Maurice Baring



An Outline of Russian Literature

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AN OUTLINE OF RUSSIAN LITERATURE

By the Hon. MAURICE BARING

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AUTHOR OF “WIT
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PREFACE

The chief difficulty which Englishmen have experienced in writing about Russia has, up till quite lately, been the prevailing ignorance of the English public with regard to all that concerns Russian affairs. A singularly intelligent Russian, who is connected with the Art Theatre at Moscow, said to me that he feared the new interest taken by English intellectuals with regard to Russian literature and

Russian art. He was delighted, of course, that they should be interested in Russian affairs, but he feared their interest was in danger of being crystallized in a false shape and directed into erroneous channels.

This ignorance will always remain until English people go to Russia and learn to know the Russian people at first hand. It is not enough to be acquainted with a certain number of Russian writers; I say a certain number advisedly, because, although it is true that such writers as Tolstoy and Turgenev have long been naturalized in England, it is equally true that some of the greatest and most typical of Russian authors have not yet been translated.

There is in England no complete translation of Pushkin. This is much the same as though there were in Russia no complete translation of Shakespeare or Milton. I do not mean by this that Pushkin is as great a poet as Shakespeare or Milton, but I do mean that he is the most national and the most important of all Russian writers. There is no translation of Saltykov, the greatest of Russian satirists; there is no complete translation of Leskov, one of her greatest novelists, while Russian criticism and philosophy, as well as almost the whole of Russian poetry, is completely beyond the ken of England. The knowledge of what Russian civilisation, with its glorious fruit of literature, consists in, is still a sealed book so far as England is concerned.

M. B.

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AN OUTLINE OF RUSSIAN LITERATURE

CHAPTER I

THE ORIGINS

For the purposes of the average Russian, and still more for the purposes of the foreigner, Russian literature begins with the nineteenth century, that is to say with the reign of Alexander I. It was then that the literary fruits on which Russia has since fed were born. The seeds were sown, of course, centuries earlier; but the history of Russian literature up to the nineteenth century is not a history of literature, it is

the history of Russia. It may well be objected that it is difficult to separate Russian literature from Russian history; that for the understanding of Russian literature an understanding of Russian history is indispensable. This is probably true; but, in a sketch of this dimension, it would be quite impossible to give even an adequate outline of all the vicissitudes in the life of the Russian people which have helped and hindered, blighted and fostered the growth of the Russian tree of letters. All that one can do is to mention some of the chief landmarks amongst the events which directly affected the growth of Russian literature until the dawn of that epoch when its fruits became palpable to Russia and to the world.

The first of these facts is the existence of a Slav race on the banks of the Dnieper in the seventh and eighth centuries, and the growth of cities and trade centres such as Kiev, Smolensk, and Novgorod, which seem already to have been considerable settlements when the earliest Russian records were written. Of these, from the point of view of literature, Kiev was the most important. Kiev on the Dnieper was the mother of Russian culture; Moscow and St. Petersburg became afterwards the heirs of Kiev.

Another factor of vital historical importance which had an indirect effect on the history of Russian literature was the coming of the Norsemen into Russia at the beginning of the ninth century. They came as armed merchants from Scandinavia; they founded and organized principalities; they took Novgorod and Kiev. The Scandinavian Viking became the Russian *Kniaz*, and the Varanger principality of Kiev became the kernel of the Russian

State. In the course of time, the Norsemen became merged in the Slavs, but left traces of their origin in the Sagas, the *Byliny*, which spread from Kiev all over Russia, and still survive in some distant governments. Hence the Norse names Oleg (Helgi), Olga (Helga), Igor (Ingvar). The word Russian, *Rus*, the origin and etymology of which are shrouded in obscurity, was first applied to the men-at-arms who formed the higher class of society in the early Varanger states.

The next determining factor in the early history of Russian literature is the Church. Vladimir, Prince of Kiev, married the sister of the Emperor of Byzantium and was baptized; henceforward Christianity began to spread (987-8), but the momentous fact is that it was the Christianity of the East. The pearl of the Gospels, says Soloviev, was covered over with the dust of Byzantium, and Russia was committed to the Greek tradition, the Greek rivalry with the West and was consequently excluded from the civilization of the West and the great intellectual community of which Rome was the centre. This fact is of far-reaching and momentous importance. No less important was the introduction of the Slavonic liturgy, which was invented by two Greek brothers from Saloniki, in the ninth century, who tried to force their Macedonian dialect on all the Slavs, and succeeded in the case of Bulgaria and Servia. A century or so later it reached the Russian Slavs. Through Bulgaria, the Russians acquired a ready-made literature and a written language in a dialect which was partly Bulgarian and partly Macedonian, or rather Macedonian with Bulgarian modifications. The possession of a written language acted as a lever as far as culture was concerned. In the eleventh century, Kiev was one of the most enlightened cities

in Europe.

The rulers of Kiev were at this time related to the Kings of France, Hungary, Norway, and even England. The Russian MSS. of the eleventh century equal the best MSS. of Western Europe of the same period. The city of Kiev was a home of wealth, learning, and art. Byzantine artists went to Kiev, and Kiev sent Russian painters to the West. There seemed at this time to be no barrier between East and West. Nothing could be more promising than such a beginning; but the course of Russian history was not destined to run smooth. In the middle of the eleventh century, the foundations of a durable barrier between Russia and Western Europe were laid. This was brought about by the schism of the Eastern and Western Churches. The schism arose out of the immemorial rivalry between the Greeks and the Latins, a rivalry which ever since then has continued to exist between Rome and Byzantium. The Slavs, whom the matter did not concern, and who were naturally tolerant, were the victims of a racial hatred and a rivalry wholly alien to them. It may seem unnecessary to dwell upon what some may regard as an ancient and trivial ecclesiastical dispute. But, in its effects and in its results, this “Querelle de Moine,” as Leo X said when he heard of Luther’s action, was as momentous for the East as the Reformation was for the West. Sir Charles Eliot says the schism of the Churches ranks in importance with the foundation of Constantinople and the Coronation of Charlemagne as one of the turning points in the relations of West and East. He says that for the East it was of doleful import, since it prevented the two great divisions from combining against the common enemy, the Turk. It was of still more doleful import for Russia, for the schism erected a barrier, which soon became

formidable, between it and the civilizing influences of Western Europe.

But in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the existence of this growing barrier was not yet perceptible. The eleventh and twelfth centuries in Russia were an age of Sagas and "Byliny," already clearly stamped with the democratic character and ideal that is at the root of all Russian literature, and which offer so sharp a contrast to Greek and Western ideals. In the Russian Sagas, the most popular hero is the peasant's son, who is despised and rejected, but at the critical moment displays superhuman strength and saves his country from the enemy; and in return for his services is allowed to drink his fill for three years in a tavern.

But by far the most interesting remains of the literature of Kiev which have reached posterity are the *Chronicle of Kiev*, often called the *Chronicle of Nestor*, finished at the beginning of the twelfth century, and the *Story of the Raid of Prince Igor*. The *Chronicle of Kiev*, written in a cloister, rich in that epic detail and democratic quality that characterize the Sagas, is the basis of all later chronicles dealing with the early history of Russia. *The Story of the Raid of Prince Igor*, which also belongs to the twelfth century, a prose epic, is not only one of the most remarkable memorials of the ancient written language of Russia; but by virtue of its originality, its historical truth, its vividness, it holds a unique place in the literary history of Europe, and offers an interesting contrast to the *Chanson de Roland*.

The Story of the Raid of Igor tells of an expedition made in the year 1185 against the Polovtsy, a tribe of nomads, by Igor the son of Sviatoslav, Prince of

Novgorod, together with other Princes. The story tells how the Princes set out and raid the enemy's country; how, successful at first, they are attacked by overwhelming numbers and defeated; how Igor is taken prisoner; and how in the end he escapes and returns home. The story is written in rhythmical prose, with passages where the rhythm has a more strongly accentuated quality as of unrhymed verse. All the incidents recorded in the epic agree in every respect with the narrative of the same events which is to be found in the *Chronicle of Kiev*. It is only the manner of presenting them which is different. What gives the epic a unique interest is that the author must indubitably have belonged to the militia of Sviatoslav, Grand Duke of Kiev; and, if he was not an eye-witness of the events he describes with such wealth of detail, his knowledge was at any rate first-hand and intimate.

But the epic is as remarkable for the quality of its style as it is for the historical interest of its subject-matter. It plunges, after a short introduction, *in medias res*, and the narrative is concentrated on the dramatic moments which give rise to the expression of lyrical feeling, pathos and description—such as the battle, the defeat, the ominous dream of the Grand Duke, and the lament of the wife of Igor on the walls of Putivl—

"I will fly"—she says—
"Like the cuckoo down the Don;
I will wet my beaver sleeve
In the river Kayala;
I will wash the bleeding
wounds of the Prince,
The wounds of his strong
body."

. . . . . .

"O Wind, little wind,
Why, Sir,
Why do you blow so fiercely?
Why, on your light wings
Do you blow the arrows of the
robbers against my
husband's warriors?
Is it not enough for you to blow
high beneath the clouds,
To rock the ships on the blue
sea?
Why, Sir, have you scattered
my joy on the grassy
plain?"

Throughout the poem, Nature plays an active part in the events. When Igor is defeated, the grasses bend with pity and the trees are bowed to the earth with grief. When Igor escapes, he talks with the river Don as he fords it, and when the bandits follow him, the woodpeckers tell them the way with their tapping. The poem, which contains much lamentation over the quarrels of the Princes and the injury ensuing from them to the Russian people, ends in the major key. Igor is restored to his native soil, he goes to Kiev to give thanks in the Church, and the people acclaim the old Princes and then the young Princes with song.

A transcript of the poem, made probably at the end of the fourteenth century, was first discovered in 1795 by Count Musin-Pushkin, and first published in 1800, when it made the same kind of impression as the publication of the *Songs of Ossian*. It was not, however, open to Dr. Johnson's objection—"Show

me the originals"—for the fourteenth century transcript of the original then existed and was inspected and considered unmistakably genuine by Karamzin and others, but was unfortunately burnt in the fire of Moscow.[1] The poem has been translated into English, French and German, and has given rise to a whole literature of commentaries.

Up to the twelfth century, Russian life was concentrated in the splendid and prosperous centre of Kiev; but in the thirteenth century came a crushing blow which was destined to set back the clock of Russian culture for three hundred years, namely, the Tartar invasion. Kiev was destroyed in 1240. After this, the South was abandoned; Lithuania and Poland became entirely separated from the East; the Eastern principalities centred round Moscow; the Metropolitan of Kiev transferred his see to Moscow in 1328; and by the fourteenth century Moscow had taken the place of Kiev, and had become the kernel of Russian life and culture. Russia under the dominion of the Tartar yoke was intellectually stagnant. The Church alone retained its independence, and when Constantinople fell, Moscow declared itself to be the third and last Rome: but the independence of the Church, although it kept national feeling alive under the Tartar yoke, made for stagnation rather than progress, and the barrier between Russia and the culture of the West was now solid and visible.

From the fourteenth century until the beginning of the nineteenth century, Russian literature, instead of being a panorama of various and equally splendid periods of production, such as the Elizabethan epoch, the Jacobean epoch, and the Georgian epoch, or, as in France, the Renaissance, the *Grand Siècle*, and the

philosophic era of the eighteenth century, has nothing to show at all to the outward world; for during all this time the soil from which it was to grow was merely being prepared, and gradually, with difficulty and delay, gaining access to such influences as would make any growth possible. All that is important, as far as literature is concerned, in this period, are those events and factors which had the effect of making breaches in the wall which shut Russia off from the rest of Europe; in letting in that light which was necessary for any literary plants to grow, and in removing those obstacles which prevented Russia from enjoying her rightful heritage among the rest of her sister European nations: a heritage which she had well employed in earlier days, and which she had lost for a time owing to the barbarian invasion.

The first event which made a breach in the wall was the marriage of Ivan III, Tsar of Moscow, to Sophia Palæologa, the niece of the last of the Byzantine Emperors. She brought with her Italian architects and other foreigners, and the work of Peter the Great, of opening a window in Russia on to Europe, was begun.

The first printing press was established in Moscow during the reign of Ivan the Terrible, and the first book was printed in 1564. But literature was still under the direct control of the Church, and the Church looked upon all innovations and all foreign learning with the deepest mistrust. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, Peter the Great had a strange forerunner in the shape of that enigmatic historical personage, the false Demetrius, who claimed to be the murdered son of Ivan the Terrible, and who, in spite of his western ideas, Polish

manners, and Latin culture, succeeded in occupying the throne of Moscow for a year. His ideal was one of progress; but he came too soon, and paid for his prematurity with his life.

But it was from Kiev and Poland that the fruitful winds of enlightenment were next to blow. Kiev, re-risen from its ruins and recovered from its long slumber, became a centre of learning, and possessed a college whose curriculum was modelled on the Jesuit schools; and although Moscow looked upon Kiev with mistrust, an imperative demand for schools arose in Moscow. In the meantime a religious question had arisen fraught with consequences for Russia: namely that of the revision of the Liturgical books, into the text of which, after continuous copying and recopying, errors had crept. The demand for revision met with great opposition, and ended ultimately in producing a great schism in the Russian Church, which has never been healed. But, with the exception of the Little Russians, there was no one at Moscow capable of preparing texts for printing or of conducting schools. The demand for schools and the decision to revise the texts were simultaneous. The revision was carried out between 1653-7, and a migration of Kiev scholars to Moscow came about at the same time. In 1665 Latin was taught in Moscow by SIMEON POLOTSKY, who was the first Russian verse-maker. It is impossible to call him a poet; he wrote what was called syllabic verse: the number of syllables taking the place of rhythm. As a pioneer of culture, he deserves fame; but in the interest of literature, it was a misfortune that his tradition was followed until the middle of the eighteenth century.

In the latter half of the seventeenth century, another

influence besides that of Kiev and Poland made itself felt. A fresh breach in the wall came from another quarter. The German suburb in Moscow in the seventeenth century, called the *Sloboda*, became a centre of European culture. Here dwelt the foreign officers and soldiers, capitalists and artisans, who brought with them the technical skill and the culture of Western Europe. It was here that the Russian stage was born. The Protestant pastor of the *Sloboda*, Gregory, was commanded to write a comedy by the Tsar Alexis, in 1672, on the occasion of the birth of the Tsarevitch. A theatre was built in the village of Preobrazhenskoe (Transfiguration), and a play on the subject of Esther and Ahasuerus was produced there. It was here also in 1674 that the ballet was introduced. A regular company was formed; several plays translated from the German were produced, and the first original play written in Russia was *The Prodigal Son*, by Simeon Polotsky.

Thus, at the end of the seventeenth century, Russia was ready for any one who should be able to give a decisive blow to the now crumbling wall between herself and the West. For, by the end of the seventeenth century, Russia, after having been centralized in Moscow by Ivan III, and enlarged by Ivan IV, had thrown off the Tartar yoke. She had passed through a period of intestine strife, trouble, anarchy, and pretenders, not unlike the Wars of the Roses; she had fought Poland throughout the whole of the seventeenth century, from her darkest hour of anarchy, when the Poles occupied Moscow. It was then that Russia had arisen, expelled the invaders, reasserted her nationality and her independence, and finally emerged out of all these vicissitudes, the great Slavonic state; while Poland, Russia's superior in culture and civilization, had sunk into the position of

a dependency.

The man whom the epoch needed was forthcoming. His name was Peter. He carried on the work which had been begun, but in quite an original manner, and gave it a different character. He not only made a breach in the wall, but he forced on his stubborn and conservative subjects the habits and customs of the West. He revolutionized the government and the Church, and turned the whole country upside down with his explosive genius. He abolished the Russian Patriarchate, and crushed the power of the Church once and for all, by making it entirely depend on the State, as it still does. He simplified the Russian script and the written language; he caused to be made innumerable translations of foreign works on history, geography, and jurisprudence. He founded the first Russian newspaper. But Peter the Great did not try to draw Russia into an alien path; he urged his country with whip, kick, and spur to regain its due place, which it had lost by lagging behind, on the path it was naturally following. Peter the Great's reforms, his manifold and superhuman activity, produced no immediate fruits in literature. How could it? To blame him for this would be like blaming a gardener for not producing new roses at a time when he was relaying the garden. He was completely successful in opening a window on to Europe, through which Western influence could stream into Russia. This was not slow in coming about; and the foreign influence from the end of the reign of Peter the Great onwards divided directly into two different currents: the French and the German. The chief representatives of the German influence in the eighteenth century were TATISHCHEV, the founder of Russian history, and MICHAEL LOMONOSOV.

Michael Lomonosov (1714-1765), a man with an incredibly wide intellectual range, was a mathematician, a chemist, an astronomer, a political economist, a historian, an electrician, a geologist, a grammarian and a poet. The son of a peasant, after an education acquired painfully in the greatest privation, he studied at Marburg and Freiburg. He was the Peter the Great of the Russian language; he scratched off the crust of foreign barbarisms, and still more by his example than his precepts—which were pedantic—he displayed it in its native purity, and left it as an instrument ready tuned for a great player. He fought for knowledge, and did all he could to further the founding of the University of Moscow, which was done in 1755 by the Empress Elizabeth. This last event is one of the most important landmarks in the history of Russian culture.

The foremost representative of French influence was PRINCE KANTEMIR (1708-44), who wrote the first Russian literary verse—satires—in the pseudo-classic French manner, modelled on Boileau. But by far the most abundant source of French ideas in Russia during the eighteenth century was Catherine II, the German Princess. During Catherine's reign, French influence was predominant in Russia. The Empress was the friend of Voltaire, Montesquieu, and Diderot. Diderot came to St. Petersburg, and the Russian military schools were flooded with French teachers. Voltaire and Rousseau were the fashion, and cultured society was platonically enamoured of the *Rights of Man*. Catherine herself, besides being a great ruler and diplomatist, was a large-minded philosopher, an elegant and witty writer. But the French Revolution had a damping effect on all liberal enthusiasm, for the one thing an autocrat, however enlightened, finds difficulty in understanding, is a revolution.

This change of point of view proved disastrous for the writer of what is the most thoughtful book of the age: namely RADISHCHEV, an official who wrote a book in twenty-five chapters called *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*. Radishchev gave a simple and true account of the effects of serfdom, a series of pictures drawn without exaggeration, showing the appalling evils of the system, and appealing to the conscience of the slave-owners; the book contained also a condemnation of the Censorship. It appeared in 1790, with the permission of the police. It was too late for the times; for in 1790 the events in France were making all the rulers of Europe pensive. Radishchev was accused of being a rebel, and was condemned to death. The sentence was commuted to one of banishment to Eastern Siberia. He was pardoned by the Emperor Paul, and reinstated by the Emperor Alexander; but he ultimately committed suicide on being threatened in jest with exile once more. Until 1905 it was very difficult to get a copy of this book. Thus Radishchev stands out as the martyr of Russian literature; the first writer to suffer for expressing opinions at the wrong moment: opinions which had they been stated in this case twenty years sooner would have coincided with those published by the Empress herself.

Catherine's reign, which left behind it many splendid results, and had the effect of bestowing European culture on Russia, produced hardly a single poet or prose-writer whose work can be read with pleasure to-day, although a great importance was attached to the writing of verse. There were poets in profusion, especially writers of Odes, the best known of whom was DERZHAVIN (1743-1816), a brilliant master of the pseudo-classical, in whose work, in spite of its antiquated convention, elements of real poetical

beauty are to be found, which entitle him to be called the first Russian poet. But so far no national literature had been produced. French was the language of the cultured classes. Literature had become an artificial plaything, to be played with according to French rules; but the Russian language was waiting there, a language which possessed, as Lomonosov said, “the vivacity of French, the strength of German, the softness of Italian, the richness and powerful conciseness of Greek and Latin”—waiting for some one who should have the desire and the power to use it.

FOOTNOTE:

[1] Another copy of it was found in 1864 amongst the papers of Catherine I. Pushkin left a remarkable analysis of the epic.

CHAPTER II

THE NEW AGE—PUSHKIN

The value of Russian literature, its peculiar and unique message to the world, would not be sensibly diminished, had everything it produced from the twelfth to the beginning of the nineteenth century perished, with the exception of *The Raid of Prince Igor*. With the beginning of the nineteenth century, and the accession of Alexander I, the New Age

began, and the real dawn of Russian literature broke. It was soon to be followed by a glorious sunrise. The literature which sprang up now and later, was profoundly affected by public events; and public events during this epoch were intimately linked with the events which were happening in Western Europe. It was the epoch of the Napoleonic wars, and Russia played a vital part in that drama. Public opinion, after enthusiasm had been roused by the deeds of Suvorov, was exasperated and humiliated by Napoleon's subsequent victories over Russian arms. But when Napoleon invaded Russia in 1812, a wave of patriotism swept over the country, and the struggle resulted in an increased sense of unity and nationality. Russia emerged stronger and more solid from the struggle. As far as foreign affairs were concerned, the Emperor Alexander I—on whom everything depended—played his national part well, and he fitly embodied the patriotic movement of the day. At the beginning of his reign he raised great hopes of internal reform which were never fulfilled. He was a dreamer of dreams born out of his due time; a pupil of La Harpe, the Swiss Jacobin, who instilled into him aspirations towards liberty, truth and humanity, which throughout remained his ideals, but which were too vague to lead to anything practical or definite. His reign was thus a series of more or less undefined and fitful struggles to put the crooked straight. He desired to give Russia a constitution, but the attempts he made to do so proved fruitless; and towards the end of his life he is said to have been considerably influenced by Metternich. It is at any rate a fact that during these years reaction once more triumphed.

Nevertheless windows had been opened which could not be shut, and the light which had streamed in

produced some remarkable fruits.

When Alexander I came to the throne, the immediate effect of his accession was the ungagging of literature, and the first writer of importance to take advantage of this new state of things was KARAMZIN (1726-1826). In 1802 he started a new review called the *Messenger of Europe*. This was not his *début*. In the reign of Catherine, Karamzin had been brought to Moscow from the provinces, and initiated into German and English literature. In 1789-90 he travelled abroad and visited Switzerland, London and Paris. On his return, he published his impressions in the shape of "Letters of a Russian Traveller" in the *Moscow Journal*, which he founded himself. His ideals were republican; he was an enthusiastic admirer of England and the Swiss, and the reforms of Peter the Great. But his importance in Russian literature lies in his being the first Russian to write unstudied, simple and natural prose, Russian as spoken. He published two sentimental stories in his *Journal*, but the reign of Catherine II which now came to an end (1796) was followed by a period of unmitigated censorship, which lasted throughout the reign of the Emperor Paul, until Alexander I came to the throne. The new review which Karamzin then started differed radically from all preceding Russian reviews in that it dealt with politics and made *belles lettres* and criticism a permanent feature. As soon as Karamzin had put this review on a firm basis, he devoted himself to historical research, and the fruit of his work in this field was his *History of the Russian Dominion*, in twelve volumes; eight published in 1816, the rest in 1821-1826. The Russian language was, as has been said, like an instrument waiting for a great player to play on it, and to make use of all its possibilities. Karamzin accomplished this, in the

domain of prose. He spoke to the Russian heart by speaking Russian, pure and unmarred by stilted and alien conventionalisms.

The publication of Karamzin's history was epoch-making. In the first place, the success of the work was overwhelming. It was the first time in Russian history that a prose work had enjoyed so immense a success. Not only were the undreamed-of riches of the Russian language revealed to the Russians in the style, but the subject-matter came as a surprise. Karamzin, as Pushkin put it, revealed Russia to the Russians, just as Columbus discovered America. He made the dry bones of history live, he wrote a great and glowing prose epic. His influence on his contemporaries was enormous. His work received at once the consecration of a classic, and it inspired Pushkin with his most important if not his finest achievement in dramatic verse (*Boris Godunov*).

The first Russian poet of national importance belongs likewise to this epoch, namely KRYLOV (1769[2]-1844), although he had written a great deal for the stage in the preceding reigns, and continued to write for a long time after the death of Alexander I. Krylov is also a Russian classic, of quite a different kind. The son of an officer of the line, he started by being a clerk in the provincial magistrature. Many of his plays were produced with success, though none of them had any durable qualities. But it was not until 1805 that he found his vocation which was to write fables. The first of these were published in 1806 in the *Moscow Journal*; from that time onward he went on writing fables until he died in 1844.

His early fables were translations from La Fontaine. They imitate La Fontaine's free versification and they

are written in iambics of varying length. They were at once successful, and he continued to translate fables from the French, or to adapt from Æsop or other sources. But as time went on, he began to invent fables of his own; and out of the two hundred fables which he left at his death, forty only are inspired by La Fontaine and seven suggested by Æsop: the remainder are original. Krylov's translations of La Fontaine are not so much translations as re-creations. He takes the same subject, and although often following the original in every single incident, he thinks out each *motif* for himself and re-creates it, so that his translations have the same personal stamp and the same originality as his own inventions.

This is true even when the original is a masterpiece of the highest order, such as La Fontaine's *Deux Pigeons*. You would think the opening lines—

> "Deux pigeons s'amoient
> d'amour tendre,
> L'un d'eux s'ennuyant au logis
> Fut assez fou pour entreprendre
> Un voyage en lointain pays"—

were untranslatable; that nothing could be subtracted from them, and that still less could anything be added; one ray the more, one shade the less, you would think, would certainly impair their nameless grace. But what does Krylov do? He re-creates the situation, expanding La Fontaine's first line into six lines, makes it his own, and stamps on it the impress of his personality and his nationality. Here is a literal translation of the Russian, in rhyme. (I am not ambitiously trying a third English version.)

"Two pigeons lived like sons
born of one mother.
Neither would eat nor drink
without the other;
Where you see one, the other's
surely near,
And every joy they halved and
every tear;
They never noticed how the
time flew by,
They sighed, but it was not a
weary sigh."

This gives the sense of Krylov's poem word for word, except for what is the most important touch of all in the last line. The trouble is that Krylov has written six lines which are as untranslatable as La Fontaine's four; and he has made them as profoundly Russian as La Fontaine's are French. Nothing could be more Russian than the last line, which it is impossible to translate; because it should run—

"They were sometimes sad, but
they never felt *ennui*"—

literally, "it was never *boring* to them." The difficulty is that the word for *boring* in Russian, *skuchno*, which occurs with the utmost felicity in contradistinction to *sad*, *grustno*, cannot be rendered in English in its poetical simplicity. There are no six lines more tender, musical, wistful, and subtly poetical in the whole of Russian literature.

Krylov's fables, like La Fontaine's, deal with animals, birds, fishes and men; the Russian peasant plays a large part in them; often they are satirical; nearly always they are bubbling with humour. A writer of

fables is essentially a satirist, whose aim it is sometimes to convey pregnant sense, keen mockery or scathing criticism in a veiled manner, sometimes merely to laugh at human foibles, or to express wisdom in the form of wit, yet whose aim it always is to amuse. But Krylov, though a satirist, succeeded in remaining a poet. It has been said that his images are conventional and outworn—that is to say, he uses the machinery of Zephyrs, Nymphs, Gods and Demigods,—and that his conceptions are antiquated. But what splendid use he makes of this machinery! When he speaks of a Zephyr you feel it is a Zephyr blowing, for instance, as when the ailing cornflower whispers to the breeze. Sometimes by the mere sound of his verse he conveys a picture, and more than a picture, as in the Fable of the Eagle and the Mole, in the first lines of which he makes you see and hear the eagle and his mate sweeping to the dreaming wood, and swooping down on to the oak-tree. Or again, in another fable, the Eagle and the Spider, he gives in a few words the sense of height and space, as if you were looking down from a balloon, when the eagle, soaring over the mountains of the Caucasus, sees the end of the earth, the rivers meandering in the plains, the woods, the meadows in all their spring glory, and the angry Caspian Sea, darkling like the wing of a raven in the distance. But his greatest triumph, in this respect, is the fable of the Ass and the Nightingale, in which the verse echoes the very trills of the nightingale, and renders the stillness and the delighted awe of the listeners,—the lovers and the shepherd. Again a convention, if you like, but what a felicitous convention!

The fables are discursive like La Fontaine's, and not brief like Æsop's; but like La Fontaine, Krylov has the gift of summing up a situation, of scoring a sharp

dramatic effect by the sudden evocation of a whole picture in a terse phrase: as, for instance, in the fable of the Peasants and the River: the peasants go to complain to the river of the conduct of the streams which are continually overflowing and destroying their goods, but when they reach the river, they see half their goods floating on it. “They looked at each other, and shaking their heads,” says Krylov, “went home.” The two words “went home” in Russian (*poshli domoi*) express their hopelessness more than pages of rhetoric. This is just one of those terse effects such as La Fontaine delights in.

Krylov in his youth lived much among the poor, and his language is peculiarly native, racy, nervous, and near to the soil. It is the language of the people and of the peasants, and it abounds in humorous turns. He is, moreover, always dramatic, and his fables are for this reason most effective when read aloud or recited. He is dramatic not only in that part of the fable which is narrative, but in the prologue, epilogue, or moral—the author’s commentary; he adapts himself to the tone of every separate fable, and becomes himself one of the *dramatis personæ*. Sometimes his fables deal with political events—the French Revolution, Napoleon’s invasion of Russia, the Congress of Vienna; the education of Alexander I by La Harpe, in the well-known fable of the Lion who sends his son to be educated by the Eagle, of whom he consequently learns how to make nests. Sometimes they deal with internal evils and abuses: the administration of justice, in fables such as that of the peasant who brings a case against the sheep and is found guilty by the fox; the censorship is aimed at in the fable of the nightingale bidden to sing in the cat’s claws; the futility of bureaucratic regulations in the fable of the sheep who are devoured by their

superfluous watchdogs, or in that of the sheep who are told solemnly and pompously to drag any offending wolf before the nearest magistrate; or, again, in that of the high dignitary who is admitted immediately into paradise because on earth he left his work to be done by his secretaries—for being obviously a fool, had he done his work himself, the result would have been disastrous to all concerned. Sometimes they deal merely with human follies and affairs, and the idiosyncrasies of men.

Krylov's fables have that special quality which only permanent classics possess of appealing to different generations, to people of every age, kind and class, for different reasons; so that children can read them simply for the story, and grown-up people for their philosophy; their style pleases the unlettered by its simplicity, and is the envy and despair of the artist in its supreme art. Pushkin calls him "le plus national et le plus populaire de nos poètes" (this was true in Pushkin's day), and said his fables were read by men of letters, merchants, men of the world, servants and children. His work bears the stamp of ageless modernity just as *The Pilgrim's Progress* or Cicero's letters seem modern. It also has the peculiarly Russian quality of unexaggerated realism. He sees life as it is, and writes down what he sees. It is true that although his style is finished and polished, he only at times reaches the high-water mark of what can be done with the Russian language: his style, always idiomatic, pregnant and natural, is sometimes heavy, and even clumsy; but then he never sets out to be anything more than a fabulist. In this he is supremely successful, and since at the same time he gives us snatches of exquisite poetry, the greater the praise to him. But, when all is said and done, Krylov has the talisman which defies criticism, baffles

analysis, and defeats time: namely, charm. His fables achieved an instantaneous popularity, which has never diminished until to-day.

Internal political events proved the next factor in Russian literature; a factor out of which the so-called romantic movement was to grow.

During the Napoleonic wars a great many Russian officers had lived abroad. They came back to Russia after the Congress of Vienna in 1815, teeming with new ideas and new ideals. They took life seriously, and were called by Pushkin the Puritans of the North. Their aim was culture and the public welfare. They were not revolutionaries; on the contrary, they were anxious to co-operate with the Government. They formed for their purpose a society, in imitation of the German *Tugendbund*, called *The Society of Welfare*: its aims were philanthropic, educational, and economic. It consisted chiefly of officers of the Guard, and its headquarters were at St. Petersburg. All this was known and approved of by the Emperor. But when the Government became reactionary, this peaceful progressive movement changed its character. The Society of Welfare was closed in 1821, and its place was taken by two new societies, which, instead of being political, were social and revolutionary. The success of the revolutionary movements in Spain and in Italy encouraged these societies to follow their example.

The death of Alexander I in 1825 forced them to immediate action. The shape it took was the "Decembrist" rising. Constantine, the Emperor's brother, renounced his claim to the throne, and was succeeded by his brother Nicholas. December 14 (O.S.) was fixed for the day on which the Emperor

should receive the oath of allegiance of his troops. An organized insurrection took place, which was confined to certain regiments. The Emperor was supported by the majority of the Guards regiments, and the people showed no signs of supporting the rising, which was at once suppressed.

One hundred and twenty-five of the conspirators were condemned. Five of them were hanged, and among them the poet RYLEEV (1795-1826). But although the political results of the movement were nil, the effect of the movement on literature was far-reaching. Philosophy took the place of politics, and liberalism was diverted into the channel of romanticism; but out of this romantic movement came the springtide of Russian poetry, in which, for the first time, the soul of the Russian people found adequate expression. And the very fact that politics were excluded from the movement proved, in one sense, a boon to literature: for it gave Russian men of genius the chance to be writers, artists and poets, and prevented them from exhausting their whole energy in being inefficient politicians or unsuccessful revolutionaries. I will dwell on the drawbacks, on the dark side of the medal, presently.

As far as the actual Decembrist movement is concerned, its concrete and direct legacy to literature consists in the work of Ryleev, and its indirect legacy in the most famous comedy of the Russian stage, *Gore ot Uma*, "The Misfortune of being Clever," by GRIBOYEDOV (1795-1829).

Ryleev's life was cut short before his poetical powers had come to maturity. It is idle to speculate what he might have achieved had he lived longer. The work which he left is notable for its pessimism, but still

suffers from the old rhetorical conventions of the eighteenth century and the imitation of French models; moreover he looked on literature as a matter of secondary importance. “I am not a poet,” he said, “I am a citizen.” In spite of this, every now and then there are flashes of intense poetical inspiration in his work; and he struck one or two powerful chords—for instance, in his stanzas on the vision of enslaved Russia, which have a tense strength and fire that remind one of Emily Brontë. He was a poet as well as a citizen, but even had he lived to a prosperous old age and achieved artistic perfection in his work, he could never have won a brighter aureole than that which his death gained him. The poems of his last days in prison breathe a spirit of religious humility, and he died forgiving and praying for his enemies. His name shines in Russian history and Russian literature, as that of a martyr to a high ideal.

Griboyedov, the author of *Gore ot Uma*, a writer of a very different order, although not a Decembrist himself, is a product of that period. His comedy still remains the unsurpassed masterpiece of Russian comedy, and can be compared with Beaumarchais’ *Figaro* and Sheridan’s *School for Scandal*.

Griboyedov was a Foreign Office official, and he was murdered when Minister Plenipotentiary at Teheran, on January 30, 1829. He conceived the plot of his play in 1816, and read aloud some scenes in St. Petersburg in 1823-24. They caused a sensation in literary circles, and the play began to circulate rapidly in MSS. Two fragments of the drama were published in one of the almanacs, which then took the place of literary reviews. But beyond this, Griboyedov could neither get his play printed nor acted. Thousands of copies circulated in MSS., but

the play was not produced on the stage until 1831, and then much mutilated; and it was not printed until 1833.

Gore ot Uma is written in verse, in iambics of varying length, like Krylov's fables. The unities are preserved. The action takes place in one day and in the same house—that of Famusov, an elderly gentleman of the Moscow upper class holding a Government appointment. He is a widower and has one daughter, Sophia, whose sensibility is greater than her sense; and the play opens on a scene where the father discovers her talking to his secretary, Molchalin, and says he will stand no nonsense. Presently, the friend of Sophia's childhood, Chatsky, arrives after a three years' absence abroad; Chatsky is a young man of independent ideas whose misfortune it is to be clever. He notices that Sophia receives him coldly, and later on he perceives that she is in love with Molchalin,—a wonderfully drawn type, the perfect climber, time-server and place-seeker, and the incarnation of convention,—who does not care a rap for Sophia. Chatsky declaims to Famusov his contempt for modern Moscow, for the slavish worship by society of all that is foreign, for its idolatry of fashion and official rank, its hollowness and its convention. Famusov, the incarnation of respectable conventionality, does not understand one word of what he is saying.

At an evening party given at Famusov's house, Chatsky is determined to find out whom Sophia loves. He decides it is Molchalin, and lets fall a few biting sarcasms about him to Sophia; and Sophia, to pay him back for his sarcasm, lets it be understood by one of the guests that he is mad. The half-spoken hint spreads like lightning; and the spreading of the

news is depicted in a series of inimitable scenes. Chatsky enters while the subject is being discussed, and delivers a long tirade on the folly of Moscow society, which only confirms the suspicions of the guests; and he finds when he gets to the end of his speech that he is speaking to an empty room.

In the fourth act we see the guests leaving the house after the party. Chatsky is waiting for his carriage. Sophia appears on the staircase and calls Molchalin. Chatsky, hearing her voice, hides behind a pillar. Liza, Sophia's maid, comes to fetch Molchalin, and knocks at his door. Molchalin comes out, and not knowing that Sophia or Chatsky are within hearing, makes love to Liza and tells her that he only loves Sophia out of duty. Then Sophia appears, having heard everything. Molchalin falls on his knees to her: she is quite inexorable. Chatsky comes forward and begins to speak his mind—when all is interrupted by the arrival of Famusov, who speaks his. Chatsky shakes the dust of the house and of Moscow off his feet, and Sophia is left without Chatsky and without Molchalin.

The *Gore ot Uma* is a masterpiece of satire rather than a masterpiece of dramatic comedy. That is to say that, as a satire of the Moscow society of the day and of the society of yesterday, and of to-morrow, it is immortal, and forms a complete work: but as a comedy it does not. Almost every scene separately is perfect in itself, but dramatically it does not group itself round one central idea or one mainspring of action. Judged from the point of view of dramatic propriety, the behaviour of the hero is wildly improbable throughout; there is no reason for the spectator to think he should be in love with Sophia; if he is, there is no reason for him to behave as he

does; if a man behaved like that, declaiming at an evening party long speeches on the decay of the times, the most frivolous of societies would be justified in thinking him mad.

Pushkin hit on the weak point of the play as a play when he wrote: "In *The Misfortune of being Clever* the question arises, Who is clever? and the answer is Griboyedov. Chatsky is an honourable young man who has lived for a long time with a clever man (that is to say with Griboyedov), and learnt his clever sarcasms; but to whom does he say them? To Famusov, to the old ladies at the party. This is unforgivable, because the first sign of a clever man is to know at once whom he is dealing with."

But what makes the work a masterpiece is the naturalness of the characters, the dialogue, the comedy of the scenes which represent Moscow society. It is extraordinary that on so small a scale, in four short acts, Griboyedov should have succeeded in giving so complete a picture of Moscow society, and should have given the dialogue, in spite of its being in verse, the stamp of conversational familiarity. The portraits are all full-length portraits, and when the play is produced now, the rendering of each part raises as much discussion in Russia as a revival of one of Sheridan's comedies in England.

As for the style, nearly three-quarters of the play has passed into the Russian language. It is forcible, concise, bitingly sarcastic, it is as neat and dry as W. S. Gilbert, as elegant as La Fontaine, as clear as an icicle, and as clean as the thrust of a sword. But perhaps the crowning merit of this immortal satire is its originality. It is a product of Russian life and Russian genius, and as yet it is without a rival.

Outside the current of politics and political aspirations, there appeared during this same epoch a poet who exercised a considerable influence over Russian literature, and who devoted himself exclusively to poetry. This was BASIL ZHUKOVSKY (1783-1852). He opened the door of Russian literature on the fields of German and English poetry. The first poem he published in 1802 was a translation of Gray's *Elegy*; this, and an imitation of Bürger's *Leonore*, which affected all Slav literatures, brought him fame. Later, he translated Schiller's *Maid of Orleans*, his ballads, some of the lyrics of Uhland, Goethe, Hebbel, and a great quantity of other foreign poems. His translations were faithful, but in spite of this he gave them the stamp of his own dreamy personality. He was made tutor to the Tsarevitch Alexander—afterwards Alexander II,—and for a time his production ceased; but when this task was finished, he braced himself in his old age to translate *The Odyssey*, and this translation appeared in 1848-50. In this work he obeyed the first great law of translation, "Thou shalt not turn a good poem into a bad one." He produced a beautiful work; but he also did what all other translators of Homer have done; he took the Homer out and left the Zhukovsky, and with it something sentimental, elegiac, and didactic.

Zhukovsky's greatest service to Russian literature consisted in his exploding the superstition that the literature of France was the only literature that counted, and introducing literary Russia to the poets of England and Germany rather than of France. But apart from this, he is the first and best translator in European literature, for what Krylov did with some of La Fontaine's fables, he did for all the literature he touched—he re-created it in Russian, and made it his

own. In his translation of Gray's *Elegy*, for instance, he not only translates the poet's meaning into musical verse, but he conveys the intangible atmosphere of dreamy landscape, and the poignant accent which makes that poem the natural language of grief. It is characteristic of him that, thirty-seven years after he translated the poem, he visited Stoke Poges, re-read Gray's *Elegy* there, and made another translation, which is still more faithful than the first.

The Russian language was by this time purified from all outward excrescences, released from the bondage of convention and the pseudo-classical, open to all outside influences, and only waiting, like a ready-tuned instrument, on which Krylov and Zhukovsky had already sounded sweet notes and deep tones, and which Karamzin had proved to be a magnificent vehicle for musical and perspicuous prose, for a poet of genius to come and sound it from its lowest note to the top of its compass, for there was indeed much music and excellent voice to be plucked from it. At the appointed hour the man came. It was PUSHKIN. He arrived at a time when a battle of words was raging between the so-called classical and romantic schools. The pseudo-classical, with all its mythological machinery and conventional apparatus, was totally alien to Russia, and a direct and slavish imitation of the French. On the other hand, the utmost confusion reigned as to what constituted romanticism. To each single writer it meant a different thing: "Enfonçez Racine," and the unities, in one case; or ghosts, ballads, legends, local colour in another; or the defiance of morality and society in another. Zhukovsky, in introducing German romanticism into Russia, paved the way for its death, and for the death of all exotic fashions and models; for he paved the way for Pushkin to render the

whole quarrel obsolete by creating models of his own and by founding a national literature.

Pushkin was born on May 26, 1799, at Moscow. He was of ancient lineage, and inherited African negro blood on his mother's side, his mother's grandmother being the daughter of Peter the Great's negro, Hannibal. Until he was nine years old, he did not show signs of any unusual precocity; but from then onwards he was seized with a passion for reading which lasted all his life. He read Plutarch's *Lives*, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in a translation. He then devoured all the French books he found in his father's library. Pushkin was gifted with a photographic memory, which retained what he read immediately and permanently. His first efforts at writing were in French,—comedies, which he performed himself to an audience of his sisters. He went to school in 1812 at the Lyceum of Tsarskoe Selo, a suburb of St. Petersburg. His school career was not brilliant, and his leaving certificate qualifies his achievements as mediocre, even in Russian. But during the six years he spent at the Lyceum, he continued to read voraciously. His favourite poet at this time was Voltaire. He began to write verse, first in French and then in Russian; some of it was printed in 1814 and 1815 in reviews, and in 1815 he declaimed his *Recollections of Tsarskoe Selo* in public at the Lyceum examination, in the presence of Derzhavin the poet.

The poems which he wrote at school afterwards formed part of his collected works. In these poems, consisting for the greater part of anacreontics and epistles, although they are immature, and imitative, partly of contemporary authors such as Derzhavin and Zhukovsky, and partly of the French anacreontic

school of poets, such as Voltaire, Gresset and Parny, the sound of a new voice was unmistakable. Indeed, not only his contemporaries, but the foremost representatives of the Russian literature of that day, Derzhavin, Karamzin and Zhukovsky, made no mistake about it. They greeted the first notes of this new lyre with enthusiasm. Zhukovsky used to visit the boy poet at school and read out his verse to him. Derzhavin was enthusiastic over the recitation of his *Recollections of Tsarskoe Selo*. Thus fame came to Pushkin as easily as the gift of writing verse. He had lisped in numbers, and as soon as he began to speak in them, his contemporaries immediately recognized and hailed the new voice. He did not wake up and find himself famous like Byron, but he walked into the Hall of Fame as naturally as a young heir steps into his lawful inheritance. If we compare Pushkin's school-boy poetry with Byron's *Hours of Idleness*, it is easy to understand how this came about. In the *Hours of Idleness* there is, perhaps, only one poem which would hold out hopes of serious promise; and the most discerning critics would have been justified in being careful before venturing to stake any great hopes on so slender a hint. But in Pushkin's early verse, although the subject-matter is borrowed, and the style is still irregular and careless, it is none the less obvious that it flows from the pen of the author without effort or strain; and besides this, certain coins of genuine poetry ring out, bearing the image and superscription of a new mint, the mint of Pushkin.

When the first of his poems to attract the attention of a larger audience, *Ruslan and Ludmila*, was published, in 1820, it was greeted with enthusiasm by the public; but it had already won the suffrages of that circle which counted most, that is to say, the

leading men of letters of the day, who had heard it read out in MSS. For as soon as Pushkin left school and stepped into the world, he was received into the literary circle of the day on equal terms. After he had read aloud the first cantos of *Ruslan and Ludmila* at Zhukovsky's literary evenings, Zhukovsky gave him his portrait with this inscription: "To the pupil, from his defeated master"; and BATYUSHKOV, a poet who, after having been influenced, like Pushkin, by Voltaire and Parny, had gone back to the classics, Horace and Tibullus, and had introduced the classic anacreontic school of poetry into Russia, was astonished to find a young man of the world outplaying him without any trouble on the same lyre, and exclaimed, "Oh! how well the rascal has started writing!"

The publication of *Ruslan and Ludmila* sealed Pushkin's reputation definitely, as far as the general public was concerned, although some of the professional critics treated the poem with severity. The subject of the poem was a Russian fairy-tale, and the critics blamed the poet for having recourse to what they called Russian folk-lore, which they considered to be unworthy of the poetic muse. One review complained that Pushkin's choice of subject was like introducing a bearded unkempt peasant into a drawing-room, while others blamed him for dealing with national stuff in a flippant spirit. But the curious thing is that, while the critics blamed him for his choice of subject, and his friends and the public defended him for it, quoting all sorts of precedents, the poem has absolutely nothing in common, either in its spirit, style or characterization, with native Russian folk-lore and fairy-tales. Much later on in his career, Pushkin was to show what he could do with Russian folk-lore. But *Ruslan and*

Ludmila, which, as far as its form is concerned, has a certain superficial resemblance to Ariosto, is in reality the result of the French influence, under which Pushkin had been ever since his cradle, and which in this poem blazes into the sky like a rocket, and bursts into a shower of sparks, never to return again.

There is no passion in the poem and no irony, but it is young, fresh, full of sensuous, not to say sensual images, interruptions, digressions, and flippant epigrams. Pushkin wondered afterwards that nobody noticed the coldness of the poem; the truth was that the eyes of the public were dazzled by the fresh sensuous images, and their ears were taken captive by the new voice: for the importance of the poem lies in this—that the new voice which the literary pundits had already recognized in the Lyceum of Tsarskoe Selo was now speaking to the whole world, and all Russia became aware that a young man was among them "with mouth of gold and morning in his eyes." *Ruslan and Ludmila* has just the same sensuous richness, fresh music and fundamental coldness as Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*. After finishing the poem, Pushkin added a magnificent and moving Epilogue, written from the Caucasus in the year of its publication (1820); and when the second edition was published in 1828, he added a Prologue in his finest manner which tells of Russian fairy-land.

After leaving school in 1817, until 1820, Pushkin plunged into the gay life of St. Petersburg. He wanted to be a Hussar, but his father could not afford it. In default he became a Foreign Office official; but he did not take this profession seriously. He consorted with the political youth and young Liberals of the day; he scattered stinging epigrams

and satirical epistles broadcast. He sympathized with the Decembrists, but took no part in their conspiracy. He would probably have ended by doing so; but, luckily for Russian literature, he was transferred in 1820 from the Foreign Office to the Chancery of General Inzov in the South of Russia; and from 1820 to 1826 he lived first at Kishinev, then at Odessa, and finally in his own home at Pskov. This enforced banishment was of the greatest possible service to the poet; it took him away from the whirl and distractions of St. Petersburg; it prevented him from being compromised in the drama of the Decembrists; it ripened and matured his poetical genius; it provided him, since it was now that he visited the Caucasus and the Crimea for the first time, with new subject-matter.

During this period he learnt Italian and English, and came under the influence of André Chénier and Byron. André Chénier's influence is strongly felt in a series of lyrics in imitation of the classics; but these lyrics were altogether different from the anacreontics of his boyhood. Byron's influence is first manifested in a long poem *The Prisoner of the Caucasus*. It is Byronic in the temperament of the hero, who talks in the strain of the earlier Childe Harold; he is young, but feels old; tired of life, he seeks for consolation in the loneliness of nature in the Caucasus. He is taken prisoner by mountain tribesmen, and set free by a girl who drowns herself on account of her unrequited love. Pushkin said later that the poem was immature, but that there were verses in it that came from his heart. There is one element in the poem which is by no means immature, and that is the picture of the Caucasus, which is executed with much reality and simplicity. Pushkin annexed the Caucasus to Russian poetry. The Crimea inspired him with another tale,

also Byronic in some respects, *The Fountain of Baghchi-Sarai*, which tells of a Tartar Khan and his Christian slave, who is murdered out of jealousy by a former favourite, herself drowned by the orders of the Khan. Here again the descriptions are amazing, and Pushkin draws out a new stop of rich and voluptuous music.

In speaking of the influence of Byron over Pushkin it is necessary to discriminate. Byron helped Pushkin to discover himself; Byron revealed to him his own powers, showed him the way out of the French garden where he had been dwelling, and acted as a guide to fresh woods and pastures new. But what Pushkin took from the new provinces to which the example of Byron led him was entirely different from what Byron sought there. Again, the methods and workmanship of the two poets were radically different. Pushkin is never imitative of Byron; but Byron opened his eyes to a new world, and indeed did for him what Chapman's *Homer* did for Keats. It frequently happens that when a poet is deeply struck by the work of another poet he feels a desire to write something himself, but something different. Thus Pushkin's mental intercourse with Byron had the effect of bracing the talent of the Russian poet and spurring him on to the conquest of new worlds.

Pushkin's six years' banishment to his own country had the effect of revealing to him the reality and seriousness of his vocation as a poet, and the range and strength of his gifts. It was during this period that besides the works already mentioned he wrote some of his finest lyrics, *The Conversation between the Bookseller and the Poet*—perhaps the most perfect of his shorter poems—it contains four lines to have written which Turgenev said he would have burnt

the whole of his works—a larger poem called *The Gypsies*; his dramatic chronicle *Boris Godunov*, and the beginning of his masterpiece *Onegin*; several ballads, including *The Sage Oleg,* and an unfinished romance, the *Robber Brothers*.

Not only is the richness of his output during this period remarkable, but the variety and the high level of art maintained in all the different styles which he attempted and mastered. *The Gypsies* (1827), which was received with greater favour by the public than any of his poems, either earlier or later, is the story of a disappointed man, Aleko, who leaves the world and takes refuge with gypsies. A tragically ironical situation is the result. The anarchic nature of the Byronic misanthrope brings tragedy into the peaceful life of the people, who are lawless because they need no laws. Aleko loves and marries the gypsy Zemfira, but after a time she tires of him, and loves a young gypsy. Aleko surprises them and kills them both. Then Zemfira's father banishes him from the gypsies' camp. He, too, had been deceived. When his wife Mariula had been untrue and had left him, he had attempted no vengeance, but had brought up her daughter.

"Leave us, proud man," he says to Aleko. "We are a wild people; we have no laws, we torture not, neither do we punish; we have no use for blood or groans; we will not live with a man of blood. Thou wast not made for the wild life. For thyself alone thou claimest licence; we are shy and good-natured; thou art evil-minded and presumptuous. Farewell, and peace be with thee!"

The charm of the poem lies in the descriptions of the gypsy camp and the gypsy life, the snatches of gypsy

song, and the characterization of the gypsies, especially of the women. It is not surprising the poem was popular; it breathes a spell, and the reading of it conjures up before one the wandering life, the camp-fire, the soft speech and the song; and makes one long to go off with “the raggle-taggle gypsies O!”

Byron’s influence soon gave way to that of Shakespeare, who opened a still larger field of vision to the Russian poet. In 1825 he writes: “Quel homme que ce Shakespeare! Je n’en reviens pas. Comme Byron le tragique est mesquin devant lui! Ce Byron qui n’a jamais conçu qu’un seul caractère et c’est le sien ... ce Byron donc a partagé entre ses personages tel et tel trait de son caractère: son orgeuil à l’un, sa haine à l’autre, sa mélancolie au troisième, etc., et c’est ainsi d’un caractère plein, sombre et énergique, il a fait plusieurs caractères insignifiants; ce n’est pas là de la tragédie. On a encore une manie. Quand on a conçu un caractère, tout ce qu’on lui fait dire, même les choses les plus étranges, en porte essentiellement l’empreinte, comme les pédants et les marins dans les vieux romans de Fielding. Voyez le haineux de Byron ... et là-dessus lisez Shakespeare. Il ne craint jamais de compromettre son personage, il le fait parler avec tout l’abandon de la vie, car il est sûr en temps et lieu, de lui faire trouver le langage de son caractère. Vous me demanderez: votre tragédie est-elle une tragédie de caractère ou de costume? J’ai choisi le genre le plus aisé, mais j’ai tâché de les unir tous deux. J’écris et je pense. La plupart des scènes ne demandent que du raisonnement; quand j’arrive à une scène qui demande de l’inspiration, j’attends ou je passe dessus.”

I quote this letter because it throws light, firstly, on

Pushkin's matured opinion of Byron, and, secondly, on his methods of work; for, like Leonardo da Vinci, he formed the habit, which he here describes, of leaving unwritten passages where inspiration was needed, until he felt the moment of *bien être* when inspiration came; and this not only in writing his tragedy, but henceforward in everything that he wrote, as his note-books testify.

The subject-matter of *Boris Godunov* was based on Karamzin's history: it deals with the dramatic episode of the Russian Perkin Warbeck, the false Demetrius who pretended to be the murdered son of Ivan the Terrible. The play is constructed on the model of Shakespeare's chronicle plays, but in a still more disjointed fashion, without a definite beginning or end: when Mussorgsky made an opera out of it, the action was concentrated into definite acts; for, as it stands, it is not a play, but a series of scenes. Pushkin had not the power of conceiving and executing a drama which should move round one idea to an inevitable close. He had not the gift of dramatic architectonics, and still less that of stage carpentry. On the other hand, the scenes, whether they be tragic and poetical, or scenes of common life, are as vivid as any in Shakespeare; the characters are all alive, and they speak a language which is at the same time ancient, living, and convincing.

In saying that Pushkin lacks the gift of stage architectonics and stage carpentry, it is not merely meant that he lacked the gift of arranging acts that would suit the stage, or that of imagining stage effects. His whole play is not conceived as a drama; a subject from which a drama might be written is taken, but the drama is left unwritten. We see Boris Godunov on the throne, which he has unlawfully

usurped; we know he feels remorse; he tells us so in monologues; we see his soul stripped before us, bound upon a wheel of fire, and we watch the wheel revolve; and that is all the moral and spiritual action that the part contains; he is static and not dynamic, he never has to make up his mind; his will never has to encounter the shock of another will during the whole play. Neither does the chronicle centre round the Pretender. It is true that we see the idea of impersonating the Tsarevitch dawning in his mind; and it is also true that in one scene with his Polish love, Marina, we see him dynamically moving in a dramatic situation. She loves him because she thinks he is the son of an anointed King. He loves her too much to deceive her, and tells her the truth. She then says she will have nothing of him; and then he rises from defeat and shame to the height of the situation, becomes great, and, not unlike Browning's Sludge, says: "Although I am an impostor, I am born to be a King all the same; I am one of Nature's Kings; and I defy you to oust me from the situation. Tell every one what I have told you. Nobody will believe you." And Marina is conquered once more by his conduct and bearing.

This scene is sheer drama; it is the conflict of two wills and two souls. But there the matter ends. The kaleidoscope is shaken, and we are shown a series of different patterns, in which the heroine plays no part at all, and in which the hero only makes a momentary appearance. The fact is there is neither hero nor heroine in the play. It is not a play, but a chronicle; and it would be foolish to blame Pushkin for not accomplishing what he never attempted. As a chronicle, a series of detached scenes, it is supremely successful. There are certain scenes which attain to sublimity: for instance, that in the cell of the

monastery, where the monk is finishing his chronicle; and the monologue in which Boris speaks his remorse, and his dying speech to his son. The verse in these scenes is sealed with the mark of that God-gifted ease and high seriousness, which belong only to the inspired great. They are Shakespearean, not because they imitate Shakespeare, but because they attain to heights of imaginative truth to which Shakespeare rises more often than any other poet; and the language in these scenes has a simplicity, an inevitableness, an absence of all conscious effort and of all visible art and artifice, a closeness of utterance combined with a width of suggestion which belong only to the greatest artists, to the Greeks, to Shakespeare, to Dante.

Boris Godunov was not published until January 1, 1831, and passed, with one exception, absolutely unnoticed by the critics. Like so many great works, it came before its time; and it was not until years afterwards that the merits of this masterpiece were understood and appreciated.

In 1826 Pushkin's banishment to the country came to an end; in that year he was allowed to go to Moscow, and in 1827 to St. Petersburg. In 1826 his poems appeared in one volume, and the second canto of *Onegin* (the first had appeared in 1825). In 1827 *The Gypsies*, and the third canto of *Onegin*; in 1828 the fourth, fifth, and sixth cantos of *Onegin*; in 1829 *Graf Nulin*, an admirably told *Conte* such as Maupassant might have written, of a deceived husband and a wife who, finding herself in the situation of Lucretia, gives the would-be Tarquin a box on the ears, but succeeds, nevertheless, in being unfaithful with some one else—the *Cottage of Kolomna* is another story in the same vein—and in the same year *Poltava*.

This poem was written in one month, in St. Petersburg. The subject is Mazepa, with whom the daughter of his hereditary enemy, Kochubey, whom he afterwards tortures and kills, falls in love. But it is in reality the epic of Peter the Great.[3] When the poem was published, it disconcerted the critics and the public. It revealed an entirely new phase of Pushkin's style, and it should have widened the popular conception of the poet's powers and versatility. But at the time the public only knew Pushkin through his lyrics and his early tales; *Boris Godunov* had not yet been published; moreover, the public of that day expected to find in a poem passion and the delineation of the heart's adventures. This stern objective fragment of an epic, falling into their sentimental world of keepsakes, ribbons, roses and cupids, like a bas-relief conceived by a Titan and executed by a god, met with little appreciation. The poet's verse which, so far as the public knew it, had hitherto seemed like a shining and luscious fruit, was exchanged for a concentrated weighty tramp of ringing rhyme, *martelé* like steel. It is as if Tennyson had followed up his early poems in a style as concise as that of Pope and as concentrated as that of Browning's dramatic lyrics. The poem is a fit monument to Peter the Great, and the great monarch's impetuous genius and passion for thorough craftsmanship seem to have entered into it.

In 1829 Pushkin made a second journey to the Caucasus, the result of which was a harvest of lyrics. On his return to St. Petersburg he sketched the plan of another epic poem, *Galub*, dealing with the Caucasus, but this remained a fragment.

In 1831 he finished the eighth and last canto of *Onegin*. Originally there were nine cantos, but when

the work was published one of the cantos dealing with Onegin's travels was left out as being irrelevant. Pushkin had worked at this poem since 1823. It was Byron's *Beppo* which gave him the idea of writing a poem on modern life; but here again, he made of the idea something quite different from any of Byron's work. *Onegin* is a novel. Eugene Onegin is the name of the hero. It is, moreover, the first Russian novel; and as a novel it has never been surpassed. It is as real as Tolstoy, as finished in workmanship and construction as Turgenev. It is a realistic novel; not realistic in the sense that Zola's work was mis-called realistic, but realistic in the sense that Miss Austen is realistic. The hero is the average man about St. Petersburg; his father, a worthy public servant, lives honourably on debts and gives three balls a year. Onegin is brought up, not too strictly, by "Monsieur l'Abbé"; he goes out in the world clothed by a London tailor, fluent in French, and able to dance the Mazurka.

Onegin can touch on every subject, can hold his tongue when the conversation becomes too serious, and make epigrams. He knows enough Latin to construe an epitaph, to talk about Juvenal, and put "Vale!" at the end of his letters, and he can remember two lines of the *Æneid*. He is severe on Homer and Theocritus, but has read Adam Smith. The only art in which he is proficient is the *ars amandi* as taught by Ovid. He is a patron of the ballet; he goes to balls; he eats beef-steaks and *paté de foie gras*. In spite of all this—perhaps because of it—he suffers from spleen, like Childe Harold, the author says. His father dies, leaving a lot of debts behind him, but a dying uncle summons him to the country; and when he gets there he finds his uncle dead, and himself the inheritor of the estate. In the

country, he is just as much bored as he was in St. Petersburg. A new neighbour arrives in the shape of Lensky, a young man fresh from Germany, an enthusiast and a poet, and full of Kant, Schiller, and the German writers. Lensky introduces Onegin to the neighbouring family, by name Larin, consisting of a widow and two daughters. Lensky is in love with the younger daughter, Olga, who is simple, fresh, blue-eyed, with a round face, as Onegin says, like the foolish moon. The elder sister, Tatiana, is less pretty; shy and dreamy, she conceals under her retiring and wistful ways a clean-cut character and a strong will.

Tatiana is as real as any of Miss Austen's heroines; as alive as Fielding's Sophia Western, and as charming as any of George Meredith's women; as sensible as Portia, as resolute as Juliet. Turgenev, with all his magic, and Tolstoy, with all his command over the colours of life, never created a truer, more radiant, and more typically Russian woman. She is the type of all that is best in the Russian woman; that is to say, of all that is best in Russia; and it is a type taken straight from life, and not from fairy-land—a type that exists as much to-day as it did in the days of Pushkin. She is the first of that long gallery of Russian women which Turgenev, Tolstoy, and Dostoyevsky have given us, and which are the most precious jewels of Russian literature, because they reflect the crowning glory of Russian life. Tatiana falls in love with Onegin at first sight. She writes to him and confesses her love, and in all the love poetry of the world there is nothing more touching and more simple than this confession. It is perfect. If Pushkin had written this and this alone, his place among poets would be unique and different from that of all other poets.

Possibly some people may think that there are finer achievements in the love poetry of the world; but nothing is so futile and so impertinent as giving marks to the great poets, as if they were passing an examination. If a thing is as good as possible in itself, what is the use of saying that it is less good or better than something else, which is as good as possible in itself also. Nevertheless, placed beside any of the great confessions of love in poetry—Francesca's story in the *Inferno*, Romeo and Juliet's leavetaking, Phèdre's declaration, Don Juan Tenorio's letter—the beauty of Tatiana's confession would not be diminished by the juxtaposition. Of the rest of Pushkin's work at its best and highest, of the finest passages of *Boris Godunov*, for instance, you can say: This is magnificent, but there are dramatic passages in other works of other poets on the same lines and as fine; but in Tatiana's letter Pushkin has created something unique, which has no parallel, because only a Russian could have written it, and of Russians, only he. It is a piece of poetry as pure as a crystal, as spontaneous as a blackbird's song.

Onegin tells Tatiana he is not worthy of her, that he is not made for love and marriage; that he would cease to love her at once; that he feels for her like a brother, or perhaps a little more tenderly. It then falls out that Onegin, by flirting with Olga at a ball, makes Lensky jealous. They fight a duel, and Lensky is killed. Onegin is obliged to leave the neighbourhood, and spends years in travel. Tatiana remains true to her first love; but she is taken by her relatives to Moscow, and consents at last under their pressure to marry a rich man of great position. In St. Petersburg, Onegin meets her again. Tatiana has become a great lady, but all her old charm is there. Onegin now falls violently in love with her; but she,

although she frankly confesses that she still loves him, tells him that it is too late; she has married another, and she means to remain true to him. And there the story ends.

Onegin is, perhaps, Pushkin's most characteristic work; it is undoubtedly the best known and the most popular; like *Hamlet*, it is all quotations. Pushkin in his *Onegin* succeeded in doing what Shelley urged Byron to do—to create something new and in accordance with the spirit of the age, which should at the same time be beautiful. He did more than this. He succeeded in creating for Russia a poem that was purely national, and in giving his country a classic, a model both in construction, matter, form, and inspiration for future generations. Perhaps the greatest quality of this poem is its vividness. Pushkin himself speaks, in taking leave, of having seen the unfettered march of his novel in a magic prism. This is just the impression that the poem gives; the scenes are as clear as the shapes in a crystal; nothing is blurred; there are no hesitating notes, nothing *à peu près*; every stroke comes off; the nail is hit on the head every time, only so easily that you do not notice the strokes, and all labour escapes notice. Apart from this the poem is amusing; it arrests the attention as a story, and it delights the intelligence with its wit, its digressions, and its brilliance. It is as witty as Don Juan and as consummately expressed as Pope; and when the occasion demands it, the style passes in easy transition to serious or tender tones. *Onegin* has been compared to Byron's *Don Juan*. There is this likeness, that both poems deal with contemporary life, and in both poems the poets pass from grave to gay, from severe to lively, and often interrupt the narrative to apostrophize the reader. But there the likeness ends. On the other hand, there

is a vast difference. *Onegin* contains no adventures. It is a story of everyday life. Moreover, it is an organic whole: so well constructed that it fits into a stage libretto—Tchaikovsky made an opera out of it—without difficulty. There is another difference—a difference which applies to Pushkin and Byron in general. There is no unevenness in Pushkin; his work, as far as craft is concerned, is always on the same high level. You can admire the whole, or cut off any single passage and it will still remain admirable; whereas Byron must be taken as a whole or not at all—the reason being that Pushkin was an impeccable artist in form and expression, and that Byron was not.

In the winter of 1832 Pushkin sought a new field, the field of historical research; and by the beginning of 1833 he had not only collected all the materials for a history of Pugachev, the Cossack who headed a rising in the reign of Catherine II; but his literary activity was so great that he had also written the rough sketch of a long story in prose dealing with the same subject, *The Captain's Daughter*, another prose story of considerable length, *Dubrovsky*, and portions of a drama, *Rusalka*, The Water Nymph, which was never finished. Besides *Boris Godunov* and the *Rusalka*, Pushkin wrote a certain number of dramatic scenes, or short dramas in one or more scenes. Of these, one, *The Feast in the Time of Plague*, is taken from the English of John Wilson (*The City of the Plague*), with original additions. In *Mozart and Salieri* we see the contrast between the genius which does what it must and the talent which does what it can. The story is based on the unfounded anecdote that Mozart was poisoned by Salieri out of envy. This dramatic and beautifully written episode has been set to music as it stands by Rimsky-Korsakov.

The Covetous Knight, which bears the superscription, "From the tragi-comedy of Chenstone"—an unknown English original—tells of the conflict between a Harpagon and his son: the delineation of the miser's imaginative passion for his treasures is, both in conception and execution, in Pushkin's finest manner. This scene has been recently set to music by Rakhmaninov. *The Guest of Stone*, the story of Don Juan and the *statua gentilissima del gran Commendatore*, makes Don Juan life. A scene from *Faust* between Faust and Mephistopheles is original and not of great interest; *Angelo* is the story of *Measure for Measure* told as a narrative with two scenes in dialogue. *Rusalka*, The Water Maid, is taken from the genuine and not the sham province of national legend, and it is tantalizing that this poetic fragment remained a fragment.

Pushkin's prose is in some respects as remarkable as his verse. Here, too, he proved a pioneer. *Dubrovsky* is the story of a young officer whose father is ousted, like Naboth, from his small estate by his neighbour, a rich and greedy landed proprietor, becomes a highway robber so as to revenge himself, and introduces himself into the family of his enemy as a French master, but forgoes his revenge because he falls in love with his enemy's daughter. In this extremely vivid story he anticipates Gogol in his lifelike pictures of country life. *The Captain's Daughter* is equally vivid; the rebel Pugachev has nothing stagey or melodramatic about him, nothing of Harrison Ainsworth. Of his shorter stories, such as *The Blizzard*, *The Pistol Shot*, *The Lady-Peasant*, the most entertaining, and certainly the most popular, is *The Queen of Spades*, which was so admirably translated by Mérimée, and formed the subject of one of Tchaikovsky's most successful operas. As an

artistic work *The Egyptian Nights*, written in 1828, is the most interesting, and ranks among Pushkin's masterpieces. It tells of an Italian *improvisatore* who, at a party in St. Petersburg, improvises verses on Cleopatra and her lovers. The story is written to lead up to this poem, which gives a gorgeous picture of the pagan world, and is another example of Pushkin's miraculous power of assimilation. Pushkin's prose has the same limpidity and ease as his verse; the characters have the same vitality and reality as those in his poems and dramatic scenes, and had he lived longer he might have become a great novelist. As it is, he furnished Gogol (whose acquaintance he made in 1832) with the subject of two of his masterpieces —*Dead Souls* and *The Revisor*.

The province of Russian folk-lore and legend from which Pushkin took the idea of *Rusalka* was to furnish him with a great deal of rich material. It was in 1831 that in friendly rivalry with Zhukovsky he wrote his first long fairy-tale, imitating the Russian popular style, *The Tale of Tsar Saltan*. Up till now he had written only a few ballads in the popular style. This fairy-tale was a brilliant success as a *pastiche*; but it was a *pastiche* and not quite the real thing, as cleverness kept breaking in, and a touch of epigram here and there, which indeed makes it delightful reading. He followed it by another in the comic vein, *The Tale of the Pope and his Man Balda*, and by two more *Märchen*, *The Dead Tsaritsa* and *The Golden Cock*; but it was not until two years later that he wrote his masterpiece in this vein, *The Story of the Fisherman and the Fish*. It is the same story as Grimm's tale of the Fisherman's wife who wished to be King, Emperor, and then Pope, and finally lost all by her vaulting ambition. The tale is written in unrhymed rhythmical, indeed scarcely rhythmical,

lines; all trace of art is concealed; it is a tale such as might have been handed down by oral tradition in some obscure village out of the remotest past; it has the real *Volkston*; the good-nature and simplicity and unobtrusive humour of a real fairy-tale. The subjects of all these stories were told to Pushkin by his nurse, Anna Rodionovna, who also furnished him with the subject of his ballad, *The Bridegroom*. In Pushkin's note-books there are seven fairy-tales taken down hurriedly from the words of his nurse; and most likely all that he wrote dealing with the life of the people came from the same source. Pushkin called Anna Rodionovna his last teacher, and said that he was indebted to her for counteracting the effects of his first French education.

In 1833 he finished a poem called *The Brazen Horseman*, the story of a man who loses his beloved in the great floods in St. Petersburg in 1834, and going mad, imagines that he is pursued by Falconet's equestrian statue of Peter the Great. The poem contains a magnificent description of St. Petersburg. During the last years of his life, he was engaged in collecting materials for a history of Peter the Great. His power of production had never run dry from the moment he left school, although his actual work was interrupted from time to time by distractions and the society of his friends.

All the important larger works of Pushkin have now been mentioned; but during the whole course of his career he was always pouring out a stream of lyrics and occasional pieces, many of which are among the most beautiful things he wrote. His variety and the width of his range are astonishing. Some of them have a grace and perfection such as we find in the Greek anthology; others—"Recollections," for

instance, in which in the sleepless hours of the night the poet sees pass before him the blotted scroll of his past deeds, which he is powerless with all the tears in the world to wash out—have the intensity of Shakespeare's sonnets. This poem, for instance, has the same depth of feeling as "Tired with all these, for restful death I cry," or "The expense of spirit in a waste of shame." Or he will write an elegy as tender as Tennyson; or he will draw a picture of a sledge in a snow-storm, and give you the plunge of the bewildered horses, the whirling demons of the storm, the bells ringing on the quiet spaces of snow, in intoxicating rhythms which E. A. Poe would have envied; or again he will write a description of the Caucasus in eleven short lines, close in expression and vast in suggestion, such as "The Monastery on Kazbek"; or he will bring before you the smell of the autumn morning, and the hoofs ringing out on the half-frozen earth; or he will write a patriotic poem, such as *To the Slanderers of Russia*, fraught with patriotic indignation without being offensive; in this poem Pushkin paints an inspired picture of Russia: "Will not," he says, "from Perm to the Caucasus, from Finland's chill rocks to the flaming Colchis, from the shaken Kremlin to the unshaken walls of China, glistening with its bristling steel, the Russian earth arise?" Or he will write a prayer, as lordly in utterance and as humble in spirit as one of the old Latin hymns; or a love-poem as tender as Musset and as playful as Heine: he will translate you the spirit of Horace and the spirit of Mickiewicz the Pole; he will secure the restraint of André Chénier, and the impetuous gallop of Byron.

Perhaps the most characteristic of Pushkin's poems is the poem which expresses his view of life in the elegy—

"As bitter as stale aftermath of
wine
Is the remembrance of delirious
days;
But as wine waxes with the
years, so weighs
The past more sorely, as my
days decline.
My path is dark. The future lies
in wait,
A gathering ocean of anxiety,
But oh! my friends! to suffer, to
create,
That is my prayer; to live and
not to die!
I know that ecstasy shall still lie
there
In sorrow and adversity and
care.
Once more I shall be drunk on
strains divine,
Be moved to tears by musings
that are mine;
And haply when the last sad
hour draws nigh
Love with a farewell smile shall
light the sky."

But the greatest of his short poems is probably "The Prophet." This is a tremendous poem, and reaches a height to which Pushkin only attained once. It is Miltonic in conception and Dantesque in expression; the syllables ring out in pure concent, like blasts from a silver clarion. It is, as it were, the Pillars of Hercules of the Russian language. Nothing finer as sound could ever be compounded with Russian

vowels and consonants; nothing could be more perfectly planned, or present, in so small a vehicle, so large a vision to the imagination. Even a rough prose translation will give some idea of the imaginative splendour of the poem—

"My spirit was weary, and I was athirst, and I was astray in the dark wilderness. And the Seraphim with six wings appeared to me at the crossing of the ways: And he touched my eyelids, and his fingers were as soft as sleep: and like the eyes of an eagle that is frightened my prophetic eyes were awakened. He touched my ears and he filled them with noise and with sound: and I heard the Heavens shuddering and the flight of the angels in the height, and the moving of the beasts that are under the waters, and the noise of the growth of the branches in the valley. He bent down over me and he looked upon my lips; and he tore out my sinful tongue, and he took away that which is idle and that which is evil with his right hand, and his right hand was dabbled with blood; and he set there in its stead, between my perishing lips, the tongue of a wise serpent. And he clove my breast asunder with a sword, and he plucked out my trembling heart, and in my cloven breast he set a burning coal of fire. Like a corpse in the desert I lay, and the voice of God called and said unto me, 'Prophet, arise, and take heed, and hear; be filled with My will, and go forth over the sea and over the land and set light with My word to the hearts of the people.'"

In 1837 came the catastrophe which brought about Pushkin's death. It was caused by the clash of evil tongues engaged in frivolous gossip, and Pushkin's own susceptible and violent temperament. A guardsman, Heckeren-Dantes, had been flirting with

his wife. Pushkin received an anonymous letter, and being wrongly convinced that Heckeren-Dantes was the author of it, wrote him a violent letter which made a duel inevitable. A duel was fought on the 27th of February, 1837, and Pushkin was mortally wounded. Such was his frenzy of rage that, after lying wounded and unconscious in the snow, on regaining consciousness, he insisted on going on with the duel, and fired another shot, giving a great cry of joy when he saw that he had wounded his adversary. It was only a slight wound in the hand. It was not until he reached home that his anger passed away. He died on the 29th of February, after forty-five hours of excruciating suffering, heroically borne; he forgave his enemies; he wished no one to avenge him; he received the last sacraments; and he expressed feelings of loyalty and gratitude to his sovereign. He was thirty-seven years and eight months old.

Pushkin's career falls naturally into two divisions: his life until he was thirty, and his life after he was thirty. Pushkin began his career with liberal aspirations, and he disappointed some in the loyalty to the throne, the Church, the autocracy, and the established order of things which he manifested later; in turning to religion; in remaining in the Government service; in writing patriotic poems; in holding the position of Gentleman of the Bed Chamber at Court; in being, in fact, what is called a reactionary. But it would be a mistake to imagine that Pushkin was a Lost Leader who abandoned the cause of liberty for a handful of silver and a riband to stick in his coat. The liberal aspirations of Pushkin's youth were the very air that the whole of the aristocratic youth of that day breathed. Pushkin could not escape being influenced by it; but he was

no more a rebel then, than he was a reactionary afterwards, when again the very air which the whole of educated society breathed was conservative and nationalistic. It may be a pity that it was so; but so it was. There was no liberal atmosphere in the reign of Nicholas I, and the radical effervescence of the Decembrists was destroyed by the Decembrists' premature action. It is no good making a revolution if you have nothing to make it with. The Decembrists were in the same position as the educated élite of one regiment at Versailles would have been, had it attempted to destroy the French monarchy in the days of Louis XIV. The Decembrists by their premature action put the clock of Russian political progress back for years. The result was that men of impulse, aspiration, talent and originality had in the reign of Nicholas to seek an outlet for their feelings elsewhere than in politics, because politics then were simply non-existent.

But apart from this, even if the opportunities had been there, it may be doubted whether Pushkin would have taken them. He was not born with a passion to reform the world. He was neither a rebel nor a reformer; neither a liberal nor a conservative; he was a democrat in his love for the whole of the Russian people; he was a patriot in his love of his country. He resembled Goethe rather than Socrates, or Shelley, or Byron; although, in his love of his country and in every other respect, his fiery temperament both in itself and in its expression was far removed from Goethe's Olympian calm. He was like Goethe in his attitude towards society, and the attitude of the social and official world towards him resembles the attitude of Weimar towards Goethe.

During the first part of his career he gave himself up

to pleasure, passion, and self-indulgence; after he was thirty he turned his mind to more serious things. It would not be exact to say he *became* deeply religious, because he was religious by nature, and he soon discarded a fleeting phase of scepticism; but in spite of this he was a victim of *amour-propre*; and he wavered between contempt of the society around him and a petty resentment against it which took the shape of scathing and sometimes cruel epigrams. It was this dangerous *amour-propre*, the fact of his being not only passion's slave, but petty passion's slave, which made him a victim of frivolous gossip and led to the final catastrophe.

"In Pushkin," says Soloviev, the philosopher, "according to his own testimony there were two different and separate beings: the inspired priest of Apollo, and the most frivolous of all the frivolous children of the world." It was the first Pushkin—the inspired priest—who predominated in the latter part of his life; but who was unable to expel altogether the second Pushkin, the frivolous *Weltkind*, who was prone to be exasperated by the society in which he lived, and when exasperated was dangerous. There is one fact, however, which accounts for much. The more serious Pushkin's turn of thought grew, the more objective, purer, and stronger his work became, the less it was appreciated; for the public which delighted in the comparatively inferior work of his youth was not yet ready for his more mature work. What pleased the public were the dazzling colours, the sensuous and sometimes libidinous images of his early poems; the romantic atmosphere; especially anything that was artificial in them. They had not yet eyes to appreciate the noble lines, nor ears to appreciate the simpler and more majestic harmonies of his later work. Thus it was that they passed *Boris*

Godunov by, and were disappointed in the later cantos of *Onegin*. This was, of course, discouraging. Nevertheless, it is laughable to rank Pushkin amongst the misunderstood, among the Shelleys, the Millets, of Literature and Art; or to talk of his sad fate. To talk of him as one of the victims of literature is merely to depreciate him.

He was exiled. Yes: but to the Caucasus, which gave him inspiration: to his own country home, which gave him leisure. He was censored. Yes: but the Emperor undertook to do the work himself. Had he lived in England, society—as was proved in the case of Byron—would have been a far severer censor of his morals and the extravagance of his youth, than the Russian Government. Besides which, he won instantaneous fame, and in the society in which he moved he was surrounded by a band not only of devoted but distinguished admirers, amongst whom were some of the highest names in Russian literature —Karamzin, Zhukovsky, Gogol.

Pushkin is Russia's national poet, the Peter the Great of poetry, who out of foreign material created something new, national and Russian, and left imperishable models for future generations. The chief characteristic of his genius is its universality. There appeared to be nothing he could not understand nor assimilate. And it is just this all-embracing humanity—Dostoyevsky calls him πανάνθρωπος —this capacity for understanding everything and everybody, which makes him so profoundly Russian. He is a poet of everyday life: a realistic poet, and above all things a lyrical poet. He is not a dramatist, and as an epic writer, though he can mould a bas-relief and produce a noble fragment, he cannot set crowds in motion. He revealed to the

Russians the beauty of their landscape and the poetry of their people; and they, with ears full of pompous diction, and eyes full of rococo and romantic stage properties, did not understand what he was doing: but they understood later. For a time he fought against the stream, and all in vain; and then he gave himself up to the great current, which took him all too soon to the open sea.

He set free the Russian language from the bondage of the conventional; and all his life he was still learning to become more and more intimate with the savour and smell of the people's language. Like Peter the Great, he spent his whole life in apprenticeship, and his whole energies in craftsmanship. He was a great artist; his style is perspicuous, plastic, and pure; there is never a blurred outline, never a smear, never a halting phrase or a hesitating note. His concrete images are, as it were, transparent, like Donne's description of the woman whose

> "... pure and eloquent
> blood
> Spoke in her face, and so
> distinctly wrought,
> That you might almost think
> her body thought."

His diction is the inseparable skin of the thought. You seem to hear him thinking. He was gifted with divine ease and unpremeditated spontaneity. His soul was sincere, noble, and open; he was frivolous, a child of the world and of his century; but if he was worldly, he was human; he was a citizen as well as a child of the world; and it is that which makes him the greatest of Russian poets.

His career was unromantic; he was rooted to the earth; an aristocrat by birth, an official by profession, a lover of society by taste. At the same time, he sought and served beauty, strenuously and faithfully; he was perhaps too faithful a servant of Apollo; too exclusive a lover of the beautiful. In his work you find none of the piteous cries, no beauty of soaring and bleeding wings as in Shelley, nor the sound of rebellious sobs as in Musset; no tempest of defiant challenge, no lightnings of divine derision, as in Byron; his is neither the martyrdom of a fighting Heine, that "brave soldier in the war of the liberation of humanity," nor the agonized passion of a suffering Catullus. He never descended into Hell. Every great man is either an artist or a fighter; and often poets of genius, Byron and Heine for instance, are more pre-eminently fighters than they are artists. Pushkin was an artist, and not a fighter. And this is what makes even his love-poems cold in comparison with those of other poets. Although he was the first to make notable what was called the romantic movement; and although at the beginning of his career he handled romantic subjects in a more or less romantic way, he was fundamentally a classicist—a classicist as much in the common-sense and realism and solidity of his conceptions and ideas, as in the perspicuity and finish of his impeccable form. And he soon cast aside even the vehicles and clothes of romanticism, and exclusively followed reality. "He strove with none, for none was worth his strife." And when his artistic ideals were misunderstood and depreciated, he retired into himself and wrote to please himself only; but in the inner court of the Temple of Beauty into which he retired he created imperishable things; for he loved nature, he loved art, he loved his country, and he expressed that love

in matchless song.

For years, Russian criticism was either neglectful of his work or unjust towards it; for his serene music and harmonious design left the generations which came after him, who were tossed on a tempest of social problems and political aspirations, cold; but in 1881, when Dostoyevsky unveiled Pushkin's memorial at Moscow, the homage which he paid to the dead poet voiced the unanimous feeling of the whole of Russia. His work is beyond the reach of critics, whether favourable or unfavourable, for it lives in the hearts of his countrymen, and chiefly upon the lips of the young.

FOOTNOTES:

[2] Not 1763, as generally stated in his biographies.

[3] The poem was originally called *Mazepa*: Pushkin changed the title so as not to clash with Byron. It is interesting to see what Pushkin says of Byron's poem. In his notes there is the following passage—

"Byron knew Mazepa through Voltaire's history of Charles XII. He was struck solely by the picture of a man bound to a wild horse and borne over the steppes. A poetical picture of course; but see what he did with it. What a living creation! What a broad brush! But do not expect to find either Mazepa or Charles, nor the usual gloomy Byronic hero. Byron was not thinking of him. He presented a series of pictures, one more striking than the other. Had his pen come across the story of the seduced daughter and the father's execution, it is improbable that anyone else would have dared

to touch the subject."

CHAPTER III

LERMONTOV

The romantic movement in Russia was, as far as Pushkin was concerned, not really a romantic movement at all. Still less was it so in the case of the Pléiade which followed him. And yet, for want of a better word, one is obliged to call it the *romantic* movement, as it was a new movement, a renascence that arose out of the ashes of the pseudo-classical eighteenth century convention. Pushkin was followed by a Pléiade.

The claim of his friend and fellow-student, BARON DELVIG, to fame, rests rather on his friendship with Pushkin (to whom he played the part of an admirable critic) than on his own verse. He died in 1831. YAZYKOV, PRINCE BARIATINSKY, VENEVITINOV, and POLEZHAEV, can all be included in the Pléiade; all these are lyrical poets of the second order, and none of them—except Polezhaev, whose real promise of talent was shattered by circumstances (he died of drink and consumption after a career of tragic vicissitudes)—has more than an historical interest.

Pushkin's successor to the throne of Russian letters was Lermontov: no unworthy heir. The name

Lermontov is said to be the same as the Scotch Learmonth. The story of his short life is a simple one. He was born at Moscow in 1814. He visited the Caucasus when he was twelve. He was taught English by a tutor. He went to school at Moscow, and afterwards to the University. He left in 1832 owing to the disputes he had with the professors. At the age of eighteen, he entered the Guards' Cadet School at St. Petersburg; and two years later he became an officer in the regiment of the Hussars. In 1837 he was transferred to Georgia, owing to the scandal caused by the outspoken violence of his verse; but he was transferred to Novgorod in 1838, and was allowed to return to St. Petersburg in the same year. In 1840 he was again transferred to the Caucasus for fighting a duel with the son of the French Ambassador; towards the end of the year, he was once more allowed to return to St. Petersburg. In 1841 he went back for a third time to the Caucasus, where he forced a duel on one of his friends over a perfectly trivial incident, and was killed, on the 15th of July of the same year.

In all the annals of poetry, there is no more curious figure than Lermontov. He was like a plant that above all others needed a sympathetic soil, a favourable atmosphere, and careful attention. As it was, he came in the full tide of the régime of Nicholas I, a régime of patriarchal supervision, government interference, rigorous censorship, and iron discipline,—a grey epoch absolutely devoid of all ideal aspirations. Considerable light is thrown on the contradictory and original character of the poet by his novel, *A Hero of Our Days*, the first psychological novel that appeared in Russia. The hero, Pechorin, is undoubtedly a portrait of the poet, although he himself said, and perhaps thought, that

he was merely creating a type.

The hero of the story, who is an officer in the Caucasus, analyses his own character, and lays bare his weaknesses, follies, and faults, with the utmost frankness. “I am incapable of friendship,” he says. “Of two friends, one is always the slave of the other, although often neither of them will admit it; I cannot be a slave, and to be a master is a tiring business.” Or he writes: “I have an innate passion for contradiction.... The presence of enthusiasm turns me to ice, and intercourse with a phlegmatic temperament would turn me into a passionate dreamer.” Speaking of enemies, he says: “I love enemies, but not after the Christian fashion.” And on another occasion: “Why do they all hate me? Why? Have I offended any one? No. Do I belong to that category of people whose mere presence creates antipathy?” Again: “I despise myself sometimes, is not that the reason that I despise others? I have become incapable of noble impulses. I am afraid of appearing ridiculous to myself.”

On the eve of fighting a duel Pechorin writes as follows—

“If I die it will not be a great loss to the world, and as for me, I am sufficiently tired of life. I am like a man yawning at a ball, who does not go home to bed because the carriage is not there, but as soon as the carriage is there, Good-bye!”

“I review my past and I ask myself, Why have I lived? Why was I born? and I think there was a reason, and I think I was called to high things, for I feel in my soul the presence of vast powers; but I did not divine my high calling; I gave myself up to the allurement of shallow and ignoble passions; I

emerged from their furnace as hard and as cold as iron, but I had lost for ever the ardour of noble aspirations, the flower of life. And since then how often have I played the part of the axe in the hands of fate. Like the weapon of the executioner I have fallen on the necks of the victims, often without malice, always without pity. My love has never brought happiness, because I have never in the slightest degree sacrificed myself for those whom I loved. I loved for my own sake, for my own pleasure.... And if I die I shall not leave behind me one soul who understood me. Some think I am better, others that I am worse than I am. Some will say he was a good fellow; others he was a blackguard."

It will be seen from these passages, all of which apply to Lermontov himself, even if they were not so intended, that he must have been a trying companion, friend, or acquaintance. He had, indeed, except for a few intimate friends, an impossible temperament; he was proud, overbearing, exasperated and exasperating, filled with a savage *amour-propre*; and he took a childish delight in annoying; he cultivated "le plaisir aristocratique de déplaire"; he was envious of what was least enviable in his contemporaries. He could not bear not to make himself felt, and if he felt that he was unsuccessful in accomplishing this by pleasant means, he resorted to unpleasant means. And yet, at the same time, he was warm-hearted, thirsting for love and kindness, and capable of giving himself up to love—if he chose.

During his period of training at the Cadet School, he led a wild life; and when he became an officer, he hankered after social and not after literary success. He did not achieve it immediately; at first he was not

noticed, and when he was noticed he was not liked. His looks were unprepossessing, and one of his legs was shorter than the other. His physical strength was enormous—he could bend a ramrod with his fingers. Noticed he was determined to be; and, as he himself says in one of his letters, observing that every one in society had some sort of pedestal—wealth, lineage, position, or patronage—he saw that if he, not pre-eminently possessing any of these,—though he was, as a matter of fact, of a good Moscow family,—could succeed in engaging the attention of one person, others would soon follow suit. This he set about to do by compromising a girl and then abandoning her: and he acquired the reputation of a Don Juan. Later, when he came back from the Caucasus, he was treated as a lion. All this does not throw a pleasant light on his character, more especially as he criticized in scathing tones the society in which he was anxious to play a part, and in which he subsequently enjoyed playing a part. But perhaps both attitudes of mind were sincere. He probably sincerely enjoyed society, and hankered after success in it; and equally sincerely despised society and himself for hankering after it.

As he grew older, his pride and the exasperating provocativeness of his conduct increased to such an extent that he seemed positively seeking for serious trouble, and for some one whose patience he could overtax, and on whom he could fasten a quarrel. And this was not slow to happen.

At the bottom of all this lay no doubt a deep-seated disgust with himself and with the world in general, and a complete indifference to life, resulting from large aspirations which could not find an outlet, and so recoiled upon himself. The epoch, the atmosphere

and the society were the worst possible for his peculiar nature; and the only fruitful result of the friction between himself and the society and the established order of his time, was that he was sent to the Caucasus, which proved to be a source of inspiration for him, as it had been for Pushkin. One is inclined to say, "If only he had lived later or longer"; yet it may be doubted whether, had he been born in a more favourable epoch, either earlier in the milder régime of Alexander I, or later, in the enthusiastic epoch of the reforms, he would have been a happier man and produced finer work.

The curious thing is that his work does not reveal an overwhelming pessimism like Leopardi's, an accent of revolt like Musset's, or of combat like Byron's; but rather it testifies to a fundamental indifference to life, a concentrated pride. If it be true that you can roughly divide the Russian temperament into two types—the type of the pure fool, such as Dostoyevsky's *Idiot*, and a type of unconquerable pride, such as Lucifer—then Lermontov is certainly a fine example of the second type. You feel that he will never submit or yield; but then he died young; and the Russian poets often changed, and not infrequently adopted a compromise which was the same thing as submission.

Lermontov was, like Pushkin, essentially a lyric poet, still more subjective, and profoundly self-centred. His attempts at the drama (imitations of Schiller and an attempt at the manner of Griboyedov) were failures. But, unlike Pushkin, he was a true romantic; and his work proves to us how essentially different a thing Russian romanticism is from French, German or English romanticism. He began with astonishing precocity to write verse when he was twelve. His

earliest efforts were in French. He then began to imitate Pushkin. While at the Cadet School he wrote a series of cleverly written, more or less indecent, and more or less Byronic—the Byron of *Beppo*—tales in verse, describing his love adventures, and episodes of garrison life. What brought him fame was his "Ode on the Death of Pushkin," which, although unjustified by the actual facts—he represents Pushkin as the victim of a bloodthirsty society—strikes strong and bitter chords. Here, without any doubt, are "thoughts that breathe and words that burn"—

"And you, the proud and
shameless progeny
Of fathers famous for their
infamy,
You, who with servile heel have
trampled down
The fragments of great names
laid low by chance,
You, hungry crowd that swarms
about the throne,
Butchers of freedom, and
genius, and glory,
You hide behind the shelter of
the law,
Before you, right and justice
must be dumb!
But, parasites of vice, there's
God's assize;
There is an awful court of law
that waits.
You cannot reach it with the
sound of gold;
It knows your thoughts
beforehand and your
deeds;
And vainly you shall call the
lying witness;
That shall not help you any
more;
And not with all the filth of all
your gore
Shall you wash out the poet's
righteous blood."

He struck this strong chord more than once, especially in his indictment of his own generation,

called “A Thought”; and in a poem written on the transfer of Napoleon’s ashes to Paris, in which he pours scorn on the French for deserting Napoleon when he lived and then acclaiming his ashes.

But it is not in poems such as these that Lermontov’s most characteristic qualities are to be found. Lermontov owed nothing to his contemporaries, little to his predecessors, and still less to foreign models. It is true that, as a school-boy, he wrote verses full of Byronic disillusion and satiety, but these were merely echoes of his reading. The gloom of spirit which he expressed later on was a permanent and innate feature of his own temperament. Later, the reading of Shelley spurred on his imagination to emulation, but not to imitation. He sought his own path from the beginning, and he remained in it with obdurate persistence. He remained obstinately himself, indifferent as a rule to outside events, currents of thought and feeling. And he clung to the themes which he chose in his youth. His mind to him a kingdom was, and he peopled it with images and fancies of his own devising. The path which he chose was a narrow one. It was a romantic path. He chose for the subject of the poem by which he is perhaps most widely known, *The Demon*, the love of a demon for a woman. The subject is as romantic as any chosen by Thomas Moore; but there is nothing now that appears rococo in Lermontov’s work. The colours are as fresh to-day as when they were first laid on. The heroine is a Circassian woman, and the action of the poem is in the Caucasus.

The Demon portrayed is not the spirit that denies of Goethe, nor Byron’s Lucifer, looking the Almighty in His face and telling him that His evil is not good; nor does he cherish—

> "the study of revenge, immortal
> hate,"

of Milton's Satan; but he is the lost angel of a ruined paradise, who is too proud to accept oblivion even were it offered to him. He dreams of finding in Tamara the joys of the paradise he has foregone. "I am he," he says to her, "whom no one loves, whom every human being curses." He declares that he has foresworn his proud thoughts, that he desires to be reconciled with Heaven, to love, to pray, to believe in good. And he pours out to her one of the most passionate love declarations ever written, in couplet after couplet of words that glow like jewels and tremble like the strings of a harp, Tamara yields to him, and forfeits her life; but her soul is borne to Heaven by the Angel of Light; she has redeemed her sin by death, and the Demon is left as before alone in a loveless, lampless universe. The poem is interspersed with descriptions of the Caucasus, which are as glowing and splendid as the impassioned utterance of the Demon. They put Pushkin's descriptions in the shade. Lermontov's landscape-painting compared with Pushkin's is like a picture of Turner compared with a Constable or a Bonnington.

Lermontov followed up his first draft of *The Demon* (originally planned in 1829, but not finished in its final form until 1841) with other romantic tales, the scene of which for the most part is laid in the Caucasus: such as *Izmail Bey*, *Hadji-Abrek*, *Orsha the Boyar*—the last not a Caucasian tale. These were nearly all of them sketches in which he tried the colours of his palette. But with *Mtsyri*, *the Novice*, in which he used some of the materials of the former tales, he produced a finished picture.

Mtsyri is the story of a Circassian orphan who is educated in a convent. The child grows up home-sick at heart, and one day his longing for freedom becomes ungovernable, and he escapes and roams about in the mountains. He loses his way in the forest and is brought back to the monastery after three days, dying from starvation, exertion, and exhaustion. Before he dies he pours out his confession, which takes up the greater part of the poem. He confesses how in the monastery he felt his own country and his own people forever calling, and how he felt he must seek his own people. He describes his wanderings: how he scrambles down the mountain-side and hears the song of a Georgian woman, and sees her as she walks down a narrow path with a pitcher on her head and draws water from the stream. At nightfall he sees the light of a dwelling-place twinkling like a falling star; but he dares not seek it. He loses his way in the forest, he encounters and kills a panther. In the morning, he finds a way out of the woods when the daylight comes; he lies in the grass exhausted under the blinding noon, of which Lermontov gives a gorgeous and detailed description—

"And on God's world there lay
the deep
And heavy spell of utter sleep,
Although the landrail called,
and I
Could hear the trill of the
dragonfly
Or else the lisping of the stream
...
Only a snake, with a yellow
gleam

Like golden lettering inlaid
From hilt to tip upon a blade,
Was rustling, for the grass was
dry,
And in the loose sand
cautiously
It slid, and then began to spring
And roll itself into a ring,
Then, as though struck by
sudden fear,
Made haste to dart and
disappear."

Perishing of hunger and thirst, fever and delirium overtake him, and he fancies that he is lying at the bottom of a deep stream, where speckled fishes are playing in the crystal waters. One of them nestles close to him and sings to him with a silver voice a lullaby, unearthly, like the song of Ariel, and alluring like the call of the Erl King's daughter. In this poem Lermontov reaches the high-water mark of his descriptive powers. Its pages glow with the splendour of the Caucasus.

To his two masterpieces, *The Demon* and *Mtsyri*, he was to add a third: *The Song of the Tsar Ivan Vasilievich, the Oprichnik (bodyguardsman), and the Merchant Kalashnikov*. The Oprichnik insults the Merchant's wife, and the Merchant challenges him to fight with his fists, kills him, and is executed for it. This poem is written as a folk-story, in the style of the *Byliny*, and it in no way resembles a *pastiche*. It equals, if it does not surpass, Pushkin's *Boris Godunov* as a realistic vision of the past; and as an epic tale, for simplicity, absolute appropriateness of tone, vividness, truth to nature and terseness, there is nothing in modern Russian literature to compare

with it. Besides these larger poems, Lermontov wrote a quantity of short lyrics, many of which, such as "The Sail," "The Angel," "The Prayer," every Russian child knows by heart.

When we come to consider the qualities of Lermontov's romantic work, and ask ourselves in what it differs from the romanticism of the West—from that of Victor Hugo, Heine, Musset, Espronceda—we find that in Lermontov's work, as in all Russian work, there is mingled with his lyrical, imaginative, and descriptive powers, a bed-rock of matter-of-fact common-sense, a root that is deeply embedded in reality, in the life of everyday. He never escapes into the "intense inane" of Shelley. Imaginative he is, but he is never lost in the dim twilight of Coleridge. Romantic he is, but one note of Heine takes us into a different world: for instance, Heine's quite ordinary adventures in the Harz Mountains convey a spell and glamour that takes us over a borderland that Lermontov never crossed.

Nothing could be more splendid than Lermontov's descriptions; but they are, compared with those of Western poets, concrete, as sharp as views in a camera obscura. He never ate the roots of "relish sweet, the honey wild and manna dew" of the "Belle Dame Sans Merci"; he wrote of places where Kubla Khan might have wandered, of "ancestral voices prophesying war," but one has only to quote that line to see that Lermontov's poetic world, compared with Coleridge's, is solid fact beside intangible dream.

Compared even with Musset and Victor Hugo, how much nearer the earth Lermontov is than either of them! Victor Hugo dealt with just the same themes; but in Lermontov, the most splendid painter of

mountains imaginable, you never hear

> "Le vent qui vient à travers la
> montagne,"

and you know that it will never drive the Russian poet to frenzy. On the other hand, you never get Victor Hugo's extravagance and absurdities. Or take Musset; Musset dealt with romantic themes *si quis alius*; but when he deals with a subject like Don Juan, which of all subjects belonged to the age of Pushkin and Lermontov, he writes lines like these—

> "Faible, et, comme le lierre,
> ayant besoin d'autrui;
> Et ne le cachant pas, et
> suspendant son âme,
> Comme un luth éolien, aux
> lèvres de la nuit."

Here again we are confronted with a different kind of imagination. Or take a bit of sheer description—

> "Pâle comme l'amour, et de
> pleurs arrosée,
> La nuit aux pieds d'argent
> descend dans la rosée."

You never find the Russian poet impersonating nature like this, and creating from objects such as the "yellow bees in the ivy bloom" forms more real than living man. The objects themselves suffice. Lermontov sang of disappointed love over and over again, but never did he create a single image such as —

> "Elle aurait aimé, si l'orgueil

Pareil à la lampe inutile
Qu'on allume près d'un
cercueil,
N'eut veillé sur son coeur
stérile."

In his descriptive work he is more like Byron; but Byron was far less romantic and far less imaginative than Lermontov, although he invented Byronism, and shattered the crumbling walls of the eighteenth century that surrounded the city of romance, and dallied with romantic themes in his youth. All his best work, the finest passages of *Childe Harold*, and the whole of *Don Juan*, were slices of his own life and observation, *choses vues*; he never created a single character that was not a reflection of himself; and he never entered into the city whose walls he had stormed, and where he had planted his flag.

This does not mean that Lermontov is inferior to the Western romantic poets. It simply means that the Russian poet is—and one might add the Russian poets are—different. And, indeed, it is this very difference,—what he did with this peculiar realistic paste in his composition,—that constitutes his unique excellence. So far from its being a vice, he made it into his especial virtue. Lermontov sometimes, in presenting a situation and writing a poem on a fact, presents that situation and that fact without exaggeration, emphasis, adornment, imagery, metaphor, or fancy of any kind, in the language of everyday life, and at the same time he achieves poetry. This was Wordsworth's ideal, and he fulfilled it.

A case in point is his long poem on the Oprichnik, which has been mentioned; and some of the most

striking examples of this unadorned and realistic writing are to be found in his lyrics. In the "Testament," for example, where a wounded officer gives his last instructions to his friend who is going home on leave—

"I want to be alone with you,
A moment quite alone.
The minutes left to me are few,
They say I'll soon be gone.
And you'll be going home on
leave,
Then say ... but why? I do
believe
There's not a soul, who'll
greatly care
To hear about me over there.

And yet if some one asks you
there,
Let us suppose they do—
Tell them a bullet hit me here,
The chest,—and it went
through.
And say I died and for the Tsar,
And say what fools the doctors
are;—
And that I shook you by the
hand,
And thought about my native
land.

My father and my mother, too!
They may be dead by now;
To tell the truth, it wouldn't do
To grieve them anyhow.
If one of them is living, say

I'm bad at writing home, and
they
Have sent us to the front, you
see,—
And that they needn't wait for
me.

We had a neighbour, as you
know,
And you remember I
And she ... How very long ago
It is we said good-bye!
She won't ask after me, nor
care,
But tell her ev'rything, don't
spare
Her empty heart; and let her
cry;—
To her it doesn't signify."

The language is the language of ordinary everyday conversation. Every word the officer says might have been said by him in ordinary life, and there is not a note that jars; the speech is the living speech of conversation without being slang: and the result is a poignant piece of poetry. Another perhaps still more beautiful and touching example is the cradle-song which a mother sings to a Cossack baby, in which again every word has the native savour and homeliness of a Cossack woman's speech, and every feeling expressed is one that she would have felt. A third example is "Borodino," an account of the famous battle told by a veteran, as a veteran would tell it. Lermontov's fishes never talk like big whales.

All Russian poets have this gift of reality of conception and simplicity of treatment in a greater

or a lesser degree; perhaps none has it in such a supreme degree as Lermontov. The difference between Pushkin's style and Lermontov's is that, when you read Pushkin, you think: "How perfectly and how simply that is said! How in the world did he do it?" You admire the "magic hand of chance." In reading Lermontov at his simplest and best, you do not think about the style at all, you simply respond to what is said, and the style escapes notice in its absolute appropriateness. Thus, what Matthew Arnold said about Byron and Wordsworth is true about Lermontov—there are moments when Nature takes the pen from his hand and writes for him.

In Lermontov there is nothing slovenly; but there is a great deal that is flat and sullen. But if one reviews the great amount of work he produced in his short life, one is struck, not by its variety, as in the case of Pushkin,—it is, on the contrary, limited and monotonous in subject,—but by his authentic lyrical inspiration, by the strength, the intensity, the concentration of his genius, the richness of his imagination, the wealth of his palette, his gorgeous colouring and the high level of his strong square musical verse. And perhaps more than by anything else, one is struck by the blend in his nature and his work which has just been discussed, of romantic imagination and stern reality, of soaring thought and earthly common-sense, as though we had before us the temperament of a Thackeray with the wings of a Shelley. Lermontov is certainly, whichever way you take him, one of the most astonishing figures, and certainly the greatest purely lyrical *Erscheinung* in Russian literature.

With the death of Lermontov in 1841, the springtide of national song that began in the reign of Alexander

I comes to an end; for the only poet he left behind him did not survive him long. This was his contemporary KOLTSOV (1809-42), the greatest of Russian folk-poets. The son of a cattle-dealer, after a fitful and short-lived primary education at the district school of Voronezh, he adopted his father's trade, and by a sheer accident a cultivated young man of Moscow came across him and his verses, and raised funds for their publication.

Koltsov's verse paints peasant life as it is, without any sentimentality or rhetoric; it is described from the inside, and not from the outside. This is the great difference between Koltsov and other popular poets who came later. Moreover, he caught and reproduced the true *Volkston* in his lyrics, so that they are indistinguishable in accent from real folk-poetry. Koltsov sings of the woods, and the rustling rye, of harvest time and sowing; the song of the love-sick girl reaping; the lonely grave; the vague dreams and desires of the peasant's heart. His pictures have the dignity and truth of Jean François Millet, and his "lyrical cry" is as authentic as that of Burns. His more literary poems are like Burns' English poems compared with his work in the Scots. But he died the year after Lermontov, of consumption, and with his death the curtain was rung down on the first act of Russian literature. When it was next rung up, it was on the age of prose.

CHAPTER IV

THE AGE OF PROSE

When the curtain again rose on Russian literature it was on an era of prose; and the leading protagonist of that era, both by his works of fiction and his dramatic work, was NICHOLAS GOGOL [1809-52]. It is true that in the thirties Russia began to produce home-made novels. In Pushkin's story *The Queen of Spades*, when somebody asks the old Countess if she wishes to read a Russian novel, she says "A Russian novel? Are there any?" This stage had been passed; but the novels and the plays that were produced at this time until the advent of Gogol have been—deservedly for the greater part—forgotten. And, just as Lermontov was the successor of Pushkin in the domain of poetry, so in the domain of satire Gogol was the successor of Griboyedov; and in creating a national work he was the heir of Pushkin.

Gogol was a Little Russian. He was born in 1809 near Poltava, in the Cossack country, and was brought up by his grandfather, a Cossack; but he left the Ukraine and settled in 1829 in St. Petersburg, where he obtained a place in a Government office. After an unsuccessful attempt to go on the stage, and a brief career as tutor, he was given a professorship of History; but he failed here also, and finally turned to literature. The publication of his first efforts gained him the acquaintance of the literary men of the day, and he became the friend of Pushkin, who proved a valuable friend, adviser, and critic, and urged him to write on the life of the people. He lived in St. Petersburg from 1829 to 1836; and it was perhaps home-sickness which inspired him to write his Little Russian sketches—*Evenings on a Farm on the Dikanka*,

—which appeared in 1832, followed by *Mirgorod*, a second series, in 1834.

Gogol's temperament was romantic. He had a great deal of the dreamer in him, a touch of the eerie, a delight in the supernatural, an impish fancy that reminds one sometimes of Hoffmann and sometimes of R. L. Stevenson, as well as a deep religious vein which was later on to dominate and oust all his other qualities. But, just as we find in the Russian poets a curious mixture of romanticism and realism, of imagination and common-sense, so in Gogol, side by side with his imaginative gifts, which were great, there is a realism based on minute observation. In addition to this, and tempering his penetrating observation, he had a rich streak of humour, a many-sided humour, ranging from laughter holding both its sides, to a delicate and half melancholy chuckle, and in his later work to biting irony.

In the very first story of his first book, "The Fair of Sorochinetz," we are plunged into an atmosphere that smells of Russia in a way that no other Russian book has ever yet savoured of the soil. We are plunged into the South, on a blazing noonday, when the corn is standing in sheaves and wheat is being sold at the fair; and the fair, with its noise, its smell and its colour, rises before us as vividly as Normandy leaps out of the pages of Maupassant, or Scotland from the pages of Stevenson. And just as Andrew Lang once said that probably only a Scotsman, and a Lowland Scotsman, could know how true to life the characters in *Kidnapped* were, so it is probable that only a Russian, and indeed a Little Russian, appreciates to the full how true to life are the people, the talk, and the ambient air in the tales of Gogol. And then we at once get that hint of the supernatural

which runs like a scarlet thread through all these stories; the rumour that the *Red Jacket* has been observed in the fair; and the *Red Jacket*, so the gossips say, belongs to a little Devil, who being turned out of Hell as a punishment for some misdemeanour—probably a good intention—established himself in a neighbouring barn, and from home-sickness took to drink, and drank away all his substance; so that he was obliged to pawn his red jacket for a year to a Jew, who sold it before the year was out, whereupon the buyer, recognizing its unholy origin, cut it up into bits and threw it away, after which the Devil appeared in the shape of a pig every year at the fair to find the pieces. It is on this Red Jacket that the story turns.

In this first volume, the supernatural plays a predominant part throughout; the stories tell of water-nymphs, the Devil, who steals the moon, witches, magicians, and men who traffic with the Evil One and lose their souls. In the second series, *Mirgorod*, realism comes to the fore in the stories of "The Old-Fashioned Landowners" and "The Quarrel of the Two Ivans." These two stories contain between them the sum and epitome of the whole of one side of Gogol's genius, the realistic side. In the one story, "The Old-Fashioned Landowners," we get the gentle good humour which tells the charming tale of a South Russian Philemon and Baucis, their hospitality and kindliness, and the loneliness of Philemon when Baucis is taken away, told with the art of La Fontaine, and with many touches that remind one of Dickens. The other story, "The Quarrel of the Two Ivans," who are bosom friends and quarrel over nothing, and are, after years, on the verge of making it up when the mere mention of the word "goose" which caused the quarrel sets alight to it once more

and irrevocably, is in Gogol's richest farcical vein, with just a touch of melancholy.

And in the same volume, two *nouvelles*, *Tarass Bulba* and *Viy*, sum up between them the whole of the other side of Gogol's genius. *Tarass Bulba*, a short historical novel, with its incomparably vivid picture of Cossack life, is Gogol's masterpiece in the epic vein. It is as strong and as direct as a Border ballad. *Viy*, which tells of a witch, is the most creepy and imaginative of his supernatural stories.

Later, he published two more collections of stories: *Arabesques* (1834) and *Tales* (1836). In these, poetry, witches, water-nymphs, magicians, devils, and epic adventure are all left behind. The element of the fantastic still subsists, as in the "Portrait," and of the grotesque, as in the story of the major who loses his nose, which becomes a separate personality, and wanders about the town. But his blend of realism and humour comes out strongly in the story of "The Carriage," and his blend of realism and pathos still more strongly in the story of "The Overcoat," the story of a minor public servant who is always shivering and whose dream it is to have a warm overcoat. After years of privation he saves enough money to buy one, and on the first day he wears it, it is stolen. He dies of melancholia, and his ghost haunts the streets. This story is the only begetter of the large army of pathetic figures of failure that crowd the pages of Russian literature.

While Gogol had been writing and publishing these tales, he had also been steadily writing for the stage; but here the great difficulty and obstacle was the Censorship, which was almost as severe as it was in England at the end of the reign of Edward VII. But,

by a curious paradox, the play, which you would have expected the Censorship to forbid before all other plays, *The Revisor*, or *Inspector-General*, was performed. This was owing to the direct intervention of the Emperor. *The Revisor* is the second comic masterpiece of the Russian stage. The plot was suggested to Gogol by Pushkin. The officials of an obscure country town hear the startling news that a Government Inspector is arriving incognito to investigate their affairs. A traveller from St. Petersburg—a fine natural liar—is taken for the Inspector, plays up to the part, and gets away just before the arrival of the real Inspector, which is the end of the play. The play is a satire on the Russian bureaucracy. Almost every single character in it is dishonest; and the empty-headed, and irrelevant hero, with his magnificent talent for easy lying, is a masterly creation. The play at once became a classic, and retains all its vitality and comic force to-day. There is no play which draws a larger audience on holidays in St. Petersburg and Moscow.

After the production of *The Revisor*, Gogol left Russia for ever and settled in Rome. He had in his mind a work of great importance on which he had already been working for some time. This was his *Dead Souls*, his most ambitious work, and his masterpiece. It was Pushkin who gave him the idea of the book. The hero of the book, Chichikov, conceives a brilliant idea. Every landlord possessed so many serfs, called "souls." A revision took place every ten years, and the landlord had to pay for poll-tax on the "souls" who had died during that period. Nobody looked at the lists between the periods of revision. Chichikov's idea was to take over the dead souls from the landlord, who would, of course, be delighted to be rid of the fictitious property and the real tax, to

register his purchases, and then to mortgage at a bank at St. Petersburg or Moscow, the "souls," which he represented as being in some place in the Crimea, and thus make money enough to buy "souls" of his own. The book tells of the adventures of Chichikov as he travels over Russia in search of dead "souls," and is, like Mr. Pickwick's adventures, an Odyssey, introducing us to every kind and manner of man and woman. The book was to be divided in three parts. The first part appeared in 1842. Gogol went on working at the second and third parts until 1852, when he died. He twice threw the second part of the work into the fire when it was finished; so that all we possess is the first part, and the second part printed from an incomplete manuscript. The second part was certainly finished when he destroyed it, and it is probable that the third part was sketched. He had intended in the second part to work out the moral regeneration of Chichikov, and to give to the world his complete message. Persecuted by a dream he was unable to realize and an ambition which he was not able to fulfil, Gogol was driven inwards, and his natural religious feeling grew more intense and made him into an ascetic and a recluse. This break in the middle of his career is characteristic of Russia. Tolstoy, of course, furnishes the most typical example of the same thing. But it is a common Russian characteristic for men midway in a successful career to turn aside from it altogether, and seek consolation in the things which are not of this world.

Gogol's *Dead Souls* made a deep impression upon educated Russia. It pleased the enthusiasts for Western Europe by its reality, its artistic conception and execution, and by its social ideas; and it pleased the Slavophile Conservatives by its truth to life, and

by its smell of Russia. When the first chapter was read aloud to Pushkin, he said, when Gogol had finished: "God, what a sad country Russia is!" And it is certainly true, that amusing as the book is, inexpressibly comic as so many of the scenes are, Gogol does not flatter his country or his countrymen; and when Russians read it at the time it appeared, many must have been tempted to murmur "*doux pays!*"—as they would, indeed, now, were a writer with the genius of a Gogol to appear and describe the adventures of a modern Chichikov; for, though circumstances may be entirely different, although there are no more "souls" to be bought or sold, Chichikov is still alive—and as Gogol said, there was probably not one of his readers who after an honest self-examination, would not wonder if he had not something of Chichikov in him, and who if he were to meet an acquaintance at that moment, would not nudge his companion and say: "There goes Chichikov." "And who and what is Chichikov?" The answer is: "A scoundrel." But such an entertaining scoundrel, so abject, so shameless, so utterly devoid of self-respect, such a magnificent liar, so plausible an impostor, so ingenious a cheat, that he rises from scoundrelism almost to greatness.

There is, indeed, something of the greatness of Falstaff in this trafficker of dead "souls." His baseness is almost sublime. He in any case merits a place in the gallery of humanity's typical and human rascals, where Falstaff, Tartuffe, Pecksniff, and Count Fosco reign. He has the great saving merit of being human; nor can he be accused of hypocrisy. His coachman, Selifan, who got drunk with every "decent man," is worthy of the creator of Sam Weller. But what distinguishes Gogol in his *Dead Souls* from the great satirists of other nations, and his

satire from the *saeva indignatio* of Swift, for instance, is that, after laying bare to the bones the rascality of his hero, he turns round on his audience and tells them that there is no cause for indignation; Chichikov is only a victim of a ruling passion—gain; perhaps, indeed, in the chill existence of a Chichikov, there may be something which will one day cause us to humble ourselves on our knees and in the dust before the Divine Wisdom. His irony is lined with indulgence; his sleepless observation is tempered by fundamental charity. He sees what is mean and common clearer than any one, but he does not infer from it that life, or mankind, or the world is common or mean. He infers the opposite. He puts Chichikov no lower morally than he would put Napoleon, Harpagon, or Don Juan—all of them victims of a ruling passion, and all of them great by reason of it—for Chichikov is also great in rascality, just as Harpagon was great in avarice, and Don Juan great in profligacy. And this large charity blent with biting irony is again peculiarly Russian.

Dead Souls is a deeper book than any of Gogol's early work. It is deep in the same way as *Don Quixote* is deep; and like *Don Quixote* it makes boys laugh, young men think, and old men weep. Apart from its philosophy and ideas, *Dead Souls* had a great influence on Russian literature as a work of art. Just as Pushkin set Russian poetry free from the high-flown and the conventional, so did Gogol set Russian fiction free from the dominion of the grand style. He carried Pushkin's work—the work which Pushkin had accomplished in verse and adumbrated in prose—much further; and by depicting ordinary life, and by writing a novel without any love interest, with a Chichikov for a hero, he created Russian realism. He described what he saw without flattery and without

exaggeration, but with the masterly touch, the instinctive economy, the sense of selection of a great artist.

This, at the time it was done, was a revolution. Nobody then would have dreamed it possible to write a play or a novel without a love-motive; and just as Pushkin revealed to Russia that there was such a thing as Russian landscape, Gogol again, going one better, revealed the fascination, the secret and incomprehensible power that lay in the flat monotony of the Russian country, and the inexhaustible source of humour, absurdity, irony, quaintness, farce, comedy in the everyday life of the ordinary people. So that, however much his contemporaries might differ as to the merits or demerits, the harm or the beneficence, of his work, he left his nation with permanent and classic models of prose and fiction and stories, just as Pushkin had bequeathed to them permanent models of verse.

Gogol wrote no more fiction after *Dead Souls*. In 1847 *Passages from a Correspondence with a Friend* was published, which created a sensation, because in the book Gogol preached submission to the Government, both spiritual and temporal. The Western enthusiasts and the Liberals in general were highly disgusted. One can understand their disgust; it is less easy to understand their surprise; for Gogol had never pretended to be a Liberal. He showed up the evils of Bureaucracy and the follies and weaknesses of Bureaucrats, because they were there, just as he showed up the stinginess of misers and the obstinacy of old women. But it is quite as easy for a Conservative to do this as it is for a Liberal, and quite as easy for an orthodox believer as for an atheist. But Gogol's contemporaries had not realized

the tempest that had been raging for a long time in Gogol's soul, and which he kept to himself. He had always been religious, and now he became exclusively religious; he made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land; he spent his substance in charity, especially to poor students; and he lived in asceticism until he died, at the age of forty-three. What a waste, one is tempted to say—and how often one is tempted to say this in the annals of Russian literature—and yet, one wonders!

What we possess of the second part of *Dead Souls* is in Gogol's best vein, and of course one cannot help bitterly regretting that the rest was destroyed or possibly never written; but one wonders whether, had he not had within him the intensity of feeling which led him ultimately to renounce art, he would have been the artist that he was; whether he would have been capable of creating so many-coloured a world of characters, and whether the soil out of which those works grew was not in reality the kind of soil out of which religious renunciation was at last bound to flower. However that may be, Gogol left behind him a rich inheritance. He is one of the great humorists of European literature, and whoever gives England a really fine translation of his work, will do his country a service. Mérimée places Gogol among the best *English* humorists. His humour and his pathos were closely allied; but there is no acidity in his irony. His work may sometimes sadden you, but (as in the case of Krylov's two pigeons) it will never bore you, and it will never leave you with a feeling of stale disgust or a taste as of sharp alum, for his work is based on charity, and it has in its form and accent the precious gift of charm. Gogol is an author who will always be loved even as much as he is admired, and his stories are a boon to the young; to

many a Russian boy and girl the golden gates of romance have been opened by Gogol, the destroyer of Russian romanticism, the inaugurator of Russian realism.

Side by side with fiction, another element grew up in this age of prose, namely criticism. Karamzin in the twenties had been the first to introduce literary criticism, and critical appreciations of Pushkin's work appeared from time to time in the *European Messenger*. PRINCE VYAZEMSKY, whose literary activity lasted from 1808-78, was a critic as well as a poet and a satirist, a fine example of the type of great Russian nobles so frequent in Russian books, who were not only saturated with culture but enriched literature with their work, and carried on the tradition of cool, clear wit, clean expression, and winged phrase that we find in Griboyedov. POLEVOY, a self-educated man of humble extraction, was the first professional journalist, and created the tradition of violent and fiery polemics, which has lasted till this day in Russian journalism. But the real founder of Russian æsthetic, literary, and journalistic criticism was BELINSKY (1811-1847).

Like Polevoy, he was of humble extraction and almost entirely self-educated. He lived in want and poverty and ill-health. His life was a long battle against every kind of difficulty and obstacle; his literary production was more than hampered by the Censorship, but his influence was far-reaching and deep. He created Russian criticism, and after passing through several phases—a German phase of Hegelian philosophy, Gallophobia, enthusiasm for Shakespeare and Goethe and for objective art, a French phase of enthusiasm for art as practised in France, ended finally in a didactic phase of which the watchword

was that Life was more important than Art.

The first blossoms of the new generation of writers, Goncharov, Dostoyevsky, Herzen, and others, grew up under his encouragement. He expounded Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol, Griboyedov, Zhukovsky and the writers of the past. His judgments have remained authoritative; but some of his final judgments, which were unshaken for generations, such as for instance his estimates of Pushkin and Lermontov, were much biassed and coloured by his didacticism. He burnt what he had adored in the case of Gogol, who, like Pushkin, became for him too much of an artist, and not enough of a social reformer. Whatever phase Belinsky went through, he was passionate, impulsive, and violent, incapable of being objective, or of doing justice to an opponent, or of seeing two sides to a question. He was a polemical and fanatical knight errant, the prophet and propagandist of Western influence, the bitter enemy of the Slavophiles.

The didactic stamp which he gave to Russian æsthetic and literary criticism has remained on it ever since, and differentiates it from the literary and æsthetic criticism of the rest of Europe, not only from that school of criticism which wrote and writes exclusively under the banner of "Art for Art's Sake," but from those Western critics who championed the importance of moral ideas in literature, just as ardently as he did himself, and who deprecated the theory of Art for Art's sake just as strongly. Thus it is that, from the beginning of Russian criticism down to the present day, a truly objective criticism scarcely exists in Russian literature. Æsthetic criticism becomes a political weapon. "Are you in my camp?" if so, you are a good writer. "Are you in my opponent's camp?" then your god-gifted genius is

mere dross.

The reason of this has been luminously stated by Professor Brückner: "To the intelligent Russian, without a free press, without the liberty of assembly, without the right to free expression of opinion, literature became the last refuge of freedom of thought, the only means of propagating higher ideas. He expected of his country's literature not merely æsthetic recreation; he placed it at the service of his aspirations.... Hence the striking partiality, nay unfairness, displayed by the Russians towards the most perfect works of their own literature, when they did not respond to the aims or expectations of their party or their day." And speaking of the criticism that was produced after 1855, he says: "This criticism is often, in spite of all its giftedness, its ardour and fire, only a mockery of all criticism. The work only serves as an example on which to hang the critics' own views.... This is no reproach; we simply state the fact, and fully recognize the necessity and usefulness of the method. With a backward society, ... this criticism was a means which was sanctified by the end, the spreading of free opinions.... Unhappily, Russian literary criticism has remained till to-day almost solely journalistic, *i. e.* didactic and partisan. See how even now it treats the most interesting, exceptional, and mighty of all Russians, Dostoyevsky, merely because he does not fit into the Radical mould! How unjust it has been towards others! How it has extolled to the clouds the representatives of its own camp!" I quote Professor Brückner, lest I should be myself suspected of being partial in this question. The question, perhaps, may admit of further expansion. It is not that the Russian critics were merely convinced it was all-important that art should have ideas at the roots of it, and had

no patience with a merely shallow æstheticism. They went further; the ideas had to be of one kind. A definite political tendency had to be discerned; and if the critic disagreed with that political tendency, then no amount of qualities—not artistic excellence, form, skill, style, not even genius, inspiration, depth, feeling, philosophy—were recognized.

Herein lies the great difference between Russian and Western critics, between Sainte-Beuve and Belinsky; between Matthew Arnold and his Russian contemporaries. Matthew Arnold defined the highest poetry as being a criticism of life; but that would not have prevented him from doing justice either to a poet so polemical as Byron, or to a poet so completely unpolitical, so sheerly æsthetic as Keats; to Lord Beaconsfield as a novelist, to Mr. Morley or Lord Acton as historians, because their "tendency" or their "politics" were different from his own. The most biassed of English or French critics is broad-minded compared to a Russian critic. Had Keats been a Russian poet, Belinsky would have swept him away with contempt; Wordsworth would have been condemned as reactionary; and Swinburne's politics alone would have been taken into consideration. At the present day, almost ten years after Professor Brückner wrote his *History of Russian Literature*, now that the press is more or less free, save for occasional pin-pricks, now that literary output is in any case unfettered, and the stage freer than it is in England, the same criticism still applies. Russian literary criticism is still journalistic. There are and there always have been brilliant exceptions, of course, two of the most notable of which are VOLYNSKY and MEREZHKOVSKY; but as a rule the political camp to which the writer belongs is the all-important question; and I know cases of Russian politicians

who have been known to refuse to write, even in foreign reviews, because they disapproved of the "tendency" of those reviews, the tendency being non-existent—as is generally the case with English reviews,—and the review harbouring opinions of every shade and tendency. You would think that narrow-mindedness could no further go than to refuse to let your work appear in an impartial organ, lest in that same organ an opinion opposed to your own might appear also. But the cause of this is the same now as it used to be, namely that, in spite of there being a greater measure of freedom in Russia, political liberty does not yet exist. Liberty of assembly does not exist; liberty of conscience only partially exists; the press is annoyed and hampered by restrictions; and the great majority of Russian writers are still engaged in fighting for these things, and therefore still ready to sacrifice fairness for the greater end,—the achievement of political freedom.

Thus criticism in Russia became a question of camps, and the question arises, what were these camps? From the dawn of the age of pure literature, Russia was divided into two great camps: The Slavophiles and the Propagandists of Western Ideas.

The trend towards the West began with the influence of Joseph Le Maistre and the St. Petersburg Jesuits. In 1836, CHAADAEV, an ex-guardsman who had served in the Russian campaign in France and travelled a great deal in Western Europe, and who shared Joseph Le Maistre's theory that Russia had suffered by her isolation from the West and through the influence of the former Byzantine Empire, published the first of his *Lettres sur la Philosophie de l'Histoire* in the *Telescope* of Moscow. This letter came like a bomb-shell. He glorified the tradition and

continuity of the Catholic world. He said that Russia existed, as it were, outside of time, without the tradition either of the Orient or of the Occident, and that the universal culture of the human race had not touched it. "The atmosphere of the West produces ideas of duty, law, justice, order; we have given nothing to the world and taken nothing from it; ... we have not contributed anything to the progress of humanity, and we have disfigured everything we have taken from that progress. Hostile circumstances have alienated us from the general trend in which the social idea of Christianity grew up; thus we ought to revise our faith, and begin our education over again on another basis." The expression of these incontrovertible sentiments resulted in the exile of the editor of the *Telescope*, the dismissal of the Censor, and in the official declaration of Chaadaev's insanity, who was put under medical supervision for a year.

Chaadaev made disciples who went further than he did, PRINCESS VOLKONSKY, the authoress of a notable book on the Orthodox Church, and PRINCE GAGARIN, who both became Catholics. This was one branch of Westernism. Another branch, to which Belinsky belonged, had no Catholic leanings, but sought for salvation in socialism and atheism. The most important figure in this branch is ALEXANDER HERZEN (1812-1870). His real name was Yakovlev; his father, a wealthy nobleman, married in Germany, but did not legalize his marriage in Russia, so his children took their mother's name.

Herzen's career belongs rather to the history of Russia than to the history of Russian literature; were it not that, besides being one of the greatest and most influential personalities of his time, he was a

great memoir-writer. He began, after a mathematical training at the University, with fiction, of which the best example is a novel *Who is to Blame?* which paints the *génie sans portefeuille* of the period that Turgenev was so fond of depicting. Herzen was exiled on account of his oral propaganda, first to Perm, and then to Vyatka. In 1847, he left Russia for ever, and lived abroad for the rest of his life, at first in Paris, and afterwards in London, where he edited a newspaper called *The Bell*.

Herzen was a Socialist. Western Europe he considered to be played out. He looked upon Socialism as a new religion and a new form of Christianity, which would be to the new world what Christianity had been to the old. The Russian peasants would play the part of the Invasion of the Barbarians; and the functions of the State would be taken over by the Russian Communes on a basis of voluntary and mutual agreement—the principle of the Commune, of sharing all possessions in common, being so near the fundamental principle of Christianity.

"A thinking Russian," he wrote, "is the most independent being in the world. What can stop him? Consideration for the past? But what is the starting-point of modern Russian history if it be not a total negation of nationalism and tradition?... What do we care, disinherited minors that we are, for the duties you have inherited? Can your worn-out morality satisfy us? Your morality which is neither Christian nor human, which is used only in copybooks and for the ritual of the law?" Again: "We are free because we begin with our own liberation; we are independent; we have nothing to lose or to honour. A Russian will never be a protestant, or follow the

juste milieu ... our civilization is external, our corrupt morals quite crude."

The great point Herzen was always making was that Russia had escaped the baleful tradition of Western Europe, and the hereditary infection of Western corruption. Thus, in his disenchantment with Western society and his enthusiasm for the communal ownership of land, he was at one with the Slavophiles; where he differed from them was in accepting certain Western ideas, and in thinking that a new order of things, a new heaven and earth, could be created by a social revolution, which should be carried out by the Slavs. His influence—he was one of the precursors of Nihilism, for the seed he sowed, falling on the peculiar soil where it fell, produced the whirlwind as a harvest—belongs to history. What belongs to literature are his memoirs, *My Past and my Thoughts* (*Byloe i Dumy*), which were written between 1852 and 1855. These memoirs of everyday life and encounters with all sorts and conditions of extraordinary men are in their subject-matter as exciting as a novel, and, in their style, on a level with the masterpieces of Russian prose, through their subtle psychology, interest, wit, and artistic form.

Herzen lived to see his ideas bearing fruit in the one way which of all others he would have sought to avoid, namely in "militancy" and terrorism. When in 1866, an attempt was made by Karakozov to assassinate Alexander II, and Herzen wrote an article repudiating all political assassinations as barbarous, the revolutionary parties solemnly denounced him and his newspaper. *The Bell*, which had already lost its popularity owing to Herzen's pro-Polish sympathies in 1863, ceased to have any circulation. Thus he lived to see his vast hopes shattered, the

seed he had sown bearing a fruit he distrusted, his dreams of regeneration burst like a bubble, his ideals exploited by unscrupulous criminals. He died in 1870, leaving a name which is as great in Russian literature as it is remarkable in Russian history.

Turning now to the *Slavophiles*, their idea was that Russia was already in possession of the best possible institutions,—orthodoxy, autocracy, and communal ownership, and that the West had everything to learn from Russia. They pointed to the evils arising from the feudal and aristocratic state, the system of primogeniture in the West, the higher legal status of women in Russia, and the superiority of a communal system, which leads naturally to a Consultative National Assembly with unanimous decisions, over the parliaments and party systems of the West.

The leader of the Slavophiles was HOMYAKOV, a man of great culture; a dialectician, a poet, and an impassioned defender of orthodoxy. The best of his lyrics, which are inspired by a profound love of his country and belief in it, have great depth of feeling. Besides Homyakov, there were other poets, such as TYUTCHEV and IVAN AKSAKOV. Just as the camp of Reform produced in Herzen a supreme writer of memoirs, that of the Slavophiles also produced a unique memoir writer in the SERGE AKSAKOV, the father of the poet (1791-1859), who published his *Family Chronicle* in 1856, and who describes the life of the end of the eighteenth century, and the age of Alexander. This book, one of the most valuable historical documents in Russian, and a priceless collection of biographical portraits, is also a gem of Russian prose, exact in its observation, picturesque and perfectly balanced in its diction.

Aksakov remembered with unclouded distinctness exactly what he had seen in his childhood, which he spent in the district of Orenburg. He paints the portraits of his grandfather and his great-aunt. We see every detail of the life of a backwoodsman of the days of Catherine II. We see the noble of those days, simple and rustic in his habits as a peasant, almost entirely unlettered, and yet a gentleman through and through, unswerving in maintaining the standard of morals and traditions which he considers due to his ancient lineage. We see every hour of the day of his life in the country; we hear all the details of the family life, the marriage of his son, the domestic troubles of his sister.

What strikes one most, perhaps, besides the contrast between the primitive simplicity of the habits and manners of the life described, and the astoundingly gentlemanlike feelings of the man who leads this quiet and rustic life in remote and backward conditions, is that there is not a hint or suspicion of anything antiquated in the sentiments and opinions we see at play. The story of Aksakov's grandfather might be that of any country gentleman in any country, at any epoch, making allowances for a certain difference in manners and customs and conditions which were peculiar to the epoch in question, the existence of serfdom, for instance—although here, too, the feeling with regard to manners described is startlingly like the ideal of good manners of any epoch, although the *mœurs* are sometimes different. The story is as vivid and as interesting as that of any novel, as that of the novels of Russian writers of genius, and it has the additional value of being true. And yet we never feel that Aksakov has a thought of compiling a historical document for the sake of its historical interest. He is

making history unawares, just as Monsieur Jourdain talked prose without knowing it; and, whether he was aware of it or not, he wrote perfect prose. No more perfect piece of prose writing exists. The style flows on like a limpid river; there is nothing superfluous, and not a hesitating touch. It is impossible to put down the narrative after once beginning it, and I have heard of children who read it like a fairy-tale. One has the sensation, in reading it, of being told a story by some enchanting nurse, who, when the usual question, “Is it true?” is put to her, could truthfully answer, “Yes, it is true.” The pictures of nature, the portraits of the people, all the good and all the bad of the good and the bad old times pass before one with epic simplicity and the magic of a fairy-tale. One is spellbound by the charm, the dignity, the good-nature, the gentle, easy accent of the speaker, in whom one feels convinced not only that there was nothing common nor mean, but to whom nothing was common or mean, who was a gentleman by character as well as by lineage, one of God’s as well as one of Russia’s nobility.

There is no book in Russian which, for its entrancing interest as well as for its historical value, so richly deserves translation into English; only such a translation should be made by a stylist—that is, by a man who knows how to speak and write his mother tongue perspicuously and simply.

CHAPTER V

THE EPOCH OF REFORM

For seven years after the death of Belinsky in 1848, all literary development ceased. This period was the darkest hour before the dawn of the second great renascence of Russian literature. Criticism was practically non-existent; the Slavophiles were forbidden to write; the Westernizers were exiled. An increased severity of censorship, an extreme suspicion and drastic measures on the part of the Government were brought about by the fears which the Paris revolution of 1848 had caused. The Westernizers felt the effects of this as much as the Slavophiles; a group of young literary men, schoolmasters and officers, the Petrashevtsy, called after their leader, a Foreign Office official PETRASHEVSKY, met together on Fridays and debated on abstract subjects; they discussed the emancipation of the serfs, read Fourier and Lamennais, and considered the establishment of a secret press: the scheme of a popular propaganda was thought of, but nothing had got beyond talk—and the whole thing was in reality only talk—when the society was discovered by the police and its members were punished with the utmost severity. Twenty-one of them were condemned to death, among whom was Dostoyevsky, who, being on the army list, was accused of treason. They were reprieved on the scaffold; some sent into penal servitude in Siberia, and some into the army. This marked one of the darkest hours in the history of Russian literature. And from this date until 1855, complete stagnation reigned. In 1855 the Emperor Nicholas died during the Crimean War; and with the accession of his son

Alexander II, a new era dawned on Russian literature, the Era of the Great Reforms. The Crimean War and the reforms which followed it—the emancipation of the serfs, the creation of a new judicial system, and the foundation of local self-government—stabbed the Russian soul into life, relieved it of its gag, produced a great outburst of literature which enlarged and enriched the literature of the world, and gave to the world three of its greatest novelists: Turgenev, Tolstoy, and Dostoyevsky.

IVAN TURGENEV (1816-83), whose name is of Tartar origin, came of an old family which had frequently distinguished itself in the annals of Russian literature by a fearless outspokenness. He began his literary career by writing verse (1843); but, like Maupassant, he soon understood that verse was not his true vehicle, and in 1847 gave up writing verse altogether; in that year he published in *The Contemporary* his first sketch of peasant life, *Khor and Kalinych*, which afterwards formed part of his *Sportsman's Sketches*, twenty-four of which he collected and published in 1852. The Government rendered Turgenev the same service as it had done to Pushkin, in exiling him to his own country estate for two years. When, after the two years, this forced exile came to an end, he went into another kind of exile of his own accord; he lived at first at Baden, and then in Paris, and only reappeared in Russia from time to time; this accounts for the fact that, although Turgenev belongs chronologically to the epoch of the great reforms, the Russia which he paints was really more like the Russia before that epoch; and when he tried to paint the Russia that was contemporary to him his work gave rise to much controversy.

His *Rudin* was published in 1856, *The Nest of Gentlefolk* in 1859, *On the Eve* in 1860, *Fathers and Sons* in 1862, *Smoke* in 1867. Turgenev did for Russian literature what Byron did for English literature; he led the genius of Russia on a pilgrimage throughout all Europe. And in Europe his work reaped a glorious harvest of praise. Flaubert was astounded by him, George Sand looked up to him as to a Master, Taine spoke of his work as being the finest artistic production since Sophocles. In Turgenev's work, Europe not only discovered Turgenev, but it discovered Russia, the simplicity and the naturalness of the Russian character; and this came as a revelation. For the first time, Europe came across the Russian woman whom Pushkin was the first to paint; for the first time Europe came into contact with the Russian soul; and it was the sharpness of this revelation which accounts for the fact of Turgenev having received in the West an even greater meed of praise than he was perhaps entitled to.

In Russia, Turgenev attained almost instant popularity. His *Sportsman's Sketches* made him known, and his *Nest of Gentlefolk* made him not only famous but universally popular. In 1862 the publication of his masterpiece *Fathers and Sons* dealt his reputation a blow. The revolutionary elements in Russia regarded his hero, Bazarov, as a calumny and a libel; whereas the reactionary elements in Russia looked upon *Fathers and Sons* as a glorification of Nihilism. Thus he satisfied nobody. He fell between two stools. This, perhaps, could only happen in Russia to this extent; and for the same reason as that which made Russian criticism didactic. The conflicting elements of Russian society were so terribly in earnest in fighting their cause, that any

one whom they did not regard as definitely for them was at once considered an enemy, and an impartial delineation of any character concerned in the political struggle was bound to displease both parties. If a novelist drew a Nihilist, he must either be a hero or a scoundrel, if either the revolutionaries or the reactionaries were to be pleased. If in England the militant suffragists suddenly had a huge mass of educated opinion behind them and a still larger mass of educated public opinion against them, and some one were to draw in a novel an impartial picture of a suffragette, the same thing would happen. On a small scale, as far as the suffragettes are concerned, it has happened in the case of Mr. Wells. But, if Turgenev's popularity suffered a shock in Russia from which it with difficulty recovered, in Western Europe it went on increasing. Especially in England, Turgenev became the idol of all that was eclectic, and admiration for Turgenev a hall-mark of good taste.

In Russia, Turgenev's work recovered from the unpopularity caused by his *Fathers and Sons* when Nihilism became a thing of the past, and revolution took an entirely different shape; but, with the growing up of new generations, his popularity suffered in a different way and for different reasons. A new element came into Russian literature with Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, and later with Gorky, and Turgenev's work began to seem thin and artificial beside the creations of these stronger writers; but in Russia, where Turgenev's work has the advantage of being read in the original, it had an asset which ensured it a permanent and safe harbour, above and beyond the fluctuations of literary taste, the strife of political parties, and the conflict of social ideals; and that was its art, its poetry, its style, which ensured it a lasting and imperishable niche among the great

classics of Russian literature. And there it stands now. Turgenev's work in Russia is no longer disputed or a subject of dispute. It is taken for granted; and, whatever the younger generation will read and admire, they will always read and admire Turgenev first. His work is a necessary part of the intellectual baggage of any educated man and, especially, of the educated adolescent.

The position of Tennyson in England offers in a sense a parallel to that of Turgenev in Russia. Tennyson, like Turgenev, enjoyed during his lifetime not only the popularity of the masses, but the appreciation of all that was most eclectic in the country. Then a reaction set in. Now I believe the young generation think nothing of Tennyson at all. And yet nothing is so sure as his permanent place in English literature; and that permanent place is secured to him by his incomparable diction. So it is with Turgenev. One cannot expect the younger generation to be wildly excited about Turgenev's ideas, characters, and problems. They belong to an epoch which is dead. At the same time, one cannot help thinking that the most advanced of the symbolist writers would not have been sorry had he happened by chance to write *Bezhin Meadow* and the *Poems in Prose*. Just so one cannot help thinking that the most modern of our poets, had he by accident written *The Revenge* or *Tears, Idle Tears*, would not have thrown them in the fire!

There is, indeed, something in common between Tennyson and Turgenev. They both have something mid-Victorian in them. They are both idyllic, and both of them landscape-lovers and lords of language. They neither of them had any very striking message to preach; they both of them seem to halt, except on

rare occasions, on the threshold of passion; they both of them have a rare stamp of nobility; and in both of them there is an element of banality. They both seem to a certain extent to be shut off from the world by the trees of old parks, where cultivated people are enjoying the air and the flowers and the shade, and where between the tall trees you get glimpses of silvery landscapes and limpid waters, and soft music comes from the gliding boat. Of course, there is more than this in Turgenev, but this is the main impression.

Pathos he has, of the finest, and passion he describes beautifully from the outside, making you feel its existence, but not convincing you that he felt it himself; but on the other hand what an artist he is! How beautifully his pictures are painted; and how rich he is in poetic feeling!

Turgenev is above all things a poet. He carried on the work of Pushkin, and he did for Russian prose what Pushkin did for Russian poetry; he created imperishable models of style. His language has the same limpidity and absence of any blur that we find in Pushkin's work. His women have the same crystal radiance, transparent simplicity, and unaffected strength; his pictures of peasant life, and his country episodes have the same truth to nature; as an artist he had a severe sense of proportion, a perfect purity of outline, and an absolute harmony between the thought and the expression. Now that modern Europe and England have just begun to discover Dostoyevsky, it is possible that a reaction will set in to the detriment of Turgenev. Indeed, to a certain extent this reaction has set in in Western Europe, as M. Haumant, one of Turgenev's ablest critics and biographers, pointed out not long ago. And, as the

majority of Englishmen have not the advantage of reading him in the original, they will be unchecked in this reaction, if it comes about, by their appreciation of what is perhaps most durable in his work. Yet to translate Turgenev adequately, it would require an English poet gifted with a sense of form and of words as rare as that of Turgenev himself. However this may be, there is no doubt about the importance of Turgenev in the history of Russian literature, whatever the future generations in Russia or in Europe may think of his work. He was a great novelist besides being a great poet. Certainly he never surpassed his early *Sportsman's Sketches* in freshness of inspiration and the perfection of artistic execution.

His *Bezhin Meadow*, where the children tell each other bogey stories in the evening, is a gem with which no other European literature has anything to compare. *The Singers*, *Death*, and many others are likewise incomparable. *The Nest of Gentlefolk*, to which Turgenev owed his great popularity, is quite perfect of its kind, with its gallery of portraits going back to the eighteenth century and to the period of Alexander I; its lovable, human hero Lavretsky, and Liza, a fit descendant of Pushkin's Tatiana, radiant as a star. All Turgenev's characters are alive; but, with the exception of his women and the hero of *Fathers and Sons*, they are alive in bookland rather than in real life.

George Meredith's characters, for instance, are alive, but they belong to a land or rather a planet of his own making, and we should never recognize Sir Willoughby Patterne in the street, but we do meet women sometimes who remind us of Clara Middleton and Carinthia Jane. The same is true with regard to

Turgenev, although it is not another planet he created, but a special atmosphere and epoch to which his books exclusively belong, and which some critics say never existed at all. That is of no consequence. It exists for us in his work.

But perhaps what gave rise to accusations of unreality and caricature against Turgenev's characters, apart from the intenser reality of Tolstoy's creations, by comparison with which Turgenev's suffered, was that Turgenev, while professing to describe the present, and while believing that he was describing the present, was in reality painting an epoch that was already dead. *Rudin*, *Smoke*, and *On the Eve* have suffered more from the passage of time. *Rudin* is a pathetic picture of the type that Turgenev was so fond of depicting, the *génie sans portefeuille*, a latter-day Hamlet who can only unpack his heart with words, and with his eloquence persuade others to believe in him, and succeed even in persuading himself to believe in himself, until the moment for action comes, when he breaks down. The subjects of *Smoke* and *Spring Waters* are almost identical; but, whereas *Spring Waters* is one of the most poetical of Turgenev's achievements, *Smoke* seems to-day the most banal, and almost to deserve Tolstoy's criticism: "In *Smoke* there is hardly any love of anything, and very little pity; there is only love of light and playful adultery; and therefore the poetry of that novel is repulsive." *On the Eve*, which tells of a Bulgarian on the eve of the liberation of his country, suffers from being written at a time when real Russians were hard at work at that very task; and it was on this account that the novel found little favour in Russia, as the fiction paled beside the reality.

It was followed by Turgenev's masterpiece, for which time can only heighten one's admiration. *Fathers and Sons* is as beautifully constructed as a drama of Sophocles; the events move inevitably to a tragic close. There is not a touch of banality from beginning to end, and not an unnecessary word; the portraits of the old father and mother, the young Kirsanov, and all the minor characters are perfect; and amidst the trivial crowd, Bazarov stands out like Lucifer, the strongest—the only strong character—that Turgenev created, the first Nihilist—for if Turgenev was not the first to invent the word, he was the first to apply it in this sense.

Bazarov is the incarnation of the Lucifer type that recurs again and again in Russian history and fiction, in sharp contrast to the meek humble type of Ivan Durak. Lermontov's Pechorin was in some respects an anticipation of Bazarov; so were the many Russian rebels. He is the man who denies, to whom art is a silly toy, who detests abstractions, knowledge, and the love of Nature; he believes in nothing; he bows to nothing; he can break, but he cannot bend; he does break, and that is the tragedy, but, breaking, he retains his invincible pride, and

> "not cowardly he puts off his
> helmet,"

and he dies "valiantly vanquished."

In the pages which describe his death Turgenev reaches the high-water mark of his art, his moving quality, his power, his reserve. For manly pathos they rank among the greatest scenes in literature, stronger than the death of Colonel Newcome and the best of Thackeray. Among English novelists it is,

perhaps, only Meredith who has struck such strong, piercing chords, nobler than anything in Daudet or Maupassant, more reserved than anything in Victor Hugo, and worthy of the great poets, of the tragic pathos of Goethe and Dante. The character of Bazarov, as has been said, created a sensation and endless controversy. The revolutionaries thought him a caricature and a libel, the reactionaries a scandalous glorification of the Devil; and impartial men such as Dostoyevsky, who knew the revolutionaries at first hand, thought the type unreal. It is possible that Bazarov was not like the Nihilists of the sixties; but in any case as a figure in fiction, whatever the fact may be, he lives and will continue to live.

In *Virgin Soil*, Turgenev attempted to paint the underground revolutionary movement; here, in the opinion of all Russian judges, he failed. The revolutionaries considered their portraits here more unreal than that of Bazarov; the Conservatives were grossly caricatured; the hero Nezhdanov was a type of a past world, another Rudin, and not in the least like—so those who knew them tell us—the revolutionaries of the day. Solomin, the energetic character in the book, was considered as unreal as Nezhdanov. The wife of the reactionary Sipyagin is a *pastiche* of the female characters of that type in his other books; cleverly drawn, but a completely conventional book character. The redeeming feature in the book is Mariana, the heroine, one of Turgenev's finest ideal women; and it is full, of course, of gems of descriptive writing. The book was a complete failure, and after this Turgenev went back to writing short stories. The result was a great disappointment to Turgenev, who had thought that, by writing a novel dealing with actual life, he would

please and reconcile all parties. To this later epoch belong his matchless *Poems in Prose*, one of the latest melodies he sounded, a melody played on one string of the lyre, but whose sweetness contained the essence of all his music.

Turgenev's work has a historic as well as an artistic value. He painted the Russian gentry, and the type of gentry that was disappearing, as no one else has done. His landscape painting has been dwelt on; one ought, perhaps, to add that, beautiful as it is, it still belongs to the region of conventional landscape painting; his landscape is the orthodox Russian landscape, and is that of the age of Pushkin, in which no bird except a nightingale is mentioned, no flower except a rose. This convention was not really broken in prose until the advent of Gorky.

Reviewing Turgenev's work as a whole, any one who goes back to his books after a time, and after a course of more modern and rougher, stormier literature, will, I think, be surprised at its excellence and perhaps be inclined to heave a deep sigh of relief. Some of it will appear conventional; he will notice a faint atmosphere of rose-water; he will feel, if he has been reading the moderns, as a traveller feels who, after an exciting but painful journey, through dangerous ways and unpleasant surroundings, suddenly enters a cool garden, where fountains sob between dark cypresses, and swans float majestically on artificial lakes. There is an aroma of syringa in the air; the pleasaunce is artistically laid out, and full of fragrant flowers. But he will not despise that garden for its elegance and its tranquil seclusion, for its trees cast large shadows; the nightingale sings in its thickets, the moon silvers the calm statues, and the sound of music on the

waters goes to the heart. Turgenev reminds one of a certain kind of music, beautiful in form, not too passionate and yet full of emotion, Schumann's music, for instance; if Pushkin is the Mozart of Russian literature, Turgenev is the Schumann; not amongst the very greatest, but still a poet, full of inspired lyrical feeling; and a great, a classic artist, the prose Virgil of Russian literature.

What Turgenev did for the country gentry, GONCHAROV (1812-91) did for the St. Petersburg gentry. The greater part of his work deals with the forties. Goncharov, a noble (*dvoryanin*) by education, and according to his own account by descent, though according to another account he was of merchant extraction, entered the Government service, and then went round the world in a frigate, a journey which he described in letters. Of his three novels, *The Everyday Story*, *Oblomov*, and *The Landslip*, *Oblomov* is the most famous: in it he created a type which became immortal; and Oblomov has passed into the Russian language just as Tartuffe has passed into the French language, or Pecksniff into the English language. A chapter of the book appeared in 1849, and the whole novel in 1859.

Oblomov is the incarnation of what in Russia is called *Halatnost*, which means the propensity to live in dressing-gown and slippers. It is told of Krylov, who was an Oblomov of real life, and who spent most of his time lying on a sofa, that one day somebody pointed out to him that the nail on which a picture was hanging just over the sofa on which he was lying, was loose, and that the picture would probably fall on his head. "No," said Krylov, not getting up, "the picture will fall just beyond the sofa. I know the angle." The apathy of Oblomov, although

to the outward eye it resembles this mere physical inertness, is subtly different. Krylov's apathy was the laziness of a man whose brain brought forth concrete fruits; and who feels neither the inclination nor the need of any other exercise, either physical or intellectual. Oblomov's apathy is that of a brain seething with the burning desires of a *vie intime*, which all comes to nothing owing to a kind of spiritual paralysis, "une infirmité morale." It is true he finds it difficult to put on his socks, still more to get up, when he is awake, impossible to change his rooms although the ceiling is falling to bits, and impossible not to lie on the sofa most of the day; but the reason of this obstinate inertia is not mere physical disinclination, it is the result of a mixture of seething and simmering aspirations, indefinite disillusions and apprehensions, that elude the grasp of the will. Oblomov is really the victim of a dream, of an aspiration, of an ideal as bright and mobile as a will-o'-the-wisp, as elusive as thistledown, which refuses to materialize.

The tragedy of the book lies in the effort he makes to rise from his slough of apathy, or rather the effort his friends encourage him to make. Oblomov's heart is made of pure gold; his soul is of transparent crystal; there is not a base flaw in the paste of his composition; yet his will is sapped, not by words, words, words, but by the inability to formulate the shadows of his inner life. His friend is an energetic German-Russian. He introduces Oblomov to a charming girl, and together they conspire to drag him from his apathy. The girl, Olga, at first succeeds; she falls in love with him, and he with her; he wants to marry her, but he cannot take the necessary step of arranging his affairs in a manner which would make that marriage possible; and gradually he falls

back into a new stage of apathy worse than the first; she realizes the hopelessness of the situation, and they agree to separate. She marries the energetic friend, and Oblomov sinks into the comforts of a purely negative life of complete inaction and seclusion, watched over by a devoted housekeeper, whom he ultimately marries.

The extraordinary subtlety of the psychology of this study lies, as well as in other things, in the way in which we feel that Olga is not really happy with her excellent husband; he is the man whom she respects; but Oblomov is the man whom she loves, till the end; and she would give worlds to respect him too if he would only give her the chance. Oblomov often defends his stagnation, while realizing only too well what a misfortune it is; and we sometimes feel that he is not altogether wrong. The chapter that tells of his dream in which his past life and childhood arise before him in a haze of serene laziness is one of the masterpieces of Russian prose. The book is terribly real, and almost intolerably sad.

Goncharov's third and last novel deals with the life of a landed proprietor on the Volga, and its main idea is the contrast between the old generation before the reforms and the new generation of Alexander II's day—a paler *Fathers and Sons*.

To go back to criticism, the name of BAKUNIN, the apostle of destruction and the incarnation of Russian Nihilism, belongs to history; that of GRIGORIEV must be mentioned as founding a school of thought which preached the union of arts with the national soil; he exercised a strong influence over Dostoyevsky. KATKOV, whose influence was at one time immense, originally belonged to the circle of Herzen and

Bakunin; he became a professor of philosophy, but was driven from his chair in the reaction of '48, and, being banished from erudition, he took up a journalistic career and became the Editor of the *Moscow News*. He was a Slavophile, and when the rising in Poland broke out, he headed the great wave of nationalist feeling which passed over the country at that time; he doubled the number of his subscribers, and dealt a death-blow to Herzen's *Bell*. After 1866, he headed reactionary journalism and became a Nationalist of the narrowest kind; but he was of a higher calibre than the Nationalists of later days. Slavophile critics of another kind were STRAKHOV and DANILEVSKY, like Dostoyevsky, disciples of Grigoriev, who preached the last word of Slavophilism and were opposed to all foreign innovations.

On the Radical side the leaders were CHERNYSHEVSKY, DOBROLYUBOV and PISAREV. Chernyshevsky, who translated John Stuart Mill, and published a treatise on the æsthetic relations of art and reality, served a sentence of seven years' hard labour and of twenty years' exile. His criticism—socialist propaganda, and an attack on all metaphysics—does not belong to literature, but his novel *Shto dielat*—"What is to be done?"—had an immense influence on his generation. It deals with Nihilism. Dobrolyubov, who died when he was twenty-four, belonged to the same realistic school. His main theory was that Russian literature is dominated by Oblomov; that Chatsky, Pechorin, and Rudin are all Oblomovs. Both Pisarev and Dobrolyubov followed Chernyshevsky in his realistic philosophy, in his rejection of metaphysics, in his theory that beauty is to be sought in life only, and that the sole duty of art is to help to illustrate life.

Pisarev recognized that Turgenev's Bazarov was a picture of himself, and he was pleased with the portrait. Both Pisarev and Dobrolyubov died young.

VLADIMIR SOLOVIEV (1853-1900), critic as well as poet, moral philosopher, and theologian, is one of the most interesting figures in Russian literature. What is most remarkable about him, and what makes him stand out, a radiant exception in Russian criticism, is his absolute independence. He belonged to no camp; he was a slave to no party cry; utterly unselfish, his sole aim was to seek after the truth for the sake of truth, and to proclaim it. In an age of positivism, he was a believing Christian, and the dream of his life was a union of the Eastern and Western Churches. He deals with this idea in a book which he wrote in French and published in Paris: *L'Église Russe et l'Église Universelle*. He admired the older Slavophiles, but he severely attacked the Nationalists, such as Katkov. His range of subjects was great, and his style was brilliant; like many great thinkers, he was far ahead of his time, and in his criticism of the *Intelligentsia* anticipated some tendencies, which have become visible since the revolution of 1905. He reminds one at times of Mr. A. J. Balfour, and even of Mr. G. K. Chesterton, with whose "orthodoxy" he would have much sympathy; and he deals with questions such as Woman's Suffrage in a way which exactly fits the present day. He never became a Catholic, holding that the Eastern Church *qua* Church had never been cut off from the West, and that only one definite schism had been condemned; but he believed in the necessity of a universal Church. He was the first intellectual Russian to point out to a generation which took atheism as a matter of course that they were possibly inferior instead of superior to religion. He believed in

Russia; he had nothing against the Slavophile theory that Russia had a divine mission; only he wished to see that mission divinely performed. He believed in the East of Christ, and not in that of Xerxes. He died in 1900, before he had finished his *Magnum Opus*, a work on moral philosophy written on a religious basis. He preached self-effacement; pity towards one's fellow men; and reverence towards the supernatural. His whole work is a defence of moral principles, written with the soul of a poet, the knowledge of a scholar, and the brilliance of a dialectician. It is only lately that his books have gained the appreciation which they deserve; they are certainly more in harmony with the present generation than with that of the sixties and the seventies. His *Three Conversations* has been translated into English. Vladimir Soloviev stands in a niche of his own, isolated from the crowd by his own originality, his brilliance, and his prematurity; he was *intempestivus*.

To the same epoch belong four other important writers, each occupying a place apart from the current stream of literary or political influences: one because he was a satirist, one because he wrote for the stage, and the two others because one impartially, and the other bitterly, dared to criticize the Radicals.

MICHAEL SALTYKOV (1826-89), who wrote under the name of Shchedrin, holds a unique place in Russian literature, not only because he is a writer of genius, but because he is one of the world's great satirists. Unlike Russian satirists before him, Krylov, Gogol, and Griboyedov, good-humoured irony or sharp rapier thrusts of wit do not suffice him; he has in himself the *saeva indignatio*, and he expresses it with

all the concentrated spite that he can muster, which is all the more deadly from being used with perfect control. His work is bulky, and fills eleven thick volumes; some of it is quite out of date and at the present day almost unintelligible; but all that deals with the fundamental essentials of the Russian character, and not with the passing episodes of the day, has the freshness of immortality. At the outset of his career, he was banished to Vyatka, where he remained from 1848-56, an exile, which gave him a rich store of priceless material. His experiences appeared in his *Sketches of Provincial Life* in 1886-7.

He describes the good old times and the officials of the good old times, with diabolic malice and with an unequalled eye for the ironical, the comic, the topsy-turvy, and the true; and while he is as observant as Gogol, he is as bitter as Swift. He puts his characters on the stage and makes them relate their experiences; thus we hear how the collector of the dues manages to combine the maximum amount of robbery with the minimum amount of inconvenience. In his pictures of prison life, the prisoners tell their own stories, sometimes with unaffected frankness, sometimes with startling cynicism, and sometimes the story is obscured by a whole heap of lies. The prisoners are of different classes; one is an ex-official who states that he was a statistician who got into trouble over his figures; wishing to levy dues on a peasant's property, he had demanded the number, not of their bee-hives, but of their bees, and wrote in his list: "The peasant Sidorov possesses two horses, three cows, nine sheep, one calf, and thirty-nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-seven bees." Unfortunately he was betrayed by the police inspector.

Saltykov's satire deals entirely with the middle class, the high officials, the average official, and the minor public servants; and his best-known work, and one that has not aged any more than Swift has aged, is his *History of a City according to the original documents*.

In this he tells of the city of *Glupov*, *Fool-City*, where the people were such fools that they were not content until they found some one to rule them who was stupider than they were themselves. The various phases Russia had gone through are touched off; the mania for regulations, the formalism, the official red-tape, the persecution of independent thought, and the oppression of original thinkers and writers; the ultimate ideal is that introduced by the last ruler of Glupov (the history lasts from 1731 to 1826), of turning the country into barracks and reducing every one and everything to one level—in which the régime of the period of Nicholas I is satirized; until in the final picture, as fine in its way as Pope's close of the *Dunciad*, the stream rises, and refusing to be stopped by the dam, carries everything away. The style parodies that of the ancient chroniclers; and its chief intent lies not in the satirizing of any particular events or person, but in the shafts of light, sometimes bitter, and sometimes inexpressibly droll, it throws on the Russian system of administration and on the Russian character.

In his *Pompaduri*, Saltykov dissects and vivisects the higher official,—the big-wig,—and in his sketches from the "Domain of Moderation and Accuracy," he writes, in little, the epic of the minor public servant —the man who is never heard of, who is included in the term of "the rest," but who, nevertheless, is a cogwheel in the machinery, without which the big-

wigs cannot act or execute. No more supreme piece of art than this piece of satire exists. The typical minor official is drawn in all the variations of his miserable and pitiable species, and in all the phases of his ignoble and sometimes tragical career, with a pen dipped in scorn and stinging malice, not unblent with a grave pity, which always exists in the work of the greatest satirists—"Peace to all such, but there was one ..." for instance—and wielded with terrible certainty of touch. This epic of the *Molchalins* of life —the typical officials who cease to be men—was the story of a great part of the Russian population; and in its essence, a great deal of it remains true to-day, while all of it remains artistically enjoyable.

Saltykov continued to write during the whole of his long life. His field of satire ranges from the days before serfdom to the epoch of the reforms, extends to the days of the Russo-Turkish War, and passes the frontier into the West. It is impossible here even to name all his works; but there is one, written in the decline of his life, which has a solid historical as well as a rich and varied artistic interest. This is his *Poshenkhonskaya Starina*; it is practically the history of his childhood, his upbringing, and the state of affairs which existed at that time, the life lived by his parents and their neighbours, the landed proprietors and their serfs. With amazing impartiality, without exaggeration, and yet with evidences of deep feeling and passionate indignation, all the more striking from being both rare and expressed with reserve, he paints on a large and crowded canvas the life of the masters and their serfs. A long gallery of men and women is opened to one; tragedy, comedy, farce, all are here—in fact, life—life as it was then in a remote corner of the country. Here Saltykov's spite and malice give way to higher strokes of tragic irony and

pity; and the work has dignity as well as power In the bulk of Saltykov's early work there is much dross, much venom, and much ephemeral tinsel that has faded; the stuff of this book is stern and enduring; its subject-matter would not lose a particle of interest in translation. The Russians have been ungrateful towards Saltykov, and have been inclined to neglect his work, the lasting element of which is one of the most original, precious, and remarkable possessions of Russian literature.

The complement of Saltykov is LESKOV (or, as he originally called himself, *Stebnitsky*). The character of his work, its reception by the reading public on the one hand, and by the professional critics on the other, is one of the most striking object-lessons in the history of Russian literature and Russian literary criticism. Leskov has been long ago recognized by educated Russia as a writer of the first rank; what is best in his work, which is bulky and unequal, has the unmistakable hall-mark of the classics; he is with Gogol and Saltykov, and the novelists of the first rank. Educated Russia is fully aware of this. Nobody disputes Leskov his place, nor denies him his supreme artistic talent, his humour, his vividness, his colour, his satire, the depth of his feeling, the richness of his invention. In spite of this, there is no Russian writer who has so acutely suffered from the didactic and partisan quality of Russian criticism.

His literary career began in 1860. Like Saltykov, he paints the period of transition that followed the epoch of the great Reforms. In spite of this, as late as 1902, no critical biography, no serious work of criticism, had been devoted to his books. All Russia had read him, but literary criticism had ignored him. It is as if English literary criticism had ignored

Dickens until 1900.

The reason of this neglect is not far to seek. Saltykov was an independent thinker; he belonged to no literary or political camp; he criticized the partisans of both camps with equal courage; and the partisans could not and did not forgive him. Like Saltykov, Leskov saw what was going on in Russia; with penetrating insight and observation he realized the evils of the old order; like Saltykov, he was filled with indignation, and perhaps to a greater degree than Saltykov, he was filled with pity. But, whereas Saltykov's work was purely destructive—an onslaught of brooms in the Augean stables—Leskov begins where Saltykov ends. Like Saltykov and like Gogol before him, the old order inspires him with laughter, sometimes with bitter laughter, at the absurdities of the old régime and its results; but he does not confine himself to destructive irony and sapping satire. With PISEMSKY, another writer of first-class talent, of the same epoch, Leskov was the first Russian novelist—Griboyedov had already anticipated such criticism in *Gore ot Uma*, in his delineation of Chatsky,—to have the courage to criticize the reformers, the men of the new epoch; and his criticism was not only negative but creative; he realized that everything must be "reformed altogether." He then asked himself whether the new men, who were engaged in the task of reform, were equal to their task. He came to the conclusion not only that they were inadequate, but that they were setting about the business the wrong way, and he had the courage to say so. He was the first Russian novelist to say he disbelieved in Liberals, although he believed in Liberalism; and this was a sentiment which no Liberal in Russia could admit then, and one which they can scarcely admit now.

His criticism of the Liberals was creative, and not negative, in this: that, instead of confining himself to pointing out their weakness and the mistaken course they were taking, he did his best to point out the right path. Dostoyevsky was likewise subjected to the same ostracism. Turgenev suffered from it; but the genius of Dostoyevsky and the art of Turgenev overstepped the limits of all barriers and frontiers. Europe acclaimed them. Leskov's criticism being more local, the ostracism, although powerless to prevent the popularity of his work in Russia, succeeded for a time in keeping him from the notice of Western Europe. This barrier is now being broken down. One of Leskov's masterpieces, *The Sealed Angel*, was lately translated into English; but he is one of the most difficult authors to translate because he is one of the most native.

A far bitterer and more pessimistic note is heard in the work of Pisemsky. He attacks the new democracy mercilessly, and not from any predilection towards the old. His most important work, *The Troubled Sea* (1862), was a terrific onslaught on Radical Russia; and Pisemsky paid the same price for his pessimistic analysis as Leskov did for his impartiality, namely social ostracism.

The work of OSTROVSKY (1823-86) belongs to the history of the Stage, to which he brought slices of real life from the middle class; the townsmen, the minor public servants, merchants great and small, and rogues, a *milieu* which he had observed in his youth, his father having been an attorney to a Moscow merchant. Ostrovsky may be called the founder of modern Russian realistic comedy and drama. In spite of the epoch at which his plays were written (the fifties and the sixties), there is not a

trace of *Scribisme*, no tricks, no effective exits or curtains; he thus anticipated the form of the quite modern drama by about seventy years. His plays hold the stage now in Russia, and form part of the stock repertories every season. They give, moreover, just the same lifelike impression whether read or seen acted; and they are as interesting from a literary as they are from a historical or dramatic point of view, interesting because they are intensely national, and as Russian as beer is English.

This brief summary of the epoch would be still more incomplete than it is without the mention of yet another novelist, GRIGOROVICH. Although on a lower level of art and creative power than Pisemsky and Leskov, he was the pioneer in Russian literature of peasant literature. He anticipated Turgenev's *Sportsman's Sketches*, and for the first time made Russian readers cry with sympathy over the annals of the peasant. Like Turgenev, he was a great landscape painter. In his "Fishermen" he paints the peasant and the artisan's life, and in his "Country Roads" he gives a picture of the good old times—replete with rich humour, and in sharp contrast to Saltykov's sunless and trenchant etching of the same period. Humour, the pathos of the poor, landscape—these are his chief qualities.

CHAPTER VI

TOLSTOY AND DOSTOYEVSKY

With TOLSTOY and DOSTOYEVSKY, we come not only to the two great pillars of modern Russian literature which tower above all others like two colossal statues in the desert, but to two of the greatest figures in the literature of the world. Russia has not given the world a universal poet, a Shakespeare, a Dante, a Goethe, or a Molière; for Pushkin, consummate artist and inspired poet as he was, lacks that peculiar greatness which conquers all demarcations of frontier and difference of language, and produces work which becomes a part of the universal inheritance of all nations; but Russia has given us two prose-writers whose work has done this very thing. And between them they sum up in themselves the whole of the Russian soul, and almost the whole of the Russian character; I say almost the whole of the Russian *character*, because although between them they sum up all that is greatest, deepest, and all that is weakest in the Russian *soul*, there is perhaps one element of the Russian *character*, which, although they understood it well enough, their genius forbade them to possess. If you take as ingredients Peter the Great, Dostoyevsky's Mwyshkin—the idiot, the pure fool who is wiser than the wise—and the hero of Gogol's *Revisor*, Hlestyakov the liar and wind-bag, you can, I think, out of these elements, reconstitute any Russian who has ever lived. That is to say, you will find that every single Russian is compounded either of one or more of these elements.

For instance, mix Peter the Great with a sufficient dose of Hlestyakov, and you get Boris Godunov and Bakunin; leave the Peter the Great element unmixed, and you get Bazarov, and many of Gorky's heroes; mix it slightly with Hlestyakov, and you get Lermontov; let the Hlestyakov element predominate,

and you get Griboyedov's Molchalin; let the Mwyshkin element predominate, with a dose of Hlestyakov, and you get Father Gapon; let it predominate without the dose of Hlestyakov, and you get Oblomov; mix it with a dose of Peter the Great, you get Herzen, Chatsky; and so on. Mix all the elements equally, and you get Onegin, the average man. I do not mean that there are necessarily all these elements in every Russian, but that you will meet with no Russian in whom there is not to be found either one or more than one of them.

Now, in Tolstoy, the Peter the Great element dominates, with a dose of Mwyshkin, and a vast but unsuccessful aspiration towards the complete characteristics of Mwyshkin; while in Dostoyevsky the Mwyshkin predominates, blent with a fiery streak of Peter the Great; but in neither of them is there a touch of Hlestyakov. In Russia, it constantly happens that a man in any class, be he a soldier, sailor, tinker, tailor, rich man, poor man, plough-boy, or thief, will suddenly leave his profession and avocation and set out on the search for God and for truth. These men are called *Bogoiskateli*, Seekers after God. The one fact that the whole world knows about Tolstoy is that, in the midst of his great and glorious artistic career, he suddenly abjured literature and art, denounced worldly possessions, and said that truth was to be found in working like a peasant, and thus created a sect of Tolstoyists. The world then blamed him for inconsistency because he went on writing, and lived as before, with his family and in his own home. But in reality there was no inconsistency, because there was in reality no break. Tolstoy had been a *Bogoiskatel*, a seeker after truth and God all his life; it was only the manner of his search which had changed; but the quest itself remained

unchanged; he was unable, owing to family ties, to push his premises to their logical conclusion until just before his death; but push them to their logical conclusion he did at the last, and he died, as we know, on the road to a monastery.

Tolstoy's manner of search was extraordinary, extraordinary because he was provided for it with the eyes of an eagle which enabled him to see through everything; and, as he took nothing for granted from the day he began his career until the day he died, he was always subjecting people, objects, ideas, to the searchlight of his vision, and testing them to see whether they were true or not; moreover, he was gifted with the power of describing what he saw during this long journey through the world of fact and the world of ideas, whether it were the general or the particular, the mass or the detail, the vision, the panorama, the crowd, the portrait or the miniature, with the strong simplicity of a Homer, and the colour and reality of a Velasquez. This made him one of the world's greatest writers, and the world's greatest artist in narrative fiction. Another peculiarity of his search was that he pursued it with eagle eyes, but with blinkers.

In 1877 Dostoyevsky wrote: "In spite of his colossal artistic talent, Tolstoy is one of those Russian minds which only see that which is right before their eyes, and thus press towards that point. They have not the power of turning their necks to the right or to the left to see what lies on one side; to do this, they would have to turn with their whole bodies. If they do turn, they will quite probably maintain the exact opposite of what they have been hitherto professing; for they are rigidly honest." It is this search carried on by eyes of unsurpassed penetration between blinkers, by

a man who every now and then did turn his whole body, which accounts for the many apparent changes and contradictions of Tolstoy's career.

Another source of contradiction was that by temperament the Lucifer element predominated in him, and the ideal he was for ever seeking was the humility of Mwyshkin, the pure fool, an ideal which he could not reach, because he could not sufficiently humble himself. Thus when death overtook him he was engaged on his last and his greatest voyage of discovery; and there is something solemn and great about his having met with death at a small railway station.

Tolstoy's works are a long record of this search, and of the memories and experiences which he gathered on the way. There is not a detail, not a phase of feeling, not a shade or mood in his spiritual life that he has not told us of in his works. In his *Childhood, Boyhood and Youth*, he re-creates his own childhood, boyhood and youth, not always exactly as it happened in reality; there is *Dichtung* as well as *Wahrheit*; but the *Dichtung* is as true as the *Wahrheit*, because his aim was to recreate the impressions he had received from his early surroundings. Moreover, the searchlight of his eyes even then fell mercilessly upon everything that was unreal, sham and conventional.

As soon as he had finished with his youth, he turned to the life of a grown-up man in *The Morning of a Landowner*, and told how he tried to live a landowner's life, and how nothing but dissatisfaction came of it. He escapes to the Caucasus, and seeks regeneration, and the result of the search here is a masterpiece, *The Cossacks*. He goes back to the

world, and takes part in the Crimean war; he describes what he saw in a battery; his eagle eye lays bare the *splendeurs et misères* of war more truthfully perhaps than a writer on war has ever done, but less sympathetically than Alfred de Vigny—the difference being that Alfred de Vigny is innately modest, and that Tolstoy, as he wrote himself, at the beginning of the war, "had no modesty."

After the Crimean war, he plunges again into the world and travels abroad; and on his return to Russia, he settles down at Yasnaya Polyana and marries. The hero of his novel *Domestic Happiness* appears to have found his heart's desire in marriage and country life. It was then that he wrote *War and Peace*, which he began to publish in 1865. He always had the idea of writing a story on the Decembrist movement, and *War and Peace* was perhaps the preface to that unwritten work, for it ends when that movement was beginning. In *War and Peace*, he gave the world a modern prose epic, which did not suffer from the drawback that spoils most historical novels, namely, that of being obviously false, because it was founded on his own recollection of his parents' memories. He gives us what we feel to be the very truth; for the first time in an historical novel, instead of saying "this is very likely true," or "what a wonderful work of artistic reconstruction," we feel that we were ourselves there; that we knew those people; that they are a part of our very own past. He paints a whole generation of people; and in Pierre Bezukhov, the new landmarks of his own search are described. Among many other episodes, there is nowhere in literature such a true and charming picture of family life as that of the Rostovs, and nowhere a more vital and charming personality than Natasha; a creation as living as Pushkin's Tatiana,

and alive with a reality even more convincing than Turgenev's pictures of women, since she is alive with a different kind of life; the difference being that while you have read in Turgenev's books about noble and exquisite women, you are not sure whether you have not known Natasha yourself and in your own life; you are not sure she does not belong to the borderland of your own past in which dreams and reality are mingled. *War and Peace* eclipses all other historical novels; it has all Stendhal's reality, and all Zola's power of dealing with crowds and masses. Take, for instance, a masterpiece such as Flaubert's *Salammbô*; it may and very likely does take away your breath by the splendour of its language, its colour, and its art, but you never feel that, even in a dream, you had taken part in the life which is painted there. The only bit of unreality in *War and Peace* is the figure of Napoleon, to whom Tolstoy was deliberately unfair. Another impression which Tolstoy gives us in *War and Peace* is that man is in reality always the same, and that changes of manners are not more important than changes in fashions of clothes. That is why it is not extravagant to mention *Salammbô* in this connection. One feels that, if Tolstoy had written a novel about ancient Rome, we should have known a score of patricians, senators, scribblers, clients, parasites, matrons, courtesans, better even than we know Cicero from his letters; we should not only feel that we *know* Cicero, but that we had actually known him. This very task—namely, that of reconstituting a page out of Pagan history—was later to be attempted by Merezhkovsky; but brilliant as his work is, he only at times and by flashes attains to Tolstoy's power of convincing.

Anna Karenina appeared in 1875-76. And here Tolstoy, with the touch of a Velasquez and upon a

huge canvas, paints the contemporary life of the upper classes in St. Petersburg and in the country. Levin, the hero, is himself. Here, again, the truth to nature and the reality is so intense and vivid that a reader unacquainted with Russia will in reading the book probably not think of Russia at all, but will imagine the story has taken place in his own country, whatever that may be. He shows you everything from the inside, as well as from the outside. You feel, in the picture of the races, what Anna is feeling in looking on, and what Vronsky is feeling in riding. And with what reality, what incomparable skill the gradual dawn of Anna's love for Vronsky is described; how painfully real is her pompous and excellent husband; and how every incident in her love affair, her visit to her child, her appearance at the opera, when, after having left her husband, she defies the world, her gradual growing irritability, down to the final catastrophe, bears on it the stamp of something which must have happened just in that very way and no other.

But, as far as Tolstoy's own development is concerned, Levin is the most interesting figure in the book. This character is another landmark in Tolstoy's search after truth; he is constantly putting accepted ideas to the test; he is haunted by the fear of sudden death, not the physical fear of death in itself, but the fear that in the face of death the whole of life may be meaningless; a peasant opens a new door for him and furnishes him with a solution to the problem—to live for one's soul: life no longer seems meaningless.

Thus Levin marks the stage in Tolstoy's evolution of his abandoning materialism and of seeking for the truth in the Church. But the Church does not satisfy him. He rejects its dogmas and its ritual; he turns to

the Gospel, but far from accepting it, he revises it. He comes to the conclusion that Christianity as it has been taught is mere madness, and that the Church is a superfluous anachronism. Thus another change comes about, which is generally regarded as *the* change cutting Tolstoy's life in half; in reality it is only a fresh right-about-turn of a man who is searching for truth in blinkers. In his *Confession*, he says: "I grew to hate myself; and now all has become clear." He came to believe that property was the source of all evil; he desired literally to give up all he had. This he was not able to do. It was not that he shrank from the sacrifice at the last; but that circumstances and family ties were too strong for him. But his final flight from home in the last days of his life shows that the desire had never left him.

Art was also subjected to his new standards and found wanting, both in his own work and in that of others. Shakespeare and Beethoven were summarily disposed of; his own masterpieces he pronounced to be worthless. This more than anything shows the pride of the man. He could admire no one, not even himself. He scorned the gifts which were given him, and the greatest gifts of the greatest men. But this landmark of Tolstoy's evolution, his turning his back on the Church, and on his work, is a landmark in Russian history as well as in Russian art. For far less than this Russian thinkers and writers of high position had been imprisoned and exiled. Nobody dared to touch Tolstoy. He fearlessly attacked all constituted authority, both spiritual and temporal, in an epoch of reaction, and such was his prestige that official Russia raised no finger. His authority was too great, and this is perhaps the first great victory of the liberty of individual thought over official tyranny in Russia. There had been martyrs in plenty before, but

no conquerors.

After *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy, who gave up literature for a time, but for a time only, nevertheless continued to write; at first he only wrote stories for children and theological and polemical pamphlets; but in 1886 he published the terribly powerful peasant drama: *The Powers of Darkness*. Later came the *Kreutzer Sonata*, the *Death of Ivan Ilitch*, and *Resurrection*. Here the hero Nehludov is a lifeless phantom of Tolstoy himself; the episodes and details have the reality of his early work, so has Maslova, the heroine; but in the squalor and misery of the prisons he shows no precious balms of humanity and love, as Dostoyevsky did; and the book has neither the sweep and epic swing of *War and Peace*, nor the satisfying completeness of *Anna Karenina*. Since his death, some posthumous works have been published, among them a novel, and a play: *The Living Corpse*. He died, as he had lived, still searching, and perhaps at the end he found the object of his quest.

Tolstoy, even more than Pushkin, was rooted to the soil; all that is not of the soil—anything mystic or supernatural—was totally alien to him. He was the oak which could not bend; and being, as he was, the king of realistic fiction, an unsurpassed painter of pictures, portraits, men and things, a penetrating analyst of the human heart, a genius cast in a colossal mould, his work, both by its substance and its artistic power, exercised an influence beyond his own country, affected all European nations, and gives him a place among the great creators of the world. Tolstoy was not a rebel but a heretic, a heretic not only to religion and the Church, but in philosophy, opinions, art, and even in food; but what the world will remember of him are not his heretical

theories but his faithful practice, which is orthodox in its obedience to the highest canons, orthodox as Homer and Shakespeare are orthodox, and like theirs, one of the greatest earthly examples of the normal and the sane.

To say that DOSTOYEVSKY is the antithesis to Tolstoy, and the second great pillar of Russian prose literature, will surprise nobody now. Had one been writing ten years ago, the expression of such an opinion would have met with an incredulous smile amongst the majority of English readers of Russian literature, for Dostoyevsky was practically unknown save for his *Crime and Punishment*, and to have compared him with Turgenev would have seemed sacrilegious. Now when Dostoyevsky is one of the shibboleths of our *intelligentsia*, one can boldly say, without fear of being misunderstood, that, as a creator and a force in literature, Dostoyevsky is in another plane than that of Turgenev, and as far greater than him as Leonardo da Vinci is greater than Vandyke, or as Wagner is greater than Gounod, while some Russians consider him even infinitely greater than Tolstoy. Let us say he is his equal and complement. He is in any case, in almost every respect, his antithesis. Tolstoy was the incarnation of health, and is above all things and pre-eminently the painter of the sane and the earthly. Dostoyevsky was an epileptic, the painter of the abnormal, of criminals, madmen, degenerates, mystics. Tolstoy led an even, uneventful life, spending the greater part of it in his own country house, in the midst of a large family. Dostoyevsky was condemned to death, served a sentence of four years' hard labour in a convict settlement in Siberia, and besides this spent six years in exile; when he returned and started a newspaper, it was prohibited by the Censorship; a second

newspaper which he started came to grief; he underwent financial ruin; his first wife, his brother, and his best friend died; he was driven abroad by debt, harassed by the authorities on the one hand, and attacked by the liberals on the other; abused and misunderstood, almost starving and never well, working under overwhelming difficulties, always pressed for time, and ill requited for his toil. That was Dostoyevsky's life.

Tolstoy was a heretic; at first a materialist, and then a seeker after a religion of his own; Dostoyevsky was a practising believer, a vehement apostle of orthodoxy, and died fortified by the Sacraments of the Church. Tolstoy with his broad unreligious opinions was narrow-minded. Dostoyevsky with his definite religious opinions was the most broad-minded man who ever lived. Tolstoy hated the supernatural, and was alien to all mysticism. Dostoyevsky seems to get nearer to the unknown, to what lies beyond the flesh, than any other writer. In Tolstoy, the Peter the Great element of the Russian character predominated; in Dostoyevsky that of Mwyshkin, the pure fool. Tolstoy could never submit and humble himself. Submission and humility and resignation are the keynotes and mainsprings of Dostoyevsky. Tolstoy despised art, and paid no homage to any of the great names of literature; and this was not only after the so-called change. As early as 1862, he said that Pushkin and Beethoven could not please because of their absolute beauty. Dostoyevsky was catholic and cosmopolitan, and admired the literature of foreign countries—Racine as well as Shakespeare, Corneille as well as Schiller. The essence of Tolstoy is a magnificent intolerance. The essence of Dostoyevsky is sweet reasonableness. Tolstoy dreamed of giving up all he had to the poor,

and of living like a peasant; Dostoyevsky had to share the hard labour of the lowest class of criminals. Tolstoy theorized on the distribution of food; but Dostoyevsky was fed like a beggar. Tolstoy wrote in affluence and at leisure, and re-wrote his books; Dostoyevsky worked like a literary hack for his daily bread, ever pressed for time and ever in crying need of money.

These contrasts are not made in disparagement of Tolstoy, but merely to point out the difference between the two men and between their circumstances. Tolstoy wrote about himself from the beginning of his career to the end; nearly all his work is autobiographical, and he almost always depicts himself in all his books. We know nothing of Dostoyevsky from his books. He was an altruist, and he loved others better than himself.

Dostoyevsky's first book, *Poor Folk*, published in 1846, is a descendant of Gogol's story *The Cloak*, and bears the influence, to a slight extent, of Gogol. In this, the story of a minor public servant battling against want, and finding a ray of light in corresponding with a girl also in poor circumstances, but who ultimately marries a rich middle-aged man, we already get all Dostoyevsky's peculiar sweetness; what Stevenson called his "lovely goodness," his almost intolerable pathos, his love of the disinherited and of the failures of life. His next book, *Letters from a Dead House*, has a far more universal interest. It is the record of his prison experiences, which is of priceless value, not only on account of its radiant moral beauty, its perpetual discovery of the soul of goodness in things evil, its human fraternity, its complete absence of egotism and pose, and its thrilling human interest, but also on account of the

light it throws on the Russian character, the Russian poor, and the Russian peasant.

In 1866 came *Crime and Punishment*, which brought Dostoyevsky fame. This book, Dostoyevsky's *Macbeth*, is so well known in the French and English translations that it hardly needs any comment. Dostoyevsky never wrote anything more tremendous than the portrayal of the anguish that seethes in the soul of Raskolnikov, after he has killed the old woman, "mechanically forced," as Professor Brückner says, "into performing the act, as if he had gone too near machinery in motion, had been caught by a bit of his clothing and cut to pieces." And not only is one held spellbound by every shifting hope, fear, and doubt, and each new pang that Raskolnikov experiences, but the souls of all the subsidiary characters in the book are revealed to us just as clearly: the Marmeladov family, the honest Razumikhin, the police inspector, and the atmosphere of the submerged tenth in St. Petersburg —the steaming smell of the city in the summer. There is an episode when Raskolnikov kneels before Sonia, the prostitute, and says to her: "It is not before you I am kneeling, but before all the suffering of mankind." That is what Dostoyevsky does himself in this and in all his books; but in none of them is the suffering of all mankind conjured up before us in more living colours, and in none of them is his act of homage in kneeling before it more impressive.

This book was written before the words "psychological novel" had been invented; but how all the psychological novels which were written years later by Bourget and others pale before this record written in blood and tears! *Crime and Punishment* was followed by *The Idiot* (1868). The idiot is Mwyshkin,

who has been alluded to already, the wise fool, an epileptic, in whom irony and arrogance and egoism have been annihilated; and whose very simplicity causes him to pass unscathed through a den of evil, a world of liars, scoundrels, and thieves, none of whom can escape the influence of his radiant personality. He is the same with every one he meets, and with his unsuspicious sincerity he combines the intuition of utter goodness, so that he can see through people and read their minds. In this character, Dostoyevsky has put all his sweetness; it is not a portrait of himself, but it is a portrait of what he would have liked to be, and reflects all that is best in him. In contrast to Mwyshkin, Rogozhin, the merchant, is the incarnation of undisciplined passion, who ends by killing the thing he loves, Nastasia, also a creature of unbridled impulses,—because he feels that he can never really and fully possess her. The catastrophe, the description of the night after Rogozhin has killed Nastasia, is like nothing else in literature; lifelike in detail and immense, in the way in which it makes you listen at the keyhole of the soul, immense with the immensity of a great revelation. The minor characters in the book are also all of them remarkable; one of them, the General's wife, Madame Epanchin, has an indescribable and playful charm.

The Idiot was followed by *The Possessed*, or *Devils*, printed in 1871-72, called thus after the Devils in the Gospel of St. Luke, that left the possessed man and went into the swine; the Devils in the book are the hangers-on of Nihilism between 1862 and 1869. The book anticipated the future, and in it Dostoyevsky created characters who were identically the same, and committed identically the same crimes, as men who actually lived many years later in 1871, and

later still. The whole book turns on the exploitation by an unscrupulous, ingenious, and iron-willed knave of the various weaknesses of a crowd of idealist dupes and disciples. One of them is a decadent, one of them is one of those idealists "whom any strong idea strikes all of a sudden and annihilates his will, sometimes for ever"; one of them is a maniac whose single idea is the production of the Superman which he thinks will come, when it will be immaterial to a man whether he lives or dies, and when he will be prepared to kill himself not out of fear but in order to kill fear. That man will be God. Not the God-man, but the Man-God. The plan of the unscrupulous leader, Peter Verkhovensky, who was founded on Nechaev, a Nihilist of real life, is to create disorder, and amid the disorder to seize the authority; he imagines a central committee of which he pretends to be the representative, organizes a small local committee, and persuades his dupes that a network of similar small committees exist all over Russia; his aim being to create them gradually, by persuading people in every plot of fresh ground that they exist everywhere else.

Thus the idea of the book was to show that the strength of Nihilism lay, not in high dogmas and theories held by a large and well-organized society, but in the strength of the will of one or two men reacting on the weaker herd and exploiting the strength, the weakness, and the one-sidedness of its ideals, a herd which was necessarily weak owing to that very one-sidedness. In order to bind his disciples with a permanent bond, Verkhovensky exploits the *idée fixe* of suicide and the superman, which is held by one of his dupes, to induce him to commit a crime before he kills himself, and thus make away with another member of the committee who is

represented as being a spy. Once this is done, the whole committee will be jointly responsible, and bound to him by the ties of blood and fear. But Verkhovensky is not the hero of the book. The hero is Stavrogin, whom Verkhovensky regards as his trump card, because of the strength of his character, which leads him to commit the most outrageous extravagances, and at the same time to remain as cold as ice; but Verkhovensky's whole design is shattered on Stavrogin's character, all the murders already mentioned are committed, the whole scheme comes to nothing, the conspirators are discovered, and Peter escapes abroad.

When *Devils* appeared in 1871, it was looked upon as a gross exaggeration, but real life in subsequent years was to produce characters and events of the same kind, which were more startling than Dostoyevsky's fiction. The book is the least well-constructed of Dostoyevsky's; the narrative is disconnected, and the events, incidents, and characters so crowded together, that the general effect is confused; on the other hand, it contains isolated scenes which Dostoyevsky never surpassed; and in its strength and in its limitations it is perhaps his most characteristic work.

From 1873-80 Dostoyevsky went back to journalism, and wrote his *Diary of a Writer*, in which he commented on current events. In 1880, he united all conflicting and hostile parties and shades of public opinion, by the speech he made at the unveiling of Pushkin's memorial, in one common bond of enthusiasm. At the end of the seventies, he returned to a work already begun, *The Brothers Karamazov*, which, although it remains the longest of his books, was never finished. It is the story of three brothers,

Dimitri, Ivan, and Alyosha; their father is a cynical sensualist. The eldest brother is an undisciplined, passionate character, who expiates his passions by suffering; the second brother is a materialist, the tragedy of whose inner life forms a greater part of the book; the third brother, Alyosha, is a lover of humanity, and a believer in God and man. He seeks a monastery, but his spiritual father sends him out into the world, to live and to suffer. He is to go through the furnace of the world and experience many trials; for the microbe of lust that is in his family is dormant in him also. The book was called the *History of a Great Sinner*, and the sinner was to be Alyosha. But Dostoyevsky died before this part of the subject is even approached.

He died in January 1881; the crowds of men and women of all sorts and conditions of life that attended his funeral, and the extent and the sincerity of the grief manifested, gave it an almost mythical greatness. The people gave him a funeral such as few kings or heroes have ever had. Without fear of controversy or contradiction one can now say that Dostoyevsky's place in Russian literature is at the top, equal and in the opinion of some superior to that of Tolstoy in greatness. He is also one of the greatest writers the world has ever produced, not because, like Tolstoy, he saw life steadily and saw it whole, and painted it with the supreme and easy art of a Velasquez; nor because, like Turgenev, he wove exquisite pictures into musical words. Dostoyevsky was not an artist; his work is shapeless; his books are like quarries where granite and dross, gold and ore are mingled. He paid no attention to style, and yet so strong and vital is his spoken word that when the Moscow Art Theatre put some scenes in *The Brothers Karamazov* and *Devils* on the stage, they found they

could not alter one single syllable; and sometimes his words have a power beyond that of words, a power that only music has. There are pages where Dostoyevsky expresses the anguish of the soul in the same manner as Wagner expressed the delirium of dying Tristram. I should indeed put the matter the other way round, and say that in the last act of Tristram, Wagner is as great as Dostoyevsky. But Dostoyevsky is great because of the divine message he gives, not didactically, not by sermons, but by the goodness that emanates, like a precious balm, from the characters he creates; because more than any other books in the world his books reflect not only the teaching and the charity, but the accent and the divine aura of love that is in the Gospels.

"I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, or even of mortal flesh; it is my spirit that addresses your spirit, just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God's feet, equal—as we are!" These words, spoken by Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, express what Dostoyevsky's books do. His spirit addresses our spirit. "Be no man's judge; humble love is a terrible power which effects more than violence. Only active love can bring out faith. Love men, and do not be afraid of their sins; love man in his sin; love all the creatures of God, and pray God to make you cheerful. Be cheerful as children and as the birds." This was Father Zosima's advice to Alyosha. And that is the gist of Dostoyevsky's message to mankind. "Life," Father Zosima also says to Alyosha, "will bring you many misfortunes, but you will be happy on account of them, and you will bless life and cause others to bless it." Here we have the whole secret of Dostoyevsky's greatness. He blessed life, and he caused others to bless it.

It is objected that his characters are abnormal; that he deals with the diseased, with epileptics, neurasthenics, criminals, sensualists, madmen; but it is just this very fact which gives so much strength and value to the blessing he gave to life; it is owing to this fact that he causes others to bless life; because he was cast in the nethermost circle of life's inferno; he was thrown together with the refuse of humanity, with the worst of men and with the most unfortunate; he saw the human soul on the rack, and he saw the vilest diseases that afflict the human soul; he faced the evil without fear or blinkers; and there, in the inferno, in the dust and ashes, he recognized the print of divine footsteps and the fragrance of goodness; he cried from the abyss: "Hosanna to the Lord, for He is just!" and he blessed life. It is true that his characters are taken almost entirely from the *Despised and Rejected*, as one of his books was called, and often from the ranks of the abnormal; but when a great writer wishes to reveal the greatest adventures and the deepest experiences which the soul of man can undergo, it is in vain for him to take the normal type; it has no adventures. The adventures of the soul of Fortinbras would be of no help to mankind; but the adventures of Hamlet are of help to mankind, and the adventures of Don Quixote; and neither Don Quixote nor Hamlet are normal types.

Dostoyevsky wrote the tragedy of life and of the soul, and to do this he chose circumstances as terrific as those which unhinged the reason of King Lear, shook that of Hamlet, and made Œdipus blind himself. His books resemble Greek tragedies by the magnitude of the spiritual adventures they set forth; they are unlike Greek Tragedies in the Christian charity and the faith and the hope which goes out of them; they

inspire the reader with courage, never with despair, although Dostoyevsky, face to face with the last extremities of evil, never seeks to hide it or to shun it, but merely to search for the soul of goodness in it. He did not search in vain, and just as, when he was on his way to Siberia, a conversation he had with a fellow-prisoner inspired that fellow-prisoner with the feeling that he could go on living and even face penal servitude, so do Dostoyevsky's books come to mankind as a message of hope from a radiant country. That is what constitutes his peculiar greatness.

CHAPTER VII

THE SECOND AGE OF POETRY

The fifties, the sixties, and the seventies were, all over Europe, the epoch of Parnassian poetry. In England, Tennyson was pouring out his "fervent and faultless melodies," Matthew Arnold was playing his plaintive harp, and the Pre-Raphaelites were weaving their tapestried dreams; in France, Gautier was carving his cameos, Banville's Harlequins and Columbines were dancing on a Watteau-like stage in the silver twilight of Corot, Baudelaire was at work on his sombre bronze, Sully-Prudhomme twanged his ivory lyre, and Leconte de Lisle was issuing his golden coinage. It was, in poetry, the epoch of art for art's sake.

Russian poetry did not escape the universal tendency; but in Russia everything was conspiring to put poetry, and especially that kind of poetry, in the shade. In the first place, events of great magnitude were happening—the wide reforms, the emancipation of the serfs, the growth of Nihilism, which was the product of the disillusion at the result of the reforms: in the second place, criticism under the influence of Chernyshevsky, Pisarev, and Dobrolyubov was entirely realistic and positivist, preaching not art for life's sake only, but the absolute futility of poetry; and, in the third place, work of the supremest kind was being done in narrative fiction; in the fourth place, no prophet-poet was forthcoming whose genius was great enough to voice national aspirations. All this tended to put poetry in the shade, especially as such poets as did exist were, with one notable exception, Parnassians, whose talent dwelt aloof from the turbid stream of life, and who sought to express the adventures of their souls, which were emotional and artistic, either in dreamy music or in exquisite shapes and colours. This neglect of verse lasted right up until the end of the seventies. When, however, in the eighties, the wave of political crisis reached its climax and, after the assassination of Alexander II, rolled back into a sea of stagnant reaction, the poets, who had been hitherto neglected, and quietly singing all the while, were discovered once more, and the shares in poetry continued to rise as time went on; thus the poets of the sixties reaped their due meed of appreciation.

A proof of how widespread and deep this neglect was is that TYUTCHEV, whose work attracted no attention whatever until 1854, and met with no wide appreciation until a great deal later, was four years younger than Pushkin, and a man of thirty when

Goethe died. He went on living until 1873, and can be called the first of the Parnassians. Politically, he was a Slavophile, and sang the "resignation" and "long-suffering" of the Russian people, which he preferred to the stiff-neckedness of the West. But the value of his work lies less in his Slavophile aspirations than in its depth of thought and lyrical feeling, in the contrast between the gloomy forebodings of his imagination and the sunlike images he gives of nature. His verse is like a spring day, dark with ominous thunderclouds, out of which a rainbow and a shaft of sunlight fall on a dewy orchard and light it with a silvery smile. His verse is, on the one hand, full of foreboding and terror at the fate of man and the shadow of nothingness, and, on the other hand, it twitters like a bird over the freshness and sunshine of spring. He sings the spring again and again, and no Russian poet has ever sung the glory, the mystery, the wonder, and the terror of night as he has done; his whole work is compounded of glowing pictures of nature and a world of longing and of unutterable dreams.

The dreamy dominion of the Parnassian age, on whose threshold Tyutchev stood, was to be disturbed by the notes of a harsher and stronger music.

NEKRASOV (1821-77), Russia's "sternest painter," and certainly one of her best, drew his inspiration direct from life, and sang the sufferings, the joys, and the life of the people. He is a Russian Crabbe; nature and man are his subjects, but nature as the friend and foe of man, as a factor, the most important factor in man's life, and not as an ideal storehouse from which a Shelley can draw forms more real than living man, nurslings of immortality, or a Wordsworth reap harvests of the inward eye. He

called his muse the "Muse of Vengeance and of Grief." He is an uncompromising realist, like Crabbe, and idealizes nothing in his pictures of the peasant's life. Like Crabbe, he has a deep note of pathos, and a keen but not so minute an eye for landscape.

On the other hand, he at times attains to imaginative sublimity in his descriptions, as, for instance, in his poem called *The Red-nosed Frost*, where King Frost approaches a peasant widow who is at work in the winter forest, and freezes her to death. As Daria is gradually freezing to death, the frost comes to her like a warrior; and his semblance and attributes are drawn in a series of splendid stanzas. He sings to her of his riches that no profusion can decrease, and of his kingdom of silver and diamonds and pearls: then, as she freezes, she dreams of a hot summer's day, and of the rye harvest and of the familiar songs—

"Away with the song she is
soaring,
She surrenders herself to its
stream,
In the world there is no such
sweet singing
As that which we hear in a
dream."

His longest and most ambitious work was a kind of popular epic, *Who is Happy in Russia?* written in short lines which have the popular ring and accent. Some peasants start on a pilgrimage to find out who is happy in Russia. They fly on a magic carpet, and interview representatives of the different classes of society, the pope, the landowner, the peasant woman, each new interview producing a whole series of stories, sometimes idyllic and sometimes tragic, and all showing their genius as intimate pictures of various phases of Russian life. Here, again, the analogy with Crabbe suggests itself, for Nekrasov's tales, taking into consideration the difference between the two countries, have a marked affinity, both in their subject matter, their variety, their stern realism, their pathos, their bitterness, and their observation of nature, with Crabbe's stories in verse.

Two of Nekrasov's long poems tell the story in the form of reminiscence,—and here again the naturalness and appropriateness of the diction is perfect,—of the Russian women, Princess Volkonsky and Princess Trubetzkoy, who followed their husbands, condemned to penal servitude for taking part in the Decembrist rising, to Siberia. Here, again, Nekrasov strikes a note of deep and poignant pathos,

all the more poignant from the absolute simplicity with which the tales are told. Nekrasov towers among the Parnassians of the time and has only one rival, whom we shall describe presently.

The Parnassians are represented by three poets, MAIKOV (1821-97), FET (1820-98), and POLONSKY (1820-98), all three of whom began to write about the same time, in 1840; none of these three poets was didactic, and all three remained aloof from political or social questions.

Maikov is attracted by classical themes, by Italy and also by old ballads, but his strength lies in his plastic form, his colour, and his pictures of Russian landscape; he writes, for instance, an exquisite reminiscence of a day's fishing when he was a boy.

The quality of Fet's muse, in contrast to Maikov's concrete plasticity, is illusiveness; his lyrics express intangible dreams and impressions; delicate tints and shadows tremble and flit across his verse, which is soft as the orient of a pearl; and his fancy is as delicate as a thread of gossamer: he lives in the borderland between words and music, and catches the vague echoes of that limbo.

"The world in shadow slipped
away
And, like a silent dream took
flight,
Like Adam, I in Eden lay
Alone, and face to face with
night."

He sings about the southern night amidst the hay; or again about the dawn—

"A whisper, a breath, a shiver,
The trills of the nightingale,
A silver light and a quiver
And a sunlit trail.
The glimmer of night and the
shadows of night
In an endless race,
Enchanted changes, flight after
flight,
On the loved one's face.
The blood of the roses tingling
In the clouds, and a gleam in
the grey,
And tears and kisses
commingling—
The Dawn, the Dawn, the
Day!"

Polonsky's verse, in contrast to Fet's gentle epicurean temperament, his delicate half-tones and illusive whispers, is made of sterner stuff; and, in contrast to Maikov's sculptural lines, it is pre-eminently musical, and reflects a fine and charming personality. His area of subjects is wide; he can write a child's poem as transparent and simple as Hans Andersen—as in his conversation between the sun and the moon—or call up the "glory that was Greece," as in the poem when his "Aspasia" listens to the crowds acclaiming Pericles, and waits in rapturous suspense for his return—an evocation that Browning would have envied for its life and Swinburne for its sound.

But neither Maikov, Fet, nor Polonsky, exquisite as much of their writing is, produced anything of the calibre of Nekrasov, even in their own province; that is to say, they were none of them as great in the artistic field as he was in his didactic field. Compared

with him, they are minor poets. There is one poet of this epoch who does rival Nekrasov in another field, and that is COUNT ALEXIS TOLSTOY (1817-75), who was also a Parnassian and remained aloof from didactic literature; yet, under the pseudonym of Kuzma Prutkov, he wrote a satire, a collection of platitudes, that are household words in Russia; also a short history of Russia in consummately neat and witty satirical verse. As well as his satires, he wrote an historical novel, *Prince Serebryany*, and more important still, a trilogy of plays, dealing with the most dramatic epoch of Russian history, that of Ivan the Terrible. The trilogy, written in verse, consists of the "Death of Ivan the Terrible," "The Tsar Feodor Ivanovitch" and "Tsar Boris." They are all of them acting plays, form part of the current classical repertory, and are effective, impressive and arresting when played on the stage.

But it is as a poet and as a lyrical poet that Alexis Tolstoy is most widely known. Versatile with a versatility that recalls Pushkin, he writes epical ballads on Russian, Northern, and even Scottish themes, and dramatic poems on Don Juan, St. John Damascene, and Mary Magdalene; and, besides these, a whole series of personal lyrics, which are full of charm, tenderness, music and colour, harmonious in form and transparent. No Russian poet since Pushkin has written such tender love lyrics, and nobody has sung the Russian spring, the Russian summer, and the Russian autumn with such tender lyricism. His poem on the early spring, when the fern is still tightly curled, the shepherd's note still but half heard in the morning, and the birch trees just green, is one of the most tender, fresh, and perfect expressions of first love, morning, spring, dew, and dawn in the world's literature. His songs have inspired

Tchaikovsky and other composers. The strongest and highest chord he struck is in his St. John Damascene; this contains a magnificent dirge for the dead which can bear comparison even with the *Dies Iræ* for majesty, solemn pathos, and plangent rhythm.

His pictures of landscapes have a peculiar charm. The following is an attempt at a translation—

"Through the slush and the ruts
of the highway,
By the side of the dam of the
stream,
Where the fisherman's nets are
drying,
The carriage jogs on, and I
dream.

I dream, and I look at the
highway,
At the sky that is sullen and
grey,
At the lake with its shelving
reaches,
And the curling smoke far
away.

By the dam, with a cheerless
visage
Walks a Jew, who is ragged
and sere.
With a thunder of foam and of
splashing,
The waters race over the
weir.

A boy over there is whistling

On a hemlock flute of his
make;
And the wild ducks get up in a
panic
And call as they sweep from
the lake.

And near the old mill some
workmen
Are sitting upon the green
ground,
With a wagon of sacks, a cart
horse
Plods past with a lazy sound.

It all seems to me so familiar,
Although I have never been
here,
The roof of that house out
yonder,
And the boy, and the wood,
and the weir.

And the voice of the grumbling
mill-wheel,
And that rickety barn, I
know,
I have been here and seen this
already,
And forgotten it all long ago.

The very same horse here was
dragging
Those sacks with the very
same sound,
And those very same workmen
were sitting

By the rickety mill on the
ground.

And that Jew, with his beard,
walked past me,
And those waters raced
through the weir;
Yes, all this has happened
already,
But I cannot tell when or
where."

The people also produced a poet during this epoch and gave Koltsov a successor, in the person of NIKITIN; his themes are taken straight from life, and he became known through his patriotic songs written during the Crimean War; but he is most successful in his descriptions of nature, of sunset on the fields, and dawn, and the swallow's nest in the grumbling mill. Two other poets, whose work became well known later, but passed absolutely unnoticed in the sixties, were SLUCHEVSKY, a philosophical poet, whose verse, excellent in description, suffers from clumsiness in form, and APUKHTIN, whose collected poems and ballads, although he began to write in 1859, were not published until 1886. Apukhtin is a Parnassian. The bulk of his work, though perfect in form, is uninteresting; but he wrote one or two lyrics which have a place in any Russian Golden Treasury, and his poems are largely read now.

In the eighties, a reaction against the anti-poetical tendency set in, and poets began to spring up like mushrooms. Of these, the most popular and the most remarkable is NADSON (1862-87); he died when he was twenty-four, of consumption. Since then his verse has gone through twenty-one editions, and

110,000 copies have been sold; ten editions were published in his own lifetime. And there are innumerable musical settings by various composers to his lyrics. His verse inaugurates a new epoch in Russian poetry, the distinguishing features of which are a great attention to form and *technique*, a Parnassian love of colour and shape, and a deep melancholy.

Nadson sings the melancholy of youth, the dreams and disillusions of adolescence, and the hopelessness of the stagnant atmosphere of reaction to which he belonged. This last fact accounted in some measure for his extraordinary popularity. But it was by no means its sole cause; his verse is not only exquisite but magically musical, to an extent which makes the verse of other poets seem a stuff of coarser clay, and his pictures of nature, of spring, of night, and especially of night in the Riviera (with a note of passionate home-sickness), have the aromatic, intoxicating sweetness of syringa. Verse such as this, sensitive, ultra-delicate, morbid, nervous, and pessimistic, is bound to have the defects of its qualities, in a marked degree; one is soon inclined to have enough of its sultry, oppressive atmosphere, its delicate perfume, its unrelieved gloom and its music, which is nearly always not only in a minor key but in the same key. Nobody was more keenly aware of this than Nadson himself, and one of his most beautiful poems begins thus—

> "Dear friend, I know, I know, I
> only know too well
> That my verse is barren of all
> strength, and pale, and
> delicate,
> And often just because of its

debility I suffer
And often weep in secret in the
silence of the night."

And in another poem he writes his apology. He has never used verse as a toy to chase tedium; the blessed gift of the singer has often been to him an unbearable cross, and he has often vowed to keep silent; but, if the wind blows, the Æolian harp must needs respond, and streams of the hills cannot help rushing to the valley if the sun melts the snow on the mountain tops. This apologia more than all criticism defines his gift. His temperament is an Æolian harp, which, whether it will or no, is sensitive to the breeze; its strings are few, and tuned to one key; nevertheless some of the strains it has sobbed have the stamp of permanence as well as that of ethereal magic.

The poets that come after Nadson belong to the present day; there are many, and they increase in number every year. The so-called "decadent" school were influenced by Shelley, Verlaine, and the French symbolists; but there is nothing which is decadent in the ordinary sense of the word in their verse. Their influence may not be lasting, but they are factors in Russian literature, and some of them, SOLOGUB, BRUSOV, BALMONT, and IVANOV, have produced work which any school would be glad to claim. This is also true of ALEXANDER BLOCH, one of the most original as well as one of the most exquisite of living Russian poets.

CONCLUSION

With the death of Turgenev and Dostoyevsky, the great epoch of Russian literature came to an end. A period of literary as well as of political stagnation began, which lasted until the Russo-Japanese War. This was followed by the revolutionary movement, which, in its turn, produced a literary as well as a political chaos, the effect of which and of the manifold reactions it brought about are still being felt. It was only natural, if one considers the extent and the quality of the productions of the preceding epoch, that the soil of literary Russia should require a rest.

As it is, one can count the writers of prominence which the epoch of stagnation produced on one's fingers—CHEKHOV, GARSHIN, KOROLENKO, and at the end of the period MAXIME GORKY, and apart from them, in a by-path of his own, MEREZHKOVSKY. Of these Chekhov and Gorky tower above the others. Chekhov enlarged the range of Russian literature by painting the middle-class and the *Intelligentsia*, and brought back to Russian literature the note of humour; and Gorky broke altogether fresh ground by painting the vagabond, the artisan, the tramp, the thief, the flotsam and jetsam of the big town and the highway, and by painting in a new manner.

Gorky's work came like that of Mr. Rudyard Kipling to England, as a revelation. Not only did his subject matter open the doors on dominions undreamed of, but his attitude towards life and that of his heroes towards life seemed to be different from that of all Russian novelists before his advent; and yet the difference between him and his forerunners is not so

great as it appears at first sight. It is true that his rough and rebellious heroes, instead of playing the Hamlet, or of finding the solution of life in charity and humility or submission, are partisans of the survival of the fittest with a vengeance, the survival of the strongest fist and the sharpest knife; yet are these new heroes really so different from the uncompromising type that we have already seen sharing one half of the Russian stage, right through the story of Russian literature, from Bazarov back to Peter the Great, and on whose existence was founded the remark that Peter the Great was one of the ingredients in the Russian character? Put Bazarov on the road, or Lermontov, or even Peter the Great, and you get Gorky's barefooted hero.

Where Gorky created something absolutely new was in the surroundings and in the manner of life which he described, and in the way he described them; this is especially true of his treatment of nature: for the first time in Russian prose literature, we get away from the "orthodox" landscape of convention, and we are face to face with the elements. We feel as if a new breath of air had entered into literature; we feel as people accustomed to the manner in which the poets treated nature in England in the eighteenth century must have felt when Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley and Coleridge began to write.

Chekhov worked on older lines. He descends directly from Turgenev, although his field is a different one. He, more than any other writer and better than any other writer, painted the epoch of stagnation, when Russia, as a Russian once said, was playing itself to death at *vindt* (an older form of *Bridge*). The tone of his work is grey, and indeed resembles, as Tolstoy said, that of a photographer, by its objective realism

as well as by its absence of high tones; yet if Chekhov is a photographer, he is at the same time a supreme artist, an artist in black and white, and his pessimism is counteracted by two other factors, his sense of humour and his humanity; were it not so, the impression of sadness one would derive from the sum of misery which his crowded stage of merchants, students, squires, innkeepers, waiters, schoolmasters, magistrates, popes, officials, make up between them, would be intolerable. Some of Chekhov's most interesting work was written for the stage, on which he also brought Scenes of Country Life, which is the sub-title of the play *Uncle Vanya*. There are the same grey tints, the same weary, amiable, and slack people, bankrupt of ideals and poor in hope, whom we meet in the stories; and here, too, behind the sordid triviality and futility, we hear the "still sad music of humanity." But in order that the tints of Chekhov's delicate living and breathing photographs can be effective on the stage, very special acting is necessary, in order to convey the quality of atmosphere which is his special gift. Fortunately he met with exactly the right technique and the appropriate treatment at the Art Theatre at Moscow.

Chekhov died in 1904, soon after the Russo-Japanese War had begun. Apart from the main stream and tradition of Russian fiction and Russian prose, Merezhkovsky occupies a unique place, a place which lies between criticism and imaginative historical fiction, not unlike, in some respects—but very different in others—that which is occupied by Walter Pater in English fiction. His best known work, at least his best known work in Europe, is a prose trilogy, "The Death of the Gods" (a study of Julian the apostate), "The Resurrection of the Gods" (the story of Leonardo da Vinci), and "The Antichrist"

(the story of Peter the Great and his son Alexis), which has been translated into nearly every European language. This trilogy is an essay in imaginative historical reconstitution; it testifies to a real and deep culture, and it is lit at times by flashes of imaginative inspiration which make the scenes of the past live; it is alive with suggestive thought; but it is not throughout convincing, there is a touch of Bulwer Lytton as well as a touch of Goethe and Pater in it. Merezhkovsky is perhaps more successful in his purely critical work, his books on Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky and Gogol, which are infinitely stimulating, suggestive, and original, than in his historical fiction, although, needless to say, his criticism appeals to a far narrower public. He is in any case one of the most brilliant and interesting of Russian modern writers, and perhaps the best known outside Russia.

During the war, a writer of fiction made his name by a remarkable book, namely KUPRIN, who in his novel, *The Duel*, gave a vivid and masterly picture of the life of an officer in the line. Kuprin has since kept the promise of his early work. At the same time, LEONID ANDREEV came forward with short stories, plays, a description of war (*The Red Laugh*), moralities, not uninfluenced by Maeterlinck, and a limpid and beautiful style in which pessimism seemed to be speaking its last word.

In 1905 the revolutionary movement broke out, with its great hopes, its disillusions, its period of anarchy on the one hand and repression on the other; out of the chaos of events came a chaos of writing rather than literature, and in its turn this produced, in literature as well as in life, a reaction, or rather a series of reactions, towards symbolism, æstheticism,

mysticism on the one hand, and towards materialism —not of theory but of practice—on the other. But since these various reactions are now going on, and are vitally affecting the present day, the revolutionary movement of 1905 seems the right point to take leave of Russian literature. In 1905 a new era began, and what that era will ultimately produce, it is too soon even to hazard a guess.

Looking back over the record of Russian literature, the first thing which must strike us, if we think of the literature of other countries, is its comparatively short life. There is in Russian literature no Middle Ages, no Villon, no Dante, no Chaucer, no Renaissance, no *Grand Siècle*. Literature begins in the nineteenth century. The second thing which will perhaps strike us is that, in spite of its being the youngest of all the literatures, it seems to be spiritually the oldest. In some respects it seems to have become over-ripe before it reached maturity. But herein, perhaps, lies the secret of its greatness, and this may be the value of its contribution to the soul of mankind. It is—

> "Old in grief and very wise in tears":

and its chief gift to mankind is an expression, made with a naturalness and sincerity that are matchless, and a love of reality which is unique,—for all Russian literature, whether in prose or verse, is rooted in reality—of that grief and that wisdom; the grief and wisdom which come from a great heart; a heart that is large enough to embrace the world and to drown all the sorrows therein with the immensity of its sympathy, its fraternity, its pity, its charity, and its love.

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

1113. *The Chronicle of Nestor.*

1692. First play produced in Russia, Gregory.
Simeon Polotsky's *The Prodigal Son* acted.

1703. The first Russian newspaper, *The Russian News*, appears.

1725. Death of Peter the Great.
Foundation of the Academy of Science.

1744. Death of Kantemir.

1750. Death of Tatishchev.

1755. University of Moscow founded.

1762. Accession of Catherine the Great.

1765. Death of Lomonosov.

1790. Radishchev's *Journey Through Russia* published.

1796. Death of Catherine the Great.

1800. First edition of *The Story of the Raid of Prince Igor* published.

1802. Zhukovsky translates Gray's *Elegy*.
Death of Radishchev.

1806. Krylov's first fables published.

1816. Death of Derzhavin.

History of the Russian State, by Karamzin, published.

1819. University of St. Petersburg founded.

1820. Pushkin's *Ruslan and Ludmila* published.

1823. Griboyedov's *Misfortune of Being Clever* circulated.

First Canto of *Eugene Onegin* published.

1825. The Decembrist Attempt.

1826. Rileev hanged.

Death of Karamzin.

1827. Pushkin's *Gypsies* published.

1829. Death of Griboyedov.

Pushkin's *Poltava* published.

1831. Pushkin's *Boris Godunov* published.

Complete version of *Eugene Onegin* published.

1832. Gogol's *Evening on the Farm near the Dikanka* published.

1834. Gogol's *Mirgorod* published.

1835. Gogol's *Revisor* produced on the stage.

1836. Chaadaev's letters published.

1837. Death of Pushkin.

1841. Death of Lermontov.
1842. Death of Koltsov.
Gogol's *Dead Souls* published.
1844. Death of Krylov.
1847. Gogol's correspondence published.
Turgenev's *Sportsman's Sketches* published.
Death of Belinsky.
1849. Dostoyevsky imprisoned.
1856-7. Saltykov's *Government Sketches* appear.
1859. Ostrovsky's *Storm* produced.
Goncharov's *Oblomov* published.
1860. Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* published.
1861. Emancipation of the Serfs.
1862. Pisemsky's *Troubled Sea* published.
1863. Chernyshevsky's *What is to be Done?* published.
1865. Leskov's *No Way Out* published.
1865-1872. Tolstoy's *War and Peace* appeared.
1866. Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* published.
1868. Dostoyevsky's *Idiot* published.

1875.	Death of Count Alexis Tolstoy.
1875-6.	Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* published.
1877.	Death of Nekrasov.
1881.	Death of Dostoyevsky.
1883.	Death of Turgenev.
1886.	Death of Ostrovsky.
1887.	Death of Nadson.
1889.	Death of Saltykov.
1900.	Death of Soloviev.
	Production of Chekhov's *Chaika* (Seagull).
1904.	Production of Chekhov's *Cherry Orchard*.
	Death of Chekhov.
1910.	Death of Tolstoy.

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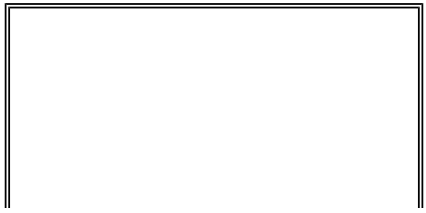
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Minor punctuation errors and printer errors (omitted or transposed letters) have been repaired. Hyphenation has been made consistent.

The following amendments have also been made:

Page 22—mas amended to was—"... but in the interest of literature, it was a misfortune ..."

Page 192—be amended to he—"... disbelieved in Liberals, although he believed in Liberalism; ..."

Page 222—Brönte's amended to Brontë's —"These words, spoken by Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, ..."

Page 251—Simon amended to Simeon —"1692. ... Simeon Polotsky's *The Prodigal Son* acted."

Alphabetic links have been added to the beginning of the index for ease of navigation.

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