

position to men of proven worth. In the United States candidates are restricted, by Constitutional provision, to local constituencies. In consequence the quality of our leadership suffers.

Politically it is a great Constitution, one of which we are rightly proud. It might, however, easily be improved—were the world any longer interested in politics.

## THE GLOOM AND GLORY OF RUSSIAN LITERATURE.<sup>1</sup>

BY MAXIMILIAN J. RUDWIN.

*Russian Literature the Lady of Sorrows of Holy Russia.*

“**A**BANDON all hope, ye who enter here.” These fateful words of Dante might well be inscribed on the fly-leaf of every Russian book. The foreign reader of Russian literature walks in the Valley of Shadow. He is overwhelmed by a wealth of woe. He is steeped in gloom.

*The Tragedy of Russian Life.*

Russian literature is a faithful record of the history of Russia. In her literature, hapless and helpless, Russia has recorded her grief and sorrow. In her song and story she has uttered her heaven-rending cry of anguish. Russia's fiction is the direct outcome of the sufferings of her people. The misfortunes of Russia are darker and deeper, her shrieks of agony are louder and longer than those of any other country. Her literature is sadder and gloomier than that of any land. It is the literature of a country which is always “complaining and sighing and wailing.” If the joys of Russia are bitterly ignored in her literature, it is because in truth they cannot be said to exist. The humorous details in Russian literature often hide a most tragical background, which all of a sudden breaks

<sup>1</sup> In this essay pre-revolutionary literature only will be considered. With the overthrow of the czaristic régime, the literature of Russia enters upon a new phase. It is impossible to overestimate the effect which the Russian revolution will have upon Russian literature. Russian literature under the old régime was but an incomplete reflex of the life and character of the country. It was a fragment. It was but that part of the whole which succeeded in escaping governmental authority. It was circulated for the most part in manuscript form just as if Johann Gutenberg had never lived. It was born in prison and was but the echo of the sighs which were heaved in gloomy dungeons. The Russian revolution opened the gates of prison for Russian literature as well as for its makers. A literature finally set free will gradually wipe out the traits which it acquired in the house of bondage. It will in the course of time rid itself of its grief and gloom. It is to be hoped that it will not lose its glory.

through. Russian literature is indeed a faithful reflex of the life and character of the land and the people. When Gógol read to Púshkin the manuscript of his novel *Dead Souls*, Púshkin exclaimed: "My God, how sad our Russia is!" In speaking later of this novel to others, Púshkin added: "Gógol invents nothing; it is the simple truth." Nor did any of the later novelists, following in the footsteps of their master, invent anything. They told the simple truth, the terrible truth about the fate of their country, and about their own fates.

### *The Tragedy of Russian Literature.*

The same adverse fate which has brooded over Russia has in a like manner inexorably pursued her writers. In the writers of Russia are mirrored the life and character of their country. They on their part reflect in their works their own sad lives. In the creations of their imagination they reproduce their own sufferings, griefs and fears. With many a Russian author it is as though he had dipped his pen in his own blood. *Le malheur d'être poète* is not wholly a Russian trait. Sappho and Tasso are classical examples of the tragic fate of a poet. In all lands have the writers drunk of life's cup of bitterness, have they been bruised by life's sharp corners and torn by life's pointed thorns. Chill penury, public neglect, and ill health have been the lot of many an author in countries other than Russia. But in the land of the Czars men of letters had to face problems and perils which were peculiarly their own, and which have not been duplicated in any other country on the globe. It was a great misfortune in Russia to possess a talent. "The devil," cried Púshkin in despair, "has caused me to be born in this country with a talent and a heart." The literary career was especially filled with danger in Russia. Every man of letters was under suspicion. The government of Russia treated every author as its natural enemy, and made him frequently feel the weight of its heavy hand. The wreath of laurels on the brow of almost every poet was turned by the tyrants of his country into a crown of thorns.

### *Social Discontent in Russian Literature.*

The hatred of the rulers of Russia against writers had its good reason. They saw in them their literary chastisers. Russian authors were enthusiastic supporters of the dream of social justice. They were, indeed, fighters for liberty on a battlefield where the pen was a sword. Russian literature in the last century was actuated more than any other by a powerful social instinct. It reflects more than

any other the main tendencies of the social and political movements of the day. In Russia more than in any other country, literature was a vehicle for social ideas. A country without free speech and free press must needs turn to literature for the discussion of its social and political problems. In its literature at first did it try to solve in an ideal way the problems which it hoped would some day be solved in reality. A novel, a story, a poem, an essay on literature, when reading between the lines was not neglected, was a political manifesto. The Russian expected to see in the work of every writer of note a new program of social and political reform. He was accustomed to regard a good writer as a prophet. The best of the Russian authors became indeed the guides of their people. They were not only writers, but apostles and martyrs, who in the cause of Holy Russia faced imprisonment, exile and death.

Oppression and persecution bred demigods. "The madness and pride to starve and to die will never be wanting me," writes Bêlinsky not merely of himself, for it was true of any of the best Russian men of letters. Their history is, indeed, a catalog of tragedies. It is hard to mention a single great writer in Russia, who was not condemned to death, or sent as a convict prisoner to the mines of Siberia, or put as a conscript into a disciplinary battalion, or was not exiled to remote provinces, or interned on his estate, or silenced by the censor. Of all the men of letters of the world, those of Russia can surely boast of the greatest number of martyrs. Alexander Herzen calculated that during the reign of Nicholas I, the most typical and the most determined adversary of the freedom of the press that Europe has ever seen, within a period of thirty years, the three most illustrious Russian poets were either assassinated or killed in duel, three lesser ones died in exile, two became insane, two died of want, and one by the hand of the executioner. The writers who saved their lives by flight to foreign countries pined away with homesickness and loneliness in their voluntary exile. Turgénev, for instance, declared that in a strange land a man lived isolated, without any real props or profound relation to anything whatsoever. These Russian exiles used to say, in bitter irony, that they could see their country, the object of their study and love, better from a distance. In foreign lands such an unfortunate did not feel at least the torments of being a burning dreamer in a land of eternal snow. Herzen, the creator of a public sentiment in Russia from his refuge in London, could well say to his countrymen: "Here in a foreign land I am your uncensored speech, your free voice." But it was the voice of a preacher in the wilderness. Herzen lived in

London a stranger. In the British metropolis he felt, before he was joined by Bakúnin and other countrymen, as isolated as he had been in exile in Russia. Russian fugitives felt their exile more keenly than their German or French comrades. Those who had to flee from Germany or France for their political views found a congenial atmosphere in Switzerland or Belgium. But there was no free Slavonic country which could offer the Russian exiles a pleasant asylum, one in which they would not feel totally strange ground under their feet.

Many a Russian writer, who did not seek safety in flight, smothered his inspiration, or broke his pen in despair before his time, or sought to forget his disappointment in drink, or lost his mind, or took his own life! Attempts at suicide were very common among the younger generation of Russian writers. If they did not end their lives themselves, consumption as a result of privations and overwork, or *delirium tremens* as a consequence of the drink habit, or insanity, which developed from melancholia, a disease so common among Russian authors, lay in wait for them. Many Russian writers died just when or even before they had reached the full development of their talents. The knell of every ambition sounded for them just when the first rays of glory touched the long despised brow. "Whom the gods love die young." They preserved by this means many a Russian writer from a worse fate. Death saved Púshkin, Gógol, Nádsen, and Chékhov from insanity, and death saved Bêlínsky from prison. The cause of early death of such a great number of Russian authors lay not wholly in the stark misery of their youth, although many authors of plebeian descent had to acquire an education under the most terrible privations. The brief span of life allotted to these Russians is chiefly due to the sudden transition from an uncultured state to strenuous mental activity. "It is but natural," says Brückner, "that a generation so suddenly brought into contact with an ocean of new ideas should turn giddy on the edge of the abyss and lose its balance."<sup>2</sup>

### *The Apostles and Martyrs of Russian Literature.*

It would fill volumes to record the martyrdom of Russia's men of letters. The lives of the better known among them, considering but the last two centuries, will show the manner in which Russia stoned her prophets.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> A. Brückner, *A Literary History of Russia*, p. 528.

<sup>3</sup> This survey of the lives of the Russian authors starts with the reign of Peter I who gave a new turn to Russian literature by bringing it in contact with the literature and learning of Western Europe. Literature proper, how-

Iván Pososhkóv (1670-1726), an economist and self-taught writer, author of *The Book of Poverty and Wealth*, was the first of them to be thrown into the fortress of SS. Peter and Paul. He thus consecrated this mausoleum for living Russian authors.

Vasíli Tretiakóvsky (1707-1769), was paid for his endeavors to reform Russian versification with poverty and persecution.

Mikháil Lomonósov (1711-1765), who laid the foundations for a Russian grammar, suffered from political persecution and the hostility of his colleagues. He gave the first impulse to the liberation of Russian intellectual life from German domination. But as he himself owed all his knowledge to German schools (Marburg and Freiburg), he was not a fit person to undertake this task.

Alekséi Sumarókov (1718-1777), the first writer of *belles lettres* in Russia and the founder of the Russian national stage, was rewarded for his great services with poverty and public neglect.

Vasíli Máikov (1728-1778), the Russian Scarron, was cast into the gloomy dungeons of the fortress.

Gabriel Derzhávin (1743-1816), the poet laureate of Catherine, was accused in his old age of Jacobinism for having translated into verse one of the psalms of David.

Nikolái Nóvikov (1744-1818), the first Russian philosopher, was sentenced to death. The death-sentence, however, was afterward commuted to fifteen years in the fortress.

Aleksándr Radíshchev (1749-1802), a political writer, the foe of slavery, as Púshkin called him, tasted prison and exile, his death-

ever, interested this monarch very little. He looked upon all printed matter as a mere vehicle for the importation of practical sciences to his half civilized country from abroad. Russia's national literature begins with Lomonósov, who has justly been called the Peter the Great of Russian letters. As far as of interest to the western world, Russian literature begins with Púshkin.

*The Biographic Dictionary of Russian Writers* by S. Vengérov has not been accessible to the writer. The biographical details presented in this paper have been gathered from various books on Russian literature in the English language. To harmonize the conflicting records of the lives of Russian authors as presented in our literary histories was almost as difficult as to attempt a harmony of the Gospels. The writer's own knowledge of men and affairs in Russia has been of great help to him in the preparation of this paper. It was not always easy to ascertain the correct dates of the birth and death of each author mentioned. Some of the Russian men of letters probably did not know themselves in what year they were born. Of the living authors Górký, for instance, is not sure whether he was born in 1868 or in 1869. The Russian does not think of his age as a matter of great importance. He does not observe his birthday, as he does not consider his birth a piece of great luck.

Pains have been taken to present a uniform transliteration of Russian names. It is highly desirable that a stop be put to the Babel in the English rendition of Russian words. English writers on Russia should agree on a standardized transliteration. In all names the vowels *a, e, i, o, u* have to be pronounced as in *father, then, in, on, push*, and the consonants *ch, g, zh* as in *church, go, azure*.

sentence having magnanimously been commuted to ten years of Siberian exile. When his superior in office jokingly asked him one day if he longed for the Siberian landscape, he lost his mind and poisoned himself. Radishchev's *Ode to Liberty* is the forerunner of all the poems of liberty of the Decembrist group.<sup>4</sup>

Aleksándr Lábzin (1766-1825), a Christian mystic, died in exile.

Nikolái Karamzín (1766-1826), a novelist and the first Russian historian who can properly claim the title, lost through the persecutions he had to suffer all zeal and love for literature and turned wholly to history.

Iván Kozlów (1774-1838), paralyzed and blind,—the poet of calm resignation.

Vasíli Zhukóvsky (1783-1852), the Columbus of Russian romanticism, spent the last twelve years of his life in voluntary exile and ended like Gógol as an ascetic mystic.

Kondráti Batúshkóv (1787-1855), a poet, ended in insanity. His verses on Tasso are almost an autobiography. He dragged on for thirty-three years the miserable existence of a man hopelessly a maniac.

Piótr Chaadáev (1793-1855), a philosopher, one of the most original and brilliant thinkers of Russia, was declared to be a maniac by the czar and was turned over to the care of an alienist. When he was finally freed from the strait-jacket, he fled to Paris.

Kondráti Ryléev (1795-1826), the citizen-poet, as his countrymen called him, was one of the five Decembrists who were hanged by Nicholas I.

Aleksándr Griboédov (1795-1829) author of the comedy *Wit Comes to Grief* and also a Decembrist, was assassinated by a mob in Persia. His short life was moreover embittered by prison and banishment. In his exile he fortunately tided over the December revolt.

Aleksándr Bestúzhev (1797-1837), a prose writer and also one of the Decembrists, was killed in the Caucasus, where he had been sent as a conscript soldier, after having served his term of forced labor in the Siberian mines. He was so cut to pieces by Circassian sabres in an engagement with the mountaineers that his body could not be found.

<sup>4</sup> The Decembrists or "Dekabrists" are the members of the Northern Society who openly revolted on the 26th of December 1825, when Nicholas I came to the throne. From this event dates the revolutionary movement in Russia. For a short account of the Decembrist uprising see Peter Krapótkin, *Russian Literature*, pp. 34-36.



Baron Anton Delwig (1798-1831), a poet and a personal friend of Púshkin, died of consumption.

Aleksánder Púshkin (1799-1839), the father of modern Russian literature and the greatest of Russian poets, was killed in a duel which was the result of a drawing-room conspiracy. He died, as Lérmontov expressed it, "a victim of honor." Of the few years of his literary activity six were spent in exile from the capital for his liberal views. His banishment, however, was a great blessing to him as it was to Griboédov. He would have shared the tragic fate of his friends if he had been in St. Petersburg during the December uprising.

Mikháil Venevítinov (1800-1822), a great poet and a pessimist, died of a broken heart and melancholia in his twenty-second year, his end hastened by insults and outrages.

Prince Evgéní Baratínsky (1800-1844), the most gifted of the Russian romantic poets, the earliest and most brilliant of Russian pessimistic bards, died of melancholia, after having spent twelve years in exile in Finland.

Prince Aleksánder Odoévsky (1803-1839), a poet and a friend of the Decembrists, met with an early death in the Caucasus, where he had been sent as a conscript soldier, after having suffered in the dungeons of the fortress of SS. Peter and Paul in the capital and in the convict prison in Siberia.

Nikolái Yasíkov (1803-1846), a poet, also died young, worn out from continual illness.

Nikolái Polezháev (1806-1838), a poet, died in the military hospital in Moscow of consumption and drink, to which he had fallen a prey during the eight years of forced military service in Caucasia.

Piótr Kircévsky (1808-1856), a philosophical writer, suffered exile.

Alekséi Koltsóv (1809-1842), Russia's greatest folk-poet, the Russian Burns, died of consumption at a very early age, worn out in body and mind, killed by hard work and sorrow. He was more unhappy than the Ayrshire poet, with whom he has also this point in common that his poetic vocation, too, sprang from a thwarted love, for he never married his Jean Armour.

Nikolái Gógol (1809-1852), the first master of Russian fiction, spent the last ten years of his short life in mental darkness, his brain becoming diseased with religious superstition. In fits of rage and despair he twice flung the second and third parts of his novel *Dead Souls* into the fire. His was an inspired insanity. He finally

died of what may indeed be called religious *delirium tremens*. He was found one morning lifeless before an icon which hung at the head of his bed, and before which he had often spent his nights in prayer.<sup>5</sup>

Vissarion Bêlinsky (1810-1848), the famous literary critic of Russia, who was called by some the Russian Lessing and by others the Russian Marat, was carried off by consumption in the midst of his impassioned literary fight with the official world and the official literature of Russia. But he did not die too soon. A pleasant cell had already been reserved for him in the fortress of SS. Peter and Paul. A merciful death rescued the unhappy man from this imperial "advancement."

Aleksándr Herzen (1812-1870), a political writer, called the Russian Voltaire, the very incarnation of the aspirations and agitations of the year "forty-eight," fled abroad after six years of imprisonment and exile in order to avoid a worse fate. Many sufferings embittered his short life. He was stigmatized an illegitimate child because his father, a Russian nobleman Ivan Yakóvlev, who married in Germany the daughter of a Stuttgart merchant, did not legalize his marriage in Russia.<sup>6</sup> Both his mother and his son were drowned in a shipwreck,<sup>7</sup> and his wife—his cousin Natasha—with whom he had eloped while still in exile in Russia, left him for a while for Georg Herwegh, the German political poet and revolutionist.<sup>8</sup>

Ivan Goncharóv (1812-1891), author of the famous novel *Ob-lómov*, took an involuntary trip to Siberia.

Nikolái Ogarév (1813-1877), the intimate friend of Herzen, while attending the University of Moscow was arrested for singing revolutionary songs and was banished to his father's estate. He later fled abroad and spent the rest of his life in exile.

Mikháil Lérmontov (1814-1841), the most fascinating personality among all Russian poets, died before he had even reached the

<sup>5</sup> Recent writers claim to know that Gógol died of typhoid fever, which, with his chronic infirmities, was a fatal complication.

<sup>6</sup> According to other writers, no marriage ceremony ever took place between his parents. As a natural son Alexander did not feel justified in taking the name of his father. Nor did he wish to assume his mother's name Haag. But as a token of love for her he chose the first half of the pet name by which she used to call him—*Herzenskind*, "child of my heart."

<sup>7</sup> According to other biographers, two of his children were drowned with his mother in a shipwreck which occurred between Nice and Marseilles.

<sup>8</sup> That most important part of his memoirs, on account of which all the rest seems to be written, and written, as Turgénev says, with tears and his heart's blood, the part which deals with this most tragic episode of his storm-tossed life, was suppressed by his relatives.



zenith of his powers. He was killed in a duel in his twenty-seventh year.<sup>9</sup> But in his short life he had twice been banished to the Caucasus.

Táras Shevchénko (1814-1861), the Ukrainian poet, was put into the disciplinary battalions in the Caucasus for ten years. Already in his youth he had more than his share of the whip and the knout.

Mikháil Bakúnin (1814-1876), a revolutionist and political writer, escaped from his exile in Kamchatka, and after having been hounded from country to country died in poverty and neglect, forsaken by all his former friends and associates.

Iván Turgénev (1818-1881), the greatest artist among Russian novelists, spent a month in prison, a few years in banishment to his estate, and the rest of his life in voluntary exile in foreign lands. He had many trials to endure in his life. He suffered from nostalgia and melancholia. He was attacked on account of his books both by the conservatives and the liberals, by "fathers and sons." The last two years of his life were unrelieved agony. He died from an incurable disease, cancer of the brain.<sup>10</sup>

Alekséi Pisémsky (1820-1881), a folk-novelist, died amidst much mental and physical suffering, neglected and despised by the literary men of his time.

Iván Polónsky (1820-1898), a poet, suffered for the greater

<sup>9</sup> He did not believe in duels, but as an officer had to accept the challenge. As he had done before in the first duel, he purposely missed; but his opponent slowly and deliberately took his aim, so as even to call forth the protests of the seconds, and shot Lérmontov through the breast. He died on the spot. This was the death he had always wished for himself. Already as a boy of eighteen he expressed his opinion that it was better for one to die with a bullet in his breast than of the slow decay of old age. He also had a presentiment of his death, as is seen in his poem *Dream* (1841):

"With lead within my tortured breast,  
A burning wound, in midday sun,  
I lay in the vale of Daghestan,  
While drop by drop the blood did run."

On the 15th of July of that same year the poet actually died in this manner.

<sup>10</sup> Turgénev was from his childhood on all through life very lonely. His parents had no affection for him and treated him like a miscreant. He knew many women in his life, but he never married. Still he yearned for a home, a hearth of his own. He is reported to have said that he would gladly surrender all his literary fame if he had a fireside of his own with a woman by it who cared whether he came home late or not. For the greater part of his life he was in the fetters of an infatuation for Mme. Pauline Viardot, a concert singer, the wife of a French writer. He felt a deep devotion and admiration for her and meekly submitted to her rule. But it was not a *liaison*, as a few malignant countrymen of Turgénev have claimed. His daughter, who married a Frenchman in 1864, was not from Mme. Viardot. She was born to him by a beautiful but illiterate Russian serf, with whom he had lived in 1841-1843 while banished to his estates.

part of his life from ill-health. He laughed at himself that he, half a denizen of the grave, ventured to sing of love.

Nikolái Nekrásov (1821-1877), a poet, whom M. de Vogüé, the French critic, calls the Russian Vallès, experienced utter want and misery in his youth, which left him broken and embittered for life.<sup>11</sup> His last two years were unspeakable agony.

Fiodór Dostoévsky (1822-1881), the poor, diseased, possessed, inspired spokesman of the "humiliated and offended," was acquainted with grief from the very beginning. As he was born in a charity hospital, his eyes first opened upon scenes of misery and suffering. Through life he was destined to see and know little else. Pinched by poverty, hounded and persecuted, he never knew a moment of peace or serenity. When fame and fortune came to him, they were accompanied by increased physical anguish and mental distress. He languished in the dungeons of the fortress, spent seven years as a convict prisoner in Siberia and four years as a conscript soldier in the Caucasus, and another four years in flight abroad from the debtors' prison. The agonies which he endured when in 1849 he heard his death-sentence pronounced for supposed participation in a political conspiracy, left their traces on his body and mind. He was all his life a victim of a violent form of neurosis, of epilepsy, and of hallucinations.

Aleksándr Palm (1822-1851), a dramatist, was in prison and exile.

Aleksándr Ostróvsky (1823-1886), the dramatist, was placed under police surveillance for a drama he wrote in his twenty-fourth year. His life was cut short by illness, brought about by years of privation and physical suffering.

Piótr Lavróv (1823-1901), the philosopher and political writer, was arrested and exiled to a small town in the Urals. He succeeded, however, in escaping to London.

Valerian Máikov (1824-1847), who promised to become a literary critic of great power, died very early in life, having literally killed himself by overwork.

Iván Nikítin (1824-1861), a poet, died of consumption as a result of overwork and privation. As a student he had to support

<sup>11</sup> Writing later of his student life in St. Petersburg, Nekrásov says: "For fully three years I felt continually hungry every day.... It often happened that I entered one of the great restaurants where people may go to read newspapers, even without ordering anything to eat, and while I read my paper I would draw the bread plate toward me and eat the bread, and that was my only food."

not only himself, but also the family, the head of which was constantly under the influence of drink.

Alekséi Pleshchéev (1825-1893), a poet, spent many years among the convict gangs in the Siberian mines and among the conscript soldiers in the Orenburg region.

Iván Kókorev (1826-1853), a folk-novelist, died very young of consumption as a result of overwork and privations, which he suffered in his childhood and youth.

Mikháil Mikhailóv (1826-1865), a translator of poems and one of the most brilliant writers of the Russian review *The Contemporary*, died in Siberia after four years at hard labor.

Mikháil Saltykóv (pseud., Shchédrin) (1826-1889), the chief Russian satirist, was exiled to Viatka for seven years.

Nikolái Chernyshévsky (1828-1889), one of the most gifted writers Russia has ever had, was totally broken by oppression. He spent two years in the fortress of SS. Peter and Paul, seven years at hard labor in the Siberian mines and fifteen years in solitary confinement in Eastern Siberia.

Count Lvóv Tolstóy (1828-1910) was spared by the Russian government for fear of public opinion abroad, but he suffered to see his followers persecuted for his own ideas while he himself was not molested in the slightest manner. In his yearning for a share in universal suffering, he exclaimed: "Oh, for a rope, to have it put around my own neck to make me share the fate of those who suffer and are put to death in my country!" This was the tragedy of the life of a man who otherwise was indeed the spoiled child of Fortune.

Nikolái Pomialóvsky (1835-1863), a folk-novelist, died before he had even reached the age of thirty from the effects of the abominable conditions in the clerical schools which he describes in his novels.

Aleksándr Lévitov (1835-1877), also a folk-novelist, tasted poverty from the first to the last of his short but sad life. He lived for many years in exile in the far north of Russia, and died from inflammation of the lungs, superinduced by drink for which he had acquired a taste from the monks while yet a child in school.

Nikolái Dobrolúbov (1836-1861), a realistic critic, early worked himself to death. His short life was barren of all joys and pleasures.

Gleb Uspénsky (1840-1902), the writer of scenes from village life, had a very sad and shattered existence.

Dmítri Pisárev (1841-1868), a literary critic, paid with four

years in the fortress of SS. Peter and Paul merely for an offense against the censorship. In the casements of this terrible prison he wrote the greater part of his essays. When he was freed, his health was already affected, and while bathing at a Baltic sea-side resort where he had gone for his health, he was drowned.

Fiodór Reshétnikov (1841-1871), a folk-novelist, died early in life from the effects of drink. He had been taught to drink in a monastery school to which he had been sent for a petty offense. In his novel *Among Men* he tells the story of his own terrible childhood.

Sergéi Kravchínsky (pseud., Stepniak) (1852-1890), who wrote chiefly in English, was forced to flee from Russia because of his revolutionary leanings. He died in a railway accident.

Vladímír Korolénko (born 1853), a short-story writer, was banished to the frozen regions of Siberia for many years. Like Tolstóy he also frequently contemplated suicide.

Alekséi Pavlów (born 1854) was a political exile in Caucasia. He had shown such great talent in his *Three Tales* that the czar declared that the author might for the future be recommended to describe life in Caucasia and other remote provinces of Russia.

Vsévolod Gárshin (1855-1888), a war-novelist, committed suicide early in life in a fit of insanity, leaping headlong down a stairway. He had suffered all his life from melancholia and had been committed for a few years to a mad-house.

Nikolái Petropávlovsky (pseud., Karónin) (1857-1892), a poet of village life, died of consumption. He had taken an involuntary trip to Siberia.

Anton Chékhov (1860-1904), a short-story writer, also died of consumption. His early death saved him from insanity which he had feared all his life, for he, too, suffered from deep melancholia.

Piótr Yakubóvich (pseud., Mélshin) (1860-1911), a folk-novelist, was kept for twelve years at hard labor in Siberia as a political prisoner.

Aleksándr Amfiteatrów (born 1862), a popular feuilletonist, was suddenly arrested one fine morning, and nothing has been heard of him ever since.

Semyon Nádsón (1862-1887), lyric poet, suffered from deep melancholia, which would have ended in insanity, if consumption had not carried him off before.

Maxim Górký (pseud., Alekséi Péshkov) (born 1868 or 1869) is also afflicted with the consumptive malady, which is the result of

the privations of his youth.<sup>12</sup> When twenty-one years old, he attempted suicide by shooting himself in the chest. He was repeatedly imprisoned and exiled for his revolutionary ideas and activities.

Leonid Andréev (born 1871), like Górký, came to know fearful misery early in his life and tried to put an end to it, but, as he himself ironically remarks, "without any appreciable result." He, too, suffers from melancholia.

Mikháil Artzibáshev (born 1878), the author of that famous novel *Sanin*, is suffering from pulmonary tuberculosis, inherited from his mother.

### *Pessimism in Russian Literature.*

"Sadness, scepticism, irony," said Alexander Herzen, "are the three strings of Russian literature." Pessimism and scepticism are Russian national traits of character. The Russian is the spirit of negation become flesh. He is the spirit of doubt and denial. His heart is the abode of *der Geist der stets verneint*. "Truly," said Dostoévsky, "the Russian soul is a dark place." The Russian soul, alas! has always been fed on the milk from what Nietzsche calls "the udders of sorrow." Profound pessimism is as distinctive a feature of Russian literature as it is of Russian temperament. As far as we can trace back the history of Russian literature, we find these traits of the national character permeating it. The plaintive note of their national music, the soul-gripping melancholy of their folk-songs, the dreary sadness of their folk-tales, the overwhelming pessimism of their literature, all are the manifestations of these national characteristics of the Russians. All the chords of the Russian lyre are strung to the same tunes of mental sadness, moral scepticism, and spiritual despair. The only muse which the Russian poets seem ever to have invoked is the muse of Hypochondria. "I owe my early inspiration to the muse of sobs, of mourning and of pain—the muse of the starving and the beggar." What the poet Nekrásov says of himself is true of nearly all Russian writers.

All men of letters in Russia express this national trait, but it differs with each individual in accordance with his own temperament. The pietistic melancholy of Zhukóvsky, for example, differs from the indignant melancholy of Gógol; Lérmontov's militant melancholy stands in contrast to the sceptical, almost ironical melancholy of Púshkin; the idealistic melancholy of Turgénev is different from

<sup>12</sup> Górký has told the history of his childhood and youth in his narratives *My Childhood* and in its continuation *In the World*, which is an account of two or three years of aimless wandering and of various occupations, and ends with his setting out in quest of an education.

the fatalistic melancholy of Tolstóy; the meek melancholy of Gárshin forms a sharp contrast to the bitter melancholy of Górký; Korolénko's melancholy is not the heartrending, cheerless kind of melancholy of a Baratínsky or Nádsen; Chékhov's pessimism is not as cynical as that of Pisémsky. But dark despair has taken possession of the souls of all Russian writers. There are pessimists among the great men in all literatures, but the Russians are especially sad.

"No novelist in Western Europe," says Brandes, "is so sad as Turgénev."<sup>13</sup> Professor Phelps says he heard Professor Boyesen remark that he had never personally known any man who suffered like Turgénev from sheer despair.<sup>14</sup> It is so characteristic of Turgénev that the last page written by him bore the very title *Despair*. His pessimism is fundamental. Melancholy was with him a matter of conviction as well as of temperament. It was due to his losing all faith in God and man. Seated one day in a garden, he became the solitary witness of a struggle between a snake and a toad. This made him first doubt the providence of God. Whatever he saw later in life confirmed him in the conviction that nature is totally unconcerned about insect or man, that nature treats the man of the noblest aspirations and the man of the most brutish disposition with equal indifference. And so all ideals of the human race are in his opinion a matter of total indifference to it. He loved the good and the true, but he had no faith in the triumph of the good and the true. Turgénev anticipated by half a century the naturalist's point of view of our own day.

Turgénev's views of nature are most admirably set forth in his sketch *Nature*, which appeared in his *Poems in Prose*:

"I dreamt that I entered an enormous subterranean hall with high vaults. It was all filled with an even, subterranean light.

"In the very center of the hall sat a majestic woman in a flowing garment of green color. Bending her head on her hand, she seemed to be buried in deep meditation.

"I saw at once that this woman was Nature herself, and, with a sudden chill, a reverential awe entered my soul.

"I approached the woman who was sitting there, and making a respectful bow: 'Oh, our common mother!' I exclaimed. 'What are you meditating on? Are you, perchance, pondering on the future destiny of the human race? Or, how it may reach the highest possible perfection and happiness?'

"The woman slowly turned to me her dark, piercing eyes. Her

<sup>13</sup> Georg Brandes, *Impressions of Russia*, p. 273.

<sup>14</sup> William Lyon Phelps, *Essays on Russian Novelists*, p. 70.



lips moved, and there issued from them a ringing voice, like the clanking of iron.

"I am thinking how to add greater strength to the muscles of a flea's legs, that it may more easily save itself from its enemies. The equilibrium between attack and defense has been impaired—it must be reestablished."

"What?" I lisped in answer. "Is it that what you are thinking about? But are we men not your favorite children?"

"The woman barely frowned: 'All creatures are my children,' she spoke, 'and I take equal care of them, and equally exterminate them.'

"But goodness—reason—justice—" I muttered again.

"These are human words," was heard the woman's voice. "I know neither good nor evil—reason is not my law, and what is justice? I have given you life, and I shall take it from you and shall give it to others, worms or men—it makes no difference to me—you defend yourself in the meantime, and do not bother me!"

"I wanted to retort—but the earth around me gave a dull groan and trembled, and I awoke."

Humor is as alien to Russian literature as it is to Russian temperament. "Our laugh," said Herzen in speaking of Russian writers, "is but a sickly sneer." The laughter of the humorist Gógol is full of tears and bitterness. It is so characteristic of him, the first Russian novelist, that his last words were the old Russian saying: "And I shall laugh with a bitter laugh."<sup>15</sup>

### *Renunciation in Russian Literature.*

The uselessness of the struggle for existence, and the necessity for resignation is the prevailing theme of Russian literature. Through the mouths of the children of their sorrows the Russian authors express their renunciation of hope, their weariness of the world. Many a Russian writer reminds the reader of a monk who would fain drag down all men to the level of his own renunciation. As life had never given anything to him, he could not realize that it might have something to give to others. Some of the characters in Russian literature in their sad weakness resemble the aged saints in Russian sacred pictures. The call to physical joy and physical revolt, which is the predominant note in most recent Russian literature, is alien to the Russian temperament. This self-asserting individualism, which has found its strongest and fullest expression in Artzibashev's novel *Sanin*, has its origin in the philosophies of

<sup>15</sup> These words were placed on Gógol's tombstone.

Max Stirner and Friedrich Nietzsche. How it will blend with the Russian temperament is hard to foresee. It is a part of the great Russian enigma.

Russian writers do not consider life the supreme possession of man. Lérmontov calls life "a stupid jest." Chékov speaks of the nothingness of life, the absurdity of life. Nádsou believes that the only goal of man is non-existence. Andréév shows us the weakness, vanity and vacuity of life, nay, the nonsense of life. Turgénev, although he loves life, sadly realizes its fleeting nature.

But in spite of this *taedium vitae*, these Russians fear death. This fear of death, which in an intensely intellectual people like the Russians is an obsession of terror, is found in almost all the works of the best-known Russian writers. It runs all through Tolstóy's diaries and novels. It is eloquently expressed in certain pages of Turgénev's *Poems in Prose*.

#### *Poetry of Human Suffering in Russian Literature.*

Suffering is the foundation of Russian literature, as it is the essence of Russian life. The poetry of the sorrow of man is the *Leitmotiv* of many and many a Russian song or story or drama. The Russian capacity for suffering is the text of the great works of Russian literature. The patience and passivity, the humility and long-suffering (*smirénie* and *dolgotôrpenie*) of their nation is stressed in the writings of all of Russia's representative men. Dostoévsky, who fully understood the hearts of his countrymen, in perfect accord with the national temperament, regards suffering as a blessing, shows the transports of dejection and despair, describes the purification of character through grief and sorrow.

#### *Pity for Human Suffering in Russian Literature.*

The great and glorious result of this suffering as set forth in the lives and works of Russian men of letters is universal compassion and commiseration for suffering humanity. Pity, as all the world knows, is a fundamental trait of the Russian character. Pity is also the keynote of Russian national literature. Gógol was the first writer to point out this trait in the Russian temperament—the tolerance and forbearance, the kindness and tenderness for the poor, the ignorant, the weak—nay, even for those who have sunk to the very bottom of the Inferno of Life. Russian pity extends even to the dumb beasts. "The death of a horse described by one great Russian novelist," says Bazan, "is more touching than that of any emperor."<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Emilia Pardo Bazan, *Russia; Its People and Its Literature*, p. 204.

This trait of the Russian national character has found its most perfect expression in the novels of Dostoévsky. In them we learn "the charity that passeth all understanding, and the pity that is a folly to the worldly wise."<sup>17</sup> Dostoévsky loves more than any other Russian writer, for he has suffered more than any other. There is nothing on which he would not take pity. With him, suffering puts a halo even around sin, it sanctifies the wretchedness of the most wretched and the ugliness of the ugliest. In his novel *Crime and Punishment* the assassin kisses the feet of the harlot and exclaims: "I do not bow down to you personally, but to suffering humanity in your person." This evangelical charity for sinful humanity was raised by Dostoévsky to the highest degree of piety, to "pious despair," a phrase coined by the French critic Vicomte Melchior de Vogüé. Dostoévsky loved erring humanity, and did better than judge it—he pitied it. "If there ever was a person," a writer has said, "who would forgive any human being anything seventy times seven, the individual was Dostoévsky." To him Christianity is reduced to the three parables of the repentant thief, the prodigal son, and the woman taken in adultery. His whole religion is summed up in the one verse: "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged; condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned; forgive, and ye shall be forgiven" (Luke iv. 37). In the novels of Dostoévsky as in the writings of other great Russians we find the essence of Christianity. It is, indeed, remarkable what analogies the Russian writers offer to the early Christians. Turgénev was an atheist, but his life may have been more pleasing to God than that of many a self-styled believer. Professor Phelps claims that Turgénev was a true Christian in the definition of Edwin Booth, who said that a Christian was a man who rejoiced in the superiority of a rival.<sup>18</sup> Turgénev was always happy over the success of a rival. Tolstóy may have been anathematized by the church, but with his principles he indeed had a better claim to Christian fellowship than the members of the church of his country, and of many another country.

The Russian has eyes for suffering only. No scenic beauty, no material grandeur, impresses him as much as human need. He has no eyes for nature or art. He seeks but man in his misery. What memories did Dostoévsky bring back from London? Was he impressed by Westminster Abbey, by the English fleet, by England's Constitution? queries Brückner. O no. One little scene in the streets of London left an indelible impression upon his mind. A

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246.

<sup>18</sup> William Lyon Phelps, *Op. cit.*, p. 73.

poor girl, clad in rags, to whom he gave a silver coin, who fled like a wild animal from him and all men, to hide her little treasure! What memories did Tolstóy bring back home from his travels in Western Europe? queries Brückner further. For the rest of his life the Russian sage incessantly thought of the beggar-musician in the streets of Lucerne to whom no one gave anything. "Aye," comments Brückner in the words of Herodotus, "the barbarians have lizard's eyes."<sup>19</sup>

## LABYRINTHS AND THE PITCHER OF TRAGLIA- TELLA.

BY THE EDITOR.

IT is not so very long ago that the reading public was still of the belief that the ancestors of mankind should be sought in the south and that, their original state being a kind of happy primitive paradise, their home should be identified with the Biblical Eden. Some facts, however, caused certain scholars from the camp of the natural sciences to reject this idea and rather seek for the cradle of the human race in the north. They pointed out that the north was the place where nature had in readiness for man that severe school in which primitive folk would develop higher and higher on penalty of perdition, and that it was from here that from time to time emigrations of tribes took place that sought for a happier and better state in the more prosperous south. The emigrants did find easier conditions of existence and more fertile and pleasanter countries, but the people that remained behind and stayed longer in the school of nature advanced in the meantime by eliminative selection to still higher degrees of development, which enabled them to send out new streams of emigrants even more fit to survive in the struggle for existence than those who had preceded them.

This view, which turned the search for the hypothetical cradle of the human race in the opposite direction, has been most vigorously opposed by the representatives of the philological world because in the new era of comparative philology the oldest language of the highest races was thought to be Sanskrit, and Sanskrit was discovered in India. It was considered as the classical language of ancient India, the language spoken by the ancestors of the Indo-Germanic races. From the frontiers of India, probably the valleys of the Hindu-Kush, they were supposed to have emigrated north,

<sup>19</sup> A. Brückner, *Op. cit.*, p. 392.