold there. The competition was massive. The prospect of having to ship back unsold merchandise led to give-away prices. The yarn which remained unsold was sent mostly to Irbit for the winter fair. The Sarts from Turkestan and the Persians came to the fair with their own goods and bought our goods with the money obtained. The money had to be paid within 12 months. When a buyer came back the next year he paid for the merchandise from the year before. If he didn't come back, we'd consider the delivery lost. Whether they showed up depended on the harvest at home, and no losses. Once, the Sarts did not come for three years, but paid in the fourth year, but of course without interest. The fair lost its importance when the railroad to Turkestan was constructed. We established our warehouses and offices there in Kokand, Samarkand and Old-Bokhara. Around 1900 we stopped sending goods to the fair, sending only our salesmen there, with samples. There was an exception; two fat sisters who bought yarn, from Simbirsk. During the early eighties they'd come to the factory every year before the fair, to choose the best goods in the warehouse. On arrival, they were first taken to the steam bath, and after having a rest they dined with us. They ate with their fingers. Once they'd seen the goods, they haggled. Usually, they wouldn't come to terms immediately. Then they threatened to go to Franz. They demanded a coach, were packed into the carriage, then ordered the coachman to turn back at the first bridge. Finally, the sale would be settled. They often took 35,000 roubles in cash out of their bodice to pay. To maintain relations we sent them a box of oranges every year. They showed us their appreciation by sending a box of frozen poultry – geese and so on. But they tasted fishy, because they had been fed on fish.

In 1872 my uncle delegated Mr. Toussaint, a foreigner, to construct a gas factory to light the site. This man did not know our climate conditions and he laid the pipelines only one foot under the ground. When winter came, he was surprised that the installation did not work, until they discovered that the pipes were clogged with ice. The next summer all the pipes had to be re-laid three metres deeper. And the lamps had to be re-installed. At the same time, we experimented to replace the 'krapp' of the Madder-root, or the extract of the krapp, by synthetic alizarin. My uncle learned that at Leonovo, 16 versts from our place, the Swiss firm Binder and Böhme had established a factory to make synthetic alizarin.

Since they were losing money, my uncle proposed to set up a business with them and, later in 1873, he arranged a merger. The alizarin factory was in the old drying room of the dyeworks. Next to it was the house where the gentlemen lived, in the so-called 'Roshtsha' (woods). As children we often had picnics there. There was a spring nearby with very pure water, which later was ruined by a blood-cellar built above it. The blood was added to the dye bath to purify the water. Later, it was replaced by albumin (protein).

Following the merger of 1879 Binder and Böhme received payment in shares of the Ludwig Rabeneck factory, and they became salaried employees. They never regretted this move, because previously they hadn't managed to turn a profit with the alizarin factory. On the other hand, it was indirectly of great advantage for us to have two clever chemists like Binder and Binder and Böhme. Personally, I remained very thankful to Mr. Binder; he taught me to put my chemical knowledge to practical use at the factory. Mr. Böhme was more of a theorist and spent all his time in the laboratory. But Mr. Binder was asked for his advice in all situations where practical chemistry counted. We were good friends with him and his wife, and later we visited him when he lived in Zurich.

Under Mr. Nabholz' supervision, the dyeworks were not in good shape. The pieces of cloth came out stiff. Uncle Louis lost a lot of money, and he eventually decided to close the factory and discharge he staff. Nabholz went back to his cameras, and Uncle Jan became a cashier for his wife's uncle, K.I. Ferrein, a drug manufacturer. The colour expert Mr. Thalmann founded a printing shop and the elderly Mr. Bauer, who did the engravings for the hand printing rollers, got a position with Ferrein as well.

Soon after the dyeworks closed my uncle learned of a Russian dyer from a small dyeworks in the region of Vladimir¹², whose colours were extremely vivid. That was Mr. Matvey Andreivich Slotinsev. He joined us in 1874, and eventually became supervisor.¹³ At the age of ten he was already working in a factory in his home district, spreading the pieces of cloth on the meadow and pinning them down, bleaching them in the sun. He took on supervision of the dyeworks and the printing works, once the colour experts had left, and soon obtained the same good results for us that he had in his home district. He had bags of energy and always tried to improve production. His lack of chemical knowledge made it difficult

¹² Vladimir – near Moscow

¹³ See *Memoir of Matvey Slotintsev, dye-master of the Rabeneck factory from 1864 to 1895*, as told to his son Nikolai Matveyevich Slotintsev, at www.livesretold.co.uk

for him, and I often noticed his unconventional methods, but he was lucky. He was the first one to produce good colours with synthetic alizarin oil, produced by the Müller-Jakobs method using castor oil. This helped us out of the difficulties resulting from the fire of 1878.

Slotinsev made a fortune for himself. In order to retain him he was paid a high salary, as well as a bonus for every piece he dyed above a certain quantity. He earned about 25,000 roubles per year but remained a modest man and did not spend more than 3,000 roubles a year on himself. It was characteristic of him that he wanted to limit his son's education to village school level, so they wouldn't look down on him as uneducated. With some difficulty my brother talked him into sending his eldest son Nicolai to Moscow high school. Later, all his sons went to university, but they never lacked respect for their father. Slotinsev was very religious and for many years he was one of the elders in our parish church in Shegalovo. I often sought his advice, and I was sure he gave me an unselfish opinion. At the end of the nineties, he retired after introducing his eldest son, Nicolai, to the dyeworks. We kept up our friendship even after he moved to Moscow.



House of the master-dyer occupied by Matvey Slotinsev

After my brother had finished his military service in Dresden where he distinguished himself by his appearance and his smart character, he was promoted to reserve officer rank. He interrupted his chemistry studies and returned to the factory, intending to continue – whenever he could – his studies at the university. But he was so busy at the factory, that he could not get away. He came to Sobolewo and he learned the dyeing of red yarn from Slotinsev. Three weeks later a terrible fire broke out in the drying

room of the dyeworks. It spread very quickly to the office, the other buildings and the high drying racks, which were connected to the drying room by a wooden bridge. The fire also destroyed the stables.

When the drying racks were burning there was such a fierce draught that the burning debris flew as far as Könnemann's. Our grandparent's house was also threatened. Great efforts had to be made to get the factory back into production as quickly as possible. There was a much demand for our goods, and soon the fair would be starting. My brother had to supervise the construction of the new buildings, instead of learning the dyeing process. Hundreds of workers were employed on the construction job. About six months before the fire broke out, Uncle Louis had obtained the services of a chemist, Müller-Jakobs, from Switzerland. He claimed he could produce synthetic Turkish-red oil. Its use would avoid the need for oxidizing the oiled cotton goods in the air. The process was quicker and cheaper and was independent of the weather; we experimented enthusiastically at the dyeworks. Meanwhile, Matvey Andreivich also got hold of some of this oil and tried to use it for dyeing cotton. Just before the fire broke out, he'd been successful in producing a beautiful red colour and now the cotton needed oiling only once instead of five times as before. Output could be increased, and we were able to produce enough to send goods to the fair.

Soon after Slotinsev claimed to have discovered the new process his behaviour towards Uncle Louis became arrogant. He kept making demands until Louis finally fired him, and my brother took over the position of head dyer, despite his short apprenticeship. Slotinsev first went to our competitor, Watremez, where he was unsuccessful in producing anything new. There too he was given notice and he returned to his native town, Barmen, and became a barkeeper.

After my brother had been dyeing successfully for six months, Uncle Louis engaged a dyeworks-supervisor from Watremez, Proshigalov. This promised to introduce the process used by Watremez, without relying on that from Sumach; but he was unsuccessful, so my brother taught him our process. The experiments with the Turkish-red oil continued, but we lost a lot of yarn in the process. The workers called it 'chemistry'. Finally, my brother teamed up with Proshigalov and together they discovered a quicker process using the synthetic oil. My brother worked very hard and lived a punishing regime. In summer he took his meals at Uncle Louis' place, living in a room in the long house at the gate. In winter he boarded with our mechanic Mr. Köhler.

Köhler led an easy-going life, when he was still married to his first wife. Later he was divorced. They went to bed very late each evening, and my brother had to start his work at four o'clock in the morning. Unfortunately, he fell ill (trichinosis), but he was lucky in that it happened while he was visiting his uncle in Moscow. After studying chemistry at Dresden, I finished my military service with a promotion, and in spring 1879 I went to Moscow. Arriving on April 1, I went to see Uncle Louis, but he wasn't there; the family had gone to Crimea and only mother and daughter Alice were there to take care of their adopted second daughter who was still a baby. They told me that my brother was suffering from angina and that he had tried to jump out of the window and run away to Moscow, but that the Binders restrained him. I was very afraid and took the next train to Mytischtschi and went to the factory, where I was glad to find my brother much better. Binder and his wife had kindly taken care of him. He lived in Mr. Böhme's apartment, who was away on his honeymoon. After a few days, when my brother had recovered, we visited Uncle Jan in Moscow for the Easter holiday. When we got back, we did not know where we could get anything to eat. We'd have gone hungry had our chief bookkeeper Kusel not invited us in. We joined three single employees, Gruskow, the son of our old factotum, and Beck and Erbe, who shared a room. We soon realised that two of them were embezzling. Therefore, we checked up on them to get our uncle some proof. We soon fingered Erbe, and by Louis' next visit he was dismissed. Louis trusted neither the cashier nor the bookkeeper Beck anymore and fired him. So, I became head of the office and cashier, even though I'd never done bookkeeping and I preferred factory work. Only after Beck had left, we found that he'd made up accounts for workers whose wages he pocketed. The situation with Erbe was embarrassing because we had eaten meals with them. But that convinced Louis to change our circumstances. By the next summer we had our meals with Uncle Louis and then we moved to an apartment with a kitchen in the same house. So at last we had our own household.

The first years were difficult. Uncle Louis had the best intentions of raising us to become conscientious workers, but he wasn't always fair. He would pull us to pieces in the front of employees for trivialities we were hardly guilty of. He named it "à la canaille". It wasn't easy for my brother to put some order into all of this, but later we had the satisfaction of having faithful staff, whom we trusted very much and could work with hand in hand. It was to my brother's credit that our reputation with authority changed for the better.

In summer 1879 our factory nearly had to close due to a lack of fuel, had we not bought freshly cut wood at the last moment in the neighbourhood. It was immediately brought in carts to the boiler houses for heating. To prevent a recurrence of this they decided to acquire a large stock of wood in winter and store it at the factory, but also to enlarge the production of peat. At that time many estate owners in our district were selling their estates because they had no money, as a result of the end of serfdom. The merchants profited by it. They bought the estates, logged off everything even the beautiful old parks, and sold the wood to the factory owners. Thus, we were able to pile up enough wood for the winter. My brother ordered the wood stacked very tightly. He brought in a specialist from Moscow who obtained such a perfection that even the merchants were fascinated, though it was to their disadvantage. Increasing peat production was more difficult. All surrounding areas were searched for peat, and every useful bog was leased for exploitation. In this way, after a few years we were working 8 peat-bogs of different sizes. The farthest one was 17 kilometres from the factory. We had 22 peat extractors running, and 1,000 workers were employed. The peat-workers gave us trouble. They were employed for the summer, but they got their advance already in winter. Before they had worked off their advance they tried to be free, and sometimes they went back home even without passports. To move the peat in was not always easy and depended on sleighing conditions¹⁴. Most of the hauliers came from far away, for example from Rasan, Vladimir and so on. In the winter of 1883, 2,400 sleighs with peat were weighed in on two scales and unloaded on the 24th of December. To gain space for stockpiling peat the factory court had been enlarged in 1880 to include the so-called new court, surrounded by a high fence. At the same time rails were laid, linking the peat piles with the boiler houses and drying rooms. For such a large-scale enterprise on the bogs a clever supervisor was needed. My brother was lucky to find Andrei Genduhne, who worked at the machine factory in Koloma nearby as supervisor of peat production there. My brother introduced him to Uncle Louis in his apartment in Moscow on the very same day of the terrible assassination of Alexander II (1881). The whole world was struck with consternation and sadness. He worked first at the farthest bog near Pamfilovo, but soon he became the managing director of all peat works and he moved, since he was unmarried, with his sister Ekaterina Gusavovna to the peat bog near Grebnovo. We soon became friends, he had pleasant manners. He was bald and seemed to be older than his years. When we visited the Crimea in 1897 many people took him for our father, yet he was only four years older than my brother. He was very useful in many ways. He

¹⁴ Transportation by sleigh in winter was much easier than by wagon in summer.

advised us to change our nationality to become Finnish. He did it too. In 1894 my brother had the lucky idea to ask Mr. Mamontov, if he would be interested in a railway spur to Shchelkovo.¹⁵



Contemporary photo of the Rabeneck locomotive at its siding near Shchelkovo

Gendhune enjoyed working on the project even though it wasn't in his interest, because once the railway opened, it was cheaper to use bunker oil than peat. He had a generous character and my brother often had to hold him back. That was especially noticeable when he went to work for Franz Rabeneck, because our peat production fell off. Many years after he had left, we had piles of cast steel wheels and other materials he had ordered in too great quantity. But we remained friends with him until his death in 1915.

Before I continue my memoir, I should say something about the guards at the factory. While I was still a boy, a pack of hounds was released after dark when work was over. The dogs answered only to the guards, and nobody dared to go out; when an employee wanted to cross the factory courtyard, he had to call for the chief guard, who would guide him with his lantern. Lighting in the courtyard was pretty bad, and the dogs were tethered just inside the high fence until we got electric lights. The guards had their posts and they had to beat with a hammer on an iron plate, to announce to the chief guard that they were not sleeping. Some of them developed great virtuosity in it. The chief guard had to announce that all

¹⁵ Savva Mamontov (1841-1918) was an important rail pioneer in Russia, a patron of the arts, and a director of the Moscow-Yaroslavl railway line some 1500km long, with Shchelkovo station on it.

was well the next morning. Later we had time clocks, and the hammering stopped.

The workers could only leave the factory courtyard on Sundays. When they began to go over the fences Uncle Louis ordered higher fences to be constructed, even along the river, to avoid the possibility of swimming to the other side. But when Louis retired, we gave the workers more freedom. They were frisked at the gate when they left. Later, I separated the factory courtyard from the apartments of the workers. That was not very easy at the old factory. Even the friskings stopped, while at other factories they continued. There was no noticeable increase in theft. The Bolsheviks reintroduced the frisking at the gates later. When the merged company was founded (1879) the factory had a value of 600,000 roubles in shares. My uncle held most of them. The children of Arthur Rabeneck together received 71,000 and Binder and Böhme 25,000 each. For an additional 600,000 roubles they sold shares to new shareholders, thus the entire share capital was 1,200,000 roubles.



Bale label depicting the Ludwig Rabeneck factory

The first directors of the company were Louis Rabeneck, W. Thornton and Karl Risch, also Mr. Konrad Bansa and my brother. Thornton wasn't active in management. He joined because he was a close friend of Louis. Bansa was a very amiable gentleman. My uncle said he had come to Russia as a drum-major with Napoleon. He was director at Zundel, a great statistician and much respected. My brother prepared himself for the yearly directors meeting as if for an examination. He needed to know the consumption of fuel, colours and other expenses, and how much oats and

hay the horses had eaten on an average last year. There was a booklet in which all charges were accounted after the yearly close – even how much it cost on average to keep the dog. Mr. Harmes was chief-accountant, his books were all right. He never came to the factory, but he often surprised me with questions about factory details, which came to him only through his bookkeeping.



Ludwig Rabeneck and Alexandrine Weber in portraits of approximately 1890

My brother married Alexandrine Weber on Palm Sunday 1882. She was the daughter of the late former owner of a cotton-printing works in Zarevo (which had a good reputation) 15 versts from Pushkino. The young couple honeymooned abroad. My brother had been installed in the house of our grandparents for about a year when my uncle retired. The house was not fully renovated. I met Otto Hilger, whom I'd got to know at Barens, at my brother's wedding. I invited him to spend the Easter holidays with us despite the renovation works going on, and I was glad and surprised when he accepted. We became friends and the friendship got closer still in 1885 when he married my sister Lilly.¹⁶ In business, he supplied us with various German machines and supplies, and also with 16 Steinmuller boilers.

Travelling from the factory to Moscow was sometimes difficult despite being only 24 versts to the outskirts of the city. In spring and summer the roads were swampy. When the first boiler installation was made in 1872,

¹⁶ See memoir of Otto Hilger (1857-1945) covering the years 1885 to 1923 at www.livesretold.co.uk

a big boiler got stuck in Shegalovo, in the bush. To bring it to the factory many workers were sent out who rolled it, which was not great for its riveted joints. Only in 1884 did we succeed in persuading the local authority to build a gravel road from our place to Moscow by contributing 25,000 roubles to the costs. My brother put it through despite objections from our neighbour Tschetverikov. The highway went from Strominka to Shchelkovo and a branch was built to Aniskino, which was near Tschetverikov's factory. In Moscow, Karl Risch became our commercial manager in 1881, after Uncle Louis had retired.

In the cotton department were Belajev and Novishilov, the latter already an elderly employee. He was a salesman and had been employed when Nicolai Alexandrovich Svorokin was only a boy. Svorokin remained at the factory until his death. The accountant was Harmes and the cashier was Grote, later replaced by Lehmann. In the yarn department we had Rodonov, a salesman, and an Artelschtschik (member of an association). Illarion Larionov was the foreman, who later became manager of the department, and was then chosen to manage the Reutovo factory. He was an extremely faithful, calm, and clever workman and we all appreciated him very much.

My brother did all the administration work at the factory, and I was the dyeing supervisor at the dyeworks for yarn, after Proshigalov became too old to work and went back to his native village. At first I hit a lot of snags; the new process with the synthetic oil had to be perfected, and we were noticing violet iron spots on the Turkish red threads which we couldn't explain. Eventually I discovered that the supposedly pure water of the Klasjma now contained fine iron mud, which probably came from our black-dyeworks recently installed upstream. We had to find an alternative source of water for the dyeworks. We drilled large wells 14 arschin in diameter in the new yarn dyeworks courtyard, and another well outside the gate, at the pond, for the cloth dyeworks. It wasn't enough, so we dug an artesian well two feet in diameter and over 350 feet deep, and that produced good quality water. Otto Frick and I studied together. He came to us in 1884. I introduced him gradually to the dyeworks for yarn. He wasn't a chemist, but with time he became a good manager. He got on well with the workers, helped them with money and good advice as far as he could, and they liked him very much. When I became managing director of the print shop in 1889 I turned over the management of the dyeworks to him.

Our first factory doctor, Porfyry Iwanowitsch Kusmin, came to us in 1884. At that time he was very young, 26 years old. He was

recommended to us by Berens. He was very conscientious and a skilled surgeon, and we trusted him very much. He was also a good manager; we noticed it when our hospital had to be enlarged. He had a good reputation and patients came from far away, during his consulting hours. We didn't charge for such consultations, only well-to-do patients paid for the medicine used. These payments Kusmin used to pay for the small running costs of the hospital. Other cases that Kusmin treated free of charge, besides those of the workers and their families, were those he found interesting. He remained our chief factory doctor until he died, staying at the factory even after the Bolshevik takeover, but eventually leaving us. He lived near factory where he had a dacha,¹⁷ and died in 1927.



Dr Kusmin and his staff at the opening of the maternity unit of the factory hospital in 1907

During our first years at the factory we had many fires; we could never leave without apprehension. After the big fire in 1881, the gas factory, the horse stables, the alizarin factory (1883) and several times the drying rooms of the dyeworks burnt. The water tower with the hydrants helped to put out fires after 1882, but it didn't eliminate the cause of the fires. The reasons were not only that fire risks were not sufficiently taken into consideration when the buildings were put up; sometimes we couldn't establish the exact cause of each fire. For example, there was the case of our drying-room which burnt down at least once a year¹⁸. The stoker nearly always maintained that he had examined the condition of the pipes

¹⁷ Dacha = country home

¹⁸ The drying-room used a firebox with hot air pipes running from it to the drying room.

under the drying room only recently. The drying of the oily yarn produced a combustible gas. It was possible that the passage of cold air into the heating pipes compressed and ignited the gas. Therefore, we ordered the door to be locked as soon as the drying process began. Since then, the drying room has not burned. Over time the incidence of fire at our factory has diminished, and insurance policy premiums were reduced to a minimum.

Oiling of the yarn was a nuisance, which was done at the request of the merchants as a way of cheating the peasants, who were their buyers. The ready dyed thread were made so heavy with oil that a nominal 25 Pud thread hank actually weighed 45 Pud. This thread (called polutaiki) was sewn into mats of 3 Pud bundles. The pressing into bundles would have caused self-combustion. Later, we no longer oiled the material, treating it instead only with palm-oil and potato-syrup. That then became more common than oiling with whale oil.

The buyers were deceived as much as possible by the salesman, who bought the rough-weight yarn, and sold it with added weight. They wanted a twisted thread in a high number, but a thick thread. We ordered the spinner to produce yarn number 40 or 42, not wound into 20-21 strands to an English pound, but in 24-25 strands. The buyer, who designates the gauge by the number of strands, had a high number and a thick thread, but instead of 840 yards in a hank, there were less than 700 yards.

My brother left in 1881 for military training. Uncle Louis ordered, a little rashly, from an engineer Keisel a gas heating installation for peat¹⁹ for both factories during his absence. A similar installation was used at the machine factory on Kolomnaer. For the boiler house of the dyeworks for thread this installation could have worked well, since it was built up in front of the boiler house. But condensation in the large gas pipelines to the drying rooms and to the dyeworks for thread produced tar and water in the gas. Quite a bit of liquid was produced, which had a disagreeable smell and caused us much trouble. It drained into the river through old disused wooden pipes and contaminated the water. Neighbours living downstream became angry and complained. We also built an ammonia plant which old Mr. Binder took under his management. But the elimination and removal of the ammonia from the water did not remove the unpleasant smell. Later we constructed a pipeline half a verst long into the woods outside the gate, and pumped the liquid to that place, to

¹⁹ The gas was produced from peat.

prevent it running into the river. In 1894 the excavation where the gas generator had been was used to house new oil tanks. In the abandoned ammonia factory came the first installation to produce smoking sulphuric acid from liquid sulphuric acid by the process of Grillo-Schroeder. Later on the process was simplified and the installation enlarged.

The dyeing of the Turkish-red goods by the old methods, with oxidation in the air was very difficult in late autumn and winter. Also, the colours would be duller and only by the second part of February did they become vivid. So, the dyeworks had to be closed from November till January; also, the buildings weren't built to withstand long cold periods. Closing the factory was problematic in many ways, for example we couldn't have steady workers. But with the new process it was possible to dye even in winter. Therefore, from the middle 80's to the 90's we constructed solid brick buildings for the dyeworks, some several stories high, with ventilation and warm air heating. At the same time the dyeworks were greatly enlarged.

I became engaged to Nellie Lasch from Dusseldorf in spring 1887. We married in September. My brother built for us during this short time from



Nellie Lasch in 1887. Portrait by her father Karl Lasch

May until September, a two-storey wooden house, with a stone basement for the kitchen and cellar. We chose a location for the house near the entrance of the garden, where we had a little pond. A short time before, the water of the pond had been drained and the pond was partly filled in to make room for the house.



Edouard Rabeneck's wooden house on the estate built in 1887

On my wedding trip I got a message in Bellagio, that my brother was ill with pneumonia. I was very afraid and quickly turned home with my wife. On my return I found him still weak but happily recovering. He had caught a cold at the fair at Nizhny, did not look after it and became ill. He went to San Remo for recovery.

My brother started a school for the factory children around this time. First the school was a bungalow, a wooden house near the gate. Later Alexeivich Borisov lived there. Subsequently it moved to a building that later became a children's day-care centre, once the new spinning and weaving mill had been built, finally moving to our grandparents' former house. Rodion Kusmisch Fadejev was the first teacher; he'd formerly taught at the village school in Amerevo, where the children of the workers were schooled. He was an employee of the local authority; a very clever teacher who later became a strong and esteemed headmaster when the school was enlarged to two classes of five, and later six grades, with seven teachers employed. My brother was an honorary director of the school, and was very interested in it, even after he moved to Moscow.

My grandparents' house, where my brother lived, was rebuilt in 1881; it got an extension and the upper floor was raised by 1.40m. My brother had pneumonia again in the same year, when he bought the peat bog of Xomuovo, while negotiating for hours in a stuffy farmhouse. First it was a catarrh, in January he was better, but suddenly he got another dangerous pneumonia, and we were worried and afraid. He went to Bogdanovka to a

health spa, for a horse milk cure, with his wife and his five-year old son Arthur, spending the Winter of 1889-90 in Montreux.

When my brother was nearly recovered from his severe illness, and he could busy himself but not yet leave the house, he asked the cashier and bookkeeper Oesberg to send him the cashbook. On examining it he found that the page totals were frequently marked too high, by as much as a 1000 Roubles. He was very upset about it. Oesberg was a clever man who had brought order to the office at the factory. My brother wanted to file a lawsuit against him, but Risch advised him not to do so. Oesberg was able to do those embezzlements because he had to send the statements of accounts to Moscow to the chief bookkeeper. Henceforward the cashbook had to be sent as well, and the statements of accounts were made up there. My brother finally found Pavel Danilovich Jaschke, who had grown up in Zarevo and worked there. He was a diligent, clever and reliable employee, and was well liked and respected, but he died soon after I had left the factory.

We heard about the alkaline printing process for Turkish-red goods in 1889. A colour-expert from a printing-factory had developed it. His name was Schmidlin, from Alsace. This process was cheaper than the former one and had the advantage that it used only genuine printing-colours. Uncle Louis therefore went to London and negotiated a licence for the process with the owner, Ashton. We acquired the exclusive rights for Russia for 100,000 Roubles. We had to pay by instalments, 10,000 Roubles yearly for ten years. I went with Slotinsev's son Nicolai to Manchester to learn the new process in August of the same year. Nicolai had been studying chemistry in a technical university in Petersburg (Leningrad) for two years. I arranged for him to go with me because I felt that knowing about the new process would be more valuable than the study time lost. However, I didn't know the conditions at Russian universities. I did not expect that at the Russian technical university the study of chemistry only started in the third year of the course, and that Slotinsev would be excluded from the institution for having interrupted his studies. First, he held a grudge against me for years, that I hadn't let him finish his studies, but later he wrote me a long letter from the Crimea on my 25th jubilee, that he was very grateful that I had introduced him to the factory. He remained always a conscientious faithful worker, whom I respected as human being also.

On my return from England, we improved the machines for the new process. We made the apparatus in the factory workshop to prevent our competitors from learning about it. We even had to re-build the printshop.

The work was very tiring, but I had the satisfaction of obtaining good results, and our goods caused a sensation at the Middle-Asiatic fair in Moscow the next year. Our competitors were keen to get this process by any means, and Ashton finally re-sold the rights through Mather and Platt in violation of our agreement, so we stopped our payments to them. I directed the printing-shop for two years and then Karl Dubeli a colour-expert from the firm Tuerskaia manufacture took it over. He improved details of the process, which were not quite worked out yet. I respected him for his upright sincere manner and we became friends. He moved to Mulhausen, Alsace, in 1910, where he lived with his brothers and sisters, dying in 1916. He was succeeded by A. Schamin, a skilled university-educated colour expert.

At the beginning of the 1890s Risch wanted to acquire the Troizki wool cloth factory, but the management in Moscow didn't agree. Furthermore, Risch had plans to purchase Mitkal,²⁰ but he could not get a good deal. At the beginning of the 90's the market was depressed anyway and thus our returns were poor for this period. My brother Ludwig moved to Moscow in 1893, becoming director of the commercial part of the business while I became director of the factory, the technical side. At first my brother found his new job very difficult; he was new to the business world. He overcame these difficulties with his keen intelligence and conscientious diligence and soon earned the esteem of the businessmen. After a few years he was elected as a member of the commodities exchange, he earned great merit by his participation, especially as a member and founder of the cotton committee, and for development of the standards for the Arbitrage of Russian cotton from Turkestan. The insurance company of the Russian mutual insurance association elected him as a member of the board of directors, as did the commerce association. They gave him the title of Manufacturrat²¹ for his efforts. Everyone who had to deal with him trusted him. Friends and employees liked to ask him for advice, and he took care of their problems and gave them unselfish help.

Alexander Lasch, my brother-in-law, came to us from Valparaiso in 1894. We wanted to send him to Turkestan, where he was to establish our agencies and stores. He first lived in Kokand for a year, to acquaint himself with the conditions of the cotton firms there. He was a clever businessman, establishing our stores in Kokand with Katschirek, in Samarkand with Rawing, and in Old-Bukhara with Sukov. He went to Turkestan with my brother in 1899. On the way back they separated at

²⁰ Mitkal = a type of cotton cloth

²¹ Manufacture councillor

Krassnovodsk, and Lasch went on to Teheran. On the way, which he had to cover on horseback, he got rheumatism of the joints. He was ill for several months in Teheran. Eventually, we sent our young factory doctor to fetch him, because he could not travel alone. He had to hire a hearse since there was no comfortable coach in Teheran. On the hearse he could lay stretched out and travelled that way to Rescht on the Caspian Sea. He established agencies in Teheran and Tabriz which gave us good business for years. He learned Russian quickly, had a friendly manner with customers, and was very popular. When we discharged our chief salesman for piece-goods, Lasch joined the division and became member of the management team. His first love, though, remained the trade with Persia and middle-Asia. It was difficult for him, therefore, even before the war, since trade with Persia had stopped nearly completely. When war finally broke out and we had to give up our warehouses in Turkestan, he lost interest in the business. He was very concerned about the war. He left us suddenly in 1915 and went to Switzerland, dying in 1924, in Bremen.

Böhme retired in 1889 from the alizarin factory. Binder found a Mr. Iljinski in Berlin, to take over his position. Iljinski was a skilled chemist, but more of a theorist than a practitioner. Mr. Binder senior retired five years later, and his son Fritz took his place. We engaged Mr. Pontius for the smoking sulphuric acid factory, which had been enlarged.²² He had been a chemist at a small chemical factory of Pondik, Arens & Co. Pontius was a calm and clever worker, without university training. He did his work in the laboratory knowledgeably and managed the factory carefully. When the war broke out, being German, he could not stay in Russia any longer and left at the first opportunity. He died in Hamburg in 1920, where he had found a position with Grillo.

When we gave up the production of Alizarin in 1896 and transferred it to Wedekind in Uerdingen (Rhine) who had up to that time delivered Antradinon, which we needed to produce Alizarin, Iljinski went to that firm. Fritz Binder became the manager of the Copsdye works, which were installed in the former Alizarin factory. We had many difficulties at the start with these dyeworks, and he brought it to great perfection. His great contribution was the introduction of the genuine *indanthrene* colours²³. He always showed great interest in all problems concerning the factory and was our faithful friend and a clever and skilled chemist.

²² See *The Suffocating Secret of the Rabeneck Dynasty* about the factory's production of poison gas during WW1. Available at www.livesretold.co.uk.

²³ Indanthrene – a synthetic indigo water-soluble dye discovered by René Bohn of BASF in 1901.

For me 1896 was a hard year. My wife died at the young age of 34, after giving birth to my son Ernst in June. It was hard to overcome this loss. I remembered the years I spent with my wife as the happiest of my life. The death of Uncle Louis in the fall of the same year was very sad for us. He'd been living in Karlsruhe. Despite having the flu, he went to Mulheim-am-Rhein to find out about a problem relating to our business. It wasn't even urgent. On his return he got pneumonia and died in November. He had visited us with his wife, Aunt Auguste, and his daughter, Ada, at the factory a year before his death and he was pleased to see the new rail connection. In 1898 I married my wife's younger sister, Else Lasch.

In order to compete in dyed cotton cloth, we already knew that it was necessary to have spinning and weaving mills. Now, with the railway finished, that became possible, and we decided to build a factory with 34,000 spindles and 800 looms. We thought it best to build it on our neighbour Könemann's land. We knew that Victor Könemann would be against the sale because he lived there with his hounds. My brother explained to him that his brother Emil, who owned the estate, had a lot of expenses with his extensive family, and it would be a relief for him to receive the interest on 120,000 Roubles instead of having to pay for the upkeep of the buildings. In this way we got him to convince his brother to agree to our proposal. It was difficult for Victor, who left only when we threatened to demolish his kennels. By acquiring this estate, we now owned nearly the whole estate of the former owner Durnovo. We had three versts of river-frontage and we also purchased the meadow of the peasants of Turabjevo across the river. Since the bleaching was no longer necessary, we established settling ponds for the dirty coloured water on the meadow. This water was separated from the purer wash water and run through wooden channels from the dyeworks to the other side of the river. At the same time, we built an iron bridge from which the wooden channels were suspended. Sixteen fields had been arranged, each of which could take a daily production.

The railway branch line had been constructed to the newly acquired piece of land in 1898. The lime trees of a beautiful park unfortunately had to be cut down, because this was the most suitable place for the building, and the foundations were nearly finished in autumn. I went to Manchester with my brother in November of the same year where we contacted the firms that fabricated the machines for the spinning and the weaving mills. When we came back, we planned the new installation, with the help of Napoleon Ramberg, especially hired for the new factory. We also placed orders for all the machines with exact specification of the delivery date.

Hoping to speed up the construction, we hired a big masonry contractor in spring 1899. He had the work done by the end of June and in autumn he finished the flats for the workers. We thus managed to have the factory running in February 1900, and if Sulzer hadn't been late with the machines, we could have had it operating two months earlier.

The government had set up a factory police force about a year earlier. Our factory, being the largest one around, got an inspector. The first was a pompous fellow, and he came on like a governor. He was the inspector for both Shchelkovo and the factory, and his boss was a chief of police. Hence, he had no responsibility to the local police.

In the summer of 1900, we nearly had a strike at the spinning and weaving mills. However, I heard about it in time, and who the ring leaders were. I insisted that the inspector arrest them – but he did so only when I threatened to go to the district chief. The strike was prevented by the arrest of the leaders. I got a lingering pneumonia in the autumn of the same year – this was the third one since 1893. I was just recovering from my illness and was still in my room, when federal policemen came to investigate the strike business. It was the time of the politics of Subatov, inciting factory workers against the factory-owners to distract them from anti-government feelings. I found out right away that he wasn't interested in repressing the strike. Later, he tried to get me to take on his informers as employees at the factory, and it was hard to resist his demands.

My brother engaged Mr. Iswolski, a yarn salesman, after the death of Rodinov. He was a useful employee, a skilled salesman, popular with the customers, and had a big circle of friends. He had achieved this under the supervision of my brother. He often proposed new projects to my brother most of which were not properly thought out. My brother would take his pencil and calculate the cost of the project and I could just hear Iswolski saying: "Well, when you, Lev Arturovich, pick up the pencil, the project has already failed". But did draw my brother's attention to one project that was very profitable. That was the purchase of the Reutovo plant. The owner at the time, K.M. Masurin, had lost interest in the factory, and let it run down. He made no profit from the business and was willing to sell his shares at nominal value. We managed to acquire the other shares, which were in the hands of his sisters and a Mr. Gerassimov, so that finally the whole enterprise belonged to our company. The purchase was favourable one, even though the factory was dilapidated, and the machines worn out when we got it. The assets included 500,000 Roubles in the bank, treated by Masurin as a reserve which could not be touched. Also included was a

whole warehouse of finished goods which altogether amounted to the purchase price of 150,000 Roubles. The factory of Reutowo was of great value to us, since it had been our chief supplier of yarn. Masurin thread was always very important in the trade with Turkish-red yarn. The salesmen usually brought Turkish-red only when they were guaranteed double or triple the quantity in the raw Masurin yarn which the factory produced, especially twisted yarn.

In this way Franz Rabeneck became dependent on us for raw Masurin yarn, and his director Viquet feared that my brother would take advantage of this. He much appreciated that Ludwig never abused their relationship, treating him as a good customer. Unfortunately, Isvolski wasn't the man of confidence we thought he was, as we noticed it some years later. My brother found out that he did not forward payments which he received personally from his friend Staxejev, and in this way embezzled a significant amount. It was great disappointment for Ludwig, causing him much excitement and vexation. Larionov got the position of yarn salesman, and my brother was satisfied with him. He was very much esteemed by the customers and he died after we had already left Moscow. We acquired Reutovo during a most unfavourable period, on the 1st March 1905. The prices for yarn were very low and the mood was depressed by the unfavourable political situation. Ramberg became the director of Reutovo, his place being taken by Sergei Andreivich Meschkov, the brother-in-law of Ilvovski. He turned out to be an excellent, conscientious director, who kept the factory in perfect condition. He remained director of the spinning and weaving mills after we had left, and even the Bolsheviks appreciated him as a clever manager and specialist. Politically, he certainly did not agree with them. He died at the factory in 1928 from a long-term gastric complaint.

There was a lot to tidy up in Reutowo. My first problem was to get ventilation into the spinning mill. Two big ventilators had been installed and each of the pumped 100,000 cubic metres of air into the rooms. When it was cold the air had to be warmed up. At the same time we built a humidifier. Then we planned to replace the old machines by new ones. For a start the old, worn-out spinning machines, which produced defective thread, had to be replaced with new ring thread machines. A new Felser steam engine had already been ordered by Gerassimov and nearly installed, instead of the old one. Most of the employees had to be replaced, because nearly all of them had no sense of duty required. They followed the example of the old Mr. Masurin, the uncle of Mr. Konstantin Mitrofanovich, who thought of the factory as a milch-cow and who lived nearby in his dacha. He became our worst enemy, when we opposed him.

Ivan Woskressenski, the supervisor of the peat bog, was a glorious exception among the old employees. At first, we distrusted him too, but after we visited the Reutovo peat bogs with him we realised immediately that he was a clever manager. He managed everything systematically and with economy. The peat engines used a system that he himself had devised; preference was given to the grinding and mixture of the peat, rather than to the pressing. He also had a gift for choosing and working with his subordinates. Later, we had to protect him against Ramberg, who didn't appreciate severe criticism. Anyhow, Ramberg was a poor administrator, unlucky in his choice of employees and sensitive to flattery. I saw him all the time at Sobolevo, but at Reutovo I saw him only twice a week, and here he tried to avoid my orders. Since his actions went against our opinion, he had to leave his job after a few years. It was nevertheless to his credit that under his management we had no strike, during the whole restless time of 1905. This was achieved through many concessions, although these concessions would have been of no use in Shchelkovo. During the whole summer we felt as if we were sitting on a volcano that was about to erupt.

I heard about secret meetings of the workers, which took place in the evenings and on Sundays. Emissaries came from Moscow to give rousing speeches. However, our workers remained loyal; they were against the incitements to strike. They gave me an address in August which mentioned all I had done to improve their circumstances. My dear little son, Ernst, died at the age of ten in June 1905. I needed a break after the sorrow and the exciting summer. I postponed it until it seemed to me that the situation calmed down at the end of September. I went with my wife Else and my two daughters to Italy about the first of October. We had just arrived when we heard that there was a general strike of the railway. We immediately returned to Berlin, and when the railway was running again went back to Moscow via Petersburg. My brother Ludwig had gone to the factory by carriage with his wife and his youngest son Nikolai during the railway strike, since the ticket offices in Moscow were closed. Only the factory was operating. The strike began just before I got back, and my brother was very upset.

There were demonstrations that passed our Moscow house, where Miss Pieper was looking after with my two little sons, Eduard and Hermann. Ludwig and I immediately negotiated with the workers. Despite offering more concessions they didn't begin work for another fortnight, once they'd got an order from their central committee, I later discovered. Work then ran normally through the end of November, when workers' deputies came to me saying that they regretted being forced to strike again, but

they couldn't contradict their central committee's order. The first strike had been economical, but now it had become political one, even though it was against their will. Every day about 20 delegates went to the meeting in the Mytischtschi on our small locomotive, returning around 9pm. When they got back, they'd call me to tell me what they had learned in Moscow. That's how I found out the post office had been blown up and the town was in the hands of the revolutionaries. At the same time, I got more reliable news from my brother via a messenger whom I sent on horseback to town every day. I was careful not to tell our workers about this. My brother was in danger as there was shooting going on in town. For me and my family it could have ended badly, had this rebellion not been put down by the regiment of Semenov. My brother and I were worried about each other during this time.

The engraver, who in August had delivered the reassuring address, had become a police-officer and I later found out that other duties had been distributed among the revolutionaries.

When Mytischtschi was occupied by the troops, the revolutionaries asked me for protection, but the police arrested them and took them off to Bogorodsk, our district town, where they were soon released. They demanded to be employed again at the factory, but I was against it, despite threats they made to me and the director Mishkov. As a result, we worked calmly and normally for the next few years, unlike at factories where the revolutionaries had been re-hired.

After the political disturbances bunker oil became too expensive for heating, and so we had to re-activate peat production. I gave the management of the Lossino-Ostrow bog to Ivan Borisevich. The boiler house of the spinning and weaving mills had been rebuilt for peat heating, with moveable grates, and artificial draught by ventilator, because the chimney was designed for oil heating, and it had not enough draught for peat heating. The boiler houses of the dyeworks had been converted to coal heating (anthracite). We bought an anthracite mine from Mr. Tronchet in the Donez district in 1913 to be independent of the fuel market. But the war prevented us from exploiting it.

After the death of Vassili Adolfovich Kohler, his nephew Alexander Rudolfovich worked as mechanic at the dyeworks and in the plant for sulphuric acid. He'd finished the technical university in Moscow, acquiring a solid knowledge and he was a good mechanic and manager of several buildings constructed at that time. Unfortunately, as a German subject, he had to resign from his position when war broke out. The loss

of such an able helper was a blow to me, since we expanded so much during the war, and I needed him very much. I had to fall back on employees who were not very reliable.



Edouard in the chain-drive 1908 Benz

We bought our first car in 1908, a closed-chain drive Benz. That made it easier for me to go to Reutovo and Moscow, and to Bogorodsk where I had to go to the conferences as a deputy of the district. I went by car, even in deep mid-winter, until the snowdrifts made it impossible to drive. I was the only one who drove an automobile along our highway, and this caused much incidental trouble, from frightened horses and the hostility of the population who were against the innovation in its early years. My brother Ludwig also preferred to go by car, especially when he was at his dacha near the factory in summer.



Ludwig's dacha the 'Zenker House' of 1900 at Lapino-Spasskoye. Source: Sabine Hartung

This dacha was built on the newly acquired estate at the same time when the spinning and the weaving mills had been built. It was a one-storey house with a large veranda and a wide view. In 1900 my brother Ludwig also moved into a new house on the main estate, and the rebuilt house of our grandparents was cleared out for the enlarged school.



Ludwig Rabeneck's main house on the Sobolevo estate, described as an 'art-nouveau' villa

My nephews lived there while they worked in the factory. For my nephew Leo a two-storey stone house had been built on the same estate in 1910. My nephew Lev worked at the factory after he finished his studies in 1908, and Arthur joined the administration in 1909, which made things easier for us.



Lev Rabeneck's house of 1910

The dyeworks for piece goods had to switch to other products because Turkish-red goods were now less in demand. To do this we converted the former drying rooms and the building where the goods were laid out and oiled, into a three-storey building. Here we installed the machines for the new production, machines for mercerising, stretch frames, indanthrene vats, brushing and shearing workstations. We finished all this about a year before war broke out.

Our weaving mill was enlarged by a fourth storey and a wing was added to house the office. It produced nearly exclusively patterned materials.

The useless machines at Reutowo were replaced by new ones in the early years and we planned to enlarge the factory. Ramberg was succeeded by director Artuschkov, who had been his assistant. Mr. Ohl was assigned to him as his assistant. We engaged Dimitriev as an administrator who came from Trechgorny Plant. He was a former officer, and not very popular because he was often harsh and unfair to the workers. It was to his credit, though, that he installed an excellent fire brigade at Reutovo, similar to that at Trechgorny. Later, we installed a similar fire brigade at Shchelkovo. When my son Carl became managing director of the factory at Reutovo, in 1910, we didn't need Dimitriev anymore, and we discharged him. Ohl took his place, a great theorist and statistician. He was complemented by a fine assistant, Ivan Slotinsev. Calm and regular work was guaranteed through such a distribution of management. We had as mechanic Michael Mikhailevich, a clever and able technician, with

whom it was pleasant to work, because he took advice with understanding. But unfortunately, he fell ill and became an invalid and it was hard for us to find another suitable person.

We built a power station with a 2,000kw Turbo generator and four Steinmüller boilers to grow production at Reutovo. The installation was so efficient (1.8 pud peat per KW) that the electrical company engineers only believed it when they checked it themselves. We also constructed a three-storey building where we installed the twisting mill, which was enlarged, with 27,000 spindles and a winding mill. In the old buildings we installed a ring spinning mill, and now we had 92,000 spindles for single threads. We bought the Maslov peatbog (800 Dessatin)²⁴ which delivered perfect peat to enlarge our peat production. It was situated near the Nizhny railway, on a branch line.

We planned to enlarge the spinning mill at Shchelkovo too. To accommodate a 1,500 KW turbo generator, which we ordered along with 20,000 spindles, the powerhouse had to be enlarged. We managed to build the walls during the war, but we couldn't get iron girders, so the building could not be finished. My nephew Andrew worked in the factory from spring 1914, first as a colour expert under Schamin, who took over the print shop after Dobeli. Later, when Frick left us (being a German subject) , he took over the dyeworks for thread.

The administration of the artillery asked us soon after the beginning of the war, if we could greatly accelerate the production of sulphuric acid, since they needed it urgently to make gunpowder. General Ipatiev liked Leo, our nephew, very much. So, we sent him to Warsaw to pick up and import the machinery from the Praga factory to our factory, since they used the same technology. The Praga factory had been confiscated by the administration of the artillery, being a German enterprise. Leo was lucky to complete this mission just before the capture of Warsaw by German troops. He brought everything we needed for the expansion. He had to make several trips but everything arrived in time. We ordered a big mechanical oven for pyrite combustion from Sweden at the same time, which arrived punctually and enabled us to double our production. Fritz Binder became manager of the acid factory after Pontius had left. The administration of the artillery ordered us to produce a special gas, from the liquid sulphuric acid, which was used to fill the shells. We got two officer-chemists, Oskin and Skinder, to control the production. The liquid

²⁴ Dessatin = measure of land area 2.7 acres, i.e. 2160acres

sulphuric acid was combined with liquid chlorine which they delivered to us in special apparatus. This fabrication was unpleasant and unhealthy.²⁵

During the war, a law was passed that German citizens who had been naturalized for less than 30 years in Russia could not manage an enterprise. Since our naturalisation in Finland was only 25 years ago, we were also threatened by this law. Leo went to Petersburg to get an exemption from this law. He had to overcome many difficulties – there was great hostility to Germans. He fought for nearly a year, and finally succeeded in gaining an exemption. He attained it through our good connections with the administration of the artillery, who appreciated our unselfish efforts. Pushai, Ipatiev's secretary, and Ipatiev himself helped a lot.

There were new elections for the members of the stock exchange immediately after the outbreak of the war. The younger businessmen, led by Pavel Rabuschinsky, took the opportunity to make propaganda against anyone with a German name, and also against the older members of the stock exchange. After considering the situation, my brother cancelled his membership in the stock exchange before the election. He had judged the situation correctly because Rabuschinsky's party won a majority, and he himself was elected president of the stock exchange committee; even members of pure old Russian families, such as G. A. Krestovnikov, had to quit.

Despite our good relations with the administration of the artillery we couldn't prevent a government inspector being assigned to us. This young man who had studied at the technical university in Moscow, was a horrible pedant, he followed instructions strictly and interfered in all matters concerning the factory. He wasted a lot of my time and caused a lot of trouble. He got another position during the last year of the war, and we got the chemist Oskin as inspector of our whole business. He was a big, good-natured gentleman, who didn't make any difficulties for us. The whole situation changed abruptly when the revolution broke out in February 1917. Before the revolution we could work calmly and intensely, but from 1917 the workers suddenly came to us with all sorts of demands. Those who had suffered under the former regime, and were unemployed, had to be employed as workers under any circumstances. It made no difference whether a man had been punished for a political crime or for a theft, or even more serious crimes. Representatives were elected immediately from every department, and they formed workers

²⁵ QV 'The Suffocating Secret of the Rabeneck Dynasty'

committees. Now began endless conferences with the workers. Lev stood faithfully by my side and was a big help to me. They paid no attention to urgent orders from the army supply commissariat, immediately instigating the eight-hour working day. The working time in the spinning and weaving mills, and in some departments of the dyeworks as well, had been reduced to 16 hours from the two previous shifts of 9 hours each. The conferences took place several times a week, usually lasting from 2 to 8pm. It was impossible to do regular work. One of the guards of the spinning and weaving mills was unreasonable in his demands during the conferences, without any contradiction from the other workers. At our slightest objection he showed a menacing attitude, as if to strike us down. But on the job, we often found him asleep. When we found that we couldn't do anything at these conferences, and felt threatened by the workers, we decided to move to Moscow in October 1917. My son (Charles), who was in the same position at Reutovo, also left his factory.

My wife, Else, had been suffering from tuberculosis since the birth of my youngest daughter (Helen), and had to spend several years in a sanatorium in the Black Forest. She became worse during the war, with all its excitement and troubles, and was bedridden when she came to our rented house in Bolshoi Haritonnjevski Pereulok in Moscow. She was too weak to get up, and she died on 29 June, 1918.

The Bolshevik uprising began soon after our move to Moscow. The Bolsheviks came to power after days full of excitement, and our situation got substantially worse. The workers' committees came at least twice a week from both factories to the Moscow office. The conferences were not interrupted by our move. In addition, control commissions had been installed, which watched all transactions of the management. We couldn't buy or get anything without the permission of the commission, and without the presence of one of their members, no goods could be delivered. It was hard to keep the factories running. There were shortages of everything, especially food supplies.

The factory owners of our district, joined by those of Krestovnikov, united to withstand the demands of the workers. We held our conferences at least once a week, in our office. But we were completely without power. As soon as the Bolsheviks came to power, we noticed that the workers planned to take over the administration from the former owners and transfer it to the workers. Because the leaders of the movement knew that the workers were not yet competent to manage, they proclaimed a decree, ordering the former directors to remain at their posts. I went to the factory

where my daughter, in summer 1918, lived with her husband and child, and my daughter-in-law Olga with her son Leo in my house.

The garden presented a wild picture – a tornado had destroyed the big silver poplar in front of my house, as well as the lime tree walk, which my grandfather had planted, and all the cedar trees. This happened in May on the day of my daughter's arrival, and when I arrived everything was left where it had fallen. I immediately went to the factory, but as soon as I got there and was welcomed in by the old workers, a delegate from the workers committee appeared and told me to come straight to the office of the committee. At first, I paid no attention, but after summoning me several times I thought it better to go and see them. They were very sharp and asked how I could dare to visit the factory without the permission of their committee. To enter the factory grounds I would have to be accompanied by a member of the committee. That was my last visit to the factory. My brother had it just as bad at the administration, as well. The banks had been confiscated immediately. To get money from the bank for the business, we had to make a list of imminent expenses, separately for each factory, and get permission from the control commission. Only when a member of the commission accompanied us to the central bank could we get the necessary money, even then with difficulty.

On the first day of Christmas my brother-in-law, Otto Hilger, and his wife (my sister Lilly) arrived with their eldest son and their two daughters from their exile in a village near Totjma to Moscow. They wanted to get to Germany at the first opportunity.²⁶ My son Charles took his family to Kislovodsk in the Caucasus since they no longer had permission to live in my house at the factory. He had great difficulty bringing them back, when the Bolsheviks came to power in the Caucasus too.

Besides the tiring work in the office we were always beset by menacing rumours. Several times we heard that the workers planned to arrest us. This caused me and my brother to flee to Vladimir, where two daughters of Andrei Petrovich Tschaikevsky (Ludwig's brother-in-law) lived at that time. Another time, my brother hid at his brother-in-law's in Moscow and I at my daughter's on the Petrovsky Prospekt, where she lived in Berens' flat, who had left Moscow. Our doorkeeper told me, that several times a car came in the night with armed men, who asked for me. He told them that I did not live here. Even during the day we were alarmed. Once I was called to come home, because our house was being searched. When they

²⁶ QV Memoir of Otto Hilger at www.livesretold.co.uk

were through with the search, they confiscated our last bottles of wine and left.

Soon after my wife's death, my brother and I made serious plans to leave Russia. The depressing feeling that our whole life's work had been destroyed; the stressful situation at the office, where every action was under surveillance; and for me the sadness of my suffering wife, who died and whom I could not help; all this wore us down and we decided to leave our positions, where we could not be of any use anymore. The young men of our family had to stay behind. However, we didn't succeed in leaving quickly. Our belongings stood packed in our rooms for months, before we could be on our way. Another difficulty was that we were crowded out of our house. They left us only three rooms. My brother Ludwig, who had a large house in the Gussatnikov Pereulok, took the admiral Berens and his staff into his home. But that didn't help him; militiamen came to the house next door and expelled the owner, Schlippe. Soon it was my brother's turn for the quartering. He had to leave behind all his belongings except that which he could take secretly with him. He took refuge with his son Nicolai, who lived in a small house in the Chudlovski Tupik²⁷. I had given over two rooms to a younger couple with a child some time ago, but then two officers came into our house from a unit in Tver. One was a captain with a wife, children and a dog. Each of them got one room, so that for me, Miss Pieper and my three children only the dining room and two small rooms were left. These families all cooked their meals in the kitchen.

Once there was an opportunity to escape to Riga in the autumn of 1918 using transport organised by a Dr Schiemann, mostly for Germans from the Baltic. The trains consisted of freight cars with a small stove in them. The passengers were packed in with their luggage. My brother and I and our families were supposed to go with the sixth transport. But when we were supposed to leave at the end of October it no longer safe to go this way. Most of us decided not to go. The few who risked it got stuck part way and had to endure considerable danger and suffering. It was lucky that we had not gone to Riga because it was taken over very soon by Latvian Bolsheviks, who introduced a reign of terror. Next we tried to get permission to go to Finland, the country of our naturalisation, that had become independent by then. After many difficulties I got the necessary visa in December and decided not to wait for my brother's visa but to go on my way immediately with my three youngest children and Miss Pieper. We had to escape secretly, because there was the danger of being

²⁷ Tupik = dead end street

detained or arrested for not having paid taxes, which were so high that it was impossible to pay them anyway or being detained or arrested by the workers' committee. We escaped safely to Petersburg (Leningrad) and there we learned that the frontier had been closed for Finnish people. There were quarrels between the Finnish government and the Bolsheviks and, therefore, it was uncertain whether we could come through. We spent ten terrible days in the deserted town in unbelievable circumstances. We were afraid of starving till we got the visa from the military authorities. It was a great relief when we crossed the frontier on the 31st December 1918.

My brother had to wait until the 9th of January to get his visa. And it was by no means clear that he would get it at all. He almost decided to accept the help of people who had helped several families (for example the Catoire family) to escape towards the South. Fortunately, this didn't work out; the journey would have been very tiring and dangerous. But I finally had the great pleasure of meeting Ludwig and Alexandrine in Helsinki at the end of January. I came from Vasa, where we settled during our stay in Finland. My daughter Lessie arrived with her husband a little later. We travelled through Finland to get to England. I managed to speak to her in Abo, before they embarked for Sweden.

The Finns had captured a couple of Bolsheviks in the spring who wanted to go to Russia. At the same time my nephew Andrei came to the Finnish committee in Moscow. They arrested him together with the committee and took him to the Butyrki prison. This unpleasant incident, which frightened our relatives in Moscow very much, had a good side, since many Finns had been exchanged for the two Bolsheviks, among them our relatives. Andrei gave them the names of our family members, when they asked him. They had to be ready in 24 hours, and were expelled to Finland in May 1919.

We felt relieved when we left Russia, but we didn't believe that the conditions we had left behind us would last for long. We thought that in six months or, at the most, in one year we would be able to go back, and that then we could regain our old rights. We often talked over how we'd clean up everything that had been destroyed during the revolution. But where would we get the necessary funds?

Eleven years have passed now since our escape. Two of us are no longer alive. 1928 was a year of deep sorrow. My brother Ludwig died on the 19th of February. He had to have two operations. We believed him to be out of danger after the second operation, but suddenly he died of heart

failure. A blood clot stopped his heart. My nephew Andrei died on the 5th of November in Nice, where he was had a job. He had very bad pneumonia and when his mother and brother Arthur got to him it was already too late.

We who are still alive have given up any hope that there could be a change in Russia during our lifetime, allowing us to go back and manage our business; a business in which the fourth generation of our family was working, dreaming of celebrating the 100th year jubilee in 1932, and into which we put so much pain and work in the hope of leaving it to our descendants.

Bourg-la-Reine, December 1929

Edouard Rabeneck



*Left to Right: Nellie's youngest son Ernst, Else Lasch, Nellie's daughters, Sophie and Elizabeth, Nellie's eldest son Charles, and Edouard (seated).
Photo taken in 1902*

