This is the second part of Tswett's letters written to John Briquet, his former thesis advisor at Geneva University and director of the Botanical Gardens in Geneva.

M. S. Tswett's Correspondence with John Briquet
II. Letters from St. Petersburg (1896–1898)

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Summary
The letters written by M. S. Tswett to John Briquet (University of Geneva, Switzerland) are presented in English translation, with critical comments.

Part I. of this series published in last month's issue of this journal contained Briquet's evaluation of Tswett's Ph.D. Thesis, as well as Tswett's letters written to Briquet from Simferopol in 1896. In the present Part II. the English translation of the letters written by Tswett to Briquet from St. Petersburg, from December 30, 1896, to October 29, 1898 are presented.

For details on the considerations used by us in preparing Tswett's letters for publication, see the Introduction to Part I. of our series.

Letters from St. Petersburg
The Geneva collection contains nine letters and three postcards which Tswett wrote to Briquet from St. Petersburg within two years: the first was written on December 30, 1896 and the last on October 29, 1898. To these a brief letter written by his father from Simferopol is added. This was a crucial time in young Mikhail Tswett's life. After being frustrated for not finding a position at the University in Odessa, he arrived in St. Petersburg with high hopes that now, finally, his difficulties will be straightened out and he will get a position commensurate with his degree and knowledge. However, soon he had to find out that no permanent position is available for him, and he has to start from scratch, first obtaining the proper Russian degrees.

Reading the comments in various biographical treatments published in the last 25 years, one may have the impression that this was the result of some kind of discrimination against Tswett. However, this is not true: according to the rules valid in Imperial Russia, foreign degrees were not sufficient to obtain any senior position at a university or other scientific establishment. It is surprising that Tswett was unaware of this and it is understandable for us that he did not even inquire about the situation prior to his move from Switzerland to Russia.

The first few letters – particularly those of December 30, 1896, March 30 and June 19, 1897 – demonstrate the depression in which Tswett was at that time. As we could see from his last letter from Simferopol (November 13, 1896; see Part I.) Borodin – a principal Russian botanist of that period, working in the "center of the world", in St. Petersburg – assured him (or at least, Tswett believed that he did) that he will receive permission and support to work in the Physical Laboratory of the Academy of Sciences, in St. Petersburg, and he took it as an actual proposal. However, after his move he found out that although he was permitted to work in Professor Famintsyn's laboratory, it did not represent any position, nor did he obtain any salary: it simply provided him with a bench space to work. We should not be surprised by his statement that "I feel myself a stranger in my homeland" (je me sens étranger dans ma patrie) and that he considered his stay in Russia as a kind of exile: he tells Briquet to think about him as a fellow (Swiss) country-

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man (compatriote) and not as a Russian, and calls Russia "his nominal country" (ma patrie nominale). He also emphasized that he is dreaming only of one thing: to escape (Je ne rêve que d'une chose: m'échapper), and that if there is any opportunity to have a position in (Western) Europe, he would not hesitate to take it. Note also that he said: "in Europe" – obviously, he did not consider Russia as part of Europe! These points were obscured in previous discussions of his first years in Russia.

In spite of these bad beginnings, Tswett slowly settled in St. Petersburg. He found a low-level temporary position in Lefgast's institution while continuing to work on his thesis for the Russian magister's degree. When in the summer of 1898, Briquet proposed him a position in Germany, he did not consider it anymore. He told Briquet that a year earlier, he would have accepted it without hesitation; however, since then he created a position for himself which he expects to further improve: in addition he is cherishing the independence of his scientific activity which obviously he would not be able to maintain in Germany where there are "schools". This is particularly interesting: if we investigate Tswett's whole life work, we can see that he was always working alone, without any supervision, but also without any collaborator: all his publications are single-authored. This would have been impossible in any Western country, with the existing scientific hierarchies at the universities.

Three points in this correspondence are worth for mentioning. The first concerns Tswett's investigations for his master's degree. We can see how its subject slowly evolved toward the investigation of the chlorophylls in plant tissues. One would need a much deeper understanding of botany to fully understand his brief remarks – and for us, chromatographers, this is beyond the scope of our interest –, but one can obviously follow how the direction of his thinking was slowly developed. Later Tswett emphasized that the development of chromatography had its basis in the investigations carried out in St. Petersburg which were summarized in his master's thesis submitted in 1901 to Kazan' University, and we can see in these letters the embryonic evolution of his ideas.

The second interesting observation refers to his letter of September 30, 1898, in which he sarcastically criticizes a publication by Chodat and Bambier. In Part I. of our series we have already mentioned the apparent animosity in Geneva between Professor Chodat and Tswett (or between Chodat and Thury?), and this letter is a proof of the continuing existence of this situation. In this respect see also the brief, sarcastic remark in Tswett's letter of December 30, 1896, that Chodat would certainly evaluate differently Briquet's description of their laboratory at the University of Geneva (in other words, that he would consider it at a lower grade than discussed by Briquet)!

Finally, we have to comment specially on three letters: M. Tswett's letters of September 20 and October 3, 1897, and his father's letter dated September 17, because these give an interesting insight of M. Tswett's general attitude.

The background of these letters is simple. Apparently, M. Tswett received two bills related to the publication of his Thesis: one from a Mr. Duc (addressed to Briquet) for 57 Francs and another from Rey et Malavallone, the publisher, (addressed directly to M. Tswett) for 106 Francs and 20 Centimes. He asked his father, Semen N. Tswett, to pay them (don't forget: he had no regular salary!) who then transferred through the Bank of Azov (which apparently, was the major international banking establishment in the Crimea) the respective amounts to Briquet and to Rey et Malavallone. In his letter of September 20, 1897, Mikhail informed Briquet about these payments. Meanwhile, however, his father was notified by the Russian Bank that Briquet refused to accept the payment of 57 Francs, and Semen Tswett immediately wrote directly to Briquet, asking to clarify the situation. (M. Tswett, when writing his letter of September 20, was not aware of this as yet.) Obviously, this was the logical and correct thing to do.

However, when he learned about this situation, M. Tswett did not wait for the clarification – what everybody would have done – but wrote on October 3, 1897, a long and nasty letter to Briquet, stating that he was offended by his behavior: he compared Briquet to a businessman acting against dishonest debtors (envers leurs débiteurs véreux) (which, in fact, means that he accused him to be a dishonest businessman), and accused Briquet with unfair handling of the debt. Note also that Tswett's letter is addressed simply to Monsieur, while all of his other letters to Briquet start with Cher Monsieur. One must understand the fine differences in these addresses: one would only start a letter in this way if wanting to deliberately provoke the addressee!

Meanwhile Briquet already answered Tswett's previous letter (do not forget the 12-days difference in the two calendars!) and obviously clarified the situation. Thus, with M. Tswett's October 10 letter, the controversy was finally closed.

The interesting observation in this misunderstanding is M. Tswett's hasty reaction: without waiting for any clarification, he immediately jumped to a false conclusion, even before the situation could have been cleared up. This is again an early manifestation of Tswett's unfortunate nature which later, in the polemics with his antagonists, often overshadowed the valid scientific arguments. This unpleasant tone of his later publications was also mentioned in the 1918 evaluation of the Chemistry Nobel Prize Committee and certainly contributed to their rejection of his nomination [12].

Below we give the translations of Tswett's letters written from St. Petersburg to Briquet. As an illustration, copies of two postcards and one letter are also shown.